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Navigating Through Increasing Social Inequalities in Times of Covid-19

A Research Report on Interviews with Migrants in the Middle East and Europe and Migrants and Indigenous People in South America

CeMig Centre for Global Migration Studies

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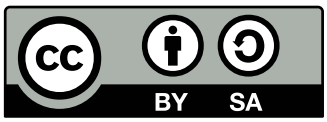

Abstract

This account of research in times of Covid-19, carried out by a team at the Center of Methods in Social Sciences, University of Goettingen, under the supervision of Gabriele Rosenthal, is an updated version of a report published in July 2020. Since then, within the framework of ongoing empirical research in the geographical regions of West Africa, Western Europe, the Middle East and South America, members of the team and their field assistants have conducted many more online interviews (n= 102). We have now updated our description of the individuals presented, with whom we have maintained contact, and look at the ways in which their situation has changed since summer 2020. This report also includes reflections by Victoria Taboada Gómez on the research she carried out for her dissertation on the situation of indigenous people in Paraguay. The contributors to this report have all used a biographical and figurational approach. This means, in the tradition of Norbert Elias, making an attempt to reconstruct the collective and historical backgrounds of the interviewees, their membership of various we-groups, and the changing collective belongings and power chances in the figurations of different we-groups and groupings. A contrastive comparison of the case studies shows that two components have played an important role in determining how the interviewees have experienced the pandemic, how they have dealt with changes in their situation, and especially ***to what extent their power of agency has been affected by the pandemic***. Even before the pandemic, these components were significant in the lives of migrants and the indigenous population in Paraguay: on the one hand, ***their degree of integration in social networks or we-groups***, and, on the other hand, their ***legal status*** in the country in which they are living. The analyses reveal not only that legal status is an extremely significant component but also that its effects depend on the extent to which the individual is integrated in a we-group or network.

Keywords: Migration, indigenous people, Covid-19 pandemic, social inequalities, biographical research, figurational sociology

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Navigating Through Increasing Social Inequalities in Times of Covid-19

A Research Report on Interviews with Migrants in the Middle East and Europe and Migrants and Indigenous People in South America

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1 General Design and Findings of Our Research

Gabriele Rosenthal

Preliminary remarks. The following account of our research in times of Covid-19 is an updated version of a report published in July 2020. Since then, within the framework of our empirical research in the geographical regions of West Africa, Europe, the Middle East and South America, we and our field assistants have conducted many more online interviews. A total of 102 interviews have

been conducted during the pandemic. These include interviews with a thematic focus on people's experiences during the pandemic (n=64), follow-up interviews with people we had first interviewed during our fieldwork (n=31), and first biographical-narrative interviews with people we had never met before (n=10). We have now updated our description of the sample and of the individuals presented, with whom we have maintained contact, and look at the ways in which their situation has changed since summer 2020. Further, this report also includes reflections by Victoria Taboada Gómez on the research she carried out for her dissertation on the situation of indigenous people in Paraguay (see chap. 5). Because of the pandemic, she had to postpone the field trip to Paraguay that she had planned for 2020. Instead, she conducted online interviews in order to inquire into the precarious situation of the indigenous population. She learned how members of this grouping, who are clearly in the position of outsiders in their own country, are struggling to deal with the current situation and their social status in Paraguay. If we compare the situation of indigenous people in America with that of so-called irregular migrants, we can see parallels in the increasing social and global inequalities they experience, as we show in this report. There are also parallels in their practical strategies for dealing with the situations they find themselves in, and, to borrow the words of Johanna Pfaff-Czarnecka (2013), in their biographical navigation through the different areas of their lives. Pfaff-Czarnecka sees social navigation (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2013: 2) "as a practice of 'moving in a moving environment' ", and explains that this unfolds "in a myriad of confrontations with social boundaries, categorical exclusions (Tilly, 1998) and different kinds of institutional pressures exerted through rules and regulations, group pressures as well as through moral blackmailing."

In terms of "legality", the migrants who figure in this report represent very different kinds of biographical navigation along their migration routes and in their current situations (from a more or less stable and legalized framework, to very precarious illegalized situations). From our sociological perspective, people

who have had to flee from their countries are also migrants. In contrast to state-centred and legal distinctions between "labour migration" and "forced migration", for instance, we conceptualize refugee migration as one specific type of migration.[1] Using a biographical approach, we try to show how migration routes are based both on unplanned processes and on actions planned individually in the family or in a group. The different phases or situations along the route are more or less strongly determined by what was planned beforehand and by unplanned reactions to difficult or even traumatic situations (see Apitzsch and Siouti, 2007). Many of the migrants interviewed by us had fled from their country of origin or from life-threatening situations they experienced on their way. Their departure from their home town, or from other places they passed through, was triggered in part, or entirely, by an overpowering sequence of events full of suffering, the kind of events that narrow down people's agency and capacity to plan. However, pre-planned decisions can be embedded in such migration courses, such as leaving the country of origin, or moving from one country to another.

The contributors to this report have all used a biographical and figurational approach to analyze the migration courses they present here. This approach also determined the empirical design (see Bogner and Rosenthal, 2017). Above all, this means making, in the tradition of Norbert Elias (e.g. 2008 [1976]), an attempt to reconstruct the collective and historical backgrounds of the interviewees, their membership of various we-groups, and the changing collective belongings and power chances in the figurations of different we-groups and groupings.

For two current research projects funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) entitled "Dynamic figurations of refugees, migrants, and longtime resi-

[1] For an overview of the debate on conceptual challenges in the fields of migration research and forced migration/refugee research, see Worm (2017, 2019).

dents in Jordan since 1946"[2] and "Biographies of migrants from Syria and West Africa in Brazil and in Germany"[3], we had plans to carry out fieldwork in Jordan and Brazil in the spring and summer of 2020. We intended to hold follow-up interviews in both countries with refugees and migrants whom we had met and interviewed during previous fieldwork, and to conduct further group discussions and participant observations. In the light of the empirical findings resulting from four protracted periods of fieldwork in Jordan covering several months between 2017 and 2019, and from two months of fieldwork carried out in Brazil in 2019, this time we wanted to include groupings of refugees or migrants that we had not interviewed before. But what could we do, when not only was it impossible for us to enter Jordan or Brazil, but, more importantly, the people living there, and especially migrants and refugees, were facing extremely precarious circumstances? We knew that the conditions in which practically all these groupings were living had seriously deteriorated, and that the inequalities that already existed between them and the established residents – whether in Europe, the Middle East or South America – had markedly increased. We heard of these changes mainly from our field assistants in the different regions, with whom we had worked during earlier periods of fieldwork, and with whom we had maintained contact. Many of them belong to the migrant and refugee groupings that we had interviewed and with whom we hoped to conduct further interviews. Some of our assistants were originally

[2] This project (RO 827/20-1) is funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) for the period April 2017 to March 2022 and is under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Gabriele Rosenthal (University of Göttingen, Germany). Team members: Dr. Ahmed Albaba, Dr. Johannes Becker, Dr. Hendrik Hinrichsen and Dolly Abdul Karim, M.A. (2017–2018). See: uni-goettingen.de [accessed: July 07, 2020].

[3] This project (RO 827/21-1) is funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) and is also under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Gabriele Rosenthal. The duration is from February 2019 to January 2022. Team members are: Dr. Eva Bahl, Dr. Sevil Çakır-Kılınçoğlu, Lucas Cé Sangalli, M.A., Dr. Arne Worm. The student members of the research team, whose findings are also presented here, are Margherita Cusmano, Merve Eryoldas, Tim Sievert and Tom Weiss. See: uni-goettingen.de [accessed: July 07, 2020].

interviewees themselves, before agreeing to work for us. In addition, we had kept in contact with many of our interviewees via digital media platforms. We decided we could use all these existing contacts to make the shift from local fieldwork to online interviews. The follow-up interviews we conducted with migrants and refugees, including some currently living in different countries of the European Union, on their situation in times of Covid-19 made us painfully aware of the effects of the various lockdown measures and the loss of sources of income. This, as well as certain methodological considerations, led us to offer them an opportunity to conduct online interviews for us; in the case of the project in Jordan, this included interviews with members of their families back home. This turned out to be an extremely useful research method. On the one hand, the data obtained gave us a more differentiated view of the lifeworlds of the refugees and their transnational networks, and especially of their relations with their families back home. And on the other hand, it inspired important methodological reflections on conducting online interviews, and the significance of the setting in which the interaction takes place. An earlier project[4] showed that what refugees say depends on the framing of the interview, and especially on the collective belongings ascribed to the interviewers (see Rosenthal, Bahl and Worm, 2016, 2017). Mainly as a result of the follow-up interviews, our current analyses show that the way the interviews are framed is determined by the present situation of the interviewees much more than by the belongings they ascribe to the interviewers.

For a number of years now we have kept in contact via social media with refugees whom we interviewed between 2014 and 2018 in the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in North Africa. This enables us to follow their

[4] The comparative project "The Social Construction of Border Zones: A comparison of two geopolitical cases" (RO 827/19-1; see: uni-goettingen.de [accessed: July 07, 2020]) was led by Gabriele Rosenthal and funded by the German Research Foundation. For this project, Eva Bahl, Gabriele Rosenthal and Arne Worm did field research at the Moroccan-Spanish border, and Prof. Dr. Efrat Ben-Ze'ev and Dr. Nir Gazit at the border between Israel and Egypt.

processes of arrival, and in some cases processes of re-migration or continuing migration, over a long period. We have seen clearly how the figurations of migrants with their relatives and friends back home have changed over time. An important factor here is the way the pandemic has restricted opportunities for sending remittances to the family at home. At the same time, in many cases the situation of the family in the home country has deteriorated due to the pandemic, increasing the need for remittances from abroad. Especially in connection with the question of remittances, the interviews showed us how important it is to consider not only how the pandemic has changed the lived realities of the interviewees in the places where they are currently living, but also the changes it has brought about in their countries of origin, and in their relations with their families of orientation and their families of procreation. This issue will be looked at more closely in some of the examples presented below.

The online interviews were frequently conducted by field assistants who came from the same ethnic grouping as the interviewee, or had the same mother tongue (especially in the case of Arabic). After receiving audio recordings of the interviews conducted by our field assistants, we then interviewed them and asked them to tell us briefly about their own experiences with making these recordings,[5] how they positioned themselves, and especially how they felt during the interview. This research design provides us with important data that help us to analyze how and why different interviewers provoke differences in the way migrants present themselves, and how different discursive rules apply, depending on who is talking to whom.

Our experience with online interviews has shown us their advantages and disadvantages compared to face-to-face interviews. We have learned that digital forms of communication have certain disadvantages when making initial con-

[5] We organize transcription and translation of the audio recordings so that all our team members can understand them. For methodological reasons, we usually ask a person other than the interviewer to do this, or at least to check the translation.

tact with someone, and especially when conducting a biographical interview, because physical co-presence helps to establish trust and to grasp meanings between the lines, emotions, which are usually expressed through body language. But in our experience digital follow-up interviews are a good way of maintaining contact in the longer term. And the interviewees concerned tell us that they appreciate being able to stay in contact with us in this way.

In general, we can say that the online interviews conducted so far have provided us with data that are extremely valuable for our research. The advantages of this method can be summed up as follows:

1. The possibility of an easy and quick flow of information, especially after critical events. The flexibility of digital message apps allows the interviewees to reach us or respond to our questions on their own terms, when they want, when they have time, or when they need to contact us.
2. The inclusion, or rather participation, of our field assistants in the gathering of empirical data means we can continue discussing the research results, as well as their own experiences in the field, with them.
3. Our field assistants have carried out further interviews for us with people in their social context, including members of their own family of origin, and
4. they have provided us with data concerning the situation during the current pandemic.
5. This helps to give a clear picture not only of differences in the particular situations of the refugees or migrants interviewed, but also of how they are affected by the measures taken by the government in the country where they are living (e.g. loss of income, reduced salary, or interruption of language and integration courses as in Germany).
6. In the case of individuals with whom we have previously conducted a biographical interview with a subsequent case reconstruction, it is ad-

ditionally possible to show the biographical genesis of their patterns of interpretation and action with regard to the current Covid-19 crisis.

7. We gain insights into how people react to the spread of the coronavirus[6], how they deal with it, how their attitude to the pandemic and the measures taken by the government have changed over time, and how these reactions or activities and biographical work are influenced by the collective history and changing discourses in respect of epidemics and infectious diseases in their home region or country.

8. In general, we get a good picture of the public discourses and regulations issued by the authorities in each country, the opportunities for vaccination, and how these have been received and interpreted. In the case of Jordan, conducting interviews in different phases of the pandemic has shown, for instance, how the strict imposition of hygiene measures led initially to much wider public support of the government – even among outsider groupings – than was the case before Covid-19, but also how this "new" trust was replaced by general distrust of the government during the devastating first and second waves that hit the country in autumn 2020 and spring 2021.

9. We can see whether, and to what extent, past experiences of epidemics, and of the state healthcare system in general, have been passed on to the following generations in families and local communities, and especially whether they play a role in the current situation.

10. Our interviews also show to what extent migrant networks, NGOs or religious institutions have gained importance, or lost it, in the current situation.

[6] When we use the general term "coronavirus" in this report, it refers to the different variants of the SARS-Cov-2 virus. By "COVID-19", we mean the disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

11. This design enables us to give financial support to our field assistants, as well as the interviewees, who receive an expense allowance from us for their participation in the interviews.

12. In addition, we have started thinking about the differences between online and face-to-face interviews. This includes reflecting on the fact that in online interviews we cannot benefit from the implicit knowledge or tacit knowledge (see Polanyi, 1966) that in face-to-face interviews is transmitted, for instance, through body language. On the other hand, the process of arranging online interviews gives us important insights into the situation of our interviewees (just as with conventional qualitative interviews).

Below, we will present along these dimensions the findings to date from our research in Jordan and the Middle East, in Brazil, in Germany and Italy (and other countries of the European Union), and from interviews with women belonging to indigenous communities in Paraguay. What will not be discussed here is the successful attempt we made at the end of 2020 and beginning of 2021 to conduct more interviews with female refugees and migrants via online contacts. During our fieldwork in North Africa and Brazil – in contrast to Jordan – we had been able to interview women in only a very few cases, despite our efforts. We want to counteract the tendency to focus on the perspective of male migrants or refugees in our project samples. A certain male-centredness, or a failure to represent the perspectives of people of different genders*, has often been addressed in the context of refugee research (see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2014), a tendency which, as we have self-critically noted, is also manifested in this report. However, we were able to interview some women in both projects despite considerable difficulties in accessing the field. It was helpful in this respect that we worked with women as field assistants in our projects. In the case of the interviews with indigenous people in Paraguay, Victoria Taboada Gómez focused on women in these groupings.

We are planning to use the data we have collected to make a contrastive comparison of the case studies[7] which in this report simply form a mosaic of different case histories. They reveal how people have navigated through the pandemic biographically who, as migrants or members of indigenous groupings, tended to occupy outsider positions in society before it. Our aim is to join the different parts of this mosaic together to form a larger picture or pictures. According to our empirical findings to date, significant components[8] that contribute to increasing power inequalities between groupings, social and global inequalities, and precarious living conditions are:

- transformation processes in the region of origin, and here especially national, but also ethnic or religious, belonging;
- degree of integration, or lack of integration, in social networks;
- the region or country in which the persons concerned are living today;
- legal status of the persons concerned in the place where they are living today;
- access to free medical care and, currently, opportunities for vaccination against Covid-19.

Acknowledgements. On behalf of the whole team, I would like to express our gratitude to all our interviewees. For reasons of data protection, we refer to them here only with masked first names (and in some cases masked place names). Our thanks also go to those who supported us as field assistants and themselves conducted follow-up interviews. Without all of you, this report would not have been possible.

[7] On theoretical sampling and maximal and minimal contrastive comparison following Glaser and Strauss (1967), see Rosenthal (2018), chap. 3.

[8] We borrow the term component from Gestalt theory and use it in the sense discussed by Aron Gurwitsch. A component of a Gestalt "is defined and qualified by its functional significance which, in turn, is determined by its essential and necessary references to functional significances of other parts" (Gurwitsch, 2010 [1964]: 135).

Our thanks go to Ruth Schubert for her language editing and translation and to Friederike von Ass and Vasiliki Vourvachaki for their careful revision of the final manuscript.

2 Interviews with Refugees in the Middle East

Ahmed Albaba & Johannes Becker

When the first Covid-19 case was announced on March 2, 2020, the reaction of the Jordanian government was swift and restrictive. King Abdullah II declared a state of emergency under the terms of the "National Defence Law" on March 17, 2020. The disease was thus placed in the same category as "war, disturbances, armed internal strife, public disasters", which shows how seriously it was taken in the beginning (UNDP Jordan, 2020). The aim was to make Jordan free of "internal" cases of Covid-19. That this policy (and the political discourse in Jordan in general) was couched in terms of "national defence" is also shown by the fact that armed soldiers and armored vehicles were deployed to enforce the subsequent very rigorous lockdown which involved a strict stay-at-home order. Anyone who violated the lockdown was threatened with immediate arrest and imprisonment. On June 28, 2020, the then Jordanian health minister, Saad Jaber, declared that the coronavirus had "dried up and died" within the country.[9] Only around 1,000 cases had been recorded at that time.[10]

However, after this apparent success, Jordan was hit hard by a first and second wave of the pandemic, the first one peaking in late November 2020 at 7,933 cases, and the second peaking at 9,535 cases in late March 2021.[11] For a country of roughly 10 million inhabitants, and taking into account many undetected cases, these are very high numbers. The government refrained from enforcing another all-encompassing lockdown during fall 2020 and spring 2021, and instead imposed a series of changing measures, including night and weekend curfews and the closure of schools, shops, and restaurants.[12] This is due to the

[9] Al-Rai, June 28, 2020, alrai.com [accessed: December 7, 2021].
[10] Roya News, July 05, 2020, royanews.tv [accessed: June 29, 2021].
[11] COVID-19 Dashboard by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University (JHU), see: arcgis.com [accessed: June 30, 2021].
[12] Al-Monitor, March 11, 2021, al-monitor.com [accessed: June 29, 2021].

fact that Jordan has been hard hit by the pandemic economically. Its economy was weak before the outbreak, and through the immediate and complete closing of the borders it lost its income from tourism, one of the most important sectors. And for the very high number of poor families, whose members are unemployed or who live in urban areas with no land they can cultivate, the pandemic has been extremely challenging, despite increased government relief.

However, political commentaries have criticized the authoritarian character of the government measures, pointing out that, especially after the first months, the imposed state of emergency was increasingly used to curtail the freedoms of expression and assembly. General elections, which were held during the wave that peaked in November 2020, were read as an attempt to keep up democratic appearances, while facing criticism of the restrictive political environment. At the time of writing, in summer 2021, the state of emergency has not yet been lifted (Human Rights Watch, 2021; Kayyali, 2020; Ma'ayeh and Sweis, 2021).

At first most people supported the government's strict policy. Indeed, during the initial period from March to May 2020, up to 90% of the people approved the government's actions, while only 40% did so before the pandemic (UNDP Jordan, 2020). However, later, the approval ratings plummeted even below the level of pre-pandemic times.

Here, we will discuss follow-up interviews we conducted in Jordan during the Covid-19 pandemic. These interviews were based on contacts we established during several field trips between 2017 and 2019 for our research project[13] and

[13] The research project "Dynamic Figurations of Refugees, Migrants, and Long-Time Residents in Jordan Since 1946: Between Peaceable and Tension-Ridden Co-Existence?" is funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) (project number: RO 827/20-1) for the period April 2017 to February 2022. Principal investigator: Prof. Gabriele Rosenthal, additional team member: Dr. Hendrik Hinrichsen. During extended periods of fieldwork in Amman between 2017 and 2019 we conducted 82 biographical-narrative

the biographical interviews we conducted in this context.[14] We will focus on interviews with two individuals who represent two very different courses or processes of dealing with the pandemic. **Nadeem** and **Masoud**, as we call the two men, live in Amman, Nadeem since the 1990s, and Masoud since 2016. Nadeem, in his early 50s, came as a Palestinian refugee from Kuwait in 1990/91 and has Jordanian citizenship. Masoud, around 30 years old, is a refugee from Iraq and has no residence permit or work permit. In addition to the differences in their legal status, their age, and the length of time they have lived in Jordan, another significant difference between the two men is that Nadeem's family of origin (his siblings and his mother) also lives in Jordan, while Masoud's family lives in North Iraq. In addition, Nadeem has founded a family of his own and is integrated in a Palestinian neighborhood. Masoud has not yet been able to found a family and is generally in a much more precarious situation. As we will show, these different situations have led to different experiences of the pandemic in Amman.

Johannes Becker conducted biographical-narrative interviews with Nadeem and Masoud during his earlier fieldwork in Amman. During the pandemic, Ahmed Albaba has conducted online interviews with them about their experiences of the Covid-19 period: in April 2020 with Masoud and Nadeem, in April 2021 with Masoud, and in July 2021 with Nadeem. These interviews were organized for Ahmed by our field assistant Sameera Qatooni, a Palestinian woman whose family fled to Jordan in 1948. We mention this because it is not irrelevant to the framing of the interviews (see below). We assume that Sameera told both men that Ahmed has a Palestinian background (Ahmed had not taken part in our earlier fieldwork in Amman and was not known to

interviews with refugees and migrants from Syria, Iraq, Palestine, and Sudan, and with long-time residents.

[14] The online interviews were conducted by Ahmed Albaba (a German citizen of Palestinian origin) and local field assistants from Amman. In total we conducted 31 online interviews with 17 interviewees who were interviewed once or more between April 2020 and August 2021.

Masoud and Nadeem). Additionally, Masoud worked as a research assistant for our project, before and also during the pandemic. During that time, he interviewed his parents and a sister for us in North Iraq where the rest of his family resides.

In particular, we will discuss the different and changing ways in which the pandemic was perceived by these two men in the context of their different biographical, legal, and familial positions. Their attitudes ranged from the discursive "rationalization" and the emphatic "modernity" they displayed in 2020, to increasing skepticism regarding government action and the character of the disease in Nadeem's case, and increasing suffering because of his excluded and solitary situation in the case of Masoud, when we talked to them in 2021.

2.1 The Case of Nadeem: The Path from Acceptance of Government Measures to a Critical Attitude

In order to show how **Nadeem's** experience of the pandemic and his view of it changed in the course of a year between 2020 and 2021, we will consider the first online interview we held with him in May 2020, and contrast this with what he told us in 2021.

