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1 Introduction

Since the post–World War II era, the population of refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), asylum seekers, and stateless persons has been growing steadily. Forced migration continues to be a trend that shapes population flows and influences people's lives in the contemporary world. In recent years, political conflicts, natural disasters, food insecurity, and the COVID-19 pandemic have severely intensified this trend, causing displacement on an even greater scale. According to the UNHCR Global Trends Report, by the end of 2020, 82.4 million people had been forced to flee, pushing the population in forced displacement to a historical high (UNHCR 2021a). The number continued to climb in 2021, surpassing 84 million by the middle of the year (UNHCR 2021b).

Since 2015, Germany has experienced a significant influx of refugees and asylum seekers. With a refugee population of 1.2 million as of mid-2021, Germany became the fifth-largest host country for refugees worldwide and the largest in Europe (ibid.).

The East and Horn of Africa is one of the world's main refugee-producing and refugee-hosting regions.[1] At the end of 2021, the region hosted more than 4.9 million refugees and asylum seekers, as well as more than 12 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), representing more than one-sixth of the globally displaced population (Operational Data Portal 2022). Decades of warfare, violence, and famine continue to threaten lives throughout East Africa, resulting in widespread displacement. In Eritrea, a system of forced military and civil service has led to massive human flight and the development of organized human smuggling networks. In Ethiopia, tensions along the border with Eritrea continue to threaten the lives of residents despite the 2018 peace agreement; domestic political persecution and ethnic tensions have resulted in widespread social turbulence and continuous migration. South Sudan remains the top refugee-producing country in Africa and the fifth worldwide, with millions of people having fled extended civil war (2013–2018), political violence, and ethnic massacres. Sterile land and political complexities in Somalia also cause widespread displacement and homelessness. In recent years, climate shocks, natural disasters (such as the 2019–2021 locust infestation), food insecurity, and the COVID-19 pandemic have intensified these conditions, presenting a barrier for local people hoping to establish normal lives in their homeland. In the face of such social turbulence and natural threats, displacement has severely impacted the well-being of many people in East Africa.

[1] The descriptor, "East and Horn of Africa," is used to refer to the following countries: Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, Djibouti, Somalia, and Eritrea. In the following text, "East Africa" is used as a simplified geographic name for the region.

Highly differentiated border regimes have been enforced to combat a growing displaced population: while EU citizens, for example, face almost no borders within Europe, access to European countries for non-EU citizens has become increasingly difficult (Engbersen et al. 2017; Harvoth et al. 2022). For refugees from East African countries, the search for asylum in Germany is characterized by strenuous effort and extended waiting. According to the BAMF (the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees) (2021c), only 0.8% of the 149,954 decisions on asylum applications granted asylum, while 23.4% were rejected. Statistics show that among children and young people (6–30 years of age) currently living with a status of toleration, nearly half (42%) have held that status for more than six years (ZOOM 2014). Although the "cluster system" was introduced to make legislative procedures more efficient for asylum seekers from countries with high protection rates, it comes at the cost of even longer periods of waithood and impeded access to integration services for non-prioritized groups, such as those from some East African countries (Brücker et al. 2019).

Opinions about refugees and refugee policies have long been divided and controversial. The motto "we can do this" (Germen: „Wir schaffen das"), formulated in response to the inflow of refugees in the summer of 2015, was used as a guiding theme for Germany's refugee policy and has been widely discussed and disputed (Brücker et al. 2020). On the one hand, continuous media reports and discussions call attention to refugee wellbeing and the need for humanitarian aid. This perspective, however, has been met with a rise in racist, xenophobic, and anti-Semitic sentiments, a trend exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Media and political debates about the so-called "refugee crisis" are shaped by such sentiments, and contemporary migration policies reflect these conflicting public attitudes (Krzyżanowski et al. 2018; Horvath et al. 2022). There is thus a great urgency to advance deeper studies and open discussions on refugee issues to promote a broader understanding of different refugee groups.

Refugees from East Africa are an especially young demographic. For example, among asylum seekers in Europe in 2015, more than 91% of those from Eritrea and Somalia were under 35 years of age; specifically, individuals aged 18 to 34 constituted 65% of the Eritrean and 58% of the Somali asylum-seeking population (Pew Research Center 2016). A common pattern is that children and teenagers from East Africa leave their homes on their own to seek asylum without their parents or other adult relatives (see for example reports about "The Lost Boys of Sudan," or the comparative study between Eritrean and Syrian refugees in Germany, BiB, 2021; the present research also confirms this observation).[2] Having left home as adolescents or young adults, they often spend numerous years on their journey seeking asylum, moving between

[2] This pattern is the one of the reasons for the imbalanced gender ratio among East African refugees, which will be discussed in later chapters.

countries in search of stability. Even after arriving in Europe, their status remains highly uncertain, characterized by temporary residence permits and the persistent risks of deportation, detention, exclusion, and marginalization. To gain a deeper understanding of these experiences, this research investigates the lives of refugees and asylum seekers from East Africa in Germany. It focuses on the social and biographical constellations before, during, and after migration to reconstruct the interconnections between them.

