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Migration, Vulnerability, and Experiences of Insecurity: Conceptualising Insecure Migration Status

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Abstract: This research examines the insecurities that are embedded within immigration status or lack thereof. I argue that, to improve our understanding of the relationship between immigration-related insecurity and violence, we need to reconceptualise how we think about, measure, and analyse immigration-based characteristics. This research proposes building an analytical category that can conceptualise insecure migration status to include forms of immigration status that internalise insecurity in addition to being without status, or with an irregular status. These insecurities often incorporate gendered dynamics. Grouping these different categories around a commonly shared experience of insecurity allows us to prioritise experiences of insecurity that are persistent even as people move, cross borders, and change status. I propose that this will permit a more comprehensive picture of migration-related harms that exist across states, status types, and borders while allowing researchers and data gatherers to be attentive to intersectional vulnerabilities that enhance insecurity for particular categories, subgroups, and populations.

Keywords: migration; violence; gender; intersectionality; insecurity

1. Introduction

Throughout the 90s, particularly in western states, the governance of incoming migration became more complex, with increased regulation and control exercised over who entered the borders of a given state, for how long, and why, although with also significant liberalisation of immigration rules within specific zones, such as the EU (Czaika et al. 2018; de Haas et al. 2019). As variation in immigration statuses has increased and the associated rights have contracted, forms of precarity and insecurity have evolved (for example, see Lewis and Waite 2015; Lewis et al. 2015; Anitha 2008). These vulnerabilities are associated with insecurity embedded in immigration status, even when immigration status is properly held.

Immigration statuses might exacerbate insecurities and vulnerabilities that already exist along gendered and racialised identity lines. For example, statuses might rely on income thresholds that are affected by the gender pay gap or might be revoked for minor civil infractions, enhancing the insecurities associated with racialised policing practices. Bonizzoni (2017) found that legalisation strategies in Italy are gendered, with women in domestic roles undertaking a position of 'patient submission' in the hope of an opportunity to regularise status under amnesty laws. This of course increases what is at stake and can intensify employment-based exploitation and violence. Alternatively, men are more likely to belong to diversified and commodified networks in which opportunities to regularise are ambivalent. Men are also more likely to be stopped and detained by police, which could affect potential regularisation (Bonizzoni 2017). Such circumstances point to complexities that indicate that migration-related insecurities are broader than those typically associated with 'irregular' or 'undocumented' categories, but involve other statuses and status transitions, and are closely connected with other intersectional insecurities. These insecurities expose migrants, and particularly migrant women, to an increased likelihood

of experiencing violence. For the purposes of this conceptualisation, I focus primarily on interpersonal violence, which is violence directed at an individual, perpetrated by an individual. Nevertheless, the complexity of immigration status implicates the state as a collective actor, and implicates structures and systems of violence which cannot be separated from violent outcomes. I focus on interpersonal violence as providing empirical evidence of violence against people with insecure migration status, but this is not to suggest that interpersonal violence can be solely attributed to individual agency, rather than systemic and structural conditions.

In what follows, I argue that an inclusive conceptualisation of 'insecure migration status' could offer a means of theorising insecurity in a way that adopts insecure status as an intersectional minoritized identity characteristic. This could potentially guide data-gathering categories or data linkages to offer a picture of the extent to which insecure migration status produces specific types of vulnerability, including vulnerability to interpersonal violence, and acknowledging the close relationship with psychological, structural, and legal violence. I offer a brief review of the literature that considers the relationship between migration status and insecurity in the context of vulnerability to interpersonal violence. I focus on violence in particular as a vehicle through which to evidence the need for such a status categorisation, particularly in the context of gender-based violence. I then move to form a conceptualisation of insecure migration status as an identity category and outline the basis of such a category. Finally, I offer an analysis of insecure migration status, situating it within the context of intersectional feminist theory. Here, I suggest some parameters for an attentive, reflexive, and responsive conceptualisation of migration-related insecurity that foregrounds shared experiences of insecurity without essentialising personhood to an immigration status type. I propose that such a conceptualisation can be applied to theoretical and empirical analytical strategies.

2. Migration Status and Identifying Insecurity

Existing research has evidenced forms of insecurity linked to migration status. This has been bounded and conceptualised in a number of different ways, including status-induced precarity, deportability, and associated vulnerabilities (De Genova 2002, 2004; Bernhard et al. 2007; Lewis and Waite 2015). Conceptualising and measuring the relationship between insecure migration status and associated vulnerability is riddled with difficulties, not least because mobile populations are constantly in flux so a stable count is difficult (for example, see McAdam 2015; Vogel et al. 2011; Dearden et al. 2020; Ardittis and Laczko 2017; Vespe et al. 2017). Immigration status is designated by states who each claim the sovereign right to control their own borders and citizenship criteria. Yet mobile populations and mobile people cross state borders and often seek to avoid direct surveillance of this action because immigration restrictions are such that leaving one country and entering another is often made more difficult the more it is necessary. States are designed to contain people and irregular migration happens outside of the control of states (Vespe et al. 2017). Most measurement is either carried out by state bodies (such as census data or by recorded border-crossing events, such as the data compiled by FRONTEX in the EU), affiliated organisations that draw from state-produced data (such as the UNODC), or on a smaller scale by local service providers and specialist services. Of these, localised specialist service providers might be the most likely to come into contact with people who need assistance, but this is a subset of the population and there are significant barriers that prevent people with insecure immigration status from seeking out specialist services (Thiara and Harrison 2016). Indeed, Massey and Capoferro (2004) documented various forms of population survey that fail to adequately capture the phenomenon of undocumented migration in the United States, including population census, intercensal surveys, registration systems, and specialised surveys. They argue alternatively for an ethnosurvey as a means of capturing and categorising variables that can measure undocumented migrants longitudinally through a combination of survey questions and thick, life-narrative interviews. The latter

values the uniqueness of migration characteristics and circumstances and the complexities that can only be traced through thorough, detailed description.

