

Marlene E. Wildner (Org.)

# REBUILDING LIVES AT THE BORDERS

Challenges in dealing with  
migrants and refugees



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MARLENE E. WILDNER (ORG.)

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## INTRODUCTION

Rebuilding lives at the borders is the challenge that migrants and refugees face for themselves and for their people, at every phase that brings them closer or further away from some physical, familiar or strange boundary, on the crossings of the migratory or refuge-seeking journey; or the search for a safe place to live in other lands.

The Scalabrinian Missionary Sisters make the reconstruction of life on the borders a mission and ultimate goal of their dedication in many local realities, near or far from the territorial borders, in a sense, the Sisters also became migrants together with migrants and displaced people who are in search of life, dignity and a better future.

“Rebuilding Lives at the Borders: Challenges in dealing with migrants and refugees” was the title of a conference organized by CSEM and Weltkirche in partnership with Bienvenu Shelter and the congregation of the Missionary Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo - Scalabrinians, with the support of Radio Veritas and the Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Conference.

The event held in Johannesburg, South Africa from 4 to 6 December 2018 of which this volume brings the main results in Portuguese. Another volume simultaneously publishes the texts in English. The event aimed to disseminate and discuss the results of CSEM researchers in border contexts — Angola/DRC; Mozambique/South Africa, Mexico/United States — and

observe how migrants and refugees deal with situations of risks and uncertainties in these border regions and intense migratory flows. The event also presented results of a survey conducted in three border dioceses in Italy and concrete experiences in dealing with migrants and refugees.

The Conference provided a space for the exchange of experiences on the care of migrants and refugees around the world, providing discussions on different methodologies and practices of action in the field of migration and assistance to persons in mobility.

In research, the border is interpreted dialectically as a space that unites and separates us; as a bridge that allows dialogic encounters, but also as a wall that discriminates and violent people. In today's frontier, physical and symbolic, millions of people around the world try to rebuild their lives, their daily lives interrupted, as well as the lives of their families and social communities of reference. The migrant *does not cross a border*, he *lives at the border*. On the other hand, beyond the physical barrier, there are symbolic, cultural and social boundaries that accompany the migrant in the crossing and destination. But how to help migrants and refugees so that life at the border becomes a source of empowerment, autonomy and self-determination, instead of violence, exploitation and discrimination? But how to help migrants and refugees so that life at the border becomes an opportunity for empowerment, autonomy and self-determination and not violence, exploitation and discrimination?

The results of the four surveys presented at the Conference shed light on concrete actions by agents and institutions aimed at assisting migrants and refugees in their lives on the border. These are actions that aim to respect and value the protagonism and autonomy of the interlocutors, supporting their migratory projects, which is at the Hard Core

Research Program in the Scalabrinian Center for Migration Studies basis of all the research and analysis.

The research in Italy, carried out between 2016 and 2017, in three dioceses of border of the Catholic Church, was developed in a context marked by growing xenophobia, by the enthusiasm brought by Pope Francis and also by the strong impact of the phenomenon that became known as “refugee crisis” of 2015. It is a research that addresses the challenges of welcoming people “in mobility” in stable “structures”(parishes and dioceses), an event that disrupts the daily life of these structures stable and challenges the transforming reciprocity in interpersonal, social and pastoral relationships, in dialogue with the political context in the country.

The Mexican research, carried out in 2017 and 2018, sought to analyze the socio-pastoral actions developed by the MSCS Sisters with the migrants in Tijuana, Mexico’s northern border with the United States, from the Madre Assunta Institute. It is a temporary shelter for migrant women and their children, in a context marked by intense flows and violence. The temporary nature of the stays, the heterogeneity of the interlocutors and the diversities of the migratory projects raise the challenge of how to build networks of solidarity support to help the migrants from a material, legal, psychological and spiritual point of view, always preserving and promoting their autonomy.

The Research in Angola, held in 2015, focused on the reintegration of Angolan returnees from the Democratic Republic of Congo, in order to understand the situation of the border population of the Uíge Diocese, and promote socio-pastoral interventions in the area. By focusing on everyday life experiences, this research allowed us to understand the formal and informal mechanisms used by migrants and refugees returned to deal with the new situation they were in. The

research argues that it would be possible to qualify assistance to migrants by strengthening dialogue between dioceses on both sides of the border, as well as between dioceses and other organizations, especially with regard to long-term integration projects. In addition, the survey identified that care programs work best when the returnee is recognized as a person who has gained new experiences and knowledge rather than being treated as a victim.

Finally, Mozambique's research of 2018 sought to reflect on the care provided at Ressano Garcia, on the border of South Africa, held at the *Casa de Acolhida* — a center for the reception of internally displaced migrants and returnees — and at the *Centro Scalabriniano* — a shelter of support to women and children who are allegedly victims of human trafficking. Among other aspects, the research showed the good results of the collaboration of MSCS with the Mozambican authorities and other NGOs and civil society groups in raising awareness about human trafficking and the protection of minors.

The focus of the debate provided by the Conference was to deepen the reflection and promote the sharing among the participants about the performance in the care of subjects in a situation of mobility in order to identify promising strategies, to divulge successful experiences and to strengthen network articulations for interdisciplinary and propositional approaches to the protagonists flows of human mobility.

The event highlighted the importance of the knowledge offered by researchers, social and pastoral agents and, above all, by migrants, as sources for thinking, planning, implementing and evaluating actions in support of strategies to overcome and resilience migrants and refugees. Debates, studies and experiences presented at the Conference showed that this

knowledge, besides taking into account the human capital involved, must always take into account the historical, cultural, political, economic, legal, social and religious contexts in which displacements occur, beyond the biographical peculiarities of each subject.

The perspective adopted at the event considered human mobility from a positive and propositional vision, that understands it as a resource that people have in their trajectories and in facing the challenges of their respective realities and local contexts. The same reading acknowledges the subjects involved in situations of human mobility as protagonists of their trajectories, subjects capable of self-determination and citizens who enrich themselves and their collectives, despite and through the paths of population displacement. As stated in the Open Letter issued by the Conference: “we empathize and understand that people on the move contribute immensely and variously to human progress and human fraternity”.

The event reinforced the importance and relevance of the reciprocal and fruitful relationship between academic studies and direct action with migrants and refugees, since the direct action in the service can qualify the researches, while the reflection and the in-depth studies can make more incisive the action with the subjects in mobility situation and in the institutional and socio-political contexts that interface with migrants and refugees. The event produced an open letter, which integrates this volume, stating “broadly the importance of integration” and urging all stakeholders to solidarity with migrants and refugees to “promote lasting solutions, livelihoods, reduce inequalities and finally, the universal fraternity”.

The research project and the conference “Rebuilding Lives at the Borders” have provided important results and further impulses both externally — in politics and civil society — and

internally, in the Catholic Church and the Christian churches as a whole, as well as in the Scalabrinian religious community.

This publication is both a solid basis for the strategic development of working with refugees and migrants, as well as for a qualified awareness in politics, churches, civil society and the general public. The ultimate goal is the recognition of fundamental rights and self-determination of migrants and refugees, “people who, protected by their dignity, can contribute to the well-being and progress of all” (Pope Francis, 2016).

With gratitude and recognition for the valuable collaboration that made it possible to hold the Conference “Rebuilding Lives at the Borders: Challenges in dealing with migrants and refugees”, once again our thanks to Weltkirche, who promoted the event with the CSEM, the congregation of the Missionary Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo Scalabrinians and Bienvenu Shelter for the partnership, and the African Catholic Bishops’ Conference and Radio Veritas for their support. A special thanks to each participant, who with his presence, his reflections, sharing and coexistence made the event fruitful and brightened with the richness of each one’s contributions. Volunteers who have acted in the preparation and conduct of the Conference, have our esteem, gratitude and affection.

Sr. Marlene Wildner, mscs

Director of CSEM

Brasilia, June 30<sup>th</sup> 2019.

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**RESEARCH RESULTS  
CARRIED OUT BY CSEM**

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## SOME REFLECTIONS ON CHALLENGES OF CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

*Roberto Marinucci\**

[1] Migration is an inherent part of human history, since the first hominids, from the African continent, spread throughout the globe. However, if geographic displacements have always occurred in the history of mankind, they never have become objects of debates and disputes as today. Some important factors — at local, national and transnational level — have encouraged or made possible the diffusion of an increasingly visible and intense human mobility throughout the world. Among them, a brief summary of: (a) the decolonization process, (b) the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the so-called “iron curtain”, (c) the resurgence of new war conflicts, especially in Asia and in Africa, (d) increasing social inequalities coupled with media display of minority welfare, (e) increasing climatic events and environmental disasters, (f) enhancement and relative reduction in the price of transportation and communication facilities, (g) urban development and its implications, (h) the new demographic dynamics linked to changes in the labor market, and (i) the “tremendously human” (Bauman, 2017) and “modern” desire for better living, study and work conditions.

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\* He is Italian. Master in Missiology and PhD Student in Theology. Researcher at the Scalabrinian Center for Migration Studies and Editor of the Journal REMHU - Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana – Brasília –Brasil .Translated from Portuguese by Nathália Vince E. Fernandes.

[2] In addition to these elements, two more recent aspects should be highlighted. The first refers to what Alain Badiou (2016) defines as a “zoning” process, namely a phenomenon of political gangsterism aiming the weakening, shattering or disappearing national states, with the formation of chaotic areas dominated by armed forces manipulated by international powers. What is happening in Iraq, Libya, Mali or, even, Syria, would not be a mere chance or the product of the action of marginal groups, but a planned and coordinated strategy at the service of contemporary capitalism. This phenomenon, evidentially, generates a systematic violation of the local population most basic rights — including migrants in transit — encouraging mass evictions and expulsions.

Referring to the second aspect, Saskia Sassen (2016) has recently called attention to the dynamics of “expulsion” that would characterize the contemporary capitalist system: “Anything or anyone, whether it be a law or a civic effort, that makes it difficult to make a profit is at risk of being set aside - of being expelled” (Sassen, 2016, p.253). It is a systemic, purposeful, brutal and predatory logic that covers different spheres: the “storage” of refugees in certain areas; the expulsion of “flora, fauna, cities, small landowners and traditional rules” of possession or land use (*ibidem.*, p. 138), as a result of the increasing of land grabbing by States or multinational companies; the expulsion processes resulting from the production of “dead land and water”, in other words, “land exhausted by the incessant use of chemicals; water dying from lack of oxygen as a result of all kinds of pollution” (*ibidem.*, p.179), which makes the “habitable earth” smaller on our planet.

These structural and systemic factors do not necessarily determine human displacements, but they certainly become variables that profoundly condition the choices of the populations involved.

[3] We can, therefore, say that we live in a context of ‘hypermobility’, although official estimates indicate the opposite. In fact, according to the UN, only 3.4% of the world’s population lived outside the country of birth in 2017<sup>1</sup>, which corresponds to about 257 million people. However, a more pondered assessment of these estimates proves that, at present, *the migratory phenomenon involves the great majority of the world population.*

- First, the UN estimates do not present with accuracy the large flows of irregular migration and, in particular, *the intense temporary, cross-border, circular and seasonal movements.*

- Secondly, due to the definition of international migrant (person residing outside the country of birth), UN estimates do not include the millions of ‘returnees’ who returned home after living abroad. This group of people has often gone through several forms of migrations, including the last one — the return — which does not fail to present typical challenges of a migratory journey.

- Furthermore, the UN estimates do not take into account *internal migrations* that, depending on the cases, may present similar challenges to international migration, especially when displacement involves radical changes, as it happens, for example, in cases where migration occurs in a region where another ethnic group or a different language predominates, or in the circumstances so-called rural-urban flow.

- Another aspect to be highlighted is that the migratory phenomenon concerns not only the person who migrates, but also their “*social unit of reference*” (Martins, 2003, p. 145). With this expression we mainly understand a nucleus, more or less extensive, bound by ties of kinship or affective, that

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<sup>1</sup> This is the definition of UN international migrant: the person residing outside the country of birth.

ends up being involved in the migratory dynamics of some of its members. The expression ‘transnational family’ indicates, precisely, nuclei composed of persons linked by blood ties, matrimony or adoption that, although residing in different countries, maintains strict affective and economic relations.

- Finally, the migratory condition is also shared by people who, even if they do not move geographically, live in a *context marked by intense sociocultural changes, conditioned even by migrations*: these people also share a certain “uprooting”<sup>2</sup> typical of the migratory condition, although with different characteristics. Forms of xenophobia can sometimes arise from these experiences of estrangement.

[4] In the midst of this hypermobility, there is a significant increase in the so-called *forced migrations*. The importance of this category lies in the need to emphasize that there is some kind of violation of rights at the origin of the decision to migrate. There is a “situation of adversity” that conditions — not necessarily determines — the decision to migrate. Forced migrations, in the background, are “security migrations”, in search of security from conflict, human rights violations or even food insecurity. The etiology of the process often influences numerous successive choices in the migration process, sometimes multiplying the violations suffered by migrants.

Despite the importance of underlining the factors that have driven the migratory process, the category “forced migration” is now the subject of many questions and debates. Generally, this category is associated with so-called refugees, within the meaning of the Convention of 51 (refugee convention), those

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<sup>2</sup> The Italian term *spaesamento* would be more correct, because before the lack of roots (the human being has no roots, has legs) the human being may suffer from loss of typical identity references of a village (*paese*).

displaced whose situation falls within the restrictive definition of the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1967 Protocols and are therefore entitled protection by the signatory countries. In our view, however, the boundaries between ‘voluntary’ and ‘involuntary’ migrations are rather porous, nebulous, and in the furniture of a migratory act different motives can converge, with different degrees of willingness. Castles and Miller have called this “migration-refuge nexus”:

Underdevelopment, impoverishment, bad governance, endemic wars and human rights violations are closely intertwined. These conditions are the causes of either economic migration or political flight. Many migratory movements involve both migrants with economic motivations and refugees, to the point of leading UNHCR to use the term ‘mixed flows’ (Castles, Miller, 2012, p. 58).

In addition — it is always good to remember — the so-called “forced migration” universe largely exceeds the restrictive refugee definition of the Convention of 51. In other words, all refugees are “forced migrants”, but only a few “forced migrants” are recognized as refugees. Being aware of this is very important because the Geneva Convention is often “used” as an instrument of exclusion and deportation: those who do not fit perfectly into their definition of “refugee” are summarily judged as “economic migrant”, which in the sense of many means only “a person who has entered the country irregularly in order to abuse the generosity or social services offered by the recipient countries”. It does not matter whether, in the perception of the people involved, the dramas and violence suffered should be sufficient for the request for refuge or for some humanitarian visa (Zetter, 2007, p. 178). In other words, it is important to avoid that the rejection of the request for refuge justifies the criminalization of the applicants. Above all, it is important to

revisit the category of “economic migrants”, which in the current sense covers both people who seek safety (including food) — those that Alexander Betts (2010) calls survival migration — and wealthy people who wish for better living conditions.

[5] But there is also another aspect that must be raised in relation to the so-called forced migrations. Due to the absence or reduced presence of mechanisms for regular entry into other countries, the search for refugee status or some other humanitarian visa becomes fundamental in order to guarantee the permanence, and often the security, and the social unit of reference. However, this process of labeling migrants, although important from a legal and administrative point of view in order to establish reception parameters, often becomes a straitjacket for the people involved. In other words, the ‘official’ etiology of the displacement ends up determining the ‘identity’ condition of the person; the need for refuge becomes inability of agency; the right to protection necessarily implies the duty of docility<sup>3</sup>. Citing an analogy used by the Brazilian researcher Iana Vasconcelos (2018), when being recognized as a refugee, the migrant is forced to assume the status of ‘pet’, supported, fed and cared for, but never considered fully equal and/or someone from the receiving community (Vasconcelos, 2018, p. 144). This domestication of migrants entails a set of standardized expectations that, when frustrated, may trigger in society, or in welcoming agents, resentment reactions to the supposed ‘ingratitude’.

In this sense, it is important to insist on the fact that the official etiology of the fugue, the increased violence and the need for protection do not eliminate the agency, the autonomy and

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<sup>3</sup> “Institutional needs transform a story into a bureaucratic label and ascribe an identity of the ‘other’. The concept of labelling reveals how seemingly essential bureaucratic practices to manage the influx of refugees, and thus manage an image, in fact produce highly discriminatory labels designed to mediate the interests of the state to control immigration” (Zetter, 2007, p. 184).

the right of self-determination of the migrants. Geographical displacement is sometimes just one of the possible ways out of a crisis situation, an exit that often involves a projections and numerous punctual choices (where to go, how to go, when to go). It is therefore appropriate to value approaches which, irrespective of the more or less voluntary circumstances and motivations of displacement, insist on geographical mobility as a “historical” (Malkki, 1996), “creative” (Inglès, 2018), and “political” process (Di Cesare, 2017) process of subjects who, despite the intense external conditioning, resort to cultural and experiential tools for structuring tactics (De Certeau, 1990) *to deal with adverse situations*. Not only individual, but also collective confrontation. In fact, often “migrating is a political act” (Di Cesare, 2017), an act of rebellion. Disregarding the autonomy of forced migrants is a way to “depoliticize” their deeds.

[6] These reflections send us yet another challenge of contemporary migrations. As we have already stated, in the context of increasingly secure and selective migration policies, one of the only options to enter another country is the search for refugee status or some kind of humanitarian visa. However, in order to achieve this, *it is often necessary to ‘expose’ or even ‘dramatize’ one’s own suffering*. In the specific case of refuge, an officer must be convinced of the eligibility — with oral language or *body language* — must convince the “founded fear”; in the case of other migrations, newcomers are constantly pressured, more or less directly, to manifest and prove their vulnerability (from the Latin *vulnus*, wound) in order to confirm that their journey was not addicted to the mere desire of a life best. In the end, only suffering justifies the reception. Suffering — past and present — is the price to be paid for gaining access to social services<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> “Rifacendoci al saggio di Marcel Mauss (1923) possiamo pensare questa messa a nudo dell’infelicità come un dono a cui il richiedente è tenuto, in cambio del contro-dono rappresentato dalle prestazioni sociali sperate” (Fassin, 2006, p. 103).

In addition to the evident psychosocial challenges associated with this need to “expose” their sufferings (De Micco, 2019) — including their body marks — I would like to draw attention to a threefold passage, inspired by the reflections of Didier Fassin (2006): in the last decades, narratives about rights violations have tended to be superseded by narratives about *individual suffering* which, in turn, in an increasingly indifferent society (Pope Francis, 2013), are transforming into alarmist and security narratives about the **guilt of the victims**. In other words, the reception of migrants ceases to be an act of justice (because of violations of rights, including systemic ones), to become an act of compassion or mercy (because of individual sufferings), being more and more common the denial of reception, precisely because of the indifference to injustice, insensitivity to the sufferings of others, or, more simply, by the scattered sensations of fear and insecurity. The very social representation of volunteers, social workers or pastoral agents, changes depending on the hegemonic narratives, as we will see later.

[7] I believe it is within this process of narrative change that the phenomenon of the *criminalization of migration* (Guia, Pedroso, 2015; Mansur, 2015) is inserted. The increasing visibility and sometimes intensity of migratory flows has led many countries to enact legislation and implement restrictive and security policies. These legal and political devices, in addition to their capacity to manage the phenomenon, convey an image, a social representation of the phenomenon of migration. The “restrictions” on the tickets convey the message that the presence of migrants in the territory is a “problem”, an “injury”, a “loss” for the local population; on the other hand, the link between security and migration is the idea that the presence of migrants is a potential “danger”, a “threat” for

the Nation<sup>5</sup>. The criminalization of migration is based on the view of the migrant as “injury” — it is criminal to “steal” our work, our wealth, our social services — and as a “threat” is criminal for bringing violence and even terror in our Earth. It is an approach that resolves and at the same time ratifies an idealized or ethnocentric view of the recipient nation: *problems come from outside, are exogenous*. To solve the “problem”, in addition to walls and ditches, closure of ports and restrictions on obtaining visas, frontiers are erected before and after the border, as in the case of outsourcing of borders (outsourcing, Casas-Corte, Cobarrubias, 2015) and subordinate integration policies (internal borders)<sup>6</sup>.

[8] The growth of xenophobia should therefore not be surprising. It is not something “natural”, but carefully planned (Perocco, 2017). With the expression xenophobia we understand the different forms of violence — physical and psychological — against “foreign” people (*xenos*) or migrants. However, it is worth remembering that xenophobia intersects (Piscitelli, 2008) with other violence linked to social class, ethnicity, skin color, gender, religion, among others<sup>7</sup>.

The consequences of xenophobia are extremely serious and cover not only its victims but society as a whole. Hostility

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<sup>5</sup> It is important to underline that this even involves refugees from the 51 Convention, who are entitled to protection but also suffer the consequences of negative representations regarding immigrants.

<sup>6</sup> An example will suffice: in 2016 Denmark approved the confiscation of assets to refugees with more than 1,300 euros. Asked at the time, Danish Integration Minister Inger Støjberg stated that the real goal was not to reduce state spending, as the precious assets and money of refugees were extremely limited, but “to reduce affluence of asylum seekers” (cf. <[https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2016/01/26/internacional/1453796798\\_630517.html](https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2016/01/26/internacional/1453796798_630517.html)>). Similar laws have also been passed in Switzerland and some German states.

<sup>7</sup> For example, xenophobia affects children of foreign-born migrants who have the nationality of the host country. In the strict sense, they are not foreigners nor migrants. But the combination of factors such as phenotype, religious adherence, social class, and cultural traits is sufficient to trigger xenophobic violence.

to newcomers, which may be veiled or manifested, individual or institutional, demarcates a border between people residing in the territory, a border that ends up hampering integration and dialogic processes. The desire for a “pure society” or the chimerical escape in an invented, idealized or imagined past (Anderson, 2008), tends to produce racist, nationalist and sovereigntists setbacks, in the logic of “ethnic cleansing”<sup>8</sup>. In other words, a stratified, hierarchical humanity is created, in which human dignity is determined not by belonging to humanity, but by *the quality of its identity document*. In fact, as Marco Aime (2013, p. 35–36) states, *it is not enough to be born or live to exist socially today*: a “document” is necessary to confer dignity and rights. Birth guarantees “biological” existence, but “political existence”, which gives rights, derives from the document of reference. The problem is that not all have documents (for example, stateless *stricto sensu* or “stateless persons in fact”<sup>9</sup>) and, above all, that not all documents confer the same amount of rights, the same dignity. In this stratified society, the undermining of certain groups, as Taguieff (1999) stresses in relation to racism, aims at extermination — through physical elimination<sup>10</sup> or expulsion (*ex terminus*) — or exploitation — through the processes of illegalization and deportation (De Genova, 2002), as well as the so-called “pedagogy of precariousness” (Perocco, 2017).

[9] Xenophobia is produced and, at the same time, it reinforces the *criminalization of migration*. Among its main effects is the so-called criminalization of solidarity (Penchaszadeh, Sferco, 2019). If the foreigner — whether he is a migrant or a

<sup>8</sup> One could also speak of “chromatic cleaning”, “class cleaning”, etc. The return of the Ku Klux Klan in the US is a clear example of this disturbing phenomenon.

<sup>9</sup> Those who don’t have ‘documents available’ because of the mishaps of the leaks.

<sup>10</sup> These are what we otherwise call “Malthusian” migration policies (Marinucci, 2018).

refugee — is a loss and a threat to the local population, all those who, in some way, sympathize with the newcomers, alleviating their suffering and, directly or indirectly, in their migratory journey, become *accomplices*. Volunteers, social workers, pastoral workers who, in different ways, commit themselves to the defense and promotion of the rights of persons in mobility, become suspected not only of treason of their homeland and of their legitimate population<sup>11</sup>, but also of connivance with criminal activities. The case of Benoît Duco, a French mountain guide, in March 2018, is well known. After finding a family of Nigerians two thousand meters above sea level in a snowy region between Italy and France in March this year, he took the migrant woman with her husband and her two children aged 2 and 4, to a hospital. The child was born safely while the mother could not resist. The mountain guide has been charged with violating French immigration laws and can be sentenced to up to five years in prison. Acts of persecution and violence against individuals and organizations of solidarity have spread globally. It is a further development of xenophobia and the criminalization of migration.

