

Göttingen Series in
Sociological Biographical Research

Maria Pohn–Lauggas, Steve Tonah,
Arne Worm (Eds.)

Exile/Flight/Persecution

Sociological Perspectives on Processes of Violence

Göttingen University Press



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Foreword by the editors

In recent years, methods in biographical research that are anchored in social constructivism and the sociology of knowledge have become established in the Center of Methods in Social Sciences at the University of Göttingen. In this context, a large amount of innovative and empirically sound research on a great variety of topics has been carried out. This new series is intended to do justice to this development. The editors wish to offer a forum for studies in the field of sociology written in German or English, whether doctoral dissertations, research reports or scholarly articles, which are based on the methodologies developed at the Center of Methods in Social Sciences. The studies published in the series shall include research works focused on methods and methodological developments as well as on material topics.

Maria Pohn-Lauggas, Gabriele Rosenthal, Nicole Witte, Arne Worm

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Exile/Flight/Persecution

Maria Pohn-Lauggas, Steve Tonah, Arne Worm

1 Introduction

This volume brings together articles by authors who work sociologically on experiences, processes and constellations of exile, flight and persecution. With these three keywords, we refer to phenomena that have deeply shaped global history and are still widespread aspects of human existence today. They have also significantly shaped the history of sociology, even if this is rarely in the foreground of the history of the discipline (see the articles by Christoph Reinprecht and Ludger Pries in this volume). People are persecuted, incarcerated, tortured or deported on the basis of their political beliefs, gender, ethnic or ethno-national belonging, religious affiliation, and other socio-political categories. People flee or are displaced in the context of collective violence such as wars, rebellions, coups, environmental disasters or armed conflicts, and move not only across state borders, but also within countries (see Steve Tonah's article on internally displaced people in Ghana). After migrating, but not exclusively in this context, people find themselves suddenly isolated, cut off from their networks of belonging, their biographical projects and their collective histories (see Ursula Apitzsch's reflections in this volume on the experiences in prison of Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci).

Historical perspectives teach us that these phenomena are far from new or recent. Human history and societies have been shaped by social transformations, movements and displacements in contexts of crisis and violence in different world

regions. Historically oriented researchers argue that, “(i)n the global context, forced migration can be described as a characteristic of the 20th century” (Oltmer 2017), referring to the level of macro violence in the context of two world wars, genocidal violence in different world regions, (de-)colonialization, or the “Cold War” (see also Barkhof/Smith 2014; Chatty 2010; Marrus 2002; Zolberg/Suhrke/Aguayo 1989). If we go back further in history, and think about the transatlantic slave trade, imperial and colonial expansion and rule, religio-political wars and persecution, or famines and epidemics, it is probably more appropriate to interpret these phenomena as a characteristic of the *longue durée* of global colonial modernity, if not of human history as a whole. As sociologists, we can observe how the dynamics of violence have shaped social fabrics and power relations in manifold ways in different parts of the world up to the present. And how individual and collective experiences of violence are spoken of, remembered, or silenced in public discourses and memory practices. This volume seeks to answer the general and rather broad question of what contribution sociology, especially empirically oriented research, can and should make to understanding and explaining these phenomena. This general question concerns us as editors of this book for various reasons. We approach it from the standpoint of our specific social and academic backgrounds and experiences.

First, we – as editors – look at these phenomena as sociologists based in Austria, Ghana, and Germany, who have made empirical studies of migration, displacement, violent conflicts, and persecution, albeit with different focuses. At a first glance, our different research fields seem to address phenomena that have little in common in a spatial, temporal, and conceptual sense. Thus, one might ask how and why do studies of migration dynamics and chieftancy conflicts in Ghana (Tonah/Setrana/Arthur 2017; Tonah/Anamzoya 2016), family histories of perpetrators and persecuted people in National Socialist Germany and Austria (Pohn-Lauggas 2020, 2021), refugee migration from Syria to Germany (Worm 2019) and refugee communities in Israel/Palestine (Worm/Hinrichsen/Albaba 2016) lead to a joint desire to explore the contribution of sociology to the study of exile, flight and persecution? The answer lies in the observation that:

- (1) the phenomena we are dealing with are significantly entangled with processes and phases of collective violence,
- (2) we are similarly interested in the (transgenerational) consequences of violence for individuals, collectives or communities, we- and they-images, and connections/entanglements as well as disconnections/disruptions across and within state borders,
- (3) we are interested in the extent to which social hierarchies, power inequalities and experiences relating to these dynamics are visible or invisible, heard or unheard within public discourses, memory collectives, and in academic contexts.

Second, we are concerned in quite different ways with the contexts in which we currently live with respect to how histories of violence and migration are presented, or not presented, in public discourses. In Germany and Austria, where Arne Worm and Maria Pohn-Lauggas are based, we have witnessed many polarizing and politically charged discussions on migration, diversity, and border and boundary making in recent years. The binary public discourse creates a homogenizing picture which distinguishes only “refugees” and “economic migrants”. In Ghana, where Steve Tonah is based, migration is predominantly thematized in public discourses in connection with the displacement and expulsion of “foreign traders” or “foreign nationals”. Calls for the expulsion of foreign nationals by specific groups within Ghanaian society should be seen as attempts by citizens to reserve certain sectors of the economy for their exclusive use and to exclude non-citizens or recent immigrants, who are seen as competitors. The sector where such calls are heard most frequently is the wholesale and retail trading of local and imported goods in major towns.

Third, based on our sociological socialization, which is strongly rooted in a process-orientated, case-study approach, we share the conviction that sociological contributions to understanding and explaining these phenomena need historical sensitivity, everyday-life-based approaches, and reflexivity. Reflecting on the history of our own discipline, sociology, or at least on important proponents of the social theory and methodological paradigm on which our work is based, involves reflection on the phenomena of exile, flight and persecution. The history of sociological and social theory is to a large degree a history of people who reflected, spoke and wrote from positions emerging from experiences of exile, flight and persecution, such as Karl Marx, Alfred Schuetz, Norbert Elias, Karl Mannheim, Marie Jahoda, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, or the members of the early Frankfurt School, including, for example, Theodor W. Adorno and Erich Fromm. We are aware that we cannot provide a complete list of exiled sociologists here. It would be interesting to reflect, for example, on W. E. B. DuBois’s later years in Ghana through the categorial lens of persecution and exile. Also, we could easily include many social thinkers from neighbouring disciplines, like Hannah Arendt or Edward Said, who have reflected on their own experiences as “refugees” (Arendt) or in “exile” (Said 2000).

Given the extent to which these experiences and constellations have shaped global history – and the history of western European sociology – throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, it is remarkable how peripherally or marginally these phenomena are treated in sociology, in public discourses, and in collective memories. This is a paradox that is not easy to explain, but a critical starting point for the research presented in this volume. As an example of the paradoxical lack of attention paid in sociology to its own history of displacement and forced migration, we think of the experiences of those scholars who were forced to flee to different parts of the world in the 1930s and 1940s to escape persecution by the Nazis in Germany and Austria. Some of them we have already mentioned. The paradox is even

more astonishing if we reflect on the Eurocentric nature of many debates and policies concerning refugee migration and displacement processes. Thomas Faist argues that those states that have ratified human rights conventions are the most engaged in restricting the entry of forced migrants and externalizing migration control:

“the countries that house most of the world’s refugees or forced migrants are those that have not ratified the Geneva Convention of 1951 and the New York Protocol of 1967. ... Overall, close to 80–90 per cent of refugees are housed by countries in the Global South.” (Faist 2018: 412)

The papers in this volume are concerned with the challenges of navigating through multiple paradoxes and contradictions when it comes to grasping phenomena such as exile, flight, displacement and persecution sociologically, on the levels of self-reflection, theorizing, and especially doing empirical research. There are paradoxes and challenges relating to the common-sense and academic labels used to name complex dynamics and experiences (What kind of movements in the context of collective violence are labelled as forced or involuntary migration, exile, diaspora, displacement, refugee migration, etc?). Attention is focused on displacement processes in both a historical and a geographical sense (Which processes of flight at what times and in which geographical contexts are considered by whom?), as well as on public discourses and collective memories (Which individual and collective experiences of flight are thematized and remembered by whom and in which ways?).

It is one of the major achievements of “refugee studies”, an interdisciplinary field that began to take shape in the Anglo-American academic context in the 1980s (see Harrel-Bond 1999; Black 2001), to shift our focus to the Global South when studying flight, migration and exile. Besides the United States and Germany, which have received large numbers of migrants and refugees since 2020, most of the world’s refugees are found in countries such as Afghanistan, Colombia, DR Congo, Lebanon, Jordan, Pakistan, Turkey, Uganda, Sudan, and other countries in the Global South. Furthermore, studies on refugees have tended to examine the varying historical contexts and current circumstances under which individuals and groupings have to flee their countries or places of habitual residence. It is important to bear in mind that nowadays refugee status is usually granted to an individual or grouping by the “sovereign” state. Different countries have their own criteria, based on their laws, for granting individuals refugee status. This means there are many international migrants who do not have refugee status but are merely tolerated on the territory of the sovereign state until a decision has been made on their application. Such persons may be expelled after examination of their case.

Generally, studies on exile, flight and persecution have tended to focus on persons compelled by state authorities to flee across national borders. Not much consideration has been given to individuals who have to flee, not because they are

being persecuted by the state, but as a result of inter-ethnic, “racial” and other differences within the state. This is where the concept of displacement (internal and international), which is largely used and promoted by the United Nations agencies, becomes useful. Today, there are more persecutions and flights within national borders than there are across national borders. Internally displaced persons include those who have been forced to leave their places of habitual residence (but remain within the national borders) as a result of violent conflicts, tensions between social, political or religious groupings, natural hazards, and weather or climate change.

And we see another gap: despite a growing interest in “refugee studies” or research on “forced migration”, little attention has been paid to the advantages of sociological traditions that closely link empirical research with a historical orientation and an actor’s perspective, thus reconstructing the social realities of migration in the past and in the present from the perspectives of both immigrants and established groups. Prominent calls have been made to avoid simplifying dichotomies, such as voluntary versus forced migration (Ottonelli/Torresi 2013), and to focus more thoroughly on displacement-related phenomena. For example, Stephen Castles, a sociologist and former director of the International Migration Institute in Oxford, has outlined a pathway “Towards a Sociology of Forced Migration and Social transformation” (2003) in multiple publications. We also find conferences and anthologies that try to bring together concepts of exile and flight (O’Neill/Spybey 2003; Horst/Grabska 2015), mostly from the perspective of social anthropology. Here, we may refer to the well-known paper by social anthropologist Lisa Malkki entitled “Refugees and Exile: From ‘Refugee Studies’ to the national order of things” (1995), in which Malkki shows how deeply the categories used to grasp these phenomena tend to essentialize the phenomena and are entangled with state formation and the construction of nations/national differences – and how important reflexivity in this research field is. Malkki cites Edward Said’s famous “reflections on exile” to draw our attention to the complicated relations between categories, social constellations, and experiences:

“Once banished, the exile lives an anomalous and miserable life, with the stigma of being an outsider. Refugees, on the other hand, are a creation of the twentieth-century state. The word ‘refugee’ has become a political one, suggesting large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance, whereas ‘exile’ carries with it, I think, a touch of solitude and spirituality.” (Said 2000: 173)

And as a sociologist writing from the position of an Iranian exile in the United States, Hammed Shahidian sees the experience of exile as a punishment, not as a choice: “Exiles are physically in one land, intellectually in another” (2000: 73).

In this volume, however, we do not want to commit ourselves to definitions, but rather to elaborate the diversity of experiences that result from different historical, geographical, social and political contexts, while at the same time not losing

sight of the commonalities. Additionally, we want to contribute to making the life-worlds of those who have fled or gone into exile more visible, not only in public discourses but also in our own sociological discipline. We note especially the lack of an empirical and historical perspective that would reveal how significantly the histories and realities of contemporary societies all around the world have been shaped by processes involving exile, flight and persecution. Such a perspective involves reconstructing the diverging experiences and histories of the groupings, we-groups and individuals who have fled from violence and persecution. Only one famous example among very many is the process leading to the creation of modern India and Pakistan. We are convinced that it is important not to reproduce the tendency in the social sciences to treat processes of persecution and flight, as well as constellations of exile, as marginal and ahistorical phenomena, as peripheral to social realities. We see a need for more research in the social sciences which focuses on these phenomena as fundamentally interwoven with the past and present of the social and political fabric of local and national societies, as well as global institutions.

And as a last point: besides people's experiences in certain socio-historical contexts, we also want to underline the relevance of collective memories in respect of phenomena of exile, flight and persecution. If we go back a hundred years, we will find a long list of collective events which forced large groupings of people to leave their home region or country of origin. But if we consider hegemonic memory practices, it is obvious that there are memory lapses regarding specific periods, world regions and groupings. Flight and exile are often part of the social unconscious. Both phenomena are often not included in, or only on the margins of, dominant national memories which offer narratives explaining "how we have become what we are". Here, it seems to be a promising task to empirically study the differences between people who consider their situation as a form of exile, asylum or diaspora, especially as such labels are usually defined in opposition to established groups in a particular social context. The experiences of those who do not belong to the established groupings and groups in the societies concerned have less chance of being remembered in public arenas. In this sense, "doing memory" is always connected to memory conflicts between marginalized and established groupings and between marginalized and dominant discourses.

In view of the need for a stronger consideration of global and regional historical perspectives that contribute to the visualization of the countless examples of migration caused by violence, and the increase in calls for deconstruction of the existing ordering criteria of the causes, processes, and consequences of migration, the question arises as to what contribution social research based on the perspectives and experiences of the actors concerned can make. We argue that more everyday-life-based research is required on the social conditions of people who have had to flee and/or live in exile, and that we need to address the question of how to make persecution, exile and flight more visible as experiences which find different forms of expression and have different consequences. Making exile visible

would be significant not only for sociology, but also for homogenizing public discourses, because it would help to show that people experience forced migration in very different ways: they define their own status in divergent terms, as refugees or exiles for instance, and they have different official statuses in their host country. Instead of viewing them as a homogeneous grouping, it is important to see that their experiences differ considerably, depending not only on their situation in the host country, their belonging, their social status, the history of their groupings and families, but also on their life histories in their countries of origin and the collective and individual circumstances of their departure.

2 On the Articles

The bulk of the articles in this volume are revised versions of papers presented at the international conference on Exile, Flight and Persecution organized by the Center of Methods in Social Sciences, University of Göttingen, Germany, from 28th to 30th November 2019. A few of the papers were specifically written for this volume.

In his article “Forced Migrants from Hannah Arendt Up to Now: Negotiating Biographical Belongings” Ludger Pries shows how Germany’s history has been shaped by displacement and exile. He reflects on the challenges of finding a language for and remembering experiences of persecution in the process of fleeing and arrival. He compares examples of flight from Germany during the era of National Socialism with present processes of flight to Germany and sheds light on the complex ways of negotiating belonging in both cases.

Focusing on Ghana and other West African countries, Steve Tonah makes a strong plea for a historical perspective on processes of displacement, as “forced migration and displacement has always been a common phenomenon in Ghana and other West African countries”. In his article “Displaced Persons, Refugees and International Migrants: An Overview of the Situation in Ghana”, he shows how multiple forms of internal movement arising from localized violent conflicts, large development projects, or natural and man-made disasters have shaped the region’s history of displacement.

In her paper on “Exile and Prison as a Loss of Biographical Knowledge about the Present: Antonio Gramsci as Reader of Dante’s *Inferno*”, Ursula Apitzsch considers the question why Antonio Gramsci, an Italian intellectual and communist, reflected on Dante’s *Inferno* during his time of imprisonment, until shortly before his death in 1937. In a close reading of Gramsci’s interpretation of Dante’s poem in his letters, as well as in the Prison Notebooks as an autobiographical note, the author elaborates on exile and prison as an experience of the loss of biographical knowledge of the present.

Without ignoring the fluid transitions between migration and exile, Christoph Reinprecht, in his article “Sociology of Exile, Sociology in Exile”, draws on the

exile literature produced by European intellectuals who elaborate central moments of the exile experience, including constant readiness to cross borders, an open time horizon, and a high degree of uncertainty with a simultaneous desire to return. Closely interwoven with these aspects, the author discusses sociology in exile and the sociology of exile as “a reflexive, multi-sighted, multilingual sociology and a sociology of intergenerational transmission”.

In their historico-sociological article “On the Present Situation and Future Perspectives of Eritrean Migrants: Deported from Israel, Stranded in Kampala”, Gabriele Rosenthal and Lukas Hofmann turn to the situation of Eritrean refugees in Uganda. After fleeing to Israel and staying there for several years, they were forced to migrate to a so-called ‘safe’ African country and became caught up in the mills of state agreements. The authors present a type of refugee which they describe as “dreaming of and working for a better future”. In contrast to representatives of the type “lost in passivity and despair”, the authors show that this type is characterized by investment of energy to maintain power of agency and self-esteem in a hopeless situation.

Peter Rieker and Rebecca Mörge, in their article “Integration Between Excessive Demands and the Desire to Belong – Young Refugees’ Biographical Accounts of Integration”, discuss how unaccompanied minors in Switzerland from different countries of origin perceive their experiences of integration and the requirements for integration they are confronted with. The authors argue that for young refugees integration in the host country involves not only a cultural and socio-structural dimension, but also a generational one.

The article “Flight and Displacement from Syria: Why Regional History and Family Figurations Matter” by Johannes Becker, Hendrik Hinrichsen and Arne Worm examines the case of migrants from Syria who fled to Jordan following the civil unrest and internecine war that broke out in Syria in 2011 from a biographical and figurational sociological perspective. They demonstrate how the flight experiences and flight processes of migrants and the figurations of family members are structured, using the case example of a young Syrian migrant who fled from Damascus during the civil war in Syria. On the basis of a biographical interview with Najib, the authors show that the interview is very much shaped by his current living conditions and the reorientation process associated with it. This finding also applies to other interviews the authors have carried out with migrants who have fled their homes.

In “Experiences, Expectations, and Challenges of Return. Liberian Refugees in Ghana” Razak Jaha Imoro, Kaderi Noagah Bukari, and Richard Ametefe bring up the issue of the return of refugees to their homeland and their inability to remain there. They examine the lived experiences, expectations and challenges of returned Liberian refugees in the Buduburam Refugee Camp in south-eastern Ghana. The authors discuss the social, economic and psychological challenges in Liberia which ‘force’ former refugees to return and show that the returnees face numerous challenges upon their return to Ghana, where they live under circumstances of discrim-

ination. The authors conclude with a discussion of three key issues in the context of legal, economic and socio-cultural processes which have to be addressed for the successful local integration of the returnees.

In her article “One Biography, Many Facets, Captured in a Homogeneous View – A Critical and Biographical Perspective on the Migration from Turkey to Austria”, Faime Alpagu discusses migration processes as multifaceted phenomena, that are often homogenized within dominant (national) narratives. Her research on so-called “guest workers” from Turkey in Austria shows how – depending on the circumstances in the country of origin and in the country of arrival – the meaning of migration and of specific places changes over time, and cannot be grasped by static and homogenizing categories.

Fabio Santos’ article “Memories of Migration in Times of Global Inequality. Drawing Aspirational Maps in-between Africa, Europe and the Americas” shows the great potential of biographical case reconstructions for tracing the complex interweaving of global inequalities and global history with people’s migration projects and aspirations. His reconstruction of Célestins migration project from the Central African Republic to the European Union enclave of French Guiana illustrates how migration is shaped by a complex web of unequal socio-spatial entanglements in which people are enmeshed.

In the chapter “Migration from Brazil to Angola in the Post-Colonial Period: Experiences of War and Social Transformation after Independence”, Zeila de Brito Fabri Demartini analyses the migration of Brazilians to Angola following the independence of this former Portuguese colony in 1975. She also deals with the experiences of these migrants in the civil war that engulfed Angola during this period, and the attempts made by the migrants to transform the social conditions of a country torn apart by civil war. This chapter shows that there were different reasons for the displacements that took place in Angola and other former Portuguese colonies before and after their independence.

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Forced Migrants from Hannah Arendt Up to Now: Negotiating Biographical Belongings

Ludger Pries

1 Introduction

In the 21st century, climate change, collapsing economies and insufficient development, weak states and organized violence imposed new challenges for societies and science. “Exile – Flight – Persecution” marks a crucial field of scientific research and of societal debates that might seem less central, dealing only with marginal groups. Nevertheless, it is at the center of current societal and scientific challenges for various reasons. First, for the volume of forced migration. For 2022 the International Organization for Migration reported 89.4 million forcibly displaced persons, in which 34.4 million of them are identified as international refugees and forced migrants, while 55 million are internally displaced persons (IDP; IOM 2021: 4). The “population of concern to UNHCR” increased to 92 million (UNHCR 2021: 2 ff.). During the period 2010 to 2020, the total number of forced displacements increased by some hundred percent, while the world population grew by only twelve percent.¹ Second, besides the overall simple numbers, the challenges of forced migration concentrate in certain times and certain places, where almost everybody is affected. In 2020, more than two thirds of all forced

Pries, L. (2023): Forced Migrants from Hannah Arendt Up to Now: Negotiating Biographical Belongings. In: Pohn-Lauggas, M./Tonah, S./Worm, A. (Eds.): Exile/Flight/Persecution. Sociological Perspectives on Processes of Violence. Göttingen: Göttingen University Press, 21–40.

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¹ Growth was from 6,957 to 7,795 million, see <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/#table-historical> <20.07.2022>.

migrants originated from just five countries (Syria, Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar), and 86 percent are hosted in developing countries like Turkey, Colombia, Pakistan or Uganda (UNHCR 2021: 2). Third, forced migrants do not arrive massively or concentrate in rich countries of the Global North, but cluster in the countries surrounding conflicts. In 2015, Germany received a considerable number of refugees, mainly from Syria and the Middle East, and still in 2020 hosted the fifth-highest number of arriving forced migrants (1.2 million, see UNHCR 2021) in the world. This was accompanied by heated and agitated debates in Germany and other EU member states since then (Pries 2018). During the takeover of power of the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2021, restrictive statements of many politicians in Europe dominated in the sense of ‘massive refugee inflow like in 2015 should not repeat’ or ‘we have to manage that refugees keep nearby their home country’.² In sum, exile, flight and persecution are of substantial relevance – in regions, where forced migration concentrates, and in regions, where the fear of ‘massive refugee inflows’ dominates public discourses in a scientifically inadequate way.

While the consequences of forced migration have been felt globally, they have not been felt equally. Forced migrants seeking refuge in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey represented between 5 and up to 16 per cent of the population. In contrast, Germany in 2015, a country perceived with high economic and geographic potentials received forced migrants, who constituted one percent of its population. Restrictive and exclusive statements are especially irritating in Germany and Europe, because just two generations ago, the German Nazi-regime was responsible for World War II with more than 60 million deaths and millions of additional forced migrants. After World War II, some 40 million of the total population of 67 million people living in Germany had personal experiences of forced migration as being forced laborers, as displaced persons from Eastern Europe, as returning prisoners of war and as internally displaced persons.³

This leads to a fourth argument why the topic “Exile – Flight – Persecution” is important. At the middle of the 20th century, in one way or another, forced migration had been a crucial experience in almost all families in Germany and many countries in Europe. Afterwards and until 1990, almost 4 million persons fled from East to West Germany alone, many more felt forced to leave their countries in the former Soviet bloc. Forced migration similarly was in play after military coups or authoritarian regimes in several Mediterranean countries. For example, in Greece, Portugal, Spain or Turkey, where hundreds of thousands of people had to leave their country and migrated to Germany or other Western countries as so-called “guest workers” but actually were forced migrants (see the chapter by Faime Alpagu in this volume). During the 1990s, hundreds of thousands of refugees ar-

² See e.g. press releases like <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/08/18/europe-fears-a-repeat-of-2015-refugee-crisis-as-afghanistan-collapses.html> or <https://www.trtworld.com/europe/fears-over-repeat-of-2015-refugee-crisis-reopens-eu-divide-49614> <20.07.2022>.

³ See Bade 2000: 297 ff.; Pries 2016: 140 ff.

rived in Germany and other European countries in the context of the Yugoslav Wars. In sum, “Exile – Flight – Persecution” focuses on a global and especially a European challenging topic.

In this chapter⁴, we will not deal with numbers or present a historical analysis, but will focus on the question, how forced migration has worked out in personal biographies and collective memories of specific social groups. Forced migration has to be negotiated individually and collectively. It could lead to social marginalization, to segmented integration or to extraordinary efforts to assimilate. It leaves unprocessed experiences and sometimes traumas. It often strengthens transnational social ties. First, we give some examples of scientists and intellectuals who had to flee the German Nazi-regime during the 1930s. There is no general term to characterize these people. Many of them did not accept to be called refugees or exiled or emigrants. This reflects the broad variety of fates and destinies, but also different coping strategies and reactions in countries of arrival. This leads, second, to a closer look at the dynamic process of forced migration and arriving that has to be managed and negotiated with oneself and the social spaces of origin and of arrival. We will focus on this from an everyday-life perspective. This leads, third, to a proposal of four ideal-types of how people cope and negotiate biographical belongings in situations of migration, especially of forced migration.

2 How to Name Forced Migrants – The German Nazi-Experience⁵

On the 7th of April 1933, that is, just two months after the Nazi regime had taken over power in Germany, the “Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service”, in German “Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums”, was published. It established that all those members of the civil service, from the federal up to the community level, who were of “non-Aryan” descent, had to be dismissed.⁶ This led to massive termination of appointments also in German universities. According to the historian Claus-Dieter Krohn, in 1933 alone, “about 1,200 academics lost their jobs in Germany ... This number was to grow by the end of the 1930s to about 1,700, to which another 400 university faculty were added after the annexation of Austria” (Krohn 1993: 11). Including artists and other professionals and not counting their family members, “about 12,000 intel-

⁴ I appreciate critical comments and suggestions of Mais Masadeh, Maria Pohn-Lauggas, Steve Tonah, and Arne Worm.

⁵ An extended version of this section was published in Pries 2019.

⁶ § 3 (1) Civil servants, who are not of Aryan descent, shall be retired (§§ 8ff); in that they are honorary civil servants, they shall be dismissed from office. (2) Para. 1 shall not apply to civil servants, who have been civil servants since August 1, 1914, or who, in the World War fought at the front for the German Reich or its allies, or whose father or sons were killed in the World War. Further exceptions may be made by the Reichsminister of the Interior in agreement with the corresponding minister or the supreme state authorities for civil servants abroad.” (translation from the German by the authors). <http://www.documentarchiv.de/ns/beamtenenges.html> <20.07.2022>.

lectuals lost their jobs and were eliminated from Germany's social and cultural life" (Krohn 1993: 11). In total, since 1933, around half a million persons were directly affected and had to flee the Nazi regime (Krohn 2011).

By no means could these thousands of 'forced migrants' be considered as a homogeneous group. On the one hand, the reasons for their expulsion varied from simply being Jews, over being politically 'suspicious or dangerous' to discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation. On the other hand, their backgrounds, destinies and life strategies abroad were quite diverse as well. In the scientific literature, different terms and (stereo) types are used to characterize the identity and self-concepts as well as destinies and life courses of these forced migrants. What could we learn from this historical case for the situation of forced migrants in the 21st century?

First, there is no general labeling that fits all of the individual cases of this group, be it self-descriptions, scientific identifications or public denominations. While some of these persons called themselves refugees or exiled persons, others rejected explicitly such terms. We will use the terms *émigrés* or forced migrants to describe this assemblage although both names have their pros and cons. The indication "forced migrant" suggests the possibility to distinguish between voluntary and involuntary migration. But as indicated in the term "mixed migration flows", between voluntariness and coercion, between free will and force there is only a blurred line. The French term *émigré* is used here to describe a person, who has left his or her country of usual residence in the context of persecution, of political or social self-exile. The term was used for the French Huguenots, who left France during the 17th century and also for those, who had to flee from the US-American, the French or the Russian revolution. Although the term is often related to higher social classes, its advantage is to describe the broader societal context of a given migration rather than a specific event.

Second, as a general pattern, the intellectuals and scientists as *émigrés* of the German Nazi-regime describe their experiences as feelings of ambiguities and contradictions. On the one side, they feel rescued and saved, on the other side they feel as strangers and transient guests in their new environment. In her famous essay "We refugees" Hannah Arendt (1994[1943]: 110) wrote what could be thought as a common denominator of exile: "We lost our home, which means the familiarity of daily life. We lost our occupation, which means the confidence that we are of some use in this world. We lost our language which means the naturalness of reactions, the simplicity of gestures, the unaffected expression of feelings."

Meanwhile, this might characterize the feelings and experiences of most exiled persons, the exceptional situation of the Jews as victims of what has to be considered the unique barbarism of the Nazi regime is reflected in the sentence which Arendt adds to the foregoing: "We left our relatives in the Polish ghettos and our best friends have been killed in concentration camps, and that means the rupture of our private lives." (Arendt 1994[1943]: 110). The experience of the Jewish genocide causes Hannah Arendt to reject the term refugee for her situation: "A

refugee used to be a person driven to seek refuge because of some act committed or some political opinion held. Well, it is true we have had to seek refuge; but we committed no acts and most of us never dreamt of having any radical opinion” (Arendt 1994[1943]: 110). On one side, Arendt describes the common denominator of the Jewish refugee experience, and on the other side, she mentions the self-distinction and discrimination of subtypes of Jewish refugees even inside the Jewish community according to their countries of departure like France or Germany (called Jekkes) or Eastern Europe (called Polakes).

In the same way as Hanna Arendt was critical of the term refugee, many of the forced migrants from Europe during the 1930s were not happy with defining themselves as emigrants. The German poet and writer Berthold Brecht, who had to flee from Germany already in February 1933 because of his critical political work, questions the term “emigrant” in a poem called “Concerning the Label Emigrant”. He argues that he never emigrated voluntarily: “Merely, we fled. We were driven out, banned. Not a home, but an exile, shall the land be that took us in” (Brecht 1967[1937]: 701). He claims that he, as a refugee, goes on to be interested in the fate of friends and fellow campaigners. And he underlines that refugees differ from emigrants by the wish of returning: “But none of us will stay here. The final Word Is still unspoken” (Brecht 1967[1937]). In this text, Brecht clearly defines himself as a refugee and exiled person who by no means thinks of staying, but only of returning to his country of departure and his former life as soon as possible.

In his seminal work on the German exile at the New School for Social Science in New York, Claus-Dieter Krohn distinguishes three types of exiled intellectuals, who had to leave Germany and arrived in the USA, according to their success or problems in integrating in the country of arrival. The first type is described as “dynamic and creative individual who was able to adjust to the new circumstances without apparent difficulty and to amalgamate the perspectives developed in Germany with the new experiences encountered in America” (Krohn 1993: 181). The second type includes all those individuals who were not able or willing to adapt, assimilate or integrate into their new social and societal environment, “who refused to make any concession to the new world in which they found themselves” (Krohn 1993: 182). The refugees of the second type “always remained immune to new influences” (Krohn 1993: 182). Those of the third type did not integrate into the US-American society and academia but got “increasingly disconnected from concrete reality” (Krohn 1993: 182). They turned more and more from specific empirical and theoretical work to philosophical speculations, became uprooted, alien to America and were in constant search for identity (that those of the second type simply maintained from their German experience).

Obviously, these findings relate to academics, artists and intellectuals. But they reflect much of the general ambiguous and contradicting situation that is typical for all migrants. The German Nazi-experience also lets us learn that attributing a formal status or specific term to groups of forced migrants must not correspond with their self-awareness and self-designation. External and self-attribution are

quite different things and have to be handled carefully. Therefore, in the next section we will reflect more explicitly on the general social situation of (forced) migrants and corresponding external characterization from the perspective of an everyday-life approach.

3 Negotiating and Managing Forced Migrants' Belonging

Migration can be considered as the long-lasting change of the spatial center of everyday life. Official definitions are often based on the criteria of formal residence for a minimum period. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) of the United Nations defines short-term migrants as those persons, who live for a minimum of three and a maximum of twelve months outside the country of their "usual residence" (IOM 2004: 60). Correspondingly, long-term migrants are those, who live for a minimum of one year abroad (IOM 2004: 39, 60). IOM understands forced migration as "a migratory movement in which an element of coercion exists, including threats to life and livelihood, whether arising from natural or man-made causes" (IOM 2004: 25). In the sense of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its additional 1967 protocol, refugees can be considered as a subset of forced migrants given that in this case the forced migration process is "owing to well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinions, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" (IOM 2004: 53).

Besides such legal-formal differentiation, in this section we will develop a sociological approach to migration and forced migration based on agency and struggling for belonging in social worlds. Forced migrants are not addressed as passive objects or victims, but as social actors under restricted structuring conditions. Our starting point to elaborate on the term 'usual residence' that was mentioned earlier, is to look into the concept of *everyday life* and *lifeworld* as developed by the phenomenological school of thinking in sociology, namely Alfred Schütz. All people perceive themselves as embedded in a complex arrangement of everyday routines, stocks of knowledge and social relations as certainties. Human beings reduce the millionfold complexity of signals perceived by their body and brain each second to a framed order of regularities, social sense and predictabilities. This is, where their home is, their habitual physical and mental residence. For Alfred Schütz, all sociological reflection has to start with analyzing the structures of the everyday lifeworld (in German: *alltägliche Lebenswelt*). In his seminal work "Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt" he defines the lifeworld as the essence of that reality

that people experience, live in and suffer from. It is also a reality that is managed and forged by practical doing and where people could fail to manage it.⁷

For Schütz our everyday life as *lifeworld* is that part of the overall existing objective reality that we are experiencing and participating in an inevitable routinized repeating way. The lifeworld enables and restricts our action and communication. We can interact with each other only in a joint communicative environment. This lifeworld is that part of reality, that the average and conscious adult accepts and handles as taken for granted. Only when irritations or contradictions occur, do we reflect on that lifeworld more explicitly and perhaps integrate new elements into our 'stock of knowledge' (in German: *Wissensvorrat*). According to Schütz, who took over Edmund Husserl's concept of the mundane lifeworld, the *lifeworld* could be differentiated into four types of worlds. Besides the social reality that is directly experienced, there exists the world that is actually on the horizon of direct experience. The latter represents the (social) *environment* (in German: *Umwelt*) and includes all those consociates or fellow-men (and women) who one takes into account as the conscious experience of the other as you in an attitude of lived intentionality (Schütz/Luckmann 1973: 202). Whereas the environment is defined by agents' direct relations of perception and action, the *world of contemporaries* (in German: *Mitwelt*) consists of all those actors, who share a community of time and could become fellow men or consociates and, by this, could change into the lifeworld of direct perception and interaction. For Schütz, besides lifeworld and environment, there exist two more worlds, the *world of predecessors* (in German: *Vorwelt*) and the *world of successors* (in German: *Folgewelt*). They are characterized by the fact that those living in the environment and in the world of contemporaries are not able to become fellow-men or contemporaries of those of the worlds of predecessors and of successors.

The concept of lifeworld could be applied to the situation of migration and arrival. Migrants are characterized by changing their physical environment, that is: their habitual residence and, by this, intentionally or not intended change their mental and social environment. They have to cope with new languages, cultural norms and world views in addition to distinctive ways of organizing private and public life. Combined with their geographic space, migrants almost always change their social positioning and social spaces. Whereas they could maintain social ties to those of their former environment, e.g. by telecommunication, sending letters, videos, money or other goods, the world of contemporaries changes completely. The lifeworld of migrants will include the world of predecessors in the sense of awareness of ancestry and ethnic belongings, but they will be in an ambiguous and

⁷ See Schütz (1993)[1932] and Schütz/Luckmann (1973). Interestingly, "Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt" was published in German in 1932 in Vienna (in English it appeared in 1974 titled *The Phenomenology of the Social World*) and "The structures of the Life-World" was finished and published after the death of Alfred Schütz in 1959 by his scholar Thomas Luckman in English in 1973 and in German as "Strukturen der Lebenswelt" in 1975. This by itself reflects the complex conditions of production, travelling and reception of theories of forced migrants, see e.g. Pries 2019.

open situation concerning the world of successors, for they do not know where and who this will be. Schütz himself was a forced migrant, who was dismissed from his job and had to flee from Austria in 1938 after the takeover of the country by the Nazis. In his scientific work, he often dealt with different types of migrants or mobile persons, especially with their way of dealing with substantially different social environments. In his famous essays “The Homecomer” and “The Stranger” (Schütz 1944, 1945) he analyzed, how American soldiers returning from World War II in Europe and socially marginalized people in general negotiate and manage their everyday lifeworld in interaction with themselves and others.

Based on this Schützean approach and the later work of Norbert Elias (Elias 1970; Elias/Scotson 1965) and Karl Mannheim (1931) we could differentiate six basic aspects of the everyday lifeworld and its corresponding stocks of knowledge.⁸ First, it refers to the specific given *social relations* and entanglements with others. These include family and household members, neighbors, colleagues at work and in leisure activities etc. The lifeworld is secondly composed by specific *biographical experiences* that sediment in the stock of knowledge and are remobilized according to specific action situations. Third, it includes the *internationalization of norms, values, roles and patterns of behavior* by socialization. People from different backgrounds of socialization could share similar sets of biographical experiences like forced migration, and, vice versa, people from the same cultural-societal background do not have to share the same biographical experiences like forced migration. Fourth, the lifeworld of actors also comprises *preferences* (from moral sentiments over passions to interests) that structure perceptions of social reality and inclinations for social action. People with the shared socialization background and biographical experiences might differ substantially concerning their individual or collective, egoistic or altruistic preferences. Fifth, the lifeworld as taken for granted embraces *expectations of what is normal and to be expected*. Habitual-conventional, emotion-driven, value-rational or purpose-rational social action could be triggered by implicit or explicit expectations of what will happen and how people will act in the future. Finally, everyday lifeworlds include a given set of *social, cultural, economic, organizational and political resources*. Actors might mobilize these resources without further explicit reflections or by deliberate instrumental attitudes.

All these six dimensions of the lifeworld are in play in processes of forced migration because the latter has to be understood and explained as a substantial shift in this set of elements of the lifeworld. Many social entanglements are cut off, new ones are built in the migration trajectory and after arriving. Well established biographical experiences have to be reviewed and redefined based on substantially new insights of real life. The socialized norms and values, roles and patterns of behavior e.g. concerning power relations, gender roles and the significance of seniority can no longer be taken for granted. The preferences for instance related to alimentation, security of life or housing are in turbulence and have to be redefined.

⁸ For a differentiated reasoning of these six dimensions, see Pries 2021, chapter 6.

The expectations of what is normal in the present and could be expected from the future are fully insecure. And many of the resources that one was able to mobilize before are no longer existing, valid or relevant.

The taken for granted lifeworld with its corresponding stocks of knowledge and interpretative patterns of reality normally develops gradually and continuously in individual and collective biographies and life. But in the case of migration the changes are so manifold in quantity and so deep in quality that substantial re-configurations of the lifeworld and concepts of everyday life occur. This holds especially for the case of forced migration because the *environment* and the *world of contemporaries* in the sense of Schütz change dramatically, involuntarily and in a disruptive manner. People have to move and to arrive in new geographic and social spaces. This has to be analyzed as a complex and long-lasting social process of individual and collective negotiating and managing. The question is not, how forced migrants adapt and assimilate passively to a new given environment and world of contemporaries – as often envisaged through the lenses of dominant groups of arriving societies – but how they interact and negotiate their new life. Such opposing conceptual frames of assimilation, plural coexistence or interactive integration can be found in migration theory since long.

In 1953, the US-American sociologist Ronald Taft distinguished three types of conceptualizing immigrants' integration: monistic, pluralistic and interactionist integration.⁹ In *monistic integration* immigrants adapt to the culture, language and norms of the hosting society and become step by step "absorbed" (Taft 1953: 45). It can be considered as a kind of "container hopping" from one country and society to another. This cognitive frame induced the dominant assimilation approach in classic migration theories. According to that, integration is figured out as a step by step uni-linear adapting of immigrants to the host society (Park/Burgess 1924; Alba/Nee 1999: 137–160). The assimilation of so-called ethnic Germans, who came to Germany after World War II and after the fall of the Iron Curtain, could be considered as an example: they were expected to forget their Russian socio-cultural belonging and assimilate as "good Germans".

The second pattern according to Taft is *pluralistic integration*: "two or more cultural groups can form part of the same community and, at the same time, keep assimilation down to a minimum. The failure to assimilate, in this instance, is not the result of prejudice, but of agreement on both sides to preserve and tolerate differences." (Taft 1953: 46 f.). In this case, most elements of the lifeworlds, stocks of knowledge and interpretative patterns of reality of the immigrating groups are maintained as ethno-cultural minorities. Only some minimal agreements on joint legal-political rules and norms between the ethno-cultural groups are defined and

⁹ Whereas in US-American research the term 'assimilation' is used as the overarching concept and integration is one specific type of assimilation, in Europe predominantly 'integration' represents the general idea and assimilation is handled as a specific subtype.

ruled at the level of national society. The United Kingdom had been considered an example of such a multiculturalism model.

Finally, in the *interactionist integration* pattern the focus is on negotiated and agreed processes of defining common standards: “Assimilation is thus viewed by us in the light of this two-way interaction with resulting group norms emerging from the interaction of the original norms of the members of both groups.” (Taft 1953: 51). In this approach, questions of belonging to “us” and “them” are socially constructed and have to be negotiated between “established” and “outsiders” (Elias/Scotson 1965). For the USA the melting pot model was proclaimed as an ideal of a national society as a result of integrating different cultures by negotiation and tolerance. We know that this melting pot was more ideology than adequate description of reality. Similar to other experiences of colonialism the supposedly new society was built upon the persecution, marginalization and extinction of those people, who already had lived in the corresponding territory. And integration did not mean the end of racism, discrimination and marginalization of specific groups.

During the 1990s, the *transnationalization* approach introduced a fourth framework of thinking migration. According to this, migration is much more than container hopping from one national society to another – being it assimilationist or multicultural. Migration processes always create cross-border social ties between groups in different places and national societies. Transnational social relations and transnational social spaces include the interchange of resources like sending money or other goods, but also communications by regular phone calling, sending videos or sharing social media spaces on Facebook or Instagram. By this, everyday life is not concentrated in just one place but spans multiple locales across national borders. In order to understand and explain the lifeworld of migrants, we have to relate to the places they or their ancestors lived before, to the places they are currently living and the places they are including in their visions for the future life. This holds for all migrants, but is especially true and challenging for forced migrants given that they were pushed to leave their home and normally begin to negotiate their new social belonging after their flight.

4 Ideal Types of (Forced) Migrants

Taking the example of German and Austrian émigrés at the New School of Social Research in New York during the 1930s and considering the sociology of migration in general as well as the transnationalization research, we can distinguish four ideal-types of how migrants negotiate and cope with their experiences and trajectories and develop projects for their future life. Concerning their lifeworld, stocks of knowledge, interpretative patterns and biographical projects for the future, forced migrants could be situated and move within four ideal types of belonging. First, they refer to their place of origin and/or to their place of arrival as frames of reference. And, second, their belonging and ties to both social spaces could be

Table 1: Strong or weak belonging to social space of origin and of arrival. Source: own elaboration inspired by Berry 1997

		Belonging to social spaces of arrival	
		strong	weak
Belonging to social spaces of departure	strong	transnational migrant, double integration	return migrant, Diaspora-migrant
	weak	emigrants, immigrants, assimilation	double marginalization: uprooted and no arrival

either strong or weak. This leads to the four combinations of belongings and social spaces in Table 1.

We could speak of migrants as **immigrants** or – looked from the perspective of their social spaces of departure – as **emigrants**, if they are resolutely decided to leave behind their former life and begin a different one with new *social entanglements*, fully new biographical *experiences*, a second process of *socialization*, re-defining their *preferences* and *expectations* and build on new *resources*. Millions of Europeans left their countries at the turning from the 19th to the 20th century as emigrants towards the USA in search for better economic and socio-cultural conditions. They integrated into their new homeland in a long-term and unlimited perspective. Although they maintained manifold ties to their regions of origin, these were considered as spaces of ancestry, historical reminiscence and of farewell.

A second ideal-type are the **return-migrants**, that is, those who are strong-willed to return to their country of origin and their former life. They maintain mainly *social entanglements* in the place of origin and live in their former *experiences* and *socialization*. They are not willing to shift their *preferences* and *expectations* and focus on *resources* in their old homeland. Take the millions of so-called guest-workers in Europe, who for decades lived for instance in Germany or France as their ‘host country’ to which they maintained distance and differences but continued to long to their places of origin and return one day which they thought would have remained the same. A second form or subtype in this constellation are Diaspora-migrants. **Diaspora-migrants** define themselves in the frame of reference of a specific “land of promise” as their social space of origin and identity. They are open to accept or negotiate to live in other places. They manage *social entanglements* and *experiences* and socialize in different places, they develop hybrid *preferences* and *expectations* and combine *resources* of different places – but they always maintain a strong belonging to what they imagine as their social space of origin or roots. The classic example is religious communities like the Jewish or the Alevi Diasporas distributed all over the world. But we could think also of members of diplomatic corps or of business organizations maintaining strong social ties to their home country or headquarters as their living center. Diaspora migrants experience the places they are currently living in normally as spaces of suffering or of mission.

In a third ideal type cluster **doubly marginalized migrants**. They experience their life as uprooted from the social space of departure as well as from the social space of arrival. Therefore, their social *entanglements* are minimized, they *experience* their life as living in a limbo, they are quite indifferent in relation to specific *preferences* and *expectations* in life, and they normally manage only restricted *resources* and see little opportunities to change their living conditions. Referring to the social spaces of departure and of arrival, they feel like marginalized twice. There are many examples of doubly marginalized migrants, especially of forced migrants. Many Jews and other persons marginalized, persecuted, arrested or deported by the German Nazi regime were highly traumatized or even committed suicide.¹⁰ Famous writers, who had to flee from Europe during that period like Kurt Tucholsky or Stefan Zweig ended their lives. Based on biographical narrative interviews, Rosenthal (2010) presented studies on the interplay of experiences of violence, forced migration, traumata and up to suicide in life stories of three generations of victims and survivors of the Nazi-regime. For more recent times, this type of forced migrants might echo in studies that indicate that “first-generation European migrants had a significantly higher prevalence of both suicidal ideation and suicide attempts than their non-migrant peers” (McMahon et al. 2017: 297).

Finally, transnational migrants or **transmigrants** typically do not distinguish by this way between region of origin and of arrival, but develop an ambiguous and hybrid mixture of adherence, belonging and sustaining differences to the region(s) of origin and of arrival. Transmigrants live – mentally and often physically – between and span places in different countries. Maintaining their lifeworld, their stocks of knowledge, interpretative patterns and biographical projects for the future in some parts related to their countries of origin or the places of their ancestors, in other parts their lives take new *entanglements*, *experiences*, *socialization*, *preferences*, *expectations* and *resources*. Examples of such transmigrants could be found in social groups of artists, sportspersons, managers or politicians. But also in transnational families of labor migrants between Mexico and the USA or Poland and Germany. The distinction between these four ideal types of migrants does not mean that people are situated and remain in the same condition and perspective. Those, who considered themselves as return migrants, might shift to transmigrants or immigrants. In general, migrants might change their world views and biographical projects and, by this, move between the ideal types.

As compared to labor migrants, forced migrants experience the ambiguities of migration in an accentuated manner. As we know from social psychology research, migration is likely to include the feeling of ‘being lost’, of des-organization and re-organization of world views, norms and habits, of feelings and behaviors. Psychoanalysts León and Rebecca Grindberg speak “of potentially traumatic experiences characterized by a series of partially traumatic events and being at the same time a

¹⁰ As examples in the Americas see e.g. Möbius/Möbius 2019: 44; Gleizer 2019: 195; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilhelm_Reich <20.07.2022>.

situation of crisis” (Grindberg/Grindberg 2016: 16). *Émigrés* situate themselves in the country of arrival in a situation of “open doors” and of “return impossible” at the moment (Grindberg/Grindberg 2016: 169). Taking the example of survivors of the Nazi-Holocaust, *émigrés* often experience a “syndrome of survival” (Grindberg/Grindberg 2016: 171, 183), of feeling guilty or unhappy asking themselves ‘why did I survive?’ given that many of their relatives were murdered or died in other circumstances.

Émigrés struggle with themselves arriving in a new place because they feel that in case of opening themselves for the new place they would give up parts of their memories and of their relatives lost or left behind. “They remain <trapped> between the former mystified life that they hold as the only of value and the future life that is concentrated in the illusion of returning to the country of origin” (Grindberg/Grindberg 2016: 184). *Émigrés* often situate themselves as transit migrants, they experience an extreme dependency from others and the loss of self-efficacy.

Social science research on *émigrés*, who had to flee from Nazi-Germany during the 1930s underlines their specific and contradictory situation. All four ideal types of migrants could be found. Taking the example of scientists and artists escaping and arriving in New York to work in the New School for Social Research, the majority of them could be characterized as successful immigrants given “that the New School scholars, with a few exceptions, came to regard themselves quite quickly as immigrants rather than exiles waiting to return to their home country” (Krohn 1993: 199). A smaller part of scholars arriving at the New School come near to the ideal type of Diaspora-migrants. According to Krohn (1993: 190 f.), a great part of the exiled members of the Frankfurt School did not focus on integration but showed “a lack of interest on the part of the Institute’s core group in becoming integrated. Adorno’s description of himself as ‘European through and through’ also suggests that he made no great effort to deprovincialize himself.” (Krohn 1993: 192; see also Jay 1998). Therefore, many of the Frankfurt Institute in New York could be considered Diaspora-migrants yearning for their return home to Germany.

During the last two to three decades, there arose substantial research on the dynamics of forced migrants arriving and living in refugee camps and as asylum seekers and displaced persons. Whereas the earlier mentioned research on *émigrés* during the 1930s was focused on the destiny of scientists, intellectuals, politicians and artists, that is: on upper social classes, more recent research focused on refuge as a mass phenomenon – and by this reflects the substantial increase in the volume of forced migration mentioned at the beginning. In the context of enduring situations of armed conflicts, organized violence and forced migration, refugee camps got institutionalized in many regions of the world, mainly in the neighboring countries from which people have to flee. Refugees are increasingly considered as subjects and agents of their life, entangled in social networks and religious communities and exploiting all new information and communication technologies.

Recent research on forced migration could validate the usefulness of the ideal types presented above.

5 Forced Migrants in between Lifeworlds

In this section we present some empirical evidence of the value of the conceptual approach presented so far. One of the globally most outstanding scholars researching the lifeworld and interpretative patterns of forced migrants is Gabriele Rosenthal. Her biographical analysis examined survivors of the Shoa, victims of the Yugoslavian wars, child soldiers in Northern Uganda and other forced migrants in Africa and Europe (see e.g. Rosenthal 2018; Bogner/Rosenthal 2020; Bahl/Becker 2020). In the analysis of different life courses of child soldiers in Uganda, Bogner, Rosenthal and Schmiereck (2020: 112) underline the ambivalences of the child soldiers and their corresponding *environment* and *world of contemporaries* between the spaces of departure of the child soldiers (the villages they lived with their families) and the spaces of arrival in the world of the *Lord's Resistance Army* (LRA) causing "intra- and interpersonal split" (Bogner/Rosenthal/Schmiereck 2020: 113). Concerning the four ideal types presented here in section 3, the authors reconstruct life courses and biographies that fit into the category of *double marginalization* (e.g. the case of Johann, Bogner/Rosenthal/Schmiereck 2020: 112) and of *return migration* and reintegration (the cases of Sancho and Maria; Bogner/Rosenthal/Schmiereck 2020). In the case of Sancho, a former child soldier abducted by LRA, who after his successful return to his village of origin, later joined the government's army and felt better estimated there because of his experiences 'in the bush': "My advantage is my experience of the bush because they believe that for them who have been in the bush they have more experiences, that is my capital" (Bogner/Rosenthal/Schmiereck 2020: 103).

In a life-course oriented study of young Syrian refugees, we could demonstrate that they experienced substantial shifts in the framing of their everyday lifeworld not only during or after, but sometimes already before their forced migration to Germany (Pries/Linsel 2021). When fleeing their places of origin and 'habitual residence', some of them intended to survive by just an internal migration, hoping that the Assad regime would fall or have to drastically change its oppressive politics. One of the interviewees, let us call him Orhan, returned to his place of origin in Syria but then had to flee again from there due to constant fears of being forcibly recruited by the Assad army. His next biographical project was to flee to Turkey and stay there temporarily. But then, due to constant instability, his next 'biographical project' included migration to Germany. In the biographical narration of Orhan we could identify all four ideal-types of managing the relation to the social spaces of origin and arrival. In a first phase the biographical project was of a future return migrant, who had to leave his place of origin and was ready to return as soon as conditions would allow for this. Then, after emigrating to

and living for an extended time in Turkey, the forced migrant and his family lived in between the types of return migrants, marginalized migrants and integrating in Turkey. For various reasons, Orhan and his family decided to migrate further to Germany, where they live between the ideal types of assimilation and double integration.

Many biographical and life-course oriented studies underline that especially forced migration is not a phenomenon of once-in-time decision-making, but consists of protracted and sequential social practices of negotiating everyday lifeworld between different social spaces. Forced migrants have to cope with unforeseen challenges and unpredictable future – this holds for their countries of origin, of current living and for possible future regions of migration. Although all social action has not-intended consequences (Merton 1936), this holds especially for the case of forced migrants. They are normally leaving their home for a projected short period, then have to arrange a new life in transit and to develop strategies where to arrive in the future. Criteria and priorities for action and decision-making shift over time. Forced migration – as all migration – is embedded in its *environment* as broader social networks of families, households, kin and friendship relations, as well as in *worlds of contemporaries* that change constantly with the travelling persons. All this is embedded in migration regimes with networks of migrant organization, legal and informal rules of states and regions.

In a study of Yazidi women, who survived the massive killing of Yazidis by the Islamic State in Northern Iraq in 2014, and based on a life-course perspective we could demonstrate that the biographical orientations and strategies of the interviewees spanned between the four ideal types of negotiating self-perceptions, belongings and biographical projects (Masadeh/Pries 2021). Some of the women felt in the double marginalization of a protracted limbo, perceiving that they had lost their former lifeworld and were not pertaining to the new social space of arrival in Germany. Some of them tried to forget their former life and assimilate as much as possible in their new social space. Some maintained strong personal and social belonging to the Yazidi region and community in Iraq, felt like they were in a Diaspora situation in Germany and waited for the opportunity to return home. Finally, some showed many aspects of transnational migrants and a double integration into the social spaces of origin and of arrival.

All interviewed Yazidi women came to Germany in the context of the same program and arrived almost at the same time. The government of the German state of Baden-Württemberg had organized a humanitarian *Special Quota Program* (called *Sonderkontingent für besonders schutzbedürftige Frauen und Kinder aus dem Nordirak*) and invited 1,200 female survivors of the terror of the Islamic State and their children to live in a safe environment in Germany and receive medical and psychosocial assistance. Despite this unified institutional frame, the interviewed women narrated quite differing strategies and outcomes of their negotiating and managing of belonging and lifeworlds. No Yazidi émigré is immune to the entan-

gements and ambivalences of migration, because it is almost impossible for them to maintain a linear flow of social experiences.

Not only have they survived violence that significantly impacted their biographies and collective memories, but also continue to experience and negotiate the complexities of migration in Germany. This leads to the creation of new meanings, concepts, and decisions between weak and strong belonging in social spaces of origin and of arrival, which themselves reflect characteristics of the four ideal-types of migrants. Analyzing migration and especially forced migration only from the perspective of leaving one place and integrating at another place falls short. These processes have to be analyzed in a broader perspective of protracted and complex multidimensional negotiating of belonging to different social spaces and lifeworlds. In any place – be it of departure and origin, be it of transit or preliminary arrival or be it of uni- or pluri-local long-term arrival – migrants should be understood as agents managing their opportunities and challenges to define their own strategies and biographical projects.

6 Conclusion

Not only migration, but especially forced migration in its different forms is of increasing relevance. In public discourse and political debates, refugees and other types of forced migrants are often perceived either as passive and pitiable victims or as challenge of uncontrollable ‘flood waves’. In social science research, forced migration is analyzed in its structural contexts and migrants’ return to their home countries or their assimilation in countries of arrival. Herein, the subjective lifeworld of forced migrants and their struggling with different frames of reference in their everyday life are frequently underestimated as well as the long-lasting process of negotiating and managing biographical projects and belonging. Without an adequate analysis of the everyday lifeworld of forced migrants between different frames of reference in their multifaceted dimensions, it will be impossible to comprehend and explain the challenges of their arrival in new places or their return to old places that then will be different from when they were left.

