

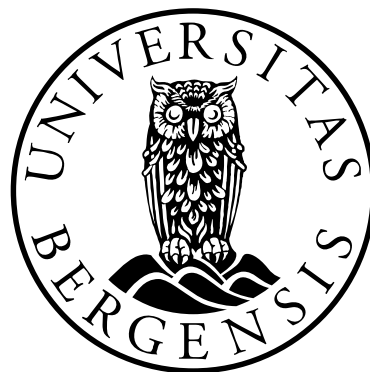


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# LIFE IN TRANSITION:

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*The case of young Eritreans in Norway*



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## **Abstract**

In the context of contemporary population mobility, the topics of migration, immigration, refugee resettlement have become the focus of studies in several disciplines including political sciences, sociology, anthropology but to name a few. It is a subject, which involves and fascinates both the scholarly world and the public sphere equally. It is an area of study, which by its nature has been and continues to be politicized, thus engaging both the policy makers and the public in equal measures. However, the study of youth in the paradigms of migration have not gained the necessary attention. Youth are often overlooked or a little is studied of them, and when studied the attention is usually on their psychological wellbeing or their educational success. Their socio-cultural adaptation process and their inclusion to the new society are most of the time overlooked. The purpose of the thesis is therefore to shade light onto this process.

The thesis draws upon a yearlong fieldwork among a group of young Eritreans who came to Norway as unaccompanied minors. The thesis discusses their unique experiences in light of two broad anthropological concepts i.e. Human mobility and youth studies. From a transnational perspective, the thesis discusses the involvement of the youngsters with in the Eritrean diaspora. Taking a supposedly religious event as a case study, it examines their daily interactions with their neighboring Eritreans. Moreover, their social connections with their families and childhood friends are also examined. Facebook is a popular social media among the youth, which is used to maintain close relationships with family members in Eritrea and their childhood friends around the globe. My fieldwork also included following the youngsters' online activities on two social media, Facebook and Snapchat. Their online activities, which by the way continues also on the real (offline) world, indicates their attempt to establish and maintain new social bonds with their mainstream peers, which is presented via detailed discussions of their posts and meanings behind them. Towards the end of the thesis, I further examine their involvement with their mainstream peers by studying their newly established friendship. I discuss how their love and participation in football and football related activities has helped the youngsters to foster a symbiotic friendship that goes beyond football arenas. The nature and utilization of this kind of friendship are thoroughly discussed. Their online as well as offline interactions imply that these youngsters are negotiating daily their existence in two worlds their original homes and their new cultural surroundings.

**Keywords:** Migration, Transnationalism, Youth Studies, Social Capital, Social Identity, Eritrean Youth, Friendships, Adaptation.

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I joined the Master program in Social Anthropology University of Bergen in 2017 more than a decade after I first graduated from the University of Asmara. When I joined, I was excited yet skeptical if I would successfully fulfill my study. However, all members of the department of Social anthropology, the staff, the professors and even my classmates have encouraged and sustained me, which I am forever grateful. For it has been a dream journey for myself on both the academic and social levels. I have learned a lot and I will be missing each and every one of you and specially Hilde Ellefsen (senior consultant for students) as her office was always open whenever I had a question.

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December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2019 Bergen.

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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

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## **Introduction**

In the context of contemporary population mobility, the topics of migration, immigration, refugee resettlement have become the focus of studies in several disciplines including political sciences, sociology, anthropology but to name a few. These disciplines have brought a range of new perspectives, theories, and methodologies towards the study of human mobility. It is a subject, which involves and fascinates both the scholarly world and the public sphere equally. It is an area of study, which by its nature has been and continues to be politicized, thus engaging both the policy makers and the public in equal measures.

One area of study which haven't gained the necessary attention is the study of youth within the paradigms of migration. Across the disciplines, the challenges of young refugees are often overlooked or did not receive enough attention. When studied, young refugees are studied for their psychological wellbeing or their educational adjustments with reference to their mainstream counterparts. Yet, the challenges they face when settling into new socio-cultural environments are often disregarded or neglected. Especially, young refugees or particularly those who came without the supervision of adults are not given a fair share of attention by the social sciences and/or by the society in which they resettle into. As their adaptation processes are assumed smooth or they are thought to be resilient, that can adapt quicker than their adult counterparts. Yet in reality their adjustment to new ways of living and culture in the host country happens simultaneously with their adjusting period or when they are still coming to terms with traumatic experiences from their country of origin and during the flight, the waiting period in asylum processes. Therefore, in this thesis I will try to document their unique experiences and argue that their adaptation process is far from seamless, and it is particularly challenging.

Many may assume that younger refugees and migrants are particularly resilient, and able to adapt to the new life (culture) quicker than their adult counterparts are. However, the task is more challenging and daunting for these young refugees. Often, they are tasked with adapting to their new surroundings as well as recovering from the cultural dislocation, loss of established social networks, and in addition to the often traumatic nature of refugee experiences. Therefore, the main task of the thesis is to show that their adaptation process is unique and challenging, as it is associated with several key components such as identity formation, shifting family roles, determining careers and life goals, and fitting in with their peers and finding belonging in their new homes.

Before moving to Norway, these people spent the majority of their formative years in a different culture; they were schooled in different language, established peer groups and were immersed in a different youth culture than their current situation. Back home, they were masters of their own cultural practices and defining what was cool and trendy. However, their status changed the moment they arrived here and now they are attempting to deal with these issues, while at the same time they are trying to negotiate a close connection and/or relationships with the practices in their homeland. The main purpose of the paper is therefore to show how they achieve this process and build new relationships that have profound ramifications to their future lives. Therefore, in hope of providing significant data to the general discussions of youth refugees, and their adaptation process in their new environments, the thesis considers a group young Eritreans who came to Norway as unaccompanied minors and discusses their day-to-day adaptation process.

The study presented in this thesis draws on an ethnographic work in Fjord<sup>1</sup> and Bergen during 2018. A common understanding of ethnography is the focus on practices within natural settings, contexts that has not been constructed by the researcher (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). This definition fits well with my fieldwork, as the main aim of my fieldwork was to uncover the meaning behind their daily practices that took place in the places where my informants are currently situated. The thesis specifically deliberates their unique experiences through three different case studies in light of prominent anthropological discussions. To give the reader a background information about these young Eritreans, the next section of this chapter is dedicated to the Eritrean case, and towards the end of the chapter, I discuss the main conceptual frameworks in which the thesis is based upon together with the outlines of chapters.

## **The Eritrean situation**

'If I die at sea, it's not a problem – at least I won't be tortured'<sup>2</sup>. This was a response of an Eritrean refugee in the United Kingdom named Sofia when asked about why she risked her life to escape Eritrea and cross the Mediterranean Sea. For many it still unknown to why so many people from such small country flee their country or why do they risk their lives in a perilous journey. Here I am going to discuss the Eritrean situation and give a short clarification to why these people involve in journeys often described as precarious and life threatening.

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<sup>1</sup> Fjord is a pseudo-name I gave to the small town on the Western Coast of Norway in order to preserve the anonymity of my informants.

<sup>2</sup> It is a response many Eritreans, when asked about all the risks they take. The full article can be accessed here : <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/apr/21/escaping-eritrea-migrant-if-i-die-at-sea-at-least-i-wont-be-tortured>



Eritrea, a small country on the horn of Africa, is one of the largest producers of asylum seekers in the world. Since the turn of the century, hundreds of thousands of Eritreans have fled Eritrea and sought asylum in various corners of the world. Many young Eritreans have fled the country to the neighboring countries of Ethiopia and Sudan. For example, in 2015 alone, the UHNCR estimated that more than 400,000 Eritreans were living as refugees and asylum seekers outside the country (UNHCR 2015). Their journeys took them across the Sahara Desert via Mediterranean Sea to Europe. This journey according to Kibreab one of my informants;

Throughout my life, I have met and taken many challenges but nothing compares to the struggles I had to overcome on my journey from Sudan to Libya. The journeys from Eritrea to Ethiopia (illegally crossing the border) and from Ethiopia to Sudan were very difficult and challenging but they cannot be compared to the life-threatening journey from Sudan to Libya.

More than the perils of illegal crossing of the Eritrea-Ethiopian border or the journey from Ethiopia to Sudan (which included crossing the Blue Nile and the jungles around it), the manner in which some Sudanese people threatened me was very difficult to say the least. For example, I could not go outside easily, as I would be risking of being fined without any particular reason. The worst part of this mishandling was the threat posed by the Rashaida<sup>3</sup> smugglers and the many Sudanese authorities who said they would like to send us back where we came from. I am not lying to you, some Sudanese people were actually very friendly and those who were not made my stay in the country very difficult.

I was hopeful and was not expecting worse mishandling or life threatening excursion in the Sahara. I should start from the beginning; we were around one hundred people that began the journey together. There were children, women, older men and other youngsters just like me among the passengers. Our first driver was Sudanese and we were put together on a big truck.

The journey from Sudan to Libya is not a short one by any means and you could not reach your destination in a short period. You travel and sleep along the way in the dessert. During the journey, the driver would stop the truck after very long hours of driving in the middle of the dessert for us to eat. Before eating, we usually search for a tree in order to eat our food underneath or in a shade. However, most of the time it was not possible to find any kind of shelter, because you see in the Sahara there are not any kind of trees you just see one or two small bushes scattered over the huge flat and sometimes mountainous sand. Most of us went to these small shelters while others just ate under the truck. Nevertheless, sitting on the sand was impossible, as the sand is very hot.

After some days with the truck, we met the Libyans who would then smuggle us to Libya using four Toyota Hilux. The Sudanese passed us to the Libyans and we were put more than twenty persons in each of the Toyotas. We were put just like a sack potatoes one over another and began our journey towards the center of Libya. The drivers were crazy and drove very fast just like a bullet.

The Sahara is not just a flat dessert, it is filled with sand and sometimes a hills of sand (here he is describing the nature of the dessert and Sand dunes). Sometimes the cars would be stuck in the sand. Then we would

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<sup>3</sup> Rashaida are one of the nine ethno-linguistic groups in Eritrea. They are part of a large group of people, who currently reside on both sides of the Red Sea. <http://www.madote.com/2010/02/eritrea-rashaida-people.html>

go off them and forced to push them out these situations. Then we continue our journeys as nothing happened. During our travel, there was a long distance between the four Toyotas and one of them was captured by Sudanese border patrols and sent back to Sudan. The rest of us regrouped and continued our journey to Libya.

After several days on the Sahara, we were getting tired, thirsty and hungry. We were consuming a lot of water and the water we had had from the previous truck was almost finished. Then the Libyans mixed the water with some diesel and made it undrinkable. It was very horrible and if you drink it, you would burp diesel for several hours, which is why most of us tried to avoid it as long as possible. Some drank it because their life was hanging in the balance. After about five days, we reached the outskirts of Libya and we began to see the first villages. We were at those places where we were told to pay (hawala as it is usually called). After about a week, those who were able to pay the said amount of money on time began the journey towards the heart of Libya. They smuggled us sometimes in covered trucks (usually when we crossed the towns or villages) and other times on the back of Toyotas. When we reached near the coast of Libya, we were very tired, hungry and thirsty.

The Libyans who received us from the Sudanese border onwards were very aggressive. They tried to beat us with everything they have, usually sticks, whips, and Kalashnikov handles every time they got a chance. Once while I was standing near our Toyota, unaware of my surroundings, an angry looking Libyan came waging his sword towards me. He was shouting and saying something but I could neither understand nor hear what he was saying. Suddenly he lashed his sword towards my hand. There was a collective gasp around me as we thought he severed my arm there. Thanks to God, he missed me by mere centimeters. Yet, I thought I was going to be amputated there and bleed to death. I cannot forget this day to the rest of my life.

The same day, there were other refugees just like us in another compound. The Libyans wanted to take them and bring us together but the other Libyans resisted and began shooting at each other. Some Eritrean brothers and sisters were caught in a crossfire and died that day. That night the Libyans took us to another place at the center. Along the way, they tried to separate us from the girls as they wanted to have their way with them, but the girls resisted and took them with us to the Mezrea (a collecting compound near the seashore where all wait to cross the Mediterranean Sea).

After some weeks, we were onboard of small boats and began our journey to the coasts of Italy.

Even though, it is not under the scope of the research revising the main argumentations to why Eritreans flee their country on such large scale is vital. In the next section, I am going to discuss this briefly.

### **But, why risk your life**

Many Eritreans have been fleeing their country in large numbers since the 1960s because of war, poverty, and lack of freedom. The long war for independence of the country produced over a million people in diaspora, mostly centered in Sudan, the Middle East, and Europe. A significant number of Eritreans also migrated across the Atlantic to the United States. The more

recent border conflict with Ethiopia from 1998 – 2000 and other hostilities with neighboring countries, have resulted in further continuance of the migration trends from Eritrea.

Most of the people leaving Eritrea are men aged below 40, even though there is a notable percentage of women in this age category also. Reports indicate that a large number of unaccompanied minor Eritreans are also among those leaving the country as well, mainly due to young people being drafted into national service from the final year of secondary school. Furthermore, a strict emigration rule is practiced in the country, which has severely limited citizens in leaving their country legally. Many reports indicate that illegal emigrants being detained and sometimes killed. Asylum seekers are generally seen as deserters and they are denied basic embassy services unless they pay two percent in “tax remittance”. Thus serious concerns about the treatment of returnees have generally prevented the deportations of Eritreans from many countries.

Eritrean asylum seekers are usually granted to some kind of protection either as a refugee or lesser protection due to the internationally acknowledged lack of political, religious and civil rights in Eritrea. The major driving factor quoted in asylum applications made by Eritreans is the indefinite conscription into national service. Young Eritreans aged between 15 and 40 are most likely to leave their country in order to avoid national service and in response to their perceived limited prospects within the country (Müller 2012), (Riggan 2013). Others such as Hrit and Mohammad note also structural militarization of the country has led to family disintegration, as men are kept away from their families and this worsened the general economic conditions in the population (Hirt and Mohammad 2013). Worsening economic conditions make households increasingly dependent on income from abroad and increased motivations of young people to leave the county to provide their families.

The above-mentioned national service is a system introduced around April 1995 that required every adult Eritrean to undertake a mandatory eighteen months long national service, which included military training. Lately, many say that the open-ended duration of service, far beyond the 18 months stipulated in law and conscripts suffer under abusive conditions, which may include the use of torture, sexual violence and forced labor. Other Eritreans are forced to leave their country of origin because there is not any kind of freedom of religion in Eritrea, with only individuals belonging to Orthodox Christianity, Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism (Evangelical church) and Islam allowed to practice their religion. Individuals practicing other religions are said to experience discriminations, harassments, torture and imprisonment. Same-sex relationships are widely condemned in Eritrea and some face criminal sentences, and LGBT individuals face discrimination and mishandling both socially and legally as well.

Eritreans leaving the country without a regular exit visa predominantly cross the border into Ethiopia and Sudan. Sudan have been receiving Eritrean refugees since the 1960s and a UNHCR statistics from 2015 shows that Sudan hosted around 108,000 Eritrean refugees. The number cited by UNHCR does not cover all Eritreans, as many do not register with the UNHCR. Border Crossing to Ethiopia is a recent phenomenon compared to Eritreans immigrating to Sudan. The previous animosity between Eritrea and Ethiopia has hindered many Eritreans from crossing to Ethiopia. Nonetheless, Ethiopia has received approximately 155,000 Eritrean refugees since the beginning of the 2000s according to UNHCR (UNHCR 2015). Owing to the risks involved on different routes over time, Eritreans may choose to cross the border with Sudan or that with Ethiopia.<sup>4</sup>

Sudan and Ethiopia are rarely seen as final destinations by Eritreans. Due to the lack of long term prospects in these countries, Eritreans tend to move on to a third country. Many travel north towards Europe and Israel. Eritreans face huge risks during their journeys, because of the dangers of traffickers and smugglers along the borders. The journey from Sudan to the coasts of Libya and the Sinai is extremely risky not only due to the potential kidnappings along the way but also because of the extreme hard travel conditions, whereby migrants risk death through hunger and thirst.<sup>5</sup>

On July 2018, the government of Eritrea signed a peace accord with Ethiopia, formally ending an almost twenty years long of hostilities. The cessation of the hostilities set a high hope among Eritreans. They were hopeful that this peace agreement would change the situation inside Eritrea for the better. However, nothing has changed thus far, many Eritreans are still conscripts and the conditions inside the country have not changed yet. The peace agreement signed with Ethiopia should have provided the security that the government of Eritrea has argued it needs to discontinue this indefinite national service conscription and help shift its focus from security to development. Yet, nothing has changed and this absence of promising signs of tangible rights progress the current movement of Eritrean asylum-seekers is not expected to drop.

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<sup>4</sup>The sudden outbreak of peace in the Horn of Africa means an open border and new vulnerability. Many Eritreans have used this opportunity to escape the regime in Eritrea. Thus, changing the trend of migration from Eritrea.

<sup>5</sup> Detailed information about the migration process of Eritreans and the risks associated with their emigration from the country can be found in (Stavis and Parkinson 2016), (Andom 2017), (Bariagaber 2013), (Tsegay 2016).

## **The Norwegian process**

Norway has been and is a favored destination for many Eritrean migrants. The country's economic prosperity, relatively high level of political stability and democratic principles are appealing to many migrants, especially to asylum-seekers. The asylum process of Eritreans in Norway simply can be classified in four phases. First, the asylum seeker arrives in Norway and is received in police stations. Secondly, he or she applies for asylum and thus arrives in temporary reception where they are interviewed by the immigration authorities and undergoes basic medical checkup. Third, the asylum-seeker is transferred to a residential reception center, where he or she awaits answer to his/her application. The fourth phase is when the seeker gets a positive or negative answer of his/her application. If accepted he or she is, in due time, resettled or moved in the society. If not he or she can appeal his/her case to the UNE (the court of immigration appeals), and when all options are exhausted he or she may be returned to country of origin or third party country. However, the thesis focuses on young Eritreans, who after the long and dangerous journey, arrived in Norway. It precisely focuses on Eritreans who were unaccompanied minors at the above-mentioned fourth stage in the Norwegian refugee process.