In addition to the avoidance of contact with border controls, state authorities, and social services preventing accurate measurement, research has also identified the fluidity of status that further propagates measurement difficulties. For example, Menjívar (2006) examined the 'permanent temporariness' of forms of protected status, referring specifically to immigrants from El Salvador and Guatemala in the United States. Menjívar conceptualises this as a liminal status that moves between documented and undocumented. Identifying liminality allows the acknowledgement that status is not stable and that the effects of undocumented status might extend beyond the period during which no status is held, or beyond the person who is without status. For example, the family members of a person with insecure status also experience insecurity by association. This was further explored by Bernhard et al. (2007), who found that a precarious status of parents can have negative repercussions for other family members, such as children who are citizens, but still suffer from parents' lack of contact with service providers because of parental precarity.

Capturing insecure status as an alternative means of locating vulnerability permits those with liminal statuses or with legal statuses that internalise a form of vulnerability or insecurity to have that insecurity acknowledged. Security and insecurity cannot be simplified into documented and undocumented. While specific types of vulnerability or precarity might be associated with specific types of status, thinking about insecure status as an identity characteristic allows for insecure status to be mapped to types of vulnerability (rather than mapping the vulnerability to the status type). This is useful for then understanding the implications of liminal and insecure statuses in general. For example, extant evidence suggests that people without regular immigration status experience violence more frequently and often more severely than the rest of the population (McAdam 2015; Rigoni 2016). Limited opportunities to work push migrants into informal labour markets where they are vulnerable to exploitation; people fear reporting violence, coercion, and exploitation in case contact with authorities leads to removal; there is direct violence against migrants in detention facilities and in interactions with border guards, and interpersonal violence, xenophobia, and hate crime in society (McAdam 2015; Rigoni 2016). Furthermore, the UNODC finds evidence to support the idea that the criminal justice system is not brought sufficiently to bear on instances of the exploitation of vulnerable migrants because fear of removal inhibits reporting (McAdam 2015). Violence is produced where the state has made individuals vulnerable by fostering an environment in which migrants cannot access the protection of the state due to fear regarding their own insecure migration status.

Additional evidence suggests that people with regular statuses that internalise forms of insecurity are more vulnerable to violence than people living in the country of their citizenship, or people who have a secure form of permanent residency. These include any type of dependent immigration sponsorship—for example, spousal visas, where immigration is based on marriage to a citizen of the host state, or work visas that provide for a dependent 'trailing spouse'. In these cases, people—more often women than men—rely on their spouse for their immigration status (Balgamwalla 2014; Moon 2021), which affects the intimate partner power dynamic. Immigration can be used as a form of threat that leaves intimate partner abuse and violence unchecked (Anitha 2008). Immigrants entering a country may also be socially isolated, which can exacerbate intimate partner violence or mean that such violence goes unreported (Choi et al. 2012). Lewis et al. (2015) studied the exposure of migrants in the Global North to insecure and exploitative employment, associated with precarity and 'lifeworlds that are inflected with uncertainty and instability' (Lewis et al. 2015; citing Waite 2009). Lewis and Waite (2015) traced the relationship between immigration restrictions and 'hyper precarity'. Ultimately, they argued that 'the rise of casual, flexible, sub-contracted, temporary, contingent and part-time work in a neoliberal economy' (Lewis and Waite 2015, p. 2) gives rise to forced labour. While forced labour may not be, by definition, violence, there is certainly an association between forced labour and violence (Anderson and Rogaly 2005; Lewis et al. 2015; Mak et al. 2017). This

precarity is also associated with asylum status and immigration restrictions, demonstrating an additional aspect of vulnerability to violence associated with an insecure status that is different from a spousal or dependent visa referenced above, but cannot be considered undocumented migration. Understanding insecure statuses as sharing characteristics, rather than a binary of undocumented and documented, allows for the capture of this complexity and for the identification of forms of vulnerability to violence that exist within immigration systems globally.

I propose conceptualising insecure migration status as a global signifier and identity category that can be applied across different immigration systems and can aggregate existing evidence that applies to different forms of insecure status as a means of improving our understanding of the outcomes associated with that insecurity. This focuses specifically on enhanced intersectional vulnerabilities to violence and how they are exacerbated by other forms of precarity (such as socio-economic, labour, gender-based, or family related).