At this juncture, those who choose to be in solidarity with the displaced people know that they will have to face not only the challenges of welcoming them, but also the rejection of large segments of the national population. Even within the religious group itself.

[10] In this regard, the religious issue deserves a brief reflection. Belief systems impact both immigration/deportation policies and integration policies. Religious persecution is a major cause of people being evicted and expulsion in many parts of the world; belief systems may also be an impediment to

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<sup>11</sup> In their view, the patriot must put national interests first, following the motto “nationals first”.

the immigration of certain groups of migrants, when recipient countries have migratory policies with religious cleavage, as in the case of the Muslim Ban of Trump. In addition, there is also an impact on integrative policies: a number of states have imposed serious restrictions on freedom of religious expression and freedom of worship, such as temple building or the overt display of religious symbols.

[10] In this regard, the *religious issue* deserves a brief reflection. Belief systems impact both immigration/deportation policies and integration policies. Religious persecution is a major cause of people being evicted and expulsion in many parts of the world; belief systems may also be an impediment to the immigration of certain groups of migrants, when recipient countries have migratory policies with religious cleavage, as in the case of the Muslim Ban of Trump. In addition, there is also an impact on integrative policies: a number of states have imposed serious restrictions on freedom of religious expression and freedom of worship, such as temple building or the overt display of religious symbols.

In general terms, in our opinion, at the origin of these approaches there is a mistaken or instrumental interpretation of the religious phenomenon as mere “cultural factor”, source of social cohesion and, therefore, in the service of the preservation of the status quo and institutional order. In this view the humanist, inclusivist, and universalist values that the various religious denominations in general carry are grossly disregarded or overlooked (Pace, 2018). The consequences can be very serious both for migrant populations and for autochthonous populations. The first are religiously discriminated against and sometimes pressured to abandon or privatize their own beliefs, which in reality are important community tools to cope symbolically with the adversities of the migratory journey;

and the second, the autochthonous populations are induced to a questionable sectarian and exclusivist interpretation of the religious phenomenon.

Finally, in an increasingly interconnected and pluralistic world, it is no longer the “exclusivist” logic that can guarantee social cohesion — as it did in seventeenth-century Europe, with the separation of the faithful according to the principle *cuius regio eius religio* (Sciortino, 2017) — but it is, on the contrary, inclusivist universalism, often related to a common creation or a universal salvation. However, this approach, which has the potential to create paths of encounter, dialogue, tolerance and coexistence, openly collides with nationalist and sovereignists pretensions, as well as the idealized narratives of imagined communities (Anderson, 2008). The resistance that Pope Francisco faces in his open commitment to the defense of migrants’ rights (Marinucci, 2018) confirms the deep tension that exists, even within the same denominations, between the exclusivist and inclusive paradigms.

[11] But there are also *signs of hope*. Generally, the daily acts of solidarity, resilience and overcoming produce very little media content. But they do happen. Numerous examples of solidarity with migrants can be cited, a solidarity that takes on even greater significance in a context marked by the criminalization of migration. Among the numerous examples, we would like to cite only three cases:

- the creation of *humanitarian corridors* (Morozzo Della Rocca, 2017) in some European countries by religiously inspired civil society organizations. Such corridors attest that deaths during journeys could be quietly avoided, depending exclusively on political will;

- the emergence of so-called “refuge cities” or “sanctuary

cities” (Furri, 2018), which have implemented urban networks of solidarity in open opposition to scaremongering and restrictive national policies. These cities are generating “a set of interdependent and participatory local policies aimed at recognizing the ‘right to the city’ of all resident subjects, regardless of their origin and nationality” (Marinucci, 2018, p. 8).

- the growing number of individuals, families, civil society organizations and religious institutions working to promote the rights of migrants and refugees. Mention should be made, in this regard, of *Las Patronas*, a group of women volunteers from the *La Patrona* community in the municipality of Amatlán de los Reyes, Veracruz, Mexico, who since 1995 have been providing food to migrants in transit.

Such actions, at the local, national and transnational level, generate a broad and dense fabric of solidarity, both in institutional and interpersonal terms, which strengthens the surmounting tactics (De Certeau, 1990) developed by the migrants themselves.

In fact, in addition to acts of solidarity — which are not exempt from the risk of being coupled with control and domestication dynamics — it is important to point out the daily struggles of the migrant subjects themselves, which, to paraphrase Otto Maduro (1994), use geographical dislocations as “Maps for the party”, “a kind of itineraries to try to find and open avenues that lead us back to happy life, to a life that deserves and facilitates to be often celebrated with joy, pleasure and taste” (p.13). Their resilience, their “abject” presences, and their claims to action constitute intrusions into the public and private realm of human beings who self-recognize themselves as political subjects, transform mobility into mobilization, and denounce the contradictions and paradoxes of the current global (dis) order. Contemporary migration is a political act.

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**CHALLENGES OF THE CARE OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES  
FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE ASSISTED  
CONTRIBUTIONS OF A FIELD RESEARCH WITH MIGRANTS AND  
REFUGEES**

*Carmem Lussi\**

The reflection on the care of migrants and refugees receive unique contributions of the actors themselves in situations of human mobility, whether as recipients of services, especially when they experience situations of vulnerability or need, either as agents in the role of professionals/volunteers and/or representatives of institutions operating in human mobility contexts, participating as responsible partners and/or holders of initiatives in favor of other migrants, international asylum seekers, refugees or other categories of people on the move.

The CSEM has conducted a research<sup>1</sup> on the impact of migration on the Italian ecclesial context, between October

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<sup>1</sup> The first results of the research were published in the volume: LUSSE, Carmem (Org.). *Incontro che trasforma. Sfide e opportunità della relazione tra Chiesa italiana e le migrazioni*. Collana Quaderni Migranti n. 11. Todi (PG): CSEM, Fondazione Migrantes and Tau Editrice, 2018. More information about the research can also be found in the article LUSSE, Carmem. *Encontro transformante. Desafios e oportunidades da relação entre igreja local e as migrações internacionais*. In *Espaços – Revista de Teologia e Cultura*, v. 26, n. 2, 2018, pp. 185-207.

2016 and May 2017, with the main objective to analyze this phenomenon, and to support the Church activity among migrants and refugees<sup>2</sup>, as well as broaden the dialogue on the issues related to the human mobility relations. These efforts challenge the Italian Church and promote participatory analyzes on the migratory issue in that context. A total of 115 people was interviewed, including 34 people in mobility situations, from more than 20 countries and with migratory profiles of great diversity<sup>3</sup>.

They were interviewed as informants, and invited to reflect on the theme, regardless of the faith they profess and the ecclesial and social place in which they stand. The survey also included participant observation activities and discussion seminars to broaden and deepen the analysis of the research results.

The following notes summarizes the main results emerging from the data collected from the 34 migrant and refugee informants who participated in the study, to contribute to the reflection on successful practices in human mobility contexts, with the objective of “to value the migratory trajectory

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<sup>2</sup> To avoid over-repetition of the terms, I choose to use the term ‘migrants and refugees’ as a collective category, indicating people who have migrated with migratory projects and also people and groups fleeing at risk, therefore seeking protection, regardless of the fact that some can and most cannot get official recognition of refugee status under the Geneva Convention.

<sup>3</sup> The 21 nationalities of the 20 men and 14 migrant women who collaborated in this study are: Tanzania, Mali, El Salvador, Philippines, Burkina Faso, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Nigeria, Gambia, Senegal, Cameroon, Morocco, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Romania, Syria, Albania, Togo, Ethiopia, Ukraine and Chile, from which came a returnee, a second-generation Italian emigrant. Of these, 10 were applicants for international protection, 2 refugees with recognized status, 1 returnee and 21 migrants for other reasons, of which 2 had already obtained Italian citizenship (Albanian and Moroccan). Among the 10 applicants for international protection who participated in the survey, 2 were already in an irregular migratory situation and others risked the same condition at the time of the interview, except for the informant from Syria and his 29 family members, who are part of the humanitarian corridors project, therefore they were already in advanced process of recognition of refugee status when the field activity was carried out.

experienced by the migrants themselves” (Dias and Vettorassi, 2017, p. 13).

### **1. Protagonism and reciprocity**

The listening to the interlocutors revealed two common assumptions about the contribution of those assisted in the context of human mobility: a) the role of the migrants themselves, refugee seekers and refugees, and b) reciprocity between them and the people who work in the services and institutions with which they interface, in their migratory trajectories or during their way searching for protection in a foreign land.

The protagonism is understood as “the incidence that they can be able [migrants and refugees] to themselves, their closest entourage and the socio-cultural and even political context in which they live. This incidence may be in the form of symbolic weight of their presence, their actions and their positions, or in the form of dialogue strategies with individuals with whom they come over because of the migration, offering, requesting or challenging the recognition of their otherness and their contributions” (Lussi, 2017, p. 575). Interlocution can be with ideas, speech or even actions.

The recognition of effective protagonism of migrants and refugees means that the subjectivity and identity of these people and groups are recognized and strengthened, intrinsically and institutionally. Promoting ways of integration of migrants and refugees, the local society receives the contributions of vitality and richness that these individuals bring with them, transforming the immigration contexts through intercultural processes. The awareness that the processes related to human mobility include directly sorts the country in which the flows take place can transform the interpretation given to the phenomenon and the relationship with his actors, as well explains a Nigerian

immigrant in Italy for four years: “Immigrants will be part of the future of this country, we need to start preparing for it, because immigration does not have to be treated separately, it is part of what this country is living” (Inf. 2)<sup>4</sup>.

The reciprocity refers to the posture of the interlocutors with whom migrants and refugees come into contact in their trajectories, an approach that is capable of considering and respecting, welcoming and valuing people in a mobility situation in their otherness and singularity that, at the same time, involves those who receive and / or put themselves to service. The reciprocity is an attitude that sets options, meeting spaces, responsibility and real opportunities, which neutralize or brake inequalities that the difference may favor where lack welcome and a meeting culture (Lussi, 2018).

Reciprocity means that acting in favor or between migrants and refugees is something based and structure from interpersonal relationships, in which each actor contributes by donating and receiving, serving and taking responsibility and initiatives. In the words of a Filipino immigrant, who has lived in Italy for 16 years, “native people are easy to donate, they probably donate because they have. But there are those who do not have things to give, and know how to give invisible things, values, good. Doing good is a gift with which immigrants can collaborate here, such as welcoming the other. It is a reciprocal giving, for each one can give only what he or she has” (Inf. 5).

The importance of reciprocity and the role of people in mobility reveals the need to find ways to overcome the

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<sup>4</sup> Names and other information about informants have been omitted to preserve their identity and privacy. The citations are identified by the file numbers of the recording of the respective interviews, preserved at CSEM. The interviews were in Italian and partly in the interviewees’ languages (Spanish, English, French or Portuguese). The translations are mine.

asymmetries that mark the encounter between subjects in mobility and autochthonous subjects. Where the interaction takes place effectively, the actors who have the capacity and / or symbolic or institutional power to create spaces and / or favor channels for migrants and refugees to be and act, can influence in a decisive way the quality of the processes experienced by the protagonists in a situation of mobility and even in the community dynamics of local contexts.

The meeting brings to the discussion elements of the baggage that migrates with people moving around the world, even if it is something entirely *sui generis*, far from any expectations of native people. A young second-generation community leader, son of Filipino parents, believes that “to feel part and not mere emergency cases, migrant and refugee people have to contribute something of their own in relationships and interpersonal encounters in the local context, otherwise, they fail to develop a sense of belonging to the new context. It is necessary an effective encounter, in which it is feasible to share life and history of the migratory project. And for this you must take an interest in the human dimension of people, not only to help the emergency aspects. Those who do not listen to the stories of dangerous and suffering migratory journeys cannot put themselves in the shoes of migrants and refugees” (Inf. 14).

The interaction of active and responsible subjects in a foreign land with natives and people or communities of other ethnic / national belonging, is the challenge once more visible in contexts of human mobility. At the same time, it should be stressed that there are demands and opportunities that are shaped because of the migratory fact and experiences related to this that focus is specially *ad intra*, existentially, for each person and within their families and close relationships. Such processes can trigger itineraries and develop skills and potentialities —

or threats and weaknesses — that embrace the whole arc of a person's life, including socially and politically. The testimony of the Togolese immigrant in the retelling of her trajectory is particularly eloquent in this sense: "There my daughter was born, everything changed. I was no longer an immigrant who came for luck. When a child arrives, when one has family and children, he/she changes the vision of the migration. You must protect the family and integrate not only yourself but also your children, even if born here, you must teach your children to feel in their homeland. I understood then that I had to do something. What to do? I started making myself known, because what people knew about me was what they saw in my different way of dressing. I had my cultural background on which to count: being welcoming, knowing how to give and not only receive, know how to unite with other people, welcome foreigners as wealth, share everything you have" (Inf. 23).

The two axes- the protagonism of migrants and refugees and reciprocity in interactions with natives and service agents in contexts of human mobility — are defined as attitudes, postures, speeches and operational choices that the informants of the research point out as intrinsic characteristics the action strategies that are likely to be promising, because they add to the efforts of the subjects themselves in mobility situation.

The perspective of reciprocity and protagonism of migrants and refugees also allows the identification of elements of criticism that emerge from the informants' contributions as obstacles that oppose or curb migrant experiences or even slow down the trajectories of migrants and refugees. Such barriers can be found or identified across the processes and projects of pastoral and socio-cultural care, assistance or promotional actions in migratory context, in local contexts where the research was carried out in Italy.

I briefly present the main promising strategies and the main obstacles that the analysis of the research data suggests about the service in a migratory context, from the point of view and interpretation of the patients heard in this study.

### **1. Promising Strategies**

The first contribution of the attendees by their own perspective on the services in a migratory context is a constant call to awareness that the vulnerability that exposes the protagonists of the human mobility flows to the condition of need that demands help and accompaniment is a contingency, not an intrinsic condition to migratory processes as such.

Migrants and refugees, when they need some assistance, they do not simply seek help, they want a future. Therefore, the action must be configured primarily as an aid in autonomy trajectories, not because they have failed, but so that they do not fail.

Assistance to migrants and refugees who are in vulnerable situations is a contribution that protects and strengthens their existential and socio-cultural, professional and spiritual paths. Therefore, when performance does not have the capacity to allow migrants and refugees to appropriate care as an opportunity in their trajectories, it can paradoxically weaken their pathways, increasing their vulnerability.

The overcoming of crises and fragilities favors the reinvention of migratory and existential projects, as the animator of the ethnic community points out. She speaks focusing on her efforts in insertion strategies, emphasizing the importance of the role of solid interpersonal relationships that can be with indigenous or even with migrant agents acting as leaders in their respective contexts: “To live in emigration it is necessary to participate in the context of arrival, it is necessary to discover

the new. To favor processes of insertion in the new local context serve small steps, through relations of concrete people who meet and know themselves, from small things. I believe that having a reference point in a person in the community helps a lot to open the way for interaction and insertion in the new local context” (Inf. 5).

The attentive listening of the voices of the women and men heard as informants in the research points out some elements that can positively characterize the performance in a migratory context. I emphasize the proximity, solidarity among migrants, the respect of individuality and an appropriate approach that favors the overcoming of asymmetries in the meeting between institutions or native subjects and migrants / refugees.

### **2.1. The proximity between native people and/or agents and the people assisted**

The search for interactive courses and integration in foreign lands usually begins in stages of little or no autonomy, in which migrants or people seeking international protection go through periods of dependency and go through the limitations of vulnerability related to the toil of displacement and the difficult trajectories in tangles and in legal and cross-cultural challenges. Along with the intrinsic initial dependence, may develop, among other reactions, feelings and postures of gratitude for the listening and welcoming received and of co-responsibility for the pathway to go.

When agents in service and friendships embrace, cherish, stimulate, confirm, guide, challenge and believe in the people assisted, closeness becomes interpersonal and network articulations, as well as strengthening the steps in migratory and existential paths. And people open and take care

of relationships, blossoming to themselves and to the local or transit society, wherever they are in their walk, as expressed by the immigrant from Mali, asylum seeker: “They welcomed us, they opened the door for us to enter. Some Italians are afraid of immigrants, but by frequenting us, they change their idea of immigrants. If we have the possibility to live together, carry out activities together, eat together, everything changes. We found family here among the Italians. What makes most of the X is that he trusts us and protects us, without prejudice, he takes care of us and thinks of everything we need, him and his friends. I’ve never lacked the food here” (Inf. 17b).

Proximity is a decision to meet engaging and referring to the quality and depth of involvement in the interpersonal relationship with someone who erupts in new contexts and interactions. It is a chosen movement, to do voluntarily, embracing, to develop interculturality in contexts where the otherness prevails over the common elements. It must be mutual, bidirectional. An outburst by a Burkina Faso community leader explains a bit of frustration when closeness is missing: “I feel like part of this community, but they do not feel me as a part of them. I can say that I feel part of this family, but if the family does not accept that you belong to them, it is useless” (Inf. 6).

## 2.2. Solidarity among migrants

The informants’ statements refer to the importance of engaging relationships that bring them together and converge people from different backgrounds and conditions by the desire and need to be able to count on someone, being away from the loved ones with whom life had taught to live and of which history had shown support and guidance. The speech of a Ethiopian immigrant naturalized Italian is revealing: “We try to

meet, to carry out activities to unite among people of different nationalities. The contacts between us are beautiful, because we are united and so we support those who cannot participate with us for work” (Inf. 28).

The desire and need for community groups with relationships that strengthen, protect and guide and at the same time, promote the association between migrants / refugees and ethnic communities is underlined with insistence by the informants, who believe that “meetings in the language maternal, in foreign land, give sense of home, is important for the welfare of people. Meetings between countrymen and women creates friendships, relationships, mutual support and all need a lot of it, [though] not all have an interest and do not always know how important this can be for a person” (Inf. 4 - immigrant woman from Ecuador).

The need for community between migrants and refugees is somewhat different from the community proposal that brings together people of common interests made up of peers, more common in groups that are articulated in a same territory. Another migrant from Ecuador, who is also a woman and a volunteer in the care of migrants and refugees, points out some elements of the specificity of human mobility: “We started to organize the immigrant community of our country, slowly, the three of us, so that people do not get lost and help ourselves. This helps us to integrate” (Inf. 1).

The search for relationships and coexistence in groups contributes creatively to the construction of new bonds and aggregations, something fundamental, especially in the initial stages of immigration, as some reflections of a Senegalese immigrant couple show: “To be a part, you have to participate in fact, also in decision spaces. /.../ The migratory experience changes us. We feel a lack of community, but since we have this intercultural choir with other migrants and Italians, we do not

feel lack of community, this choir is community for us, it makes happening the encounter of many cultures and nationalities, the discovery of the other, something new, it transforms us. Each one brings something of their culture, we share moments of coexistence together, that makes change the habits. The choir is a community, it is a family, it is an instrument to show the beauty that exists between us and that there is the possibility of being together, starting from the small things, each with its singularity” (Inf. 13).

### **2.3. Respect for individuality**

The migratory experience can be very challenging for those who live it, and those who work among migrants and refugees cannot ignore the fact that it is necessary to understand, especially regarding public policies, that this population has the right to have rights and be protected from, if not combat, the inequalities that face the natives. The different histories and cultures of the countries of origin, the diversity and complexity of the migratory event, the maturity forged in the sufferings and the challenges faced in the international displacement paths transform the people. The service must know how to listen to these elements and adapt in a constant effort to offer personalized service and to be able to act in compliance with the need to strengthen and even encourage the autonomy of migrants and refugees who are vulnerable. The performance of the migrant service and refugees crossing situations of vulnerability cannot lose sight of the richness of identity, values, faith, knowledge and life experience, as well as studies and acquired skills in previous professional careers that bring with them.

The contributions of the research interlocutors also emphasize that the assisted should be assured of the right to say no to the standard courses thought out institutionally, normally,

to the measure of the native ones, considering that the situation of eventual vulnerability cannot favor the humiliation or the despotism on the subjects attended. The alert from the young refugee from Mali helps to clarify this challenge: “I was in a shelter and when the documentation was ready, they wanted to make me go to another city, where I did not want to go. I was told that then I had to leave the house. I do not want to go where I do not know anyone, I only know one person in this country and she lives here in this city. It was then that I came to ask welcome here, and in three days Mr. X did all bureaucratic steps that I needed, I owe a lot to him. He trusted in me” (Inf. 8a).

Migrants also close to the interaction, they also settle in the face of the challenges, even so, the action in a migratory context cannot fail to consider the investment in efforts and self-overcoming that the subjects themselves live in their trajectories. It determines many of the psychological and social situations in that they may be found when the vulnerability prevails, as highlighted by the testimony of an informant from Togo: “I spoke today for two hours with an immigrant from another country, he was welcomed in a house with others from other countries. Each different flow has very different needs and profiles. He could not stand the pressure and burst. I listened to him, I feel that I can and need to do it for him, I understand it because I have also faced greater challenges than I” (Inf. 23).

The uniqueness of each migrant and refugee is also the richness of their contributions and the originality of his creativity, acceptance, can contribute greatly in welcoming contexts. The testimony of the Senegalese immigrant is encouraging: “I joined when I first arrived in Italy, because I went to the church where I knew I could participate in a choir, because in my country I already did that. The way of singing there is not the same thing as here, so in dialogue with the pastoral leader, was born the

idea to make this intercultural choir” (Inf. 13a).

## **2.4 Overcoming the asymmetries between assisted and agents**

The undeniable asymmetry between people from other countries and cultures in a situation of vulnerability, attended by agents and institutions that have the power of resources and response is an undeniable and sometimes necessary fact, but an understanding of the meanings and risks of negative effects help to ensure that asymmetries do not become unjust and exclusionary processes.

The primary challenge lies in respecting the differences without discounting the same dignity among the interlocutors, against inequalities in the treatment of people, which can accumulate discrimination and even stimulate perverse reactions (Zanfrini, 2011, 4). Therefore, the support offered, and the help given, if corroborated by personalized accompaniment, open to relationships and to co-responsibility in the successive steps, which favors participation and even a sense of belonging. Thus, the young Senegalese immigrant informant and intercultural mediator agent dares categorically, to synthesize that “the task of the institutions in the first reception is to accompany immigrants and applicants for international protection in autonomous paths” (Inf. 27).

Asymmetries are not easily to overcome, and sometimes are not even surmountable, but reciprocity allows for common trajectories. “Italians have to help immigrants and immigrants have to study Italian. This makes the future” (Inf. 8b - Refugee Applicant, from Mali).

One cannot force the other to assimilate to the world of arrival, to have the right to be and to participate. Although

language learning is not enough to counteract asymmetries, migrants and refugees tend to invest effort in appropriating the language of the place of destination, but their identity, values and language of origin cannot be grounds for exclusion or discrimination. The contributions of the informants in this study emphasized the importance of listening and providing the means to respond to the challenges that migrants and refugees are experiencing because of the language. The catechist Costa Rican immigrant underlines its importance: “It is necessary to create moments and spaces for groups by language, which is important for migrants, a sign of openness and a fundamental way of welcoming the other in their otherness” (Inf. 9).

The challenge of overcoming asymmetries is not only a question of language, but of relations of power. Professionals and volunteers, paradoxically, can help each other by subtly transmitting the idea that the person being treated as inferior, who can only survive through the help received, which in fact becomes a humiliation that harms rather than favors. The help relationship, in fact, includes a power aspect about who receives care, including the simple power of being able to offer help. This is a priority for migrants, especially nowadays, where migrants and refugees are rejected, and the media and many political discourses are inspired by xenophobic principles. In this view, the “rebellion” of the migrants, the non-acceptance of the imposed “institutional project”, which is seen as “ingratitude” by some, is considered resistance (De Genova, 2015) and resilience, protagonism and even prophecy by others.

### 3. Obstacles

The contributions of the interlocutors of the research, analyzing the processes of welcome, interaction and integration of migrants and refugees in the Italian context point to some structural problems which are by their systemic obstacles in

the assistance to individuals in mobility crossing situations of vulnerability and need.

The main difficulties can be gathered into three groups: the lack of attention to concrete people in their real and complex realities; the incompetence linked to the lack of knowledge of the reality and the migratory experience; and assistance, which emits prejudices and adopts standards of care and even objectives without listening and recognizing the reality and subjectivity of the people served.