## **Conceptual frameworks**

Adolescence is the period of life for young people aged between 16 –20 or in some cultures up to 25 years. It is understood to be a time when young people experience significant physical, psychological, and intellectual growth. From a cultural and social perspective, it falls in the transitional age of one's life. It is characterized by separation from parents and/or caregivers to being an adult. Furthermore, it is at this critical stage where the adolescents develop both mentally and physically. For young refugees, this transitional stage can be very difficult, as the above-mentioned tasks of adolescence are compounded by their migrant experiences and the challenge of settling in a new culture (country). In addition, they are faced with the challenge of developing a sense of belonging and fitting-in their current surroundings.

Accordingly, these young Eritreans the same as other young refugees are tasked with adapting alone to their new surroundings as well as recovering from the cultural dislocation, loss of established social networks, and the traumatic nature of their refugee experiences. They are faced challenges associated with identity formations (their individual and their social identities), adjusting to new educational systems and determining career goals. They face these challenges while simultaneously negotiating their path to adulthood. The intention of the thesis is to shed light on their coping mechanisms and make sense about their daily interactions. In

order to pursue these, I put my study into two conceptual frameworks, first in the context of migration and human mobility in general, and second, in a more specific context of youth culture.

### **Migration and human mobility in Anthropology**

The study of migration and human mobility is a multifaceted, very complex, and diverse phenomenon, in which micro as well as macro factors interact. This makes research on the subject of human mobility conceptually and empirically challenging. It is a subject studied by scholars from range of disciplines, and these studies tend to focus on answering questions related to why people move, who moves and what happens when they move. As noted by Brettell and Hollifield, anthropologists are interested in more than the who, when, and why of migration; they want to capture through their ethnography the experience of being an immigrant and the meaning, to the migrants themselves, of the social and cultural changes that result from leaving one context and entering another (Brettell and Hollifield 2000). Therefore, anthropologists tend to be context specific and their level of analysis to be on micro levels (such as individuals, groups, and households). Vertovec also shares the sentiment and argues that migration and migration-related topics currently have a prominent place in the discipline of anthropology (Vertovec 2010). Anthropologists are invested in the study of this phenomenon across an assortment of topics such as its cultural and social dimensions, identities, citizenship, religion, and so on. Thus, through its holistic approach, anthropology contributes to the contemporary migratory studies greatly.

Despite the wealth of information on the subject matter, migration studies are generally criticized for having not enough theories or for being under theorized, as noted by (Brettell and Hollifield 2015; De Haas 2010; de Haas and Rodríguez 2010; Lidén 2017). Nonetheless, a few theories related to migration studies in the field of anthropology have been put forward, and most of them are particularly interested in studying migrants' lives, identities and experiences. For example, transnational, diaspora and changeable processes and practices have been at the center of the studies. According to the Horevitz, most prominent theories of migration and human mobility to have developed in the past two decades include transnationalism theory, modernization theory, dependency theory, and world system theory (Horevitz 2009). Although these theories may apply to the study migration of these youngsters from different perspectives, here in this thesis I have focused on the transnational theory of migration.

Many scholars have forwarded various definitions of transnationalism across the field of anthropology, but generally these definitions center on exchanges, connections and practices

across borders, thus transcending the national space as the primary reference point for activities and identities. One such definition put by Basch et al. states that transnationalism is the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together society of origin and settlement (Basch, Schiller, and Blanc 1994). A transnational perspective on immigration/migration studies is increasingly relevant due to the forces of globalization and their impacts on mobility. It is now easier than ever to be connected to two or more realities across national borders. The accelerated development of communication, transport, trade, and information networks through globalization has strengthened the connections of migrants to two or more places. Taking the main understanding of transnationalism that migrants (refugees) are connected to several places at once and not specifically delimited to one place, the first part of my thesis discusses how these youngsters maintain their connection to the Eritreans back home and with Eritreans in diaspora.

As the overall focus of the research was oriented towards the adaptations in Norway, in the second part of the thesis I focus not only within the paradigm of migration but also within the context of general youth studies. Obviously, their Eritrean background, and the links to an Eritrean diaspora are important contexts, but my aim was also to look at this group of young Eritreans as they adapt to a youth culture in the places they live. Here their interactions with and their relationships also to Norwegian youth and other migrants from other countries become significant elements for understanding how this particular group adapt.

### **Adaptation and “youth culture”**

For much of the history of anthropology, as for other social sciences, the attention towards youth has been focused on a paradigm of socialization and seen adolescence as a life cycle stage. Only recently has anthropology’s focus on you begun to emphasize on the engagement of youth in local context through the lights of modernization and globalization. This shift in emphasis is reflected by the works of Helena Wulff in 1995. She argues that our approach to youth should move beyond seeing it as a life-stage approach, which examine it as a stage in a developmental trajectory, current studies of youth culture, should emphasize the conditions of young people’s experience, and the social and cultural practices through which they shape their worlds (Wulff 1995).

However, categorizing and defining youth has always been problematic yet a significant one in anthropological studies. The “youth” category lacks clear definition as in some situations it may be based on one’s social circumstances rather than chronological age or cultural position. Furthermore, youth as a cultural stage often marks the beginning of a long term, even life-long

engagement in particular cultural practices, whether its practitioners continue to be included in the youth category or not. According to Bucholtz, the anthropology of youth is characterized by its attention to the agency of young people, its concern to document not just highly visible youth cultures but the entirety of youth cultural practice, and its interest in how identities emerge in new cultural formations that creatively combine elements of global capitalism, transnationalism, and local culture (Bucholtz 2002)

One common anthropological practice is to define youth by age categories. Which is relevant, but still problematic. Particularly for young Eritreans as they have very different expectations about what they should be doing at different ages. I think it might be better to see young people as “youth” and as producers of “youth culture”. Thus, they are part of the production of a “sub-culture” in society and we need to see these young people as active agents in shaping their own lives, within available contexts, thus also contributing to what on an aggregate level becomes such a sub-culture.

As early as 1942, Talcott Parsons coined the phrase “youth culture” to describe a distinctive world of youth structured by age and sex roles with a value system in opposition to the adult world of productive work, responsibility, and routine (Parsons 1942). It refers to the unique cultural forms and practices that are produced by young people as a response to the experience of the conditions of their lives that define them. Thus, youth culture is broadly referred to as a particular way of life, combined with particular patterns of beliefs, values, symbols, and activities that are shared, lived, or expressed by young people (Frith 1984). In this regard, young people are seen as active agents and producing their own cultures.

According to Anthony Giddens, agency is the stream of actual or contemplated casual interventions of corporeal beings in the ongoing process of events-in-the-world (Giddens 1976). In his argumentation, Giddens links the notion of agency to that of practice. Putting his standpoint into consideration, one can look at these young Eritreans as agents of their own practices and consistent with the observation of Schiller et al, about migrants ability to keep several identities at one same time (Schiller, Basch, and Blancszanton 1992). The second part of the thesis, takes youth culture in to consideration and discusses, and examines these young peoples’ day-to-day activities and interactions in relation to their negotiating between what we might call ‘belonging to other Eritrean in diaspora’ and ‘being in close contact with their Norwegian and other immigrant peers.



## **Chapter Outline**

Chapter two discusses the methodological approaches that were practiced during my yearlong fieldwork among the young Eritreans. In the methodological discussions, the current anthropological views and argumentations are included to underline my statements. In the second portion of the chapter, the reader is introduced to my informants and their initial reaction towards my research intentions. The last part discusses the ethical considerations taken by the researcher.

Chapter three, which is titled as homage to saints or a reason to social gathering, discusses the first important context for these young people that is how they relate to a generational system of Eritrean society, to their parents and grandparents, to younger siblings and relatives and their Eritrean networks. Such relationships are different for the Eritrean youth I worked with, as they have left such relationships behind, in Eritrea or in the Eritrean diaspora. Thus, what we may call their “historical consciousness” is shaped by factors that are different from most of their Norwegian friends. Taking a seemingly religious gathering as an example, chapter three discusses how these young people cope with the lack of immediate cross-generational relationship and how participating on this monthly event is correlated to other aspects of their lives.

The next chapter takes another important aspect of their day-to-day activity i.e. their activities on their mobile phones and discusses how they identify themselves with regard to the Norwegian peers. The discussions involves two popular applications among the youth (Facebook and Snapchat) and how these two social media are utilized by the youngsters in their attempt to find balance between the realities of parental influence and individual freedom, dependence and independence, belonging and fitting in.

Chapter five’s main discussion is about friendship, and how participating in football and football related activities have created an opportunity for the youngsters to make new friends and establish new social networks. The chapter discusses the nature and dynamics of their friendships. Moreover, it discusses also the utilization of their newly established friendships in overcoming challenges associated with their daily lives in Norway.

Chapter six is the last chapter of the thesis and deliberates the main argumentations of the thesis. It summarizes and concludes the thesis.



# CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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## **Introduction**

Anthropology have diverse methodological choices, ethnography being one of them, and according to Falzon it privileges the researcher to an engaged, contextually rich and a different types of qualitative as well as empirical data, in which fine-grained daily interactions that constitute the lifeblood of the studied are produced (Falzon 2016). With respect to method, it entails the situational combination of field techniques rooted in the ideal of participant observation, and interviews. It is based on data gathered through an access to privileged information based on trust and interactions between researcher/s and the researched.

The question for a complete and thorough account of the lives being studied can easily affect the time one spends with his/her informants. Thus, it is up to the researchers to define the length of the study and indicate its closure. I argue that anthropological fieldworks are never finished, just left with their accounts considered provisional and tentative. Additionally, how much time one spends doing his/her studies varies and the same applies to the questions how often one visits the sites and interacts with his/her subjects. The same argumentation can also be projected towards the ways of carrying out a qualitative research. As argued by Silverman, there are no right or wrong methods. There are only methods appropriate to your research topic and the model with which you are working (Silverman 2005). Indeed, how researchers proceed depends up on a range of factors including the purposes and goals of the research, the characteristics of the research participants, etc. The followings are short discussions on the methodological approaches taken by the researcher in order to attain the necessary empirical data.

## **Participant observation**

The primary data collections method during my fieldwork was participant observation and open-ended interviews. Many argue that participant observation holds central role to anthropological studies. It provides the researcher with different kinds of data such as nonverbal expressions, in determining who interacts with whom, how participants communicate with each other. It helps the researcher to gain an invaluable information with regard to his/her participants, which is not easily attainable with superficial interactions.

Therefore, instead of just relying on quantitative data and interviews alone, I tried immersing

myself into the field. Because the aim was from the beginning, as it is asserted eloquently by Malinowski almost a century ago, was to truly understand the participants (in his terms “the native”). To truly understand and to cover the full extent of the phenomena in each aspect of [...] culture studied one needs to accomplish a meticulous data collection ‘carried on systematically throughout the course of one’s work (Malinowski 1922) .This has been the foundation of my fieldwork.

As mentioned above, participant observation was my principal tool of data gathering during my fieldwork. As it is indicated in its name, to be participant and observer indicates to immerse the researcher into the everyday routines and activities of the researched. It is to develop a relationship with the people and to see and experience what is going on. Those relationships, together with my participation in the daily lives of the youngsters, gave me a window into the daily lives of the subjects and a better understanding of it. I spent countless hours with these youngsters in their domestic domains or their homes. We met to formal and informal gatherings. Even from time to time, I played football with them and sometimes stayed home, where we would idly watch TV whilst chatting about their daily interactions or particular situations.

Participating in religious ceremonies and festivities was also an important part of my fieldwork. It was during those group gatherings that I was able to develop an understanding to the context and phenomenon under study. These particular situations enabled me to get to know my informants in “outside” domain and experience their social interactions among their fellow acquaintances and peers. I dutifully followed them to the religious institutions and participated in their religious oriented discussions as well as social instances. These religious atmospheres created an interesting social activity that led to profound discussions and interactions with my fellow informants.

There were also community-oriented circumstances in which I participated during my fieldwork for instance coffee ceremonies, birthday and wedding ceremonies. All this private and group interactions gave me the opportunity to look closely into the private and group dynamics of the youngsters. In addition, leisurely activities that I arranged from time to time were of paramount importance. These activities include pizza and traditional coffee ceremonies, usually on Saturdays and Sundays. During these occasions, I engaged with my informants privately to discuss and enlighten some of my findings. And it was during such instances that I conducted my open-ended interviews, where I asked them to clarify and enrich specific actions. In the end, I hope that my participant observation methodology has accomplished what Dewalt and Dewalt argued that the goal of participant observation should be. According to Dewalt and Dewalt, the goal for design of research using participant observation as a method is to develop

a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study that is as objective and accurate as possible (DeWalt and DeWalt 2002). They suggest that participant observation be used as a way to help the researcher have a better understanding of the context and phenomenon under study. With the use of additional strategies used with observation, such as interviewing, document analysis, participant observation was used to help in providing an answer to my research questions, and gain an understanding of their interactions.

### **Multi-sited ethnography**

We know ethnography, as a research methodology, is a typical marker of any anthropological research. The traditional understanding is that ethnography, as a methodological approach, encompasses participant observation and interviews occurring over a long period of time. The researcher leaves his/her place and begins to share everyday life with a group of people in order to gain insight on their understandings. It is a practical approach that is delimited to a single geographical space. This geographical space or site is pre-selected by the researcher, as it is understood as it is understood to contain a set of particular information and social interactions that interest the anthropologist and perhaps compared to findings from elsewhere.

My fieldwork did not adapt this traditional anthropological fieldwork, as I was not confined to a particular spatial space. I had to follow my informants in to different spatial spaces, as most of them are not situated in a single neighborhood. Thus, during my stay in the field I had to follow these youngsters in Fjord and Bergen across several arenas while they engaged in different functions and I had participated in ceremonies that took place in public places such as churches, mosques, and ceremonial halls. Sometimes, I visited them in their homes and engaged in one to one conversation. I took field notes and at times reflected upon them either right after the occasions or in the evening hours. Hence, my field research can be categorically seen as a “multi-sited ethnography”.

In anthropology and other disciplines, changing notions of place, culture and nation have led researchers to refocus their “object” or “site” of study. (Appadurai 1996; Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Scholars have recognized the changing nature of the field in response to an increasingly global, mobile, transnational world (Appadurai 1990; Hannerz 1992, 2003; Hendry 2003; Marcus 1995). G.E. Marcus in 1995 identifies a new mode of ethnographic research that moves out from the single sites and local situations of conventional ethnographic research designs to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space. This mode defines for itself an object of study that cannot be accounted for ethnographically by

remaining focused on a single site of intensive investigation. He further elaborates that by stating multi-sited fieldwork consists of mapping strategies or pathways where connections are formed that traverse localities: following the people, the object, the metaphor, the story, the biography, or the conflict (Marcus 1995).

Most of my research depended on a multi-sited ethnographic approach to explore these youngsters' experiences, perspectives and representations. As a result, a few concerns were raised, such as time limitations and coordination of localities and building relationships with the informants. My fieldwork experience presented challenges to my research in terms of i) location; ii) relationships with informants and iii) the type of data produced.

Hannerz admits that multi-sited research cannot have an ethnographic grasp of the entire field" for each linked locality. Rather, this type of research tends to examine movement or processes that negotiate localities. Accordingly, the selection of sites depends on research design and questions as well as opportunities for comparison (Hannerz 2003). My research pathway was to study a process of the construction and performance of these youngsters. My field site selection was guided by my interest in examining the representation of these persons in their day-to-day interactions. Once I began my fieldwork, the addition and selection of other participants from other localities was based on the opportunity for comparison and access to wider networks. These sites are connected in a way that the relationships between the informants in different localities become just as important as their relationships with one another. Therefore, the comparative nature of multi-sited ethnography was of paramount significance.

My fieldwork did not focus on a particular individuals rather it focuses on the participation and experience of these youngsters in the broader Norwegian society. Therefore, it made more sense not to exclude particular informants when the opportunities arose and only investigate the experiences at one locality. While budget, distance, and time constraints limited the number of sites I could visit, my selection provided an interesting comparison on the representation and actions of young Eritrean refugees. The data produced from this type of fieldwork also provides a broad perspective on the experience of young Eritreans in general and reveals the variation in their experiences. If I conducted research at just one site, for example Fjord, and followed the young Eritreans' experiences, this would have been a very different account.

Another concern I had was the quality of relationships as a result of short time frames for my field visits. Would I be able to establish contacts and conduct interviews during these visits? As in multi-sited research, the ethnographer is placed in a trans-local network of relationships

rather than developing relationships at a single locality (Hannerz 2003). In my research, my previous relationships with the youngsters was very vital in establishing relationships and becoming immersed in the network of people connected to the youngsters via their shared experiences and/or identities.

I met with different informants and acquaintances of my informers in different localities such as Bergen, Fjord and other places. I situated myself within their network through my multi-sited research plan. The fact that many of the informants were connected in such a way assured me that I indeed had a broad yet interrelated view of the phenomenon while still being focused on a network of people who shared in this experience. Therefore, I think ethnographic researches should be flexible enough to accommodate these forms of relationships and connections.

Relationships are also about building networks, not just time depth at a specific field site. Significantly, relationships built over the span of my entire fieldwork year, independent of how long I was at a specific location. Not only did relationships develop as a series of connections or networks, they were also of a different nature. “Virtual relationships” were formed when I arrived and after I left my sites. My multi-sited research required extensive preparatory work throughout the year for each site. It was important to establish contacts well in advance because I would be visiting many sites for varying lengths of time. I sometimes conducted “fieldwork” by phone, and on the web. This virtual fieldwork served to establish contacts and was crucial to this success of this project. Moreover, the informal conversations and communications that ensued became additional data for my multi-sited ethnography.

As standalone data, virtual fieldwork may be limited. However, together with the observational data and interviews collected at the field sites, virtual fieldwork establishes a time depth in terms of data and relationships similar to that of an extended stay in one location. I have maintained relationships throughout the research period as much as possible via such technologies. Return visits to Bergen and Fjord provided opportunities to conduct follow up interviews, update participants on my research, and receive feedback.

