



CAUGHT IN THE BORDERLANDS

**DISCURSIVE, BODILY, AND COLLECTIVE
FRONTIERS OF VIOLENCE AND SUFFERING
EXPERIENCED BY ERITREAN REFUGEES IN
ISRAEL**

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Discursive, Bodily, and Collective Frontiers of Violence and Suffering Experienced by Eritrean Refugees in Israel

By Laurie Lijnders

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<p>Laurie Lijnders Student number: 3485358 Supervisor: Dr. Ir. Yvon van der Pijl University of Utrecht Master Cultural Anthropology: Multiculturalism in a Comparative Perspective laurielijnders@hotmail.com</p>

For those who are on the way, may they arrive

Zemen

Time, you have betrayed me, I have become a refugee.

Someone that lives in shame, who cannot walk with pride.

Someone who cannot tell how he feels, you make me weak and a complainer.

You make me carry a wound that reopens again and again and that can never be healed.

I will question you and you should answer me, *zemen* (time).

Why can you not give me love, unity and pride?

You took my humanity away.

You took it to the market so that it could be stepped on.

You made me landless, someone that cannot walk straight on his feet.

You made me hopeless, without a future, someone who cannot vote and be voted.

The green land have changed into a desert, you made the wetland dry.

You changed love to hate and betrayal.

You made me like a landless that cannot walk straight on his feet.

Yemane Barya, Eritrean Musician,

Translation from Tigrinya by Adhanom

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Amidst everything you endured, I am motivated by your courage and determination for the future in a life in which you witness the nadir of human cruelty and an existence in which the past never ceases to show its face. I was repeatedly surprised by the optimism with which you meet your life under the exacting conditions of existence and remembrance in Israel. The fear, impiety, and anger, as well as the expectations, perseverance, and hope that you shared with me made me reconsider the world, which I knew previously. You showed me the dark side of humanity and made me aware of a world raged by violence, pain, inhumanity, and indignity but equally showed me resilience and strength. The time spent with you has been illuminating both on a human and intellectual level. I hope that for all you did entrust me I have kept the integrity of your words.

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Some of the many stories and experiences shared with me did not - to my frustration and regret - find their way into written text. It would have been beyond the scope of this thesis to include all the issues that were voiced by African refugees in Israel. However, this does not mean in any way that I forget them; on the contrary, I continue to share these issues in different ways; in endless - often emotional - talks with friends, fellow students, and in several small projects within Amnesty International the Netherlands. My three fields of interest - journalism, anthropology, and activism - discerned along the way.

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PROLOGUE

'THE LONG ROAD OF DEATH'

"They arrive without money but with stories written on the parchment of their hearts which they don't recite easily. They are stories, which have crept out of the edges of civil wars and scattered into the fleeing wind. You can read the words in their eyes, stained by despair; in their mouths, silenced and tightened by horror. You can even read the words in their torn and weary clothes"

Pinnock (2010: 10)⁴

I was confronted with 'massacres in the Sinai' desert and the 'long road of death' (Frantzman 2010)⁵ during preparations for fieldwork to be conducted for my master research on sub-Saharan African refugees' journey to Israel. My research initially focused on the experiences, embodiment, and symbolization of the Egypt-Israel border and the Northern Sinai⁶ border region by African refugees who illegally cross this frontier. At that time, I had never imagined that I would eventually perform research on experiences and expressions of violence⁷, torture, ransom, and death during the journey to Israel, as well as on processes of mourning and representation on arrival. I first realised the research would necessarily explore these themes by reading the article 'The Long Road of Death, Massacre in Sinai' in which the Egyptian territory is described as a 'human prison for African migrants' and a 'place of death'. In 'savage and disturbing' details the author describes how people are suspended in trees with metal chains, how women fall victim to 'gang rape', and how men are tortured with electric cables in 'torture camps' by 'Bedouin captors' in the Sinai desert. The author describes the camps in which asylum seekers are beaten on a daily basis, while their relatives are called to raise a ransom up to tens of thousands of dollars for their release. The refugees, mostly Eritreans and Ethiopians, are held as 'modern day slaves' and are threatened with organ-removal by the human traffickers if they fail to pay the 'ransom'. According to the author the 'slave trade' in Africans in the Sinai desert has become an out of control 'business' where victims are recruited and then transported to Israel as a way for people smugglers to get rid of the 'human cargo'. In addition,

if they manage to escape the violence, they are shot by 'Bedouin smugglers' or Egyptian guards at the Egypt-Israel border.

It was in Israel, through the narratives of Eritreans asylum seekers, that I heard about the violence and torture about which I had hitherto only read. Never before had I been intimately involved in the lives of people and felt so connected to their stories. The power of spoken word has surprised me and I do realise that written text can be misleading. This ambiguity made me aware of the precariousness with which to choose my words and caution in the way in which I represent victims.

Words like 'torture camp', 'gang rape', 'modern slavery', and 'human cargo' evoke a shared discourse among journalists, social workers, and activists both in Israel and the diaspora. It is a discourse of suffering and helplessness and although this is a feasibly powerful discourse - and a needed one to draw attention to this situation and make people understand this is a reality and not just contrived - this is not always the discourse in which the narrators of this thesis recognize themselves and neither do I as an anthropologist. An analysis delimited to this discourse would fail to capture the many other aspects of the topic. I want to go beyond a discourse of hopeless victims, for the reason that I believe writing about Eritrean refugees held hostage in 'torture camps' in the Sinai is about more than torture, despair, defiance, and death. Several anthropologists (cf. Lammers 2006, Nordstrom 2004, Nordstrom and Robben 1995) addressing violence accord that if we concentrate on "suffering, power, force, and the infliction of pain and constraint" (Nordstrom and Robben 1995: 6) we fall short of realizing that violence is about more than death and destruction, but equally about reconstruction and survival as well as "peace, victory, humour, boredom, and ingenuity" (ibid. 1995: 6). In the pages that follow I will avoid the description of the Northern Sinai as a region benumbed by fear, a desert in the hands of 'Bedouin smugglers', a place ruled by murder, violence, and unleashed madness and more importantly I will show that people are more than victims only.

During my fieldwork and writing I was not only confronted with the dark side of humanity, but also with the limits of my own emotions and for that reason it has not only been an academic process, but maybe even more so contributed to my personal development. After returning home from my field research, to a peaceful place where I could contemplate on the endless encounters, my body overtaken by emotions of sadness, anger, and disbelief I realised I was captured by the very discourse of suffering and helplessness. My emotions blocked a critical academic attitude toward the stories, interactions, experiences, and observations. To question these narratives and write with a 'distant' and academic notion about the atrocities felt

like betrayal. Didier Fassin (2009: 280) writing about trauma shows that even researchers are affected by the violence of events experienced and the pain and suffering it produces exert a sort of fascination for their informants. I created an emphatic relation with African refugees that made it difficult to distance myself sufficiently from the protagonists of this thesis. I have been indirectly exposed to the violent acts through the narratives of those who were tortured and held captive for indefinite periods by human traffickers in the Sinai desert. Moreover, listening, reading and writing about violence and its consequences have forced me to rethink the safe world that was previously mine. This experience challenged me to alter a few raw realities of life. For months, I listened to stories of death, torture, violence, rape, humiliation, and inhumanity, stories that succeeded each other in fiendishness. Despite all the cruelty and horror the protagonists of this thesis showed strength, perseverance, and hope. This inspired me and gave me the necessary strength to carry on myself.

As I moved between narratives of the storyteller and my own thoughts about the social reality, the stories, the words, and the sentences transformed into images in my head. Images that dominated my thoughts after I returned from the fieldwork. Anthropologist Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi (2009: 5) reveals that in an indirect way, through the stories of others, full of violence, the listener is charged with a debt that often also finds its way into the body of the researcher. According to Ghassem-Fachandi this encumbrance is converted into the physical body as a wound (*ibid.* 5). Anthropologists, like the persons with whom they work, cannot remain unmoved from the impact of the testimony of tragedy. They can unfeasibly free themselves from the struggle of working in a context where violence raises fundamental questions about human nature (Nordstrom and Robben 1995: 18). Additionally, violence confronts anthropologist with ethical questions as to what extent the process of telling their story might be harmful to the narrators. We can record the stories of victims of violence but it is not in our power to alleviate their experiences and we can never redeem their lives (*ibid.* 19). The experience of violence penetrates the subconscious of both the protagonist and the researcher with an effect that goes beyond a person's awareness. I was not prepared for the violent events unfolding around me in the appearance of narratives, metaphors, and scars; much less could I foresee the effects it would have on me afterwards. No less could the protagonists of this thesis. While I only listened to the narratives of torture, distress, and hostage, they 'lived' the stories told in this thesis.

COMMENCEMENT VIOLENCE EXPERIENCED, EXPRESSED, AND REMEMBERED

“Anthropology may be about studying what it is and what it means to be human. But surely it is also about what it means to barely live as a human being, or to be treated as less than human”

Rylko-Bauer (2003: 2)

commencement: the beginning of something.⁸

In the hallway of the Open Clinic of Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) patients are waiting. A mixture of 'Tigrinya'⁹ and Arabic arise from their soft-spoken conversations. The waiting patients sit on the floor, passing time impatiently for their turn. The patients are women from Eritrea, their heads covered with colourful scarves and men from Darfur with oversized winter jackets to keep the February cold from taking over their bodies. In the waiting room more patients sit on green and white plastic chairs. In their hands are their medical files. They all try to thrust and be first but must wait to see a nurse for triage until their names are called by one of the volunteers. A man walks around with crutches; the bullets of Egyptian border guards wounded his body when he was crossing the border into Israel. A baby is crying; the mother takes her from the clothing on her back and rocks her soothingly in her arms. The waiting room is too small for all the patients visiting the Open Clinic. There are more patients than the voluntary doctors can give medical treatment. Some people are waiting outside others go home, perhaps deciding to return another day.

Each month around 700 people visit the Open Clinic.¹⁰ The majority of the patients are African asylum seekers¹¹ who are excluded from social welfare service, including any access to government-provided healthcare.¹² Since July 2010, more and more asylum seekers visit the Open Clinic and the types of medical conditions require more specialist treatment and care.¹³ The staff of the Open Clinic believe that a parallel can be drawn between the worsening medical conditions since mid 2010 and the increased violence many African refugees are

experiencing at the hands of human traffickers in the Sinai desert. Refugees bear witness of repeated physical abuse, sexual assault, and slavery and give evidence of threats of organ removal and death (Physicians for Human Rights 2010). The conditions in which refugees are held are experienced as inhuman and humiliating. The traffickers extort thousands of dollars from the refugees' families in return for their release. They are held for weeks and sometimes months without water and food, as their captors demand increased ransom. The Open Clinic offers medical treatment and raises awareness about the ransom, rape, and torture in the Northern Sinai Desert.¹⁴ During the period of my fieldwork I worked as a volunteer in the Open Clinic and was part of a team who conducted interviews (see attachments page 97 for questionnaire)¹⁵ with new patients about their journey through the Sinai desert into Israel. Together with Aziza Kidane,¹⁶ an Eritrean sister who was sent to Israel by her church congregation, I interviewed the asylum seekers about the abuse they suffered or witnessed.

One evening in March, Tsehay, a 19-year-old man from Eritrea, recites his experiences of violence in the Sinai desert. His thick eyebrows cover his tired eyes. He wears a necklace with a cross of Jesus Christ around his neck. His face, covered with a mustache and curly black hair, becomes despondent over the course of our conversation. Tsehay is captured by human traffickers on the Sudanese-Eritrean border. His experience of being kidnapped resembles that of many other refugees, as more and more people recount that they have been brought to the Sinai desert against their own will.¹⁷ People smuggling¹⁸ becomes human trafficking¹⁹ as certain rogue groups of 'Bedouin smugglers'²⁰ - a common name used for those who take refugees across borders - use force and hold refugees hostage. Once the asylum seekers arrive to what are publicly called 'torture camps', they are forced to pay vast amounts of ransom that at the time of writing have reached up to 40,000 US dollars.²¹ Tsehay is promised a job in Sudan, but in reality is taken to a house in Kassala, a Sudanese city close to the border with Eritrea. In the Open Clinic Tsehay narrates his story:

"The man who took us at the Eritrea-Sudan border told me we were going to work, so I put in my mind that I was going to work. But in the house we found two girls who were chained; they were already there for four months. The smuggler kept me with the girls in the house for one month, before he brought us to Sinai. We traveled for ten days before we entered the Sinai. On the road from Sudan to the Sinai desert, three people fell from the car, one died, and the other two ... I do not know where they are. During the journey, the smugglers did not give us water for four days. The smugglers themselves had water, when one boy took it, the smugglers were very angry. They killed him with a gun. We were 48 persons when we left. Only 43 of us arrived in the Sinai, the other five were killed. When we reached the Sinai, the smugglers beat us severely. After three

days, when I could not bear the torture anymore, I escaped. I ran away, but the bandits (the smugglers) took me, they beat me until my body was swollen. Then, they told me to beat the others that were staying with me. I did not want to do this, but if I did not beat them they would beat me. I was crying while I did this, so were the people that I was beating. They gave me a stick to beat the others. It was a really bad experience for me. My body started to burst. I still have scars on my back from this day.

The bandits made me work; I was forced to build a palace for Abdullah.²² It was very heavy to carry the bricks around, I was shaking and it was too tough for me. With chains around our ankles we were going up and down the ladder. Many people were working with me. It is slavery. One day we escaped from the smugglers again, ninety-four ran away toward Israel. I was weak because I was beaten and had swollen legs. The others could run and reach the border, but the smugglers came after me and I was caught again.

I never called my mother, because I know she is very poor and I have no family abroad to ask for the money to pay the ransom. The smugglers were aware that I had nobody in the world, if I died or not, no one cared. The traffickers told us to bury someone in the sand. That time I knew someone died. The traffickers tied me for many months and made me do dirty jobs. The refugees urinated in a small room, the smugglers made me clean everything and gather wood and bring water. The smugglers would come and take women to another room to rape them. For twelve days we were hungry; we did not eat. Again this was a very bad experience for me. I stayed for ten months with the smugglers. I was working like a slave. We lost sense of days and months. We do not even remember. We were there for such a long time, we do not know.

When the smugglers realised I had nothing, no one to call, they organized for me to go to Israel, but not via a safe way. The smugglers sent me during the daylight and via a bad road. There were some girls and Sudanese men with me. The Egyptian border patrol shot one person in our group. This person was caught and wounded in his leg. It is difficult to say if people die or not because, when there is a shooting you only think about yourself. The Egyptian army takes those who are wounded. If they are treated or not, I do not know, maybe they die. You do not see what happens to the others. From the 43 that reached Sinai, 39 entered Israel. The Egyptian army caught the others. Some parents believe their children are dead. After a while, their children remain silent, they do not have the energy to talk again. They do not want to hurt their families with stories about their experiences.”

Through the narratives and alternative idioms of numerous African asylum seekers I will illustrate the experience of borders as ‘frontiers of violence’. I approach frontiers of violence

from three different perspectives: discursive frontiers of violence; bodily frontiers of violence; and collectively experienced frontiers of violence and suffering. Discursive frontiers of violence focus on the limits of everyday language in constituting meaning to experiences of violence. Bodily frontiers of violence focus on the limits of expressions of suffering and represent experiences of the body in alternative idioms. Collective frontiers of violence focus on the collective experiences and expressions of suffering.

FRONTIERS OF VIOLENCE CONCEPTUALISED

Before I continue, I come to a conceptualisation of frontiers of violence for which I am significantly influenced and inspired by Tsing's *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Tsing provides an insight in multiple and conflicting social interactions that make up the contemporary world and for which she uses the metaphor of 'friction'. Tsing (2005: 28) conceptualizes frontiers in the context of the rainforests in Indonesia and argues that frontiers are projects in making geographical and temporal experience. African refugees encounter both geographical as well as experiential frontiers of violence during the journey to Israel. The Egypt-Israel border, as well as the borderlands, can be understood as a geographical frontier and landscape of violence. Tsing argues that landscapes are simultaneously natural and social, and they move and change in the interplay of human and nonhuman practices (ibid. 29). For decades, the Egypt-Israel border has been a disputed frontier that is defined by violence, war, terrorism, and illegal businesses. The Egypt-Israel border is visible by barbed wire that geographically defines where the Egyptian territory ends and Israel begins and is experienced by African refugees as a frontier of violence. Egyptian border guards patrol the frontier and follow a 'shoot to kill' policy. Israel is constructing a security frontier along the almost 240-kilometer border with Egypt that further visualizes and defines the border. Tsing explains that frontiers 'create' wildness that that move between past and present, bringing old forms of savagery to life in the contemporary landscape (ibid. 28, 29). Frontiers of violence exhibit power structures and create insecurity, violence, lawlessness, and death.

"The frontier is made in the shifting terrain between legality and illegality, public and private ownership, brutal rape and passionate charisma, ethnic collaboration and hostility, violence and law, restoration and extermination" (ibid. 33).

The human traffickers in the borderlands of the Sinai desert create a frontier of violence by captivating Eritrean refugees in 'torture camps' where they inflict torture on the refugees to extort money. Frontiers are deregulated because they "arise in the interstitial spaces made by

collaborations among legitimate and illegitimate partners” such as border guards and human traffickers (cf. Tsing 2005: 27). The frontiers of violence are also experienced in the different power structures that refugees encounter in Eritrea, Sudan, Ethiopia, Egypt, Libya, and Israel. The frontiers of violence are created in an illegal agreement between official and officious. The frontier of violence is experienced throughout the journey and exists in a collaboration of trafficking networks that stretches from Eritrea to Israel and involves international, national, and local connections. Frontiers blur the boundaries of law and theft, governance and violence, and use and destruction.

It should be clear by now that frontiers of violence are not necessarily geographical in character; they are an experience. Frontiers of violence do not stop after they are crossed, as experiences with frontiers of violence influence self, collectivity, and memory and can be discursive as well as bodily in character. Frontiers of violence deconstruct language and confront people with the bodily limits of violence. Although experienced by many, frontiers of violence can be expressed differently and not everyone experiences frontiers of violence. Frontiers of violence are selective. Although violent in nature frontiers of violence do not need to be of actual physical harm. I show further on how frontiers of violence are also experienced from a distance. Frontiers of violence become part of an individual and collective memory and are included in expressions of collectively experienced suffering. In the course of this thesis experiences of and with frontiers of violence will be explained more extensively.

VIOLENCE, TEXT AND THE BODY: AN AMBIGUOUS RELATION

In the period from February to May 2011 I recorded nearly one hundred narratives related to me by African refugees living in Tel Aviv, Israel.²³ The narratives show how acts of torture are understood, represented, and communicated and how meaning is (re)produced (cf. Weiss and Six-Hohenbalken 2011: 4). The narratives and fragments together with observation and participation in demonstrations, gatherings, and everyday life provide an ethnographic account of the “lived experiences” (Chuangsatiansup 2001: 31) of being held hostage by human traffickers. Narratives provide an empirical understanding of the experience of clandestine border crossing and the infliction of torture.

The narrators of this work will remain unnamed, and on the request of the interlocutors I adopted fictitious names. I will introduce the narrators more extensively in part one. The narratives, often violent in content, focus on the multiple experiences of borders and the diverse structures of power African refugees encounter during their journey to Israel. A central

aspect of this thesis is the narratives of a number of young Eritrean men who, at the time of my research, had crossed the Egypt-Israel border in the past few days to several months. The violence in the Northern Sinai region is illustrated through the narratives of patients interviewed at the Open Clinic. For this work I also interviewed staff of refugee organisations working in Tel Aviv.²⁴

I have struggled enormously with the way I should understand and represent narratives of bodily suffering. The use of narratives as a form of representation, methodology, and analysis is the only way in which I feel I can modestly portray the experiences of violence in the Sinai desert. I use narratives as a methodological and analytical tool. I gathered life histories and elements of life-stories during my research to broaden my understanding of the effects and the meaning of being held hostage and torture. The narratives serve as an illustration of violence; a point of departure for debate; and a way to problematise theories of violence, suffering, embodiment, and experience. In the field I created a relational, dialogical interaction between the protagonists and me. (Throughout this thesis I will use the terms narrator, interlocutor, and protagonist interchangeably.²⁵) During the writing phase - analyzing, and converting empirical data into an ethnographic text – I used theoretical paradigms to understand and give meaning to violence. In this process of writing I have struggled with the authority of representing the victims of human trafficking in the Sinai desert in an ethnographic text. The narratives and the manner in which the Eritrean men construct meaning help me to understand and write about the atrocities in the Sinai desert without taking too much authority from the words of the protagonists. I wish above all not to misinterpret their experiences.

I realise that focusing solely on narratives of violence and the context in which violence emerges is not sufficient to understand the meaning and the effects of violence (Weiss and Six-Hohenbalken 2011). To understand violence, we should study the phenomenon on different levels that go beyond the narrative. In order to provide a comprehensive picture of experiences of violence I analyse and interpret experiences with violence from three different perspectives; the individual expression of violence; power structures at the border and in the borderlands; and collective suffering.²⁶ The body reveals power relations and violence is experienced and expressed through the body. As such the body is central in this thesis. I will examine the relation between violence, text, and the body from three different anthropological dimensions: the “individual body”, the “body politic”, and the “social body”. This distinction, entitled the “mindful body”, was made by medical anthropologists Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret Lock (1990) and was initiated to advocate the deconstruction of conventional concepts about

the body (ibid. 6). I will use the concept - which has its origins in the medical field of anthropology - in my analysis of violence, for pain is inflicted on the body and human suffering lived and relived through the body. The individual body, the social body, and the body politic do not only represent three separate concepts but also overlapping units of analysis (ibid. 8) and are relational during the journey.

I will separate each perspective on the body in two parts, and bring them together in the reflections, with which I end each part. First, in Part One, I focus on the individual body and the Self and study the lived or embodied experiences people have of their bodies (ibid. 7) in relation to violence and torture. I focus on the ways in which individuals address discursive and bodily frontiers of violence. I will go beyond an analysis of narratives and look for alternative idioms in which experiences of suffering are expressed. In the last chapter of part one *Graves and Body Bags: The Ultimate Expressions of Frontiers of Violence* I will focus on the body politic referring to the regulation, surveillance, and control of individual and collective bodies (ibid. 8). In body politic the human body is perceived as a tool or weapon of domestication that can direct identification, subjection, resistance, power, and control (ibid. 7). I explain how violence is experienced through the body and reveal power relations through physical experiences with various structures of power that control the geographical and symbolic borders and borderlands. Secondly, in part two, I show how experiences of violence, suffering and being a refugee are collectively expressed in events of mourning and commemoration, gatherings of remembrance, and protest of a political character. I focus on the social body, which refers to the representational uses of the body as a symbol with which to think about nature, society, and culture (ibid. 7). Part two examines the collective remembrance of suffering in Eritrea, during the journey, and on arrival in Israel and in other countries of exile. I end with the *Advent: A Temporary Arrival* in which the journey is concluded with an ephemeral arrival in the 'Promised Land' and I come to an anthropological coming into view. Tel Aviv is the context in which the protagonists constructed expressions of experiences of violence both on an individual and collective level and where the Eritrean community tries to create continuity between the two lives they live.

Throughout the thesis the ambiguous relation between violence, text, and the body will be examined extensively. Text should in the context of this thesis be understood as more than written and oral text such as narratives or poetry, but should be extended to bodily text such as bodily wounds and symbols. Csordas (1994: 12) suggest that the body can be placed in a paradigm that complements text and the body and text can be seen as corresponding

methodological fields. Experiences of violence shatter or complicate this already ambiguous relationship between text and the body.

A JOURNEY FOLLOWED: STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This thesis has a relatively unusual structure. I do not depart from a main question but - in words - I follow the journey of African refugees to Israel and the impediments they encounter along the route. An emphasis lies on the Egypt-Israel border and its Sinai borderlands (see map page 94). Much like the journey is chaotic and fractured, the narratives central to this thesis are discontinuous and made up of contradictions. I do not follow a chronological order in the refugees' journey because I do not distinguish such continuity in the narratives of the protagonists. I do not elaborate a singular argument; instead in every part multiple arguments are developed. As the thesis proceeds these arguments assemble and collide. Each part deals with a number of issues, theoretical concepts, and approaches that stand alone but are also coherent. These arguments are both methodological and theoretical in character. I also make use of a number of narratives to create an understanding of the journey. The narratives are presented as both fragments and wholes (e.g. *The Narrative of A Scorpion* on page 15). The narratives are distinguished from the rest of the text through use of a different font. *Part One: Narratives, Metaphors, Scars, and Graves: Discursive and Bodily Frontiers of Violence* serve as the backbone of this thesis and is considerably more extensive than *Part Two - Collective Frontiers of Violence: Experiences and Expressions of Suffering*.