### **3.1. The reduction of the person to contingent problem of the moment**

It is necessary to think on migrants including their world and their life projects, not alone as failed projects or, even worse, as misplaced objects. The direct interaction between migrants and refugees shows resistance on the part of the attendees, who do not want to become objects, they want to participate in social and institutional processes. Sometimes the services adopt their specific vulnerabilities as a benchmark for the understanding of reality, including for evaluation of people, and for the interpretation of the difficulties to overcome in the trajectories of human mobility.

A key challenge is to develop the ability to think human mobility as an aspect of reality, not only as a specific problem. “For us who are here, the migrations are a point of reflection without answers. /.../ How can we say: this is a fellow citizen, so he/she deserves help and not the other one? Living here in Italy, I, as a migrant and next to those who work with migrants, feel that this reality is also mine, I feel I must fight with those who are coming now. Whenever one gets a job, finds solutions, I’m happy. I rejoice with each person who solves hi/her difficulties. I know what it is to be in need” (Inf. 1 - woman from Ecuador).

The informants interviewed complain of a lack of interest and consideration by the agents with whom they interact in the field of services for migrants and refugees. They recorded the importance and the difficulty of developing personalized relationships. The immigrant from Guinea Bissau bitterly emphasizes: “You did not meet me for a while, but you did not call me either, you did not look for me [referring to the leaders of the Christian community]. There is lack of attention after the meeting, in addition to the scheduled activities” (Inf. 21).

The criticisms used to refer to institutional referents, but there is no shortage of indications that individuality, even in the street, in commerce or in the church, among strangers, as well as between agents working in services, can make a difference. “What I have to complain about is that lack to meet people in person, to meet people, to talk, to listen, to visit, to trust, to show interest in one another’s lives, to offer contacts in cases of need, this is very important” (Inf. 1), recalls the immigrant from Ecuador, arrived in Italy 18 years ago.

### **3.2. Insufficient training and knowledge by the agents**

The lack of knowledge on the structural causes of human mobility and on the paths of exclusion and discrimination that migrants and refugees pass, induces approaches and even intervention projects without effective attention to people, starting from the pretension of solving emerging problematic aspects. It may fortify the risk to implement activities that reproduce prejudices and generate negative reactions on the part of those served and, especially, in the local contexts.

In many cases, what the informants emphasize is the lack of interest of the agents in getting to know more deeply the migratory reality that has therefore, among others consequences, a partial view of the migrants and the inability to establish relations of reciprocity. Knowing the migratory dynamics means

recognizing their deep complexity, which should open the door to the search for a more individualized knowledge.

The rejection of migrants and naive attitudes that deny the difficulties are both insufficient approaches and can have negative consequences for the subjects in mobility, as well as for the host communities. According to the young Nigerian Christian, “just getting closer is not enough, if you do not overcome the prejudices that serve to discriminate”. He continues: “I am trying to integrate into a choir, but when one looks at me, he does not greet me, I feel he sends me the message that I am in the wrong place. They even ask me: what are you doing here? /.../ I think in a few years it will be possible for immigrants and Italians to live together as a family in the community. I believe that one day it will be possible for migrants to bring their ideas about how to be a Christian. The experience that they lived in their country can contribute to the Church in Italy, it will be beautiful, but for now I do not see how to make this exchange between the two ecclesial experiences” (Inf. 7). The lack of openness of the agents becomes, in fact, a barrier in the trajectories of migrants and refugees in situations of vulnerability.

Insufficient information, lack of interest, prejudice is added, sometimes to the lack of adequate training for professional action corresponding to the demands and the target subjects. Human mobility requires agents also prepared from a psych pedagogical point of view to deal with people of other nationalities, cultures, and often also of different languages and religions. No one becomes a mediator or a cultural mediator spontaneously.

In the density of the challenges, migrant and refugee people must be able to choose which demands to respond to and which problems to face, at least as a matter of priority. Which fights are worth and when it is worth taking some

challenges. Institutions have behavior patterns and goals that tend to fix steps and even existential path, but migrations are more dynamic and complex than programs and projects. The challenge is to overcome the temptation to stifle procedures and human and social processes and take interaction that values the contributions of the attended people, even developing with greater slowness and complexity.

### 3.3. Welfarism

A well-known obstacle and still widely present in programs and projects for the care of migrants and refugees is assistance made as a welfarism, that does not recognize dignity and identity of the subjects receiving the services, in a vision of care as a provisional and emergency activity.

Assistance in vulnerable situations, mandatory and necessary, if not considered as a contingency, contextualized in migration and existential processes, can reify the people attended, what is contempt and no consideration of their dignity, of their potential and the opportunity that the population movements represent for the country. The cry in the voice of an Italo-Ethiopian informant serves as an alert: “Immigrants are not objects, they are people, they are human” (Inf. 28).

Even in emergency and even the need to standardize the service, there is no generic answer identical for all. The challenge is to find ways and approaches to ensure problems and subject to value life and the uniqueness of each person, his identity, baggage, life project and dream of happiness. In the words of a Syrian refugee: “It is not always easy to be the one who gets the help. At this moment we need help, the situation requires it. Despite this, and from this complex situation in which the relationships are also complex because of this assistance we need, I hope we can still raise our heads, look forward to the

future and in the future, we will have no debt to anyone and we can all reach at the same level” (Inf. 18).

The intensification of certain migratory flows led in some national contexts, to heat the theme of the first welcome, said the need to ensure the least represented in the offer of a bed in a shelter. Listening to the subjects of human mobility points out that, in addition to help in emergency, it is crucial the importance of ‘home’, to prepare the living space and the right to privacy and intimacy of space, uniqueness and reserve for a person to share in her/his life path. The testimony of a Ukrainian lady helps explain the relevance of a reception beyond offering punctual responses to emergency needs: “After a week that I slept in the street, I was welcomed to spend a night with a family that received me and that still makes part of my life. I was a stranger and they welcomed me. So, after that I helped many people, including receiving in my home, even today. /.../ The reception restored dignity on me, made me start again from scratch” (Inf. 20). The reception that gives dignity is one that favors autonomy and protects the freedom of responsible self-determination” (Inf. 20).

Training and information indicate that the performance in the context of human mobility must include a commitment by appropriate public policies and respect for human rights and dignity. The speech of the Italian-Moroccan resident in Italy for 28 years is clear: “The commitment for migrants has to be done well, competently and with perspective, because there are structural discriminations, practiced by public institutions, that the services cannot ignore or shut up. It is necessary that the action attack not only the emergent manifestations that hurt the dignity of the migrants, but also the causes and the injustices that are in the origin of the problems” (Inf. 11).

The care that the migratory paths can demand for its

actors is always contingent and temporary, for that reason it must transform itself constantly. Besides people fleeing in search of life with dignity, migrants and refugees are also bold and daring subjects, walkers and pilgrims, dreamers and entrepreneurs, people who only need that support with the characteristics of a “home, where people can find welcome and the appreciation of baggage” (Inf. 20). It leads a person to be able to continue in life and participates in building the future of all people.

### **Other Challenges**

As a conclusion, I point out two more challenges, which appear in the informants’ contributions and which deserve special mention in the reflection on strategies and goals of care for people in situations of human mobility. First, the fundamental importance of institutional leadership and the important role of the churches; and, secondly, the need to go beyond assistance and think about models of society that determine the quality and profile of concrete action in contexts of vulnerability related to human mobility.

The immigrant women from Guinea Bissau cites a positive experience of attendance, where the action goes from vulnerability to coexistence, recognizing the importance of the festive and intercultural celebration: “People’s festival represents a moment of encounter, a moment to live our different colors, a moment to remember our culture and our belonging. It is a chance for us to present and show our belonging and we thank the people who welcome us, moment to see that we are just migrants, people” (Inf. 21 - Guinea Bissau).

An ethnic community visited during field research, with the presence of a chaplain of the same nationality, strengthened strategies of participation in the local reality, nourishing feelings and ties of belonging to the territory, at the ecclesial and social

level, as part of its construction process of community among foreigners in a foreign land. The leadership favored, through the accompaniment, the focus on the present day in which the migrants live and the possibility to value the steps reached in their migratory and existential trajectories. Monitoring strengthens develop convergence in ethnic groups and activities, while releases and encourages the inclusion in local contexts, autochthonous or intercultural. The participation of the migrants in the plural activities of the territory and among the Italians, favors the feeling of being part, the continuity between daily life and planning to relaunch migratory projects in new trajectories, with hope of future, in the reinvention of the goals to be achieved.

The involvement of migratory context, even when it is distinctive and reserved for immigrants and refugees, cannot miss the historic and comprehensive approach to migration as a total fact, thus aiming at a common future in the local or national context where people meet before all, and which are served in response to some contextual vulnerability and, hopefully, contingent.

To conclude, a testimony from the representative of a Syrian family of 30 people, refugees in Italy thanks to the humanitarian corridors: “When we arrived there were many people to welcome us and it was beautiful, we did not expect that. Even though we did not know the language yet, we had the opportunity to meet people who came to us and helped us.

It was very important to see people here for us, even without knowing and feeling their closeness to us, regardless of whether we were Muslims or Christians; this helped us a lot and gave us strength. /.../ The Bishop came to visit us and to welcome us. It was an honor for us to welcome him here and watch him

play with the children, who ran with him and welcomed him. This made us feel part of this place. This context of the welcome we receive reflects what we most want, which is to be in contact with people, regardless of our origin, to establish meaningful relationships and to live in peace” (Inf 18).

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**CHALLENGES IN THE SERVICE TO RETURNEES IN THE  
FRONTIER BETWEEN ANGOLA AND DEMOCRATIC  
REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO  
ELEMENTS OF A RESEARCH IN UÍGE**

*Paulo Inglês\**

**Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

In 2015, a research was carried out on the Reintegration of Angolan Returnees from the DRC, in the framework of the Pastoral Care of Migrations and Diocesan Caritas actions of the Diocese of Uíge, in its plan of social and pastoral activities with migrants, where the welcome and reintegration of returnees has become more relevant.

This is research on the mobility and reintegration of Angolan returnees from the Democratic Republic of Congo

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<sup>1</sup> The first part of this text, which is an introduction to the research, was extracted from the book INGLÊS, Paulo. *Angola is our home. Reintegration of returnees in Uíge from the Democratic Republic of Congo*. Brasília: CSEM, 2017, with some elements of textual revision. The second part is a text by the same author, published in the REMHU: INGLÊS, Paulo. *Creed, credit and gender: economy of affection between women returned* (fieldwork notes with women returned in Uíge, Angola, July 2015). REMHU, Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana, Brasília, v. 23, n. 45, p. 311-316, 2015.

(DRC), in the Province of Uíge. The report focuses on returnees who, after having been compulsorily expelled from the DRC, were welcomed and reinstated with direct support from institutions of the Catholic Church in Uíge and/or in collaboration with state institutions and other organizations. The period studied is between 2009 and 2015, although, as we will see below, compulsory expulsion was only between 2009 and 2010, the rest of the return could be classified as voluntary return.

This research had as objective to know the experience of the mobility of the returnees — the route of trip, stay and return of them; to obtain more information about the process of reintegration of returnees — strategies, resources and *networking* — from their own narratives and to know the functioning of the structures of reception and support in the reintegration of the returnees in the Diocese of Uíge. In addition to these objectives, research sought to make recommendations and suggestions on the challenges and implications of human mobility in cross-border areas, such as the Diocese of Uíge, and also suggest the kind of responses that can be given and ways to make pastoral and social structures that deal with issues of human mobility more efficient.

The research consisted of collecting information in the field — through interviews, questionnaires, informal conversations and group discussions, visits to resettlement sites — and documentary sources — reports, documents and articles from national and international organizations, and Assessments of international agencies.

### **The research**

The information gathering took place between 1 and 31 July 2015. The four weeks were spent in the city Uíge, capital of

the Uíge Province and seat of the Diocese of Uíge. In addition to Uíge, there were brief stays in the municipalities of Damba, Songo, Kimbele, Sanza Pombo and Maquela do Zombo. The field survey also included an outgoing Kimpango Village in the DRC.

During the field visit, contacts with returnees of various generations were held, with those responsible for the pastoral care of the migrations of the Diocese of Uíge — priests, Religious, catechists and lay people, some responsible for returnees in local administrations, associations and returnee organizations.

In the encounter with the returnees, we tried to explore the return path: return decision, means of return, places of settlement and transition and places of destination. We also explored integration processes — strategies, social and family networks, adaptation and creativity in the reconstruction of daily life upon return, as well as social, economic and cultural difficulties that include bureaucratic and political barriers. Still, with the returnees, individuals for in-depth interviews were randomly selected, who brought to light details of the return path and reintegration strategies; a number of returnees from the Cardan neighborhoods (zone I and II), Mbemba-Ngango, Bem Vindo and Quituma were also selected to complete a questionnaire on “routes and reintegration”.

In the interviews with priests, religious and catechists, the type of humanitarian assistance provided to returnees, especially those who were compulsorily repatriated in 2009, was explored. In addition to the initial emergency aid, more information on settlement aid programs and projects and reintegration of returnees was acquired.

With the administrative authorities and public services, in the meeting, the type of social support provided to the returnees, the plans and strategies of present and future settlements were explored: land distribution for housing

construction and for cultivation, support in agriculture, documentation, schooling and support for the elderly.

With the few contacts made with the police authorities and the Emigration and Border Service, we acquired general information on migratory flows and the challenges of border controls. In the interviews with organizations and associations of returnees, it was sought, besides gaining knowledge about the functioning of these organizations, their usefulness as platforms through which the returnees reintegrate.

During the visit to the Kimpango, DRC, a meeting was held with a team working with Angolan refugees and immigrants in the diocese of Kinsantu, DRC. In addition to the sharing and exchange of experiences and information, he found that he had completed the information he had about the return process of the Angolans, opening the possibility of a follow-up between the departure of the returnees from the DRC and their integration in Angola.

Although the Catholic Church in Angola had provided some form of support to refugees and displaced persons, especially during the civil war, it was not until 2006 that the Episcopal Conference of Angola and Sao Tome and Principe established a Pastoral Commission for Migrants and Travelers at Conference Level Episcopal. This commission was driven in part by the presence and work of the Missionary Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo, Scalabrinians (MSCS), whose service to migrants and itinerants is at the heart of their charism and tradition. It is also the presence of the MSCS Sisters that is promoting the pastoral care of migrants in the Diocese of Uíge. This research work on the integration of returnees from the DRC comes in part in the follow-up that the pastoral care of migrants and itinerants is acquiring, even at the local level, in the context of the pastoral organization of the Church in Angola.

The research carried out, in general terms, showed that the experience of projects supporting the integration of returnees, even on a small scale compared to the needs and challenges of mobility, was nevertheless effective and almost laboratory: noted on the one hand that it is possible to design successful strategies to support mobility and that these strategies would entail creating long-term service structures even when they had to act in emergency situations. These strategies and the infrastructures that would sustain them would be linked to the initiatives of the returnees themselves, but for this to be possible, the image of human mobility must be reversed: mobility is not only an expression of a human crisis, it can indicate the dynamism of a society or the initiative to deal with adversity.

As Pope Francis says: “It is important to look at migrants, not only on the basis of their regularity or irregularity, but above all as persons who, protected by their dignity, can contribute to the well-being and progress of all, to in a particular way when they assume responsibly the duties with those who welcome them, gratefully respecting the material and spiritual patrimony of the host country, obeying its laws and contributing to its charges”<sup>2</sup>. This image of mobility as a possible expression of the dynamism of groups or individuals in dealing with their context does not, however, prevent the identification of constraints of unintended consequences of the decision to move, of crises and of human dramas that oblige, in many cases, an emergency intervention. But in areas with a history of mobility, the existence of long-term support structures is justified. These support structures must be framed in long-term pastoral programs or initiatives that are both capable of adapting and identifying new forms of mobility, their contours and constraints (Inglès, 2017, p. 135–136).

What follows is the presentation of one of the many

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<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2016.

activities developed by the Missionary Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo, Scalabrinians (MSCS) with a view to integrating small businesses into the world. In fact, the lack of employment in Angola, both in the public administration and in the private market, makes it necessary to seek income through informal labor activities, especially commerce. Most returnees interviewed are dedicated to some of these activities. In addition to the commerce, usually carried out in the popular markets and squares, as in the central market of Uíge, of the city of Uíge, in the Square of Salabonge in the Damba and in the seasonal market of the Songo. In these markets are sold different types of products, from those of first necessity (flour, fish, oil, food, salt, soap and sugar); to clothing, kitchen utensils, fabrics for cutting and sewing. Other activities, such as tailoring, carpentry, electrotechnology, bricklaying (building houses), are also very common among returnees. Although they are all informal activities, because of their unofficial character and without the obligation to pay taxes on the income obtained - taking the symbolic fees paid in the markets — they are the main means of acquiring income for many families (Inglês, 2017, p. 106-107).

### **Creed, credit and gender: economy of affection between returnee women**

Maria-Antonieta is an Angolan woman in her discreet 50 years, with eyes sharply alive, but with a circumspect and nostalgic look. She presents herself as returnee; says that last word with a near resignation and some stoicism. She fled with the parents of the anti-colonial war of Angola against the Portuguese in the late 1960s for the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). He does not remember the year, but he was a child, he says in a Portuguese with a French accent and a konggo, a language spoken in northern Angola and southeast of the DRC. Like her, thousands of other Angolans took refuge in Congo during the 20th century.

It was not just because of war, it corrects me with affection. In fact, the rigidity of the colonial administration that went through both the encroachment of villagers' lands in the interior, the levying of heavy taxes, and the forced labor obligation on coffee plantations led many Angolans to seek better living conditions in the DRC. However, in the early 1960s an anti-colonial war broke out between the Angolan nationalist movements and the Portuguese army that ended in 1975, with the proclamation of the Independence of Angola, followed by another war, this time internal and civil, which ended only in 2002; and, also, by the return of thousands of people. One can, therefore, speak of successive waves of refugees and returnees for a century. However, it is only after 2002 that the wave of returnees becomes more constant and stable, but not less troubled and complex.

This is why, or in part because of this, the Scalabrinian Missionaries, whose mission is "to meet those who are on the way," opened a mission in the Diocese of Uíge; Uíge, capital city of the province with the same name, and Zaire, whose capital is Banza-Congo, the former capital of the Kingdom of Congo, constitute the northern region of Angola bordering the DRC. The Congolese province bordering the northern region of Angola is called Bas-Congo (under the Congo, also named after a river in the two regions of the Congo) and the people on the sides of the border belong to the same ethnolinguistic group, the Bakongo. The two regions, the Congolese and the Angolan, constitute an intense zone of human movement, in both directions of the border. And, by chance, the Scalabrinian Missionaries have missions in both regions, that is, one on the Angolan side in Uíge and the other on the Congolese side in the province of Bas-Congo. On the Congolese side is Sister Marizete Garbin, Brazilian and with about 3 years of mission in Lower Congo, in the diocese of Kisantu. On the Angolan side are the Sr. Rita de Cássia Luíz,

responsible for the diocesan pastoral ministry of migration, and Marivane Chiesa, diocesan director of Caritas from Uíge, both Brazilian and with experiences in other African cities. It was also at the invitation of the latter that I went to work on the reintegration process of the Angolan returnees in Uíge during the month of July 2015.

It was through Sr. Rita de Cassia Luiz, a Scalabrinian Missionary, that I met a group of returnees, including Maria-Antonieta. It was a tropical winter Friday, known in Angola as “cacimbo time”, due to persistent morning fog and falling temperature. The reason for the meeting with women that Friday was not the trajectory of their lives as a migrant — refugees and returnees, in itself interesting — but the negotiation and renewal of a financial credit to strengthen the business. That being said, without any explanation, it may seem strange to the reader that a missionary nun in Africa negotiates financial credit with returned women! But this is where these notes should have begun.

During fieldwork in Uíge, returnee women emerged as a category which, from the outset, attracted attention, not only by the expression of numbers, but also by being in them — in their bodies and in their faces — where the appearance of human mobility more transparency. And because of this, or because of this, it was one of the groups that most demanded responses to adverse situations. For example, Maria-Antionietta told us that during the time of refuge in a foreign land woman had to make an effort to integrate into the host society for the sake of survival: they had to discover how society works, its rules and norms, their daily lives and, above all, how women “arranged” to create in everyday life some form of routine that gives stability to their children; and how, at the moment of return, it was inevitable to break with this routine and recreate another in the places of return, often unknown to them, having to start almost from scratch; there

were cases where they were abandoned by their husbands, who, however, married women from their places of destination as a way of integrating themselves. They were taking care not only of the children, but also, sometimes, of the grandchildren or of their own parents. To return the challenge was not only to reach a land, virtually unknown, but the responsibility of maintaining a family. Allied to this was the representation of women in society as one that should give answers to vital situations: food, health care, children and the elderly. If being a woman was already a challenge in the context of the mobility situation, being a returnee and woman was doubly. What Maria-Antonieta described only as “our responsibility” was, in fact, the gender factor: the difficulties they went through were not only because they were returned, but were sharpened because they were women. This was one of the aspects that stood out in the research.

The Scalabrinian Missionaries working with returnees in the Uíge intuited with great certainty that a way of dealing with the immense limitations encountered by returnees on a daily basis was not only to alleviate daily difficulties but to establish strategies that would result in improving the conditions of life in the medium and long term. They also felt that the families gathered around a nucleus, the woman; and, therefore, any strategy of a possible intervention would put focus on the woman. The intervention always has a risk: the attempt to interfere in the daily structure of people to improve their lives, can destroy the social ecosystem that makes it possible to precisely the social world of people in a given context. It was to avoid this, and as a matter of pragmatism that the Scalabrinians Missionaries observed what the women already did, talked with them and tried to understand how they were getting away from their everyday life to support theirs. They found that there was what in technical jargon is known as “economy of affection”, proposed by Göran

Hyden arising from his study of rural traders in Tanzania. Very briefly, it refers to the informal economy of small-scale, made in small communities where the base of the commercial interaction was not only profit, but the affinities that stakeholders — buyers and sellers were between and each other and, thereby, allowed the survival of the community itself. There have been further developments and criticisms of the concept that it is no longer important to discuss. What interests us is to highlight how the economy of affection worked among women returned in Uíge.

Women did small-scale business in small urban markets. It sells from food genres (rice, beans, potatoes, cassava flour) to household items (towels, bed linen, frying pans, etc.). These sales, at low prices, did not allow much accumulation since the profits were low and of that money one took away a part for the daily sustenance: food, clothing, medicine, transport, income of house, communications and school material of the children and grandchildren. The informality of the business did not allow the use of credit to reinforce the investment money. They created a kind of “loan bank”, known in various Angolan languages as “kixiquila”, which could be translated as a loan. What does it consist of? One of the women, usually the oldest in the group, is elected to be the “storeroom,” called “Kixiquila Mom” by the other women, about ten. The 10 women give “mama kixiquila” a certain amount of money, for example \$ 25 — which totals \$ 250. The \$ 250 is given to one of the women in the group for credit. This process is weekly and rotating. Mama Kixiquila receives \$ 250 each week from the \$ 25 contribution from each of the women in the group and then turns it in turn to one of the women; Every 10 weeks a woman has \$ 250 available, which she returns weekly by contributing her \$ 25. The process does not allow accumulation or loss, as there is no interest. It allows you to dispose of a sum of money, capital, which can be invested in a small business and thereby provide some income for everyday

needs. It is a risky, vulnerable, and somewhat rudimentary system, but effective enough to remedy everyday life.

The Scalabrinian Missionary with experience working with returnees, noted the women's efforts, the effectiveness of the mutual assistance scheme, but also their vulnerability and risks involved in the scheme and therefore decided to intervene: the intervention was to strengthen the capital women had through an informal credit system. The object of the capital reinforcement was to create a margin between the money being invested in the everyday business, the weekly deposit that was made in the *kixiquila* mum and the daily income. It is only tens of dollars but in the context in which it is makes a big difference! Thus, through an aid program financed by an American foundation Conrad Hilton Sister Found, which has the particularity to finance only projects for women, the Sisters Rita, *Marivanne* and Eidith designed a project. It consisted in giving a microcredit, technical name of the program, to these women that they would invest in their businesses and would return only 80% of the total received and with a great margin of time. Women received training on home economics, basic elements on finance and, curiously, time savings. The ages of the women who participated in the project varied between 20 and 70 years. About 80 women was participated.