One of the main criticisms about multi-sited fieldwork is whether this type of approach produces the same quality of data and the question of breadth over depth. I argue that the multi-sited research may produce just as eloquent a picture as single-sited ethnography, although to do so it needs to incorporate multiple methods and a variety of sources. There were some differences in terms of the type of data generated from multi-sited in comparison to traditional single-site ethnographic research, but not in terms of the quality of data. Hannerz suggests that multi-sited

research depends more on interviews and informants than on participant observation and also must combine various kinds of sources (Hannerz 2003). While I agree that the participation of the researcher is shortened in multi-sited research, the opportunity for observation still occurs. In my own project, I engaged in participant observation while establishing contacts, attending various events, and analyzing cultural displays. For example, I observed and participated in football matches arranged by the informants themselves. I was welcomed to watch and participate in as many cultural and religious gatherings I choose. I spent many hours with each participant and spoke informally with the participants. I acquired data through these informal conversations and by observing the dynamics and relationships between my informants and others. The processes of building rapport and establishing contacts is similar to single-site fieldwork, albeit in condensed form.

Although my research included observational field notes, it did also depended on open-ended and semi structured interviews and a variety of sources rather than participation and observation. Since the goal of my research was to gain insight the youngsters, quality in-depth interviews with a few key informants was also essential. Interviews also provided data on their experiences and on what representations and performances mean for themselves. In addition, I used a variety of media as sources as data for my analysis such as their online presence and interactions (shared imagery, videos and texts) which is discussed in the following section.

## **Virtual Ethnography**

During my stay with the youngsters, it became apparent that all of them spent considerable amount of time glued to their smart phones and laptops accessing the internet, which led me to devise a plan and approach them from a different angle that is to follow them on their online activities as well. The aim of this engaging type of research method was to follow and document their activities across different yet most popular social media platforms, namely Facebook and Snapchat. Furthermore, I was able to collect both pictorial as well as audio-visual data which helped me to understand about their day to day activities. This kind of involvement, which resembles in many ways to the “traditional” and “field-site” based ethnographical research method, is called “virtual ethnography” by (Hine 2000) or “netnography” by (Kozinets 2010).

Virtual ethnography is an investigative method used by many anthropologists and other social scientists to study communities on the internet. It refers to an ethnographic research approach that is carried out in the online and offline locations. Virtual ethnographers often engage in studying online communities and cultures by conducting a “fieldwork” on the World Wide



Web. The research purpose and aim may vary from one to the other, but virtual ethnography refers to the ethnographical research approach that is carried out in the internet. During this kind of research, researchers engage to immerse themselves in the phenomenon they are studying just like the actual Malinowski-an ethnography, the only difference is that it is carried out on the internet. Kozinets provides a concise definition on netnography, according to him, it is an ethnography conducted on the internet; a qualitative, interpretive research methodology that adapts the traditional, in-person ethnographic research techniques of anthropology to the study of online cultures and communities formed through computer- mediated communications (Kozinets 2010).

Virtual ethnography can be considered as a qualitative approach to data collection in virtual communities. Its aim is usually to look beyond “what”, “where” and to try uncovering a deeper understanding. As Hine points, it is an ethnography for the internet rather than an ethnography of the internet. She argues that for development of an ethnographic strategy for the internet, it has seemed particularly significant that it is embedded in various contextualizing frameworks, institutions, and devices, that the experience of using it is embodied and hence highly personal and that it is every day, often treated as an unremarkable and mundane infrastructure rather than something that people talk about in itself unless something significant goes wrong (Hine 2000). She argues further that virtual ethnography is not bound by a single site, but follows a phenomenon across multiple sites, that is tracing networks both physical and online as well as identifying social worlds. moreover, according to her all ethnographers need a working sense of the field site that forms the focus of their study and it can be challenging if a study is conducted partly online and partly offline(Hine 2000). Mobile phones and mobile internet make the researcher to face constant dilemma on the issue of a pre-defined yet confined field site, like the already recognized and closely examined issue of the constructed nature of the field as noted by (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Therefore, I believe virtual ethnography should be considered as a blended and fluid research methodology that encompasses diverse frames of meaning making research designs that enables one to reflect the complexity of lived experiences across different platforms rather than confined to singular locality.

Taking the above-mentioned point in to account, I was able to follow the youngsters online and offline across different social media platforms such as Facebook and Snapchat. Just like a traditional ethnographical approach, virtual ethnography is capable of using qualitative methodologies like observation and unstructured interviews. It can document mediated activities on the internet and sett interviews with key informants that can help to shape a valid

description of a studied virtual phenomenon. Virtual ethnography studies the internet with the intent to be used as an access to participants' interactions on the virtual worlds. I used two social media platforms (applications) Facebook and snapchat not only to observe my informants' online activities but also to understand and gain meaning of their activities on these social medias. I think virtual ethnography in its flexible nature, offers the researcher an opportunity to participate as well as observe as the participants interact on the virtual world. It also offers an opportunity to investigate and make meaning of the relationship between the online and offline spaces. I argue that virtual ethnography is not only for studying online spaces as noted by Kozinets, rather it helps to conceptualize the relationship between the online and offline spaces by emphasizing on their connectivity.

The first step of any anthropological field research is "entering" the field itself. The way one enters the studied community depends on the aim one intends to research. My intentions for this kind field research was not only to gather data via observation of the youngsters' social media accounts, but also to engage and make sense of their activities. Therefore, my first step was to create a Snapchat account and befriend my informants (add them to my friends list) and to add them on my already existing Facebook account. As I was unfamiliar with the Snapchat application, I consulted one of my fellow informants in to assisting me in creating an account. As a result, this helped me also to find an excuse to be familiar and create an amicable relationship with my informants during the Creation of a Snapchat account.

The second step in my virtual ethnography process was data collection. My data collection included three steps. The first step was documentation collections. It refers to the process by which I was able to document pictorial, audio-visual and text productions of the youngsters on the two applications. This was done by saving what they shared online and sometimes screen shots of their posts. The second step was observation of their online activities. This included silently observing (following) those youth across the two social medias and watching closely their online interactions, who they text the most, on what they comment the most etc. The third step was engaging with my informant online as well as offline. This kind of interaction enabled me to get to know my informants' intentions and make sense of their activities. Sometimes, I try to mimic their activities and try to engage them into sharing what they are thinking and at other times I would conduct unstructured interviews with them. The topics of interviews varied from time to time, but mostly were based on my online observations or the materials they just shared (posted) online.

The third and final step of virtual ethnographic study was to present an empirical data of the studied phenomena just like a traditional anthropological ethnographic study. In order to produce such description of the result one need to carefully analyze and give sense to his or her findings. As a result, I was able to present a thick description which presents and analyzes the online as well as offline activities of my informants in this thesis.

## **Introducing my informants**

Back in December 2015, I received a call from my then contact person at fjord communal administration. I was summoned to her office and informed about incoming new refugees from Eritrea and Afghanistan. I was told they were unaccompanied minors and the administration was hiring some people who can work as community workers (in Norwegian miljøarbeider)<sup>6</sup>. I accepted the offer and began working as a community worker. Later the same month, eight unaccompanied minors from Eritrea came and resettled in the community, four boys and four girls. At that time, they were in their late sixteenth and early seventeenth years of age. Thus, officially I began my professional association with these Eritreans.

Later in autumn 2017, when I joined the University of Bergen the same Eritreans became my informants. When I began my research they were already over eighteen years old. Initially, my aim was to do research among unaccompanied minors in Norway, but after several discussions with then my instructors and other personnel in the department, I became aware of the associated complications with regard to conducting research among underage, issues related to ethics and permit from the government. I changed my study to young Eritreans refugees in Norway who came as unaccompanied minors. Furthermore, via my original informants I was able to make contact with other young Eritreans who currently reside in Bergen.

Thus, this thesis present in this paper draws on ethnographic work among young Eritrean refugees currently residing in Bergen and the above mentioned small town Fjord. A common understanding of ethnography is the focus on practices within natural settings, contexts that has not been constructed by the researcher (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). This definition fits well with my fieldwork as the center of attention of my research was towards the practices taking place within these young refugees. I accompanied two young Eritrean groups in order to

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<sup>6</sup> Miljøarbeider literally meaning environmental worker. As an environmental worker (more precisely as community worker), our job descriptions included helping the minors with day-to-day activities both in school and at home. We were in a way acting as parental figures or guides.

observe and document their socio-cultural adaptation process. From the eve of 2018, I have followed closely these two groups both in their private domains as well as in public arenas.

Even though I have had prior knowledge with my informants at the beginning of my field work I made sure that the participants fulfilled certain criteria. The criteria were: first, the participant should have come to Norway as unaccompanied minors; second, that they were voluntary participants; third, the participants have a residence permit which means that they have been granted asylum here in Norway. Overall, a total of twelve youngsters agreed to participate in the field work, out of those four are females. All the research partakers, goes to school either to a high school or pre-high school classes. The majority of the informants are followers of the Eritrean Orthodox Church and some few are Moslems.

### **Presenting my intentions**

As I mentioned before, prior to my fieldwork I have had a professional acquaintance with the participants and this enabled me to maintain close contact and establish an amicable relationship with these youngsters. Hence, my invitation to their annual New Year gathering on the Eve of 2018. These youngsters in collaboration with other young adult Eritreans in the area arrange every year a New Year's get together party at one of the residences of Eritrean couples.

During the coffee ceremony, while everybody was chatting and relaxing before the actual program started, I announced my research interest. I told the participants about my interest in their perspectives and experiences of resettlement, and that I wanted to study them for my master thesis. They were fascinated at the same time puzzled by my request. All of them accepted my request but some of them needed a detailed clarification about the prospect of the project and what I intend to do during my fieldwork. As a consequence we agreed to meet another time and discuss it further.

Throughout the years, anthropological studies are perceived as having an intrusive nature. Due to the anthropologists' eagerness to reflect his/her findings from what Malinowski has described as the informants point of view, sometimes anthropologists forget that the researches they carry out can have a deterring effect on the informants. This happened to be the case with my prospective informants. I was expecting to dive in and began to collect the fruits of my research right away and harvest all the information I would get. I thought my prior contact and knowledge with the participants would be easier to make the transition from "acquaintances" to the role of a researcher (ethnographical research) and researched, but it was not to be. As many of my informants needed further information and clarifications.

During our second meeting, I tried to explain my intentions and I was met with mixed (yet changed) reactions. My initial assumption was that our previous interaction would make it easier to communicate freely with me. However, that was far from it. For example, Mussie, Drar, and Ghirmai, all born in 1998 were reluctant to participate and only agreed after further detailed explanations about my intentions, its aim, and how I would carry it out. As an assurance for participation I drafted a summary of my research objectives, aim in an interview consent paper and handed them before the start of the research.

On the other hand, Nuredin, Omer, Sara and Selam agreed cheerfully and even asked me:-

*“What is it in for us or are we going to get any payment out of this. No, definitely you should pay us, so how much are you going to pay us?”*

To which I asked them, why I should pay them. Their response was that they have had participated in a “research” before and they know that participants are usually paid handsomely for their participation. I stressed that participation is free and voluntary, but I was also curious and asked them if they have been paid before. To which Sara recalled “back home, I think it was in 2012 or 2011, there was a governmental research in our area and my mother was paid 200 Nakfa<sup>7</sup> every time she participated”. After further probing and her detailed explanation, I came to understand that what she thought as a research was in fact an HIV/AIDS awareness campaign carried out by the government. Even though they all agreed to participate and share their wisdom with me, they also stressed that under no circumstances were I to record our conversations and discussions rather communicate only orally.

### **A note about anonymity and ethical consideration**

As I have already touched it in the previous section of the text, I have tried to avoid ethical dilemmas associated with doing anthropological fieldwork among young peoples. First, all my participants were consenting adults. Before, I began my research I gave a detailed information about my interest, what I am going to do and asked them for their participation. Prior to my fieldwork. They agreed upon their freely and were also told that they can under any circumstance stop their participation if they ever felt it is unsuitable or did not want to participate longer.

Furthermore, I assured them about their anonymity. Thus, all their names are changed and I have also left certain personal facts in order to preserve their anonymity. In addition, throughout

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<sup>7</sup> Nakfa = the name of Eritrean legal tender. In today's rate, 200 Nakfa amounts to around 120kr.

the thesis, I have tried to make their faces unrecognizable as possible in order to preserve their anonymity. All the photos and screenshots presented in the thesis were taken in agreement with them.

As anthropologist we are faced many ethical dilemmas associated with the fact that the empirical data we collect and present to the public may contain an intimate detail, which can affect the integrity of our informants. As my initial informants were from the small town and are the only unaccompanied minors from Eritrea, changing the name of the town was also necessary. However, in Bergen, there are many young Eritreans, so I felt changing the name of the city was unnecessary.

Another issue that arose repeatedly during my interactions with these youngsters was the issue of money and their constant question “what is in it for me”. To this, I have to convince them that their participation was completely free. I told them repeatedly that my interest is pure academic and that I would not gain financially or otherwise. I even suggested that to bring them an official letter from the university, to which they declined and said it is not necessary. Nonetheless, when we have had pizza parties or traditional coffee ceremonies I insisted on paying the necessities, like pizza, soft drinks and to some extent biscuits and popcorn for the coffee.

## CHAPTER THREE: HOMAGE TO SAINTS OR A REASON TO SOCIAL GATHERING

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### Introduction

One of the many aspects of migration is how one settles in a new society and the unexpected circumstances that follows it. Many may realize that relationships and day-to-day interactions will be changed but not what the changes are about. These changed daily interactions means that many young people will probably end up in strange country and may find themselves in an unfamiliar context with challenges to their socially held beliefs at times when they are supposed to form their social identities as adults. They are met with many challenges regarding their ongoing establishment of themselves in a very different environment from the one they had been familiar to growing up. They lose the social context and continuity to their socially learned normative patterns while at the same time they must adjust their new cultural and social values. As a result of this discontinuity and the traumatizing nature of their escape from their homeland many turn to things or displays that offer familiar sounds, sights and practices. One such example is religion and religious practices among young refugees.

Religion is very important for many especially to those who are displaced from their societal roots its significance increases drastically. Religion and religious practices serve as a stabilizer agent for many refugee communities as they try to adapt to their new surroundings. Customary religious practices, such as attending services, burning candles, reciting prayers in familiar languages, and communal rituals are very vital to many newcomers. They offer a continuity to the already disrupted daily interactions and lost social contexts from which one has been accustomed to his/her whole life. Furthermore, it is through religious beliefs and spirituality that many people try to find support for their experiences such as death and familial loss. Churches and other religious organizations also play a crucial role in the adaptation process of many migrant communities as well as a source of social assistance to those in need. In addition to the psychological benefits, religious practices among immigrants also assist to the adaptation of young people to the new social contexts.

During my yearlong fieldwork among the Eritrean community in Fjord, I was able to document one such religious practice, the homage practice of St. Michael or Tsebel (ጸብል) of St. Michael as it is called in Tigriña. The main focus of this chapter will be about this veneration practice and how it is associated with the daily interactions of my informants. Furthermore, I take this

supposedly religious practice and examine it in how it relates to their adaptation process. In the chapter, I begin with recounting what happened during my first participation during this practice. Further in the chapter, I try to argue that the intention of this practice is more than a religious manifestation, rather it is a prelude to socializing, that plays a significant role in their sense of belonging and social capital.

### **St. Michael's day**

Eritreans, both abroad and in the country are fond of social gatherings. They like to find one reason after another to gather. They like to gather to celebrate, commemorate, or for the sake of it. Eritrean communities everywhere welcome occasions that might bring people together, work together and face hardships together. One famous saying among the Tigrigna speakers might explain this feeling, the saying goes like this “ምስ ሰብካ መዓት ዳርጋ ጋዓት” (literally facing hardship together is like eating porridge and it means a trouble shared is trouble halved). It is a saying deeply rooted in the Tigrigna society, where traditionally prepared porridge is a favorite dish used mostly for ceremonial purposes such as a breakfast in Easter after church mass, after childbirth and during preparations to marriage ceremonies.

The same can be said also to the small Eritrean community that lives in Fjord. Around one hundred Eritreans currently live in Fjord and most of them are followers of the Eritrean Orthodox Church. Even though they are small in number compared to the general population of the Fjord commune (which is roughly around 12,000), they are a highly motivated community which gather often. They are very fond of these social gatherings and tend to participate with their small children as well. Like many other Eritreans, they look for occasions to be together whether they are religious or celebratory in nature. The peoples' ability to set schedules and create events whereby the young and the old come together is just natural to them. The final minutes of every gathering is used to plan or to relate which and where the next gathering will be. Bigger focus and attention are given to events (that might be considered not significant or of minimal significance to others) such as religious festivities, birthday celebrations and death commemorations. One constant source of togetherness among the Eritreans in Fjord is the veneration of St. Michael.

Both the Eritrean and Ethiopian Orthodox churches use a Geez calendar whereby days and months are subdivided into working and worship days. There are days reserved for saints and holy persons in a month, accordingly followers are encouraged to abide by the calendar. For example, the seventh day every month is reserved for the holy trinity while the twenty first is



reserved as St. Mary`s day. Likewise, the twelfth day of every month is St. Michaels day. Back in Eritrea it is common that every village, small town and parts of the bigger cities celebrates specifically the day of a Saint their church is named after. Similarly, the Eritreans in Fjord celebrate St. Michael particularly as their church is named after St Michael. Every month, the feast of St. Michael is celebrated among the Eritrean followers of the Orthodox Church. Every household takes turns in preparing the feast, which means that every adult takes a turn in preparing the feast for the special day. For example, if family A took responsibility for the first month, then family B takes for the Second and family C for the third and so on rotates among the residents.

