HUMANITARIANISM AND COVID-19: STRUCTURAL DILEMMAS, FAULT LINES, AND NEW PERSPECTIVES

Issue Editors **Jeremy Allouche and Dolf J.H. te Lintelo**

Covid-19 and Urban Migrants in the Horn of Africa: Lived Citizenship and Everyday Humanitarianism[*]

Tanja R. Müller[1]

Abstract This article focuses on the everyday humanitarianism of migrant communities in three cities in the Horn of Africa: Nairobi, Addis Ababa, and Khartoum. It is framed around the concept of lived citizenship, defined as a means to secure wellbeing through everyday acts and practices. Based on an analysis of comparative interview data among Eritrean and Ethiopian migrant communities in each city, the article argues that the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted lived citizenship practices to different degrees, linked to previous forms of precarity, and the means and networks of coping with those. Disruptions of transnational support networks resulted in a turn towards local networks and everyday practices of solidarity. These forms of everyday humanitarianism range from spontaneous to more organised forms, united by a perceived lack of involvement by international humanitarian actors and the local state. The article raises important questions in relation to transnational humanitarian action in a global crisis.

Keywords Covid-19, urban migrants, lived citizenship, everyday humanitarianism, Horn of Africa.

1 Introduction

In the globalised world we live in, any pandemic profoundly affects migration and mobility. At the same time, the wellbeing of migrant population groups is rarely at the forefront of government policies, and much less so during times of crises. This state of affairs is visible in global measures to contain the spread of Covid-19 that centred on lockdowns and (border) closures (Mueller *et al.* 2020; Zimmermann *et al.* 2020). Such measures were also key features of the 'quick and decisive response' to the pandemic in many African countries (Dzinamarira, Dzobo and Chitungo 2020: 2466) and have disproportionally impacted the

lives of migrants and those dependent on transnational networks (Mobarak 2020; UN 2020).

In this article, I consider how migrants from Ethiopia and Eritrea who reside in Nairobi, Khartoum, and Addis Ababa (Eritreans only) have responded to the challenges that the Covid-19 pandemic created for their everyday lives. The concept of lived citizenship is used to analyse coping strategies and the forms of everyday humanitarianism that have emerged. Some policy-relevant conclusions are then drawn on how to better consider mobile lives in responses to global crises.

Lived citizenship conceives of citizenship as relational and affective practices grounded in multiple forms of interconnectedness (Isin and Nielsen 2008; Wood and Black 2018). In focusing on citizenship as practised in everyday encounters, it allows analysis of the lives of mobile populations regardless of official status or papers, but with respect to acts aimed at securing rights and wellbeing (for examples, see McNevin 2006; Nyers and Rygiel 2012; Müller 2016; Ticktin 2006).

Everyday humanitarianism is used here in its most basic sense, as aiming to alleviate suffering in everyday lives with the objective of making a difference outside the traditional structures or boundaries of humanitarian action (see Richey 2018). It is a form of affective engagement that, based directly or indirectly on a moral imperative to intervene when suffering occurs or help is needed, is always also a form of political action and governance (Ticktin 2014) – even if only in demonstrating a lack of other, more traditional, humanitarian responses.

In this article, the argument is made that the Covid-19 pandemic is exacerbating the inequalities and precariousness of lived citizenship practices among migrant communities to different degrees. At the same time, even where transnational support networks were disrupted, renewed attention to local support networks and everyday practices of solidarity enhanced migrants' agency in the face of adversity. These emerging forms of everyday humanitarianism range from spontaneous to more organised forms, but what unites them is their independence from international humanitarian actors and/or the local state. The Covid-19 pandemic can therefore serve as an interesting example to rethink the call for localisation of humanitarian responses from the perspective of migrant networks and transnational diasporas.

Methodologically, the article is based on the analysis of interviews conducted with 16 Eritrean and Ethiopian migrants in Nairobi, five migrants in Khartoum, and eight Eritrean migrants in Addis Ababa. The majority were long-term residents of their respective cities with relevant papers such as work permits; some were recognised refugees, others were non-status refugees. However, most regarded the city they lived in, often for a prolonged period of

time, as a transit destination and were planning for resettlement usually in the global North where in some cases family members already resided.[2]

The interviews were conducted for a broader comparative study on transnational lived citizenship and belonging among regional diasporas in urban centres of the Horn of Africa (with the cities Nairobi, Addis Ababa, and Khartoum as the key sites). Face-to-face fieldwork was to commence in Nairobi in March 2020, but due to the Covid-19 pandemic had to be postponed indefinitely. Instead of sampling based on participant observation of diaspora community activities on the ground, snowball sampling starting from informal personal networks was used to conduct virtual interviews via Zoom or WhatsApp.

