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Living with Uncertainties : Coping Strategies
of Eritrean Refugee Youth in Geneva

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List of Acronyms

ACCES II	<i>Accueil de l'enseignement secondaire II</i>
AMIC	<i>Association de Médiatrices Interculturelles</i>
MSF	<i>Médecins Sans Frontière</i>
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
SEM	<i>Secrétariat d'Etat aux Migrations</i> (State Secretariat for Migration)
SNS	Social Networking Service
UNHCR	The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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Abstract

This paper examines the factors surrounding young refugees' lives that contribute to protracted uncertainties, and how these uncertainties associated with their social status, managing life in Geneva, and prospects for the future, would be reduced or reinforced when they make their new lives in Geneva. This research also sheds light on the kinds of coping strategies young refugees deploy to minimize their sense of lack of control and precarious survival in the context of exile in Geneva.

Notably, Eritrean refugees have recently attracted attention worldwide for their exile from the political instability of their homeland. This research sheds light on certain generational group characteristics of Eritrean refugees and explores how they struggle with the situation. In Switzerland, Eritrean migrants have recently increased in numbers, among whom are mostly young people. Their context of displacement derives from the instability of their country of origin and the duty of conscription to military service at a certain age. The status of Eritrean refugee youth in Geneva is influenced by a political change that might lead to deportation. In the receiving society, there are many supportive organizations or associations which implement social assistance in various domains. For instance, AMIC (*l'Association des médiatrices interculturelles*) provides programs for empowering Eritrean refugee youth.

This research uses a qualitative approach for investigating the uncertainty surrounding Eritrean refugee youth in Geneva, including participant observation both in AMIC's activities and their social environment, as well as in-depth interviews with 13 young Eritreans. Based on a conceptualization of youth and protracted uncertainty, Eritrean refugee youths' status is framed by the bureaucratic categorization of "unaccompanied minors" which creates differences among young people's ability to access social services and makes non-qualified young adults excluded from the services. The youth age migration consists of many factors of uncertainty – memory of pre-migration period, inadequate educational background, incompatibility to new norms and unclear vision of the future. The factors which create differences among young people's status are intersectional elements, such as arrival age, type of residence permit, and presence of family. The relationship with peers plays an important role in bringing relief and solidarity, however sometimes it leads to tension or embarrassment. Eritrean refugee youth use coping strategies to minimize uncertainty and improve their lives as much as possible by accessing social services, including doing internships that will potentially allow for future employment. Young refugees choose these strategies according to their abilities and at the same time deal with the everyday problems they face.

Relevance to Development Studies

This research contributes to a better understanding of the protracted uncertainty that refugee youth living in Europe face. With an in-depth analysis of their everyday struggles and protracted uncertainties in the country of asylum, this research provides a nuanced picture of the coping strategies that these young refugees deploy to overcome these challenges. In this way, using an intersectional analysis, the research contributes to a better understanding of the particular challenges related to young refugees' status in the country of asylum, as well as the ways in which they address it. Furthermore, this research contributes to development studies by unfolding the complexity of young refugees' problems and their context, which is often described in simplified ways.

Keywords

Protracted uncertainty, Eritreans, young refugees, unaccompanied minors, Geneva, NGOs, coping strategies

Chapter 1

Introduction

The starting point where I became interested in Eritrean refugee youth was the days when I worked in Djibouti as an NGO volunteer. While our beneficiaries were mainly Somalian refugees who consist of approximately 90% of the population of refugees in Djibouti, I encountered an Eritrean youth group in the urban area of Djibouti city. After a while, we got close to each other by talking about our countries, family, hobbies, and what we desire to be in the future. Building relationships apart from “NGO staff” and “beneficiaries”, I realized their feeling of isolation in the host culture, the experience of discrimination, and grief for giving up their prospects of the future. Everyone used to have their own life in Eritrea; someone worked as a hairdresser, and another was a footballer. Their lives were totally interrupted by political changes, they thereby had to make the decision to seek a new life in another country. All of them, that I encountered, were young in age, ranging from 20-25 years old.

My interest in refugee can be traced back to my childhood experience of the earthquake that affected my hometown, Kobe, Japan in 1995. The calamity changed many local people’s lives, including mine, as I was sheltered at an evacuation center for a couple of weeks. This childhood experience has made me empathize with evacuees; in my view, refugees are a particular type of evacuee. However, I am quite aware that whereas my life was restored after a relatively short period of disruption, refugees’ lives are often full of long-lasting precarity. This was the starting point, to think of what is the difference among people who have a guarantee of certainty in life, on the other hand, who are those continuously exposed in a life full of uncertainties. And this made me seek out what kinds of factors cause uncertainty in their lives and how people deal with them.

Based on my experience above, I believe that uncertainty makes one’s life unpredictable with anxieties due to various factors. Indeed, the degree of uncertainty varies depending on one’s context, hence some people might be affected for a certain period of time, and others may be full of uncertainty throughout their lives. Starting with questioning the concept of uncertainty, I have decided to look at Eritrean refugee youth living in Europe.

1.1 Research problem and background

In this research, I examine what kinds of factors contribute to protracted uncertainties of Eritrean refugee youth in their lives. Moreover, I investigate young refugees’ coping strategies in order to know how they attempt to deal with various problems they face on a daily basis in Geneva.

Since 2015, there has been much focus on the influx of asylum seekers and refugees into Europe, among whom Eritreans are the second largest group¹. While Switzerland has been welcoming to Eritrean refugees, more restrictive immigration policies have been recently proposed following the general European trends in migration, so that Eritreans increasingly face various kinds of uncertainty and precariousness as relating to their status and survival in

¹ UNHCR (2014) ‘Number of Eritreans Seeking Asylum in Europe Soars Over Figures for Last Year’. Accessed 30 Oct 2019 <<https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2014/11/546606286/number-eritreans-seeking-asylum-europe-soars-figures-year.html>>.

the city. Eritreans' initial aims relate to exile and escape from the oppressive authoritarian regime in Eritrea and aspirations for a brighter future in Europe are challenged by the uncertainties related to their status and access to services in Switzerland.

This research thus examines what factors surrounding young refugees' lives contribute to protracted uncertainty, and how this uncertainty could be reduced or reinforced when they reconstruct the lives in Geneva. Uncertainty is "imperfect knowledge and the unpredictability of the future" (Williams and Baláž 2012: 168, as quoted in Horst and Grabska 2015:4). While radical uncertainty is induced by conflict and displacement with the extreme unpredictability and severe lack of information, protracted uncertainty is associated rather with the long-term waiting and unpredictability of the future, and thereby this distinction highlights the temporal and spatial aspects of the uncertainty of refugees (Horst and Grabska 2015).

This research also explores strategies employed by young refugees in compensating for inadequate knowledge and incapacity in surviving life in Geneva. Although the research findings are based on the context of Switzerland as a host society, the fact that young refugees have to reconstruct their lives, which is interrupted by external factors and the migration experience, is common also to the situation in their home country/region.

1.2 The context of the study

1.2.1 The context of Eritrean youth's displacement

The youth's uncertainty in envisioning their future is derived from the political instability of their home country, which has been the reason why such a large number of Eritreans, especially young people, leave the country seeking more stable conditions. Eritrea has been a highly militarized country with a dictatorship under President Isaias Afewerki since independence in 1993. According to Eritrea's 1995 Proclamation of National Service, all citizens aged between 18 to 40 years old have to serve compulsory military duty for 18 months. Yet, in practice the duty is often imposed after completing the period. Besides, conscripts are subjected to a 72-hour work week, severe arbitrary punishment, rape by commanders if female, and grossly inadequate food rations (Human Rights Watch, 2018:201). Hence, the harshness and endlessness are the principal reasons why over 486,000 Eritreans fled the country in 2017².

Notably, the national system affects young Eritrean's life by forcing people to enter military service in the last year of school. As Belloni (2019) points out, Eritrean young people's educational period is parallel with joining the national service at a certain age. Since this militarist government regime has lasted over 17 years, the youth know what a hopeless and desperate situation would be waiting for them when entering "adulthood" in Eritrea. Meanwhile, denying conscription in national service means to be systematically considered as dropping out from the step to adulthood and excluded from "normal life" in Eritrea (Belloni 2019:6-7).

In such an oppressive life, Eritrean youth usually have a complicated relationship with their families. Belloni argues "the complexity of socio-economic, political and cultural factors underpinning the mobility of young people from Eritrea", which international organizations,

² QUARTZ AFRICA (2018) 'Eritrea's Exiled Community are Skeptical about the Historic Thaw with Ethiopia'. Accessed 13 May 2019 <<https://qz.com/africa/1341884/eritrea-exiles-want-afwerki-reforms-after-ethiopia-deal/>>.

media, and human rights agencies simply explain as a resistance to militaristic policies (Riggan 2013; Hepner 2015; Treiber 2018, as quoted in Belloni 2019:2). Belloni describes the situation as “mostly ‘a young people business’ in Eritrea” (2019:5) and also mentions in particular:

...young people often take the decision to leave without family consent to avoid government educational and labor market measures. However, their aspirations for geographic mobility are rooted in a social and cultural context where migration is a core value recognized by most as the main channel for personal realization and family survival (Belloni 2019:4).

It is also important to look at the context of sexual violence occurring in female conscription into the national service. According to Kibreab (2017), the pervasiveness of sexual violence is rooted in a social context that suppresses women’s ability to report their experiences. In contrast, the Eritrean government has taken an affirmative stance on gender equality and women’s emancipation in the post-independence period. For instance, 30 percent of seats in the National Assembly are reserved for women (National Union of Eritrean Women 2000, as quoted in Kibreab 2017). Related to this gender equality policy, mobilization in national service is also imposed on both men and women, but it has become a place of violence committed by commanders. In the interviews with Eritrean women and adolescent girls who flee their country’s militarist regime, their narratives imply complexity of how they perceive sexual violence and possible stigma which would continuously remain throughout their lives (Kibreab 2017; Grabska 2013).

Taking into account these varied backgrounds that lead Eritrean youth to migrate, their decision of exile is attributed to complex relationships with their family and unclear prospects for the future. These complex relationships have an impact on a new life. This may be characteristically different from the general phenomena of transnational relationships in which migrants maintain ties with their hometown. Besides, although they could escape from the militaristic regime of the country of origin, unpredictability for the future would emerge in a different form in their new life.

1.2.2 Swiss Policy related to Eritrean Refugees

Eritrean migrants are one of the largest national groups living in Switzerland. In 2018, about 23,000 have been recognized as refugees, 9,500 are on temporary admission (F-permit³) and 3,000 are waiting for a decision⁴. Turning to the case of Geneva, in 2016 Eritrean youth occupied a large proportion of the total number of Eritrean residents in the city; 15-19 year olds: 108 (10%), 20-24 year olds: 227 (13%), and 25-29 year olds: 280 (15%)⁵. In the past, as the recognition rate of Eritrean asylum seekers reached 82% in 2006, Switzerland had

³ According to the Swiss Refugee Council, “Temporarily admitted foreigners receive the F-Permit. This is the confirmation that a deportation cannot be carried out for legal reasons. For the case of renewal, SEM regularly reviews whether the requirements for temporary admission are still met.” Swiss Refugee Council, <<https://www.refugeecouncil.ch/asylum-law/legal-status/temporary-admission-of-foreigners.html>> Accessed 5 May 2019

⁴ SWISS REVIEW (2018) ‘Bern Puts Pressure on Refugees from the Eritrean Dictatorship’. Accessed 15 April 2019 <<https://www.revue.ch/en/editions/2018/06/detail/news/detail/News/bern-puts-pressure-on-refugees-from-the-eritrean-dictatorship/>>

⁵ The statistic was shared by AMIC, which have been provided by Canton of Geneva, Department of Social Cohesion, foreigner’s integration office (République et Canton de Genève Département de la cohésion sociale, Bureau de l’intégration des étrangers)

showed a much more welcoming attitude towards Eritreans who fled from tyranny. However, this changed with the increase of migrants arriving in Europe since 2015. In 2017, as Eritreans accounted for 18.7% of all asylum applications in Switzerland⁶, and furthermore stimulated by the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ in Europe, Switzerland has shifted to reducing the number of accepted refugees through the introduction of more restrictive policies.

