"Living between here and there": Trans-local coping with urban marginality among internally displaced persons in urban Ethiopia

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Abstract

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) in urban areas experience spatial, social and symbolic marginality because of interactions between the processes of displacement and the socio-spatial contexts in which they are relocated. While an increasing body of research has highlighted the agentic possibilities of urban margins, little is known about IDPs' coping practices beyond the urban contexts that produce their marginality. Drawing on a qualitative study in two urban settlements in Ethiopia, this paper disentangles how trans-local practices of mobilities, connections and attachment, and the circulation of resources support IDPs in coping with disadvantages in urban settings. The findings show first, that constellations of mobilities across different nodal places constitute strategies to diversify the sources of livelihood thereby coping with the effects of spatial disadvantages. Second that, that trans-local connection and attachment preserves a sense of belonging to trans-local 'homes' and acts as a symbolic resource against the processes of exclusion and othering. Third, that the trans-local social network facilitates the exchange of material and intangible resources, and expands IDPs' employment opportunities and social relations. This study contributes to our understanding of forced migrants' agency to transform places and produce fluid lived spaces to reduce the impact of marginalization in relocation contexts.

Key words: IDPs, urban, marginality, trans-local, mobility

Introduction

The majority of internally displaced persons (IDPs) — people who have been forced to flee their place of residence but remain within the territory of their country — live in urban areas (Huang & Graham, 2019). Most of these IDPs live outside a camp system whereby they join a large group of the urban poor and new settlers inhabiting marginal urban spaces (Crisp et al., 2012; Earle et al., 2020). These IDPs are often represented by governments either as economic migrants or as integrated citizens (Refstie & Brun, 2012). In these places, IDPs often experience marginality due to their displacement and the exclusionary practices induced by uneven processes of urbanization, particularly in the Global South (Gogishvili & Harris-Brandts, 2019; Jacobs & Kyamusugulwa, 2017; Crisp et al., 2012).

While the expanding body of literature portrays urban IDPs as a challenging category to identify due to their unregistered movement and spontaneous settlement, the Ethiopian case

illustrates the presence of organized IDP settlements in urban settings. This study unravels how these IDPs cope with the interrelated forms of marginality in the newly established urban settlements. Marginality here refers to the imbalance of power engendering the social, political, symbolic and economic exclusion of people from the city system, which brings along stigma (Aceska et al., 2019; Gibbons, 2017). This understanding of urban marginality is often operationalized using two analytical dimensions: social and spatial. Social marginality involves injustice and exclusion related to ethnicity, gender, religion, culture, and social hierarchy, whereas spatial marginality involves exclusion related to location, distance, and segregation (Gatzweiler & Baumüller, 2014). Previous research particularly focusing on the experiences of urban IDPs, added the relevance of symbolic marginality, referring to the reinforcement of differences and borders between IDPs and other residents by urban authorities (Author's own, 2023). This dimension of marginality bears resemblances to how governments reinforce the marginality of refugees as shown in several case studies in Africa (Daley, 2013; Grabska, 2006; Kihato & Landau, 2017). Nonetheless, refugees' marginalization is largely related to legality and citizenship and is therefore not entirely similar to the situation of IDPs relocated to urban areas.

While a focus on urban marginalization adds to the dominant emphasis on the constraining effects of urban conditions, a growing number of urban studies also point to the agentic possibilities of cities and the production of alternative practices by the urban poor and displaced persons (Aru et al., 2017; Earle et al., 2020; Sisson, 2021). These studies highlight the practices of disadvantaged groups to appropriate urban spaces and engage in non-spectacular activities to ameliorate their circumstances (Aceska et al., 2019; Aedo, 2019). While fully endorsing the need for such insights, we argue that this branch of scholarship situates the everyday practices of the marginalized groups entirely in the city that produces their exclusion. This sedentarist and place-bounded approach could obscure constellations of mobilities and practices beyond the urban contexts, certainly for (mobile) groups that have established connections across places, such as IDPs relocated to a city. In fact, recent forced migration studies have highlighted the importance of analyzing trans-locality in urban displacement contexts, by stressing how IDPs maintain connections to their place of origin (Etzold et al., 2019; Jacobs et al., 2022). However, we argue that nodal places and connections extend beyond the place of origin and include other places experienced during displacement

and resettlement. Government-led resettlement schemes, for example, involve the mobility of IDPs from provisional places (such as collective transit centers) and their dispersal across cities, thereby connecting them to a variety of places. These complex trans-local connections and the way they are maintained or expanded to cope with interrelated forms of marginality after resettlement have attracted little scholarly attention.

Drawing on a trans-local perspective, this paper highlights how IDPs who are relocated into urban areas in Ethiopia situate themselves across the different socio-spatial contexts created during their displacement and resettlement trajectory to cope with interrelated forms of marginality in their new urban settlements. Specifically, we analyze how mobility, connections and attachment, and the circulation of resources across places constitute the trans-local coping mechanisms of these IDPs. Trans-local coping here represents the ability of IDPs to produce alternative practices and cultivate networks spanning different socio-spatial contexts to reduce the effects of urban marginality (Etzold, 2016; Jacobs et al., 2022). This perspective uncovers the often invisible but persisting everyday trans-local practices of IDPs after the government-led 'solution' of resettlement. By doing so, the paper expands the study of (forced) migrants agency beyond the city and contributes to the emerging debates about IDPs' subjective solutions to their displacement 'from below' (see Long, 2014).

In what follows, the paper further discusses the trans-local perspective and its usefulness in explaining how IDPs cope with marginality in urban contexts. We then situate the Oromo-Somali inter-ethnic conflict, internal displacement and urban resettlement in Ethiopia, before turning to the fieldwork in two urban settlements established by the government. The subsequent section sheds light on the key trans-local coping practices, including mobility, connections, and the circulation of resources. In conclusion, the importance of places and the practices of IDPs to transform these places to change their conditions are discussed.