The use of virtual interviews excluded potential participants without access to mobile technologies and/or the means to pay for data bundles. This was navigated through offering to use the internet facilities of local project partners, and through arrangements to pay for data bundles. Nevertheless, non-virtual fieldwork might have included other migrant groups; thus, the data and findings presented here need to be read with this bias in mind, and some of the coping mechanisms discussed later may not be available to all migrant groups.

The interviews were conducted by the former postdoctoral researcher of the project, Mesghina Abraha. Covid-19 was raised by most participants without probing, leading to more specific questions on the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on their lives. Answers to those questions form the empirical basis of this article.

Participants have been anonymised and any markers that could help identify them have been removed from the article. The project received all required ethical approvals. All participants agreed to the use of anonymised content and quotations from their interviews in publications.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. Section 2 discusses the specific repercussions of Covid-19 for migrants; Section 3 then focuses on how lived citizenship has taken a local turn in response. Section 4 analyses the forms of everyday humanitarianism and solidarity that have emerged from that response, and the article concludes with an emphasis of the importance of transnational diasporas in response to shock and crises.

2 The Covid-19 pandemic and repercussions for migrant wellbeing
Broadly speaking, Covid-19, combined with the policies pursued to combat its spread, had multiple repercussions for migrant communities and the way they exercised their lived citizenship, in both material and non-material terms.[3] These repercussions were intimately linked with migrants' legal or aspired legal status

in their respective city, as well as previous forms of insecurity.[4] In that sense, Covid-19 was less the pathogen that fundamentally altered everyday lives, but rather an additional stress that re-enforced pre-existing forms of precarity.

In terms of material or economic wellbeing, repercussions centred on changes in remittances combined with local changes in employment. Only in Khartoum, where no real lockdown took place and where most people who settle in the city for longer have work and are less dependent on remittances, was the economic impact negligible. Respondent 'V' said: 'I have my secure job so my income was not reduced, but a [weak Sudanese pound] has forced prices to surge'[5] leading to some difficulties at times. And respondent 'U' adds: 'As there was no lockdown, the virus did not bring any change in itself [for the] social and economic life of the migrant community',[6] adding that the main issue was the political situation in Sudan and the tensions between the civil and military arms of government during the ongoing transition period, thus not Covid-19. In particular, respondent 'U' enforced the argument that Covid-19 might not necessarily be the main cause of concern in a volatile political and economic environment.

In Nairobi and Addis Ababa, a majority of migrants from both communities depend on remittances solely or partly, Eritreans usually more so than Ethiopians. How the cycle of the Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted remittances that secure everyday material wellbeing is described in exemplary fashion by respondent 'D' from Nairobi: her partner and the father of their two children works in the construction sector in the UK. Since his departure, 'D' lives off the remittances he sends that also pay for tuition fees for the eldest school-aged child – the only way to secure a good education in Kenya's school system and to learn proper English. The Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown measures in the UK left her partner without work for many months. She had just enough savings to allow the continuation of her child's schooling and started to give some home-schooling lessons to others, as she is housebound with her youngest child. When the UK lockdown eased, her partner started work again, but her example demonstrates the fragility of this transnational arrangement.[7]

Like 'D', those who rely on remittances usually do so from countries in the global North, and as those remittances for many have decreased in Covid-19 times, they struggle to make ends meet.[8] Even those who have work in 'customer service, as barista, in hairdressing [in this line of work] one does not earn a lot' so even with a job they rely on remittances for their regular expenses.[9]

In addition, many Ethiopians and Eritreans in Nairobi and Addis Ababa especially work in sectors particularly affected by the pandemic; namely, the hospitality industry or as drivers. These jobs are usually done on an informal or semi-formal basis, which

makes it easy for employers to reduce working hours and wages. In this respect, respondent 'N' says that for Eritrean-run business owners, it is good 'to have cheap labour', often meaning qualified Eritrean employees to whom they pay meagre wages as they lack official papers. In contrast, 'for us [Eritrean employees] it is an earning, we have to chase those jobs and if we are lucky, we get one'.[10]

