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In-between Lives: Attending to age-position in adolescent refugees' experiences of forced migration in the Horn of Africa

Caitlin Phillips

MA Refugee Protection and Forced Migration Studies

caitlindr@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

This study uses a qualitative approach to examine the experiences of forced displacement from the perspective of adolescent Eritrean refugees residing in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia). It uses a "generational" framework to analyse the ways in which their age-position influences their lived experiences. In so doing it highlights the ways in which interconnectedness with family and peer group, within a historical and social context, combined with their stage in life, shapes the complexity of their experiences. This study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the perspective of this age-group and illustrates the usefulness of employing more sophisticated concepts of 'age' to enable more age-sensitive analysis. It demonstrates that attending to the position of adolescents, as distinct from younger children, can serve to deepen an understanding of their lived experiences. For instance, this study highlights the role of family attachments (and separations) in the interviewees' displacement trajectories, and the age-specific impact of displacement on their educational opportunities. It also explores the important role of the peer group in providing a social identity, and a social support, in situations of exile. This analytic approach contrasts with more binary and linear accounts of forced migration, that often miss out on the processes that shape and link the different stages of displacement.

Keywords

Eritrean refugees. Adolescence. Age-position. Forced displacement.

Contents

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Focus

This study will explore the experiences of eleven Eritrean refugees, all in their mid to late teens, all male, and all currently residing in Addis Ababa (the capital city of Ethiopia). It will look at the ways in which their experiences of forced displacement are shaped by their age-position. By employing a relational understanding of age, this study aims to build on existing research with adolescent refugees and draw out a holistic and contextualised understanding of their lived experiences in order to contribute to a deeper understanding of the perspectives of this age-group.

1.2 Background

In 2018, children under the age of eighteen constituted roughly half the global refugee population.[1] Of the sub-group of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) estimates suggest that nearly two-thirds were older adolescents (between the ages of fifteen and seventeen years old). Regarding children arriving in the border countries of the European Union (EU), in 2018 around 32% of new asylum seekers were under eighteen and two-thirds of this group were boys. 42% of this under-eighteen age-group were unaccompanied and, most strikingly of all, 91% of UASC were boys between the ages of fifteen and seventeen years old.[2]

The overwhelming majority of children seeking refuge on Europe's shores (whether accompanied or travelling alone) come from countries of the Middle East (Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq) and the continent of Africa (particularly the Horn and Sub-Saharan Africa). Eritrea continues to figure within the top ten major source countries of new asylum-seekers with Eritrean children arriving in Europe mainly through the central Mediterranean route (via Libya and Italy).[3]

Despite the significant presence of older adolescents, particularly male, within refugee movements into the EU, their 'voices' remain muted within the field of forced migration studies. This may in part be due to the amount of research that has focussed on the emotional wellbeing of UASC, who are viewed as particularly vulnerable and at risk of mental health problems.[4] This has been termed by some a "mental health and social work" approach.[5] Such studies often employ quantitative methods, using standardised research tools, to measure symptomatology. There can be a tendency to look at background experiences as a way of highlighting vulnerability, rather than as the central focus of the research. In addition, a child rights and advocacy approach is dominant in political and policy discourses. This also tends to foreground the vulnerability of child refugees in order to advance a protection agenda.[6] The label of 'vulnerability' is paradoxically powerful and operates as "a signifier that incites and legitimises intervention".[7] However, preferencing intervention (based on vulnerability) can serve to direct the researcher's gaze away from other aspects of the lived experiences of young refugees, such as examining their capacity to act independently (i.e. their agency).

This is not to dispute that adolescent refugees are subject to structural forces out of their control and confronting real risks. For instance, data provided by UNICEF reveals extremely high rates of exploitation of young people (aged fourteen to twenty-four years) taking the Mediterranean routes to Europe, with age emerging as a specific risk factor.[8] Rather, the point being emphasised here is that young asylum-seekers are also social actors who display resilience and resourcefulness that it is important not to overlook.

Many commentators and academics are now highlighting the need to recognise the complexity of forced displacement from the perspective of 'adolescents' as distinct from younger 'children'. This includes considering how their relative social age (age-position) shapes their experiences.[9] To do this requires a willingness to attend, with an open

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1   UNHCR, *Global trends: Forced displacement in 2018.* <https://www.unhcr.org/5d08d7ee7.pdf> accessed 30 October 2019

2   UNHCR UNICEF IOM, *Refugee and migrant children in Europe: overview of trends 2017* (2017) <https://www.unicef.org/eca/sites/unicef.org.eca/files/Infographic%20Children%20and%20UASC%20overview%202017.pdf> accessed on 01 June 2019

3   UNHCR (n 1); UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM (n2); UNICEF, *Harrowing Journeys: Children and youth on the move across the Mediterranean Sea, at risk of trafficking and exploitation* (September 2017) <https://www.refworld.org/docid/59b7fdd74.html> accessed on 4 November 2019

4   U Wernesjo, Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children: Whose perspective? (2012) 19 *Childhood* 495.

5   J Hart, Children and forced migration. In: E Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, G Loescher, K Long and N Sigona (eds), *The Oxford handbook of refugee and forced migration studies* (OUP 2014) 383.

6   A Lems K Oester and S Strasser, Children of the crisis: Ethnographic perspectives on unaccompanied refugee youth in and en route to Europe (2019) 45 *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 1.

7   L Turner, The politics of labelling refugee men as "vulnerable" [2019] *Social Politics* 1, 2.

8   UNHCR UNICEF IOM (n 2).

9   Hart (n 5); Lems Koester & Strasser (n 6); C Clark-Kazak, Towards a working definition and application of social age in international development studies (2009) 45(8) *Journal of Development Studies* 1307; L Pruitt H Berents G Munro, Gender and age in the construction of male youth in the European migration "Crisis" (2018) 43(3) *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 687; N Mai, Marginalised young (male) mi-

mind, to the "self-expressions and experiences of forced migrants" as a counterbalance to prevailing state-centric viewpoints concerning refugees.[10] This means looking beyond dominant modes of framing young refugees as simply 'vulnerable' and engaging instead with questions of agency and meaning, however constrained.[11]

1.3   Understanding Adolescence

It can be stated with some confidence that the first two decades of human life are marked by profound and multi-faceted developmental changes (biological, social and psychological) that most human beings will pass through, taking an individual from the total dependency of infancy towards social adulthood.[12] Western-centric models of fixed, normative life stages have long been critiqued for oversimplifying the relationship between biological and social age and ignoring the cultural aspects to how age is socially expressed.[13] Notwithstanding, a more fluid and socially embedded notion of "youth" as an important phase of social maturation between childhood dependence and participation in the 'adult' world, remains socially meaningful and relevant.[14] This includes recognising adolescence as a "critical phase in life for achieving human potential"[15] and as a "terrain of encounters between growing persons and the adult world" that is important in the construction of gender-related identities.[16]

Despite these insights age-normativity (based on chronological age) continues to dominate discourses concerning 'children' in the forced migration field. This is largely attributable to the prevailing legal definitions that regard anyone under the age of eighteen as a 'child'.[17] However, this does not sit comfortably with the fact that many child refugees, particularly UASCs, are in older adolescence and nearing social adulthood. Indeed, the moment they reach the age of majority at eighteen, they are instantaneously recast as 'adults'.[18] Neither categorisation ("child" nor "adult") attends enough to the unique position and experiences of the adolescent age group. Rather, it masks the experiential dimensions of their social age and risks missing the complexity of young lives in flux, including their transitions into social adulthood.[19]

As Crawley (2011) points out, this blanket merging into one category of "child" can create particular paradoxes for older adolescent asylum-seekers when they fail to conform to essentialised Western ideas of children as "passive, vulnerable, dependant, asexual and apolitical".[20] Showing agency, sexual activity and political engagement can undermine access to legal protection and provoke bureaucratic age-disputes.[21] It can also create a "backlash" against those who do not conform to type, evoking suspicion and fear.[22] The backlash may be particularly acute for adolescent young men arriving from Africa, who sit at the intersection of age with gender and race, which plays into a "long genealogy of racialised and gendered fears of migrant youth as liminal beings out of control".[23]

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grants in the European Union: Caught between the desire for autonomy and priorities of social protection. In: J Kanics DS Hernandez K Touzenis (eds), *Migrating alone: unaccompanied and separated children migrating to Europe* (UNESCO 2010) 69.

10   D Chatty, Refugee voices: Exploring the border zones between states and state bureaucracies (2016) 32(1) *Refuge* 3.

11   Mai (n 9); H Crawley, 'Asexual, apolitical beings': The interpretation of children's identities and experiences in the UK asylum system (2011) 37(8) *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 1171; M Eastmond, Stories as lived experience: Narratives in forced migration research (2007) 20(2) *Journal of Refugee Studies* 248.

12   WHO, 2014. *Health for the world's adolescents: A second chance in the second decade* (2014) <http://apps.who.int/adolescent/second-decade/> accessed on 30 October 2019.

13   Clark-Kazak (n 9); T Burgess, Introduction to youth and citizenship in East Africa (2005) 52(3) *Africa Today* vii; RW Connell, Growing up masculine: Rethinking the significance of adolescence in the making of masculinities (2005) 14(2) *Irish Journal of Sociology* 11.

14   Burgess (n 13); JJ Arnett, Life stage concepts across history and cultures: Proposal for a new field on indigenous life stages (2016) 59(5) *Human Development* 290; G Valentine, Boundary crossings: Transitions from childhood to adulthood (2003) 1(1) *Children's Geographie* 37.

15   GC Patton SM Sawyer JS Santelli DA Ross R Afifi NB Allen M Arora P Azzopardi W Baldwin C Bonnell, 2016. Our future: A Lancet commission on adolescent health and wellbeing (2016) 387(10036) *The Lancet* 2423.

16   Connell (n 13) 11.

17   Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, 1577 UNTS 3.

18   UNHCR, 2014. *Unaccompanied and Separated Asylum-seeking and Refugee Children Turning Eighteen: What to Celebrate?* (2014)<https://www.refworld.org/docid/53281a864.html> accessed on 04 November 2019.

19   Mai (n 9) 84 ; Valentin (n 14).

20   Crawley (n11)1171.

21   H Crawley, *When is a Child Not a Child?: Asylum, Age Disputes and the Process of Age Assessment* [2007] Immigration Law Practitioners' Association (ILPA).

22   Wernesjo (n 4); M Herz, 'Becoming'a possible threat: Masculinity, culture and questioning among unaccompanied young men in Sweden (2019) 26(4) *Identities* 431.