ETHNOGRAPHIC SETTING: 'LITTLE AFRICA IN TEL AVIV'

I conducted three months of fieldwork with African refugees in Tel Aviv. The neighbourhood of South Tel Aviv became my home like it is home to a majority of African refugees residing in the outskirts of the second largest city in Israel. The area around the streets of *Neve Shanaan* is frequently referred to as 'little Africa' as it is crowded with restaurants, bars, and shops owned by African men and women. Israel is home to approximately 40,000 refugees from Africa, the majority of who are living in South Tel Aviv in shabby apartments and rooms they share with relatives and friends or in the streets. Smaller populations of African refugees are living in Jerusalem (the political capital of Israel), Arad (a northern Negev city), and Eilat (a city along the Southern border with Egypt). On the West side of *Neve Shanaan* is Levinsky Park, a meeting point known as 'the garden' by most refugees. I met the narrators in the streets of South Tel Aviv, in apartments, and in 'the garden'. The young men fled their home countries and illegally crossed borders to arrive in Israel while passing the Sinai desert on their way. Refugees are

“scattered representatives of an extreme world” says Michel Agier (2008: 1); they are a “new category of the human condition that take shape at the margins of the world”. Agier refers to refugees as a “bruised population”. As this thesis advances I show that in the case of African refugees in Israel it is better to talk about a “scarred community”. In Tel Aviv African refugees told me about their lives. They shared stories about the home countries from which they fled, the journey that followed, and the situation they face in Israel, the so-called ‘Promised Land’. The ‘unwelcome guests’ of Israel welcomed me into their lives with an unexpected warmth and openness. The often short histories of their lives were complete with experiences of violence, memories of suffering, and continuous escapes, as well as, strength, hope, and courage in troubled times. The protagonists opened their modest homes to me and provided me with an insight into their lives pre- and post-flight.

During the period of fieldwork I volunteered at the Open Clinic of Physicians for Human Rights (PHR-Israel) in Yaffa. As I explained above, the PHR staff regularly interviews asylum seekers about their experiences in the Northern Sinai. These interviews served as a major source of understanding and provided insight into violence in the Sinai experienced by African asylum seekers. The context in which narratives were told was an important determinant of the information gleaned. Where the interviews in the Open Clinic focus on the torture and treatment of the human traffickers, in daily encounters there was more space for other themes. The accounts gathered in the Clinic focus on violence. In the often narrowly targeted conversations there was no place for in-depth questions, lengthy explanations of the reasons for flight, and the experiences during the journey and the life afterward in Tel Aviv. The nearly one hundred interviews that have been conducted in the Open Clinic generally last from five to thirty minutes and focus solely on the experiences in the Sinai desert.

I interviewed over one hundred people at the Clinic and was able to establish relationships of trust that were sustained outside of the context of the Clinic with six of these interviewees. I was first introduced to the four protagonists of this thesis, with the exception of Scorpion, in the Open Clinic. Tsehay, Abel, and Yonas visited the clinic for different medical reasons and on different occasions. I selected the narratives of Tsehay, Scorpion, Abel, and Yonas, as these fragments represent the experiences of many others, but at the same time reflect personal experiences. Their narratives are a combination of the interviews in the Open Clinic and more informal conversations outside the context of the Open Clinic. Conversations, gatherings, and observations outside the context of the Open Clinic are of a different value because they do not follow a questionnaire and took place in a more informal setting. I attended several

demonstrations, meetings, gatherings, and church services and observed how everyday life is lived in communities of ‘survivors’. I established long-term relations with people who experienced violence in the desert camps.

AFRICAN REFUGEES IN ISRAEL

An estimated 40,000 African refugees live in Israel²⁷ of whom the majority arrives from Eritrea and Sudan (for a map of Eritrea see page 91). Young Eritreans claim asylum based on having escaped from an extremely repressive state and compulsory military service in Eritrea, a country that has long been known for its grave violations of human rights: religious and political persecution, disappearances of citizens and use of torture by the government (Tronvoll 2009). Men and women from Darfur account of an ever-continuing genocide. They flee persecution and mass murder of civilian populations perpetrated by the government and armed militia groups. Israel also hosts a smaller, but close community of men, women and children who have escaped years of governmental persecution, civil war, insecurity, and a lack of social infrastructure in South Sudan. In addition, there are a small number of refugees from other African countries such as Central Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Somalia, and Togo where civil wars and conflict are still raging or recently have come to an end (for a map of Africa see page 92).²⁸

In 2005 asylum seekers and refugees from Africa began crossing the Egypt-Israel border (for a map of the Egypt-Israel border see page 93). An agreement between the Libyan and Italian government cut off popular sea routes to Europe and helped direct the flow toward Israel. Reasons for the crossing to Israel cannot only be found in the tighter control of the borders of the European Union but also in the decline of living conditions for African refugees in Libya and Egypt. Refugees face imprisonment in Libya, abuse on racial grounds, and possible forced return. Most, if not all, asylum seekers arrive in Israel via Egypt, a country in which many African refugees lived for years before crossing to Israel. Security problems, (violent) racism, and harsh living conditions in Egypt, led them to risk the illegal Sinai border crossing.

From 2007 the number has increased every year and at times over one thousand refugees cross the border each month. Recent events in both Egypt and Libya created new incentives to seek safety and security in Israel. The political unrest, the state of insecurity, and chaos in North Africa increased the number of asylum seekers from Eritrea and Sudan traveling through the Sinai desert to Israel. The Arab spring created a political vacuum that is demonstrated by lawlessness and impunity. Mainly in the Northern Sinai police presence is limited after police

has been forced out of the area after the revolution in Egypt. In September a military operation to eradicate Islamist extremists from the area entirely ignored the human trafficking in African refugees. Besides people smugglers who are hired by the refugees themselves to illegally direct them across the border for money, there are human traffickers who hold African refugees as hostages and abuse them for ransom.

The journey of African refugees from Sudan, Eritrea, and West Africa merges in the Northern Sinai, a region that is bordered on the West by the Suez Canal and on the East by Israel and the Gaza Strip. A sizable network of smugglers operates across Eritrea, Sudan, Egypt and Israel to smuggle sub-Saharan refugees to their destination in Israel. The smugglers live in the borderlands of the Northern Sinai and exploit the ‘unique locational ambiguity’ by building their lives and livelihoods around the resources that borders offer (Donnan & Wilson 1999: 87). The Egypt-Israel border route is also used for the smuggling of arms, prostitutes, drugs, cars, and stolen goods. In 2005 smugglers discovered another lucrative business: the trafficking of humans, mostly African asylum seekers who hoped to obtain asylum in Israel. Along the route, African refugees are caught in the borderlands of the Sinai region in desert camps.

CAUGHT IN THE BORDERLANDS

Evidence collected over the last 18 months demonstrates a vivid depiction of the circumstances under which African refugees²⁹ are held in the borderlands of the Sinai by human traffickers (for a map of the Sinai Peninsula see page 94).³⁰ More and more African refugees who have arrived in Israel now recount their mistreatment by traffickers. In these accounts a violent mix of life and mortality exists. The refugees bear witness and experience different methods of violence, such as punching, slapping, kicking, and whipping. They also testify of torture including burial in the sand, electric shocks, hanging by one’s hands and legs, burning with hot-iron bars, and prolonged exposure to the sun.³¹ I will focus on the experiences of violence expressed by Eritrean refugees, as amongst African refugees that are held captive by human traffickers in the Northern Sinai desert, the majority are Eritrean or Ethiopian.³²

* * * * *

The fieldwork and this thesis symbolize a search for understanding of (in)humanity, violence, flight, and refuge. On the one hand, I reflect on the experiences of the protagonists. On the other hand, I elaborate on my anthropological search for an epistemological, theoretical and empirical understanding of violence and the ‘remaking of the world’ (Das et al. 2001). The

commencement and the parts that follow represent the beginning of an ongoing thought process. This is an academic development, and an empathic understanding, both of which I realise will never be accomplished entirely. The extent of the topic appears boundless, for every answer raises many new questions. Although my probe for answers continues, this thesis symbolizes a temporary closure of this search.

A note from the author:

Writing about discursive and bodily frontiers of violence, I suggest that one can only understand the ambiguous relation between violence, text, and the body if one can feel it through the words of someone who experienced and expressed suffering. The *Narrative of a Scorpion* will give a sense of the difficulty of narrating, and writing about violence. Scorpion's narrative is somewhat unusual in comparison to the other narratives presented here. The young man from Eritrea has not been chained and tortured, but was forced to work for the human traffickers as a translator and mediator between the hostages and their families in both Eritrea and abroad. Scorpion's narrative gives an insight in the method used by human traffickers in the Sinai desert to extract money from African refugees and certain elements of Scorpion's narrative are indicative of the narratives collected during the fieldwork. Through Scorpion's narrative Tsehay and Abel will be introduced, two Eritrean men whose narratives fill the pages of this thesis.

NARRATIVE OF A SCORPION

A tattoo of a scorpion adorns the upper arm of the man sitting in front of me. For the last one and a half hours he has been talking interminably.³³ Questions need not to be asked, for he was waiting for someone to share his story with. The tattoo on his arm is adjoined by the unpleasant glimpse of the scar of a bullet. Tangible and visible memories on his body that remind of the tough life he led in Eritrea and his eventual flight. A life he is willing to share with me, under the conditions of anonymity; therefore, I decide to give him the name Scorpion. Scorpion got the tattoo during his three years imprisonment in a military jail in Eritrea. His other arm is decorated with a bird and a snake. When I ask him about the meaning of his bodily decoration he explains that together the bird and the snake symbolize disagreement. Scorpion explains that he loves peace but that he does not abstain to attack like a snake if someone harms him. Scorpion was introduced to me by Tsehay, the founder of the *Sinai Group*, a group of people that gathers every month in Tel Aviv to remember those who died in the Sinai desert and to pray for those who continue to be held captive by human traffickers. Tsehay, like all the members of the group, was held hostage for an indefinite of time, and is what Eritreans call an *ab Sina jibo xitetabzu*, literally a kidnapped one for ransom in the Sinai desert. After one of the gatherings the young founder informs me that he wants to introduce me to someone. He resolutely takes me to a barbershop in *Neve Shanaan* Street where Scorpion with his bleached hair, golden necklace, earring and many tattoos works. I am astounded that it is the founder of the Sinai Group who introduces me to Scorpion, as Tsehay himself turns out to be tortured by Scorpion. But does Tsehay see himself as a victim and does Scorpion recognizes a perpetrator in himself? Scorpion's narrative shows that there is no clear distinction to be made between victims and perpetrators, as victims of violence may become perpetrators themselves (cf. Weiss and Six-Hohenbalken 2011: 5). Would there have been space for Scorpion's narrative in the Open Clinic? In the context of the Open Clinic, narratives follow the discourse of suffering of a 'victim' not of a 'perpetrator'. Scorpion is moving in what Primo Levi (1988:40) and others have called a "gray zone", and is a "privileged prisoner". Scorpion claims that he was forced by the traffickers to work for them. He did not accept his role as a privileged prisoner, as we will see in his story. Scorpion believes the people

in Israel are in favor of him, but I experienced that not everyone likes him. Abel, who was held in the same camp with Scorpion, tells me: “I do never want to see this person again, he is bad”. Primo Levi in the context of concentration camps during the Second World War asks: “What would I be capable of doing in order to survive? Would I rather die a dehumanized ‘mummy-man’ than make the mortal compromise necessary to stay alive?” (Levi 2004: 11). I do not, in any way, want to suggest that we can compare the desert camps in the Sinai desert with the concentration camps in Europe. I do believe though that every person tries everything in its capability to survive: from attempting to escape, to endure unfeasible torture. Scorpion narrates:

“I will tell you about the real life, one full of bad experiences, after sharing my story with you, I will tell other people’s story. My story represents the story of many and it is a story that should be told not only because it helps me to forget what happened, but also because the world should know. I am from Eritrea and I am 28 years old. My father and my mother passed away, I am on my own. I was imprisoned for three years in a military prison, for which I want to keep the reasons for myself. We tried to escape from the military prison, 53 of us. We dug a hole from inside the building. Fifty people managed to escape, but three were left. I was one of them. The officials decided to kill us for this attempt. It was on a Friday. The other two were shot dead. I was shot in my arm, you can still see the scars. I literally looked death in the eyes. Since that day, I have been rescued out of death several times. They left my body there, which gave me the opportunity to escape. I sold my golden ring to buy a bus ticket to my sister. But my sister did not want me to stay with her. She called the General of the Army, who showed up at the door and imprisoned me again. For one month and three days I was hanged by my hands. I was only given a cup of tea and one piece of bread a day. One day there was a huge rain that created inattention among the prison guards. I had a spoon with me with which I tried to break the lock. At night I managed to open the door.

I walked to Port Massawa³⁴, which is not far from where I was imprisoned. I had to pay 60.000 Nakfa³⁵ to the Rashida³⁶ in Eritrea, who helped me to cross into Sudan. I worked as a barber in Khartoum³⁷ for two years. I worked very hard. I was living a hard life until I saved enough money. I saved money for two years with the goal to come to Israel. For nine days we were travelling to the Sinai without food. From the sixty to eighty people with whom you start the journey from Sudan five to six people will die. If you are lucky only five lives will be sacrificed. The crimes committed by the dictator in Eritrea, the hardship and torture, creates a situation where people prefer to sacrifice their lives.

When the moment of departure arrived I was taken from Khartoum with sixteen other people from Eritrea. While we were travelling we were kidnapped by another group of smugglers. If you are a Muslim he will not beat you, if you are a Christian the situation will be different. The Sudanese are the most respected, they pay only 400 dollars. He asked us 'are you Christian or Muslim', I was safe because I pretended to be a Muslim. Religion is an important factor for their behaviour; the other thing is money. When we arrived to the Sinai, I made a mistake to tell the smugglers I speak Arabic. They told me to tell the others that they have to pay 2700 dollars. After they paid the smugglers let them go, but I was kept because I know the language. I had no intention to collaborate with the smugglers, but I was forced to stay and work for them. After a while they gave me a hand phone. They told me: From now on you are the representative of the smugglers and you arrange the money from the Eritreans. I told them that the only thing I want to do is to secure my life, I want to go to Israel, please let me go. There was another Eritrean working for them. He was brought to make me understand that I had no choice. In the end I need to have a life, so I was forced to accept the job.

The smugglers gave me a small room with a guard. I was working for the smugglers for three months and twenty days. There was a huge influx of Eritreans coming from Sudan. Two people smuggled them from Egypt in a patrol truck. It is a situation of life and death. There is no other way to Israel than to be smuggled. There is a lot of suffocation; people might die on the way.

One day I was told that I would receive 85 people. But when the group arrived there were only 83 people. Two people died in the truck because of suffocation. I went to see if they were really dead. The two people were lying on the ground, their eyes were covered with sand, and their lips were dry. I tried to save them, I gave them water and mouth to mouth, but they were dead. I used to see a lot of skeletons of dead people. There were a lot of dead people in the Sinai. The smugglers left them there. People die like animals in the Sinai. The Sinai is a hell place. I have seen them cut hands of the people and throw them away. Guns and sticks were used to beat the people. We started burying the bodies, unidentified. While we were doing this I saw a sign of life. Abdullah, the boss of the smugglers trusted me, he allowed me to bring water and the bodies awoke again. We took them to the camp where they rest for weeks. 83 people paid the money, 2300 dollars and left to Israel. When I arrived in Israel I got comfort from these people. Everyone in Israel welcomes me and thanks me for how I tried to help them. Nine people were not able to pay the money; they were tied with ropes. Among them were the two that were considered dead, but woke up again.

When people left for Israel they were forced to leave everything because their belongings might be useful for the newcomers. Abdullah became a popular smuggler. Lots of people came his way. There were two houses for the refugees. There was only one kind person among the criminals, but

the others intimidated him. I will tell you about Abdullah the smuggler. Although he is a young man, he is bigger than devil, than Satan. He is only 28 years old. He has a good body, and he has different cars. He has four multi-story buildings and four land cruisers. He rules like a kind of governor. In Sinai there are many people who work like him, who are smugglers as well. Six people work for Abdullah, two persons belong to his family and the others are like me. Abdullah pays them. They are Bedouins. Abdullah has every kind of military equipment, Kalashnikovs, guns. He used to be guarded by Egyptians; because everyone knows he has a lot of money, he has to recruit people to keep him safe.

The other Eritrean who convinced me to work for the smugglers was doing the money calculations and handed the money to Abdullah. One day he lost money. Abdullah accused him of stealing money from him and chained him with the others. After a while Abdullah told the guards to kill him and he was killed. After that the work became hard, twenty-four hours I had to call around the world in order for the people not to be beaten. I worked hard for people not to stay long. The Sinai is not a good place; there is hardly any food so there is a lot of hunger. I worked hard to facilitate the things so they did not have to stay long. 43 people were beaten a lot. They were kidnapped from Sudan. The smugglers forced them to pay the ransom. They were chained and they were beaten day and night in order to pay the money. But they did not have anyone to pay for their release. They smugglers hit them on their shoulders with ropes that were lit with fire, at the same time they would phone their relatives, they heard the crying and screaming of their family members being tortured. It was very difficult for me to see this violence. One day I told Abdullah that if you keep doing this action I couldn't resist seeing such criminal acts anymore on my own people. 'I rather want you to tie me with them. I rather am with them than help you in committing crimes against humanity. I rather be tortured with them than to help you with this.' Girls were getting raped, I used to give them a razor blade to make a scratch on their finger and put blood on their vagina and in their underwear so that it seemed they had their period. The smugglers did not want to have sex during their period, so they were kind of safe for a while.

I managed to tell three people how to escape. I untied them from their chain and the three people managed to escape. As soon as the smugglers found out that three people escaped they came after them. Tsehay, a young boy, was caught by Abdullah. The other two escaped, and until now no one knows where they are. The smugglers returned Tsehay to the camp. I was afraid that if they beat him Tsehay would tell them that I helped him escape. I used to slap Tsehay so that Abdullah would not get suspicious and I told Tsehay in my language not to tell him. The smugglers asked him: 'who helped you to escape?' He told them he found a way himself. The smugglers stripped him naked; took all his clothes from his body. They were ready to kill him; everyone was crying. I

told him, if you kill him he will rest, don't kill him but beat him instead so that everyone will be scared. Abdullah agreed, from the people he called four strong men and he brought a chair. After that he gathered all the people in order to see the torture, so that everyone would be scared and not try to escape. Four people were holding Tsehay and the guard was beating him. I was afraid they may hurt him a lot; they hit him on his penis very badly. I was acting as if I was on Abdullah's side and continued the beating, but not so badly as the guard. After that Abdullah came with a plastic stick and whipped and beat him; eight times on his back and eight times on his front. There was no blood, but his skin was peeling off and puss was coming from his body. After that Tsehay fainted. When the girls cried they were beaten as well. Abdullah ordered the guards to kill Tsehay and pointed a gun at his head. I told him it was better to kill me. I told him 'I was loyal to you, worked for you. If you kill him people will not come anymore.' I begged him not to kill Tsehay. Abdullah tied his two arms and two legs and laid him down in the sand, at a rocky place. Tsehay was hungry, I gave him food, but when Abdullah saw this he took the food and let him stay with hunger, naked. They smugglers left him like this for fifteen days. After this the smugglers told him to pay the ransom. Tsehay did not have any money and he did not want to call his mother because he knew she did not have the money to pay. He has no relatives outside Eritrea who could pay for his ransom. The smugglers asked him to find any number in Israel. He found the number of a girl in Israel. The smugglers called the girl and beat Tsehay at the same time. When the girl heard him cry she locked the number. The smugglers pulled him on the ground and smashed his head with their feet. But God did not decide for him to die. I told Abdullah that he has nothing, even if he stays for a long time he cannot pay. I suggested he could better work with me. The smugglers forced him to build a house. They made Tsehay serve tied with a long rope, like a slave. They continued to beat him. His body was completely broken.

After I locked all the phones and slept. Abdullah woke me up and asked if I received the money and the phone numbers. I received 180.000 dollars from different locations in ten days. I received money from Israel, America and Saudi Arabia via Western Union. Twenty to thirty groups came. The ones who were able to pay made place for newcomers. Another person would take them to the border. One and a half to two hours by car and then you have to walk. If this person met another smuggler on the way he would sell them to him. There are kind and bad guards – they are all there now at the border.

After he let me go with ten other people and let us midway at the border. There was a girl with us. She fell and I carried her for two hours on my back. She was pregnant. At the border the Egyptians received us. They beat us and they took us on the road. They asked 'who speaks Arabic?' I told them I did. They said if you have any money on your body give us and we will release you. They

beat us and told us not to tell the Israelis. Around the border there were a lot of skeletons of dead bodies. There was a very bad smell. They were shot by the border patrol and then left there. The bodies were not buried. Their families don't know where their sons and daughters are.

This is a curse for Eritreans. I don't want to remember what I have seen over there. No one cares what is going on. This is a voiceless war. It is a war against Eritreans. The world does not recognize and understand the hardship we have to endure. Terrible crimes happen over there. I want to forget what I have seen. Still now Abdullah is forcing people to pay 18,000 dollars. Nobody comes that way anymore voluntarily. Now he has become a kidnapper and forces them to pay. I care a lot for these people. I want to make an operation. If I know anyone to go back and make an operation I would go. I know where the crimes happen.

I have told you only little from the many stories I have. I have seen a lot in the Sinai. The stories are endless.”

The story of Scorpion and that of other people raises the question: how can anthropologists contribute to an understanding of violence? As I mentioned in the commencement, by presenting the narratives of people who endured and witnessed violence we can come to a certain point of understanding. Regina Bendix (in Pichler 2011: 198) writes that narrating violent events is a fundamental means to “transform an unsettling and dangerous experience into a meaningful story”. Furthermore, narratives and personal accounts serve a political purpose (Lammers 2006:84). Lammers quotes Benmayor & Skotnes (1994: 16) to show that the “very act of telling” can be seen as “a strategy of resistance” both by the narrator and the anthropologist. In addition, narratives can serve as an illustration of a “world politics of inclusion and exclusion” and are able to promote “awareness about the violations of people’s rights and dignity” (Lammers 2006: 84). Writing a personal narrative can “cause some degree of transcendence of difference and a reaffirmation of a common humanity” (Caplan 1997: 17).

* * * * *

Narration as a strategy of resistance can be personal, political, and communal in character. In *Part One – Narratives, Metaphors, Scars, and Graves: Discursive and Bodily Frontiers of Violence* I examine how personal narratives are meaningful expressions of experiences of violence. I show that alternative idioms contribute to an understanding of torture and are a strategic language to create continuity between past and present. Through the lives, bodies, language, and the memories of the narrators I concretize how experiences of violence become expressible and how meaning is constituted.



PART ONE

NARRATIVES, METAPHORS, SCARS, AND GRAVES: DISCURSIVE AND BODILY FRONTIERS OF VIOLENCE

“[...] the ontics of violence – the lived experience of violence – and the epistemology of violence – the ways of knowing and reflection about violence – are not separate. Experience and interpretation are inseparable for perpetrators, victims, and ethnographers alike. [...] Violence is both expressed and experienced.”

Nordstrom and Robben (1995: 4)

The Sinai desert is frequently referred to by the protagonists of this thesis, journalists, activists, and Eritreans living in the diaspora as a ‘desert hell’ (Fishbein 2010), a ‘human prison for African migrants’ (Frantzman 2010), a ‘place of death’ (Frantzman 2010), a ‘burial ground for Eritreans’ (Estefanos 2011), and the ‘killing fields of Sinai’ (EYSC 2011). These metaphors are used to describe the accounts of violence, torture, and rape that arise from the Sinai desert and from the narratives of death at the Egypt-Israel border. Metaphors are used by individuals to make sense of the world (Fernandez 1986) and can be seen as an attempt to “define the undefined and nascent experience of a person or group” (Low 1994: 143). Low argues that metaphors allow one to “move from the abstract and inchoate of lived experience to the concrete and easily graspable” (ibid. 143). Metaphors can provide a “strategic language” for the expression of suffering and a representation of experiences of the body (ibid. 143). Senseless and unspeakable suffering becomes expressible with the use of metaphors, as they are “creative and infinitely generative in their allusions and meanings” (ibid. 143). The metaphors used by Eritrean refugees to express the violence they witnessed or endured in the Sinai desert are often of a biblical content. Scorpion for example sees Abdullah, the ringleader of a human

trafficking group, as someone who is bigger than devil and his acts of torture and extortion more evil than Satan.

Both metaphors and narratives are a manner in which the experiences in the ‘torture camps’ become expressible in language. Language moreover appears insufficient to express experiences of violence (Scarry 1985: 5) and speech not adequate to describe the infliction of pain (cf. Bindford 2004, Weiss and Six-Hohenbalken 2011: 1). I deal with a paradox in my research, for I attempt to turn violent experiences that are not easily expressed through verbal everyday language or academic discourse into text. One who attempts to express experiences of violence and torture is confronted with the frontiers of language (cf. Appadurai 1996, Das 2007, Weiss and Six-Hohenbalken 2011), as language often seems insufficient in describing the abhorrence of torture (Scarry 1985). The limits of language in researching or writing about violence have been stressed by several scholars (cf. Appadurai 1996, Das 2007, Weiss and Six-Hohenbalken 2011) for the limits of narration are not only experienced by narrators, but also by anthropologists who represent experiences of violence in an ethnographic narrative.