As exemplified by the history of European *Émigrés*, who had to flee the Nazi-regime since the 1930s, up to that of Syrian and Yazidi refugees who migrated to Turkey or Germany in recent times, forced migrants experience similar complexities. They have to manage – with themselves, their families and social peer groups as well as with the wider social environment and world of contemporaries – their social, cultural, economic and political belonging. They have to process their own life interacting with their selves and with the well-known and foreign others in old and new places. They experience the feeling of being lost, of disorganization and of reorganization of world views, norms and habits. Feelings of grief and degradation, of ambivalences and success are common to almost all forced migrants. While some negotiate their arrival through looking back at their mem-

ories and former life in their homeland, others look forward to detach from the past and transform into the present. Some émigrés end up belonging to one social space of either home or arrival society, others experienced double belonging in a transnational space, whereas some find themselves marginalized from both.

Wars and other protracted situations of organized violence are of much greater significance for the future of humanity than currently recognized in science and society. Such contexts that force people to migrate probably will not reduce but become more frequent if we think of climate change and its consequences for conflicts over water and land. As demonstrated, organized violence is disrupting biographies, the lifeworld of people, and entire social entanglements. It is relatively easy to repair the physical damages of war and armed conflicts. It took only 12 years to reconstruct the Liebfrauenkirche in Dresden. But the social and socio-psychological wounds of organized violence and forced migration might need generations to heal, if ever they could be cured. Public consciousness, scientific attention and political strategies are still far away from understanding these challenges. Material-technical aspects of situations of organized violence and protracted forced migration might be visible and manageable with reasonable efforts and timeframes – the sociocultural devastations and possibilities for healing forced migration are less visible but definitely go deeper in lifeworlds and are long-lasting challenges.

Especially in Germany we can learn from history about the disturbing socio-cultural consequences of repressing memories. After World War II, Germany was a country of (forced) migrants, but during almost three decades neither the genocide and the war crimes during the Nazi regime, nor the often traumatic experiences of forced migration were processed individually or collectively in an appropriate manner. This went hand in hand with the statement “Germany is not a country of immigration”, shared for decades by the majority of citizens and politicians. In light of the millions of so-called “guestworkers” this contra-factual denial to perceive and accept Germany as a country of migration has to be analyzed in the context of fading out the proper migration experiences of the majority of residents in Germany. History always matters; studying the individual and collective experiences and memories of (forced) migrants opens opportunities for a better living together.

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Displaced Persons, Refugees and International Migrants: An Overview of the Situation in Ghana

Steve Tonah

1 Introduction

In the 1950s and 1960s, Ghana was well known as a haven for international migrants and refugees in West Africa due to its relatively prosperous economy and a liberal foreign policy that supported migrants from other African countries. Ghana received thousands of international migrants who came to work in the booming agricultural and mining sectors of the economy as well as persons fleeing persecution in neighbouring countries. Having gained independence from British rule in 1957 the country also hosted a number of leading political refugees and supported other African countries in their struggle for political liberation from colonial rule and apartheid, particularly in Southern Africa. However, this situation changed in the 1970s and 1980s following the downturn in the country's economy and the accompanying political instability and insecurity (Awumbila et al. 2011; Anarfi/Kwankye 2003). During the 1980s, Ghana became a net out-migration country with a large proportion of its population moving abroad in search of greener pastures. Most of these migrants went to the neighbouring West African countries, particularly Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire, where they sought for employ-

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ment and a better standard of living. Indeed, it is estimated that there were over a million Ghanaians resident in Nigeria prior to their expulsion from that country in 1983 and 1985 (Aremu/Ajayi 2014).

Since the 1980s, Ghana has been categorized as a country of emigrants with large numbers of its citizens moving abroad, particularly to neighbouring West African countries, each year. It also has many diaspora communities abroad (Kandilige 2017; Akologo 2005). The country has not been associated with having large numbers of internally displaced persons, refugees and international migrants on its soil. Indeed, the 2021 census indicated that only 1.5 percent of its current total population of 30.8 million inhabitants, (that is, a mere 462,000 persons), are of foreign origin, with nearly two-thirds of the foreign migrants in the country coming from the neighbouring West African countries. Similarly, Ghana's population of international migrants and refugees is, in comparison with its West African neighbours, very low (Tonah/Setrana/Arthur 2017). In the early 1990s, Ghana officially received about 45,000 refugees and internationally displaced migrants, most of whom were victims of the violent conflicts and political unrest in neighbouring Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire. The number of refugees and displaced migrants in the country has since fallen sharply. In the past decade, the population of foreigners granted refugee status has decreased from 23,000 persons in 2011 to the current figure of about 12,000 in 2020. This is mainly due to the policy of returning, reintegrating or transferring some of these refugees and displaced persons to third countries (Antwi-Boateng/Briamah 2020; Agblorti/Grant 2019).

In spite of the general picture of a relatively peaceful country with low numbers of refugees, international migrants and internally displaced persons, Ghana frequently experiences occurrences that result in the forceful dislocation and displacement of its population. These are largely a result of localized violent communal conflicts, land and chieftaincy disputes, large development projects, irregular migration and refugees from the Sahelian region, natural and human-made disasters such as recurrent drought, floods, erosion, environmental and resource pollution and other occurrences.

In this paper I examine some of the key issues that have resulted in the displacement of the local population, as well as the situation of refugees and internationally displaced migrants in Ghana. The focus is on analysing the situation within Ghana as well as the neighbouring West African countries where most of the foreign migrants and refugees come from and Ghanaian migrants move to. I adopt a historical approach, by analysing cases of Internally and internationally displaced persons and forced migration during the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods in Ghana. This approach enables us to realise that forced migration and displacement has always been a common phenomenon in Ghana and other West African countries. Indeed, the situation of migrants and refugee in Ghana cannot be well understood without placing it within the West African sub-region where people have moved around voluntarily or forcefully for several centuries. What

has changed has been the political, social and economic conditions under which forced migration and displacement took place during the different eras and the factors responsible for such displacements. The next session provides some conceptual clarifications about the main concepts used in the paper. This is followed by an analysis of international displacement to and from Ghana and a historical analysis of displacement during the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial period in Ghana. The paper then examines the main factors responsible for internal displacement in Ghana.

2 Explaining Displacement

Displacement is a particular form of mobility in which individuals and groups have to relocate from their habitual place of residence to another location for a long period of time or even permanently. Displacement can be forced or voluntary. The former involves where individuals or groups are compelled to move against their will while the latter deals with cases where such persons agree to move away from their places of residence on their own volition; or as is sometimes the case, such persons may be induced to move to another location after some negotiations and the payment of compensation in kind or cash or both. However, it should be indicated that, in popular usage, a displaced person is a generic term for individuals or groups of people who have been forced or obliged to leave their home or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of the effects of armed conflicts, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights, natural or human-made disasters; but also those seeking refuge from natural disasters, climate change or other such events. In this sense, displacement is akin to forced migration. While forced displacement typically takes place during violent conflicts, after a (sudden) natural disaster or other such occurrences, negotiated displacement can be the result of an agreement between two or more warring factions or following the construction of a large development project such as an irrigation dam, a hydro-electric scheme or a mining project.

3 International Displacements To and From Ghana

This section examines expulsion exercises undertaken by the Ghanaian and other West African governments that forcibly displaced international migrants resident in their countries.

3.1 Mass Expulsions of Foreign Nationals

The expulsion of foreign nationals from a country has been a recurring phenomenon in West Africa, particularly between the 1960s and 1990s. Ghana, Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire and other countries in West Africa have at different periods expelled foreign nationals from their territories (Adepoju 2010). For example, in November 1969 Ghana expelled more than 830,000 foreign nationals, mainly Nigerians, Togolese and Burkinabes resident in the country (Aremu/Ajayi 2014; Brydon 1985; Peil 1971). Similarly, Nigeria expelled foreign nationals from the country in 1983 and 1985. Those affected by the expulsion order were mainly nationals of Ghana, Niger, Benin and Togo. Over a million Ghanaians were displaced by the Nigerian expulsion of 1983 which ordered illegal and/or irregular migrants to leave the country (Gary-Tourkara 2015; Aluko 1985). Cote d'Ivoire also expelled foreign nationals, particularly those from neighbouring Burkina Faso, during the period of political upheavals in the 1990s. Several thousands of West African nationals left that country as a result of political dispute and insecurity (Bouquet 2003; Bredeloup 2003). In all of these cases, foreign nationals were typically blamed for the deteriorating economic situation, depriving locals of economic opportunities and accused of being involved in criminal activities such as smuggling, armed robbery, car-jacking, and for contributing to the high unemployment situation among locals (Peil 1971; Aluko 1985).

Since the 2000s, mass expulsions of foreign nationals from individual West African countries have been rather uncommon. It appears most West African nations have learnt some lessons from the decisions to expel foreign nationals from their territories in the earlier decades since the benefits of the expulsion exercises were minimal in comparison with what can be derived from regional cooperation (Ninsin 2009). Besides, the emergence of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a regional body that allows citizens of member states free entry and exit as well as the right of residency, and seeks to promote regional trade and cooperation has dissuaded states from implementing such mass expulsion exercises in West Africa.

3.2 Forced Migrants and Refugees

Ghana has for several decades been host to a number of internationally displaced persons and forced migrants from neighbouring West African countries. Most of these internationally displaced persons are irregular migrants who cross the border unregistered and undocumented because of the visa-free policy applicable in the sub-region. The vast majority of these forced migrants are from the Sahelian countries of Niger and Burkina Faso, They seek refuge in Ghana as a result of the violent conflicts, civil wars and recurrent droughts that have decimated their means of livelihood. There are also many international migrants from Togo and Cote d'Ivoire and other African countries, who moved to Ghana to flee ethnic,

communal and political conflicts in their countries. Among these include the pastoral Fulani and Tuareg from Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, as well as the Zarma and Kotokoli agriculturalists from Niger and Togo, respectively (Osei 2021; Tonah 2005; Painter 1988). Most of these forced migrants work in the informal sectors of the economy as petty traders, itinerant recyclers, security personnel, street beggars and other low-level jobs (Bertrand 2010). It is difficult to estimate the number of internationally forced migrants in Ghana but they could be several thousands given that most West African migrants enter and reside in the country without adhering to the required formal registration of their residency.

Another group of international migrants are those who have refugee status. They usually constitute a small fraction of the total population of forced migrants. In comparison with its neighbours, Ghana has traditionally a very low population of refugees and asylum seekers. The number of refugees in Ghana which stood at about 45,000 in the early 1990s decreased to 12,153 persons in 2017. This further decreased to 11,896 in 2018 but slightly increased to 11,946 in 2019. By 2020 there were only about 12,411 registered refugees and asylum-seekers in Ghana after many of the refugees were given the option to return home or integrate into the country as permanent residents (Agblorti/Grant 2019). Most of Ghana's officially registered refugees come from neighbouring Togo, Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia with smaller numbers arriving from Sudan, Syria, DRC, Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Niger. Most of these refugees and internationally displaced persons have fled political conflicts, ethnic and communal violence, as well as political persecution and human rights abuses. While Ghana has in the past received political refugees from several southern African countries, it became famous for the reception given to refugees from the civil wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire during the 1990s and 2000s (Antwi-Boateng/Braimah 2020).¹

¹ Ghana has six main refugee camps. These are the Ampain, Krisan, Egyekrom and Fententaa camps and the Urban Refugee Area (formerly Buduburam Refugee Camp) in the Greater Accra area (Agblorti/Grant 2019; Yeboah 2013). Even though the Ghanaian government officially announced the closure of the Buduburam Refugee Camp in 2012 (following the option given to the refugees to either return home, integrate into the local community or move to a third country), most of the former Liberian refugees continue to live inside the camp area. By February 2014, almost two years after the cessation of their refugee status, Liberians remaining in Ghana were issued with ECOWAS passports, which included a two-year work and residence permit. Nevertheless, many of them have been unable to return to their home countries while their integration into the Ghanaian society has also proven more difficult than envisaged (Antwi-Boateng/Braimah 2020; Essuman-Johnson 2011).

4 Internally Displaced Persons, Refugees and Migrants in Ghana – A Historical Overview

4.1 The Pre-Colonial and Colonial Era

Population movements and displacements have always been part of the search for a better livelihood in Ghana, formerly the Gold Coast, for several centuries. During the pre-colonial era, the movement of people were largely the result of groups seeking new territories to settle down. The establishment of kingdoms in the forest and savannah areas of Ghana during the pre-colonial era was a major source of population displacement in the region. Powerful and hierarchically organized groups such as the Ashanti, Gonja, Mamprusi, Dagomba invaded the territories of their largely acephalous or clan-based ethnic groups, and in the process killed, expelled and integrated sections of the autochthone groups into their fold (Maasole 2006; Cardinall 1969; Rattray 1932). Other groups such as the Ewe and Fante fled despotic rulers and warring factions before establishing themselves at their current locations (Adu-Boahen 2000; Amenumey 2008).

Trade was another major source of population movements and displacements in the pre-colonial period. Individuals and groups moved across the West African sub-region to trade in products such as kola nuts, gold, slaves, ivory, livestock, gun powder and manufactured goods (Adu-Boahen 2000; Amenumey 2008). For example, the Hausa of Northern Nigeria migrated to the savannah and forest areas of Ghana where they purchased kola nuts, livestock and other goods from the local inhabitants. Similarly, the Wangara and other traders from the Sahelian region settled in Gonjaland where they were engaged in trade and other commercial activities (Wilks 1989; Maasole 2006).

The wars and raiding of weaker groups by their more powerful neighbours for loot, women, warriors and slaves also accounted for a large part of the forced migrations and displacements that took place in Ghanaian territory during the pre-colonial period. Powerful ethnic groups used their access to European goods, arms and ammunitions to raid their weaker neighbours, particularly those in the savannah region, for slaves, warriors and other products. Indeed, it is well documented that slavery, and in particular the trans-Atlantic slave trade and its associated raids, looting, wars, and fear of attacks, was a major source of death, forced migrations and displacement of thousands of persons in Ghana and West Africa between the 16th and the 19th century (Keren 2009; Schramm 2005; Der 1998).

The colonial period did offer some form of respite as the European powers pacified the country putting an end to many of the inter-ethnic raids and wars that raged in the country. Furthermore, colonial rule also terminated the activities of the slave raiders, traders and merchants (Akyeampong 2001). Nevertheless, the policies of the colonial government in both Ghana and neighbouring states also introduced new forms of migrations and displacement among the population. For example, the introduction of head taxes and forced labour recruitment among the

population compelled people, especially young men to leave their communities. Others left their homes because they did not want to be recruited into the colonial security forces or detested being sent to work in the mines in southern Ghana where they were compelled to do dirty and dangerous work (Bening 2013; Thomas 1973).

Generally, colonial rule in Ghana was characterized by uneven economic development and provision of social infrastructure which compelled many people from the then Northern Territories of Ghana to seek greener pastures in Southern Ghana. Many Northerners and savanna peoples were compelled to migrate to the south to work as labourers, miners, farmers, soldiers and on infrastructural development projects (Bening 2013; Thomas 1973).

4.2 The Post-Colonial Era (1957 to Date)

The post-colonial period in Ghana has seen massive population movements as a result of unevenly distributed social and economic infrastructure, recurrent drought and conflicts. There is a general movement from Northern Ghana to the south of the country and from small, rural settlements to larger urban settlements (Awumbila/Badasu/Teye 2018).

Internal displacements among the population have also been a recurrent phenomenon during this period. The seven main sources of forced migrations and displacements in contemporary Ghana include, first, climate variability and change, recurrent droughts and the associated poverty, especially in Northern Ghana. Second, violent conflicts resulting mainly from communal, intra- and inter-ethnic, land, chieftaincy, boundary, farmer-herder and other sources of violent conflicts. Third, natural and human-made disasters such as floods and sea erosion. Fourth, large development projects such as the construction of dams, irrigation projects, hydro-electric schemes. Fifth, population and housing expansion and changing land-use. Sixth, mining, land degradation and pollution; and finally, displacements resulting from socio-cultural factors such as banning and expulsion of persons accused of witchcraft, forced marriages, forced labour (child slavery), among others. These factors are expatiated upon below.

5 Factors Responsible for Internal Displacements in Ghana

Ghana has had a number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and migrants since the 1960s. Many of the factors responsible for these conditions are still being experienced currently with continuing grave consequences for the population while other factors have over the decades been transformed.

5.1 Drought, Climate Change and Poverty in Northern Ghana

Climate variability and change are significant drivers for internal displacement in Ghana, particularly in the north of the country. Northern Ghana experiences a single rainfall pattern with a very long dry season which can last up to about 6–7 months each year. The area has an annual rainfall of between 800–1200 millimetres with temperatures ranging between 16 and 42 centigrade. A poorly distributed rainfall pattern and recurrent drought have been a feature of the climatic conditions in the savannah north since the 20th century and in earlier periods (Hunter 1967; Fortes/Fortes 1936). Household food security has been a frequent problem in the area. It is common for households to experience inadequate food (grain) supply during the long dry season when sections of the households will migrate to southern Ghana in search of work and income. The introduction of dry season irrigation agriculture during the 1960s and 70s has somewhat attenuated food shortages and poverty in the north during the dry season (Tonah 1993; Nabila 1974). Nevertheless, the problem persists and household food shortages is a recurrent phenomenon.

As a result of climate change, Northern Ghana has since the 1970s been experiencing not only lower total volumes of rainfall and very high temperatures but also unreliable and unpredictable rainfall pattern and violent rainstorms resulting in land degradation, soil erosion, poor crop harvests and occasional famine, and widespread poverty among the rural subsistence farming population (Adu-Boahen/Dadson/Halidu 2019; Yelfaanibe/Zeeter 2018; Van de Geest 2004). In response to the unfavourable weather conditions and climate change, large numbers of able-bodied men and women leave Northern Ghana seasonally or permanently in search of farm lands and other forms of livelihood in the formal and informal sectors of the economy in Southern Ghana (Obour/Owusu/Teye 2017; Oteng-Ababio 2013; Awumbila et al. 2011). They are part of the growing victims of environmental displacement in Northern Ghana.

5.2 Violent Conflicts-Induced Displacement

Localized violent conflicts are a major source of population displacement in Ghana. Most of these conflicts are a result of land, communal, ethnic, chieftaincy, boundary and farmer-herder disputes. Land-related conflicts are the most widespread in Ghana. While some of the land conflicts date back to the colonial era, others are a result of socio-economic changes and developments in the country since independence. In particular the commercialization of land has made land-related conflicts very common in Ghana (Owusu/Tonah 2013). Disagreements over the ownership of land amongst neighbouring communities and traditional areas are a common source of violent conflicts and population displacements. Some of the violent boundary disputes in Ghana that have displaced hundreds of inhabitants in-

clude the Nkonya-Alavanyo, Nsuta-Beposo, Weija-Oblogo and Tsito-Peki conflicts (Gariba 2021; Kpormasi 2013).

Violent intra- and inter-ethnic conflicts in Ghana have also resulted in population displacements in several areas. The most devastating ones include the Dagomba-Konkomba conflict and the Gonja-Nawuri conflict in the 1990s in the Northern Region of Ghana. Indeed, the Dagomba-Konkomba war was one of the bloodiest conflicts in Ghana in the last century resulting in hundreds of deaths, destruction of properties and the displacement of thousands of inhabitants (Bogner/Neubert 2016; Brukum 2001, 2007). Similarly, the Gonja-Nawuri conflict in 1991 also led to the displacement of hundreds of persons from settlements in the Northern Region. In Southern Ghana, chieftaincy disputes have occurred among the Anlo, the Ga and the Krobo in the last decade but these have not been as violent as those in Northern Ghana and have not involved the displacement of large numbers of people (Bogner 2020; Tonah/Anamzoya 2016).

Finally, conflicts between the pastoral Fulani herdsmen and sedentary farmers over the destruction of crops by cattle, the struggle for farm and grazing lands, cattle rustling and the pollution of water sources by cattle are common in Ghana. These clashes have been particularly fierce in Agogo, Gushiegu and in the Afram Plains resulting in deaths and the displacement of the inhabitants. In other parts of the country, including in Kassena-Nankana, Agogo, Atebubu, West Mamprusi, and Afram Plains, local and central governments have organized the expulsion of migrant Fulani herdsmen from their settlements following clashes with the local farming population (Paalo 2020; Olaniyan 2015; Tonah 1993, 2002).

5.3 Disaster-Induced Displacements

Ghana regularly suffers from natural and human-made disasters that result in the displacement of sections of the population. Some of the most common forms of disaster include flooding, storms, and coastal erosion. In the north-east of the country and the capital Accra, flooding has become an annual affair with severe consequences for the population. Low-lying areas in parts of Accra experience flooding during the rainy season resulting in extensive damages to properties and the displacement of residents. Similarly, some residents of eastern Accra experience flooding whenever the Weija dam is spilled. North-eastern Ghana also experiences flooding during the wet season when water is released from the Bagre and Kompienga dams in Burkina Faso. These floods typically result in loss of lives and damage to farmlands, houses, roads and other properties as well as the displacement of inhabitants living close to the banks of the Black and White Volta Rivers. In 2018, for example, floods from the Bagre dam spillage resulted in 34 deaths, inundation of downstream communities and widespread destruction of properties (Amuquandoh 2016).

Between 2011 and 2020, Ghana reported 49 natural disasters, comprising mainly of floods and storms which led to the destruction of habitations, dis-

placements, and deaths with the highest number occurring in 2017. In 2016 for example, flooding resulted in 7,918 people being displaced throughout the country. Each year on average, some 20,081 people are at risk of earthquake and flood related displacement in Ghana. Similarly, in October 2019 as many as 29 people died in flood-related incidents in north-eastern Ghana and between 1,000 and 4,000 buildings were damaged in the Kassena-Nankana Municipality and the Bongo District.² Sea erosion is also very common in the south-eastern shoreline of Ghana, particularly at Accra, Ada Foah and Keta, resulting in the washing away of buildings, damage to properties and the displacement of hundreds of residents in the country each year (cf. Kusimi/Dika 2012).

5.4 Displacements due to Large Development Projects – Hydro Dams and Irrigation Projects

Large development projects such as hydroelectric schemes and irrigation dams have contributed to the displacement of large populations in Ghana. The hydroelectric dam at Akosombo and the subsequent Volta Lake that the dam created flooded large parts of the Volta River Basin. The Lake flooded hundreds of communities and displaced more than 84,000 people (Tsikata 2006; Stanley 2004; Chambers 1970). The resettlement of the displaced inhabitants proved complex and in some cases unsuccessful; traditional farming practices disappeared and poverty increased among the affected population. Many residents in the Upper and Lower Volta sections of the Akosombo dam lost not only their lands and important archaeological sites but also their sources of livelihood. The dams at Akosombo and Kpong also led to an increase in water-borne diseases such as bilharzia, river blindness and malaria. These diseases and the accompanying loss of livelihood compelled many inhabitants of the lower Volta area to migrate from their settlements (Tsikata 2006). Similarly, the Bui Dam project on the Black Volta River in north-western Ghana resulted in the flooding of dozens of communities as well as the Bui national park. It also resulted in the displacement and relocation of 1,216 people to new settlements (Fynn/Abdulai 2018; Asiamah/Lengoiboni/Van der Mole 2017).

Large irrigation projects such as the Tono, Veia and Botanga irrigation projects in Northern Ghana have also displaced hundreds of households and destroyed livelihoods as well as social and cultural artefacts. The Tono irrigation project, one of the largest irrigation schemes in West Africa, was completed in 1985 and brings about 2490 hectares of land under cultivation. The Veia irrigation project, on the other hand, has about 850 hectares under cultivation. Despite the positive impacts of both projects in terms of providing alternative livelihood forms and securing household food requirement and income, particularly during the peak dry season, these irrigation projects have displaced hundreds of residents, led to the

² See: <https://reliefweb.int/disaster/fl-2019-000135-gha> <25.11.2022>.

expropriation and loss of farms and rangelands, as well as loss of cultural artefacts, among others (Asare 2002; Laube 2008).

5.5 Population/Housing Expansion and Changing Land Use in the Peri-Urban Areas

The last decades has seen a continuous increase in Ghana's population as well as the proportion of urban residents. Ghana's population increased from 12.29 million inhabitants in 1984 to 24.65 million in 2010 and is currently estimated at 30.8 million in 2021. Similarly, the proportion of the population living in the urban areas has increased from 32% in 1984 to 50.9% in 2010 and is estimated at 56.7% in 2021. The sharp increase in the urban population has been accompanied by an increase in the population density in the urban areas, particularly in the Greater Accra Region. The population density in the Greater Accra Region has increased from a mere 278.4 persons per km² in 1970 to 895.5 per km² in 2010 and then further to 1,236 persons per km² in 2021. As a result, cities such as Accra and Kumasi have rapidly expanded to absorb most settlements in the peri-urban and hinterland areas. Accra, for example, has since the 1980s expanded more than 10 kilometres in all directions to absorb the peri-urban settlements of Kasoa, Amasaman, Oyarifa and Adenta (Cobbinah/Aboagye 2017). The accompanying expansion in housing and commercial infrastructure have often meant that rural residents in the peri-urban localities have been displaced from lands that served as the basis for their economic survival and social cohesion. Lands hitherto used by smallholders for farming and livestock herding have been sold out as building plots, offices, industrial estates, retail and wholesale shops and other commercial uses (Gough/Yankson 2000). Most of the farms and agricultural projects in the peri-urban areas of Accra have either been relocated or shutdown while many rural residents have been displaced and compelled to look for alternative work in the city's informal sector. Similarly, hundreds of livestock herders who for several decades have reared their animals in the peri-urban settlements of Accra are being increasingly forced out of their settlements as rangelands are converted into residential areas, retail shops, factories or for other commercial purposes. Hundreds of herdsmen and livestock owners as well as their households have been compelled to move out of the Accra-Tema-Ashiaman area to the nearby Ho and Afram Plains in search of new settlements (Tonah 2022; cf. Ubink 2008).

5.6 Mining, Land Degradation and Poverty

Ghana has been engaged in industrial and artisanal mining activities for more than a century. The country has over 20 large-scale mining companies and more than 300 registered small scale mining groups and 90 mine support service companies as well as thousands of artisanal miners. Some of the major minerals that are mined in the country include gold, diamond, manganese, bauxite, limestone, iron

ore and salt (Teschner 2012; Akabzaa/Seyire/Afriyie 2007). Mining activities have traditionally been done by the state, private companies and groups of individuals. While the state and private companies, both foreign and local, tend to mine on a large scale using more modern technologies and equipment, there are hundreds of individuals and groups engaged in artisanal mining relying mainly on labour-intensive, and very rudimentary tools. In the last two decades, artisanal and small scale miners have come under increasing criticism for the negative effects of their activities on the land, water, forest, the general environment and the health of the miners and the community members where their mining activities are located (Bansah et al. 2018; Hilson 2002). Small scale and artisanal miners have been blamed for indiscriminately siting their operations within residential areas, especially in rural communities, thereby destroying rural settlements, lands and forests. They have also been accused of illegal entry into and citing of mines in forest reserves, diversion of river courses, use of dangerous and unapproved chemicals in their operations thereby polluting the land and water bodies (Ofosu et al. 2020; Ontoyin/Agyeman 2014).

Generally, mining activities, whether by large (multinational) companies or artisanal miners have displaced thousands of residents, deprived them of their sources of livelihood such as farming and fishing, endangered their health and left behind a devastated and polluted landscape and environment (Ofosu et al. 2020; Tom-Dery/Dagben/Cobbina 2012). Although the benefits of mining to individuals and communities as well as the Ghanaian state are numerous, mining activities in Ghana have displaced more than 30,000 residents from their places of residence and deprived thousands of rural inhabitants of their livelihoods (Cobbinah/Amoako 2018). In old Salman town in the Ellembelle District of Western Region, for example, 2,154 persons were displaced because of the commercial extraction of gold ore. A new settlement had to be constructed for the displaced inhabitants in 2012 (Abankwa et al. 2020; Aboagye 2014). Similarly, Induced or forced displacement has accompanied various mining projects. For example, between 1990 and 1998, more than 30,000 people were displaced in the Tarkwa district due to gold mining operations. According to Akabzaa and Darimani (2001), at least several hundred people each year are resettled in the Western Region as a result of mining development in Ghana.

5.7 Banishment and Displacement of Persons Accused of Witchcraft

In Ghana, the belief in witchcraft and persons with supernatural powers is quite ubiquitous. During the pre-colonial era, people accused of witchcraft, or declared as witches, were executed publicly after going through a trial by ordeal, (Drucker-Brown 1993; Goody 1970). Attempts to ban the practice of witchcraft accusations and the accompanying trial by ordeal during the colonial period were only partly successful, since the practice continued at secret locations across the territory or were held in secret (Mutaru 2019; Adinkrah 2015). Today, there are hundreds of

people in Ghana who have been accused of witchcraft and banished from their homes and communities by their partners, relatives and neighbours.

Though both men and women are accused of witchcraft, the vast majority of them are women, especially the elderly. Widows, childless or unmarried women are vulnerable to being branded as witches especially when they do not meet expected gender stereotypes. Women accused of witchcraft are typically blamed for any misfortunes afflicting their co-wives, nuclear and extended family members. These may include allegedly causing sickness, droughts or fires, cursing a neighbour or based on flimsy accusations like appearing in someone's dream, being talkative, assertive or provocative. Persons accused of witchcraft are often denied their basic human rights, such as the right to food, the right to physical well-being, the right to free movement and even the right to life and often have to flee their communities (Igwe 2016; Schauber 2007; Drucker-Brown 1993).

In Southern Ghana, most of the alleged witches are banished from their communities and compelled to seek refuge in 'prayer camps' where they undergo rituals of exorcism organized by pastors and traditional priests (Palmer 2010; Adinkrah 2015). In Northern Ghana, on the other hand, persons accused of witchcraft are often beaten and may be killed by their relatives and neighbours, while others are forced to flee to one of the numerous 'witches camps' or sanctuaries located across the region.³

6 Conclusions

This paper has examined the nature, causes and consequences of displacement, refugees and migrants in Ghana from a largely historical perspective. Although the focus was mainly on internally displaced persons in the country, we argued that events and occurrences in Ghana with respect to population displacement are closely connected with the socio-cultural, political and economic situation in the West African sub-region where people have moved to and from for several centuries. Hence, we also examined the phenomenon of cross-border displacement of people in West Africa, with particular reference to how it affects the people of Ghana and their neighbours.

The paper established that displacement has been a common phenomenon in Ghana and indeed the West African sub-region since the pre-colonial period when land was widely available and movements from one traditional area to the other was relatively easy. During this period, widespread internecine and inter-ethnic conflicts did create considerable displacement of the population. Furthermore, slavery and its associated raids and warfare was a major source of forced displacement

³ There are 10 such camps or sanctuaries for victims of witch hunt in Northern Ghana. These are at Gambaga, Gushiegu, Gbintiri, Nabule, Gushiegu Ghetto, Gushiegu Town, Kpatinga, Tindang/Gnani, Kukuo, Duabone, and Banyasi. These camps hold hundreds of people, mostly women, and are often located at sites of famous earth shrines (Riedel 2016; Schauber 2007).

among the weak, clan-led groups in the savannah zones. Colonialism reduced the spate of inter-ethnic conflicts and raids and its associated trade in slaves. Nevertheless, colonial policies such as the imposition of taxes, forced labour and unequal promotion of economic development in the colony also promoted the forced and negotiated displacement of the inhabitants; albeit at a much lower level in comparison with the pre-colonial period.

The post-colonial period did initially produce a number of internationally displaced persons, migrants and refugees across West Africa as a result of the frequent expulsion of foreign nationals from the national territory by the newly-independent states. However, this problem appears to have abated since the 2000s following the failure of such expulsion exercises and the renewed emphasis on the importance of cross-border trade and cooperation among ECOWAS countries. Besides, in recent times, violent conflicts, recurrent drought and poverty associated with climate change are among the major factors responsible for internal displacement and forced migration in Ghana since 2000.

Generally, Ghana has had more challenges dealing with internal displacement than international migrants and refugees. This is because the number of international migrants and refugees in the country has been comparatively low. The generally stable political, social and economic situation in the neighbouring countries has reduced the incidence of international displacement and refugees. However, this is likely to change if measures are not taken to tackle the phenomenon of climate change and Islamist conflicts in the Sahelian countries that are engendering conflicts, and impoverishing farmers and pastoralists in West Africa. So far, the number of international migrants and refugees from Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso moving to Ghana and the coastal countries in West Africa remains low. This could however change if adequate measures are not put in place to resolve the conflicts and environmental degradation that confront the Sahelian countries.

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Exile and Prison as a Loss of Biographical Knowledge about the Present: Antonio Gramsci as Reader of Dante's Inferno

Ursula Apitzsch

1 Introduction

Antonio Gramsci, Italian philosopher, journalist and politician, is still today one of the most important representatives of Critical Marxism of the 20th century. His best known and most influential writings, the Prison Notebooks and the Letters from Prison, were published in many languages all over the world only after his death in prison in Rome on April 27, 1937 (Apitzsch 1999). He was then only 46 years old. Gramsci had been among the founders of the Italian Communist Party and had been sent to Moscow in May 1922 as an Italian delegate to the Communist International (Comintern), also known as the Third International, founded by Lenin. Gramsci did not expect that his participation in the Fourth Congress of the Comintern would turn into an exile of more than two years after the Fascist March on Rome and Mussolini becoming Prime Minister in October 1922. During the late summer of 1922 Gramsci fell ill because of a nervous breakdown, and recovered in the Sanatorium Serebryano Bor near Moscow, where he got to know Eugenia Schucht and her sister Giulia (Julija) Schucht, his future wife. The sisters

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had received their higher education at the Academy of Fine Arts and at the Music Academy S. Cecilia during their family's political exile in Rome, and they both spoke and read Italian fluently. Most members of the Schucht family had returned to Russia before and during the October Revolution. Giulia worked as a solo violinist and a teacher at the Music Academy of Ivanovo, an industrial center not far from Moscow. She gave recitals at the sanatorium where her sister Eugenia and Antonio Gramsci were recovering, and Antonio immediately fell in love with her. Antonio, in view of the danger that he could be arrested after his return to Italy because of Mussolini's arrest warrant, already had to prepare his departure to his exile in Vienna. There he waited for a possible return to Italy, as the plan was that he would re-organize the Italian Communist party after its defeat by the Fascists. He did not know then that Giulia was pregnant. She gave birth to their first son, Delio, in August 1924. In April 1924, Mussolini held elections in Italy because he wanted to gain international recognition. The Communist Party participated in the elections, and Gramsci was elected to parliament for the region of Veneto, which meant he could return because of the indemnity connected with his new role. This lasted till the beginning of 1925 when the Communist party was again made illegal. Despite the critical political situation, Giulia joined Antonio in Rome together with Delio in the early autumn of 1925 as a staff member of the Russian Embassy in Rome, where she worked till June 1926. Because of the increasingly dangerous illegal situation of Antonio in Italy, where the police were searching for him, Giulia returned to Moscow in August 1926, a few weeks before she gave birth to their second son, Giuliano. A very important help and ally in her travel project had been her sister Tatiana, the only member of the Schucht family who had remained in Rome and would return to Russia only after Gramsci's death and after she had saved Gramsci's prison notebooks and correspondence. She wrote more than 600 letters to Gramsci in prison and served as his link to the outer world (GB II and III). It had been Antonio who had repaired the ties between Tatiana and her family when he found Tatiana in Rome in January 1925.¹ Immediately after their first meeting, Tatiana developed the plan to bring her family back to Rome at least for a brief holiday after the summer, and maybe for a longer period so that Giulia and Delio would live together with Antonio as a family for the first time. Tatiana had just begun to work at the Soviet Embassy as a translator, and it seems that she was also successful in helping Giulia regarding contacts with the embassy (Vacca 2012: 39–45.). Giulia had exhausting working hours at the embassy, while her sister Eugenia – who had accompanied her – cared for the child.

¹ Gramsci found Tatiana with the help of Nilde Perilli, a friend of Giulia's from her time at the S. Cecilia Conservatory and also a friend of Eugenia, with whom she had been in uninterrupted correspondence since the Schucht family's stay in Rome and also after their departure to Russia during the 1st World War. Tatiana rented a room in Nilde's apartment in Rome for several years. For the relation of the Schucht sisters, Nilde Perilli and Antonio Gramsci see Adele Cambria (1976, esp.: 58, n. 1, 94 n. 29 and 96 n. 58), an Italian feminist writer who was the first to publish the letters of the women to Gramsci.

After her return to Moscow in August 1926, Antonio never saw Giulia again, and he never got to know his second child Giuliano. The last letters he wrote to Giulia before his arrest show that despite the enormous personal grief, because he could not be with her when their child was born, and despite an enormous amount of political stress, Antonio was working in a very productive way and shared this experience with Giulia. She wrote to him personally about the birth of Giuliano (she had sent a telegram to Tatiana while Antonio was travelling) in her letter dated September 13. Antonio answered her in his letter dated October 7, with great love and tenderness. On October 14, in the same letter that contained his famous message to Palmiro Togliatti² criticizing Stalin and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR, he confessed to Giulia that he was

“truly crushed by worry. If I think that up to now you’ve had the whole weight of the two children on your shoulders, as well as other responsibilities weighing you down, I feel humiliated and sad. Notwithstanding everything, it will seem I don’t love you enough, or love the two children enough either, until the day I manage to change these conditions once and for all.” (LB: 368)

Despite all the pressure he felt, he could tell Giulia: “Over this last period I’ve been able to work a lot more than I have managed to in the past” (LB: 367). This work meant not only the long, complicated and risky letter to the Soviet Communist Party from the same day, but also his essay on the Italian “Southern Question” about which he wrote to Giulia on October 20, 1926: “I’m finishing off a work that has taken up much time and effort and which maybe turn out to be interesting and useful” (LB: 377).

In his letter of October 14, 1926 to the Central Committee of the CPSU, less than a month before his arrest, Gramsci had demonstrated in the name of the Political Bureau of the PCI a very clear and fearless position against the sectarianism being manifested in the Soviet party under Stalin’s majority against the minority, namely Trotsky.

It shows Gramsci’s full confidence in Giulia that he sends this very important letter for Togliatti through her, attached to his letter to her from the same date (only the letter to Giulia is dated, LB: 368, 389, n. 15).

In his last letter to Giulia before his arrest, written on November 4, 1926, Gramsci announced that he would soon come to Moscow and expressed his hope that Giulia would be able to await his arrival “without any more serious concerns” (LB: 383). Already on October 26, 1926, Gramsci had written about his travel plans: “On the 30th, that is in three days’ time I’m leaving Rome and will try to get out of the country to come to the next enlarged executive” (LB: 381). The party had

² Palmiro Togliatti (1893–1964) was Gramsci’s University colleague in Torino, together with Gramsci since the FIAT strikes member of the “Ordine Nuovo” group and after Gramsci’s imprisonment leader of the Communist Party of Italy PCd’I.

decided that he should not go back to Italy afterwards and had prepared his exile (Vacca 2012: 22, n. 52).

On November 8, however, Gramsci, together with other Communist Party deputies, was arrested in Rome and taken to the Regina Coeli prison in accordance with the Exceptional Decrees that the fascist government had just issued, abolishing the rules of parliamentary immunity. After seven weeks of confinement on the island of Ustica (near Sicily) he is being transferred to the prison of San Vittore in Milan where he arrives on February 7, 1927. In his letter from Milan from February 12, 1927 to Giulia and Tatiana, Gramsci described in detail his transfer from Ustica to Milan. "Ordinary transport" was a euphemism for the torture to which prisoners were subjected in order to break their will before any judicial trial had taken place. It is probably during this transport that Gramsci was infected by tuberculosis which would be one of the reasons for his early death in 1937. Gramsci's trial before the Fascist Special Tribunal in Rome took place from May 28 to June 4, 1928. He was sentenced to 20 years, four months and five days in prison. His health deteriorated still more during his terrible transport from Rome to Turi, his prison destination, where he arrived on July 19, 1928. Only in February 1929, after seven months in Turi, did he receive permission to write and to study in his cell. From this moment he can start to work systematically and to use his time to do something "für ewig", as he already had explained to Tatiana Schucht two years earlier, in his letter from March 19, 1927.

2 Gramsci's Reference to Dante as an Autobiographical Note

At the beginning of August 1931, almost five years after his imprisonment by the Fascist Italian state, Gramsci underwent a severe physical crisis. He himself described this crisis in the letter of August 17, 1931, to Tatiana:

"This is how it began: at one in the morning of August 3, exactly 15 days ago, I had a sudden discharge of blood from the mouth ... This cough was not violent or even strong; it was the sort of cough you have when something sticks in your throat one cough at a time, not in a serious of attacks ... This lasted until at about 4 o'clock." (LR II: 54 f.)

From that moment it was almost certain that Gramsci suffered from an open tuberculosis which the prison doctor neither recognized as such nor treated with any adequate therapy.

Surprisingly, one month later, in his letter to Tania Schucht of September 20, 1931, he turns to an idea seemingly far away from his personal conditions: to an old plan for a series of notes on Canto X of Dante's *Inferno*. Gramsci, as a student of philology and philosophy at the University of Turin from 1911 to the end of

1915, had always loved and as a young journalist already written about Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the most important piece of medieval Italian literature and the first work in Italian history that had been written not in Latin but in "Volgare", the language of the Italian people, which Dante's work had transformed into a poetic language. Gramsci's letter from September 1931 is written as a request to his old University Professor Cosmo from Turin, to get some advice on his main ideas about this poem.

We might ask: What seemed so urgent to Gramsci that it brought him to reflect about a medieval piece of literature when he was in such a bad condition that he knew that time was running out and that he might die soon in prison?

What had the situation of the prisoner in common with the poetry of Dante and with Dante as a historical person? The answer might be found by analyzing Gramsci's interpretation of Dante's poem in his letters, as well as in the *Prison Notebooks* as an autobiographical note. So, let's see whether this interpretation makes any sense.

Where does Canto X of the *Divine Comedy* take place? It is placed in the First Part of this huge work and thus is playing in hell, the "Inferno", which is also the title of the First Part. The scene is set like this: The author Dante, who describes himself as still alive and able to communicate with living persons, visits together with his guide, the Classical Roman poet Virgil, a certain circle of hell where the heretics are being punished. More concretely, these heretics are Epicureans who do not believe in a life of the soul after death (Ghetti 2014). Now it is interesting how Gramsci interprets their punishment.

The person that mostly interests Gramsci from all persons he sees in the flames of hell is Cavalcante, a figure very near to Dante's own biography because in his poem Dante presents Cavalcante as the father of his close friend, the poet Guido Cavalcanti. Like Dante himself, Guido's father belongs to the political party of the Guelfs who throughout the Middle Ages were regarded as defenders of the pope and enemies of the German emperors, and therefore also enemies of their counterparts, the Ghibellines, who were regarded as among the supporters of the emperors. In Florence, however, the situation at the end of the 13th century was more complicated. The Guelfs themselves split into the "white Guelfs", who were more open towards the emperor, and the "black Guelfs" who were strictly against the emperor. Dante, as a member of the government of the Republic of Florence, belonged to the party of the "white Guelfs". After the defeat of the "white Guelfs" in 1302 Dante was expelled from Florence. He never returned and died in Ravenna. The later readers of his *Divine Comedy* knew that the historical author Dante himself would be exiled two years after the fictive scene with Cavalcante in Canto X of the *Divine Comedy* that Dante had placed in the fictive historical moment of the days before Easter in the year 1300. Thus, Dante himself shares the troubles of exile that he depicts in his *Divine Comedy* in the person of Cavalcante.

Coming back to Gramsci's note on Dante's Canto X, one finds that this text normally – and mainly in the famous interpretation by the liberal philosopher

Benedetto Croce,³ whom Gramsci admired as a young student and criticized in his Prison Notebooks – puts another historical person at its center than the already mentioned tragic figure Cavalcante. The person normally in the center of philological interpretations of Canto X is the figure of the great Ghibelline hero Farinata, who is not moved by any human feeling of pain and does not even ask about the present situation of his daughter who is married to Cavalcante's son Guido. Both persons, however, are lying in the same tomb of flames because in their lifetime they were both regarded as Epicureans, heretics who did not believe in a life after death.

Gramsci now asks about Guido's father: "What is his torment?" And Gramsci himself gives the answer:

"Cavalcante sees into the past and into the future, but he does not see the present: that is, he does not see within a specific zone of the past and the future that comprises the present. In the past Guido is alive. In the future Guido is dead. But in the present? Is he dead or alive? This is Cavalcante's torment, his affliction, his sole dominant thought. When he speaks, he asks about his son, when he hears [from Dante, U.A.] '*he had*', the verb in the past tense, he persists in his questioning ... Cavalcante seizes on this immediately and cries out in despair. He experiences doubt, uncertainty. He asks for further explanation with three questions in which there is a gradation of emotional states: 'Did you say he *had*? Does he not still live? Does the sweet light not strike his eyes?' Contained in the third question is all Cavalcante's paternal affection. Generic human life is seen in a concrete condition, in the enjoyment of light which the damned and the dead have lost. Dante delays in answering, and at that point Cavalcante seizes to doubt ... Cavalcante collapses." (PN II: 247; emph. added by U.A.)

3 Gramsci's Biographical Situation in September 1931

Now we want to ask: What is the concrete historical and biographical situation of the political prisoner Antonio Gramsci in September 1931, so that we can judge whether there is a similarity between Cavalcante's situation and Gramsci's own and whether Dante's poem can highlight a specific dimension of his state of mind in prison.

In 1929, the Third International abandoned the Common Front policy that had been the leading idea of Gramsci in his Thesis for Lyon, the program for the clandestine conference of the already illegal Italian Communist Party in 1925 after the rise of Mussolini. In 1928–29, when Gramsci was already in prison,

³ Benedetto Croce (1866–1952) was a liberal philosopher and politician and one of the most influential Italian intellectuals of the 20th century. Gramsci dedicated one of his Prison Notebooks to a critique of Croce's philosophy.

the Communist International declared that Social Democracy was reactionary and regarded it as form of social fascism; this was in total contrast to Gramsci's position, which he continued to defend in prison. The new leadership of the Communist Party of Italy under Togliatti, after a short resistance, had accepted the new position of the Comintern and foresaw an immediate revolutionary situation in the struggle of one class against another class in which fascism could only be defeated. Gramsci, on the other hand, suggested that the party took up the Constituent Assembly as its slogan as an alliance of all democratic forces against fascism (Fiori 1991: 48). This provoked a strong negative reaction among the group of communist prisoners against Gramsci.

Despite this internal conflict in the prison in Turi, Togliatti was eager to maintain the figure of Gramsci as the former leader of the Italian Communist Party and as a political martyr. During the clandestine conference of the party in Cologne in spring 1931, Gramsci was mentioned as its President of Honors with a big picture of him at the side of Stalin (Rossi/Vacca 2007: 43–46). At the same time, great campaigns for Gramsci's liberation, especially in France, were initiated. Gramsci appeared here as a strong hero who might die of starvation in prison.

4 What Does Gramsci Try to Explain in His Dante Interpretation?

My hypothesis is: What Gramsci tries to explain in his interpretation of Canto X is the drama he is living himself. As a historical personality he is placed on the big stage as the great hero who does not know any human pain, but in his actual human situation as a prisoner he is living the drama of Cavalcante who only asks about the fate of his son and of his family.

What happens now with this seemingly just literary note on Dante, written in the private letter of a prisoner to his sister-in law? Does anyone besides her read what Gramsci wrote in his loneliness in his cell?

The answer is: yes. In the introduction to the third volume of the German edition of Gramsci's correspondence from prison the editors have called what now happened a "Circulus Virtuusus" of clandestine communication (Apitzsch/Kammerer 2014). As Gramsci had asked her, Tatiana Schucht sent Gramsci's seemingly mere philological exercise to his old university professor Cosmo from Turin, with whom Gramsci had always had a relationship of mutual friendship and critique. Cosmo answered Gramsci with a friendly personal note and philological comment, and sent this answer to Piero Sraffa, Antonio's old friend from the time of his studies in Turin, also one of Cosmo's former pupils. He sent Cosmo's answer to Tatiana who copied this correspondence for Antonio.

Sraffa was at that time living in Cambridge as an assistant of the famous economist Keynes, to whose university chair he was later appointed. Sraffa was in continuous contact with another member of this former student group in Turin, the current leader of the Italian communist party in exile in Paris and Moscow,

Palmiro Togliatti. Sraffa, Togliatti and Gramsci had become friends as students at the University of Turin and were political allies during the FIAT factory strikes in 1919–1920 and through their participation in the “Ordine Nuovo” group and journal. Interestingly enough, after he had received the Gramsci – Cosmo correspondence, Sraffa wrote to Tatiana that he had spoken about the text on Dante with an old Piedmontese friend who had remembered that there had been a discussion of this text by Dante as long ago as 1918 in Turin. And in fact, Gramsci had written on this Canto X already as a journalist in the Turin edition of the socialist journal “Avanti” in the column “Sotto la mole”.⁴ Thus, Sraffa’s answer made it clear to Antonio that Togliatti in Moscow had got the text and the secret message in it.⁵

But what was this message? Was it only the possibility of disguising political contents as literature? My hypothesis is that it was the desperate cry of a prisoner in his cell that his loneliness and his being cut off from his private life was as terrible as the inferno. The situation of isolation in his cell was lived and understood by Antonio as still more severe than any isolation in exile. It was bearable for him to be isolated in prison from his political comrades because of his different analysis of the historical situation. But it was not bearable that being treated at the same time as hero and heretic also destroyed all the personal ties that bound him to the most important persons of his intimate life, his wife and his two sons who were at that time five and three years old.

5 Gramsci’s Experience of Prison as Exile from his Family and Inner World

As already mentioned above, Antonio had got to know his Russian wife Giulia Schucht during his stay in Moscow as the Italian delegate to the Comintern conference in 1922 when he was recovering in the “Serebryano Bor” sanatorium after a nervous breakdown. Here he had got to know Giulia’s sister Eugenia, who also was recovering there after a nervous breakdown in connection with the civil war when she had worked as a teacher on the side of the revolution during the school boycott.

Giulia and Eugenia were on the father’s side members of the noble German-Russian family Schucht and – on the mother’s side – members of the Jewish family Hirschfeld, a family of well-known lawyers. Giulia’s father Apollon had been in

⁴ Sraffa writes about this “friend” and about Gramsci’s article from 1918 in his letter to Tania Schucht from May 2, 1932 (Sraffa 1991: 64).

⁵ Ingo Lauggas (2013), with reference to Sraffa, underlines that the issue of Dante’s Canto X had been for the prisoner Gramsci a possibility to masque political contents as literature (Lauggas 2013: 99). However, Lauggas sees in Gramsci’s essay on Dante also the chance to produce Marxist aesthetics at a very high level, equal to that of Benedetto Croce and – quoting Galvano Della Volpe (1958) – in a way that was more sophisticated than that of any other Marxist philosopher.

opposition to the Czar since his education as a cadet in the army. After arrest and confinement to Siberia the family lived in exile in Geneva, Montpellier, and Rome.⁶ After her return to the Soviet Union in 1926, Giulia lived with her two sons in Moscow and worked at the NKVD which was the department for internal affairs of the Soviet Union, and which also meant that she could have worked for the secret service. Giulia had stopped corresponding with Gramsci in July 1929, just at the same time when the Executive Committee of the Comintern in its X session had formulated its new politics against so-called “social fascism”. On November 18, 1929, Gramsci writes to Giulia’s sister Tatiana:

“I’ve seen that Giulia has not yet written after all this time. This saddens me sometimes. I think that if she doesn’t write to me this might also depend on the fact that she no longer enjoys receiving letters and news from me.” (LR I: 293 f.)

On December 16, 1929, he writes again to Tatiana: “I feel as though all my links with the outside world are breaking one by one ...” (LR I: 296). And even more despairingly, five months later, on May 19, 1930, Antonio writes to Tatiana:

“I am subject of various prison regimes: there is the prison regime constituted by the four walls, the bars on the window, this spy hole on the door, etc.; this had already been taken into account by me and as a subordinate probability, because the primary probability from 1921 to November 1926 was not prison but losing my life. What had not been included in my evaluation was the other prison, which is added to the first and is constituted by being cut off not only from social life but also from family life etc. etc.” (LR I: 331)

As Dante had seen Farinata and Cavalcante in one tomb of flames, Antonio saw himself in the figure of the tortured Cavalcante and at the same time as something like a cartoon of the political hero Farinata, re-invented as the international anti-fascist martyr Gramsci (cf. Apitzsch/Kammerer 2014: 23 f.).

⁶ Apollon met his future wife in a revolutionary circle in St. Petersburg. In 1887, when their first daughters had already been born, Apollon was arrested and afterwards condemned to confinement in Siberia. Here, he met the young Lenin whose brother had been executed and who also was condemned to the same confinement. In 1894, he was given permission to emigrate to Switzerland. For the history of the Schucht family see Natoli 1991: 3 ff.

6 Exile and Prison as a Loss of Biographical Knowledge of the Present

What Gramsci did not know for a long time was the fact that Giulia from 1927 on suffered from attacks of psychic illness. She sometimes could not speak or might break down. She spent many months undergoing diverse therapeutic treatments in clinics. For years, there has been a long and still ongoing debate among historians on the causes of her illness. Some like her grandson Antonio Gramsci Jr., say that in 1927 she suffered from Spanish flu, and afterwards symptoms of epilepsy appeared (Gramsci jr. 2010: 68). Antonio Gramsci himself mentioned in a letter to his sister Teresina that his family was hit by the “Spanish fever” in spring 1927.⁷ However, he never connected this with the reasons of Giulia’s illness. He tended to see those reasons in giving up her career as an artist and in taking up “bureaucratic” duties for the Soviet state. On March 28, 1932, he wrote to Giulia:

“I have always believed that your personality has in great part developed around artistic activities and that it suffered almost an amputation because of the merely practical orientation focused on immediate interests that you have given to your life. I would say that in your life there has been a metaphysical error which has resulted in disharmonies and psychophysical imbalances.” (LR II: 156)

One year later, on February 27, 1933, he makes a very severe analysis of his own interpretation regarding Giulia’s situation. He writes to Tatiana:

“I am convinced to this day that in my relations with Julca, there exists a certain equivocation, a false bottom, an ambiguity that prevents us from seeing clearly and being completely frank; my impression is that I am set aside, that I represent so to speak a bureaucratic dossier to be annotated and nothing more ... Don’t even believe for a minute that my affection for Julca has diminished. From what I myself can judge, I would rather see that it has increased ... I know by experience the world in which she lives, her sensibility and the way in which a change might have taken place in her.” (LR II: 275 f.)

And in the same letter he concludes: “I have the impression that in some way Julca suffers from the same complaint as mine, that at least in part her ailments derive from the same causes from which my psychic ailments spring.” (LR II: 277)

What were these “same causes” that made Antonio and Giulia suffer in the same way? It seems that Gramsci sees them both in a subaltern position, governed

⁷ He writes about the “Spanish fever” in his Moscow family in a letter to his sister Teresina from March 26, 1927 (LR I: 89). The “Spanish” virus, known as a pandemic that appeared after the 1st World War, might have had long-term effects similar to those that we in our present pandemic experiences of 2020–2022 now call “Long Covid”.

by outer forces and cut off from almost any possibility of making themselves understood by the outside world. We know through his letters some details from Gramsci's situation in prison, but how did Giulia become cut off not only from Antonio but also from her former life as an artist in Russia?

Antonio Gramsci Jr., son of Antonio's son Giuliano, makes a clear statement about the material situation of the Schucht family in 1924. The economic situation of the family during their stay in Ivanovo had been desperate. They all, her parents and her sister Eugenia, lived mainly from the earnings of Giulia. Apollo wrote this in a letter to Krupskaya, wife of Apollon's old friend Vladimir Lenin. (Gramsci Jr. 2010: 34). But life seemed too hard for Giulia and her many jobs, at the conservatory and at the same time for the communist party, and the whole family was still without a home, without an apartment where they could live on their own. The economic situation of the family would become better only when Giulia, at the end of 1924 after the birth of her first son Delio, started to work for the OGPU in Moscow, later on followed by the NKVD (Gramsci Jr. 2010: 38). Her salary was –according to Gramsci jr. – at least twice as much as Giulia's father Apollon had ever earned by teaching (Gramsci Jr. 2010: 38).

Giuseppe Vacca comments on the fundamental change in the life of Gramsci's companion with the following consideration:

“For a police state like the one that resulted from the revolution, the activities of intelligence and control of the personal life of the leaders of the ‘Soviet apparati’ and those of the Comintern were the norm, and as such they were accepted and internalized by the militant leaders who were convinced that they could not place themselves in opposition to the personal life of women and men who were totally dedicated to the worldwide mission that was incarnated in the ‘socialist fatherland’.” (Vacca 2012: 10; transl. by U.A.)