In Switzerland, the issues relate to Eritrean refugees having been frequently discussed in the immigration policy regarding the criteria that judges deportation or detention⁷. A court hearing held in 2017 resulted in the rejection of an Eritrean woman’s claim based on the judgment that her claim could not prove enough reason to flee the country and hence her return does not mean she will be punished. This decision was criticized by the UN for lack of real evidence that involuntary returnees would not be persecuted⁸.

On the other hand, Switzerland has witnessed increasing family reunification requests recently⁹. Likewise, Geneva has experienced a large inflow of Eritrean refugees, including a number of young and unaccompanied minors in 2015- 2016. Swiss law defines an unaccompanied minor as “those who are less than 18 years old and are not accompanied by an adult who takes care of him/her according to the law”(International Social Service Switzerland 2014). As some people turn 18 during their asylum procedures, their status becomes more uncertain, as they no longer receive the legal protections available to unaccompanied minors.

1.2.3 Organizations working for refugees in Geneva

In Geneva, supportive organizations become a platform to share experiences and knowledge, which helps migrants and refugees practically and psychologically. *Secrétariat d’Etat aux Migrations* (SEM) is the authority that handles asylum applications and the implementation of immigration policy. Under SEM’s authorization, federal asylum centers are established in several regions which facilitate asylum procedure and provide a shelter for applicants during this procedure. In this section, I refer to a couple of organizations as an example of social service providers in Geneva, who work in the particular domain of social assistance.

Firstly, *l’Association des médiatrices interculturelles* (AMIC) is an association which is visited by a lot of Eritrean participants. AMIC has been established and run by former Eritrean refugee women in Geneva. Their role is bridging the gap between Eritrean refugees and Swiss society, and also facilitating access to public services, such as education and labor market integration. AMIC has become oriented towards the Eritrean-Ethiopian community according to the increasing needs of Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees and asylum seekers. They established a reception space for migrant women to build relationships with others, as well as offering language training. They also approach youth by providing holistic support in constructing their self-reliance, obtaining working experience and integrating into society as an adult.

⁶ *Secrétariat d’Etat aux Migrations* (2018) ‘Migration Report 2017’. Bern. SEM.

⁷ [Swissinfo.ch](https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/asylum_swiss-court-rejects-risks-for-eritrean-returnees/43483780) (Last updated 2017) ‘ASYLUM RULING Swiss Court Rejects Risks for Eritrean Returnees’. Accessed 15 April 2019 <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/asylum_swiss-court-rejects-risks-for-eritrean-returnees/43483780>.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Emma Wallis (2019) ‘Tears of Sadness and Joy: The Difficult Task of Reuniting Parents and Children on Europe’s Migration Routes’ (a webpage of Info Migrants). Accessed 15 April 2019 <<https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/15171/tears-of-sadness-and-joy-the-difficult-task-of-reuniting-parents-and-children-on-europe-s-migration-routes>>.

Apart from targeting a particular nationality, there are various social services provided by the civil association. Camarada is a NGO that offers a program for migrant women in Geneva. They provide opportunities for migrant women in obtaining necessary skills for integration, such as vocational training and language courses. Cooperating with the other NGOs and associations, Camarada maintains a network to share information and to be a holistic supporting team for those who seek asylum in Geneva with other organizations relevant to refugees or migrants.

Reliance is an organization that offers educational support for migrant adults and children on a tutoring basis. About 80 volunteers work as language tutors. They further focus on attaining norms and culture in the host society, aiming to obtain autonomy and capacity to realize and envision the future.

La Roseraie arranges spaces that promote a network for migrants. Their program is a workshop-style practice of using language. They distinguish their role from the public educational institution, by offering less obligation to join a program. They further focus on what they benefit on “that day”, rather than on a long-term basis, considering migrants’ flexible mobility.

Therefore, in Geneva, various types of social services, organized by NGOs and grassroots associations, are available to meet the various needs of refugees and migrants.

1.3 What has been discussed in the academic field?

Young refugees have been discussed in various ways in the academic field. They are often described as passive actors whose lives are interrupted by external factors. The gender-based inequality in migration has been discussed much in studies, while Eritrean’s context shows a difference in progress relating to gender norms. Yet, the research on refugees and migrants in the host countries have only partially given attention to young refugees’ life course and their agency as an active subject engaging and struggling in exile.

1.3.1 Refugee youth

Although Eritrean youth in Geneva, who are the focus of this research, are already over 18 now, many of them were underage when they made a decision to migrate and arrived to start a new life. Hence, when they arrived in Geneva they fell into the bureaucratic category of ‘unaccompanied minors’ as they arrived without adult guardians and were under 18 years of age.

Hopkins and Hill (2008) and Thomas et al. (2004) illustrate that examining “pre-flight experience” and understanding the circumstances of unaccompanied minors’ trajectory is important when considering children’s needs. Other studies have focused on the psychological dimension of unaccompanied minors and refugee youth, addressing the emotional and behavioral problems, traumatic stress and psychological strains which they have often experienced in their life course (Bean et al. 2007, Derluyn and Broekaert 2007). Bean et al.’s research in the Netherlands and Belgium shows unaccompanied youths have experienced more internalized distress and behavioral problems than the accompanied refugee children, and this was partly explained by the higher burden of traumatic stress.

Lems et al. (2019) suggest an ambiguous status of unaccompanied children and youth who are often described as passive and vulnerable actors. These images became prominent when the refugee crisis evoked in 2015 by the European media’s promotion of the terms “unaccompanied minor” with the dramatized implication. Lems et al. warn that this

nomination does not explain properly the problems of young refugees, calling for “more nuanced depictions of young people’s independent migratory pathways” (2019:17).

On the other hand, Lems et al. (2019) shed light on the education of youth refugees in Switzerland, which is important for their future-making as well as their integration into the host society. Investigating the integration class, the research found an “ambiguous potential of education in creating and obstructing refugee youth’s pathways into the larger society” (Lems 2019:1). Interaction between teacher and youth refugees would create “contradictory expectations” that promote refugee youth’s right to inclusion, and simultaneously “expect them to willfully accept their continued exclusion” (Lems et al. 2019:15).

Therefore, this research takes a more in-depth view that is not constrained by a general interpretation of “unaccompanied minors”. Thereby, internal differences seen among young refugee groups can be argued focusing on what elements bring about such differences.

1.3.2 Research on refugees in Switzerland

Several surveys of refugees in Switzerland analyze the problems they face in integrating in society and the structural background embedded in the many issues they face. However, there is still partial consideration for the youth that would face particular obstacles in the host society.

Funn (2017) argues, in an analysis of African diaspora in Switzerland, that the dynamics of culture and backgrounds are embedded within the African diaspora, and highlights the narratives of Eritrean asylum seekers, one of whom mentioned his situation in Switzerland living next to an Ethiopian who used to be the opponent in the previous conflict.

Deponti (2017) analyses the social inclusion of young refugees in German-Speaking parts of Switzerland. Interviews with Eritrean refugees proved that they were engaged in either regular job or vocational training, and most of them had completed either junior or secondary education in their homeland. As a result, they still face structural obstacles in access to decent jobs, and in fact many applicants are awaiting vocational training for a long period. The interviews also imply that young people actively deployed their personal and relational resources to find strategies of integration and to have a clear plan for the future (Deponti 2017:42).

This prior research and studies have argued partially the characteristics of Eritrean migrants and the structural barriers and strategies Eritrean refugee youth manage in Switzerland. Yet, they rarely argue young refugees’ trajectory and how their experience is reflected in their present lives in Switzerland. In this paper, I also shed light on this aspect.

1.3.3 Youth, migration and gender

The majority of studies on young refugee movements have focused on boys and young men (Gardner 2012; Hashim and Thorsen 2011; Punch 2007; Thorsen 2006; White et al. 2011, as quoted in Grabska et al. 2019). The young refugee women have not appeared extensively in the research despite their increasing numbers. Yet, as several authors underline in research of youth through a gender analysis it is pivotal to understand “how the social phase of adolescence and the process of transition to adulthood are constructed and lived in different socio-cultural contexts” (Grabska et al. 2019:258). Women migrants, at the age of adolescence face a high possibility of falling victim to oppressive gender regimes, such as forced marriage, sexual violence, and exploitation.

Meanwhile, although there is gender-based and generational inequalities, some progress towards achieving gender equality has been brought in Eritrea by the results of active participation of women as a subject in the national liberation struggle (Grabska et al. 2019:11).

Bean et al. (2007) state gender difference in the emotional problems experienced by unaccompanied minors as compared to natives and refugees accompanied by parents. While gender modestly affects the emotion and behavior of the natives and refugee minors with parents, the unaccompanied refugee minor group has a different indication; because the external stress they experience is more excessive than inherent factors associated with gender.

Therefore, to some extent, while young Eritrean women have nearly equal rights to men in deciding on whether or not to migrate, their gendered feature as migrants place them in a vulnerable position, with a high possibility of being victimized during the transition to adulthood. This research looks at how Eritrean refugee youth reconciles the different gender norms that operate in Eritrea, as opposed to the social norms of the host country.

1.4 Research objective and question

The research objective is to investigate how factors contribute to the protracted uncertainty of Eritrean refugee youth. The objective is to shed light on how uncertainty for young refugees, relating to their sense of loss, social status, and to their prospects for the future has been created and amplified or mitigated, during their process of constructing life in the country of destination after fleeing their home country.

Another objective is to explore the coping strategies used by Eritrean refugee youth to survive life in Geneva. The strategy is a tool for young refugees aiming to compensate for insufficient knowledge and lack of ability in surviving, and to mitigate unpredictability for the future. As a part of the strategy, this research looks at the external actors' role that contribute to alleviating the challenges faced by young refugees. This research explores how their strategies effectively work toward solving their problems.

To achieve these goals, I pose the main research question:

- What creates protracted uncertainty and the precarious status of Eritrean refugee youth in Geneva and how do they deal with it?

In order to answer this broad question, I ask the following sub-questions:

- What are the sources of protracted uncertainty and precarious status of Eritrean refugee youth and asylum seekers in Geneva? How are these sources experienced differently by young people in their legal / social status, and in their gender respectively?
- What are the coping strategies that Eritrean refugee youth and asylum seekers resort to in the context of protracted uncertainty in Geneva?
- How do these strategies contribute to minimizing uncertainty in young Eritreans' lives in Geneva or do these perhaps increase elements of uncertainty?

1.5 The outline of the research paper

In this paper, I start with the research problem and context in Chapter 1. In Chapter 2, I present the theoretical framework. In Chapter 3, I explain the methodology used for investigating the research question and analyzing findings. In Chapter 4, I analyze the relationship between youthfulness and uncertainty based on my findings of fieldwork. Chapter 5 explores coping strategies of young refugees reflecting the activities of Eritrean refugee youth in Geneva. Chapter 6 shows the conclusions of this paper.

Chapter 2

Theoretical framework

My research is placed in the following theoretical debates: conceptualizing youth, protracted uncertainty and coping strategies.

2.1 Conceptualizing youth

Since a number of Eritrean youth refugees in Geneva are very young (around 18 years or less) when deciding whether to attempt migrating to and subsequently arriving in Europe, examining the relationship of children and migration is important to understand the background of this phenomenon and problem. “Youth” is a broad category to describe age, often including young people up to 30 or 35 years old. However, this cannot be simply defined in terms of chronological age, because this categorization is largely affected and subject to being manipulated by a relationship with context-specific practices (Grabska et al, 2019).

The international age-based definition of youth has revealed various interpretations. The World Bank has set the youth age range from 14 to 25, while there are various national level definitions of youth that have set the upper bar to 35 or even 40 years of age (White 2012:10, as quoted in Huijsmans 2015:10). Notably, the 2009 Human Development Report which focused on young people’s migration frames a young person’s migration as being one concerning a person who is below 18 years old and without his/her parents or adult caretakers (Huijsmans 2012). Meanwhile, framing the term “youth” is linked to debates and concerns based on cultural, generational and spatial contexts (Huijsmans 2015:8).