I. DISCURSIVE FRONTIERS OF VIOLENCE

The people who narrate their experiences in ‘torture camps’ often had difficulties verbally expressing the experiences of flight from their home countries, experiences of violence and humiliation in the desert camps, and an exposure to life and death during the journey. Few of the protagonists of this thesis, in narrating about the desert camps in the Northern Sinai, had words beyond the acts of torture they endured or witnessed: “I was hanged like Jesus Christ.” “A boy was beaten to death and the smugglers took out his eye.” “We were forced to bury the body of an Eritrean man after he got killed for not being able to pay the ransom.”^{xxxviii} The narrators experienced difficulties to put into words how the torture and being held hostage had affected them emotionally. Lammers (2006: 96) explains that “although loss, pain, and suffering are among the universal features of the human condition, the actual experiences of this kind are difficult to communicate”. I was warned by one of the protagonist that there is a limit to what we can know (and want to know) and what we are capable of understanding:

“You do not want to know everything and we cannot tell you all, because we do not have the words to express the situations we experienced. We do not always want to remember the things we have witnessed or endured. The past should remain the past. We now live in the present.”

From the start of the fieldwork I realised that researching and writing about the ‘torture camps’ would not be a simple undertaking. Therefore, inspired by other anthropologists I ask: how can

anthropologists take hold of the meaning of expressions of experiences of violence? (Weiss and Six-Hohenbalken 2011: 1). Although narratives give an insight into experiences of violence, the method of narration is not entirely sufficient in describing the experiences in the ‘torture camps’. In my research I have come across metaphorical language and “alternative idioms” (Lammers 2006: 312) to both comprehend and express the experiences of suffering. Perceptions and memories of flight, the ‘torture camps’ in the Sinai desert, and the journey are not only expressed in narratives, (bodily) metaphors, and poetry, but also become tangible in bodily wound and scars: bodily expressions of violence. Experiences of violence and suffering can be expressed through language and the body. Before discussing and outlining bodily frontiers of violence, I examine discursive frontiers of violence and elucidate methodological problems, insecurities, and empirical frontiers of representation I struggled with in my research.

WHOSE VOICES?^{xxxix}

“I would love to have died in the Sinai desert. I could not face the suffering. However, today I thank God I am alive because I can tell the story of those who suffered and passed away, for those who did not have time to tell you, for those who died in the Sinai, or for those who are still there. The people who are here now (in Israel) are a voice for the voiceless, we are spokespersons.”

A young Eritrean woman in Tel Aviv, who requested anonymity, believes her voice and that of other survivors of the desert camps are speaking for those who are silenced. Her voice gives recognition to other voices and so do the voices of the protagonists of this thesis. In speaking for themselves they are also legitimately speaking for others (cf. Das et al. 2001: 5). The woman - let her name be Voice – told me that listeners - anthropologists amongst others - are considered spokespersons and that we should share the stories told to us. She and others encouraged me to become a witness of their suffering (cf. Weiss 2011: 120). The woman’s desire forces me, inspired by Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004:26), to ask: How do I position the people whose suffering I make public in the interest of the theoretical argument? Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois warn that we should not create new forms of “totalizing narratives” through an “aestheticism of misery” (ibid. 26). Anthropologists should be careful about the manner in which they represent ‘survivors’ of violence and torture. Amongst anthropologists - and I have been guilty of this belief as well – the idea prevails that we should give the ‘voiceless a voice’. But what legitimacy and authority do we have to speak for others? Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) points out in her work *Can the Subaltern Speak?* that research and representation are irreducibly intertwined with politics and power. Spivak points out that anthropologists who proclaim to ‘give a voice’ to those who are less capable of speaking, are

involved in a relationship with a post-colonial discourse, revived for a postmodern world (cf. Nordstrom and Robben 1995: 11). Nordstrom and Robben (ibid. 11), both Western anthropologists, imply that when we speak for others, we force our Western enterprise onto others. They claim that no matter how dedicated we are, we cannot escape the legacy of our culture (ibid. 11). By focusing on narratives and by representing the words of the narrators in these pages I hope to show that I want to relay the focus from ‘speaking for others’ to *speaking with others*. Narratives come to existence in a dialogue (more on this in *Writing Against Inhumanity*) and therefore we should focus on intersubjectivity not on autonomy. This ethnography is not merely my work, it is equally the work of the protagonists of this research. Instead of perceiving violence and torture as an imperceptible topic and therefore too difficult to discuss and understand, we should think about an anthropology in which we do not perceive our interlocutors solely as information-givers, but as co-researchers. The protagonists play an important role in constructing meaning and understanding. We should not fear our Western enterprise, but rather fear our arrogance about focusing on speaking for others and not with others. I am inspired by Amina Mama - to whom I was introduced through the work of Ellen Lammers (2006:16) - who articulates that ‘giving a voice’ should not be the issue, but deafness. “Who can afford to be deaf?” Nordstrom (2004: 32) argues: “why do we omit the telling and in so doing allow the acts behind the telling to continue?”. I share, as the Somali novelist Nuruddin Farah (2000) argues, that the stories of violence, torture, and death are told in the hope that “a person whose story is shared will not die”.

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE UNKNOWN

I have struggled to find the right words to represent the narrators and their experiences of torture and I often felt I could not voice the experiences of violence from a distant position (cf. Das et al. 2001, Lammers 2006, Weiss and Six-Hohenbalken 2011). I was often left with the question of how to comprehend what I heard, just as the narrators had difficulties in comprehending what they experienced. Ellen Lammers ‘struggled’ with this difficulty – albeit from a different order - in her research on refugees in Kampala. She explains that:

“The subject confronts academics with epistemological and representational dilemmas: what can we know, who are the ‘knowers’, what is truth, and how do we share our understanding? Even if one listens carefully, it remains a challenge to fully comprehend a person’s confusion, anger or trauma, and to convey this in writing” (2006: 288).

I have dealt with these questions of representation, authenticity, comprehension, and truth throughout my research and the process of writing. Lammers (ibid. 97) argues that she can only comprehend something about the lives of the young refugees by mentally placing herself in their world, and simultaneously searching for her own passions, uncertainties, and beliefs. I struggled with the limits of intellectually and emotionally comprehending the experiences and narratives of torture; I was confronted with violence unknown to me. In my research diary (22 April 2011) I asked myself:

“Can I understand how it feels to be tortured while your family is on the other side of the satellite phone hearing your cries of pain? Can I understand how your body responds to being held captive, chained and blindfolded in a cave for months, unexpectedly receiving beatings, deprived of food and water? Can I understand how it feels to leave your country in the middle of the night without telling anyone in fear of arrest? Will I ever be able to fully understand the rationale of the human traffickers and the experience of humiliation and fear of the hostages? Am I able to comprehend their actions and pain?”

This brings me to an epistemological dilemma: what can I know?, which is intrinsically grounded in a representational dilemma: how can I convert spoken words and bodily expressions of violence into an ethnographic text? Can we represent what we do not know? Not only was I confronted with my own limits to understanding, but also with that of fellow anthropologists who responded with scepticism toward the stories of torture I shared with them. A culture of disbelief seems to surround the testimonies of refugees, as I was more than once asked: Do they not make up these stories to get a refugee status in Israel?^{xl} It makes me question: do we, because we are unable to imagine the extraordinary events narrated, choose to dismiss them as false or fabrication? (cf. Feldman 1995: 245). Are there limits to the stretch of the imagination when confronted with extreme and disturbing experiences? Feldman, drawing on his research on political violence in Northern Ireland asks: “How can they be understood and depicted if they dwell on the other side of the border of conventional or known bodily sensory and moral experience?” (ibid. 245). This dilemma of understanding is an underlying fear that anthropology has long ignored: are we willing to abandon our pretty picture of the world? Do we want to read an academic text that is disconcerting? Van der Port argues that “confrontations with the most brutal violations of the integrity of the human body - violations of what is perhaps the ultimate story we have to tell about ourselves: the story that says that we are more than just skin, bones, blood, and brains - seem to bring about an utter alienation” (van de Port 1998: 102-103).

Even though I do agree that each witness brings his or her own perspective to violence and therefore each testimony should be contested, I wonder if we should focus on authenticity and truth. We are trained to ask: Is it true what we are told? Is the violence exaggerated? But are these the questions that we should ask? To gain a better insight into the experiences of refugees, Lammers (2006:105) asks, inspired by African epistemological traditions, not “is what you tell me true?” but “why do you tell me this?”. I do agree with Lammers that it is not up to the anthropologist to judge or distinguish true from false, but we should comprehend peoples’ experiences (ibid. 96). We always deal with a ‘struggle’ between the true experience and the lived experience, people act on the latter. Therefore, I ask: why and how do Eritrean refugees express experiences of torture? What words do Eritreans choose in their accounts of being held hostage? Taussig (1984) sees the anthropologist as a mediator and emphasizes that the concern of an anthropologist should be with the mediation of a “culture of terror” through narration and should focus on “writing effectively against terror”. I share these narratives with the hope that the “culture of torture” is not forgotten and I write “effectively against inhumanity”.

VIOLENT EXPERIENCES NARRATED

Narrative is an experience
Narrative is a way of remembering
Narratives constitute (new) meaning
Narratives express bodily suffering
Narrative is a form of identity constitution
Narrative is a form of representation
Narrative is a performance
Narratives come to existence in the ‘intersubjective field’
Narratives are dialogical
Narrative is a way of analysis
Narratives construct new lived realities
Narratives...

“I never thought that I would be alive and among people again. I was afraid that I would not survive the hardship in the Sinai. The smugglers kept us in a cave. We were 64 in total, chained by our feet. There was hardly any food or water. The smugglers told us that they were going to kill us. They were beating us very terribly. The men were treated more badly than the woman. And I did not even want to come to Israel, I was kidnapped in Sudan and taken against my will. It was terrible. When I arrived to the camp in Israel I had scars all over my body, scars from the beating and the torture. We were chained for two months and two weeks. My family from all over the world paid for my ransom: 7750 US dollars.”

Narratives and personal histories can enhance the “interplay between individual experiences and external events” (Lammers 2006: 83) and therefore demonstrate wider social processes (Caplan 1997). I do not claim that the narratives presented here are equivocal for the diverse narratives of African refugees I interacted with in Israel. Each witness to violence brings his or her own perspective, and violence is an intricately layered phenomenon (Nordstrom and Robben 1995: 5). The narratives of the Sinai desert are infinite; the stories hermeunetic and meaning-giving. Every individual reflects on his or her past differently and deals in another way with a process of remembrance that is often marked with distress. The narratives of the young men are part of a larger communicative body of stories, interactions, experiences, and observations that influenced the interpretation and understanding of the narratives I gathered during my fieldwork. Yet, the narratives and alternative idioms were the only insight in the Northern Sinai desert, as the region was inaccessible to me as a researcher.^{xii} Therefore the information provided is acquired through dialogical relations with, observations of, and participation with African refugees in Tel Aviv.

Needless to say, narratives are more dialogic than monologic, and anthropological knowledge should be distinguished as something produced in human interaction (Bakhtin 1981 in Scheper-Hughes 1993: 23). The narratives came to existence in a relationship between the narrators and me, the researcher (and others), and thus in a dialogical context that implies an audience and a narrator. I am aware that I perform the role of audience and act as a co-narrator and I partake intimately in the production of knowledge “refracted by social relationships” (Ghassem-Fachandi (2009: 2). The different perspectives of the narrators are important for the construction of meaning and the representation of violence. Meaning is constructed in the ‘intersubjective field’ and expressions of violence come into being within an “already existing web of human relationships” (Arendt 1958: 184 in Weiss and Six-Hohenbalken 2011: 6). There exists a relation of power between the human traffickers and the Eritrean refugees; a relation of uncertainty with the Israeli authorities; a relation of distance with the Eritrean government; a relation amongst Eritrean refugees and other African refugees; and with the anthropologist. Dealing with experiences that often did not want to be remembered, I had to be careful in my approach and keep in mind the limits of expressions of experiences of violence that are not narrated easily and require a relation of trust. In our interaction the narrator decides when to speak and when to be silent. Narrating and expressing violent experiences is a constructivist and subjective endeavor (Weiss and Six-Hohenbalken 2011: 14). As a listener I am not aware of the elements that are left out in the process of narration and I have limited influence on this. Weiss and Six-Hohenbalken refer to Jackson (2002) who emphasizes that expressions of

violence are never expressed as “purely personal revelations, but authored and authorized dialogically and collaboratively in the course of sharing one’s recollections with others” (in Weiss and Six-Hohenbalken 2011: 5).

Furthermore, the reader should keep in mind that the narratives and narrative fragments presented are often – with the exception of the account of Abel and Adhanom – an interpretation for they were translated from Tigrinya to English by an interpreter. The mediation of an interpreter and my interposition raises questions of authenticity on the texts presented here. Most narratives were told in a short time period and often only in one or two encounters, while the narratives told often cover years of experiences. We never get the full story at once, if we ever get it at all. How much value do the narratives shared with me have? Three months are not enough to unravel gaps and discontinuities in narratives and develop a relationship of trust in which the narratives at different times can be compared with each other. Long-term research would contribute to the identification of violent long-term effects and discontinuities.^{xlii}

* * * * *

In the second half of Part One I show different discursive and bodily strategies to express experiences of violence. The use of strategic language and alternative idioms are attempts to comprehend the experiences, meaning, and effects of violence. The young men situate their bodies in the narratives and use metaphors with an emphasis on the body to express experiences of torture. Although narratives and metaphors give an insight to the experience of suffering and are conveyed through language; nonetheless I have stressed frontiers of what can be addressed in words. Speaking about bodily experiences of torture has its limits and people turn to show bodily wounds and scars to convey experiences of torture. Embodied expressions of torture are a way through which some of the protagonists attempt to comprehend memories of torture and place themselves in this world. Nonetheless, sometimes the task of placing oneself in this world is a difficult one and pain resides in another body, as women who experienced sexual torture narrate these experiences through other bodies. I conclude with empty spaces, missing and disappeared bodies in graves and the Sinai desert that are silenced, but symbolically speak.

II. BODILY FRONTIERS OF VIOLENCE

“Their bodies might tell you their story more than their tongues.”

Scorpion

Scorpion – whose narrative was presented at the beginning of this thesis (page 15-21) - indicates that rather than to talk and enquire about torture, I might better understand the experiences in the desert camps by looking closely at the bodies of those who survived. Scorpion explains that narrating about experiences of violence is a difficult undertaking that brings a person back to relive the torture. Alternatively, traces of experiences of torture can be read as a text from the body by bodily wounds and scars. Scars and bodily wounds serve as an alternative idiom for experiences that cannot be addressed through language. Liisa Malkki (1997: 232) argues that bodily wounds are accepted as objective evidence of suffering and regarded as more reliable than words. That would mean however that memory and feelings derived from experiences are inferior to the act itself, and attempts to create continuity between past and present are not taken into account. Therefore, before turning to narration through the body, I show how Eritrean refugees narrate about their bodies. The young men situate their bodies in the narratives and put emphasis on bodily experiences of violence and torture to attempt to reconstruct life after the destruction of self.

BODILY EXPERIENCES OF TORTURE: 'MY BODY IS NOT MINE'

Yonas, a 23-year-old youngster escapes from his country after playing hide-and-seek with the Eritrean government for five years.^{xliii} The government is looking to recruit him for compulsory military service. Yonas deceives the Eritrean army by hiding in the forest at night and working in his father's fields during the day. He is always on his guard to escape if the army comes to arrest him. Incessantly afraid for his safety, he feels he cannot continue living like this. One night, without telling anyone, he escapes to neighbouring Ethiopia. The United Nations Higher Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that around one thousand Eritreans cross the border into Ethiopia each month (IRIN 2011). Yonas is what Eritreans call a *batati okba*, literally someone who runs from the government and crosses the border. Most of the men and women I spoke with kept the plans for their escape secret from their families and just disappeared. They were too afraid that someone would inform the Eritrean army of their plans and that they would be arrested before they could attempt to flee the country. Anyone who leaves Eritrea is perceived as a traitor and military guards on the Eritrean border have orders to shoot on site if people attempt to leave the country (Tronvoll 2009).

After a week in a refugee camp in Ethiopia, Yonas walks to Sudan with the help of Ethiopian smugglers. Eritrean refugees often walk for days after they cross the Eritrean border and

before they either arrive at refugee camps in Sudan and Ethiopia or bigger cities such as Khartoum. Refugee camps in Eastern Sudan (such as Shegerab and Kassala) or in Ethiopia's Tigray Regional State (Shimelba, Maiaini and Adi-Harush) are often the first stages in the journey to Europe or Israel. Time and again, the young men and women leave the refugee camps after a few weeks, as the situation in the camps is harsh and there are only few opportunities for work. Additionally, the refugee camps are not entirely safe as the Eritrean military crosses the border for periodic roundups in search of 'traitors' and returns refugees to Eritrea. In Eritrea, returned refugees face persecution, imprisonment, and death.

From the refugee camps Eritreans travel for days and sometimes weeks in the back of pickup trucks through the desert of Sudan into Egypt and cross the Suez Canal either by boat or in the back of a truck via one of the two bridges. At the border of Ethiopia and Sudan as well as in Sudan and Egypt, African asylum seekers run the risk of being arrested and deported. In September 2011, 300 Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees were deported from Sudan to Eritrea after weeks of detention on charges of illegal entry to the country (UN News Centre 2011). The Sudanese police believe that most of the deported refugees were bound for Israel.

On the Ethiopia-Sudan border Yonas is kidnapped in what he believes is a set up plan by a human trafficking network. Together with a group of 85 Eritreans Yonas is held in the Sudanese desert for weeks without shelter, guarded by four men with Kalashnikovs. In a weeklong journey Yonas and his group are taken by car to the Suez Canal. They cross the canal in wooden boats in the middle of the night. From the Suez Canal they are driven to the Sinai desert packed in the back of pick-up trucks. For two months the 86 Eritreans are held in a house, deprived of food and water and are forced to build an apartment for a human trafficker that goes by the name of Abu Kamal. After two months Yonas is moved to a cave, where he is held for another three months, blindfolded, with twenty other Eritreans. Yonas explains how Abu Kamal extorts money from him and the other hostages:

"It was too terrible, when I remember these moments I feel bad. We were treated inhumanely, we faced hunger and troubled moments. I have to speak, I am so happy of my coming. They were torturing us, beating us, using electronic instruments. We were treated very inhuman. We really suffered a great thing. They were demanding huge money. This is the way they do that. During the morning time and the evening time they can beat us what they want, they simply ask the money. When I paid 16000 they did nothing, their demand was money. My family borrowed money from different corners of the world, from relatives around the world. This money has to be paid back and that stresses me. The smugglers started from five in the morning with calling 'pay the money, talk

to them, tell your families we will kill you if you don't pay'. My family was crying, the smugglers told them and me I am going to die. At first I paid 3700 dollar. My brother sold his car and paid the money. I cried when one person of the group died. Death is nothing. It is my expectation. I morally prepared myself to see this. I was saying to myself 'when shall I die?' When they were beating us, I expected only death. Before I left Eritrea I did not know anything about the journey. I never expected to have this experience of torture. This is the first time in my life, no one has beaten me since I was born."

Yonas denotes the worthlessness of human beings as he emphasises the inhumane treatment by human traffickers. The hostages regressed to a state of "abstract nakedness of being nothing but human" (Arendt 1973: 300) and the torture confronts the Eritrean refugees with an extreme humanness. Talal Asad argues that:

"the modern history of torture is not only a record of the progressive prohibition of cruel, inhuman, and degrading practices. It is also part of a more complex story of the modern secular concept of what it means to be truly human" (Asad in Kleinman et al. 1997: 258).

The refugees are dehumanized by the human traffickers. In the eyes of the human traffickers their bodies become a commodity - a source of money. Only if the family of the refugees can pay for the ransom are they perceived by the human traffickers to be useful; if not they are killed or their organs are removed and sold on the black market. These are not just empty threats. In interviews, Eritrean refugees narrate about fellow hostages who were beaten to death or had been killed with a gun. Threats of murder and organ removal, and the situation in which the hostages are held constitutes an expectation of death. Their "out-of-place bodies" make young Eritreans understand that their bodies, their lives, and their deaths are thought of as dispensable and hardly worth counting at all (cf. Scheper-Hughes 2004: 175). The hostages are kept on the verge of dying to speed up the process of payment: they are hardly given food and often the water is undrinkable because it is salty or mixed with gasoline. The traffickers are not interested in the lives, of Eritrean refugees only in the money they are extracting from their bodies. "Their only God is money", I was often told by those who survived.

While crossing actual and experiential geographical borders African refugees are confronted with bodily boundaries. The conditions under which the refugees are traveling and are held hostage contest the limits of the human body. Yonas narrates how his body became unknown to him:

“I was so much tired, but nothing is impossible, I tolerated everything. I had a dry throat because there was not enough water. I became hopeless. When they came to beat me I simply accepted it. We could not talk to each other, if we do so they will kill us. We were abnormal; the only choice was to undergo everything. We were asking ourselves in the morning ‘when are we going today?’ For five months I wore the same clothes without washing them. No one allowed us to wash our bodies. We had lice on our bodies. We could fill a car with all of them. The smugglers are not interested in our lives; they are only interested in money. We were kept on the verge of dying. I did not feel as if my body was mine, I felt as if it belonged to the smugglers. It is against a human being. We were blindfolded for three months. We lived in constant fear. I was afraid they would stab me with a knife. You don’t know when they approach you.”

Yonas and his fellow hostages regressed to a state of abnormality in which they felt they lost all sovereignty over life and their bodies. This state of abnormality is filled with uncertainty and fear. Captivated, deprived of freedom, and exposed to torture, the only thing that one feels one can trust is one's own body. Yonas had to survive under circumstances that removed the certainty of his body (cf. Scheper-Hughes 2004: 184) and he felt even his body became unknown to him. One's taken for granted experience of embodiment questions one's existence: “is this really happening to me? Am I real?” (Strejilevich 1997 in Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004: 23). Torture and disorder pervades the known and familiar with uncertainty and fear, alienates the body, and makes it feel unfamiliar (cf. Becker 2000: 322). The bodies of Eritrean refugees held hostage in the Sinai desert transformed and the experiences changed them into strangers to their own bodies. Yonas no longer felt as if his body was his own dominion, it belonged to the smugglers. He became isolated in a “social space” enclosed by the blindfold, the walls of the cave, and the unexpected beatings (cf. Robben 2005: 217). He was tortured on a daily basis for weeks to extract money from his family members. Acts of torture are, what Robben (*ibid.* 217) calls, “pitiful manifestations of the depths of humanity”. Yonas expresses fear and the uncertainty in a question of life and death: “will I live?”. He and his fellow-hostages are placed in a “disordered world of ambiguity and incongruency” (Nordstrom and Robben 1995: 18) and experience the “deconstruction, destruction, transformation, traumatisation and ultimately, the assassination of identity and self” (*ibid.* 18).

Some Eritreans express the feeling of creating another skin, an extra layer over their original body. This expression should be understood as both symbolic and literal. Skin diseases are common in the ‘torture camps’ due to the poor circumstances in which the refugees live and a lack of nutritious food and water. Often hostages are not allowed to wash their bodies and this

lack of hygiene changes the structure of their skin. Dryness and rash are literal signs of skin diseases. Symbolically, the metaphor of transformation of the skin is a strategic language through which the foreignness of one's body can be expressed. The metaphor of transformation is a strategy to get through the torture and a way for hostages to extract themselves from their bodies. By extracting themselves from their bodies the torture is inflicted on this new layer of skin and one can attempt to disclose oneself physically from the violence. Although accounts of attempted escapes and successful escapes from the desert camps are existent, most of the men and women I interviewed did not see a possibility of escape from the violence. As Yonas explains: "I simply accepted it". He narrates how the group was tortured:

"I was not beaten as bad as the others because I was sick, but I was beaten on the soil of my feet. There were seven girls in our group, the smugglers would come and take them and do whatever they liked with them. The women were raped, even though they were with their husband. The beatings were really bitter. Some were tortured with electric shock on their ears and hands. The smugglers threaten to kill us or to take our organs. One day when the smugglers refused to give us water we drank our own urine. We had to hide drinking urine from the smugglers, because they would not allow us. The people were passing their urine and others in a plastic bag, they did not allow us to go outside."

Yonas describes how he experienced and endured the everyday violence in the Sinai desert. The types of torture the young Eritrean man enumerates are in accordance with the accounts of other Eritrean refugees I spoke with, both in and outside the context of the Open Clinic. African refugees are exposed to physical torture: beatings, the use of (electrical) instruments, and exposure to extreme circumstances. African refugees also mention psychological violence: deprivation of food and water, deprivation of freedom, slavery, witnessing violence and murder, fear, uncertainty, and exhaustion. Here, I should make a distinction between torture and violence. Where torture is an actual attack on the body, violence can be experienced without physical pain. Torture is an infliction of physical and mental pain and has a bodily dimension. Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004: 23) argue that torture resides:

"not only in the explicit acts of bodily violence and violation but also in the reversals and interruptions of the unexpected and the predictable, striking terror in the ontological security of one's life world".