Gramsci, however, was from the very beginning of his relationship with Giulia suspicious about the conditions of security that were imposed on the life of the Schucht family by the rules of the NKVD. In the context of the feminist view of the role of Giulia Schucht it is important to interpret her hesitation about her maternity (that can be found in her letters to Antonio in Vienna in his pre-prison time) not in terms of a lack of an active role in her relation with Antonio (Cambria 1976: 75.), but instead as an aggravating material fact of her disappearing autonomy regarding a possible life together with him. In fact, when deciding for maternity, Giulia had given up her whole professional life as an artist in Ivanovo. On the one hand, she saw herself forced to earn money for herself and for the children, and on the other hand as a single mother she had to find someone who would care for the children. She decided to end her career as an artist by ending her work as a teacher of violin at the Conservatorium in Ivanovo and by taking up a new job in Moscow where she could join her parents and her sister Eugenia.

Historians like Angelo Rossi and Giuseppe Vacca (2007) argue that it might have been the clash of Antonio's position in the Italian party in the Communist

International and Giulia's position in the political services of the Soviet Union, as well as the negative political image as a dissident and bad father that some members of the Schucht family (mainly Giulia's sister Eugenia) had associated with the heretic prisoner,⁸ that prevented her from writing. Because of her professional duties she was under strict surveillance by the NKVD and had to deliver all her letters to a certain office for censorship (Rossi/Vacca 2007: 73). The historical study by Rossi and Vacca (2007) states clearly that

“from December 1924 Giulia Schucht worked for the NKVD. Also, if her work was only bureaucratic, her life was from that time subjected to special supervision and censorship ... At that time this might have been lived as normal, not creating particular problems ... But evidently this symmetric relation between public and private life had to crack with Gramsci's imprisonment and was totally abolished between 1928 and 1930. There cannot be other than political explanations for this. The control of Giulia had been progressively transformed into paralyzing restrictions.” (Rossi/Vacca 2007: 73 f.; transl. by U.A.)

From 1928 onwards, Gramsci suspected that the Italian Communist Party had deliberately or through gross negligence contributed to his long prison sentence in the run-up to the Rome trials. The central point for Gramsci was the fact that he did not have any more any certain empirical knowledge of his own and his family's biographical presence so that he could have analyzed and judged what was the case.

On December 16, 1929, Antonio writes in one of his letters to Tania: “The fact is that in my life there aren't any little things or details, there are no shaded areas. The only area that is not like the picture that showed a black man in the dark is the cerebral one.” (LR I: 296 f.)

Giulia, on the other hand, interprets her own illness and inactivity as fleeing into silence. When Giulia remembers this phase of her life almost five years later, on March 16, 1932 she writes to Antonio:

“It is difficult to show why I am worried by these thoughts now. But if I was not active for so long, if when you were arrested I sought strength in passivity ... I must look for the explanation and the way to change, to come out of this state ... My state of being now is absolutely different from the way I was before ... even though the symptoms of the disease have not gone away (some moments in which I cannot understand a word) ... Dear, I should and could tell you much more than before ... I feel an immense pain, especially for this mutuality in my life, especially of our life with you

⁸ For the relations between Giulia and Eugenia see Righi 2011.

... Also before I didn't tell you so many things that I was almost afraid to feel. Love me, Giulia."⁹

7 The Critique of Deterministic Concepts of the Future and Blindness for the Presence: Gramsci's Interpretation of the "Philosophy of Praxis"

And here we come back to the question: Why did Gramsci, in the middle of the most critical phase of his life, return to the interpretation of Canto X of Dante's *Inferno*?

Gramsci would not have been Gramsci if his analysis of the complex scene between two Epicurean heretics and historical personalities in exile would not have a still deeper meaning than an artistic camouflage of a secret message to his former political world about the motives for his own critical situation in prison and that of his family in Russia. My hypothesis is that Gramsci's reflection on the loss of biographical knowledge of the present is deeply connected to his fear about a catastrophic clash of deterministic societal concepts under Bukharin and Stalin on one side and the concepts of presence and future in his Philosophy of Praxis on the other side. This was one of the great themes Gramsci was writing about at the same time in his Prison Notebooks when dealing with Marx' Theses on Feuerbach. In his letter to Tania on Canto X from 1931, Gramsci had written: "The law of retribution in Cavalcante and Farinata is this: for having wished to see into the future, they ... are deprived of the knowledge of earthly things for a certain specific period of time, that is, they live in a cone of darkness" (LR II: 74).

The issue of possible knowledge about societal development in the future was a great issue among socialist theoreticians during the time of the First World War.

Theoreticians of the Philosophy of Praxis argued against deterministic concepts of the future. Gramsci himself, in his above-mentioned article "Il cieco Tiresia" (The blind Tiresias) in the "Sotto la Mole" column of the Piedmont edition of the newspaper "Avanti!", April 18, 1918, referred for the first time to Dante's Canto X. However, before he turned his argumentation to the blind Teresias and Dante, he referred to a series of reports in the newspaper "La Stampa" on so-called "miracles" where children prophesied that the First World War would end in 1918. The newspapers reported that all these children had been found to have become blind after their prophecy. Gramsci related this to the old "people's poesy" – as he called it – that no one should dare to see into the future without being punished.

"The little prophet was not blind prior to the prophecy; his blindness, however, was indissolubly linked with his newly acquired ability ... The quality

⁹ This letter has been published for the first time from the archives of the Gramsci Institute in Rome (AFGI: 1043) for the first volume of the German edition of the correspondence between Antonio Gramsci and Giulia Schucht (GB I: 181 f.; transl. by U.A.).

of being a prophet was reconnected with the misfortune of blindness. The Greek Teresias was blind, ... blocked from all impressions of actuality ... The tenth canto of Dante's *Inferno* ... depends on this experience. Farinata and Cavalcante are punished for having wanted to see too far into the world beyond ... Farinata is admired for his statuesque attitude ... Cavalcante is ignored; yet he is leveled by a word – *he had* – which makes him think that his son is dead. He does not know the present; he sees the future, and in the future his son is dead: but in the present? Tormenting doubt, a terrible punishment in this doubt, the highest drama that is consummated in a few words.” (PN II: 606 f.)

It is the concrete biographical account that Dante gives to Cavalcante a verb in the past tense – *he had* – that leads to Cavalcante's punishment, his blindness about the present.

But in the years between 1929 and 1933 it's not the case of divine prophecy that concerns Gramsci about the concept of societal development; rather, he is very concerned with the concept of “Marxist Sociology”.

Against Bukharin's *Popular Manual of Marxist Sociology*¹⁰, Gramsci writes in Prison Notebook 11:

“Sociology has ... become a tendency on its own, it has become the philosophy of non-philosophers, an attempt to describe and classify schematically historical and political facts ... Sociology, therefore, is an attempt to extract ‘experimentally’ the laws of evolution of human society in such a way as to ‘predict’ the future with the same certainty with which one predicts that an oak tree will develop out of an acorn.” (SPN: 426)

“Moreover, the extension of the law of statistics to the science and art of politics can have very serious consequences in so far as it is employed to formulate prospects and programs of action.” (SPN: 426)¹¹

“In the natural sciences the worst that statistics can do is produce blunders and irrelevances which can easily be corrected by further research ... But in the science and art of politics it can have literally catastrophic results which do irreparable harm.” (SPN: 428 f.)

¹⁰ “Nikolai Bukharin's *The Theory of Historical Materialism, A Manual of Popular Sociology* was first published in Moscow in 1921 ... An English translation, based on the third Russian edition, was published by Allen and Unwin in 1926, under the title *Historical Materialism, A System of Sociology*, and there was a French edition in the following year, which was probably the one known to Gramsci.” (Introduction, SPN: 378 f.) The French edition has the title „La théorie du matérialisme historique. Manuel populaire de sociologie marxiste“, Paris 1927: Editions Sociales Internationales.

¹¹ The American Critical Edition of Gramsci's Prison Notebooks by Joseph A. Buttigieg (PN) remained incomplete when the editor died in January 2020. It contains Notebook 1–8 in three volumes. However, my quotations from Notebook 11, relating to the Italian edition of Valentino Gerratana (G: 1428 f.), were already part of Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, ed. and transl. by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (SPN).

In contrast, in the same notebook Gramsci defines his own concept of the Philosophy of Praxis:

“The experience upon which the philosophy of praxis is based cannot be schematized; it is history itself in its infinite variety and multiplicity, the study of which can give rise to ‘philology’ as a method of scholarship for ascertaining particular facts and to philosophy understood as a general methodology of history.” (SPN: 428.)

This can also be understood as a definition of the principle of reconstructive historical hermeneutics.

The missing knowledge of the concrete presence in its variety, this is what concerns Gramsci most in his experience of prison as exile from the outside world. This was his obsession in relation to his personal biographical situation as well as in his elaboration of an innovative concept of the Philosophy of Praxis developed during his time in prison, against a blind determinist and positivist “Marxist Sociology”.

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Sociology of Exile, Sociology in Exile

Christoph Reinprecht

The following article reflects on the difficult and complex relationship between sociology and exile: difficult with regard to its distinction from migration (including asylum); complex in terms of the need for an open, non-hierarchical and multidisciplinary approach. Taking up the perspectives of different authors, postures and disciplinary contexts, including literature and poetry, features are worked out that potentially characterize both a sociology *in* exile and *of* exile. A core question of the article is whether there is a sociology *of* exile that is not at the same time a sociology *in* exile. Since the article focuses on sociology, most of the biographical and historical examples are from the history of the discipline. However, exile is by no means limited to members of the intellectual classes. What connects the various forms and experiences of exile is its understanding as something essentially political.

1 “The Place Where Place is Absent” (Georges Perec)

For Georges Perec, the great, unforgettable French writer and member of OuLiPo, *L'Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle*, Ellis Island represents the “the ultimate place of exile, that is, the place where place is absent, the non-place, the nowhere”. (Perec/Bober 1995: 58). Ellis Island, New York’s historical arrival point for Millions of people who desired to enter the United States: between 1892 und 1924 around 16 million emigrants first set foot on American soil here, most of them

Reinprecht, C. (2023): Sociology of Exile, Sociology in Exile. In: Pohn-Lauggas, M./Tonah, S./Worm, A. (Eds.): *Exile/Flight/Persecution. Sociological Perspectives on Processes of Violence*. Göttingen: Göttingen University Press, 81–98. <https://doi.org/10.17875/gup2023-2446>

arriving from Europe. A site of border control and health checks, and of the arbitrary power of immigration officers deciding whether entry is possible or whether a return must be undertaken; at the same time a site of hope and metamorphosis where biographies of “men, women and children, driven from their homelands by famine or poverty, or by political, racial or religious oppression” became transformed and redesigned: “from emigrant to immigrant, someone who had left into someone who had arrived” (Perec/Bober 1995: 58).

In *Recits d’Ellis Island, histoire d’errance et d’espoir*, a script for a documentary about Ellis Island, directed by his friend Robert Bober, Perec tells the following story: After leaving the transatlantic steamboat, newcomers had to pass a series of tasks, including answering several lists of questions, concerning their biography, professional skills, health or the readiness to become American, i.e. to share the American way of life. To get to the offices of the New York immigration department, people had to climb to the first floor of the agency’s main building, a good opportunity for officers to check the health of immigrants: Difficulties in breathing indicated illness and reduced significantly the chance of entry. The lucky ones were interviewed by an immigration officer – a crucial moment not only in the formal aspects of immigration, but also in the passage to becoming an American: Abandoning one’s old identity and adopting a new one was often tantamount to taking on a surname familiar to the new environment. And this is exactly the setting of Perec’s story: An elderly Jewish man, who had emigrated from Russia, got advice “to choose himself a nice American name that the civil authorities would have no trouble transcribing” (Perec/Bober 1995: 17 f.). A baggage man he asked for help suggested *Rockefeller*, and the old man tried to memorise this name. However, when he stood in front of the officer a few hours later, he could no longer remember it and exclaimed, desperately, in Yiddish, *schon vergessen*. But the officer who didn’t understand the meaning (“I already forgot”) wrote down a name he thought he had understood phonetically: “And it was thus he was inscribed under the very American name of John Ferguson.” Perec concludes: “This story is perhaps too good to be true, but it hardly matters, in the end, whether it’s true or false. For the emigrants avid to America, changing their names could be considered as a benefit” (Perec/Bober 1995: 18). Changing family names is a widely spread practice in contexts of exile and immigration: An expression of the desire to flee contexts of persecution, poverty, social conflicts, and to break the burden of stigmatization, in particular for descendant generations. For many of the children and grandchildren, however, things often look different: In digging for the own family history, they discover the name change, challenge the reasons and arguments for it, some may even try to get the former name back: *Kowalski instead of Smith*.¹

¹ In France, after World War II, it is estimated that 10,000 Jewish families have decided to change their name, mainly with the aim of protecting their children from anti-Semitism (see Lapierre 2006). Efforts by members of succeeding generations to reverse these changes had no chance of success for a

Georges Perec (1936–1982) was the son of a Poland born Jewish couple, Icek und Cyrla (Szulewicz) Peretz, who had emigrated to France in the 1920s. The Peretz had been communists, engaged in fighting Nazism. The father died 1940 as a soldier of French army in fighting Nazi-German troops, his mother was murdered in 1943 in Auschwitz. Georges, who was a child as his parents disappeared, was taken into the care of his paternal aunt and uncle and survived clandestine in a small village on the Vercors plateau, south of Grenoble. There are some aspects in his biography that reminds me always the biography of Pierre Goldman, another “Polish Jew born in France” (to quote Goldman’s 1975 first published book of memories), although their lives were very different in many ways, and Goldman was born almost ten years later. Goldman (1944–1979), whose parents, also communists, had taken part in the anti-fascist resistance in Lyon, identified himself as a radical leftist, refused military service and suspended his studies in philosophy at the Sorbonne for joining the guerrilleros in Latin America. Back in France, he was convicted of murder and robbery but was released after the court’s verdict was overturned. At the end of 1970s Goldman was killed by extreme right wing in the open streets of Paris; he was 35 years old. Whereas Pierre Goldman, in his way to overcome the traumatism of early childhood, decided to pursue a radical, nonconformist and existentialist way of life, attracted by armed anticolonial fight, becoming affiliated with militants Guerilleros in the entourage of Che Guevara, and being involved in robberies in Venezuela, and also in France after his return to Paris, Georges Perec became a radical writer. Writing, the use of language, literature as the place of exile, far beyond any nostalgia and the myth of a language. *Ancrage* (anchorage) through *encreage* (to use/to put the pen into ink). Perec died young too, a few days before his 46th birthday.

Vilém Flusser (1920–1991), another exilé, refers in a letter to Franz Kafka and his struggles with writing in German: „Firstly, it is impossible to write German, secondly impossible to write other than German, thirdly impossible to write, and fourth, impossible to live without writing” (quoted from Guldin/Bernardo 2017: 373).

Exile as a place where the place is absent: Vilém Flusser, born 1920 in Prague and, similar to Kafka, raised in a German speaking Jewish family, had to escape Czechoslovakia in 1939, both parents were murdered in Nazi concentration camps. Flusser first fled to London, from where he emigrated to São Paulo, Brazil, where he became professor for communication theory. In 1972, the military dictatorship gave reasons to fleeing to Southern France. In 1991 he died in a car accident on his way back from Prague, where he had been for the first time after his long exile to give a lecture.

long time; applications for renaming had been systematically rejected by courts until 2011. Thanks to the activities of the NGO “la force du nom” there was a change in the prevailing case law, renaming applications have since been permissible (see Masson 2020).

2 Death as a marker of life in exile

For Georges Perec, as a Jew and descendant of Shoah victims, life is based on the certainty that it is owed by nothing but “chance and exile” (Perec 1990: 58). In his *Souvenirs obscurs d’un juif polonais né en France*, published in 1975 by Éditions du Seuil, Paris, Pierre Goldman writes that he has been obsessed by the idea of death since his early youth, a fact he explains by being born as an atheist and as a Jew. He recounts his life from a standpoint of “not belonging”, situating “his identification with the cause of the suppressed in the Third World within his own existential particularity as a Jew born to Polish members of the resistance fighters” (Norden 2003: 58). In his reflections on exile, Vilém Flusser notes:

“The expelled are uprooted people who attempt to uproot everything around themselves, to establish roots. They do it spontaneously, simply because they are expelled. Perhaps one can observe it when one tries to transplant trees. It can happen that the expelled becomes conscious of the vegetable, almost vegetative aspect of his exile; that he uncovers that the human being is not a tree; and that perhaps human dignity consists in not having roots – that a man first becomes a human being when he hacks of the vegetable roots that bind him. In German, there is the hateful word *Luftmensch*, a careless ‘man with his head in the air.’ The expelled may discover that *air* and *spirit* are closely related terms and that therefore *Luftmensch* essentially signifies human being. This sort of discovery is a dialectical change in the relationship between expelled and expeller. Before this discovery, the expeller is the active pole and the expelled is the passive pole. After this discovery, the expeller is the victim and the expelled is the perpetrator. This is the discovery that history is made by the expelled, not the expellers. The Jews are not part of Nazi history, the Nazis are part of Jewish history ... But this is not the decisive part of the discovery that we are not trees – that the uprooted make history. Instead, the decisive part of it is to discover how tiresome it is not to establish new roots. After all, habit is merely a cotton blanket that covers up everything. It is also a mud bath where it is nice to wallow. Homesickness is a *nostalgie de la boue*, and one can make oneself comfortable anywhere, even in exile. The discovery that we are not trees challenges the expelled to struggle constantly against the seduction pleasures of the mud bath. To continue to experience expulsion, which is to say: to allow oneself to be expelled again and again.” (Flusser 2002: 107)

Extraterritoriality (“Unzugehörigkeit”) and *groundlessness* (“Bodenlosigkeit”): Flusser’s view on exile is shaped by his own “course of survival”: experiences of displacement, escape, involuntary migration. He got to know feelings of loss and groundlessness but also the conviction that “the expelled must be creative if he does not want to go to the dogs” (Flusser 2002: 104). Flusser prefers the

notion “*expelled* rather than *refugees* or *emigrants*, to bring the totality of the problem before our eyes” (Flusser 2002: 105): Exile has a radical and existential meaning, it reflects the destabilization of every-day practices and routines, a chaos of information exiled people are exposed to, a dominance of uncertainty, stress and fear. At the same time, the experience of deracination, related to exile, is a source of freedom. For the expelled freedom means “the freedom to remain a stranger, different from the others. It is the freedom to change oneself and others as well” (Flusser 2002: 108). This is why Flusser regards exile, as “a breeding ground for creative activity”: a context that requires reflexivity but also new skills and competences, e.g. in dealing with (*multi-*)*linguality* and translation or in applying *multisightedness* and *multiple loyalty*.

Exile as an experience of fragile and questioned belonging, of a trans-national, trans-lingual, and sometimes also trans-class (Jaquet 2014) in-between: The term exile evokes the specific, and existentially demanding, role and function what we designate as *porteur*: This term refers to the idea of somebody floating between different worlds, passing on something, sometimes clandestine, who is transmitting, conveying; who is serving as a messenger, interpreter, an expert for knowledge transfer, and as cross-border commuter between the various linguistic, cultural and social spheres (see Reinprecht 2016). Flusser would have argued that people living in exile can only assume this role and function if they resist the attempts to take new roots in the place they have found refuge. “The dialogic atmosphere that characterizes exile is not necessarily part of a mutual recognition, but rather, it is mostly polemical (not to mention murderous). For the expelled threatens the ‘particular nature’ of the original natives; his strangeness calls them into question” (Flusser 2002: 108).

3 “One Does Not Go to Exile, One is Exiled” (Hammed Shahidian)

The narrative scene developed by Georges Perec in his book on Ellis Island refers to the experience of *emigration* and *immigration*. Is there a difference between e-/immigration and exile? *Yes and No*. In fact, there is some overlapping experience: a movement in time and space, a change of reference systems, the challenge of border crossing, and a specific administrative framing: bureaucratic systems and administrative categories which might you label as migrant or expatriate, as refugee, asylum seeker, a person under subsidiary protection, or as an unlawful, undocumented foreigner. These labels and categories are not fixed, but depending on national, politico-historical and institutional contexts, the particular migration and asylum regime, etc. This can also be illustrated using the example of sociological exile from Austria after the so called “Anschluss” 1938²: Those who found

² Annexation of Austria into the German Reich on 13 March 1938.

refuge in UK – we might take as examples Otto Neurath and Marie Rademister (see Burke/Sandner 2020) – were first detained as “enemy aliens” in Isle of Man; those who had the chance to find a way to US – such as Otto Neurath’s son Paul Martin Neurath – found welcome and job opportunities at Universities. The context matters.

However, there are some important differences between *emigration* (which, according to the terminology of classical migration studies, can be defined, even under economically and politically restrictive conditions, as based on free decision), *immigration* (which implies an orientation toward the target country as new home), and *exile* as an outcome of violent process. In the case of exile, we assume a predominance of so-called *push factors* – war, persecution, expulsion, banishment. Leaving the country is always by force and violence. Just as the choice of the new environment, the place of refuge, is constrained, living in the host country is imposed and *by definition* transitory; the return from exile remains in long-term the dominant objective.

The distinction between emigration and exile is by no means purely academic; it rather reflects a social, emotional and also political reality that is also strongly perceived by the people concerned, shaping their daily life. Bertolt Brecht, who himself spent 17 years in exile, with stations in Prague, Vienna, Zurich, Paris, Svendborg, Stockholm, Helsinki and Santa Monica, was a sharp, sensitive and critical observer in this respect too. In a poem from 1937 he addresses the conceptual confusion of terms, criticizing the false use of the “label emigrant” (Brecht 2018: 730):

On the Label Emigrant (1937)

I always found the name false which they gave us: Emigrants.
 That means those who leave their country. But we
 Did not leave, of our own free will
 Choosing another land. Nor did we enter
 Into a land, to stay there, if possible for ever.
 Merely, we fled. We are driven out, banned.
 Not a home, but an exile, shall the land be that took us in.
 Restlessly we wait thus, as near as we can to the frontier
 Awaiting the day of return, every smallest alteration
 Observing beyond the boundary, zealously asking
 Every arrival, forgetting nothing and giving up nothing
 And also not forgiving anything which happened, forgiving nothing
 Ah, the silence of the Sound does not deceive us! We hear the shrieks
 From their camp even here. Yes, we ourselves
 Are almost like rumors of crimes, which escaped
 Over the frontier. Every one of us
 Who with torn shoes walks through the crowd
 Bears witness to the shame which now defiles our land.

But none of us
Will stay here. The final word
Is yet unspoken.

Über die Bezeichnung Emigranten (1937)

Immer fand ich den Namen falsch, den man uns gab: Emigranten
Das heißt doch Auswanderer. Aber wir
Wanderten doch nicht aus, nach freiem Entschluss
Wählend ein andres Land. Wanderten wir doch auch nicht
Ein in ein Land, dort zu bleiben, womöglich für immer
Sondern wir flohen. Vertriebene sind wir, Verbannte
Und kein Heim, ein Exil soll das Land sein, das uns da aufnahm
Unruhig sitzen wir so, möglichst nahe den Grenzen
Wartend des Tags der Rückkehr, jede kleinste Veränderung
Jenseits der Grenze beobachtend, jeden Ankömmling
Eifrig befragend, nichts vergessend und nichts aufgebend
Und auch verzeihend nichts, was geschah, nichts verzeihend.
Ach, die Stille der Sunde täuscht uns nicht! Wir hören die
Schreie
Aus ihren Lagern bis hierher. Sind wir doch selber
Fast wie Gerüchte von Untaten, die da entkamen
Über die Grenzen. Jeder von uns
Der mit zerrissenen Schuh durch die Menge geht
Zeugt von der Schande, die jetzt unser Land befleckt
Aber keiner von uns
Wird hier bleiben. Das letzte Wort
Ist noch nicht gesprochen.

The situations of “John Ferguson”, Georges Perec, Pierre Goldman, Vilém Flusser and Bertolt Brecht differ significantly. Whereas Ferguson shares the experience of a typical immigrant to US in a specific historical context, and Perec and Goldman share the experience of families persecuted by the Nazi-terror regime, and the burden of early childhood trauma connected with the history of Shoah³; Vilém Flusser and Bertolt Brecht both share the exilic experiences in proper sense and in their own lives. The exilic experience: Exile is not a one-and-forever status, writes the Iran born sociologist Hammed Shahidian, *exile is a real experience and it has a history*. A story of banishment, of expulsion, of rejection from one’s homeland, marking and shaping one’s life and life horizon. It is, also in that regard, different from (even forced) migration. A refugee, writes Shaihidian, “is an actor; the exile acted upon” (Shahidian 2000: 75).

From 1933 to 1939 Bertolt Brecht found refuge in a house in Svendborg, a small town in southern in Denmark, where the famous Svendborg poems were

³ Masterfully reflected in Georges Perec’s novel “W, ou le souvenir d’enfance” (Perec 1975).

written. An intriguing, at the same time touching aspect of these poems is the relation of space and time. Svendborg was also chosen because of its proximity to the German border, so that Brecht could return quickly if the political situation changed. As is well known, the situation was not changing, on the contrary, Nazi Germany was preparing for war, and with no end to the exile foreseeable, Brecht began to doubt whether his hope of returning had any real basis. In that context of uncertainty Brecht wrote the famous “Thoughts About the Duration of Exile” (*Gedanken über die Dauer des Exils*), an interior dialogue about the tension between hope and disillusion. In the following the first lines of the first and the second part of Brecht’s poem (Brecht 2018: 731):

Don’t drive a nail into the wall,
 Throw your coat on a chair!
 Why bother about four days?
 Tomorrow you’ll go back
 (...)
 See the nail in the wall, the nail you hammered into it!
 When do you think you’ll be going back?
 Do you want to know what you really believe in your heart?

Schlage keinen Nagel in die Wand
 Wirf den Rock auf den Stuhl.
 Warum vorsorgen für vier Tage?
 Du kehrst morgen zurück.
 (...)
 Sieh den Nagel in der Wand, den du eingeschlagen hast:
 Wann, glaubst du, wirst du zurückkehren?
 Willst du wissen, was du im Innersten glaubst?

And three years later, written in 1940 in Helsinki, eight desperate, depressing lines with a small door of hope at the end (Brecht 2018: 776 f.)⁴:

Fleeing from my fellow-countrymen
 I have now reached Finland. Friends
 Whom yesterday I didn’t know, put up some beds
 In clean rooms. Over the radio
 I hear the victory bulletins of the scum of the earth. Curiously
 I examine a map of the continent. High up in Lapland
 Towards the Artic Ocean
 I can still see a small door

⁴ The tension between despair, disgust at the Nazis on the one hand and of solidarity and small glimmer of hope on the other hand was powerfully set to music by Hanns Eisler in his so-called Hollywood Songbook, composed 1942–1943.

Auf der Flucht vor meinen Landsleuten
Bin ich nun nach Finnland gelangt. Freunde
Die ich gestern nicht kannte, stellten ein paar Betten
In saubere Zimmer. Im Lautsprecher
Höre ich die Siegesmeldungen des Abschaums. Neugierig
Betrachte ich die Karte des Erdteils. Hoch oben in Lappland
Nach dem nördlichen Eismeer zu
Sehe ich noch eine kleine Tür

Brecht's poetry reflects on the existential dimension of the exilic experience: experiences of persecution and banishment and the absence of free choice; a strong and durable interest in the political development in the home country; feelings of despair and mourning given the situation in home country and the behaviour of the compatriots; an active memory work; the refusal to be silenced; a long-lasting desire to return, to fight for the values and people oppressed in the home country, to be engaged in curing and healing the wounds and violations, the collective and own one's, and to continue the way of exile, even under conditions of uncertainty and restrictions, etc. All these elements constitute not only the condition of exile but also the condition of a sociology in exile. In its next section the article puts emphasis on the specific features and challenges of doing sociology in the context of exile.

4 Doing Sociology in the Context of Exile: Reflexive and Proactive Rather than Interpretative

"Is doing sociology in the context of exile different from its practice in non-exilic conditions?", asks Hammed Shahidian (2000: 72) in his article on Sociology and Exile, without hesitating to answer: Yes, it is! Shahidian's understanding of the relation between sociology and exile is deeply shaped by a personal experience: as an exile who has left Iran as a young man to study in the United States and remained in exile after the Islamic Revolution, and as an academics whose research was particularly focusing on the situation of women and gender-related policies in Iran. Shahidian also died young, only 46 years old. His understanding of a sociology in exile (and a sociology of exile) reflects this biographically anchored position as likewise learning insider and informed outsider.

There are several aspects of Shahidian's argument that can be seen as constitutive of what it means doing *sociology in exile*, defined as "a real experience of expulsion or rejection from one's homeland" (Shaidian 2000: 75). The following synopsis of his reflections, also in dialogue with other literature, give some indications of what needs to be considered when conceiving a *sociology of exile*.

- (1) Working (and living) “under exilic conditions makes exile sociology political in nature” (Shaidian 2000: 73). The exilic sociologist will remain struggling for social and political change in home country, and this is a struggle not limited to the situation in home country or in diasporic structures but encompasses (often even foremost) the situation in host country. This struggle is not restricted to academic battle fields, but includes an involvement in various political, social and cultural aspects of exile. Doing sociology in exile thus means applying a “reflexive and proactive rather than (merely) interpretative” perspective (Shaidian 2000: 73). It implies being critically engaged not only with other academics but also with activists and compatriots, participating in political and public debate, fighting against the silencing of injustice and domination. Insofar, sociology in exile takes a double face: an analytically powerful discipline, and demanded as an effective public voice. Sociology in exile has to serve both needs.

- (2) If sociological literature states that migration is a movement in time and space, then it has to be said that living in exile has no clear, predefined time-limit. Exile rather nourishes the wish to return, what makes the aspect of time becoming political. Living in exile permanently recalls the reason for expulsion “against which the exile must rebel” (Shaidian 2000: 88). However, the situation is ambivalent. For Goldschmidt, “exile is the moment when presence turns into absence in a timeless moment” (Goldschmidt 2020: 9)⁵. In their daily lives, the exilic condition means for the people concerned multiple experiences of insecurity, unsafe and, first of all, of uncertainty. The idea of returning represents an act of resistance against these forces of destabilization and social isolation, and of downgrading the socioeconomic status exilic situations empirically are often connected with. In contrast to situations of forced waiting most refugees are exposed to, the *raison d’être* of exile consists in proactively refusing to be marginalized or silenced, that also means: to take responsibility and to intervene, enter in dialogue. On individual levels, memories, dreams, hopes are mobilized to re-vision the future of one’s homeland, and to embed the story of one’s life in it. In collective terms, sociology serves as “a repository of collective memory of social movements. Moreover, it creates a space for disclosing dynamics of social control and resistance” (Shaidian 2000: 80). Sociology in/of exile therefore represents a sociology of resistant and transformative practice; and at the same time a sociology of remembering.

- (3) Sociology *in* and *of* exile reflects the interwoven relations between individual biography and general (political) history. Living in exile not necessarily produces nostalgia or idealizations of the old home country; but it always

⁵ Translated by the author from German: “Das Exil ist der Augenblick, in dem Abwesenheit in Abwesenheit kippt in einem zeitlosen Moment.”

constitutes a double consciousness, mirroring a simultaneously living of inside and outside of society, a double presence and absence in the sense of absence in presence and presence in absence at the same time (Sayad 1999). Sociologists are often said they are trained to act as “outsider insiders”, from a “third space” position. The exilic condition contributes to the constitution of a kind of “in-between person” (Shahidian 2000: 72). Sociology in /of exile is elaborating, deciphering and re-composing the divided, fragmented habitus (Bourdieu/Wacquant 1996; Bourdieu 2002; Eribon 2009). This said, sociology in/of exile requires a radical reflexive approach, enabling us to study the conditions of exile not in abstract terms, but its actuality in a framework of concrete power-relations also controlling our positions as social scientists. In that sense, sociology in exile produces a knowledge for liberation and thought models of liberation (see Kranebitter et al. 2022).

- (4) A sociology of/in exile represents also a *sociology of suffering* (see Wilkinson 2005), based on “the painful realization that where you live is not home and that you do and do not live where home is” (Shahidian 2000: 76). This pain may merge with feelings of guilt (among survivors and its descendants), loss and shame – the most enduring marker on the life of “exiles renegades” (see Jaquet 2014). Moreover, feelings of strangeness and alienation, resignation and fatigue may derive from the often marginal and subaltern position in host society. Suffering reflects the eminently physical dimension of exile, which authors such as Vilém Flusser or Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt repeatedly have referred to in their writings on exilic life. “For the expelled”, Flusser noted, “it is almost as if he has been expelled from his own body” (Flusser 2002: 105). And Goldschmidt (2020: 9) writes: “Exile, like fear ‘eats the soul’, it eats away at the soul’s innermost roots, where it begins. It erases all images, voices, feelings, it forces you to turn inside out. Exile turns you inside out, like a sack. Exile never lets you go, it sits in your chest. The strange thing about exile is the sharpness of this boundary, separating two geographically disparate yet intertwined entities”.⁶ The sharp boundary, Goldschmidt is speaking about, is running through the body, and a mark of the divided, fragmented habitus. A sociology of/in exile will deal with the painful consequences, also in physical terms, illness, early death, suicide, and will discuss strategies to cope with.
- (5) Solidarity networks, alliance building, diasporic community. Among the empowering strategies in the context of exile, hospitality is the most relevant one. The experience of exile is essentially linked to the practices of

⁶ Translated by the author from German: “Das Exil, wie die Angst, ‚fressen Seele auf‘, es zehrt am innersten Ansatz der Seele, da, wo sie anfängt. Es löscht alle Bilder, Stimmen, Gefühle aus, es zwingt zur Selbststülpung. Das Exil stülpt einen um, wie einen Sack. Das Exil lässt einen nie los, es sitzt einem in der Brust. Das Sonderbare am Exil ist die Schärfe dieser Grenze, die zwei geographisch unvereinbare und doch ineinander verwobene Beschaffenheiten voneinander trennt.”

hospitality (see Agier 2021): hospitality made it possible to escape, to find refuge, to remain in uncertainty, even to survive economically. Hospitality is constituted by taking over responsibility (often also against state authorities; Laacher 2004) and by actively entering in dialogue with people in search for refuge. Exile relies on (often micro-forms of) hospitality, at the same time it creates by itself a context where hospitality is produced be it in form of informal help such as allocation of accommodation, distribution of information, bridge contacts, or the creation of organizational structures, etc. Exiles as guests and hosts: In that double way of being target and source of hospitality, exile contributes to the institutionalization and anchoring of hospitality in the collective consciousness. Sociology in/of exile is therefore essentially also a *sociology of hospitality*.

- (6) The fact that exile has no fix, no predetermined term, that there is no certainty of any end, whereas at the same time, one has continuously to adapt to the environments where one is imposed to live, in continuing one's life in all its various facets, creates a certain worldliness (*Weltgewandtheit*). The "closing of the homeland's border ironically could open new horizons", notes Hammed Shahidian (2000: 82) referring to Edward Said's reflections on the potential gain of autonomy and freedom in exile (1983). Exile reshapes the relationship to space and time, making it more abstract, passive, detached from familiar reality. Exile may produce feelings of homesickness and nostalgia; at the same time, "arriving in new territories, seeing new landscapes 'allows' that the homeland takes on a new appearance when re-visioned" (Shaidian 2000: 83). The relation to time is changing as well: Exile does not mean being thrown into the past or the present, i.e. life in exile is primarily oriented neither towards the past nor the present (even if coping with everyday life requires a lot of survival skills), but is forward-looking and imaginative with a view to the little door is still visible, to use Brecht's formulation again. Sociology of/in exile requires not only a flexible habitus, ready to adapt to new places of refuge and to assimilate new social, cultural and linguistic environments; it also requires, what Ernst Bloch (1959) called "anticipatory consciousness". Anticipatory consciousness is, according to Bloch, inherent to the ambition and desire to change the inhuman, unjust conditions of our world. The power of anticipation lies in identifying "categories of the possible" within the existing reality. All reality has a horizon, Bloch notes, and on the horizon of every reality stands the concrete utopia. Utopia, the imagination of what Bloch calls the *Real Possible*, what could be different, what could be done differently, what could become different, is a driving element of all those living in exile; and it drives us who do not live in exile but doing exile research. In that sense, a sociology in/of exile is always synonymous with a *sociology of concrete utopia*.

5 Exile and Post-Exile

Can the exile become an emigrant? Flusser would reply: Yes, if he/she accommodates to the new societal and cultural context, when nestled into the blanket of habits, able and ready to *take new roots*.

The history of sociological exile from Nazi-Germany knows some characteristic and almost ideal-typical examples for this transition: Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, Marie Jahoda, to give some names, did not remain in a position of exile but decided to settle in the receiving country, to assimilate, to becoming *emigrants*; for most of them, the former home has become a strange country. Well known counter examples are intellectuals such as Theodor W. Adorno or Max Horkheimer who ended their exilic experience by returning to post-war Germany (on the ambivalent exile experience of German intellectuals in the US see e.g. Goebel and Weigel 2012). In most cases, the transition from exile to emigration happened through the integration in academic institutions, a successful academic career, by holding an institutional position, or similar processes of incorporation in other segments of society. Living in exile opened opportunities to detach from restricting academic practices in home countries and to open up to new academic culture, but also coming into contact with new colleagues, entering professional associations and mainstream networks or adapting new research methodologies, epistemologies, and theories. That the exile in the context of Nazi-Germany and World War II went along with processes of reciprocal (transatlantic) enrichment, is well documented (e.g. Fleck 2007). At the same time, the exile situation involved numerous difficulties, also due to the particular historical war/post-war and political context (such as McCarthy in US) where people found themselves again excluded from academic career and positions appropriate to their academic qualification. This was e.g. the situation of Else Frenkel Brunswik, one of the lead authors of the seminal study “The Authoritarian Personality” (Adorno et al. 1950) and particularly interesting with regard to transforming Viennese-related scientific elements (Karl and Charlotte Bühler, Vienna Circle, psychoanalysis) into US-contexts (Ash 1998), who was due to institutional, and here also gender-related framed logics, pushed into long-lasting precariousness. Alfred Schütz, on the other hand, who fled Vienna in 1938 and found refuge in the USA after a stopover in Paris, describes exile as the ultimate experience of alienation. In his famous essay “The Stranger” (1944), which can be read as a reflection on one’s own exile, exile is linked to the fact that “man can lose his status, his rules of guidance and even his history and that the normal way of life is always far less guaranteed than it seems” (Schütz 1944: 507). During his exile in the United States Schütz remained a stranger in a strange land. Also because of his difficulties in accessing the academic world, he returned to Vienna after the end of World War II to continue his career as a bank clerk. However, it was thanks to his academic contacts and activities during exile that Schütz received in 1952 a professorship at the New School of Social Research in New York for the last seven years of his life.

There is no shift from exile to post-exile - returning, taking roots in the host country, moving on elsewhere – without ambivalences, disaccords, unanswered questions. Returning from exile often signified, also in the case of the most prominent members of the Institute of Social Research, a cutting off of experiences and (collective) learning processes: It is no coincidence that the returned members of the Institute for Social Research did not continue their empirical (social psychological) research conducted in the USA, such as the Studies on Prejudices just mentioned. For others, returning home was a situation of despair, disillusionment and shattered hopes: it was not the same country they returned to, reality undermined their hopes, shattered utopian thoughts, shattered the idealizations nurtured in exile. However, the general impression of most remigrants was that they were not welcome. This impression corresponded to the facts: not a single one of the numerous sociologists who were expelled from Vienna was invited to return (Fleck 1987).

It is indeed difficult *not to take new roots*. Vilém Flusser, also in his own biography, reminds us: It requires radical, nonconformist life, accepting a life in-between, the ability to bear complex uncertainty, and a constant (self)reflexivity and high degree of autonomy.

Following Shahidian's argument that "exile is not a once-and-forever status" (Shahidian 2000: 71) but a real experience and has a history, we can say: sociology in/of exile is a political sociology, a sociology of borders and boundary makings and of politicized memories, and a sociology of pain and estrangement; at the same time a sociology of resistance and transformative practice, of concrete utopia and a sociology of hospitality. And in this sense: a reflexive, multi-sighted, multilingual sociology and a sociology of intergenerational transmission.

At the end of this paper I would like to stress again the phenomena of living in-between. Reflecting his exiledom, Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt, Hamburg born Jewish writer and translator who survived as a child in French Savoy Alps and who became a wanderer between the German and French linguistic worlds, uses the image of his poetological essay "Une chaise à deux dossiers" ("A Chair with Two Backs"; Goldschmidt 1991). In one of his texts he shares the following observation: "The inversion of languages makes them neutral to the object they express. The German lens on the French things and the French lens on the German things allow this distancing, through which the language achieves accuracy" (Goldschmidt 1991: 91)⁷. Exile as an existentialist experience: "Exile is a sharply drawn, impassable border that not only separates the past from today, the present from the past, but

⁷ Translated by the author from German: "Die Umkehrung der Sprachen macht sie dem Gegenstand gegenüber neutral, den sie zum Ausdruck bringen. Die deutsche Blende auf die französischen Dinge und die französische Blende auf die deutschen Dinge erlaubt diese Distanzierung, durch welche die Sprache die Genauigkeit erreicht."

also two different worldviews, two different self-horizons, which, however, form a closed unit” (Goldschmidt 2020: 9).⁸

Exile. Translation. Distancing. In-Between, *Dazwischener*, Transition. In summarizing the arguments discussed in this article, we could state that a future sociology in/of exile requires to overcome, and to deconstruct, the still widespread opposition of essentialist (determinist) versus existentialist (free will-based) notions of identity and biography. If we think the phenomena of exile from the idea of a double presence-absence also with regard to the challenging and ambivalent processes of re-rooting, it seems challenging to follow the argument of the French philosopher and sociologist Chantal Jaquet. In the context of her reflections on the phenomena of trans-classe Jaquet speaks about identity not as a “self-creation of the ego”, but as a “social co-production of the milieu of origin and the milieu of evolution, insofar as it only happens with or against them” (Jaquet 2014: 219). By applying the term *complexion*, Jaquet shifts the perspective away from identity or biography towards the experience of passage and transition. With regard to our reflections on a sociology in/of exile, applying the term *complexion* means aiming to deconstruct the subtle distinctions that distinguish people, the particularities of each person and the conflicting relationships in which they are embedded. It is an approach that makes visible exile as a structured field of action without ending in a too general description of common characteristics nor slipping in pure individualism.

Again, Georges Perec’s film script on Ellis Island helps us to sharpen our perspective. For Perec, Ellis Island is emblematic of a nation-state organized sorting machine, where the masses of incoming people are sorted into groups of desirables and undesirables: being on this list or that was a gamble, like in the story of John Ferguson. “Ellis Island was to be nothing other than a factory for making Americans, for turning emigrants into immigrants: an American-style factory as quick and efficient as a Chicago pork-butcher’s. At one end of the assembly line, they would put an Irishman, a Ukrainian Jew or an Italian from Apulia, at the other end – after their eyes and pockets had been inspected, and they had been vaccinated and disinfected – there emerged an American.” (Perec/Bober 1995) The topicality of this description is stunning: The current Europeanized asylum policy resembles a machine with thousands of people across Europe who put themselves at the service of governments in order to classify other thousands of people through the implementation of a detailed master plan: access or refusal (Dahlvik/Reinprecht 2015). The exilic experience radicalizes this “game” – exposed to arbitrariness, dependent on hospitality –, and this is what comes to mind when Perec is describing Ellis Island as the ultimate place of exile: “What I find present here, are in no way landmarks or roots or relics but their opposite: something shapeless, on the

⁸ Translated by the author from German: (Exil) “ist eine scharf gezeichnete unüberschreitbare Grenze, die nicht nur das Einst vom Heute, die Gegenwart vom Vergangenen trennt, sondern auch zwei verschiedene Selbstsichten, zwei verschiedene Selbsthorizonte, die jedoch eine geschlossene Einheit bilden.”

outer edge of what is sayable, something that might be called closure, or cleavage or severance, and that in my mind is linked in a most intimate and confused way with the very fact of being a Jew” (Perec/Bober 1995: 58).

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On the Present Situation and Future Perspectives of Eritrean Migrants: Deported from Israel, Stranded in Kampala

Gabriele Rosenthal, Lukas Hofmann

1 Introduction¹

This is an updated version of an article published in German in 2020. It was based on the results of our joint fieldwork carried out in spring 2018 in Kampala, the Ugandan capital, and on interviews conducted by Gabriele Rosenthal in 2015 and 2016 with Eritreans who had been deported from Israel to Uganda. We have maintained contact via social media with all the interviewees presented here, so that we can briefly sketch their present situation. One important finding can be mentioned right at the beginning: those who are still stuck in Kampala today (in the summer of 2021), because they have not found any way to continue their migration, are still living in extremely precarious circumstances, as they were in 2018. Their chances of earning money have diminished since spring 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions this has brought about. In addition, they have become increasingly worried about their families in Eritrea since armed

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¹ Our thanks go to Ruth Schubert for her translation of the German text, to Avi Kotsere-Burg for translating the Hebrew sources, and to Friederike von Ass for her assistance with formatting issues. We are also grateful to Eva Bahl, Lucas Cé Sangalli and Arne Worm for their critical comments.

conflict broke out in November 2020 in the Ethiopian region of Tigray, which borders on Eritrea. This has resulted in the border between Eritrea and Ethiopia being closed again: it had only recently opened in the summer of 2018 after being closed for two decades. Eritrean militias are involved in the conflict and Eritrean refugees in Tigray have suffered from the violence and serious food shortages.²

Our interviews with Eritrean refugees and migrants in Uganda provide insights into the present situations and future perspectives of people who have fled from a context of collective violence, who have lived and worked in a foreign country for several years, only to be deported to another country where they are still living today in desperate situations, separated from their families of origin, and in some cases from their wives and children. These migrants have very little hope of seeing improvements in the situation in their home country, and of being reunited with their loved ones. Our focus here is on a grouping of Eritreans who fled to Israel, in most cases between 2010 and 2012,³ lived there for several years, found work, in some cases married and had children, and were finally pressurized into agreeing to be flown to a so-called 'safe' African country. The pressure consisted in being interned at the Holot Detention Centre in the Negev desert that was opened in 2013, which meant losing their jobs, and in the threat of long terms of imprisonment for petty crimes (see Birger/Shoham/Bolzman 2018). Women were not (and today are still not) subjected to this kind of pressure to leave Israel. The men who were deported landed either in Rwanda or in Uganda, and some of them were interviewed by us in Kampala between 2015 and 2018.⁴ In most cases they were informed of their destination only during the flight. Those who arrived in Rwanda were given a short-stay tourist visa which meant they had to leave the country again after a few weeks. They therefore accepted the aid of people who offered to smuggle them 'illegally' across the border to Uganda. In Kampala they found a large community of refugees from Eritrea who had traveled

² See the UNHCR report of Jan. 2021: <https://www.unhcr.org/dach/de/58139-zur-lage-der-eritreischen-fluechtlinge-in-der-aethiopischen-region-tigray.html>; or <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/working-group/284>; <https://msf.org.uk/issues/tigray-violence-ethiopia-and-refugee-crisis-sudan<07.10.2021>>.

³ 37,347 Eritreans had fled to Israel by the end of 2012 (<https://esa.un.org/MigGMGProfiles/indicators/files/Eritrea.pdf<09.05.2019>>). After this, it became increasingly difficult to get past the fence that was constructed between 2012 and 2014 at the border between Egypt and Israel, and the route across the Sinai became increasingly dangerous. At the end of 2020 there were only 21,807 Eritreans living in Israel (<https://reporting.unhcr.org/node/10324?y=2020#year<11.08.2021>>). It should be noted that in this article we frequently refer to the reports of NGOs or the mass media. Much of this information has not been published in academic studies, or only in studies that rely on similar sources. However, we have endeavored to cross-check the information by comparing different sources, which cannot all be named here for reasons of space.

⁴ These were biographical-narrative interviews. On interpretative research methods, narrative interviews, and biographical case reconstructions, see Rosenthal 2018: chaps. 5 & 6.

through Sudan or flown from Ethiopia.⁵ Those who were *de facto* deported from Israel are able to apply for asylum only under certain conditions, and thus live with a legally insecure status, while those who entered the country in other ways, if they have sufficient financial means,⁶ can apply for temporary asylum status in Uganda, which can be regularly extended. By contrast, those who were deported from Israel can only apply for asylum if they conceal the fact that they have been in Israel, since Rwanda and Uganda deny the existence of any agreement with Israel to take in deportees from Israel.⁷ At present there is no sign of the program coming to an end, but it has been temporarily interrupted due to the COVID-19 travel restrictions⁸.

Common to almost all of them is that they are facing an uncertain future, that they want to find some way of getting to another country, and that they long to be reunited with their families. They constantly suffer from feelings of having lost their power of agency, and are at risk of sinking into a state of depression and apathy. As we were able to observe, they seek to relieve their feelings of powerlessness by taking drugs, in particular khat combined with tobacco and strong coffee (both of which enhance the effects of khat). They experience a temporary drug-induced euphoria which gives them feelings of strength or invincibility, but in the long run the drugs reinforce their prevailing mood of depression. Those who can expect a life in social and financial security in Ethiopia were given some hope by the Joint Declaration of Peace and Friendship signed by Ethiopia and Eritrea in July 2018 and the resulting opening of the borders.⁹ This hope was not only shattered at the end of 2020, but all those who had moved to the region of Tigray in Ethiopia and were living in the refugee camps there, experienced a deterioration in their living conditions.

The life stories of these people who have left their homes in Eritrea show how a binary distinction between refugees and migrants would fail to do them justice,

⁵ In April 2019, there were 10,391 Eritreans registered in Kampala (<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/69444> <30.07.2021>.) One third of the population of Eritrea is living in the diaspora!

⁶ In addition to paying a fee when submitting an application at the Ugandan embassy, applicants also need papers issued by the Eritrean embassy. Here they are required to pay a contribution for leaving Eritrea and the so-called “recovery tax” or 2% of their income, which is supposed to be paid regularly. People pay it for fear of reprisals against their relatives in Eritrea (https://www.dsp-groep.eu/wp-content/uploads/The-2-Tax-for-Eritreans-in-the-diaspora_30-august-1.pdf, 10 <09.05.2019>).

⁷ While we were writing the German version of this article which was published in 2020, the Daily Monitor, the most important English-language newspaper of the opposition in Uganda, published an article by Kakkooza and Mutaizibwa on 08.07.2019, in which they report on the “secret deal that violates international law obligations” between Israel and Uganda (<https://www.monitor.co.ug/SpecialReports/Stateless-Eritreans-secretly-moved-Uganda/688342-5186934-o26emx/index.html> <13.07.2019>).

⁸ Our local contacts told us that people continued to arrive up to the worldwide outbreak of COVID-19 (see also <https://hotline.org.il/en/refugees-and-asylum-seekers-en/voluntary-departure/<05.08.2021>>).

⁹ On the situation at the border and the growing number of applications for asylum by Eritreans in Ethiopia, see <https://www.nrc.no/news/2018/october/ethiopia--eritrea/> <18.07.2019>.

as Arne Worm (2017, 2019), for instance, has convincingly shown in the case of Syrians who have come to Europe. As in many cases of people wishing to escape from everyday collective or familial violence, who often flee first to a different part of their own country, phases of great suffering or powerlessness can alternate with phases in which they enjoy a certain power of agency. For the Eritreans stranded in Uganda a new phase of passive suffering has begun which can lead to a reactivation of traumatizing experiences in the past. Our analyses of the biographies of these people show that many of them have experienced not just one traumatizing situation in the course of their flight or migration, but sequential traumatization as defined by Hans Keilson (1992) or David Becker (2001). Keilson, who regards this as a long-term process with several intertwined traumatic sequences, points out that going through a difficult time after experiencing violence can lead to continuation and *aggravation* of the traumatization. Our interviewees had experienced traumatizing situations in their home country, mostly in the context of their unlimited “national service”,¹⁰ and during their flight, when crossing regional and national borders. Many women, but also men, were raped during their journey or even during their military service. In the Sinai several of them had been abducted and tortured to force their relatives to pay ransom. Some of them witnessed the removal of organs from fellow prisoners who were then left to die.¹¹ In Israel, where they are officially labeled as “infiltrators” and stigmatized as such, they also experienced humiliation both in everyday situations, and during their internment in Israeli prisons and camps. In their precarious situation in Uganda, memories of all these experiences may often be reactivated. Their days are filled with fear of discrimination and violence, fear of the Eritrean secret service, or of other cooperating secret services, and especially fear that their relatives in Eritrea will be subjected to persecution. Especially the ever-present danger of being captured and taken back to Eritrea reactivates memories of traumas they suffered during their military service. In most cases, their decision to leave Eritrea was triggered by the concrete circumstances of their military service, which was transformed into a more or less unlimited “national service” in 2002. This “national service” is a form of forced labor of different kinds, with low wages (about 10–40 US dollars per month), which is supposed to serve the rebuilding of the country. This means that they have no means of earning an income to support their families (see Kibreab 2017a).

¹⁰ Compulsory “national service” has existed since 1995 for men and women from the age of 18, officially up to the age of 47, and in some cases to 59 (see Bartolucci 2017). Differing figures concerning the length of service are given in the literature, perhaps because the figures given by the Eritrean government cannot be independently checked (<https://www.fluechtlingshilfe.ch/assets/herkunftslaender/afrika/eritrea/170630-eri-nationaldienst.pdf> <13.06.2019>).

¹¹ Some of our interviewees described their traumatizing experiences in great detail. There are many publications on this topic. We refer here to the empirical study by Mekonnen and Estefanos (2012). In 2011 they conducted over a hundred narrative telephone interviews with Eritreans who were still being held captive in the Sinai desert, and analyzed interviews conducted on behalf of “civil society” or humanitarian NGOs in Israel. On torture, removal of organs, and the raping of women in the Sinai, see the study carried out by Tesfagiorgis on the basis of interviews (2013).

Not only were the living conditions in the army, and the different operations in which they were involved, extremely difficult and dangerous, but they were also subjected to imprisonment and torture for the slightest misdemeanor, and women often experienced sexualized violence (see Kibreab 2017b).¹²

We assume that our empirical findings on the experiences of refugees and the situation of Eritreans in Uganda today do not only apply to this grouping. These are people who have been exposed to state despotism and violence in their countries. Behind their backs, and without the knowledge of the international public, agreements are concluded between governments, which may then be denied. As a result, the refugees become passive and helpless objects controlled by the interests of governments and other powerful political forces (see Hirt 2016; Hirt/Mohammad 2018). Besides the agreements which Israel concluded with African countries in respect of African asylum seekers coming from Israel, these refugees are also affected by agreements made by the EU with the aim of securing Europe's external borders and preventing so-called irregular migration, as well as combating 'criminal networks' inside the African continent. The borders inside Africa have become far less permeable, especially since the setting up of the Khartoum Process in November 2014, because the EU has increasingly tried to prevent so-called irregular migrants from reaching the borders of the EU by signing agreements, for instance with Sudan, but also with Eritrea. Migrants have always had to reckon with the closing of borders in Africa, and this has again become a very real risk since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The closing of borders is met with approval by the international community because it can help to stop the spread of the coronavirus, but it negatively affects the informal economy, on which many refugees depend.

Our empirical finding also applies to other groupings of refugees: people who are stranded in a hopeless situation, after many years of hardship, and very often the experience of collective and life-threatening violence, although at times they have had a certain power of agency that allowed them to pursue their migration project. Nevertheless, the overall experience of violence, both before and during their migration, results in a successive process of disempowerment and control by others. In the case of the Eritreans we interviewed in Kampala, their sense of powerlessness is growing more intense, because their chances of continuing their journey to some other country are very limited, and they are increasingly in danger of losing the power to act and the competences which they have acquired in the course of their migration. Even those of our interviewees who have not completely given up and who still invest much energy in trying to find a way to get to a 'safe' country, are facing an extremely insecure future, as shown by the case of Robel which we will present below. Before presenting the case of Robel, and that of Abraham, a former secret service officer, first we will say something about the

¹² On sexualized violence in the army, see the report published in 2018 by the Swiss Refugee Council, which contains a list of references: <https://www.fluechtlingshilfe.ch/assets/herkunftslander/afrika/eritrea/180213-eri-sexualisierte-gewalt-an-frauen.pdf> <02.03.2020>.

context of our research and how difficult it was to access the field, mainly because the people we wanted to interview feared the secret services.

