

**IM/MOBILITY: HOMELAND, IDENTITY AND WELLBEING AMONGST  
THE BENI-AMER IN ERITREA-SUDAN AND DIASPORAS**

**Thesis Submitted for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
at the  
University of Leicester**

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**September 2017**

## **Abstract**

This thesis focuses on how mobility, identity, conceptions of homeland and wellbeing have been transformed across time and space amongst the Beni-Amer. Beni-Amer pastoralist societies inhabit western Eritrea and eastern Sudan; their livelihoods are intimately connected to livestock. Their cultural identities, norms and values, and their indigenous knowledge, have revolved around pastoralism. Since the 1950s the Beni-Amer have undergone rapid and profound socio-political and geographic change. In the 1950s the tribe left most of their ancestral homeland and migrated to Sudan; many now live in diasporas in Western and Middle Eastern countries. Their mobility, and conceptions of homeland, identity and wellbeing are complex, mutually constitutive and cannot be easily untangled. The presence or absence, alteration or limitation of one of these concepts affects the others.

Qualitatively designed and thematically analysed, this study focuses on the multiple temporalities and spatialities of Beni-Amer societies. The study subjected pastoral mobility to scrutiny beyond its contemporary theoretical and conceptual framework. It argues that pastoral mobility is currently understood primarily via its role as a survival system; as a strategy to exploit transient concentration of pasture and water across rangelands. The study stresses that such perspectives have contributed to the conceptualization of pastoral mobility as merely physical movement, a binary contrast to settlement; pastoral societies are therefore seen as either sedentary or mobile. This study argues that pastoral mobility is more than mere physical movement: it is a mechanism through which pastoralists formulate their sense of homeland, identity and wellbeing.

As part of the analysis the study investigates the multiple interlocked factors which underpin dynamic change to Beni-Amer pastoral systems across time and space. It argues that those binary boundaries between the sedentary and the nomadic are fuzzy: pastoralists are 'mobile when mobile, mobile while sedentary, and sedentary while mobile'; mobility is a permanent feature, but its purpose and practice differ across time and space. The study argues that mobility is central to Beni-Amer existence, intrinsic to their everyday practices. It happens everywhere; even when camping for extended periods at a single site in a good rainy season their life incorporates mobility. Furthermore, the study argues that for those who leave

pastoralism as their primary livelihood strategy ('drop-out pastoralists'), their continuing mobility is invisible in research literature: pastoralists are perceived to cease mobility when leaving pastoralism. This study found that leaving pastoralism does not mean leaving mobility; it means engaging in multiple im/mobilities beyond pastoralism. Pastoralists in transition engage in non-pastoral mobility in search of alternative livelihoods in 'new', often urban, environments; many gravitate towards illegalised migration, often experiencing fragmented im/mobilities, characterised by multiple returns, stillness, stuckness, waiting and uncertainty. This study found that this fragmented im/mobility itself converts pastoralists in transition into asylum seekers and diaspora communities. In the new destination, they develop a diasporic identity while remaining connected to the pastoralist identity of their upbringing. In the host country, their im/mobility rights link to their immigrant status; as such these have a significant impact on their sense of wellbeing, identity and homeland attachment. The study concludes that those Beni-Amer who are unable to revisit their homeland demonstrate profound disappointment with life in the diaspora and face the risk of being permanently deracinated, in contrast with those who can maintain contact with their homeland.

## **Acknowledgements**

I praise Allah the Almighty, the Merciful, the Most High, the All Knowing. Indeed, Allah is the Most Compassionate and Appreciative. My deepest gratitude and appreciation go to my Supervisors Dr. Caroline Upton and Dr. Jen Dickinson. This thesis would have been impossible without their empowering, critical and insightful supervision. I am grateful to my Panel Committee, Professor Clare Madge and Professor Martin Phillips, for providing me with great personal and professional guidance, teaching me a great deal about social scientific research; without them, the PhD would have been a lonely and incomplete project. I am also grateful to Dr. Margaret Byron for her constructive suggestions and encouragement when they were most needed; and I would like to thank Associate Professor Nicholas Tate for his guidance at the beginning of my PhD. I would like to thank my extended family members whose love and guidance are always with me in whatever I pursue. Similar thanks go to all of my research participants: without them nothing could have happened, no story, no past to remember, no present to contemplate and no future to aspire to.



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## **Acronyms**

BAf, Di	Beni-Amer Female Diaspora Interviewee
BAm, Di	Beni-Amer Male Diaspora Interviewee
Di	Diaspora Interviewee
EF	Eastern Front
Eh	Ex-Herder
Eh, FGD	Ex-Herders Focus Group Discussion
ELF	Eritrean Liberation Front
ENSP	Eritrea National Service programme
EPLF	Eritrean People's Revolution Front
EWI	Eritrean War for Independence
IM	Immobility
KI	Key Interviewee
KI, FDG	Key Interviewee Focus Group Discussion
PFDJ	People's Front for Democracy and Justice
SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **1.1. Introduction**

In the last century, pastoralist societies globally underwent several human-induced and natural challenges. As a result, many pastoralists exited pastoral nomadism altogether while some diversified and/or adopted alternative livelihoods (e.g. see Catley et al., 2013; Krätli et al., 2013). This poses several significant questions vis-à-vis the contemporary practice of pastoralism and the challenges pastoralist societies encounter. For instance, how do pastoralists in transition construct alternative livelihoods? Where do they go after leaving pastoralism? Does their sense of identity as pastoralists persist after they have exited the day-to-day practice of pastoralism? Does their mobility cease after dropping-out of pastoralism? How is their pastoral identity altered in 'new', usually urban environments? How does their pastoral identity and low economic status complicate their mobility outside pastoralism, what modes of subsistence do they practice, and how do these experiences inform their sense of homeland, wellbeing and cultural identity? How do pastoralists in transition, especially in a destination away from their locality, adopt changes and maintain attachment to their past? Addressing such questions requires investigation of multiple interlocked factors which underpin dynamic change to pastoral systems across time and space. Geographers therefore need to rethink pastoral mobility beyond its contemporary theoretical and conceptual framework as a merely physical movement to exploit transient concentration of pasture and water across rangelands. Indeed, geographers should scrutinise the current understanding of pastoralism as a dualism between mobility and settlement in order to comprehend where drop-out pastoralists go and into what kinds of (im)mobility. To investigate the complex trajectories of changes pastoralist societies undergo, geographers must draw on multi-dimensional concepts of mobility from human geography and sociology.

This chapter is organised into six sections: firstly it presents the main arguments in the chapter. Secondly, it identifies the most critical gaps in previous literature. The third briefly describes the Beni-Amer and their homeland. The fourth presents the purpose of the thesis, delineates the research questions, methodology, objectives,

significance, scope and limitations of the study. Finally, the structure of the thesis is outlined, and the main points summarised.

## **1.2. Statement of the problem**

In geographical and anthropological literature pastoralism is considered the principal livelihood strategy in harsh environments characterised by natural resource scarcity. In the last decade it has been estimated that pastoralism is a mode of subsistence for more than 200 million people with more than 1 billion livestock heads worldwide (Davies, 2013; Karplus and Meir, 2012; Reid et al., 2014). It covers 26 million km<sup>2</sup> of the Earth's land surface, more than any other type of land use (Anser et al., 2004; Reid et al., 2014). Herding communities primarily inhabit semi-arid areas of grasslands, shrublands, savannas, and marshes, and over half of the world's pastoralists are estimated to be in the arid and semi-arid regions of Africa (Allen et al., 2011; Galvin et al., 2009; Reid et al., 2008). In the pastoralism literature pastoralist societies are broadly classified into three types: nomadic, transhumant and semi-transhumant pastoralists, depending on the extent of their household mobility. Several authors affirm that pastoral mobility is the most important strategy of survival and resilience in the environments inhabited by the majority of pastoralists. Among them Wario et al. (2016) stated that livestock mobility is vital to harness high temporal and spatial inconsistency of pasture across rangelands; Krätli et al. (2013) and Behnke et al. (2013) explain that pastoral mobility is an effective strategy to exploit ephemeral concentrations of resources; Opiyo et al. (2015) argue that pastoral mobility allows adjustment of herd size according to pasture and water availability. In this way, pastoral mobility is comprehended only via its role as a survival mechanism. This perspective has contributed to the conceptualization of pastoral mobility merely regarding physical movement, as a binary opposite of settlement; therefore, pastoral societies are seen as either sedentary or mobile. This study argues that pastoral mobility is not merely physical movement but a more complex mechanism through which pastoralists formulate their sense of homeland, identity and wellbeing.

Theoretically framing pastoral mobility merely as herd movement by pastoralists to exploit transient concentrations of resources across time and space strips them of rootedness and attachment to the land. This contributes to the economic, social and

environmental marginalisation of herding communities. Indeed, usually pastoralists inhabit marginal areas on the fringes of the economy and public services of contemporary nation-states (Sayre et al., 2013; Wolputte et al., 2004). Their culture is regarded by states and 'mainstream' sedentary societies as uncivilised and primitive. Aronson (2016) explains that the state, which often favours the sedentary, views environmental sustainability and economic growth as impossible in the pastoral system, and designs policy to curtail its practices. For more than a century pastoralists have been perceived as irrational over-stockers, who aspire to increase herd sizes irrespective of environmental constraints (Herskovits, 1926; Stebbings, 1935). Although pastoralism supports pastoralists, it has become understood as unproductive and environmentally damaging (Lamprey, 1983). These views call for policy action by the state to save the environment from the damage inflicted by the apparently irrational practices of herding communities.

Several scholars among them (e.g. Lengoiboni et al., 2010; Turner, 2011; 2012) argue that pastoralism has come under attack by state development policy backing sedentarism. In Ethiopia current economic strategies call for extensive development projects including the construction of large dams for hydroelectric power and to irrigate agricultural estates producing cash crops (Elliot, 2014). In Sudan Al-Qadarif state pastoralists find their seasonal livestock migration routes reduced to very narrow routes due to ever expanding mechanised farms (Babiker, 2013); and in Eritrea dry season refuges for pastoralists are given over to extensive agricultural development (Naty, 2001). Thus, pastoralists are forced into restricted mobility and sedentarism, to de-stock their herds and seek alternative livelihoods in urban areas and towns. Usually, they lost their land and often lacked the political power to resist these changes. This became further complicated by increasing drought frequencies, rainfall variability, climate change and conflicts in the pastoral areas, together threatening pastoralism's integrity. Consequently, pastoralists have become impoverished and left pastoralism in search of alternatives. For example, the Beni-Amer societies were entirely pastoralist before the 1960s but due to the reasons stated above currently almost the entire Beni-Amer people reside in refugee camps and urban areas in eastern Sudan, while many have migrated out of Africa.



Pastoralists in search of alternative sources of income engage in multiple forms of mobility outside pastoralism and often outside their localities. Thus, migration becomes a livelihood strategy amongst drop-out pastoralists. Progressively many gravitate towards international migration and, subsequently, become members of diaspora communities, a little-researched area this study proposes addressing. Indeed, investigating the dynamic economic, socio-political and environmental changes in pastoral regions should be a topic of importance to scholars of migration and mobility. For example, examining the links between contemporary pastoralism in Sub-Saharan Africa can enrich analysis of the dynamics of illegal migration from these countries to the EU. This study will address the Beni-Amer pastoralists in transition and their diaspora communities to analyse how they formulate their sense of identity, homeland and wellbeing in relation to the multiple im/mobilities they experience across time and space.

### **1.3. The Beni-Amer and their homeland**

We [the Beni-Amer] used to be wealthy and dignified pastoralists, but the two evils [war and drought] and bad governments changed our life profoundly, killed our roots and weathered our life. War, drought and unjust governments have been endemic to our ancestral homeland since the 1950s. We had a pivotal role for the freedom of Eritrea, but our anticipation never came right. The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) did not want our return, they betrayed our hope and left us in limbo. Our patience has been put to the test since the independence of Eritrea in 1991 and the country went from one war to another since. Many of our youth considered the return to a peaceful ancestral homeland hopeless and left us, gone far away. Some went to America, Europe, Australia and the middle east. Few come back here to visit us, but many just disappear; some perished in the Sahara desert and Mediterranean sea. (KI, FGD3, east Kassala rangeland, 13 January 2015)

My parents used to be very wealthy pastoralists. They left Baraka because of war and drought in 1967. Me and my five siblings, all of us were born in the refugee camp in Sudan. My parents used to tell us about their life before their migration to Sudan. The narration of my parents had contributed seed to the feeling of nationalism in my brothers. Two of them joined the EPLF in 1988;

both were martyred in the war for the independence of Eritrea. After the war had ended our life remained unchanged, just refugees, it was hopeless; then we migrated to Egypt in 1994. At the time I was 27, and now I am 48. I have never had a chance to visit my parents for 21 years. In search of a place as asylum I travelled, from Libya-Malta-Italy-France and finally in the UK. I feel I have no roots. I lost the sense of belonging. I reached the UK in 2009, but don't have a passport. I am waiting for the home office: maybe one day they will grant me refugee status. (BAm, Di8, interview, London, 17 May 2015)

The Beni-Amer communities inhabit western Eritrea and eastern Sudan. Their livelihoods traditionally depended on livestock; livestock formed the basis of food provision and transport. The wellbeing of the Beni-Amer pastoralists was intimately connected to livestock: their cultural identities, norms and values, and their indigenous knowledge revolved around their animals, and they were integral to ceremonial activities. As the above quotes explain the ancestral homeland of the Beni-Amer became a battleground for over half a century, leading to their displacement, and in consequence their pastoralism has virtually disappeared in the last four decades. Currently only a few Beni-Amer remain as full-time pastoralists and only a few families possess small numbers of livestock heads. In the oral narration of the Beni-Amer, every Beni-Amer household before the 1960s possessed on average 70-80 animals. Currently, from a village of 50 households, only 3 to 5 of these possess any livestock, though no more than ten livestock heads each, while the other households have no animals. Thus, most Beni-Amer have dropped out of pastoralism.

Many instead reside in refugee camps and on city outskirts. In the refugee camps they face disease, hunger, much waiting and multiple deprivations. Many impoverished Beni-Amer pastoralists migrated to towns to look for wage employment; however, job opportunities were and remain limited. As a result, distressed Beni-Amer pastoralists in transition have become mobile outside pastoralism and their local area and have increasingly gravitated towards illegal migration, and consequently, become members of diasporas communities.

#### **1.4. Significance, scope and limitations**

The aim of this study is to explore how Beni-Amer nomadic pastoral livelihoods have been transformed through various forms of mobilities and immobilities across time and space, and how this informs their contemporary construction of identities, homeland and wellbeing. The research aims to address this overarching question from three sub-questions. The study is accordingly divided into three phases. In the first stage of the study data were gathered to investigate the question, how are identities, homeland and wellbeing constructed among Beni-Amer pastoralists in eastern Sudan and western Eritrea? In the second phase data were gathered to investigate the question, how are Beni-Amer constructions of their identities, homeland and wellbeing transformed and experienced through multiple mobilities and immobilities? In the third phase data were gathered to investigate the question, how are identities, homeland and wellbeing reconstructed and negotiated once the new destination of resettlement is reached? Although this study focuses on the Beni-Amer, it also has an important contribution to geography, conceptually and theoretically, to link the current debates on pastoralism, mobility and diaspora. By using the case of the Beni-Amer, this study reveals how pastoral mobility is intrinsically used to formulate (home)land, identity, and wellbeing; but the study also reveals the complicated interplay between mobility, identity, wellbeing and homeland amongst pastoralists in transition and in their diasporas.

Pastoralist communities in Africa or elsewhere have been studied for centuries by anthropologists, geographers and others. Nomadic herding communities were a particular fascination for adventurers, tourists and activists. Thus, studying nomadic pastoralists is by no means a new phenomenon. But studying how pastoralists use the concept of pastoral mobility to formulate their homeland, identity and wellbeing is little-researched, a large topic for geographers to make important contributions to. Moreover, significant literature is available on pastoral mobility and pastoralists' resilience and adaptation to change. But what happens to pastoralists after leaving pastoralism? Where they go and in what form of mobility they engage is fresh territory and suitable for geographers to investigate. Moreover, this study might make a significant contribution to migration research on 'transit' migration. It pioneers investigation of the relationship between pastoralist drop

outs and illegal migration from Sub-Saharan Africa to the EU via the Sahara desert and the central Mediterranean sea. Indeed, this can enhance understanding of one of the world's most significant contemporary issues, the dynamics behind illegal migration from many African countries to the EU.

### **Research questions and aims**

1. How are identities and wellbeing constructed in the Beni-Amer nomadic pastoralists, in south western Eritrea?
2. How are Beni-Amer identities and wellbeing transformed and experienced through multiple mobilities and immobilities?
3. How are their identities and wellbeing reconstructed and negotiated once the new destination of resettlement is reached?

### **1.5. Methodology**

The study employs qualitative methodology to gather qualitative data related to the experiences, emotions, attitudes, imaginations and accounts from research participants. The researcher uses inventive multiple qualitative data gathering methods, including walking along face-to-face-one-to-one in-depth interviewing, informal focus group discussion, remote interviewing (using mobile communication technology) and dual insider participant observation. Thus, this study might have an important methodological contribution to migration research and to the study of traditional communities. The use of mobile phones to interview illegalised migrants on the move, and the trend away from insider-sedentary-traditional practice to more dynamic mobile methods which employ more informality of conversation in natural backgrounds, can between them engender better natural flow of verbal and nonverbal information from respondents.

### **Based on this, the following research objectives were developed:**

1. The study traced thirteen Beni-Amer family networks containing ninety-one research participants across three geographical locations: in eastern Sudan, the in-between, and in the UK. This enabled the researcher to outline changes among the Beni-Amer across time and space.

2. The study conducted participant observation, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with members of Beni-Amer communities in the Kassala in eastern Sudan and examined how the Beni-Amer formulate their ancestral homeland, identity and wellbeing.
3. The study conducted remote-interviewing with ex-herder members of the Beni-Amer in the in-between as illegalised migrants on their way from Sudan via Libya to the EU, and investigated their experiences of mobility in the in between.
4. The study conducted participant observation, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with members of Beni-Amer diaspora communities in the UK. These were used to assess their everyday practices and experiences in their (re)construction of identity, homeland attachment and conceptualisation of their wellbeing.
5. Data obtained from the three phases of the study were analysed and examined. They revealed that experience of multiple (im)mobilities informs their (re)construction of identities, sense of (home)land and (re)conceptualization of wellbeing across time and space.

The researcher believes this research will contribute to further studies investigating the extent of subsistence, and the transformation of cultural identities endured by pastoralist communities amid contemporary dynamic socio-political and environmental changes. Furthermore, this study will contribute to further investigation of the relationship between illegal migration and the collapse of pastoralism and pastoralists drop outs in many parts of the world. Moreover, it might add to diaspora literature by examining how formerly illegal migrants in diasporas (re)construct their identity in their host country, and how their immigration status influences their mobility, wellbeing and attachment to their homeland. One significant challenge in this study was the pioneering new approach of tracking respondents across countries to establish their lines of change across time and space. Secondly, reviewing and linking the literature - i.e. pastoralism, mobility and diaspora - was a complicated, demanding process, though completed successfully. Third, the inability of the researcher to trace the Beni-Amer from

within Eritrea due to political problems in the country meant much relevant data of the Beni-Amer remain ungathered.

## **1.6. Thesis structure and chapter-by-chapter summary**

The thesis has been organised into eight chapters. Chapter one has introduced the purpose of the thesis, delineated the research questions, methodology, significance, scope and limitations of the study. Moreover, this chapter has also provided snapshots of the arguments and scholarly debates addressed in the thesis. Now it provides chapter-by-chapter summaries of the entire thesis.

**Chapter two:** This chapter presents an up-to-date literature review of the main studies of pastoralism, mobility and diaspora. The chapter is divided into three parts. Part one: pastoralism: this looks at the global distribution of pastoralist societies and the challenges they face. Furthermore, the chapter scrutinises pastoral mobility beyond its traditional meaning as herd movement. Part two critically analyses contemporary debates on mobility research. Part two looks at how (im)mobility is often complicated by the identity of the traveller: (im)mobility does not equally distribute human rights. Indeed, for some people (im)mobility is a choice, while for others it is imposed; for some it is a lifestyle while for others it is leisure. Part three critically discusses contemporary debates on diaspora, including diaspora as a process, diaspora as unbounded, hybridity and concepts of identity.

**Chapter three:** This chapter presents the systematic and rigorous procedures undertaken to gather, organise and analyse the qualitative data in this study. The chapter discusses research problems and purpose and the underpinning philosophical assumptions and methodological choices made in the study. As part of the discussion, the chapter presents my experiences as insider researcher and challenges I encountered.

**Chapter four** presents the chronological history of Eritrea and examines its impact on the sense of homeland and the (re)construction of identity among the Beni-Amer and the rest of the inhabitants of the country. As part of the analysis, the chapter looks at how geography and climate in the country dictate certain modes of subsistence across time and space.

**Chapter five:** This chapter analyses the main themes of the study: mobility, and conceptions of identity, homeland and wellbeing in relation to the Beni-Amer societies in 'place', for example, in their original homeland of western Eritrea and eastern Sudan and as practising pastoralists. The chapter argues that these are intertwined elements creating the sense of being a Beni-Amer, and that they are bound together by the concept of pastoral mobility. As part of the analysis, the chapter looks at how dynamic political, social, economic and environmental changes in the last four decades have affected pastoralism among the Beni-Amer.

**Chapter six** analyses the complex interplay between mobility and construction of identity by the Beni-Amer pastoralists in transition. The chapter focuses on how the steady disappearance of pastoralism has led to the impoverishment, dislocation and settling down of pastoralist societies in western Eritrea; how this has then resulted in the emergence of pastoralists communities in transition. As part of the analysis, the chapter looks at how pastoralists in transition gravitate towards illegal migration and investigates important aspects of the process.

**Chapter seven:** Chapter seven analyses the interlocked relationship between homeland, wellbeing and mobility in the construction of identity in the diaspora. As part of the analysis, the chapter looks at how everyday Beni-Amer practices and experiences shape their diaspora identity.

**Chapter eight:** The thesis concludes in chapter eight by returning to the research objectives to evaluate how they have been addressed. Finally, the thesis closes with an appraisal of the limitations of the research and a summary of the main findings of the study. It also produces recommendations for the way forward for further studies that might add to understanding of pastoralists in transition, their shifting identities and conceptualisation of their wellbeing across time and space.

## **1.7. Conclusion**

Having presented an overview of the study in this opening chapter, the study will move on to chapter two to provide in-depth literature reviews of the major studies available to date on pastoralism, mobility and diaspora.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review: Pastoralism, Mobility and Diaspora**

#### **Part One: Pastoral mobility, (Home)land, Identity and Wellbeing**

##### **2.1. Introduction**

In the last century, pastoralist societies worldwide endured several challenges. Thus, herding communities either diversified or adopted alternative livelihoods; many pastoralists exited pastoral nomadism altogether. This poses many important questions regarding the contemporary practice and space of pastoral societies. For example, where do shepherds go/live after they drop-out of pastoralism? What modes of subsistence do pastoralists in transition exercise and how do these affect their wellbeing and cultural identity, especially in a destination away from their homeland? Answering such questions requires investigation of multiple cross-cutting factors which underpin dynamic change to pastoral systems across time and space. In doing so we may construct a theoretical framework within which their trajectories of change can be understood. In pastoralism literature, pastoralism is understood as a dualism between mobility and settlements. Mobility is treated as physical movement in search of pasture and water. While acknowledging previous studies this study argues that pastoralism is a multifaceted system. Pastoral mobility is more complex than physical movement alone: rather, it is crucial in the formation of homeland, identity and wellbeing. To address this gap, this study draws on multi-dimensional ideas of mobility from human geography and sociology.

This chapter is organised into three parts: part one reviews and critically analyses current debates on herding communities; parts two examine contemporary mobility debates, including the governing of im/mobility, migration trajectories and illegalised migrants; part three reviews and critically analyses contemporary diaspora discussions, including community formation, identity and homeland attachments, and the slowly destructive consequences of denied mobility. The chapter concludes with the main points of diaspora literature and links with chapter three, which details the methods this study employs.



## **2.2. Critical pastoralism: rethinking mobilities in pastoral societies**

In the literature pastoralism is classified into three types of mobility: nomadic pastoralism is highly mobile with no cultivation and not necessarily returning to a single base every year; transhumant is highly mobile but on a specific seasonal basis, and may include non-sedentary cultivation; semi-transhumant: only a part of a household is mobile, and it includes sedentary farming. The key point is that, even with these variants, pastoralism literature conceptualises pastoral mobility merely in terms of physical movement, as a binary opposite of settlement and as not occurring within one site. Pastoralist societies are therefore seen as either mobile or sedentary. This study argues that pastoral mobility underpins pastoralists' everyday existence, but that this does not mean mobile pastoralists are endlessly wandering; mobile pastoralists are not simply sedentary when they are immobile. Conceptually this thesis moves beyond the sedentary versus nomadic binary to grasp how the entire experience is more varied in both space and time. Life happens beyond static enclaves or nomadic wanderings Jensen (2009); as we shall see in chapter five, pastoral societies formulate homeland, identities and well-being within the two extremities of nomadism and sedentarism; mobility is not a sole property of nomads and fixity is not only for sedentary societies. Thus, mobility can be multiple over time and space, and its practice and purpose vary between individuals and across time and space. So how should we formulate a useful definition of pastoral mobility?

Several scholars, among them Niamir-Fuller (1998), Galvin (2009), Krätli et al. (2013), Reid (2014) and Oba (2014), describe it as a strategic move to encounter a transient concentration of resources. Humphrey and Sneath (1999) define it as a profit-oriented economic activity while Khazanov (1994) explains nomadism as a distinct form of food-producing economy. This study acknowledges such predecessors' conclusions but goes beyond the focus on livelihood strategy to consider pastoral mobility as a far more sophisticated practice that influences the concept and construction of homeland, home, identity and wellbeing among pastoralist societies. In so doing the study argues that those binary boundaries between the sedentary and the nomadic are fuzzy. Pastoralists are 'mobile when mobile, mobile while sedentary, and sedentary while mobile'; their mobility

happens in all cases but its purpose and practice differ across time and space. Mobility is central to what it is to be human, away of being in the world it is a fundamental geographical facet of existence (Cresswell, 2006, pp. 1-4). Pastoralists' mobility is intrinsic to their everyday practices. It happens everywhere; even when camping in a good rainy season their life incorporates mobility. Pastoral mobility involves what Cresswell (2006) identifies as movement, representation and practices. Therefore, pastoral mobility is a complex and meaningful experience beyond simply livestock movement in environments distinguished for their climatic variability; it is integral to the construction of identities, homeland/home and wellbeing among pastoral societies.

Policy makers, development NGOs and mainstream societies have all continued to view pastoral mobility through this binary perspective, treating mobility as a physical movement seasonal practice to 'exploit' ephemeral concentrations of resources across time and space; a movement from A to B. The A to B approach focuses on the survival aspect of pastoral mobility, but neglects its role in the formulation of identities, wellbeing and sense of homeland attachments. One can argue geographers have to subject pastoral mobility to scrutiny beyond this traditional connotation to establish a more holistic understanding about pastoralist societies and their complexities and vulnerabilities. Focusing from A to B masks what happens in A and B, and between A and B.

This theoretical framing leads towards reconceptualising pastoral mobility, not merely as physical movement but as a mechanism through which pastoralists formulate their homeland, identity and wellbeing. Thus identities, meanings and cultures are associated just as much with fluidity as to fixity (Jensen, 2009, p. 140), and with process as much as economic end-goals. As in sedentary societies pastoralists' mobility is an important everyday life practice that produces meaning and culture. The sedentary-nomad dispute is complicated and long-standing. As Cresswell (2006) explains sedentary mobility theories view mobility with linkages to place, roots, spatiality and belonging, while for nomadic mobility focus is placed on flow, flux and dynamism. This dichotomy denies pastoral nomads' attachment to place, rootedness and belongingness, and adds conceptually to the marginalisation of pastoral societies by governments which often favour the sedentary.

As we shall see below several factors, including drought, rainfall variability, conflict, climatic change and development policy interrupt pastoral mobility and threaten the integrity of pastoralism. Consequently, many pastoralists become impoverished and leave pastoralism. According to McPeak et al. (2012, p. 187) pastoralists' livelihood transition and diversification strategies fit into a four-part framework: '*left out*' are pastoralist households with little cash and cattle, thus trapped in low-paid employment; '*moving from*' are pastoralist households with little livestock but high cash from alternative livelihoods; '*staying with*' are pastoralist households with high livestock but low cash, thus little income outside pastoralism; '*combining*' households are equally dependent on cash income from non-pastoral activities and pastoralism. In the framework of Catley and Aklilu (2013), pastoralist households capable of gaining much cash from livestock-related activities were categorised as '*moving up*'; pastoralist households engaging in non-pastoral activities but maintaining some independence were named '*stepping out*', and households leaving pastoralism altogether were '*moving out*'. This study goes on to argue pastoralists in transition from livestock-based livelihoods to diversification or leaving pastoralism altogether do not fit some blueprint process; rather their experience is complex and contingent on their specific situations. But one common feature shared by many pastoralists in transition is that leaving pastoralism does not mean leaving mobility; it means engaging in multiple im/mobilities outside pastoralism.

Those pastoralists in transition engage in non-pastoral mobility in search of alternative livelihoods in 'new', often urban, environments and encounter multiple im/mobilities, including return, stillness, stuckness, waiting and uncertainty. This mirrors what Collyer (2010) called a fragmentation journey. As we shall see in chapter six multiple im/mobilities have a significant impact on the lives of pastoralists in transition. For example, Blerk (2016) found increased im/mobility shapes livelihoods and identities among young Ethiopian sex workers. Identities are complex and contested, but can be explained by examining the spatiality of identity in its social realm, including interactions between individuals and spatial domains such as landscape, public spaces and regions shapes 'insideness' to a community and its attachment to land (Rowles, 1983; Dixon and Durrheim, 2000; Horton and Kraftl, 2013, p. 179). Indeed, the social and spatial are interlocked elements and people (re)create and experience their individual and collective identities within those

realms, and it is dynamic across time and space. As we shall see in chapter six when Beni-Amer pastoralists abandon pastoralism and become wage labourers, various forms of their pastoralist identities tend to transform. The im/mobility of pastoralists in transition is little-researched and a large subject for geographers to address.

Mobility is highly political. It is the producer and the product of power relations (Cresswell, 2006). It is not equally accessed. For example, illegalised migrants cross the Mediterranean Sea close to death in rickety boats while wealthy tourists use luxury yachts to enjoy the sunny islands nearby. One can argue that politics, power relations and hierarchy regarding decisions to move or stay are central to various conceptions of human rights with the nation state (Blomley, 1994b, in Cresswell, 2010): as we shall see in chapter seven among the Beni-Amer diasporas im/mobility rights link to their status in the UK; as such these have a significant impact on their wellbeing, identity and homeland attachment. Cresswell (2010) suggests that understanding of the hierarchies and politics of mobility can be refined if mobility is examined in terms of motive forces, speed, rhythm, route, experience and friction. Using these six constituent parts could help to clarify the details of the pastoralists' transitions and their various effects. But before reviewing and analysing the mobility literature, it makes sense to present the geographies and nature of mobilities of global pastoralists societies.

### **2.3. Geographies and mobilities of pastoralist societies**

Globally pastoralism is an important livelihood strategy in environments distinguished by scarcity of natural resources, where crop production is limited and usually ecologically inappropriate (Niamir-Fuller, 1998). It is considered the most significant and sustainable livelihood system in the world's arid and semi-arid rangelands (Galvin et al., 2008; Sanford, 1983). According to Swift (1988; cited in Niamir-Fuller, 1998. p. 251) pastoral households are those in which at least half of household gross revenue comes from livestock-related activities. Swift's influential definition does not however sufficiently distinguish the variety of pastoral practices. For example, Davies et al. (2013, p. 2) argued that Swift's definition could include intensive livestock production and exclude pastoralists with significant other sources of income, suggesting researchers could better comprehend pastoral

production systems by including other criteria, such as mobility, use of family labour and use of common land.

In the last decade, it has been estimated that pastoralism supports more than 200 million households with nearly a billion livestock heads worldwide (FAO, 2001a; cited in Davies, 2013). More than half the world's pastoralists are estimated to be in Africa, where over 60% of the land is arid and semi-arid (Reid et al., 2008). Environments inhabited by pastoralist communities cover more of Earth's land surface than any other type (Reid et al., 2014). Approximately 26 million km<sup>2</sup> of land from global biomes are under pastoral production systems. This is greater than the United States, China, and the European Union combined: more than 25-45% of the world's land area (Anser et al., 2004).

Around 91% of global rangelands comprise open grazing land with few landscape boundaries and limited crop agriculture, according to Reid et al (2008), while the remaining 9% is of mixed use for grazing and crop production on private land. Rangeland worldwide is inhabited by only 3% of the global population, but grazed by 35% of the world's sheep, 23% of goats, and 16% of cattle and water buffalo (Reid et al., 2014). According to Blench (2000) 36% of global rangelands are in Asia, 30% in Africa, and are managed and used in common. The remainder are distributed across North America, with 13%; Australia, 10%; South America, 8%; and Europe, 3%. Most of these rangelands differ from Africa and Asia by being privately owned and used.

Environments inhabited by herding communities are primarily grasslands, scrublands, savannas, and marshes grazed by livestock and wildlife (Allen et al., 2011). According to Asner et al. (2004) 60% of rangelands are warm and dry, and pastoralists inhabit their drier parts; 16% of pasturelands are cold, and herding communities graze their livestock on their wetter and warmer parts. As shown in figure 1, globally pastoralists inhabit marginal lands in which livestock mobility is a vital production strategy to harness high temporal and spatial variability of fodder across the rangelands (Wario et al., 2016). For example, in the arid and semi-arid regions of East Africa livestock herding is indispensable to millions of pastoral households solely dependent on livestock to survive. Likewise, 85% of the Ethiopian population inhabit rural areas, and 16% inhabit the lowlands as pastoralists or agro-

pastoralists. 62% of national land area is rangeland. Pastoralism approximately employs 27% of the population (IFAD, 2013; Kassahun et al., 2008). In South Sudan 83% of the population are rural, and 78% of all households rely on agriculture or animal husbandry as their primary livelihood source (Maxwell et al., 2012). Those vast and marginal geographies inhabited by pastoral societies depend on varied and complex forms of mobility across differing regions. For example, pastoralists in Ethiopia's highlands might practice short-radius movement with limited livestock due to overpopulation, agriculture, private land ownership, while, by contrast, the Danka of South Sudan might own large cattle herds and practice seasonal long-distance mobility.

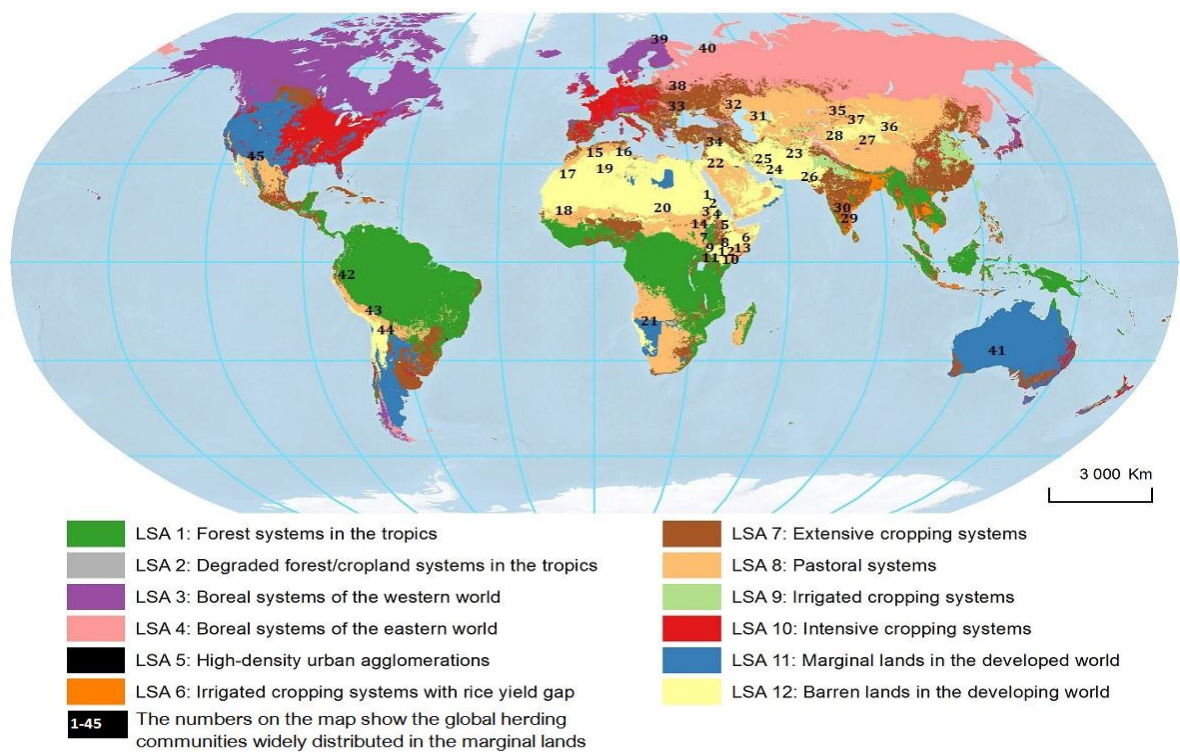


Figure 2.1. Global land use systems and worldwide herding communities' distribution (Numbers in the map added by the researcher to roughly locate some pastoralist societies worldwide). (Václavík et al, 2013)

The available literature indicates countries with a high pastoral population share features including significant pastoralist drop-outs, migration and displacement, high poverty rates, low human development index and increasing sedentarisation of nomadic pastoralists. Global distribution of pastoral communities' livestock and herd sizes reflects the environmental, socioeconomic and political circumstances of

the region they inhabit. Thus we find alpaca in southern Chile and Argentina, reindeer in northern Norway and Finland and sheep, goats, cattle and camel in sub-tropical and tropical regions. Environments inhabited by herding communities no matter the land type share underlying similarities. Often rangelands are used and managed in common, have variable and often harsh climates and are sparsely populated and distant from markets (Reynolds et al., 2007). Furthermore, often herding communities inhabit fringes of contemporary nation-states and graze their livestock on marginal lands (Wolputte et al., 2004, p. 4). Most rangelands are characterised by ecological, economic and political marginality (Sayre et al., 2013, p. 348), which then leads to them receiving little or no public services from the state.

Currently, herding communities encounter several natural and human-induced challenges: encroachment of rangelands by crop cultivation; changing property rights; state policy oriented to sedentarisation and agriculture; war; rainfall fluctuation/drought; environmental degradation/climate change. For example, as shown in figure 2.2, large parts of regions inhabited by pastoralist communities are socio-economic, political and ecological hotspots. These processes together shape pastoral production systems and impact on pastoral mobility and wellbeing of herding societies.

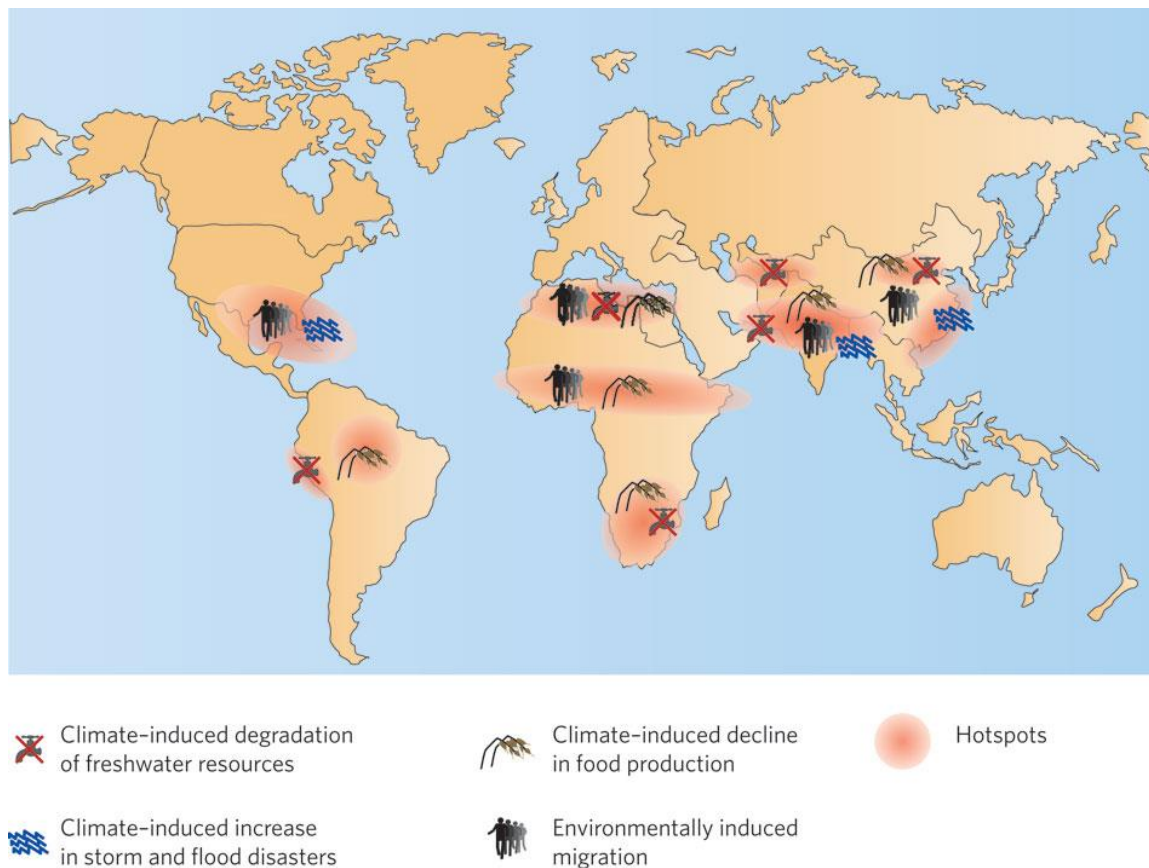


Figure 2.2. Most areas inhabited by pastoralist communities are environmental and conflict hotspots. (G.A.C.O.G., 2008)

Pastoralists employ several adaptation strategies in the face of these dynamic processes of change: mobility and migration; asset accumulation; diversification of livestock; diversification of income and subsistence sources; migrant wage income; adaptation of modern technologies, sending children to formal education considered as a long term investment and so forth (Opiyo et al., 2015). The primary production in these areas is livestock and livestock-related products. Most rangelands feature low productivity because most highly productive pastures are used for crop production. For example, across the Sahel the advent of new crops and production practices caused a northward expansion of cultivated areas; crops such as millet are now regularly cultivated in former grazing areas, where average annual rainfall is between 200 and 300 millimetres (Kamuanga et al., 2008). In the face of rising human populations and the relatively constant livestock, population agriculture is likely a necessity today for most East African pastoralists (Galvin, 2009). Political, socioeconomic and environmental changes affect pastoral communities' ability to produce socioeconomic space across time, with consequent



loss of land and political voice to resist it, and with, in turn, further impact on the identity and wellbeing of herding communities. The following section examines features of pastoral mobility and changes in its practices.

#### **2.4. Pastoral mobilities: drivers and constraints**

Because governments share the binary characterisation of pastoralism found in pastoralism literature they disempower mobile pastoralists' land and mobility rights in practice. For example, most East African countries encourage industrial-scale farming in previous pastoralists areas, and if shepherds approach or cross through the farm during the trek, they face possible severe punishment by the state; the land is decreed unavailable to them. Therefore, in the face of increasing drought, climatic change and agricultural encroachments pastoralists become increasingly vulnerable. According to Adriansen (2008) pastoral mobility departs from two knowledge systems: firstly, the 'new rangeland paradigm' which views pastoral movement as a means to balance variability in dryland resources; hence 'nature' is the point of departure. Second is a knowledge system centred on local pastoral experience. For the pastoralists the wellbeing of their animals is the point of departure and mobility is used to ensure that their livestock are in good condition.

Bruijn and Dijk (2003) argued that on land inhabited by pastoralists' climatic dynamics have most influence on people's decision-making. Spatial and temporal utilisation of the environments requires pastoralists to use mobility as a flexible strategy of coping with changing environmental resources. 'If one characteristic were to be attributed to nomads, it would be their tremendous flexibility and ability to incorporate change' (Wolputte et al., 2004, p. 7). Therefore, mobility is intrinsic to the integrity of pastoral production systems. However, livestock mobility varies more in its practice. Often as part of their way of life herding communities employ a range of adaptive strategies geared to facilitate mobility and avert risk in the face of the spatial and temporal variability of natural resources (Krätli et al., 2013; Behnke et al., 2011; Niamir-Fuller, 1998; Scoones, 1994a).

The combined effects of modern dynamic change pushes pastoralists into non-livestock-based livelihoods (Ayantunde et al., 2011). Climatic variability and frequent drought cycles are typical in most drylands making water the crucial scarce

resource in most rangelands. Both nomadic and agro-pastoral systems have developed resilient strategies to deal with extreme climatic uncertainties (Krätli et al., 2013).

For instance, nomadic pastoralists diversify their livestock breeds for several years to enhance herd capacity and tolerance during droughts. Breeds were improved to accumulate fat quickly during short rainy periods and lose it slowly during long dry seasons (Kaufmann et al., 2007; cited in Krätli et al., 2013). Rangelands in sub-Saharan Africa typically receive less than 600 millimetres' rainfall annually; often pastoralists cope with 200-300mm of rainfall (Ellis and Swift, 1988; Ellis and Galvin, 1994; Scoones, 1995; Catley et al., 2013). Therefore, one can argue pastoral mobility is a dynamic system in which mobility intrinsically alters to accommodate changes. Despite pastoralists' flexibility regarding various forms of adaptation pastoral mobility has reached a dead end and pastoral resilience is broken in most rangelands. Consequently, many pastoralists drop out of pastoralism and search for alternative livelihoods outside their local area, becoming mobile outside pastoralism, as illegalised migrants and members of diasporas. For example, Beni-Amer pastoralists in transition in their everyday mobility outside pastoralism are not allowed access to some places because of their economic and social status. If they then want to migrate they have to surmount legal migration regimes, so their mobility is channelled towards illegalised migration routes, thus being subjected to fragmented and dangerous journeys. These experiences of course dramatically impact on pastoralists' identity, relationships with homeland and wellbeing across time and space.

Rangelands across the world experience extensive changes that alter them and livestock systems with vital consequences for the wellbeing of pastoral communities. Galvin (2009) illustrated two major causes of such change: 'fragmentation', the dissection of natural systems into spatially isolated parts; and climatic variability which alters arid and semi-arid rangelands, now and in the future. The drivers of change can be largely divided between natural and human induced transformative factors. This is because climatic changes could also create fragmentation of natural resources across ecological zones in many rangelands. Indeed, these transformative factors of change interact with both increased and

decreased mobility and lead to a decline in pastoral mobility's effectiveness. The following subsection examines rainfall variability and climate change, and development policies and conflict impact on pastoral systems.

#### **2.4.1. Rainfall variability and the impact of climate change on pastoral mobility**

Pastoralists' interaction with their environment is a dynamic process in which pastoral communities pursue their livelihoods in relation to the fluctuations of their rangeland climate. Their mobility is closely linked to the availability of pasture and water (Krätli et al., 2013). Eastern African herders, for example, adjust annual mobility and grazing patterns efficiently according to rainfall availability in their rangeland. In arid and semi-arid climates such as East African rangeland rainfall is a key driver of vegetation growth, hence growth closely follows rainfall amount, frequency and duration (Vetter, 2005; Ellis and Galvin, 1994). Throughout the year pastoralists structure their livelihood strategies in consideration of their environment. Odd rainfall and climatic conditions directly impact on their wellbeing by altering everyday mobility practices. For example, the amount of annual rainfall received in any arid and semi-arid rangeland influences the burden of labour borne by members of pastoral households: water holes go deeper, so need more labour to dig them, and women take longer to collect fuelwood and drinking water. Rainfall variability drives the distribution of pasture in the rangeland and this shapes pastoral mobility. For example, mobility timing and direction change in response to unusual environmental aspects. Herders may try to reach optimal animal nutrition by monitoring the rangeland and leading their herds onto the best available pastures throughout the year during critical water and pasture shortages. Spatial and temporal variations in rainfall result in corresponding variations in the quantity and quality of fodder available from natural pastures and fallow lands (Opiyo et al., 2015). Moreover, the utilization of the arid and semi-arid lands through mobility allows pastoral communities to adjust herd sizes and livestock species to the available pasture and water.

Intra- and inter-annual rainfall has serious consequences on pastoral systems in most dry rangeland (Galvin et al., 2004). The rangeland of Eastern Africa and Sahel in West Africa is particularly distinguished by frequent droughts and heterogeneous

animal and plant species. Ecosystem heterogeneity in Eastern African rangeland is a reflection of its climatic variability, soil, physical landscape and the disturbance of temporal and spatial rainfall (Coughenour and Ellis, 1993; Abel, 2013). The amount of rainfall is unpredictable from year to year in any given area, so pastoralists have to utilise strategic mobility to minimise the effects of drought and to 'exploit' productive patches. Accessing productive patches in different locations from time to time is an essential adaptation strategy. To utilise spatially distributed areas of pasture herders keep specific livestock species to specific vegetation species, thus maintaining healthy, productive and stable herd populations. Herders have to follow rainfall patterns with unrestricted mobility in the rangeland (Ellis and Swift, 1988; cited in Oba, 2013). However, this does not mean pastoralists are unbounded, but that they should be protected by law to pursue their livelihood through mobility.

Climate variations, especially of rainfall drive rangeland livestock systems, thus increased seasonal rainfall variability and drought challenge pastoralists resilience and response mechanisms (Hailegiorgis et al., 2010). To achieve optimal use of the available spatial and temporal natural resources pastoralists have to remain flexible, maintaining the mobility of their livestock capital. However, pastoral mobility is often restricted by a range of factors, including; conflicts, animal diseases and state development policies. These factors added to climate change increase pastoralists' vulnerability and overwhelm their traditional coping strategies. Several studies show rainfall variability increasing with global warming, and this surely makes changes to vegetation species that significantly affect pastoral mobility. It may affect pastoral mobility by increasing or decreasing the distance between productive patches, for instance, thus pressurising pastoralists' longstanding risk management and coping strategies.

Climate change impact on pastoral livelihoods is hard to quantify precisely. It is clear nonetheless that climate change presents unprecedented challenges to pastoralist livelihood strategies, including mobility. Understanding these challenges requires consideration of a range of sophisticated yet unknown factors in the pastoralist discipline. Critical uncertainties will probably persist for decades in assessment of the implications of climate change for pastoralist societies. Climate is the long-term realization of interactions among complex, closely coupled, nonlinear systems,

according to Dumaine and Mintzer (2015), including the ocean and the atmosphere, and biological systems. Rapid changes in these systems can occur if a significant threshold or tipping point is crossed. Furthermore, the authors argue that the crucial situation is becoming clear: Climate Change is 'Everything Change'. This is not a simple problem, and researchers have different arguments regarding how climate change impacts pastoralism. For example, some argue that current climate change goes beyond pastoralists' adaptive range (Steen, 1994; Markakis, 2004; Sanford, 2013). Jónsson (2010) claims pastoralism is disappearing due to inherent fragility because it inhabits marginal areas known for unfavourable environments and climatic variability. Several other studies however conclude that pastoralism is well-situated in its marginal lands and better capable of adaptation than any other type of land use (Davies and Nori, 2008), while Jones and Thornton (2013) note that in the last 40 years cropping has occurred even in marginal places. Others maintain that the combination of factors has created 'multiple stressors' that undermine pastoralism (Fraser et al., 2016).

For centuries pastoralists made a living from unpredictable rainfall and recovered following severe droughts. However, global warming in the twenty-first century poses enormous challenges to traditional coping strategies in arid and semi-arid environments. Scientific studies show that across Africa temperature has been increasing by 0.5 °C per decade (Desanker and Magadza, 2001). Computer generated models of surface warming estimate it will increase by about 1-2 °C by 2050 and by about 1.5-3 °C by 2080 (Meehl et al., 2007). This will bring about three possible changes to pastoral systems: increases in maximum and minimum temperatures; changes in the duration, frequency and intensity of precipitation events; and an above 350ppm increase in CO<sub>2</sub> concentration in the atmosphere (Ericksen et al., 2013). These changes in the pastoral area will undoubtedly affect vegetation species and most likely this will determine the ecological function of the area (Abel, 1997; cited in Ericksen et al., 2013). The temporality and spatiality of rainfall variability will increase due to global warming. According to several researchers some parts of Eastern Africa will become drier, with a considerable reduction in the duration of the growing season, while other areas are predicted to become wetter, extending their growing season (Thornton et al., 2002). The length and intensity of rainfall ultimately will affect forage and water availability and this will dictate which

livestock pastoralists can keep and whether they should continue pastoral mobility or leave pastoralism.

To reduce and monitor vulnerability to climate change-induced effects, pastoralists must increase their adaptive capacity. Pastoral systems may require a range of strategic adjustments, including rights to remain mobile with limited border restrictions between neighbouring countries, land rights, technological support, financial incentives and representation in political decisions. Region and group specific empowering pastoralists will increase their role in response to the actual and expected climate change effects; this is because the experience of climate change and requirements of adaptation differ by socioeconomic group and region. Those with the least ability to adapt are highly vulnerable to severe effects (Galvin et al., 2009). Pastoralists in the drylands of East Africa exemplify the most vulnerable due to economic and technological limits, and also bad governance, on top of their geographical factors. Countries in the region lack sufficient infrastructure to cope with accelerating displacement of people caused by climate change (McMichael et al., 2012). By the middle of this century over 250 million people are estimated to become displaced (McMichael et al., 2012). The main impact of climate change will apparently be borne by areas mostly inhabited by pastoralists: Sub-Saharan African countries, for instance, are projected to face intense effects (World Health Organisation and World Meteorological Organisation, 2012). As shown in figure 2.3, increasing frequencies and intensity of droughts is killing livestock, altering seasonal mobility and in most cases livestock mobility fails to cope with the pace of climatic change. This has led to pastoralists migrating to urban centres in search of life-rescue methods rather than stable, well-paid livelihood alternatives.



Figure 2.3. 'Cattle on the verge of death after not eating for weeks. Shepherds have left their traditional grazing pastures, entering the city in search of food for their animals'. (Wiggers, 2016)

Several regions inhabited by pastoralists in East Africa are becoming at odds with the experiences of past of the pastoralists. The land of the Beni-Amer pastoralist is becoming too hot, too dry, too stormy; rainy months are unpredictable, too far apart or too close, and all this impairs the continuation of the pastoral way of life. Much climate-change damage exacted on the land is invisible to laymen (Seaton, 2013): for many of those in western societies, the natural environment is alien to everyday life, and their experiences of nature come as a view from a window (Monbiot, 2001; cited in Seaton, 2013, p. 74). In contrast, for nomadic pastoralists the natural environment is under their feet, over their head, encompassing them and their everyday life is directly and deeply. Its ongoing deterioration affects pastoralists existentially, destabilising them psychologically as well as dislocating them physically.

For example, for pastoralists witnessing their natural environment collapsing to an irrecoverable stage experience loss that alters their sense of home, status, and group and individual identity, among whose emotions are a yearning for a return to the

'lost' environment. This is a common dilemma among pastoralists globally as they find themselves poorer, marginalised and requiring new livelihood strategies, often in new places. A basic internalised sense of attachment to place, therefore, is distorted along with the practical choices such as migration required of pastoralists by changing natural environments. These choices involve mobility and experiences beyond pastoralism, hence reconstruction of identity and wellbeing. Tschakert et al. (2013) argue altered homes, deteriorating social networks and loss of belonging cause sadness (Solastalgia) distress from the irretrievability of the changes pastoralists encounter.

Little investigation has been done of implications for the health of pastoralists displaced by climate change. Apparently, the majority of climate refugees suffer mental and physical problems in urban environments. Contrasting climate change-driven Maasai migrants of Tanzania with non-migrants in the country, Winter et al. (2015) discovered that the Maasai migrants emphasised the importance of mental health and overall health perceptions, while the non-migrant populations emphasised the importance of their physical health. Migrants' mental and physical status falls at risk in many urban centres (McMichael et al., 2012). In Kassala city, Sudan, car and motorcycle accidents involving ex-herder migrants are common, and some roads are nicknamed the street of the one million stupid after so many accidents. Pastoralist migrants in urban centres suffer from homelessness, joblessness, social marginalisation and food insecurity and these life circumstances can result in health challenges such as depression and malnutrition (McMichael et al., 2012).

The effects of contemporary global warming on pastoralist communities are catastrophic; it may be current climate variability is much greater than those pastoralists communities used to deal with (Oba, 2013). Pastoralists drop out of pastoralism to pursue other livelihoods as local, regional and international migrants, and experiencing multiple forms of im/mobility across time and space that shape their identities and livelihoods. The next sections present development policies' impact on pastoral mobility.



#### **2.4.2. Development policies and pastoral mobility**

For nearly a century the relationship between rangeland ecosystem and pastoralists has been researched by scholars. Early work by ethnographers romanticised nomadic pastoralism as free-moving and living off the land (in binary in contrast to sedentarism) (Spencer, 1973; Jacobs, 1965). But later models attributed irrational, destructive practices to pastoralists. Stebbings (1935) reported overstocking and overgrazing of their environment, detailing the concept of ‘cattle complex’ pioneered by Herskovits as early as 1926: Herskovits (1926, cited in Eills and Swift, 1988, p. 451) described pastoralist accumulation of large livestock as an irrational tradition. Lamprey (1983) argued that pastoral management is rational and adaptive, but merely aimed at pastoralist survival. This is an important perspective because it sounds sympathetic to the pastoralists, but has the effect of separating them from their environment: human practice and the land are not necessarily bound together. This rather legitimates calls for policy action to ‘rescue’ the environment from pastoralist exploitation. Policy makers assumed privatisation was the antidote to environmental degradation allegedly caused by overgrazing, overstocking and communal grazing. Pastoralists became policy targets with further support from Hardin’s ‘Tragedy of the Commons’ concept (Hardin, 1968). This view coupled with periodical drought, dying livestock, low productivity and hunger in pastoralist areas added to mainstream sedentary society’s perception of pastoralism as inefficient and environmentally destructive. It came to be seen as an unnecessary exploitation mechanism that could be chosen or rejected, and should be stopped (Cresswell, 2010).

For several decades policymakers, conservationists and development agencies portrayed pastoralism as economically unproductive, an obstacle to development, environmentally unsustainable. As a result, pastoralism has been under attack by state development agencies (Turner, 2011). In the implementation of development policies in many regions herding communities, primarily nomadic pastoralists, have faced forced settlement programmes, land titling and group ranches. Significant development policies were designed to de-stock pastoral herds, to restrict mobility and create an outlet from pastoralism through non-livestock-based alternative livelihoods (Turner, 2012; Lengoiboni, et al. 2010; Niamir-Fuller, 1999).

Consequently, livestock herds decrease to an unsustainable number, creating an imbalance between the number of people dependent on livestock and the number of animals needed to support them (Sandford, 2013). Consequently, pastoralists with small-size livestock already on the borderline of poverty are becoming even poorer and struggle to supplement their income in other ways (Fratkin, 2014, p. 198). For instance, nowadays many pastoralists are seen looking for unskilled jobs in urban areas of east Africa. In the majority of local urban centres sources of alternative income are very limited and, impoverished pastoralists receive minim returns that cannot sustain them (Devereux, 2006). As a result, poor pastoralists drop out of pastoralism and dwell in the outskirts of cities, in slums or in refugee camps and await food aid. Furthermore, shepherds face difficulties coping with urban lifestyles and face ethnic prejudice in towns (Sandford, 2013). Step-by-step, disadvantaged pastoralists migrate beyond their local region, maintaining mobility to search for sources of income and gradually become regional refugees and illegalised migrants and diasporas.

In several countries, pastoralist societies have suffered political and economic marginalisation for decades. Consequently, their cultural identities have been perceived as primitive and uncivilised. Economic growth, and social and environmental sustainability were considered impossible in the pastoral system and some policies were designed to destroy it (Aronson, 2016). In most pastoralist-inhabited countries policymakers formulate development and emergency intervention policies based on the principles of the environmental carrying capacity paradigm (Oba, 2013). Since pastoralists are viewed as a threat to rangeland recovery policymakers believe their removal from pastures will increase biodiversity. Protected areas have grown in biomass, including shrub encroachment and increase in woody plants and this is mistaken for an increase in habitat and biodiversity (Abel, 1997). For example, in East Africa pastoralists are usually criticised for overstocking herds and held responsible for accelerating land degradation, soil erosion, overgrazing and plant species decline.

Garrett Hardin's 'The Tragedy of the Commons' was partially understood and wrongly interpreted by policymakers in pastoral areas. For example, in Eritrea since 1993 policymakers directly linked herd-size to environmental degradation. Pastoral

mobility was disfavoured by the state, pastoralists became sedentary, receiving a plot of land to cultivate (Tesfagiorgis, 1993). Regardless of the need of pastoralists and without any consideration to their local knowledge, many countries designed development policies to protect rangeland environments from livestock grazing, hoping to improve regeneration of rangeland ecological diversity (Sandford, 2013). Pastoralist communities have a range of stock management skills and traditional knowledge to regulate the balance between livestock and the environment. For example, the Beni-Amer nomads always keep their goat herds below one hundred, and they slaughter one old goat for every new kid born in the herd. Moreover, expanding drought cycles increase animal die-offs which render overstocking of herds beyond local environmental carrying capacity impossible (Catley et al., 2013, p. 4). Arid and semi-arid environments in sub-Saharan Africa are influenced more by regional and global climatic events than by pastoralists' livelihood strategies and overgrazing. Nonetheless, pastoralists are held responsible for problems not of their making. In most of East Africa, for instance, rainfall is bimodal, due to the movement of the inter-tropical convergence zone (ITCZ) and El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO) cycles, which more significantly determine wetter and drier years and environmental degradation (Ericksen, et al. 2013). Policymakers nonetheless continue to blame pastoralists' livelihood strategies for soil and land degradation, retreating plant species, dissolution of herbaceous vegetation cover and failing development projects.

The impact of 'ill informed' development policies on herding communities escalates in drought years, as mentioned above. Studies carried out in Kenya and Ethiopia indicate that in droughts calves and reproductive females are most affected, leaving herds with more males and steers (Catley et al., 2013, p. 31). Droughts also influence the size and structure of pastoralist households: during harsh droughts livestock die-offs increase and this is followed by the death of the most vulnerable members of pastoral households: women, children, the elderly and the sick. Reducing herds' size can directly impoverish pastoralist households and consequently drive pastoralists to leave their livestock-based livelihood.

Young pastoralists may become reluctant to embrace nomadic pastoral livelihoods, raising several unintended consequences. For example, calls to leave pastoralism

encourage rural to urban migration. Young herders migrate to cities in the hope of finding waged unskilled jobs. Often this promise is not fulfilled and young pastoralists are pushed into regional and international migration. In their analysis of the safety net livelihood programmes in Kenya, for example. Catley and Aklilu (2013) found that safety net projects seem to assume increasing numbers of destitute pastoralists can either return to pastoralism or develop a viable alternative livelihood in pastoral areas. However, some opportunities were found to lie outside the pastoral areas or in other countries. This might lead to the migration of pastoralists in transition beyond the countries in their region.

Most rangelands in Africa have experienced substantial transformation since colonial times. Alongside dynamic changes in land use pastoralists experienced reduced access to essential land resources. A continuous haemorrhage of rangeland in East Africa transformed pasture land to commercial agricultural use, in one case. The land was taken from local pastoralists and small holding farmers and allocated for use by the state, powerful internal actors and wealthy foreign investors (Homewood et al., 2009). Even though the term 'land grabbing' appeared in literature recently, land has been grabbed in the rangeland of Africa from powerless traditional users for more than 150 years. In present day Eritrea and Sudan 'land grabbing' dates back to the Ottoman administration in the 1860s (Bernal, 1997). Increasing commercial farming in African rangelands is growing on an unprecedented scale, reducing livestock mobility; pastoralists are increasingly squeezed into dead-ends.

For example, in 2008 sharp rises in food prices, water shortages and uncertainty in food security prompted several countries - from the Middle East, East Asia and India - to try to produce food in other countries (World Bank, 2010). This ambition found perfect ground in the developing world and opened new south to south exploitation. African countries with a long history of failed development projects, conflict and famine were the first targets for land grabbing. Ethiopia's relatively comfortable foreign investment policy and cheap and fertile land attracted 1,300 foreign investors in commercial farms. Pastoralists were displaced without compensation; it was assumed 'they will go somewhere else' (Graham et al., 2009. p. 46). Lands taken for industrial agriculture are among the most fertile and provide crucial dry-

season refuges for pastoralists (Galaty, 2013, p. 145). In Eastern Sudan, a recent estimate shows around 5.8 million ha. of rangeland were under mechanised rain-fed commercial agriculture in 2009 (Babiker, 2013, p. 180). Consequently, pastoral mobility significantly declined, impoverishing many pastoralists and forcing them out of pastoralism.

In most pastoral societies, pasture land is traditionally-owned, and herders target the patchy availability of resources with few restrictions (Krätli et al., 2013). The unpredictability of rainfall and the dispersion of pasture across the rangeland does require pastoralists to negotiate with other traditional land users for access and to remain mobile (Galaty, 2013). Therefore, traditional landownership directly influences freedom of pastoral mobility without an exclusionary notion or boundary restrictions. However, their need to keep livestock in an open area unrestricted by private ownership comes with the risk of losing their traditional ownership of the rangeland.

The discourse of scapegoating pastoralists as backward, criticising them for refusing to market their animals (Galaty, 2013, p. 144) and scapegoating them for environmental degradation has disarmed them in their fight to retain traditional rangeland ownership they become powerless thus 'lost' pastoral mobility. The absence of privately assigned land ownership has made it straightforward for the state to hold allocation rights (Berry, 1993): in Eritrea after independence was gained in 1993 a land proclamation was issued, in 1994. The announcement put all land under government ownership, ending the country's traditional land tenure system. At a stroke many pastoralists lost their traditional grazing lands. Competition to grab land in the rangeland undermined pastoral land use and reduced pasture to commodity value, thereby reducing livestock mobility and pushing pastoralists into deadlock. Animal movement was significantly reduced, and herders found it difficult to move their livestock between ever increasing commercial farms. Many governments in developing countries justify their allocation of rangelands to industrial agriculture in this way, reducing pastureland available for pastoralists. As a result, herding communities are pushed into small and marginal lands. Usually, these are areas far from water sources and afforded only narrow corridors between large farms for livestock migration. Moreover, even

these corridors are also disappearing. For example, animal corridors in Gedaref in central Sudan have been reduced from around four miles during colonial times to currently anywhere between 150 and 300 meters wide (Abbo, 2005). Backing the sedentary, the state curtails pastoralists' mobility: thus mobility becomes a directly political product (Cresswell, 2010). The next section investigates conflict and its implications for pastoral mobility.

### **2.4.3. Conflict and pastoral mobility**

It is well documented that in most pastoralist-inhabited regions, prolonged civil wars and pastoralist conflicts are common (Sleger and Stroosnijder, 2008). Several researchers argue that pastoralist conflicts are usually triggered due to environmental stress factors which lead to water and forage scarcity in pastoralist areas (De Bruijn et al., 2016). Others maintain that environmental stress factors are only part of the problem (Ki-Moon, 2007; Scheffran and Battaglini, 2011). Current pastoralism studies pay considerable attention to the drivers behind pastoralist conflicts; despite this the implications of conflicts for pastoral mobility and wellbeing remain a little-researched area in which geographers can play a useful role.

As with drought, conflicts can erode livestock holding and affect mobility, threatening pastoralist households and their animals (Pike et al., 2016, pp. 150-151). Markakis, (1995) argued that pastoral communities' marginalisation and powerlessness was worsened by the number of conflicts in pastoral areas. The majority of herding communities inhabit conflict and drought troubled areas: in many Sub-Saharan countries and Middle East states regional wars severely damage pastoralism and in many cases war between states in pastoral areas has terminated pastoralism. The war between Eritrea and Ethiopia for example ended nomadic pastoralism in the border regions between the two countries. Rangeland became a no-go area and many pastoralists were killed or disabled by land mines decades after the war ended. Although as shown in figure 2.4, some signposting forewarned people but most signs are too small and illegible in the bush, and it was of little use to night-grazing livestock and their herders.



Figure 2.4. Land mines remain dangerous in and after the conflict in which they were deployed. (Wallentine. 2017)

In most rangelands livelihood systems often involve multiple stakeholders utilising the natural resources for several purposes, such as cropping and grazing, grazing and wildlife conservation and tourism. This too can cause conflict. As shown in figure 2.5, some conflicts in pastoral areas are related to the scarce resources - water and land – but it is noteworthy that multiple users often engage in negotiation and reciprocities. The private land ownership that grew from state expropriation of traditional land has altered the way people relate to land and fuelled conflicts not only between different land users but also within herding communities that are spilt by differences in wealth, status and ethnicity (Babiker, 2013, p.180).

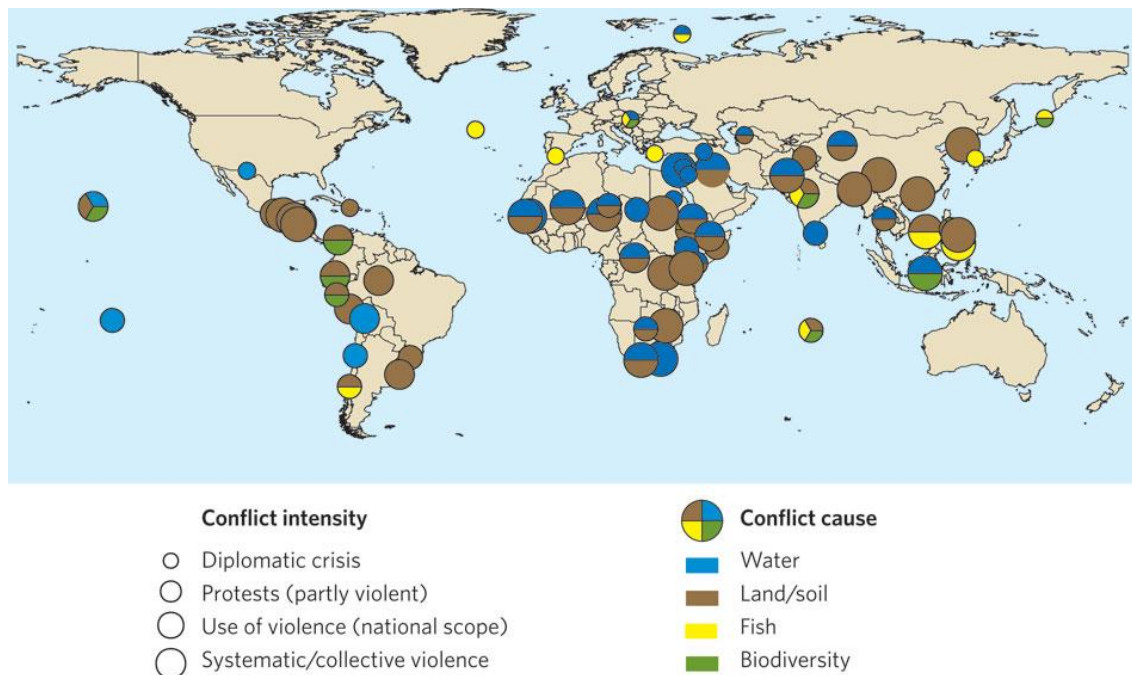


Figure 2.5. Water and land related conflicts are common in areas inhabited by pastoralist communities. (Adelphi, 2010)

Pastoral conflicts have been researched from various viewpoints. From common property management perspectives, they are conceived as scarce-resource-driven violent or nonviolent social conflicts. Turner (2004) analysed conflicts by examining farmer-herder clashes in the drylands of Africa from a political ecology standpoint, finding resource-related conflict generated by increased competition over a dwindling pool of resources. For Blench (2004), when resources are limited and populations live on the edge, minor deficits in rainfall or pasture may generate major conflicts. The material contradiction between farming and herding are obvious conditions to cause recurrent intense competition (Turner, 2004).

According to Gelats et al. (2016) global warming has narrowed pastoralists' options, fuelling further conflicts; poverty contributes material logic to the disputants (Broad, 1994; Le'le', 1991). Pastoralist conflicts are naturally arising resource-related phenomena, according to a political ecological view. They constitute an almost instinctual response to scarcity, and are regarded by many as a kind of 'primitive war' (Peluso and Watts, 2001b). Hendrickson (1997) noted that resource-related conflicts dominate the resource management literature of the Sahel and other African drylands, arguing that the proximity of resource scarcity and conflict in the dryland lead to simplistic statements causally linking the two phenomena.



