

Gender, Geopolitics and Forced Migration

A Report

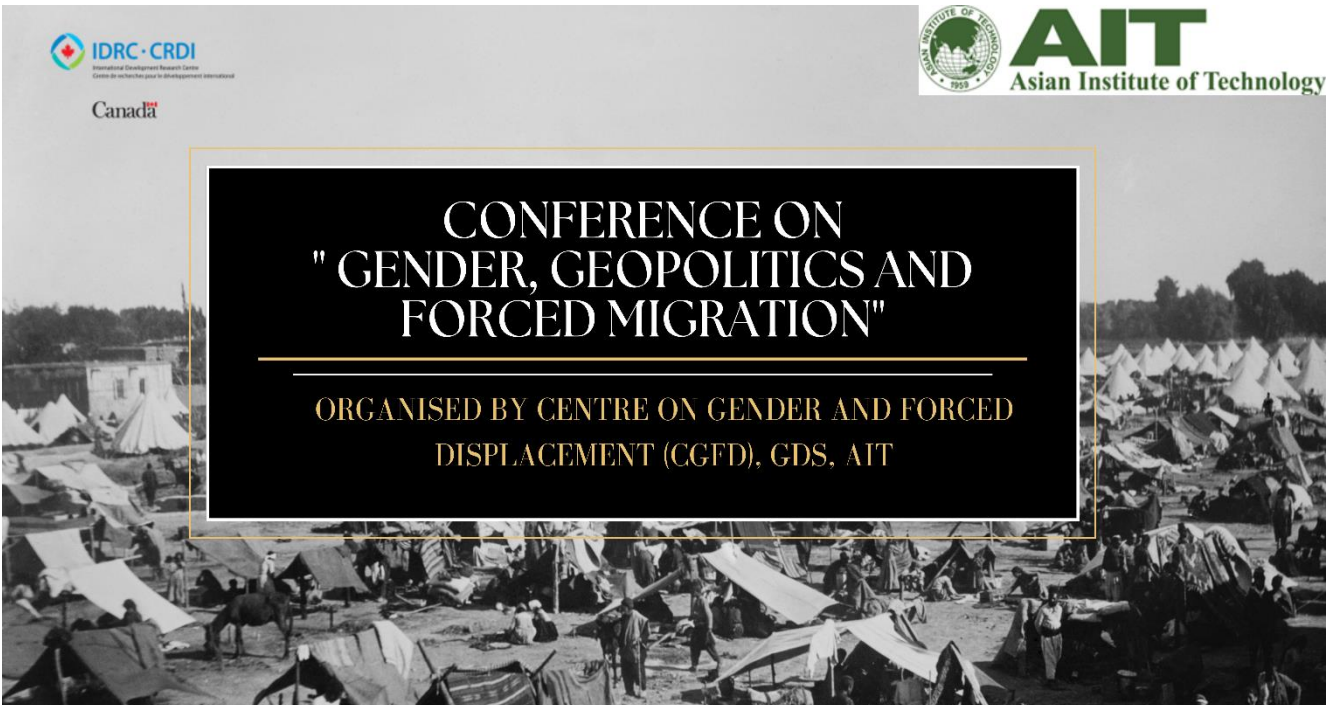


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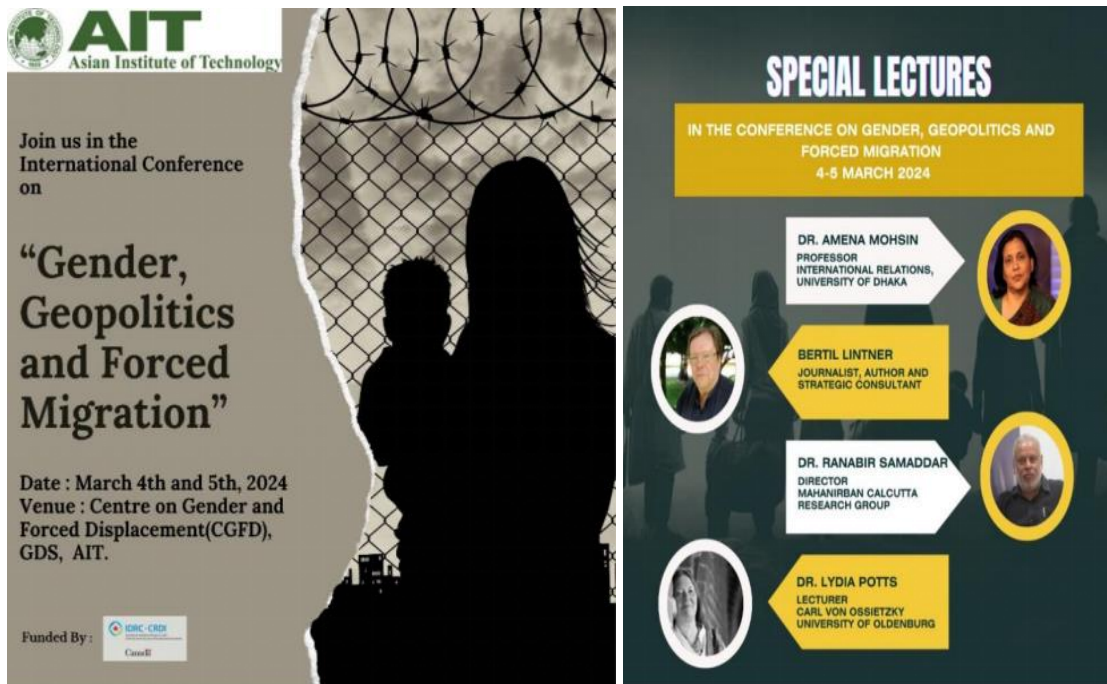


CONFERENCE ON "GENDER, GEOPOLITICS AND FORCED MIGRATION"

ORGANISED BY CENTRE ON GENDER AND FORCED
DISPLACEMENT (CGFD), GDS, AIT



*Compiled by the Centre on Gender and Forced
Displacement*



On March 4 & 5, the Centre on Gender and Forced Displacement AIT, Bangkok organized a two-day conference on “Gender, Geopolitics and Forced Migration.” The event witnessed a gathering of eminent academics, practitioners, media persons and experts with shared experiences of vulnerabilities of the forced migrants, deliberating on critical feminist perspectives on war, conflicts, displacements, migration, and peace.

Objectives

1. Investigate the gendered assumptions/stereotypes in the study of forced migration, displacement, international relations, and national and foreign policy making.
2. Explicit geopolitical and biopolitical reasoning and how political spatialization renders women and vulnerable groups even more vulnerable.
3. Examine the implications of militarized notions of territorial citizenship, using the masculinist ideas of power, space, and security and feminine representations of peace, security, and victimhood.
4. Explore how the practical everyday implications of geopolitics and biopolitics and their intersectionalities impact the causes and consequences of displacements in South, Southeast Asia and the extended neighbourhood.

Keywords:

Gender, Geopolitics, Forced Migration, Internal Displacement, Statelessness, Vulnerability and Gender Sensitivity.

DAY I: 04 March 2024

**Venue: Auditorium, School of Management (SOM) Building, AIT, Pathum Thani,
Thailand**



Inaugural Session

**Chair: Professor Kyoko Kusanabe, Professor, Gender and Development Studies,
Department of Development and Sustainability, AIT.**



Master of Ceremonies: Dr Joyee Chatterjee, Associate Professor, Gender and Development Studies, AIT.

Speakers: Professor Nitin Tripathi, Professor Paula Banerjee and Mr Edgard Rodriguez.

The first day of the seminar began with an address delivered by the Vice President, Academic Affairs, AIT, Professor Nitin Kumar Tripathi, who via a detailed power-point presentation highlighted the achievements of AIT and its unique character, terming it as a global village.