### **I was invited to the Tsebel (ጸብል)**

Date: Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2018

Time: 18:00 to 21:00

On this day Mrs. *Tsighe*’s family had the responsibility for preparing the feast of St, Michael. She is a single mother of a child and a health worker at the community geriatric center. She lives alone in a two-bedroom apartment which she recently bought it.

I arrived at the house with Ghirmay around five past six. Some Eritreans were already waiting inside when we got inside and at around six thirty most of members had come. The house (rather the living room) was still decorated from Christmas with red curtains and blinking lights across the walls. While waiting for the veneration to start many already deep in conversations about daily life in Fjord. At around half past six an elderly man stood up and cleared his throat in a signal for attention. After everybody was quiet, he welcomed everyone to the feast and indicated that Ghirmay lead with the prayer and remind everybody why we celebrate the day.

Ghirmay began his narration by prayer and continued to narrate how St. Michael the archangel of God, has performed miraculous works throughout the history of humanity. He described how by this day, many people have witnessed the miraculous and healing powers of St. Michael. Taking various quotes from the Bible, he stressed that it is the obligation of every Christian to celebrate and commemorate the day. As in his narration, those who fear and venerate in his name will be remembered and saved. Ghirmay concluded with that the second coming of Christ is nearing and everybody needs to confess and be prepared to receive the sacred Eucharist.

While Ghirmay was going about the days significance and why we need to confess and receive the Eucharist, Mrs. Tsighe together with another woman were already busy with preparing the coffee. Unlike in many other societies, the Eritrean People prepare coffee in a special way that it can be classified as ceremonious.

Eritreans prepare their coffee is prepared elaborately and a warm traditionally brewed coffee is offered to visiting friends, during festivities and as a gesture of hospitality or just as a daily primary of life. Preparation and serving of coffee take more than one hour and is usually accompanied with traditional bread (Himbasha አምባሻ), popcorn and may also include burning of traditional frankincense.

The ceremony begins with toasting of green coffee beans on a small roasting pan (menkeshkesh መንክሻክሻ). Most of the time red-hot charcoal is used for roasting, but in this case, Mrs. Tsigie roasted the beans over an electrical oven. They are left to roast until they turn dark brown and are emptied over to a plate like circular thing (meshrefet መሸረረት), which is hand crafted from palm tree leaves. It is then passed around all participants to savor its rich aromatic and refreshing scent. After everybody took turns of smelling the beans, the coffee beans are grounded in a traditional wooden pounder (megdi`i bun መግዳኦ ቡን). Mrs. Tsigie used instead an electrical coffee grinding machine.

The powdered coffee is poured into a cooking ceramic kettle (Jebena ጅብና) with water. Then it is left on either red-hot charcoal or electrical oven to brew. Throughout its brewing process the Jebena is carefully monitored as it may overflow. When fully cooked (boiled) sufficiently, the jebena is put aside to simmer and cool a little bit. An artificial filter usually made of horse tail or plastic strings is put on the top of the jebena before pouring the already brewed coffee to small handless cups (finjal ፍንጃል). The cups are placed on a large rectangular or oval tray and are served to the participants. Serving the participants usually begins with religious leaders or elders. The process of brewing continues three or four times after the first. To preserve its intensity roasted and grounded coffee may be poured onto the jebena.

The first brew (awel አወል) is the most important of the ceremony and is usually followed by Qursibun (ቁርሲ ቡን), in this case Himbasha and popcorn were served. The second batch is called kaleyti (ካልአይቲ) simply meaning the second. The third batch (Bereka ቦረካ), which is usually the last means to be blessed. The fourth (dereja ደረጃ) is usually optional and used to prolong the ceremony. The first and the third are the most important. When one is in a hurry, he or she is often asked to may be drink the first (Awel). If one has time drinking up to the third is a must, one at the end say ቤት ቦረካ ቤት ሽሻይ ይግበሮ (biet bereka biet shishay yigbero), meaning may the house be full of riches and be blessed.

## **Religion according to my informants**

Several hours after the Tsebel while writing about the days finding in my notebook, I came to realize that I needed further clarification about the Tsebel from my informants. I invited them to a pizza party for the next weekend, as I knew already that they would be busy with schoolwork during the following week. We agreed to meet at a pizzeria at the center of the city.

Before our meeting, I planned to ask them about their religious tendencies and what they make about participating on such social functions.

Yosan was the first to arrive at the pizzeria. I asked her if she has been an active churchgoer back home and why she likes to participate on the Tsebel Celebrations. She said “I wasn’t much of a church goer back home. I rarely attended church services. I remember I went to the church during Christmas, Easter or the revelation of the Cross-(which is celebrated in the month of September). Once I was out of the country, I began to go to the church and thanks to God now I am safely in Europe.” Upon further probing, Yosan goes to the church every Sunday because she thinks she owes her life to God. For her going to the church is a way of repaying the favor God has granted her. She believes that she owes her life to God for her safe arrival in Europe and overcoming the perilous experiences of the Sahara. Most of my other informants also gave the same reasoning as to why they are suddenly going to the church. After their migration related ordeals, they feel indebted to God to show their true appreciation by going to the church every Sunday.

Ghirmay on the other hand has his own reasoning. His involvement with the church begun when he was a kid. Prior to his escape from Eritrea, he was learning to be a deacon and follow in the footsteps of his father, who is a revered priest back in his native village. Before his escape from Eritrea, he was began studying religious practices to be a priest, beside the usual academic school, thus he is known as nefqe-deacon (semi-deacon or assistant deacon) among his Eritrean counterparts<sup>8</sup>. For him, he feels that it is his destiny to be servant of God. Furthermore, the lack of a religious leader such as a priest or a full-fledged deacon among the Eritrean contingent in Fjord led him to be their de facto religious leader. It is a role that he performs willingly as well as dutifully to fulfill the expectations of his compatriots. He is often called upon to lead prayers during Sundays at the church<sup>9</sup> and during the Tsebel ceremonies.

On the other hand. Omer who is a Muslim rarely goes to the mosque, but interestingly he frequents the Tsebel ceremonies. For him going to the mosque every Friday is an impossible

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<sup>8</sup> To be a priest of the orthodox church of Eritrea, one has to study all the church’s practices and theology. It is a lifetime dedication, that begins under the mentorship of a close priest or in a church. After a certain accomplishments one is awarded the title of deacon and serves as an assistant to the priests. Later upon completion of the courses and when he marries he becomes a priest and can lead his own church.

<sup>9</sup> It is a temporary locality they rent to a weekly prayer usually from 08:00 am to 12:00pm on Sundays, as the people of Fjord do not have a priest and arch of covenant to establish their own church. Yet, they call it church and in this thesis, it is mentioned as a church.

task. He says that one cannot go to the mosque every Friday, because of school. When he goes to the mosque on rare occasions, it is just to appease his mother. He revealed that, when he rings back home his mother asks him if he had been to the mosque, so he goes to the mosque in order to fulfill his mother's wishes. Nonetheless, their participation on these activities goes beyond fulfillment of parental expectations, religious needs or societal expectations, it is much more than that. Their participation is related to their search for belonging in the new social context and to their social identity formation process. Furthermore, participating on these activities are a means by which they demonstrate and/or fulfill their perceived obligations as young Eritreans.

### **Attending matters**

When I was attempting to unravel the actual reasons behind these young people's participation, I came to realize that those religious activities are much more than an ordinary religious function. Thus, rather than focusing on what religion and the morality it sets on the youngsters, in this part I try to explore the function of those "religious gatherings" and their impacts on the daily life choices of the young. These kinds of institutionalized meetings offer the young an opportunity to form an informal relationship with their adult counterparts, which may result in developing both social and economic resources. The function of these monthly events can be categorized in to three.

#### **a. To maintain continuity in a changed context**

The young people appeared to engage in a strategy of maintaining continuity in a changed social context. They embraced the opportunity for continuity between their past social life, which was discontinued due to migration, and their present life. It is reflected during our conversations that these activities resemble to the past and present to facilitate their continuous sense of belonging, thus suggesting the significance of this adaptation strategy. They constantly mention about being able to experience and live a normal Eritrean life. For them these arraignments are reminiscent of their Eritrean traditions. The contact with their fellow compatriots provided them opportunities for continuity of culture and conversations.

The day-to-day adaptation and social interaction of these youngsters is very difficult, it is further assisted by their separation from family and childhood friends. Faced with this challenge, these young people frequently chose to engage themselves with others around them. The above mentioned Tsebel ceremony offers a distraction from the challenging situations they are in. It helps them make meaning out of their current difficulties by placing them in the

company and comfort of their compatriots. Hence, their participation is as a result of them trying to be always in the company of others and overcome their loneliness.

Nevertheless, seeking continuity for their discontinued lives was not the only reason why these young people participate in the Tsebel events. They use these vents also to adjust and learn from their compatriots. These events offer the youngsters with an opportunity to interact with their compatriots and learn more about the practical aspects of Norway. One such example is that how discussions in those events led the youngsters to their educational and career choices.

#### **b. Adjusting by learning and changing**

As I mentioned earlier, the topic of conversations during these arrangements are not entirely religious. They vary constantly, sometimes it is about educational system in Norway, at other times its more about work- and work-related issues, and often it is more about politics; specifically, the current political situation of Eritrea. By attending and actively participating on these conversations, the youth try to learn and fulfill the roles, norms and values so they can become fully functioning members of the society. Attending such services facilitates the youngsters contact with members of local communities, it reintroduces a sense of normality and routine, it provides a safe environment to foster social, psychological and intellectual development. I believe that these young people like many other youngsters around the world by participating on these kinds of activities they tend to assume the attitude and values of those whom they respect and admire.

While discussing their educational choices and carriers, I noted that these young peoples' educational choices and carrier choices are heavily influenced by their adult Eritrean counterparts. For example, Luwam (who is born in 1998) is a sophomore high school student. She is studying sales and services and plans to become a successful salesperson. During our private conversations, she revealed that she always dreamt of becoming a successful cloth designer, but now she is persuaded to choose a "practical" study. In her own words: -

"While I was young girl, I dreamt to be a fashion designer. I wanted to make beautiful, colorful, and traditional dresses. I dreamt to be a well-recognized designer, but here we are I am studying sales and services."

Why change your childhood dream? Why are you studying sales and services? I asked

"You see, I changed because they (the Eritreans) told me that it is difficult to make living out of designing clothes. They told me there are not many designer schools in Norway. In this

country, I need to secure a stable career and future. By studying sales and services for two years, I can easily find a job at one of the many shops here. Therefore, I choose an education that would give me quick access to job opportunities. Then I would be able to sustain myself and help my family back home. Mind you, I haven't quashed my dream of becoming a designer, I just put it on hold until I have a stable work and have a good living."

Another example is that of Omer, who just begun his freshman year at Fjord secondary school. He is enrolled to study health and become a health worker at the geriatric Center. His reasoning behind his choice of education is like that of Luwam. He chose this vocational training because he has seen the success of Mrs. Tsige and other Eritreans who work on the communal healthcare institutions. Similarly, many of my informants quote Mrs. Tsige and other Eritreans in similar career paths as their role models.

As the above-mentioned cases shows, these youngsters' educational choices and career paths are heavily influenced by their interactions with their adult Eritrean compatriots. Participation in these activities has resulted in shaping their career paths. During their transition from youngsters to adults, these young people are aspiring to become just like their Eritrean neighbors. Interestingly, having a steady job and owning a house (an apartment) are seen as measures of success among these young people. This kind of mentality is reflected on their educational and career choices.

Today, all my informants are at vocational training programs offered by the Norwegian schools or they are in their first year of their practical training. The popular education choices among these young people include health work, car mechanic, and sales and services studies.

### **c. Participation as a source of social capital**

Social capital is an integral concept that helps us understand the link between an individual social behavior and his or her immediate social context. It describes how primary social influences shape and develop individual outcomes in any given society. It is a key idea that links social networks support and peoples' social productivity. It provides us with understanding how sustained networks provide individuals to produce and mobilize social resources such as trustworthiness and reciprocity norms. The concept is used to represent the features of social organizations that facilitate working and cooperating for mutual benefits, such as friendship networks. It analyses that the socialization of individuals that occurs over time instills shared norms and encourages cooperative societal action. Therefore, unlike other forms of capital, social capital describes the relation between persons and among persons.

Social scientist Robert D. Putnam, taking a political approach in his view of social capital, he defines the concept as a trust, norms and networks that helps the effectiveness of a society. When used, these three components (trust, norms, and networks) they grow social capital and if not used they get smaller (Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993). In his book, *Making democracy work*, Putnam argues that a society needs social capital to get democratic and national or regional success. In his argument, trust and network take a central stage. On the other hand, Bourdieu as noted in Siisiäinen comparison of the two theorists, that capital is a symbolical and material asset that can be divided in to four different forms, economic, social, cultural, and symbolic ((Siisiäinen 2000). As noted by Koniordos, Bourdieu-an social capital is formed more or less consciously via integration to networks and it is not specific material form. It is characterized by certain interdependency and in a sense; it is “suspended” in the air just like social structures as it inheres in social relations (Koniordos 2008). According to Bourdieu social capital is “the sum of active or potential resources that are connected through the possession of a network of permanent relations of mutual acquaintances and mutual recognition, which are more or less institutionalized or in other words with the inclusion in to a group, as a sum of agents that are not only endowed with common attributes but also tied by bonds that are useful and permanent (Koniordos 2008). Hence, participation in a group provides its members with collectively owned capital.

As noted by Siisiäinen, social capital of Bourdieu, has two components. The first is group membership and social networks, where membership in groups and involvements in social networks have a “multiplicational effect”. The second is cognition and recognition. Social capital is, therefore, the sum of actual or potential resources, that are available for an individual or group by having access to sustaining network of more or less institutionalized relations of mutual cognition and recognition (Siisiäinen 2000). Thus, Bourdieu’s concept of social capital, unlike that of Putnam’s, does not need trust it needs exchanges within a network. Another aspect in their differences is that Bourdieu’s social capital does not believe that there is a collective aspect to social capital like Putnam’s. Using a structural definition, Bourdieu emphasized on resources, those resources that can be used instrumentally by individuals who benefit by participating in groups. This kind of participation can be in different sectors of social lives and may well result in different social consequences.

But the most common definition of social capital and by far the one most commonly used among researchers comes from James Coleman (Field 2003). Coleman’s conceptualization of social capital centers on understanding the creation of social capital and what it means to have

it and he describes social capital as residing in the ties between people or their networks. His focus is on the structure and function of the creation of social capital and he provides us a clear definition of the notion. According to him social capital's creation comes from the actor's actions and once created it then can be in different forms such as expectations, obligations, information channels and norms (Coleman 1988, 1990). For him, being member of a social organization is considered as social capital. Most notable contribution of Coleman's argument about social capital is that he brings agency in to the field where many others focused on structure.

On the other hand, Bourdieu argues that capital is a symbolical and material asset that can be divided in to four different forms, economic, social, cultural, and symbolic (Siisiäinen 2000). As noted by Sokratis, Bourdieu-an social capital is formed more or less consciously via integration to networks and it is not specific material form. It is characterized by certain interdependency and in a sense, it is "suspended" in the air just like social structures as it inheres in social relations (Koniordos 2008). According to Bourdieu social capital is "the sum of active or potential resources that are connected through the possession of a network of permanent relations of mutual acquaintances and mutual recognition, which are more or less institutionalized or in other words with the inclusion in to a group, as a sum of agents that are not only endowed with common attributes but also tied by bonds that are useful and permanent (Koniordos 2008). Hence, my argumentation here is that participation in a group provides its members with collectively owned capital.

Here in line with the arguments of Putnam, Coleman and Bourdieu, I try to argue that how participation on the above mentioned Tsebel ceremony have a direct effect/benefit to the youngsters with regard to developing their social capital. The kind of social capital these youngsters have, is here represented by the social benefits (to be included and recognized as a member), the trust shown towards them, and the obligations they feel towards the other members. For example, when I asked about the benefits of participating in the events Yosan responded by saying;

"Back home, these kinds of events are just for adults, but here we are invited to participate. I am happy they treat as adults and usually I learn a lot during these events about traditional ways, even sometimes Tigrigna words and meanings. Here I go to interact with others that are similar



to me and shared the same history. We usually get new information and updates about UDI<sup>10</sup>, our rights and duties here in Norway. They are like a family to us.

The social capital (trust) generated by participating in the Tsebel ceremonies has a profound effect on whether those young people are to be invited to participate in other Eritrean social functions. This was reflected when those who frequent the event were invited to a birthday celebration of another boy.

On March 31<sup>st</sup>, a boy named Tesfu was celebrating his 20<sup>th</sup> birthday. He is born and raised in Norway to an Eritrean family. He can barely communicate in Tigrigna, his mother tongue by birth. His mother Mrs. Simret is well known among the Eritrean community and she has been an active participant in the Tsebel events and other social gatherings. She invited some of my informants (Omer, Selam, Yosan, and Ghirmay) to her son's birthday which was held at a big rented local. She invited them during St. Michael Tsebel. While speaking about the birthday some days later, my informants (those who participated) told me that the party was very lavish and other Norwegian youngsters were present. Mrs. Simret invited the youngsters in order to befriend them with her Son. She used the event of birthday as an opportunity where her son would get to meet and interact with his "Eritrean peers". She trusted these youngsters would help her son to learn and develop both the necessary linguistic (Tigrigna) and social skills.

What is interesting here is not the birthday party itself, but the invitation and trust put by Mrs. Simret upon the youngsters. Mrs. Simret could have invited just Eritrean mothers with small children, as it is the usual case during birthday celebration among the Eritreans in Fjord. Instead, she invited these youngsters because she deemed them trustworthy whom her son can learn from.