Torture serves as an infliction of pain, humiliation and the deconstruction of the self and therefore becomes related to the deconstruction, of society, culture, and eventually the world one lives in (cf. (Robben 2005: 233). Robben argues that (sexual) torture unmakes the process

of creation and leaves physical, mental, social, and cultural traces (Ibid. 233) on a person's body and psyche. In academic literature there is an emphasis on torture used to elicit information (cf. Robben 2005, Scarry 1985, Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004). Scarry states that torture consist of a "primary physical act": infliction of pain and the "primary verbal act": the interrogation (Scarry 1985: 35). However, torture is not only a method to obtain information, but also to receive ransom and extort money from family members. The human traffickers try to break the body and strength of the refugees and the relatives in order for them to pay.

The everydayness of violence in the Sinai desert is not restricted to physical pain, but extends to the embarrassment of not being able to wash one's body for months, to secretly drink one's own urine and the constant feeling of fear and uncertainty. Some of the hostages were not allowed to go to the toilet and had to meet their needs where they were or in a plastic bag that was passed around. Violence is also the unbearable smell of human bodies packed in a small room. Violence goes beyond what one endures oneself; it is also witnessing other people being tortured, hearing cries of pain, and not being able to stop the violence or sexual torture. Nordstrom and Robben (1995: 3) argue that violence is "confusing and inconclusive" and is "emblematic for the extremes that people's existential disorientation may reach". Further, violence is to hear the cries of your relative or friend on the phone while you are forced to pay ransom. Violence can be experienced without being present yourself; it rises above the individual body and can be experienced collectively (more on the collective experience of violence in Part Two).

Yonas once again loses sovereignty over his body when he crosses the Egypt-Israel border. He can no longer trust his exhausted body and awakes in a hospital bed in Israel two weeks later. He remembers nothing of the act of crossing the border. Yonas narrates:

"We went half an hour by car and half an hour by foot. I lost my consciousness; I cannot recognize the people I crossed the border with. We lived in three months of total darkness. I was so much exhausted, so tired, I was unable to tolerate all the hardship. On my way to Israel I fainted, I lost my consciousness. I saved my body when I reached Bersheeva hospital, I stayed there for two weeks. I am happy; I never expected to survive the Sinai. 'Where am I?' I asked the doctors when I woke up. The doctors explained the situation to me and told me to go to Yaffa (PHR), they gave me money for a bus ticket to Tel Aviv and called my friend."

I meet Yonas for the first time in the Open Clinic of Physicians for Human Rights. Yonas is diabetic and visits the clinic to do a blood test. He believes he developed diabetes in the five

How do people make sense of their lives in the face of a scarred self? Can survivors of the ‘torture camps’ reorder their lives given the enormity of the task? There are many ways in which people make sense of their lives after violent experiences. The process of remembering is personal and experienced in various ways by individuals. Sometimes people keep silent in an attempt to forget what they went through or simply because they do not have words with which they can address their memories. Others speak in an act of resistance, to bear witness to what they had to endure and to what fellow Eritreans are still enduring. Yonas, by centering his body in the narrative, finds a way to speak about the torture. Meira Weiss (2002: 12) argues that representations of the body, or embodiments, which she sees as discursive formations, are mediated through language as well as embodied practices. Narrative is a means through which embodied distress is expressed and experiences with violence and death are put into words. Narratives are a way through which Eritrean refugees enact, or perform, their experience of violence, and these performances constitute action (cf. Becker 2000). The enactment of embodied memories through narrative keeps the past alive and enables the narrator to attempt to create a bridge to the present. Becker (ibid. 322), who has written extensively on narration and the suffering body, holds the opinion that bodily experience is given voice through narrative. Where Yonas focus on his body through the language he uses, Abel makes use of bodily metaphors: a strategic language through which torture becomes expressible in metaphorical words.

BODILY METAPHORS AND POETRY: ‘I STEPPED OUT OF A GRAVE’

“The Rashida attacked me and tied me. I was with the smugglers for six months and three weeks. During the day we were exposed to the desert sun. I have polio but the smugglers did not care about that, they beat me as badly as the others. I was forced to work. We were building a palace for Abdullah [the human trafficker]. There was no food, water or medical treatment. We stayed in the compound. We were locked and guarded and I was beaten with electricity and fire. They used

cigarettes to torture me. I have seen everything. I have seen dead bodies with my own eyes. We were 270 in two camps together. Abdullah hit you, burn you, he put electric. He beat me for two weeks. My legs did not go anymore, I was so tired. He calls you and makes you sit and does whatever he likes. He puts a cigarette on your body, takes out your nail. These smugglers, they were all on drugs, they were smoking Hashish all day. One day Abdullah said after he took the drugs 'please don't show me these guys, I will kill them all'. I never expected the Rashida would do like this, this is new for me. It is hell, a degrading world. You are afraid all the time."

Abel

In the introduction to Part One I showed how Eritrean refugees use metaphorical language to convey what they experienced in the Sinai region by comparing the desert region in which they were held with a 'desert hell', a 'burial place', or a 'place of death'. The emphasis on graves and burial grounds can be understood in the light of the constant confrontation with death during the journey. These metaphors of death are extended to the body as several people I spoke with metaphorically considered their bodies as graves and the experiences in and release from the 'desert hell', as 'stepping out of a grave'. Abel, after narrating his experiences in the hands of Abdullah metaphorically states: "I stepped out of a grave. I was given another life". Abel felt as if he lived two lives: one before the release from the desert camp and one on arrival in Israel. Those held hostage experience a sense of 'having lived two lives'. Becker points out that in research with refugees who escape from totalitarian regimes - dictatorship in Eritrea or the power regime of human traffickers in the Sinai desert - a common theme emerges (cf. Langer 1991):

"the unending effort to reconcile the sense of having lived two lives that are distinct from each other, yet constantly intertwined through memory, resulting in a continual reworking of a schism in the self brought about by this upheaval" (Becker: 2000: 321).

Abel suffered multiple violent disruptions (ibid. 324) in his young life that continue to impact his being in the world. He has to deal with past and present disruptions of having lived in a stratocracy, escape, flight, torture, violence, hostage, and the uncertainty of life in Israel. These experiences have influenced his life and the ideas about himself. The lack of freedom in his country and the situations he experienced in the Sinai desert and during his escape confronts him with a feeling of discontinuity. The use of bodily metaphors is a way in which Abel can explain and comprehend his experiences of torture. The bodily metaphor of a grave creates some continuity between past, present, and future. Through this almost biblical metaphor, that resembles a form of resurrection, Abel creates an alternative idiom through which he gives

meaning to the experiences of torture and through which he can somehow distance himself from the experiences in the 'torture camp'. The uncertainty of life in Israel influences the way he remembers and creates hope for the future. Narratives of suffering and bodily metaphors illustrate how people struggle to create continuity out of chaos. At the same time bodily metaphors reveal the struggle to create a coherent narrative that links the past with the present. However, under certain circumstances, such as the struggle for life in Israel, this attempt is negated by the magnitude of the memories that are engendered (cf. Das 2001). Abel discloses to me: "If you can help me I can live, if not I will not survive".

I first met Abel in the Open Clinic of Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) on an evening in March 2011 when the 25-year-old Eritrean visits the clinic in search for treatment for polio, a disease diagnosed when he was a young boy. The polio confronts Abel with the limitations of his body. He cannot walk or stand for longer than a few hours, and he drags his left leg. His illness was no reason for the human traffickers to treat Abel differently from the other hostages. Abel sees the inflictions of pain as attacks on his body. The torture inflicted on Abel's body worsened the dysfunctionality of his body. By metaphorically stating that he "stepped out of a grave" Abel accentuates his weakened body. Abel is released from the 'torture camp' after his family paid the ransom. He is sent to the border by the human traffickers with other hostages who leave him behind due to his state of being:

"At the time we crossed the border my legs were not good, I was injured by the beatings. Pus was leaving my body. The other people left me alone and crossed the border. Step by step I was crawling. An Egyptian soldier came, he did not see me. I lay down on the ground. The soldier was singing. He took his clothes and arranged his gun. I was not afraid, I was out from Abdullah, after that experience, crossing the border was nothing for me. I left and crawled to another one (border guard). The soldier spoke with the one I left before. I waited for one hour. I had to cross between them. 'How can I pass?' I was thinking all the time. I went thirty meters and crossed the barbed wire. I was not afraid of them, I crossed by God. Then I reached to the fence, up it was too much for me, down there was one circle. I went slowly, slowly. I was not afraid. The soldiers were very close but they did not see me."

When released from the camps of the human traffickers, African refugees cross the Sinai border into Israel. The 240-kilometer, largely unfenced border with Israel is the only border African refugees can cross by foot out of the African continent. The Egypt-Israel border is an actual frontier of violence. The crossing is not without risks. In 2010, Egyptian border guards killed more than 30 African refugees (Amnesty International 2011: 134). Since 2007, there have

been 85 known cases of refugees who were shot at the border known as a 'shoot to kill' policy. Human rights organisations believe that in reality there are more deaths.^{xliv} Most people who cross the border are aware that they risk death or imprisonment for themselves and their families. An unknown number of people who attempt to cross the border are arrested and imprisoned in Egyptian police stations and prisons (Global Detention Project 2011). After surviving the 'torture camp' in the Sinai desert Abel claims he no longer knows fear. Crossing the border was nothing in comparison to the captivation he endured in the hands of Abdullah. The violence Abel experienced was worse than what he was capable of imagining would happen to him and what he could possibly endure and survive. Although Abel mentioned he could not imagine the Rashida would behave as inhuman as they did, he told me that before he fled Eritrea he was aware of the atrocities happening in the Sinai desert. He said:

"The Sinai is a very dangerous place. This desert has a bad history. In Eritrea everyone knows about this. Even the child knows about this, if he sees the Sinai he knows is the darkest area on earth, everyone knows this. And now I have seen it myself."

Not only does pain defy language as we have seen previously, it also deconstructs what can be known. The torture Eritrean refugees endure goes beyond any form of anticipation and is not expected. Although Eritreans often heard about the smugglers in the Sinai desert they had not expected that they would become victims themselves. This unexpectedness constitutes a feeling of discontinuity. Abel continues by saying:

"Dying by one day is better than to die slowly in Eritrea after years of oppression. Which one do you choose? Sinai was the best option for me."

Abel is not willing to sacrifice his life for his nation, but he is prepared to die to escape from Eritrea. Abel found another alternative idiom in which he can relieve the pain and memory of the torture he experienced and the discontinuity he has to live with. He writes poems as a way to recover the memories of violence in the Sinai and to come to grips with his past. After Abel safely crossed the border Israeli soldiers from the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) brought him to *Saharonim*, a detention centre in the Negev Desert where African refugees are held after they cross into Israel and before they are released to one of the bigger cities. Abel is filled with rage and wants to go back to the Sinai desert to take revenge on the human traffickers. To ease his anger he says he starts writing poems and otherwise puts into writing what he experienced. Philosopher Slavoj Žižek is convinced that poetry might serve as an artistic expression of violence. Žižek affirms that poetry is by definition about something that cannot be addressed

directly, but only alluded to (Žižek 2008:5). The poems Abel writes are mainly for personal relief, but he also shares the poems at meetings of the Sinai Group. During one of the meetings the leaders of the Sinai Group encourage the members to express their feelings in poetry, art or other forms of alternative expressions. Poetry can become a form of expressing the impossible (Schäuble in Weiss and Six-Hohenbalken 2011: 9). One afternoon when I visit Abel in his home he writes down one of his poems in my notebook. Back in the Netherlands, with the help of an Eritrean friend, I translate the poem from Tigrinya into English:

EMBAH: A shout of freedom.

At the wild deserted forest there were no beasts.
My life to be killed is what I expect.
I was not scared.

I was searching for someone to eat me.
Not to be a witness of these atrocious things.
No.
Stop.

But...

I pray to God
Little from my prayer.
These bad things never happened to me from the time I was young.

Like other human beings this is also my life.
I will wait for what will happen.
Will I lose my life or will I have normal days again?
That is what I ask myself in the place of father Abdullah.

There was no thorn in that place, only the biggest beast.
We were scared.
We saw things only darkness can endure.

This poem by Abel, with the title *Embah*, starts with a shout of freedom: he survived the atrocities that only “darkness can endure” and which he did not expect to live out. He questions if he will ever experience normal days, a referral to the expectedness of death. The emphasis on his survival resembles the use of the bodily metaphor of having lived two lives and can be understood as an alternative attempt to link the past to the present. Abel's poem, as his narrative, is full of contradictions and demonstrates the difficulty of creating continuity. At the beginning of the poem he mentions that there are no ‘beasts’ at the ‘wild deserted forest’ and that he is not scared, but he finishes with the opposite: “there was no thorn in that place, only the biggest beast” and “we were scared”. He expresses the fear of losing his life, but he is also looking for someone to eat him, so that he does not have to witness and endure the

torture. Abel's poem contains personal accounts of suffering as he uses the first person perspective. He concludes his poem with "we were scared" and "we saw things only darkness can endure", by turning to the perspective of multiple persons he emphasises the collective expressions of being hostages. Narratives of suffering, poetry, and bodily metaphors are a way for Abel to remember and express the violations of his body in the Sinai desert.

REMEMBERING/FORGETTING THE PAST: 'MY BODY IS A GRAVE'

"The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting."

Kundera (1978)

Bodily metaphors of graves are extended to a process of remembrance. Adhanom, a young man from Eritrea, uses a bodily metaphor to explain his individual process of remembering and forgetting. Adhanom stores his past in his body, which he compares with a grave:

"My body is a grave, I buried my memories somewhere deep down and I know that if I am going to open the door again, it will take me at least six months to close it again."

Adhanom's body is a site of conflicted memories that "confine the need to remember" and the "desire to forget" (Becker 2000: 340).^{xlv} Miroslav Volf (2006: 11) argues that to remember a wrongdoing is to struggle against this same wrongdoing. Adhanom's comparison of his body with a grave does not only show the fragility of memory, but also the complexity of the notion of forgetting (cf. Cohen 1994: xiii). Through his body Adhanom reflects on past, present, and future temporalities and through embodied memories he strives to create new meaning to his life as a refugee in Israel.

The process of narration has an ambiguous relation with the past that is deployed in the present (Argenti and Schramm 2010: 1). Memory, says Roy (1994: 24), is formed by past knowledge and experience, but it is also altered by what has come after. Roy argues that each new experience, including each telling, changes the narrative. Narration in itself is part of the experience, for what we live combines with what we think and constructs what we do. Living, thinking, and constructing define experience in a constant interplay. Experience, memory, and life can be influenced by performing a narrative in the presence of an audience, such as an anthropologist. Remembering involves a mixture of truthful description and imagined construction. We make claims to truth when we say that we remember (Volf 2006: 46). Becker (2000: 340) argues that bodily experiences of the past are fused together with the present in "endlessly complex ways and memory legitimizes the sense of self". Becker explains that when

the self has been destroyed or when identity is tested, memory reaffirms the self and validates suffering. Memory can illuminate present suffering and connect suffering to the past (ibid. 340). Adhanom's sense of self is influenced by past experiences that are not easily eliminated and a legitimization of this new self is not effortless. In remembering embodied experiences Eritrean refugees do not only struggle to make sense of past violence, but also of present suffering. Is one able to re-contextualise the narratives of devastation and generate new contexts through which everyday life may become possible (cf. Das 2001: 6)? Das (2004: 327) alludes that:

“in the genre of lamentation people have control through their bodies and through their language. Thus the transaction between body and language lead to an articulation of the world in which the strangeness of the world revealed by death, by its non-inhabitability, can be transformed into a world in which one can dwell again, in full awareness of a life that has to be lived in loss”.

But can one find one's voice in the making of one's history? Finding one's voice is part of the experience of remembering. Das denotes that individuals and communities formed in suffering do not always succeed in a re-contextualisation of devastation through words. The “scribes of such experiences can be read from the body” (cf. Das 2001: 6) as memories of survivors of torture or slavery, or those who have witnessed death or harm of loved ones, whose experiences are lived and relived through the body (cf. Becker 2000: 321). In the next chapter I focus on embodied expressions of violence and ‘read the scribes of violence’ from the body

SCARS: EMBODIED EXPRESSIONS OF TORTURE

Tsehay, a young man from Eritrea, shows the scars of the chains with which human traffickers locked him with his ankles to other refugees in the Northern Sinai desert. The young asylum seeker was held hostage for nine months, enclosed with over 200 Eritrean refugees in small houses in a compound close to the Egypt-Israel border. Tsehay was beaten severely, as his narrative showed in the commencement (page 2,3) and as Scorpion narrated in his story (page 15-21). In speaking about his experiences in the hands of human traffickers Tsehay struggles to find words to describe the torture. At some point in his story Tsehay prefers to be silent. He cannot find the words to speak about the pain inflicted on his body; instead he unfolds his leg and lets the scars speak. The violence inflicted by human traffickers is inscribed on the bodies of African refugees (cf. Daniel 1994, Csordas 1994, Weiss and Six-Hohenbalken

2011: 159) and becomes visible by wounds and scars (Das et al. 2001: 8). The scars - the remains of a vicious past - are an embodied memory of the violence endured. Lammers (2006: 312), in her study on refugees in Kampala, explains that scars have the power to indicate the narratives of the people who tell them and that they can replace words people endeavor to find to speak about their experiences of violence.

In the Open Clinic of Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) refugees repeatedly show their scars; the places where bullets entered their body, where cigarettes were burned on their arms, or where their fingers never entirely healed after repeated beatings. Scars from the barbed wire of the fence are remnants of the crossing of the Egypt-Israel border. A young woman visits the clinic with her husband. While she is narrating about her experiences in the Sinai desert, she stops talking and opens her blouse to show us the scars of the bullets that were fired at her while she crossed the border. Her chest is covered with scars caused by the grazing of bullets, although none penetrated her body. The scars make speaking secondary, as they tell a story in themselves. Lammers notes that “bodily inscriptions of violence” provide an alternative idiom that serves to assert and present oneself as the persons they have become (ibid. 312).

For some Eritrean refugees, their bodies have become an “unspeakable and hostile place” (cf. Becker 2000: 321) and some experiences can only be expressed through the alternative idiom of the body. As I have argued before, torture has a bodily aspect: pain is experienced and lived, and memories of torture are re-lived through the body (cf. Becker 2000, Das 1997, 2001, 2004). How can we understand the relation between the body and the way the self is perceived and expressed? Braidotti (1991: 219) stresses the notion of the body as “one’s primary location in the world, and one’s primary situation in reality”. Marcel Mauss (1970 [1950]: 6) argued that the body is at the same time the original tool with which humans shape their world and the original substance out of which the human world is shaped. The body contributes to the world we live in, but the reverse is also true. Becker paraphrases Dillon (1991: xv) to show that structures of power, such as state actors and human traffickers, contribute to the constitution of the body. Through embodiment, experiences during the journey and in the ‘torture camps’ are integrated and conveyed. Embodiment can be understood as the “existential condition in which culture and self are grounded” (cf. Becker 2000: 322, Csordas 1994) and refers to being, to living through the body (Merleau-Ponty’s 1962). If one lives through one’s body and the self is bodily experienced then violence and torture constitute an assault on the self. Violence, Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004: 1) write, can never be understood in terms of its physicality

(force, assault, or imposition of pain) alone. Violence includes an assault on the personhood, dignity, and sense of worth of value of the person on whose body the pain is inflicted.

Narratives, bodily metaphors, and scars can express experiences of torture at the hands of human traffickers. Language, both everyday and strategic, and alternative idioms are ways in which suffering becomes communicable. However, some violations to the body cannot be expressed through one's own body. In the next chapter I show how pain may reside in another body (cf. Wittgenstein in Das 2004: 328).

EXPRESSIONS OF SEXUAL TORTURE: NARRATING THROUGH OTHER BODIES

So far, women have been underrepresented in the pages of this thesis.^{xlvi} In this chapter I show women's expressions of experiences of violence in the Sinai desert. A dominant focus lies on the way women convey experiences of sexual torture. In the Open Clinic I interviewed over 40 women, and none of them narrated about being sexually abused. On the contrary they told about other female hostages that were raped, or it was through the narratives of men that I learned about sexual abuse.

This absence from the women's narratives contradicts the reports that were published by several organisations working with African refugees in Israel. The reports testify that a majority of the women that were held captive in the Sinai desert are victims of rape.^{xlvi} The Hotline for Migrant Workers published a report in which several women report experiencing sexual violence. An Eritrean woman who was held captive for eight months in the Sinai desert gives the following testimony:

“Abdullah raped me for five days and two other smugglers raped me as well. I wanted to resist but I had no strength and the smugglers nearly strangled me during the rape. As a result of all these rapes, I got pregnant and I'm now seven months pregnant. During this time, I was chained to another woman. We received food every few days and I managed to wash myself three times during that entire period. Only after eight months was my father able to send the smugglers \$5,000; they released me and allowed me to cross the border to Israel. I must have an abortion. My husband should not know what happened to me in the desert and I must not give birth to this child” (HMW 2011: 11).

Sexual torture is experienced and expressed through the body and therefore the pain, humiliation, and shame evolving sexual violence are connected attacks on the body, mind, self,

sexuality, and identity (cf. Robben 2005: 218). Sexual violence assaults the captive's body, psyche, and sociality (ibid. 227). Anthropologists writing about rape have argued that experiences of sexual violence are often incommunicable. The person suffering from rape find it hard, if not impossible, to convey the painful experiences with others (Klungel 2011: 130). Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004: 1) argue that rape survivors often become "living-dead people, refusing to speak of the unspeakable. Das (2004) explains that rape lacks its own language and is beyond words. Fernandez (1974) explains that that which cannot be transmitted into words remains formless and unreal and therefore may seem to not really exist (in Klungel 2011). I, however, want to argue that experiences of sexual torture become expressible through the bodies of other women.

After contemplating about the silences of sexual torture, I realised that some of the women who narrated that they were not sexually abused actually experienced sexual torture. During the interviews in the Open Clinic I noticed that some women talked about the atrocities in the desert camps as if they happened to another person. It is as if they are talking about their own experiences through another body. The women place their own experiences of rape within the body of fellow hostages who were raped. By placing their own experiences in the body of someone else they can express the experiences of rape from a distance. By narrating these experiences of rape through the bodies of other women the formless is made into something concrete (cf. Klungel 2011: 130) and therewith becomes expressible in words. Their pain is felt, and their memories re-lived in another body. Through the bodies of other women they addresses their own experiences. The inexpressibility of pain and experiences of rape inhabit another body. Narrating through other bodies is a strategic performance that allows one to comprehend the role of witnessing rape in everyday life. Narrating through other women's bodies is a way to express individual suffering and experiences of sexual torture, and to make it public.

Some women however misuse the rape cases as a way to get an abortion for an unwanted pregnancy. A 21-year old Eritrean woman visits the clinic to ask for an abortion. When we ask her about the reasons for the abortion she tells Sister Aziza that she has been raped by the 'Bedouins'. When Aziza confronts her with stories of rape in the Sinai desert and asks again why she wants an abortion the woman confesses that she wants to wait. The stories of rape and torture have become part of a collective discourse of suffering, a discourse that is misused by some.

Violent events are not only 'stored' in narratives and 'archived' in language, but also in artefacts and objects (Bendix 1996 in Pichler 2011: 188). I have shown in the two previous chapters how memories of torture are incorporated into bodies. Throughout the second half of Part One I have focused on the ambiguous relation between the body and expressions of violence. In the next chapter I argue that violence is alternatively expressed through graves and body bags. Where I previously focused on bodily frontiers of violence in the process of experience, remembrance, and expression, I now describe the biological bodily frontier of violence: death.

GRAVES AND BODY BAGS: EXPRESSIONS OF THE ULTIMATE BODILY FRONTIER OF VIOLENCE

30117. 3/0763. 3/1234. 3/0716. 160205. 3/0983. 30813. 30254. 30120. 31607. 30419. 3/0750.

At a cemetery in Hatzor (Israel) the bodies of African asylum seekers who lost their lives during their escape to Israel are buried. Dozens of graves only bear a number and sometimes a date. Some of the graves are marked 'Anonymous Sudanese' and there is a grave that reads 'Anonymous Infiltrator'. The human beings - reduced to a number - died an anonymous death. The bullets of the guns of Egyptian border guards ended their often-young lives. A barbed wire fence separates Egypt from Israel. The 240-kilometer long border is a demilitarized zone. A ripped blouse entangled in the fence is a reminder of one crossing. Every few meters an Egyptian border guard patrols. Watch towers protrude above the dry and desolate landscape. Approximately every night gunshots are heard in the area.^{xlvi} In the distance Israeli construction workers are building a security fence of large segments of wire to prevent the crossing of African refugees.^{xlix} The body of a young Eritrean man lies in the sand, his hand raised in the air as if ready to surrender. The blue shirt he wears is covered in blood. The brown sand of the desert colored red, and foot prints of an army boot are left around his body.¹ The young man tried to cross the Sinai border with Israel, but he was shot and left by Egyptian border guards.

On the Egyptian side of the border African refugees who are found death in the borderlands are buried according to the religion in their identity cards in an Islamic graveyard or a Christian cemetery. African refugees who died an anonymous dead are buried outside the walls of the graveyard underneath a pile of garbage (Pleitgen and Fadel Fahmy 2011a). The morgue in El Arish hospital is packed with bodies of African refugees. Body bags containing the lifeless bodies of African refugees are lined up in the back yard of El Arish hospital^{li} (Youm7 News 2011). In this chapter I ask: what meaning have these empty spaces, these dead bodies?