Professor Paula Banerjee, IDRC Endowed Research Chair, Director, Centre on Gender and Forced Development, AIT, reflected on the pandemic's lesson on global interconnectedness and the pressing need to unite for progress. She emphasized the shift from focusing solely on climate change to addressing ongoing conflicts and displacement, advocating for new solutions, and a collective effort to challenge norms and build a better future.

Mr Edgard Rodriguez, Lead (Myanmar), International Development Research Centre (IDRC), highlighted the cross-border nature of geopolitics and displacement, calling for a shared responsibility to alleviate suffering. He stressed the importance of the conference discussions in finding practical solutions and steering towards positive change, expressing confidence in the collective effort of IDRC and AIT teams to ensure a brighter, more secure future.



Mr Shawn Patrick Kelly, Executive Director, Office of International and Public Affairs, AIT, in his presentation highlighted the close association between Canada and AIT over the years, with a particular emphasis on the growing collaboration between IDRC and AIT, culminating in the creation of the Centre on Gender and Forced Displacement (CGFD) and the establishment of the IDRC endowed Chair at AIT. Mr. Shawn Patrick Kelly also presented a short video on the creation of the CGFD.



The inaugural address was delivered by Professor Ranabir Samaddar, Distinguished Chair in Migration and Forced Migration Studies, Calcutta Research Group, Kolkata, India. Professor Samaddar elaborated upon the theme of the conference, Gender, Geopolitics and Forced Displacement. Professor Samaddar began his address by stating that while the relationship between gender and displacement has been well articulated and discussed in migration literature, the challenge lies in trying to connect geopolitics with gender.

Professor Samaddar observed that the discussion between geopolitics and gender in recent migration literature, though present, is not deep. The impact of geopolitics on national changes, the final sacrifice/transformation is done on women and with women. The changes in national politics and state structure/national destiny can hardly be imagined without referring to women. He cited the example, in recent times, of Gaza, wherein most deaths have been of women. Therefore, it can be said that war extracts its own casualties and women and children are ranked very high. In other words, geopolitical changes, geopolitical calculations and geopolitical configurations have maximum consequences on women. Professor Samaddar observed that geopolitics as a concept came of age in the late Victorian period and in the first two/three decades or so of the last century, where it connotes the idea of an expansive space and an imperial attribute.



Professor Samaddar stated that geopolitics has, as a concept, become conservative, to the extent that one can question its relevance. These spaces are not static anymore, in the wake of neoliberalism with the emergence of digital infrastructure, large logistical reorientation of the global economy, financial flows and virtual forms of accumulation/extension. Within geopolitics, the kernel of space that is territory is now being challenged in this new scheme of imagining of geopolitics, and something that is not connected to territory, but, in this case, gender. Professor Samaddar concluded by referring to the structural inadequacies of geopolitics to accommodate new flows and referred to migrants as probably being the link between the Global North and South.



Academic Session II

Theme: Gender, Geopolitics and Internal Displacement

Chair: Professor Paula Banerjee, IDRC Endowed Chair, Director, CGFD, AIT.

Theme: IDP's in Myanmar

Speaker: Dr. Nyi Nyi Kyaw, Research Chair, IDRC, Chiang Mai University, Thailand.

Dr Kyaw discussed the issue of internally displaced people (IDPs) in Myanmar, highlighting the nation-state and border obsession in international discourse on refugees. The speaker also highlighted the differences within the IDP community, such as the rich, poor, and marginalized individuals. In Myanmar, some IDP camps are considered acceptable compared to others, while others are regarded as more dangerous and securitized. In Myanmar, around a million people are internally displaced, with most living in the center of the country. The speaker emphasizes that the number of IDPs has been increasing since February 2021, coinciding with the military coup in Myanmar. The speaker also discussed the experiences of the Myanmar refugees, who often use the term “out of the group” to describe themselves. This highlights the differences among refugees and within IDPs, emphasizing the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the situation.

Dr. Kyaw emphasized the importance of understanding the differences within the IDP community and the challenges faced by IDPs in Myanmar. By addressing these issues and promoting better communication and understanding, we can work towards a more equitable and sustainable solution for the IDPs. In Myanmar, internal displacement can be categorized into pre-coup and post-coup phases. Post-coup internal displacement is larger, but pre-coup displacement is also important. It's crucial to understand the nature of the conflict that led to these types of internal displacement, as conflict-induced displacement is still a significant



issue. It is essential to distinguish between pre-coup and post-coup displacement, both internal and cross-border, to better understand the situation. Violence is another significant factor, as local IDPs are often treated differently. There are differences between one-tier IDP population and another-tier IDP population, and there are differences between IDP and refugee masses. The plurality of refugee IDP masses is crucial to understand, as one can become an IDP first and then become a refugee.

Theme: Spatial Confinement and Displacement: The Bedouins (Badu) of the Negev (Naqab)

Speaker: Dr. Priya Singh, Post Doctoral Researcher, CGFD, AIT.

Dr Singh in her presentation highlighted the predicament of the Bedouins of Negev/Naqab in a Jewish constructed space. She described it as a study in contrast, of the conjectures and policies of the hegemon, that is, the Jewish state and the implications for, as well as the responses from the hegemonized, in this case, the Bedouins of the Negev. The Bedouin as a category is unique in terms of being an appendage of a larger community that transcends the geographical confines of the state of Israel.

However, for the speaker, it is in their lived realities in the Jewish state that a severance has developed primarily due to the contradictory objectives and narratives of the state and its marginalized communities. Employing a policy of spatial confinement that emanates from the Zionist ideology of a rarefied land exclusive to the Jews, the Jewish state rendered the community an enclave existence, restricted mobility, as well as a segregated way of life, a fringe presence, which ironically engendered social cohesion, articulated in myriad forms of resistance to the laws and practices of the state as exemplified by the protests against the multiple demolitions of Bedouin homes and their resettlement/s.



Dr Singh stated that besides protesting marginalization, the community is in the process of deconstructing its distinctive identity, contradicting and contesting state constructs with counter claims and resisting generalization. The speaker concluded with the observation that

the contestations between the Bedouins of the Negev and the state of Israel, premised on land is grounded on an apprehension emanating from the intrinsic character of nomadism, connoting access to and control over infinite space, i.e., vast expanses of “Jewish land.” The centrality of “occupation” (of land) perceived contrarily, is therefore underscored in the presentation.

Theme: IDP’s and Climate Change

Speaker: Mr. Bradley Mellicker, Senior Regional Emergency PostCrisis Specialist, Regional Office for Asia Pacific, International Organization for Migration.



Mr Mellicker began with the statement, the IOM migration agency reports that in 2020, Asia and the Pacific experienced almost 23 million internal displacements due to disasters, including rapid onset disasters like storms, floods, earthquakes, and landslides. This aligns with the 2010 average of 225 million people displaced in the region in the past decade due to rapid onset disasters. However, slow onset impacts of climate change, such as continued high carbon emissions and unequal development pathways, could force nearly 9 million people to move internally by 2050. The increasing frequency of intense events, such as floods and typhoons, has led to recurring and multiple displacements. These events can lead to increased vulnerability to future emergencies, compounded by existing insecurity and instability. Existing emergencies, combined with vulnerabilities created by climate change, create complex emergencies that lead to displacement.

The speaker discussed the challenges of climate change and its potential impact on people's livelihoods, jobs, and cultural connections. Climate security is another area where climate can fuel further disasters or displacement, as seen in Myanmar last year. While issues such as mass urbanization and akin trends are also being discussed, they emphasize the need to unpack these issues rather than view them as a single event. The speaker defines disaster management space

and risk as hazard plus exposure plus vulnerability equals risk. Gender plays a significant role in these factors, with women and other marginalized population groups facing increased risks due to future climate-induced displacement. Economically disadvantaged groups may be exposed to hazards due to living in flood-prone land or forced into remote locations to access water or other critical resources. Vulnerability is influenced by pre-existing factors, such as gender inequality, access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunity.