Based on the definitions above, “youth” as the term used in this research has a dynamic meaning, including those whose agency is being constructed during the process of migration and is affected in multidimensional contexts. Youth can be defined as a period of shifting from parents’ care and of proceeding into the starting point of adulthood. Generally, when completing compulsory education, persons face an important decision to enter a new stage which they choose based on willingness, capacity, and opportunity.

During the period of childhood and adolescence, people are ambitious and usually have a “dream” such as what to be or how to be in the future. Even if it would not be a bright and ideal goal, it would be a positive image or idealized model illustrated in their individual minds. In the period of transferring two stages, people inevitably face precarious and ambiguous feelings because they are going to be exposed to the unknown world with insufficient knowledge and experience, and unpredictability of the future, which are the sources of uncertainty (Williams and Balaž 2012: 168, as quoted in Horst and Grabska 2015:4).

2.2 Protracted Uncertainty

The experiences of young Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers in Geneva can be characterized as “protracted uncertainty” (Horst and Grabska 2015). The situation which young Eritrean refugees encounter in Geneva can be linked to the fact that their emotions and intelligence would be affected by external impediments such as conflict and political disorder. Such experiences would cast a shadow on their lives and could be prolonged even if their living environment is changed after migration.

According to Horst and Grabska (2015:7), for refugees and displaced people, uncertainties created by displacement or a dreadful experience continuously influence one's life. The concept of uncertainty associated with imperfect knowledge and the unpredictability of the future is induced by forced displacement. The protracted uncertainty is strongly related to the "waiting" which involves enduring harsh everyday realities in the short-term, and this leads to "the longer-term uncertainty of imagining a future that is somewhere else - either back in the country of origin or in a third country that is stable and peaceful" (Horst and Grabska 2015:8).

Dewey (1929) as quoted in Horst and Grabska (2015:7) explains that controlling and accepting the future entails a "quest for certainty" that is associated with a fundamental ambiguity. The driving force of people's movement is not only attributed to a refusal to live in harsh conditions but also to seek hope for the possibility to return or to re-create a better life elsewhere (Horst and Grabska 2015:2).

However, as people obtain knowledge through their education and interaction with society and proceed to undertake education at an advanced level, they are also creating hope for the future, albeit sometimes in such hopeless circumstances. Then this leads to migration decisions.

If young Eritrean refugees have prospects for a future in Europe, those will be linked to the "before" and the hope they had when living in their homeland, but the prospects they perceived for the future in their homeland, in fact, might have been dominated by anxiety and desperation. According to Belloni (2019:2), "protracted crisis" refers to realities that are "characterized by long-term social disruption, economic deprivation, and political oppression", and "crisis" affects young people's life by means of widespread unemployment and limited access to meaningful prospects (ibid). However, considering that their situation involves "hope and waiting that occurs in protracted displacement" (Horst and Grabska 2015), the "protracted uncertainty" can be an adequate term to describe Eritrea and Eritrean migrants' realities, because this term would imply the waiting and stagnating in various dimensions in their lives, rather than "crisis" which would avert attention to the dynamic nature of young people's situations.

2.3 Coping strategies

To survive in the host society, young refugees have various strategies to deal with many difficulties. The strategies are employed to overcome a lack of information or knowledge to survive, to avoid danger or health problems, or to achieve a safe and stable life in an unfamiliar place. While the strategy is worked out by the individual, sometimes they are achieved by interaction in a network.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define coping as "constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (1984:141). The coping is not static, it is a process that constantly changes according to the person, their environment and their relationship to it (1984:142). They refer to coping strategies' function in two categories: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping.

The problem-focused coping strategies include clarifying the problem, considering alternative solutions, "regarding costs and benefits, choosing from these available options and acting on it" (1984:152). The problem-focused coping deals with external factors, such as environmental pressures and resources. Instead, they also tackle internal elements including motivational or cognitive changes, such as reducing ego involvement, changing a degree of

desires, developing alternative ways of satisfaction or obtaining new skills (ibid). Khawaja et al. (2008) argue a case of refugees' coping strategy with a change of cognitive process by reframing the situations they experience; for example, when confronting a devastating experience, they change their mindset into being confident to overcome challenges.

On the other hand, the emotion-focused coping strategies deal with "avoidance, minimization, distancing, selective attention, and wresting positive value from negative events" (Lazarus and Folkman 1984:150). It is also described as "self-controlling, seeking social support, escape-avoidance, and accepting responsibility" (Folkman et al. 1986:572). In some cases, emotional-focused coping is used to change the way of translating an encounter, as it leaves objective situations intact.

Coping is constructed by a particular person's context which is designed to manage the situational demands relating to his/her well-being (ibid.). Those who prioritize self-focused coping goals are likely to make an effort to control the environment to suit their personal needs. Those who have collectivistic perspectives and prioritize other-focused coping goals are eager to protect interpersonal relationships (Wong & Ujimoto 1998, as quoted in Lonner 2007:42).

The social environment is important for coping strategy resources which are fed by social relationships and networks. The social support positively works in providing sympathy or giving helpful information, while negatively functions by bringing irritation and resentment or giving misleading information. Likewise, as for prevention, social support reduces uncertainty and worry or sets a good example; instead, it also creates some anxieties or emerges new problems (Suls 1982, as quoted in Lazarus and Folkman 1984). Specifically, in the case of migrants, according to Khawaja et al. (2008), the social network plays an important role in the pre-migration period through support by family, friends, and neighbors, who continuously help young refugees during migration and after arrival. Huijsmans (2012) presents the role of a network of young migrants getting involved in migration, as the parent-based network which facilitates young people's access to the migration of youth through parents' effort. On the other hand, the youth-based network is particularly organized as a form of peer recruitment that is related to the workplace where other peers already have a job.

Chapter 3

Methodology and research approach

For investigating the research questions, I applied a qualitative research approach. This method focuses on respondents' thoughts and perceptions through their voice, in their own words describing their life events, present status, social environment, and prospects for the future. Through their description, I collect information on how they understand or find meaning from every event (Bernard 2017). Here, I explain the methods I employed in the field research, namely ethnographic observation and interviews. In addition, I also discuss ethical considerations and limitations concomitant to the research. Finally, I introduce an intersectional analysis which I employ as a data analysis method.

3.1 Ethnographic observation

To begin my field research, I started with ethnographic observation featuring participant observation, the "Go-along" method, and the social media.

3.1.1 Participant observation

Participant observation leads to a better understanding of people's attitudes and also provides a chance to explain the purpose of the research at the beginning and get permission to act as a participant-observer (Barnard 2011:266). Positive participation can gradually reduce alienation experienced by the researcher and build a rapport with participating members.

I joined in AMIC computer training classes as a volunteer and observed members' motivation, action, and participation. Although time was limited to a few weeks, this occasion enabled me to encounter participants and to see how they dealt with the activities. Participant observation could help a researcher to deal with sensible questions with carefully phrased language and a sensible attitude (Bernard 2011:266). Indeed, communication with participants in the class made me find people's characters to some extent, which helped me to proceed in follow-up individual interviews.

Whereas, I originally planned a group discussion of AMIC participants to see their collective perception of their situation. However, it could not be realized due to fewer participants during the summer season, and the closure of some activities.

3.1.2 "Go-along" and mapping methods

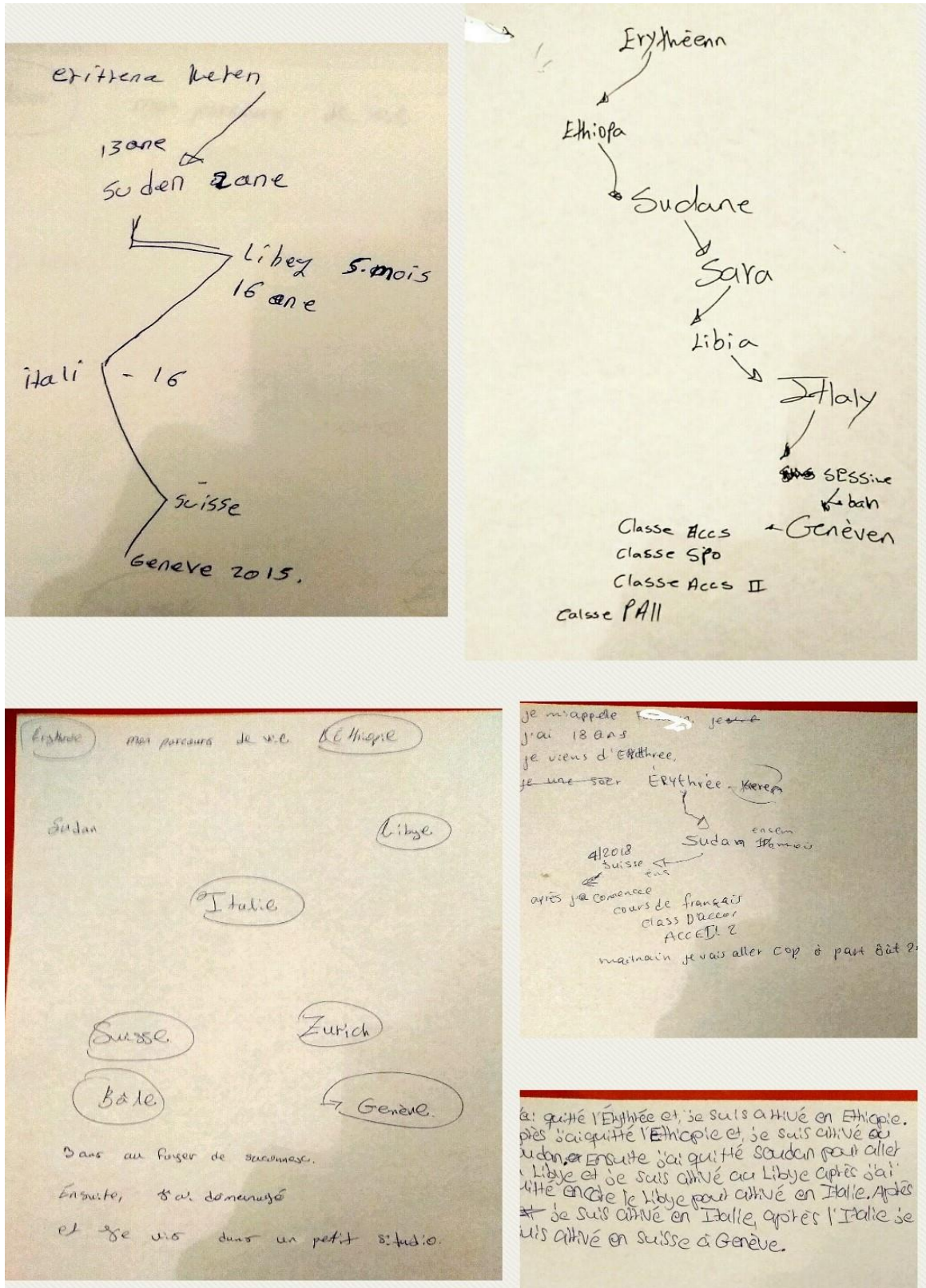
I also focused on young people's daily sphere; people's actions and relation to the social environment. I set up meetings with informants for interviews (as mentioned later) in natural settings in accordance with their preference, in a café or some other meeting points at the station, the lakeside park, and sometimes roaming in the neighborhood of their residence.

The 'Go-along' technique enabled me to look at "The role of the environment and the meaning of place in everyday lived experience" (Kusenbach 2003: 456). The method illustrates youth refugees' life experience and various factors in situ that shapes their uncertainty, precarity, relief or happiness, that they encounter in Geneva. The go-along technique is effective to compensate for the shortcomings of a direct interview by accomplishing 'natural' events in the environment of social settings.

Besides, knowledge generated by “hanging out” with refugees, it can also lead to researcher opening channels to the voices of refugees and reaching the problems that are defined in more locally articulated terms (Rodgers 2004). Moreover, when we focus on the everyday life of young refugees, it is also important to take some distance from the humanitarian organizations in order to clarify my position as a researcher, and not as part of the humanitarian enterprise (Grabska 2013).