Taken together, economic hardship was partly a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, in combination with the precarity already present in pre-Covid-19 migrant lives. While such economic hardship was difficult enough for those who experienced it, non-material aspects of wellbeing were of equal or even greater importance for many in those cities where social contacts were severely restricted or forbidden. Two social activities are of prime importance within both communities to similar degrees: gathering for daily coffee ceremonies to exchange news but also to develop mutual support networks and strategies; and attendance at religious gatherings, mainly in Christian churches (e.g. Orthodox, Catholic, Pentecostal) and Muslim places of worship. With lockdown measures, both social activities were restricted, albeit to different degrees.

Many places of worship were closed during periods of lockdown or had visiting numbers severely curtailed. Particularly for those who live on their own, church or mosque gatherings are the most important means to meet others, in terms of social connections as well as in relation to asking for actual help with any emerging problems. Especially for those residing in neighbourhoods without a substantial diaspora community and/or those living on their own, without family or relatives, isolation in such circumstances was a constant struggle. Eritreans and Ethiopians are social beings: 'People cannot handle the loneliness', as one participant summed up.[11]

Apart from or in addition to church/mosque gatherings, the coffee ceremony is often the only social outlet for many: it is a key feature of everyday life in their home country, and is even more important in a migrant setting. It is the glue that holds society together. But in some areas coffee ceremonies have ceased almost completely because of lockdown policies, according to some informants:

> *People* [referring to Kenyans] *started to monitor neighbourhoods for Covid-19 symptoms, and if they see somebody breaking the rules, they pass it on to the authorities to safeguard the neighbourhood health… people are very active in that respect to ensure government guidelines are followed.*[12]

This has resulted in a state of affairs where 'we refrain from going into other people's houses and have coffee as we

used to; this has created pressures on our lives'.[13] This pressure is more devastating for single men, who not only often lack the equipment necessary for a proper coffee ceremony but who in the past would have been invited by women living in their neighbourhood or by connections further away. Travel and visiting have been constrained while coffee houses they would otherwise have visited have also remained closed.

In Addis Ababa, many of the young Eritrean migrants who depend almost entirely on remittances and find jobs hard to come by, spend their time in *shisha* bars, restaurants, and night clubs – which were all closed due to the pandemic. Participant 'Q', a student who is also involved in setting up an informal association to help advance the education of members of the Eritrean migrant community, says in this respect: 'For young Eritreans who were regular visitors of such venues [such as bars] it was challenging... staying at home was hard for them'. He thus started to give them counselling with the hope that engaging them in the future in education would 'drive them away from their... habits of drinking and being lazy'.[14]

Taken together, many of the challenges raised by members of both migrant communities in relation to employment and economic security, but also in relation to social connections and community, are similar to those of migrant workers more generally, whether they are internal or external migrants. However, both migrant communities created new networks locally or strengthened pre-existing ones related to their country of origin as a coping mechanism. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the orientation of many was towards transnational networks away from the city where they resided, with the ultimate aim of leaving that city. The pandemic resulted in or enforced what is described in Section 3 as a 'local turn' in lived citizenship.

3 Migrant responses: lived citizenship takes a local turn
In all three cities, migrants, even those with urban residence permits, have not only fewer legal rights than citizens, but they usually also lack access to social services, including health services, unless they pay for them privately. With economic insecurity accelerating throughout the pandemic and reduced remittances, those with more wealth who ran their own businesses were also partly affected.

The combination of these dynamics triggered a turn to localised networks and relations as the key means to respond to the material repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic but also the non-material and emotional aspects, including the loneliness felt by those affected by lockdown policies. In relation to this, some notable differences have been reported between Eritrean and Ethiopian communities.

In the case of the Eritrean community, no support was provided by their embassy or other semi-formal networks. This has resulted in *ad hoc* support measures in their neighbourhoods or through friends gaining new importance, while the transnational dimension of lived citizenship has moved into the background. In addition, connections through faith-based groups have gained in significance, also in relation to the provision of material support.