3. Evidencing the Need

Intersectional feminism points to the overlap in identity categories: where particular minoritised identities intersect, individuals are further disadvantaged, subject to additional or multiple forms of discrimination, and exposed to intersecting vulnerabilities. First conceptualised by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989, 1991), intersectional feminism famously argues that the experience of a black woman is subject to (at least) two forms of oppression—both that directed at black people, and that directed at women—but is not the core normative identity group associated with either of these sources of disadvantage. Black referred to men and women were white; hence, Crenshaw argued there was little space for the Black woman to be seen either in feminism or black identity politics in the workplace (Crenshaw 1989). The objective, though, is not to create a new, additional category of Black women: this would relocate, rather than resolve, the problem. Rather, we should be attentive to the potential that there will be new or unseen categories of exclusion that are driven by normative (white supremacist and patriarchal) biases in society. The conceptualisation of insecure migration status is conceived as a means of acknowledging the normative bias of citizenship as a justification for unequal treatment and unequal access to resources and residency. Citizenship represents a hierarchical system of power that produces discriminatory effects for those that exist outside of the normative boundaries (Salcido and Menjívar 2012). It is important to recognise the complexity in experiences of insecure status that are often not resolved by legal status, permanent residence, or even citizenship. For example, recipients of spousal visas might be unaware that, once temporal constraints have expired, their permanent resident status is valid, regardless of their relationship status (Vasil 2023). Someone might remain in an abusive marriage, believing it to be necessary for immigration purposes. Anitha et al. also noted cases of transnational marriage abandonment where insecurity resides in the country of citizenship (Anitha et al. 2018). Citizenship and immigration status represent one dimension of a complex system of insecurity. Experiences of violence are one form of evidence of that insecurity.

The way the category of immigrant is most often conceptualised and measured in population-level demographic or census data relies on the designation of 'foreign-born'. Such a category does not provide meaningful information about immigration status, because one can be both foreign-born and a citizen with all of the protections and guarantees that come with citizenship. While looking at foreign-born status might capture some of the social, cultural, and economic effects of being an immigrant, it can only do so very crudely. For example, a person might have been foreign-born, but immigrated as an infant and naturalised in childhood. Their experience will be vastly different from someone who immigrated in mid-life and was surveyed shortly after that immigration. Someone who immigrated with specific plans into an established community might have a vastly different experience from a forced migrant who immigrated with little or no warning. The particular vulnerabilities that might reside within specific immigration statuses and the potential associations with immigration status are impossible to detect if all immigrants

are considered equal, regardless of status. Of course, there are good reasons to maintain a broader approach. If outcomes are dependent on being an immigrant, rather than the particular classification of immigration status, then this broader measure of foreign-born can capture that effect. Asking people about their immigration status can make them vulnerable, as admitting a lack of status on record can expose an individual to detection from authorities, threatening jobs and livelihoods, family integrity, and potentially leading to detention and removal. Looking at cross-sectional census data or similar can track trends common to people with immigration status, while comparatively small n results for different classifications of insecure immigration status would compromise the possibility of statistically significant findings. Nevertheless, something that explicitly cannot be captured by the designation of 'foreign born' is the state power that is embedded in immigration status. Conceptualising insecure migration status constructs the category itself around the unequal distribution of power between individual and state. Adopting this category can offer insight into the inequality rendered by this hierarchical system.

It should be noted that any use of a conceptualisation of Insecure migration status and resultant data that might be collected must be subject to the ethical responsibility of not putting people in danger. One of the greatest forms of precarity for migrants comes from data-sharing agreements between law enforcement or social services and immigration enforcement authorities (Price and Rojas 2021; Dobson and Turnbull 2022). Such data sharing disincentivises migrants with insecure status from seeking needed healthcare or social services, and from reporting abuse (Shortall et al. 2015; Woodward et al. 2014). As this precarity produces (well-placed) distrust, the question of how to reach populations with insecure status remains a pressing one. Survey methods anonymise data, but cannot require participants to agree to take part. The refusal rate among migrants is higher than that among the remainder of the population (for example, see Reichel and Morales 2017). A standardised way of recording insecure status would allow for data amalgamation across surveys and therefore permit more robust insight into experiences associated with insecure status, even when participation rates are low. This will not resolve the data gap, but may offer some scope for improvement.

I argue that it is worthwhile to conceptualise insecure migration status in a way that can be adopted as an independent variable in large quantitative studies, or can be stratified into more specific types of insecure status in order to look at particular sub-groups or to adopt separately for more in-depth qualitative studies. A standardised adoption of insecure migration status could permit analyses of the effects of insecure status across country, allowing for an understanding of insecure migration status as a category of identity that is independent of the state, despite the state being the body that provides or removes status. It can offer the potential to aggregate data on various insecure statuses, providing empirical evidence on the relationship between insecure status and vulnerability, such as violence.

