

Author: Lizzie Andare
Co-Author: Professor Margarita
Mondaca; Dr. Nadine Blankvoort

Everyday resistance

The quiet fight for
belonging



INTRODUCTION

12 million (UNHCR, 2021) of 21.3 millions refugees have disabilities;
number is under-identified (WHO, 2023)

Refugee camps, intended to be temporary, met with permanence (Turner,
2016)

RWDs experience triple the risks of vulnerabilities while living in refugee
camps (Steindl et al., 2008)

- Disability: impairment interacting with other barriers, hindering participation (UNCRPD, 2006)
- Failure to accommodate, to adapt and assist, 'disables' not the impairment (Crock & Ernst, 2017)

Theoretical Frameworks

Intersectional lens

- Disabled refugees suffer layered disadvantages (Crock & Ernst, 2017) and can be marginalised in more than one way.
- Refugee status associated with political barriers and disability status, gender and age associated with social barriers compounds their challenges while living in camps (Steindl et al., 2008).
- Ignoring such complexities erases their intersected identities and realities in ways that can be dehumanising
- Effective support is mindful of intersectionality as it is the reality for many people experiencing forced displacement and living with disabilities
- The lives of refugees living with disabilities cannot be understood without presenting their whole story; it all interacts and feeds into each other

METHODOLOGY

- Qualitative, short-term ethnography
- Purposively sample and obtained 6 (5 males, 1 female) refugees with physical disabilities over 18 years of age
- Data collected from participants' lives, refugee context and objects of significance
- Participant observations, field notes, semi-structured interviews and visual data

FINDINGS

1. Migration Trajectory as Compounding Trauma

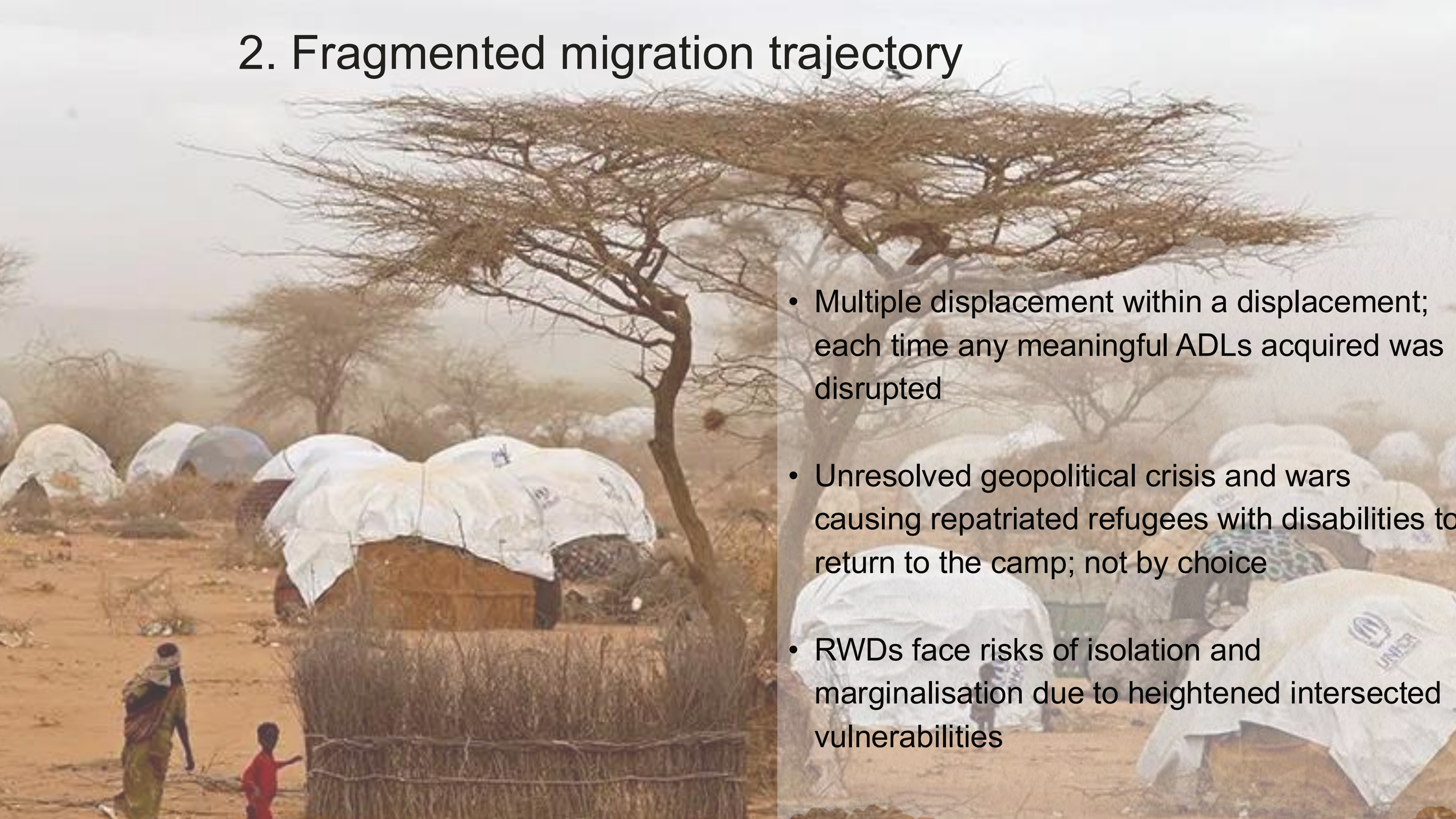
Journey acquires disability:

- Fled after father killed
- Dangerous, arduous routes
- Acquired disability before reaching camp

Result: Transitioning into camp with multiple disruptions

- Becoming a refugee
- Becoming disabled
- Losing family/caregivers (ALL AT ONCE)

2. Fragmented migration trajectory

- 
- Multiple displacement within a displacement; each time any meaningful ADLs acquired was disrupted
 - Unresolved geopolitical crisis and wars causing repatriated refugees with disabilities to return to the camp; not by choice
 - RWDs face risks of isolation and marginalisation due to heightened intersected vulnerabilities

3. Systemic failures as disabling environments

Camps designed as “temporary”= permanently inadequate

- Poor infrastructure (inaccessible terrain)
- Lack of urgent specialized healthcare
- Unsanitary conditions= deadly diseases= more disabilities/death

Environmental barriers + intersecting identities= occupational deprivation

4. A whole life unfolding in “temporary” space

- Refugee camp in practice is met with permanence (Turner, 2016)
- Resettlement and repatriation as durable solutions = living in state of limbo but life goes on
- All 6 participants arrived as children
- 2 out of the 6 got married and have children
- Both got divorced
- 1 is dating and hoping to get married; he is 50 years old
- All participants were on the resettlement waitlist from their teenage and young adulthood age

5. Pre-existing hardships evolving over time

- You're forced to flee. You become a refugee
- You become disabled during the journey. Now you're displaced and disabled.
- You lose your family, your caregivers during the journey. Now you're displaced, disabled, and isolated.
- You can't find work for three years because of discrimination. Now you're displaced, disabled, isolated, AND poor.
- The loneliness becomes unbearable. Suicidal ideation sets in. Now you're displaced, disabled, isolated, discriminated against, lonely, and actively wanting to die.

From research to action

OTs in Wartime Toolkit

Moving beyond documentation to disruption

Introducing: OTs in Wartime Toolkit

- Co-created with OTs in Haiti, Ukraine, Gaza, Ethiopia, Somalia
- Context-specific, community-led, grounded in lived experience
- Adaptive and reimagining; NOT prescriptive

This toolkit is: A rebellious act of resistance
NOT about adapting OT to war

The aim is not to adapt practice to war but to end the wars

Collective action

Decolonise OT Knowledge: redistribute power

- Practice critical reflexivity: examine our assumptions, biases, social position
- Center relational ethics
- Challenge biases and disrupt the status quo
- Amplify local knowledge
- Provide context-specific practice tailored to local realities
- Be disruptors- question practices that harm clients

Quiet fight for belonging is loud in
its refusal to be erased.

Endless Gratitude:

ELIZABETH CASSON TRUST 

Contact:

LinkedIn: Lizzie Andare

Instagram: @OTintheMargins

Email:

elizabethandare254@gmail.com

Let's Connect