The program seemed to run to the wonders. Early evaluations noted a very high microcredit return rate signal that, in theory, business was running well! A whirlwind, however, came threaten women's activities: the oil crisis! Angola, the second largest oil producer in Africa, whose economy depends on 90% of extractive industry, was entering into an economic crisis due to falling oil prices in international markets. Inflation had skyrocketed, about 10% in July, with considerable loss of the value of the national currency against the dollar and the fall in

domestic consumption. This affected the women's business: first, the prices of services and products for resale rose and the level of buyer purchasing power had dropped. They needed more money to keep the business and more money for their daily living.

The Scalabrinian Missionary, who had prepared a second loan in the light of the economic crisis, decided to call a meeting with the women selected for the new loan. The meeting took place on July 24 at the Diocesan Caritas facilities in the diocese of Uíge, where Sister Marivane Chiesa is diocesan director. I attended this meeting. The new loan would be awarded from the money, that had been returned by the women on the first loan. The focal point of the meeting agenda with women was the new modality of the loan and the date of the start of the loan.

The Scalabrinian Missionary had established that the microcredit program would begin in September 2015 preceded by a shorter training program compared to the first. The majority of women felt that September was too late to start the program and that they would have been completely decapitalized in the aftermath of the economic and financial crisis. As for training, they suggested that they should be shortened for two reasons: they had already been trained when they received the first credit and therefore there was no need for a second and if it was necessary, it should last no more than a week. The problem that had remained pending was whether the amount of credit would be greater by having the rate of inflation sing. For the Scalabrinian Missionary the problem was purely technical. If you increase the credit amount, two hundred fifty dollars to four hundred, few people could benefit from credit taking into account the available money. If the goal were to benefit more people then would have to download the credit values. By the time I finished the research, there had not yet been a decision on this subject.

The important thing for this fieldwork note was

negotiating this aspect of the returned women and especially the responsiveness and sensitivity of the Scalabrinian Missionaries; another important aspect was the extreme vulnerability in which these returned women meet. Some were educated people with higher level of education or vocational training and careers: teachers, nurses, social workers, decorators, dressmakers, etc. Being returned are often excluded from the labor market and this makes them engaged in trade as a way to earn income. The use of microcredit is a means of circumventing the vulnerability of the situation in which they find themselves, but also an active and creative way of dealing with unforeseen events in their daily lives. Although the credit system is an essential tool in the functioning of the capitalist system, in the case of microfinance among women returned looked like a tool to keep families and communities together. An economy of affection because it is trust, rather than the possibility of profit, that makes the system effective.

At the end of the meeting on July 24, the women, who were tense and somewhat frightened at the beginning of the meeting, left the meeting with a cheerful and confident countenance. Maria-Antonieta said at the end that the meeting had gone well and all were happy with the result and that the Missionaries, because they were women, had understood their situation perfectly: it was a question of credit and trust, but also of gender!

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**REBUILDING LIVES AT THE BORDER  
CHALLENGES IN THE CARE OF MIGRANTS IN  
RESSANO GARCIA - MOZAMBIQUE**

*Paulo Inglês\**

**Premise<sup>1</sup>**

The Scalabrinian Center for Migration Studies (CSEM) developed the research “Rebuilding Lives at the Border: Assistance and Protection of Migrants and Refugees” between 2015 and 2018 in three border regions: Angola-Democratic Republic of Congo; Mozambique-South Africa and the Mexico-United States.

The project aimed to identify the survival strategies of migrants and refugees and to understand the modalities through which the subjects in mobility situations deal with the adversities they face in their trajectories. At the same time, the research sought to understand and analyze the strategies adopted in humanitarian interventions with this type of

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<sup>1</sup> This article reproduces the content presented by the researcher Paulo Inglês at the Conference “Rebuilding Lives at the Borders: Challenges in dealing with migrants and refugees”, without review by the author.

population and bring the focus to the challenges faced and the answers that have been given by the MSCS Sisters in their work with migrants and refugees in their border regions.

The Research on the border between Mozambique and South Africa took place predominantly<sup>2</sup> in the town of Ressano Garcia, Mozambique, bordering Comati Porti, South Africa, where the MSCS Sisters develop socio-pastoral action since April 1994, with different oriented projects and activities, in particular, with returnees and children/adolescents in a situation of mobility.

During the Conference “Rebuilding Lives at the Borders: Challenges in dealing with migrants and refugees” the author presented the text, which was transcribed by the CSEM team, and we now publish it below.

### **1. Two emerging axes**

The research field on the Mozambican-South African border was conducted between September and October 2017. I had different options on how to make this presentation. The first was to go a lot by the technical route, this means to present all the objectives of the research, the methodology, the process of data collection, interpretation and so on. Then, at the suggestion of colleagues, I understood that this could take a long time. So, I follow the second option: I will make this presentation with a brief introduction about objectives and methodology, and go directly to what is important in this research, which is, on the one hand, the work that the sisters do and, on the other, everything the process of rebuilding lives at the borders. And before that, I will present the context in which the research was done.

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<sup>2</sup> There were also interviews with families in places of origin of some of the children and adolescents found in Ressano Garcia, however, in this article are mainly presented the results of the study of the migrants themselves, with the South Africa-Mozambique border.

There are two fundamental elements that I will present, two subtopics that emerged during the work where the data were collected, and the process of interpretation that I made of these data, in conjunction with the work that the sisters do. Basically, they are two: the immigration dynamics on the border and how the sisters respond with their work to the challenges of that specific region.

## 2. The context

In Mozambique, the social and political situation is fragile. Many Mozambicans seek better living conditions in South Africa. Migration policies implemented by the South African authorities, however, have hampered mobility on both sides, showing a tougher side on the Mozambican side. The Ressano Garcia border is an example of poor management of migration policies and a challenge for humanitarian organizations and the government. In addition to the repatriated migrants arriving and often remain in Ressano Garcia, many from the interior of Mozambique, occupy the city as a way to cross to South Africa, turning this little village in a transition where people depart and arrive. The village has also become a place for informal trade, prostitution, crime and trafficking in human beings. On the one hand, these aspects show the hope of a better life that leads migrants to take risks in their trajectories. In this sense, migrants deal with heavy situations like an active reaction to an adverse environment rather than victimization<sup>3</sup>.

Ressano Garcia is a small village on the border, between Mozambique and South Africa, on the southern side of the Mozambican border. It is a village that already has history. This means that throughout the twentieth-century thousands

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<sup>3</sup> It reflects elements of the context of the research project, which are presented of the following results.

of Mozambicans went to work in the mines in South Africa, especially in Johannesburg, passing through Ressano Garcia. This village was an access point to South Africa; was always a place of transition between the two countries.

In the past, this village had an infrastructure to support the mobility of people passing by. There were shops and different types of commerce that facilitated the exchange between the Rand and the Escudo, especially in colonial times. This is what I call the Phase I *migration through Ressano Garcia*.

Then, there was a big change following independence, because when Mozambique became independent relations with South Africa were not the same as those between the two countries when the Portuguese were in the country's administration. After independence, Mozambique and South Africa became two different ideological spectra. This has had consequences for their relationships and has had an impact on people's mobility, marking a new phase, which I call Phase II.

Another important factor that followed independence was the beginning of the civil war in Mozambique. Due to the conflict, many people who were from Ressano Garcia and the south of the country took refuge in South Africa, crossing the border into the neighboring country. This element alone shows how the category of mobility on the border between the two countries has changed. Previously it was a category, a mobilization, or a labor migration, by the many Mozambicans who were going to work for the neighboring country. With the onset of civil war, mobility continued, but it was no longer labor migration, so a new category of mobility, caused by the conflict, emigrated because of war. So, they were refugees or a forced migration if we wanted to use this category.

Thus, Ressano Garcia ceased to be a transition village

related to labor migration, became a point of passage for forced migration and then, when the war ended, in the early 1990s, experienced another type of immigration, which was the return of the Mozambicans who were in South Africa, thus constituting Phase III of the migration in the village. Therefore, after the labor migration, after the forced migration, there was migration, which we would call voluntary, although this term is debatable.

The Mozambicans returnees who were refugees in South Africa practically took place during the 1990s. It was a slow, progressive return, but people were always in between, that is, they did not know well if the war could start over, so many were on the side of Mozambique, but since they could still go to the South African side, they were on the move between the two countries.

After these three periods of migration, Ressano Garcia went through another stage of welcoming people, which I call Phase IV. This meant that it was not only Mozambicans who were going to work for the mines of South Africa, but also Mozambicans who went to work in the Farms, to the fields of production, even as domestic servants. This was partly due to the political change in South Africa, for after the end of apartheid many black South Africans were better off, with legislation changing and what was once considered to be cheap labor, has been reconfigured. The Mozambicans started to do the kind of work that some South Africans did not do because it was cheap labor. This fourth phase of mobility has led to a new wave of immigration and, therefore, Ressano Garcia has had a new status as a waypoint. During this period many Mozambicans went to South Africa to work for some time, for example, at harvest time or for a construction site, while the work lasts, they stay there and, as soon as they finish, they return to Mozambique.

More recently, there is a new situation regarding migration between the two countries that it infers in Ressano Garcia, at least until 2017<sup>4</sup>. As a first factor, there has been a legal change, this means that Mozambicans no longer needed a visa, that is, they need a work visa, but they do not need a visa to enter South Africa if they are to stay, for example, a month. That is why the Mozambicans used to enter the neighboring country, stay for a month, work, then leave and return. This made Ressano Garcia a place of a frantic movement because if they stayed longer in South Africa than was permitted, they would enter into the status of “illegality”. And if they stayed less time, they could lose their jobs. That is why migrant Mozambicans were in a kind of dilemma, having to choose between legality and job security. This tension between job security and legality resulted in a very large impact on how Mozambicans began to draw immigration; the way they consider going to South Africa.

### 3. The research

My job was precisely to try to capture this moment when the Mozambicans decide to leave Mozambique, try to enter South Africa and often fail and stop at the border.

The frontier has become a kind of space that is not just a reference physically, geographically, politically. Ressano Garcia

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<sup>4</sup> I've already wondered what the Ressano Garcia frontier would look like, for example, in 10 years. I think this will depend a little on the kind of measures they take now. The sisters already do a job that I think is good, because they work with the authorities. They have a monthly or quarterly meeting; I already participated in one of those moments. These meetings include police officers, border police, customs policy, immigration policy, are also present some judges from the region, juvenile court, juvenile police, prosecutors. There is a meeting that is only on the Mozambican side and another that is the South African side. This is an excellent tool to establish policies, crime prevention strategies, etc. The advantage is that as the sisters are directly linked to the field, they can bring elements that can help the police, for example, the authorities, redraw the acting, how to deal with these border processes. I believe that this could be further elaborated. This is an instrument that, in my view, was not very thorough because it is very informative, they share information, but not much of policy design, action.

was a Mozambican space, but in cultural and social terms it became an undefined space, because people were on the border, but with the expectation of jumping to South Africa.

My attention has focused mainly on young people and adolescents. The profile of the people in mobility in Ressano Garcia was also a new thing because until then the vast majority of people who migrated to South Africa were adults or people when they reached the age of 17 or 18 did not with other perspectives, went to the neighboring country to work in the mines. There was a specific name given to these migrants; it was almost a kind of initiation into adulthood to undertake the migratory project for work in the mines. As an adult, they were supposed to go to the mines.

My investigation focused mainly on the people who were in Ressano Garcia. I was on the spot for a month, from the middle of September until the middle of October 2017, staying at the sisters' house. The Sisters MSCS have a service center for migrants on the border just literally almost stuck at the border. And my job consisted primarily of looking at the movement of the border because the border is not just people, they are also trafficked, trucks, especially mines, among other scenarios. The presence of heavy truck traffic is due to the fact that the nearest port of Johannesburg is to Maputo, which is a mining port, to say so. For example, once I got up very early in the morning and was enjoying myself: I saw dozens and dozens of trucks, those large trucks leaving South Africa for Mozambique. This will then have a consequence because the boys themselves were run over, as I found later in the research. First, my job was to look at the border.

Secondly, I had contact with young teenagers. These young people were working with MSCS, that is, the Sisters had a program, specific projects with these teenagers. I started

interviewing them. The first interviews were not with them, they were with the activists who worked with these young people because the Sisters have a system of collaborators who participate in their projects. Then, I started working with these collaborators as a way of introducing how they saw all these dynamics on the border.

The next step was to interview some young migrants. The interview consisted of listening, first to their stories, life stories. They told me about their lives and the interviews were recorded; then transcribed. The proposal was for them to tell the life story from the moment they left their lands to the route they had taken and the arrival at the border. Many of them came from regions located geographically in central Mozambique, about 1000, 1500 km from the border. Secondly, I also asked what they did at the border, what their activity was. The third question was whether they intended to go to South Africa and why they wanted to go there. The fourth question was whether they knew the consequences of what it meant to go to the neighboring country. These were more or fewer questions for young people.

After that, I also spoke with the authorities at the border. I talked to the head of customs, the chief of the migration policy, the border police. I talked to these authorities because they were directly linked to the migration process, because at the border beyond these passing trucks were also passing goods, many of them simple, that Mozambicans buy from South Africa and sell in Mozambique. I wanted to see through the boss, first and foremost the quantity of that commodity, and then the mechanisms that revolve around that movement.

It was possible to see that the border is not only a political artifact that divides two states; it is also a place of constant negotiation. What is negotiated at the border? Everything is

negotiated, including the law itself. Negotiating the law does not just mean giving people money to cross, negotiating the law means that the authorities made ad hoc interpretations of the law so as to make it flexible and allow passages that should not be formally allowed. With this what I mean is: is that immigration, in this case, is not only Mozambicans go to South Africa, is a whole complex that involves geography, therefore, move from one space to another, and also implies social relations. This means that Mozambicans have concrete relations with the South Africans and also means that employers in South Africa need cheap Mozambican labor. And it also means that border agents also receive money. Interestingly, one thing I discovered in interviews, South African agents also get money.

Beforehand I understood this idea that Mozambicans paid as negotiation at the border, but then I had access to more information and learned that some people who went *to South Africa* without documentation could pass and passed the border by paying agents. I followed one up to a point, but after, I could not pass. They told me at the time I had no visa to go to South Africa, but they told me I could go also. And I said, “No! If I have no visa, I cannot cross”. And they said that it was enough for me to have a Rand, that I would pass. At the time I was afraid that they would get me and put me in jail, I had real fear, so I did not take any chances. But the information I had is that there are people who pass by and the police officer does not ask, people who pass in the car, for example, can go undocumented.

From the elements I have presented briefly, I believe that the very process of transition at the border itself is very complex. That is why the word illegal is a word that has to be questioned. If the individual can cross the border without documentation, then he can cross the border. And the authorities know that these individual passes. That is why it is said that it is illegal because

it entered without a document, but it is not questioned how the person entered. For the authorities, if someone entered without a document is because he did not cross the border, he passed an alternative post. Here there is a contradiction, or at least it must be said that what is illegal is subjective of many interpretations. That's why when you say that a migrant is illegal it is said much more than simply stating that the person did not come with the documentation; It means that the system allows that illegality.

Then also I interviewed some people that they call *Mareyane*. They are people who allow passage at the border, they call themselves facilitators. They are people who cross other people from Mozambique to South Africa, through different routes from the official border post. There are passages, which call the way short, although it is long. These passages are along the border, about 500m from the police station, so not too distant. These people take other of Mozambique through a barbed wire, which has a hole through which people pass. In that way, there is an area called No-man's Land, as they enter South Africa. Once in this country, there are taxis waiting. There is a mountain, there is Mozambique, there is nobody's land, then there is a space with trees and then there is a place where is the transport with which they go to South Africa.

In my prejudice, I conceived of these *Mareyanes* as human traffickers, applying to them a concept that is even the technical term, since they would be people who traffic people. But then I had an in-depth interview with one of them, more or less, almost an hour interview, and then he gave me another concept of what *Mareyane*. It made me realize even more the complexity of what border mobility is. It is interesting to understand well what they do.

For example, a father leaves Mozambique and goes to South Africa and begins to work, then creates the conditions,

rents a house there in the periphery, then sends the woman, the woman goes and all remain there without documents. Then comes the moment to call the son. How does the son go to South Africa? He goes through these gentlemen, who identify themselves as Mareyanes. According to the Palermo protocol, when an individual, an adult, take a child with whom he or she has no ties, this, in legal terms, constitutes trafficking in persons. If it is with an adult, if you take an adult against your will, it is also trafficking.

In the interview with a *Mareyane*, I asked if this is not traffic:

And he said, "Why?"

And I said: - You have no relationship with the boy.

And he said, "Yes, but I have a relationship with his parents, I know the boy's parents.

I said: "Do you know how?"

And he answered: "Through the telephone, the father calls me to take the son and I take him".

Then he asked me: "Would you rather have your son stay in Mozambique alone without his parents?"

I said: "well ... of course I would rather have the children stay with the parents, but there are many ways to take the children<sup>5</sup>.

#### 4. Elements of analysis of the main results

The data collected on the strategies and dynamics of the Ressano Garcia border, between Mozambique and South Africa, clashed with the idea of "illegal", which is understood traditionally and with the concern of what should be done. I do not say it's good or bad, I'm just saying that it challenged me during the

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<sup>5</sup> The Palermo Protocol does not take into account the type of family relationships that exist, for example, which are familiar with direct ties. For example, an uncle, the father's brother, in that context is also called a father, and the mother's sister is also called a mother. Often even a neighbor becomes familiar. In many cases, when parents emigrate, neighbors take parental responsibilities; there is even an expression in xangani, which says that the neighbor is almost like family. The relationship is sometimes so narrow that many of those who stay with the neighbor is sometimes as if adopted circumstantially. Then this neighbor, who is almost like family, takes on the role of family indeed.

research. So, this brings me to mind that the issue of immigration cannot be read just like the poverty that causes migration.

During the research, I thought it would be important to work with Mareyanes because they conceive their function as an aid to mobility. They consider that their service is to make mobility safe. That is their interpretation. But soon there are issues of violence and other problems. The mareyane that I interviewed said, “No, those who resort to violence are others; our service is to bring people from Mozambique to South Africa”. The question is: how to create a system or type of service on both sides of the border where this process is actually safe? The Mareyanes say they are facilitators, but they are traders because they make a lot of money from it. To take people from one place to another pays a lot and well; it is a complex profession, they are connected with transportation and technology and have to have contact with taxi drivers and the *chapa*<sup>6</sup>, which brings people from the interior of Mozambique to the border. At the border there is an infrastructure that welcomes these people, who can spend the night, all this is combined over the phone. Then there is a whole payment system between Rands and Meticaïs. At the border, there are also exchange houses and technology for telephone use between Mozambique and South Africa and the police, because there is the waypoint. In the alternative passage also have police officers. And once I went there, I got close, could not go very close because I was afraid. The word fear is important because fear is also a protective feature. But when you inflict fear on the other, it can be a form of social control. I had occasion to see that the police were negotiating with the facilitators and there was a dispute, a competition, so often the cops left their post at the time of passage, for example, when I

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<sup>6</sup> *Chapa* is a public transportation system of “mini-busses”.

went there were no police. At other times the police were and they passed the same way.

Reflecting on the boys interviewed, I noticed that they left their land, with the goal of going to South Africa, but when they arrived at Ressano Garcia, they stopped. Because sometimes the money did not even get through, even if it was by alternative means, sometimes because there was no guarantee of work on the other side of the border or for other reasons as well. They stayed at the border and engaged in street trading. Then another infrastructure was created.

The organization of the itinerant commerce was structured in the following way. There are ladies, that is families, who live on the border and are engaged in business and informal commerce. Those who practice this trade are the migrant boys, engaged by the merchant ladies of Ressano Garcia. When the boys arrive, they search until they find such ladies, who are known as “mistresses”. It’s curious, it’s not the boss, but the “mistress”. That is, big employers are women. While I was there, they sold mostly cookies, refreshments, juice, they also sold cards for cellular recharge, which they call balance and freshwater. The three main products sold are phone cards, water, and small cakes, which are the items consumed by people who come and go from Mozambique. Therefore, these boys and their commercial activities are a kind of walker resource. People need to drink because it is a very hot area, need communication and need to eat. These boys work for these ladies to sell on the street, and these ladies pay a monthly fee.

The research was partly to try and understand the whole process in which the boys leave their lands, get there and earn some money. The idea is to make money to then go to South Africa, but for some, the business was so good that they stopped at the border and stayed permanently. When I arrived, I found a

group of boys who were in Ressano Garcia and who said in the individual and group interviews that they were no longer going to South Africa, they preferred to stay there because they were part of a well-structured migratory movement. To leave their lands the boys had contact with people who were already there in Ressano Garcia working and they called each other. When a mistress is in need of someone else then another boy leaves the interior of the country and goes to the border to work.

There are also girls. But the girls were not my focus of research because there needed another methodology, another gateway. First, because the girls are more closed, I would rather have an auxiliary woman, inclusively, because there are certain things that they do not say if they are before a man. And there is also a matter of respect and dignity to know why they left home. For example, there are people who sometimes flee because of violence or violation and they do not tell that to a man. I did not go at this point, but it is a field that would need another study. There are hundreds of girls who leave their villages and work for these ladies, work as maids, many school-aged, 13, 14 or 15 years, and work to take care of other children, the daughters of the mistresses. Later, many arrive until the 18 and they marry, that is to say, they have husbands<sup>7</sup>.

#### 4.1 The homeland of the boys

When I found out that these boys went to Ressano Garcia through calls, there is a call effect, my interest was to

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<sup>7</sup> Ressano Garcia is a region with a lot of movement, where there is also a high HIV rate. But this part I did not explore, in my research, because I would need more time. At the border, there is also a lot of prostitution. There are thousands of truck drivers who pass by, and I myself have seen, in the morning, in the afternoon, very early in the morning, girls by the side of the road and the truckers who come to meet them. I did not get into the HIV issue, but I know the number is high and more and more. And there is a risk, especially, of those girls who work for these ladies in Ressano Garcia, who often get more money for prostitution in order to get more money. There is a very great risk. One can work together on the border on both sides, on the side of Ressano Garcia and on the South African side.

understand the dynamics at the starting point. I went on a trip and went to visit the families of about 10 of them, in Inhambane, where the majority came from. It's about a thousand kilometers from Ressano Garcia. I visited and interviewed these families, and there I discovered four things: the first is that in many of these families there was already a tradition of migration of an uncle or grandfather or of some relative who had worked in the mines of South Africa in the 1970s or 1980. There is a history of going, leaving the village as a kind of resource.

Secondly, I also saw that not all families were poor in the sense that they were people who were in need. I even visited a family that had good conditions; one of the families you had a bakery, a pick-up truck, had employees. In these cases, I asked why the boy decides to leave the family and go to Ressano Garcia or to South Africa? This made me question the issue of poverty as the cause of mobility.

The third element I discovered was that immigration was also a way for these young people to become autonomous from their own families. It may happen that in the main house where the family lives the father, the mother and the brothers. When the boy reaches a certain age, he builds his room outside the main house. That process of building your room outside the father's house has an almost intimate relationship with the immigration process. What I concluded through the interviews is that they broaden this, they broaden the process of leaving. When they are leaving home or from the big house to the little room, they are going through a process of becoming an adult, so to speak. I believe that building the house has somewhat lost the symbolic value of what it is to be an adult, so going outside has emerged as a greater value than building a small room.

And here is the fourth element. When the boys go to work, then they buy things they send to the family, buy tables,

chairs and send money. That sending money to the family for the boys is a very important thing, because when we went to visit these families the boys had stayed in Ressano Garcia, but they asked us to take things to the parents. They bought tables, pieces of clothing and sent money to the parents.

In ancient times, in colonial times, when people went to South Africa, they bought artifacts, for example, radio, sheets, shoes and other goods and took them to the family, especially at Christmas. There is a lot of literature and a lot of work done on the fact that they bought goods to take to their families, making an impact on the villages. In the case of boys, this happened a lot. They bought something to send to their parents and this sending was a way of showing that they were adults, that “I am a man”. In this case, immigration gets a different reconfiguration. Immigration is a kind of resource for these people as if it were a device they use for their claim. In this context, the concept of combating immigration is not very well used. Because that’s their life. What can be done is to control the unintended consequences of migration. This is where the sisters play their role.