Some churches, for example, organised prayer sessions via Zoom, as respondent 'O' elaborates:

> *One good thing was the church had organised daily prayer time using Zoom. That felt like we were together because we can see each other's faces on the screen. That was great... for people to comfort one another. We were spending more than one hour chatting after the prayer time to talk about how people were doing during lockdown... Some people did not have the opportunity to join and were suffering psychologically* [as a result]. *Some Eritreans were meeting up with their Eritrean neighbours in small numbers, to overcome that.*[15]

While one may imagine that these virtual encounters through faith-based groups within and beyond the neighbourhood and connecting to the transnational diaspora community might have a similar effect, these encounters could not disperse the feeling of being isolated for some migrants. Rather, of prime importance was the possibility of connecting directly to those within the city or the local community. This was partly the case as many concrete initiatives to provide support, not only psychologically but also in material ways, started from local churches or mosques, as this business owner from Nairobi explains:

> *I now support two families regularly with their rent payments... the assistance is organised by the church, they communicate with us which people need help... I don't know the people personally who I support, as it is better to do this anonymously.*[16]

Among parts of the Ethiopian community in Nairobi, support networks were more structured and drew upon connections already in place before the Covid-19 pandemic. Among the Ethiopian Oromo migrant community, for example, a strong semi-formal network of support does exist: 'We Oromos have a social welfare organisation where we support each other... this is our culture as Oromos; though I come from Ethiopia I am first an Oromo... we Oromo are helping each other as much as we can', interviewee 'B' says.[17] These social welfare organisations are in fact structured entities in the different communities, he continues to explain; in effect, 'it's like a social welfare system by the Oromo community in different parts of the city'. 'B' is a member of his local organisation made up of 75–100 people. They collect money on a regular basis from their members and then support either

activities for the common good of all Oromo or, in times of crises like Covid-19, those in urgent and unexpected need. They are also loosely interlinked across closed social media groups globally and thus can draw on wider support if needed.

Among both migrant communities, research participants felt the need to be reassured in their daily struggles by engagement within their locality. Some were simply lucky in relation to their personal living conditions. One example here is 'J' from Nairobi who says:

> If I see it from my building's perspective, I can say we are lucky. I personally did not go out for two months at the beginning of the pandemic, I used my time to finalise some project. But in this neighbourhood in general and my building in particular, I always hear people laughing. People were trying to forget their problems by congregating in small groups inside their houses and chat, having fun and laughter while having traditional coffee, eating what they had together, doing most of the things together with their neighbours. That encouraged me to be optimistic that this problem will go away and the community will overcome it together.[18]

Others tried to live in the same compound with people they knew or at least from the same original locality, and by doing this could draw on each other's support during periods of Covid-19 restrictions, while those living on their own or far away from areas where many migrants settle were often left lonely and isolated. 'R' elaborates in this respect on how her roommates in Addis Ababa 'are also my best friends, one from my childhood days and one who I met in the refugee camp... for me this is emotionally getting back to life in Asmara [the Eritrean capital]'.[19] And 'D' explains that she lives close to her friends who 'are mostly Ethiopian Oromo... there are also Kenyan Oromo in Nairobi but I do not socialise with them... I mostly socialise with Oromo from my province'.[20]

In a similar way, 'E' emphasises the increased importance of local connections: she shares a flat with a member from the same diaspora community whom she first met in a refugee camp in Kenya. When they decided to live together, it was partly as an extra layer of security and confidence, as for unmarried women to live on their own always carries risks. In Covid-19 times, it became a life saver, as she explains:

> We were able to survive the lockdown because I shared my expenses and my life with my friend [her flatmate]. We were and are still supporting one another in all aspects, financially, emotionally and socially. That is a blessing for me.[21]

While both participants see Nairobi as a transitional place, their future plans have moved into the background in favour of securing their joint life in the city.

Taken together, how well participants dealt with Covid-19 repercussions and, in particular, lockdown periods, depended strongly on local connections. Out of these connections forms of everyday humanitarianism emerged, in the absence of help from the host state or international organisations.

