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Experiences of uncertainty for South Sudanese refugee youth

An explorative study in Adjumani refugee settlement

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Research Project

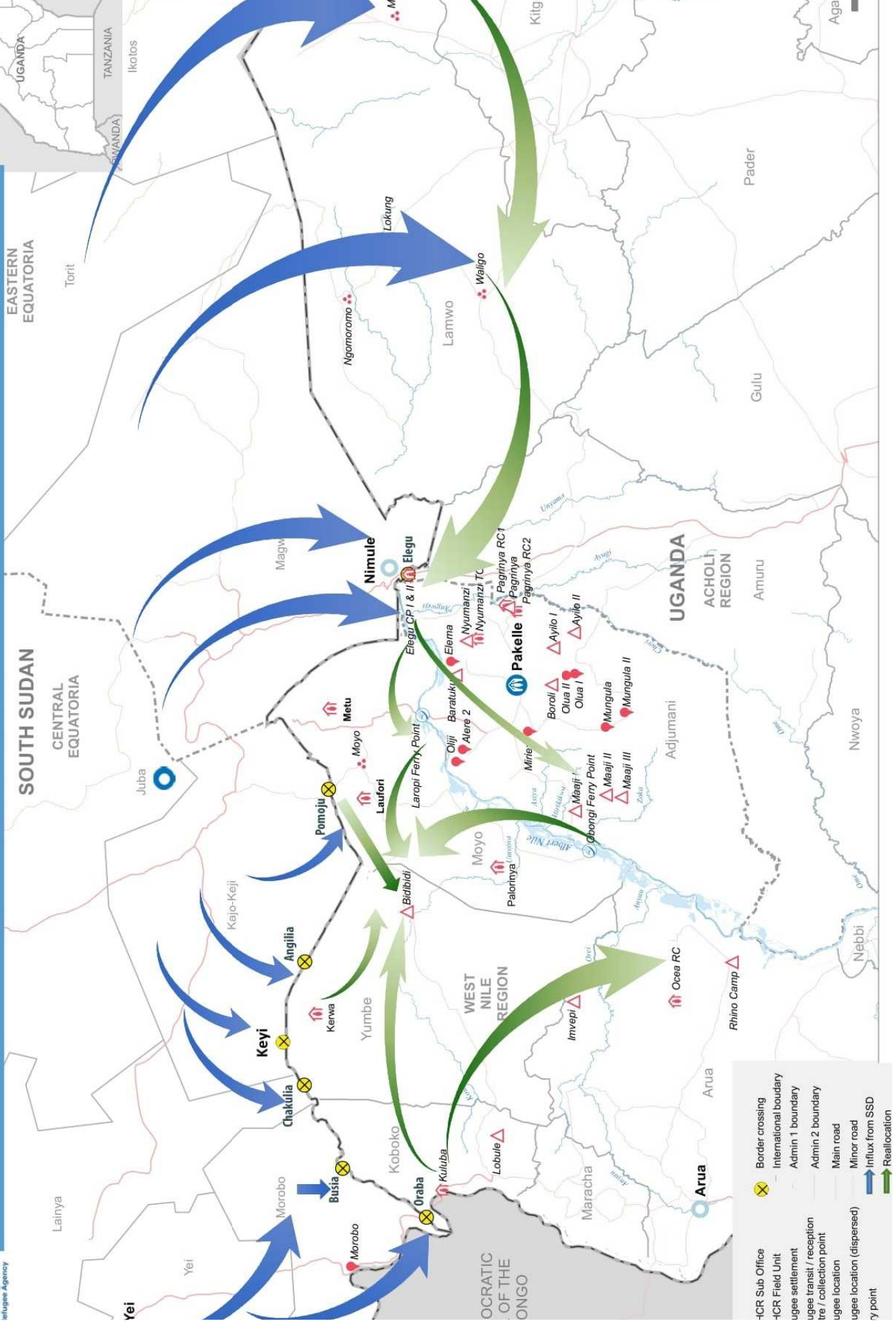
- PhD research, 2014-2018
- Follow-up of 30 refugee youth
- Qualitative interviews
- Focus on
 - Experiences of uncertainty
 - Future perspectives

Research Context

- Adjumani refugee setting
- > 200.000 South Sudanese refugees since December 2013
- Ugandan refugee policy: self-reliance and empowerment
- Office of the Prime Minister and UNHCR
 - + Implementing partners
 - + Operational partners



South Sudan Refugee Emergency Response July 2016 (UGANDA)