Migrants are mobile and migration might be sequential, with spells in various locations, interspersed or not with time in a home country, might be circular, or involve multiple temporary migrations. Hence, to know about migration necessitates gathering global, regional, and international data. Using insecure migration status as an identity category or a demographic category can potentially allow for prospective studies with longitudinal data, or comparative studies that can examine experiences of insecurity across countries. It overrides the particularities of status type to focus on experiential insecurity as the relevant designation that creates various manifestations of precarity or vulnerability. Liminal and changeable statuses (Menjívar 2006) can be included as constantly insecure, thus capturing outcomes that are attached to liminality, rather than the particular status at the moment of study. This concept is not designed to replace conceptualisations of dependent statuses, liminal statuses, or undocumented statuses, but is instead intended to offer a means of grouping them together through the common characteristic of insecurity. This might be achieved simply by identifying if someone has been *affected by* insecure migration status in a given time period to acknowledge that the effects of insecure migration

status are not limited to the status holder and might not be temporally consistent with the status period. This proposal proceeds from a theorisation of intersectionality adopted by Salcido and Menjívar (2012) that positions the category of citizenship as a rarely scrutinised normative bias that has implications for how people experience the world. As mentioned above, the need for more complexity in our engagement with citizenship or lack thereof is evident in Anitha et al.'s (2018) research on transnational marriage abandonment, which evidences spousal abandonment in the country of citizenship as a form of abuse rising from insecure status. Vasil (2023) also points to the insecurity of women who may be in a secure permanent resident status, but who are unaware that their status is not dependent. As will be shown below, insecure status is not simply a legal question, but internalises a power dynamic (whether that power is wielded by the state, an individual, or a corporation) that can be used to control, oppress, and harm people, even when they have a legal status.

4. Conceptualising Insecure (Im)migration Status

To use insecure migration status as an analytical category, it is necessary to designate criteria and boundaries that can ascertain what status is insecure versus the types of immigration and citizenship statuses that are secure. Voolma (2018) defines insecure immigration status as

> "not having citizenship or permanent residency, where permanent residency means the right to live and work in a specified country for an unlimited period. . . . they are on time-limited or dependent visas (e.g., spousal visas, student visas, work permits), are in the middle of an immigration application process (e.g., asylum seekers), or who have no legally valid documents (e.g., survivors of trafficking, visa "overstayers" or undocumented (people)" (p. 1832).

Accordingly, people with insecure migration status might include: people without any status (having left their country of citizenship or habitual residence, but not entered a territory through official channels); people in the midst of an application for asylum, refugee status, or another protected status; people whose status has lapsed or have overstayed a visa; people who have not continued to fulfil all the conditions of their status; people whose status has changed but have not informed the immigration authorities or applied to change it; and people who have a status that does not reflect their current circumstances. These are all people who may be subject to immigration control of some type. Additionally, insecure status can include people who have a status that gives rise to a particular vulnerability. This includes certain types of spousal visa, particularly second-degree spousal visas (such as the spouses of people on student or worker visas) who have less recourse to the protection of the state. For example, people on spousal visas are disqualified from permanent residency if their marriage breaks down before the end of a designated time period, which produces vulnerability to domestic violence. This vulnerability is enhanced amongst particular ethnic minorities (Anitha 2011).

As there is some variance in the types of insecure status, it is worth identifying what insecurities are common to all those with insecure status, and what might differ according to status. Table 1 summarises the various types of insecure status.

Table 1. Types of Insecure Status.

Immigration Status	Examples of Insecurity and Related Precarity
No status/undocumented	Subject to border enforcement (pushbacks, restraint, and detention); subject to removal so tend to avoid contact with social services, police, and healthcare where possible. Gives rise to vulnerability to exploitation in employment and living circumstances.
Asylum seeker	Subject to deterrence policies of the state. Subject to violence in detention facilities, restraint, and removal. Subject to violent border policies, and pushbacks.

Table 1. *Cont.*

Immigration Status	Examples of Insecurity and Related Precarity
Failed asylum seeker	As above, also subject to destitution and removal to unsafe location. Lack recourse to health, social, and specialist services.
Overstayer/lapsed status	Subject to removal, destitution, vulnerable to exploitation, lack recourse to health, social, and specialist services.
Not fulfilling conditions	Subject to removal, destitution, and vulnerable to exploitation. Some scope to regain full visa by fulfilling conditions.
Change in circumstances	Subject to removal, destitution, and vulnerable to exploitation. Some scope to regain full visa by filing change in circumstances.
No recourse to public funds	Enhances vulnerability to exploitation by the person to whom the visa is tied (such as spousal). Lack recourse to health, social, and specialist services. Leaving unsafe circumstances produces vulnerability to destitution.
Status tied to employer	Subject to enforced servitude, unsafe working conditions, and unsafe living conditions with no recourse to report.
Status tied to family	Vulnerable to domestic violence, enforced servitude, financial abuse, and bureaucratic abuse.

Arguably, the most insecure status is 'undocumented'. This term is, to some degree, controversial because there are instances of people without regular immigration status being 'documented' as such (Brigden 2013). The word is often used as a blanket term to refer to any person without current immigration status; however, this is inaccurate, because not having current status does not mean that one does not have any documents, or indeed has never had status, or been 'documented' in other ways or through other interactions. To be specific in this case, undocumented refers to a person who has crossed an international border without inspection or with a false document that does not align with their identity or the identity under which they live in the host country. It refers to people residing long-term in a single host country after crossing without inspection or crossing with false documents that are not used after immigration inspection, without regularising their identity or presence in the host country. It also refers to people who have made a border crossing as described above, but who are still in transit to their intended destination. These are the people who are not documented by immigration authorities in the host country and whose presence there is, to a large degree, undetectable. People with no documented status who have entered a country without immigration inspection are vulnerable to the border enforcement and deterrence policies of the state, should they be detected and judged removable. Border enforcement might take the form of pushbacks for recent entrants (Cortinovis 2021; Giuffré 2012). They might include physical restraint or detention (Fekete 2011; Könönen 2020; Athwal 2015). The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs reports that 99% of countries use fines, detention, and deportation to control irregular migration (United Nations 2017). Their removability often means that people who have entered without inspection avoid public services, including services designed to protect public safety, such as police and social services, and even healthcare, apart from in the case of emergencies (Thiara and Harrison 2016; Britz and McKee 2016; Feldman 2021). This gives rise to vulnerability to modern slavery and to exploitation in employment and living circumstances that may not reach the extent of modern slavery, but can be harmful to physical and mental wellbeing. Living without status, particularly when opportunities to regularise status are scant, affects the ability to plan long-term and ascertain future