4 Everyday humanitarianism at different levels

Multiple expressions of everyday humanitarianism have emerged in both migrant communities, often with recourse to what people perceive as the solidarity borne out of the culture of their country of origin. Respondent 'R', who was made redundant from her job in a boutique due to the pandemic, describes it in this way:

> 'Til now, I could not get another job... and we receive less remittances because our family who send us money are struggling too... in this difficult time, I admire the social heritage of our people [that is] embedded in our culture, it helps us share what we have, helping family and friends and even others in our community. That is what is keeping us alive, I wish this culture could last forever... emotionally, the increasing life challenges are damaging, [but] the culture of support gives me hope.[22]

Similar thoughts are expressed by respondent 'S' who says when looking back at the time with the most restrictions in Addis Ababa:

> I admire the compassion of the Eritrean community during this difficult time. I am proud to be Eritrean, no one was left behind... people were looking after each other... we felt more connected during the pandemic... There was a real sense of community.[23]

This sense of a new type of togetherness from which support could be drawn was widely reported, locally but also across closed international borders. This suggests that even as the economic situation of many migrants remained precarious, they could activate a range of relationships and networks.

'T' says, for example: 'Our family relatives were constantly calling us from abroad, we managed to get through [the pandemic at the time when restrictions were in place in Addis Ababa that prevented business activities] in a good emotional condition'.[24]

Taken together, for members of the Eritrean diaspora who participated in this research, everyday humanitarianism in the form of mutual support largely drew on informal networks of peer-to-peer support or local community groups, and also involved local faith-based organisations as outlined previously. The (re-)activation of such networks as ad hoc everyday humanitarianism in response to the Covid-19 crisis partly drew on narratives of past histories that define understandings of community, but are now lived in a migrant context that, ironically, was created as a repercussion of that history.

'J' says in this regard that those who still get remittances often share them with others, and then draws a comparison with wider Eritrean history: 'It reminds me of the time in 1990 when Massawa was liberated and people in Asmara were struggling to get some food, our mothers then shared what they had with their neighbours to get through that difficult time'.[25] 'J' here refers to some of the founding narratives of Eritrea as an independent state that centre on community and sacrifice, narratives that have ultimately resulted in the repressive politics in Eritrea from which the migrants in Nairobi, Addis Ababa, and Khartoum have actually fled. In this interesting referral back to this 'heroic' past, these narratives are now reinvigorated as a means to get through the difficult life of a migrant during a time of crisis (for a wider discussion of the role of memory in migratory lives, see Hirt 2021).

In the case of the Ethiopian participants, more coordinated forms of everyday humanitarianism emerged, often driven by business owners and/or other wealthy members of the Ethiopian migrant community. In Nairobi, reportedly partly coordinated through the Ethiopian embassy, immediate relief for the Covid-19 shock was provided in the form of necessities such as flour and sugar for those who lost their work. In addition, money was raised to provide monthly stipends to those affected by unemployment and the loss of other livelihoods.[26]

Also on an individual basis, Ethiopian employers often showed compassion to their employees. An example of this is provided by 'E' who works for an Ethiopian compatriot:

> Our wages and jobs are not guaranteed by law, we are casual workers… I entirely depend on the mercy of the owner, if she wants, she can fire me anytime… I want to thank her for letting me work when possible. I owe her a lot for the help she gave me during that difficult time.[27]

What was notable among all the respondents was the perceived lack of support they received, not only from host states but equally from international actors such as the UNHCR, including those registered with the agency and/or awaiting status outcomes or outcomes on potential resettlement, for which many had applied. Rather, in some cases in Nairobi, UNHCR augmented fears and anxiety instead of being helpful, according to some respondents:

> UNHCR is sending text messages asking refugees to verify themselves. Nobody knows the purpose of this. The majority of people here wait for resettlement and people do not know if the text is good news or bad. Some have optimism that their process got a positive result and that the text is sent to such people. Others think it is for the purpose of checking up on them. This has a psychological impact or puts pressure on people who have received such text messages.[28]

The issue here arguably is not so much a lack of response from organisations such as UNHCR, as the organisation did provide various forms of assistance to urban refugees in Nairobi and Addis Ababa, including outreach and awareness; needs assessments; donations of protective kits; and food and rent support. Rather, among respondents, a lack of trust in the agency or awareness of its role dominates, as much of this assistance was administered through local refugee organisations or jointly with local, international, or government partners (for further details, see UNHCR 2020a, 2020b).