⊗	-ICR Sub Office
⊗	-ICR Field Unit
⊗	Refugee settlement / reception site / collection point
⊗	Refugee location (dispersed)
⊗	Refugee location
⊗	Border crossing
⊗	International boundary
⊗	Admin 1 boundary
⊗	Admin 2 boundary
⊗	Main road
⊗	Minor road
➔	Influx from SSD
➔	Reallocation



Nyumanzi Transit Centre, August 2014



Nyumanzi Transit Centre, March 2015



Relocation to Maaji Refugee Settlement, April 2015



Nymanzi refugee settlement, March 2015



Maaji refugee settlement, November 2015



Livelihood project in Nyumanzi refugee settlement, November 2015



Market in Ayilo refugee settlement, November 2016

Uncertainty for refugees

- Often considered
 - **inherent** to refugee contexts
 - Rarely questioned
 - **constraining** (waiting, being stuck)

- **Social phenomenon**
 - Produced by dynamics of everyday life, humanitarian actions, policy measures, the environment,...
 - Differs among contexts and individuals
 - Experienced in various ways

Research Question

- *How do refugee youth experience uncertainty upon arrival and during their first months in a refugee setting?*
- *How are these experiences shaped by the context?*
(cfr. uncertainty as a social phenomenon)

Methodology

- Longitudinal study
- Participants $n=30$
 - 15-24 years old
 - 22 female, 8 male
 - 15 Dinka, 15 Madi



Data Collection current study

- 2 data collection phases
 - **T1**: April 2015 (30 participants)
 - **T2**: December 2015 (25 participants)
- Qualitative interviews
 - Experiences of uncertainty
 - In Dinka/Madi with the help of translator



Preliminary analysis

- Exploratory analysis of interviews
 - Observations
- ➔ narratives in interaction with observations of everyday life in the settlements

Findings (1)

T1: Arrival in the border reception centre

- Lots of questions
- Generally very little information about what is going to happen
- Feeling relieved
- Suspicious questions from aid workers



Findings (2)

T1: Stay in the Transit Centre

- Duration: few days – months
- No information about date or place of relocation
- Sources of information: guard, neighbours or family members in settlements, nearby settlement, ...
 - Confusing
 - Rumours



Findings (3)

T1: Stay in the Transit Centre

- Safe, structured environment
 - Relieved
 - Confined
- Hopeful towards future
- Repetitive days



Findings (4)

T1: Summary

- Radical, intense uncertainty
- Difficult to acquire information
- Information often unreliable, contradicting
- Very little control about their lives
- When longer in transit centre: repetitive days, but not settled



Findings (5)

T2: After relocation

- **Support** available, safety
 - Food, water, education, household items, etc.
- Questions about **when** support is going to come
 - Very ad hoc

“You don’t know when they will bring soap or other support, and at times people have gone to school or the market and may miss out”



Findings (6)

T2: After relocation

- Questions about **who is entitled** to receive certain supports
 - Categories of vulnerability
 - Arbitrariness
- For how long?
 - Settlement as temporary place



Findings (7)

T2: After relocation

- Very little control about what is (not) provided

“We cannot tell them [the organizations] we want this and that, since what they give us is what they have in their plans, so we just accept it like that”.



Findings (8)

T2: After relocation

- Uncertainty about **acquiring income**
 - Generally resource-poor population, limited jobs available
 - People are reluctant to spend money



Findings (9)

T2: After relocation

- People settle down, get used, 'make lives'
- Quite clear that **opportunities are limited**
- Less hope than upon arrival, little room for change



Findings (10)

T2: Summary

- Uncertainty related to how, when and to whom support is provided
- Uncertainty related to status as refugee in settlement
= temporary status
- Uncertainty related to difficulty to acquire an income
- But: also certainty
 - Structured, safe environment
 - Support
 - Limited opportunities, not many prospects for change



Findings (11)

T1 - T2

- **Uncertainty differs by context**
 - **T1:** Initially strong and radical uncertainty, related to lack of information and limited knowledge
 - **T2:** Uncertainty related to specific circumstances: difficulty to get income, provision of support, temporality
- **Also certainty**
 - Structured, safe environment, support
 - T1: hope vs T2: constraining



Some conclusions

- Uncertainty as social phenomenon: shaped by policy decisions, provision of support, context of the camp as a temporary place etc.
- Refugee contexts can be surprisingly certain
 - Safety, support is provided
 - Little room for improvement
 - vs. self-reliance and empowerment policy?
- Uncertainty – certainty ≠ negative – positive
 - Uncertainty can open up perspectives, certainty can be constraining



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