2 The Research Context: Difficulty of Accessing the Field

In spring 2015 and spring 2016, while in Kampala in connection with fieldwork for a research project on former child soldiers in northern Uganda funded by the German Research Foundation (Bogner/Rosenthal 2020), G. Rosenthal had an opportunity to interview six Eritreans, four of whom had become stranded in Uganda after being deported from Israel to Rwanda, and then forced to leave that country. A few months after the interview, three of them succeeded in making their way through South Sudan and Sudan to Libya, and then across the Mediterranean to Europe. The fourth man, whom we will call Abraham, cannot use this route. It would be too dangerous for him on account of his former function in the Eritrean secret service, and his activities in both South Sudan and Darfur (in the west of the Republic of Sudan). For opponents of the Eritrean government, and especially for deserted officers, traveling to the Republic of Sudan is risky (Hirt/Mohammad 2018: 117), because they are likely to be abducted and deported back to Eritrea by members of the secret service operating there.¹³

Since these interviews were extremely helpful for understanding the migration courses of Eritrean refugees whom we and our colleagues had interviewed in Israel, in connection with a project on the social construction of border zones, funded by the German Research Foundation,¹⁴ we returned to Kampala (Uganda) for further field research in February/March 2018. At this time, in a dramatic development, the Israeli authorities had actually started deporting African immigrants, especially those from Sudan and Eritrea. In November 2017 the Israeli government had decided that by March 2018 all single men among the approximately 40,000 Sudanese and Eritreans at that time in the country should be deported to a so-called ‘safe’ African country. They had been under pressure since 2013 to leave the country voluntarily, and now this was to be done by force. By the end of 2019, a total of 12,513 Eritrean refugees,¹⁵ often under threat of imprisonment, or after ac-

¹³ The government of the Republic of Sudan under Umar al-Bashir was in close contact with the Eritrean president Isayas Afewerki, and Eritreans fear that they will be arrested and deported back to Eritrea, as frequently happens (see Hirt 2016: 3). In March 2011, Magnus Treiber (2013) and Kurt Beck were able to speak to a group of officers in Khartoum who had deserted from the Eritrean army. The officers told them of the measures they take to avoid being arrested and deported.

¹⁴ This project (RO 827/19-1; <https://www.uni-goettingen.de/en/477891.html> <05.08.2021>) was led by G. Rosenthal and lasted from March 2014 to February 2019. In addition to the authors, the research team consisted of E. Bahl and A. Worm who investigated the border between Morocco and Spain, and our Israeli colleagues E. Ben-Ze’ev and N. Gazit who worked at the border between Israel and Egypt. See also Rosenthal/Bahl/Worm 2017; Ben-Ze’ev/Gazit 2017.

¹⁵ The Israeli government publishes an annual report called “Statistics of Foreigners in Israel”, with figures relating to the “voluntary departure” program. Up to the end of 2019, the number of Sudanese

tual imprisonment, had been pressurized into signing a declaration that they were willing to be taken to a 'safe' African country. They were then given 3,500 US dollars, flight tickets and travel documents. In addition, the 20 percent of their wages which had been withheld since May 2017 was paid out to them.¹⁶ The government's intention of deporting all refugees was strongly criticized by Israeli civil society, and in April 2018, one month after our field trip, it was announced that plans to expel all Eritreans and Sudanese had been stopped by the Supreme Court of Israel. However, this court ruling does not mean greater security for refugees. In January 2019, for instance, an attempt was made to expel four hundred Congolese asylum seekers, until this was again stopped by the court.¹⁷

In spring 2018, unlike in previous years, we found it difficult to get access to the field in Kampala, partly because the refugees had such a deep-seated fear of the Israeli, Ugandan and Eritrean secret services, and partly because they had developed a highly charged antagonism toward white people, or people from NGOs or the mass media. They all told us they were tired of being exploited by journalists who constantly come and ask questions about the plight of Eritreans and Sudanese in Israel and Uganda, as well as by people from NGOs: they said these people only want to use the refugees for their own purposes, and don't try to help them. We had to admit that we could not help them, either, apart from a small amount of money for each interviewee, and a meal in the restaurant where the interview took place, which was always chosen by the interviewees themselves. During the three weeks we spent in Kampala, besides several ethnographic interviews and three group discussions, as well as participant observations in cafés and bars which were frequented by Eritreans, we were able to conduct and record on tape four biographical interviews with Eritreans who had been deported from Israel. From our analyses of the interviews, and our reflections on the interactions that we experienced with the Eritreans in Kampala, we conclude that such a dialogue with us became possible because we were German and not Israeli, because we had no connection with Eritrea, and because we belonged to a German university and not to the media.

That people are unwilling to be interviewed or to have the interview recorded on tape is related to their very real fear of the secret service and the way asylum seekers are treated in practice in Uganda. Since the Ugandan government has officially denied ever having agreed to admit African refugees sent by Israel, the latter are obliged to hide the fact that they are deportees from Israel. We were

who had left Israel under this program was 1,595: <https://www.unhcr.org/il/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2020/07/PIBA-2018-Summary-Foreigners-in-Israel-HEB.pdf>, 8 <05.08.2021>; https://www.gov.il/BlobFolder/reports/foreign_workers_stats_2019/he/sum_2019.pdf, 10 <30.7.2021>.

¹⁶ Refugees have 20% of their wages confiscated in accordance with the so-called 'deposit law' (see <https://hotline.org.il/en/information-about-the-new-deposit-law/> <18.07.2019>).

¹⁷ See <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/israeli-court-suspends-expulsion-of-some-400-congolese-1.6802168> <05.03.2019>.

told by our interviewees that all papers showing that they had come from Israel were taken away from them on arrival at the airport (see Birger/Shoham/Bolzman 2018).¹⁸ Eritreans who want to apply for asylum are instructed by the responsible officials to say that they came to Uganda via Sudan. This means that the ‘deportees’ have to invent a new life story, which involves denying the years they have spent in Israel, their often extremely traumatizing experiences, including torture, in the Sinai,¹⁹ their knowledge of Hebrew, their work experience, the friends they still have in Israel, and, in some cases, that their wives and children are still living there.

In order to gain a better understanding of the situation of this grouping and their extremely precarious situation in Uganda, we also conducted biographical interviews with Eritreans (referred to below as Hadinet and Simon) who had traveled via Sudan and Ethiopia. In contrast to those who were forced to leave Israel, it is easier for them to get all the documents they need from the Eritrean embassy, which means they are in a comparatively more secure situation in Uganda.

3 Fear of the Secret Services

All the interviews we conducted reveal a deep fear of the various secret services. We saw clearly how little the refugees from Eritrea are able to trust each other, and how this mistrust, this caution, has been internalized and become part of the habitus of these people right from the time of their early experience of state oppression in Eritrea. They never know whether they are being observed, and whether by talking about the past they are putting themselves or their relatives in Eritrea at risk (see for instance Massa 2016). This internalized caution was clearly expressed in a group discussion we conducted at the end of our field trip in 2018. Before leaving, we invited our field assistant, Tom, and three of our Eritrean interviewees to join us in the garden of our hotel for a discussion and an evening meal. Tom’s friend Simon was also part of the group. These two men have known each other since they were children and come from well-established Roman Catholic families in Eritrea. Tom is exempt from military service because of a health condition, and is living legally in Uganda. While his situation was relatively stable when we met him, this changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. His chances to earn money as a translator or as a trader became very restricted due to the pandemic and we heard from Simon that he was in a bad condition both financially and mentally. But after the end of the total lockdown in Uganda, his financial situation improved,

¹⁸ See also the detailed report “Forced and Unlawful” by Amnesty International (2018) (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde15/8479/2018/en/>, 32 < 02.03.2020>).

¹⁹ See Nakash et al. (2014) and Human Rights Watch (2014): Human trafficking in the Sinai. Refugees between life and death, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/02/11/i-wanted-lie-down-and-die/trafficking-and-torture-eritreans-sudan-and-egypt> <03.03.2020>.

thanks to his established networks, and he has resumed contact with G. Rosenthal via social media.

Simon (born in 1988) fled to Ethiopia in 2011 because of the hard conditions – including severe torture – he experienced during his military service. In Ethiopia he attended university and obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree. In 2017 he traveled legally to Kampala, with the hope of being able to move on from there to a Western country to continue his studies. In 2019 he left Uganda and returned to Ethiopia after applying unsuccessfully for a scholarship and admission to a master's degree course in Europe or North America. Since then he has lived in the capital, Addis Abeba, and is employed by a social welfare agency. Two of his younger brothers have succeeded in leaving Eritrea and were living with him at the time of writing (summer 2021). Besides the social and economic status of his family of origin, Simon's relatively well established situation in Ethiopia is related to the fact that one of his relatives was a member of the "Group of 15" (G15). In 2001, after the war against Ethiopia, when the regime in Eritrea was becoming increasingly repressive, these high-ranking officials had called for a democratic dialogue (Hirt/Mohammad 2017). They were arrested; today most of them are either dead or still in prison.²⁰

In addition, Hadinet (born in 1983) took part in the discussion. She had to leave Eritrea because of her husband, who was subjected to political persecution, and had fled to Germany in 2011. She left school after passing her final exams in 2002, at the age of 19, and was then conscripted into the army. In 2011 she managed to leave the country. In the biographical interview we conducted with her, Hadinet indicates clearly that she had traumatizing experiences during her time in the army, but she explicitly declares that she cannot talk about them. She also mentions in the group discussion that she was imprisoned and tortured during her military service. It should be underlined here that women doing their "national service" are frequently subjected to sexualized violence by their commanders. Not only this, but if they manage to leave the country, they very often end up as victims of rape and prostitution during the subsequent migration, while trying to get past the different regional and national borders (see Abdulkadir 2018: 54; Leghese 2017). In 2011, Hadinet's mother forced her to marry a man who was a stranger to her. Because of his political activities and his desertion from the army, her husband left the country in the same year and traveled to Germany via Libya. She was again in danger of being arrested and imprisoned, so that she went to join the family of an uncle in Juba in South Sudan. She had planned to try and cross the Mediterranean, but this uncle refused to let her do so. Instead, he allowed her to travel to Uganda, where another uncle lives with his family. From 2011 to 2020 she was stuck in Uganda, hoping that her husband would be able to arrange for her to join him in Germany. This hope had not been fulfilled at the time of

²⁰ The Eritrean government has disclosed scarcely any information concerning the G15 (see <https://www.ecoi.net/de/dokument/1443746.html> <13.06.2019>).

our interview with her in 2019, but there is nothing in the interview that explains why not. What is clear is that the couple wanted to start a family, but she had failed to become pregnant, even after her husband had visited her in Kampala. We saw clearly that Hadinet was feeling extremely frustrated, even angry, at that time, and she appeared to be having doubts as to whether her husband actually wanted her to come to Germany. Since she is a strict Catholic, she could not contemplate marrying another man in Uganda. In April 2020, we heard that her husband had succeeded in moving to Canada, and that Hadinet had been able to join him there. She soon became pregnant and gave birth to a son.

The fourth person present at the group discussion was Robel. He was the only person in the group to have lived previously in Israel. We will present his life story below. We have also stayed in contact with him. In summer 2021 he was still living in Kampala.

The group discussion helped us to understand why the Eritreans in Kampala were keen to meet us more than once, and that they clearly enjoyed talking to us, and yet hesitated when we asked if they would agree to a biographical interview. On the one hand, they clearly enjoyed spending time with us ‘Westerners’, and found it good to be able to talk about how it felt to be stranded in Kampala. On the other hand, they could not face the idea of taking part in an interview that would be recorded on tape. They have to be careful and cannot trust anybody. And so at every meeting their feelings alternated between interest and fear, and their manner of speaking between caution and relief at being able to talk about the hardships they had suffered. This was made clear by their reaction to a remark made by G. Rosenthal regarding the good atmosphere in the group discussion. All the participants said explicitly that they could not trust each other. Simon even went so far as to say that he couldn’t trust Tom, with whom he had been friends since his childhood. Robel confirmed this and said, with the clear non-verbal approval of all the others, that it was not even possible to trust members of one’s own family. Not only that the Eritrean secret service is active all over the world, but also you can’t know who is working for it: this attitude of mistrust is instilled into every child in Eritrea, and it is impossible to throw it off, regardless of which country one is in. Saying something critical about Eritrea, even outside the country, could result in persecution of one’s relatives in Eritrea. And yet, as Robel said, in Uganda one can breathe more freely – symbolically speaking – and he didn’t want to go back to Eritrea for even a single day.

In order to throw more light on the powerful role of the Eritrean secret service in the Eritrean diaspora, we will present below the case of a former secret service officer.

4 Abraham: From Freedom Fighter and Secret Service Officer to Being Stranded in Kampala

Abraham (born between 1954 and 1956) is one of the four Eritreans deported from Israel who were interviewed by G. Rosenthal in Kampala in spring 2015. He had left Eritrea in 2006 and traveled to Israel, taking the route through the Sinai. He had worked in Tel Aviv, mainly as a cleaner for an Israeli of Ethiopian origin, until he was interned in Holot in August 2014. He was pressurized into agreeing in writing that he would leave Israel, for instance by threats that otherwise he would be sent back to Eritrea. So he signed a document he couldn't read, and was flown to Kigali (Rwanda) with other Eritreans. Like the other men interviewed by G. Rosenthal in 2015, he was accommodated in a hotel and was given a tourist visa for three weeks at the immigration office. Soon after arriving in Kigali, he and the others were introduced to a smuggler who could help them to cross the border to Uganda "illegally" at night. For the journey to Kampala he had to pay 3,500 US dollars – the exact sum that had been given to him by the authorities in Israel.

This course of events, and his traumatizing experiences while crossing the Sinai, correspond to the stories we know from the literature (see footnote 19). Abraham's past in Eritrea, his position in the Eritrean community, and his present situation make him different from all other Eritreans we interviewed both in Israel and in Uganda. However, this became clear to us only in the third, and especially in the fourth interview with Abraham. Because of this, we must admit that we don't know whether things were hidden behind the self-presentations of other interviewees that were not revealed to us. Only in the fourth interview, which was conducted by Tom alone, did Abraham speak explicitly about his senior position in the Eritrean army, his close relationship with the dictator Isayas Afewerki, and his secret service activities, mainly in Sudan. Abraham told Tom that he must keep some secrets, but that there were some he wanted to reveal²¹ and then he spoke for instance about the fact that he had trained rebels from Yemen in Eritrea: "We were training Yemenis this was the nature of our work. Now since we are kept as secret, we had Somalis, the ones from Sudan, Darfur." This information is interesting because the Eritrean government has repeatedly denied (for example in 2010) that rebels from other countries, such as Iran or Yemen, were being trained in Eritrea, and has described such claims as Western rumors (see Shaheen 2010). In the fifth interview in January 2016, Abraham also offered to reveal Eritrean state secrets to G. Rosenthal, if she would help him to get to Germany – an offer which she could not accept. In summer 2021, we heard from a common acquaintance that Abraham was still living in the same hopeless situation in Kampala.

²¹ All interviews with Abraham were conducted in Tigrinya, his mother tongue, and translated during the interview into English by Tom. The quotations given here without correction are not the spontaneous translations in the interviews, but Tom's very careful translations of the tape recordings.

In the first two interviews Abraham didn't mention these things. He talked mainly about his abduction and torture in the Sinai, and how this had plunged him and his relatives into financial ruin, because they had to sell their land to pay the ransom (he first said 25,000 US dollars, and later 40,000 US dollar). He describes seeing how people had their organs removed by doctors, who were all white and spoke Arabic, how they died as a result, and how the corpses were heaped up: "You see the harvested bodies one top of the other thrown there."

At first we understood that he had a high rank in the army only by reading between the lines, and he tried to suggest that he had gone to Israel for economic reasons – which was confirmed in later interviews but with a completely different framing. In the first biographical interview, he began the story of his life with the following words:

"Ok, my name is Abraham B. and I fought for the liberation of Eritrea for twenty-five years. And the reason I went to Israel is due to my economically situation at home. See, I support both my children and the children of my brothers who died during the war for independence. So I left the Eritrean government and went to Israel to solve my economic situation ..."

This point runs through the whole of the first interview, although in the very first sequence there is a clue to his position in Eritrea. Instead of saying he left Eritrea, he says he left the Eritrean government. He offers the same clue – probably quite unintentionally – in a later sequence, in which he repeats that he left for economic reasons. He finishes with the following evaluation: "And of course I'm not pleased with what the government is doing in Eritrea and it pains me inside."

Our second meeting took place in the context of Abraham's visit to a notary in Kampala, where he swore an affidavit to confirm that he had been forced to leave Israel, describing in detail what happened, including not being allowed to stay in Rwanda. He did this at the request of G. Rosenthal, who had suggested it on behalf of our Israeli colleagues. They wanted to give the affidavit to a lawyer who is active in a civil society organization, so that she could use it for a court case against the Israeli government's deportation policy. In the affidavit, Abraham says that for opposing his superior in the army in Eritrea, he had been put in prison, from where he had escaped. When the notary asked him for the name of the prison, he was at first very hesitant, and when he finally gave the name, after insistent requests, it was clear that it was a prison for high-ranking officers who as a rule are held there without trial. The law firm in Israel was not satisfied with this affidavit because it did not contain enough details. They asked if he could go to the lawyers of an NGO in Kampala and get another, more detailed one. Abraham agreed, and a few months later he gave these lawyers the information that because he had protested to his commander about the poor living conditions and the low pay in the army he had been put in prison, and after two months condemned to death. On hearing this, G. Rosenthal asked Tom to conduct another

biographical interview with Abraham. Abraham needed to satisfy himself about Tom's family background, including who Tom's father is, and subjected him to a veritable interrogation. Only after a basis of trust had been created in this way did he agree to another interview and to having the interview recorded on tape. In this interview he spoke of his high rank in the army, of a meeting which he and other high-ranking officers had with President Afewerki personally in spring 2006, of how they complained about their low pay, of their imprisonment (he gives the names of all his fellow prisoners), of his escape from prison, and of how all the officers who had been imprisoned with him were executed.

With these increasing revelations, we can see that Abraham always told the truth, and had initially managed to communicate a rather different picture of his reasons for leaving Eritrea only by omitting information. From his point of view, he was condemned to death for economic reasons and this was why he had to leave the country. In answer to Tom's question why he had chosen to go to Israel and not to Europe, he said quite frankly that traveling to Libya was too dangerous for him because of his former role in the army, which he again explained:

“So I couldn't go to Khartoum; because since I am now one of the wanted officials given that from those we were secretly training and our unit had direct communications I couldn't go to Khartoum. I could not go to Ethiopia; because we were training the opposition and I was in the borders monitoring unit, spying division, they know me by name, they know what my job is.”

Abraham says further that he was a member of a secret service unit during the war of independence and after 1991, that he had helped to train the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in Southern Sudan, and that after the peace agreement signed in 2005 between the SPLA and the Sudanese government, with which Southern Sudan became an autonomous region, he had served in Darfur until the Darfur Peace Agreement was signed in May 2006. It was at this time that the meeting with Afewerki took place.

How can we imagine the situation today of this former high-ranking officer of the Eritrean army who is over 60 years old, who suffered serious injuries in the war of independence, who has difficulty walking, and whose wife and children are living in Eritrea in an economically precarious situation? We can assume that, except for a few odd jobs in Israel, he has never worked outside the army. When he says that he spent 25 years fighting for Eritrea's independence, he is referring to the war of independence which began in 1961 and continued, with interruptions, until 1991, when Eritrea became an independent country. Thus he was still a child at the beginning of this time. Depending on when he was born (he gives different dates), he was between 10 and 12 years old when he joined the rebel army; this does not mean that he was immediately put in a combat unit of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) or the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF)

which split off from the ELF in 1970.²² Unlike his four older brothers, who were all killed in this war, he has no school qualifications, which also suggests that he joined the army at a very young age.

It is too dangerous for him to leave Uganda because of his former secret service activities in Sudan, as he says himself. This means that he is literally stranded in Kampala. In response to his application for asylum, he was granted a temporary residence permit in February 2015, but this has to be regularly renewed. Nevertheless, he is in a better situation than the other stranded refugees we met. He is familiar with the methods of the Eritrean secret service, and he was aware of being under surveillance when he was in Israel. He says he knows which countries are safe and which are not, and that he feels relatively safe in Uganda. He told G. Rosenthal that they were not likely to kill him as long as he refrained from openly criticizing the regime in Eritrea. But if he were to go to Sudan, then he would be murdered. In the last interview he says again that he knows the Eritrean system inside out. He says he has enough contacts in Eritrea to be able to talk to his wife on the phone regularly, for example, without the knowledge of the Eritrean authorities.

This case study shows that Abraham's prestige in Eritrea is still recognized by other Eritreans today. Abraham comes from an established social and political position, and, as we saw clearly in the time we spent together with him and other Eritreans in Uganda, he can rely on being treated with respect within the grouping of Eritrean refugees, and on their assistance in Uganda (such as the free use of a hotel room).²³ He can rely on this even though the other refugees are deserters from the Eritrean army, which he has always revered. In the past he probably thought it was right to send deserters to prison, and maybe even issued such orders himself. Abraham is still in contact with members of the political elite in Eritrea, and is skilled in secret service investigation or interrogation methods. The only way he sees to get out of his present situation is if President Afewerki could be overthrown, and in this respect he is optimistic. Here he positions himself in the "we" of the freedom fighters who struggled for independence for so many years: "We are the ones who fought for and brought liberty there. We could not just stay by and watch these idiots manipulate it ... result is the knife." This idea of resistance, which he believes can only come from inside, is reinforced when he says to Tom: "Tell her (G. Rosenthal) that I would one day live in my country, I will work in a civilian job and I believe I will be once again in Eritrea." The political situation in Eritrea has not changed since this interview took place in 2016, five years ago, so that Abraham must surely be finding it difficult to stay so optimistic.

²² Even if he includes the two-year war against Ethiopia (1998–2000) in these 25 years, he would have been only 14 when he joined the army. On the role of child soldiers in the war of independence, see the UNHCR report of 2001, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/498805fd5.html> <07.03.2019>.

²³ G. Rosenthal met Abraham together with other Eritreans on various occasions when she was invited to take part in the Eritrean coffee ritual, and her observations at these meetings confirmed the impression conveyed by the interviews.

Moreover, Abraham's situation has deteriorated as a result of the Ugandan government's measures to combat the pandemic. In particular, the financial support he was receiving from the other Eritreans has become very limited and he had very little contact with others during the 42-day total lockdown²⁴ which the government imposed in June 2021.

5 Robel: Looking for a Country Where He Can Stay Legally

"If you are staying there [in Israel] you are immigrant it means you are beggar, a beggar could not choose nothing, but I hate my choice", says Robel (born in 1977) in an interview conducted in English by L. Hofmann in 2018. In other words, Robel doesn't want to be a beggar, he wants to live in a country with legal rights and to which he can feel he belongs. He has lived with the status of an immigrant since his youth because he and his family are among those Eritreans who in 1998 were living in an area that today belongs to the territory of Ethiopia, and who were expropriated and deported to Eritrea. The family was in a comfortable situation in Ethiopia, the father having worked first as a mechanic and then as a driver for a UN organization. The six children were all engaged in good educational careers before the family was expelled. However, since 1998 the family has been in a precarious situation. All the children were conscripted into the army, the father has been arrested several times, and one of Robel's brothers died while in military service.²⁵ Like Robel his youngest brother fled to Israel where he was shut up in the notorious Saharonim Prison for over one and a half years. After being released his brother lost his job because of COVID-19 and is currently looking for an opportunity to move to another country. After the opening of the border to Ethiopia, one sister entered Ethiopia legally, together with other relatives, and was registered there as a refugee. Another sister is still in Eritrea and is hoping to be able to join her husband, who succeeded in emigrating to Australia.

We first met Robel in Kampala in February 2018. He had been there since 2015. After our first meeting, we met him in several different interview contexts, the last being the group discussion. After completing his fieldwork, L. Hofmann stayed in contact with him and interviewed him again by telephone in April 2021 in order to ask him about his situation in Kampala during the pandemic.

First we will consider the course of Robel's migration. In 2015 he gave in to the pressure of the Israeli authorities to leave the country, although he had to leave his wife, his two children and his brother behind.²⁶ It is thus not surprising

²⁴ See <https://www.bbc.com/pidgin/tori-57516481> < 30.07.2021>.

²⁵ This biographical and family history, with conscription into the Eritrean army in 1998, the interruption of schooling or occupations begun in Ethiopia, and subsequent economic precarity is typical of the generation of Robel and his family (see Kibreab 2017a: 128 ff.).

²⁶ In 2015 about 485 Eritreans and Sudanese were flown to Uganda (see <https://observer.ug/news/headlines/57721-uganda-now-opts-out-of-israel-migrants-relocation-deal.html> <24.11.2018>).

that in the first interview which the authors conducted with him in Kampala he spoke almost exclusively about his untiring struggle to have his deportation from Israel officially recognized by a Ugandan court, in order to be able to apply for asylum. For this purpose he had constantly sought contact with representatives of NGOs and tried to persuade Ugandan officials (sometimes by giving bribes) to issue documents confirming that he had been deported from Israel. He refused to comply with the advice that he should conceal his past in Israel, because this would reduce the chances of being reunited with his wife and children.

It took two more meetings before Robel agreed to take part in a biographical interview, spread over two meetings, which was conducted by L. Hofmann in Kampala. Despite being asked to tell the story of his life and that of his family, on both occasions he spoke mainly about his present situation and again gave a detailed account of his struggle to obtain a court hearing in Uganda. Our analysis of these interviews shows that he was tormented by strong feelings of guilt concerning both his family of procreation and his family of orientation. He felt it was his duty to do everything he could to help them. In this he differs from other people we interviewed who appeared to be paralyzed by their complete lack of perspectives. In 2018 we began to ask ourselves how long Robel would be able to keep up his active struggle to find a way out of his situation in Kampala, in which his separation from his wife and children is the driving force. This is a question which is even more acute in the present situation. In addition, Robel and his family are concerned by the current violent conflict in the Ethiopian region of Tigray.

However, as we will show, Robel is managing to navigate very well through this critical life situation, and has succeeded in maintaining his power of agency.

The biography and family history of this refugee are marked by forced migration and will continue to be so. This case represents the painful experience of a family that belongs to the ethnic grouping of the Tigray²⁷ and comes from the area which constituted the Italian colony of Eritrea up to 1941. In order to find work, Robel's parents moved to Ethiopia's capital in the early 1960s, and their six children were born there. This was the time when the autonomous region of Eritrea was annexed by Ethiopia. Thus the family lived through a politically turbulent period, with the struggle against annexation from 1961 onward, serious droughts in the 1970s, and a military coup in Ethiopia in 1974. Further destabilization in the region followed, with the Ogaden war between Ethiopia and Somalia in 1977/1978, a drought in 1984/1985 which led to the deaths of over a million people, and the repression and killing of political opponents. The overthrow of the Ethiopian dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam in 1991 led to a decisive turning point in this collective history, resulting seven years later in the expropriation and

²⁷ This grouping lives in the province of Tigray in northern Ethiopia, and in neighboring Eritrea. In Eritrea they form about 50% of the population, and in Ethiopia about 5%. In Eritrea they are referred to as Tigrinya, and in Ethiopia as Tigray (see Appleyard 2017: 46 ff.).

deportation of Robel's family. The struggle for independence which lasted – with interruptions – for thirty years, carried on by the Eritrean Liberation Front, later replaced by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, ended when a new Ethiopian government was formed and enabled the independence of Eritrea in May 1993. However, May 1998 saw the beginning of a two-year war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, whereupon the Ethiopian government ordered the expropriation and deportation to Eritrea of 200,000 Eritreans living in Ethiopia (see Hunziker 2000: 8). At that time, Robel was 21 years old. He had finished high school, had attended a commercial school in Addis Abeba for a year, and had been hoping to gain admission to the university. In Eritrea, however, he was immediately conscripted into the Eritrean army, together with his brothers and sisters. Since this biographical turning point he has had an ambivalent attitude toward Eritrea, which can be seen in the self-positioning which Robel summed up in the first interview as follows:

“I am born in Ethiopia I grow there I don't I have anything to study in Eritrea but I grow up in Ethiopia and I served in Eritrea.”

Robel is one of those Eritreans who were “born and grew up” in Ethiopia, as Robel puts it himself, and who have had to struggle with ambivalent feelings of national belonging, especially when taking part in armed conflicts as soldiers of the Eritrean army. While at first, as Robel makes very clear, they identified themselves with the goals of the struggle for Eritrean independence, when fighting against Ethiopia they found themselves in the situation of having to kill people who were once their neighbors or friends, or even their relatives.

In 2000, the conflict with Ethiopia came to an end, but Robel was not released after two years of military service. In 2003 he decided to desert the Eritrean army and found employment with an international company. This allowed him to support his family financially, but as a deserter he constantly feared arrest. After one and a half years he was indeed arrested and condemned to twelve years in prison. After one month, together with a younger brother, he managed to escape and enter Sudan. Robel lived in Khartoum for three years, opened a hostel without legal permission, and met Sarah, who later became his wife. She had also been deported from Ethiopia to Eritrea in 1998, and had also escaped from the Eritrean “national service”. In 2007 Sarah became pregnant and decided to go to Israel, where Robel's brother was living. She had already given birth to her first child when Robel followed her two months later.

Robel worked for five years as a cleaner in various restaurants in Israel. At that time workers were in short supply in Israel, and even people without an official work permit were taken on for short periods. Life became more stable for Robel and Sarah and a second child was born. However, they had to apply to have their visas extended each month or every two months, and constantly faced the risk of expulsion. Robel's uncertain future perspectives, and those of many other African refugees, were further reduced by the opening of the Holot Detention Camp in

2013, the beginning of pressure by the authorities on refugees to make them agree to leave the country, and the almost non-existent chances of making a successful application for asylum (which became possible as from 2013).²⁸ At one point it seemed that he and his family would be able to go to Italy, but this hope was disappointed: the visas which had been obtained for them by people they knew in Italy turned out to be forgeries when they tried to leave the country. At the end of 2015, Robel therefore decided to take part in the Israeli deportation program and let himself be taken to a 'safe' African country – with the hope that he would be able to arrange for his family to follow. Only during the flight did he learn that he and the six other “deportees” would land in Entebbe, Uganda. Robel had read in a number of reports and publications that there was a risk that their identity documents would be taken away from them, but he succeeded in “smuggling” his papers out of the airport. He told us that he and the other deportees were taken out of the airport through a special exit and were given beds for one night in a hotel. The next day they were told by Ugandan officials that they must leave Uganda and go back to “their countries”. If they wanted to stay in Uganda, they should be careful to say nothing about being deported from Israel. This put an end to Robel’s hope that he would be able to stay legally in an African country and that his family would be able to join him there. As he put it concisely in the interview: “In Uganda things became broken.” He started looking for ways out of this desperate situation. Like the Eritreans interviewed by G. Rosenthal in Kampala in 2015/2016, many people set out for Europe on the very unsafe route to Libya and across the Mediterranean, even though they are not unaware of the dangers that await them, especially from the IS, a jihadist militia, and other rebel groupings. Robel, however, as the father of a family, did not consider this dangerous route as a viable option: “I don’t want to get in this kind of risk, because I know the risk ... I have kids now.” Instead, one year after his arrival in Uganda, he tried to travel to Canada with a forged passport. He flew via Khartoum to Doha, but was arrested there because of the forged passport. The officials discovered that he was carrying an Eritrean identity document, and wanted to send him back to Eritrea. Robel told us that because of his knowledge of Arabic, and because he threatened to commit suicide, he managed to persuade them to let him fly back to Khartoum. However, Sudan was not a safe place for him, and so he decided to go back to Kampala.

In the follow-up interview that we conducted two months before the 42-day total lockdown in 2021, we learned that things were looking better for Robel. In August 2020 he had finally been granted official refugee status in Uganda and was now in the possession of a Ugandan refugee identity card. This status opened up the perspective of being able to apply for a passport and to participate in a relocation program. His long struggle for this status had ended with this as the

²⁸ The recognition rate is 0.48% (see <https://hotline.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Eng-Web-RSD-Report-HRM-17Oct2018.pdf>, 9 f. <29.05.2019>).

best option; however, the pandemic meant that his plan to go first to a country bordering on Uganda, and later to Canada, could not be realized, at least for the time being. He wants to go and find work in Kenya or Sudan – if the political situation there is safe for him – as soon as he can, in order to earn enough money for the journey to Canada. He also spoke about a possible option for his children in Israel (10 and 13 years old). He thinks that they could be enlisted for military service in Israel, which would give them rights of residency, and that this would open up the option of migrating to Canada. This rather illusionary dream shows that, despite so many crises, Robel still clings to the idea that he will be reunited with his family, even if only in a far-off future.

However, Robel is not just passively waiting in Kampala. He is fighting actively for the rights of refugees. Thus, together with other Eritreans, he has applied for permission to found an NGO whose main purpose would be to assist refugees when visiting government offices. He believes that the NGO will soon be approved. From our perspective, these activities are for Robel a biographical strategy that allows him to feel that he still has some power of agency. It is very important for him to think that he can do something to prevent his wife and children from being deported to Eritrea – something he still fears – and to bring about their reunification at some time in the future. In other words, he cannot give up the struggle to find a way for the whole family to migrate to Canada.

6 Conclusion

Abraham and Robel occupied very different social positions in Eritrea, and still do so in Kampala; they had very different attitudes to the political system in Eritrea, and they left their country for different reasons. And yet today there are clear similarities in their situations. They represent a type of refugee that we can describe as “dreaming of and working for a better future”. In contrast to representatives of the type “lost in passivity and despair”, Abraham and Robel have invested much energy in maintaining their power of agency and their self-esteem in a situation that appears to outside observers to be almost completely hopeless. They are both dreaming of a different future, and are actively seeking to bring about the changes they hope for, instead of sinking into passivity like most of the other Eritreans we interviewed. While Abraham wants to go back to his wife, his children and their families in Eritrea, Robel is looking for a country where he and his family will be allowed to stay. When Abraham says “we could not just stay by and watch this idiots manipulate it”, he shows that he wants to actively contribute to overthrowing the “idiots”. And Robel does not intend to stop looking for ways to migrate to a safe country and to be reunited with his wife and children. In other words, their longstanding plan for the future, of which a central aspect is reunification with their families, is a constitutive component of their actions in the present. At this point we can only repeat the question: how long will these two men be able to

maintain their power of agency in respect of this future plan? How long will they be able to continue hoping for a better future in the face of the current economic and political developments in Uganda, Eritrea and Ethiopia?

Another similarity in the biographical trajectories and migration courses of these two men, and of many other refugees, is that they are helplessly exposed to the consequences of intergovernmental agreements, some of which are initiated by the European Union, as well as to social developments in various African countries. The terms of such agreements are often unpredictable, arbitrary, and extremely problematic in both legal and moral terms. In the case presented here, this can be seen clearly in the agreement between the governments of Israel and Uganda. It is difficult for the affected individuals to apply for asylum in Uganda, and they are told to deny that they have lived in Israel. Moreover, it amounts to discrimination of asylum-seekers from Eritrea, a country which in the media is often compared to present-day North Korea, in other words a country with an extremely undemocratic government and which shows no regard for human rights.

For these two men, and for other refugees from Eritrea, questions arise concerning a future over which they have very little influence: Will Eritrea always be a country in which their lives are at risk? Will Uganda always be a country from which they will not be deported? Will they get opportunities to live in neighboring countries – such as Ethiopia, where Simon has managed to find a safe place at least for the time being, or Kenya as an option for Robel, or Sudan for Abraham, or will they be able to establish themselves – together with their families of procreation – in Uganda?

The follow-up interviews we have conducted show how quickly the life situation of these refugees can change and how this depends to a large extent on circumstances over which they have no control. During our stay in Kampala, we had the impression that the situation of Simon who had been able to enter Uganda legally in connection with admission to a master's degree course (because, among other things, he had a very good BA degree), with the hope of migrating to Canada or Europe, was the most promising, and that the most desperate was that of Hadinet who was dreaming of being able to join her husband. Like Hadinet, we also doubted that her husband wanted, or would be able, to help her to follow him to Germany. So we were all the more surprised when we heard that she had joined her husband, who had succeeded in migrating to Canada, and that, after hoping in vain for so long, she had given birth to a child. Simon's applications for admission to an MA course were unsuccessful, but thanks to his family history and his networks in Ethiopia he was able to return to Ethiopia, where he is now living in a relatively stable, and above all safe situation. On the basis of our interviews with migrants from Eritrea and interviews conducted in the context of other projects relating to the life situation of migrants (see Rosenthal/Worm 2021), we can conclude that favorable biographical trajectories depend on the possession of cultural capital, family history capital (in the sense of the family's (socio-)political milieu,) and transcultural capital. Other very important components are having

good support networks, and having a recognized legal status in the home country and in the host country.

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Integration Between Excessive Demands and the Desire to Belong: Young Refugees' Biographical Accounts of Integration

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1 Introduction

In countries such as Germany or Switzerland, the social integration of (young) refugees is associated with questions and ambiguities (Huke 2021). It is unclear whether integration should be the goal at all, or whether, in the long term, a return to the home country would be more appropriate, as it is sometimes argued both by political actors in the host countries and by the migrants themselves. In the face of restrictions of residence permits and the challenges of acquiring qualifications and language skills, the future prospects of these adolescents and young adults are extremely uncertain, even if the decision is taken to remain in the host country (Scherr/Breit 2020). The debates on this issue are usually conducted above the heads of those affected, with the result that their perspectives are rarely included in the public and scientific discourses.

The aim of this contribution, therefore, is to focus attention on the perspectives of young refugees with respect to the question of their integration. We work on the assumption that they have to deal with the requirements for integration they are confronted with. We empirically analyse and discuss reflections on the inte-

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gration process as well as the question of how young refugees address integration experiences and requirements and the effort they put into integration in different phases of transit to and arrival in Switzerland. Our analysis is based on interviews with young people who fled different countries (primarily Syria, Afghanistan, and Somalia) as unaccompanied minor refugees (UMR) and came to Switzerland. The aim is to reconstruct their perspectives and analyse these primarily against their biographical backgrounds. Once we have summarised the current state of research and debate on questions regarding the integration of young refugees, and introduced the study this contribution is based on, we will present two case studies. These will focus on both shared and different aspects of integration that have developed out of the specific biographical backgrounds in each case. Finally, we will bring together and classify the key insights of this analysis.

2 Current State of Research and Debate

The public engagement with integration is a central theme in political and social science debates in the migration society. The term “integration” evokes associations of assimilation, acculturation, and cultural conformity – people talk about integration deficits, integration processes, those who are willing to integrate and those who are not, and successful integration. Above all, integration has become a buzzword used to talk about people who are marked as culturally different or foreign (Lingen-Ali/Mecheril 2020; Pries 2015). This also affects young refugees who have applied for asylum as UMR in European countries such as Germany or Switzerland. In the light of these children’s and young people’s often insecure status with regard to residence permits, and their largely uncertain future prospects, this does initially seem conceivable. In the following, we outline the state of research on integration in the context of migration before reflecting on different concepts of integration.

2.1 Political Dimensions of Integration

The concept of integration has a central role in the socio-political context of migration in Switzerland (Wicker 2011). The term integration is associated with the hope of integrating individuals with experience of migration into society. Following the restructuring of the asylum system, the federal government and the cantons¹ jointly passed the so-called integration agenda in Switzerland. Based on the motto “start earlier and step it up”, this aims to integrate refugees more quickly into the labour market and therefore better into society, thereby reducing their dependence on the public purse (e.g. welfare benefits) (see SEM 2021). Here, two aspects in particular have emerged at the political level that are central to the idea

¹ Switzerland is organized as a federation of cantons (states), whereby political power is shared by federal government, cantonal governments, and local communities.

of “welfare to work” [“Fördern und Fordern”]: learning a Swiss national language (German, French, Italian, or Romansh) as well as professional integration into the labour market (Wicker 2011: 30).

The political ideas of integration also affect UMR. This is because these young people’s living conditions are not purely determined by the asylum legislation. Young refugees are in fact also confronted with a number of requirements for integration that they need to fulfil if they wish to make a social and professional life for themselves in Switzerland. Even though UMR are given priority in the handling of their asylum applications in Switzerland (Rieker et al. 2020), when it comes to rulings on the right to asylum and access to the education system and professional training market young people are finding themselves “in a state of waiting around”, which could have a detrimental effect on their development (Hargasser 2014). Experts emphasise that the young people are primarily being positioned as asylum seekers, while their specific needs as children and adolescents are seen as being of secondary importance (Rieker et al. 2020: 13). In this respect, political concepts of integration are based on the assumption that the young people have a debt to pay back, calling upon them to prove their “preparedness” and “willingness” to integrate (Geisen 2010: 16). Here, integration is connected with a system of sanctions (Lingen-Ali/Mecheril 2020: 9): If the young people fail to perform, e.g. do not complete a training placement or do not acquire the appropriate language skills, they are generally threatened with both symbolic and economic sanctions, such as measures relating to their right to residence. However, there is very little recognition of the fact that social integration and the development of feasible future prospects are made more difficult if the young person’s situation is characterised by various pressures (Scherr/Breit 2020). Hence, Anika Lems (2019) makes clear that integration measures, such as access to the specific educational offerings of an “integration class”, prove to be a contradictory route into Swiss society. Under the difficult, restrictive conditions of asylum laws, the young people put significant effort into developing their future prospects in the host society (Scherr/Breit 2020: 184). In terms of their educational and professional biographies in particular, they make personal contributions and put a lot of effort into adapting and integrating, which could be judged as indications of “successful integration” (Scherr/Breit 2020: 187). This is because school-based and professional education is not only relevant to integration into the labour market but also opens up the possibility of securing residence permits and is of “existential importance” for the future (Scherr/Breit 2020: 187).

2.2 Social Dimensions of Integration

In terms of the requirements for social integration imposed on young people, scientific debates focus in this context on the issue of self-reliance and the attendant processes of becoming independent. With respect to young refugees, there is a focus on detachment from individuals who function as carers (e.g. foster parents),

independent organisation of daily life as well as meal preparation (Lips/Gesang 2021). From the young people's point of view, a slow and gradual process of detachment and increasing independence is desirable, as this is less overwhelming (Lips/Gesang 2021: 197). Research results on the institutional accommodation of young refugees suggest on the one hand that children and adolescents are not always given the appropriate level of everyday tasks; instead, these are carried out by the professionals, which inhibits children's and adolescents' independence (Jurt/Roulin 2016: 104). On the other hand, it has been shown that young refugees have often taken on familial duties and financial obligations during their flight from their home countries and that they have acquired a high degree of self-reliance and independence because they have had to handle a broad range of extreme situations (Detemple 2015: 82f.). Accordingly, much emphasis is placed on what is seen as a central field of tension in the socio-pedagogical support of UMR: The high degree of independence is simultaneously accompanied by a need for assistance among unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors (Theilmann 2005; Hargasser 2014; Detemple 2015). In many cases, it is unclear to what extent the institutional actors are ascribing to the children and adolescents a need for assistance that they themselves do not perceive or attest to because they do not see themselves as helpless objects but as active subjects (Detemple 2015: 82f.).

In addition, experts point to some individual cases where young refugees demonstrate processes of increasing orientation towards native young people and their practices, which can be understood as an indication of acculturation or integration processes (Schwittek 2021: 8). In this context, there have been occasional discussions on young migrants' willingness to acculturate more quickly than their parents or family members from their parents' generation (Schwittek 2021: 3). However, there is also evidence of discrepancies between the different cultural backgrounds. For example, the concepts of having "leisure time" connected with images of childhood and youth in Switzerland are alien to many young refugees, as is the feeling that there is a moratorium on social obligations (Schwittek 2021: 3). Neither of these align with their previous culture of finding affirmation through social participation. Accordingly, research results suggest these children and adolescents are often accustomed to participating in marginal, sometimes illegal activities in order to contribute to the family income, increase their self-esteem, and thereby integrate socially (Liebel 1999: 40ff.).

2.3 Conceptual Discussion of Integration

Forms of social integration and participation are used conceptually differently in research when it comes to the contexts of integration and migration (Geisen 2010; Hess et al. 2009; Lingen-Ali/Mecheril 2020; Pries 2020; Riegel 2009).² Following Roland Taft, Ludger Pries (2020: 8) differentiates between different conceptual frameworks. These depend on the respective understanding of migration. The

² For a detailed discussion of integration in sociological theories and subject areas, cf. Pries 2020.

following concepts are differentiated: monoistic, pluralistic, and interactionistic integration (Pries 2020: 8).

The concept of monoistic integration follows the implicit assumption that integration is a one-way process. Migrants have to adapt to the existing society (Pries 2020: 9). This conceptual understanding can be found in classical German research on integration by Esser (2009) and Heckmann (1992). Different dimensions are distinguished here: Accommodation means learning basic ways and means of communication and living in order to be able to participate in everyday life in the new society; acculturation refers to the change of values, norms, attitudes, and lifestyles; and assimilation means the complete adoption of the culture of the host society by the immigrants (Heckmann 1992: 168ff.). Social integration is understood in the sense of assimilation: It is about the cultural assimilation of migrants into the host society (Bowskill et al. 2007; Esser 2009). Integration is considered as a “one-way street” and a one-sided achievement (Pries 2020). Those who join a society have to provide integration (Bianco/Ortiz Cobo 2019: 58; Freitag 2019: 156). Furthermore, integration is often connected with the idea that an immigration is final and permanent (Pries 2015).

In contrast, concepts of pluralistic integration are negotiated under the terms multiculturalism (Neubert et al. 2013) or post-migrant society (Foroutan et al. 2018). The basic idea is to allow the diversity of different cultures to coexist (Pries 2020: 10). This means that migrants are not expected to adapt completely to the majority society. Rather, transnational relations, values, and norms can be cultivated (Pries 2015: 23f.). Such an understanding is characteristic of classic immigration societies, such as the USA or Germany (Neubert et al. 2013). Post-migrant perspectives emphasise in particular the ambivalences, contradictions, and conflicts that have changed society due to various forms of migration. One of the central questions is how democratic participation and social justice can be reshaped in the age of migration and globalisation (Espahangizi 2018). This is where an interactionist understanding of social integration as equal opportunity participation comes in, as described by John W. Berry (1997) and Pries (2015).³ In view of the observation that societies have become culturally plural in the course of migration processes, Berry (1997: 7ff.) bases his concept of integration as acculturation (see Pries 2020: 11). This involves *both* the preservation of cultural identities of the non-dominant group *and* participation in the majority society (Pries 2015: 27). In this sense, integration is also an issue for the host society. It is emphasised that integration should work both ways. It therefore requires the willingness of all people in a society to adapt and change. This does not only apply to a specific group, such as refugees (Castles et al. 2002; Pries 2020: 11). Following this, Pries (2015) argues for an open, interactionist understanding of integration. For him, integration is an open-ended process of social, political, economic, and cul-

³ The conceptions of a pluralistic and an interactionist integration are ideal-typical distinctions that are not clearly separable in their understanding of migration and society.

tural interdependence between individuals and social groups. With regard to the social integration of immigrants, a distinction can also be made between different social relations: integration with regard to the host society, the society of origin, or the ethnic community in the host country (Berry 1997: 9f.), which stand in transnational interrelationships with each other (Maestri/Profanter 2021: 6). Furthermore, there are studies within migration and youth research which express an empirically-based and differentiated perspective on integration and consider this in connection with questions of belonging and approval (Riegel 2009; Riegel/Geisen 2010; Scherr/Breit 2020). In this sense, integration is in addition always an object of negotiation processes in which not only criteria of symbolic membership but also the consequences of inclusion and exclusion are negotiated (Riegel/Geisen 2010).

Against this background, we follow an open, pluralistic, and interactionist understanding of social integration (Berry 1997; Pries 2020) in this article because it challenges the concept of integration in a predefined social context and as one-sided assimilation (Esser 2009). Firstly, it enables references to various dimensions of integration, such as the cultivation of social relationships and the integration of young people into the education system and the labour market. Secondly, it can be used to emphasise the importance of actors' perspectives and experiences. In the empirical analysis, we focus on young people's agency (Riegel 2009; Lingen-Ali/Mecheril 2020) and enabling strategies (Pries 2015) in the context of social integration. This is related to current empirical research results that focus on the importance of young refugees' agency within the European border regime, outlining their negotiations with employees in refugee accommodations and the extent to which they competently represent their own interests and ideas (Otto 2019). In addition, young refugees are sometimes also seen in the familial context as autonomous actors whose decisions to flee are not based on familial support (Heidbrinck/Statz 2017: 547ff.; Belloni 2019; Lems et al. 2019: 12).

Below, we discuss on an empirical basis how prevailing concepts and requirements of integration impact on the lives of young refugees who have come to Switzerland without guardians, and the subjective meaning they ascribe to their integration.

3 Methodological Approach

With reference to the study "Unaccompanied Refugees Minors in Institutional Care: Opportunities and Challenges",⁴ we empirically analyse and discuss reflections on the integration process as well as the question of how young refugees

⁴ The research project has been running at the Institute of Education at the University of Zurich since 2018. It is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation and is part of the National Science Programme NFP 76. The researchers on the project are Ellen Höhne, Rebecca Mörge, and Peter Rieker (project leader).

address integration experiences and requirements and the effort they put into integration in different phases of transit to and arrival in Switzerland. The project investigates the (institutional) accommodation and care of UMR with a focus on the tension between care and coercion. In the course of this project, we participated in the daily life in different institutional care contexts in German-speaking Switzerland (UMR centres, transit centres, foster families) over a period of up to three months, carrying out ethnographic observations. During the period 2018–2021, we also conducted interviews with different people involved in daily care (young people, professionals, foster parents).

This contribution references the interviews thus far conducted with 13 young people within the scope of the study, focusing on their subjective perspectives. In total, we interviewed one young woman and twelve male adolescents who, at the time of the interview, had been living in Switzerland for at least one year, had migrated to Switzerland from different countries (primarily Afghanistan, Syria, and Eritrea), and came from different social backgrounds. At the time of the interview, the young people were living either with a foster family or in institutional care. The access to the young people happened on the basis of ethnographic site visits by the respective researchers. After a certain amount of time spent participating in the daily life of the institution, engaging in contact, and building up relationships, we interviewed the young people. By contrast, our contact with the young people who were living with foster families happened via a foster-family-placing organisation. After a preliminary conversation with all foster family members, we conducted interviews with both the foster families and the young people. The conversations with the young people took place at locations chosen by themselves, e.g. in cafés, in classrooms within the institutions, on walks, or in their homes.

In terms of our methodology, we used the problem-centred interview method (Witzel 2000). The conversations were based on a guideline that could, however, be used flexibly according to the respective interview situation. At the same time, we tried to include as few specifications as possible, thereby allowing the young people to explore their own areas of relevance. In order to support this exploration of their own subjective areas of relevance and in order to generate narrative passages, we also inserted narrative-generating elements into the interview process (Rosenthal 2014). The interviews were focused on the respective experiences of the young people in the different care settings. In the conversations, we asked about the daily experience of living with other people in care institutions or foster families and the associated challenges and opportunities. In addition, in all the interviews we asked about the context of origin and the young person's current life situation, prompting them to talk about the topics of the asylum system, their arrival in Switzerland, their experience of difference, and social relationships.

The interviews were fully transcribed and, in the process, all the data connected with individuals and locations anonymised. The materials were analysed by the research group, drawing on the Grounded Theory method (Strauss 2007). Once we had openly coded the interviews and thereby deduced the young people's sense of

the relevant areas, we were able to reconstruct through comparative and contrasting analyses the case-specific characteristics and the relevant conditions for these. In addition to the coding analyses, we also used sequential analytical methods within the case study analyses in order to reconstruct the temporal stratifications of biographical experiences and how they are interwoven with aspects of the integration experience (Rosenthal 2014: 173ff.).

The interviews conducted in the context of our study point to very different experiences in the context of origin, the flight, the arrival, and the life in Switzerland. With regard to the experiences in the context of origin, the narratives of the young people can be divided as follows, whereby four young people did not talk at all about their experiences in the context of origin:

- Family care: In three cases, the narratives about the context of origin are dominated by reports of parental care and a “protected childhood”.
- Care and work: In contrast, three young people report about family care and at the same time about the need to work and contribute to the family income.
- Work: In contrast to this, the narratives in three other cases are characterised by the young people’s need to organise their own lives and to work, whereby no forms of family care are reported here. In two of these cases, the young people mostly grew up without their parents or other family members. In one case, the necessity to work for the parents is reported.

With regard to *the flight and arrival experiences*, in four cases both the flight and the arrival in Switzerland are primarily described as a burden, which takes place through the articulation of feelings of fear and being locked in. In contrast, two young people also use positive attributes in addition to stressful aspects to recount their experiences, e.g. the flight had also been fun. In one case, the arrival at the asylum centre is outlined as a positive experience, while the flight is not reported. In six cases, neither the flight nor the first arrival experiences are talked about in the interviews.

With regard to *their life in Switzerland*, eight of the young people outline an ambivalent picture, with the initial period in particular being described as a challenge. On the one hand, the young people did not understand much on a linguistic level, as they first had to acquire the language “German” of the majority society. On the other hand, conflicts and misunderstandings arose – also due to linguistic challenges –, as a result of which the young people sometimes reported being over-taxed. In these cases, (institutional) re-placements took place, which contributed to the well-being as well as to the adaptation and social integration of the young people. In contrast, three young people describe their life in Switzerland so far primarily as a stressful challenge. In one case, the young person has only been living in Switzerland for a short time, so the various forms of stress can be seen

as an expression of an orientation that has not yet taken place. In the other two cases, the young people's hopes and wishes (e.g. for work) have not been fulfilled and the young people report social isolation.

Against this background, two individual cases were selected for this article in which the contrast according to the respective subjective perspective is of special relevance. They differ in particular in their perceptions of the institutional and structural conditions of their arrival in Switzerland and the related integration requirements.

4 Young Refugees' Perspectives on Integration

Questions of their social integration are very important to young refugees and in the interviews we conducted with them they refer in different ways to the implicit and explicit demands they face. In so doing, they demonstrate a distinct willingness to meet the political and social requirements they are confronted with and take on the associated challenges. Below, in two case studies, we investigate various aspects of positioning on questions of integration.

4.1 Zamir – Giving It Your All so You Can Get a Handle on Everything

Zamir comes from Afghanistan and he is 17 years old at the time of the interview. He came to Switzerland four years ago. After two months in an immigration centre, he was transferred to an institution for UMR, where he lived for around one year, took German lessons, and started school in year 8. Later he switched to a foster family where he has been living for three years. In connection with this, he changed schools, repeated year 8, stopped going to school after year 9, and began a vocational training course, changing his specialism shortly after that. His life in Switzerland has therefore been characterised by fluctuation and discontinuities: He went through three accommodation contexts, two schools, and two training contexts in four years. For Zamir, this frequent switching between contexts meant that he had to re-orientate himself several times. In the passages below, he describes his feelings about his school, the contact he had there with his peers, and the activities he undertook in response.

Zamir: To be honest, it was difficult. It wasn't that I was new, or anything. The problem was just the language. I didn't know what the Swiss were like or how they lived or what exactly was going on here [...] until gradually I got to know the boys a bit better [...] but it feels a bit weird or even a bit shitty when you're in a group and no one wants to do anything with you [...] that's why it was difficult getting into a group at the beginning, and then finding a place for myself, but it does come, and then, when I could speak the language a bit better, I got to know people very quickly in the other school, I got a handle on everything very quickly [...] for me, the most

difficult thing was break time. Everyone hung around with their peers at break time and I didn't know what to do. Just sitting by myself somewhere and watching is also weird [...] they held a leaving party and they invited their best friends and then I got a call. They said you should come too, you are one of us [...] you have to give it your all and do something, otherwise you won't find your place. (16ff.)

Zamir describes here very poignantly the difficulties he had when he started attending school and which he associates with “being new”. He found the lack of social contact at that time very difficult as well as the experience of other young people not wanting to work with him, which he puts down to his lack of language skills and knowledge about the culture of the host context. Changing schools then obviously helped him overcome his isolation and build up social relationships. On the one hand, he sees his fellow pupils – from whom he initially felt cut off but who later made him feel accepted – as central in this, especially as he describes them as having explicitly addressed him as one of them. On the other hand, he also sees himself as responsible for his social integration: “Giving it your all” and “doing something” are necessary in order to find your “place”. The fact that he captures the success of his efforts to integrate with the phrase “getting a handle on everything” also shows that he ascribes great importance to personal responsibility. Zamir therefore primarily sees integration as a challenge he must keep on meeting anew, one where he is expected to demonstrate a capacity to adapt. The underlying paradigm of this school-related account applies similarly to other areas of his life where, likewise, there is an emphasis on difficulties and the unfamiliar at the beginning, before his own activities and other people's attempts at adaptation contribute to a successful integration. This is particularly apparent in his relationship with the foster family he has been living with for a number of years.

Zamir: At first, it was very difficult for me to find my place there; I mean, I was new there and (.) in the beginning, one of my foster sisters somehow didn't like the fact that somehow someone had come into her home and was living with the family [...], but gradually she got to know me and now (.) yes, now she sometimes jokes that if I move away, she'll come and live with me. [A]t first, we did a lot together, and gradually they also got used to me and accepted that I belonged with them too. (2)

In this passage, Zamir also talks about a process of integration: After some initial reluctance to accept him as a new family member, the foster family has not only got used to him, but the foster sister who initially had problems with his presence in the family has now said, in jest, that she does not want to be separated from him when he leaves the family. This passage foregrounds the willingness of the other family members to grow accustomed to him, which is a prerequisite for Zamir being able to integrate. According to his account, Zamir chose his foster family

himself and a foster family is connected with increased integration requirements in his eyes.