#### **4.2 The work of the MSCS Sisters**

The work of the sisters has several activities. I highlight just some.

The first was this: the boys who left the villages for Ressano Garcia went without any documentation. The MSCS Sisters took care of their documentation, including registration. The sisters took the boys from the village and took them to the register to obtain the identity card, which was in a municipality called Muamba, which is more or less 40km away and there registered the boys. The boys had documentation for the first time. Some were already 17, 15, 16 years old. Then

they would come back and deal with the identity card and then the passport. On the first day that I arrived at Ressano Garcia, that same day I went with the Sisters to take the boys who were going to handle the identity card. This is one way to deal with the unintended consequences of immigration. Many of the projects the Sisters had were just to pay the costs of the documentation process of these boys.

This is related to the local administration itself. That is, the administration knew that the Sisters did this job of assisting in the documentation. And this is a way for the Sisters to interfere in the immigration process itself, to somehow humanize the process, or at least to control possible harm. This means that if a boy had the identity card, he could get the passport, so he could go to South Africa and come back more protected.

The first point is the migration definition. I would say that it is a resource that people use to deal with adverse context, to deal with adversity. Adversity does not necessarily mean poverty. It can mean family conflict, it can be, for example, to increase training, others will work for a while and with that money, they will then study. It can mean difficulty: for example, there was a boy who impregnated a girl, how could not deal with it ran away. Immigration can also be a way to deal with some sort of adversity. Adversity does not mean a bad thing, it can mean a new challenge or a situation that the person cannot solve... then immigration is a resource that the person has to use. It's like a bank account, you do not know how much you have, so it's there and he says, "Okay! I set off and there will always be a solution. The only problem is that from the moment we decide to move we do not control the consequences that mobility has. Therefore, when we say that immigration is good or bad or dangerous, it is not in the desire that the person has to move, it is in consequence that the individual cannot control

that process. This is the great challenge of the countries' internal immigration, cross-border immigration, and transcontinental migration. People say, "I'm going to that place because I want to get there!" But they do not control the whole process. That is a big challenge.

Second point. It's just that these boys made money, worked with the mistress and got paid. The sisters opened an account where each boy could deposit his money in the bank. This means that the boy at the end of the month would receive a sum of money and he would go to the bank and put the X-bill and bring a ticket, a number, and deliver it to the Sisters. They organized a file system, made a copy to document the deposit of each of the boys. From there they worked all year round, a month, they put an amount and by the end of the year, they took the money and bought things to send to their parents. In this way, there is a whole process of intervening in immigration through what the Sisters did. In the background, their performance was not of the "look, you're here in Ressano Garcia, come back to your family". They listened to what the boys had in mind and took that idea they had in their heads and turned it into a gateway to intervene in immigration, in the migratory process of those boys. The interviews I did with the boys, when I asked why they gave up on going to South Africa, they gave this testimony of the Sisters, spoke of the sisters as a mother, as an angel, using these metaphors. Ideally, there should be a relationship between the families, the mistresses, especially in the case of the girls, and the reception center to which they are attached.

There is a third point. In addition to the boys, the issue of human trafficking was also part of my research. Before going to Mozambique there was the idea of human trafficking

and organ trafficking. But this was very specific research and it would need some time and another methodology. I talked to the Mozambican border police chief on the subject and he told me that it is very difficult to detect people trafficking in Ressano Garcia. Every process begins, from where the passport is treated. He said that people who are trafficked across the border legally, do not pass “illegally”. It is difficult to detect a person being trafficked, who are being forcibly taken. And that border passes thousands, they pass to pass about 30 thousand people in both directions. He said that it is impossible to control all this, who are being trafficked and who is not; this would require a special device. And I also said that it involves a lot of money because many of these people go to South Africa for sexual or labor exploitation whatsoever and other people even cross with the intention of going to Europe because South Africa is a kind of waypoint to go to Europe. There are several reasons why people cross that border. So, to capture that, he needed another methodology. CEMIRDE, where the Sisters also work in Maputo, works hard on this, especially the issue of organ trafficking. But this is another aspect.

And there is the fourth point of the service of the Sisters, which has to do with education<sup>8</sup>. The sisters try to get young immigrants back to school. The Sisters try to help, especially the younger ones, to continue their studies, especially the girls. The difficulty was that the mistresses, that is, the ladies in the house of who they were, did not allow the girls to study. This

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<sup>8</sup> When the sisters arrived in Ressano Garcia, after addressing the returnees and the highly accentuated HIV issue, they raised the issue of education, including opening a well-known secondary school in the region, practically the main one. After a while, the sisters felt that they should leave that school and devote themselves to what was specific to their charism. That is why they went from school to state and always maintained a relationship with the school board, because many, including teachers, also worked with the sisters.

is a challenge for the sisters' work. On the one hand, the girls themselves feel they have to work, but many are of school age. How to reconcile the two?

Another aspect of this intervention is the activity linked to the production of bread, in that area is practically the main bakery. The bread is produced in the Center and then this bread is distributed at points of sale at the most affordable price. With this, they really help, first and foremost, in the food question, because bread is a fundamental thing, but they also make it possible for the business to do for those people who can do the resale. I remember once, very early, at 5:30 in the morning, that the sister superior, Sr. Lisete, had left with a cart to distribute bread. When she came back I said, "Where was the sister?" and she replied that she had gone to distribute bread, but as I had just arrived I was not in the context I had to understand the relationship between the superior and having to distribute bread through the village and she explained to me that this is part of their insertion strategy.

There is another work that the Sisters do with the girls as well. At least once a week, they go to the Center and have a meeting where they learn sewing. Most importantly, they have, in the Center, a convivial space where they can talk about their difficulties. I got to interview 4 of these girls and asked them what the job was like, what they did, where they came from; I consider this a very important field of work. I also think they were the most vulnerable in some respects, vulnerable in the sense that more could easily be exploited.

It would be very interesting and could be fruitful to intensify cross-border collaboration between the communities of the Sisters in Mozambique and South Africa and also, why not, in Angola. Such collaboration could save human and financial resources and even psychological resources. To explain why I'll give you an example. Mozambique has a system

of constant repatriation of people. The Mozambicans who come to South Africa when they are caught by the police are detained for weeks and when the number is reasonable, then, they catch these people put on the bus and send them to Mozambique. They are simply left there. At the point where they are left there are the MSCS Sisters. That is, there is always a Mozambican lady, and her service is, when you see a bus arriving, go immediately to the police station, which is 50 meters from the house of welcome, and make a record of all who arrived and then is offered some money so that they (the returnees) can accompany the Ressano Garcia convoy to return to their homelands. Other times they offer some food and, above all, make them aware of their documents. In this sense the South African police are very strict, they are arrested and detained and then there is an administrative order of expulsion. If there is collaborative work with the Mozambican police, with the South African police as well, I think it could be controlled, for example, in the case of women who are also detained and then repatriated or in cases where they are caught when are out of the house and when repatriated sometimes the children are left behind. If there is a common work of the Sisters of the two countries would be able to control it.

Anyway, immigration is a way to reestablish order. I mean, immigration is not synonymous with a disorder, it is an effort to reconstruct the daily life. And sometimes, to rebuild everyday life implies people leaving. It could be poverty, family conflict, climate, war, etc. People consider your every day was interrupted, then move with the desire to rebuild, maybe in another space, far, that is, in another state, in other countries, on another continent. In this sense I can say that immigration is a kind of device, because deep down what they want is an order, only goes through this process. But

that's not the only way. There are several. There are people, for example, who feel that where they work, they suffer violence, so they stop working because it is a way to create order elsewhere. There are people who sometimes separate a family relationship, because they think that relationship is violence and aggression, etc. What I want to say is that there are many examples of how to create an order in the face of the difficulties and challenges that you encounter in your life, and immigration is one of them.

**REBUILDING LIVES AT BORDERS.**  
**GOOD PRACTICES IN SERVING MIGRANT WOMEN AND CHILDREN**  
**ON THE NORTHERN BORDER OF MEXICO**

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**Introduction**

The Rebuilding Life at the Border research program: *service and assistance to migrants and refugees*, carried out by the Scalabrinian Center for Migration Studies (CSEM), sought to analyze the ways in which migrants and refugees live and face adverse situations of risks and uncertainties in three regions of borders: Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique and South Africa, and Mexico and the United States, as well as the socio-pastoral actions developed in these regions in response to migratory challenges.

Specifically, this chapter will present the stage of the

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research *Reconstruyendo la vida en la frontera asistencia y atención a migrantes en la Frontera Norte de México*, held in Tijuana, which aimed to analyze the socio-pastoral actions that the Missionary Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo – Scalabrinians (MSCS) carried out in the city of Tijuana, from the Madre Assunta Institute (hereafter IMA), highlighting good practices, that is, the models of action and / or programs that proved successful in responding to the needs of migrants (Padilla; Portugal, 2007). In addition to good practices, we will present some challenges that may open future perspectives and lead to the reflection, evaluation and improvement of the service to migrant women and children in Tijuana.

Tijuana, a Mexican city located on the border with the United States has become the main migratory corridor in the world, either because of the human flows it receives or because of its implications. Although it may be considered a receptive and cosmopolitan city, migration is often associated with social problems, especially in the case of those who have been deported, such as alcoholism, crime, drug use and homeless people. This context provides a hostile atmosphere for people in mobility and hence implies a controversial environment for institutions working on behalf of migrants.

That said, to reflect on the reconstruction of the lives of migrant women and children on the northern border of Mexico, we began the text by approaching the context of the research, the paths covered and the methodology. Next, we present the profile of the migrant women assisted at the Madre Assunta Institute, which is fundamental for understanding the good practices and challenges listed in points three and four. Finally, our closing remarks.

## 1. Research Paths

The CSEM has a Research Core titled Protagonism of Migrants and Refugees, which brings together a series of concepts that gave scientific basis to their study activities, in general, and specifically the theoretical-methodological proposal of the research. In this sense, the understanding of the person in mobility (migrants and refugees) as a subject of rights prevails, as a social actor who actively contributes to the construction of his own history. That is, not simply a victim of macro social processes, but an active part of events, which confers meaning to the events to which it relates (CSEM, 2018).

Emphasize the characteristics that refer to the ability that individuals have of incidence, protagonism, emancipation, capacity for social change, creativity, etc. (Haas, 2009; English, 2015; Pedreño, 2017) is particularly important because it presents the theoretical and methodological foundations of the research and inserts it in a broader context of reflection, which refers to the institutional identity of CSEM and its mission.

The research developed methodologically from two main instances, both marked by an interaction between the theoretical and the empirical part. The first phase, called exploratory, came about through contacts and interviews with sisters who had done some work at the IMA before. The objective was to establish an approximation to the object of study and to raise elements for the design of the second stage, which we call the deepening phase. This, in turn, involved the field research, from the immersion of two researchers for a period of five weeks in Tijuana, between the months of January and February of 2018.

Field research involved two concomitant moments, an ethnographic immersion *within* the IMA, in order to observe the dynamics of care, the functioning of the house and to

accompany the migrants assisted there; and outside of it, with actors, institutions and organizations that provide assistance to migrants in Tijuana and who dialogue in some way with the IMA and with the migratory reality. A look at the activities carried out by similar shelters helped to understand the dynamics of these institutions, as well as the specificity of the socio-pastoral actions developed in the IMA.

In general, the methodology involved the observation and informal conversations of the researchers with the Sisters, staff / volunteers and migrants in the IMA while participating in the daily activities of the household (food preparation and distribution, cleaning, internal celebrations, etc.); and formal interviews, conducted after a few days of coexistence, in which the presence of the researchers began to be felt in a more integrated way to the daily routine of the IMA.

All this methodological path made it possible to identify good practices, challenges to the service and also the reflection on “rebuilding life on the border”, a topic addressed at this conference, which concerns, in the last instance, the actions carried out in the reception and its impact on the relations of autonomy, protagonism and dependence of the migrant women assisted in the IMA.

## **2. The Madre Assunta Institute: a safe place for “women on the run”**

The presence of the Scalabrinian Sisters in Tijuana began in 1985, starting with collaborations in the activities of the Casa del Migrante, of the Scalabrinian priests, which until then had formed a mixed shelter, that is, that received men and women whose main objective was migration to the United States (Durand, 2000). From the increase records of abuse situations, sexual harassment against women was noted the need for a

specific location to shelter migrant women and children, which took place in 1994 when the MSCS Sisters opened the Institute Madre Assunta.

The IMA was the first hostel dedicated specifically to the care of migrant women and children in Tijuana and is destined for the newly arrived migrants. Since its foundation, it is estimated that more than 20,000 women have passed through the house. More recent data, from 2015 to 2017, indicate an average of 1,431 people attended annually by the IMA, with differences from one year to the next depending on “migratory waves” such as that of Haitian migrants in 2016, the year it was recorded more than three thousand migrants attended in the house.

According to data from the IMA, among the people attended, the vast majority are applicants for political asylum (66%), followed by deportees (22%). In addition to these profiles, migrants arrive to cross the border and go to the United States for economic reasons; internal migrants seeking employment in Tijuana; and women with family problems, fleeing domestic violence or violence in the community of origin.

The women arrive at the shelter sent by the Migration Assistance Module of the Mexican government, located in the El Chaparral border — where people deported from the United States and / or other areas of migratory circulation arrive. Each case is evaluated individually, except for some emergency situations, from the conduct of an interview to identify the profile of each migrant and their needs. If any person does not fit the institution’s criteria, a referral is made to other shelters in the Tijuana service network<sup>1</sup>.

During field research at the IMA, a total of 15 migrant

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<sup>1</sup> The IMA does not receive women in situations of drug addiction or alcoholism. They also do not receive people who are already living for some time in Tijuana, or if they have family in the city.

women were interviewed, which contributed to allow different levels of analysis: six of them were spontaneous conversations during the daily tasks of the household, and with eight of them were performed formal interviews. The women interviewed had a mother migrant mother profile, that is, 15, only three reported not having children, and 5 of the 12 who were mothers had at least 1 of their children with them at the time of the survey. The others left their children in the United States or in their places of origin, usually in the care of a relative. This resulted in an average of 2 children per interviewee, 6 of whom had 3 or more children.

The age of these migrant women varied between 22 and 58 years, with a higher concentration between 26 and 35 years. 7 were Mexican deportees, 6 Central American (Honduras and El Salvador), one from Haiti and one had dual nationality for being born in a city on the border between Mexico and Guatemala. Among them, 8 had already been deported, 3 were asylum seekers and the others claimed to have tried to cross to the US but decided to stay in Tijuana. Of the professed religion, 7 of the interviewees said they were Catholic, 4 were evangelicals, 1 declared themselves non-religious and the others did not report.

The stories are quite similar among migrants interviewed and reflect the broader context of the flows of people passing through the city of Tijuana. They are women who have set themselves on the path of “fleeing” from violence and organized crime (gangs) present in their countries of origin, such as those in Central America; in some specific cases, for situations of domestic violence or to save their threatened sons and husbands; or, as some Mexican coming mainly from the states of Guerrero, Chiapas, Oaxaca and Michoacán who are there, ask for political asylum in such cases, running away from drug trafficking.

We also highlight the profile of the Haitian migrant, which represents a particular situation, that is the escape from

a context of political, economic and environmental crises that Haiti suffered in the last decade, with several arriving in Mexico after having crossed Brazil in search of a better life. Finally, there are also those Mexicans who have been deported from the United States several times, both for unsuccessful attempts and because of the difficulty of crossing the border. All migrants, regardless of nationality and migrant project, seek safety, employment opportunities and a more dignified life for themselves and / or their families.

### **1. Rebuilding lives at the border: good practices in the IMA**

The IMA is a shelter for migrant women and children who have recently arrived in Tijuana, in an emergency and vulnerable situation. The activities developed there are suitable for high turnover of beneficiaries, given that it is a passage house, with an average time of 15 days stay. Even if it is a short stay, it is intended during this period to offer a broader service possible, covering the most diverse needs, including, making the length of stay flexible for those who need to stay longer, as in the case of pregnant women, sick children, and others.

When women arrive to the shelter, usually accompanied by their children, after all the way to the border, passing through a migratory path often marked by dangers and violations, or after they have been deported, have to face the difficult question of deciding which they will do next. The Madre Assunta Institute is an environment where they can find the basic conditions to be able to “redo” themselves and from there decide the next steps. In other words, women find a place where they can eat, sleep, care for their children, share their stories, fears and most immediate needs. In addition, they fall into an environment in which they have the minimum conditions — shelter, food and information — that allow

them to resume, regardless of their migratory decision. During your stay are protected, have ceiling to think about what to do next.

The work of the Sisters, the social workers, the psychologist and the lawyer are very important at that moment, since it gives the necessary information and adequate guidelines on each case. According to the interviews, only providing a safe place, bed, food, guidance of various kinds, including spiritual, would already be important so that the migrants who arrive at the IMA could think about how to rebuild their lives. This helps them with the pain they carry, and provides comfort and serenity that they need to continue on their paths. When they leave the shelter, the migrants are visibly stronger and full of hope. In addition, they receive, food provisions to travel, coats, etc. to follow up on their projects.

### 3.1 Good practices

The objective of the research was to analyze the socio-pastoral actions developed in the IMA with migrant women and children, namely, the actions developed by the MSCS sisters in favor of migrants, especially the poorest and most vulnerable, based on the principles of the Gospel message and fundamental rights of the human person (CNBB, 2001). Given this emotional and physical recovery service, then we highlight the main good practices identified during the research:

a) *Focus of action.* The fact that the IMA is a welcome home for women and children has contributed to these people seeing the house as a reference and understanding that their specific needs are met there, which increases the sense of security and confidence in the work of the MSCS and others employees;

b) *Comprehensive Care.* Providing comprehensive care means welcoming migrants and treating them as human beings.

That is, to support them in every possible way in everything they need. In this way, in addition to providing a place to sleep and food, the IMA promotes, through employees, volunteers and projects, spiritual accompaniment, medical care, psychological counseling, legal advice, access to the media to be able to contact the family, donation of clothing and personal hygiene items, directions to other institutions if necessary and introduction to the possibilities of jobs offered by some public agencies and services of the city.

c) *Listening service*. In a shelter for women and children, providing comprehensive care goes through meeting the specific needs of these people. After many of them experience traumatic experiences, all they need is a space, even if temporary, where they can be listened to and attended to in their needs. It is this listening service that makes each migrant feel welcomed and believes that their stories matter. This is because each particular case is accompanied, even when the migrant stays there for a short period. This listening service that the IMA's work team systematically seeks to accomplish, combined with the Sisters' experience with direct assistance to migrants and refugees and the Scalabrinian charisma, is what enables the IMA to offer its service and intervene in the mobility and life paths of these people, always respecting their migratory decisions. It is this method of work that particularizes the work of the MSCS sisters and refers to an accumulated know-how of reference for those working at the front line in the care of migrants and refugees.

d) *The discipline and order* in the daily routine of IMA was highlighted as a positive element by some migrants interviewed. The internal order foresees that the migrants "take care of the house", helping in the organization of meals and cleaning, for example, which is particularly important because it allows the interaction among the people served during the

ordinary activities, favoring spaces of sharing and helping them in their own mental and inner organization, which is valued by the migrants met, even though it has an immediate effect of delaying the access of these migrants to other possibilities of labor insertion in Tijuana.

e) *Religiosity as a factor of reconstruction.* After going through traumatic processes, many people who are in a mobility situation feel the need to “hold onto something”. In this sense, the performance of religious activities was considered important by the migrants to cultivate, or even to rescue, their faith. Therefore, it is something important in the process of their psychic recovery. In this sense, the fact that it is a religious house in which the MSCS sisters are cared for — emphasizing Scalabrinian charisma and spirituality — is symbolically relevant to understand how this religious factor contributes to the reconstruction of lives, especially in the Mexican context, where the Catholic religion prevails.

f) *Respect for the ways of living the religiosity* not only of the migrants, but also of the employees and volunteers. Being a Catholic shelter that welcomes migrant women and children does not require people to participate in celebrations or Catholic practices in their daily lives in the IMA.

g) Encouragement to the research and production of scientific knowledge. At the IMA, students and researchers or volunteers interested in migratory issues find an openness to collaboration and knowledge production on the migratory theme, which, on the one hand, values the work performed there and, on the other hand, can contribute to the improvement of services provided for the dissemination of the work of the MSCS Sisters and for the awareness of society at large about the rights of migrants.

h) *Networking*. The IMA is part of the *Coalición Pro Defensa de los Migrantes*, a network made up of some of the most traditional hostels in the city<sup>2</sup>, which is an important institutional strengthening strategy, as well as an extension of service coverage, since it can redirect the different migratory profiles for the shelters that make up the network, redividing the demands to focus on their specific needs, which is to serve migrant women and children. Moreover, it is a strategic presence in the institutional framework, as part of this network gives you access to government edicts and networks for exchange of various experiences and aid in the context of public services, outreach activities such as seminars, lectures involving other NGOs and civil associations, among other actions. The *Coalición* network, of which the IMA is a member, also has an office in the Mexican Federal Government Module at the border, where the first reception and screening of newly deported persons are carried out, such as information on documentation and hostels available — so it is possible to refer them to the hostels belonging to the network.

#### **4. Challenges in the attention to migrants**

Next, some challenges encountered in the care of migrants in Tijuana, in general, and IMA, specifically, will be highlighted.

##### **a) Emotional health of the person providing the service**

An important point about the direct care to vulnerable people are the issue of mental health who exercises the function to welcome, listen and provide. Listening generates emotions. Much has been reported in interviews about how difficult

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<sup>2</sup> The institutions that are part of the Coalition are: Madre Assunta Institute and Casa Del Migrante, as well as various religious institutions or organizations that have appeared as religious in Tijuana, such as the Salvation Army and the YMCA House for Migrant Minors. In Mexicali, they integrate the network on Albergue del Desierto, the *Centro de Apoyo al Trabajador Migrante* and the *Centro de Derechos Humanos y Educación Cívica*.

it is to deal with day to day life with such difficult stories. Frequently, the interviewees were excited and were not quite sure how to answer the question “how to handle the emotional load?”. To maintain a personalized quality service, it becomes essential that the institutions care about the emotional health of all people involved. Not only migrants need of psychological support, but also the sisters, employees and volunteers.

Undoubtedly, the Scalabrinian spirituality gives meaning to every donation that the sisters engaged in his tireless service to migrants, however, is of paramount importance to have times when you can ease the emotional burden.

### **b) New migration flows: LGBT population**

Working with the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) public may be a relatively new issue for some institutions, which brings challenges for the service provided not only by the IMA, but also to other humanitarian shelters. According to the Guide for LGBT Migrants<sup>3</sup>, conducted by the Arco Iris Foundation, an institution that exclusively serves this public, in recent years the migratory flow of LGBT people has increased. The reason for the increase is due to the persecution these people faced in their home countries because of their gender identity and sexual orientation, forcing them to seek protection and better living conditions. The social context of these people is violent and discriminatory, even within Mexico, which is the case of LGBT migrants who arrive in Tijuana to seek asylum in the United States.

The shelters themselves realize the need to have a specific space to give adequate attention to the LGBT community and especially to people who identify themselves as transsexuals,

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. <<http://www.fundacionarcoiris.org.mx/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Gui%CC%81a-para-personas-migrantes-LGBT-interactivo-PDF.pdf>>.

transvestites or transgenders — as the division is made between male and female sites, many agents do not know where people of the “T” can fit in, in addition to reporting cases of prejudice and rejection by other sheltered migrants, which makes it all the more delicate to establish an inclusive reception.

Because most shelters have large shared rooms with bunk beds, a few houses can separate this audience in order to avoid situations of discrimination, abuse and violence. During the research it was observed that with regard to trans women, some shelters only received them through their stay in the masculine places (not corresponding to their gender identity), with the condition of wearing men’s clothes, being prohibited the use of makeup, hair loose, prosthetic and women’s clothing.

In an interview with COCUT (Tijuana LGBTI Cultural Community, AC), an NGO that advocates on LGBT rights in Tijuana, activists have said that the LGBT population generally plans their migratory project, already aware that they should stay out of the shelters that host migrants, because many are afraid of suffering discrimination, especially the transsexual population. In this way, they end up forming networks of support among themselves to face the migratory path and, in case they need more help, they go to LGBT organizations that are not usually prepared for emergencies and the care of migrants, and they end up being hosted in houses of activists, or rely on private donations.