Mr Mellicker emphasized the importance of intersectionality, as it involves gender, economic status, and religious minorities, etc, creating dangerous conditions that make displacement more likely. The speaker proposed ways to manage climate change impacts: preventing, minimizing, and addressing them. He underlined the need to discuss the role of women and the vulnerabilities they face. The speaker also discussed the secondary impacts of climate change on macroeconomic stability and security.

Keynote Address: The geopolitics of conflicts of Myanmar

Chair: Dr. Misha Glenny, Rector, Institute for Human Sciences, (IWM) Vienna.



Dr, Misha Glenny began the session by exploring the relationship between geopolitics and migration. He introduced Bertil Lintner as an exceptional media person working for over forty years in the region. Mr Lintner discussed the concept of nationality and its impact on various cultures, particularly in the context of Myanmar. He touched upon the controversial change in the name of the country in 1985, from Burma to Myanmar, which meant a change for almost all the 135 national races of the country. This change was seen as a contradiction, as the Burmese language was not in vogue in the media.

Speaker: Mr. Bertil Lintner, Senior Journalist, Asia Times

Mr Lintner explained that the difference between the two terms is not semantic but rather a significant issue. In the 1990s, Aung San Suu Kyi initiated a movement called Dogama Arsenaeo, which focused on unity among all nationalities. However, the speaker noted that



there is no term in any language that links all the various nationalities and ethnic groups within the country. The speaker also discussed succinctly the 35 ethnic groups in the country, which in itself was a contradiction due to the complexity of the economy and the need for efficient resources. The speaker argued that the government's efforts to create a new nation-state were driven by the desire to recognize the diversity of the country. The speaker emphasized the importance of understanding and respecting the diverse cultures and languages in diverse societies, such as that of Myanmar. By acknowledging and addressing these issues, the speaker hoped, would lead to the creation of a more inclusive society. Mr Linter commented on the geopolitics of change in Myanmar, specifically mentioning the role of China and the United States, underlining the leverage of the former. He referred to the decisive shift in relations between China and Myanmar in a geopolitical sense after the Rohingya refugee crisis erupted in August 2017., the complications arising out of the coup of February 2021, though China's displeasure with the same did not result in disengagement.



Academic Session III

Theme: Gendered vulnerabilities under the rubrics of citizenship and statelessness

Chair: Geraldine Forbes, Professor Emeriti, State University of New York, Oswego, USA

Theme: LGBTQ Community in Lebanon

Speaker: Dr. Houwayda Matta Ramia, Chair, IDRC, St Joseph University, Lebanon.

Dr Ramia, in her presentation, observed that the LGBTQ refugees face a multitude of challenges, including legal, societal, and political. In Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and different parts of West Asia, they face a hostile environment, discrimination, and limited access to essential services like housing, education, and landscapes. They also face challenges in anti-slavery, such as decision-making, interpretation, and violence. Obtaining adequate gender identity documents is challenging, as is vulnerability and mis-disclosure. These refugees face increased risks of violence, harassment, social isolation, and mental health issues due to their gender identity and non-sexual orientation. Human rights organizations and NGOs face challenges in certain countries impacting the availability of support. Multiple marginalization refers to various forms of harm, including physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual assault, bullying, and discrimination. This process involves a multifaceted interplay of personal vulnerabilities and systemic factors.

Dr Ramia, referred to a study by a Masters student in social work that explored the social violence and discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ Syrian refugees in their community and beyond. The results represent the effects of multiple victimization, including domestic violence, critical and psychological violence from society, abduction, and discrimination. In Lebanon, LGBTQ+ individuals face displacement, arson, and violence perpetrated by roommates and partners. Factors contributing to this violence include jealousy, sexual



aggression, and hatred. The massive demonization experienced by children and LGBTQI adults results in a range of consequences that significantly impact their overall well-being. Integration plays a role in increasing vulnerability to health issues and enabling LGBTQI adults to stand their ground and emphasize social dynamics between members. A holistic approach is necessary to address these challenges and promote a more inclusive and supportive environment for LGBTQI refugees. Dr Ramia concluded on the note that addressing the needs of LGBTQI refugees requires establishing mental health services, reducing stigma, and providing culturally sensitive support. Community programs, education, and legal support are also necessary. Inclusive policies should advocate for anti-discrimination strategies and partner with LGBTQI backgrounders. Empowerment programs should develop skills and self-esteem, offering vocational training and employment opportunities. A researcher's foundation is needed to inform tailored interventions and policies.

Theme: Writing This History Like Touching Madness: Gender in 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War)

Speaker: Dr. Purna Banerjee, Associate Professor, Presidency University, Kolkata, India.

Dr Banerjee began her presentation by providing a context to the theme of her paper, which essentially dealt with the fictional representation of the Biranganas in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Liberation War, also known as the Bangladesh War of Independence, was a revolution and armed conflict sparked by the rise of the Bengali nationalist movement in East Pakistan. The war began on March 25, 1971, when Bangladeshi security forces launched operations against the people of East Pakistan, initiating the Bangladesh genocide. The situation reached a climax in 1970 when the Bangladeshi Awami League, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, won a democratic victory in the national election, giving the party the constitutional right to form a government. The League, on assuming power, brought the plight of Biranganas (war heroines) to the forefront through various media, including films, plays, photographs, novels, and short stories. The League's representation of Birangana is a married woman with late trauma, unable to testify to atrocities she experienced during the Liberation War. This figuration is related to incoherence and conformity, as Biranganas are enigmatically



taught not to be accepted within their families due to their sexual taint. The Birangana's voices were not included in the trial of those involved in the atrocities committed during the Liberation War, where their image was included. Uncovering the Birangana voices pushes us towards prioritizing fiction as a prison to be exhumed. Literature bridges memory and history by allowing for euphoria, melancholy, and mourning, representing the spectral effect of assets, the war traditions.

Dr Banerjee highlighted Amal and Alam's novels, which critique the state's constant rewriting of history by pushing the borders of truth-telling and mapping the notions of self. By focusing on porous genres and forms supplementing historiography, they help to repudiate the dominant absence of 1971 and disembodied subjects who make their stand first in the war. The discourse of Lina Amar in Bangladesh's post-liberation historiography often portrays her as a warrior, but this view is often distorted and stereotypical. To challenge this, we can examine the fictional narrative of Rehana Haq, a Bengali-speaking East Pakistani widow who lived in West Pakistan during the 1971 Liberation War. Rehana takes on the role of a nation-mother, guarding the threshold of a house that she wills to shelter her loved ones, shattering the discourse of sexual pollution and circumscribing living organs. She builds Shona, or Rose, a literal embodiment of pastoral Bangladeshi, and uses it to house Sohail and his country's patriots, Arik and Joy, as pro-liberation insurgents. Rehana-Rose herself and Indiangola refuse to just stand by and witness the literal Bangladesh, allowing Sohail to build Shona and Tata headquarters for anti-occupation guerrilla operations. By transmuting into a nation-mother, she prevents the rape of Bangladeshi children and situates Nargotra for her reality outside the perimeters of Indiangola and West, circumscribed by the patriarchal Bangladeshi state. The Golden Age, an English novel about the 1971 Liberation War, often reveals itself as Rehana's recall of her memories of the war. The novel explores the struggle between the real and imagined, with Rehana losing her privacy and being perceived as a horrible illness. This comparison with particularly East Pakistan, highlights the suppression of adequacy and readiness of the Bangladeshi nation.

Theme: Biometric data, identity, and refugee protection: The case of the Rohingya camp in Bangladesh (Biometric Identity and Refugee Protection)

Speaker: Professor Nasreen Chowdhory, Department of Political Science, University of Delhi, India.

