IBN HALDUN UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

MASTER THESIS

HOPES IN TRANSITION: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN MIGRANTS IN ISTANBUL

ABDIRASHID DIRIYE KALMOY

THESIS SUPERVISOR

PROF. RAMAZAN ARAS

ISTANBUL, 2021

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by

ABDIRASHID DIRIYE KALMOY

A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Sociology

THESIS SUPERVISOR

PROF. RAMAZAN ARAS

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APPROVAL PAGE

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Sociology.

Thesis Jury Members

Title – Name Surname	Opinion	Signature
Prof. Dr. Alev Erkilet	_____	_____
Assoc. Prof. Ramazan Aras	_____	_____
Assoc. Prof. Eda Ünlü Yücesoy	_____	_____

This is to confirm that this thesis complies with all the standards set by the school of Graduate Studies at Ibn Haldun University, Istanbul.

Date of Submission Seal/Signature

ACADEMIC HONESTY ATTESTATION

I hereby declare that all the information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conducts, I have fully cited and referenced all materials and results that are not original to this work.

Name: Abdirashid Diriye KALMOY

Signature:

ÖZ

GEÇİŞTEKİ UMUTLAR: İSTANBUL'DAKİ SAHRA ALTI AFRİKALİ GÖÇMENLER ÜZERİNE BİR ETNOGRAFYA

Kalmoy, Abdirashid Diriye
Sosyoloji Yüksek Lisans Programı
Öğrenci Numarası: 187040003
Open Researcher and Contributor ID (ORC-ID): 0000-0003-0634-937X
Ulusal Tez Merkezi Referans Numarası: 10371651

Tez Danışmanı: Doç. Dr. Ramazan Aras
Ocak 2021, 145 sayfa

İstanbul, son yıllarda Avrupa'ya giden küresel mülteci ve göçmen yolları, rotaları ve varış noktaları ağının en önemli düğüm ve geçiş noktalarından biri haline geldi. Bu çalışma üç önemli meseleye ışık tutma amacı ve iddiası taşımaktadır. İlk olarak, Sahra Altı Afrika ülkelerindeki göçün nedenlerini ve tetikleyicilerini ortaya koymaya çalışmaktadır. İkinci olarak Sahra Altı Afrikalı göçmenlerin deneyimlerini, tanıklıklarını, seslerini, mücadelelerini, "zaferlerini", direnme öykülerini, acılarını, refah ümitleri ile dolu uzun ve zorlu yolculuk hikayeleri ışığında analiz etmektedir. Bu göç hikayelerinin muhtevasında göçmenlerin maruz kaldıkları gözaltı, şiddet, ölüm, tecavüz, savunmasızlık, sömürü, ırkçılık, yabancı düşmanlığı, belirsizlikler gibi konular ve insani yardım ve sansasyonel medyada yer alan haberler ön plana çıkmaktadır. Son olarak, bu çalışma Sahra altı Afrikalı göçmenlerin İstanbul'daki yaşamlarının ve geçim kaynaklarının etnografik bir incelemesini sunmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Sahra Altı Afrikalı göçmenleri çok yönlü ve karmaşık matris etkileşimlerinin kurbanları ve "yaratımları" olarak resmetmek ve tasvir etmektir. Bunlar arasında sömürgeciliğin acımasız mirası ve ardından mevcut sosyal, çevresel ve politik kurumun yıkılması; birçok Sahra Altı Afrika ülkesinde sömürge sonrası ulus inşa süreçlerinin başarısızlığı; çevreye zarar veren sömürücü kapitalizm ve finansal şirketler, böylece yüzyıllar süren ortak yaşamları ve doğal eko-sistemlerini değiştirdi. Bu tez, Türkiye'deki göç çalışmalarına katkıda bulunmayı ve ardından göçmenlerin, mültecilerin ve sığınmacıların yaşam deneyimlerini ve kişisel

mücadelelerini örtük olarak göz ardı eden güvenlik, insancıllık, milliyetçi ve entegrasyon perspektiflerine dayalı özcü yaklaşımları eleştirmeyi ve farklı bir perspektif sunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Göçmenler, Hayat hikayesi, Mülteciler, Sahra Altı Afrika, Sınırlar, Post-kolonyalizm

ABSTRACT

HOPES IN TRANSITION: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN MIGRANTS IN ISTANBUL

Kalmoy, Abdirashid Diriye
MA in Sociology
Student ID: 187040003
Open Researcher and Contributor ID (ORC-ID): 0000-0003-0634-937X
National Thesis Center Referance Number: 10371651

Thesis Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Ramazan Aras
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Istanbul has become one of the most crucial nodes in the global network of refugees and migrants' trails, routes and destinations to Europe. Consequently, Istanbul has become a "hub" for migrants and refugees who are waiting impatiently to sneak across the border in the dark of the night to Greece or Bulgaria. Moreover, sub-Saharan African transit migrants' numbers have increased drastically in Istanbul over the years. This phenomenon is the subject matter of this ethnographic research project. This research has three objectives: first and foremost, is to explore the causes and triggers of migration in Sub-Saharan African countries; Second, is to relay the lived experiences, testimonies, voices, struggles, "victories", resilience, hurdles and pains of the Sub-Saharan African migrant throughout the long journeys that are imbued with hopes of prosperity but that have in-store for the migrants detentions, violence, death, rape, vulnerability, exploitation, racism, Xenophobia, uncertainties, humanitarian aid, and sensationalist media coverage; third, is to offer an ethnographic account of sub-Saharan African migrants' life-experiences, life-conditions and livelihoods in Istanbul. The aim of this study is to paint and portray the sub-Saharan African migrants and refugees as victims and "creation" of a multi-faceted and complex interactions of matrices. These include: the brutal legacy of colonialism and its subsequent demolition of existing indigenous social, environmental and political institution; the failure of the post-colonial nation-building processes in many sub-Saharan Africa countries; exploitative capitalism and

financial corporations that has wreak havoc on the environments, hence altering centuries-long communal lives and their natural eco-system. This thesis aims to contribute to the sociology and anthropology of migration studies in Turkey and subsequently critique and challenge essentialist approaches predicated on security, humanitarianism, nationalist and integration perspectives that disregard implicitly and discursively the life experiences, testimonies and personal struggles of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

Keywords: Borders, Life-stories, Migrants, Post-colonialism, Refugees, Sub-Sahara Africa

DEDICATION

I humbly dedicate this thesis to:

My mother Ceebla Cabdikariim Cabdirahmaan, for the ineffable love and sacrifice.

My father Diiriye Kaalmoy Jeelle, I saw you once and that is worth eternity.

My brother Jamaal, who left us too soon.

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Teachers, books and educational institutions have always inspired and comforted me throughout my life. I am grateful and full of adorations to all my teachers at Mandera secondary school, Nakuru high school, Bulla Mpya primary school, Al-Qalam primary school, Wabera primary school and Al-Falah nursery school. This thesis and my educational life would not have been possible without all of you. Moreover, the writings and books of Pierre Hadot, Evelyn U, Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, Jalaluddin Rumi, and Dr. Francis I. R have changed my life most recently. To them also, I say thank you.

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I am grateful and thankful to all my sub-Saharan African transit migrant interlocutors who accepted to be interviewed in the course of my fieldwork – and those I interacted with briefly. I am humbled that you have entrusted your life-stories and life-experiences in my "hands" and hence rendering them part of my educational life, memory and life-experience. May your dreams, wishes, hopes and what you seek find you all as soon as possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWARD

The act of migration is many things: it can be political, economical, spiritual, psychological or emotional depending on the varying contexts that occasion migration. Migration in the context of my thesis project has a political and economical emphasis and approach – I am interested in the life experiences of sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul who escaped economic degradation and violence in their home countries and geographies. In this sense, migration becomes an act of survival and betterment of livelihoods, which is intrinsic in every being in the universe. Migration involves a leap of faith into the unknown with will and at times desperations. It becomes an intuitive reflex of self-preservation, and of loved ones from conditions one is not able to control such as ethno-tribal and state violence, and economic devastations that lead to unemployment and social strife. Migration across nation-state borders or within the migrants' own country is a human undertaking that involves the will to exist, thrive and self-actualize that challenges and transcend geography, race, religion, or politics. The migrant is a traveller who does her/his best to find life, existence and meaning in a world that is chaotic, threatening and full of uncertainties – what a humbling metaphor that captures every being's situation in our cosmos. The migrant is not an "another", a foreigner or an invader into our lands. The migrant is an image reflected back to us if we closely looked.

On June 25, 2005, my mother left for Saudi Arabia to work and live there as an immigrant. She took with her our youngest sibling then, Cabdirahmaan. At that time, I was going to grade six (class 6 B) at Bulla Mpya primary school. Since then she has been an immigrant in Saudi Arabia. I would only see my mother once: in April 2018, when I visited Saudi Arabia under the pretence of an Umra visit. I have experienced the act and feeling of migration on an intimate personal level. It is a collective family memory I share with my siblings and my parents. I can comprehend: how it feels when a loved family member leaves with hope and uncertainties their homes, families, communities and country; the emotional taste of that journey into the unknown; the feeling of longing for home and loved ones. The migration experience is an experience that I can relate to and empathize with in a deeper sense – on many levels indeed.

Furthermore, I have experienced migrations and long-distance travelling on a personal level since childhood; leaving a familiar home is an emotional feeling I am also familiar with. Our family moved from town to town in Kenya when I was young: Mandera, Nairobi, Limuru, Naivasha and Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) in the early 1990s; Isiolo and Meru in the late 1990s; then finally Mandera and Beled Xaawo (Somalia) where I schooled my primary education. After finishing my primary school education in 2007, I joined Nakuru High school, a boarding boy's high school in the middle of the Rift Valley, and took a journey that would take three days of bus ride from the border-town of Mandera to Nakuru.

I would only visit my family and home town once in the year: the December holidays. Home-sickness, mild depression and longing for familiar social and geographical milieu of family and friends was a constant companion. At such a tender age, I become familiar with life's storms, stress and trials. Furthermore, in 2012, I would travel again far from home to pursue undergraduate education in Turkey. I would only visit home once: the summer of 2016. As of the writing of this thesis project, I haven't visited or seen home for close to four years and counting. Hence, given my family and personal history, it would suffice if I consider myself a perennial ''migrant'' who is always on the move, crossing large swaths of geographies, joining different educational institutions, making many good and bad friends and missing siblings and home. These experiences have psychologically, emotionally, spiritually and ontologically shaped me – and continue to re-shape me as a person and my world-view.

In the summer of 2019, I received a call from a relative in Nairobi informing me that Bille (not his real name) will be arriving in Istanbul in few days. Later, Bille himself called me and requested if I can pick him up from Istanbul Ataturk airport. Bille was in his late forties; he worked as a taxi driver in Nairobi; he had five children and a hard-working wife who sold children clothes in Eastleight, Nairobi – he was among the relatives I visited in Nairobi in the summer of 2016. Bille secured a health visa – he had a genuine heart and lungs problems that made easy for him to secure the visa – through the facilitation of a travel agency and a hospital in Istanbul after paying approximately 3000 US dollars. However, Bille had other plans in mind. I took him

from the airport and he stayed at a small hotel in Eminonu for few weeks; I would visit him few times and take him around Istanbul's historic scenes.

Bille, through a network of friends in Nairobi and Addis Ababa found a Somali human smuggler who would take him across to Greece. The next time I visited him, he was in Aksaray staying in an apartment alongside other sub-Saharan African migrants. The father of five children going to primary school in Nairobi was expending his life-time savings to become a migrant and move to Europe for a better life. Eventually he would attempt three times to cross the border but would be arrested and returned to Istanbul. Finally, in December 2019 he called me on WhatsApp from Athens. He sounded happy and joyous. I wished him all my best wishes and prayers. At that time I had no interest in Migration studies. I was preparing a thesis project on the oral history of state and tribal violence in North Eastern Kenya. Unfortunately, after writing the two chapters of literature review and methodology, Covid-19 become a full-blown global pandemic and it was untenable to carry out that project due to travel restrictions. There was no way of conducting a fieldwork without endangering myself and others in the process. Moreover, travelling was rendered impossible by the pandemic.

After days of frustrations and uncertainties I settled to initiate a project on sub-Saharan African migrants here in Istanbul given its feasibility. My experiences of migrations and travelling ingrained in me were yelling for attention and recognition I suppose. As much as this thesis project is about sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul, it also resonates on a deeper level with my family and personal history and experience. In the course of my ethnographic interviews, I interviewed migrants and refugees who could easily be a family or a relative – and their stories, experiences, testimonies and voices had similar trajectories and contents. This is a thesis project about migration, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers by a global migrant, a traveller, and the son of a migrant worker. As a descendant of Somali pastoralists and nomads who criss-crossed the Horn of Africa (Geeska Afrika), this thesis is a personal coming-to-terms with the life-styles of my nomadic ancestors, the phenomenon of global migration and modern global nomadism which is becoming a trend and norm in our highly interconnected capitalistic world that has rendered

travelling a source of fetish and base-pleasures and also an exercise of seeking life and livelihood for many: migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and drifters.

Abdirashid Diriye Kalmoy
Başakşehir, Istanbul.
11.11.2020

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In October 31, 2020 Congolese militia members killed more than twenty people in a raid in North Kivu region of D.R. Congo and displacing hundreds of thousands of other people from their homes and villages.[1] In November 4, 2020 fighting broke out in Ethiopia between the central government and the opposition-ruled Northern Tigray region with the potential of hurling Ethiopia's 110 million citizens into a civil war and displacement into refugee camps.[2] In Guinea, a small country in West Africa, post-election violence engulfed the nation after an October 18, 2020 presidential elections contested between the incumbent and the opposition candidate, leading to killings and crackdown on opposition groups.[3]

In the month of October and early November 2020, these were the tragic news headlines that captivated my mind as I was contemplating how to start writing the introduction to my thesis project. Sub-Saharan Africa is a vast geography with complex and intricate political and social developments that on daily basis avails to

[1]See ''Suspected ADF attack in DRC village kills more than 20 civilians''*Aljazeera News,* October 31, 2020 https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/31/21-dead-in-new-dr-congo-massacre-by-adf-rebel-group-official; and ''DR Congo: Authorities blame Islamist militia for village massacre'', *DW News,* October 31, 2020 https://www.dw.com/en/dr-congo-authorities-blame-islamist-militia-for-village-massacre/a-55460373

[2] For violence in Ethiopia see, Zecharias Zelalem, ''Abiy Ahmed won a Nobel peace prize. Now Ethiopia is on the brink of civil war'', *Mail and Guardian* November 4, 2020 https://mg.co.za/africa/2020-11-04-analysis-abiy-ahmed-won-a-nobel-peace-prize-now-ethiopia-is-on-the-brink-of-civil-war/; AwolAllo, '' Civil war in Ethiopia: Who, What and Why?, *Awash Post* November 5, 2020. https://www.awashpost.com/2020/11/05/civil-war-in-ethiopia-who-what-why/; Abdirashid Diriye Kalmoy, ''Ethiopia-Tigray war: A debacle of democratic transition'' *Daily Sabah* November 2020, https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/op-ed/ethiopia-tigray-war-a-debacle-of-democratic-transition

[3] See ''Nearly two dozen dead in Guinea post-election violence''*Aljazeera News,* October 27, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/27/guinea-post-election-violence-left-21-dead-state-tv; and ''A disputed election leads to violence in Guinea'' *The Economist,* October 31, 2020**,** https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2020/10/31/a-disputed-election-leads-to-violence-in-guinea

Western and local media with tragic news headlines. The whole continent, in the apt observation of Ali Mazrui, swings between tragedy and a strong will to persevere and prosper (Mazrui, 1980). These tragedies and innumerable unfortunate socio-political conditions have wrecked peoples' livelihoods propelling many into refugee camps, poverty, unemployment, and as migrants beyond the continents coastal shores.

In August 20, 2020 while I was conducting ethnographic interviews with migrants in Istanbul, a migrant-carrying boat capsized off the Libyan coastal town of Zwara drowning more than 50 migrants from sub-Sahara Africa.[4] Again on September 25, 2020 another boat capsized off the Libyan coast drowning all its 22 migrants while on the same day Tunisian authorities apprehended a boat carrying 246 migrants heading to the Italian shores.[5] In Turkey, in July 19, 2020, 59 migrants perished while crossing Lake Van[6]; in October 19, 2018 tourists and beach goers were shocked when they encountered a floating migrant body from a capsized boat that was heading to Greece[7]; in November 11, 2020, 38 migrants were arrested in İzmir heading to Greece[8]; in November 3, 2020, 20 Somali, Eritrean and Ethiopian migrants were arrested in Foça, İzmir[9]; in the most tragic incident, a mini van carrying 72 migrants of which 2 were already dead was apprehended by Turkish Gendarmerie in October, 4, 2020.[10] Just as the global pandemic of Covid-19 wreak havoc across the world while many politically and socially volatile regions across the

[4] ''Dozens of migrants die in 2020's deadliest shipwreck in Mediterranean''*TRT World,* August 20, 2020 https://www.trtworld.com/africa/dozens-of-migrants-die-in-2020-s-deadliest-shipwreck-in-mediterranean-39044

[5] Nathan Morley ''Migrant boat sinks off Libyan coast'' *Vatican News,* September 25, 2020.https://www.vaticannews.va/en/world/news/2020-09/migrants-drown-boat-sinks-libyan-coast-mediterranean.html

[6] ''Van Gölü'nde batan tekneden 3 acı haber daha! Sayı 59'a yükseldi'' *Hurriyet News,* July 19, 2020 https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/son-dakika-van-golunde-batan-tekneden-3-aci-haber-daha-sayi-59a-yukseldi-41567956

[7] ''Turistler hayatının şokunu yaşadı! Yer Bodrum''*Hurriyet News,* October 19, 2018 https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/turistler-hayatinin-sokunu-yasadi-yer-bodrum-40992311

[8]'' Dikili'de bir gün arayla toplam 38 kaçak göçmen kurtarıldı''*Hurriyet News,* November 5, 2020 https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/dikilide-bir-gun-arayla-toplam-38-kacak-gocmen-kurtarildi-41655301

[9] ''Yunan askerlerinin Türk karasuların aittiği 20 kaçak göçmen kurtarıldı''*Hurriyet News,* November 3, 2020 https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/yunan-askerlerinin-turk-karasularina-ittigi-20-kacak-gocmen-kurtarildi-41653134

[10] ''15 kişilik minibüsten ikisi ölü 72 kaçak göçmen çıktı!'' *Sozcu News,* October 4, 2020 https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2020/gundem/15-kisilik-minibusten-ikisi-olu-72-kacak-gocmen-cikti-6066334/

world were producing would-be migrants, migrants were already perishing in the Mediterranean Sea and were also apprehended en masse in Turkey, Italy, Greece, Bulgaria, Spain, the United states of America and France et cetera.

Human migration is a natural global-wide phenomenon – but also a man-made tragic phenomenon. It is a natural phenomenon in the sense that human beings have a natural proclivity to migrate and move from one place to another in the event of social, political or natural adversities or seeking better livelihoods and opportunities in other geographies. Human migration is a rational and self-interest based undertaking on the part of the migrant (Manning 2020; Runde et al 2019, 3; Malley 2016). It is also a man-made in the sense that migration is an epiphenomenon of socio-political conditions like unemployment, economic adversities, violence of all types and forms and human-occasioned environmental disasters like climate change and its consequences.

While legal migrations and travelling are sanctioned by laws, "illegal" migration is legally, politically, socially, and discursively prohibited and criminalized. "Illegal" migrants have been reduced to what is reminiscent to Giorgio Agamben's "homer sacer" figures leading "bare life" in our global and modern world (Agamben 1998) and are considered "wasted lives" (Bauman 2003). This has rendered a situation where "illegal" migration has gone "underground": it has become a sphere operated and sustained by gangs, human traffickers, human smugglers, corrupt border police and xenophobic politicians and policy makers. Moreover, migration has become the biggest challenge for the modern nation-state since migrants undermine and disregard the imaginary nation-state borders and laws prohibiting "illegal" travelling. This thesis project is not about migration per se; it takes as its subject matter the lived experiences, life stories, struggles and testimonies of migrants and refugees in migration.

This thesis project is about sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul, Turkey. Hence, three questions that are interrelated are posed and in the course of the coming chapters are answered with the testimonies and lived experiences of sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul. First, why do (some) sub-Saharan Africans migrate and leave their home countries, communities and families? Second, what experiences and

challenges sub-Saharan African migrants face in the course of their journeys through migrant routes, trails and destinations? The final question which is the central theme of this thesis is: what lived experiences, challenges or benefits sub-Saharan African migrants face in Istanbul, a city that has become a crucial gate-way to Europe in the global flow of migrants to the European continent? These three questions will be the foundation and guideline of this thesis project's theoretical, conceptual and argumentative framework of inquiry and investigation. Hence, primarily, Istanbul and it is various neighbourhoods populated by substantial populations of migrants and refugees will be the context of this project.

Istanbul, a metropolitan city with a population of 16 million residents and 4 to 5 hours drive to the Greek and Bulgarian borders, has become one of the most crucial nodes in the global network of refugee and migrants' trails, routes and destinations to Europe. Apart from being a commercial, touristic, educational and recreational hub, Istanbul is also a migrant and refugee hub for migrants waiting impatiently to sneak across the border in the dark of the night to Greece or Bulgaria. Hence, Istanbul is a transit destination to Europe (Duvell 2014). This has come to my awareness when I first come to Istanbul in September 2012 as an undergraduate student: among fellow African students there were always talks about students who will hire human smugglers that would take them to Greece and beyond – some even left University education and migrated. This was a tantalizing prospect. Indeed many students left their scholarships and education and migrated to Europe seeking a much better life.

Moreover, with the outbreak of the Syrian Civil war and numerous political and economic instabilities in Africa, Istanbul has received record number of migrants. Neighbourhoods like Aksaray, Mecidiyeköy, Esenyurt and Beyoğlu's Tarlabaşı have become migrants and refugee "dominated" and populated spaces. I have personally experienced the increased visibility of sub-Saharan African migrants and Syrian migrants in these neighbourhoods in the last eight years I have been in Turkey. And I was always intrigued and interested in the life experiences of these fellow human beings – who run away from adversities, facing legal and socio-economic challenges on daily basis and embodying hearts and souls full with hopes, traumas, dreams, fears, resilience, faith and courage in a world under the gaze of disrupting technological and political changes, climate change and most recently by a global

pandemic on unprecedented scale. This thesis project aspires to capture honestly, empathically and with respect their life stories, experiences and testimonies.

This Master's thesis has three objectives that will tread like a connecting string throughout its chapters and numerous paragraphs: first and foremost, is to explore the causes and triggers of migration in Sub-Saharan African countries; Second, is to relay the lived experiences, testimonies, voices, struggles, "victories", resilience, hurdles and pains of the Sub-Saharan African migrant throughout the long journeys that are imbued with hopes of prosperity but that have in-store for the migrants detentions, violence, death, rape, vulnerability, exploitation, racism, Xenophobia, uncertainties, humanitarian aid, and sensationalist media coverage; third, is to offer an ethnographic account of Sub-Saharan African migrants' lives and livelihoods in Istanbul - a trans-continental and cosmopolitan massive city that has become over the years a crucial nexus in an ever-expanding global migrant travelling networks and routes.

The aim of this ethnographic study is to paint and portray the Sub-Saharan African migrants (and migrants all over the world, by extension and context) as victims and "creations" of a multi-faceted and complex interactions of matrices. These include: the brutal legacies of colonialism and there subsequent demolition of existing social, environmental and political institution; the failure of post-colonial nation building processes in many Sub-Saharan Africa countries; exploitative capitalism and financial corporations that has wreak havoc on the environments, hence altering centuries-long communal lives and their natural eco-system.

Moreover, this study aims to contribute to, review and critique the Sociology, Ethnography and Anthropology of migration studies in Turkey. In doing so, I will investigate the "place" of the Sub-Saharan African migrant in this burgeoning multi-disciplinary field of study and ethnography. How are the sub-Saharan African migrants portrayed in these studies? What happens to the agency and voices of the Sub-Saharan African migrant amid a statist, security-oriented and nationalist discourses and politically-charged rhetoric in the media and in some scholarly works? How does the positionality and perspective of the scholar as an ''outsider'' or "insider" reflect on the final analysis and scholarly out-put of the study of the Sub-

Saharan African migrants? These questions will inform the critical framework of this thesis project and they will be of considerations in structuring the project, its aims, its objectives and its challenges. Furthermore, this study aims to blend voices and testimonies of migrants from different African countries, races, genders, class and religions: I will explore different life stories and experiences of migrants that are diverse and complex beyond the scope and competence of this master thesis project. I will always be grateful and thankful to my interviewees for sharing with me their intimate, sometimes filtered, others sincere, some painful, few humorous life stories, experiences and biographies.

I have had personal interactions with approximately forty sub-Saharan African migrants and refugees in Istanbul who were planning in few months or years to cross the Turkish-Greek border and seek better livelihood in Europe. As of November 11 2020, I had conducted twenty one face-to-face unstructured interviews with voice records. I deemed it essential not to video record or divulge the identities of my interlocutors since most of them were individuals carrying "fake" documents or have overstayed their visas in Turkey. Moreover, since my interviewees were individuals seeking better life in Europe via challenging and traumatic journeys of crossing borders and borderlands, I felt it wise to undisclosed their faces or identities. Given the sub-Saharan African migrants' and refugees' legal and economic precarity in Istanbul it was hard to find willing interviewees. However, after many efforts of trust building and guarantees, I was able to conduct my ethnographic fieldwork between June and November of 2020. I have visited innumerable times to neighbourhoods like Aksaray, Mecidiyeköy, Beylikdüzü, Esenyurt and Tarlabaşı and interacted with sub-Saharan African migrants and refuges while a deadly global pandemic of Covid-19 was raging.

Chapter one, which is about the methodology and ethnographic techniques of this project commences with an account of how this project was initiated, structured and executed. I discuss the challenges and research advantages I encountered during the ethnographic process during the global pandemic of Covid-19. Most crucially in this chapter I discuss my positionality as a sub-Saharan African graduate student investigating the life stories and livelihoods of migrants and refugees in Istanbul: how was my positionality as an insider an advantage and also risky when it comes to

analysis and assumptions. Furthermore, I discuss the complex and intricate dynamism between the interviewer and the interviewee during the interview process occasioned by the interacting subjectivities of the ethnographer and her/his interlocutors. Here I will be discussing the complex inter-subjective dynamism in the interview process: how the interviewee and the interviewer negotiate information-sharing and exchange of intimacies during the interview.

Chapter two is a literature review and critical analysis of the sociological and anthropological studies conducted previously on sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey and especially in Istanbul; I will also offer a brief historical timeline of the different migrant groups that migrated to Istanbul since the fifteenth century. In this chapter I also offer the theoretical framework of analysis of my ethnographic project. Both Chapters one and Chapter two offer the general scope and framework of the project while the rest of the chapters are ethnographic chapters dealing explicitly with the subject matter of the project: sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul.

Chapter three is about the initial stage of the migrant and refugee journey: leaving home. This chapter offers an analysis of the factors and conditions that force sub-Saharan African migrants to leave their communities, families and countries through the testimonies and life stories of our interviewees. Here I would make a literature, conceptual and thematic review on scholarly works written about sub-Saharan Africa to corroborate my argument and thesis that at the root of migration flux in the continent lie serious structural problems. These include the legacy of colonialism and the utter failure of post-colonial nation-building efforts in many sub-Saharan African countries. These structural conditions alongside other intricate sociological and anthropological issues fuel political and social instability which also lead to economic instability and hence migrations. Here I will be discussing what produces "the wretched of the earth" to use Frantz Omar Fanon (2005) seminal phrase, that is, the sub-Saharan African migrant. We will also hear testimonies and life-stories of sub-Saharan migrants regarding these issues in this chapter.

Chapter four is about the second stage of the journey: that is the journey of travelling and crossing borders and borderlands. Here, the emphasis will be on the life-experiences and testimonies of migrants and refugees in the migrants' trails and

routes. How do migrants and refugees cross so many borders and borderlands? What kind of challenges and problems do they face and encounter in these migratory undertakings which are always illegal? Here, the migrants' strategies of migration through human smugglers and travel agencies will be discussed. We will also hear life stories regarding the journey of migration from the home-country to Istanbul and to other destinations.

Finally, chapter five will be concerned with the sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul. This chapter will be about ethnographies of migrants' and refugees' life in Istanbul. We will hear from interviewees about life in Istanbul while they await their crucial journey across the border to Greece. How do sub-Saharan African migrants cope-up and deal with their "illegality" situations in neighbourhoods like Aksaray, Mecidiyeköy, Tarlabaşi and Beylikdüzü? What kind of social and communal support networks do the migrants form while living here in Istanbul? What issues define their daily lives economically and socially? These and other issues will be discussed and conceptually analysed in this chapter while also offering migrants' testimonies and life stories.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY AND ETHNOGRAPHY: FIELDWORK AMID THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC OF COVID-19

In this chapter, I will outline the methodology and research techniques that I employed in carrying out my ethnographic fieldwork in the summer of 2020 in different neighbourhoods of Istanbul that have substantial presence of Sub-Saharan African migrants. I will offer a theoretical and conceptual analysis of my methodological approaches and techniques and why I preferred these research methods. Moreover, I will offer conceptual justifications for why I preferred a particular methodological perspective and what kind of challenges and obstacles I encountered in the ethnographic process. Furthermore, in this chapter, I will avail to the reader a full spectrum of the whole ethnographic fieldwork I conducted and its intricate details that included my interactions with my interlocutors amid a global Corona virus (COVID-19) pandemic that ravaged lives and livelihoods all over the world and how it posed challenges in the ethnographic process.