And from the environmental security perspective, pastoralist conflicts are viewed as everyday sub-national strife characteristic of the global south. According to Dalby (1996) and Kaplan (1994) everyday, resource-related conflicts and environmental degradation in the South figure prominently in the environmental security literature as a precursor of insurgency movements, international border disputes and are even believed to fuel north-south migration.

Thébaud and Batterbury (2001) maintained that West African Sahel pastoralist livelihoods and communities are linked to the complexity of the activities they must engage in to ensure access to resources. This includes the nature of conflicts and cooperation between ethnic groups. Pastoralists therefore must minimise conflicts and regularly negotiate with state development programmes and other land users. Donors and State development interventions often alienate pastoralists against crop cultivators and agricultural encroachments of rangelands often sours relations between land users.

Swift (1977) claimed localised development interventions shocked the carefully balanced ecosystems. Pastoralists negotiate access to water in boreholes and public wells while residents retain priority rights and allow access while honouring the principle of reciprocity. But reciprocity can be compromised, leading to conflict when development agencies interfere in pastoral areas. For example, the creation of watering points by state development efforts could initiate social conflicts due to lack of clear ownership. Moreover, replacing traditional borehole by hand pump water points could facilitate the erosion of traditional poetry and folklore during watering and some cultural watering tools might disappear because it seems these tools are not needed anymore. Among all users pastoralist and nomadic herders may be most vulnerable if their ability to practice livestock mobility is jeopardised. The following section explores the use of modern technology in contemporary pastoral mobility.

#### **2.4.4. Contemporary pastoral mobility and modern technology**

Pastoralist societies face internal and external factors that challenge pastoral systems' integrity. Often they become fragmented, physically isolated grazing hotspots. For example, due to agricultural encroachment seasonal grazing areas

have become spatially further apart. The increasing fragility of pastoral production impinges on the physical, representation and practice of pastoral mobility, adding to effects of climatic changes and increasing droughts. For example, well-established seasonal pastoral mobility routes change or disappear, hence pastoral mobility might lose its shared meaning and practice among pastoralist groups. Rapoport (1978) argued uncontrollable changes occur in societies that are weakened economically, politically and culturally. Thus, faced with changes beyond their control or understanding pastoralists have to alter mobility practices.

The introduction of contemporary mobile technologies opens a new horizon for pastoralist negotiation of space and everyday herding. Nilsson and Salazar (2015) argue that the implementation of mobile technologies is 'embedded, rationalised and repurposed' to transform Maasai cultural space. In other words, the use of mobile communications could help pastoralists to make well informed short-cuts in their mobility decisions. However, changes beyond control such as prolonged war and conflicts, consecutive drought years and forced sedentarism by the state can throw poorer livestock owners into the margins of marginal land. Sooner or later destitute pastoralists will be forced to leave pastoralism altogether and search for alternative livelihoods, such as migrating to urban centres, becoming hired herders, refugees, and so on. In this way changes in pastoral systems alter not only mobility but also wellbeing and cultural identity. In response to socioeconomic, cultural, environmental and political influences, whether internal or external, social space can alter its 'qualities and attributes' (Karplus and Meir, 2014). The following section examines the essential role of pastoral mobility in the home(land) making amongst pastoralist communities.

#### **2.4.5. House, home and 'homemaking' in pastoralist societies**

Home and house have been researched in many disciplines as synonymous terms meaning an accommodation or a roof over one's head; while 'homemaking' on the other hand, is the 'lived-experienced' processes; how people make sense of their environment and call it home, a topic that is little explored. Though the concept of home has received attention in the contemporary world more often home remains perceived as identical to house. In the available literature the concept of home has

been conceptualised and theorised as a multidimensional concept. The meaning of home has proved diverse and even contradictory (Mallett, 2004). In the literature home is widely studied and defined as a haven; a place of rest, enjoyment and comfort; a physical structure where the dwellers have privacy away from the public; visibly marked as inside and outside (Moore, 1984; cited in Mallett, 2004, p. 71). Critics of this approach reject the conception of home as safe and secure for all its dwellers, arguing that for a significant number of women, young people and children home can be a place of violence and abuse (Jones, 2000; Wardough, 1999; Goldsack, 1999). Indeed, home as a roof over one's head might be gender and age segregated; featuring unequal access and distribution. For instance, children, the disabled and the elderly may have limited access in the home space. Feelings of privacy, dignity and intimacy are central features of being at home but being at home and in private may also signify deprivation, disadvantage and more of "confinement, captivity and isolation" (Goldsack, 1999, p. 121), hence enacting a form of structural restraint. In such situations the home is less a "castle, and more of a cage" (Wekerle et al., 1980; Dark, 1996; cited in Goldsack, 1999, p. 121).

According to Ahmed (1999, p. 331) home is where the self is in a familiar place, where the self feels the sense of being-at-home; a sense of security, comfortable and comforting; it is not a particular place the self merely inhabits, but more than one place. Indeed, the concept of multiplicity is useful. It can also be argued that the feeling of home may include the place of departure and destination and the multiple places between "departures and destinations" within a place of familiarity and belonging; for example, mobile pastoralists migrating seasonally from dry rangeland to wet rangeland for weeks or even months may consider neither the place of their departure nor the place of their intended destination to fit their understanding of 'home', but, rather, "the place of departure, the multiple places-in-between and the intended destination" might all be considered home for them. Therefore, home may not be necessarily fixed with impermeable boundaries, it may mean not only the 'exterior world but primarily the heart feelings' of the self. Thus home can be wherever occupies the here and now and sense of belonging. This theoretical approach may support our understanding of home as extending beyond the modern Anglo-European vision of home to include nomadic pastoralists'

divergent notions of home. As Jackson (1999; cited in Mallett, 2004, p. 63) defined for nomadic people, home need not be synonymous with being “housed and settled” and home is not necessarily clearly segregated from the surrounding environment. Thus, for nomadic pastoralists home might encompass the rangeland, meaning perceptions of home as a house with a boundary might be irrelevant. The internalised conception of home might extend across the familiar ancestral rangeland and the physical structure that is the house might be valued for practicality rather than for psychological separation or for its monetary value. For example, a nomadic pastoralist’s house might be appreciated for being easy to build and to transport, qualities integral to mobility, while the home(land) might mean the entire rangeland that has come under their livestock mobility for centuries.

Home as a family, in the literature of home and family, are strongly fused together; the mention of a home links with the nuclear family, and vice-versa. As many researchers have noted, both terms are used almost interchangeably (Jones, 2000; Bowlby et al., 1997). In this sense, home is mainly seen from a Western perspective: it symbolises the birthplace, the dwelling of the nuclear family, a place where children are nurtured and finally a place from where they depart after a certain age (Bowlby et al., 1997; Jones, 2000; cited in Mallett, 2004, p. 73). It is worth mentioning that departure may be only physical; emotional separation may not be possible. Moreover, for nomadic pastoralists, place of birth and ‘home-as-house’ may not merit such a link since birthplace is neither registered nor clearly felt as home.

Home is identified as a place of “respite and retreat, its territory being the locus of childhood, family and marriage” (Goldsack, 1999, p, 121). Unsurprisingly, the family and marriage in many ‘traditional’ pastoralist societies is at odds with the notion of family and marriage in modern Western societies. For example, the family in pastoralist societies may mean the extended network of kinship rather than the father, mother and their children. Traditional nomadic pastoral families and types of marriages may differ by including, for instance, polygamy in which the polygamous family consists of a man, his wives and their children. This arrangement is common among pastoralists in the countries of the Horn of Africa. And the levirate marriages, a type of marriage in which a widow is forced to marry her deceased

husband's brother and a man is obliged to marry his deceased brother's widow and looks after his deceased brother's children, are common among the Beni-Amer. So in such ways the prevailing Western-oriented conceptions of nuclear family structures predominant in available literature to date are challenged by such varied, extended notions among pastoralist nomads. Therefore, though the concept of home has been thoroughly investigated by many prominent scholars, approaching home from nomadic pastoralists' perspective may contribute interesting insights to the literature.

Furthermore, several scholars have studied home from a gender dimension. Feminist perspectives in particular have been used to discuss home space in relation to gender. It is often seen as clearly delineated space for safeguarding "family life" (Bowlby, 1997, p. 343). Home is also conceptualised as an "active state of the state of being in the world", and significant literature is available that views home from a journeying perspective (Mallett, 2004, p. 61). Home is also studied in relation to transnational migration, making a home away from home, the ideal home, and so forth, again in contrast with the more limited framework found in the relevant literature, where the more sedentary associations prevail. If an extended understanding of home is recognised, home is not necessarily a place between four walls, but can also reach out beyond the confined notion of a house to the neighbourhood and beyond, and can even relate to the presence or absence of particular feelings (Ahmed, 1999). So, for our definition of home it can be the feeling of the 'self' in any particular place, regardless of the presence or absence of physical structures such as rooms and boundaries. The concept of home is inherently intangible, fluid, characterised by multiplicity and complexity, rather than based on fixed physical location and distinguished by dualisms such as insideness/outsideness, private/public and so forth. Therefore this thesis argues that home is not only the inside nor the outside of defined spaces and barriers but both, and the fuzzy boundary between the inside/outside is an equivocal dichotomy. In this way the concept of home can accommodate 'lives-within-and-beyond' the enclaves of physical structure in any particular location.

In the migration literature home is viewed in relation to staying and leaving, a place of origin and return, a place from where to venture on a journey from which one can

hope to return (Case, 1996). Critics maintain that home in this sense is less about “where you are from and more about where are you going” (Ginsburg, 1999, p. 35). Likewise, Tucker (1994; cited in Mallett, 2004, p. 77) argues that home-searching is integral to human nature. In recent studies stress has been placed on the centrality of home as a place of origin in the reconstructing of migrant identity, especially in the sense of identity and belonging (Marschall, 2017). According to Blunt (2003, p. 718) through the interplay of memory, home and identity people are oriented towards the future as well as towards the past and a sense of place that is both proximate and distant. Blunt (2003, p. 717) terms this as “productive nostalgia”: people relate to their past home and recreate it across time and space. Indeed, through productive nostalgia displaced people including migrants and those living in diasporas may engage in some practices to create the feeling of home in their dynamic world of mobility.

Adding to this perspective, Dovey (1985) observed that house is an object, part of the environment, while home is the relationship between people and the environment. Therefore, one can aver that home is the product and produce of everyday lives and experience. Thus Dovey (1985) explains that home is at best conceptualised as a kind of relationship between people and the environment. Indeed, people cannot be externalised from the environment in which they are integral. Adding further to this extended conception of home, Ingold et al., (1992) characterises home as an emotionally-based and meaningful relationship between dwellers and their dwelling places; while Dovey (1985, pp. 5-7) points out that home is the relationship or experiential phenomenon rather than the house, place, or building that may or may not represent its current manifestation in built form. Dovey (1985) also explains this relationship as home being a kind of “order” through which people are oriented in the world; “as identification” through which we connect with our world in a meaningful way; “as dialectic processes”, processes that generate an essential dynamism in the process of becoming at home.

Bollnow (1987) writes that space and place and house and home are parallel and distinct concepts: the house is a structured and firm conceptual space while home is the lived space. Thus, the conceptual space of the ‘house’ is objectively measured as the space within which people and things exist, while the ‘home’ is the lived space

that is full of meaning and experience. Heidegger (1962; cited in Dovey, 1985, p. 6) called it the experience of “being-in-the-world”. Indeed, a house is a geometric structure in place, while home is abstract in space; an elusive, fluid and ambiguous concept, difficult to understand; furthermore, synonymous usage of home and house makes it even more ambiguous. Thus, in this thesis home is considered to have a profound meaning which relates to the memory and identity of the ‘self’; it is unexchangeable, therefore, if ‘lost or distorted’ home is irreplaceable. Indeed, understanding the complicated distinction between home and house can further our cross-cultural understanding in relation to home(making) across time and space. Vycinas (1961) states that the sensation of home is overwhelming and unexchangeable; people are subordinate to it and their way of life is oriented and directed around it. Vycinas (1961, p. 85) observes that home in the dynamic world is increasingly becoming a distorted and perverted phenomenon identical to a house; it is subordinate to us; it can be anywhere; easily fathomable in monetary value and thus it can be exchanged “like a pair of shoes”.

Therefore, the way we theoretically and conceptually differentiate home and house can assist our understanding of how pastoralists formulate their home(making) and make sense of the environment in which they are integral, and on which their livelihoods depend, and from which their identity emerges and is shaped across time and space. As we shall see in chapter five, nomadic pastoralists establish the sense of home and belonging to their environment through everyday practices and livestock mobility. Pastoralists on the move assemble and/or dismantle their houses in response to economic, socio-cultural and environmental factors. In the available literature territorial identities are considered irrelevant to pastoralists because they are consistently on the move with no fixed houses (Clapham, 2017, p. 15). This thesis argues that regardless of their constant mobility pastoralists have a profoundly rooted sense of territorial identities and call the environment grazed by their livestock their home(land). For example, pastoralists might move with their herds for weeks without physically erecting a house even in its simplest form; every night they may set a fire, and rest, eat and sleep around their livestock.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that the absence of the house as a discrete geometrical figure in their lives does not mean nomadic pastoralists have no

territorial identities and sense of belonging to place. Instead, nomadic pastoralists interact and experience their environment while living in the open; as Ingold (2008, p. 6) terms it: “to inhabit the world is to live in the open”; we live our lives on a “roughly horizontal surface between earth and sky” (Heidegger, 1971; cited in Ingold, 2008, p. 6). In his seminal work on entanglements of life in an open world Ingold maintains that a dwelling means far more than an indoor space and to inhabit the world entails a dynamic process of entanglements. It is important to note, however, that Ingold’s work does not address how the ‘open is sensed as home’; instead it is a hint that could inspire rethinking around the contemporary Western-oriented theories we have been considering.

According to Ingold (2008), to inhabit the open does not mean to live on a flat surface, absolutely level, boundless in all directions and horizons without obstruction under a blue sky; if being in the open is perceived in this way then it must be a boundless, unresponsive and inconceivable mirage with little to support life; as Gibson (1979, p. 78) specified, in such a space little of life can exist. Ingold (2008, p. 5) calls the surface of the earth “the furniture of the earth”: cluttered with hills, mountains, valleys, and inhabited by animals and plants, and their interaction and entanglement are the basis of inhabiting the world. Thus, creatures should not be understood as “externally bounded entities but as bundles of interwoven lines of growth and movements together constituting a meshwork in fluid space” (Ingold, 2008). Therefore, home then comprises not merely the surroundings of the creatures but a zone of flux and of entanglement in which beings exist.

It is important to note, however, that ‘open’ and between the ‘sky and earth’ in the context of nomadic pastoralism does not mean wandering without borders but includes occasionally existing without building a house as shelter. For example, nomads may house themselves under a tree, and milk, prepare food, gather and celebrate events on the river banks; hence there is no physical or symbolical boundary between insideness/outsideness, and there is no limiting structure of the house as a geometric formation in place. Therefore, again, the sedentary-Western conceptualisation of the enclosed insideness and open outsideness become irrelevant to the concept of home among mobile pastoralists; consequently, the environment is not externalised but internalised and interlocked to their lives and



identities. Thus, one can argue that in pastoralist societies home and home(making) are intrinsically intangible, mobile and complicated concepts characterised by entanglement between pastoral mobility and the environment. The whole rangeland grazed by livestock and covered by pastoral mobility practices is considered their home(land). Having considered house, home and home(making), it also makes sense to examine wellbeing in pastoralist societies in the following section.

#### **2.4.6. Wellbeing, poverty and diversification in pastoralist societies**

Wellbeing might mean to be freedom and choice, for example, freedom from exploitation and ability to choose from available alternatives. Mobility equals freedom, and that freedom requires movement. Indeed, constraints on mobility are experienced as a loss of freedom (Sheller, 2008, p. 25). Thus, mobility is crucial to existence in the world (Cresswell, 2006).

Wellbeing in pastoralist societies can take many forms, for example, it can be seen through the social network, reciprocity, food provision and so forth. Wellbeing is a growing research area, yet lacks universally agreed definition (Guillemin et al., 2016, p. 50), leading to 'the blurred and overly broad definition of wellbeing' (Kern and Seligman, 2011, p. 81). Several studies attempting analysis focus on 'dimensions of wellbeing, rather than on the definition' (Dodge et al., 2012, pp. 221-222). The definition of wellbeing, the authors continue, is 'a state of equilibrium or balance that can be affected by life events or challenges'. Or, wellbeing is a multidimensional and complex concept; it may refer to the psychological state and a physical state that includes emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual aspects (Roscoe, 2009; McGillivray and Clarke, 2006; cited in Guillemin et al., 2016, p. 51). Diener et al. (2003) and Frey and Stutzer (2002) summarise wellbeing's attributes as the presence of positive feeling; pleasant emotions; life satisfaction; and self-fulfilment. Wellbeing lies beyond economic measures, and is a multidimensional concept (Boarini and D'Ercole, 2013). Others approached wellbeing as 'ability to fulfil goals' (Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project, 2008) and simply happiness (Pollard and Lee, 2003). So how should we address wellbeing among pastoralists?

Pastoral production is central to pastoralist societies, and livestock wellbeing is closely related to the wellbeing of pastoralist families. East African pastoral herders

strategically move their livestock to make efficient use of fodder resources in the rangeland and to support their households. One can therefore argue restricting pastoralist mobility may jeopardise the wellbeing of both pastoralist family and animals. Pedersen and Benjaminsen (2008) found food in nomadic families primarily comes from livestock and their children are better nourished than those from an agriculture background inhabiting in the same environment. Thus the case for sustaining nomadic pastoralism globally. In Eritrea, an estimated 1.5 million people depend on livestock for food and cash (White, 2005). Indeed, sheep, goats, donkeys, cattle and camels form the primary sources of livelihood. Milk is the dietary staple, supplemented by sheep and goat meat, and cattle products are essential during all ceremonies. Many pastoralists directly use their livestock as sources of food in daily life and during a crisis they might market their animals to purchase food (Chang et al., 2012).

In many pastoralists communities individuals with large herds impress their communities but also support less fortunate members; nomadic pastoralists build their reputation and authority around the size of their animals (Spencer, 1988). Moreover, pastoralist communities use their animals to compensate for redemption money, or to exchange gifts (Waller, 1985; cited in Chang, 2012). Pastoralist societies are well known for their generosity. Among the Beni-Amer nomadic community selling milk goes against their moral code so they give cows for milk to the poor in their community without financial or labour reciprocity. Livestock serves as the basis of hospitality too (Broch-Due, 1999; cited in Chang, 2012). Reciprocity maintains the security of pastoralist households in time of disaster thereby enhancing their wellbeing (Baird and Gary, 2014). And according to Cronk and Aguiar (2011) in pastoralist societies reciprocity can alleviate food insecurity and contribute to the wellbeing of pastoralist households. Pastoralist community livestock are sources of livelihood, symbolising wealth and prestige. Wealthy pastoralists donate livestock generously during ceremonies to maintain social and kinship relations across vast networks (Chang et al., 2012).

In addition to its contribution to wealth and wellbeing within its own communities, pastoralism also enhances wellbeing beyond them. For example, the national and regional economic contribution of pastoralism was recognised by the African Union

(Krätli et al., 2013). Pastoralism has made a substantial contribution to food security, wellbeing, employment and economic growth in the Horn of Africa: informal livestock trade is estimated to be worth more than US\$ 1 billion per year (Catley et al., 2012). In Kenya alone 25% of the population are pastoralists, with 14.1 million livestock, equal in value to US\$860 million; this enables yearly exchange worth US\$ 69.3 million (Davies and Hatfield, 2007). In Sudan, approximately 90% of the national livestock herd are held in pastoral systems; in 2009 livestock trade was equal in value to US\$ 1.8 billion; and approximately 98% of pastoral livestock trade supplied the domestic market (Behnke and Osman, 2012). Despite its significant contribution the livestock economy is under-valued by policymakers. On the other hand, the economic contribution of the pastoral economy is over-valued by various non-governmental organisations and humanitarian groups, believing that livestock trade can elevate millions of East African pastoralists out of poverty. Livestock trade has the potential to assist economic growth, but claiming it can solve poverty in pastoral areas is over-ambitious. Poverty in pastoral areas has deep and varied roots and its amelioration requires understanding of its complexity (Little et al., 2008). Otherwise, poverty reduction programmes might discourage invisible but effective economic activities such as nomadic pastoralism, while ill-informed measures might encourage long-term displacement such as rural to urban migration.

Coordinating between regional and international actors to empower pastoralists to participate in decision-making has the potential to reduce poverty in pastoral areas. Deaton (2010) argues that it is worth returning the conceptualisation and measurement of poverty to the people themselves: they have very good idea of whether they are poor or not. If they think they are poor they might suggest ways out of poverty. Denying pastoralists participation in decision-making processes must make their failure more likely. For example, researchers and practitioners frequently miscomprehend local patterns of poverty. The rangelands of East Africa are littered with the consequences of flawed assumptions (Little et al., 2007). Addressing persistent poverty in pastoral areas requires strategic development shifts rather than short-term poorly coordinated emergency assistance. Barrett et al. (2006) argue the short-term misery of drought victims is indicative of longer-term fundamental problems poverty, food insecurity and inequality.

One response to pastoral constraints has been diversification of income through a range of non-pastoral activities. Alongside livestock-keeping some pastoralists practice livestock-trading, collecting and selling of forest products, and selling milk and other dairy products; some members of pastoralist households engage in waged employment including as herders and farm workers. This is especially so in drought and conflict times (Elliot, 2013, p. 197). Diversification is not a new phenomenon among pastoralists, but it is increasing, along with abandoning pastoralism altogether. In East Africa, pastoral wealth is slowly concentrating into the hands of a few wealthy pastoralists, who are shifting towards commercialisation and exporting livestock, benefiting from the booming local and regional livestock trade (Catley and Aklilu, 2012).

Significant numbers of pastoralists with few animals drop out of pastoralism and become destitute. Development agencies formulate alternative livelihood programmes to assist them, but not many have fared well (Devereux and Tibbo, 2013). The vast numbers who dwell in refugee camps, in the outskirts of towns and who become labour migrants in urban centres beyond their region implies that very few are remaining in pastoralism (Catley and Aklilu, 2013, p. 25), while many of those adopting waged employment remain very poor. Many studies show pastoralists fail to cope with the new livelihood strategies devised by policy makers (Babiker, 2013). The following section summarises the main points of part one of the literature review and links to part two of the literature review.

## **2.5. Conclusion**

This section has critically discussed pastoral mobility beyond its traditional meaning as herd movement. It also looked at the global distribution of pastoralist societies and the challenges they face. Despite the fact that pastoralism has been an important source of livelihood for over 200 million households the state and other development agents view pastoralism as environmentally unsustainable. As a result, the majority of herding communities inhabit fringes of the contemporary nation-state and graze their livestock on marginal lands. Pastoralism literature shows that herding communities currently encounter several human-made and natural factors which combine to fragment pastoralism. Theorists' dualistic understanding styles

pastoralists as either mobile or sedentary and considers only it in terms of physical movement. The chapter maintains that this has been one aspect of the process that has disempowered pastoralists in the struggle to secure land rights amid dynamic contemporary socioeconomic, political and environmental changes. It argues that fragmentation in pastoral systems leads to fragility of the pastoral systems of production and interrupts pastoral mobility. Many pastoralists are consequently in transition, pursuing mobility outside pastoralism, during which they encounter multiple im/mobility experiences that can influence their (re)construction of identity, wellbeing and homeland attachments.

Therefore, for several decades increasing social and environmental stress factors in many regions across the world have threatened pastoralism as a livelihood. As a result, pastoral systems have become fragmented, physically isolated grazing hotspots. Pastoral mobility is thus impaired. In most cases only wealthy livestock owners can adapt and prosper, by investing in contemporary communication technology and transport, while poorer pastoralists leave pastoralism altogether. Leaving pastoralism does not mean leaving mobility for pastoralists but it means mobility outside pastoralism, as we shall see in chapter six. The next section presents part two of the literature review of mobility with a particular focus on migration, mobility and identity.

## **Part Two: Mobility, Migration and Identity**

### **2.6. Geographies of mobility and contemporary debates**

Humans, animals and goods have always moved. Mobility did not emerge for the first time in the twenty-first century or the 1750s with the industrial revolution (Cresswell, 2010), nor even with city-states and empires. Therefore, as we have seen in pastoralism to develop a theoretical understanding of movement in illegalised migration we should review the history of mobility research in literature.

Mobility has been researched from several approaches and often theorised from an interdisciplinary perspective. For example, mobility in the form of migration is theorised via traditional push-pull factors underpinning migration decisions. In pastoralism research pastoral nomadic mobility takes place in relation to the seasonal availability of pasture and water in rangelands. As indicated above this

understanding of pastoral mobility focuses only on the physical movement aspect, masking the representation and experiences of pastoralist mobility. In diaspora studies, mobility becomes transnational movement in the sense of diasporas and homeland returns for ancestral-place attachment or cultural reconnection. In the geography of tourism, mobility comes in the form of visiting places and transport geography in relation to time and infrastructure. As Cresswell illustrates (2010b, p. 18) time lost in transit in the principles of transport geography is seen as unproductive 'dead time', a problem in need of a technical solution. The feminist approach to mobility comes in the form of daily mobility patterns in relation to asylum seekers, migrants and refugees and the way domestic workers experience mobility between their country of origin and their country of work (Hanson 2010; Mountz, 2010).

Mobility is also critically researched in relation to identity. Ritterbusch (2016) found in Bogotá in Colombia transgender sex workers experiencing discrimination and sociospatial exclusion – even homicide - with their mobilities are restricted to only four blocks of the city. Even though there is no single definition of the term identity, Horton and Kraftl (2013, p. 159) usefully suggest it comprises 'building blocks' of various components: social categories, physical characteristics, personality traits, and so forth. And often one element becomes primary, for example, in the case of transgender sex workers sexuality is the paramount social category in their lives; as a result, they face marginalisation by mainstream society. And migrants who arrive in the EU by crossing the Mediterranean are socially constructed as 'illegal', hence their mobility is uninterruptedly blocked; even if they survive to reach the EU they are unwanted and marginalised. This case shows identity often complicates mobility: to some extent identity informs the (im)mobility of individual and group. Movement has also been thoroughly examined in relation to the politics of mobility. Cresswell (2010) explored three entangled features of mobility including 'mobility as physical movement', that is, the physical movement of the body from one location to another. Therefore, physical movement is seen as one aspect of mobility, but movement on its own does not tell what is experienced in that particular mobility event. 'Mobility as representation' is the shared meaning which portrays any particular movement: mobility as representation means words act like tags, to label certain mobility patterns according to societal values. For example, the refugee

movement is metaphorically represented as an exodus of flooding and swamping by media and by some politicians (Abid et al., 2017). 'Mobility as practice' according to Bourdieu (1990; cited in Cresswell, 2010, p. 19) is 'embodied and habitualised' and experienced through the human body.

As we have seen, to understand mobility holistically means paying attention to the entanglement of 'movement, representation and practice' of any particular case of (im)mobility (Cresswell, 2010, p. 26). The author states that these three figures are not easy to untangle. For some people, mobility is pleasurable but for others a painful experience. Mobility to reunite with family members is a moment of joy, for instance, but forced mobility to avoid persecution is a time of sorrow. For some people, mobility is a livelihood strategy. Mobility might arise from the free will of the individual, but it can also be imposed by the powerful on the powerless. The reasons which force people to stay or move are many and in most cases they are politically, socially and economically informed. For example, mobility is a risky decision for illegalised migrants, but a happy choice for many holiday makers. Tourists usually know their destination, the methods of transport they will use and how long they will be travelling; for illegalised migrants any of these things may be unknown.

A small but significant literature is also available concerning the 'shadow' of mobility under the terms 'waiting', 'stillness' and 'stuckness'. The term 'mobility' brings some sort of movement to mind, often related to moving horizontally - walking, cycling, driving, train travel, air travel, and so forth, or vertically - rocket travel and deep sea diving. With these and other forms of mobility comes the notion of speed, for instance, the speed of the internet connection, the speed of the car, of the train and so forth. But it is worth mentioning almost all mobility happens under some sort of regulation: motorway speed limits, airport checkpoints, national and geographical borders all remind us of waiting, stillness and stuckness. Cresswell (2010a, p. 3) argues that stillness is thoroughly incorporated into the process of moving.

On many occasions moving and stillness occur together in time and space: travelling in a car as a passenger, as Cresswell observes, people often travel 'sitting down and trapped in'. Queuing in lines is an everyday experience for many, for example, waiting for public transport, waiting in hospital and so on. In transport geography

stillness can be regarded as empty and wasted time like 'dead time' (Bissell and Fuller, 2011, p. 3). However, one can argue stillness is not all negative and empty; rather it can save a life, and many achieve their dreams because of moments of it. Although nerve-wracking, for illegalised migrants stillness in vehicles may be life changing. Therefore, awareness of stillness could help to understand how illegalised migrants experience mobility, but methods to examine such stillness remain difficult to formulate. Martin (2011b) approached stillness from 'comfortability' of waiting: stillness is often differentiated by the status of the movement: illegalised migrants locked into containers and trucks, 'kinetic elites' provided hospitality in lounges.

Finally, waiting, stillness and stuckness could be the starting point of socialisation. Vannini (2011a) found that people of Island near Vancouver in Canada who negotiate their everyday mobility in the ferry system, have built social relations because of the time spent together in transit. The following section examines the relationship between (im)mobility and identity.

## **2.7. (Im)mobility in relation to identity**

Increasing global interconnectedness creates increasing movement of people and materials around the world. Mobility is at the heart of modern lifestyles. and scholars are interested in the international processes of 'everything' on the move. According to Hannam et al. (2006) and Sheller and Urry (2006), a 'new mobility paradigm' perceives the world constantly moving. They estimated 4 million air passengers each day; 31 million refugees in 2007 and over 1 billion legal international passengers by 2010.

Although all people on the move are seen as mobile and free-mobility is considered as a human right mobility is often complicated by the identity of the individual on the move. Despite the scale of movement of people, goods and information globally, traditional nation-state borders and immigration policies remain in operation. National and supra-national institutions such as European Union borders are increasingly digitalised to facilitate smooth border crossing for desired migrants and to deter undesired migrants (Dijstelbloem and Broeders, 2015; Verstraete 2001; cited in Sheller and Urry, 2006, p. 2). Some mobilities are therefore valid and



others not: mobility is inseparably bound up with 'embodied politics of differences' (Blunt, 2007, p. 3).

Questioning who is moving, where from and to, may help to reveal the centrality of the traveller's identity in the mobile world. Cresswell (2010) says boundaries and borders remain very much relevant to the dynamic world of the twenty-first century. Some people move across the borders of nation-states faster and more often, while others take longer to cross short distances or do not get to travel at all, growing and dying in the same area of their birth. This is unimportant if it is a personal choice, but matters if travel is not available for social, economic, citizenship or identity reasons. Cresswell (2009; cited in Cresswell, 2013) describes humans as both 'human body in the material world and a figure in a representational landscape': humans are not only 'packages of living tissue', he goes on, but a figure of one kind or another: humans are members of societies, countries and social classes among other things and these play a crucial role in the (im)mobility of the individual.

Mobility is an entirely different experience to some people, for example, for celebrities and prominent businesspeople mobility practices are compatible with their social status. They travel on private jets by yachts or first class public transport. Usually, they do not wait to show their passport to immigration officers: borders between countries are open for them. For illegalised migrants mobility is a perilous decision; they travel to unknown destinations through risky and unknown transit routes. From 2007-2013 more than 36,000 Eritreans faced the risks of human trafficking after being forced to leave their troubled homeland (Jacobsen et al., 2013). Mobility under such circumstances is bounded by significant risk to human life, including death and torture. Furthermore, mobility for illegalised migrants is 'pent mobility' characterised by delays, blocks, stopping and long waits. Many illegalised migrants end up in a country they didn't choose. Im/mobility marks 'codes of experiences' on people and their effects impact on individual wellbeing and even sense of identity - this is relevant for further investigation by geographers.

Mobility, whether chosen or forced, affects the personal experience of it. Im/mobility is produced, reproduced, experienced, occasionally transformed and reflected within social interaction (Cresswell, 2006). Mobility is experienced and

practised differently depending on who created it and under what circumstance it is exercised. Cresswell (2010) showed how mobilities involve people, time and space, so allowing them to be geographically mapped and socially experienced. Therefore, one can argue mobility practice and experience could inform individual conceptualisations of their wellbeing and their identity across time and space. As Cresswell (2006) argued, 'mobility is a resource that is differently accessed' in relation to the economic and class status, and citizenship and identity of the traveller: it is therefore a politically, socially and economically informed practice. Cresswell (2006) argues that mobility is one of the significant resources of the 21st-century life, and that its differential distribution produces some of the starkest differences today.

Depending on how and who is travelling, the time and space of travel, mobility produces complex routes across the globe (Kloppenburger and Peters, 2012). If mobility were studied in relation to people's identities then the routes, nodes and circuits people make would produce very complex maps of individuality. This is complex even at the formal level of citizenship. For example, the citizenship of a person refers to a form of belonging to a specific place, usually a nation-state: 'citizens are citizens of somewhere' (Cresswell, 2009). Citizenship brings with it certain rights, which includes the right to free movement. However, free movement may only be within the nation-state space or within supra-national institutions such as the EU. According to Balibar (2004) within EU space there have been efforts to produce a new transnational European citizenship primarily by linking free mobility to citizenship. People who are citizens of the EU are automatically entitled to free mobility while others from outside the EU particularly from developing countries are subjected to the mobility constraints when they attempt to cross nation-state borders.

Much has been written about the significance of nation-state borders in the twenty-first century. Some scholars view them as obsolete in an increasingly interconnected world. They claim that in the era of globalisation national borders no longer need to be barriers to the cross-border movement of people, goods and information. Several scholars have challenged this notion: Casas-Cortés et al. (2015) argue that the contemporary, dynamic nation-state border negotiation increases the number of

borders as 'new' boundaries emerge: borders are becoming 'thicker, taller, and more highly securitized', they maintain. Despite increasing global mobility, borders are becoming sophisticated tools deployed in the management of migration.

Casas-Cortes et al. (2015, pp. 48-51) illustrate the externalisation of the EU border towards non-European southern and eastern neighbouring states and the outsourcing of border management to non-EU states and non-state actors. For example, the EU border has become externalised towards Turkey in the east and Morocco in the south, whose border agencies must carry out the EU's policing of movement at its borders. The border management is also subcontracted to non-state actors such as FRONTEX operating in the Central-Mediterranean, and the Seahorse Operation between Spain and Morocco. This externalisation of EU borders not only focuses on the EU frontier but deep into the places of origin and transit of migratory routes (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015). Redesigning and externalising borders suggests states' physical ability to follow human mobility beyond its territory is increasing (Ryan, 2010, p. 3). The externalisation of the borders could challenge the continuation of the illegalised routes: illegalised migrants may be stopped in the middle of their journey, fingerprinted, detained and if their asylum case is rejected they could be deported. According to Ryan (2010; cited in Casas-Cortes et al., 2015, p. 51) developed countries seek to control migration outside their physical border as Ryan illustrated:

The immigration control systems of developed states are today frequently characterized by strategies of 'extraterritorialisation'. Developed states now take immigration control action – both decision-making and enforcement – prior to an individual's arrival on their territory. In some cases, indeed, the objective appears to be that as much immigration control activity as possible should take place elsewhere, either on the territory of other states, or in international waters, where the presumption is that states lack jurisdiction.

The externalisation of borders has humanitarian effects and increases migrants' vulnerability and abuse at the hands of their smugglers. For example, as happens frequently, if the smugglers know EU vessels will pick up the illegalised migrants in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea they might impose higher charges and overload migrants in leaky boats. The externalisation of borders is thus unsustainable and

restrictive in its conception of human mobility (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015). Moreover, if the illegalised migrants manage to cross the Mediterranean and hand themselves to EU authorities to seek asylum they still have to surmount several hurdles before they can become legalised and documented.

Immigration and border control regimes increasingly target the human body (Dijstelbloem and Broeders, 2015). The descriptive identity of the migrant is not considered authentic. Information identity is therefore extracted and collected from the body of the migrant. Usually, fingerprints, bone and DNA are regarded as authoritative sources of information to determine the migrant's age and family relationship (Dijstelbloem and Broeders, 2015). This makes the migrant clearly identified and digitally coded for the state's convenience, allowing it to trace, track, restrict. For example, Regulation No. 604/2013 limits asylum seekers' applications to the first country of their arrival and if that country rejects their application their mobility rights effectively cease and they cannot restart their asylum request in another EU member state.

According to Brekke and Brochmann (2014) the EU-wide reception system for asylum seekers is not harmonised – individual member states have different processes and standards of treatment. Migrants risk physical and psychological damage to increase their mobility, such as rubbing their fingertips in a hot pan, submerging them in battery acid or even using sharp blades to permanently destroy their fingerprints to avoid digitalised EU border detection. This desperate attempt has a marked impact on the future of the migrant's identity and wellbeing. In this regard the immigration regime and the power of the state in the developed country is not only stretching its geographical border, it is also breaching the bodily integrity of the human individual and his/her kinship. For example, if the state requires it DNA information collected from the migrant can be used to track and trace migrants' kinship before they migrate.

Moreover, developed countries cultivating 'smart borders' deploy new technology to meet the challenges of control (Dijstelbloem and Broeders, 2015, p. 2). Through the use of information technology, a network of information has been created between collaborative states to collect, store, check, compare and exchange all kind of data gathered from the migrant body and narratives. The mobility of migrants and

others is increasingly coming under state surveillance to allow or deter mobility (Redpath, 2005). The following section presents how im/mobility is governed, with special focus on illegalised migrants' identity, wellbeing and mobility experiences.

## **2.8. 'Governing im/mobility': between legality and illegality**

The number of people displaced due to war, conflicts, poverty and extreme climatic events around the world has reached an all-time high. The UNHCR report entitled *Global Trends* published in 2015 found that a total of 65.3 million people were displaced in 2015, an increase of around 6 million, compared with 59.5 million at the end of 2014. This is the highest since UNHCR records began. According to the report, on average 24 people were forced to flee their home every 60 seconds in 2015; that is four times higher compared to six people fleeing each minute in 2005. The report found that, out of the total world population of 7.4 billion, from every 113 people 1 person is either an asylum-seeker, internally displaced or a refugee. For some the displacement is internal within their country of origin, while for others it is international displacement; they have to cross state boundaries. Indeed, it is worth noting that neither internal nor international displacement can be considered 'safe'. Often all displacements mean danger and stress, but only really vary in the degree of trauma they inflict on the lives of the displaced.

For instance, the internal displaced might face the risk of being persecuted by their governments, of hunger, of trying to survive in besieged areas and of strict government control and restricted mobility. While those who are internationally displaced may face the risk of smuggling and trafficking, of being sold for slavery, of suffering degrading treatment at the hands of smuggling networks and even at the hands of state forces, of blocked borders, death at sea or land and of forced im/mobility. One can argue that the contemporary transnational migration routes not only crisscross the physical landscape while displacing bodies, they also cause the displacement of attitudes and leave deep scars on human psyches, shattering human rights. These experiences often leave a long-lasting legacy on the self-worth, identity, and dignity of those who have had to endure them. Moreover, they may have a significant impact on 'human-human' relations. For example, those who have faced inhumane treatment at the hands of members of a particular tribe or state, or

even if their asylum case has been rejected, might perceive malice against all members of that country or tribe, and might want to retaliate. For instance, one Eritrean migrant murdered a 55-year-old woman and her son in an Ikea store because his asylum application had been rejected. Although this trend might be rare, it might also be the tip of a dangerously little-perceived iceberg, another little-researched topic ample for migration scholars to make a significant contribution to.

In the era of unprecedented population displacement mobility and migration are becoming increasingly important topics for research (Wright, 2012). The recent humanitarian catastrophe along transnational migration routes constitutes the worst migration crisis since the end of World War II (Mainwaring and Brigden, 2016). The substantial number of those displaced undertaking arduous journeys across countries and continents over land and sea is often concealed from the eyes of mainstream societies in 'pent mobility', and when they become visible, dead, near death or alive in rickety boats on the shores of the global North, they raise a moral outcry. It is worth noting, however, migration and refugees attract multiple responses in the global North. For some politicians, they are illegal, and in this view their influx must be blocked, and they should be detained and deported; though on the other hand for some NGOs they may be seen as the source of income and employment. However, the majority of the population in the global North might feel their suffering and have a sense of moral obligation to do everything within their means to help. In the last two decades illegalised migration has been extensively studied, but it is largely only investigated by the immigrants' receiving countries with the aim of increasing measures to deter their unauthorised entry. For example, migration is an issue of political contest in the EU. Much policy attention is given to where illegalised migrants arrive and how they can be stopped, and therefore the individual suffering endured by those illegalised people, or what pushed them out of their home, is of no relevance to some policymakers. Lindley (2014) observes that the narration of Europe's migration and the refugee is dominated by the language of 'crisis'. Indeed, contemporary migration has been portrayed as an unprecedented overflow of the 'other' that encompasses tremendous risks to the receiving societies. According to Crawley et al., (2015), the migration crisis is not about the numbers of

refugees and migrants arriving on the shores of Europe. Instead, it is a crisis related to a broad lack of political solidarity among the EU states.

Furthermore, several researchers describe how illegalised migrants' mobilities are fragmented and dangerous and argue that restricted mobility is the product of states' migration policies. Collyer (2010) observes that international transit migration routes used by illegalised migrants increasingly become fragmented, longer and more dangerous, with urgent humanitarian concerns; these fragmented journeys are becoming the norm due to the development of modern communication technology. As we shall see later the risk faced by illegalised migrants in the in-between mobility is imposed from multiple sources. Among these we find natural obstacles such as deserts, seas, freezing and boiling temperatures and human-imposed risks including physical abuse, such as rape, enslavement, organ harvest, torture and money extortion. Moreover, modern communication technology eases the mobilisation of smuggling networks, though it could also help to connect illegalised migrants with their kin and is extremely useful in the processes of money transfer from kin to smugglers.

Furthermore, according to Vertovec (2004), and Fernández-Ardevol and Híjar (2009), communication technologies are used to transmit the images of 'the good life' across the globe: these act as triggers of inspiration for Africans to move 'elsewhere' by placing their current life in negative relation to the better possibilities elsewhere, by suggesting that those other possibilities should be available to them, and by offering the sense that they may be attainable. Africans are increasingly connected to the rest of the world through internet access and mobile telephony (de Bruijn, 2008; Fernández-Ardevol and Híjar, 2009). Mobile phones have even reached areas that have always lacked access to landlines (de Bruijn, 2008). And, according to Jónsson (2008), and Barren (2009) these increasing connections build ideas and aspirations about alternative possibilities in Europe for people in African societies - societies whose poverty is itself causally-related to the better life that African migrants seek for themselves in Europe. Thus Schapendonk (2012) argues that Sub-Saharan African migration towards the EU is the most stigmatised form of migration in the 21st century. Ironically it is perceived among much imagery in media communications as a matter of economic aspiration even though much of the

imagery show the extreme dangers and suffering that the journeys entail and the far from satisfactory resulting lifestyles attained by illegalised migrants into the EU. Indeed, such negative images are widely circulated among many would-be illegalised migrants. Many Africans know the risky and unknown future involved before making a single step towards illegal migration; therefore, as we shall see in chapter six, the assumption that they are opting for a 'better life' as classic aspirational 'economic' migrants is not the engine behind their choice to follow their immensely life-changing path.

Moreover, there is substantial literature growing which at least implicitly debates the nature of the transnational journeys undertaken by refugees and migrants in a global geopolitical context (Schapendonk, 2012; Triandafyllidou and Maroukis, 2012; Collyer et al, 2012; Martinez et al., 2015; Mainwaring and Brigden, 2016; Crawley et al., 2016a; Crawley and Dimitris, 2018). This burgeoning literature is producing important insights into the fragmented nature of the journeys, while the increasing politicisation of the idea of 'transit migration' and the features of the often-clandestine smuggling and trafficking network and migrants' agency have been extensively discussed. Mainwaring and Brigden (2016) argue that the empirical enquiry around the fragmented journeys within this scholarship reveals insights around the geographies of power in transit migration. It challenges longstanding dichotomies around transit/settlements and trafficking/smuggling, and starts/ends – in this respect fragmented journeys are viewed as never-ending. Mainwaring and Brigden (2016) maintain that fragmented journeys are a continuation of a much longer life trajectory embodied in a much longer chain of events in the life of the individual. Therefore, according to Mainwaring and Brigden (2016) fragmented journeys echo 'stepwise migration'. Migrants usually make multiple attempts to arrive at their given destination, but that destination place itself often becomes a departure across time and space. In this way, too, we see how migrants experience these new locations in time and space in a way that is unpredictable and unstable: mobile life is integral to nomadic pastoralists and for migrants, but the latter form is strange, alien and traumatic. Indeed, even if they arrive in Europe migrants' asylum cases might be rejected, meaning detention and deportation, and even if they attain successful asylum and establish the over-



emphasised 'better life', at the very least this life is likely to involve another new dimension of mobility as they travel back to their country of origin: the starting and the ending of this uncertain journeying lifestyle becomes harder to quantify, to control, to cope with. Crawley and Dimitris's (2018) vivid discussions with 500 migrants from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Eritrea short of their arrival at a Greek island reveal the temporal, spatial unstill nature of their fragmented journeys. Migration decisions along the transit routes are socially complex, infused with political and economic forces, and their significance for the individual migrant is continually shifting across time and space.

Furthermore, this volume also goes on to challenge the oversimplified representation of smugglers as highly-organised criminals, manipulating migrants who amount to no more than passive bodies with little or no agency themselves. As we have seen above, fragmented journeys are the product of a hierarchy of global citizenship. For example, the citizens of rich countries from the global North such as Switzerland are more likely to secure legal entry to any countries they choose regardless of geographical proximity. Citizens of economically less prosperous countries of the global South in contrast are unlikely to obtain a visa even to their neighbouring countries. Illegalised migrants are channelled into the dangerous and fragmented journeys mentioned due to insurmountable visa policies and border controls. Moreover, Carling and Hernandez-Carretero (2011) note that externalised migration control in the form of pre-border patrolling might restrain irregular migrants but in addition controls at the border are met by new smuggling strategies rather than to an overall reduction of unwanted migrants, as the people traffickers adapt their strategies. Therefore, one can argue that migration regimes contribute to the making of illegal migration routes and shape the nature of their fragmentation across time and space. Adding to the recent knowledge of this form of migration, several multi-disciplinary studies have been conducted to understand the potential of migration in transforming cultural reproduction (Giralt and Baily, 2010). Furthermore, from the available literature, it is apparent that mobility and migration research often links mobility to immigration and shows insufficient interest in local and regional mobility within developing countries.

As we have seen above, even though much has been written about migration and refugees, little is explored on how im/mobilities in the context of 'illegalised' international migration can transform migrants' sense of wellbeing, and the reconstruction of their identities in their new destination remains a challenge for geographers. Illegalised migration mobility is multi-directional, leading not only to the planned destination but also to unknown destinations and, for many, movement never ends. While the study of migration journeys does increasingly acknowledge the complexity, non-linearity, multi-directionality and ambiguity of journeys undertaken by illegalised migrants, the trend to date in such studies has been to focus on the 'journeys' rather than on the 'individual' and the journey's long-term impacts on their lives: on those who arrive alive on the shores of the global North rather than on those who perish in the fragmented journeys; on those who have attained successful asylum rather than on those who have been unable to obtain asylum, who might have been detained and deported; on the presence and impact of migrants in the receiving countries rather than on the lives continuing but changed back in the sending countries. Yeoh (2007) argues that mobility in the contemporary era is no longer uni-directional, but characterised by a whole range of movements: circulation; return; dead-ends; detours; multiple destinations; multiplicity; simultaneity; and transnational migration. An unknown and/or uncertain future is an integral aspect of fragmented journeys. Contemporary migration is also characterised by the layers of uncertainty/instability of migration to destinations that are new and strange, or entirely unknown to the illegalised migrants until arrival, and towards unknown fates once there, which research has yet to address in detail. The traumas endured in fragmented journeys do not merely leave scars on the bodies of migrants but also in the psyches of those who survive. Paul (2011) examined the 'stepwise' mobility among Philippine migrant workers in the Middle East on their way to the EU, USA or Canada; this might be relevant to the contemporary case on pastoralists in transition on their way to join illegalised migration routes. For example, the Beni-Amer pastoralists in transition take multiple steps towards intra- and international migration.

Im/mobility takes place at the extreme ends of legality and illegality. The regime geared to govern international migration has adopted a bipolar approach that

categorises cross-border movement of people as legal or illegal. This is because migration has mostly been viewed from a position of fixed locations, where the push factors are attributed to the place of departure and the pull factors are associated with the place of arrival. Therefore, the governing of mobility is concerned with who is coming and from where. Reducing migration from A to B underpins the conceptualization of migration as a bipolar linkage between two places (Van Bochove, 2012). In addition to the restrictive immigration policies produced from these standpoints, such perspectives give less attention to the experiences of mobility and spatial friction in the mobility processes (Schapendonk, 2011; Burell, 2008).

The governing of im/mobility is inherently problematic as, by its very nature, it concerns complicated human mobility and immobility decisions and practices. In its oversimplified form current state immigration policies set in place restrictive measure to authorise or decline entry, and to detain or deport illegalised migrants. One can argue the wellbeing and identity of the migrants underpin state immigration systems. Based on the above view the mobility and entry of international migrants can take place in the following three ways: 1) legal migrant: verified, documented and observed. 2) partially illegalised migrant: documented, observed, but wrongly verified. For example, a migrant enters a foreign country via legal, well-documented and observable airport entry, but is wrongly verified with a stolen or forged document. Or, entering a foreign country with 'hazard knowledge': that may include the dissemination of actual information about their identity or entering a foreign country with a visit visa, but with an intention to remain. 3) illegalised migrants: entering a foreign country through illegalised means, but claiming legality at arrival; in some cases, entering illegally, unverified, undocumented and unobserved. Or. a clandestine stay: this may include imposed im/mobility, such as illegalised migrants at the hands of trafficking gangs. For the purpose of this study only illegalised migration is presented in the following two subsections.

### **2.8.1. Illegal migration routes and illegalised migrants**

There is little agreement about what exactly constitutes 'illegal' migration, who is included in it, where it happens, why, and how. Debates around the terminologies

attributed to illegalised immigration are evidence of its problematic nature. To mention a few from the list of terminologies, we have 'illegal', 'irregular', 'unauthorised', 'non-compliant', indicating the 'unwantedness' of illegalised migrants and the intensely politicised nature of the illegalised migrant phenomenon. Today, illegalised migration is an inevitable feature of border controls and nation-state citizenship (Anderson and Ruhs, 2010). According to Torpey (2000) and Ngai (2014) no matter how border controls are exercised there will always be entrants deliberately or otherwise prepared to break the systems attached to entry. Currently, illegalised migration is a daily topic in most media channels; it was an insignificant issue less than three decades ago. Anderson and Ruhs (2010) claim illegalised migration was of little academic interest up to the early 1990s, but in the last 20 years a significant body of policy and academic literature on the issue have grown. Researchers have approached its complexities from different perspectives. Alexseev (2006) and Koser (2009) argue that illegality is not merely a challenge to state authority, it is increasingly linked to national security and organised crime. Others have approached illegalised migration from the economic perspective and argue that the illegality results from unfair competition in the labour market: employers who are prepared to break the law and exploit illegalised migrants' cheap labour can use them for niche opportunities (Home Office, 2007). And other researchers have tried to re-theorise the state, border and migrants' agency nexus to argue that illegality is produced by the state immigration control measures themselves (Papadopoulos et al., 2008).

Illegalised migration routes, causes and im/mobility experiences are as many as the number of the illegalised migrants. Although south-south illegalised migration exists, it is of little interest to researchers and policy makers. Apparently, the majority of illegalised migrants head northwards from sub-Saharan Africa through the trans-Saharan and trans-Mediterranean routes, through Libya to Italy and Malta, from West Africa through Morocco to Spain, and the trans-Sinai route from the Horn of Africa to Israel through Egypt. The current east-west trend from the Middle East and Asian countries to Europe through Turkey and Greece and other several routes includes Southeast Asia to Australia to the USA via Mexico. These complicated routes can be seen on the map below. However, these lines representing migration routes

do not show the mobility practices and experiences of illegalised migrants and such representation masks the ‘real’ experiences of the individuals involved.



Figure 2.6. An example of illegal migration routes from Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East towards the North and the West. (Source: ICMPD, 2015)

Illegalised migration in the literature over-researches illegalised migrants' situation in the labour market. For example, see Tapinos (1999); Jandl (2004); Düvell (2006); Anderson and Ruhs (2010). From this perspective Tapinos (1999) generated six categories of 'illegal immigrations: 1) legal entry, legal residence but illegally employed. 2) legal entry but illegal residence and illegally employed. 3) legal entry but illegal residence and unemployed. 4) illegal entry but later on legalised and unemployed. 5) illegal entry, illegal residence and illegally employed. 6) illegal

entry, illegal residence and unemployed. These categories reflect the mobility of status of illegalised migrants across time, from illegality to legality, but also from legality back to illegality. For example, a person may enter a foreign country illegally but be granted legal residence through the asylum process, or may enter a foreign country legally by tourist visa but overstay and become illegalized: 'the line between legal and illegal status can be crossed in both directions' (Ngai, 2014, p. 57). The following section investigates how mobility is practised and experienced in relation to illegal migrants' wellbeing and identity.

### **2.8.2. Im/mobility experiences and illegalised migrants: identities and wellbeing**

As with pastoralism, mobility, identity, and wellbeing are three distinctive yet highly interrelated aspects of illegalised migration. The experience of various forms of mobility is a major component of subjective wellbeing measured by affect and sense of satisfaction (Cresswell, 2010). Mobility is conceptualised as a means of distributing resources and opportunities through which personal and collective wellbeing are affected (Kaufmann et al. 2004). Cross-border irregular migrants' movements involve entering a foreign country unlawfully. And unlawful entry requires days, weeks, months or even years of im/mobility from starting place to final destination. Illegalised migrants may fall into the hands of smuggling networks in which the im/mobility decision of the illegalised migrants comes under the gun of traffickers. Moreover, illegal migration routes operate in accordance with regional and global geopolitical circumstances. For example, following the Arab spring and the fall of Gaddafi in Libya, the number of Eritrean illegalised migrants entering Italy increased considerably.

Legal entry is unimaginable to most people from the impoverished section of societies and many feel they must surmount legal requirements to enter a country with better economic opportunities. The identity and wellbeing of illegalised migrants are factors in their choice to take the illegal route. For example, destitute pastoralists in transition from western Eritrea are, financially, socially and politically unlikely to secure a visa to any country in the region and it is particularly unimaginable to obtain a visa to the West.

In a similar situation Paul (2011) found high-cost barriers and bureaucratic immigration restrictions prevent low-capital Filipino migrant workers from getting to Western countries. Consequently 'a stepwise international migration' process became an alternative strategy for such low-capital migrants. In this case, the migrant gradually approaches their preferred destination by building up their human and financial capital. A migrant inspired by Western migration might move from Bangladesh to UAE and from there to Italy and later to the USA. This type of international mobility takes a long time and multiple spaces. However, the majority of illegalised migrants short-cut the barriers associated with immigration by taking 'unwise steps to international migration'. Unlike 'stepwise' migration, 'unwise steps' take a short time and cross multiple spaces under life-threatening circumstances. It may take only two months for an ex-herder to migrate from the Sudan to Italy, but he may end up in Libyan jail or dying on his way. The following section provides summarises the main points of part two of the literature review and links to part three, which is about diasporic identity across time and space, and homeland return.

## **2.9. Conclusion**

This section has provided contemporary debates on mobility research. Mobility is often studied and theorised from a multi-disciplinary perspective. This section examined the relation between identity and movement and argued mobility is often complicated by the identity of the traveller and as such is not an equally-distributed human right. Certain people's mobility patterns are metaphorically labelled to identify who and in what circumstances that particular mobility is taking place. Human mobility is enacted, practised and experienced, and it may affect the wellbeing and identity of the person involved, but this remains a challenge for geographers and other social scientists to investigate. The section presented waiting, stillness and stuckness as integral to mobility and argued these are not all negative; rather they are vital for some travellers and waiting for moments may be a part of socialisation and friendship.

This section showed that increasing global mobility does not mean no border and immigration regulation. Borders are in fact becoming 'higher, thicker and securitised' and some supra-national institutions have externalised their borders to exert immigration control in the territory of other states and international waters.

Immigration management and goes not only into other countries but also enters migrants' bodies to extract identity elements to track, trace and restrict migrants' mobility. Immigration regulations such as the Dublin regulation ended mobility for rejected asylum seekers and endanger their wellbeing and identity. The next section considers diaspora identity, homeland and return across time and spaces.

### **Part Three: Diaspora, Identity, Homeland and Return**

#### **2.10. Understanding diaspora across time and space**

The term diaspora in the Greek interpretation of the Hebrew Bible roughly translates as to spread or scatter (Cohen, 2008). Therefore, diaspora involves the dispersal of people from the place they call homeland to a 'new' destination where they perceive themselves as separated and diluted. Therefore, one can argue diasporas live straddling between 'here and there'. And, again, mobility, identity and wellbeing are three distinctive yet highly interconnected aspects of diaspora. For example, diasporas moving within and between the host country and homeland of origin significantly involve physical movement, representation and practice fused with experiences. These thus shape what diaspora means, its identity. Moreover, it is worth distinguishing between host and homeland countries because not all diasporas become internationally mobile. For example, in the UK the mobility of diaspora members with rejected asylum cases is limited within the country, and because of their social, political and economic marginality, they are invisible in diaspora studies.

Diaspora is a growing research area, and some scholars identify diaspora by listing the typological characteristics of diasporas (Johnson, 2007; Axel, 2004; Baumann, 2000; Vertovec, 2000; Butler, 2001; Van Hear, 1998; Cohen, 1997; Tölölyan, 1996; Safran, 1991). In the available literature, the concept diaspora is often defined in association with paradigmatic cases, primarily the classic examples of the Jews, the Armenians and the Greeks (Safran, 1991). Until recently, dictionaries defined diaspora with reference to the Jewish diaspora (Sheffer, 2003). The concept of diaspora was for long about the particular case of Jewish exile and dispersion from historic homelands throughout the world (Baumann 2000; Safran, 1991). According to Safran, the concept signifies the moral degradation implied by that dispersion:



diaspora is increasingly used as a metaphoric designation to include expatriates, expellees, political refugees, immigrants, ethnic minorities and so forth. The 'diaspora' diaspora is evidence of the ever-stretching meaning of diaspora to accommodate all sorts of transnational dispersions (Brubaker 2005, p, 1). Brubaker (2005) stated that multidisciplinary diaspora research had grown by 130% since the 1970s. The use of the term diaspora is also growing outside the academic research, and is increasingly discussed in political rhetoric. Moreover, the term is frequently used by the media and the general public (Story and Walker, 2016). However, in research literature diaspora is conceptualised in different ways. Safran (1991) describes it as homeland-centred, identity-bounded, often with shared experiences. Walker (1988) defines diasporas as 'segments of people living outside the homeland' The term has been extended over recent decades to include all forms of dispersion, even where no migration is involved (Bruneau, 2010). The term is extended to accommodate the idea of African diaspora (Shepperson, 1966), and a trading diaspora which includes transnational mobile trading communities such as the Hausa of Nigeria, Chinese and Indians (Armstrong, 1976). Furthermore, diaspora is also used more abstractly, for example, Islam in diaspora (Saint-Blancat, 2001) and Reimagining Islam in diaspora (Mandville, 2001) differ from analysis of Muslims in diaspora. The Jewish model was used to express the Palestinian dispersion as the 'victim diaspora' (Cohen, 1997). Clifford (1994; cited in Brubaker, 2005, p, 3), suggested the Jewish case 'can be taken as a non-normative starting point for a discourse travelling or hybridising in a new global condition'. This makes the Jewish case a one-size model to fit all cases.

Furthermore, a segment of people living outside their homeland may also be a diaspora even if they have been widely assimilated - the Italian diaspora has been conceptualised in this sense (Brubaker, 2005). Diaspora has also been conceptualised from the political support they provide to the homeland, for example, Kurds, Palestinians, Tamils (Anderson 1998; cited in Brubaker, 2005). Diasporas have also been conceptualised from their social ties and economic contribution towards the homeland, for example, Bangladeshi, Filipino, Turkish and Indians (Sheffer, 2003). Therefore, one can argue that the primacy of the Jewish model and the ever-expanding meaning of the term diaspora lead to ever-evolving,

imprecise conceptualisations. The following section presents contemporary debates about diasporas in relation to identity formation and homeland.

### **2.11. Criteria of diaspora identity formation and homeland debates**

Criteria of diaspora and attempts to investigate what makes diasporic consciousness are long-standing debates among geographers and other social scientists. Many researchers attempt to analyse diaspora. For example, Safran (1991) defined diaspora as homeland-centred social formation infused with collective identity and shared experiences: diaspora is based on commonalities and the maintenance of the ancestral homeland. Vertovec (1997) argued in response that diaspora is a social form of consciousness and mode of cultural production. For Butler (2001) diaspora is social formation based on shared commonalities. And according to Clifford (1997), diaspora is an experience of fluidity and hybridity. This means diaspora is the product of social interaction in space and time. Brubaker (2005) wrote 'diaspora is unbounded'. Sökefeld (2006; cited in Mavroudi, 2007), defined diaspora as the product or instance of a mobilisation process, rather than an entity. Furthermore, Brubaker, (2005) argued that diaspora is a formation of identities and loyalties based on what he called 'boundary-maintenance', though added that it is fruitful to analyse the diasporic 'stance, idiom and claim', rather than the diaspora as bounded or unbounded. Mavroudi (2007) called diaspora a process, a flexible and dynamic negotiation of 'collective, strategic and politicised identities' based on 'sameness', within which individual identities are 'malleable, hybrid and multiple'.

The work of the above researchers shows the formation of diaspora shares some 'sameness' among the members and primarily this formation can be grouped as: 1) 'Diaspora as bounded': homeland-centred, commonalities-bounded social structure. 2) 'Diaspora as unbounded': a fluid and transient state that describes an experience rather than a particular population. Therefore, 'unbounded'. 3) 'Diaspora as process': a socially constructed status claimed by the diaspora and expressed by the other.

The definition of diaspora by Connor Walker to include all people living outside their homeland and William Safran's suggested characteristics entitle widespread minorities to be regarded as diasporic communities. Several minorities living

outside of their 'original homeland' describe themselves as diaspora, and the governments of their original countries recognise them as diasporic communities, although they do not fit the original meaning. Members of diaspora communities share several common ties:

1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original 'centre' to two or more 'peripheral,' or foreign, regions; 2) they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland, its physical location, history, and achievements; 3) they believe that they are not and perhaps cannot be fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it; 4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return when conditions are appropriate; 5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and 6) they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship.

The diaspora as bounded discourse stresses the centrality of home and fixity. One can argue the 'bounded' view of diaspora its formation from sedentary societies and shows little consideration for a mobile population such as stateless and nomadic pastoral societies for whom the ancestral homeland is a 'blurred homeland' stretched between several sovereign countries. Brubaker (2005) and Pasura (2010) characterise three major factors shaping the formation of any diaspora, and these differentiate it from other similar phenomena: 1) history of dispersal, primarily involving cross-border dispersal from the demarcated homeland. 2) boundary-maintenance: maintaining a collective identity distinct from host societies. According to Armstrong (1976; cited in Brubaker, 2005), boundary-maintenance can be self-enforced segregation against assimilation in host communities. Indeed, though it can also be the result of boundary-enforcement by host societies. As Laitin (1995) argued boundary-maintenance may be an unintended consequence of social exclusion. 3) attachments to the country of origin, for example through myths, memories and the desire for return. This means diaspora-orientation to the homeland is used as a source of collective identity and solidarity away from home.

A recent study (Story and Walker, 2016) argued that diasporas' claims to shared commonalities such as cultural, social, symbolic linguistic features distinguish them from others and provide them with internal cohesion. Moreover, the commonalities are often invoked to encourage solidarity in the host country and to sustain links with the remembered homeland. Critiques of the 'home-centred model' claim diasporas are oriented by constant cultural connection to a single source and 'teleology' of return (Clifford, 1997; cited in Brubaker, 2005). Although the critique does not make it explicit, the so-called single source should ultimately include the ancestral homeland. According to the home-centred model, one can argue boundary-maintenance is multidirectional not unidirectional. Diasporas don't therefore exist in isolation from social interaction.

Bruneau (2010) detailed four major types of diasporas, whose organisational structure is influenced by domains such as the nation of origin, religion, enterprise, politics and a combination of 'race' and culture: this means diasporas exist by maintaining the shared bond between those who want to group together and manage relations with other groups which, although dispersed elsewhere, invoke a collective identity (Bruneau, 2010). Yet not every diaspora community invokes a clearly-demarcated 'home' nation, and this remains a challenge for geographers to investigate. For example, diasporic communities who are unable to articulate the 'exact' home country claim a continental or regional homeland. Such diasporas trace their identity and ethnicity to a 'vague homeland' and invoke traumatic collective experiences and memories. The Africa-Caribbean diaspora frames no simple relationship between home and host nations (Clifford, 1997; cited in Christou et al., 2016): in this diaspora the 'here' and 'there' is not necessarily a single place or an exclusivist nation. The Africa-Caribbean case helps to illustrate that the term diaspora is not static; rather it is dynamic and its meaning changes across time and space. For example, a pre-colonial African diaspora related to the slave trade organised themselves as the African diaspora, but the diaspora of post-colonial African origin describes themselves as Eritrean diaspora, Nigerian diaspora, Zimbabwean diaspora and so on. However, it is worth mentioning 'country-diasporas', for example, Iraqi, Eritrean, Sudanese, encompass within them ethnocultural diaspora subgroups; geographers might investigate how these subgroups negotiate among each other in the host country.

Diaspora is a 'fluid and transient' state that describes an experience rather than a particular population (Blunt, 2007). Therefore, homeland and boundary-maintenance are not critical to diaspora communities. Describing identity as a hybrid could be an alternative approach to analyse diaspora in the increasingly mobile and interconnected world (Clifford 1997). The notion of hybridity emphasises the continuously making and remaking of identities across time and space. In this thought, identity is represented as 'malleable, ever-changing and always-in-the-making' (Hall, 1990; Minhha, 1991; Anzaldua, 1999; cited in Mavroudi, 2007). However, the notion of identity as ever-changing may disconnect the diasporas from their past, and base them on something that lacks necessary foundation. Brubaker (2005) questioned the hybridity and unboundedness discourse, asking how distinctive identities can emerge if all is 'hybrid, fluid, creolized and syncretic'.

Mavroudi (2007) in support of unboundedness asserts the always-in-the-making, flexible and unstable nature of identities and culture. Moreover, critiques of diaspora as bounded argue migration, globalisation and an increasingly mobile world undermines home as a static concept. In the period of globalisation, 'people become migrants of identity and home becomes movement' (Rapport and Dawson, 1998; cited in Tilley, 2009, p, 9). This means 'home' like identity, becomes always-in-the-making, generated by the diaspora across time and space. According to Tilley (2009, p, 9), this more complex concept of home treats identity as an 'unfinished game' and the use of the concept of identity increasingly becomes hybridised and fluid across time and places.

Such views may strength the position of the unbounded tradition, but may also loosen the connection of the diaspora with the homeland of origin or even invalidate the concept of diaspora as a social group based on 'sameness'. Moreover, if diaspora is seen solely from an unbounded position, with the notion of 'home as movement' and identity as hybrid and ever-changing, it may weaken the connection of the diaspora with kin back home and amongst diaspora groups. On the other hand, the significance of frontiers in the experience of the diasporas can easily be expressed as 'places of separation and articulation' (Bennington, 1987; cited in Sarup, 1994, p, 95). This means the presence of a boundary can help the formation, mobilisation

and connection of diaspora across time and places. However, a challenge remains for geographers and other social scientists to articulate the boundary of the contemporary diaspora communities from mobile backgrounds such as nomadic pastoralists from a 'blurred homeland' and for those from 'unspecified homelands' for example people from contested state border regions.

Research has discussed 'diaspora as process' as an alternative means of understanding diaspora formation. 'Diaspora as process' primarily debates the construction of identity in relation to '(de)construction' boundaries in which time, space and place are seen as bounded and unbounded (Mavroudi, 2007). Ní Loaire (2003; cited in Mavroudi, 2007) states that 'understanding diaspora practices and identities requires understanding their location in geographical, historical and material process'. It may though be more fruitful if 'process' discourses investigate diasporas' identity negotiation and their social location within their recipient communities and sending communities. In other words, it remains a challenge for geographers to explore the experiences of diasporization and its implications for identity and wellbeing in the host country. It is apparent from the available literature the debate on diaspora identities stagnated with the bounded and unbounded discourses. Perhaps geographers need to move beyond this debate: as Mavroudi (2007) argues, geographers have to move on to explore the dynamic and complex diaspora negotiation of identities across place, space and time.

Discussion of diaspora as process draws attention to geographically grounded analyses of the diaspora. Supporters of this perspective hope to explore the construction of diaspora identities in time, place and space. This may include exploring diaspora network connections in other locations, rather than treating it as linked only with the homeland. As argued by Werbner (2004) and Story and Walker (2016) diaspora not only recognises a collective responsibility to its home-country but also to 'co-ethnics' networks in other far-flung locations. According to the available literature diaspora may originate as bounded, develop as unbounded, and transform itself as process. Geographers may explore where that process might lead diaspora communities in the future.

## **2.12. Diasporic and ancestral homeland return**

Diasporic ancestral homeland return appears under different names in research literature and its motives and experiences are attached to many ends. Returners to home are often tourists holidaying in their ancestors' lands to reconnect to their past. Among the diaspora of Chinese origin in North America Elle Li and McKerracher (2016) found home return travel generated positive, neutral and negative reactions to cultural identity and place attachment. Home travel is vital in the management of kinship over a long distance: kinship visits have 'a particular symbolic and practical significance in the maintenance of transnational kin relationship' (Mason, 2004). Even after the diaspora returns to the host country kinship management remains vital. For example, to strengthen bonds, the diaspora and their back-home kin exchange gifts and share ideas and experiences using modern technology. Furthermore, remittance diasporas may participate in their kin's everyday practices. Visiting family and friends and familiar places integrates emotions and memory, reconnecting the diaspora to their past (Pearce, 2012) and to their cultural identity and roots (Fourie and Santana-Gallego, 2013).

Germans of Polish and Eastern European origin visited their ancestral homeland as homesick tourists (Marshall, 2015): revisiting favourite childhood places revived memory, identity and belonging. Pelliccia (2016) likewise found tourism among a second generation Greek diaspora in Italy was 'crammed with a much deeper meaning as there are transnational practices aimed at vesting relatives and friends, the desire to find cultural roots and relocating cultural identities'. And for Korean-American diaspora college students, travel to their ancestral homeland helped them confirm their ethnic identity as Koreans, or change their identity to Korean-Americans and some even altered their identity to Korean (Kim and Stodolska, 2013).

Diaspora is often understood as segments of people living between two societies (the host and the homeland), but it maybe they live on the periphery of the two. The diaspora may in fact maintain distance from both host and ancestral homeland societies. Consequently, the diaspora may lose cultural, political or economic relations with the country of origin, while social exclusion in the host country may provoke a crisis of identity and diminishing sense of belonging. Lack of community

networks and connections with the country of origin can influence diaspora identity formation, and may contribute to the diaspora's vulnerability (Al Raffie, 2012); failure of integration can render diaspora communities fragmented and vulnerable (Zimmermann and Rosenau, 2009). Diasporic return to ancestral homeland has been popular for so long, and much has been written about it, including the impact of return home travel on identity, place attachments and belonging. However, its impact on the kinship migration decision is under-explored for example, diaspora choice of destinations is not random: usually 'new' migrants follow previously established migratory routes and destinations (Dufoix, 2000). This is another strand of the intertwined experiences of the diasporas and their kinship in the homeland, as yet not fully studied.

### **2.13. Conclusion**

This section has provided the history of the concept of diaspora across time, in which the term stretched to encompass all segments of people living away from their ancestral homeland and leaving it lacking precision. The analysis of 'diaspora as unbounded' and 'diaspora as process' challenges the long-standing 'diaspora as bounded' tradition which statically categorises diaspora as 'homeland-state', 'ethnicity', 'community' and 'place-bounded' entity. 'Diaspora as unbounded' discourses treat diaspora identity formation as open-ended: 'hybrid, malleable, ever-changing and always-in the making'; and home is seen as a movement. 'Diaspora as process' critics argue the need to analyse diaspora as process and practices grounded on geographical locations, time and space.