Professor Chowdhory discussed the impact of information and communication technologies (ICT) on the humanitarian sector, particularly in the context of Rohingya camps in Bangladesh. The paper argued that biometric identification has a unique impact on refugees and individuals, with each person having a unique form of biometric existence. Biometric hieroglyphics impose computer-based identification of individuals by psychological characteristics such as fingerprints, iris, vagina, facial geography, and behavior-related characteristics. This estimation mirrors the objective constitution of identity of a citizen of body, which often prioritizes the role they play to be. However, the agency of technology in determining the material relevance of the body is undermined by scholars who structure the body as the site of great mediation, where the body itself is the medium and is simultaneously open to mediation via technology. Professor Chowdhory then discussed the biometric registration of refugee camps in Bangladesh, which was conducted jointly by the Bangladesh Ministry of Home Affairs and the UNHCR. Despite the challenges, the paper suggests that the process of biometric registration is still ongoing, with refugees in new settlements experiencing resistance.

The Rohingya refugee community in Myanmar has faced mixed structures and conditions, with some refugees voluntarily visiting for biometric restoration. In the third stage, authorized enumerators and officials conducted the collection of household data using biometric credentials to improve humanitarian assistance. The authorities and some refugees believed that biometric identification would enhance protection from trafficking and locate separated family members.



Professor Chowdhury went on to underline the intersectionality of gender identity and racial identity configurations. Gender relations prevalent among the households of migrants are fractured along with remembrance of home. A retrospective analysis is warranted because the potential reconstitution of life as a refugee often involves the reconstitution of a prevalent portion of family and the constitution of alternate approaches of survival promoted by anxiety and compulsions of exile. Gender is not a fixed attribute but acquired through social control constructs. The role of the community within Myanmar was sometimes demoralized and structurally excluded, leading to a sense of liminal existence of the Rohingya community in Myanmar. Masculinity among Rohingyas was largely associated with rare women's ability, trustworthiness, honesty, and capacity to protect her family, while femininity excludes more virtuous values like chastity, humility, and compassion. Female refugees have indicated strong tendencies to ensure the well-being of the household through greater resource distribution, indicating their capacity to navigate the structural definitions encountered in the camp. The narratives suggest that women are pushed to leave the household to take care of their family, and their husbands respond to this by managing household chores and complaining about abuse from local government officials. This vexation often leads to women adopting new choices, such as taking a livelihood as a daily wage labourer.

Professor Chowdhury concluded with the observations that the International Migration and Displacement Defense Policy Report suggests that biometric systems like the Biometric

Identity Management System (BIMS) improve operational efficiency in providing protection assistance and deliverable solutions. However, the dehumanizing nature of the body and the reduction of biometric identity to a passive one raise questions about agency, denial, and concreteness.

Academic Session IV

Theme: Geopolitics and Biopolitics: Everyday Experiences of the Displaced

Chair: Professor Lydia Potts, Coordinator, European Masters in Migration and Intercultural Relations, Carl Von Ossietzky University, Germany.

Theme: The Complex Nexus of Geopolitics and Biopolitics on the Health and Well-being of the Displaced: Evidence from Rohingya Refugees in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

Speaker: Dr. Monira Ahsan, Postdoctoral Researcher, Centre on Gender and Forced Displacement/Gender and Development Studies, AIT, Bangkok.

Dr Ahsan began her presentation with the statement that over the past 14 months, she has been working with female Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. The key determinants that pushed Rohingya people to flee Myanmar have a colonial legacy and regional geopolitics. The domestic and regional politics of South and Southeast Asian nation-states have significantly shaped the polarisation and politicisation of the minority Rohingya, resulting in their plight as vulnerable and precarious. Nevertheless, the stateless Rohingya people currently lack any legal protection as refugees in their host country, Bangladesh.



In the confluence of such geopolitics and biopolitics and their intersectionalities, the protracted displacement of the Rohingya refugees presents new sets of vulnerabilities as humanitarian funding is dwindling while inter and intra-communal, national, and regional security and geopolitics are escalating. Drawing on her recent field research in Bangladesh, Dr Ahsan's presentation revealed the gendered dimensions of health and well-being of the Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. It argued how the practical everyday implications of the complex nexus of geopolitics and biopolitics and their intersectionalities leave profound gendered impacts on the physical, mental, psycho-social, and reproductive health and well-being of Rohingya refugees in the confinement of the camps. Drawing on feminist methodologies, gender and decolonisation, and the gender framework, the presentation underlined the significance of gender and intersectionality as powerful determinants of healthcare access and utilisation in the lives of displaced populations.

Theme: Security of the Rohingya Refugees among Thai Muslims

Speaker: Dr. Amporn Marddent

Dr. Marddent began her presentation with the violent conflict that had begun in Rakhine State in 2016, as a result of which, the Rohingya refugees crossed the border not only into Bangladesh but into other countries as well. The speaker argued that Thailand is among one of the places the Rohingya crisis has become complicated due to geopolitical complexities. Rohingya refugees in Thailand remain an issue of a threat to their human security. The absence of domestic law that makes displaced refugees like the Rohingyas treated as illegal migrants and subject to arrest under the Immigration Act. This preliminary ethnographic research was undertaken to examine the lives of the Rohingya refugees on the cultural aspects of Thailand from a sub-urban community level perspective. A cultural lens to the study of the Rohingya' lives, particularly women within their community in central Thailand, broadened the understanding of security when the stream of the concept tended to frame refugees in crime and piracy as state security issues.



In summary, the speaker highlighted the importance of understanding the migration patterns and experiences of Burmese migrants in Thailand. There are no accurate numbers of Rohingyas in Thailand, but recent data suggests that there are around 10,000 Rohingyas in the country. The Rohingya leaders themselves have expressed their understanding and support for the Rohingya community, while the Rohingya Impact Power in Central Thailand has established a peace network. The Rohingya community in Thailand has a significant presence in the country, with around 10,000 volunteers. They support workers and uplift people through the Rohingya Association and establish a peace network in Central Thailand. A younger generation in Thailand aims to avoid association with the Rohingya people as a Muslim or religious minorities. The Rohingya community uses this as a movement, while the Thai community sees it as non-Muslim. Dr Marddent concluded with the statement that the government should stop denigrating self-empathy and support the Rohingya.

DAY II: 05 March 2024

Venue: AIT Conference Centre, Pathum Thani, Thailand.

Academic Session I

Chair: Professor Mokbul Morshed Ahmad, Head of Department, Department of Development and Sustainability (DDS)



The academic session on the second day began with an address by the AIT President, Professor Kazuo Yamamoto. Professor Yamamoto reaffirmed the institute's unwavering dedication to tackling pressing issues. He highlighted AIT's over two decades-long collaboration with Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), emphasizing its substantial contributions, particularly in the Gender and Development Studies program. Professor Yamamoto observed, "The IDRC-funded CGFD has played an instrumental role in advancing knowledge and leadership on forced displacement. This international conference serves as a platform for experts from various backgrounds to dissect the intersections of geopolitics, gender, and forced migration, fostering pivotal insights for addressing the challenges faced by displaced communities, especially in South and Southeast Asia".

The Presidential Address was followed by a Special Lecture.



Theme: Displacing the Geo and the Politics: Forcibly Displaced Rohingya Women in Bangladesh Camps.

Speaker: Professor Amena Mohsin

Professor Mohsin discussed the concept of geography and geopolitics, focusing on the experiences of women in camps in Cox's Bazar, Fenukia. She discussed how these camps, which have one million Rohingya refugees, challenge the Western way of writing geopolitics by separating geography from politics. The speaker also highlighted the gender aspect of geopolitics, as it is not just about women in politics but also about institutions, ethos, and values built around these concepts. She also discussed the masculine tools used to understand geography and politics, such as geopolitics, geographies, and boundaries. Geopolitics originated in Europe and was Eurocentric, with the state playing a significant role in the discourse. However, post-Cold War era South Asian discourses, such as constructivism and critical theorists, offer a different understanding of borders as processes rather than static or linear.