Scheper-Hughes (2004: 175) argues:

“against the compelling images of bodily autonomy and certitude stands the reality of bodies that are simultaneously discounted and preyed on and sometimes mutilated and killed”.

Eritrean refugees held hostage in the Sinai desert do not have the sovereignty to decide over life and death. They are held captive in the power structures of the human traffickers, governments and armies. Death is an excruciating element of the journey, one that includes hunger, thirst, starvation, violence, torture or bullets. Everyone has lost someone on the move. As Nordstrom (2004: 59), in her research on war in Angola was told by one of her informants:

“You need to understand death. Everyone is on intimate terms with death; everyone has lost someone they love to the violence. Death walks everywhere with the people.”

Many of the people I interviewed conveyed the fear for and the presence of death during their journey. Death was something people expected. For many of the people I spoke with death was part of their journey and the imagination of death accompanied them during their escapes (cf. Beneduce 2008: 511). Some feared death, some ignored the presence of death, and others said they ignored all fear of death. For many, bereavement became part of life:

“We got used to the stories of death. Death became part of our life. We simply bury the death and move on. We try our best not to remember.”^{lii}

Almost all Eritrean refugees I spoke with during my fieldwork witnessed the death of one or more of their fellow travellers either by starvation, suffocation, torture, or murder by the human traffickers or the Egyptian border patrol. The death of fellow prisoners serves as an ominous warning for others; if you are not able to pay the ransom this is your destiny too. There are stories where fellow prisoners have been killed in front of others. One man recounts how he and other men were forced to bury the body of a person who was killed. Often, bodies are not buried but left in the desert; the dead bodies in the desert increase the fear and pain of others travelers.

In certain situations death can also become something people desire, as Eritrean journalist and human rights activist Meron Estefanos explains in her account of hostages in the Sinai desert. “This time we cannot bear the sufferings we are facing and we are in a position to prefer death to life. Death is not simple to get it here, only the lucky ones get it. We have no means to take our lives as both our hands and legs are in chains” (Estefanos 2011). She shows that there exists a thin line between life and death in situations where one loses the sovereignty over one’s

body. The wish to survive and bear witness can become a desire to lose life so that one does not have to endure the torture. The body becomes a site of loss and social vulnerability:

“Each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies - as a site of desire and physical vulnerability, as a site of a publicity at once assertive and exposed. Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure (Butler 2004: 20).”

Death in the Sinai desert, whether unexpected or desired, is experienced both as power dominance by the human traffickers and the loss of sovereignty by the hostages. The social vulnerability of Eritrean refugees is neither publically acknowledged nor experienced by the human traffickers as loss. This evokes the question: when is life worth grieving? (Butler 2004, 2009). In Part Two, I elaborate more on a question of grievability. Being held hostage and experiencing death in the Sinai desert show antithesis between ‘body autonomy’ and ‘discounted, preyed on and sometimes mutilated and killed bodies’ (Scheper-Hughes 2004: 175).

The graveyard in Israel, the mass graves in the Sinai desert, and the body bags in the mortuary in El Arish are evidence of the ultimate expression of power, an expression that displays the decision to kill or let live. I am inspired by Achille Mbembe's inquiry into the meaning of the body in relation to power. Mbembe (2003: 12) asks: “what place is given to life, death, and the human body and how are they inscribed in the order of power?”. Where Mbembe asks the question in a context of war, Roberto Beneduce (2008, 516), 'struggles' with a similar question that he localizes in the context of national borders and globalized as well as transnational expressions of migration. Fassin perceives the body as “the ultimate place on which the mark of power is imprinted”. He sees the body as an ‘instrument’ that is used to display and to demonstrate power (Fassin 2005: 5). Mbembe assumes that “the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large extent, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die” (2003: 11). He argues: “to exercise sovereignty is to exercise control over morality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power” (ibid. 12). Mbembe (2000) puts forward the body and embodiment as an arena of oppression and resistance. The human traffickers and hostages indulge in what Mbembe calls a “grotesque and obscene bodiliness” that dissolves boundaries between ruler and ruled, powerful and powerless, and hegemonical and the counterhegemonical. It is particularly in these contested power structures that the frontiers of violence are experienced.

The graves in the corner of the cemetery and the dead bodies in the Sahara and the Sinai desert represent untold stories of years spent in motion, passages through the desert, and the various reasons for individuals to leave everything behind in a search for protection and safety in the 'Promised Land'. The graves and mutilated bodies are a way in which violence appears visible beyond narration or otherwise alternative idioms. Death is the ultimate expression of the frontier of violence. Graves serve as an alternative idiom and symbolize the anonymous, silent witnesses of the 'shoot-to-kill' policy at the Egypt-Israel border. They embody the torture and organ removal in the Sinai desert, and demonstrate the body politic of exclusion. Although the bodies are silenced, the graves speak. The graves are a symbol of the anonymous, silenced witnesses of power structures encountered during the journey. The anonymous bodies in the graveyard in Israel – as well as the unburied bodies in the Sinai desert – bear witness to the journey and the clandestine crossing of borders. The deaths confess of a world politic of exclusion, of human rights violations, and of arduous journeys. These graves and body bags represent the surreal.

REFLECTION: BODIES THAT EXPERIENCE, EXPRESS, AND REMEMBER^{liii}

I started Part One with the question: how can anthropologist take hold of the meaning of expressions of experiences of violence? I focussed on representational dilemmas of frontiers of violence experienced by both narrators and anthropologists. I argued that to create understanding, anthropologists should relay their focus from 'speaking for others' to 'speaking with others' (cf. Ingold 2011). Expressions of experiences of violence come to existence in a dialogical context and human interaction.

The narratives presented in Part One show the dark side of humanity and disclose the worthlessness of some human beings. I have argued that the very act of telling can be seen as a strategy of resistance and can create awareness about violations of human rights and processes of exclusion. Through personal histories I have come to an understanding of a wider social process of flight and being held hostage. However, I also questioned how survivors of the 'torture camps' create continuity: how do they remake the world they live in and how do they create meaning? At the level of the protagonists, discursive frontiers of violence occur when they attempt to narrate about experiences of torture. The relation between language and violence is deeply paradoxical, both for the protagonists and the anthropologist. I have showed the ambiguous relation between violence, text, and the body, and described the different ways of expressing experiences of violence. The act of (re)telling violent experiences is not

effortlessly expressed through verbal everyday language. Scarry has stated that torture silences and deconstructs language, eradicates words and writing, and de-scribes experience (Scarry 1985 in Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004: 23). Therefore, I argue that anthropologists should be creative and open their eyes for alternative ways of expression of experiences of violence. These may be grounded in metaphoric language or the body. Besides narratives, I have found meaning and understanding in bodily metaphors, poetry, scars, and graves. Discursive and bodily frontiers of experiences of torture are interconnected, one cannot view them separately because pain is experienced through the body. Our body is the tool through which we see the world. Bodily metaphors connect the body with language. Scars are embodied expressions of torture. They serve as an alternative idiom through which one can comprehend and express violent experiences. Alternatively, I showed that some Eritrean women retell their personal experiences with sexual torture through the body of other women and explained how pain may reside in another body.

When death becomes part of a journey - both in the memory of those who bear witness and in anonymous graves in an Israeli graveyard or in the desert - scarred, mutilated bodies become an alternative idiom through which experiences of violence and the bodily limits of torture are expressed. Because Eritrean refugees are 'on intimate terms with death' in the 'torture camps' and the journey we find this synthesis with death in the metaphoric language and the bodily metaphors. The graves of 'anonymous infiltrators', the cemetery in El Arish, and the body bags equally express the ultimate bodily limits of a journey. It is in the use of these alternative idioms that we may find meaning and understanding of the effects of violence to a person's life.

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Part One: Narratives, Metaphors, Scars, and Graves: Discursive and Bodily Frontiers of Violence focused on individual expressions of experiences of violence and personal histories. In the following part I detail experiences of suffering in relation to processes of mourning, remembrance, and commemoration that are typically expressed collectively. Commemoration is typically performed in the spirit of mourning in moments when people lose life both literally through death and symbolically through being a refugee. Mourning, remembrance, and commemoration should be understood as interplay of individual and collective experiences of death, suffering, and violence. Roy (1993: 186) quotes Cicero to argue that "memory is both an intensely personal experience and a thoroughly social one". Eritrean refugees incorporate individual and

collective memories of suffering into (dead) bodies, movements, actions, objects, and symbols (cf. Bendix 1996 in Weiss and Six-Hohenbalken 2011: 7). Acts of remembrance and commemoration become visible in memorial ceremonies, groups established for victims of human trafficking, and funerals in which empty coffins are buried symbolically because there are no bodies. In this part I focus on the intersection between individual and collective experiences of remembrance through the presentation of public manifestations, rituals, and gatherings (Weiss and Six-Hohenbalken 2011: 1) that concentrate on collective suffering and commemoration.

Although each act of remembering is distinctive and young men and women have individual memories of their flight, their expressed experiences influence a collective memory of suffering. The individual experience of grief and the collective expression of mourning and commemoration are relational in the process of remembering. Process of remembering and mourning are equivocal and ambiguous. Durkheim emphasises that the individual grief experienced at the death of another human being is expressed collectively in culturally prescribed ways of mourning (Durkheim in Robben 2004: 7). Robben in *Death, Mourning, and Burial: A Cross-Cultural Reader* paraphrases Freud (1968) to argue that grief and mourning should be understood in relation to other losses that provoke personal and collective crisis (2004: 7). The death and suffering of Eritreans in the Sinai are relational to the collective flight from the country due to the political and social oppression of the regime.

In the previous part I explained how experiences of violence become expressible through narratives, metaphors, scars, and graves. In order to give meaning to the personal histories presented in the previous part one needs to understand the context and the process in which narratives and discourses are formed within the Eritrean community in Israel and abroad (cf. Kleinman and Das 2001, Weiss 2011: 121). I illustrate how collective meaning is created through ceremonies and gatherings and I present another example of poetry that illuminates the real meaning of life of a generation of displaced youth. The individual narratives, bodily metaphors, scars, and graves are an element of a larger discourse of flight and suffering that dominates the social and political lives of Eritreans in Israel and abroad (cf. Weiss 2011: 109). The torture, rape, organ removal, and killings in the Sinai have been referred to by some Eritreans in the diaspora and Israel as massacres and some speak of genocide against Eritreans. Eritreans feel as if they are attacked in their background, culture, Christianity, and identity and there is a common belief that Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees (Habesha) are 'deliberately killed' by human traffickers. Terms as killing field, massacres, and genocide carry a strong

political overtone, formulate a political act to raise awareness and indirectly refer to past conflicts. One can both understand these terms as an expression of the atrocious situation and an attempt to place the contemporary suffering of Eritrean refugees in a broader discourse of suffering in Africa.



PART TWO

COLLECTIVE FRONTIERS OF VIOLENCE: EXPERIENCES AND EXPRESSIONS OF SUFFERING

“My people are dying in the torture camps in the Sinai desert, they are losing their lives on the road, some die on the sea from Libya or in the Sahara desert, others are killed while crossing the border of Eritrea with Ethiopia. My generation is losing from the country.”

Adhanom

“[...] it is not that mourning is the goal of politics, but that without the capacity to mourn, we lose that keener sense of life we need in order to oppose violence”

Butler (2004: xviii-xix)

Over thousand Eritreans gather in Levinsky Park at the heart of South Tel Aviv. They assemble to commemorate fellow-Eritreans who lost their lives at sea. Together they mourn for those who did not survive their ‘journey to safety and protection’.⁵⁴ Priests from different church congregations, who have made the arduous journey themselves, perform religious rituals of mourning. The Eritrean refugee community commemorates the deaths of over 350 Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees. At the start of April 2011, they lost their lives in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea when two overcrowded boats capsized just off the coast of Italy. The sea returned their bodies and uncovered a human tragedy. In the Eritrean community in Israel people lost relatives and friends who tried to escape the threatening situation in Tripoli. Many more have come to Levinsky Park to pay respect to the people who died and to families in Eritrea who lost sons and daughters to the sea. By performing these rituals of mourning the Eritrean community in Israel, survivors of a collective tragedy of flight, create a public space in which experiences of victims and survivors of arduous journeys can be represented, mourned,

and remembered (cf. Das 2001: 3). Individuals attend the commemoration with their own personal experiences and personal grief in mind. The ceremony creates a common alternative idiom in which thousand personal stories form a collective discourse of suffering. Eritreans gather in Levinsky Park to mourn the anonymous death of their “brothers and sisters” devoid of their bodies. Bodies disappear in the sea, in mass graves in the Sinai or anonymous graves in burial grounds in Egypt and Israel. The Eritreans present at the memorial service in Levinsky Park collectively give meaning to these empty spaces. By mourning the deaths the deceased will not be forgotten; they will live forever in the collective conscience of Eritreans.

In Part Two, I show how the Eritrean community in Israel and abroad both publically and privately perform communal and political acts of commemoration. I place the atrocities in the Sinai in a larger discourse of social and political suffering of Eritrean refugees worldwide. Secondly, this thesis shows how Eritreans in Israel and Eritrea collectively mourn the deaths of Eritrean refugees on the move. I illustrate the ambiguous connection between life and death through poetry. The third chapter exemplifies how private, communal acts of mourning and remembrance are formed in Israel through the organization of the Sinai Group, a group of victims of human trafficking that meets monthly in Tel Aviv to remember the atrocities in the Sinai and mourn the death. The chapter that follows demonstrates how the extortion of Eritrean refugees in the Sinai has become a collective affair because of to the ransoms asked from relatives and friends of the hostages worldwide. Then, I explain the public, political act of remembrance through demonstrations in which Eritreans ask the world to undertake action for humanity. Finally, the last chapter poses the question whether the lives of Eritrean refugees caught in the borderlands are grievable lives?

THE LOSS OF A COUNTRY, THE DEATH OF A GENERATION⁵⁵

I started this thesis with a song of the late Yemane Barya, an Eritrean musician whose songs were immensely popular during the liberation struggle that lasted from 1961 to 1991 (ICG 2010: 1) and concluded in the formulation of an independent Eritrea in 1993. During the liberation struggle Eritrean separatists fought for independence from Ethiopia. Yemane Barya's songs reflect the Eritrean experience during the war that lasted thirty years. His songs focus on stories of immigration, being a refugee, and liberation. I first heard the song *Zemen* in an Eritrean bar in Jerusalem after a celebration of Easter. When the song started to play the atmosphere in the bar altered, a silence fell over the room, and people turned into their own thoughts. Adhanom, a young refugee from the capital city of Asmara, explains that although Barya recorded the song in a different time it reflects the feelings of Eritreans today. The time

(*zemen*) of which Barya sings returned as each month an over one thousand Eritreans flee Eritrea to neighboring countries or seek refuge in ‘Western countries’ or in Israel (IRIN 2011). The overwhelming majority of these refugees are young educated men and women. Unlike the previous generation, they flee a “state under siege” by its own government (ICG 2010: i). The culture of militarism and authoritarianism that defines Eritrea’s national and international policy today has its roots in the violent history (ICG 2010: i) about which the late Barya sang. Adhanom finds comfort in the song:

“The song makes me cry. It touches the wound of exile that I am carrying and that will never be healed. I have to face this wound and live with it. Barya experienced the same thing I am experiencing now. His words give me hope. He feels what I am feeling, he reminds me of home, and shares in my sadness.”

Adhanom and the other men in the bar recognize the lives of fellow Eritreans all over the world in the song. They live with the concern that the generation to whom they belong will be lost:

“In Eritrea only the old men, women, and children remain together with the dictator and his followers. Young people flee the country and become refugees in all possible countries in the world. Even out of this world you will find Eritreans who escaped from the dictatorship of Isaias Afwerki.”

Young men and women flee a policy of indefinite conscription into national and military service (HRW 2009: 2) and leave the country to “escape a culture of arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, extrajudicial killings, and severe restraints on freedom of expression, freedom of worship, and freedom of movement” (HRW 2009: 3).⁵⁶ A culture of suffering and torture follows them along their journey and beyond Eritrean borders. A feeling exists that Eritreans who flee their country lose their lives in the deserts and seas on the “margins of the world” (Agier 2008:1). Eritrean refugees face forced deportation in Libya, Egypt and Sudan, get killed by Egyptian border guards or tortured by human traffickers in the Sinai desert.

“Death, torture, imprisonment has become the norm for Eritreans both inside and outside the country. The country is undergoing a process of silent extinction unless something immediate is done to deter this unfolding scenario. Young Eritreans are seeking refugee into neighboring countries of Ethiopia and Sudan in their hundreds on a daily bases. In an attempt to escape the harsh realities on those refugee camps many of them attempt to go to Israel and end up in another nightmare, this time in the Sinai desert (Tsegay 2011).”

Adhanom and Tsegay show how experiences of torture, extortion, organ trade, and killings in the Sinai are part of a larger discourse of suffering. Adhanom and other Eritreans in Israel are not only mourning the death of fellow Eritreans, they mourn a collective refugeehood (the experience of being a refugee) instigated by the dictatorship in their country. They mourn the loss of life, the loss of self, the loss of a country, and the loss of dignity. Sigmund Freud (1917: 242) in his work *Mourning and Melancholia* argues that one does not only mourn the loss of a loved person but can also mourn the loss of some abstraction such as one's country or liberty. Eritrean refugees mourn the loss of Eritrea, a country they had to flee and therewith exchanged 'being Eritrean in Eritrea' for the insecurity of 'being a refugee in Israel'. Although they no longer fear imprisonment or death in their own country, they now feel emotionally distressed by the uncertainty that defines the lives of refugees in Israel.

A banner held by an Eritrean demonstrator during a rally in front of the Eritrean embassy in Israel in March 2011 reads: 'Stop the Torture camps in the Sinai! End the Dictatorship in Eritrea!!' In the context of refugeehood Eritreans connect the dictatorship in Eritrea and suffering experienced during the journey:

"Unless the cause of this human tragedy is controlled as soon as possible and in a drastic way, there would be many more tragedies on the way before a single migrant is saved. Young Eritreans have lost all hope because they are given two choices; either to live in trenches until old age or die in the deserts or seas trying to escape their predicaments. They have chosen the second."⁵⁷

Young men and women see no other choice than to leave Eritrea in search for safety and protection in Israel. The Eritrean community in Israel is a community formed by loss. Eritreans are confronted with individual losses - the loss of self - and collective losses - the loss of a country and the 'death of a generation'. Risking their lives in a journey to safety and security became a collective experience and a metaphor of death and actual loss became part of the discourse of collective suffering. The Eritrean community seems to express the strenuous situation of the living through death. Death became a symbol for lives lived in loss. The collective discourse of Eritreans in exile is one of suffering and distress. However, it is also a community that demands change and is determined to overthrow the current regime in Eritrea (Fitihi 2011). The torture in the Sinai desert seems to be an extra incentive for young Eritreans to fight for change.

ANALOGY OF HOSTAGE

“Nature seems to have conspired against the people from this nation. As if the hostage-like environment under the totalitarian regime does not suffice, the people fleeing its realms to Sudan, Libya, and Egypt are likewise falling into criminal groups, who have made ransom-taking as their commerce” (Lebona 2011).

The individual narratives of hostage and torture come together in a collective experience of hostage that follows Eritrean refugees throughout the journey and across borders. In this analogy of hostage, individual and collective experiences with violence collide and become part of a larger discourse of social and political suffering. In Eritrea people feel their nation and its people are taken hostage by the regime of Isaias Afwerki (cf. Abraha 2011) that commences Eritreans to leave the Eritrea and seek refugee in countries such as Israel. Young Eritreans see not other option than to cross the border into Ethiopia or Sudan from where they continue their journey for safety and protection, but where human traffickers confront thousands with an inhuman treatment.

Before their arrival to Israel, Eritrean refugees cross a number of geographical (Eritrean border with either Ethiopia or Sudan; and the Sudanese border with either Libya or Egypt) and experiential frontiers of violence in which they encounter a number of formal and informal power structures, both national governments (police, army, border guards) and local groups (people smugglers and human traffickers), who decide on the prospect of crossing. This is a decision that could often mean the difference between life and death. The narratives and alternative idioms in Part One showed that during the journey human traffickers use excessive violence to extort ransom from their relatives and friends. Eritrean refugees are held hostage in the Sinai desert in ‘torture camps’.

In Israel, Eritrean refugees experience another feeling of being held hostage by the asylum policy that defines their existence. People I spoke with regularly expressed the insecurity in Israel by saying: “The Israeli government occupies our mind”. Refugees that successfully cross the Egypt-Israel border are held in Israel’s Saharonim detention center, in the Negev desert, for weeks, months, and sometimes years.⁵⁸ The detention center holds nearly 3,000 Africans who illegally entered the country. The commander of the detention center notes that every day hundreds of Africans arrive, are released, or deported (Kubovich, Weiler-Polak and Nesher 2011). The refugees hope to find safety, protection and dignity in Israel; instead they are met with hostility, xenophobia, harsh migration policies and yet another struggle for life. Over the years, the language the government uses has become more aggressive and the policies implemented focus on deterrence. Last year, Israel began erecting a fence along its border to

prevent illegal African immigration and to preserve what Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu called the ‘democratic and Jewish character of the state’ (Ravid 2010). A ‘detention facility’ is built to hold 10,000 ‘infiltrators’, the term the Israeli government uses to describe people who have crossed to Israel illegally through the porous southern border (Ravid and Weiler-Polak 2010). The rumors of a detention facility add to the fear of deportation.

The Israeli government is discussing an amendment to the ‘Prevention of Infiltration Law’. If the law gets through parliament the Israeli authorities can hold asylum seekers and migrant workers in administrative detention for up to three years. The law does not distinguish between terrorists, migrant workers and asylum seekers. Citizens of “enemy” countries, such as Sudan are subject to indefinite detention (Rozen 2011). African asylum seekers are continuously confronted with the temporality of their stay. The Israeli asylum policy creates a state of fear and uncertainty among the refugees. Eritrean refugees are literally caught in the borderlands of the Sinai desert and are symbolically held ‘hostage’ in the borderlands of Israeli society.

MOURNING WITHOUT BODIES

Dearly Departed
Prison walls
Torture chambers
Desert torturers
An angry dark tide
In the dead of night
Eerie lonely frozen streets
Fiery eyes and cold gaze
And so I live and you don't?
one survives and the other not...
Is my luck a blessing or a curse?
Was your life a tragedy or prophesy?
Were your parents merely unfortunate?
Are mine a sign of our times?
You are dead I am not
Is there a difference?
Below grave or above
Is a question of location
Not a pronouncement of life
You are dead and so motionless
I am all inert and utterly voiceless
You are dead now but not lifeless
I am simply a poor listless refugee
You have a name: Dearly Departed
All I have is a bane
You have a grave
You have a place
I have...none
You are dead
And I...I am
...I am...
Eritrean
Still

Selam Kidane's poem *Dearly Departed* rewrites the text of suffering in the shape of a body bag. Not only in the words that Kidane chooses, but also in the location of the words Kidane has found an alternative language with which she can both convey and comprehend suffering and loss. The poem embodies death by the shape of a body bag. In the poem, Kidane directs herself to the victims of the 'desert torturers'; the title is an exordium to the victims of human trafficking and Eritrean refugees in general.

The poem is layered and meaning can be assigned through different explanations. From my understanding, the poem can be understood as an act of mourning, remembrance, and commemoration. The poet challenges the notion of life by explaining the life of an Eritrean refugee as similar to death. She asks: Is there a difference between below grave or above?

Kidane does not only commemorate the death in her poem, she simultaneously mourns the living. She commemorates the people who live life in loss and who are confronted with the insecurity of being a refugee. Where the death found a place and a name “Dearly Departed”, the living are nothing both “poor listless refugees” without a voice. Eritrean refugees suffer from a lack of existence and are not acknowledged as full human beings, both by the government of the country they left and the countries they flee too.

With this poem Selam Kidane, an outspoken critic of the Eritrean government, illuminates the social and political suffering of her generation and shows how collective losses, both actual and the loss of a country, can be expressed. When she talks about death, it is to evoke the real meaning of life, of an extreme humanness of her generation of displaced youth. The interlocutors in Part One experienced the discursive and bodily frontiers of violence in expressing and comprehending the infliction of torture. The limits of language are also experienced by Eritreans in Israel and abroad in expressing collective social and political suffering. Again the language of poetry has shown to be a form of expressing the impossible and serves as an artistic expression of collectively experienced violence.

The deaths of Eritreans on the move have become a loss for Eritreans worldwide and are transformed into collective events of mourning. Eritreans worldwide collectively express concern (cf. Magana 2006: 135). The poem and the mourning event in Levinsky Park are an example of how Eritreans are collectively trying to construct meaning and express collective experiences of suffering. Where Selam Kidane mourns the death and the living in a poem, the commemoration ceremony in Levinsky Park is another way to express experiences of suffering collectively. Ceremonies of mourning are a collective expression of the frontiers of violence. Through acts of commemoration a collective awareness of the dictatorship in Eritrea and border violence emerges and strengthens. Commemoration and remembrance in the context of Eritrean refugees in Israel and abroad can, on the one hand, be seen as a political act to raise attention for the suffering of Eritreans worldwide. On the other hand, collective commemoration should be understood as a ‘communal act’ to release pain and create meaning collectively. Collective mourning can be seen a creative approach to suffering. Eritreans found a way to shed tears collectively and share experiences of suffering.