security (Calavita 2003; Menjívar 2006). Thus, a lack of regularised immigration status affects multiple aspects and types of security.

A person who enters a country with a visa but overstays, has allowed their status to lapse, has stopped fulfilling the conditions of their visa, or has a change in circumstances that they do not share with the visa-issuer can face a number of similar insecurities. This might take the form of a student who drops out of education at the visa-issuing institution, or a person who enters on a temporary employment visa, but then marries a citizen which creates an 'intent to remain' in the visa-issuing country and negates the terms of a temporary visa. Conceptually, in these types of situations, because people have an immigration status that does not reflect their circumstances, they are undocumented in the same sense that someone who entered without inspection is undocumented. However, the word 'undocumented' is not accurate, because they do possess an immigration document and they are known to the host state. The person is documented, but their change in circumstances has not been (properly) documented. In some cases, this is relatively easily rectified and visa status can be amended, although this often involves some form of penalty. The cases in which a route to regularisation is possible are relatively few: only 34% of the 177 countries with available data offer schemes or conditions that would make it possible to regularise status (United Nations 2017). In other cases, an individual becomes vulnerable to the same forms of immigration enforcement (detention and removal) as someone who enters without inspection.

Asylum seeker status is a particularly vulnerable and insecure immigration status. An asylum seeker is a person who has entered a country and asked that country to offer protection based on the 1951 Refugee Convention and/or 1967 Refugee Protocol. They must meet the definitional criteria of the refugee convention (outside of the country of nationality or habitual residence, persecuted with a nexus reason to race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion) to qualify for refugee status. They have asylum seeker status while their application is being processed. This is intended to be a short-term status; however, there are cases where the status is extended for several years (Schockaert et al. 2020; Coffey et al. 2010). Asylum seekers in Europe are often subject to detention in designated 'reception centres'. Asylum seekers are potentially insecure because of past experiences—people who meet the definition have been subjected to persecution and often trauma in their home countries. They have often undertaken hazardous journeys to reach a destination state. Their experiences are subject to intense scrutiny from the state and are often subject to a culture of disbelief (Gibson 2013; Jubany 2017). Asylum seekers are forced to re-tell traumatic events from their past, often in uncomfortable situations, and are judged unfavourably for any discrepancies, despite evidence that trauma disrupts memory (Strange and Takarangi 2015; McFadyen 2019). Asylum seekers are subject to a form of identity insecurity in that asylum seekers identify as such when leaving their home state and embarking on a migration journey. However, they are only defined by the state as asylum seekers at the moment at which they file their application. The time in between is subject to scrutiny for evidence that an asylum application might be 'bogus' or that journeys have taken place illicitly and 'illegally' (Oelgemöller 2011).

Failed asylum seekers in the UK are documented—indeed, their asylum applications have been assessed by the state and found wanting. They are subject to sudden removal proceedings should the state find removal possible. In the event that they cannot be removed, they are often detained or destitute, or they might 'disappear' from the system (Innes 2014). They are subject to the same insecurities (vulnerability to forced labour, modern slavery, violence, and so on) as people without status. The forcible removal of failed asylum seekers is relatively common across Europe. Failed asylum seekers who have been forcibly returned might be vulnerable to the threat that provoked their initial departure (Fekete 2011). They might be subject to other new vulnerabilities in cases of third country returns. They are vulnerable to harm and violence during removal proceedings (Granville-Chapman et al. 2005).

Refugee status is based on the definitional criteria of the Refugee Convention and the Refugee Protocol and this can be considered, in some ways, more secure than asylum status. People who have refugee status have their identity affirmed either after having made an asylum application in a state, or by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the branch of the UN that administers refugee reception resources in states that are not signatories of the Convention, but where resources are deemed necessary due to population flows of prima facie refugees. Refugee status is subject to some particular types of insecurity in the cases of urban refugees in non-Convention states, where refugee reception is handled by the UNHCR, but refugees themselves reside in a host city. They are vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination, and often have limited employment opportunities and limited access to social and community resources that might help to mitigate vulnerabilities (Pantuliano et al. 2012; Fábos and Kibreab 2007).

Additionally, different countries have a selection of various temporary protected statuses, special protected statuses, or special humanitarian statuses. These statuses are often contingent on external events and are temporary in the sense that the status can be changed, or can become non-renewable at very short notice (for example, see Menjívar 2006).