Trans-locality as a coping strategy in internal displacement

The concept of trans-locality has been widely used in migration and area studies to explain how migrants make a living across different socio-spatial contexts (Brickell & Datta, 2011; Freitag & Oppen, 2010). It embodies the multidimensional and overlapping networks created by mobilities and how these facilitate the circulation of resources, practices, and ideas, and transform the localities they connect (Greiner, 2011). Beyond the conventional place-bound

dichotomy of the *here* and *there* of migrants, particular attention is paid to the *in-between* — to the mobility and interdependence that connects people and places and the tensions between mobility and locality arising from increasingly complex socio-spatial dynamics (Greiner, 2011; Steinbrink & Niedenführ, 2020). While the trans-local perspective builds on insights from the long-established research on transnationalism, it also seeks to address the limitation of the latter by highlighting mobilities, spatial interconnectedness, and the circulation of resources not necessarily limited to national boundaries (Greiner & Sakdapolrak, 2013). By doing so it has shifted attention toward local-to-local relations and the simultaneity of the mobility and situatedness of migrants across interconnected places (Brickell & Datta, 2011) to access resources beyond their destinations, and to diversify their source of livelihood (Greiner, 2011; Schapendonk et al., 2021). This implies that trans-locality takes an agency oriented approach to mobility by stressing how people move across places, without losing sight of the importance of localities in their life. This understanding also foregrounds the practices of people who do not physically move, yet are part of the trans-local networks and connectedness (Brickell & Datta, 2011; Jacobs et al., 2022).

Migration studies have widely applied the trans-local perspective in the context of labor migration and related livelihood strategies that strengthen rural-urban linkages (Etzold, 2016; Greiner, 2011; Peth et al., 2018; Steinbrink & Niedenführ, 2020). To date, trans-local practices in the context of forced migration due to conflict have nevertheless been insufficiently addressed. This could be interpreted as a perpetuation of the biased assumption that once forced migrants settle elsewhere, they are integrated into that place and cut connections to their previous places. While they are relocated into a certain socio- spatial context, forced migrants maintain relationships and belonging in various places they have experienced. This serves as a crucial means to navigate the challenges of integration in new resettlement contexts. We argue that the framework of trans-locality — focusing on movements and flows on the one hand, and notions of fixity and situatedness on the other — is crucial to uncover how IDPs relocating into urban areas depend on multiple places and connections to make a living. However, livelihood strategies, such as mobility amount to more than generating income across places. As we illustrate, it also embraces the qualitative dimensions of constructing and expanding social networks that further facilitate the access to resources and social support. Moreover, based on a previous study on marginality of IDPs (Author's own

2023), we add trans-local connection and attachment to obtain more insights into IDPs' emotional attachment to their previous places and every day practices substantiating their trans-local embeddedness or belonging across socio-spatial contexts. We argue that this reproduction of a trans-local identity and active reconstruction of actual and imagined 'trans-local homes' help (forced) migrants cope with social and symbolic marginality in their new places (see also Brickell & Datta, 2011; Smith, 2011).

Drawing on case studies of self-settled urban IDPs in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Jacobs and colleagues (2022) have already brought attention to key trans-local practices, and have analyzed the extent to which they constitute an alternative 'durable solutions' to protracted internal displacement. These and other authors affiliated to the Transnational Figuration of Displacement (TRAFIG) project (see Etzold et al., 2019) have shown that the trans-local practices of IDPs are orientated toward the community of origin. While these studies have importantly disentangled key trans-local practices such as (1) mobility, (2) connectivity, and (3) the maintenance of social networks to understand the livelihood strategies of urban IDPs, they reduce the complex mobility pathways to linear origin–destination connections. This approach to trans-local practices obscures the functions of other places involved during the displacement and resettlement processes and transformed by IDPs to access resources and support their livelihood in new socio-spatial contexts (Brickell & Datta, 2011; Ting, 2018). A place of displacement is not necessarily that of 'origin', as the context of displacement often involves multiple moves leading to multi-local anchorage and the production of new homes across places (Crawley & Jones, 2021; Ting, 2018). For instance, in Ethiopia, IDPs include people who had initially migrated to urban areas beyond their region, lived there for decades, and were then displaced to other places (Author's own, 2023). Under the dispersal strategies of the Ethiopian resettlement programs, IDPs are also relocated to different cities, thus creating multiple places or nodes where trans-local practices play out.

This paper analyzes trans-local practices as coping strategies among the ethnic Oromo people who were displaced from the Somali region and relocated to designated urban settlements by the government as a durable solution to their displacement. Before the relocation, these IDPs were living in collective centers or with relatives and families, hinting at multiple place connections between 'origin' and 'destination.' Through the resettlement schemes, IDPs were relocated to newly-built urban settlements characterized by physical distance from a city

center, poor infrastructure and limited employment opportunities, and bordering with long-term residents creating socio-spatial and symbolic marginality (Author's own, 2023), which — as we illustrate — they managed by remaining mobile. Although (forced) mobility practices are prerequisite for the production of migrants' trans-local spaces, trans-locality does not automatically arise from mobility (Peth et al., 2018), yet in the context of the ethnic Oromo IDPs, trans-locality was a constitutive part of their daily life.

This study explores how IDPs' trans-local practices transform places into meaningful nodes to cope with marginality in urban settlements. Inspired by the literature above (Etzold et al., 2019; Jacobs et al., 2022), yet operationalized in the study context, we analyze the trans-local practices in terms of (1) the constellations of mobility and its contribution to family livelihood, (2) attachments to and belonging of IDPs in different socio-spatial contexts and (3) social networks and ties which allow for the exchange of material and non-material resources.

Oromo-Somali inter-ethnic conflict and displacement in Ethiopia

The Oromo and Somali ethnic groups form the Oromia and Somali regional states, respectively, which share a 1400-km-long boundary (Hagmann & Abdi, 2020). This boundary represents a cultural frontier where pastoralists from the two ethnic groups interact, coexist, and compete over natural resources (Hussein, 2017). Before the introduction of ethnic-based federalism in 1991, conflicts between the Oromo and Somali were largely localized or were clan based. The new federal structure and its territorialization of administrative boundaries changed the intergroup dynamics, turning tensions over resources into confrontation between the two regional states (Adugna, 2011). Notwithstanding the recurrent tensions across the border, the Somali region was home to a large number of the Oromos, and the two ethnic groups had cohabited relatively peacefully prior to 2017. While the majority of the Oromos in the Somali region were from East and West Hararge zones, which border the region, a significant proportion of ethnic Oromo merchants, civil servants, and demobilized military originally from other parts of Oromia also lived in several towns of the region. In late 2017, ethnic conflicts between the Oromo and Somali led to an estimated 1.7 million people being forcibly displaced in both regional states (Easton-calabria et al., 2021). The majority of the Oromo were displaced from across the boundary and from urban areas such as Jigjiga (the Somali regional capital), Togochale, Mulu, Erer, and Kebri Dehar (see Figure 1). Our study focuses on Oromo people displaced from these cities and found refuge in Oromia. The Oromia