In Khartoum, the government organisation dealing with refugees, the Commission for Refugees (COR), is the official authority to support those in need, but works with international organisations including UNHCR as it deems appropriate. For urban refugees, UNHCR through COR supports income grants as well as food and hygiene packages for vulnerable households (UNHCR 2020c). Respondents were, however, suspicious of this assistance, as they feared this would result in the cancellation of their urban permit and a return to refugee camps where UNHCR is then the main responsible body. This arrangement enforces the tendency to seek support predominantly in one's local community, not least as, in the words of an Ethiopian, migrants in Khartoum 'don't have rights and there is nobody to advocate for your rights'.[29]

5 Conclusion

In this article, I have analysed empirical data on the forms of everyday humanitarianism as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic within Eritrean and Ethiopian migrant communities in Nairobi, Addis Ababa, and Khartoum. These migrants lack formal citizenship and citizenship laws in all settings make it near impossible to ever attain full status. A majority see the city they live in as a transitory space, but at the same time secure their livelihoods and wellbeing through 'behaving like citizens' in the way they act out their everyday lives. While Covid-19 policies have been different in each setting, ranging from full lockdowns in Nairobi, partial restrictions in Addis Ababa, to more limited restriction in Khartoum, the pandemic added to pre-existing forms of precarity in everyday lives and impacted the material and non-material wellbeing of these migrant communities. At the same time, new forms of everyday humanitarianism emerged as a response to this additional crisis, ranging from informal and/or spontaneous responses to more structured approaches.

These different forms of humanitarian responses were strongly embedded in pre-existing networks of local or transnational support created and sustained by migrant agency and lived citizenship practices. As such, they served as an entry point to flesh out policy agendas in the localisation of humanitarian responses from the perspective of migrants.

The empirical analysis presented for these distinct migrant communities, even if based on a small sample, lends itself to the following policy recommendations in relation to the mitigation of the Covid-19 pandemic, similar future shocks, and the turn towards localisation in humanitarian debates.

Firstly, much has been said about the important role of civil society organisations in Covid-19 mitigation, and civil society in its organised form can play a vital role (a good summary on a global scale is provided in CIVICUS 2020). But when talking about civil society, the focus is predominantly on organised parts within the non-governmental organisation (NGO) sector, whereas migrant networks are often informal; all the more so in settings where migrants may not have the correct residency papers for their place of residence. Such networks are not part of civil society *per se* but, rather, are grounded in specific moral economies, as the empirical data for this article have demonstrated. That is, they partly make up for the (real and perceived) lack of response by states and/or international humanitarian actors. A better understanding and recognition of these informal networks and their functions in crises, and an effort to link those with state or international humanitarian actors, for example in including them in inter-agency coordination or consultation fora, would be useful.

Secondly, as the empirical data presented here has shown, migrant respondents, through the interconnectedness of their lives, were key actors in their own right in navigating the repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic. Visions for a clearer focus on interconnectedness have been formulated as a tentative agenda for certain regions of the world in light of the pandemic (see, for example, Kabutaulaka 2020) – based largely on nation states as crucial actors; migrant networks could be a way to move beyond the state here or feed into state responses.

From the interview data presented, the tentative efforts by wealthy members of the Ethiopian business community to provide monthly stipends to those in need is a case in point. It is on the one hand, a charitable response to an immediate crisis. But in its rationale, it is an inherent acknowledgement that a form of income security (rather than, for example, donations of food or other necessities) is a vital component of wellbeing, not dissimilar in approach to that propagated by supporters of a Universal Basic Income.

Activism on the part of migrant networks could be one way to lobby state and/or international organisations to provide forms of such an income for mobile populations. But even on a smaller scale, simply strengthening local migrant networks with transnational links could have many positive externalities for migrant wellbeing, as also demonstrated in a recent paper on translocal connections and displacement outside Covid-19 concerns (Tufa *et al.* 2021).

Taken together, migrant populations, through the interconnectedness of their lives between their country of origin, their country of residence, and the wider transnational social field, should be better recognised as key actors in imagining different ways to ensure people's wellbeing, beyond material resources, when a shock such as the Covid-19 pandemic hits. To do so effectively, and potentially via claim-making from below in the cities they reside, support by key international humanitarian and other actors (such as UNHCR in this case) is important (see also Olliff 2018).