The visa terms for immigrating an intimate partner rely on demonstrating that the relationship is genuine. It is common for spousal visas to have a minimum conditional period where visa status is dependent on the relationship (for example, in the USA and Australia, this is 2 years, in the UK the spousal visa is reassessed at 2.5 years and again at 5 years). This implements a specific vulnerability to intimate partner abuse and violence, whereby immigration status is tied to a relationship. This can be aggravated by cultural norms or by immigration patterns. For example, after marriage, a return to the premarital home may provoke shame for the individual returning or for their family members. Sometimes, simply reversing the passage of immigration would be a shameful or even dangerous undertaking (Anitha 2008). In these cases, a person may be unlikely to report intimate partner violence or abuse or to leave an unhappy or harmful relationship if it is probable that this will result in losing their immigration status (Thiara and Harrison 2016). Thus, the conditional tie to a relationship produces a tangible and gendered vulnerability.

Several OECD countries require a minimum income threshold to be met to immigrate a family member (Joppke 2011; Kofman 2018; Block and Bonjour 2013). This is based on the incoming family member (most commonly a spouse) having access to social benefits after arrival, usually for a fixed time period. The most common way is to establish the level relative to the national minimum wage or according to an assessment of the earnings required to support a household without recourse to the state (López 2017). For example, the UK spousal visa specifies a 'no recourse to public funds' stipulation that is active until the visa holder adjusts to the status of 'settled person' (Sirriyeh 2015). The family based statuses that require an income threshold being met by a citizen-sponsor are all legal, documented statuses. They are not subject to the same specific vulnerabilities as undocumented or irregular status types. Nevertheless, they implement an additional dynamic of power inequality, whereby an individual is charged with providing the types of social protection to their family member that are usually afforded to citizens by their state. The state is actively advising that it will not help people should they become economically or socially vulnerable. This should, therefore, be attended to in conjunction with intersectional forms of oppression or vulnerability.

Many of the vulnerabilities that are experienced by people in these statuses are common across them. Some are common to the insecure statuses that are irregular. Some are produced by particular ties or power dynamics that are attached to a visa status. And some are connected to or aggravated by other intersectional inequalities. It is also relevant to recognise that migration motivations and experiences are as complex as everyday lives. These status categorisations reflect the way that states organise immigration and they are derived from exclusion objectives. In other words, there is a finite number of categories into which a person can immigrate in each state. There are multiple reasons that may converge

behind any migration decision, and any associated vulnerabilities can cross-cut immigration categories. Status may change over time, while insecurity remains constant. Having a means to conceptualise, theorise, group, map, measure, and analyse the outcomes of these vulnerabilities that are common across various types of insecure status is crucial to better understand how immigration can be made more secure, or how already-vulnerable populations can be protected from the enhanced vulnerability attached to insecure immigration status. The intent is not to replace valuable work relating to liminality or precarity attached to various or specific statuses, but instead to offer a means of grouping this work around the common characteristic of insecurity to better reveal the normative bias of citizenship and its implications.

5. Analysing Insecurity and Immigration Status

The challenges of gathering data associated with people with insecure status replicate the key vulnerability underscoring these statuses: that many people avoid contact with authorities (which may extend to any record-keeping) because they fear undermining what security and stability they do have. Here, I build on the insights of feminist security studies to conceptualise this attentive, reflexive, and responsive conceptualisation of insecurity that can be applied to analytical frameworks and strategies for understanding and evaluating immigration status and, crucially, to data-gathering practices.

Feminist security studies have offered insights at multiple levels and units of analysis, both to deconstruct the concept of state security and to better understand substantive security that does not reproduce patriarchal structures. Here, the key objective is to centre a security framework around people with insecure immigration status. The shared characteristic of insecurity is having insecure migration status. However, gender is a significant intersecting vulnerability; hence, applying gender lenses (Sjoberg 2018) to the conceptualisation of insecure migration status as an identity category is both relevant and urgent. The gender lenses can identify where women and female experience are uniquely relevant, but also where gendering practices are relevant to all experiences of insecure status. This, in turn, exposes the normative bias of citizenship and the exclusions inherent in state power. Taking an intersectional approach allows multiple concurrent or mutually reinforcing insecurities to be foregrounded to better reveal the normative biases and their harmful outcomes. Drawing from the insights of feminist security studies provokes a reflexive and responsive analysis of non-typical or non-normative experiences of insecurity (assuming the typical scope of security applies to the masculine, hetero-normative, middle-class, white Western citizen). Importantly, care is also taken to consider the intersection of colonial relations, domination, and racial discrimination, as it is woven into immigration systems. Looking at the everyday experiences of harm of people who fall outside the scope of military and security studies is an established part of the project of feminist security studies (Tickner 1993; Lobasz 2009).

5.1. State Level

It is not controversial to suggest that, at the state level, the concept of immigration has been heavily securitised. This has been widely researched (Huysmans 2006; Bigo 2002; Bigo and Guild 2005; Johnson 2014). Work in critical security studies has examined how the concept of state security has been broadened, which has offered insight into the ways that state narratives have articulated immigration as threatening not just the borders of the state, but also the economy, social services, and cultural sanctity (Huysmans 2006; Innes 2010). Empirically, the link between the securitisation of immigration and the practice of immigration has demonstrated where exceptional measures in the name of security have normalised the use of hostile border policies and excessive physical force in immigration practices, such as restraints, tranquillizers, and force-feeding (Khosravi 2009). People with undocumented or irregular immigration status are then vulnerable to this violence in any interaction with the state. Interacting with the state may lead to their freedom being

restricted in detention, to separation from loved ones, and to removal to a place where they may be in physical danger and are often exposed to a subjective insecurity.