Zamir: That was the reason why I went from a refugee shelter to a fam-, to the family. When you're in a shelter, well (.) it's somehow like being in a camp (.) to be honest, you don't understand anything about the culture and you don't know how the Swiss live. [...] In a family, it's not like that. In a family, you live with them and everything they do, you join in too. (5)

The switch from the shelter to the foster family is presented here by Zamir as his own conscious decision, which he justifies on the basis of needing to integrate into the host context. In the shelter, which he compares to a “camp”, he says people are disconnected from the everyday life of the host society, whereas a family offers the opportunity to live together and get to know the culture and lifestyle of Swiss people by participating in shared activities. Here again, it is his own interest in integration and his own decision to live with a foster family that, according to Zamir, have facilitated his integration. This emphasis on his own activities is also apparent in the way he uses his leisure time.

Zamir: In the beginning, when I first came to Switzerland, I had no hobbies. I didn't do anything (.) and then gradually, as I started to feel a bit better, I said, “OK, now I've found my place and now I have to have a bit of action in my life”. I said, “Right, let's do it”, and I looked for a sport I could do. (11)

The extent to which Zamir is prepared to adopt ideas from the host context and apply them to his own life is apparent here in the specific idea of looking for a hobby connected with a particular cultural and class-specific context. In this passage, he presents an internal dialogue in which he decides to take on a hobby, something he thinks is worthwhile now that he has more secure living conditions – “now I've found my place”. Once again, we find here the same paradigm we have seen in Zamir's thinking before – he presents his life as characterised by his own considerations, decisions, and activities, just as he does in the following statement.

Zamir: She [the foster mother] asked me in the beginning whether I wanted her to wash my clothes too, and I thought, no (.). I'll do everything myself. (9)

By being willing to wash his own clothes himself and by communicating this decision to the foster mother, Zamir is implicitly acting on the requirement to take charge of his own life. This is often an expectation placed on young people in the context of residential youth care and it is particularly important for young refugees who have no entitlement to professional support beyond their 18th birthday. Zamir

is therefore signalling his willingness to operate as an adult and as someone capable of independently shaping his own life, thereby also meeting the expectations of refugees as set out by institutions in the host society.

Finally, we would like to look at what Zamir says about his context of origin. He says that, as a child, he helped his mother with cleaning and his father with temporary jobs.

Zamir: I worked for a tailor, I worked as a car mechanic and as a cook. He did these things, and he needed help with them [...], then suddenly my father was gone and I took over the family. No more school, so I had to work. So I worked until I came to Switzerland [...] and after that, when my father died, I just kept on working as normal and didn't go to school, and then I said to my brother, "Now you're the second Zamir and you must" (I: go to school), yes, exactly, and then I worked the whole time, so yes, this meant I had responsibilities but it was good. (34f.)

Zamir went to school up until he was around ten years old and he was helping his parents with their work at the same time. Then, when his father died, he gave up school and took over the role of the family breadwinner. In this connection, he paints a picture of a sudden shift into the role of head of the family when his father was "suddenly" gone. At the same time, he transferred the duty of fulfilling the family's educational ambitions to his younger brother, "the second Zamir". He describes this change as a logical consequence of the death of his father. He does not report any hesitation by either himself or his brother and he judges the work and the assumption of responsibility as having been good.

On the whole, the high value Zamir attaches to his own responsibility and activity in the context of his integration into Switzerland can be linked to these early experiences. Just as he could no longer rely on his father and the earnings from his work by the age of ten neither does he see his integration as purely dependent on others. Just as he took over responsibility for his family by working, so too has he taken responsibility for his integration through his own endeavours. Nonetheless, he is also conscious of the fact that other people have to get used to him as well i.e. he can give it his all, but ultimately he cannot achieve integration on his own. In this sense, what is apparent in Zamir's case is that integration means above all working towards belonging, i.e. it is the constant production of belonging (Riegel 2009).

4.2 Aras – We Young People Have to Fight

Aras was born in 2002 in Syria and grew up there in a caring family context until he came to Switzerland in 2015. His parents still live in Syria at the time of the interview, while two of his sisters live in other European countries. In the interview, Aras does not talk about his travel route and the experiences made during the flight. In Switzerland, he was received by his uncle and brought to an immigration centre,

where he stayed for one month until he was reassigned to an UMR centre, i.e. an establishment specifically for UMR. He lived at this centre for three years, during which he went to a state school. Shortly before the interview, he moved into his own small flat in a city nearby; his uncle lives with his family in this city, too. At the time of the interview, Aras is 17 years old; he is in his final year at school and will start a vocational training course in the autumn of the same year. At the beginning of the interview, he decides that the first thing he would like to talk about is his new hobby.

Aras: Since coming to Switzerland, I have found new hobbies. (.) I went skiing for the first time ever in Switzerland, (.) it just became my hobby.
(1)

Like Zamir, Aras also adopted the idea that people in Switzerland had hobbies and he touches upon his hobby after he is invited, via an open prompt, to talk about his life after arriving in Switzerland. The hobby he refers to – skiing – is a typical leisure activity in Switzerland, and he learned to ski with a Swiss friend and his mother. This activity also represents a break with the types of sport he was possibly involved in Syria. At the end of his account of his new hobby, he starts to address the theme of independence.

Aras: Because I live alone now, I am more independent, because I'm alone in one room or, and no one, (.) no one takes care of me, or now there's no one in the house who's responsible for me, so I'm just independent, (.) I have to do everything, (.) make decisions, organise things independently, like a grown-up, or I have to set the alarm clock and (.) get up early in the morning and really just do everything, (..) manage everything independently.
(2)

This passage gives the impressions that Aras is struggling with the requirements of independence, which are new to him since he moved into his own flat. He emphasises he is alone now – no one is looking after him or is responsible for him, and the onus is on him to become independent in this context. In Aras' case, independence is not something he seems to have chosen himself, it is rather a fate that has been thrust upon him. At the same time, he implies that independence for him is the expression of leading an adult life and that he himself is not yet an adult but still has to make decisions and organise his life “like a grown-up”. In response to follow-up questions, Aras confirms that he is finding it difficult to meet this expectation of independence and he compares this new experience with his life in his country of origin.

Aras: Yes, when I was still in Syria, my parents were responsible for me (.), they were just (.) there for me, or they just did everything for me, cooked,

and also bought things (.), so I just didn't have to worry , and (.), and when I left Syria, (.) emigrated, or when I went away, or (.), then I came to Switzerland, (.) so, in Switzerland I have no idea, a really weird feeling, or a new life, (.) an independent life, or (.) like a grown-up life. (2)

Here, Aras contrasts the carefree childhood he experienced in Syria, made possible by his parents who “did everything”, with his new life in Switzerland, which he associates with expectations of independence. Here again, he sees independence as the expression of leading an adult life and associates it with a “weird feeling”. At the beginning of the interview, therefore, Aras is describing first and foremost the difficulties he sees as connected with his feeling that he has had to take on the responsibility for his life too soon. In contrast to Zamir, Aras' flight to Switzerland coincides temporally with the beginning of the requirement for him to lead an adult life. In this respect, it is not surprising that Aras cites a cluster of requirements that ensue from him being an adolescent and a refugee.

Aras: You have to be in Switzerland for at least five years, (.) be able to speak the language, (.) Level B1 or around that, (.) then you can move into status B (..) and you have to have an apprenticeship position, (.) you have to work. (14)

Aras articulates very clearly in this passage the feeling of being faced with a multitude of integration requirements that he has to fulfil. Central to these requirements is the goal of reaching residential status B, which provides a certain level of security – at all events, more than status F,⁵ which Aras attained shortly after arriving in Switzerland and still retains, just like most of the young people in his situation (Scherr/Breit 2020). Along with being in Switzerland for a certain amount of time and having an appropriate level of language skills, he cites vocational training and having a job as the necessary conditions he must fulfil in order to acquire the desired residence permit. Aras, however, is not at that point yet, as he goes on to explain:

Aras: [Without status B] we just have to, (.) do without and just, (.) (.) just fight (I: What do you mean by “fight”?) develop yourself further or (.) just keep going to school and trying (.) just to make progress yourself or (.) do something with school or, (.) if you can speak the language when you go to school, or (.) then you'll cope better, too. (16)

We can conclude from Aras' statements that he is currently still very far off the opportunities afforded by status B (e.g. travel) and that, in his eyes, he needs to

⁵ Refugees whose application for asylum was declined, but who are tolerated temporarily were associated with residential status F by which they are not allowed to leave the country. After some years, they can change to status B, which represents a permission to reside in Switzerland and to travel to foreign countries.

concentrate on doing without and putting in a lot of effort. Here, he presents school and acquiring language skills as areas in which he has to try his hardest to “make progress” or “cope better”. Aras chooses to use the metaphor of “fighting” here in order to emphasise the existential dimension of the developmental responsibility demanded by integration. With regard to establishing his capacity to act in the reception context of Switzerland, he must practice renunciation. At the same time, he must adopt an adaptable attitude towards the asylum system and the associated integration requirements of the reception context. Aras accordingly develops a fighting spirit that opens up possibilities for action for him. Only successful education and the competent acquisition of the hegemonic language enable Aras to have a future-oriented perspective of staying in Switzerland (Mörger/Rieker 2021). When Aras talks about his family, it becomes clear that he sees integration not only as his responsibility as a refugee but above all as an adolescent refugee.

Aras: My family is just, well, they're in Syria (..) and they want to stay there and not come to Switzerland, (.) no idea why. (.) I told them, once, "Come to Switzerland", and then they said "No we don't want to" [...] of course, they're not as young as me, they're older people, they're around forty, between forty and fifty or so (.) and, erm, they can, (.) well, I'm sure they'll have difficulties or (.) with integrating or with the language. (12)

This passage gives the impression that Aras is torn between the desire for his parents to come to Switzerland like him so that they can live together as a family again and the understanding that it would be (too) difficult for his parents, as “older people”, to fulfil the requirements. He assumes they will have problems with integration and language acquisition. This suggests a generational demarcation, for although Aras as an adolescent is willing to fight to achieve integration, he knows he cannot expect the same of older people such as his parents. A little later, he explains precisely what it is that he sees as difficult in this respect:

Aras: They just feel they are free there. (.) of course, it's not safe, or (.) of course, there's a war there, (.) but after all, they were born there and they have a handle on everything, (.) they're allowed to drive, they're allowed (.) to do anything they like, (.) and if they come to Switzerland, (.) they'll just be refugees or they'll have to (.) go into a shelter somewhere they don't want to go or (.) they would feel bad there or (.) going into a shelter at the age of fifty or, (.) and (.) hey, that just wouldn't work, (.) and in the end, Switzerland will say "Yes we'll give you status F, you just have to eat and drink", huh, somehow they don't want that or it's just (.) unpleasant (.) and, above all, my father is, (.) just has a lot of stuff there or (.) he has a lot of (.) assets or lots of fields (.) he has two thousand olive trees (.) that belong to him (.) and also a flat in town that belongs to him, (.) a house in the village, (.) everything, (.) and a tractor, and so on, (.) which all costs

a lot of money, so (.) he doesn't just want to leave it there and come to Switzerland. (13)

According to Aras, his parents are established in their home country; as adults and property owners, they have many freedoms that make their lives worth living despite the war. In this respect, he acknowledges it would be unthinkable for them to live in Switzerland as refugees with the residential status he himself holds: "That just wouldn't work." From his parents' point of view, which Aras can understand, his own living conditions in Switzerland – living in a shelter, merely eating and sleeping – seem unbearable. Whereas he still believes he can improve his situation and achieve integration by fighting on, he does not see any comparable perspective on the part of his parents. In Syria they "have a handle on everything", whereas he himself, to use Zamir's words, is aiming to "get a handle on everything" here. Against this background, Aras sees the integration of refugees as affording very different opportunities to members of different generations in terms of meeting the perceived integration requirements. Added to this is the experience of the distinct, generation-specific necessities of integration into "adult life" so clearly described here by Aras.

5 Conclusion

In the interviews with UMR who live in shelters or with foster families in Switzerland, it is striking how willing they are to take on the challenges posed by the integration requirements. In doing so, they demonstrate extensive acceptance of the new environment with its specific rules and practices, sometimes almost giving the impression they are undergoing "epiphanies", as reported in the context of a conversion. In this respect, some young people imply they no longer understand how they were able to live under the conditions in their home country or transit country, i.e. living homeless on the streets, eking out a living by doing odd jobs or engaging in criminal activities, or not eating regular meals (see Mörge/Rieker 2021). Although there is no fundamental questioning of this acceptance of the host context, sometimes the accounts include overtones of ambivalence. For example, some young people express regret that they do not have the freedom to watch films rated 18 or drive a motorbike here or they dream of earning money from tuning cars illegally later on. This confirms existing findings that demonstrate an extensive orientation towards the cultural ideas of native peers (Schwittek 2021), whereas there is no evidence that the young people are striving for approval primarily by undertaking illegal work or that they wish to live by the standards they experienced in their countries of origin (Liebel 1999). When they talk about illegal activities in their interviews, they seem to be primarily focused on the fun connected with these and they often pass critical comment on the standards of normality they experienced in their countries of origin when these do not corre-

spond to the prevailing norms in Switzerland. The theme of independence is also very present in the young people's descriptions: Independence is experienced as a requirement (see Lips/Gesang 2021) that is actively accepted (Hargasser 2014) and can be associated with an early assumption of responsibility in the country of origin and during the flight from there (Detemple 2015).

In this contribution, we looked at two examples of such descriptions in detail and reconstructed various aspects of experiences of integration as identified by the young refugees. In his interview, Zamir makes clear that he himself feels primarily responsible for his integration. He has to "give it his all", find a hobby, organise his life independently, and thereby give other people, i.e. his fellow pupils and his foster family, the opportunity to get used to him – and this is also a means by which he can develop his sense of belonging and explore the courses of action open to him (Riegel 2009). Aras, too, is responding to the requirement to make independent decisions and "fight" to achieve a better residential status and integration by putting in a lot of effort at school and acquiring language skills. In Aras' case, it also becomes clear that he thinks these integration requirements are reasonable expectations to be placed on himself as an adolescent but not on his parents or other adults. In his opinion, these older people cannot be expected to learn a new language, lead a restricted life in shared accommodation, or achieve other forms of integration. In this respect, integration is framed and accepted by the young people, on the one hand, as a generation-specific challenge; on the other hand, the young people have to work hard to meet the social and political requirements for integration, which is shown by the fact they view their efforts to integrate as a fight for recognition and belonging (Lems 2019).

The very different framing of expectations of integration in the accounts of Zamir and Aras seems plausible in the context of their different biographical backgrounds: Whereas Zamir had already been forced to make autonomous decisions and organise his life independently while he was living in his home country and while he was fleeing from there, in Aras' case this process of becoming independent coincided with his flight from his home country. In this respect, it is understandable that Aras tends to emphasise fighting and putting in a lot of effort in this connection (Mörjen/Rieker 2021), whereas Zamir's descriptions tend to imply a certain level of confidence and a playful approach to the challenges. His thus far successful fulfilment of the integration requirements may also have contributed to his life in Switzerland, which has been characterised by phases of instability and experiences of alienation and rejection in relation to the Swiss people. Due to his continued strong bond and communication with his parents, Aras' experience of integration is one of a generation-specific challenge, whereas this comparative yardstick seems to be less present in Zamir's account.

Against this background, we conclude that integration in the context of migration and flight is often reduced in the discourse to the dimension of cultural assimilation (Pries 2015). This does not do justice to the complexity of processes of integration, which are also connected with different challenges in terms of socio-

structural inclusion, e.g. finding a job or a training placement (Scherr/Breit 2020; Huke 2021). Furthermore, there are generation-specific dimensions of integration in the case of young people, i.e. the requirement to enter into adult life. Young refugees must therefore achieve cultural and socio-structural integration as well as generational integration; these are interwoven with one another and, due to their complexity, are not easy to distinguish.

In addition to the analysis presented here, it would also be interesting to include members of other age groups in comparative analyses of experiences of generation-specific integration requirements. It may also be helpful in these analyses to take into account practices of dealing with integration requirements, as this would also enable us to consider the interactive production or avoidance of integration. In this way, we could differentiate and hone the concept of integration in its specific dimensions, a concept which is often subject to over-generalisation within the debate.

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Flight and Displacement from Syria: Why Regional History and Family Figurations Matter

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1 Introduction

In an article first published in English in 1987 with the title “The Retreat of Sociologists into the Present”, Norbert Elias noted that sociology, in the course of its institutionalization and specialization as a discipline, had increasingly come to focus on immediate problems in the present. Elias was not criticizing this interest in acute problems as such, and even saw it as a positive aspect of the development of the discipline. But he felt that what was missing was an analysis of the emergence and development of social problems over time. The introductory sentences to his clear plea for a diachronic perspective in sociology contain a small, but interesting, detail: almost as an afterthought, Elias describes the retreat into the present as a “flight from the past” (Elias 1987: 223). Neither here, nor in the rest of the article, does Elias explain clearly what he means by this expression. But for us, as sociologists interested in the significance and the consequences of processes of flight and displacement for social constellations in different regional contexts, it serves as an impulse for reflection: according to our observation, the tendencies

Becker, J./Hinrichsen, H./Worm, A. (2023): Flight and Displacement from Syria: Why Regional History and Family Figurations Matter. In: Pohn-Lauggas, M./Tonah, S./Worm, A. (Eds.): Exile/Flight/Persecution. Sociological Perspectives on Processes of Violence. Göttingen: Göttingen University Press, 145–160. <https://doi.org/10.17875/gup2023-2449>

described by Elias seem to be particularly strong in research on flight, displacement and other forms of migration linked to violence and armed conflicts.¹

At first sight, it might seem that flight processes are very firmly anchored in the present, and that calling for regarding them from a socio-historical or processual perspective is less important than focussing on the acute, often precarious living situations of people who have fled violence and conflict. Accordingly, research in the social sciences on present-day migration phenomena seems to be quite strongly influenced by shifting attention cycles of public discourses and the need for political action. Perhaps it is for this reason that few studies on flight in the social sciences adopt a *socio-historical* perspective, despite the importance of this phenomenon in world history (see also the article by Pries in this volume). And yet empirical analyses that take socio-historical and biographical processes into account show how necessary this is, because flight processes have constitutive elements that point backwards from the present – flight in the present is also flight in the light of the past. We believe that there is a need to counteract the “flight from the past” in sociology, especially in the case of research on flight and displacement.

In this article, we will show how a figurational and biographical approach can contribute to the empirical implementation of a diachronic sociological view of the experiences of refugees (Becker 2021; Worm 2019; Rosenthal/Bahl/Worm 2017; Rosenthal 2022). Combining a biographical approach in the social constructivist or socio-phenomenological tradition with figurational sociology following Norbert Elias has been discussed and empirically applied by Bogner/Rosenthal (2017). An important aspect of this combination is that it enables us to reconstruct flight courses in their processuality. This means reconstructing displacement in its entanglement with processes within the family history and the regional history. In the tradition of figurational sociology, we always try to reconstruct the interdependence networks of which the biographers are a part, the groups or groupings they belong to, the power chances bound up with these belongings and how they change.

How strongly the migration courses of refugees and their experiences are structured by their biographically constituted interdependence networks, and especially their family figurations, will be shown in the following contribution through the example of the biography and migration history of a young Syrian from Damascus.

¹ This article is a translated and revised version of a paper previously published in German (Becker/Hinrichsen/Worm 2021). It is based on two research projects on which the authors worked. In the DFG project *Biographies of migrants from Syria and West Africa in Brazil and in Germany – Processes of inclusion and participation in the context of so-called irregular migration* (2019–2023; RO 827/21:1), participation processes of ‘irregularized’ migrants in Germany and Brazil are reconstructed in the light of different family histories and individual biographies. In the DFG project *Dynamic figurations of refugees, migrants, and longtime residents in Jordan since 1946: Between peaceable and tension-ridden co-existence?* (2017–2022; RO 827/20-1), the central question was how relations between the different groupings in Amman developed after the founding of the Jordanian state in 1946, and how they have been changed or modified by the arrival of new groupings of migrants, for instance from Palestine, Iraq, Kuwait or Syria.

Najib Haddad, as we will call him, came to Amman to escape from the Syrian civil war. Our reconstruction of his life history shows how migrations are shaped by the entanglement of collective and family history processes. In Najib's case this includes his migration route, the process of his becoming established in Jordan, and how he reached decisions connected with his migration, such as his decision not to continue migration from Jordan, or his refusal to consider a possible return to Syria in the medium term. Like many other interviews which we have conducted with refugees in the context of various projects (see for instance Worm 2019), in the biographical interview with him, Najib strongly focussed on his precarious present situation, which made it difficult for him to narrate about his past life. Nevertheless, we will use this case to show how important it is in the analysis to go beyond the present, by making a detailed reconstruction of the interviewee's biography and its embedment in collective and family history processes. This is necessary in order to understand and explain the migration processes, decisions and experiences of refugees. In this way, we can investigate many different forms of refugee migration that find no place in established approaches to refugee studies, which focus on the present and on refugees who are registered or categorized as such within state and non-state institutions (such as refugee camps or asylum procedures). In Najib's case it was socio-historical developments more than 40 years ago – within Syria, but also between Syria and Jordan – that influenced, or even determined, his family's flight from the civil war after 2011.

2 Migration of Refugees to the Urban Space of Amman

After 2011, increasing numbers of people fled to Jordan from the civil war in Syria. The Jordanian authorities completely closed the border with Syria in April 2015. At that time, over 650,000 Syrian refugees were registered by UNHCR in Jordan. The Jordanian government stated that the number was much higher with an estimated 1.3 million (Lenner 2016: 11–13). Jordan is not a signatory of the Geneva Refugee Convention of 1951 or its additional 1967 protocol, but an agreement between UNHCR and the Jordanian government, made in 1998 and updated in 2014, regulates the legal framework for the protection of refugees. Legal regulation and greater control by the state over the daily realities of refugees, for example in respect of residence and work permits, with increasingly restrictive effects on their lives (see Lenner/Turner 2018), is thus a recent development in Jordan. But migration to Jordan on a large scale, and in particular the arrival of refugees fleeing from wars and armed conflicts, is not a new phenomenon.

In different phases of its history since becoming independent in 1946, Jordan has received large numbers of refugees, especially from Palestine/Israel, Iraq and Syria, who left their homes in the context of violent conflicts. When considering the situation today, we must remember that the population of Jordan rose from

around 375,000 (Massad 2001: 233) to about 8,000,000² between 1947/48 and the present, one of the reasons being the different large-scale immigration movements, mainly refugee movements. The migration movements are also reflected in the development of Amman, the capital, where the number of inhabitants grew from about 70,000 to over four million between 1948 and 2018. Different groupings from (what was later) Syria also moved into the territory of what is today Jordan during earlier socio-historical phases (see for instance Wilson 1987; Schayegh 2017).

We can take it that these socio-historical migration movements still heavily influence the migration courses and daily realities of refugees who arrive in Amman today: on the one hand, through the translocal or transnational networks and family histories most of the inhabitants of Amman have and which are connected to these earlier migration movements, and, on the other hand, through the way different groupings of migrants live together in the city. And this can be seen as a more general feature of the region: such transnational and translocal networks are very important for mobility in the Middle East (see Becker 2021; Chatty 2010; Gesemann 1999; Shami 1996; Worm 2020). This also applies to the relevance of existing Jordanian-Syrian networks for the arrival of Syrian refugees after 2011: “These settled Syrians are now expected to help ‘new’ Syrian refugees in Jordan by engaging them in commercial activities or providing connections to get a Jordanian sponsor” (Bekkers 2017: 12). However, these networks and their genesis in the Middle East have not been carefully studied from the perspective of migration sociology.

These networks have emerged from a variety of different migration movements, in which flight, political persecution and expulsion often overlap with economic motives or marriage migration. As a result, it is not easy to discern the transnational networks and mobility spaces established by refugees at different times. We discovered during our research that there are earlier migration movements to Jordan which were triggered by political dynamics but disguised as labour or economic migration, or in which political persecution was the dominant factor. To the latter category, for instance, belongs the flight of several thousand members of the Muslim Brotherhood, who were persecuted in Syria from the late 1970s onwards. After 2011, these migrants, or their families, were a significant factor in the genesis of a certain type of Syrian-Jordanian networks. As we will show below, Najib’s flight and that of his family also builds on the transnational network which was created in the framework of this earlier refugee movement.

In our study of the significance of these transnational networks which have been built up over many years, our focus is not on those refugees who have been placed in camps in the north of the country, and who have attracted the attention of NGOs, the media and academic research. Although only about 20 percent of

² Estimate for July 2015, World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/jo.html> <07.01.2016>.

the over 650,000 registered Syrian refugees were accommodated in camps during the period when we gathered our empirical data (UNHCR 2018), less interest has been shown in the migration courses and perspectives of those refugees who live in urban areas and who are more strongly integrated in these transnational networks. This includes Najib and his family.

The concentration on refugee camps, with the associated risk of overlooking such transnational networks, is due to the fact that the focus within refugee studies is on people who have been categorized and officially registered as refugees. This has rightly been criticized with the argument that it reproduces the interests of the state in maintaining public order (see Bakewell 2008). With our reconstruction of Najib's biography, we will try to counter this tendency and show the advantages of examining in detail the historical context of his migration. This case is representative of the way refugee migration is shaped by regional history and family bonds, with their concrete influence on the decisions made by refugees and (re-)establishment processes in the country of arrival.

3 Refugee Migration from Syria to Jordan in the Context of Family Bonds and Collective History – The Case of Najib

3.1 Self-Presentation and the Socio-Historical Context of Najib's Birth

We met Najib³ through members of a loose network of Syrian refugees. We had already conducted a biographical-narrative interview with Yunis, a close friend of the same age, at which he was present. Although he must have known from this that we were interested in the whole of his life story and that of his family, in his self-presentation he concentrated on events since 2012, in other words his arrival and establishment in Amman. He said very little about his life before coming to Jordan. In the context of various projects, we have repeatedly observed in interviews that people who have recently left their homes to seek safety elsewhere find it difficult to talk about their life before this event, because they are in the process of forming 'new' contacts and positioning themselves in relation to the continuing dynamics of the conflict they have escaped from (see Worm 2019). These people frequently feel obliged to exercise great self-control in their daily lives, so that persuading them to put this control aside is a (methodological) challenge for the researcher, more so than with interviews in other contexts (see Rosenthal/Bahl/Worm 2017). However, in Najib's case, with patient follow-up questions and by spreading the interview over three meetings, he did gradually embark on remembering and story-telling processes. We argue that in order to enable refugees – or people in similar

³ The interview with Najib covers a total of six and a half hours. It was conducted by Hendrik Hinrichsen in Arabic with the help of Dolly Abdul Karim as interpreter in the course of three meetings in March 2018.

precarious situations – to access memories of their past lives, it is important to spend time with them and make repeated efforts to stimulate (biographical) narratives. Additional socio-historical research that enables us to embed cases in their context increases our chances of going beyond patterns of self-presentation that are focussed on the situation in the present, and helps us to reconstruct courses of migration in their complex entanglement with the dynamics of personal biography, family relations and regional history.

Najib's family on his father's side lived for several generations in a province which in the south bordered on the city of Damascus. The members of the family originally cultivated fields. In the course of the past few decades, the area has become increasingly (sub)urbanized. Najib's father (born in 1953) studied mathematics and then worked as a teacher. His career reflects the change in social structure that is characteristic of this period. This was driven by the government's 'modernization campaign' and expansion of the state apparatus, which started in the 1950s/1960s, especially in the education sector (see Hinnebusch 2001). More and more people from rural peasant milieus became wage-earners in the public sector (see Perthes 1990: 203 ff.). For many people this offered a chance for upward social mobility, but at the same time, especially from the 1970s onwards, it gave rise to tensions between members of the rural milieus who had become proletarianized but who profited little from the change, on the one hand, and the 'new' grouping of established government employees who were becoming more powerful, on the other (Perthes 1990: 205). In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Najib's father became active in Islamic groups that opposed the Syrian regime. At the beginning of the 1980s, he was arrested during a massive campaign of repression, which culminated in the so-called massacre of Hama in 1982,⁴ and spent eleven years in prison. This campaign of repression was tabooed in the official Syrian discourse, just like the massacre, in which estimates of the number of people who died vary between 10,000 and 40,000 (Lefèvre 2013: 128). The father's imprisonment was also dethematized as far as possible within the family (see below). But it was an open secret that political prisoners in Syria were subjected to torture, given inadequate food, and suffered the anguish of not knowing what would happen to them. In addition, their families were not informed about the fate of the prisoners.

Unlike his father's family, Najib's family on his mother's side can be described as urban. The family lives in Damascus, and is descended from the milieu of self-employed Sunni craftsmen, although most family members today are engaged in trade. This is a milieu which Volker Perthes (1990: 195–199) has called the 'self-employed middle class'. Perthes described the financially stable, or improving,

⁴ The massacre of Hama in February 1982 was the culmination of conflicts between the Syrian regime and oppositional Sunni groups. This is connected with a number of attacks by radical opposition groups on government institutions and persons, and with the increasing oppression of Sunni opposition groups by the government and violent collective punishments in the late 1970s and early 1980s. For example, in 1980 a decree was issued making membership of the Muslim Brotherhood punishable by death following a (failed) attempt to assassinate President Hafiz al-Assad (see Gerlach 2015: 135).

situation of this class in the 1970s. He added that the urban members of this class came from a conservative Islamic milieu, were often religiously engaged, and were initially among the strongest critics of the Assad regime. While over the years one part of the petty bourgeoisie – particularly in Damascus – came to terms with the regime, another part positioned itself close to the Islamic opposition, for which it was an important source of funding. A brother of Najib's mother was also a member of Islamic opposition groups. However, he managed to evade arrest and escaped to Jordan, probably at the beginning of the 1980s, where he settled in Amman. In the literature, there are occasional references to Syrians, especially those close to the Syrian Muslim Brothers, who fled to Jordan in the early 1980s (see for instance Lefèvre 2013: 165 or Dorai 2018: 115). This must have involved several thousand people, although we have not been able to find any more detailed reports, even in Arabic, of their arrival and establishment in Jordan.⁵ However, in the frame of the Syrian civil war, these refugees assumed an important role for incoming Syrians, which we will discuss in detail below.

It is possible that Najib's father and his mother's brother met each other through their engagement in opposition groups. His parents got married just a few months after his father, who was 40 years old at the time, was released from prison in 1993. It seems likely that the marriage was arranged by members of his mother's family. Najib's mother was born in 1965 and worked as a nurse. In accordance with the patrilocal marriage norms, she went to live with her husband's family, but the family rejected her. This was due not only to her urban origin and the associated markers of difference (see Becker 2017), and inheritance disputes, but also to different political positionings: parts of her husband's family, the family of Najib's father, had close connections to the Syrian regime or were at least loyal to the system. There is little doubt that it was problematic for the family to accept not only Najib's mother, but also his father following his release from prison. An important dynamic in Najib's biography is the need to find his own position within a doubly conflict-ridden web of family relationships (conflict between his father's family and his mother's family, and conflict between his father and members of his own family of origin).

Najib was born in 1994 as the first child of his parents. They then had three daughters, and only after nine years another son. Najib's life was affected early on by his position as the first-born son. His father did not work as a teacher after returning from prison, but took on a job that was physically very demanding, although his state of health was probably poor as a result of torture and neglect when he was in prison. After an accident at work, he was partially paralysed

⁵ In one report, these refugees from Syria described themselves as travellers or migrants: "They did not register as refugees but called themselves *muhajiraat* (migrants/travellers)" (Ansari 2014). Up until 1984, Syrians could settle in Jordan without having to seek official permission (Chatelard 2010), and settlement continued to be comparatively easy until the beginning of the Syrian civil war. They could apply for Jordanian citizenship after fifteen years (or it could be granted by the king at any time) (Massad 2001: 41–42).

for two years and unable to work. His wife was forced to give up her job as a nurse to look after him. During this phase, the nuclear family was dependent on financial support from relatives of Najib's mother. His maternal uncle in Jordan had succeeded in making a living for himself there, and we assume that it was he who bore the main financial burden. But as a child or adolescent, Najib also had to help by taking on temporary jobs. The fact that his ailing father had abandoned his career as a teacher to do manual work, and was accepting support from Najib's mother's family, explains why Najib at this time felt close to his mother's family and their ideas – and estranged from his father's family. Certainly, this was also linked to a clear mandate for Najib to compensate for his father's loss of status resulting from his political involvement, so that Najib would later be able to provide for the family. These aspects were later to play a decisive role in Najib's life in Amman.

3.2 How Najib Experienced the Protest and Conflict Dynamics in Syria after the Spring of 2011

Najib was twelve (in 2006) when he first discovered that before he was born his father had been a political prisoner for many years. By chance he found a document relating to this among other papers in the house:

“I took the document and asked what it was, he took it and hid it and told me that he had been put in jail and so, that was one of the things that shocked me, if I hadn't seen the document he wouldn't have told me ... I was afraid they would come and take him away again ... so after this document I never set foot in a government office or police station again ... at home it was forbidden to talk about it, of all my siblings I was the only one who knew it and if I hadn't seen the paper he wouldn't have told me and later when I tried to ask him questions he told me nothing, not allowed in this house, no one is allowed to talk about this matter, he had not even said anything to our relatives about it.”

This passage gives us an insight into the way the political involvement of the family members was treated. The familial dialogue is characterized by complete dethematization of his imprisonment and political involvement, not only in the presence of the children, but also in the presence of other adults. This points to the family's great fear that family members might be watched or interrogated, and thus to the ubiquitousness of the Syrian regime. Thus, the practices of the regime not only resulted in traumatization of those political opponents who suffered intolerable conditions in Syrian prisons, but also affected the following generations through their dethematization. Evidently, Najib became aware of the serious consequences which political or oppositional involvement can have for everyday realities and relationships within the family. At the same time, as also shown in the quotation, due to the tabooing of this topic in the family he not only distanced himself clearly

from the regime, but also felt a strong *individual* pressure to lead his own life in a way that would avoid repression and persecution with their individual and familial consequences. For a long time, he took care to repress his own feelings of anger and felt under pressure to conform because of the family's fear of the regime.

After completing secondary school, Najib took up a degree course in Damascus. His first year as a student coincided with the beginning of the protests against the Syrian regime. Najib took part in demonstrations. Like many of the demonstrators, he covered his face and initially he didn't tell anyone that he had been there. He says that during the protests he thought of his father: "I had hate in me, why did you lock him up for eleven years, and when the revolution started in Syria I was nearly 18 and I was one of the first to join the demonstrations." Najib's participation in the protests became overlaid by the increasingly apparent differences and diverging political loyalties within his extended family: in 2011 his father was arrested again and imprisoned for two weeks, and Najib thinks that he was denounced by his own brother.

When the conflict in Syria escalated, the question of who was on whose side became acute in the family. There followed a complete rupture between the family of Najib's father, on the one hand, and his nuclear family and his mother's family, on the other hand. All the members of his nuclear family shared the views of the family of his mother. This break between the two parts of the family had significant effects on Najib's subsequent decisions and actions in the context of his migration. Najib continued to take part in demonstrations and was arrested towards the end of 2011. The security officers detained him overnight and he was kicked and beaten in the police station. During the interview, Najib showed us photos of his wounds. After this he stayed away from demonstrations. Meanwhile, the fighting, which was becoming increasingly militarized, was approaching the area where the family lived. Najib moved with his siblings and his mother to some of her relatives, but his father decided to stay behind. Shortly afterwards he was killed by the advancing troops or militiamen. Najib was told on the telephone only that his father had been injured. He immediately hurried back to the town that was now occupied by government troops or militiamen:

"I came to a place which they didn't know about, in our neighbourhood there are lots of byways, I went in and I saw snipers so I hid the car in another place and walked under the trees, until I got to where people were gathered, there I found about 18 martyrs lying side by side, then I saw him and I started to cry, I went into the mosque they were laid out in the mosque and I saw where he was and held him in my arms, he had been dead since morning."

During the interview, Najib showed us photos of his dead father and of the house and surroundings that had been destroyed by bombs. At night he had to bury him:

“Nobody except me knew about it, my friends called me from inside from a different place, so the security men came and let me at one o’clock in the night, it was very late, let me enter the cemetery with a gun pointed at my head, I had to sign a paper that my father had died from natural causes, not by a gunshot, that he had died in a hospital or from a heart attack or whatever, and let me bury him with my own hands so I went down and buried him with my own hands.”

For Najib, the murder of his father meant that he was now (again) obliged to assume responsibility for the family. He was about 18 years old. The fact that he ignored his family’s ‘Syrian’ past in the following years, and also in the interview, and his failure to come to terms with the death of his father, can be seen as a result of this heavy responsibility. Najib seems to have been aware of his new position directly after the death of his father:

“When I went back to my family and they saw me I didn’t cry in front of them, I made an effort and was patient until they had calmed down and gone to bed, when I went to bed for example I cried in the night yes, I cried when I was alone, I couldn’t cry in front of other people ... so now I’m responsible for the family, I am now the oldest, if I don’t keep going it would affect the whole family, they wouldn’t know what to do, a problem for the whole family, that’s how it is, I’m the oldest, I am the one who has to hold them together.”

In the context of escalating violence in the area where they lived, this change in Najib’s position within the family figuration played a decisive role in the process of fleeing to Jordan with his family.

3.3 Migration to Jordan

In the period following the death of his father, Najib fled to Jordan with the remaining members of his nuclear family. They first stayed with his mother’s brother in Amman, the uncle of Najib who had left Syria in the 1980s. Today this uncle lives with his nuclear family in a middle-class district of Amman. In the first few weeks after their arrival, Najib, his mother and his siblings lived in his uncle’s house. The uncle’s familial and neighbourhood network played a very important role in helping the family to become established in Amman. The uncle helped Najib and his family to find temporary accommodation and later a home of their own, and he organized various jobs for Najib. The resources of his uncle’s network in Amman opened up opportunities for Najib to gain a foothold in the city, which he strove to profit from. Najib and his family were able to rely on the solidarity of people in the immediate neighbourhood who actively helped them to get settled in Jordan. Najib speaks about how they found accommodation with the help of

this neighbourhood community. Their Jordanian landlord did not charge them the full rent.

While the existence of this familial network is of great importance for him and his family, Najib is again faced with a constellation in which no one is allowed to speak about the political dimension of his uncle's migration. Like Najib's father, his uncle refuses to say anything about his former political activism. Najib only knows that his uncle has lived in Amman for at least thirty years and was unable to return to Syria for political reasons. Even today, his uncle refuses to speak about this. Thus, despite all the support he received, for Najib the phase of getting resettled in Jordan also involved struggling to hide parts of the family's past and parts of his own biography.

In part this was also due to the ambivalent attitudes towards Syrian refugees which we were able to reconstruct during our research in Amman. Besides positive ascriptions, such as that the Syrians work hard and are polite, we also heard accusations in different environments that 'the Syrians' take jobs away from 'the Jordanians', so that the government gets less money, and that they are conservative. A frequent comment we heard is that Syrians make their children marry at an unduly young age. Experiences of being confronted with such ascriptions are probably shared between Syrian refugees. Najib was repeatedly confronted in his everyday life with they-images that were in stark contrast to the way his family was received in his uncle's neighbourhood. He was subjected to insults especially in taxis (which are a common means of transport in Amman). As a result he increasingly made an effort to hide his Syrian accent in public places.

As if this was not stressful enough for Najib, he was striving at the same time to do justice to his not new, but now even more serious duty to provide for the family, by taking advantage of the opportunities provided by his uncle's network. During the day he attended a course in journalism at an international training institute. In the evening or at night he worked in restaurant kitchens, and at the weekend as a porter. In this way he could help to pay for the maintenance and education of his younger sisters, whose schooling had been interrupted when they left Syria.

In 2014, as for many other Syrian refugees in Jordan, Najib began to ask himself whether he should stay in Jordan, or whether he should try to move on to some other region, such as Europe, with the aim of settling there. This was a much discussed topic especially among the refugees of his own age he met at the training institute. Many of his friends and fellow students – Najib speaks of at least ten – left Jordan, and even one of his uncle's sons migrated to Germany. In the summer of 2014, Najib started making plans to leave. The idea was to fly to Turkey with a group of friends from the training institute, and to try to get to Europe from there. He started preparing by getting money together for the journey and renewing his passport. But shortly before going to buy the ticket, he discovered his mother, who knew of his plans, in tears, so that he suddenly had doubts about his decision. At that time, his brother was only ten years old. Najib had to decide whether to set

out on the planned journey, or whether to buy a good laptop and try to make a career for himself in Jordan. He was already an adult, and thus would not have had the right to be reunited with his mother and his siblings in Europe. When he suddenly received an offer of a job as an NGO internet editor, he decided to stay in Jordan – also for the sake of his mother, who did not want him to leave. Today he is formally a free lancer, although he is secretly paid a monthly salary by a firm – an administrative trick because Syrians are prohibited from working in this sector.

In the situation of trying to decide whether to continue his migration, his family history constituted a burden and a mandate for Najib. On the one hand, the support he received from his uncle allowed him to continue establishing himself in Amman, a privilege not enjoyed by other families. In Amman he was able to provide for his family. In other words, the flight of his uncle from Syria over thirty years previously influences Najib's life today, and gives the family a kind of security. On the other hand, Najib once again finds himself in the position of breadwinner or head of the family, which seriously limits his freedom of decision.

4 Conclusion

Our reconstruction of Najib's biography shows the high degree to which the decisions he makes in connection with his migration from Syria to Jordan are intertwined with past constellations in his family history and with collective history. It is hardly possible to understand the family's decision to flee, or how they experience their migration and its consequences, if we only consider the present phase of 'arriving and getting settled in Jordan', or the present context of the (civil) war in Syria. To understand all the aspects of this migration, we need to consider the whole course of Najib's biography and family history, the reconstruction of which requires a knowledge of the family dynamics and regional history. In this way it is possible to adopt a socio-historical perspective, as understood by Elias, in research on processes of flight and displacement, and to avoid 'fleeing from the past'. The split in Najib's extended family mirrors the entanglement of political, socio-economic and other social dynamics in Syria. Against the background of this split, and the taboo on speaking about the political involvement of his father and his uncle, Najib had to negotiate his own position within the family figurations. This contributed significantly to shaping the process of flight from Syria, his interpretation of this process, his decision not to leave Amman and continue his migration, and the conditions of becoming socially established in the country of arrival. This background helps us to understand, for example, why Najib stayed in Jordan while many of his friends continued their migration.

For Najib, Amman is a place where existing (family) resources can be effectively mobilized, and where he has positive experiences of integration into a Jordanian environment (for instance through helpful neighbours and job opportunities). But

at the same time Najib has to struggle with legal and structural forms of discrimination (regulation of employment and ownership, mobility restrictions), as well as negative they-images and stigmatization ('Syrians take jobs away', having to hide his accent). Our analysis of the figurations in Amman shows that the homogenizing view of 'Syrian refugees', for instance, is not only a 'Western' view, but also that in a space that appears in various ways to be culturally similar to Syria, the relations between groupings are negotiated through hierarchizing discourses and different we- and they-images. These markers of differentiation, which bear witness to a growing national discourse in an environment of relatively young nation states, mean that Syrians are now regarded as 'Others', although in the past they were seen as sharing a common culture within the region known as Bilad ash-Sham (the Levant) or Greater Syria. Preoccupied with positioning himself against these they-images, Najib does not thematize the real complexity of the (forced) migration courses, and often traumatizing war experiences, in his family. In the foreground of his presentation are his efforts to establish himself in Amman and to provide for the family as the eldest son. Thinking about and coming to grips with the 'Syrian' past recedes into the background. This applies in particular to the topic of conflicts within the family, which led to a final rupture between the two sides of his family following his father's murder during the war.

The analysis of Najib's family history shows how transnational or translocal networks that are the result of earlier migrations or 'smaller' refugee movements can play a decisive role in shaping the migration of later refugees and helping them to get settled in the country of arrival. In the Jordanian context, this applies, for instance, to the former members of the Muslim Brotherhood who were forced to leave Syria in the 1980s and who were then able to support refugees from Syria who came to Jordan after 2011. This may be taken as an indication that refugee studies should not focus atomistically on those refugees who have recently arrived in the country, and who are supported for by supranational institutions such as the UN or NGOs, but should take into account the relations between different refugee groupings with a common or similar origin. However, for this it is necessary to "reconstruct the interrelationships between individual cases, and the figurations between different groupings, we-groups and organizations, and at the same time to analyse the changing asymmetrical power balances or power inequality between different groupings" (Rosenthal 2016: 19; transl. by A.W.). In this way, not fleeing from the past, a substantial contribution to the study of refugee migration can be made by using an approach based on figurational sociology and biographical research methods.

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Experiences, Expectations and Challenges of Return: Liberian Refugees in Ghana

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1 Introduction

Migration has been one topical issue that has occupied global discussion and attention for a very long time (UNPD 2009). Migration has been part of human history; people have migrated from one continent to the other, from country to country or internally, within the same country for many years. For instance, in 2019, international migration stood at 272 million which was 3.5% of the world's population (International Organisation for Migration (IOM) (2020). Human migration includes movement of people over long distances, including refugees, displaced persons, uprooted people, and economic migrants (IOM 2020). People often migrate for various reasons such as for better livelihoods, greater opportunities, improved security and to escape violent conflicts/war in their countries (Kallio 2016; UNDP 2009; Oglethorpe et al. 2007).

In Africa, the trend of international migration has not been that different from the global level. Millions of Africans migrate on daily basis. Earlier attempts to study migration patterns in Africa have shown a huge wave of human movement that even exceeded the global average (Russel et al. 1990). Data suggest that international migration in Africa increased from 15.1 million to 26.6 million between 2009 and 2019 which is a sharp increase (76%) compared to other major regions

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in the world (IOM 2020). This increasing trend of migration in Africa is attributed to extreme poverty, starvation, violence/civil wars and climate change (Flahaux/De Haas 2016). Major civil wars in the African continent such as the Rwandan Genocide, Liberian, Libyan and Ivoirian civil wars have resulted in migrations from these countries to seek refuge in neighbouring countries (Salehyan/Gleditsch 2006) and across the Mediterranean to Europe.

In the migration literature, the issue of “return migration” is often said to be the end of the migration cycle (Adepoju 2010). However, evidence suggests that there can be re-migration, especially back to the host community/country (Hirvonen/Helene 2015), such as in the case of the Liberian refugees in Ghana. Refugees who are often forced to migrate out of their country of residence as a result of violent conflict mostly expect that when the war ends, they could return home and live peacefully with their families and communities. However, this is often not the case. The return of refugees is often characterised by a lot of challenges as some are not able to reunite with their family members and settle in their communities. Some also find it very difficult to get jobs after their return to their original country whilst others even find it difficult to reintegrate because they are not able to relocate their homes or families or because of loss of culture. Also, the process of return migration comes with many fears, uncertainties and challenges (Setrana/Tonah/Asiedu 2018). The process of re-integration for migrants back to the former host country also comes with challenges such as unemployment, lack of accommodation and loss of culture. Thus, the processes of repatriation, return and re-integration for refugees/migrants come with many fears, hopes and experiences.

In Ghana, the Buduburam Refugee Camp was established in 1990 by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in collaboration with the Ghanaian Government to provide refuge (food and shelter) for displaced Liberians who were affected by the civil war in Liberia (Dzeamesi 2008). According to estimates by the Liberian Refugee Welfare Council and the Ghana Refugee Board, there were about 40,000 Liberians (men, women and children) residing in Ghana as refugees as of 2005 (Bortu 2009). Since 2003, Liberia has witnessed relative peace and an end to the war. The country has since held more than one peaceful democratic election including the 2017 presidential election where former President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf peacefully transferred power to George Weah. Following the return to peace in Liberia, the UNHCR launched a large-scale repatriation programme for the Liberian refugees in Ghana. Under this repatriation initiative from the host government (the Ghanaian Government) and UNHCR, about 10,000 Liberian refugees were repatriated to Liberia between April 2008 and March 2009 (Omata 2011). Again in 2012, a number of Liberian refugees were repatriated to Liberia.

However, many of the refugees from the Buduburam Refugee Camp that were repatriated to Liberia could not settle well in communities in their country of origin. Many of them encountered issues ranging from economic to security challenges that made life difficult for them after their return. As indicated by Boateng

and Hilton (2011), refugees returning to Liberia encountered a multitude of social, economic and psychological problems. According to Boateng and Hilton (2011), many repatriated refugees go back to countries where peace is fragile, security is tenuous, and the economy and infrastructure of the homeland are devastated and therefore have to return irregularly and quickly to ruined homelands and face many daunting challenges.

In light of the inability of many of the refugees to live in Liberia comfortably after their repatriation from Ghana many of them returned to the Buduburam Refugee Camp, (Boateng/Hilton 2011; Omata 2012). But their return to Ghana was not smooth either. Many of these returned migrants had difficulty in obtaining places to stay, work permits and jobs in general, coupled with discrimination from Ghanaian communities around the area. These factors prevented the return migrants from obtaining work in the local community (Hardgrove 2009). Their reintegration into the Ghanaian community thus came with many challenges and fears. Aside from local integration and repatriation (which in some cases was forced) as durable solutions, the Liberian refugees' option of resettlement in a third-country of refugees' choice has become difficult, if not impossible. Even their current status as 'refugees' is in contention as the host government and UNHCR claim to have ensured local integration and repatriation with the evocation of the Cessation Clause. This has led to the Ghanaian Government's intention to demolish the Buduburam Refugee Camp because the state claims it is a hub for "criminals and bad people" and that the status of Liberian refugees has ended (Cessation Clause) (Adogla-Bessa 2021).

Even though Article 34 of the UN Refugee Convention states that when refugees voluntarily return to their original home country is not immediately feasible, the country of Asylum should create temporary conditions for settlement or integration of the refugees into the community and also ensure their full participation in its social and economic life, the local integration of Liberian refugees has been challenging and difficult (Boateng/Hilton 2011). It is in the light of all this that, this chapter examines the lived experiences, hopes and expectations of return Liberian refugees in the Buduburam Refugee Camp in Ghana. The chapter further examines the challenges that the return refugees faced both in their return to their country of origin (Liberia) and back to Ghana in the process of reintegration.

This chapter proceeds as follows: the first part deals with the introduction. In the second section, we review literature highlighting theoretical and conceptual issues underpinning the study. This is followed by a discussion of the methodology adopted for the study. The next section is dedicated to the results and discussion of the findings. The final part draws a conclusion and makes some recommendations.

2 Review of Literature

2.1 Theorising Return Migration

Setrana and Tonah (2016) among many scholars have argued that return migration is not the end of the migration process as earlier thought. This is because there has been re-migration after the return. Therefore, the subject of return migration (including refugees to both origin communities/countries and host countries) has gained interesting debates and dimensions in the academic literature. Also, return migration of refugees is not only a difficult aspect of refugee problems but also an opportunity for countries and communities to receive exiled citizens back into their communities and countries. While issues of refugees have received research attention, research on return migration of refugees is yet to receive comparable research attention (Carling/Mortensen/Wu 2011). Research in the area of return migration of refugees has focused on initial arrivals of refugees back to origin communities and the associated challenges. Such return migrations are also usually organized by the UNHCR and host governments. Hence in theorising the concept within the framework of refugee return, there is the need to broaden the scope of understanding to capture the nuances that general return migration might overlook. The subject of return migration was first defined by Gmelch (1980), as the movement of emigrants back to their homeland to resettle. King (1978) also conceptualizes return migration to mean when people return to their country or region after a significant period of stay abroad or in another region.

In the view of Khoser (2009), return migration is the return of migrants to their country of origin sometimes as a fulfilment of original intentions or sometimes as a consequence of revised intentions. According to the Ghana Statistical Service (2010), return migrants are persons born at their current place of residence but who had moved out and lived outside their localities of birth for more than a year and have returned to their current locality for a year or more or intend to do so.

Return migration of refugees has several issues that demand a review as intended in this work. The critical areas of attention in the discourse on return migration of refugees include the economic, psychosocial, cultural and political aspects that confront refugees. Hirvonen and Helene (2015) note that return migration is influenced by unsuccessful migration. Explaining that for men, return is linked to poor job-market outcomes at the migrant's destination, and for women, to the ending of marriages. According to Sabharwal and Varma (2012), return migration is a process since return migrants embark on the return due to cultural, social, economic and political factors. Therefore, the decision to return entails both a psychic preparation and availability of financial, cultural, economic as well as political resources. Cromartie, Von Reichert, and Arthun (2015) emphasize the ability to secure employment, community assets and family considerations as determinants of return migrations.

Given the general lack of a broad and in-depth theoretical perspective for return migration, the general migration theories which cover the aspect of return migration offer a possibility to better understand the magnitude and dynamics of return migration to places of origin (Schmidthals 2010). Two theories that significantly explain the context of refugee return migrations in this research are the neo-classical and the network theories of migration. The Neo-classical perspective argues that return migration is seen as the outcome of a failed migration experience which did not yield the expected benefits of migration (Arango 2004). The theory further espouses that migrants miscalculated their cost of migration and therefore did not reap the actual benefits of their migration hence compelling them to return (Castles/Miller 2009). This mirrors the situation of former refugees in the Buduburam camp in Ghana since evidence indicates that they returned due to their inability to integrate into their original community and their inability to find jobs. This indicates that they may not have adequate knowledge and information regarding their destination before their migration. Hence, former refugees miscalculated their cost and benefits of migration before they embarked on their journeys to their origin countries.

The network theory of migration defines migrant networks as sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, non-migrants and former migrants in webs of kinship, friendship and shared origin (Fussell 2012; Taylor 1986). They can be considered a form of social capital stretched across migrant space, and therefore facilitate the likelihood of international movement because they provide information which lowers the costs and risks of migration (Massey et al. 1998). By providing information and contacts, they direct migrants to particular destinations where help regarding accommodation, finding a job, financial assistance and other kinds of support are available. Hence, migrant networks tend to have a multiplier effect and perpetuate migration (Arango 2004). This applies to the case of return former refugees in this study as they could not trace family members upon return to their origin country and had also lost touch with friends and relatives who could have helped them to integrate into their origin community. Furthermore, the loss of culture and their inability to relive the values and customs of their origin communities rendered them poorly integrated hence their return migration. We conceptualise return migration within the network theory of migration. We agree that networks are important in the return of refugees; refugees need networks of family, friends and other people to be able to resettle and reintegrate into the place of return. The challenges that Liberian refugees face in the course of their return to both their country of return and back to the host country are partly because of lack of networks especially in their country of origin (Liberia).

2.2 Conceptualising Local Integration

Local integration is one of the three durable solutions to refugee problems proposed by the UNHCR. The other two are repatriation and resettlement in a third country. Therefore, local integration is not new in the literature on forced migration. The concept has always existed from pre-colonial times, but it was quite prominent in the 1950s as a major way of resolving the refugee crisis. It was mostly practiced in a de-facto manner where refugees are locally integrated without any formal process. It takes place primarily at a local level whereby individuals or groups negotiate their belonging to the locality in which they are living (Hovil 2016). The other aspect, de-jure local integration, is primarily about national belonging. It is represented by the formal process of obtaining new citizenship and is an overtly political process (Hovil 2016). However, after the dawn of independence with the creation of nation-states, people who flee into other countries due to wars and conflicts in their countries were now considered as cross-border refugees. Countries then adopted a protectionist approach to the refugee phenomenon in their bid to protect their territories and populations. This made local integration a formal process necessitating the UNHCR to begin to use it as one of the durable solutions to solving the refugee problem.

Despite its long history of usage, the term has no universal definition. Several definitions of the concept exist in the literature. A few of which include the UNHCR's definition which states that local integration is a process by which refugees legally, economically and socially integrate into the host country, availing themselves of the national protection of the host government (UNHCR 2019). Also, according to Byrne (2013: 51), "local integration is a process by which refugees acquire and exercise legal rights within the host country, which can include, but are not limited to citizenship." Similarly, Valtonen (1999) opines that local integration is the ability of a refugee to participate fully in economic, socio-cultural and political spheres in the host country without relinquishing his/her ethno-cultural identity. In the context of this research, local integration is understood to mean a multidimensional process enabling refugees to establish economic, social, cultural and psychosocial relationships needed to maintain life, livelihood and dignity in a host country after a long period of stay as refugees. The concept of local integration has been used in several countries with some protracted refugee situations. For instance, it has been utilised in the case of Mozambican refugees in Malawi and South Africa (Polzar 2004), as well as Congolese refugees in Angola (Fielden 2008). Similarly, in West Africa, the local integration of Sierra Leonean refugees in Guinea after the war in Sierra Leone ended in 2021 and Liberian refugees in Ivory Coast (Harrell-Bond 2002).