Local as well as transnational migrant networks are too often neglected when considering the localisation of humanitarian action. As demonstrated in this article, local support networks and everyday practices of solidarity strengthened migrants' agency in the face of adversity exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. This happened in different ways in the three cities of Nairobi, Addis Ababa, and Khartoum. These findings highlight the importance of migrant networks and transnational diasporas to the call for localisation of humanitarian responses.

Notes

* This *IDS Bulletin* was funded by the UK government's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) through the Covid Collective. The Covid Collective cannot be held responsible for errors, omissions, or any consequences arising from the use of information contained. Any views and opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of FCDO, the Covid Collective, or any other contributing organisation. For further information, please contact: **covid-collective.net**.

1 Tanja Müller, Professor, Global Development Institute, University of Manchester, UK.

2 From the 16 interviewees in Nairobi, three had lived there for three years, six between five and nine years, and seven for ten years or more. In Addis Ababa, three participants had lived there for two to three years, the rest for between four and eight years. In Khartoum, two participants had resided there for two years, two between 16 and 19 years, and one for more than 20 years.

3 Policy measures in response to the Covid-19 pandemic in each city were different. While Nairobi had two extended periods of lockdown that not only included public closures but also forbade private gatherings to different degrees, in Addis Ababa mainly the hospitality sectors were closed, while other services remained open with hygiene rules in place such as mask-wearing and social distancing. In Khartoum, there was no real lockdown, but various hygiene/social distancing rules were in place.

4 In terms of legal status, migrants in Nairobi were predominantly UNHCR-registered refugees hoping for resettlement (even if this wait could take years or never end); students; or those who

had residence papers for the city. The process of getting any of these papers is not without challenges but was reasonably straightforward in Nairobi before the Covid-19 pandemic (when many services, including access to asylum procedures, were temporarily halted). Similarly, Eritreans in Addis Ababa usually held urban residence permits, or were registered as refugees and covered by the Out-of-Camp policy (in January 2020, Ethiopia changed its general policy of granting all arriving Eritrean asylum seekers refugee status, but this change in policy did not affect any of the migrants interviewed for this study). The legal situation of migrants in Khartoum was often less secure: longer-term residents usually held residence permits, more recent arrivals often lived below the radar and were exposed to harassment by police or security forces. To discuss status issues in more detail goes beyond the objectives of this article (for more details, see for example, Betts *et al.* 2019; Kibreab 1996; MMC 2020; Treiber 2014).

5   Virtual interview with 'V', 13 April 2021.
6   Virtual interview with 'U', 24 March 2021.
7   Virtual interview with 'D', 31 October 2020.
8   Virtual interview with 'J', 28 September 2020.
9   Virtual interview with 'A', 8 September 2020.
10 Virtual interview with 'N', 6 October 2020.
11 Virtual interview with 'I', 9 September 2020.
12 Virtual interview with 'A', 8 September 2020.
13 Virtual interview with 'A', 8 September 2020.
14 Virtual interview with 'Q', 15 December 2020.
15 Virtual interview with 'O', 8 October 2020.
16 Virtual interview with 'G', 13 January 2021.
17 Virtual interview with 'B', 6 October 2020.
18 Virtual interview with 'J', 28 September 2020.
19 Virtual interview with 'R', 22 December 2020.
20 Virtual interview with 'D', 31 October 2020.
21 Virtual interview with 'E', 31 October 2020.
22 Virtual interview with 'R', 22 December 2020.
23 Virtual interview with 'S', 20 March 2021.
24 Virtual interview with 'T', 26 March 2021.
25 Virtual interview with 'J', 28 September 2020.
26 Virtual interview with 'A', 8 September 2020.
27 Virtual interview with 'E', 31 October 2020.
28 Virtual interview with 'G', 29 September 2020.
29 Virtual interview with 'W', 7 April 2021.