If one applies a gender lens to immigration-related vulnerability at the state level, the patriarchal security narrative tends to suggest that men (agents) pose a danger and women (passive) are in danger. Women may be subject to trafficking and modern slavery, or are refugees, while men are constructed as economic migrants and 'illegal immigrants'; hence, a narrative association with criminality is made along gendered lines (Bosworth and Turnbull 2014). Where there is deviance from the state narrative, for instance, if a woman is not suitably vulnerable or has demonstrated agency, this arouses a culture of suspicion. For example, the patriarchal gaze constructs a female undocumented migrant who has paid a broker to assist in her immigration as an 'illegal immigrant' who is exposed to harsher judgment due to her deviance from the value of vulnerable passivity (Luibheid 2013). This gender dynamic is evidenced in Bonizzoni's (2017) research, cited above, that finds that women pursue regularisation by adopting a position of 'passive submission'.

If one applies a racial lens, the narrative link between black African undocumented migrants and economic insecurity is evident in work focusing on Europe. In 2015, for example, Syrian refugees were contrasted with black, male 'economic migrants' who were constructed as a security threat (Simpson 2015). The racialisation of Muslim migrants has also been securitised, particularly in the West, post-9/11, and linked to a threat of terrorism (Kaya 2009; Banai and Kreide 2017). The state level of analysis tends to prioritise state security, and even arguments that justify and defend open borders or liberal immigration policies acknowledge the right of a state to protect its sovereign borders and to restrict immigration for the sake of national security (Carens 2013); hence, the normative value of the state justifies the restrictions of citizenship. Security narratives distort the everyday experiences of people with insecure migration status and create the idea of a homogenous and threatening mass of immigrants that threaten security and stability in receiving states. However, this securitising relies on targeting a 'threatening group' and making it almost impossible for that group to turn to state resources for protection from violence, harm, and vulnerability. Of course, there are the ethical and philosophical questions of to whom the state owes protection and security, and whose protection and security can be sacrificed in order to protect the former (for further discussion see Squire 2017; Davies et al. 2017; Estévez 2014). Conceptualising insecure migration status as a category allows the empirical identification of a place where inequality is generated and maintained and makes it comparable across countries or across administrative sectors. This, in turn, offers a step towards understanding the complex vulnerability and precarity and towards addressing violence as an outcome of this inequality.

5.2. Gendered Structures

The most common type of immigration globally is family based immigration; indeed, 41% of all permanent migration to OECD countries is family based (OECD 2020). Conventionally, the right to reside with a foreign spouse has been generally accepted as the right of a citizen to their private family life. However, as immigration rules have become more restrictive and as the narrative of immigration at the state level has linked immigration to economic insecurity, the right to reside with a foreign spouse has been reserved for those who make enough to support their spouse without needing recourse to public funds (Kofman 2018; Sumption and Vargas-Silva 2019). This is a notably gendered structure that is embedded in the gendered and racialised history of family immigration (although it is not the only gendered immigration structure: it serves as an example of gendering in practice). For example, Joe Turner demonstrated that the regulation of British family life was such that family outward migration to colonial settlements was designed to avoid interracial marriages. The government established laws and restrictions to prevent interracial marriages, but also managed the development of relationships through a policy of family migration (Turner 2015) and the promotion of the bourgeois family unit, "understood as heterosexual, patriarchal, economically solvent, but above all, white" (Turner 2015, p. 8).

This policy was embedded in maintaining hierarchical international relations, whereby interracial relationships would "blur the boundaries between colonisers and colonised, thus calling to question British right to rule" (Innes and Steele 2015, p. 405). This racialised history is reproduced in postcolonial family visa requirements and restrictions, whereby evidence of an existing 'romantic relationship' is required by the state. The form and quality, both of the romantic relationships and of evidence demonstrating its existence, have been established according to British cultural values that require a degree of assimilation pre-migration and are biased against the recognition of arranged marriages or cultural values that do not permit an unchaperoned pre-marital relationship. In addition to racialised and cultural scrutiny, same-sex marriages have also been subject to additional inspection and discriminatory practices in recognising evidence of a relationship, including a longer period of cohabitation and a higher standard of evidence of cohabitation and relationship than that imposed on heterosexual relationships, including affidavits from family members (Simmons 2008).

A narrative adopted by the state in the UK as a defence of increased restrictions on family migration was as a protection against forced marriage (Wilson 2007; Chantler et al. 2009). Here, the racialised and gendered structure that positions the vulnerable Asian woman as culturally defenceless against forced marriage is evident and reinforces the idea that regulation serves to 'protect' women, thus constructing women as inherently incapable (Carver 2016). Nevertheless, Maher and Segrave found that the risk to women in 'culturally and linguistically diverse communities' is produced by service and legislative regimes (Maher and Segrave 2018). For example, restrictions on family immigration create a broader and more pervasive vulnerability by trapping victims of abuse and intimate partner violence into a relationship that must endure the visa probationary period and prohbit help-seeking from health, social, and specialist services (Crenshaw 1991; Raj and Silverman 2002; Adnan Hameed and Sanjana 2020).

In short, when a spousal visa is issued, a power imbalance is produced in any relationship where the immigration of one partner depends on maintaining their relationship with their partner. This makes immigration status available as a weapon. It does not require that it be used in that way, but the lack of attending to this power dynamic, and instead reinforcing it, contributes to an already gender-biased structure and enhances vulnerability to violence and insecurity. The overarching concept of insecure migration status can empirically account for this inequality: it does not always indicate an outcome of violence or coercion, but it is a structural power imbalance that creates vulnerability to violence.

6. Unravelling Insecurity, Gathering Data

Unravelling these feminist narratives helps to locate crucial places where insecurity is produced and is attached to immigration status. For example, following existing traumas, the first instance of vulnerability that is shared across any irregular status categories comes from the violence of immigration enforcement, such as detention, restraint, and removal, which can trigger symptoms of PTSD and cause re-traumatisation (McFadyen 2019; Zeidan and Ferdowsian 2022). These deterrence policies use state-sanctioned violence against migrants to deter the immigration of other people. However, aside from the ethical debate about this use of force, there is substantial evidence that suggests that deterrence policies are an ineffective means of reducing incoming migration, because they do not affect the motivators of international migration (Cornelius and Salehyan 2007). The second element in operation is that people who are made vulnerable by their immigration status cannot avail themselves of the protection of social services and the police because of the potential negative impact on their immigration status. This then enhances vulnerability and turns immigration status into a weapon that can be used against a person by institutions and by individuals. The fear is substantiated where there are data-sharing practices between police, social services, or even healthcare and immigration enforcement. This is both relatively common in advanced industrialised states and also difficult to trace: while data sharing is not guaranteed, it is often discretionary, such as in UK police data-sharing agreements

(Sawyer 2022). Therefore, there is always a chance that data might be shared, which means that most people with insecurity built into their immigration status, or without immigration status, will avoid interaction with authorities. These vulnerabilities are specifically created by insecure immigration status.

Where people with insecure status do interact with immigration enforcement or make or renew an immigration application, their vulnerability is increased by ideal-type identity standards. For example, an asylum seeker that has demonstrated agency in showing preference for a host country or has travelled onwards after making a subjective determination that they are not yet secure has undermined their potential for protection (Long 2013; Oelgemöller 2011). By seeking their own security, an asylum seeker produces a danger of removal after failing to have their application recognised. However, if they do not seek their own security and remain passive, they are always already vulnerable to harm, as is the nature of seeking asylum; thus, there is a security paradox where an asylum seeker must remain insecure for their identity to hold. The insecurity is, in part, produced by the distinct categories of immigration, despite the fact that shared vulnerabilities and shared gender and racialised hierarchies are evident across them. The acknowledgement of the types and forms of insecurity that are shared across immigration categories or embedded in shared specificities across countries and are inherent to the nature of being a migrant suggests that a retooling of immigration categories is necessary. The current categories serve state administrative purposes and fail to recognise human complexity and the inevitable tangles of everyday life and lived experience. The creation and maintenance of power relationships within immigration systems reproduce normative and structural power imbalances. Attending to insecure migration status as a global intersecting identity characteristic can capture a variety of statuses and status types and unite them under the vector of the shared experience of insecurity. This shifts the focus from 'immigrant' that is implied in foreign-born to 'insecurity' that can capture a variety of statuses while introducing more precision in the effect. Asking whether a person has been 'affected by' insecure migration status can help to account for fungibility in the status itself while limiting the extent to which disclosure is required. While it does not completely resolve the difficulties of gathering empirical evidence of violence associated with insecure status, it has the potential to improve upon what is currently available while remaining attentive to the risks and drawbacks of increasing surveillance of an already-vulnerable population.

7. Conclusions

This research has sought to establish that insecurity is embedded within and experienced across different immigration status types. Using a framework of intersectionality and focusing on where vulnerability to violence is enhanced by immigration status, I argued that insecure migration status should be considered a demographic characteristic to permit both data capture that can respond to intersectional inequality attached to state citizenship and permit the analysis of the outcomes of this intersectional inequality that are not limited to a specified status, but find commonalities across statuses that can be collectively considered insecure.

After identifying vulnerabilities associated with different types of insecure status and across types of insecure status, I used a critical feminist framework drawn from security studies in international relations to highlight sources of insecurity that could be understood in an experiential way and that could challenge the normative power of the state. I offered a reading of some of these sources of insecurity by viewing immigration status through lenses of race and gender to better understand where insecurity not just resides, but is actively produced by immigration systems and intersects with other minoritised characteristics. I argued that migration-related insecurities are broader than those typically related to being without regular status or undocumented, and that there are common experiences of insecurity across countries and across statuses within a country, but also there is great scope for complexity. I demonstrated ways in which a conceptualisation of insecure migration status can permit analysis that cuts across state-designated categories

and offers the potential for new insight into the outcomes of migration-based insecurity with a focus on increased vulnerability to violence.

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