Kidane Isaac, a member of the Eritrean Committee for Political Asylum Seekers in Israel (EPASI) elucidates that collective deaths are an adversity in Eritrean society both in Eritrea and exile. The collective event of commemoration performed in Levisnky Park is part of the cultural demands for mourning of Eritrean society. Eritreans gather to support the families of

those who died, to mourn together, and to show solidarity. Kidane explains why the collective mourning event in Levinsky Park was conducted:

“Mourning together means in our culture telling the victims families that we are always on their side. In the ceremony in Levinsky Park everyone felt so sad and worried about our endless and very risky migration. The priests paid full religious prayers and spread a general message on how to stop these endless painful tragic journeys. We thought about our country's future and the way to end the dictatorial regime.”

The event of mourning performed in Levinsky Park convey a social charge as well as a political message. During the ceremony people comforted each other, found relieve in sharing bereavement, and showed solidarity to the relatives of the deceased Eritreans in Eritrea. However, they also discussed manners in which the exodus from Eritrea could be stopped. I showed in Part One that death is part of the journey. How do people mourn the death of fellow travelers? Kidane Isaac explains how deaths are mourned on the move:

“In times of death that happen in the Sahara desert, the Sinai desert, and the sea we have to mourn without the death body. If someone dies on the Sahara there is no choice than to leave the body and pray not to lose more. I can say it is like someone who got killed in a war confrontation with the enemy, obviously people cry and feel sad but at the same time they feel very afraid not to lose their own life. Sometimes the smugglers do not allow anyone to cry instead they intimidate or try to show the travelers the dead body as a symbol of fear. When everyone gets to a place of destination or reaches a relatively safe place people start to remember the tragedies they passed on the Sahara and in the Sinai desert, and start to mourn together for the left ones.”

Eritreans in exile inform the families in Eritrea of those who died on the move. In Eritrea relatives and acquaintances conducts a burial ceremony equal to a funeral for people who died in a normal situation. Relatives bring an empty coffin and symbolically burry it with the memory of their son, daughter, brother, or sister. People who lose their lives on the move often die anonymously and therefore rituals of mourning are performed without bodies. Sometimes relatives who stayed behind in Eritrea will never be informed about the death of their children. Bodies often disappear into anonymous graves, wash ashore unrecognizable, or are left to decompose in the desert. In the case of collective deaths on the sea or in the desert the community is left with many deaths as people with different connections to each other - relatives, friends, villagers, and people from the same city - often travel together. When this happens the village creates a symbolic group grave so that the deaths can be remembered in the future.⁵⁹ Death has become part of societies in exile and the families who stay behind.

In individual remembrance, Eritreans use a metaphor of a grave to describe past experiences with violence and death. In events of commemoration the collective memory revolves around death and mourning. Adhonom showed that the body could be a site of conflicted memories that confine the need to remember and the desire to forget. The empty coffins and the symbolic group graves represent the desire to remember and never to forget. Graves symbolise a memory of the dictatorship in Eritrea, a memory of the journey, and a memory of the many lives that are lost on the margins of the world. The deaths are seen as a testimony of the suffering and torture Eritreans endured both in Eritrea and on the move.

COLLECTIVE REMEMBRANCE: SHARED EXPERIENCES OF TORTURE

In a basement in *Neve Shanaan* - a street in South Tel Aviv where the majority of the African refugees live - a group of Eritreans gathers on a Saturday morning. A small stairway leads to the basement that is shut off from the noise outside. While descending one catches a glimpse of Levinsky Park. A group of Eritrean men is playing soccer on the basketball field, others are sleeping in the grass. Sudanese men are sitting on a small fence alongside the road. The room, which serves as a bar, is dark, the walls are decorated with fake flowers and posters of Israeli movie stars. The ceiling is covered with mold, the remnant of an unfixed leak. Young men greet each other, bouncing their right shoulders several times, a sign of friendship and absence. Most of them did not see each other since the previous gathering last month. A young girl is welcomed with kisses on her cheek. The people in the room are mostly young men, but there are some elders and women amongst them. The people who gathered call themselves the Sinai Group. They are all survivors of the 'torture camps' in the Sinai desert. The Sinai Group gathers in Tel Aviv to mourn the deaths of fellow Eritreans in the Sinai desert and share experiences of violence and torture collectively. Each month the Sinai Group commemorates the people who lost their lives in the Sinai; relatives, friends and fellow Eritreans. Collective remembrance of violent events gives comfort and empowers the community. Robben (2004: 8) argues that the communal act of remembrance holds societies together:

“In the case of death, weeping and embracing manifest the social attachment of the living and the death, enhance the social solidarity of the survivors, and mend the weakened social collectivity” (ibid. 8).

The young men and women endured and witnessed abuse, torture, and rape and paid amounts up to 14,000 US dollars to reach Israel. The young men and women have been chained for indefinite periods of time in the borderlands of the Sinai. They were held captive in iron

containers, bamboo shelters, and sometimes in the open air. Some have scars on their bodies from the torture; they literally embody the journey. The monthly meeting of the Sinai Group is a form of private, communal remembrance. Only victims of human trafficking visit the meetings. The young men exchange news on relatives who are held captive and raise money for ransom. The people of the Sinai Group connect as if they are a family, a family of kindred spirits, for they endured similar experiences in the Sinai often being witnesses of each other's pain. Robben argues that collectively mourning the death illustrates "cultural unity, social cohesion, and solidarity" and helps to bring people closer together and "invigorates the weakened social group" (2004: 8). Not only by remembering together, but also by taking care of each other in daily life. Abel shares an apartment with three men who were held hostage with him in the same compound. They now share their life together, share the rent of the apartment and share the necessities to survive. If someone does not have a job the others will pay for his expenses and help him in the search for a job. The Sinai Group does not forget the people who are still held captive in the Sinai and keeps the memory of continuous suffering alive.

"Not only does remembering keep the memory of those who have been lost alive, it collectively empowers the survivors as they memorialize loved ones and cultural traditions and protest such destruction. Remembering, despite the pain it causes, constitutes a political activity that protests injustice and inhumanity. In such circumstances, forgetting is unthinkable" (Becker 2000: 341).

The gatherings of the Sinai Group are organized to share a past that is painful to remember but difficult to forget. The people of the Sinai Group do not always need language to express what they endured. In many cases, they have witnessed each other's torture as they were held hostage together. The Sinai Group is a gathering of companions; they share the same experiences, and find comfort in each other's presence.

RANSOM: 'HOW CAN I SAVE MY SON?'⁶⁰

In essence, the violence inflicted on Eritrean refugees by human traffickers in the Sinai is a collective experience. With the torture in the Sinai desert, the human traffickers do not only harm those who are physically inflicted by violence, it also damages their family members and relatives who gather money for their release. Avraham Asmara, an Eritrean refugee who shares his experiences in the Sinai desert at a press conference of the Hotline for Migrant Workers (HMW) expresses that the involvements of his family has been one of the difficult experiences

in the desert camp:

“The most painful moments were when they called my family as they beat me and I cried of pain. I was always thinking about what my family was thinking and feeling when they heard me like this.”

The extortion of Eritrean refugees became an issue of the refugees in Israel and family members in Eritrea and the diaspora. Many Eritreans - and also Sudanese - are contributing money to the ransom of a family member or a person from the same village. Relatives and friends in Eritrea, Israel, and Western countries are confronted with the phone calls and the cries of pain when the traffickers phone them and demand money. The method of extortion used by human traffickers brings Eritreans in a difficult position: if they pay their relatives will live, if they fail to collect the ransom they will die. Adhanom explains that no one can resist such a demand for ransom. He believes that Eritreans will do whatever in their capacity to help their relatives or friends:

“We have a culture of helping each other. It is a good thing but bad at the same time. If someone is kidnapped, we pay for the ransom. We help each other.”

Eritreans feel collectively responsible for the lives of their ‘brothers and sisters’. Human traffickers are aware that whatever amount of money they ask from the hostages’ family or relatives they will pay. This is one of the reasons that the ransom asked has now increased up to 40,000 US dollars. A human trafficker who left the business because he did not agree with the torture and extortion of Eritrean refugees explains why the majority of the hostages that are held captive come from Eritrea:

“It is because Eritreans help each other. They are not like the Sudanese or others. They have support. They help each other. I have worked with Habesha and know them very well, they help each other. But the Sudanese says ufffff... let him die, he has no problem.”⁶¹

The human traffickers either reach an agreement of payment with the refugees before they travel to the Sinai or kidnap the refugees at the border of Eritrea and Ethiopia, or Eritrea and Sudan, or from refugee camps in these countries. The people who reach an agreement on departure are usually told that they have to pay around 3,000 US Dollars for the journey. Upon arrival in the Sinai they are chained or guarded. Refugees are then forced to pay extra amounts of ransom that can reach up to 40,000 US dollars. On Asmarino Independent, a diaspora website, writer Zekre Lebona calls upon family members and friends to boycott the demands of the human traffickers. He says:

“In order to deal a final blow to this rampant exploitation of numerous Eritreans and other nationals, the collaboration of the relatives and friends of the hostages mostly living in America and Europe is the most essential. The origin of the money that flows to the coffers of the gangs comes largely from the people employed or otherwise in the affluent societies of the West. Likewise, they are the ones who facilitate the remit of undisclosed money oblivious to the aspect of the crime in progress. In other words, the disbursers of the money demanded are nothing but “coyotes” laundering money that contravenes the laws of the host nations they happen to belong. By boycotting the demand of the syndicates of human trafficking, Eritreans would not only save potential victims but also be honorable and responsible citizens of their host countries in the West” (Lebona 2011).

The article brought about many reactions and criticism. Mostly people saying that the author was insensitive to the struggling. How would he respond if he was phoned and his sister was beaten on the other side of the phone, would he let her die? Relatives raise these large sums of money, even if they have to sell their house, jewelry, and family members all over the world have to contribute to the ransom. Payment does not necessarily bring liberation from the hands of human traffickers. There are accounts of refugees who disappeared after the ransom was paid, or who were sold to other smugglers where the extortion and torture started all over again.⁶² In demonstration and events of mourning both Eritreans in Israel and exile try to raise awareness on an international level to end the suffering of fellow Eritreans in the Sinai.

POLITICAL ACTS OF REMEMBRANCE: ‘HOW MUCH IS MY SISTER’S KIDNEY WORTH?’⁶³

“USA: Tell Egypt to stop human trafficking.”

“World: Save Eritrean lives in Egypt.”

“Egypt: Stop torture of Eritreans in your prisons.”

“We demand an international investigation.”

African asylum seekers in Israel, on the 25th of November 2011, conducted a demonstration in front of the American embassy in Israel.⁶⁴ A group of few hundred Eritrean and Sudanese refugees together with a small number of Israeli’s publically showed their concerns about the torture, organ trafficking, and killings of Eritrean refugees in the Sinai desert. Eritrean refugees in exile adopted a human rights discourse to ask attention for the atrocities in the Sinai. Both Eritrean and Sudanese refugees, victims of human trafficking, and families of victims called upon the ‘USA’ and ‘the World’ to act in saving the lives of “innocent Eritrean refugees who

are kept hostage for ransom by Bedouin human traffickers for prolonged periods of time”.⁶⁵ Previously, I have showed how mourning and remembrance can be understood as a communal act in which people show solidarity and find relieve. Mourning and commemoration can also become a “vehicle through which political power is manifested” and social and political suffering are transferred to a broader public (Magana 2008: 107).⁶⁶ The protest is organized by Eritrean Youth for Revolution and Democracy, a movement of young Eritreans who fights for human rights for Eritreans worldwide. The protest in front of the American embassy should be understood as a political act organized to raise awareness and ask for international interference. The demonstrators direct themselves to the American government and ‘the world’ to put pressure on the Egyptian government. The demonstrators ask them to interfere in the situation of refugees and stop the human trafficking on the Egyptian territory.⁶⁷

Not only Eritreans in Israel mourn the losses in the Sinai desert in public, also Eritreans in the diaspora show their concern and solidarity in events of mourning. On November 11 2011, The Eritrean community in Stockholm held a candle light vigil in memory of their “Eritrean brothers and sisters who perished in Sinai, killed by human traffickers or shot by Egyptian border guards while trying to cross into Israel”.⁶⁸ The Eritrean community in Stockholm prayed for those who are still being held in the ‘torture camps’ in Sinai and led a candle for the victims.

The young men and women raise awareness about the violations of fellow Eritreans’ rights and dignity. The public events are organized with the hope that they cause some degree of transcendence of difference and a reaffirmation of a common humanity. Eritreans in exile speak for those who are silenced. A banner during the protest reads: “we march for those who cannot speak”. The young Eritreans represent those who died, or who are still held captive. An important aspect in events of mourning and demonstrations is to bear witness of collective suffering. The act of witnessing serves a political and a communal purpose.

However, pain and suffering need public recognition, a claim that can be given or denied (Weiss and Six-Hohenbalken 2011:8). The atrocities committed in the Sinai desert by human traffickers were first reported over 18 months ago through the testimonies of refugees from different African countries. Since then, both media and human rights organisations working for the rights of refugees have paid attention to the fiendishness in the Sinai desert. In the beginning of December 2010, Pope Benedict XVI called for payers for the “victims of traffickers and criminals, such as the drama of the hostages, Eritreans and of other nationalities, in the Sinai desert” (Gondwe 2011). Although organizations and journalists

demand attention and ask national governments and the international community to intervene, there seems little effort to change the situation on a national level: by both the Israeli and Egyptian government or on an international level. There seems to exist an indifference to the plight of the ‘hostages’ in the Sinai desert. Halfway November 2011 Everyone Group, an Italian based human rights organization, and the International Broadcasting Organization CNN reported that human traffickers released over 600 Eritrean refugees from captivity in the ‘torture camps’.⁶⁹ Despite these release over 700 hundred refugees are still held hostage in the Sinai desert at the time of writing (PHR et al. 2011).⁷⁰ In a recently report jointly published several human rights organisations worldwide call on the Egyptian and Israeli authorities and the international community:

“to act quickly in order to free the refugees held hostage in the Sinai, to prosecute the smugglers and those that assist them, to bring an immediate end to the torture camps and the network of human trafficking, and to provide care for the torture survivors” (Physicians for Human Rights et al. 2011).

The unanswered attempts by Eritreans in Israel and the diaspora to raise attention on a national and international level elevate the question: are the lives of Eritreans publically grievable lives? (cf. Butler 2004, 2009, Magana 2008)

‘WHEN IS LIFE GRIEVABLE?’⁷¹

“This is a voiceless war no one knows. This is a war against Eritreans, the world does not recognize this and certainly does not understand our suffering. It is a curse for Eritreans. No one cares what is going on, terrible crimes are happening over there. I want to forget. I do not want to remember what I have seen in the Sinai.”

Scorpion

Throughout the thesis, I have directly and indirectly focused on structures of power experienced by Eritrean refugees, such as states, governments, and border guards, with a focus on human traffickers in the borderlands of the Sinai desert. In the following chapter, I examine a less obvious and less visible power structure: the recognition of suffering and loss of persons and groups by states, governments and the international community. Herewith I mean the power of states, institutions and people to ignore or notice what is going on in the world, in this case in the Sinai desert, and to act accordingly. I started Part Two with a quote of Judith Butler who reminds us that mourning is not the goals of politics, but that without the “capacity

to mourn” violence is not opposed (Butler 2004: xviii-xix). Magana argues that the management, representation, and mourning of bodies of people who illegally cross borders are a “contested field of practice in which power relations between subjects and nation-states are fiercely and strategically negotiated” (2008 107). Butler emphasizes that certain forms of grief become “nationally recognized and amplified”, whereas other losses become “unthinkable and grievable”. Butler speaks of “differential allocations of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved, and which kind of subject must not”. This differential allocation of grievability operates to produce and maintain exclusionary conceptions of “who is normatively human: what counts as a liveable life and a grievable death” (ibid. XIV). Dr. Khataza Gondwe, advocacy officer for Sub-Saharan Africa for Solidarity, emphasises that the lives of refugees are not considered grievable lives. She says:

“It is happening to Africans who are termed migrants whether they are running from legitimate persecution or not, there is this feeling that there is no rush to take action, so suddenly the humanity of these people doesn’t matter, the abuse doesn’t matter, it is a question of immigrant policy.”⁷²

The refugee situation around the world, among which the political indifference to stop the extortion of Eritrean refugees in Egypt, is paradigmatic for the world we live in today. Refugees who flee their country are not considered to be grievable lives. The inhuman experiences in the Sinai desert really seem to bring about political “utter alienation” (van der Port 1998: 102-103) and the hostages seem to dwell on the other side of humanity.

REFLECTION: ‘WE ARE TORTURED’

“We are tortured”, an Eritrean man tells me. “We Eritreans, we are tortured”. In previous conversations the man narrated how groups of people smugglers that guided him from Libya through the Sinai desert to Israel treated him with respect. He did not experience torture and was not physically inflicted with violence, but his “brothers and sisters”, his fellow Eritreans, are held hostage in the Northern Sinai and are tortured by human traffickers. Although he has not suffered physically he feels affected by the atrocities committed in the so-called ‘torture camps’. The torture, extortion, and sexual violence of Eritreans in the Sinai affect Eritreans in Israel, exile, and Eritrea and are considered a collective suffering. Individual narratives of being held hostage and suffering are embedded in a collective discourse of torture that follows Eritrean refugees throughout the journey and across borders.

The Eritrean community in Israel lives with the men and women on whose bodies (sexual)

torture was inflicted, who were held hostage for indefinite periods of time, and women who had an abortion or delivered birth to children who were conceived through rape. The Eritrean community in Israel is a 'scarred community' formed by loss. Eritreans mourn the loss of their country, the death of a generation, the loss of self, and the loss of dignity.

In Part Two, I focused on the interplay between individual and collective expressions of experiences of violence. Individual expressions of violence and suffering are part of a larger discourse of social and political suffering of Eritreans worldwide. The extraction of ransom of Eritrean refugees in the Sinai is a collective experience. Families, relatives, and people from the same village or town are involved in the payment of ransom and therewith also experience the frontiers of violence. The lives of relatives, friends and other acquaintances held hostage are put in the hands of those who pay the ransom. The deaths of Eritreans on the move and the extortion and torture of Eritrean refugees in the 'torture camps' are a loss for Eritreans worldwide and are mourned in collective events, gatherings and demonstrations that can be understood as both a political act and a communal act. Eritrean communities in exile collectively mourn, remember, and commemorate the political and social situation in Eritrean and across borders.

Both publically and privately Eritreans perform communal and political acts of commemoration. In public events of mourning, gatherings of 'survivors', and demonstrations for global intervention, the community 'speaks for those who cannot speak'. Eritrean refugees in exile bear witness for those who died or who are held captive. They keep the memory alive of death and scarred bodies and collectively give meaning to the empty spaces that their deaths left behind. The collective events of mourning, performed in Israel, Eritrea and abroad are attempts to bring the deaths "back from oblivion and reassert that the losses in the desert are valuable human lives, worthy of collective noting and grieving" (Magana 2008: 136). Mourning, remembrance, and commemoration are general expression of "loss for a social collectivity under threat" (cf. Robben 2004: 8). The communal act of remembrance holds the community together, provides comfort, and empowers the community. The common language somewhat consoles the 'collective and individual tears'. In the events of mourning, demonstrations for political change, and funerals without bodies Eritreans have found a common alternative idiom through which they express the discourse of political and social suffering.

Although the suffering and pain is recognized by Eritreans in exile and worldwide (human rights) organisations, the 'torture camps' have been ignored nationally in Israel and Egypt and the governments of these countries do not act accordingly. I asked: what counts as a liveable

life and a grievable death? Grievability, in the case of Eritrean refugees held hostage in the Sinai is contested admits different political and communal acts of mourning and pleas for action or interference in the Sinai.

* * * * *

Throughout this thesis, I have directly and indirectly focussed on frontiers of violence encountered by Eritrean refugees during their journey to the ‘Promised Land’. I conclude this thesis with an (temporary) arrival of Eritrean refugees in Israel. The frontiers of violence can be extended to the Israeli policy of deterrence. The Israeli Defense Force (IDF) regularly deports African refugees back to Egypt, a practice known as “Hot Return”.⁷³ Being ‘hot returned’ means that newly arrived refugees are directly expelled to Egypt without access to the asylum process, contrary to Israel’s responsibilities under the UN Refugee Convention of 1951. Under international law, Israel must not deport refugees to a place where they risk persecution, and Egypt is not without risk. Although often safer than the country of origin, refugees are not safe in Egypt because they risk deportation back to the countries from which they escaped despite the danger to their lives. Refugees that remain in Egypt suffer discriminatory treatment and harsh prison conditions (Global Detention Project 2011).

The Israeli government does not conduct asylum determination interviews for individuals from Eritrea, Sudan, Ivory Coast or the Democratic Republic of Congo. Instead, these groups are given ‘temporary group protection’. If one can prove to be from one of these four countries one receives a ‘conditional release visa’, which must be renewed every three months. This visa has a line printed on it that reads: ‘not allowed to work’ and provides no social or legal rights other than the assurance they will not be deported. People from other African countries have to undergo the Refugee Status Determination procedure (RSD), a process that may result in years of legal limbo and often ends in deportation or imprisonment.

The context in which the narratives and alternative idioms of violence are constructed are important to come to an understanding of the meaning of these expressions and is important for the manner in which people remember or forget past violent experiences. The narratives and alternative idioms presented in this thesis are all constructed in a dialogue with the narrators in Tel Aviv. Therefore, I conclude this thesis with a temporary arrival in Israel in which I place the journey, individual and collective experiences and expressions of violence and suffering, and an extreme humanness in retrospect by closing with an anthropological coming into view.



ADVENT A TEMPORARY ARRIVAL

“Now, in Israel, I feel really bad. I wake up from my sleep, from my dreams saying, ‘okay okay, I will pay, I will pay’. I feel like I got out from a grave. I am in Tel Aviv now for one month and I have troubled moments. I have no money, no house, no visa, no job and my medicines are finishing. Where do I get new medicines? Life has finished here. At first when I came, I had to sleep in the park. But since I experienced great things in the Sinai I could easily endure it. I ate in the Sudanese church the first day, but the second day they rejected me. I went to a restaurant and begged for food. I have hope for the future though, I hope to get a visa, start a job, and pay the money my family gathered for my ransom. I have to have a visa and a suitable life.”

Yonas

advent: 1. the arrival of a notable person or thing; 2. a coming into place, view, or being.⁷⁴

Overnight Levinsky Park – a stone’s throw from the Central Bus Station in Tel Aviv – revolves into a sleeping place for refugees from Africa. A glare of sharp light overlooks the nocturnal scene in the park. On the playground a pair of legs jut out from a slide. The slide has become a bed for one of the 40,000 African refugees in Israel. A group of men gather around the slide, some have managed to get a blanket to cover their bodies, others sleep in the clothes they have on them. The men lay on their sides with their knees raised against their chest to protect themselves from the cold. On the grass that surrounds the playground groups of men lie entangled in blankets; their meager belongings are spread around them. Some of the men have found a piece of cardboard on which they sleep. Others sleep on the damp grass. Most of the men who sleep in the park have newly arrived in Israel. They do not have a job and a place to live, and they have to beg for food. The situation in Israel forces African refugees to focus on day-to-day survival more than to move forward. During a meeting of the Sinai Group an Eritrean man poses the following question:

“How can we live in Israel? When we are out of detention we receive no recognition, no work visa, no support, this adds to the full psychological impact we have to deal with. We are not allowed to

work, we have no food, no water. If we cannot rely on ourselves how can we support our families?
How can we pay the debt of the high ransom?"

When does one arrive? When does the journey end? With an arrival in Israel a temporary destination has been reached, but for many the struggle continues. Eritrean refugees in Israel have to live with the many disruptions in their lives: they live with the memories of their home country, their families and friends who stayed behind, breathe the exhalation of exile, walk with the fragility and insecurity of everyday life, and live with the memories of violence in the 'torture camps'. For Eritrean refugees the "rhythm of hope and despair" (Schwarz 1997: 120) repeats itself upon arrival in Tel Aviv. The arrival in Israel, for many, represents the continuation of insecurity, fear for arrest or deportation, absence of rights, and the lack of existence and acknowledgment. African refugees struggle with the asylum policy in Israel⁷⁵, the difficulties in finding and keeping a job, and the difficulties of survival. Asylum seekers from Africa do not find the security and protection they hoped for.