Reinforced border controls and a stratified asylum system, which have coincided with new technologies and manifold forms of social exclusion, contribute to the challenges that young people with a migration background face. Vera King and Burkhard Müller (2013) suggest that a "double transformation demand" (*„verdoppelte Transformationsanforderung"*) framework can capture challenges related to both the transition from childhood to adulthood and those concerning migration-specific life conditions. Herwartz-Emden and Schultheiß (2015) describe how young immigrants often face great pressure to acculturate in their host societies, a process that can be conceptualized as an indispensable second socialization (where the first socialization is the transition into adulthood). From the perspective of education and reflexive transition research (Bauer et al. 2022; Stauber et al. 2022; Walther et al. 2020), both the transformation into adulthood and the process of migration place special demands on young adults with migration backgrounds, as they are expected to achieve certain milestones to accomplish these transitions.

This research thus suggests the framework of "double transitions" as a starting point to observe and grasp the processes by which young refugees become adults throughout the process of migration. It investigates the process of double transitions—growing up in diaspora —among the East African refugees (i.e., refugees from South Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Somalia, and Eritrea) who now live in Germany using the method of biographical transition research, with the aim of enriching existing scholarly understanding of the lives of East African refugees in Germany[3] as well as to advancing the fields of life course studies, migration studies, and transition research. As an

[3] The term "refugees in Germany" in this research is used to denote those who flee to Germany and intend to obtain the right of stay by claiming that they have been displaced from their home country, regardless of the reasons of displacement (political persecution, climate, or economic emergency, etc.) and their actual legal status (recognized refugees, undocumented refugees, asylum seekers with continued applications, temporarily tolerated asylum seekers, failed asylum-claimants, etc.). Some scholars suggest using "migrants with a refugee background" as an inclusive term for all the following migrant groups: 1) individuals who have submitted an asylum application but have not yet received a decision; 2) individuals whose applications have been approved and who have received political asylum according to Article 16a of the German Constitution; 3) protection status as a refugee according to the 195/Refugee Convention; 4) subsidiary protection; 5) protection against deportation (*Abschiebeschutz*); 6) individuals whose asylum application have been rejected but whose stay in the country is tolerated (*Duldung*); or 7) those who have been ordered to leave Germany (Brücker et al. 2019).

interdisciplinary research project, this study seeks to combine the perspectives of life course transitions and forced migration studies through the discussion of transition to adulthood in diaspora.

Instead of conceptualizing adulthood as a fixed state that can be reached once and for all, "growing up" describes the arduous process in which young refugees face changing expectations and constant challenges to act and behave like responsible adults. The term "growing up in diaspora" attempts to portray the process of young East African refugees shifting between countries and searching for stable asylum during their teenage and young adult years. On the one hand, it demonstrates the tight connection between time and space in this process; on the other hand, it enables a relational understanding of the spatio-temporalities of migration. Such an approach centers on education because educational attainment is often the first milestone young refugees must achieve in their lives in Germany. Education in this context also refers to informal learning, such as adjusting to a new system, grasping a new language and culture, and navigating both implicit and explicit integration imperatives. Moreover, considerations of family relations and transnational familyhood can provide insights into an essential dimension of refugee life. For refugees, transnational familyhood emerges as a "normality" in their family life (Krüger-Potratz 2004), which challenges traditional mechanisms of generational transmission and family relations, thereby raising the question of how individuals deal with these challenges as they "grow up."

Data were collected using biographical narrative interviews, which invited young refugees to recount their life stories, describe their experiences of living in a transnational context, and explain how they cope with related challenges. This approach places the focus on the participants, their lived experiences of the transition to adulthood and integration into German society, and the ways they maintain or reconstruct transnational family ties. Accordingly, it enables an exploration of the individual strategies that young refugees employ to navigate these "double transitions." By creating space for subjective voices, biographical research provides a comprehensive understanding of young refugees' life stories without resorting to victimizing narratives.

Prior to presenting the empirical findings, this dissertation provides a brief historical contextualization of the research subject; that is, it examines the modern construction of "young refugees." This chapter offers an overview of how the legal and social status of "refugee" was shaped by processes of colonization and post-war nation-building, and how the category of "youth" or "young adulthood" emerged in response to the modern neoliberal economic system. Following this historical and theoretical overview of the subject's construction, Chapter Two outlines the aim of the present research, the primary research questions, and the study's relevance, supported by a brief review of the current state of research.

Chapter Three presents the theoretical and methodological foundation of this research. Following a general theorization of differentiation and an explanation of the research focus on "doings in transitions," the chapter introduces the theoretical and methodological approach of poststructuralist and postcolonial biographical transition research. To apply this approach, Chapter Four describes the concrete research design and procedures. This includes the process for gaining access to the field, participant recruitment and sampling, data collection and evaluation steps, and ethical considerations for conducting research with refugee populations. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations inherent in the research method and practice, which helps to contextualize the findings and suggests prospects for further research.

The empirical material is presented in two parts. In the first part (Chapter Five), three cases are selected and presented extensively for a detailed analysis of different strategies for coping with transition in a diaspora context. Chapter Six first presents an overview of the other biographical cases to establish a foundation for cross-case analysis and discussion. The main findings of the research are organized across three dimensions: (a) educational practices and how they become key to the dialectical relation between vulnerability and resilience; (b) transnational familyhood and the dialectic between transmission and transformation; and (c) the significance of temporality in the migration governance regime as well as its role as a key concept of agency. The final chapter provides a summary of the results, focusing on how the current research enriches our understanding of differentiation and transition. It also offers reflections on the results and suggests directions for further research.

2 Boundary-Making and an Inquiry into "Young Refugees"

This chapter provides a brief discussion of the research field and the emergence of the research subjects, namely "young refugees." It begins from the basic assumption that both the status of "refugee" and that of "young adult" are products of social boundary-making. The modern nation-state system and neoliberal capitalism construct boundaries between people based on origin, age, and socio-cultural background, thereby dividing them into different categories and establishing distinct transition imperatives. These essentialized differentiations and compulsory transitions can be experienced as a form of violence, as they establish normative rules for individual practices and determine whether boundary-crossing is permitted or attainable.

Boundary hegemony can be readily observed in the lives of young refugees. Dispersed from their home countries, they are thrown into a world divided into territorially separated nation-states and a society whose members are stratified into visible classes and disparities. This chapter explicates how the world of nation-states and capitalism functions as a world of boundaries and competition, and how this system contributes to the challenges young refugees face. It begins by drawing an overview of empirical and theoretical research on the construction of "young refugees." Finally, it outlines the aim of the present research, its primary questions, and its relevance, drawing on a review of the current state of scholarship on the topic.

2.1 Refugees in the Global Nation-State System

2.1.1 The Nation-State System and Its Influence on East Africa

The world today is divided into nation-states—that is, territorially separated regions with strict borders. Each state declares its control over a defined land and its people based on the concept of sovereignty, a concept that dates back to the specific historical context of Christianity at the end of the Middle Ages (Frahm 2014). According to Carl Schmitt (1958), the modern concept of sovereignty was shaped by the 16th-century religious civil wars that shattered Christendom. To overcome these conflicts, sovereignty was conceived as "the absolute and perpetual power of a Republic" (Bodin 1992 [1576]), which could not be divided into other forms of political power and thus transcended imperial and pontifical domination. The Treaty of Westphalia (1648), following the Holy Roman Empire's Thirty Years' War, instituted the principle of state

sovereignty that underlies Western European state-building processes (Alles and Badie 2016; Andrew 2011; Bartelson 2011). The universal ideal of Westphalian sovereignty was a core heritage of the Enlightenment, marking an emancipation not only from religion and monarchy but also mankind's liberation more broadly. Marx points out that the state is the mediator between mankind and freedom, arguing that, "Just as Christ is the mediator to whom man burdens all his divinity and all his religious constraint, so too is the state the mediator into which he transfers all his non-divinity and all his human unconcern" (Marx 2016[1843]:9).[4] The state is the intermediary to which man confides his non-divinity and his human freedom. The sovereignty of man is thus derived from the sovereignty of the state; the state, as a form of sovereignty and universality (*„Allgemeinheit"*), transcends human particularity and subsumes individuals into its sacred sovereignty. The state is sacred because it retains the Christian theological structure, spirit, and content, through which it asserts its sovereignty as a universal ideal (e.g., Brown 2014).[5]

Across changing historical contexts and different understandings of sovereignty, three main principles of its original concept have remained stable and recognizable: territoriality, *jus plenum* (absolute power), and differentiation (from the Pope and the Emperor) (Alles and Badie 2016). These principles remain the foundation of the modern international system.

The first principle, territoriality, is key to understanding global territorial divisions and control over a specific population. Territoriality is not only about the control and defense of a geographic area but also—according to Robert Sack's well-known definition—the "attempt to affect, influence, or control actions and interactions (of people, things, and relationships)" (Sack 1983:55). Therefore, territoriality serves as a primary instrument for the articulation and execution of laws and political power.

In this regard, territoriality is connected to the application of violence, which is required to defend against external threats and to protect the interior by eliminating arbitrary border crossings and enforcing an ideology of internal loyalty. The invention of the concept of the "nation" thus serves as an important tool to underscore internal commonality and demand this loyalty. It is consequently not surprising that the establishment of state sovereignty has commonly accompanied nation-building processes.

4 Original text: „*Wie Christus der Mittler ist, dem der Mensch seine ganze Göttlichkeit, seine ganze religiöse Befangenheit aufbürdet, so ist der Staat der Mittler, in den er seine ganze Ungöttlichkeit, seine ganze menschliche Unbefangenheit verlegt."*

5 This declaration also reveals the connection between the idea of sovereignty and Christian belief, despite the ostensible separation under secularization. Numerous scholars have highlighted this contradiction. See, for example, Agamben 1998; Taylor 1989, 2007. As this chapter describes, this association influences concepts like subjects (human sovereignty), democracy, and human rights, etc., and is thus essential for understanding the modern international order and the postcolonial biographical research approach.