23   Lems et al (n 6) 4.

1.4   Analytic Framework

Recognising adolescent asylum-seekers as social actors and trying to better understand how they navigate their challenging social landscapes, requires more than simply getting them to talk.[24] It also requires understanding how their age-position, including relationships with others, shapes and influences their experiences.[25] In order to do this a more sensitive way of employing 'age' as an analytic tool is needed. This is a challenging task because 'age' is an inherently shifting and "woolly" construct.[26]

In searching for a more flexible analytic tool it has been necessary to look beyond the forced migration field, which is dominated by age-normative (legal and policy) approaches to researching "children". Social geographers have long been interested in exploring what they term "relational geographies" of age in which age-position is seen as being produced within a situated social context of reciprocal inter-generational relationships.[27] In 2009 Clark-Kazak proposed the concept of "social age" to help distinguish socially constructed meanings from processes of biological maturation, offering the potential for a greater depth of analysis (in much the same way that the concept of 'gender' is analytically distinguished from 'biological sex').[28]

Loizos reviews the ways in which the concept of 'generation' has been employed in forced migration studies and argues that the field needs to do more conceptual work in this area.[29] He draws on the four analytically distinct meanings of 'generation' outlined by Kertzer as a way of delivering better conceptual clarity.[30] These meanings include generation as kinship descent (e.g. parent-child connections); generation as cohort (e.g. position within a peer group); generation as a stage in the course of an individual's life and generation as the subjective experience of a historical period.

The terms 'social age', 'generation' and 'age-position' are sometimes   used synonymously, and all share an analytic approach to 'age' that is relational, socially embedded and views 'children' as social actors. Recent academic work (focussing on children and migration) has brought these insights together under one conceptual umbrella that has been labelled a "generationing approach".[31] This framework combines a consideration of broader social and historical processes with a focus on the influence of relationships (within and between generations) in the life-course of the young and is beginning to be applied in forced migration research. For instance, Hart (2014b) applied a "generational framework" to studying young Palestinian refugees' lives in a refugee camp in Jordan using Kertzer's four aspects of "generation" as his lens.[32] More recently Grabska, de Regt and Del Francohave used a similar approach (combined with a feminist methodology) to explore the lives of adolescent female Eritrean refugees living in Khartoum (as well as other female adolescent migrants).[33]

The preoccupation with categorisation and compartmentalisation in much migration related research today often serves to obscure our understanding of the social and relational processes at work.[34] One advantage of adopting a "generational framework" is that it has the analytic potential to deepen our understanding of the lived experiences of young refugees. This study therefore builds on existing research within the forced migration field that has taken a generation-focussed analytic approach, in order to explore the different age-related processes at work in the displacement experiences of adolescent Eritrean refugees living in Ethiopia.

The following section will review the available literature looking at the experiences of adolescent refugees. Findings

24   A James, Giving voice to children's voices: Practices and problems, pitfalls and potentials (2007) 109(2) *American Anthropologist* 261.

25   D Chatty, Researching refugee youth in the Middle East: Reflections on the importance of comparative research (2007) 20(2) *Journal of Refugee Studies* 265.

26   Burgess (n 13).

27   P Hopkins R Pain, Geographies of age: Thinking relationally (2007) 39(3) *Area* 287, 288.

28   Clark-Kazak (n 9).

29   P Loizos, 'Generations' in forced migration: Towards greater clarity (2007) 20(2) *Journal of Refugee Studies* 193.

30   DI Kertzer, Generation as a sociological problem (1983) 9(1) *Annual Review of Sociology* 125.

31   R Huijsman S George R Gigengack SJTM Evers, Theorising age and generation in development: A relational approach (2014) 26(2) *The European Journal of Development Research* 163; R Huijsmans, Children and young people in migration: A relational approach. In: CN Laoire (eds), *Movement, mobilities and journeys: Geographies of children and young people* (Springer 2015); N Ansell, 'Generationing' Development (2014) 26(2) *The European Journal of Development Research* 283.

32   J Hart, Locating young refugees historically: Attending to age position in humanitarianism (2014) 26(2) *The European Journal of Development Research* 219.

33   K Grabska M de Regt N Del Franco, *Adolescent Girls' Migration in The Global South: Transitions into adulthood* (1st edn, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

34   Huijsmans 'theorising age' (n 31).

will be organised around four conceptually distinct elements of age-position (following Kertzer, Loizos and Hart [35]). Firstly, attention will be given to social and historical processes for as Hart points out, the 'historicity' of lives is often under explored and yet the past informs the present.[36] Secondly, the influence of family relationships (or kinship descent) will be examined. This encompasses both the inter-generational order and inter-dependant relationships between children and primary caregivers. Thirdly, cohort (or peer relationships) are explored. This captures the experiences that derive from being part of the same age cohort as distinct from older generations and includes peer group influence and identity. Finally, the way in which an individual's position in their life course can impact on their experience of displacement will also be reviewed.

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35   Kertzer (n 30); Loizos (n 29); Hart 'Locating young refugees' (n 32).

36   Hart 'locating young refugees' (n 32).

2.   Literature Review

2.1   Overview of Research with Adolescent Refugees

The individual stories and circumstances of adolescent refugees are complex and diverse. Research carried out with this age-group reflects this variation and takes place across different geographical terrains and national borders, in urban and camp settings and in countries of final destination and of transit. Young refugees are following life's path within different constellations of relationships, sometimes alone, sometimes accompanied by their age-peers, sometimes as part of supportive family networks – sometimes in different guises at different stages of their journeys across time and place.

In the face of such diversity, it is difficult to make comparisons across studies without succumbing to the trap of over-simplification and thereby losing valuable nuance. In addition, the studies available are broadly ethnographic and qualitative in nature with constraints on their generalisability beyond the contexts within which they are situated. Nonetheless some broad themes do start to tentatively emerge. The presentation of these themes is organised according to the core analytic elements of the "generational approach": historical context, family and peer relationships and life-phase. Although considered in turn, these influences are dynamic and mutually influencing. This review limits itself to research focussing on adolescent refugees coming from countries within the continent of Africa, and of the Middle East (rather than from Asia or Latin America).

Much of the published research in this area relates to refugees who have arrived in destination countries of the "global North" and the focus is often on psycho-social wellbeing and integration into the host societies.[37] This may be partly a reflection of the logistics of accessing participants, and because much refugee focussed research is conducted by researchers from the "minority world" (a term used to highlight that the privileged 'global North' represents the minority of the global population[38]). It may also be linked to the conceptual framing of 'children' in terms of their vulnerability, as mentioned earlier.

Such studies rely on retrospective accounts of how and why young people flee their countries of origin, which raises questions about the reliability (and representativeness) of the accounts that are shared. In addition, the asylum context within which the research takes place often exerts an influence on the findings produced. For instance, O'Higgins found that displays of "victimcy" were conducive to obtaining more support from services in the UK, and this shaped the kind of personal narratives that were shared by young refugees (aged sixteen to twenty-one years old) during the research process.[39] This chimes with findings that young refugees (aged eleven to eighteen years old) minimised their ongoing family and social ties in order to be viewed as more convincing by conforming to notions of child refugees as alone and "severed" from their past lives.[40]

Other substantial bodies of research have explored the experiences of adolescent refugees within communities living in refugee camps. These include research with Palestinian refugees living in camps in the Middle East;[41] with Sahrawi

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37   E Chase, Security and subjective wellbeing: The experiences of unaccompanied young people seeking asylum in the UK (2013) 35(6) *Sociology of Health and Illness* 858; I Correa-Velez M Nardone K Knoetze, Leaving family behind: Understanding the irregular migration of unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors. In: M Mcauliffe K Koser (eds), *A LONG WAY TO GO: Irregular migration patterns, processes, drivers and decision-making* (ANU Press 2017) 141; JE Bettmann R Wright D Olson-Morrison RP Sinkamba, A qualitative exploration of African adolescent refugees' attachment relationships (2016) 47(4) *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 501; K Bek-Pedersen E Montgomery, Narratives of the past and present: Young refugees' construction of a family identity in exile (2006) 19(1) *Journal of Refugee Studies* 94; PE Hopkins M Hill, Pre-flight experiences and migration stories: The accounts of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (2008) 6(3) *Children's Geographies* 257; A O'Higgins, Vulnerability and agency: Beyond an irreconcilable dichotomy for social service providers working with young refugees in the UK. In: A. ORGOC-KA and C. CLARK-KAZAK, (eds), *Independent child migration, insights into agency, vulnerability and structure: New directions for child and adolescent development 136.* (Wiley Online 2012) 79; M Sleijpen HR Boeije RJ Kleber T Mooren, Between power and powerlessness: A meta-ethnography of sources of resilience in young refugees (2016) 12(2) *Ethnicity & Health* 158; M Sleijpen T Mooren RJ Kleber HR Boeije, Lives on hold: A qualitative study of young refugees' resilience strategies (2017) 24(3) *Childhood* 348; D Spiteri, On the way to freedom: An ethnographic appreciation of the life projects of unaccompanied minor asylum-seekers who flee from Africa, cross the Mediterranean Sea, and finish up on the Island of Malta (*SAGE Open 2015)* 1.

38   S Punch, Cross-world and cross-disciplinary dialogue: A more integrated, global approach to childhood studies (2016) 6(3) *Global Studies of Childhood* 352, 353.

39   O'Higgins (n 36)

40   M Adams, Stories of fracture and claim for belonging: Young migrants' narratives of arrival in Britain (2009) 7(2) *Children's Geographies* 159.

41   Hart 'locating refugees historically'(n 32); D Chatty, Palestinian refugee youth: Agency and aspiration (2009) 28(2) *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 318; A Ramadan, Spatialising the refugee camp (2013) 38(1) *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 65.

refugees living in South-West Algeria;[42] with Burundians living in refugee settlements in Tanzania and in Nairobi;[43] with adolescent Congolese girls living in Rwanda[44] and Liberian refugees living in Ghana.[45] The research situated in camps can offer unique insights into the inter-generational dynamics at work in situations of protracted displacement. This includes ways in which a shared history of displacement, linked to ethnic identity, can continue to influence life in the present and also future-orientated aspirations.

With most refugees under the age of eighteen now residing in urban settings research studies are increasingly focussing on these settings too.[46] For instance, Grabska, de Regt and Del Franco explore the experiences of adolescent Eritrean girls living in Khartoum.[47] Other scholars have investigated the lives of young Syrian refugees living in Lebanon and in Cairo;[48] undocumented young Congolese refugees living in Dar es Salaam and in Kampala;[49] young Burundians living illicitly in Dar Es Salaam and Nairobi;[50] and young men seeking asylum while living in Nairobi.[51] In these shifting and challenging cityscapes, themes of daily survival and marginalisation, as well as hope and opportunity, come to the fore.