regional government established hundreds of collective centers across several towns in East and West Hararge, and Adama — among others — to accommodate them until a 'solution' was found. IDPs lived in these centers for a minimum of eight months. All collective centers were characterized by freedom of movement, which allowed contact with extended family or relatives and the establishment of networks with other residents around the centers. In this sense, these centers were not only shelters or transient places, but also places with further (trans-local) opportunities, encounters, and social relationships. In 2018, the regional government selected 11 intermediary cities where they created resettlement sites — Sululta, Adama, Bishoftu, Batu, Dukem, Gelan, Lega Tafo, Burayyu, Sebeta, Bishan Guracha, and Modjo (see Figure 1) — and assigned IDPs through a lottery system. In addition, Gelan Kersa (henceforth Kersa) was established in Addis Ababa. As Ethiopia has no clear institutional framework to protect and assist IDPs, resources for the resettlement were mobilized under ad hoc initiatives which was coordinated by the Regional Disaster Risk Management Bureau. Similarly, in each urban areas selected for resettlement, the municipality established an emergency response committee, mobilized additional resources, constructed houses, and built new infrastructures in resettlement sites (Author's own. 2023).
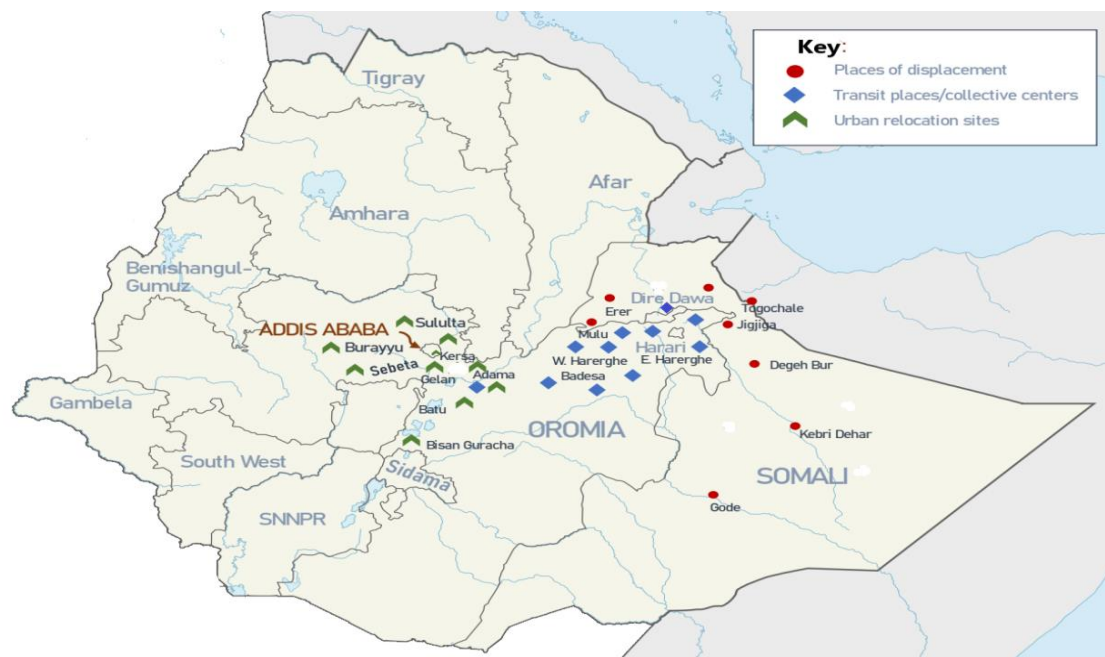

Figure 1: *Places of displacement, collective centers, and relocation*

Some resettlement sites were in the same city in which collective centers had been established (Adama, for example), yet most were located approximately 600 km away. Figure

1 shows that these sites were generally in the central part of the country, surrounding Addis Ababa. The lottery system allowed the government to disperse IDPs across these cities, which was enacted without taking into account their family relationships or socio-economic characteristics. The focus in this planned resettlement was relocating as many IDPs as possible to predetermined urban areas by centralizing information regarding the time and place of resettlement. The displacement condition and needs of IDPs are assumed to be temporary, thus ending once relocated to new settlements. On the contrary, resettlement is only the beginning of another struggle in new places due to lack of government support and the socio-spatial characteristics of the urban settlements creating IDPs' social, spatial and symbolic marginality (Author's own, 2023). This necessitated trans-local practices as coping strategies.

Methods

Studying trans-local practices requires a researcher to move across different places to capture the pattern of mobilities and exchanges between the people situated in these places. Beyond conducting a multi-site study, researchers need to observe the practices and flows of resources connecting different localities (Steinbrink & Niedenführ, 2020). Accordingly, this study started by observing most of the urban settlements in the above-mentioned resettlement scheme, including the movement of people and resources across these and other places. This revealed a strong interconnection between IDPs' places and several key nodes, and hence the reality of trans-local practices. The urban settlements of Kersa and Sululta were eventually selected for in-depth investigation, because of the large number of IDPs relocated there, as well as their different socio-spatial contexts potentially requiring different coping strategies.

Kersa is a village on the outskirt of Addis Ababa and has been the main expansion zone of the city over recent years. While the long-term residents of Kersa are mostly farmers, a new condominium housing project has attracted residents from the city center, although it was largely unoccupied at the time of the study. This village received 1854 registered IDP households into a newly established settlement, including civil servants, merchants, laborers, and demobilized military. The physical distance of Kersa from the center of Addis Ababa, the poor infrastructure in the IDP settlement, and the exclusionary practices by the city systems and long-term residents reinforced the IDPs' marginality. The limited employment opportunities coupled with the mismatch between the skills of IDPs and the available jobs

have also rendered them largely unemployed. Similarly, the quota system assigned more than 521 registered IDP households to Sululta, a town located 25 km north of Addis Ababa. Two IDP neighborhoods in Sululta were established on pastureland previously been used by dairy farmers. The majority of the IDPs relocated to these settlements were merchants and laborers before displacement. Again, the limited socio-economic capacity of the town has left many unemployed.

