Addis Ababa as a City (e)scape of Refugee Resilience: A Trialectical Perspective

Aman Mohamedsaid Adem [iD], Getahun Fenta Kebede [iD] and Teferee Makonnen Kassa [iD]

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Article abstract

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Aman Mohammedsaid Adem[a] ⓘ,[*], Getahun Fenta Kebede[b] ⓘ and
Teferee Makonnen Kassa[c] ⓘ

ABSTRACT

Using Edward Soja's thirdspace theory, this paper spotlights Addis Ababa as a city of refugee resilience. Beyond the real and imagined representations of resilience, the thirdspace illuminates the multiplicity of refugee resilience in the forms of hope, transience, religiosity, retrospection, flexibility, cultural adaptation, frugality, cultural resources, diaspora ties, co-ethnic support, and transnational and local ties. However, refugee resilience is severely constrained by legal restrictions, policy–practice gaps, resource shortages, language barriers, internal conflict, fear of being targeted, misconceptions about refugees, and some refugees' strong fervour to emigrate to the West. The study emphasizes the importance of the thirdspace for understanding the incompatibilities of refugee resilience and for improving their well-being and support.

KEYWORDS

Addis Ababa; Edward Soja; host community; sefers; thirdspace; urban refugee resilience

RÉSUMÉ

En s'appuyant sur la théorie du tiers-espace d'Edward Soja, cet article met en lumière Addis-Abeba en tant que ville de résilience pour les réfugiés. Au-delà des représentations réelles et imaginaires de la résilience, le tiers-espace fait ressortir la multiplicité de la résilience des réfugiés sous les formes de l'espoir, de la transience, de la religiosité, de la rétrospection, de la flexibilité, de l'adaptation culturelle, de la frugalité, des ressources culturelles, des liens avec la diaspora, du soutien coethnique et des liens transnationaux et locaux. Cependant, la résilience des réfugiés est fortement entravée par les restrictions juridiques, les écarts entre les politiques et les pratiques, le manque de ressources, les barrières linguistiques, les conflits internes, la peur d'être pris pour cible, les idées fausses sur les réfugiés et le désir ardent de certains réfugiés d'émigrer vers l'Occident. L'étude souligne l'importance du tiers-espace pour comprendre les contradictions qui caractérisent la résilience des réfugiés et pour améliorer leur bien-être et le soutien qui leur est apporté.

INTRODUCTION

Over 60% of the global refugee population resides in urban environments, with developing countries in the Global South hosting the majority (Verghis & Balasundrum, 2019). Urban refugees in developing countries face challenges including restrictive government policies and poor socio-economic conditions. However, the relatively developed status of the cities can offer opportunities to improve their well-being and interactions with the host societies (Fábos & Kibreab, 2007). To capture both the strengths and shortcomings

CONTACT

[a] **(Corresponding author)** ✉ aman.mohammedsaid@aau.edu.et, Centre for African and Asian Studies, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

[b] ✉ getahun.fenta@aau.edu.et, Centre for African and Asian Studies, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

[c] ✉ teferi.makonnen@aau.edu.et, Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

that exist in the lives of refugees, a holistic approach that entwines both the deficit and agency aspects of refugeedom has been recommended (Turton, 2003). Accordingly, not only are refugees weak and vulnerable, but they also exhibit a great deal of engagement and agency, giving rise to the proliferation of the resilience paradigm in refugee studies.

In response, interest in promoting the resilience of urban refugees in Africa and further afield as a means of facilitating durable solutions has been gaining momentum among researchers, policy-makers, and humanitarian agencies. Four slightly varied approaches have been observed in literature depicting the resilience experience of urban refugees in major refugee-hosting African cities. In the first, resilience is presented as a moderator of mental health and hope (Ejoke, 2015). Second, studies use resilience metaphorically to depict refugees' ability to survive in the face of adversity (Johansson, 2020). The third group of literature focuses on spotlighting key enablers of refugee resilience (e.g., see Borisenko, 2016; Meda, 2017; Sigamoney, 2018). The final corpus of literature applies socio-ecological and resource theories to capture the resilience experience of the forcibly displaced (Adem et al., 2023; Tippens, 2019; Yotebieng et al., 2019).

This paper proposes the use of Edward Soja's (1998) theory of thirdspace as an alternative framework of understanding refugee resilience. Soja's three-dimensional synthesis of space can be applied for understanding refugee resilience. The **firstspace**, which represents the real and material environment, can be equated with the perceived forms of refugee resilience. The **secondspace**, coinciding with the abstract space that is created through the mind's imaginative mechanisms, can be linked with refugee resilience in its conceived form. The **thirdspace** denotes a new space of multiplicity through the

coming together of concrete and abstract spaces and can be associated with the lived form of urban refugee resilience. In conducting a spatial analysis, giving emphasis to the thirdspace through a strategy of "thirding-as-othering" has the capacity to stimulate trialectical thinking and illuminate the dynamic aspect of space where meaning is formed. Similarly, a thirdspace analysis of refugee resilience can uncover the productions and constraints of refugee resilience that abound in the subaltern space. A rich literature showcasing the significance of space in understanding the experience of urban refugees in Africa already exists (e.g., see Johansson, 2018; Lyytinen, 2015). However, there is a gap in foregrounding thirdspace theory as an innovative and alternative theoretical approach of understanding refugee resilience.