Professor Mohsin observed that critical theorists argue geography is not an objective category but a subjective category around which politics or life and living take place. Feminists also have a strong feminist understanding of geopolitics, challenging the geopolitical reproductions of power and broadening the domain of geopolitics by focusing on the linkages among people, places, events, and issues. They do not claim to offer a new theory of geopolitics, but rather a new approach to looking at politics and geography. Feminist geographers also develop scholarships that revolve around home and challenge established understandings of geopolitics, such as the state, welfare, and border security. They argue that geopolitics is about intimate geopolitics, where the distribution between global, local, political, and personal becomes blurred.

Professor Mohsin observed that over the past 7 years, the Rohingya people have been experiencing a transformation in their understanding of borders and the concept of borders as saviours. They have been able to express themselves and make narratives that suggest they are thinking differently about borders, with women and men also being marginalized within the same community. The main theme of this discussion is the perception that borders can be spaces for humanity and provide protection. The Rohingyas believe that their oppression in Myanmar was due to their religious identity, and on the other side of the border, a predominantly Muslim country, such as Bangladesh, they would be considered a saviour. They prefer to live peacefully in Canada or the United States, as there is enough empty space and land for them to live peacefully. This change in perception of general things and spaces is also evident in the politics and interventions happening within the camps. The Rohingyas use the words “apne raja” (king and sovereign) to describe their freedom and citizenship rights. They believe that others’ king is their own king, and but their (Rohingya’s) king is not their king. This concept of sovereignty and ownership is important to them, as they feel that they belong within the camps of Bangladesh, which they are not given refugee status. In conclusion, the

Rohingya people's perception of borders and the importance of citizenship rights and ownership is changing, as they are becoming more conscious of their rights and ownership

within the camps. This shift in perspective highlights the importance of understanding and respecting the unique experiences and perspectives of marginalized communities within the Rohingya community.

According to Professor Mohsin, the Bangladesh government has constructed camps in Bhashan Char for the Rohingyas, but they are unwilling to move due to concerns about space and community cohesion. They believe that leaving their homeland will break their community and cause them to feel like they are being taken to another border within another border. This reflects the life and living of a community and the politics of home. Crossing mental borders is also important for the Rohingyas, who have lost many members of their families and believe that they can cross over with full citizenship rights one day. They want to be near the border, as they believe that one day they will be able to go back with their full rights. The women in the Rohingya community want to have a proper border, as they cannot bury their children or husbands properly when crossing the border. They want to be buried in their homeland, as it is the place of their ancestors. They also want to have education in both mass English and Myanmar language, as the Bangladesh government expects them to return to their land.

Geography is a process that evolves, and mental space allows for the alteration of physical geography and politics surrounding it. The binary between high politics and low politics, as well as the binary between private and public, is a point in time that strengthens the masculine ethos of the state and politics. Professor Mohsin concluded with the statement that the Rohingyas' desire to return to their homeland and maintain their traditions while also crossing mental and physical borders is a complex issue.

Academic Session II

Theme: Trafficking, Forced Migration and Gender

Chair Professor Soraj Hongladoram, Director, Centre for Ethics of Science and Technology, Chulalongkorn University

Theme: Voices of the Displaced

Speakers: Mary Paula (Asian Institute of Technology)



Mary Paula observed that the IDP search function in Karenni state, Myanmar's smallest ethnic minority group, is currently facing severe fighting against the un-military group. Since the military cyber in 2021, conflict has escalated across the country, with over 4 million people internally displaced. Prior to the coup, there were around 500,000 IDPs in Myanmar, including 1 million people who no longer remain IDPs to seek refuge. The current IDP situation is more severe in some regions, like Karenni, where violence and discrimination are rampant. From the coup 2021 to now, people from Karreni have had to flee their residences and become IDPs, with around 300,000 within the smallest ethnic states. Over 200 IDP camps in Karreni have been moved at least three times due to military airstrikes. Free Burma radio states that there is no really safe place in Karreni right now. The humanitarian crisis in Karenni is exacerbated by ongoing fighting, insecurity, and remoteness. The majority of IDPs move to remote areas for safety, and they face mental hardship, abuse, violence, exploitation, and human trafficking due to their lack of control of power, authority, and limited access to resources. Women and girls are more vulnerable to discrimination due to their lack of livelihood opportunities and the loss of social community roles. In the process of conflict, women can be both agents and victims. They participate in various activities, such as taking leadership roles and organizing, and supporting families and fighters. However, they are also seen as weapons of war, with around 1 in 5 fully disabled women facing sexual abuse. Other measures faced by women in current camps include restrictions on mobility, low income, gambling, and privileges of return.

Aung Khant Min (Chiang Mai University)

Aung Khant Min, introduced himself as a Master of Social Sciences from Chiang Mai University and discussed the current situation in Myanmar, and changes in life and displacement before and after the coup. He elaborated upon the reasons and consequences of protest/s and protestors. He spoke of the lack of humanitarian aid, poor life conditions and



undocumented illegal status. He argued that the military is not a legitimate government and does not recognize international organizations and communities. The situation affects not only the gentry but also the elderly and senior citizens in the country. He also discussed the resolution for resettlement in India and emphasized the need for a more inclusive and inclusive approach to international relations.

Ayesha Siddiqa (Mahidol University)



Ayesha Siddiqa, discussed about her experiences as a refugee in Pakistan, where she faced discrimination and struggled to access education. She migrated to Thailand with her parents in 2013, feeling that her life was more important than her dreams and the threats she faced. She

longed to be the only woman in her family who could attend university but faced difficulties in obtaining a degree due to her national language and lack of English skills. She shared that she learned English through Google and YouTube, as she couldn't afford traditional classes. She aimed to become a human rights defender and pursue a bachelor's degree in business administration, which she completed in 12 years. She then went on to study international relations at Mahidol University in Bangkok. Throughout her journey, she fought for her rights and advocated for the women who were suffering in her community. She was the only refugee woman to achieve a university degree, representing all urban refugees from the community in Bangkok.

Ayesha's story highlighted the struggles faced by women in Pakistan and the importance of education in raising their voices and advocating for their rights. She believes that education is the only tool that can help raise awareness and create change for the women who are suffering in their communities. She emphasized the importance of education for women's confidence and the need for girls forced to leave their countries to find a better future. They advocate for universities to accept refugees, and last year, the UNHCR granted them a scholarship. This led to the enrolment of seven refugees in Siam University, who are now in their second semester. The speaker also addressed the depression in her community, highlighting the lack of professional support and facilities for women in Thailand. Ayesha hopes for better facilities and psychological support for these women. She also spoke about her international presentations and reiterated that education is crucial for women's confidence and empowerment.



The session was followed by a discussion with practitioners from the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Asylum Access Thailand, USAID, Winrock International, Migrasia Global Solutions Limited and the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW). They shared their experiences of forced migration, displacement, and trafficking in the region.



Ms Sara Piazano, Chief of Party, Winrock International, began by identifying 'the prevention of trafficking' as the core idea of the organization. However, the difficulty lies in how to achieve the objective and when to accept that the goal has been realized. The process includes the identification of trafficked victims, their rescue and subsequent integration within society. The process demands that we address certain research questions, such as identifying the people, and in order to do so, participatory research is required. It is crucial to build a bridge between the researcher and the practitioner. While sometimes the researcher can get funding, the practitioner can get recommendations that are feasible. It is necessary to have a budget and a work plan but one may have to contend with bias, bureaucracy and obstruction and sometimes compromises have to be made to meet the needs of the funder. Projects evaluate the output and outcomes. For the donor, the critical question is where/to which head, has the money been allocated and the number of victims who have been integrated, determines the success of a project.