While the Sululta and Kersa settlements were the core nodes where the data was collected, we focused on the simultaneous situatedness of IDPs across different places, as well as on the circulation of material and non-material resources. Several observations and informal conversations were conducted to capture trans-local practices, such as the movement of people and goods, connections, and networks. Business places — for example, khat shops and shacks where IDPs sold food — were crucial sites of interaction with the residents of Kersa and Sululta settlements. After these exchanges, 50 IDPs were purposively selected for a semi-structured interview. In order to generate rich data, the selection focused on creating a diversity of participants with regard to their places of displacement, the collective center where they stayed, and the trans-local situation of households. This resulted in 24 interviews with IDPs in Sululta and 26 from Kersa, with 31 male and 19 female participants. A highly flexible interview schedule spanning several months was key to gain access to participants who were frequently on the move.

The interviews focused on the places IDPs experienced during their displacement and resettlement trajectory, the reasons and the extent to which the participants felt connected to these places, practices to emplace themselves, mobility paths, connections, communications across different nodes, and resource flows. All the participants gave oral consent to be interviewed. This study was approved by the Ethical Committee of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences (Ghent University) (2021/75). While 41 participants consented to the interview being recorded, nine did not. Data from these interviews were collected by taking notes. All interviews were conducted in Afan Oromo, transcribed, and translated by the first author, with pseudonyms used for the analysis. On average, the interviews lasted for an hour.

The data were analytically organized into the key trans-local practices: mobility, connection, and the circulation of resources (Etzold et al., 2019) using the code-and-retrieve software

program, Nvivo 11. The practices were contextualized or operationalized by searching for relevant nodes across which the participants moved, the connections created and maintained in these nodes, and the relevant resources circulating in social networks spanning these nodes. In the following section, we delve into these trans-local practices of IDPs, examining how they serve as coping strategies to deal with the interrelated aspects of urban marginality.

Constellations of mobility as livelihood diversification

The interviews revealed that most participants or their family members constantly moved between the urban settlements (designated to them by the government) and other places. The aim was to diversify their source of livelihood, as they were assigned to places with limited resources, and experience social and spatial marginality in newly established urban settlements. Although there might have been other nodes in particular stories, the following five were mentioned most frequently: place of displacement (in this case urban centers in the Somali region), birth place, transit place, other urban IDP settlements, and Kersa/Sululta.

The place of displacement was the most important node for the IDPs to rely on as they grappled with socio-spatial disadvantages in their newly established urban settlements. Most of the participants moved between their urban settlement (Kersa and Sululta) and the city in the Somali region, because they were largely unemployed and lacked resources for survival (Fig. 2). The data reveal that participants who were predominantly merchants before displacement frequently moved between the two places to continue their business and overcome the livelihood challenges in urban settings. Ayu, for example, a divorced woman in her early forties, was trading garments and drugs as far as Djibouti with her husband before being displaced. In 2017, she was displaced and stayed in a collective center until she was relocated to Sululta with her three children. Her husband chose not to join them in Sululta and they separated. As the government did not create job opportunities in the settlement as promised during resettlement, Ayu experienced serious financial and food shortages. Although she initially built a shack and started a khat and shisha business, the town authorities destroyed her shop because it was unauthorized land occupation and an 'illegal' business. As a result, Ayu sent her children to her mother living in her birthplace and embarked on trading second-hand cloth (locally called *bonda*) between Sululta and her previous residence in the Somali region. She stated: "It is difficult to live in Sululta. So, I decided to work between my previous place and Sululta to improve my living conditions. Though it is difficult for a woman,

movement allows you to seize opportunities across places." This case is only one example of many cases where individuals depend on their former places of residence to sustain their livelihoods in urban areas. In fact, only a few of the female participants were able to move across places like Ayu. She was only able to do so because she had sent her children to relatives, freeing her from childcare responsibilities. Clearly, not all the women with children had this opportunity.
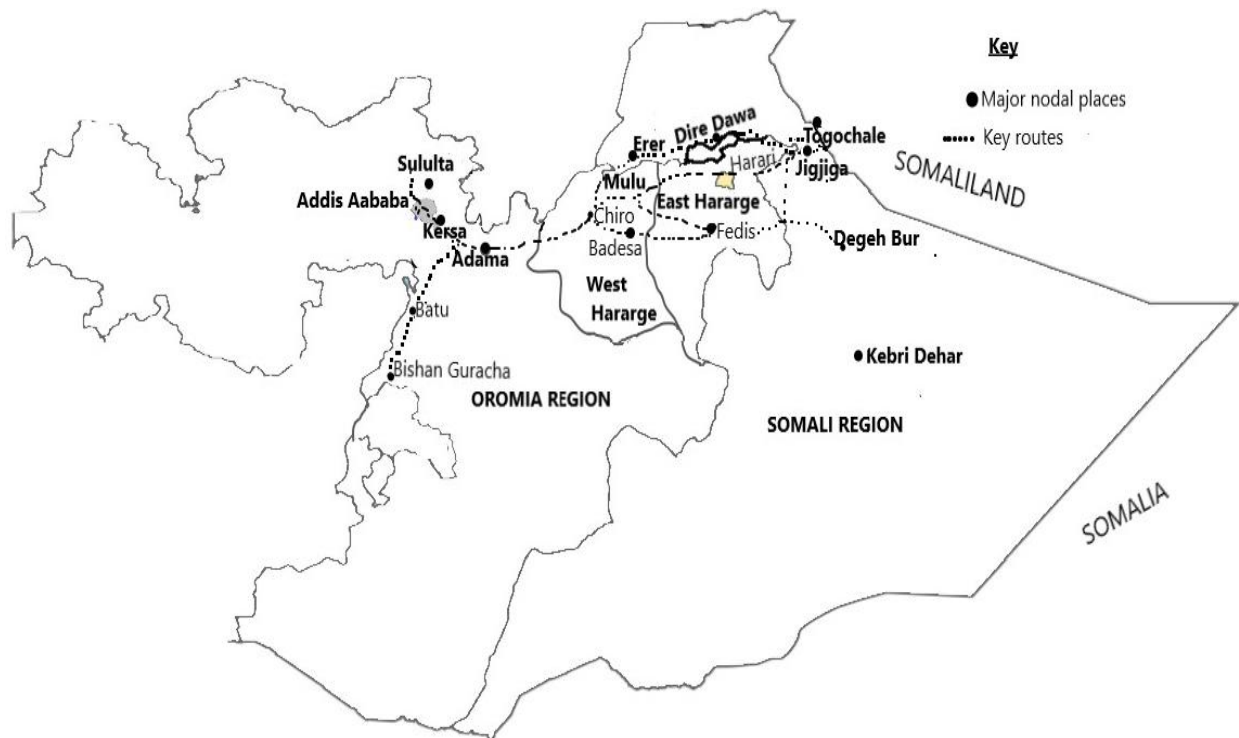

