The COVID-19 Pandemic, (Im)Mobilities, and Migration in Southeast Asia

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Received: 31 January 2023 / Accepted: 4 June 2023 / Published: 28 June 2023

▸ Missbach, A., & Stange, G. (2023). The COVID-19 pandemic, (im)mobilities, and migration in Southeast Asia. *Advances in Southeast Asian Studies, 16*(1), 1-16.

creative commons www.seas.at 10.14764/10.ASEAS-0092

Rarely has a single subject seen such extensive participation in debate across numerous disciplines within international academic publishing as the COVID-19 pandemic. Considering its enduring nature and global impact, COVID-19 has transcended its initial health crisis and evolved into a multi-faceted crisis. According to Ali (2021), COVID-19 manifested as an economic, social, emotional/psychological, and political pandemic. Since its first detection in late 2019, COVID-19 profoundly affected the world's political, legal, social, economic, moral, and cultural systems, necessitating responses on multiple scales. This multiple crisis has demanded scientific explanations and technocratic solutions, while also prompting philosophical sense-making and even speculation about what lies ahead.

Due to the frequent use of metaphors likening the COVID-19 pandemic to warfare or invasion (Avalos & Moussawi, 2023), it is hardly surprising that defensive introspection and inward-looking perspectives were propelled by the pandemic. The swift and extensive arrival of the pandemic, along with its vast scope, immediately redirected attention to local living environments. Consequently, analyses focused on cities, provinces, and nation-states became readily available and were highly sought after, surpassing interest in developments elsewhere.

Developments outside of immediate contexts were further complicated by the virus's diverse dynamics and its rapid mutations, resulting in constantly evolving landscapes of contagion. The scope of the pandemic was simply overpowering and (academic) capacities were overwhelmed (early exemptions include Muhammad & Zanker, 2021). Throughout the pandemic, the prevailing tendency was towards inward-looking approaches, as vaccine nationalism took precedence over universal distribution schemes. International solidarity and transnational cooperation took a back seat, giving rise to a resurgence of nationalism. According to Christoph Horn (2020), the initial national responses to COVID-19 undermined significant progress achieved within supranational institutional frameworks responsible

for global governance in health, conflict, and migration, which had been established over the previous five decades. Now, more than three years since the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic, it is essential to reflect and shift our focus from immediate news announcements within our surroundings to broader, trans-regional, and long-term developments. In this special issue, we emphasize the nexus between migration and COVID-19 to capture some of the significant shifts initiated or catalyzed by the pandemic.

Even in non-pandemic times, migration presents numerous challenges for researchers and politicians alike. Depending on various individual factors such as aspirations, gender, class, age, legal status, and access to national migration systems, as well as broader structural conditions like political instability, forced displacement, and macroeconomic trends, migration flows and outcomes are often mixed at best. Given that COVID-19 infections spread through people's movements and ultimately rendered hundreds of millions immobile, the contributions in this collection concentrate on highly mobile people, including internally displaced people (Jaehn, 2023, this issue), refugees (Abd Jalil & Hoffstaedter, 2023, and Prabaningtyas et al., 2023, this issue), and international students (Missbach & Purdey, 2023, this issue), as well as researchers and labor migrants (Cusripituck & Yamabhai, 2023, this issue). Recognizing the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to study disruptions in migration and mobility, this special issue explores topics and trends that have been insufficiently addressed thus far. While the contributions in this collection primarily examine the limitations, restrictions, and challenges brought about by the pandemic and the responses to it, some also highlight new possibilities and opportunities (see Cusripituck & Yamabhai, 2023, and Stange et al., 2023, this issue).

When studying the migration-COVID-19 nexus in specific locations, Southeast Asia invites such engagement for various reasons. Southeast Asian societies exhibit high levels of both domestic (mainly rural-to-urban) and international mobility (mostly from 'poor' to 'rich' countries). For many Southeast Asians, short-term and long-lasting migration has become an integral part of life, if not a way of life itself. Southeast Asia plays a crucial role as a major exporter of temporary migrant labor, particularly to the Middle East and other parts of Asia such as Korea, Taiwan, and Japan (Foley & Piper, 2021; Palmer, 2016). Even intra-regional labor migration, such as from Indonesia to Malaysia or from the Philippines and Thailand to Singapore, holds significant importance. Without the influx of international labor migrants and rural-to-urban migrants, who are willing to take up 3-D (difficult, dangerous, and demeaning) jobs at low pay, Southeast Asian metropoles would be smaller and less vibrant. Moreover, many essential sectors like hospitality, healthcare, construction, retail, and agriculture would suffer from labor shortages. Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, Southeast Asian countries hosted approximately 10 million international migrants, nearly half of whom were women, working outside their countries of birth (ILO, 2020a; Ullah, 2022). The recruitment of labor migrants and the facilitation of their movement have become substantial sources of revenue for states and their associates,[1] not to mention the remittances sent back by migrants to their families

1 Moreover, the migration industry relies largely on private agencies and their brokerage services for recruitment, facilitation of migration, and surveillance of labour migrants.

and communities in their countries of origin. Unlike migration linked to long-term integration or settlement in liberal democratic states of the Global North, a significant portion of low-skilled migration in Southeast Asia is limited to temporary employment, with little to no pathways to full and permanent integration (Yeoh, 2022). The inherent transience of labor and other forms of migration became the weak point of these migration systems once COVID-19 disrupted the usual dynamics of migration and mobility, a topic extensively discussed by the contributors of this issue.

Beside vibrant labor migration, Southeast Asia has one of the highest rates of internal displacement globally, not only due to natural and human-induced environmental disasters (Miller & Douglas, 2018), but also due to ethnic, religious, and social conflict. The exodus of close to one million Rohingya, an ethnic-religious minority from Myanmar, to Bangladesh in 2017 and their subsequent secondary movements to Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia is the most crucial forced displacement in the region, but by far not the only one. Despite open conflict, ongoing tensions, and political instability, some Southeast Asian countries have also become hosts for other extra-regional forced migrants, for example from Afghanistan, Somalia, and the Middle East. In particular, Malaysia and Thailand have been accommodating tens of thousands of refugees, asylum seekers, and also undocumented (forced) migrants, often living under precarious circumstances for protracted periods of time (Koizumi & Hoffstaedter, 2015; Missbach, 2015; Stange et al., 2019). Given the lasting unwillingness to become signatories to the 1951 International Refugee Convention and its 1967 protocol, as well as the disregard for protection claims issued by asylum seekers, those people are often just categorized as 'irregular/illegal' migrants by the receiving states (Kneebone et al., forthcoming).

Keeping in mind Southeast Asia's heterogeneous migrant population in terms of ethnic-religious affiliations, educational and skills levels, earning capacities, and general needs, it is important to acknowledge the range of their legal statuses, social acceptance, and (trans-)local embeddedness. In handling COVID-19 infections, treatment and prevention have been closely intertwined with these three factors. It was hardly surprising to see that the virus succeeded in hurting mostly those who were already vulnerable, as they carried the wrong legal label, lacked strong social contacts, and lived at the margins of the host society (Schmidt-Sane et al., 2020). Considering the many ruptures brought by the pandemic, it is necessary to explore and analyze from various perspectives the intersections between COVID-19 and migrants in or from Southeast Asia, as well as the mid- to long-term transformations of the norms, practices, and experiences of migration and mobility within Southeast Asia and beyond.

Aside from those migration-related factors that make Southeast Asia a productive site for the study of the migration-COVID-19 nexus, it is important not to lose track of other crucial developmental features that impacted the progression and handling of the pandemic. Southeast Asian countries occupy various positions along the development spectrum. The 'poorer' ones are known to have been struggling prior to the pandemic in terms of economic disparities and inadequate infrastructures, such as limited access to healthcare and education, clean water, and electricity, in addition to large-scale unemployment and poverty. The enormous discrepancies in the public and private healthcare systems are undeniable. The underfunding of the public healthcare sector has had many negative repercussions for large segments

of the population throughout the early stages of the pandemic when denial of the existence of the pandemic and underreporting of infections and death rates were particularly widespread. To some extent, even the more affluent countries with better public provisions have been weathered by various earlier crises, including the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, and the 2008 Global Financial Crisis.

Previous crisis encounters may have shaped the way some Southeast Asian governments dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 was not the only "frightening enemy" (Grundy-Warr & Li, 2020, p. 499), but the pandemic was used as justification by the authoritarian government in Myanmar to claim extraordinary powers (Jaehn, 2023, this issue), to legitimize an increasingly securitized response to immigration in Malaysia (Abd Jalil & Hoffstaedter, 2023, this issue; Khanna, 2020), and to bust union activists in Cambodia (HWR, 2022). In some cases, perhaps, the state's anti-COVID-19 measures proved to be more fatal than the actual infection by the virus.

LESSONS LEARNED SO FAR

A general tenor across the social sciences is that the COVID-19 pandemic has further aggravated pre-existing injustices, prejudices, and inequalities, including (im)mobility inequalities (Avalos & Moussawi, 2023; De Genova, 2021; Jensen, 2021; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2022; Muhammad & Zanker, 2021; Velasco, 2021; Ye, 2021). COVID-19 attested that both "mobility but also immobility can be used as a kind of capital (in the Bourdieuan sense), a right and resource that not everyone enjoys and has access to" (Salazar, 2021, p. 12). Based on our systematic yet highly selective readings of publications covering COVID-19 and issues of migration and mobility, we delineated the following sub-themes and observations that support this notion of amplification of global inequalities due to the pandemic, and which are also highly relevant for our more specific deliberations on the impacts of COVID-19 on migration and mobility in Southeast Asia, featured in this special issue.

Re-bordering

Confronted with the rapid spread of a viral disease, governments worldwide implemented various migration management measures, such as border closures, travel restrictions, and lockdowns to prevent or mitigate the spread of the virus. As of 23 March, 2022, at least 174 countries had implemented travel bans, border closures, and other mobility restrictions (IOM, 2020). These stern mobility restrictions at subnational, national, and international levels led to a process of re-bordering, where previously diminished or relaxed borders reemerged and became more rigid, and borders that were already heavily guarded before the pandemic became further militarized (Suhardiman et al., 2021). The global sense of emergency, rooted in the labeling of cross-border movements as a health risk, gave rise to new forms of migration governance, manifested in unprecedented global lockdowns. Flights were grounded, people stayed at home, and freedom of movement came to an abrupt halt, at least for very many individuals.

While most observers noted the "great immobility" brought about by COVID-19, the significant rush of individuals returning home triggered by the pandemic should not be overlooked. Xiang Biao introduced the concept of "shock mobilities" early on, referring to "sudden human movements in response to acute disruptions" (Xiang, 2021, p. 1). Some Global North countries spared no expenses or efforts to evacuate and rescue their citizens stranded in holiday destinations or work placements abroad. Meanwhile, many labor migrants from the Global South had to fend for themselves (Stange et al., 2023, this issue). Some individuals walked or cycled hundreds of kilometers just to reach their homes, with many of them dying on their way (Pandey, 2020). Between late March 2020, after the Indian government announced a nationwide lockdown, and late May 2020, 7.5 million domestic Indian migrants flocked back to their homes (Xiang, 2021).

Shock mobility encompasses degrees of forced migration but typically lasts only briefly. However, there have been cases where shock mobility resulted into more protracted forced migration. News reports revealed that an Indonesian crew was forced to stay at sea for 13 months and continue fishing before being allowed to disembark in South Korea (Carvalho, 2020). During this extended voyage, four crew members died, with three of them being dumped overboard without any official report or investigation into the cause of their deaths. The surviving crew members were repatriated to Indonesia and left waiting for unpaid wages. They were unable to seek compensation for their outstanding wages, despite international laws that, at least in theory, stipulate the right of migrant workers to receive unpaid wages. This extreme case illustrates the common treatment of deported or repatriated migrant workers, which was further exacerbated during the pandemic. Globally, between 150,000 and 200,000 seafarers were trapped on board ships as of June 2020 due to port closures (ILO, 2020b).

While border closures were justified as being in the interest of everyone and held the promise of future freedom (Heller, 2021), the reality was that borders were not as impenetrable as often portrayed by politicians and decision-makers. Only "essential" border crossings were allowed to uphold basic services such as healthcare and food production, as well as crucial sectors like agriculture and transport (Guild, 2020). The sudden and, in many cases, complete closure of national and sub-national borders due to COVID-19 had severe consequences for migrants who play vital roles in essential services such as healthcare, social care, and food supply chains (Anderson et al., 2021). While the interests of the host society and its citizens took precedence, and specific exemptions were granted for border crossings, there was lesser attention given to the fragility of migrant livelihoods and the disruption to their careers and income-generating mechanisms, resulting in what could be described as enforced impoverishment. The indifference towards migrants' lives in comparison to the privileges enjoyed by citizens was striking and manifested in various forms. Fassin (2020) interpreted the differential treatment of migrants and citizens in emergency measures as indicative of a broader moral hierarchy that positions migrants at the bottom.

Pathologizing mobility and associating migrants with disease has influenced immigration control for centuries (Boris, 2022; Cresswell, 2021). The stigmatization of migrants, particularly those seen as unruly, culminated in accusations of being 'superspreaders'. As migration and mobility became increasingly politicized across states and regions, it seemed 'natural' for state responses to COVID-19 to adopt

further security measures and restrictions on cross-border movements. Aradau and Tazzioli (2021) observed that "COVID-19 has not only become coterminous with borders and bordering, but it has entrenched their acceptability as techniques of governing" (p. 3). Yet, for those such as refugees, for whom mobility was not just essential but even existential (Salazar, 2021), border closures created risks that, in some cases, became life-threatening (Reidy, 2021). Discriminatory practices arising from emergency measures turned "those at risk into a risk" in the name of health and safety (Mezzadra & Stierl, 2020).

During the early stages of the pandemic, there was not only an increase in diverse bordering mechanisms, but, more importantly, the enforcement of these more restrictive border management practices was often uneven. This was not a coincidence, but rather reflected pre-existing b/ordering techniques and socio-political boundary-making. Even during the strictest border closures, there were exemptions, and the preferences for who was allowed to enter and who needed to stay out perpetuated enduring class-based asymmetries and racialized inequalities. Elites and politicians often set poor examples, seeking special concessions for their own transgressions (as was prominently exemplified by the "Partygate" affair that evolved around Boris Johnson, the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (Allegretti, 2023)), thus exacerbating existing mistrust in elected leaders and state institutions.

While none of the bordering measures proved successful in halting the spread of the virus, primarily due to its uncontrollable nature, these measures were eventually relaxed and lifted, albeit not uniformly or for everyone to the same extent (Heller, 2021). In the context of vaccine nationalism and immuno-privileges, crossing international borders required not only passports and visas, but also an internationally recognized proof of up-to-date immunization, commonly referred to as COVID passports. In the years ahead, migration scholars must strive to better comprehend why the emergency-governance nexus unfolded during the COVID-19 pandemic and uncover any remnants of bordering mechanisms that may persist in the post-pandemic era.

Intensifying rejection of those seeking asylum

Long before COVID-19 struck, several scholars had bemoaned the "politics of rejection" (Heyman, 2012), the "death of asylum" (Mountz, 2020), and the fact that the chances to find refuge had shifted "beyond reach" (FitzGerald, 2019) because the global system that was supposed to guarantee protection to persecuted people was no longer functioning. Mountz (2020) shed light on the global chain of remote detention centers used by states of the Global North to confine people fleeing violence and poverty and thereby preventing them from accessing the national territories from where they could launch asylum applications. FitzGerald (2019) analyzed additional, non-territorial measures of exclusion adopted by the rich democracies to systematically shut down legal paths to safety and protection. The onset of the pandemic that saw abrupt border closures, therefore, provided most useful justifications to intensifying the politics of rejections towards refugees, as they were immediately associated with the deadly disease. The prohibitions to disembark migrants rescued in the Mediterranean Sea, introduced by Italy and Malta, clearly illustrate these politics of rejection in the name of preventing COVID-19 from spreading (Tazzioli & Stierl, 2021).

The hostile rejections did not only play out in the borderlands around the Global North, but also along migration corridors in the Global South, where potential transit and destination countries implemented disembarkation bans. One notorious example for ramping up border protection and enforcing rejections is Malaysia, which according to Malaysian authorities had blocked at least 22 refugee boats in the first half of 2022 alone (HRW, 2020). In public statements, the Malaysian authorities made no secret of their motivations and justified their action by claiming that boat passengers would otherwise bring COVID-19 into the country (Royal Malaysian Airforce, 2020). The fear of contagion was utilized to cover up deep-seated xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiments that have prevailed for decades (see also Abd Jalil & Hoffstaedter, 2023, this issue). Instead of blaming refugees for being potential criminals or threats to the host society pre-emptively, this time around they were blamed as potential carriers of disease. Despite protest from several UN agencies that were concerned with protection of maritime refugees in distress, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Malaysia and Indonesia continued their pushbacks throughout the pandemic widely unhindered (Khanna, 2020).

While COVID-19 reactions are commonly associated with a standstill and deceleration of mobility, it is important to recognize that pushbacks and other refoulement practices have resulted in (en)forced mobilities (De Genova, 2022; Xiang, 2021). In the United States, the COVID-19 crisis provided the Trump administration with an opportunity to use health justifications to expel individuals arriving at the border, even if they were being returned to life-threatening circumstances (Adey et al., 2021). Reports of fast-track deportations to Myanmar also emerged from Malaysia. Despite the relaxation of bordering measures related to COVID-19, there is reason to believe that the intensified politics of rejection and other forms of necropolitical cruelties may persist beyond the pandemic. Tazzioli and Stierl (2021) argue that the seemingly temporary responses to an unprecedented health crisis do in fact have a long afterlife. Not least, as the pandemic "has been seized as an opportunity to strengthen existing deterrence measures and hamper migrants' access to asylum through biopolitical and spatial tactics that aim to restructure the border regime" (p. 539).

Confinement and segregation

Responses to COVID-19 have given rise to a continuum of confinement rooted in an underlying hygienic-sanitary logic (Aradau & Tazzioli, 2021). Whether embraced voluntarily or not, measures such as social and physical distancing, lockdowns, quarantine, or self-isolation were initially seen as a means to prevent or slow down infections. While the retreat into private spaces for well-to-do citizens may have constituted an unexpected and novel experience of isolation, their confinement can still be seen as a privilege, especially for those who received financial compensation for staying at or working from home. However, for others who could not afford to stay home but were still obligated to do so, confinement was not just uncomfortable but rather a punitive experience and a severe disruption of their income strategies. The affective rule of the pandemic hailed from the implementation of lockdowns, which in turn revitalized segregation patterns between those who belong and those who

seemingly do not belong to the nation, thereby seeking to legitimize the treatment of migrants differently from the rest of society. As land-based confinement spaces such as vacant hotels and unoccupied barracks became fully occupied during the pandemic, floating spaces such as quarantine ships referred to as "floating hotspots" in the Mediterranean Sea were utilized to confine migrants (Giacomelli & Walker, 2022).

Having already pointed out to the "racialized confinement" along the borders separating the Global North from the Global South (Tazzioli & Stierl, 2021, p. 539), confinement measures also accentuated segregation within by reinforcing the topographies of separation between citizens and non-citizens. In some cases, they exposed the "bare viscerality of biopolitics already in place prior to the pandemic" (Ye, 2021, p. 1895). Confinements in various spaces not only temporarily prevented conviviality but also manifested difference through place-based diversification that was heavily policed. The pandemic notably amplified forms of 'citizens-first' chauvinism and anti-immigrant sentiments, particularly in relation to accessing medical care. Assuming that migrants are problematic and difficult-to-manage subjects, for example, low-wage labor migrants in Singapore were confined to their dormitories, and Afghan refugees in Indonesia to their shelters (Mixed Migration Centre, 2020; Ye, 2021). This risked exacerbating COVID-19 health risks through densely packed forms of collective confinement. Over 1.2 million Rohingya refugees were confined to camps along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border. Public risk assessments fluctuated between the need to protect camp inhabitants from sick members of the surrounding host society and the need to protect the host society from sick refugees in the camps. Regardless, their confinement often meant limited access to fresh food, medical services, vaccinations, and other essentials. In other words, confinements undertaken for precaution and safety became "the formula which encapsulates the politics of containment in COVID times" (Tazzioli & Stierl, 2021, p. 550), ultimately forcing refugees to share cramped spaces instead of being protected from exposure to the virus. From this perspective, the confined were effectively "displaced in place" (Crawley & Nyahuye, 2022, p. 25).

Heller (2021) spoke of "sanitary apartheid" (p. 113) to capture the attempts to separate populations designated as at risk of COVID-19 infection from those designated as COVID-free, which clearly echoes the earlier perception of "global apartheid" (Richmond & Valtonen, 1994) that uses citizenship and visa restrictions to police the differential access to mobility founded on race and class. Also, in other regions, confinement and containment measures were justified to support the safety of both migrants as well as the broader host society, but often required exceptional authoritarian backing in order to be enforced. Yet, in reality it was not always clear who needed to be protected from whom or who was seen as riskier transmitters of COVID-19. The vagueness supported measures that saw migrants being pitted against poor citizens, not least as those confined in crowded dormitories, camps, and shelters were simultaneously blamed for constituting a breeding ground for the virus. Poor people, rather than the enabling political conditions of poverty, were blamed for their own vulnerability and higher mortality rates as well as the spread of the virus (Mudhoffir & Hadiz, 2021).

Given that many of those assigned spaces were contested by those confined there and living in enclaves was resisted, states had to monitor their pandemic regulations and pastoral practices with different technologies of mass surveillance. As observed by Molland (2021), the focus of de-territorial governance shifts from keeping people

in fixed locations to tracking individuals as they traverse through territory. This resulted in the introduction of new mobile applications designed to monitor the spread of infections by tracking people's movements. Additionally, individuals were required to scan QR codes when accessing public spaces as a means to monitor their mobility. Instead of confining people to their homes and limiting their mobility, these measures allowed for increased agility, but at the cost of constant surveillance and the tracing of encounters with others. Permissible mobility was contingent on up-to-date information regarding individuals' past infections, vaccination status, and current test results. Those found to be in violation of the rules could face reprimands, fines, or even arrest. In Singapore, there were reports of labor migrants who breached social distancing and confinement rules having their work permits revoked (Ye, 2021).

Waiting in stasis

Next to spatially separating people from each other and confining them to specific spaces, pandemic confinement also entailed specific temporal dimensions. COVID-19 mandates produced mobility regimes with distinctly slow or decelerated temporalities (Avalos & Moussawi, 2023), which, however, played out very differently for different people, following suit with the long-established hierarchies of inequality. Although the outcomes of such measures negatively affected all people concerned by them, from an intersectional perspective the impacts varied tremendously according to the fault lines of gender, class, and age, but also residency status and socio-economic inequalities. COVID-19 became associated not only with deceleration of public life but particularly with waiting. The fewer privileges people had during the pandemic, the longer their waiting and the more hindered their mobilities. Social scientists have studied particularly the temporality-anxiety nexus that resulted from many COVID-19 public health measures. Resulting from their research in Macau, Zuev & Hannam (2021) developed the notion of 'anxious immobilities' to capture the mid- and long-term experiences of waiting associated with COVID-19 related lockdowns. According to them, anxious immobility is "characterized by a total disruption of everyday rhythms and anxious waiting for a return to normalization of activity" (Zuev & Hannam, 2021, p. 35).

Waiting for life to resume or continue the way people knew it was not just a natural outcome of the pandemic. But waiting was in fact produced and intensified through the creation of ever more legal, administrative, and infrastructural measures that intensified the experience of individual and collective acts of waiting. Over the last decade, migration scholars have interrogated the connections between time and temporality in regard to movement, migration governance, and immobilization (De Genova, 2022; Jacobsen et al., 2021). Prolonged periods of waiting and stasis increasingly characterize the lives of refugees, asylum seekers, and other irregular(ized) migrants. A core element of people's experiences navigating immigration institutions is the act of waiting (Torres et al., 2022). Chronic and cumulated waiting for being able to register as an asylum seeker, to conduct status determination interviews and await the outcome, or to be chosen for resettlement or any other assistance program while being excluded from geographic and social mobility can exhaust people far in excess.

While waiting, people are to remain in protracted uncertainty until their cases are resolved. But the waiting they have to face proceeds unevenly, often arbitrarily, and more often defies legal transparency. The temporal suspension of mobility goes hand in hand with spatial uncertainties in regard to when, where, and how people can stage their legal claims. This became particularly visible in the US-Mexico context and along the migration corridors in Southern and Central America where thousands of asylum-seekers had gotten stuck. In a way, their lockdown began long before the COVID-19 pandemic, yet for these immobilized people the COVID-19 related lockdown measures then provided the final blow to their immobilization (Torres et al., 2022). Welander (2021) has coined the notion of "politics of exhaustion", by which she refers to the "raft of (micro) practices and methods strategically aimed to deter, control, and exclude certain groups of people on the move who have been profiled as 'undesirable,' with a detrimental (un)intended impact on [their] lives" (p. 29). The fact that many countries suspended asylum registration and resettlement at the start of the pandemic shows how waiting was made deliberately indefinite, and how those countries failed in properly protecting those under their mandate.

Exploitation, (hyper)precarity and detouring

COVID-19 restrictions have widely exacerbated pre-existing conditions of lived precarity and social inequality for many documented low-wage migrants who have already been living under perilous conditions prior to the pandemic. Their precarity was founded in and exacerbated by migrants' limited knowledge about their workplace rights, language barriers, and the limited interaction with local society that increases the isolation and active exclusion they often face. Fueled by public responses to mitigate COVID-19, they, more than others, faced unjust wage-reductions and unlawful deductions for food, accommodation, and other expenses. Those defined to constitute 'essential' workers during the pandemic also faced increased health risks when conducting risky transmissions in lowly paid sectors such as health service, food industry and retail. Their lack of privilege to stay at home and live on wage continuation or special COVID-19 related hardship-allowances meant that they were not only 'essential' but indeed 'sacrificial' workers in light of the insufficient safety measures provided, which in the worst of cases turned them into 'disposable' workers who were not granted basic rights as they could be replaced with ease. In this regard, Mezzadra and Neilson (2022) speak of the 'Capitalist virus', thus stressing "how the pandemic has intensified capitalist forms of extraction and exploitation" (p. 2). It comes as no surprise that migrant workers died at a higher rate than non-migrants during the first phases of the pandemic.

Loss of jobs and income during the pandemic have further increased instability and precarity, not just for the migrants themselves but also for their families back home. Unemployment and unpaid salaries meant that those families lost remittances, a lifeline to about one billion people worldwide. Foley and Piper (2021) reported the widespread non- or underpayment of wages for essential but widely undervalued work provided by Southeast Asian migrant workers in the Middle East during the pandemic. Those with temporary working contracts are usually excluded from national social protection provisions. If they lost their jobs, they were often forced to accept less

beneficial salaries and conditions of employment, while others faced termination of their work permit and possible deportation. More than two million labor migrants in Southeast Asia lost their jobs and had to return to their home countries (ASEAN, 2022).

While risks of abuse and exploitation for documented labor migrants intensified enormously during the pandemic, for undocumented and, thus, illegal(ized) migrants heightened precarity became catastrophic. Having already pointed out the exclusionary practices directed at those who were deemed not to belong to national populations during the pandemic, some had no other choice but to withdraw even more from society and try to live clandestine lives to avoid any contact with authorities and circumventing control measures such as vaccine passports and COVID-19 tests. Illegal(ized) and undocumented forms of migration and residence translated into unregulated livelihood pathways that further intensified migrant exclusions and the pressure to take even higher risks (Suhardiman et al., 2021). The appeal to stay home was particularly overwhelming for those who did not have a proper home, as the pandemic had made them homeless. For example, many live-in domestic workers who had been taking care of children at their employers' house, found themselves roaming streets at the onset of the pandemic (Pandey et al., 2021). This hyper-precarity results from destroyed livelihoods on the one hand and "the limited choice, or even complete absence, of any substitute strategies for generating an income on the other hand that would allow them to meet the costs of living in a lawful manner" (Missbach, 2022, p. 109).

While the negative impacts on migrants and refugees during the pandemic were in many regards disastrous, it needs to be acknowledged that "even against the considerable forces aligned to immobilize their movement, or to subject them to the stringent and exclusionary rules and constrictions of asylum, the subjective autonomy of human mobility remains an incorrigible force" (De Genova, 2022, p. 143). According to Aradau and Tazzioli (2021), COVID-19 did not entirely put on hold nor substantially decelerate migrants' movements for long, but rather redirected their routes and flows. For example, arrivals from Libya to Italy (Central Mediterranean route) have intensified, while those from Turkey to Greece (Eastern Mediterranean route) decreased. A similar shift can be noticed in regard to Rohingya movements across the Andaman Sea as well as the land routes (Khanna, 2020).

Concomitantly, the need for unsanctioned mobility and migration triggered a need for facilitators. Sarrica et al. (2020), who studied the effects of COVID-19 on irregular(ized) migrants, including those who had been trafficked or smuggled into host countries in the Global North, found that the number of irregular arrivals in Europe and the USA decreased only temporarily. The authors expected that the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to make smuggling of migrants riskier and more expensive, especially for people fleeing persecution, violence, and conflict. Subsequent studies detected an increasing reliance on the service of smugglers as well as the emergence of new, more dangerous routes, with key areas of concern including transit camps in Niger, at the border with Libya and Algeria (Maple et al., 2022).

Redefining normalcy

The implications of COVID-19 presented here may not have fully become visible in all their facets and intricacies, but it is safe to assume that the consequences of the

pandemic will determine our future lives in one way or another. Assuming that the virus will not disappear but mutate and continue to strike again, a better understanding and adjustment to the pandemic ruptures in migration and of mobility might help cope with related problems for the years to come. Or in other words, "tomorrow's normalcy will grow out of today's disruption" (Xiang, 2021, p. 6). Concomitant with the need to define the 'new normal', however, runs the risk that "normalising 'exceptional' policies that restrict freedoms and rights in the name of crisis and public safety" (Mezzadra & Stierl, 2020) might cement mobility injustices for the long term. National governments, rather than supranational organizations, have acted as main protagonists in the contrivance and implementation of COVID-19 responses, reserving their hegemonic power to censor and control people's behaviors.

Rather than the institutionalizing of a new 'immobility regime', this literature review has demonstrated the majority of scholars seem to agree on two principal findings: a) that the COVID-19 pandemic has shown the unsustainability of the contemporary migration and mobility schemes; and b) that the current pandemic has given rise to the "extremes of heavy-handed authoritarian biopolitical overreach and reckless necropolitical negligence" (De Genova, 2022, p. 142). Although some argue that the outbreak of COVID-19 did not necessarily constitute a watershed moment in the perpetuation of border, asylum, and mobility regimes, as the pandemic was merely an accelerator of changes that were already meant to be implemented, some of which will presumably remain in place in the foreseeable future (Tazzioli & Stierl, 2021), others expect more transformative shifts to emerge from the pandemic that influence not only the way we understand migration and mobility but that might potentially also stimulate key reconfigurations of people's mobility rights.

So, while scholars have detected similar findings, their predictions and prescriptions seemed to differ substantially. Conformist proposals include careful (minor) adjustments. Yeoh (2022), for example, argues in favor of longer work contracts and selective residency pathways for temporary labor migrants to encourage employer responsibility and prevent the exclusion of labor migrants from national health and welfare provisions. More secure employment, better working conditions, upskilling and more social awareness are also part and parcel of the recommendations by Suhadirman et al. (2020) and Sariputta (2022). More radical observers demand more encompassing change. They are basically asking for a fundamental readjustment between mobility rights and global equality. After all, "going back to the 'normality' of mass air travel for the privileged is no more desirable than the perpetuation of the planetary apartheid for the othered and dispossessed" (Heller, 2021, p. 124).

No matter where on the political spectrum one positions oneself, a key challenge of defining a 'new normal' will be the ability to incorporate a sufficient degree of uncertainty, where living with risk and uncertainty is an acceptable quotidian experience. From this point of view, COVID-19 has brought the intrinsic "dilemma of futuring" (Müller-Mahn & Kioko, 2021) to the fore. Yet, instead of relying on forward-looking visions, reliable forecasts and more delicate politics of anticipation and ever more complex scales of preparedness in order to gain control over the future, this would require a greater openness towards living with contingencies and uncertainties, a vision that is politically unpalatable for most. But neither can we 'future-proof' Southeast Asia, nor any other part of the world. In relation to an ongoing presence

of COVID-19 as well as other future global pandemics that may befall the planet and spur additional multi-scalar crises, new meanings of 'risk', 'uncertainty' and 'freedom' will need to be coined and embraced.

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DISCLOSURE

The authors declare no conflict of interest.