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*Erasmus*

**Journey Narratives of Eritrean Refugees living in The Netherlands:  
Becoming and Being a Refugee**

A Research Proposal Design presented by:

***Jeanette M. Kindipan-Dulawan***

(Philippines)

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Members of the Examining Committee:

Helen Hintjens

Nahda Shehada

The Hague, The Netherlands

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***Inquiries:***

**Postal address:**

Institute of Social Studies  
P.O. Box 29776  
2502 LT The Hague  
The Netherlands

**Location:**

Kortenaerkade 12  
2518 AX The Hague  
The Netherlands

Telephone: +31 70 426 0460

Fax: +31 70 426 0799

## Dedication

*To Loinaz, my greatest support;*

*To Malinnay, my baboochangers, I hope someday you will understand.*

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## List of Acronyms

EDF	Eritrean Defence Forces
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IND	Immigratie en Naturalisatiedienst
NS	National Service
SSM	Snowball Sampling Method
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WYDC	Warsai-Yikealo Development Campaign (WYDC)

## **Abstract**

This paper wishes to analyse the journey narratives of Eritrean refugees in The Netherlands in their becoming and being refugees. It consists of the different constructions of the participants' journeys through its beginning or ending; as an (un)imagined destination; as narratives of uncertainties and as influenced by the mode of travel in the stages of their physical journeys. The study illustrates that focusing on refugees' own meaning and narratives of their journeys can help in understanding the temporalities and permanence of temporariness in becoming and being a refugee. I argue that the participants' notions of time and place were altered while becoming and being a refugee as demonstrated by their narratives of waiting, enforced idleness and being made to wait especially before and after granted a refugee status and that important places where refugee status have been granted can be both a place of 'opportunity' and 'constraints'. I hope that this paper will give voice to the refugees whose narratives are part of the global narratives of refugees but are most often misrepresented or not heard.

## **Keywords**

Eritrean refugees, refugee journeys, time, place



# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.2 Why Refugee Journeys?

When someone becomes a refugee, how does that person construct the journey in becoming and then being a refugee? This was one of my questions when I was contemplating on my research problem before and during field work. Initially, I intended to look at the journeys of young Eritrean refugees while crossing borders in their pursuit of asylum in The Netherlands or elsewhere. However, the fieldwork gave me the opportunity to revisit my assumptions and initial research problems and to reformulate them. In short, the journeys of Eritrean refugees, as studied in this work, are not only cross-border but involve notions of time, place and a sense of ‘home’ that has proved of great interest both to myself and I believe also to those I interviewed. Before coming up with these questions, I also observed that Eritrean refugees were a very under researched group, and decided to focus on them rather than asylum seekers in general.

While working on my theoretical frameworks and related literatures on refugee studies, I found that some reports and articles<sup>1</sup> about refugees tend to focus on reasons for flight. This is often linked with establishing their ‘just claim’ to asylum, where persecution is a key criteria. Under Article 1 Para. 2 of the 1951 Convention, a refugee is a person who, owing to a:

“...well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”<sup>2</sup>

Focusing on their precarious situations while fleeing and their ‘integration’ stories in the country where they sought asylum is another set of studies. Although there are very few articles that theorized how refugees construct their journeys I did find some researches, which I will discuss in Chapter 2 the relevance of their concepts for this study. This apparent lack of interest among researchers on the refugee experience of displacement (the ‘journey’) fostered my interest to focus on exploring Eritrean refugees’ own journey narratives in becoming and being refugees.

This paper draws on the findings of the research I have undertaken with ten Eritrean refugees living in The Netherlands. The paper builds on the related literatures on forced migration and refugee studies. While there is discussion on the reasons for the flight of Eritrean refugees, the analysis of construction of their journeys is rigorously explored in the paper. Framing the construction of the journey as the central research problem follows another two important aspects of the research that is to look at how the construction of refugee journey is linked to their notions and experience of time, place and sense of home. It is my hope that this paper might offer a different perspective on the current context of forced migration of Eritreans than that which is often heard in news reports and political discussions. In order to achieve this, I am presenting the

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<sup>1</sup> Mentioned in Section 1.3

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR webpage

narratives of the participants and their multifaceted experiences through their journeys of becoming and being refugees.

## 1.2 Why individual narratives?

In my fieldwork, I asked the participants what stories they would like people to know about the Eritrean refugees, Ferej<sup>3</sup> responded that they have different stories and “even people who came in same boat have different stories.” His response reminds us that ‘the refugee experience’ should not be regarded as “undifferentiated, essentialized” placing them in a “universal category” disregarding their different circumstances and individual differences of refugees (Malkki 1995). In order to present the experiences of the participants, I engaged with narratives of their refugee journeys including how their experiences impact on their notions of time and place. Situated in their socio-political contexts, these narratives will also offer insights how refugees “make sense of displacement” and re-establishment of their interrupted lives (Eastmond 2007: 248).

The individual narratives of the participants included a description of their experiences before arriving and while in The Netherlands and the meanings they attached to these experiences and of the time and places they have been. Engaging with individual stories does not only convey the “isolated individual” but also a recognition of the “individual in society” (Elliott 2005: 39).

Furthermore, Desbele reiterates that Eritreans do not arrive with their families, he says “now we are alone, we do not have anyone here, we should not be pushed away.” This illustrates the importance of narratives of displaced people in understanding the “discontinuities” in their lives and how they engage with and act on their situation (Eastmond 2007: 251). Desbele also appeals for “solidarity with refugees” which is seemingly yielding to “distrust in many parts of the world” resulting to their stories as deemed irrelevant, unreliable or “not heard at all” (Ibid: 261).

This paper does not claim that narratives of the participants are representative of their group, but, as these are individual stories, it is still part of a global narrative of refugees worthy to be shared in deepening our understanding of refugee situations. Reflecting on and integrating the study of “refugee voices” may shed light on Bourdieu’s doxa, “that of which is taken for granted” in refugee and forced migrations studies (Sigona 2014: 379).

## 1.3 Situating the participants of this study

As of March 2016, the Immigratie en Naturalisatiedienst (IND) reports that the second highest number of asylum seekers in The Netherlands are those from Eritrea, next to Syria<sup>4</sup>. Thousands of Eritrean young men and women are fleeing Eritrea to seek asylum in other countries, making Eritrea the 9<sup>th</sup> largest refugee producing country between 2008 and 2011 (Kibreab 2013: 630). The

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<sup>3</sup> All names of participants were changed upon their request while allowing me to share their stories and quote them. Appendix 2 contains some background of the participants.

<sup>4</sup> <https://ind.nl/Documents/Asylum%20Trends%20march%202016.pdf>

identified driving force is the universal and indefinite National Services (NS) and the Warsai-Yikealo Development Campaign (WYDC) <sup>5</sup>(Ibid).

The 2015 Amnesty International reports that Eritrea is one of the biggest refugee producing countries in the world, third biggest group crossing the Mediterranean were Eritreans “with no ongoing armed conflict”. This coincided with the year when the ‘refugee crisis’ in Europe was brought into the headlines, political discussions, activism across the globe. In November 2014, the UNHCR reports 90% of Eritreans arriving in Europe were between 18 and 24 years old<sup>6</sup>. While most young Eritreans begin military training for the last year of high school, children as young as 15 are sometimes conscripted. Desertions and refusals to report became more common in 2014, thus more than over 5% of the population have fled the country, to Europe and Israel<sup>7</sup>.

This study does not reflect the ‘typical’ Eritrean asylum seeker or refugee profile, since out of the ten Eritrean refugees interviewed, three were aged between 18 and 24. Furthermore, three left Eritrea when they were 15 or 16. The rest left Eritrea between 26 and 28 years of age, with one over 30. This profile shows the varying ages and backgrounds of those leaving Eritrea and clarifies that my sample was perhaps not ‘representative’. The profile of my informants also seem to impact on how the refugees themselves construct, express and thereby mediate their refugee ‘journey’, as will be elaborated in Chapters 3 and 4.

The narratives shared by participants in this study seem to bring in different narratives of flight. I found that the drivers for flight were often composite, and were different according to age, gender and background. Other than this, the findings also manifest that these connections are implicated on how the Eritrean refugees constructed and mediated their refugee journeys as further explained in Chapter 3.

Although some of the participants mentioned similar causes of flight, they also narrated how this is not as simple as how it is usually presented. While the ‘indefiniteness’ of the NS is the major factor why Eritreans opted to flee, there are complexities involved.

*“Military training is different from military service. In military training, they teach you how to shoot, how to kill. In military service, watching the border, not only fighting but doing lots of things”* (Gezai 2016).

The findings present that teenagers as young as 15 flee because of the compulsory military training undertaken at the Sawa<sup>8</sup> even before they turn 18. One of the contributions of the findings is that the NS is already implemented while students are still in university and the ‘indefiniteness’ happens when they finish university. Compulsory military training does not excuse anyone from doing the national or military service.

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<sup>5</sup> The WYDC is a multi-faceted national social and economic programme which require all conscripts to serve the government and the country indefinitely.

<sup>6</sup> Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Covering the period 1 July 2014-30 June 2015 <http://www.unhcr.org/562f44619.html>

<sup>7</sup> Review of UK Home Office Country Information and Guidance Eritrea: National (incl. Military) Service’ (version 2.0e, September 2015) and Eritrea: Illegal Exit

<sup>8</sup> This is how the participants described the military training camp. Beginning 2003, “all schoolchildren are required to undertake grade 12 of school in Warsai Yikealo Secondary School in Sawa NS and Training Centre (Sawa). Some students are younger than 17” (Amnesty International 2015:19).

## 1.4 Research Objectives, Main Question and Sub-questions

### *Research Objectives*

Disregarding refugee journeys and the multifaceted processes may lead to “limited” or inaccurate interpretation (Benezer and Zetter 2015:303) or representation of the lived realities of refugees. For example, we may assume that refugee journeys may have only started upon physical exit from countries of flight, or may have ended upon receiving their refugee status in host country, disregarding the facts that their journeys might have started even before leaving their countries and that their status prolonged their journeys. Thus, the research aims to address this by focusing on refugees’ own understandings of their journeys, defined as movement beyond and through place and time and forms of transformation through journey.

I hope that these narratives will contribute in enriching existing literatures on ‘refugee journeys’ and expounding the scope of refugee studies in order that we, including policy makers, governments and humanitarian agencies contribute in addressing the concerns of refugees through an understanding of their ‘lived realities’ in becoming and being refugees.

### *Main question*

How do Eritrean refugees construct their journeys in becoming and being a refugee in The Netherlands?

### *Sub-questions:*

- a) What are the different constructions and representations of their journeys?
- b) To what extent do notions of time and place become altered through their refugee journey?

## 1.5 Reflecting on Interviews and Methodology

I conducted my fieldwork and interviews for the research from July to August mostly in Den Haag and Holland Spoor. Recognizing that interviews “provide the ideal method” in learning about individual’s experiences that “constitute human condition” (Elliot 2006:19), I interviewed ten Eritreans; one is a male asylum seeker, two female refugees, two teenagers and five male refugees. Before the interviews, I asked some of my Eritrean friends for advices in communicating with Eritreans to gain their trust in sharing their stories. With the information that some Eritreans are hesitant and suspicious when interviewed, I communicated with some of them through phone calls, explained why I wanted to talk to them and requested if I can have an informal and semi-structured interviews. Fortunately, I was able to build an immediate rapport with my interviewees.

Before every interview, I asked permission from the participants if I can audio-record our conversations because I was not confident I can capture all the relevant information. Fortunately, all my participants agreed however, they requested that I do no mention their names in the paper. All of the interviews were conducted in the choice of place and time of the participants<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> The pseudonyms, dates, places and duration of interviews can be found in Appendix 2.

In the interviews, I noticed that the male participants are more open and willing to share their stories, why and how they arrived in The Netherlands. The two female participants did not disclose much about their journeys, but were more open in sharing their current situation. Both of them referred to their reasons for seeking asylum as “the situation in Eritrea” and that they cannot further elaborate ‘this situation’.