Ms Isla Mairi Wilson, Programme Manager, Migrasia Global Solutions Limited, underlined the purpose of the organization she represents is to eliminate all sources of forced migration. She described her organization as a think tank premised on action research which identifies information gaps pertaining to forced migration. They possess a vast amount of data on forced displacement across geographies. She narrated the story of Julia, a domestic worker



from the Philippines, who went through an abusive experience in Saudi Arabia, wherein she was threatened that her hands would be cut, passport would be retained, was totally isolated, as such, her exit and entry visas were controlled by her employer. While Julia was safely repatriated with the collaboration of multiple stakeholders, justice has not been done, action has not been taken against all the agencies who had facilitated her forced displacement and subsequent persecution. Ms. Wilson observed that their work entails meeting the migrant workers, wherever they are situated, engaging in conversations to identify forced labour and aggressive cases of trafficking. The system operates both online and on the basis of one-to-one meetings with the objective of offering some form of remedy and is managed by a team of migration specialists.

Mr Chakkrid Chansang, Senior Protection and Empowerment Coordinator, IRC, Thailand, began with the statement that the organization he represents is focused on the displaced population. He went on to mention that within Asia, they have offices in Afghanistan, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Thailand etc. The organization began functioning in Thailand almost 40 years ago and is unique in terms of its operation, particularly in Mae Sot, in western Thailand. Mr Chansang remarked on the perceptible change that is visible with respect to the influx of undocumented migrants as the border is closed. The refugees come in either groups or families and very rarely with a plan. The idea being to cross the border and then see how things unfold. The camps along the borders make preparations for the resettlement programme. The greatest influx of refugees into Thailand was witnessed last year, between July to December. Mr Chansang specifically mentioned the challenges faced in distributing food in a humanitarian crisis such as this. In addition, they need to be aware of the reasons for crossing borders, that is, reasons of safety and security, due to participation in activism in Myanmar. The refugees need access to international as well as local-

organizations, who then figure out ways to provide security based on government rules and regulations. In other words, the collaboration and intervention of local governments/NGOs and international organizations is required in certain cases of a sudden influx of refugees. The ultimate objective is inculcating self-reliance and capacity building amongst the displaced population.



Matthijs Ivo Niks, Project Coordinator, ARPR Project, Asylum Access, Thailand, spoke about AAT's approach and the challenges that it has to contend with. He mentioned about a domestic law which was introduced in Thailand, last September, which allows temporary visas for that section of the forcibly displaced that cannot go back to their country due to the fear of prosecution. Mr Niks referred to the protected persons status, pointing out that the process was a long one and, as such, proved to be a huge deterrent for refugees to applying for this status. A prerequisite to applying for the status, was to be arrested and detained, not available to all with a long-drawn screening process. This in turn impacts their ability to work, access to healthcare, access to education, access to justice and disproportional rights of women and girls, as they not only face security risk but also additional layers of discrimination and exclusion from the host community as well as within their own community.

Mr Niks mentioned that AAT works with urban refugees in Bangkok and other parts of Thailand irrespective of their status with UNHCR. They check to see if the refugees face fear of prosecution in their own country among those who are already in Thailand. The organization provides advocacy, teams/groups go through the process of refugee status with UNHCR with the aim of obtaining refugee status from UNHCR. One team works with refugees who are arrested. They work with the police to release them from detention centers. Another team works in Bangkok for the organization of information sessions to share-

awareness of refugee rights, provide accurate information and interpretation of refugee rights. Other projects include capacity building, development of skills and inculcating self-reliance.



Srishty Anand, Programme Officer at GAATW (Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women) introduced her organization as a membership-based organization with its secretariat in Bangkok but with members from across the globe. The organization began its journey 30 years back, in 1994, with an emphasis on trafficking centered around women. The organization has over the years made significant contributions to the anti-trafficking movement. GAATW's Human Rights Standards in the Treatment of Trafficked Persons (1999) and the Human Rights and Trafficking in Persons (2000) were ground-breaking applications of human rights to the trafficking context and were instrumental in expanding the concept of trafficking in the United Nations Trafficking Protocol. Ms Anand pointed out presently the organization is focusing on women migrants, particularly those who are migrating for work. The emphasis is on the linkages between migration and trafficking and the lived experiences of the migrants. The organization focuses on research and advocacy with an emphasis on participatory research.

Ms Anand underlined the distinct political, cultural ethos of each country with their own border control regimes based on nationalist and sovereign approaches. The nature of border control (rigid/hard, soft/flexible) depends upon multiple factors such as the composition of the ruling class, class, race and gender etc.

Women's roles, their right to work is dependent upon the political agenda of the national dispensation. It is largely determined by the national policy to control the sexuality of the women. Women want to work, earn and live a good life but are often seen only participating in activities such as care work, domestic work and seasonal migration. These are low wage-



based works and fall under the category of tight visa policy where the workers are tied to their employers without much understanding of law enforcement and whose side the law enforcement would be. Under the circumstances, if they chose to walk out, they would be categorized as falling under irregular migration.

Academic Session III

Theme: Geopolitics and Biopolitics: Everyday Experiences of the Displaced

Chair: Professor Nasreen Chowdhory, Department of Political Science, University of Delhi.



Theme: The “abandoned” identities and realities of being a migrant worker: The case of the Bangladeshi women domestic migrants in Asia.

Speaker: Dr Poonam Sharma, International Centre for Cultural Studies (ICCS), NYCU, Taiwan

Dr. Poonam Sharma, a postdoctoral fellow at the International Centre for Cultural Studies at National Yang University in Taiwan, discussed the increasing presence of Bangladeshi women domestic migrants in Asia. The topic of her paper is “The Abandoned Identities and Realities of Being a Migrant Worker: The Case of the Bangladeshi Women Domestic Migrants in Asia.” She highlights the identity struggle, adjustments, and exploitation faced by these women migrant workers, particularly in parts of India and Asia. Migrants from Bangladesh often work in the domestic health and care industry, often without proper documents. This migration has increased drastically since the Bangladeshi government lifted the ban on migrating unskilled workers to seek work overseas. However, many women migrants face gender-based discrimination and structural and physical exploitation during their migration cycle.

The author’s research methods include surveys documenting socioeconomic conditions, age, educational qualifications, and the push and pull factors of migrating from home to destination countries. The data used in this study were collected from 2019 to 2023, and interviews were conducted in parts of India and not in Bangladesh. The author found that 33 of the 35 migrants initially denied their Bangladeshi origin, while only two shared their journeys. In contrast, both women migrants working in Malaysia were honest about their origin from the beginning. Employers of these migrants prefer to hide their identities due to mixed reactions from locals. The author also highlights the need for better understanding of the identities of women migrants and the challenges they face as outsiders. They argue that the lack of information rights and support from labour unions can lead to a culture of silence and marginalization of these women.



The discourse on racism, inferiority, exclusion, and identity in the racialized labour market has evolved significantly in recent times. New Racism has emerged in the post-colonial era, targeting different groups of migrants based on their intersections of social positionings, power relations, and hierarchies. Ethno-racism is directed towards groups who are not racially distinct but are considered inferior due to their different national or cultural origin. Bangladeshi women migrant workers, primarily domestic helpers, nannies, or caretakers in urban hubs like New Delhi, Bangalore, and Hyderabad, face this form of racialization. These women often struggle with discrimination and ignorance due to their lack of vocational skills. They often end up sheltering in trash trucks made of bamboo and plastic sheets in slum-like colonies shared by other migrant workers and menial labourers. Employers often threaten or take advantage of these migrants' attempts to hide their identities, leading to identity clashes with locals.