From the definitions above, local integration anywhere in the world must address three key issues; legal, economic and socio-cultural processes (Crisp 2004). The legal process is where refugees attain a wider range of rights in the host state. While the economic process entails establishing sustainable livelihoods and a stan-

dard of living comparable to the host community, the socio-cultural process is the adaptation and acceptance imbibed by refugees that enables them to contribute to the social life of the host country and live without fear of discrimination (Crisp 2004). For local integration to be successful, there must be a mixture of these three factors in their right proportions and at the end of the integration process, refugees should be able to attain citizenship status through naturalisation. That explains why the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees focuses on the importance of citizenship in achieving durable solutions. According to Article 34 of the UN Convention on Refugees, “the contracting states shall as far as possible facilitate the assimilation and naturalisation of refugees. They shall, in particular, make every effort to expedite naturalisation proceedings.” Other scholars, such as Fielden (2008), have suggested that for local integration to be successful, there must be a degree of linguistic, ethnic and cultural similarities between the host and refugees and that the length of time must be long enough. Hence, a protracted refugee situation is conducive for local integration purposes.

The above explanation of local integration implies that in the case of return refugees in the Buduburam camp in Ghana, local integration is a viable option given that they have stayed in the camp for more than two decades and some de-facto integration has already taken place. They have been given the choice to either be repatriated, resettled into a third country or locally integrate into the host country and society. The three durable solutions have all been carried out in the Buduburam case as some repatriations and resettlements in a third country have been done (Addo 2016). The residual refugees at the camp opted for local integration. Within the period of over twenty years, local integration should have been completed. However, this is not the situation as these former refugees still face challenges in their quest to locally integrate. Currently, residents at the camp no longer have refugee status since the Cessation Clause was evoked in 2012. Therefore, these former refugees ultimately have agreed to local integration though it is beset with challenges, hence the import of this chapter (Agblorti 2011).

2.3 Challenges of Local Integration into Host Countries

The issue of local integration of refugees has received scholarly attention in the literature. What remains patchily researched is the context of local integration and taking into consideration country-specific issues that confront governments who want to implement local integration as a way of solving refugee problems in host countries. Local integration usually occurs when refugees seek to attain rights similar to those enjoyed by the citizens of the country in which they have sought refuge and where they maintain a positive attachment to the new society as well as to their original culture and community (Abbasi-Shavazi/Sadeghi 2015; Byrne 2013; Valtonen 1999). The challenges of local integration in Sub-Saharan Africa mirror similar issues in several parts of the World, such as in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Yemen. Host countries have pursued different policies towards migrants

and refugees. Some countries consider migrants as an opportunity for economic development while others see them as a threat to national security. Refugees, for many host countries and governments, are seen as temporary guests who will go back to their home countries in the foreseeable future (Jacobsen 2001).

Contrary to the popular claim that refugees are often not interested in local integration as a durable solution, research has found that a significant proportion of refugees consider local integration as a viable solution once it comes with an acceptable package (Agblorti 2016; Ahimbisibwe/Ingelaere/Vancluysen 2017). Therefore, the most important aspect of local integration is to look at the key issues that militate against successful local integration programmes to formulate policies that can address them. Many Sub-Saharan African countries have poor economies which make the hosting of refugees challenging as it places pressure on inadequate resources. Although many refugees have dreams of going back to their home countries, this is often not possible in the short term, particularly where the origin countries are also not politically stable. This means that in the short to medium-term, local integration is the viable option for countries to contain refugees. However, this often comes with a myriad of challenges which is the import of this chapter.

The economic aspect of local integration is arguably the most important part of achieving a successful local integration programme for refugees. However, addressing the economic problems of refugees in host communities often comes with challenges. In the case of the Liberian refugees in Ghana, Amoani (2019) found that an economic challenge to their local integration is the high standard of living and difficulty in getting access to job opportunities in Ghana. Given that the economic conditions in Ghana are generally difficult, the day-to-day economic survival of refugees in the Buduburam camp is also affected by the harsh economic realities of the country. Acheampong (2015) has also indicated that refugees in the Buduburam camp of Ghana are facing difficulties in accessing the job market and this situation has made attempts at local integration difficult and problematic. The refugees have acquired skills including Information and Communication Technology (I.C.T, both software and hardware), masonry, baking, beauty care, carpentry and electrical repairs which can make them employable (UNHCR 2011; Omata 2012). However, practicing these trades is limited only to the camp vicinity as it is difficult to work outside the camp. This implies that their legal status as refugees has also imposed restrictions on them which compounds their economic integration. This explains why Tanle (2013) and Loescher et al. (2008) indicate that refugees in the camp live with many socio-economic hurdles and the situation is a rising challenge for the refugee protection regime and local integration.

Similar conditions have been identified by Whitaker (1999) in the case of Somali refugees in Dar es Salam where the economic challenges in the refugee camp were related to the increase in the cost of living. Housing became particularly expensive and the prices of basic items such as meat, salt, soap, and kerosene rose by 100 to 400 percent. Furthermore, Whitaker (1999) in the same research found that Eritrean refugees in Gofa Mebrat Hail also had limited income-generating business

activities since their active involvement in business was curtailed by government policies on refugees in the country. In many countries, refugees do not have the unrestricted right to work, move freely, own property or access financial services and are confronted with discrimination and this often makes their local integration difficult (Zetter/Ruauadel 2016). In such situations, refugees are more likely to lack the skills, language, social networks and information required in the host labour market, hence rendering them unemployed (Schuettler/Caron 2020).

Aksoy, Poutvaara and Schikora (2020) in their study of refugees in Germany pointed to how initial local unemployment shaped the multi-dimensional (economic, linguistic, navigational, political, psychological, and social) integration of refugees in the context of the European refugee crisis. Focusing on refugees who arrived in Germany between 2013 and 2016, Aksoy, Poutvaara and Schikora (2020) found that their labour market integration faced steep challenges. It was evident that among refugees aged 18 to 49 who have been in Germany for five years, only 54% of men and 17% of women were in employment. Potter and Phillips (2008) state that refugees depend largely on incomes received from UNHCR and other international donors for survival. This implies that they are often unable to gain employment that allows them to create a decent livelihood for themselves. According to the 2015 Survey of Afghan returnees, around 40 per cent of returnees had a low level of economic integration and were less able to find a good job or earn sufficient income (Mohammadi/Abbasi-Shavazi/Sadeghi 2018). Agblorti (2011) also found that the major challenges facing local integration, particularly in the Buduburam refugee camp in Ghana, included land and potable water whose use and access have generated suspicion and mistrust between the refugees and camp administration on the one hand, and the host population on the other. These issues have not only strained relations between the refugees and their hosts but have serious implications for the potential acceptance of local integration of the refugees within the host community. Many of the challenges that impede the successful integration of the Liberians in Ghana included a high cost of living in Ghana, the provision and access to social services, economic and related issues such as unemployment and underemployment, security and protection (Hamilton-Kodua 2018). In a research conducted by Lubkemann (2008), the challenges of local integration included lack of shelter, no reliable support networks, no marketable livelihood skills and lack of UNHCR identity cards for refugees. In addition, there are threats to the physical security of refugees including organised crime, errant military and police forces, anti-government militants, local populations and the refugee community itself. The physical threats to refugees range from theft, assault and domestic violence to child abuse, rape and human trafficking.

3 Methodology

This study is exploratory as it seeks to explore the views of return Liberian refugees on their experiences, expectations (hopes) and challenges in the Buduburam camp. Methodologically, the researchers used the interpretivist paradigm for the study. The paradigm helped us to generate meanings from the data collected based on the views of respondents (Creswell/Poth 2016; Neuman 2000). This enabled us to delve in-depth into issues of return migration and the reasons, expectations (hopes) and challenges of refugees in their host community. The data was collected using in-depth interviews involving the lived experiences of return refugees. The methods and instruments chosen aided the researchers to seek explanations into the issues under investigation from the viewpoints of the participants selected for the study. The interviewees for the study comprised 13 respondents made up of four return migrants, four refugees who did not migrate, two leaders of the Buduburam refugee camp and three community residents who are Ghanaians.

The data for the study was collected from the Buduburam refugee camp, in the Central Region of Ghana. The area is the home of the Liberian refugees in Ghana and where the return refugees came to settle. Data collection took place in November 2021 over seven days. The researchers and two field assistants (who were trained for a day) took part in the data collection for two days and the field assistants were left to continue with the interviews. The study employed purposive and snowball sampling techniques in collecting data. Purposive sampling was used in the selection of community residents and leaders of the refugee group. These groups were selected to enable us obtain an in-depth understanding of the topic and also because of their knowledge of the issues being studied. Snowball sampling was used in sampling return refugees and refugees who did not return. In selecting the return refugees, the snowball sampling technique was used to identify one member of the camp who had returned from Liberia after being repatriated voluntarily or forced. The study ensured respondents' rights of consent, anonymity, and confidentiality (Neuman 2000; Walliman 2006). We supplemented the primary data with secondary data from reports, academic journals, publications and media reports on return migration. The data was transcribed and a thematic analysis was done.

4 Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the results emphasizing the experiences, hopes and challenges of return migrants and their quest to locally reintegrate.

4.1 Experiences, Refugees' Repatriation and Reasons for Return Migration

Escaping the War in Liberia: Experiences of Refugees

The land of Liberia since the arrival of the Americo-Liberians has been a struggle between indigenous inhabitants and freed slaves from the Americas. These freed slaves established the political power base of the country and ruled over the indigenous population for a long time until the indigenous population started agitating for their rights (Ellis 2006). However, these early struggles did not create a refugee problem for Liberia as compared to the civil wars of the 1980 and 1990s. Liberia has experienced several waves of civil wars starting from the 1980 civil war which brought Samuel Doe to power and resulted in several deaths sparking the genesis of Liberia refugeeism. This situation was exacerbated by the 1989 civil war which led to massive killings creating a huge wave of Liberian refugees to the neighbouring countries of Ivory Coast, Guinea and Ghana. The country was unstable until 1997 when peace reigned with Charles Taylor as president. But there was yet another civil war in 2000 which ended in 2003. These incessant civil wars have produced millions of refugees and Ghana became a destination for over 30,000 refugees since 2002 (UNHCR 2009; Omata 2012).

The nature of Liberian refugee migration to Ghana was varied as it took both voluntary and involuntary or forced patterns. Voluntary refugee migrations took the form of organised migrations from Liberia to the host country while involuntary migrations took the form of individual decisions to migrate out of war or conflict zones owing to force or cohesion to leave the country of origin. Refugees in the Buduburam camp acknowledged the diverse nature of their migrations from Liberia to neighbouring countries including Ghana. This also includes the routes of migration which were illegal, and for some, perilous journeys to destination countries. Experiences of refugee migrations from Liberia involve narrations of perilous journeys to host countries. As a result, refugees often share daunting and lengthy stories of their experiences escaping the war and the often bizarre, risky and life-threatening journeys they embarked on in a quest to survive. A respondent at the Buduburam camp narrated his journey to Ghana thus:

“I, first of all, went to Guinea around 1996 and came to Ghana in 2003. When we set off from Guinea, we had food problems, we struggled on the ship that brought us, two times before we got here. Back in Liberia, we were forced to leave because my parent didn't want to be a part of the war so they took us to Guinea. The family is no longer together, my mother

went to Nigeria, my siblings are also scattered around, and some of them are in Benin and Senegal.” (Interview with a 40-year-old male respondent)

The above quote depicts the bitter experiences of refugees who lost their social relations and networks including familial, societal and friendship ties. Family separations tend to negatively leave a void in their personal growth, economic and social situations. The narration of the life trajectory of the interviewee vis-à-vis his current situation of job search, economic hardships, security, problems of local integration and social imbalances that refugees face also show the changes in the figurations of network structures of refugees when they flee their homes. Another returnee narrated his journey from Liberia to Ghana as follows:

“I left Liberia on December 24, 1989, for Ivory Coast before coming to Ghana. When the war broke out in Liberia, we ran through the bushes until we reached Ivory Coast. I fled with my family in the night. We were chased out of Niba county. That was the first county the Charles Taylor rebels attacked, so we fled to Ivory Coast. I was in Ivory Coast in 2003, when the war started, I fled to Ghana by boat. I came to Ghana alone; my brothers were killed in the Ivorian War.” (Interview with a 48-year-old male returnee)

Fleeing conflict zones is an attempt to escape danger and seek for survival in other countries. Therefore, the migrations out of Liberia and other neighbouring countries were driven by the quest for refugees to save their lives. Such migrations were desperate and did not take care of family relations. Where refugees could migrate with family members, they did so but it was not a primary motivator for migration. The quest for survival dominated their migration intentions as exemplified by this respondent.

“When the first war started in Liberia (1989–1997), I moved to Guinea and when war also broke out in Guinea (1998–1999), I run to Ivory Coast. I moved to Ghana when another civil war broke out in Ivory Coast in 2002. I finally got to the Buduburam camp in 2003. My movement from Liberia to Guinea, Ivory Coast and finally Ghana is because I was running from the wars, it’s not for pleasure. I was in Danane when rebels started fighting in Cote D’Ivoire, I couldn’t go back to Liberia because they were also fighting the third war. So I was forced to come to Ghana for refuge.” (Interview with 40-year-old female refugee)

The consequences of conflicts of this nature also result in separation, killing of family members and breakdown in familial networks. In the midst of the war, some refugees also migrated with their families. This re-echoes the importance of family relations and connections to refugees. It also demonstrates the bond that

refugees attach to their families and family life in general. Though many of the migrations out of Liberia were involuntary, there were also voluntary migrations. This involved organised migrations by the UNHCR and other international bodies out of Liberia. This was confirmed by some refugees in the Buduburam refugee camp.

Repatriation to Liberia and Return Migration of Refugees to Buduburam

The presence of refugees in the Buduburam camp was intended to be temporary and therefore if conditions in Liberia got better, then the refugees would be repatriated. However, to comprehensively deal with the Liberian refugees' problem in Ghana the three durable solutions were all explored; repatriation, resettlement in a third country and local integration. Since 2003 with the signing of the peace agreement and the stepping down of Charles Taylor as president of Liberia, there have been negotiations and attempts to repatriate Liberians from the Buduburam camp back to Liberia. This was the result of the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf government's desire to rebuild Liberia and therefore there was a national call for all Liberians who were in exile to return to the country. The first batches of refugees from Buduburam repatriated to Liberia was between 2004 and 2007 (Agblorti 2011). The repatriations were organised by the UNHCR, the Ghanaian government and the Liberian government as well as the leadership of the refugees at the camp (UNHCR 2009; Omata 2012). Again, between 2008 and 2009, UNHCR launched another one-year repatriation programme for refugees. Due to the persistent repatriation pressure from both national and international refugee regimes, at the beginning of 2011, the total number of registered Liberian refugees in Ghana was reduced to about 11,000 (UNHCR 2012). A return refugee narrated how the repatriation was carried out at the time.

“During the regime of President Kufour, Liberians were sent back to Liberia by force. I was among those who were sent by force. By force because the government and UNHCR were not willing to take us to America (USA) where we were interested in settling. When the government was taking us there, it was difficult. Imagine you coming to Ghana since 1990. So I came back to the camp after a short stay in Liberia because conditions were bad, no job, no contacts and relations. Since then I have been doing business to survive. It's better than Liberia.” (Interview with 48-year-old male returnee)

The interview clearly shows that factors that influenced refugees' return include changes in refugees' family and household networks of interdependencies, especially economic interdependencies in the place of origin. The repatriated refugee in the interview above noted that upon his forced return to Liberia, he lost his networks and contacts with family, relatives and neighbours. The absence of jobs, as well as security in Liberia, has forced his return to the Buduburam camp. Just like Abbasi-Shavazi, Sadeghi and Mohammadi (2017) and Boateng and Hilton (2011) found,

changing structures of networks and the absence of close networks of neighbours, family, friends and opportunities are driving factors for refugees' decisions not to stay in their countries of origin.

Following these large-scale repatriations to Liberia, there has been a phenomenon of return re-migration by some of these refugees back to the Buduburam camp. For instance, according to the UNHCR, in 2001 alone 150 repatriated refugees returned to the refugee camp in Ghana and this has since continued. While many feel they were forced to return to Liberia, others voluntarily returned due to the economic, social and cultural challenges they faced in Ghana.

Reasons for return Migration to the Buduburam Refugee Camp

The research revealed several reasons adduced by refugees for their return to Ghana after their repatriation to Liberia. First among them was the perception of (in)security in Liberia which was related to their personal experiences of the wars. Refugees had gone through harrowing experiences of witnessing beatings or killing of relatives. In the case of women, some narrated issues of sexual violence including rape. Participants also stated that children were molested and some were kidnapped as child soldiers (see also Podder 2011). These combined effects created indelible marks of insecurity among some refugees and this meant that staying in Liberia was practically difficult for such people, hence their decision to return to the Buduburam camp. A returnee narrated his experiences during the war and how that influenced his return migration to the camp:

“Due to the conditions under which I left, when I got back to Liberia I was scared of people that’s why I returned to the Buduburam camp. My family was persecuted, my father for instance was working with the then government and he was murdered in the presence of me and my siblings. He was murdered by the forces of Taylor (MPFL). We got lucky because while they were executing my father, there was heavy gunfire coming from the outside. So they thought it was their enemy because there were many warring factions. So they rushed outside and that gave us the opportunity to escape in different directions. I managed to run through the bushes, I was lucky I met an ECOMOG officer who helped me. After explaining my situation to him, he helped me to board the ship carrying refugees to Ghana called Bulk Challenge.” (Interview with a 25-year-old male returnee)

In the interview above, the respondent indicates insecurity and the absence of family ties as reasons for his migration to Ghana. This highlights the very important ‘factor’ of family and household networks and how their absence affects the interdependencies of migrants, either economically or security-wise. Among refugees in the Buduburam camp, many were particularly concerned about the risk of persecution in Liberia hence their return to the camp. These refugees noted that they were not safe in Liberia. This was compounded by the fear of the war and other

ethnic reprisals which made them feel insecure staying in Liberia, hence their return to the Buduburam camp. Thus, their security coupled with lack of familial, clan and societal networks influenced their return. Just like Massey et al. (1998) assert, one's social networks facilitate migrants return because networks help migrants navigate economic and security problems and provide support to the return migrant. Hence, the multiplier effect of networks in migration (Arango 2004).

A second reason why refugees returned to Ghana was the issue of finding accommodation and shelter. Finding shelter in the country of origin is a key variable in the decision of displaced persons to return home (Abbasi-Shavazi/Glazebrook 2006). In this research, returned refugees complained that the UNHCR and the Liberian government did not make any accommodation arrangements for the repatriated refugees except for the stipends they got from the UNHCR upon arrival back in Liberia and the initial accommodation by the UNHCR upon arrival. For many refugees, the stipends were used for temporary rents and once the rent expired, they no longer had anywhere to sleep. Given their low level of skills, many found it difficult irking a living in Liberia resulting in their return migration. After fourteen years of a destructive civil war, for many displaced Liberians, their previous homesteads no longer existed. Because no housing support was provided for returnees either by the Liberian government or by refugee-supporting agencies, all returnees had to find shelter and those who could not get places of abode decided to return to their former places of abode including Ghana (cf. Omata 2012). One returnee narrates her experience:

“Upon arrival in Liberia, we had no house and we didn't know anywhere to go in Liberia. My father tried to locate one of my auntie's places but he couldn't. Even my parents didn't know the county well again because they left the place for a long time, 1990. They didn't know anywhere. So we had to go back to Ghana after a short stay. The little money that the UNHCR gave to us had to be used for transportation back to Ghana. To compound the problem, there was no light. As a result, we couldn't move freely at night because we feared for our security. In Liberia, by 7:00pm–8:00pm everybody was in the room.” (Interview with 27-year-old returnee)

The interview above shows that a key factor for the re-migration of some refugees from Liberia to Ghana was the lack of familial and other social networks in Liberia. In particular, refugees emphasized the absence of immediate family members in Liberia as a major impediment to their repatriation (see also Hovil 2010). In any migration process, networks serve as a means of risk reduction for migrants and it is a common strategy for them to create a set of people on whom they can count on in the destination area (Van Hear 1998: 51). Without access to reliable networks, refugees in origin country would find it difficult to integrate and navigate the social milieu in the once culturally familiar environment that they found themselves. These networks help to ease the pressure of re-assimilating into the community.

This study found that the return of many refugees to the Buduburam camp after repatriation was mainly due to the refugees' lack of familial, friendship ties and social networks in Liberia. The lack of familial, friendship ties and neighbourhood social networks is also emphasized by a returnee in the Buduburam camp:

“When we were being sent back, we were wondering how we can survive because we didn't have friends, jobs nor connections there. Though someone like me still had my mother's relatives back in Liberia, I have never stayed with them. It was going to be difficult but I had no option. We went by ship but I already knew what was at stake. While in Liberia it was difficult to find any job and also not like the way I have it in Ghana. After a year of stay, I came back to Ghana; that was in 2009.” (Interview with 50-year-old male returnee)

A major reason why refugees returned from Liberia was because of the economic situation and lack of jobs back in Liberia. The unavailability of jobs and the nature of economic conditions put repatriated refugees in despair about their future, hence their reluctance to accept voluntary repatriation to Liberia. The unavailability of jobs and lack of economic opportunities and networks that refugees faced in Liberia is succinctly opined by this returnee:

“I have been to Liberia and over there it's not easy. Things are hard. The government is not employing too. Its rather unfortunate that President Weah cannot help us as refugees. So, there are already unemployed people there and they are struggling. Some have been demonstrating for better living conditions. Also, the corruption in Liberia is too much, people in power are abusing their powers and there are no jobs, so I took all this into consideration and decided to come back to Ghana.” (Interview with 40-year-old male businessman at the camp)

The current socio-economic conditions in Liberia have not improved since the end of the war. Therefore, the survival and livelihoods of return refugees are still uncertain, hence their return to the Buduburam camp. The situation of the returnees, according to the interviewee, was compounded by perceptions of corruption and extreme poverty in Liberia.

5 Hopes and Expectations of Refugees upon Return to the Buduburam Camp

Another issue worth interrogating in this chapter is the issue of hopes and expectations among return refugees in the Buduburam camp. Refugees after experiencing life in Liberia could not cope with the myriad of challenges and problems, hence

their decision to return to Ghana. Upon return to the Buduburam camp, refugees had hopes and expectations regarding life back at the camp. There were high hopes among return refugees of being able to better reintegrate into their host community given the package of local integration incentives available. Also, they had renewed hope of making a livelihood in the host community. There were also expectations of getting chances to resettle in a third country which can make life better for them. In addition, it was their expectation that the issue of identity and their status as refugees will be resolved, as well as a good relationship between return refugees and their host community in Buduburam and the surrounding communities.

The refugees expected that local integration which is one of the durable solutions available to them would be implemented fully to their benefit in the Buduburam Camp. This was aimed at getting refugees a better livelihood and also to engage them in other socio-economic activities. The return refugees were hopeful that the package of local integration will be implemented to the letter so as to guarantee them a permanent stay in Ghana. In an interview with one such return refugee, she narrates that:

“About local integration, they should provide me with proper housing instead of me living here in this wooden dwelling. Also help my girl to enter the University and my boy to also advance his studies then I will be very happy because I don't think Europe is the only place where one can make it in life, Ghana is a very good place to also make it in life.” (Interview with 48-year-old female return refugee)

The local integration package rolled out to refugees included skills training, provision of health insurance packages and residence permits (Omata 2012). However, in the view of the return refugees, other aspects of the local integration including the provision of decent accommodation, avenues for employment and giving scholarships to wards and children of refugees were not offered and hence rendering their integration incomplete. Therefore, it was the hope of these return refugees that upon their return, they would be provided with such facilities. Acheampong (2015) has also indicated that refugees in the Buduburam Camp face difficulties in accessing the job market and this situation has made attempts at local integration difficult and problematic. Importantly, another expectation of return refugees was improvement in their physical security and safety at the camp. The camp is open with no defining borders. Therefore, movement in and out of the camp is easy and this exposes camp residents to robberies and attacks by criminals. A return refugee indicated his hopes and expectations upon return below:

“Initially when I was coming, I was only coming for safety. So, when I came and I saw that the camp here is not safe, I decided to go back. The security here is really bad as criminals from other places have come here to stay and engage in bad things. We are even afraid being here. So security was important for my return.” (Interview with 40 year-old return refugee)

One important expectation expressed by return refugees in this research is their dream to be resettled in a third country. For these return refugees, their chances of being resettled in a third country are higher in the camp than if they stayed in Liberia. Resettlement in a third country is one of the durable solutions that was carried out for some refugees. It involves, the resettlement of refugees to mostly developed countries. In 2006, 1,467 refugees departed on resettlement from Ghana to Australia, United States and Canada. As of February 2006, the UNHCR had processed less than 50 Liberian individuals who had pressing medical or emergency protection needs for resettlement (Essuman-Johnson 2011). For many return refugees it would be a way out of their economic woes. The high expectations by return refugees for resettlement is exemplified by this narration:

“My first expectation before coming to Ghana for the first time was that the Ghanaian Government would allow us to travel to a third country. This is because anywhere that you are as a refugee, you get the opportunity to travel once you are documented as a refugee. It means your country is not safe so you can have the opportunity to go to a new place and start a new life. So when I went to Liberia and things were difficult I came back to Ghana still expecting that there will be an opportunity for me to be resettled in either Australia or Canada.” (Interview with 34-year return refugee)

A key expectation among returned refugees was also to see the final determination of their identities and status as refugees in Ghana. Following the evocation of the Cessation Clause in 2012, the Budumburam camp was no longer regarded as a “refugee camp” and therefore all the refugees became foreign nationals in Ghana. This meant that the authorities had to properly recognize and profile them as foreign nationals. However, profiling these refugees as foreigners was impracticable because the number of years they had stayed in Ghana qualify them for naturalization (Essuman-Johnson 2011). Return refugees were of the opinion that they should be allowed to participate in the economic activities in Ghana which had been curtailed by their refugee status. They, however, raised issues concerning their status as to whether they are still refugees or not. They have been given Liberian passports valid for two years and their complaint is that after the two years what becomes of their status? They do not know whether it will be extended or they will be asked to leave Ghana. Therefore, their expectations are that their status as refugees have elapsed and the UNHCR should come to their aid. One of the camp leaders emphasized this in an interview:

“They told us after the cessation clause in 2012, they will locally integrate us in the Ghanaian community but they haven’t done so. So I was surprised when they gave us the ECOWAS passports for Liberia. So even if the passports expire, we have to go to Liberia ... I am not even saying they should

give us Ghanaian passports but give us ID cards that can identify us easily but to give us Liberian passports is a serious challenge for integration.”
(Interview with male camp leader)

Importantly, the legal situation regarding access to land, work permits, residence, repatriation and also the security situation impinge upon the economic situation of the return refugees. The contestation of their legal status as refugees affect their opportunities of local integration and therefore access to land, work permits and security. In fact, the Ghanaian government and the UNHCR think the legal status of refugees had been dealt with following the evocation of the Cessation Clause. Similarly, many Ghanaians consider refugees around the Buduburam camp as illegal residents, a nuisance and a security threat, hence their refusal to offer them land and jobs (Agblorti 2016). In spite of the invocation of the Cessation Clause, return refugees do not clearly understand their status as they still consider themselves as refugees under the care of UNHCR. The issue of identity and status of return refugees have remained key issues that refugees expect to be resolved. This corroborates Acheampong's (2015) finding that the current status of most refugees still remains unclear to them despite the invocation of the Cessation Clause.

6 Challenges of Local Integration of Return Refugees

This research revealed that return refugees' hopes and expectations centered around the local integration which they claim has not yet been achieved. Data gathered from return refugees further show that local integration has only been perfunctory. Efforts at local integration either failed or were faced with several challenges rendering local integration a failure. One major challenge return refugees faced is their poor socio-economic conditions. In 2012 after the Cessation Clause was evoked, attempts at local integration were made by the UNHCR in collaboration with the IOM and the Ghana Refugee Board as well as the leadership from the refugees. This was because at the end of the Cessation Clause the country did not have a local integration policy for refugees. The local integration package proposed at the time included: issuance of Liberian passports, two-year residence permits/work permits and National Health Insurance premium for one year (Omata 2012; Agblorti 2011). This was in addition to skills training activities the refugees have benefitted from to help with their self-reliance.

Socio-economic integration means refugees should be able to have access to basic necessities of life including education, housing, health, in addition to an economic livelihood as well as a cordial host-refugee relationship within the camp enclave and the general society of the host country (Talukder et al. 2021). According to return refugees, the local integration package was either partially provided or not available in some cases. This made life difficult and challenging as they were restricted to just the “camp economy” to make ends meet. One crucial challenge

to their socio-economic integration is housing. For many of the return refugees, housing is largely what they have around the camp vicinity which are not well-constructed. Housing around the camp is mostly made of mud and thatched buildings and self-constructed dwelling places. The few that can afford blocks and cement had houses that are roofed with zinc. The poor nature of these houses and dwelling places makes return refugees live in precarious conditions. A return refugee described her housing situation:

“Just look at where I am sleeping [pointing at a mud house in a bad shape] when it rains, we don’t even come out to harvest rain water we just collect the one flooding our rooms through the leaking roof ... and when you say you are coming to break it down, what do I have left? You are just killing us; we cannot fight anybody. Aaah ... it is well.” (Interview with 48-year-old female return refugee)

Housing can be an important part of a local integration process for refugees in host countries. This provides a sense of security and comfort for them. The unavailability of decent housing for refugees can make their local integration problematic as they would find other ways of accommodating themselves including sleeping in places that can make them prone to attacks and for the women, rape and sexual harassment. Amoani (2019) had earlier found that though refugees received support from UNHCR, they were still facing challenges in their quest to integrate locally. These challenges included access to shelter, means of living, job opportunities, access to education and health care. Also, Hamilton-Kodua (2018) has found that most of the challenges that impeded the successful local integration of the Liberian refugees included high cost of living in Ghana, the provision and access to social services including housing, unemployment and underemployment and insecurity. The findings from earlier researches (Amoani 2019; Hamilton-Kodua 2018) show that these issues are still persistent among return refugees. Given that Liberian refugees have stayed in Ghana (Budumburam) for a long period, local integration for those who opted for it should have been achieved. This explains why Tanle (2013) and Loescher et al. (2008) indicated that refugees in the camp live with many socio-economic hurdles which is a persistent challenge for the refugee protection regime.

While housing is problematic and militate against a successful local integration process for return refugees, access to health has also been challenging to them. Since the expiration of the one-year health insurance premium offered to them as part of the local integration package, return refugees have had to pay cash for their health needs. Given that many of them are unemployed and underemployed, getting money to pay for their health needs mostly become a challenge (Amoani 2019; Hamilton-Kodua 2018). In a UNHCR and World Food Program Joint Assessment Mission Report (2006), it was found that refugees faced difficulties particularly where they need referral treatment in public hospitals since some hospitals

request that refugees pay fees as non-Ghanaians. Such fees are usually high and given that these are refugees who do not have the financial capacity to pay, they suffer the health consequences. This trend of accessing health has not changed since the return of refugees back to the Buduburam Camp. Even though the Camp clinic still provides some outpatient services, refugees still need to access health care outside the camp at a high cost. A return refugee narrated his experience accessing health care outside the camp:

“I got my NHIS card from Apam and when I went to the Swedru Ahmadiyya Hospital last month, I had to pay for all my drugs. Immediately I arrived there I received a text message indicating that I am at the Swedru Hospital. When I handed over my NHIS card and after all the processes, they gave me prescription to go outside and buy the drugs. Is the health insurance functioning for us as foreigners? The only medicine I received was paracetamol, the rest, I bought it at a pharmacy.” (Interview with 46-year-old male return refugee)

Another important aspect of local integration is the security issues that confronted both refugees and host governments. For instance, a frequent argument made by host governments is that refugees bring security problems, and therefore it is better to restrict them to camps where these problems can be controlled (UNHCR 2019). This often makes local integration difficult as government and local residents fear possible attacks from refugees due to cases of armed robbery, stealing and other crimes committed by refugees (Fielden 2008). Petty and organised crimes have indeed flourished in some refugee hosting areas. These real and perceived security threats can cause resentment and clashes between locals and refugees, diminishing chances for successful local integration (Fielden 2008). Among return refugees, security is a key challenge and to be able to achieve local integration, security, particularly in the camp, is very paramount. In a document by UNHCR (2003) titled *Camp Security*, a report by Surge Protection Project stated that throughout Greater Accra, Buduburam was becoming known for some criminal activities. In response, camp residents initiated the neighbourhood watch team to patrol the camp at night and enhance security. This prompted the UNHCR to support the efforts of the refugees in ensuring security within the camp by providing logistics and materials to members of the neighbourhood Watch Team. The initiative from camp residents and supported by the Ghana Police and UNHCR brought the criminal activities in the camp under control. Data gathered from this study showed that return refugees complained they often have local security personnel coming into the camp to search for suspected criminals and they do this at will and in the process harassing and intimidating them and sometimes beat them up. The narration of a return refugee exemplifies the security concerns in the camp.

“As for security in the camp, the security is very poor. Anybody can move in at any time. Some people go and commit crimes outside the camp and

they run into the camp to hide. We have three entrances to the camp which are all free entrances. Everybody needs an exit, so when they commit the crimes outside, they use the camp as an exit point and so at the end of the day, they link it to the camp residents.” (Interview with 37-year-old male return refugee)

Opaye (2005) found that inhabitants of refugee camps and surrounding areas suffer a wide range of security problems, including attacks by external forces, the militarisation of camps and the breakdown of law and order. Threats to the physical security of refugees emanate from a variety of sources including organized crime, errant military and police forces, anti-government militants, local populations and the refugee community itself. Another lamentation of the security situation is given by a female return refugee.

“It is not an easy life to live here when you talk about security., This place is like an open door, anyone can come in unchecked. As a single mother here, I feel vulnerable because anyone can come and attack me and take advantage of me or my daughter and I cannot defend myself and I don’t have any man to protect me but God has been good. Since they revoked our refugee status in 2012, the camp has been an open space, you may not know who is coming in or going out. If someone harasses me or my girl no one will come and help us.” (Interview with 48-year-old female return refugee)

The biggest security threat at the time of data collection was the fear that the Government of Ghana was going to demolish the camp because of claims that the camp is a den of criminals. Camp residents feared this will have serious socio-economic and security challenges for them since they will be left with no accommodation. For those who have constructed their places of dwelling, they feared that they will have nowhere to go. The demolishing of the camp has been announced by the government of Ghana on several occasions but yet to be carried out. This follows demands by the Chiefs and residents of Gomoa Fetteh in the Gomoa East District of the Central Region, who are the custodians of Gomoa Buduburam lands.

The interplay of the search for jobs, security, legal status of refugees, access to land, work permits, residence and health care/insurance in both the destination country and the country of return are intricately linked and are the main reasons for refugees’ return both to their country of origin and the destination country. Although these factors have been similarly found by several authors (Essuman-Johnson 2011; Hovil 2010; Omata 2012; Acheampong 2015; Agblorti 2016), this study found that these factors were interdependent and present in both Liberia and the Buduburam camp. Interestingly, these factors hinder refugee integration in the host country (Ghana) and local communities. Social networks (familial, neighbourhood, friendship ties, etc.) are interlinking factors in all this and play important roles in the lives of return refugees.

7 Conclusion

This chapter examined the lived experiences, expectations (hopes) and challenges of return Liberian refugees to Ghana after their repatriation to Liberia. Liberian refugees in the Buduburam Camp had to choose between two durable solutions – repatriation or local integration. Some who opted for repatriation to Liberia later returned to Ghana as they faced several challenges. Even upon their return to Ghana, there were several challenges they encountered. The study found that the experiences of return refugees were inexplicably tied to their challenges before their return to Ghana and their economic, social and political challenges as return refugees in Ghana. These experiences are traumatic with challenges of job finding, loss of culture and concerns about security. Local integration is linked to the lack of understanding of the refugees about their own status. Also, although their preferred durable solution is resettlement in a third country, refugees are willing to accept local integration if measures are put in place, including opportunities for jobs, housing, health and non-discrimination by Ghanaians and state security agencies.

From a theoretical lens, our study conceptualises the subject of return refugees within the neo-classical migration theory as well as the network theory of migration where we argued that refugees return is linked to already established networks. The study recommends that the reintegration of refugees into the Ghanaian society requires concerted efforts of major stakeholders including the UNHCR, the Ghana Refugee Board, Ministry of Interior, the Ghana Immigration Service and the Government of Liberia through the Liberian Embassy. Resources must be mobilised to assist return refugees in their reintegration into the host communities. Key issues of housing, health and jobs need to be provided for refugees. With the demolishing of the camp looming, the predicament of refugees will get worse. Besides, one major issue confronting local integration of return migrants is the discrimination, marginalisation and labelling of refugees as criminals and “bad people” by both state agencies (especially, the Ghanaian security agencies) and Ghanaians resident in and around the camp. A lot of education and sanctions will be required to break these prejudices.

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One Biography, Many Facets, Captured in a Homogeneous View: A Critical and Biographical Perspective on the Migration from Turkey to Austria

Faime Alpagu

1 Introduction

In the study of migration, it is always necessary to consider hegemony and power relations. Antonio Gramsci developed the concept of the “subaltern” in order to make such power relations and inequalities visible. According to him, hegemonic structures severely limit subaltern subjects’ ability to become aware of their political interests and their potential political strength. In addition, they are afforded limited possibilities to articulate themselves politically and publicly. Gramsci therefore defines the history of the subaltern classes as “fragmentary.” So how can their stories be told and passed on if most historical accounts, including the official history, focus on powerful and advantaged members of the majority society? Gramsci argues that “... reconstruction of the historical traces of the subalterns requires a precise search, a great deal of patience, and a connection to their movements. Such a history ‘from below’ can contribute to common learning processes”¹ (Becker et al. 2013: 212). For Gramsci, “subaltern” is, on the one hand, a collective term for

Alpagu, F. (2023): One Biography, Many Facets, Captured in a Homogeneous View: A Critical and Biographical Perspective on the Migration from Turkey to Austria. In: Pohn-Lauggas, M./Tonah, S./Worm, A. (Eds.): *Exile/Flight/Persecution. Sociological Perspectives on Processes of Violence*. Göttingen: Göttingen University Press, 191–211. <https://doi.org/10.17875/gup2023-2451>

¹ Translated from German by F.A.

various subjugated groups; on the other hand, the term emphasizes the fact that these groups do not form a homogeneous unit and are instead marked by very different living and working conditions.

Public and scientific discourse about the migration from Turkey to German-speaking countries is dominated by the viewpoint of the majorities in both Turkey and the country of arrival and is thus rooted in a colonial,² middle-class and white perspective. For example, almost everyone who came from Turkey to Austria between the 1960s and the late 1980s is classified as a “guest worker,” even though their motives, causes, and practices of migration were multilayered and varied. Such limited representations lead to the assumption that only men migrated as workers and that women from Turkey were, and still are, powerless, helpless, and unable to speak for themselves – though in fact, many women actively advocated for more space to express for their individual wishes and rights (e.g., Hahn 2012; Gültekin/Inowlocki/Lutz 2003; Inowlocki/Lutz 2000). This problem is not unique to the popular media; scientific literature regularly categorizes all migrants from Turkey as “Turkish”, eliding the fact that Turkey is a multiethnic country.³ Considering the various human right violations perpetrated against minority groups in Turkey,⁴ this narrow and generalizing definition of migrants from Turkey contributes to the invisibilization of minority groups already facing double discrimination in the country of arrival: Turkish nationalism on the one hand, and Austrian

² I am referring here to Turkey as a colonial nation which refuses to recognize ethnic and religious groups other than the Turkish and Sunnite majorities, and actively directs state policies against such minorities (see the popular statement in Turkey: “one nation, one flag, one homeland, one state” (*tek millet, tek bayrak, tek vatan, tek devlet*). While there is currently belated discussion about opening up Austrian society to minority languages and multilingualism, this discourse focuses almost exclusively on the official languages of Turkey, Syria, and Iran. People from these countries living in Austria speak a variety of languages, such as Kurdish, Armenian, Circassian and, of course, German. None of these languages, except for German, receive high recognition in German-speaking countries. From the perspective of these migrant populations, Turkish, Arabic and Persian – official national languages – ought to be considered peripheral. These are, however, colonial languages which are actively oppress other co-territorial languages, especially Kurdish. While questioning Eurocentrism is important, patriarchal, hierarchical, and colonial language politics outside of Europe must also be interrogated.

³ In the course of my study, I questioned the role of categories in defining peoples and groups and asked myself whether the categories I use would lead to similarly problematic results. As a result of this critical reflection, I use various categories in order to make visible what happens once a person has been assigned to a certain category. Thus, I do not mean to naturalize various categories ascribed to migrants, such as “guest worker,” “Turkish,” “Kurdish,” “Muslim,” “non-Muslim,” “Sunnite,” and “Alevi.” Rather, I consider how these categories have been used, how they continue to shape the lives of migrants, and how they exclude and discriminate against certain individuals. My field access made me aware of how these categories continue to build boundaries and to shape people’s lives and perceptions, leading to stereotypes and prejudices (Reinprecht 2021).

⁴ Many Kurdish and Armenian migrants, for example, want their ethnic identities to be recognized without facing discrimination. Some others migrate precisely because they no longer want to be “recognized” as a response to the discrimination they experienced in Turkey. In the arrival country, however, if they are labeled as “Turkish”, their particular ethnic identities are effaced and the discrimination they experienced in Turkey continues.

xenophobia on the other. To avoid reproducing this homogenization, I deliberately avoid the term “Turkish,” and instead use “persons from Turkey.”

In this article, I will challenge the homogenized point of view on migration from Turkey to Austria from a holistic and critical perspective. Through the analysis of a person from Turkey’s biography, I will elaborate two central arguments: first, that despite frequent flattening in popular and academic discourse, migration from Turkey is a multifaceted phenomenon; second, that migrant people are classified into too many categories. Such excessive classification is an instance of what Raia Apostolova (2015) calls “categorical fetishism” – the normalization of certain categories as natural, given, and fixed, rather than historically emergent and flexible.

“[I]t is easy to fall victim to a type of categorical fetishism that blinds us to the temporal dimension of our discursive strategies. Some of these strategies are effective in the present but might compromise the future. We need to overcome such fetishism by exposing the concrete realities such categories represent and entail.”

Moreover, as I will demonstrate, the divisions between and terms for different forms and causes of migration are not as rigid as they are often presumed to be, often shifting and overlapping over time, even within a single biography (Horder/Lucassen/Lucassen 2007; Castles/De Haas/Miller 2014; Shahidian 2000).

2 The Problem of Using Fluid Categories Strictly

Based in part on his own experiences, the sociologist Hammed Shahidian (2000) delineates the differences between various categories such as exile and migration, arguing that “[a] lengthy exile, for instance, could strengthen one’s roots in the new environment, so much that an exile becomes an emigrant” (72). Hammed Shahidian himself migrated to the USA as a student and wanted to return to Iran after finishing his studies. In the meantime, the political situation in Iran changed and it became impossible for him to return. He went from being an “educational migrant” to an exile. The process of migration is complex and life-changing; it is therefore necessary to dissolve the homogenizing image of the migrant as constant through time. We must instead consider not only what comes after migration, but the social and familial contexts in which a person was socialized prior to migration (e.g., Siouti 2018; Rosenthal/Bahl/Worm 2016; Aritzsch 1990). The reasons and motives of migration are multifaceted. “Migrants who primarily move for economic reasons may also flee political oppression. It is difficult to separate economic from social, cultural and political causes of migration” (Castles/De Haas/Miller 2014).

In their study, “The Comfort of Things” (2008), anthropologists Daniel Miller and Fiona Parrot recount visiting the homes of people living in London, and then

present thirty portraits of residents of the city. One of the portraits is of a man named Jorge. Miller reflects on how he and Parrot first reached out to Jorge as a migrant, before recognizing how limiting and constraining this point of view can be:

“It is too easy to regard Jorge as a Brazilian who has settled in England. But Jorge is just Jorge. As we left his house after our first visit, Fiona and I realized with some shame that our discussion with him had been too forced, too directed by this assumption of identity – looking for what he had brought with him from that place to this place. Rather than allowing Jorge to take command of his own story.” (181).

In the course of their conversations with Jorge, Miller and Parrot become aware that, contrary to their expectations, the reason for his migration from Brazil

“was personal rather than economic or political. ... For reasons that had to do with academic projection and not with Jorge himself, we were too interested in what it meant to come from Brazil and to live in London. Over the course of the next year and a half, we were to come to know, and become very fond of, an altogether different and more authentic Jorge. This Jorge was much more about his relationship to his partner, his ambivalence about architecture and home decoration, issues to do with how to manage a difficult, time-consuming job as well as a home life.” (185).

As Heaven Crawley and Dimitris Skleparis (2018) show, while reasons for migration are complicated and entangled by the particularities of individual experience, the discourse around migration is confined to the arrival country’s point of view and a handful legal terms, which in turn are adjusted based on the needs of a given country of arrival.

“It is clear therefore that there is nothing ‘natural’ or ‘fixed’ about the legal and policy categories associated with international migration: rather these categories are in a constant state of change, renegotiation and redefinition. The categories ‘refugee’ and ‘migrant’ do not simply exist but rather are made. Choosing to label – or equally not label – someone as a ‘refugee’ is a powerful, and deeply political, process, one by which policy agendas are established and which position people as objects of policy in a particular way.” (52).

The country of arrival, and the multiple power relations within it, determine more than the circumstances under which a person is allowed to live there; it also decides how migration and the migrant are defined. For example, back in the 1960s and 1970s, labor migration was welcomed in Austria, as the nation needed workers

(Hahn 2012; Reinprecht 2006). However, today there is intense debate around migration due to economic reasons. Under the terms of contemporary discourse, so-called guest workers would now be called “economic refugees” – currently a quite unwelcome group in Austria and Europe (Alpaga 2019).

In the following, I will use biographical case reconstruction (Rosenthal 2018) to analyze the biography of Ronî Ciwan, paying particular attention to the multiple ways in which migration is embedded in his biography. As I will show, his migration is not reducible to the category of labor migration, and his status changed over time: from labor migrant to exile. With this, my aim is to show that categories attributed to migrant people are not merely too strict; they are themselves fluid and changeable. In looking at the temporal and spatial dimensions of migration, I show how the meaning and perception of migration are subject to constant change, transformation, and flux.

3 Biographical Case Reconstruction –

“It Seemed to Be Economic but in Fact It Was Political, Too”

I came across Ronî Ciwan’s⁵ name while conducting interviews on the “guest workers” in Austria. After reaching out to him over the phone, he immediately agreed to an interview. He offered to meet in his Stammcafe a few days later. He was very self-confident throughout the interview, and it was obvious that he was used to leading conversations. This was also demonstrated in his decision of the interview place. I ask my interview partners to choose where the interview takes place in order to foster a sense of comfort and safety (e.g., Rosenthal 2018; Fallend 2008). For a person who is considered a “guest worker,” and thus the “other,” to meet an interviewer in a Stammcafe, where he and the waiters clearly know each other well, demonstrates a sense of belonging and arrival in Austria. That very belonging suggests the limitations of a perspective that defines the migrants as “potential wanderer[s]” (Simmel 1950[1918]), as expressed in categories such as “guest workers,” “people with migrational backgrounds,” etc.

Ronî Ciwan migrated to Austria in the mid-seventies when he was a minor, joining his uncle who already resided there. After several years working in facto-

⁵ This article is based on the outcome of my dissertation project which consists of a total of 25 biographical interviews and two group interviews, as well as photographs, written and audio letters and official documents. The analysis was done with a case study approach. In line with the principle of maximum and minimum contrasting (Glaser/Strauss 2006[1967]), and based on comprehensive memos, a sample of cases was chosen for analysis. I took into consideration the urban, rural, gender, and ethnic aspects of the target group. Based on the principle of contrasting (Rosenthal 2018), I chose the case study of Ronî Ciwan as an example of a member of a displaced family due to the political situation in Turkey against Kurds and Alevis. Furthermore, Ronî Ciwan shared with me audio letters that had been sent to family members in the 1970s. This material, which has been neglected in the available research, is of great interest and has the potential to contribute new insights into the study of migration (Alpaga 2021).

ries, he started to work as a social worker, which remains his profession to this day. Ronî Ciwan's biography is strongly influenced by various forms of violation and discrimination due to his Kurdish-Alevi background, which in turn led to his strong sense of belonging to a group that he experienced as being oppressed and discriminated. As a result, he speaks in a blend of personal and collective narration/memory, which I will elaborate on below. He was born and raised in a neighborhood populated by Sunnite and Alevite Kurdish people, which is to say that he probably grew up in an atmosphere of double discrimination and violence: both from the Sunnite Kurdish community and the Turkish state (Gezik 2021). When presenting his biography, however, he leaves issues of Kurdish-Alevi conflict in the background. As Erdal Gezik (2021) explains, "in the provinces where [Alevi communities] used to live with Sunni populations such as Maras, Malatya, Sivas and Erzincan, being a Kurd or Alevi was synonymous" (570). Speaking from Austria in the present, Ronî Ciwan figures the Kurdish people as a single collective identity defined in contradistinction to an oppressive Turkish state.

4 Early Childhood in Turkey

Ronî Ciwan starts the interview by giving me the clear message that he is a very busy and important person. He begins the interview with a negotiation, asking me "Let's say an emergency call comes or something like that, we can press the button, right?" With "emergency call," his latent intention might be to say that there is an ongoing emergency situation, and that he is the person who will be contacted in such situations. Although he speaks very self-confidently from the outset, the first topic he brings up is marked by ambivalences and ambiguities. He tells me that until he was seventeen or eighteen years old, he did not know his exact birth year. Together with his mother, he had to reconstruct the historical and personal events that had taken place throughout his life in order to determine his actual birthday. By beginning with this anecdote, Ronî Ciwan folds his personal biography into the collective experiences of the Kurdish people. He goes on to say that this was common among Kurdish people, for whom it was not that important to know one's exact birthday. In Kurdish cities, he says, this practice was exacerbated by the lack of infrastructure and institutions to register newborn children.

Ronî Ciwan was born in a village without running water or electricity in a provincial city in the Kurdish part of Turkey. He has six siblings and his parents worked in agriculture and animal husbandry. Ronî Ciwan was born into scarcity and poverty, though he had a certain degree of stability in his life until he started school: "Until I was six or seven-years-old, I stayed within the family. I mean, I was a child, I spent my time with my siblings" (Interview 1, lines 27–28.). The start of school constituted a breach in his life. Although he could not speak Turkish, he was not allowed to speak Kurdish in school. He says: "With violence, humiliation and insult, we had to say that we were Turkish even though

we all were Kurdish and Alevi” (Interview 1, lines 44–45). Here, Ronî Ciwan frames his narration through the collective experience of Kurdish school children who were strictly forbidden from speaking Kurdish due to assimilationist state policies denying the existence of Kurds and the Kurdish language (Zeydanlıoğlu 2012; Skutnabb-Kangas/Bucak 1995).

Next, he refers to the first lines of the Turkish “Student Oath,”⁶ which students recited in the school yard at the beginning of each day. The oath rejects any ethnic background other than Turkish:

“I am Turkish, honest and hardworking. My principle is to protect the younger, to respect the elder, to love my homeland and my nation more than myself. My ideal is to rise, to progress. My existence shall be dedicated to the Turkish existence”.

In the interview, he reflects on his childhood in Turkey from the perspective of the present. When talking about his life prior to migration in the main narration, he continuously switches between personal and collective experiences. There are three possible reasons for this narrative oscillation.

The first possible reading is that Ronî Ciwan might want to express that in order to understand his life, one has to understand his origins, that is, the collective experience and story of a certain group: the Kurdish people in general, and Alevi-Kurds in particular. He not only identifies himself with a Kurdish collective, but even figures members of his family as the major collectives which have structured his life. After discussing his experiences in school, he jumps to a recent episode in Austria, when he was invited to speak at a workshop on mother tongues. He relates that in the workshop he said that he has three languages: Kurdish as “the actual mother tongue,” Turkish as “the father tongue,” because his father “collaborated with the Turkish state” by telling him to speak only in Turkish if he wanted to achieve anything in Turkey, and German as “the uncle tongue,” because his uncle told him to only speak German if he wanted to achieve anything in Austria. In his perception, his father represents the Turkish state that rejects everything concerning his Kurdish background and his uncle represents an Austrian migration politics which does not take the needs of migrant children into account. The only innocent person is his mother, who he perceived as helpless, without any rights and deprived of everything – just like his mother tongue. His mother tongue is also the only language which is not linked to violence and coercion, instead, it is violence that keeps him from speaking his mother tongue.

On the other hand, speaking in collective terms may make his experiences easier for him to discuss. During the interview, it seemed that talking about his childhood was painful, as he experienced it as a difficult time marked by discrimination and violence. Consequently, naming these experiences collectively might help him

⁶ In 2013, the practice of reciting the Student Oath was abolished.

to cope, re-assuring him that he was not alone. While talking about his time in Turkey, he jumps repeatedly to his later experiences in Austria. This too seems to help him to be able to talk about his difficult childhood. The narration of his time in Austria can be considered as a pause which enables him to continue to talk about hard times back in Turkey.

The third possible reason is rooted in his strong feeling of belonging to a certain group. In his early childhood, beginning in the 1970s, the political situation in Turkey was quickly deteriorating. This was especially felt in Kurdish cities. Ronî Ciwan grew up in an atmosphere of uncertainty, in which nobody knew who was fighting against whom, who was killed by whom. It was a chaotic and confusing time, marked by conflicts, fights, and deaths, multiple political clubs and organizations, as well as ongoing financial difficulties. Today, as an adult and a politically active person, he can make sense of his experiences in the 1960s and 1970s.⁷ Even though he did not really understand what was going on at the time, one thing was clear: he, his family and the people close to him felt and defined themselves as Kurdish and Alevi. As a consequence, they differentiated between the Turkish state and left-wing groups and people, who were – despite different positions – pro-Kurdish. As a child and young adult, Ronî Ciwan experienced himself as belonging to a particular group, which helped him to cope with state violence and uncertainty. In order to survive, he had to stick to this group.

Despite these difficulties, he and his family still tried to have a 'normal' life. Ronî Ciwan attended school. His primary school was approximately seven kilometers away from the village and he walked there every day. His secondary school was approximately twenty kilometers away and he walked there daily, too. Then he started high school in the next city and commuted by bus every day. In this period, he started to visit Kurdish and leftist political clubs. Still a child, he could not fully understand what was going on and felt himself stuck: "We kids and young people were in the middle of this *cendere*."⁸ Even though he felt he belonged to a certain group, he was confused. When talking about this time, he talks about a common feeling that minority and repressed groups share: shame. He says that he felt ashamed of being Alevi. The strategy of distancing oneself from and rejecting the "origin" group might give the feeling that one can overcome its accompanying limitations, discriminations, and exclusions. It can, however, cause simultaneous feelings of guilt toward the group of origin. Interestingly, he does not say that he felt ashamed of being Kurdish, even though this a common experience related by Kurdish people about their childhoods. The reason might be that, knowing that I am Kurdish too, he did not want me to think badly of him, especially given his work as an activist for Kurdish rights. An extensive body of work demonstrates how the position of the researchers in the field and their interaction with research

⁷ For more information on Kurdish movement see e.g., Bozarslan/Günes/Yadırgı 2021; Günay 2014.

⁸ I will leave the word *cendere* in original in Turkish as it is not easy to translate it with the full semantic range that Ronî Ciwan means. *Cendere* means squeezing something, crushing, an industrial press. More figuratively, it refers to being under moral and psychological pressure.

participants affect the research process and interview situation (Rosenthal 2018; Devereux 2014[1967]); Fallend 2008).

When Ronî Ciwan was about fifteen years old, one of his uncles, who was living in Austria, came to visit them. Ronî Ciwan's father asked him to take one of his sons. His uncle picked Ronî Ciwan, as he was "his uncle's favorite nephew." Here, Ronî Ciwan talks about a shared trait between himself and his uncle, namely, that he and his uncle have the same name, Ronî. He then talks about the collective experiences of the Kurdish people and relates that one of his brothers is also called Ronî on his birth certificate. In fact, this brother's name is different in Kurdish, though it sounds similar.⁹ As Kurdish names were not permitted, government officials at the registration desk would sometimes choose a Turkish name based on how a Kurdish name sounded. He then gives more examples of family members who have both a Kurdish and Turkish name. Here, Ronî Ciwan's narrative falls in the thematic field of 'all basic identities were denied and erased by the Turkish state.' His name, mother tongue and ethnic and religious background were all officially erased and understood as a source of shame (see e.g., Zeydanlıoğlu 2012; Skutnabb-Kangas/Bucak 1995). In this, the various kinds and moments of violence he and his family experienced is obvious.

5 Migration to Austria

Ronî Ciwan begins discussing his migration to Austria by noting that prior to the migration: "I was in the world of dreams, excitement, fears, sadness as I left friends" (Interview 1, lines 148–149). Together with his uncle and two other men, he arrived in a town in western Austria. Ronî Ciwan reflects on the reason for his migration from the perspective of the present and says:

"People keep asking me in interviews whether it [the reason for migration] was economic or political. It seemed to be economic but in fact it was

⁹ One recent example is the name of Alan Kurdi, the refugee boy whose body was found in 2015 in Bodrum. Alan's body was first photographed by a Turkish journalist. It is likely that this is the reason his name was first announced as Aylan Kurdi, as Alan sounds like the Turkish name Aylan. Aylan is a girl's name, the meaning of which has nothing to do with the original Kurdish name, a common boy's name which means "flag." I see such confusion as one of the outcomes of Turkey's language policy. There are numerous people who have both a Kurdish and an official Turkish name. At the beginning of the 2000s, due to the so-called "democratization package," more and more people could register their children with a Kurdish name. At that time, some Kurdish names were also very popular because of a Turkish series set in Kurdish areas, which led some Turkish people to give their children a Kurdish name as well. However, the use of the letters „w,x,q,ê,û,î" has remained forbidden, as they are not part of the Turkish alphabet (see e.g., Zeydanlıoğlu 2012; Skutnabb-Kangas/Bucak 1995). And some very obviously Kurdish names are still not permitted. Generally, however, Kurds avoid naming their children obviously Kurdish names in order to prevent and protect their children from possible problems and discrimination.

political, too. There were conflicts, deaths in the region” (Interview 1, lines 115–118).

In this part of the interview, Ronî Ciwan implicitly reminds me that he is an important person by emphasizing that he given many other interviews and that this is not the first time he has talked about or reflected on his migration. He criticizes attempts at making rigid divisions and classifications of reasons for migration (Castles/De Haas/Miller 2014). In fact, in various public interviews he is referred to as a “guest worker,” even though he migrated to Austria as a child of fifteen years and has worked as a social worker for the past two decades. One reason why he comments on the issue might be that he wants to make a ‘correction’ and draw attention to the complexity of the reasons for migration.

His uncle’s decision improved his financial situation and rescued him from the violence in his hometown. His siblings, however, stayed in the hometown and were thus exposed to both financial difficulties and political violence. When someone migrates for economic reasons, they can still support their family back home by sending money; in cases of migration due to political reasons, however, financial support is insufficient, which can intensify feelings of guilt for the migrant. All this shows the degree to which the reasons and motives of migration are intermingled and overlapping; the political and the economic cannot be neatly separated. Consequently, contexts in both the country of origin and the country of arrival must be considered.

After his arrival, Ronî Ciwan stayed together with his uncle at a dormitory for workers. He talks about his feeling on the first day there:

“The next day I woke up, everything is strange to me, language, people, food. I was a fourteen-and-a-half-year-old very young person. And it is snowing badly” (Interview 1, lines 183–185).

Ronî Ciwan is caught in-between; he is neither a child nor an adult, neither a student nor a worker. His uncle is there for him but is himself a young man who has to work and who has no experience taking care of a child. After a few months, the fact that he is alone and does not know how to take care of himself becomes apparent. On New Year’s, all of the men in the dormitory go out and Ronî Ciwan stays behind, as he is still too young to go out. He finds a bottle of wine and drinks it alone and consequently gets sick for two or three days. This experience, which he remembers vividly, metonymizes his loneliness. With his migration, he found himself in a completely new situation; unlike in Turkey, where he was part of a collective community, he was now alone, a stranger amongst other strangers.

This feeling of being alone, of being a stranger, is particularly acute in school. In Austria, he experiences school as a breach in his life for the second time. His uncle registers him in a secondary school so that Ronî Ciwan can receive a residency visa. He again has the experience of lacking the language to express himself.

Although speaking Kurdish or Turkish was not forbidden, he still could not speak the language of instruction, in this case German. He says:

“It [the school] was like a torture. I can’t speak German, not a word, my clothing is different ... It is at the first sight clear that I am a stranger” (Interview 1, lines 234–238).

Unlike in the village, where he was part of a collective, albeit it one informed by anti-Kurdish discrimination, in Austria he felt himself to be completely alone and a complete stranger. Unsurprisingly, after receiving his visa, he dropped out of school and started to work at a factory. Despite the difficulties, Ronî Ciwan went to school in Turkey for nine years. But now, in Austria, he could not see any way to continue attending school, it seemed unbearable. I suggest that being a complete stranger in Austria was the biggest burden. In Turkey, in his hometown, all the students were in a similar situation, enduring the similar limitations together, thus providing Ronî Ciwan a sense of solidarity and security. This shift is manifest in his language. Ronî Ciwan does not describe his experiences in the Austrian school system in the collective language he used earlier; in Austria, he was an individual.

Unlike when narrating his childhood in Turkey, Ronî Ciwan is able to speak about his complex (and mixed) feelings about his migration to Austria quite clearly. When talking about his first years in Austria, he does not jump between the incidents in Turkey and Austria, like he did while talking about life in Turkey. Instead, he narrates sequentially. This supports the suggestion that talking about his childhood in Turkey is difficult for him and that it might be too painful to talk about this time and the entirety of his struggles as a single narrative episode (Rosenthal 1995, 2018). His newfound ability to discuss his own feelings and experiences without embedding them in collective terms reveals an important characteristic of migration: gaining (more) space for individual wishes and aspirations (Kılıç 2008). With migration, he, for the first time, had the opportunity to be, and feel himself to be an individual. This is likely the reason why he can talk about his own feelings and experiences as distinct. Migration allowed him to distance himself from his family – not only geographically, but psychologically as well – and so to feel like an individual.

Ronî Ciwan presents his childhood and early youth in the thematic field of ‘my childhood was determined and directed by the others and I had too many responsibilities’. This is particularly clear when he describes returning to Turkey in the 1970s to visit his family. In the years since his emigration, one of his brothers had become involved in political activism. His father wanted Ronî Ciwan to take his younger brother with him:

“My father told me that he [the brother] is still fourteen or fifteen, he will be killed in this chaos. ... I was in a dilemma. I had to take care of him, residency visa, a place to stay, job. Will it all work?” (Interview 1, lines 331–335)

Ronî Ciwan needed time to consider whether he wanted or was able to take care of his brother, but a chaotic and violent situation in the village left no time or space for him to make a decision. Ronî Ciwan, his brother and another young man, who was also politically involved, left the village in the middle of the night. This was Ronî Ciwan's first experience fleeing:

“My father told us to leave at night. He said the next day the police and army would come to the village and take all young men and it will take months until they release them. It was a huge chaotic atmosphere in 80s, you know. So we did not have a choice and left” (Interview 1, lines 345–349).

After leaving the village, they stayed in the mountains for one night before hitchhiking to the next city. Then they went to Austria via Istanbul. At nineteen-years-old, Ronî Ciwan was the only one who was well-versed in life in Austria and thus had to take care of both young men. He adopted the role of caretaker under exceptional circumstances and had neither the time to consider this new role, nor the chance to refuse it.

6 Second Arrival in Austria as a Recognized Refugee

Together with his brother and the young man, he arrived in Austria. But it was now very difficult to get a residency visa as there was no longer a demand for workers. Therefore, his brother and the young man sought asylum. On September 12, 1980, after their arrival in Austria, Turkey declared a military coup.¹⁰ This brought state violence, particularly that directed against Kurdish cities, to its peak. In this period, many people were arrested and executed; in the prisons, hundreds were tortured or died (e.g., Bozarlan/Günes/Yadırgı 2021; Günay 2014; Demirel 2009). Of this time, Ronî Ciwan says only: “I don't need to tell you about the September incidents” (Interview 1, line 360). Here, Ronî Ciwan makes me a member of the collective by presuming that I am someone opposed to the state repression following the coup, someone who immediately knows what he is talking about.

In this period, many other incidents happen in Ronî Ciwan's life. He meets a woman, falls in love, and moves to eastern Austria “because of love.” Ronî Ciwan tells me that in the same period, his father and the father of the young man who traveled with him were arrested and tortured. This made him afraid of returning

¹⁰ The coup led to a second wave of migration from Turkey to Austria, as people fled both before and after the military coup. Contrary to the “guest worker” generation, these individuals were mostly well-educated (e.g., they had a high school diploma, were graduate students or had already graduated from the university), came from urban areas and were well versed in organizing themselves to demand their rights. Consequently, after the arrival of these individuals, movements asking for better working conditions, language classes, etc. started.

to Turkey and led him to seek political asylum; consequently, all three became “recognized refugees.” Ronî Ciwan managed to secure his residency in Austria, but seeking asylum meant that he was not allowed to go back to Turkey until receiving Austrian citizenship. This can, then, be considered a second arrival in Austria. He was now not responsible only for himself, but also for his brother and the young man. He was no longer a labor migrant, but a refugee living in exile.

Despite attempts to distance himself emotionally from Turkey and his family in order to have more individual space, the political situation in Turkey and other parts of Kurdistan do not allow him this distance. Two years after his migration, the Maraş Massacre, which lasted for seven days, occurred in a city not far from his hometown. More than one hundred Kurdish-Alevi civilians were killed. Hundreds of houses and shops belonging to them were destroyed. This incident affected Ronî Ciwan deeply, and he started to become politically active in a leftist club with people from Turkey. The club organized aid for people in need in Africa, Peru, Palestine, etc. He says that he could not understand why they focused on other groups while Kurdish people were suffering, and so he eventually left the club:

“95% of people in the club were Kurdish but nobody talks about Kurds. ... We are struggling for lots of countries in the world, making for them campaigns but there is no Kurdistan. ... I started to have conflicts with my club. I said ‘What is that? I am not against the solidarity for other repressed people but dear friends; we are being repressed, killed. Doesn’t it tell you something? We are fighting for the democratization of Turkey, for a revolution in Turkey. But where are the Kurds in this revolution?’” (Interview 2, lines 414–425).

By speaking in present tense, Ronî Ciwan shows that little has changed; his sentiments remain the same, and Kurdish people are still “being repressed, killed”. After leaving the club, he decided to instead fight for the rights of Kurds whenever and wherever he could. He did not concentrate exclusively on the Kurds in Turkey, but in four countries: Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria.

Ronî Ciwan talks about an unpleasant experience while trying to work with a left-wing political party in Austria. The party asked him to be a candidate for the local council. However, shortly after his nomination was announced, he was accused of being a “terrorist”:

“In the sense that it is okay to support foreigners, guest workers, but Ronî is a terrorist. It was such an attack, newspapers wrote about it seven or eight days.” (Interview 1, lines 519–521).

He says that the political party did not support him, instead they said:

“We actually wanted to run an election campaign not a Ronî campaign. ... So my first political career ended within one month (laughs)” (Interview 1, lines 539–540).

After his visibility in the newspapers, he had difficulties finding a job:

“From the 90s until April 93 unspoken employment ban. Neither factories, nor this and that, unskilled labor, nobody gave me job” (Interview 1, lines 558–559).

Ronî Ciwan felt helpless, attacked and unprotected. Kurdish collective history includes numerous “attacks” and the accusation of being a “terrorist” is a common ascription used for Kurds, as being Kurdish is primarily regarded as a political identity and is thus reduced to violence and separatism (e.g., Saraçoğlu 2011; Bora 2006). In saying that “it is okay to support foreigners, guest workers, but Ronî Ciwan is a terrorist,” he implicitly references a saying from Turkey: “You can be anything in Turkey but not Kurdish.”¹¹ This gesture links shared Kurdish experiences of discrimination in Turkey with those in the supposed country of refuge, Austria.

Ronî Ciwan has experienced himself as being helpless, but he does not present and perceive himself as a victim or passive subject. Rather, because of his experience being “attacked” again and again due to his background, he seeks solutions in political activity. After the end of his “first political career,” in 1988, the Halabja massacre happened. Saddam Hussein attacked Kurds in the city of Halabja Iraq using chemical weapons, killings around 5,000 people (Bozarlan 2021). The Halabja massacre again brought Ronî Ciwan into contact with other political organizations, and he became a member of a support committee for Halabja. The 1990s are considered one of the darkest times in Kurdish history, with the situation in Kurdish cities in Turkey becoming very fragile and precarious. It was, on the one hand, a period of intense Kurdish political activity in Turkey, in which a large number of Kurds joined together in an uprising against the violence of the Turkish state, particularly in Kurdish towns and cities in the south-east of Turkey. Moreover, pro-Kurdish political parties with a majority Kurdish base legally expressed the demands of Kurds in Turkey. On the other hand, the Turkish state responded with increased violence and pressure on the Kurdish population. Villages were evacuated, families displaced, and people were murdered by “unknown”

¹¹ “You can be anything in Turkey but not Kurdish” (*Türkiye’de her şey olabilirsin ama Kürt olamazsın*) means that as long as Kurds remain silent and do not ask for human rights such as securing the Kurdish identity, language etc. they will not face problems. Tough the discrimination continues even when Kurdish people go through a complete assimilation process because in most of the cases one can identify them as Kurdish due to e.g. physical appearance and family background.

perpetrators (e.g., Bozarslan 2021; Bozarslan/Günes/Yadırgı 2021; Günay 2014). Ronî Ciwan sought support and solidarity in Austrian media and politics in order to draw attention to human rights violations against Kurds happening in Turkey.

7 Marriage and “Career Jump”

In the mid-eighties, Ronî Ciwan married his current wife. In the interview, Ronî Ciwan talks a lot about various family members: his parents, brothers, uncle, his wife and daughter. The way he talks about his family reveals that, despite managing to stay in near constant contact, his family was nonetheless shattered and displaced at the same time. Ronî Ciwan enjoys having a secure and stable life in Austria, but his strong identification with a Kurdish collective causes him feelings of guilt and vulnerability which challenge his sense of security and safety. He takes responsibility for others, within and without Austria, due to the exceptional political situation in his hometown.¹²

After about fifteen years working in different factories, he experienced a “career jump,” as he calls it. He started to work as a social worker. Alongside his career as a social worker, he continues to work with other activists to build solidarity for, and to raise awareness about Kurds in Austrian politics. He seeks visibility and support by promoting dialogue and organizing cultural events, including talks with well-known scholars in Kurdish Studies. Ronî Ciwan has organized numerous concerts by Kurdish-Austrian musicians, bringing the most famous Kurdish singers living in exile in Europe together with well-known Austrian musicians in central venues in Austria. The significance of these organizations is that they bring the most important Austrian and Kurdish politicians together in respected and highly visible spaces in Austria. Unlike most migrant activists, who stay within migrant communities, Ronî Ciwan brings a migrant community together with the Austrian-majority population in the very center of Austria.

Ronî Ciwan has worked for over fifteen years as a youth worker with unaccompanied refugee minors and young migrants. There is a clear pattern in his life: after he has overcome difficulties, he tries to help people experiencing what he has already left behind. After his migration, he started to fight for Kurds and Alevis, who were, and are, still being repressed. As a person who no longer lives in Turkey, it is less risky for him to visibly engage in political activities against the state. In his first years in Austria, he felt very alone and rudderless as a minor. As a result, Ronî Ciwan can generally understand what young people, especially new arrivals, are going through, and thus feels he can better help them. His role as a youth worker can be interpreted similarly: he would have benefitted from the help of youth workers when he first arrived, but no one really cared about him. He lived

¹² See Norbert Elias (2001[1991]): *The Society of Individuals*, in which he discusses that the “individual” and “society” are not categories that are ontologically independent from each other, rather they are interwoven and bound together.

in a rough environment, a dormitory of adult male workers occupied with their own challenges and struggles, where no one saw him as a child.

His sense that he lives in an ongoing exceptional and “emergency” situation in which he has to help people is not merely a private feeling. It is also his lived reality: during the interview, he receives three or four calls from individuals in Austria who are active in the struggle for the rights of Kurds, migrants, refugees and women. One of the calls, for example, is about a young woman who needs assistance due to visa regulations. Just as Ronî Ciwan began the interview by warning me that he is a person who deals with “emergency calls,” he ends the main narration by saying “I have to make another phone call. I would suggest I still have certain sequences in my life that I will tell you. ... My feeling says I stop and you can ask questions” (Interview 1, lines 615–620). At the close of the interview, Ronî Ciwan reminds me of his role: the person who is responsible for others and must always be on call.

8 Conclusion – Shifting Categories from “Guest Worker” to Exile

This paper aimed to challenge and question the homogenized view on migration from Turkey to Austria from a holistic and critical perspective, focusing on the contexts of both the country of arrival and of origin. By applying a biographical case reconstruction on a micro-level, I aimed to underline the importance of analyzing a society on both the micro- and macro-level. Close examination at the micro-level allows us to better explain certain social phenomena and problems on the macro-level. Moreover, the two levels are necessarily connected. It is through biographical research, as this paper has demonstrated, that we can reconstruct and deconstruct the multiple entanglements between them.

This is especially salient in making the “subaltern” (Becker et al. 2013; Spivak 1988), e.g. migrants, visible. The lives of migrants do not begin with their migration to the country of arrival; therefore, the meaning of migration in the context of an individual’s whole biography, and not only the event of migration itself, is crucial to an understanding of migrants’ lives (Kempf 2014). Therein, I have explored sites in the biography of Ronî Ciwan in which migration is embedded and the various meanings it holds for him. It was only by investigating the living conditions and circumstances of his in life in Turkey that I was able to articulate the transformations that happened over the course of his migration to Austria. These transformations concern both Ronî Ciwan’s individual biography and social changes which in both countries. For instance, his biographical reconstruction shows how his cross-border activism draws attention to human rights violations, and thus also sensitizes Austrian society as a whole to the rights of minorities.

Even though migration research has already proven that reasons for migration are manifold (De Haan 2020; Castles/De Haas/Miller 2014; Hoerder/Lucassen/Lucassen 2007), the so-called guest worker migration from Turkey

to Austria is still perceived as mainly economic in cause, reducing the various biographies to an economic push and pull. However, this case study reveals that personal backgrounds, such as family structure, and political situations are significant factors in the motivation for and perception of migration from Turkey to Austria. Migration and displacement played a major role in the biography of Ronî Ciwan, both constituting a major challenge in his early life, and simultaneously helping him overcome discrimination and violence in Turkey. His migration allowed him to actively fight against (state) violence and discrimination, while also enabling him to create his own personal space despite the expectations of his family.

The definitions and categories used for various forms of migration and refuge are fluid and variable, rather than static (Castles/De Haas/Miller 2014; Hoerder/Lucassen/Lucassen 2007). The category of labor migration, used to designate migration from Turkey to Austria between the 1960s until the end of the 1980s, is insufficient, as a single biography can include multiple kinds of migration (Siouti 2018; Rosenthal/Bahl/Worm 2016; Apitzsch 1990). Ronî Ciwan was never actually a so-called guest worker in the true sense, but he is considered and classified as one in various interviews. Ronî Ciwan migrated to Austria with a basic tourist visa. In Austria, he received a residency visa as a school student and then started as a worker in a factory. At the beginning of the 1980s, due to the political situation in Turkey, he sought asylum and started to live in exile. After receiving Austrian citizenship, he was allowed to visit Turkey. However, because of the political situation in Turkey in the last few years, he faces potential danger in Turkey. Therefore, he is now living in exile again, and has not visited Turkey for several years. Hammed Shahidian (2000) has shown that, in the course of a life, one can migrate between various categories, just as Ronî Ciwan went from first arriving in Austria on a tourist visa to living there as an exile today.

Migrants from Turkey are usually perceived as a homogeneous and uniform group in the public discourse in Austria, and public discussion is mostly “about” them, rather than “with” them. In this context, this paper aimed first to overcome the homogenized image of individuals who are often reduced to the category of “Turkish” migrant by highlighting their biographies; and second, it endeavored to make visible the commonalities between different people with migrational experiences (such as working conditions and language barrier). Depending on the circumstances in the country of origin and in the country of arrival, the meaning of migration and of specific places changes over time. At present, Ronî Ciwan’s center of life is located in Austria, and he does not talk about places in the nation of Turkey. Rather, he dreams of a place, for the Kurdish people; to him, that means the end of oppression and human rights violations against the Kurdish people. Today, decades after his migration, Ronî Ciwan no longer talks about the economic situation in Turkey, as he no longer faces any difficulties in this regard. However, human rights violations against Kurds and Alevi remains a real danger with which

he is confronted, revealing the ongoing effects of Turkish politics on individuals living in Austria, a phenomenon which has only recently begun to receive public and academic attention (e.g., Scherndl 2020; Aktan 2012).

These findings correspond with my other interviews with Kurdish, Alevi, and non-Muslim people originally from Turkey and now living in Austria. They do not face state violence in Austria, nor do they feel oppressed by the Turkish state. However, the cross-border effects of Turkish nationalism restrain and restrict their freedom of speech in Austria, where the dominant discourse continues to overlook the heterogeneity and multi-ethnic structure of Turkey. Still, minority groups have developed strategies against discrimination in Austria, based on their experience in Turkey. For instance, political activists who took refuge as a result of the military coup in Turkey in 1980 have advocated for the rights of workers and developed networks in order to enable solidarity for and between foreign workers in Austria. This shows that the biographical background of individuals is crucial to how migrants perceive the place of arrival, causing multifaceted transformations and creating new possibilities for collaboration and solidarity. In this regard, it is not just a transmission of concepts brought along from the place of origin. Rather, the experience of migration engenders a need for self-organization and for a sense of belonging to a common group.

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Memories of Migration in Times of Global Inequality: Drawing Aspirational Maps in-between Africa, Europe and the Americas

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Archives and Aspirations

“What happens in the future, what you will be in your life, well – this is a sad terrain, honestly, it’s sadness. You think, you fight, you struggle, but you still have hope. People meet each other and nothing happens incidentally, nothing happens by chance in life. I always say to myself that one day an opportunity will arise, and maybe things can change.”

—Célestin

How does someone who was born in the poorest country in the world, the Central African Republic, end up in the distant, comparatively well-off (yet still deprived) EU-exclave of French Guiana?¹ This question preoccupied me over the course of my ethnographic fieldwork in the little-known French-Brazilian borderland and will guide this chapter. Oriented around Célestin’s memories of migration and thus his life story, it provides insights of global interconnections, illustrating how

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¹ This chapter is an updated and translated version of a paper previously published in German with a stronger focus on entangled inequalities (Santos 2020a). Large parts of it also feature in my book (Santos 2022), with kind permission for reproduction from Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

a single case of transnational migration can be analysed in the context of colonial continuities and global inequalities.

French Guiana is a full-fledged part of France and the European Union, which lists the vast territory of approximately the same size as Austria as an “outermost region”. This is a status shared by eight other far-flung territories still administered by a European “nation-state”, a term hiding the colonial relations maintained by countries such as France, Spain, and Portugal (Santos 2017). Sociological theory has unveiled this avoidance to engage with Europe’s colonial history and present as “coloniality of memory” (Boatcă 2018, 2019, 2021) with tremendous methodological and analytical flaws to be countered by truly global perspectives (Santos/Boatcă 2023). This chapter engages in one such counter-attempt by taking France’s longest external border – the one with Brazil – as the empirical starting point illuminating patterns of migration and inequality experienced by a single person who I call Célestin.

This chapter is dedicated to his remarkable “adventure” – a euphemism he himself used several times – that stems from the “hunger for leaving” characteristic of a multitude of the younger (West) African generation who wish to resurrect themselves from “the social death among those who can neither find work nor move” (Andersson 2014: 19). It sketches parts of Célestin’s border-crossing life and how – along the way – he made sense of the ways in which borders perpetuate inequalities he hoped he could counterbalance by his burning ambition to study and work in the Global North. Célestin was the only migrant from sub-Saharan Africa I met while conducting fieldwork in Saint-Georges and Oiapoque.² Why portray him instead of the more obvious case, that is, Brazilians moving to French Guiana (e.g., Arouck 2000; Mam Lam Fouck 2015; Martins/Superti/Pinto 2016; Piantoni 2011; Pinto 2016; Police 2010). Obviousness and representation were not the guiding criteria when I walked through the two border towns day in, day out, when I watched the boats swaying along the riverside, when I attended meetings and when – one day in October 2016 – I stumbled across Célestin. It is, I argue, more promising and innovative to analyse a rather new and rare migratory pattern, adding hitherto unheard voices to the research field. Figurational-biographical and ethnographic research in and about the Spanish exclaves in North Africa (Ceuta and Melilla) has shown that “exceptional” cases are oftentimes more revealing than the analysis of many similar cases (Rosenthal 2016). Furthermore, “it is absolutely possible that the rare case indicates social change” (Rosenthal 2016: 6). A sin-

² I choose to describe Célestin as a “migrant”, which I use as an umbrella term that encompasses different forms of migration. I do so not only because his status and aims have changed over time, but also “because migration policies are themselves pushing people into, and out of, categories which determine their access to protection and rights. ... The current use of simplistic categories of “forced” and “voluntary” migration creates a two-tiered system of protection and assistance in which the rights and needs of those not qualifying as “refugees” under legal definitions are effectively disregarded. It is important to challenge dominant, but mistaken, assumptions about who is or is not deserving international protection” (Crawley et al. 2018: 8).

gle case is able to illuminate wider entanglements across time and space. In the tradition of a social-constructivist research approach of this type, it is of great importance “to show how the people themselves are the *actors and authors* of their history and their stories, how they carried out activities and made decisions which affected their later life, how they *interpret and comprehend* their past and present life, and how they present themselves and their conduct to ‘Western’ social scientists” (Rosenthal/Bogner 2017: 9; italics in original).

Indeed, this chapter seeks to transmit the ways in which Célestin re-constructed his border-crossing life, showing that it was shaped by, and responded to, larger processes beyond the scope of his control. A few narrative blind spots will remain, for not every single detail was remembered, reconstructed, and/or openly mentioned by Célestin. “Memory, for migrants, is almost always a memory of loss”, anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (2018) points out, and so it was occasionally painful for my interlocutor to revisit the past and to share details of his biography. Still, the experiences and hopes of millions of people on the move or prevented from moving worldwide represent an underexplored and valuable living archive from which to draw new aspirational maps countering prevailing citizenship regimes.

The study of unequal mobilities across the globe from the perspective of migrant archives – understood by Appadurai not only as storehouses of memory but also as aspirational maps – is a critical intervention helping illuminate the case at hand. While it is undeniable that Célestin too made significant decisions which affected his later life, a portion of his life course was subject to the “sorting machines” which borders represent today (Mau 2021). From the very moment he was born, Célestin’s prospects of scoring high within the “birthright lottery” (Shachar 2009) that pre-conditions cross-border movement and life chances more generally were all but rosy. In light of his weak “starting position” within global stratification, it is even more impressive how he challenged static border conceptions imposed by the nation-state. Yet, while citizenship played an important role during his literal trajectory, other ascriptions as well as economic and political constellations were also decisive for his position in a world marked by intersecting inequalities beyond national borders. This is both an empirical observation and in line with conceptual arguments made for global and intersectional perspectives within inequality research (Boatcă 2015; Braig/Costa/Göbel 2015; Jelin/Motta/Costa 2018; Weiß 2017).

The larger processes I am referring to in the case of Célestin include seemingly unrelated incidents such as the post-9/11 immigration policies in the United States and the recent financial crisis in Spain where he arrived in 2005 after a perilous migration route across various African states. At a later point, his partner and new (ultimately unfulfilled) job prospects, amongst others, took him to South America: here, his journey began in the Amazon’s megacity of Manaus and continued in the French-Brazilian borderland, where we met each other. In our conversations, Célestin demonstrated a thorough understanding of spaces and how they reflect in-

equalities on a large scale. The exclusionary function of borders, in particular, was repeatedly criticised by Célestin who, against all odds, entered “Fortress Europe”: He crossed Melilla’s barbed-wire fences in 2005 after six unsuccessful attempts that had left him physically and psychologically injured. By crossing, almost ten years later, the border between Brazil and France, his is a story that highlights the multifaceted ways of reaching forgotten Europes.

Célestin and I initially met during my second, longest research stay in October 2016, that is, before the implementation of several new legal instruments aiming at the deterrence of migrants, including fast-track asylum processing (Santos 2024). Having established good relations with the team of the local NGO DPAC Fronteira (*Associação de Desenvolvimento, Prevenção, Acompanhamento e Cooperação de Fronteira*) during my first, explorative research phase, I returned to DPAC’s office space located in a hilly, dusty street in order to have some cordial small talk with Jane, the director of the organisation, and to learn more about their current projects. She asked how my dissertation was going, urging me to meet Célestin, a new team member at DPAC. While we were speaking, he was giving a French class in one of the rooms. I was surprised to learn that DPAC began to offer language courses and asked Jane why. She explained that it emerged spontaneously with Célestin’s arrival. Besides giving Célestin a welcome activity, it also made sense, we agreed, given that most people in Oiapoque did not speak French.

When the class was over, Célestin came out of the classroom and Jane introduced us to each other. I told him about my doctoral thesis and he said he wished he could have studied and that he still plans to do so. We constantly changed languages during this first encounter, switching from Portuguese to French and Spanish, eventually speaking a potpourri of all three. As I later learned, he also has good knowledge of English, German, Italian, and Catalan. In most of our conversations, though, we spoke French, his mother tongue. In some parts of our interviews, we sometimes mixed it with “Portuñol”, a border tongue that Célestin and I spoke most fluently. These conversations – two of which were arranged as formal but open-ended interviews – form the empirical basis of this chapter. What follows are the memories as aspirational maps drawn by a single migrant who himself was differently positioned along his complex trajectories in-between Africa, Europe, and the Americas.

1 From *Centrafrique* to Cameroon

The fourth of seven children, Célestin was born in the late 1970s into a country of political turmoil which peaked in the so-called Central African Empire, a short-lived monarchy (1976–1979) and, subsequently, the 1981 *coup d’état* resulting in a military dictatorship led by André Kolingba. In this phase of political instability and in fear of repressions, his parents decided that the family should leave the Central African Republic and move to neighbouring Cameroon where Célestin’s

parents came from originally. It can be assumed that his father (and through him also his mother, his siblings, and himself) had certain cultural capital, since, according to Célestin, he was a recognised photographer who had already photographed Jean-Bedel Bokassa, the self-proclaimed emperor of the Central African Empire. And yet: “*Centrafrique* is always in a state of war, always in conflict, still today”, as he explained his parents’ will to escape. The rest of his childhood and adolescence was spent in Cameroon where his family had to start anew. As his father had difficulties working as a photographer, his mother started to earn the family’s living as a cleaning lady, and Célestin remembered that she also “cooked to sell on the streets.” Looking back on his childhood, he explained these difficult conditions as the central impetus for his diligence at school, which he completed in the late 1990s in Bafoussam, the capital of Cameroon’s West Region:

“I was educated the tough way, really, we never celebrated my birthday, never, I was educated like that, because of the poverty ... And I had to fight to go to school, to earn my degree ... I had to fight to get my books myself: during holidays, I always worked, and with that money I bought my schoolbooks. My life was really ... always very harsh, nothing was easy, I always had to make an enormous effort to achieve everything, to attend university, there were obstacles everywhere, you really have to fight to overcome these obstacles. *La vie est comme ça.*”

After finishing high school, he began to study natural sciences in Yaoundé, but very early on, it was clear to him that he wanted to go abroad. While his studies went smoothly, he sensed a lack of perspectives and was eager to continue his studies in another country, preferably in Germany, Italy, Canada, or the United States. Despite his comparatively good education, his prospects of getting a decent job and some stability in life were meagre. This assessment coincides with scientific studies that have diagnosed a “routinized state of crisis” (Alpes 2017: 306) in Cameroon, which in turn is closely interwoven with states and institutions of the Global North: “Migration aspirations have become an essential part of society in Cameroon in the wake of the economic crisis following the structural adjustment programmes of the International Monetary Fund and the devaluation of the country’s currency, the CFA franc” (Alpes 2017: 306).

In view of this structurally conditioned hopelessness, it is hardly surprising that Célestin planned an alternative life path early on. Similar to other Cameroonian youth, Germany was his dream destination.³ He had learned German in high

³ In 2003, the year of Célestin’s emigration to the North, 5,300 Cameroonian students were enrolled in German universities, which suggests that the emigration rates of the highly skilled hide a much larger human capital loss – the outflow of dynamic, intellectually engaged young people who go abroad to study and often remain there upon completing their coursework, as a consequence of the depressing economic and political situations in their country of origin (Mberu/Pongou 2016).

school and has held a positive view of Germany ever since.⁴ However, he soon abandoned his plan of going to Germany because of financial burdens: in order to move to Germany as a foreign student, he had to take a year of intensive classes at the Goethe-Institut – the German cultural association promoting the study of the German language – where he went for some information sessions. Yet he then realised that “the classes were expensive, but after one year of classes you could go to Germany – under one condition: at that time, you had to provide evidence of around €10,000 in your bank account. It’s only for families who have lots of money.”

Going to Italy, in contrast, seemed more feasible: Célestin remembered that one had to demonstrate €4,000, which he hoped he could save up and, partly, borrow from his family and friends. Hence, he enrolled in a year-long Italian course in Yaoundé. However, as he did not pass the final exam, his plan of going to Italy did not materialise. The exact reasons for why he failed the exam remain unclear, though the multiple burdens of work, study, language course, and family commitments seem the obvious explanation to me. Parallel to pursuing his plan to go to Italy, he explored two more options: on the one hand, he applied for permanent residence in the United States through the Diversity Visa Program (Green Card lottery). On the other hand, one of his university professors supported Célestin by trying to establish links with Canadian universities, where he was hoping to continue his studies. This is how he recounted the results of these two options:

“All of this was in 2001 and I was unexpectedly granted the Green Card. But at this moment, the attacks on the World Trade Centre occurred, and well, the US government announced that they will reduce the number of visas. I already held the letter in my hands, with congratulations and everything, I got accepted, but with all of what had happened, with the World Trade Centre, they wanted to reduce the number of visas, so they withdrew my Green Card, and this really shocked me. I really wanted to continue my studies abroad! So, then my professor promised me a scholarship in Canada, that was my last opportunity, but nothing materialised. It was at this point that I just left *comme ça*, without saying anything to my family, I was totally disappointed, so I packed my bag, *et moi j’ai pris la route*.”

After his Green Card was cancelled and thus none of his migration plans worked out as hoped, Célestin said that he left on his own, though his friends and relatives knew about his general intention to migrate. His hopes to migrate legally were shattered, and he saw no other option than to become “illegal”, as he termed it: “For the longest part of my adventure, I was an illegal migrant, one of those that no one wants, no one cares for.” Célestin, it seems to me, used the term “illegal migrant” with reference to the label that others had put on him. In other words,

⁴ Célestin’s connection to Germany and the fact that Germany is still widely taught in school can also be seen as an after effect of German colonialism in Cameroon.

he employed it as a popular term and was aware that he himself might have been “undocumented” during certain parts of his journey, but never “illegal” in a strict sense, given that this term is “pejorative, stigmatizing, and even incorrect, implying as it does that migrants are criminals when they have usually only committed an administrative infraction” (Andersson 2014: 17).

When Célestin, who was clearly a loser of the “birthright lottery”, tried to improve his position by means of transnational migration, he realised “the harsh reality ... that not everyone who wishes to leave his or her country of origin will be able to lawfully enter a desired destination country” (Shachar 2014: 114). Whereas he lost the birthright lottery, he became a (temporary) winner of the Green Card lottery, yet his fortune did not last long, as the September 11 attacks prompted the US government to withdraw a number of granted residence permits. Thus, in a way, he was a double loser of two citizenship/residence lotteries. Not only was he born in a country that offered him far fewer opportunities for mobility than EU citizenship, but he also did not come from a wealthy family, even though he apparently had above-average cultural capital by Cameroonian standards. Nevertheless, it can be seen that the intersection of citizenship and class (here above all in an economic sense) significantly restricted “legal” migration. Célestin could not buy into legal mobility to one of his prioritised destinations (Germany), as he was not even able to pay for the required language preparation. He was thus forced to embark on a difficult, illegalised path towards Europe to attempt to gain a better life.

2 From Cameroon to Spain

Célestin’s destination was Italy, as he had already completed an Italian language course. The only possible route for him was through the Sahara and then across the Mediterranean. In the beginning he travelled from Douala in Cameroon to Calabar and Kano in Nigeria and from there to Niger. He seemed to have no serious problems crossing these borders. From Agadez in Niger he followed the so-called northern route towards Libya. At the time of his migration in the early 2000s, this was the most important route from Africa to Europe, with 60,000 to 80,000 migrants per year (Simon 2006: 54). Still today, it is *the* transit town for people moving from South to North: “IOM recorded over 60,000 refugees and migrants passing through Agadez between February and April 2016 alone” (Crawley et al. 2018: 35).

Most of this route, Célestin told me, was done with the aid of migration brokers (“smugglers”), which corresponds with recent research findings that suggest that it is almost impossible to make this “journey” without either bribing border guards or using the “services” of a “smuggler” (Crawley et al. 2018: 35). Rather than regarding these “facilitations” (only) as illicit and harmful, making use of these “services” can be seen as actions countering the lack of other options being offered by the

desired destinations in the Global North: “The migration facilitation services offer real avenues of hope for geographical mobility. Aspiring migrants relate the potential trickery of a broker to the institutionalized sabotage of their migration ambitions, notably by destination states that deny visas” (Alpes 2017: 308).

In order to reach the Algerian oasis city of Djanet in the border triangle of Algeria, Niger, and Libya, he had to be driven through the desert in a pick-up car. He described this route as follows:

“I wanted to get to Djanet [an Algerian oasis city in the tri-border area of Algeria, Niger and Libya] and you can only get there through the desert, you have to cross the desert by car. If you’re lucky, sometimes the police will let you continue your journey. This is what happened to me. My way to Djanet took me one week, but others have died.”

Célestin told me in a low voice, almost whispering, about the death of so many others who were pursuing migration goals similar to his own. From Djanet he travelled to the Libyan border town of Ghât, which “is considered the most dangerous and deadly land route that migrants can take” (Simon 2006: 54). At this point, Célestin’s journey became much more difficult and he found himself in great despair. As indicated here in this paragraph, he had seen several dead bodies along the way, though he stopped counting them, on his way to Libya:

“In the desert ... it’s incredible ... in the end, I made it, I arrived, but sometimes I didn’t know if I’m strong enough. Honestly, there were people who didn’t endure it any longer. It’s the desert, and there’s no water. And this is what happened to me, the water was empty, so I drank my urine, you drink your urine because there is no water and you don’t know ... when you will have some water. ... Fortunately, I arrived. We saw a Tuareg, really: it is Tuareg who saved us. I have seen so many ... people who died there. I don’t know ... *le destin a voulu que j’arrive.*”

Timidly speaking the unspeakable, Célestin mentioned those who passed away in transit. Unlike others, Célestin survived his journey to and through Libya, finally arriving in Tripoli. His disturbing story is no exception when one looks at another study which found that “refugees and migrants described the long desert crossing in treacherous conditions which often ends in starvation, thirst, and sometimes death” (Hamood 2008: 31). A more recent study on refugee movements concludes that one in five people who crossed the Sahara on their way to Europe saw dead bodies or were present at the deaths of others (Crawley et al. 2018: 77).

In addition to these issues, Célestin faced multiple other problems upon arrival in Libya where, as he put it, “at this point, it was Muammar al-Gaddafi who controlled everything, it was tough.” He found Libyan society distinctly hostile towards refugees and migrants more generally which he in turn attributed to the

regime's anti-immigration propaganda and actions. "I saw so many people getting caught by the police, and I never saw them again. It was very harsh", he recollected. In fact, about 43,000 migrants were deported in 2003, and 54,000 in 2004 (Simon 2006: 32 f.). In hardly any other country is racial discrimination as strong as in Libya, where Black migrants often become victims of police despotism, violence, and new forms of enslavement (see Crawley et al. 2018: 98–102). In fact, between 2000 and 2003 – that is, at the time of Célestin's stay in Libya – Célestin, too, feared repatriation or imprisonment. He told me that "in Libya, migrants were treated badly, and it was difficult to officially register, because you don't know what happens next. That's why people want to leave Libya as soon as possible." These harsh conditions also blur the lines between "forced" and "voluntary" migration, for "even though the initial decision to migrate may have been primarily driven by economic factors, many ... decided to leave Libya due to factors that are more typically associated with forced migration" (Crawley et al. 2018: 99). In the case of Libya, an additional factor is that, according to the law and official rhetoric of the time, there could be no refugees at all on Libyan territory (Hamood 2008: 25).

So how did Célestin deal with this highly dangerous context? Whereas, as he said, being Black often aroused suspicion concerning his legal status in Libya, he developed an important strategy to relieve the discrimination he encountered in his daily life. Even though he was a baptised Catholic, Célestin pretended to be a Muslim in order to receive help and to use the mosque. This strategy relieved some of the challenges the majority of migrants had to face in Libya where, besides the formal criterion of citizenship, religion and race were important factors in the entanglement of inequalities. Nevertheless, he wanted to leave Libya as soon as possible, but the way across the Mediterranean to Italy seemed too risky to him, and he began to consider other possibilities:

"You know that Libya also has a border with Egypt. So, one day, when it was really difficult, I thought of going to Egypt and from there to Israel. I had a friend who had done this. I also thought of doing it like that, but ... it's also very dangerous. I didn't want to risk anything, I didn't want to get into that conflict between Israel and Palestine. My plan, from the very beginning, was to go to Europe, not Asia. But when things are difficult, people change their plans every day. *Você fica assim*: What am I going to do now? ... You keep thinking: which route should I take, how will it go on? You have doubts. What will I do to get out of this situation?"

Finally, Célestin decided to attempt his entry into EU territory via Melilla, the Spanish exclave located to the Northeast of Morocco. In order to do so, he had to cross three more borders: the one between Libya and Algeria, the one between Algeria and Morocco and, the most difficult, the one between Morocco and Spain (Melilla). He told me that he crossed the Libyan-Algerian border at Ghadames,

then making a difficult journey through Algeria, “but I was already used to it. It was difficult, but it worked. I now had a clear goal. This was my last chance.” In the Spanish-Moroccan borderland, he became a border dweller at the Moroccan Mount Gourougou, infamously known for housing thousands of African migrants since the early 2000s.⁵ Overlooking Melilla and the Moroccan city of Beni Ensar, Mount Gourougou became Célestin’s temporary home for several months. From here, he aimed to “jump over” (*sauter*) the two border fences with an altitude of three metres each, topped with barbed wire.⁶

“You had to jump over the barrier. I tried it seven times. Very few people succeed the first time ... sometimes at night, they are lucky. If not, you go back to Gourougou, you sleep with your shoes on, because the *gendarmérie marocaine* can come any time. They came many times when I was living there, in the camp.⁷ They chase you, they burn your stuff, it’s crazy. And when you walk to the border or down to Beni Ensar, they stop you, they punch you, they arrest you, they put you in prison, or they bring you back. But we, since our goal was to go to Spain, would always come back. It’s like a game. This really was the hardest border. I have a friend who lost his eye, another one broke his leg, the barriers have barbed wire and are 3 or 4 metres high, you have to climb up the first fence and then jump to the second, because they have two barriers. So, when one of the others jumped, he broke his leg. The other one is blind until today. I have made seven attempts and got little injuries, too. On the 7 March 2005, it was at night, I tried it again and, well, we had a ladder and then I jumped – I jumped and I made it. There I was, in Spain, but there also was the Spanish police; they were shooting with rubber bullets, they were running behind us, some make it, others don’t make it. So, when you enter, you have to hide, you need to find a place to hide because otherwise they will take you, the Spanish *gendarmérie* will detain you and send you back behind [the border]. You have to wait until sunlight and then go to the refugee centre. Well, I

⁵ See the documentary *Les sauteurs* (2016; directed by Abou Bakar Sidibé, Moritz Siebert, Estephan Wagner) which gives insight into everyday life at Mount Gourougou from the perspective of a migrant who filmed his daily activities there.

⁶ In 2005, shortly after Célestin’s entry to Melilla, the height of the fences was doubled to 6 metres and a third fence was built to deter migrants from jumping over the border. Triggered by the infamous mass attempts to enter Ceuta and Melilla in 2005, the literal “walling” of Fortress Europe was but one among many other measures taken by the Spanish and EU authorities who began to implement a “Global Approach to Migration and Mobility” (abbr. GAMM; see Commission of the European Communities 2007; European Commission 2011). However, it is important to note that the “reinforcement” of the borders between Spain and Morocco already began to take shape with Spain’s EU accession in 1986 (Bahl 2017: 185).

⁷ Mount Gourougou is not an official refugee camp, but an impromptu camp established by migrants themselves who try to hide from the Moroccan authorities. Nonetheless, it can be counted as part of the “world of camps” (Agier 2014).

was lucky, I could hide from the police, and then in the morning, I went to the centre.”

519 days after leaving Yaoundé, Célestin finally reached his goal: entering the European Union, albeit differently than he had originally planned. Even today, he regards his arrival as a key moment for the course of his further life: “I was in the reception centre, this is when I entered: I was born anew.” While being glad to have finally made it, to be “here” and no longer “there”, Célestin realised that 519 days of crossing borders, of “surviving, not living”, as he put it, have left marks on him. These marks have not healed until today, as he told me:

“Fabio, I don’t have anyone. Many of us have headaches, they don’t go away. It’s a lot. *C’est la vie, es la vida*, life goes on, but there are many things that we, deep inside ... you know ... I don’t know how to explain. It’s a lot of suffering. When you arrive, there is no one, no psychologist to help ... a little bit. And when you arrive there [in Melilla], the adventure begins anew. When you enter, you think that everything is over, but no, another adventure begins. You don’t have money, you don’t have papers, you don’t have anything, you cannot work. So, another adventure begins.”

3 From Spain to Brazil

The Spanish-Moroccan border has been described as a “threshold between worlds. Behind them [the migrants], the violence of the borderlands they have trudged through for months or years; ahead, a space of ‘human rights’ and the promise of freedom” (Andersson 2014: 137). Célestin soon learned that the inverted commas around “human rights” are placed there wisely, and that “freedom” was indeed more of a promise rather than a reality. In Melilla, he spent six months waiting, stuck in limbo in the local *Centro de Estancia Temporal de Inmigrantes* (CETI). Besides learning some Spanish, he and the other migrants were mainly waiting to be “transferred” to one of the other Spanish regions. Célestin had no voice as to where he would be “transferred”, and the administrative “lottery” finally placed him in Madrid.

In Madrid’s Aluche *barrio*, Célestin had to spend a month in the local *Centro de Internamiento de Extranjeros*, an expulsion centre where immigrants are detained and deprived of their freedom of movement for up to two months. However, 71% of the detained immigrants are not expelled and struggle to strike roots or move on after their incarceration.⁸ Célestin, too, was released after several weeks and tried his best to gain ground, seeking a normal life, as he termed it: finding a job, an apartment, making some friends. None of this really worked in the beginning, and

⁸ See the special dossier of the Spanish newspaper El País: https://elpais.com/agr/cies_la_reforma_pendiente/a<06.02.2022>.

Célestin found himself at the margin of society: impoverished, hungry, homeless. “I was finally in Europe”, he said, “but it didn’t feel like I was in Europe.”

It was a friend of Célestin whom he had met in Madrid that convinced him to leave the Spanish capital, as there were “too many people and there weren’t lots of opportunities.” After harsh months marked by homelessness and precarity, Célestin thus moved to Santander. During his first three months, he stayed at a convent and an association that houses migrants. It was in Santander that he obtained a residence card (*tarjeta de residencia*) which facilitated many of the day-to-day activities of a “normal life”, such as banking and training. During that time, he found his first job as “a guy who searches for car wheels at garbage sites and in containers.” He remembered that this was an extremely exhausting job which he could not do on a long-term basis. By that time, his Spanish had improved significantly and he was actively looking for job trainings and sending applications. In Santander, he completed several training programmes, the certificates of which he proudly showed me in the *pousada* (guest house) where he was living in Oiapoque during my second research stay. Ironically, some of these training programmes – all of which trained Célestin in manual, auxiliary activities such as welding, dock working, or industrial cleaning – were funded by the European Union, whose logo was shining in blue and yellow on the certificates. Wavering between modesty and pride, he told me how he experienced his first stories of success:

“The vocational training in welding, it was an eight-month training. It was a tough selection procedure, there were 150 applicants, but they only wanted 15 persons, and I was selected as one of these 15 people, because they held a Spanish test. That’s how I was selected.”

But like all the other trainings, it did not lead to any serious job perspective, as Célestin remembered: “You just couldn’t get a job, and also the financial crisis began during that time.” From time to time, he had some unofficial work and also received financial aid from these training programmes. This is how Célestin, who was rigorous in saving money at every turn, managed to set aside some money over the years, although he sent additional money to his family in Cameroon. But between 2012 and 2013, he told me, he got into trouble. Like many people in Spain and around the world, he was personally affected by the global financial crisis. At the height of the crisis, he was still in Santander and could not find employment, be it informal or formal. Therefore,

“I moved to Barcelona, in Barcelona I thought I would have more opportunities, I learned Catalan, and there was the option to work as a taxi driver. I had obtained my license in Santander, and so I began a course to become a taxi driver ... But during the course I saw that the conditions didn’t allow me to gain a proper license to be a taxi driver. Meanwhile, the situation worsened, I didn’t find anything, and it was at this point that I came to

know this lady from Brazil [his partner] and a Brazilian man who told me that in Manaus there were lots of opportunities for welders. He said he could help and get me a job at a company in Manaus. And by chance, she [his partner] had lived in Manaus, and this is how we planned to go there, this is how I came to Brazil.”

Célestin and his partner, Marcia, scrambled all their savings to book a one-way flight to Manaus in 2013. The lack of prospects in the midst of the Spanish financial crisis prompted them to leave Europe and turn to Brazil which had been witnessed a stark economic rise since the early 2000s and seemed to withstand the contagion effects of the Great Economic Crisis: The Brazilian economic growth “was followed by a sharp reduction in the unemployment rate, from 12.4% in 2003 to 5.1% in 2013” (Prates/Fritz/Paula 2017). In contrast, the unemployment rate in Spain was five times higher in 2013, amounting to more than 26.1%. Célestin, certainly, maintained his “capacity to aspire” (Appadurai 2018) and went to Brazil with high hopes, not thinking that it could get worse.

4 From Brazil to French Guiana

When Célestin and Marcia arrived in Manaus, the capital of the Brazilian federal state of Amazonas, there was no trace of Célestin’s acquaintance who had offered to help him get the job. He tried to make the best of his situation and applied for various posts, again without success. At least he now found a certain degree of stability in private life, which in turn affected his residence status in Brazil: Marcia and Célestin entered into a registered partnership in Brazil, which offered Célestin a long-term perspective in Brazil. However, apart from minor auxiliary activities, no prospects were offered to him and Marcia. The two therefore decided to reorient: while Marcia would stay in Manaus for the time being, Célestin was to explore the possibilities of moving to French Guiana. It was only in Brazil that he became aware of this European backdoor in South America. In 2014 he travelled by bus to Boavista, from there to Georgetown in Guyana and then via Suriname to French Guiana. What happened in Cayenne?

“I arrived there, but it wasn’t as I had hoped. I explained my situation to the authorities, showing my documents and that I had lived in Europe legally, that I have an education, that I completed trainings that were funded by European funds. They said, ‘no, there’s no solution for you here, you have to go back there, to Spain.’ I even applied for asylum, but it didn’t work.”

Sociological research has provided strong evidence for the fact that in the French (and, by extension, European and international) asylum system, rejections have become the norm, especially at the first stage, which in the French case takes

place at the OFPRA (Fassin/Kobelinsky 2012; Laacher 2018). While waiting for the result for several months, Célestin was again stuck in limbo, trying to work here and there. Once, he got hired on a building site in a private home without receiving the promised money afterwards. “Cheap and willing immigrant labour is everywhere in Guyane” (Price 2018: 22), and it can sometimes get exploited to a tremendous degree when the privileged white and Creole populations take advantage of the despair of migrants, especially if they are *sans papiers*.

After the application for asylum had been declined, he and Marcia decided to reunite in Oiapoque. Here, they lived in a *pousada* where we met most of the times. As it was located in the centre of Oiapoque, there was always something going on when we sat on the terrace: someone was trying to sell pirated DVDs and the next minute, a van with oversized loudspeakers on its roof would pass by and announce a party for the weekend. Célestin and I usually sought refuge from this turmoil, sitting down in a little corner of the hostel’s open-air corridor. Sometimes, Marcia would show up, wiping the wooden floor around us or emptying trash bins. She had started to work as the *pousada*’s cleaning lady so that she and Célestin would not have to pay the rent for their dim, small room, equipped with nothing more than a double bed, a chair, a fridge, and an air conditioner which was probably louder than the huddle of Oiapoque’s streets.

It was from Oiapoque that Célestin filed an objection to the negative outcome of his asylum application at the French *Cour Nationale du Droit d’Asile* (CNDA), the institution in charge of appeals on unfavourable asylum decisions. After years of struggling, he could not come to terms with the rejection of his application for asylum and grasped at the last legal straw he had in his search for a better life. The aforementioned sociological works have shown that the rare successful appeals are relatively arbitrary: asylum claimants and their lawyers are forced to play “Russian roulette” (Laacher 2018: 27), hoping to convince the judges in a process where there is no such thing as an “objective proof.” In fact, the empirical evidence on the arbitrary character of asylum decisions should encourage any asylum seeker to appeal against the first judgement: “an asylum seeker has a nearly five-times greater chance of receiving refugee status by appearing before a ‘benevolent’ president than an ‘inflexible’ colleague”, Fassin and Kobelinsky (2012: 462) observed in analysing everyday asylum decision practices in the CNDA. They were able to show that asylum has become a scarce resource only allocated to “real” refugees. Yet, what a “real” and convincing refugee story is and how it is perceived by the judges is subject to “injustices of chance” (Fassin/Kobelinsky 2012: 466). In this moral economy of asylum delineated by Fassin and Kobelinsky, only a few can counterbalance the inscribed principle of mistrust towards individuals seeking asylum. As in many other (inter)national contexts, the courts and their representatives deciding on asylum value asylum as an abstract principle “while devaluing those who claim it” (Fassin/Kobelinsky 2012: 265).

Like innumerable others, Célestin refused to give up his fight for the right to asylum in a system actively turning it into a scarce good. While waiting for the

result of his appeal against the CNDA, Célestin got in touch with Jane and the other team members of DPAC Fronteira, and he and Jane soon decided he could offer French classes. “It gives me some structure”, he told me, “a reason to be here.” It was the first time in a very long time that he felt appreciated for what he did. Jane trusted him and he designed the curricula independently. “It’s a lot of responsibility, I like it”, he said. At the same time, however, it was clear to him that this was a temporary activity. He had given classes for some months now, and the course would end within the following weeks, by the end of my fieldwork phase. When I asked Célestin why he did not want to give another course, I discovered that he gave the classes on a voluntary basis:

“I like to help people. Consecrating myself voluntarily to others for three hours, that doesn’t disturb me, but not all the time. Two hours, three hours, doing some kind of voluntary activity, well, I do it with pleasure ... I myself, during my adventure, I received help, there in Morocco, during my long march, there were people, they didn’t know me and they gave me something to eat: ‘come eat with us,’ they said. These are experiences that have really left a mark on me. So, when I can, I help.”

Célestin wanted to help, and at DPAC Fronteira he received a long-missed recognition in the midst of his precarious situation: as an applicant for asylum, he received the *allocation temporaire d’attente* and was not allowed to work apart from volunteering.⁹ Whereas the volunteer work boosted his self-esteem, he decided not to give another course the following year, in 2017. “I like the work. The students are nice, but I need to move on”, he said. What, then, were his plans? “What’s your dream”, I asked him.

“My dream, honestly, is to study. I have not given up, I’m not finished yet. They say a man without education is an incomplete man. I always wanted this, studying something useful, so I can work afterwards. All these trainings that I did there, welding and all these things, I fought so much to have them. This disappointed me so much, so much. When they give me asylum in French Guiana, I will enrol at the university, because I can do it, with my degree. ... I really want to go back to university, even though I have finally understood that perhaps destiny will not permit me to do so, *voilà* ... If you don’t have access to these small cogs, to this knowledge ... sometimes, in life, it’s only a small piece of information that can change everything. A little orientation. A bit of information that can change your life. Sometimes, I feel like that, because I, particularly I, I didn’t have anyone who could have,

⁹ On the basis of articles L. 5423–8–1 and L. 5423–9–2 of the *Code du travail*, the amount is given to applicants of asylum in France only if the respective prefecture is unable to provide housing for the asylum seekers (which is particularly pertinent in Guyane). Concerning the prohibition to work, see article R. 742–2 of the *Code de l’entrée et du séjour des étrangers et du droit d’asile*.

who gave me orientation. I sense that this has perhaps been the worst, for me, to suffer: this lack of orientation. If only I had had someone to guide me.”