This section also posed several important questions. For example, it challenges geographers to explore how diasporisation experiences affect the reconstruction of identity and wellbeing in the host country. The previous literature portrays diaspora homeland return as having distinct travel motives. As tourists visiting family and friends, homeland returners may reconnect with their ancestral identity and places. But homeland return may have intertwined motives and experiences for both the diaspora and the homeland kin, and this would be one more interesting area for geographers to explore. The following chapter elaborates methods employed in this study and their advantages and limitations.



## Chapter Three

### Methodology and Methods

#### 3.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the systematic and rigorous approach taken in this study to gathering and analysing data in order to address its key aims and research questions. The nature of the research problem must underpin philosophical assumptions and methodological choices. To address how (im)mobilities influence the making of identity and the conceptualization of well-being among Beni-Amer pastoralists and their diasporic communities across time and space, fieldwork was carried out to gather data related to the experiences, emotions and attitudes of the research participants; thus, imaginations and accounts are investigated using qualitative rather than quantitative methods (Creswell, 2013). The study tracked thirteen Beni-Amer family networks between November 2014 and May 2015. To investigate the multiple spatialities and temporalities of their experiences qualitative data were gathered through in-depth face-to-face interviews and remote-interviewing, focus-group discussions in three locations, and participant observation. The data were transcribed, translated and coded for thematic analysis.

The chapter is structured into six sections. Following an outline of the chapter's main arguments (3.1), Section 3.2 examines philosophical positionalities: particularly the insider-outsider debate. As we shall see below, I explicitly state my insider position. As a member of Beni-Amer communities I have experienced similar predicaments to those encountered by some of my research participants; I confess my position as an insider researcher was at times problematic. Indeed, I experienced an overlapping and dual internal position with several pros and cons. Therefore, being an insider researcher does not mean automatic access to the life of respondents; instead, it is a challenging position which requires constant negotiation as a researcher and with shared ties and experiences as the researched. I argue in the thesis that insider researchers may share experiences similar to that of their respondents, but a researcher cannot precisely hold the '*true central position*' owned by the respondent. To be sure, that must be understood as the life of the respondent only; thus, it is the 'life of the other', and only an insider researcher

could impose their values on their respondents should they fail to recognise their shifting position as a researcher. Indeed, acknowledgment of the continually shifting positions held by the researcher could safeguard the analysis from being contaminated by the value of the researcher or by the institutions to which they belong. Section 3.3 considers the rationale for using qualitative methodology and related methods; section 3.4 covers data collection matters. Section 3.5 addresses issues relating to data analysis. The chapter concludes by summarising the main arguments discussed.

### **3.2. Philosophical positionality and justification**

Researching phenomena, actions, ideas and concepts requires a philosophical standpoint from which to view them. Jackson (2013, p. 49) argues that philosophical underpinning is crucial for shaping research design and for its ultimate effectiveness. Hubbard et al. (2010) describe philosophy as theories about theory. Scientific knowledge is based on the principle that the world can only be truly known and understood through the implementation of systematic scientific methods that are logical and rational. However, science's 'claims to know' have been challenged in various ways. For example, beliefs concerning truth, objectivity and value-free practice have been shown to be open to contestation. Indeed, one can argue that in social scientific research there is no single truth; rather, reality is multiple, subjective and research 'truths' often not replicable.

Social science disciplines have struggled to adopt scientific methods. The discipline of Human Geography adapted interpretative frameworks from the Humanities (Hubbard et al., 2010; cited in Johnston and Sidaway, 2015, pp. 169-72). The contested epistemology within Geography opened an intense and ongoing debate among geographers. Throughout the history of the subject geographers have used a variety of knowledge-acquisition approaches. To name a few, they include positivist epistemology during the quantitative revolution of the 1960s (Harvey, 1969; Hill, 1981); structuralist, Marxist, and structurationist traditions (Cloke et al., 1991; Taaffe, 1993). Postmodernists or 'counter-modernists' maintain that all geographic phenomena are social constructions (Soja, 2001a; cited in Johnston and Sidaway, 2015). The interpretivist paradigm proposes that various elements intersect and interact in multiple ways, producing outcomes with no universal directionality

(Wood, 2015). Interpretive approaches recognise that similar events can be given very different but equally valid interpretations (Buttimer, 1974; Tuan, 1976; Jackson, 1989), thus challenging the positivist approach to scientific truth. This study aims to explore complex social issues which require all-encompassing flexible approaches. Thus, its research is conceptualised under the umbrella of the interpretative research tradition for its suitability to the research problem and aim. This is because to answer the research question, collection and analysis of qualitative data about how informants understand their situation was required. Smith (2003) argues that to function, human beings must construct and live 'within' the world of multiple meanings.

Interpretative methods of research start from the position that our knowledge of reality, including the domain of human action, is a social construction by human actors and that this applies equally to researchers (Walsham, 1993; Walsham, 2006). Thus, there is no objective reality which could be discovered by scientists and replicated by others, in contrast to the assumptions of positivist science (Walsham, 2006): 'reality' is what arises from the meanings individuals assign to the world around them, and the interpretive researcher's task is to access those meanings (Andrade, 2009). Interpretative research provides more opportunities for the development and progress of knowledge as it views more phenomena in the world that cannot be experimentally tested. For example, phenomenology regards the social world as made up of emotions, organisations and opinions which are made by human beings like us (Alfred Schuetz 1944; cited in Smith, 2003, p. 17).

Understanding of the contemporary situation and experiences of Beni-Amer communities was most meaningfully accomplished utilising interpretative approaches. It would be impossible to do so through positivist logic, which believes that scientific knowledge can only be established from empirical evidence. Empiricist accounts are primarily geared towards providing scientific explanations of distinct social objects rather than attempting to understand the meaning of social relationships and processes. Smith (2003) maintains empiricist approaches to theory and observation should be treated as two separate and distinct things. This highlights the limitations positivist approaches place on knowledge production when peoples' experience, emotions, and attitudes are the sources of research data.

For instance, to investigate the challenges facing Beni-Amer communities, study participants' experiences and meanings were best captured through observation, walking-along in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. These methods provided the opportunities for respondents to express and analyse their own experiences. Walsham (2006) justifies qualitative methods such as interviews in interpretative research as the primary data source. For Walsham it is through interviews that the researcher can best access participants' interpretations of actions and events in their past or present.

However, despite their value interpretative approaches are not without limitations. For instance, the researcher/researched and outsider/insider positions contain inherent difficulties in interpretative study. These are discussed below in the context of insider-outsider debate. Many approaches to social research disagree about the precise role of imaginative interpretation of experience; however, all social research approaches agree it is impossible to separate objective truths from the mental constructs people use to organise and understand their perceptions. According to Smith (2003) without such mental constructs, people simply cannot make sense of the complex world around them. Therefore, in aiming to unravel the imaginations, experiences, emotions and attitudes of the research participants, this study is qualitative in nature, based on the words and body language participants used to express their feelings to the researcher. This process does create overlapping rapport between researcher and the research participants, which is discussed later in this chapter. Thus, in this study, philosophical coherence informed the choices made regarding overall methodology and specific methods: the use of qualitative methodology and methods is justified by the very nature of the research questions. The next section presents the value problem in the context of the insider-outsider debate by reflecting on my own experience drawn from the fieldwork in the study.

### **3.2.1. Value positionality: insider-outsider debate while researching communities**

The understanding of social processes involves getting inside the world of those generating them (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991). To do this remains challenging to social scientists. For example, Smith (1998) explains how when social scientists

study the family, education or culture, they are part and parcel of these very things. Although there is a long-standing assumption that insider researchers are better situated than outsiders to carry out research on their social group, my own experience shows being an insider has some advantages, such as knowledge of the local culture and language, but it does not mean automatic access to data. Indeed, being an insider doesn't mean there is objective 'data' (truth) there ready to be collected.

Many scholars have suggested possible links between everyday experience and social scientific research. For example, Alfred Schuetz in 1944 suggested the standpoint of the 'stranger'. He argued that this position could provide social researchers with a middle standing while conducting qualitative research. The 'stranger' perspective serves as a way of grounding social science in human processes and relationships (Smith, 2003). Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) suggest the best position in the qualitative inquiry is the 'marginal position': neither completely insider nor entirely outsider, but living both in the world of the researcher and the researched. Smith defines the marginal position of ethnographer writing: 'the ethnographer needs to be intellectually poised between familiarity and strangeness'. Of course, the position of the qualitative researcher in relation to the researched is a longstanding debate, but I found myself in the marginal position in the fieldwork simultaneously as researcher and as research participant.

There is much literature devoted to the insider-outsider, researcher-researched debate in qualitative inquiry across multiple disciplines. For instance, in Geography (Rose, 1997; Clark, 1998; Mullings, 1999), Ethnic studies (Beoku-Betts, 1994; De Andrade, 2000), Social work (MacDonald, 1990; Kanuha, 2000), Sociology (Merton, 1972, Griffith, 1998) Education (Mercer, 2007). These researchers all address the challenges to insider researchers in the place they work. Regarding Management, Labaree (2002) studies shared governance in his workplace. Indigenous community is studied by Brayboy and Deyhle (2000). The concept of insiderness evolved from its clear-cut distinction between researcher and researched due to Western anthropologists in the first half of the 20th century: Mead in Samoa and Malinowski in Melanesian New Guinea. In contemporary studies, scholars' focus has moved beyond the methodological dichotomy (Labaree, 2002).

Merton (1972) analysed insiderness-outsiderness in relation to the idea of access, viewing the insider as having privileged access to valuable knowledge of the group under study; otherwise, that information is hidden from the outsider. Merton called the outsider the 'professional stranger' with no intimate knowledge of the group before entry into the field, detached from the commitments of the group. The strength of this position is that the outsider can raise questions unlikely to be raised by an insider researcher, as pointed out by Kauffman (1994) among others. Unlike the outsider, on the other hand, the insider's analysis can be distorted by the connection and their inability to distance themselves from the accounts of the research participants (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1996). Olson (1977, p. 100) sees the dichotomy of insiderness and outsiderness as 'two mutually exclusive frames of reference'.

Arguing against this perspective, Christensen and Dahl (1997) suggest the researcher's occupies a more subtle relation to what they are researching. Deutsch (1981) goes further, arguing that researchers are 'multiple insiders and outsiders'. This would fit the position I found myself in during the data gathering process for this study. Specifically, according to Mullings (1999) the resting position of the qualitative researcher is 'highly unstable'; likewise, Merton (1972) defines the boundaries of the insider-outsider as being 'permeable'.

So how did this apply to my own field work? I found that the boundaries between myself as insider researcher and research participants from my community were constantly shifting. For instance, when we discussed the history of the tribe I mostly occupied the position of listener, while doing my best to put questions that were culturally appropriate; for example, making a clear distinction between probing and interruption. When interviewing the herders, ex-herders, the diasporas and the 'illegalised migrants' my similar personal past forced me to return in time and sometimes the reflection of my past put me into the shoes of the research participants. Many times my own situation resembled the complications encountered by interviewees. Kanuha (2000) in her study of her own social group mentions finding difficulty focusing on the interview process when research participants narrated painful life histories because of her self-reflection on similar events. In the data gathering processes in this study, being an insider provided me

with a dual and mutually purposeful position, both as a researcher and researched. Chavez (2008) argues that outsider researchers may have the advantage of detachment from the researched and insider researchers must learn to manage the influence of being subject and object of their study. Sometimes, in the data gathering process, I found myself detached from my research participants and felt more an outsider than an insider because of my identity and my country of residence in the UK. I even felt detached from the Beni-Amer diaspora life as it involves less association with my community due to having less time to spare for socialisation.

In a more recent study Muhammed et al. (2015) suggests the identities of researchers-researched are complex, multi-layered and dynamic, inter-related and sometimes contradictory. Mercer (2007) argues that the insiderness-outsiderness dichotomy is a continuum with multiple dimensions: 'all researchers continually move back and forth along some axes depending upon time, location, participants and topic'. In my data gathering, I was constantly moving back and forth along the insider-outsider continuum from one site to another, from one topic to another, from one age group to another and even from one conversation to another. This is illustrated in the figure below. The Y axis represents the shared experiences between the respondents and the insider researcher while the X axis represents the time and space between the researcher and respondents since the event of the shared experience. The diagonal (PLWE) line represents the initial point for research participants, events they had lived or witnessed, in other words having first-hand experience of. And the brown circle (PRs) to the left of the purple line represents narrations told to the respondents, for example by parents, but with respondents having no first-hand experience of them. Respondents narrate these stories to the insider researcher, for example when asked about the historical events of the group in the distance past. The red circle to the right of the purple line represents respondents' (Rs) individual experiences and the curved yellow line represents the insider researcher's (IRh) fluctuating positions. In the fieldwork, I found myself shifting positions along the IRh line. When discussing shared experiences, my position became closer to the Rs circle but when respondents narrated individual experiences my position moved farther from it. Thus, the point I would make in this chapter is that insider researchers can come near or slightly attach to the Rs circle, but can never hold a central place within it; if they attempt to

do so their research findings become contaminated by the values they hold or by the values of the institution to which they belong.

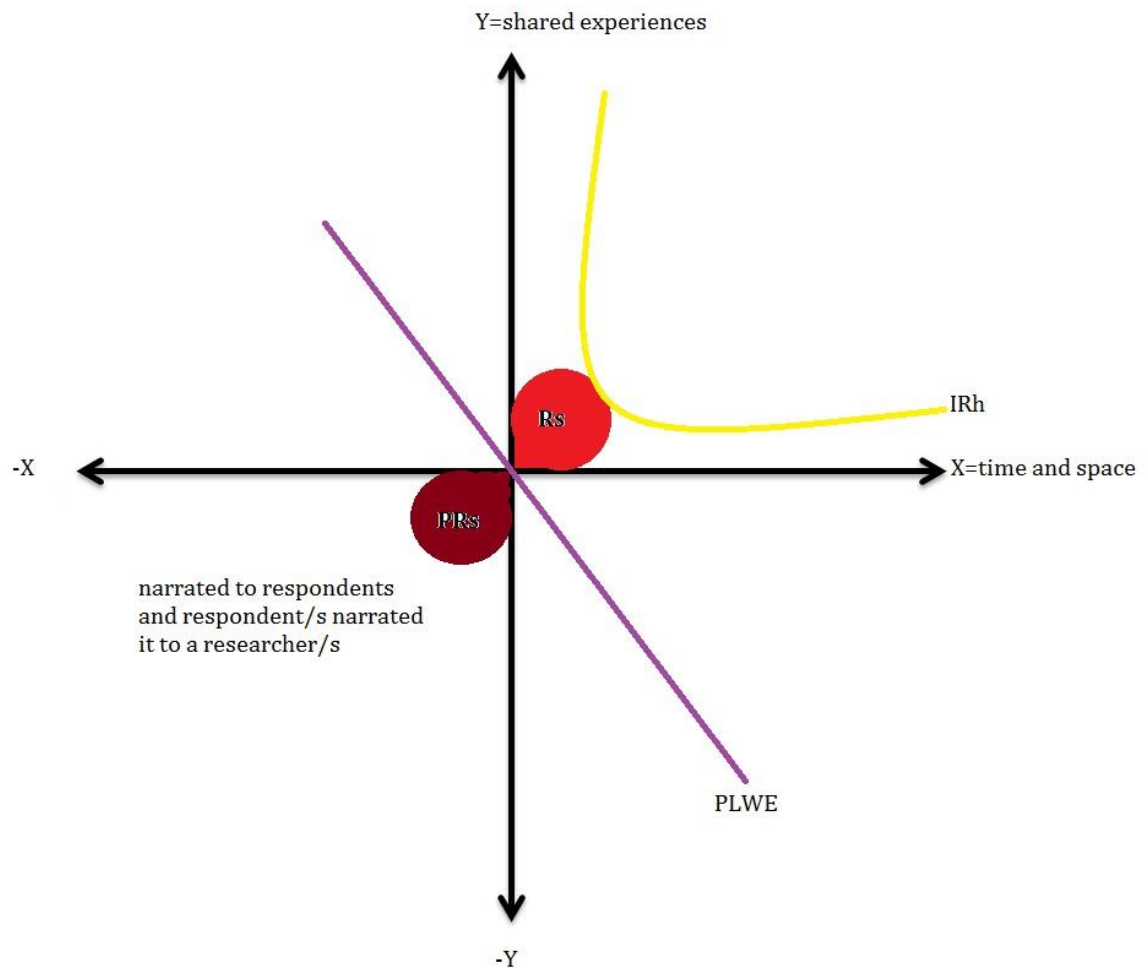


Figure 3.1. Representing insider researcher and respondents' relationship across time and space. (Sketch by the researcher)

My fluctuating position in the field mirrors the findings of many researchers, including Labaree (2002); Mercer (2007); Chavez (2008); Cui (2015); Muhammed et al. (2015). The latter conclude that regardless of whether the researcher is insider or outsider, the 'researcher's relationship with the researched is not static, but fluctuates constantly, shifting back and forth along a continuum of possibilities from one moment to the next and from one location to the next'.

In my data gathering I found being insider meant greater access, flexibility, quick and tension-free rapport, and useful insights for cultural understanding, comfort



and safety, though did not guarantee valid data collection, since this remained not readily available. This brought me to conclude that being the 'son of Beni-Amer is not enough to study the Beni-Amer society'. As Beoku-Betts (1994) puts it, 'black is not enough' to study the black community. Similar statements have been made regarding the study of femaleness (Riessman, 1987; Reay, 1995; cited in Mercer, 2007), or by Zavella (1993) researching his gay community, saying being gay does not give him special access to the life of others.

While it is a traditionally-held assumption that insiderness offers a direct advantage - Ohnuki-Tierney (1984) associates it with being able to reveal hidden knowledge of the researched group - De Andrade (2000) argues more subtly that getting accepted as an insider is a process and that the insider has to negotiate for special rights with the researched. I found myself having constantly to negotiate my researcher position in relation to the moment and my membership of the Beni-Amer community. For example, when respondents were discussing the Eritrean war for independence and the refuge life of the 1980s I tended to forget my position as researcher. Indeed, I felt no geographical, social or economic distance between myself as a PhD student living and working in the UK and the respondents residing in the rangeland of eastern Sudan. But when respondents were discussing the contemporary life of the Beni-Amer I found myself at geographical and social distance from the research participants. In my study having shared experiences with my respondents facilitated the building of trust and this did encourage a more open exchange of information. The value of this greater access was to allow me heart-to-heart of conversation and welcome and unquestioned observation. The value of deeper understanding, my prior knowledge and membership of the community did I believe present me with a clarity of thought. Regarding cultural interpretation, my insider position provided me with variable understanding and interpretation of cultural clues. For instance, my understanding of the proverbs of the Beni-Amer gave me strong knowledge of what the research participants meant in conversations. However, I also faced negative aspects. For instance in my research I had to constantly wrestle with ethical dilemmas associated with open access and trust. The next section discusses the rationale underpinning the methodology and methods used.

### **3.3. Rationale for qualitative methodology and methods**

As asserted earlier the conception of this study underpins the rationale for using qualitative rather than quantitative approaches. Several authors (e.g. Bryman and Crame, 1990; Smith, 2003, pp. 3-5; Cresswell, 2013) argue that quantitative research approaches involve the collection of evidence which is standardised, measurable and comparable; by contrast, comparing and measuring qualitative evidence is difficult. However, most quantitative questions are closed, resulting in limited responses from respondents. By contrast, in qualitative research, most questions are open-ended: respondents can express their opinions and experiences in detail: hence extensive information comes from each respondent. Thus, quantitative research lacks the depth of qualitative research (Smith, 2003, p. 349).

Qualitative and quantitative research methods are often portrayed as representing two different world views (Hammarberg et al., 2016). Quantitative research is commonly considered as hypothesis-driven, objective, therefore scientific. Critics dismiss quantitative research as ‘oversimplifying individual experience in the cause of generalisation’, failing to acknowledge researcher biases and expectations in research design, and requiring guesswork to read the human sense of aggregate data (Hammarberg et al., 2016, p. 498). Whether to use qualitative and quantitative methods separately or together should be driven by the research question. ‘The crucial part is to know when to use what method’ (Hammarberg et al., 2016, p. 498). According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1990) and Denzin and Lincoln (2011) interpretivist methodology based on thematic analysis with its ‘thick description’ of actual context is best suited to address complex social issues. For example, the complex and dynamic socio-political, economic and environmental changes facing the Beni-Amer can only be understood from their experiences and insights, and qualitative methodology and methods most suit this task. Thus, the qualitative approaches in this study were carefully chosen to explore and critically analyse the mobility, homeland, identity and wellbeing across time and space of those under-researched Beni-Amer societies.

Social research involves choosing a substantial number of methods. Thus, often researchers must make difficult choices of method. Saldaña (2015) nicely summarises this:

Qualitative research has evolved into a multidisciplinary enterprise ranging from social science to art form. Yet many instructors of research methods vary in their allegiances, preferences, and prescriptions for how to conduct fieldwork and how to write about it. I myself take a pragmatic stance toward human inquiry and leave myself open to choosing the right tool for the right job; sometimes a poem says it best; sometimes a data matrix does. Sometimes words say it best; sometimes numbers do. The more well versed you are in the field's eclectic methods of investigation, the better your ability to understand the diverse patterns and complex meanings of social life (Saldaña, 2015, p. 3).

Indeed, research questions are context-specific. Addressing them requires understanding of the ontological background of the research problem. Therefore, spontaneously the 'right' epistemological approach emerges, and therefore appropriate methods can be selected. In this study, the research problem is a complex social issue. Its background comprises various social-political and environmental dynamics threatening pastoralism among the Beni-Amer, in turn affecting their wellbeing, identity and homeland attachments; therefore, its understanding requires capturing the experiences, attitudes and imaginations of the Beni-Amer; this is qualitative research, though used with appropriate flexibility. Qualitative researching has an extraordinary set of strengths. 'It engages researchers with things that matter in the way it matters' (Mason, 2002, p. 1); and it aims to produce rounded and contextual understanding based on rich, nuanced and detailed data (Mason, 2002). For this study, in-depth interviews were optimal for collecting data on the individuals' personal histories, perspectives and experiences. During interviews participants discussed their life course in-depth including sensitive issues about themselves and their households, sensitive topics they could not discuss in group discussions. The researcher used focus groups to generate broad overviews of the challenges and opportunities facing the Beni-Amer. For example, one group formed from Beni-Amer elderly people helped to reconstruct

the most important historical events and their impacts on the Beni-Amer. The following subsections present the methods employed in this study.

### **3.3.1. Ethnography: participant observation**

The term ethnography lacks consensual definition. According to Lambert (2010), ethnographers are in the early stages of defining what ethnography is and how it works. For instance, Spradley (2016) explains ethnography as a way to appreciate another way of life from a native point of view. Many researchers are totally committed to it; for others, it is simply a method that one uses as and when suitable (Spradley, 1984). Certain researchers employ the term 'folk description' to emphasise that they are examining and making sense of an alien world (Agar, 1986). Some concept of culture always informs ethnography. Ethnographic research involves the use of various techniques for collecting data on human beliefs, values and practice (Hume and Mulcock, 2004). Hammersely and Atkinson (2007) argue that lack of a well-established standard definition is due to ethnography's complicated history; nonetheless, it is field-orientated cultural interpretation, and the lack of unified definition should not undermine its validity. One can argue ethnography is the way ethnographers systematically write their 'thick' description from their organic data collected through participant observation and other methods.

Participant observation means employing one's eyes and ears to understand what is going on in any social setting; it is a major aspect of qualitative research (Silverman, 2010). Indeed, ethnography often involves some form of direct observation. Furthermore, researchers can be 'external' observing participants but not participating or 'internal' observing participants, i.e. to be part of the context being observed, which was my position in the fieldwork. In east Kassala I herded with herders, watering and milking with them (see figure 3.2).



Figure 3.2. East Kassala rangeland cattle herd (Photo automated camera, 9 January 2015).

In Kassala city I observed Beni-Amer daily activities and several social events (see figure 3.3). Similarly, in the diaspora I attended community gatherings, political debates and social events. In short, in the fieldwork I was observing and participating in the everyday life of the research participants.



Figure 3.3. Participant observation, Kassala city ((Photo credit, Eh 17) 19 January 2015)

In the fieldwork, my position resembled what Yeats (2003) describes as 'internal' observation, a classic method of social anthropology. But it also went a step further: I termed it 'dual internal'; this is because I was exploring the social life and the social process in the community of which I am a member, employing my eyes and ears as an internal observer. My fieldwork created an overlapping inner position, and it was a significantly challenging task. I argue what I have named 'dual-internal' is a problematic position for social researchers but does allow methodologists to make a vital contribution. I have explained the complexity I encountered in this regard (see the insiderness/outsiderness section above). One can argue ethnography is inherently Western: comprising Western researchers having adventures in faraway and exotic places. The root of the term extends to nineteenth century 'Western anthropology, where an ethnography was a descriptive account of a community or culture, usually one outside the West' (Hammersely and Atkinson, 2007, pp. 1-2). Moreover, ethnography books are written *by* Western ethnographers *for* Western ethnographers, largely ignoring non-Western students who want to pursue ethnographic study in their own communities for example, for me as a member of the community I explored in the fieldwork, ethnography was not an adventure, it was a reflection and reconnection to the everyday social life of my community.

As Hammersely and Atkinson (2007) suggest, it makes sense to ask what ethnographers do rather than what ethnography means. Regarding data collection, ethnography involves participant observation, living with research participants, observing what they do and listening to what they say, asking questions informally and/or formally as necessary. As explained above, 'internal' participant observation involves the researcher partaking directly in the social setting to collect data in a systematic manner (Delamont, 2004, p, 218). Although I was exploring my community, this does not mean I knew everything about its social fabric nor that I saw it from a researcher's eye before this study. Therefore, participant observation was relevant to this project because it provided 'right' opportunities with a fresh eye and ears to understand the contemporary challenges facing the Beni-Amer 'from inside' the homeland and the diaspora.

Certainly, participant observation is not a technique, but being 'there' in the field at the right time researchers might identify something that is not considered in

interviews or focus groups. Countless valuable occasions will remain hidden unless observed in 'real' life. For example, I observed a herder participant reacting emotionally when receiving a mobile phone call from a peer, an ex-herder who now lives in the UK. The participant spoke for 32 minutes with his diasporic peer; while conversing he drew on the ground using his stick. When the call ended I examined the drawing: it looked abstract, with straight lines, zigzags and circles. I took a photo of it and asked the participant what he meant by his drawing. He said, 'I was so immersed in the conversation with my friend I was writing his name and making lines and circles around it'. In a comparable situation later in the UK in an internet cafe I observed a participant telephoning a relative who was in Khartoum on his way to Libya. The respondent was holding a pen in his hand, drawing on the table while talking on the phone. I was astounded by what I observed when he ended his 56-minute conversation: he had drawn an abstract of straight lines, zigzags and several circles and scribbles, much like the one I observed in east Kassala. I asked this participant formally what his drawing meant. He replied, 'I felt stressed and I was writing people and place names and scribbled it many times' (see figure 3.4 and 3.5 below). The drawings' meaning might have more to do with psychology than geography; I present this in chapter seven. Suffice to say, such moments cannot be captured in interviews. It is interesting to be 'there' when events happen and intersect, often speaking more than words.

'What people say?

What people do

And what people say they do are entirely different things' Margaret Mead (1901-1978) an anthropologist (Sarah, 2006). Observing research participants in their natural setting might increase the researcher's opportunity to inspect the difference between what people do and say.





Figure 3.4. Scribbled drawing by a respondent in eastern Kassala (Photo by the researcher, 20 January 2015)



Figure 3.5. Scribbled drawing by a respondent in the diaspora (Photo by the researcher, 18 May 2015)



In fieldwork I followed participants in an unstructured style rather than creating structured situations to observe, thus using an interpretist/naturalistic paradigm (Ahmad et al., 2017). The data often comprised messy fieldnotes at the time, but by sorting them thematically I found a way to make sense of them and eventually they became important building blocks of the thesis. I also occasionally made audio and video recordings while taking part in participants' daily activities. As an insider I had 'open' access and trust from my community but this brings with it complicated ethical problems. The phrase 'from the inside' automatically triggers issues of privacy and confidentiality and trust brings with it moral responsibility to do no harm. Flowerdew and Martin (2005) argue that participant observation requires several serious practical and academic considerations during the study period. To name a few: ways of access to communities within which research can take place; identities the researcher can adopt; ethics of images; and ethics of observation. This applies also to the analysis and writing process: confidentiality is crucial, nothing should be given to a third party without participants' informed consent.

Observational ethnography depends so much on the context, and it can reveal important discoveries which can lead researchers in previously unexpected directions (Flowerdew and Martin, 2005). From my fieldwork experience in east Kassala rangeland, for example, I saw pickup land-cruiser vehicles driven at high speed, yet accelerating further when approaching police checkpoints. When I asked casually about them, I was told they belonged to human smugglers, were fully armed with modern weaponry, and were smuggling their human cargo from Eritrea to Khartoum. This was the 'headwaters', the start of the precarious illegal migration to the EU via the Sahara desert and the Mediterranean sea. Illegalised migrants from anywhere in Eritrea to Khartoum paid a minimum 4,700 US dollars per head at that time. I felt impelled to seek more information regarding this 'newly' emerging problem encountered in fieldwork, so set a new research question to address the issue. Thus, gradually I found myself carried in an unpredicted direction which could have resulted in an entirely different study from my research proposal. The next section presents in-depth-walking-along interviews in the context of my experiences.

### **3.3.2. In-depth-walking-along interview**

Qualitative interviewing is broadly categorised as in-depth, semi-structured or loosely structured (Mason, 2002). It has been defined as a ‘conversation with a purpose’ (Burgess, 1984, p. 102). It might be better to describe interviewing as a conversation with a special purpose systematically tending towards specific topics, rather than establishing a false boundary between purposive or non-purposive conversations. In this study, in-depth interviewing was one of the primary methods of data collection. I interviewed 91 participants between November 2014 and May 2015 (see appendix 3a). Prominent ethnographers such as Malinowski emphasise the importance of in-depth interviews to grasp respondents’ views (Legard et al., 2003, p. 138). Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, p. 126) define interviews as the most valuable resources to illuminate meaning about any ‘aspect of the world, including itself’. Therefore, interviewing is a fundamental process in the construction of knowledge about the social world (Rorty 1980; Rubin, 1995; Legard et al., 2003).

Diverse perspectives on interviewing exist. The central debates question whether knowledge is constructed in the interview or is a pre-existing phenomenon. Moreover, there is also a long-standing debate about what role the interviewer should hold, whether being active or remaining passive in the conversation (Legard et al., 2003). Furthermore, Kvale (1996) suggests two metaphors regarding interviewers’ positions in in-depth interviews. First, the ‘miner metaphor’ in which the interviewer is acting like a miner, with knowledge like buried metal: the interviewer unearths the valuable knowledge from the interviewees through the process of interview. Second, the ‘traveller metaphor’ models the constructivist approach which views knowledge as given, but created and negotiated (Kvale, 1996, p. 3; cited in Legard et al., 2003, p. 144). Therefore, interviewers are travellers, developing the stories of the interviewees and interpreting them, hence constructing knowledge in collaboration. Douglass and Moustakas (1985, p. 140; cited in Legard et al., 2003, p. 142) argue that interviewing is a collaboration between interviewer and interviewee negotiating in the process the construction of knowledge. A feminist view of interviewing is as a process of reciprocity with no hierarchy and less stark distinction between researcher and participant (Olesen,

2000; Reinharz, 1992; Oakley, 1981; cited in Legard, 2003, pp. 138-40). In this study I found myself in shifting positions, moving back and forth along a continuum of possibilities, and from researcher to researched and from insider to outsider.

In recent decades methods of interviewing have multiplied, including from conventional sedentary to mobile forms. Several authors use mobile approaches to interviewing. Hein et al. (2008, p. 1268) argue being in motion prompts a different kind of engagement with the world than being stationary, and so stimulates different kinds of knowledge and identity. It is critical to understand the links between people and their places (Frisby and Featherstone, 1997); Phillips (2005) explains different kinds of movement: on one hand, walking as embodied, as in walking to experience an external place; and on the other, disembodied, as in walking internally to the self as contemplation. In this study walking-along interviews were used not for the sake of walking as an external experience but to recuperate disembodied walking toward the feelings and sentiments of the interviewee by conducting in-depth interviews in the respondent's environments. This helped capture the way respondents value their environment, triggering emotional feelings and 'solastalgia' (sadness prompted by 'lost' environment) by witnessing, walking on and talking about the dynamically transforming environment and their lives there. It makes sense to interview mobile subjects such as the Beni-Amer herders using mobile interviewing methods.

In-depth interviews can combine flexibility with structure (Legard et al., 2003, p. 141). Indeed, even in the most unstructured interviews researchers often have some sense of themes, topics or issues they wish to investigate. For example, in this study, I prepared a mental guide to the topics I wanted to explore before entering actual interviews. However, the structures were deliberately made appropriately flexible to allow respondents to answer questions fairly freely and for the researcher to probe if necessary. This does not mean the stages of the interview process were not carefully managed; it means I asked initial questions in such a way as to encourage respondents to express their views and listened carefully, following up without interrupting the conversational flow. Thus, interviews were an interactive process between interviewer and interviewees. For example, in 7 out of the 91 interviews conversations went broadly and at other times became very narrowly focused. This

was clearly irrelevant to the purpose of the study, so I moved the conversation back to the topic through a technique I had learned from previous interviews: I call it 'backdoor' technique, to manoeuvre the conversation towards the benefit of the research. Certainly, when I was manoeuvring the conversation I did not intend to manipulate the conversation to confirm what I already knew; rather I meant to prevent it going too widely amiss.

During the in-depth interviews opportunities spontaneously arose for probing. However, in traditional societies like the Beni-Amer, it is important to distinguish between probing and interrupting: it is not culturally acceptable to interrupt while others are talking; it is considered good practice to give people space to finish talking and listen to them prudently without being judgemental. Indeed, this was also helpful in the interviews because active probing requires the interviewer to be a careful listener too. One can argue listening in interviews goes far beyond the act of hearing as it requires 'full' immersion in the conversation while managing the interviewing process and remaining alert to probing opportunities. Legard et al. (2003, p. 144) suggest that during interviews even analysis should be deliberately set aside so that the interviewer focuses on listening and responding. I often put myself into a listener position after posing a question, but in fact I found the dichotomy between interview and analysis to be artificial.

Interviews and analysis are intrinsically entangled and recognising this can help the researcher to keep on track and swiftly move through the stages of the interview process. For example, in initial questions, respondents might give only superficial answers, and the interview might resemble natural dialogue, but if the researcher loses track of the analysis, they could end up collecting unrelated data and asking inappropriate questions. Thus, good listening was important in two ways. First, it was impossible to follow important points made by the respondents without sensibly listening; second, listening often goes with concentration which is important to make sense of the non-verbal and non-recordable aspects of the interviews. For example, spoken words can be recorded, but interviews encompass non-verbal elements such as facial expressions and other body language careful observation of non-verbal elements influenced my response in the interviews, analysis and writing of the research outcomes.

As indicated above, the how and where of interviews for this study were flexible. Sometimes interviews were conducted in respondents' homes seated around a coffee gathering and sometimes while walking, herding or travelling with the interviewees. I used walking-along-interview techniques according to the interviewees' daily routines and engaged in conversation while interviewees were doing something else such as herding or watering if that was their preference (see figure 3.6).



Figure 3.6. Walking-along interview, east Kassala rangeland ((photo credit, Eh9) 9 January 2015)

The spirit of movement can take the methods of data-gathering nearer to the respondents than the traditional sedentary interview allows (Hein et al., 2008). Further, mobility while interviewing can aid the researcher's understanding of the respondents' environment. Moreover, removing the feeling of formality in the traditional non-mobile interview puts respondents at ease, improving the flow of information. For example, in the traditional interview respondents were observed to be tense, conversation slow as respondents attempted to offer 'exact' answers, and in danger of stopping. Likewise, Hitchings and Jones (2004) find information given outside while walking with respondents to be different from interviews inside. In this study, in walking-along in interviews in natural settings information positively flowed while it trickled in the formal-sedentary-interviews. Several

drawbacks were found while doing walking-along interviews, such as practical problems of sound recording, note-taking and their destruction; this limitation was minimised by placing the recorder in the top pocket nearest to the mouth of interviewer and interviewee. Taking notes at intervals was helpful and being proactive to open conversation can help to move attention away from these items. The next section presents the advantages and disadvantages of remote-interviewing as my first-hand experience in the context of illegalised migrant mobility in the in-between from Sudan via the Sahara desert to Libya and via the central Mediterranean to the EU.

### **3.3.3. Remote-interviewing: mobile phone interviews of illegalised migrants on the move**

Traditionally face-to-face interviews are considered the 'gold standard' regarding rigour, validity, rapport and cultural cues (McCoyd and Kerson, 2006; Deakin and Wakefield, 2013). Many prominent scholars have published critical textbooks about the use of interviews in qualitative inquiry (Limb and Dwyer, 2001; Opdenakker, 2006; Bryman, 2008; 2013; Sedgwick and Spiers, 2009; Dunn, 2010; Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015; Hay 2016; Silverman, 2016). A small but significant literature is also available for computer-mediated interviews. This includes e-interview (Bampton and Cowton, 2002; Meho, 2006; Burns, 2010; Bowden and Golindo-Gonzalez, 2015). Telephone interviews have been described as rich, vivid, detailed and of high quality, safer and more private, and viewed as feasible alternatives to face-to-face interviews (Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004; McCoyd and Kerson, 2006; Novick, 2008; Holt, 2010; Petrie et al., 2012). Skype is addressed too (Deakin and Wakefield, 2013; Seitz, 2016), and others also consider that both online and offline qualitative data gathering can enable the creation of rich ethnography (Sade-Beck, 2004).

In my own research I used both face-to-face interviews, and non-face-to-face interview modes I termed 'remote-interviewing' because although not necessarily emotionally remote it involves a geographical distance between interviewer and interviewee. Both modes have advantages and disadvantages associated with them. I argue the use of the different modes of interviewing can be effective if used in relation to the objectives of the study, rather than as an alternative to one another.

There is not much evidence that non-face-to-face data are lower in quality (Bampton and Cowton, 2002).

Face-to-Face interviewing is the prime data gathering mode in the field of qualitative research, but its dominance could be challenged with the innovation of communication technology. Communication devices such as mobile phones and computers equipped with over multiple communication software such as e-mail, Messenger, Paltock, WhatsApp, Viber, and so forth can push the boundaries of interviewing across extended geography and time. The advance in online communication technologies made it possible for increasingly geographically dispersed qualitative researchers to engage in remote-interviewing in cyberspace (Opdenakker, 2006; O'Connor et al., 2008). In this study, I interviewed research participants using mobile phones while on their way from Sudan to Libya to Italy and finally to seek asylum in the EU. Due to risks in the 'illegalised migration routes,' it was unimaginable for me to conduct face-to-face interviews with research participants while on their journeys. Sedgwick and Spiers (2009) illustrate how doing face-to-face interview is particularly challenging for the researcher whose participants are geographically dispersed, socially isolated, in dangerous areas and hard to reach. O'Connor et al. (2008) argue that non-face-to-face methods can mitigate the distance of space and cost and be valuable for researchers whose participants may otherwise be difficult to reach. Thus, the remote-interviewing using mobile phone was the first option for me. Deakin and Wakefield (2013) argue online interviewing should be treated as a viable option rather than as an alternative or secondary choice when a face-to-face interview cannot be achieved. For that matter, I interviewed my research participants in hard-to-reach places through a mobile phone connection. The presence of the Thurayya mobile phone connected to orbiting satellites instead of terrestrial cell sites facilitated these interviews in remote and dangerous areas.

Many studies show non-face-to-face interviews can produce reliable and in-depth data. Madge (2010) argues that online interviews allow innovative data collection. Likewise O'Connor et al. (2008) described online research methods as having great methodological potential and versatility for research. During the non-face-to-face interviews, I was constantly challenged with principle drawbacks mainly associated

with the emotional expression of research participants and the ethical problems associated with it. Online interviews are not simple acts of talking but can involve researcher and researched emotional engagement in which the researcher may need to live the imaginary world of the researched. To quote Cooper (2009), online interviewing is not as simple as 'point and click'.

O'Connor et al. (2008) report that in online interview researchers encounter challenges relating to interview design, loss of cues and rapport and ethical problems. They pointed out that in the non-face-to-face interview visual and other non-verbal cues that can assist the interviewer to contextualise the interviewee in a face-to-face situation are lost. Indeed, in my study I was in the same situation many times and did feel on occasion that the interview could be a bit more virtual than real, lacking the background of the moment. But although the visual clues are lost social cues such as voices and intonation are still available to help the researcher with extra information about research participants (Opdenakker, 2006). The main drawback in non-face-to-face interviews is the inability of the researcher to determine the location and the environment of the interview (Deakin and Wakefield, 2013, p. 3). During my non-face-to-face interviews, I had to stop and start interviews for background reasons. For instance, in one interview I had to stop and start three times. In these cases the start and stop of the interview is in the hands of the interviewee and this can interfere with the flow of the interview, and may affect the data. Another important drawback associated with mobile phone interviews experienced in this study was the challenge of asking, listening and note-taking at the same time. Conversations were recorded using the mobile phone speaker key but that was not considered as an adequate alternative to note taking; rather it was viewed as a support to data recording. To explore contested issues and the validity of the data I conducted focus group discussions, to which we turn in the next section.

#### **3.3.4. Focus group discussions**

Focus groups are a form of group in-depth interviewing/discussion. In this study I led 13 focus group discussions (see appendix 3g). The primary aim of focus group discussion is to comprehend and elucidate the meanings, principles and cultures that influence the feelings, attitudes and actions of individuals (Thomas et al., 1995; Fade, 2004; Rabiee, 2014). They were therefore ideal for investigating the



complexity surrounding Beni-Amer conceptions of homeland, mobility, identity and wellbeing. The interactive nature of focus group discussion often encourages respondents to engage in the process of the research in a positive way (Kitzinger, 1995; Rabiee, 2014). In this study, focus group discussion embraced a non-formal and non-hierarchical approach that was similar to the techniques used in the in-depth interviews. For example, I dressed and spoke in similar ways to respondents. But my position was to some extent different from that of the one-to-one in-depth interviews, since in the focus groups I was more like a moderator or facilitator rather than interviewer. Unlike one-to-one interviews, in the focus group participants interact among themselves more than with me as a researcher. They were comfortable to joke and laugh which was not usual in the one-to-one interviews. However, this does not mean the focus group discussions were simply general chat or covering random topics; rather it meant participants were addressing the scheduled topic through interaction among themselves and the researcher.

Focus group interviews were continued until comments and patterns began to repeat, and little new material was generated. Livingstone and Lunt (1994) call this the 'point of saturation', a threshold to terminate data collection or move onto an extension of issues raised in the group sessions. Participants were accessed for their appropriateness, as explained below, and nominated during the one-to-one interviews, and each group was composed of between six and eight members. Krueger and Casey (2000) suggest that this is sufficient to bring variety of perspectives yet small enough to avoid fragmentation. Participants were carefully selected based on their knowledge about the Beni-Amer among several other social and interpersonal factors discussed below. Thomas et al. (1995) argue that focus group participants are chosen because they are purposive, although not necessarily the representative sampling of a particular population. Indeed, in the focus group discussions in this study participants were nominated not because they represented the Beni-Amer but because they knew valuable information about them; therefore, they could offer a valuable contribution to the study. Richardson and Rabiee (2001) and Rabiee (2014) suggest participants should be selected on the criteria that they would have something to say on the topic, within the 'age-range, similar socio-characteristics and should be comfortable talking to the interviewer and each other'.

Participant selection in this study was based on knowledge and contribution they could offer rather than availability. Therefore, focus group selection relates to the concept of applicability (Burrows and Kendall, 1997). Additionally, though, to increase group interaction and cohesiveness I considered candidates' demography, geography, interpersonal differences, and physical and personality characteristics before inviting them to focus group interviews. Hollander (2004) argues that focus groups are intrinsically social phenomena, and so understanding of the multifaceted social setting in which discussion takes place is critical to the overall success of group.

Several studies stress the importance to group cohesiveness. Stewart and Shamdasani (2014, p. 25) say 'cohesiveness is what holds the group together'. It is the fact that attracts the group to each other (Pennington, 2002). Others define group compatibility in relation to homogeneity, and heterogeneity. In the focus group settings homogeneity increases compatibility and decreases anxiety (Rabiee, 2014; Cohen, 1956) while Stewart and Shamdasani (2014, p. 27) maintain that although closely related compatibility of participants does not automatically suggest homogeneity. In this study, the demographic factors I considered include age, sex, occupation, education and social status. Through observation and the in-depth one-to-one interviews, I concluded that age and gender are the principal factors that influence focus group dynamics among the Beni-Amer, while race and religion were irrelevant because the respondents were of one race and religion. Stewart and Shamdasani (2014, p. 20) state that influences of demographic factors on focus group dynamics, though pervasive, are hard to determine. In this study, though it was hard to determine demographic influences on group discussion, age and sex had a significant impact on the dynamics of groups and beyond them. For example, women always wanted to avoid talking to men except to their mahram (unmarriageable kin), but also men equally avoided talking to women except to their mahram. This is influenced by both religion and culture. Bringing men and women together in one focus group was clearly impossible, so the genders were separated in all groups. Moreover, even when I did the focus group with female participants, I was accompanied by women from my extended family. In the available literature on men and women, behaviour in a group setting is mainly seen from Western societies'

perspective: differences are explained stereotypically as men being aggressive and dominant in discussions and women articulate and sensitive (Frieze, 1980; Swim and Campbell, 2003). In this study focus group settings were influenced by religious and cultural obligations rather than male aggressiveness and domination.

Several scholars have studied the influence of age differences in group settings: Shaw (1981) concludes that age differences in group discussion conduct are based on anecdotal evidence; Stewart and Shamdasani (2014, pp. 20-21) argue that age influences group behaviour in group discussions, but that its extent and direction of influence are little-documented. Others also note frequency and complexity of interaction varying according to age (Dymond, et al., 1952) with age increasing individuals' ability to empathise. With age 'proneness to simultaneous talking and interruptions decreases' (K. H. Smith, 1977; cited in Stewart and Shamdasani, 2014, p. 21). In this study's fieldwork, though differences were difficult to detect, youth were mostly quiet in the presence of elders, and the elders spoke slowly and in few words. Even in the most fascinating topics, youths choose to be silent. I observed that it is religiously and culturally unacceptable for them to talk before their elders or to interrupt them. I therefore separated youth from elders in groups. This led to smooth conversation, encouraged participant-to-participant interaction and interruption; the focus group discussions were therefore informative, and indeed fun.

As well as advantages, focus group interviewing has weaknesses too. Yates (2004, p. 171) rather uncharitably calls it 'quick and dirty'. This description captures the messy and large amount of data that can be generated in a brief time in focus group discussions, making sorting and analysis demanding for qualitative researchers. For example, a one-hour group discussion in east Kassala rangeland took me six hours to transcribe, eleven hours to translate and generated a twenty seven page Word document. Focus groups are not an alternative to one-to-one in-depth interviews; they are a way to clarify contested issues raised in the in-depth interviews. In short, Yates (2004, p. 172) states that focus groups are not a 'cheap replacement' for individual in-depth interviewing. Focus groups encourage discussion and are sometimes praised as being a vehicle to empower disadvantaged members to have their say. Their discussions can also, though, discourage the shy, the modest and

those with low self-esteem whose opinion might pass without being heard. It is up to the facilitator to make sure groups are of the 'right' composition and/or to motivate participants. For example, in the focus groups with herders I noticed hired shepherds tended to agree with those who reared their own livestock. To encourage hired herders to have their opinions I regularly reinforced rapport by using verbal confirmations such as 'I see', *Aiwa* (Yes) and non-verbal ones such as nodding of the head and maintaining eye contact. In this study participant observation, in-depth interviewing and focus group discussions were intertwined, overlapping processes. The process of participant sampling, recruitment and main ethical issues are dealt with in the next section.

### **3.4. Data collection processes: sampling and recruitment criteria**

Participant recruitment started in the UK in September 2014. The main criteria for all participants to take part in this study were organised into three main factors. Firstly, to participate the individual had to be a member of any one of the twenty six sections of the Beni-Amer (see table 5.1). Secondly, participants had to be a member of extended family networks with relatives spanning the homeland, the Kassala area in Sudan and diasporas in the UK. Thirdly, participants had to have families living as pastoralists, ex-herders and in diasporas. These criteria helped to focus on thirteen extended family networks and to track changes across time and space, which matched the purpose of the study well. I explained the study to friends and families in Birmingham, and with their help, I collected contact details of eleven potential key participants living in Kassala, Sudan. They proved happy to take part in the study, and through them and my extended family in Sudan, I was able to recruit all those involved in the Kassala area. Before the actual fieldwork, I was able to establish thirteen extended family networks with help from elders living in Kassala. I contacted forty three participants in person over the phone before the actual start of the fieldwork, and the remaining twenty five were recruited when I was in Kassala. Thus all respondents were recruited using the snowball sampling method. There is an extensive literature on the advantages and disadvantages regarding snowball sampling. Vogt and Johnson (2011) explains that it works by one respondent giving the name of another respondent, who also gives another, and so on. In this study, the referral of respondents was not a linear process but one

respondent referred more than two and sometimes up to four others. This is because respondents belong to extended families. Snowball sampling has been judged a suitable method when sampling a hard-to-reach population such as the disadvantaged, isolated, criminals and so on (Faugier and Sargeant, 1997; Sadler et al., 2010; Padgett, 2016, pp. 68-9). The participants in this study are hard-to-reach and disadvantaged. In Sudan and Eritrea they commonly live in remote borderlands. After leaving pastoralism they live in the outskirts of cities and towns; in the in-between, they are illegalised migrants, and in the diaspora, they are a disadvantaged minority. Snowball sampling is therefore the most suitable technique to recruit participants. In this study it was also cost-effective. Participants recruited through personal contact in the initial recruitment and sampling process were used as a workforce, expanding the network of respondents in a brief time. Spreen (1992) maintains snowball sampling is a link-tracing method: identified respondents contribute to the expansion of participant networks (Spreen, 1992; Thomson, 1997). According to Berg (1988) a series of referrals is possible because of the assumed 'link' between the initial sample and others in the same targeted population. Indeed, the presence of multi-layering 'bond', for example through blood relation, friendship, shared history was at the core of the sampling and recruitment of the participants in this study.

#### **3.4.1. Data collection process: number and locations of interviews and focus groups**

Through the process of snowball referral, I recruited ninety one respondents, sixty eight of them in the Kassala area in Sudan, eleven of them remote-interviewed while in illegal migration routes from Khartoum-Libya-EU and twenty three in the diaspora in the UK. The number of respondents was equally distributed across age and location: twenty three elders, twenty one herders; twenty four ex-herders: out of those, eleven were from the in-between and twenty three in the UK. The number of respondents was distributed in such a way as to balance opinions and thoughts across age groups and across time and space. As explained above this study extended into three locations in the Kassala area near the border between eastern Sudan and western Eritrea, the in-between (Sudan-Libya-EU) and the UK. In the Kassala area, I interviewed sixty eight participants and conducted ten focus group discussions and participant observations from November 2014 up to February 2015

(see appendix 3c, 3d and 3g). In the in-between, I led nineteen remote interviews with eleven participants between February and May (see appendix 3e). However, as discussed earlier participant observation and focus groups were not possible with those in the in-between. In the UK with twenty three members of the diaspora communities, I carried out twenty three in-depth interviews and three focus group discussions and participant observations between March and May 2015 (see appendix 3f and 3g), and for all focus groups (see appendix 3g).

### **3.4.2. Central ethical issues and informant consent**

Before starting the study, I gave details of central ethical issues that might arise from carrying the research and a plan to address these problems to the Central Ethical Committee at the University of Leicester for approval. Following rigorous consideration, the study gained approval to proceed, but this did not mean a 'green light'; rather it was a 'red light': no harm should come from this study. Indeed, no harm should reach those involved in the study even if I encounter newsworthy issues while conducting the research. The study is not funded by a political institution, therefore is not driven towards evidence-based policy making. The Beni-Amer are hospitable, trustworthy, honourable traditional Muslim societies who respect others, and expect to be respected. As explained I recruited participants through family and friend networks. This does not mean I was authorised to enter their lives without their informed consent. Research can involve unravelling people's innermost secrets, sacred rites, experiences (Fetterman, 2010, p. 133). I made explicit to each participant the purpose of the study and provided them with clearly-stated informant consent, explained in their own language and dialects, making clear their right to withdraw from the study or any part of it at any time. Thus, participants first comprehend fully and agree voluntarily (Beauchamp, 1982; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Thus, I collected verbal and/or written consent from all interviewees before anything else.

Though I explained the purpose of the study to those directly involved I could not explain everything about the study to all participants. Neither did I collect informed consent from all the people I observed. Moreover, not all that I observed was considered data. Ironically, that would have been informed disruption to the study. (Bell, 1977, p. 59; cited in Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 210) referring to

‘anything you say or do may be taken down and used as data’. While the study was in progress participants tended to forget research was taking place, so after a few days they started to see me as a member of the community rather than a researcher. This aided the research because respondents were not conscientious about being observed. In the natural setting, I observed those directly participating and others who I did not ask for informed consent: observation in a natural setting is beyond full control of the ethnographer; researchers have no power to ensure that all participants are fully informed or that they freely consent to be involved (Hammersely and Atkinson, 2007). Therefore, in the process of the field work, I was overt to those who I interviewed but covert to some of those I observed. Thus, all researchers fall variously on a continuum between the completely covert and the completely open (Roth 1962; cited in Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 211). In the whole study, I was given trust from the people involved, and I have an obligation to guard their trust well after the end of the study. No quote is attached to names or villages in the entire thesis and raw data will not be available to any third party. The next section presents limitations encountered in data collection.

### **3.4.3. Data collection limitations**

I encountered some obvious disadvantages in the use of snowball referral. In some cases, in the process, I have to accept respondents were referred to me rather than me finding them. To overcome this limitation, I contacted most respondents over the phone and some in person. Thus a pilot study helped to minimize the risk of biased sampling. One major limitation was the number of female participants in the study. Only eight senior women in eastern Kassala and seven women aged 33-47 participated in the study. No young women were recruited in the Kassala area. This is because it is culturally and religiously difficult for a researcher to recruit young females in the traditional Beni-Amer society. The researcher included the Beni-Amer near the border between eastern Sudan and western Eritrea, but it was impossible to cross the Eritrean border due to the political problems in the country. This is a significant limitation, and everyday practices there remain unknown. Nevertheless, this study might help future researchers into a little-researched society.

### **3.5. Approaches to qualitative data analysis**

There are several qualitative data analysis methods, such as content analysis, grounded theory analysis, thematic analysis. Content analysis links back to state censorship: Zionist content in songs in Sweden (Dovring, 2009; Schreier, 2014). Content analysis is orientated towards systematically describing the meaning of qualitative data through categorising it into coding frames (Schreier, 2014). All content analysis uses coding systematically to break down, categorise and describe the textual data (Boréus and Bergström, 2007). Indeed, in content analysis researchers pre-design categories and count the number of instances that fall into each category. It is a well-established method particularly in the field of mass communication (Silverman, 2011, pp. 64-5). Marvasti (2004, pp. 90-1) explains that content analysis offers convenience by simplifying and reducing data into organised segments. Despite being easy and non-time consuming, its main attribute as a pre-fixed categorisation of data was not appropriate for this study. The method seems suitable to data analysis in quantitative research (Silverman, 2011, p. 66). At best qualitative content analysis is unclear (Atkinson, 1992, p. 459).

Grounded theory is common to qualitative researchers. As the term indicates, it does not begin with a hypothesis, but rather is orientated towards generating theory from close data analysis: 'The purpose of grounded theory is theory construction' (Charmaz and Bryant, 2011, p. 292). Indeed, grounded theory is about generating theory from data rather than describing or applying existing theories. Therefore, data analysis using grounded theory involves using memo and tentative codes and this might become the base for a theory at the end of the analysis. Grounded theorists at the early stages of analysis separate, sort, synthesise qualitative data through coding, distil and attach labels to data and subsequently compare data (Silverman, 2011). Thus, grounded theorists continually move back and forth between data and theory, terminating once theoretical saturation is hit (Rapley, 2011, p. 284). Theoretical saturation is reached when additional information 'no longer sparks fresh theoretical insights nor reveals new properties to the core of the theoretical categories' (Charmaz, 2006, p. 113; cited in Silverman, 2011, p. 72). Being committed to generating theory from data, grounded theory is not suitable for this study. In many ways, grounded theory resembles thematic analysis. But unlike



grounded theory thematic analysis is not explicitly committed to generating theory from data but, rather, generating insights from them.

Thematic analysis is a process of qualitative data inquiry used by many qualitative researchers, yet it does not articulate specific techniques explaining how it works (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 53; Roulston, 2001). Indeed, thematic analysis is unclearly demarcated, in contrast with grounded theory and content analysis. It is widely used as part of many qualitative data analysis methods but not separately. Thus, in this sense it is only useful to assist qualitative researchers pursuing insights, themes and patterns from data (Boyatzis, 1998). The thematic analysis offers an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analyse qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 77). Thematic analysis, like other major analytic traditions such as grounded theory, inspects data through thematic coding (Ryan and Bernard, 2000). Holloway and Toders (2003) explain that thematic analysis should be regarded as the initial method for qualitative analysis; therefore, qualitative researchers should learn thematic analysis before any other method. Moreover, Boyatzis (1998) characterises thematic analysis as a tool to be used across different methods. For example, identifying themes is a shared analysis process across several qualitative data analysis methods. Opposing those views, Braun and Clarke (2006) claim thematic analysis should be considered a method in its own right and praised for its flexibility. Furthermore, a lot of analysis is principally thematic, but either claimed to be something else or not identified as any specific method at all (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 80).

Thematic analysis is distinguished by its flexibility. Unlike grounded theory it is not tied to any specific pre-existing theoretical framework. It is a form of analysis very much akin to the interpretative form of qualitative data analysis (Clarke, 2005), so can be used with multiple theoretical frameworks. For example, from the realist or essentialist, constructionist and interpretivist perspectives thematic analysis can be a useful analytic tool bringing insights and reporting participants' experiences and meanings (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Willig, 1999). It is therefore well-matched to the purpose of this study, and was used to reflect the reality of the Beni-Amer and untangle the nature of their reality.

This study is explicitly committed to generating insights from data. Thematic analysis does code like grounded theory but unlike grounded theory is not committed to theory (McLeod, 2001, p. 80). Thematic analysis is should not be thought just about coding and identifying themes: more usefully, it offers detailed and nuanced account of those themes. While themes are not separate from the researcher's outlook they do emerge from the data and can then be defined refined by the research analysis. Ely et al. (1997, p. 205) explain the complicated process in the identification of themes:

If themes 'reside' anywhere they reside in our heads from our thinking about data and creating links as we understand them. (Ely et al., 1997, p. 205).

This study adopted an inductive approach because the themes identified are strongly linked to the data. This bottom-up approach required close inspection of data, which involved looking for patterns, similarities and differences, coding and re-coding, categorising and re-categorizing. Four intertwined main themes (mobility, homeland, identity and wellbeing) emerged from the data. Those themes appeared interlocked and dynamic; this is presented in the three analysis chapters. In this process, the essence of the themes was disseminated across the whole data rather than from one portion of them. As such I conclude that thematic analysis in this study was data-driven. Therefore, although not committed to generating theory this study bears some similarity to grounded theory. In it, the process of thematic coding did not fit the data into pre-existing coding frames or analytic preconceptions; instead, the entire process intertwined and emerged from the close inspection of the data. However, we must still acknowledge that the analysis developed within a pre-existing framework. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 83) make this clear:

researchers cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments, and data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 83)

Indeed, in this study memos, codes, categories and themes were not based in a vacuum; rather, their context was filled with data. The following sections present the process involved to make sense from data.

### **3.5.1. Making sense from data: transcribing for translation**

In qualitative research literature conducting high-quality, interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation etc are thoroughly discussed (see, Bryman, 2006, 2015; Silverman, 2011, 2016; Taylor et al., 2015; Merriam and Tisdell, 2015; McCartan, 2016). Making high-quality transcription or translation, however, is rarely mentioned (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015, p, 203). The extensive number of groups and individual interviews I conducted inevitably generated enormous qualitative data. This all needed to be proceeded by translation and transcripts before it could be readily amenable to analysis. Qualitative research based on interviews and observations generate vast non-numeric data. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015, p. 215) say that in many cases the researcher is confronted with many pages of interview transcripts and is led to ask: 'How shall I find a method to analyse the 1,000 pages of interview transcripts I have collected?' They suggest the first reaction to the question is to dismiss it. 'Never pose that question!' This means if interviews have been conducted in such a way that a method for analysis is sought only afterwards it is too late to help the analysis process. Therefore, in this study, the analysis process was initially started in the fieldwork.

The data gathered in the fieldwork contain detailed information about how informants understand their situation. They described and clarified their life experience in spoken interviews. They were videoed, and memos were noted during the ethnographic observation. In its first stage, the data were mixed, 'crude' and in languages other than English. Therefore, the first step was to transform them into written text for reading, reflection and analysis. The immediate post-fieldwork stage involved much time-consuming work to transcribe, translate and code categories to thematise, and thereby to analyse, verify and report their outcomes academically. The research process as a chain was an overlapping and progressive task.

Transcription involved two stages. First, audio recorded oral conversations, video streams and ethnography observation notes were transcribed carefully to produce exact word-for-word accounts of all the fieldwork processes in both the participants' language and that used in the fieldwork. For instance, elderly participants in east Kassala spoke some Arabic and more 'pure Tigrāyit', the mother tongue of the Beni-Amer. The young herders and ex-herders spoke a mixture of

more Tigrāyit and less Arabic; and research participants in the diaspora were speaking ‘supper-mixed’: more Arabic, less Tigrāyit, and some English. From the languages spoken in the fieldwork I noted the shifting of language usage across time and space, and this became a part of the observational data. In the initial stage I transcribed all data manually because being able to flip through the pages was useful. Thus, the first stage was completed with textual data in Tigrāyit, Arabic and English. The second stage was to transform the entire data into English and prepare them for analysis. The translation process was helpful because, for example, it provoked reflection about the time of the fieldwork, and created engagement and familiarity with data.

Shortcutting issues of transcription could lead to loss of important data, passive engagement and poor analysis. At best transcriptions are effective translations from oral conversations, but as we have already discussed regarding interview recording, transcripts cannot capture the full sense of an actual interview. Ong (1982) argues that oral speech and written texts entail different language games and different cultures. What has been said and felt in oral social interactions over time fades from the participants’ memories; it is, as Bourdieu (1999, p. 622) puts it, ‘lost in transcription’. Coding further encourages the fragmentation of interview transcriptions (Elizabeth et al., 2014). At this stage, non-English text data were ready for the process of translation into English after the first stage of the transcription; to this I turn in the next section.

### **3.5.2. Making sense from data: translation for analytic use**

For researchers conducting qualitative research in languages other than the language used in the final written version, translation is significant to their research. Despite recognition of the complexity around non-English qualitative research few empirical studies exist. Several issues emerge when translation is involved. For instance, Sheila (1997) notes the difficulty of managing data when no equivalent word exists in the target language, and issues of grammatical style in the analysis. The main problems not only involve word-for-word translation; they go deeper, including issues of sampling and validity of the study. Temple and Young (2004, p. 161) in their Article ‘Translation dilemmas in qualitative research’, highlight three key issues that can influence qualitative research involving translation. Temple and

Young (2004) question, firstly, 'whether methodologically it matters if the act of translation is identified or not'; secondly, the epistemological implications of who does the translation and, thirdly, the consequences for the final product of how far the researcher involves a translator. I discuss the process of translation in this study in relation to the framework outlined by Temple and Young (2004) for its suitability to the study.

As stated above this data were gathered in more than one language, and acts of translation between languages were involved. The translation process is largely influenced by the researcher's position in relation to the researched. If they see themselves as objective then the elimination of bias becomes their primary concern (Temple and Young, 2004, p. 163). This means my epistemological position in relation to the insiderness and outsidersness debate dictated the translation process of this study. While total neutrality cannot be achieved by qualitative researchers, my multiple insider-outsider positions dictated my translation of the data. In other words, data were translated unbiased as provided by the participants. This dual position as insider/outsider researcher/translator is problematic because the borders become 'fuzzy', complicating the translation and analysis. For example, researchers studying their communities could ignore the process of translation involved and claim a neutral stance (Harrington and Turner, 2001). Likewise, Temple and Young (2004, p. 163) note that much 'grey' literature written concerning ethnic minorities in the UK lacks any reference to their language and translation issues. Temple and Young state: 'results are presented as if the interviewees were fluent English speakers or as if the language they used is irrelevant'. Thus, we encounter an immediate point of 'divergence' where the researchers ignore the researched as if they were not part of the study.

Many writers argue that there is no single correct translation of text. Simon (1996; cited in Temple and Young, 2004, p. 165) argues that translation is not 'a matter of finding the meaning of a text in a culture', therefore 'solutions to dilemmas of translation cannot be found in dictionaries'. Likewise, Spivak (1992) says meaning is constructed, and translation is not a matter 'of synonym, syntax and local colour'; rather language is rhetoric, logic and silence and a relationship between these all. Therefore, if language is a construction to express realities, then translation must

take that into consideration. In this study a research participant in a walking-along interview said life in Kassala is 'difficult'; after probing, he said there are no jobs or only low paid jobs. A participant in the diaspora also said life there is 'difficult'; after probing he explained he felt socially excluded: same word, 'difficult', different meanings tied to respondents' local realities. Temple and Young (2004) state that, if researchers speak the language of their research participants they must be fully aware when they represent others and their languages, and if they do not speak the language of the research participants then they must be aware of the baseline from where they can claim to speak for them. At this stage, the data was transcribed from the original sources and translated into English for analytic use. The next section presents the coding-recoding and categorisation-recategorization and the emergence of themes from data.

### **3.5.3. Making sense from data: memoing for analytic use**

At an early stage in the field I produced notes of quick insights and as a reminder of events I observed. Later, these developed into analytic memos serving to draw connections between multiple insights and to derive conceptual meanings from the data (Glaser, 1992; cited in Patel et al., 2015, p. 2). Likewise, Groenewald (2008) describes researchers' iterative process as they move back and forth through their memos, editing and refining ideas towards greater complexity and precision. Indeed, memos in this study linked first notes and emerging themes. For instance, one of my observation memos read as:

[One] research participant's family living in an open land in the rangeland within a fence made of doum palm branches. In the middle of the compound is a tree, in the morning between 7:00 am and 9:00 am the family seems not bothering about the sun normally it is not that hot and eat breakfast within their compound. But from 9:00 am up to 12:30 pm they stay to the west of the tree that is where the shade of the tree is now. But at around 12:30am-13:00 pm they remain right under the tree when the sun at noon the shade of the tree becomes in its roots. And after 13:00 pm up to 16:30 pm they remain to the east of the tree that is where the shade is now, and the eat and drink coffee and socialise. And at night they stay within the compound but not under the tree. From this I come up with analytic memo *pastoralists home*

‘the family moved to the shade of the tree’, but ‘the shadow moves with the sun’. The culture of eating and socialisation is influenced by the heat of the sun and revolves with the shade of the tree. The movement of the family within their compound is derived from ‘nature and culture’, and data from this formed the basis for structuring my findings mobility and pastoralist home.

In this way memos helped capture ideas in an informal and open mode. Memos by their very nature allow researchers space and freedom to explore connections and viewpoints and to express ideas in underdeveloped form (Hay, 2016, p. 375). Despite their informal nature, Hay added, memos contribute valuable interpretive practice towards generating data. Furthermore, they allow researchers to step back and contemplate their interpretations. As a result, before the start of coding I grouped data that were internally cohesive into large primary groupings. For example, all data related to herding practices were placed as one data source, then regrouped and split into two: past and present herding practices. This was not to perform cluster analysis but to assess similarity and differences between current and past herding systems in simple and visual form.

#### **3.5.4. Making sense from data: coding for thematic analysis**

Throughout the data-generating period analytic memos were developed, noting down the first themes as they appeared in every interview and discussion. Reading and re-reading transcripts line-by-line helps to code, to create categories from related codes, and to refine these as they appear by looking at wider thematic categories. The method of analysis was built on the data-generating process, thinking about the analysis before and during data collection in such a way the two processes go together. Therefore, in the fieldwork, considerable parts of the analysis were ‘push forward’ in such a way to go side-by-side with the data generating process. Ideally, interviews are already analysed by the time the sound recorder is turned off (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015, p. 217). The above perspective does not mean the analysis was all done during the fieldwork, but it means the methods were considered before entering the field, then refined in the fieldwork and after. This has value to guide both the data gathering and the analysis early on. Bryman (2014, p. 576) suggests getting down to analysis as soon as possible by initially focusing on a

small part of the data and analysing it thoroughly will give the researcher more time to test findings overall. That can be done 'manually' with pen and paper from the initial codes and analytic memos completed after each interview.

Coding is almost a tradition of qualitative research, but coding should not take place for the sake of coding. The primary aim of coding should be to generate new ideas and gather materials by topic (Richards, 2015. P. 103). Furthermore, coding must be purposive that collects all the data on the subject, themes and ideas to encourage thinking and to drive enquiry further. It has been used for various reasons depending on the goals and epistemological position of the researchers: sometimes exploratory inductive application, as in ground theory, or to support a theory or hypothesis in a deductive way (Hay, 2016). The purpose of coding in this study is inquire for insights into data rather than to generate theory from data.

There are some advantages in coding data reduction: distilling it into key themes, clearer organisation to aid inquiry, and, more importantly, enabling analysis and theory-building (Hay, 2016). Qualitative coding is about data retention, to help researchers learn from data by revisiting data extracts to understand patterns and explanations (Richards, 2015). In this study, coding was not seen as an end; rather it was viewed as one way to analyse the qualitative data. Therefore, its primary objective in this research is to bring topics together to encourage the development of themes. Code segments assisted in reflecting on categories and their meanings. Furthermore, codes were used to further refine categories, facilitating inspection, interrogation and interpretation of data from multiple dimensions.

Despite these obvious advantages, critics warn against over-reliance on coding, even recommending researchers refrain (St. Pierre, 2008). Squashing data into codes and categories could impoverish, and decontextualize data transcripts. According to Maclure (2013) coding offends by positioning the analyst at a distance from the data: coding in this view undermines researchers' ethical responsibility by putting them into coders' position and respondents into a coded position. Therefore, coding should not be considered a panacea: 'No one including myself can claim final authority on the utility of coding or the 'best' way to analyse qualitative data' (Saldaña, 2015, p. 2). Even more strongly, Paker (2011, p. 8) insists 'coding as a way



to analyse qualitative research interviews is not philosophical but in fact it does not and cannot work'. For Strauss (1987; cited in Saldaña, 2015, p. 2) research excellence rests primarily in the excellence of coding. This study coded not according to these absolute views but by selecting what suited its requirements.

The following three examples highlight this study's coding process. Coding was not accomplished in the first cycle, nor was it straightforward, sometimes involving two to three cycles. As Saldaña (2015) says, no-one will get coding right the first time; it demands attention to details and emerging patterns.

One of my initial codes was 'mobility': everything related to mobility was coded under this category. In the second cycle of coding and recategorizing mobility was coded as 'mobilities' referring to its multiple types: 'pastoral mobility'; 'illegalised migrants' mobility'; 'diaspora mobility'. In the third cycle, by looking on relationships and connections between themes, pastoral mobility subdivides into two sub-themes: 'drivers to pastoral mobility' and 'constraints to pastoral mobility'. Likewise, the theme 'illegalised migrants' mobility' divided into two sub-themes: 'forced illegalised mobility' and 'forced illegalised immobility'. Likewise, the theme 'diaspora mobility' split into two: 'diaspora mobility' and 'diaspora in immobility'. The examples below show coding for patterns directly taken word-for-word from the participants.

To cross borders within EU was much harder for me, I was in Calais two months. I remember I tried 33 times and the border police caught me 32 times. But after all the waiting, we were lucky five of us hidden in big truck we were still inside the vehicle very quiet finally we crossed to the UK.  
(Respondent in the diaspora)

The above verbatim text was coded as 'quietness', symbolising the silence involved in stowing away. Coding summarises, distils or condenses text data rather than reducing them to one word. Madden (2010, p. 10) argues that analysis does not diminish data but 'value adds' to the research story.