Since I wanted to gain more information on female journeys, I asked the assistance of one of the participants in looking for female participants, but did not materialize. I also asked help from one of the church leaders of the Orthodox Church where Eritreans usually go on Saturdays, however, he said that they do not speak English and did not want to talk without the presence of a male Eritrean interpreter. For a while, I attempted to analyze the differences of the male and female participants’ openness in sharing their stories, however, I felt that I did not have the capacity to further explore such observation. I still feel, however, that this observation can be further studied in future researches how gender relations and identity in Eritrea and among the refugee communities can be implicated in sharing their narratives.

Aware of the difficulty, I asked help from some of my colleagues and networks in looking for respondents. The first participant I have interviewed was introduced to me by my supervisor whom she randomly met and asked if he was willing to be part of my research. The other two participants were introduced to me by an Ethiopian working at the Stichting Vluchteling. A former ISS student requested one of her Eritrean classmates in Dutch language class to participate in my research. The other male participant was referred to me by an Eritrean journalist<sup>10</sup>. The other five were identified through Snowball Sampling Method (SSM).

In addition, the informal conversations with five Eritreans who were and are refugees living in The Netherlands contributed in my understanding of the context of Eritrean refugees before they arrived, a little bit of the cultural and political context and journeys across borders.

When face to face with the respondents, most of them asked why I was doing a research specifically about Eritrean refugees and not about my country. I explained that although I am not an Eritrean, I feel that as a student of development studies, I have a responsibility to contribute in letting the voices of Eritrean refugees whose narratives of their journeys are either ignored or misrepresented to be heard or known. Upon further reflection, I find myself agreeing that including social justice as part of social researches on refugees by sharing their journey experiences is a deserving goal with Benezer and Zetter (2014: 304).

Although I am not very convinced, I think that I, not being an Eritrean had a positive influence in gaining the trust of my interviewees. Some of them told me that most of the time even if they are in The Netherlands, they are afraid to share their stories to other Eritreans for fear that some of them are “Eritrean spies sent by the government.” In one of my informal conversations with an Eritrean refugee, he mentioned that the deep distrust and suspicion against fellow Eritreans were instilled because of the “constant fear of speaking against the government while growing up” and indeed there is fear even when they are outside Eritrea.

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<sup>10</sup> Prefers anonymity.

The case of ‘mistrust’ and ‘constant fear’ was also pointed out when the Danish Immigration Service Report<sup>11</sup> about Eritrean refugees was ‘discredited’ through the review of the UK Home Office Report<sup>12</sup>. The report says that “in the climate of fear and mistrust in Eritrea, open conversations/discussions necessarily limits the information provided to foreigners.” Although the report points to the limited information provided to foreigners, I still trust that the narratives shared to me by the participants are legitimate and valuable. When traumatic accounts arise during the interview, I was careful in choosing what were relevant in my analysis and avoided implicating or incriminating others.

From the interviews, I have learned that indeed the journeys of Eritrean refugees who came to The Netherlands have multifaceted and transformative influences on themselves and on their notions of time, place and sense of home. It is hoped this study will also give a glimpse of their personal journey narratives while living in temporary shelters, in refugee camps and asylum processing centers and upon and after receiving their status.

## **1.6 Chapter Outline**

This research is divided in five chapters. Chapter 1 presents the general introduction of the research, such as the rationale for choosing refugee journeys as central topic and for engaging narratives, background of the participants, the research objective and questions and my reflections of the interviews and methodologies. Chapter 2 illustrates the main theoretical concepts that I have engaged to analyze and support this study, mainly ideas or concepts on refugee journeys, discourses on time; place and home, and studies regarding force migrants. Chapter 3 and 4 illustrate the different construction and narratives of journeys, and meanings of time and place for the participants including some of their plans as they continue navigating their refugee journeys. I begin my analysis by using quotes from and narratives of the participants with concepts discussed in Chapter 2 and others that I find relevant. Lastly, Chapter 6 presents the conclusion of the research.

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<sup>11</sup> Country Information and Guidance Eritrea: Illegal Exit\_ Version 2.0e September 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Review of UK Home Office Country Information and Guidance Eritrea: National (incl. Military) Service (version 2.0e, September 2015) and Eritrea: Illegal Exit (Version 2.0e, September 2015).

# Chapter 2: Theorizing Refugee Journeys, Time and Place

## 2.1 Introduction

In my attempt to further understand the journeys of Eritrean refugees and how other scholars theorized refugee journeys, I used some references on refugee studies relevant to this research. One of the critiques on refugee studies is that journeys “scarcely appear in the indexes of books”, abstracts or references about the refugees who underwent such (Benezer and Zetter 2015: 303). There is an “increasing salience of research” on those who are ‘forcibly uprooted’ in the twentieth century, thus it is labelled as “century of the refugees” Colson (2003: 2). This chapter will consider such studies and explain how refugee journeys are theorised in relation to refugee narratives. To illustrate how time and place can be theorised in relation to the journey, some brief extracts from interviews with refugees are used to connect analysis in their narratives with more scholarly approaches reviewed in the rest of the chapter.

## 2.2 The refugee journey: narrative and analytical tools

Finding concepts to use in analysing or theorizing about refugee journey proves to be challenging. However the concepts of Benezer and Zetter in their work on the “Directions: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges in Researching Journeys” proved to be relevant in my paper. The authors claim that ‘the refugee journey’ is one of the most under-researched theme that are being undertaken in refugee and migration studies even though it is a significant “feature of the exilic process” and a “formative and transformative experience” [refugees] (2015: 297).

I also find their work not imposing theories but rather presenting gaps that need to be explored in order to understand and come up with useful researches on refugee journeys. Their work also offers an opportunity to present different constructions of refugee journeys defined by refugees themselves. There is a “conceptual challenge” in undertaking researches on refugee journey given that there are several levels of interpretation (Benezer and Zetter 2015:304). As an example, it can be interpreted as “conceptual construct, physical process, a distinctive indicator of refugeehood, representation of the exilic process; a transformative experience involving immense personal and social upheaval” (Ibid: 305). Studying refugee journeys also brings in a critical comprehension on the “lives of refugees, on their way and on arrival” and deepens our understanding of “who they are at best” (Ibid: 303).

I also looked into reports of the UNHCR regarding refugee journeys. In the 2005 State of the World’s Refugees, the report focused on forced migration, displacement, experiences of loss and the effect on the influx of refugees in host countries as well as the strategies implemented to address the roots of forced migration. The report overlooked providing a space for refugees to voice out their experiences through their journeys. The succeeding 2012 report presented the trends in forced displacement, solutions on integration, repatriation and resettlements. In addition, there was an effort to expound it to the protection of refugees including resettlements and presented some ways forward, one of which is to “actively engage refugees in the search for solutions.” The report covers most of the main themes extensively discussed in refugee studies under

the fields of sociology, anthropology, politics and legal among others. Although there is an attempt of the reports to include ‘refugees’ experiences’, refugees or forcibly displaced persons are always presented as ‘victims of circumstances’ (UNCHR 2005 and 2012). Presenting refugees as ‘victims’ and persons identifiable “through their needs dehumanizes and dehistoricizes” refugees (Colson 2003: 2), like the case of the UNHCR reports. The reports also overlooked their journeys, thus missing out on the potential contribution of understanding refugee journeys in addressing the state of the world’s refugees.

Collyer is one of the prominent authors who talked about journeys in migration studies. He presented that over the past decade, complex, lengthy and often dangerous overland journeys have become a significant feature of undocumented migration (2007: 669) or the “common feature of the global migration system” (2010: 274). His work on journeys is based on the research about ‘stranded migrants’ in Morocco who undertook the fragmented journeys. He refers to ‘stagnant migrants’ as groups of refugees who are “yet to be recognized, previously recognized and those with other protection needs” (2010: 277). The concept of ‘fragmented journey’ is used to analyse some of the narratives of ‘uncertainties’ in Chapter 3.5 as a construction of the participants’ refugee journeys.

I have also referred to the recent work of Kaytaz on the journeys of ‘Afghan migrants’/asylum seekers and refugees to Turkey. Interestingly, the author also used some of Collyer, Benezet and Zetter’s concepts. She defined their journeys as constructed narratives comprising of lengthy periods of “immobility” disrupted by brief periods of travel (2016: 284), thus pointing out that the journey is used as “an analytical tool” in understanding the migration history of Afghan migrants. Kaytaz argues that conceptualizing the journey as a form of narrative constituted by long periods of immobility offers a shift from the “traditional view” of journeys as “having a beginning and end or an origin and final destination” (2016: 290). The findings in Chapter 3 will present similar yet different construction of the participants’ journeys as comprising of periods of planning, waiting and uncertainty (Ibid: 285). Chapter 3 will present a slightly different finding with the study of Kaytaz on the construction of journeys as “narratives of travel and immobility and circular” (2016: 293-297). Placing the journey as an “in-between phase” reinforces the separation of the journey process between [Eritrea and The Netherlands] but conceptualising it as “narrative transcends” this contradiction (2012: 287).

In the interest of the main problem of this research, I will use some temporal characteristics; the process and content of the journey; and drivers and destinations of refugee journey of Benezet and Zetter (2015). In my conversations with the participants, some of them mentioned that they knew the moment they started planning and preparing to flee Eritrea, they already anticipated that they will be considered as deserters in their country but refugees in the country they are moving to. All these experiences of planning and preparation “stretch the journey in time, beyond its spatial/temporal dimensions” generating “anticipatory socialization” to the journey and to the country they intend to go or settle (Benezet and Zetter 2015: 305). In asking when the journey ends, it should be noted that there are combinations of the “physical and mental continuity of a journey”, and that a journey is not a “fixed-end” point (Ibid: 306). This means that a journey maybe constructed as something not ending with the “physical arrival at the destination” but may not “end at all”, because of many combinations of circumstances (Ibid: 307).



The next Chapter will present the findings that are either similar or different from the concepts of the authors on the construction of the refugee journeys in terms of its beginnings or endings(?); uncertainties and stability; the unexpected, not the imagined; and meanings of journeys by foot, plane or boats and

## 2.3 Tools for Analysing Time and Place

### 2.3.1 Temporalities

Analysing the relationship of time and migration is necessary in comprehending the “theoretical and practical problems” related with [forced migration] yet it is seldom mentioned even though it is one of the leading themes in studying current global processes (Cwerner 2001). Griffiths responded to this challenge through her research on the experiential temporalities of asylum seekers and immigration detainees in the UK (2014: 1991-2009) with some reference to Cwerner’s work. Although Griffiths’ concept of time was drawn from the experiences of different group of people, her concepts are relevant in this paper as shown in the temporal experiences of the participants. In fact, Griffiths’ experiential temporalities can be found in the account of one of the participants.

*“When in refugee camp, you wait for house they give, while waiting for housing, most of the time, I stay inside. When in camp, it is not possible to visit other people, no money to go around, everything is boring. Time is slow, day is long, and time is boring.”*

Introducing Haleka’s account is useful, since this short extract from his narrative describes his experience of time and place when he arrived at the refugee camp in The Netherlands and stayed for 6 months. He was there to wait for the processing of his request for refugee status. Even after receiving his status, he describes how time is ‘sticky’ as he then had to wait for housing to be provided.

*“When [you] receive your status, another time is spent in refugee camp, you wait for the house they give, while wait for housing, most of the time I stay inside, just watching TV and facebook.”*

Haleka’s story of a slow, long and boring time is the first we are introducing in this study, and is followed by many more in Chapter 4. This can be linked directly with the research of Griffiths who described refugee time very vividly as ‘sticky time’: “a long, slowing of time” (2015: 1994).

The research of Griffiths’ presents that time is a significant way by which asylum seekers [and refugees] put meaning to the uncertainties and frustrations brought about by “progress and efficiency” of the immigration and judicial processes and practices (2014: 1994). Drawing from this thesis, she presented the “four experiential temporalities” one of which is ‘sticky time’. The ‘sticky time’ can lead to the experiential temporality of “complete stagnation (suspended time)”; or a “fast rushing out of control (frenzied time)”; and “temporal ruptures” (Ibid).