In this sense, there is a great challenge to attending to migrants, which is to broaden the understanding of the gender category beyond the male and female dichotomy, in order to include other identities. The IMA could be the first to establish a more targeted institutional orientation towards the care of LGBT migrant women, for example, from the creation of a separate room to host them.

### c) Institutional cooperation

Despite the great importance that the activities of the Coalition for the Defense of Migrants bring to the context, networking for greater results and institutional strength remains a challenge, not just for the IMA. Clearly, “lonely” shelters have more difficulty in obtaining financial, human and financial resources for projects that aim at empowering the person with mobility, with a more than basic and emergency approach for people who need access to information and legal advice, as in the case of deportees and asylum-seekers, or who wish to have a social and work reintegration in the case of people who decide to remain in Tijuana.

That said, strengthening the work with cooperation networks and with institutions linked to the service of assistance to migrants in a more comprehensive way, whether public or civil society, is strategically important and should be prioritized at the moment of decision-making on the distribution of work and prioritization. In this sense, closer actions with other institutions of the congregation of the Scalabrinian Sisters, for example the mission of Mexico City, so that they can work together and support one another in fundraising and performance of activities could be an interesting alternative.

Another point to note is that the demands that come to the IMA, such as the case of LGBT migrants or women victims of domestic violence, who are urgent and need an immediate and humanized response, are concrete cases that can be passed on to the network and, in a more articulated way with organized civil society, could be taken to the governmental instances. In this sense, investing in the strengthening of cooperation networks is also investing in political advocacy in search of better public policies for the migrant population.

#### **d) Projects and fundraising**

The IMA is a long-standing institution and respected by the government and local organizations for being a concrete work of the Scalabrinian mission of attention to potentially vulnerable women and children. In order to develop strategies to increase the workforce within the Institute, there is a great possibility of attracting resources, especially taking into account the growing appeal that these target groups have in local and international communities.

In the absence of a professional specialized in fundraising for the preparation and submission of projects that finance activities with this public — a fundamental procedure for subsistence of non-governmental and non-profit organizations such as the IMA — the sustainability of the institution and the service itself. Migrant women and children become susceptible / vulnerable. Therefore, it is something that needs to be prioritized.

During the field research it was possible to see a facility to get donations of food and clothing, that is, for more emergency items thinking of the newly arrived migrants. However, to establish a comprehensive care, covering a longer period of follow-up for these migrants and that allows to re-enter the Mexican labor market, for example, would require a greater ability to raise capital to fund specific projects. This is also an important element for the “reconstruction of life” of the assisted migrant women, as well as an important step towards autonomy and empowerment, in causing a long-term effect. In this sense, developing strategies that promote a balance between the internal care activities in the IMA and offer other opportunities for alternative activities to house care and cooking would allow them to break the cycle of sexual and racial division of labor, favoring women’s reintegration into the labor market. To achieve this, it is fundamental to increase

the capacity of fundraising and institutional coordination to guide the promotion of courses in Tijuana that open up other possibilities of labor insertion for women, as well as occupy children's free time while their mothers can train.

Mexico often faces migration waves, with a sudden increase in the number of people cared for — as in 2016 with Haitians and as has been the case with the migrant caravans in Central America since 2018 — situations that forced the whole community of attention to migrants to come to terms with the demands. Having an institutional capacity to take advantage of such emergencies to raise funds from the design of projects that are capable of responding quickly will strengthen the impact and impact of mission work.

### **Final considerations**

This text aimed to present some reflections arising from the research *Reconstruyendo la vida en la frontera. Asistencia y Atención migrants en la Frontera Norte in Mexico*, highlighting good practices and challenges in serving migrant women and children at the Institute Madre Assunta, in Tijuana, Northern Border of Mexico and the United States.

The comprehensive care service carried out by the IMA is fundamental, both historically and nowadays, in the face of an ever more challenging situation, given the permanent increase in the demand for assistance to migrants and refugees in a situation as complex as that of Tijuana.

Reflecting on the reconstruction of lives in this context, implies considering emergency and immediate assistance as a fundamental element for the physical and psychological recovery of women and children who are experiencing adverse situations and whose life projects are interrupted either by deportation or by running away situations of abuse, violence and / or a context

of few prospects for the improvement of life for themselves and their families. On the other hand, it involves also aim to develop more lasting actions to enable labor and social reintegration of these women in Tijuana society, if they choose. Regardless of the choices they make about their migratory and life paths, the assistance provided in the IMA reflects the Scalabrinian charisma and seeks, ultimately, an intervention in the sense of promoting the autonomy and protagonism of the migrants.

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**SUCCESSFUL EXPERIENCES IN  
CARING FOR MIGRANTS AND  
REFUGEES**

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## **SCALABRINIANS: MISSION WITH MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES - SMR.**

**MAMBRÉ HOUSE, MEXICO CITY – MEXICO**

*Sr. Ana Silvia Zamin, mscs\**

### **Introduction**

Each year, more than 450,000 people transit irregularly through Mexico, mainly from the Northern Triangle of Central America (Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador). However, other countries are beginning to contribute significantly to migratory flows in Mexico. Over the last ten years, the causes of migration in the region have changed. While the main cause in 2012 was economic, from 2016 violence has taken center stage forcing thousands of families to move in search of international protection. The Central American North Triangle, for example, the region responsible for 90% of refugee applications in Mexico, continues to be the cradle of gang violence and organized crime, which represented 68% of the reasons for exit of migrants from their countries of origin between 2016 and 2017.

Forced displacement increases as the restrictive immigration policy of the US government deports thousands of people who, facing risks in the event of their return to their

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country, find Mexico a host country. According to data from UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees), applications for refugee status in Mexico have increased considerably in recent years. In 2015, for example, 3,424 applications were filed with the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR), representing an increase of 162% compared to 2013. The number of refugee applicants in 2016 increased to 8,800, and in 2017 the applications amounted to 14,596. Lack of information amongst the migrant population on their rights increases vulnerability.

The Mexico–US migration corridor is an area where organized crime, drug trafficking, abuses and serious crimes are committed. It is within this context that our work as Scalabrinian Missionary Sisters, and many other organizations, becomes the only viable humanitarian response to the multiple needs and vulnerabilities of migrants. Such broad needs led us to prioritize specific migrant populations. We work with three populations:

- Migrant People Victims of a Serious Crime (PMVD)<sup>1</sup>, (felony: kidnapping, torture, rape, extrajudicial detention, etc.)
- International Protection Applicants (PSPI) or refugee status in Mexico.
- People who defend the human rights of migrants (PDDH), who, because of their work and commitment, are at risk in the country.

Our mission is to guarantee migrants their fundamental rights, security and justice. We provide services that are not provided by the political actors, legally and morally responsible for providing them. Through the Organization of Scalabrinian

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<sup>1</sup> The acronyms refer to the original description in Spanish.

mission with Migrants and Refugees (SMR) – Mambré House, we provide accommodation, food and items for personal use to migrants. In an interdisciplinary way, we guarantee legal advice, psychosocial, medical, dental health, socio-occupational and spiritual reinsertion, among others.

Our work through the Reception Center at Mambré House counts on a team made up of lawyers, social workers, psychologists, doctors, dentists, sociologists, nuns, administrators and volunteers from different disciplines. The duration of residence of each migrant at the Reception Center is approximately 3 months, and in some cases can reach up to 6 months or more. Monthly, the Reception Center welcomes approximately 60 people from different countries, such as Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Haiti, Congo, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Syria, among others. We also have an area that provides the PDDH and 7 hostels in the region, through our network and relationships with related institutions, support services, risk analysis, institutional strengthening, security protocols, resource management, and dialogue with local and federal authorities and with civil society.

### **Identity / gender of persons followed up**

We accompany women, men, children, adolescents. Our Reception Center is the only one in Mexico City that receives migrants from the LGBTTTI community (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Intersex). Discrimination against people from the LGBTTTI community, in the cases we followed, led several people to make the decision to leave their places of origin. There is increased violence against this population in the countries of origin, driven largely by the desire to punish those considered to be defying gender norms (IACHR, 2015, p.8). Through understanding sexual diversity, we are able to

offer a differentiated and specialized follow-up services focused on inclusion, reduction of discrimination, attacks, exclusions and violations of rights based on gender identity.

### **Main intervention strategies**

We seek to contribute to the dignity of migrants during the migratory processes, through the integral follow-up of the PMVD, PSPI and PDDH. We start with an analysis of the context, especially an analysis of violence in the community. Xenophobia, delinquency, corruption and lack of compassion in the treatment of the other constitute conditions of vulnerability. The general objective is for PMVD, PSPI and PDDH to be recognized and to view themselves as social subjects with capacity to exercise their rights. Our Pastoral Center for Human Rights (CPDH) is responsible for direct follow-up. The interdisciplinary approach used by the CPDH facilitates the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Comprehensive Monitoring Strategy for PMVD and PSPI. Within the PDDH strategy, support and follow-up of defenders at risk of aggression are defined, and steps are taken to increase capacities and reduce threats.

### **Integral follow-up**

The mission we carry out through the Pastoral Center for Human Rights (CPDH) is the most visible face of SMR's being: to welcome people, to listen to them, to accompany them and, along with them, to move towards sensitizing, humanizing and seeking justice, supporting to continue their plans and projects of life, with a permanent exercise of dignity. Each migrant person who arrives at the SMR–Mambré House is a sister and brother. We use a theological perspective to recognize that the migrants have to live in a face-to-face encounter with God the Father and the Mother, the God of life. In the person of the migrant, we live a fraternal meeting with whom we could

give the best of what we are: charity, acceptance, inclusion, guidance and hope in the quest to restore trust in the human being, communion, community and peace. Migrants, refugees and their advocates are the occasion for us to humanize and be human. At the same time, they take on the task of responding: “Do the same” (Lk 10:37), which means: “Continue to humanize and allow yourself to be humanized on your journey”. Only in this way, we believe that, the marks left by the violent situations that hurt the migrants and their defenders can be remedied.

The integral monitoring considers the migrant people as social subjects, promoters of a new humanity and capable of transforming societies. This transformation also underpins the proper functioning of institutions that respect the rights of the people and ensure their exercise. That is why we work alongside migrants and those who defend them in building a rule of law based on democratic principles. The experience gained contributed to the creation of an integral monitoring protocol structured around the following areas of work:

- Channeling and shuttles
- Social work made up of a team of social workers, who take care of the first approach to migrants and the accompaniment during their stay at Mambré House.
- Medical attention, which pays immediate attention, prepares the corresponding diagnoses and determines if it is necessary to refer people to an instance where they can receive other attention if necessary.
- Attention to dental health, in which the population has access to this service for free.
- Legal follow-up, which provides all legal and administrative advice necessary for the regularization of immigration or other matters and access to justice, according to each case.

- Psychosocial follow-up, in which a team of psychologists provides the first psychological help, as well as other care they may need.
- Accommodation and training, where we take the time that people spend with us to give them the lived message of empathic and inclusive human relationships and strengthen their training in migration issues and other issues that interest them.
- Social work reinsertion, through which people are supported in drafting a Curriculum Vitae (CV) and in the process to find employment. Writing agreements with companies and authenticating the qualification for the employment purposes are constant tasks of a specific area.
- Spiritual accompaniment through which we invite people to deepen the meaning of their lives from a transcendent vision that helps integrate the experiences they had during the migratory journey and to project their life into a project of personal and social fulfillment.

It is important to emphasize that the elaboration of a Protocol of Integral Monitoring is the result of systematizing the actions, procedures and activities carried out in favor of the people PMVD, PSPI and PDDH during the last five years. During this period, we identified the tools and procedures for a comprehensive follow-up appropriate to the legal context and public policies in force in Mexico.

### **Monitoring Route**

The process proposed to serve the migrant who decides expressly to accept the monitoring of PCHR is implemented from the routing and transfer and continues through the duration of the engagement with the project. The first contact is reception. Based

on the principle that people have a right to self-determination, at this stage, we assess the relevance and pertinence of the PCHR intervention and propose the best monitoring strategies. In this first stage, we prioritize the victim's right to truth and justice.

Once we identify the damages and define the following strategies, we move to the second stage, which is, attending to the urgent vulnerabilities. Since most of the people we accompany have been victims of crime (in their place of origin or during transit), it is necessary that efforts are made to resolve the most pressing crises before any further procedures are taken. The duration of this stage depends on the type of damage suffered and involves facilitating access to justice and when the PMVD or PMCV is a foreigner, initiating migration regularization procedures. This second stage prioritizes the victim's right to compensation and to justice. In this stage, when those who are accompanied are in an irregular migratory situation, the process of migratory regularization begins. In addition, we privilege the continuation of legal proceedings. In this second moment, we privilege the victim's right to compensation and to justice.

The third stage is of recovery and attention to vulnerabilities that are not of urgency. Intrinsically, we monitor the person or send them to other institutions for further intervention. At this stage, we attempt to make the person who has overcome some of his immediate vulnerabilities and became more aware of being a subject of law is properly accompanied so that his vulnerabilities are reduced.

The following stage focuses on strengthening the migrant's skills. This helps the person to continue their path, either to return to their country, to continue its course to the north of the country or, if they so wish or to rethink their life in Mexico. We call this moment of future projection. We hope that the migrants we accompany can see real life alternatives and

plan the future, with full awareness that they have rights. Those persons who are carrying out the immigration regularization can receive notice of approval of the migration process or rejection. Asylum seekers seeking refugee status are handed temporary migration documents for humanitarian reasons until they are legally recognized as refugee through a refugee status. At this stage, we focus on the rights of victims to truth and compensation.

When the monitoring provided by PCHR is about to complete, we prepare for the departure of migrants so that they resume their life projects in a practical and resilient way. In every moment of our monitoring route, the PCHR areas assume different responsibilities, and areas of attention and priorities shift. In this way, through an interdisciplinary intervention, we guarantee a real impact on human development.

### **Impact of the monitoring**

The greatest impact is restoring the dignity of the migrant and that federal and state authorities recognize the seriousness of the crimes committed against Victims of Crime (VDR) so that they are recognized as victims and have their rights respected, with the granting of a visa for humanitarian reasons until the compensation. Constant work and dialogue with the authorities has made it possible to recognize the seriousness of security incidents against Human Rights Defenders of Migrants. This has resulted in the adoption of adequate protection measures for their level of risk, as well as the creation of a network of shelters. This provides for a common front for Human Rights violations of migrants and human rights defenders. An important result pertains to people seeking refuge, 60% of whom had their request accepted or received complementary protection from

a permanent residence in Mexico. In addition, monitoring strategies have resulted in migrants living in Mambré House getting free health care, with the support of volunteers who provide medical assistance within the Mambré facilities.

Of the people that we monitored between 2013-2017, more than 80% had achieved a regular stay in Mexico. About 360 people had regularization for humanitarian reasons, and 121 received an official exit from the migratory station and left the process before the INM (National Institute of Migration). Notably, 67 people were granted permanent residence, 11 were provided with humanitarian documents and 45 had their processes on hold. In cases of monitoring migrant people victims of crime, we have cooperated with the authorities; more than 5 criminal groups belonging to a drug cartel were arrested and two of these groups were convicted, with long sentences—one of 57 years and another with 50 years, plus a total of 162,000 Mexican pesos of indemnity.

### **Protection and training for defenders of migrant's human rights**

We design the strengthening of the work of the defenders in an integral way, which includes training on relevant issues and the promotion of a security environment that allows them to carry out their work. Our perspective also includes working with public servants. The main actions we performed were: 1) training; monitoring the migratory route and the security situation; 2) risk analysis and security plans; 3) design and implementation of protection measures; 4) improvement management and administration, seeking justice and psychosocial care; and 5) linking between different actors, to strengthen the coordination of advocacy actions. Among the most relevant activities, we held a workshop on strategic litigation and two workshops on the procedure for reporting complaints of crimes and crimes of

migrants. The participants were organizations of CODEMIRE (Collective of Defenders of Migrants and Refugees).

### **Support Coordination**

The intervention is a complex task that requires several support structures and coordination. One of them is the permanent need to ensure that the authorities in charge of care and protection meet and respect the rights of the populations we serve and follow. Better coordination of incidence is imperative for the realization of this effort. We also have a sustainability and administrative coordination that concentrates the efforts for the sustainability of the mission.

### **Challenges**

One of the challenges we find is the language barrier. As the migratory flows of the recent years became intercontinental, in 2017 we had 50% of people from Africa, such as Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo and in 2018, Venezuela, Colombia, Iraq, Morocco, Cuba, among others. We face a challenge to support them through voluntary work and to accompany the complex processes of management of migratory regularization and psycho-emotional attention with people of different languages.

Social integration is a major challenge as we continue to live in our society discrimination against migrants and especially LGBTTTI community who are discriminated against because of their appearance and sexual orientation. It is common for many companies not to recognize temporary documents issued by the National Institute of Migration, although section V of the General Migration Law recognizes that they can work with an economic compensation.

Another challenge is duration of residence in shelters for the migrants we accompany. Since 2016, a clear security

policy which prioritizes deportation and therefore allocates less resources to other alternatives was promulgated. The delay in the migratory regularization process and high numbers of rejections are worrisome. This has created pressure on institutions that provide accommodation to applicants as they have to be accommodated for almost a year.

Psychosocial care requires long processes of attention to alleviate the high levels of violence suffered. Approximately 65% of the people that we are monitoring bring traumas because they have experienced violence. The consequences are huge. Additional problems such as family violence in which children, adolescents and women live, traumas of family separation and separation from their customs or addictions are rife.

### **Shortand medium-term prospects**

- There is hope that the issue of migration will change in Mexico from what has been transpiring over the past decades. Civil and academic organizations have long pointed the need for public policies that do not take a national security approach but rather a human rights approach. This possible change would attack the structural causes of vulnerability amongst populations. However, this change could be limited by the bilateral relationship with the United States.
- For us, there is a lot of uncertainty on the change and we can only be clear about the changes when the national planning processes closes in the first quarter of 2019.
- The phenomenon of migration becomes more complex and aggravates as countries do not create fair and inclusive development policies as well as perpetuate conditions of structural violence and as populations respond to the forces of global exploitation. We do not see a solution to these tensions in the medium term, so we do not expect massive

migratory flows to be reduced in the medium term.

- Given these considerations, the key questions are whether our work will be continued and sustained and how to build spaces to share what has been learned with other people and organizations so that we build a broad social response for these problems.

SMR – Mambré House is an institution that seeks to ensure that all who pass through the reception, promotion, protection and integration processes of migration are dignified. We want to support the construction of a world where there are ethical, civil and economic conditions that guarantee human life with dignity for all, and “life in abundance” (Jn 10:10), even during the conflicts encountered along the crossings. It is urgent to express the same feelings and actions of the Jesus “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Mt 25:35), for every human being on this journey of life.

## **“NO LONGER STRANGERS, BUT MEMBERS OF THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD” (EPH 2:19)**

### **AN EXPERIENCE OF WORKING WITH IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES IN THE DIOCESE OF ROTTENBURG–STUTT GART**

*Thomas Broch\**

1. Around the world, these days, flight and migration are topics that affect almost all nations, albeit in different ways. Roughly 70 million people are homeless within their own countries, have sought refuge in neighbouring countries, or have undertaken hazardous journeys to far distant lands. Everywhere, the countries who receive them are confronted with enormous challenges. Here in South Africa, I hardly need to go into details about that. Nevertheless, I want to point out here, that it is not really the countries that receive them, but the refugees themselves who experience the greatest problems. I stress that, because when people in Europe talk about the “refugee crisis”, they generally have in mind the idea that the catastrophe consists in the immigration — some talk of “invasion” — of European nations by vast numbers of refugees. No! The real catastrophe is the fate of the refugees themselves: they flee from catastrophic living conditions in their homelands, and, all too often, they encounter hardly less and sometimes even more catastrophic living conditions in the places where they arrive in the hope of finding a better future.

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2. In Weingarten, there is a thousand-year-old Benedictine monastery complex, that the monks, for lack of vocations, unfortunately had to abandoned some 12 years ago. Since then, the buildings have remained empty. In the year 2013 in which the first reports began coming in about the refugees who were drowning in the Mediterranean, our Bishop, Dr. Gebhard Fürst, decided to open up this empty monastery complex to serve as a haven for such refugees. The monastery, like the whole diocese, stands under the patronage of St. Martin of Tours, a 4th cent. saint famous for having cut in half his soldier's mantle to clothe a freezing beggar.

What does Martin's example mean today? As our bishop has often pointed out, dividing our mantles today, means sharing with others our living space, our time, our talents, our material goods, our values, our social and cultural experiences, and, last but not least, our experiences of our religious faith. In Weingarten, it quickly became clear that our efforts to share with each other had to go beyond merely putting empty buildings at the disposal of others; sharing our goods here meant cooperating in a common task. For the enterprise to succeed, the whole community needed to become involved in the task; the whole city needed to grow into it. Furthermore, it became clear that a municipal community can grow into this task all the more successfully to the extent that it succeeds in achieving engagement as comprehensive as possible. In this way, the achievement of this goal within the narrower boundaries of a single municipal community can serve as a model for the way the society as a whole can succeed in dealing with the challenges posed by migration and the plight of the refugees seeking relief from inhuman situations.

For this reason, the Weingarten Integration Centre, which I will now describe in more detail, is supported by

a variety of institutions; among them are: the diocese of Rottenburg–Stuttgart, the Caritas organization, which is the welfare agency of the Catholic Church, the Catholic and Evangelical–Lutheran parishes in the city, the congregation of Franciscan Sisters of Reute, the municipality of Weingarten, and various government offices and agencies of the Federal State of Baden–Württemberg.

3. This Integration Centre is, first of all, a “house”, i.e. a building in a real, physical sense. It has a roof and walls: it is divided up into rooms, and in these rooms, men and women of diverse backgrounds and life experiences can come together, can learn to know each other, and can obtain counselling and assistance. In this “house” people find help in dealing with their personal problems: they get aid in looking for work and finding lodging; they can attend courses in the German language. Under the building’s roof, people can join in festive group celebrations and in all sorts of events. There is a well-equipped workshop, where local and refugee children and young people can learn technical know-how by working together. Above all, however, this “house” serves as a meeting-place for all those who want to come together. And indeed, many people — local residents and migrants — regularly come together here. In short, this “house” not only offers rudimentary shelter, but also — so is the intention — it more and more serves as a comfortable and friendly home, where locals and migrants enjoy hospitality.

4. The Integration Centre, however, is not just a building, it is also an idea, an idea embodying a vision of humane togetherness, in which the questions — “where do you come from?”, “what is your skin color?”, “what religious community do you belong to?” — cease to set the tone. Under this roof, the decisive question is simply “who are you?” In other words, what counts here is the unique character and endowments of each individual person.

What counts is not the demarcating labels we are inclined to ascribe to others, not the sorting-trays that we are inclined to use when we categorize other people, distinguishing between those who are like ourselves and those who are not like ourselves. In short, what is at stake is the vision of an “inclusive” society, from which no one is excluded and in which everyone can find his or her place. In order that such a vision not be a mere pipe-dream utopia, a “no-where”; it is necessary that people experience this visionary reality — however imperfectly — in the context of a real place — a place where men and women of different backgrounds are invited to come together. In short, a physical meeting-place is needed, a home, that people can move into and feel “at home”. A real place in which people feel free to unfold their different styles of living. That is why I stress the role of the Weingarten Integration Centre as a real place, where it becomes possible to “localize” something that originated as an ideal, world-spanning vision.

5. There are many reasons why, over the course of history down to our own days, men and women around the world have been and are being put to flight. But common to all of these motifs is a core experience of all the refugees’ that the home-soil in which they originally been rooted — for one reason or another — had ceased to support and nourish them. Whatever the concrete motives for their flight, all shared a similar experience of no longer being able to live where they wanted to live. And we Europeans and our societies must acknowledge that, through colonialism and commercial exploitation and false promises, we bear a large share of the responsibility for promoting or at least not checking the diverse developments that today cause thousands of men and women to risk life-threatening, indeed often fatal adventures in the hope of finding a life better than the one they left behind. Many of these refugees have ended up with us in Europe, in Germany,

and now they live among us in the hope of finally coming to rest and recovering a modicum of security and prosperity: they hope to take root in a soil that will again support them and enable them to realize their life expectations. I am convinced that we will have to live with this situation for a long time.