We are in somewhere in Libya. I do not know what it is called. It is old warehouse we are not allowed to walk or talk. The smugglers are very ruthless they are abusing the people here. The smuggler forced me to work

for him. I translate and organise the migrants for him. I make calls hidden under my blanket. We are over 700 migrants in one warehouse, we have been here eight days it is agonising. (Respondent in the in-between)

This verbatim text was also coded as 'silence', referring to silence imposed on illegalised migrants. Another reported the following:

I lived in Egypt for two years [...] I came to Egypt from Sudan. I was working making some money in Cairo then through smuggling network I secured a passport and visa to France. If you pay them, they do for you everything the passport was not in my name of course. I was so afraid I was not able to say a word and I was felt shortness of breath when the Airplane landed. (Respondent in the diaspora)

This text is verbatim from a respondent who entered the EU through airports. The text is coded to express his major concerns: 'silence and fear'. Therefore, from the above cases and others a pattern developed demonstrating the role of silence in lives of illegalised migrants. In the second cycle the code 'silence' evolved to a theme 'stillness and illegalised migration'. Coding for patterns was heavily used in this study to indicate the shared experiences of research participants. Patterns are 'stable indicators of humans' way of living and working to render the world' (Stenner, 2014; cited in Saldaña, p. 5).

### **3.5.5. Making sense from data: manual and software use for analysis**

The task regarding qualitative data analysis is usually seen as demanding. Usually, it involves some manual exercise by the researcher. Often unlike quantitative research, qualitative lacks division of tasks between data collectors and analysts (Basil, 2003). Most qualitative researchers have to collect and analyse data. Raw qualitative data might include sensitive materials that the researcher must address before releasing data to a third party. Furthermore, researchers analysing data they have collected manually and/or electronically can enhance their insights from data. For example, the collection, transcription and translation of data continually deepen my understanding of them. As discussed above the data was collected in languages other than English, and was collected using several qualitative methods in multiple

locations, some of them remote. This necessitated manual techniques of analysis at least initially.

The analysis was divided into three stages. First, the fieldwork data were initially coded manually. Second, transcription and translation were done manually. This process involved close familiarity with data, including listening to recodes, watching videos, reading transcripts and reflection on photos. During this process, I analysed the data manually using a whiteboard, sticky notes and seven different coloured markers. I divided the whiteboard vertically into five matrices - elders, herders, ex-herders, in-between, and diaspora - then divided it horizontally into four matrices - in-depth interviews, remote-interviewing, focus groups and field notes. Using the sticky notes this produced sixty codes which, following inspection for similarity or differences were recoded into twenty seven codes. And these were categorised into twelve categories. Close inspection showed these categories contained similarities and differences, further condensing them into four interlocked themes - mobility, homeland, identity and wellbeing.

Third, by now, familiar with the detailed insights it entailed, the transcribed-translated-transcribed data were logged into Nvivo. The software assisted me in retrieving codes and categories in the process of analysis, simplifying back and forward inquiry through the data transcripts. It enhanced effectiveness and efficiency, but the software was not intended to supplant time-honoured learning from data (Bazeley, 2013, p. 4). Bazeley (2013) maintains that thinking about analysis always remains the work of the researcher. Computer software cannot offset the researcher's thinking, merely enhance it; or, as Weitzman and Miles (1995, p. 3) put it, 'computer software does not analyse data; people do'. Nonetheless, Nvivo is indispensable software for managing data by organising and keeping track of records, including audio and video. It also helped in this study to manage ideas, to reconnect me with the fieldwork, to query and visualise data, and assist reporting from data using contents from the database. The software was used to enhance searching, determine code relationships, to categorise and inquire into relationships between categories. In the initial Nvivo coding, I coded 102 codes and using the concepts from the manual analysis technique I regrouped them into sixty, then, on further inquiry, to twenty seven. These twenty seven codes were grouped into twelve categories, which were found to relate to one another. In both manual and

computer analysis the data culminated in the four interlocked themes: mobility, identity, homeland and wellbeing. In the following section the chapter concludes by summarising the main concepts discussed in it.

### **3.6. Conclusion**

This chapter has addressed the broad practical and theoretical differences between qualitative and quantitative methodologies and justified the use of qualitative approaches in this study. Silverman (2000, p. 234) suggests that in qualitative study researchers need to recognise the often-contested theoretical underpinnings of methodologies, the usually contingent nature of the data chosen and the non-random character of cases investigated. Therefore, this chapter explicitly explained the theoretical assumptions underlying qualitative approaches, the nature of the data sought, and the processes of data gathering. Cresswell (2013), Atkinson and Hammersley (1994), and Silverman (2010) maintain that the primary purpose of the methodology chapter is to detail the methods and data collecting processes. Thus, this chapter has provided particulars of the research procedures, including recruiting, access, ethical considerations and limitations. Moreover, it has presented the debate about insiderness/outsiderness and explained my position in relation to it and my methods as a participant observer. The chapter discussed the theoretical frameworks commonly used by qualitative researchers and justified the use of thematic analysis in the study.

The chapter also looked in detail at debates emerging from several schools of thought about interviewing. Their primary debate involves whether knowledge is constructed in the interview or pre-exist it, and what the position of the interviewer should be in the process. This chapter has made clear the interviewing process for the study was non-hierarchical and collaborative. The chapter covered the multiplying techniques of in-depth interviews, especially the trend from inside-sedentary-traditional practice to more dynamic mobile methods which employ more informality of conversation, use natural settings and set more store by non-verbal communication. Because of these, mobile interviewing generates more ease and natural flow of information from interviewees. Amongst dynamic techniques of interviewing the chapter stressed the value of detailed listening, probing answers appropriately to gain richer detail and clarity of information. The chapter also

explained the role of focus group discussions to elaborate important contested issues raised in one-to-one-face-to-face in-depth interviews. Like the in-depth interviews, focus group discussions were also predominantly informal and conducted among natural activities and settings. The chapter explained that my position as a researcher was not fixed but rather was continually unstable, moving along the continuum of the interview and varying according to situation from one interview to the next. Having explained the process of data gathering from the present-day Beni-Amer, the next chapter presents a chronological history of Eritrea, examining its impact on the sense of homeland and the (re)construction of identity among the Beni-Amer and the rest of the inhabitants of the country.

## **Chapter Four**

### **History and Geography: Implications for the Re/construction of Identity, Homeland and Subsistence in Eritrea**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the chronological history of Eritrea and discusses its impact on the sense of homeland and the (re)construction of identity among the Beni-Amer and the rest of the inhabitants of the country. The chapter argues that the overlapping kingdoms, colonialism and multiple wars significantly affected and shaped the present-day identities and ways of life. It attempts to assess how the long and complex precolonial history of invasions by Christian Abyssinian kingdoms and Islamic Empires stamped religious and cultural influence on the local inhabitants. Moreover, the chapter argues that modern-day Eritrean frontiers emerged with little attention to the diverse background of people in the country. Thus, ethnic and national identities of Eritrean societies are largely the creation of the sweeping history of invasions and wars in the region. As part of the analysis, the chapter looks how the diverse environmental and climatic regions in the country attracted certain modes of livelihood across time and space. Understanding the complex and dynamic (re)construction of identity, homeland, mobility and wellbeing among the Beni-Amer and other Eritrean societies requires addressing of three essential factors. The chapter is accordingly divided as follows: the first section provides an overview of the country's geographical and socio-political contexts; the second covers Eritrea's complicated political history; the third details Eritrea's geographical, economic and ethnic diversity; and the final section presents the geographical socio-political background of the Beni-Amer. The chapter concludes by drawing conclusions from the main arguments discussed.

#### **4.2. Contexts**

There is a dearth of research about Eritrea, and what exists is predominantly outdated, limited and at times tendentiously addressing its war of independence. Culture and economy are not well treated, and so much discussion of the Beni-Amer comes from their oral tradition and the present researcher as a member of this ethnic group. Deeper accounts were produced by S.F. Nadel: Notes on Beni-Amer

Society (1945), and G.K.N. Trevaskis: *Eritrea: A Colony in Transition, 1941-52* (1960). Trevaskis, who served in the British Administration of Eritrea between 1941 and 1950 and Brigadier Stephen Longrigg provide extensive analysis of Eritrean history and culture, but with focus on the post-World War II period.

Subsequent literature on Eritrea can be divided into two politically-charged spectrums. Some studies, including the work of Edward Ullendorf, Richard Pankhurst, and Harold Marcus, have firmly sympathised with what Venosa (2007) termed 'Ethiopianist regional history', i.e. legitimatising Ethiopian domination in the region, downplaying the Eritrean war for independence as a minor conflict within the Ethiopian state, and disregarding the Muslim presence in the area. For example, Abbay (1998) pays scant attention to the Muslims of Eritrea while discussing the Eritrean independence struggle as the sole property of the Christian 'Tigray-Tigrignie' political movement. Furthermore, other studies solely focused on the struggle for Eritrean independence, for example; *Never Kneel-Down Eritrea* (Firebarce and Holland, 1985), *Against All Odds* (Connell, 1993), and *From Guerrillas to Government* (Pool, 2001). Broader more recent works include *Diaspora and the Afterlife of Violence* (Bernal, 2017), *Islamic Nationalism in Eritrea* (Venosa, 2014) and *Islam in Eritrea* (Miran, 2005). As Dirar (2007) states, only a few studies had been carried out in the country to investigate its historical past; Miran (2005) explains that scholarly analysis is limited in Eritrea due to the longstanding conflict in the region. It is evident there is a significant need for research on the dynamic of socio-political changes of the inhabitants of Eritrea.

Eritrea is roughly a triangle-shaped country located on the western shore of the Red Sea. It occupies latitude 15.3333° N and longitude 38.9167° E. Eritrea shares national frontiers with three African countries: on the south Ethiopia, on the north and west Sudan, on the south-east Djibouti; to the east is the Red Sea. Eritrea's approximate total area is 121,320 square kilometres - slightly larger than the state of Pennsylvania. The country's total coastal shore stretches over 1,200km from Ras kāsār in the north up to the Bab el Mandeb strait at the southern Red Sea.



Figure 4.1. Eritrea. (Wpclipar, 2016)

The state of Eritrea is neither geographically nor ethnically unified: it is a climatic and cultural mosaic shaped and troubled by its social, political and geographical complexities. The country consists of semi-arid and arid regions, a moderate high plateau in the middle; coastal and sub-coastal plains along the Red Sea; the Rift Valley and sharp slope escarpments on the eastern and western edge of the highland; vast plains and riverine forest in the west; desert, volcanic wilderness and depression more than 100 meters below sea level in the south-east. The diverse conditions attracted certain modes of livelihood. Pastoral nomadism and agro-pastoralism predominated in the lowlands, sedentary cultivations in the central highland.



The country has an estimated six million population, comprising over nine ethnic groups: Tigrinya, Tigré, Saho, Bélyāin, Afar, Rashaida, Kunama, Nara, Hadāreb and Hausa. Those groups include numerous sub-ethnic groups, including the Beni-Amer, Irob and Jāberti. For this study, the areas with geographical and ecological resemblances are grouped together into six broad geographical areas this is presented in figure 4.2: the central highland, the escarpments, the northern highland, the western and southern lowlands, the Red Sea coastal plains north of Massawa and Dankalia.

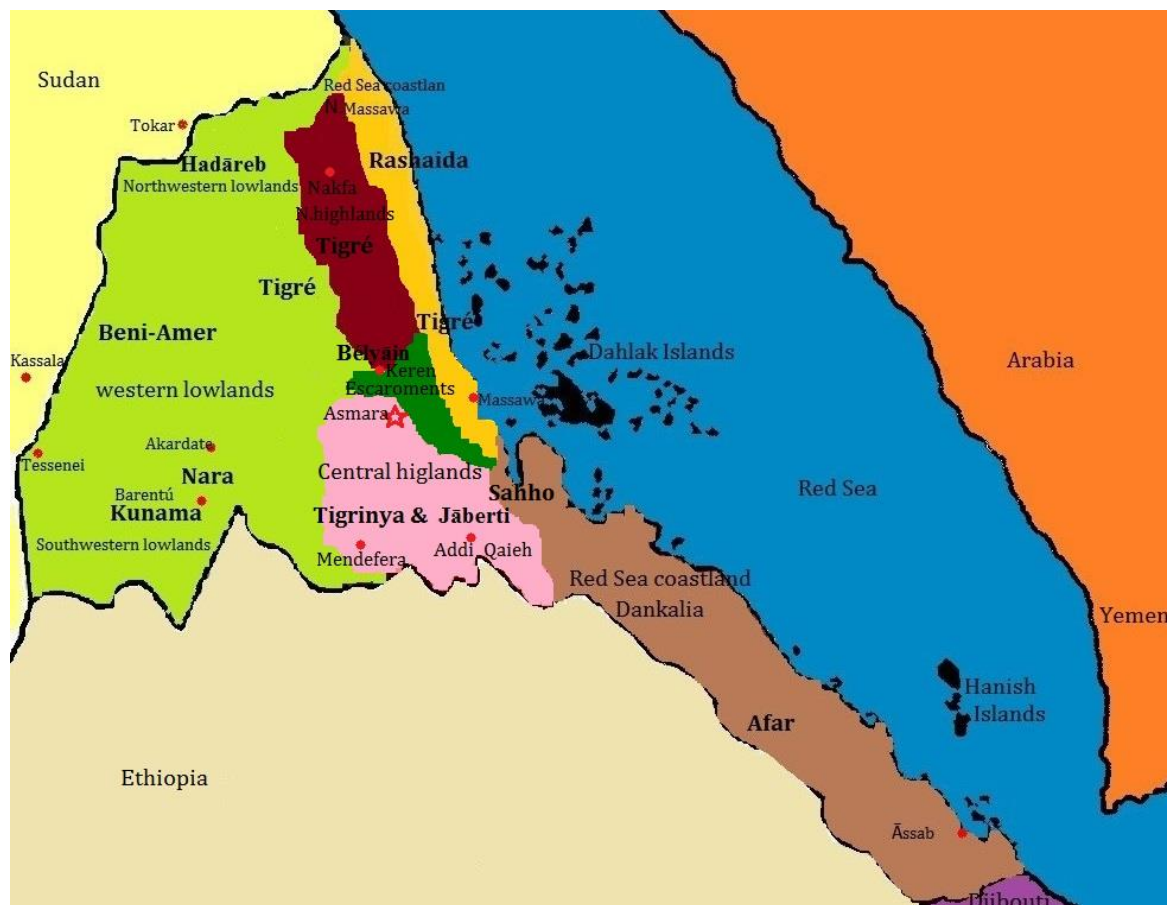


Figure 4.2. Ethnolinguistic groups, main cities and regional divisions before the 1990s. (Map by the researcher)

Despite the long coexistence each ethnic group is markedly distinct from its neighbours, whether language, marriage, birth, circumcision and funerary services, dress code, hairstyle, food or eating norms. Except for the Muslims Jāberti the majority of the Tigrinya are Christian, inhabiting the central plateau. The other ethnic groups are predominantly Muslims, occupying the lowland regions of the country. Thus, the inhabitants of Eritrea are not by any accepted sense a single

people, but a conglomerate of different communities (Trevaskis, 1960). In most cases they are related to societies of the neighbouring countries by blood and culture (Trevaskis, 1960). Indeed, the ethnic groups are only separated from their kin between the present-day neighbouring countries by those colonial frontiers created after Italian colonisation in the 1890s. According to the oral history of the ethnic groups, before there were modern state borders the inhabitants largely intermingled and coexisted for centuries. Therefore, it could be argued that modern day Eritrean ethnic identities partially emerged from centuries of harmonious intermingling between the inhabitants of the wider region.

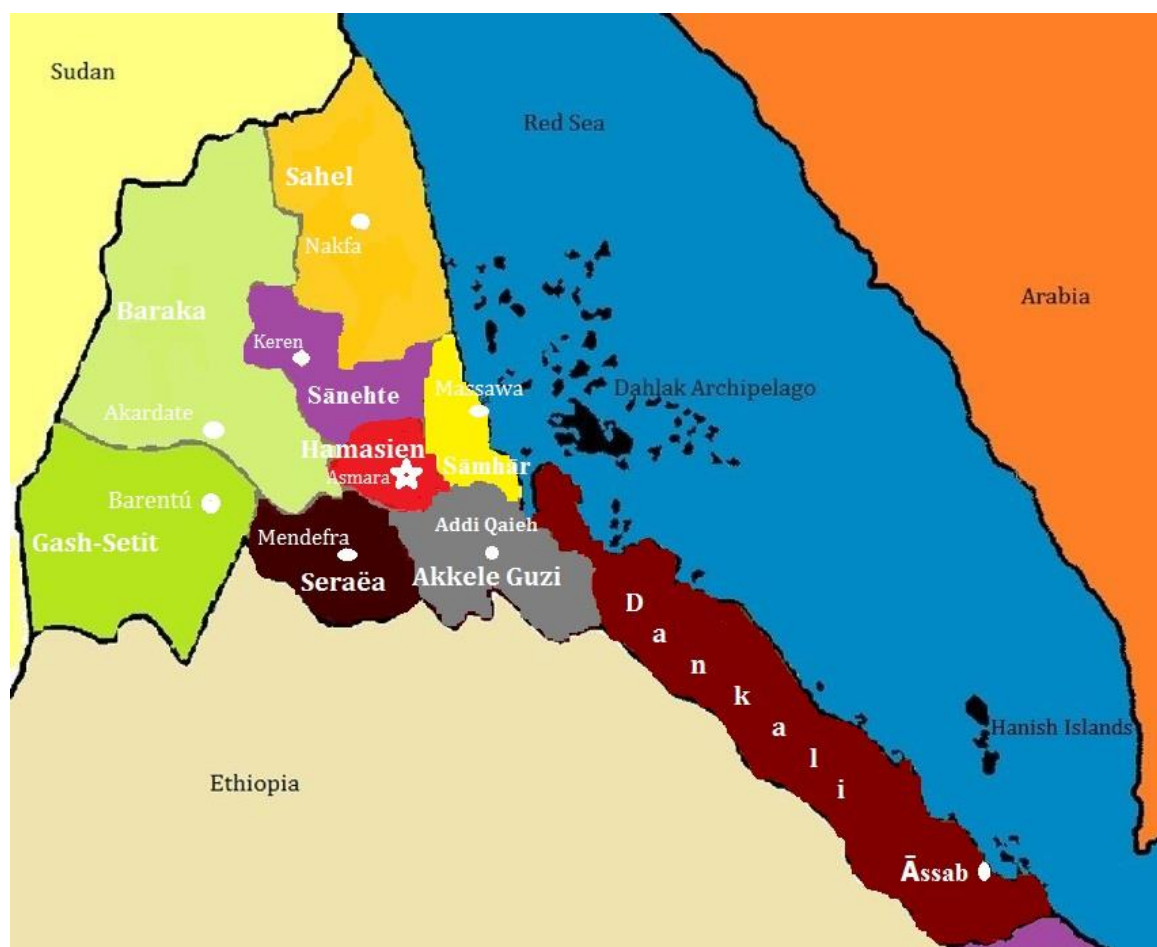


Figure 4.3. Regional divisions of before 1993. (Map by the researcher)

Before the 1990s, as presented in figure 4.3, the regional administration of the country was based on ancient ethnic-based regional names. Following the declaration of independence in 1993 the provisional government divided the country into six new regions: Northern Red Sea, Anseba, Gash-Baraka, central, southern and southern Red Sea regions; see figure 4.4. below. This encouraged

further movement of people from the densely populated central highlands towards the sparsely populated Gash-Baraka and Anseba regions. Population density, agriculture and urbanisation increased in previously pastoralist areas in the lowlands, gradually transforming several livelihoods and cultural aspects of Eritrean societies (Tronvoll, 1998, p. 461).



Figure 4.4. Regional divisions introduced after independence, May 1993. (Map by the researcher)

Table 4.1. Population of Eritrea: regional, ethno-linguistic, livelihoods and religious groupings before the 1970s. (By the researcher, after Trevaskis (1960) and Naty (2003)).

<b>Ethnic and some sub-ethnic groupings</b>	<b>Ethno-linguistic regions</b>	<b>Geographical area</b>	<b>Modes of livelihood in the 1970s</b>	<b>Religion</b>
<b>Tigrinya (speakers of Quānqā Tigrinya)</b> Hamasiennay Akklaguzātay Serawātay Jebertay/Jeberti	Hamasien Akkele Guzi Seraëa in all the three regions	The central highland (Kebessa/Mortofate)	Predominantly peasant agro-pastoralists. Few urban - the Jeberti predominantly urban merchants	Christians - only the Jeberti are Muslims
<b>Tigré (Tigrāyit speakers)</b> Over 26 Beni-Amer sections. Bait Asgāde sections: the Habab, Takles, Ādd Hebtēs and Ādd Tamariam, Mānsā (Bait Shakan and Bait Ebrahay) Sab-Sāmhār and Sabderate	Widely scattered over large part of the country in Baraka, Gash-Setiet, Sānehte, Sahel and Sāmhār	Southern and western lowlands (Mortofaāte /Metahit)	Predominantly nomadic pastoralists and agro-pastoralists, but some are urban traders	Followers of Islam. Only some of the Mānsā are Christians
<b>Saho (Saho speakers)</b> Assa’orta, Minaferi Hazu, Debrimaila, Sanafāy	Eastern Akkele-Guzi and some in Seraëa	Eastern edge of the central highland	Sedentary cultivators and agro-pastoralists	Predominantly Muslims, but a few called Irob are Christians
<b>Afar (Afar speakers)</b> Northern Afar and southern Afar	Dankalia	Eritrea’s Red Sea coastal plains south of Massawa	Majority nomads and some involved in fishing and trade	Followers of Islam
<b>Kunama (speaker of the Kunama)</b> Karaua, Shua, Semma and Gumma	Gash-Setiet	In the south-western lowlands between the rivers Gash and Setiet and in the hills around Barentú	Village-based cultivators and agro-pastoralists	The majority are Muslims or Christians, but a few are adherents of traditional belief systems.
<b>Nara (Nara speakers)</b> Mogareb, Higir, Santora, Koyta	Gash-Setiet and Baraka	The south-western lowlands	Sedentary cultivators and agro-pastoralists	Followers of Islam
<b>Bélyāin (speakers of Bélyāin)</b> Bait Tauqay, Bait Tarqay	Sānehte	The western edge of the central highland (western escarpment)	Sedentary cultivators and agro-pastoralists	Bait Tauqay (followers of Islam), Bait Tarqay (Christians)
<b>Hadāreb (speakers of Tu-Bedawíé)</b>	Sahel and north-western Baraka	South-western lowlands	Predominantly nomads	Followers of Islam
<b>Rashaida (Arabic-speaking group)</b> Baraticke, Braesha Gelamat	Sahel	Widely scattered in coastal plains north of Massawa and in Red Sea, Kassala and Atbara in Sudan	Predominantly nomads and cross-border traders	Followers of Islam
Hausa and Bargo	Gash-Setiet	South-western lowlands	Involved in horticulture, trade and handcrafts	Followers of Islam

Although there is no neat fit between ethnic groups and regions, loosely central highland comprises Hamasien Akkele Guzi and Seraëa regions, locally known as Kebessa/Mertofate; parts of the escarpments were inhabited by predominately Christian communities organised in peasant villages before the 1990s. The lowlands and northern highlands (Baraka, Gash-Setiet, Sānehte, Sahel, Sāmhār and Dankalia - locally called Munkhafadat/Mathet, were inhabited by predominately nomadic Muslim pastoralists. These distinctions are relevant to later analyses of Beni-Amer societies. The lands initially formed a series of overlapping kingdoms: the Aksumites from the first until the seventh century A.D; following their decline the central highlands were ruled by Christian monarchs until Italian control of the highland in 1889, while the Red Sea and the western lowlands came under Islamic Empires. The western lowlands came under the Funj Sultanate of Sinnar from 1504 up to 1820, while part of Eritrea, mainly the Red Sea coast, came under the Ottoman Empire from 1557 to 1872. The Egyptians succeeded the Ottomans and controlled the port city of Massawa on the Red Sea and the town of Keren, Akardate and the rest of the western lowlands briefly from 1872 to 1889. Italy occupied the land west of the Erythrean Sea in 1882 and conquered Massawa and Keren in 1885 and 1889 respectively, ending the Egyptian era in Eritrea.

From 1882, up to 1941 the Italians generated the current political frontiers and the collective existence of what they termed Eritrea (Makki, 2011). Italians brought together a conglomerate of diverse ethnic and religious communities (Trevaskis, 1960). In World War II the former Italian colony became a British protectorate from 1941 until 1952. Following nearly a decade of debate and negotiations by the four great powers and the United Nations Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia in 1952. The Ethiopian government of Haile Selassie oppressed and marginalised the Muslims of Eritrea, seeded religious and ethnic enmities among the inhabitants and finally unilaterally abrogated the Federation, as detailed by many writers, among them Trevaskis (1960), Ellingson (1977) and Lobban (1976). Eritrea fought continuously for independence from 1961-1991. The war was one of the most brutal and protracted in modern history, wasting many lives and causing huge economic and social disruption (Abbay, 1998; Araya, 1990). Since 1991, the country has been torn by post-independence wars and ruled by a tyranny/authoritarian government. Indeed the government in Eritrea is a characteristic example, of a single ruler and

domineering rule that demands people to submit complete and repudiate to them any freedom. After independence in May 1991, the government introduced mandatory 18 month military service for all Eritreans between 18-40. In 2002 under the Warsay-Yikealo Development Campaign (WYDC) the government compelled all Eritreans into unlimited and unpaid military service, with inevitable impact on pastoralist families where livestock herds were left without herders.

Composed of over 26 offshoots the Beni-Amer before the 1900s were a unified pastoralist society spread between the Red Sea hills and the Nile valley. According to Nadel (1945), there were approximately 60,000 souls in the 1940s. The tribe's historical homeland came under the Funj sultanates from 1504-1820, the Ottomans 1557-1872 and Egyptians 1872-1889, but never came under full control of the Christian monarchs of the Abyssinian plateau. According to Nadel (1945) during the uprising of the Dervishes (1882-1898) Hashbiri, Manaab, Aikota and Algaeden resisted the Dervishes. The former three sections were wiped out by the Dervishes. Oral history reports that the Dervish uprising weakened the Beni- Amer, pushing them farther southwards to the foothills of the central highland, restricting their seasonal mobility. In the 1890s, the Italian occupation removed the Dervishes, and the tribe extended annual migration back towards the Gash-Baraka and Setiet in western Eritrea. The creation of the political frontier between Eritrea and Sudan in the 1900s split them: an estimated 40,000 Beni-Amer lived in Eritrea and 20,000 in Sudan (Nadel, 1945). According to the oral history of the tribe, the creation of the Ethio-Eritrean federation in the 1950s marked a turning point in the homeland identity, pastoral mobility and wellbeing. Enduring the worst oppression, the Muslims of Eritrea and the Beni-Amer felt the greatest animosity towards the Ethiopian government (Lobban, 1976, p. 340). Some Beni-Amer rebelled, starting the Eritrean war for independence in 1961. As a consequence the tribe suffered widespread reprisals such as military attacks, the bombing of livestock and people, kidnapping and killings at the hands of the Ethiopian government and the Gash-Baraka rangeland became a battleground (Lobban, 1976). Most Eritrean Beni-Amer migrated to Sudan in the mid-1960s, and since then the majority have inhabited refugee camps and towns in eastern Sudan.

This chapter argues that in addition to invasions by foreign powers, inter-ethnic mingling, intra-ethnic blood feuds and droughts also significantly shaped Eritrean people's identities. For several centuries, many tribes intermingled and small clans and tribes were submerged in the larger ethnic groups, making figuring one ethnic group identity a difficult task. For example, Naty (2001) mentions that three sections of the Kunama intermingled and finally submerged into the Beni-Amer. Likewise, Kifleyesus (2001) indicates that the Bélyāin ethnic group is increasingly submerged into the Tigré and Tigrinya ethnic groups. Natural factors such as drought and periodic variation in rainfall, and famine, also determined the migration and intermingling of the inhabitants. Markakis (1987), explained:

in the time of drought and famine people moved, not food, hence constant population shifts have regularly redrawn the ethnographic map, as migrating people acquire new modes of production, even new religions and languages. (p. 364)

The following section attempts to unravel the long and complicated socio-political history of Eritrea and its population and to discuss the impacts of this on the identity, homeland, wellbeing and mobility of the Beni-Amer.

#### **4.3. Pre-colonial-post-colonial chronicles: Aksum kingdom and Eritrean identities**

The Aksumite kingdom as presented in figure 4.5 had its settlement core on the now-denuded, sub-humid Plateau in the central Tigray regional state in northern Ethiopia and the central plateau of present-day Eritrea. Anfray (1973) explains that the Aksumites were predecessors of the Sabāeian from the land of Ma'rib in modern-day Yemen. They introduced irrigation and the construction of dams, some of which can be traced today in the pre-Aksum historical sites in Eritrea in Qohāitō and Matāra. The Aksumite civilization, with its roots in an indigenous agrarian culture and trade links across the Red Sea to southern Arabia, had become one of the great civilizations of the old world (Reid, 2011). The geographical extent and chronology of the Aksumite kingdom is a matter of scholarly debate (Seland, 2014). In the available literature the Aksumite kingdom spans the first until the seventh century A.D. Aksumite culture has had its influences on the inhabitants of what is now



northern Ethiopia and adjacent parts of Eritrea for over two thousand years (Manzo et al. 2014). Indeed, this Aksumite influence is evident in the religious and cultural practices of the modern-day peoples of Tigray and in parts of Eritrean central highland.

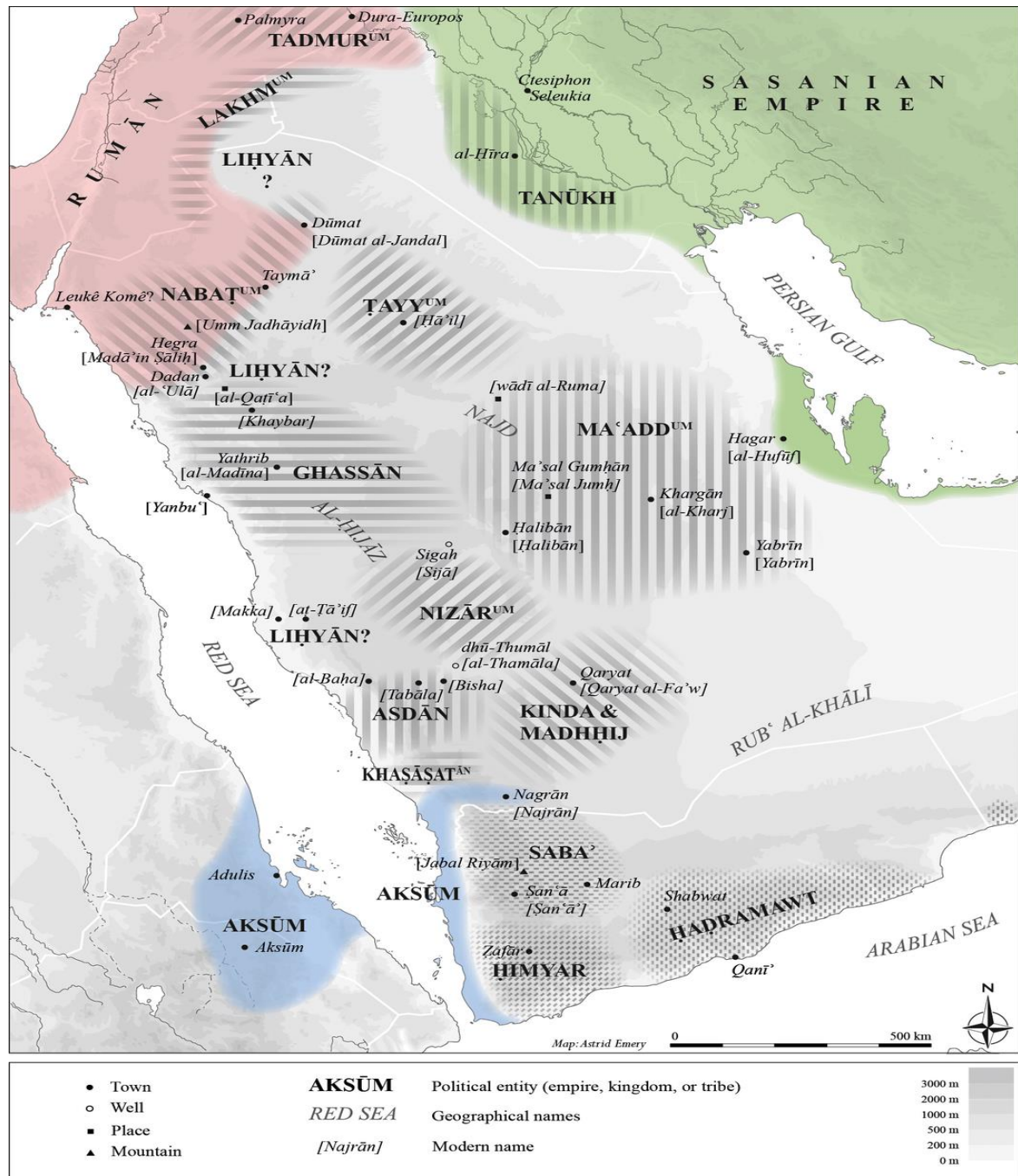


Figure 4.5. Aksumite kingdom, with periphery extending to Arabia. (Map by A. Emery & J. Schiettecatte, 2015)



Aksumites controlled access to the Red Sea through the port of Adulis on the Bay of Zula. In the fourth century, Aksum reached its highest power and controlled resources in much of Arabia and Africa, and maintained close ties with the Eastern Roman Empire (Butzer, 1981; Manzo, 2014). Aksum was trading as far as China, India, Spain and the Black Sea. The fifth dynasty of the pharaohs (c. 2541-2407 B.C.) obtained gold and dark tropical timbers from inland areas dominated by Aksum (Kitchen, 1971). Thus, through trade, the inhabitants received visitors and were exposed to cultural influences from overseas; they embraced Christianity and latterly Islam when Aksum was part of the international community (Phillipson, 2013).

Though in need of more study, it appears that the Aksumite civilisation had a vital role in shaping the cultural and religious identity of the inhabitants of the region. Moreover, Aksum had a significant impact on the environment. For example, Schoff (1912) lists some of the exports of Aksum; ivory, rhinoceros horns, hippopotamus hides, and slaves. Kobishchanov (1979) mentions that large-tusked elephants, ivory, civet and cattle together with gold dust and hides, were shipped out from Axum via Adulis. Wilson (1976) notes Aksum controlled the frankincense trade too: there were 32 million incense trees producing up to 5,000 tonnes annually along the steep edges of the northern Abyssinia in the 1970s.

Large-scale Aksumite trade continued for centuries after their decline: wildlife and slaves were exported via the port of Massawa up to the late 1870s (Pankhurst, 1968; Crawford, 1958). The remarkable effects of the Aksumite era, positive and negative, strongly affected the cultural and religious heritage of the modern-day Tigrinya in Eritrea. Aksumite civilisation was intensely pressurised following the rise of Islam in Arabia. Aksum declined as it lost control of Red Sea trade routes to the Arabs; by 715 A.D. it was landlocked and permanently weakened (Sabby, 1974). Christian influence abruptly gave way to the new Islamic influence in the region. Consequently, areas that had long been conquered and incorporated into the Aksum kingdom, notably the Wélqāite forest area beyond the Tekeze/Setiet river and Sinñar, became independent kingdoms. Thus the Beni-Amer and other Bega tribes were free from Aksumite influence (Sabby, 1974).

The core of the Aksumite kingdom lay in high ridge areas which separate the basins of the numerous rivers flowing in the direction of the Nile and the Red Sea; they formed a compact geographical unit. It was in the northern half of this area that Sabāeian settlers had intermingled with the Cushitic inhabitants of the land, out of which Aksum civilisation emerged (Leeman, 2009). Reid (2011) argues that the Aksumite kingdom was distinctly Semitic and formed very sharply along religious lines, ethnicity and language. Its legacy has cast a long shadow over the cultural and religious divisions of the inhabitants of present-day Eritrea. The Aksumite kings supported Christian missions across the wider region propagating Christian teachings, communal living, obedience and self-discipline (Reid, 2011). Good relations with the Eastern Roman Empire encouraged missionaries to spread Christianity in Eritrea's highland countryside and many monasteries existed there by the fifth century (Hastings, 1995). Their influence has persisted all the way to modern-day Eritrea. In the central highland, the inhabitants are overwhelmingly Orthodox Tewahido Christians. They and the minority Jāberti/Jābar Muslims are culturally indistinguishable from their kin across the frontier in Tigray in Ethiopia. Abbay (1998) stated the Tigrinya of Eritrea share with their Tigrayan kinship in Tigray historical and cultural rootedness.

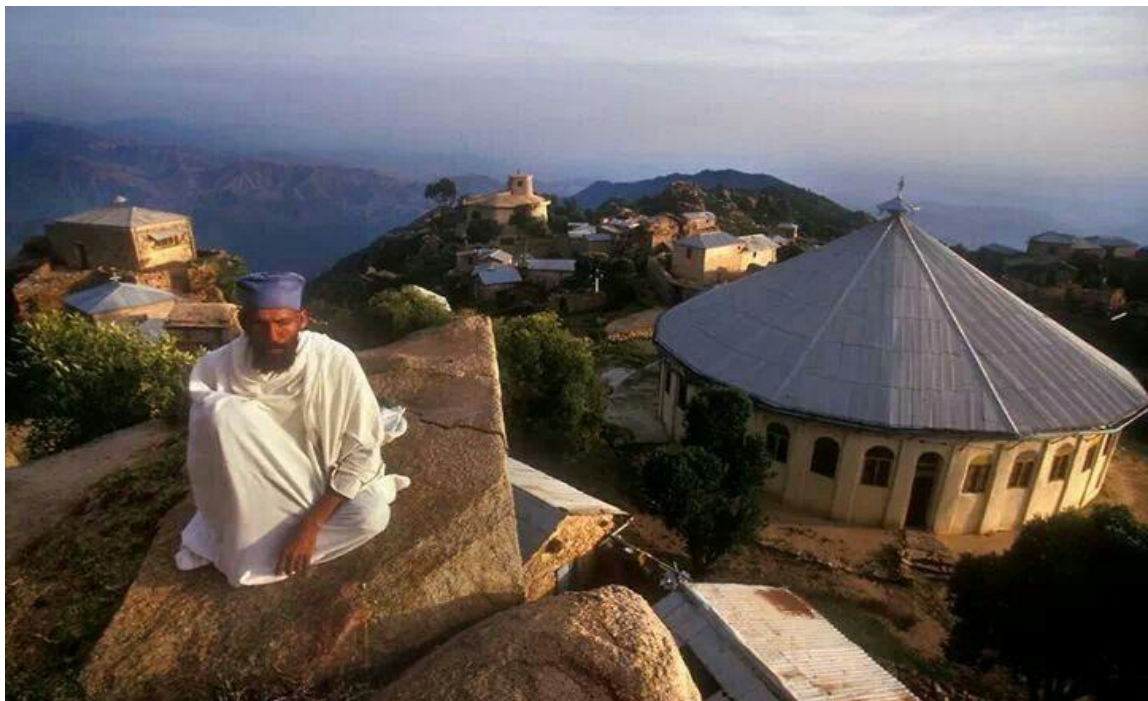


Figure 4.6. Debre-Bizen Monastery in central Eritrea built by Abuna Filipos in 1361 helped spread Christian teachings in the country. (Gedab, 2017; Ternafi, 2015)

An Arab geographer and historian, Al-Ya'qubi observed continuing Aksumite influence in its former strongholds. The Eritrean highland and Tigray (the Land of the Habasha) were ruled by a Christian monarch bearing the title of al-Najāshī (an Arabic nickname for the king of the land of Al-Habasha). The Najāshī is a title that corresponds to the ancient Aksumite royal title Negus (means king/lord) a title which had been used by Aksumite rulers since pre-Christian times. Like his predecessors such as the King Ezana of the fourth century, the Negus ruled over many tributary local rulers who paid taxes and obeyed his orders (Leeman, 2009). Therefore, one can argue Aksumite kingdom, and Christian monarch left a marked cultural and religious legacy that divided the Eritrean society Christian in the central highland in peasantry villages and Muslim nomadic pastoralists in the lowlands. The lowland areas were under Islamic-Arab influences from the seventh century which will be presented in the next section.

#### **4.3.1. Arab control of the Red Sea: Islamic identity among Eritreans**

In the second half of the ninth century, the influence of the Christian kingdom moved further south from the stronghold of Aksum towards the Shoan plateau, in which they met strong resistance from pagan inhabitants (Leeman. 2009). By the end of the eighth century in the Red Sea islands such as Dahlak and the coastal region, Islam already flourished and started to expand further inland. The Islamic influence in the coastal settlements increased due to trade on the Red Sea in the time of the Umayyad Caliphates and the Fatimids in Egypt (Sabby, 1974). The religion propagated among the predominantly nomadic inhabitants in the lowlands and the inhabitants frequently developed current Islamic characteristics, while the highlanders clung to their Aksumite Christian legacy.

The relation of the Arabs after Islam with the inhabitants of the Eritrean region dates to the seventh century A.D. when Islam first appeared in the Hijaz. The early Muslims were harassed and persecuted by the Meccan Quraish nobility and the Prophet Muhammad advised his Sahaba (Companions) to immigrate to the land of Al-Habasha across the Red Sea. In what early Islamic history calls the *hijrā al-ūla* (first emigration in Islam) twelve companions including the daughter and son-in-law of the Prophet crossed the Red Sea and docked in the Eritrean coastal town Ma'adar;

from there they travelled to Aksum in 615 A.D. where the Negus Ashama ibn-Abjar offered them hospitality and protection (see Al-Mubarakpuri, 2011; Nāwād, 1994; Sabby, 1974). According to Miran (2005), Muslims in Eritrea and Tigray in Ethiopia attach unique symbolic importance to this first Muslim emigration into their land, perceiving it as the cornerstone of unique cross-Red Sea Islamic relationships. Places such as Massawa, Hārar and Wiqro include important Islamic heritages and Muslim inhabitants in the region build their Islamic identity by referring back to the first hijrā.



Figure 4.7. Masjid al-Sahaba in Massawa built before 624 A.D. is the oldest Masjid in Africa. (Corman, 2012)

According to Sabby (1974), at the beginning of the early eighth century A.D. recently Islamized Arabs under the Umayyad Caliphate (661-750 A.D.) occupied the Dahlak islands in Eritrean territorial waters off the Massawa coast. From Dahlak islands Islamic influence spread across the Eritrean region. Approximately a century later several Arab tribes transplanted from the Arabian Peninsula and gradually introduced Islam to the Beni-Amer and other Beja pastoralists inhabiting the plains between the Red Sea and the Nile (Miran, 2005). As stated in table 4.1. it is worth noting that Eritrean Muslims are heterogeneous societies belonging to more than

nine ethno-linguistic groups. The socio-cultural and religious divisions among the inhabitants of Eritrea were further strengthened by the arrival of the Ottoman Empire and Egyptian invasions. We shall consider these in the following section.

#### **4.3.2. Ottoman and Egyptian occupations: Islamic identity among the locals**

In around 1520 the Portuguese controlled transit trade ports on the west Red Sea coast, principally Massawa and Sāwākin. Sabby (1974) explained that the Ottomans felt their interests threatened by Portuguese control of these strategic ports on the trade routes, which were close to the Islamic holy places in Hijaz. They defeated the Portuguese in the coasts of Massawa in 1554, liquidated their positions along the shores of the Red Sea and built fortresses in Massawa. Three years later the Ottomans began a three century occupation of Massawa, the adjacent lowlands and the Kassala area, ending only with Egyptian takeover in the 1860s. According to Sabby (1974), the natives cooperated with the Turks, and the Naibe (local leader) in Hārḱiko was given the power to collect tax from the locals. As presented in figure 4.8 the Ottomans built several infrastructures and Islamic centres in the region that facilitated the spread of Islamic teachings. In the oral history of the Beni-Amer during the Ottoman empire some nomadic pastoral families settled around market centres and became traders, while others studied the Quran in the Islamic centres. Thus, the Ottoman domination empowered the re/construction of Islamic identity among the Beni-Amer and other local inhabitants in the area.



Figure 4.8. Masjid Abu Hanafi, built in 1203 in Massawa, one of the Islamic centres built during Umayyad Caliphate and Ottoman occupation. (Gedab, 2017; Wikimedia, 2013)

Control of Massawa by successive Islamic empires ended Christian influence on the Red Sea coastal settlements. In the 1840s the Egyptians, having moved into Ottoman territories, increasingly encroached into the Christian-dominated central highland and towards the hinterland of modern Ethiopia. They were warned by the British not to attempt any serious incursions into the land of the Habasha (Reid, 2011). Therefore, Islamic-Arab influence broadly remained in the lowlands whilst Aksumite Orthodox Tewahido Christianity remained influential in the central highland.

In the western lowlands, Egyptians created the administrative province of Taka, encompassing the Gash-Setiet and Baraka areas in present-day Eritrea and the Red Sea and Kassala area in modern-day Sudan (Reid, 2011). The Egyptian occupation thus further consolidated Islamic Arabic identity among the Beni-Amer and other inhabitants. The Egyptians used Beni-Amer and other pastoral nomadic and semi-nomadic groups as frontlines in ongoing local animosities and as markers in the evolution of larger and politically expedient regional identities (Reid, 2011). However, the Egyptians remained in the lowlands, and Christian monarchs ruled the Eritrean central highland under the title of Bāhri Najāshī. When European colonisers arrived in the region the inhabitants were clearly divided by a distinctive regional, cultural and religious fault-line. This is examined in the following section.

#### **4.3.3. Creation of Eritrea: Italian occupation, urbanisation and Eritrean national identity**

At the time of the Italian arrival the western shore of the Red Sea was under Egyptian control. The Italians were following the example of the English and the French to occupy harbours for their ships in the Red Sea and their first step to colonise Eritrea was to deceive the local Afar people's Sultan (Sabby, 1974). At the end of 1869 the missionary, Sabito approached Sultan Ibrahim and negotiated the purchase of land in Āssab. On November 15th Sabito made an agreement with the two Sheikhs of the Ādd Ali tribe, Sultan Hassan ibn Ahmad, and Sultan Ibrahim ibn Ahmad. Sabito

bought a plot of land near the bay of Āssab between Mt. Jānja and Mt. Luma for 15000 Maria Theresa, to be used only as a stopping station for the ships of the Rubatino company that would provide them with coal (Sabby, 1974). But on the 13 of March 1870 Sabito hoisted the Italian flag over the coast of Āssab. Italians would go on to conquer Massawa on February 5th, 1885 and occupy the city of Keren in Sānehte province, hoisting the Italian flag over it on 2 June 1889. In less than two months, in August 3rd, 1889, Italy occupied Asmara in Hamasien province and a week later Gourā in Akkele Guzi.

One can argue the Italian occupation brought under one administration societies with diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds and eight ethno-linguistic regions without regard for the local inhabitants. On January 1st 1890 King Humbert I of Italy issued a royal decree establishing the Italian colony of Eritrea on the western shore of the Red Sea and appointing General Oreiro as its first Governor General. According to Sabbe, sporadic popular resistance to the Italians lasted for around two decades. However, this was quelled ruthlessly under a martial law known as the law of Pacification and Security. Nākuhora islands off Massawa coast were filled with the leaders of the national movement, most of whom died of malnutrition in severe prison conditions. At the same time as Italian occupation of Eritrea the British defeated the Mahdist and captured Port Sudan and Sāwākin on the Red Sea coast of Sudan that brought with it the everlasting division of the Beni-Amer between Eritrea and Sudan.





Figure 4.9. Asmara, the capital city of Eritrea, and many other cities were built during the Italian occupation and resemble Italian cities. (Gerrits, 2016)

The Italians defined the frontiers of the country, named it Eritrea and colonised it for sixty years. Italian rulers were dismissive of the cultural identity of the local people. For example, this can be observed of the iconic buildings in the country that typically reflect Italian culture rather than that of the local inhabitants. Thus, the Italian occupation left notable socio-political and cultural changes on the people of present-day Eritrea.

Perham (1962) argues that until the penetration by Europe, the greater part of Africa was without writing and so without history. The argument put by Perham mainly ignores and dismisses the history of many African societies. For example, there is a written history of customary laws in Eritrea for the administration of land tenure and other village issues that existed several centuries before the arrival of Italians. Some of these customary laws such as the Beni-Amer customary law (Pool, 2001), Loggo Ciwa, Atcheme Melga and Adghena Gheleba have been translated into either Italian or English (Russell, 1959). Before the Italians, the Christian villages in the highland were under collective village ownership and administered by customary laws locally known as Tsilmi and Diesa. In the Tsilmi system individual family land ownership applied, while in Diesa land was under collective village property and periodically distributed to village clans (Pool, 2001). In the lowlands



land was commonly owned and administered by clan elders but due to the predominantly nomadic pastoralist livelihood and largely sparsely populated area livestock mobility was mostly unrestricted. The Italians introduced Demeniale, a new land system, and converted a large part of the village and clan-owned lands under government land ownership. For example, in 1895 over 400,000 hectares of land were expropriated by the colonial power for distribution to Italian immigrants in the new colony (Yohannes, 1991). These changes introduced by the colonial system were sudden, large-scale and of completely external colonial origin. Many locals resisted, but were brutally suppressed by the colonisers.

The cultural and religious differences and ethno-linguistic identities in Eritrea today and in the last century, along with many of their accompanying problems, can be traced back to colonial periods. It is equally true that many of the roots of identity, homeland and belonging among the Eritrean people lie much further back in pre-European colonialism. Hodder (1978) argues that great length and continuity mark African societies and cultures and the colonial period was only a brief episode in that long history. Indeed, the colonial era was relatively brief, but the socio-cultural, political and economic transformation that it brought has been immense. Nation and identity in Eritrea were distorted and sabotaged by the Italian colonial powers to satisfy their own objectives. Without colonisation the inhabitants of the region could have built their identities and state frontiers based on their cultural and religious affiliation and kinship, which could have resulted in an entirely different map of the region. The creation of Italian Eritrea produced several permanent changes among the inhabitants. Italians introduced a new land tenure system that converted extensive rangelands into commercial plantation and cash crop farming, and according to the oral history narrated by Beni-Amer elders some Beni-Amer pastoralists became sedentary, mixing livestock herding and labouring jobs in commercial farming. Eritreans were introduced to a monetary exchange economy, and a considerable number of the population became urban labourers.

Naty (2001) reports that in 1928 the Italians established Alighidir cotton plantation in the land of the nomadic communities in the Gash region. And Pool (2001) explains that new transport and telecommunication systems plus new economic motives attracted many pastoralists from rural Eritrea into urban areas. Nadel (1945)

observes that Italian control also increased security, and small and weakened tribes no longer depended on the protection of conquering tribes. Therefore, it can be said that colonial occupation enhanced cultural intermingling among the local inhabitants. It also, makes sense to conclude that the new economic system disrupted the predominantly subsistence economies, transforming pastoralists into factory, transport and construction workers. For example, in 1935 70,000 *Askar Talian* (native Eritrean soldiers) were conscripted (Makki, 2011, p. 430; Yohannes, 1991). Beni-Amer oral history narrates how the native army included many Beni-Amer men and fought wars in faraway places such as Libya and Ethiopia. This also of course exposed them to cultures of other people and led the sedentarism of few Beni-Amer families around the towns of Akardate and Tokar. In the 1930s over 52 industrial firms were established and over 20 percent of the Eritrean population was urbanised. Some cities increased their native population up to 13 fold; for example, the population of the capital city Asmara rose from 15,000 in 1935 to 120,000 in 1941 (Yohannes, 1991). Defeated in WWII the Italians were replaced in Eritrea by the British, to which we turn in the following section.

#### **4.3.4. British administration and transition of Eritrea**

As stated above, the sixty years of Italian colonisation to some extent created an Eritrean national identity and promoted the feeling of national unity and introduced modernisation of the economy. This however was challenged by the defeat of Italy by Britain in 1941. The British were ill-prepared for their Eritrean responsibilities and the country was in a dangerous period of transition during British occupation (1941-52) (Trevaskis, 1960, p, 21). In those 11 years the new Eritrean sense of national identity fragmented; Eritreans were introduced to unfamiliar Western political processes, and the response was political parties based primarily on ethnic, religious, economic and geographical foundations. Ellingson (1977) argues that the lines were sharply drawn by late 1947: some ethnic groups were oriented to return and unite with their kin in the neighbouring countries while others were pro-Italian and others pro-independence.

In May 1941, a political organisation formed in Eritrea named Mähber Feqri Hāgar Ēretra (Society for the love of the land of Eritrea), becoming in 1944 the Unionist

Party. Unionist Party members were predominantly Christian highlanders who felt that Eritrea had been 'stolen' by the Italians, and that it should therefore be unconditionally returned to Ethiopia on the grounds of historical, cultural, religious, geographical, and economic connexions (Venosa, 2014; Makki, 2011; Ellingson, 1977; Trevaskis, 1960). The majority of the Muslim communities however demanded independence and resisted Ethiopian domination. In this period, then, the people of Eritrea drew back to their older religiously-demarcated identities, with the recent national delineation splitting between those who wanted to unite with Ethiopia/Tigray and those who wanted independence.



Figure 4.10. Haile Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopia, with Winston Churchill, former British Prime Minister. Selassie used his friendships with Western leaders to influence the UN decision to annexe Eritrea. (Flickr, 2012)

The Unionist Party was dominated by Christians and appeared unchallengeable by the end of 1946 (Trevaskis, 1960). Longrigg (1944) observes that the priesthood was dominant in rural Eritrea, and was used by unionist agents to persuade their

congregations to support the unionist cause. On the 3rd December 1947, Rabita al-Islamiyya al-iritriya (the Eritrean Muslim League) was formed to oppose the Unionist Party. It drew its members from the mainly Muslim-dominated lowlands. Alongside these major opponents others emerged, including one promoting the return of Eritrea into Italian trusteeship.

Ellingson (1977) reports that the non-unionist parties were financed by their members, while the unionist party was subsidised secretly by the Ethiopian government. By mid-September 1948 in the absence of consensus among the four powers the country was referred to a United Nations Commission. As a result, the Unionist Party became openly militant toward its opponents. The political parties opposing union with Ethiopia formed a coalition, known as the Independence Bloc. Unionists stamped them as traitors and began a new wave of terrorism and harassment (Ellingson, 1977). For example, in June 1947 before the arrival of the UN Commission, several bombing incidents occurred in Asmara. There were several attempts on the lives of Independence Bloc leaders, including Dejjach Hassan Ali, Ibrahim Sultan, Hajj Suleiman; Abdul Kadir Kabire was assassinated. In the 1950s *shifta* (bandits) organised by the Unionist Party raided Muslim communities, and the Beni-Amer and Jāberti were in the forefront of these attacks.

During the British occupation historical, religious, ethnic and regional differences were exploited by internal and external agents and Eritrea became the only colony of an African master in the region. Much analysis has been made of the transition from Italian to British to Ethiopian rule. Trevaskis (1960) argues that a combination of economic crisis, Ethiopian activity and the pro-Ethiopian position of the Orthodox Tewahido Church leaders brought forth an alliance between Christian sectarianism and the Ethiopian government in pursuit of unity with Ethiopia. The most important principle of the Muslim League was to oppose union with Ethiopia. Many crimes took place including the killing and torture of civilians, and many Beni-Amer lost their livestock to organised cattle raiding by pro-union highlanders. On June 16th 1951, for example, the Manchester Guardian reported that the Shifta had killed 20 civilians in Mänsura and lifted 1,000 cattle from a village nearby.

Gebre-Medhin (1989) argues that both the Christians ruling class and Muslim feudal chiefs favoured union between Eritrea and Ethiopia to secure their privileged position in their societies. Although both arguments hold some truth, the primary concern for Christian communities was fear of Islamic domination and unease about disconnecting from their kin in Tigray-Ethiopia. For the Muslims, the major concern was that union would bring with it Christian domination in the region; they also feared disconnection from the Islamic and Arab worlds. As we have seen, identity, homeland and a sense of belonging are part of a long and complicated history in the region. Its next stage began in 1952 when Britain left Eritrea under federation with Ethiopia.

#### **4.3.5. Eritrea 1952-1991: federation, the war for independence and forgotten refugees**

Political mobilisations and sectarian tensions imparted a sense of urgency to international deliberations on the fate of Eritrea (Makki, 2011). The UN had inherited from the Four Power Commission of Investigation the task of resolving the former Italian colonies. Libya and Somalia proved relatively simple; Eritrea did not. On 9 February 1950, a UN Commission of Inquiry composed of representatives from Burma, Guatemala, Norway, Pakistan and South Africa arrived to conduct meetings with various leading personalities and political organisations. Only two months later the Commission presented its final report, recommending three possible scenarios: a self-governing Eritrean unit federated with Ethiopia; Eritrea's complete and immediate annexation, with the possible exception of the western lowlands; and a UN trusteeship for an interim period before independence. To some extent, these recommendations might have been influenced by the traditional divisions of groups in the country. Makki (2011) suggests Cold War polarisation and behind-the-scenes pressure from the United States led the General Assembly to adopt Resolution No. 390A (V) on 2 December 1950, recommending that Eritrea constitutes 'an autonomous unit federated with Ethiopia under the sovereignty of the Ethiopian Crown'. The federation was short-lived, from 1952 to 1962; and in less than ten years Ethiopia abrogated its terms to annex Eritrea (Ellingson, 1977). According to Makki (2011, pp. 440-442), the 'federation act has narrowed down to two opposing groups the Unionist Party, which, favours Union with Ethiopia [but] would accept

partition'; and the Independence Bloc, 'which advocates independence and opposes union with Ethiopia and partition'.

Underground political mobilisations in the independence bloc took place during the 1950s and 60s. Up to the 1980s Eritrean nationalist consciousness and political organisations passed through various contradictory phases (Makki, 2011). In the 1960s Eritrean nationalism and the quest for independence shifted to armed liberation movements. In September 1961, armed struggle was launched under the leadership of Hamed Idris Awate, a Beni-Amer warrior and an ex-Italian Askar, in Adal, in the Beni-Amer heartland. It was linked to the Muslim League political organisation and from this emerged the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF). Ethiopia responded violently, and the Beni-Amer and other Muslim lowlanders were the first victims of reprisal. According to Kibreab (1987), the counterinsurgency operations resulted in large-scale human and livestock displacement. In response to Ethiopian assault from February to March 1967 over 30,000 Beni-Amer and Maria pastoralists fled to Sudan (Kibreab, 2003). These and the thousands who followed them in the last four decades are the so-called forgotten Eritrean refugees in eastern Sudan.

In the spring of 1974 Hailie Selassie was overthrown by revolution in Ethiopia, later dying in prison. With his overthrow a 1,000-year-old Christian monarchy and 58 years of absolute rule came to an end. Makki (2011, pp, 437-440) explains that the 'untrammelled despotism of the Ethiopian imperial regime, and the displacement of an older ethno-religious Abyssinian identity by a reactive Amhara-centred 'official nationalism', fractured the Unionist bloc irretrievably. As a result, by the early 1970s, a new generation of Christian youth started to overlook their parents' Unionist political position and uphold nationalism, and many joined the ELF. The Muslim-Christian cultural and regional division was always an underlying issue; as a result, the ELF started to split, and in the early 1970s, highlander-dominated Eritrean People's Revolution Front (EPLF) emerged. The two liberation movements engaged in civil war in 1980-1981; one unpublished ELF source says over 1,500 freedom fighters from both sides lost their lives. The ELF lost, fled to Sudan in 1981, and since then its members have been an opposition in exile. Majority pro-ELF Beni-Amer communities and other pastoralist lowlanders migrated to Sudan with the defeat of the ELF, and their return after independence is unwanted by the EPLF.

Since the 1980s and in the post-independence period internal religious frontiers between Christian highlanders and Muslim lowlanders have been pushed back into the national identity building process and nowadays the inherited ethno-linguistic, religious and regional differences undoubtedly are coming back in post-independence politics. Let us consider how the conflicts the country has been embroiled in since independence have affected the wellbeing, sense of homeland and re/construction of identity among its inhabitants.

#### **4.3.6. Post-independence Eritrea 1991-2016: wars and displacement**

In addition to the above-mentioned major conflicts the large part of western Eritrea, eastern Sudan and the western Tigray region are also a battleground for many wars. They include the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) war from 1997-1999, in the rangeland east of Kassala area, directly affecting the Beni-Amer and other nomads. Also, ten years of armed conflict in the Kassala region up to October 2006 between Sudan and the eastern Front (EF), which includes the Beja Movement, widened the crisis in the region (Assal, 2013). The EF directly recruited from Beni-Amer and other Beja tribes in east Sudan, which had a significant impact on pastoralist families in the region.



Figure 4.11. Eastern Front (EF) rebels. (Image by Milner. Sudan, 2007)

From 1998 to 2000 Eritrea and Ethiopia fought a bloody war: more than 300,000 troops were in trenches on both fronts of the border, and an estimated 70,000 to 100,000 soldiers primarily conscripted from pastoralist background died (Akresh et al., 2012). By the end of 2000, an estimated 1.1 million Eritrean and 360,000 Ethiopians were internally displaced and mainly resettled in the Kassala region,

accelerating pre-existing environmental stress (Global IDP Project 2004a and 2004b, cited in Akresh et al. 2012).

In Eritrea, the war zones were mostly in the rangelands in the Gash-Baraka region. Thus pastoralists suffered particular impact. Since June 2000, pastureland across western Eritrea and Ethiopia, 25-kilometres wide and over 1000-kilometres-long, has been temporarily demilitarised. As shown in figure 4.12 although nearly two decades have passed since the war, the border area between Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan is still the most feared place in the region. The establishment of the security buffer zone in the heart of the rangeland leaves the Beni-Amer and other pastoralists without grazing land in the area.

Rural-urban migration correspondingly increased, leading to population growth in receiving areas such as Barentú and Tessenei in western Eritrea and Kassala and Al-Qadarif in eastern Sudan, bringing with it more tribal and land rights conflicts. Post-independence wars have arguably proved as bad as or worse than the independence war for producing internally displaced people and refugees: according to Kok (1989), the war for independence created approximately 627,000 Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees in 1988 but a two-year post-independence war with Ethiopia resulted in over 1 million internally displaced and refugee Eritrean in 2000 (Global IDP Project, 2004b, cited in Akresh et al. 2012). Most of the displaced people settle in refugee camps around Kassala city in eastern Sudan and the daily activities such as collecting firewood and water intensely pressurise surrounding rangeland.





Figure 4.12. Buffer zone in the rangeland between Ethiopia, Eritrea and Sudan is dangerous. (Gov.uk, 2016)

Eritrea was at war with Yemen in 1995 and after it ended 54,000 Eritrean soldiers were de-mobilised. The majority was given resettlement land in Alighidir in the heart of the pastureland (Wolde-Giorghis, 1996, cited in Naty, 2002). The Eritrean government demobilised 200,000 soldiers after the war against Ethiopia ended, and most of these were resettled in the Gash-Baraka region (Kibreab, 2012). The distribution of farmland to demobilised soldiers further reduced the much-needed pastureland there. While demobilising the regular army, the government in May 1994 proclaimed (Hāgarawe-agālegalot/Al-kādma al-wātnia) the National Service (NS) programme to mobilise Eritrean youth to the army. Between 1994 and 2015 an estimated 450,000 Eritreans have been trained for the NS programme, draining human resources from all sectors of the economy and particularly the herding communities.



Figure 4. 13. Military parade in Sawa in the Baraka area. (Zekarias, 2016)

At the time of writing the heart of the rangeland in the Gash-Barka region is hosting armed Ethiopian opposition movements such as Ginbot 7, as shown in figure 4.14. Thus, Eritrean rangeland has been a battleground since Independence Day, a fact the Beni-Amer blame on the Eritrean government for hosting armed groups fighting for regime change in Ethiopia.



Figure 4.14. Ginbot 7 armed forces in Gash-Baraka. (durame, 2015)

The overlapping kingdoms, colonial occupation, biased act of federation, persisting conflicts and multiple wars together created the present-day identities and sense of homeland among the people of Eritrea. Equally, they challenged the traditional ethno-linguistic regional distribution of the inhabitants, contributing to pastoralism's critical stage in the country. The geographical regions, their inhabitants and their livelihood strategies are provided in the following section.

#### **4.4. Geographical regions, ethnic groups and subsistence: Central Highland**

The central part of Eritrea is a plateau roughly covering 8,189km<sup>2</sup>, running south-north through the middle of the country. The total land area of the central highland is less than 10% of the total area of Eritrea, but it is densely populated, inhabited by over 40% of the entire population, estimated at over a million people - approximately 150 people per square kilometre, compared with 9 per square kilometre in the western lowlands. The capital city Asmara alone is inhabited by an estimated 563,930 (World Atlas, 2013). Between 1993 and 1998 villages near the city were transformed into semi-urban centres and their population increased considerably. The central highland or the plateau, locally known as the Kebessa/Mortofaāte, is characterised by undulating plains, bare rock outcrops, small hills and a few fertile valleys at Hazamo in Akkele Guzi and Moōragōuse, Maitsahda in Seraēa. It is occasionally dissected by rugged elevations towards the east which reach over 3,018 meters above sea level in south-eastern Akkele Guzi.

The plateau gradually slopes from an average altitude of about 2,450 meters at Asmara to less than 1,400 meters above sea level towards south-western Akkele Guzi, western Seraēa, and western Hamasien provinces. The central highland is the watershed to the main seasonal rivers that flow towards the western lowlands and eastern plains. Climate is cool and dry for much of the year, with an average of 16°C, and an average annual precipitation of 541mm with potential evapo-transpiration of 771mm (Ministry of Information, 2015). There are two rainy seasons: a small amount of rainfall between April and June followed by the major season between July and early September. However, rainfall is unreliable: there is a long dry season during fall and winter, and drought is frequent. The plateau is flanked on the west by broad and torrid lowlands, vast plains; large rivers flow towards western Eritrea and eastern Sudan. A considerable part of the highland is arable land with scarce

vegetation: it is a characteristic example of temperate semi-arid climate, predominantly open shrubs and scrubby trees of *Acacia etbaila*, *Acacia Euphorbia*, and *Dodonea*. Once the plateau was sparsely covered with Eurasian tundra-like vegetation (Jones, 2005). Today, only a few patches of natural vegetation, mostly acacias and juniper forests, remain in some lower valleys.

The plateau is commonly thin-soiled, heavily cultivated land; infertile soil such as Chromic, Eutric, and Calcic Cambisols predominate (Boerma, 2006). Much of the soil occurs on mountain foot and slopes and is of limited agricultural value. For example, in most parts of Akkele Guzi Soil depth is usually shallow, has reduced moisture retention and contains rocks and stone outcrops. However, some valleys and depressions such as Hazamo and Āla soils are deeper, allowing better agricultural production and vegetation. In the former Hamasien and Seraëa regions, soil types are of better quality. Especially in the upper Seraëa Plains Vertic Cambisols and Luvisols are the dominant soil types. These places have traditionally been areas of intensive cultivation and this continues in most of the Seraëa area (FAO, 2016).

As shown in figure 4.15, smallholding farmers produce wheat, barley, teff, and maize, sorghum with animal traction, traditionally low-input cultivation techniques: iron-tipped oxen-drawn ploughs, and bronze wood-hafted sickles to prepare their land for the rainy season. Also, the majority of highlanders herd sheep and goats and some transhumant sections own cattle. Mules and donkeys are the main pack animals. However, as mentioned earlier the post-independence wars and the National Service programme significantly drained the workforce and as a result a large part of the highland is unploughed dry farmland. Nowadays, some highlanders practice irrigation agriculture, mainly horticulture confined to small areas around local towns.





Figure 4.15. Traditional farming in Hamasien, Akkele Guzi and Seraëa provinces. (Flickr, 2009)

Inhabitants' livelihood strategies are in line with the differences in their environment. In areas of better soil fertility and rainfall reliability most inhabitants are sedentary cultivators; in areas of open scrubland and reduced rainfall agropastoralism is the principal strategy. To some extent movement of people and mode of subsistence are accommodated in consideration of the natural and socio-political existence across time and space. For example, the fertile plains and better-watered parts of Seraëa and the Gash-Setiet are densely populated compared to the rugged topography of Akkele Guzi or the deserts of Dankalia. After independence, the Eritrean government announced that all land now belonged to the state. This encouraged considerable movement of people from the highland to the Gash-Setiet region (Naty, 2001).

The central highland is predominantly inhabited by the Tigrinya ethnic groups and the Jāberti minorities; other ethnic groups such as the Tigré, Saho and Bélyāin inhabit the edge of the plateau. In Eritrea, Tigrinya ethnic groups are the largest communities, followed by Tigré societies. According to Trevaskis, some of the Tigrinya claim lineage from a mythical common ancestor named Meroni; others

claim lineage from ancient Agau clans collectively called the Adkameh-Malaga. Before the 1960s the Tigrinya communities inhabited the three provinces of the central plateau (Akkele Guzi, Seraëa and Hamasien provinces); they are the offshoots of the Abyssinian people inhabiting modern-day Tigray region in northern Ethiopia.

Eritrean Tigrinya communities were like their kin in neighbouring Ethiopia: the vast majority were Orthodox Tewahido Christians; there were 487,000 as against 37,000 Jāberti (minority Moslem, Tigrinya-language speakers) who inhabited central highland (Trevaskis, 1960). According to UCLA (2015) Tigrinya-speakers are estimated at 4.5 million in both Eritrea and Ethiopia, of whom approximately 1.2 million inhabit Eritrea. The majority of Tigrinya communities are bilingual, speaking fluent Amharic; others speak Arabic or Tigrāyit. The Tigrinya people speak Tigrinya-language (Quānqā Tigrinya) with many dialects among them. The critical dialectics are the Tigray dialect in Ethiopia and Asmara in Eritrea. It is a member of the Southern Semitic language subfamily of the Afro-Asiatic family, which is the second largest member of the Ethiopian branch of the Semitic family of languages, and it constitutes together with Tigrāyit and the extinct Ge'ez the northern subdivision (Appleyard, 2015).

Historically the Tigrinya inhabited approximately 10% of the total area of Eritrea, but in the last four decades Tigrinya societies have migrated to western lowlands and other parts of Eritrea and abroad. Today, the majority of Tigrinya are internally displaced or resettled by the government throughout the country. Like the Beni-Amer thousands of Tigrinyans lived for decades in refugee camps in eastern Sudan between 1985 and 1991. Unlike the Beni-Amer the majority returned to Eritrea after 1993 and resettled in the Gash-Barka. This again indicates that cultural and religious differences had a role to play in the settling of the independent country.



Figure 4.16. Predominantly Tigrinya Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia. (Aljazeera, 2016)

In the last decade, as shown in figure 4.16, the majority Eritrean Tigrinya migrated to the neighbouring Tigray regional state. An estimated 99,000 dwell in Ethiopian refugee camps (UNHCR, 2014). Whether the majority escaped to Tigray because of geographical proximity or because of cultural and religious resemblances requires further study.

#### 4.4.1. Eastern and western escarpments

The central plateau and the northern highland mass slope sharply on two sides, forming the eastern and western escarpments. Westwards, the steep slope of the highland mass at the foothills constitutes the start of the eastern lowlands towards the Red Sea and the western plains towards Sudan. The massif of the highland forms watersheds for all the seasonal rivers and streams in the country. The eastern part of the escarpment located at an elevation between 900 and 2,400 meters above sea level overlooks the sandy coastal plains near Massawa. Because of its height, the eastern slope receives some of the summer rains.





Figure 4.17. Natural vegetation in the eastern escarpment. (Eritrea-chat, 2013)

This part of Eritrea receives the highest amount of annual rainfall: average precipitation 766mm and average temperature 20°C. Locally known as the evergreen belt of Eritrea lush forest land extends through Sabur, Fishey and Filfil valley with an abundance of large trees and some wildlife species. Farther northwards and westwards the sides of the slopes are usually steep and stony, and erosion processes commonly outstrip the rivers and streams' catchment area. Storms on the mountain ranges cause the rivers and streams to flow rapidly leading to flash flooding in the lowlands. Rainfall on the eastern slope west of Massawa brings extensive watering to the numerous wadis in the eastern plains.