The 2019 Ethiopian Refugee Proclamation (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia [FDRE], 2019) has improved local integration and provision spaces (Mehari, 2019). Yet, legal restrictions persist regarding refugee mobility, work, and citizenship rights (Assefa, 2020; Belay, 2023; Fassil, 2020). The country's primate and capital city, Addis Ababa, is a cityscape where refugees escape the hardships of camp life and dream of emigrating further abroad. Refugees arrive to its **sefers** (localities), which are already grappling with rural-to-urban migration influx due to drought, landlessness and farmland degradation, conflict, and lack of livelihood opportunities elsewhere in Ethiopia. Under these circumstances, refugees persevere, navigating the uncertainties, precarities, and restrictions surrounding their daily life. Against this backdrop, a thirdspace analysis of refugee resilience in the city's context is helpful to understand refugees' struggles and attempts to rebuild their lives. There is an ever-growing emerging literature dealing

with the rising number of the urban refugee population in Addis Ababa (e.g., Abebe, 2018; Adugna et al., 2022; Asabu, 2018; Betts et al., 2019; Brown et al., 2018; Kindie et al., 2023; Mekonnen, 2019; Woldetsadik et al., 2019). Nevertheless, such research focuses on conceptually related topics in lieu of providing a spatial gaze into urban refugee resilience. In addition, literature on African cities as sanctuary and shelter for urban refugees beyond Johannesburg and Nairobi is limited (Bauder, 2019).

In light of this gap, prior works have not applied Edward Soja's thirdspace to analyze refugee resilience in an urban context. Thus, this paper seeks to make use of this spatial analysis to explore the resilience experience of adult refugees residing in the city of Addis Ababa. Consequently, it seeks to address the following research questions:

- How is Addis Ababa perceived as a place of refugee resilience?
- How is Addis Ababa conceived as a space for refugee resilience?
- How does the lived experience of refugees in Addis Ababa demonstrate spaces and constraints of resilience-making?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Setting

Addis Ababa has a history of welcoming refugees from neighbouring countries, primarily fleeing conflict and harsh living conditions. Somalis have been established in spaces such as Bole Michael since the early 1990s, while Yemenis and Syrians have recently begun establishing themselves. As of June 2023, Addis Ababa has a registered refugee population of over 74,000, primarily from neighbouring countries of Eritrea, South Sudan, Somalia, Sudan and other nearby countries like Yemen, Syria, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi (UNHCR, 2023). This study aims to understand urban refugee resilience in Addis Ababa using a spatial lens.

Research Methodology

This study applies a qualitative research approach to explore urban refugee resilience in the context of Addis Ababa for its capacity to provide a contextually sensitive understanding and thick description of refugee resilience (Ungar, 2003, 2005). Using Edward Soja's thirdspace theory (1998), the research employs a multi-method ethnography and investigates urban refugee resilience by emphasizing the subaltern space of refugee resilience in Addis Ababa.

Participant Characteristics, Data Collection Tools, and Procedures

The study used a variety of qualitative tools to gather information on adult refugee resilience in Addis Ababa. In-depth interviews (n = 47) were conducted with various groups, including Burundians, Congolese, Eritreans, Somalis, South Sudanese, Sudanese, Syrians, and Yemenis (Table 1). Repeated transect walks (single line systematic walks around a community area to explore spatial distinctions through observation) across different sefers and informal conversations were also employed. Key informant interviews (n = 6) were conducted with government officials and non-governmental organization representatives (Table 2). Focus group discussions (FGDs; n = 3) were used as an additional data gathering tool among Eritrean refugees due to their presence in the city in large numbers. Documents such as the country's proclamation and refugee organizations' websites were also used to understand the space of refugee resilience in Addis Ababa.

Purposive sampling was used to gather qualitative data from refugee informants, focus group discussants, and humanitarian

Table 1

Characteristics of In-Depth Interview and Focus Group Discussion Participants

Characteristic	n
Gender	
Male	47
Female	15
Age	
18–24	10
25–29	12
30–34	11
35–39	15
40–44	5
45–49	8
50–55	1
Country of Origin	
Eritrea	24
South Sudan	13
Yemen	7
Somalia	5
Syria	4
Burundi	3
Congo	4
Sudan	2
Ethnicity	
Nuer	12
Anywa	1
Tigre	5
Tigrigna	19
Tutsi	4
Twa	2
Hutu	1
Somali	3
Somali Bantu	2
Other	13
Duration of Stay in the City	
< 1 year	6
1–3 years	15
4–6 years	23
7–9 years	9
10+ years	9

Table 1

Continued

Characteristic	n
Education	
Non-secondary	25
Secondary	22
University	15
Marital Status	
Single	33
Married	27
Divorced	2
Religion	
Orthodox	22
Muslim	20
Protestant	15
Catholic	5
Occupation	
Refugee outreach volunteer	8
Higher education	3
Informal employment	9
Unemployed	41
Self-employed	1

professionals. Nine sefers were identified as main study sites due to their high refugee population and city presence. Adult refugees' resilience space in Addis Ababa was analyzed using the thematic framework method and NVivo 9 qualitative data analysis software. Data saturation was used to determine the number of data sets.