2.2   Historical Context

Hart makes the case for attending to how the young are located within "the historical trajectory of a society" as this contributes to forming their outlook on themselves, their lives and the narratives they tell about themselves.[52] A range of scholarly literature appears to bear out this close interweaving of the geopolitical with the everyday. Lives of young Palestinian, Sahrawi and Afghan refugees illustrate how the historical, political and economic realities within which they are situated influence their lives and national identities as well as their "imaginings and aspirations for the future".[53] For instance, Hart describes how the social organisation of a Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan still has its roots in the community structures and geography of the past.[54] Sommers finds that the history of selective genocide perpetrated against the Hutu community in Burundi (in the early 1970's) continues to exert a strong influence on the sense of existential threat and "cultural fear" that infuses the present lives of young (male) Burundian refugees living in Dar es Salaam.[55] This is even though they themselves did not directly live through these events.

2.3   Family Relationships

Although family structures and forms vary significantly across societies (for instance they may be organised through consanguinity, affinity or social practices) they remain a fundamental way for societies to reproduce and raise children and prepare them for eventual social adulthood (however this is expressed). Despite the culturally relative ways in which biological and social maturation needs to be understood, ideas and practices around age-deference, and the way this is changing, remain important in understanding inter-generational relationships in many countries of the

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42   Chatty (n 25); E Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Representing Sahrawi refugees' 'educational displacement' to Cuba: Self-sufficient agents or manipulated victims in conflict? (2009) 22(3) *Journal of Refugee Studies* 323.

43   LH Malkki, Speechless emissaries: Refugees, humanitarianism, and dehistoricization (1996) 11(3) *Cultural Anthropology* 377; S Turner, Staying out of place: The being and becoming of Burundian refugees in the camp and the city(2016) 2(1) *Conflict and Society* 37.

44   TP Willimas V Chopra SR Chikanya, "It isn't that we're prostitutes": Child protection and sexual exploitation of adolescent girls within and beyond refugee camps in Rwanda (2018) 86 *Child Abuse & Neglect* 158; I Iyakaremye C Mukagatarem, Forced migration and sexual abuse: Experience of Congolese adolescent girls in Kigeme refugee camp, Rwanda (2016) 3(3) *Health Psychology Report* 261.

45   K Hampshire G Porter K Kilpatrick P Kyei M Adjaloo G Oppong, Liminal spaces: Changing inter-generational relations among long-term Liberian refugees in Ghana (2008) 67(1) *Human Organization* 25.

46   UNHCR 'Global trends' (n 1).

47   Grabska et al (n 33).

48   J Dejong F Sbeity J Schlecht M Harfouche R Yamout FM Fouad S Manohar C Robinson, Young lives disrupted: Gender and well-being among adolescent Syrian refugees in Lebanon (2017) 11(1) *Conflict and Health* 25; M Suerbaum, What does it mean to be young for Syrian men living as refugees in Cairo?(2017) 9 *Middle East-Topics & Arguments* 122.

49   G Mann, Finding a life among undocumented Congolese refugee children in Tanzania (2010) 24(4) *Children and Society* 261; G Mann, "Wakimbizi, wakimbizi": Congolese refugee boys' and girls' perspectives on life in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (2002) 14(2) *Environment and Urbanization* 115; L Stark WD Plosky R Horm M Canavera, 'He always thinks he is nothing': The psychosocial impact of discrimination on adolescent refugees in urban Uganda (2015) 146 *Social Science & Medicine* 173.

50   Turner (n 42); M Sommers, Young, male and Pentecostal: Urban refugees in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (2001) 14(4) *Journal of Refugee Studies* 347.

51   R Jaji, Masculinity on unstable ground: Young refugee men in Nairobi, Kenya (2009) 22(2) *Journal of Refugee Studies* 177.

52   Hart 'locating young refugees historically' (n 32), 221

53   Chatty (n 25); Chatty (n 40); Ramadan (n 40); Hart 'locating young refugees historically' (n 32) 222.

54   Hart ibid (n 32).

55   Sommers (n 48).

world.[56] One of the themes that emerges from research with adolescent refugees is the way in which the association between senior age and social status is shifting in the context of displacement.

Often the harsh realities of subsisting in exile, including social marginalisation, mean that adults' normal capacities to provide for younger members of the household can be seriously undermined and this has implications for inter-generational relationships. For instance, Mann found that Congolese teenagers were having to provide emotional support to the adults in their lives, which made them feel "helpless".[57] Adolescent refugees living in Kampala (aged from thirteen to seventeen years old) described a loss of faith in their parents' ability to protect and provide for them. This was contributing to the youth turning to their own street-based connections for support, with all the concomitant risks attached.[58] These findings chime with research carried out by Clark-Kazak with refugees from Eastern Congo living in a refugee settlement in Uganda.[59] This research highlights the difficulty of parents to fulfil their responsibilities towards their offspring, the decrease in respect shown towards elders and the phenomenon of groups of young refugees forming households together within the camp. This shift in power between with the generations is also a theme that emerges from the work of Hampshire et al. (2008) who observed a widespread perception that the traditional mores of authority and respect between youth and their elders had broken down in the Buduburam camp for Liberian refugees in Ghana.[60] Indeed, within that camp youth ghettos (known as "the Gaps") had formed. These were largely occupied by young male ex-combatants and operated in parallel to the rest of the camp.

Sometimes inter-generational tensions occur because of differences in the future-orientated ambitions between generations. For example, some young Palestinians express ambivalence about being positioned as the "generation of return" by their elders, as part of the communal project of return to the Palestinian homeland.[61] In a similar vein, young Burundians living irregularly in East Africa describe the freedom that urban living gives them to shape their own destinies, in contrast to the orthodox politics of the camps which are premised on a vision of eventual communal return to the homeland.[62]

The political antecedents of forced migration have the potential to create divisions between generations too. Suerbaum (2017) found that young (male) Syrian refugees were critical of their parents' generation for not having more actively opposed the Assad regime from which they had fled.[63]

2.4   Peer Relationships

Peer based relationships tend to become more important in adolescence and to provide a source of companionship, intimacy and sense of belonging. It is perhaps therefore unsurprising that the role of the peer group in young people's experiences of forced displacement is mentioned in a range of research studies. As shifts in inter-generational roles and cohesiveness occur, so many young people may turn to one another for validation and mutual support. The youth Ghettos of Buduburam, already mentioned, are one extreme example of this, but developing youth cultures of different degrees of intensity are observed in a range of settings. Sommers (2001) notes the urban youth culture that many young refugees fall into when they move to cities such as Dar es Salaam.[64] Here youth from a variety of backgrounds (including those migrating internally) are living marginalised lives and developing new social identities through peer networks that are marked out by particular ways of speaking and dressing.

Peer relationships and social interactions within camp settings can be intense, and the resulting friendship bonds that are formed are strong.[65] Sometimes bonding occurs through adversity, and the shared sense of not belonging or of being discriminated against.[66] Sometimes it is the relief of having a shared language and cultural reference points that will draw youth together. [67]

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56   Burgess (n 13).

57   Mann (n 47) 120.

58   Stark et al (n 47).

59   Clark-Kazak (n 9).

60   Hampshire et al (n 44).

61   Hart 'locating young refugees' (n 32); Chatty (n 25).

62   Sommers (n 48); Turner (n 42).

63   Suerbaum (n 46).

64   Sommers (n 48).

65   Hart 'locating young refugees' (n 32).

66   Stark et al (n 63).

67   Spiteri (n 36).

2.5   Life Phase

Loizos (2007) highlights the ways in which an individual's life stage can impact on displacement, for instance through differences in levels of dependency and responsibility, or economic capacity.[68] 'Adolescence' is a multi-faceted process that brings young people nearer to social adulthood. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that many adolescents living in situations of disadvantage in the "majority world" express an increasingly urgent preoccupation with their futures as they move through their mid to late teens.[69]

The aspiration of finding a "good life" often involves dreams of accessing greater opportunities through onward migration elsewhere, typically to countries of the "Global North". Ambitions are no longer just locally inspired but influenced by the global connectedness and transnational networks of refugee communities, and an understanding of the value of remittances in helping communities that remain in countries of origin.

Sometimes preoccupation with the future serves to relegate the present to a kind of 'non-time' and remaining 'out of place' becomes a means for advancing future possibilities. Turner (2016) found that young Burundian refugees living illicitly in Nairobi were remaining 'apart' in the present in order to achieve emplacement elsewhere in the future. He refers to this as living a "life of becoming rather than being".[70] In research with Sudanese refugees in Cairo, Grabska (2006) found that parents would sometimes withhold their offspring from the local public schools because they believed it could improve their chances of being accepted for resettlement (because any form of local integration was viewed as reducing their chances).[71] Other scholars hypothesise that the intense focus on futures elsewhere is a form of coping strategy for managing the pain and suffering of the present and of escaping the constraints of reality.[72]

With the expansion of the neoliberal project of economic and social globalisation, formal education has become an increasingly normative part of the expectations of adolescence.[73] Young people across the globe are therefore now pursuing educational qualifications as their passport to accessing choice and opportunity, despite the daunting economic and structural inequalities that they face. Throughout the studies reviewed, obtaining a good education was regularly cited by teenage refugees as part of what motivated them to flee and what fuelled their hopes for their futures elsewhere. The sad irony is that in reality displacement for many spells the disruption or curtailment of their education.[74]

Where education is disrupted, the reasons are varied with some displaced teenagers having to abandon school in order to help provide a household income.[75] Other barriers include costs (including for uniforms, transport and school supplies), language, and the experience of social ostracism in the classroom.[76] Once missed out on, regaining opportunities for education becomes harder over the age of eighteen, when state provision often ceases. This is a specific, age-related impact.

It is important to note that the influence of gender also permeates adolescents' experiences of forced displacement. Adolescence is a phase in life when differences in social expectations for males and females tend to become more apparent, and control of the capacity for sexual reproduction (particularly for girls) becomes more marked. In situations of poverty and marginalisation, the survival strategies of young men and women often vary. Studies repeatedly highlight how age and gender intersect to mean that adolescent girls are particularly susceptible to sex work, sexual exploitation and abuse.[77] Also, that they may be pushed towards social 'adulthood' (for instance through marriage and domestic responsibility) sooner than their male counterparts.[78] Research with young refugee men gives some suggestion that economic self-sufficiency may be particularly key to their sense of adequacy as men. and that older male refugee children may be particularly susceptible to family pressures to move-on irregularly.[79]

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68   Loizos (n 29).

69   Ansell (n 31); Mann (n 47).

70   Turner (n 7).

71   K Grabska, Marginalization in urban spaces of the global south: Urban refugees in Cairo (2006) 19(3) *Journal of Refugee Studies* 287.

72   Mann (n 47).

73   C Jeffrey L McDowell, Youth in a comparative perspective: Global change, local lives (2004) 36(2) *Youth & Society* 131.

74   Grabska et al (n 33).

75   Suerbaum (n 46).

76   Stark et al (47).

77   Iyakaremye Mukagatare (n 43); Williams et al (n 43); L Stark K Ashar I Seff B Cislaghi G Yu TT Gessesse J Eoomkham AA Baysa K Falb, (2018) 5 *Global Mental Health*.