To visualize their perception about the pathway to their present life, I also asked some people to map their trajectories. This mapping method is borrowed from participatory research practices which Chambers (1991) advocates for as it makes connections to place/situations which remain in their mind. This helped me to visually figure out which places have been important in their journey and which aspects (period of stay, places, and events after arrival, etc.) they emphasized (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.
 "Map" of journey drawn by informants



Source: Drawn by informants in August 2019.

3.1.3 Social Media

Social media is included in observation to look at how this tool plays a role in the expression and communication of young refugees. Social Networking Service (SNS) serves as a tool that connects migrants in an unfamiliar environment. Meanwhile, it would also be important to look at how they balance or separate relationships that span online and offline, which emerge as ‘intensities’ of social media activity and sociality (Postill and Pink 2012:125). This idea suggests that “to focus on the qualities of relatedness in online and offline relationships offers a better way of understanding how social media practices are implicated in the constitution of social groups, and the practices in which they engage together” (Postill and Pink 2012: 132).

In my fieldwork, I got involved in a WhatsApp group of young members of AMIC. Although there seemed no clear line to limit participation, they invited young people who needed information. I also connected on Instagram and Facebook with people whom I met face to face.

3.2 Interviewing method

I conducted fieldwork in Geneva, Switzerland for 1.5 months in July – August 2019. I used semi-structured interviews that predetermined the outline of topics with suggested questions but flexibly judged how to navigate the outline according to the particular interviewee’s response (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). The interviews were conducted with 13 Eritrean refugee youth (7 men and 6 women) who were 18 to 29 years old. 6 (3 men and 3 women) were unaccompanied minors when they arrived in Switzerland, and 3 (all men) were 19 – 24 years old and arrived alone (See Table below).

Table: Informants’ information about arrival age and status

	Name (anonym)	Status upon arrival	Age of leaving country	Arrival (in Switzerland) age	Arrival year	Present age (2019)
Male	Idris	Unaccompanied minor	15	16	2014	21
	Henok	Unaccompanied minor	?	17	2015	20
	Abraham	Unaccompanied minor	?	16	2015	20
	Tesfay	Single (over 19)	18?	19	2014	23
	Adonay	Single (over 19)	18	20	2015	24
	Dawit	Single (over 19)	?	24	2014	29
	Freselam	with family	18?	18	2018	19
Female	Mehret	Unaccompanied minor	12	16	2016	20
	Senait	Unaccompanied minor	14	16	2015	20
	Almaz	Unaccompanied minor	?	16	2014	21
	Gabriel	with family	18	18	2014	23
	Lemlem	with mother and sister	16	16	2014	20
	Semret	sister of Lemlem	13	13	2014	18

Source: Fieldwork interview

(* The data is based on interview responses. The contents which I could not clarify in the interview are indicated as “?”.)

3.2.1 Choosing respondents

I approached respondents by participating in AMIC’s program and tried to ask members who are 18 - 30 years old to be informants for the research. Unfortunately, the research period overlapped with the summer vacations in Geneva, so the regular activities of AMIC were mostly closed. I could meet with some people during the two weeks at the beginning of the research period when the AMIC office was still open. A couple of young people came there for a computer training class or for other concerns to consult staff.

On the other hand, I asked AMIC staff to introduce those who were unaccompanied minors upon arrival. As I proceeded with the research, I noticed certain characteristics of the problem that unaccompanied minors particularly struggle with. Hence, I used a purposive sampling method to seek respondents who have relevance to the research topic (King et al. 2018).

Since I had a limitation to approach participants during AMIC activities due to the vacation period, I reached out to respondents through different methods. I actively utilized a messaging application (WhatsApp) and a social networking service (Instagram). AMIC has a WhatsApp group consisting of approximately 50 young members, and in the group, AMIC volunteers frequently post calls for recreational activities. I could always meet 5-6 participants in this activity. I also tried to find possible informants within the Instagram network. In the communication via a digital network, some people did not respond or declined to join the research due to a busy schedule or physical absence in Geneva.

3.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

For the semi-structured interviews (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009), several questions included young people’s experiences in pre-migration, transit, and post-migration. I usually started with a general question about their present daily life. Next, I proceeded to a conversation regarding their migration experience, asking how they left Eritrea and how they spent time in transit countries in their journey. Furthermore, I asked their situation when arrival in Switzerland and how they have constructed the present life. Finally, I asked about their vision for the future.

However, I flexibly changed questions according to the informant’s responses and attitude. If they tended to talk more about a particular story or put stress on certain words, I tried to enhance it by asking suggested questions. For those who seemed to hesitate to reply, I did not ask more and proceeded to the next topic.

Since I was new and unfamiliar to everyone, I needed to build a relationship by meeting with each person multiple times. Although some could not make it due to busy schedules, I have met on 2 -3 occasions each person in a place they preferred; such as the lakeside park, the Geneva central station, or in front of the AMIC office.

The informants’ narratives quoted in this paper are translated in English.

3.3 Ethical consideration and limitation

When it comes to research involving children or youth, it is important to encourage their meaningful and ethical participation, and research should look at them as active agents in their own lives, not passive victims or research ‘subjects’ (Save the Children 2004). As for research with refugees in particular, when asking about migration experience, the method should be carefully planned in consideration of the informants’ well-being as it could result in a certain amount of trauma and mental distress. Moreover, the researchers should take into account the power relationship that affects individual’s visibility. In terms of young women refugees, some of them might be spontaneously invisible or may not actively join in the research (Grabska et al. 2019:31). This could be due to the risk of being exposed therefore, the researcher should be careful in the way he/she approaches the research concerning “do no harm” (Jacobsen and Landau 2003).

Based on the ethics above, I gave attention to the research design to ensure that it would not bring any risks or harms to any of the young people who cooperated with my research. In every interview with informants, I started with the research objectives and followed to explain the confidentiality that protects their privacy and anonymity. I often asked them if they had any questions or doubts about the research, and finally asked for their consent in being part of the research. I decided to use a pseudonym for each informant in this paper in order to protect their privacy which includes information on individual status and background. I also interviewed the respondents in a place where they felt free to talk.

There are temporal and spatial limitations to grasp the whole network of Eritrean refugees in fieldwork in a summer season, so the findings should be a partial capturing of their dynamics. Accessibility to NGO’s programs including contact to staffs are also limited during this period. Moreover, the cohort of informants is a homogenous group who have once joined an AMIC’s activity. This inevitably excludes people who do not have access to AMIC.

In terms of language, all communication including interviews are done in French which is the second or third language both for informants and me, as such their way of expression may be constrained compared to their native language. To avoid miscommunication and misunderstanding, I recorded conversations (only with those who consented) and effectively utilized the smartphone for researching information or images that could compensate for informants’ expression.

3.4 Intersectional Analysis

I used an intersectional framework to both choose respondents and to analyze data I obtained in encounters with Eritrean refugee youth. For the categorization that regards young people as a homogenous group would simplify the differences inside the cohort and make an important issue invisible, thus an intersectional analysis is useful in revealing this simplification.

Investigating young people’s social practice and their relationships, shows the emergence of division within the cohort. To discuss their situation based on the only salient feature can render more important problems invisible. The intersectional theory thus promotes an inclusive understanding of young people’s situation and achieves visibility (Cooper 1995 and Harper 1994, as quoted in Norris et al. 2007:4) of hidden agents among young people. An intersectional analysis enables me to articulate what differentiates the degree of stability and uncertainty in the lives of refugees in the host country.

Hence, by applying an intersectional approach, Eritrean refugee youth experiences and the hardships of each person are presented in different ways and to different degrees. Intersectionality views people's identities as multifaceted and context-specific, wherein the meaning of people's locations and identities, as well as their salience, are the product of history, culture, and society (Norris et al, 2007:5). These intersecting facets would give rise to young Eritrean's inequality, difficulty in accessing opportunities, and degree of level of integration to the host country. I coded the interview transcriptions based on the theoretical framework. Likewise, I coded the findings from informal interviews, observation in AMIC programs, and from hanging out in social environments.

Chapter 4

Youthfulness and Uncertainty

Eritrean refugee youth whom I met in Geneva face different challenges that contribute to their feeling of protracted uncertainty.

Every informant's narrative and "map" (Figure 1) indicated their long trajectory fleeing their homeland by foot, transiting through some countries, and staying in others during their journey to Europe. Many informants narrated their dreadful journeys in passing a desert from Sudan to Libya by foot, and/or saw violence, human trafficking, or a scene of death.

The concept of Eritreans' youthfulness may be different from the general notion to some extent. For them, entering adulthood is usually signaled by starting the process of conscription to military service in the country. It can be assumed that children anticipate that "to become an adult" in this country means to live a life that engages in the military infinitely. Given the fact that they are raised in such an environment up to the age of 18, children are likely to be pessimistic, give up and despair about their future. The pessimistic anticipation of Eritreans toward adulthood would be derived from the concept of uncertainty in terms of indefiniteness and the inability for them to form future expectations, along with periods of toughness or other possible brutalities that could ensue.

In 2015-2016, a large influx of Eritrean migrants was seen in the whole Switzerland. The aftermath of this has affected many places in Geneva, such as schools and housing. Now after 3-4 years have passed, the integration of Eritrean refugee youth into Swiss society has progressed to some extent, but the degree varies from person to person. There are those who have been appropriately included in an immigration program, become good speakers of French or/and get access to job training. In contrast, those who have had few opportunities tend to be left behind on the way toward integration. The present situation reveals gaps and parallels in an outcome of how young Eritreans have succeeded or not in reconstructing their lives.

4.1 Young age migration

Nine informants have experienced their migration between the ages of 12-18 years old. Young age migration is filled with potential vulnerabilities and risks, especially for people migrating alone without a caregiver. In Eritrea, they are deprived of their desire for the future, because their period of youth is in parallel with compulsory military service when entering "adulthood". However, it is important to note that the migration for young people is a life-changing decision, and young people have agency in the process of migration (Grabska et al. 2019:8).

The "map" drawn by informants (Figure 1) explicitly shows their long journey over years that passed many countries before arriving in Europe. This implies that refugee youth have been faced with uncertainty over prolonged periods of time from the place of origin and the several places of transit during their migratory journeys.

4.1.1 Memory of the dangerous journeys

All informants eagerly talked to me about their migrating pathway to Switzerland. Some precisely described their experience in chronological order, while some carefully chose words

following my questions. Broadly, they were honest and humble in explaining their experiences to me.

All informants passed through Ethiopia and arrived in Sudan on foot. Some stayed in Khartoum for several weeks or months and left for Libya with the help of a smuggler. Crossing a desert is highlighted by many informants as “very dangerous” with a risk of starvation and human trafficking. Lemlem, a 20 year old woman, who fled with her mother and sister said,

“We had a strategy to hide from human traffickers. They didn’t reach out to a lady who is with a partner, so I pretended to be with a boyfriend – but I didn’t know him! Otherwise, they kidnapped young ladies once they found a good one. I saw this many times”¹⁰.

The memory of the dangerous journey remained intact in the mind of many informants. Tesfay showed me pictures of “Eritrean migrants in the desert” on the internet to explain how it is. As it can be understood by their emotion in talking about their journey, this horrible memory still remains strong in their minds and affect their daily lives in the form of stress, disruption, or seamless anxiety. Lemlem faced many problems related to the poverty of her family in Eritrea. Since her father was imprisoned, her mother has raised children without a breadwinner. Lemlem’s elder brother and sister went missing when both reached the age of conscription. The accumulated problems meant her mother suffered from depression, which also affected young Lemlem mentally as she always saw her mother’s crying face. After deciding to leave Eritrea to escape from poverty, Lemlem’s burden was amplified because she played a role to take the initiative of her family’s journey on behalf of her sick mother. 4 years have already passed since she arrived, yet she is sometimes disrupted by recalling her missing brother and sister. She feels sympathy for unaccompanied minors when remembering her own family.