Ethical Considerations

This study, conducted between June 2022 and December 2023, received institutional review board approval from Addis Ababa University and adhered to principles of respect, beneficence, and justice. Interviews were conducted in various languages, with interpreters moderating discussions. Three Eritrean refugees, experienced in humanitarian situations, were enrolled as facilitators in each of the urban refugee FGDs.

Table 2

Characteristics of Key Informant Interview Participants

Place of employment	Position	Gender	Educational qualification	Years of experience
RRS	Livelihood and refugee economic inclusion team leader	M	Post-graduate	4
RRS	Urban refugee program team leader	M	Post-graduate	4
DRC	Ethiopian migration program monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL) coordinator	F	Post-graduate	1 year, 5 months
DRC	Ethiopian migration program resilience and integration department manager	F	Undergraduate	1 year, 4 months
ZOA	Urban program project manager	F	Undergraduate	3
ZOA	Urban program project officer	F	Undergraduate	1 year, 4 months
JRS	Project director	F	Post-graduate	15
JRS	Program officer	F	Post-graduate	4

Note. RRS = Refugees and Returnees Service; DRC = Danish Refugee Council; ZOA = International Relief and Recovery Organization of the Netherlands; JRS = Jesuit Refugee Service.

Data collection involved obtaining informed consent and recording proceedings on an electronic device, with participants choosing the location where the discussion took place.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Perceiving Addis Ababa as a Place of Urban Refugee Resilience

Edward Soja's spatiality theory suggests that perceived space is part of the firstspace hierarchy, which focuses on the physical world. Thus, a surface-level overview of refugee resilience in Addis Ababa might aid in understanding of refugee resilience within the city's context.

Under the authority of the National Intelligence and Security Services, the Refugees and Returnees Service (RRS) is the UNHCR counterpart in Ethiopia, coordinating refugee registration, protection, and support. It collaborates with various organizations to ensure the safety and security of refugees and host communities (RRS, 2023). UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) also form a piece of Addis Ababa's refugee protection and resilience puzzle, with the former having a strong presence in Addis Ababa, as well as across Ethiopia's 24 refugee camps, and the latter having offices in the city since 1995 until it was decommissioned into a Special Liaison Mission serving the African Union, the Economic Commission for Africa, and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development in 2010 (IOM, 2014; UNHCR, n.d.). Various

Table 3

Refugee-Focused Organizations' Resilience-Building Initiatives in Addis Ababa

Organization	Type	Areas of engagement
Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission	CSO	Implemented cash-based interventions, health, education, psychosocial and livelihood support, gender-based violence prevention, and water, sanitation and hygiene programs, based at its centre located in Arat kilo, Arada subcity
Danish Refugee Council	International NGO	Undertook interventions including migration mentorship program and refugee host community centre establishment
German Agency for International Cooperation	International GO	Implemented refugee and host community employment enhancement program (GIZ, 2023)
International Organization for Migration	IGO	Oversaw and organized the movement of refugees into a third country through resettlement, family reunion, humanitarian, and other admission initiatives (IOM, 2022)
Jesuit Refugee Service	International NGO	Availed refugee host community services like educational and psychosocial support and vocational training at its Refuge Community Centres located in various sefers in the city
Norwegian Refugee Council	International NGO	Participated in refugee legal support, information exchange, and livelihood intervention programs
Refugees and Returnees Service	Local GO	Oversaw and managed the nation's operations pertaining to refugees;
UNHCR	IGO	Attended to refugees' protection needs and encouraged their self-reliance and resettlement in accordance with the Global Compact on Refugees (UNHCR, 2024)

Note: CSO = civil society organization; NGO = non-governmental organization; GO = governmental organization; IGO = intergovernmental organization.

other international and local organizations also operate in the hope of bettering the lives of vulnerable refugees and host communities in the city (Table 3). They include international humanitarian NGOs such as the Jesuit Refugee Service, the Danish Refugee Council, the Norwegian Refugee Council, and the International Relief and Recovery Organization of the Netherlands; the German Agency for International Cooperation, which is a global development organization owned by the German Federal Government; the Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which is a local civil society organization that focuses on refugees and returnees; and governmental organizations such as the Ministry of Labour and Skills and the Ministry of Education. According to key informant interview participants, these organizations