The availability of pasture and water in the foothills of the eastern escarpments brings many sections of Tigrāyit-speaking societies in contact with the nomadic pastoralist Rashaida, Saho and Tigrinya highlanders who come to cultivate crops. Thus, the geography, climate and natural resource availability play important roles in the intermingling and re/construction of identities among the inhabitants of the country. The western slope of the escarpment comprises parts of Loōgo Ansaba in western Hamasien and the former Senheit province. This part of the escarpment is predominantly inhabited by the Bélyāin ethnic group, and some Tigré and Tigrinya



offshoots. Before the 1990s, the inhabitants were predominantly agro-pastoralists and sedentary cultivators, but after independence urbanisation increased considerably in the region. Today, most of the eastern escarpment and some part of the western slope is a reserved national park and livestock-keeping is strictly prohibited.

The eastern part of the escarpment is inhabited by the Saho ethnic group - i.e. east of the rugged mountains of Akkele-Guzi and Sāmhār and across the border in Ethiopia. In Eritrea, the Saho roughly occupy 5,374km<sup>2</sup> of the most impassable mountainous topography in the country. Their territories include many sites of historical civilisations, including Qohāitō, Matāra and Audlis.



Figure 4.18. Pre-Aksumite kingdom: historical site in Qohāitō the area inhabited by the Saho. (pinterest.com, 2013)

According to Trevaskis in 1960 the Saho numbered around 110,000, of whom 66,000 inhabited Eritrea and 44,000 lived in Ethiopia. Recently, the Saho were estimated at 268,500 in total, of whom 229,000 live in Eritrea (Peoplegroups, 2015). The Saho in Eritrea are primarily Sunni Muslims, but a few, the Irob group, are Christian. Those in Ethiopia are mostly Christians. Like the Beni-Amer, the Saho were nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralists predominately herding goats, sheep, camels, with a few owning cattle. Some were also sedentary cultivators. Like most

Eritrean ethnic groups, the Saho administered their tribal affairs by a committee of a panel of elders. Today, many Saho have migrated to neighbouring countries; some dwelled in Sudanese refugee camps since the 1970s and intermarried with the Jāberti, Beni-Amer, Tigré and Bélyāin ethnic groups. Thus, ethnic groups intermingling is an important element in the construction of identities in the country.

The western part of the escarpment is inhabited by the Bélyāin ethnic group. The Bélyāin are descendants of the Agau people of Hamitic origin and set up the Zagwe dynasty, who migrated from Lasta in Ethiopia and settled in northern Ethiopia and Eritrea (Pool, 2001). According to Trevaskis (1960), the Bélyāin are originally from Abyssinia, or are Tigray migrated to Eritrea in the sixteenth century under the control of two powerful clans, the Bait Tarqay and Bait Tauqay. The tribe reside in the former Sānehte province scattered among permanent peasant villages in and around the Anseba Valley; the majority dwell in Keren town (Kifleyesus, 2001). In the 1960s, the Bélyāin numbered about 38,000; 27,000 were Muslims and 11,000 were Christians (Trevaskis, 1960, p. 15). Today the tribe is estimated about 336,000 across Eritrea and among their nearest linguistic relatives the Xamtaṇa and Kemantney in Ethiopia. The Bélyāin in Eritrea are located between two large and dominant ethnic groups, the diverse Tigre groups and the Tigrinya speakers, which makes them culturally and linguistically submerged in the country.



Figure 4.19. Doum palm mats at market in Keren. (Lafforgue, 2013)

The traditional land of the Bélyāin in Eritrea is approximately 1,462km<sup>2</sup>, sandwiched by the Tigrinya ethnic group in the south, by the Tigré in the north and east and by the Beni-Amer in the west. The Bélyāin were sedentary agriculturalists and kept a few livestock, and also bred camels, donkeys and mules as beasts of burden. The Muslim section of the Bélyāin (Bait Tauqay/also called Bet Tawqe) intermarried with the Beni-Amer and the Tigré ethnic groups, becoming multilingual. And their Christian portion (Bait Tarqay, also called Bet Gebre Tarqe) intermingled with the Tigrinya and resembled that ethnic group, while retaining their Bélyāin language and traditions, at least within their households. Like the Beni-Amer many Bélyāin migrated to Sudan in the last four decades. Today a considerable number dwell in eastern Sudanese towns and refugee camps, while others are in the diaspora in the Middle-east, Australia, EU, Canada the USA.

#### **4.4.2. The Red Sea coastal plains**

The Red Sea coastal plains of Eritrea extend from south of Dadda'to town's border with Djibouti northwards into the Red Sea province of Sudan. The Eritrean coastal plains can be divided into two. The coastal plains north of Massawa extend



northwards from the port city of Massawa up to the Eritrea-Sudan border, and are characterised by a hot and arid climate. Annual average precipitation recorded at Massawa is 183.3mm, reducing northwards, reaching only 76.1mm at Port Sudan; the annual temperature averages 29°C with the highest temperature reaching 41°C between June and October (Climatemps, 2016). The land is covered by shifting sand dunes and limited vegetation, mostly acacia trees, in the foothills. Approximately 100 miles northwards from Tokar vegetation starts to disappear from the landscape.



Figure 4.20. The coastal plains north of Massawa: desert climate inhabited by the nomadic Rashaida and Hadārba. (Ruebush, 2002)

Due to its harsh environment, the region is extremely sparsely populated by mostly camel-herding nomadic tribes, including Arab Rashaida, Beni-Amer, Hadendowa, Amarar, Besharin. A decade of intense drought, repeated famines and war in the area forced an increasing number of pastoralists into urban centres in search of work or aid. For example, in the late 1940s only 2% of the population of Port Sudan was estimated to be Beja nomads, but by the end of the 1960s, the Beja nomads represented more than 50% of the urban population (Babiker and Pantuliano, 2006). In the 1970s the war in Eritrea forced approximately 120,000 people, mainly pastoralist Beni-Amer, into Port Sudan (Hashim et al, 2011).

As mentioned above there is no clear-cut measure of ethnic and regional demographics. Nonetheless most of the minority Rashaida ethnic group inhabit the

coastal plains north of Massawa. This group is related to the Banu-Ab's tribe of Hejaz and Najd area in Saudi Arabia. The tribe migrated from the Arabian Peninsula in 1846 (Fadlalla, 2007, p. 44). Compared to the other ethnic groups in Eritrea the Rashaida are the most recent arrivals and one of the smallest minorities. They settled in the coastal plains north of Massawa in Eritrea and the Red Sea province of Sudan. The push factor behind their migration is not precisely known, but according to their oral history, their migration might have been due to tribal warfare breaking out in their homeland in the 1840s. In Sudan, the Rashaida inhabit vast areas.



Figure 4.21. Rashaida woman in colourful dress and face cover (Borqo). (National Geographic, 2007)

Like the rest of the ethnic groups in Eritrea, the Rashaida had never had a census done. Their number was guessed by the government to be 78,000; that is 2.4% of the total Eritrean population. They are practitioners of Sunni Islam. Like the Beni-Amer the Rashaida were forced by the Eritrean authorities to transform themselves from nomadic pastoralists into sedentary cultivators. For example, as early as 1992 the then-new Eritrean government planned to settle them at Sheeb, 57km north-

west of Massawa (Perlez, 1993). Although the Rashaida communities are trying to resist cultural and livelihood changes, they are more likely to leave pastoral nomadism and adopt a sedentary lifestyle that is particularly policy-driven in Eritrea.

Despite longstanding marginalisation, isolation and the absence of official political representation the Rashaida tribe kept its highly distinct ethnic-cultural identity. Their culture and traditions have much in common with the Bedouin of Saudi Arabia (Salih, 2008). The Rashaidas are known to other ethnic groups for their unbounded lifestyle and colourful dress, and, though a small minority, they are powerful, linked by strong loyalty to their own clans across Eritrea and Sudan. The tribe was traditionally grouped into three ruling houses: the al-Barāteak Rashaida inhabit over fifteen villages on the Red Sea coast in Eritrea and Sudan and their largest village was Al Sahgera near Port Sudan. The al-Bearāesa Rashaida occupied the Kassala area. The al-Gelamat Rashaida were scattered over many villages near the Atbara river. Traditionally the affairs of the tribe would be administered by a group of elders (Shaikhs) under Islamic Sharia law, and the members of the tribe were represented by their leader, the Nazar. Although the Rashaida are nomadic pastoralists, they are also opportunistic cross-border traders heavily involved in selling and buying contraband trade goods.

Dankalia region is the coastal area to the south-east of Massawa, extending approximately 900km up to the Eritrea and Djibouti frontier. The Dankalia plain is approximately 27,603km<sup>2</sup>, that is around a quarter of the total area of the country. Like the coastal plains north of Massawa the Dankalia plain is sparsely populated by the predominantly nomadic pastoralist Afar tribe. The climate is the desert type, intensely hot and humid with annual temperature averaging 30.9°C and average annual precipitation of 50mm recorded around Āssab (Climate data, 2015). However, some places south-eastwards from the port city of Āssab are cooler and receive more annual rainfall. The land is characterised by an isolated group of volcanic mountains, widely distributed volcanic rocks, vast and fragmented salt lakes over 100 meters below sea level, a depression at Kobār sink, and active volcanic spots such as Nabro volcano, which erupted on June 12th 2011. Although Dankalia is virtually desert its vast sand, gravel, and volcanic wilderness is drained



by a few watercourses. Mimosa shrubs, thorny acacias and doum palm trees are sparsely scattered on the desert landscape (Trevaskis, 1960).



Figure 4.22. The land of the Afar in Dankalia contains scattered vegetation cover. (Lafforgue, 2005)

The Afar ethnic group in Eritrea inhabits the Dankalia region, starting from the coastal plains near Zula and scattered approximately 81km south-eastwards of Massawa up to the south of Dadda'to at the Eritrea -Djibouti frontier. Like all Eritrean ethnic groups the Afar have share cultural features with their kin across the border, in this case in Djibouti and Ethiopia. Afar societies are traditionally loosely oriented to the Sultans or Anfari of Assua in Ethiopia, but the northern Eritrean Afar have also maintained allegiances with Massawa (Pool, 2001). The Afar speak a Hamitic dialect, and are culturally though not religiously akin to the eastern Hamites, the Galla and the Somalis. The Afar are Muslims. Around sixty years ago there were approximately 33,000 Afar in Dankalia and around 70,000 in Ethiopia (Trevaskis, 1960, p. 14). And in 2005 the Afar population was estimated at around 1.4 million in three countries: approximately 1,276,374 in Ethiopia, 345,600 in

Djibouti and in Eritrea 30,000 (Ethnologue,2005). In Eritrea they were thinly scattered over the vast arid area of Dankalia, organised in villages of small clans, predominantly nomads herding goats and camels, with a few involved in fishing and trade.



Figure 4.23. An Afar girl with her goats near Beylul, Dankalia. (Angeles, 2014)

Today, Dankalia is a war frontier between Eritrea and Ethiopia and between Eritrea and Djibouti. More recently, United Arab Emirates has leased the port Āssab from the Eritrean government for 30 years in return for money and fuel supplies. UAE and its Gulf ally's forces are battling Houthi rebels in Yemen from the Dankalia coast (Fitzgerald, 2015).





Figure 4.24. UEA fighter jets Āssab Airbase in Eritrea. (Munkhafadat, 2016)

Currently, thousands of wars and drought-troubled Afar live in Aysaita refugee camp in Ethiopia; many also live in refugee camps in Djibouti far from home and in extreme poverty.



Figure 4.25. Eritrean Afar refugees in Assayita refugee camp in Ethiopia. (Connell, 2015)

#### 4.4.3. Northern / Sahel highland

The northern highland is a narrow geological extension of the central highland, which begins at the upper Anseba in Senheit province and extends over 220km northwards up to the Sudanese frontier near Karora. It is approximately 6,367km<sup>2</sup>, overlooking the Baraka lowlands in the west and the Red Sea coastal plains in the east. The region is mostly arid with rugged mountain ranges. The land is cut by deep narrow valleys and large wadis. The Sahel highland in the middle rises over 2,400 meters above sea level. The climate is cold and dry, though at lower-lying valleys it is largely dry and hot. North-westwards, the northern highland drops abruptly and is joined by vast semi-arid plains. The region frequently suffers drought and rainfall is extremely inconstant.



Figure 4.26. The northern/Sahel highland was a war trench for over 25 years.  
(Emm, 2007)

In the region vegetation cover is poor, with only some acacia varieties sparsely scattered across the narrow valleys. Eastwards the river Laba, Falkat and Lebka drains the Sahel into the Red Sea coastal plains, and westwards it flows towards Khor Baraka. Though sparsely populated in the past, today, the Sahel is increasingly

inhabited by agro-pastoralists in urban settlements such as Nakfa and Afabat (Pool, 2001). Some sections of the Beni-Amer claim they settled the region when first docking in the African continent, after crossing the Red Sea from the Arabian Peninsula, over 2,000 years ago. The remote and rugged Sahel mountains were the main base of the Eritrean independence war for over 25 years, which brought both the Derg regime; and pastoral nomadism to an end.

Northern/Sahel highland is mainly inhabited by the Tigré ethnic group. It is hard to categorise this as one ethnic community; rather the Tigré peoples are the agglomerate confederation of sub-tribes and clans. Again, it is rather hard to allocate to the Tigré any one region in Eritrea: it is the second largest ethnic group after the Tigrinya, and inhabits a large part of the country, though predominantly the Sahel. They do not claim a single common descent, but loosely all the Tigré speak Tigrāyit, and the majority are Muslim, except the Christian Mänsä clan. Considering the Tigré as one ethnic group they account for nearly one-third of the total population of Eritrea (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2016), slightly over 1.5 million people. Today the Eritrean government linguistically groups the Beni-Amer as a section of the Tigré, while in Sudan they are considered a subgroup of the Beja. Some of the Tigré were serfs of the Beni-Amer in their recent past (Nadel, 1945). The Tigré are of multiple origins. Some claim Arab lineage; some claim Beja; others are of Abyssinian ancestors and some were Christians before converting to Islam in the eighteenth century. For example, according to Littmann (cited in Crawford, 1955) three sections of the Tigré (Ädd Takles, Ädd Hebtes, and Ädd Tamariam) are the sons of Mafias the son of Asgade from the Christians of Akkele Guzi. They thus typify ethnic intermingling in the construction of identities among the inhabitants of the country.





Figure 4.27. Tigré women in Akardate market selling doum palm mats. (Fred, 2009)

As discussed above the long history of war and conflicts and increasing drought forced the majority of Tigré to settle in towns. Mostly women supported households by weaving and selling doum palm mats. Since the 1970s the majority of Tigré like the Beni-Amer languish in the many refugee camps in eastern Sudan. Nowadays, the Beni-Amer and the Tigré have intermingled to the point that the two groups can barely be distinguished from each other.

#### **4.4.4. The western lowland of Eritrea**

The lowland of Eritrea can be roughly divided into south-western and north-western lowlands. The western lowlands are approximately 37,000km<sup>2</sup> - that is roughly one-third of the total land of Eritrea, and were traditionally known for sparsely scattered nomads and a few sedentary tribes. However, today the region is inhabited by over 600,000 people, which make 16 persons per square kilometre (EMOI, 2015). South-westwards the western lowlands comprise the vast Gash-Barka region. The plains start in the foothills of the Safāa Mountains and extend as far as north-western Tigray and eastern Sudan. It is the most productive part of the country and hosts the two largest rivers in Eritrea: the seasonal Mereb-river and the perennial Setiet river. The Mereb-river in its middle course changes name to the Gash river. It is the lifeline for the Beni-Amer and other pastoralists and agro-pastoralists in the Gash plains in south-western Eritrea and east Sudan. The Mereb-river headwaters rise in the foothills of Emba-Takera in the central highland 27km

towards the south-west of Asmara; it flows over 525km from its source to Sudan. The riverine forests of the Gash river and the open savannah in Gash plain were refugee locations for the majority sections of the Beni-Amer and homeland for the sedentary Kunama and Nara tribes.



Figure 4.28. Pastoralists in Gash-Baraka region, western Eritrea. Before the 1990s Gash-Setiet was mostly inhabited by pastoralists. (Abraha, 2016)

As stated above, since 1991 in addition to war and the establishment of large state-owned industrial farming a considerable number of refugee returnees, demobilised soldiers, and internally displaced communities resettled in the Gash-Setiet area, contributing to the end of pastoral nomadism in the region. According to the ministry of Agriculture the western lowland (Gash-Setiet) region is designated the bread basket of Eritrea and since 2000 eight large dams, 32 reservoirs and 118 microdams were built to support the farming industry in the area. The region is therefore attracting people from the densely populated central highland and reducing grazing areas for pastoral communities. This could also encourage farther intermixing of Eritrean societies.



Figure 4.29. Extensive state farming in the western lowlands. (Eritrea-chat, 2014)

North-westwards the lowland locally known as Areād Baraka or Medrē Baraka is largely homogeneous geographically and culturally with the eastern region of Sudan. Northwards the area is characterised by vast plains and rugged mountains. Open savannah plains start in the foothills of Loōgo Anseba near Mensoura, 35km to the west of Asmara and extend to Karora in the north. Baraka region is intersected by the seasonal river Khor Barka and its fourteen major tributaries. The broad sweep of the Baraka river rises in the central highland near Hamberte, 30km west of Asmara. In its more than 400km course across the western lowland, as presented in figure 4.28, Khor Baraka is joined by several Khors of considerable size and by many small streams. In its middle course, Khor Baraka is joined by six large tributaries and in its final section in the south, it is joined by four.



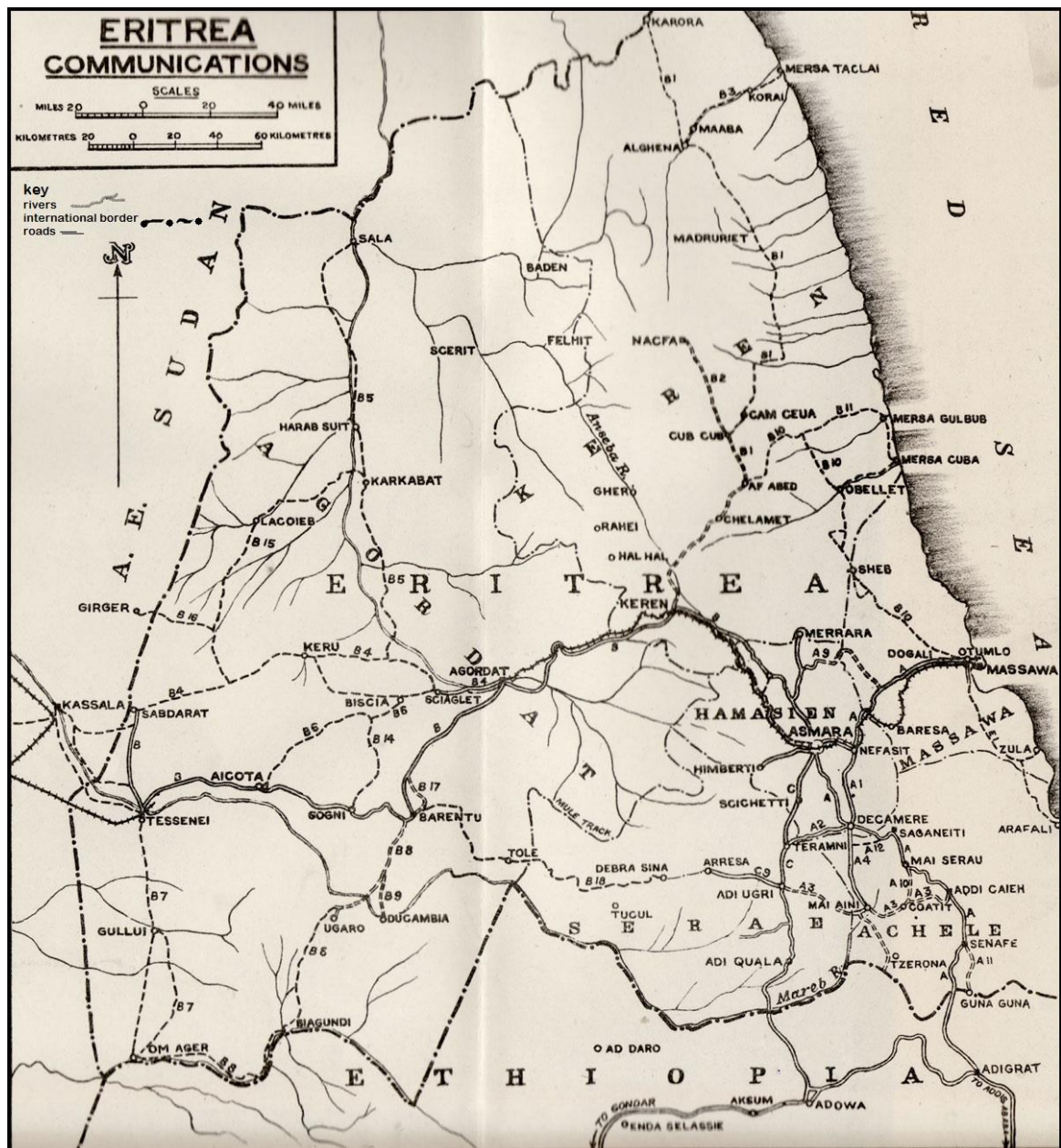


Figure 4.30. Baraka, Gash, Anseba and Setiet rivers and their catchment area. (ibiblio.org)

Before the 1970s the Baraka and Gash plains were sparsely populated by nomadic pastoralist tribes and a few settled cultivators. The availability of water, pasture and extensive rangelands distant from sedentary communities made it ideal for pastoral nomadic communities. Like the Gash region a large part of the Baraka region hosts government-owned commercial farms, mining companies and is inhabited by a large number of internally displaced people and the Eritrean army. Industrial-scale mining is a growing phenomenon in many parts of Eritrea.



Figure 4.31. Bisha. Industrial-scale mining in Baraka. (Mining-technology, 2016)

Among other societies such as the Nara the Kunama ethnic group mainly occupy the south-western lowlands. The Kunama people were previously also known as Basé/Bazen. They are the earliest inhabitants of modern-day Eritrea and historically the offshoots of the Nilotic peoples inhabiting western Ethiopia and the southern Sudan (Trevaskis, 1960). The Kunama people were sedentary agriculturalists for centuries, inhabiting the fertile plains between the Gash and Setiet rivers and the hills around Barentú town. Unlike the neighbouring Beni-Amer the Kunama were not rich in cattle flocks, but were cultivators producing sorghum millet and a variety of legumes (Naty, 2001). Like the rest of the Eritrean ethnic groups, the Kunama ethnic group also extends across the border. (Pool, 2001).

The Kunama tribe has been subjected to raids and involved in many tribal conflicts with neighbouring Beni-Amer and Tigrinya ethnic groups. However, ethnic coexistence and intermingling by Kunama is also widespread and has contributed to the creation of present-day identities of Eritreans. For example, Naty (2001) mentions that some clans of the Kunama such as the Elit and Bitama have intermarried with the Hedareb so much that they have adopted the latter's language,



culture and religion. Furthermore, the Hedareb also intermarried with Beni-Amer clans.



Figure 4.32. Kunama ploughing a field in Gash-Baraka region. (Yannivenizelos, 2011)

The current Eritrean government estimates that the Kunama constitute about 2% of the country's total population. The Kunama for most of their history were matrilineal and adhered to traditional belief systems (Trevaskis, 1960; Naty, 2001). That made Kunama social organisation different from other ethnic groups in Eritrea, who are patrilineal and Muslim or Christian. However, recently a considerable number of the Kunama have converted to these religions. Today, like the Beni-Amer, many Kunamas have left their homeland and live in refugee camps in neighbouring countries. For example, following the 1998-2000 border war between Eritrea and Ethiopia, according to UNHCR in 2002, over 4,000 Kunama refugees arrived in Ethiopia (USCIS, 2003). In the last two decades many Kunama sought asylum in Ethiopia and Sudan, and a few refugees were resettled in the USA, leaving virtually none in Eritrea.



Figure 4.33. Eritrean Kunama refugees in Shimelba refugee camp in Ethiopia. Some resettled in the USA. (pathe.com, 2007)

The Nara ethnic group also inhabit the south-western part of the Eritrean lowlands. The Nara, previously also known as the Baria, like the Kunama are offshoots of Nilotic peoples, and share with the Kunama the status of earliest inhabitants of Eritrea. Murdock (1957) credits them with introducing agriculture. The tribe inhabited the plains and hills north of the Gash river. Their present-day land is approximately 820km<sup>2</sup> sandwiched between the land of the Beni-Amer towards the south-west of Akardate and Bisha and adjacent to the area of the Kunama. The Nara were sedentary cultivators and agro-pastoralists, mostly cultivating sorghum, millet, sesame and legumes; some were involved in trade. Today most have forsaken their homeland.





Figure 4.34. Nara dwell in grass huts in villages and in Barentú town. They are predominately agro-pastoralists. (Vitale, 2006)

Bender (1976) estimated the Nara population at around 25,000, but Trevaskis (1960) claimed 31,000 of Nilotic offshoots were followers of Islam. Recently the government estimated Nara numbers around 63,000. Despite the small numbers, as mentioned in Table 4.1, the Nara are divided into four clans: the Mogareb and Higur are the dominant clans, and Santora and Koyta are smaller (Bender, 1976). The Nara too intermingled with neighbouring tribes and in the nineteenth century embraced Islam (Pool, 2001). Today, a minority of Nara live in poverty in peasant villages near Barentú town, many of them in the refugee camps in eastern Sudan and a few in Kassala city.

The south-western lowland of Eritrea is also homeland to many minorities, including Eritreans of Nigerian origin, the Hausa and Bargo (locally in Arabic called the Tokharin/Tokharir, meaning people who came on foot).



Figure 4.35. Hausa people are known in the Gash-Setiet for snake dancing. (Vehdego, 2006)

According to Ausenda (1999, p. 179) the Hausa and Bargo migrated to Eritrea in the late eighteenth century, due to rising exploitation of the peasantry in northern Nigeria and religious pilgrimage to Macca. In the mid-1970s there were an estimated thirty thousand West Africans inhabiting Eritrea (Bascom, 2001, p. 70). The majority lived near the Gash river and lived by horticulture, trade and handicrafts. After the 1970s the majority migrated to Sudan. Other minorities resident in Eritrea for over seventy years include Yemenis, Sudanese, Ethiopians, mixed-race Italian-Eritreans, and other Europeans. All inhabit urban areas, and the majority participate in trade.

The north-western part of the Eritrean lowland is mainly inhabited by the Hadāreb ethnic group. The Hadāreb are Hamitic-speakers of the Tu-Bedawié tongue, but the majority are multilingual. They speak Tigrāyit, the language of their close neighbours the Beni-Amer, and Arabic, widely spoken in Eritrea and Sudan. The Hadāreb is likely the smallest ethnic group in Eritrea. ISL Ethnologies (2000) estimated them to be around 20,000 souls, but the government officially doesn't mention even the rough estimate. The Hadāreb are Sunni Muslims, though knowledge of their religion is very nominal in some clans. While disappearing today,

the Hadāreb were once the dominant group in the Beja region, which stretches approximately 697km from Aidhab in the eastern desert on the Red Sea coast to the port of Massawa in the south. According to Paul (1959) the Hadāreb are the progeny of the Himyarite tribe who migrated from Shihr in southern Arabia at the end of the sixth century, settling in the Red Sea hills at Atbai, approximately 110km south-west of modern-day Port Sudan.



Figure 4.36. Hadāreb nomads near the Eritrea-Sudan border in Hamashkhoreib (Krijnen, 2008)

Settling among the indigenous Beja the newcomers strengthened their position by intermarriage with daughters of the Beja local chiefs, and later their sons became leaders of the Beja (Paul, 1959). The Hadāreb tribe are partly Arab. Their ancestors were the Hadramaut people from modern-day Yemen. Indigenous Beja described them as the Hadāreb, a local corruption of Hadarma (inhabitants of Hadramaut). Paul (1959) in his study of the Arab-Beja relationships firmly concluded that the Bellōu (obsolete inhabitants of modern-day Eritrea) were the Hadāreb at a later stage in their history. Inter-tribal matters were managed by their chief, called Emir el Hadārba. The tribe's past is full of aggressive conflicts with the Beni-Amer, the Hadendowa and other sections of the Beja, but they did also intermingle with the



former. Like the Beni-Amer the Hadāreb were predominantly nomadic camel, goat and sheep-owners; a few owned cattle after they were ejected by the Hadendowa from the riverine forests in the last meandering of Khor Baraka. The majority of the Hadāreb were small-radius nomads scattered in the arid plains and hills of north-western Baraka at Sawa, Lukeyb, Carcabat and Molōbear and subdued by the Beni-Amer in the recent past of their history. They left Eritrea in recent decades, weakened by war and droughts. Today the Hadāreb are indistinguishable from the Beni-Amer and the Hadendowa with whom they share Sudanese towns and refugee camps.

#### **4.5. The Beni-Amer: socio-political and geographical background**

The Beni-Amer have been scarcely researched, except for the work of Nadel (1945). The grossly oversimplified study by Olson (1996; Marin, 2005) is irrelevant and outdated for the purpose of this study. Therefore, this section is mainly based on Beni-Amer oral history, the knowledge of the researcher as a member of the Beni-Amer and what their neighbouring ethnic groups attribute to them. According to Nadel the Beni-Amer are the progeny of a Ja'ali man and a Bellōu woman; the Ja'aliin were a powerful tribe which ruled on the middle Nile in the 16th century, and the Bellōu were the aboriginal inhabitants of large parts of present-day Eritrea. This son avenged the slaying of his father by the Bellōu by bringing an army from his father's country to conquer the Bellōu, out of which over here centuries the Beni-Amer tribe arose, and within it the Nabtab nobility. The consciousness of identity among the Beni-Amer is essentially an awareness of common ancestors and original ancestral homeland (currently split between western Eritrea, eastern Sudan and northwestern Ethiopia), collective cultural and religious identity, and shared historical experiences.



Figure 4.37. The Beni-Amer are locally known by the three-line facial scarification on each cheek. (P. Blair, 1965)

In the oral history of the Beni-Amer, their ancestors migrated from present-day southern Arabia over 2000 years ago. According to a documentary published by the Sudan Ministry of Information the Beni-Amer are among the oldest inhabitants of the present-day Sahel highland, Gash and Baraka regions in Eritrea and the area around Tokar in the Red Sea province of the Sudan; they were among the first to

accept Islam in the area, and many members of the tribe such as Sāmrä ibn Kamel al-Amer are credited with spreading Islam in the region. An alternative version (Paul 1950) explains their conversion as a phenomenon of the 19th century at the hand of the Arab missionary Sayyad Mohammed Uthman al-Mirghani, with the Beni-Amer accepting the Khatmiyya branch of the Muslim Sufi order of the Sudan. Nowadays the Beni-Amer are Sunni Muslims, and they reject this version of their conversion.

According to the British Administration in 1952, there were 80,000 Beni-Amer, inhabiting eastern Sudan and a large part of Eritrea. Recently the Beni-Amer as a subgroup of the Beja of the Sudan were estimated at 300,000, concentrated in eastern Sudan and western Eritrea (Olson, 1996). As stated in Table 4.1 the Beni-Amer's over 26 offshoots constituted a unified society. Besides, the tribe contains many subgroups based on family lineages. Before the 1950s the tribe was highly stratified: at the peak of its social hierarchy was the Nabtab, calling themselves 'pure' Beni-Amer, an elite group who controlled political and economic power among the entire society, while the remainder constituted a subservient group of serfs called the Tigré (Olson, 1996). In the last six decades this social structure has completely disappeared, and it is impossible to tell who is a Nabatab or a Tigré. The main reasons for this were the abolishing of the serf system by Ibrahim Sultan Ali in 1948, the start of Eritrean Armed struggle by Idris Awate, migration and poverty that affected the entire Beni-Amer community and the increase in Islamic religious knowledge which does not accommodate the old social stratification of the tribe.

The Beni-Amer are multilingual. Those who inhabited the northern tip of Eritrea and the south-eastern part of the Red Sea province of Sudan mixed with the Hadārba and Hadendowa among various other tribes and learned to speak a Cushitic language called To-Bedawié and Arabic alongside their primary Tigrāyit language. And those who inhabited Kassala, Tessenei, and Akardate and farther inland Eritrea mainly speak their Semitic Tigrāyit, Arabic and Tigrinya. Currently, it makes sense to conclude that all Beni-Amer speak Arabic in Eritrea, Sudan or in the diaspora: Arabic is considered a lingua franca. In Sudan, they are regarded as one of the five Beja sections, and in Eritrea, they are categorised under the Tigre ethnic group. The tribe was predominantly nomadic, herding cattle, camels, sheep and goats, scattered over a vast area, from near Tokar and the Red Sea hills in the north-east, down to



the western lowlands in Baraka, Anseba, Gash, and Setiet. In the north-east of the western lowlands, the majority sections of the tribe grazed their animals and cultivated crops such as pearl millet and sorghum in the Khor Baraka delta around Tokar. The presence of the delta attracted some sections of the Beni-Amer to adopt sedentary livelihoods. However, the majority of Beni-Amer sections made small radius migration between Karora and the Eritrean hills south up to Agra and Hasta on the north-western slope of the Eritrean Sahel highland.



Figure. 4.38. Camel and small ruminant herds in the border between eastern Sudan and western Eritrea. (Medhanie, 2016)

In Gash-Setiet, the Beni-Amer grazed their sheep, goats, and camel and cattle herds. From September to February the Beni-Amer grazed their livestock in the Eritrean hills east of Kassala city. In the south-western lowlands, they used to encounter the agro-pastoralist Nara tribe. Farther west around the Gash river the Beni-Amer would meet the sedentary agro-pastoralist Kunama around Foda, Tole, Shambuko and Anāgolo plains. Particularly camel owners of the Beni-Amer sections used to enter in contact with Kunama to the west of Barentú around Tagowda, and Gogne. In the dry season between March and June, Beni-Amer cattle herders would migrate towards Tigray province of Ethiopia across the Tekeze river. The only perennial river in the area, its waters, and the Wilkeite forests around it attract nomadic

pastoralists in the dry season. Beni-Amer also grazed their cattle in the Setiet plains around the Tekeze river, and they used to migrate over 378km to Mai-Kuhili, Mai Gaba, Birkuta, Adi Ramets and Mai-Tsemre in north-west Tigray.

The federation of Eritrea and Ethiopia created by the UN General Assembly in the 1950s survived less than ten years: Ethiopia annexed Eritrea on the 24<sup>th</sup> December 1958. Since the 1960s the region inhabited by the Beni-Amer has undergone socio-economic and political transformation, starting with the Eritrean war for independence started on the 1<sup>st</sup> September 1961 when Hamid Idris Awate, a Beni-Amer warrior who had served in the Italian army during WWII, with thirteen of his kinsman attacked Ethiopian forces at Mt. Adal (Woldemariam, 2016. p. 141).



Figure. 4.39. Martyr Hamid Idris Awate who initiated the Eritrean war for independence. (Eritreadaily, 2007)

This led to the emergence of ELF, mainly organised by the Beni-Amer and other Muslim lowlanders living in exile in several Arab capitals. Most supporters and fighters were also Beni-Amer, while other Muslim lowlanders and ELF resistance were concentrated in the western lowlands. Because of their active role for the independence of Eritrea, the Beni-Amer and other Muslims were subject to gruesome crimes by the Ethiopian government and pro-unionist sections from the

central highlands; we shall examine this in chapter five. The war for independence played a vital role in shifting the Beni-Amer and Eritrean society: for example, women, traditionally responsible for tasks around the house, joined the front and fought on the frontlines.



Figure. 4.40. Eritrean women fighters. Characteristic facial scarification of the Beni-Amer can be seen on the cheeks of the fighter on the right. (Harper, 2016)

In 1967 Emperor Haile Selassie launched a retaliatory offensive killing Beni-Amer and other lowland communities, slaughtering livestock, burning villages and pastoralists' camps to the ground and poisoning well-waters. This led to the first mass-migration of Beni-Amer to Sudan (Bascom, 1989).

Besides the war, rainfall variability and climate change severely restricted pastoral mobility, leading to livestock die-offs, impoverishment and ultimately large-scale migration. Many of the tribe have languished and faced death in refugee camps in eastern Sudan for more than four decades, others self-settled in the outskirts of eastern Sudanese towns, while some passed into the Beni-Amer communities of Sudan and obtained Sudanese ID cards. Intermixing with other urban settlers has



particular impact on Beni-Amer identities across time and space. We shall return to this in chapter six.



Figure. 4.41. Predominantly Beni-Amer Eritrean refugees, at Wad Sharife refugee camp in Eastern Sudan. (Eisenloeffel, 1985).

In the following analysis, chapters present the mobility, homeland, identity and wellbeing of the Beni-Amer across time and space.

#### **4.6. Conclusion**

This chapter has provided the background of the history, geography and people of Eritrea and argues that understanding Eritrea requires understanding its occupation by overlapping kingdoms and colonial powers and its many wars. The sense of identity, wellbeing, homeland and mobility of its people, inside and outside the country, is closely related to those kingdoms, colonials and wars. The chapter demonstrated how the identity of the inhabitants of present-day Eritrea is the product of the political history of the past overlapping kingdoms, and that it must dynamically change with future socio-political circumstances in the region and beyond. The chapter showed that the inhabitants fought but also coexisted and

intermingled, and that these were vital parts of the history that shaped their identities and sense of belonging. Moreover, this chapter outlined how geography and climate dictated modes of subsistence in the country. Thus, the inhabitants of the land carefully followed the diverse environmental and climatic situation of their environment and adjusted their modes of life in relation to it. Whether pastoral nomads and agro-pastoralists in the lowlands or sedentary cultivators on the highland, war, drought and environmental changes displaced and impoverished Eritrean people. The Beni-Amer compete for decreasing natural resources and space, with each other and with other nomads, with agro-pastoralists and mechanised farming, leading them to relinquish nomadic pastoralism and migrate locally and internationally in search of alternative livelihoods. The following chapter analyses the relationship between pastoral mobility, homeland, wellbeing and identity among the contemporary Beni-Amer.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Beni-Amer Pastoral Mobility: Homeland, Identity and Wellbeing**

#### **5.1. Introduction**

This chapter analyses the main themes of this study: mobility, identity, homeland and wellbeing in relation to the Beni-Amer. This chapter argues mobility, identity, homeland and wellbeing are intertwined elements creating the sense of being a Beni-Amer, and that these are bound together by the concept of pastoral mobility. The tribe's ancestral homeland is founded on pastoral mobility, and their wellbeing, linked to the wellbeing of the livestock, depended on pastoral mobility. Therefore, pastoralism as a system of production and culture among the Beni-Amer dependent on pastoral mobility, and its disruption has led to the end of their pastoral nomadism. This argument is presented in five sections: following this introduction, section 5.2 gives the background context of the Beni-Amer. Section 5.3 examines the significance of pastoral mobility as the key underlying factor for identity and wellbeing. Section 5.4 discusses wellbeing and its fluctuations in the relation to pastoral mobility. Section 5.5 discusses the construction of identities and wellbeing in relation to livestock breeds, herding practices and religion, and section 5.6 by draws conclusions from the main findings.

#### **5.2. Background and Context of the Beni-Amer**

The Beni-Amer comprise over 26 sections (see Table 5.1 overleaf). Before the creation of Eritrea in the 1890s the Beni-Amer lived scattered between the Red Sea around Tokar in the north to the Nile valley in the west down to the river Gash and Setiet in the south and the foothills of the central highlands and Anseba valley in the east (see Figure 5.1 overleaf). Since federation in the 1950s the Beni-Amer has undergone rapid and profound socio-political and geographic change. The tribe left most of the ancestral homeland and migrated to Sudan; many live in diaspora in Western and Middle Eastern countries. Before the migration to Sudan, the Beni-Amer were mobile pastoralists, and only a few sections (Beit-Juk, Ädd Towas, Ädd Tāule, Ädd Ali Bākhīt and Ädd Assālā, see appendix, 5b) in the upper Anseba Valley and the foothills of Hamasien were agriculturalists. Pastoralist Beni-Amer groups owned livestock (camels, cattle, goats and sheep). Herding practice, cultural values

and religious teachings intertwine to influence their cultural identity. Beni-Amer 'homeland making' applied to the entire region covered by their livestock mobility; pastoral mobility is not merely a livelihood strategy but also a process through which the Beni-Amer formulate their ancestral homeland, emphasising ownership and sentimental attachment to it. The 1890s Italian occupation spilt the Beni-Amer, creating what we will refer to as 'blurred homeland' on the peripheries of the newly created countries. Alongside these facts the Beni-Amer are Sunni Muslims and Islam also influence their everyday practices and sense of wellbeing.



Table 5.1. Beni-Amer sections' geographical migration from Eritrea to Sudan and livelihood changes across time and space. (Estimate based on key informants' interviews)

Beni-Amer sections Add means the family name of the section	Modes of livelihoods before the 1960s & 1970s	Geographical area of livestock mobility and camping before the 1960s & 1970s	Livestock mobility between 1961 and 1985	Modes of livelihoods between 1985-1993	Modes of livelihoods between 1993-2014
Ādd Humbierra, Algaēden, Ādd Sheikh Garābit, The Fāidāb, Ādd Nāseh, Ādd Gultāna, Beit Awat	All these sections were cattle owners	Middle Baraka and the Gash near Aikota	Majority migrated to Sudan, but few stayed in lower Baraka and Gash	In refugee camps in east Sudan	Majority wage workers in towns and refugee camps in east Sudan
Ādd Assālā, Ādd Tauliab, Ādd Towas, Ādd, AbSheneiāb, Ādd Hāssal, Lēbet and [Aretaga in Tokar some migrated to port Sudan]	All these were predominantly cattle owning sections of the Beni-Amer	Scattered villages in upper Baraka (Ādd Assālā, Ādd Tauliab, Ādd Towas), but lower Baraka border with Sudan (AbSheneiāb, Ādd Hāssal, Lēbet)	Migrated to Sudan. Few sections migrated with some of their livestock and stayed around Wadi el Hileau	In refugee camps in east Sudan	Majority wage workers in towns and refugee camps in east Sudan
The Dagga, Ādd Hamad Awat, Ādd Okud, Ādd Sheērif, Ādd Alāllam, Ādd Ali, Ādd Elāmean, Beit Mal'a,	All these were Predominantly camel owners' sections of the Beni-Amer	Middle Baraka and Gash Some sections of Ādd Okud move towards Tokar	Migrated to Sudan	In refugee camps in east Sudan	Majority wage workers in towns and refugee camps in east Sudan
Ādd Hāssrai, Sinkāt Kēinaāb, Ādd Hāshish, Ādd Fāgie and Ādd Ali Bākhīt	Camel and cattle owners' sections of the Beni-Amer	Central Baraka, Gash and Setiet and some clans migrate north towards Ansaba	Near Aikota in the Gash later migrated to Sudan	In refugee camps in east Sudan	Majority wage workers in towns and refugee camps in east Sudan
Ādd Ibrahim	Goats and sheep, camel and cattle owning sections of the Beni-Amer	Central Baraka and the Gash	Migrated to Sudan	In refugee camps in east Sudan	Majority wage workers in towns and refugee camps in east Sudan
Majority of the Beit-Juk and a few sections of Ādd Ali Bākhīt, Ādd Assālā, Ādd Tauliab and Ādd Towas	Some of these sections were sedentary and combined seasonal crop production and livestock mobility	Southwest of Keren (Beit Juk), but Ādd Ali Bākhīt, Ādd Assālā, Ādd Tauliab and Ādd Towas seasonal migrate to the Gash	Lower Baraka later migrated to Sudan	In refugee camps and towns in east Sudan	Majority wage workers in towns and refugee camps in east Sudan

We [the Beni-Amer] we used to be very wealthy pastoral nomads before the federation with Ethiopia in the 1950s. In the 1960s we started Eritrean war for independence and led the ELF [Eritrean Liberation Front]. In reprisal the Ethiopian government killed us and our livestock. We migrated to Sudan, impoverished, and became refugees. We lived over 40-years displaced. Our children and grandchildren went far away, some to America and Europe. Now we are not nomads any more; those of us who have a few livestock feed them straw from the market, herd them by using a collectively hired herder and mostly keep them inside a fence. Nomadic pastoralism is ended. We are becoming city people. (KI, FGD3, east Kassala rangeland, 13 January 2015)

As with the Fulani of West Africa, the Bedouins of the Middle East and the Sami of Norway pastoral mobility among the Beni-Amer was backed with environmental and herd-management knowledge, but as the above quote illustrates this has been ended over the last five decades.

Scholars such as Niamir-Fuller (1998), Galvin (2009), Krätli et al. (2013), Reid (2014) and Oba (2014) define pastoral mobility as a strategic move to meet ephemeral concentration of resources; Khazanov (1994) defines nomadism as a distinct form of food-producing economy. According to Humphrey and Sneath (1999) mobile pastoralism as in institutional contexts alike to technologically advanced profit-oriented economic activity and even compatible with urbanised lifestyles. The present study affirms the conclusion of previous studies but argues that pastoral mobility demands extreme flexibility to meet livestock feeding requirements and social needs. Pastoral mobility is not only a livelihood strategy but bonds economic wellbeing, cultural identities and homeland attachments. As one 78 year old grandfather interviewee explained:

The Beni-Amer homeland was spacious; when some part of it was dry another part became rainy. We [Beni-Amer] were mobile pastoralists, seasonally making cyclic treks in well-established migration routes connecting our entire homeland together. We knew when and where to feed our livestock and accordingly planned our social events, marriages, circumcision and so forth. (KI3, interview, east Kassala rangeland, 27 December 2014).

This indicates that wellbeing of people and livestock are based on pastoral mobility, ranging beyond the colonial borders of the 1890s and the federation in the 1950s: from the Red Sea hills in the northeast frontier between Sudan and Eritrea up to the Setiet southwestern border between Eritrea and Ethiopia. According to key informants, before their migration to Sudan in the 1960s and 1970s their livestock grazed around 88,420 square kilometres of the rangeland in the region; this is sketched in figure 5.1. below. The region is characterised by low rainfall, strong seasonality, year to year variability in precipitation and several climatic and geographical differences (see appendix, 5a).

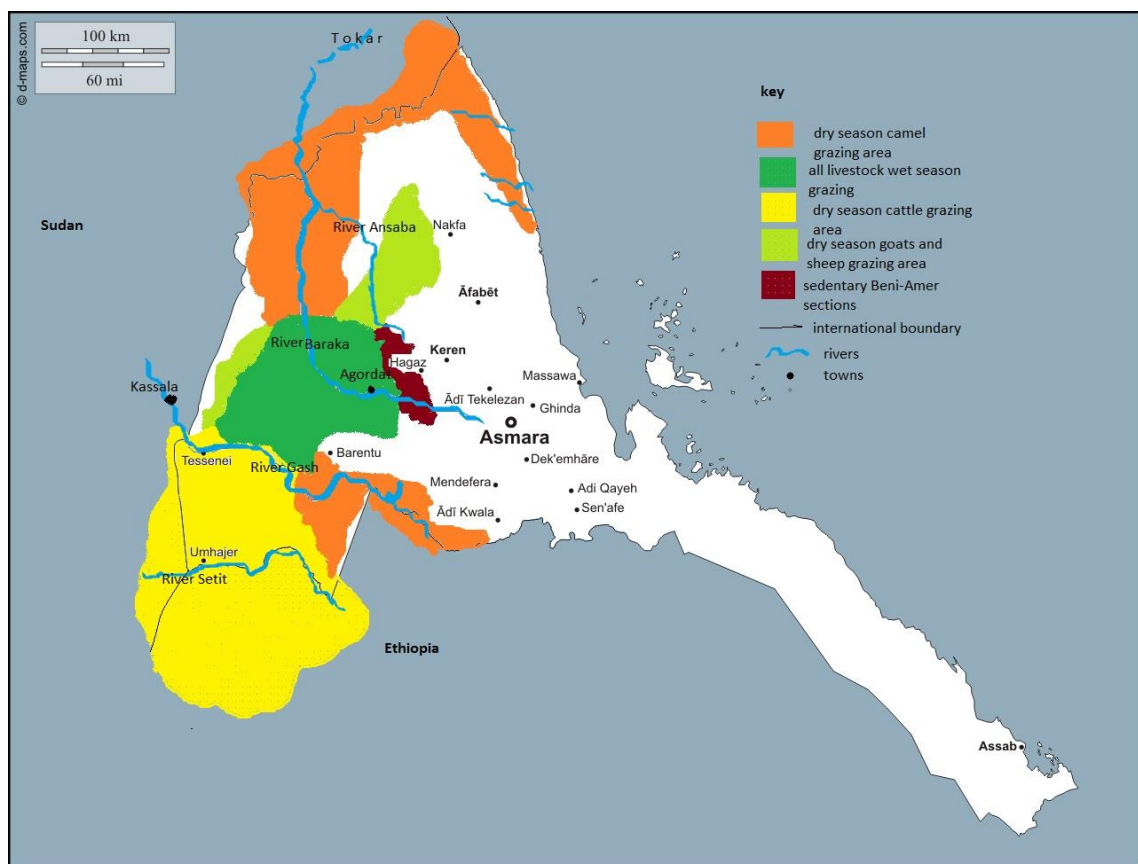


Figure 5.1. Estimated wet and dry seasonal distribution of the Beni-Amer pre-1970s. (KI, FGD3, 13/01/2015). (d-maps.com, 2017)

The heavens and the land dictate our life. We used to move and camp based on the availability of water and grass. (KI, FGD1, east Kassala rangeland, 12, January 2015).

The above quote indicates the Beni-Amer lived with climatic variability long before the emergence of contemporary concerns with global warming. Climatic features

influenced herd-types, annual mobility cycles of the tribe, housing material and labour organisation in households. Predominately the Beni-Amer were nomads migrating from the dry northern foothills and river beds in summer to winter pasture in the southern plains and river valleys. On the move, they inhabited easily dismantled houses called *Aagnet* made from locally available doum palm mats and sticks. These simple constructions allowed complex family space, including gender segregation. If the family had only one *Aagnet* then it was exclusively for females, and males stayed in a *Rakuba* (shade made from four sticks and doum palm mats).



Figure 5.2. Agnat used during Beni-Amer pastoralists camping. (Beni-Amer culture, 6 March 2016)

Another form of Beni-Amer dwelling was the *Bashor* (mobile house on camel back used during treks). This was used when transporting females, children, the old, and sometimes new-born animals. Moreover, it was used to transport brides from one pastoral camp to another; even sedentary Beni-Amer in small villages use this when transporting a bride. In bigger towns and cities like Kassala the Beni-Amer use cars

to transport their brides and the *Bashor* is disappearing from their culture, an example of how among sedentary Beni-Amer some elements of their cultural identity are gradually declining, as has been noted of the sedentarised 'Bedouin' of the Negev Desert (Dinero, 2004, p. 261).



Figure 5.3. *Bashor* on camel back. (Beni-Amer culture, 6 March 2016).

Some sedentary groups have different versions of these dwellings, usually gender segregated - *Tokalab/Tukuls* (conical huts) made of doum palm leaves and tree branches, *Zareeba* (a large compound made of doum palm branch fences; see figure 5.4 below), or *Darator* (a rectangular mad brake and straw covered house).





Figure 5.4. Sedentary Beni-Amer conical huts in small village. The stone circle forms a class for learning the Holy Quran. (Danielzolli, 8 March 2016)

Pastoral spatiality represents an economy adjusted towards the unitization of natural resources in a way that maximises livestock production yields while minimising threats to animal wealth (Ingold, 1987; Niamir-Fuller, 1998; And, 2008; Behnke and Kerven 2011; Galvin, 2009; Krätli, et al. 2013; Reid, 2014; Oba; 2014). Moreover, it was facilitated by seasonal cyclic mobility, environmental knowledge, and social relations, the combination of which underpin the Beni-Amer people's pastoral mobility. Key informants reported that geographically fragmented and seasonally varied areas grazed by Beni-Amer livestock were brought together through pastoral households' movement. The pastureland comprises semi-desert climate in the north, arid grassland and well-watered river valleys in the middle and Savannah and dense woodland in the south – all part of what the tribe considered their unitary ancestral homeland. The following section examines the relevance of pastoral mobility in the homeland making and its implications for the formation of identity and wellbeing.

### **5.3. Pastoral mobility, homeland-making and sentiments among the Beni-Amer**

Our homeland is the land of our ancestries, the land where our heroes were buried; the land of Begait Arabite, [local Beni-Amer Zebu cattle] Ensa Hawete [pinkish-red and graintawny camel herds], Atal thadie [white goats] Sahel, Baraka, Gash and Setiet is our historical pastureland 'Sabek wa Sagem alna' [we were fully nomads]. (KI, FGD3, east Kassala rangeland, 13 January 2015)

There has been little investigation of the relationship between homeland-making and pastoral mobility. A few geographers researched pastoralists' space using Henri Lefebvre's theory of the 'production of space' (e.g. Meir and Karplus, 2013; Gonin and Gautier 2016). These studies mainly focus on the impact of dynamic change in land tenure systems on pastoral mobility, but do not analyse how pastoral nomads make their homeland in the first place. This section therefore examines the relationship between pastoral mobility and homeland-making and argues that pastoral nomads' homeland-making and attachment are results of everyday experiences of herding and other practices, and not from mythic or other abstract processes: the homeland is established by centuries of pastoral mobility and because of this it is understood as a whole, connected and utilised between dry and wet seasons. In the quote above respondents acclaimed their homeland as a valuable historical asset in which their heroes were buried and an economic asset grazed by their livestock. Thus, pastoral mobility itself contributes to the formation of the ancestral homeland, and is the means that helps to create their sentimental attachment to their historical homeland. Therefore, the creation of ancestral homeland through pastoral mobility pre-exists and challenges the colonial boundary based on national identity and belongingness across Africa. For example, the Eritreans are Eritreans because Italians created the present-day Eritrea's boundary; Sudanese are Sudanese because the British created the boundary of the present-day Sudan and so forth. As key informants explained:

We [the Beni-Amer] associate with Eritrea because Eritrea encompasses our ancestral homeland and the history of our people. [Sahel, Gash, Baraka and Setiet] is our homeland and our history goes back for thousands of years covering almost all parts of Eritrea from Karora in the Sahel up to the port of

Massawa in Sāmhār. And we [the Beni-Amer] affiliate and love the Sudan because like Eritrea our land and history is here [east Sudan] you know! From Tokar in Red Sea province up to Siñnar in the Nile was the core Beni-Amer ancestral homeland for centuries. (KI, FGD2, east Kassala rangeland, 12 January 2015).

This quote elucidates the complicated sense of homeland among the Beni-Amer. Their sentiments are connected to the ancestral homeland formulated through pastoral mobility but also signal attachment to Eritrea and Sudan since the ancestral homeland is found divided in these countries. Further, though, because of this complexity, sedentary groups in the Central Highlands question mobile pastoralists' attachment to the land they inhabit. One group of key informants expressed it thus:

Because we [the Beni-Amer] were nomads the sedentary people in the villages such as the Tigrinya assume we don't have affection for our homeland. They do not know our homeland is to us like the sea for the fish: every armlength of our homeland is loved by us and it is dearly missed. Our ancestral homeland is divided by the colonial powers and its peace and blessing are degraded by them, but we [the Beni-Amer] will always remain sentimentally attached to it as a whole. (KI, FGD3, east Kassala rangeland, 13 January 2015).

Sedentary societies such as the Tigrinya peasant villagers assume the Beni-Amer nomads have little or no attachments to the land. Moreover, as stated in chapter four the government of Eritrea holds the same view. But as stated in the quote above the Beni-Amer demonstrate ultimate attachments to their ancestral homeland; for them every river, hill, plain and tree is loved and dearly missed when lost: for them to inhabit a land means to internalise it and to become part of it. Thus, create attachment and rootedness (Dixon and Durrheim, 2000). The Beni-Amer elders were able to maintain a sense of belongingness to their ancestral homeland even while it was lost to them by remembering their past in it, while the young developed belongingness through internalising their elders' oral narration. Centuries of uninterrupted pastoral mobility left historical names on places across the Beni-Amer homeland. For example, key informants said areas were named for pasture and water availability, such as *Sorobatet* (the land of sorob herbage), *Gabie-alabo*



(land without route due to thick herbage and wildlife). Interviews with the key informants indicate pastoral mobility is not merely herding movement from one pitch available pasturage to another, rather pastoral mobility itself facilitates homeland-making and belonging.

Through pastoral mobility homeland includes everyday places such as seasonal camping sites, rivers, water points and hills. This study argues the '*everyday embodies everything*', including past-present-future traditions, attachments, sentimentalities and belongingness. In short, the accumulated everyday practices across time and space shapes 'insideness' to a community and its attachment to land (Rowles, 1983, p. 300). In contrast to sedentary societies (Rowles, 1983 cited in Dixon and Durrheim, 2000, p. 29) three senses of 'insideness' represents nomadic relationships with their surroundings: 'Physical insideness': implicit knowledge of the physical details of place; 'Social insideness' relates to 'integration within the social fabric of the community', for example, 'knowing others and being known'. And 'autobiographic insideness' 'designate[s] their idiosyncratic sense of rootedness'. Therefore, the feelings of place-belongingness and community between sedentary and mobile pastoralists are similar but the different physical, psychological and political factors mean that the sedentary society has a more utilitarian and transient relation to their environment. For example, a person in sedentary society travel by car to work guided by satnav, but a mobile pastoralist might use a camel and be guided by natural features such as the moon, sun and stars. A sedentary might have regular contacts in the local pub; mobile pastoralists might know and be known by herders watering their livestock in the same water point. Or the nomadic pastoralist's journey might be influenced by reciprocity with neighbouring communities but for sedentaries mobility across country borders are affected by the passport and finances of the individual. Each case involves a more casual, impersonal connection with the small details surrounding the sedentary person's experience. Key informants expressed this in their words as:

Our ancestral homeland is so vast and in some areas a stranger could die of thirst, but we know how to live in every part of it because of our nomadic lifestyle, environmental knowledge and social networks among our people

[the Beni-Amer] and others such as the Hadendowa, Hadāreb and Rashaida. (KI, FGD1, east Kassala rangeland, 12 January 2015)

This signals the Beni-Amer perceive the vast geographical area which includes parts of present-day western Eritrea, eastern Sudan and north-western Ethiopia as ancestral homeland established through centuries of pastoral mobility. and their mobile pastoralism lifestyle in the ancestral homeland was shaped by many factors including tacit and environmental knowledge and by maintaining the fabric of social networks among the members of the Beni-Amer and neighbouring communities.

On the other hand, another factor in homeland-establishment is conflict. The Beni-Amer fought several conflicts with intruders and rival tribes such as the Hadendowa and Hadāreb mainly over pasture and water.

But with the arrival of the colonial powers, their homeland was exposed to the new concept of territorialisation under the Italian occupation:

Our ancestors defended our homeland with sword; they were warriors on horseback. We [the Beni-Amer] fought against the warlords from Tigray and defeated them in several incidents before the arrival of Italians in the 1900s, and we fought with Dervishes and lost many of our people. Those clashes were because the intruders wanted to occupy our land. We fought the Kunama because of cattle theft and clashed with the Hadendowa over pasture and water and because they kidnapped our women. We resisted the Italians but our resistance was ended in a brief time; it was hard for our ancestors to fight with the sword against tanks and fire arms. After the Italians, we [the Beni-Amer] faced new reality: a colonial government and a divided homeland. (KI, FGD3, east Kassala rangeland, 13, January 2015)

Key respondents describe Baraka, Gash, Sahel and Setiet as theirs. The historical ancestral homeland encompasses a vast geographical area but currently it is fragmented by the colonial boundaries, mainly splitting the Beni-Amer between Eritrea and Sudan, as found by Nadel (1945). Among the Beni-Amer birthplace is not related to a single officially-registered place such as a hospital, but refers to a vast area. Key informants revealed that birthplaces are not precisely appointed locations, but somewhere within the ancestral homeland.

I was born in middle Baraka, and my younger brother was born in Gash. (KI2, interview, east Kassala rangeland 13 December 2014).

The essence of being Beni-Amer is not “where and when you are born but to have a clear blood lineage to one of the Beni-Amer sections”. (KI1, interview, Gash basin, 29 November 2014).

The interviews revealed birthplaces neither known nor registered. The birthplace was mobile space and it was common for the children of a single family to be born across the extended ancestral homeland. But this geographical dispersal acted as another essential feeling towards the ancestral homeland. Therefore, the ancestral homeland in the collective memory of the Beni-Amer encompasses the whole extended region as inhabited for centuries: While having an unspecified birth place actually facilitates inclusion and community belongingness between Beni-Amer it works negatively at the modern state level: unregistered birthplaces meet exclusion, inequality and marginalisation in Eritrea and Sudan; the Eritrean authorities suspect the Beni-Amer of being Sudanese and the Sudanese authorities suspect them of being Eritreans. Thus, the Beni-Amer are marginalised in both countries and suffer from inequality in service-provision from both. Thus longstanding material inequalities are compounded by these identity-related national additions in the ‘politics of redistribution’ (Fraser, 2003, cited in Bond, 2006. p. 609). The concept of homeland has been doubly challenged by Italian colonialism and the creation of the nation of Eritrea.

### **5.3.1. Italian colonisation and homeland: impacts on pastoral mobility, identity and wellbeing**

As stated in chapter four the construction of Beni-Amer cultural identity and their present situation closely reflect the socio-political history and geography of their region. The historical influences of the overlapping kingdoms were observed on Beni-Amer religious beliefs and cultural identity. Italian colonisation left a marked legacy, the creation of the colonial boundaries. Key informants explained that the Beni-Amer were the most powerful tribe in the region and asserted uncontested domination of the ancestral homeland, which straddles three sovereign countries: eastern Sudan, northern and western Eritrea and parts of north-western Ethiopia.

The Italians first over-powered local resistance then their colonial administration divided the homeland between these countries, splitting the Beni-Amer mainly between Sudan and Eritrea, creating Eritrean Beni-Amer and Sudanese Beni-Amer. Respondents affirmed that the split weakened the Beni-Amer ruling house, complicated pastoral mobility, had a negative impact on wellbeing and caused a 'blurred sense of homeland' among the Beni-Amer:

*Talian* [Italian colonisation] divided the land only one time but split the Beni-Amer every time. Therefore, I feel my right hand is Eritrean, and my left hand is Sudanese; it is like 'my external skin is Sudanese, but my heart is Eritrean'. (KI6, interview, east Kassala rangeland, 08 January 2015)

As stated in the quote above the seniors' affiliate more to Eritrea than to Sudan because the land they claim as their ancestral homeland largely falls in the present-day Eritrea and their memory is drawn from their past in it. But unlike their seniors some young respondents dismissed the Eritrean-Sudanese view, claiming the entire eastern Sudan, a large part of Eritrea and parts of north-western Ethiopia as solely the ancestral homeland of the Beni-Amer. Consequently, this view is one of the underlying reasons behind the insurgency in the region. Respondents stated that the Beni-Amer in Eritrea and the Beni-Amer of Sudan are *Hawo-toom*, meaning brothers. And the young herders reasoned the Beni-Amer should live as one people in one region, therefore, the Beni-Amer should claim their ancestral homeland from Eritrea and Sudan.

The Italian occupation was part of the European scramble for Africa. Thus, the Beni-Amer ancestral homeland was divided between the newly formed countries. The Beni-Amer became nomads of the borderlands of these countries and were eventually pushed to the peripheries of Eritrea-Sudan frontiers. Key informants explained that creation of the territorial boundaries disregarded the Beni-Amer nomadic lifestyle and notion of homeland. Therefore, the nature of the colonial borders is a challenge to Beni-Amer societies' emotional attachment to the tangible and intangible heritage of their ancestral homeland. Currently, the problem caused by colonial boundaries is observed on the Beni-Amer fragmented homeland attachment. In available literature the concept of homeland is described as a country of origin where native ethnic groups hold history and cultural association; thus, it

forms the start of national identity (e.g. Safran, 1991; McAdams, 2013). Indeed, in many parts of Africa, national identities are related to the creation of colonial boundaries. For example, as mentioned in chapter four the Italians created the artificial borders of Eritrea and split the inhabitants of the land among the newly created neighbouring countries. Key informants explained the creation of the colonial boundaries adopted by present-day Eritrea, Sudan and Ethiopia and the many wars fought to enforce them gradually eroded the Beni-Amer from their ancestral homeland, ended their pastoral mobility, forced them into poverty and left them in a state of a 'blurred homeland' and sense of belonging. One informant elaborates the meaning of 'blurred homeland':

We were nomads. All the land from the Red Sea hills and upper Baraka in the northeast and up to Gedaref state in central Sudan in the west, and the Setiet area in the South is our homeland. We were pastoral nomads; our livestock grazed unchallenged in the whole region. The border and passport were not known to our ancestries, you know the thing called my countries your country divided the Beni-Amer it is the making of the *Alestermar* [colonisation] split our homeland and brought us war and poverty. See! It is an eternal problem our homeland is divided, and we do not have clear feeling of belonging either to Eritrea nor Sudan, but we have deep sentiments to our ancestral homeland [pointing his stick to the bush in the rangeland]. (KI7, interview, east Kassala rangeland, 08 January 2015. 'We' is used interchangeably with 'I').

The creation of Italian Eritrea and English Sudan resembles the argument by Ernest (1983 and Gellner and Breuilly (2008) describing nations as recent phenomena; discrete ethnological units unambiguously segmented on the ground. Contemporary nation-states are separated from each other; where one country's territory ends, another country's territory begins. If ambiguity exists states fight for control and nomadic societies in the border like the Beni-Amer bear the consequence of those wars. In an attempted to explain the complicated situation created by the colonial borders a key informant said:

My third grandad was born in upper Baraka, and my grandfather in Tokar at the Sudan-Eritrea border and I was born in middle Baraka, and my children

were born in the refugee camp in Sudan. We came to the refugee camp decades ago in 1981. But I don't call myself Sudanese and if I do the Sudanese will call me Eritrean. If I say I am Eritrean Eritreans will call me Sudanese. My ancestors were born before the making of Eritrea-Sudan and Ethiopia borders, and I have never been in Eritrea since 1981. I have lived away from my ancestral homeland in the refugee camps in Sudan for 34 years. (KI9, interview, east Kassala rangeland, 09 January 2015).

Key informants explained the creation of the border between eastern Sudan and western Eritrea split the western rangeland between Eritrea and Sudan. And the colonial boundary between Eritrea and Ethiopia divided the pastureland between Eritrea and Ethiopia, obstructing pastoral mobility between the Gash-Baraka in Eritrea and the Setiet area in northern Ethiopia. The demarcation split the heart of the most productive pastureland areas used as dry season refuge. This colonial border starts at Khor Um-Hāajar in southwestern Eritrea running eastwards following the Setiet River up to the junction with the Gash River, splitting the Gash-Setiet rangeland between present-day Eritrea and Ethiopia (Péninou, 1998). The colonial borders fragmented the consciousness of the Beni-Amer ancestral homeland (see figure 5.5 overleaf, based on key informants). After generating the colonial borders the colonisers divided the new Eritrea into seven districts and confiscated extensive rangelands for industrial farming (Naty, 2001). Privatisation of rangelands, particularly near river banks, obstructed pastoral mobility with eventual impact on wellbeing, as the pastoralists lost their sense of place, independence and freedom from oppression. Key informants explained these effects on their parents between 1903-1930:

Italian colonisers wanted to know who lives where and what he does; they want to control us. Some of our fathers such as *Sheik Okud* rebelled, but they were sent to an island prison where they died. The Italians confiscated '*good land*' (dry season refugee places). Here they created the largest cotton plantation in Eritrea. This was a problem because we were not allowed to come close or cross the farm to migrate from Gash to Setiet. (KI, FGD2, east Kassala rangeland, 12 January 2015),

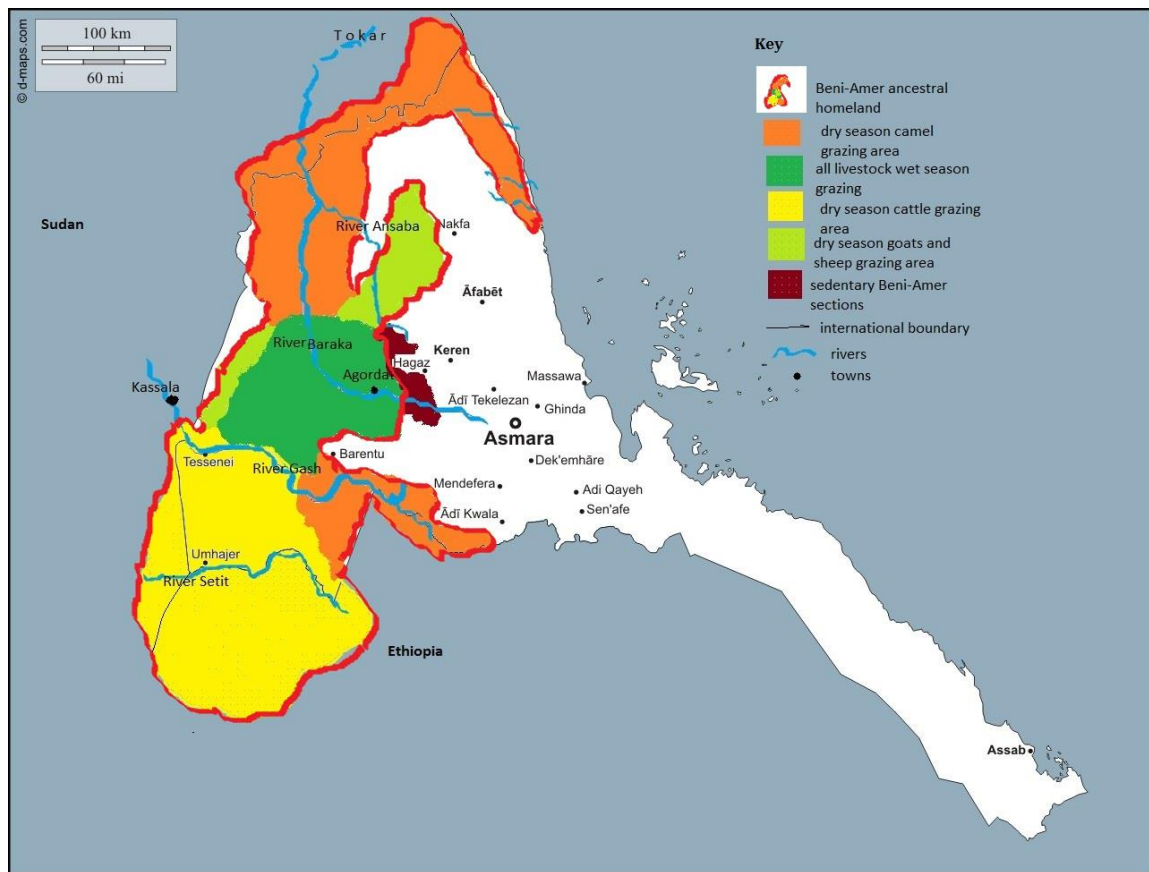


Figure 5.5. Estimated Beni-Amer ancestral homeland pre-1890s. ((KI, FGD3, 13 January 2015 (d-maps.com, 2017)).

Key informants explained the creation of the colonial border led to a new sense of land ownership in the region. Thus, Ethiopian armed militia claimed the Setiet belonged to them and carried out cattle raids in which many Beni-Amer were killed:

From the 1960s and 70s onwards Ethiopian bandits claimed the rangeland across the Um Hāajar river as their country. Sometimes the Ethiopian bandits demanded money and cattle heads from the Beni-Amer to allow them to graze their livestock in the Setiet region. That caused a lot of clashes, cattle raids, and some herders were killed. (KI5, interview, east Kassala rangeland, 07 December 2014).

At the early stage, regardless of the creation of Italian Eritrea, the Beni-Amer nomads had little respect for boundaries even if they know where they are on the political frontier. They were obliged to follow the grass on which their existence depended. Therefore, key informants affirmed that their livestock were grazed extensively between Sahel, Baraka, Gash and Setiet; the Beni-Amer considered any

non-Tigrāyit speakers to be strangers and ferociously fought them. However, nomads from other ethnic groups could graze their livestock as long as they accepted the dominance of the Beni-Amer. Moreover, key informants said that colonial administration tribute collection forced the Beni-Amer to disclose their livestock heads. Although most of colonial history was mentioned negatively, respondents said the Italians brought with them modern medicine, transport and modern agriculture and some Beni-Amer were employed in the colonial farming. Thus, some Beni-Amer clans became sedentary around Tokar and Alighidir and mixed waged work with pastoralism. Moreover, the Italian colonial administration conscripted some Beni-Amer men to Italian *Asker* (native army). This introduced the Beni-Amer to modern weaponry and this military skill was used to start the Eritrean War for Independence (EWI) in 1961; we will return to this in the following section.