78   Hampshire (n 44) ; Clark-Kazak (n 9); Stark et al (n 47).

79   Jaji (n 49) ; Corea et al (n 36).

2.6   Summary

By attending to what the available literature can tell us about the influence of age-position on adolescents' experiences of displacement, this section has illustrated how analytically productive a "generational" approach can be. This relational approach contrasts with more static, age-normative approaches and offers scope for a multi-dimensional exploration of the lived experiences of adolescent refugees to take place.

The following section will give an overview of the context of forced migration from Eritrea. It will highlight some of the historical and social processes that continue to impact so forcefully on the lives of young Eritreans today. This enables a more contextualised understanding of the experiences recounted by the participants taking part in this study.

3.   Forced Migration from Eritrea

3.1   The Current Context

One year prior to this study being conducted a historic peace accord was agreed between Ethiopia and Eritrea (in September 2018) for which the Ethiopian prime minister was awarded the Nobel peace prize.[80] This resulted in the borders between the two countries being opened for the first time in twenty years, leading to a surge in the numbers of Eritreans (particularly women and children) crossing into Ethiopia. Official figures indicate that approximately 45,000 Eritrean refugees entered Ethiopia between September and December 2018, but this is likely to be a significant under estimation.[81] By the end of December 2018 exit passes for Eritreans had been reintroduced and at the time of writing all border crossings are once again closed.[82] Despite this, an estimated 300 Eritreans continue to cross irregularly into Ethiopia every month.[83]

Eritrea is currently ranked 179th out of 189 countries on the human development indices (these look at life expectancy, years of education and standard of living).[84] It is governed by a single-party dictatorship, headed by the same president, Isaias Afewerki, for over twenty years. This deeply repressive political regime tolerates no independent media, prohibits all other political parties and all non-governmental organisations (NGOs). No constitution, legislature, independent judiciary or elections are allowed.[85]

A system of compulsory and indefinite national service, that disproportionately targets the younger members of Eritrean society, is imposed.[86] The woefully low wages that conscripts receive undermines the economic capacity of families.[87] Conscription also has a generally detrimental impact on family cohesion, with conscripts granted very little home leave and several members of a family often serving simultaneously. Because of this situation impoverished communities increasingly rely on the remittances sent by family members living overseas.

Despite its small population size, Eritrea was the ninth largest refugee producing country in the world in 2018.[88] Eritreans move in large numbers to the neighbouring countries of Ethiopia and Sudan. Ethiopia grants Eritreans prima facie refugee status and in recent revisions to its refugee law has extended its out of camp policy and awarded more inclusive rights to refugees.[89] In 2018 Ethiopia hosted approximately 173,879 Eritrean refugees, although this is also likely to be an underestimation.[90] Sudan hosts an estimated 120,000 Eritrean refugees.[91]

Many Eritreans also move further afield, with many taking the arduous central Mediterranean route to Europe. In 2018

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80   J Burke J Henley, Abiy Ahmed, Ethiopia's prime minister, wins 2019 Nobel peace prize. *The Guardian, international edition* (online,

11 October 2019) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/11/abiy-ahmed-ethiopian-prime-minister-wins-2019-nobel-peace-prize> accessed on 05 November 2019.

81   UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY, *The situation of human rights in Eritrea: Report of the Special Rapporteur on Eritrea,* A/HRC/41/53 (16 May 2019). [online] < https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G19/140/37/PDF/G1914037.pdf?OpenElement> accessed on 06 November 2019.

82   M Belloni J Jeffrey, Amid border wrangles, Eritreans wrestle with staying or going. *The New Humanitarian* (online 30 April, 2019) <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2019/04/30/amid-border-wrangles-eritreans-wrestle-staying-or-going> accessed on 22 October 2019; S Creta, Eritrean refugees defy border closures only to find hardship in Ethiopia. *The New Humanitarian.* (online 21 October, 2019) <http://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2019/10/21/Eritrean-refugees-Ethiopia-border-closures> accessed on 05 November 2019.

83   UNGA (n 78).

84   UNDP, *Human development indices and indicators: 2018 statistical update – Eritrea*, (briefing note). (online, 2018) <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/ERI.pdf> accessed on 06 November 2019.

85   Human Rights Watch, *Eritrea: Events of 2018 (world report 2019).* (online, 2019) <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/eritrea> accessed on 05 November 2019.

86   AMNESTY, *Just deserters: Why indefinite national service in Eritrea has created a generation of refugees*. (online, 2015) <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AFR6429302015ENGLISH.PDF> accessed on 05 November 2019; HOME OFFICE UK, *Eritrea: National service and illegal exit (country policy and information note)* (online 17 July, 2018) <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/726192/Eritrea_-_NS_Illegal_Exit_v5.0e__July_2018_.pdf> accessed on 05 November 2019.

87   M Treiber, From revolutionary education to futures elsewhere: Children and young refugees fleeing Eritrea. In: J Bhaba J Kanics DS Hernandez (eds) *Research Handbook on Child Migration* (Edward Elgar Publishing UK, 2018) 49.

88   UNHCR 'Global Trends' (n 1)'

89   UNHCR, *UNHCR welcomes Ethiopia's law granting more rights to refugees: Press release,* (18 January, 2019) <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2019/1/5c41b1784/unhcr-welcomes-ethiopia-law-granting-rights-refugees.html> accessed on 06 November 2019.

90   UNHCR, *Ethiopia: Fact sheet,* (31 August 2018) <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/65729.pdf> accessed on 28 December 2018.

91   UNHCR, *Sudan: Fact sheet,* (August 2019) <http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Sudan%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20August%202019.pdf> accessed on 05 November 2019.

Eritreans constituted one of the most numerous groups of new asylum-seekers arriving into the EU.[92] Switzerland and Germany are particularly favoured destination countries. Despite the Israeli government's policy of non-voluntary relocation, a notable presence of Eritrean refugees remains in Israel.[93] There are also of reports of new destinations emerging including Latin America, from where people try to access asylum in North America and Canada.[94]

3.2   The Historical Context

Seeking refuge elsewhere has been part of the founding experience of the modern Eritrean state. Its incarnation has been characterised by war, authoritarian rule and flight. In the thirty-year war of independence with Ethiopia (ending with independence in 1993) it is estimated that around a quarter of the population left Eritrea.[95] After independence the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) put in place an increasingly repressive regime, which included establishing a dominant political narrative of loyalty, sacrifice and struggle which was exemplified through the "heroic" and idealised figure of the patriotic soldier.[96] This helped prime the population for the progressive militarisation of Eritrean society which was accelerated as a result of the subsequent border war of 1998 – 2000, also against Ethiopia, which fuelled a further exodus of the population.[97]

The spectre of open-ended national service is credited as one of the primary current drivers of flight, which impacts particularly on the young. A compulsory national service (including military and civilian elements) for all citizens aged between eighteen and forty years old was first formally introduced in 1995.[98] To begin, conscripts were allowed to return to their normal civilian lives after serving for eighteen months. There was initial support for the scheme as part of a shared societal commitment to nation building in the aftermath of hard-won independence.[99] However, the renewal of war in 1998 began to change this social contract. Conscription into the national service shifted and became increasingly open ended, with conscripts serving for up to twenty years in conditions of effective servitude to the state.[100] It also increasingly targeted the young, and some scholars attribute the period after the end of the 1998-2000 war, referred to as the era of "no war no peace", as the starting point for the mass migrations that are witnessed today.

In 2003 conscription became integrated into the design of the nation's educational system. Since then pupils have been obliged to spend their final year of secondary school at the infamous military training camp of Sa'wa. Here they undergo military training and prepare for final exams (with teaching staff themselves often conscripts). The military component includes inculcation into a political nationalist ideology that promotes loyalty and sacrifice to one's country and values subordination of the individual to the collective. Only a minority of students achieve high enough grades to attend further education at government colleges (there are no universities) but most enter compulsory service. Conscription also occurs through intermittent 'round-ups', known as "giffa", aimed at catching those who have evaded Sa'wa through different means (such as withdrawing from school early in order to avoid detection).[101]

For young people approaching adulthood the Sa'wa system "is the beginning of a process which paralyses their chances of achieving generational and socio-economic mobility".[102] As a result, Eritrea is "haemorrhaging its youth".[103] Many secondary school students attempt to leave before being drafted. In the harsh and punitive environment of Eritrea, prisons are full of young people who have tried to leave illegally.

Those who fled during the period of the independence struggle were regarded as patriotic victims of Ethiopian ag-

92   UNHCR 'Global Trends' (n 1).

93   UNHCR, *UNHCR and Israel sign agreement to find solutions for Eritreans and Sudanese – press release*, (02 April 2018) < https://www. unhcr.org/news/press/2018/4/5ac261bd4/unhcr-israel-sign-agreement-find-solutions-eritreans-sudanese.html> accessed on 06 November 2019.

94   Creta (n 79).

95   Belloni Jeffrey (n 79).

96   A Massa, Learning not to ask: Some methodological implications of studying Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia (2016) 141(2) *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 257, 260.

97   J Ashford, Indefinite conscription: Why so many people are fleeing Eritrea. *The Week*. (online 13 August, 2019) <https://www.theweek. co.uk/102761/indefinite-conscription-why-so-many-people-flee-eritrea> accessed on 06 November 2019.

98   *Proclamation on National Service No. 82/1995 of 1995* (Eritrea, 23 October, 1995) <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3dd8d3af4.html> accessed on 05 November 2019.

99   Treiber (n 84).

100   Amnesty (n 83).

101   Treiber (n 84).

102   M Belloni, Family project or individual choice? Exploring agency in young Eritreans' migration (2019) Special issue: Children of the Crisis *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 1; M Belloni, Becoming unaccustomed to home: Young Eritreans' narratives about estrangement, belonging, and the desire to leave home [2018] *Contested Belonging: Spaces, Practices, Biographies* 161.

103   Amnesty (n 83) 7.

gression (and continued to help the independence struggle with remittances from overseas). However, today's young refugees are regarded as deserters of the state by the regime, although many argue that their flight is more rightly understood as a political act of resistance.[104] For Eritrean youth who have been brought up strongly inculcated with patriotic feelings, and for whom conforming to national service means foregoing their own individual life projects, the relationship with the Eritrean state can be a highly ambivalent one.

3.3   Summary

As this brief synopsis of the political and historical context shows, there is a significant generational dimension to understanding the ongoing refugee exodus from Eritrea. By merging compulsory conscription with school education, young people of school age have been specifically targeted by the regime. For children growing up within Eritrean society, often separated from family members due to conscription and exile, there is a way in which migration has become a socially normalised survival strategy.[105]

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104   M Belloni, Refugees and citizens: understanding Eritrean refugees' ambivalence towards homeland politics (2019) 60(1-2) *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 55.