4.1.2 Living environment

The living environment is important for young Eritreans to secure safety and a comfortable space for their daily life. After completing an asylum procedure at the reception center, young Eritreans first move to a shelter. Many kinds of shelters are set up in Geneva according to the type of resident; for families, for singles, or for unaccompanied minors.

In the shelter for unaccompanied minors, 10 people live in one room with 5 double beds, sharing a kitchen and bathroom. The building is temporal housing without proper facilities to control the temperature and is located in a remote industrial area. Most regrettably 2 unaccompanied minor residents (an Afghan and an Eritrean) committed suicide in the shelter during 2018 to 2019. According to the press release of the General Hospice, Ali (an Afghan) is “psychologically vulnerable” with a provisional residence permit¹¹. The press also noted “the difficulty of transition of unaccompanied minors to adulthood” in relation to being residents at shelters. These incidents revealed a lack of support and proper supervision of unaccompanied minors, degraded housing conditions, and acts of violence seen in the shelter.

¹⁰ Interview with Lemlem (2 August 2019)

¹¹ Asile.ch (2019) ‘Le Suicide d’un Jeune Réfugié à Genève Attriste Et Interpelle’. Accessed 21 Oct 2019 <<https://asile.ch/2019/04/08/le-suicide-dun-jeune-refugie-a-geneve-attriste-et-interpelle/>>.

All informants once stayed in a shelter, and some of them still lived there, whilst others have chosen to move to private housing. Lemlem has stayed in the shelter since she arrived in Geneva. She commented,

“We share a toilet and kitchen with others, it is so dirty. Many men smoke and take a drug in the shelter, especially during a vacation... Before I lived in the other shelter which is only for women. Now it is mixed”¹².

Tesfay also had been in the shelter for 4 years. He left a shelter, however, now he has troubles with the family who he shares a room with.

“I am not satisfied. I like to be alone. When I bring my friend to the room, they are not happy and tell many things (complaints) to me. I paid rent, but... I have no choice to leave there. I always look for a place. But I don’t work so I cannot find (any room that he can afford to pay)”¹³.

In contrast, a few people successfully found comfortable housing. Almaz used to live in a shelter for unaccompanied minors, and she recently moved to an apartment that she found and pays rent by herself. Idris also lived in the shelter previously, and he found a room, assisted by his friend, and now shares it with a Syrian man.

Indeed, all informants who live in the shelter suggested to me to set a meeting at the park or the station, not at their house. When I was hanging out with Freselam, who also lives in the shelter with his family, I asked why he preferred meeting at the park. He said,

“For me, the problem is that shelter is closed for the visitors after 6 pm. We (residents) can go in and out anytime, but we cannot invite my friend”¹⁴.

He always meets up with friends at the lakeside park. As I observed on Instagram and Facebook, other informants also spent a lot of leisure time at the lakeside park with peers. They use this place as their alternative relaxing place instead of their room in the shelter.

It is obvious by the narrative of informants and NGO staff that living conditions deteriorate young people’s psychological wellbeing and is harmful to their study. Finding a proper living environment is key for young people to avoid confronting a situation that increases their stress and anxieties.

4.1.3 Ambivalence between “freedom” and homeland’s norms

Because they decided to flee Eritrea due to lack of freedom in their country, young people are largely opposed to the restrictive norms of Eritrea. Many informants mentioned that there is “freedom” in Swiss society and they appreciate it. Instead, their narratives imply that some cognition of homeland remains intact more or less in their identity. It would be difficult to immediately shift their minds filled by their original norms to the other one even if it is believed to be an “ideal” one. As a result, an ambivalent feeling would make them uncomfortable to fit themselves into daily life in Swiss society.

Lemlem had never moved from her hometown before her migration because “we might be arrested if we move to the other town without paper”. Even in Ethiopia she was surprised

¹² Interview with Lemlem (2 August 2019)

¹³ Interview with Tesfay (1 August 2019)

¹⁴ Interview with Freselam (6 August 2019)

by encountering the other cultures for the first time, she was so shocked when she finally arrived in Switzerland. Lemlem talked about her shock regarding gender issues,

“In my country, as you may know already, girls do not work. It is boys who work. Husband works and wife stays at home and takes care of children. They (girls) do not talk with boys and go out with them...When I arrived in Swiss, the things were changed. Girls go out with boys and talk with them. It is so different. But I understood now.... For girls, it (living as a girl) is difficult. For boys also difficult, but it is much more for girls. Because in our country, there is less confidence and motivation for them. When I left my country and arrived here, I found the other life. There is much freedom for girls here. I go out in the evening with friends, it is equal here. But in my country, it is forbidden. I can go out with my brother or sister, it is not forbidden. But with a boyfriend, it is forbidden”¹⁵.

Senait also mentioned, “In Geneva, there are many people from the world and many nationalities. There is equality and no racism for people”.

She added,

“It was still freedom. In my home woman is closed, and 13 or 14 or 15 years old have to find a husband. It is crazy.... There was a law. Parents would like to follow this, but at that same time, they allow me to make a decision depending on the motivation what I want to do”¹⁶.

Some of the NGO staff have pointed out that young people’s behavior, that has been nurtured in their homeland, would generate incompatibility in study in the present. In Eritrea, students generally maintain a passive attitude in the classroom; just sitting and patiently listening to lectures. Since they have not been taught in the way of actively interacting with teachers, Eritrean students have difficulties in getting accustomed to the Swiss school style. In NGO staff’s perspective, this educational discipline reveals a gap in comprehension between Eritrean and other migrant students. Additionally, the educational attainment upon arrival in Switzerland also causes a difference from other migrants.

Although girls have felt uncomfortable due to gendered norms in their homeland, they have been for a long time forced to compromised and accept it as they have grown up. Hence it would not be easy for them to change their complex feelings and simply accept norms of equality which they have once desired but abandoned in Eritrea. Or otherwise, the external stress they have might be more excessive than inherent factors associated with gender, as Bean et al. (2007) point out. Educational attitudes are also what young people have long believed in as ideal behavior. Young people struggle with the dilemma between a society of “freedom” and the norms and cultures of the country of origin.

4.1.4 Not sure for my future - their complex “destination”

Eritrean refugee youth’s prospects for the future is filled with uncertainty created by horrible events and the displacement they experienced in the past and the instability of life in the present. All informants mentioned “I’m not sure of my future” – that would be led by a negative prospect for employment or foreseeing the political changes that threaten the

¹⁵ Interview with Lemlem (2 August 2019)

¹⁶ Interview with Senait (29 July 2019)

present status with the possibility of deportation. Indeed, the degree of unpredictability would differ from each people following their status and context.

As *La Roseraie* director describes, “Geneva is not their (migrants’) final destination. They will go to the other canton or country”¹⁷. This implies their uncertainty regarding freedom of movement which cannot simply be ameliorated in Switzerland. However, in the case of Eritrean’s it is more complicated due to the type of residence permit that differentiates each person’s mobility, such as the F-permit holder with limitation of movement¹⁸.

AMIC staff pointed out that the priority for Eritrean refugee youth is seeking stability in life in Geneva, more than envisioning various possible futures. The staff commented;

“The reason why young Eritrean fall into a problem in new life, even though they assure a safety here after escaping from the insecurity of homeland, because everything comes up to them when they arrive in the destination. During migration, they just consider their lives today and tomorrow. They hardly think of their future. When they arrive and settle down, many things suddenly come up for them”¹⁹.

Henok, who is a 20 year old man who arrived alone in 2015, states “I want to go back my home” for a question where he envisages to stay in the future. Despite his will, he works as a regular employee in a sports goods shop. He is only one among the informants who work as a regular employee. He was employed after completing ACCES II (*Accueil de l’enseignement secondaire II*) course (explained in the next section) and a few weeks of internship in the same shop. I asked him “Do you want to continue working in this shop?” but he replied “No.” Although he is satisfied with the working conditions including the owner and colleagues, he prefers to obtain various working experience in different domains. He also thinks it is natural behavior to change a job during one’s life course.

Furthermore, his status, that his asylum application has been rejected stimulates the sense of uncertainty for future job prospects. Henok mentions that “They (Switzerland) always change. Switzerland is democratic, but it is not always true”. This implies that both his status and that of other Eritreans’ in Switzerland are always exposed to possible deportation through political change. This perception may connect to his sense to recall his homeland, even though he is in a relatively successful situation with regards to employment.

4.2 Emerging gaps among Eritrean refugee youth

In the cohort of Eritrean refugee youth, I explore a variation in problems they confront according to their diverse backgrounds. A personal situation is derived from intersectional factors; arrival age, residence permit, and arrival status. These factors substantially determine each youth’s accessibility to education and job, and inevitably emerge some differences in situations among the cohort of Eritrean refugee youth.

¹⁷ Interview with the director of *La Roseraie* (19 August 2019)

¹⁸ Theoretically a F-permit holder is admitted of free movement in the territory of Switzerland. However, it is actually risky to move to another canton because of grounds for revocation under law regarding foreign nationals. Swiss Refugee Council <<https://www.refugeecouncil.ch/asylum-law/legal-status/recognised-refugees-provisional-admission.html>>

¹⁹ Interview with AMIC staff (13 August 2019)

4.2.1 Exclusion in education based on age at arrival

In Swiss law, all people under the age of 19 take compulsory education regardless of status. This systematically excludes young people who are over 19. Other integration programs for adults are set up by the municipality. These are for youth between the ages of 15-19:

ACCES II is a secondary school for all non-French speaking migrant students between the ages of 15-19 in Geneva. Among 13 informants, 10 have enrolled or have already graduated from this school. In 1st grade, students are placed in “reception class” with intensive French lessons. From the next grade, students enter a course of apprenticeship and technical lecture, for instance, working in the office for 3 days and attending class for 2 days per week.

Apprenticeship is a remarkable educational system in Switzerland and “award a diploma which is so important to get a job in a particular domain in Switzerland” according to AMIC staff. Students ordinarily join for 2-3 years in apprenticeship in a respective domain of job. The diploma of completing an apprenticeship is highly evaluated in certain categories of jobs in Switzerland, therefore this curriculum is rather preferable and adjustable for migrant students in the perspective of AMIC staff. Among informants, 10 have joined or have already completed this program.

However, Tesfay, who arrived in Switzerland without family when he was 19 in 2014, could not go to ACCES II school because of his arrival age,

“I didn’t go to school, a reception class as well. I couldn’t find a good professor (for language). I talked with a friend who speaks French well and learned from them... When I arrived in Swiss, I was in the Vallorbe camp²⁰. I was registered and did the interview there. I was sent here and stayed for 1 year and had the second interview. For one year, I did nothing. I stayed at home like a baby. They did not give a French class, or anything”²¹.

Tesfay is one example of a young migrant who has been excluded by the ACCES II education program including apprenticeship. His accessibility to education which must be provided to a person his age, was restricted and even amplified his anxiety. His words “I stayed at home like a baby” implies his isolation and powerlessness that he cannot be a part of the society. He once enrolled in the integration program for adults, however, he could not obtain a good skill, as he mentioned “I couldn’t find a good professor”.

Due to an influx of migrants in 2015-2016, the backlash has caused a number of young migrant arrivals who could not enroll in the school like Tesfay. According to ACCES II director, there were more than double the number of students enrolled during this period. Even though it was such a chaotic situation, the minors could still secure access to school because of the law, as all unaccompanied minors among informants could enroll in school at least within 2 years. In contrast, those who were over 19 years old upon arrival - 3 informants including Tesfay - joined an integration program individually and some of them dropped out. This demonstrates that the age at arrival plays a major role in building a life in Geneva.

²⁰ Vallorbe asylum center operates asylum registration and provides accommodation for applicants. Federal Department of Justice and Police (Last updated 2017) ‘*Centre Fédéral Pour Requérants d’asile De Vallorbe*’. Accessed 13 Oct 2019

<[https://www.sem.admin.ch/dam/data/sem/asyl/beschleunigung/sachplanasyl/wch-2_objektblatt-vallorbe-f.pdf#search='le+centre+f%C3%A9d%C3%A9ral+pour+requ%C3%A9rants+d%27asile+%28CFA%29+de+Vallorbe.'](https://www.sem.admin.ch/dam/data/sem/asyl/beschleunigung/sachplanasyl/wch-2_objektblatt-vallorbe-f.pdf#search='le+centre+f%C3%A9d%C3%A9ral+pour+requ%C3%A9rants+d%27asile+%28CFA%29+de+Vallorbe.'>)>.