To emphasize ‘sticky’ time, Griffiths illustrated slowness of time as a recurring complaints of “traveller and migrants” because of the long bureaucratic processes of which some aspects of the migration processes also lead to slowing down of time (Ibid). ‘Sticky time’ is experienced through the slow and long decision making processes of granting refugee status to include the bureaucratic processes of “applications, interviews, paperwork and judicial hearings” (Ibid: 1995). Chapter 4 will also present that there are also other stages of the refugee journeys where sticky time is experienced including while on their way to The Netherlands and also after they were

granted status as already illustrated by Haleka's story. Furthermore, 'suspended time' is elaborated through the examples of detainees where they refer to their situation as "timeless present" or "directionless stasis" because of their incarceration with no time limit (Ibid: 1997). Suspended time is also referred to as "time not only become stuck", but can lead to "Kafkaesque"<sup>13</sup> (Ibid). It is also associated with the "lack of social or personal progress" while one remains in limbo (Ibid: 1998). These two experiential temporalities of sticky and suspended time reinforce my thesis that Griffiths' theory can be expounded using refugee journeys while becoming and being refugees, not only when they are still on the process of seeking asylum. However, the 'frenzied and time rupture' is not applied in the analysis of notions of time, but this does not mean that it cannot be used in further researches of refugee journeys.

Chapter 4 also demonstrates the suitability of other 'time' concepts. The research framework for social time illustrates "time as a social factor, as causal link, quantitative and qualitative measure" (Hassard 1990: 14-18). Time as a social factor implies that social relations or interactions are influenced by time in two ways as a "resource" and "social meaning" (Ibid: 14-15). Time as a resource indicates that as it adopts a "commodity image" it "becomes valuable" and as a resource with a "fixed-sum variable" (Ibid). Although there are different conceptions of time, to include physics, thermodynamics astronomy, geology and biology, the sociological aspects of time is important given that the man's reality is deeply penetrated by "social reality" (Gurvitch 1990: 43-44).

Other theories of time used in giving meaning to the temporal notions of the participants include those that were referred to by Griffiths and some authors who studied time include Nowotny who posited that "time dwells in us" because of our biological nature and because as social beings we live in a society with "temporal structures" (1994). Other than these authors the concept of Gasparini in relation to 'waiting' and Gray on the productivity view of 'waiting' as aspects of sticky and suspended time are relevant.

Given the different theories of time in different fields it is difficult to choose frameworks to analyse the temporal experiences of refugees, thus one need to "choose a particular perspective" to provide a "complete picture" as possibly one can the "complexities of time" experienced by [refugees and asylum seekers] (Cwerner 2001: 16).

### **2.3.2 Place and 'sense of home'**

People's lifespan do not only comprise of one but several different places that may not exist at the same time nor does it have equal weight and the same meaning (Pascual-de-Sans 2004: 350). The group of people like refugees and displaced persons are one of the groups who are mostly forced to experience different places. But do they even arrive at their destination where they see as 'meaningful place' because they have to leave 'that place' where they were displaced? Or will they ever find their place?

Bauman is one of those who looked at the 'liminal drift' conditions of refugees, where they "do not know whether it is transitory or permanent" (2007: 37). He argues, that even if they are 'stationary for a time', they are still on "journey" that is never completed because the country of

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<sup>13</sup> "having a nightmarishly complex, bizarre, or illogical quality (e.g. *Kafkaesque bureaucratic delays*)" (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Kafkaesque>)

arrival or return “remains forever unclear” and the place that they consider as “final” is never accessible (2007: 37-38). But what and why are these places inaccessible? In order to deepen the analysis, of making and meaning of places to the participants, I have engaged some of the concepts of Brun who worked on the relationship between refugees, displaced persons and places. However, I have mostly used some of Gustafson’s theoretical concepts of the meanings of places in everyday life (2001: 5-16) through his three-pole triangular model.

Brun’s thesis that “becoming a refugee or a displaced person denotes that they have to move from their places of residence to another (2001: 15) although to some degree applies to the participants because they left Eritrea, it also does not present that moving from one place to another does not happen when becoming but also happens when one is being a refugee. For refugees and migrants, they move to a ‘place’ which comprises of “physical, social, economic, and cultural realities” (Brun and Fabos 2015: 6). Some parts of Chapter 4 alludes that for the participants, place is a particular articulation of their social relations extended outside Eritrea and beyond other places they have been to in becoming and even being refugees.

Gustafson’s theoretical concept illustrates the ‘three-pole triangular model’ in which several meanings ascribed to places can be analysed “around and between self, others, and environment” but these meanings may go beyond these poles because of “distinction, valuation, continuity and change” attributed to places (Ibid: 9-13). Although there are three poles, only the ‘self and environment’ poles are used in the analysis of notions of place.

Under the ‘self’ pole, places have “highly personal meanings” (Ibid: 9). There four themes linking meaning of place to self, the “life-stages” conveyed through “memories and experiences”; and emotions of “security and sense of home”. The third and fourth theme comprise of connecting self to place where the individual undertake or have activities and place as basis for “self-identification” using the place to convey “who they are” or sometimes a representative of their own “country” (Ibid). In the ‘environment’, meanings of place are attributed not only to the ‘physical environment’ like weather and seasons but as a “historical environment” (Ibid: 9-11). The link between self and environment also comprise the meanings of places wherein the place is often seen as meaningful because of the opportunities that it offers to people like prospects for “personal development”, or can either be a place “constraining opportunities” (Ibid: 10-11). Another meaning of place comprise of the ‘institutional environment’ that denotes ‘citizenship’ and that “localization theme” where the place is either “close or far away from, easy or difficult to reach” by people (Ibid).

Chapter 4.3 elaborates the making and meaning of places for Eritrean refugees of which for some there are places that are ‘vexed and loved’, important, with positive and negative valuation, called home which is here or there. There are also places that left profound spots along their journeys of becoming and being refugees. One of these places include the participants’ notion of ‘home’ as illustrated in Chapter 4.3. In fact this notion of place as home was voiced out by Haleka who arrived a year ago. According to him.

*“Home is the place where most of the memories are there, my home is in Eritrea because family is there, but for this time, this [Netherlands] is home for me, even if I live alone, I am safe, I am free.”*

This notion of home presents that “home is a place and idea imbued with feelings” (Brun and Fabos 2015: 6). This notion relates to the concept of the link between home and forced migration

“home and place are complex and interrelated notions, thus, the accounts of people leaving home produces too many homes and hence no home” (Ibid). Chapter 4.3 elaborates on the multifaceted notions of some of the participants.

# Chapter 3: Analysing Eritrean Refugee Journey Narratives: becoming and being

## 3.1 Introduction

Building on the framework presented in the last chapter, this chapter quotes extensively from interviews to illustrate how participants understand and construct their journeys. This can now be discussed in more detail, with direct quotations that show the nuances of different forms of representation and meanings of the journey. The purpose is to address the central research question which is about how different constructions of journeys depend on the situation of individuals, their age and their life circumstances in Eritrea, on their way to and upon arrival in The Netherlands. The participants constructed their journeys through its beginning or ending, their (un)imagined destinations, their narratives of uncertainties, and mode of travel and stages in the physical journeys they made. The chapter starts by providing an overview of journey narratives.

## 3.2 Constructions of Journeys

When asked about their refugee journeys, most of the participants first referred to their experiences while crossing the borders in order to seek asylum ‘elsewhere’ because of the ‘bad situation back home in Eritrea’. However, in the course of the interviews, the participants started to share the construction of their journeys before they physically left Eritrea, while staying in transit countries<sup>14</sup>, on the boat, on their way to Europe<sup>15</sup>, in refugee camps, while waiting for refugee status and after receiving their status.

Most of the participants flee Eritrea by either following the ‘typical routes’<sup>16</sup>. However, two of them came to The Netherlands directly by plane before deciding to seek asylum, while one arrived by plane but had to cross Sudan and Egypt. Although most of the participants have the same purpose for coming to The Netherlands, that is to seek asylum, there are similarities but more of differences and sometimes contradictions in the construction of their journeys. In the analysis of the construction of the journeys that were ‘differentiated into stages’ by the participants, I will use the concepts mainly presented in Chapter 2 and some other relevant studies.

## 3.3 When did it start; does it really end?

The temporal characteristics refer to how refugees construct their journey if it is a “time-limited or finite” journey and the ‘mental and physical representation’ of their journeys (Benezer and Zetter 2015). Although, there are three main questions under the temporal characteristics, the responses of the participants are limited to how they constructed the start and end of their journeys.

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<sup>14</sup> These refer to Ethiopia, Sudan, Libya or Egypt as shown in Appendix 1.

<sup>15</sup> Most participants refer to Europe as destination to seek asylum.

<sup>16</sup> Please refer to Appendix 1-a map showing the routes of Eritrean asylum seekers.

*“Since I was still in grade 9, I know that if I complete grade 11, I will go to Sawa; I know that when I go to Sawa it [will] stop me from going to other places, to study and work. I planned to run, escape and become refugee.”*

This is Ashenafi’s articulation of the start of his journey as a 15-year old escaping Eritrea right after finishing 9<sup>th</sup> grade. He arrived in the Netherlands almost after one year of *“running, hiding, waiting and waiting.”* Ashenafi’s narrative is similar to the stories of Abiel, who left Eritrea at the age of 15 and Desbele, who sought asylum in 2002 at the age of 16. Their journeys started even before they left Eritrea.

*“In Eritrea, everyone knows that procedure all same, everyone must go to Sawa and military service, everyone is same, no one exempted, that’s why I left before going to Sawa. I had to leave or I will serve for the rest of my life.”*

For Desbele, although he went to military camp he decided to leave knowing that he will be forced to stay indefinitely just like what happened to his father and brothers who served in the military service.

*“I was 16 that time when I decided to escape. Even before and now, everyone has to serve. My father is 68 years old, he was judge for 37 years, it was his time for pension, but they ordered him to carry ‘Kalashnikov’, to guard in the night. After war, he has to work again as part of military service even if he is 68. I left or I will be same with them.”*

In the construction of their journeys the three participants indicated that theirs already started even before they physically left Eritrea, thus illustrating that journeys of forced displacements in most cases “start in anticipation of events” (2015: 305). The ‘anticipated event’ for the participants is the indefinite military training which leads to insecurity, constrained travel and work opportunities and suffering the same fate as others, thus their premeditated escape. Although, most of the participants mentioned that main reasons why they decided to leave Eritrea is because of the ‘anticipated’ indefiniteness of military and NS, they did not consider this as a start of their journeys but rather the reason why they are refugees. These findings illustrate how the age and circumstances can impact on how refugees construct the start of their journeys.

Some participants indicated that their journeys already started when they were planning and preparing to leave Eritrea. Ameny shared that his journey was planned while he was still in university:

*“I planned to leave Eritrea when government tell me [to] quit in university and teach in secondary school. I wanted to finish my schooling, but I was told to stop. When I went to Ethiopia, I need diploma because I need work, because I need money so I can go to Sudan, Libya and Europe.”*

In here, we can see that his preparation was to study and work in Ethiopia, the first country he fled to, in order to have the resources to continue his journey. The diploma and work are his preparations to finance his escape. Ameny’s account as echoed by few of the participants is similar to the concept that journeys start when planning and necessary preparations are undertaken even “long before or very close” to the time of exiting (Benezer and Zetter 2015: 305). Other preparations mentioned by participants include borrowing or asking money from family and friends outside Eritrea or working in the country where they first arrived after leaving Eritrea. The findings differ from the ‘preparatory’ concept of the authors given that the ‘preparations’ did not only

happen in Eritrea, but mostly happened in the transit countries. Moreover, the narratives indicate that the utmost priority is to physically leave Eritrea and the major part of preparations happen in transit countries. Although some of them have resources to reach Sudan and Libya, most of them had to stay an average of 4-14 months in transit countries and work even if it is illegal so they can earn money as payment for ‘smugglers’ to “take them to the boat” (fieldwork 2016).

In terms of representing the journeys through the time of planning, Amenay was the only one who planned his escape from Eritrea in a very short time immediately after he was informed to do the NS. Three of the participants shared that although it took them 1 to 4 years in planning, they implied it as the start of their journeys. Efreem shared that after university he was forced to do NS even though he finished a degree not related to teaching. According to him:

*“I have planned and prepared for 3 years after I graduated in 2009, worked 4 years in government. I expected that after teaching situation will get better, that is why I stayed but the situation got worse and worse.”*

This long term planning was also echoed by Gezai who planned his journey while in the military service:

*“I stayed 1 year, 6 months. I decided to [get] out of military service and my country because it was really bad. I was in military service looking after animals and I hate to do that for unlimited time.”*

Ferej, who finished university implies that his journey started when he was planning to leave and emphasized on the reason for leaving:

*“I waited first if I can get the chance to work while living with my family, but it was not possible to choose the work I want. If they assign you as teacher you have to accept or you have nothing.”*

The narratives present that planning and preparations in becoming a refugee happen simultaneously. These stages indicate a commencement of their journeys even before they physically left Eritrea. Ferej and Gezai’s account present that the start of their journeys also comprise of waiting for an opportunity within Eritrea before finally deciding to leave.

As refugees start their refugee journey, this may break their social and familial relationship because of the establishment of distrust even before and while they are moving. As one of the teenagers related he did not discuss his plans of fleeing with his family and friends, saying he decided on his own. By his account:

*“Even if I am young I [did] not make hard decision with my family and friends because in Eritrea you do not trust anyone if you plan to leave.”*

Abiel’s account may present his sense of mistrust for the people around him, however, deciding on his own also demonstrates his agentic capacity in search for safety and security somewhere else even if it is dangerous or uncertain.

From the constructions of journeys, there are differences in terms of how teenage refugees construct the start of their journeys from the adults. For them it was the ‘anticipation’ of indefinite military service, but for the adults, it was the ‘preparation and planning’ they undertook. This shows how age can influence the meaning or representation of journeys. The narratives of planning indicate that the start of one’s journey can either happen in a very short or long time before

they physically embark on their journeys. The narratives present a similar construction that journeys do not only comprise of [physical] “beginning and end, origin and final destination” but rather of planning and preparing (Kaytaz 216: 290) embedded within the journey.

In terms of the ‘end’ of their journeys, the participants did not consider leaving Eritrea, their arrival in the Netherlands and receiving their status as an ‘end’. The end of a journey for some might mean the physical arrival at a “refugee camp or reception centre”, however, most of the time, arrival is not defined (Benezer and Zetter 2015: 306). Their arrival in transit countries did not mean as the ‘end’ of their journeys because most of them had to either work or wait until they move towards ‘Europe’. Also, even if they have already arrived in The Netherlands, in refugee camps and provided with social housing, the participants implied that their journeys did not yet ‘end’. Why then did they imply that their physical arrival did not mean the end of their journeys? It may be that more than the physical end of the journey, refugees might have different way of constructing the end of their journeys (Ibid).

The end of the journeys mean different things to different people. The findings in this research suggest that the construction of the end of a journey is not only the physical arrival. The articulation is through Efrem’s representation of the end of the journey:

*“It is not a matter of arriving or staying in a place, you go to a certain place, and they take you from there, and they say let’s go, let’s go, it never ends.”*

For Haleka, a male refugee speaks of ‘unending journey’ after receiving refugee status:

*“Even before and after we get status, we have to learn Dutch language for 3 years (with frustrated voice), we still we have long long way to go.”*

The narratives of these participants present different construction of when for them do their journeys end. It shows that for some it does not end at the arrival in the first country nor does it end in arrival at the host country nor after receiving the status. The narratives present a different construction of end of journeys to that of Benezer and Zetter, that for some ‘wayfarers’<sup>17</sup>, the journeys end upon arrival at their ‘last destination’ (2015: 306). For Desbele, Haleka and Efrem, their arrival and receiving of status is not the end of their journeys. Instead there is still a longing for their journey to end when they do not have to keep on waiting for permit to look for jobs and completion of the required Dutch language. Although this construction of end of a journey is different from that of the authors, it is similar to their idea that for some refugee, the end of journey may not relate to the “physical border or crossing”, but of the “process of being” (2015: 306).

For some refugees, the end of their journeys are associated with the “reception and integration process” (Ibid).

*“For now, I feel safe and stable with my refugee status because I got a home, a volunteer job, and free to search for job.”*

For Anaresh, she implies an end of her journey being a refugee given that she has a house and the freedom to look for a job, thus implying her “social mobility” which is sometimes one of the

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<sup>17</sup> The term interchangeably used by the authors for refugees.



indicators of the “completion of the journey”(Ibid). These narratives indicate that the construction of the end of a refugee journey are made dependent of other factors that may not necessarily mean the arrival to the final destination or receiving of refugee status, but requirements imposed or provided for by the host country. The different constructions of the end or completion of that participants’ refugee journeys slightly indicate that “journeys [of refugees] may take years, [in different stages], and often have no fixed-end points” (Collyer 2012: 479).

The different narratives of the start and end of the journeys also illustrate that theirs is not “linear” but rather a “circular journey which involves “zigzags and back-and-forth” movements (Kaytaz 2016: 295). These are demonstrated when the refugees had to stop either in transit countries before arriving to prepare for additional resources, or just stay immobile and wait for the time to move again, thus alluding to journey of “immobility”. The circulatory also happens in the country of arrival where the refugees are directed to stay in temporary camps, wait and move as dictated by bureaucratic processes. The circularity and the narratives of seemingly ‘unending’ journeys are also embedded in the narratives of the ‘unexpected’ and illustrate how these are linked to how refugees ascribe meanings to their ‘experiential temporalities’ as elaborated in Chapter 4.

### 3.4 The unexpected, not the imagined

This part of the chapter will now analyse how the ‘image of destination’ influences the participants’ representation and experiences of their journeys (Benezer and Zetter 2015: 308). To do this, the participants were asked about their expectations and their planned destinations to seek asylum. Most of the participants did not plan to come to The Netherlands but most of them planned to go to ‘Europe’, except for the two female participants who came to study here but did not plan to seek asylum. The other participants only decided to come here upon arriving in Italy. Two of the participants knew very little about Netherlands through internet. As shared by Haleka:

*“Before I come here, I[have] no information about any Europe country, I just go with other guys in Italy.”*

It is clear that most of the participants already planned their transit before coming to ‘Europe’, but did not plan to go to any specific European country. Some went first to either Ethiopia or Sudan depending on proximity. One common country they all had to go is to Libya where they embark towards Europe via the Mediterranean Sea. The findings present that people may directly go to the location closest as an initial stopover before they continue to several destinations until they arrive and continue to the country where they finally seek asylum. On the other hand, people set out to their destination with the assumptions that “they will have better prospects” (Benezer and Zetter 2015: 208), however, for the participants their assumptions are not only limited to ‘better prospects’ in their final destination, but rather, they have imagined images of their journeys, their stopovers and their final destinations which probably have affected how they constructed their journeys.

When asked about their expectations when they decided to leave Eritrea, most of them related to experiences that were not expected. This includes the Dutch language lessons that refugees have to undergo before and after receiving refugee status. Such sentiment was expressed by Efrem and Afrahi and echoed by most of the participants:

*“I[did] not expect that I have to spend three years learning a language to have a job”;*

*I did not expect the challenges, being alone, the procedures with government. Those things I never knew and expect. I never expected that I need to learn language, everything was new to me, and it was out of my expectations.”*

Haleka also articulated that the three years spent in learning the Dutch language could have also been undertaken simultaneously while a refugee is also taking up university degree so as not to “waste time” and to give more opportunities in terms of seeking for employment or continuing disrupted education. He further elaborated:

*“Before coming here, I expected that I will start my education very fast, but I am not studying yet, but three years has already passed, three years without nothing, I am almost destroyed.”*

Haleka’s sentiment echoed by some of the participants manifests that when “imagination meets reality” upon arrival (Ibid: 308) in the final destination, it may have an impact on how refugees view or construct their journeys. In this case, the journey is viewed as a ‘waste of time’ and ‘personal destruction’ because of the language requirements. This experience also impacts on their temporal experience as elaborated in Chapter 4.

This finding hopes to input in revisiting the policies of host countries requiring asylum seekers and refugees to undertake language courses. The willingness of the refugees to comply with requirements denotes the need for host countries to look for the most viable and practical ways in implementing such policy without adding too much burden or hindering refugees from pursuing personal and social progress.

Other images of the destination also referred to the journeys and its impact. As Abiel, the teenager refugee shared:

*“I [did] not expect problems<sup>18</sup> on [my] way here. I was only concerned of the problems at home. I did not think of what will happen on the way. The decision is crazy, because I put my life in danger. I came here everything is not I [have] imagined. I have a lot of things to do and situation not expected. I never expect problems here like culture, language, everything and living without family. I also not expect I will miss my family.”*

Abiel’s construction of his journey include policy-related requirements like language and social relations in terms of culture. The ‘unexpected’ also covers not only the material but also ‘familial’ relations. Abiel’s account is similar to the story of young asylum seekers from Iqbal’s study (2016)<sup>19</sup>, wherein the experience of young people leaving their homes is an “unexpected and emotional experience”, their realization of how significant their experience is when they were “already on the move” (Ibid: 107). In here, Abiel’s story present how limited his expectations in terms of fear, danger and missing his family. It was only during his actual moving and upon arrival did he realize such circumstances and expectations, thus showing that his realization did not only happen when he was moving, but also upon arrival and receiving his status. This shows that realizations and expectations do not only happen in one or final stages of becoming and being a refugee, but rather in most of the stages.

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<sup>18</sup> Refer to Appendix 2 in the interview extract with him to understand the ‘problems’ he was referring to.

<sup>19</sup> Hannah Iqbal’s qualitative study is about the “precarious journeys” of young asylum seekers and refugees aged “12-23” from “19 countries.

It is important to note that most of the ‘image of destination’ for the participants did not focus on employment or economic opportunities. The ‘image of freedom and being safe’ in the host country of seeking asylum were the highlights of ‘fulfilled imaginations expectations’. This are implied from some of the accounts of the participants.

*“Before leaving Eritrea, my expectation was to live without fear of the government. I am living it and I don’t expect anything else”* (Ferej 2016);

*“I did not expect too much especially money to earn. I was thinking I will be free to move and think. Now I am here”* (Gezai 2016);

*“I expect only freedom in Europe, but life with family is better, but I cannot live with my family, so I will stay here.”* (Ashenafi)

These accounts also present how the image of destinations differ from teenagers and young adults. In the case of Ashenafi, although he still indicates his preference of ‘living with his family’, his expectation of being free is more important to him for now. The image of destinations for both teenagers always suggests to familial connections, while for adults to freedom and safety.

On the other hand, some narratives of the participants deviated from Benezet and Zetter’s idea of the imagination of ‘better prospects’ in terms when refugees flee their countries. Afrahi, who was ‘forced by situation’<sup>20</sup> to seek asylum in The Netherlands after finishing her diploma here also confirms through her account:

*“I did not have a lot of expectations. Why? I guess people like me do not have lots of expectations. I did not expect too much, earning money, the main thing is freedom and I got it here.”*

The ‘images of the destination’, prospects of work and “expected policies of reception” may have impact on how the journeys are experienced or reminisced (Benezet and Zetter 2015:308). However, the stories of the participants present a similar but unique construction of their journeys. Their journeys are constructed through the unexpected, not the imagined; by feeling of security and freedom<sup>21</sup>; and in the case of young people, freedom, no compulsory military training and familial relations. These ‘unexpected’ have led to how the participants re-examined their motives, the construction and impacts of the journeys on their lives.

### **3.5 Narratives of uncertainties and stability**

Some journeys are focused on uncertainties and dangers encountered before and after leaving Eritrea, while waiting, crossing borders and upon arrival in The Netherlands. These findings will illustrate some of the “long and dangerous fragmented journeys” by Collyer (2010). The dangers faced by stranded migrants or refugees include crossing of “seas, deserts, mountain rangers and deserts” to avoid “policed borders” (2010: 277). These dangers are exacerbated by human smuggling and trafficking, enslavement and violence while crossing or remaining in temporary stop-overs (Ibid).

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<sup>20</sup> Refer to Appendix 2 in the interview extract with Afrahi to understand what she was referring to as “forced by situation”.

<sup>21</sup> Freedom as described by most of the participants include “going to work, school, to speak freely against the Eritrean government, free to think, to do and use own time and activities on a daily basis” (fieldwork July-August 2016)

The journeys of uncertainty and dangers were emphasized through the sharing of three as supported by most of the participants. The uncertainties and fears during the journey were first related to the physical journey, depending on the borders to stay or cross, the mode of transportation and transaction. However, the more emphasized point of uncertainty is whether to get a refugee status and what happens after the five-year validity of the status expires. Upon fleeing Eritrea, the participants are mostly considered as “traitors” by their government. While living in Ethiopia, some of them are able to find jobs in order to have further finances before they can proceed with their ‘journey’ while others are not able to find jobs and stay with relatives or friends who provide shelter and food. Most of those who went to Ethiopia did not mention the fear of imprisonment or death, but of the uncertainty of being able to have enough resources or ‘money’ to go to Sudan, Libya and Europe. As shared by the participants they mostly stay in harsh and difficult conditions in houses with other ‘strangers’ while they wait for the next ‘movement’ towards Europe. Most of the participants described their journeys to Sudan and Libya and to the Mediterranean as dangerous, full of uncertainties and dangers. As shared by Gezai he directly went to Sudan since he was leaving near its borders.

*“I came first in Shagarab, the journey was on foot 3 days, and it was dangerous, we do not know the place and where the soldiers are. In Shagarab, we are not safe, so many people taken from refugee camp by the traffickers, you do not trust anyone, even friends.”*

Gezai’s description of danger and uncertainty in Sudan and Libya was also articulated by most of the participants. Same as Gezai, Efrem, another Eritrean male refugee who escaped from Eritrea in 2013, but stayed in Ethiopia before going to Sudan described his journey on his way and while in Sudan and Libya.

*“For me, it was only moving, moving”. We living in constant fear while in different borders, until you get status. Crossing the border is always not sure. I think I might get shot, killed or caught by police or smugglers<sup>22</sup>, go to jail or sold to traffickers.”*

Monetary arrangements for transits, although expected are the frequently mentioned dangers encountered. For some of the participants, they mentioned that in every border they cross or stay, they pay different transactions and paying does not automatically mean they will have sea transport. Other than this is the danger of being sold by ‘smugglers’. Per Ferej’s account: *“Becoming a refugee, is like a market, people being sold.”* These experiences are also shared by some Eritrean refugees. As per the 2014 HRW report<sup>23</sup>, since 2010, hundreds of Eritrean refugees are trafficked in Eastern Sudan and sold to Egyptian traffickers to be held for ransom or further sold to other traffickers. I refer to these dangers as a “Laissez-faire” system where refugees are violently exploited for economic enterprises without the regulation or protection from any law or government. I link this analysis to the thesis of Agier (Bauman 2007: 37) that refugees are “outside the law, not this or that law of this or that country, but law as such.”

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<sup>22</sup> Participants refer to the people they pay to take them across borders and to the ‘boat’ either as ‘smugglers’ or ‘traffickers’.

<sup>23</sup>“I Wanted to Lie Down and Die” Trafficking and Torture of Eritreans in Sudan and Egypt [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/egypt0214\\_ForUpload\\_1\\_0.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/egypt0214_ForUpload_1_0.pdf)

For some, the journey of uncertainties are more elaborated when they arrived. Amenay, the only one still waiting for his status for 2 year shared his journey as:

*“In Netherlands, I hope to receive my status this year, but even if I receive status, I do not know if I will be allowed to work and study. I start from zero here, I go back to start, but I am not sure, I do not know what will happen to me, it depends on the government.”*

Although he does not have the status yet, he is certain that he will receive, but what is most uncertain to him is what comes after the status. This uncertainty was also echoed by some of the participants who have already received their status now for around 2-3 years. Their uncertainty also extends to the ambiguity of what happens to them after validity of their status as refugee ‘expires’. As summed up by Ferej:

*“We all have gone through the process to be a refugee, but not having and having status is still same, because you do not know what will happen or what will come.”*

Although the journey is acknowledged as uncertain, Anaresh articulated this uncertainty as a situation where she does not have control. These narratives question the assumptions that arriving in the place of settlement and receiving a ‘refugee status’ as provided by laws provide a sense of permanence/definite place to settle. It illustrates that refugees will never be free from “sense of transience, indefiniteness and provisional nature of settlement” (Bauman 2007: 38). Within these narratives, we can see how the lives of refugees extend before and after they receive refugee status. We can see here that refugees are telling their stories of “uncertainty and liminality”, not of “progression and conclusion” (Eastmond 2007: 252). This also relates to “waiting” not only happens between the “present and future” but also transpires in “certainty and uncertainty” (Gasparini 1995: 31). These narratives are linked with the notions of time and place where the participants experience ‘temporal suspension’ while waiting for the uncertain and are in “permanence of temporariness” (Brun and Fabos 2015: 5) while in places. These connections are emphasized in Chapter 4.

There are also positive constructions of journeys where for some even though they went through a difficult journey, arriving in host country provides a sense of being ‘legal’, safe and a feeling of affinity. As Desbele mentioned *“I was going from county to country with forged passport, I had no legal things, and the only thing legal was when I came to Holland.”* (Desbele). This shows that by contrasting these narratives, we can comprehend the “commonalities and the internal variations” (Easton 2006) among refugees.

### **3.6 On foot, boats and planes**

The “process and content characteristics of the journey” including the mode of transportation influence how the [refugees] understand their journeys (Benezer and Zetter 2015). The impacts were expressed through the accounts of some of the participants:

*“Being on the boat is like nothing, I prepared for it mentally, because I have also experienced more frightening, horrible journey from Sahara, to Mazra, while Sudan and Libya”; (Abiel, 17 years old 2016)*

For Abiel, he has different meanings of the journeys by foot and by boat. Although he finds his narrative in the places where he stayed and crossing borders by foot terrifying, the journey by boat is “less frightening”. Meanwhile, Amenay and some participants present a different meaning:

*“journey on the boat was of fear, stress, very strange feeling whether you sink or survive, most of the time we were afraid, praying to our gods, keeping quiet, I cannot describe, but very high fear.”*

Asylum seekers who arrive by boat although they arrive safely at the host countries may still “suffer psychological and emotional trauma” (Mannik 2016: 3). In the case of the participants, two or three years have passed and still they have these traumatic memories, thus securitization of a arrival by boat of refugees in host countries “inverts the risks” for they are the ones who are at the risk of “shipwrecks and drowning”(Ibid). The UNCHR reports<sup>24</sup> that there is an increasing number of asylum seekers “taking their chances” to board hazardous boats in order to reach Europe and increasing number of dead/missing in the Mediterranean Sea. For Desbele his mode of transportation also offers a different meaning:

*“Luckily, I did not use boat, I arrived by plane, the only route very difficult was 3 days travel via desert. My story is different, I consider my life very lucky because people who used boat, I heard so many bad things. My experience is a good one, comparing to others, who arrived by boat.”*

Here we can see how the “mode of travel” affect how some of the respondents construct their journey. For Desbele, although he also came as an asylum seeker, he perceives his story as different because he arrived by plane. For example, most of the respondents see traveling by foot as terrifying, but they do not attribute the same meanings with arrival by boat/plane.

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<sup>24</sup> <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php>

# Chapter 4: Notions of Time and Place

## 4.1 Introduction

Drawing from the participants' account of their journeys, this chapter demonstrate the dimensions of time, place and home as expressed in the refugees' narratives. The purpose is to address the question the extent do notions of time and place become altered through the refugee experience. This chapter will emphasize the notions of time and place that were initially presented in Chapter 2.2. In addition, the chapter reflects on the forward-looking aspects of the narratives of refugees, showing how a sense of future temporality can be affected by the refugee experience.

## 4.2 Temporality, waiting and survival

Using the narratives of the participants, this section will argue that 'time' is indeed ever present in the journeys of becoming and being a refugee and that there are different ways how it was altered or remained given that "times migrate with people" (Cwerner 2007: 7). The analysis was drawn from the participants' narratives of how time was experienced, altered and when is time essential in their journeys. When discussing the time when they left and arrived in The Netherlands, most of the participants referred to the 'quantitative measure of time' (Hassard 1990: 15).

As initially presented in Chapter 2, Haleka's account illustrates "sticky time" (Griffiths 2015: 1994) while in refugee camp and waiting for housing. Some of the participants echoed Haleka's story on the slowness of time when waiting for status. Based on the interviews, the average time the participants receive their status is between 12-14 months except for the two who received their status after six months. Gezai, one of those who received his status in six months shared that he thinks he received his status "very fast" because according to him, he arrived in the "perfect time" in April because the Mediterranean opens from March-August. He said:

*"If you arrive in April, you are the first one to arrive, so there was big chance of being interviewed fast, there were not too many people at that time."*

Although he received his status in a short-time, he still shared that six months spent in refugee camp is still long when "there is nothing to do." As for Amenay who was not yet granted status and Desbele who received his status after five years indicated a 'suspended time'. Although Griffiths referred to bureaucratic processes<sup>25</sup>, like interviews as factors in refugees' experiencing 'sticky time' in the slow and long-time of decision making, some of the participants consider the 'interview process' as very crucial in speeding up their journeys towards receiving their status.

'Sticky time' also happens when asylum seekers are prohibited from working, thus causing "enforced idleness" wherein the only thing they can do is to "wait" (Ibid: 1996). All of the participants only spent their time waiting for status by "waiting, learning Dutch language, staying inside, playing football, doing nothing inside the camp." It was only when they received their status that some of them were allowed to do 'volunteer works' as translators or working in municipal offices. Some of them described time in refugee camp as "nothing special, with nothing to do." The findings show the most of the participants cope with the enforced idleness by finding ways of

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<sup>25</sup> Bureaucratic processes is also referred as asylum procedures in The Netherlands (Appendix 3).

‘wasting time’ or as Griffith mentioned “temporal markers” (Ibid). As Afrahi, so aptly described it “*while waiting in camp, it was like killing time, wasting time.*”

Drawing from Bourdieu (1997), Griffiths presented another characteristics of ‘sticky time’ through the power relations as related to “being made to wait” (2014: 1996). As shared by some of the participants, long time waiting is mostly spent in Libya, where they have to pay first and wait for ‘traffickers’ to facilitate sea transportation en route Europe. The waiting time for the ‘traffickers’ and then waiting for refugee status demonstrates the “imposition of waiting” with the hope for subsequent change is part of the “technique of control that sustains the marginality and compliance” of [asylum seekers] (Ibid).

So in both the transit countries and in The Netherlands, the power relations of being made to wait are caused by bureaucratic processes before one gets status and from ‘traffickers’ for transportation. However, some participants hinted that receiving status does not mean that ‘sticky time’ stops because these are prolonged by other asylum procedures and that there is no assurance of what will happen after the five year status expires, of which I also referred to in the narratives of journeys as part of the ‘uncertainties’. This denotes that “temporal considerations” is the core of citizenship issues (Cwerner 2001:10) wherein for Eritrean refugees, time is essential in their quest for refugee status, but there is no certainty of seeking Dutch citizenship given that they are still in the liminal stage of the five year duration of the status.

Furthermore, some of the participants, while idle used the ‘waiting time’ as an opportunity to work ‘illegally’ in order to have additional funds that will take them to ‘Europe’. One of the female refugee worked on her application for asylum while doing her studies in The Netherlands. The narratives present how waiting time is composed of varied aspects and factors, including bureaucratic processes, different actors and meanings.

Time is multifaceted and influenced by factors such as “tempo and duration”, then “temporalities of waiting is assumed as multidimensional (Conlon 2011: 357). Although Gray (Ibid: 421) discussed three dimensions of waiting as ‘waiting for opportunity, return, waiting for [a gap] to be filled up’, the narratives of the participants illustrate more of the ‘waiting for opportunity’. Wherein they escaped from Eritrea to be seek safety and freedom somewhere else indicating a “productivist” view of waiting and as an “expectation” (Ibid: 429 and 42).

Other narratives of ‘waiting’ under sticky time was relayed by other participants with the feeling of frustration, boredom and resentment.

*“It was more of frustrating every day, because always waiting and not easy, but always there is a way.”*

The participants’ feeling of frustration and resentment as articulated by Desbele shows that “process of waiting” brings discontent, frustration to the person waiting (Gasparini 1995:31). However, some of the participants articulated that although there was a lot of frustration while waiting to flee, to cross or to receive status, they have acceptance of their situation and patience in waiting. The participants’ journey narratives of uncertainties as shown in section 3.4 also indicate that waiting happens not only in the “present and future, but also in certainties and uncertainties” (Ibid). From their narratives we can see how ‘sticky time’ is experienced in different forms of waiting for status to be granted, for the convenient time to proceed on their physical journeys, while they were in refugee camps and after receiving their status.



In Griffiths' study, 'suspended time' for immigration detainees refer to their lives as "having stopped" for time spent in detention (2014:1997). Not only did time stop but can also become disorienting or complex and that "temporal suspension" happens as detainees feel that they are 'stuck, going nowhere and "passing life" without progress (Ibid). Similar to this is the story of Desbele who arrived as a teenager in 2002 and stayed in refugee camps for five years, as per his account:

*"For five years, I was refused three times, the court decided against me. In Netherlands camp, we did not have hope, we stay in camp with nothing, with no papers, nothing, we cannot progress, go to school, work and nothing."*

Although it took five years for him to receive his status, his account is similar to some of those who stayed even for less than 5 years in refugee camps. Desbele's experience of time was altered through his experience before and after arriving and receiving his status. According to him, his time in Eritrea was filled with "more good times" because he was active in organizing activities and then eventually was sent to military camp when he was 16. He described his time in military camp as "horrible experience" but also a time and place where he had two identities, a student and a soldier. Associating time in military camp as 'horrible experience' also indicates "time-as-a-context", wherein place and time comprise the context of which the happenings "assume meaning" (Hassard 1990: 15). His experience of time in Sudan also was different, a mixture of "easier", 'sticky and suspended time'.

However, the longest 'suspended time' as indicated by some participants is the whole duration of the journey, from the time they decided to leave Eritrea to the time they arrived in The Netherlands. This was also presented in the construction of the journey where the experience of 'suspended time', journey is constructed as "a waste of time" even though they have felt they are safe and free in The Netherlands. Thus, presenting also contradictions of narratives and notions. As Amenay said:

*"Time is very important in Eritrea because I do many things, but when I started my journey as immigrant to be safe, I have nothing to do, I have lost almost 4 or 5 years."*

Amenay' account speaks of The Netherlands as a place to seek safety, but also a place where there is "nothing to do", where time is only spent in going to Dutch language class while waiting for status. It also denotes time as a "resource", with a "fixed-sum variable" (Hassard 1990:14) where the 5 years that Amenay spent on his journey will never be recovered, lost forever. As presented in Chapter 2, time as a social factor also becomes 'valuable' when it is considered as a 'commodity'. In the case of Ferej, time is like money where he refers to time as crucial when waiting for sea transportation.

On the other hand, Afrahi speaks of the value of time since it is moving fast. She shared that since she has already her status which is valid for five years, she has to be practical because for her "time is moving fast." Her account illustrates the value of time because of the limited validity of her status which she and some refugees have to contend with when it ends. This feeling is also shared by most of the participants where the quantitative scale of time of the 5 year validity of the refugee status is valuable to all of them given that it will implicate not only their current situation but their future.

We can see here that time is extended to the future as the “present could hardly be regarded as the perfection of all things (Nowotny 1994: 46). This brings to attention the policy on the five year validity of the temporary asylum permit<sup>26</sup> wherein ‘time’ is used as the main “variable and tool” adapted by “immigration law, policy and control” wherein immigrants [asylum seekers and refugees] once allowed to have temporary residency are exposed to the “temporal conditions” of having legal documents (Cwerner 2001: 10) to stay or be repatriated once the five year temporal condition of the refugee status is no longer valid. The temporal conditions of ‘refugeeness’ might be an interesting start in looking at how policies are exacerbating the protracted refugee situations including illegality and forced repatriation. These narratives of the value of time as a resource and commodity demonstrates that asylum seekers and refugees “can have too much or too little of” it (Griffiths 2014: 2003).

In the case of the other participants who received their status, they speak of their time experience in the refugee camps and when they were given houses, illustrating how time is experienced in different places. For some, temporal suspension happens in the refugee camps and extended when they already have their own houses, but may also be a ‘sticky time’ after having houses. As one some of the participants have said, when one has a house, “there are time schedules to follow and activities to do including going to language class, going out with friends” compared to time experience in the camp there is “nothing special, nothing to do, feeling of loss of time.” However, most of those who do not have voluntary jobs “do nothing, sleep whole day” even after status and housing was provided, thus the ‘protracted temporal suspension’.

Categorically speaking, although most of the participants received their status in less than five years, the time in which they are caught in a state of temporal suspension also indicates that they are within the bounds of UNHCR’s definition of “protracted refugee journey in which refugees find themselves in a long-lasting and intractable state of limbo” (Milner 2014: 152). However, the UNHCR’s measurement of ‘protracted refugee situation’ in “temporal form (more than 5 years in exile)” (Ibid) indicates that refugees who have been in ‘sticky and temporal time’ are not covered. This paper posits that there is a need to revisit the ‘temporal’ definition of protracted refugee situation to consider the sticky and suspended time experiences of refugees after they received their status which is not within UNHCR’s temporal measurement and definition.

Echoing some of the participants, Efremlinked temporal suspension as the “lack of social or personal progress” similar to the feelings of being unproductive, no personal progress or “cannot achieve social goals” to include ‘forced idleness’ when they are not allowed to seek employment (Griffiths 2014: 1998). Efreml described this kind of temporal suspension because he feels that not continuing his education for three years because he is a refugee led to his destruction, with no personal progress. He also feels that he could have been another person in Eritrea if he did not “waste” his time in the three years that he stayed in The Netherlands. He started to realize the immensity of his decision to come here when knew that some of his friends who decided to stay in Eritrea have progress somehow.

The ‘time-as-a-context’ illustrates his story when he compared his life was better in Eritrea. Efreml’s account also indicates a ‘temporal panic’ (Cwerner 2001: 21) in which he is reacting to his

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<sup>26</sup> Term used after refugee status is granted from the <https://ind.nl/en/asylum/Pages/Asylum-seeker.aspx>

feeling of not being able to accomplish what he is supposed to achieve. ‘Temporal panic’ and time traps are amplified especially when individual immigrants have expectations and did not have information (Ibid) about host countries. As shown in the previous discussions, most of the participants did not specifically choose to come here and did not know about this country. This also shows how time for some “becomes in the present, the possibility of creation and destruction, of certainty and uncertainty” (Nowotny 1994: 58).

These narratives show that temporal suspension do not only happen to asylum seekers, but can also happen even they have become or are being refugees. Thus, this question comes into mind, is the status adequate enough in making the lives of refugees more bearable and allow them to pursue personal and social progress. Temporal suspension also constitutes a “liminal space” wherein people are confined within “legal categories, rights and countries”, required [Dutch language courses, limited asylum residence permit] and restrictive access to work, education, thus making these people different from the people around them (2014: 1998).

Following the narratives temporal experiences of the participants they have also expressed their assessment of when and where is time essential their journeys which still cannot be determined if it ended or not. In Haleka’s account;

*“Time is everything after the interview, because before interview, I know nothing, if I will be given status or not, after interview, I got my status and I have an idea what to do.”*

Haleka’s account shows that although he experienced the stickiness of time he still sees time after the interview as providing space for him to have an idea of what to do next. In here he sees time as a “strategic concept” where there is “timing in everything” (Nowotny 1994: 15). Haleka’s notion of the importance of time after the interview demonstrates that temporal conditions like schedules of interviews imposed on refugees should not be taken for granted because for refugees, these are critical times which means that time around these processes can either be “oppressive when [...] too slow” or might put them in a time trap reinforcing that [refugees] are people with very limited degree of “time sovereignty” (Cwerner 2001: 21).

Another story shows how limited ‘time sovereignty’ is also experienced in Eritrea and why for them time is important upon leaving despite of their uncertainty of their journeys.

*“As soon as I left Eritrea that is an important time for me because I can now manage my own time, without government telling me what to do. I can also plan things to do.”* (Gezai)

This account presents how some refugees who had little time sovereignty in their countries and left although they are caught in ‘sticky and suspended time sometimes ‘reconceptualise’ other important temporal stages as a “meaningful time in itself rather than simple, dead space of killing time” (Griffiths 2014: 2003).

Other contrasting accounts include how time is important in place of origin (Eritrea), where there are activities to do and participate in, while The Netherlands is considered a place to seek safety, it is also a place where there is “nothing to do”. These temporal and place experiences of the participants are linked to how time and place implicate each other as elaborated in the next section.

### 4.3 Of places and ‘sense of home’

Proceeding from the discussion of time, the conversations about places led to sharing of the participants’ views of places that are and were significant to them through their refugee journeys. The notions of home were also shared by most of the participants. How place/places become altered through the refugee experience is analysed based on the idea that displaced people or becoming refugees who were forced to leave their places of residence have to move to another (Brun 2001:15). The findings although based on the interviews with very few number of respondents indicate that places have different or similar meanings to people, as places can be “interpreted, perceived, felt, understood and imagined”(Gieryn 2000: 465).

To analyse the extent how the notions, meanings and understanding of place were altered through the refugee experience, I only used two of the ‘three-pole triangular model’ of Gustafson (2001:5-16) discussed in Chapter 2. The triangular model is the analytical framework in understanding important places to people and what these places mean to them. Although I have used the model, it is important to note that this does not cover the entire analysis, thus some concepts will also be used.

*“Netherlands is important place to me. Back in Sudan or Libya not safe, no freedom to move, but here, I am safe, there is everything, except that I have to adjust to life here. Everything is here because I study for free with help of government. Here, there is no conscription, no military service like in Eritrea. Here is also important to me because I got status, there is everything here but must adjust.”*

This was Abiel’s response when participants were asked to identify the important place/s for them throughout their refugee experience. Some identified combination of places for example Netherlands and some of the transit countries, while one participant identified church and individual groups of people. Netherlands stood out as an important place for most of the respondents. Abiel sees Netherlands as in important place because he feels safe and free. This account illustrates that personal meaning of places to people is associated with the feeling of “security and sense of home” (2001: 9). Most of the participants also echoed the feeling of being safe and free in The Netherlands, but not all of them consider it as ‘home’. The discussion of ‘sense of home’ will be elaborated in the later part. Interestingly, Abiel’s notion of Netherlands as an important place to him because it is the place where he has ‘everything’. This shows that his meaning of place is a combination of two poles: Self and environment. The combination of several meanings of a place in Abiel’s story indicates that every place can fit into many categories at the same time or may change its classifications “during the course of a lifetime” (Pascual-de-Sans 2004: 354).

For some of the participants, meanings of places are linked to the “relationship between self and environment” (Gustafson 2001: 11). For example, The Netherlands is important to them because they are offered with opportunities like prospects for “personal development” (Ibid). For Abiel it means pursuing his education and self-determination to do certain activities like moving and traveling. This meaning of places were also echoed by some of the participants where The Netherlands is seen as a place where they have freedom move and make plans. However, as presented in the previous discussions, it is also seen as limiting or “lacking of opportunities” (Ibid) to pursue because of the attached consequences of being refugees. This illustrates that important places where refugee status have been granted can be both place of ‘opportunity’ and ‘constraints’.

There is also an alteration of notion of place as illustrated by Abiel and most of the participants wherein before arriving in The Netherlands, they did not see it as safe with 'everything' in it. In fact most of them were not aware of this place, they only knew that they were going to a place somewhere in 'Europe' to seek asylum. Several place-meanings associated with The Netherlands were articulated as a "place to seek safety, but also a place where time is sticky or suspended, with nothing to do and forced-idleness.

As indicated in Chapter 4.2, the temporal experiences also implicate how people ascribe meaning to places. The narratives include how time is important in place of origin (Eritrea), where there are activities to do and participate in. In Sudan, although there is less time spent there, it is still considered by most of the respondents as an important place, because time is spent there waiting for the chance "to go to Europe". It also presents a contradictory notion, that although The Netherlands is considered a place to seek safety, it is also a place where there is "nothing to do", time only spent in going to Dutch language class-while becoming and being a refugee or just like in Eritrea, how time should be spent is always dictated upon the individuals. These narratives also illustrate that what links 'self to place' is the activity (Gustafson 2001: 9), wherein The Netherlands is a place with 'nothing to do', where time is sticky because of the routinary activities of the respondents while in and outside refugee camps. Except for the two teen-agers, most of the participants mentioned of their frustration and boredom because of the 'enforced idleness' brought by the prohibition of employment. This again show time, place and activity links.

Personal meanings are associated with sense of home under the self-triangular model. When asked about where and what is home to them, most of the participants refer to home as places of importance, "home as family"; where the "heart is resting"; and a place where they belong. Some of them consider Eritrea as home because family, memories, emotions are in there, with some referring as 'having roots there', and "have left many things there". This association of Eritrea as an important place or as a home show that individuals also give meaning to places that were important in their "life path" as "expressed in their memories" (Gustafson 2001: 9). This also shows that places become meaningful because of the "relationship between self and others" (Ibid), wherein although they left Eritrea it is still meaningful for the participants because their families are there.

Interestingly, although Eritrea is considered as home, all of them associated this 'home' - as not "a place where it not safe to live". Here we can see that there is a mixed feelings associated with Eritrea, as a place of home and an insecure place to live in. This notions of Eritrea presents the personal experiences of forced migrants that "home is simultaneously a loved and vexed place."(McHugh 2000: 76). Furthermore, at least four of the participants consider Netherlands as 'home' because it is where "shelter" is provided, where people are free and there is sense of privacy which gives a "sense of home."

These notions of home present how 'home' is not merely understood as physical, a building or a house. Although it is associated with the geographical location of home as located in Eritrea or in The Netherlands, the results present how 'home' is linked to family, culture, emotions and memories. This illustrates that home is not understood as the "physical structure, natural or built environment", but is seen as the 'place' with "social, psychological and emotive meaning" for people, individuals or groups (Easthope 2004: 135). As further illustrated by Efrem's version of 'home':

*“My heart is resting here, now home is Netherlands. Here, I can decide what to do with time after I finish work in the municipality. In Eritrea, even if you go on your own, you are always under command.”*

Just like some of the participants who considered Eritrea as home but not a safe place to live in, Efreem considers The Netherlands as ‘home’. This shows that aspects of meaning implicates ‘distinction’ wherein meaning is defined by comparing the similarities or differences and is often related with “positive or negative valuation of places” (Gustafson 2001: 14). As observed, most of the participants always define sense of home by comparing what they have/have not, can/cannot do ‘here’ and in their country. In addition, Abiel also indicates the ‘emotive and social’ elements of the meaning of ‘home’, however he does not consider Eritrea as home.

*“In Netherlands the culture and way of life is different, but it is my home now even if all my feelings and culture I grew up with is in Eritrea.”*

It is important to note that Abiel and Ashenafi, the two teenage refugees have different notions of home.

*“Eritrea is my home. I do not know anything about Netherlands, I don’t know if they will let me stay or leave. In Eritrea, even if there is war or hard to live there, it is still home.”*

These narratives show that the two teenagers have same feelings of attachment for Eritrea, yet they do not associate same meaning to it as ‘home’, thus reiterating that people may have similar or different meanings of place/places. Although Gustafson stated that a “place may not mean the same thing to everybody” (2001: 14) similar to the narratives of teenagers, it may also be that people will have same meaning to a place but with different reasons of why they attach such meaning.

Similarity of assigning meaning to the same place is also drawn from the two female refugees. Both of them associate Netherlands as ‘home’, however both have different reasons for considering it as ‘home’. For Anaresh, ‘here’ is home because she has ‘privacy’ giving her “sense of home”, while for Afrahi, here is ‘home’ because it is she was provided ‘shelter’. Afrahi’s narrative presents that for some refugees, the meaning of home encompass the ‘emotive and physical’ elements of a place. However, some of the participants still consider Eritrea as ‘home’. As Ferej narrated:

*“Home is best, but it is not safe. Home means everything from the very beginning, my family, my parents, all my emotions, everything is back home in Eritrea especially in my hometown. I came here few years ago and I feel safe, I feel good, but this is not home. I would feel home if I am in Eritrea, but I cannot go home.”*

Ferej’s narratives show the multifaceted meanings of home including emotive, familial and cultural attachments. He was the only one among the participants who also illustrated his construction of home through a scale referring to his hometown, as ‘back home’. His narrative also shows that home can be interpreted in various scales like town as “homeland” (Kabachnik 2010: 319). His narrative illustrates that a place contains physical, social and cultural realities indicating that home for some refugees is specifically a significant place “with which and within which” they undergo “strong social and emotive attachments” (Brun and Fabos 2015: 6).

In addition, Desbele who lived in The Netherlands for 13 years does not consider it as 'permanent home' because he is still considered as a "foreigner". His narratives present the complexity of the notions of home and place and its relationship to force migration's dilemma of 'belonging and identity' (Brun and Fabos 2015: 6). Furthermore, although he cannot go back to Eritrea, he still feels a connection because of his family, but he does not consider it as home. This also shows that living in host countries for a long time does not guarantee permanency. For Desbele, he has an imagined home in Eritrea but cannot go back. In the Netherlands it is place where he has opportunities but also a place he feels he does not belong to. Desbele's story illustrates that refugees are in an "extended temporariness of home" in relation to their "social roles and cultural belonging" (Brun and Fabos 2015: 10).

As I have alluded in the previous discussions, these notions and experiences of 'sense of home and place' are important in revisiting how the UNHCR's definition of protracted refugee situations to include 'temporariness of home' and 'permanence of temporariness' to make it inclusive of those who experienced such but are not assisted because they do not belong within the margins of the 'official definition'. The feeling of loss of home further expounds Gieryn's (2004: 82) notion of homelessness as "persona non locata is to be almost non-existent." (2004: 82).

## Chapter 5: Conclusions

This research shows how refugee journeys are constructed in becoming and being an Eritrean refugee in The Netherlands. By asking the research participants about their journeys, I was able to draw the nuances of similar or different meanings and representation ascribed to their journeys. In this paper, I argue that focusing on refugees' own meaning and narratives of their journeys can be used as an analytical tool in understanding the progressions, temporalities and 'permanence of temporariness' in becoming and being a refugee. This paper also presents that sometimes age, situation and individual circumstances of the participants in Eritrea, on their way to and residence in The Netherlands impact on how they construct their journeys. Through this paper, I can also claim participants' notions of time and place were altered in their becoming and being refugees as demonstrated by their narratives of waiting, of affinity for safe places and sense of home that is either 'here or there'.

In the construction of the participants' refugee journeys, some journeys were constructed as a journey that 'did not yet end'. This characteristic of journey probes when and how does a journey actually start or if it ever ends. For some of the participants, the start of a journey commences even without physically leaving Eritrea by the premeditated escape due to an impending insecurity and constraints to personal development. For other participants, the short or long planning and preparations for the physical stage of the journey is already the start of a journey. The finding illustrates that the start of a journey can happen either in a very short or long time before they physically embark on their journeys. These kinds of construction of the start of a journey implies that it may have its beginnings with an imagined ending, but does it really end.

The findings illustrate that the end of their journeys have different meanings. For some, the physical arrival in a host country and granting of refugee status is not the end yet of a journey because for the participants there is still another stage of navigating their 'being refugees' like completing Dutch language requirements and 'just waiting' because of forced idleness. For some the completion of the journey is having 'social mobility'. However, the findings present that most of the participants' journeys have not yet ended, illustrating that they are still caught in 'circular journey' as their journeys are made dependent of other factors like the requirements imposed or provided for by asylum procedures. The journeys constructed here have clear beginnings, yet there is uncertainty of end of the journey of being a refugee denoting temporality of a journey.

Others construct their journeys as narratives of the unexpected and not the imagined destination. The participants' journeys are constructed through the unexpected, not the imagined; by feeling of security and freedom; and in the case of young people, freedom, no compulsory military training and familial relations. These narratives of the 'unexpected' have led to how the participants re-examined their motives, the construction and impacts of the journeys on their lives.

The 'image of freedom and being safe' in the host country of seeking asylum were the highlights of 'fulfilled expectations'. The findings explain that the realities encountered by the participants upon arrival in The Netherlands were not what they have imagined. One of the most 'unexpected' was the requirement Dutch language lessons that refugees have to undergo before and after receiving refugee status. This impacted on how they constructed their journey as a 'waste of time' instead of part of personal development as was imagined. This also impacted on their



temporality as refugees because according to them most of their time are spent on Dutch language lessons instead of pursuing disrupted education. This finding implies the need to revisit the policy of host countries on imposed language courses on refugees to make it more manageable to allow refugees pursue personal development, not stuck on just taking up language courses.

Other images of the destination referred to the journeys and its impact, wherein the ‘unexpected’ includes familial relations especially for teenagers who only realize the implications of their journeys when they have already physically embarked on their journeys and upon arrival, not while contemplating escape from Eritrea. This illustrates realizations of the ‘unexpected’ happen in most of the stages of becoming and being a refugee.

The narratives of uncertainties illustrate that arriving in the place of settlement and receiving a ‘refugee status’ does not provide a sense of permanence or stability for some refugees. The narratives of dangers of the participants are usually ascribed to their physical journeys while in transit countries because of the dangers of being trafficked, killed or drowned. The highlighted narrative is the uncertainty of receiving refugee status most especially the ambiguity of what happens after the validity of being a refugee ‘expires’, thus reiterating that the participants’ progression is not guaranteed by the status alone, as they are trapped in the certainty of the expiration of their temporary residence and in the uncertainty of the end of their journeys as refugees.

The findings in Chapter 4 illustrate how time and place are experienced through the participants’ refugee journeys. The construction of their journeys have been influenced by their temporal experiences, indicating that both construction of journeys and the notions of time and place implicate each other. The findings on the temporal experiences of the participants present that throughout their refugee journeys, especially upon arrival, they have either experienced a “long, slowing of time (sticky) or a complete stagnation (suspended) of time” (Griffiths 2014). The findings present that sticky time is mostly experienced in different forms of ‘waiting’, ‘enforced idleness’ and ‘being made to wait’ while the refugees are waiting for transportation in transit countries, while waiting for status to be granted, while in refugee camps and after receiving their status.

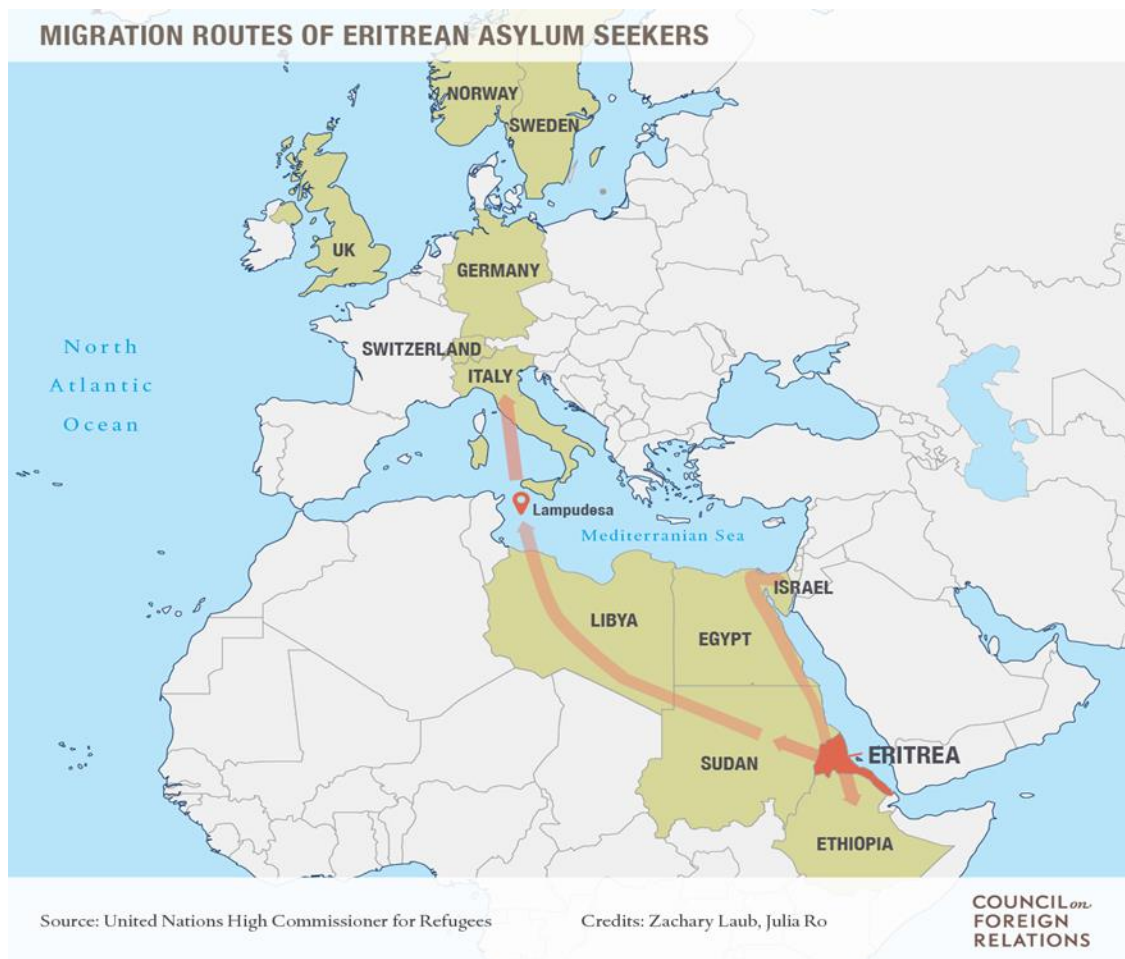
The narratives present how waiting time is composed of varied aspects and factors, including bureaucratic processes, different actors and meanings. On the other hand, the findings indicate that the longest ‘suspended time’ is the whole duration of the journey, from the time they decided to leave Eritrea to the time they arrived in The Netherlands as exacerbated by their narratives of uncertainties. Time is also considered a ‘valuable commodity’ that has been useful, but is also lost and will never be recovered throughout the journey of becoming and being a refugee, thus a sense of ‘temporality’. These findings illustrate that temporal conditions imposed by asylum procedures like schedules of interviews and validity of refugee status should be viable because for refugees, time is critical within these processes which can either be “oppressive when [...] too slow” or might put them in a time trap (Cwerner 2001: 21).

The findings on the how the notions, meanings and understanding of place were altered through the refugee experience illustrate that that personal meaning of places to people is associated with the feeling of being safe and ‘sense of home’. For most of the participants, The Netherlands is important to them because it is the place where they felt they are safe, however, it is also a place where time is either ‘sticky or suspended’ and limiting opportunities because of the attached consequences of being refugees. This illustrates that important places where refugee status have been granted can be both place of ‘opportunity’ and ‘constraints’. The findings argue that notions

and experiences of ‘sense of home and place’ of refugees should not be taken for granted as these are important insights in looking at expanding or revising policies that will be inclusive of assisting refugees who are caught in protracted refugee situation of permanent temporariness in host countries.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1 Migration Routes of Eritrean Asylum Seekers



(Council on Foreign Relations 2016)

## Appendix 2 List of Participants and other information

Pseudonyms /Age/Sex/Status; Date, duration & location of Interview; Length of stay in The Netherlands	Background	Interview Extracts
Abiel/17/M/WS; 29/07/16, 90 minutes at The Hague Academy; 1 year 6 months	Left Eritrea in 2014 after finishing 11 <sup>th</sup> grade, did not go to military camp, currently lives in	“I stayed in in prison on my way to Italy, unfortunately we were caught, boat was broken, we were caught, and we were taken to prison in Libya, there, it is scary, there is no government,

	housing provided by government with Ashenafi and 3 others teenage refugees.	you just need to pay, and they tortured you to pay.”
Afrahi/28/F/WS; 08/08/16; 2 hours since she invited me for lunch; her own place; 2 years.	Introduced to me by Anaresh, the other female participant. Finished BA degree in Eritrea. During the interview, Afrahi did not elaborate on the reason why she decided to seek asylum. Please refer to next column.	“I had scholarship, I came here to take up a short course, and then with the situation back in Eritrea, I cannot go back, so I became an asylum seeker”. When I asked what she meant by ‘situation and that she cannot go back to her country’, her response was “actually, I could not talk about these things because it is too much, you do not want both of us crying over my story.”
Amenay/29/M/NS; 14/07/16, 1 hour; at his friend’s place who is also an Eritrean refugee; 2 years 4 months	Left Eritrea in 2013 while in 2 <sup>nd</sup> year university, did military service for 1 year before university, arrived in NL in 2104. He agreed to participate in the research when my supervisor approached and requested if I can talk to him about my study.	
Anaresh/35+/F/WS; 28/07/16, 35 minutes, her workplace 4 years	Arrived in NL in 2012 as MA student and then decided to seek for asylum. She currently works as a volunteer translator in one of the NGOs working with refugees;	“Before finishing my study here, I knew that it was not safe to go back, so I seek asylum. The decision comes before finishing my study.”
Ashenafi/17/M/WS; Same with Abiel since they both requested to be interviewed together with the presence of Ferej, their friend who convinced them to talk to me; 1 year 5 months	Ferej introduced me to him and Abiel through SSM. Left Eritrea at the age of 15 in 2104 after finishing 9 <sup>th</sup> grade before he goes to compulsory military training. Stayed in UNHCR refugee camp in Ethiopia then left after 6 months towards ‘Europe’. Arrived in NL in 2015.	“In Ethiopia, I stayed in refugee camp for 6 months and just accepted whatever they give me. Since I am a teenager, I was taken by the UNHCR.”

<p>Desbele/30/ML/WS 30/07/16; 45 minutes, Café Rotterdam; Almost 14 years</p>	<p>He was introduced to me by an Eritrean journalist. Left Eritrea at the age of 16 after few months in the military camp after witnessing “horrible things”. Arrived in NL via plane in 2002. His request for refugee status was granted after 5 years staying in refugee camp. He is currently working on Dutch citizenship</p>	<p>“I went to military service, in my last year in Eritrea. I was in grade 11, I was 16. I immediately left after only few months in military service. I was ready to accept everything, to go to military service, I went voluntarily because Eritrea was in the middle of the war, but when I saw the whole system, it was very corrupt and brutal.”</p> <p><i>Me: Did you accept the military service because you were at war?</i></p> <p>At that time, it was more of being “nationalistic”, I was young, but we did not know that it was simply slavery.</p>
<p>Efrem/31/M/WS; 23/07/16: 80 minutes, Zoetermeer Centrum; 2 years</p>	<p>Introduced to me by one of the participants. He Finished BA degree in Eritrea and did NS as high school teacher for 4 years. According to him the government did not allow him to pursue the work he wanted, thus he left.</p>	<p><b>Me: What do you mean by ‘situation’ as the reason why you left Eritrea?</b></p> <p>“Situation is very harsh, both economically and politically- it is also bad for the youth there, that they stay permanently in low pay job, and it is almost permanently, you do not have choice, that you can live your own life, your family. The actual service is 1 year and 6 months but because of the situation in Eritrea, it may take 10 years of service, it might take longer than that, fortunately, it took me only 4 years”.</p>
<p>Ferej/27/M/WS; July 25: 90 minutes at the Bibliotheek, Den Haag; 2 years</p>	<p>Ferej was introduced to me by an Ethiopian working as an interpreter at the Stichting Vluchteling. After my interview with him, he introduced me to the 2 teenagers and another male participant. He accompanied me and served as the translator in some parts of</p>	<p><b>Me: Kindly tell me your story how and why you came here, but it is up to you if you want to share.</b></p> <p>Ferej: “After I graduate, I was assigned by the government as a teacher. While working as</p>

	<p>the interview when the two teenagers prefer to answer some of my questions in Tigrinya.</p> <p>Ferej finished BA degree in Eritrea but was not able to pursue career within his degree. He is one of the two participants who received their refugee statuses within 6 months, however he also had to wait for housing after receiving status. While taking up Dutch language class he volunteers also in Vluchteling as translator for Eritrean asylum seekers. During the interview he shared that he is waiting for the result of his scholarship application to pursue a BA degree in international business.</p>	<p>teacher, it was hard, you receive 10-20 dollars a month, not enough to even pay rent, and the load is more than 20 a week. As a teacher, you work at the same time you serve the government, you have to do your duty, and you do not have any rights. That means I am obligated by the government, I do not have any choice. I have to teach, if I say I am not going to do that, then the only choice I have is to leave.”</p>
<p>Gezai/25/M/WS; 17/08/16 at the Bibliotheek, Den Haag; 1 year 7 months</p>	<p>Gezai was introduced to me by Ferej.</p> <p>Before leaving Eritrea, Gezai worked as ‘animal herder’ under the military service. He was the one who explained to me the institutional processes involved and differences between military training, service and national service since he did both military training and service. Same with Ferej, he also received his status within 6 months.</p>	<p>Me: (during end of interview): What do you think are the important stories that should be known about Eritreans?</p> <p>Gezai: “Nobody knows what is happening in Eritrea, especially to the young people there, every prison of our country [is] full of young people. The government [does] not want young people to learn, because if we know about the world, about technology, if we become educated, they know we do not want them anymore, The government no care about young people, that’s why the University of Asmara is closed, there are no longer universities in Eritrea, only colleges.</p>
<p>Haleka/24/M/WS;</p>	<p>Haleka was introduced to me by a former ISS-SJP student, a refugee herself who is taking the same Dutch language class with</p>	<p>Situation is getting harder, I am asked to go to military, but I am eldest, I have responsibility for</p>

<p>14/07/16; Centrum, Zoetermeer; 1 year+</p>	<p>Haleka. Haleka then introduced me to Efrem, one of the participants I have referred to when I applied the SSM.  UNFINISHED</p>	<p>my family. My father served already in military, the government already sent my father to military. I did not go to military, if I go, we do not have enough, I must help family because I am eldest, I cannot help them when I am in military.  I know going to military is good because you can pursue university but I need to take care of my family, I need salary, but not enough if I go to military, or maybe I do not know until when I can stay there.</p>
<p>Note: Status WS=with refugee status NS= no status yet or Asylum Seeker</p>		

## Appendix Reception of Asylum seekers in the Netherlands



(Government of The Netherlands n.d.)

## Appendix 4 List of guide interview questions

I just used the following guide questions during the interviews. Some of the questions that were asked were not used in the final writing of the paper.

### 1<sup>st</sup> meeting guide

Name (anonymous):

Age (optional)

Time in Netherlands:

Level of education in Eritrea:

Where you stayed before Netherlands, after Eritrea?

Before Netherlands, where were you:

Are you willing to have the discussion recorded?

- 1) When did you start your 'refugee journey'?
- 2) Why?
- 3) How did you arrive here?
- 4) How long did it take you to decide to come here?
- 5) Can you describe how you used to spend a typical day in Eritrea?
- 6) Can you describe how you spend your typical day in The Netherlands? While in reception centres/refugee camps?
- 7) Can you describe how you spend your typical day somewhere else you have lived after Eritrea and before Netherlands?
- 8) Where do you think is time essential/important in your journeys?
- 9) How do you feel about the idea of home? (Elaborate: What does the word 'home' mean for you?)
- 10) Where or what are the places important to you during your journey in becoming or being a refugee?
- 11) When you think about yourself, (Name) do you feel the same person as before? When, where do you think you have changed?
- 12) Is being an Eritrean same when you were in Eritrea now that you are in Netherlands?
- 13) What were your expectations before coming here?
- 14) Now/if you are accepted as a refugee, what would you like to do with your life/plans?
- 15) If you can share your story in becoming and being a refugee, what would this be? (optional)
- 16) Did your views on time, space (home), who you are change when you decided to come here, while and when you arrived? What were the changes in these notions? In what instance?



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