As of 29th of December 2020, I had carried out twenty five face-to-face un-structured oral interviews – excluded from this are interviews cancelled due to health risks, others that were turned down by my interlocutors after I briefly explained to them the scope of my study. However, only eighteen of these interviews were used in this ethnographic study. Moreover, I had participated with the aim of carrying out participant observations two meeting convened by the Tarlabaşı Dayanışma Topluluğu (Tarlabaşı Solidarity Community), a non-governmental grass-root organization that offers assistance and consultancy to migrants from all walks of life in Tarlabaşı, Istanbul.

I also had the privilege of visiting a migrant's apartment that housed men, women and children who were to be transported in less than six hours to the Greek border. I

made participant observation visits to: a beauty salon operated my sub-Saharan African migrants; restaurants that serve African cuisines and operated by African migrants; tea shops frequented by migrants – I suppose I have been making these visit for the last eight years since I always frequented these migrants spaces, but these times I had the gaze of a researcher. In the course of my ethnographic fieldworks I had interacted with approximately forty Sub-Saharan African migrants and other migrants from Afghanistan, Iraq, Morocco, Bangladesh, Libya, Turkmenistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Syria, India and Uzbekistan. Although I have not interviewed the majority of these migrants our interactions have been fruitful and insightful for my study and I am grateful to all of them.

2.1. Initiating the Ethnographic Project: "I Don't Want to Talk about Myself and What I Passed"

The process of structuring, planning and conducting an ethnographic fieldwork is a task that is equally enormous and complex and even difficult. After being quarantined from 15th of March to 10th of June 2020 in our university dormitories in Başakşehir, Istanbul, due to the threat of COVID-19, starting an ethnographic fieldwork afresh was not easy. Within a week of lifting of our dormitories quarantine ban I had submitted my thesis proposal and was subsequently accepted by my supervisor Dr. Ramazan Aras. I structured a questionnaire for my thesis project and after a brief discussion with Dr. Aras I couldn't wait to start my fieldwork.

The framework of my research questions is to critically and analytically investigate the life-conditions and life-stories of sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul. I raise three questions: First, why do sub-Saharan Africans migrate and leave their home countries, communities and families? Second, what experiences and challenges sub-Saharan African migrants face in the course of their journeys through migrant routes, trails and destinations? The final question which is the central theme of this thesis is: what lived experiences, challenges or benefits sub-Saharan African migrants face in Istanbul? In tandem to these persistent questions, I decided to carry out this ethnographic project around these issues. I have lived in Turkey and in Istanbul for the last eight year: I have seen, met and befriended many sub-Saharan African migrants. Their life and what propels them to migrate has always intrigued

my conscience. I do this research to give voice, primacy and agency to the innumerable sub-Saharan African migrants and refugees I met over the last eight years.

Moreover, over the years, sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul and in Turkey have exponentially increased. Hence, it crucial and important to conduct this research so as to investigate and study the core issues of this dramatically unfolding phenomena. Furthermore, the literature on sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey is expanding and contributing to this field is a responsibility I shoulder since I have here and observed enough about sub-Saharan African migrants. This project offers the first of its kind: an ethnographic study about sub-Saharan African migrants by a sub-Saharan African student who lives in Istanbul. Nevertheless, there were many challenges faced while conducting this project as an insider – familiarity or visibility could be a liability.

The first challenge in my ethnographic fieldwork was finding Sub-Saharan African migrants who were willing to be interviewed: who will talk about life in their home communities, the journeys they undertook and finally their life in Istanbul as migrant who are planning to cross the border into Greece or Bulgaria. Indeed, finding such willing migrants was hard. I had the assumption that if I go to such neighbourhoods like Aksaray, Mecidiyeköy and Tarlabaşı I will find easily migrants who will relay their life stories to me: I will be approaching them, and after a brief introduction and interaction I will request to interview them, and they would accept it. That has not been the case. Although few accepted my interview request, the majority of people that I interacted with in Cargo shops, African restaurants, Cafes and in the boulevards politely turned down my interview request after explaining to them the scope, aim and objectives of my study. Later I used a network of friends, students, previous interviewees and non-governmental organization centres to find willing interlocutors. Emblematically, Martha, a young woman from Uganda turned down my interview request in a manner that captures migrants' fears, distrusts, suspicion of people they do not trust and the challenges of the researcher in finding relevant information in the fieldwork (See Driessen and Jansen 2013; Ogain 2013; Van der Geest 2017).

It was a sunny afternoon in the last week of June. After hours of trials, success and failures to convince migrants around Aksaray metro station, I decided to go to Tarlabaşı and try my luck there. As I come out of the Taksim metro into the famous Taksim Square I saw two African ladies and a gentleman standing at the entrance of İstiklal boulevard near a big mosque that is under construction. At first I hesitated and thought they could be tourist or business people who come to shop at İstiklal. As I was walking towards them, the gentleman and a lady descended into İstiklal boulevard leaving their friend. Martha, who I will later get to know her name carried a big red bag. I greeted her and requested if she had a minute – first, she thought I was a beggar and she frowned at me. She looked at me from toe to head, assessing my whole being. I could see suspicion and irritation in her face. I introduced myself to her after the initial greetings, and before I could explain my aims for approaching her, she requested we move to a shady place – a nearby building's shade. The sun was scorching.

We moved to the shadows of the over-towering walls of the mosque. After a brief exchange, I explained to her that I was a graduate student at Istanbul and that I was conducting a study about Sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul. At first she looked interested. But when I asked if she could participate, she politely turned the request down. I explained to her that her identity would be safe-guarded and this was an academic study and not a journalistic investigation. In my last resort, I told her that I was an African (something that was already apparent), and she should trust me and that no harm will come from the interviews.

Martha smiled. Maybe she internally laughed at my attempt to emotionally manipulate her. She sighed: "Yes, you are African but I don't want to talk about myself and what I passed" she almost lamented.[11] I looked at her empathetically, and shook my head in agreement. Our brief meeting was over. I bid her farewell. I walked towards Tarlabaşı to see if I can get other interviewees. My assumptions as an "insider" and that I would easily get to interview sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul were dashed. Kirin Narayan's argument that "the extent to which anyone is an authentic insider is questionable" captured my encounter with Martha (Narayan

[11]Personal interaction with Martha, June 2020 Istanbul.

1993, 671). Issues of fear, trust and suspicion were elements that I had faced in the ethnographic process although I was an insider. And the ethnographer has to face and wisely deal with them in an ethical and moral manner (See Grieser 2016; Ingridstodder and Kallenberg 2018).

Coincidently, almost a month later I met Martha in Yusufpaşa, Istanbul. At that time I had conducted seven interviews already. Both of us seemed to recognize each other. I greeted her. After a brief exchange, I reminded her about my interview. "Why do you want to interview people, why do you want to interview me?" she had asked me.[12] I explained to her again that this was an academic study and emphasized that she could withheld her personal information and just tell me about her journey and life in Istanbul. She agreed. We exchanged telephone numbers and agreed to meet at a date that she will be not busy. That was the last time I was Martha. A week later, I called her and we agreed upon a date for an interview with her and her friends.

She later called me back and requested we meet another day. The last time I called her regarding the interview she informed me that her apartment-mates were sick, and she was worried they could have contracted COVID-19. After almost a week, I called her to ask about her situation. Her phone was not available; since then it is not available. I dialled her number in January 2021 and still it was not available. Martha, like many migrants, disappeared into thin air. Nevertheless, my encounter with Martha shed light on my assumptions of being an insider and that I would get easy access. This was not the case. Moreover, gender issues or maybe ethnicity or even religion implicitly impacted our inter-subjective interactions. I will deal with these issues in the proceeding sub-sections.

2.2. Structuring and Constructing the Ethnographic Fieldwork

In the course of building my ethnographic project design, I have followed the model outlined by Ramazan Aras and co. (Aras et al. 2013) in the context of constructing an ethnographic oral history project. Given the multi-disciplinary nature and inter-disciplinary approach of oral history (Dunaway 1996), the choosing of this method in

[12]Personal interaction with Martha, July 2020 Istanbul.

an ethnographic study of Sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul is justified and deemed relevant and helpful. Ethnographic oral history aims to document the past and the present in vivid manners that capture peoples' life stories and life experiences. Consequently, I have followed the project design essentials and considerations of Aras and co. (Aras et al. 2013) in formulating my ethnographic research goals, the temporal span of the research, in establishing themes and topics, languages, recording techniques and ethical considerations of my project. Furthermore, the interview essentials and techniques of Aras and co. (Aras et al 2013) have been employed throughout my ethnographic fieldworks. This has been crucial and beneficiary throughout.

Throughout my ethnographic fieldwork and literature reviews I have been intrigued by the scope and scale and conceptual groundings of the ethnographic method and processes. The conceptual flexibility and inter-disciplinary richness of ethnography and its application from History to Linguistics and even beyond Anthropology and Sociology has amazed me. Nevertheless, the ethnographic study and project has a conflicting origin and foundation. Historically and traditionally, the ethnographic project has been predicated on "an ethnographer being expected to thoroughly access the 'primitive' others' backstage without necessarily divulging too much of his or her own" (Jackson Jr. 2012, 493) story or agency completely. This is the grim reality of the emergence of such a noble research method. However, ethnography has been beneficial to human knowledge over the years. Ethnographic studies and the ethnographic method is "an imaginative analytical vehicle that produced true knowledge about a great range of patterns of human relationships" (Wardle and Blasco 2011, 125). So, what is ethnography? What is the ethnographic fieldwork? How did I mould and structure my ethnographic methods in carrying out my research? I will deal with these questions in this sub-section of this chapter.

According to Karen Ann Watson-Gegeo, "ethnography is the study of people's behaviour in naturally occurring, ongoing settings with the focus on the cultural interpretation of behaviour" (Watson-Gegeo 1998, 576). This definition of ethnography by Karen Watson-Gegeo emphasizes on the cultural interpretations aspects of the ethnographic method. Scott Reeves and et al offer a more expansive definition of what ethnography is: "ethnography is the study of social interactions,

behaviours, and perceptions that occur within groups, teams, organizations and communities" (Reeves at al. 2008, 512). In tandem to these definitions, my ethnographic study is about members of the Sub-Saharan African ‘‘community’’ in Istanbul: their life in their home communities, the journeys they have undertaken and their life stories and life experiences about Istanbul. My conception and application of ethnography will be best captured by Ben Burt's conceptualization of ethnography as a study that captured and documents both the past and the present (Burt 1998, 10-14).

Moreover, over the years, ethnography "has become a synonym for qualitative research, so that qualitative approach maybe called ethnographic in whole and part" (Watson-Gegeo 1998, 575). Hence, as much as my research is ethnographic, it is also a sociological qualitative research that employs all relevant qualitative research techniques. In addition to this, Watson-Gegeo adds also that "the terms ethnography, qualitative and naturalistic are often used interchangeably" (Watson-Gegeo 1998, 576). This nature of ethnography of being also a qualitative method, in part underlines the broad scope of the ethnographic method and its applicability in different spheres and fields of the social sciences.

Following that, "the central aim of ethnography is to provide rich, holistic insights into peoples' views and actions, as well as the nature (that is, sight, sound) of the locations they inhabit through the collection of detailed observations and interviews" (Reeves et al 2008, 512). With this aim in mind a "researcher 'dive-bombs' into the setting, makes a few fixed-category or entirely impressionistic observations, takes off again to write up the results" (Watson-Gegeo 1998, 576). These two observations capture my ethnographic fieldwork of the months of June, July, August, September, October, and November of 2020. Although I would argue I always made "impressionistic observations" of Sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul and wherever I visited in Turkey over the years.

The ethnographic method is a long process that is complex depending on various contexts. Nevertheless, Karen Ann Watson-Gegeo (1998, 583) offers a description of the ethnographic method that captures its central ideas. For her, the ethnographic method:

> Includes techniques of observation, participant-observations, (observing while interacting with those under study) informal and formal interviewing of the participants observed in situation, audio and video-tapping of participants for close analysis, collections of relevant or available documents and other materials for the settings, and other techniques as required to answer research questions posed by a given study.

This analysis of the ethnographic method underlines why it is also a synonym for qualitative research. The ethnographic process is immensely significant in sociological and anthropological studies and research process.

Participant observations, a crucial and indispensable ethnographic tool, have played a crucial role in my ethnographic fieldwork (see Agar 1980; Sanjek 1990). I have attended two fruitful meetings as a participant observer of the Tarlabaşı Dayanışma Topluluğu, a non-hierarchical grass-root organisation that helps migrants in Istanbul. After these two meetings, I will go to the nearest cafe I could find and scribble down all my observations and impressions of these meetings. I will offer a detailed analysis of these meetings and other participant observations in the coming chapters – insights from these participant observations inform my overall analysis of the migrants' life-conditions in Istanbul. Moreover, I also visited an apartment in Aksaray that housed migrants who were travelling to Greece – this was a house that functioned as a gathering point for the travellers of a particular human smuggler. In the course of the ethnography, participant observation "gives ethnographers opportunities to gather empirical insights into social practices that are normally 'hidden' from the public gaze" (Reeves et al. 2008, 514). Indeed, I would argue that my participant observations excursions were equally important as the interviews I conducted with regards to insight and information.

The interviews I conducted were based on questions that I prepared after I had submitted my thesis proposal. Since I was conducting an ethnography based on life stories and life experiences, I decided to use open ended, un-structured questioning style. However, I would map and internalize these questions in my head and conduct the interviews with no questionnaire-paper at hand. Mostly, I will start with questions regarding the interviewees' home country: the political and economic situations, his or her family's economic status, job opportunities and security situation – these questions are posed to assess the factors that prompted the interviewee to migrant from his/her homeland. Then, I will proceed by asking

questions regarding the her/his journey all the way to Istanbul: questions about how he/she travelled, how many countries crossed, any form of detention or violence or even assistance throughout the journey. After this, I will ask questions about his/her life in Istanbul: where s/he lives, who s/he lives with, whether she or he works, duration of stay in Istanbul, challenges and opportunities in Istanbul, then issues of racism, assistance or solidarity among the larger migrant community. Finally, I will ask questions regarding their expectations if they reach Europe or Greece; what kind of life do they anticipate; If they are aware about "fortress" Europe's "fight" against migrants. In the end, I would ask how the experience of migrating shaped their life and worldview; and their reflections on the whole journey.

After the interviews, some interviewees will interrogate me on why I do conduct such a study; others we would talk about life in Istanbul, while few of them will be telling me more stories and even significant details about their journeys or life in Istanbul. These detailed that are not captured in the audio-recorded interview, I do write them down when I arrive back at the university dormitory. Surprisingly, as much as I interview my interviewees, they would also interview me. Sidney Mintz observes that "the highly personal nature of the ethnographic interview'' creates a situation or moments where "the ethnographer and his or her informant are interrogating each other" (Mintz 1979, 23).

The ethnographic interview is not a one-sided interaction, it is an interactive encounter between the researcher and the informant. Abdiaziz, a young man in his mid-twenties from the Somali regional state in Ethiopia, after the interview exclaimed sincerely why I had prepared such intimate and "hard" questions in Somali: "*war walaaloow meesha su'aala adag ayaad dadku weeydiineeysaayee!"* (brother, you are asking hard questions to the people).[13] I construed and assumed that I had asked questions that touched upon traumatic and painful experiences in his home community and the journey – maybe things he would rather forget and not talk about. Abdiaziz's remarks highlight the inter-subjective interaction between the ethnographer and the interviewee which puts into question my assumed authority in

[13]Interview with Abdiaziz, July 19, 2020 Istanbul

the ethnographic process (see Clifford 1983). This will be the subject in the next sub-section.

2.3. Implicit Ontology: Positionality in the Ethnographic Fieldwork

The understanding and comprehension of issues like positionality, subjectivity and inter-subjectivity on the part of the researcher/interviewer is crucial and important. Awareness of these issues will help the ethnographer evaluate and understand herself and her interlocutors. To gain such awareness of these subtle and intricate issues Lynn Abrams proposed self-reflection of the researcher on these issues: "to gain insight into other peoples' personal experiences they (oral historians) encouraged self-reflection on the researchers' own identity" (Abrams 2010, 56). This is a profound insight. Such a self-reflection on the part of the ethnographer helps to bring to their attention assumed assumptions, biases, presuppositions and internalized believes and worldviews.

In the course of the ethnographic project, "the ethnographer try to define his or her place between the informant and the reader" (Mintz 1979, 24). This is an inescapable reality in research. The ethnographer assumes consciously or unconsciously a subject position, and in the course of the research interacts with the interlocutors with their own subject positions. This renders the ethnographic project an inter-subjective interaction that is highly dynamic. Hence, the "loci along which we are aligned with or set apart from those whom we study are multiple and in flux" (Narayan 1993, 671). There is nothing stable – dynamism, implicit subtle negotiations and fluidity marks the ethnographic interaction where the researcher is conscious or unconscious of these issues.

More importantly, these issues of positionality, subjectivity and inter-subjectivity have over the years made many social scientists with post-structuralism and post-modernism leaning grow "increasingly suspicious of the possibility of such claims to objectivity and neutrality" (Moser 2008, 384) in the social sciences. Is the ethnographic project out-put objective and entirely neutral? No. In this sub-section of this chapter I will discuss my own subjective position and subjectivity, what Karen Ann Watson-Gegeo refers to as "implicit ontology" – that is, the researcher's own

identity, value constellations, biases, assumptions, assumed power in the interview encounter (Watson-Gegeo 1998, 578). Before I discuss my own positionality in my ethnographic subjective perspective, let me offer a brief discussion on positionality theory and how it entails to research and the social sciences.

Adrianna Kezer and Jaime Lester posit that "similar to post-structural notions of subjectivity, positionality theory claims that individuals have a *position* that impacts how they socially construct the world" (Kezer and Lester 2010, 166). Consequently, "the position of the individual is formed by multiple identities (such as race, gender and class) that simultaneously construct and reinforce individual perspectives" (Kezer and Lester 2010, 166). Hence, subjective positionality entails that the ethnographer constructs, sees, investigates and analyses the social world not through inherent objectives on his or her part, but through socially acquired notions and views accrued due to their gender, race, age, educations, religion, sexuality, agenda, class or political ideologies. Kirin Narayan explicitly outlines the impact of these social positions and how they impact the research process (Narayan 1993, 674).

Furthermore, Sarah Moser argues that positionality plays a crucial role in the formulation and construction of the whole ethnographic project: "occupying certain positions and being aware of them may, for example, encourage researchers to take up projects that will place them at an advantage as an *insider*" (Moser 2008, 385). Indeed, positionality determines in part which ethnographic project the researcher chooses and why. Consequently, positionality highlights the aims and agenda of the ethnographic output and its intended impact and consequences on the social world. Understanding this is crucial since the researcher knows his or her aims, limitations and the intended results – this helps in producing an ethnographic work that is nuanced, sober, realistic and consciously drafted and written.

Positionality also acts as a regulative mechanism that can make the researcher face and see his or her subjective position in the fieldwork and its short-comings. Sezer İdil Göğüş (2019), a German citizen of Turkish descent observes who she came to terms with her own subject position during an ethnographic fieldwork in Istanbul and Muğla. She observed how issues of being native or being a foreigner played out in her ethnographic interviews, forcing her to face "dilemmas of positionality" inherent

in her ethnographic project. She was always reminded of her nativity and her foreignness frequently she observed. Hence positionality brings awareness to the researcher to their unconscious subjective position and hence shed light on assumptions and biases.

Ever since I started my ethnographic fieldwork I have become highly conscious of my dynamic, shifting and contextual subjective position. First of all, my perspective is that of a Somali young male in his late-twenties from Kenya who has witnessed, observed, experienced and seen migration since childhood. Since the 1991 Somali civil war in the neighbouring Somalia, I have seen migrants and refugees pour into and settle North-Eastern Kenya towns and villages – some of these were close relatives, others become close family friends. Moreover, I have witnessed vividly the 2011 East Africa drought that instigated the migration of poor families from southern Somalia and eastern Ethiopia into Northern Kenya, which was itself drought and poverty stricken geography. I have seen tired and dehydrated bodies under acacia trees. I have seen hungry and exhausted faces of children, men, women and the old pleading for food and waters. I have seen angry faces of migrants interrogated by police. I have seen mature men and women scramble for food in anarchy and mayhem – hence injured brutally in the process. I have seen sub-Saharan African migrants' conditions in Istanbul: their gloomy and resilient faces; their stories in the news. I have seen migrants sleep in public parks; sex workers walking in highways; detained migrants in polis stations. All these memories and experiences shape how I approach this subject matter. This is my initial perspective and position, and its offers a glimpse into the aims and objectives of my ethnographic project.

Second, my perspective is informed by my current subjective position: as an educated graduate student who is privileged to have a full scholarship and a comfortable life in Istanbul with no worries about "illegality" regarding existence and residence. Throughout the ethnographic fieldwork, I was consciously aware of my position as a person who is lucky to have an education opportunity and economic stability contra my informants who were people struggling to make ends meet – in constant uncertainty, worried all the time, and some exhausted by life's storm and stress. This has made me sympathetic and emphatic with the migrants' life and situations making me somewhat angry about the political class in Africa and in

Europe, policy makers and state institutions that make consequential decisions about migrants and refugees.

Finally, being an African has rendered me an insider and a trustable individual to the Sub-Saharan African migrants – although, this has not been the case sometimes. My interactions with Martha underline that the insider subjective position can sometimes be treated as an outsider depending on the text. Nevertheless, in all my interviews, I have been accepted and interacted with as an African fellow in relatively "better" manners and ways than will a non-African researcher not accepted. I have had access to a human smuggler's apartment housing migrants. I have befriended Ethiopian ladies working as waiters in Taksim; I have befriended Somali ladies working in a famous Somali restaurant in Yusufpaşa, Istanbul; I have befriended a Kenyan and Zambia beauty salon workers in Mecidiyeköy. Being an African male had helped me access spaces and people with ease and comfort operated by Sub-Saharan African migrants. My implicit ontology and its consequent positionality as an educated and economically stable relatively to the migrants (some were rich and well-off) and being a Sub-Saharan African male has been beneficial in relation to acceptability and trust on the part of the migrants. This has relatively relaxed interviewees and those I interacted with. The interviews I audio recorded were intimate, sincere and I had sight and insight into intricate behaviours and interactions throughout my ethnographic fieldwork.

Moreover, the ethnographic interview is the most crucial thing or undertaking in the whole ethnographic project. Interviews avail to the researcher life stories, facts, fictions, lies, experiences, analogised stories, metaphors, captivating phrases et cetera. The interview encounter between the interviewer and the interviewee is a moment of interaction between two individual – two subjectivities. Lynn Abrams informs us that "the interview is a process that involves the dynamic interactions of subjectivities" (Abrams 2010, 59). Abrams's conceptualization of the interview as an encounter of two subjectivities is predicated on George Herbert Mead's (1863-1931) symbolic interactionism theory (Mead 2015) and Sociologist Erving Goffman's notion that people present themselves in every different situation and context in their social life strategically (Goffman 1959).

As much as the researcher *comes* to interview, he or she is also presenting himself or herself; as much as the informant offers data, he or she is also presenting himself or herself. Both the researcher and the informant interact through each others' implicit and internalized subjective positions. In this case the subjectivities of the researcher and the informant interact. Paul Thompson and Joanna Bornat observe how the informant communicates his or her life story with difficulty: "the act of communicating experiences of an event 'outside the range of usual human experience' may not always be achieved exactly" (Thompson and Bornat 2017, 253). For instance this has been my case with Martha, who explicitly said she wouldn't like to communicate her past experiences of the journey. Despite the fact that some informants might find hard to speak about their experience, the encounter in the interview produces an inter-subjective interacts that occasions the informant to shape and remould his or her story life and experience – packaging it in a desired manner, structure and sequence. Here, we can observe how subjectivities impact the interviewees' facts and answers.

The nature of the ethnographic interview is such that, Lynn Abrams argues "is the result of a three-way dialogue: the respondent with himself or herself, between the interviewer and the respondent and between the respondent and the cultural discourses of the present and the past" (Abrams 2010, 59). Hence the interview encounter is a subtle and complex interaction that the researcher ought to have an insight of: his or her subjectivities, the informants' assumed subjective positions and the socio-cultural-political discourses available to the informant. This will later help in deconstructing the informants' interview content and categorise them properly. Moreover, the researcher should also be conscious and aware of his or her own subjectivity, which also impacts the interview questions and mode or interaction with the informants. So, what is subjectivity? What role does it play in the interview interaction or encounter between the interviewer and the interviewee?

Subjectivity refers to the "constituents of the individual sense of self, his or her identity informed and shaped by experiences, perception, language and culture, in other words an individual's emotional baggage" (Abrams 2010, 54). Following this definition, subjectivity is the emotional, cultural and social ''learning'' that informs an individual's worldview of the social world. Both the interviewee and the

interviewer interact and respond to each other through these subjectivity lenses. Moreover, subjectivity gives us an insight into "how the interviewee constructs an identity or subject position for himself or herself by drawing upon available cultural constructions in public discourses" (Abrams 2010, 54). Hence subjectivity and its clear understanding of how it is implicit in the interview encounter and self-presentation is crucial in ethnographic interview and in understanding general human interaction in the social world.

Given that both the interviewee and the interviewer assume subject positions, we can consider the interview as an inter-subjectivity interaction. For Lynn Abrams, intersubjectivity refers "to the relationship between the interviewee and the interviewer or, in other words, the interpersonal dynamics of the interview situation" (Abrams 2010, 54). The intimate and intricate interaction during the interview produces an inter-subjective moment that researcher needs to be conscious of and "see". At this moment of interaction, an intimate space of "intercorporeality" is occasioned where the two (in this case the ethnographer and the interviewee) interact and encounter each other – and comprehend each other (See Merleau-Ponty, 2013).

A good indicator of how inter-subjectivity occurs in the interview is what Lynn Abrams calls "Subjective composure": "the striving on the part of the interviewee for a version of the self that sits comfortably with the social world" (Abrams 2010, 59) or other situations occasioned by the interview context and process. In the course of my ethnographic interviews I have witnessed silences that underlined omissions, life stories that seemed to be too good to be true, jovial self-presentations that masked pain and trauma, and deflections that underline refusal to relay traumatic and painful experiences. For me, all these interview materials are equally important: there are reasons why my informants choose to tell or not to tell or lie or indirectly tell their story through other peoples' experiences. It is the task of the researcher to correctly and empathetically read these minute but important details and expression, and capture them in his/her ethnographic account comprehensively (see Geertz 1988; Sperber 1985).

Furthermore, the ethnographic interview encounter is full of surprises and unexpected moments. The informants "desire to speak about oneself, to reflect on

life, to claim an identity, or to share the burden of a troubling or harrowing experience will not always fit with the interviewer, who may have approached the interviewee with quite another theme in mind" (Thompson and Bornat 2017, 238). The informant might surprise the researcher with unexpected answers and life stories that will up-end the researchers' assumptions, presuppositions and expectations. Or the informant might choose to speak and talk about other life experiences that are not of importance to the researchers' ethnographic project, and this, the researcher has to take note of, and why this happened. All these are intricate occurrences that are actually full of insight and information. Christina Toren sees how "the clash of understanding between the ethnographer and his or her informants is an Anthropological common-place" (Toren 2009, 135). Therefore, the ethnographer has to be prepared for such surprising and dramatic encounters throughout the fieldwork apart from other obstacle and challenges.

2.4. Ethnographic Fieldwork amid the Global Pandemic of COVID-19

On March 11, 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that the new Corona Virus of 2019 (COVID-19) as a global pandemic threat[14]. Covid-19 wreaked havoc and claimed thousands of lives in Iran, Italy, Spain and England in the first few months of its spread. In the middle of the summer, the United States, Brazil, Russia and India become the epicentre of the virus, claiming hundreds of thousands of lives. The virus had spread to all the five continents inhabited by human beings.

Consequently, many countries imposed lock-downs and curfews on their citizens bringing all forms of social and economic life to a halt. Schools and Universities were locked down; all non-essential services producing centres were closed. Our university decided that apart from the Turkish students who travelled to their families and the other international students who could afford and be able to travel to their home-countries, the rest of the student to be locked-down in their dormitories. Hence, between 15th March and the first week of June we could not go out of our dormitories and no one will visit us from the outside. With this being the case, my

[14] See Abdirashid Diriye Kalmoy, ''Corona Is For All And There Are Lessons To Be Learnt Globally''*Politics Today,* June 2, 2020, https://politicstoday.org/corona-is-for-all-and-there-are-lessons-to-be-learnt-globally/

ethnographic thesis project was in limbo. I feared I would not be able to conduct my fieldwork in time, and hence will not be able to graduate at all.

According to a report published by academic, health workers and policy makers, covid-19 was a fatal contagion and spread like bush-fire: "covid-19 is a deadly contagion that threatens the livelihoods of all, regardless of their socioeconomic status" (Kapur and Suri et al 2020, 36). The risk of being infected was high since the disease spread through the air, mostly. Nevertheless, the fact that social scientist worked in critical conditions and in previous epidemics like the Ebola crisis and the HIV/AIDS epidemics and wrote about their experiences motivated me to draft my thesis proposal and prepare for an ethnographic fieldwork as soon as possible (See Miller and Joffe 2009; Barro at al 2020; Brian et al 2014; Erikson et al 2017; Burlat and Grünewald 2017). Furthermore, ethnographers have offered potential coping mechanisms while working during natural disasters, for instance in the case of the Maasai draught in Kenya and Tanzania that claimed many lives (Miller et al 2014). However, Covid-19 global pandemic was a more serious natural disaster. And hence I had to come up with a strategy of not putting myself and my interlocutors' lives at risk. This was hard, but no ethnography would have taken place without it – and I don't know if the risks are worth it, the future will tell.