Figure 1

Study Area
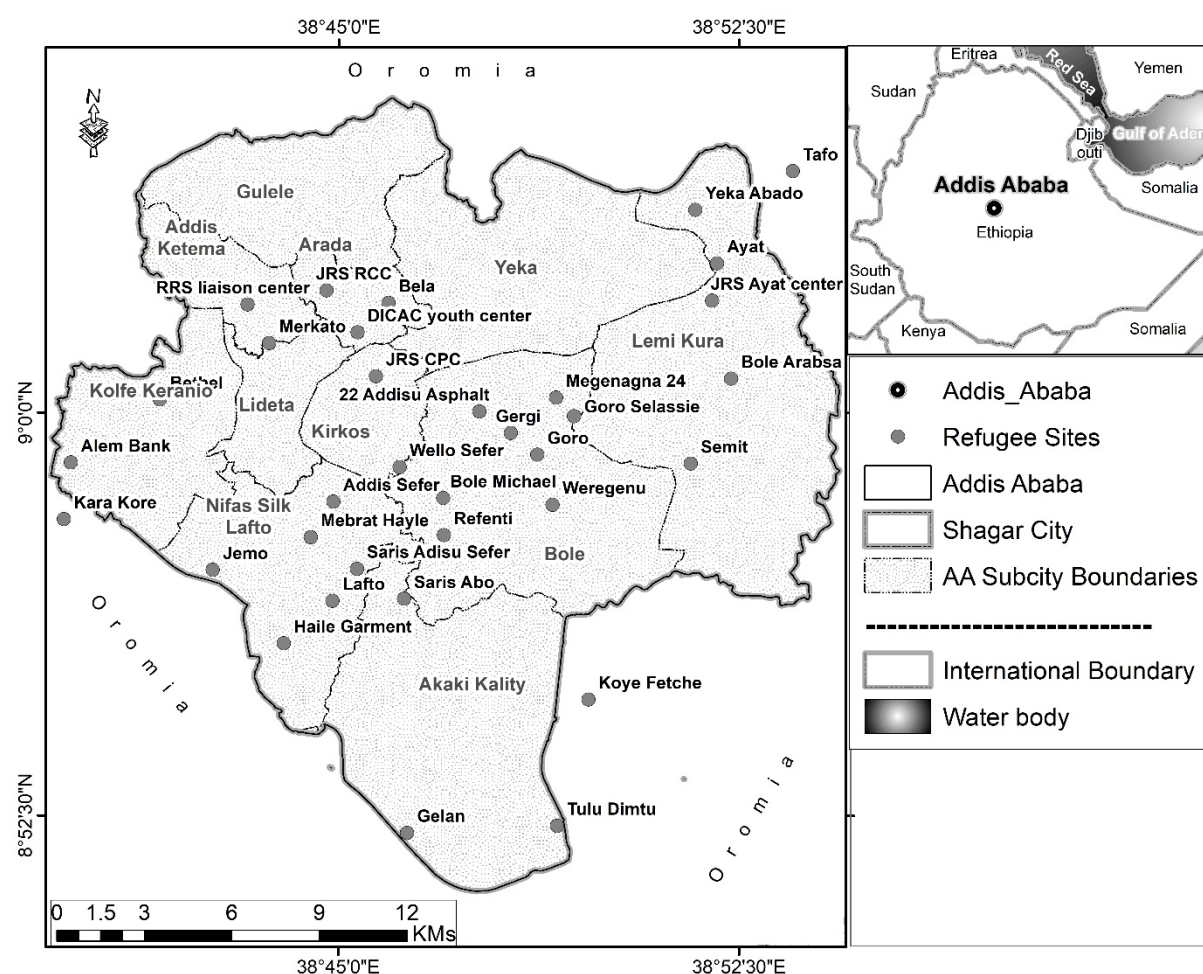
Note. RRS = Refugees and Returnees Service; JRS = Jesuit Refugee Service; RCC = Refugee Community Centre; DICAC = Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission; CPC = Child Protection Centre; AA = Addis Ababa. Map adapted from the Ethiopia Central Statistical Agency (https://www.statsethiopia.gov.et/). Copyright 1999–2019 by Esri Inc.

look for funds from global patrons and sponsors as they work to implement their refugee related missions. At the same time, they also work in tandem in areas of common interest and partnership.

Addis Ababa is a city where refugees share social, employment, housing, health, education, and transport spaces with the host community, as evidenced by the presence of refugee-populated and associated sefers in various parts of the city (Figure 1). Some of these sefers are relatively affluent neighbourhoods of the city, like Bole Michael

and Mebrat Hayle condominium, where financially capable refugees rent a residence, whereas others are in relatively impoverished sefers like Weregeno, where refugees with limited resources rent houses (Figure 2).

Two patterns of refugee settlement concentrations emerged during observations. On the one hand, the study identified several inner-city sefers that were hosting significant refugee populations. Somali, Syrian, and Yemeni refugees were commonly found in the Bole Michael sefer. 24-Megenagna sefer was home to Somali, Eritrean, and

Figure 2

Mebrat Hayle and Weregeno Sefers

Note. Street snapshots show two contrasting refugee-populated sefers in Addis: Gofa-Mebrat Hayle condominium, where financially capable refugees rent residences, and Weregenu, an impoverished sefer in Addis where limited-resourced refugees rent houses. Photographs were taken by authors during data collection.

South Sudanese refugees. Eritreans made up the majority of the city's refugee population and were visible in different inner-city neighbourhoods, including Saris, Mebrat Hayle, Gerji, and Lafto. Sefers like Wollo and Merkato were associated mainly with Yemeni refugees. However, inner-city sefers like Bela, which were once popular among South Sudanese refugees for their affordable rent, had seen a decline in refugee resident numbers. The emergence of the Sudanese civil war on April 15, 2023, led to a surge of Sudanese refugees in Addis Ababa, with Addisu Aspalt in Haya Hulet (22) seeing increased Sudanese presence and influence. Inner-city organizational spaces like the Jesuit Refugee Service Refugee Community Centre, located in Arada district of the city, became convenient spots for finding different refugee communities of the city.