Second, these youngsters, through their active participation become beneficiary of group support when faced with tragedies. For example, Selam lost her younger brother in the summer of 2018. He died in near Libya in the Mediterranean Sea, while attempting to cross to Europe. Soon after his death, members of the Eritrean community came to Selam's house to pay their respect and comfort her. The news of his death travelled very fast across the community's network. The Eritrean gathered to Hazen (mourning) for the loss of a loved one began. The Hazen lasted for about a week and Selam was embraced and surrounded by the Eritrean community while she grieved her loss. She was not left alone during the week and the community came to comfort and help her go through a difficult period. They tried to support

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<sup>10</sup> UDI- the Norwegian directorate of immigration.

her both logistically (by bringing food and drinks to be served for the grieving public) and emotionally. They intentionally tried to engage her and others present in humorous narratives in order to divert her attention. In addition to the constant food supplies for the collective gatherings, the community also raised some money to be sent to her immediate family in Eritrea. Which I presume would be used for Hazen in Eritrea. The other youngsters were also present throughout the week, and they can be seen trying comfort their peer all the while helping with serving food, tea and coffee.

On another case, Omer (a Muslim by birth) was invited by some Eritrean families to iftar (the evening meal with which Muslims end their daily Ramadan Fast at sunset). This year Ramadan was observed from May 16<sup>th</sup> – June 14<sup>th</sup>. He was invited several times to dine with Christian families because according to him they thought he is alone far away from his family. Even though, he is follower of the Islamic religion, he is constantly invited and encouraged to participate in different social activities by his Eritrean compatriots.

In the above examples, I have tried to present how these youngsters engage in the company fellow Eritreans. Those young people yearn for familiar social functions such as Tsebel and use those activities to create a symbiotic relationship with their adult counterparts. As the examples present here have shown, different aspects of the social capital defined differently by Putnam, Coleman and Bourdieu can relate to the social interactions of these youngsters. Putnam stresses that forms of social capital are moral resources of the community and they can be divided into three components; the first is trust, in the youngsters' case the generally positive values of their participation. The second is obligation, that is the moral obligation Ghirmay feels towards serving as a religious leader. The third is their voluntary association with their adult compatriots. On the other hand, Bourdieu-eau social capital also applies to when discussing these adolescents' social capital as well. Because their social capital is dependent on their 'group membership' and by which they can effectively mobilize. Through purposeful participation and sustained networks, those youngsters reaffirm also their social togetherness or as themselves call it “ኤርትራውነት (ertrawnet)<sup>11</sup>.

### **“Eritrean-ness” as a social identity**

Identity has increasingly become an important keyword in contemporary human and social sciences. An array of researches have intensively explored how meanings, expectations, and

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<sup>11</sup> Ertrawnet literally meaning Eritrean-ness. The youngsters and the adults repeatedly used it alike to describe their actions and involvement in the activities.

conflicts are associated with the different location of individuals and groups; how individuals represent themselves using one or another element that constitutes their identity; how these elements can be categorized; and how multiple identities are compounded and negotiated when they conflict (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). The literature on this topic is so rich that it is nearly impossible to present an overview of the different contributions in this field, and neither is the scope of this thesis. However, I will be focusing more how this group of youngsters constitute and maintain their sense of belonging around their adult compatriots.

Identity is used ambiguously in anthropology. Sometimes it is used to refer to properties of individuals as to assert that a person might be distinct from others. At other times, it is used in reference to qualities of sameness that persons may associate themselves. It is a very difficult term, that may apply to various aspects of life and can also vary from context to context. However, the basic meaning of identity refers to where one belongs and what is expressed as self-image and sameness, what integrates the self and the group existence and what differentiates them. In attempt to define identity people assert their individuality but also join others in creating social identities. Richard Jenkins argues that identity should not be seen as a fixed possession but as a social process in which individuals and the social are inextricably related (Jenkins 2004). For Jenkins, identity is a process of becoming rather than fixed or established. It is not something which already exists, it transcends time, history, and culture. As such, identity is a fluid contingent matter – it is something we accomplish practically through our engaging interactions and negotiations with other people. In this respect as D. Buckingham argues, it might be appropriate to talk about identification rather than identity (Buckingham 2007).

As noted by Kibreab, while discussing the development of national identity among Eritrean refugees in Sudan, argues that Eritrean-ness or the Eritrean identity is a trans-ethnic and trans-religious that developed through time and is closely related to the history of Eritrean people (Kibreab 2000). This idea of Eritrean identity is a relational process that has formed, reformed and transformed with reference to the culture and cultural discourses around it.

Like any most national identities this Eritrean-ness (Eritrean identity) is associated with some cultural values that are not static. Those values are not simply related to reasoning but are products of experiences and interactions. Acquisition of these values are achieved through a process based on repeated experiences. The above mentioned Tsebel events and other religiously motivated gatherings provide the young Eritreans with an opportunity build and affirm their Eritrean-ness. Their embodied roles during the ceremonies typifies what Jenkins

noted about identity being best described by as something that individuals “do” rather than something that they “have”, as a process rather than as a property (Jenkins 2008).

Hence, these young people “do” identities through everyday encounters, which usually are negotiable and changeable. As noted by Goffman, identities are multi-faceted, evolving, flexible, responsive to circumstances, and reliant on contact with others (Goffman 1969). Their identity is guided by both internal and external factors. The internal factors are set of meanings applied to the self in a social role. They are formed by internal process of personal values as well as expectations associated with their roles in the group memberships. This can be illustrated by their assumed as well as expected roles in the above-mentioned social event. In their attempt to be seen as young, vibrant and obedient members of the social group, those youngsters can be seen carrying and serving foods and drinks to their adult compatriots.

The external factors are usually the opinions and perspectives on them due to their status. They are more exemplified by their constant labeling themselves as being an “Eritrean refugee” rather than simply as a person, which can be associated with the process of othering. This feeling of being other is then used to create a sense of belonging to a particular group (in this case the Eritrean community around them) due to their similarity to them. Hence, they seek opportunities to celebrate aspects of their shared identity all the while attracting external validation from others.

Furthermore, this othering sentiment is constantly echoed during these social events by adult Eritreans when they say, “we Eritreans need to stick together and lookout for each other”. The adults openly encourage the youngsters to participate during those services, as they are seen a perfect opportunity in transmitting the Eritrean ways and traditions. It was also evident during my fieldwork that these youngsters place very high premium on cultural values, which they regard as an essential factor for establishing of themselves as Eritreans and creating a sense of belongings to their immediate community. Thus, their purposeful and active participation in the Eritrean celebrations in the community are aimed at learning the traditions and habits that may constitute to their shared identity i.e. their Eritrean-ness.

# CHAPTER FOUR: ADAPTATION THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

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## **Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I have tried to shed light on how these youngsters interact with their adult compatriots. Taking a monthly Tsebel event among the Eritreans in Fjord as a case study, I tried how participation in such affects their day-to-day interaction with their neighboring countrymen. In addition, I argued that their participation contributes both to their social capital and the formation/reaffirmation of their social identity that is their “Eritrean-ness”. In order to avoid only relating these youngsters in the paradigms of migration, I tried also to look at their adaptation in Norway through youth studies.

Obviously, their Eritrean background and their links to an Eritrean diaspora are important contexts, but my aim was also to look at this group of young Eritreans as they adapt to the youth culture in the places they live. To do this, examining their interaction with and their relationship to the Norwegian youth and other youth migrants from other countries becomes a significant element. In this chapter, I discuss this peer interaction, through the examination of these young people’s activity across two social media platforms or applications on their mobile phones namely Facebook and Snapchat.

## **The youth and their mobile phones**

Since its initiation, the Internet have been an omnipresent in our daily lives. We use it in search of information, to read and communicate others using different applications and platforms. Internet is used also as a platform for discussions, reflections, protest, and so on. It is also a popular means of communications, sharing ideas, images, and digital data for the youth. And according to technological deterministic view, the internet is an innovative force that has profound influence on children and youth. Mobile phones, as gateway to the internet, are used by these youth not only to stay in touch with their relatives back home, but also to generate new patterns of expression, communication, and motivation.

Mobile phones are imperative in most contemporary young people. They play a huge role in the day-to-day proceedings, as they function as communication devices, an aesthetic objects and icons of culture. Mobile phones have become central to a wide range of activities, transforming friendship, work, media and the communications. For these young people, mobile phones carry significant social and cultural meanings. The role of mobile phones intersects with

a number of significant features of youth culture, including family relationships, peer culture and issues of self and group identity.

The role of mobile phones in youth life is quite imperative as it is an outlet for expression and a place of comfort. With the advances in technology the youth have now become producers and consumers of media, and the mobile phone has become an integral tool for these modern tech savvy younger generations. Similarly, mobile phones play such a vital role in the day-to-day proceedings of these Eritrean youth. Mobile phones (with different applications and Medias) has empowered these youngsters in diverse virtual social spaces. As a vital tool, the internet holds a strong standing position on these Eritreans.

Using their mobile phones, these youngsters were enabled to create an alternate online persona that enables them to express themselves in ways they may not be able to do so otherwise. This is especially important for these adolescents, who often struggle to fit in (or form an individual identity) and are constantly trying to negotiate their existence in a new and different environment. These virtual spaces on the internet have a place for everyone, white, black brown, purple, gay, straight, transgendered etc., whereas the physical walls of high school or a home and neighborhood often may do not. As a result, these youth are creating new intimate social relationships via their phones and the internet, because people on the internet can do and be who they really are. One example among these Eritrean youth is their daily interactions using Social Medias such as Facebook, Snapchat, and Viber.

Today these kinds of Social Medias play an important role in young people's new responsibility to construct an explicit project of the self especially because they are expected to increasingly participate in explicit discourses of identity and identity construction (Lievrouw and Livingstone 2002)). For example, according to Couldry Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp mark the emerging requirement in everyday life to have a public presence beyond one's bodily presence, to construct an objectification of oneself (Couldry 2012).

### **Why Facebook and Snapchat**

When I first began my fieldwork among the youngsters I was intrigued by these young peoples' apparent close attachment to their mobile phones. When we met, they would usually be glued to the screens of their phones doodling something on different applications. It became apparent to me that their mobile phones are much more than communicative tools that are solely used to stay in touch with their relatives and acquaintances. Mobile phones offer these youngsters to a virtual arenas and virtual relationships that are important in how the actors (young people) adapt their new social contexts. In order to test this presupposition, I chose two social media platforms (Facebook and Snapchat) to conduct my study.

Facebook and Snapchat are two of the most popular social media platforms among the youth. Both platforms have a popular status among the youth because they cater the interests of the youth. These social media platforms have an increasing importance in the daily lives of the youngsters, because they are the places where they showcase their living experiences. They are gaining more and more importance in today's youth and have a deeper impact on the daily interactions of these youngsters.

Across their similar yet different individual attributes, these two applications enable individuals to present themselves to others and determine the way they would like to be perceived by others. In addition to helping their users to connect, they offer people to participate in activities they wish. Thus, it was of paramount importance for me to study the young people across these two digital platforms, where they have established personal profiles that represent themselves and where they are in interaction with others which involved them into creating virtual social communities. Although these social communities are specified as virtual the context where they take place and the communications, they are engaged in with others are in real time.

## **Facebook**

Facebook is a social media platform founded by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004. The site connects people with friends, family, acquaintances, and businesses from all over the world and enables them to post, share, and engage with a variety of content such as photos and status updates. The platform currently boasts around 1.49 billion active users<sup>12</sup>. Facebook is one of the most popular social media applications among the youngsters. Facebook allows people to connect with friends, family members, and acquaintances and gives people the opportunity to post, share contents such as photos, and status updates. Facebook has features, which makes it easy for everyone to interact with others. Those interactions are done through posting or sharing status on their profile walls. They interact with others also through commenting and responding to posts by others. The social media application also offers my story (daily story) option, it is an option where one can post a status update (may it be a text, photo, web site address or video) for twenty-four hours. An instant messaging apparatus associated with the profile also enables its users to send and receive private text and audio-visual materials.

During my fieldwork, I noticed that these youngsters spent a considerable amount of time daily in accessing Facebook. Usually, the time they spent on the site depends on the amount of free time they have. According to them, when they are active on Facebook, it is usually to kill time

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<sup>12</sup> <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/social-media-terms>

especially when they have nothing to do, and sometimes they use it to play built in mini games with other 'friends'<sup>13</sup>, who happen to be online.

Facebook has features which makes it very easy for everyone to interact with other users. On Facebook, interactions are done through posting status updates, commenting and responding to other posts. According to my informants, when they login to Facebook, they check their messages and their notifications (information about updates by their contacts). They do this to keep up with their friends and know what their friends are doing or done. The update reports on their notification feeds reveal everything about their friends. They know more about latest news and they learn more about the person through these updates.

Using the instant messaging application (which is associated with their Facebook profile) that is installed on their phones features they stay in contact with their families and relatives back home and with other young refugees whom they met during their flight. Moreover, as Facebook offers a group interaction, these youngsters use Facebook's group messaging to communicate with their classmates and schoolteachers. They often use this apparatus to stay in touch and be updated about their schools.

According to Selam, Facebook lets you find long lost friends, since it requires people to fill in their full name when they sign up, people tend to provide their real names and where they came from. Even if they use nick names or made up names it is quite easy to find them. Because, you and them will have shared school names or many mutual friend lists. These youngsters use Facebook, to search and befriend with long lost or childhood acquaintances and re-establish connections. This reconnection with old friends via Facebook opens an alternative method of communicating and interacting about their lives. Instead of calling or emailing their friends, they send short messages.

### **What they Post**

One day while discussing the roles of Facebook and Snapchats on their daily lives the youngsters revealed that the materials they post and share on the two social media platforms are different. When I asked about their preferences and the material they post on the two platforms, the youngsters admitted that; on Facebook what they share is probably good and a bit safe. According to them, everyone who follows you not necessarily your friend can see and comment on what you share, thus one needs to be careful. On the other hand, some materials shared only on Snapchat (like ugly faces, double chins intimate photos and poems) but not on

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<sup>13</sup> When they say their friends, it does not necessarily mean their actual close friends. The term is loosely used to refer all the people and acquaintances who are on their Facebook list.



Facebook. Because, they are meant for one's close friend or friends or somebody who knows you well. Here in this section, the argument is that the types and contents of materials shared on their Facebook accounts are different from that of Snapchat because of their viewers and concern for privacy. Unlike in Snapchat where provocative materials are shared, on Facebook these youngsters share more polished and meaningful materials.

They share and upload materials that are deeply intertwined with their attempts in resolving their personal and social disturbances due to changed cultural values, familial relationships and school dynamics. For example, as part of their attempt to inclusion and building a sense belonging, these youngsters post materials related to their displacement and their emotional status as a consequence. They frequently upload pictures of places in their home regions, quotes, poems and audiovisual media products that represent their longings caused by their situations, and their desire to closeness with their near relatives and childhood friends.

Once Selam shared a scanned photo of her family accompanied by a lyric from a song by the late Abraham Afwerki<sup>14</sup>. The song titled my family narrates how the singer has missed his family. He describes how he misses each and every member of his family from his parents to his younger siblings.

When I asked her about it, she said "I'm not happy. I don't know how my family are and I don't have brothers and sisters near me here. Believe me, I am always thinking about my own family but especially I miss my mother. I do not know what to do. So, I shared this quote with my family picture in it, as it explains my yearning and longing for my family."

Like Selam, Omer also shared a song lyric. His post was about a song titled Zemen (ዘመን) roughly meaning time accompanied with its full lyrics and photo of Yemane Ghebremichael (Baria)<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Abraham Afwerki (1966 - 2006) was a famous Eritrean singer and song writer. He is hugely admired and popular among the youth because of his love inspired songs.

<sup>15</sup> Yemane Ghebremichael (1949 – 1997) was another famous Eritrean singer and song writer, famously known by his nickname Baria (meaning Slave), Yemane is a beloved Eritrean artist who sang about Eritrea and the Eritrean peoples' struggle.



Zemen has changed, I have become a migrant  
 Who lives uneasy with his head held down  
 One who can't do what he wishes,  
 An emotional person, who hurts all the time  
 I am going to ask you Zemen, why hurt me  
 Answer me Zemen, why can't have love and pride  
 .....

Fig.1 Yemane Baria with lyric to his song Zemen.

These and other similar materials are shared on the Facebook accounts of the youngsters to garner reactions from their friends and acquaintances. The viewers of the posts are expected to react to these posts either by liking it or commenting on it. When commented upon the youngsters respond to the comments and engage in communications with the commentators. These communications generally lead the adolescents to keep in touch with their friends and also to obtain an update about situations back home.

In attempt of pledging sorority or fraternity with other Eritreans and especially the Eritrean diaspora, these youngsters also share plea-information bearing posts. These posts are usually about lost persons and about the hardships of follow migrants. They share also post with regard to Eritrean hardships in Libya and commemoration posts about the tragedy of Lampedusa<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> On 03/10/2013 a boat carrying illegal immigrant capsized on the coast of Lampedusa, Italy and three hundred and sixty-nine Eritreans died as a result. For further report of the tragedy follow this link <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-24380247>



Fig.2 on the left “we have not forgotten you and we will never forget you. 03/10/2013 Lampedusa. A black day that took the lives of 369 Eritreans”. On the right, “stop killing Eritreans in Libya”<sup>17</sup>.

The plea posts begin with a request to share them further with friends and contacts. If they are about a missing person, they usually contain information about the missing person such as who he or she is, where he/she is from and when and where they were last seen or heard from. Similarly, they share regularly also a plea about their fellow Eritreans who are suffering due to their migrant processes either in refugee camps or in detaining centers. The above being figure to the right being one example of such posts.

Moreover, the young people use the digital tagging to include specific peoples to an issue or they use it to reflect whom the context is intended to. This kind of tagging is more common when the youngsters express their political views or when they want to join large variety of groups. When they share and defend a political view on Facebook, they are getting together

<sup>17</sup> A plea shared by many eritreans in solidarity to the eritreans currently in Libya hoping to cross to Europe. These people are suffering because of the civil unrest and clashes among the several military groups in Libya. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/01/slavery-libya-life-container-180121084314393.html>

with people defending the same view. In other words, while their actions are on virtual worlds, but they are affected by real life events. One such example being their involvement in the tagging and denouncing the human and political situations in Eritrea. Like thousands of Eritreans around the globe, the youngsters have recently posted and shared audio-videos, on their Facebook pages accompanied by the hashtag # ይህን (enough in Tigrigna)<sup>18</sup>.