Although the Turkish government had made face masks compulsory, since I was travelling with metro trains every day, I made sure I was carrying hand sanitizers in my bag and use it whenever I got off any public transportation. Moreover, in the course of my interactions with potential interviewees and during participant observations, I would make sure I had my face mask and not remove it. Before arranging interviews with informants, I would ask them if they had shown any signs or symptoms of Covid-19 (jokingly and in humorous way) to make sure that any possible transmission doesn't occur. It is only during the interview process that I would put off my face mask and conduct the interview – but still maintain a fair and reasonable distance.

Unfortunately, in the middle of my ethnographic fieldwork around the second week of September, one day I woke up with a headache and fever and a total loos of the sense of smell and taste. And this continued for three days. I couldn't differentiate

whether it was Covid-19 or normal flu since the Istanbul weather was getting colder by the day – and since I had struggled with cold weathers since childhood. I indefinitely cancelled all arranged interviews with informants. After three weeks of self-imposed quarantine, I did carried-out one participant observation while following all the required social distancing rules and regulations. Despite the circumstances of the global pandemic of Covid-19, I finalised and concluded my ethnographic fieldwork in late December; I started working with the interview and participant observations that I had in my possession and proceeded to write the whole project.

2.5. Research Codes of Ethics

Observing codes of ethics are central to the conducting of an ethnographic fieldwork. First of all, "the responsibility to act ethically rest ultimately on the individual researcher" (Fujii 2012, 718) and he or she should observe all necessary relevant codes of ethics of his or her research field. Furthermore, Lee Ann Fujii argues that the "research ethics matter for the simple reason that social scientists can bring harm to the study participants and the collaborators" (Fujii 2012, 717). Hence, the social scientist must follow a code of ethics so as to safe-guard the well-being and safety of his or her informants and collaborators. Indeed, following the relevant codes of ethics in the fieldwork during a raging global pandemic has been crucial and important for me and my informants. Moreover, the researcher must "develop an *ethics in practice* perspective through a reflexive engagement with the research process" (Belton et al 2011, 13). A fuller understanding of the research implications by the researcher will offer her an insight on why research ethics are important.

In the course of my ethnographic fieldwork I have internalized and followed the standard guidelines of research codes of ethics of the following academic associations and scholarly communities: the American Sociological association[15], the

[15] For more on the American Sociological Association research ethics and guidlines, see 'Code of Ethics and Policies and Procedures of the ASA Committee on Professional Ethics,'' 1999. ASA. https://www.asanet.org/sites/default/files/savvy/images/asa/docs/pdf/CodeofEthics.pdf

Association of Social Anthropologists[16] and the guidelines of the American Anthropological association[17]. I have followed an amalgam of these codes of research procedures strictly in the course of my field work bearing in mind that the "anthropological researcher must do everything in their power to ensure that their research does not harm the safety, dignity or privacy of the people with whom they work, conduct research" (Johansen and Aagaard-Hansen 2008, 17). Despite working in a time of global pandemic, following these codes of ethics have been helpful and reassuring.

At the beginning of my ethnographic fieldwork I had to deal with finding willing interviewees. This has not been easy at the beginning. I had to find interviewees who were willing to be interviewed. Patricia A. Marshall observes that "meeting requirement for informed consent and anonymity in anthropology is often difficult, given the immersive and exploratory nature of the anthropological research" (Marshall 2003, 263). Nevertheless, I made sure I secured the willing consent of every interviewee I interviewed. After a brief introduction of getting to know each other, I would explain to my potential interviewees the scope and "reach" of my ethnographic fieldwork including its methodology, objective and aims. After doing this I would request the potential interviewee to participate in the research with the assurance that her dignity and profile will be safe-guarded. Securing an informed consent has been the first step in my ethnographic interview process.

Moreover, I faced language barriers with some of my informants, especially those from West Africa who spoke French – very few knew Turkish. Most of my interviews were conducted in English, Somali and few in Swahili. Interestingly many interviewees would use Turkish phrases and words in the course of the interview. Somali being my mother tongue and Swahili being an official language in Kenya, I was versed in both languages. In some interviews, interviewees used Turkish, Arabic or other languages' words and phrase to express themselves more.

[16] For more on the Association of Social Anthropologists see, ''Ethical Guidelines Review Working Group'' 2019, https://theasa.org/ethics/

[17] See ''past statement on ethics'', American Anthropological Association (AAA), 2009 https://www.americananthro.org/ParticipateAndAdvocate/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=1656

Furthermore, gender was another issue I faced in the ethnographic process. Women who seemed elderly than me, seemed to be willing to be interviewed compared to younger women (women of my age-mate group). I had a feeling that younger women were more shy and reluctant to speak about themselves. Sagal and Khatra from Somalia, Blen from Ethiopia and Grace from South Sudan interviews and interaction are a good example. Although I contacted many young women through network of friends and other interviewees, few accepted to be interviewed. Yet interviewees like Mama Sifan, Ezichi, Caroline, Gina and Namwaya, who were my mother's age-mate or elder than me, were willing and forthcoming to talk about their life experience in Istanbul.

The other ethical consideration that I had was that of interviewee anonymity and confidentiality. Since my interviewees were Sub-Saharan African migrants who were transiting and living in Istanbul, I have categorically decided to not give their official given names. This will secure their profiles and confidentiality. Moreover, these were migrants who were seeking a better life in Europe and to safe-guard their names, dignity and privacy, I decided to inform them that they can withheld their names and hence use a pseudo-name or any other name of their choice. This option (of using a different name) actually made interviewees agree to the interviews and they seemed comfortable to share many intimate stories of their life with me – this strategy had a relaxing effect on interviewees I observed. Moreover, since these migrants were ambitious and wanted to travel to Europe in "illegal" means, safeguarding thier identities and personal information was necessary. To concluded this sub-section, the ethnographer "need to contemplate the messy, ambiguous and often-times uncomfortable dimensions of research ethics, lest we become complicit in building a discipline that is non-ethical or worse, un-ethical" (Fujii 2012, 717). To avoid such a scenario, I made sure an informed consent had been secured; interviewees' confidentiality, identity and dignity has been protected; finally, all necessary steps regarding social distancing during the Covid-19 global pandemic has been observed.

CHAPTER III

SOCIOLOGY OF MIGRATION AND REFUGEE STUDIES IN TURKEY: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN MIGRANTS IN ISTANBUL

For centuries (or even millenniums) Turkey (that is Anatolia – Asia minor- and Eastern Thrace) has been the destination of migration and refugees. Historically, from the Byzantium periods to the twenty-first century, Turkey has been receiving migrants incessantly and has been on the pathways of major migratory ways to Europe, Asia and beyond. In this chapter, which is the back-bone of my thesis project, theoretically and conceptually speaking, I will initiate the discussions with a conceptual analysis of the terms migrant and refugee, since they are used interchangeably – and sometimes confusing for many people. These are overlapping terms that are crucial to the understanding of the phenomena of human migration – they need to be unpacked and understood properly. Then I will offer a brief historical time-line of migration patterns in Turkey, especially Istanbul, using as a starting point the fifteen-century migration of Sephardic Jews into the Ottoman lands and conclude this sub-section with the Syrian migration in contemporary Turkey after 2012. Following this history of migration patterns, will be a critical review of literature on Sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey, with more focus on African migrants in Istanbul.

3.1. Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers: A Brief Conceptual Analysis

In his book *Migration in the World History* (2020), Patrick Manning observes how "Migration stems from the very core of human behaviour" (Manning 2020, 2). For him, people have been constantly migrating since time immemorial because of numerous different reasons. Indeed, migration, in the literal sense, is what humans do throughout their lives: we move from one city to another for education or work; we

visit other countries for holidays and vacations; while others migrate to other geographies and form colonies and diaspora communities. All these are acts of migration that people undertake in their lives. Furthermore, globalization and modernization have increased human migration on a global scale unfathomed by our ancestors who lived even one century ago – the technology and know-how of migration has become easily accessible and wide-spread. In their book, Megan Berthold and Kathryn Libal argue that "one of the most profound aspects of globalization in the early 21st century has been efforts of individual and families to migrate across borders seeking refuge, safety and corresponding economic stability" (Berthold and Libal 2019, 1). Hence, with globalization, human migration has phenomenally increased: modern means of transportation and communication have rendered migration possible and relatively faster. And today's economic upheaval would even render migrants citizens from the so-called developed world.

As argued above, migration is a historical and persistent human activity. Throughout human history "people have moved for economic, political and conflict and other reasons" (Runde at al 2019, 3). Consequently, this has produced migrants, refugees and asylum seekers – more so, in the last century in magnitude numbers. In her book *Human Migration: Investigate the Global Journey of Humankind* (2016) Judy Dodge Cummings refers to human migration as "the movement of people from one place to another" (Cummings 2016, 3).

Furthermore, Cummings offers conceptual analysis of four types of human migration throughout history: home-community migration; colonization; whole-community migration; and cross-community migration (Cummings 2016, 4-6). Home-community migration occurs when people or families migrate within their communities or familiar communal geographies; a good example whole would migrants from the different parts of Anatolia migrating to Istanbul. Another good example would be a Somali migrant from Djibouti migrating to the Somali region of Ethiopia or Kenya or to Somalia. Colonization migration occurs when settler peoples migrate to another unfamiliar geography for settlement. A good example would be the European settler migration to the new world – the Americas and Australia. Whole-community migration happens when a whole community migrants en masse to another geography. Finally, cross-community migration occurs when people or

families migrate to a whole new unfamiliar community, country or land. These typologies are significant since they differentiate and un-pack the migration phenomena. In my thesis project, cross-community migration is my sole focus, following Cummings migration typology.

Now that we have seen the different type of human migration, it would suffice to delve into the different categories or typologies of refugees. In his book, *What is a Refugee?* (2016) William Maley offers a brief definition of the different categories of migrants and refugees. There are four categories of refugees: regular refugees; irregular refugees; anticipatory refugees; and finally, acute refugees. Regular refugees and irregular refugees are opposite categories that encapsulate all categories of refugees: you are either a regular refugee or an irregular refugee. Regular refugees are refugees that have all the required legal documents in their migration from one country to another (Cummings 2016; Maley 2016). A good example would be the Turkish labour workers who migrated to West Germany in the 1960s and 1970s; or migrants who win resettlement through the legal asylum seeking process. However, the majority of refugees are irregular refugees: refugees with no proper legal documents of travel or settlement.

Furthermore, there are two interesting refugee categories: the anticipatory refugee and the acute refugee. Acute refugees are refugees who have been rendered refugees instantly by political and violent upheavals in their home countries leading to equally instant massive exodus of refugees (Maley 2016, 7). Refugees from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and many others from Sub-Saharan countries would fall under this category. Interestingly, most of acute refugees would also be irregular refugees since they mostly don't have proper legal documents due to their instant precarious condition. Anticipatory refugees are refugees, as William Maley puts it, as "people who see what is coming and get out before it is too late" (Maley 2016, 7). Hence, these are people who anticipate the trajectory of politics, economics or social upheaval in their home countries and migrate before it is too late to escape. Anticipatory refugees are refugees that escape a looming economic or political breakdown in their home countries; or they just migrate because of the dire political and economic situation in their countries is not favouring their situations. Anticipatory refugees could be regular refugees or irregular refugees depending on

their willingness or capacity to acquire legal travel documents. However, most professionals who migrate would fall under this category.

The categories of anticipatory refugees and acute refugees underline the precarious conditions of the migrants' decision to migrate. Throughout history and in many cases, "people both choose to leave home or are forced to leave home" (Runde at al 2019, 1). Furthermore, "desperate people move out of their desperation and often without alternatives, regardless of the barriers they encounter on the way" (Runde et al 2019, 1). Hence refugees are people seeking refuge from political violence or economic desperation in their homelands. Consequently, refugees automatically become migrants since they flee their homelands seeking refuge elsewhere – other countries. Both terms, refugee and migrant, are mutually inclusive terms that overlap. Moreover, migrants and refugees can also fall under the category of asylum seekers. William Maley underlines the similarities between a refugee and an asylum seeker: "a person can be both a refugee (on the basis of the circumstances surrounding his or her flight or exile) and an asylum seeker (seeking the protection of the authorities in a state which he or she is not a citizen)" (Maley 2016, 9). And of course, they are also a migrant since they left their home-country.

Nevertheless, an asylum seeker is a migrant or refugee who seeks protection through legal means in a country where he or she is not a citizen – a distinguishing factor from those migrants or refugee who do not seek legal protection. Moreover, Maley observes that an "asylum seeker is someone seeking to be recognized as a refugee" (Maley 2016, 9). The different categories of refugees and the different typologies of migrations indicate the complexities refugees/migrants/asylum seekers, humanitarian workers, border police and policy maker face in the understanding of the migrant condition vis-a-vis legal codes, lexicons and humanitarian statutory conventions. More interestingly, since through the media and socio-cultural discourses migrants are portrayed as destitute and desperate peoples, they can also be well-off people. Legally speaking the "figure" of the migrant is a complex being that the laws have to accommodate and "define" beyond legal considerations – for instance, sociologically and anthropologically. However, throughout my thesis project I will be using the general category of the migrant since it also accommodates the refugee and the

asylum seeker – moreover, my interviewees are people in transit in Istanbul, literally still in the course of migration.

3.2. Layers upon Layers: Historical Patterns of Migration in Istanbul

In this sub-section I will offer a historical account of the diverse of groups of migrants that flocked into Istanbul since the fifteenth century. these different waves of migrants include: Sephardic Jewish migrants in the fifteenth century; Muslim migrants from the Balkan regions during the Balkan wars and world war one; migrants from the rural Anatolian regions during the modernizations, industrialization and urbanizations periods of the 1950-1980s; migrants from the south-eastern Anatolian region in the 1980-1990s; Bulgarian migrants in the 1990s; migrants from the Caucasian and central Asian Turkic nations after the collapse of the Soviet Union; Migrants from Iran and Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war and after the American invasion in Iraq; and finally Syrian migrants after 2011. My aim here is to offer a time-line of the different migrant groups that come to Istanbul. Moreover, most of these migrants come to Istanbul under different circumstances and faced different challenges and benefits in Istanbul based on their unique conditions. Although sub-Saharan African migrants face their own unique and diverse conditions in Istanbul, a historical analysis of the different migrant groups in Istanbul will offer a general framework of analyzing migrant experiences historically in this migrant-welcoming city – and its spaces.

Although Istanbul – at that time Konstantinopolis – has been receiving migrants during the Byzantium era and even beyond that time, for the purpose of space and objective, I will stick to the city's more recent history and its encounters with migrants. There is abundant scholarly works on Sephardic Jews migrants seeking refuge in Istanbul in 1492, during the Ottoman Empire era. These accounts offer an explicit history and account of those migrations, and the challenges, risks and advantages that these migrants faced and encountered in Istanbul – which are quite similar to contemporary migrant circumstances although they have their own disparity of experiences. Sephardic Jews were facing executions and violence in the Iberian Peninsula – Spain and Portugal - and they had to seek a safe heaven. For them the Ottoman realms were more welcoming for a couple of reasons. First, "the

Ottoman Empire housed a more heterogeneous population than did Northern Europe" (Chazan 2018, 200). This diversity and plurality was also reflected in Istanbul. Although many of these migrants settled other cities and provinces of the Empire, Istanbul was their more preferred site due to its cultural diversity and its potential for economic prospects since most of these migrants were business people in the finance and trading sectors.

Moreover, "for these Jews expelled from Spain, the Mediterranean territories of the Ottoman Empire were climatically and physically familiar and thus congenial" (Chazan 2018, 200). Istanbul's climate and weather patterns seem to be tolerable to individuals than the extreme climatic regions of Europe. This makes the city habitable and migrants navigate their daily lives more easily. More importantly, the Ottoman state welcomed Sephardic Jews with open arms. These migrants received a warm welcome message from the Sultan himself who ordered his administration to assist them in all manners (Naar 2015, 180). For migrants this is crucial since their legal status as residents with "rights to the city" will enable them to navigate their lives in the new city (Lefebvre 1996, 158). Hence the Sephardic Jews encountered a more willing and welcoming Istanbul. Robert Chazan underlines that the Ottoman state's directives enabled the "successful accommodations of the refugees to their new environment" and their new livelihoods (Chazan 2018, 201). A city like Istanbul that is diverse and plural has its own neighbourhoods and social spaces that is already resided and claimed by different social groups who reside in these areas. The Ottoman state's willing to accommodate the Jewish migrants was crucial.

Social spaces and sphere are normally implicitly and explicitly contested between different social groups in the city of Istanbul and its suburbs (See Yücesoy 2008). In the likelihood of the arrival of migrants this is more acutely felt through exclusions and sometimes even through violent pogroms, violence and sometimes xenophobic attacks. Although such cases were avoided with the arrival of the Sephardic Jews migrants, their visibilities were rendered and marked as different. In this case, "Romaniote Jewish men usually wore yellow turbans, while newly arrived Sephardic Jews, who abandoned their Spanish costumes, wore officially assigned red hats shaped like sugar loaves" (Uluç 2013, 904). This rendering of host communities and newly arrived migrants' differences visible, marked the migrants as different and as

"outsiders". This could have a negative consequence for access or involvement in cultural, economic, political, and social spaces. Nevertheless, the Ottoman state at the time was successful in integrating the descendants of the Sephardic Jewish migrants into government positions and crucial business circles (Cohen 2012, 240). Moreover, the Sephardic Jews received enormous solidarity and assistance from the already established Ottoman Jewry in Istanbul.

Centuries later, Istanbul received a huge non-Turkish Muslim migrant population during the Balkan wars from the lost Balkan lands and Thracia. These Muslim migrants were escaping violence from nationalistic rebels that were fighting to end Ottoman rules in these lands. Hence, locals who converted to Islam and who were deemed to support Ottoman rule were targeted with violence and brutalities. And with Istanbul relatively close, Muslim refugees arrived in Istanbul en masses (Çalişkan et al 2019, 84-85). Over the course of the Balkan war and even during World War one, Istanbul continued to "gained many non-Turkish speaking Muslim groups from the former lands of the Ottoman Empire through migration and population exchange" (Geniş and Maynard 2009, 553). These new arrivals of migrants added unto the many layers of migrants in Istanbul. The city's cultural, ethnic, and artistic diversity continued to burgeon. These newly arrived migrants from the Balkan regions contributed to Istanbul's ever expanding residents who were ethically, religiously, economically diverse and the formations of new ethnic neighbourhoods and enclaves (Dündar 2001, Hirschon 2005 Tekeli 1990). Neighbourhoods like Arnavutköy (Albanian village) and Yenibosna (new Bosnia) derive their names from these early migrants.

Oktay Özel (2010) offers a historical and memoir account of these periods when Balkan migrants arrived in Istanbul and how tensions rose in some neighbourhoods concomitantly with solidarity and empathy in other neighbourhoods around Istanbul. Oktay Özel relays how Sephardic Jewish business tycoons and wealthy Armenians offered support and assistance to the newly arrived migrants. While some neighbourhoods were implicitly and structurally un-accessible to these new migrants, other neighbourhood were more welcoming (Özel 2010). During this time of war and migration "Istanbul's Jewish and Christian neighbourhoods were not segregated nor even exclusively non-Muslim" (Houston 2020, 52). Balkan migrants received

enormous help, assistance and solidarity since they were Muslims who were perceived to be persecuted by Christians. They were also viewed with sympathy and solidarity with the city's non-Muslim descendants of migrants.

Moreover, throughout the 80s and 90s Turkey received a diverse group of migrants from the then politically volatile Caucasian region, Iran and the newly independent post-soviet Turkic nations (Chochiev 2007; Rivetti 2013, 309; Zijlstra 2014; Duvell 2014; Özel 2010). In this period it also received migrants and refugees from the Balkans and Eastern European nations such as Moldova and Bulgaria (Parla 2009). Most of these migrants were economic migrants from the recent collapsed Soviet Union while others were seeking political asylum and security from persecutions in Bulgaria. These diverse groups of migrants from the Balkans come to Istanbul with hopes and zeal for a better life. While most assumed they would socially benefit from their Muslim and Turkic identity, they nevertheless faced precarious conditions economically and socially (Parla 2019). Istanbul was a space implicitly contested over by diverse migrants groups each with its own claim to identity, heritage, ownership and space.

Know that we have observed the Sephardic Jews and Muslim migrants from the Balkans, Caucasia and Central Asia into Istanbul it will suffice to touch upon Turkey's most significant and consequential migration in history: the migration in the 1980s and 1990s of Anatolian Kurds to Istanbul. However, this is not to say that there were no significant population of Kurds in Istanbul during the Republican era or during the Ottoman Empire; Kurds have been part and parcel of Istanbul's economic, cultural, spiritual and artistic spheres for centuries. Nevertheless, Istanbul received close to 3 million Kurdish internally displaced persons in the 1980s and 1990s (Kılıçaslan 2016, 82). Moreover, Ayşe B. Çelik estimates the Kurds who fled to Istanbul to be 4 million (2005, 140). Other Kurds who escaped the violence in the South-Eastern parts of Anatolia resettled in other major cities in the country. Apart from Istanbul, "the most crucial outcome of the forced migration is the resettlement of rural Kurdish people in major cities" (Göral 2016, 114). This was indeed a mass migration that had consequential impacts on the migrant families and their day-to-day lives. Karol Kaczorowski concludes that there are approximately "over 5 million

Turkish Kurds living outside the Eastern region of Anatolia" (Kaczorowski 2015, 348).

The violent confrontation between the Turkish state and the nationalist Kurdish rebels (the PKK terror groups) was the impetus behind the uprooting of these migrants from their familiar geographies, spaces, social and economic livelihoods. State violence and induced fear strategies by state security agencies forced these migrants to flee en masse (See Aras 2014; Aras 2019). In the South-Eastern Anatolian Kurdish region "in addition to extrajudicial execution and disappearances, the water ways of the Kurdish villages were diverted, leaving fields, animals and families without water" (Ahmetbeyzade 2007, 160). This caused an exodus into Turkey's other big cities. Due to the nature of the war in the region and the nationalistic discourses surrounding it, Kurdish migrants faced a hostile environment in big cities where they fled to seek refuge and normalcy for their families. While Kurds faced explicit and implicit exclusions and discriminations (Keyder 2006, Erder 1997) in Istanbul, they formed social networks of solidarity and associations that helped them in their existence in the big cities (Kılıçaslan 2016,Yükseker 2006, Aktan 2014, Yörük 2012). More importantly, these newly arrived migrants organically connected itself into the already established and thriving Istanbuliote Kurds (Çelik 2005).

Soon all over Istanbul, Kurdish majority neighbourhoods emerged. Neighbourhood "such as Ümraniye and Sultanbeyli on the Asian side, and Büyükçekmece, Küçükçekmece, Silivri, Esenler, Esenyurt, Gaziosmanpaşa, Avcılar and some parts of Taksim (Tarlabaşı) on the European side were suddenly populated with the new comers" (Çelik 2005, 143). With Istanbul population and demography becoming one-third Kurdish, the emergence of implicit and sometimes explicit social discrimination and racist violence emerged and become imbedded. Kurdish neighbourhood were marked and projected as dangerous zones and inaccessible to the supposedly 'native' Istanbuliotes. On the contrary, "Kurdish cites of urbanities" (Göral 2016, 119) emerged all over Istanbul with vibrant economic, social and cultural creativities. The arrival of the Kurdish migrants added another layer into Istanbul's long history of migrants. Nevertheless, "old urbanites still consider Kurdish ghettos (*Varoş*) dwellers as potential criminals and expose to them racist,

discriminatory practices" (Çelik 2005, 142). This is an indicator of a multi-faceted assumed ownership of Istanbul by 'old Istanbuliotes' and a contesting 'right to the city' on the side of the new comers.

Migrants face all sorts and climes of discriminations and violence no matter where – especially in big metropolitan cities that are highly contested. They also develop solidarity and sometimes contesting networks amongst themselves and the host communities that they live with. More recently Istanbul has witnessed the arrival of Syrian Arabs, Turkmen, and Kurds – this, I myself was also a witness to. Due to the political nature of the Syrian civil war and its geopolitical conundrum of which Turkey is part of, Syrian migrants have faced the most discriminatory and racist attitudes in all over Turkey, especially in the journalistic media and in social media (Erdoğan 2014, Yıldız and Uzgören 2016, Doğanay and Keneş 2016). To be clear, the Turkish state and society stood in with solidarity with the Syrian migrants – which is commended all over the world and in the Turkish media. But also, Syrian migrants faced a hostile and excluding social urban spaces and cities all over Turkey. Cenk Saraçoğlu and Daniele Belenger (2019) have documented the rise of xenophobic attacks against Syrian migrants in Izmir and all over Turkey. This underlines the precarious lives that migrants face in cities all over Turkey and in the world in general. Similarly, my interviewees throughout the ethnographic fieldwork relayed to me stories similar in substance to the stories of the Sephardic Jews, Balkan Muslim migrants, internally displaced Kurds and recently migrating Syrian citizens of all ethnicities and religious denominations.

3.3. A Critical Review of Literature on Sub-Saharan African Migrants in Istanbul

Over the years, Istanbul has become one of the most significant cities in the migrant routes: migrants from Africa and Asia have seen Istanbul, which is close to the Greek and Bulgarian borders, as a gate way into Europe. Consequently, you will see migrants from different countries, some as far from Mongolia and Zambia in Istanbul waiting their moment of luck to cross the Greek or Bulgarian border. This has attracted journalists, politicians, humanitarian workers and academics attentions and interests alike. If you search the term ''migrants in Istanbul'' in google search engine

you will get five million results, of which the majority is journalistic and media contents. This underlines the interest of the media regarding migrants. Moreover, uncountable academic papers and numerous book chapters have been written about migrants in Istanbul, underlining the burgeoning academic interest of the city and its migrants. Nevertheless, since my aim is to offer an ethnographic study of Sub-Saharan African migrants, in this sub-section I will conduct a critical review of literature on Sub-Saharan African migrants.

To begin with, Sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul (and Turkey) have received the least academic and scholarly research attention in comparison with migrants from Asia. However, paradoxically, they have received disproportionate media attention with captivating titles – listing these media publication is near impossible. Mahir Şaul states that "sub-Saharan African migration in Turkey developed full-fledged in the past 15 years" (Şaul 2014, 143). Hence, from 2000 to 2015 sub-Saharan African migrant have flocked to Turkey, Istanbul in particular, and their visibility in urban commercial centres increased. More crucially, observing the literature on African migrants, the last five years have seen a steep increase in academic and scholarly attention. Kristen Biehl observes how "academic interest in studying mobility patterns and experiences of different migrant groups living in or transiting through Istanbul has also grown" (Biehl 2015, 597). One of the prime objectives of this ethnographic project is to contribute to this burgeoning field as a pioneering insider and researcher.

Over the years the scholarly and academic publications on sub-Saharan African migrants have increased steadily. These include country specific studies (Cham 2016), policy formulation oriented studies (Mavric 2016; Mohammed 2017), ethnographic account (Uçar 2020) and a political science thesis on sub-Saharan African migrants (Mardesic 2014). However, MahirŞaul observes that "some of the emerging literature on sub-Saharan migrants in Turkey has the marks of the asylum seeker/refugee problematic and national security perspective" (Şaul 2014, 147). Indeed, doing a literature review on this subject will bring to your attention the prevalence of two perspectives, as Şaul observed: the assumptions of sub-Saharan African migrants as destitute and desperate in need of incessant humanitarian assistance; and the national and social security threat-laden discourses, approaches

and perspectives. To be clear, most of the sub-Saharan African migrants need assistance, solidarity and support in Istanbul.

Nevertheless, this should not be defining their overall condition, life stories, experiences and more so, their agency and will to prosper against all odds as migrants. While the majority of the literature is contributed in good faith, nevertheless, the agency and voices of the migrants is rendered a background instead of acquiring primacy and foreground in these studies. My aim is to offer a more substantial ethnography with contextualized and nuanced narratives. The French Anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss rebuked how the majority of ethnographers and researcher share their ethnographic findings in "either a fleeting or a lasting manner" (Levi-Strauss 1976, 7) with the readers. While my ethnographic project might not have a "lasting" impact, I will definitely avoid offering "fleeting" accounts of the subject matter. I aspire to contribute an ethnography that is more substantial in depth and narratives and full with life-stories and life-experiences.

In many cases the majority of the literature essentialize and reduce sub-Saharan African migrants' conditions into one conceptual narrative or perspective. Yasır Bodur's thesis on Sub-Saharan African migrants in Tarlabaşı, Kurtuluş, Feriköy and Aksaray deals rigorously and excellently with the migrants' economic conditions and the poverty they face on daily basis (Bodur 2020). Indeed sub-Saharan African migrants face dire economic conditions and Bodur has conducted an insightful analysis of these economic situations. However, the economic precarity is one in a network of other conditions that migrants deal with on daily basis: social issues; legal issues; gender and racial issues; and even religious and spiritual concerns and needs.

Although Yasır Bodur focuses on economic issues and poverty and hence contributing to the literature, other aspects of life escape from this scope and analysis. Moreover, this implicitly undermines the sub-Saharan African migrants' capacities and strategies of surviving socially and economically through legal and illegal means despite economic hardships. Although Yasir Bodur conducted an excellent 69 ethnographic interviews, these stories have been framed and relayed with a discourse that over-emphasises or considers the migrants' presupposed and assumed economic poverty and destitutions, forgetting the human strategies of

survival, perseverance and dynamism. Furthermore, poverty and economic issues are not primary in my view when "illegality" looms over your head. The sub-Saharan African migrants' struggles, resilience, economic persistence and will to survive has been shadowed by presuppositions about African migrants' poverty and vulnerability forgetting their coping and counteracting strategies to these situations. Moreover, sub-Saharan African migrants have diverse economic conditions: some are well-connected and economically stable while others live in destitution and poverty.

Furthermore, the bulk of the literature on sub-Saharan African migrant adopt a national security perspective: that is, propagating discourses and perspectives that are laden with national security concerns like refugee violence, prostitution, drug-trafficking, and other social insecurities in their host communities (see Çarmıklı et al 2016). A good example is the fear and insecurity engendered by Bulgarian and Iraqi migrants and the subsequent media discourses that followed their arrival and presence in Turkey (Daniş and Parla 2009, 140). Here I totally agree with Mahir Şaul. However, there are more subtle problematic of the literature on Sub-Saharan African migrants. First of all, most of the literature (Bodur 2020; De Clerck 2013; Şimşek 2019; Wissink and Mazzucato 2018) approach sub-Saharan African migrants as a homogenous group, consequently failing to grasp the intricate minute dynamics of language, ethnicity, religion, culture, tribe and country in the course of their scholarly analysis and ethnographies.

Furthermore, the homogeneity approach inherent in the literature, produces and sediments assumptions and essentialist views about the Sub-Saharan African migrants. Unfortunately, this approach de-centres and marginalizes the complexities that underpin migrants' lived experiences, their socio-economic conditions and the world-views that inform their approach to and understanding of social life. Homogenizing the African migrants' conditions and experiences will render the final scholarly out-put dry, un-nuanced and superficial at best. Moreover, sub-Saharan African migrants' racial visibility has rendered them vulnerable to generalizing and homogenizing tropes since they are all considered as one unique group (See İçduygu 1996; Jackson 2012). This racial categorization of sub-Saharan African migrants as one category has considerably suppressed the diversity and heterogeneity within sub-Saharan Africans.

Omar N. Cham in his graduate thesis *African Migrants in Turkey: A Case Study of Senegalese Migrants in Istanbul* (2016) focuses explicitly on migrants from his native country, Senegal. Cham conducted interviews with eighteen Senegalese migrants in Istanbul in the course of his fieldworks (Cham 2016, 3). Although he offers explanations for why Senegalese migrants leave their home countries I found them to be secondary-factors and not dealing with the primary structural issues that force people to leave their countries: such as underlying issues like post-colonial state incapacity, political violence, rising unemployment, France's economic hegemony in Senegal and the growing youth population. Moreover, while he offers migrants' accounts of life in Istanbul (Cham 2016, 59-65) their voices and testimonies about life in Istanbul, a detail accounts that is comprehensive is not availed to the reader: how can only six pages accommodate the life experiences and life stories of eighteen interviewed migrants?

Nevertheless, Cham touches upon how Senegalese migrants live in fear (Cham 2016, 65) and how they face racism and discrimination on a daily basis – some explicit, other subtle (Cham 2016, 53). Senegalese migrants comprise a huge part of sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul. They operate their own restaurants in Aksaray, have their own Sufi *dergah* (prayers and meditations space) and annually conduct football tournaments in coordination with the municipality – I have personally participated in the football tournament. Although Omar N. Cham offers a perspective on Senegalese migrants as an insider, their life experiences and conditions in Istanbul were not relayed in detailed and comprehensively: only in six pages do where hear the voices, narratives and life-experiences of the interviewees.

Zulkarnain Mohamed's graduate thesis *The Plight of African Migrants in Istanbul in the Wake of the Syrian Refugee Crisis* (2017) was the shortest in scope thesis study on sub-Saharan African migrant in Istanbul: it consisted of forty-nine pages. Although Mohammed conducted forty-four interviews with sub-Saharan African migrants (Mohammed 2017, 31) their life stories and experiences in Istanbul have been rendered abstract and reduced to few referenced lines. Indeed, after conducting forty four interviews, one would expect a long and stimulating life stories about sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul, but this was not the case in this thesis project.

The biographical life stories, life conditions, and life experiences of the interviewees' seems not to be considered fully and comprehensively. Moreover, while Mohammed aspires to capture the reasons why sub-Saharan African migrants migrate from Africa (Mohammed 2017, 6) clear reasons of the underling structural factors is not abundantly offered to the reader – a similarity he shares with Cham's thesis project. The instigating factors that produce migration such as violence, unemployment, population increase, environmental degradations, human smuggling and transportation and the allure of life in Europe are not elaborated. Furthermore, how the Syrian migration crisis in 2015 affected sub-Saharan African migrants' life in Istanbul is not made clear, and how do they have a cause-effect relationship that has an impact? How did the Syrian migration into Turkey, and Istanbul in particular, affected sub-Saharan African migrants life conditions and situations? Did the Syrian migration crisis positively or negatively affect the sub-Saharan African migrants conditions and how?

The core issue of my thesis is to offer a voice and agency to the sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul. As an ethnographic project, my objective is to critically, objectively, contextually and in a nuanced manner to capture the life experiences of African migrants in Istanbul. Cham (2016), Bodur (2020) and Mohammed (2017) offer crucial studies and perspectives on sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul. With few relayed ethnographic interviews and participant observations, most studies frame the sub-Saharan African migrant as an abstract figure to be studied and hence divorced from their complex social, political, global and community context. The significance of my study is that it offers a three staged ethnographic analysis of the sub-Saharan African migrants: life at home and why they migrate; the long journey towards Istanbul; and finally, life experiences and challenges in Istanbul and their wait as they try to go to Europe.

Hence I aspire to offer a holistic analysis of the sub-Saharan African transit migrants' conditions in Istanbul – while building on the previous literature and interviewees' narratives. It is beyond my imagination how someone can analyse and write about a group of people or community without analysing and observing the underlying structural issues that produce, shape and sustain this group of peoples' lives and life-circumstances. What conditions and circumstances have forced these migrants from

their home countries and brought them to Istanbul? What are they seeking in Istanbul and beyond, that they don't have in their home countries? Although there is no single answer to these questions, a sociological, historical and anthropological analysis of sub-Saharan African countries is essential and necessary – with a clear focus on the modern post-colonial state.

Bartola Mavric's graduate thesis *African Migrants in Istanbul: Toward Socio-Economic Assessment* (2016) is one of the most unreasonable and uncritical studies conducted about sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey. Throughout the whole thesis, we only hear the voices of only four migrants, all captured in less than five paragraphs. Mavric aspires to offer accounts about the residence, work and socio-economic situation of migrants in Istanbul (Mavric 2016, 58-70), yet the readers will find hard to find both the factors that shape these situations, and the migrants' views, voices and opinions on these issues. Moreover, the identity of a sex worker and her pictures are offered in the work (Mavric 2016, 46). Even if the interviewee consented to them, a disregard to their human dignity and self-esteem is implicit in this crucial detail. The researcher indeed has a responsibility to safe-guard and protect her interviewee's dignity and identity even if they are irresponsible and un-caring about themselves.

On the other hand, Sonja Mardesic's thesis *Bringing Agency back in: The Case of sub-Saharan African Migrants in Istanbul* (Mardesic, 2014) offers an excellent ethnographic account about the life experiences of sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul. Sonja conducted forty interviews. More crucially she states, "I conducted most interviews in French or English and had Somali and Amharic translators for most of the interviews" (Mardesic 2014, 50). She relays how she faced challenges in getting willing interviewees and the language barriers she faced during the fieldwork. However, in her sub-chapter "Affecting structures back at home" (Mardesic 2014, 122) that deals with why sub-Saharan African migrant, she offers generalities and abstractions on why Africans migrate. She doesn't delve in the post-colonial state building efforts and challenges that mired most of these sub-Saharan African states; the root causes of ethno-tribal political and state violence are lacking; and most crucially, the hopelessness and unemployment of youth and Africa's population

explosion which play a consequential role in migration are not dealt with in the overall analysis.

Moreover, Mavric (2016) and Mardesic (2014) studies have the mark of what MahirŞaul calls asylum seeker/refugee problematic and security perspective. While both writers offer insights for policy orientations and formulations on how to deal with or assist sub-Saharan African migrants, they come short in capturing holistically the sub-Saharan African migrants' conditions and tribulation. Mardesic also over emphasises the role of non-governmental organizations that deal with sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul; the migrants' perspectives on this issue is also absent and lacking. In my ethnographic process, migrants only mentioned Urfali Mehmet and some had no idea about the existence of non-governmental organizations assisting migrants. Moreover, most NGOs deal with asylum seeking process and have low capacity in assisting transit migrants. Bodur (2020), Mavric (2016), Mardesic (2014), Cham (2016) and Mohammed (2017) graduate thesis offer unique insights and perspectives in different degrees of depth and length into the life experiences and conditions of sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul.

In a parallel manner, my thesis project most crucial aim is to offer a holistic and comprehensive ethnographic analysis of sub-Saharan African migrants' life experiences in Istanbul and beyond: structural post-colonial circumstances that shape life and migration in sub-Saharan Africa; and the long and precarious journey to Istanbul and the prospect of travelling to Greece or Bulgaria under dangerous circumstances. In my view, such a broad and nuanced undertaking will comprehensively capture the life-stories and life-experiences of African migrants in Istanbul. Although my thesis project has its own assumptions, biases and short-comings, I am aspiring to offer a framework on how to approach sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul; one that includes post-colonial history in Africa and how it causes migrations, the long journeys migrants take to Istanbul and other destinations and finally their life stories and life experiences in Istanbul.

In her Doctoral dissertation *Differentiation and Integration process of African Migrants in Globalization Period: The Case of Istanbul* (2020) Nazli Uçar conducted only twenty two ethnographic interviews (Uçar 2020, 43). She offered the life-

experiences of sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul with a specific focus on how they integrated and also get marginalized in the Turkish social life. Nazli Uçar conducted an Anthropological ethnographic fieldwork using translators and friends to access sub-Saharan African migrants' spaces in Istanbul. However, in the aspirations of capturing their life experiences in Istanbul and factors forcing migrants to leave their homelands she offered thematic and theoretical analysis of why African leave their home countries.

In her chapter titled, "Karakita Afrika ve Türkiye İlişkileri" (The Black continent of Africa and its relations with Turkey) (Uçar 2020, 51-65) which I assume is the section of her dissertation dealing with why sub-Saharan African migrants leave their home countries – since there is no other chapter or section dealing with sub-Saharan Africa – she delves into the history of slavery, colonization and the Ottomans political excursions attempts into the continent. How the history of slavery, colonization and the Ottoman Empire's presence in Africa is producing migrants who live in Istanbul today is not made clear?

What forces sub-Saharan African migrants to migrate, or why sub-Sahara Africa produces migrants, is lacking in the whole dissertation except a mention of slavery, colonization and Ottoman rule in North Africa – and their impact and role in migration is not clearly explicated. How does the Ottoman history in Africa have a cause-effect relationship with migration and migrants in Istanbul? The dissertation suffers from an approach and conceptual analysis that many scholarly works about sub-Sahara Africa suffer from: over-emphasising slavery and colonization in Africa (subduing other sociological, anthropological and political issues) with no insight into the contexts and diverse patterns of histories, resilience, resistance and cooperation that occurred in the continent; the allure of imperial historical legacy of foreign powers out-side Africa and viewing the whole African continent as a homogenous entity that is easily discernible and understandable. Still, how is the Ottoman presence in Africa related to sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul transiting into Europe?

More crucially, the positionality of the researcher as an insider or as an outsider plays a critical role in the ethnographic fieldwork and the analysis of the ultimate scholarly

out-put. This positionality is played out in the inter-subjective interviews which will definitely have an impact on how the researcher analyses and configures his or her ethnographic data and material. My positionality as an African has privileged me to access intimate life stories and spaces that houses migrants; furthermore, as an African I do have a relatively more intricate understanding of the migrants' socio-economic conditions and dynamics that play out in their lives in Istanbul. Lynn Abrams states that positionality plays a critical role in the stories and interviews: different interviewers depending on their positionality will solicit different stories or different versions of a story from the same interlocutors (Abrams 2010, 54).

Furthermore, "many life stories lose some of their value because the field-worker lacks sufficient knowledge of the communities or culture" (Mintz 1979, 20) of the interviewee. Hence, due to the positionality as outsiders and the lack of knowledge about interviewees' home culture or country, all the literature on Sub-Saharan African migrants suffers from different degrees of biases, assumptions, essentialism, asylum seekers/refugee problematic and national security perspective. The field of sub-Saharan African migrants is expanding and all the existing literatures are significant but as pioneers, struggle with the subject matter is inevitable. This ethnography aspires to rectify all these short-comings – if it can live up to its goals and agenda. However, as an African, my positionality as an insider can also lead to biases, assumptions and exaggerated analysis. Hence my insider positionality has its own disadvantages and advantages and I have to be cautious and careful of this complexity as well.

CHAPTER IV

LEAVING HOME: THE FAILURE OF THE POST-COLONIAL SOCIAL CONTRACT IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

The post-colonial African state building efforts had hit a wall: the continent is witnessing incessant numerous coups, civil wars, ethno-communal violence, elite fragmentations, state failure, violent totalitarian regimes, massacres, genocides and unprecedented corruption and lootings that persist even today. This has produced a complex situation that produced indifference, hopelessness, resistance or utter disregard to the post-colonial state by the majority of the citizens – some even resort to indigenous traditional institutions to solve their day-to-day social and political life.

Despite its functionality at many levels, the post-colonial state in Africa is understood, conceptualized and instrumentalized differently: it contests for legitimacy and political sovereignty alongside embedded ethno-tribal political king – pings, ethnic identities that undermine national civic patriotisms and traditional political authorities as in the case of Ghana, Nigeria, Somalia and Ethiopia. This has rendered the post-colonial state a failure. Consequently, its capacity to secure internal security has been weakened; ethnic mobilisation is rampant with deadly ends; state institutions have been informalized (and tribalised); corruption and lootings are wide-spread. This is the background that generates migrations from Africa and a nuanced understanding of these complex conditions is essential to any ethnographic study of sub-Saharan African migrants all over the world. In his book *Secure the Base: Makıng Afrıca Visible on the Globe* the Kenyan renown writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o laments the consequences of many African countries dictatorships and violence, but hopes the future looks bright with African youths aspirations for better lives who will revolutionize the whole continent (Thiong'o 2016, 1-24). Although Ngugi is optimistic about the whole continent, the reality on the ground reflects dire situations.

In this chapter, we will meet Yordanos, Mekdes, Tilfe and Abdiaziz from Ethiopia, Christopher from Uganda, William from Tanzania, Xareed from Somalia and Abdoulaye from Senegal who will all relate to us their life stories in their home countries and why they decided to leave and migrant. Their testimonies portray migrants escaping violence, economic destitution, wide-spread unemployment and the will to seek better life elsewhere in our globally networked humanity.

Moreover, analysing closely, I would argue that at the foundation of migrations out of sub-Saharan African is a failed post-colonial state-building experience. Catherine Coquery-Vidvovitch posits that "the upheavals in Africa today occur too frequently to be merely the result of chance" (Coquery-Vidvovitch 1988, 1) three decades ago. Indeed, they are not the result of mere chance: Africa has a structural problem at its foundations – that is, a dysfunctional, failed, ethnically divided with incompetent institutions and inefficient state capacity but with meagre success stories here and there. The imposed colonial states, which were originally constructed for colonization and violence, are incompatible to Africa's long socio-political heritage, political memory and ethno-communal diversity and its historical socio-political arrangements that existed in pre-colonial Africa.

4.1. Post-Colonial State Failure in Sub-Saharan Africa

Responding to my questions on why they decided to leave their home countries, Christopher and Abdiaziz (whom we will meet later in this chapter alongside other interlocutors) gave coincidently similar answers using almost similar phrases respectively: "*there was nothing there. I had to leave"*; "*nothing left for me in my country. I had to leave"*. Indeed, most of the testimonies of my ethnographic interlocutors painted their home countries' situations as unbearable in terms devastating economic or political upheavals – I can personally corroborate their testimonies: numerous relatives and friends advised me to not come back home and wished that I should go to further better places in Europe or Northern America. Such is the perverse sentiment among the multitudes.

This paints sub-Saharan Africa as a place with dire economic, social and political conditions. In their book *Making Africa Work: A Handbook* (2017) G. Mills, J.

Herbst, O. Obasanjo (former president of Nigeria) and D. Davis prophesize that Africa is a continent that "faces a difficult, possibly a disastrous future" (Mills et al 2017, 1) if actions aren't taken as soon as possible. Indeed, the continent and its inhabitants are already facing these disasters I would argue: from political upheavals, population explosion to underemployed youths. Moreover, they offer prescriptions that emphasises on good leadership and service delivery (Miller et al 2017, 213), use of technology in agriculture to feed the whole continent (Miller et al 2017, 91), improvement of infrastructure in the connecting and integrating the continent economically and socially (Miller et al 2017, 68) and finally entrenching democratic culture in the political sphere (Miller et al 2017, 45).

However, although these political prescriptions are in good faith, sub-Saharan Africa has a long way to achieve all these structural improvements. Already we are witnessing sub-Saharan Africans migrating in flock to Europe, America and Asia escaping economic destitution, social breakdowns and political mismanagement. Sub-Saharan African has a structural problem: "many parts of Africa are characterised by weak states" (Chingono and Lamb 2014, 19) coupled with bad governance and corruption. Furthermore, the "African state is a weak organization in terms of efficient social delivery" (Animashaun 2009, 48) to its citizens. Hence, how can states that are weak in terms of organization, and struggle with efficiency implement the aforementioned prescriptions to alleviate their populations of poverty, famines and unemployment?

Sub-Saharan African is in a big quagmire: the post-colonial states that gained independence in the 60s, 70s and 80s could be deemed as a failure. Indeed, numerous scholars are studying the failure of the post-colonial nation-states in sub-Saharan African and why they are unfolding in dramatic and tragic ways (Scott 2017; Jeffrey and Mills 2012; Jeffrey and Mills 2007; Coquery-Vidvovitch 1988; Coquery-Vidvovitch 1999; Kaplan 1994; Chabal and Daloz 1999; Bates 2008; Mamdani 2010; Mamdani 2018). Then, the question is, has the post-colonial African state building experiment failed? Has this failure instigated an exodus of young and old African migrants from the continent to all over the world? My short answer is yes. The long answer is this ethnographic study of sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul – who are far away from their countries seeking better livelihoods in foreign countries.

Since independence, in Sub-Saharan Africa the post-colonial state formations have come to be accepted as norm and given (Scott 2017, 8). In many African countries independence from colonial powers was a respite from colonization and domination. However, historically, sub-Saharan Africa "inherited embryonic administrative networks from the colonial authorities" (Joseph and Herbst 1997, 177) and hence the post-colonial state in African is administratively speaking a continuation of the colonial legacy. Interesting, and historically speaking, these post-colonial states were "imposed and organized from outside" (Scott 2017, 13) by the European powers giving Africans little say in their foundations and constructions as modern nation-states.

After independence many African leaders ruled over states that were organically and administratively "colonial" and unsuitable for independent and thriving Africa. Moreover, the colonial states that the European constructed weren't meant to be run smoothly in a civilian way: they were predicated upon violence and coercion. Catherine Scott argues in her book *State Failure in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Crisis of Post-Colonial Order* that African "colonies were never intended to be entities for themselves and were certainly never envisioned as proto-states" (Scott 2017, 20). Hence, the post-colonial African state was initially intended for social exploitation and mass murders not to organize society efficiently. Interestingly, the bureaucratic traditions, state organizations and constitutional cultures of many African colonies are still intact and implement in many sub-Saharan African countries – a continuation of the colonial legacy, and good example is police and military brutalities.

Post-colonial African states have numerous structural challenges that undermine state functions and hinder the states' social service deliveries – hence rendering many post-colonial African states as failed states. As a many as 53 African states are affected by conflicts; 40% of the sub-Saharan 600 million people exist on less than 1 USD per day; sub-Sahara has countries with "weak, imperfect and mutating state formations" (Herbst and Mills 2007, 1-5). Moreover, most of these countries have undergone abrupt transformations that the rural, agricultural and pastoralist African societies were unprepared for (Coquery-Vidvovitch 1988, 49) leading to acute tribalism, contestation and contradictions in the state functions (Coquery-Vidvovitch

1988, 85) and ultimately causing revolts, resistances and political uprisings and secessions in many sub-Saharan African countries (Mamdani 2010, 231; Coquery-Vidvovitch 1988, 168). The destructions of the traditional indigenous socio-political arrangements of many African societies by the European colonialist administrations opened Pandora boxes that the post-colonial constructed states could not handle properly or have no capacity to ameliorate.

First of all, the post-colonial African states faced numerous challenges in state building processes since the traditional political system were destroyed by colonialists. Consequently, borderlines, citizenships, national identity and migration policies become enormous challenges for post-colonial African states (Herbst 2000, 227). Borderlines dividing ethnic groups lead to wars and secessionist political uprisings, citizenships were contested since many communities practised a nomadic way of life. Appropriately, many of the structural issues that rendered many African states as a failure have their roots in the inherited colonial political structures (Chingono and Lamb 2014, 53).

The post-colonial African state formation, structure and organisation is not nuanced and appropriated to the sociological and anthropological contexts and histories of all African societies and communities. It was intended as a tool of domination and not governance. Consequently, the post-colonial African state (the majority of them indeed) "has been the theatre of numerous armed conflicts and state failure" (Wai 2012, 29). Political elites and ethnic group contestations over power in the newly formed post-colonial African states wreak havoc in many regions of the continent: Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, South Sudan, DRC Congo, Rwanda, Nigeria, Uganda, Sierra Leon, Chad to mention few. Consequently, since gaining independence from the colonialist, many post-colonial African states witnessed elite fragmentations, state informalization through tribalism, leading to overall state failure and dysfunction (Mamdani 2010, 145-206; Branch and Cheeseman 2009, 5-13).

This has led to migrations, wars and atrocities, corruptions and mismanagements of resources that disheartened many citizens, youths in particular. One of my interlocutors, William from Tanzania whom we will meet later, complained about

few elites benefiting from state resources rendering the rest of the population destitute. Using the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe's (1930-2013) famous phrase "*things fall apart"*, Robert Bates delineates in his book *When Things Fall Apart: State Failure in Late-Century Africa* (2008) how the post-colonial African state is a failure producing life-altering social inequalities, violence, refugees and migrations in the continent and beyond. Nevertheless, social and political disorders have been normalised and become political instruments of control and terror in Africa (Chabal and Daloz 1999). This has led to military coups and regime that are tyrannical and totalitarian, leading to political exiles and migrations. Moreover, these states struggle in maintaining peace and security within their borders amid raging communal and ethnic tensions and violence (Wai 2012, 30).

The post-colonial African state is a dysfunctional modern state. Structurally and administratively it is predicated on the legacy of colonization. The post-colonial African state which regulates the youngest and second largest population in the world is unravelling (Scott 2017, 167). It is unravelling in a dismal and tragic manner: through state violence, ethnic violence, environmental catastrophes, political violence, diseases and disasters, and finally, brain drain and migrations for those who can escape. The post-colonial African condition is tainted with paradoxes and contradictions, which are the products of the legacy of colonialism, which have stunted the growth of African societies (Mazrui 1978; Mazrui 1980; Mazrui 2004).

The post-colonial social contract in Africa is weakening and withering into thin air. Was there a socio-political contract given the colonial imposition of states, ideologies and borders since independence? The states are a failure and dysfunctional in the face of population explosions, youths unemployment, environmental degradations, violence and radicalism. This is leading to massive brain drains and migrations from sub-Saharan African countries. This thesis aspires to capture the life stories of the sub-Saharan African migrant who left Africa due to state failure, economic destitutions, lack of hope and future, and violence and transiting through Istanbul to Europe or to death.

4.2. Escaping Hopelessness and Unemployment in Sub-Saharan Africa

Widespread unemployment and lack of entrepreneurial opportunities have occasioned equally widespread hopelessness in the future and faith in their governments among millions of sub-Saharan African youths. Consequently, this has led to ‘‘escaping’’ sub-Saharan Africa through migrations as workers and refugees. The Middle-East Arab states receive hundreds of thousands of sub-Saharan African migrants as domestic labour and as workers in the service industry (See Pelican 2014; Moors and De Regt 2008). Migrants are escaping hopeless sub-Saharan African countries in what is reminiscent of what Jacque Roland calls “getting out of being by a new path” (Levinas 2003, 3). Migrants are seeking new paths so that they can escape their dire and limiting social, economical and political conditions.

While Emmanuel Levinas is interested in the phenomenological and ontological escape from pleasure, boredom and purposelessness by being in the western world hedonistic and materialistic cultural attitudes (Levinas 2003); for me, I conceptualize escape as means for a new being, a new possibility for the sub-Saharan African migrant escaping violence, unemployment, economic degradation and hopelessness. The sub-Saharan African migrants’ escape is totally different from Emmanuel Levinas ideation of escape – they are diagonally opposite. Although they are both existential escapes, their underlying reasons are different. Here, the migrant doesn’t escape her being; she is escaping to better her being; it is not negating the being; it is opening new paths and trajectories of hope for the being. This is the escape of the sub-Saharan African migrant who leaves home.

In the film *2067* (2020) directed by Seth Larney, at the introductory monologue, the speaker listing the effects of climate change includes as interesting phrase: “overpopulation in the Middle East and Africa is now catastrophic”. Interestingly, decades ago, in 1994, at the height of the Soviet Union collapse and the assumed victory of the liberal and capitalist global order, Robert Kaplan heralded that there was a “coming anarchy” brewing in Africa and in many developing countries (Kaplan 1994). This anarchy will be a product of hopelessness and uncertainties occasioned by rural to urban migrations, over-crowded cities, rising unemployment,

population explosions, climate change and ultimately socio-political instabilities in the third world, African countries in particular.

At this moment in history, where nativist nationalism is on the rise in the Western world and the migration crisis in Europe and the Americas, one can argue that Kaplan's prophesy is a grim reality today. Migration out of Africa is incessantly increasing. In the continent, young people are growing hopeless in the future and in their dreams, causing migrations, mental health problems and out-right anarchy, radicalism and violence. In this sub-section, I will discuss issues of over-population in Africa, the impact of climate change on lives, unemployment and violence which are the main factors producing migrants to mention just a few.

Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest fertility rate in the world (Lura 1985). This is related to facts that there is a prevalent culture that promotes and hold-dear to young-age marriages throughout the continent. From my own personal experience, I had friends who got married after we graduated from primary school before even proceeding to high school education – and they were not one or two. This led to population explosions with no government policy and plan to anticipate human capital development. Indeed, "in the 1950, the population of Africa comprised about 7% of the global total. By 2050, the equivalent population will be 22%" (Cleland and Machiyama 2017, 264). This is a population increase that is unprecedented and which many African countries will struggle to deal with. A good example is Nigeria and Ethiopia, which are relatively politically stable, but producing migrants disproportionately in comparison to states facing political violence. More interestingly, "a rapid population increase is anticipated even if there is a substantial reduction of fertility" (Population council 2015, 558) in the continent. This underlines that Sub-Saharan Africa's population will steadily increase over the years. Consequently, this population explosion in Sub-Saharan Africa will negatively impact human capital formations which will directly produce inequality and increased poverty in many countries (Cleland and Machiyama 2017, 269). Overpopulation leads to a situation where resources are scares and this produced poverty and destitution. Furthermore, this population increase, if not anticipated with effective government policies, which will have a negative impact on food security, the agricultural productions and the ecosystems of the habitats. Slums and outskirt

make-shift neighbourhoods dot all over many African cities and towns – just bring to your mental eyes the slums in Nairobi or Johannesburg. This is a direct consequence of unregulated and an-anticipated population increase. Moreover, population increase also had led to massive migrations in sub-Saharan Africa over the years (Salinari and De Santis 2013). Increase in populations, coupled with meagre resources and opportunities lead to migrations as people seek better livelihoods and opportunities. This led to abandoned villages and over-crowded cities and capital cities with disproportionate young populations and stringent social services.

More crucially, Africa is witnessing a cataclysmic climate change that is transforming the natural ecosystems of the continent. Consequently, this climate change has adversely affected whole habitats and their populations. Interestingly, "9 of the 10 most climate change vulnerable states are in sub-Saharan Africa" (Madeira 2019, 1) hence endangering whole populations and societies while African is the least contributor of dangerous gases that alter the atmosphere. The majority of the Sub-Saharan African populations heavily depend on agriculture and rainfalls for subsistence and survival. Hence, climate change will alter traditional livelihoods and survival mechanisms.

Moreover, agriculture and nomadic pastoralism, Africa's main economic activities, depend heavily on rainfalls in the rainy seasons. Unfortunately, climate change has impacted the rainy seasons in the continent leading to decrease in rainfalls (Madeira 2019, 6; Lopez-Carr et al 2008, 325). This has rendered sub-Sahara Africa as a hot-spot for climate change. Indeed, the increased rural to urban centres migrations observed in many Sub-Saharan African countries is as a result in climate change altering traditional life in the rural settlements. Furthermore, western-based corporations and the private sectors have literally mutilated the natural ecosystems in many African regions occasioning a man-made environmental crisis that wreak havoc on communities and their habitats (Hoch, Friedmann and Michaelowa 2018, 1-8).

Faced by increasing populations and unprecedented climate change, many Africans migrated from the rural areas to urban centres or towns. This has occasioned its own crisis in the urban centres as Robert Kaplan anticipated (Kaplan 1994). Since

independence from the colonial powers, African states have struggle to offer employment opportunities to their citizens, hence rendering the majority of the population unemployed and economically unproductive (O'Brien 1972; Miracle 1970; Eckert 2019; Powdthavee 2007; Mpungose and Monyae 2018; Klouwenberg and Butter 2011). Interestingly, today, Africa has the highest youth bulge as a continent in the world. Crucially, "65% of African population is below 25 years" (Hlungwani and Sayeed 2018, 108) making the continent the "youngest" in the world. With no employment opportunities some scholars have diagnosed the continent as a "demographic time bomb" (Arnould et al 2017, 19) that is about to explode. Although this "time bomb" concept implicitly connotes languages and discourses that portray Africa and Africans as dangerous in the eyes and interests of the Western world and its public, nevertheless, it captures Africa's demographic problems. Mohamed Ali, a researcher based in the US, who was himself once a refugee, captures the predicaments of Africa's unemployed youths:

> Millions of youths migrate from small towns and villages into urban centres, they face limited opportunities with insufficient infrastructure, housing and other basic services as well as unequal access to opportunities for education and employment (Ali 2014, 14).

Furthermore, Mohamed Ali argues that Africa's youths have been instrumentalized in or are susceptible to radicalization and are used in the continents political and communal violence and wars (Ali 2014, 15). This is a direct outcome of youth unemployment throughout in the continent.

More conspicuously in the global media, sub-Saharan Africa is an epicentre of political violence (Goldsmith 2010; Bjarnesen and Kovacs 2018; Dwyer 2017), electoral violence (Burchard 2015; Elekwa and Eme 2011), state violence (Nasong'o 2008; Folala and Nasong'o 2016) and communal-ethnic violence (Roessler 2016; Nasong'o 2015; Tarimo 2009) causing many casualties and human displacements that lead to intra-continent migration and even beyond. Given the ethno-communal diversity of all sub-Saharan African countries and the rancid political contentions amongst the different political classes, violence becomes a mean of resort whenever state institutions fail to handle contested issues and elite interests. Violence of all kinds has led to massacres and genocides in the continent.

As a realistic example today, Ethiopia has close to two million internally displaced refugees because of ethnic violence between Somali, Amhara, Oromo, Gurage and Gumuz communities since 2018[18]. Paul Richards attributes this communal violence to the lack of political hierarchy, weak state institutions and the formations of ethnic based political enclaves in many sub-Saharan African countries (Richards 1999, 434). Post-colonial African countries struggle is forming a patriotic nation-wide identity given the diversity of the populations and the incapacity of forming coherent national identity based on tolerance and harmony. Hence, during political contestations violence is likely to erupt and engulf whole regions as it takes ethnic, tribal or religious dimensions.

More importantly, at the foundation of many sub-Saharan African violence is an ‘‘ontological uncertainty’’ (Dunn 2009) in the formations of these post-colonial states. Again, given the profound ethnic and communal diversities, issue of autochthony are contested. For instance, in Rwanda, DRC and Cote d’Ivoire “access to land has been the central feature of recent conflicts” (Dunn 1999, 116). Access to agricultural land and nomadic grazing lands for pasture lead to violence and inter-communal memory of hatred and anger. In the political sphere, in sub-Saharan Africa there are many competing identities, loyalties and interests (Tarimo 2009, 580). During elections or political contestations and political transition, violence is prone and increased.

I have personally witnessed Kenya’s 2007-2008 post-election violence in Nairobi and Nakuru as a high school student, which claimed the lives of approximately 7000 civilians; and tribal violence in my childhood. Most of these acts of violence are perpetrated as “violence against enemy constituents” (Fjelde and Hultman 2014, 1233). Ethnic and tribal communities conceptualize each other as ‘enemy’ constituents that are contesting for power, recourses and interests which in itself is the creation of European colonial strategies as Mahmood Mamdani observes in the roots of the Rwandan genocide of 1994 (Mamdani 2001, 76). Political, state, post-

[18]See Abdirashid Diriye Kalmoy. 2019. ‘‘Ethiopia: Political Reforms, Violence and now a Coup d’Etat’’. *Politics Today,* June 28, 2019. https://politicstoday.org/ethiopia-political-reforms-violence-and-now-a-coup-d-etat/

electoral and ethno-communal violence has created millions of migrants in sub-Saharan Africa who are displaced perennially.

4.3. A Generation without a Future: "There Was No Job at Home. I Went to Dubai to Clean Houses of other People".

Every year hundreds of thousands of migrants leave sub-Saharan Africa for the Middle-East and Europe seeking jobs and better economic incomes. Young people with the desire to prosper flee their home countries. Migrants escape violence, unemployment and economic destitutions as I have discussed in the previous sub-section. In this sub-section we will meet interviewees from Ethiopia, Tanzania and Uganda who will share with us their life stories and why they left their home countries. Ethiopia is an East African nation that has high rural and urban poverty (Mulugeta 2008, 73; Bekele 2018) and widespread ethnic violence (Oba and Tache 2009; Kalmoy 2019) and state violence (Bulcha 2005; Wiebel 2015; Faleg 2019); Uganda is under the dictatorship of Yoweri Museveni for the last three decades and economically struggling (Tripp 2010); while Tanzania is politically stable relatively but economically and in terms of employment is no better that Ethiopia and Uganda (Coulson 2013). These migrants who live in Istanbul and do different jobs to make a living will offer us an insight into why migrants escape particular sub-Saharan Africa.

When I met Tilfe, Mekdes and Yordanos at Taksmi Square in Istanbul, they were working as waiters in a famous Ethiopian restaurant that is flocked by Africans and tourists alike in Istanbul. All the three women were young, most probably in their mid-twenties. In fact Mekdes would later tell me she was twenty one years. I went to the restaurant twice to eat Ethiopian *Injera* which is similar to, but spicier than the Somali *Canjera*. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic there were few customers. This gave me the opportunity to talk with the ladies, I thought. Tilfe was the more jovial and welcoming – I thought maybe she was doing her job perfectly, or that was just her personality, or was the most senior of the three.

After a brief conversation on how the Covid-19 affected the business, she asked where in Africa I was from, and we started to get to know each other. While her

colleagues, Mekdes and Yordanos were standing at the entrance chatting and waiting to welcome new customers in vain, I and Tilfe were conversing about life in Istanbul, Covid-19 and education in Turkey – all the while as I am enjoying the food. When I requested that she could join me and eat the food, she politely turned it down. I thought the restaurant management doesn't allow workers to eat customers' food – but I had asked her out of respect despite knowing what her response would be.

The restaurant was descent: it was not a big restaurant, but it had an up-stair floor. To the right side of the entrance there was a mini-bar and a place to drink Ethiopian coffee. The walls were decorated with African artefacts: small face masks; animal statues; painting of Maasai Morans. There was a big Ethiopian flag on the opposite wall next to a Turkish flag. And on the tables, there were small flags of different African country. Amharic music was playing in the background: it was not that loud. After eating the *Injera* I requested a cup of Ethiopian coffee. Mekdes brought it: I thought it was her duties when it comes to coffees and the mini-bar. Yordanos was responsible for cleaning and preparing the tables. I also ordered coffee for all of them; the restaurant was empty; I was the only customer. Tilfe and Mekdes accepted, while Yordanos said she didn't want to drink coffee in Amharic, I thought. But she appreciated me with a glance and shy smile.

Yordanos remained at the entrance while Tilfe and Mekdes joined me at the table. Tilfe was talkative and inquisitive while Mekdes was silent and following the conversation, briefly interjecting sometimes. Tilfe was the more senior; she was the authority in the restaurant I observed. Tilfe said she was from Gondar, in the Amhara regional state while Mekdes was from the capital city, Addis Ababa. Tilfe travelled to Dubai and lived there for four years before coming to Turkey. She said she worked there, without specifying what she did. Mekdes similarly lived and worked in Saudi Arabia and had recently arrived in Turkey: two years ago, that is 2018. Before I paid the bill, I had exchanged telephone numbers with Tilfe. Both of them had agreed to my interview proposals and they assured me Yordanos will also accept it. I left the restaurant greeting Yordanos who was standing at the entrance. I was glad and happy to have three women for interviews, and I hoped cynically there would be few customers the next day.

With gusto I arrived the next day. I made sure I was there around 16:00 thinking the restaurant would be empty. As I entered there were a couple sitting in the far-end left side: they looked Scandinavian. There was also an Ethiopian man eating and talking on the phone. I sat on the right-side near the min-bar. Tilfe welcomed me with a big smile; Mekdes and Yordanos also greeted me. I ordered for an *Injera*. I enjoyed my food slowly hoping the restaurant would be empty and conduct the interviews. The Scandinavian couple left, the Ethiopian man was busy with his phone. I started with Tilfe for the interview. I was worried the space and their work would be a distraction since we were in a public space; and Tilfe was in work. She requested that it should be brief. I nod and smile. She seemed satisfied with my reply. Tilfe grew up in Gondar, she had a college education certificate. Her family was large: four boys and six girls. She had lost her mother recently to cancer.

I asked her about life in Gondar and about getting employed there. With grammatically-broken English she replayed: ‘‘life is not bad at home. After finishing collage, I had studied tourism and hospitality, I went to Addis Ababa to look for job. I lived with friends. I could not find a satisfying job. I worked in a small restaurant. They did not paid well and I left that place’’.[19] She relayed how she travelled to the United Arab Emirates to work through a consultancy firm. Her family were happy for her. She said she lived with an Arab family as a house-helper for four years. She seemed uncomfortable and unhappy about her experiences in Dubai. I could see this: she avoided eye contacts; her voice grew coarse. “I worked day and night for them. And they treated us like animals. They did not like me”[20]Tilfe said. After four years, the family gave her passport back and Tilfe decided to go back home. Back in Ethiopia, with her money, she got a Turkish business visa. She come to Turkey in 2016 and over-stayed her visa. She told me she never took or applied for a resident permit. She was saving money since then, and plans to travel across Greece to Germany or Netherlands where she has some friends.

When I asked her if she would like to return home, speaking in the past tense, she replied: “We have no job at home. I went to Dubai to clean other peoples’ homes and

[19]Interview with Tilfe, July 22, 2020 Istanbul
[20]Interview with Tilfe, July 22, 2020 Istanbul

houses. We have is no job at all".[21]Tilfe sounded definitive. Mekdes was a high school drop-out. Like Tilfe, she also travelled to Saudi Arabia to work as a house maid. She seemed uncomfortable throughout the interview: her answers were brief and short. She avoided eye contact whenever she was talking, staring into the table in between us. She seemed depressed and unhappy about her Saudi Arabia experience. She had left home at a tender age: "my mother wanted me to stay at home, but I went. I was very young when I went to Saudia, I stayed Saudiyya for two years and went back home".[22] After interviewing Mekdes, the restaurant received other customers. I decided not to interview Yordanos who seemed uncomfortable and anxious about the whole interviewing issue. After paying the bill, I promised them I will come back and with smiles and greetings we separated.

I met Christopher, a young man from Northern Uganda, for the first time in-front of the Aksaray metro station in Istanbul. He seemed a funny and forthcoming in meeting people; he had a jovial face and laughter. He accepted my interview proposal and we agreed to meet four days later on August 10, 2020. Christopher was short, muscular and wouldn't seem as a migrant – he had the body of an Olympian weight lifter. When we met he wore a yellow T-shirt and black eye-glasses to protect himself from the scorching summer sun of Istanbul. I could see his jovial face through the face mask and the eye-glasses. He come to Turkey two years ago and lived previously in Kocaeli province and worked in a small factory. He narrated the situation in Uganda as follows: "firstly, like, when it comes to politics we are not stable, like too much political violence, like too much politically motivated fights and all that kind of stuff. We always have an issue, our people like fighting, fighting".[23] Being from neighbouring Kenya, I am familiar and saw in the news Uganda's perennial political violence during every electoral cycle. Economically, he posited that "it is a developing economy, you know not everyone can afford to live a day with more than 2 USD, so we are just a poor country, resources are their but we don't use them to our benefits".[24]

[21]Interview with Tilfe, July 22, 2020 Istanbul
[22]Interview with Mekdes, July 22, 2020 Istanbul
[23]Interview with Christopher, July 10, 2020 Istanbul
[24]Interview with Christopher, July 10, 2020 Istanbul

Christopher was critical of the current Uganda government headed by Yoweri Museveni. After he had finished high school he looked for a job, as a labourer. He lamented: "I looked for a job for two years but I couldn't see anything".[25] That was when he decided to leave his country. In fact he told me about his visit to Kenya, Nairobi and living there for a couple of month with friends and relatives. Back in Kampala, Uganda he managed to get a tourist visa – by paying a facilitator a lot of money – and travelled first to Istanbul and then to Kocaeli for work. When I asked him how he decided and planned to leave Uganda, he replied "to tell you the truth, I did not have any clear plan, I just wanted to do something in my life, you know, I realized nothing in Uganda as coming my way".[26] He had left his country because of political violence and joblessness.

William, another interlocutor, was living in Mecidiyeköy, Istanbul. He was from Tanzania – a country I assumed would not produce migrants to Europe – and seemed to be in his mid-twenties. He complained about the political class in Tanzania: "people are normally happy back at home, but economically and politically, it is not favourable for anyone to flourish in the country. People are prospering but it is not all of them, just a few privileged minority get it. you must have connection to get somewhere".[27] For him only the few politically-connected benefit and prosper in his country. Moreover, William could not see any change in his country's situation. He continued:

> Parties go out, others coming in, and nothing was changing, every time people are hoping for something new but every party comes in, just takes from where the others left not bringing any change, I mean for the purpose of prosperity.[28]

Interestingly, William informed me he could play several music instruments after the interview. I thought he was an artist. His answers were very political: "when things were not changing politically and economically by the leaders, that is what led me to my decision of me leaving the country".[29] Now he was working in a clothing shop owned by another Tanzanian. When I asked him how he planned and decided to

[25]Interview with Christopher, July 10, 2020 Istanbul
[26]Interview with Christopher, July 10, 2020 Istanbul
[27]Interview with William, July 26, 2020 Istanbul
[28]Interview with William, July 26, 2020 Istanbul
[29]Interview with William, July 26, 2020 Istanbul

leave, his answer was concise: “I had no plan bro, you just have to leave. But I want to go to Europe, here is also not better”.[30]

Abdoulaye, one of the most stoic-looking person I ever met, was a watch vendor in the streets of Taksim, Şişli and Beşiktaş neighbourhoods of Istanbul. He was from Senegal and lived in Istanbul since 2011. For nine years, the forty three years old walked the streets of Istanbul selling watches, perfumes and belts to make a living. He told me he had a wife and children back in Senegal and hadn’t seen them for more than a decade. Previously, he immigrated to Spain via Morocco and Mauritania. He was arrested and sent back to Senegal after a brief period of long detention. Abdoulaye accepted my interview proposal on the condition that it is done while walking; he needed to walk – that was that his work required. Hence, I decide to interview him while walking from Beşiktaş Meydan to Mecidiyeköy. He spoke French fluently but his English was grammatically broken, but I could understand him. He narrated the conditions of life in Senegal and his family while we walk all the way to Mecidiyeköy - he also had questions for me, on why I am interviewing Africans and what my purpose and benefits were in doing the interviews. He narrated:

> Life at home is not bad. But it is very hard. I have no money, no work. I went to Spain and worked in Spain. I was sent back and I was arrested. I could not stay at home. I have children. There is no work in Dakar and there is no business or money. Then I decided to travel again to find work and send money back to home. I could not stay. And here, life is not bad but it is hard. Police will disturb you all the time. I always run from them.[31]

Sub-Saharan African migrants leave their home countries because of three main reasons: violence; unemployment and dire political situations. Migrants would flee to neighbouring countries and then from there to the Middle-East and to Europe. Moreover, as my interviewees underlined, they leave behind families that depend on them financially and for support. Hence, migrants would undertake different job opportunities in the countries they are to support themselves, their journeys and their families back at home. But some would not have the opportunity to work at all.

[30]Interview with William, July 26, 2020 Istanbul
[31]Interview with Abdoulaye, July 13, 2020 Istanbul

4.4. Escaping State Violence and Civil War: "Either You Are Arrested or Killed"

Other crucial drivers of migration in sub-Saharan Africa are civil wars and state violence. People who live in politically volatile regions are prone to migration and displacement that constantly keeps them on their toes. Moreover, many sub-Saharan African countries like Somalia, South Sudan, Angola, Mali, and Ethiopia have witnessed violent civil wars that have rendered economically and socially weak their communities and societies. In this sub-section we will meet Abdiaziz from the Somali region in Ethiopia and Xareed from Somalia, two geographies that have witnessed violent instabilities for the last three decades.

In the Somali regional state of Ethiopia, which is heavily militarised, has witnessed a century-long uprising and violence in which ethnic Somalis who are indigenous to the region are seeking independence from the Ethiopian state. This has led to perennial violence between the state and rebel groups and catastrophic state violence and repressions (Stremlau 2018; Hagmann 2005; Berhanu 2019). Violence in the Somali regional state is instrumentalized to subjugate the body and spirit of the Somali people in what Arturo J. Aladama calls "semiotic generators of fear" (Aladama 2003, 3). In Somalia, where Xareed is from, civil war between clans has reduced the country into a failed state leading to a massive migration and displacement (Walls 2009; Eklow and Krampe 2019; Ahmad 2014; Kalmoy 2021).

I met Abdiaziz, a tall, slender and silent young man in Tarlabaşi. He was from the Somali regional state in Ethiopia – an autonomous federal region bordering Somalia, Djabouti and Kenya. Meeting Abdiaziz in Tarlabaşi was a surprise: Tarlabaşi was a west Africans dominated space, while East Africans considered Aksaray their space. Although there are no determined borders between the Africans, there were un-spoken understandings and preferences that coalesced West Africans into Tarlabaşi and East Africans into Aksaray. After a brief meeting Abdiaziz accepted my interview proposal and we exchanged numbers. The next day when come out of the Taksim metro I called him and he directed me to come to Omer Hayyam road which is a boundary between Tarlabaşı and Taksim. We descended into Tarlabaşi and after few minutes we are in his house – a small basement he shared with other migrants,

mostly from Somalia. The room was hot and we could hardly breath. There was a small electric fan ventilating the room and it was not enough. The summer heat was manifesting its presence loudly.

Abdiaziz's mother died when he was a small child. He was raised by a sister in Jijiga – the regional capital of the Somali regional state. His father was an old man who had no income and lived in Qabri Dahar, a nearby small town. After finishing primary school, he couldn't proceed to high school due to health problems. He recounted that he was taken several times to Addis Ababa, Hargeisa and Djabouti for medications by his elderly sister. After few years, he regained his health but never continued any education. When I asked him if he worked, he replied ''I was doing nothing in Jijiga, no jobs, I was jobless, it was a place with many problems''.[32] After the interview he informed me that some of his relatives were part of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), a Somali nationalist rebel group in Ethiopia seeking independence from the Ethiopian state.

He told me that many of his close relatives were arrested, some even killed by the Ethiopian army. He used the Somali phrase "*gumaad baa meesha ka jiray"*, meaning, "they did massacres in the whole land". He continued:

> In our land we have many political problems which were confusing, it was indiscriminate, people were arrested, others were just imprisoned with no charges, some of my relatives were tormented. If they are suspicious about you, you and all your relatives would pay for it. There were no courts or judicial systems that were fair. The people were always in big troubles.[33]

He sounded embittered and angry. But he resisted his emotions and kept a straight face. His eyes were glaring. "It was either you are arrested, or killed, so if you are free you were lucky" he concluded.

I asked him what happened when he finally decided to leave. "You cannot live in that place. There is no life in the homeland. There are no jobs, the economy was bad. Politically, the government was brutal: killings, jailing, we had problems all the time. I could not stay. I went to Somalia, then to Djibouti, then to Eritrea, then to Sudan

[32]Interview with Abdiaziz, July 19, 2020 Istanbul
[33]Interview with Abdiaziz, July 19, 2020 Istanbul

and now I am here"[34] he concluded. I felt he was angry and almost emotional and on the brink of bursting into tear. But still me maintained an indifferent harsh face. I decided to ask him about life in Istanbul (we will meet again Abdiaziz and other interlocutors in the proceeding chapters) to change the topic. The room was very hot, at this point the sound of the fan was very audible and loud, its wind caressing our heated faces.

After the interview, we went out together into the metro; we drank Somali tea at a famous Somali cafe in Aksaray. We talked more about the Covid-19 pandemic, politics in the horn of Africa and his plans to move to Greece and beyond. After sunset we parted ways, promising I will visit him again. Although he never asked for it, I gave him 100 Turkish Lira of which I had to give him by "force". The next time I called him, he and his friends had moved with other migrants from Djabouti (who were ethnic Somalis) to Yusufpaşa, a walking distance from the Aksaray metro station. He complained about rampant robbing incidents in Tarlabaşı and he had to move out.

Xareed, one of my interlocutors who witnessed violence and migration at a tender age was from Caabudwaaq, central Somalia. He was in his early twenties. I met him near the Yenikapi metro station. He was carrying goods – clothes and shoes – he wanted to send via Cargo to Somalia. After a brief introduction, I informed him about my research project. He accepted and we walked together to the Cargo shop where he deposited his goods to be sent home. I proposed we go to a nearby cafe so that I conduct the interview as we drink some tea. He was talkative and energetic. He spoke Somali in the *Galti* dialect – as we called it in Southern Somalia and North-Eastern Kenya.

Xareed whom I later realised we hailed from the same Somali clan had his own fair share of a traumatic childhood. But I decided to withhold this clan relation so that it doesn't impact our interviewer-interviewees bond. Xareed narrated that he was born in a border village between Somalia and Ethiopia near Caabudwaaq. His father died when he was young; he grew up in Shilaabo, Caabudwaaq, Gaalkacyo,

[34]Interview with Abdiaziz, July 19, 2020 Istanbul

Dhuusamareeb and Mogadishu until the family decided to go to the refugee camps in Kenya. “I have seen many wars in Mudug (a region in central Somalia), my family was always displaced. We moved to Mogadishu, we had a piece of land we owned. After the Ethiopian invasion we moved to Kenya, the refugee camps”.[35]

“We come to the refugee camps around 2007, I started *Dugsi* (Quranic school) in the camps, then I went to primary school and high school in the refugee camps”[36] he continued. As we enjoyed our tea with Turkish *Kunefe* I asked him how life was in the refugee camp. He complained about intra-refugee violence that are based on tribalism and lack of water, in Xareed’s own words, he said:

> Our family was very large, other relatives nick-named us *jamaaca dhurwaa* (the community of foxes). We were a big extended families. Scarcity of food and water, especially water in the camps happen all the time. People were many fighting about water. Every tribe had its own water pipes, although the humanitarian people never knew this. People fought about these pipes and the waters. Life was very hard. The camp food was small and bad in quality. We did not receive any resettlement to Europe. The whole system was corrupted. Only an uncle of mine was resettled in the United States. He is the only one providing for the whole family right now.[37]

After finishing high school Xareed could not go to University in Kenya or Somalia. Then, one of his grandfather became seriously ill. The old man was taken to Mogadishu for treatment. Then the doctors in Mogadishu advised he should be taken to Turkey for further treatments. Xareed’s uncle in the US paid for the Visa and travel expenses to turkey. Xareed accompanied his grandfather to Turkey as one family member was required to travel with the ill grandfather. After arrival in Turkey, unfortunately his grandfather passed away and was buried in Istanbul. Xareed decided to stay illegally. His uncle in the US promised he will facilitate and pay for his travel and resettlement in Europe through Somali human smugglers networks. He informed me he will cross the border into Greece in the nearest opportunity. He was being hosted in Aksaray by a Djiboutian human smuggler – one famed for taking migrants to Greece with surety and success. In the course of my interactions with migrants, especially those from the Somali world, I would hear about this famous Djiboutian human trafficker who had connections with Turkish,

[35]Interview with Xareed, August 8, 2020 Istanbul
[36]Interview with Xareed, August 8, 2020 Istanbul
[37]Interview with Xareed, August 8, 2020 Istanbul

Kurdish and Syrian gangs in Istanbul and in the Turkish-Greece border. He even had Arabs, Afghanis and Indians migrants as clients I was told.

State violence and civil wars have produced millions of migrants, internally displaced peoples and refugees in sub-Saharan African. These migrants, especially those who can afford it, would migrants through networks of human smugglers and migrants trails to the Middle-East and Europe seeking better life. On November 4, 2020 a violent military confrontation erupted between the Ethiopian federal government and the Tigray regional state in the North of the country. Such abrupt violent confrontations between different political and ethnic actors are common in many volatile regions of Africa. As the Ethiopia and Tigray war ragged, hundreds of thousands of Ethiopian migrants and refugees already crossed into Sudan fleeing the violence and there were already reports of a massacre in Mai Kadra.[38] Such perennial violence are the factors and drivers of sub-Saharan African migrants leaving their home and migrating.

Sub-Sahara Africa has many active and volatile hot-spots of violence and displacement. Be they state or ethno-tribal violence, these conflicts ravage peoples' stable lives and throw them into uncertain conditions. Moreover, the continent has still ongoing civil wars as in the case of Somalia, DR Congo and Mali which have not been resolved yet. As the interviewees relayed in their testimonies, these violence and conflicts have unravelled personal and communal lives leading to displacements and subsequently to migrations to neighbouring countries and beyond. Violence in all its forms is the main trigger of migration and displacement in sub-Saharan African.

Although many countries in the continent do have United Nation peace-keeping forces and international community funded efforts of nurturing stability and peace, the violence seems to be perennial and incessant. I do argue that at the foundations of these violence's are structural issues such as the colonial legacy and the failure of

[38]See ''Ethiopia: Investigation reveals evidence that scores of civilians were killed in massacre in Tigray state'', Amnesty International, November 12, 2020. https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/11/ethiopia-investigation-reveals-evidence-that-scores-of-civilians-were-killed-in-massacre-in-tigray-state/

state-building processes in many sub-Saharan African countries. As far as these structural issues are not attended to, migration from Sub-Sahara Africa will persist and continue. Now that migration seems to be constant reality in sub-Saharan Africa in the near-future, I would proceed with the life experiences of migrants in these journeys – and hence aspire to answer my second research question.

CHAPTER V

THE JOURNEY: BECOMING A MIGRANT

Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers (of all types and categories) take consequential decisions of leaving their homelands and communities and travel into the uncertain futures which are pregnant with possibilities and potentialities of livelihoods, challenges and dangers equally. Migration is as much a psychological undertaking as it is a physical undertaking for the migrants and the refugees. The Somali world *buufis* is an interesting word that literally means, blowing air from the mouth but metaphorically used to mean the urge and need to migrate or leave a particular place. It captures and encapsulates the psychology of leaving home and taking a leap of faith into the unknown.

Buufis denotes the universally embodied psychological and mental aspects of leaving home and travelling away from home – and the need to do that. The journeys undertaken by migrants, refugees and asylum seekers is for the most a gruesome and difficult journey with many casualties – abductions, violence, exploitations, acute uncertainties, death, assistance, rape, solidarity from other fellow humans and imprisonment are the potential predicaments. Hence, the migration is also a journey of becoming that literally reconstitute and reconfigure the social, political, cultural dispositions of the migrant ontologically and psychologically with profound impacts on worldview and social life. The displacement of the migrant from her familiar social community and bonds occasions a new becoming ontologically.

Moreover, migrants cross nation-state borders and borderlands which are heavily guarded by security agencies. However, other actors are also present in these borders and borderlands: gangs, smugglers, drug traffickers, militants et cetera. This renders crossing these borders and borderlands precarious and dangerous. Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are targeted by all these actors for different reasons and interests. Borders and borderlands have become haunting grounds for all migrants and

refugees. Furthermore, given the nation-states' efforts to close-off these borders and the heightened securitization of migrants' routes and trails, human smuggling and transcontinental migration has acquired a new actor: travel and education agencies as human smugglers.

Although not all travel and education agencies engage in human smuggling, many are knowingly and unknowingly (used by would-be migrants and refugees) becoming an essential components in migration especially to Europe and North America. This underlines the dynamism and complexities of migration in our highly globalized world. In this chapter, we will meet and hear the live stories and testimonies of the migration journey from Christopher, William, Mohammed, Cabdalla, Abdiaziz and Kanu. Migration is a lived and ontologically embodied experience that migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and even travellers undertake physically, geographically, psychologically, imaginatively and even spiritually. In this universe every being is in the trajectory of their own migration – a journey of becoming.

5.1. *Buufis*: Between Hope and Uncertainty

In the summer of 2018 I was in Nairobi, Kenya. The FIFA world cup edition of 2018 in Russia was going on. Restaurants, cafes and small make-shift eateries were always full with men and boys whenever there was a football match. There was a small restaurant in Eastleigh's 12th Street next to a Shell petrol station that I used to frequent to eat food and watch the world cup football games. It was always crowded and I used to come half an hour early to secure a chair to sit on for myself – and sometimes together with my friend Hussein Sheikh and Mohammed Adan "Nuurow", two of my childhood friends. More importantly, at the beginning of these matches and in the half-time breaks there was a recurring and incessant advertisement that intrigued and captivated my mind. I thought this was a well-funded advert since it was showed in the prime time before the football games.

In short, the content of the advert was a warning: a warning against migrating to Europe; the misinformation spread by human smugglers and traffickers about life in Europe; the dangers of dying in the high seas. The advert advised young men and

women to be careful of human smugglers' tricks in luring people to emigrate, it emphasised on the tragedies of the journey and showed small clip-videos of sub-Saharan Africans crowded on a plastic boat, most probably in the Mediterranean Sea. The message was clear: do no migrate to Europe; don't come here. I asked myself how many televisions in Sub-Saharan Africa is this advertisement being played right now. The anti-migrant effort had permeated: the messaging reached televisions in peoples' bedroom and in local mini-cafes all over Sub-Saharan Africa. The European Union was fighting *Buufis* in its home-ground, making sure no one have the will or intention to migrate.

The Somali term *Buufis* is a complex word that encapsulates many meanings and nuances. Literally, it means blowing air from the mouth – like blowing air into a balloon. However, it is used in the migration context. For instance, *buufis* means the desire and will to migrate; the longing to leave home for abroad that borders psychological stress and depression; the psychological uncertainty that forces one to leave and migrate. Often times it is termed as a disease: someone would say for instance, "Kaalmooy has *buufis*"– meaning, I am inflicted with psychological uncertainty and wish to escape and leave my current condition, especially for Europe and to the US.

I would term *buufis* as an embodied psychological uncertainty that befalls young men and women in Sub-Saharan Africa, propelling them to migrate and seek better lives out of the continent. I have seen throughout my life people with *buufis*, friends and relatives under psychological duress and wishing the leave home. One such relative, after finishing high school and unable to join University education due to financial circumstances travelled without the knowledge of his parent to South Africa, then travelled to Brazil so that he can go through South America to the US. This has become a favourable root for many East Africans. The last time he contacted his family he was in Mexico around 2016. That was the last time any information was heard from him. His family assumed he was dead or detained either in Mexico or the United States.