The first online interview in May 2020. This interview was conducted during the first lockdown and it shows how Nadeem's initial perception of the pandemic evolved. At first, he increasingly approved the strict measures taken by the government, which corresponds to what we were told by other interviewees. This is remarkable because of the negative image of the Jordanian government that is common in many Palestinian milieus. As already mentioned, Nadeem was born in Kuwait in the 1970s into a family of Palestinian refugees. He migrated to Amman together with his parents and siblings in 1990, following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and experiences of violence and discrimination. In Amman, he moved into a neighborhood which is heavily dominated by Pales-

tinians, and married a Palestinian woman with whom he has four children. He has a part-time job teaching in a government institution, and he runs a small snack bar. Interestingly, in the interview Nadeem compares the Covid-19 crisis with the crisis of his family being forced to leave Kuwait in 1990. He says that in both situations their lives took a 180 degree turn, and both times the family had to re-organize or re-establish itself. In Kuwait this was because of the unplanned and abrupt move to Jordan, and in the case of Covid-19 it was because of the financial crisis which threatened to plunge the entire extended family into serious difficulties.

Two of his five brothers, who all live in Jordan, have been hit the hardest by the Covid-19 crisis, because they are day laborers with no regular employment and have had no work since the lockdown began in March 2020. Nadeem says that although his two brothers applied several times for government relief, they have received nothing, or only from their relatives. By contrast, Nadeem was in a fairly secure financial position at that time, given his two jobs. However, his income no longer covered his expenditure, so that in the lockdown period Nadeem had to set new priorities. The fact that his salary was reduced by more than 50 JOD (approx. €60) in the context of measures taken by the government added to Nadeem's insecurity.[15]

The interview we conducted with Nadeem in May 2020 during the first lockdown shows that the way he dealt with the Covid-19 crisis, and the way he navigated through this period biographically, can be divided into three phases. This changed again in 2021, as we will see. In the **first phase**, Nadeem thought there was no real danger of being infected with the coronavirus, not least because only one case had been identified in Jordan. He says that people around him thought the risk was exaggerated, and some of them even believed that

[15] On April 16, 2020, the then Prime Minister Omar ar-Razzaz declared that under Defence Order No. 6 issued on 8th April the monthly wages of government officials could be reduced by up to 30% in May and June 2020. See: Al-Ghad, May 31, 2020, alghad.com [accessed: December 7, 2021].

the whole thing was a perfidious conspiracy and should not be taken seriously. With reference to this phase, he says:

> In the beginning I believed what people in the street were saying. They said it's not dangerous. It's just a kind of flu. There was a coronavirus a few years ago and it wasn't so bad. Just a virus like any other virus. But this coronavirus is different from the old one. (Nadeem, May 2020)

To explain why he changed his mind, Nadeem (like Masoud and other people we interviewed in Jordan) says that after a wedding in the city of Irbid on March 20, 2020, around 85 attendees had developed Covid-19. This event, which became known as "the Irbid wedding", led to a heated debate in the media.[16] Among other things, reference was made to a study which apparently blamed this wedding for the spread of the coronavirus in Jordan (Yusef, Dawood et al. 2020). The publication of the number of infections was a turning point for Nadeem; it made him see that the coronavirus was a risk to be taken seriously. This **second phase** can thus be characterized by his "rational reaction" and his new insight regarding the risk of becoming infected with the coronavirus. An important role was played here by institutionalized awareness campaigns and media reports, including social media. The **third phase** of Nadeem's biographical navigation consists of developing everyday strategies for dealing with the crisis, or for navigating through the crisis biographically. Nadeem tried to get used to wearing a mask, reducing his social contacts, and restricting his mobility. He said that he now disagrees with people who play down the coronavirus crisis. To illustrate this, he describes a situation that makes his position clear:

> But after a while we had no more bread and I had to go out to buy bread and other things we needed. Directly after the morning prayer, I went to the baker's and waited in a queue for three hours, from 6 o'clock to 10 o'clock, before I was served. Everyone was moving about on foot. The baker's shop is two kilometres away from where I live. I had to go out shopping several times, because I had to go on foot and I couldn't carry

[16] BBC Arabic, March 22, 2020, bbc.com [accessed: June 29, 2021].

> everything at once. I can't send my children because they are too small and anyway they are the most vulnerable group. A bit later we were allowed to use the car. That was a help. People ignored the rule that we should keep 1.5 meters apart from each other. They said: the coronavirus doesn't exist, it's all a conspiracy. There are lines marked on the ground to show where we should stand when queuing. I kept the right distance from the person in front of me in the queue but the person behind me came closer and closer. I said to him: You're not worried about yourself, but I'm worried about myself and about my family, and I don't want to infect them. (Nadeem, May 2020)

Like many segments of the Palestinian population in Jordan, Nadeem is basically distrustful of, or opposed to, the Jordanian monarchy and the Jordanian government. However, the government's initial rigid strategy in this crisis led him to take a positive view of it during the period in spring and summer 2020 when Jordan managed to suppress transmission successfully. Thus, the government succeeded, in the short term, in gaining the support of various groupings within the population for this joint task. Despite his general critique of the government, and despite the financial problems that affected his family, Nadeem believes that the initial measures to contain the pandemic taken by the government were right and necessary: "Although I have plenty of criticisms against the government, I can testify that it acted wisely in respect of the coronavirus." Thus, in the interview situation in 2020 he presented himself as informed and "rational".

This is characteristic not only of the interview with Nadeem, but also of the other interviews we conducted in 2020. Almost all our interviewees mentioned similar exchanges with people within their own milieu who tended to play down the severity of the crisis. The interviewees distanced themselves from those who believed that the Covid-19 crisis was a conspiracy and that it posed no real threat. They said they complied with the rules set by the government or by health institutions, even in situations where there was no one to enforce this. This "rational" presentation could also be due

to the context of the interview. All the interviewees were told beforehand that the interviews were being conducted for the Center of Methods at the University of Göttingen. Perhaps they ascribed certain qualities to the German interviewers – such as "rational thinking" – and therefore tended to describe or represent themselves, their family, and even their country, as rational. They also saw themselves as representatives of their community or their country. This was the case in the interview with Nadeem. Ahmed, who has lived in Germany for many years, was regarded as a member of a German university or German research team, even though we suppose that Sameera informed the two men that Ahmed had a Palestinian background. It is very likely that Nadeem's insistence that the government measures were "rational", expedient, and legitimate was influenced by this interactive setting. For the framing of his self-presentation in the first interview, the fact that Ahmed Albaba came from the same region as himself was obviously less important than Nadeem's perception of him as a member of a research team with whom it was appropriate to speak about the measures in the terms of a "rational discourse".

The second online interview in July 2021. In the second online interview a year later, Nadeem sounds insecure, skeptical and critical. His arguments have changed and he now shows mistrust of the government measures. He attempts to play down the risks, and displays an ambivalent attitude to vaccination, despite the fact that he and many other members of his family had been ill with Covid-19, some of them seriously. This can be explained by the family's increasingly difficult economic situation. Nadeem justifies his skepticism by saying, for example: "The whole of Jordan is infected despite the measures." With regard to Nadeem's biographical navigation, we can assume on the basis of this interview that, after the third phase of very cautious behavior and acceptance of the measures, there followed a **fourth phase** in which he and many members of his family caught the virus, fell ill, and recovered. Currently, Nadeem is going through a **fifth phase** of his biographical navigation,

which is characterized by serious doubts in respect of the measures taken by the government. This skepticism means that he is again generally critical of the Jordanian government, like many others in Amman's Palestinian milieu.

In this second online interview, Nadeem says that in the first year of the pandemic all went well with him and his family (both his family of orientation and his family of procreation). But then he and several members of his family caught Covid-19. Let us briefly consider these cases. In December 2020, the eldest brother, who lives in a nearby city, was the first to fall seriously ill. Because he had several pre-existing conditions (heart disease, diabetes, and lung problems), his was a very severe case. At several points the family feared he would not survive. The main problem was shortness of breath. There was no bed free at the hospital and he could be connected to a ventilator for only a few hours. He was not given any medicines. On the recommendation of neighbors and friends, the family tried to help him by giving him herbal mixtures. Nadeem compares this time with a "horror film".

This brother survived. But then other members of the family fell ill. In January 2021 another brother, his wife and their six children all caught Covid-19. However, they had only mild symptoms, resembling a cold. At the end of March 2021 Nadeem caught it. He thinks that this may have happened at the funeral ceremonies for his mother-in-law, who, according to him, did not die of Covid-19. A few days after the funeral he felt pains in his leg joints, he had a raised temperature, and breathing became difficult. His doctor said it was an ordinary cold. When the usual medicines did not help, Nadeem had himself and his children tested for Covid-19, and the result was positive for himself and his son. They were told to self-isolate for 14 days and so they stayed at home. However, they had contact with the other children and with Nadeem's wife. For Nadeem, this means that "we as a family are a good example showing that contact does not always mean you will be infected."

After this, his attitude clearly changed, which is surprising in view of the cases of Covid-19 in his family. He now finds the panic with which people reacted to the pandemic quite unnecessary, and thinks that the government measures were exaggerated. He explains his change of heart by saying that no one in his family has died. But it can also be read as trying to justify the fact that he did not isolate himself from the non-infected members of his family. For Nadeem it can be said that the cases of Covid-19 in his family took a "positive" course. The experience of the eldest brother showed that even severe cases do not necessarily lead to death. He no longer fears for his own life. Nadeem is also no longer worried about his mother, not least because she has been vaccinated. Here we see Nadeem's ambivalent attitude to the measures taken by the government. On the one hand, he says they are exaggerated, and he has doubts about the importance of the vaccination campaign, while on the other hand he is happy that his mother is unlikely to be severely ill now that she is protected by the vaccine.

Nadeem and his wife were both vaccinated with the Chinese vaccine Sinopharm at the end of June 2021. In answer to the question why he was vaccinated although he had only recently recovered from a Covid-19 infection, he said:

> We had no other choice, because I work as a teacher, as a government employee, and if you're not vaccinated you are not allowed to walk in the street during the curfew, or to go to the tourist areas [...] I had a permit to go out at night during the curfew, but it had run out [...] Jabs are free up till next month, and then there will be a charge. (Nadeem, July 2021)

Vaccination is not compulsory in Jordan, but there are restrictions for unvaccinated people. From July 2021, all government employees who are not vaccinated must be tested for Covid-19 every 72 hours. Anyone who fails to com-

ply with this rule may be fined.[17] Nadeem thinks that "most people agree to be vaccinated because of their work and because it is free up to August".

As we have shown, he has a very ambivalent attitude to vaccination. On the one hand, he is glad that his mother has been vaccinated, but on the other hand, he told us of a cousin in Jordan who has had Covid-19 three times and who developed severe symptoms, even after being vaccinated. He says his family has heard of a 57-year-old relative in Kuwait who died although he was vaccinated. Nadeem also knows of another case of someone dying despite being vaccinated. He cannot understand why this happens, or why his cousin was ill so often. He takes this as evidence that vaccination is ineffective.

His skepticism is probably due to the fact that the government measures frequently change and are not transparent for Nadeem, as well as to the serious economic effects the pandemic has had on Nadeem's family (both his family of orientation and his family of procreation). He says that the economic situation in Jordan has clearly deteriorated since our first interview in 2020. He is unable to pay the tax and insurance for his snack bar. He already owes the state JOD 1,500 (approx. €1,800). Nadeem is worried about the future of his snack bar, since he has seen how other firms and shops have had to close down because of the crisis. In addition, his two brothers have suffered terribly as day laborers, because they have had long phases without any income at all. At the same time, prices have risen: the price for many food items has almost doubled, says Nadeem.

In contrast to the first interview, when we talked to Nadeem in July 2021 he appeared to be very uneasy, which we assume can be explained by all these experiences. He does not trust anything he hears about either the virus or vaccination against it. "Nothing is really clear", is how he put it. And it seems that,

[17] Al-Ghad, July 18, 2021, arabic.cnn.com [accessed: July 22, 2021]. See also: Al-Ghad, April 29, 2021, alghad.com [accessed: July 22, 2021] and Roya News, April 28, 2021, royanews.tv [accessed: July 22, 2021].

as a result of how things have developed, many people in the poor Palestinian neighborhood where Nadeem lives have again become critical of the Jordanian government, as they were before the pandemic. Other empirical data that we collected suggest that Nadeem's change of attitude is not unusual: many people who first approved the measures imposed by the government have become critical und mistrusting, as they were before the pandemic. This is especially so among the Palestinians who do not primarily define themselves as Jordanians.

2.2 The Case of Masoud: Sliding Slowly into a Trajectory of Suffering

Masoud's situation in Jordan is much more precarious than Nadeem's, legally and also financially: he does not have refugee status but lives in Amman with an expired visa and no work permit. He is an Iraqi man from Mosul (born in 1990) who has lived in Amman since 2016.

While Ahmed Albaba was addressed by Nadeem as a member of a German university or German research team, and not as a Palestinian, this was not so in the first online interview with Masoud.[18] It seems that the interviewer's Palestinian origins, or, more exactly, the Arab and Muslim belonging ascribed to him, could be the reason for the wariness and caution displayed by Masoud when he was asked if he would agree to an interview, and in the interview itself. Despite his earlier cooperation with us, he clearly had doubts when asked if he would agree to being interviewed by Ahmed. He wanted to know the purpose of the interview, exactly what the team would do with the information collected, whether it would be possible to identify the interviewees if it was published, and whether the German government or the German secret service would have access to it. Masoud explained that he wanted to leave Jordan and

[18] The interview took place on April 7, 2020.

travel to somewhere like Germany, and he was afraid this might not be possible if things that he said should get into the wrong hands. Since he had formerly cooperated with us on a basis of trust, we conclude that his doubts were related specifically to Ahmed. Although we assured him that we would make it impossible to identify him or his family, he refused to allow the first interview to be recorded on tape. The following quotations from the interview are therefore based on the notes made by Ahmed. Our hypothesis is that while Masoud and the interviewer had plenty in common in cultural and religious terms, which made communication easier – they are both Muslims and they talked to each other in Arabic – this also made Masoud more cautious. This was probably due to his biographical experiences, for instance with armed Arab-Muslim groupings in Iraq, or with Palestinians in Amman. During our further contacts, however, an increasing level of rapport was established between Ahmed and Masoud who, for example, agreed to have the second interview recorded, as well as all interviews with his family members.

Masoud, who comes from a well-established family in Mosul, is the son of an Arab father and a Kurdish mother. In the context of the advance of the so-called Islamic State in 2012, he had fled to Iraqi Kurdistan together with his family, after his father had several times been threatened or blackmailed. In 2016 the family migrated to Jordan. After one year, his family returned to relatives in Iraqi Kurdistan, while he remained in Jordan. The family suffered economically from the experiences of repeated flight (from Mosul to Kurdistan and to Amman and back to Kurdistan).[19] However, contrary to other refugees whom our colleagues interviewed in different countries of the European Union and in Brazil (cf. chaps. 3 and 4), Masoud is not expected (and has never been able) to send money home. This means that his relations with his family of origin have not changed in this respect during the pandemic. However, it seems that a slight opening in the otherwise very restricted family dialogue has been

[19] For an analysis of another family from Iraq with similar aspects of flight and a similar precarious legal situation, see Becker and Hinrichsen (2020).

brought about by the online interviews which Masoud conducted at our request with his relatives in Iraq (both his parents and his sister).

First online interviews with Masoud in 2020. The approach to the pandemic revealed in the first interviews with Masoud and members of his family in 2020 is characterized strongly by a family focus on hygiene and a state discourse of modernity. His precarious legal (and financial) status in Jordan, and the fact that he was living alone in the city, meant that even before the pandemic Masoud behaved cautiously, or even warily, in public spaces. For several years now Masoud has seen no future for himself in Jordan, but he has not found any opportunity to migrate to another country. He puts it this way: "Your future is uncertain and all the time you think about emigrating. Life is impossible here in this country [...] I want a different future."

In the context of the pandemic, this difficult situation and his perception that he is stuck in Jordan, is reinforced by his fear of the consequences of infection. Like Nadeem, he compares the experience of the pandemic with collective experiences of war and violent conflicts:

> We saw many things in Iraq in 2003, murder, unrest, fighting on the streets, and we experienced many difficult situations. The situation with the coronavirus is just as difficult as the situation in Iraq in 2003. (Masoud, April 2020)

Masoud's fears have led to a greater avoidance of public spaces, increased media consumption, and complaints about people who do not keep to the rules. It is very clear that Masoud's "daily life in the pandemic" is influenced by the family dialogue on hygiene. What he says in this respect is very similar to what his family members say. Hygiene was important for Masoud even before the pandemic, and now even more so. He describes how every time he comes back home he washes himself thoroughly and changes his clothes. His mother **Nermin**, in the interview with her, describes similar behavior, and

puts this down to the "modern" orientation of her Iraqi family. This is what the mother says in the interview conducted by her son Masoud:[20]

> [...] cleanliness and prevention are most important. We were taught this when we were young. I wash my hands, and if I go to the hospital and come back from there, I wash my hands and change my clothes. I never sit at home in clothes I have worn outside. We are a self-confident people. You don't have to be muthaqaf [educated/intellectual], but if you are wā'y [self-confident] and if you have experience, you will be able to protect yourself. We learned this from our parents. (Nermin, April 2020)

This family dialogue is reflected in Masoud's remarks, mixed with disdain for people who do not observe the basic rules of hygiene:

> My mother taught us the importance of cleanliness when we were children. But now she pays even more attention to it. She calls me and asks whether I have washed the dishes, cleaned, tidied up, or not. She told me I should stay at home and not hang out with my friends. Hygiene is nice. I have clothes that I only wear at home. When I come from outside, I change my clothes, wash my hands and feet. I've bought a mask, gloves and disinfectant. I disinfect everything and wash my food thoroughly. I try not to go out. But in the poor districts people don't follow the rules properly. They stand too close to each other when queuing at the baker's or in the supermarket. People eat, drink and smoke out of doors, as usual. They are more afraid of food shortages than of the virus. They don't take the virus seriously. They don't go to the hospital when they develop symptoms. The situation here is really hard. People meet each other as usual and talk and hang around together. (Masoud, April 2020)

The negative view of others in his neighborhood expressed by Masoud in this quotation is related in the first place to their failure to observe the hygiene rules. But beyond this, it also suggests that Masoud sees a difference between himself and the other people in the "poor district" of Amman where he now

[20] The interview took place on April 15, 2020.

lives, because their status does not correspond to the former status of his family in Mosul. While this distinction has existed all the time that Masoud has lived alone in Jordan, it has become clearer, or been reinforced, by the pandemic.

Second online interviews in 2021. In one of the follow-up interviews with Masoud conducted by Ahmed a year later, he reflects on the ongoing pressure of the pandemic on his life, which is an additional burden in his illegalized position:

> At the moment, honestly, I'm tired and I feel bad, okay, of course because of the pandemic, okay, you know, because of Covid contacts were very [...] and I got cautious, okay, at the moment there is a curfew at the weekend, there is no weekend [...] So I stayed- I stay at home all the time; I mean, from morning to afternoon. Ummm, but sometimes I go to the shops, when I need something for my household, and then I come back, that's all. (Masoud, April 2021)

This depressed mood is probably due to the fact that almost all members of Masoud's family in Kurdistan fell ill with Covid-19 in November and December 2020. They all recovered, but in addition to worrying about themselves, they had feared for the life of the mother, who had to be taken to hospital several times. In the interview with **Khalid**, Masoud's father, Khalid speaks about how depressed everyone felt, especially during the time they were all ill. Each sick person was isolated at home, and cared for by one other family member:

> [...] we were afraid of the disease. We didn't go out. So the situation was a bit difficult, we were depressed, we had something like depression. (Khalid, December 2020)

This was a difficult situation for Masoud, because he was in Amman and couldn't do anything to help, apart from occasionally talking to them on the phone. It became painfully clear to him that from Amman he could only follow the happenings in his family passively. This increased the feelings of powerlessness and inadequacy from which he had suffered already before

the pandemic. In other words, we assume, after analyzing the interviews we conducted with him, that his experience as a refugee, together with his precarious legal and social status in Amman today, and the recent news from his family in Kurdistan, have combined to create a trajectory of suffering (see Riemann and Schütze, 1991).

We asked Masoud if he could conduct interviews with members of his family, which he did. This evidently helped him to form a closer relationship with them, but at the same time he found the interviews stressful. They took place during a phase in which the family had not yet fully recovered from Covid-19. The interviews showed him that he did not know everything that had happened to his relatives in Iraq. At first he was angry at this practice of not telling him everything, and he confronted his father and his two older sisters about it. But then he began to understand their behavior. He realized that they had kept bad news from him because they didn't want him to worry. He says:

> Yes I was once surprised to hear [in the interview with his mother] that my mother had been very seriously ill (much worse than I thought), so that they had taken her to the emergency department at the hospital [...] And I knew nothing of this, although I had said to them "may God protect you, keep me informed of any new developments, okay, everything that happens to you, whatever it is." But I don't know, perhaps they didn't want me to worry, okay. (Masoud, April 2021)

Masoud says that for him these interviews were mainly an opportunity to have long talks with members of his family. This helped him to feel more involved in their life, or at least to hear more about it, so that he felt more like an active member of the family. He had been unable to talk to them like this for a long time, not only because of the crisis caused by Covid-19, but also because their life as refugees had made communication generally difficult.

2.3 Summary

These two cases of refugees known to us from our field research in Jordan show that the way people experience the pandemic is closely bound up with past experiences of crises, and especially their situation before the pandemic. Masoud and Nadeem both refer to earlier crises in their lives (experiences of war and flight) when describing their present situation. Nadeem is much better established in Amman than Masoud. In particular, he has Jordanian citizenship, he has founded a family of his own and his family of origin is also in Amman, he has a regular income, and he is integrated in a Palestinian neighborhood. His attitude to the measures imposed by the government after the outbreak of the pandemic was at first surprisingly positive. However, this changed in the second year of the pandemic. Nadeem has become increasingly skeptical of these measures, and doubts the seriousness of the pandemic in the light of economic challenges in the family, and the way the government keeps changing the regulations. This has led him to become increasingly mistrustful of the Jordanian government, as he was before the pandemic. As we know from the biographical interview we conducted with him, and from other data we collected, the way he talks today about the Jordanian government corresponds to the dominant discourse in the Palestinian milieu in which he lives. Being integrated in this milieu in Amman means that he is surrounded by people with whom he can share his experiences and his skepticism, unlike Masoud who is completely alone.