## **Snapchat**

Snapchat is a valuable and beloved application for these young people. It is a social application that allows users to send and receive time-sensitive photos and videos known as "snaps," which are hidden from the recipients once the time limit expires (images and videos still remain on the Snapchat server). Users can add text and drawings to their snaps and control the list of recipients in which they send them to. Moreover, a Snapchat has a my story attribute similar to that of Facebook, it is a string of Snaps lasts for 24 hours. Users can create stories to be shared with all Snapchatters or just a customized group of recipients. Unlike Facebook, Snapchat is a social media mobile application that lets users send and receive time-sensitive photos and videos, which expire upon viewing. On Snapchat, all contents are short-lived with strict limitations on copying and sharing. Moreover, most contents are privately sent, and no content can be copied or shared without the knowledge of the owner. Snapchat offers the user to share a snap (a photo or a video) with a list of "friends" or acquaintances. The sender stipulates the life span of these snaps between one and ten seconds. The receiver/observer can take copies of the shared material, but the applications informs the sender of the snap that a copy has been made by the receiver.

While discussing social media in general and their preference in these two social media platforms in particular, my informants shared their belief that snapchat is more for the young (among their peers) while their Facebook accounts are used mainly to communicate with family and friends back home. Even though, the usually slow and unstable internet access in Eritrea may have influenced their preferences, these youth stressed that their preference in snapchat comes from that it being very popular among their peers. The applications time sensitive messaging and its instant deleting features played also a key role in for their preference of the application.

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<sup>18</sup> This political campaign under the hashtag enough was inspired by the viral ice bucket challenge. The campaign was aimed to show the Eritrean diaspora's solidarity to force change in the political system of Eritrea. For further reading, read the following reportage on BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-48034365>

The materials they share on Snapchat are usually targeted to their immediate friends and peers. Unlike in Facebook, where the materials they share are usually reserved or “toned down” posts, in Snapchat these youngsters do not feel inhibited about what they share. When I asked them why they share and communicate freely on the app? Selam revealed that “since the contents disappear quickly and I can control who sees it, I can share what I want without fearing it might be distributed elsewhere”

But what happens when someone takes a copy? I asked.

Selam: - if it is one of my close friends its ok. However, if it is another person, I usually confront them either by messaging or calling them directly. And I ask them to delete it immediately.

### **Their Snaps**

These young peoples’ lives are heavily connected with their social media activities and their online interactions. Like many youngsters around the globe these young Eritreans share snaps<sup>19</sup> frequently and often on the go. The photos and videos they share give the receiver a glimpse of their everyday interactions, their whereabouts and their adventures. By sharing posts about their whereabouts, adventures and interactions, these youngsters engage in a self-presentation process. Though a series of photos and short videos these youth narrate and interact with their peers. Hence, by actively engaging on snapchat these young people become part of mobile youth culture<sup>20</sup>

Although, the materials they share may vary from each participant to the other, their snaps can be categorized in to three types according to their purposes.

1. Sharing photos and videos to talk about a particular subject. These include photos and videos shared as a support to talking resources. For example, they often share photos/videos of places they have been;

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<sup>19</sup> A term commonly used by the youngsters when referring to every photo and video they shared on snapchat.

<sup>20</sup> As noted by Mariek Vanden Abeele, the concept of mobile youth culture here refers to the distinctive ways in which youths around the world embed the mobile phone in their everyday lives. Mobile practices typically associated with adolescents are for example; Preference of mobile messaging and the use of mobile phones for self-presentation(Vanden Abeele 2016).



Fig.3 photo showing where they have been: in this case a morning visit to a wood workshop

When they share snaps like these, they intend to focus on the content and visual qualities of their snaps. While much of the content may seem inconsequential in terms of content it is the act of sending the message, which helps sustain the relationship.

2. They share also about their emotional states, when they feel lonely or they are in need of attention. The snaps are usually accompanied by emoji<sup>21</sup>. Here the snaps are used to relay their emotional status and as communication starters. The focus is usually on the emoji or texts if they have written on the snaps or the display, not the quality of the background photo or video.

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<sup>21</sup> An emoji is a visual representation of an emotion, object or symbol, which is typical in most of the social media such as Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram.



Fig. 4 here they shared to show they are feeling sad.

3. They share also seemingly meaningless snaps accompanied by random texts or questionnaires. Like how much do you like (love) me in a scale on to ten. Or ask me anything about my private life, I am going to answer it I promise. These kind of snaps are shared in their own terms when the market is slow<sup>22</sup>. In addition, the viewer is expected to comment and respond in accordance. While it may seem as a meaningless exchange of texts, they are used to maintain an already existing relationships. Beneath the back and forth responses lies an understanding that indicates to confirm their relationship.

Above all, they share also snaps with irrelevant objects for the sake of connectivity and self-esteem. For example, they may share jokes, stories, memes<sup>23</sup> or sometimes just plain text messages among their close friends not necessarily for their content but for the act of exchanging itself. This kind of interaction is solely used to maintain snap sending streaks<sup>24</sup>. These streaks represent the youngsters need for assurances and acceptability among their peers. When they reach a certain number, these streaks are proudly shared in their my-stories for others to see.

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<sup>22</sup> Correlating it to actual market to describe that they have not engaged with anyone as they had hoped.

<sup>23</sup> Meme on the internet is used to describe a thought, idea, joke, or concept that is widely shared online. It is typically an image with text above and below it, but can also come in video and link form.

<sup>24</sup> Streak is a record of how many days in a row two users have Snapped (not chatted) each other. The fire emoji and a number, which indicates how long that streak has been going on, denote it. If an hourglass emoji appears next to the fire emoji, it means that the streak will expire unless both users Snap each other soon

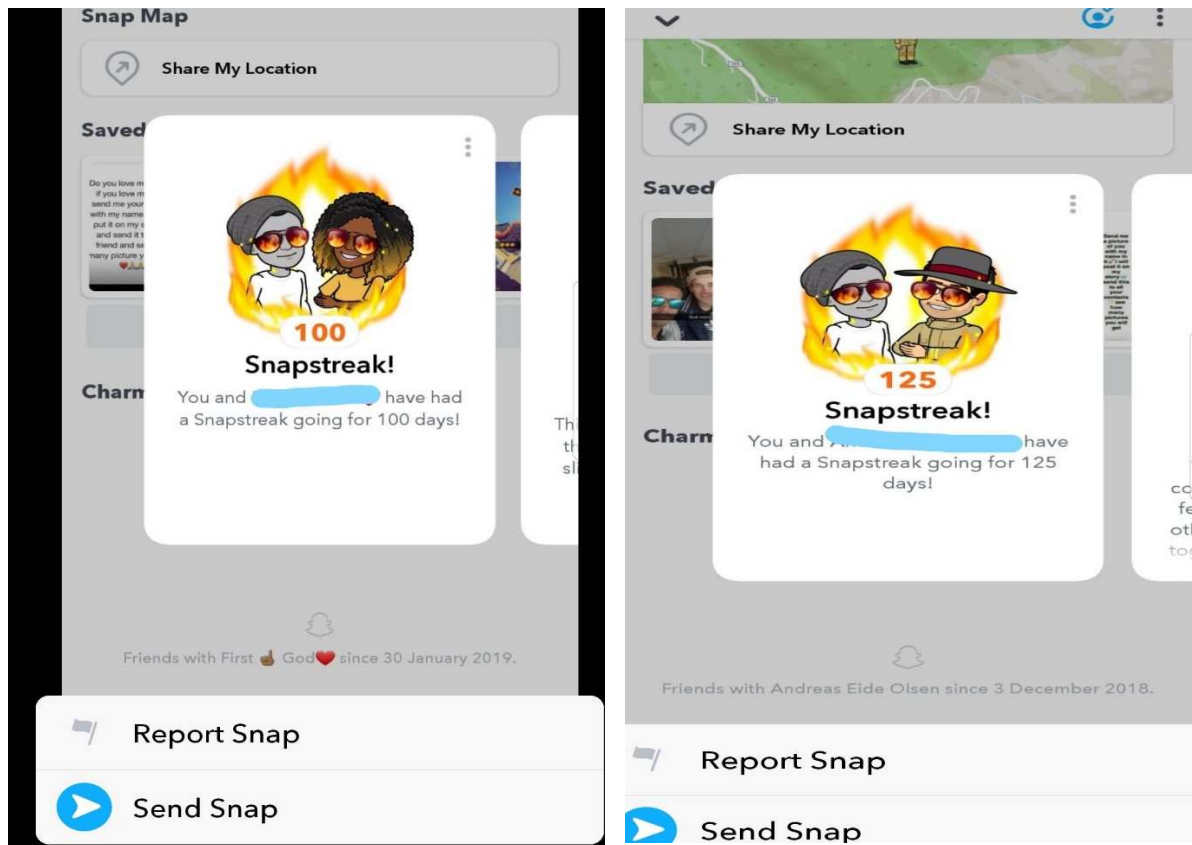


Fig.5 two screen shots of streak achievements posted by the youngsters

They continually try to maintain these streaks as they seek validation and encouragement from their peers. This reflects the competitive environment these youngsters live in, because having a larger audience and maintaining uninterrupted streaks is associated with their notion of being accepted by their peers. It is also directly related to their social capital.

As I have mentioned it in the previous chapter, social capital is an approach to examining the benefits produced through individuals' social networks (Coleman 1988; Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993; Siisiäinen 2000). Of particular interest in this discussion are the 'network' elements of Putnam's analysis of social capital that is the "linking" of contacts to formal structures and organizations as well as the "bonding" of social life. Therefore, their social capital can be described as the aggregated resources and benefits deeply rooted in their relationships with their peers, such as emotional support in the form of bonding and strong ties with their 'friends', the popularity and tangible resources that allows them to new perspectives and information.

For example, these youngsters use their 'gained' acceptance into promoting others by sharing snaps that display a photo to their 'loyal' followers to add other individuals. These kinds of photos are usually accompanied by the snapchat address of the person to be added.



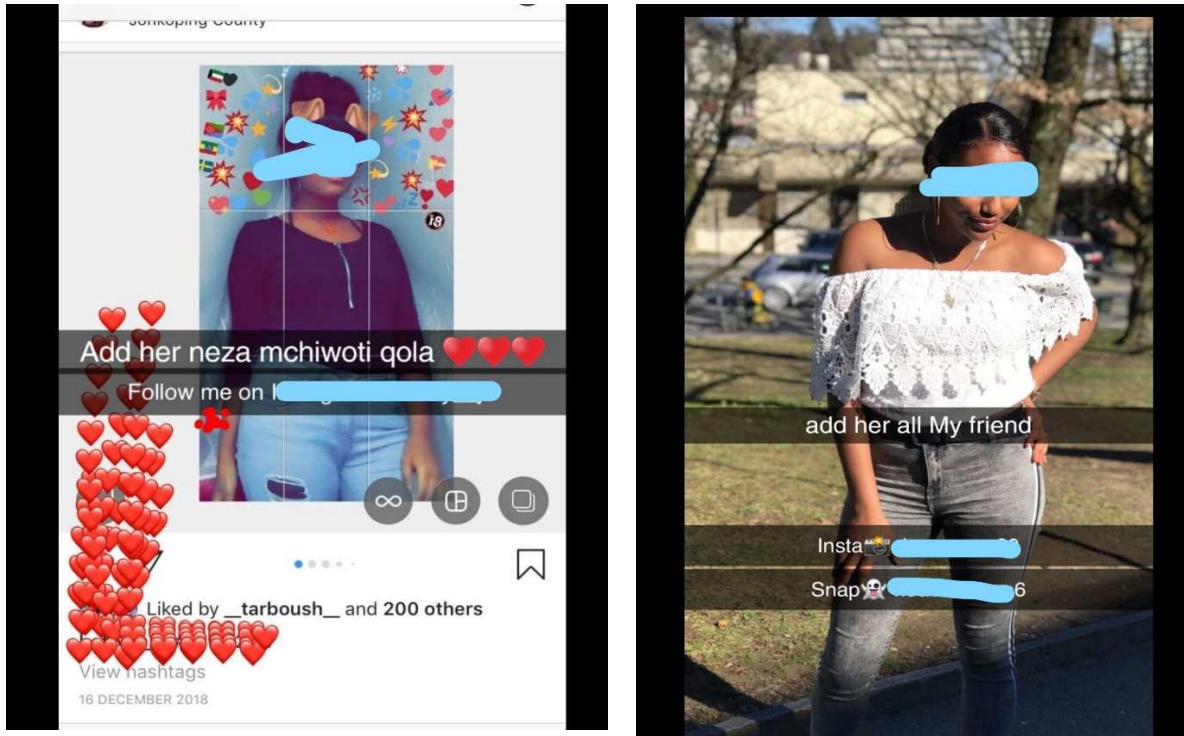


Fig. 6 left – “add this beautiful baby” to the right – “add her all my friends”

Therefore, it is easy to conclude that participation on these social media is a critical element for these young people, when they want to stay socially connected with their peers. By engaging in these popular social media, these youths were able to develop and maintain friendship with peers. While these young people may see one another at schools, or other public driven activities, they use social media to keep in touch with their friends and peers when getting together is not possible. Conversations and interactions that begin in the real world do not end when they are separated, rather they merely continue on the virtual worlds of social media. Hence, it can be argued that these two popular social medias and their instant messaging platforms have allowed these youngsters to interact in one-to- one or small groups. Even though, their mobile phones are loaded with a lot of applications for several purposes, these youngsters use their mobile phones predominantly to engage in friendship-driven interactions and as digital spaces where these youth use it to hang out with their peers.

### **Mediating the self through Facebook and Snapchat**

In addition to being a significant part of young people’s daily lives and relationships, Facebook and Snapchat are heavily connected with their self-presentation and the construction of their identity. These applications hold a very important value for these young people, they reinforces their individual and group identities. They use their social media accounts to express their

individuality alongside forms of peer based group identifications. These two social media platforms hold significant symbolic values for these youngsters in reinforcing their individual and group identities. They use them to express their individualities together with forms of peer identification. This is primarily facilitated through the expressive dimensions of these social media, both in terms of their use in emotional interactions and the manner in which they are used. These applications play an important role for the adolescent during their development of sense of belonging and they are used in gaining awareness about who they are and where they belong among their mainstream peers. In this section, I am going to discuss, how these two social media contribute to their self-representation online and offline.

Recently there has been considerable attention in public discourses about the role of technology on today's globalized world. One arena that has received extensive attention is the impact of social media in youth identifications. Young generation's identity construction today is aligned with the new perceived freedom of expression and communications. As Buckingham noted it identity formations for youths through social media has been extensively researched as youths have been immersed in modern technology from a young age(Buckingham 2008). By focusing on identity, we are required to pay close attention to the diverse ways in which media and technologies are used in everyday life and their consequences both for individuals and for social groups and this entails to viewing young people as significant actors.

However, much of the focus on self-expression and claim to a group or community stems from Erving Goffman's "dramaturgical analysis". Goffman in his book the presentations of the self in everyday life, extensively discusses that personal interaction is based on performance and relationship between actor and audience where in the agreed upon definition of the situation. He argues that when individuals interact with others, they are attempting to guide and create a certain image in which other persons see them and attains knowledge about them (Goffman 1990). While the concept about the self-being a representation of a role rather than an innate characteristic put by Goffman was meant for in-person interactions, this idea of self-representation can be also used to understand interactions on social media. For example, these youngsters often share selfies<sup>25</sup> and spend many hours viewing similar posts of others, usually their peers. While comparing themselves to others, they comment and share also their reactions with their mainstream peers. Thus, engaging in interactions with their viewers or audience. Common to this idea of self-representation during interactions in the social medial is the

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<sup>25</sup> A selfie is a self-portrait that is typically taken using the reverse camera screen on a smartphone or by using a selfie stick (a pole that attaches to your camera). Selfies are also commonly shared on social media networks like Instagram, Twitter, accompanied by the hashtag #selfie.

creation of the self with the emphasis on creating a desired self. Let us take these two examples below and the response of Mussie (one of my informants) with regard to his post; the first is a photo of Selam. It is a screen shot of Selam’s shared photo after she removed her denture regulating chains and a funny response she got from one of her friends. The second is a photo shared by Mussie (this snap was shared in April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018) a Friday evening meal captioned as have a nice weekend in Norwegian.



Fig.7 Selam’s photos; left “my innocent teeth, which have been under arrest without any crime, have been set free”. Right “they crossed the border to the front of your mouth” (implying they deserve to be chained, her response “oh.... Really”



Fig. 8 Mussie’s meal

Even though, Mussie claims to be an orthodox Christian and a churchgoer, what he shared on this particular Friday was against his beliefs. The snap displays a traditionally cooked chicken with some biscuits and beer. The month of April falls in the middle of the fasting season for Eritrean orthodox believers, thus making his snap was somewhat interesting. As followers of the church are expected to abstain from meat, dairy products, chicken, and eggs during the fasting

season. I asked him why he shared it on snapchat and not on Facebook. “Wow... its TSom (fasting time). What will my family and friends on Facebook say to me? I do not want to be judged by them. That is why I shared it only on Snapchat.”

What about your Snapchat friends though? I chimed in.

Mussie: - nah...they are my buddies (jema natey yom<sup>26</sup>). They understand it and its ok with them.

Me: - Why do use Norwegian language and not English or Tigrigna?

Mussie: - You know my friend (sahbey<sup>27</sup>), I shared it to you, my Norwegian buddies and some Eritreans who live in Norway. So, the language is not a problem they can understand it.

Here it is important to underscore Goffman’s insistence not only on the performative aspects of identity formation but also his emphasis on individual agency. As we can see it from these two examples, the youth shared materials that paint them in what they thought are a good looking (Selam’s snap) and fun loving (Mussie’s snap) narrations of themselves. While doing so, they are becoming the actors in the interaction by carefully choosing the content to be shared. And through these social media activities, the youngsters become individual unit of a larger peer-influenced cultural environment (the audience). They use positive feedback they get from this kind of selective self-representation to gain acceptance among their peers and make new friends.

When asked if social media use helped the youngsters make Norwegian and non-Norwegian friends, their responses were almost the same. They all agreed that through the social medias especially Snapchat, they have begun interacting with their mainstream peers and become friends with them. For example, Mussie states that he has made a lot Norwegian friends with whom he interacts with daily. According to him they exchange snaps every time and now that they have become buddies whom hangout often at the “corner- house”.<sup>28</sup> Online and offline interactions are interconnected for these youth, characteristics that were formerly exclusive to offline interactions, are now typical for online interactions. These youth use their social media to convey friendliness, build intimacy or express strong emotions.

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<sup>26</sup> Jema derived from Arabic word for friend or ones’ close associates is commonly used by young Eritreans to indicate one’s friends.

<sup>27</sup> Another word derived from Arabic language, meaning one’s followers.

<sup>28</sup> Corner-house- it is not the actual name of the place. It is a youth recreational center in Fjord, where youngsters above the age of thirteen hangout most of the time. The place is open Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday. Organized and run by the municipality, the local offers assorted board games, music, dance, video gaming, and discotheque.

After following and carefully studying the youngsters' activities in these two social media, I came to realize that these youngsters "perform" their identities differently across these two mediums. It is evident that these youth are aware of their target audiences in each of the two media and carry out what Goffman described as "impression management" (Goffman 1990). The materials they share on these two social media, though different in content, reveal how these youngsters want to be perceived via the messages they communicate. In response to the community or environment they are attempting to be part of, these youth produce pieces of information consistent with the profile of their targeted group or community.

In hope of sustaining a sense of belonging (given that a sense of belonging represents the extent to which one feels that one is a part of one or more social groups) to their 'historical consciousness' and becoming part of the Eritrean diaspora, these youngsters are known to use Facebook to connect and reestablish interactions with their childhood friends. Their online activities on Facebook reflects their offline' negotiations processes to be accepted among their Eritrean counterparts. That is why their Facebook accounts are dominated by images of their childhood playgrounds, famous Eritrean landmarks, photos of their families and relatives. Their conversations on the instant messaging also are a testimony to their conversations and interactions with their families and childhood friends.

As noted by Donath and Boyd, the main point of social networking sites is to help people make new connections (Donath and Boyd 2004). Dwyer also holds similar views and argues that the ability to develop new relationships seems to be a stronger feature of social networking sites (Dwyer 2007). In line with this thinking, I argue that Snapchat as a social interaction media has given the youngsters an opportunity to interact and develop relationships with their Norwegian counterparts. This is due to the fact that, the youngsters on Snapchat they relish a social media platform that on one hand that lets them present an image of themselves, including selfies and audio-visual representations of their interests, beliefs and values among their peers. On the other hand, partly due to the attributes of the media on Snapchat and its popularity among mainstream adolescents, these youngsters interact their intimacies and emotions via the application. The attributes being that the material produced and shared by Snapchat is ephemeral (short-lived). Moreover, what the young share on Snapchat, like the above-described two snaps, facilitates their attempts to be accepted by their mainstream peers. In order to sustain an image of cool, fun loving and carefree individuals who likes to hangout all the time, they are known to curate and share photos and videos of themselves having 'fun' times. Like the following two examples.

1. The bottles of beer or wine they presumably drank or going to drink.



Fig. 9 left – “my friend Areqi<sup>29</sup>, after four year. I missed areqi so much”. Right -several empty beer cans  
 2. Photos of themselves accompanied by texts that indicate they are7have been outside with friends



Fig.10-“today, enjoying coffee with friends”

<sup>29</sup> Areqi- Eritrean equivalent of Vodka.

## CHAPTER FIVE: FOOTBALL BUDDIES

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### Introduction

Friendship in one form or another has been in discussion across the social sciences. It is a notion with long literary history. The interest in the subject matter varies depending on the discipline; psychologists have always been interested in examining friendship as part of personal relationships, while sociological perspectives on friendship tended to focus on it in relation to social and cultural conditions. At the same time, most anthropological studies on friendship had been to frame itself in relation to kinship. It is may be due to the fact that kinship has a bigger representation in anthropological literatures, but as argued by Bell and Coleman, the power of kinship cannot be denied as an idiom through which we express the power of social relations that are considered to have binding qualities(Bell and Coleman 1999). At the same time, they warn us also that while there can be relationship between friendship and kinship, we must not reduce friendship to kinship. Similarly, Allan also agrees with the notion that kinship and friendship may be based on different principles. However, he also argues questions the need to treat them as discrete and separate' (Allan 1996).

Contrary to kinship, many societies see friendship as one of the lesser established forms of social relationships. In its simplest forms, friendship can be viewed as being an amicable relationship between two or more individuals. Many scholars view it as a relationship that is voluntarily achieved rather than an ascribed relationship (Allan 1998; Paine 1969). Anthropologists also tend to consider how this particular kind of relationship figures into our understanding of social life and how already existing social structures might have an effect on this kind of relationships. In the introduction of their book, the anthropology of friendship, editors Bell and Coleman admit that the consideration of the role of friendship in social life serves not least as a means to understand kinship but also as a means for anthropology to understand other forms of social ties (Bell and Coleman 1999).

Interestingly, while the paradigms of friendship has been interdisciplinary from its origin, yet the lack of clear definition of the idea has posed a challenge to the study of it with in the field of anthropology. The vast majority of anthropological studies on the subject matter fail to define the term friendship. Desai and Killick claim that the study of friendship as being 'haunted' by the problem of definition. They assert that questions about 'who (or what) are friends?' are commonly refrained in much of sociological and anthropological discussions (Desai and Killick 2010). The challenges, in defining the boundaries of friendship in comparison to other interpersonal relationships and to identify features for a universal categorization that can be

applied in real situations, were also noted by Paine (Paine 1969), Carrier in (Bell and Coleman 1999) and Aguilar in (Bell and Coleman 1999). Moreover, the above mentioned problem of defining the term is further compounded when we include the appliances of friendship in social networking media (especially Facebook and Snapchat). Not only friendship is the name given to the social interaction between users of these social media, the individual subjects are also addressed and positioned as friends.

Therefore, instead of dissecting the category friendship itself or the theoretical discussions that underline friendship, in this chapter I am going to focus on a type of friendship my informants engage in. Their friendship in its essence is an unofficial social construction between persons (as noted by (Bell and Coleman 1999) and that involves mutual acknowledgement and shared understanding that are not based on kinship. The objective of this chapter is thus to consider the nature (by which those friendships are formed through shared experiences), the utilization of friendship among my informants. The manner by which they meet and the frequency of their interactions were subjected to a range of complex social constraints which the individuals have no or little control over them, such constraints include the amount of free time they had depending on their school or work obligations.

### **Friendship in context**

Usually friendship is understood to be personal and intentional relationship and there is also the tendency by social scientists in viewing friendship as simply as a matter of individual choice. Accordingly, friends exercise agency and individuals have discretion. Even so, friendship cannot be seen separately from the organization of social life. Allan and Adams argue that friendship does not arise haphazardly, nor are they organized in a random way. Instead, they are embedded in social contexts that frame their performance (Adams et al. 1998). They identified different levels at which context influences patterns of friendship: the personal, the network level, the community level and the societal level. Here in this section I will be drawing to attention to the context, which includes the elements that are external to the development, maintenance and dissolution of friendship, but are still surrounding the friendship.

According to Adams and Allan, the first level should be describing the aspects of the personal environment of the individuals who are friends, which can involve features like economic circumstances, free time preferences and work commitments, which can either create or limit opportunities for sociability with others and assist with friendship (Adams et al. 1998). Therefore, in line with the argument put forward by Allan and Adams, I will be discussing the



kind of friendship my informants were able to create an aura of friendship due to their involvement in FPL<sup>30</sup>, weekly football games and watching Premier League matches on the weekends.

### **The setting**

Almost every weekend, my informants play football with other youngsters including Norwegians, Somalians, Sudanese, and Syrians. Most of the participants go to the same high school or are acquaintances to the others. These football games, first began as a recreational events organized by the municipality for newcomers, but since the youngsters have begun to arrange football matches among themselves. These matches are played in the evening hours usually from 8:00 to 10:30. Depending on the weather, they play either on the outside football field or inside football or handball halls (depending on the availability). The participants have created a Facebook group where they use it to exchange information with regard to their football matches.

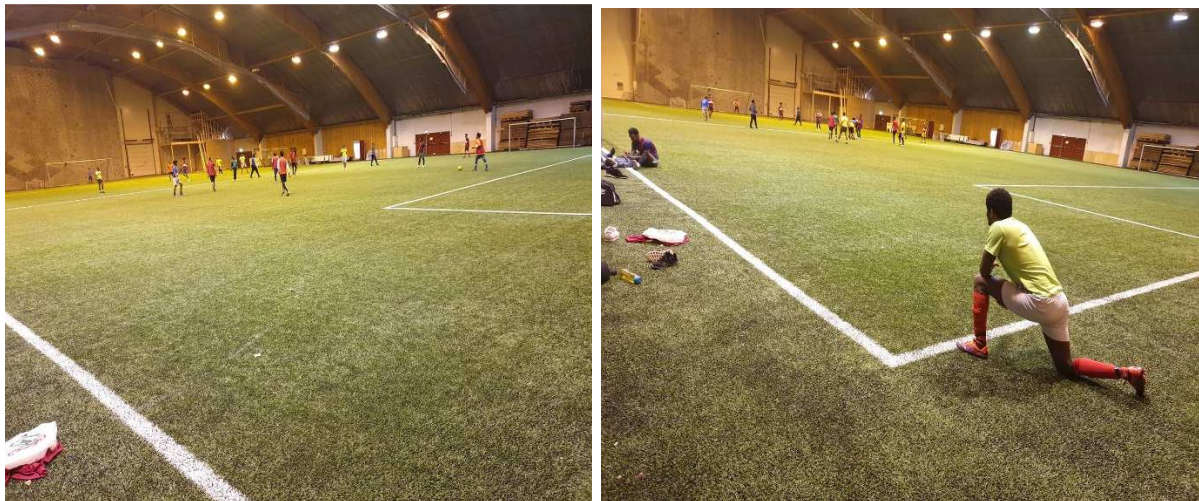


Fig. 11 the youngsters playing football

The football began as a leisurely activity where the youngsters were able to pass the time, but lately has become very competitive and institutionalized. Every match day begins with selecting and forming of two or three teams, depending on the availability of personnel. Once everybody

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<sup>30</sup> FPL – (Fantasy premier League) - is a game in which participants assemble an imaginary team of real life footballers and score points based on those players' actual statistical performance or their perceived contribution on the field of play. Usually players are selected from one specific division in a particular country in this case from the English Premier League. For much information about the game and how it is played, refer to the official site at <https://fantasy.premierleague.com/>.

is assigned to his or her respective teams, they place a wager as extra incentive and maintain competitiveness. The amount is usually between twenty to fifty kroner each. Even though, the rule is that the winning team takes all the money, in reality the winnings money is used to buy pizza and refreshments. If three teams are playing, together they decide which team should wait and play with the winner of the other two, usually using rock, paper, and scissors. Being the third team is usually considered the worst option due to the reduced amount of game time. While playing or waiting on the sidelines, it is common for the youngsters to engage humorous activities, every bad tackle is jeered and meg<sup>31</sup> are usually followed by cheers and teasing from other players. After the games, the youngsters usually go to pizzeria in downtown. While at those pizzerias, they engage in discussions about the game, and their performances. At the same time, they plan also where to watch Premier League matches.

Sport bars at the heart of the city are their usual preferred destinations. At the bars, while drinking coffee, coca cola or beer, they watch premier league matches. Watching the matches at the big screen while sipping drinks is one of their preferred activities during the weekends. According to Mussie, “watching the games (Premier league or Champions league) with my friends is much more interesting than watching it alone at home”. These youngsters prefer to watch the games in the company of others because it creates an interactive environment. The loud atmospheres at the bars, the shouting, the cheering and frustrations all the while sipping drinks, creates a feeling of being in a place of likeminded souls or a place closest to being actually there at the stadium.

At the same time, these youngsters also play/ participate in a fantasy game the fantasy premier league. On the actual FPL website/ application, they have created their own private league and named it dream team. For example, this year’s dream team has twenty-four members including myself. As stated at the official website of the game, the aim of the game is to accumulate as much as possible weekly points depending on the statistical performance or contribution of the actual players during that particular game week. At the end of each season, which ends late May or June depending on the actual Premier league season, the top three with the highest are rewarded<sup>32</sup>. The youngsters also award the top three winners in their private dream team. For example, this year’s prize winnings are not monetary but the official home t-shirt of premier league clubs i.e. each winner will be awarded the official t-shirt of the club he supports. One of the topics for discussions while watching the actual matches at the bars is therefore about their

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<sup>31</sup> A footballing term used to describe when an opponent is able to pass the ball between your legs.

<sup>32</sup> The prizes by the official Premier League can be accessed at <https://fantasy.premierleague.com/prizes>

previous week's results and sharing information about which players they should consider for next game week.

### **The nature of their friendship**

Friendship among young people is very important yet it is also a complex social phenomenon. As I have mentioned it above, defining friendship is not easy because of its diverse implications. As first in the introduction to (Bell and Coleman 1999) puts it, the concept of friendship can vary greatly in intensity, from simple well-wishers to familiar, close, dear and intimate companions and each friend with its own subtle qualities. Taking the complexity of the notion into consideration, I turned to my informant in search of a definition. According to them, friendship is a relationship and being in it or to consider someone as a friend is if you have mutual trust and understanding for each other. For example, if we take Mussie's response to why he posted his meal on Snapchat and if he did fear that they might reveal it to the public (the previous chapter); he responded by saying that "nah...they are my buddies (jema natey yom)". His response, they are my friends, implies that his social media interaction with these followers is based on trust. According to him, because they are his friends, he can rely on them to care about him and be responsive to his needs now and in the future.

One late Saturday, while eating pizza, I asked my informants what friendship means to them. In his response, Omer underlined the need for trust among friends. He said that "friendship is a kind of relationship between people that are very familiar with each other and can express whatever they want without being judged by their friends". Here, we can clearly say that trust within their friendships is associated with the safety of keeping one's activity hidden from others who may judge them negatively.

According to my informants, the bond or connectedness of friendship, in its core has a personal connection that binds them together. The foundation for this connection and trust is found in their shared activities. Sociologist Scott L. Feld, in his paper, the focused organization of social ties, argues that a social context can be seen as a focus around which individuals organize their social relations. According to him, the focus is defined as the social, psychological, legal or physical entity around which joint activities are organized (eg. Workplaces, voluntary organizations, hangouts, families etc.) (Feld 1981). In the case of these youngsters, the focus around which my informants have organized their friendship is their mutual appreciation for premier league and their participation in football.

The weekly activities serve these youngsters a context where they can be interpersonally linked to each other. Similar to many youngsters around the world, their friendship is cultivated through their commitment in shared activities; these activities include playing football regularly, watching and following premier league together, and competing in the FPL. Hence, we can argue that their shared interest in football serves as a facilitator in forming friendship with others. When I asked them, they acknowledged that their shared interests and activities led them to trust and form a close tie with the other players.

As I have mentioned above, when I asked my informants how they define friendship, their answers were very similar and revolved around two themes, sociability and personal disclosure. Here in this section I am going to discuss these two points. During my fieldwork, it was easy to see how much value they place on sociability. It was demonstrated in their enjoyment and frequent participation in the football matches as well as their preference to watch football matches together rather than sit alone in their homes. Regardless of the bonds they share, football was the commonly expressed activity they enjoy the most with each other. In order to spend time and commit to their friendships, these youngsters are always willing to play football with their friends. That is despite being tired after a day's work (as most of them are full-time high school students) they are happy to spend time and be in the company of their friends. Therefore, for my informants playing football and watching football is incorporated in their weekly routines and holds a vital function regarding socialization and interactions with friends.

For them, it is not the act of playing or how good one plays that counts, rather the time one spends on the field that counts. The time they spend together on the field together with the pizza (or coffee time) afterwards are considered as efforts towards maintaining their friendship. During the pizza time and while watching matches on the weekends these youngsters share information and update about the wellbeing of one another. Often while watching football matches together at sport bars and cafeteria, these youngsters demonstrate their closeness and friendliness towards each other through their constant teasing and sharing humor with each other. Usually the activities on the actual match, they happen to be watching together, like live scores, fouls and attempts provide these youngsters a common subject to start conversations and engage in pleasurable social interactions. They engage in playful, expressive, carefree and joking forms of social interactions with each other.

However, as the youngsters support different clubs, I wondered if their club rivalries and their excessive mocking after games might become sources of friction that could lead to strained relationships among each other. Therefore, I consulted Mussie, who is often on the receiving

of such banter<sup>33</sup>, if these constant mocking may become source of friction. He said, “No, no. you got it wrong there. You see, once the football ends, there is no talk of which club you support. The most important thing about these matches is that because of them I am able to meet my friends often. You see, they help us to catch up with one another and share a laugh, the club thing it does not matter”. Instead of friction, these youngsters revel in their friendships and companionship. Their banter or their informal engagement in joking and making fun of each other serves as phatic communication. These constant bantering provides these youngsters an easy way in or as an icebreakers to the often-serious conversations that follows.

Their love for football has provided these youth a common point of reference, a starting point from which their friendships blossom. Nevertheless, though their shared time and experiences serve central to their building of friendly relations that goes beyond the social connections, the youngsters also expressed that they prefer certain people to be their closest friends. According to them, their preferences are based upon other shared experiences, for example their experiences related to their migration. Once I asked Omer, if he is close friend with the Norwegians who play regularly with him. His response was

“It is easier to interact with those who are similar to us. Those who are refugees like us like those who came from Sudan, Somalia, and Syria.”

Why is that I chimed in

“Because sometimes the Norwegians do not understand us like the others do. Like when we want to talk about the Sahara or about sending money back home. Don’t get me wrong they are great guys, but they just don’t understand us like the others”.