### **5.3.2. Impacts of the Ethiopia-Eritrea Federation and EWI**

This section focuses on the Federation and argues that the making of the Federation was the root cause of the Beni-Amer migration to Sudan and the ending of their pastoral nomadism. Key informants explained that the creation of the Federation in the 1950s had long-term impact on their pastoral mobility and wellbeing. The Eritrean war for independence (EWI) was started by Beni-Amer warriors in Adal in the heart of their homeland. The fight for independence lasted for 30 years from 1961-1991, devastating the rangeland in that time. Key informants said the Beni-Amer were the first victims of Ethiopian revenge: massacres of civilians and looting of livestock. The regime backed the Unionist party and armed Shifta, to inflict fear on Beni-Amer and other Muslim communities; this led to the development of the Muslim nationalist political movement followed by the outbreak of the armed liberation struggle against Ethiopia, viewed as anathema to the interests of Ethiopia and its allies (Venosa, 2014). As stated in chapter four the Ethiopian regime exploited the inherited religious, regional, and ethnic differences and waged a civil war, arming some highlanders to combat those seeking independence. Widespread atrocities committed by the Ethiopian-backed Christian highlanders' union Shifta scarred the collective memory of the Beni-Amer communities, according to key respondents.



The transition of Eritrea from British protectorate to an autonomous unit federated with Ethiopia under the sovereignty of the Ethiopian crown proved complex. The 1940s and 1950s were years of argument, bargaining and lobbying by several local, regional and international actors to settle the Eritrean case; consequently, the simple post-Italian colonial case of the country was transformed into an international political conundrum that led to insecurity and bloodshed (Trevaskis, 1960).

When the British were in Eritrea, we [the Beni-Amer] and other Muslims demanded independence. But because we demanded freedom we were killed, and our livestock was looted and our villages burned by the *Habash commandos* [Christian peasant army in the time of Haile Selassie]. (KI, FGD1, east Kassala rangeland, 12 January 2015).

Trevaskis (1960) illustrates how indecision and delay not only arrested progress but encouraged Christian-Muslim conflict. Indeed, as discussed in chapter four the post-Italian politics in the country was marked by the intervention of several actors with their agendas that fragmented the homeland identity and wellbeing among the inhabitants of Eritrea.

The dangerous time of insecurity cost the Beni-Amer several thousand livestock and human life at the hands of *Shifta*, organised by the Unionist party and armed by Ethiopian money:

In the 1950s we [the Beni-Amer] faced terrible killing and livestock raids by the *Shifta* [bandits from the highlands], organised in groups of 15-30 men well-armed by Ethiopia. And in the 1960s it got worse. Haile Selassie trained Habash Commandos in thousands who burned semi-urban centres, villages and nomads' camps in the lowlands. A series of massacres took place in areas such as Akardate, Ädd Omer, Ädd Ibrahim, Herqiqo, and Um Hāajar to name a dark tragedy that does not wear from our memory. (KI, FGD1, east Kassala rangeland, 12 January 2015).

The sense of belongingness to homeland identity now manifests itself as 'we and them': the 'we' includes the Beni-Amer and other Muslims and Eritrean Christians who endorse Eritrean separateness from Ethiopia; 'them' refers to Christian peasant

highlanders affiliated to Ethiopia. Key respondents expressed historical resentments against the Ethiopian aspiration to annex Eritrea:

The Ethiopian regime used to say *Eritrea ārda endico shabā enhadeū* [We don't want the inhabitants of Eritrea, but we need the land of Eritrea]. Therefore, the Ethiopian Habash armed by Russian, US and Israeli weapons committed genocide on our people to occupy our land and our Red Sea. It was unbearable, so we were obliged to migrate to Sudan to save our life, and since then we dwelled the tents of the refugee camps. (KI, FGD2, east Kassala rangeland, 12 January 2015).

Having been sealed from the Red Sea ports following the decline of Aksum in the seventh century, Ethiopia wanted to occupy the Red Sea coast of Eritrea after the British defeated Italy in 1941. In the transition period, the Abyssinian rulers wanted to make the most of the opportunity to annexe Eritrea into the Ethiopian Empire. To achieve this, Haile Selassie's government was engaged in terrorism against independence-seekers. One of the primary tools used by the Ethiopian government to achieve their desire was by organising and equipping pro-union party members which increased enmities between Christian and Muslim inhabitants of post-Italian Eritrea. As a result, the Beni-Amer were the first Muslims targeted by the Ethiopian government. An elderly respondent illustrates the dangerous period of government and Unionist party terrorism of the 1950s and 1960s:

We have seen our fathers shot in front of our eyes, our pregnant mothers split open, children were caught and thrown into the burning huts alive. (KI2, interview, Gash basin, 13 December 2014).

The victimisation and marginalisation of the Beni-Amer and other lowlanders led to the migration of Muslim elites to the Middle East, which later in the 1960s organised the creation of armed struggle movements with its distinctive Islamic and lowlander/Beni-Amer identities. The start of the war for independence in the 1960s by the Beni-Amer and in the land of the Beni-Amer significantly reduced the tribe's mobility and wellbeing and increased the slaughtering of civilians and mass migration to Sudan.

The genocide committed by the Ethiopian Army and the Shifta riots wreaked havoc on the tribe, leading the Beni-Amer who lived in the foothills of the Christian plateau to migrate westwards to the Sudan border as early as the 1950s.

I am from Ädd Tauliab; we left our village around Mansura sixty years ago, when I was a teenager (KI8, interview, east Kassala rangeland, 08 January 2015).

The Ädd Assälā, Ädd Tauliab/Täule and Ädd Towas sections of the Beni-Amer were predominantly cattle owners in scattered villages in the upper Baraka. They were semi-sedentary in villages around Mansura, Ēān, and the grassland around Ghergher in the foothills of Loōgo Ansaba in the border of Hamasien province. These sections were the outermost of the Beni-Amer tribe. With the arrival of Emperor Haile Selassie in power and the annexation of Eritrea by Ethiopia, they experienced cattle raids and most of their villages were burned to the ground between the 1960s and the 1980s: key informants consider the impact of the federation and atrocities on their lives:

Because of the atrocities by the Ethiopian governments we [the Beni-Amer] suffered the desolate refugee camps for over 40 years. We are impoverished, scattered in many refugee camps across eastern Sudan. Our wellbeing is depressed and the majority of us lead poor and unhappy lives. (KI, FDG3, east Kassala rangeland, 13 January 2015).

This quote affirms the impact of the federation and war decades on the Beni-Amer. Loss of pastoral livelihoods and impoverishment eroded their pastoralist self-perception over the years spent in refugee camps. Thus, this study argues that such significant material changes alter both the wellbeing and sense of cultural identity of the Beni-Amer. According to key informants the Beni-Amer were first internally displaced in the 1950s and in the 1960s became international refugees in Sudan. However, it is worth mentioning the Beni-Amer of Eritrea when they migrated to Sudan they settled between the Beni-Amer of Sudan whom they called brothers. The implementation of the Ethio-Eritrea Federation marked the beginning of the Eritrean armed struggle. Beni-Amer nomads were the first to suffer atrocities by the Ethiopian armed forces.

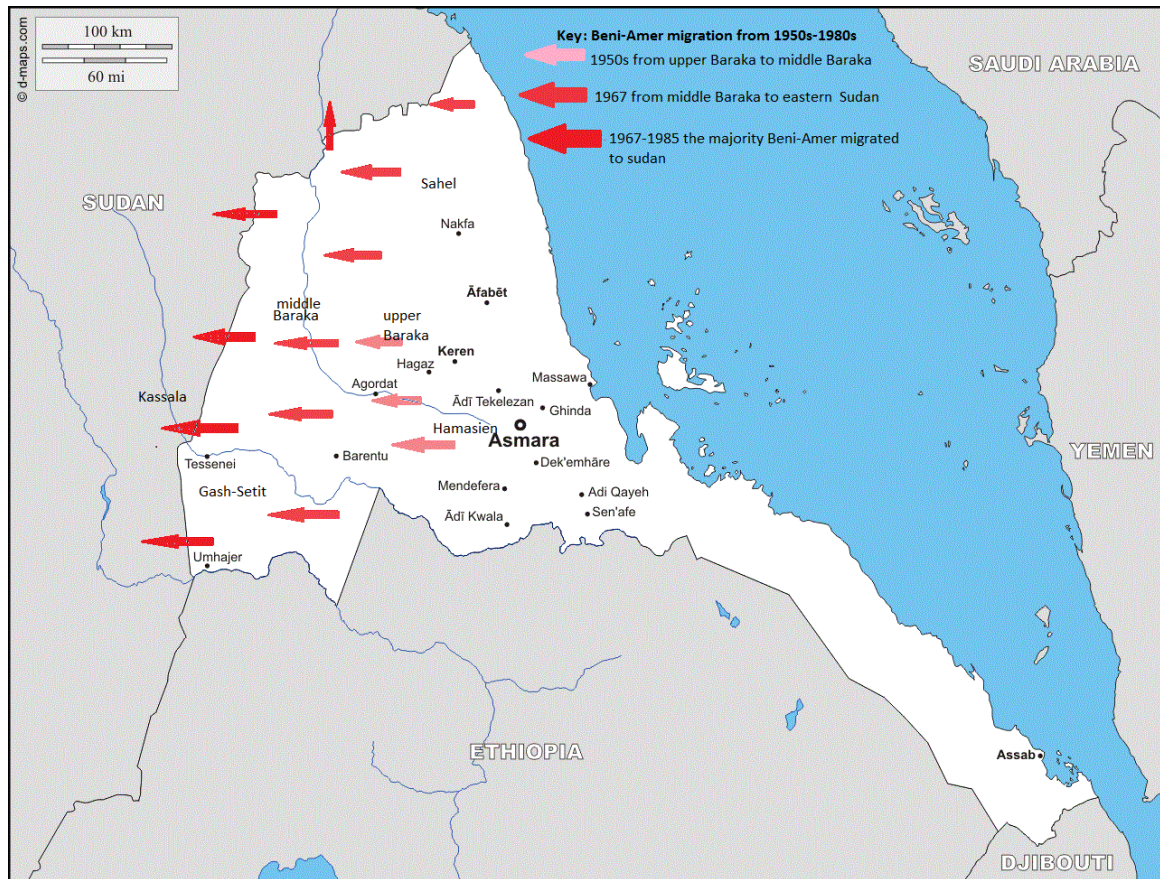


Figure 5.6. Beni-Amer migration from upper Baraka towards middle Baraka and finally to Sudan. ((KI, FGD3, 13 January 2015 (d-maps.com, 2017)).

Terrorism and livestock-looting by the Ethiopian-backed *Shifita* and commandos between the 1940s and 1960s for example disturbed livestock mobility towards the western Seraëa and across the border to Ethiopia but increased the Beni-Amer and other Muslim Eritreans' national identity. Key informants reported that sometimes the Beni-Amer and other Muslims of the western lowlands led by Sheikh Ali Musa Radai sought to exit Eritrea to form an independent state comprising only the present-day Eritrean lowlands.

Them and we are not one type of people, the Habash Tigray and Amhara; we have nothing in common just we are bad neighbours as far as we can remember (KI, FGD3, east Kassala rangeland, 13 January 2015).

According to Trevaskis, the most reliable information source in the transition period, supporters of the Independence Bloc were attacked by the Unionists. For example, in the capital Asmara five days of relentless violence between Christians and Muslims resulted in an extensive list of dead and wounded. Thus, the Beni-Amer

sections mentioned above were the first to leave their villages, gradually moving towards the lower Baraka and Gash. And in 1967 some sections migrated west towards Hamdait, crossing the Sudanese border to settle around Wadi el-Hila in the Sudan-Ethiopia border.

According to Trevaskis (1960), Beni-Amer tribesmen and other Muslims who sometimes travelled across the Ethiopian border in search of pasture throughout the dry season were denied access by the Ethiopian authorities. Some sections of the Beni-Amer, especially Ädd Assälā, Ädd Tauliab/Tāule and Ädd Towas, move their cattle towards Kola Seraäa by the Ethiopian border inhabited by majority Coptic Christian Tigrinya. One elderly respondent illustrates their plight:

If our Beni-Amer, he said, cross the border, the Habash Ethiopia kill you and loot your cattle (KI11, interview, east Kassala rangeland, 08 January 2015).

The inherited hatred operates within the diasporic communities, divided and organised between Christians-Muslim, supporters of the exiled ELF or the ruling party EPLF/PFDJ, highlanders-lowlanders; this is presented in chapter seven. From 1961 up to the 1980s war intensified between ELF and the Ethiopian government forces on one hand and between ELF and EPLF on the other. Between war and the droughts of 1967, 1973, 1974, 1979, 1984 and 1985, pastoral mobility was reduced, livestock die-off increased, and the Beni-Amer risked death from all sides. Migration to the east Sudan refugee camps followed. The next section analyses the effects of war and drought on the wellbeing and identity of the Beni-Amer.

### **5.3.3. Impacts of drought and a war-torn homeland**

Data collected from key informants directly details the effect on pastoral mobility of drought and war combined:

For us [the Beni-Amer] war meant fear, insecurity and massacre, hence everyday herding and seasonal mobility was risky and drought meant no rain, consequently no pasture, thus livestock and people at risk of death. But if only drought we used to migrate to other areas and recover like our parents did. But when the two evils [war and drought] combined it was hard for us to survive. (KI, FGD3, east Kassala rangeland, 13 January 2015).

In 1961 the Eritrean demand for independence passed from a peaceful political movement to three decades of guerrilla warfare to the inevitable detriment of the Beni-Amer pastoral production system. The Beni-Amer and other lowland societies started an armed struggle in response to the repressive and barbaric measures taken by the Ethiopian occupation and the Shifta.

We [the Beni-Amer] and other lowland communities were always at the core of the battle; we provided warriors, logistical supplies to strengthen fighting capabilities of the freedom fighters and we offered our homeland. We paid the ultimate price for the independence of Eritrea. (KI, FGD4, Gash basin, 11 January 2015).

According to Firebrace and Holland (1987) the Eritrean war for independence can be divided into two phases. In the first period from 1961 to 1977 the armed struggle was under the leadership of ELF (Eritrean Liberation Front), most of whose fighters were from the lowland societies. Within this phase, the ELF expanded from guerrilla bands to a sizable well-armed front. Their sparse attacks put Beni-Amer and other lowland societies at risk of reprisal.

When the freedom fighters attack the 'Thor Sarawet' [Ethiopian armed force] and the Ethiopian army and air force massacre us the civilians and many of us escaped to the refugee camps in Sudan. (KI1BAf (Beni-Amer female) FGD, east Kassala rangeland, 10 January 2015).

Firebrace and Holland (1987) documented how ELF guerrillas attack were answered by Ethiopian reprisals. For example, in 1967 the Ethiopians massacred hundreds and burned villages, and 60,000 refugees migrated to Sudan; three years later the Ethiopian second offensive forced over 100,000 people to migrate to Sudan.

As stated previously after the removal of Haile Selassie in 1974 many Christian highlanders joined the ELF, making it a well-armed front. This did not last long. The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) emerged as a new front, and the ELF and EPLF engaged in their own bloody civil war. From the emergence of the EPLF until after the exile of the ELF in 1981 is described as the second phase of the Eritrean war for independence (Connell, 1993; Firebrace and Holland, 1987), a period in which the war expanded to cover the entire country up to Independence Day in

1991. Ethiopian bombing raids on civilians increased in the second phase of the growth of the fighting capabilities of the freedom fighters:

In 1984 when we lost our livestock in the drought empty handed we settled in the outskirt of Tessenei, but after only one month Ethiopian Air raids flattened Tessenei town to the ground; many people died. In September 1984, many families migrated to the refugee camp in Sudan, and since then we live in the tents in the refugee camp (KI2BAf, (Beni-Amer female) from the refugee camp, interviewed in Kassala city, 09 January 2015).

The war and drought affected every aspect of the pastoral life of the Beni-Amer. Eritrea gained its independence in May 1991 under the leadership of EPLF; Eritrean refugees from Sudan and diasporas from across the globe returned to the country. But the Beni-Amer and others who were the traditional base for the exiled ELF were systematically blocked. Key informants stated that the EPLF were suspicious that the Beni-Amer would resurrect the ELF:

We finish our patience from 1991; the EPLF do not want our return to Eritrea, they want us to stay refugees in Sudan forever. The EPLF fear if we return the ELF will also return with us and we will claim our ancestral homeland. (KI, FGD2, east Kassala rangeland, 12 January 2015).

This could be the reason today that Eritrean refugees in Sudan are from Beni-Amer and other Muslim communities of Eritrea.

The prolonged and large scale war drastically limited mobility, reduced grazing area and dried the workforce due to the recruitment of the youth to the liberation fronts. And the increase in drought frequencies complicated by war made it impossible for the Beni-Amer to recover livestock after drought years:

Our parents usually lived with drought and three to four years after the drought year they recovered their herds. We were told that in the Italian colonial era there was severest drought ever experienced by the Beni-Amer, but our parents recovered, and we inherited large herds from them. But now we lost every head of our livestock. (KI, FGD3, east Kassala rangeland, 13 January 2015).



Firebrace and Holland (1987) reported that in eight of the years from 1970 to 1983 drought and famine were widespread.

Firebrace and Holland also reported Ethiopian air bombardment targeted livestock herds. As a result, over the years, many thousands of cattle, camel, goats and sheep perished. Moreover, because it reduced space for pastoral production the war caused overgrazing in available areas, adding to the migration to Sudan. Respondents explained *zaman hawone* (bad times of drought) added to the war ended their pastoral mobility and some left with a severe disability that has significant impacts on their physical, social and economic wellbeing:

The war took off my hands and the drought die off my livestock, decades of war and droughts turned my life upside down. (elderly, interview, Kassala city, 11 January 2015).



Figure 5.7. An elderly man who lost both hands as a teenage herder in Eritrea because of abandoned explosives. (Photo taken by the researcher, 11 January 2015)

The prolonged war made accessing pasture difficult for months or even years during which herders risked their lives to graze their livestock in the war zone. Key informants explained that in 1982 and 1983 the Baraka, Sahel and Senhit regions



were non-stop battlegrounds that entirely removed the Beni-Amer from the area and sent them towards the refugee camps in eastern Sudan.

In curtailing nomadic ways of life droughts of course also greatly harm Beni-Amer wellbeing. Key informants said that three decades ago the wet months were longer, between May-October, but now last only between August and September. Multi-year droughts have been typical for several decades. Extreme droughts in the highlands affect the annual flow of the river Gash and Khor Baraka. Their inconstant flow impacts on nomads in the middle and lower Gash and Baraka. Intense heat from above and landmines on the ground, war, bandits, dried water sources all happening in the same area and at the same time strangled the Beni-Amer nomadic mobility and removed them from the profession they loved.

Climatic change struck the Beni-Amer nomad very hard the dry south-east trade winds sweep the bare earth lifting the dust storm locally known as *Kamsin* and during the day the heat is unbearable. Nights in November, December, January and February are cold.



Figure 5.8. Everyday mobility from the outskirts towards Kassala city. (Photo by the researcher, 17 January 2015)

In the early hours the temperature falls to single figures; hungry sheep and goats shiver in the cold. Children and women sleeping on empty stomachs look much older than their age. Every morning the displaced and impoverished adults take the *Carão*

(donkey pulled cartage) to Kassala city centre to look for a job at any pay. They call it '*Reski alyome*': 'living for the day'.



Figure 5.9. Pasture land in the outskirts of Kassala city. (Photo by the researcher, 09 January 2015)

The daily move from the outskirts to the city centre is necessary to make a living for the day. Older men amble towards the dryland slum (*al Ashwāe*) to the east of Kassala city after attending early morning prayer and some herd a few ruminants in the dryland east of Kassala city. One key informant herding his ruminants said:

The young don't want to be herders anymore; therefore, I have no option but to shepherd a few small ruminants in my 70s. (elderly, interview, east Kassala dryland, 09 January 2015)



Figure 5.10. A hired herder and the researcher in the rangeland east of Kassala. (Photograph taken by automatic timed camera, 14 January 2015)

The majority of the younger men work in bakeries, shops and in horticulture around the Gash River; some are ‘collective hired herders’: one herder collectively shepherds the ruminants of several families. This is a new phenomenon among the Beni-Amer, indicating dwindling herd sizes, showing livestock are no longer the primary source of livelihood. Young Beni-Amer herders drop out of pastoralism to look for alternative income, and gradually they gravitate towards illegalised migration, as we shall consider in chapter six. Restricted mobility, reduced livelihoods, dispersal as migrants or refugees: colonisation, federation, drought and war have devastated the Beni-Amer. How do they maintain and pass on their homeland attachments? What are the generational differences between elders with memories of their homeland and generations born in refugee camps?

#### **5.3.4. Homeland and Pastoral mobility memory: passing on to the next generation**

We do not have television stations to tell our history, nor we have access to our ancestral homeland, but we have it here [pointing to the heart], so we talk about it with our children and grandchildren. (KI, FGD3, east Kassala rangeland, 13 January 2015).

In the available literature, maps have been created by cartographers to bring the image of the national homeland and its boundaries closer to its citizens. The historical homeland is 'logoized, and reproduced on stamps, flags, posters to nationalise its images on the minds of the population' (Kaiser, 2002, p. 233). Unlike the modern concept of national identity, among the Beni-Amer the ancestral homeland is internalised into the minds of the community. Tadmor-Shimony (2013) suggests in the case of Israelis the use of varied educational means to create the desired image of the homeland. Indeed, the 'imagined image' of the ancestral homeland could be set up in the minds of pupils through educational tools: history and geography textbooks can be used to fashion the image of the homeland's landscape to diaspora-born children. However, the reconstruction of the imagined ancestral homeland among the Beni-Amer is enacted through folklore and storytelling by the elders from which young herders imagine their distant ancestral homeland. Although decades have passed since they were forced to leave, Baraka, Gash, Setiet and Sahel are still vivid in the collective memory of the seniors. The seniors took their memories from living in the ancestral homeland, and these pictures are romanticised and passed on to their children and grandchildren. The romantic image of the ancestral homeland and nomadism and the devastating impact of colonial powers are featured in the poetry of the tribe.

*Lalie Sekab badine*

*Iehai lakekate fegrate kola la asjar wa adbeer*

*Lalie sekab badine*

*Lalie sekab badine*

*Wa Lalie sekab badine*

*Eritrea wolada kolo dora hanie kabir*

*Egl hemik etkele wa mein denata agber*

*Gashi etme et ettata atneker*

*Kola la kekate fegrate kola la asjar wa adbeer*

*Lalie sekab badine*

*Ekayouda kaidna wa esama samenia*

*Wa kam highsama abuna hanta kabir gahna*

*Wa kam highsama abuna hanta kabir gahna*

*Meina salase million mellonian sababa dafaena*

*Kadra shefer kadana nehina gorke tamena*

*Lalie sekab badine*

*Lalie Sekab badine*

*Iehai lakekate fegrate kola la asjar wa adbeer*

*Lalie sekab badine*

*Lalie sekab badine*

*Wa Lalie sekab badine*

My nights are sleepless

You the best of creation covered with trees and elevated by hills, raised up by mountains

My nights are sleepless

My nights are sleepless

All my nights are sleepless

Eritrea's children every time to graveyards

Because they refuse to be cowards to be enslaved

A guest never feels thirsty nor hunger or restless

You' the best of creation covered with trees and elevated by hills, raised up by mountains

My nights are sleepless

We have been treated severely and we heard they indescribable

And how many of our admirable parents we have seen lay to rest in graves

How many of our admirable parents we have seen lay to rest in graves

From the three million population, we paid two million youth

Green Eritrea all over the place we died thirsty of you

My nights are sleepless...



The herders interviewed express emotional attachment to the ancestral homeland and Beni-Amer virtues such as sharing, hospitality, resilience, modesty and courage and abstaining from greed, despair, gluttony and excessive fear. Young herders express a feeling of disassociation in time and space from their current situation in eastern Kassala and strive to associate themselves with the imagined ancestral homeland.

I was born and raised in the slum on the outskirts of Kassala city, but I have never felt I belong from here. I am from Baraka. (Herder 7, interview, east Kassala rangeland, 16 January 2015).

During fieldwork it was observed only a few Beni-Amer families own livestock, and almost none of them are 'fully pastoral nomads'. The profound need for the past is constructed through nostalgic memory: 'displacement leads to identity discontinuity and nostalgia provides one way of maintaining or regaining identity continuity' (Milligan, 2003. p. 381). One 75 year old key respondent described his nostalgic memory in these words:

My paradise ancestral homeland is only one-day walking from here, but sadly I have been languishing in this desolate dryland slum for 41 years. When I remember my past in the land of ancestries I feel *sohge wa hanini* (longing and nostalgia) it is sad to live away from the land you loved in forced exile. (KI8 interview, east Kassala rangeland, 08, January 2015).

The above quote affirms the stress of life away from the homeland and how through nostalgic memory emotional connection is sustained. Furthermore, time has little effect on the force of feeling. But many felt that being scattered in distant refugee camps in eastern Sudan and others weakens their social fabric while strengthening ties with others. Key informants say they yearn for their traditional nomadic livelihood, their kinship and for wellbeing and cultural identity as constructed by their seniors' narratives, or 'imagined things' (Anderson, 2013, p. 5). Indeed, it is all 'imagined things' for the young herders: they imagine back to the ancestral homeland and fashion its landscape the way it was narrated to them and feel attachment to it. They also imagine forwards to the future and create a desired image for the 'unknown' life in the diaspora, perhaps influenced by images or words

received from peers who migrated to Europe through Libya. Hence for the young herders past and future reside in imagination and as a result they develop a sense of dissociation from their present 'reality' in east Sudan.

As discussed in chapter four, in Eritrea all adults between the age of 18-40 are forced into military conscription through the national service programme and young herders are aware of that because of their contact with these who escape to Sudan from the Eritrean army.

Sawa [an Eritrean military training camp] is like 'hell'; we do not want to go to Eritrea because if we start to live there, the government will take us to Sawa, you know they take everyone. Sawa means slavery for life in the Eritrean army without salary. For that matter, we do not want to go to Eritrea; instead, we migrate to Libya. Although eastern Sudan is a historical land of the Beni-Amer and all of us born here, we are considered as refugees (FGD3, with herders, east Kassala rangeland, 19 January 2015).

Interviews with young herders revealed that they show interest neither in returning to the ancestral homeland in Eritrea nor staying in Sudan. But while aspiring to the imagined diasporic life they are often discouraged by kin because of the risk of death and hardship in the illegal routes; this will be addressed in chapter six.

Key informants state that their ancestral homeland gives them happiness because it helps to disconnect them from their current living status in refugee camps and the dryland slums of Kassala city which they associate with poverty and shame. But the homeland also causes them sadness because it reminds them of their inability to live in it. The image of unchanged ancestral homeland landscape is made clear by language used by key informants about their missed homeland:

Our ancestral homeland is like heaven, large rivers with plenty of water and rangeland with abundant vegetation and grasslands. I miss it very much. By the well of God if some time is left to my life I may visit Baraka one day. The Beni-Amer are blessed people. God is with us; we do not despair, hope in God someday our grandchildren will return to Baraka and live like the Beni-Amer; united, strong and warriors, faithful to God and generous with plenty of livestock. (KI9, interview, east Kassala rangeland, 09 January 2015).

Currently, the Baraka region in western Eritrea is very different from the Baraka that the respondents are referring to. For example, as discussed in chapter four the Baraka area significantly affected by climate change and drought and mostly occupied by sedentary settlers from the central highland. A large part of the area is also given to industrial farming, mining industries and for military training camps. For the herders in the dryland east of Kassala city, the ideal pastureland narrated by their grandparents is only a mental space, and it does not inspire the continuation of pastoral nomadism in the younger generation:

I wish if we live in Baraka life is hard in here and disappointing; this a scorched land (Herder 13, interview, east Kassala rangeland, 16 January 2015).

The mental image of Baraka narrated by the seniors discourages rather than motivates the young generation to continue as pastoral nomads in the dryland east of Kassala city under scorching sun and fragmented by pasture and farm enclosures. When they compare the 'narrated ancestral homeland' (Sahel, Baraka, Gash and Setiet) with the current situation in eastern Sudan the herders view their situation as unworthy of animal husbandry. They drop out of pastoralism, search for alternative sources of income in the local towns and aspire to migrate beyond the familiar regions. The next sections analyse the contested concept of home among the Beni-Amer generations.

### **5.3.5. Pastoral mobility and contested concepts of home**

The concept of home is widely researched in the literature (e.g. Ingold, 1995; Ingold, 2008; Basu, 2004; Ginsberg, 1999; Tucker, 1994; Mallett, 2004; Olesen, 2010; Lui, 2014). This study builds on their findings, adding that among the Beni-Amer home reflects mobility, culture and religious practices. Key respondents reported that Beni-Amer mobile-home is influenced by nature, culture and religion. Key informants stated that multiple camping sites arise due to pastoral mobility and that the 'inside and outside' boundary between the mobile-house and the open rangeland is only a 'fuzzy boundary'. As we saw the *Agnet* (camping-house) is used during camping. With consideration for Islamic belief the *Agnet* is divided according



to gender and often faces the Qibla – i.e. towards Mecca. Nomads' mobile-homes are not only practical but also express cultural and religious needs.

Many scholars have researched the concept of 'home' but mostly concerning sedentary societies that view 'home' as a 'house'. And a few examined the concept of home in nomadic pastoral societies: to inhabit the world is to live life in the open and dwelling means far more than indoor space (Ingold, 2008). This section analyses the complex concept of home in relation to pastoral nomadic societies and argues that among the Beni-Amer home is a contested space whose production and conceptualization varies across time and space. For instance, for the senior Beni-Amer home is a loose, fluid and dynamic concept, but for young herders home is a house with physical geometric structures. For the seniors, home is an integral part of the ancestral homeland and pastoral mobility; for the young, 'home' is an integral part of the sedentary neighbourhood.

Key informants viewed the mobile-home as integral to pastoral mobility and the multiple camping places. Often the concept of home is used to describe the whole rangeland: for senior Beni-Amer home was mobile and anywhere in the rangeland could be considered home:

The sky is the blanket, and earth the mat for us. We feel everywhere within the ancestral homeland as our home. (KI, FGD2, east Kassala rangeland, 12 January 2015).

The group discussion with key informants revealed among the elders that the concept of home is a mobile space produced through livestock mobility, that becomes 'real' across time and space. Contrastingly, young herders' understanding of home resembles the sedentary perspective: the home as house, a fixed place they leave to start their herding day and return to in the evening. Young herders I interviewed watering their cattle in the Gash river regarded the area around it as a place to graze their livestock during the day while in the evening they return to the family house on the outskirts of Kassala city. While spending much of their day rearing their animals in the area, the herders do not consider the rangeland their home: 'home' is not a mobile concept for them. Home, they explained, is where their

sedentary family live: a mud house surrounded by an enclosure and a neighbourhood.

Our house is in the outskirts of Kassala city; it has two rooms and a shade made from doum palm leaves and straw. I live with my parents and my two younger brothers (Herder 4, interview, Gash basin, 15 January 2015).

The young herders' description of home as a fixed place with a house and fence, a nuclear family and a neighbourhood corresponds to the sedentary home, that is, a place with the physical structure of a house and the nuclear family, whose experience within the house is considered 'home' (Olesen, 2010; Lui, 2014; Mellte, 2004; Blunt, 2003, Morley, 2000; Blunt, 2006).

Unlike sedentary societies, for the Beni-Amer pastoral nomads home includes multiple locations of seasonal camping sites, and the physical structure does not mean permanent delineation of the mobile-home from the immediate rangeland. Key informants considered static perimeters such as fences irrelevant to them. Therefore, living in the open is integral to Beni-Amer pastoral nomads; 'inside and outside' cannot be easily untangled. Key informants said camping sites are not homes for nomads but places for nomads on the move, established through pastoral mobility and considered an integral part of the pastoral nomadic life. Therefore, the entire rangeland is perceived and experienced as home, and the home itself is fluid, multiple and dynamic across time and space. Key informants demonstrated Beni-Amer pastoral nomads encompass the rivers, trees, mountains and plains as an integral part of the pastoralist mobile-home. Pointing his forefinger towards the hills in the Eritrean border, one informant said:

This was our home. We used to graze our cattle and camel herds all the way up to the Gash and across the Setiet river. Now it is Ethiopia and Eritrea. Our ancestral homeland is spacious, and we used to graze our livestock as we wish and live in the open with our herds. 'Everywhere' we move with our livestock that land was our home (KI7, interview, east Kassala rangeland, 08 January 2015).

Consistently with this generational distinction the focus group discussion with the key informants revealed the same difference regarding the connection with

livestock. Among the seniors the concept of 'home' encompasses the entire rangeland grazed by their livestock, whereas the young herders see a clear boundary between home and the places they herd their animals. This again is because seniors' memory is linked to their 'fully nomadic' prior life where nomadism was the only lifestyle while the young herders are not nomads anymore; they are not inspired to the nomadic lifestyle and often look for an alternative to pastoralism.

Similarly, the idea of family for seniors extends to include all relatives beyond the immediate nuclear family. This is because for the seniors' relatives are viewed directly as an extension of their nuclear family. Key informants said they do not use a different term between their sons or daughters and their brothers' sons or daughters: all are called my son or my daughter. The young do distinguish: the son or daughter of an uncle have different titles - *howia wad abuia* (my brother the son of my father's brother). Moreover, the elders speak some Arabic but mostly Tigrāyit, the mother language of the Beni-Amer, and mainly socialise with their fellow Beni-Amer elders, while the young herders speak more Arabic and some Tigrāyit due to their everyday mixing with non-Beni-Amer during herding and due to their upbringing in the refugee camps and the outskirts. Interviews with the key informants revealed that seniors are more nostalgic to the entire ancestral homeland and their kinship compared with their children and grandchildren. Therefore, the study concludes that among the Beni-Amer home and kinship sentiments are relational concepts and their meaning differs across time and space.

#### **5.4. Wellbeing in relation to pastoral mobility**

This study found that wellbeing was relative and fluctuated significantly across time and space. People's self-perception and psychological status respond directly to external circumstances and inner expectations of wellbeing. Wellbeing is a growing research area, yet lacks universally agreed definition (Guillemin et al., 2016, p. 50). Therefore, researchers have focused on its 'dimensions' rather than on the 'definition' (Dodge et al., 2012). According to (Roscoe, 2009; McGillivray and Clarke, 2006) wellbeing is a state of equilibrium or balance that can be affected by life events or challenges; therefore, wellbeing is multidimensional and complex, and this

is evident among the Beni-Amer. Key informants stated pastoral mobility is central to animal wellbeing, and that is closely related to their wellbeing. Elements of wellbeing such as food, health, transportation, social networks, status and reciprocity are therefore related to their opportunity for movement. Restricting pastoralist mobility, we must conclude clearly in this study, jeopardises the wellbeing of the Beni-Amer families and their animals. Key informants explained the relationship between pastoralists and livestock wellbeing:

Beni-Amer without livestock mobility is like birds without wings. In the dry season the primary concern is to feed the livestock, but in the rainy season, we return to Baraka that was a happy time for everybody, for us and our animals. We socialise, visit relatives, and marriages and circumcision and other social events used to take place when we rest and our livestock in good shapes. Once we ensured livestock are well, and families camped we used to go to the market towns such as Akardate and Tessenei to sell some animals and buy everything we need, like sugar, coffee, clothes, shoe and medicine it was a pleasant time. (KI, FGD3, east Kassala rangeland, 13 January 2015).

Animals play a dominant role in marriages and divorce, in giving birth, burial, inheritance, diet and legal organisation (Wolputte et al., 2004). As well as this, as key informants explained, the wellbeing of livestock determines the size, quality and timing of the ceremonies:

In the good season a father may slaughter up to three camels to feed the people attending the wedding day of their son or daughter, but in bad times, he may slaughter only one goat. For that matter the majority of Beni-Amer doesn't like marriages in the dry season. (KI, FGD4, Gash basin, 11 January 2015)

Thus, if pastoral mobility disrupted because of socio-economic and/or environmental factors the wellbeing of both animals and the nomads faces an imminent threat.

Key respondents explained clearly how wellbeing was not 'one thing', nor constant across time and space. Faith in Allah is the single most successful thing to overcome hardship and increase hope:

In our homeland wellbeing was livestock wealth, minimum 200 good cattle heads, happy extended family members, peace and freedom to move or stay and camp. But in the refugee camps, wellbeing is to have something to feed the family for the day; it is life bounded to food aid. You see! In the towns of eastern Sudan, no jobs and young people hang over the streets and in front of the coffee shops: you know wellbeing for them is to find a job so they can feed themselves. Ela-Dunia-ta (this is Earthly life not paradise). The best thing is to say Alhamdulillah (thank God) for everything; be patient and accept the decree of Allah. (KI, FGD3, east Kassala rangeland, 13 January 2015).

This quote nicely encapsulates the inevitably fluid, relative nature of wellbeing in such difficult or different situations. While there is no ultimate wellbeing in the respondent's view thanking God for everything is his source of comfort and of spiritual wellbeing. The next section examines identity and wellbeing in relation to livestock and Islam.

### **5.5. Identities and wellbeing in relation to Beni-Amer herding and religion**

As stated in the literature review human/non-human relations have been addressed by several geographers. Among them Zulka (2004) discusses how humans fix the identity of non-humans, such as herd sizes and movement. Philo and Wilbert (2000a) debate human and non-human relations in relation to animal space and ethics. Wolch and Emel (1998) argue that progressive elimination of animals from everyday human experience increases the inhumane treatment of food-related animals. And Sanders (2000) discusses guide dogs' impact on the identity of people with visual impairments. This study affirms previous studies and adds that among the Beni-Amer livestock influences their identity and geography.

The Beni-Amer Arabs are, I believe, the most powerful tribe in the Egyptian Soudan; very rich in flocks and herds, and their sheik is certainly one of the most intelligent, shrewd fellows I met with. (Williams, 1882)

The above quote by Josiah Williams, an English medical traveller, indicates that the Beni-Amer were very wealthy in livestock and their power and identity related to this. This section argues that to a large extent the Beni-Amer cultural identity and wellbeing are founded on livestock breeds, herding practices and religion. Key informants explained that the Beni-Amer owned large herds of dromedary and classified them by their natural breeding areas, morphology, workability and colour; this classification related to the identity of the owner. It expressed Beni-Amer identity to name them as Sabe-nuway or Sabe-Aha (owners of livestock or owners of cattle). The indigenous cattle of the Beni-Amer are called Begait (a large type of zebu cattle known for high milk yield); the Beni-Amer call the Begait *entlna* (ours) making the Begait the symbol of the tribe. But after the migration to the refugee camps in East Sudan the Beni-Amer cross-bred their Begait with Dohein cattle (a tall and slender type of cattle with short ears and long thin legs). This was to overcome cattle raids; the raiders came to refer to Beni-Amer herders as owners of the Dohein. This illustrates one element of pastoralists' identity change over time in relation to their livestock breeds. Some clans of the tribe predominantly owned large goat herds and sheep flocks - mostly Nubian, Baraka, and Worre types and named as Sabe-Atal (the people of goats). Besides camels, cattle and small ruminants the Beni-Amer used to possess horses in large numbers. Key informants explained horses and camels were part of the Beni-Amer identity:

Horses and camels were the mounts of the warriors, and the Beni-Amer were warriors (KI7, east Kassala rangeland, 08 January 2015).



Figure 5.11. Beni-Amer man on horseback in Kassala. Owning a horse is prestigious among the tribe. (Photo by the researcher, 17 January 2015)

The following subsection examines Beni-Amer cultural identity in relation to livestock breed, herding practice and religious beliefs.

#### **5.5.1. Identity and wellbeing in relation to Camel-herding practices**

Pasturelands are not the same type even if it has plenty grass and water, you see! There are areas liked by certain kinds of camels, but not useful for some camel types and it is the same for cattle and goats and sheep (KI2, interview, Gash basin, 13 December 2014).

Key informants categorise the camels by breed, coat colour and morphology. This section investigates how this categorisation and the herding practices relate to the construction of the cultural identity of the tribe. As seen previously the Red Sea coastal plains and the lower and middle Baraka were mainly homeland to camel herding Beni-Amer, Rashaida and other Beja groups. Key informants said camel

herding is characterised by wide dispersal at an average of 100km radius away from their water source and involves long-distance mobility; therefore, camel herding families are identified by their knowledge of the environment, resilience to drought and long distance movement. Key informants explained that camel herding involves detailed knowledge of animal breed and morphology, which is a distinctive identity of the camel herding clans. For instance, key informants from the camel owners Add Okud stated:

Bishari camel breeds graze in desert-type vegetation and salt marshes along the coast of the Red Sea. Favoured migration routes were between Tokar, the Red Sea coast and in Khor Baraka. (KI16, interview, east Kassala rangeland, 07 January 2015).

Because of the desert-like climate and seaside sand dunes landscape, the informant continued, camels in the coastal area are smaller than in central Baraka. They are *Thseda* and *Kafeeff* (white colour and lightweight) and named Anafi and Bishari after their coat colour. Key informants affirmed the relation between the camel coat colour and the identity of the owners:

The Anafi and Bishari are highly valued pure breed, and their owners are respected members of the society (KI, FGD3, east Kassala rangeland, 13 January 2015).

Acland (1932) describes the Bishari camel breeds as short-legged, small and light-weight, capable of carrying moderate loads at a quick pace. During the fieldwork, Bishari camels were observed in small numbers owned by the Beni-Amer, Hadendowa and the Rashaida. Such camels' owners are considered affluent and are highly respected not because of the size of their herds but because of the 'pure breed' of their camels.

Key informants said coat colour was relevant to classify camel owners too. For example, there are Sabe Ensa Hawite (the people of pinkish-red and grain tawny colour coat camels) predominantly the clans at Baraka and Gash; Sabe Ensa Cajeh (people of reddish colour coat camels) mainly the Sahel and lower Ansaba; and Sabe Ensa Thseda (Anafi and Bishari white pure Arab blood camels) mostly along the Red Sea coast. This agrees with Mugerwa (1981) who identified camels of Add Shekh,



Ädd Temeryam, Ädd Saora, Ädd Moalim and that of the Habab as grain tawny coloured baggage camels and the Cajeh (reddish) camels of the Beni-Amer intermediate between Bishari and the grain tawny in the Khor Baraka region. Key informants describe these camels as Ensa Hawite (reddish and pinkish-red) predominantly owned by Beni-Amer clans in central Baraka. Key informants showed their traditional knowledge in their descriptions:

Sweet plant eaters, giant camels compared to the Bishari and particularly slow moving heavy pack camels. And their owners often had small ruminants and often move with clan members (KI6, interview, east Kassala rangeland, 08 January 2015).

The social status of the owners of the reddish, pinkish-red and grain tawny camels related to the size of the herd rather than the coat colour or breed types. The above quote also indicates camels were also classified in relation to workability, identity and clan mobility.

200-300 camels per household of wealthy Beni-Amer were not uncommon before the 1980s, but towards the *Mertofate* (highlands) camels were one or none per household (KI, FGD4, Gash basin, 11 January 2015).

Camel herds increase towards the central Baraka and the Gash, and decrease towards the central highlands. The central highlanders are Christians, and do not drink camel milk nor eat its meat; they only use camels as beasts of burden. During seasonal pastoral mobility male camels of six years or more are employed for lighter pack work. While the old camel was primarily used to transport women, children, the elderly and new-born animals, the Agnet (mobile-home) is transformed into a Bashor (purposefully designed camel back-house) and this feature was a symbolic Beni-Amer identity. Key informants explained the relation between the Beni-Amer Bashor identity and the camel as;

Camels were like our right hand. We used to put all our women and children and our weak animals on them. The family can sit or even sleep, and during the seasonal migration of the household, our Bashor is known even to the village people (KI, FGD2, east Kassala rangeland, 12 January 2015).

Beni-Amer construction of identity also comes from herd management skills practised under the watchful eye of the elderly, which includes knowledge of animals' reproduction systems, seasonal pasture requirements of herds, and castration. For example, one key informant described preventing their camels from breeding until they are 5-6 years old to increase fecundity, and that camels in central Baraka usually calve only alternate years in drought years, but twice in two years in good rainy years. Key informants explained the Beni-Amer castrate to control reproduction:

We practice castration by twisting the spermatic cord and the animal recover from its wound in 10 days, therefore we control the reproduction of our herd. And we also brand our livestock camels and cattle using a unique symbol for each clan (KI, FGD4, Gash basin, 11 January 2015).

The above quote indicates castration and branding were practical and also elements of identity construction.

The elderlies of the Beni-Amer are like a specialised botanic library, and traditional environmental knowledge is integral to their cultural identity. One informant in the Gash basin named 17 grasses in an area less than seven square kilometres near Kassala, and he put them in order of their milk, meat and health utility to camels and cattle. The Beni-Amer abstain from beating their livestock and manage the herds through vocal commands; the oral literature of the tribe is full of songs and poetry about camels and cattle. Key informants in Gash basin narrated to me seven long poems about camel herds in twenty minutes. The rhymed verse is often chanted or sung in consonance with the rhythm of rabab traditional guitar-like musical instrument. The poetry of the tribe marks changes in the tribe's wellbeing and identity. However, in-depth knowledge of the tribe's language, culture and lifestyle are required to unwind the meaning of the tribe's poetry and folk literature; I will come to this in chapter seven. The tradition and history of the tribe are mainly an oral tradition, one that is on the brink of disappearance along with the knowledge of the elders. It can be concluded that camels are integral to the Beni-Amer cultural identity as a symbol of wealth and status and with significant contributions to the wellbeing of the pastoral household as food and transportation. The following

section analyses the relationship between the Beni-Amer identity, wellbeing and small ruminants herding practices.

### **5.5.2. Identity and wellbeing in relation to small-ruminant-herding practices**

Goats eat almost everything but give you milk and meat; our goats are in the forefront of our needs; goats are not like cattle and camel. The large animals are not handy, not easy to sell, give or slaughter. But, goats and sheep are convenient. These animals were paid as bride money, slaughtered for the guest and in religious festivals and sold for cash in the local markets. Small ruminants were possessed by every Beni-Amer family, but the families in central Baraka such as Ädd Ibrahim held them in big herds (KI, FGD3, east Kassala rangeland, 13 January 2015).

Gilboa et al. (2000) describe goats as having an enormous capacity to survive in extensive ecosystems; they can thrive on rough rangelands owing to their feeding habits. Apart from thriving in arid desert areas, goats succeed in tropical rainforests; that makes these ruminants the largest ecologically distributed animals. Key informants affirmed that Beni-Amer clans in the northern highland were predominantly goat herders, and nowadays very few Beni-Amer clans practice short-radius pastoral mobility in the semi-arid region of the Sahel. Key informants call the goat herding clans Sab Atal (people of the goats) thus directly linking their identity to the type of animals they herd.

In the 1980s it was reported that there were over 2.5 million goats in Eritrea, (Africa, F.A.R.M., 1996). The author classified the goats of the country into of four types: Worre goats, estimated over 500,000 mostly inhabiting northern highlands; Baraka/Begayit goats, estimated over 600,000 in western lowlands; Nubian goats estimated over 200,000 in southwestern plains; and the Afar type of goats, estimated over 1,000,000 in the escarpment and Dankalia. Key informants classified the types in relation to the environment they inhabit and capacity for food (milk and meat) provision. For example, key informants describe the Worre goat as:

Goats of the highland people have a small body but strong-built hoof well-adapted to the rugged mountains and the arid climate of the Red Sea hills. These goats are good for meat but produce moderate milk yields. They

provide the family even in drought. (KI, FGD3, east Kassala rangeland, 13 January 2015)

The above quote shows that livestock type and herding practice are sources of an identity among the Beni-Amer. Moreover, the quote indicates animal wellbeing underpins the wellbeing of the nomadic societies.

Since Beni-Amer pastoralists inhabit drylands with frequent droughts small ruminants surviving on low-quality rough plant materials and even on urban food leftovers are of great usefulness, today as in the past. Goats graze and utilise uncultivated parts of farms, thus transforming the wasteland into high-value commodities (Wanyoike et al., 1992). Although goats can thrive with minimum inputs, for maximum output, according to informants, indigenous goat breeds are better adapted to their local agro-climatic zones. Beni-Amer clans in the northern highlands practise short-radius pastoral mobility without removing the Worre goats from their local agro-climatic zone. Moreover, key informants explained how Beni-Amer in the central and upper Baraka owned large herds of goats and sheep flocks, and seasonally migrated south-west to the lower Baraka and the Gash, keeping the goats within their local habitat. The wellbeing of the animals was therefore prioritised, seasonal livestock movements were designed to reflect the strain of the ruminants, and geographic patterns of activity were determined by the animals themselves.

Ruminants are integral to the tribes as a source of cash, hospitality and reciprocity. Key informants illustrated the relationship between the small ruminants herding practice, wellbeing and identity:

Small ruminants are like a snack for the Beni-Amer, we drink their milk, and their meat sells them for cash; we slaughter them for our guest and give them to the needy (KI, FGD4, Gash basin, 11 January 2015).

Key informants affirmed that goat herds were mainly for milk rather than meat. Male Baraka goats were only slaughtered as hospitality to guests, occasional meat for the family, sacrifices in social and religious events or sold for cash. Key informants stated Baraka goats have larger udders than Worre and the Nubian goats, and the goats were milked.

We never used to sell milk and milk left from direct consumption was made into butter and consumed within the household or given as goodwill and reciprocity. (KI1W, women's FGD, east Kassala rangeland, 10 January 2015).

Therefore, milk is not solely the source of food but also an element of identity. And milk was one of the primary factors used to select breeds:

Milk was the most important for us, we used to keep our goat herds composed of 99% females, and only 2-4 males were kept within the herd. We selected males from their mothers - we know their mothers sometimes we are aware of up to 8 generation of their mothers, and we choose them for milk (KI, FGD3, east Kassala rangeland, 13 January 2015)

Therefore, small ruminants become integral to identity and wellbeing. The following section analyses the relationship between the Beni-Amer identity and cattle herding practices.

### **5.5.3. Identity and wellbeing in relation to cattle-herding practices**

In Eritrea cattle contribute significantly to the livelihoods and wellbeing of smallholder farmers. Cattle provide peasant families with draft power and manure (in the central highlands) milk, meat, and cash income, mainly in the lowlands, and they play a significant role in the social and cultural values of the society. Despite the importance of cattle to peasant and pastoral communities in the country, the livestock sector has remained underdeveloped (Andom and Omer, 2002). Indeed, this sector is significantly neglected; for example, no full livestock study has been conducted in the country in the last three decades. Therefore, the current circumstance of the cattle breed in Eritrea is crying out for research. Key informants mentioned four leading cattle breeds in the region: Arado, the cattle of the highlands and escarpment; *Aha Bāahr Cajeh* (the cattle of Red Sea); Begait in the Gash, Baraka and Setiet; and Dohein in lower Gash and Setiet, thus like the goats Begait cattle also determine the geography of their owners. The Begait breed is known for its high milk produce and larger size and mainly found in the western lowlands of Eritrea. Begait cattle are known for the highest milk yield in Tigray, northern Ethiopia (Ftiwi and Tamir, 2015). Key informants said the Beni-Amer were proud Begait cattle owners. Begait originated in the present-day lowlands of western Eritrea, Sudan and

north-western Tigray in Ethiopia (Zerabruk et al., 2007b; Mekuriaw and Kebede, 2015).



Figure 5.12. Begait cows, Kassala city cattle market (Photo by the researcher, 07 January 2015)

Cattle distribution in the country is compatible with the phenotype of the animals, herd size and the owners' purpose of holding. For example, a key informant explained:

Arado cattle are small with low milk yield, but sturdily built, capable of climbing hills and mountains almost like Worre goats. We never kept Arado in our cattle herds; it is the animal of highland people. (KI, FGD2, east Kassala rangeland, 12 January 2015).

Zerabruk et al. (2007) agree, describing the Arado breed as small and hardy with phenotypical characteristics compatible with the mountains of the highlands. Key informants describe the cattle of the Red Sea as medium-sized with large ears, low milk yield, well-adapted to the harsh Red Sea coastal plains and the rugged topography of the escarpment.

Key informants said that Begait cattle mostly forage at night and cover an extensive area. They have large bodies, long necks, are aggressive, with lunar crescent-like horns in both male and female, a well-developed udder and long teats with a higher milk yield, and adapted to drought and long-distance migration. The Begait breed's phenotypical characteristics make it agreeable to the geographical area inhabited by the Beni-Amer. It is worth noting the Begait characteristics are not only agreeable to the environmental conditions, but also to the social circumstances in the region. For example, its capacity for long-distance migration is essential to seasonal mobility and its aggressive nature discourages cattle looters. Key informants said herding Begait requires courage:

Begait herders are brave and resolute young men; they do not run away leaving their herds for cattle raiders. (KI, FGD4, Gash basin, 11 January 2015).

Therefore, herding Begait is used to characterise the identity of their herders.

The high milk yield makes the Begait the most liked cattle among the Beni-Amer, key informants explained:

Begait were our backbone. We lost Begait, and then we lost everything. Begait were milk, dignity and cash the Beni-Amer lost Begait and then lost everything (KI, FGD3, east Kassala rangeland, 13 January 2015).

Therefore, the Begait cattle were the foundation of wellbeing, integral to the identity and prestige of the Beni-Amer. For the Beni-Amer and other pastoralists groups, cattle have been the primary basis of life in the region. However, since the 1960s cattle have gradually lost ground, and one can argue the massive loss of livestock is the single biggest loss of sustainable livelihood sources in the area. Key informants describe the loss of their Begait as the most significant loss to their wellbeing:

Begait left the Beni-Amer with a weeping eye and in poverty. We lost Begait because of droughts and wars that never stop. (KI, FGD3, east Kassala rangeland, 13 January 2015).

As mentioned earlier the folk literature the Beni-Amer is full of songs about their livestock and their homeland, so in addition to economic contributions livestock possess aesthetic values for key informants:

looking to them in green river bank was a pleasure that pleased the soul (KI3, interview, Gash basin, 27 December 2014).

The Beni-Amer loved their Begait and named them after their coat colour, other beautiful appearances and after their mothers. According to their coat colour called, for example, Derfeat, Helwet, Eddobay (grey with small brown dots, white with small reddish dots, white with black strips, respectively) and the coat colour of their cows is put into songs and poetry. One respondent composed 43 poems on the beauty of the Begait cattle. Cattle were integral to the cultural identity of the tribe; particularly before their migration to Sudan livestock were the principal sources of livelihoods. But after the 1960s the tribe began migrating to eastern Sudanese refugee camps they cross-bred their Begait with Dohein cattle from a fear of organised cattle raids in the area, consequently losing their Begait breed. Key informants describe the Dohein cattle:

*Ekit ta Haliba wohowd too' Siga ba Lakin Abay ethbata* means Dohein type is not of an exquisite type, low milk yield, but meaty and the enemy cannot get hold of Dohein (KI, FGD2, east Kassala rangeland, 12 January 2015).

As Zerabruk et al. (2007b) noted Dohein cattle are tall with long thin legs and long tails, a slender type with short ears, a straight nose, a long narrow neck, a less developed dewlap and a smaller udder.



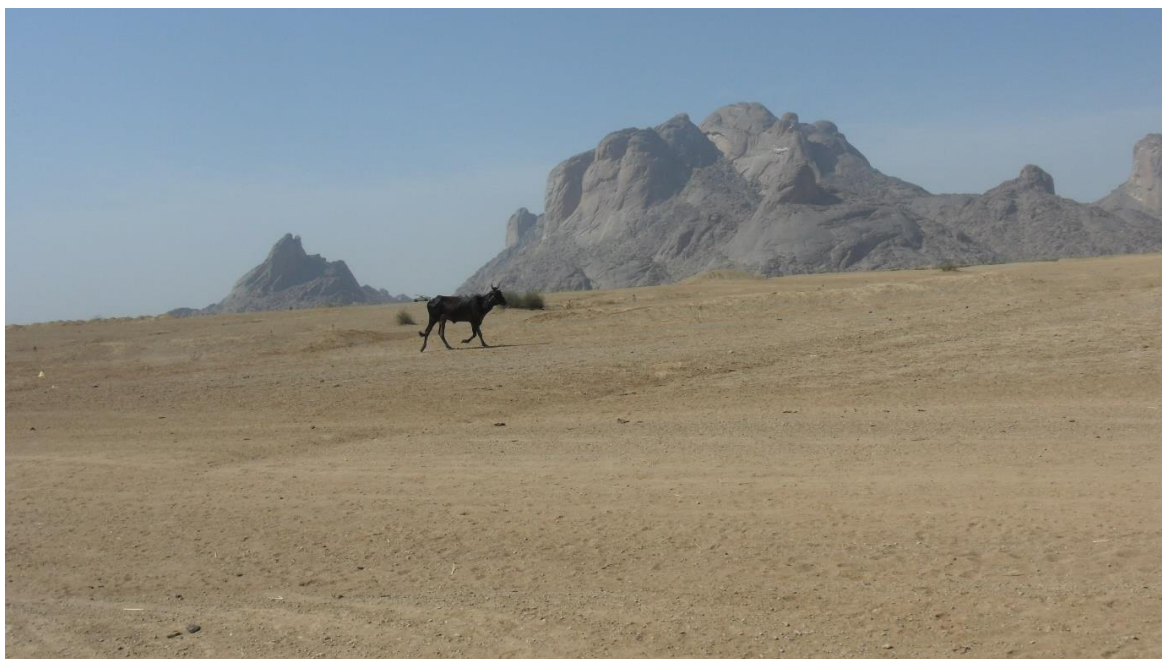


Figure 5.13. Dohein cow, east Kassala rangeland (Photo by the researcher, 08 January 2015).

The most important traits of this type are its aggressive behaviour towards intruders which is an advantage in areas where cattle-rustling is a big problem, and the capacity to travel far and graze in the vast rangelands. Respondents in the east Kassala dryland describe the Dohein phenotype as predominantly of black coat colour, relatively small ear compared to the Begait, very aggressive with thin, sharp and slightly forward-oriented horns, excellent for vocal commanding and very fast.

Because of the assault of the Ethiopian army on the Beni-Amer and other lowlanders, in 1967 many sections of the Beni-Amer left Baraka and Gash. Some sections managed to escape with their livestock through Um Hāgar and Hamdait to cross the Sudan Border and settle in Wadi Hulu near the Ethiopian-Sudan border. Therefore, the Beni-Amer crossbred the Begait to avoid cattle-rustling which was common in the region of Ethiopia-Sudan border near the Setiet River. As we have discussed Beni-Amer herding practices are dictated by the cultural values of the tribe: livestock are not merely sources of food and transport but strong elements of cultural identity too. As Sunni Muslims Beni-Amer cultural values and Islamic teachings intertwine and both influence the everyday activities of the Beni-Amer. How this works in their sedentary lifestyles we shall examine in the next section.

#### **5.5.4. Identity and wellbeing in relation to Islamic teaching among the Beni-Amer**

The Beni-Amer are adherents of Sunni Islam and their daily life activities including herding are dictated by Islamic teachings, but the tribe's social values influence day-to-day operations. Therefore, it is complicated to identify the Beni-Amer identity in relation to daily practices as either Islamic or traditional. Among the Beni-Amer on many occasions traditional values are informed by Islamic teachings but also the Islamic teachings are informed and practised under the traditional social values held by the tribe.

Camels have been part of the Beni-Amer cultural identity but also have medical and religious values. Key informants mentioned that camel milk, meat and even urine were used as Dewa (medicine). The animal is referred to in the verses of the Holy Quran as a miracle: Allah said in Sura Al-Ghosyiyah 17-18, 'Do they not look at the camel, how it was created? And at the heaven, how it is raised?' And in the Hadith (authentic words of the prophet) camel urine is mentioned as a medicine. A key informant explained camel religious values by citing a Hadith; narrated by Anas: '

Some people from the tribe of 'Ukl came to the Prophet and embraced Islam. The climate of Medina did not suit them. So the Prophet ordered them to go to the [herd of Milch] camels of charity and to drink their milk and urine [as a medicine]. They did so and were all right. (Sahih Bukhari, 8:82:794)

In addition to the many advantages of having a camel in their life, the Beni-Amer show appreciation and respect to the animal precisely because it is mentioned in the Quran and Hadith:

A camel is like a mountain. When alive he transports all the family and when he dies feeds the whole village (KI7, interview, east Kassala rangeland, 08 January 2015).

The Beni-Amer show due respect to camels alive or dead. Camel meat was popular in the past as it is today and it has the potential to feed the wealthy and poor. The camel market in the east of Kassala city is evidence of the popularity of camel meat among the Beni-Amer and other ethnic groups in the region.



Figure 5.14. Kassala city camel market. (Photo by the researcher, 23 January 2015.)

We slaughter the animals in line with sharia and share the meat. It is in our culture to not make the animal suffer needlessly, and sharing is a Beni-Amer thing (KI, FGD1, east Kassala rangeland, 12 January 2015).

In the fieldwork it was observed before being preparing for slaughter the animal is placed before water and grass and slaughter does not take place in front of the herd. Sometimes camels weep before slaughtering, said one respondent - this cannot be independently verified. In the tribe slaughtering of the animal is done in an amiable manner in line with Beni-Amer social values and Islamic teachings. For example, the knife is not seen or sharpened in front of the animal, and it is made extremely sharp to reduce the cutting time, thereby minimising pain time for the animal. At the time of killing if the animal is a sheep or a goat both of its hands, and one foot are tied together, and the other foot is left free. For a cow, both hands and both feet are tied, and the tail left free. For a camel, the animal is put gently into a sitting position, and its two hands made tied with each other from below up to its knees, its left free, and a very sharp knife is placed into the hollow between its neck and chest. All animals are placed facing the Qibla - Mecca - before slaughter and the complete cutting of the four principal arteries (jugular artery, jugular vein, windpipe, and food pipe) in the neck of the animal is an essential requirement:

If the animal stands up while pouring blood from the neck, we do not place a knife second time into the neck of that animal. Therefore, we must get it right in quickly first time. Using a very sharp knife during the slaughter of an animal is required by Islamic teaching (KI, FGD3, east Kassala rangeland, 13 January 2015).

It was observed in the fieldwork that it takes about an hour to slaughter a camel from start to finish. Meat is then distributed among the people; sometimes the owner keeps the liver, and the hump that is considered most expensive and most of the rest is shared. The camel holds a prestigious place for the Beni-Amer: when alive never beaten and rarely made to work like a beast of burden; grazed in the best available pasture and mounted by the nobility. And when dead the meat is shared and consumed as protein in the hard, dry years and as extra wholesome food in the good wet years.

Goats are mentioned in several religions, and through religious beliefs, some animals have been internalised as part of their identity. In Islam the goat is mentioned as the animal of paradise; Abdullah Bin Omar narrated that the prophet of Islam said it is the animal of Paradise (Sahih Bukhari, 709).

*Atal wa Abagee Barakah bou deba* means goats and sheep they have a blessing on them (KI1, Gash basin, 29 November 2014).

The blessing of goats is stated in the Hadith narrated by Um Hani: (she) described the Prophet of Islam saying 'do rear goats because it is Barakah which is a blessing'. It is not clear whether the Beni-Amer are keeping goats based on this hadith or because of the practical benefits they get from the animal, but it is certain that goats are preferred animals among the Beni-Amer, even in the refugee camps and town centres. Goat-rearing has been favoured as a way to combat poverty and mentioned as a blessing in Hadith (Badshah et al. 2012). Barakah means blessing, which in the Islamic dictionary means an increase; Barakah is the attachment of Divine goodness to a thing, so if it occurs in something little, it increases it:

In the past, we used to have a large number of goats, and even now we keep a few goats and sheep. These animals are useful for milk, and if you need

money, you can sell a goat or a sheep on the spot (KI4, interview, east Kassala rangeland, 07 January 2015).



Figure 5.15. A herder selling goats in Kassala city (Photo by the researcher, 10 January 2015)

In small ruminants, the profitability of suckling systems of production depend primarily on the efficiency of offspring production (Lebbie, 2004). The great reproductive attributes of goats are very useful in reducing poverty since they have the potential to produce one to three offspring twice a year.

Goats are blessed animals and goats' milk is the best substitute for mother's milk for the infants even in the town we keep some of them (KI2, interview, Gash basin, 13 December 2014).

During fieldwork, a new phenomenon was observed where goats and sheep are kept in herds in Kassala city feeding on food and green vegetable leftovers, sleeping under city buses and at sunset returning to their owner's home safely.





Figure 5.16. Small ruminants without herders, Kassala bus station (Photo by the researcher, 22 January 2015)

This could be described as the urbanisation of livestock where herds live in town centres without a herder. Key informants explained the relation of this phenomenon and the concept of blessing:

I have 23 goats. All day they feed in the town and come back in the evening. My goats help me to meet some of the family needs. They are blessed animals (KI2, interview, Gash basin, 13 December 2014).

The respondent's attitude to owning goats corresponding with Islamic beliefs: Anas, a companion of the prophet, says a goat blocks seventy doors of poverty. They are currently used by the Beni-Amer to reduce debt and provide milk for children, pregnant and the elderly. The Beni-Amer hold some of the Hassen-type goats in refugee camps and urban areas. They eat crop residues in the evening that encourage their return at sunset. During fieldwork, it was observed that a bag was placed over the udders to prevent suckling by kids.

The herding practice of Begait cattle was likewise dictated by tribal traditions and the teachings of Islam. For example, a key informant mentioned a relevant verse from the Quran:

And indeed, for you in grazing livestock is a lesson, we give you drink from what is in their bellies between excretion and blood-pure milk, palatable to drinkers (Verse 16:6 of surat-nahl, the holy Quran).

A respondent in Kassala city mentioned that if presented with a cup of tea and a cup of milk he would drink the milk first, not for its nutrition but because of its white colour. The Beni-Amer like white and disfavour red in food and even in dress. Andom and Omer (2001) mentioned that consumption of blood is strictly prohibited in Beni-Amer communities. The Islamic concept of Barakah (blessings) is considered significant in their daily life. '*Allahumma baraik lanaa fihi wa-zidnaa minhu*' could be translated into English as 'Oh God grant us blessings in it and increase it for us.'

Before the migration to Sudan in the 1960s and the 1980s, it was typical for a Beni-Amer household to own two to three Mora (100 cows  $\pm$  15 cows) of cattle. A herder can commend them just by making a song-like voice. Andom and Omer (2002) noted that a shepherd leads the herd from the front, not from the rear. Key informants said they believe the herder must never hit cattle and always lead cattle from the front and feel proud of his animals. The Beni-Amer herders form a special relationship with herds. They select the fiercest cows and call them in times of danger. These selected cows lead the herd to follow their herder. Andom and Omer (2001) mentioned that shepherds tied bells to the necks of Haa Shaamat (selected cows) so the herd follows them. However, key informants explained they believe the ringing sound of a bell calls Satan and the majority abstain from using one.

One of the important factors for camping or moving is the Islamic concept of Barakah. For example, the grazing area is tested for Barakah (blessings), as key informants stated:

We [the Beni-Amer] send two or three strong herders on horse or camel back to check the land, water, and grass in the area for Barakah (KI9, interview, east Kassala rangeland, 09 January 2015).

To utilise Barakah scouts check the quality of the grass and water availability and observe if other people are grazing livestock in the area. They pour water into the earth: if it stays on the surface the land is hard; if it sinks quickly the area is not

blessed; but if water sinks and the soil make some bubbles, then the area is blessed. This is in line with findings by Andom and Omer (2001) with a slight difference. The authors describe how 'herders urinate in the soil. If air bubbles come out, they regard the place as good for grazing'. In the rainy season Beni-Amer sections stay close together, and most of the social events and Quranic teachings are used at this time in Baraka and Gash.

The Hadendowa are neighbours of the Beni-Amer and likewise pastoral nomads. For the Hadendowa their religious leader Ali Bet'i calls upon the Hadendowa people to study the Quran, sell their livestock and engage in trade. Abdel Ati et al. (1996) described the calling of Ali Bet'i: 'you love your livestock too much, and keep too much of it. Livestock does not allow you to learn the Quran. Sell your livestock and start trading, put your children in Quranic schools.' Although admitting their love of their animals and that their nomadism limited their Islamic education, key informants consider the Beni-Amer had better opportunities than the Hadendowa due to their Sheiks' contacts with Ottomans and Egyptians, and the fact that Beni-Amer Nabtab were ruling nobilities and leaders before the 1940s. But despite some religious knowledge and contact with Ottomans and Egyptians their herding practices were also dictated by cultural beliefs and it is unclear whether the culture of the Beni-Amer is dictated by the keeping livestock or livestock herding practices are driven by cultural practices. For example, before the 1940s the Beni-Amer tribe featured two castes: the Nabatab (also called Nabtab), the minority ruling nobility, and the majority, called the Tigré (the serfs). Nadel (1945) mentions that Nabtab men and women never milk their cows: a Tigré serf does it for them. This master-serf relationship dictated much herding and eating behaviour in the tribe. For example, key informants said the Nabatab would prefer to die rather than milk their cows, and the Tigré would prefer to die rather than drink the fresh milk from a cow before his Nabatab:

A long time ago used to master and serf but today everybody is the same. There is no way you can tell between Tigré and Nabatab. God made us all the same (KI7, interview, east Kassala rangeland, 08 January 2015).

This is a visible indication of how cultural practices dictate daily life and livestock herding among the Beni-Amer. Today these practices are removed due to the



prolonged political and social transformation in their societies and both the Beni-Amer Nabtab and the Tigré serfs were impoverished and became refugee camp dwellers. The driving factors that led the Beni-Amer out of nomadic pastoralism and the cultural changes took place because of their migration to Sudan.

## **5.6. Conclusion**

This chapter has provided the main findings of the first phase of the study and analysed the construction of identity and wellbeing among the Beni-Amer. The chapter concludes that the four themes of this study - mobility, identity, (home)land and wellbeing - are intertwined life processes: the absence or presence of one affects the construction of the rest among the Beni-Amer. Data gathered at this stage reveal dynamic political, social, economic and environmental changes in the last four decades, ending nomadic pastoralism among the Beni-Amer. Thus, herders increasingly drop out of pastoralism, find it difficult to secure alternative livelihoods in local towns and often migrate to Libya and the EU. Interviews with key informants reveal that pastoral mobility's construction of identity, sense of (home)land and conceptualization of wellbeing transform across time and space. The concept of home is a contested concept that is different across time and space and between age groups. The ancestral homeland was formulated because of centuries of pastoral mobility, and the Beni-Amer claim their ancestral homeland extended across the present-day Eritrean, Sudan and Ethiopia, before being fragmented due to their modern colonial frontiers. The creation of the boundary split the tribe and complicated their pastoral mobility. This challenged the notion of the ancestral homeland and blurred the sense of ancient homeland. The construction of a cultural identity and wellbeing among the Beni-Amer emerged in relation to their pastoral nomadic lifestyle including herding practices and Islamic teachings, and their experience of these significant modern changes. The next chapter analyses the four themes of study concerning pastoralists in transition (im)mobility between Sudan and the EU.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Beni-Amer in the In-between Identity:**

#### **Mobility, Homeland and Wellbeing**

##### **6.1. Introduction**

This chapter analyses the complex interplay between mobility and construction of identity by the Beni-Amer pastoralists in transition. This case is particularly relevant for dynamics involved among sub-Saharan illegalised migration to the EU. The chapter focuses on how the steady disappearance of pastoralism in western Eritrea and eastern Sudan led to the impoverishment, drop-out of pastoralism and dislocation of Beni-Amer pastoralist societies in western Eritrea and eastern Sudan; how this led to the emergence of Beni-Amer pastoralist in transition societies, who used their non-pastoral mobility to seek alternative livelihoods. These reveal that non-pastoral mobility transforms the construction of pastoralists in transition identity. The chapter argues that the processes of non-pastoral mobility are integral to the formation of pastoralists in transition identities and that that process itself converts herders into asylum seekers and diaspora communities. As part of the analysis, the chapter looks at how pastoralists in transition gravitate towards illegal migration, and investigates important aspects of the process including money mobility. Collyer (2010) termed illegal migration 'fragmented journeys'. This chapter argues these 'fragmentations' are characterised by multiple 'stillness', 'stuckness', 'waiting' and 'uncertainty', which have significant impact on the lives of illegalised migrants.

The chapter is organised into seven sections: the first outlines the main arguments; the second contextualises Beni-Amer transition from pastoralism by contrasting them with other pastoralist societies in their region; the third analyses how the identity of pastoralists in transition is constructed in relation to non-pastoral mobility and alternative livelihoods. The fourth investigates how mobility is complicated by the layering of individual and collective identities; this section also addresses how ex-herder Beni-Amer become illegalised migrants, and the impact of the long and fragmented mobility on the identity of illegalised migrants. Section five, homeland and mobility, discusses the relationships of illegalised migrants with the

concept of home and homeland across time and space. Section six, covering wellbeing and mobility, analyses the fluid conceptualisation of wellbeing across time and space. Finally, section seven concludes by summarising the main findings.