FRONTIERS OF VIOLENCE

This advent does not only represent the temporary arrival of African refugees in Israel, but also an (personal) anthropological coming into view. In the course of this thesis, I argued that meaning is (re)produced in narratives, alternative idioms such as scars and graves, but also collective events of mourning, remembrance, and commemoration. Anthropologist should look for meaning in bodily and collective expressions of experiences of torture. In the interplay of expressions of individual and collective frontiers of violence a larger discourse of social and political suffering is formulated. I discussed frontiers of violence and experiences of being held hostage from three different perspectives; discursive, bodily, and collective frontiers of violence. Discursive frontiers of violence focus on the limits of everyday language in constituting meaning to experiences of violence. These discursive frontiers are not only experienced by narrators, but also by anthropologists who represent victims of torture in an ethnographic text. Discursive frontiers, on the one hand, reflect the methodological problems, insecurities, and empirical frontiers of representation of the anthropologist, and on the other hand, the ambiguous relation between violence, text, and the body experienced by the interlocutors of this thesis.

Human suffering is lived and re-lived through the body. Bodily frontiers of violence focus on the limits of expressions of bodily suffering and represent experiences of the body in alternative idioms that dissolve discursive frontiers of violence. The protagonists of this thesis

strategically situate their bodies in the narratives and use metaphors with an emphasis on the body to express experiences of torture. Through the use of bodily metaphors and poetry Eritrean refugees try to create continuity between past and present experiences of violence. Both in the alternative idioms used by individuals as well as in the common alternative idioms used in collective events of mourning, remembrance, and commemoration there is a focus on death. Through death Eritreans find meaning for a life lived in loss. Yonas expresses the fear for death in his narrative on the ‘torture camp’ and emphasizes the loss of sovereignty over his body. Abel, in the use of bodily metaphors and poetry, expresses the feeling of having lived two lives by saying that he felt as if he “stepped out of grave”. Adhanom extends the metaphor of a grave to his body and to a process of remembering and forgetting to show that his body is a site of conflicted memories. Scars – embodied expressions of violence - serve as an alternative idiom through which otherwise unspeakable suffering becomes expressible. Some violations to the body cannot be expressed through one’s own body and pain resides in another body. Eritrean women strategically narrate their own experiences of sexual torture through other bodies. In different ways the interlocutors have found performative strategies with in which they can constitute meaning, remember and express experiences of violence. Alternatively, graves are a symbol of the anonymous, silenced witnesses of power structures encountered during the journey and represent the ultimate bodily frontier of violence: death.

Individual expressions of violence are part of a larger collective discourse of suffering and flight that dominates the social and political lives of Eritreans in Eritrean, Israel, and abroad. I showed that Eritreans do not only mourn the death of fellow Eritreans, both also the loss of a country and the death of a generation. Collective frontiers of violence focus on the collective experiences and expressions of suffering. Both publically and privately Eritreans perform communal and political acts of commemoration. In public events of mourning, gatherings of ‘survivors’, and demonstrations for global intervention the community ‘speak for those who cannot speak’. Eritrean refugees in exile bear witness for those who died or who are held captive. Eritreans in exile have found a common alternative idiom through which they express the discourse of political and social suffering and through which collective and individual tears are consoled. Mourning, remembrance, and commemoration are general expression of loss for a social collectivity under threat. Mourning, remembrance, and commemoration should be understood as an interaction between individual and collective experiences of death, suffering, and violence. A less visible frontier of violence is the grievability of life on a local, national, and international level. In the commencement of this thesis, I quoted Rylko-Bauer (2003) to point out that anthropologists should not restrain from studying what it means to “barely live as a

human being, or to be treated as less than human”. If anthropologists study what it means to be treated as less than human than anthropologist should simultaneously ask: when is life grievable? What counts as a liveable life? We will not have an answer to these questions, but by probing them in an ethnographic text we question the indifference that is paradigmatic for the contemporary world.

Now, I reflect on the role of anthropologist in presenting and comprehending how violence is experienced, expressed, and remembered.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL WITNESSING

Through the eyes of the protagonists I showed what it means to be confronted with an “abstract nakedness” of being nothing but human (Arendt 1973: 300). The story of African asylum seekers caught in the ‘torture camps’ in the Sinai desert is one of endurance and hope in a place filled with darkness, pain, and despair. Days become nights, nights become days, the beatings, the torture, the insults, the hunger, the humiliation, the fear and the pain continue. The protagonists of this thesis have faced the cruelties of modernity in the borderlands of the Sinai desert. I gave a portrayal of their (in)human suffering not only with the effort to come to an understanding myself, but to make others understand (cf. Taussig 1984: 470). Beneduce (2008: 509) writes that: “the ethnography of journeys, of deaths and destinies, forces us to stand by their pain and confusion and their stories of inhuman violence”. Beneduce (2008: 509) argues, and I agree with him, that the “obstinate ambivalence” of the experiences of refugees reflects an “ambiguous present full of enticements and shadows”. I plead that it is the task of anthropologists to write about these shadows of humanity. Anthropologists should focus on “people in transition who are uneasy about themselves in a world that ignores their desire and need for continuity” (Colson 2003: 3). Already in 1992, Barbara Harrell-Bond (1992), emphasized that ethnographic accounts should reflect violence and suffering, the precariousness of life, and the evils humans do to one another. Almost ten years later, I believe that her statement is still accurate and necessary. The situation in the Sinai desert that I describe bears witness to this and provide a portrayal of human suffering.

Scheper-Hughes (1993: 28) in her ethnography *Death Without Weeping* on the violence of everyday life in Brazil calls for engagement with other human beings through a “good enough” ethnography as a tool for critical reflection and a tool for human liberation. Scheper-Hughes believes that with the “ability to listen and observe carefully, empathically, and compassionately in acts of solidarity and the work of recognition” (ibid. 28) we can contribute to a better

understanding of the world. This understanding should include more than ever the suffering of people. As a young anthropologist, I am aware that I cannot be removed from politics. I too perform acts of activism by writing this thesis. I hope I have shown that anthropology and activism can go hand in hand. Research and personal involvement can be interwoven as long as we keep enough distance to objectify the suffering and not lapse into feelings of pity and contempt. Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004: 26) believe that anthropological witnessing “positions the anthropologist inside human events as a responsive, reflexive, and morally or politically committed being, a person who can be counted on to “take sides” when necessary and to eschew the privileges of neutrality”. Ethnographers are gifted with the privileges of listening, observing, participating, and anthropological witnessing. With these ‘anthropological tools’ anthropologists can turn alienation (van de Port 1998) into transcendence of difference and can contribute to a common humanity (Caplan 1997).

IN TRANSIT

During the day Levisnky Park, in the heart of South Tel Aviv, becomes a meeting place for African refugees. Abel awaits the arrival of his brother, whom he desperately tried to restrain from making the crossing into Israel. The journey of his brother reminds Abel of his own journey: “I will never forget what happened in the Sinai desert, if someone calls from the Sinai, I think back about what happened to us, even though the people are treated well.” Abel looks back at the day he arrived in Levinsky Park. He felt optimistic and happy that he had survived the hardship in the hands of human traffickers. An emotion remarkably different from the way he feels today, he is pessimistic about his future and believes he should never have made the crossing at all: “now I realise that I could better have stayed in Sudan or Ethiopia. There you are free. In here the government disturbs your mind.” In a long procession about fifty African refugees walk into the park. The young men and women were released this morning from Saharonim, the detention center in the Negev desert, where they were imprisoned for weeks, months, and sometimes years after they were arrested when they crossed into Israel. The Israeli government gave the young men and women a bus ticket to one of the larger cities, the only assistance it provides to African asylum seekers. In their hands the refugees carry a bag of clothes and papers. The paper defines their status in Israel. The men seem to feel uncomfortable with their new environment. They look around for familiar faces; relatives, friend, or people from the same village or city. Abel does not find his brother, he will arrive with the next batch of refugees later today. The men crowd together around the public telephones in the park. On crumpled pieces of paper they keep the phone numbers of family,

friends or fellow villagers who live in Tel Aviv. They call to let them know that they have arrived. Eritrean men consecutively touch each other's shoulders as a way of greeting. The Sudanese tap each other on the shoulder before they fall into each other's arms. Families, friends, and villagers are reunited after months and often years of absence. Some of the new arrivals are taken to the housing accommodations of their relatives and friends. The different refugee communities try to take care of new arrivals. The Darfurian community runs a shelter in a run down basement in the South of Tel Aviv where sometimes over 180 refugees from Darfur sleep. The African churches on Levanda Street, a block from Levinsky Park, also offer a sleeping place for the night. Others will have to call Levinsky Park their home until they find shelter somewhere else.

This advent is not concluded without returning to the protagonist of this thesis. Scorpion was working as a hairdresser in *Neve Shanaan* when I left Tel Aviv. We did not stay in contact after I left because of the language barrier we faced. "Life has finished here" is what Yonas said when I asked him about his life in Tel Aviv to conclude that he needs to have a "suitable life". He announced the end of his life but also the will to live. A life in which he has to live with the memories of the many disruptions he experienced. Yonas was staying with friends when I left the field. Although I lost track of Yonas, through contact with others, I hear that he is well. When I left Tel Aviv Abel was full of ideas of opening an internet shop. He took me to his future shop in one of the streets around Levinsky Park. I kept in close contact with him via Facebook and Skype, he has realised his dream of opening an internet shop and proudly he shows me his customers and computers during a Skype conversation. He has found the strength to start a business himself after being refused for jobs repeatedly due to his Polio. He shows me a picture of his future wife who is still in Eritrea but wants to come to Israel. He strongly discourages her to come via the Sinai, he is afraid that she will be held hostage by the human traffickers in the Sinai desert. Her possible journey confronts him with the torture he had to endure. Tsehaye lives outside Tel Aviv, he is looking for a job. Adhanom is politically involved in a youth movement for Eritrean refugees and was one of the speakers during the demonstration in front of the American embassy. He has devoted his life to change in Eritrea and of Eritreans in exile.

Israel is a temporary arrival for many, a place of being that will once be exchanged for another destination. The young men are in transit and see Israel as a temporary destination as they wish to continue their journey onwards or return to their home countries.

* * * * *

In the elaboration of my research, I have focused on individual and collective expressions of experiences of violence and suffering. My approach is one of the many ways in which one can look at the journey of African refugees to Israel and the frontiers of violence encountered both on the way and arrival. In December 2011, I return to the field to work with the African Refugees Development Center in Tel Aviv and to continue my anthropological research. By performing long-term and in-depth fieldwork one can get a better insight in the long-lasting effects of violence and the individual and collective experiences and expressions of torture. I conclude with future ideas and interests for research that I consider complementary for the anthropological debate on refugees, violence, and human trafficking. I will highlight two niches in current anthropological research: the perspective of the human traffickers and multi-sited research to understand the chain of smuggling from the Horn of Africa to Israel.

The existing anthropological literature on violence often examines the ‘victims’ of violence and overlooks the ‘perpetrators’ and performers of violent events (cf. Ben-Ari 2011: 56). One should bear in mind, however, that there is no clear line between ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’. As I explained in a *Narrative of a Scorpion* it would be too simplistic to understand their relation as mutually exclusive and flimsy. Victims are not just victims and perpetrators are more than perpetrators, they are human beings in the first place. Human traffickers should be considered as human beings and violence as a dimension of human existence (cf. Nordstrom and Robben 1995: 6). Therefore, it is necessary to comprehend the motives of human traffickers, for example, by interviewing those who were arrested or left the business. I realise it is complicated to get access to human traffickers as they operate illegally. Also, the researcher has to reconsider ethical and human boundaries to gain insight in the motivations and motives of human traffickers and come to an understanding of their incentives and networks. We should come to an understanding of the relation between the human trafficker and those who are trafficked and their human good(s) and elaborate on the illegal organ trade in tissues, body parts, and human organs of African refugees in the Sinai and abroad.

To get a better insight in the journey of African refugees multi-sited research is necessary to explore the network of human traffickers and the trafficking routes that are used on an international, national, and local level. Multi-sited research will reveal connections and movement and posit logics of relationship, translation and association among sites of departure, transition and arrival (cf. Marcus 1998). In order to get a better insight in the chain of human trafficking into Israel the field should be extended from Israel to Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia. Refugee camps in both Sudan and Ethiopia are often transits on the way to either

Europe or Israel. What decisions are made for the continuation of the journey? Are people aware of the atrocities happening in the Sinai desert? It is said that human traffickers kidnap refugees from the refugee camps. How is this done and what is done to protect the refugees? How do the refugees travel and how do they connect with people smugglers? Furthermore, routes are subject to political and social change, the revolution in Egypt, the construction of a security fence in Israel, the policy of deterrence and the political and social situation in the home countries of African refugees. Multi-sited research reveals the different stages of the journey and discloses changing power structures. The questions revolving the journey of African refugees are endless and transcend the issues raised above.

* * * * *

In the epilogue, I place the journey of African refugees to Israel in the perspective of the Arab Spring and the atmosphere of change that the revolutions in North Africa put in motion. Through the eyes of Natsnet, an Eritrean refugee in Cairo, I show the effects of the revolution on African refugees in Egypt and how it influences the continuation of a journey to Israel.

EPILOGUE

'MY LIFE HAS GONE LOST'

I concluded my fieldwork in Tel Aviv with a journey to Egypt that was both instructive and of epistemological value. The journey and encounters with African refugees in Cairo enriched my empirical data and made me understand why people continue to flee to Israel. As I crossed the southern border of Israel into Egypt, traveling to Cairo, I passed parts of the Sinai desert on my way, my thoughts processing what I had heard over the months of my fieldwork. The journey confronted me with the freedom I enjoy and the people I write about lack. I cross the border in reversed order, legal, not meeting vicious border guards or experiencing mayhem on my way. I feel uncomfortable about the ease with which I apply for a visa at the Egyptian embassy in Tel Aviv and take a bus to the Egyptian border where my passport is stamped and I am greeted with an exultant *assalamu aleikum*.

A small room on the upper floor of an apartment block in the neighborhood of Ardeliwa in Cairo is cramped with furniture. The walls are decorated with images of Jesus Christ. The smell of Eritrean food is extant. Downstairs young men gather in a small bar. Their conversations are almost inaudible. Somali music is playing quietly. The dusty streets are nearly empty. In May 2011, a curfew is still in effect after the revolution that ousted Mubarak, the former President of Egypt, from power. Nearly seventy percent of the Eritrean refugees live in the neighborhood of Ardeliwa. I visit an Eritrean family who is giving shelter to four recently arrived refugees from Eritrea. In the room I meet a young man and woman from Eritrea who both escaped from an Egyptian prison during the revolution in Egypt. The young man - let me call him Natsnet, meaning freedom in Tigrinya - left Eritrea for political reasons. He was forced to serve in the military and like many young Eritreans, crossed the border into Sudan to escape from compulsory conscription:

"Crossing the border is a question of life and death but thanks to God I passed this challenge soon to face another greater challenge. In Sudan I was kidnapped from the refugee camp. We were tied with a chain and injured badly. Many women were raped. We traveled by car for five days through the desert and crossed the Suez Canal by night. 75 people were moved into a truck and covered by

grass so that no one could see us. It was very difficult to breathe. We traveled for one and a half days. Some people were nearly suffocating. We were told that if anyone would make a sound we would be killed instantly. We were afraid so we kept silent. We continued to travel by foot, guarded by people with Kalashnikovs. In the Sinai desert we were sold to another group of smugglers. While we were traveling to their camp the police stopped us. The smugglers were shooting in the air and escaped, but the police caught us. They started shooting and surrounded us. We were brought to prison. The prison is a big room with a lot of people in it. We were all Eritreans caught in the borderlands. Men and women were separated from each other. We were not allowed to go out and they would only throw some food inside the cell. I was there for one and a half months. Then the revolution started. The police and the people were fighting for five days. Finally the people entered the prison and unlocked the prisoners.”⁷⁶

Natsnet is among those being released by the revolutionaries. An enduring three days journey toward Cairo follows after he is freed. Natsnet leaves the prison without any money but with the help of locals he and other Eritrean refugees are taken to a church in Cairo. The church connects him to the Eritrean family and he lives with them since his escape. Out of fear of being arrested by the Egyptian police, Natsnet hardly leaves the house. He feels he is living in involuntary custody. The fear of being arrested occupies his mind. Afraid to leave the house he is now locked, yet again. Natsnet continues his story:

“My life has gone lost. I cannot go back to Eritrea for I face imprisonment or death. I cannot leave the house because I am afraid I will be send to prison again for the act of my escape. Here I am, in Cairo, spending my days watching television, I am dependent on other people for my living, I am again in prison.”

Without any trust in his future Natsnet contemplates the idea to cross the border into Israel, a country about which the asylum seekers in Cairo cannot openly speak but that they secretly call the ‘small land’. Well aware of the dangers, but with hope for the future, they believe escaping to Israel is the only tangible solution. On my return to the Netherlands, the Eritrean family writes to me that Natsnet disappeared; he too decided to go to Israel.

Israel, the so-called only democracy in the Middle East, is surrounded by revolutions in neighboring countries. I arrive in a post-revolution Cairo where a sentiment of freedom reigns the capital city and her people. Demonstrations for democracy and freedom are held every Friday in *Tabrir Square*. As I am writing this epilogue, rebels enter Tripoli and the fall of Gaddafi is emerging and by the time this thesis is submitted Gaddafi is killed and Libya declared liberated by the National Transitional Council (NTC). In Tunisia people voted in the

first free elections in the country and the region since the Arab Spring. Syria is still in the grips of fighting despite promises of President Bashar al-Assad to stop. In Egypt a time-demanding process of elections started after days of intense violence and fighting between demonstrators and the police and army. Spring became winter and in all countries affected by the Arab Spring the future is uncertain and it is unclear what change the revolutions will bring.

The possibility of a revolution in Eritrea or Sudan fills the air in Israel and is a regular topic of conversation. In Israel, I witnessed a lot of personal revolutions for freedom. Small revolutions carried out by ambitious young Eritreans to change the migration policy and to create goodwill among the Israelis. Young men speak of and discuss revolutions for a free Eritrea and Darfur. As South Sudan witnessed the celebration of independence, more and more Southern Sudanese are preparing for their return from Israel to a free country. They follow those who left in the months before the referendum and after the overwhelming vote for secession. No longer they consider themselves refugees; they are Southern Sudanese, citizens of a newborn nation. But what does it mean to be a Southern Sudanese? It is questionable if an independent South Sudan will give the peace that people long for. Fighting continues in the disputed border regions. There is criticism on the Dinka-majority government and corruption is wide spread. Many refugees in Israel have decided to postpone their return until there is more certainty and stability in South Sudan.

Personal revolutions, struggles in the mind, struggles for a life: for the people I spoke with life is often a struggle for individual and collective sovereignty. So many people, so many stories in which the constants can be found in the fight for freedom and dignity. But when will the search for freedom come to an end? At this moment, human traffickers keep hundreds of refugees hostage in the Sinai desert (Physicians for Human Rights et al. 2011). An unknown number of people will continue to live and die outside the eye of the public (cf. Nordstrom 2004: 240). Aware of the dangers, African refugees continue to cross the borders of the Sinai desert into Israel. Also Natsnet was well aware of the dangers of the journey, as he experienced them during his failed attempt to Israel. He knew arrest was imminent and heard the stories of death at the border, and torture in the Sinai but did not see any option other than to try. He could not wait for his life to pass by confined in a house in Cairo. Ever since he left Cairo, there has been no word of Natsnet. He has gone lost.

ABSTRACT

Caught in the Borderlands: Discursive, Bodily, and Collective Frontiers of Violence Experienced by Eritrean Refugees in Israel

African refugees are confronted with constantly changing structures of power and border-regimes in different geographical and political contexts during their journey to Israel. This thesis focuses on the expressions of experiences of violence of Eritrean refugees who were held hostage in the borderlands of the Northern Sinai desert by human traffickers for indefinite periods of time. Eritrean refugees bear witness to torture, extortion, rape, and organ removal. Both actual and experiential borders and borderlands crossed by African refugees can be seen as 'frontiers of violence' that contest the boundaries between legal and illegal and reflect lawlessness, insecurity, and physical and psychological violence.

This thesis discusses frontiers of violence and experiences of being held hostage from three different perspectives; discursive, bodily, and collective frontiers of violence. Discursive frontiers of violence focus on the limits of everyday language in constituting meaning to experiences of violence. These discursive frontiers are not only experienced by narrators, but also by anthropologists who represent victims of torture in an ethnographic text. Discursive frontiers reflect, on the one hand, the methodological problems, insecurities, and empirical frontiers of representation of the anthropologist and on the other hand the ambiguous relation between violence, text, and the body experienced by the interlocutors of this thesis.

Human suffering is lived and re-lived through the body. Bodily frontiers of violence focus on the limits of expressions of suffering and represent experiences of the body in alternative idioms. Alternative idioms dissolve the limits of bodily expressions of frontiers of violence. The protagonists of this thesis strategically situate their bodies in the narratives and use metaphors with an emphasis on the body to express experiences of torture. Through the use of bodily metaphors and poetry Eritrean refugees try to create continuity between past and present experiences of violence. Scars – embodied expressions of violence serve as an alternative idiom through which otherwise unspeakable suffering becomes expressible. Some violations to the body cannot be expressed through one's own body and pain resides in another body. Eritrean women strategically narrate their own experiences of sexual torture

through other bodies. Alternatively, graves are a symbol of the anonymous, silenced witnesses of power structures encountered during the journey and represent the ultimate bodily frontier of violence: death.

Collective frontiers of violence focus on the collective experiences and expressions of suffering. Individual expressions of violence are part of a larger collective discourse of suffering and flight that dominates the social and political lives of Eritreans in Eritrea, Israel, and abroad. Both publically and privately Eritreans perform communal and political acts of commemoration. In public events of mourning, gatherings of ‘survivors’, and demonstrations for global intervention the community ‘speak for those who cannot speak’. Eritrean refugees in exile bear witness for those who died or who are held captive. In the events of mourning, demonstrations for political change, and funerals without bodies Eritreans have found a common alternative idiom through which they express the discourse of political and social suffering and through which collective and individual tears are consoled. Mourning, remembrance, and commemoration are general expression of loss for a social collectivity under threat.

Keywords Anthropology; Multiculturalism; Refugees; Frontiers of Violence; Alternative Idioms; Embodiment; Suffering

ABBREVIATIONS

ARDC	African Refugees Development Centre
EPASI	Eritrean Political Asylum Seekers Israel
EYSC	Eritrean Youth Solidarity for Change
HMW	Hotline for Migrant Workers
IDF	Israeli Defence Force
PHR	Physicians for Human Rights
RSD	Refugee Status Determination
UNHCR	United Nations Higher Commission for Refugees

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Africa



802549 (R02109) 6-97



Base 801166 (B00570) 6-88

ATTACHMENTS

Questionnaire - Identifying victims of trafficking, torture, and abuse.

The patient has the right to give as much or as little information as she/he wishes, no one has to answer all the questions.

* Required

Patient file number * חשוב מאוד למלא את מספר התיק הרפואי על מנת שנוכל לאתר את המטופל/ת בהמשך

Sex זכר/נקבה

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

Age? *

What country are you fleeing from? *

What year did you come to Israel?

What is the total amount of US dollars that you had to pay? כמה כסף נאלצת לשלם על מנת להגיע לישראל

Did you come through the Sinai desert? האם הגעת לישראל דרך מדבר סיני

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

How many days did you spend in the Sinai desert? כמה זמן נמשך המסע בסיני ועד הגעתך (לישראל)? (ימים)

Were you guarded, locked up or tied up in the Sinai desert? האם נכלאת, אזקו אותך, שמרו עליך ?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

תואור קצר של תנאי ההחזקה - While you were in the Sinai desert were you kept in a
בית/מכולה/אוהל/ חוץ-פנים/ כמה זמן הוחזק והכן ערות אחרות של המטופלות

- ☐ Building
- ☐ Container
- ☐ Cave
- ☐ Outside

האם במהלך המסע לישראל נמנע While you were in the Sinai desert were you deprived of
ממך - מים/ מזון/ שינה/ טיפול רפואי / אחר

- ☐ Water
- ☐ Food
- ☐ Other:

האם היית עד לאלומות כלפי אחרים/ מוות/ רצח/ אחר While you were in the Sinai desert did you see any refugees who had died, or were
beaten, tortured, or murdered?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

דרוש ניסוח אחר/ עקיף לשאלות While you were in the Sinai desert were you a victim of
הללו

- ☐ Beatings (punching, slapping, kicking, whipping)
- ☐ Burning/Branding
- ☐ Electric shock
- ☐ Burying in the sand/ soil
- ☐ Hanging by the hands/ feet
- ☐ Exposure to sun
- ☐ Sexual assault
- ☐ Threats of execution
- ☐ Shooting by the smugglers
- ☐ Shooting by the border patrol
- ☐ Other:

Do you have marks, scars, other signs on your body, resulting from the violence against you? האם יש סימני פגיעה על גופך כתוצאה מעושים שעברת? במידה וכן, אנא פרטו בקצרה

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Would you like to add any other information or stories regarding your journey to Israel? טקסט חופשי- להרחבה במידה והמטופלות מעוניין ?