Fig. 2 Key nodes and mobility routes

While most IDPs moved to the place of displacement on temporary basis, our findings reveal instances where participants splintered their family between the place of displacement and urban settlement to generate additional income and manage properties such as a house or land left behind. They first hoped to sell the house and establish a business in the new urban settlement, but eventually changed their mind due to insecurity of tenure for houses provided by the government and unemployment. Instead, most married participants had sent some family members to their previous place. Interestingly, this trans-local organization of a family is also a tactic to reduce the number of family members in the settlement and thus food and other expenses given the persisting livelihood insecurity.

Second, transit places or towns where the collective centers were established also constituted meaningful nodes in the complex mobility pathways of the participants. As indicated earlier,

while waiting for a solution, the IDPs lived in collective centers for several months where they engaged with other residents and relatives. After being relocated in urban areas, return to these transit places was among key strategies used by IDPs to expand their employment opportunities and source of support. This form of movement involved circular and onward mobility, spanning different towns on the Oromia side and places where IDPs worked on the Somali side, and extended as far as the Ethiopia-Somalia border (see Fig. 2). The interviews exposed a pattern of these mobilities among drivers, porters, and construction workers. This route was often repeated or used back and forth by participants such as Bulto, based on the availability of opportunities. Bulto, a father of eight, lived in a collective center established in Dire Dawa city before being relocated to Sululta. He explained the importance of the city:

> You know, my life is like that of a bird having a nest at one place and collecting food from different places for its hatchlings. Relocation to this town [Sululta] rendered me poor and dependent. Therefore, I frequently travel to Dire Dawa, where I know some porters at a bus station. I move with them to other business centers to do *bonda* and other businesses. I bring along money, cloth, packed milk, spices, and electronics.

This demonstrates how places often considered as 'transient' facilitate the mobility and livelihood activities of IDPs. As mentioned above, the cities in which the collective centers were established were once used to accommodate and govern IDPs in the resettlement process. Nonetheless, as they experienced livelihood challenges in the new urban contexts, mobility reconnected them to their former provisional places and transformed them into meaningful nodes where they reroute their movement and diversify their source of livelihood.

Third, the quota-based resettlement of IDPs across different urban areas created additional configuration of nodes that in turn facilitated mobility and access to resources. The data show that the residents of Kersa and Sululta settlements frequently moved to settlements where their relatives and friends were relocated. Strikingly, this form of inter-settlement movement was also reinforced by the uneven distribution of socio-economic opportunities and disadvantages in the urban settlements. Galana— a sport trainer — was relocated to Kersa, which he referred to as more "under-invested and detached" than he expected. Residential segregation and the symbolic marginality Galana was confronted with in the settlement as "a trainer of gangs," challenged his work and thus he considered moving to Adama, where his friends had been offered employment opportunities by the city administration. Each week, he stayed in Adama for three days and then returned to Kersa, where his family was situated.

This was not specific to Galana's situation. Most of the skilled IDPs particularly masons and carpenters, worked in other urban settlements — which offered better opportunities — yet left their family in Kersa/Sululta because they had a house and thus did not pay rent, which they would have done had they moved to another settlement with their family. This movement across urban settlements not only allowed IDPs to seize opportunities to overcome their economic challenges related to the socio-spatial characteristics of the settlement but also served as a strategy to preserve networks within families and relatives.

Fourth, the mobility of IDPs also involved movement between the urban settlement and their place of birth or 'homeland.' As mentioned earlier, the participants were originally from different areas of Oromia and moved to the Somali region in search of better employment opportunities, due to drought, or for military purposes — particularly in the 1970s. After being displaced and resettled in urban areas, many participants moved to their birthplace to have access to land and to revitalize social networks, thereby improving their living conditions in the urban settlement. Kena — a 68-year-old born in East Hararge— migrated to a city in the Somali region due to drought and associated production failure. He lived there for more than three decades while he would occasionally visit farms during the suitable production seasons. After being displaced and relocated to a segregated settlement with limited employment opportunities, he ended up in collecting discarded plastic to generate income but it was not sufficient. As a response, he temporarily split the family, and his wife and daughters worked on a farm in his birthplace seasonally. He explained: "Currently, my wife and daughters are hoeing and weeding maize in the Fedis district [birth place]. When they come back, I will go there for mowing and harvesting." While many male participants were able to access land in their birthplace after almost four decades, female participants often could not, as male members of the extended family (in-law) controlled the land left behind for so long. This constrained women in their mobility from the urban contexts to which they were assigned.

Lastly, as shown in Fig.2 the urban settlements of Kersa and Sululta were also crucial nodes for mobility and livelihood diversification, as they constituted anchorage from which the IDPs stretched their movements. Notwithstanding the interrelated forms of marginality IDPs experienced, the urban settlement was also what they considered to be 'home,' as they had a house where they often left their family when they moved to make a living across places. Further, many participants invested their income in these urban places and aspired to

emplace themselves by establishing new businesses, building new houses, and educating their children. The above analyses highlight that the mobility pathways of the participants were non-linear and complex, involving multiple places experienced in the displacement and resettlement trajectory. The meaningfulness of a particular nodal place for the participants depended on their skills and the availability of opportunities. Common to IDPs' complex web of mobility and livelihood diversification were (temporary) household splits and returns to places where they had lived before to cope with disadvantages in the urban settlements.

Trans-local connections and attachment

Not only physical mobility, but also maintaining connections to places and people were important mechanisms to cope with social and symbolic marginality in an urban settlement. This connectedness was maintained through physical mobility, as discussed above, and through what Brickell and Datta (2011) frame as the "trans-local imagination" of places experienced. The interviews revealed, however, that movement across these places did not automatically create strong attachment in each of them. The most evident pattern observed throughout the interviews was that places of displacement and birthplaces were key nodes to which the participants were strongly connected. Connections and attachment to the place of displacement through symbolic and daily communication, disconnection from the urban settlement, and connection to the birthplace were meaningful tactics for the participants to respond to social and symbolic marginality they experienced in new urban settlements.

First of all, notwithstanding the ordeals and the losses they experienced, most participants expressed a connection to their place of displacement. Nostalgic feelings and memories about place identity were invaluable anchoring elements, which mediated participants' connectedness to these geographically distant places. This sense of attachment was notably pronounced among participants who had resided in the Somali region for an extended period and perceived themselves as key contributors to the overall development of their former city. Genet, a 52-year-old woman, lived in Jigjiga for more than three decades and served in the Somali regional state government in different capacities until she was displaced. She was married to an ethnic Somali man and had five children, four of whom were in Jigjiga. Despite enduring loss and injuries during the displacement, she continued to hold a deep connection to her 'home,' Jigjiga, where her children still resided:

> Half of my heart is still in Jigjiga, where I left tangible imprints as a civil servant in the finance, security, and logistic departments for 32 years. I left my children in Jigjiga because it is the only home they have ever known. For me, Jigjiga is a city that made me who I am today. After displacement I ended up in Kersa, which is a detached village with poor access to water and limited employment opportunities. Long-term residents and officials may not understand who I am in this settlement because I am an IDP, but Jigjiga knows my reforms in different offices. My Somali colleagues and former neighbors often remind me of my good name in the city. I do not want to lose this connection to my previous home, as it preserves my reputation and helps me forget the challenges in Kersa.

This illustrates how emotional attachment to a place of displacement serves as a crucial psychological strategy to cope with experiences of marginality in a new urban settlement. Similar to the case of Genet, most mothers continued to refer to their previous residence as places where their 'children's umbilical cord is buried', a common expression used in Ethiopia to denote the lifelong connection between a child and a birthplace. When asked about their children's place identity, mothers emphasized that the second generation predominantly favored their birthplace in the Somali region. This was partly related to challenges in adjusting to the conditions in the urban settlements, as they experienced different forms of discrimination, for instance, due to their level of language proficiency and associated academic competence.

Second, participants emphasized disconnection from the urban settlement as a primary reason in explaining their continued attachment to their displacement location. This sense of place identity and emotional attachment to the distant 'home' was explained by a feeling of being included and respected, regardless of one's socio-economic status. While self-employed participants such as carpenters could work without a license across the cities in the Somali region, in the urban settlements the same was exceedingly challenging due to limited opportunities, discrimination based on the lack of a work experience certificate, and, to some extent, the language skills. Abdella, a 48-year-old male mason from Sululta, explained this:

> In Togochale, no one would ask you for a formal certificate as long as you demonstrate your construction skills. You know, the city [Togochale] is a harbor for the poor with no stratification based on certification. In Sululta, I am unemployed because I am *buqqa'aa* [displaced] without work documents. I have not known any experienced mason in Sululta to work with and show my skills. A good thing is that I am still a respected mason whenever I go to Togochale.

The preservation of a sense of rootedness or a stronger situatedness in the city of displacement was indispensable as it compensated for the lack of social embeddedness resulting from social distancing of IDPs in new urban settlements. As Tan and Yeoh (2011) aptly put, nostalgic feeling mediates attachment to the past and the preservation of lived spaces that help migrants' present life to be protected from the consequences of disconnection.

Next, the findings show that communication and everyday exchanges were important modes of establishing connections and fostering attachments to geographically distant socio-spatial contexts without changing physical location. As previous researchers have already highlighted, these modes of exchanges bring absent places and practices into migrants' everyday life (Tan & Yeoh, 2011). A recurring pattern observed throughout the interviews was that the participants consistently maintained contact with their previous Somali neighbors and with temporarily returned IDPs, allowing them to stay updated on post-displacement security conditions, progress, and available opportunities. For most of the participants, regular phone calls facilitated the cultivation of everyday trans-local imaginaries to preserve intimacy and social embeddedness. Tokuma, a 36-year-old man, ran two large stores with his brother, Ousman, in the 'Taiwan Market,' a large open market in Jigjiga city. He started business in this market as a tailor in his teens and consistently upgraded it, as a special place for his growth. Tokuma fled Jigjiga with his brother, who was relocated to another urban settlement but temporarily returned to repair the stores, which had been looted. While Tokuma opened a small shop in the IDP neighborhood of Sululta, he could not develop it due to financial constraints, the limited number of customers and residential segregation. As part of his daily routine, he often sat at the window of his shop and called his brother and his former porters to get information about and to imagine the market, including the "hustle of porters, customers, and vendors." Chats, imagination, and the exchange of pictures on an everyday basis helped Tokuma and many others to 'exit' the challenging living conditions in the settlement and remain connected to their previous place. Social media also facilitated the emergence of new forms of self-representation and the cultivation of simultaneity of experiences that strengthen shared feelings of belonging — something highlighted in previous studies (Etzold et al., 2019; Peth et al., 2018). As such, imaginative connections and everyday

practices allow people to transgress the socio-spatial contexts in which they experience marginality and to maintain their trans-local identity or belonging.

As highlighted above, participants' 'homeland' or ancestral birthplace was also a key node of trans-local belonging that allowed them to experience rootedness and a sense of being included. Birthplace was also where they owned property or inherited it from their parents. This right to land was a key marker of belonging that allowed them to retain their entitlement to established social relations of property management and the production of food. Such entitlement to a precious social and economic asset held significant importance, especially considering that the IDPs had no access to land in their new urban settlements, and this was often emphasized as an indicator of enduring displacement experiences (Author's own, 2023). At the time of the interviews, the IDPs predominantly relied on their homeland for burial services because the urban authorities had not allocated land to the 'new settlers'. This clearly demonstrates that homeward attachment is a source of rights and a symbolic resource against the typical hardships of everyday life, including othering in new places (Boccagni, 2012). The above analyses expose the importance of actual and imagined situatedness in places beyond the relocation setting in producing and preserving trans-local identity. Nonetheless this trans-local attachment to does not diminish the importance of the urban settlement or the 'new home' of the IDPs. The point here is that alternative forms of belonging helped the participants in coping with their social and symbolic marginality in these places.

Trans-local social network and the circulation of resources

The circulation of resources facilitated by the social networks spanning the nodal places constitute another key trans-local practice that helped the IDPs cope with disadvantages in urban areas. Trans-local ties were rooted in mutual trust and norms of reciprocity between participants, kinship, friends, and other IDPs in different socio-spatial contexts. The data show that this configuration of networks and moral economy of obligation mediated the flows of goods, finance, information, and social support that enabled the participants to engage in business and compensated for the effects of marginality and the resource constraints they experienced in urban settlements. Various other places were important for IDPs to access these resources, but birthplaces, the place of displacement, and other urban settlements were the most frequently discussed across interviews.

First, places of kinships or birthplaces were crucial nodes from which the participants obtained support for their livelihood. Beyond transferring food, cloth and other material assets that were scarce in the new urban settlements, kinship ties enabled most participants to resume business and increase their income. The khat business illustrates the significance of trans-local social networks among the kinships. Teso was a 51-year-old man engaged in the khat business with his wife, Chaltu; they used to do the same business before displacement. After being relocated, Teso resumed khat business, as his sister-in-law sent them khat— which was not produced in his new urban settlement —for free for almost a year. He sold khat in his newly built shack without worrying about supply, which was partly facilitated by regular transportation. This khat business, which thrived on kinship ties, not only boosted Teso's family income but also enabled them to diversify into other ventures, including the purchase of discarded metal for resale to recycling companies. As the household income increased, Teso, started sharing the profit from the khat business with his sister-in-law, who was cultivating khat. This is just one of several instances where kinship ties played a crucial role in empowering the participants to navigate their lives in the new urban environments. The rural-based kin also provided the IDPs with dairy products such as milk — which was relatively expensive in urban areas — both for family consumption and for selling. Interestingly, for example, some women in Kersa settlement received camel milk from their pastoralist kin that they then sold directly to restaurants, sharing the resulting income.

Beyond facilitating access to goods that were not available but in high demand in urban areas, as in the cases of khat and milk, kinship ties enabled the participants to acquire skills and practices to expand business opportunities. Participants who engaged in the *bonda* business shared how their kinship connections in various transit locations provided them with essential information, enabling them to escape restrictive customs checkpoints, *Kella*, and to sell garments in Addis Ababa markets. In this, and various other unregistered businesses, kinship networks along the route connecting the cities in the Oromia and Somali regions, as shown in Fig.2, were also the sources of financial assistance to mitigate or distribute the risks of items being confiscated. For instance, merchants often kept garments and other items purchased from Somali cities at their relatives' residence in Oromia, before transporting to Addis Ababa.

The participants' birthplace or 'homeland' further facilitated the reproduction of associations, and the linkage of these associations that were instrumental in mobilizing additional social

support. The data show how the participants created local self-help associations, such as *Afooshaa* — an informal social insurance — in the urban settlements. Strikingly, they simultaneously integrated these associations with those in their birthplaces to obtain more financial and social resources from the non-displaced community members during hardships, such as death or accident. Interviews unveiled what mirrored Velayutham and Wise's (2005) notion of trans-local villagers, as IDPs from the same place of origin often travelled home for funeral ceremonies and brought back khat and milk to the settlement place. Hence, practicing trans-local *Afooshaa* not only facilitated the fulfillment of traditional modes of obligation, but also created opportunities to access resources for livelihood.

Second, supportive networks were also situated in the places of displacement and extended beyond the boundaries of kinship ties. The interviews exposed how friendships and membership of associations enabled the transfer of money, goods, and information across distant places thereby sustaining the livelihoods of individuals in urban settlements. Bulto was a leader of a porter's association until he was displaced, and also worked as a broker in the garment business across the Ethio-Somalia border. After being relocated to Sululta, Bulto worked as a car washer and casual laborer because he could not find a suitable job, though he applied at different places. As the income from car washing was insufficient to support his family, he frequently sought financial assistance from his former association members. Besides monetary assistance, his friends frequently sent clothing, packed food, and other gifts for his children, thanks to the affordable prices of items available across the Ethio-Somalia border. In return, Bulto acted as an agent for members of his previous association in Addis Ababa, where he purchased and sent items such as sugar and oil for the porters. Moreover, he also provided lodging for his friends and relatives seeking health services in hospitals in Addis Ababa. This clearly illustrates that IDPs were not merely passive recipients of trans-local support; instead they were active agents contributing to the development of networks for mutual benefits. Beyond facilitating the circulation of goods and services, such mutual assistance and reciprocity reduced living costs for the actors involved in different places.

The case of Bulto clearly demonstrates that cultivation of social networks requires investment in reciprocity, and a person's opportunities for reciprocity and the density of their network influences the exchange. Participants such as Mame, a traditional bone setter, had highly-valued personal skills and roles in different places, and hence a dense social network. When

he was denied a workplace in Sululta, he relied on people who had received his healing services in the Somali region and other places to refer him to others. In similar vein, experienced carpenters and masons counted on employment information from friends and their clients in the Somali region. This exchange was vital, as these IDPs were largely unemployed and experiencing exclusion in the new urban settlements as mentioned above. The findings reveal that women and people with disabilities often got the least out of social networks from displacement places because of having little input to create reciprocity while they were still part of the trans-local social networks.

Lastly, the urban IDP settlements themselves were also other crucial nodes across which resources were exchanged. Most participants wished to secure loans and start businesses, but they faced barriers in accessing the formal credit system due to a lack of collateral. As they had not been issued a housing document, the were unable to use their house as collateral at the time of study. Hence, in both Sululta and Kersa, *equb,* an informal rotational saving and credit association, was the main source of credit for the participants. Interestingly, around 100 IDPs from various urban IDP settlements mentioned earlier (Fig. 1), pooled the one-time financial assistance and established a cement retailers association. The aim of this association is to purchase cement from factories and sell it across the cities in which IDPs were relocated. Interviewed members argued that the association enabled them to save, share profit, and access credit. One of them was Fuad, a 38-year-old man, a representative of the enterprise who had received credit from the association and purchased a tailoring machine. He stated, "The enterprise symbolizes our [IDPs in different settlements] togetherness to withstand financial challenges in our respective urban settlements." While this form of association required substantial financial capital and thus excluded the majority of IDPs, it demonstrates how inter-urban settlement enterprises of IDPs empowered them to act collectively and respond to their resource constraints. Overall, the above analyses highlight how IDPs' social networks stretched across different nodal places facilitate the circulation of material and social resources and contribute to their trans-local coping in their new urban settlements.

Conclusion

This paper explores how IDPs resettled in urban areas rely on a constellation of mobilities, trans-local connections and attachment, and the circulation of resources to cope with the

interrelated forms of marginality within their new urban settlement. Drawing on the analytical lens of trans-locality, we have shown the many nodal places across which IDPs move to diversify their livelihood as a response to socio-spatial disadvantages in urban settings. This mobility is shaped by the availability of opportunities and the established social relations in each node. In addition to facilitating access to material assets, mobility as a livelihood tactic enhances the non-material dimensions of well-being, such as self-worth and the ability to negotiate difficult circumstances. Going beyond the 'conventional' places of displacement and destination in migration literature, and turning the gaze to other meaningful ones — such as birthplaces, transit areas, and other urban settlements — allows us to understand how the interconnectedness of IDPs' places reproduces trans-local identity and helps them cope with marginalization experienced in urban settlements. Notwithstanding the various important nodal places of IDPs, the paper demonstrates that these urban settlements remain pivotal hub for the trans-local organization of a family and the management of resources originating from across other nodes, and thus serve as an anchoring context.

Moreover, our analyses allow us to show in detail how connections to 'trans-local homes' — as a metaphorical, and multiply-sited space of attachment, belonging, and identification (Smith, 2011) — help IDPs to feel rooted and included, protecting them against exclusion and tenure insecurity in urban settlements. While mobility is necessary for maintaining connection, it is more the everyday practices of imagination, communication, and exchanges that promote the simultaneous embeddedness or a sense of trans-local belonging (Peth et al., 2018). These practices reproduce nostalgic memories as an attachment to the past that help people make sense of their present life. By bringing together absent places, people, and practices, trans-local imagination constitutes a psychological strategy to withstand the social and symbolic marginality IDPs experience in urban areas. What is more, this study demonstrates how attachment and its function as trans-local coping is embodied by IDPs' access to land in their birthplace for social and economic purposes. This homeward attachment is a source of rights and opportunities, as well as a symbolic and emotional resource to reproduce some fragment of 'home' in terms of sociability and consumption that further maintain a sense of belonging (Boccagni, 2012).

We further shed light on the circulation of resources across geographically distant nodal places because of IDPs' trans-local social networks. By facilitating access to goods, finance,

and information, this trans-local practice expands IDPs' employment options; both in urban settlements and beyond. Social reciprocity and the trans-local organization of informal associations also foregrounds how non-displaced people actively support the trans-local coping of urban IDPs. Indeed, similar to the case of labor migrants (Etzold, 2016; Peth et al., 2018) or other categories of migrants (Crawley & Jones, 2021) the trans-local ties of IDPs and flows of material and social resources also benefit the non-displaced kin and friends, and thus the emergence of mutual support.

This study contributes to our understanding of the lived spaces of (forced) migrants and their agency in two interrelated ways. First, it reveals the emergence of trans-local homes that facilitate the organization of families and resources across key nodal places in order to reduce the effects of socio-spatial disadvantages in urban areas. Previous studies have highlighted that IDPs resettled in urban areas often choose to remain there despite the marginalizing forces, such as spatial segregation, insecurity and risk of further displacement (Crisp et al., 2012; Earle et al., 2020). By analyzing IDPs' trans-local coping practices, we argue that this understanding essentializes the place of relocation and fails to recognize the ability of IDPs to rely on other places. While IDPs rely on their urban settlement as a central node for protection and aspiration, they do not leave their home behind altogether and re-establish their life in a new urban place. This is particularly the case when the resettlement is government-led and individuals' preferences regarding the place for relocation are constrained and support provided is temporary. This study demonstrates the production of fluid lived spaces and trans-local practices that enable IDPs to live between 'here' and 'there,' thereby helping them to cope with social, spatial and symbolic marginality they experience in the destination place. This fluidity embodies the resilience of the IDPs to transgress locally-bounded understandings of place, and situate themselves in changing trans-local spaces, similar to the trans-national practices of refugees and other migrants (see Crawley & Jones, 2021). Nonetheless, mobility and navigation of fluid lived spaces may not be attainable for all IDPs.

Second, the study highlights how the meaning and functions of places transform in displacement and resettlement trajectory. This brings the temporal aspects of the subjective meaning people in displacement situation attach to place to the forefront in forced migration studies (Crawley & Jones, 2021). Places where IDPs experience displacement or control turn into crucial nodes of mobility and connection to help cope with urban challenges after

relocation. Our findings demonstrate how the transit places, such as towns or collective centers become meaningful nodes of mobility and opportunity that support IDPs' means of living. Prior to resettlement, these settings were sites of control for IDPs while awaiting for support and solution to their displacement. Nonetheless, they also offer opportunities in which IDPs engage with other residents and expand social relationships, to which they turn after resettlement in search of opportunities. Thus, trans-local coping practices transform places by connecting them, facilitating resource flows, and producing new forms of interdependencies. People reconstruct and shape the functions of crucial nodal places through trans-local imaginaries and everyday practices of communication and imagination. These non-material aspects of trans-local practices serve as symbolic resources for coping (Boccagni, 2012) with everyday marginality in urban areas.

Overall, the paper analyses how trans-local practices — mobility, connection and attachment, and the circulation of resources — help IDPs make a living in different places and cope with urban marginality. Adopting a trans-local perspective aids our understanding of the meaning and functions of places in (forced) migration, and the ability of migrants to shape them through mobility, connection, and the circulation of resources. These trans-local practices are multifocal, involving many nodes or trans-local homes — rather than being bifocal or oriented toward the place of origin — depending on the availability of opportunities and social relations. Important to underscore, however, is that trans-local coping is gendered; men and women have different levels of trans-local opportunities due to family dynamics and access to resources. This gendered dimension of trans-local coping practices and related family dynamics warrants further investigation. The findings also suggest the importance of focusing on the coping strategies of women IDPs in urban areas, who have limited trans-local options.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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