## **6.2. Contextualising the Beni-Amer: drop-outs and alternative livelihoods**

Faced with immense challenges during the last century, pastoralist societies worldwide had to either diversify or adopt alternative livelihoods; many pastoralists exited pastoral nomadism altogether. This poses many important questions regarding the contemporary practice and space of pastoral societies. For example, where do shepherds go after they drop-out of pastoralism? How do they make an alternative living? And how do these affect their wellbeing and their pastoralist cultural identity? In the past half century, the drop-out of former pastoralists has increased dramatically. Many sources describe this, as settling down, including Hogg (1986); Scoones (1995a); Köhler-Rollefson (2016); Gharibvand et al. (2016). They identify several factors: stock loss, impoverishment, drought, resource competition, land loss and population pressure and escaping war. This study agrees with these findings and builds on them, adding that Beni-Amer pastoralists are impoverished and drop out of pastoralism because of exogenous factors restricting their pastoral mobility and pushing them to destitution. However, this does not mean they left mobility after leaving pastoralism; rather they are engaging in other forms of mobility outside pastoralism.

We six of us left herding around two years ago, and since then some of us travelled to Port Sudan, Al Qadarif, Wad Madani and some of us went farther up to Khartoum and Ad-Damazīn. *Aiwa!* [yes] When we left pastoralism, we visited distant places and met many people. You know! To make a living, it is important to travel wider and ask many people. (Eh, FGD3, Kassala city, 3 February 2015).

They are obliged to seek alternative livelihoods to support their families, in local urban centres, working as wage labourers, petty commodity traders, livestock traders and so forth which involve mobility beyond pastoralism and often away from their locality. Therefore, the longstanding conceptualisation framing pastoralism as a dualism between mobility and settling down has a fuzzy boundary.

Within pastoralism and/or outside it, pastoralists are 'mobile when mobile, mobile while sedentary, and sedentary while mobile'; their lives incorporate im/mobility wherever and whenever they are. Thus, mobility is, a way of being in the world it is a central geographical facet of presence (Cresswell, 2006, pp. 1-4).

As discussed in chapter four Eritrea and Eastern Sudan have experienced war and drought that has threatened the Beni-Amer for over five decades. Therefore this study argues that the factors that underpin their search for an alternative, sedentary livelihood pre-date the current circumstance of the tribe, and extend back to the 1950s Federation, the war for independence (1962-91) and the Ethio-Eritrean war (1998-2000). Chapter four also detailed the impact of the National Service Programme and Warsay-Yikealo Development Campaign in Eritrea. This was illustrated by ex-herder respondents in focus group discussions:

We four of us were born in Wadsharefy refugee camp in the east of Kassala city when our parents emigrated from Eritrea in the 1980s. Our parents were pastoralists in Baraka, Sahel, Gash and Setiet areas, and they used to be wealthy pastoral nomads with a large number of livestock heads - cattle, camels, goats and sheep - but they were forced to leave their homeland because of war. Thus, they migrated to Sudan and settled in a refugee camp. Twenty three years after the independence of our country we are still languishing in desolate refugee camps and impoverished urban outskirts as if the liberation of our nation is for nothing. We [the Beni-Amer] and other Eritreans inhabited the shack in the heartbreakingly so-called refugee camps waiting every day to return to our homeland, but our hopes come to be elusive dreams. There is nothing in the refugee camps, it is only dust and scorching sun. *Ehhee!* [sound made to initiate a question] What option is left for us? To find an alternative to our disappointing reality the only option for us is to migrate to somewhere otherwise we will be finished in this godforsaken place. (Eh, FGD1, Kassala city, 1 February 2015)

In the collective consciousness of the Beni-Amer, their displacement and impoverishment are viewed as intertwined consequences of the loss of their ancestral homeland to war and drought.

All seven of us were born and grew up in the refugee camps of eastern Sudan. Nothing there it is just a place where we always wanted to leave and dreamed for the places we have never been: Baraka, Sahel, Gash and Setiet. Our parents narrate to us they were dignified and wealthy there but sad we [the Beni-Amer] lost our homeland. (Eh, FGD3, Kassala city, 3 February 2015)

The dropping out of pastoralist households is a complicated process, and it can be brought about both by wealth or impoverishment. For example, Opiyo et al. (2015) found that wealthy pastoral families in northern Kenya ‘settle down’ and send their children to school. Impoverished pastoral families drop out of pastoralism to become wage workers. This study found that leaving pastoralism and seeking alternative livelihoods among the Beni-Amer were driven by war and/or drought, with consequent livestock and land loss; therefore, dropping out of pastoralism was neither their plan nor wish.

In the framework of Catley and Aklilu (2013), pastoralists’ diversification and/or pathways out of pastoralism were categorised as ‘moving up’, ‘stepping out’ and ‘moving out’ (see chapter two, section 2.2). According to McPeak et al. (2012, p. 187) pastoralist livelihood transition and diversification strategies fit into a four-part framework: ‘left out’, ‘moving from’, ‘staying with’; ‘combining’ (see chapter two section 2.2). Beni-Amer pastoralists in transition do not easily fit into either framework, therefore, as presented in Table 6.1 the concept of ‘*out with nothing to nothing*’ was added to McPeak et al’s framework to describe the impoverished exit of the Beni-Amer pastoralists.

<i>‘left out’</i>	<i>‘moving from’</i>	<i>‘staying with’</i>	<i>‘combining’</i>	<i>‘out with nothing to nothing’</i>
Pastoralist households with little cash and cattle, thus trapped in low-paid employment.	Pastoralist households with little livestock but high cash from alternative livelihoods.	Pastoralist households with high livestock but low cash, thus little income outside pastoralism.	Households equally dependent on cash income from non-pastoral activities and pastoralism.	From being high in livestock but low in cash (from alternative income) to low in livestock and low in cash.

Table 6.1 Pastoralist livelihood transition and diversification strategies (By the researcher, after McPeak et al., 2012)

Applying these concepts to the Beni-Amer shows pastoralists remaining or exiting pastoralism take many different forms, often informed by factors outside their power. For example, Beni-Amer moves from being high in livestock, low in cash to being low in livestock were mainly due to prolonged war and drought while the Bedouin of Saudi Arabia exited pastoralism because of the booming oil economy (Vassiliev, 2013; Cole, 1981). Therefore, pastoralists' diversification or exits do not form a linear process, but rather a complicated transition involving variations of these practices in response to the specific threat they face. This is because any household's shifts from one status to another is contingent on the geography, politics and economic dynamics of the region it inhabits, across time and space. Thus, as the changes noted in chapter four affected Beni-Amer regions they rapidly changed from being wealthy pastoralists with large livestock numbers but low cash from alternative incomes to destitute refugees with few or no livestock and little cash from alternative livelihoods. In contrast to other pastoralist communities in the region such as the Rashaida the Beni-Amer were unable to recover and moved out of pastoralism dramatically. As discussed in chapter four, unlike the Rashaida the Beni-Amer were the target of Ethiopian reprisals. Unlike the Beni-Amer the Rashaida were/are opportunistic cross-border traders while the Beni-Amer were nomadic pastoralists. Also, large parts of the area inhabited by the Rashaida lie at the margins of the battlegrounds, while the Beni-Amer homeland was/is torn by war and drought, complicating their pastoral mobility: as discussed in chapter five after the independence of Eritrea in 1991 their return to their homeland was also systematically blocked by the EPLF, preventing their recovery. Bushby and Stites (2014, p. 11; cited in Lind et al., 2016) found stress on pastoralist livelihoods led to myriad livelihood diversifications and adaptation, primarily from pastoralism to agro-pastoralism, to strictly agrarian livelihoods and often on to mixing urban livelihoods with pastoral activities. This study found that such step-by-step shifts were not common among the Beni-Amer. Rather, they moved from pastoralism to become refugees, urban labourers and migrants. One key informant explained the fast drop out of Beni-Amer from pastoralism:

When we left Baraka in 1967, we were over one thousand families with over 20,000 cattle heads. We escaped to Sudan through the small town of

Hamdaite and reached Al-Showak refugee camp in Sudan. And after three years in a refugee camp, every one of us left with no more than three to four cows. *Seaga teray gabana* [We became like an open wound] *Begait hadgatena fatse gaba wa bekai* [Zebu cattle left us, and it was/is the time of sorrow and cry] (KI16, east Kassala rangeland, 9 January 2015).

Among Beni-Amer pastoralists in transition access to alternative livelihoods such as urban day-wage jobs requires such mobility as moving daily between urban centres and outskirts, and daily, weekly or monthly mobility between rangeland and local towns. Therefore, leaving pastoralism does not necessarily mean pastoralists in transition lose mobility. Thus, this study argues that for pastoralists in transition mobility remains meaningful and transformative, central to their shifting of identity: Beni-Amer pastoralists in transition, including those in the refugee camps, not only seek alternative livelihoods in urban centres; rather a new sense of pastoralists in transition identity emerges from their non-pastoral mobility. They refer to themselves as *sabe noway-alna* [we were the people of livestock] an impression that expresses their sense of their pastoralism becoming something of the past. Respondents in group discussion expressed this:

*Hako zoorufe ajberte liamrana tā-la-lina* [When life becomes desperate, we are obliged to mimic others]. That is life! From being wealthy pastoralists we became refugee camp-dwellers because of war and drought, and now we are urban poor, so we have no alternative unless we have to make our way through it. *Al-Umam Al-Mothheda* [UN] removes its hand because they don't see us as refugees anymore because now Eritrea is an independent country. But to be honest for us Eritrea is not free but a nightmare: we are not welcomed there, and many of our people were jailed for no reason and disappeared after their return. *Ab'bie!* [indeed] we are Eritreans but exiled, Sudanese but without citizenship rights, refugees without food aid, and pastoralists without livestock, you see! We have no option but to do everything possible to support ourselves and our families. (Eh, FGD3, Kassala city, 3 February 2015)

The non-pastoral mobility of the Beni-Amer pastoralists in transition in search of alternative livelihoods challenges the longstanding perception of a dichotomy

between pastoral nomadic life and settling down. This dichotomy is characterised as a process of sedentarisation, with formerly nomadic communities gradually settling into non-mobile and permanent populations and seeking alternative livelihoods (Little et al. 2011; McPeak et al. 2011, cited in Catley, 2013). For example, ex-Beni-Amer herders increase their social networks step-by-step with other Beni-Amer ex-herders and non-Beni-Amer in urban centres. Likewise, the area and network of their non-pastoral mobility stretches beyond the local area; therefore, their mobility and networks increase after leaving pastoralism. Thus, across time and space, their pastoral cultural identity shifts to accommodate urban societies. As a result, they develop a pastoralist in transition identity, bridging the 'past pastoralism and present urban', and gradually often gravitating towards illegalised migration. I will consider this in the next section.

### **6.3. Identity and mobility: Beni-Amer pastoralists-in-transition identity and non-pastoral mobility**

The search for alternative livelihoods among the Beni-Amer is based on non-pastoral mobility, and leads to dynamic re/construction of pastoralists in transition identities, characterised by 'liminality and amalgamation', drawing from within and beyond pastoralism. Identity therefore becomes a complicated amalgam of both pastoral and urban. Interviewees in Kassala city affirmed they have regularly navigated the urban and the rural communities, therefore emerging with a perpetual flexible identity which accommodates both urban and pastoral social environments. Interviewees declare that the construction and reconstruction of identity they experience occurs as a continuous process of readjusting the self to fit the social norms of the wider communities in which they exist.

I work in a restaurant in the city. All employees wear trousers and t-shirt. So, I have to change two times every day at work because I cannot serve with my *jalabia*, *sherwalock* and *sadaret* [Beni-Amer traditional clothes]. If I do people may laugh at me; that would make me feel disrespect to my culture. And I can't go to my community with trousers and t-shirt: they will see me as having converted to a city person, half Beni-Amer [then he chuckles]. (Eh10 interview, Kassala city, 25 January 2015)



Thus, identities can be defined as processes of repeated rewriting of the individual and cultural collectives (Milligan, 2003). As stated in the introduction through the lens of Beni-Amer pastoralists in transition their mobility can be categorised in two stages: local non-pastoral mobility, in which they are constantly mobile within the space of eastern Sudan, and in-between mobility, in which they are designated illegalised migrants within Khartoum and EU space.

Local non-pastoral mobility is driven by the collapse of pastoralism. Pastoralist in transition identity is brought about by non-pastoral mobility undertaken in search of alternative livelihoods: the initial pastoralist background of Beni-Amer identity is adapted to accommodate both urban and pastoral experience according to the circumstances of their surroundings:

I left pastoralism because of drought, and I came to the refugee camps, but there was no aid. Thus, I decided to come to the town and found a night security job at a wholesale store and a year later I managed to save some money and started to trade in livestock from the rangeland to the town. I know how to make a good deal with the people in the rangeland, and I also learned the skills of trading in the city. People in the rangeland do not behave like those in the town they do not dress, eat, socialise and deal the same way, therefore, to live within the pastoralists and urban I have to understand them both. Since I left herding, I have learned how to live in cities. (Eh3 interview, Kassala city, 27 January 2015)

This quote indicates that leaving pastoralism does not mean severing all ties with its cultural identities. Rather, some ex-herders maintain links and trade livestock and other commodities between the rangeland and local towns. The interviewees demonstrated that their pastoralist in transition identity developed over time and space due to both their everyday non-pastoral mobility and interaction with non-Beni-Amer in the urban areas, and by their construction of networks straddling urban and rural to maintain their sense of being a Beni-Amer. Thus, identities are not ready-made, but, rather, they are discursively constructed through processes in cultural and historical contexts (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Cote and Levine, 2014). Interviewees declare their personal identities instantly change to house their working life in the urban areas, when they visit relatives in the rangeland, and even

when their diaspora kinship make a phone call. These changes were observed in their behaviour, speech, dress, walking and thinking. For example, by contrast with those still in the rangeland drop-outs often use city buses while those in the rangeland walk when they come to the city. Drop-outs find they differ from those in the rangeland by, for example, disliking the idea of starting a family, while those in the rangeland do so. They explain that they need to make money before thinking about it. Those drop-outs seem unhappy even if they make in one day money enough for ten days' food and drink; by contrast, those in the rangeland seem more content even if they do not have enough for the day. The majority of drop-outs seem to be more stressed, unstable and wanting to migrate; some of those in the rangeland also want to migrate but seem less stressed. The ex-herders in the cities seem more sophisticated: their lives straddle the urban and the rural, their sense of identity informed in some way by their everyday practices. Therefore, identities are continuously fluid and can never be 'inertly fixed' (Marcu, 2015, p. 507). Identity is a process of continuous negotiation between the 'various parts that form the self and the various moments of time in which this self-lives', and the different environments or relationship systems they encounter in the wider community (Marcu, 2015, p. 508). Interviewees affirmed that their pastoralist in transition identity is not caused by opposing the other; rather it is based on copying the other: identity is formed as much through mimetic performances of the other as it is through insistence on the difference from the other (Taussig, 1993). This quote from an interview makes the point:

People in the cities you can learn from them good and bad things and it is up to you to take good things and leave bad things. For example, you can learn like smoking and stealing quickly, but also you can learn how to make money, saving and some skill like driving. When I came to the town, I was working as a controller in the city buses, but in less than two years my boss trained me how to drive. I see myself I came a long way in life from herder to minibus driver. (Eh5 interview, Kassala city, 20 January 2015)

Interviewees explained in this way how in urban centres they became open to other cultures inhabiting the cities, and through daily activities pastoralists in transition assimilate but also learn about their distinctive pastoralist identity. Thus, subjective

identities appear in relation to others creating the 'otherness' (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Mirroring an argument put by Yuval-Davis in this study, ex-herders in Kassala city centre were observed with a distinctive identity that is neither entirely urban nor fully pastoral: this is pastoralist in transition identity. It can be noticed from the language they use and their everyday mobility. for example, it was observed when ex-herders meet in the Kassala city centre they usually talk for 10-20 minutes standing at the side of the street; it often hard to hear to them from a few feet away; usually they walk together in one direction. By contrast those originally from the city were observed when meeting with friends just shaking hands, separating and moving in their own way; sometimes they do not even shake hands, simply waving *salaam* [Hi] from a distance, and talking more loudly than the ex-herders. Interviewees felt that their pastoralists in transition identity emerged because of mobility as a life strategy between rangeland-urban-rangeland spaces and urban-urban spaces in eastern Sudan. Pastoralists in transition perceive their identity as constantly informed by the experience of moving back and forth between rural and urban societies. In the early stages of leaving pastoralism, they become mobile between their rangeland and local towns for day-wage jobs, connecting pastoralism and the urban centres in which they develop a liminal identity between pastoralist and urban wage worker: their mobility is not merely physical mobility, rural-urban and urban-rural, it incorporates a profound cultural change from the experiences they encounter in its practices. In this way they maintain links to their pastoralist roots and through mobility itself reaffirm and negotiate their identities, values and norms with urban societies.

Respondents explained that dropping out of pastoralism is not an automatic decision by the individual herder. It involves family and friends and takes time, depending on the number and type of livestock left for the family. Among the Beni-Amer the persistent dwindling of the herd is proceeded by male members of the household moving to local towns and cities. Therefore, older men, women and young girls shepherd the few small ruminants left for the household. This entails change to the everyday mobility and socialisation of all household members. For example, mothers and their daughters become herders, mobile outside traditional norms of the Beni-Amer in which female members remain around their *Agnet*. For younger males everyday urban-rural mobility increases with employment or job

searches in which they experience 'new' forms of mobility, such as presented in figure 6.1: their daily travel leads to them becoming inured to travel on top of a vehicle speeding around 100kmh without seats or seatbelts. This type of behaviour grows in the early stage of drop-outs and later becomes useful for travel in overcrowded pick-ups from Khartoum to Libya and during the crossing from Libya to Italy. One interviewee explained how he became unafraid to travel on top of a fast-moving car:

When I left shepherding I travelled to Kassala city, and I found a job in the grain market. My earnings were very low, not enough for renting a house, food and helping a family in the village. Thus, I was left with one option to travel every day at dawn from the village towards Kassala city and at sunset from Kassala city to the village. But it was expensive to travel every day seated in the bus but cheaper if you sat on the top and sometimes I do not pay if I do not hold a seat. I used to fear falling, but after some time I became used to it. (Eh1 interview, Kassala city, 19 January 2015)



Figure 6.1. Beni-Amer pastoralists in transition: everyday mobility between Kassala city and villages on the Eritrean border. (Photo by the researcher, east Kassala city, 21 January 2015)

At a glance, no connection is obvious between ex-herders' contemporary everyday mobility and pastoral mobility, but a close look shows that both mobilities are not

merely physical but also representation, practices and experiences that have a potential to inform (re)construction of identity, wellbeing and 'new' forms of attachment to the land. For example, when the researcher was travelling with ex-herders on top of a bus they were observed pointing to the hills on the rangeland and nostalgically remembering their herding days there. Although hard to explicitly prove, they seemed while on the bus to be physically distant from but emotionally intimate with the land on which the bus was travelling. Ex-herder respondents were asked about their feelings about their identity in individual in-depth interviews and in focus group discussions. All respondents said they felt themselves Beni-Amer and proud of that, but declared they did not feel themselves to be pastoralists any more:

We feel we are Beni-Amer and we will remain Beni-Amer, but we do not feel we are pastoralists; we are not herders any more, we are leading a different way of life. *Aiwa* [Yes]! People may observe we were herders but we see ourselves changing now. We resemble more to city people rather to pastoralists. (Eh, FGD3, Kassala city, 3 February 2015)

Thus, interviewees expressed strong attachment to their ethnic identity while affirming constant shifting from their pastoralist identity. This indicates that the concepts of identity, mobility and livelihood strategy are intertwined and are important elements in the construction of identity. Searching for alternative livelihoods not only necessitates mobility, it is also a complex process by which pastoralists in transition eventually become members of urban societies, their pastoralist identity shifting to accommodate their everyday lives.

It was observed that most ex-herders in Kassala city are employed in low-paid, insecure and low-status jobs, with attendant effect on their self-esteem:

This is hopeless. No jobs, and if you find a job to do anything, the money is not enough. For many of us, it is hard to support our parents and to start a family; it is hopeless here. That is why many of our friends went to the big cities like Khartoum and some of them migrated out of Africa. (Eh12 interview, Kassala city, 21 January 2015)

Through alternative livelihoods related to mobility pastoralists in transition gradually gravitate towards bigger cities, widen their communication networks and

often join the illegal migration trajectories to Libya and the EU. The majority of those interviewed confessed that with the increase of contacts in metropolitan areas like Khartoum their sense of pastoralism fades and their desire to migrate grows.

I have changed as a person. It has been three years since I left pastoralism. Now I have new friends, many of them not Beni-Amer, and many of them went to Italy. I have a mobile phone, Facebook and use the internet and watch Indian, Arab and American films. I can tell you I am almost another person, (Eh11, Kassala city, 25 January 2015)

In a similar situation, another respondent expressed the change he observed in himself:

I have not changed from been a Beni-Amer, but the life in the urban area changed me to a different Beni-Amer, a Beni-Amer with no livestock, a taxi driver Beni-Amer. Now I have many non-Beni-Amer friends including Indians and Rashaidas. Some of my friends are police, soldiers, drivers and traders. I have many friends living abroad, some of in Britain, France, Australia and others in the Middle East. Here I am like a middle man. When my friends call me I explain to them about their relatives in the villages and they explain for me about their life abroad. (Eh16 interview, Kassala city, 27 January 2015)

Thus, interviewees declare the more they have a wider social network, the more they feel themselves changed and inspired to migrate out of Africa. Although in the early stages of their dropout ex-herders' mobility is based on their search for alternative livelihoods within the space of their locality, they inevitably increase their social network and mobility. In this way, they develop a distinct pastoralist in transition identity and gravitate towards illegal migration. Amongst the ex-herders this identity is characterised by dissatisfaction with the political and economic situation, hopelessness and unwillingness to work in the available job market, and a desire ultimately to migrate, regardless of risks, which causes stress to relatives. For example, a common sentiment among ex-herder interviewees between the age of 23-35 was 'I want to try my chance. Either I will reach EU or die'. Interviewees

affirmed that this desire is not because they dislike Eritrea or Sudan but because they dislike how these countries are ruled:

We want to change our life! *Sheofv!* [See] Our parents came to the refugee camps when they were younger than we are now. They spent their lives in the fight for Eritrea and fought for their rights in Sudan. The fight and wait for Eritrea bore no fruit: we lost a beautiful country for a tyrant government. We feel sadness in the pit of our stomach, and in Sudan, most of us are still alien to the country. Naturally, it is correct! Most of us do not feel we are fully Sudanese. We can tell you most of us now want to migrate to Europe to find a better life, but this does not mean we [Beni-Amer]) will leave our ancestral homeland forever. *Abadan!* [Never] Even if we migrate to Europe, America and so on and we take the passport of those countries, we will never give up our homeland. (Eh, FGD3, Kassala city, 3 February 2015).

Therefore, the push factor is far more complicated than ‘purely’ economic issues. Interviewees refer to historical factors to explain their economic and political hopelessness in those countries. The next section presents peer effects and self-motivation and the unusual money mobility that funds illegalised migrants’ journeys.

### **6.3.1. Identity and mobility: illegalised migrants, peer effects and money mobility networks**

Many Beni-Amer pastoralists in transition engage in new forms of mobility. As illustrated in figure 6.2 the mobility of the Beni-Amer pastoralists in transition extends beyond local towns to include main cities like Khartoum, and from there ex-herders move step-by-step, though with a migration plan, to join the eastern illegal migration routes.

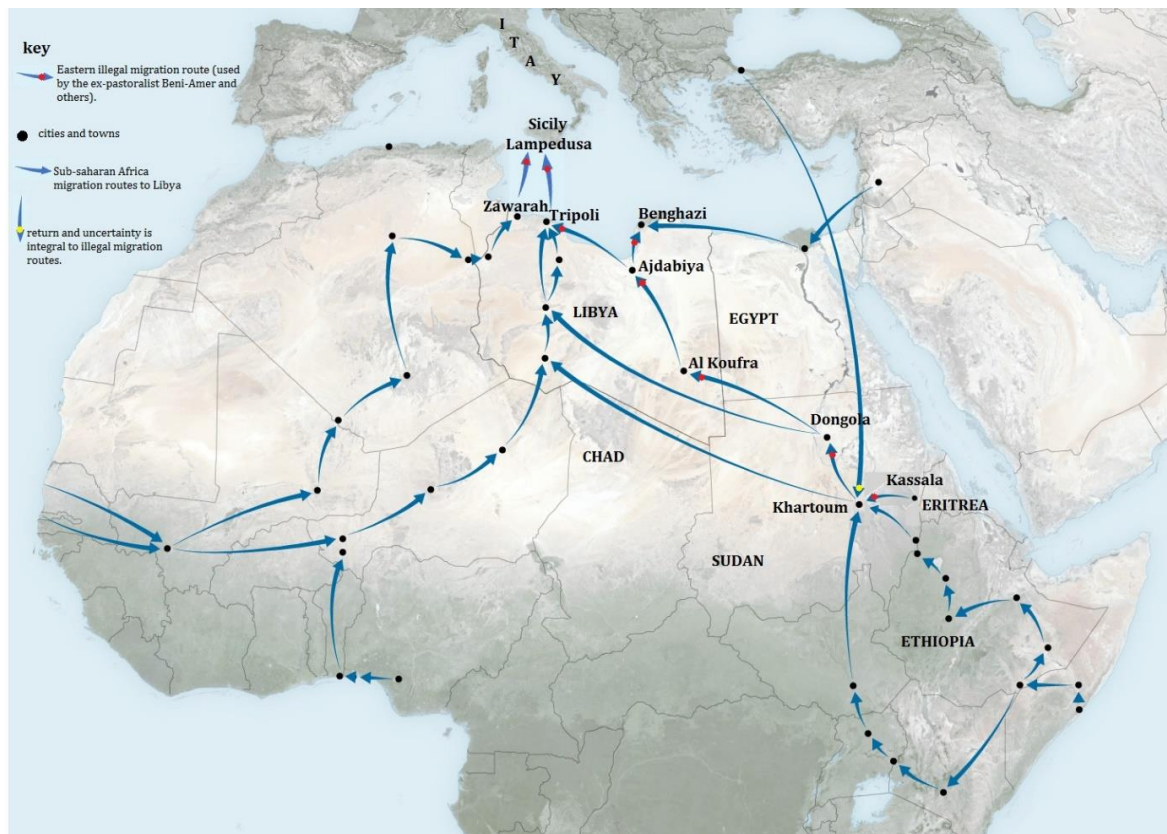


Figure 6.2. Routes commonly used by illegalised migrants from sub-Saharan Africa to southern EU coast via Libya. (Map modified by the researcher, Frontex, 2016)

In contradiction of prevailing wisdom in the available literature the decision to illegally migrate among ex-herders is little encouraged by relatives already in the diaspora and by those in the homeland; rather they are advised not to pursue illegalised routes. Ex-herder respondents reported these warnings and that they were acutely aware of difficulties of the journey between Khartoum and Lampedusa. While their primary push factor was economic and political hopelessness in Sudan and Eritrea, peer effects were important too. Peers did not encourage them to use illegal migration routes however. Nonetheless if the illegalised migrants made up their minds and started the journey themselves without telling or without reaching an agreement with their relatives then families and their relative and non-relative peers contributed money to rescue them. This quote from a focus group discussion affirmed the point:

In Eritrea's war, drought and endless National Service without pay - you know we call it National Slavery - and Sudan was better than in Eritrea but only hand to mouth. Our brothers and friends whom we grow up with, they



all left scattered like seed all over the world. Many migrated to the Middle East, Europe, USA and Australia. Nowadays hardly you find members of one household living in one country. You know when your peers migrated you feel you do not like to be left behind. *EEi!* [Of course] Families and friends do not encourage us to illegal migration but if we put ourselves in to it they do not leave us die in the hands of people smugglers. (Eh, FGD2, Kassala city, 2 February 2015)

All ex-herder participants were asked in an individual in-depth interview and focus group discussion to clarify how peer effects inspired their decision to migrate. Only 7 out of 24 interviewed reported being inspired by remittance and economic benefits seen among the families of migrant peers. The other 17 respondents hadn't seen much financial gain by such families. Rather they believed that since families are now scattered the kin back home and diaspora suffer stress (see table 6.2).

Table 6.2 Influences of remittance on ex-herders' decision to migrate

From 24 ex-herders interviewed in Kassala city	7 interviewees' decision to migrate was inspired by remittance seen among the migrant peers' families.
	17 respondents' decision to migrate was not driven by financial gain by the families of diaspora peers.

Strangely, those who believed migration stressed rather than benefited the kin also expressed the greatest interest in migrating themselves:

We are aware of the dangers involved in the illegal migration routes and the hardship after migrating. For example, of course, there is a language barrier and a new culture and some of our friends call us from abroad, like Britain, Germany, Switzerland and Italy, and some say they do not have legal documents to work in those countries. But we consider they are better than us. Maybe their situation will improve in the future but what future do we have here? You know the bitter reality is pushing us to the unknown future. You see! We hate to be destitute refugees in our land or slaves of the so-called National Service for life. (Eh, FGD3, Kassala city, 3 February 2015)

Thus, the decision to migrate is complex, driven by several interlocked elements. Despite their awareness of the risks involved in illegal migration routes and the uncertain future in the host countries most of those interviewed preferred to migrate rather than remain in Eritrea or Sudan. In the past 15 years since 1999, most migrants (261,768) journeyed to Europe from Sub-saharan countries including Eritrea, Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia (Fargues and Bonfanti, 2014).

You know! If our problem is poverty alone, we would not have thought to migrate. After all, our ancestral homeland in Eritrea or eastern Sudan is not poor; it is the land of many minerals and livestock. But we lack freedom and peace in Eritrea, and we are marginalised here in the Sudan. *Aiwa!* [Yes] That is why many youths, not only us [Beni-Amer] but others also, usually prefer to migrate. (Eh, FGD3, Kassala city, 3 February 2015)

As this quote indicates push factors are not some short-lived episodes but endemic predicaments in the region; interviewees therefore emphasised that migration is not their solution; they are an alternative for them to pursue their future elsewhere.

The months before taking an actual journey are characterised by mobile phone calling: to relatives in the diaspora to get them to pay the smugglers, and home in eastern Sudan, often to parents to convince them the only way out of their hopelessness is to migrate out of Africa. Ex-herder respondents explained how the idea to migrate developed across time and space following increasing contact with non-pastoralists in towns. They emphasised the impact on long-term residents of refugee camps in Sudan of arrivals escaping from the Eritrean army, an issue explored in the case study below. This study found that the first Eritrean illegalised migrants to Libya via the Sahara dated back to 2001. The 1998-2000 Ethiopia-Eritrea border conflict displaced over a million mostly rural inhabitants, and many Eritrean soldiers defected to Sudan. Unable to secure jobs they feared for their lives as Eritrean security operated freely in eastern Sudan freely, snatching deserters from camps and towns. Thus, army defectors gravitated towards Khartoum, but on their way there had contact with Beni-Amer and other Eritrean refugees, often relatives. Interviewees in this study reported that early migrants to Libya travelled there on camels, hoping to find work. In Libya they maintained contact with their kin in Sudan and Eritrea and sent money, and others started to follow suit. From

Libya gradually some made their way to Malta and Italy, and the illegal Sudan-Libya and Libya-Italy sea routes became established.

### **Case Study 1: ex-herder interviewee (Eh13)**

Eh13 is 29 years-old, an ex-herder Beni-Amer. He was born in a refugee camp in eastern Sudan. In his early childhood, he mixed herding with Quranic school, and he was high school-educated. His parents are Eritrean Beni-Amer refugees who did not return there after the country's independence in May 1991 because his father was a member of the ELF. His cousin's household returned and were given resettlement in Tessenei town. Eh13's cousin at the age of 18 was taken to Sawa [an Eritrean military training camp] in 2004; after seven years in the Eritrean Army he deserted, and after staying three months in a refugee camp across the border in northern Ethiopia he crossed into Sudan with the help of a people-smuggler. Sudanese border police arrested him, but after one month in detention he was taken to the Shagarab refugee camp in eastern Sudan. Fearing abduction by human traffickers or the Eritrean security forces who operated without restrictions in the camps and border region between Sudan and Eritrea, he fled the camp for Kassala city where he had left his relatives in 1995.

Eh13 was euphoric for his cousin escaping the army for Sudan, and they shared his house. After four months the cousin decided to move to Khartoum and Eh13 helped him to find a people-smuggler to take him there. In Khartoum the ex-soldier worked as a day-wage labourer for a construction company for about a year; after making enough money he journeyed to Libya with the help of people-smugglers, reaching the EU by the Central Mediterranean route. He did not want asylum in Italy, so proceeded on to the UK, crossing via Calais. His application for asylum was refused by the Home Office, but after a year he was granted leave to remain in the UK. This escapee from the Eritrean army sent money to his ex-herder cousin in Kassala; Eh13 bought a mobile phone and the pair maintained contact. Following his cousin's advice Eh13 moved to Khartoum in 2015. Lacking a Sudanese ID card, he moved to Al-Gedaref first, and by taking employment was able step-by-step to transfer to Khartoum. His cousin advised him to purchase a labourer's visa and migrate to the Middle East by legal means, but Eh13 was unable to secure the visa and finally decided to migrate to Libya, Eh13's decision

was not strengthened by his cousin. Eh13 started the journey first, then the cousin felt morally obliged to fund him.

Eh13 met a Samsari [a person at the lowest ring of the smuggling network] in Khartoum for a price of \$1,600 from Khartoum to Libya but after a 9-day journey in the desert he was caught by the Sudanese army. After spending 17 days in detention he was released on bail. Eh13 then made a second, successful, attempt to get into Libya. He was detained twice, however, in Ajdabiya and in Tripoli, and released on payment respectively from his cousin of \$500 and by other relatives of \$1,000. This time smugglers took him to the north-western coast, and in March 2015 he crossed the Central Mediterranean from Zawarah town to Lampedusa on the southern border of the EU. Like his cousin Eh13 did not want asylum in Italy because of the disappointing conditions he witnessed illegalised migrants endure there. He travelled to Calais hoping to cross to the UK, but the UK's border control prevented this. After 34-days in Calais he chose to migrate to Norway, where he was granted asylum.



Figure 6.3. Eh13's fragmented in-between mobility routes and moments of stillness and waiting. (Map modified by the researcher, google maps, 2017)

Hiwatari's study of social networks and migration decisions in rural Central Asian households (2016) argues that peers positively influence household decisions to migrate, and spillover effects might increase migration from village societies. The findings of this study accord with Hiwatari's view: decisions by ex-herder Beni-Amer to migrate are to an extent subject to peer effects, but the effect is not necessarily one of encouragement. The above case study is a typical example of the peer effect and self-motivation in action. In a similar situation, another interviewee explained peer effects spillover and self-motivation this way:

My cousin came from Eritrea. He escaped from Sawa and stayed with us in our house in the outskirts of Kassala, and he was always thinking about going

to Italy. He encouraged me to move to Khartoum; he said jobs are better in Khartoum. I could not make it that year. He migrated to Europe in 2009, and now he is living in Britain. His example inspired me to decide to migrate to Khartoum and he helped me buy a taxi. After saving money I purchased a forged Sudanese citizenship ID card to help me travel within Sudan. A year has passed since. I always think to migrate to EU but he [my cousin] always warned me not to attempt to migrate through Libya due to the risk involved. And he was suggesting to try directly to Italy by legal means [e.g. immigration marriage] otherwise he said stay in Khartoum. (Eh6 interview, Kassala city, 20 January 2015)

Moreover, the case study shows that the migration of ex-herder Beni-Amer within Sudan starts with a small movement towards the main Sudanese cities. Thus, step-by-step mobility in the early stages of their movement towards illegalised migration resembles the study conducted by Paul (2011), who found that Philippine migrant workers moved similarly step-by-step to their preferred destinations. Paul used the term 'stepwise' mobility but, unlike Philippine migrant workers, ex-herder Beni-Amer are unable to secure legal entry to any country, including Libya and Egypt. As a result, they are forced to take 'unwise mobility' steps at the hands of smugglers operating international smuggling networks. The case of the Beni-Amer shows how identity often complicates mobility: it partly informs the (im)mobility of individual and group (Ritterbusch, 2016). Indeed, one can argue contemporary immigration regimes do not accommodate the needy and displaced. Often persons from war, and poverty-torn countries suffer from the failure of their countries, on which basis their referrals are judged: they are usually refused legal entry even to their neighbouring states. Those from such backgrounds understand that the legal option does not exist for them, and thus ex-herder Beni-Amer gravitate towards illegal migration: in a sense, the legal requirements creates illegal entries (Fargues and Bonfanti, 2014; Carling, 2007). Unlike the 'stepwise' mobility practiced by the Philippine migrants studied by Paul (2011), Beni-Amer mobility from Khartoum to Italy is characterised by multiple 'unwise and desperate steps'. Respondents outlined how migrating beyond their homeland involves illegalised mobility even within Sudan:

We [the Beni-Amer] may travel between the villages and Kassala city as we wanted but from Kassala city to Khartoum needs Sudanese ID card and most don't have Sudanese ID. Although they had been in Sudan since birth they had no mobility rights. (Eh, FGD2, Kassala city, 2 February 2015)

The case study also presented the fragmentation of illegalised migrants' mobility in the in-between space, mirroring the findings of Collyer (2010) whose study of illegalised migrants from West Africa to Spain found their experiences treacherous and disjointed. For example, in case study 1 Eh13, travelling from eastern Sudan to Norway, approximately 8,945km, without flying, experienced 69 moments of stillness and places of waiting.

This study found that for Beni-Amer without Sudanese ID cards intra-state movement is more difficult in Eritrea and Sudan than in the EU. It was observed that from Kassala to Khartoum - around 600km motorway - public transport buses are stopped to be searched by police in four places. Armed and unarmed police search for anyone travelling without Sudanese ID or foreign country passports; if anyone is found they are jailed and the bus driver penalised; therefore, the bus drivers always want to make sure no-one without ID sets foot in their bus. In Eritrea, intra-state mobility is peerless. One key informant woman who visited Eritrea a few months before being interviewed explained that from the capital city Asmara to Tessenei town by the Sudan-Eritrea border - less than 400km motorway - the bus she was travelling in was stopped and searched by army personnel at intervals of less than 30km. She witnessed young Eritreans taken from the bus by army men. Therefore, one can argue by contrast for persons without documents there is a better chance of mobility within EU countries, and they can even work in the illegalised labour market. However, this does not mean illegalised migrants are as mobile as the mainstream society; rather their mobility is channelled in relation to immigration and economic status, and among them it is connected to the social status of the individual or group. Thus, mobility is a political product, and it helps shape social hierarchies (Gossling and Nilsson, 2010). One can argue the channelling of illegalised migrants' mobility starts in the country of departure rather than in their destination. For example, legal entry into countries with better economic opportunities is unimaginable for Beni-Amer ex-herders and other impoverished

and displaced groups, so many of them feel they must surmount legal requirements. This study argues that identity and wellbeing of illegalised migrants are factors in their choice to take the illegal route. As one respondent put it:

He [my cousin] does not want me to come through Libya. But I see there are no alternative means except through Libya. It is impossible for any embassy to give me a visa; they are always suspicious that people of Eritrean origin will travel to any country for tourism or business but only to ask for asylum. That is why I do not want to try it - I already know no country will give me a visa. I tried many times for my parents to agree to my decision and persuade our relatives living abroad to pay smugglers for me but my mother refused. You see that is why I must try my chance through Libya even if my relatives warned me not to. (Eh15 interview, Kassala city, 21 January 2015)

For some the back and forth calling resulted in diaspora relatives paying for the journey and back-home-kin accepting their decision to migrate and to pray for them. But for others, parents rejected migration, and their diaspora relatives refused to pay for it. Often those rejected start work in Khartoum to collect money to finance themselves while, in some cases, the ex-herders and the smugglers make an agreement to start the journey without prior payment, but call relatives from Libya to demand a higher price. Strangely, return is very rare after embarking on the illegal migration. In Kassala city returnees can be counted on the fingers of one hand. Respondents explained that it is considered an embarrassment to start and terminate, usually not discussed, or mocked by peers. Thus, some returnees were observed working in the shops in Kassala city but not interviewed.

In the illegal migration, uncommon and intricate mobility routes are not only about people but also about non-human things such as money. For interviewees, money to rescue illegalised migrants takes an unusual path. First, diaspora kin in the UK and other countries transfer money to an EU member state where the smugglers have an agent. Second, once collected in the EU the money is transferred to another agency in Dubai. Third, the agent in Dubai transfers the money to another agent in Sudan, and later the agent in Sudan splits the money between himself and the Libyan smuggler. One important feature of money mobility along smuggling networks is when illegalised migrants move north towards the EU, the money collected from



illegalised migrants' diaspora kin, who usually live in developed countries in the global north, is transferred south towards Khartoum to pay smuggling networks.

It's complicated to state a fixed price for illegal migration; usually, money is extorted along the way. Nevertheless, based on the data collected from interviewees, on average smugglers collected \$6,000 from each illegalised migrant from Khartoum to Italy. Often the money comes from multiple sources and is paid neither to one person nor one occasion or place. It can be argued that payment for illegal migration takes place across time and space and from several sources. Thus, some locations became convergence locations on the illegal migration routes as displayed in figure 6.4: the solid arrows show the usual money transfer routes while the broken arrows show occasional ones. In a simplified way, the complex mobility of money and illegalised migration can be explained in three stages until illegalised migrants from Khartoum arrive in Lampedusa. Stage one: illegalised migrants are collected in Khartoum by the Samsari; \$1,600 is received by an agent in the EU from kin living in the diaspora. Stage two: transporters meet the second stage of the smuggling network in Ajdabiya; an additional \$1,600 is gathered by the agency in the EU, transferred to Dubai and later to Khartoum; the migrant moves north towards Tripoli. Stage three: the third ring of smugglers receives migrants in Tripoli or Zawarah and demands \$1,600 for the sea crossing to Lampedusa. \$1,600 is gathered by an agent in the EU, transferred to Dubai and later to Khartoum; migrants launched to Italy from Zawarah or nearby coast. Although Ajdabiya and Zawarah are the main staging-posts and money extortion locations, interviewees also reported being stopped and abused by their transporters and Chadian bands at many points in their journey. I will return to this detail later.

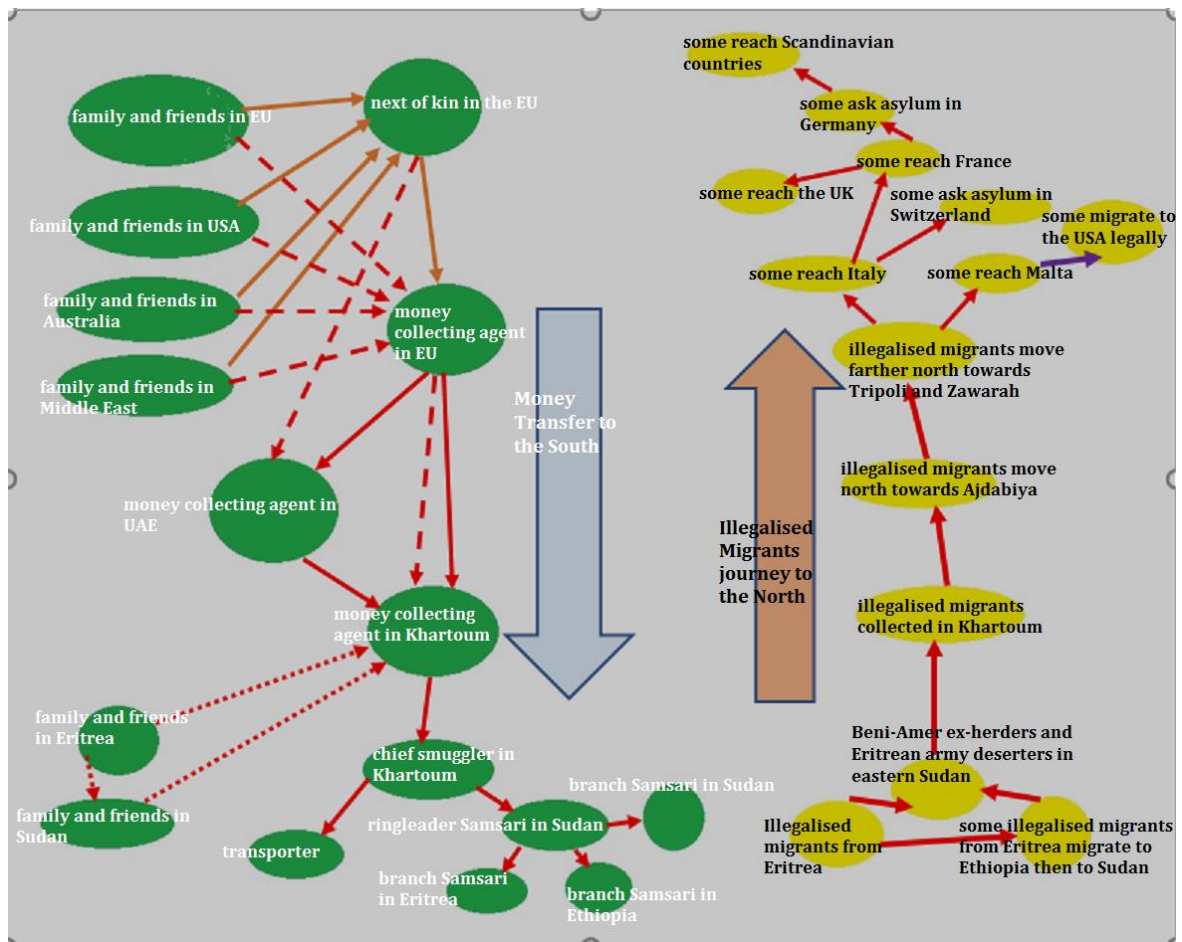


Figure 6.4. The mobility of illegalised migrants and money collecting process to fund illegalised migrants on the Khartoum-Ajdabiya-Zawarah-Lampedusa-EU routes. (Sketch by the researcher)

First, the Samsari in Khartoum advertises smuggling to potential illegal migrants. Sometimes the Samsari receives a group from other smugglers operating between Eritrea, Ethiopia and eastern Sudan. After negotiating a price either the illegalized migrant or his Samsari makes a mobile phone call to the migrant's kin in the diaspora. \$1,600 is the average price to take the illegalized migrant from Khartoum to Libya. The Samsari uses a false identity and keeps much information concealed from kin, using only a mobile phone to contact them, to avoid arrest or reprisal in the event of failure, injury or death to the migrant. After collecting the first payment, the Samsari hands over the migrants to a chief smuggler in Khartoum. The chief smuggler receives at least two thirds of the \$1,600 from the Samsari and organises the migrants' transportation to Libya, usually using local transporters driving Toyota Land Cruiser four-wheel-drive vehicles.

Second, interviewees explained that illegalised migrants are transported from Khartoum to Dongola in North Sudan. Often, no extra payment is required. After 5-9 days they cross the Libyan border through Kufrah district and travel north towards Ajdabiya. At this point, extra money is asked from migrants, and they are forced to call kin in the diaspora and back-home relatives; money from relatives is transferred to an agent in an EU country. (Sometimes the money is transferred directly to Dubai or Khartoum.) In the third phase of the fieldwork of this study, conducted in the UK, it was observed that money is directly transferred to Khartoum or Dubai if the smuggler's agent in the EU fears discovery by the authorities due for example to an abnormal amount of money being transferred into his bank account. Third, after payment is received by the chief smuggler in Khartoum migrants move north to Tripoli and Zawarah in Libya. At this stage, the migrant is forced by his smugglers to call his relatives to send money for the Mediterranean crossing to Lampedusa. Once payment is completed the illegalised migrant is launched towards Lampedusa in rickety boats and dinghies. Once successfully in Italy the migrant starts a new northward mobility within EU space with the help of smugglers, often crossing to the UK via Calais, or migrating to Scandinavia.

Respondents reported that money did not transfer from Sudan to Libya; the share of the smuggler in Libya was kept by his agents in Khartoum, and once informed of this, the smuggler released the illegalised migrant to continue on to Italy. But if the relatives refused to comply the illegalised migrant would be forced to make a mobile phone call. If money was still withheld the smugglers would sell or harvest their prisoner's organs. A key informant father narrated his experiences with the smugglers of his son:

He [the son] left here without telling us. He said the people smugglers kidnapped him. I was searching for him asking everyone I thought might have seen him. It was stressful for me and our relatives and friends. *Ehhi! Ehhi!* [sound made to express distressful experience]. There was a time I thought his mother was lucky: she passed away before all of this. After 11 days, he called and explained he was somewhere in the desert with many other people [illegalised migrants]. He said smugglers demanded \$3,000 to take him to Libya. As you can imagine we are living hand to mouth; the money

asked by the smugglers was very high. Over the phone, I explained to the smugglers I am a poor man, I don't have the money to give them. You know they are merciless. They started beating him and made me hear his agony. I cried too! The smugglers said if I cannot pay for him within two days they will increase the ransom money to \$7,000 and if not paid in full they will sell his organs. It was very hard for all of us. To rescue him I sold everything I owned and managed to gather \$1,700, and desperately I made phone calls to my brother's wife's cousin living in *Alemannia* [Germany] to help. *BarakAllah feehe!* [God bless him], he did. We transferred the money to a person the smugglers described in Khartoum. We did exactly as the smugglers said. And then the smugglers took him to Egypt, not Libya. From there by the help of the UN he migrated to Canada, and since 2010 he never came back but helped us with some money. (KI12 interview, east Kassala rangeland, 9 January 2015).

This study argues that illegalised migration means fear and stress not only to the illegalised migrants but also to the whole family, at home and in the diaspora. One ex-herder in Kassala disliked the idea of migrating to Europe through Libya but instead preferred the Middle East: he affirmed the stress endured by the relatives at home of those travelling to the EU through Libya:

Many people have parched in the desert of Libya and others drowned in the sea while crossing to Italy. Their mothers they do not know whether they are alive or dead or rotted in jail. They [illegalised migrants] lost contact with their relatives and their mothers are sobbing every day. It is haram [forbidden in Islam] to waste your life and put your mothers into stress. (Eh1 interview, Kassala city, 19 January 2015)

Those not wanting to migrate to the EU via Libya are few compared with the numbers who do, but they see the migration route as like trying suicide. They mention verses from the Holy Quran to justify their opinion. For example:

'And do not kill yourselves. Surely, God is Most Merciful to you.' [Quran 4:29]  
'And do not throw yourselves in destruction.' [Quran 2: 195] (Eh8 and Eh21 interviews, Kassala city, 25 and 27 January 2015 respectively)

Thus, those wishing to remain in Sudan or migrate through safe methods to the Middle East express strong religious perspectives. Those wanting to travel disagree and justify their desire by citing the migration of the companions of the Prophet of Islam to Abyssinia. For instance:

There is nothing wrong with migration. Even the companions migrated to Ethiopia. If it is haram to migrate they would not have done it.' (Eh, FGD2, Kassala city, 2 February 2015)

However, this study found that in the later stages of the migration process those who justify migration held this view only before approaching Libya. Once experiencing the fragmented in-between mobility feelings of despair typically took over. Once embarking on the journey in the hands of the smugglers they changed their minds but through a sense of shame and the fact that their mobility was controlled by the smugglers they could not return. One mobile phone interviewee confessed this simply:

It is wrong to do this to my life. May God the Almighty forgive me. I am in the middle of it; going back is as bad as going forward. (Eh13 mobile phone interview, Ajdabiya, 9 March 2015)

Illegalised migrants changing their minds is rarely due to preferring the life available in economically and political hopeless Eritrea and Sudan. They do so because of the extreme difficulties faced on the journey. While travelling, they call upon verses from the Quran for comfort:

We are desperate with people smugglers who they do not have mercy upon us. But God the Merciful is with us, he alone will help us. And I said: 'So verily, with hardship, there is ease.' [Quran 12:86]. (Eh13 and Eh19 mobile phone interview, Ajdabiya, 9 and 11 March 2015 respectively)

This quote shows the importance of Islam in the identity of the Beni-Amer as they face dangers while trying to make a better life. The next section will look in more detail at the little-researched illegal routes and mobility fragmentation and its implication for the migrants.

#### **6.4. Fragmented in-between mobility: illegalised migrants, smuggling networks stillness, waiting and uncertainty**

Though illegal migration is extensively researched, illegalised migrants' experiences and practices of in-between mobility between the shores of the Sahara in the south and the Mediterranean coast in the north are scarcely-explored. This study argues that illegalised migrants' mobility from their societies of origin, a place they call homeland, to a host community that they can also feel a sense of belonging to is characterised by multiple (im)mobilities across time and space. Collyer (2010) argues that contemporary migration systems have become increasingly long, dangerous and fragmented. Indeed, the findings of the study mirror this in identifying how ex-herder Beni-Amer experience lengthy migrations without clear ending characterised by fragmentation, waiting, return, uncertainty, stuckness and stillness.

Moreover, within the in-between mobility illegalised migrants' journeys are complex and cannot be understood using traditional migration dichotomies between im/mobility, pull/push and start/destination. Interviewees in the in-between mobility declare they have been travelling for days tangled in one place: thus travel entails sitting down and being trapped (Cresswell, 2012). Some respondents demonstrated the 'in-between' phase of their journey: they used their pastoralist resilience to endure boiling temperatures and physical hardship on their journey, and in one instance, discarded by their transporters, journeyed northwards using the stars and following birds to discover an oasis. Respondents felt being legalised migrants meant being abused, walking in fear; sometimes it meant rushing but at other times waiting, slowness, stillness and uncertainty.

In the fieldwork it was observed that the rangeland bordering Eritrea, Sudan and Ethiopia is a very feared region. At a distance pick-up vehicles speed across the lunar landscape: respondents in this study call them Landy, meaning Toyota Land cruiser, and their owners are the people-hunters. These are starting points to the intense and traumatic experiences we have characterised as 'in-between mobility'. Interviewees testified that crossing the Sudan-Eritrean border is highly risky. Border-crossers are hunted by human traffickers or shot by Eritrean armed forces who operate a shoot-to-kill policy. Many migrants from Eritrea cross the Eritrean-

Ethiopian border then head south-west towards Sudan. They enter eastern Sudan via the Ethiopia-Sudan border through Humera and Metema towns. Interviewees telling of their relatives escaping the Eritrean army revealed that they crossed the Sudan border directly through the rangeland inhabited by the Beni-Amer, though some crossed through Ethiopia. Those who cross from Eritrea to Ethiopia then to Sudan travel via central Ethiopian cities such as Gondar and Bahar Dahr. After a short stay with relatives in eastern Sudan new arrivals head straight to Khartoum. Interviewees stated that although it was unusual for a Beni-Amer to migrate to Ethiopia, nowadays some Beni-Amer cross the border to Ethiopia after deserting the Eritrean army. Then they cross the Ethiopian-Sudan border with the help of smugglers. Ex-herder interviewees describing relatives crossing to Sudan from Ethiopia stated that in the first stage of their journey people smugglers in Ethiopia would make an offer to ex-army kin to 'move now pay later', in which the client is smuggled to Sudan and money is paid once they arrive. But if the client fails to pay they risk being sold to traffickers for ransom. Thus, the first stage of the smuggling operation starts by collecting potential clients in Khartoum.

Illegal migration routes shift continually across time and space to accommodate political circumstances in the region and beyond, as this study has made clear. Interviewees reported how Sudan-Libya-Italy routes are operated by smuggling rings and their networks, mainly based in Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, Libya, UAE and the EU. Contemporary illegal migration escalated due to the presence of modern communication technology, according to Collyer (2010): indeed, these routes of protracted in-between mobility connect through advanced mobile communication technology, advanced weaponry, four-wheel drive vehicles, night vision goggles, determined and experienced personnel with local knowledge. Moreover, the economic and political instability in Eritrea and Sudan has led to a constant flow of migrants, fuelling the growth of a vast business drawing in enormous amounts of cash; smugglers can bribe as well as threaten anyone who stands in their way. One interviewee described the networks like this:

The smugglers are the leaders of the desert and in cities they bribe and control government officials and do what they want. They are well connected and always on their Al-Thurayya mobile phones, know the routes in the

desert and they are very brutal. (Eh7 mobile phone interview, unnamed location in Libya, 17 March 2015)

Interviewees described migrating from Kassala city to Khartoum step-by-step, even taking jobs along the way, but kin escaping the Eritrean army directly will migrate to Khartoum using people smugglers. It was observed in the fieldwork that Beni-Amer herders and Eritrean ex-soldiers fear abduction by trafficking gangs. If abducted they would be forced to join the illegal migration by their abductors, and might end up in the Sinai desert. The kidnappers plot this sort of route, on the basis of the profits they can make from abductions. Respondents in Kassala city reported that Beni-Amer herders kidnapped from the rangeland and refugee camps in eastern Sudan end up in Sinai and their relatives sell everything to pay their ransom, since they would be considered highly illegal in Israel. Otherwise, Beni-Amer only join the illegal migration route from Khartoum in order to reach Libya or Egypt and subsequently the EU. As displayed in figure 6.5 Khartoum acts as the first crossroads for irregular migration in the region, not only for recently arriving Eritreans, but also for ex-herder Beni-Amer, Sudanese, Somalis, and Ethiopians. Interviewees explained how Sudan-Egypt-Sinai-Israel was the preferred migration route before 2011 but, after Israel constructed a security fence on its border in 2013, the Sinai route was dropped. Smugglers opened the Sudan-Egypt route in response, and then the Alexandria-Italy route. This illustrates how irregular migration routes operate in relation to geo-political events in the region and beyond.





Figure 6.5. Khartoum is a hub for illegalised migrants heading towards Libya. (Source: Frontex)

This also applies to conflicts and political stability in the transit countries. Routes are designed by the smugglers, not according to the needs of the migrants. Migrants must gravitate to the smuggling networks, which prosper in destabilised countries. For example, interviewees explained how under the Gaddafi regime, Libya was a notable destination for some Beni-Amer and other Eritreans who worked and lived there. After the fall of Gaddafi, the country entered an extended period of instability and most Beni-Amer migrants entered the country to cross the Mediterranean using smugglers. Therefore, interviewees entered Libya not to raise funds by working, but only to gain transit to Europe. Smuggling networks therefore escalated their operations and increased fees in response to the increasing demand for their services while the Libyan state moved towards collapse.

This study found smuggling networks straddle Sudan, Libya and the EU. In the ‘no man’s land,’ about 200km north of Khartoum up to Zawarah in north-west Libya illegalised migrants undertake serious risks. These include the natural risk of the temperature and remoteness of the Sahara desert, and the other danger inflicted upon them by their transporters and armed gangs. These include being sold off to ransom collectors and the fact that their transporters themselves risk death if captured, so drive at dangerous speeds using night vision goggles but no lights, and without care for anyone who might fall off the vehicle. Interviewees told that from Dongola to Ajdabiya one pickup is loaded with 2-3 1,000 litre fuel-barrels, approximately 700kg food and water, and many boxes of contraband goods, leaving inadequate space for their human cargo. Each vehicle contains three armed transporters, and on average twenty seven migrants, who must sit on top of the load, fastened by cables to the main body of the car. If any fail their life is finished; they will get buried naturally by the shifting Saharan sands.



Figure 6.6. Illegalised migrants in the Sahara desert often travel in two or three jeeps close to each other. (Source: Eh7)

One interviewee reported that they change vehicles and transporters throughout the journey. If one driver reaches his designated destination and the next driver fails to arrive the first driver discards the migrants in the desert, and if the next transporter should not come then the migrants risk death because of dehydration.

Respondents said women, young girls and even men are raped and sexually abused by Libyan/Chadian armed gangs and by their transporters, though not by other migrants. Throughout the journey illegalised migrants face armed robbery, beatings and torture, and detention is integral to their experience of mobility. Transporters' actions were described by one interviewee:

These people [the transporters] are very cruel. When we were in the desert a Somali man fell from the jeep and we banged the car to draw the attention of the transporters. He stopped after some time and we told him a man had fallen and requested him to return to rescue the man. The transporters took their guns (AK-47) and started beating us with rubber sticks and in one word they said if you ask us to stop again we will kill you all. They left the man to die in the desert. (Eh7 mobile phone interview, Ajdabiya, 21 March 2015)

Illegalised migrants entered Libya through the sparsely populated quadrant border between Sudan-Chad-Egypt-Libya located in the south-eastern Al-Kufrah district. Because of its location and remoteness the old Kufrah town was traditionally used as a stopover on trans-Saharan slave trading routes, and in the last decade Kufrah has been a smuggling hub, not only for illegalised migrants but also all sort of contraband goods. A report by ISSP (2015) noted that weapons, drugs, fuel and people are smuggled through the Kufrah area. Migrants flow south to north, fuel paths flow north to south and drug routes run south to north; weapons routes run south, then generally turn west towards Niger. These routes add to the dangers migrants face in the region. The Kufrah district is mainly inhabited by the Toubou and Zuwayya tribes, members of which compete to control the profitable drugs and people-smuggling routes. Toubou and Zuwayya groups fought for several years over this and in March 2015 many migrants coming from Sudan were killed (ISSP, 2015). Routes from Sudan to Libya fluctuate in response to such conflicts, extending either 300km north from Kufrah or 300km south-west Kufrah. Clashes led to high militia presence and police checkpoints, so smugglers by-passed Kufrah (ISSP, 2015). Interviewees reported that prior to the war in Darfur in 2003 human cargo was smuggled through Darfur to reach Libya but following the war the route switched to Dongola in the north of Sudan. The irony is that while conflict is a major cause of

people's displacement, it also shapes the illegal migration routes by which migrants escape it.

This study argues illegalised migrants' mobility is fragmented around several desert locations in which they have to languish in warehouses, sometimes for several weeks. For example, infrastructural breakdowns including vehicle and communication failures impede mobilities, leading to waiting, uncertainty and stuckness. Moments of stuckness can occur in dramatic ways at such times (Graham, 2010). Furthermore, fragmentations of the in-between mobility are imposed on illegalised migrants mainly by their transporters and armed gangs to extract money through abuse. However, interviewees declare, illegalised migrants face abuse, fragmentation and loss of control of their mobility right from the first day of their encounters with smugglers. It gets worse across time and space when migrants move northwards to Libya and the Mediterranean. For example, Samsara in Khartoum collects 15-30 illegalised migrants and hides them in back-street houses where they have to wait until final preparations are done. Even at this early stage the migrants are regularly hidden and moved from one location to another in small groups, usually at night, to avoid detection by security forces. As one interview illustrates it:

We contacted the Samsari in Khartoum, and we negotiated the price from Khartoum to Tripoli: \$1,600 per person. After we had paid him he took us to a house in north Khartoum at night, around 2a.m., and we found other people in the room. After two days, someone came to the house. I think he was the one arranging the journey to Libya, and they start taking people to another house in Khartoum. We were moving from one house to another for 13 days. After that they came to us at night and put us in a bus with no seat and made us sit inside and we were not allowed to make any sound. After three hours, we reached a small house and date-palm farm, and we were locked there for another three days before we move to another place further north. (Eh19 and Eh18 mobile phone interview, near Dongola north Sudan, 3 March 2015)

Illegalised migrants' mobility is not only fragmented but as we see here is also characterised by loss of control from the start and imposed immobility as well as movements. Another mobile phone interview adds to the point:

We are in north Khartoum now. We came here five days ago, but we don't know when they will move us or which way we are going. Them [the smugglers] arrange everything. (Eh9 mobile phone interview, north Khartoum, 1 March 2015)

The following case studies – no.s 2 and 3 - demonstrate the loss of control, fragmentation, return, and stuckness experienced in in-between mobility.

#### **Case Study 2: ex-herder interviewee (Eh9)**

Eh9 is a 31 year old ex-herder from a Beni-Amer community in the rangeland bordering Eritrea and Sudan. His parents left Eritrea in 1981 and lost their livestock to the drought of 1984; they migrated to the refugee camp in eastern Sudan. He grew up mixing school with herding the few goats his father bought while he was working in the grass market in Kassala city. Now his parents and younger siblings live in the outskirts of Kassala city but his uncle has lived in Saudi Arabia since 1999, and he looks after them if they need help. Eh9 always wanted to migrate to the Middle East to help his parents. He had friends working in shops in Kassala city, many of them non-Beni-Amer. He is a gifted sketcher and many loved him for his sketches. Because of his wider social connections he managed to purchase a false Sudanese ID card by bribing government officials. Eh9 started petty trade from Khartoum to Kassala city and nearby villages.

In 2014 Eh9 decided to migrate to Italy inspired by his peers, many of whom now live abroad. In February 2015, he paid \$1,600, (\$1,000 came from friends living in Britain) to a smuggler in Khartoum to take him to Libya. The journey took 27 days. Many fellow-migrants didn't reach northern Libya; eight died in the desert.

Eh9 was detained in Ajdabiya for 11 days, and forced to call his family and friends to help him pay \$1,500. Because of his wider social network money was collected for him. In March 2015 he and another 180 illegalised migrants attempted to cross the Central Mediterranean Route and reached Lampedusa, but their boat was caught by Libyan police and returned to Benghazi. He was detained for 9 days in Benghazi and this time had to ask friends and relatives to pay \$500 for his release. He was given to smugglers from the detention centre, and his smugglers demanded \$1,400 to launch him towards Lampedusa; this time his uncle paid. On 3rd of April 2015 this journey began, along with 150 other migrants, but after three days in the

Mediterranean they were rescued by Maltese Coast Guards, and now he is detained in Malta. The researcher contacted Eh9 in Malta over the mobile phone using an IMO app. Eh9 sent his sketches about his experiences of the fragmented mobility.



Figure 6.7. precious life lost in the precarious fragmented mobility in the Sahara desert. (Sketch by Eh9)

In case study 2, Eh9 faced multiple stoppings and financial extortions. Throughout the journey he was forced to move in and out of locations beyond his control and ended up in a place not of his choice. In this in-between mobility push and pull factors are obscured by the continuous difficulties encountered by migrants. Thus, the destination of their journey remains unknown. They do not have control of their movement so they cannot judge when to move, where to move, and how much it will cost. This fragmented mobility is of course accompanied by insecurity and fear. Case study 3 demonstrates further the fragmentation of the in-between mobility that illegalised Beni-Amer must endure.

### **Case Study 3: ex-herder interviewee (Eh17)**

Eh17 is a 27 year old ex-herder Beni-Amer. Like Eh9 he was born in the rangeland border between western Eritrea and eastern Sudan. His parents lost all their livestock in the 1990 drought. The family moved into the refugee camp in east Kassala city but there was little food aid and many newcomers did not get any. His



family resettled in the outskirts of Kassala city. His father was a day-wage labourer in a bakery and his elder brother was working in the bus station in town, and later became a taxi driver; in 2008 he moved to Khartoum. In 2009 he migrated to Qatar, and after three years he travelled to France. Via Calais he went to the UK in 2011. After requesting asylum he was granted limited leave to remain in the UK. Eh17 moved to Khartoum at the age of 25, and his elder brother sent him money to buy a three-wheeler auto-rickshaw. But Eh17 sold the rickshaw after a year and paid a smuggler in Khartoum \$1,600 to take him from Khartoum to Tripoli. He began his journey towards the EU without informing his relatives or brother. On the way to Libya the transport broke down leaving all passengers in the desert for 9 days before being rescued by another transporter coming from Ajdabiya.

In Ajdabiya Eh17 was detained by armed gangs and his smuggler in Sudan agreed to sell him to other smuggling gangs. He was forced to call his relatives to pay a ransom. Intensely distressed, his family paid \$3,000 to the traffickers. From Ajdabiya another smuggling ring bought Eh17 and another 29 migrants, took them to Tripoli, and then demanded \$1,600 from families or their prisoners would be held in a warehouse on the outskirts of Tripoli and face abuse by their captors. Eh17 contacted his brother, who felt ashamed to ask for help from other relatives this time, so borrowed money and paid the whole sum. Eh17 reached Zawarah in February 2015, but couldn't make the Mediterranean crossing because once more he faced smugglers demanding \$1,600 for the journey. Eh17 informed his elder brother and asked him to forgive him for the stress caused. No more money was available, and Eh17 had to wait 28-days in Zawarah until his elder brother could find some. While waiting, Eh17 prepared to evade fingerprint identification by damaging his fingertips using fire, acid and electricity. In early April 2015, he reached Italy through Sicily and though fingerprinted the damaged fingertips meant he was not identified. After 9 days he travelled to France and reached the UK through a port other than Calais (He did not know the name of the place).

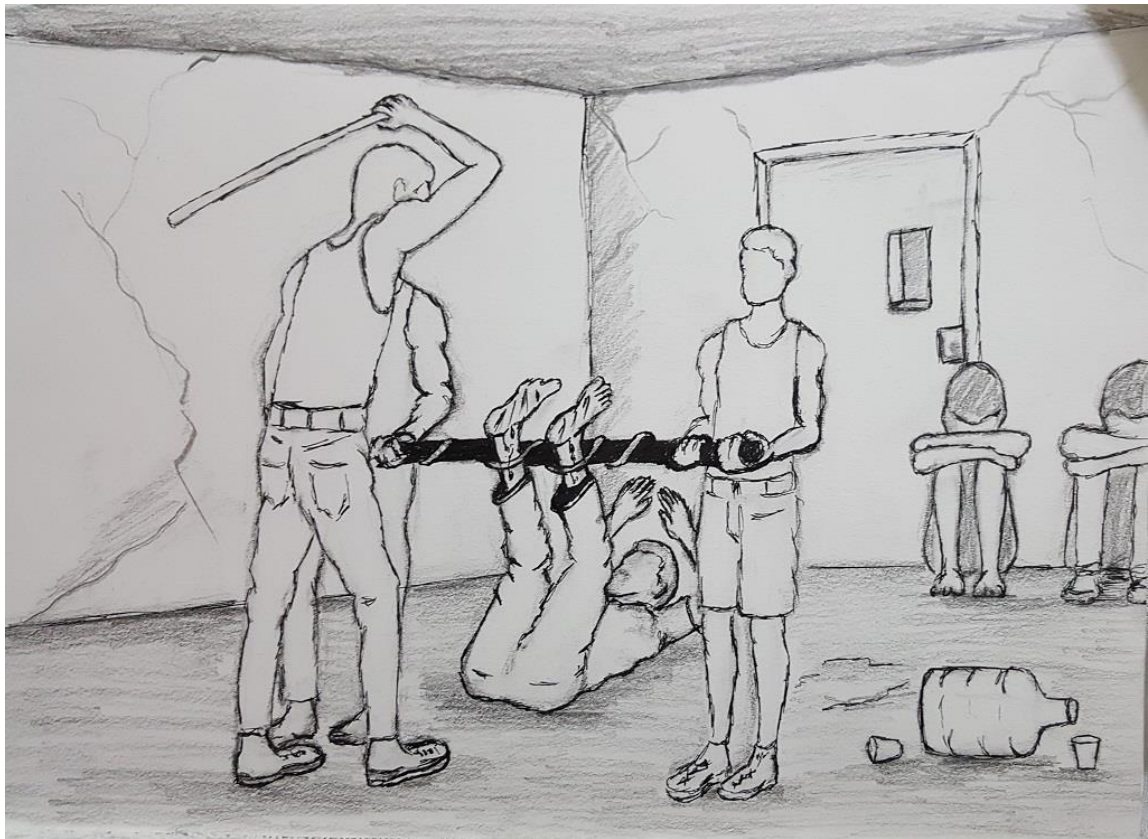


Figure 6.8. Illegalised migrants in Libya detained and assaulted by smuggling gangs for ransom. (Sketch by Eh9)

This again underlines how the mobility of illegal migrants is rarely a journey from A to B, but is instead a ‘fragmented mobility’ which can lead to permanent dislocation of geographical and cultural identities across time and space. Cresswell (2012) argues the movement of people is not ‘empty’ but filled with liveliness. Indeed, this concept can illustrate how fragmented mobility impacts on the memories, self-esteem and sense of identity of individuals as they try to settle in host countries. I will look more at this in chapter seven.