²¹ Interview with Tesfay (1 August 2019)

As a result of the law and system, minors are prioritized, while other young people over 19 are left behind. That situation is the result of strict age-based categorization of migrants.

Dawit, 29 years old, arrived alone when he was 24. His successful story is featured in an article about a new integration program for migrants²² : **pre-apprenticeship program**. This new program was launched in 2018 financed by SEM. In 2018 – 2019, 60 places were available in 8 domains of work (stewardship, hotel-restaurant service, cleaning, logistics, health, administration, agriculture and sales) in Geneva. The applicants are between the ages of 16 – 35 are selected regarding their motivation, educational level including language competency and basic professional experience.

In Eritrea, Dawit worked as an army nurse for 4 years. After arriving in Switzerland, he had taken a French course for adults for 3 years and several months. His language proficiency and professional background qualified him as a pre-apprenticeship trainee and he worked as a caregiver for elderly people in Geneva's homecare institution (*Institution Genevoise de maintien à domicile*). He can deploy his skill and experience that was gained in his homeland for this present work. Dawit commented;

“The present work is different from what I did in the homeland, even if it is the same domain. This (work) is planning for working in the hospital in the future”²³.

This new program has a progressive approach that opens doors for young migrants who cannot be enrolled in secondary school. This program, however, has a limited number of places (as mentioned above, 60 for 2018-2019, and 20 for 2020-2021) and it targets migrants who already have at least a basic language skill and professional experience. Regarding Dawit's case, pre-apprenticeship is a nice occasion that he tries to adjust his capacity into the host society's work and enhance the skill further to the level needed in the workplace. Even though he said “Of course there is so many differences” in working, his ability can be utilized in the relevant domain of health care. As he recently finished a training period, he envisions pathways to approach a regular employee.

Yet, pre-apprenticeship is still a selective procedure that excludes people with a low language proficiency and professional experience. This is indeed enhances the chances for young migrants; however, it is available only for those who have a skill and experience.

4.2.2 Residence permit

Another element that contributes to the feeling of uncertainty in the lives of refugee youth in Geneva is access to legal status and residence permit. In the Vallorbe asylum center, new arrivals are interviewed twice in a period of 2 weeks without any legal support to legitimate their claim. If the first and second interviews result in a contradiction in narratives, their statements are recognized as inaccurate. Especially for minors, it is quite difficult to construct a consistent explanation about their situation. Thus, this results in a variation of permit holders among young people.

Among the 13 informants, two have a B-permit that admits working. Both are a family member of a B-permit holder (father, in both cases) and applied for a procedure of family reunification. The other two informants (a man and woman, both were unaccompanied minors) have a F-permit which is a provisional permission to stay. Six (2 unaccompanied minor

²² Youri Bernet (2019) ‘*Maintenant on Se Sent Utiles*’ (a webpage of Le Courrier). Accessed 19 September 2019 <<https://lecourrier.ch/2019/07/08/maintenant-on-se-sent-utiles/>>.

²³ Interview with Dawit (9 August 2019)

men, and 1 unaccompanied minor woman, and 2 women with family) have applied once, but they have been rejected, they thereby stay without a permit.

Since 2017, the SEM has taken a restrictive stance towards those who have temporary status. SEM has attempted to scrutinize this temporary permit holder by searching for any probability of suitability or unsuitability for legal status. Since the F-permit is temporary in nature, many refugees fear being deprived of residential status, including loss of access to social assistance or education as the policy changes. The policy's change attracted the attention of NGOs and associations whom I interviewed. According to NGO staff, even though the F-permit legally allows work, yet, in fact the company was reluctant to hire these people with doubting their skill and avoiding costs to train them. On the other hand, a N-permit is given for asylum seekers whose asylum application been processed. This does not allow working nor traveling abroad.

The choice of occupation is largely constrained according to the type of permit. ACCES II director noticed a limitation depending on the type of permit, for instance, a student who is awaiting being legalized with a N-permit, cannot join certain domains of training. A student with a F-permit has more choices for trainings.

Senait arrived in Switzerland alone in 2015 when she was 16. She is now a 3rd year student in ACCES II and starts her apprenticeship in an agriculture training course to be a gardener. According to her, a gardener is a more accessible job for a person who does not have a residence permit like her. Her situation without any permit actually constrains her choice of job. Yet, AMIC staff were surprised by Senait's plan for training in gardening because they had never heard from Senait about her decision, and are skeptical of the appropriateness of this information.

Meanwhile, the permit increases the sense of precarity for possible deportation. Anticipating a possibility of deportation affects young migrants' mental health and reinforces their sense of uncertainty for their present life and for the future. They are always nervous about political changes. Idris, who is 21 years old, arrived without family in Switzerland when he was 17. Recently his friend who had stayed for 4 years left Switzerland because of the change of policy. "He has already left without information where he is going to. I think he might not return to Eritrea, but I'm not sure".

Lemlem, 20 years old woman, who does not have a permit, talked about her stress of being constrained in her movement. It reminds her when she could not move freely from her hometown without permission in Eritrea with a fear being arrested by police. She still has stress about moving to another canton in Switzerland because of her status without "paper". Consequently, she has never moved from Geneva for 4 years.

Many informants mentioned the policy change for Eritrean migrants, but did not emphasize it primarily. They might perceive it is "nothing can be done" by themselves; as they are coping with struggles in problems that they are facing in their present life.

4.2.3 Uncertainty of unaccompanied minors and those who arrived with family

Eritrean refugee youth, who fled the homeland alone without family, encounter particular difficulties. ACCES II director finds that a student who arrived alone without family or lost family during migration has a solitude that impacts their schooling and study.

Unaccompanied minor students experience a stronger sense of loneliness and higher stress levels in the school environment when interacting with other accompanied students.

Senait arrived in Switzerland alone, pursuing her brother who had already arrived in Switzerland. Despite her brother's support, Senait was placed in a shelter for unaccompanied minors, not allowed to live with her brother because she was under 18 upon arrival. On the other hand, Tesfay had no acquaintances in Switzerland. He faced much confusion in the asylum procedure when he arrived in 2014 without any support from a caregiver. It was difficult for him to explain about the time of arrival. He commented: "I don't know what happened to me... because I did not understand French". He had no one who supported him before AMIC staff reached out to him in the shelter.

In contrast, young Eritrean migrants accompanied by their families have a different feeling in comparison to their unaccompanied peers; they sometimes feel embarrassed themselves for lack of self-reliance and dependence to their parents. Gabriel, who arrived in 2014 with her family following her father's move to Switzerland, said: "My father prepared everything for me... I didn't know anything. It is not good." She is ashamed at her ignorance about asylum procedures which unaccompanied minors inevitably experience as their own responsibility. She arrived by flight organized by her father, which is also in contrast to the other minors' trajectories that is a horrible journey across the Mediterranean Sea.

Thus, companionship is important for young Eritreans to mitigate anxiety and confusion in various procedures to start a life in exile, and to have psychological support. The family members who formerly arrived would navigate a new life of unaccompanied minors, even if they do not live in the same place. On the contrary, those who have no families/acquaintances live in solitude. Meanwhile, young people who arrived with family members do not face problems of access to services, their lack of confidence would affect the sense of uncertainty for the future.

4.3 Complex relationship with peers and family

The relationship with peers and family help young people in mitigating anxieties in an unfamiliar society or brings relief and a sense of solidarity. However, sometimes interacting with others may reveal a sense of competition, tension or jealousy in their minds.

4.3.1 Embarrassment, tension, confidence

The knowledge of the official language of Geneva, French, is the most referred to point by all informants - everyone showed a strong aspiration for attaining language skills. Their motivation derives from a hope for a successful and comfortable life; however, it sometimes contributes to tension among young people.

AMIC arranges a computer training class supported by volunteers from a supportive company. 2-3 volunteers teach a basic computer skill to 5-6 students for 2 hours per day, 3-4 days per week. AMIC staff call for participants every week by WhatsApp, and set classes separated to men and women. AMIC staff explained the reason,

“Before, we set both (men and women) in the one class. But women felt ashamed to ask the question to teachers. They are shy because of their language ability, and women hesitate to be exposed.”²⁴

Despite this, there was a class with the same number of men/women that went well without any problem. “It is indeed case by case”, according to AMIC staff.

I attended several of the classes and noticed that students and volunteer teachers seem to have a good interaction. Students asked a question in French, and the teacher replied by showing how to operate it in practice. In some classes, Eritrean woman volunteers who used to be students in this class instructed younger female students by demonstrating operations individually. She explained a general procedure in Tigrinya by compensating some words in French. Aside from the teacher, students had a conversation in Tigrinya among them, while they shifted to French when they spoke to the teacher.

For language, almost all informants said “I’m not good at French” when we started the interview. Some informants refused to be recorded, by saying “I’m bad in talking”. Even if there is a slight gap among their level, I did not particularly find difficulty in understanding or conversing with them in French.

It is obvious that everyone has never seen or heard French before they arrived in Switzerland. In Eritrea, although English is taught in compulsory education, a long time has already passed for young people. Some from a rural area have not experienced a proper education, hence they have rarely seen alphabet other than Tigrinya.

Mehret, who is 20 arrived alone when she was 17, has encountered multiple languages in her life.

“Learning multiple languages is very difficult. When I was in Italy, I understood Italian but when I started to learn French, I almost forgot Italian. I also forgot English, too. But I try to watch films in English or Italian. I can understand it.”

She has been in Milan, Italy during the ages of 12 -17. She then did not go to school but learned a language from daily conversation. Mehret is a student of ACCES II and goes to the summer class for the level DELF B2.

4.3.2 Relationship with family

The young refugees’ relationship with family shows complexity to some extent. The family of unaccompanied minors often supported their children’s migration by paying amounts of money for smuggling. According to Tesfay and Adonay, their parents paid approximately 6,000 dollars (from Eritrea to Italy) to the smuggler for their son’s migration. Many informants maintain contact with their parents by phone, but it is not so often. Senait said “The internet is available only in the big city. For telephone, it’s just once per 2 weeks”. Henok also commented, “I sometimes call my father, not often. But, after reconnaissance, it doesn’t work”. The technical barrier makes family relationships estranged, and furthermore psychological distance would emerge as they deal with many problems in their present life; instead, the relationship with peers in their present life would become more intensive by using Internet networking tools, such as Facebook and Instagram.

²⁴ Interview with an AMIC staff (19 July 2019)

Lemlem arrived in Geneva in 2014 with her mother and sister. Her father arrived just at the beginning of 2019, after he has imprisoned in Eritrea for 13 years. “There is a small history in our family,” she said. “I’ve rarely seen my father since I was so small when he was imprisoned. Then we left my country because there are many problems and concerns”²⁵.

She continued:

“One day when I and my sister took a cafe at home, someone knocked on a door and entered. We couldn’t understand who he was and asked: «Who are you?» I didn’t know his face because I was so small. My mother was crying. We are so shocked. After escaping from prison, he arrived in Sudan and contacted a cousin who lived in Israel. He (cousin) told him about us. Thanks to the cousin, my father knew about us”²⁶.

When she met her father after such a long separation, she was inevitably shocked and it was hard to accept many things.

“After his coming back, it became a bit difficult to live with him. Because we were raised by my mother, and she knows everything about us. We are close to her. My father sometimes talks a lot and gets upset, and mother mediates...”.

For young Eritreans, family relations are one of the important factors that encouraged their migration. Meanwhile, in their present life in Geneva, young people still maintain ties with family, although a complex relationship with parents rather continues from the time of decision-making of migration (Belloni 2019). The technical problem and physical distance reinforce this complex relationship. The situation, distant from family, reinforces their uncertainty in terms of lack of protection and psychological support; but otherwise, the relationship with peers might become closer and more important than family.