Sub-Saharan Africa has numerous challenges from famines, violence and unemployment to mention few that occasion "forced migrations" (Elliot 2020, 112) –

or forced *buufis*. These migrants migrate to seek better lives outside their socio-political conditions. Forced migration also causes uncertainty in peoples live – they have no other option other than migrating or persevering while hearing stories about others who travel and made into Europe. This occasions a psychology of *buufis* and uncertainty in peoples' lives – especially the young and vibrant. Uncertainty in a prevalent psychological condition in all would be migrants (Jansen 2008).

However, uncertainty as a psychological condition "is a permanent condition in human lives, a fundamental experiential realms of human existence" (Horst and Grabska 2015, 2). I would argue that this uncertainty is more acute among migrants – while at home or in the course of their journey. Moreover, *buufis* denotes the inherent psychological liminality as the migrant anticipate to migrate until reaching or achieving her goal in the final destination. Wendy A. Vogt critiques that "migration is often treated in binary terms: people migrate or stay at home" (Vogt 2018, 6). This binary over-shadows the liminality and *buufis* throughout the migration trajectory – both its psychological and its ontological impacts on the migrant. The migrants and the would-be-migrants are always in a transition that denotes liminality – physically, geographically, or psychologically.

The Somali word *buufis* captures and encapsulate the liminality, uncertainty, trajectory, ontological becoming of a migrant and the psychology of the whole migration process. Migrant are often described and categorised as people in between geographical places or destinations (Vogt 2018; El-Shaarawi 2015, 39). The migration experience is more complex and intricate than that. Its beginning and end is incomprehensible: it is a lived experience. Only migrants and imaginative and nuanced researchers can have a glimpse of it. Although Vogt and El-Shaarawi are not familiar with the term *buufis*, they allude to its manifestations in the migration process.

The migration experience is imbued with many ontological and psychological experiences. These include hopes, ambitions, dreams, fears, uncertainties, prayers, regrets, faith and indifference to the world and the self on the part of the migrant. In an ethnography about migrants from Ethiopia, researchers found that 30% of them had psychological breakdowns in the course of the migration or after the migration

experience (Fejerskov and Zeleke 2020). Apart from being physical, the migration experience is also a psychological and spiritual one. *Buufis* captures this migration experience – since migration is rampant in the ‘‘Somali world’’ given the civil war situation in Somalia, state and political violence in Ethiopia’s Somali regional state and unemployment and under-development in North-Eastern Kenya and a dictatorship in Djibouti.

Moreover, many migrants in the course of my ethnography used the phrase “seeking greener pastures” as a metaphor for migrating. William from Tanzania whom we met in the previous chapter and Mohammed from South Sudan whom we will meet in this chapter used this English phrase. Given the socio-political precarious conditions in many countries in Sub-saharan Africa, it is not surprising that migrant will use metaphors such as ‘‘seeking greener pastures’’ to identity why they migrated. William had escaped jobless that he attributed to a failed and corrupt political class in Tanzania. For him, migration was a means of seeking a better life of making income and leaving poverty and idleness behind.

Hope for a better life is one of the most drivers of migration out of Africa (Fejerskov and Zeleke 2020; Pascal et al 2020; Andersson 2014). Uncertainty in the existing life conditions prepares the individuals for seeking other options in life – migration being the main option in Africa. Many in Sub-Saharan Africa would not decide to migrate, yet the thought of migrating is prevalent in the social discourse and conversations in many countries. People migrate to make their lives better; irregular and “illegal” migrants are no different from traditional and modern nomads seeking better lives (Kohl 2010). Mekdes, Yifru, Yordanos, Abdiaziz, Christopher, William and Abdoulaye whom we met in the last chapter, all migrated to make their lives better. And this is honourable albeit its consequential risks, challenges and dangers.

5.2. Becoming a Migrant: An Ontology of Migration

The central theme of this sub-section is, what is a migrant? How does one become a migrant? What is the ontology of the migrant? These questions tilt to philosophical inquiry which is not the subject of this thesis project but I will offer a brief discussion on becoming a migrant – that is, the ontology of migration. Becoming a

migrant is a traumatic experience that no human being wishes to encounter. “The rise of civil wars and internecine conflicts in Africa has seen millions of people fleeing the horrors of violence in their homelands to seek refuge in other countries” (Masuku and Nkala 2018, 89) hence becoming the cause of waves and waves of migration in the continent.

The act of migration and fleeing home alters the lives of the migrants – that is, their “pre-flight life” (Pearlman 2018, 304). In the course of migration, the migrant is psychologically and ontologically *re-made* again by the experience of migration. This psychological and ontological reconstruction will impact the migrants’ subjective identity, personality and their worldview. It is as though the migration experience and its horrendous experience is a kind of purgatory experience that reshapes the migrant. Nevertheless, the process of migration is an ontological becoming.

The act of migration will have a profound impact in peoples’ lives throughout their lifetimes (Kingsley 2016; Yusufzay 2019; Nguyen 2018; Deprince 2016; Gratz 2017). Migration is an implicit process of ontological becoming that alters forever the migrants’ life. Moreover, migration alters the conceptions of selfhood and individuality in the migrant (Aguilar Jr. 2018). Hence, migration is a transformative experience that ontologically reconstitutes the migrants psych, emotions and psychology. The migrant leaves home – her familiar and intimate geography and community taking a leap of faith into uncertainty and hopes. As a traveller, the migrant hurls herself into the unknown future which is pregnant with possibilities and potentialities of all kinds.

Migration is risky and a hard undertaking – hence it moulds the migrant forever. In his book *Illegality Inc.: Clandestine Migration and the Business of Bordering Europe* Ruben Andersson admires Senegalese and Malian migrants as the real risk takers and genuine global travellers; he introspectively compares their journeys with his youthful journeys as a hippy constant traveller through Turkey to India (Andersson 2014). While Andersson travelled as a privileged passport-waving white man as many tourists do, sub-Saharan migrants travel under precarious conditions

that oscillate between life and death – yet, still both journeys have transformative impact but are totally different in terms of experience and encounters.

Patrick Kingsley (2016) travels through the migrant trails witnessing personally the odyssey of the migrant journey. However, his experience of the journey is totally different from those of the migrants but unique in its own ways. A migrant is an individual dwelling physically, geographically, legally and psychologically in a state of uncertainty, hope, fear, expectations and maybe regrets. The migrant is always in an "ontological insecurity" (Zegarra 2019, 49-51; Mitzen 2018). Ontological insecurity is life-condition where an individual has a psychological insecurity in the present and of the future. This is prevalent amongst migrants all over the world. Moreover, the migrant is a displaced individual lacking the psychological needs for a home as a place of "being" (Mitzen 2018). The migrant has no geographical and communal rootedness: she is away from home – with no home at all. This lived experience of the migrant is an ontological experience. The sense of being away from home, of feeling in-between places, of not belonging is what underlines the migrant experience – coupled with other challenges.

Moreover, the migrants have other losses: those of family and social bonds that nurtured him or her. The migrant is displaced from his family, friends and community. This leads to a lack in treasured social and communal bonds on a personal level. Indeed, this contributes to the migrant ontological insecurities that reconfigure him or her forever. My personal experience of going to a boarding boys high school that was very far away from home – I would go home for holiday once in a year, and travel for 3 or 4 days with a bus – and latter travelling to Turkey for undergraduate education is a good analogy of the migrant experience of displacement and its consequent ontological becoming. To be clear, my experience are no near the experiences of the migrants I encountered and interviewed.

The migrant after all will have to make a sense and give meaning to his or her experiences. This will occasion an ontological becoming that will be part of the migrants' psycho-social disposition and frame of reference. The migration is embodied by the migrant socially, economically, politically, psychologically and spiritually. The journey of migration is a journey of becoming and un-becoming on

the part of the migrant – and in some travellers most of the cases. The Turkish film director Nuri Bilge Ceylan attributes his motivation to be a director after he travelled to Northern India and Central Asia as lone traveller in search of self-discovery. Travelling, just like migration, has a profound effect of the Self and personality.

Migrants and refugees cross borders and borderlands; they pass through communities and geographies unknown to them throughout the migration experience. It is the migrant routes and trails through these foreign borderlands and communities that ontologically reconstitute the migrant figure. Communities, cultures, languages, different modes of interactions and socially, different judicial and administrative styles and religions are encountered in these borderlands.

This is a profound experience, while the migrants also harbour her own fears, hopes, expectations and assumption throughout the journey. Moreover, all over the world migrant routes and trails have become centres of economic, security and legal operations. Migrants are expected to buy things, while the security agencies are also on the hunt to apprehend them. Furthermore, gangs and human traffickers are prevalent these in borders and borderlands. Hence crossing borders is a risky endeavour on the part of the migrant. In the next sub-section I will dwell on borders and the migrants crossing them. We will also meet and read some testimonies from some of our interlocutors.

5.3. Crossing Imaginary Borders and Borderlands: "I Passed Almost Ten Countries"

Borders and borderlands are a crucial markers and identifiers of state sovereignty and political legitimacy in our modern world; borders are crucial to nation-states' existence. Moreover, borders and borderlands have been transformed into security apparatuses proliferated with security agencies, customs and immigration officers. They have also become territories desired by migrants, smugglers, contrabands, migrants, refugees, and terrorists. Given the frontier-ness and peripherality of borders and borderlands they have become sphere where state sovereignty is weak but at the same time sovereignty is imposed violently and brutality. In this sub-section I will

deal with the intricate and complex interplay of dynamics between borders, borderlands and migrants and the migrant experience in these spaces.

Borders are central to the identity of the nation-state; the conventional and modern nation-state system revolves around borders and the populations dwelling within these borders. The modern nation-state is historically a recent phenomenon in our global history. It has its roots in Europe and implemented and imposed as a system of administration all over the worlds – more specifically, in the colonial geographies. "Much of the modern state system, including contemporary notions of borders, territory and sovereignty can be traced to political developments beginning in Europe around the sixteenth century" (Hagen and Diener 2010, 5) which is historically quite recent.

Nevertheless, this has rendered borders crucial to human migrations and economic transactions over the years. Borders have become nodes through which supra-nationalism and multi-culturalism are enacted within them or across them (Baudet 2012). They have become *membranes* across which cultures, ideas, peoples, religions, goods, violence and politics have traversed and moved. However, in our global world of globalization, borders are being challenged and changing rapidly conceptually and instrumentally (Hagen and Diener 2010, 189). In different contexts, some borders are being walled while other borders are becoming more porous and almost irrelevant due to socio-economic interactions across them.

In the last two decades, due to globalizations and heightened human migrations "we are living in a world where state borders are increasingly becoming obsolete" (Wilson and Donnan 1998, 1). Borders are becoming more porous to goods and people despite many states consolidating resources to guard them with security agencies, customs and watch towers. This has become a big challenge to the nation-state; controlling borders and borderlands is a complex operation. Wendy Brown argues that the post-Westphalian order of the nation-state is crumbling and borders are becoming hard to control (Brown 2010, 21). She attributes this to what she called "paradoxes at the border" (Brown 2010, 20). That is, while borders aspire to create boundaries they are inevitably also places of interactions and exchanges. Hence, the borders and borderlands are self un-making imaginary boundaries and

"structures" (see Aras 2020). While borders are territories of boundaries and controls, they are also membranes through which peoples and goods permeate through.

Interestingly, these paradoxes at the borders are dramatically played-out in post-colonial sub-Saharan Africa where borders are just "lines drawn in the sand". Africa nation-states have antecedent boundaries which were imposed by colonial powers that wanted them to function for the purpose of economic and resource exploitations and at the same time violently repress any form of indigenous political resistance. Antecedent boundaries are "boundaries drawn without the prior knowledge of the territories being separated" (Shelley 2013, xii). This is prevalent in Africa where you get to see borders separating communities and nations with the same linguistic, historical and cultural identities and heritage. Hence, borderlands become a paradox and an irony given the ideals that every nation supposed to be a state. This is played-out throughout sub-Saharan Africa in unprecedented ways, many countries will receive migrants from other countries that have ethno-cultural and linguistic ties with some of their citizens. This has made border controls in Africa an impossibility. Can a Somali or a Maasai or an Afar or a Fulani assume borderlines separate his/her indigenous homeland? This has led to identity, citizenship and ownership of lands notions complex in many regions of Africa: a battleground between the modern nation-states and the sociological realities on the ground.

Moreover, sub-Saharan Africa's arterial borders (Vogt 2018) are a security risk since they are proliferated with gangs, militants and robbers targeting migrants. Furthermore, these borders have also become centres of business where lots of money change hands. For instance "the human smuggling along the trans-Sahara route including Libya alone, is worth up to 765 million US dollars annually" (Williams 2019, 22). Refugees are targeted both by security agencies and gangs for money, sex, labour and goods. All over the world, anthropologists and sociologists have documented violence and robbing, targeting migrants and refugees by both security officers and gangs (Kovic 2010; Cettat and Brigden 2016). Migrants fall into justified victimhood since they are considered to break the laws of the land, associated with drugs and prostitutions and sometimes violence. This has rendered

the migrant journey precarious and dangerous. Wendy A. Vogt (2018, 64) explains that:

> Violence is routenized and central to state security and enforcement practices. Because migrants harboured significant distrust to authorities, and in some cases believed they deserved to be treated poorly, because they were the ones breaking the laws, state authorities operate with near-complete impunity.

Violence against migrants and refugees seeking better life is more prevalent in sub-Saharan African countries with dysfunctional state and institutions. Consequently, migrants avoid security agencies since they implicitly know they will be subjected to violence and exploitations. Moreover, as state security agencies operations intensify in borders and borderlands, migrants and refugees are dynamic enough to seek and find new routes and migration trails. Migrant routes and trails are not permanent: they are changing, they narrow and sometimes expand over space and time in the borderlands. This makes them dynamic and fluid in border geographies. Migrants and human traffickers are knowledgeable of this dynamics that can change abruptly due to gang violence or security operation raids by police. The borderlands and migrant trails become spaces where "cat and mouse games" are occasioned strategically on the migrant side and cynically of the security apparatus side.

Mohammed from the Northern Somali city of Hargeisa has witnessed robbing, detention and violence in the migrant trails. Interestingly he travelled across more than 10 different African countries. I met Mohammed in Aksaray in front of the Somali money remittance offices of Taaj. He was well dressed and carried an expensive looking mobile phone. After a brief exchange and interactions we got to know each other. First, he was suspicious of me – his eyes were wide open when I first talked to him. He was waiting for a friend who was getting money from Boorama Somalia sent through the Taaj money remittance company. As we talked and waited for his friend we talked and got to know each other more. I explained to him my ethnographic project and he accepted to be interviewed on the condition that he will be anonymous – I guaranteed him that. I also requested that he should ask on my behalf if I can also interview his friend.

Mohammed seemed to be in his late thirties. He spoke fluent English, a marker of people from Northern Somalia which was a British colony. He spoke softly and seemed to have mild and respectful manners. He was born in Hargeisa but his parents were from Boorama. He lived all his life in Hargeisa until deciding to migrate. He first wanted to go to South Africa and work with a relative who owned shops in Pretoria. After a long journey from Somalia, through Kenya, Tanzania and Malawi, he was arrested and detained in Zambia. His dreams were dashed. He was detained for almost a year and later released after his family sending and paying a lot of money to lawyers and the police.

Finally, He went to South Africa in 2014. He worked there as a shop keeper in Pretoria. He lived there for two years. He relayed that it was the most boring time in his life; they were not able to leave the shops; they ate and slept in the shops. In South Africa, other migrants are targeted with violence and robberies. In early 2017, he decided to leave and come back to Somalia or Kenya and found his own business with the money he made in South Africa.

However, after getting married and economically nose-diving, he salvaged the rest of the money and decided to migrate to Europe. When I asked Mohammed how many countries he travelled through, his answer was concise: "I passed almost ten countries. I was escaping from one country to another".[39] I asked him about his experience in crossing all these borders. He narrowed it to the lack of legal documents and his interactions with human smugglers. In his own words:

> The biggest danger was how to cross the borders. You don't have legal documents. So, you have to find people that can manage to make you enter. So, you have to pay them. And they always want more money. They can charge whatever they want. Sometimes you can't trust them, they can robe you and even kill you because you have no people in that land.[40]

For him the journey was a tricky one; one had to rely on his gut instinct feelings in every decision – and of course information shared by other migrants. When he was arrested in Zambia, the police had informed him that he should pay them money. He told them he didn't have any money. They searched all his body and couldn't find

[39]Interview with Mohammed July 9, 2020
[40]Interview with Mohammed July 9, 2020

any cash money. Migrants usually post their money to travel agencies in the countries they are travelling to so that they can withdraw when they reach there; they also secure their money in case they are robbed in that way. I asked Mohammed whether he was travelling in a group or was a lone migrant. He said in a group of "10 to 15 but it changes. When you reach another country, you find and join another group. One group might stay there, another group might add into your group so it depends. You meet new people all the time".[41] Indeed migrants travel in groups; and these groups change in terms of numbers and composition from one country to another. Some wish to travel in a matter of months others due to economic considerations travel in years.

When I asked about the risks involved in the journey Mohammed was not forthcoming with comprehensive answers; he offered a highly filtered and short answer. I thought maybe he doesn't want to share those experiences. Nevertheless, he replayed "the journey is very risky, you are an immigrant and you don't have legal documents. Always you are subjected to different rules and law of different countries. You also face violence and threats from gangs, irresponsible government people and sometimes other migrants. So it is very risky especially if you are a woman".[42] Mohammed came to Turkey via Lebanon. His travels were facilitated by a travelling agency which also had connections with human smugglers. He interchangeably used travel agency and human smugglers even during our conversations after the interview. He was also referring his journey as "these things", meaning the process of migrating. He first travelled to Sudan via Ethiopia. Then the after depositing the money he secured a Lebanese visa and a promise of a Turkish visa when he arrives in Beirut. He said "I come through illegal agencies, they manage these things. You will find people who manage these things wherever you go. I meet these people back at home. A lot of business going on. I paid them from country to country and they have people in every country".[43]

Two interlocutors whom we met in the last chapter also travelled to Turkey with similar illegal travel agencies. Christopher who was from Uganda said, "my friend

[41]Interview with Mohammed July 9, 2020
[42]Interview with Mohammed July 9, 2020 Istanbul
[43]Interview with Mohammed July 9, 2020 Istanbul

who is also a relative connected me to some travel agency here in Istanbul. So, I passed some money to them, he also paid some money for me. So they facilitated the whole journey"[44]. Later I would learn that these travel agencies are genuine travel agencies with addresses here in Istanbul and in many African capitals – especially in countries producing migrants. They usually engage in facilitating health, business and tourists visas but they have become knowingly or un-knowingly part of the human migration and smuggling to Europe. William from Zanzibar Tanzania could not even differentiate the travel agencies and human smugglers: "is a combination of both. The travel agencies and human smugglers work together. Within Africa you travel with local agencies and human smugglers but when you reach the sea like in Libya, they connect you to other people – agencies and smugglers based in Europe". [45]

It took Abdiaziz from Ethiopia almost a year to reach Istanbul. He was detained for almost two month in the Sudan-Egypt border. While in detention he become seriously ill and lost wait extremely. He said "*qoray ayaan noqday*" meaning I become thin as a stick. After being released he travelled from the border to Khartoum. He joined a group of new migrants there and struck a deal with a new human smuggler. Back at home, his relatives fundraised money for him and sent it through Western Union – another business instrumentalized by migrants. However, after staying in Khartoum for three more months he finally crossed the border into Libya. He complained migrants were being targeted for goods and money by border communities, militias and security services that were funded by the European Union (EU). Often I was struck by migrants' awareness of these complex relationships between the European Union and many African states and their border patrols. For him it was "a long journey of travelling in the desert. Our group had many women and children. Water was very scares and the children were always crying. It was a long journey. The car was very hot. We feared bandits and robbers, but the driver knew the good roads very well. We reached Tripoli in the middle of the night".[46]

[44]Interview with Christopher July 10, 2020 Istanbul
[45]Interview with William July 26, 2020 Istanbul
[46]Interview with Abdiaziz July 19, 2020 Istanbul

Borders and the challenges faced in borderlands has never been an obstacle to migration. Despite nation-states investing heavily on border security, migrations across borders have steadily increased. Borders are crucial to state security and sovereign rights, and migrants have been an incessant issue to the modern nation-states. My ethnographic interlocutors have criss-crossed borders and borderland in Africa, the Middle East and possibly in the near future European borders. They face grave dangers and problems in these borders and borderlands. Yet they do not de-motivate the migrant and the refugee from trying to cross them.

Migrants and refugee are conscious of their agency and goal; they spearhead a dynamic un-making of rules and regulations required to be followed in borders and borderlands. They twist and evade laws and regulations to their rational interests and benefits. Moreover, alongside migrants and refugee there are also other actors in the migration trails: human traffickers, smugglers, gangs, travel agencies and money remittance companies and agencies. They all constitute a complex interaction of human and economic involvements in the borders and borderlands. In the next sub-section I will deal with the role of travel agencies – normally genuine companies with office addresses and paying taxes – and human smugglers in the migrant journey.

5.4. Human Smugglers and Travel Agencies: Vice or Vital?

Human smuggling as an activity is considered in the popular social, political, moral and humanitarian discourses as an inhuman, wrongful and vice undertaking. However, from the perspective of the migrant and the refugee this conception is different, complex and more nuanced. To be clear, I do not consider or condone human smuggling activities as a lawful, humane, moral, appropriate or good. It endangers peoples' lives, exploit and benefit from peoples' sufferings and more crucially operates outside the frameworks of accepted public, moral and lawful activities. It is a business predicated on human sufferings, blood and tears. Nevertheless, human smuggling is an essential part and parcel of migrations and human movement all over the world. And in the course of my ethnographic encounters, human smugglers were depicted not as necessarily evil and immoral people, but as an essential and inevitable component in the migrants' journey.

Moreover due to tightening migration laws and border security the human smuggling business has also evolved: most of them have morphed into a network of travel agencies along the migration routes and trails. This will be the subject of matter in this sub-section.

Human smuggling in the Afro-European migration routes have drastically increased in the last decade (Karaçay 2017; Reitano 2017). This can be attributed to the increasing numbers of sub-Saharan Africans and the political instabilities in North Africa as in the case of Libya. Moreover, migrants and refugee from sub-Saharan Africa numbers have also increased due to political instabilities, environmental disasters and unemployment in many sub-Saharan Africa countries. This has supplied a huge number of migrants and refugees into the hands of human smugglers. Human smuggling is a transnational organized crime that evades all sorts of regulations and policing (Shelley 2010, 83). Smugglers are scattered all over the migration trails and routes. They hide in plain sight.

Furthermore, human smugglers as "transnational criminals have been a major beneficiaries of globalization" (Shelley 2010, 2). This has made human smuggling easy and widespread. One of the challenges to security agencies is the difficulty to detect human smuggler because they are central and invaluable for migrants; hence information about their activities in rendered hidden and protected by migrants. Hence it is hard to prove a case against a human smuggler (Hepburn and Simon 2013, 295).

In sub-Saharan African, human smuggling has become a widespread business that has interlocked itself with travel agencies and many actors that include security agencies (Tamura 2013; Kfir 2017; Kah 2019). Human smugglers are functioning under the guise of providing genuine travel documents (which they usually provide through a network of actors and facilitators that span from Africa to Europe) by operating travel agencies that have offices across the continent and also in Europe. Human smuggler through the travel agencies have perfected in benefiting from visa and bureaucratic loopholes all over the world (Hepburn and Simon 2013, 11). This has become the case due to the flow of huge amount of money in the migrant and refugee routes and trails.

Migrants and refugees pay huge amount of money in the course of their journeys across countries. This has led to the ‘‘industrialisation of smuggling’’ (Micallef 2017, 40). The smuggling and trafficking business has become a global wide multi-billion industry. Stephanie Hepburn and Rita J. Simon observe that “as of 2005 this global phenomenon reaped an annual worldwide profit of 44.3 billion US dollars and affected more than 12.3 million persons” (Hepburn and Simon 2013, 1). Human smuggling and trafficking across borders has become a complex and global phenomena that is intertwined with globalization, the global economy and innumerable actors – both criminals and security agencies.

Migrants and refugees are always on the receiving end in this human smuggling business. Interviewees have told me that contracts between migrants and human smugglers are unscrupulous and never kept as agreed upon. Violence, intimidations and raping are common in the hands of human smugglers also. More critically, “human smugglers always operate with some level of sanction from the regimes” as in the case of post-Gadaffi Libya (Micallef 2017, 39). Across many countries in the migrant and refugee routes like Sudan, Chad, Mali, Ethiopia, Somalia, Niger, Mauritania where state capacity is inefficient, human smugglers work with security agencies and state paramilitaries to carry out their activities. This has made tracking and apprehending those involved in the business of human smuggling and trafficking a challenge and difficult (Tinti 2017, 44). Moreover, with globalization and money, human smuggling business has become a prestigious business: travel agencies are the new face of human smuggling. By securing travel visas (especially education, health, tourism, business visas) travel agencies have officially joined the lucrative business of human smuggling and trafficking across borders and continents. However, not all travel agencies are engaged in this business.

For instance, if you walk along Adnan Menderes boulevard, Turgut Ozal road and Ordu road in Istanbul’s Aksaray district alone you will be flabbergasted with the number of travel agencies on both sides of the road advertised and promoted in languages from Arabic, Hausa, Somali, Russian, Persian, Spanish, Urdu, Swahili, Kurdish, Wolof, Igbo, Amharic, Oromo to Hindu and Bengali. Interestingly, most of these offices have registered and operational money exchange offices within them or alongside them. This is the heart of travel agencies doubling as human smugglers and

traffickers in Istanbul. More or less, this scenario is replicated in neighbourhoods like Taksim, Mecidiyeköy and most recently Beylikdüzü which is becoming Nigerians' "base" in Istanbul. Cabdalla from Djabouti whom I met in Aksaray, Istanbul and Kanu from Nigeria whom I met in a cafe in Beylikdüzü, Istanbul both arrived in Turkey with education visas facilitated by travel and education agencies that had offices both in their home countries and in Istanbul. Cabdalla paid close to 5000 US dollars while Kanu said he paid 6500 US dollars for his travel to Istanbul. Interestingly, when they arrived in Istanbul the travel agencies connected them to human smugglers who will help them cross the border to Greece – I would later get to know and interview Cabdalla's would-be smuggler and we will meet him in the next chapter as I visited his apartment in Kumkapı.

Cabdalla was in his early twenties and hailed from a middle-class family in Djabouti. He spoke Somali in the Northern dialect and he would often joke he needed a translator to understand my Southern Somali dialect. He narrated that his family and father in particular, was a businessman in Djabouti city who was a member of reform oriented political party in the country. Due to his opposition politics his father fled and resettled in Oman after getting a hint that he would be arrested and his business confiscated in 2012. Since then Cabdalla never saw his father but the father communicated with the family through phone calls and video calls. Cabdalla complained about the narrowing political space in Djabouti and rampant corruption in his country that rendered youths like him hopeless and jobless: "*madaxweynuhu*(the president) and his family and his small sub-sub-clan control everything in the country. You cannot even speak bad about them, you will be arrested and detained or beaten. You can't speak about corruption (*Musuqmaasuq*)"[47]. He continued with his political criticism adding, "his family has looted the country and the port of Djibouti. Today there is poverty in Djibouti today, people are hungry. This has never happened in our country before even during the drought seasons".[48]

Given my understanding of Somali clan politics in the Horn of Africa, I framed and understood Cabdalla's criticisms of the Djibouti government as grievances about a

[47]Interview with Cabdalla, August 19, 2020 Istanbul
[48]Interview with Cabdalla, August 19, 2020 Istanbul

perceived sub-clan political domination and exploitation of the other Somali sub-clans in that tiny horn of Africa country, albeit with genuine reasons and concerns. When Cabdalla graduated from high school in 2017 his family has decided that he should study in abroad either in the Arab world or in Malaysia and Indonesia since they couldn't foresee a bright future in their country. After two years of applications and waiting he didn't secured any university; he also didn't have an English language proficiency certificate since the education language in Djibouti is either Somali or French. In 2019, he visited a travel agency in Djibouti that advertised education opportunities in Turkey. He said "I paid the application fees and submitted all my documents and passport".[49] The travel agency did the university applications on his behalf and after paying all the academic year school fees, they secured for him a Turkish education visa for Turkish language proficiency education in Istanbul. With visa and a placement in Istanbul Gelişim University Turkish language course, he arrived in Istanbul with ambitions. That was August 2019.

However, Cabdalla had given up on pursuing university education and had other plans in mind: travelling to Europe and seek asylum. He joined other Djiboutians in Istanbul and found for himself a human smuggler that will facilitate his journey across the Turkish-Greek border. Indeed, he tried twice but was unfortunately apprehended by the Greek border patrol who then stripped them naked and gave them a beating before funnelling them back to the Turkish side of the border. He lamented "we had many Arabs in our group. They were smoking and talking loudly. Even the guide warned them but they didn't heed his words. I think the Greek police saw the smoking cigarettes. They found us in large field which I think was a farm. It was a cold night; they separated the women and children from us. Then they stripped us of our clothing, took all our telephones and money and then they beat us. People were beaten heavily. Big men were bitten like children (he almost laughed loudly). And then they made us run to the Turkish border".[50]Cabdalla now lives with other migrants in Pazartekke, Istanbul. He plans to go again after Covid-19 in the next summer when the weather in warm and good. He seems to be resilient and determined. I could see all his ambitions and dreams through his jovial face and his indifferent strong will to migrate in the face of even a possible death or detention.