105   Belloni 2019a 'family project or individual choice' (n 99).

4.   Research Methods

4.1   Data Collection and Recruitment

Primary data for this research study is based on the responses of eleven Eritrean, male, adolescent refugees who were interviewed in person in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) in August 2019. All participants were interviewed on one occasion, and the interviews lasted from between half an hour to an hour in length.

A semi-structured interview format was used and supported by an interview guide (to help ensure consistency in the topics discussed). Interviewees were asked to talk about the different stages of their displacement experience, including how they came to be in Ethiopia, what life is like for them in Addis Ababa, and how they see their futures. Care was taken to build rapport and put participants at ease. A professional interpreter facilitated simultaneous translation of the interviews from Tigrinya and Amharic into English (and vice versa). The interviews were also recorded and later transcribed.

Sampling was purposive with all interviewees being male refugees from Eritrea between the ages of sixteen and eighteen years old (children under sixteen were excluded). The homogeneity of the sample was intended to make it easier to compare themes across the sample, but the drawback of this is that it limits the generalisability of the findings.

Interviews were held at a community centre attended by the young refugees. Staff at the centre facilitated the recruitment of participants from this hard to reach and potentially vulnerable group by distributing information about the study in advance, and by providing a private room in which to conduct the interviews. This arrangement was preferred because it provided a layer of support to the researcher and the interviewees, with staff (including counsellors) accessible should any participant have become emotionally upset due to the interview process. Staff were also able to verify the ages of the research volunteers where this was in question. A senior social worker attached to the Centre was able to act as the responsible adult for the younger participants. Volunteers also introduced one another to the study through word of mouth (a snowballing method). This convenience form of sampling was justified given that the researcher did not have pre-existing links with the community and that there was a limited research timeframe available. However, this creates a limited sample which is not representative of the broader population of young refugees.

All the participants were residing in Addis Ababa and had been living in the city for between one and five years at the time they were interviewed. Most were living with their mothers and siblings although some were living with more distant relatives (or non-family members) and one participant was living on his own. The majority had crossed the border into Ethiopia irregularly, with around half of the group having made the crossing in the company of their mothers and some of their siblings, assisted by smugglers. The interviewees were aged between twelve and sixteen at the time that they had made the border crossing.

4.2   Data Analysis

Interview recordings were transcribed and anonymised, and the original recordings deleted (in the interests of data protection). Data was analysed by developing a thematic framework from key topics present in the data and using this to "index" and compare themes both within and across data sets. The data was then further analysed by applying a "generational" lens to identifying themes related to family, peer group and life-stage influences contained within the interviewees' accounts. By doing this the study used a combination of inductive and deductive analysis to interpret the data.

4.3   Epistemological Approach

This research was carried out within a broadly qualitative paradigm that was informed by a phenomenological approach. It sought to understand the participants' experiences from their own perspectives and within the context of their lives and attempted to keep interpretations grounded as far as possible in the data.[106] The researcher was recognised as an active contributor to the knowledge produced and therefore attempted to make biases as transparent as possible by reflecting critically on the research process.[107] This was done by keeping field notes, and attending to process issues between the researcher and the participants when listening back to the interview recordings.

Constructionist approaches, which pay more attention to language practice, were not deemed appropriate for the research aims of this study, nor to the cross-language nature of the data collection, which necessitates reliance on the

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106   J Ritchie J Lewis CM Nicholls R Ormston, *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers.* (Sage 2nd edn London, 2014); H Starks S Brown-Trinidad, Choose your method: A comparison of phenomenology, discourse analysis, and grounded theory (2007) 17(10) *Qualitative Health Research* 1372.

107   T Kock A Harrington, Reconceptualizing rigour: The case for reflexivity 1998) 28(4) *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 882; AE Pezalla J Pettigres M Miller-Day, Researching the researcher-as-instrument: An exercise in interviewer self-reflexivity (2012) 12(2) *Qualitative Research*.

use of an interpreter.[108]

4.4   Ethical Considerations

Research with potentially vulnerable young refugees raises significant ethical considerations, including awareness of the magnified power differentials at play.[109] At all times the researcher put the emotional needs of the young participants before the interests of the research project and was alert for signs of discomfort or distress. Time was also provided at the end of each interview for feedback to be given on the experience of being interviewed.

Ethical clearance for the study was granted by the School of Advanced Study, University of London. Authorisation was also obtained from the lead governmental agency for refugee affairs in Ethiopia and from the UNHCR urban programming and child protection teams in-country.

Participants were provided with clear written information in advance that was in their own language (Tigrinya or Amharic). This information was also repeated verbally at the outset of each meeting. It was made clear that participation in the study would confer no advantages, and that withdrawing or not answering questions would incur no disadvantages. All participants gave their informed written consent to being interviewed, to being recorded and to having an interpreter present. Additional separate consent was sought from an appropriate responsible adult for participants who were aged sixteen and seventeen. They were also offered the option of having a responsible adult present in the interview, but none chose to do this, preferring to be interviewed on their own. In addition, a confidentiality agreement was signed by the interpreter prior to him taking part in the interviews.

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108   A Squires, Methodological challenges in cross-language qualitative research: A research review (2009) 46(2) *International Journal of Nursing Studies* 277.

109   James (n 24); S Spyrou, The limits of children's voices: From authenticity to critical, reflexive representation (2011) 18(2) *Childhood* 151.

5.   Findings and Analysis

Analysing the interviewees' accounts of their displacement experiences through a "generational" lens reveals some of the relational aspects of their experiences. This contrasts with more linear narratives of displacement that often describe refugees' journeys in a sequenced way. Instead the focus in this study is on the way that age, understood in social and relational terms, serves to shape and influence aspects of the participants' displacement. It draws out the ways in which their inter-relationship with parents effects aspects of migratory decision-making. It also attends to the significance of the peer group to life in the 'present' as well as to imagined futures elsewhere. This analytic approach also highlights the age-specific way in which educational aspirations are impacted in situations of prolonged uncertainty for adolescents.

The findings emerging from the participants' accounts will be presented in detail below, focussing on the different elements of their age-position in turn and beginning with some observations regarding the interpersonal process of the research interviews.

5.1   The Interview Process

In this study the research interview was a process shared between three people: the researcher, the interviewee and the interpreter. It is important to attend to the potential ways in which aspects of the inter-personal process may influence the data being produced. It was anticipated that trust was likely to be a salient issue for this group. Not only is it recognised as a prominent issue in conducting research with refugees, at all stages of the research process but it is also an issue that has been identified when working with the Eritrean refugee community in particular.[110] Massa found that suspicion and secrecy were so endemic to her research encounters with Eritrean refugees (who were university students) that it became necessary to address the issue of 'silence' as a core part of her research analysis.[111] The obfuscation she experienced appeared to be born from peoples' direct experiences of state repression and surveillance in Eritrea, which had become internalised and thus reproduced at a collective level.

Contrary to expectation, during this study participants were, overall, willing to be interviewed and ready to talk about their experiences. They also all agreed for the interviews to be recorded. The degree to which they were forthcoming varied, with some interviewees being more expansive than others. Typically, participants would appear formal and a little nervous at the outset of the interview and would then visibly, and quite quickly, relax. The presence of the interpreter, who was a middle-aged Ethiopian man with a calm and sympathetic manner, appeared to facilitate rapport. The young interviewees seemed at ease with him, and together they shared the complicity of language and familiar cultures. It seems likely that the location of the interviews, in a private room at the Community Centre that the interviewees attended, also contributed to this sense of being at ease. It was a familiar place that they felt safe in and the room afforded privacy.

It seems likely that the participants' age and curiosity also played a part in their readiness to be interviewed. They welcomed the individual attention and interest shown in them and their stories, and all said that this was the first time they had been interviewed in this way. On the last day of interviewing, after news of the research project had circulated by word of mouth, several new volunteers appeared and waited outside the interview room. Unfortunately, they were too young to be included in the study. A similar experience was reported by researchers interviewing children and youth who travelled via the Mediterranean route into Europe.[112] They found that adolescents would approach them eager and excited to share their stories, sometimes queuing to be seen.[113]

Despite the positive engagement of the participants with the interview process overall, the data produced remains partial and limited by the cross-language methods employed. Interview based research is reliant on what participants chose, or are able, to say and relying on an interpreter adds an additional layer of representation that can affect the trustworthiness of results, including assumptions of cultural equivalence.[114] In addition, the differences between the researcher and the participants in terms of gender, age, language, culture and life-experience raise questions about the phenomenological credibility of what emerges from the interview process. It is important to keep these caveats in mind when evaluating the research findings of the study.

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110   Massa (n 93); T Hynes, *The issue of 'trust' or 'mistrust' in research with refugees: choices, caveats and considerations for researchers* (online UNHCR Geneva, 2003) <https://www.unhcr.org/3fcb5cee1.pdf> accessed on 10 November 2019.

111   Massa (n 93).

112   UNICEF (n 3)

113   Ibid, 12.

114   Squires (n 105).

5.2 Family Relationships

As has already been acknowledged, family structures (however configured across different societies) remain integral to the way society reproduces itself and raises children. This research group consisted predominantly of teenagers moving within the context of family-based processes of reunification and resettlement. In keeping with this, nearly half of the young people interviewed had crossed the border from Eritrea into Ethiopia accompanied by their mothers and (at least some of) their siblings. The remaining participants had crossed alone or accompanied by siblings or friends. The majority were now in Addis Ababa waiting for official processes to take their course. Because their displacement trajectories are being shaped within shared family migration projects, this group of participants may not be representative of the wider population of adolescent refugees (including Eritrean and other nationalities), many of whom are moving outside family networks and official reunification processes.

Between them the group of interviewees revealed some of the complex and dynamic ways in which close family (including the absence of close family) shaped their experiences of displacement. This includes the role of emotional attachments with parents (at home or overseas) and the influence of parents on their decisions to flee. Both aspects will now be discussed in turn.

5.2.1 Separation and attachment to family

Parents, or other primary caregivers, often provide the most important emotional attachments of a child's life and the security and quality of these attachments can be integral to a child's sense of well-being and resilience.[115] It is striking to note that within this group of eleven participants, all but one came from households from which one or both parents had emigrated between four and nine years previously. This means that participants were principally being brought up by mothers, or by other women in their extended families (such as a grandmother or an aunt), from late childhood onwards. Fathers were mainly absent from households and living overseas in Europe (particularly Germany) or North America. This shared experience of family separations is something that accords with other scholarly accounts of Eritrean society. Ghilazghy, Kulman and Reim (2017) interviewed Eritrean women (aged twenty-five to sixty years old) living in a refugee settlement in Uganda. The women described pervasive levels of family separation including long-term absence of male partners due to conscription, death, divorce and migration. Many were therefore bringing children up alone, or unaware of their children's whereabouts as they too had fled Eritrea. The authors argue that the damage inflicted by the regime on Eritrean society is deeper than simple exodus alone, it also means that "the family, the very fundamental unit of society, has been broken and fragmented".[116] The participants of this study are part of this wider societal phenomenon and it is relevant to consider the age-specific ways in which it impacts on their experiences of displacement.