In summary, young age migration due to potential vulnerability and risk, is a memory of a dangerous journey which still remains in their minds and affects their daily life. The accumulative concerns in the life of the host country, including an insecure living environment and the incompatibility with new norms, are a burden for young refugees whose anxiety is further reinforced circumstance. It should be noted that the degree of uncertainty varies according to a person’s context. The differences or similarities in young refugees’ situations appear as legal status or access to education. The complex relationship with family or peers fosters a sense of uncertainty that they have to stand alone and cannot depend on anyone.

²⁵ Interview with Lemlem (2 August 2019)

Chapter 5

Coping Strategies of Eritrean refugee youth

Eritrean refugee youth employ diverse strategies to cope with different challenges and protracted uncertainty in Geneva. They have realized some important points as they have encountered several mistakes or fears in an unfamiliar society. The strategies are used to adjust to a new system of society, to minimize or avoid obstacles, and to maintain a physically and psychologically secured life.

5.1 Access to the social service

For Eritrean refugee youth, to access social services means finding effective solutions suitable for problems they face. In Geneva, various social services are organized by different institutions. The General Hospice is a public sector organization in charge of social assistance for migrants, including housing and education. Many NGOs and civil association implement a diverse program to support migrants regardless of their status and residence permit. For young refugees, choosing appropriate services from various possibilities is a part of strategy.

5.1.1 How NGOs and associations respond to strategies?

NGOs and civil associations in Geneva play a role to make up for the gap of service that the General Hospice's social assistance does not reach. Eritrean refugee youth utilize services that meet their needs and accessibility.

AMIC's approach to young refugees is based on "a holistic approach in a different element of life" according to staff. Their activities are diverse; assistance with homework, sports and cultural activities, an integration program including French class for women migrants, and support for parents with preschool children (AMIC report 2017). The aim is to contribute to solving everyday issues that migrants face and to equip them with skills and tools for building their lives in Geneva.

According to AMIC staff, computer skills is the most necessary ability demanded by many companies that are willing to accept migrant employees. AMIC has encouraged computer skill training for young people to enhance their possibility of employment. The computer training class organized by BNP Paribas volunteer, set three levels in order to correspond with various levels of participants; beginner (how to use Microsoft), website making, and professional IT skills. The exercise is to make business documents or learn how to find a company to apply for a job or internship on the Internet.

Adonay, who is 24 arrived alone when he was 20, often joins AMIC's computer training class. He effectively utilizes the computer class for his self-learning and job preparation; minor questions about Microsoft operation or asking for advice on his CV to improve the content. This occasion is so valuable since they scarcely have a chance to get skill training or consulting for free.

On the other hand, for people newly arrived, it is crucial to know about the facilities of the city and how to access them. AMIC arranges an orientation for people newly arrived in order to remove anxiety in their new life and settle down as soon as possible. When I was accompanied in this orientation, there were 6 people who have arrived within 2 months. The

orientation was consulting about their new life so far, and they were guided to the several important facilities in the city, such as the hospital, the Caritas distribution center and the Red Cross's integration center. At several locations, we could find the leaflet of social services written in various language including Tigrinya. This orientation is carried out in Tigrinya by AMIC staff; therefore, this would be an important occasion for the new arrivals to solve any unclear issues around daily life in their native language.

Although all informants have not participated in any other programs other than AMIC, many other social services are open to young refugees in Geneva. Another NGO working with migrants in Geneva is Camarada, which caters to women - among Camarada's participants, about 10% of the whole population are Eritreans. According to the director, at present the General Hospice is in charge of social service for migrants, so Camarada accepts particular cases that do not fall within the General Hospice beneficiaries' criteria, such as people with inadequate years of education or improper educational environment etc. Also, for young women who have never been to school, they offer basic training which starts from how to use a pen.

In Reliance's educational support, according to the director, the number of Eritrean participants has increased since 2015. Reliance's objective is individual follow-up by providing tutoring support. In Reliance's service, migrants can learn not only language skills but also a social norm through close communication with tutor volunteers.

La Roseiraie's action to provide a space for networking of migrants is also helpful. This tolerant and open mode of service makes users accessible to the place. The sense of relief that there is always someone who cares, is one of the objectives of *La Roseiraie*, and is in fact why they attract many users, such as 150 people per day.

Apart from services organized by associations, there is an opportunity for assistance provided by voluntary local people. Tesfay has joined in a French lecture organized by his Swiss neighbor for free. The lecture is a small class with 5 students and sometimes includes drama activities using French. He enjoys it and thinks the class size preferable because it is easy to ask a question. Even though only 1 year and a few months has passed since he arrived in Switzerland, his language knowledge has improved so much.

Therefore, there are many occasions where young refugees can access social services. These services are resources on strategies that young refugees deploy for dealing with problems.

5.1.2 Young people's responses to social services

All informants benefit more or less from social services, but the frequency of use depends on the choice of the person. Some of the informants mentioned that they have personally received support from staff which became an anchor for them. Almaz said, "AMIC staff helped me to find an internship in housing for the elderly". NGOs staff are big supporters and are those whom unaccompanied minors can count on for many aspects.

In some cases, the social services motivated young people to contribute to their peer's support as a side provider. Gabriel used to be a student of computer class and now teaches younger students by using materials that she studies in her business college. She can pick up more necessary and important content for younger students based on her own experience. AMIC staff trusts her skill to instruct students.

Several of the informants have joined a cultural activity of AMIC. Senait showed me a video of a traditional dance performance they joined in the event last year. Dawit also joined this event, bringing ideas for drama and dance based on their cultural tradition by themselves.

This occasion has allowed them to engage with Eritrean culture in Switzerland and reminded them of ties with their homeland.

In contrast, Lemlem used to participate in AMIC programs but does not join currently. She tries to avoid being embarrassed by interacting with boys in AMIC activities. She has previously been pointed at by boys who mock her language mistake and she fears to lose her motivation for language by being treated like this. AMIC staff are aware of this situation and understand as it happens in young people's relationships with each other. Lemlem is keen to learn the language, she speaks French with her sister and watches a film in French "for learning". She commented,

"If I always talk in Tigrinya, I could speak only Tigrinya. I don't like to speak Tigrinya with Eritreans. Because they always watch a film in Tigrinya, listen to music in Tigrinya... Finally, they will speak only in Tigrinya"²⁷.

Besides, I gathered several comments from other interviewees regarding their seriousness for the learning French and sometimes denying a utilization of Tigrinya with Eritreans.

AMIC staff notice challenges in the young refugees' attitude to cope with their problems. They mentioned that language itself is still a barrier, but it depends on how each feels it and deals with it. Some people can manage to socialize well even he/she does not speak well, others just feel confident by understanding a language well.

Therefore, some people found their work worthwhile by participating in the service, and others maintained their motivation by avoiding interaction with peers that fosters stress. For young people, choosing services that correspond to their intension properly contributes to mitigate uncertainty.

5.2 Accessing works

How to access paid work is one of the most important coping strategies to minimise uncertainty in the lives of young refugees. Among Eritrean refugee youth in Geneva, an internship is a first step to work and allows them to realize what kind of skill, attitude and actions are required. Besides, by referring to one informant's example for employment, what strategies are deployed is focused on in the following sections.

5.2.1 Internships: advantages and cognitive shift

Internship is a popular way to obtain various experiences that serve as an advantage to getting a job. Among informants, everyone has experienced an internship at least once. While apprenticeship is part of the school course, internship is relatively accessible for everyone regardless of educational background. Tesfay, who is 21 and arrived alone, has not enrolled in ACCES II courses because he was over the age of schooling when he arrived. He tried to find an internship by sending an email to several companies by himself. He completed his internship that he obtained through AMIC last month and will start another internship after a month.

According to AMIC staff, an internship has three objectives, it is a practical training to learn how to work, adding various skills to a CV and connecting to job market networks. The internship does not ensure work in the same place, it is rather a starting point to know about what skills are necessary and what the work environment is like. Generally, it is a short

²⁷ Interview with Lemlem (2 August 2019)

period, from 2 weeks to 1 month. In order to get a chance, people contact a company by themselves or through a connection of NGOs.

According to informants and NGO staff, doing an internship in more diverse fields would be more advantageous in employment. Abraham, 20 years old, who arrived in 2015 alone, has started his internship at a lawyer's office introduced to him by AMIC. I met him at the AMIC office when he was preparing formal clothes for his internship with AMIC staff. After 2 weeks, I met him once again to hear his impression of the internship. "I was observing what they are doing, which is accounting or documentation in the office". He was not assigned a particular task, but had the opportunity to see what the work was like. He once did an internship in MSF (*Médecins Sans Frontière*) in Geneva. He wants to do the next internship in nursing because "I need a different experience through internships"²⁸.

Likewise, Semret also did many kinds of internships, such as in a patisserie and in a hair salon, despite this she felt it was hard and exhausting. In the patisserie, she could not continue after a week because "It was so hard. It started at 5 am and ends at 5 pm". She also mentioned, "some patrons were very serious and gave many tasks". Nevertheless, she will apply for another internship when a new semester in ACCES II starts. Largely, every informant seriously engages in the internship with high motivation and expectation.

Sometimes, young people's motivation cannot be fulfilled by the internship when it falls short of what they expected. Gabriel is doing her internship at a BNP Paribas during her summer break of college. "I am assigned to a little task, which is boring". Although her time-shift is from 9am to 5:30 pm, she feels she is working for only 2 hours or so. Employees are kind to answer her questions about their work, but she prefers to do some tasks. She understands it is difficult to assign a task with a responsibility to interns. The other Eritrean intern is working in an archives department with a lot of tasks. She is jealous of him.

The internship is a first step to expose a new world for young people. Lemlem is doing her internship in an elderly people's care facility. While it is physically hard to work a whole day, she feels a little incompatibility due to cultural differences. "They ask me a lot and speak to me so much. They are more than the ages of 70 - 80 years old. In my country, the family takes care of the elderly. But here it is different".

As a whole, Eritrean refugee youth were keen to obtain an advantage by doing many internships as a precaution to unemployment. This action would be associated with a "quest for certainty" (Dewey 1929, as quoted in Horst and Grabska 2015:7) in terms of seeking an opportunity to gain an advantage for future employment. While they are exposed to challenging work and cultural differences in the working environment in Switzerland, they recognize which job fits their ability and intention. Likewise, they also learn how to adjust themselves with cognitive changes according to external demands in the working environment and in society.

5.2.2 Job: adapting to the work environment

Obtaining a regular job is a big challenge in reality, as a report of SEM in 2015²⁹ shows that the unemployment rate of Eritrean F-permit holders is higher than the total rate of the same

²⁸ Interview with Abraham (22 August 2019)

²⁹ This report named "*Portrait des Erythréens: Domaine de l'asile Permis F-B-C, Septembre 2015-MT*" was shared by AMIC in August 2019.

permit holder. This is explained as a result of the characteristics of the Eritrean group: minors, with limited choices of professions due to inadequate training and professional experience.

Among informants, Henok is the only informant who works as a regular employee, despite him not holding a permit. The sports shop where he works is located in Carouge which is a little distant from the center city. It sells sports goods and tools, such as uniform, shoes, socks for hiking or jogging³⁰.

When I arrived there, he was talking with a client who tried shoes on in the shop. He told me to wait for a while. When the client left the shop, he came back and welcomed me. He introduced his colleague (the other 2 staffs) and his patron who was an Italian man. When a client came into the shop when we were talking, he stopped our conversation and gave a greeting to clients with a smile. When a client asked about products, he replied quickly and explained humbly. He seems to have no stress in communication with clients, as well as clients seemed satisfied with him.

Surprisingly, he has worked for just 2 months in the shop. After he graduated from the ACCES II course, he was introduced in this job by his friend and he started there as an intern. Fortunately, he was hired as a regular employee. I said to him “This means you are successful in your internship, right?” He replied “Yes.” with a smile. He has never worked in Eritrea. By communication with clients, he learns a language in dealing with clients.