[49]Interview with Cabdalla, August 19, 2020 Istanbul
[50]Interview with Cabdalla, August 19, 2020 Istanbul

After the interview, he promised he will convince his human smuggler for my interview. We will meet both of them in the next chapter.

I met Kanu who seemed my age-mate in Beylikdüzü while I was there not for an ethnographic fieldwork; we were celebrating a Malawian friend's birthday in a famous African cafe called *the million cafe-bistro*. I mate him outside while I was trying to get a fresh air; the cafe was crowded and the summer heat made things worse. Kanu was from Benin city in Southern Nigeria. Similarly, like Cabdalla, he come to turkey with an education visa but never stepped a foot into campus. He had accepted my interview request on the condition that he should be anonymous. And given that we were in a public space I bothered not to overwhelm him with many questions that would elongate the interview; that would have attracted undesired attention. I decided I should ask him only question of how he travelled To Turkey. He narrated "an agency here in Turkey owned by Nigerians and Cameroonians got me a placement in a private university in Izmir (*he couldn't even remember the University's name*). They took all my documents and applied for me, and I paid them almost 6500 US dollars". [51]

When he came to Istanbul he complained that the University emailed his several times and even called his parents back at home. They had said that they will pass his information to the relevant Turkish authorities since he disappeared and never come to school. "I was worried for many months and made sure I avoided police and going out. But after some time, I didn't care and I started my hustle here in Istanbul".[52] The University passing his personal details to the police had worried Kanu and he had maintained low profile fearing police will arrest him. Now he seemed indifferent to that. All he wants is to make money by sending goods back home and travel to Greece in the nearest opportunity.

Both Cabdalla and Kanu seemed happy that they were in Istanbul. They implicitly appreciated the travel agencies that brought them here. Cabdalla even had a close intimate relationship of friendship with the human smuggler who we will meet in the next chapter. Migrants and refugee see human smugglers from a different perspective

[51]Interview with Kanu, September 27, 2020 Istanbul
[52] Interview with Kanu, Septmber 27, 2020 Istanbul

laden with personal interest. For them human smugglers are not necessarily evil people; they are part of a network of actors, migrants and refugees encounter in the migrant routes. Furthermore, they are essential in the journey; they are knowledgeable of the routes and trails that are safe; they secure accommodation and meals for the migrants and refugees. This part is hidden from the public eyes and gaze. In the last few years, travel agencies working order the guise of facilitating education and business visa and trips have joined the human smuggling business. With amounts ranging from 5000 to 10,000 US dollars, they facilitate visa for migrants with the relevant documents given their intricate knowledge of university application requirements and health visa requirements – especially in the hair transplant business and private universities. Istanbul is permeated with such travel agencies that have offices in migrants producing regions of the world and migrant-populated neighbourhoods in Istanbul.

CHAPTER VI

ISTANBUL: A NEXUS IN THE GLOBAL MIGRATION FLOWS

Istanbul has offered homage and hope to migrants and refugee throughout its illustrious long history. With migrant routes and trails proliferating the whole world with the possibilities availed by globalization, Istanbul has become a gateway to Europe and a consequential destination for many migrants and refugees from Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia. Over the years, migrants and refugee population have steadily increased in Istanbul. Neighbourhoods like Aksaray, Mecidiyeköy and Tarlabaşı have become centres of sub-Saharan African migrants and refugees. These migrants and refugees who are in transit to Europe face and have their own personal, gendered and racial challenges like facing racism, discrimination and often violence and robbery in different situations and conditions.

However, migrants and refugees have also formed an intimate and solidaristic relationships that help them cope with their legal and economic precarious situations. In Istanbul, migrants have also received solidarity, assistance and care from non-governmental organizations, associations, mosques, student unions, municipalities and from the random people. The lived experiences and life stories of migrants in Istanbul is complex, diverse and different on many issues and situations. In this chapter, I will delve into the life experiences and stories about sub-Saharan African migrants and refugees in Istanbul and we will meet both interviewees and other migrants encountered during my ethnographic fieldwork process.

6.1. Istanbul: A Refuge for Migrants and Refugees throughout History

The metropolis of Istanbul is a mega city of approximately eighteen million residents. A good proportion of these residents are foreigners who are either legal or ‘illegal’ migrants who contribute to the city’s social, economic, and cultural scenes.

The metropolis of Istanbul has approximately 250,000 refugees, with many undocumented residents (*Daily sabah*, 2019). Neighbourhoods like Aksaray, Mecidiyeköy, Beyoğlu, Bağcilar, Esenler, Kuçükçekmece, Şirinevler, Esenyurt, Başakşehir and Beylikdüzü are steaming with foreign tourists and migrants residents alike, and over the years they have morphed into the most vibrant sites of Istanbul in terms of business and entertainment industries. Moreover, these aforementioned neighbourhoods are also where most of Istanbul's "illegal" migrants reside and prefer to dwell in. For this peculiar and distinctive reason do I choose Istanbul as the most preferable site (context) to conduct an ethnographic study about migration and migrants' lived experiences. In addition to this, Istanbul is one of the most significant cities in the migrants' network of routes and trails to Europe – it is a final gateway to Europe.

More significantly, Istanbul can be considered a melting pot of migrants from all over the Anatolian regions of Turkey. Istanbul has also received migrants – who were Muslim and also non-Muslim – throughout the city's Ottoman era. In the fifteenth century Istanbul received a huge population of Sephardic Jews who were escaping violence in the Iberian Peninsula (Naar 2015, Chazan 2018, Uluç 2013, Cohen 2012). Later in the Balkan wars and during and after World War one Istanbul also received a huge population of non-Turkish Muslim migrants from all the Balkan regions and Thracia (Houston 2020, Geniş and Maynard 2009, Dündar 2001, Duru 2016). After the foundation of the modern Turkish republic Istanbul continued to receive large populations of Anatolian migrants from the hinterlands who were displaced by the modernization, industrialization and mechanization of agriculture and also processes of urbanizations that occasioned rural-urban migrations. However, Istanbul received a sustained and continues to recieve migrants from the South-East Anatolian Kurdish region throughout the 1980s and 1990s due to political violence, executions and destruction of villages during a brutal war between the Turkish state and Kurdish secessionist rebels and terror groups (Ahmedtbeyzade 2007, Hirschler 2001, Aras 2014, Aras 2018, Kılıçaslan 2016, Aktan 2014, Keyder 2006, Yörük 2012).

More recently Istanbul has been receiving Syrian migrants of all ethnicities since the Syrian civil war broke out in 2011. However, over the years Istanbul has also been

receiving migrants from Africa whose aim is to travel to Europe. It seems that apart from the meagre sensationalist media reports, the journeys, predicaments, solidarities, exclusions, inclusions, resilience and networks of African migrants has escaped the scholarly literature reviews and studies of migrants in Istanbul. Nevertheless, Istanbul is a city of migrants from all over the world: Mongolian and Afghani migrants from the East; Moroccan and Venezuelan migrants from the West; African migrants from all over the African continent – all trying to seek a better life in Europe.

All these migrants have found in Istanbul a refuge – that is excluding and including, that is challenging and precarious, that is solidarity and also violent. Istanbul has an incredible propensity to host refugees and migrants of all walks of life. Feyzi Baban observes how Istanbul's "flourishing cultural plurality itself emanates from a multi-faceted geography that enables movements from the east to west and from the north to south over water and land" (2018, 55). This has rendered Istanbul a safe refuge for migrants historically and in our contemporary times although with different circumstances, challenges and benefits. Nevertheless, Istanbul has been a city for migrants of all walks of life throughout its history (Mills 2018).

Moreover, Istanbul has become crucial and significant for sub-Saharan African migrants willing to migrate to Europe via Greece. Mostly, migrants who avoid the dangerous waters of the Mediterranean Sea, and who can afford human smugglers, prefer to travel to Europe via Greece through borderlands crossings. However, sometimes migrants cross the Meriç (or Maritsa or Evros) river that lies between the Turkish and Greek border which has claimed human lives in its own ways. Some migrants prefer the Aegean Sea and travel from the City of İzmir and hence face dangerous sea waters. I come to Turkey in September 2012 as a student. I remember walking around Aksaray, Eminönü, Karaköy and Üsküdar in the cold winter weather of 2012 while I visited the city's historical sites and scenes.

Walking with friends we would hardly see or come across Africans or Black people – except very few. Retrospectively, when I look back and compare it to today, that is 2020 and 2021, these neighbourhoods and spaces have a tangible population of sub-

Africans – mostly transit migrants and business people, and also foreign languages speaking inhabitants. A visit to the public square in-front of Aksaray metro station or the Haliç (the golden horn) public parks will bring my point home. Moreover, sub-Saharan African visibility and presence has increase in faraway neighbourhoods like Beylikdüzü, Mecidiyeköy and Sultanbeyli which attract many factory and informal labourers and workers.

Istanbul has become the most favourable site of entry to Europe and a centre of commerce for sub-Saharan Africa migrants and business people. This has consequently increased the number of sub-Saharan African migrants in the city. Moreover, Cargo offices dealing with export of goods to sub-Saharan Africa and beyond have dotted the whole city. These enterprises are mostly operated by Africans – I have friends whom we graduated together who have benefited from this opening business opportunities. Moreover, today Istanbul has Somali, Ethiopian, Nigerian, Ghanaian, Kenyan, Senegalese and Burundian restaurants, cafes, clubs and community association centres and offices. These eateries serve African dishes and drinks giving their customers as sense of being at home. They also function as meeting places were migrants, tourists and business people rub shoulders and interact.

Since 2012, I have personally implicitly watched and seen the growing of the African community in Istanbul. Since 2018 I have lived in Istanbul continuously as a graduate student and I have frequented these spaces for different purpose: from football tournaments, national day celebrations, marriage ceremonies, community gatherings, fund raisings to burial ceremonies. This has to an extent made me familiarise with the Somali community from Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti and many other African communities especially those from Eastern Africa. Hence, this ethnographic project is principally about their lived experiences in this city: those life stories in Aksaray, Mecidiyeköy and Tarlabaşı in particular.

6.2. Aksaray, Mecidiyeköy and Tarlabaşı: sub-Saharan African Migrants in Istanbul

I conducted my ethnographic research in these three sites in Istanbul: Aksaray, Mecidiyeköy and Tarlabaşı. These are neighbourhoods that have relatively high African migrants as residents; and also migrants from Syria and Turkey's own migrants from Anatolia. In the Turkish media discourses, these neighbourhoods alongside others are portrayed as violent places that transform into red-light districts and drug-zones after mid-night. Ironically, tourists and migrants prefer to hang-out and entertain themselves in these neighbourhoods once it is beyond mid-night or even during the day. During the day, these neighbourhoods ooze with people, businesses and street food-courts. Cargo offices and currency exchange shops are prevalent in these neighbourhoods which are an indication that they are intimately integrated into the global flows of goods and economies – and also people. Cheap hotels and residential apartments that are preferred by the migrants and the 'lower' classes are readily available in these neighbourhoods. In Istanbul, a city highly contested and gentrified (Yücesoy 2008) migrants have transformed Aksaray, Mecidiyeköy and Tarlabaşı neighbourhoods into their own social and living spaces.

In an ethnographic study about Muslim men's masculinity and there conception of migrants-populated spaces in Istanbul, Banu Gökariksel and Anna Secor (2017, 390-393) relay how their interviewees portrayed Taksim's Beyoğlu and Tarlabaşı as both "foreign" and different in terms of demography, sexuality, creed, race, mannerism and culture. For them, these were inaccessible spaces that were inhabited by tourists, migrants and "dangerous" peoples. Hence, Tarlabaşı, Beyoğlu and other spaces are imaged as "foreign" and belonging to a particular imaged subjects. Since, Istanbul is inherently a migrants' city, these sentiments have been hold against different neighbourhoods and different groups of peoples who migrated to the city. Indeed, long-time "urbanites have railed against what they see as the 'migrants invasion' of the city" (Secor 2002, 10) since Turkey initiated its modernizations and industrialization efforts. Waves after waves of migrants have been arriving in Istanbul from the Anatolia regions. These new migrants would reside in specific neighbourhoods that are accessible to them – by nature of their social and economic status. These migrants would drastically change Istanbul's neighbourhood and the

demographic tapestry of its social spaces through their visibilities and economic activities (See Kemal Karpat 1976).

Similarly, African migrants have transformed Aksaray, Mecidiyeköy and Tarlabaşi through their demographic populations and visibilities: personally I know Somali and Ethiopian restaurants that are famous among African students in Istanbul and tourists alike. Alongside Cargo offices that send specifically commercial goods to African countries, there are also entertainment places like Bars, Cafes and Discotheque owned, operated and frequented by African migrants, Turkish citizens, tourists and international students alike. African migrants have curved for themselves a space in Istanbul – and this is not without contestation, implicit confrontations and suspicions with other migrants and 'local' Istanbuliote residents.

At the centre of these contestation and mutual suspicions lie "anxieties about losing a pre-existing or pre-concieved status shape local peoples' opinion about migrants and refugees" (Saraçoğlu and Belenger 2019, 365). In the context of Sufi Naqshibandi orders, Ramazan Aras (2018) stipulate how space is significant in both social and spiritual matters, and that we humans are ultimately attached to specific spaces, locations and places. This attachment to space, and the feeling of belonging to an imagined space produces contestations, confrontations and exclusions among migrant groups and the local residents.

Moreover, apart from being part of the network or circuit of migrants travel routes, Aksaray, Mecidiyeköy and Beyoğlu's Tarlabaşı have become centres of solidarity and sometimes confrontations between different African migrant groups along ethnic, religious and national lines. In addition to this, local non-governmental organizations and civil society groups have extended solidarity efforts to these migrants who are often in precarious economic, social and health conditions. The peculiar case of a man commonly known among migrants and locals as Urfali Mehmet Ağabey (I suppose and assume that he himself migrated to Istanbul in the 1990s) depicted in a short documentary underlines solidarity efforts and networking among migrant and local residents in Tarlabaşı (*Tarlabaşı Kahramani Urfalı*

Mehmet, Youtube 2019).[53] Despite migrants facing implicit exclusionsionary state policies and implicit social exclusions and negative labelling, nevertheless migrants and locals maintain solidarity networks that are both institutional in the form of NGOs and in individual in the case of Urfali Mehmet Ağabey.

I would later in my fieldwork participant observations meet Urfali Mehmet Ağabey, a short in stature and humble man in his mid-fifty, in one of the meetings of Tarlabaşı Dayanışma Topluluğu. Since neighbourhoods like Aksaray, Mecideyeköy and Tarlabaşı are already spaces marked as 'foreign' and historically being resided by minorities and internally displaced Turkish citizen migrants, newly arrived migrants (both Africans and Syrians) have made them their homes and spaces of dwelling and socializing. They have become urban spaces imbued with belonging and imagined as secure zones for migrants. Moreover, migrants have also decidedly diversified these spaces, Aksaray's Kumkapı in particular (Biehl 2015). However, a walk down into Tarlabaşı's Kara Kurum road would make you feel you are in an African neighbourhood.

Caroline, a 40 years old single-mother from Uganda and a migrant, said she felt safe and at home in Aksaray. I met Caroline and got to know her in the vicinities of Cerrahpaşa hospital. She was tall in figure and seemed visible and detectable in any group of people. Caroline left Uganda in 2016 after her husband died. She was an economic migrant: her small business in Kampala was unsustainable and she decided to migrate. After securing a Turkish Visa, she left her children with her mother and decided to migrate to Europe via Turkey. But for four years she was stuck in Istanbul. When I met her she was about to buy medicines prescribed for her in a pharmacy near Cerrahpaşa hospital. She had complained about bouts of chronic headaches. Luckily, later in the week when I interviewed her she said that she was feeling well and good after taking the medications. She lived in different neighbourhoods of Aksaray for the last four years. I asked her why most African migrants prefer or live in these three districts. For Caroline this was obvious and clear:

[53] For a brief documentary on Tarlabaşi solidarity community see, ''Tarlabaşı kahramanı Urfalı Mehmet'' *YouTube* May 31, 2009. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z51iLnhLyxk (accessed on 01.06.2020).

> Because most of the blacks are around these places, because other places there are no black people, it is mostly white people. You find many problems and things that make you angry like racism and discrimination in these other places. But if you are close to your friends or other black people, or your country mates then you can be more safe and have peace. That is why.[54]

For her Aksaray, Mecidiyeköy and Tarlabaşı, are spaces with many African peoples, and were places that were safe haven from racism and discrimination in relative comparison to other neighbourhood.

William from Tanzania whom we met in the previous chapters also alluded to that Aksaray and Mecidiyeköy were safe places for Africans. Although these districts are not spaces that are free from racism, discrimination and violence against migrants and Africans in particular, they have become over the years spaces where sub-Saharan African migrants deemed safe as home and dwellings. William lamented that in other districts "people will look at you, and talk behind your back and you know they talk about you. Others laugh at you and show you their friends that you are passing. But here we have no such things. There are many Africans and Arabs here".[55] Later after the interview William would tell me about how there are many African restaurants and cafe that belong to Africans here in Aksaray, Mecidiyeköy and Tarlabaşı (some which I have visited before) and that is why Africans prefer to live in these neighbourhoods.

However, Abdiaziz from Ethiopia had different sentiments about Tarlabaşi – later he would move to Pazartekke. For him these were violent, drugs-infested and bad neighbourhoods reflecting the media discourses about these neighbourhoods in Turkey. Abdiaziz was a devout Muslim and I contextualized his views as reflecting his religious values. He had complained about some African migrant women who were his neighbours in the apartment and how they would often bring dangerous people – Turkish men and other customers, some who are drank. I thought he was also worried that these women activities might attract the apartment owners, other neighbours or even the police. He said: "they bring many men, I don't know what

[54]Interview with Caroline, August 10, 2020, Istanbul.
[55]Interview with William July 26, 2020, Istanbul

they do in their houses but sometimes you will hear shouting and arguments. They are problematic women".[56]

Cabdalla from Djibouti, whom we met in the previous chapters said that he never left Aksaray or the greater Fatih district since he come to Istanbul. "I don't leave this neighbourhood, everything is here, all my friends are here. In other places you can get into problem with police"[57] he remarked to my question. He also used a Somali phrase to describe Aksaray: "*meeshaan waa meel shidan*" meaning this place is a lively place.[58] He seemed to be comfortable in the Somali community and friends he met here in Istanbul – a foreign and distant place for him. Apart from migrants and business people these neighbourhoods attract sub-Saharan African students. Whenever I am bored in the dormitory and I feel to go out I usually take the metro to Aksaray. The cafes and restaurants have become gathering places for students, migrants and business people alike. This has rendered Aksaray, Mecidiyeköy and Tarlabaşı accessible and comforting spaces *a la* Harlem in New York City. Nevertheless, these three neighbourhoods have their own challenges: violence, drugs, robbing, prostitutions, human smugglings and racist incidents. This will be the subject matter in the next sub-section.

6.3. Robbery and Violence against sub-Saharan African Migrants in Istanbul: "They Know We Can't Go to the Police"

One of the issues that my ethnographic project brought to my attention, which I was not aware of, was robbery and violence meted out against sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul – by gangs and other migrants possibly. This issue was so prevalent that many of my interviewees raised it during our interactions. This was an issue that was marginal in my assumptions of migrant life in Istanbul; for me, I presumed that migrants would only face violence and robbery only during their journeys to Istanbul and not in Istanbul. I was mistaken. Migrants and refugees are vulnerable people who will face violence and robbery throughout their journeys and in destinations like Istanbul.

[56]Interview with Cabdalla July 19, 2020 Istanbul
[57]Interview with Cabdalla August 19, 2020, Istanbul
[58]Interview with Cabdalla August 19, 2020, Istanbul

Researchers have observed the prevalence of violence, deceit, rape and robbery in the hands of human smugglers, gangs, local thieves and even police which is a common thing in the migration route and trail faced by migrants on the move or in destinations (Slack and Whiteford 2011; Conte and Migali 2019). In this sub-section we will hear the voices and testimonies of migrant who faced violence and robbery in Istanbul: Ezichi and Namwaya and their helper Aminata; Caroline; and Abdullah from Niger. Migrants face violence and racism in the Mexico-American borderlands and border towns (Hernandez 2010; Hill 2006; Magana 2008; Magana 2011; De Leon 2015), in Greece (Papadantonakis, 2020; Karamanidou 2016) in Spain and Italy (Lucht 2012) and in Turkey (Erdoğan 2014; Duvell 2014; Herda 2015; Üstübici 2018).

Ezichi from Nigeria and Namwaya from Uganda operate a small mini-restaurant in Yenikapi neighbourhood of Aksaray. Their customers are cargo shop workers in the vicinity who will crave for West African cuisine and East African food and migrants and sometimes African students. When I first visited their small mini-restaurant and get to know them I was amazed how two women from two different regions in Africa worked and cooperated diligently to make a living in Istanbul. Ezichi would cook and prepare the West African Jolof rice and other Nigerian meals; Namwaya would cook Ugandan Matoke and sometimes Ugali with stew and meat.

Furthermore, working for them was a young woman from Mali named Aminata who cleaned tables and served water to customers. Ezichi and Namwaya seemed to be in their late forties; Aminata would be barely nineteen or twenty. When I first went to their restaurant Namwaya jokingly complained with a smile on her face: “Somalis and Ethiopians don’t come to our place, they go to their own places”.[59]Ezichi who was looking me was nodding her head in agreement. Aminata was indifferent to the conversation and was cleaning utensils. I jokingly replied: “I will bring Somali and Habesha customers here”. That was the only way I could react to Namwaya’s critical questioning – and it broke the ice for all of us.

[59]Personal interaction with Namwaya, September 29, 2020 Istanbul.

The three women were all busy: they were serving food in plastic plates to customers in the mini-restaurant and also packing food into plastic dishes to be taken to customers' shops. Aminata would carry these packed plastic dishes to the customers' shops and then she would come back and take others. I ordered Jolof rice and fish. After I paid the bill I told Namwaya that I would like to interview them about life in Istanbul. She was surprised; I thought she didn't understand what was an interview. Then I told her I was writing about African peoples' life in Istanbul and that I would like to hear her views. I could see the scepticism in her eyes while she tried to comprehend what was my agenda in coming into their small mini-restaurant. She said they were now busy and I should come in the afternoon beyond 5 p.m. Ezichi was watching from the corner of her eyes all long while I was talking with Namwaya. Aminata was away delivering a food package.

When I come back later in the afternoon they were cooking tomorrow's food, cleaning the place and the plastic utensils. They agreed to be interviewed as far as they would continue doing their own work: cleaning utensils and cooking. Instinctively, I decided to produce my phone and record their voices; although it felt inappropriate given the conditions. The ethnographer needs to *read* situations and contexts wisely to have a rapport with the interviewees. Then I would ask a question and wait any of them to answer after brief questions on their background – it was like I was conducting unstructured focus group interview. Both of them come to Turkey five years ago. Ezichi worked previously in İzmir as a hotel cleaner before she came back to Istanbul. Namwaya was an "Istanbuliote": never leaving the city since she come. "Life here is good and also bad. Here we are many Africans here, you have seen. Some work and make money others are doing prostitution and drugs. So, it depends. But life here is not easy, we work every day, no holiday for us. Our customers work every day and they want food, so we have to work".[60] Interestingly, like my previous interviewees, both Namwaya and Ezichi complained about robbery and violence in Aksaray – but this was also common in Tarlabaşı.

In January of 2019, some robbers broke into their small mini-restaurant but couldn't find anything of value; moreover, Ezichi was robbed of her phone and money by

[60]Interview with Namwaya, September 29, 2020 Istanbul

gangs at a night while she was walking to home; Aminata was also robbed but luckily she was not carrying her phone or any money. She was lucky. “They are young boys, they were walk in four or five. I think they are Syrians. They use a lot of drugs. If you see them you know they are bad people. I was just walking and they stopped me. One of them was carrying a big knife. I gave them my phone and all my money. I was very angry and I wanted to cry”[61]Ezichi narrated that fateful night she was robbed. With eyes wide open she continued: “here in Aksaray you don’t walk alone. It is a dangerous place. We have a brother here who works in the Cargo business, we go with him every night if it is late”. [62]Aksaray has narrow roads and alleys that stream down into the neighbourhoods. It also has many desolate and abandoned houses. It is an ideal place for gangs and robbers to way-lay unsuspecting people and rob them.

When Caroline first come to Turkey in 2016, she relayed that Aksaray and the larger Fatih municipality were infested with many gangs and thieves. They would rob people with impunity and violence. When she first come:

> We have too much thieves around. But after sometimes, I think police cleared them away. But some are still here. By the time I come here we could not move with money, they can grab your bag and run with it. They are small kids, some are Turkish others are from Syria. They are very dangerous people, they can even kill you because of small money.[63]

Caroline said most of these gangs and petty thieves targeted black people, tourists and other migrants. When I asked why, she replied: “they know we can’t go to the police. We can’t complain to the police. Most blacks here don’t have papers”.[64] Later after the interview Caroline narrated how a young Ugandan woman was killed by her Turkish boyfriend by throwing her from the balcony in the sixth floor. She said that that Turkish boyfriend claimed that his girlfriend committed suicide and that was end of the case. The young woman was buried in Istanbul by the Ugandan community. Caroline also told me how a young Eritrean man who was her friend and business collaborator was stabbed in the neck by Syrian gangs in Aksaray and almost died because of bleeding profusely. For her, Aksaray was safe haven from racism and

[61]Interview with Ezichi, September 29, 2020 Istanbul
[62]Interview with Ezichi, September 29, 2020 Istanbul
[63]Interview with Caroline, August 10, 2020, Istanbul
[64]Interview with Caroline, August 10, 2020, Istanbul

discrimination but also a dangerous place with gangs and thieves hovering over migrants like eagles.

I met Abdullah a young man in his mid-twenties from Niger at Historia Mall in Fatih. Similarly he complained about insecurities in Aksaray posed by gangs and thieves when I interviewed him. Abdullah come to Istanbul three years ago and was living with friends somewhere near Kennedy Road in Aksaray. Describing these marauding gangs and thieves he said "they are always more than two, they are young men like us. Some will walk from behind you while his friends wait you in the front. Then they rob you and harass you badly."[65] He continued "sometimes they act friendly and ask you something like an address, and then others come around you and you are robed of your phone, money and anything precious. That was how they robbed me, and every night this happens to people here".[66] Robbing and violence was part and parcel of migrants' lives in Istanbul. In fact he told me that Aksaray was better; robbing and murders occurred frequently in Tarlabaşı more than in Aksaray.

Robbing and violence affected migrants' lives in Aksaray, Mecidiyeköy and Tarlabaşı. Often these incidents will surface in the Turkish national media. Nevertheless, sub-Saharan African migrants found and created safe havens for themselves in Aksaray, Mecidiyeköy and Tarlabaşı. Despite the violence and robbing prone in these neighbourhoods, these spaces have paid homage to vulnerable migrants and refugees from Africa, the Middle East and those from Central Asia. Apart from violence and robbing, racism and discrimination are what most of my interlocutors complained of in Istanbul. This will be the subject matter in the next sub-section.

6.4. Solidarity, Racism, Assistance and Discrimination against Sub-Saharan African Migrants in Istanbul

Migrants and refugees from all walks of life face rancid racism, violence and discrimination – but also assistance and solidarity from organizations and the local people. The fact that migrants and refugees are displaced peoples renders them

[65]Interview with Abdullah August 01, 2020 Istanbul
[66]Interview with Abdullah August 01, 2020 Istanbul

vulnerable and target for racism, exploitations and discrimination. Racial, linguistic, geographic, religious and cultural differences between the migrants and refugees and their host communities exacerbate the propensities of racism and discrimination.

More significantly, these issues exist between migrants themselves as they exclude each other and contest for space and resources. Moreover, migrants and refugee are socially and discursively framed as bad people who break the legal laws of the land and hence undesirable. Furthermore, migrants and refugee are considered as invaders who will take over jobs, businesses and the host community economy despite the contrary being that they improve and contribute to the economy. Nevertheless, migrants and refugee in host communities and those in transit are vulnerable to violence, racism and discrimination (Georgi 2019; Bangura 2019; Rivetti 2013). In this sub-section we will meet and hear from the testimonies of Gina and Nkwame from Ghana and Caroline from Uganda.

I met Gina in Tarlabaşı. A mother of three, Gina was from Kumasi in central Ghana. She owned and operated a bar and beauty salon in Tarlabaşı. At the time of our interview Gina was six months pregnant and her husband was deported back to Ghana after months of legal battles and even after hiring a Turkish lawyer. She sounded embittered and angry throughout the interview. Gina came to Turkey four years ago. Immediately she settled in Mecideyeköy and opened a beauty salon business with sub-Saharan African migrants as customers in mind. However, neighbours called on them the police and despite having all legal documents she was forced to close-down her first business. "I suffered in this country. I paid for everything and they closed my place. Some bad neighbours said we were making a lot of noise. And we were not making anything, I did not even played music in my place"[67] Gina complained how her business in Mecidiyeköy was shut-down. Her eyes were blazing with anger I noted.

I probed Gina why would her neighbours call the police on them. She said "a lot of African women were coming to me, I had many customers and I think this disturbed them. It shouldn't be like that, I was doing my business".[68] Although Gina did not

[67]Interview with Gina August, 13, 2020 Istanbul
[68]Interview with Gina August, 13, 2020 Istanbul

explicitly gave me the reason the police were called on them, I thought neighbours suspected them as sex workers and Gina downplayed this crucial detail. One year ago Gina travelled back home, and while she was coming back to Turkey her residence permit had expired by few days. She was arrested at Istanbul's Atatürk airport awaiting immediate deportation. "I was in the airport for three months. My husband was here and he got a lawyer for me, the lawyer demanded a lot of money. For three months I was in bad conditions, I couldn't even call and speak with my children. And after all that suffering they released me three months later"[69] Gina narrated of those fateful months of detention with anger and embitterment. Unfortunately, in January 2020 her husband whose residence permit had expired and was even planning to renew it was arrested in Taksim and deported back to Ghana.