I was impressed by his long-practiced “capacity to aspire” while being excluded from the life he had imagined. “The work of the imagination, especially for poorer migrants, is critical for exercising the capacity to aspire”, Appadurai (2018) explained. Célestin’s future-oriented imagination was also obvious in the opening quotation: “What happens in the future,” he said, “what you will be in your life, well – this is a sad terrain, honestly, it’s sadness. You think, you fight, you struggle, but you still have hope.” Clinging to hope for a better life while simultaneously describing the “sad” prospects, it seems, was the only resource that propelled Célestin in new directions. This imagination can even be lifesaving: “Without developing this capacity, which may also lead to rape, exploitation and death (for migration is a world of risk), poor migrants will always remain captive to the wishes of the vanguard” (Appadurai 2018). However, this imagination can also be fuelled by mediators or role models, as Célestin’s words suggest: “sometimes, in life, it’s only a small piece of information that can change everything”, he said, implying that he was lacking important pieces of information. In this regard, then, one could even argue that the (re)production of inequalities has a knowledge dimension which, in turn, is strongly entangled with other factors such as a person’s social surrounding and economic background. With this knowledge dimension, I am not (only) referring to formal education in the sense of skills required in contemporary capitalism which are usually expressed in degrees, titles, and years of schooling (see Costa 2016: 4, 12). While it seems obvious that Célestin could have achieved a better social position if he had had access to the best high schools and if he had passed the aforementioned Italian language test, I would add a rather subtle dimension to this more formal understanding of knowledge: “a small piece of information”, as Célestin mentioned, transmitted through mediators or role models in everyday, seemingly “banal” encounters. This aspect will become clearer in the remaining part of this chapter which focuses, amongst others, on Célestin’s own role as a supporter passing knowledge to others. At one time of our interview, he expressed his sorrow with the following words:

“Honestly, sometimes, you know, Fabio, sometimes ... I ask myself: am I taking the wrong decisions? Sometimes, I feel sick, nobody understands me, I’m on my own ... I really make efforts to see if there are opportunities to work somewhere, any kind of work really, *je fais tout, je cherche partout*, I’m not here to do any harm, no, I want to earn an honest living. You know, sometimes I feel bad, really bad, sometimes I am disappointed by my life, but well, ... *ça arrive, ça arrive*. But ... deep inside my soul, sincerely, I sometimes feel sick, sincerely ... I don’t do what I like, because everything that I am doing at the moment, well, this is not really what I would have liked to do.”

What he wanted to do was to study and, subsequently, work in Europe or North America. What he wanted, as I learned in the course of our conversations, was to live his brother's life, in somewhat exaggerated terms. As was mentioned earlier, Célestin felt a lack of guidance and he worked hard to get every little piece of information about leaving Cameroon, studying abroad, and so on. He himself, however, asserted that he was always eager to pass information to others, helping them to pursue similar plans successfully. "I fought so much for him", he said when speaking about his younger brother, Amos, with a certain sense of bitterness. Having Célestin as a role model, Amos "imitated" his older brother, stepping into his footsteps. Yet whereas Célestin stumbled along the long and rocky road to Europe, Amos was able to take the fast track: just like his older brother, he attended Italian classes in Yaoundé, but – unlike Célestin – he passed the final exam, which enabled him to apply at Italian universities. Shortly after Célestin crossed the EU's fortified external border around Melilla, his younger brother boarded an airplane to Italy. Holding official visa documents in his hands, Amos could "skip" his brother's dangerous journey lasting 519 days by booking a flight which brought him to Italy within approximately 10 hours. In Italy, he pursued pharmaceutical studies at the *Università di Bologna*. While Célestin was struggling to, in his own words, survive – sleeping under bridges, looking for car wheels, applying for jobs, and so on – his brother studied at one of the oldest and most prestigious universities in the world. On the one hand, Célestin was proud of his brother, yet on the other hand, he expressed a certain disappointment. I was perplexed: how can two brothers with similar (if not the same) starting conditions end up in these strikingly discrepant lifeworlds?

Today, Amos lives in Hamburg, where he works at a pharmacy. After finishing his degree in Bologna, he moved to Germany where he completed a specialised Master's degree at the University of Bonn and married a German woman. In a nutshell, this was Célestin's early plan: "He went to Italy to study, then to Germany to work ... which is what I wanted to do, right? I wanted to go there, but he was the lucky one." Like his brother, Amos has not inherited a citizenship that is "valuable" in terms of rights, protections, and opportunities. In fact, it is rare to become a pharmacist in Germany as a Cameroonian citizen who was not born into a wealthy family. Nevertheless, it is not odd to say that a kind of "lottery" or "sorting machine" partook in the aforementioned developments: Since "liberal states face the challenge of both facilitating wanted mobility and restricting unwanted mobility" (Mau et al. 2012: 2), one can conclude that Amos appeared as a promising, "wanted" migrant: one who has the prospect of becoming a highly educated, specialised expert. Célestin, in contrast, was among "those who [did] not promise any benefit" (Mau et al. 2012: 49), despite the fact that he was an aspiring student. Yet being an aspiring student in Cameroon did not mean a lot in the scramble for visas, as Célestin's case shows. The crucial watershed moment, it seems in retrospect, was when he failed the Italian test his brother

passed. Moreover, perhaps “this lack of orientation” was the decisive factor, as Amos had more time and guidance to prepare his plan of going abroad.

I came to understand that Célestin hoped that Amos would help him and his family in Cameroon. He told me how he had supported his younger brother, giving him a share of the scarce money he earned while still in Cameroon and, later, in Spain:

“When I was in Spain, I made an effort to save money, so when I had like €100, I sent it to him and to my family, so they can go to the hospital. But my brother, no, he doesn’t send any money back home, even today.”

Partly due to this unequal approach in supporting each other as well as family members in Cameroon, the two brothers have drifted apart over the years. As was cited beforehand, living and volunteering in Oiapoque “is not really what [he] wanted to do.” During my last days of fieldwork in late 2016, I went to see Célestin one last time before my departure. He was smiling and joking as always, despite all of his difficulties. While growing increasingly frustrated, he was still brimming with enthusiasm and plans for the future. It was a warm meeting and I thanked him for all the hours he had spent with me, for all the stories he had told me – a thanks, though, which will never compensate for his openness to become my interlocutor and, I dare to say, my friend. Yet having already learned my fieldwork lessons, I feared that we might lose sight of each other even though we promised we would keep in touch. Long-term relations across borders in the post-fieldwork phase often become complicated by other obligations and interests, though new communication technology, of course, helps one to stay in contact. Additionally, I was not sure if I would return to the field and – if so – whether Célestin would still be here. Once again, I told him about my return trip and that, only a few days later, I would spend Christmas and New Year’s Eve in Germany before going back to the desk in order to digest my field notes. “What about you”, I asked.

Célestin said he would spend the following weeks in Oiapoque, but that he might leave the town in the beginning of the coming year. “Who knows what will happen, we will see. Maybe I’ll go to the forests and do *garimpo*”, he explained. I was surprised, as it was the first time he told me about his plan of joining a group of *garimpeiros* (gold miners) in French Guiana. Noticing my surprise, Célestin shrugged his shoulders and said: “What else can I do? I know someone who did it. It’s hard, but you earn lots of money.” Understanding his desperate situation, I did not want to talk him out of doing it, but I mentioned the dangers of becoming a *garimpeiro*. “I wouldn’t do it for a long time”, Célestin reassured me; he would only do it while waiting for the asylum response from the CNDA. Our diametrically opposed positions in the global stratification system could not have been clearer at this very moment: as an asylum seeker at the Amazonian edge of Europe, he was seriously thinking of becoming involved in the clandestine gold mining industry,

whereas I was about to fly back to Germany to continue my doctoral project from there. Célestin was still optimistic for his objection to the negative asylum decision to be successful. I simply had no clue how it would end, and I wished him all the best while we said goodbye to each other.

The next day, he sent me an email, wishing me a good flight back to Germany. In early 2017, we were still in touch and he sent me the following lines: “Hi Fabio, happy new year, lots of health, peace and love! How are you? I hope you are well. *Um abraço muito forte.*” I also wished him a Happy New Year and after that, I reached out to him during the general strike which left Guyane paralysed for four weeks in March and April 2017. A few weeks later, in May 2017, Célestin sent me a message, saying that he just got a positive answer from the CNDA. Fifteen years after leaving Cameroon, Célestin was granted asylum in French Guiana and, consequently, in France. “I always say to myself that one day an opportunity will arise, and maybe things can change”, he said in the opening quotation. Finally, he was proven right.

5 From French Guiana to ...?

Célestin’s biographical account is unique and extraordinary. Still, this rare case illustrates a web of unequal socio-spatial entanglements on an impressive scale, indicating not only the difficulty but also the possibility of social change, as Rosenthal has postulated for the detailed, embedded analysis of rare cases. The fact that people leave Cameroon and head to Europe is not new. That someone leaves Cameroon and ends up in the French-Brazilian borderland, however, is a conspicuous novelty that reflects, I argue, a kind of *ping-pong* between macro forces and the decisions taken by an individual actor. As was detailed in this chapter, societal change refers to a variety of aspects in the present case, the majority of which can be subsumed under a general trend towards increasing mobility restrictions and a “hardening” of borders: With no possibility of acquiring a European visa due to intersecting reasons mirroring the entangled inequalities he encountered (as a member of the lower middle class lacking economic capital to counter the fact of having “accidentally” lost the “birthright lottery”, the Green Card lottery, the German and Italian sorting machines which preselect desirable immigrants on the basis of their economic “self-sufficiency” and their human capital), he embarked on a dangerous migration route, zigzagging across various African states, changing plans according to the conditions he encountered in each place. Libya, in particular, played an important part in his life story, for it showed how the crucible of being Black, Christian, and Cameroonian put him in dangerous situations that could lead to physical violence and deportation. While he did not have the financial means to circumvent these asymmetries, Célestin found strategies that mitigated his precariousness.

After assessing the Mediterranean Sea route as too risky, he opted for re-directing towards Melilla. This alone is not new since “not being able to acquire a visa does not prevent a person from travelling to a border” (Mau et al. 2012: 7). Furthermore, the frustration Célestin started to feel once he arrived in Europe is a widely shared sentiment experienced by illegalised migrants. The financial crisis in Spain highlights how deeply Célestin – seeking work opportunities in Spain where he moved to different cities in the hope of finding stable employment – was and still is part of a globally interwoven economic world-system and how, in turn, the latter’s inherent production of unequal positions impacted his life. Unable to find work and a minimum quality of life (and triggered by his encounter with Marcia), he decided to leave crisis-ridden Europe and head towards Brazil. This, in fact, is an impressively new aspect in the present case. After several attempts to gain a foothold in Spain, he presented himself as a clever, well-informed, and well-connected actor who found new paths across borders against all odds.

Managing to obtain a legal residence permit in Brazil, however, did not translate into any significant improvement in terms of employment and, hence, his financial situation and well-being more generally. Again, Célestin demonstrated a distinguished flexibility and mobility by deciding to move to French Guiana, the postcolonial “backdoor” of France and the European Union in South America. While Guyane has for a long time been a destination for migrants from its immediate neighbouring countries – Suriname and Brazil – as well as from the wider Latin American and Caribbean region, the overseas territory has very recently become a promising EU anchor for a variety of people who have fled on unexpected migratory routes and from diverse contexts of origin (Santos 2020b, 2021). This, I maintain, is an aspect of the *current social change* that Célestin’s case illuminates. Among the increasing number of asylum seekers in French Guiana, the majority still comes from Haiti, yet recently the number of Syrians, for instance, seeking refuge in Guyane after first entering Brazil and then crossing the French-Brazilian border has been on the rise.¹⁰ While the reasons for and the courses of their journeys vary tremendously and should be examined in future studies, it is not far-fetched to argue that Célestin’s case exemplifies the quite recent “discovery” of French Guiana as a destination for asylum seekers not only from the Americas but also *from other world regions*. In this vein, it is an interesting coincidence that on the cover of the 2018 annual report issued by the *Office Français de protection de réfugiés et apatrides* (OFPRA), a woman from the Central African Republic is pictured carrying her child on her back in Adamaoua, Cameroon (see OFPRA 2018).

Even though the French-Brazilian border is not insurmountable, it has become increasingly policed (Santos 2021). In order to be with his partner, Marcia, he went to Oiapoque after spending about a year in Cayenne and decided to dispute

¹⁰ Within ten years – from 2007 to 2017 – the number of asylum seekers in French Guiana has risen tremendously. While only 322 people applied for asylum in 2007, the number was 16 times higher in 2017 (5,176 asylum seekers, 88.9% of whom come from Haiti; see OFPRA 2018: 24–25).

the negative outcome of his “refugee roulette” from there. While Célestin could watch the *catraias* crisscrossing the Oyapock River, his younger brother, a pharmacist in Hamburg, could watch much bigger ships on the Elbe. The case of the two brothers leading astonishingly different lives in different countries and on different continents may represent the subtle ways in which entanglements play out unequally: even the supposedly smallest piece of information and a minimum of support can help one to cross unequally shaped spaces and to overcome barriers maintained by a system of interwoven inequalities. These inequalities, though globally interwoven, can be analysed by reference to a single person who lives in the French-Brazilian borderland. Citizenship was a factor which clearly determined Célestin’s life course yet – in the sense of “entangled inequalities” – it was *in interaction with* other dimensions of inequality such as class, race, and access to knowledge that Célestin’s position shifted during his migration story.

Célestin and I have been in irregular exchange since we met, mostly via instant messaging. I also had the opportunity to meet Célestin again in 2018 and 2019 through conference trips to Cayenne. At both times, he lived in Matoury, right next to the airport where he picked me up in with his car in 2018. Célestin was tired and euphoric at the same time when we met again. The tiredness, he told me, came from his strenuous job as a gardener’s assistant, which he does from early in the morning until midday. But there were more exciting news: his wish had come true and he was now enrolled at the *Université de Guyane*, studying computer science. In his private life, too, things had changed significantly: Célestin had not been with Marcia for some time now. In the meantime, he was living in Matoury with a Haitian woman who was expecting their child. A few weeks later, he became the father of a healthy son. Undoubtedly, due to his birthplace, his son has drawn a better lot than his parents in the global birthright lottery.

At the end of 2019, yet another and, for the time being, our last in-person reunion took place. I waited in front of the Matoury town hall for Célestin, who arrived shortly after me and waved me into his new car. In the front passenger seat was his son, who had just turned one year old, in a baby car seat, looking at me with big eyes. We drove for a few minutes to the home of Célestin and his partner. After Célestin’s son unwrapped my birthday present for him and played with it, Célestin and I talked not only about current world events but also about our private and professional plans. He was happy about the completion of my doctorate and then said that he took a break from his studies. Besides work and new family responsibilities, he said, there was hardly any time left for studying. He also told me again about a plan he had already mentioned at our meeting the year before. In the long term, he told me, he wanted to apply for French citizenship. Interestingly, however, his interest lies not so much in the unrestricted right to work and reside linked to citizenship as in the global mobility privileges that certain citizenships enable. He sees his future in Canada where he aimed at working in a relevant field. And so it remains to be seen where and how Célestin

– still striving for hope in a world marked by entangled inequalities – will live in the future.

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Migration from Brazil to Angola in the Post-Colonial Period: Experiences of War and Social Transformation after Independence

Zeila de Brito Fabri Demartini

1 Introduction

The purpose of this text is to reflect on the migration of Brazilians to former Portuguese colonies that took place in the 1970s and 1980s. It is part of a broader research project¹ that addresses the intense migratory flows of Portuguese and their descendants from the former colonies to São Paulo, due to the colonial wars, and especially the tensions and violence in 1975, during the post-independence period. During this period, migration took place in two different directions: some were fleeing the former colonies, while others went there from Brazil. We were intrigued

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by the fact that Brazilians should head for territories that were experiencing deadly political disputes, while thousands were coming to seek refuge in Brazil. Like all research that investigates situations about which little is known when starting the study, it was necessary to seek reliable sources. References to these migration movements are rare, even to the large numbers of migrants arriving in São Paulo. We wanted to understand the reasons why Brazilians should head to territories where violent conflicts of various natures were being carried on. For this purpose, we contacted people who had experienced displacement, as such information was not made available by official Brazilian institutions. These were working under a military dictatorship that especially controlled those who approached socialist groups or nations, including newly independent countries such as Angola. The focus of this study is on Angola, as the nation that most consistently maintained relations with Brazil, and also because most of the Portuguese settlers who did not go to Portugal in 1975, the year of independence, lived there.

In this article, we initially focus on how Portuguese colonists who settled in Angola over the centuries, and especially in the period before independence in 1975, structured a strongly hierarchical society, with great economic, political and social inequalities. There was a dominant white minority and a majority of subordinate blacks and mestizos (people of “mixed race”). This situation changed with independence, resulting in the departure of most whites for Portugal or Brazil. Independence also led to the arrival of foreigners willing to assist in the construction of the new Angolan nation, which began to face serious conflicts between the groups vying for power. There followed a period of war with suffering, many deaths and great difficulties for the entire population. We will then present some reflections on the methodological approach we adopted to study migration movements between the Portuguese colonies and the state of São Paulo, highlighting in particular the way we collected oral narratives from Brazilians who went to work in Angola, against the great flow of migrants who came to São Paulo from Angola. To exemplify this situation, the article presents the narratives of interviewees who worked in governmental projects or religious missions in Angola. The reflections presented may suggest new perspectives of analysis on migration in war contexts.

2 Angola: Economy, Society and Politics before and after Independence

In order to understand the problems faced by the members of the different population groups and the demands that were being generated in Angolan society, we need to consider Portuguese colonialism, the struggles for independence and the post-independence period. Angola was considered by Portugal the “Princess of the Empire”, the colony with the greatest economic potential for the metropolis. Angola was rich in natural resources (oil, diamonds and several other minerals) and

Table 1: Evolution of the Population of Angola by Official Racial Groups Between 1900 and 1974. Source: Pimenta 2008: 449

Year	White	%	Mestizos	%	Black	%	Total
1900	9,000	0.4	7,000	0.3	2,700,000	99.3	2,716,000
1910	12,000	0.4	9,500	0.4	2,900,000	99.2	2,921,500
1920	20,700	0.6	10,500	0.4	3,100,000	99.0	3,130,200
1930	30,000	0.9	13,500	0.5	3,300,000	98.6	3,343,500
1940	44,083	1.2	28,035	0.8	3,665,892	98.0	3,738,010
1950	78,826	1.9	29,648	0.7	4,036,687	97.4	4,145,266
1960	172,529	3.6	53,392	1.1	4,604,362	95.3	4,830,449
1970	290,000	5.1	(?)	-	(?)	-	5,673,046
1974	335,000	-	(?)	-	(?)	-	(?)

had great agricultural potential (Correia 1991; Vicentini 2012). In order to maintain its dominion over this territory, Portugal intensified its presence there during the 20th century, encouraging Portuguese settlers to move there from 1950 onwards. It intended to expand the white population, introducing changes in the work that was carried out by the natives, and increasing investments in infrastructure. The improvements generally benefited only the white settlers, while most Angolans continued to live in very precarious conditions, in addition to not being considered rightful citizens.

According to several authors, the number of whites in Angola increased from 44,083 in 1940 to 335,000 in 1974. However, the number of blacks and mestizos was much higher. The table below, prepared by Pimenta (2008), a scholar who has written about the presence of whites in Angola, summarizes not only the growth of the white population before independence, but also the dominant presence of blacks and mestizos in Angolan society.

The natives were on the lowest level of the social hierarchy, suffering social inequality and exclusion. As noted by several authors, in the tense period of independence, society was in a situation of backwardness and fragmentation as a result of colonialism and colonial wars. According to Vicentini:

“The society was divided between privileged whites, poor whites (peasant immigrants), mestizos, assimilados – a minority of the most prominent Africans, who were educated and worked within the administrative system of Angola – and indigenous people – that is, the majority of Africans. Such divisions were founded on the Portuguese system of reinforcing educational and class barriers, preventing most Africans from having any opportunity to progress economically and socially. Social tension was even greater between

assimilados and indigenous people, especially leveraged by the forced labor system, which only ended with the insurrections of 1961.” (Vicentini 2012: 65; transl. by Z. B. F. D.)

These authors also show that the situation was complex due to the ethnic divisions that gave rise to disputes, allied to the main political groupings: thus, the MPLA was composed of mulatto assimilados and the Creole community of Luanda and the Kimbundu, while UNITA was formed in the lands of the Oimbindu, and the FNLA was based on the Bakongo ethnicity (Vicentini 2012; Serrano 2009).

The independence of Angola in 1975 profoundly altered the social structure and the domination of white colonizers, mainly because there was a massive departure of Portuguese and their descendants at that time. But it did not change the precarious living conditions of Angolans. According to Pimenta, the departure of the Portuguese occurred due to Portugal’s lack of concern for the future of democracy in Angola. It did nothing to solve the problem of the status of the white minority, two-thirds of whom were born outside the country, and who, due to their colonial status, placed themselves on a political plane different from that of the colonized population, without any agreement that would ensure their safety (Pimenta 2008: 410–411). According to Correia (1991: 178–179), around 300,058 people left out of a total of more than 330,000 whites, most of whom returned to Portugal as “returnees”. But thousands also went to Brazil, as we have shown (Ribeiro 1996; Demartini/Cunha/Doppenschmitt 2005).

With the departure of the whites and the need to build a new state, the situation became extremely problematic, because, in addition to difficulties in recognizing independence, the three main movements were not in agreement. The withdrawal of the settlers deprived the country of capital and technical administrators, at the same time that they had to face internal chaos and external invasions (Vicentini 2012: 59).

The Angolan economy was in ruins, there was a great shortage of skilled labor, resulting from the Portuguese exodus and colonial policies, which denied education to the vast majority of Africans. Several bridges, roads and transport vehicles had been destroyed, meaning it was impossible to send supplies and food to some areas of the country. Added to the economic problems was the continuation of guerrilla fighting in the areas of Cabinda (FLEC), in the province of Zaire (FNLA) and in Moxico, as well as in other parts of the southern and central districts of the country (UNITA), financed with the exploration of diamonds (Vicentini 2012: 62, transl. by Z. B. F. D.).

The problem was to rebuild the economy weakened by colonialism, internal struggles and the loss of technicians and capital.

In fact, with the Portuguese exodus in 1975, the Angolan economy was devastated. Most Portuguese immigrants, economic and government administrators, upon leaving the country, took with them capital, transport vehicles, a good part of the fishing fleet and – even more important – managerial experience and most

of the skilled and technical workers who managed the state machine in a monopolistic manner. Although the new government had the material means to rebuild the Angolan economy, it had serious difficulties in finding qualified personnel to manage it (Vicentini 2012: 62, transl. by Z. B. F. D.).

Independence did not immediately bring improvements for the vast majority of the population. The posts previously occupied by white settlers as part of the administrative structure of the Portuguese state were taken over by the leaders of the revolutionary movements. However, they disputed the exercise of power among themselves, which led to a civil war that lasted for many years. The population was affected in various ways by the power struggles, which resulted in the death of members of all political movements, as the struggles took place in various regions of the country. According to scholars, the manipulation of the movements by foreign forces incited disputes and violence across the country: the MPLA was supported by Cubans and Soviets who sent soldiers to Angola, while UNITA and FNLA were supported by capitalist countries – the United States and France, as well as other African countries (Bernardo Neto 1998; Tali 2001; Schubert 2000; Enders 1997, among others). In the rural areas, where most of the population lived, people were indiscriminately killed. Many sought protection in the cities, but the urban situation also became difficult with the continuation of the war.

In the 1980s, coup attempts to overthrow Agostinho Neto's MPLA were harshly repressed. Mabeko Tali (2001) summarizes some events of the repression of the Nito Alves's group:

Searches were organized in the neighborhoods most affected by the nitista networks, especially in Sambizanga, to the north of the city, and also in Rangel and other "hot" *musseques* in the capital. Hundreds of people linked closely or remotely to these networks or simply suspected of doing so were executed across the country. There was even an opportunity to adjust personal accounts through fanciful denunciations, so that power itself seemed to have lost its footing in the process of physical liquidation that would bleed the country of many cadres, not only political and military but also administrative, and young people still barely awake for political action.

These excesses of repression were particularly sensitive in certain provinces, under the action of provincial commissioners who had accounts to settle with young elements who, in colonial times, had enjoyed the privilege of better education and reached a higher level of education. This would be the case in the province of Moxico, and also in Huila. In the latter province, for example, the main political leader would declare, after some time – when we were there in person – that all those who had completed the fifth grade of official education should be considered "class enemies" (Tali 2001: 184–185, transl. by Z. B. F. D.).

Schubert (2000) also speaks of the bloodshed in this period:

"The coup plotters coldly murdered several senior MPLA officials, sure of resolving the issue of power with this ultimate argument. With the same

resource of bloodshed, Neto responded to the coup with actions of political purification, a process of 'rectification' of the moment. In Luanda, and from there throughout the country, hundreds, or rather thousands of 'nitistas', the 'fractionists', were arrested and killed. As is the practice in such actions, the slightest suspicion sufficed to become a death sentence; once again intellectuals were the most targeted. It is not possible to specify the exact number of victims. The memory of the population was marked by the image of 'rivers of blood flowing down from Kinaxixe'; several times people told me about 20,000 victims. This number is symbolic." (Schubert 2000: 126; transl. by Z. B. F. D.)

In 1990, after sixteen years of civil war, the Angolan government and UNITA signed a peace agreement. But in 1992 tensions increased with the elections, the result of which was not recognized by UNITA. The civil war was recommenced in Luanda and in the countryside, killing thousands of people every day (Enders 1997). Several peace agreements were attempted, but the situation only changed with the death of Savimbi in combat, which led to a formal ceasefire agreement signed in 2002. Millions of displaced people and refugees remained, with landmines throughout the country and destroyed infrastructure (Vicentini 2012: 88).

According to Bernardo Neto (1998), several generations of Angolans lived through the war and suffered the harmful effects of the warlike confrontation, which violently affected the demographic, social and economic character of the country. They bear the marks of war (Dáskalos 2000). The largely rural population (over 80%) suffered badly from the impacts of the civil war. The economy was unable to recover, especially the agrarian sector, in a territory that was "infested" by landmines. The export of diamonds and oil abroad did not undergo any interruption, although production declined in the early post-independence years. During this period, there was a large presence of foreigners, mainly Soviets and Cubans, who supported the revolutionary movement. They had economic and political interests linked to the socialist orientation of the new Angolan state.

These were very difficult years for most of the black Angolan population, who during the colonial period had not achieved the education and qualifications necessary to participate in the process of reconstructing a devastated country. The support of foreign technicians and specialists was necessary in order to improve the quality of life and education of a population that had been excluded for centuries from services and wealth. In this context, the presence of foreigners was important. They were needed to help with the construction of the new state, and to guarantee the production of oil and diamonds for export, which was of interest to important oligopolies. Contrary to what was internationally expected due to the nature of the new regime, Brazil was the first country to recognize Angola's independence, despite being governed at this time by an anti-communist right-wing dictatorship. It supported the MPLA and always maintained its presence and eco-

conomic support for Angola (Fernando 2005: 88). It also had a diplomatic interest in counterbalancing the Cuban and Soviet presence in Angola.

The departure of Brazilians to work in Angola was therefore a viable prospect for technicians seeking to participate in governmental projects, for political activists, and for missionaries interested in humanitarian assistance for the poorest parts of the population. It should be remembered that although the new government was guided by the socialist model, both the Catholic Church and the Protestant Churches continued to be present and active in the country. It was in this context that Brazilians linked to religious institutions or governmental bodies went to Africa to support the new nations that were entering a new historical moment.

An important dimension of colonial society was the Catholic religion of the Portuguese state and its colonizing dimensions. At the same time, the religious field was a space for criticisms of colonism, especially by Protestants, but also by Catholics. The Catholic Church, through its religious orders, was present among the Portuguese settlers, both those with greater purchasing power and those who in their first years in Africa found themselves in a situation of poverty. Some of the latter managed to get support from the more welfare-oriented religious orders, whether they were Catholics or Protestants, such as the Congregationalists. They found places for their children in religious institutions, thus not having to bear the cost of food and schooling. But also the more well-off resorted to Catholic schools, considering that they were more rigid and well-disciplined than the public schools existing in the colonies. Some people sent their children to Europe. It is worth remembering that Protestant missions also had a strong presence in the African colonies, many of them serving the so-called “indigenous” or “uncultured” population (Gonçalves 1960). The main missionary groups were Congregationalists (or Congregationalists), Methodists, Baptists, and Adventists. The Portuguese government was worried about the emancipatory potential of the evangelical churches spread throughout Angola, which offered the natives the possibility of rejecting the rudimentary teaching “of indigenous adaptation” associated with regional administration posts, and of learning something more about new social and cultural realities.

The post-independence situation became difficult and dangerous for many white Portuguese settler families because of the relationships established between the groups in colonial society. According to Balandier, the colonial situation was characterized by relations of domination and submission between the colonizers and the colonized (Balandier 1993). The author also draws attention to the importance of political facts and administrative methods in understanding the colonial situation before and after the independence of colonies; the cultural dimension is emphasized because “political domination is accompanied by cultural domination” (Balandier 1993: 114). According to Nzongola-Ntalaja, the post-independence situation was one of crisis for the population:

As mentioned above, the people had the hope that the new State would provide them with the necessary assistance to exercise full citizenship rights and thus ensure a decent and sustainable life for all and a more promising future for their children.

These hopes were dashed by the state and postcolonial rulers. Initially, the leaders of the nationalist movement had expressed a commitment to democracy, economic development and pan-Africanist solidarity. When they began to deal with the practical realities of governance, they became more interested in defending their selfish class interests whose satisfaction required recourse to the authoritarian methods of power, corruption and large-scale enrichment, as well as the promotion of territorial nationalism, instead of pan-Africanism and even tribalism instead of national unity. (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2012: 113–114)

The same author observes that the promises that were not kept were manifested in the persistence of poverty and created insecurity because, in addition to reducing the chances of leading a productive life, poverty can increase conflicts of identity, and ethnic, religious and regional conflicts (not only in Angola) (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2012).

After independence, more than thirty years of armed conflict in the country followed, marked by poverty and problems for the Angolan population (Macêdo 2008: 206). Considering the political circumstances of the period, we were able to outline a “political map” of the colonial situation, with the various existing groups and the alliances established by them, and indications of proposals for the society under constitution. On the basis of the oral reports, we were able to apprehend scathing criticisms of the political leaders of Portugal and the local leaders of revolutionary movements. In particular, we had contact with people involved in the revolutionary processes, representing both those who supported them and those who opposed them. It was also possible to verify the existence of several country projects, linked to the different political actors involved in the colonial process in Angola.

The civil war ended only twenty-seven years later, in 2002, when UNITA became a political party (Vicentini 2012; Serrano 2009) and the MPLA began to incorporate former opponents into the nation’s reconstruction processes, as we learned when interviewing a former UNITA guerrilla.

3 The Methodological Processes adopted for the Study

For our study we initially interviewed people who, following Balandier (1993), form part of the dominant minority, understanding that this numerical minority is not a sociological minority, but an active “minority” that bases its domination “*on an incontestable material superiority, and on a state of law established to its advantage, on a system of justifications on a racially biased scale*” (116). We focused on individuals who came to São Paulo after fleeing from the colonial wars or difficult post-independence situations. By analyzing their reports, we tried to understand

the complex situation that led to the immigration of these so-called “white settlers” during this troubled period, who they were, which identity they had, and their representations of their experiences in Angolan society and of the colonizing nation, Portugal. We interviewed people whose trajectories were very varied, having in common only the fact that they all left Angola at the same time due to the escalation of political issues and the war.

During the research process, we later interviewed people belonging to the so-called “autochthonous populations”, to find out how they represented that same period and the society into which they were born and in which they remained. We also interviewed some members of religious groupings who worked there, and some Brazilians who went to Angola after independence in 1975.

Some assumptions and theoretical-methodological reflections have arisen from our studies in recent years of migrants who came to São Paulo, as well as people who moved from São Paulo to the former Portuguese colonies. Here we return to some of our reflections. With the new trends in the social sciences and history, what we observed is that the subjects of the research started to be incorporated into the production of sources, through their oral narratives, obtained in different ways and using different methodologies. And immigrants, as constituent parts of the Brazilian population and Brazilian history, as we have already pointed out, have increasingly been sought after by scholars following new paths in the production of knowledge about the displacement processes of various groups in very different places.

With the institutionalization of Oral History in Brazil, since at least the 1990s, and the growing recognition by historians, as well as social scientists, of the importance of oral narratives for the study of the present time in historical-sociological studies, the biographical approach has gained significance for addressing the issue of migration (Demartini/Truzzi 2005; Rocha-Trindade/Campos 2005). We understand Oral History as a methodological approach in which the researcher is involved with the object of study, seeking to unravel it from the oral reports of the people involved, in conjunction with the use of other written or iconographic sources (Demartini 2019). This study, which is aimed at apprehending the experiences and representations of migrants in São Paulo, thus found support not only in the usual practices of qualitative research in sociology, but also in the most recent practices in the field of Oral History, which helped us to apprehend the different ways in which people describe the same moments, processes and contexts.

In the case of migration between Brazil and Africa, the lack of knowledge about this topic due to the absence of data poses a problem for those working with a diachronic perspective. Data are necessary to confirm the diversity of views that oral sources give the researcher. But, in this case, there is no sampling method or research path that can be defined a priori, because what characterizes such oral sources is their construction by the researcher, a construction that for us occurs not only during the interview, but also and fundamentally in the choice of interviewees.

We work with what we call “summary life stories” (Demartini 2018, 2003). The oral report is collected in a process of interviewee/interviewer interaction in which the interviewer is in a position of attentive, careful, patient listening, in order to establish the necessary complicity with the interviewee, who must be put in a situation of wanting to talk. The researcher needs to learn to listen (including the “hidden” message) in order to find the right moment to ask the questions that he is interested in investigating. In order to understand people’s accounts of their lives as a whole, the dimensions that most interested the investigators were deepened, based on the reports constructed by the interviewees. To this end, we prepared a script with the topics that interested us and which served us to review the interviews, soon after they were carried out. As we knew almost nothing about Brazilians who went to Angola, the most important thing was free dialogue with the interviewees.

In this way, the analysis was not carried out after the field work. When using oral sources, reflection during the field work is essential, and analysis starts with the first interview. The construction of the report grows out of the interaction between the researcher and the narrator, and thus involves therefore the intentionality of the researcher, who must be attentive to the questions which interest him or her (Demartini 2005b). Regarding biographical research, Franco Ferrarotti (1983) reminds us that:

“L’approche biographique n’exclut pas le moment de la réflexion critique, au contraire. C’est plutôt dans les méthodes quantitatives traditionnelles que l’on peut, très simplement, faire des énumérations extérieures, mécaniques, des réponses précodifiées et les passer à l’ordinateur pour des calculs divers. Ici, le chercheur doit s’interroger sur les thèmes significatifs qui surgissent des matériaux, sur les moments cruciaux, sur les prises de décision.”² (Ferrarotti, in: Jobert 1984: 29)

We always made a careful analysis of the transcribed material, so that we could reaffirm the observations elaborated and discussed during the field work and make sure that our preconceptions and prejudices were not preventing us from seeing new facts and important aspects of Angolan reality. Considering, as Pollak (1992) does, that memory is a socially and individually constructed phenomenon, one can think about the complexity of the situations experienced by the interviewees and the memories that were generated. In the case of the former Portuguese colonies, the experiences take place in two, three or more countries, permeated by political instabilities.

² Translated text: “The biographical approach does not exclude the moment of critical reflection, on the contrary. It is rather in traditional quantitative methods that one can, quite simply, make the external, mechanical enumerations of the pre-coded responses and analyze them on a computer through various calculations. Here the researcher must ask himself about the significant themes that emerge from the materials, about the crucial moments, about decision-making” (Franco Ferrarotti, in: Jobert 1984: 29).

Research with migrants involves a systematic construction during the work process, continuous attention to the research problem, and, above all, careful listening by the researcher to what the migrants report, so that the process of selecting interviewees needs to constantly revised, as well as the themes from which to start. Their suggestions are necessarily incorporated during the process, so that the researcher who uses the life stories and testimonies builds the documents together with the interviewees. The researcher chooses the informants and the aspects of their experiences to be analyzed. The research is thus strongly influenced in its development by the incorporation of these subjects in the production of knowledge. This is what happened with our study of migration between Brazil and Africa. For these reasons, it can be said that there are no ready-made “methodological recipes”, that is, predefined paths for studies of migration and migrants. While there are some characteristics that are common to processes of displacement and the experiences of migrants, as has been observed by some scholars (Sayad 2000, Feldman-Bianco 1995; Bonvin/Ponchaud 1981, among others), there is a multiplicity of situations and much diversity between migratory processes, especially considering the different contexts of departure and arrival, with all their economic, political, cultural and ethnic implications. Displacement in times of war is especially complex.

Regarding the time frame, some issues were raised in relation to the interviewees: the need to take into account the context of origin and the context of destination, as we have pointed out above.

Some issues were decisive from a methodological point of view, as they implied different proceedings depending on the people approached, particularly in the case of those who went to Angola. We needed to take into account the heterogeneity of the interviewees, considering their origin, education, political and religious involvement and living conditions at the time of their migration. It was necessary to think about the specificities, similarities and differences between the Angolan context and the Brazilian context in different historical periods, in their various dimensions (economic, political, educational, cultural, ethnic, religious, etc.) and the implications of this for the migrants. A fundamental point to be considered here is that the two contexts involved placed restrictions on a research practice that requires consultation of documents and official statistics in order to locate possible interviewees: in Brazil, under a harsh dictatorial regime, information was controlled by the military, and considered as a state secret (in some cases to this day); in Angola, with the colonial wars and the civil war after independence, much remains to be properly known. The reports of those who were active in some way in the post-independence period are fundamental for understanding Angolan society (an important step in this direction are the reports obtained by Dalila Cabrita Mateus 2006).

Considering such restrictions, we decided to incorporate Brazilians who went to, or stayed in, Angola during this period as a counterpoint to our research on people who came from there to São Paulo. It would be impossible to carry out a survey on the number of those who went and those who stayed there after independence.

But we cannot discard them from the investigation. Our methodological stance has always incorporated the reflections of Franco Ferrarotti (1983) on the importance of individual life stories in the production of scientific knowledge and, in this case, we were not interested in the number of migrants, but in what they could say about their experiences. In this and previous studies (Demartini 2005a), we consider that each life story carries the totality of the social. In the words of Ferrarotti:

“C’est une question sur laquelle j’ai polémique avec D. Bertaux qui parle de standardisation. Pour moi ce qui est le plus important c’est la question du rapport entre le fragment et la totalité. Dans le fragment il y a déjà la totalité. Dans la profondeur de l’expérience la plus individualisée, il y a la concentration, la restructuration ou le sténogramme de toute une culture, de toute une vie sociale. Comment faire ressortir de l’individuel cahotique, apparemment cahotique, l’ordre social, pas seulement l’ordre intériorisé mais la structure d’ordre qui rend l’individu, même le plus marginal, susceptible d’être compris, de se faire comprendre, dans la globalité des significations. Il n’y a pas de totalité préconçue sans fragments, mais dans tout fragment il y a la nostalgie de la totalité.”³ (Ferrarotti, in: Jobert 1984: 30; emph. added by Z. B. F. D.)

During our research, we got in touch with missionaries who had worked in Angola, Catholics, Methodists and Baptists; some of them returned to Brazil after independence, and others remained there. We interviewed six of them, as well as a political activist, and a sociologist who went to work on government projects. They all mentioned the difficult conditions faced by society and the need to rebuild the country, which had been destroyed by colonialism and wars. We believe that even this small number of cases allows what Ferrarotti calls an understanding of the social totality.

They show that, while thousands of people were leaving Angola, there were also those who came from outside to help, even from countries like Brazil which was politically opposed to the socialist Angolan regime. In Brazil, there was a dictatorial government between 1964 and 1985, commanded by the military and based on conservative principles. However, Brazil was the first country to recognize Angola’s independence, which may have made it easier for Brazilians to stay or go there. Balandier (1951, 1993) underlines the importance of moments of crisis for the

³ Translated text: “This is an issue I have been talking about with D. Bertaux who talks about standardization. For me the most important thing is the question of the relationship between the fragment and the totality. In the fragment you already have the totality. In the depth of the most individualized experience, there is the concentration, the restructuring or the stenogram of an entire culture, of an entire social life. How to make the chaotic, apparently chaotic, individual, produce the social order not only the internalized order but the structure of the order that makes the individual, even the most marginal, susceptible of being understood, of making himself understood, in the globality of meanings. There is no preconceived totality without fragments, but in every fragment there is a nostalgia for totality” (Ferrarotti, in: Jobert 1984: 30).

apprehension of social phenomena and the relationships that are established in society, at certain times and in certain contexts. This is what Brazilians going to Angola allow us to learn. The examples below that we have selected for this article show how the interviewees came to migrate.

4 People from São Paulo who went to Angola in the Post-Independence Period

The respondents who went to Angola after 1975 had different backgrounds and careers: militants, specialized professionals, Catholic and Protestant missionaries. Their stories show that they all had a “predisposition” to meet new challenges: in a certain way they desired to participate in situations where they could contribute to overcoming difficulties faced by other countries. The situation in Brazil, where the dictatorship imposed drastic sanctions on social movements, even those considered conservative, seems to have influenced their desire to leave the country (Gaspari 2004). They saw no opportunity for social intervention in Brazil. We have selected the narratives of two women, one specialized in training and human resources, and the other a nurse and missionary, to show their motivations for migrating and the involved process, as well as the activities they developed in Africa and the way they describe the post-independence period.

4.1 The Case of the Interviewee who worked in Governmental Projects

The interviewee was born in São Paulo (1945), after her father and her mother had left Europe. She studied in a private school, attended by many children of immigrants, who gave her, as she said, a “*very important multicultural contact, I was created inside an open community.*” Also central to her choices in life, were the values conveyed to her by her family, especially by her father, who “*had an open view of the world of openness.*” The subject she chose to study, Social Sciences, was an opportunity to propose changes to “save the world,” “revolutionize society, and the world would be wonderful.” But in reality she took up a career that was far from being revolutionary, because she was working in educational institutions associated with industry and trade.

Her first contact with Africa came from living with friends in the 1960s who had contact with descendants of Portuguese living in Angola. One of them gave her a book that led her to become interested in African problems. Reading the book increased the concerns of the interviewee, who, as she says several times, “*really wanted to save the world.*” Her interest in the academic field was the sociology of development and she read the work of economists who were then considered revolutionary, such as Celso Furtado. The situation in Brazil did not satisfy her: “*I was so at that time and could no longer stay here in Brazil*”. Contact with people connected to Africa also served as a stimulus. Because of these friendships and her

interest in Africa, she applied to participate in development activities in Angola and Mozambique:

“... I had sent my CV to Angola and I managed to go to Angola in January of 1982, that’s it. I always had it ... so much fascination with the academic world, I always wanted to study but I did not want to stay within the university, because I always wanted much action, isn’t it?”

Her return to Angola, years later, in 1986, was also brokered by Brazilians who had relations with the government, such as Paulo Freire. She was received by a minister’s representative and hosted as a guest of the government in that same year. Although in Angola she had very few Brazilian colleagues, and she mainly had contact with foreigners from various places, who lived in the same building, she considers she was always very well treated. Her relationships with Angolans were great, both professionally and privately.

At various times she served as a means of communication for those who had left Angola and gone to São Paulo, bringing and taking letters and parcels as part of what was known as the “*courier of the blacks*” (local name, in the original “*correio dos pretos*”). With the Cubans she did not have much contact, although their presence was constant in Angola, and she felt that there was some resistance to them on the part of the Angolan population. As a professional selected by the government, she moved to different regions of Angola to work on development projects, and also worked in Mozambique for some time. About her work, she observes:

“... in Angola and Mozambique. I coordinated projects in Angola, they wanted to build a distance learning scheme, and Mozambique was a Health Education project supervised by the ILO [International Labor Organization]. I was never hired by the United Nations, I was always hired by the government with which I was always cooperative I was linked to an education project, say, informal ... It was an ILO project for Health Education, those projects of the United Nations ... So this was: was a project of health education for women and families, ... to teach a few things – that the problem of war and the immigration problem of men to the mines of South Africa, one way they win or do something, to make money to do something for them ...”

What is important to note is that the interviewee worked in Angola (and Mozambique) in government-controlled areas, so that she was not exposed to the conflicts between opposing political groups. She traveled by air from one region to another and didn’t directly experience the conflicts that occurred during that period, but she realized the gravity of the situation. “... *When I arrived, the situation was so heavy, so tense, it was a state of war ... This was in eighty-two, the war was still in full swing. ... During day and night there came up trucks loaded with weapons. There, the*

Port of Luanda. ... Control is great in wartime.” The interviewee also formulated her vision of Africans in their relationship to Portugal:

“I think Portugal has never ceased to be a reference for them, because what we cannot forget are the emotional ties, who were ... although not blended families, we always had some connection with Portugal ...”

At the same time she felt the strong presence of Portuguese culture in everyday life, and noted the strengthening of national identity, realized by restrictions on returning:

“It was very important to be Angolan. The problem in Angola was what they called the returnees, it was a group who had fled to Zaire for many years, and they returned ... When the independence of Angola occurred they returned, because it was their land and there was a culture shock for those who had been under the Portuguese colonization.”

This is a very interesting dimension of the narrative of this interviewee. While those who left Angola speak of themselves in Portugal and Brazil as “returnees” or as immigrants, she points out another issue not noticeable in these narratives: the comments of returnees to the newly independent countries, especially Angola. Her experience during this difficult period of war and nation-building leads her to question the kind of work that was being done in the name of development. She criticizes the discontinuity and especially the inadequacy of these projects in the light of the realities in Angola and Mozambique: “*But it was a surreal thing, I think the UN programs are surreal, surrealist ... So you see, the UN programs you have very relative. I mean, what is the continuity?*” A knowledge of the reality experienced by the population, according to her, is essential to the success of any project: “*I mean, you have to see who is this people to know how to act. ... I mean, these projects are ineffective, it is a transfer of money actually ... so that was it, you do a job and it has no continuity*”. While citing a project developed by journalists (including Brazilians), which she considered very good (the newspaper that went to villages), generally she is critical:

“And Pepetela as well so you know: ‘The day you let Africa think, she will choose her own path.’ ... I really came across very delicate situations of distance learning, and then they asked me to teach because they had no teacher. I had to take the manual of Cuban pedagogy and teaching pedagogy, was the worst thing I did ...”

Her narrative also reveals that the local population resents the expenses that such projects involve and the fact that foreigners have benefits that do not exist for them. An important fact that deserves to be highlighted is that the interviewee assesses her experiences in Africa as extremely positive, although she would not want to return there now. We must also mention that the interviewee later carried out a scientific study of the Mozambican reality.

4.2 The Case of the Interviewee who went to work in Protestant Missions

The interviewee explained her concern with social issues: “... *from a young age inequalities, pain, suffering always bothered me, I always wanted to do something for humanity.*” She was born in São Paulo and her parents were the children of immigrants. She initially studied theology, and then did a course in midwifery, to facilitate her trip to Africa:

“... with that urge to go, because I did theology, and then I followed a technical course because I wanted to leave, only that my visa did not come, so I took advantage and went to do obstetrics ... I was encouraged to take other courses that would be difficult, they facilitated me because of my choice for Africa and also a religious choice helped in one way: ... when I finished these courses I was given my visa for Africa, then it was an old dream, and this time I chose the evangelical church ... Then an African pastor ..., someone said to me, introduced me, I know he came to Brazil ... that was in 1983. Then he came to me, he said: Look, if you want to go, go.”

The interviewee describes the difficult situations she experienced in Angola, which was in the middle of a violent war between opposing political groups. Some parts of her narrative are very eloquent, and the interviewee was thrilled to be reminded of her experiences. Her arrival caused some feelings of strangeness. In Angola, her ties of friendship were diverse, encompassing both evangelicals and Catholics. She says “*the pain brought people together*”:

“There my best friends were always Catholics. ... So I always went to sleep there in the convent with them, was there with them, and they said ... that the government was opening the National Institute of Public Health in Huambo, and they were building the only team because nobody wanted to go to Huambo that time, the Angolans were very afraid. And it is the second city in the country. And then they told me: ‘Look, this is a Brazilian doctor.’ ... And then he invited me to work with him, so I worked with him for five years ... My passport was my medical training, because if I went as a missionary I would be super limited in my performance, but not as a nurse ... And then I worked with him in research, we published materials and some works. Who financed the publication was the UNICEF, the same government. ... So I worked with this doctor who introduced me to the culture, introduced me to the country ...”

She worked for five years at a mission and then went as a missionary to the Board of World Missions of the Brazilian Baptist Convention, where she has remained to this day. The intensification of war in the region in which they worked meant they had to shut down; it was a period of extreme hardship involving deaths, escapes, and terror. Of her own volition she decided to stay in the region dominated by UNITA:

“... The doctor’s house was bombed, killing him before the fight in the city, because UNITA was taking the country and when they occupied our city ... I stayed there nearly a year with UNITA. I was taken for dead there, my name was on the list of dead ... but I only ever imagined that UNITA was so strong, it had lots of weapons because it was supported by the United States and the Soviet government then UNITA surprised everyone with its military force, then the government took 55 days in battle, killed thousands of civilians ... I saw atrocities ...”

Her performance during the war was to bolster the courage of the people who trusted her, looking for ways to protect themselves. Work as a missionary was not easy:

“... In the bombings I had to calm down, the pastor himself was there in the corner with the men and said: control there, because you are foreign and they will obey, then I said, but you’re the pastor, one of the places that we had because we had several hideouts, no, you have to be because you are white and foreign, so I silence, all on the floor, come on! When planes began to bomb, then everyone obeyed the voice of the white foreigner, or those who were near me when the plane was bombing too much, everyone wanted ... stay close. ... After 17 years, now that period fight, after 55 days of intense fighting relentlessly, right? People running for shelter in a shelter, I was 10 days without a hot meal, without bath, we are at the first ten days hiding in the church, there were over 300 people went to every house there, then the government that has lost an area, then UNITA said, you have to get out of here because it will be bombed here, there we went through the fire, so let’s go, let’s gamble, then I went out with injuries, I went out with a wheelbarrow in a coma, people helping me and the guy is still alive, and we went to another shelter and other shelter.”

Her Brazilian identity was not always well accepted during UNITA’s attacks:

“The identity with Brazilian government is very positive; Brazil was the first country to recognize the independence of Angola, but to UNITA it is very negative, because Brazil did not recognize UNITA until today.”

The many years she spent in the region of intense war enabled her to build up a good knowledge of the culture of the various parts of the Angolan population:

“For the people, there never was an ideological struggle, a militant ideology, the people actually wanted to eat and have the minimum conditions, and indeed in Angola, I say something about this here, I did not go much into detail because I think that in the master’s thesis my focus was not on politics, but when it came to Angola’s independence, when they got independence, the three major movements rather than understand, the power struggle was

so ... Then one asked the Soviet Union for help, then the other asked the U.S. for help, they asked for help so they entered the cold war by accident, were used in the cold war, then the third movement is diluted among them, but actually to the people has always been so, UNITA movement was Southern, the Umbundus, then for the people ethnicity is much stronger, ethnic warfare, I'm Umbundu, I'm for Savimbi, then for the people no matter what proposals or interests MPLA has, 'I'm Umbundu, I'm with the guy', Savimbi ..."

According to her, the Portuguese settlers divided the people:

"... And Savimbi used this ethnic discourse: Umbundus, let us unite! In the south, because he was Umbundu, and in African culture the king of the tribe is still very important, right? Colonization divided them ... so this geographical division, but they actually, for example, Congo, Congo and Angola was a division of agreements between France and Portugal, but the tribe of southern Congo is the same tribe in northern Angola, the Bakongo, is the same people, and the people of southern Angola, the Cunhamas is the same in northern Namibia, speak the same language, then the whites, they divided the kingdoms, they still think of the kingdom, Savimbi to say was a king, because he was the son of kings, the MPLA was from the north, then in fact the people had this ideology, now the parties themselves, they were talking about, right?"

Having worked in a region UNITA was strong, she was often identified as belonging to that group, or even to the CIA. She was also criticized for the manner of operation of the NGOs [Non Governmental Organizations] which "invaded" Angola in the 1990s, mainly in the fields of health and education. In this period the interviewee developed several projects which involved money for development:

"... So I was known as the nurse who was then during that period, I had taken a course in UN development projects, I'm not a social worker, turned around, I learned to write projects, I used it, I wrote a lot of proposals, and all my proposals, the doors that I knocked on, they released the money was then that there was a boom in projects, so today we have there Baptist College, the largest college is the Baptist College built with funds from the Netherlands, an organization called ICO gave us the money ..."

The situations she experienced left a strong mark on the interviewee, and she needed several treatments to overcome the consequences: "*I had psychiatric treatment, I was pretty crazy, I went very badly.*" Yet she is still actively working to promote the development of Angola, through training of manpower, literacy programs, schools, etc.

Among those who worked in Angola after independence, it seems that most political militants did not remain bound to Angola, unlike what happened in the case of these two interviewees. For them, their work as professionals and as missionaries led to more lasting actions and ties, allowing the expansion of work and study exchanges between Brazil and Angola to the present day. After more than thirty years of independence the missionaries continue to work in Angola as social reformers and entrepreneurs, and Portuguese and Angolans are still waiting to return. We can see that, currently, some possibilities are already becoming reality, especially for those who want to participate in the process of rebuilding the country.

5 A Final Note

This study of migration between Brazil and African countries allows us to reflect on the different processes and events leading to migration before and after the independence of the former Portuguese colonies. For us researchers, the most important thing about this process of taking into account the experiences of subjects who went to Africa after the overthrow of the colonial regime was being able to think about the consequences of colonialism. Theoretical discussions are not enough, it is necessary to get closer to the local populations and their experiences, through the memories of those who lived with them and experienced their problems. In this endeavor, the voices of different people are important, as their representations of the facts help us to understand the social reality. The memories we work with hark back to difficult times.

The researcher's look at a reality that is not his own allows a better understanding of the problems faced by other people, and questioning of preconceived opinions. It becomes possible to review theoretical and political postures generally conveyed by those who were in the position of colonizers. While independence broke the link with the colonizing state, the effects of colonialism remain in the colonized territories, which, like devastated lands, have to find ways to rebuild.

The work of foreigners in this process, as exemplified in this article, shows that there is a lot to be done, but also that the forms of action can be diverse. It also shows the need to respect local populations, their cultures and their demands, and allows us to think about the type of help needed: humanitarian, financial, military, professional, educational, etc. The reconstruction process and the post-independence situation shows that the non-participation of the black population in colonial power made it difficult to learn political practice, which, in the case of Angola, resulted in disputes that are still carried on today, now no longer with the use of weapons, but in more democratic ways.

Our empirical study, based on the narratives of those who went there and those who left there, as well as some who stayed there whom we were also able to interview, allows us to affirm that colonialism, that is, the domination exercised over

local populations, cannot be forgotten, as its effects are present not only in the former colonies, but also in various ways in the colonizing countries, including those that welcomed those who left at the time of independence. Our look at colonization and its consequences in Angola allows us to better analyze the migration processes that took place in the 1970s and 1980s to and from São Paulo, but also the current migration of Africans. It allows for an exchange not only of culture, but of training and theoretical discussions from various perspectives. We note that even in serious situations of war and persecution, people are willing to collaborate, to contribute to solving the problems of other people, and to exchange experiences and cultures. With their experiences, and their professional and religious qualifications, foreigners can contribute to economic, educational and social development in the process of building new nations. There is still a lot of research to be done on the form of collaboration and cultural exchange that were established between the “strangers” who found themselves thrown together through migration. Collaboration between people from different sociocultural contexts shows the importance of respect for human beings, meeting their needs, and respecting their racial origins and their traditions. These are issues that, unfortunately, are still relevant in the present day, when wars continue to occur.

Analyzing the experiences of former African colonies during secular colonization and domination over black populations allows us to understand how racism against blacks was structured. The independence of their territories did not eliminate racist prejudices and practices that were widespread throughout the so-called developed world, continuing in various forms to the present day. This discrimination also involves exclusion from participation in scientific knowledge and technologies, exclusion from the consumption of fundamental goods, as was seen during the pandemic with a lack of access to vaccines, and even limitation of the universal right to come and go to developed countries, with the result that many people from former colonies are wandering around the world.

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Experiences, processes and constellations of exile, flight, and persecution have deeply shaped global history and are still widespread aspects of human existence today. People are persecuted, incarcerated, tortured or deported on the basis of their political beliefs, gender, ethnic or ethno-national belonging, religious affiliation, and other socio-political categories. People flee or are displaced in the context of collective violence such as wars, rebellions, coups, environmental disasters or armed conflicts. After migrating, but not exclusively in this context, people find themselves suddenly isolated, cut off from their networks of belonging, their biographical projects and their collective histories. The articles in this volume are concerned with the challenges of navigating through multiple paradoxes and contradictions when it comes to grasping these phenomena sociologically, on the levels of self-reflection, theorizing, and especially doing empirical research.

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