6. That is the one side of the coin; the other is the fact that, in the face of so many refugees who have arrived in Europe and in Germany, many endemic people have grown anxious about their own social security and even more about the cultural identity of the society in which they have grown up. I do not intend to criticize those who experience such anxieties; their concerns need to be taken seriously. But I do sharply criticize those who exploit and stoke such anxieties and who misuse the insecurities of these people to promote their own, often inhumane political and social agendas. In Germany, today, we are witnessing vicious outbreaks of xenophobia and hatred of foreigners. In our society, today, we desperately need an open and nuanced dialogue about these issues, a dialogue in which we attempt to understand each other's positions and fears, and to communicate to one another, in an honest and impartial manner, what our priorities are and what values influence our decisions.

7. The current problematic of flight and migration has brought to light a profound division in our society. I speak here deliberately about our situation in Germany, although I am well aware that in other countries similar massive social and political conflicts are being waged. It is important to realize that the current controversies over flight and migration have become symbols of the many, often much deeper cleavages that, for a long time now, have been tearing at the fabric of our German and our European societies. Those who conjure up the fiction of a make-believe cultural identity in the past that is now under

siege are either ignorant of or deliberately ignore the signs of severe fragmentation of our societies long antecedent to the current migration crisis. They reduce the long-standing disintegration marking our societies to a single, easily discernible factor symbolized by evident differences in skin color, dress, and behavior. This factor is highly charged emotionally and thus is strongly prone to promote polarization. At the same time, this phenomenon makes clear how easily elementary human decency and empathy can become lost in a fragmented society and how easily animosities and grudges can gain the upper hand.

In combating such animosities, moral appeals are of little help, and outbursts of sanctimonious moralizing are even less helpful: they only serve to harden the fronts. The only thing that really helps is patiently striving for integration, i.e. efforts to overcome the cleavage by promoting interpersonal encounters, by fostering interpersonal sensitivity, and, above all, by acting responsibly toward other human beings — despite the fact that every human person has his own set of strengths and potentials. Understood in this way, Integration is, by no means, a one-way street, in which only one group of persons, i.e. the “outsiders” and “intruders”, are called upon to “deliver”. Integration demands mutual efforts on all sides; it demands honest engagement by all those involved in shaping our social fabric. That means that the shape of our society will inevitably be changed in the process of integration, just as it has been changed time and again in the past during historical periods shaped by immigration.

In the present debates, there is much talk about the cohesiveness of society, what holds a society together. I see promoting this cohesiveness to be an important task for the churches. At the same time, however, I warn against overestimating our abilities. The rival groups and trends in our societies are too

heterogeneous, and, above all, the globalization of the problematic and its causes now set limits to our abilities. The churches are no longer a power factor in our societies, and it is good so. All the more important is it, therefore, for the churches to take the lead in a fair and nuanced debate on social identity, unencumbered by ideologies. Identity is not a static possession like some material object; it is rather a dynamic image of successful living, something that we are ever in pursuit of and that we can easily lose hold of, as soon as we start thinking that we can hold on to it as a permanent possession. For this reason, our Integration Centre in Weingarten is conceived as a place where men and women can experience how living and working together is always the better way, and that it more effectively promotes identity construction than working independently of one another or — what is worse — working at odds with each other.

For me, there is no question that the biblical values, which have helped forge the concept of humanity in Europe over the past 2000 years, are more than mere common-places for the Sunday sermon. They represent a solid foundation and a constant challenge. Among these values are:

- the inviolable worth of every human being,
- the right of every human being to live in security and to enjoy unimpaired physical and mental integrity
- the duty of the stronger to aid and protect the weaker
- the solidarity with those on the fringe of society
- the protection of marriages and families from forces threatening to tear them apart

These values are not arbitrary. They are integral parts of the constitutional law in many lands and, as provisions of *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* — exactly 70 years ago

— adopted by the United Nations, they enjoy internationally binding validity.

Once again: what kind of society do we want to live in? Is it enough simply to balance out, in one way or the other, the most powerful contending interests? — individual versus collective interests, rival economic, social, and political interests. Is it enough merely to put minimal checks on the tendency of the strong to fall upon the weak like wolves? Should we not rather be inspired by the conviction that where human beings are involved, caring for the fate of each individual person is an essential political task, one that involves an appeal to elemental humanity that personally challenges me and every other member of the groups to which I belong.

8. Coming to an end, I return once again to the Weingarten Integration Centre — both the building and the vision inspiring it. In doing so, I recall an astonishing word from the Bible, written by St. Paul' in his Letter to the Ephesians 2:19; there, he writes: “you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God”. This beautiful metaphor — members of God’s own household —, which dates back to the earliest days of the Church, is no less relevant to the Church in our days. Then as now, identification and exclusion are at issue: who belongs and who does not belong? Not only for Christians and the churches, but also for the innumerable myriads of those belonging to other religions or to no religion at all, this biblical metaphor, I am convinced, applies not to any particular group, but rather to humanity as a whole: in God’s house there are no strangers and aliens. There are only “members of God’s own household”. What a wonderful image! Although, we shall never be able to fathom the full depths of its meaning, it provides us with an indisputable and binding standard by which to measure our thinking and our acting.

## **OPERATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR RETURNEES IN ANGOLA – 2002 TO 2007**

*Sr. Marivane Chiesa, mscs\**

### **A profile of the returnees**

The congregation of Scalabrinian Sisters (MSCS) started its work in Lunda, Angola on 7 November 2000 through a sister who was posted to be the National Director of Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS). The year 2000 was towards the end of the almost 30 years civil war in which almost a million people died as a result of the conflict. Apart from the many refugees, almost four million people were internally displaced and concentrated in areas around many cities and towns throughout the country (UNHCR, 2008).

At the end of the war in 2002, a tripartite agreement was established between refugee host countries, government of Angola and UNHCR to facilitate voluntary organized repatriation of the many Angolans who had fled the war and were living in exile, especially in neighbouring countries such as Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Zambia and Namibia. The Government of Angola also created a plan to ensure the return of internally displaced people living within the country.

Noteworthy, many refugees who were to be repatriated back to Angola were born in exile and had never been to

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Angola. Most of them living in Zambia, DRC and Namibia spoke other languages than the official Portuguese used in Angola. In the period between 2003 and 2007 about 400,000 to 500,000 refugees returned to Angola, of which about 225,000 were repatriated through the organized repatriation program of UNHCR.

The MSCS sisters arrived in Angola at a time when most of the returnees were going back to restart their lives in areas deemed to be the areas of origin. Many returnees had lost family members through the war, were orphaned, landmine survivors, vulnerable and lacking any form of assistance.

### **Intervention Strategy**

The MSCS Sisters intervention strategy was two-pronged including direct service provision and coordination and management of existing institutions that could provide assistance to returnees. Important organizations that were coordinated included JRS — National Director, Archdiocese of Luanda — Archdiocesan Commission for Pastoral Care of Migrants, Episcopal Commission for Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerants of the Bishops Conference, (CEPAMI), Caritas Angola and the Diocese of Uíge — Diocesan Caritas e Diocesan Commission for Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerants. Through our coordination efforts we were involved in repatriation, reintegration and development of Angolan communities.

The strategy worked well in a situation where we didn't have many internal resources at our disposal as a congregation. Therefore, we had to pull together the resources from other partners as well as fund raise extensively. Our strategy allowed us to optimise infrastructures and tap into the cultural and geographic knowledge of local partner institutions. Through

our strategy, we were able to develop plans with provincial and national coverage. We were also present when major decisions about resources for returnees were taken. We were able to seize opportunities and channel available resources to the benefit of returnees. Our strategy enabled us to reach more beneficiaries with few human resources.

Our operational choices responded to the basic needs of returnees in order to enable their reintegration in communities of return through housing, education, peace education, health, national registration document provision, professional skills training and pastoral care. The beneficiary selection followed the criteria of vulnerability, and women and children were a priority.

Capacity building was something we started immediately and contributed immensely to the awareness, organization and empowerment of returnee communities. In order to optimize resource and capacities, networking and partnerships with other institutions was always a priority including public agencies, with whom several agreements were executed over the years. We also intervened through advocacy and legal information provision to returnees as tools for them to negotiate with authorities who oftentimes did not recognize the documents held by the returnees.

In infrastructure construction, we chose the methodology of local community participation including community provision of skills and services that didn't require special skills such as brick making, construction site cleaning and transportation of water during construction. Community involvement facilitated sustainability of the projects, in addition to optimize the costs of construction.

### **Main activities**

The main activities that were carried out by the congregation and its partners with returnees include the

following:

1. Portuguese language training and literacy: since refugees were out of Angola, or not born in Angola, they weren't conversant in Portuguese language. Therefore, Portuguese language was essential for their reintegration. For the young children, Portuguese language training was imperative for them to integrate into the Angolan national education system. Between 2004 and 2007, we trained about 70,000 children and adults in organized courses, especially in Mexico and Uíge. Adults, especially women were given literacy training and training in management of small businesses as well as professional skills including cooking, baking and took part in microcredit programs. The microcredit scheme was developed as a key income generating activity for women to support their families and these have continued to this day.

2. Peace education programs: this activity involved courses on conflict resolution, non-violent communication, human rights for teachers, border police, community leaders and militaries, among others. In addition, awareness activities, theatre, information, education and communication pamphlets were disseminated. Community based peace education seminars and recreational activities for youths and children, seminars about rights of returnees and national registration documents were carried out.

3. Infrastructure construction and repairs program: this was a very important program for the reintegration of the returnee families. This activity involved construction of houses for most vulnerable, like small children, elderly or handicapped persons. Numerous public schools have been rebuilt to ensure that returning children attending Portuguese language could be integrated into the public education system. In the case of the public schools we had executed agreements with the Ministry

of Education that ensure that trained teachers were posted to these school. A reconciliation and peace education center was built in Mexico Province.

4. Registration of children and other returnees: Through an agreement between Ministry of Justice, UNHCR and JRS, we supported the issuance of birth certificates to 22,000 children of school going age between 2005 and 2007 which permitted them to integrate into the public education system.

5. Sustainable agricultural activities: through Caritas, many projects of sustainable agriculture that included distribution of seeds, tools, negotiation of land with local authorities, trainings on water conservation and soil treatment, developing compost and manure and raising of small household animals were implemented. Notable is the involvement of Rural Development Platform supported by Misereor for the execution of these activities to date.

6. Health: Trainings on alternative medicine were provided to many communities especially focusing on returnee women. The trained groups helped their families as well as community members. Child-mother maternity programs provided subsidies for child-mothers with infants in especially vulnerable situations, trained the mother-children in using locally available materials in the care of the infants and organized trainings in basic healthy feeding using local available nutritious foodstuff in order to prevent malnutrition. This activity has continued to date.

7. Pastoral care for returnees — CEPAMI formed groups of community leaders and animators to take care of new arrivals, create awareness on human mobility and ensure that the religious needs of migrants were catered for in the

community. Celebrations were organized celebrations in the languages of the returnees thus enabling meetings of returnees with local host communities and encouraging reintegration.

### **Main Challenges**

Return of great numbers of refugees was a great activity especially after the 30 years of Angolan civil war, which caused serious destruction, and displacement of people. The expanse of Angola, the many areas of return, the extremely weak infrastructure especially the destroyed roads and bridges, houses and other public infrastructure made it difficult for intervention by social, religious and public institutions not only at the beginning of the process of return but also in successive years up to date. The returnees encountered diverse and great difficulties, some which were solved, other not to date, including:

- The difficulties associated with maintaining and sustaining their families upon return and arrival in places of origin;
- Lack of conversance in Portuguese which would facilitate interactions in their daily lives and accessing services and opportunities;
- The social-economic situation in the country that made it difficult to find employment then and till now jobs are difficult to come by;
- High cost of life and malfunctioning of public institutions;
- The difficulties to get their professional qualifications awarded in countries of exiles recognized in Angola;
- The challenges to get national identity documents, which is still a problem for many returnees;
- Discrimination and violation of their rights by authorities and members of the community in general.

## **Main Results**

Children trained in the language classes were integrated into the public education system. More than 50 schools that were constructed have continued to function under the Ministry of Education. The trained teachers were integrated into the Angolan education system where they continue to provide their services. As stated before, the different professional courses have continued to date.

The peace education activities are important during conflict and reintegration period and helped to reduce conflict, xenophobia and the integration process among returnees and locals. These activities were fundamental for the defence of the rights of the returnees and local communities before the border police, immigration officers, public authorities in general and for the process of getting national registration documents.

The agricultural that continue to be implemented within the communities, especially sustainable agriculture by Caritas Angola, was, and is, a source of income for thousands of families through selling of produce, as well as provision of food for basic sustenance.

The health programs improved significantly the health situation of families and communities. It reduced malnutrition amongst children, stunted growth, and deaths especially maternal deaths.

The many leaders who had their capacity built on returnees and migrants in the many dioceses of Angola changed significantly the environment of hostility to persons deemed strangers. The structure created then now guarantees welcome to new arrivals in the communities to date.

## Future perspectives

The MSCS Sisters now have permanent presence in two dioceses, namely Uíge and Luanda, from where they serve at national and provincial levels. The Sisters continue to Coordinate nationally and at diocese level the pastoral care for migrants, the secretariat of the Diocesan Caritas in Uíge, the coordination of a Centre for returnee migrant women in the periphery of Luanda, that is, in Vianna, and the selection and formation of young women aspiring to live a religious life.

The key focus of the MSCS Sisters relate to leadership and local community trainings as well as empowerment of migrant women. In view of ensuring sustainability of the development activities and interventions, we consider it important to network and partner with local and international actors.

In conclusion, since our congregation is going through a restructuring process in Angola and other countries in Africa, this has given us an opportunity to reflect and evaluate our future plans informed by the recommendations made in the research carried out in the Diocese of Uíge with our Sisters' active participation and whose results have been presented at this conference by Dr Paulo Ingles.

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**STUDY AND INTERVENTION IN TRAUMA SITUATION  
EXPERIENCE WORKING WITH REFUGEE APPLICANTS  
AND REFUGEES WHO SUFFERED TRAUMA FROM VIOLENCE  
AND TORTURE**

*Marivic Garcia Mall\**

**Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

I am a migrant having come from the Philippines, but migrating because of love. What a change isn't it? I work with a center for the study of violence and reconciliation and it is a non-governmental organization based in Johannesburg. We came from the University of Witwatersrand as a project of the Department of Psychology, so our organization has a very clinical and research start, and this has been a challenge for me when I came to work with the organization in January 1998, because I come from a community that works in a refugee camps in the Philippines, Hong Kong and Tanzania.

I will talk about the context that I work with. I said that We work to study violence with interventions that produce reconciliation in different contexts, but today I will focus on working with refugees and asylum seekers We also work with undocumented migrants, which is a challenge for those who

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<sup>1</sup> This text reproduces the content presented by Marivic Garcia Mall at the Conference "Reconstructing lives at the borders. Challenges in the care of migrants and refugees", transcribed from the audio recording, without review by the author.

work directly with this population. When undocumented women come to a hostel for assistance, it's a big challenge, not because of them, but because our Home Affairs Department is so slow when it comes to the asylum process for people seeking protection in the country. Our work in the refugee sector came in 1998 with our involvement in the Green Paper, which later progressed with the White Paper, eventually known as the refugee act number 130 of 1998.

Working at the Trauma Clinic, within the program that focuses on working with refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants, focuses on counseling. But our counseling section in the clinical setting is not enough, people who forcibly migrated lost their natural support systems and came to a country that is not very friendly with foreigners, especially the undocumented, so we needed an intervention that also worked with communities. This is what Jean Marie V. Uwimana helped create with different refugee groups in 1998. We worked with women's groups, youth groups, and eventually men's groups, as they insisted, "Why do you talk to our women about domestic abuse? Are they saying we're hitting them? And we said, "Oh, things happen in the community and we have to discuss them". So, where does the work we do come from? Psychology experts explain about traumatized communities as those who have experienced psycho-biological degeneration. What this means? It affects the mind, the psychological, the emotions, but it also affects the physical being. What is this, concretely? In fact, loss of trust is observed, not only in the individual, family, group, community, but in the social fabric. For example, there are difficulties in grief. How do you mourn for someone who has lost but not sure if the person has died? Who defines morality? When I worked in Tanzania for my first month, I was quite shocked: one Monday morning I walked in and my refugee team said, "Marivick, an 8-year-old

child, was raped over the weekend”. I said, “So, the man is under arrest?”. I was told no and I said “Why not?”. “Oh, the man had a ceremony, rice and wine, bananas and wine were offered to the family, goods and money, exchange hands among leaders too and the problem was finished”. And I said: “what happened to the poor girl? Is this what you do, back home in your home country, when children get raped? People drink wine and everything gets fixed?”. And they say: “No, there is a system of justice”. So, what has happened, what has world done to us? What has happened to our morality?

And besides, there are thoughts about spells that also occur. Interestingly enough, in refugee camps, if a man dies in his sleep, that means his wife has cursed him. If a woman dies during sleep, it was a natural disease or something happened. Well, maybe you can look at gender relations there, but that’s because thinking about magic has been used to deal with the extreme trauma that people have suffered. Long-term violent conflict gives rise to new social patterns, patriarchy has been entrenched, and domestic violence is widespread; This is a problem we face in Johannesburg and South Africa.

The violence experienced by specific groups reinforces people’s sense of identity between “them” and “us”; Conflicts from their home countries are transported to the country where they are granted asylum, as in Johannesburg. For example, this happens with the division of the Congolese community: people from the west live in Yeoville, people from the east live in Bertrams, and there was a time when the conflict was so great that a doctor from the east, who was operating in Yeoville, had his burned clinic. This is how ethnic problems arose in the country, and South Africa looks and says, “We don’t want this people”. This feeds xenophobic violence and xenophobic thinking. There is also the story of the chosen trauma, which

is attributed by people, family, communities. Let's take, for example, the genocide in Rwanda. Everyone talks about the death of the Tutsi, but what about the revenge killings that occurred when the RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front) entered the country to free the Tutsi? People barely talk about it, and it has given rise to a feeling of unresolved trauma that is more intense. Is this group or the other group traumatized?

The problem of not telling everyone's story becomes a fuel for new conflicts in communities. Unprocessed trauma is a blow to people's sense of identity and self-esteem. Because my pain is unimportant, so I will feel more hurt. And where is the space for me to mourn my losses? Where is the space for me to feel my pain? Dr. Fonder Cock and Dr. McFaling talked about this cost of inactivating trauma in society, the cost of child abuse, domestic abuse, continued violence and lack of productivity in refugee communities, and this is the challenge we all face.

The intergenerational effect of trauma, when individuals, families, communities, and societies cannot cope with the effects of their past trauma, gives rise to a high probability that this trauma will pass to the next generation. Judy Barcelo of the US Peace Institute, when writing about trauma and transitional justice in divided communities, talked about societies transformed by long-term conflict and how these societies engage in highly destructive political dynamics, and then get caught up in a conflict. endless with your hated enemies. This is how I tried to explain why groups of people in Johannesburg cannot work together, why this hatred is used to refuse to come together and work together in healing initiatives. Reconciliation cannot be achieved by just signing peace treaties, it needs adjustments that need to be made at a very basic level, at an individual level, at the family and

community level. Thus, transgenerational trauma, which some people would call historical trauma, requires specific healing processes, and that is what we at the Center for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation have been very challenged about. The counseling work we do with individuals, groups, families and communities is not enough, we had to look for other ways to do our healing, which means that healing is not a point, healing is a process.

What we did was embark on the community healing process using the psychological wellness workshops. When we work with communities, we work with volunteers we train to provide emotional support in their own communities. But that was not enough, because to help someone, you have to help yourself first. We believe healing begins with the self. In our psychological well-being workshops, we look at the context from which the person comes, then look at how they are taking responsibility for who they are being called to act on. These workshops are done in five phases, each phase lasts three days. Phase three is about healing things from the past, and phase four looks at “my purpose, the stories I tell myself”. Phase five is just evaluation and feedback — as a way of reporting to funders.

To assess how the process has impacted people’s lives, we have an emotional intelligence questionnaire that examines five areas: first is to look at self-awareness; second is managing emotions; third is motivating yourself fourth is about social skills; and the fifth, and last, is empathy. Through workshops, participants receive tools on how to deal with the challenges they face.

This process proved to be quite useful. That’s why we brought the program to South Sudan, we now work in Uganda, and train religious service organizations that build psychosocial capacity. That is, we are incorporating the tools

and the workshop into the work they do. If it's pastoral, we use the tools in the pastoral work they do, we don't change their mission, we help them with the tools they use. And this has proven to be helpful, especially in situations where we have very traumatized individuals in the training process. We had people leaving South Sudan with the death of their family, with brothers and sisters being killed, and we helped them to manage their emotions, to manage their reactions to it. We have also worked with Somali women's groups and it has been a big challenge because different groups have different healing needs and we have to be very sensitive to the needs of people. In addition, we have been required by funders who want evidence that we have evidence-based practices or interventions. Doing evidence-based research takes time and people need immediate action, they are human beings, they are not statistics. They have needs that we have to deal with now. About the clinic, we have a database and a monitoring and evaluation system.

At the clinic, we were initially using the Witstrauma model, because we came from the Witwatersrand University Department of Psychology, but in dealing with the trauma that victims of war and torture experience, this model was not enough. So, what we have to do is set up a practice model that has been evaluated on working individuals. Last year we began to formulate a model of working with families in communities. We have a community model of working with people who have suffered extreme trauma and violence. Much of this is work in progress, we strive to do research with the work we do, but always balancing with the needs of the people in the communities we work with, such as the documentation process.

All of this also depends very much on the challenges of availability or lack of resources. For example, we were informed two months ago that a funder reduced our budget by 40% next

year. We had to leave a community out. The work is very precious, valuable, and fortunately capital is needed. We work in communities like Maricana — you have probably heard of this community about the massacre that took place in 2012.

We work there, we have volunteers in the community, and now what we do is set up a satellite clinic, a trauma clinic to deal with traumatization. Our clinic is accessible to refugees and asylum seekers in Johannesburg, but the intense trauma that our client population has experienced needs more than first-rate counseling, more intensive treatment strategies, and that is the challenge we have. We are trying to get the Department of Health to pay attention to our project, where we are addressing mental health using volunteers in communities. Having to negotiate with the bureaucracy is also a challenge. We all understand the language, we all know what the challenges are.

Torture is not discussed in communities in South Africa or anywhere in the world; there is silence around torture. About this, our organization has programs where we conduct community awareness campaigns in different communities to talk about torture. In South Africa torture was thought to be only during apartheid and now, because we have a new democracy, it is as if no torture took place, which is wrong, torture still occurs, for example, in refugee communities with women, because of gender issues. Rape is often used as an instrument of torture, it is very difficult to get women to introduce themselves and talk about what happened to them, or even get them to seek help.

We ran a psychosocial rehabilitation program at the Trauma Clinic in Johannesburg and Pretoria, and it took years to build community confidence to talk about it. Being able to talk about your torture experience during your Home Affairs interviews is very important, because it is a way of proving that they were persecuted in their countries, but often women come

to us too late and have already had their refugee status rejected, so what happens is that we make psychological reports, we refer them to legal organizations so they can appeal their cases. We also work with other service providers to inform the Home Affairs department that torture is not something people would randomly talk about, not just about rape, not just women, men are also raped in the torture situation, it's a way of humiliation to the person.

We have to remember that torture is used by governments, by political parties. To destroy the so-called enemies, to destroy the opponent someone is destroyed by the torturer. To reconstruct it, a holistic approach is needed, not just psychological. Torture affects the way a person accesses employment; she even becomes unemployed because of the psychological effects of this act. So, it's a big challenge. We have seen people who have been through rehab and have managed to get over it. Getting into court cases is a challenge. You must have heard of Gabriel Schubert's famous case. He had sued the Zimbabwean government for torture — he won the case. Your therapist was with us at the Trauma Clinic, so we funded what was needed for the healing process; There is hope that something can be done with what we have been working on.