With her three kids, Gina was alone in Tarlabaşı. But she seemed grateful to make a living by operating a two room that each functioned as a bar and a beauty salon for women. Helping her in the bar was another young Ghanaian woman whom she employed. "Not all Turkish people are bad, but some of them are very bad. There was a woman who helped me when I first came here, I am thankful to her all the time. She was a good woman"[70] Gina reply when I probed her more on racism issues she complained about. The business woman looked at me and I knew she wanted me to end the interview.

Another Ghanaian that I met in Tarlabaşı who was willing to be interviewed was Kwame a middle-aged man. Kwame was from Accra the capital city of Ghana. He worked by exporting clothing and shoes back home. Kwame complained about the difficulties of the getting the Turkish residence permit: "I had all the documents, I paid a lot of money to an agency but still my application was rejected. This is crazy"[71] he retorted. Later in the interview Kwame opened up about racism in Istanbul: "they treat us like animals, we don't treat white people in Africa like this. Even in the metro, in the hospital, in the road they behave badly to us. They don't sit next to you, especially their women. This is hatred. This is not good".[72] Although Kwame had good relations with his Turkish business friends he still thought racism

[69]Interview with Gina August, 13, 2020 Istanbul
[70]Interview with Gina August, 13, 2020 Istanbul
[71]Interview with Kwame August 13, 2020 Istanbul
[72]Interview with Kwame August 13, 2020 Istanbul

and biased cultural traits made Africans feel disrespected in Istanbul. “The people I work with, my sells people are good people. But then you meet other people, especially the young ones who will laugh at you or even look at you with an angry face. It is like they don’t want us here”.[73]

When I asked caroline from Uganda on her views on racism and discrimination she gave me a long comprehensive answer:

> Of course discrimination is everywhere, between whites and blacks. When they see black people they see us like we are animals, I don’t think they see people. You feel bad when they talk about you, they don’t want to be close to you, they see you like you are dirty, you see? So, discrimination everywhere and you can’t stop discrimination. You have seen what happened in America, there is discrimination and racism everywhere.[74]

Caroline referred to the killing of George Floyd in America that led to global protests which were undergoing at the time of our interview. For her, racism and discrimination was everywhere and inescapable. Moreover, she complained how African women in Istanbul were seen as sex workers. “Men, old men will approach you in the metro, in the buses and other people are looking at you. This make me feel very angry”[75] Caroline seemed to complain about this prevalent perception about sub-Saharan African migrants as sex workers.

6.5. Mama Sifan’s Tea House: Information Sharing, Dealing with Uncertainty and Migrant Solidarity in Istanbul

Long before I started my ethnographic fieldwork I knew about Mama Sifan’s tea house in Kumkapi, Aksaray. Every Somali from the Horn of Africa in Istanbul knew she cooked the best Somali tea and cookies. Mama Sifan was a middle-aged tall Somali woman from Ethiopia’s autonomous Somali regional state. She had a fair skin complexion; curved cheek bones; I thought she was a very beautiful woman when she was young. Mama Sifan was jovial and talkative whenever in her tea house conversations started revolving around Somali clan politics, life in Istanbul and the journey to Greece. Apart from Somalis, I have realized that other African migrants from Ethiopia, Eritrea and Nigeria frequented her place – her tea with strong goat

[73]Interview with Kwame August 13, 2020 Istanbul
[74]Interview with Caroline August 10, 2020 Istanbul
[75]Interview with Caroline August 10, 2020 Istanbul

milk and well-boiled tea leaves was craved by all. One would always smell the strong aroma of the tea in her place.

I had frequented her place before the outbreak of Corona Virus in 2020 and I thought she would be able to recognize me with my emblematic baseball cap and beards. I also thought she understood instinctively I was not a migrant; but she couldn't figure out who I am. I would always come alone to drink tea, and I was sure this detail never escaped her mind – she always looked at with a different gaze I noted, the look we have when we see something different. Mama Sifan was always talkative and interactive but always had intuitive and inquisitive gazes; she was an intelligent woman and wise in dealing with people – her customers especially. Moreover, she was charismatic and had a positive vibe. Everyone addressed her as Mama Sifan. I thought her warm character justified the motherhood reference.

Mama Sifan's tea house was located in a narrow street going off from the main road going through Kumkapı neighbourhood. There were no sign or board indicating the tea house. On the right side, a kargo shop was next to it; on the left side was the entrance of an apartment. The tables and chairs were plastic and grey in colour. On the walls were small pictures of Camels and horses. In the second week of August I went to Mama Sifan's place to see if I can find interviewees to interview. Due to the Covid-19 global pandemic, I realised her customers diminished substantially. When I went in she welcomed me with that usual smiling face. There were only two customers drinking tea. With the aim of kicking off a conversation with her I sat on a chair next to the table she was sitting on.

I could see she recognized me, although I had shaved my beards – my baseball cap was a telling. Mama Sifan was from Godeey in the Somali regional state of Ethiopia. She was the mother of six kids, some living in the Somali regional state and others in Kismayo, Somalia. When I told her I have a maternal grandmother from Godeey, she was surprised and seemed delighted. She asked me which Somali clan I hailed from, but since Somali Clans are based on patrilineal ancestry, we were not from the same clan but definitely had distant blood relations in my mother's side. I thought Mama Sifan would see me as a family from now on-wards after that introductory conversation.

I told her I was a student here in Turkey for the last seven years and this had surprised her. She urged me to study well and hard; for her, education was the only salvation. She seemed to regret never having the opportunity to go to school since perennial state and political violence engulf the Somali regional state in Ethiopia for decades. Mama Sifan came to Turkey three years ago for health issues. Then she decided to stay after securing a residence permit. She opened her tea and cookies shop in late 2018 and it became a popular gathering place for Somalis in Istanbul. As we were conversing customers were coming in and going out while she served them and collected her money. I realized that Mama Sifan's tea house would be an ideal place for an ethnographic participant observation since migrants and refugees gathered and interacted over a cup of tea. I was delighted about this idea. Know that I got to know Mama Sifan on a personal level, I would come here often I thought. Once in August and twice in September I visited Mama Sifan's tea house. I interacted and befriended migrants who struck conversations with me. I decided that my role would be observing, listening and occasionally talk and interact only when it is relevant. This process of participant observation reconstituted my conceptions of Mama Sifan's place as just a place to drink tea and eat some Somali cookies. Moreover, I thought even Mama Sifan realized my new mannerism in her place: I was talking to people and interacting, something she never saw me doing in her place. Or maybe she never detected change in me.

Mama Sifan's place was more than a tea house. Apart from migrants coming to drink tea, the place was a gathering place to get the latest information, clues and rumours about the journey to Greece. Here, migrants shared information and exchanged stories about other migrants arrested in the migration routes and trails; about friends who made to Athens Greece who were up-dating them about the situation of life there. Crucial information usually spreads and is shared by migrants (Vogt 2018, 155). Different groups of migrants, migrants who arrived at different times in Istanbul, would exchange and gather crucial information about the journey. One afternoon, while I was drinking and conversing with some Somali migrants, the conversation turned into the capricious nature of the human smugglers and how they manipulate migrants while in the journey.

One particular migrant from Djibouti, a young thin man in his early twenties, complained about the human smuggler he had a deal with: it seemed to him that this human smuggler was having a hard time deciding when to take his migrants across the border. The young man complained that some of his friends, who took another human smuggler, made it to Greece, while others were apprehended by the border patrol and turned back. He wanted at least to make a try and see his luck. Other migrants suggested a couple of human smugglers to him and that he must change his human smuggler since delays were a sign of bad luck in the migration journey. Moreover migrants conversed about the situation in Europe and if migrants in Greece are able to progress from Greece to other European countries. Apart from talking about Somali clan politics back at home and life in Istanbul, migrants exchanged crucial and consequential information in Mama Sifan's place and in other cafes, restaurants and bars owned and operated by different sub-Saharan Africans.

Furthermore, Mama Sifan's place was an arena of socialization for migrants in Istanbul. Most migrants and refugees in Istanbul seeking to go to Greece have days and nights to make themselves busy and engaged until they undertake the journey. Instead of staying in their apartment rooms the whole day they prefer going out and having a walk. And what is more batter than a place where you intermingle with other migrants and refugees, people whom you speak the same language and look alike? The psychological upheaval and the profound uncertainty surrounding the journey make migrants bored, worried and stressed.

Hence, places and spaces like Mama Sifan's tea house are a good place to come and at least for a moment talk and enjoy some Somali tea with other fellow migrants and refugees. Mama Sifan's place has offered Somali migrants a space reminiscent and similar to home and the communities they left behind. The tea house had a pull effect on many migrants as they were coming frequently and often – sometimes in groups, and this would tell you they were travelling with that same group of people. It offered them a sense of community and some sort of emotional belonging. Somalis have a peculiar culture of making social bonds and friendships in tea houses, it is similar to the Turkish Kiraathane. Mama sifan's tea house offered such a space in Istanbul, while migrants deal with dire legal and psychological situations as migrants and refugee prospecting to journey into Europe in the face of death and detention.

Moreover, I have also realized that Mama Sifan's place is a space were mostly Somali migrants and refugees assist and help each other in case of misfortune. In my last visit a young Somali lady asked Mama Sifan about a young woman Mama Sifan helped by facilitating for her a place to sleep. The poor young woman was deported from the Greek border and her family couldn't send her money immediately. Mama Sifan had to intervene by talking to some other Somali ladies who offered her a place to sleep. I listened to their conversation with interest. Mama Sifan could see me following their conversation. After the enquiring lady left Mama Sifan offered me extra information about the migrant she helped get a place to sleep.

Mama Sifan lamented about how migrants and refugee with no means will become homeless once their money is finished. She told me how in few months back she allowed to two friends, an Ethiopian man and a Somali man, sleep in her place for two weeks since their would-be smuggler had disappeared and the owner of the apartment had kicked them out. Despite being a tea house, out of her good nature and personality, I realized migrants and refugee would seek Mama Sifan's assistance and help when they are in dire needs. She even once fundraised for a young Somali man who was sick and raised money for his travel ticket back to home – he couldn't continue the journey to Europe and his money was meagre. "He wanted to die at home" she said, narrating his health predicaments in Istanbul. And her face changed into a sad mood; I could only imagine all the migrants' traumas and experiences she witnessed and even shouldered personally.

Mama Sifan's tea house was more than a normal tea house like many other African restaurants and cafes in Istanbul. These are spaces where migrants and refugees interact. Latest information and developments about the migration routes and trails to Greece and beyond and discussed and talked about – together with rumours. Moreover, these spaces are places sub-Saharan migrants enjoy themselves and alleviate boredom, stress and the journeys' uncertainties from themselves through socializations and conversations over a cup of tea or local dishes. In these gatherings migrants and refugees have the opportunities to assist and help each other emotionally and materially whenever it is possible. Mama Sifan's tea house has become a gathering place for Somali and other sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul precisely because these implicit social interactions and bonds formed over a

refreshing hot cup of tea and delicious cookies. It also offered an atmosphere of home and belonging not only to migrants and refugee but also to international students and business peoples in Istanbul.

Migrants are dynamic people who will adapt and morph into social, political and economic situations while they are far from home. In the course of making their daily livelihoods they become assimilated economically and socially (in a relative way depending on the context) into their host communities and destination. Migrants owned and run mini-restaurants, tea shops, rented guest houses and business spring up along the migration trails, routes and destinations. This underlies the socio-economic aspect of human migration. In these destinations and routes, migrants form networks of survival techniques that are integrated into the host-community economy but that exclusively serve migrants needs and interests as observed by other researchers (Berardo 1966; Akoto et al 2014; Loi and Hale 2019, 939).

Similarly, Wendy A. Vogt has observed the growth of small scale business that are crucial for migrant survival in the migration trails and destinations in the Mexican-US borderlands (Vogt 2018, 82). Moreover, migrants have their own modes of information flows and sharing that are based on both facts, speculations and rumours in the migration routes and destinations. Furthermore, solidarity bonds of friendships, contestations and suspicions are formed that are based on categories like ethnicity, country, religions, culture, language, gender and even class. Mama Sifan's tea house and Ezichi and Namwaya's mini-restaurant play as crucial role in the manifestations of the complex and subtle human relationships that migrants have along these diverse identity categories. The migrants world is sustained and maintained by its own socio-economic norms and rules that escape the un-attentive observer. It is a totally different world.

6.6. The Last Night in Istanbul? "Ilaahey Nabad Ha Nagu Geeyo Giriiga"

Cabdalla who we met in the previous chapters met me at an Ethiopian restaurant in Yusufpaşa. We drank Ethiopian coffee and talked about life under Covid-19. Cabdalla had promised to arrange an interview with a fellow famous Djaboutian human smuggler but unfortunately the human smuggler declined the request. He

even rebuked Cabdalla for coming to him with such a proposal – the human smuggler was over suspicious and careful for good reasons. I thanked Cabdalla for the effort and apologized for embarrassing him to a human smuggler who was a kind of a friend to him. As we talked, Cabdalla told me that he wanted to visit some migrant friends who will travel that night to cross the Turkish-Greek border just to bid them farewell and good luck. They were mostly Somalis from Somalia and Djabouti and some few Ethiopians and Libyans he informed me. I asked to accompany him if that was possible. He didn't see any problem in that. When it was around 18:00 and the summer sun hadn't still set ,we decided to get moving to the place the migrants were living.

We walked from Yuısufpaşa to Kumkapı, a distance that would take twenty minutes walk. Finally we arrived at an apartment and we took the stairs going up. The building had no elevators like most buildings in Aksaray – they are quite old buildings. We arrived at the door and Cabdalla knocked the door. A voice asked who we were. Cabdalla identified with his name. The door was opened by a Somali lady in her early twenties. After removing our shoes we proceeded to the sitting room. There were many shoes and I made sure I put my shoes where I can find them later. I realized that the apartment consisted of three rooms and a wide sitting room. There were ladies and some young men in the sitting room. Cabdalla greeted some of them. I just said a greeting to all of them in a shy voice.

Moreover, I could hear people talking in all the rooms in the apartment. The atmosphere in the room was tense. I could see this in the migrants' faces and eyes. One Somali young woman had a daughter who was crying incessantly. I could also see an Ethiopian couple (or they seemed to be a couple) with a daughter and a son who were approximately age seven and five respectively. A young lady who spoke in the Somali *Xamar* dialect was on the phone and seemed arguing with someone on the phone. She seemed angry and frustrated - she also had the face of someone emotionally exhausted, worried and tired. Cabdalla was all the while talking with some Djiboutian and Somali migrants mostly who were young men. I took out my phone and busied myself with it, while also observing the people in the sitting room disinterestedly and occasionally.

Approximately there were thirty people in the apartment. This was incredible I thought. Apart from the young girl who was crying and some few migrants occasionally speaking on the phone most of the migrants were silent and had contemplative faces. I wondered what was going through their minds at that moment. I was almost overcome with sympathetic emotions but I maintained my cool. I could only wish them safety and all the best in their endeavours to have a better life from the bottom of my heart. A tall Somali man came out from one of the rooms: he said he had received a phone and that people should be ready and prepared in half an hour. He seemed to realize my presence in the sitting room. He greeted Cabdalla and then me. He seemed unworried since he assumed I was with Cabdalla and that I was a Somali – maybe I was another migrant to him I thought. The man proceeded to the other rooms and passed the same directives. Now, in the whole apartment there was a calm and coordinated chaos: migrants were preparing their back bags. A young Ethiopian looking woman took out her phone from a charger on the wall. She looked at the phone and released a heavy sight. She was happy her phone battery was full maybe.

Cabdalla introduced to me some of his friends. We shook hands and exchanged few words. I told them I was from Kenya. One of them exclaimed I was the first Somali from Kenya he ever met with a smile on his face. Then abruptly, the tall man came into the sitting room. With a restrained voice he requested that only ten women should go down the stairs. He emphasised that they should talk in low voices and make no noise while going down. When they reach the gate, they should go out in two or three and board a white van that was parked next to the door he said in restrained voice. His voice was almost pleading. One Somali lady said "*ilaahey nabad ha nagu geeyo Giriiga*", meaning "may the Lord take us safely to Greece". She looked worried and anxious. In groups of approximately ten people spanning ten minutes each the whole apartment was almost vacated. Only the lady who opened the gate for me and Cabdalla and two Somali migrants were in the sitting room. Even the tall man descended and joined the migrants. It was now around 20:30 and darkness had engulfed Istanbul. The remaining few of us in the sitting room were now talking and wishing that the migrants will hopefully make it to Greece. Later, I would learn that the remaining two men we deported from the border few days ago. They wanted to rest a little bit and try to go across the border again in few days time.

As I was conversing with the two men Cabdalla was talking with the young lady who opened the door for us. They were speaking Somali mixed with French phrases. I thought their conversation was intimate; Cabdalla was trying to seduce her I noted; he was also complaining jokingly why she didn't pick his call in the morning. I and the two remaining men in the sitting room decided we were indifferent to their conversation while we talked. One man was from Beled Xaawo in Southern Somalia while the other one was from Mogadishu. We were talking but my mind was occupied with the thirty people who had just left us few minutes ago. The rest of the people seemed not to care – or they were used to these journeys and their emotional upheavals.

Cabdalla and I left the apartment and walked back to Aksaray metro station. We bought some Döner for dinner and ate it will standing and talking as we face the Aksaray Meydan. Later I took the metro to Başakşehir where my University hostel was located. I knew what I saw that afternoon and it was profound, those people, those migrants, those children, will always remain in my memory. My views on migration, migrants and refugees would always be perceived through those people I met in Kumkapı, Aksaray – and many others. Two days later I called Cabdalla and asked him what happened to the migrants whom we visited together. I wished he would tell me they made it to Greece. Unfortunately, that fateful night they were apprehended by the Turkish Gendarmeries near the Turkish-Greek border.

In traversing borders and borderlands, the migrant undertakes a risky journey that has its own emotional tensions and uncertainties. Crossing these borders is a sacrificial act in what Kristin Yarris calls ''care across generations'', in the sense that the migrant endures these tribulations to better her life or that of her family (Yarris 2017; See also Baldassar and Merla 2014). Mothers and fathers carrying children is a common phenomenon in the migration routes and destinations. Crossing borders is a dangerous business that leaves the migrants in the mercy of the human smuggler, border patrols, gangs, other migrants, and border police. In these "desperate crossings" as Norman Zucker and Naomi Zucker call them (Zucher and Zucher 1996) or these "clandestine crossings" as David Spencer calls them (2009), the migrants' life is endangered with the risk of death being tantamount any moment.

Moreover, women and children are the most vulnerable in these border crossings (Salazar and Schiller 2013; Pessar and Mahler 2003).

What I witnessed with Cabdalla on my participant observations were profound emotionally. The whole apartment was filled with pervasive affects of fear, courage, uncertainty, hope, excitement, faith and anxiety. Imagining the travelling migrants' state of mind at that moment is beyond comprehension if you were never a migrant. In her book *Human Smuggling and Border Crossings* (2014)Gabriella Sanchez, who migrated to the United States in the 90s herself, recounts the acute mixed emotions of fear, pain, courage and hopelessness of the migrant in crossing borders (Sanchez 2014, 9-11). In crossing the border, the migrant takes a leap of faith into the unknown and expects and is ready for any outcome including her/his demise and death. Such is the migrant condition when crossing borders and borderlands in Africa, the Americas or in Europe and here in Istanbul.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

My thesis project is a three-pronged effort to study and dig into the life-stories and life-experiences of sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul. The first aim is, to observe the factors that have rendered them migrants in the first place; second, the journeys they have undertaken so far to reach Istanbul; and finally, their strategies of survival and life-experiences in Istanbul as they wait to cross the border into Greece or Bulgaria. Sub-Saharan Africa has disproportionately produced migrants in comparison to other continents. This is due to a matrix of factors that is predicated on the legacy of colonialism and the utter failure of the post-colonial nation-state building process in many African countries (Chingono and Lamb 2014; Animashaun 2009; Mamdani 2018). Moreover, the continent has numerous violent hot-spots that produce migration within the continent and to outside (Goldsmith 2010; Dwyer 2017; Nasong'o 2016). Furthermore, since sub-Saharan Africa has one of the youngest populations and that the resources are meagre, young people tend to migrate and seek better livelihoods in other geographies (Eckert 2019; Ali 2014). Combinations of all these factors have rendered many sub-Saharan Africans migrants and refugees across the world.

In their journeys as migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, migrants undertake long, expensive and dangerous journeys. They have to personally and collectively negotiate and deal with a network of EU-funded Para-militaries, border patrols, gangs, human traffickers and fellow migrants who could be violent themselves. Sub-Saharan Africans, in the course of their "forced migration" (Elliot 2020, 112), face all sort of violence, mistreatments, assistance, solidarity, racism, empathy, pity and exploitation (Micallef 2017; Hepburn and Simon 2013; Erdoğan 2014; Duvell 2014, Şaul 2014). Going through this hellish sort of experiences and rubbing shoulders with many human smugglers, travel agencies, police and gangs, they finally arrive in Istanbul as the last destination to Europe. This has render Istanbul one of the most

consequential migration destinations to Europe -the last sanctuary before you smuggle yourself into "Eden". Nevertheless, this last sanctuary, Istanbul, avails to the migrants its own share of challenges: from acts of solidarity, assistance to discrimination, racism, violence and "illegality" status. The sub-Saharan African migrants who fled her home-country and endure the brutal journey, then faces a culmination of all these challenges in Istanbul.

Sub-Saharan African migrants and refugees in Istanbul like all migrants, refugees and asylum seekers all over the world and throughout history left their families, communities and countries to seek a better life and livelihood for themselves and their loved ones. Both legal and "illegal" migrations and refugees should be conceived and framed through the sacrifice and emotional anguish of leaving behind home and social familiarities while delving into an abyss of potentialities and uncertainties. This is what defines the migration and the life of migrants and refugees; it is an excruciating experience.

Sub-Saharan African migrants escape dire conditions in their home communities and countries: political instabilities and ethno-communal violence, widespread corruption and unemployment that strangle youth and young peoples' possibilities of upward social mobility and thriving economically, socially and emotionally, and environmental degradations and climate changes that have altered centuries-old communal ways of life and the eco-systems. This is the background that stares back at researchers when they delve into the complex conditions of sub-Saharan African migrants and issues of migration in the African continent. In our hyper-technological and intricately interconnected capitalistic and materialistic global culture, migration in the case of people seeking better life conditions is inevitable and hard to curtail and stop.

Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers will cross borders and borderlands no matter how they are guarded with watch-towers, fences, walls, patrols, border police and detention centres. Migration is a complex and equally dynamic process where migrant routes and trails change overnight in contingency with the changing political, social, security, humanitarian and safety conditions. Borders and borderlands are not an obstacle to migration; they are membranes through which

migrants diffuse with risks and dangers hanging over their heads. Equally, mountains, seas, oceans and desert lands are not a hinderance to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the long run; they would always and definitely find an alternative route or trail or cope with it; this is how the migration process occurs: it is incessant and unstoppable.

Migrants face innumerable risks and challenges while crossing borders and borderlands. These include abductions for ransom money; sexual assault on both male and female migrants and refugees; death; violence from gangs, human smugglers and border police; economic and sexual exploitations in the routes, trails and destinations by host communities. Hence, migration is a traumatic mind-altering human experience; it is a baptism through fire in this life; those who undergone it will be emotionally, psychologically, socially and spiritually impacted deeply – their personalities and dispositions will be changed substantially and profoundly. This is the experience of migration.

In Istanbul I have befriended, interacted with and interviewed sub-Saharan African migrants who relayed to me their life stories and testimonies on leaving their homes and migrating. Coming to Istanbul, a crucial destination and a gateway to Europe, they had faced challenges and experiences that many would not share with anybody; most stories were shared in filtered narratives or in the third-person narrative. This underlined the pain and emotions imbued with these experiences. Migrants and refugees faced explicit and implicit racism and discriminations; violence and assaults from robbers and gangs; got humanitarian assistant and help from well-wishing fellow human beings and organizations; exploitation and daily xenophobic verbal mistreatments in social spaces and in the informal labour sector (See Erdoğan 2014; Duvell 2014).

Dealing with these issues on daily basis will break the human spirit; as a Hawraarsame Amaanreer and Faqay Yaaquub (two Somali sub-clans) on both sides of my parents, I can imagine what social exclusion, xenophobia, insults, social immobility, economic hardships and marginality can do to a person and a whole community. While facing all these inhumane social and legal challenges, the migrants and refugees have hope, resilience, patience, tenacity, vulnerability,

dynamism, faith, fears, and dreams that encapsulates and mark our collective primordial human nature as a species.

For me, migration is an undertaking and experience that aptly captures the human story. The human will and spirit to thrive and seek better life predicate the journey of migration that reconstitute ontologically the migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Migration is an act of seeking solutions; of facing dire challenges; of embracing uncertainties and its resultant outcomes; of faith and hope; of fear and death; of failure and jubilation – it is an allegory of the human story, experienced first-hand by these fellow human beings. Politically, discursively and legally, "illegal" migration is an act of breaking the laws. Nevertheless, in our contemporary interconnected world with imaginary ahistorical borderlines, the act of migration assumes a totally different conception: seeking better life against all politically and legally imposed regulations and laws. The migrant, the refugee and the asylum seeker invites humanity to inquire closely into the morality and ethics of the laws and policies put in place to curb migration – which usually are counter-productive and endanger further migrants and refugee life and safety.

Moreover, the act of migration is a testimony to unfairly divided world: a world where millions of tourists flock resorts and beaches annually, business peoples traversing the globe with "impunity", scholars and researchers jumping from conferences to conferences – an endless global nomadism. Indeed, the act of migration is a defiant and radically political act of partaking in our modern world, of also thriving and prospering in this world, and challenging what seminal sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has termed "wasted lives" in his book *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts*(2003). The migrant, the refugee and the asylum seeker is a figure assuming his/her subject position in a modern world that is economically and socially segregated – it is a claim to, and a struggle for a better life in our conventional civilization which only considers those who have wealth, money, status, the "right skin colour" and connections.

Finally, hope is what drives many migrants: the hope to have a better life; to struggle and make ends meet despite enormous obstacles. This is what defines the spirit of migration. Migrants are the most hopeful and resilient group of people on earth –

who can have hope and maintain it in the face of death? Migrants. In his book, *The Task of Hope in Kierkegaard*, Mark Bernier argues that our modern world is engulfed with despair and despondency, the West in particular (Bernier 2015, 57). Although, I am not in a position to contest Bernier's observations, I know where hope and faith still exist, where people have refused to resign into hopelessness, where life has meaning and purposes to fulfil, where no obstacle is recognised: the migrants' "heart". Sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul, and all migrants, are hopeful, faithful and fearless people who seek a better life against all odds but still journey on continuously. They transition from one destination to another destination like a spirit-soul reincarnating into different worlds, and follow their purposes and life-goals with stoic will: a good life; a better life – one worth living, as Socrates once alluded.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

TABULATED INTERVIEWEES' BRIEF DETAILS

Name	**Country**	**Gender**	**Age**	**Language of interview**	**Occupation**
Tilfe	Ethiopia	F	25	English	Waiter
Mekdes	Ethiopia	F	21	English	Waiter
Yordanos	Ethiopia	F	21	English	Waiter
Christopher	Uganda	M	26	English	Informal labour
William	Tanzania	M	28	Swahili	Salesman
Abdoulaye	Senegal	M	45	English and Turkish	Hawker
Abdiaziz	Ethiopia	M	26	Somali	Unemployed
Xareed	Somalia	M	21	Somali	Unemployed
Mohammed	Somalia	M	38	Somali	Unemployed
Cabdalla	Djabouti	M	23	Somali	Unemployed
Kanu	Nigeria	M	28	English	Informal labour
Caroline	Uganda	F	40	English	Unemployed
Ezichi	Nigeria	F	48	English	Cook
Namwaya	Uganda	F	45	English	Cook
Aminata	Mali	F	19	English	Waiter
Abdullah	Niger	M	25	English	Unemployed
Gina	Ghana	F	35	English	Beautician
Kwame	Ghana	M	45	English	Salesman
Sifan	Somalia	F	50	Somali	Restaurant owner

CURRICULUM VITAE

Personal Information:

Name - Surname: Abdirashid Diriye Kalmoy

Education:

2014-2018 Bsc. in Political Science and Public Administration, Hacettepe University, Ankara, Turkey

2018-2021 MA in Sociology, Ibn Haldun University, İstanbul, Turkey

Experience:

1. Substitute high school teacher, Mandera High school (March – September 2013). I taught English and Physics to form One and Two classes.
2. English part-time teacher at a private Dershane in Ankara (May 2017-February 2018).
3. Kiswahili-Turkish-Somali translator (July-September 2018), SuffaVakfi. I assisted as an English-Kiswahili-Turkish-Somali translator for Suffa Foundation, a humanitarian agency that operates in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania.
4. Teaching assistant/fellow, Ibn Haldun University (Septmeber 2018 – June 2020). Along-side with a colleague we moderate discussion sessions, administer quizzes and evaluate student exams in World history classes.

Publications:

‘‘They Even Killed the Camels’’: An Oral History of State and Tribal Violence in North Eastern Kenya (unfinished thesis project, 2020 – interrupted by COVID-19 travel restrictions)

Hopes in Transition: An Ethnography of Sub-Saharan African Migrants in Istanbul

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Fictional publications

Maandeeq and Monsters, *Jalada: Nostalgia* No. 9, Vol. 1, 2020 https://jaladaafrica.org/2020/12/04/maandeeq-and-monsters-by-abdirashid-diriyekalmoy/

The Milk Women of Oodan, *Shamaca,* 2021. https://shamaca.com/the-milkwomenfrom-oodan/

Opinion-Analytical publications (1000-1500 words range)

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