For several of the interviewees, the emotional effects of separation from parents was part of their decision-making to flee Eritrea. The term "family reunification" is blandly bureaucratic, but behind that label lies a sea of potential human emotions. For example, Caleb (who looked younger than his sixteen years) described a yearning to see his mother again that was emotionally palpable during the interview. His mother had left Eritrea seven years before (when he was nine) and he had often dreamt of joining her. When the border opened between Eritrea and Ethiopia he saw it as a "*golden opportunity*" and he took the money for school fees given to him by his grandmother, and he left without telling anyone of his intentions.[117] Caleb's somewhat impetuous response to the border opening fits with reported data showing that when it opened (in September 2018) high numbers of unaccompanied children crossed into Ethiopia, often to reunite with family members.[118] Caleb remains in Addis Ababa waiting for official papers that will allow him to travel to join his mother elsewhere, he told us *"I really miss my mum and I really love her, so getting the visa and going to [her] means really a big thing"*.[119]

Another participant, called Kidane, explained to us "*for me life was very difficult, my father was in Germany, my mum was in a different region, and I was living with my aunt, so I was not having a good life there*".[120] For Kidane, leaving Eritrea was in part the solution to not living with either parent. Although his mother was in Eritrea, she was looking after his younger siblings on her own and Kidane was not able to live with her. He crossed the border irregularly on his own. Five months later when the border opened his mother and siblings were able to travel to join him in Addis. They are all now waiting to be reunited with Kidane's father in Germany.

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115   Bettmann et al (n 36) ; Sleijpen et al (n 36).

116   E Ghilazghy S Kuilman L Reim, The fragmentation of families: Eritrean women in exile in Uganda. In: MV Reisen M Mawere (eds) *Human trafficking and trauma in the digital era: the ongoing tragedy of the trade in refugees from Eritrea* (Langana Cameroon, 2017) 221.

117   Interview 3 (Caleb) 2019, 13.

118   UNGA (n 78) 14.

119   Interview 3 (n 113), 10.

120   Interview 11 (Kidane) 2019, 9.

For others, leaving Eritrea to reunite with one parent can mean separating from other loved ones left behind. Birhan (aged sixteen) has parents who are divorced and have both remarried. He is the only child they have in common. His father had long been encouraging him to leave Eritrea and join him in Northern Europe. It was only when Birhan was himself detained by the Eritrean authorities that he made his decision to flee. However, this has meant leaving his mother and half siblings (with whom he has grown up) behind. He told us *"I wish I could go back and see them, but that's not possible because the situation in Eritrea is very bad at the moment.*[121] Birhan remains in Ethiopia living with an aunt, separated now from both parents, while he waits for the reunification process to take him to his father in Europe.

5.2.2   Protective Influences

Although in general data suggests that young unaccompanied Eritrean refugees are particularly likely to move on irregularly from Ethiopia,[122] this study revealed that family attachments were sometimes able to exert a protective influence over the teenagers by making it less likely that they would try to move-on irregularly via the dangerous central Mediterranean route to Europe.

Eyob (aged seventeen) lived with his grandmother in Eritrea after both his parents left for Sudan when he was ten years old. Eyob made the border crossing to Ethiopia on foot with a group of friends. His parents were subsequently able to join him in a refugee camp in Northern Ethiopia. The family are now waiting to see if they will be resettled elsewhere. Eyob explains *"you know I have this bad experience of separation from my family and I don't want that to be repeated again so I just want to move all together with my family and see some better things in our lives together, and I don't want to be separated from them".*[123] Another interviewee called Hayat (aged eighteen) lives on his own in Ethiopia while his family remain in Eritrea. He has been very tempted to travel irregularly to Europe in the past, as many of his friends have done, but he has experienced the tragedy of losing a close friend who drowned while attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea. He is haunted by the thought of the impact on his family if the same thing were to happen to him *"it will make the entire family devastated, and you know, I couldn't take those chances".*[124] This deters him from attempting to move-on irregularly from Addis, despite being very tempted at times, and he now thinks it is very unlikely that he will try to do so. He still dreams of making a life for himself elsewhere and so he plays the American "DV lottery" (diversity immigrant visa program) instead.

5.2.3   Decision-making

The accounts of the interviewees also revealed differences between them in terms of how the decisions to leave Eritrea were made, and to what degree they played a part in these. For the adolescents who were leaving Eritrea as part of a family strategy to reunite (over half of the sample) some said that they were directly involved in the family decision making, in some cases collaborating with one parent to persuade the other parent to make the move. For instance, Fikru (now aged sixteen) was just thirteen years old when he, his mother and siblings crossed into Ethiopia with the help of a smuggler. He explained that for some time before this his father (who had been living in Germany since Fikru was eight years old) had been "pushing" the rest of the family to join him, but that their mother was resistant to the idea He took his father's side and was eventually able to persuade her, *"my mum didn't agree to the idea, but it was just me who just encouraged and pushed her".*[125]

In contrast, a couple of participants said that they were kept out of the decision making process, for instance, Gebre (aged sixteen) said that he knew nothing about his parents decision for the family to leave, *"we were not aware of anything, it was our mum who did it. She even told us that we were coming here to visit our grandfather and we didn't know that she and our father have arranged the trip".*[126] Another participant (Jember, aged eighteen) described having to suppress his own wishes in order to follow the decision that his parents made on behalf of the whole family, saying *"if you ask me I can go back tomorrow [to Eritrea] but because our mother is the one who is responsible for making these decisions the whole family should decide about that".*[127]

For the teenagers making the border crossing alone or with friends, all of them had a strong say in the decision to leave. Some made their decision with the awareness and involvement of one or other parent, whereas three inter-

121   Interview 2 (Birhan) 2019, 5.

122   UNHCR Danish Refugee Council, *Study on the onward movement of refugees and asylum seekers from Ethiopia.* (online, 2016) <https://www.refworld.org/cgi-in/texis/vtx/rwmain?page=publisher&skip=0&publisher=UNHCR&type=COUNTRYREP&coi=ETH> accessed on 28 December 2018.

123   Interview 5 2019, 18.

124   Interview 8 (Hayat) 2019, 25.

125   Interview 6 (Fikru) 2019, 6.

126   Interview 7 (Gebre) 2019, 4.

127   Interview 10 (Jember) 2019, 9.

viewees mentioned that they had kept their decision to flee entirely secret from their families. The phenomenon of children fleeing Eritrea without the agreement or knowledge of their adult family members has been well documented in research by Belloni.[128] Not involving family members in escape plans may be a way of trying to protect them from worry, or from the risk of punishment for collusion by the regime, or in order to avoid family members from trying to stop them from going. It also raises questions about the nature of parental authority and peer group influences among the young in Eritrea.

These varied examples illustrate how the interviewees showed varying degrees of agency in the decision-making processes within their families. This is something that is not always reflected in the research literature, which often finds children and youth to be passive in the decisions taken on their behalf by adult relatives.[129] However, it does fit with Belloni's research in an Eritrean context which reveals complex negotiations between young refugees and their families throughout their migratory trajectories.[130]

5.3   Peer Relationships

The previous review of the literature highlighted the important role that a peer group can play in young peoples' experiences of forced displacement, and this also emerged from the accounts shared by this group of interviewees. One of the striking visual observations about the participants was that despite the differences in their ages and physical maturity they shared a similar 'look', dressing and wearing their hair alike. The standard 'uniform' was to wear American style clothing, with black ripped jeans, trainers and long-sleeved sports tops (often with logos and hoods attached). The teenagers also frequently wore visible Christian crosses around their necks, and small leather bracelets around their wrists. This distinctive style of dressing marked them out as an identifiable 'group' and suggested a level of age-based identification between them.

5.3.1   Shared history

There is a way in which the experience of being targeted as a young person for national service has helped to forge a sense of shared identity among Eritrean youth, even before they flee their country. As one of the interviewees explained "*all Eritreans share the same life, the same problems, it is the ultimate removal of the government that will make our life easier, other than that we just tell the same story, we just share the same things*".[131] This concurs with the sense of "alienation" and "estrangement" from Eritrea observed by Belloni in her ethnographic research with young Eritreans, something that takes root well before they physically leave their home country. [132]

Most of the teenagers specifically mentioned their fear of the regime (for instance due to military recruitment and detention) as one of the key reasons for their flight out of Eritrea. Awate described it like this: "*we are not able to attend our classes with a free mind, we think that someday some military personnel will come and drag us and pick us to the training facilities, so I had to cross the border*".[133] Two of the teenagers interviewed had been detained and imprisoned in their early teens (aged twelve and thirteen). One was caught attempting to cross the border and subsequently beaten in detention, which made him more determined to try again. For the other, imprisonment was imposed on him and his friends as a punishment for breaking an evening curfew. The human rights abuses of the Eritrean authorities have been well documented,[134] although the imprisonment of children has received less attention than forced conscription and gender-based sexual violence.[135]

The adolescents interviewed also understood that the system of national service severely limits their educational opportunities "*only ten out of a hundred may be eligible to join college, the remaining will be conscripted to be military personnel, that's why many youngsters are making this dangerous border crossing to escape that life*".[136] They also conveyed an awareness that the preoccupation with leaving Eritrea was part of a wider youth phenomenon. For instance, Iskinder crossed the border with his mother and siblings when he was thirteen, but would have attempted to leave with or without them explaining that "*it is the culture there, especially in the youngsters, we don't listen to anyone telling*

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128   Belloni 'family project or individual choice' (n 99).

129   Hopkins Hill (n 36).

130   Belloni 'family project or individua choice' (n 99).

131   Interview 1 (Awate) 2019, 18.

132   Belloni (n 99).

133   Interview 1 (n 127) 5.

134   Amnesty (n 83).

135   UNGA (n 78).

136   Interview 6 (n 121) 17.

us not to try the border crossings, so I would have tried anyway".[137] As mentioned before, this is also illustrated by the fact that several of the participants crossed the border on their own (or with friends or a sibling) without the consent of their adult caregivers. In some cases this caused immense stress to their families, for instance Hayat described how *"as soon as they found out that I made the trip, my mother just fell ill and was bed ridden for two months because she couldn't accept it, because I am very young and alone in Ethiopia……she was devastated"*.[138]

5.3.2   Peer group bonding

The Community Centre where the interviews took place played an important, positive role in the lives of all members of the research group. It offered a place to meet and a range of activities to take part in, including English classes. It was also the site of intense peer interactions. As a group the participants had mixed feelings about their lives in Addis, some were positive about it (for instance finding people welcoming) whereas several others mentioned experiences of being singled out and called "Eritrean" in the streets. Two of the teenagers had experienced serious physical assaults linked to being recognised as Eritrean, as one person recounted: *"when we speak Tigrinya………they will grab everything we have in our pockets and you cannot fight back because this is not your own country"*.[139]

For all the teenagers the Centre offered a place for them to meet in safety and connect with other Eritreans of a similar age. As Hayat (aged eighteen) articulated *"I met several of my Eritrean friends and sisters, brothers here, so I am very much in a high mood these days, because we speak the same language, we share the same culture and it feels at home to be here"*.[140] This sense of a shared Eritrean identity was a common bond between them, as one person expressed it: "*a man wherever he goes is his homeland*".[141] So too was their shared Orthodox Christian faith (as demonstrated by the visible wearing of silver crosses around their necks). Another way in which they bonded was through spending much of their spare time together playing football. When they were asked to describe themselves, several evaluated themselves in reference to peer group values such as sociability or football prowess. For example, one interviewee said, *"I don't play that much football, so I don't have any strengths that I can tell you of".[142]* This sense of complicity between them is reminiscent of the intense friendship bonds observed by Hart[143] amongst young Palestinian refugees. The importance of peer relations in providing a source of distraction from problems, as well as fun and support has been highlighted in previous research with young refugees.[144]

5.3.3   The Role of Football

The intensity of bonding provided through football may also help explain another characteristic common to most of the interviewees, namely their expressed dreams of becoming famous footballers in the future. Awate (sixteen years old) explained how he personally identified with his football idol *"Paul Pogba came from a very poor neighbourhood and family and undergone so much before reaching this success, and I share his past life and that's why he inspires me"* .[145] These dreams of future fame through professional sport appeared to be shaped and shared within the peer group, offering a hopeful vision projected into an uncertain future.

The degree of investment in this seemingly unrealistic version of the future invites some reflections about its possible function. For some interviewees it came across as a way of not thinking. In the words of one young man "*I don't have any other plan, I am just trying my best with the hope of being a football player, so if that does not succeed I don't know what I will do, I'm not prepared for that"*.[146] It could also be a way of coping with a difficult reality by keeping it at arm's length, and thereby retaining a sense of hope and positivity for the future.[147] It also imbues the present with a sense of purposefulness (i.e. playing football), which contrasts with the underlying sense of Addis as a place of waiting.

Jeffreyhas observed a similar phenomenon in situations of "chronic waiting" which he terms "heightened suspense", in which the longing for an idealised future life comes to dominate and overwhelm life in the present.[148] This preoc-

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137   Interview 9 (Iskinder) 2019, 17.

138   Interview 8 (n 120), 16.

139   Interview 10 (Jember) 2019, 10.

140   Interview 8 (n 120), 6.

141   Interview 2 (n 117), 15.

142   Interview 6 (n 121, p.10)

143   Hart 'locating young refugees' (n 32).

144   Sleijpen et al (n 36) ; Sleijpen et al (n 36).

145   Interview 1 (n 127), 14.

146   Interview 4 (Demsas) 2019, 9.

147   Mann (n 47).

148   C Jeffrey, Guest editorial: Waiting. (2008) 22 *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 954.

cupation with football is also consistent with research from the wider migration literature which has examined the popularity of football amongst youth in West Africa.[149] This also revealed a shared, and seemingly unrealistic, dream of "becoming somebody" through football, something the researchers conceptualise as "a social negotiation of hope, an active and collective contribution to overcome their state of being not-yet".[150]

5.4   Life Phase

As has already been discussed, adolescence is a phase in life that brings young people closer to social adulthood and to thoughts of their future adult lives and prospects. Research by Belloni has highlighted the multiple ways in which Eritrea's protracted crisis has resulted in consigning its young to a form of "perennial adolescence" in which normal opportunities for accessing education and livelihoods are lacking.[151] It is within this context that the mobility and exodus of the country's youth has become effectively normalised.

For the participants of this study life "abroad" is perceived as promising better opportunities, alongside escaping political oppression and reuniting with absent parents. Addis Ababa, where all the interviewees were residing, is not included in the concept of "abroad" or "foreign country". It is regarded as a place offering only limited social and economic opportunities. In the words of one participant (Hayat, aged eighteen) *"Life in Addis is very hard, even for the locals, let alone for strangers like us, and for a young man like me without anyone, without any assistance, it is very much harder to live in Addis and was not what I expected"*.[152]

5.4.1   Education

The interviewees had spent between one and five years in Addis Ababa, most of them waiting for official processes of resettlement and family reunification to unfold and transport them elsewhere. This represents a significant amount of time in the life of an older teenager, and the impact of this protracted displacement is shaped by their stage in life. One of the age-specific ways in which adolescents are specifically impacted is through the effect it has on their educational opportunities. The teenage years are pivotal for progressing through formal schooling and for those close to legal adulthood, time lost to education will be difficult for them to regain. This may be particularly so for those reaching their desired destination countries in Europe and North America where the school leaving age is often fixed at eighteen. Indeed, research shows that refugees who became too old to enrol in school in Europe can lose resilience and suffer from loss of hope.[153]

Although all the interviewees were attending the Community Centre and taking part in English classes (among other activities), only two were attending mainstream school in Addis. Of these, one was only attending intermittently. Most of them were behind their strict grade level for their age by between one to four years (roughly corresponding to the length of time since they had left Eritrea). One interviewee was much further behind his age-grade, but it is unclear why this was. It is important to note that both the Eritrean and the Ethiopian school systems allow for students to repeat academic years giving more flexibility for joining grades according to academic ability rather than based on chronological age.

Interestingly, several of the interviewees had attended local mainstream schools for periods of time before dropping out. The reasons given for discontinuation included finding it difficult to keep up with the local language (Amharic), losing the school place due to having to move and because of feeling unwelcome and having no friends at school. Others also mentioned barriers to being able to attend school at all, including not having the money to pay for school uniforms and lunches; having to work to earn money instead of going to school and the fact that their Eritrean school certificate was viewed as inferior to the Ethiopian standards. One participant also referred to his fear of being mugged in the street which sometimes prevented him from attending *"they ask us to give them our mobile phones and any cash we have in our pockets and if we don't agree they may stab you with a knife, and sometimes we just decide not to come here for fear that we may encounter these people on the road"*.[154] This range of barriers to accessing school in the urban setting of Addis echoes findings from previous research[155] and illustrates the fragile access to education that confronts young refugees more generally.[156]

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149   C Ungruhe J Esson, A social negotiation of hope: Male West African youth, 'waithood' and the pursuit of social becoming through football (2017) 10(1) *Boyhood Studies* 22.

150   Ibid, 38.

151   Belloni (n 99), 168.

152   Interview 8 (n 120), 20.

153   Sleijpen (n 36).

154   Interview 6 (n 121), 4-5.

155   Suerbaum (n 46) ; Stark et al (n 47).

156   S Dryden-Peterson E Edelman MJ Bellino V Chopra, The purposes of refugee education: Policy and practice of including refugees in

In addition to the reasons cited above, some of the interviewees implied that the temporariness and uncertainty of their residence in Ethiopia undermines their motivation for engaging with education, despite the significant lengths of time they in fact spend waiting in Ethiopia. This appears paradoxical because it does not fit with the high value interviewees generally said they attached to education, which most see as an integral part of facilitating their future opportunities. Indeed, several mentioned that education was one of the important elements in their decision to leave Eritrea.

It is possible that the perception of Addis an embarkation point for moving elsewhere, obstructs the ability to invest in it in the present. This fits with Turner's[157] observations about leading a "life of becoming rather than being" in which only the future holds value. One of the interviewees explained that it was only when he made the link between learning English in the present and realising his future elsewhere, that he started participating in classes at the Centre. Before that he felt he had little "passion" for education, like many of his Eritrean peers.[158]

There was some variation in the degree to which the participants were willing to consider making a life for themselves in Addis. Some mentioned that if the official process they were waiting for was not successful, then they would like to stay and complete their education or work in Ethiopia. Others were adamant that there were no circumstances under which they would stay, even if this meant making the irregular journey to Europe or returning to Eritrea.

5.4.2   Position in the life-course

Participants were asked explicitly about whether they saw themselves as "grown-up" or not. The answers they gave were varied and ranged from describing themselves as "just a child" or a "youngster", to considering themselves a "young man" or a "middleman" (somewhere between childhood and adulthood) or as "mature". As one interviewee (who viewed himself as in-between) put it *"I feel I am growing up physically from my past that's clear, but in terms of mentality I think I have too much to learn"*.[159] Another young person explained *"for me a young man has more power but with less patience and the adult guy lacks the power but has the wisdom, that's how I differentiate the two"*.[160]

Participants gave a range of explanations about what becoming an adult involved for them, and no-one referred to chronological age as part of this. Level of dependency emerged as a key theme, with adults seen as independent, self-sufficient, knowledgeable and able to help others. In contrast, children were understood to be dependent on others, still needing guidance and having a lot to learn. Drawing on his own experiences Hayat talked of children in the following way *"so for me children are innocent, and they are just, they are like blank paper. Because I myself was at a very small age when I made this daring trip I feel like I can understand what a child wants or what a child thinks"*.[161]

Frequently mentioned markers of adulthood included completing education, working and supporting oneself (for instance by training to become a doctor). Also mentioned was having your own family, attending church regularly, making peace with others, contributing to your homeland and owning a mobile phone. One of the youngest inter-viewees (Birhan, aged sixteen) described himself as "mature" because of his mental toughness : *"when you tell your brain that you'll do something and you'll achieve it, it will accept it……I don't promise that I will achieve something but I will try"*.[162] Birhan was very politically aware. His father was a well-known opponent of Eritrean regime (living in exile). Birhan himself had been in detention at the age of fourteen due to breaking a government-imposed curfew. He ran away from the detention facility and fled across the border into Ethiopia on his own. He remains fearful that the Eritre-an secret police might track him down in Addis. His lived experiences contrast vividly with idealised Western notions of childhood as a time of passive innocence.

When asked to reflect on whether moving to Western countries could be viewed as a "rite of passage" into adulthood, all interviewees firmly rejected this idea. Instead they argued that it is not where you go, but what you make of your life opportunities that determines whether you are an adult or not. Several gave examples of Eritreans they knew who had reached Europe but were now "wasting" their lives. They had moved elsewhere but were not "moving on" in their lives. Despite the rejection of this hypothesis, the participants' perceptions of Europe and North America remain that they are places where the opportunities for becoming fully fledged adults exist. So, although they do not recognise the act of migration as inherently a lifecycle transition in itself, they do view it as facilitating access to the kinds of opportunities that are. This contrasts with research suggesting that the act of migration is a necessary and intrinsic

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national education systems (2019) 92(4) *Sociology of Education* 346.

157   Turner (n 42).

158   Interview 11 (n 116), 116.

159   Ibid (n 116), 14.

160   Interview 4 (n 142), 11.

161   Interview 8 (n 120), 22.

162   Interview 2 (n 117), 13.

part of achieving 'adulthood'.[163]

5.5   Historical and Social Influences

The broader social and historical context for the high levels of ongoing exodus from Eritrea have been described in Section Three of this report. In many ways the decision to abandon Eritrea amongst this group of participants was the physical embodiment of these social and historical realities at work. The history of outward migration they described within their own close and extended families, formed part of the milieu within which they had all been brought up. As Belloni[164] so insightfully observes, the decision of large numbers of secondary school age Eritreans to flee emerges from "a society where migration is, simultaneously, a core value and an illicit act".[165] There is a sense in which flight has become socially and historically normalised due to the particular conditions within Eritrean society, particularly amongst the younger members of society.

The interviewees' accounts also drew attention to something more nuanced than straightforward rejection of their home nation in the way they talked about Eritrea. Being Eritrean was an intrinsic part of their identity and repeatedly participants talked in terms of their Eritrean "brothers and sisters" and to Eritrea as their "homeland". A striking sense of commitment to contributing something back to their country of origin came through from the way they talked about their future aspirations. They all hoped to be able to "make something" of their lives through migrating and accessing opportunities abroad, but integral to this vision of success was the capacity to give something tangible back to their "homeland". Success in life therefore appeared to consist of a blend of individual and communal ambitions. As Demsas (aged sixteen) eloquently explained: *"I should ask myself: what did I do for my country? For example, the man who created this sofa, he may have earned some money out of it, but he also helped others because we are sitting on it"*.[166] None of the interviewees talked about success in purely individualistic terms. Most said that they would want to return to Eritrea when conditions had "normalised" and the current regime was gone, but only if they had something to give. Returning empty-handed was not part of this vision of success. In the meantime, they aspired to earn enough to be able to send remittances back to families and communities at home.

The sense of dutiful attachment to the country of origin, from which they have fled, illustrates the ambivalence inherent in the relationship between young Eritreans and their nation state.[167] It consists of an incompatibility, emerging from the historical and social constext, between ideals of self-sacrifice and self-betterment that cannot be reconciled by remaining Eritrea.

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163   Grabska et al (n33) ; A Monsutti, Migration as a Rite of Passage: Young Afghans Building Masculinity and Adulthood in Iran (2007) 40(2) *Iranian Studies* 167.

164   Belloni 'family project or individual choice' (n 99).

165   Ibid (n 99), 2.

166   Interview 3 (n 113), 18.

167   Belloni 'refugees and citizens' (n 101).

6.   Conclusions

This study set out to examine the ways in which the experiences of forced migration, of a group of adolescent Eritrean refugees residing in Ethiopia, is influenced by their age-position. Older adolescents have a significant presence amongst children 'on the move', particularly within the category of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC), and yet age is a relatively under-explored analytic tool for investigating their experiences. Instead, the social dynamics that help to shape adolescents' experiences of displacement tend to get overlooked as they are subsumed within age-normative legal definitions of "children". As Grabska et al summarise, despite the importance of age in shaping the migratory experiences of young people "it is this fluid and relational property of age as a relation of social differentiation that is erased by most categorising approaches".[168]

An analytic framework with the capacity to attend to age in social and relational terms was therefore chosen for this study. This "generational" approach distinguishes the social aspects of age from biological maturation or chronological age, giving it greater analytic potential.[169] It attends to some of the key conceptual elements that constitute social age, including inter-generational (family-based) relationships, peer group influences, an individual's phase of life and the historical and social context within which they are situated. This enables adolescents to be understood as socially embedded actors, even within the structurally constrained context of forced migration. By doing this a deeper understanding of the relational and collective aspects of agency becomes possible, as well as an appreciation of migration as an inter-dependant and networked process, rather than simply about severing links.[170] The attention that this approach gives to context also provides us with a more informed perspective on the "voice" of the individual refugee, for instance where it comes from, how it is formed and where it sits within social structures of power. All of this combines to offer the potential for a more holistic, nuanced and age-sensitive analysis of the situation of young refugees.

The insights that this approach generates are also valuable in practice. It is important that different inter-disciplinary viewpoints are brought to bear on understanding the effects of law and policy on the people they affect, in order to hold the system to account.[171] Legal definitions of age, and different bureaucratic categories for managing forced migration, have an impact "on the ground" which it is important to properly understand. One of the issues that this study draws attention to is the rigidity of the legal categories of "children" and "adults" which create a somewhat arbitrary cut-off between the two at the age of eighteen. This can be counter-productive to the social and emotional needs of adolescent refugees, particularly with regard to family reunification processes, and access to education, which often expire at age eighteen. Similarly, as has been discussed in the introduction, it creates a propensity for essentialised notions of "childhood" to prevail which create false expectations of how young refugees "should" be, rather than attending to how they actually are.

Taking a generational stance proved to be a fruitful way to examine the influence of age-position on the lived experiences of the group of adolescents taking part in this study. It highlighted the web of relationships within which their migratory 'choices' and constraints were being shaped. For instance, it found that the ways in which decisions relating to migration were negotiated within the participants' families were complex and diverse. In some cases adolescents' preferences were overruled by parents who were the decision makers, sometimes decisions were negotiated between different members of the family (including the teenagers), and at other times participants exerted high levels of autonomy in the decision-making process (sometimes excluding adults completely). The range of motivations that the participants identified for leaving their country of origin don't sit neatly within policy categories. They consisted of a mix of factors related to forced migration and aspirations of self-betterment. This resonates with findings by other researchers who highlight the overlapping relationship between "forced" and "economic" drivers of flight.[172]

Family separation emerged as a hallmark of most of the participants' experiences of growing-up in Eritrea and played a significant role in their impetus for leaving. This is perhaps not surprising given that most of the participants were part of official family reunification processes at the time of being interviewed. In this respect they may not be representative of the wider population of adolescent refugees travelling outside such processes. Nonetheless, preoccupation with how to reunite with close family members living overseas was part of almost all the participants' experiences, albeit in different ways depending on different family constellations and attachments. For some the painful

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168   Grabska et al (n 33), 12.

169   Huijsmans et al (n 31) ; Hart 'locating refugees' (n 32); Ansell (n 31).

170   Grabsak et al (n 33).

171   R Sanyal, Managing through ad hoc measures: Syrian refugees and the politics of waiting in Lebanon (2018) 66 *Political Geography* 67.

172   H Crawley F Duvell K Jones S McMahon N Sigona, *Destination Europe? Understanding the dynamics and drivers of Mediterranean migration in 2015* (online MEDMIG Final Report, 2016) < http://www.medmig.info/research-brief-destination-europe.pdf> accessed on 10 November 2019; H Crawley D Skleparis, Refugees, migrants, neither, both: Categorical fetishism and the politics of bounding in Europe's 'migration crisis'(2018) 44(1) *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 48; SE Zimmerman, Reconsidering the problem of 'bogus' refugees with 'socio-economic motivations' for seeking asylum (2011) 6(3) *Mobilities* 335.

emotional impact of living apart from parents was highly salient and clearly fuelling their drive to leave Eritrea at a core emotional level. It was striking to see the degree to which family links, and the idea of the family structure, were maintained in the face of such extensive fragmentation across time and place. The desire to contribute to households and be of help to the family was also integral to the interviewee's ideas of future success.

The importance of peer group relationships also emerged strongly from the accounts of the interviewees, particularly regarding their experiences of living in Addis Ababa. The identity shared between the young male Eritreans had its roots in their common experiences of age-based repression by the regime in Eritrea. At the same time, there was a common sense of national identity and values that also drew the teenagers together, particularly as "outsiders" in Ethiopia. The physical space of the Community Centre facilitated intense peer interactions, including a preoccupation with football. The influence of the peer group was evident in the seemingly unrealistic aspirations most espoused for becoming professional footballers in the future. It is possible that this represents an active group coping strategy which has the advantage of imbuing the present with a sense of purpose, whilst keeping optimism alive for the future, but this is conjecture. The degree to which the peer group had become a reference point for contemplating onward irregular migration was also striking. Participants were aware of the phenomena of youth exodus from Eritrea, and at some level this appeared to have become part of their sense of themselves as a cohort (as distinct from their elders).

One of the most significant issues related to the life-stage of the participants, was the cost to their education of time spent "waiting" in Addis. This fits with research that has identified how a strong preoccupation with a future elsewhere can relegate the present to a 'non-time'.[173] However, this seems paradoxical given the high value that the participants say they attach to seeking out opportunities and not "wasting" their lives. It is as though their time in Addis does not fully register with them, and they seem relatively unaware of the detrimental long-term consequences of missing large chunks of education at this stage in their lives.

The phenomenon of "waiting" is one that has come to be a common part of the experiences of refugees across the globe. Being in a situation of uncertain waiting has significant social and political implications. Making others wait can be understood as an exercise of power and as Sanyal writes: "making people wait or remain still when movement or migration is essential for them is an act of entrenching political subordination".[174] In an increasingly mobile and time preoccupied world, protracted waiting is also often perceived as a social "failure" which serves to further entrench such hierarchies of power.[175]

The social implications of waiting are complex. Scholarly debate exists about whether protracted waiting is better understood as an inherently passive process, or as one that can generate agency.[176] For the participants of this study, while waiting in Addis they were continuing to live their day to day lives, invest in social relationships, take part in activities (notably English classes and playing football) and dream of better futures. At one level this can be framed as displaying resilience and agency and showing active coping with their situation (however small the acts). However, it is debatable to what degree these activities in any concrete way change the structural constraints confronting them in their lives. The paradox remains that whilst investing in future-orientated dreams of self-realisation, all but two of the participants were also no longer attending mainstream school. The gaps in their schooling seem likely to limit future options for them in the future. Understanding the political, social and psychological processes involved in prolonged waiting for this age-group would be an interesting area to explore in more depth in further research.

Despite the limitations of this small-scale, cross-language study, an age-sensitive approach has enabled a depth of understanding to emerge that more linear and binary accounts often miss. It has highlighted some of the interactions between age-position and forced displacement in a way that draws attention to the socially embedded nature, and complexity, of the participants' experiences. It also captures how social processes (for instance attachment to family and home) exert interacting and ongoing influences across the different stages of displacement. Attention is also drawn to the age-specific impact of forced migration, most notably the gaps in education that can form in situations of prolonged waiting. The current study took a broad look at some of the broad themes emerging from a generational approach. In order to develop the emerging insights further, it would be valuable to explore different elements of the generational framework, and the interactions between then, in more depth.

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173   Turner (n 42); Jeffrey (n 144);

174   Sanyal (n 168), 69.

175   Jeffrey (n 144).

176   E Olson, Geography and ethics I: Waiting and urgency (2015) 39(4) *Progress in Human Geography* 517.