The African Union signed an agreement this year that reparation is part of what would be done. That's why we are working with governments as well. Our advocacy union at the Center works with the African Union and all different organizations to obtain the rights of victims of torture to be honored and recognized.

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**OBSERVERS**

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**THE PASTORAL DIMENSION IN A NETWORK  
PERSPECTIVE**  
**THE WELCOMING ATTITUDE OF JESUS AND HIS FOLLOWERS:  
POLITICAL COMPASSION**

*Conrado Bonifácio Zepeda Miramontes, sj\**

One of the main characteristics of all human beings, at different times, has been the mobility of large populations from one place to another, in the exercise of an inalienable right of every human being: that of free transit. We have always migrated in search of new opportunities, escaping situations of hunger, wars, armed movements, lack of opportunities, forced displacements motivated by macro projects or environmental disasters, traffic. Before the nation-states, such movements were almost always free and unrestricted. With the consolidation of nation-states, the borders were increasingly defined and the passage of human groups moving from one nation to another could be recorded, thus considering the beginning of international migrations.

These international migrations can now be called human mobility and this phenomenon is generated by multiple causes. There may be human mobility due to causes of one's own will, but also by causes that force human beings to flee from their places of origin, although they do not want it. Forced migrations are crossed

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by various forms of violence: the lack of opportunities, poverty, lack of employment or threats of criminal groups, some political group, government or gangs who charge *derecho de piso*<sup>1</sup> or seeking to recruit children from their families. People flee from all the violence they face.

These forced migrations suffered by millions of human beings is where we will focus, those of us who call themselves Christians, since this situation is not indifferent to the heart of the God of Jesus and the hearts of his followers. In these groups of forced migrants who are in vulnerable situations, we find the crucified of current history. It is in migrants and refugees, among other groups, that we can more clearly recognize the living face of God. These men and women, children that are expelled and rejected by their countries of origin and in many cases also by countries of transit or destination, going through situations of vulnerability, there is a call from God who invites us to transform reality.

These people bring with them historical and present suffering, full of injustice and violence, but also bring their teachings, joys, cultures, hopes and dreams that contribute to the places where they seek to reside, temporarily or permanently. This represents new challenges for those who receive them, as are people, groups and communities with cultural, religious, political and even sexual, that invite us to adapt to this enormous human diversity, full of God's presence, and to be compassionate and merciful to follow the Jesus of the Gospel.

This compassion is understood as the action-feeling of the human being in the face of the contact and understanding of

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<sup>1</sup> Ndt: Expression in Spanish, original language of the text, which refers to "the established social fact of having to endure some abuses or injustices when a person begins to develop dependent work". Cf. <<https://elcomercio.pe/opinion/habla-culta/martha-hildebrandt-significado-derecho-piso-308779>>.

the suffering of another being, where what is important is trying to experience what other people are suffering, and through this empathy take action looking for the best to the others. Compassion is a fundamental characteristic of the gospel, and we can find it in several biblical passages where Jesus experiences it, as is the case in Mt 15: 32: Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way”.

The compassion of Jesus and his disciples leads to the action of respecting the human right to possess food for daily sustenance. Giving food to a crowd so that it would not fade on the way, and in an environment where the poorest hunger was commonplace, demanding the right to eat had a transcendental evangelical-political claim. Where the powerful did not care about people’s hunger, the importance given by Jesus and his disciples to the hunger of people was vital to evidence this human right. Jesus, through his compassion, invites others to compassion, a compassion that leads to action. This action includes defending the human right of the other person to have food, to be well, to regain their strength to continue their journey, but also to regain their dignity and be able to heed and fight for the hungry community.

But compassion cannot remain only in “feeling sorry for the other,” as I have repeatedly said. In many instances Christians misunderstand this fundamental characteristic of the Gospel, transforming it into a feeling without action. Compassion cannot be a distant or naive position; It must be marked by evangelical love, and updated language must be marked for the defense and promotion of human rights, where the basics of every human being are assured, which allows people to develop as such without shortcomings.

## Political Compassion

Compassion cannot be naive, I repeat, must be loaded with a heavy dose of fundamental rights, human rights. The human rights that are inscribed in the political, understood as political what refers to the interests of all human beings in the public space.

*Politikós* means civil, concerning the organization of the city and the affairs of the citizen. Migrants and refugees are also a matter of citizenship, because they are citizens in transit, although they appear to be not subject to rights. Migrants and refugees are also a matter of policy, a subject for citizens, and they have their human rights, which cannot be doubted.

From the point of view of the Gospel, compassion cannot be disconnected from the affairs of citizens, since the followers of Jesus are also citizens. The followers of Jesus, as one of its essential features, the follow the Master, is the compassion. If this compassion is uncertain in the field of citizens, that is, of the political, then compassion is political.

Compassion must be necessarily political to not take his force that leads to action away, for the suffering of the approach of the other leads to actions in which human and political rights of these people are respected. Political compassion refers to an inheritance of the gospel, but with a dimension that is fulfilled in strict respect for denied rights: security, life, food, education, free traffic, work, housing, etc., because we all have the right to possess these fundamental elements as a basis for survival.

These lines only mention basically what we want to reflect on the Spirit, about other narratives that are constructed not only from the hard and terrible data that immigrants and

refugees experience but also from the visions of Christians that we see these phenomena with a compassion that is not naive. It is a political compassion that helps to empower individuals in the defense of their human rights and reflects an evangelical perspective, which impels us to give life and that life is in abundance, thus fulfilling what God wants for all.

From this theological place where the vulnerable, the migrants and refugees are at the center, I participated, at the invitation of the Scalabrinian Sisters and the CSEM, as an observer on duty, reflecting in depth during and after the Conference “Rebuilding lives at the borders. Challenges in serving migrants and refugees”. These and other questions came after listening to the words and reflections of this conference, with most participants believing in Jesus: How did Jesus experience the encounter with the most vulnerable? How should the Church live pastorally work with migrants and refugees, the most vulnerable, in the Jesus way?

**Conference “Rebuilding Lives at the Borders: Challenges in dealing with migrants and refugees”**

What we experience in this conference (Johannesburg, December 2018) has been a more academic process, but based on field experience working with migrants and refugees. It is a very good combination of reflection and practice: reflection-practice, practice-reflection. Systematic reflection of an experience, problematic from a relevant research, from the point of view of empathy experienced by political compassion, produces much more consolidated results and adhering to reality and responds to the needs of migrants and refugees in all possible fields, even where they were denied basic rights such as food, education, housing, legal security, freedom of movement, among others.

## The encounter of Jesus with the most vulnerable

Jesus had an attitude of compassion for others in the face of their suffering. The Gospels show us many passages where the sick, the demoniacs, the widows, among others, were the recipients of actions that arose from the compassion of Jesus and his disciples, who thus tried to find solutions to the situations in which the most vulnerable were found.

In Ephesians 4:32 the Bible tells us about the fundamental attitude of every Christian, which is compassion: “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you”. Compassion is a fundamental trait of every Christian. Jesus, in reaffirming this characteristic, feels compassion for a leper and the priest, is what the gospel of Mark 1: 40-43 tells us: A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, “If you are willing, you can make me clean. Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. I am willing, he said Be clean! Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning”. Compassion leads Jesus to heal the leper; it is Jesus’ compassion that puts itself into action.

Jesus’ attitude in seeing the need of the other affects him emotionally, but he does not remain without doing anything. By feeling compassion, if put into action, looking for ways to solve what happens to the other. In the case of the leper, he was not only segregated by the Jewish community by his illness and possible contagion to others, but was placed outside the group of Jews, designated as cursed and sinful; was a person segregated by society, and with the terrible consequence of not having rights. Jesus, when he sympathizes and heals the leper of his illness, not only the priest but also reintegrate him into the community from which he had been segregated. Compassion leads to action. There is no compassion without action and

transformation, both for the one who feels compassion and for the one who is the recipient of the action.

### **The attitude of the Church towards migrants and refugees: political compassion**

We as followers of Jesus and in the face of the invitation of the gospel to compassion, in actual terms, we can understand that compassion cannot be understood merely as an isolated feeling, but that always leads one to action. Compassion for migrants and refugees puts us on the path of action; this action goes beyond feeding, dressing or giving them a roof; this action is aimed at promoting changes in public policies so that rights are respected. The defense of the human rights of migrants and refugees is a political struggle, a struggle that transforms lives and that for Christians is born from a deep involvement of each one, is born of the evangelical compassion.

Enter in an evangelical dynamic of deep struggle in defense of the fundamental rights of migrants and refugees in an ongoing struggle with the various governments is an effort by policy changes, so that the public space is less rustic, both for those of us who defend the rights of migrants and refugees and for the people themselves in mobility situation where their basic needs are met, especially for the most vulnerable. This is where the action of the followers of Jesus and of those who belong to his Church comes from the perspective of a political compassion.

### **What Pope Francis said in his compassion for migrants and refugees**

Pope Francis reminds us that we must be compassionate towards migrants and refugees, always being in the attitude of welcoming them, in solidarity, as the social doctrine of the Church calls us.

Pope Francis addresses us in his message for the 51st World Day of Peace: The wisdom of faith promotes a contemplative look that recognizes that we all “belong to a single family, be it the migrants or the local people who welcome them, and all have the same right to enjoy the goods of the earth, whose destiny is universal, as the Church’s social doctrine teaches. This is what underpins solidarity and sharing”.

“Welcoming” requires broadening the legal pathways for entry and no longer the action of pushing migrants and displaced people to countries where they face persecution and violence. It also requires balancing our concerns about national security with the concern for fundamental human rights. The scriptures remind us: “Be not forgetful of hospitality, for by it some have not received angels” (Hebrews 13: 2).

### **Conclusion**

Migrants and refugees, because of their extreme vulnerability, are recipients of our compassion as an essential characteristic of the Gospel. But this compassion cannot be naive, it must be activated by action. This action now translates into the defense of the fundamental rights that migrants and refugees have and denied.

This defense is political, public space. Migrants and refugees deserve our political compassion, so that their struggle is not a naive struggle, but a struggle for denied rights, both in their countries of origin, and in transit or destination. Political compassion should be a current characteristic of all Christians so that, from empathy in compassion, they may be brought to action, and this action will transform stories and defend the life of which all persons who are vulnerable, including migrants and refugees.

## THE APPROACH TO THE SUBJECTS OF HUMAN MOBILITY AND THE PROTAGONISM OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

*Sr. Carla Frey Bamberg, mscs\**

*“Migrate the seeds in the wings of the wind, migrate the birds in the seasonal currents, migrate the fish to reproduce, migrate the animals behind better airs and better pastures... In the end, migrates the human being in search of a more promising future”.*  
(Blessed Giovanni Battista Scalabrini)

The approach taken on the idea of migrant throughout the days of the Conference turned around six axes, which I present below.

First: migrations today, as never before, have become the subject of wide debate in the world of human mobility; with this, enormous transformations in the society place the migrant subject as a fundamental piece in the processes of change. However, the categorization of a migrant conditions and restricts its role in society, especially in the case of asylum seekers and refugees, making it a part of the exclusionary market.

Second: a migrant may be forced to migrate, or can voluntarily migrate as a universal right. The causes of migration

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are not limited to the issue of poverty, there are several factors that lead migrants to move from one place to another. Even if the cause is social vulnerability in which that individual lives, it brings with you and your community rich baggage of values, customs, traditions that can put in common with a new community — the migrant is the protagonist.

Third: one of the determining factors of international migration is the political factor that may have different perspectives. Sometimes impels to migration as research mechanism places more political stability and security (absence of war). Other times, the political factor catapults migration as an instrument of invasion and domination of new geographical territories with the purpose of implanting its culture, habits and economic hegemony (geo-strategy to dominate the world).

Fourth: migrations by flight may not eliminate the autonomy and self-determination of the migrant. Although at times they are stigmatized by the society in which the migrant wants to integrate, he or she seeks to create their own space, knowing that crossing a geographical border will have to go through several internal frontiers and interpersonal relationships for overcoming prejudice, xenophobia, ethnic persecution, racial, religious or other.

Fifth: it is not enough to be born and live to exist, it is necessary a political existence, to have identification document and to be validated according to the political and legislative restrictions of each country. The documentation is a base that generates empowerment and gives autonomy for the migrant to feel recognized.

Sixth: migration is a political act, with this, the migrant is a political being that seeks to claim their rights and spaces of prominence in society. Each one chooses his path according to

his life plans, whether to escape from an adverse situation or to pursue a personal, political, economic, cultural or religious project. More than that: in the majority of cases, it is precisely in search of autonomy and self-determination — strong values of Western modernity — that millions of people flee from their own lands.

Migration can contribute positively to the future of humankind and to the economic and social development of countries. The phenomenon of international migration points to the need to rethink the world, not based on economic competitiveness and the closure of borders, but anchored in universal citizenship, solidarity and humanitarian actions. Countries should adopt policies to address and integrate the positive contribution of migrants and refugees, seeing the migration as a gain rather than as a problem.

Migrations are cradles of innovations and transformations. They can generate solidarity or discrimination; encounters or shocks; acceptance or exclusion; dialogue or fundamentalism. It is the duty of each community and each human being to make the new one brought by the migrants a source of reciprocal enrichment in the construction of a culture of peace and justice. This is the way to promote and achieve universal citizenship.

The migrant is an itinerant being, he is our brother, he is Christ himself, and in this walk he finds spaces for the reconstruction of his life, aided by solidarity, in centers of welcome, in the coexistence of the new community, in interpersonal relations. All of these helps to make sense of staying on or continuing on your path, reframing your migratory path. MIGRATE IS A RIGHT.

## **STRATEGIES FOR THE WORK WITH MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES, AND THEIR SUSTAINABILITY**

*Sr. Cathy Murugan\**

The movement of peoples from one place to another is not a new phenomenon, it dates back to the earliest days of humankind! In those times there were no borders, so people moved as their needs developed and evolved! Some movements were relatively peaceful, while others plundered and took over lands that were already inhabited, sometimes violently sometimes less so. In this present history of humanity, people move not to plunder and take over, but out of necessity: internal/external political conflicts/wars; climate change; rapid urban development, are some of the main causes for whole masses of people on the move!

Over these past three days, we have heard strategies adopted by the Scalabrinian Sisters and partner organizations in their accompaniment of refugees and migrants. Some have been planned action, as a result of research undertaken, and others have been responses to crises.

All the programs and projects undertaken have been underpinned by a spirituality of compassion.

The overriding factor in working with migrants and

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refugees have been to ensure the dignity and respect of people who have suffered great trauma. In many situations, where possible, emphasis has been to enable people to rebuild their lives with dignity within their current realities, and this we have heard in the interviews with migrants and refugees from Italy to Mozambique, from Angola to Germany. Every person wants to have a say in how they live their lives irrespective of their circumstances, and rightly so! This universal need is enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, and is also Christ's teachings!

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While the focus generally has been on the most vulnerable: women and children, young women/men; men in general have not been excluded from services as we have heard from the report of Mozambique.

Right of self-determination of refugees and migrants is often limited by the way in which service is given. Often, they are seen as the recipients of service and not also participants in this process which can further undermine their sense of self-worth and dignity. It needs to be a relationship of reciprocity — where everyone has something valuable to share!

There are two main types of projects: a) camps — where people are kept together and all their daily needs are provided; and b) 'free' movement of people. Services needed in both these situations include language classes to learn the local language, skills development (re-skilling), psychosocial needs to deal with trauma, not only for the purposes of integration but to help the person/s heal and re-claim their lives with as much dignity as is possible in their new environment.

When basic needs are met, the overriding need is for self-determination, so that people can move ahead with their lives with dignity. Migrants and refugees bring skills and

resources which, if given the opportunity to utilize, can enrich the host countries.

Providing opportunities for interpersonal relationships, where people can meet one another and share stories reduces fear and mistrust of one another, as Thomas shared in the example of the Integration Centre in Weingarten in the Diocese of Rottenburg–Stuttgart. Stories of a way of touching people’s hearts and creating a sense of identification with the other.

Another area of importance, is the integration of families where passing on of one’s traditions and cultural practices to their children is given space to happen! Important to integrate this into long term sustainability, that is, culture, spirituality — to support them in their vulnerabilities.

Integration is not a one-way street, if it is to be sustained! It demands mutual effort from all sides — society changes in the process! It does need to be well planned. Migration is a process of transformation for all involved, the creation of a new society.

The issue of documentation is a politically marked topic! The whole process of obtaining documents often hurts a person’s dignity. Documentation enables a person access to social and political inclusion and is an area that needs greater attention. We are all children of God, and as Thomas, in his reflection, reminded us “members of God’s household”. In this way of thinking, all people should have the right to citizenship irrespective of country of origin! This is communion at the deepest sense of the word!

Important to see the vulnerability of the refugee and migrant and respond holistically, important too to include\ involve people where and when possible, enhancing their dignity and sense of self-worth.

The Sisters' work on the border of Mozambique and South Africa with the teenagers speaks of a heart centred accompaniment of vulnerable young people. They assisted with documentation, identity and travel, professional qualification — for example helping the young people to complete their schooling. The Sisters also focused on teaching life-skills, teaching them how to live responsibly in the border town “a home away from home”, where they were taught to save their earnings for future needs and also sharing with their families back home. In this way, enabling them to maintain family contact and cohesion despite their present challenging situation.

Issues for further attention is the challenge of HIV and Aids, and prostitution in border transit towns where out of desperation and in order to survive, people turn to prostitution.

A further challenge needing attention is that of human trafficking, especially in these border towns where long distance trucks pass frequently!

An area that has been mentioned, but needs further attention, is that of trauma suffered by refugees and migrants and the need to provide / services to attend to this. This issue of dealing with trauma, both individual and of communities, fleeing from situations of war, as well as ‘enroute’ trauma, and sometimes within the host receiving countries. Unprocessed trauma is a blow to one’s sense of identity and self-esteem. Where is the safe space to feel one’s pain and to resolve trauma?

Often, refugees and migrants have to prove their suffering, scars, marks, etc. in order to receive services. This is secondary trauma inflicted on them. It’s important that processes to assist refugees and migrants understand the trauma they’ve undergone and take this into account when

assisting them. Greater awareness is needed!

Further issues are gender and patriarchy, xenophobia and ‘transported violence’ from home countries to present country! Need for healing initiatives — all are long term processes! Is this an area for the sisters to become involved?

What’s needed for re-integration as in the case of Angola and DRC? Often this is a challenge for countries if there’s mass movement of people back to their countries of origin! Some of the challenges are scarcity of resources because of situations of war.

How to work in situations where there’s a scarcity of resources even for the local communities, minimising xenophobia and reducing fear, while creating understanding and communities of compassion! Care for the carers! Sr. Ana Sylvia mentioned this in her report and this needs to be included in programs everywhere!

How to create sustainability for the services we offer, not remaining dependant on donor funding/resources and also how to create exit plans, where services are not dependent on us, when we move on, these services can continue while there is need for them!

More reflection needs to be done on the area of long-term sustainability for refugees and migrants so that they can reclaim their lives and live with dignity as the children of the One God.

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**FINAL DOCUMENT**

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## OPEN LETTER

We, the conference participants, are writing to express our thoughts about migrants and refugees. This follows our deliberations about human migration processes in the contemporary world at a recent international conference named “Rebuilding Lives at the Borders: Challenges in dealing with migrants and refugees”, held in Johannesburg, South Africa from 4 to 6 December 2018.

We primarily acknowledge that human migration is as old as human history. However, discourses on human migration have recently been brought to fore because of politicization of migration processes and outcomes. A demonstrable point is that institutional frameworks are failing to accommodate the various migration and refugee situations should be clear to all. Unilateralism at the international arena may additionally erode the capabilities of the current international institutional framework to guarantee protection and humanely serve people on the move. The petty characterization, spurious comments and wrong assertions about migrants and refugees have recently aroused several reactions and feelings in many countries. Therefore, we think it is essential to clearly lay out some objective facts about contemporary human migration, correct some misinformation and share a much more considered perspective about people on the move.

We note that human migration process is varied, migration experiences different, migration phenomenon complex and our understanding of the human migration limited. Despite this, existing evidence unequivocally points to the intertwined nature

of man-made and natural forces behind human migrations. The protagonist in the process of human mobility is a migrant or refugee forced by circumstances to move from their home to another place. It is our common view that economic factors are pronounced frequently and there is less focus on cultural, religious, political and natural factors. We observe that these factors are intricately connected. In some instances, state security considerations are overriding humanitarian interventions. Most of the current narratives fail to express the subjective reasons for human mobility. Hence, archaic values and expressions are propagated without due regard to their effects and impacts. Given this, our message to the various stakeholders as follow.

We recognize and honour the resilience, autonomy, diversity and enduring spirit of migrants and refugees, especially in the face of pervasive and persistent world adversity. We empathize and understand that people on the move contribute immensely and variously to human progress and human fraternity. Whilst there is currency that migrants and refugees are an absolute basket case dependent on charity, we attest that many toil to make out a living even in adverse, inhuman and degrading conditions. We value the various ways the presence of people on the move enrich human lives, especially through interactions that deepen the understanding of humanity.

We note the important role that civil society play in providing tangible services and defending the rights of migrants and refugees. We suggest that the civil society should focus more on understanding human migration within countries and deliberately emphasize on movements around border areas as well as non-urban areas. We encourage the civil society to pay particular attention to the movements of youths, children, women, persons living with disabilities and lesbians, gay, transgender and intersex people. We challenge the civil society to advocate for multilateralism and

strengthening of the international architecture on human mobility.

Our message to the church is to double its current efforts on promoting human dignity and human worthy paying special attention to people on the move. The church should strengthen and create new partnerships that mobilize individuals, families and communities for the greater good of migrants and refugees. In a context of resource constraints, we think the church has to rethink and commit greater resources on pastoral services at border areas and provide a much more nuanced direction on human movement in general. Religious groups have to facilitate dialogue, creating innovative and prophetic interventions and articulate the church's position and understanding of human mobility within the various ever changing and evolving contexts.

Our message to governments is that it is the responsibility of governments to desist from using migration for electioneering purposes and political gain, but rather to promote human dignity, including that of migrants using applicable human rights statutes. Governments should strengthen programs combating xenophobia, discrimination and human trafficking. Actions that promote humane treatment of persons that regularly move around border areas, respecting their cultural rights are essential. Governments should enhance activities that facilitate a conducive environment for migration across countries, especially providing guarantees for the movement of refugees. We encourage governments to evaluate and reformulate current domestic policies on migration considering the changing global context. We encourage governments to strengthen the international architecture for human mobility within the spirit of multilateralism. We emphasize the importance of governments to focus on building bridges and not walls.

It is our hope that the many stakeholders we have addressed will consider our message. We believe our message

broadly affirms the importance of integration as an important option to migrants and refugees. Our message is important in promoting durable solutions, livelihoods, reducing inequalities and ultimately universal fraternity. It is an important duty for all of us to create a world where human lives are not deliberately and unnecessarily broken, and when and or where such would have happened, to help rebuild these.

Johannesburg, 06<sup>th</sup> December 2018.

# MIGRAÇÕES, REFÚGIO E COMUNIDADE CRISTÃ

## Reflexões pastorais para a formação de agentes

Brasília: CSEM, 2018

Carmem Lussi e Roberto Marinucci (Orgs.)



# Migrações, refúgio e comunidade cristã

**Reflexões pastorais para  
a formação de agentes**

Carmem Lussi e Roberto Marinucci  
(Orgs.)



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CENTRO SCALABRINIANO DE ESTUDOS MIGRATÓRIOS

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**Rebuilding Lives at the Borders: Challenges in dealing with migrants and refugees** was the title of a conference organized by CSEM and Weltkirche in partnership with Bienvenu Shelter and the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo - Scalabrinianas, with the support of Radio Veritas and Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference.

In the event was presented and discussed the experiences of assistance to migrants and refugees, and results of the researches carried out by the CSEM, on concrete actions of agents and institutions that aimed assist migrants and refugees in their lives at the border, with actions that aim to respect and value the protagonism and the autonomy of migrants and refugees, supporting their migratory projects.

The event was held in Johannesburg, South Africa from 4 to 6 December 2018 of which this volume brings the main results in Portuguese. Another volume simultaneously publishes the texts in Portuguese.



Irmãs Missionárias  
Scalabrinianas



**Bienvenu Shelter**

*For Migrants and Displaced Women and their Children*



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