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Source: Physicians for Human Rights Israel

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Prologue - 'The Long Road of Death'

¹ From a Western perspective we often consider a journey as a voluntarily trip made for pleasure and adventure. However, the journey I write about in this thesis is - until a certain extent - forced and is often experienced as arduous. In the twenty first century, a century of migration and globalization, people all over the world are on the move and therewith the content of a journey has changed. There is an exclusive access to freedom of movement and mobility and exclusion is inherent to the modern nation-state and part of the paradox of modernity (cf. Wimmer 2002). Tim Cresswell (2006: 233) extends this paradox to the right to mobility and states that in an era of global inequality of mobility, the freedom of movement for some is only possible by systematic exclusion of others (Cf. Bauman). See Khosravi (2010) for a recent (auto)ethnography of borders; and Agier (2008) on the refugee experience.

² Long have I considered whether I should use the word 'victim'. What is a victim and when does one become a victim? Is someone a victim when he or she considers him or oneself to be one or when researchers decide on this faith? Anthropologist should be weary in dubbing someone a victim, for we can unwittingly contribute to a further victimization. On the contrary the conceptualization of violence as a "creative force marked a shift towards an agency-centered perspective in social science, which aims at doing justice to people's individuality, for instance by refuting the reductionist portrayal of victims of violence and poverty as suffering individuals hardly in charge of their own lives" (Lammers 2006: 294). However, I we speak of creative strategies we possibly sound "rationally optimistic", and reveal an "inkling of western teleology" as this shift from suffering individuals to creative survivors is too restrained and too dichotomous (ibid. 294). Lammers rightly notes that violence and its effects on people are "inconclusive and contingent" and I agree with Lammers that we should not make assumptions about people's helplessness and suffering, neither should we take "their abilities to be creative as a natural given" (ibid. 294). But what if the protagonists of this thesis consider themselves as victims, can we as anthropologist subsequently copy their words? The discourse of victims and victimization is strategically chosen by the African refugees in Israel to ask attention for the cause of hostages in the Sinai desert. Herewith, I do not want to argue that everyone agrees with the victimization of refugees held hostage in the Sinai desert.

³ Writing about suffering I refer to both individual subjective suffering and a collective level of suffering. Furthermore, I do not only refer to the physical terms of suffering, but also the emotional, cultural, and social parameters of suffering (cf. Green 2011:22).

⁴ I found this quote of Patricia Pinnock in Carolyn Nordstrom's *Shadows of War: Violence, Power, and International Profiteering in the Twenty-First Century* (2004: 56).

⁵ The descriptions of the Northern Sinai desert that I placed between inverted commas derive from Frantzman's article.

⁶ African refugees are caught in the borderlands of the Egypt-Israel border in the Northern region of the Sinai desert and the so-called 'torture camps' are located around El Arish, a town in the north of the Sinai Peninsula. Other camps are situated around Hammah Bi'r and Abu Ujaylah also in the Northern region of the Sinai desert and Gorah and Rafah (see map page 94). When I write about the Sinai desert I refer to the Northern region.

⁷ For a critical understanding of violence see Whithead 2004.

⁸ Definition of commencement from: <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/commencement>.

⁹ Tigrinya is the official language of Eritrea and is also spoken in the neighboring Tigray region in Ethiopia.

¹⁰ Interview with Shahar Shoham, head of the migrants & refugees department, Physicians for Human Rights Israel, 4 May 2011.

¹¹ It goes beyond the length of this thesis to problematise the terms refugee and asylum seekers. After long consideration on how to write about the individuals in Israel from different African countries I decided to use both terms interchangeably, although I am aware of the differences. To avoid misunderstandings I want to make clear that I do not refer to the refugees or asylum seekers as a static 'way of being'. To understand both terms we can go back to the 1951 United Nations Convention on Refugees in which a refugee is defined as "someone who has fled their country due to a well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion". An asylum seeker is "a person who has fled their own country and applies to the government of another country for protection as a refugee". However we can also find an explanation in African literature. Refugee and asylum seeker are not simple words, endorses Abdul Razak Gurnah (2001:88), a novelist from Zanzibar, although the habit of hearing these words assume they are. The Somali novelist Nuruddin Farah (2000) expresses refugeeeness (being a refugee) as "having no home on one's own and no country enjoying the luxury of peace". Michel Agier (2008: 29) enumerates the loss of a geographical place and defines refugees as "a population reduced to the sole imperative of keeping alive far from home, in places of waiting, an unknown people that no one knows what to do with, human beings who have become both victims and undesirables". Agier believes refugees are at once victims, illegal and defenseless (ibid. 8). Whatever definition we choose, we should acknowledge that we use these terms to make sense of the world. Lammers (2006: 506) argues that 'refugees', 'victims of trafficking', 'asylum seekers' and 'victims of torture' are categories "hopelessly trying to grasp and classify impregnable and painful vicissitudes, the edges of which are incessantly being reshuffled by the actors who are involved" (2008: 506). I have struggled enormously with this terming in my research. African refugees in Israel consider themselves refugees or asylum seeker and also use the term in daily interaction and the formation of organisations (f.e. Eritrean Political Asylum Seekers in Israel) and so do organisations working for the rights of refugees. In Israel people from countries in Africa are perceived as infiltrators, terrorists, and job seekers. I will use the terms refugee and asylum seekers alternately in this thesis. By using these terms, I award African refugees and asylum seekers a certain recognition that the Israeli government declines to grant them, but which they hope to receive.

¹² Physicians for Human Rights-Israel (PHR-Israel) is a non-profit, non-governmental organization For more information on the Open Clinic see the website: <http://www.phr.org.il/default.asp?PageID=140>.

¹³ Interview with Shahar Shoham, head of the migrants & refugees department, Physicians for Human Rights Israel, 4 May 2011.

¹⁴ Interview with Shahar Shoham, head of the migrants & refugees department, Physicians for Human Rights Israel, 4 May 2011.

¹⁵ The interviews in the Open Clinic are done according to a targeted set of questions developed with an expert in trauma and rehabilitation.

¹⁶ The interviews held in the Open Clinic are all done with the help of an interpreter. Sister Aziza speaks Amharic (Ethiopia), Arabic, (Sudan), Tigrinya (Eritrea), and English. Aziza conducts interviews in the Open Clinic in one of the above languages and translates the conversation to English. I process the data in the computer.

¹⁷ The refugees who were brought to the Sinai desert against their own will often did not have plans to go to Israel, they wanted to stay in refugee camps in Sudan or Ethiopia, sometimes with the hope for resettlement, or wanted to try to reach Europe.

¹⁸ The smuggling of people is defined as: "the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a state Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident." (Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air)

¹⁹ Trafficking of human beings is defined as: "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat, or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation." (The UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.)

²⁰ The words Bedouin smugglers or Rashida are used by African refugees and NGO's and refers to a general term for a number of tribes living in the deserts of Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Ethiopia. This common term has constituted to a demonization of Bedouins in the area, which mistakenly created the idea that all Bedouins are involved in the business of human trafficking and organ removal.

²¹ I kept in close contact with a number of narrators after I left the field and regularly speak with them either on Facebook or via Skype. In the last few months I received worrying descriptions on how relatives or friends were held hostage in the Sinai desert and forced to pay amounts up to 40,000 dollar. Often the protagonists contributed to pay this towering ransom.

²² Abdullah is a well-known human trafficker and it is said that everyone that passed via Abdullah went through hell. In late May there have been rumors that Abdullah was arrested, but these rumors were never confirmed.

²³ Besides the almost one hundred interviews I had with patients in the Open Clinic and that contributed to an understanding of the situation in the Sinai desert, I had over six in-depth interviews and extensive relations with victims of the human traffickers in the Sinai desert. I also had interviews with African refugees who were not held hostage in the Sinai desert by human traffickers and with employees of organisations working for the rights of African refugees in Israel.

²⁴ These organisations are: African Refugees Development Center (ARDC), Amera Egypt, Amnesty International Israel, Anu Plitim (We are Refugees), Aid Organization for Refugees (Assaf), Hotline for Migrant Workers (HMW), Kav Laoved, Mesila, Microfy, Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), and the Refugees Rights Clinic Tel Aviv University.

²⁵ I will alternately use the terms protagonist, narrator and interlocutor to describe the ‘subjects’ of research. The term protagonist and narrator imply a connotation of fiction. In explaining the meaning of protagonist the oxford dictionary differentiates between the principal character in a work of fiction and a prominent figure in a real situation. A narrator is seen as a person who narrates something, a character who recounts the events of a novel. An interlocutor on its hand is defined as a person who takes part in a dialogue or conversation.

Commencement - Violence Experienced, Expressed, and Remembered

²⁶ Lecture on ‘Learning to Fight and Kill in Combat and Genocide’ by Professor Ton Robben, course Culture, Violence, Trauma and Reconciliation, 21 September 2011, Utrecht University.

²⁷ Interview with Amy Stringer, Programme Manager, African Refugees Development Centre, 8 February 2011.

²⁸ Interview with Amy Stringer, Programme Manager, African Refugees Development Center, 8 February 2011.

²⁹ I should explicate from the beginning that not all border crossers face similar types of danger. I talked with numerous people who did not face violence in the Sinai desert and arrived in Israel with relative ease – although the journey in itself affects people. Several factors such as political circumstances, geographical factors, the refugee’s gender and background, the composition of the migrant’s companions, and the mode of crossing determine the level of danger (Hagan 2008: 61 in Khosravi 2010: 27). Women, for example, are likely to become victims of rape and sexual assault on their way to Israel. Judith Butler (2004: XII), philosopher and feminist theorists, demonstrates that there are ways of distributing vulnerability, differential forms of allocation that make some people more subject to arbitrary violence than others. She enumerates that: “to be injured means that one has the chance to reflect upon injury, to find out the mechanisms of its distribution, to find out who else suffers from permeable borders, unexpected violence, dispossession, and fear, and in what ways” (ibid. XII).

³⁰ The information in the following section is gathered in interviews with Eritrean asylum seekers and in interviews with organisations that work for and with the African Asylum seekers in Israel. Additionally information is gathered in news reports and the following reports by organisations.

‘The Death of the Wilderness’ Testimonies from Sinai Desert 2010, Hotline for Migrant Workers, February 2011.

‘Testimonies of Sexual Assault’, Physicians for Human Rights, 7 October 2010.

‘Hostages, Torture, and Rape in the Sinai Desert: A PHR-Israel update about recently arriving asylum seekers’, Physicians for Human Rights, 13 December 2010.

‘Hostages, Torture, and Rape in the Desert: Findings from 284 Asylum Seekers about Atrocities in the Sinai’, Physicians for Human Rights, 23 February 2011.

³¹ These accounts of violence were gathered during conversations with victims of the Sinai desert and recorded in various reports published by Physicians for Human Rights.

³² In this light we can ask the question that most ignore to answer: Why are Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees more vulnerable to become victims of the human traffickers in the Sinai desert? When I confronted the narrators of this thesis with this question they gave different reasons. First, there was the explanation of religion, as the Bedouin

smugglers are Muslims and the Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees are mostly Christians. Some refugees claim that they were forced to read the Koran. Others claim they pretended to be Muslims, while they were actually Christians. Secondly, an answer to this violence can be found in the fact that most Eritreans and Ethiopians have family members living in the 'Western world'. The human traffickers provide the captives with mobile phones with which they can reach their family members abroad to make them pay for the ransom. The traffickers experienced that relatives would do whatever in their capacity to gather the money and release the captives from the hands of the traffickers. A human trafficker who left the business explains that: "it is because Eritreans help each other. They are not like the Sudanese or others. They have support. They help each other. I have worked with Habesha and know them very well, they help each other. But the Sudanese says uffffff... let him die, he has no problem". (phone-interview conducted by Meron Esteafnos, an Eritrean journalist and human rights activist)

Narrative of a Scorpion

³³ Scorpion does not speak English and therefore the interview was held with the help of an Eritrean interpreter.

³⁴ Massawa is the main port serving Eritrea.

³⁵ Nakfa is the national currency of Eritrea introduced in 1998.

³⁶ The Rashida are Eritrean nomads who roam the northern coasts of Eritrea and Sudan, as well as the southern reaches of the Nubian desert.

³⁷ Khartoum is the capital and the largest city in Sudan.

Part One - Narratives, Metaphors, Scars, and Graves: Discursive and Bodily Frontiers of Violence

^{xxxviii} Fragments of narratives narrated by patients in the Open Clinic of Physicians for Human Rights.

^{xxxix} The subtitle is borrowed from Fiona C. Ross' *Speech and Silence: Woman's Testimony in the First Five Weeks of Public Hearings of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. In *Remaking of a World: Violence, Social Suffering, and Recovery*. Das et al. 2001. Pp. 250-279 California: University of California Press.

^{xl} More on this culture of mistrust see Kibreab (2004), Michael (2002), and Voutira and Harrell-Bond (1995). Narratives of torture do not contribute to a better outcome of the RSD-procedure. The African Refugees Development Center recently published figures of refugee's status granted to people who asked asylum; since 2009 only eight people were granted a refugee status. Instead, asylum seekers and refugees receive a conditional release visa (2A5), which has to be renewed every three months. The holders of this visa are not eligible to any rights other than the legal stay in the country. The government confronts African refugees continuously with the temporality of their stay. Temporary protection is only issued to people who can prove that they come from one of the following countries: Sudan, Eritrea, Ivory Coast or the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Israeli government cannot deport them due to the situation in their home countries but does not recognize them as refugees. Sudanese, Eritreans, Ivoirians, and Congolese receive temporary protection as a group and individual claims are not reviewed. African refugees from other countries are held for longer periods in the detention centers after their arrival in Israel and file an individual asylum claim in the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) process that is often equal to an indefinite legal limbo of which the result is often return to detention or deportation. Only a few thousand Sudanese and Eritreans have residence permits or six-months working visas. These visas were granted to these specific groups respectively Darfurians and Eritreans in 2007 and 2008 after lobby by groups who work for the rights of African refugees in Israel.

^{xli} Although I visited the border and passed parts of the Sinai desert on my way to Cairo, I did not enter the Northern Sinai desert region and the areas where the 'torture camps' are located. I planned a trip to El Arish, a city in the Northern Sinai desert close to the 'torture camps', to meet with a human rights activist - who works on the case of African refugees held captive in the Sinai desert and in Egyptian prisons and police stations - and a nurse who regularly visits the police station in El Arish to check on the African refugees who were captured in the borderlands and at the border by Egyptian border guards. On the night before my departure I was warned by an Eritrean activist who lives in London that the atmosphere in the Northern region was tense after the January revolution, each night gunshots were heard and Bedouins constructed road blocks on their way to El Arish to control the area. His warnings made me cancel the fieldwork trip to El Arish.

^{xlii} However, I should acknowledge that long-term research would also influence the narrative.

^{xliii} According to a recent report of the International Crisis Group a quarter of the Eritrean population is under arms or on active reserve: "Eritrea is defined by military or national service and by a culture of militarism that profoundly impacts its politics, society and economy, causes the fragility which characterizes national life and affects foreign policy and the stability of the surrounding region" (ICG 2010: 1). For more on the culture of militarism in Eritrea see Tronvoll (2009) and Human Rights Watch (2009).

^{xliv} Interview with Oded Diner, Campaigns and Activism Director, Amnesty International Israel, 22 February 2011.

^{xliv} For further reading on remembering and forgetting see Fabian 1996; Connerton 2011.

^{xlvi} There are several reasons why women are underrepresented in this thesis. First of all, there are more Eritrean men than women in Israel. The journey is long and difficult and women are therefore advised to stay in the refugee camps in Sudan and Ethiopia. I have met only few women who spoke English, which obviously does not mean that there are no women who speak English, I however did not encounter them. Where men are visible in the streets of South Tel Aviv, in the park, in bars and restaurants, and in internet shops, women are living their lives more indoors and it is relatively difficult to get access to women. The few women I met and whom I asked if they were willing to share their experiences with me turned around my requests and cancelled appointments. This gave me the idea that they did not want to talk about their experiences.

^{xlvii} In a recent report the African Refugees Development Center (ARDC) estimates that 80 to 90 percent of the women who enter the Woman Shelter carry unwanted pregnancies as a result of rape by smugglers in 'Bedouin holding camps' in the Egyptian Sinai desert during their flight to Israel. They claim that while being held for the purpose of ransom, all women are tortured and systematically abused and raped. In one of the worst cases ARDC has encountered, a Nigerian woman who was held captive and repeatedly raped and tortured for a period of 15 months (ARDC 2011: 7). Additionally the Hotline for Migrant Workers wrote in the report 'The Death of the Wilderness': Testimonies from Sinai Desert (2010: 5) that approximately 5,000 women were smuggled into Israel through the Sinai Desert in recent years. They acknowledge that it is difficult to estimate how many women were raped on the way, but according to the testimonies the organization collected, the majority of the women who were held by the smugglers were raped, many of them repeatedly. Physicians for Human Rights Israel in its report Hostages, Torture, and Rape in the Sinai Desert estimates that more than 80 (total of 165 in between January-November 2010) of the abortions it coordinated in 2010 were for women who were impregnated as a result of rape in the desert. Many women confessed to being raped prior to entering Israel. During the same period, 1,303 women have been referred for gynecological treatment, here too, a large percentage as a result of the trauma endured in Sinai.

^{xlviii} During my visit to the border I spoke with several people living near to the border. Separately, they testified that almost every night they heard gunshots from the border.

^{xlix} In the beginning of May 2011 I traveled to the border with a group of young interested females all working with African refugees in Tel Aviv. We spend a night in Nitzana, an educational youth village and communal settlement in the western Negev desert in Israel close to the Egyptian border. The area around Nitzana is one where refugees often cross the border and people who live in this area account of nightly shootings. From Nitzana we traveled towards the Gaza strip until the road was blocked and we could not continue. The next day we drove along the border towards Eilat, a port city on the northern tip of the Red Sea located in the Southern Negev desert. The journey to the border gives me a context in which I can place the narratives about the border. To see the curled barbed wire, the Egyptian border guards, the watch towers, and the landscape constitute to a better understanding of the experience of clandestine border crossing.

ⁱ The description of the young man is based on a photo of the photo story 'Shoot to Kill' by human rights photographer Robin Hammond. <http://www.panos.co.uk/stories/2-13-1183-1689/Robin-Hammond/Shoot-to-Kill/> (20 September 2011).

ⁱⁱ I have not visited the morgue in El Arish, neither the graveyards in Egypt. The description derives from an item of CNN on the exploitation of African refugees in the Sinai desert. The readers should understand the description as an interpretation of an interpretation and are therefore a secondary observation.

ⁱⁱⁱ Quote by Adhanom.

ⁱⁱⁱⁱ For the title of this chapter I was inspired by the book *When Bodies Remember* by French anthropologist Didier Fassin (2007) on the experiences and politics of AIDS in South Africa.

Part Two - Collective Frontiers of Violence: Experiences and Expressions of Suffering

⁵⁴ I have not been present at the event on April 10, 2011. Through the observations and experiences of others I gained a good understanding of the event. I find it important to show this example for it shows how Eritreans collectively remember those who died while escaping from the country.

⁵⁵ I advise the reader to listen to the song of Yemane Barya and then continue reading: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mEOCZHJMCV8>. Music has the power to express emotions that are not easily shared and have the same fortitude of poems that have the ability to express that what cannot be expressed through everyday language. The song initiates individual reflections on a life lived, but at the same time reflect the collective suffering of which I speak in part two.

⁵⁶ The situation in Eritrea goes beyond the stretch of this thesis. For further reading on the political, social and economic situation in Eritrea and a history of the independence struggle see Gebremedhin 2004, Hedru 2003, HRW 2009, ICG 2010, Kibreab 2008, and Tronvoll 2009.

⁵⁷ On the website Asmarino Independent 'Horizon' comments on an article of Zekre Lebona, 'A Call to Eritrean Diaspora: Paying Ransom to Human Traffickers is Abetting a Crime'. Virtually he articulates what many Eritreans have told me in Israel.

⁵⁸ Interview with Oded Diner, Campaigns and Activism Director, Amnesty International Israel, 22 February 2011.

⁵⁹ *Part Two: Collective Frontiers of Violence: Experiences and Expressions of Suffering* touched upon the collective process of remembrance, commemoration, and mourning. Collective processes should be explored more extensively in future research across the borders of Israel. Due to the political climate in Eritrea it is impossible to do research in Eritrea, however it would be interesting to gain a better understanding of how the death of those who die on the move are collectively mourned and to further explore the symbolism of empty coffins and group graves and mourning the death of the youth of Eritrea in the context of the dictatorship in Eritrea.

⁶⁰ This questions derives from a comment by 'Offended' below an article on Asmarino Independent, a diaspora website, written by Zekre Lebona. The article called for a community-wide boycott of the ransom of human traffickers. His article received criticism from Eritreans living in exile. 'Offended' said on May 17: "How can I save my sister, son etc? is the only question that the family of a hostage will be asking itself and rightly so. Yes, if people refused to pay ransom, hostage taking may in the long run become less attractive to these cowardly thugs; however, before this stage can be reached many victims may have to lose their lives as the thugs kill to make a statement and frighten others into paying. The family of a hostage should be allowed to decide what they think is right. This is a very emotive and difficult subject but unfortunately the writer has not handled it with the sensitivity it deserves. Making accusations of law breaking etc is grossly insensitive. Moreover, I cannot imagine any respectable legal system would find the actions of a family coerced into paying a ransom".

⁶¹ Account from an interview with a human trafficker A. who was interviewed over the phone by Meron Estefanos, an Eritrean human rights activist and journalist. It is with her consent that I am using this quote.

⁶² For future research, it would be interesting to speak with relatives in Europe or America who were confronted with the phone calls and the cries of pain. How do they gather the money? How are they emotionally influenced by the phone calls and the burden of life and death? How is the money transferred?

⁶³ The title of this chapter is based on a slogan held by an Eritrean man during a demonstration in front of the American embassy in Tel Aviv, Israel to ask attention for the situation of Eritrean refugees in the Sinai.

⁶⁴ I have not been present at this demonstration. Through Facebook and Skype I was in close contact with the organizers of the event and after the demonstration they gave me an account of the protest. I have seen pictures and movies of the demonstration and speeches that were given. I am aware that I am using secondary sources to make an argument; I feel however that this demonstration clearly shows the political act of mourning.

⁶⁵ The text derives from an invitation for the demonstration on Facebook. Internet and especially Facebook are media through which pictures of demonstrations, candle light vigils, updates, articles, and reports are shared and where awareness is raised and political interference is demanded.

⁶⁶ In this thesis I focus on the demonstration concerning the rights of Eritrean refugees in the Sinai desert. In other demonstrations Eritrean refugees have asked for attention for the political situation in Eritrean and they

have expressed worries about their lives in Israel at the time when plans for a security fence and detention facility were issued.

⁶⁷ The public political act is attended by a few hundred of the estimated 26,000 Eritreans in Israel. Not everyone in Israel participates in the political act of commemoration. The presence of an Eritrean embassy in Israel creates fear among people and makes them restrain from publically opposing the government in Eritrea.

⁶⁸ Quote from the invitation on Facebook.

⁶⁹ The refugees were released on the border with Israel from camps in El Arish, Gorah, Rafah and other cities in the Sinai desert (EveryOne Group 2011). It is said that human traffickers were “afraid of being pursued by the authorities” (Pleitgen and Fadel Fahmy 2011b, EveryOne Group 2011) and therefore released the African refugee they held hostage. The UNHCR and Hamdy Al-Azazy, an Egyptian human rights activist, confirmed the release of over 600 Eritrean refugees. This seems to be a breakthrough in the campaign of human rights activist around the world to stop the human trafficking, torture and organ removal in the Northern Sinai desert. The refugees are now in Israel where it remains unknown how the Israeli government will protect and support them.

⁷⁰ Physicians for Human Right, Hotline for Migrant Workers, Agenizia Habeshia, Release Eritrea, International Commission on Eritrean Refugees (ICER), Eritrean Movement for Democracy and Human Rights (EMDHR) en The American Team for Displaced Eritreans.

⁷¹ The title of this chapter is based on Judith Butler’s *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* published by Verso in 2009. Butler firstly asked this question of grief in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*.

⁷² Dr Khataza Gondwe is advocacy officer for Sub-Saharan Africa for Christian solidarity worldwide. She expressed these words in an interview with the Vatican Radio:
<http://www.phr.org.il/default.asp?PageID=184&ItemID=726>. (15 August 2011).

⁷³ Interview with Sigal Rozen, Public Policy Coordinator, Hotline for Migrant Workers, 1 March 2011.

Advent - A Temporary Arrival

⁷⁴ Definition of advent from: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/advent>.

⁷⁵ For further reading on the situation of African refugees in Israel and the Israel's asylum policy see Yonathan Paz (2011) *Ordered Disorder: African Asylum Seekers in Israel and Discursive challenges to an Emerging Refugee Regime*. Maya Paley (2011) *Surviving in Limbo: Lived Experiences Among Sudanese and Eritrean Asylum Seekers in Israel*; and *Surviving in Limbo: Community Formation Among Sudanese and Eritrean Asylum Seekers in Israel*. Rebecca Furst-Nichols and Karen Jacobsen (2011) *African Migration to Israel: Debts, Employment and Remittances*, Karin Fathimath Ateef (2009) *A Promised Land for Refugees? Asylum and Migration in Israel*.

Epilogue: ‘My Life Has Gone Lost’

⁷⁶ Natsnet does not speak English therefore I communicated with him through the help of an Eritrean interpreter.