Despite these struggles and identity transformations, the demand for women workers continues to prevail. The precarity of the labour sector of women migrants is highlighted, and studies focusing on the causes of the struggles of Bangladeshi women migrants still take a back seat in mainstream academics. Modern nations' policies have not been successful in providing a secure and safe working environment for labour migrants, even in the present times. These migrants emerge as an essential element of the international labour market, operating with millions of labour migrants across international borders. They continue to cross borders after numerous hardships and life-threatening experiences, gradually forming a distinct identity that overshadows their original identity in their native places and the place they migrate. Dr Sharma concluded with the observation that the stories and experiences of these women migrants reveal the vulnerability and fragility embedded in their lives, as well as the transnational ruptures demanded by the capitalist market.

Theme: The Compounded Victimization of Women in Assam's NRC Process: A Geopolitical Analysis.

Speaker: Ms Shuma Talukdar, Corporate Lawyer and Corporate Governance Professional and Director of LexED Research, Kolkata, India.

Ms Talukdar began with the statement, "Corporate lawyers often face human rights issues in their work, such as the concept of corporate law where companies are only responsible to shareholders." However, stakeholder theory suggests that companies are also responsible for the environment and society they operate in. This is known as Environmental Social Governance (ESG). The WIPRO, a project assisting the Assam government in identifying illegal immigrants, failed to identify these social and ESG issues, leading to litigation and risk. The National Reconstruction Commission (NRC) was established in Assam to identify illegal immigrants who migrated primarily from Bangladesh. The cut-off date for inclusion in the NRC list was set on March 24, 1971, which coincided with Pakistan's Operation Searchlight in Bangladesh. To be included in the NRC list, applicants must submit a list of documents, including land and tenancy records, citizenship certificates, PRC, refugee registration certificates, passports, life insurance certificates, government issued licenses, employment certificates, bank PO accounts, birth certificates, educational certificates, and court records.



Ms Talukdar observed, Assam has a history of encountering Bengali Muslims, who were not always considered illegal immigrants. The first prime minister of British India, Sayyid Muhammad Sadullah, was from Bengali Muslim origin. The Ahomization process, ruled by Thai-born Ahom King, led to a multi-ethnic population in Assam, particularly in Karimganj, Kachar, and Dhubri districts. This increased Bengali Muslim population created apprehension about illegal immigration from bordering states. Identity, illegal immigration, and migration have always been part of Assam's politics. In the past, Bangladesh facilitated the operation of Ulfa, a training base for the Ulfa, but under Sheikh Hasina's leadership, the Ulfa leadership has been expelled from Bangladesh. This change was acknowledged by the Ulfa leader in December 2023. The Assam government, central government, and Ulfa leaders signed an agreement to enter peace talks with the Bangladesh government. The NRC identified nearly 50% of the 1.9 million population as illegal immigrants, with many women spending 10-15 years in detention camps. The lack of accountability in the legal system raises questions about who will compensate these women for their losses.

The speaker discussed the exclusion of approximately 1500 sex workers and their children from the final National Representation List (NRL) in Nagapatti, the largest red-light area in North East India, due to insufficient documents and lack of awareness about their ancestors. In Majid Bida, a flood-affected river island in Brahmaputra, nearly 40% of the excluded population are women and children, who are internally displaced (IDPs). The author argues that the NRC policy is gender-blind and has failed to consider women's individuality and identity. The author cites an example of a mother who was listed as a legitimate Indian but was not considered a citizen due to her husband's inability to make it to the NRC list. The author also mentions single mothers who may not want to pass on their citizenship to their children, which is unconstitutional. The speaker proposed several suggestions, including gender-sensitive documentation, alternative verification methods, women empowerment and legal literacy programs, cultural sensitivity training for NRC officials, inclusive policy formulations, comprehensive community engagement, regular policy evaluations, integrating a gender-

discriminated approach in data collection and analysis, and international collaboration to share best practices. Ms Talukdar concluded that IDPs should be recognized under international and domestic laws, as they are already IDPs in the NRC and victims of gender.

Theme: Gendering Salaita: Dissent in American Academia in the Era of Zionism

Speaker: Dr Debajoy Chanda, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Panskura Banamali College, India.

Dr. Chanda discussed the exploitation of free speech in American universities. The speaker argues that Zionists have no excuse to victimize scholars of Palestinian origin, as almost all of the US aid for Israel now goes towards funding the Israeli military. This situation is particularly relevant in the context of the Biden administration's refusal to call for a ceasefire, as nearly all of the aid goes towards Israel. The speaker traced the American prohibition on free speech back to how multicultural American universities functioned as a cult in the geopolitical wheel of the American-Israeli kinship during the 2000s against Gaza. The author argues that American universities run along corporatist financial lines feed into the American state's funding prerogatives and determine the logic of who would count as collateral damage when it comes to circumscribing the ethical imperative upon free speech.

In 2014, Ibn Salaita, a Palestinian-American literary studies scholar, was unhired from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for speaking out against the 2004 Israeli war against Gaza. Salaita's work focused on the intersection of studies of the Israeli occupation of Palestine and the occupation of American Indian lands in the United States. His tweets were taken out of context by unknown figures, possibly a network to Zionist rumors, who had some influence over the administrative workings of the university where Salaita was about to be employed.



Salaita's reputation was irrevocably damaged due to the tensions between Zionist donors, the American funding of the Israeli occupation of Palestine, and the consequent State of Palestinian Exception in the United States. Salaita's scholarly career was cut short, but his study of the history of occupation in Native American and Palestinian contexts was crucial. The State of Palestinian Exception curtailed freedom of speech for Palestinians in the US, and the University of Illinois used Salaita's work to critique Israel from within the American university system. This act of coercive silencing could be seen as a gendering of Salaita into docility. Scholar Joseph Massad argues that the Palestinian Nationalist Charter of 1964 portrays the Zionist occupation of Palestine as the rape of the land, with Palestinians as the children of Mother Palestine and the Zionist enemy as purely masculine. Salaita's transnational Palestinian identity is expected to be transmitted from fathers to sons. Dr Chandra raised the question, What about Salaita's gender position, then? Article 4 of the Charter states that this transnational Palestinian identity is quote, a genuine, inherent, and eternal trait and is transmitted from fathers to sons. Salaita, a Palestinian son, was expected to ascend to the throne as the Palestinian son speaking against the occupation of Mother Palestine's body by Israel and the United States of America. However, after 1947, the rape disqualified her from this role, and Salaita found himself in this position. Salaita was pigeon-holed into the axiom, Palestine as a woman and women as Palestine, as seen in works by Kazan Kanafani and Mahmoud Darwish. After the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois decided whether or not Salaita would be rehired, his prospects of employment were outvoted 8-1. This resulted in Salaita being left out of the decision-making process, and his wife Diana, who was not the nation's mother, was not included in the decision. A UN survey on Palestinian masculinities in 2017 found that men were more likely to report losing land, harassment, detention, difficulty accessing health services, and lost opportunities due to the occupation. This feminization of Palestinian masculinities played out in the context of the occupation.

Dr Chandra observed, the unhiring of Salaita is rooted in the post-2004 adjunctification of faculty in US higher educational institutions, which reduced academic labour to contingency. This reduction of academic labour to dispensability had the University of Illinois tip the scales against many prospective university faculty members. In November 2023, pro-Palestinian student activist Mohammad wore a mask to hide his identity while protesting against the University of Illinois, as if to hide his feminization under a mask of masculinity. The speaker discussed the feminization of protesters, including Palestinian activist Zaleta, who was reduced to a school bus driver for seven years before finding a job at an American university in Cairo. He argues that Saleta would not be tolerated in American institutions, and his supporters, Palestinians of ethnic origin, are not finding tenure-track jobs on American soil. The speaker also discussed Salaita's position on the 2021 war against Gaza, stating that his father will vote for Trump, rather than Biden, due to his belief in the lesser evil narrative.