References

Betts, A.; Fryszer, L.; Omata, N. and Sterck, O. (2019) *Refugee Economies in Addis Ababa: Towards Sustainable Opportunities for Urban Communities?*, Oxford: Oxford Department of International Development, University of Oxford

CIVICUS (2020) **Solidarity in the Time of Covid-19: Civil Society Responses to the Pandemic**, Johannesburg: CIVICUS (accessed 9 January 2021)

Dzinamarira, T.; Dzobo, M. and Chitungo, I. (2020) 'Covid-19: A Perspective on Africa's Capacity and Response', *Journal of Medical Virology* 92.11: 2465–72 (accessed 1 June 2021)

Hirt, N. (2021) '**Eritrea's Chosen Trauma and the Legacy of the Martyrs: The Impact of Postmemory on Political Identity Formation of Second-Generation Diaspora Eritreans**', *Africa Spectrum* 56.1: 19–38 (accessed 24 January 2022)

Isin, E. and Nielsen, G. (eds) (2008) *Acts of Citizenship*, London: Zed Books

Kabutaulaka, T. (2020) '**Covid-19 and *Re*-Storying Economic Development in Oceania**', special issue, *Oceania* 90.S1: 47–52 (accessed 1 June 2021)

Kibreab, G. (1996) '**Eritrean and Ethiopian Urban Refugees in Khartoum: What the Eye Refuses to See**', *African Studies Review* 39.3: 131–78 (accessed 8 September 2021)

McNevin, A. (2006) '**Political Belonging in a Neoliberal Era: The Struggle of the Sans-Papiers**', *Citizenship Studies* 10.2: 135–51 (accessed 5 May 2021)

MMC (2020) *Urban Mixed Migration: Nairobi Case Study*, MMC Briefing Paper, Geneva: Mixed Migration Centre (accessed 8 September 2021)

Mobarak, A.M. (2020) '**Mobility and Migration during Covid-19**', PowerPoint presentation, Yale University (accessed 31 January 2021)

Mueller, V.; Sheriff, G.; Keeler, C. and Jehn, M. (2020) '**Covid-19 Policy Modelling in Sub-Saharan Africa**', special issue, *Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy* 43.1: 24–38 (accessed 15 June 2021)

Müller, T.R. (2016) '**Acts of Citizenship as a Politics of Resistance? Reflections on Realizing Concrete Rights within the Israeli Asylum Regime**', *Citizenship Studies* 20.1: 50–66 (accessed 15 June 2021)

Nyers, P. and Rygiel, K. (2012) *Citizenship, Migrant Activism and the Politics of Movement*, London: Routledge

Olliff, L. (2018) '**From Resettled Refugees to Humanitarian Actors: Refugee Diaspora Organisations and Everyday Humanitarianism**', *New Political Science* 40.4: 658–74 (accessed 15 June 2021)

Richey, L.A. (2018) '**Conceptualizing "Everyday Humanitarianism": Ethics, Affects, and Practices of Contemporary Global Helping**', *New Political Science* 40.4: 625–39 (accessed 15 June 2021)

Ticktin, M. (2014) '**Transnational Humanitarianism**', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43: 273–89 (accessed 15 June 2021)

Ticktin, M. (2006) '**Where Ethics and Politics Meet: The Violence of Humanitarianism in France**', *American Ethnologist* 33.1: 33–49 (accessed 15 June 2021)

Treiber, M. (2014) '**Grasping Kiflu's Fear – Informality and Existentialism in Migration from North-East Africa**', *Modern Africa: Politics, History and Society* 1.2: 111–41 (accessed 8 September 2021)

Tufa, F.A. *et al.* (2021) *Figurations of Displacement in and beyond Ethiopia: Empirical Findings and Reflections on Protracted Displacement and Translocal Connections of Eritreans in Ethiopia*, TRAFIG Working Paper 5, Bonn: Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC) (accessed 15 June 2021)

UN (2020) '**Policy Brief: COVID-19 and People on the Move**', *United Nations*, June (accessed 10 June 2021)

UNHCR (2020a) *Covid-19 Response Update: Kenya*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (accessed 7 September 2021)

UNHCR (2020b) *Covid-19 and Operational Update: Ethiopia*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (accessed 7 September 2021)

UNHCR (2020c) *Sudan Covid-19 Update*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (accessed 7 September 2021)

Wood, B.E. and Black, R. (2018) '**Globalisation, Cosmopolitanism and Diaspora: What Are the Implications for Understanding Citizenship?**', special issue, *International Studies in Sociology of Education* 27.2–3: 184–99 (accessed 10 June 2021)

Zimmermann, K.F.; Karabulut, G.; Huseyin Bilgin, M. and Cansin Doker, A. (2020) '**Inter-Country Distancing, Globalisation and the Coronavirus Pandemic**', *The World Economy* 43.6: 1484–98 (accessed 12 June 2021)