On the other hand, both interview and observation data revealed the presence of large refugee residents in the sefers located away from the city centre, straddling the borders of Addis Ababa and the recently established Sheger city administration, which includes the former Finfine Zuria Special Zone in the Oromia region and some sefers on the city's outskirts. These include Semit, Bole Arabsa, Ayat, and Yeka Abado in Lemi Kura district; Tafo in the neighbouring Finfine Zuria Special Zone; Koye Fetche,

Gelan, and Tulu Dimtu in Akaki Kality sub-city; Refenti, Weregenu, and Goro in Bole subcity; Jemo and Haile Garment in Nifas Silk Lafto district; and Bethel, Alem Bank, and Kara Kore in Kolfe Keranio district. Refugees and asylum seekers resided in various city areas for various reasons, but their presence in the mentioned sefers suggests possible refugee settlement and financial status patterns within the city context as affordable housing in urban areas are typically located away from the city centre.

Refugees in the city secured shelters in the form of temporary reception centres run by UNHCR and its implementing partners, rentals like condominiums and single-room courtyard houses, and rent-free accommodations offered by city dwellers willing to host them. The study identified three instances of unregistered urban refugees in the city: those with temporary ID cards due to registration interruptions, Sudanese refugees who were allowed to reside by renewing their passports, and those who relocated and resided in the city without the government's knowledge.

In a nutshell, Addis Ababa's geographic depiction of refugee resilience demonstrates the city's status as a sanctuary city in its tangible and concerted form.

Conceiving Addis Ababa as a Space of Urban Refugee Resilience

According to Soja (1998), the secondspace is the realm of space based on real space, but it also coincides with imagined representation of power, ideology, surveillance, control, and subjectivity (van Mastrigt, 2015). Thus, examining the conceived representation of refugee and asylum space provides a distinctive angle to analyze the policy and cognitive intricacies of refugee resilience space.

According to refugee informants, the two ways an urban residence permit was allowed in the Ethiopian refugee law delimited urban refugee resilience in the context of the country. First, Out-of-Camp Policy refugee status allowed refugees to relocate to Addis Ababa only if they were self-sufficient and could provide a security-guarantor post-relocation. Second, Urban Assistance Programme refugee status permitted camp refugees requiring serious medical treatment and protection concerns to relocate to Addis Ababa. However, these legal constraints did not apply to minority refugees with limited nationality representation in the country.

Refugee work and employment right made up the other space where urban refugee resilience in the context of Ethiopia had been envisaged. According to article 26 of the Refugee Proclamation (No. 1110/2019; FDRE, 2019), refugees were given the right to earn income through either participation in organizationally funded and private joint venture projects or work activities allowed for favoured foreigners, demonstrating the constrained conceptualization of refugee resilience within the legal domain. According to an RRS officer, the rationale behind this law's design was to foster urban refugee resilience by allowing refugees to generate income through a government-controlled mechanism to protect citizens' workspace.

In addition to citizenship avenues through marriage, adoption, outstanding contributions, and becoming a naturalized child, recognized refugees and asylum seekers in Ethiopia can gain citizenship if they meet certain requirements, including reaching eligible age, establishing residency, speaking Ethiopian languages, having sufficient income, having a good character, releasing previous nationality upon citizenship, and taking an oath of allegiance (FDRE, 2003). Apparently, the requirement of securing

self-sufficiency amid restricted employment right indicates the fraught space of refugee resilience that exists in the refugee and citizenship law of the country.

Prior to their arrival, refugees conceived Addis Ababa as a transit city where they could emigrate further abroad. A recently arriving Yemeni refugee envisioned his plan of emigrating from Addis as follows:

> Refugees from Syria and Yemen have a 95% chance of being accepted in Holland due to ongoing war in the two countries. I know air tickets are cheap here and Ethiopian Airlines fly from here to Brazil [São Paulo]. Thus, I plan to migrate out of Addis using Ethiopian Airlines to Brazil, where I can cross the border to Suriname and request asylum.

The above excerpt demonstrates the refugee's plan of migrating out of Addis to Suriname with the hope of asylum shopping in the latter country for the historical and cultural ties it enjoys with the Netherlands. In fact, refugees' conception of primate cities in the Global South as transit cities where they would emigrate for resettlement and immigration to Europe and North America has also been identified in the case of Nairobi (Johansson, 2018; Kassa, 2018).

In addition, most of the refugee informants reported expecting better conditions at the time of their arrival in Ethiopia. A Yemeni refugee who came to Ethiopia with her family explained both her mother and her sister "were recommended to flee to Ethiopia" before they even arrived in the country. Similarly, an Eritrean informant explained what he hoped to evade by fleeing to Ethiopia: "In Eritrea, there is no life at all. Life is all about being a soldier. Your choice is to be a soldier and live as a soldier." Another Congolese refugee said, "I was recommended when I was in Kenya that it would be better for me to move to Ethiopia because the country does not have many Congolese that can endanger my life." Some came to Addis escaping difficult living conditions like harsh climate, conflict, and lack of infrastructure, as well as monotonous and slashed food rations in some of the refugee camps, with hopes of immersing themselves in an urban life free from camp polemics and practices.

Thus, the secondspace analysis unmasks the two cognitive precursors to refugee resilience in Addis Ababa: namely, the constrained resilience space of the country's refugee and citizenship law and the refugees' pre-arrival subjective expectations of life in the city.

The Lived Dimension of Refugee Resilience in Addis Ababa

To understand Addis Ababa's refugee resilience, a thirdspace analysis, focusing on emerging forms of resilience beyond perceived and conceived spaces, is needed. In this regard, Edward Soja's thirdspace offers a crucial perspective for zooming in on grassroots-level spaces and constraints on refugee resilience.