Much inhumane treatment is visited on migrants at these remote stopping points scattered across the Trans-Saharan routes:

After three nights, the driver stopped the jeep and commanded us to walk in the cliff between the desert hills. We found a place with fuel barrels I think they use it every time. They said every person must pay \$400 and anyone not paying will be killed or left to die in the desert. We were twenty seven people; all of us paid. Only three said they don’t have money and they were beaten



until their bones were broken. We begged them and they told us we can collect for them and we raised another \$450 among us and they let them go with us. (Eh9 and Eh3 mobile phone interview, Ajdabiya, 19 March 2015)

In a similar situation, one interviewee demonstrated the breakdown of mobility in the in-between:

In the middle of nowhere in the desert, a Chadian gang in a jeep with machine guns stopped us. They tied our driver's hands, and they took all of us about one mile away and ordered us to undress, and they took all our clothes and shoes with them and gave us one Jellabiya and flipper which they brought with them. This is because they knew we hide our money in our clothes and they do not want to waste time searching us at the spot so they take all our clothes and they will search all of them later. Including our driver and his group, we were thirty one people including three women and one child. The most disgusting thing, they rape all the women. I hate remembering this, but the sad thing is I cannot forget it either. (Eh7 mobile phone interview, Ajdabiya, 22 March 2015)

Thus, multiple stopping and abuse are integral to the illegalised migrants' mobility in which they are subjected to both physical and psychological abuse and extortion of money. Moreover, in these stopping places women are subjected to rape by transporters and armed gangs. In-depth interviews with ex-herders in Kassala city revealed women, mainly those arriving from Eritrea and Ethiopia, heading for Libya, prepare themselves by purchasing intravenous contraception in the black markets in Sudan and some dress like men to avoid abuse. Powerlessness has a hierarchy of gender and sexuality too, with women being the most abused.

Interviewees declare that the breakdown of their mobility and financial extortion increases in northern Libya. For example, when entering Ajdabiya migrants make more phone calls to relatives and money transfers increase dramatically. Interviewees suggested that at this stage the chief smugglers in Khartoum consider their work done and start on the next convoy towards Libya. Ajdabiya was therefore an important transit hub in 2015, a place where migrants' mobility was broken repeatedly in a short period. Migrants are often kept hostage until the smuggling

network divides the first payments among them before passing them to the next group to take them north to Tripoli and Zawarah. When smugglers operate in an urban area they become even more ruthless, according to interviewees, and because they fear detection by authorities, they impose stillness and absolute silence on the migrants. Interviewees reported that from Ajdabiya up to Zawarah they had been stuck in several confinement centres controlled by gangs and smuggling networks. They can be held in these warehouses for days, weeks and even months until more money is extorted. As shown in figure 6.9 smugglers transport migrants between Ajdabiya and Zawarah in inhumane ways.



Figure 6.9. Smugglers transport migrants in trucks under goods including bricks and cover them with plastics. Many suffer from the extreme heat. (Source: Micallef, 2015)

One interviewee described the inhumane transportation:

They [the smugglers] call us Dabish [goods] and transport us like stone and wood. (Eh13 mobile phone interview, Zawarah, 20 March 2015)

Further brutality follows in these disgraceful conditions, beatings, sexual abuse and rape of women and men. Although the motive for abusing male migrants is not stated, respondents suggested it is a torture mechanism to degrade them and hasten the transfer of money from their kin. The methods of torture mentioned by those

interviewed ranged from being forced to eat fruit skin such as banana and watermelon skin; being forced to consume boiling rice porridge which left many with burned fingers and mouth; being naked for weeks; forcing migrants to conduct sexual activities in front of others; forcing couples to perform sex in front of their children, and married women and their daughters being sexually abused in front of their husbands and fathers. After making enough money from them, the gangs might let them move on to the next leg of the journey, but might sell them to other bands to face the same or worse torture. The degrading and humiliating treatment crushes the individuality of its victims long after it is done. In the illegalised routes, silence is imposed on illegalised migrants by their smugglers, but it is also imposed by their circumstances. Interviewees confessed that, especially after reaching Zawarah, waiting and stillness were the main features strictly imposed on them. One interviewee reported stillness imposed by smugglers in these words:

Now we are in Libya somewhere I cannot tell you where it is or what is called. It is an old farm house. We can smell something like sea, I think is not very far. We are not allowed to walk, talk or make any noise, and the smugglers collected all our belts and shoes. We are all barefoot. I am speaking to you because I am translating for the smuggler; for that he does me a favour, to call and to distribute food to the people here. (Eh7 mobile phone interview, Libya sea coast, 25 March 2015)

At Zawarah illegalised migrants who have paid to cross to Italy are kept in a farmhouse near the coast. They are launched by the smugglers in overcrowded, rickety boats and dinghies. The captains of the dinghies are usually illegalised migrants who were unable to pay for the sea journey, given a few days training by the smugglers. Respondents mentioned that a captain would be given a Thurayya mobile phone and a GPS. Let us consider experiences of stillness, waiting, return, uncertainty and fragmentation on those sea journeys.

#### **6.4.1. End of sand and start of the sea: illegalised migrants' experiences of crossing the central Mediterranean**

My feeling when I was standing at night on the Mediterranean shore - no words can express that; in my hanini [nostalgic memory] I went back home

to my parents. I did not weep, but felt genuinely how worthless human lives can be when their countries are war and poverty-torn. I grew up listening to war and war stories; I hated war, but when I was on the shore of the sea, I hated it more. I have seen the unbelievable on the way to Libya and in Libya I couldn't believe how human beings can be that evil to fellow people. Let alone human life I grow up respecting the life of animals. What I have been through will remain to haunt me for the rest of my life. No! No! No! I did not fear death in the sea; I have already seen death on the other sea [the Sahara desert], the Sea of Sand and boiling temperature. (Eh7 mobile phone interview, Rome, 13 April 2015)

This quote encapsulates the root causes that lead illegalised migrants to risk their lives far beyond the Mediterranean coast of Libya. Throughout the long and disjointed journey migrants endure degrading treatment, and over the course of the travel they become less fearful of challenges that could kill them. On many occasions migrants wanted to leave Libya as quickly as possible, regarding staying there as a worse option, because to stay means remaining under the control of the smugglers with all the humiliations and dangers that entails. Fragues et al. (2014) illustrated how the Mediterranean had become the most dangerous border in the world for illegalised migrants. 'Crossing the central Mediterranean route', they wrote,

is more lethal than crossing the Rio Grande from Mexico to the USA, the Indian Ocean from Indonesia to Australia, or the Gulf of Aden from the Horn of Africa to the Arabian Peninsula. (Fragues et al., 2014, p. 2)

And a report by IOM (2015) stated that 2,860 deaths were recorded on the central Mediterranean route between 1 January and 29 October 2015. In the same period 580,000 migrants crossed the eastern Mediterranean route to Greece, with 435 recorded deaths, a total that is only 0.075% in sharp contrast to the 2% for central Mediterranean route: illegalised migrants using the central Mediterranean route are 30 times more likely to die than their counterparts using the eastern route.

Indeed, the deadly record of the central Mediterranean sea touched pastoralist families living in the remote rangelands, with several families losing their loved ones to this crossing. As one elderly woman respondent in Kassala city expressed it:

*Li enamoruo mathena* [something unknown came to us], our children went far away, and many become food for fish. May God the Merciful receive them with His Mercy and rest them in paradise. (KI9 interview, Kassala city, 19 January 2015)

Respondents identified the factors that lead to such high fatalities at sea: overcrowding; unseaworthy wooden boats and dinghies; lack of safety equipment; insufficient fuel; fire; damage to or loss of GPS; engine fault; damaged body parts allowing excessive water ingress. In some cases, two boats are towed together overstraining the towing boat and unbalancing both vessels. As this study has sought to emphasise about the special 'in-between' mobility these migrants experience, the combination of life-threatening danger and psychological and physical harm meted out by smugglers means that the migrants' journey becomes one that permanently traumatises them regardless of whatever follows their arrival in Europe.

As on land, illegal migration routes across seas fluctuate with geopolitics beyond the actual locations. For example, respondents reported that some smugglers launch illegalised migrants including ex-herder Beni-Amer off the coast of Benghazi, Tobruk and the shores close to Alexandria in Egypt in responses to political instability in the country. Meanwhile, with political instability persisting in Libya and the launching of the Italian sea-rescue operation Mare Nostrum the flow of migrants increased. When Europe was struggling with refugees at its eastern borders, an estimated 154,000 migrants entered Europe through the central Mediterranean route in 2015, an increase of nearly 400% over the previous year, and more than 1,000% over 2012; and over 39,000 of these were identified as being from Eritrea (ISSP, 2015). Such an increase of migrants from Eritrea meant smuggling networks speaking Eritrean languages flourished in northern Libyan coastal towns. Interviewees pointed out that smugglers of Eritrean origin in Tripoli, Az-zāwiyah, Zawarah and Abu kammash are themselves illegalised migrants who couldn't pay for the sea crossing so joined the local smugglers as translators and Samsari. Over time they became enmeshed in the network though if they felt insecure in Libya they could cross to Italy as illegalised migrants. One could argue that while the EU launched anti-smuggling projects in Africa ex-smugglers live and operate on its soil as facilitators and money-transfer agents.

Respondents explained that their desert journey in a sense prepared them for the sea stage:

You know with patience everything will pass. That is what I have learned from the desert journey. I hoped the sea journey would also come to an end. Our boat was very overcrowded; it was supposed to be for 30-40 people but the smugglers loaded it with 113 people, so literally we were sitting on top of each other. The journey took us two days and all the way I was stuck in one spot and another person was sitting on my neck and he was also holding a baby in his arms. On this type of travel no-one is better than another; all of us suffered and all kept patience. That is what God the Almighty revealed: except for those who have believed and done righteous deeds and advised each other to truth and advised each other to patience. [Quran, Surat Al-`Asr 103:103] (Eh15 mobile phone interview, Italy 17 April 2015)

Interviewees affirmed in such ways how faith sustained the migrants' patience, cooperation and hope in the face of such hardships. Moreover, this quote encapsulates how significant the idea of stillness is to these voyages, regarding both the basic stability of the vessel and the mental state it imposes on the passengers. Stillness is thoroughly incorporated into the process of moving (Cresswell 2010, p. 3), sometimes regarded as 'dead time' (Bissell and Fuller, 2011, p. 3), but not all negative and empty: it can also save a life. Respondents indicated that still moments helped them fulfil dreams, particularly when crossing the Mediterranean and from Calais to the UK:

Crossing the Mediterranean is much closer to death than to life. When we were forced on board the overcrowded dinghy we became motionless and wordless. In the middle of the journey our dinghy was punctured. I think someone had sharp thing in his clothes. The captain ordered me to insert my finger into the hole quickly to block the escaping air. I was motionless for 13 hours until we reached the Italian shore. (Eh7 mobile phone interview, Italy, 15 April 2015)

In a different boat but in similar circumstances one respondent expressed the role of stillness in their life. In their own words:

Our wooden boat was cracked in the middle of the sea and the fuel was mixed with sea water. We were soaked with fuel but we decided to remain in the same spot for 24 hours to keep it balanced until we were rescued by the Italians. (Eh19 mobile phone interview, Italy, 11 April 2015)

As well as such physical reasons for stillness, stillness and silence are also imposed on migrants by fellow-migrants travelling on the same boat. One interviewee explained it in these words:

In our rubber boat some people started fighting and a man stood up with a knife. He said if those fighting didn't stop or be thrown into the sea he would puncture the boat. (Eh11 mobile phone interview, Italy, 26 April 2015)

The sea journey also entails experiences of return, fragmentation, uncertainty and waiting. Unlike land versions, fragmentation at sea does not involve torture and money extortion. Waiting and uncertainty are relatively brief but deeply traumatic, simply because at sea a badly fragmented journey ends either in rescue or death. Waiting might be as short as one hour but must feel like a day. An interviewee who experienced boat breakdown and waiting at sea explained the moment:

One of the worst moments in life is to wait in a broken boat at sea. It is a moment when death and life appear eyeball to eyeball. (Eh13 mobile phone interview, Italy, 19 April 2015)

#### **6.4.2. Illegalised migrants in the EU and still moments**

After the long and fragmented Sahara and Mediterranean journeys illegalised migrants mostly reach Lampedusa or Sicily and after a few days in Italy start moving north towards the western EU and Scandinavian countries. As one interviewee summarised:

I have been driven, quickened, slowed, silenced, fastened, crawled, and swum from eastern Sudan up to Italy. I have seen death and hell in that. Thanks God the Almighty for preserving me my life so I can repent. Now I must face some more challenges to reach Britain or Norway. The people [illegalised migrants] here in [Italy], their life is heartbreakingly desolate and many

suggested countries like Britain, Norway and Sweden are good for migrants (Eh15 mobile phone interview, Rome, 18 April 2015)

Many interviewees for this study confessed that after crossing the Mediterranean they did not plan to ask asylum in the country of first arrival, seeking instead an EU country with better economic opportunities and a fast asylum process with a good chance of success. After reaching Italy, Beni-Amer usually wish to affirm their homeland and are recognised as Eritreans for their asylum cases. Likewise, a report published by GSDRC (2016) stated that Germany (13,255), Sweden (11,530), Switzerland (6,920), the Netherlands (3,910), the UK (3,300), Norway (2,880) and Denmark (2,275) were the European countries receiving the highest number of Eritrean asylum applications in 2014. Elsewhere the 2015 numbers were markedly smaller: Italy (480), Greece (260) and France (725); of those interviewed for this study none applied for asylum in Italy, and all continued to Norway, Sweden or the UK. Countries of first entry at the southern EU border are primarily transit hubs for illegalised migrants:

I have not been through all the life-threatening migration to end up sleeping rough on the streets and under the bridges of Italy. *Aiwa* [Yes] now I must make sure I am in the right place to lead a good life. It is equally important to me like the crossing of the Mediterranean to start my life in a good country. You know, a country which can get legal papers, work and education. (Eh14 mobile phone interview, Calais, 29 April 2015)

Respondents also affirmed the role of still moments in their life while crossing immigration points, and the return and fragmentation of their mobility in the EU. In one interviewee's words:

I was in Calais for 50 days, I have tried 38 times, and border police caught me 37 times. But finally, I made it to the UK hidden in a big truck loaded with electrical goods. I was lucky. I found a half-full box. I entered the box and pulled another box on top of me. I was similar to dead inside the box, entirely mute; that is how I made it to the UK. (Eh11 mobile phone interview, UK, 22 May 2015)



Another interviewee in similar circumstances described the return, waiting and stillness he encountered attempting to cross from France to the UK:

I was in Calais three months; I remember I tried 43 times and was caught 42 times. Finally, it was a wet night; four of us hidden in a big truck, we were like dead inside the vehicle, very quiet. But thank you God finally we made it to the UK. (Eh9 mobile phone interview, UK, 7 May 2015)

Another respondent who entered the UK through the Channel Tunnel explained his stillness and uncertainty:

We were six, hidden by smugglers from a small village town in the north of Calais. And when we entered the Channel Tunnel it was very dark; I couldn't see my own hand. When we came out to the UK sea port, I felt shortness of breath to keep myself like dead to avoid detection by the border police. (Eh7 mobile phone interview, UK, 27 May 2015)

However, not everyone who remains still makes it to their preferred destination. This study found that the sums of money extorted from diaspora-kin by smugglers was a vast amount for, for example, low-income factory workers. Moreover, one diaspora relative might have been helping more than one illegalised migrant-kin. Some respondents said they had supported three illegalised migrant-kin to reach the EU and that left them with little cash in their bank accounts, a matter addressed in chapter seven. Illegalised migrants know they have been a burden to their diaspora-kin. When encountering hardship in the EU migrants often refrain from seeking help from their diaspora-kin. If their mobility to their preferred country of destination such as the UK becomes fragmented and they are caught by border security forces they will often change plan and ask asylum in Scandinavian countries, which they can reach quite quickly by land, unlike crossing to the UK. One interviewee explained:

I tried hard to cross to the UK. I was in Calais for three months trying every day to pass, but I couldn't make it. I had suffered a lot; I was in the jungle like a wild animal with no food and no money; I was very ill. You see! I stop calling my relatives. I made them suffer a lot that is enough. Finally, I concluded, stop trying the UK, and I planned to migrate to Norway, Sweden or Germany.

Those countries are also good; many people say that. (Eh13 mobile phone interview, EU, 2 May 2015)

Whether stillness is imposed by smugglers or circumstance, this study argues that awareness of what it entails is vital for us to understand how illegalised migrants experience mobility, even as methods to examine such stillness remain difficult to formulate. While undergoing so much demanding movement in new lands, illegalised migrants' relationship with their homeland inevitably changes as a result. The next section considers some of these changes.

### **6.5. Home(land) and in-between mobility: re/conceptualising homeland amongst illegalised migrants on the move**

For us [the Beni-Amer] any place we put our feet to is a land, and all on top of it is the sky, all that shades us is a roof and any fence around us is a wall and all that compounds us is home to us. But homeland to us is the place where we feel among our people and our history. (Eh15, mobile phone interview, Calais, 11 May 2015)

As stated in the above quote, for ex-herder Beni-Amer home is a dynamic and fluid concept; home is not solid and nor does it move parallel to the movement of people. Illegalised migrants undergoing in-between mobility share the view of their elders in eastern Kassala rangeland. As we saw in chapter five, for elderly Beni-Amer home was mobile and could be anywhere in the rangeland. Likewise, for ex-herders, anywhere they traversed could be considered home. Home was not a single location or fixed structure. One interviewee referred to temporary accommodation on their journey as home, while hating staying there:

We are in a *mazra* [farmhouse] near the coast. It's beyond words. Yes, in one old warehouse they [the smugglers] stuck over 700 people. It is unbelievable. (Eh15 mobile phone interview, Libya, 3 April 2015)

The concept of home is of a place to stay, regardless of feelings of attachment, while safety was usually at the margin because of their fragmented mobility. Integral to the migrants' in-between mobility is the experience of home as merely multiple temporary staying places on the journey. Home is at best a place where other journey-mates stay. Respondents called the *mazra* in Libya and the jungle in Calais

their home. But they showed home is 'hated over time in the context of illegalised migrants'. If the illegalised migrants stayed too long in any of these homes, they considered it unblessed. If after a few days in one home it was not a desired destination for anyone else living there they would consider moving on:

If you make your home comfortable, you will not cross to the UK. Illegal migrants who built comfy homes in the jungle, they stay there for months. We [the Eritreans] only make an easy home to protect us from the rain. Our aim is not to sleep but to move to our last destination. (Eh15 mobile phone interview, Calais, 21 May 2015)

In this quote, the speaker meant we the Eritreans rather than we the Beni-Amer, indicating they are upholding their Eritrean identity once they reach the EU.

In Calais some other migrants establish shops while waiting to cross to the UK. And some 'ex-illegalised migrants' return to Calais after securing their asylum cases to run a business there, and even construct places of worship and host their national flag during the wait.



Figure 6.10. This general store, in Calais, run by a group of Afghan migrants, sells essential commodities. (Photo credit: Frederick Paxton/VICE News)



Figure 6.11. St Michael's Calais constructed by Migrants in 'the Jungle' of Calais. (Photo credit: Mario Ana Allen, 2016)

Beni-Amer Respondents said that from Sudan up to Italy they did not like to mention their country or the place they came from, and they avoided holding identification documents or valuables except some cash. In the in-between, illegalised migrants often abstain from revealing their homeland or personal identity; therefore, one can argue illegalised migrants in the in-between tactically distance 'themselves from true themselves' by changing their names and their country of origin: they rewrite themselves in relation to the situation they encounter. As one interviewee explained:

From Khartoum to Tripoli we [Beni-Amer] and other Eritreans pretended to be Sudanese because if the Libyans caught us, they give better treatment to the Sudanese. They [Libyans] do not like the other Africans such as Senegalese and Nigerians. I do not know why, but they [Libyans] are better with the Sudanese even from Eritreans. You know if the Libyan authority arrests us and decides to return us to our country of origin if we say 'Eritrean' they send us to Eritrea and the Eritrean government send us to jail. We will end up in Sawa [national services]. But if we say 'Sudanese' and the Libyans

want to send us back they will send us to Sudan. That is better than to Eritrea.  
(Eh15 mobile phone interview, Italy, 18 April 2015)

Respondents said that distance from their homeland was strategic, temporary, and as soon as they docked in the EU they started to remember and memorise and organise issues related to the homeland, to prepare a case to be used in the EU. This is because the chance of successful asylum claims for people from Eritrea is greater than for those from Sudan. Interviewees maintain their sense of homeland attachment while dealing with the practicalities of how to gain the stability of asylum and how to avoid punishment by the Eritrean government should they be sent back there. One respondent explained this complicated relation to the country of origin and of refugee life:

Our ancestral homeland comes under Eritrea territory but some of it is also in Sudan. In Eritrea, our parents were wealthy and dignified and migrated because of war, but in Sudan, we are always recognised as refugees from Eritrea. We lived in eastern Sudan as forgotten refugees, and the Eritrean government does not want our return. Effectively we [the Beni-Amer] are becoming a stateless people despite our ancestral homeland lying in both Eritrea and Sudan. (Eh13 mobile phone interview, Norway, 17 May 2015)

As discussed in chapter four the Beni-Amer's inability to return to their homelands in Baraka, Sahel, Gash and Setiet is complicated by the policy of the Eritrean government, and, while their refugee status has not changed for half a century, it could be complicated by the Sudanese government. However, for the illegalised migrant Beni-Amer the status of the land of their ancestors has remained the same. Thus, when they seek asylum in the EU they affirm their Eritrean identity and win the asylum that keeps them distant.

## **6.6. Wellbeing and mobility: changing wellbeing amongst illegalised migrants**

There are many words used to indicate our welfare. Some of these signify overall thriving; for instance, the term wellbeing is used to denote quality of life as a whole and to evaluate aspects such as dwelling conditions or employment chances (McGillivray and Clarke, 2006, p. 74); according to Veenhoven (1991), wellbeing is relative. Interviewees revealed that the concept is situationally-related to time,

place and circumstance. What wellbeing means to those in Khartoum differs from what it means in Libya and in sea journeys. As one respondent testified:

Wellbeing means for me anything, no constraint my journey'. (Eh7 mobile phone interview, Ajdabiya, 21 March 2015)

For illegalised migrants, therefore, wellbeing in the in-between is related to mobility. Enduring less fragmentation means fewer stopping places, less money extortion and reduced physical and psychological abuse. Interviewees mentioned several elements of wellbeing related to the in-between phase: one respondent explained this as:

You must believe in God; have relatives that they can help you financially; a few hundred dollars in cash hidden properly, hidden in clothes. And, you must have some friends in some vehicle to help each other; have enough space to sit in the vehicle and the vehicle must be a good one, must have sufficient food and water. (Eh15 mobile phone interview, Zawarah, 3 April 2015)

The wellbeing elements mentioned could be summarised as financial, spiritual, social and physical wellbeing, combining to facilitate mobility away from the hardships encountered from Sudan to Libya and in Libya. When behind bars in Libya wellbeing meant to get out of Libya to the EU.

When I was in jail in Libya, I was praying to be anywhere but Libya. For illegal migrants, Libya means hell. It took us three weeks in the desert to reach [Misrata, Libya]. It was terrible but better than Libyan jail. There we suffered constant abuse; guards randomly made migrants lie on the floor and beat them with iron bars until their bones broke; many could not stand again. I can tell you what I have been through and witnessed in the Libyan jail: one day was longer than a year' it broke my mind and desires and dreams as a person. You know we endured all of that thinking no condition is permanent, and waited with patience to get out from all the hardship we encountered. (Eh19 mobile phone interview, 11 April 2015)

This quote codifies illegalised migrants in the in-between: wellbeing means to get out from present hardship and even a slight change constitutes an element of

wellbeing. Interviewees affirm even in extreme difficulty they hope for better and that hope adds to their wellbeing. Many of them continue their fragmented mobility with patience believing that no condition is perpetual. In a comparable situation, another interviewee explained:

When I was in the Libyan jail my life stretched before my eyes, my parents back home my brother in the UK. I put them under tremendous stress. My life in the Libyan prison with 590 people in one room sharing only two toilets, a room filled with a nauseating smell from bodies unwashed for months. Merciless jail guards beat us without cause. It was life surrounded by fear and despair. Trust me! No words can describe what we have been through. People proceed with hope of change, that the agony will end. You know now here [Italy] after I have seen it with my own eyes, a question rings in my head all that time. I have been through all of this for what? Yes, now I do not fear death or torture from smugglers or Libyan jail guards, but I can see with my own eyes, myself and other migrants, we are sleeping rough in the cold hungry and with little hope. (Eh18 mobile phone interview, Italy, 13 May 2015).

Interviews revealed wellbeing from Libya to Italy is solely related to survival. Around the coast, illegalised migrants expressed unwillingness to board dinghies; some wanted to step back, but their smugglers threw them in by force. This was not because they preferred to stay in Libya as the above quotes amply illustrate; rather they wanted not to board the dinghies because at that moment of time they felt they stood eyeball to eyeball with death: to quote one interviewee:

At the time to board the boat I felt it might be the last time I walk on land; I did not want to board. For many of us the sea was a nightmare. In it death touches you on the nose [feels imminent]. But equally I disliked staying in Libya even for one minute (Eh11 mobile phone interview, Rome, 26 April 2015)

At those critical moments, all wellbeing meant was staying alive. Elements calming the migrants' emotional state at such a time include stillness and spirituality. Respondents observed that apart from the captain everyone in the boat became



motionless to keep the boat balanced: 'In the desert, we prayed to reach water, and in the sea, we prayed to reach dry land'. Once in Italy wellbeing for illegalised migrants related to successful asylum in an EU country with better job opportunities. That is where their perilous journey reached its conclusion, but it did not mean the end of their misery, merely the start of new life-challenges in the host country.

## **6.7. Conclusion**

This chapter has provided the main findings of the second phase of the study, analysing identity, experiences and practices of pastoralists in transition within in-between mobility from Sudan to the EU. It has explained how dynamic political, social, economic and environmental changes lead to pastoralist communities increasingly leaving pastoralism, but remaining mobile in search of alternative livelihoods. Thus, across time and space, they evolve a pastoralist in transition identity. Herders frequently drop out of pastoralism but find it difficult to secure alternative livelihoods in their local towns. Data gathered in Kassala city revealed that they develop liminal identity linked to pastoralism by their cultural identity and upbringing and to city life through day-wage jobs and their connections with diverse others. Although in the early stages they are frequently mobile between local towns and villages in the rangelands, their mobility gradually extends to main cities and, finally, they become illegalised migrants, their fragmentation characterised by in-between mobility, return, degrading treatment, and moments of stillness, waiting and uncertainty. The abuse suffered at the hands of smugglers leaves a marked negative impact on them. In-between mobility requires a huge amount of money and causes stress not only to the illegalised migrants involved but to their relatives back home and in the diaspora.

Illegalised migrants' concept of home is dynamic and mobile rather than fixed; home for them is anything that shades them anywhere. Attachment to homeland consciously shifts for the avoidance of harm. For example, pretending to be Sudanese in Libya to circumvent risk of deportation to Eritrea, while affirming Eritrean identity in EU host countries to secure successful asylum claims. Conceptualisation of wellbeing likewise constantly shifts in the lives of illegalised migrants. In life-threatening moments - in the Sahara desert or crossing the



Mediterranean - wellbeing is about staying alive; after arriving in the EU wellbeing is related to having successful asylum in a country with better life prospects. Beni-Amer illegalised migrants have endured extreme experiences in the in-between from homeland to the host country in which they claim asylum. This may have significantly influenced their ability to reconstruct their identity, and their re-conceptualization of wellbeing in the host country, an issue addressed in the next chapter.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Beni-Amer diaspora and homeland:**

#### **Identity, mobility, and wellbeing**

##### **7.1. Introduction**

This chapter analyses the four themes of the study: identity, homeland, mobility, and wellbeing, in relation to the Beni-Amer diaspora in the UK. The themes are interlocked rudiments of life in the Beni-Amer diaspora not only to mobilize them in their host country but also as vital values the Beni-Amer diaspora strives to uphold. This chapter argues that not all diasporas are internationally mobile and there is no single way that defines how they reconstruct their sense of identity; rather they reconstruct this in multiple ways, related to their mobility. As part of the analysis the chapter examines Beni-Amer diasporas' in-between fragmented mobility and argues that this particular experience has negative long-term impact on their sense of wellbeing. Moreover, this chapter argues that diaspora and identity are complicated, fluid and dynamic concepts that lack a useful universally agreed definition. To make it workable, I follow the pursuit of previous researchers. This chapter looks at the origin and use of the term diaspora across time and space and identifies a longstanding tension in its conception between being regarded as bounded, or as unbounded, or, by others, understood as a more fluid process. The chapter also looks at how Beni-Amer diasporas negotiate identity and everyday practice in the host and sending communities.

The chapter is structured into six sections: the first outlines the main arguments; the second contextualises Beni-Amer diasporas by contrasting them with other diaspora societies and the use of the term diaspora; the third section examines the Beni-Amer diaspora in relation to the homeland. The fourth section presents the influences of religion on the everyday practices of the Beni-Amer diaspora. Section 7.5. analyses the entangled relationship between mobility and wellbeing amongst the Beni-Amer diasporas. The final section concludes by summarising the chapter's main findings.

## **7.2. Contextualising the Beni-Amer diaspora**

Classifying the Beni-Amer into a context of diaspora and identifying the central elements which bond Beni-Amer diasporas together in sending and host countries is a highly complicated and challenging task. Before examining how diaspora identities and wellbeing change once the new destination of resettlement is reached it makes sense to investigate the Beni-Amer dispersal background and how it relates to the definition of diaspora in the literature. As discussed in chapter two the term diaspora has been associated with spreading or sowing, and some scholars have underlined the primarily Jewish origin of the word 'Diaspora', accentuating its root in the idea of the Jewish history of dispersal (Clifford, 1994, p. 306). But Clifford went on to state that "We should be able to recognise the strong entailment of Jewish history on the language diaspora without making that history a final model. It can be argued in its original Jewish context; the term was never applied to its contemporary use."

Several scholars (e.g., Cohen, 1997; Tölölyan, 1994; 1996; Baumann, 2000), define diaspora by its linguistic derivation. Others (Johnson, 2007; Axel, 2004; Butler, 2001; Vertovec, 2000; Van Hear, 1998) describe the term by listing typological characteristics found among different diasporas. In this way the concept of diaspora has been defined according to sameness, common denominators amongst the diasporas such as shared dispersal experience and common real or imagined homelands (e.g. Safran, 1999; Werbner, 2000). More recently diaspora formation has been seen as unbounded, transient, fluid and dynamic and the term diaspora has lost its power of distinction; thus, Brubaker (2005, p. 1) expresses the ultra-utilization and dilution of the term as "'diaspora' diaspora". Mavroudi's (2007) seminal work on diaspora as process challenges the long-standing thought of diaspora as bounded/unbounded, characterising its formation as shaped by the everyday practice of the diasporas. In relation to the literature, the Beni-Amer can be qualified as diaspora communities with collective memory, vision and commitment to maintain links towards societies and homeland of origin. Respondents in this study elucidated their dispersal experiences and how they maintain their attachment to the homeland and cultural identity and with their globally dispersed kin as follows:

Since the 1950s war, drought, and displacement have become the everyday reality of our [the Beni-Amer] lives. Our story resembles as the dry seed does from the parent plant, we have been scattered worldwide. These depressing years of dispersal do not make us misremember our ancestral homeland [Sahel, Gash, Baraka, and Setiet] but indeed, it impoverishes us, and we become marginalized, powerless and misrepresented. The decades of hardship taught us how to endure pain and adopt changes, live with patience and glorify Allah the Almighty; regardless where we live we are one people, and it is our religious and cultural obligation to stay connected and support each other. When we faced Ethiopian atrocities, and were betrayed by People's Front for Democracy and Justice [PFDJ - the ruling party in Eritrea], and food aid was stopped by the UNHCR in the refugee camps. We felt we were left alone in godforsaken refugee camps, but we found Allah's Mercy with us; we put our problems in His Merciful Hands, and His almighty puts His peace and Sabur [patience] in our hearts. *Aiwa, ehi!* Yes, you see, nowadays our people uphold strong imman [faith], and we believe Allah almighty bestows to us better opportunities to increase knowledge about our *Dīn* (Islamic religion) than the generations of the 1950s. (BAm-Di, FGD3, Birmingham, 22 May 2015)

As this quote signals, regardless of the length of time since their traumatic dispersal respondents codified that they retain collective memory and a collective commitment to the maintenance, restoration, and vision and even to the recreation of their ancestral home as formulated through pastoral mobility; hence, the Beni-Amer diaspora can clearly be analysed in relation to the concept of homeland. Therefore, this study mirrors the underlying depictions of diaspora as marked by the kind of characteristics set out by Safran (1991) and Cohen (1997) which clarify that diaspora encompasses all segments of people living outside their homeland; thus, the Beni-Amer can be conceptualised in this way. Respondents explained irrespective of the fact that the ancestral home of the Beni-Amer is a 'blurred homeland' that their consciousness involves aspects of collective memory, passion and an awareness of identities straddling what I term "multiple there'-and-here' across time and space (see below). Respondents asserted strong ethnic awareness

maintained across time and space based on a sense of distinctiveness, a shared history and the belief in a common fate that generated internal cohesion to create solidarity within the diasporas and with their back-home-kin; thus, the Beni-Amer diaspora can be conceptualized from the maintenance of their boundaries across time and space.

Dispersal in space is one of the primary criteria in classifying diaspora (Brubaker, 2005). Indeed, respondents explained the history of their dispersal influences their ties among themselves and with diverse others from the Eritrean ethnic groups. The dispersal of the Beni-Amer can be divided into two phases: first, dispersal as explained in the preceding chapters, a forced and traumatic dispersion involving crossing of the Eritrean-Sudan border but within the ancestral homeland as formulated by their pastoral mobility; second, from the refugee camps and towns in Sudan to the rest of the world through legal and illegalised routes, often to escape impoverished lives in those refugee camps. One interviewee explained the complex and increasing dispersal among the Beni-Amer:

My parents are from middle Baraka [now in Eritrea] they were nomads before their migration to the refugee camps in eastern Sudan. They were a young couple when they migrated back in the 1970s and since then lived in eastern Sudan as refugees. Our family is made up of six members; my father and my mother, my sister and my two brothers. Ta-ref! [You know] our parents' dislocation goes back to the 1950s and that was from Baraka, Gash, Sahel and Setit to the refugee camps in eastern Sudan; and the second dispersal is that of my generation. We were born in refugee camps and migrated away from there. For instance, in the last 20 years all of us scattered like the desert sand in a storm and we have never gathered together in one place since the year 1995. I have been living in the UK since 2009, my sister emigrated to the US after she married our cousin there, my elder brother lives in Qatar, my younger brother lives in Norway, and now only my parents are in Kassala city, and my sister wants them to join her in the US. (BAm-Di7, interview Birmingham, 13 May 2015)

Therefore, the Beni-Amer diaspora could also be conceptualised as diasporas based on their shared traumatic dispersal from their homeland and dispersal from the refugee camps in search of alternative livelihood.

Interviewees also explained their sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members dispersed globally and to those still residing in the homeland. With their unavoidable, inherited, religious and cultural bond, Beni-Amer diaspora ties look outward as well as inward. Furthermore, respondents affirmed the importance of future political debate with the rest of Eritrean and Sudanese societies to negotiate the unfinished process of national identity and belonging in relation to their homeland as a single people:

We [the Beni-Amer] are one people; our triumph is together and our doom is together. You know in the time of Haile Selassie we were killed together and became refugees together. That is why we believe our fate as single people is similar - we believe our boat is one; therefore, believe our future should also be one. (BAm-Di, FGD2, Birmingham, 21 May 2015)

This quote expresses the collective consciousness of the Beni-Amer with aspects of shared experiences and fate. Another respondent affirmed the importance of the ancestral homeland and religion in Beni-Amer collective consciousness:

We [the Beni-Amer] being in present-day Sudan or in present-day Eritrea, we are one people. Although our homeland is taken by the colonial powers and divided between Eritrea and Sudan we see it as one. Our people in Sudan or in Eritrea are one people and I believe no one can divide them; we are the children of one ancestor 'Amer' we are all *Amrerab* [a way of saying Beni-Amer nicely]. (BAm, Di6, interview Birmingham, 17 May 2015)

Diaspora cultures are not only transmitted across spatial gaps but are about or between those gaps (Johnson, 2007, pp. 35-40). Indeed, the diaspora culture is founded on 'absence', for example lost homeland or lost history of victory, and within those losses Beni-Amer diasporic identity arises from the active negotiation among the multiple ethnic diaspora groups that claim the shared homeland (Eritrea and the many ethnic groups living in the diaspora), various diaspora communities

and the non-diaspora community in the host country. In this way, the diaspora identity formation in the host country is a process continuously in the making. Thus, Babe (1997) argues that confrontation with otherness enables the construction of self since identity is not a finished product, but a continually updated process. This study demonstrates this constantly updating process in the formation of identity and connection surrounding today's globally dispersed populations, aided by the modern computer communication technology that facilitates their interconnection. The next section analyses the Beni-Amer diaspora notion of homeland and the concept of 'here and there'.

### **7.3. Homeland and diaspora: 'here and there' amongst Beni-Amer diaspora**

As detailed in chapter five the Beni-Amer ancestral homeland is traditionally formulated through pastoral mobility, and the notion of their homeland is challenged by the colonial borders that split the ancestral homeland between three present-day sovereign countries, leaving the Beni-Amer with a 'blurred homeland'. Furthermore, their homeland relation was made more intricate by the lingering war in the homeland and displacement. Because the Beni-Amer rebelled against Ethiopia's annexation of Eritrea they were at the forefront of Ethiopia's reprisals; thus, the majority migrated from the part of their ancestral homeland in Eritrea to the part that is in Sudan, where they have been treated by the Sudanese authorities as refugees from 1957 up to the present. Respondents explained that their homeland attachment is further complicated because, being treated as refugees, they were made to dwell in refugee camps in eastern Sudan rather than having access to their ancestral homeland there. Moreover, after the independence of Eritrea in 1993 the return of the Beni-Amer from the refugee camps in eastern Sudan to Eritrea was denied by the present Eritrean government; in this way the majority of the Beni-Amer 'lost' their national identity in Sudan and Eritrea. Their diaspora experience of 'home' and 'away' has been far from straightforward.

Interviewees emphasised this complexity in eastern Sudan, for example, saying "we are refugees in our ancestral homeland". Nevertheless, the majority of the Beni-Amer for over four decades lived in those refugee camps while some self-settled in the urban outskirts; they were not fully accepted as Sudanese by other Sudanese

communities. Such complexity makes the homeland a blurred concept among the Beni-Amer. Though homeland is a major factor that gathers the Beni-Amer diaspora, the current sense of national identity is far from being clearly delineated to help cohere the Beni-Amer diaspora into a single national identity; they cannot be classified as a country-based diaspora. Likewise, their conception of diaspora also challenges the prevailing idea of 'here' and 'there' in diaspora literature. Although the 'here' is used by interviewees to describe the host country the idea of 'there' might mean more than one country. Indeed, the 'there' might mean Eritrea or eastern Sudan, or it might mean the traditional ancestral homeland as it was formulated through pastoral mobility, which spread across formal national borders; the colonial border between Eritrea and Sudan separating the Beni-Amer is considered irrelevant among some respondents. In their words:

We [the Beni-Amer] are among the first people of Eritrea. *Aiwa!* Yes. Our ancestors were in Eritrea and eastern Sudan when there were no other people there. Unquestionably, we are among the first inhabitants of the region. Our people *Sabeko wa Sagamo alawe* [were mobile pastoralists] and our homeland and cultural identity are very much the result of pastoral nomadism. But when the Italians created Eritrea our ancestral homeland was divided between Eritrea, Sudan and even Ethiopia. See! That is how we lost our homeland. Indeed, to make it worse for us these countries treat us as aliens. You know! That is why some of us think we must create our destiny by rebelling against the dictator of Eritrea and free ourselves from the marginalisation in Sudan. (BAm-Di, FGD3, Birmingham, 21 May 2015)

Respondents demonstrated that although the ancestral homeland is divided that does not mean the Beni-Amer in the diaspora lost their connection to it; rather the attachment is dynamic and flexible. Respondents affirmed that in Beni-Amer consciousness attachment to the ancestral homeland is perceived as the foundation of solidarity and identity. For respondents, visiting any part of the homeland means visiting the entire homeland. Therefore, irrespective of having a blurred homeland, the Beni-Amer diaspora can still be understood in relation to their sense of shared ancestral homeland. Thus Brubaker (2005, p. 5) argues that orientation to 'homeland' whether real or imagined is an authoritative source of diasporic value,



identity and loyalty. Interviewees explained they are diaspora not only because they live outside their ancestral homeland but also because they sense they maintain economic, social and political ties with back-home-left-kin and with Beni-Amer diaspora networks globally:

We [the Beni-Amer] like a tree regardless how far they branch. All are attached to the trunk and the roots uphold the whole tree; despite how far we disperse in the world we keep connected to our roots; otherwise, we are parched. Aiwa, Yes! Dispersal is not new to us - before our forced displacement from the largest part of our ancestral homeland in present-day Eritrea we were pastoral nomads; we lived scattered seasonally with our livestock, but we were connected by our cultural identity and by our loyalty to our ancestral homeland. And our current international dispersal does not stop us from sustaining links with our homeland and other Beni-Amer diaspora communities. (BAm-Di, FGD2, Birmingham, 21 May 2015)

Thus, Safran (1991, pp. 83-4) explains diasporas' continuing relationship "personally or vicariously" to homeland significantly shapes their identity and solidarity. The next section presents how the Beni-Amer diaspora negotiates identity in relation to Eritrea as their main homeland.

### **7.3.1. Homeland and identity: negotiating Beni-Amer identity**

The history of Eritrea is crucial to explain the nature of the Beni-Amer diasporas. Hirt (2013) characterises the relationship of the Eritrean diasporic communities with their homeland as long-distance nationalism. Long-distance nationalism is one feature of Eritrean diasporas but does not explain the whole story of their complexity. Eritrea was created as the result of the Italian colonization, as we have seen, and a sense of national identity emerged in the course of the sixty years of the Italian occupation. But the sense of Eritrean nationalism was shaken and complicated after the Italians left Eritrea under the British Military Administration in 1941. Key respondents explained the fragmenting of 'Eritreanness' was manifested in the form of some ethnic groups wanting to unite with their kin across the borders, thus undermining the national unity of the Eritrean state. One respondent explained this complex relationship with the diverse Eritrean society as follows:

I have never been in Eritrea. I was born in the eastern Sudan refugee camps after the migration of my parents from upper Baraka, and in 2005 I migrated to Europe via Libya. I am a father of three children, all born here [UK]. They have never visited their ancestral homeland; born in exile and having kids in exile! Nevertheless, I love my ancestral home and my kids too; *Ehha! Ehha!* [expressing sadness and feelings of loss] I have never lived in Baraka [in present-day Eritrea], but Eritrea possessed my heart and the hearts of my children. *Atansha!* [listen] that is where the best of our ancestral homeland is. The love of our homeland is in our blood and not born there and the length of time is not enough to crash our heartfelt sentiments towards our homeland. (BAm-Di3, interview Birmingham, 17 May 2015)

The Beni-Amer imagined their relationship to Eritrea as their homeland because the core of their ancestral home comes under the present-Eritrea. However, since the Federation and Ethiopian annexation of Eritrea life there was characterised by reprisals and atrocities, protracted civil war and, post-independence, betrayal, bias and marginalization inflicted on them by the PFDJ government, although the majority of the Beni-Amer self-identify themselves as Eritreans, many interviewees showed a fluid extension of their feelings of homeland to include eastern Sudan as part of it.

Respondents were observed in fieldwork and noted in interviews to include eastern Sudan as homeland when discussing their refugee life but, importantly, respondents did not see themselves as refugees; rather they felt they had been refugees in the place they call home: present-day Eritrea; a country in which the Beni-Amer are not considered citizens. Therefore, respondents expressed deep resentment of the governments of both Sudan and Eritrea. Respondents explained that their return from the refugee camps to their homeland involved them being classified as part of the Tigré ethnic group rather than Beni-Amer, meaning the Beni-Amer are not an officially recognised ethnic group in Eritrea. Meanwhile, interviewees pointed out that in Sudan, since the Beni-Amer are treated as refugees from Eritrea, they have only limited refugee rights. For example, their mobility is officially restricted within the refugee camps. Respondents expressed mistrust of pro-government members of

diasporas and argue that those who claim to be Eritrean or/and Sudanese in the ancestral homeland of the Beni-Amer are themselves newcomers:

*Alak-Allah!* [by God] how one who came from as far as...[city in northern Sudan approximately 1300km away from the Kassala area] can name us [the Beni-Amer] refugees in our own land, and these who came from Tigray can claim ownership of our Gash, Baraka and Setit, this is bizarre. *Aiwa!* [Yes] that is our case in Sudan. It is difficult to imagine how our heart is bleeding how we cannot bleed while our homeland [Gash, Baraka, Sahel and Setiet] is controlled by the dictator government of Eritrea while we [the Beni-Amer] spent over 40 years in the godforsaken refugee camps in eastern Sudan. (BAm-Di, FGD2, Birmingham, 21 May 2015)

Furthermore, respondents affirmed that Eritrean diasporas are not homogenous societies; rather heterogeneity is the main feature of the contemporary Eritrean diaspora populations. Therefore, their attachment to homeland and relationships to the current government comes in various forms, including regionalism, ethnicity, religion, pro-government, anti-government and so forth. Hence, profound fragility, disengagement, intolerance and disunity are principal features of Eritrean diaspora societies and this fragility informs the homeland negotiations among them. So, while the idea of homeland remains at the core of their identity, it is an idea under constant formulation and assertion. In the words of the respondents the core of the homeland debate is expressed as:

We [the Beni-Amer] are among the earliest inhabitants of the region our ancestral homeland occupies the land from the Red Sea Hills east to the Nile Valley west. That is what we consider our homeland, and now this, our homeland, is divided between Eritrea [Baraka, Gash, Sahel]-Sudan [eastern Sudan from Tokar in the Red Sea hills to Al-Ezabe in the Nile to the west]-parts northwestern Ethiopia [Setit]. You see! Eritrea almost all of it is ours, and those [other ethnic groups] in the country can only share it with us. *Eritretra basie antlina-ta; lahala deba ma e-sharkana min e-lebal Eritretra basie antlina-ta* [Eritrea is ours, and those others can only say to have a share with us, Eritrea is ours]. (BAm-Di, FGD3, Birmingham, 22 May 2015)

As argued in chapter four in this study Eritrea is a cultural mosaic shaped and troubled by its diversities. Indeed, the social and political complexities not only inform relations and identity negotiations within the geography of the country, they also have a significant impact on the discussions and relationships within the Eritrean diaspora communities. For example, the Beni-Amer of present-day Sudan split from their brothers in present-day Eritrea; hence they are counted with the population of the Sudan; therefore, for instance, some members of the Tigrayan ethnic group classify the Beni-Amer as Sudanese. Similarly, the colonial borders split the Tigrayan ethnic groups between present-day Tigray regional state in Ethiopia and Eritrea. Hence some members of the Beni-Amer classify them as Tigrayans originally from Ethiopia; and the same goes for the Saho, Kunama, Afar, Rashaida and so on, and this historical kin-affiliation across the colonial borders has a significant impact on the contemporary Eritrean diaspora identity discussions.

Indeed, the creation of Eritrea by the Italian occupation was sudden and artificial but cast a long shadow over the identity of the inhabitants. Indeed, it is one of the main reasons for mistrust within the Eritrean population within and outside the country. Respondents affirmed that as a result of the cross-border kin-affiliation contemporary Eritrean diasporas primarily organize based on their ethnicity, regionalism, and religion. And mistrust amongst the population was further complicated by crimes carried out by some Christian highlanders organized under the Unionist Party during the federation (1948-1960s) and by the civil war between ELF and EPLF during the war for independence in the 1980s. Respondents explained the complex relationship of homeland and identity debate with the Eritrean diasporas as:

Indeed, we [the Beni-Amer] are Eritreans and nobody can claim Eritrea more than us and we are from eastern Sudan and nobody can claim eastern Sudan more than us. You know! In the diaspora people start by forming diaspora communities based on the closest possible factor found between people, then the community grows and expands. So, we organise as Beni-Amer, as eastern Sudanese, Muslim Eritreans and Muslim diasporas. (BAm-Di, FGD1, Birmingham, 20 May 2015)

This quote shows how Beni-Amer diasporas initially came from communities grounded on close similarities such as ethnicity, religion, and region, then moving those boundaries tactically across time and space. For example, from community to nation to international level. Thus, again, we see how the boundaries between diaspora communities are fuzzy, and so not impermeable. Thus, this study argues the reconstruction of Beni-Amer identity in the diaspora is based as much on differences as on sameness, in constantly shifting and permeable dichotomies. The study found no single mechanism that could describe the way Beni-Amer diasporas (re)construct identity; therefore, the study concluded Beni-Amer diasporas' reconstruction of identity, attachment to homeland and societies of origin and conceptualisation of wellbeing is a dynamic process continuously moving back and forth between the home-host and self-other across time and space. Moreover, within the processes of diaspora identity negotiation the Beni-Amer not only debate notional identity and belonging but also learn to make use of modern communication technology to reconfigure and mobilise across time and space. The next section presents homeland visits and Beni-Amer diaspora reconnection to place and culture of origin.

### **7.3.2. Home(land) visit and diaspora: reconnecting to place and culture**

I visit my ancestral homeland, I mean part of the homeland of the Beni-Amer in eastern Sudan, at least once every three to four years. Of course visiting homeland is good, it makes me feel I am at the centre of my community and culture. You know! Home visits can help to boost the connection with relatives and places of origin. But I can also tell you home visits are not all positive - it gives you odd feelings. The feelings of just a visitor! Too alien! Too foreign! It is very far from having the sense of 'true' Beni-Amer. Indeed, that was what I felt in my visits. Although I attempted hard to shake it off, I found it was impossible to get rid of feeling like a stranger. He shrugged, nodded! You know he [said] my dilemma is even worst when I return here [the UK]. Indeed, I am too alien, very foreign to the majority of the UK population. I can tell you most of the time I do not come to terms with myself, to whom I belong, not fully here and not fully there but at a distance from

both. Indeed, it is an awful reality many people similar to my situation and I have to live with. (BAm-Di21, interview, Birmingham, 27 April 2015)

This quote indicates the conflicting results of homeland visits amongst the Beni-Amer diaspora. First, the homeland visit is attached to positive feelings, delight at being at home with relatives, enforcing attachment to culture and place. In the land of ancestors, respondents demonstrated they feel at the centre of their origin. Thus, the findings of this study mirror the findings of several scholars. For example Pearce (2012) and Meson (2004) maintain that diaspora homeland return has a significant role in the maintenance of international kinship relationship and engenders emotional attachment to the place of origin. Second, the findings of this study contradict the prevailing wisdom in the diaspora study which often assumes home return enables reconnection. Indeed, but as this quote clarified, for many diaspora Beni-Amer homeland visits not only strengthened reconnection, they also add to disconnection. Interviewees who visit homeland return feeling psychologically rather than physically distance from both the sending and the host communities. Members of the Beni-Amer diasporas were observed visiting their homeland. They often socialized with fellow home-visitors in places mainly regarded by the locals as being for tourists. Some places are even named after the diasporas, for example, Fowondq al-moqtarebin (Diaspora Hotel), Maqeha al-moqtarebin (Diaspora Café). During their visits diasporas only drink bottled water, and some only consume food they brought with them from their host country. One interviewee admitted this, saying: "I am not only alien to my back-home-communities but also foreign to the environment I grew up in." (BAm-Di11, interview, Birmingham, 18 May 2015) Therefore, this study has illuminated the in-between aspect of the diaspora, the sense of identity that exists straddling the periphery of both the homeland and host societies, even while the sense of homeland remains in their minds fixed and permanent.

In addition to homeland visits the Beni-Amer diasporas attempt to maintain the connection with home-land-left-kin through remittances, marriage, and investments in the homeland. Beside the back-home-kin respondents demonstrated they attempt to keep in touch with fellow Beni-Amer diasporas globally. Therefore, diaspora-to-diaspora kin-relation maintenance creates multiple networks and

nodes of diaspora communities in various places across the globe. Moreover, the Beni-Amer diasporas with diaspora social connections are often based on gender and age similarity, for example women and youth groups. Thus, within the larger Beni-Amer diaspora there are multiple networks based on shared needs. Respondents explained that connections among these emerging diasporas to diaspora and diaspora with back-home-left-kin networks are possible because of the availability of computer-based communication technology.

You know! Nowadays talking and viewing your loved one is at your fingertips. Geographic distance does not matter too much. We can speak and see each other irrespective where we live as far as we hold *jhaze* [a device]; laptop or smart mobile phone, and thank God, these devices are not beyond reach, and most of our people have mobile phones. Even the herders have access to mobile phones and the internet. (BAm-Di, FGD2, Birmingham, 21 May 2015)

Indeed, the presence of affordable smartphones has a significant role in connecting the diaspora with back-home-kin and with fellow diasporas (see figure 7.1. below). Ideas are easily communicated with possible impact on the way of thinking and practice across the extended Beni-Amer societies. For example, respondents confess the availability of internet enables increasing knowledge about Islam and politics.

Certainly, the internet is an opportunity; it is a fantastic opportunity for us to learn more about issues of our interest. You know! It can be about many things, for example, about *Dīn* [religion] or politics, business ideas or other things; no limits to what we can learn from the internet. (BAm-Di, FGD1, 20 May 2015)



Figure 7.1. Beni-Amer youth on the hills of eastern Sudan seeking internet connection. (Photo by the researcher, 21 January 2015)

Therefore, this study argues there is no single way Beni-Amer diasporas reconstruct their identity. It can be through maintaining ties with back-home-left-kin, ties with fellow diasporas, homeland visits or/and religion. The next section presents the impact of Islam on the Beni-Amer identity in the diaspora.

#### **7.4. Diaspora identity and religion: Islamic influence on the Beni-Amer diaspora**

Several scholars have examined Islam and diasporas, stressing the process of integration, but how Islamic teachings reshape and guide Muslim diasporas in their reconfiguration of identity and wellbeing is little explored. Saint-Blancat (2002) argues the process of settlement and transnational mobility is made conceivable due to the strength of religious, spiritual extraterritoriality; for example, Islam enables integration of Beni-Amer Muslims into the UK. Moreover, Islam enables Muslims in the diaspora to strengthen the spirit of brotherhood regardless of their ethnic and cultural background (Abdun-Nasir, 2016). Indeed, as we shall see below the Beni-Amer diaspora consider themselves part of the larger UK Muslim diaspora societies. Respondents affirmed that Beni-Amer diaspora identify Islam as the source of their



everyday life, the guiding force for both spiritual and non-spiritual practices. This mirrors Ghorashi (2016), whose seminal work on Muslim diaspora argues that at present one of the most common patterns among contemporary Muslim diasporas in the West is choosing Islam as both source of inspiration and exclusive basis of identification. Interviewees explained the use of media technologies to maintain links with their kin globally and to increase their understanding of Islam and to share their views in the public sphere; thus, their previously disenfranchised voices could be heard (Mandaville, 2001). And some scholars directly link diasporas and religion, particularly Islam. Ter-Haar (1998) connects religion and diaspora through the assumption that migration means diaspora, migrants practice religion, and therefore diaspora implies religion; similarly, Wirtz, (2007, p. 5) concludes that diaspora mirrors religion. However, one can question whether religion can or should be described as 'diaspora' alongside the dispersed ethnic groups which conventionally comprise the term. Cohen (1997) argues that at best religion posits phenomena cognate to the diaspora. Engseng Ho's (2006) study of the Hadrami of Yemen and their diaspora explains that diasporas, like religions, dwell and thrive on the question of absence.

Johnson (2012) explains how religions often span more than one ethnic group and, in the case of faiths that have come to be widespread around the globe, religions typically do not seek to return to, or to recreate, a homeland. Indeed, the Beni-Amer diasporas use religion to recreate their self, family and communities' identity. Thus, religions do not constitute diasporas themselves, but "can provide additional cement to bind a diasporic consciousness." (Cohen, 1997, p. 189; cited in Johnson, 2012, p. 6; and supported by Rex et al., 1987). Upon settling in a new environment, immigrants often set about collectively organising themselves for religious worship. According to Johnson (2012), religion played a significant role in the processes of diasporisation in part because people seem to carry religion with them more easily than they do many other less portable cultural clusters. This study found the Beni-Amer carry faith in their memory among other things, and Islamic values are used to revive the past, live the present and hope for the future:

Our *Dīn* [Islamic religion] is our capital. Therefore, we hold strongly to it otherwise we are lost. Indeed, if not for the *Dīn* we are lost. (BAm, FGD3, Birmingham, 22 May 2015)

Therefore, in short it can be concluded the Beni-Amer use Islam to build their diaspora cultural identity rather than use cultural identity to become Muslims. According to Babe (1997) confrontation with otherness enables the construction of self amid the shifting factors that contribute to identity. Thus, the Beni-Amer are drawn to become part of the large Muslim diaspora communities in the UK, and they strive to re/construct their self, family and community identities based on the teachings of Islam and the diverse other Muslim diaspora communities. Interviewees elucidated how their diaspora identity is informed by their everyday interaction with diverse reception communities, but stressed that it is mainly their interaction with diverse other Muslim diaspora communities that influences their own Islamic diasporic identity:

You know when we arrive here [UK] normally we start to get in contact with other Muslims. Some of them, like the Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and some Arabs have been living in this country over 40 years so you can imagine they are well-established in this country. Many of us work for them in their businesses and befriend them so we learn some of their culture. (BAm-Di, FGD2, Birmingham, 21 May 2015)

Another respondent explained how ‘newly’ diasporas become part of ‘older’ diaspora communities:

I work for a Pakistani person with many Somalis and Iraq Kurdish. I have rented a room from another Pakistani and I share a kitchen with a Bangladeshi friend. You see! That is the way I live my everyday life in the diaspora. (BAm-Di2, interview, London, 7 May 2015)

Therefore, this study argues diaspora identity and sense of wellbeing are informed by daily interaction with fellow diasporas. This demonstrates that the contemporary dichotomy between host and diaspora community is ambiguous and must be subjected to further scrutiny. Indeed, the distinction between who is the diaspora

and who is the host is undistinguishable amongst diasporas: often the diasporas across time and space becomes a host community for other newly-forming diasporas.

Religion can be a force that profoundly influences personal, community and national life in non-obvious ways, fashioning the social and political structure of society (Kurien, 2014). Therefore, religion is a fundamental factor of social life and can contribute considerably to understanding of the formation of Beni-Amer diasporic identity. Interviewees affirmed Islamic teaching plays a vital role in the social, economic and political processes surrounding their life. Among the Beni-Amer in diaspora Islamic teachings, directly and indirectly, shape their migration patterns and reconstructing of identity in the diaspora. For example, interviewees for this study supported kin migration to work in the Middle East but discouraged the migration of female members, remittance use, dynamics of incorporation into the 'host' community and the action and forms of political and social mobilisation. Thus, religion can profoundly influence the individual and community identity as a fundamental element through the often-underlying daily practices in the social and political life. Respondent explained this as;

Our life revolves around our *Dīn* [Islamic religion]. We try to do what Islamic teachings tell us to do and attempt to avoid what Islam says not to do. Although shortcomings are inevitable we and all Muslims try to follow the footsteps of our beloved prophet Muhammad, Peace be upon him. Indeed, Allah the almighty says in the Holy Quran "You should accept whatever the messenger gives you and abandon whatever he tells you to abandon. Have *taqwa* of Allah [being conscious and cognizant of Allah - Surat al-Hashr: 7]. (BAm, FGD2, Birmingham, 21 May 2015)

This quote affirms Islam is not only a religion but a comprehensive way of life. Thus, it is a complete code of life fundamental in dictating the everyday practice of the believer, therefore capable to shape their individual and community identities.

Their ethnohistorical roots qualify the Beni-Amer as Muslims, and this study argues their Islamic attachment is strengthened in the diaspora in the absence of other familiarities and the presence of many trials. Respondents said that in the diaspora

practising Islam helped them to endure hardships such as exclusion from wider host communities, particularly in the early years of their arrival. Therefore, among the first steps they took upon their arrival was to ask for a Masjid and encountered other Muslims with whom they began building social networks. This reconstructing is a contextual process and reflects the particular socio-political circumstances faced, but clearly the Islamic element was central to each step of the interviewees' experience and reconstructed identity. Consequently, this study does not argue Islam is the identity of the Beni-Amer in the diaspora or back in the homeland, but it explains how the identity of the Beni-Amer in the multiple 'here' or 'there' revolves around the teachings of Islam. Respondents explained this in their words:

We go to the Masjid not only to perform the obligatory five prayers but also, we meet friends and discuss many family, social and economic issues. In the Masjid we meet other Muslim brothers [commonly Muslims call each other brothers even though they do not have blood relations] from other countries and get an opportunity to develop social networks beyond our Beni-Amer and Eritrean social networks. (BAm, FGD1, Birmingham, 20 May 2015)

This quote indicates the Beni-Amer through time and space become part of the Muslim diaspora community of the UK rather than living as a fenced-off minority community. Respondents affirmed becoming part of the larger UK Muslim community comes with several advantages, including a feeling of inclusion in a wider community, finding jobs, and collecting charity money to support community members in need. Becoming part of the larger Muslim community does not require cultural modification of the various minority Muslim communities. For example, the Beni-Amer do not have to look like the Saho, Jeberti, Arabs, Somalis, Pakistanis or other groups to become part of the diasporic Muslim *Ummah* (community) in the UK. One interviewee explained this:

Here (in Birmingham, UK) I have friends from thirty four Muslim countries. They are my friends; I came to know them because life in diaspora brings you among many people. They have families, sometimes we make visits; particularly when someone is in hospital we make visits. And when it is *Eid* we ['we' used interchangeably with I - this is part of the Beni-Amer way of

expression] invite them, and they invite us; it is like having extended family. We go to their gathering or homes, and we respect their culture and they respect ours too. We like to show solidarity with our Muslim brothers. We help charities and sometimes we go to demonstrations to tell the world the many sufferings endured by Muslims and many poor people. For example, like the killing of Muslims in Myanmar. And we also go to demonstrations that only affect us - like Eritreans and our people in eastern Sudan. (BAm-Di19, interview, Birmingham, 16 May 2015)

This quote shows the Beni-Amer as part of the Muslim Umma supporting humanitarian demonstrations along with retaining solidarity over issues only affecting Eritreans or the Beni-Amer in Sudan. Thus, the identity of the Beni-Amer in the diaspora is layered and hybrid, sometimes Eritrean, sometimes Muslim and, as with the Beni-Amer of eastern Sudan, it accompanies a sense of being from a 'blurred homeland'.

Furthermore, religious influence could shape diaspora communities' formation structure patterns directly and indirectly. For example, directly it could be through religious dictates, and indirectly it could be through determining social network formation, family relations and family structure, kin relations 'here' and 'there', remittance, gender norms and practices. Therefore, Islam not merely influences the migration processes and the in-between mobility - such as to be patient in hard times as discussed in chapter six - but also it affects the formation of diaspora community in the host country. It shapes how the diaspora members negotiate among themselves and with other diasporas and non-diaspora communities in the host country. In this study, those who expressed strong religious adherence have shown strong attachments to back-home-left-kin and strive to keep in touch to their globally-dispersed kin:

In our culture, we [the Beni-Amer] consider all our Beni-Amer as one people. There is so much love among us when I remember my past with my friends it makes me weep. I feel nostalgic to the people and places I left many years ago. And now I try my best to keep in touch with them and to be best to them,

in Islam Allah loves those who are best to their relatives. (BAm-Di10, interview, Birmingham, 11 May 2015)

This quote shows the intertwining nature of Islamic teachings and the Beni-Amer cultural values. Thus, it could be argued the Beni-Amer construct their identity-based in traditional cultural values, but the cultural values are not free from the teachings of Islam, which play a profound role in shaping how members of the diaspora experience migration, mobility, self and community identity; it brings scattered communities in touch and bridges ethnicity, regionalism, and other non-religious differences. Thus, Eritrean diaspora Muslim community is emerging as one homogenous but autonomous community with no central command to mobilise the community to any particular aim. In group discussion respondents clearly stated the guides of Islamic teachings in relation to remittance and other spending:

You know we work hard to make some money but we have to support our relatives back home and those on their way to migrate. We try our best to spend what we earn correctly. Every one of us has huge responsibility to help someone struggling somewhere so we are careful not to squander what we have and we try to follow Allah's command in what we earn and spend. In the Quran [Surah al-Isra 25-27] Allah the almighty says; "your Lord is best aware of what is in your minds. If you are righteous, then lo! He was ever forgiving unto those who turn [unto Him]. Give the kinsman his due, and the needy, and the wayfarer, and squander not [thy wealth] in wantonness. Lo! The squanderers were ever brothers of the devils, and the devil was ever an ingrate to his Lord." This kind of verse from the Quran is what guides our lives and we strive to follow. (BAm-Di, FGD2, Birmingham, 21 May 2015)

Tiilikainen (2003) finds Somali women in Finland to be agents of Islam. This study mirrors the findings by Tiilikainen and found that everyday life of the Beni-Amer women was woven around Islam, and their identities and their families were based on being Muslims. They demonstrate this in that they find peace and comfort and maintain their networks based on it. Respondents confess Islam helps them to heal from the war-torn Eritrean history, desolate refugee experience of eastern Sudan

refugee camps and in-between mobility experiences; one respondent explained being part of the large Muslim diaspora community in the 'host' country as:

Feeling happy is a pleasant thing, and I found the best tool for that is Islam. Reciting the verses from the Holy Quran and the Hadith makes me feel I have a real purpose in life. As a Muslim, first thing, I have to forgive the wrong people like the commandos who killed my grandparents and displaced my parents in Eritrea and the criminal people smugglers I met when I was on my way to Europe. Islam helps me to forgive and forget all of that and to start a new life here (UK) with hope. (BAm-Di3, interview, Birmingham, 23 April 2015)

Particularly in the first few years after their arrival in the host country the presence of the Masjid helped respondents to start navigating life in the host country. Beni-Amer men use the Masjid as a place where they learn more about Islam and gain information about the way of life, work and so on in the host country. One respondent described this:

A Muslim built his life around the Masjid; that is a place where we practice our religious duties and meet with people like us. And it's particularly useful for the newcomers to the country, where they get psychological and practical support. For example, in the time of Ramadan people come together to break their fasting day, the food is free and abundant, and people share information about jobs, education and so forth. (BAm-Di7, interviewee, Birmingham, 13 May 2015)

According to the Quran and Hadith Islamic religious knowledge has traditionally been a source of peace and tranquillity in the life of the believers. One respondent explains this as:

In the remembrance of God, the soul of the believer becomes in peace and tranquillity. You see that is why in the diaspora many of us attempt to live intact to the Islamic teaching it helps us to live our life peacefully. (BAm-Di12, interviewee, London, 14 May 2015)

Nowadays the Eritrean Muslims residing in the UK belong to more than six ethnic groups (Tigré and Beni-Amer, Bélyāin, Jeberti, Saho and Afar,), but they gravitate towards Islam and describe themselves as Eritrean Muslims, and the ethnic and regional differences become a secondary element when describing their cultural identity. Voluntarily, other differences are continually submerging into Islam and Arabic is becoming the language of communication among them. In focus group discussion respondents explained the emergence of this Eritrean diaspora Muslim community as a single community:

We ethnic groups all came from one country and our problems were historically similar; we are displaced because of war. Again, we are Muslims, we have one Quran that is the way nowadays. You do not see ethnicity or regionalism as a focal point of differences among the Eritrean Muslims. We use Arabic as a common language because it the language Allah uses in the Quran. Here you must understand when we say the Eritrean Muslims we do not mean we do not like our Christian brothers who share with us Eritrea, but we mean when it comes to faith-based community that prays and fasts together then the teachings of *Dīn* (religion) is the main element shaping the formation of that community. For example, our Christian Eritrean brothers in here [UK] organise themselves based on their faith groups and we see no problem in that. (BAm, FGD1, Birmingham, 20 May 2015)

In the fieldwork, it was noticed that in social events women have a significant role in organising and servicing such events. For example, at a wedding in Birmingham women was observed preparing traditional food, wearing traditional dress, dancing and serving the guests of the day. Moreover, the Beni-Amer women observed taking the role of bringing up children in Islamic values and spend much of the evening time (after school 5:00pm-7:00pm) in the Masjid and Madrasa, empowering themselves and their children in Islamic knowledge. Respondents enacted the yearly Ramadan (fasting month; see figure 7.2. below) and Haj (pilgrimage month) and monthly three days fasting known as *aye al beed* (fasting three full moon nights, the 13th, 14th and 15th of every lunar calendar month), weekly (Friday) and daily (five times daily prayers). These give order and a sense of control of the day and a spiritual break in the demanding life of the diaspora.





Figure 7.2. Muslims breaking Ramadan fasting in the Prophet's Masjed in Madinah. (Source: navedz.com, 2016)

Respondents' religious events are used to enhance family ties and foster the sense of Islamic values in children. Similarly, Tiilikainen (2003) finds that religious sacred times such as Ramadan and Haj provide cyclical rhythm and help to strengthen solidarity among the Somali diasporic communities in Finland. One respondent expressed the social and religious influences of the month of Ramadan thus:

Ramadan is a blessed month. I pray to Allah and ask forgiveness for my sin. I call my family back home and in other countries at least three times per week. We cook a lot of food and take to the Masjid and give to charity. Every Saturday in Ramadan, we organise a collective breaking of fasting with other Eritrean Muslims and our children play together and we pray Al- Tarawih together. And when it is Eid we decorate our homes and celebrate together; it is a blessed time. (Baw-Di3, interviewee, Birmingham, 17 May 2015)

Another respondent also affirmed the influences of the month of Ramadan in enhancing both Islamic and Beni-Amer cultural values:

Ramadan times are important sacred times and we use this blessed opportunity to unite our community. A lot of food is prepared and newcomers to the country (UK), most of them single men, are given food to take home, and thereby we bring them into the community as members. We make the collective breaking of fasting for all the Eritrean Muslims and socialise to strengthen our relationship with one another. We invite other Muslims, for example from Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and so on and they invite us too. In this way, we widen our networks with other Muslims, and we become part of the wider Muslim *Ummah*. (BAm-Di, FGD3, Birmingham, 22 May 2015)

In one respondent's house in Birmingham the researcher observed the rooms decorated with traditional Beni-Amer artefacts such as doum palm mats, a traditional sword hanging on the wall, pictures from Macca and calligraphy verses from the Holy Quran. Having such traditional objects in the diasporic home facilitates attachment to the cultural origin by shortening the spatial and temporal distance from the homeland-left-community. It was noticed the family sat on mats together for food and ate as a group. The father explained that it is a blessing to eat together and is in Beni-Amer culture; he used the opportunity to talk to his children about the traditions of the Beni-Amer.

Space inside the home is divided according to gender and age, the kitchen and upper rooms being the heart of the female space, while the living room is often for the male members of the family. Often Beni-Amer women and girls cover their faces but some dress in the *hijab* (also called *ebyas*) and do not cover their faces. Women confessed they wear the hijab from their own Islamic awareness and are not forced by their husbands. Marranci's 'Migration and Construction of Women's Identity in Northern Ireland' (2007) describes Muslim men as constituting a conservative Muslim community with patriarchal power and dictating to women what to do or not to do. This gives the impression that Muslim women have been denied their identity because of patriarchal power. In contradiction, this study found the Beni-Amer

women preferred to dress in the *niqab* from their interest, and want to influence their husbands and children to distance themselves from sexual and other lifestyle choices recognised as freedom by the mainstream community in the host country. Thus, the Beni-Amer women play a critical role in shaping their family as relatively conservative Muslim households. Women respondents participating in this study affirmed dressing in this way helped them to become part of the large Muslim community in the UK and they consider covering much of their body gives them private spaces and great feeling because they believe they are submitting to Allah. One interviewee demonstrated it in these words:

Under my hijab, I am in peace from the eyes of men and on good terms with Allah the Almighty. A Beni-Amer respondent mother of three in Birmingham said by dressing in modesty, she said I believe I feel I am a good example to my children as a Muslim and Beni-Amer mother. (BAf-Di3, interview, Birmingham, 11 May 2015)

Therefore, for the Beni-Amer women in the diaspora dressing in Islamic style is considered necessary to show obedience to Allah the Almighty and is also viewed as preserving the Beni-Amer cultural identity and as a mechanism for passing it to the next generation. Other women respondents affirmed that dressing in Islamic dress code could encourage their daughters to follow their example. One respondent explained in this way:

Children follow by the example of parents. If parents are modest and follow their religion, then children will follow them as a good example and otherwise also support their parents. If you force a child to do what the parents themselves are unable to lead by example the child will never follow that. (BAm-Di4, interview, Birmingham, 11 May 2015)

In the fieldwork, it was noticed that Islamic dietary regulation is strictly followed. For example, halal meat is purchased, and when shopping for foodstuffs, they often check to avoid additional substances such as pork and gelatine products. In the shopping trolley rice, halal lamb, vegetables, milk and dairy products and cereals could be observed and, usually, shopping took place in big supermarkets. Halal meat was bought from local halal shops. Thus, