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ABSTRACT

Thousands of minors are migrating unaccompanied to high-income countries. This special issue focuses on unaccompanied migrant minors from the Global South to Europe and the U.S. In this introduction, we seek to complement the contributions to this special issue by shedding light on what resources and experiences unaccompanied migrants arrive with, stressing these young migrants' challenges at each stage prior to arrival and the challenges they face navigating the receiving context. We first clarify how the international community defines 'unaccompanied minors' or 'unaccompanied children'. We then provide brief histories of unaccompanied minors in immigration flows to the U.S. and the EU. Next, we review the literature on the experiences of unaccompanied minors before, during, and after migration. Finally, we discuss key themes and insights from the articles provided in this special issue.

Introduction

New migration flows from the Global South today constitute increasing numbers of non-adult, unaccompanied migrants. Although unaccompanied minors have participated in migratory flows in other historical periods, the current contexts of migration include new forms of immigration enforcement that rely on expanded collaborations and technology as well as different actors who facilitate migration. These contexts create new challenges and forms of vulnerability for these minors today. Child migrants often leave conditions of extreme inequalities, constraints, and risks with effects that are exacerbated by daunting obstacles and dangerous migratory routes. Thus, African children of various nationalities, Iranian, Afghan, and Iraqi children all cross the Mediterranean to arrive in the European Union (EU) with an accumulation of formidably difficult experiences similar to those with which Central American children arrive in the U.S. These children's experiences position them differently and at greater disadvantage than past cohorts of childhood arrivals or other immigrants today. Importantly, although thousands of minors migrate unaccompanied to high-income countries, the vast majority are either internally displaced or stay in their region and go to poorer countries. Of the 65.3 million forcibly displaced adults and children in 2015, only 3.2 million were asylum

seekers (see UNHCR 2015). This special issue focuses on unaccompanied migrant minors from the Global South to the European Union and the U.S.

The focus on unaccompanied minors from the Global South to Europe and the U.S. underscores the parallels in the pre-migration, migration, and post-migration experiences of these migrants. It recognises their common vulnerabilities and the strategies they adopt to protect themselves and improve their circumstances. Additionally, our attention to this group highlights the challenges that both European and U.S. governments face as they develop health, social service, and legal systems which seek to balance the best interests of these children with national interests of the countries in which they settle. Finally, our focus calls attention to the need for more cross-national, comparative research to contribute to theorising on immigrant integration, in general, while at the same time developing common policies and practices that facilitate the integration of these minors into their settlement communities and their transitions into adulthood.

Though definitions and techniques for counting unaccompanied minors differ between the U.S. and the EU,[1] the numbers of unaccompanied migrant minors in both regions have increased on average, with the majority being teenage boys ages 14–17 (Connor and Krogstad 2016; Hunter and Shklyan 2016; Krogstad 2016; U.S.). There were 24,403 apprehensions of minors at the U.S. southwest border in 2012, 38,759 in 2013, and 68,541 in 2014 (Hunter and Shklyan 2016). This spike caused alarm and prompted media scrutiny (Terrio 2015) and policy responses in summer 2014, attention that has remained even as the number decreased to 39,970 in 2015 (Hunter and Shklyan 2016). As of 2016, the migration of unaccompanied minors to the U.S. was composed primarily of Central American youth from El Salvador (17,512) Guatemala (18,913), and Honduras (10,468) as well as Mexico (U.S. Customs and Border Protection 2016). Many of these unaccompanied children immediately present themselves to U.S.-border security whereas others enter the U.S. unnoticed and undocumented (Beltrán 2014). When identified by border security, the Central American minors who arrive in the U.S. can immediately state their asylum cases and are screened, processed, and held in detention for up to 72 hours.[2] In contrast, Mexicans are returned after a day or two as allowed by the 2008 Trafficking Victims Protection and Reauthorization Act. Thus, Mexican unaccompanied children are, as Goździak (2015, 7) notes, 'out of sight and out of mind of the American public'.

The number of unaccompanied minors entering the EU also spiked, doubling from 13,800 in 2013 to 23,300 in 2014, and then quadrupling to 96,000 by 2015 (Connor and Krogstad 2016; Eurostat 2016a).[3] In contrast to the U.S., the range of countries from which unaccompanied children originate is wider and has shifted slightly over the years owing to the intensity of the conflicts in the migrants' home countries. Overall, according to Eurostat data, 198,500 unaccompanied minors have entered Europe seeking asylum since 2008 (Eurostat 2016a). The majority of these migrants have come from Afghanistan (79,700 or 39%), Syria (19,300), Somalia (13,200), Eritrea (11,600), Iraq (9,100), Albania (3,100) and Russia (2,700) (Connor and Krogstad 2016; Eurostat 2016a). As in the U.S., some of these migrants present themselves to border security to begin the process of seeking asylum while others enter as 'irregular' migrants and remain undetected and uncounted (EMN 2015). Depending on the receiving country, its enforcement efforts, and border controls in neighbouring transit countries, these minors can end up detained and deported (Menjívar 2014). As a result, children

seeking protection may be found inadmissible, denied various forms of assistance and access to legal protection, and facing the possibility of removal (Deckert 2016).

Increases in unaccompanied child migrants have received scholarly attention, with most of it centred on explaining the sudden jump in these flows and their change over time (Rosenblum and Ball 2016). Some researchers have traced links between rising levels of violence in Central America to the increase in children migrating alone (Clemens 2017; UNHCR 2014; UNICEF 2016). Others have argued that child migration from Mexico and Central America to the U.S. results from the widespread and mature networks that facilitate their migration to reunite with their parents coupled with the continued need for their parents' labour in the U.S. (Donato and Sisk 2015); however, this research also has identified a close relationship between child migration and levels of violence (Donato and Perez 2017). Furthermore, researchers have observed that unaccompanied migrant children from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador apply for asylum in any country they can get to in the region, suggesting that 'pull' factors in the U.S., such as family and networks, are not central in propelling this migration; rather it is the violence in the sending countries that propels their migration from the region (Stinchcomb and Hershberg 2014). Such violence is so powerful that it can continue to drive migratory flows even when violence levels do not change; under these conditions, research has noted that a combination of the presence of smuggling networks, family connections abroad, and a minimum of resources to finance the journey are major determinants of these children's migration (Clemens 2017).

Similarly, in unaccompanied children migrations to the EU, contexts of violence have been identified as spurring these large flows; the top sending countries of unaccompanied children arriving in the EU have been identified by the Global Peace Index as the least peaceful countries in the world today (Institute for Economics and Peace 2016). In 2015, over 60% of total migrants arriving in the EU were fleeing violence in the Middle East and North Africa (Johnson 2015). Thus, violent conditions in the sending countries, whether arising from state actions or criminal activities or both, have been identified as a common denominator in shaping the migration of unaccompanied children arriving in the EU and the U.S.

Given conditions of political, structural, and gender violence prevailing in the sending countries as well as the urgent nature of many of the journeys, these migrations overlap strongly with refugee flows. Agencies involved in responding to these flows recognise and highlight in their policy approaches the desperate living conditions and threats of violence that the minors are fleeing (UNHCR 2014). These agencies have defined the migrants as 'refugees' and appealed to receiving governments to abide by international conventions for the protection of refugees in addressing these flows.[4] But receiving countries have been ambivalent about extending this designation. In contrast to policies developed by UNHCR (1997), unaccompanied child arrivals in the U.S. and EU are not always placed with foster care providers or guardians in their settlement communities and those seeking asylum face tremendous hurdles (Eurostat 2016b; Roubein 2014).

Because the unaccompanied minors on whom we focus have been unable to procure a visa and thus have undertaken their journeys surreptitiously, their flows also are often labelled 'undocumented', 'illegal', or 'irregular'. And due to their sudden increase, these flows also have been described in the media, policy circles, and scholarly work as a 'surge' or a 'crisis'. These terms evoke particular policy and public reactions including

a 'surge' in resources to increase capacity for detentions (Hernandez 2015). As such, a common element in both migration 'crises' is that they have been met with harsh enforcement policies that focus on stopping the arrival of these minors in the transit countries, detention and deportation for those who make it to the destination, and deterrence strategies in the sending country so the minors do not initiate travel in the first place. Thus, efforts to contain these flows intertwine with enforcement strategies already in place in the EU and the U.S.

In some countries, governments respond with inclusionary policies, receptive communities, and the opportunity to apply for asylum, which opens the door to resources that can facilitate the children's integration. In other countries, however, the government's response includes enforcement and detention, particularly when the public in those countries are already apprehensive about increases in migratory flows and associate migration with crime and negative consequences. Some countries have concurrently established rights-based standards and procedures for assessing asylum seekers' protection claims while at the same time creating barriers that prevent certain asylum seekers from setting foot on their territories (Frelick, Kysel, and Podkul 2016). For example, six months after the increase in the number of Central American unaccompanied children, the Obama administration announced the Central American Minors (CAM) Refugee/ Parolee Program to facilitate in-country processing of applicants deemed to need humanitarian protection in the U.S. The success of this programme has been at best modest (Hipsman and Meissner 2015). The application process is complex and lengthy and most children who need to leave their countries quickly after they receive a death threat cannot make use of this programme. Moreover, spots for CAM minors count against the 4000 Latin American and Caribbean regional allocation for refugee visas; this regional allocation, in turn, is part of the worldwide refugee visa programme allocation (typically 60,000–70,000) set annually by the U.S. Congress (Hipsman and Meissner 2015). As of January 2017, President Trump signed an executive order requiring the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to no long automatically consider parole requests from individuals denied refugee stata in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras (U.S. CIS 2017).

With the exception of an article that places today's migratory flows in historical perspective (Rodriguez, Urrutia-Rojas, and Gonzales 2019) and another one based on research in Mexico that captures the children's experiences during the journey (Thompson et al. 2019), the contributions to this special issue focus on the receiving context that unaccompanied migrant minors encounter, including legal and ethical frameworks for protecting unaccompanied minors, governmental decisions about the 'best interests' of the children, children's expressions of their own best interests or agency, the provision of services in detention centres, and children's health and social service needs in receiving communities.

In this introduction, we seek to complement these contributions by shedding light on what resources and experiences unaccompanied migrants arrive with, stressing these young migrants' challenges at each stage prior to arrival, beginning at the origin and continuing with the journey, all of which affects how these migrants navigate the receiving context. In the sections below, we first define and clarify how the international community defines 'unaccompanied minors' or 'unaccompanied children'. We then provide a brief historical background of unaccompanied minors in immigration flows to the U.S. and the EU. Next, we review the literature on the experiences of unaccompanied minors

before, during, and after migration. Finally, we discuss key themes and insights from the articles included in this special issue.

Defining unaccompanied

A focus on the migration of unaccompanied minors brings attention to important definitional questions, a central theme in some of the contributions to this special issue. The international community defines an unaccompanied migrant child as a person, 'who is under the age of eighteen' and who is 'separated from both parents and is not being cared for by an adult who by law or custom has responsibility to do so' (UNHCR 1997). Although international conventions stipulate guidelines for children migrating with adult caregivers who are not their parents, this definition can be difficult to use when children travel without their parents but in the company of unrelated adults, smugglers, and others their own age (UNHCR 1997).[5]

The UNHRC definition also belies differences in how children find themselves unaccompanied or alone (Kohli 2007). Some minors may begin and end their migration journeys alone because their parents or caregivers have been victims of violence in their home countries, or the minors are seeking to escape violence in their families. Others may begin their migration journey alone but meet others along the way and then arrive to receiving communities where family members, potentially including parents, live. Additionally, children may begin their journeys with parents or caregivers but find themselves alone when their caregivers are detained, deported, or die and the minors end up separated. Thus, the term 'unaccompanied' can veil the presence of many social actors who shape these migrations at the onset, during the journey, and at the destination. For this reason, some experts argue that the term 'separated' should be used instead of 'unaccompanied' to more accurately reflect the situation of many migrant children (Kohli 2007).

Moreover, the term 'unaccompanied migrant children' can convey images of very small children travelling entirely on their own, making decisions along the way and raising their own funds to cover their journey. Such images tend to leave the children devoid of agency (see Thompson et al. 2019), and can mask heterogeneity among them, so differences by age, social class, race, gender, national origin, and culture are not factored in (Goździak 2016) or are simply erased. Research has found that often older children migrate in search of jobs, just like adult migrants do, especially when they contributed economically to their families in their home countries and/or were already parents themselves (Chavez 2016).[6] Representations of these migrants as small children can evoke attitudes that focus on their protection because they are seen as vulnerable and defenseless, and may elicit what Fassin (2012, xii) calls a 'fantasy of a global moral community'. Although this welcoming scenario is certainly plausible and is the reality for some migrant children, many minors who end up being classified as travelling 'alone' face a hostile context of reception, scepticism about their claims, and minimal standards of care (Deckert 2016). Humanitarian impulses to care for children in liberal democracies can easily be transformed into fear and hate (Neumann 2012). Additionally, sometimes policy-makers and media depictions contribute to construct images of these minors as potential criminals and carriers of infectious diseases that can threaten the well-being of residents in the countries that accept them (Heidbrink 2014; Johnson 2014). This is particularly the case when emphasis is

placed on the conflict and violence in sending countries in Central America and the Middle East from which migrants to the U.S. and the EU flow.

As Goździak (2016) reminds us in her work on 'trafficked' children,[7] definitions and their operationalisations form the basis for government responses and bureaucratic interventions with long-term impacts on the lives of unaccompanied migrant children. For instance, Terrio et al. (2011) note that when migrant children are treated in the receiving country's legal system as 'accompanied' they become dependents of adults, but when they are categorised as 'unaccompanied' they are obligated to meet evidentiary requirements and must navigate the system similar to adult refugees. Minors who are classified as unaccompanied then face overlapping systems of protection and enforcement as they go through the legal system in their introduction to the new country (Terrio et al. 2011). The definition of immigration flows or individuals in that flow at exit, during transit, and at destination has direct implications for policy responses. Thus, as several of the contributions here make clear, definitional questions matter crucially.

U.S. and EU histories of unaccompanied minors in migration flows

Even though increases in the migration of unaccompanied minors to the EU and the U.S. have attracted media and policy attention in recent years, this migration is not unique; minors have migrated alone throughout history and these flows have been recognised by international bodies and conventions for over two decades (Goździak 2015). In the U.S., the passage of the Refugee Act of 1980 established permanent authority and a formal process for the admission of unaccompanied children (Steinbock 1989). Internationally, the UNHCR set guidelines and definitions of who is an unaccompanied child migrant in 1997.

In the U.S., minors often arrived at Ellis Island unaccompanied by their parents. Sometimes they had parents or other family members receiving them but just as often they did not. In these cases, volunteers, mostly women, would care for them upon arrival (Menjívar, Abrego, and Schmalzbauer 2016, 126). In the 1960s, Operation Peter Pan made possible the organised migration to the U.S. of Cuban children whom their parents sent to avoid the perceived dangers of communism under the Cuban revolution. Taiwanese families still send their children to acquire education in U.S. schools; these so-called parachute children then live under the care of relatives or hired caretakers (Zhou 1998). This practice is also common among other Asian groups, and mostly among wealthier families. But parents of higher social class background are not the only ones sending their children to other countries alone, albeit parents of different social classes do so for very different reasons. For instance, in 2010, Haitian children orphaned by a devastating earthquake were 'paroled' in and adopted by U.S. families (Goździak 2015). Thus, the contemporary influx of Central American minors has precedent in other cases of children's migratory flows that today can be defined as being comprised of unaccompanied minors.

Furthermore, Central American children have been migrating without adult company to the U.S. for years (Chavez and Menjívar 2010; Goździak 2015), though not at the high rates of recent years. In this issue, Rodriguez, Urrutia-Rojas, and Gonzales (2019) compare these migrations in the past and present to highlight such changes. As the authors note, the increase in the migration of unaccompanied Central American children seen in 2014 was part of an upward trend that started in 2010—the first year that the migration of Central

American unaccompanied minors exceeded the numbers of U.S.-bound Central American migrants during the civil wars in their countries (see also Chavez and Menjívar 2010). Thus, the migration of Central American minors without an adult is not new. What is new is the size of this migration today and the media attention and policies generated in response.

In the EU too, there have been previous flows of unaccompanied minors. For instance, the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) left close to 90,000 children orphaned and many of them were sent through organised programmes to various countries, such as France, Belgium, the USSR, Mexico, Switzerland, Denmark, and the UK (Bell 1996). More recently, the Second World War produced a large cohort of unaccompanied children, approximately 13 million according to UNESCO and Red Cross estimates (Kohli 2007). And through its Kindertransport programme, Britain assisted in helping approximately 10,000 children escape Nazi occupied territories (Fast 2010).

Experiences of unaccompanied minors before, during, and after migration

To complement and contextualise the contributions to this special issue, in this introduction we highlight the exit and journey and underscore the *cumulative* effects of disadvantage at each of these earlier stages. We argue that to understand how these migrants confront the legislative system, bureaucracies, and institutions at the receiving end, we must first understand where the minors come from, which can also shed light on how and why they leave their home countries and arrive at their destination. To this end, we underscore the disadvantages that pile up before arrival, beginning with deep inequalities that create a lack of access to health care and education and exposure to violence and trauma in the context of exit, as well as varied forms of violence during the journey. We also provide an introduction to organisations and institutions that manage migration in the transit countries. Each experience before arrival builds on itself, from malnutrition, lack of adequate employment, and daily exposure to life-threatening conditions in the home country to the trauma that comes from extremely dangerous conditions during the journey; all these shape the minors' lives in the receiving country, with short- and long-term effects (Perreira and Ornelas 2013).

We structure this discussion using Ko and Perreira (2010)'s three phases of migration—pre-migration, migration, and post-migration—a framework designed to capture stressors and challenges at each phase of the migration process and adolescents' responses to them. This lens allows us to illuminate the multiple factors that shape each stage and accumulate during the migration process to ultimately affect the migrant children's experiences at entry.

Pre-migration experiences

The pre-migration context for the migration of unaccompanied minors arriving to the EU and the U.S. today is shaped by high levels of political and structural violence as well as common crime in concentrated fashion in a handful of countries. Deteriorating living conditions, declining economic opportunities, and limited educational opportunities in contexts of multiple forms of violence have defined the pre-migration contexts of youth and young adults from Central America and the Middle East, with manifestations in varying forms and degrees for girls and boys (Parish 2017).

With reports that Central America has some of the world's highest homicide rates and because the conflicts in the Middle East have left several countries ranked as the least peaceful in the world, most research has focused on linking overt forms of violence to the children's migration. Rather than calling attention only to this immediate violence and life-threatening conditions, we would also like to highlight the long-term structural and economic conditions that intertwine with these more immediate factors (Menjívar 1993). Lack of access to education, health care, and employment create a 'powerful recipe for social exclusion' that promotes the migration of unaccompanied children (Stinchcomb and Hershberg 2014). Often, these conditions are also the precursors for political and more visible and immediate forms of violence. Receiving countries try to capture these dynamics in their admissions decisions, attempting to determine whether these migrations are 'economic' or 'forced'. As research has noted, however, this distinction is largely bureaucratic and does not always reflect reality (Castles and Loughna 2004; Menjívar 1993). Because violence in its multiple forms defines these migrations, international agencies and NGOs have advocated for refugee protection for the unaccompanied children leaving these areas.

Reports from the United Nations, Amnesty International, and human rights organisations have identified a range of human rights violations as precipitating children's migratory flows. In environments where death, torture, injury, abduction, sexual violence, rape, chemical weapons, and displacement are employed, women, girls, and boys are particularly vulnerable (Amnesty International 2016b; Human Rights Watch 2015; Parish 2017; UNHCR 2016).[8] Children are often pushed to participate in violence and in war, recruited as soldiers or for suicide missions, or abducted or used for intimidation (Amnesty International 2016b; Human Rights Watch 2015; UNHCR 2016). Moreover, while the civil wars have ended in the Central American region, long-standing conditions of deep inequality and lack of access to goods and services, combined with new forms of crime organisation, have created insecure and violent conditions. In 2015, the homicide rate reached 103 per 100,000 in El Salvador, 56.7 per 100,000 in Honduras, and 29.5 per 100,000 in Guatemala (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, cited in Beltrán 2017). These rates are significant as they constitute the highest rates of violence among countries technically not at war. Gang activity is often mentioned as the culprit; however, this factor alone cannot explain such conditions of violence in those countries. Extortion, briberies, and corrupt governments that persecute, rather than protect, their own citizens (Menjívar and Walsh 2017; Santamaría and Carey 2017) make it difficult to survive in those countries (Renwick 2016). Gender plays a significant role in how these multiple forms of violence are experienced, as girls are often forced to marry at young ages, exposed to sexual violence, restricted in their movement, kept from attending school, and in general experience an extra layer of violence encapsulated in gender-based violence (Parish 2017).

However, it is not only the visible and immediate forms of violence such as crime and war-related actions that create conditions for the children to migrate alone. A lack of governing authority or rule of law, alongside economic downturns involving devalued currencies and rapid inflation, as well as significantly high underemployment, unemployment and poverty rates, are mutually constitutive of the more immediate forms of violence. In Afghanistan, 40% of the population lived in poverty in 2014 and 50% in 2015, despite increased international spending in military and humanitarian assistance. Over

half of those living in poverty are children under age 15 (World Bank 2016c). In Syria, the majority of its population (60% of the labour force) is unemployed, and the overall poverty rate is estimated at 83% in 2014, compared to 12.4% before the conflict started in 2007 (The World Bank 2016b). In Somalia 63% of its population is unemployed, and 70% of the population live in poverty (United Nations Development Programme 2016). Poverty rates are also strikingly high in the northern countries of Central America; in 2014, 63% of the population of Honduras lived in poverty, 59% in Guatemala, and 31% in El Salvador (The World Bank 2016c). However, there is significant underemployment as well. And some of these conditions are compounded by climate change (and lack of rainfall) but conditions of violence also have affected the agriculture economic growth of these countries, and agriculture is one of the main forms of employment and subsistence for many families there (The World Bank 2016a, 2016b, 2016c). A general lack of access to health care exacerbates the problems above. In contexts of violence healthcare professionals and hospitals are targeted, the transportation of medical supplies is often obstructed and healthcare spaces reduced (Amnesty International 2016b; Human Rights Watch 2015; UN High Commissioner for Human Rights 2016). Access to basic needs such as food, electricity, and drinking water becomes almost impossible under the violent conditions in the regions where the minors arriving in the EU and the US originate.

Furthermore, access to education is substantially limited especially in countries with extreme conditions of violence. In 2001, girls in Afghanistan did not have access to schooling and only 1 million boys were enrolled in primary school. This has changed overtime, but even in 2015, only 21% of girls had completed primary education (World Bank 2016c). The conflicts in the region (including Syria and Somalia) also disrupt access to education as schools are turned into military security spaces (UN High Commissioner for Human Rights 2016).

While Central American youth have generally better access to education than those in the war-torn countries of the Middle East, they still face huge challenges in reaching schools as internal travel and transportation are significantly curtailed in violence-ridden areas. Young girls and boys in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras are often recruited by gangs (Amnesty International 2016a). Thus, youth who are at risk of gang violence tend to abruptly end their studies for fear of being targeted or recruited by gangs. In 2015 in this region, 39,000 students left school due to harassment or threats of gangs (Amnesty International 2016a).

Therefore, given the above conditions, children leave their countries for a variety of reasons related with various degrees of intensity to violence, a range of structural conditions, lack of rule of law, corrupt governments, and a desire for a better education and future.

Migration experiences

Travel to their destination often stretches over months or years for unaccompanied migrant children (Huynh 2015) since theirs are not trips organised by governments or international agencies and are not undertaken by air. These minors, therefore, typically leave their home countries without an entry visa to their destinations and thus must rely on a cast of actors along the way—smugglers, individuals who live in

transit corridors who lend them a hand to continue the journey, charitable and religious organisations, as well as other fellow travellers. Importantly, because the children's journeys intersect with those of adult unauthorised migrants, the minors' experiences during the journeys become indistinguishable from those of adult unauthorised migrants (Huynh 2015). Thus, it is during the journey that these minors become part of larger unauthorised migratory flows and upon arrival at their destination, the receiving government officials can more easily classify them as unauthorised migrants (and not as asylum seekers) if the immigrant minor does not state their intention to seek asylum.

As Ko and Perreira (2010) point out, the act of migration itself impacts the levels of stress during the journey, affecting the minors' experiences, and later shaping the youth's adaptation at their destination. Examining how the journey impacts the children takes into account the mode of transportation and accompaniment during travel. Central American children arriving unaccompanied to the U.S. travel by land through Mexico, a notoriously dangerous undertaking. Middle Eastern and African minors arriving in the EU sometimes travel by land, but more often make perilous journeys in rickety boats crossing the Mediterranean Sea, and thousands never make it to their destination. During the journey as well, gender is central in shaping these minors' experiences, as girl migrants have a higher likelihood to be exposed to rapes and sexual violence, by smugglers, authorities, and criminals alike (Parish 2017).

The journey has become defining in the lives of migrants as it compounds experiences of structural, political, and everyday violence and trauma that the migrant children leave in their home countries. Leaving contexts of violence seldom means these minors will be safe (Parish 2017). As border enforcement makes reaching the border of the destination countries more difficult, smugglers have transformed the transportation of migrants, especially minors, into a rather lucrative (and dangerous) business (Spener 2009; Vogt 2013). Migrants are exposed to assaults, robberies, torture, inhumane treatment, sexual violence (Parish 2017), and even death. As adult migrants often do, children migrants must stay in the transit country waiting for smugglers to find the right time and conditions to continue the journey. Many Central American children find temporary jobs during transit to support themselves (ITAM 2014). The journey through Mexico is particularly dangerous for women and girls. According to Amnesty International, 6 out of 10 Central American women and girls are victims of sexual violence during their journey through Mexico (Pereira 2010).

To cover the cost of the journey to the EU or the U.S., families pool resources together and end up indebted for long periods of time after migrants arrive to their final destinations (McKenzie and Menjívar 2011; Stoll 2012). Although journeys from Central America or Mexico to the U.S. can take weeks or months to complete by land, they are structured with a destination point embedded in the plan. In contrast, journeys to the EU entail crossing several countries and migrants' final destinations are not always fixed at the beginning of their trips, but rather decided along the way. Thus, social media and the Internet have played central roles in aiding migrants' journeys and decision-making prior to migration through sharing of information about smugglers and routes of the trip (Donini, Monsutti, and Scalettaris 2016).

For migrant children arriving to the EU, most journeys to reach a destination involve crossing the Mediterranean sea at night, in tightly packed boats, or by foot through the

forest and mountain areas (Donini, Monsutti, and Scalettaris 2016). This is not dissimilar from how Central Americans reach the U.S., as they hop on trains, ride in cargo trucks, walk in the desert, and regularly face life-threatening situations during the journey. However, travel trajectories vary according to country (and social position) of origin. Afghan, Iraqi, and Iranian unaccompanied youth typically travel the 3000 mile journey entering Europe by first crossing into Turkey and then travelling through the Mediterranean Sea to enter the EU via Greece (FRONTEX 2011). Youth originating in the Horn of Africa (mostly Somalis), travel through Sudan and Lybia to enter the EU through Italy. However, due to stricter border controls in the past several years and the expansion of border controls into transit countries (Menjívar 2014), these routes have shifted to the Eastern Mediterranean Sea and the Arabic Peninsula, a much more dangerous passage (FRONTEX 2011). Similarly, Central Americans and Mexican migrants crossing into the U.S. have shifted routes to more dangerous terrain to avoid increased border control. In other countries, such as Nigeria, unaccompanied youth travel by air with false documentation and with the aid of smuggling networks. They stop in transit countries, including eastern Europe, before final arrival in western Europe (FRONTEX 2011). Youth from China, Vietnam, and India travel mostly by air, often using documentation (FRONTEX 2011).

The first country of arrival in the EU, usually Greece or Italy, for many youth is just the entry point and the beginning of more challenges as they do not cross borders within the EU but must manoeuvre different country-specific policies, languages, and programmes to assist them. To move within Europe migrants often travel by land in trucks to reach their destination (Donini, Monsutti, and Scalettaris 2016). According to official statistics, the most popular destination for unaccompanied youth is Sweden (Connor and Krogstad 2016); however, Hillmann and Dufner (2019) note that Germany received more unaccompanied minors than Sweden, a discrepancy having to do with the methodology used to count this population.

Each of the multiple borders that migrants travelling by land and/or sea cross in order to reach the EU and the U.S. serves as a check-point, amplifying the power of smuggling networks, and thus the costs of migration. For example, before reaching the Mediterranean Sea, Somalis who travel via Ethiopia, Sudan, and Libya must pay a sum of money half-way through the journey in Sudan before being able to continue to the closer border state, Libya (FRONTEX 2011). Similarly, Afghans oftentimes stop in Iran before continuing their trip. At these stops or check-points migrants find short-term work and stay in the transit countries in order to continue paying for their journeys to Europe (FRONTEX 2011).

Experiences during the journey can have additional unintended consequences. While unaccompanied minors are exposed to trauma, dangers, and life-threatening situations, they also become acquainted with institutions and organisations, such as the Catholic Church and shelters, that exist in the migrant corridor to assist Central Americans in transit (Chavez 2016). Moreover, they meet other children and adults along the way from whom they acquire information to continue the journey. Through these contacts, these migrant children learn how to navigate institutions, the ropes of migrant life, and various strategies to traverse the migrant corridor. These experiences increase these minors' repertoire of strategies and knowledge about survival, which becomes important to cope with challenges further down the road, at entry.

Post-migration experiences

Once they arrive in their destinations, unaccompanied minors in the U.S. and the EU face another set of hurdles that can magnify the stress and deleterious consequences of the pre-migration and migration experiences.[9] These include screenings to determine if they qualify for protections under international or country-specific laws, detention, immigration court proceedings, and temporary resettlement while their cases are being processed.

In both the U.S. and EU, the treatment of unaccompanied minors is governed by the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1967 protocol, and the Convention against Torture (AIC 2015). Signatories of these treaties should conform to the non-refoulment principle, that is, they may not return individuals to countries where they face

> persecution from a government or a group the government is unable or unwilling to control based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group, or where there are substantial grounds to believe that they may be tortured. (AIC 2015, 3)

In the U.S., the treatment of unaccompanied minors is also governed by the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 which requires that unaccompanied children be screened as potential victims of human trafficking and, 'to the greatest extent practicable' to have access to a lawyer for immigration court proceedings. In the EU, the treatment of unaccompanied minors varies by country, but EU members must abide by a common set of regulations on asylum, immigration, and the trafficking of human beings that include specific provisions on the protection of the interests of unaccompanied minors (CONNECT, n.d.; EU Agency for Fundamental Rights 2010). Among other points, these regulations require that unaccompanied minors be provided with legal 'representation', be reunified with family whenever possible, be detained as 'a measure of last resort and for as short a period of time as possible', and have their safety and opinions considered when determining their 'best interests'.

In the U.S., unaccompanied minors may either be encountered at the border or apprehended internally (Byrne and Miller 2012; Kandel 2017). Minors encountered at the border are initially processed and detained by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) while those apprehended internally are initially processed and detained by Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE). In both cases, minors are transferred to Department of Homeland Security (DHS) detention centres where they can be detained for up to 72 hours while their age is verified (see Bhabha and Finch 2006) and documentation evaluated (AIC 2015). If a child meets the definition of an unaccompanied child from non-contiguous countries to the U.S. (e.g. El Salvador, Guatemala, or Honduras), the child must be transferred to Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). Children from Mexico, a contiguous country, on the other hand, can be immediately sent back through the 'voluntary return' system if a CBP officer determines that the child is able to make independent decisions, is not a victim of trafficking, and is not in danger of persecution in his/her home country. Once transferred to ORR's custody, 80% of unaccompanied children in the U.S. are placed in shelter care (Byrne and Miller 2012). According to ORR (n.d.), these shelters typically consist of fewer than 50 unaccompanied children and are located in 'quiet and good neighborhoods'. As of 2014, children spent

approximately 35 days in shelter care and were then released to an approved guardian (AIC 2015). Those not going to shelter care may be placed in more secure care institutions or in transitional (short-term) foster care.

In the EU member states, unaccompanied minors are processed in reception centres in the country in which they were initially fingerprinted or where they lodged an asylum claim (Fratzke 2015). In the UK, for instance, while in these reception centres, asylum officers work to identify and register children, verify their ages, trace their families to provide an opportunity for reunification, and evaluate their health and other aspects of their well-being (House of Lords 2016). Based on the particulars of their case, children may be transferred from a reception centre to another EU member state, released from a reception centre into the care of a family member or foster care provider, or held in a detention centre.[10]

In both the U.S. and the EU, numerous concerns have been raised about the conditions in which unaccompanied children are initially received and/or detained (House of Lords 2016; National Immigration Justice Center 2014). Reception and detention centres have been criticised for having unsafe, unhealthy, and sometimes squalid conditions which can threaten the development of children (House of Lords 2016; Phippen 2015). They are sometimes insufficiently staffed with few resources to adequately serve the health and educational needs of children. Additionally, officials in the U.S. and EU have been criticised for the inadequate screening of children who may fear that sharing the details of their stories will further threaten their safety or the safety of family members left behind. They also have been criticised for providing inadequate legal representation, if any, to children (Cavendish and Cortazar 2011; House of Lords 2016; Pierce 2015). Inadequate screening and legal representation can result in minors being inappropriately returned to their countries of origin.

In both the U.S. and EU, concerns also have been raised about the adequacy of care and resettlement resources provided to children who are released to both family and legal guardians as their immigration and asylum cases are considered by the courts (Chisti and Hipsman 2014; House of Lords 2016; Pierce 2015). These children require education, health, and social services in the communities in which they reside. However, the provision of high-quality care and resettlement services can require local investments of time, staff, and money, investments that some communities may be unable or unwilling to make (see Humphris and Sigona 2019). Thus, advocates and policy-makers have argued that more effort needs to be spent in monitoring children's needs and access to services once they are released into communities (House of Lords 2016; Pierce 2015). Additionally, children can age into adulthood while their cases are still under consideration. Thus, advocates and policy-makers in both the U.S. and EU have been concerned with the development of best practices to assist children with their transitions into adulthood and, when appropriate, repatriation back to their countries of origin (House of Lords 2016; Ramirez, McKenna, and Somers 2015).

Organisation and themes and of the special issue

The contributions to this special issue cover two broad themes regarding the treatment and care of unaccompanied minors in the U.S. and EU. The first theme interrogates the agency of children and the definition of a child's best interest. Rodriguez, Urrutia-

Rojas, and Gonzalez (2019), Thompson and colleagues (2019), Berger Cardoso and col-
leagues (2017), and Allsopp and Chase (2019) reflect on the historical and institutional
circumstances which frame children's decision to migrate and circumscribe their
capacities to assume agency and act in their own best interests. As a result of the historical
and institutional circumstances framing their migrations, the best interests of the children
are easily subsumed by the national interests of the countries in which they settle. The
second theme addresses policies and practices which criminalise immigration and priva-
tise both border control and the provision of social services to immigrants and their
families. Cuéllar (2019), Humphris and Sigona (2019), Allsopp and Chase (2019), and
Hillman and Dufner (2019) demonstrate how the criminalisation of undocumented immi-
gration and the increasing privatisation of immigration controls and services can conflict
with the duty of nation states to protect migrants' human rights.

Though there are several common themes across the articles, we have arranged the
articles to focus on the U.S. and then the EU. Within each group, articles move from con-
sideration of the pre-migration to the post-migration stage. With a focus on the U.S.,
Rodriguez, Urrutia-Rojas and Gonzalez (2019) provide insight into the differing circum-
stances leading to the current wave of childhood migrations from the northern countries
of Central America. They show how weak economic, security, and family institutions at
the macro-level can threaten economic well-being, security, and family at the micro-
level to reinforce migration networks and perpetuate the migration of unaccompanied
youth. Thompson et al. (2019) then interrogate agency among these child migrants.
They show how these youth express their agency throughout the migration process as
they confront authorities such as parents and immigration officers in their home
countries, Mexico, and the U.S. Cuéllar (2019) adds to our understanding of agency in
the migration process with an in-depth look at religious expression within U.S. detention
centres. We learn how young migrants turn to religion to express their agency and to but-
tress their quest for freedom from fear and persecution. At the same time, detention
centres rely on religious teachings to pacify and control these migrants who are crimina-
lised and commodified by the private companies building and running these detention
centres. Finally, Berger Cardoso et al. (2019) turn our attention to the post-migration con-
texts which shape the lives of unaccompanied minors. These authors provide an overview
of the challenges facing unaccompanied minors who are detained at the border and
released into ORR custody. They discuss these youth's legal, custodial, mental health,
and educational needs. Then, they turn attention to methodological challenges and next
steps for conducting research on the welfare of unaccompanied minors living in the U.S.

The articles on the migration of unaccompanied child migrants to the EU focus on post-
migration circumstances. Allsopp and Chase (2019) discuss frameworks for defining the
best interests of unaccompanied minors transitioning into adulthood. They demonstrate
how the best interests of these youth contrast with the interests of the states who ultimately
hope to return them to their countries of origin. Humphris and Sigona (2019) continue this
conversation by focusing our attention on post-migration foster care services for unaccom-
panied minors who have migrated to the U.K. and are seeking asylum. Whereas Cuéllar
(2019) discussed the privatisation of detention centres where children and families await
evaluation of their asylum cases in the U.S., Humphris and Sigona (2019) discuss the priva-
tisation or outsourcing of foster care services for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in
the U.K. Again, we see how the privatisation of the refugee and asylee process combines with

the commodification of refugees and asylees to pit the best interest of the child migrants against the interest of the state. As a result, frontline, street-level bureaucrats find themselves applying discretion wherever they can so as to protect their professional integrity and the well-being of children whose interests would otherwise be subjugated to the political expediency of the state and the for-profit contractors that the state hires. Finally, Hillman and Dufner (2019) turn our attention to Germany where the largest share of Syrian refugees to the EU has been settled. In their article, they invite us to pull away from the particulars of defining the best interest of children to discussing the ethical and legal responsibilities that states, in this case Germany, have towards caring for unaccompanied children. Focusing on two aspects of caring—housing assistance (i.e. accommodation) and health care assistance— they argue that there is no legal or ethically defensible justification for treating-unaccompanied minors differently from accompanied minors and their families or from German citizen children. Germany's constitutional law, EU law, international law, and ethical principles each warrant the conclusion that greater investments in services to shelter and care for unaccompanied migrant youth are needed.

Notes

1. The U.S. data come from apprehensions of minors, mostly at the U.S.-Mexico border, while the E.U. data come from minors who apply for asylum after arriving in Europe (Connor and Krogstad 2016).
2. Minors seeking formal protection upon entry to the U.S. can obtain T-visas (for victims of human trafficking), U-visas (for victims of serious crimes), or protection through the Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (for victims of abuse, neglect or abandonment) (Deckert 2016, 27)
3. We use Eurostat figures with a caveat. A reviewer pointed out to us that EUROSTAT counts asylum applications but not arrivals themselves, with the potential for undercounting. In the absence of other statistical sources of information for all EU-countries, we use these data but would like to note this limitation.
4. Protections to refugees defined under international conventions include material assistance and legal protection, which, in turn, include the possibility of asylum and non-refoulment (Goodwin-Gill 2014). It is in the provision of legal protections where receiving governments have misaligned their responses with the plight of the migrants as well as with pleas from organisations to recognise their predicament. Deckert (2016) discusses arguments from advocates and attorneys that extant U.S. laws and practices do not capture the unique needs of today's unaccompanied migrant children (see also Stinchcomb and Hershberg 2014).
5. Many minors initiate their journeys in consultation with others and based on information conveyed through webs of relatives and friends, and they often travel in the company of other minors and adults, including smugglers, who facilitate travel. Some seek shelter in organisations (e.g. NGOs and religious groups) along the way. Thus, quite often these minors initiate their migration or continue it in the company of others.
6. Importantly, many of these migrant children have had adult responsibilities, such as earning wages to help their families, since an early age. It is also not uncommon for the older of these children to have been forced into unions at early ages, as child marriage is pervasive in more than 50 countries (Sinclair 2015), affecting girls in particular. Thus, some of these migrant minors have left their own children in the care of others in their home countries.
7. Goździak (2016) examines the lives of unaccompanied migrant children who are categorised as 'trafficked' by government officials and service providers. In trying to do what in these actors' view is best for these children, they end up suppressing the children's agency, especially when the children have migrated to earn a living, as well as the children's own family and kin networks.

8. A survey of Central American migrant children showed that about one third had experienced sexual- or gender-based violence; approximately one fifth reported escape from this violence as the reason for their migration (Kids in Need of Defense, in Parish 2017).

9. Zimmerman, Kiss, and Hossain (2011) have broken the post-migration stage into three separate stages: (1) the destination or arrival phase, (2) the interception phase, and (3) the return phase. The last two phases apply to unauthorised or irregular migrants, refugees, and asylees who are initially held in refugee camps and detention centres and may be returned to their home countries rather than be admitted permanently into their destination country.

10. It should be kept in mind that Great Britain and Denmark opted out of the EU asylum system. Thus, EU law is not binding for them and their specific case may differ in important ways from the other 26 member-states.

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