In the case of Masoud, the fear of becoming sick and his concern about the well-being of his distant family have taken over. Starting from an already very insecure situation in Amman, separated from his family of origin, with no residence permit or work permit, in his case the pandemic has led to isolation, with very few contacts, and he has increasingly entered on a trajectory of suffering and loss of agency. His case is comparable to those of other refugees who are living in a legally insecure situation in their present country of arrival, separated from their families, as shown for instance by Margherita Cusmano

(chap. 4.4). This is bound up with the question of whether or not one is integrated in a local network, as Eva Bahl and Lucas Cé Sangalli show in connection with the interviews they conducted in Brazil (chap. 3). It is apparent that local networks and their discourses, whether these are family networks or networks based on ethnic or religious groupings, are essential for preserving agency in the long period of the pandemic with its grave social consequences. This can be seen clearly in the difference between Nadeem, who is firmly integrated in a Palestinian neighborhood, and Masoud, who is living in Amman in a comparatively isolated situation, unsupported by social contacts.

3 Interviews with Refugees and Migrants in Brazil

Eva Bahl & Lucas Cé Sangalli

3.1 Introduction

In Brazil, the polarization of the political situation has intensified since the Covid-19 outbreak at the beginning of 2020, especially with the approach of the presidential elections planned for 2022. Right-wing president Jair Bolsonaro has trivialized the coronavirus and refused to take decisive measures to curtail its spread. While the number of registered deaths due to Covid-19 in Brazil has passed 500,000 – one of the highest in the world as of August 2021, the political discourse of Bolsonaro and his followers continues to lay emphasis on the primacy of the economy and denial of scientific knowledge. Consequently, there has never been a country-wide lockdown. Nevertheless, a very successful vaccination campaign is now underway, and not only many Brazilians, but also foreigners living in Brazil, have now been vaccinated.

The groupings in society that have been most affected, either directly by suffering from the disease, or indirectly as a result of the economic crisis caused by the pandemic, are those that were already marginalized and vulnerable before the outbreak: for example, indigenous people, Afro-Brazilians, people who live in poor, over-populated neighborhoods (***favelas***[21]), and migrants. Furthermore, people who rely on the informal labor market[22] are especially af-

[21] In Brazil, the informal and marginalized settlements which are often located in the urban periphery and whose population has few economic resources, are called *comunidade* or (pejoratively) *favela* (for a discussion of these terms, see for example Pereira, Carvalho Castro and Cheibub, 2019; Freire, 2008). However, these settlements in Brazilian cities also have streets, solid houses, and other – albeit precarious – infrastructure.

[22] For different economic and political definitions of "informality", see Charmes (2012). Georg Elwert, Hans-Dieter Evers and Werner Wilkens argue that "the term informal sector can be used descriptively, but hardly analytically." According to these authors,

fected by the restrictions to commerce due to Covid-19 measures, and by the federal government's failure to make any substantial effort to address vulnerabilities created during this period. More than 40% of Brazilians work in the informal sector, i.e., with no access to social benefits in case of unemployment, pandemic-related movement restrictions, or illness.[23] The initial prohibition of commercial activities in the streets during the Covid-19 pandemic in big cities like Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Salvador, and Porto Alegre exposed the vulnerability of this part of the Brazilian population. Among them were many migrants who relied on the money from their jobs not only to pay for rent, energy, and food, for example, but also to send remittances to their families in their countries of origin. Especially migrants from Haiti and Senegal used to send money regularly to their relatives, although this was usually not the case with the migrants from Middle Eastern countries we interviewed. In the face of the catastrophic management of the Covid-19 pandemic in Brazil by the federal government,[24] and the loss of trust in the capacity of the Brazilian government to handle an economic crisis, the currency (Brazilian real (BRL)) has become devalued against the US dollar.[25] The deleterious impact of the federal government's administrative incapacity on the livelihood of migrants becomes clearer if we contrast the situation of our interviewees in Brazil with that of migrants and refugees living with a legal residency status in Germany (see

this sector can be described sociologically "as a 'stratum of the unsecured,' in which the search for security has absolute priority over income maximization." (1983: 281).

[23] Folha de S. Paulo, June 17, 2020, www1.folha.uol.com.br [accessed: August 10, 2021].

[24] The increasing deterioration of their living conditions, especially among the less powerful groups in Brazil, has led to massive public demonstrations against Bolsonaro's government, and to a parliamentary commission of inquiry (CPI) to investigate the government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. As the Globo News Network reported in August 2021, this CPI plans to seek Bolsonaro's indictment for "quackery and witchcraft". See: Journal Nacional, August 11, 2021, g1.globo.com [accessed: August 27, 2021].

[25] As of August 2021, 1 US dollar equals around 5 BRL, while two years earlier (August 2019), one dollar was equivalent to about 4 BRL.

chap. 4). As we will show in our empirical data below, this difficult situation in Brazil has led some of our interviewees to migrate to other parts of the country, or to make plans for onward migration to other countries or for a return to their home countries, and some have already done so. In the face of the economic and political crisis, Brazilians themselves have also increasingly left the country.[26]

In this part of the research report, we will discuss how the migrants in Brazil with whom we have been in contact for several years now, navigate the challenges and difficulties that emerged or increased in their daily lives during the Covid-19 pandemic. From September to November 2019, we did fieldwork in Southern, Southeastern, and Northeastern Brazil. The research team consisted of the authors, Eva Bahl and Lucas Cé Sangalli, both based at a German university, and their professor, Gabriele Rosenthal. In addition, Maria do Carmo Dos Santos Gonçalves, a Brazilian specialist in migration studies, who is currently the director of the Scalabrinian Center for Migration Studies in Brasília, was also part of the team.[27] During our fieldwork in 2019, we conducted 17 biographical-narrative interviews with migrants who were mainly from West Africa (Senegal, Ghana, and Sierra Leone), the Middle East (Syria, Iran, Iraq, and Yemen), and Haiti. After that, due to the pandemic and the travel restrictions that came with it, we kept in contact with our interviewees online. We stayed in touch via social networks and messaging apps, and conducted several follow up interviews (n=11), as well as further (online) biographical-narrative interviews (n=5) with new contacts – people we have never met in person – and with some of their relatives (living in Ghana).

[26] The New York Times, May 16, 2021, nytimes.com [accessed: August 10, 2021].

[27] We would like to thank Maria do Carmo dos Santos Gonçalves (Scalabrinian Center for Migration Studies, Brasília) and Nathalia Louruz de Mello (Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre) for assisting us throughout our research by conducting interviews, and for their very valuable input in our discussions.

The structure of this chapter is as follows: first, we will give a general introduction to the situation of migrants in Brazil before and after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic (chap. 3.2). Then, based on our case studies, we will analyze in more depth some of the components that determine their current daily lives: the significance of sending money to the family at home (chap. 3.3), and being part of a network (chap. 3.4). Finally, we will present a short summary of our conclusions (chap. 3.5).

3.2 Working and Living Conditions of Migrants in Brazil

Before the pandemic. First, it is important to stress that the legal situation for migrants in Brazil differs significantly for different groupings and individuals (see for instance Cé Sangalli and Dos Santos Gonçalves, 2020: 83ff.). While people from Syria have had access to a humanitarian visa since 2013,[28] these are seldom granted to people from West African countries. For some Senegalese citizens who had applied for refugee status in Brazil,[29] the Brazilian government issued an ordinance[30] in December 2019 which gave them the right to apply for residence and thereby regularize their status. In general, government interventions in the sense of controls, but also of support services for refugees or migrants, are much less pronounced in Brazil compared, for instance, to Germany. The effects of a new immigration law in Brazil passed in 2017, which is intended to give migrants and refugees legal equality with Brazilian citizens, are still unclear. There are currently only a few state-organized initiatives and programs for targeted welfare support for migrants. Instead, religious institutions and NGOs are most likely to provide support for migrants (see Da Silva, 2017). The living conditions of people who migrated to Brazil thus depend to

[28] ACNUR, September 24, 2013, acnur.org [accessed: August 10, 2021].

[29] According to the Globo News Network, in 17 years only 15 asylum applications (out of a total of 8,000) by Senegalese migrants have been approved by the Brazilian state. See: Mundo, December 06, 2019, g1.globo.com [accessed: August 10, 2021].

[30] See: in.gov.br [accessed: August 10, 2021].

a very small extent on the state, and to a correspondingly greater extent on their own positioning in the informal sector, and on their networks with other migrants. Many of our interviewees work, or used to work, as street vendors. While the Syrians mostly sell Arab-style street food, the Senegalese mostly sell sunglasses or technological products (such as loudspeakers or smartphone accessories). The Haitians are more involved in selling souvenirs and handicrafts. Most of our Senegalese and Haitian interviewees share apartments with others due to the high living costs and rents in Brazil, and some live in marginalized communities in Rio de Janeiro. Already before the pandemic, the perception that their monthly income in Brazil was not enough to pay for their basic needs (such as access to online communication, housing, and food) was relatively widespread amongst the people we had contact with. Nevertheless, they did what they could to send some money to their families. These high living costs have risen further during the pandemic.

After the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. With the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic the situation became more precarious and marginal for all our interviewees. The pandemic and the restrictions associated with it have directly affected their activities and their income. Many have not been able to continue selling their merchandise or be otherwise active in the informal economy. Those working in restaurants or on construction sites have lost their jobs. All of them have lost their sources of income – at least temporarily. But the high living costs in Brazil – and in some cases also of the families living abroad – still have to be covered. This means that although many of them would have liked to comply with the restrictions and feared infection, they have felt compelled to look for ways to earn money, as we will see below. Some have lived on their savings (if they have been in Brazil long enough to have any), or relied on food donations and on governmental emergency relief which amounted to R$ 600 (around 100 €/110 US $) per month in 2020.[31] Despite this initiative taken by the

[31] The federal government calculated the amount of the monthly payments based on the number of people in the household and/or on whether women were solely responsible

federal government, the small amount of money was seldom enough for our interviewees to meet their basic living costs. Besides, access to this service has proved difficult for many of them, because of bureaucratic barriers bound up with the renewal of their residence permits, or problems with their taxpayer registry identification (CPF).

Here, it becomes very clear, especially if we also take into account the case studies from Jordan and Germany, that access to the labor market is a component that has a significant impact on the current life situation of our interviewees. Among our different interviewees, we observed that the migrants from the Middle East region were engaged in (relatively) more stable and more formalized commercial activities, although they sometimes sold illegalized products (like fake brand articles): some owned food trucks that were registered with the municipal authorities, and others worked in restaurants. For them, access to the short-term aid offered by the federal government was easier due to the more formalized character of their activities. For our West African and Haitian interviewees, the situation was more precarious. Due to the pandemic, the people engaged in informalized economic activities in Brazil have been exposed to stricter and more frequent police controls. Pandemic-related prevention measures have often been the pretext for further marginalization of irregularized (and vulnerable) labor situations.

In the face of this situation, certain civil society organizations and organizations of migrants have come up with different strategies to cushion the impacts of the pandemic. Their activities range from advocacy and political campaigning to the distribution of food baskets in the context of food insecurity that once again haunts the most vulnerable groupings in the country. According to a study by the Research Group "Food for Justice", food insecurity is severe

for household expenses; initially in 2020 the federal government paid an amount that ranged between R$ 600 and R$ 1,200; with the extension of the payments into 2021, the monthly amount diminished, and the government continued with the payments until October 2021. See: g1.globo.com [accessed: November 11, 2021].

for 15% of the Brazilian population (Galindo et al., 2021: 19). This is not only related to the Covid-19 pandemic, but also to the economic crisis and the political decisions of the Bolsonaro government, which reversed or did not continue many of the advances made by previous governments in this regard. In this polarized political context, the civil rights organizations have been able to celebrate some successes. For example, important progress has been made in terms of health legislation and in regularization campaigns for migrants (see Carvalho, Viola and Sperandio, 2021; Villarreal, 2021).[32]

In view of this situation, it has always been important for us to learn what our interviewees think about their situation in Brazil, the situation of their families in their regions of origin, and the threat of infection by Covid-19, and how their views have changed in the course of the pandemic. In the beginning, some perceived infection by the virus as a serious threat, while others spoke about it with less concern. Most of them prioritized – voluntarily or not – their economic activities. These perceptions changed especially in the second half of 2020, when Brazil was the main Covid-19 hotspot in the world for several months, and the number of registered deaths in the country rose to more than 400,000. They felt more threatened by Covid-19, since many personally knew people who had been infected. The lack of significant government initiatives to combat the virus has forced many of our interviewees to rely on themselves and their networks. As we will discuss below, existing networks of solidarity and support have gained importance for our contacts in the pandemic.

Access to public services and government support. The public health system of Brazil (SUS) is accessible to all migrants free of charge (if we do not consider the cost of travel to reach facilities, for example). And a small amount of money – meant as emergency relief (Auxílio Emergencial) and paid by the federal government – is accessible to migrants. But in practice, the health system

[32] For more on these topics, see the series of interviews on migration in Brazil that we have conducted with fellow social scientists during the pandemic (Bahl and Cé Sangalli, 2021).

has been overburdened by Covid-19 patients for a long period of time, and the emergency relief fund is not always easy to access for migrants in the informal labor market because of bureaucratic or language barriers. This exposure to vulnerability is a result of the lack of effective response at all levels of government to the needs of the most marginalized groupings in Brazilian society. It is important to highlight, however, that despite President Bolsonaro's denial of the seriousness of the pandemic, and the consequently very late decision by the government to buy vaccines, the vaccination campaign has gained momentum and in the states of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, where most of our interviewees are currently located, more than 70% have had their first jab, and more than 60% are fully vaccinated (Status: December 10, 2021).[33] Marginalized people like street dwellers and indigenous people (living on their territory) have priority access to the vaccine. Migrants are not prioritized but have the same right as Brazilian citizens to be vaccinated. Different information campaigns by civil society organizations are currently directed at migrants to make them aware of this right.[34] As of August 2021, all the people we have managed to remain in contact with have had an opportunity to be vaccinated if they wished to.

In the following sections, we will further discuss the changing life situations of migrants in Brazil and the dynamic power balances they are embedded in, based on our case studies. We will focus on different constitutive components of the life situations of our interviewees and their families.

[33] See this map published by the Globo News Network on the progress of the vaccination campaign in Brazil, see: especiais.g1.globo.com [accessed: December 10, 2021].

[34] See for example this leaflet "migrants are entitled to vaccination in Brazil", available on the website of the "Land, Work and Citizenship Institute" and translated to several languages, see: ittc.org.br [accessed: August 18, 2021].

3.3 The Role of Remittances

Remittances Instead of Traveling Home

Bintu represents a case where internal migration in Brazil, rather than traveling home to Senegal, has helped her to maintain her role as breadwinner for her children. Bintu (born in 1975 in Senegal) has been separated for seven years now from her son (25 years old) and daughter (23 years old). With the movement restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and especially due to the deterioration of her economic situation in Brazil, she has had to postpone her plans to visit them again. Bintu is from Kaolack, Senegal, and worked braiding hair at Copacabana Beach when we met her in October 2019. Maria do Carmo dos Santos Gonçalves interviewed her in Portuguese. Bintu migrated alone to Brazil in 2014, after she had separated from her husband. This very difficult period was marked by the loss of her six-month-old child due to smallpox. As the oldest daughter in her family, Bintu felt responsible for paying not only the university fees of her children, but also the living costs of her younger sisters. In Brazil, Bintu lived and worked in different cities in the South and Southeast of the country. After the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, when working on the beach at Copacabana was prohibited, and there was an extreme decrease in the number of tourists, her main clients, Bintu moved to Florianópolis in Southern Brazil. There, restrictions on commercial activities and tourism were less severe, at least for some time, and Bintu rented an apartment with other women from Senegal. In a telephone follow-up interview in January 2021, Bintu told us that she had been able to earn money by braiding hair on the beaches in Southern Brazil. After some months, due to the measures restricting tourism enforced in Florianópolis at that point, she had returned to Rio, where she had continued to pay rent for the apartment she shares with a migrant from Haiti and her daughter. This internal migration within Brazil to keep earning an income and be able to provide for her family in Senegal suggests that, despite all the difficulties, Bintu and her networks came up with strategies to navigate the different and rapidly changing regional regulations.

The economic position of Bintu in her familial constellation became even more important as a result of the pandemic. She is in charge of sending money to Senegal so that her son and her daughter can continue their university studies. With the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, her son, who studies medicine at the university, had his classes suspended in Dakar, and – because he lacked economic resources – he had to return to Kaolack to live with Bintu's mother. Bintu could no longer send the same amount of money to the family as she had sent before the pandemic. In this situation, to invest in a trip back home would have meant to use the money that otherwise allows her children to study. This shows the importance of considering not only the immediate (or more visible) impacts of the pandemic on the present situation of migrants in their "arrival" society (in this case Brazil, but the same applies to migrants in the European Union (see chap. 4)), but also of reconstructing how these impacts transform the daily life of whole families in the region of origin. This helps us to understand the mobility patterns of Bintu, as well as those of other migrants living in Brazil. In order to counteract government restrictions on their irregularized commercial activities, they move to different parts of the country, despite high numbers of Covid-19 infections. Bintu felt she had to travel to another region where restrictions were less severe in order to be able to keep her children studying at the university in Senegal. Earning money for her children's education is a central biographical pattern that can be reconstructed in the case of Bintu. Her decision to prioritize the education of her children contrasts with the example of the younger Senegalese men who traveled from Brazil to Senegal to visit their families (see next section). Bintu is free of the obligations and expectations of marriage, and feels responsible only for her children, her mother, and her siblings.[35] She does not feel any need to "control" what hap-

[35] Dannecker points out that the "international migration of a female member of a family, without male guardians" (2009: 123) can imply a social decline for the family that stays in the region of origin.

pens in the family and in the compound[36], something which probably plays a central role in the decision of the recently married younger men to visit their families regularly.

Finally, we note that Bintu was offered an opportunity to be vaccinated against Covid-19, but did not respond to it because she has had a fear of vaccines since she was a child, as she puts it. However, she said that she would probably go for vaccination in the next few months, because she was aware of the importance of it. We assume that she will soon be vaccinated, mainly because she needs to avoid travel restrictions that would limit her ability to earn the family's income.

Remittances and Traveling Home

What we've discussed in the case of Bintu is typical for our interviewees from West Africa: they have an important role as breadwinners in their families. They feel a huge responsibility to send money to their families on a regular basis, and present this as their main reason for living and working in Brazil. The phrase "I haven't sent money for several months" is recurrent in the interviews we have conducted during the pandemic, and it points to the burden felt by these people when they have to spend money without being able to earn any. We have cases of migrants in our sample in Germany who have been avoiding close contact with their family members because this is associated with feelings of guilt and shame, or fear of being blamed (see the case of Hamid in chap. 4.2). Here, we will explore the question of how transnational dependencies are formed between these migrants and their family members, and within we-groups living in different parts of the world;

[36] Compound refers to a complex of houses or huts standing together, sometimes surrounded by a fence or wall. In typical cases most of the inhabitants belong to one extended family, sometimes to two different families connected by household, kin or friendship ties.

and we will look at the power transformations these figurations – especially familial constellations – have undergone in the pandemic. As we have already shown, Bintu was able to resume the sending of remittances after a relatively short time. She was able to do this because of her flexibility and ability to move to other places in Brazil, which allowed her to keep earning money when tourism in Rio de Janeiro had come to a halt and movement restrictions were very strict. **Bassam and Bayo**, also from Senegal, decided – unlike Bintu – to go and visit their families in Senegal. This points to a stable economic situation. We will contrast their biographical courses with those of **Moussa** from Senegal and **Julius** from Sierra Leone, who have very scarce resources and are not able to send remittances at all.

Bassam (born in 1986), who worked for us as a field assistant, is among those who manage to keep sending money home. He is a Senegalese from Pikine. He left his young son and his wife in Senegal. His aim is to earn enough money in Rio de Janeiro to be able to build a house for his family in Senegal, as he explained in the interview conducted with him in October 2019 by Lucas Cé Sangalli and Gabriele Rosenthal.[37] When Lucas Cé Sangalli interviewed him again in July 2020, Bassam said he had planned to go back to Senegal to see his family right after the carnival in February 2020, a period when he expected to make money. Due to flight restrictions and the unstable situation created by the Covid-19 pandemic, he postponed his plans. Airports were closed and like many others he could not afford the flight tickets, as he had been living on his savings for several months. From day to day, he became increasingly worried about his family in Senegal:

> the Corona is very difficult in Senegal is very=very=very difficult they have [...] a lot of fear well they don't work. It's really hard. But well it's going to end the good Lord [bon dieu] will help. We prefer to stay calm, ah then we will work but it is really difficult [...] Ebola was not a lot in Senegal, we

[37] The interview was conducted partly in Portuguese, but mainly in French, a language Bassam learned at school in Senegal. His mother tongue is Wolof.

> didn't have it a lot – but it was the first time I see a disease like that. The first time. Honestly. Really. (Bassam, July 2020)

As we learned in a follow-up interview, Bassam managed to visit his wife and son in Dakar, Senegal, in June 2021. Upon his return to Brazil, he got his first vaccination in August 2021.

Bayo (born in 1986 in Senegal) is another example of someone who was able to go and visit his family of procreation despite the enforcement of travel restrictions and the threat of infection. Maria do Carmo Santos Gonçalves, Lucas Cé Sangalli and Eva Bahl had interviewed him and met him on several occasions in Rio de Janeiro in October/November 2019. The interviews were conducted in Portuguese or, as Bayo's knowledge of Portuguese is rather limited, with translation from Wolof to French (by a friend of his). Bayo has been in Brazil since 2014, and for several years has shared an apartment with two other Senegalese men. All of them used to work as street vendors at the beach in Copacabana and Ipanema. They frequently sent money to their families who depended on these remittances. In a follow-up interview conducted by Eva Bahl in July 2020, Bayo told her that he and his friends had been staying at home in their small apartment for more than two months. What seemed to worry them the most was that they were spending the savings they had planned to use to travel to Senegal to visit their families, and that they had not been able to send any money to their families. When we spoke to him in June 2021, we learned that Bayo had gone to visit his family in Senegal in May 2021. He wanted to spend time with his son, who was growing up physically far away from him, and with his wife. Bayo had got married and they had their first son shortly before he migrated to Brazil. When we spoke to him, he sent pictures of the very difficult situation his family was living in, in a rural area in the region of Tambacounda, with limited access to water. In July 2021, he told us he was still in Senegal, but "inshallah" he wanted to return to Brazil in September. He has not had access to vaccination in Senegal, but he told us that "all the guys" (his Senegalese friends and colleagues) were taking it and that he most probably would also

take it, as soon as he was back in Brazil (although he also expressed a certain fear of being vaccinated).

Our case studies show clearly that traveling to the region of origin is important for people who have a family of procreation in their home country. Anyone who married and started a family shortly before leaving Senegal (or in some cases during a visit home) is expected to go back home with a certain regularity. These visits allow them to spend some time with their children, to participate more closely in their upbringing, and possibly to father more children. By contrast, other interviewees who have not founded a family, and who send money to their family of orientation (the family they were born in), have preferred, for health-related and financial reasons, not to take the risk of traveling to see their families (of orientation) in times of Covid-19. Many of the young Senegalese men we interviewed said that one of the reasons why they had migrated was to earn enough money to be able to afford a wedding in Senegal, as expected by their extended families. They are thus less willing to invest their savings in a trip home before fulfilling their initial plan. When traveling to see the family of procreation is prioritized, this must be analyzed as a sign of relatively stable economic (and other) resources. In the cases of Bassam and Bayo, traveling to Senegal meant spending a lot of money on the flight ticket, not earning money during their absence, but having sufficient economic resources to maintain their support for the family during their time in Senegal. A secure residency status in Brazil is also important, for otherwise it would not be possible to re-enter the country after an extended absence. Being able to exercise control over one's wife and children can be seen as a component that makes the journey home important. As married men and parents of young children, their visits home served to maintain or improve their position in the family system. The extent to which migrants strive to maintain their powerful position in their families by sending remittances is made clear in most of the interviews.

Next, we will present the contrasting cases of two men whose position in the family has become very fragile. They are unable to send remittances to their families, let alone visit them, and even have difficulties in maintaining regular contact.

Unable to Send Remittances

For some of our interviewees, an already existing precarity was considerably worsened by the pandemic. In the interviews, their enormous double burden became visible – the struggle to earn money for their own survival, and the guilt and shame felt due to being unable to support their families, who were often in a worsened situation themselves because of the pandemic. This can be seen, for example, in an interview with **Moussa** from Senegal, whom our field assistant Julius from Sierra Leone interviewed for us.[38] Moussa had arrived in Brazil in January 2020, shortly before the pandemic broke out. He talks about his situation and the situation of his community:

> We can barely pay for the room. We eat a little bit of everything, just to feed ourselves [juste pour nourrir]. Sometimes the neighbors in our (4-story) building give us something. They see that everybody cooks except us. Sometimes they give us something. We are very worried that we will be evicted if we don't pay the rent. We are very tired. (Moussa, July 2020)

One of the main reasons for his migration – to be able to send money home – could no longer be fulfilled. So, Moussa continues as follows:

> I told you, I left Senegal to have a better life. That's where the family is. You are leaving all of them and there is great hope that you can help them a little bit. But if you can't even help yourself, how will you help the others? We haven't been going out for three months and last week we started trying to go back out and sell something. But the situation hasn't changed much. But we are tired of just sitting in the room and not having money

[38] The interview was conducted in French.

> to pay the rent or buy something to eat. That's why we started going out. But nothing has changed much. We're still in the same situation. (Moussa, July 2020)

As we learned from Julius, Moussa left Brazil again, and after trying for several months to establish himself in the neighboring country of Argentina, he went back to Senegal.

Julius, our field assistant who conducted the interview with Moussa, is himself someone who is not able to send remittances home anymore because he has lost his job and has not yet found a new source of income. Julius (born in 1980) is from Sierra Leone and was first interviewed (in English) by Maria do Carmo Dos Santos Gonçalves and Eva Bahl in October 2019. Of all the interviewees in our sample, he has probably been in the most vulnerable situation since the beginning of the pandemic in Brazil. After having migrated back and forth between Sierra Leone and Nigeria most of his life (fleeing the civil war and an Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone, and Boko Haram in Nigeria), he decided to migrate to Trinidad in December 2018. On arrival in Trinidad, he was refused entry, but while being deported he was able to apply for asylum in Brazil. When Julius embarked on this migration project, his father and sisters stayed put and are still living in Nigeria to this day. His brothers are also "on the move" (currently in Benin) and he has a son in Nigeria from whose mother he was already separated when he left. His son and the son's mother heavily depend on money sent by Julius. As he has not been able to support them, his son has already spent a long period without attending school. The mother is not able to pay the tuition fees without support from Julius.

In Brazil, Julius has no stable networks. He has lived in very precarious situations and mostly depended on church and welfare organizations. Shortly before the Covid-19 pandemic, his situation had started to improve, and he was working at a restaurant as a cook. With the beginning of the pandemic, he lost his job and the support of his church community, which had consisted mostly of expats who left the country when the number of infections started

to rise. Since the beginning of the pandemic, he has lived on food donations from welfare organizations and is fearing homelessness because he cannot pay his rent in a hostel in downtown Rio regularly. In addition, contact with his family has become more difficult. He told us that he has problems talking to his father, his son and the son's mother, because they do not have internet or internet-compatible phones, and he can only talk to them by making an international call. This is a lot more expensive than using internet-based communication and limits the time of communication with his relatives severely, which is psychologically very burdening for him. Julius's situation was worsened by a health problem. In June 2021, he finally had surgery for an inguinal hernia that had been causing him a lot of pain. He had been waiting for this for almost one and a half years and it was postponed several times. The pandemic has made healthcare extremely precarious for migrants, as the public hospitals in Brazil (to which they have access) are overburdened with Covid-19 patients. Migrants with health problems often do not dare to go there because of the risk of infection, or they are not accepted for treatment. Julius related his difficult situation during the Covid-19 pandemic to earlier experiences in his life. In one of five follow-up interviews that Eva Bahl has conducted with him since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, he said that he had experienced Ebola in Sierra Leone:

> It's almost the same. Everything closed down. A lot of people I know died. We can't travel [...] No movements on the streets. But I'm working and I have money to eat. And I'm in my country. Here it's not my country, I don't have family, I don't have money, I don't even have my own house, it's a rented house. (Julius, April 2020)

He said that he was very afraid of catching "the disease" because in Brazil "no one will care about me." Although he expresses this feeling of isolation and loneliness in several interviews, he can also rely on (fragile) support structures. In a follow-up interview in March 2021, he told us about his friends from different West African countries who owned shops or sold things on the streets.

They sometimes helped him out. In the next follow-up interview in August 2021, he told us that in the meantime most of his friends had left the country. They were traveling northward and were trying to get to the United States – a process that we have observed with some of our Haitian interviewees who meanwhile have arrived in Southern Mexico. The economic situation in Brazil had made them desperate. Julius James describes how he and his friends observe the precarized situation of many Brazilians, and describes his own situation as "no job, living a difficult life, no money for the rent, no money for food". He concludes, "I don't see any future for me in this country". But despite all the hardships and suffering, he has learned to speak Portuguese, has created new networks with other West African migrants who support him occasionally, and is more optimistic as he is recovering from the surgery and had his first vaccination in July 2021. Currently, he is planning to wait for the second dose, and then, as soon as he has saved the necessary money, he will also set out on the dangerous path towards North America. His primary goal is to be able to send money to his family and to improve his son's situation.

3.4 The Role of Networks or Networks as a Crucial Component in "Cushioning" Precarization in Times of Covid-19

The case of Julius clearly shows that the existence and reliability of networks is a crucial component for migrants, and even more so in the absence of state support structures. In this section we will discuss three case studies that show very different – and sometimes fragile – support structures: support among West African Muslim brotherhoods, support among migrants from the Middle East based on a shared language and cultural commonalities, and support by the (extended) family.

Bassam and Bayo, two Senegalese migrants who have already been introduced, both rely on support from religious networks. All our male interviewees from Senegal in Brazil rely on the support of one of the two main Sufi orders

from Senegal, the Tijaniyya (the Tijani) and the Muridiyya (the Murids). Even though these networks are composed mainly of people from Senegal, migrants from other regions in Western Africa also take part in their celebrations in Brazil, and sometimes count on the support of their members. For example, they rely on these networks to gather funding for trips inside Brazil, and to exchange information regarding work opportunities in different regions of Brazil and in neighboring countries, which is a central component of their decisions to move from one place to another.

We will now present the case study of a Syrian refugee which illustrates the networks of solidarity between more established Lebanese migrants and recently arrived Syrians in Brazil. **Mohamed** (born in the early 1990s) is a Syrian Alawite from the region of Tartous who left Syria in March 2017 in the context of the Syrian conflict and mandatory army conscription. When Lucas Cé Sangalli interviewed Mohamed in October 2019,[39] he was running a small store in a market in downtown Rio de Janeiro. However, he was not earning enough money to pay the rent for the store and his room. Consequently, he was never able to send money to his family. In his self-presentation, he said that his family did not really need financial support, but he thought it would be good if he could send remittances at some point in the future. After the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, restrictions enforced in the market, alongside other reasons (high rental costs, low sales, no support from his family), led him to close his store. The situation at the market remained regulated by "openings" and "closings" of commercial activities enforced by the local administration. Despite the financial losses that the restrictions meant for Mohamed, he understood their importance. For a while, he considered going back to the streets to work with a food cart again, something he had proudly said he would not do anymore after he had opened his own store. When the market reopened,

[39] The interview was conducted in Portuguese.

a more established Lebanese migrant offered Mohamed a job in his store.[40] Lebanese migrants – who own several stores at this market – had mobilized help for Mohamed, one of the few Syrians working at this place. One of them, for example, even asked us, the researchers, via a messaging app if we could find a way to help Mohamed in his precarious situation. Mohamed is currently in a relatively secure situation. This is related to support networks among migrants from the Middle East, which can be interpreted as solidarity structures based on a shared language and cultural commonalities. In August 2021, when we last talked to Mohamed, he was still working at the same store. He had had his first Covid-19 jab and referred to information he had seen on the local news channel that unvaccinated people in Rio de Janeiro were no longer allowed to enter public buildings.

After these examples showing the importance of Muslim brotherhoods for Senegalese migrants and solidarity among migrants from the Middle East, we will introduce a third case study which illustrates the existence of extended family networks. It is the case of **Fadel** from Syria who, like Mohamed, came to Brazil in 2017 to flee compulsory army conscription. He was born as the second son of an Alawite family in Tartous, a port city on the Mediterranean mainly inhabited by Christians and Muslim Alawites. We interviewed Fadel in Portuguese in Rio de Janeiro in October 2019.

His grandfather (his mother's father) moved to Brazil in the 1960s, had a fruit shop there, and returned to Syria some years later "after having earned enough money" – as Fadel puts it. Other relatives stayed in Brazil. So, nowadays he has several (relatively close) relatives who are well established in Brazil. They work at important media outlets, are actors, and own real estate all over Rio. They were the reason why Fadel's parents convinced him to migrate to Brazil. Although these relatives supported Fadel in the beginning, at the time of our interview in 2019, he seemed to be frustrated by the very limited support they

[40] People from the regions that are nowadays Syria and Lebanon have migrated to Brazil at least since the 1890s (see Truzzi, 2018).

were willing to give him. At the time of the interview, Fadel was unemployed, and his father was sending him money from Syria to help him pay for his daily needs. Fadel's case can be seen as typical of recent migration movements from Syria to Rio de Janeiro: young men from Tartous with a high level of education, fleeing forced recruitment by the Syrian army. Often, they work as sellers of Arabic-style fast food on the streets, and are frustrated by their social decline and the lack of educational and job opportunities.

While Fadel is the only migrant presented in this report whom we were not able to stay in touch with after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic (he changed his phone number and we lost touch with him), we decided to include his case in order to illustrate the importance of family networks. In his case, the transnational family network was important for his migration course on at least two levels: first, his migration to Brazil would probably not have taken place without the history of migration in his family, and the support – at least in the beginning – that his extended family was able to give him. And second, Fadel is one of the few people among our interviewees in Brazil who currently receive financial support from the family in the home region. There is clearly a considerable difference here between migrants from West Africa who go to Brazil primarily to earn money, and migrants who have had to flee a context of collective violence. In the first case, the family of orientation expects to receive remittances; in the other case, the family is content to know that their relative is safe.

To conclude, the pandemic has hit hardest those who cannot count on the support of networks, or, perhaps even more importantly, we-groups. Here, we should differentiate between different kinds of networks. For instance, there are religious networks that are not necessarily organized according to ethnic or national belonging, as is the case with the various Protestant denominations that have played an important role for some of our interviewees. And there are religious networks with a strong we-image and image of the collective history that are usually limited to a narrowly defined ethnic, local, regional or national

grouping, as is the case with the Murids, a Muslim brotherhood from Senegal. And there are groupings or networks, usually less tightly organized, based on a shared language and other cultural commonalities, such as a vague reference to a (largely) imagined collective history, as is the case with people who have migrated from the Middle East and have a sense of "regional" solidarity.

Especially those interviewees who could not rely on such networks, or whose networks dissolved because of the pandemic, as was the case with Julius' church, found themselves in very vulnerable situations. These more marginalized migrants have had to rely mainly on the support of religious organizations and their charity work. The pandemic has shown how important these networks are, especially in the face of limited government action.

3.5 Conclusions

As we have tried to show in this report, although all our interviewees in Brazil are in difficult situations because of (or worsened by) the pandemic, the consequences of the pandemic are very different and multilayered, and above all have changed during the period between March 2020 and August 2021. For example, the Senegalese vendors who have been in Brazil for several years and have been able to save money, are better off, and some have even been able to travel to visit their families in the home region. But still, they have not been able to send the same amount of money to their families as they used to before the pandemic. Some of our Middle Eastern interviewees have been able to rely on their networks and on more formalized and more stable employment. Others, who lack stable networks and social security, fear homelessness and hunger because they cannot pay their rent and cannot afford to buy food. The case studies presented here illustrate different strategies used by our interviewees to navigate through these complex and challenging times. These range from managing to maintain their economic activities in Brazil, to reinforcing their social status in the region of origin by visiting and/or sending money, to struggling

for survival with the help of migration networks, civil society organizations, and very limited government support.

4 Interviews with Refugees in Germany and Italy

Arne Worm, Sevil Çakır-Kılınçoğlu, Margherita Cusmano, Tom Weiss

Preliminary remarks. In the following sections, we will present our findings in respect of how the everyday lives of irregularized migrants in Germany and Italy changed in times of Covid-19, against the background of their diverging migration courses. Our last period of intensive field research in Berlin[41] took place immediately before the pandemic became the dominant topic in Germany, affecting all areas of life. As a result, we were directly concerned about how the situation of our interviewees would change. We are currently in regular contact with a total of thirty migrants in Germany and seven migrants in Italy with whom we had previously conducted biographical interviews.

One level of comparison we focus on in the project "Biographies of migrants from Syria and West Africa in Brazil and in Germany" is contrasting cases in which the situation of the migrants has tended to stabilize with other cases in which, for various reasons, the migrants continue to find themselves in very unstable and fluctuating situations through which they must navigate with a short-term horizon. Formulated as types – and thus as poles on a continuum reflecting the stability or instability of the migrants' life situations – the following migration courses can be distinguished: ***stabilization and intensifying "biographical work"*** (type 1), and ongoing short-term ***"biographical navigation"*** (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2013) ***within fluctuating life conditions*** (type 2). Especially in cases representing the first type, we find intensifying "biographical work" (Fischer-Rosenthal, 2000) or processes in which the migrants reflect on their flight, reinterpret their own family and collective history, and consolidate their positioning in the "arrival society". Important constituent components that de-

[41] Fieldwork for the project "Biographies of migrants from Syria and West Africa in Brazil and in Germany" took place from February 21 to February 29, 2020. The team consisted of Sevil Çakır-Kılınçoğlu, Margherita Cusmano, Gabriele Rosenthal, Tim Sievert, Tom Weiss and Arne Worm.

termine stability or instability are, among others, the legal residence status of the migrants, their degree of integration into transnational (family) constellations, their positioning as outsiders even before their flight, and the specific consequences of the pandemic. In this report, Arne Worm will briefly sketch the government's responses to Covid-19 in Germany, and then present cases in Germany that illustrate this first type of relative stability or tendency toward stabilization, and what we learned about how these migration projects changed due to the pandemic (chap. 4.1). This will be contrasted with a case presented by Tom Weiss which shows how an already highly unstable und fluctuating situation as a refugee in Germany worsened due to the pandemic (chap. 4.2).

The report by Sevil Çakır-Kılınçoğlu concerns the situation of Kurdish women who have fled from Turkey to Germany (chap. 4.3). She shows that maintaining their residence status without applying for asylum in Germany has become more difficult due to Covid-19, and that the biographical plans of these women have been greatly hindered by the necessary negotiations.

Finally, Margherita Cusmano discusses how the everyday lives of refugees in Italy, a country that was very heavily affected by the pandemic, changed very differently, and how challenges such as residency status, access to the health care system, and – very important – sending remittances to the family at home, have intensified due to the pandemic (chap. 4.4).

4.1 Interviews with Refugees in Germany

Arne Worm

The Covid-19 pandemic in Germany. At the end of February and the beginning of March 2020 the German government implemented a bundle of measures in reaction to the increase in the number of Covid-19 infections in Germany, the global dimension of the spread of the disease, and its massive con-

sequences in other countries (such as Italy). From mid-March 2020, extensive restrictions were imposed in all areas of life. These measures (including the closure of public educational institutions and cultural facilities, the introduction of short-time work and working from home) were primarily aimed at reducing contact frequency in order to slow down the spread of the virus and to counteract the threat of a breakdown of the healthcare system. Unlike in other countries, this did not mean a complete "lockdown": public and private infrastructure, which was necessary for basic livelihood security, continued to be accessible under certain conditions. Meetings in groups were forbidden, but moving in public spaces alone (e.g. taking walks or jogging) was still permitted. Legally, the political measures were based on a nationwide "Infection Protection Act", extensively revised in April 2021. The implementation of these comprehensive measures was closely linked to the development of infection rates. Many of the restrictions were gradually revoked as the rates dropped in summer 2020 and re-introduced when the numbers dramatically rose again in fall and winter 2021. The number of infections declined steadily in spring and early summer 2021 but began rising again in August. A growing number of people have been vaccinated, initially based on a centralized system that prioritized certain groupings in terms of their vulnerability (especially older people) or their occupation.

Over the course of the pandemic in Germany, the debates on appropriate measures have become increasingly polarized, and political measures have become regionally fragmented. The conflictual debate on the design and implementation of measures took place primarily between the government and federal ministries, the governments and ministries of the federal states, and the responsible regional and local authorities (especially health authorities). From the very beginning, the discourse in Germany on Covid-19 was strongly shaped by the voices of experts in the healthcare system. Daily assessments (e.g. in podcasts, TV news) by virologists or by representatives of the Robert Koch Institute (a federal authority for infection control) of the development of in-

fection figures and possible measures to be taken have had considerable visibility and carried strong weight in the public discourse. Yet, the public debates quickly became shaped by topics such as public spending, repercussions on the national economy, globalization, the welfare state and the healthcare system. Also, social inequalities (e.g. precarious housing conditions; precarious employment in caring professions, slaughterhouses and agriculture; the situation of single parents) were debated in media discourses more openly than they were before the crisis, even if only briefly and in a particular way. The topic of refugees and their housing conditions (e.g. in collective accommodation centers), on the other hand, has hardly been mentioned in the public debate.[42] Instead, controversies surrounded the relation between state and citizens: personal rights and responsibilities vs. the state's right and responsibilities.[43] Far right political movements and actors are increasingly trying to benefit politically from the situation by framing the government measures as an indicator of growing totalitarianism and rule against the "will of the people".[44] Federal elections are due to take place in September 2021, and the discussion on measures to combat Covid-19 – especially demands for the relaxation of restrictions – must also be seen in the context of party-political election campaigns.

Since the rise in the number of infections in fall and winter 2020 ("the second wave"), there has been an "on and off" between imposing or prolonging measures such as wearing masks, keeping physical distance, closing of schools, on the one hand, and opening or revoking of such measures on the other hand. The regulations were not just different regionally and locally,

[42] Deutsche Welle, January 27, 2021, dw.com [accessed: June 23, 2021].

[43] This includes more and more sociological reflections on the pandemic in German sociology. For an overview, see: soziopolis.de [accessed: June 23, 2021].

[44] Polls on the level of public acceptance of the measures taken by the government show that the very high level of agreement in March (over 90%) has decreased over the course of the last few weeks, see: Süddeutsche Zeitung, June 26, 2021, sueddeutsche.de [accessed: July 10, 2020].

but changes were usually announced at short notice – reflecting contested political constellations and regional sociopolitical particularities. This "on and off" process has been discussed in the political discourse either as an indecisive "wavering course" or as the necessity to "navigate at sight". Given the numbers of infections and deaths due to Covid-19 in Germany (about 90,000 deaths in Germany by mid June 2021[45]), it is fair to say that getting the infection rate close to zero by any means necessary, in order to protect vulnerable groupings, has not been – or could not be – established as the guiding objective through the course of the pandemic.

The impact of the pandemic on migration projects with a stabilization course. Comparing the situations of our interviewees in Brazil, Germany and Italy under the conditions of the pandemic has allowed us as a project team to reflect on the differing importance of informal economies, the relevance of diverging state contexts, and the meaning of family networks. In Brazil, the collapse of opportunities to work in the informal economic sector had serious consequences for our migrant interviewees. One of the central aspects of this was that they were now unable to fulfill the expectations of family members in their country of origin that they would send money. *By contrast, the migration projects of our interviewees in Germany are typically more focused on the aspiration, the need and the challenge to establish a more stable and long-term perspective in Germany*. This by no means implies that our interviewees in Germany are less entangled in transnational relations and practices, especially with regard to the families in the countries of origin, as we will show in the case examples below. Quite the opposite: navigating through transnational entanglements became increasingly challenging due to the pandemic. In some cases this resulted in growing financial responsibilities, but on a more general level in a need for migrants to redefine their position in transnational family constellations. The case examples below will show that our interviewees have experienced the process of re-interpreting their

[45] See: rki.de [accessed: June 15, 2021].

positioning in family figurations very differently, depending on their overall biographical course, their current life situation, but also developments in their home regions. However, as our interviewees told us in the follow-up interviews we conducted with them, redefining their position in (transnational) family figurations is only one component of the growing need, or challenge, to make biographical decisions in extremely unstable times. In our first follow-up interviews over the course of the first months of the pandemic, our interviewees typically said that the governmental requirements during the coronavirus crisis should be seen as a kind of latency period to be accepted. We were surprised at the high level of acceptance that the contact restrictions imposed by the government met with among our interviewees. This was comparable with the initial responses to government measures in the Jordanian context described above (see chap. 2). This was surprising to us because our previous findings had revealed a conflictual relationship between refugees and the state authorities. Over the course of the pandemic we have learned from repeated follow-up interviews that this initial period of waiting and accepting a situation of uncertainty gave way to growing pressure to make decisions concerning migration projects or life in general (such as attaining or retaining residency status, keeping a job, continuing one's education). Our reconstruction of the different ways our interviewees have navigated through the crisis shows that there are vast and growing inequalities between them. With the following case examples, we will show the differences in how migrants in Germany in a more stable life situation and migrants in very precarious life situations have navigated through the challenges of the pandemic. Our comparison of the cases reveals how struggling with their residency status impacts on the social realities of migrants in Germany. However, we also learn from the follow-up interviews that how migrants experience the pandemic and react to it depends heavily on the overall course of their migration projects, on how planned or unplanned, how stable or disruptive the migration course was even before the pandemic.

Re-involvement with the family of origin: The case of Youssoupha from Senegal. A good example of a relatively stable current life situation, with relatively good prospects in terms of participation chances, is the case of Youssoupha, who was born in the early 1990s into a relatively well established family in the Tambacounda region in Senegal. He migrated to Spain within a transnational family network in 2009, and continued to Germany in 2010. I interviewed Youssoupha together with Gabriele Rosenthal during our fieldwork in Berlin in February 2020. I stayed in touch with him via WhatsApp and conducted three follow-up interviews by phone (May 2020, October 2020, July 2021). In the initial interview, Youssoupha presented himself and his migration project as "individualistic"; according to him, his whole focus lies on successfully establishing himself in Germany. The first follow-up interview on the Covid-19 situation (May 2020) underlined our hypothesis from the initial interview of a relatively stable position. Here, our interim findings on the components that had helped him to achieve an established position showed that, besides a relatively secure residence status and a secure apprenticeship with a public company, an important element was that Youssoupha was not under much pressure to support his family in Senegal. In this first follow-up-interview, Youssoupha interpreted his current situation as a collective position that was acceptable, which is why – according to him – he adhered closely to the official rules in his everyday practice (including avoiding contact with others). Youssoupha said in May 2020 that he closely followed the discourse in the public media. We also talked about his own and his family's previous experience of diseases and epidemics. In his case, this was experience of cholera in a family context (a grandmother had contracted cholera and was taken to hospital with support from a relative living abroad).

Additional follow-up interviews showed how Youssoupha suffered increasingly from the pressure to continue his apprenticeship under the conditions of the pandemic. The restrictions made it very hard for him to focus on his exams, but he managed to finish successfully in 2021, as the author learned in

an interview he conducted in July 2021. It also became clear that successfully finishing his apprenticeship was not just important as a means of establishing himself individually, but that he also expected symbolical gains vis-à-vis his family of origin: "It will make the whole village proud", he said. We also learned that his financial responsibilities for his family members in Senegal had increased due to the pandemic, as his siblings lost their jobs and/or dropped out of higher education, because the Senegalese government closed the universities. They had left the city and moved back to their family in the village, where they felt safer. His case highlights – as Eva Bahl and Lucas Cé Sangalli have also discussed (chap. 3) – how important it is, especially in the context of a global crisis, not just to look at migrants' lifeworlds within the "arrival society", but to include in the analysis their transnational connections (for instance changes in the situation of the migrant's family of origin). In the last interview, Youssoupha told me that he traveled back to Senegal during the time of low travel restrictions in Germany – something he could only do due to his secure residency status. There he had engaged in a relationship with a woman from his home region and she had subsequently given birth to his child. Over the course of the pandemic, Youssoupha has clearly turned more toward his family of origin and changed his views regarding his migration project. In the last follow-up interview, he reflected on how he intended to "emancipate" himself from his family of origin, but how complicated and challenging a (transnational) life between two worlds would be. Consistent with his "turn" toward his family in Senegal, he also spoke more openly about his family history, and said that his family could be described as well established. It cannot be concluded that his (re-)engagement with his family of origin was caused by the pandemic. I interpret it as a structural component or conflict of his migration project (navigating between the "individual" and the "we-group"), which intensified during the pandemic. Also, successfully finishing his apprenticeship and having a relatively stable position in Germany (he will continue to work for his employer) can be interpreted as a precondition for making these kinds of choices. This

is also underlined by the fact that Youssoupha was able to get himself vaccinated against Covid-19 in June 2021.

Navigating through an increasing detachment from the family of origin: The case of Maruf from Syria. Another case that represents a process of gradual stabilization of life in Germany is that of **Maruf** from Syria. With Maruf, I conducted a total of seven follow-up interviews starting in March 2020 (the last being in April 2021). Maruf (born in the early 1990s) has a Kurdish background and fled to Germany from the Kobane region in Syria, where he has now been living for five years. We have been in contact with him for several years. In the follow-up interviews on Covid-19, he spoke mainly about his concern that a preparatory course for university studies had been postponed. In contrast to the case of Youssoupha, however, Maruf's establishment project is more ambivalently entangled with family ties. The significance of his uncertainty as to whether the university course would take place only becomes apparent if we consider his case history: working towards a university degree (in Germany) is an important constant in his life, and a form of biographical work following his flight from a very precarious situation in Syria. After deciding to flee from Syria – and to improve his "individual" future perspectives – Maruf has struggled repeatedly with the question of loyalty to his family and his Kurdish we-group, and whether he should have stayed in Syria. Correspondingly, the postponement of his preparatory course due to the Covid-19 crisis endangers a component that gives meaning to his entire escape project. It also adds to a whole series of situations during his flight in which Maruf has had to "wait for something" and has experienced himself as passive. Our follow-up interviews with Maruf show how he tried to stay optimistic and accepted having to wait, but was worried by his growing isolation and feared depression. In this context, it should be mentioned that he said he was appreciative of the fact that we had been interested in his situation for many years, and especially so now that he was in a very difficult situation because of having to avoid contact with others.

In the most recent follow-up-interviews (February and April 2021), Maruf expressed his growing fear of being deported or forced to return to Syria. Although no Syrian refugees have been deported from Germany to Syria so far, this is a topic that is slowly approaching. And cases like Maruf's show how the slow process of (re-)establishing his life in Germany after five years is now endangered in the light of the growing discussions on possibly having to return. For us this is a sober reminder of how the German authorities have continued to deport refugees during the pandemic, and gives us cause for reflection on how this has become less visible in the public discourse due to the way Covid-19 has dominated the media.

Maruf's case shows a dynamic of gradual stabilization in Germany being interrupted – or halted –by the Covid-19 pandemic, which can be accompanied by processes of re-interpreting the migration project as a whole. We typically observe this in our empirical data in cases with a course of stabilization before the pandemic. Re-interpretations especially concern the migrant's role in family figurations. Another example of this type is the case of **Miran** from northern Syria, who was interviewed by our student assistant Tim Sievert. He had already interviewed Miran together with Ahmed Albaba, and contacted the young refugee for a follow-up interview on the Covid-19 crisis in April 2020. Tim Sievert summarizes Miran's situation as follows:

> I talked to him mainly about his worries that he will not be able to complete the training he started at a large company. The associated vocational school has postponed all training courses indefinitely, which makes Miran fear that he will not be able to successfully complete the required exams next year. This experience is reinforced by his desire to distance himself from his own family and especially from his own father, who repeatedly tried to prevent him from traveling to Germany. This

> means that the legitimacy of his flight from Syria is increasingly being questioned by the family as well. (Tim Sievert, July 2020)[46]

Summary

The cases mentioned above and the migration projects of these refugees in Germany have been seriously affected by the current measures to contain the pandemic, and further research will show the long-term consequences of this. At the same time, however, these cases are good examples of relatively successful attempts to become established in Germany. An important general finding is that the pandemic has increased inequalities and differences that are reflected in the different migration trajectories: migrants in stable situations and with a tendency toward upward mobility have navigated relatively safely through the pandemic. In these cases, the pandemic has intensified challenges that are structurally embedded in their migration project, but overall they still experience continuity. This is very different in cases where an already very precarious situation worsened because of the pandemic – as we will see below. It is also different in cases where migrants have been obliged to drastically re-interpret their migration projects (for instance by deciding to apply for asylum). The cases also show the importance of addressing the situation of the migrants' families in their countries of origin, and analyzing how their figurations have changed (for instance by growing responsibilities).

The following case of Hamid from Guinea (chap. 4.2), presented by our student assistant Tom Weiss, shows how significant the perception of the pandemic is for a refugee who is in a vulnerable situation with regard to his residence status. Keeping his status by doing an apprenticeship has become more and more

[46] This case study is a part of Tim Sievert's master's thesis on Syrian refugees in Germany, which he wrote under the supervision of Prof. Dr. G. Rosenthal and submitted at the University of Göttingen in August 2020.

challenging for him. He has also had to negotiate the expectation of his family that he will send remittances.

4.2 Experiencing Covid-19 in Germany with an Extremely Precarious Residency Status

Tom Weiss

In the following report, I will present the case of **Hamid**, who migrated from Guinea to Germany in 2017 as an unaccompanied minor. Hamid suffers from a very insecure residency status and the fear of deportation. By staying in touch with him over the course of the pandemic, I have been able to observe how he has tried to uphold his establishment project in Germany in very precarious times. The follow-up interviews also show his complicated relationship with parts of his family in Guinea, and how this has changed.

As part of the project "Biographies of migrants from Syria and West Africa in Brazil and in Germany", my colleague Margherita Cusmano and I conducted a biographical-narrative interview with Hamid in February 2020.[47] Within two months, we conducted two follow-up interviews (February and April 2020) and since then, because of the coronavirus crisis, we have remained in contact by phone. In April 2020 I met Hamid in person, while Margherita Cusmano was connected via Skype in order to maintain social distancing and hygiene measures. Hamid and I were able to meet in person again in June 2021 for a fourth follow-up interview. The framing of the first interviews was initially strongly influenced by Hamid's assumption that Margherita, and especially I, as a German and local expert, could help him with his asylum proceedings and upgrade his status in Germany. His behavior toward us was initially influenced by the question of how he could improve his participation opportunities and become more established. In the follow-up interviews after the beginning of the coronavirus crisis, we were able to learn more about his current situation, his per-

[47] This case study is a part of Tom Weiss's master's thesis on the experiences of refugees from West Africa in Germany, which he is writing at the University of Kassel under the supervision of Prof. Dr. M. Bereswill and the co-supervision of Dr. A. Worm.

spectives, and particularly his difficult position in his transnational family network.

In order to understand the complicated and precarious legal and social situation of Hamid in Germany, I will briefly sketch his biographical background.

When we met in 2020, Hamid, who originally comes from Guinea, was 18 years old according to his own statement. He told us in the second interview that in Germany he was first treated as an unaccompanied minor. However, at the beginning of 2018, in the context of his asylum proceedings, medical officers declared he was 18, in contradiction of his own claim that he was 16. As a result, he was no longer treated as a minor. Here, I rely on the information he gave us about his age. He told us in the first interview that his parents died in a very violent local conflict when he was eleven. Due to family disputes with his stepmothers and his increasing lack of rights within the family constellation, which arose in connection with his inheritance claim in respect of his father's property, his stepmothers tortured him and claimed the inheritance for themselves. Hamid then decided to sell the property and leave the family. His difficult migration course, which was associated with traumatizing experiences of violence, led him to Germany in 2017. His application for asylum was turned down, and since his arrival in Germany at the end of 2017 he has lived in a very precarious situation and is in constant danger of being deported. Under these conditions, it is remarkable that he successfully graduated from secondary school (***Hauptschule***) in June 2020 and started an apprenticeship as a painter in August 2020, which takes three years.

In the follow-up interviews, Hamid expressed his approval of the government measures. However, he was concerned about the state's interference in his life and, above all, his educational career, which is at risk. Both fears are closely linked to his insecure residency status and the constant fear of deportation. Although he has begun an apprenticeship, he still has to apply to have his residence permit extended every six months, because he does not have an official

birth certificate. While he was attending secondary school, all educational institutions were closed because of the pandemic, just as Hamid was about to take his final exams. He could not study for them, unlike his classmates, as he does not have a computer. This endangered his chances of staying in Germany on a more permanent basis, and of experiencing participation. After obtaining a graduation certificate, he was under severe pressure to find an apprenticeship in a small company. Continuing in the education system (which includes apprenticeships) is the only way to avoid deportation. The negative effects of Covid-19 on the economy, especially on companies, were evident in the high number of job losses or short-time arrangements, which also affected his company.[48] He is thus in constant fear of losing his apprenticeship position. This stressful situation is complicated by the fact that his family expects him to send them money, since he sold his father's inheritance to finance his migration. He can only fulfill this expectation if he is able to complete his apprenticeship and finds employment.

When we met again in June 2021, he emphasized that his situation improved because of his apprenticeship. This had led the government authorities to extend his residence permit regularly for six months. The gradual improvement of his situation was based on the support of non-governmental organizations and individual actors, who had helped him with finding the apprenticeship and in everyday affairs. However, his improved life situation is still very precarious. He feels threatened by the authorities and by the danger of an economic crisis, which might lead to his deportation if he were to lose his job due to employment cuts in companies. Although he is afraid of vaccination due to his bad experiences and mistrust of the medical system, he feels compelled to be vaccinated. Currently he is waiting for an appointment for his vaccination. Nevertheless, Hamid interprets the situation during the Covid-19 crisis in Germany as being better than in Guinea, as he already explained for the first time when we talked about Ebola in April 2020. He argued that "Covid-19 is worse

[48] See: destatis.de [accessed: July 20, 2021].

than Ebola" because it has global effects. Hamid also considers the consequences of the Covid-19 virus in Africa as being more serious than in Europe. In Guinea, for example, according to Hamid, basic services were threatened by closed markets and shops, and increased military and police presence, while renewed violent conflicts exacerbated local social tensions.[49] The government had also imposed a night curfew, banned assemblies, ordered the wearing of face coverings, and closed Guinea's borders. According to Hamid, the people in Guinea did not adhere to government regulations to the same extent as in Germany.

As we learned during the last two follow-up interviews, Hamid increasingly suffered from social (self-)isolation and passivity due to the restrictions and the constant fear of being deported. He reports that memories of traumatic experiences burden him while he is passive and isolated at home. He told me in July 2021: "At home, I'm losing my mind" and emphasized how he tried to be active and stayed at home as little as possible to avoid difficult memories of the past, especially the traumatic event connected with the death of his parents and the following family conflict. He was reminded of this past whenever he made contact with family members in his country of origin. Additionally, his stepmothers threatened to send evil spirits to him and to bewitch him if he did not comply with their demands to send money. As his emotional stability got worse due to this difficult family figuration, he ceased almost all contact with his family. However, he still feels obliged to send money. Thus, not only his current precarious residency status and limited options for action have led to his suffering. In times of Covid-19, it is difficult for Hamid to have to be passive against the background of his migration course which includes traumatizing experiences in the past. Our staying in touch with him helped him to open up and tell us more about how deeply embedded the complicated relation with his family in Guinea is in his whole migration project. This opening of the dialogue also enabled Hamid to concretize his complicated family relations by speak-

[49] Al Jazeera, May 13, 2020, aljazeera.com [accessed: July 20, 2021].

ing extensively about witchcraft and its dangers to his migration project. In the situation brought about by the pandemic, he has felt pressured to either "fix" his relationship with his family, or to distance himself from them. But the pandemic conditions and his very insecure status make these kinds of biographical decisions very hard.

4.3 Kurdish Migrants and Refugees in Germany

Sevil Çakır-Kılınçoğlu

In the context of a project entitled "***Biographies of migrants from Syria and West Africa in Brazil and in Germany***", I am conducting a study on Kurdish migrants in Germany. These are mostly women who fled from Turkey to avoid prosecution because of their political activities around the Kurdish rights movement. My political background is worth mentioning here because it helps me gain access to the field. I had to flee Turkey as a scholar-at-risk to avoid political persecution and a likely prosecution when the Turkish government came down hard on a group of scholars commonly known as "Academics for Peace". They had signed a petition in 2016 criticizing the government's policies against Kurds in Turkey. Thanks to my status as one of those academics, I have been able to establish contact with possible interviewees through common acquaintances in Germany, and to gain their trust, even though I do not belong to the Kurdish ethnic grouping. Furthermore, they have shown their appreciation by telling me that it is very courageous for a non-Kurd to be interested in and work on the Kurdish cause. As one of them put it: "We are born into this conflict, you chose to be involved." I have conducted four biographical narrative interviews, as well as participant observations, among Kurds in Germany since 2019, up to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, and seven follow-up interviews, one in person and six online, between the outbreak and June 2021.

The Turkish government has downplayed the threat and the implications of the Covid-19 outbreak since March 2020. Already facing an economic crisis, the measures it has taken in respect of the pandemic have mostly been based on economic concerns and, therefore, inconsistent and superficial. What has been especially striking is the continuation of the government's repression of Kurdish politicians and local governments in Kurdish cities. At the same time, the persecution, and prosecution, of Kurdish and other oppositional activists has continued unabated. Calls for the release of detained political activists who are in high-risk groups have fallen on deaf ears. Furthermore, the recent attack, on June 17, 2021, on a local office of the pro-Kurdish political party, HDP, in Izmir, by a gunman who shot dead a young party member,[50] as well as the ongoing legal process in 2021 to close the Party[51] are indicative of the tense political environment against the Kurdish political movement and its activists even during the global pandemic.

Based on the follow-up interviews (in Turkish) with the Kurdish women, and monitoring of their social media accounts, my first insights regarding Kurdish migrants in Germany during the coronavirus crisis pointed to an emerging dilemma and changing priorities. A possible suspension of compulsory residence in refugee centers due to the pandemic has made the asylum process in Germany more appealing. It is striking that the two Kurdish women whom I will introduce in more detail below began considering applying for political asylum more seriously due to their current situation. At the beginning of the pandemic, with the student visas they had, they were able to avoid applying for asylum in order not to completely relinquish the possibility of visiting Turkey[52] and to avoid having to stay in refugee centers for extended

[50] Evrensel daily, June 17, 2021, evrensel.net [accessed: June 24, 2021].
[51] Al Jazeera, June 21, 2021, aljazeera.com [accessed: June 24, 2021].
[52] Refugee and asylum policies and procedures in Germany are very complicated and contingent on many factors; thus, the following information is meant to give only a general idea of the current situation of our interviewees. After being granted asylum in Germany, asylees are not allowed to visit the countries they come from, as this im-

periods.[53] With the increased risk of losing family members, and a possible suspension of the obligation to stay in collective accommodation centers for new refugees, the dilemma was bigger than ever. However, by June 2021, both of these women had to decide to apply for political asylum in Germany for the reasons I am going to explain below.

One of these women is **Eda**, who was born in 1988, and arrived in Germany in 2017. She escaped from political persecution in Turkey after she was accused of supporting and being the girlfriend of an alleged terrorist in 2017. She started an M.A. program at a university in Germany soon after her arrival but had to pause her studies in the process of writing her M.A. thesis to be able to work and support herself financially. She used to be a photojournalist back in Turkey and is working as a freelancer in Germany. She was about to start a new job as a journalist in Cologne when I interviewed her before the Covid-19 outbreak, but she lost that opportunity due to the contact restrictions. She had an approaching deadline to finish her M.A. thesis, which she was unable to meet, as she had no motivation even before the pandemic started. After she lost her student visa during the pandemic, and because her income as a part-time and freelance worker does not guarantee her a residence permit, she had to apply for political asylum in Germany. She believes that she will probably be granted asylum, given the lawsuits filed against her by the Turkish state. She is currently living with her boyfriend. Eda, like all my other interviewees, is already fully vaccinated thanks to highly organized Kurdish and Turkish social networks which

plies that they do not need the protection of the German government. They can only visit their country after obtaining German citizenship and thus a German passport, a process that takes at least five years.

[53] Compulsory residence in a refugee processing center in Germany can last up to six months, if not more, until the result of the application for asylum arrives. The duration of stay varies from state to state in the Federal Republic and depends also on the status of the country of the origin, i.e., whether it is accepted as a safe country or not by Germany.

have done a great job of sharing information about the availability of vaccines, and to the general practitioners who have offered shots on a daily basis.

The other Kurdish woman, **Hale**, with whom I conducted a face-to-face follow-up interview at the beginning of July 2020, and online follow-up interviews in April and June 2021, is in a very precarious situation because of the pandemic, and the difficult situation of her family back in Turkey, as well as the many lawsuits against her in Turkey. She has been doing a PhD in social sciences in Hamburg since she arrived in Germany in 2019. She had spent most of the first lockdown in bed in her dormitory and was very depressed. Yet, what happened in July 2020, as she explained in our in-person follow-up interview, has put her in an even more difficult situation. She went to a Turkish consulate at the beginning of July 2020 to get a power of attorney to let a lawyer follow her trials in Turkey, but her passport was confiscated by the officials working at the consulate due to an arrest warrant in her name. It was a kind of trap, because they asked for her passport for identification (which could easily be done via her national ID) without telling her about the warrant of arrest. She spent six hours at the consulate but could not get her passport back. Her student visa in Germany was due to expire in a month, and without a passport she could not apply for an extension. Her lawyer suggested she should apply for asylum, because, as the lawyer told her, due to the Covid-19 contact restrictions, she would not have to stay in a refugee center after submitting her application. At first she did not want to apply, even though it would be "easy" for her to obtain asylum, because, very optimistically, she wanted to be able to go to Turkey if and when she won all the lawsuits against her, or if her parents' health worsened. This had a lot to do with her family's vulnerable situation in respect of the Covid-19 crisis. Both of her parents are at high risk as cancer patients. Before the confiscation of her passport, she was planning to go to Turkey in October 2020, but she would have been arrested at the Turkish airport if she had tried to do so.

After trying and failing to get her passport back legally, Hale had no choice other than to apply for asylum in Germany. However, what also seems to have played a significant role in her decision is the fact that new lawsuits have recently been filed which accuse her of undertaking terrorist activities, including being a PKK[54] member. Hale has had to take part-time jobs in order to be able to pay the legal charges resulting from the lawsuits against her in Turkey, and to send money to her parents who need financial help due to the deteriorating economic situation in Turkey which has gotten worse during the pandemic. Her wish to see her family has remained unfulfilled since the beginning of the pandemic; and as a result of the recent developments, she will not be able to go back to Turkey in the foreseeable future. Therefore, she has been looking for alternative ways and refugee status would allow her at least to travel to third countries close to Turkey, where she could meet her parents who cannot travel far due to their poor health. This could be achieved through the help of acquaintances: they would have to agree to transport her parents to a country bordering on Turkey.

In times of Covid-19, however, meeting family members in Germany or in a country close to Turkey also depends on access to and recognition of vaccinations in each country. Both Eda and Hale are fully vaccinated with BioNTech, which is the vaccination recognized by the European countries, including Turkey. However, the majority of people in Turkey, especially in the early months of 2021, have been given vaccines produced in China, namely Sinovac and Sinopharm, as in many other countries outside the EU and the US. According to a recent decision of the German government dated June 17, 2021,[55] citizens of third countries are allowed to visit Germany if they are fully vaccinated, starting from June 25, 2021. However, according to the German Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community, "the vaccine the person has

[54] PKK is short for The Kurdistan Workers' Party, which is an armed political organization operating in Turkey and other Kurdish regions in the Middle East. The PKK is designated as a terrorist organization by Turkey and the EU, as well as many other countries.
[55] Reuters, June 17, 2021, reuters.com [accessed: June 24, 2021].

received must be among those listed on the website of the Paul Ehrlich Institute".[56] The problem is that there are only four vaccines listed on this website and the vaccines produced in China are not among them.[57] This means that the family members of migrants and refugees who are likely to have received those vaccines are not going to be able to come to visit them in the near future.

Clearly, being able to visit their families back home has always been a priority for migrants, even before Covid-19. Therefore, application for asylum is considered as a last resort. The increased restrictions on travel, as well as an enhanced sense of responsibility toward their families has made this option even less appealing. However, an important empirical finding from my interviews is that for both Eda and Hale applying for asylum first became a more "attractive" option due to the Covid-19 crisis, and then it became inevitable due to Turkey's continuing repressive policies against the Kurdish political movement, and to the strict residency requirements in Germany. Being prohibited from visiting Turkey for at least five years is a heavy price to pay in times of Covid-19, when familial emergencies due to health issues are likely to occur. For example, the brother of another Kurdish refugee, whom I had interviewed, has died as a result of a heart attack and my interviewee could not go to the funeral in Turkey. This is only one example of what might potentially be experienced by many migrants and refugees due not only to the pandemic, but also to the travel restrictions it has brought about, in addition to the already difficult asylum regulations they have to face.

4.4 Migrants and Refugees in Italy

Margherita Cusmano

The pandemic hit Italy very hard with a quickly rising number of infections and people dying from the end of February 2020. Italy was the first country

[56] See: bmi.bund.de [accessed: June 24, 2021].
[57] See: pei.de [accessed: June 24, 2021].

in Europe to introduce a country-wide lockdown in March 2020, which was revoked during May and June 2020, following the decreasing number of new infections. After the first outbreak was detected in Codogno, a small town in the north Italian province of Lodi (Lombardy), and later in Vò (Veneto), new infections quickly soared in other towns and municipalities. In Nembro and Alzano Lombardo, two municipalities in the province of Bergamo, also in Lombardy, the number of cases increased exponentially at the end of February 2020. Thriving industrial hubs, these municipalities were not subjected to a lockdown until the infection had spread to the provinces of Bergamo, Cremona, Brescia and Milan, all situated in Lombardy, and hospitals had become hotspots of Covid-19. After an initial delay, the whole region of Lombardy and other north Italian provinces were put under lockdown on March 13, 2020. Only two days later, the lockdown measures were enforced country-wide. Schools, theaters and cinemas were closed and public events cancelled. Until May-June 2020 movement was rigidly restricted and non-essential businesses were closed. Travel was only permitted for essential reasons, like work or returning to one's own residence, which had to be proved by a self-declaration. The police and the army patrolled the streets and set up checkpoints. Non-permitted travel and breaches of the quarantine measures were punishable with fines and prison terms. After a gradual lifting of the restrictions during the summer of 2020, containment measures were re-introduced in October and November 2021, as new infections started to increase exponentially. This time, measures were differentiated by region according to three epidemiological scenarios. Lombardy and Piedmont, the regions where my interviewees live, were assigned to the highest tier, with curfews and strict restrictions on movement. After a brief and tentative easing of the restrictions at the beginning of 2021, these had to be reintroduced in March and April 2021 as the infections soared again. Currently, in July 2021, all Italian regions are assessed as having a low-risk scenario and, as such, most containment measures have been lifted.

Between the outbreak of the pandemic in February 2020 and June 2021, I conducted biographical-narrative and focused interviews with **seven** refugees and migrants from West Africa with different legal statuses, socio-economic situations, and familial and biographical constellations. The course of the pandemic in Italy especially affected migrants and refugees in already vulnerable positions, due to their precarious residency status, lack of access to healthcare infrastructure, as well as a further decrease in job opportunities, with the result that many of them had problems sending remittances to their families back home. However, by staying in touch with my interview partners, I was able to observe that their life situations changed in very different ways. In this report, I will focus on a comparison of three cases which illustrate how everyday lives became stabilized or de-stabilized.

First, I will briefly sketch how the pandemic affected migrants who were living in relatively stable conditions when it began. Here I will discuss the case of **Fatoumata** (born in 1986), a Senegalese woman who has been living in Italy for the last twenty years with a legalized status. Her migration and her life are embedded in a highly transnational family constellation. Her case shows the economic consequences the pandemic has had on transnational family dynamics, especially concerning her obligation to support her parents and siblings. After that I will present the cases of two migrants who were in very marginalized and precarious positions when the pandemic hit Italy in 2020. The first case, **Amadou** (born about 1989), is a Malian man who represents an unlikely path of gradual bettering or stabilization of his situation after living in very marginalized position as a homeless asylum seeker during the first months of the pandemic. The granting of humanitarian protection in late 2020 played a central role here, but also that he continuously tried to get access to (institutionalized and informal) support structures. This allowed him to negotiate better housing conditions and find employment in the formal sector. In contrast to Amadou, the case of **Malik** (born in the Gambia in 1985) represents a trajectory of experiencing a drastic loss of control over his life over the course of the pandemic.

The consequences of the pandemic compounded previous biographical experiences of powerlessness and contributed to the emergence of a trajectory of suffering (see Riemann and Schütze, 1991): rejection of his asylum application in Germany, where he was relatively established, the threat of deportation to his home country, and secondary migration to Italy, where he has been living as an asylum seeker ever since. Amadou and Malik were interviewed in the context of my research on refugees who faced deportation from Germany.[58]

Migrants in a Relatively Stable Situation and the Impact of the Pandemic on the Figuration with Their Families

The situation for the four migrants I interviewed with a more stable residency status (three of whom have a long-term or unlimited residence permit) shows that the reduction in income, caused for instance by short-time work or having to rely on unemployment benefits, has restricted their ability to send remittances to their families back home, and that this has had considerable effects on their family dynamics. This can be seen in the case of Fatoumata, a 35-year-old woman from Senegal. Fatoumata started to face increasing feelings of anxiety because the economic consequences of the pandemic prevented her from fulfilling her financial obligations toward her family. She had migrated to Italy in 2003, as a 17-year-old, with her two younger siblings, to join her father, who had been living in Italy since the late 1980s or early 1990s. As the first daughter of a numerous family – she has seven younger siblings – she was socialized in a role that entailed financially supporting her parents. She became consciously aware of this at the age of 16 or 17, when she started working and helping to finance the schooling of her younger siblings, among other things. As her father was addicted to gambling and as a result was unable to provide financial support for his family members, who were living transnationally be-

[58] These two case studies are part of my master's thesis on African refugees in Germany and Italy, which I wrote under the supervision of Prof. Dr. G. Rosenthal and the co-supervision of Dr. A. Worm at the University of Göttingen (Cusmano 2021).

tween Italy (three children) and Senegal (two wives and five other children), Fatoumata stepped in to fulfill this role. She has been working in a blue-collar job since the age of 18 and was forced to go into debt to support not only her mother and her siblings in Senegal, but also her father in Italy, who remained unemployed. For Fatoumata, the pandemic meant that her working hours and her salary were reduced, which prevented her from paying off her debts and from starting an interior decoration business, which was her plan. She also had to reduce the financial support for her family members, thus renegotiating the dynamics of her transnational family network. Her reduced salary seems to have exacerbated her inner conflict between the obligation to support her family – which also grants her acceptance and recognition in the Senegalese community in her city – and her resentment at the idea of having sacrificed her life. During the interviews, she attributed the fact that she could not study at the university, and that she was unmarried, to the heavy burden of social expectations. At the same time, she made clear that her aspiration to follow her dreams and desires despite her family's wishes has engendered guilt and the fear of not being a good daughter. For her, the economic consequences of the pandemic had led, on the one hand, to a hope that her reduced financial support to the family could beget a new dynamic that would allow her to follow her individual aspirations, such as becoming self-employed; and on the other hand, to feelings of guilt and anxiety for "abandoning" her family.

In the case of my interviewees with a relatively secure residency status ***before*** the outbreak of Covid-19, the pandemic has led to readjustments of transnational entanglements and responsibilities that had built up over the course of their migration projects. I will now turn to migrants who had lived, or continue to live, in very vulnerable, marginalized positions. Continuously staying in touch with my interview partners was very important to build trust and encourage them to speak openly about their fragile everyday lives, their fears, and the challenges they have faced. The following cases of Amadou and Ma-

lik represent two different trajectories of how a very marginalized position has changed in the course of the pandemic.

Different Trajectories from a Marginalized Position at the Beginning of the Pandemic

The case of Amadou: Stabilization after getting a residence permit. I have been in touch with **Amadou**, a man from Mali who is about 32 years old, since our first interview in January 2020. After the outbreak of Covid-19, I contacted him, at first by phone, when the country-wide lockdown was in place, and then met him personally twice in June 2020 in Bergamo, the city where he lives and my home town. In November 2020 and July 2021, I conducted two telephone interviews with him, which allowed me to reconstruct changes in his legal and socio-economic situation. During the past two years, we have remained in close contact through WhatsApp messages and telephone calls. Amadou has often actively sought contact by writing and calling, not only with me, but also with Italian NGO volunteers, social workers, and church members. This appears to be an established biographical strategy which helps him to deal with uncertainty and marginalization. It became apparent that contact with Italian people constitutes a resource for him and, at the same time, that he suffers from isolation, as he speaks neither Italian nor French fluently, and he does not know any other person able to speak Bambara, his mother tongue.

Our interaction was shaped by our positionalities as interviewer and interviewee. Especially my frantic return to Italy (my home country) from Germany (where I live) was a topic that obviously sparked his interest. Having been deported back to Italy from Germany – where he lived for some months in 2016 – under the terms of the Dublin system, and having experienced strict residency

rules during his first three months in Germany,[59] he suffered from significant restrictions to his freedom of movement. Due to his legal status and financial deprivation, he would be unable to return to Mali, where his mother and his sister still live, should they fall ill. In this context, the fact that I was subjected to border controls by the Swiss police astonished and intrigued him, showing how ingrained the perception of white Europeans and their freedom of movement is. This revealed a fundamental asymmetry, because while I was able to cross borders to join my family members who were sick with Covid-19, this is something which was impossible for most refugees and other migrants even before the pandemic. Amadou's interest in my own background represents a particular case dynamic: he constantly and actively seeks for information and opportunities in a precarious situation.

Before analyzing Amadou's experience of the pandemic, a presentation of his biographical background is necessary. He was born around 1989 in the south-east of Mali and, due to the death of his father, which exacerbated the family's existing economic problems, and his marginalized position within the family as the son of the second wife, he could not attend either a public or a Quranic school. His older sister was married off young, probably to relieve the financial strains on the family. Because of inheritance conflicts after the death of his father, his mother was forced to leave the household and migrated with him to Gao, in northern Mali. When the civil war broke out in northern Mali, including Gao, in 2012, his mother moved back to their home town in the south-east of the country, but Amadou, at the age of 24, fled to Algeria, where he lived for three years. Because of his experiences of violence and exploitation, he moved to Libya and reached Italy in 2015. After being expelled from a reception center in 2015, he became homeless and lived in the cities of Bergamo, Brescia and Varese. During this period, he experienced health problems re-

[59] The German asylum law (§ 56) lays down that asylum seekers and "tolerated" refugees must not leave the place of residence assigned to them within the Federal Republic of Germany.

lated to the respiratory system. Even though he coughed up blood, he never went to a doctor, probably fearing that he would be reported to the authorities, as he had lost his residence permit as an asylum seeker and was living irregularly in Italy. For irregularized migrants, access to healthcare is difficult. And this applies especially to migrants like Amadou, who are illiterate and barely speak Italian.

In order to understand Amadou's behavior, one must take into account the way medical care is provided for irregular migrants in Italy. In Lombardy, undocumented migrants have access to the hospital system, but they are not assigned a family doctor. They have to come to the hospital themselves and then ask for a code called "STP". Obviously, they have to know about it first and they have to be assertive and demonstrate awareness of their rights with the hospital clerks, who often refuse to issue this code. Francophone migrants also need to master the Italian language, since the clerks seldom speak French (English is more frequently spoken). To complicate the situation, different hospitals – even in the same province – often have uncoordinated bureaucratic procedures. As I experienced when I was working as an intern for a medical office providing undocumented immigrants with primary care (February 2018–July 2018), many people also fear being reported to the police. During my internship I met a woman who had been suffering from third-degree burns for two days, because she was too scared to go the emergency room. The voluntary association where I did my internship had to be closed at the beginning of the Covid-19 outbreak. Some of the patients spent the months of March and April 2020 without essential medication (for instance, for diabetes). To this day, the activities of the association have been restricted to telephone consultations and filling prescriptions.

Let us return to the case of Amadou. After experiencing homelessness and absolute poverty in Italy, he migrated to Germany in 2017, but having already applied for asylum in Italy, he was deported back under the terms of the Dublin regulation. In Italy, he experienced homelessness and illegalization again due

to the institutional failings of the Italian asylum system. Through the support of an NGO, Amadou was able to resume his asylum application and obtain a temporary residence permit as an asylum seeker. Still, due to the structural flaws of the reception system, he has continued living in a homeless shelter. Due to the pandemic, the shelter had to close its food kitchen, and was only able to provide homeless people in Bergamo with take-away cold food. Amadou thus only had access to one cold meal per day. Other homeless shelters had to close because of lack of volunteers or protective equipment. Parks and many public spaces (like libraries and cafés) were closed, so that the homeless faced difficulties in finding shelter. Around the central station in Bergamo, and in many other cities in Lombardy, many (former) asylum seekers lived in informal settlements. Those who were working in the informal sector saw their livelihoods threatened almost overnight. My impression when strolling around the Bergamo city center in June 2020 was that the police presence was greater in these low-income and migrant neighborhoods.

Until the beginning of 2021 Amadou lived in a precarious and highly stigmatized situation, in the overcrowded homeless shelter, sleeping in bunk beds with many other people, which made social distancing impossible. Still, despite his vulnerable situation, the Catholic organization that provided him with shelter also offered him some security. Unlike other homeless shelters, he did not have to apply every night or every week for a place to stay. He was allowed to stay in the inner courtyard during the day, which would not have been possible in other homeless shelters because they do not have the necessary infrastructure, and he was provided with one meal per day. In general, he expressed little worries about Covid-19 and he did not keep himself informed about the development of the pandemic, either at the local level or at the national or international levels. Even when some of Bergamo's municipalities had eleven times the average mortality,[60] he did not know if the number of infections was rising or decreasing. He did not have a television, could not read with ease, and

[60] See: istat.it [accessed: June 18, 2020].

spoke only basic Italian. He asked me repeatedly, during the lockdown and at the peak of the outbreak, if we could meet personally, despite the mandatory shelter-in-place orders.

During our telephone contacts in November 2020 and July 2021, Amadou told me about recent developments. He was granted a two-year humanitarian residence permit in late 2020, which contributed to a stabilization of his legal situation. Subsequently, he was able to find a job in the industrial cleaning sector. With his salary, he could afford to rent a small room in the same homeless shelter, which offers different accommodation options. The question is, what will be the impact of this new, more stable life situation on his future plans, and especially on his family dynamics. As the first son of his widowed mother, he is probably confronted with the expectation of financially supporting her. This had been impossible for the first five years of his stay in Europe due to his unemployment and homelessness. It is unclear whether his new, more stable situation will allow him to send money to his mother and thus improve his relationship with his family.

Amadou represents a biographical course in which the granting of a humanitarian residence permit has considerably improved his situation in Italy in times of Covid-19. Despite his very difficult circumstances, Amadou actively sought access to support structures (such as a place to sleep).

The case of Malik: Sliding into a trajectory of suffering. This cannot be said of another asylum seeker, **Malik**, a 36-year-old man from the Gambia. In his case, we can clearly see how he slid in the course of the pandemic from a relatively stable situation in Germany, with paid employment and an apartment, into an ever more precarious situation following his move to Italy after his application for asylum had been turned down. In his case this also means sliding into an individual trajectory of suffering, in the sense proposed by Fritz Schütze (Riemann and Schütze, 1991). Today Malik is struggling with thoughts of suicide. In the four telephone interviews which I conducted with him between Octo-

ber 2020 and January 2021, I saw clearly how this trajectory of suffering was made worse by the pandemic. Whereas Malik presented himself in a cheerful and enthusiastic way during our first interview, stressing his self-reliance and motivation to improve his situation, he increasingly thematized his suffering during the following interactions. Although it is unclear whether there was a direct connection, this development coincided with the newly introduced restrictions following the spread of the coronavirus during November and December 2020. The different self-presentation patterns could also be attributed to the trusting relationship we established. But he was reluctant and angry when I mentioned psychological services and hotlines. This suggests that this interaction drew attention to his vulnerability, something which was hurtful for him. Also, it was apparent that he experienced his relationships with social workers as infantilizing, patronizing and controlling, so that my suggestion triggered a reaction of rejection. To understand his suffering, and the feeling of powerlessness engendered by the pandemic, it is necessary to analyze his familial and biographical trajectory.

Malik was born in a small village in northern Gambia in 1985 as the first son of the first wife of his father. After losing his father in a fishing accident when he was eight years old, he was confronted with the responsibility of caring for his family financially. This burden grew heavier following his marriage and the birth of his two daughters. In a context characterized by widespread un- and underemployment, as well as drought and the repercussions of the Ebola crisis (FMM West Africa, 2017: 39–40), Malik migrated to Europe through the Central Mediterranean route, arriving in Italy in 2014 and moving to Germany after one month of homelessness at the Central Station in Milan. In Germany, Malik was able to fulfill his obligations toward his family in the Gambia, quickly finding a job in the hospitality sector and moving into a private apartment. With the rejection of his asylum application and the threat of deportation to the Gambia, Malik returned to Italy in 2018, where he applied again for asylum. He experienced multiple involuntary reallocations and unemployment, which

prevented him from financially supporting his family and engendered a feeling of powerlessness, which was exacerbated by his frustrated attempts to find employment during the pandemic. The feeling of being helpless triggered painful memories, including the extremely distressing experience of losing his father when he was eight years old, and being subject to torture, slavery and attempted murder in Libya. In the interviews, he presented the traumatizing memories of Libya and the experience of isolation and hopelessness during the pandemic in the same thematic field. It seems that his lack of control over the situation and his isolation provoked a resurfacing of such painful memories. When his mother and his daughter fell ill in 2020, he could neither afford to pay for their hospitalization, nor – due to his pending asylum application and lack of financial resources – travel back to the Gambia. Faced with his inability to help his family members, and with the radical social isolation caused by the lockdown, as well as his reallocation to a small village, he started to perceive his life as meaningless. He told me that he repeatedly had to struggle against thoughts of committing suicide. He saw, and still sees, no way out of his present situation. Malik's case shows how the pandemic further worsened an already existing trajectory of marginalization and suffering. The components that also affect other migrants (residency status, housing, financial situation, transnational responsibilities) became dramatically burdening for this young man, who grew more and more skeptical of getting help from institutions or informal networks.

Summary

By staying in touch with our interview partners in Italy we have been able to observe the heavy repercussions the pandemic has had, especially on migrants and refugees in very vulnerable situations. For example, it became clear to us how important remittances are for the migrants, not only for their relatives in their home countries, but also for the well-being and mental health of the migrants themselves. This is especially clear in the case of Malik, who began to talk about this issue only after repeated interviews with him. In other words,

we can assume that this also applies to migrants in the other regions and countries we have studied, and that our interviewees were perhaps not always able to open up and tell us of their despair and their fears.

The cases described here show that the everyday lives of refugees have changed in different ways over the course of the pandemic, toward either relative stabilization or further destabilization. We plan to continue making a contrastive comparison of these biographical-narrative interviews, which will enable us to make further assumptions about the different strategies developed by migrants to deal with precarious components of their everyday lives under the pandemic (for instance their legal status, their family structure, or their employment situation), against the background of their biographical courses.

5 Interviews with Women from Indigenous Communities in Paraguay

Victoria Taboada Gómez

5.1 The situation in Paraguay since March 2020

The Paraguayan government declared a state of national preventive isolation on March 10, 2020, as soon as two Covid-19 cases had been confirmed within the national territory. The measures included a curfew, the suspension of school classes, strict confinement, and the strict control or closure of borders. This led to a very limited spread of the virus over the first months of the pandemic, even when the numbers of infections and deaths due to the coronavirus were rapidly rising in neighboring countries, such as Brazil.[61] The reasons for such a quick reaction were accepted in public discourses as reflected in the press, and the measures were generally complied with by local private and public services. The country's public health system was not prepared for a pandemic, with its poor infrastructure and precarious financial situation. The government justified its decisions by arguing that it was necessary to "buy time" to strengthen the infrastructure of the health system. However, it did not attend sufficiently to the social and economic needs of the largest part of the population in Paraguay while implementing these measures against the spread of the coronavirus.[62]

In Paraguay, half of the population works in the informal economic sector and almost 20% lives under conditions of poverty. In the case of indigenous com-

[61] Press reports reflect the situation as follows: The Guardian, June 25, 2020, theguardian.com [accessed: August 23, 2021] or BBC News, May 09, 2020, bbc.com [accessed: August 23, 2021].
[62] The Guardian, April 12, 2020, theguardian.com [accessed: August 23, 2021].

munities,[63] this percentage rises to 66% of the population living under conditions of poverty and 34% living under conditions of extreme poverty.[64] The government's economic support for people who depend on a day-to-day income did not meet their needs, which resulted in the re-emergence of solidarity networks and practices such as "***ollas populares***" (popular pots, food prepared by the community).[65] This practice, led by women, is well established, given the frequent occurrence of crises and situations of need among large parts of the population, due to insufficient social policies.

What initially appeared as passive compliance with the strict government measures by the more vulnerable parts of the population gradually turned into growing outrage over the health and social situation. Also, the measures were increasingly difficult to observe in addition to pre-existing material deficiencies. During the first weeks of March 2021, daily protests, including episodes of police violence against demonstrators in Asunción, the capital, crystalized people's dissatisfaction with the president and the government's failed response to the Covid-19 crisis.[66] These protests are more understandable in their intensity in view of reprehensible practices in all spheres of government, such as acts of corruption, nepotism, or lack of social policies.

[63] I use the terms "indigenous community", "indigenous peoples", and "indigenous groups" in a generalized way for the purposes of this report. Nevertheless, multiple factors are at work in each case, such as self-ascription, linguistic family, group, location of the community (rural or urban), legal and land property situation, history, access to services, and so on. There are 19 indigenous groups in Paraguay, divided into five linguistic families.

[64] Source: Dirección General de Estadística, Encuestas y Censos (DGEEC) (2018) Encuesta Permanente de Hogares Población Indígena 2016/2017.

[65] A law for the support and assistance of "popular pots" was approved in September 2020 in this context thanks to the pressure of civil organizations, including indigenous women leaders: sen.gov.py [accessed: October 01, 2021]. As of September 2021, the economic funds for financing the popular pots were eliminated, despite strong protests by the affected groups: ultimahora.com [accessed: October 01, 2021].

[66] The New York Times, March 11, 2021, nytimes.com [accessed: August 23, 2021].

After these demonstrations the impeachment trial of the president initiated by the opposition did not proceed. The demonstrations pointed to the direct relationship between the current situation and the tradition of the president's political party (Asociación Nacional Republicana, also known as Partido Colorado). This corresponds to the party of the dictatorship (1954–1989) that has remained in power to this day, except for almost four years of political alternation (2008–2012). The indignation over this political continuity and the rise in Covid-19 infections and deaths resulted in the burning of one of the Partido Colorado offices.[67] The fear and anger shown in the demonstrations following decades of structural precarity in the public health system then turned into reality: more than a year after the outbreak of the pandemic, Paraguay has reached its highest levels of infections and deaths due to Covid-19.[68] As of May 2021, Paraguay topped the list of countries with the highest number of daily confirmed Covid-19 deaths per million people on a 7-day rolling average, after Uruguay,[69] and reached a total of 361,440 confirmed cases by early June, 2021.[70]

The Ministry of Public Health also collects specific data regarding the spread of the coronavirus in indigenous communities. The Federation for the Self-determination of Indigenous Peoples (FAPI) – an autonomous federation formed by representatives of indigenous organizations in Paraguay – publishes the data with the aim of assessing information for indigenous leaders and other public institutions for decision-making processes. According to the data, 16 out of 19 indigenous groups have registered positive Covid-19 cases

[67] Press article on the fire at the ANR (Asociación Nacional Republicana) political party, also known as "Partido Colorado". See: abc, March 17, 2021, abc.com.py [accessed: August 27, 2021].
[68] See: ourworldindata.org [accessed: June 12, 2021].
[69] See: ourworldindata.org [accessed: June 12, 2021].
[70] See: mspbs.gov.py [accessed: June 12, 2021].

so far, making 420 positive cases and 46 deceased as of June 2021.[71] The information can be tracked according to region, group and district, while the communities are kept unidentified in order to avoid stigmatization. Most of the cases come from the Boquerón department[72] in the Chaco region (Western Paraguay), which is the region I have focused on in my research.

5.2 The Occidental Region or Chaco

Paraguay is divided by the Paraguay River into two well-differentiated geographic regions. The Oriental region (Región Oriental/~95% of the population resides here); and the Occidental region (Región Occidental), also known as the Chaco, which is part of the Gran Chaco (a natural region divided between Bolivia, Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil). The Paraguayan Chaco is a semi-arid region where 47.7% of the indigenous populations reside. The region is suffering from rapid deforestation,[73] where cattle raising is the main economic activity. Mennonite settlements also play a role in the Chaco scenario. The Mennonites are a religious and ethnic grouping that has settled in the Paraguayan Chaco in different waves since 1927, as part of ongoing

[71] See: experience.arcgis.com and fapi.org.py [accessed: June 12, 2021]. The total indigenous population is 117,150 people, according to the III Censo Nacional de Población y Viviendas para Pueblos Indígenas (DGEEC, 2014).

[72] Boquerón is located in the northwest of Paraguay, in the border area with Argentina and Bolivia.

[73] "Latest studies conducted on a global scale identified Paraguay as one of the countries in Latin America with the highest deforestation rates. Prior to 1940, the Atlantic Forest in Paraguay (BAAPA) covered over 55% of the eastern region of the country (accounting for almost 9,000,000 ha). Nevertheless, uninterrupted deforestation practices resulted in the loss of 91% of its original cover. By 2003 Paraguay had become the country with the second highest deforestation rate in the world" (Da Ponte et al. 2018). High deforestation rates are also registered in the western region and within indigenous protected territory (Glauser 2019; see also earthsight.org.uk [accessed: October 01, 2021]).

colonial processes which I will discuss in more detail in my dissertation[74] in the framework of case studies. Nowadays, the Mennonites run a profitable economy, having the highest production of dairy in the country. The systematic exploitation of indigenous peoples is a fundamental component of their colonial socioeconomic system (Canova, 2021). In this sense, the Occidental Region's historical background is very rich, consisting of different aspects that include the development and consequences of the War of Triple Alliance (1864–1870) and the Chaco War (1932–1935)[75], land distribution and use of or access to natural resources, economic activities including long-lasting large estates and enclave economies, the establishment and role of religious and settler groups, and unequal power relations where indigenous groups suffer historical dispossession.[76] These processes are accompanied by discourses or particular images of the Chaco, which are marked by the erasure of indigenous peoples who developed their cultures in the Chaco region long before the establishment of the Paraguayan Nation State and its borders. These historical discourses depend on who is narrating the history and whose historical experiences are acknowledged. The task of assessing the historical background and how it is narrated is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is a central component of my dissertation, and I will consider some elements of it in my presentation of cases in the Covid-19 context.

[74] Under the supervision of Maria Pohn-Lauggas, Barbara Potthast and Gabriele Rosenthal.

[75] The War of Triple Alliance was fought between Paraguay and the allies Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay. The Chaco War, between Paraguay and Bolivia, was fought over the "Chaco Boreal" region. People from indigenous groups participated in this war (under varying conditions) but their perspective and actual participation remains excluded from the "national history". Kalisch and Unruh (2018) challenge this with their groundbreaking collection of Enlhet narratives concerning the Chaco War.

[76] See for example Kleinpenning (2009); Dalla Corte (2012); Córdoba, Bossert and Richard (2015).

5.3 My Research Project and Positioning in the Field

My doctoral research is based on analysis of the biographical self-constructions of women from different indigenous communities in the Paraguayan Chaco region. I focus on biographical and generational work around historical processes that have affected their communities and groupings and their current social reality within specific discourses. In the framework of biographical research, this means analyzing processes of self-reflection and of rendering past events understandable. It also means considering future aspirations and current situations, including interactions between generations in a family (Inowlocki, 2016; Rosenthal, 1999; Fischer-Rosenthal, 2000). Here, I am particularly interested in exploring whether and how these negotiations include processes of leadership or civic engagement.

As a non-indigenous member of the mestizo/white population in Paraguay,[77] I represent the society that has historically dispossessed and discriminated indigenous peoples in the country, a process of exclusion that can still be observed today. At the same time, doing research and living in Germany "widens" the distance between my interviewees and myself. In this sense, while I share some commonalities with them, I seek to reflect on my positionality with regard to power inequality and the differences between us in terms of ethnic belonging and social position. The sequences of our communication and interactions give me insights into the changing dynamics and figurations between myself as a member of the non-indigenous grouping and my interviewees with their own shifting belongings to different groupings.

In December 2019, I conducted fieldwork in Asunción, Paraguay. There, I undertook participant observation and conducted ethnographic and biographi-

[77] Categories to be considered in the light of the great ambivalence in the social negotiation of identities and belongings in Paraguay and what it means to be "Paraguayan", as well as of the material and social inequalities in Paraguayan society related to such belongings.

cal narrative interviews. A second period of fieldwork was planned for 2020, but was cancelled due to the pandemic. I could no longer travel to my country of origin, and I had to "observe" the development of the pandemic from abroad while experiencing it myself, but from a place of privilege in relation to the situation in Paraguay. Besides, I was able to observe how the pandemic affected groups in Paraguay differently.

In this paper, I discuss how and to what extent the Covid-19 pandemic has affected my interviewees from their perspective, as revealed to me by our exchanges. Moreover, I address how I kept in contact with "the field" while engaging with the effects of my positionality, now with a very tangible distance added to the above-mentioned differences.

5.4 (Online) Spaces of Encounter Turning Public

As an initial step, I decided to use online spaces of encounter where women from indigenous communities were meeting to share their experiences of the pandemic. The spaces were rapidly emerging, and were being used to discuss the impacts of the pandemic, for instance on education or concrete events. In one of the meetings in October 2020,[78] the topic of "isolation" – commonly described in the media discourse as a "new reality" – was assessed as a familiar situation that had now become aggravated, particularly for those women living in rural areas. In their encounters, they pointed to the necessity of remaining in contact and of building networks of support to promote participation. The topic of isolation is particularly serious in the Chaco region, where numerous communities do not have reliable access to main roads. Such communities often lack access to basic services, including health centers, and in some cases also schools. Communication with other communities and public institutions is therefore difficult. With the pandemic, these communities re-

[78] I will not reference all digital encounters, given that some of them were not recorded or published.

ceived the general advice to control and reduce access to their communities: the "closure" of communities to the "external world" has both symbolic and material connotations for indigenous communities in Paraguay. The effects of these instructions from official institutions in the framework of historical unequal power relations are worth tracing.

In the case of schoolteachers, their experiences were diverse. Some reported having succeeded with distance learning, but others talked about their struggles to keep in contact with their students, having to manage the lack of technology, lack of resources, and lack of support from the family for learning activities, as well as concerns around the students' mental health. The obstacles, particularly for women, to taking an active role in the community was a topic thematized in relation to education. That girls abandon school at a young age is a reality in many communities, and was a main concern during conversations on the effects of the pandemic.[79]

The online encounters allowed me to see the importance of existing networks of women from indigenous communities who are used to staying in touch through technology, and are able to quickly adapt to the online context. Their strategies include helping older people to use cellphones, so that they can take part in these online conversations, as I witnessed in one of the encounters. Thus, in the context of the pandemic, these women decided to render public both their strategies for overcoming physical distances and the content of their discussions. In making their talks public, they emphasized the need to render their concerns, experiences, knowledge, needs and thoughts visible, public, and reproducible. In the numerous encounters they have organized online, they have talked not only about their "new" experiences related to the pandemic, but also about other topics, such as concrete conflicts they are going through in the realms of land, health, education, or training for women in leadership.

[79] See: Observatorio Educativo Ciudadano (May, 2020), observatorio.org.py [accessed: August 23, 2021].

All the events I attended were open, but they required registration. Only some of them were published afterwards. The main speakers were women from indigenous communities, invited as experts and following the aim of promoting the participation of women. The public participated by asking questions (through chat functions mostly). We could see each other's names, but the encounters did not include self-presentations and were focused on listening to the input of experts and the debate between them, including the public's questions. My participation was therefore not entirely anonymous, but I did not have any opportunity to present myself, or my research interest.

In addition, there are online encounters organized by state institutions, NGOs, academics, civil society and indigenous representatives to discuss the situation of indigenous peoples in the context of the pandemic. Here, I would like to explore a particular intervention that could deepen the discussion on the effects of the pandemic, or rather, on the disputes that are rendered visible by it. In September 2020, the Paraguayan Anthropological Association and the National Coordination of Indigenous Pastoral (CONAPI) organized an online talk to discuss the Covid-19 situation of Indigenous Peoples in Paraguay.[80] The conversation turned around two foci.

First, the participants addressed the material problems that had to be resolved urgently. Mainly these consisted of a weak public health system, the precarious water supply, the insufficient food supply, the failure of the state to provide economic help to the communities, and the problem of indigenous territories that extend beyond national borders and whose inhabitants constantly move between countries (in particular the Paraguayan-Brazilian border).

Second, the linguist Hannes Kalisch presented an analysis based on his observations in Enlhet indigenous communities[81] located in the central Chaco,

[80] See: facebook.com [accessed: June 12, 2021].

[81] Kalisch, H., 2020 "Los enlhet y la pandemia". Ponencia en el conversatorio "Los Pueblos Indígenas ante el Covid-19. El caso de Paraguay", organizado de forma virtual por

where he has been living for over 30 years. At the time of the talk, no Covid-19 cases had been registered in those communities, so that, according to Kalisch, the reactions of the Enlhet people were related to the imposition of prevention measures (especially the restrictions on movement), rather than to the disease itself. In this context, it is important to note that the Mennonite colonies were built on traditional Enlhet territory, that the Mennonites exercise strict control over the area, and that many Enlhet work for them. Kalisch explained that

> the measures against Covid and the attitudes that the Enlhet (and also other indigenous groups) adopt towards them are related to a symbolic reading of Covid and less to the hygiene measures, given that these are implemented in a context of unbalanced co-existence which began at the end of the Chaco War (1932–1935), and almost 100 years' experience of discrimination and social, political, economic and territorial exclusion.

He continued by saying that "the responses to Covid, the discourses and the measures are seen as a form of relationship with the dominant environment". This idea was reinforced by cases of discrimination in the cities, where indigenous people were punished for not complying with the hygiene rules (while white people[82] who were also not complying did not suffer any consequences).

Kalisch added that "the measures are therefore understood as a dispute and even a fight". White people are seen as having an entire system built to protect their interests, and the responses of the Enlhet are understood as resistance. According to Kalisch, the tragic thing is that if those who use Covid to show their independence and resistance "fall (sick)", this will be twice as painful. He

la Asociación Paraguaya de Antropología, el 4 de setiembre 2020. See: enlhet.org [accessed: October 13, 2021].

[82] "Los blancos" or "white people" as a direct translation, is how people from indigenous communities mostly refer to non-indigenous people, such as Mennonites, Paraguayans, Brazilians, and so on.

said that instead of a basis of trust, there is distrust between groupings in the Chaco, with decades of lack of interest in building a dialog, despite the image of peace and harmony that many Mennonites like to cultivate.

These reflections relate to the history of dominance and unequal power relations that still continues today. Thus, besides all its material consequences and the lives it has cost up to this point, the pandemic is also an arena for symbolic disputes where members of indigenous communities, such as the Enlhet, still feel a need to fight for their autonomy.

5.5 The Changing Relationship between Interviewer and Interviewees due to the State of Emergency and the Distance Between Us[83]

The online encounters I have analyzed, as well as other sources,[84] make it clear that many of the concerns indigenous communities had before the Covid-19 outbreak have continued during the pandemic. This was the case for one of my interviewees, **Alba**.[85] I had met Alba during my bachelor's studies while interviewing indigenous leaders for a project. As a leader, she has always been highly engaged in political struggles as a representative of her own community, as well as in civil society organizations. After many years, we met again for an interview during my fieldwork in December 2019. We then kept in contact through a messaging app during 2020 and 2021.

[83] I have stayed in touch regularly through online platforms with four people, with one of whom I conducted a biographical narrative interview for the first time in the online format. Although I have conducted interviews in Spanish and Guaraní and worked with translators, the interviews presented here were all conducted in Spanish.

[84] Report by a human rights NGO, see: codehupy.org.py [accessed: August 23, 2021]. Summary by a journalist site: Latitud 25, May 20, 2021, enlatitud25.com [accessed: June 12, 2021].

[85] All names are masked.

Alba experienced first hand how the emergency caused by the Covid-19 pandemic did not prevent pre-pandemic conflicts from happening, such as conflicts over land. Through social media I found out that Alba suffered physical violence and threats while defending her community's territory in a conflict with a private company. Such conflicts over rights to land continued throughout 2020 and 2021 in different regions of the country and affected many indigenous communities.[86]

In her online messages, Alba thematized her main concerns in respect of the protection of her community's territory and the generation of income. Because of the measures against Covid-19, the opportunities for selling their products (art and crafts) were reduced, which threatened livelihoods that are based on day-to-day income. This happened at the same time that their only other sustainable source of food was being threatened and partially destroyed (their territory), which added to the pressure Alba was experiencing. The presence of the disease itself was not the main threat for Alba and her community, but the underlying vulnerable situation and the hygiene measures that came to aggravate it. Once again, the state institutions were not fulfilling their roles, and not considering the particular realities and needs of the people on whom they imposed these anti-Covid measures.

During our interactions in this context, I observed how my role was changing from that of an interviewer in a strict sense to that of someone seeking to stay

[86] During the pandemic, several indigenous communities continued to register evictions, invasions, and illegal exploitation of natural resources within their territories. To name a few examples: Community Y'aka Marangatú in Itapúa: fapi.org.py [accessed: June 12, 2021], community Cerrito in Alto Paraná: lanacion.com.py [accessed: June 12, 2021], Ayoreo communities in the Cerro Siete Cabezas, Chaco: abc, May 05, 2021, abc.com.py [accessed: June 12, 2021]; a mapping of forced evictions during 2021 by a platform gathering civil society organizations and movements can be found here: japoli.org [accessed: August 23, 2021].

in touch at a distance and to provide some kind of support, at least financially.[87] Communication through social media and messaging apps has proved an effective channel for staying updated and actively keeping in touch. Alba did not agree to a phone interview, but we still stayed in touch through voice and text messages. Thus, she allowed me to occupy a particular role, given my positionality, including me living in Germany, the online context, and the hardships she was going through.

I consider these events and the development of our interaction as meaningful input for reflecting on my relationship with Alba: How does the relationship between interviewer and interviewee evolve over time, beyond the limited research context, and in a crisis situation rather than a "stable" interview situation? This question requires an empirical analysis where both interviewer and interviewee define research processes, and where social positionalities and power relations play a role. As Gabriele Rosenthal explains: "we should let ourselves be guided by the needs of the interviewees in arranging the setting [...]. If these elements are taken as expressions of special features of the cases of these interviewees, and not just as irritating disturbances, they can be included as useful empirical data in the case reconstructions" (Rosenthal, 2018: 48f.).

At the same time, such an analysis can give insights into the value of long-term relationships that emerge from interview situations, and into the building of trust.

Internal migration and limitations of online contact. Since the Covid-19 virus started to spread in Paraguay, I have reached out to all the people I interviewed in December 2019 (N= 4) and asked how they and their acquaintances were doing. All of them responded that they and their families were doing fine and were interested in knowing how the situation with me in Germany was.

[87] During the course of the pandemic, I have sent certain amounts of money to some of my interviewees.

One of them is **Teresa**, a young woman from an urban indigenous community in the Chaco region. I met and interviewed Teresa in December 2019 in Asunción, where she was working in the formal sector. My intention was to set up a follow-up interview, to which she agreed. However, after the beginning of the pandemic, Teresa found herself moving between the capital and her community, until she finally migrated back to her community in the Chaco and resettled there. She argued that this made it difficult to set up a time for an online interview, so we kept communicating only through audio and text messages. It is difficult for me to judge the structural conditions in which she found herself, but from our message exchange, it seems highly probable that she was not in a stable situation. Migrating back to her community can be seen as a strategy to deal with the strict lockdown that was ordered in Paraguay in that moment and all the possible difficulties related to it. That she has remained there until now also indicates that this strategy, even if originally planned as merely temporary, has developed into a migration back to her community of origin. The limited communication I can still maintain with her shows how an uncertain or unstable situation, as well as the online context and the distance between interviewer and interviewee, all play a role in the lack of motivation or lack of conditions for succeeding in setting up an online interview. In our case, maintaining a relationship even if "only" through messages, that is, without being able to hold interviews, has provided an open space to which we have both turned when we feel the need or for spontaneous conversations.

Taking advantage of the flexibility of online interviews. "If it wasn't for the lockdown, I wouldn't have had the time to give you an interview," said **Claudia**. I established contact with Claudia during my stay in Asunción in 2019. She was a middle-aged woman from an indigenous community in the Chaco, who had been living in the capital for several years where she had a stable job. At that time, we did not manage to carry out the interview because Claudia was frequently away on business. I stayed in contact with her at the beginning of the pandemic and asked her if she would be interested in doing an online in-

terview. She responded positively and I called her at the agreed time. After explaining my motivation, I asked her to tell me about her family's and her own life history, just as if we were in a "normal" biographical interview situation.[88] This means that after my question, I let her tell me her life story without any interruptions or questions, after indicating that she could take all the time she needed for it.

She told me about the halting of her business trips due to the Covid-19 restrictions, which enabled her to grant me enough time to carry out several interviews (five calls of 1–2 hours each). Our interviews benefited from her stable internet connection. We even spoke while she was driving her car. Despite the fact that we had never met in person, and that our interviews were only through voice calls without video, we managed a fluent communication. That we shared some commonalities, such as having mutual acquaintances, a common language, and common geographical references, helped in establishing contact and building a comfortable atmosphere for our talks.

Claudia presented Covid-19 as a personal concern only in our last interview. She was worried that her family could not "isolate" within their community, where cases were rapidly rising, and where there were not enough health care centers. Her concerns show her privileged position as a member of the community living in the capital, a dislocation process that can be seen as a central aspect of her life history, and as a process that is located in a family dynamic with an intergenerational history of migration.

"Isolation". The next case is very different from that of Claudia, speaking in terms of a maximal contrastive comparison as defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967). I put "isolation" between quotation marks due to the above description of communities in rural areas, particularly in the Chaco region, that are "isolated" due to the lack of roads and other basic services. The process of

[88] I conducted the biographical narrative interview following the method developed by Fritz Schütze (1984) and Gabriele Rosenthal (2004, 2018).

becoming "isolated" must be considered in the context of an exploitative system that has deprived communities of their territories, resources, and autonomy. Under this system, most communities still cannot enjoy basic rights due to structural inequality and discrimination. At the same time, isolation from the national society constitutes a historical strategy of survival and resistance for some indigenous groups. So what does "mandatory isolation" imply for indigenous communities in the Chaco?

Given this context and considering the great differences between one community and another in relation to access to resources such as land, among others, I established contact with **Elisa**, who is around 40 years old. She is one of the few Spanish speakers in her community, which could constitute another aspect of "isolation". I had had no previous contact with Elisa and we had no common acquaintances, except my contact person. Elisa lives in a community which had no registered Covid-19 infections at the time of our call, and she occupies a central role in her community as a craftswoman and as the representative of other craftswomen who do not speak Spanish. During our first call in January 2021, the connection was unstable and the call ended abruptly. Here, she did not problematize the Covid-19 situation but focused on her concerns regarding the reinforced isolation, which they experience in terms of geography and also in terms of language. Now this was aggravated due to the lockdown, and they had less visitors and more difficulties in leaving the community. This situation led to a serious lack of income for the women who are highly dependent on selling their arts and crafts.

On the occasion of our second call two weeks later, the connection was more stable. When I asked her to tell me more about the place where she was, she answered she was under a cell tower, where the wind did not interfere with the call as before. She thematized the pandemic, stressing the topics already mentioned, such as how the Covid-19 restrictions have added to pre-existing difficulties faced by her community.

The conversation with Elisa shows two main points: first, the strategies undertaken to counter the "isolation" of the community, such as going to a cell tower, and Elisa as the Spanish-speaking representative of other women; and second, the ongoing problems indigenous communities face due to their structural exclusion, which have been reinforced by the direct effects of the pandemic.

5.6 Concluding Remarks: Strategies for the Positioning of Demands in a Pandemic Context

In general, the "online observation" I carried out during the pandemic shows that members of indigenous communities use online strategies to position their concerns in the public arena, embedded in the pandemic context and in the discourses around it. Clearly, the pandemic context has aggravated their problems (for example, unstable income worsened by the lockdown). Often, the topics discussed are not directly related to the pandemic (such as land invasion or the lack of women in leadership positions). Thus, in the context of the pandemic these topics have a double framing:

a) the demands of the indigenous communities cannot be postponed or reduced to the pandemic context; and

b) the members of indigenous communities, besides being experts on their own realities, provide an expert political reading of the larger scenario that includes themselves and the "national/Paraguayan" society.

While this last point is obvious, I choose to point it out because there are no signs of it being acknowledged by national social institutions. Through their online interventions, women from indigenous communities have shown that the pandemic is not just a health problem, but that it reflects a long history of imbalanced power relations (see Elias, 2001) and unequal access to resources and rights, and that the effects of the pandemic and the measures associated with it cannot be understood outside this context.

Finally, I consider the dynamics of my online exchanges and interviews, as well as how my interviewees problematize the issue of Covid-19, as important empirical data. Among other aspects particular to each case, these data have helped me to analyze and understand this double framing. By reconstructing how my interview partners embed the Covid-19 topic in a larger context,

c) I have been able to show that they resisted reducing their concerns to a "momentary situation", and that they avoided centering their presentations around it.

In addition,

d) I have been able to show that they indicated in one way or another to what extent they were interested in developing our online (interview) relationship, and how they wanted their expertise to be recognized. I followed their perspectives on how to manage distances, find commonalities, and the relevance and implications of their concerns, including the pandemic.

6 On the Significance of Powerful We-groups and Legal Status During the Pandemic

Gabriele Rosenthal & Arne Worm

To conclude this report, we will take a look at two components which have clearly played a role in determining how our interviewees have experienced the pandemic, how they have dealt with changes in their situation, and especially ***to what extent their power of agency has been affected by the pandemic***. Even before the pandemic, these components were significant in their lives: on the one hand, ***their degree of integration in social networks or we-groups***, and, on the other hand, their ***legal status*** in the country in which they are living. As our contrastive comparison of the individual groupings shows, people who are members of a we-group or a relatively stable network have been better able to navigate the challenges of the pandemic. We-groups can be families or extended family groups and local communities, but also religious, political or diaspora networks. Those we-groups, or equivalent networks, that have existed for generations and thus share a collective memory – such as the religious brotherhoods in Senegal – have greater cohesion and power, even in the diaspora, than networks of a lesser "social age" (Elias, 2008 [1976]). In order to examine these components more closely in the light of our analyses, we will first discuss the concepts of we-group and power as defined by Norbert Elias. After this, we will compare the different groupings in respect of their networks and their legal status. The reader may think that there is nothing surprising about the second component, legal status. Yet our analyses reveal not only that this component is extremely significant, but also that its effect depends on the extent to which the individual is integrated in a we-group or network. Here, we need to reflect on how the legal status of our interviewees differs in each grouping and country, and its significance in the country where they are living today, or where they have

lived for generations (as in the case of descendants of refugees in Jordan or the indigenous population in Paraguay).

We-groups and networks. Plenty of research has been done on the importance of local, regional or transnational networks for the everyday realities of migrants. In all the regions where we conducted interviews, our analyses also show very clearly the importance of networks, especially for people in an outsider position in the tradition of figurational sociology. We have already pointed out that when attempting to grasp how the everyday realities of these groupings have changed due to the pandemic, it is helpful to look at the power or influence of different networks, as well as at their ***quality***, meaning their history and their degree of integration. Following Elias, we may roughly distinguish:

- established we-groups;
- networks that have features similar to those of we-groups, in other words which have some kind of common we-image, or a collective historical image as a social group;
- relatively loose networks, for example networks that were founded (strategically) for the purpose of supporting outsiders, and which have no (clear) common conception of a collective history;
- groupings of people who are regarded by ***others*** as a social group or we-group, but less so by the people concerned.

Like Elias, we use the term "we-group" to refer to a social unit whose members have a stable we-image and we-feeling as a ***group***, with which they distinguish themselves from other individuals and groups. A group's we-image is an expression of the degree of integration and cohesion of a collective actor, and is based in particular on a shared collective history in interrelationship with other collectives or groupings. In particular, a we-image serves to create and maintain the cohesion and integration of the group, and is asso-

ciated with specific collective memories (Elias, 2008 [1976]; Rosenthal, 2016). Artur Bogner (1998: 202) points out that "the definition of 'we' always includes a definition of 'they' or 'you' ". He goes on to say that big social we-groups are formed "by excluding the others, those who are not one of 'us' ".[89] Thus, their own we-image and their image of the others serve to bind the individual members to the group, whose power potential depends essentially on its ability to organize itself. In particular, the we-image is a protection against negative they-images. It helps to prevent group members from adopting such negative elements in their own self-image (Bogner, 2003: 175–178). Like Elias, Georg Elwert (1982, 1989) and Bogner (2003) underline the fact that the "internal integration" of outsider groups can function as a power resource. Elwert argues that "close amalgamation in a clientelistic or nationalistic community is an effective means to combat insecurity in economic or social matters" (1989: 460, translated from the German by Ruth Schubert). Here, the empirical question arises of how far existing networks whose members increasingly find themselves in an outsider position can develop into powerful we-groups. We can observe processes of strengthening of networks and we-groups in the face of the increasing loss of power of their members, or in reaction to this loss, both in groupings of migrants[90] and among the indigenous people of Paraguay, who have become even more disempowered as a result of the pandemic. The important point here is that figurations must be conceived of as permeated by volatile – i.e. transient and unstable – power balances. We- and they-images, group integration, and power are not ***substantive*** but ***relational*** entities within intertwined relationships that are formed by sociohistorical processes, and

[89] In the interviews and group discussions we conducted with migrants from Senegal in Brazil, the question who belongs, or who does not belong, to which Senegalese brotherhood, and whether the brotherhoods form a single we-group or whether they are different we-groups, is highly contested, sometimes to the extent of a taboo on talking about the differences (Rosenthal, Cé Sangalli and Worm, in preparation).

[90] In 1982 Elwert discussed the positive effects of so-called internal integration for migrants in their host society.

which form these processes. How far a group is capable of collective action and able to ride out conflicts depends very heavily on its degree of integration (Bogner, 2003: 173). In future studies, we will therefore need to reconstruct the characteristics of each grouping, and to decide in each case whether we are looking at a well organized we-group, a loose we-group, or a tightly closed or relatively open network. It will also be important to reconstruct whether and how the nature of the grouping has changed over time and in relation to the social context. The groupings can be placed on a sliding scale, from formally well organized we-groups to loosely connected informal networks with no we-image. Thus, in contrast to we-groups, relatively loose networks can be regarded as collective intertwinings with a very low level of integration and cohesion. The members feel that they belong in some way to the network, but they do not share a clear we-image. Their actions or activities are situative or serve a special purpose, often pertaining to single individuals and their (inter)personal relations, and are therefore relatively volatile. Their social age as a *group* is usually what distinguishes loose networks from established we-groups. However, it is important to see that the borders between established we-groups and loose networks tend to change. Thus, questions as to the extent of integration and cohesion within a group or grouping, how unifying and binding the we-image is for its members, and whether its members have a collective memory, can only be answered by empirical research. Whether and to what extent our interviewees are actively embedded in, and feel loyalty toward, we-groups or loose networks is also an empirical question. Our intention here is to underline this empirical orientation in our studies of the everyday realities of migrants and indigenous people in the context of the pandemic, and their interrelationships within various groups and groupings in our different research contexts.

A comparative view of migrant and indigenous we-groups and networks during the pandemic. The interviews conducted in **Brazil** by Eva Bahl and Lucas Cé Sangalli reveal very clear differences between those migrants who can

rely on a relatively well established we-group to help them navigate through the pandemic, those whose migration projects are part of loose, but nevertheless clearly supportive, networks, and those who have no such networks to turn to. While most of the interviewees from Senegal are members of a brotherhood and thus of a we-group, those from Syria belong to loose networks of Arabic-speaking immigrants in Brazil. The migrants from Syria, and now also those from Senegal, have a better legal status than migrants from other African countries, and they can rely to a far greater extent on their networks. By contrast, the case of **Julius** from Sierra Leone shows how a man becomes increasingly isolated during the pandemic because he has lost the support of NGOs or religious and migrant networks. His situation is very similar to that of the people we interviewed in Jordan and Europe and who – like Julius – had no network and an insecure legal status.

Let us look more closely at the differences between the migrants from Senegal and those from Syria. Due to the pandemic, our Senegalese interviewees have been deprived of the means of earning an income. This has not only had a dramatic effect on their individual lives, but even more so on their whole transnational family organization, because it means they are unable to send remittances to their families back home. However, unlike other groupings, those who have close relations with the well organized networks of the brotherhoods, which have a long history and which can be described as we-groups in the sense discussed above, can mobilize resources that help them to improve their present situation and to support their families in Senegal. Finding opportunities for earning money in different parts of Brazil (and in neighboring countries) has always been an important reference point for collective activity, not only during the pandemic. Also not to be underestimated is the way people share food supplies, or information, for instance about where to go for vaccination (or how to access the healthcare system in general).

In addition, those Senegalese who have now been granted a secure residence status are able, even during the pandemic, to fly to Senegal to visit their families there, knowing that they will be able to return to Brazil. By contrast, those interviewees with no such networks and a precarious residence status have had to reorient themselves – especially in the face of the catastrophic economic situation in Brazil – and are planning to continue their migration in the direction of North America.

The case of the Syrian refugees also reveals the importance of having access to networks. Their migration to Brazil and their participatory practices there depend substantially on established networks of communities in Brazil with a Middle-East background. These have been formed since the beginning of the 20th century by migrants from the Levant, mainly from Lebanon, Syria and Palestine (see Truzzi, 2018).[91] Our Syrian interviewees are now mainly dependent on the support of these Brazilian-Arab communities; in our interviews the most frequently mentioned were Brazilian-Lebanese communities. This has to do with the weakening of their transnational connections with relatives or local communities back home in Syria by the ongoing civil war, in economic terms or due to the flight of family members to different parts of Syria or other parts of the world. Both before and during the pandemic the Brazilian-Arab communities have helped them, especially in the search for local employment opportunities, on the basis of a sense of regional and Arab solidarity: a kind of national or "compatriotic" form of mutual or collective loyalty and solidarity. Informal networks are important in the Brazilian arrival context, not only during the pandemic, and having contact with people with a Middle-East background who have been settled in Brazil for a long time is the best way, if not the only way, to maintain or improve one's opportunities for participation. In contrast to the Senegalese members of brotherhoods, the Syrian refugees are more like

[91] Our interviewees from the Middle East, i.e. from Syria, Yemen and Iraq, enjoy the support of a Brazilian-Lebanese network and a Brazilian-Iraqi network, many of whose members are in contact with each other.

outsiders ***within*** these Brazilian-Arab networks, in the sense that they are dependent on the support of the ***established*** Brazilian-Arabs, and do not expect to be treated as equal members of a we-group; nor do they feel that they are part of a group project. Thus, in addition to talking about the support they have received, our Syrian interviewees also mention feeling frustrated by their loss of social status, and that their expectations regarding life in Brazil have not been fulfilled so far.

It is important to note that refugees from Syria in Brazil and Germany have a relatively secure legal status, at least in comparison to other groupings. While people from Syria in Brazil have had access to a humanitarian visa since 2013,[92] which allows them to enter the country in a regularized way, this option is not available to people from West African countries. The latter usually enter the country in irregularized ways and then try to regularize their situation in Brazil. Many Senegalese migrants have tried to do this by applying for refugee status, but they have seldom been recognized as such by the Brazilian authorities.[93] In December 2019 the Brazilian government issued a decree giving some Senegalese the right to apply for residency and thus regularize their status without the need of being recognized as refugees.[94] They owe this decree in part to the efforts of the "Association of Senegalese Residents in Rio de Janeiro", and also to Caritas, as well as other (Christian) religious associations that welcome and support migrants, most of which are run by Brazilians (see Heil, 2021: 139f.). As in the case of refugees from Haiti in Brazil, this political success in respect of the legal residency status of refugees from Senegal clearly shows that there is a connection between a we-group's strong capacity for collective action and the advancement of legal rights in the field of migration.

[92] ACNUR, September 24, 2013, acnur.org [accessed: October 10, 2021]; UNHCR, September 27, 2013, unhcr.org, [accessed: October 10, 2021].

[93] According to the news site Globo, in 17 years only 15 asylum applications (out of a total of 8,000) by Senegalese migrants have been approved by the Brazilian state: Mundo, December 06, 2019, g1.globo.com [accessed: August 10, 2021].

[94] See: in.gov.br [accessed: August 10, 2021].

The interviews we conducted in **Jordan** show that during the pandemic the agency and practical options of migrants and descendants of migrants have depended not only on their legal status, but also on whether they belong to a we-group or a well functioning network. The majority of refugees and their descendants, and of the population in general, are Palestinians who have obtained Jordanian citizenship and thus a secure legal status. By contrast, the majority of refugees from Iraq are regarded only as 'visitors', and are expected to return to Iraq as soon as possible, or to move on to some other country (see Becker and Hinrichsen, 2020). They have no official permission to stay or work, with the exception of those who have been able to obtain a renewable work and residence permit because of their large deposits in Jordanian banks, or those who have found employment in sectors in which Iraqis are allowed to work, which has enabled them to legalize their status. Many work in the informal sector of the labor market. Already in precarious circumstances due to their informal jobs and the poor economic situation in Jordan, many of them lost their income opportunities during the pandemic. The interviews conducted by our colleagues with refugees from Iraq show that their insecure legal position often leads to increasing isolation and loneliness. There are some loose networks in this grouping, but especially the refugees living in Amman without a residence permit do not seem to be strongly integrated in them, or to have a strong sense of a common national belonging.

The two case studies presented in detail by Ahmed Albaba and Johannes Becker clearly reveal that there is an interrelationship between people's legal status and their position in the networks. In the case of **Massoud,** his illegalized situation and the geographical distance between him and his family in Iraq, together with a lack of social relationships in Jordan, have reinforced a negative trajectory that began with his first experience of flight. His isolation and "loneliness" have clearly increased during the pandemic. Apart from his lack of networks, this is also due to the fact that assistance services for refugees (including training courses) provided by NGOs have been drastically restricted

due to the pandemic. This can be contrasted with the situation of Palestinians in Jordan, who (almost all) have a legally secure status and live together with their families. **Nadeem**, for example, in his navigation through the pandemic, was able to turn to the we-group of Palestinian refugees who share similar interpretation patterns, for instance in respect of their image of the Jordanian state. For them there is thus a space where they can exchange opinions, information and critical ideas, and offer each other mutual aid. It is also important to note that there is a connection between legal status and access to healthcare services in Jordan. In Jordan, vaccinations are offered to all refugees, but access to other healthcare services depends on a person's legal status, which can be very different for different groupings. For refugees from Iraq basic medical services are free, but they have to pay for certain treatments and medicines.

While it seems that the already weak cohesion within the grouping of Iraqi refugees in Jordan has become even weaker during the pandemic, opposite tendencies can be observed in the indigenous grouping in **Paraguay**. Here, as observed by Victoria Taboada Gómez, there has been not only an increase in the degree of cohesion within the we-groups and networks, but also reinforcement of a common we-image and collective memories of persecution in the past. In the context of a collective history of political, social and legal marginalization,[95] our colleague's empirical findings indicate that the "individual" empowerment of members depends very largely on the we-groups of the

[95] The Paraguay Constitution of 1992 recognizes the existence of indigenous peoples prior to the formation of the state, and the application of their political, social, economic, cultural and religious systems of organization is guaranteed. Article 64 on land rights declares that: "The indigenous peoples have [the] right to communal ownership of the land [propiedad comunitaria], in [an] extension and quality sufficient for the preservation and the development of their particular [peculiares] forms of lifestyle", see: web.oas.org [accessed: September 30, 2021]. Yet there are frequent conflicts with the government and with private owners over land rights, in the sense of rights to their ancestral land, see: culturalsurvival.org [accessed: August 30, 2021]. This must also

indigenous population in Paraguay that are powerful as collectives. The pandemic has helped these we-groups, and the resulting networks of indigenous women, to direct attention in the public discourse to their position as outsiders, to the huge inequalities they experience in comparison to other population groups, and to the precarious nature of their livelihoods. By organizing themselves in networks and small groups, by mutually helping each other, and by recalling the social inequality, discrimination and persecution they have suffered in the course of history, the women interviewed by Victoria Taboada Gómez have effectively contributed to the establishment of we-groups with collective agency. This development is reminiscent of the establishment of powerful networks in the gay movement during the AIDS pandemic, with the formation of associations or organized groups. In a way comparable to the activism of indigenous women in Paraguay, the members of these gay networks introduced the issue of discrimination of homosexual men into the public discourse.

Before discussing our case studies of the everyday realities of migrants in **Germany and Italy** in relation to their networks and their legal status, we will first take a look at the significance of the "integration discourse" in Germany. In contrast to the other geographical contexts, our interviewees in **Germany**, especially at the first meeting, see themselves obliged to present their activities and their plans in terms that correspond to the dominant discourse of successful "individual" integration. It is important to mention this here, because it tends to obscure our view of the complex collective contexts in which their migration projects are embedded. Because of this discourse, the refugees in Germany feel obliged to focus in their biographical presentations on themselves and their individual efforts to become "integrated", with the result that they tend not to thematize their membership of certain we-groups, and in particular their relationship with their family in their country of origin, and their migration

be seen in the context of the unequal distribution of land in the course of historical processes in the country.

as a family project. In other words, the dominant discourse requires refugees to present themselves as "individuals" who are willing to adapt – despite their often very uncertain prospects of being able to stay – and thus to leave aside diverging collective belongings that are potential sources of conflict. An additional component is that long-time residents in Germany very rarely invite them to talk about about their context of origin.[96]

Thus, when conducting interviews and when analyzing them, it is important to find out which local and transnational networks and we-groups the refugees belong to. Our analyses show that here, too, these are very important, especially in the context of the pandemic. A we-group of the family back home can be a stabilizing component, but may also be destabilizing, as shown by the cases of **Youssoupha** from Senegal and **Hamid** from Guinea. Youssoupha's extended family in his region of origin is well established and has a relatively powerful position that is based in part, but not only, on transnational family connections in Europe. Youssoupha's migration to Spain was made possible by his family, and the family continued to be an important, very stable point of reference in his subsequent actions and plans. By contrast, Hamid's family of origin became an increasing problem for him: because Hamid could no longer send money to his family in Guinea due to the pandemic, he started to receive threats that spirits would be sent to harm him, that he would be punished by magical means. Youssoupha first tried to distance himself from his family of origin by moving on from Spain to Germany, but with the outbreak of the pandemic he renewed his family contacts. Hamid, on the other hand, tried to end all contact with his family because of the threats he had received. Un-

[96] On the one hand, refugees are required to recount painful experiences in their past as part of the procedure of applying for asylum, while on the other hand, in dialogues with long-time residents, they repeatedly come up against a lack of interest in their life before their migration. This combination has been discussed by Rosenthal (2002) with regard, for example, to refugees from Kosovo in Germany. She has shown how the asylum procedures and uncertainty regarding the chances of being able to stay can have traumatizing effects.

like Hamid, Youssoupha has a relatively established and fairly well-off family in Senegal, and in Germany he has a (relatively) secure residency status. While in Youssoupha's case we can observe a growing stabilization, Hamid's biographical constellation has led to his becoming increasingly isolated during the pandemic, as we have seen in other cases. In addition, Hamid has the threat of deportation hanging over him. Margherita Cusmano's case study of a refugee from Gambia shows how fear of deportation can cause migrants to slide into a trajectory of suffering and isolation. **Malik** first lived in Germany, where his asylum application was turned down. Fearing that he would be sent back to Gambia, he then migrated to Italy. That is where he is living today, isolated and with no means of earning an income. His sense of despair is increasing, not least because he is unable to send money to his family in Gambia. In a contrastive comparison with other migrants she interviewed in Italy who had succeeded in getting a long-term or unlimited residence permit, the author discusses how navigating through the pandemic successfully can depend on a person's legal residency status. **Amadou,** for example, who was sent back to Italy in accordance with the Dublin regulation, obtained a temporary residence permit as an asylum seeker with the aid of an NGO, and this enabled him to find employment.

By contrast, most of the Syrians we interviewed in Germany have a legal status that puts them in a relatively privileged situation. As shown by the examples of **Maruf** and **Miran**, their actions and plans are based on the stable perspective of long-term participation in Germany. Yet the example of Maruf indicates that even this "relatively secure" status is contested, and discourses on (potential) deportation to Syria have contributed to making navigation through the pandemic more difficult than it would otherwise be.

A comparison of the interviews conducted in Germany and Italy with those conducted in Jordan and Brazil shows that in the former countries the power of agency of migrants depends to a high degree on their legal status, while in Brazil, and to some extent also in Jordan, it is linked more strongly to the

strength of their informal networks. Further empirical analyses of our data will enable us to amplify these conclusions. Even in Germany and Italy, having access to certain networks and NGOs makes a difference, not least because these can help to provide legal advice or lawyers, so that there is a greater chance of gaining a legalized status. The different ways in which the pandemic has been experienced by our interviewees in Brazil and Jordan show that their options and plans depend on their membership of networks and we-groups. Those who belong to relatively stable local and/or transnational networks have not been led by the pandemic into exercising their agency by undertaking highly risky projects, such as leaving Brazil and trying to reach North America.

Up to this point we have discussed only the positive effects of networks, but before concluding we should consider the grouping studied by Sevil Çakır-Kılınçoğlu. Her interviews with Kurdish migrants from Turkey who were not only politically active, but also well organized, show that it is their connection with these networks that causes them difficulties in Germany. Some of these women have tried to distance themselves from their organizations, which often exercise a high degree of social control. The members of this grouping chose not to apply for political asylum for various reasons, mainly so that they would continue to be able to travel to Turkey to visit their families. However, the pandemic, in combination with the ongoing political suppression and persecution of their groupings in Turkey, caused them to reconsider their plans. They saw themselves increasingly confronted with the question whether it would not be better to apply for political asylum in order to gain the advantages of a permanent or long-term residency status in Germany. And finally they decided to make the application.

The latter example shows how important it is to reconstruct the different biographical, legal and national constellations in each case (both in the country of origin and in the host country), and above all the interplay between them. In all the groupings we have interviewed, we see that the two components "inte-

gration in we-groups or networks" and "legal status" play a very important role in determining how people have been able to navigate through the pandemic, but that the weighting of these components and their interrelationships are very different in the different groupings and regional contexts. And it must be underlined that – as in the case of the Senegalese in Brazil – this can change over the course of time.

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