(Re)making Spaces of Refugee Resilience

Refugees' capacity to navigate through Addis Ababa's real and imagined spaces of resilience became further evident in the lived dimension of their resilience endeavours to survive and improve their well-being.

Cognitive restructuring, a shift in mindset and attitude towards hardship, allowed them to view their experience positively in the form of hope, transience, religiosity, and retrospection. Despite their hardships, refugees were able to find optimism in re-envisioning themselves as "future emigrants." For instance, a Burundian refugee stated how he had been in a resettlement waiting list since 2012 and how he felt hopeful about "applying for a one-way travel document that was issued for refugees by RRS" in his effort to speed up his resettlement

process. A Congolese refugee expressed optimism about his future life due to his income savings and his recent resettlement interview at the US Embassy.

Others were adamant about the transience of the undesirable situation they were forced to be in. An Eritrean refugee viewed the political repression in his country as "temporary," despite the protracted nature of the situation, signalling how refugees appeal to temporariness in reframing their situation. Some took comfort in religiosity as they appealed to God and Allah for help in their terrible circumstances. One refugee, a Pentecostal from Congo, described his solace as "going to church and praising Jesus with other people whenever I feel the urge." An orthodox Eritrean refugee, on her part, felt that the "Holy Saviour is on my side and I usually go to church to pray for deliverance." A Yemeni refugee explained he was "in a lot of problems, but it is always important to praise Allah," showing the significance of prayer in his daily life. These examples indicate how refugees use religiosity to constructively reframe their circumstances.

Consolation also emanated from retrospection, or refugees viewing their present circumstances in light of their past undesirable situation. After comparing his present condition with the past, a Congolese refugee explained, "In relative terms, I can say it is good here because I feel safe as there is no gun shooting around my house." This sentiment was shared by Sudanese, South Sudanese, and Yemeni refugees, who had to flee their countries due to ongoing armed conflicts, as well as Bantu-Somali and Syrian refugees, who experienced second-time displacement from Yemen and Sudan, respectively. Thus, the frame of relativity provided refugees an opportunity to think about the chronic problems they had in the past and positively reframe their feelings about their current ordeal.

Refugees resorted to making behavioural adaptations in their struggles to meet the demands of living in Addis. They manifested adaptive behaviour in the form of flexibility, cultural adaptation, and frugality. By adapting various ways to generate income, the refugee participants strategized flexibility for resilience-making. For example, some refugees engaged in small businesses and informal employment despite restrictions in the country's refugee law. A Burundian refugee remarked that "living in a big city like Addis provides us the opportunity for income generation regardless of the nature and payment of the job." A Syrian family head demonstrated the importance of flexibility as a space of refugee resilience, stating, "We are not only 2 or 3 people, but 20, and we mainly depend on begging in the street."

Cultural adaptation refers to the learned behaviours and knowledge of refugees in their struggle to adapt and thrive in Addis Ababa. A Burundian refugee said, "In Burundi we used cassava but here we use maize" to prepare their favourable cultural dish. A Congolese refugee claimed to be capable of cooking Ethiopian dishes, including injera, shiro, and tibs, at his home. A Yemeni refugee expressed how learning some of the Amharic and Afan Oromo languages helped her gain acceptance by members of the host community, stating, "The challenge is they do not accept you if you don't show you are willing to speak their language." Understandably, other refugee participants also reiterated the importance of learning the commonly spoken local languages of the city in their drive to strengthen their personal and community resilience.

Frugality, or the quality of being economical with money and food, was particularly relevant among refugees with limited resources.

A South Sudanese UNHCR monthly cash assistance recipient showed his frustration as he lamented that "due to the high cost of rice, we somehow manage to scrape by opting for cheaper options like beans, potatoes, or barley."

Refugees utilized their culture for resilience-building, as learned by one of the researchers attending a ngdet ceremony (a religio-cultural ceremony adhered to among Ethiopian and Eritrean orthodox Christian followers to celebrate the church's patron saints) hosted by a six-member Eritrean group. In the ceremony, the researcher experienced eating tihlo, a traditional barley food, and observed a coffee-drinking ceremony. Importantly, the group used the event to discuss their past, present, and future lives, highlighting the soothing effect of culture on refugee well-being.

Syrian refugees conducted weekly family get-togethers, whereas refugees from Yemen and Somalia observed daily khat (an East African native plant that is chewed as a stimulant) chewing sessions as traditional methods of consolation. In some instances, refugees managed to turn their cultural resources into income-generating opportunities. In sefers such as Bole Michael, where Middle Eastern and Somali refugees reside, and Lafto and Mebrat Hayle, notable for their significant number of Eritrean refugees, the researchers were able to find culturally themed, refugee-owned businesses and restaurants. By leveraging their language proficiency, members of the refugee groups from Congo, Burundi, Yemen, and Somalia found informal employment as teachers and interpreters. These instances of culturally tuned income-generating strategies show the important role cultural resources play in refugee resilience-making in Addis Ababa.

Refugee participants often emphasized the importance of social relations, including social networks and support, in reducing stress and suffering and enhancing their ability to overcome challenges. Diaspora ties had a trickle-down effect in the form of remittances, as evidenced by the presence of refugees who got sponsorship not only for their daily expenses but also for engaging in ride-hailing services and establishing restaurants and shops, as well as pursuing emigration to the West through legal arrangements such as groups of five (G5), marriage, scholarship, and family migration. An Eritrean refugee who owned his own barber shop in Saris Addisu sefer demonstrated co-ethnic social support in the form of provision of space for resilience production, explaining, "I was able to find employment in another Eritrean-owned men's hair salon the moment I arrived in the city, gradually leading me to open up my own place."

The influence of other forms of social ties was also evident in some refugees' lives. For instance, an Eritrean women refugee said, "I am happy we share similar cultures with Ethiopians as it has made my stay here easier." Similarly, a Somali refugee stated, "The presence of ethnic Somali Ethiopians in 24-Megenagna sefer of the city made things easier for me initially before I was able to speak the Amharic language." These testimonies indicate that refugees with transnational ethnic kinship are better equipped to tackle some challenges in the city. There were also refugees who leveraged their ties with locals to improve their well-being and resilience. This was well demonstrated in the arrangements some were able to make with Ethiopians. For example, refugee informants explained that refugees with financial clout started businesses by renting space and obtaining a licence from Ethiopians offering them the service. Others touched on how refugees who were married to Ethiopians

used that as leverage in opening their own businesses.

The study explored the lived space of refugee resilience in Addis Ababa, highlighting how refugees constructed their own resilience spaces through cognitive restructuring, behavioural adaptability, cultural identity, and social relations. (e.g., see Güngör & Strohmeier, 2020; Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012; Msabah, 2016). Still, multiple constraints hampered their resilience, highlighting the complexity of challenges faced by the city's refugees.

Constraints of Refugee Resilience

The study explores the constraints affecting the resilience and well-being of urban refugees in Addis Ababa by examining the impact of existing conditions on their resilience and well-being improvement efforts.

Urban refugees and key informants argued that the restricted employment and property rights in the country's recent refugee proclamation strained refugees' resilience-building efforts. A Burundian refugee who was a foreign language teacher in a private secondary school said, "We are paid less than other professionals because it is deemed illegal in the refugee law of the country. We have no choice but to accept the salary offered." FGD participants said that "falling into the hands of people who issue work licences" is one of the main challenges faced by refugees who established businesses in partnership with local citizens, exposing some to "exploitation, scam and bankruptcy." This signals the absence of a legally secured employment pathway, which is often seen as fundamental to refugee self-reliance and resilience in an urban context (e.g., Jacobsen, 2006; Sanyal, 2012).

Another Eritrean refugee expressed frustration with the limited employment space of the refugee proclamation. He even contemplated "whether his family could support him if he embarked on illegal migration," highlighting how the law might dissuade some to venture into irregular migration. An NGO social worker explained the importance of addressing the lack of directives at the lower echelon of the Ethiopian legislation hierarchy: "Expanding refugees' right to not only get a licence and start their own business but also to enrol in paid employment would benefit both refugees and NGOs working on urban refugee resilience, livelihood, and economic integration."

Urban refugees in the city faced challenges in their resilience-making process due to a host of other existing factors. One was the mismatch between policy and practice. One FGD revealed that an NGO-funded project that aimed to establish a sewing shop for refugees and host communities faced challenges when host community members demanded the shop be set up under their own name, revoking the refugees' half-ownership status and undermining the project's main purpose. Similarly, An NGO coordinator explained, "One of the reasons that undid the 2018 Jobs Compact Ethiopia program, which aimed to connect refugee socio-economic opportunities with the Ethiopian government's industrialization agenda, was the inability of industrial parks to hire refugees," which impacted its implementation at the grassroots level. A 45-year-old Burundian refugee resident of the city claimed, "I still hold an asylum-seeker ID despite being in the country for 10 years," citing irregularities in the country's refugee service provision as the reason. Another refugee expressed her concern about knowing "individuals that are still treated as foreigners despite being in Ethiopia for over 20 years and fulfilling naturalization requirements."

Approaches to naturalization and citizenship are among the essential factors

that shape the prospect of local integration among urban refugees (Fábos & Kibreab, 2007). Some reported allegations of bribery in refugee registration and identity card renewal services of the city. FGD participants claimed that brokers and wealthy individuals enticed corrupt personnel and exploited refugees' resettlement opportunities to their own advantage. NGO officers explained that refugees were adversely affected by frequent interruptions in identity card renewal services, leading to difficulties in accessing essential services. The presence of such policy–practice irregularities is likely to dampen refugee resilience and well-being, forcing some to opt for illegal dealings.

Besides high living costs and inflation, dwindling resources put a strain on the resilience of the city's refugees. For example, South Sudanese interviewees revealed that their community, historically preferring inner-city sefers like Bela due to affordable rental prices, had been forced to move to outskirt sefers like Weregenu and Koye-Feche. They described their rented tukul (traditional houses made of mud) as "unliveable due to bugs infesting [their] sleeping area and lack of toilet facility," making them mere sleeping spaces. The situations of an Eritrean refugee in Bole Arabsa, who struggled to access public transport, and a Yemeni refugee, who was unable to get three meals per day, highlighted the dire situations often faced by less-resourced individuals. However, by no means were resourceful refugees and other stakeholders immune to resource shortages. FGD participants expressed the unsustainable nature of the social support they received from abroad and the feelings of dependency and guilt that it generated. An RRS officer highlighted the impact of dwindling financial support from donor agencies in the aftermath of refugee situations from international crises such as the Russia–Ukraine war.