Theme: Brothels and its relationship with geopolitics: A case study on migrant women in Kolkata

Speaker: Dr Sangbida Lahiri, Assistant Professor, JK Lakshmi pat University, India.

Dr Lahiri in her presentation discussed the relationship between brothels and geopolitics, specifically focusing on migrant women in Calcutta. It highlights the importance of the Durbar Mahila Samunnway Committee, a sex workers association, in developing cooperative roles for

women sex workers. The paper also highlights the International Sex Workers' Rights Day, initiated by Sonagachi sex workers in 2001, which is significant for their rights. The paper also discusses the connection between gender, geopolitics, and migration in sex work. It highlights that migration is mostly forced due to vulnerable situations, such as women migrating out of their homes or engaging in domestic work. The discovery of HIV in 1986 in India significantly regulated the space of sex work and sex workers' lives. Dr Lahiri in her presentation elaborated upon a case study of sex workers in Sonagachi, India, where the category of sex workers changed after the discovery of HIV. The previous categorization introduced new categories, such as Category A, Category B, and Category C. Category A and B are brothel-based and highly paid, with service charges included. These categories are mixed, as they do not solicit for work outside the area and depend on middlemen and pimps.

Customers who spend money in brothels are aware of the contamination of diseases and are not willing to disclose their identity. Middlemen and brothel keepers have a responsibility to maintain good hygiene and maintain the cleanliness of their brothels, observed Dr Lahiri.

Dr Lahiri, highlighted the challenges faced by sex workers in India, Bangladesh, and Nepal, particularly in category C. These workers are independent sex workers who come to India before the festive seasons and stay for 3-4 months or 6-5 years. They lack social security and face vulnerability, often forced to be migrant labourers. The working space for these workers violent, coercive, and unclean. Old age sex workers are particularly vulnerable as they often work in compromised situations, becoming traffickers and taking risks. They often become part of the coercive mechanism of brothels, often seeking rehabilitation and medical insurance. In Bengal, construction sites are renowned sex spaces, where women are often hired for both construction work and sex work. The presentation also discussed the situation in India and Bangladesh, where sex work is considered quasi-legal but not legally banned. Despite this, sex workers face numerous problems, particularly women, especially after the pandemic. Dr Lahiri observed, the situation is better with more customers, but labour rights and stigmas often make them struggle. The unregulated space of migrant workers is crucial in understanding how STDs, HIVs, and other diseases are spread by these vulnerable women workers.



Valedictory Session

Chair: Professor Paula Banerjee, IDRC Chair and Director, Centre on Gender and Forced Displacement, AIT, Bangkok



Theme: Gendered Reproduction of Labor and Geopolitics of Migration

Speaker: Professor Lydia Potts, Coordinator, European Masters in Migration and Intercultural Relations, Carl Von Ossietzky University, Germany.

The presentation explored the relationship between gendered reproduction of labour and the geopolitics of migration. Migrant labour is abundant globally, and dominant policies aim to manage and control migration. However, the issue is more complex, with migrants attracting and selecting the labour of choice, whether it's highly qualified or those who integrate smoothly. The presentation uses a visualization by Guy Arbour, a demographer in Hong Kong, to illustrate that global migration is relatively stable and growing within world regions. The graph shows that migrants from South Asia to West Asia are the majority, while smaller numbers are on the verge of going to North America or Europe. African migration is primarily happening within Africa, not to the global North, Europe, or the US. The presentation also confirms that the largest group of migrants in Europe is mobile within the EU, with 15 million migrants, excluding migrants from other parts of Europe. This idea of migration happening within world regions is linked to the reproduction of labour.

The European Union's population would have declined by 500,000 people in 2019 without inward migration, due to aging societies, low birth rates, and out-migration and return migration. COVID restrictions in 2020 and 2021 further impacted migration. Capitalist

economies require growth and an expanding workforce, affecting the reproduction of labour. The world's refugees are primarily in the Global South, with 85% of them hosted in developing countries. The top ten countries in 2023 are Russia, Poland, and Germany, which host a significant number of Ukrainian refugees. However, there are still issues and needs for discussion, such as the lack of Palestinian refugees in the list.



Global migration is occurring within world regions, with refugees primarily hosted in the Global South. Germany is a case study in this context, as it was the first influx of refugees after World War II. Germany hosts a high number of refugees, a trend seen in other European countries since the 1950s. Immigration has been a labour-market demand and a biopolitical necessity in under-capitalist conditions. Countries like France, the UK, Italy, and Spain have experienced a shift from labour-exporting to importing countries. This is due to birth rates below the replacement rate, which has been the case for decades. The German economy boomed in the late 1950s, leading to an additional labour force. From the late 1950s to the 1980s, migrant labour, known as guest workers, migrated to Germany. Around four million people migrated to Germany during this period. After the Cold War, ethnic Germans living in parts of the former Soviet Union could return to West Germany, as they were entitled to German citizenship and return. Approximately 3.5 million people came to West Germany with German passports, a silent process that was not considered migration.

In the early 1990s, Germany experienced the integration of ethnic Germans and the unification of East and West Germany, absorbing the economy and society. However, growing refugee movements from the Global South and North emerged due to the Balkan wars and Germany's role as a major migrant destination. In 2015, a wave of young adults migrated to Germany, with the perception that Syrians were well-educated. However, two paradigmatic shifts occurred in 2015, with approximately 1,000 young men harassing women and raping them at night. This led to a shift in the perception of Syrian refugees in Germany. Currently, 84% of Syrian refugees are Muslim, 71% have completed school, and only 31% have attended secondary school. Eight years later, 136,000 of them are employed, highlighting the limitations

they face in the labour market. The average age of Syrians arriving in Germany is 24, with many unaccompanied minors.

In 2023, Ukrainians arrived in Germany visa-free, with a lot of solidarity and public housing. The gender dimension is orchestrated by the Ukrainian state, with men not allowed to leave Ukraine. Most of these people are white, Christian, European, and well-educated. Only 9% of

Ukrainian refugees live in shelters, and 72% hold academic degrees. The social benefits Ukrainians receive are not based on asylum seekers' regulations, but they receive the same social benefits as German citizens. 77% of Ukrainian refugees come without their husbands, and one third are children. About half of these Ukrainian refugees plan to stay in Germany for an extended period, with 23% having a job. This is a significant number, as they are only in Germany for 2 years and mostly come with their children. The labor markets in Germany have depended on migrants, demography, and the welfare state for over half a century. In 2022, one in four Germans has a migration background, and the Jus Sanguinis principle, which states that if you are born German, you are German, remains strong. Ukrainian refugees represent an ideal biopolitical dimension, as they are highly educated, white, and Christian, unlike other groups with low or mid-level education.



The map in the presentation reflects capitalist economies, such as Thailand and China, where labour reproduction is a key issue. Mothers' labour of love remains essential for raising children but is not part of the capitalist production process. The welfare state contributes to raising children, but this is not sufficient. Migration has been an answer since colonial times, as labourers raised outside the capitalist sphere are subsidized by what is produced outside the capitalist sphere, primarily by women. The global migration system combines biopolitics and geopolitics, with forced migration and the role of migrants as the link between the North and the South. The family is at the heart of biopolitics, and migrants are the link between the North and the South.

In conclusion, the presentation focused on biopolitics and geopolitics, but also addressed issues of class, race, and religion in migration studies. Gender can be problematic when interacting with class, race, and religion. Professor Potts' valedictory lecture highlighted the question of primitive accumulation and choice within migration discourse. The general blue, or political elites, guides migration in Europe and North America, guiding white elites. Gender can be a double-edged sword, and other issues that have not been frontally confronted have been highlighted. The valedictory lecture highlighted the importance of confronting gender issues in migration studies.

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