Yet, he commented, “I’m satisfied with this work in the sport shop, but I don’t think I will continue for a long time, because I want to experience many jobs”. His intention for working would be connected to a sense of waiting and hope for the possibility of certainty (Horst and Grabska 2015:2).

What is important for him to work is “to communicate with people, and of course to earn money”. His working attitude shows an importance of clarifying problems and dealing with them; in his case, he recognizes well the customer’s demand and how to respond to it. In contrast, his sense of instability for working would be a cognitive strategy that anticipates losing current work and therefore being prepared for it.

5.3 The role of social networks

Eritrean refugee youth connect a network that provides various resources for coping strategies. In the pre-migration period, the network consists of family and friends in the country of origin, and they continuously help young refugees after displacement (Khawaja et al. 2008). The support by network sometimes provides sympathy or gives useful information, while it negatively functions by bringing tension in competition of resources (Lazarus and Folkman 1984).

5.3.1 Relationship with roles

Several places in Geneva are meaningful for Eritrean refugee youth to build relationships and networks.

The orthodox church in Onex is one remarkable place for young people’s relationships. A mass is held every Sunday morning from 7-10 am. Many people including adults, elderly and mothers with babies attend the mass. Although there were approximately 50 people

³⁰ Interview with Henok (8 August 2019)

during vacation, over 150 people were regularly gathered at that mass. Everyone wears traditional clothes.

Soon after finishing mass, young people start to prepare refreshments for participants. They quickly serve tea to elderly people and visitors in the recreation room. Although there are a few differences between the roles of young men and women; women are in charge of preparing drinks and snacks, while men cleaned up a room and corridor, both were engaged in something. They gave a greeting and had a chat while they were doing the task. Some stayed in the place until they closed a meeting and all had left.

Lemlem, who invited me to the church, was one of those who worked hard in the church. She explained to me about the religion of Eritrean, orthodox church activities in Geneva, and the event she plans with peers at the end of this year. The church for Lemlem is the place that gives a space for her beliefs. This is also an indispensable occasion to socialize with peers in her busy daily life in her internship.

Young Eritreans gain a sense of fulfilment by engaging in a role in the church that connects to customs of the country of origin, while they spent a pleasant time with peers away from everyday concerns. Considering the informants' frequency of participation to the church that differs person to person, this action is a consequence of a choice that they judged as a benefit for them. Those who participate in the church consider this place to feed relationships with peers that remove stresses in daily life.

5.3.2 Digital network

Meanwhile, young Eritreans' communication is strongly sustained by digital networks. They contact each other using WhatsApp and use Facebook and Instagram for sharing daily events; they post an image of religious words, a photo of a birthday with family and friends etc. The friendship in these networks is not limited only to Switzerland, but connects to peers who live in other European countries. Among informants, some friendships on Facebook and Instagram can be found. The important information of activities is sent by AMIC staff in WhatsApp group, as well as members who shares information on upcoming internships. In this group, they mostly post in French, even though all members understand Tigrinya. The posts are sometimes a call for participation to a demonstration for the unaccompanied minors (in July 15, 2019) or signing a petition for humanitarian aid for Eritreans.

Furthermore, the direct encounters at the church as mentioned above are extended to the SNS network, which allows them to be connected with each other's lives on weekdays too. The digital networks also function as practical information sharing tools. For young people, these networking places beyond spatial limitations have become a place for sharing practical information to support their life, while maintaining homeland customs and culture.

Therefore, connecting the digital network is an effective strategy to access information and to confirm solidarity with peers beyond spatial constrains. While this network makes up for insufficient knowledge to some extent, it is still unclear whether members of the network can effectively obtain the most useful information due to the nature of a network mainly consisting of young people.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This paper argues the factors that contribute to the protracted uncertainty of Eritrean refugee youth and how they deal with them in their lives in Geneva. The young people's lives are interrupted by political instability in the country of origin, and their hope for the future is also disrupted by external factors. To escape an oppressive life, a lot of young people decide to migrate to Europe hoping for more opportunities. However, they encounter various types of uncertainties which are continuous from when living in the country of origin, during their journeys or newly appears in life after displacement.

The source of uncertainty and the precarious status of Eritrean refugee youth in Geneva are strongly related to the life stage in which their migration was initiated. As these young people leave their places of origin at a young age, pre-migration memory protractedly affects refugees lives in the new place, as Horst and Grabska (2015:7) describe as protracted uncertainty. Young refugees often are trapped in the ambiguous feeling between the social, especially gender, norms of the host society and of the country of origin, perhaps because they faced a reality that was different from the expectations and ideals they had when they were in their home country. Securing a living environment in the host country is also important in terms of maintaining their psychological wellbeing by avoiding additional stress brought by the living environment. These sources of precarity which encompass the past and the present create protracted uncertainties of young refugees in their daily life in Geneva.

The factors causing uncertainty are diverse; the age at arrival, access to a residence permit, and the presence or lack of family are elements that construct the precarious young refugee's status. Indeed, categorizing "unaccompanied minors" by the age at arrival is the general standard, as the 2009 Human Development Report also stated, however, this categorization brings young adults who are excluded from education. The problem is the result of overlooking context-specific practices in the Eritrean refugee context (Grabska et al. 2019). Likewise, granting a residence permit is a system that lacks consideration of the applicant's context.

Moreover, these factors of uncertainty show that each Eritrean refugee youth's experience and hardship are experienced differently as the intersectional analysis has demonstrated. Age is one important distinction. The person who arrived at the age of 19 and over, without a companion and not granted a residence permit is in a more precarious position in terms of the lack of opportunity to access language training or professional skills training. In contrast to those who hold a more secure residence permit - albeit it is subject to political change - and those who arrived with family are more supported in their pathways in Geneva.

Young Eritreans have a complex relationship with parents in the pre-migration period as prior researchers have mentioned. This complexity continues in post-migration, as young people still connect with their parents in the country of origin, but they rather maintain more intensive relationships with peers who are physically closer to them. However, since the youth's status is unstable and fluid, it is unclear how much one can depend on these relationship. Thus, the relationship with peers also embodies uncertainty.

Eritrean refugee youth employ various coping strategies aiming to improve their lives and gain greater control over their lives. It is important to maintain accessibility to social services and choose the ones appropriate to their needs (Lazarus and Folkman 1984). There are a variety of programs organized by NGOs and associations that compensate federal social

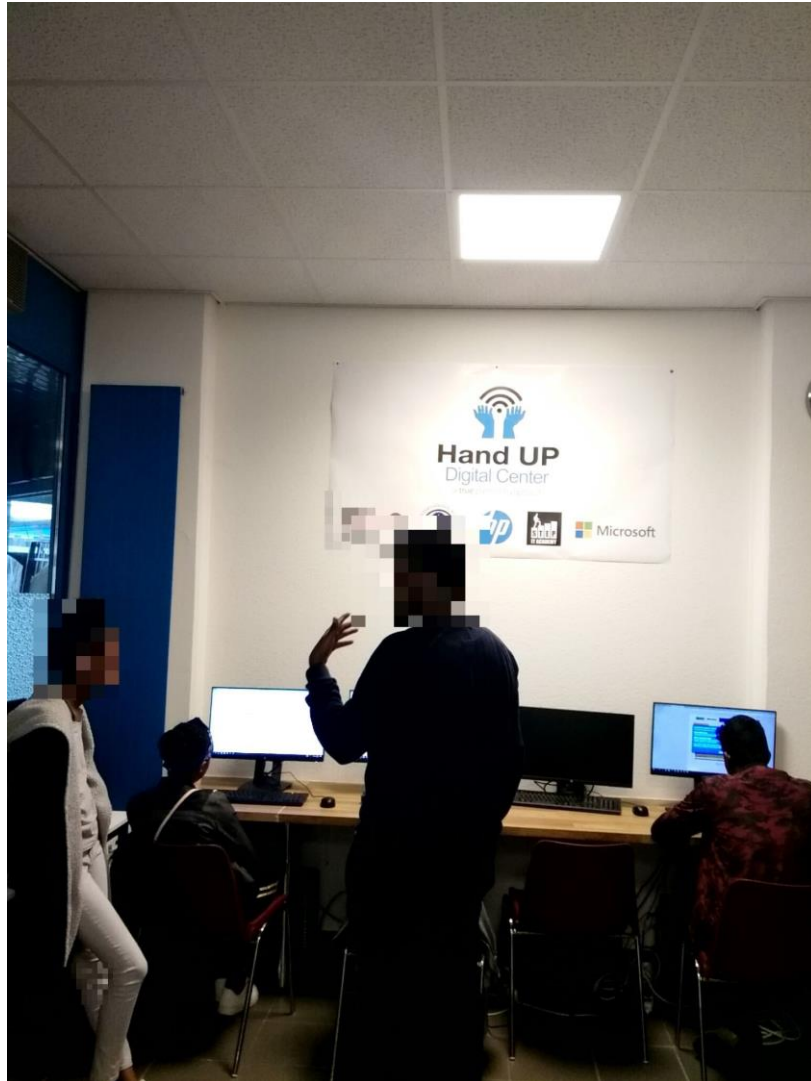
assistance. For instance, AMIC offers support to Eritrean migrants, such as vocational training in computer skills. For these services, young people do not always reach out to all opportunities which are available to them, but they sometimes avoid ones that seem harmful to their motivation. This choice varies from person to person.

As one of the coping strategies, Eritrean youth join internships, as they see it as advantageous for future employment, and is helpful in finding out how to adjust themselves with cognitive change (Lazarus and Folkman 1984) according to the demands of a working environment. The social network also plays a role to provide a resource of strategies, such as sharing useful information. Besides, the networks are also related to a place where they perform the role of their culture and reinforce ties with peers. The digital network becomes a popular tool among young refugees that extend physical communication beyond a spatial constrain. However, interaction with peers sometimes affects their motivation for improving one's ability, so some people choose to avoid it.

This research contributes to the existing debates on refugee youth and their experiences in host countries in Europe, as it provides space for the voices of Eritrean refugee youth. This research contributes to clarifying the complex problems that young refugees face in the place after displacement, by focusing on uncertainty as a concept which is part of their migratory journey through different spaces. In this way we can see how uncertainties are shaping the lives of these young people spatially and temporarily. In particular it shows the intersectional dynamics of these experiences. With regard to further research, I would recommend investigating further how unaccompanied minors or people who hold a specific legal permit face situations and problems and deal with them in particular. A deeper gender analysis of these experiences would also be important to investigate further, especially in the employment or working (internship) environment.

Finally, I hope that this research presents, even in part, the problems and difficulties faced by Eritrean refugee youth who are still fighting today. Above all, it is my pleasure that this paper can express their power and efforts to struggle with the harshness of their lives.

Figure 2.
AMIC computer training class



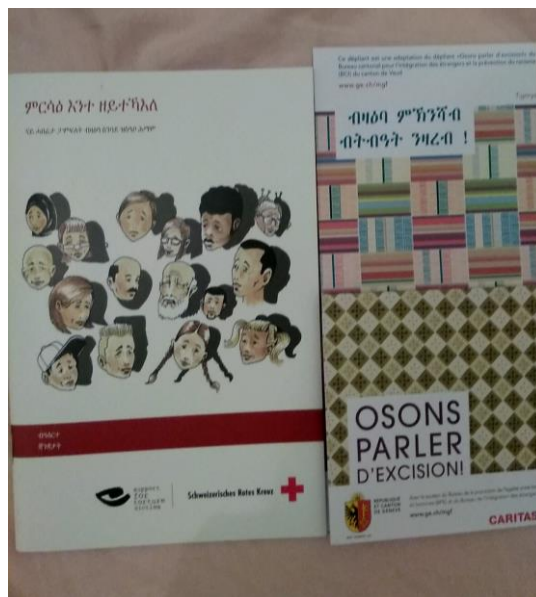
Source: Taken by the author in August 2019

Figure 3.
Orthodox Church in Onex



Source: Taken by the author in August 2019

Figure 4.
Leaflet written in Tigrinya



Source: Taken by the author in August 2019

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