Urban refugee resilience in Addis Ababa played out in the context of internal conflict plaguing Ethiopia. Members of one Eritrean FGD said, "Most of us came here [Addis Ababa] after the start of the conflict," referring to the second-time displacement they experienced during the Tigray conflict in 2020–2022. There were also South Sudanese refugees who were forced to relocate to Addis Ababa due to the threat of inter-communal violence in some of the refugee camps, including Sherkole and Kule. An Eritrean who spent time in prison during the height of the Tigray conflict stated, "They did not believe us when we told them our refugee status and showed them our identification card because we also speak the Tigrigna language." Similarly, A South Sudanese refugee of Nuer ethnic background revealed how refugees in Addis can be affected by conflicts happening far away from the capital, saying, "I have been subjected to physical attacks in the street of Addis when ethnic conflict flared up in the Gambella region."

Some refugees expressed living in fear of being targeted by different groups. Incidents of mass deportation of Eritrean refugees were reported by major international media outlets in June 2023 (United Nations, 2023). Eritrean and Somali refugees expressed concern about the potential negative impact of the strained relationship between Ethiopia and their countries of origin, fearing potential targeted actions. Eritrean refugees refused to disclose their political affiliation due to fear of exposure to "clandestine Eritrean government spies within the city." Eritrean focus group discussants said, "Brokers often fuel rumours of pending mass incarceration fuelling the illegal migration of refugees to Kenya and Uganda."

Others talked of being targeted by people who wanted to take advantage of them. A South Sudanese refugee outreach volunteer stated, "There are complaints that even the police are asking for money whenever they catch some members of my community at night." An Anywa South Sudanese refugee mentioned how "the ethnically meditated physical confrontation [her] children experienced in their school" reminded her of how she was not safe from the interethnic violence she fled in her country of origin. Somali Bantu refugees alleged not being represented in their national refugee association, barring them from access to information and benefits. Apparently, the fear and possibility of being singled out and targeted put some of the refugees in a state of anxiety, compounding their precarious situation.

The problem of the language barrier was highlighted among some refugee groups. A Congolese refugee claimed, "Whenever information concerning the latest developments of the country is transmitted in the media, we are often the last to hear because of the language barrier." A South Sudanese refugee said, "Sometimes, when we meet law enforcement personnel, it is difficult as we do not speak any of the local languages." However, this problem was most acute among recently arrived as well as minority refugees who had not mastered any of the local languages.

Misconceptions on the part of refugees and host communities about refugee life also detracted the city refugees' resilience-building efforts. On one hand, study participants expressed the existence of a widely held assumption among members of the host community that "refugees are rich and have money." The presence of remittance-receiving refugees in the city could lead to host communities' perception of refugees as "wealthy," resulting in price hikes on basic needs service charges and disproportionately affecting low-income refugees and host communities. On the other hand, some refugees were obsessed with moving to another country and staying in the city only temporarily, starting from the moment they first arrived in the city. Thus, investing every resource and hope they had into migrating to another country and waiting in vain meant exposure to stress factors that could potentially harm their well-being.

The thirdspace analysis of refugee life in Addis Ababa reveals hindrances to refugee resilience due to legal restrictions, policy–practice gaps, internal conflict, resource shortages, language barriers, fear of being targeted, misconceptions about refugees, and some refugees' overwhelming desire to leave the country. Overall, these findings coincide with those of previous studies (e.g., Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012) and oppose the principle of burden-sharing between external donors and refugee host nations (e.g., see André, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study was conducted between June 2022 and December 2023 in Addis Ababa, which has a history of hosting refugees originating from neighbouring and surrounding countries. At the time, Ethiopia's refugee law restricted refugees' freedom of movement to urban areas, including to its capital and primate city. Refugees could legally engage in income-generating activities, but only in areas for favoured foreigners, in joint ventures with Ethiopians, or with work licences and permits granted on a case-by-case basis. At the same time, the country's primate and capital city, Addis Ababa, was a cityscape where refugees escaped the hardships of camp life and dreamed of emigrating further abroad. However, it was the lived dimension of refugee resilience that demonstrated

refugees' ability to navigate through the city's real and imagined spaces of resilience.

Refugees were able to create their own spaces of resilience in the form of cognitive restructuring, behavioural adaptability, cultural identity, and social relations. However, these resilience spaces were hampered by multiple constraints in the form of legal restrictions, policy–practice gaps, resource shortages, political instability, fear of being targeted, language barriers, misconceptions about refugees, and refugees' extreme desire to emigrate from the country, highlighting the complexity of challenges faced by the city's refugees. The study's findings suggest addressing the incompatibilities that exist at the policy, practice, and mindset levels to improve the prospect of refugee resilience and well-being in Addis Ababa. In addition, Edward Soja's theory of thirdspace is recommended as an alternative framework for exploring the multi-faceted nature of refugee resilience.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors reports no conflict of interest.

ORCID

Aman Mohammedsaid Adem 🆔
    https://orcid.org/0009-0002-8433-8879
Getahun Fenta Kebede 🆔
    https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5704-6956

Teferee Makonnen Kassa 🆔
    https://orcid.org/0009-0004-8810-8725

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