As we can see from the above response, these young people also disclose their private lives and feelings during those interactions. These shared personal disclosures are used in strengthening their bonds with one another. Just like in their social media activities, these youth engage in sharing intimate details about their lives and their vulnerabilities to their peers. In doing so, they hope to establish a circle of friends where they can gain emotional support when needed, and to establish their trust and commitment to one another.

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<sup>33</sup> He supports Liverpool Fc, a Premiership club, which until recent (they won Champions League on June 1<sup>st</sup> 2019) had not won any kind of silverware. His friends would constantly call him “looserpool” or “next year is going to be our year” mocking the trophy less sentiment shared by the supporters in England .

For the youngsters, playing football on a weekly basis, watching matches together and competing on FPL, were the principal facilitators for their social interactions, given that individuals who have close contacts are more likely to form close personal relations than those who do not. Hereby, I argue that by engaging and doing things together, like these above-mentioned activities, the youngsters develop friendships. Especially, participating in these joint activities serves the youngsters to gain familiarity, trust and support with one another, all of which are believed to be important values that underline friendship by the youth.

### **The benefits of friendship**

In the previous sections, I have focused my attention on describing and understanding friendship through the eyes of my informants. In doing this, I emphasized also the nature of the friendship those youngsters built was dependent on their football engagements. Their routinely shared activities have helped the youth to build and maintain a social network with other youngsters who share the same interest as them. Moving from the nature of their friendships, in this section I will draw attention to the benefits and utilizations of these friendships. I will focus more in discussing, how the youngsters in order to cope with various contingencies they face use these gained social networks. The part these relationships play in their daily routines and activities.

During my fieldwork, my informants characterized a friend as someone they could have fun with also someone they could ask for help. Someone who you can count on, someone you can confide in and a friend is also someone you depend on when you need something. Their repeated use of the phrase “a friend is someone you can count on or depend on” in their characterization of friendship, implies that there are certain attributes and values behind their friendships. This characterization indicates to the benefits one gets when one is associated in these kind of relationships. The focus here is not so much the rights or obligations that friends have towards one another, rather more on the sort of benefits and services that these youngsters give each other. In a sense, the main idea here is to argue that friendship, among these adolescent goes beyond liking each other or having fun with each other. It is to show that by maintaining such amicable relations these youngsters tend to utilize their social networks for practical support in their daily activities.

### **Sociability and emotional Support**

The most obvious benefits of friendship according to Graham Allan are sociability and companionship that friends provide (Allan 1989). As mentioned above, spending time or recess with their friends is a highly charged sociability affair for these youngsters. Their markers of

friendship, the interactions during and after the football activities support this argumentation. For these youth, being with their friends, spending time with them and sharing activities with them are of high priority. While their interactions may seem routine or nothing out of ordinary, these weekly gatherings provide these youngsters an escape or distractions from the serious matters of life. Personal situations and personal backgrounds are often used when they jokes or tease each other, but by reacting in a playful manners, these youngsters are trying to create a feeling of commonness. Humor is something that connects with their friends on a personal level.

Moreover, their friendships are also sources for emotional support. As noted by (Spencer and Pahl 2006), emotional support among friends are embedded in the balance of verbal and non-verbal communications. As I have mentioned it already, the characterization of a friend as someone you can confide into by my informants, indicates that these youngsters engage in divulging personal experiences which involves high level of trust. In the company of their friends, these young people express their individualities and disclose their insecurities and worries that they might have not done with others. These personal disclosures, which their friendship entails, yield special information about the person concerned, their households and perhaps most importantly their challenges due to their readjustments to new social environments. Their confidants, in turn, provide these youngsters an emotional support in terms empathy, understanding as well as accepting of feelings and situations of the support needing persons. During my fieldwork, I noticed the youths will also deliberately reveal personal details which otherwise would not be readily available to the public eye in order to gain trust and strengthen their friendship.

### **Being there**

As we know, due to migration, previous already established networks might be severed and new migratory networks, diasporas and transnational communities may arise. Furthermore, settling to a new social environment (as the case of my informants) is a challenge for most refugees such challenges are also likely to become pronounced among young refugee due to their social and economic disadvantages. These youngsters are tasked to negotiate these difficulties by themselves by establishing new social networks and friendships. However, as argued in the previous chapters, the participation of the youngsters in social activities with their Eritrean counterparts and their social media presence has assisted the youngsters to maintain a sense of belonging and re-establish their old networks. Especially social medias such as Facebook has created a social space that facilitated communication among these youngsters and

their geographically dispersed relatives and childhood friends. These communications tend to provide these youngsters with information and sense of belonging.

At the same time, the above presented newly established networks with their friends also possess a different kind of information. In many situations, these new ties are more useful and contain information that helps them bond and adapt their new surroundings. These ties also are sources of support and care. We have already seen the emotional support and the sociability effect their friendship has. Here, I will draw attention to the practical support, the kind of material and personnel aid. It is a common practice among friends to lend each other small amounts of cash or buy foods and drinks for each other. However, the youngsters in the name of friendship do provide other forms of material assistance. Let us see the following two examples:-

1. In April 2018, Drar bought a used Volkswagen in order to learn how to drive and get a driving license. His plan was to learn the basics with someone before enrolling into one of the several driving schools. After he took the obligatory basic training for persons under twenty-five, he needed someone who can teach him how to drive and help him with the theoretical test as well. Therefore, he asked his friends if they know someone who is over twenty-five and can be his supervisor<sup>34</sup>. One of his friends (a boy originally from Somalia and who for the past nine years have been living in Norway) took it up on himself and asked father, who at that time was between jobs and already, helped himself. His friend's father agreed to be his supervisor and therefore advised Drar to buy a cheap used car. Consequently, Drar trained with his friend's father in the evening hours when traffic was light. He trained for about three months before he began with a certified driving school.
2. Last summer, one their friends was forced to move out from his rented apartment. He moved out because he could not come to agreement with his property owner on rent payment day. While he searched for new apartment, he stayed with Mussie for about a week and half sleeping in his couch. While all his furniture was stored in other friends house. Later on, he found a suitable apartment through one of their Norwegian friends and moved out.

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<sup>34</sup> According to the Norwegian highway authority (Statens Vegvesen), youngsters above sixteen and below twenty five years are obliged to take basic course on traffic and safety before they can begin they actually learn to drive. Once this course is finished, they are permitted to drive under the supervision of someone. The supervisor must be over twenty-five and have had a driver license for at least five years.



From these two narratives, the significance of friendship in providing assistance and access to new ties emerge as key themes. In both cases, it is apparent that their friendship became their source for support and care. There emerges a sense of obligation to help and give what is needed on the bases of friendship. The point here is that because their newly established ties (in comparison to their previous social networks in Eritrea and with the Eritrean diaspora) play a vital role in their day-to-day adaptations. Their friendship network offers these youngsters support to the various daily contingencies such as getting a driver license and being able to have someone who can be there when they need something.



## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUDING REMARKS

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In December 2016, the Norwegian language council and professor Gisle Andersen from the Norwegian School of Business announced ‘hverdagsintegrering<sup>35</sup>’ as the word of the year<sup>36</sup>. The word was deemed an apt and timely word at that time to describe the efforts of both the government and ordinary people to integrate newcomers or refugees. I do not want to debate or argue with the Language Council, rather the word integration what does it really mean. more specifically, what does it stands for? Throughout the years, scholars and politicians often had been and continue to use the word alike. The term is being used ambiguously and as (Castles et al. 2003) argue, the word is controversial and debatable. As there is no single generally accepted definition, theory or model of immigrant and refugee integration. Moreover, the whole term and framework of integration is very hard to utilize in research and as argued by (Anthias, Kontos, and Morokvasic-Müller 2013), due to its vague definition its usage of the term gives room to generalization of migrants. Hence, my reluctance to use the term in my thesis.

The term is commonly used to describe the level of socio-cultural and economic adaptation of immigrants in their settlement country. It implies a comparison between the host populace (the general Norwegian public) and the immigrants, which further complicates the concept. As there is no precise definition of the process and/or little consensus on what parameters should be implemented in order to measure a successful integration. However, in its core the word integration implies that it is a two-way process. On the one hand, we have the efforts of the host government and general public to accommodate the newcomers, and on the other hand, we have also the efforts of the refugees. The efforts of the refugees among other things include building a successful and functioning rapport with their new environments. In the thesis, I focused on the later and tried to cast a greater light on the socio-cultural adaptation process of young Eritreans in Norway, while identifying and deciphering their multifaceted daily interactions. More importantly on the ways we can conceptualize the actions of these individuals in their attempt to build a fruitful rapport with the more fluid social environments they current live in.

For my study, I chose young Eritrean refugees who came as unaccompanied minors. Based on a yearlong fieldwork, I studied and focused my energy on a group of adolescent Eritreans and

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<sup>35</sup> ‘hverdagsintegrering’ roughly translated to mean every day’s integration. The word everyday integration had hardly been used before the Prime Minister put it into use in the New Year speech at the beginning of the year. It was deemed useful that many followed the prime minister and used it in their political speeches and discussions.

<sup>36</sup> The Norwegian Language Council (Språkrådet) announces a new word every year that has marked the year. In 2016, refugees and immigration issues were so popular in the political and public arenas during that year that led into naming it as the word of the year. <https://www.sprakradet.no/Vi-og-vart/hva-skjer/Aktuelt/2016/arets-ord-hverdagsintegrering/>

their adaptation process. As we know, adolescence is considered as a transitional period where young people experience physical, psychological as well as intellectual growth. This transitional period is a critical stage for many youngsters as they move out from under their parental/caregivers and become mature adult functioning individuals. For the young Eritreans I worked with, this challenging stage of their life is further complicated by their refugee journeys. They are tasked with maintain their pervious social networks and establishing newer social networks that may provide them with links to and services of other people. These vital social connections are two folded, first these youngsters are tasked with maintaining and establishing new social connections with their Eritrean compatriots, and secondly they are also tasked to creating new bridges and belongings with their mainstream peers/communities. Therefore, in order to help me conceptualize these unique experiences, I tried to situate my study under two broad analytical concepts, the theories of transnationalism and youth culture studies, which I tried to argue it below.

The concept of transnationalism, which developed in the early 1990s<sup>37</sup>, highlights that the lives of migrants are characterized by commitments that transpire across the international borders. Consistent with postmodern thinking, the transnational perspective emphasizes on the particular ties and networks across boarders (Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt 1999; Faist 2001; Vertovec 2009). According to Schiller et al, transnationalism is the process by which immigrants and refugees forge and maintain multi-stranded social relations that link together their places of origin and places of settlement (Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992). It examines the multiple ties and interactions of individuals beyond the dichotomies of place of origin and place of destination. Many scholars have used this analytical lens to examine different types of connections that include the refugees' involvement with their friends and relatives, the economic circumstances of refugees sending remittances, and migrants' involvement in social and cultural affairs of their country of origin (Levitt 1998; Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt 1999; Bryceson and Vuorela 2002; Janta, Cohen, and Williams 2015)

Here in this thesis, I have focused on transnational identifications, which refers to how these young Eritreans identify with their compatriots both in the diaspora and within the sending country (Eritrea). To help us understand their involvement, I have chosen a religious practice

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<sup>37</sup> The concept came up when anthropologists notices intense interactions between sending and receiving countries of international migrants in the 1990s. For further discussion and development of the concept, refer to Schiller et al. transnationalism: a new analytical framework in understanding migration 1992.

that its activities and practices can be traced back to Eritrea. I discussed how their involvement in this allegedly religious function influences their current lives. By using the monthly Tsebel events as a case study, I have argued that their voluntary participation in the event is associated to several important aspects of their daily lives.

In chapter three, I have argued that participating in the event has a profound impact in the daily life choices of the youth. This institutionalized gathering is more than a religious gathering and serves as a social event. The event offers the youngsters to maintain a sense of intergenerational connections and continuity, which otherwise was disrupted due to their migrant experiences. In addition, the event opens an opportunity for the youngsters to build relationships from which they can gain emotional support and material assistance. I have noted that their educational choices and future careers are also heavily influenced by the adult Eritreans. These youngsters are aspiring to become like their adult compatriots, where the youngsters see having a steady jobs and owning a house (an apartment) in Norway as measures of success. Therefore, the young people tend to follow the recommendation and actions, when choosing vocational training such as health work, car mechanics and sales and service studies over the more conventional studying at universities or colleges as a preferred career choice to attain success.

Moreover, their participation is also correlated into their social capital, which was reflected in forms of getting group support when faced with tragedies, individual support and invitation or (to be considered) for other social functions. The event helps the youngsters to create symbiotic relationships that has huge ramifications towards their inclusion in the Eritrean diaspora. Their long-standing desire for social belonging and participation in familiar social functions led these youngsters to actively participate and reaffirm their Eritrean-ness. This trans-ethnic sense of belonging and togetherness is well established among the Eritrean diaspora and associated with the experience and history of Eritrean population.

Transnational theorists argue that transnational ties and experiences of refugees are significantly facilitated by improvements in communication techniques and decreasing transport (De Haas 2010; Levitt and Jaworsky 2007; Levitt and Schiller 2004; Vertovec 2009). The recent advancement in social media and communications have increased the involvement of the youngsters in the socio-cultural and political affairs of Eritrea. As I mentioned in chapter four, these youngsters participate actively across different social media, Facebook being one of them. Facebook is predominantly used by the youth to establish/ re-connect with childhood friends and relatives. They constantly employ the social media to find long lost friends, to display their emotional vulnerabilities and most importantly to keep in touch and exchange

current news about home (Eritrea). Another noticeable activity of the youngsters was how they use their Facebook in their attempt to pledge their belonging to the Eritrean diaspora, by actively engaging in political denouncing the Eritrean government or sharing the plea of lost Eritreans.

As mentioned above the second part of the adaptation process of the youngsters is establishing new social bonds and bridges with their mainstream peers. This perspective helps us avoid relating these youngsters only to the paradigms of migration and views them in light of youth studies as an active agents capable producers of their own culture. Anthropological interest in youth envisages the young as 'cultural agents' who participate fully not partially or in ways that are necessary conflictual, in dynamics of production and social change (Amit-Talai and Wulff 1995). In the book youth cultures: a cross-cultural perspective, Wulff argues that where the study of adolescence generally concentrates on how bodies and minds are shaped for adult futures, the study of youth emphasizes instead here-and-now of young people's experience, the social and cultural practices through which they shape their worlds (Amit-Talai and Wulff 1995). In tandem with her argumentation, I have tried to discuss the daily interaction of these youngsters had with their peers through the examination of these young peoples' activity online (across social media) and offline.

Before moving to Norway, these youngsters spent the majority of their formative years in different culture, where they were schooled, established peer groups, and immersed in different youth culture than their current situations. They were masters of their own cultural practices and defined what is cool and trendy. However, their status changed when they arrived here and became part of another peer group. In attempt to overcome such differences they use of new technologies, like mobile phones and social media to create new spaces, not only to stay in touch with relatives back home, but also to allow them to interact and shape new virtual arenas for interaction and communication that are independent of the general background of being migrants and refugees. The interaction between real life and such virtual relationships were also of importance in how actors adapt and how they develop imaginations that affect choices, for instance in terms of willingness to make new friends. Using their Snapchat, they engage in activities that are considered hip, cool, fun-loving and carefree individuals. As I have argued in chapter four, these youth are actively engaging with their mainstream peers using Snapchat. The social media applications on their mobile phones are used by the youngsters to have a public interaction that resembles Goffman's 'impression management', where they are engaged in presenting an image to the public beyond oneself. Social media are critical elements on the daily lives of my informants, which enable them to develop friendships and interactions with

their peers. These social media are platforms that allows them to interact one-on-one or in small groups. Further interactions are also maintained through creating a desired self-representation on Snapchat, which compares themselves to others all the while inviting the others to comment and react. Hence, on snapchat by presenting themselves with displays of their interests, believes and values the youngsters facilitate their attempts to be accepted by their peers.

Furthermore, in chapter five I shed further light on their attempts to establish new social connection by studying their friendship. Moving away from the psychological views that tend to study friendships as a personal study and the earlier anthropological perspectives that dealt friendships in relation to kinship, I considered their friendship an unofficial social construction between persons (as noted by (Bell and Coleman 1999)) and studied the role of their friendship in their daily lives. In order to understand the nature of the kind of friendship they experience, I took a popularly shared activity among the youngsters as a case study. Playing football on a weekly basis, watching English Premier League at sport bars, and playing in FPL, were among the favored activities of the youngsters. These shared activities has helped them to foster interpersonal bond of friendship, that is bound by trust (which is strengthened by their shared activities) and support for each other. These weekly activities serve as a focus around which they have built their friendship.

Their common interest in football has enabled the youngsters into building a relationship that goes beyond the football arenas. It has served them gain support, trust and familiarity. Banter and mocking, which are common practices among football fans are used by the youth as phatic combinations and icebreakers to conversations that involve personal disclosures. As I have mentioned it in the previous chapter, their habitual shared activities offers the youngsters an opportunity, which they can build and maintain social ties with others that share the same interests as them. These newly constructed social ties re utilized from time to time by the youngsters as sources of emotional support when needed, or companionships. Furthermore, they have a vital role in providing support during various daily contingencies in their adaptation process such as getting driving license, or having someone who is dependable and can be there when they need him.

As I have demonstrated in the thesis, the youngsters cannot be considered as just products of migration, who were uprooted and left their previous life behind, we cannot see them either as only part of the Norwegian society. Rather, their day-to-day interactions are a testament that they are young people caught between two worlds, their former lives, which they have left behind, and a new world full of new realities and contingencies. At the moment, they are

negotiating their existence between these two worlds. They are not static and unchanging as some may assume, rather they are in a transitional period of becoming well-functioning young Eritreo-Norwegians<sup>38</sup> evidenced by their day-to-day actions. Their actions are reflection of their daily struggles and negotiations.

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<sup>38</sup> The term does not exist but I believe it can be used to reflect the unique experiences of these youngsters.



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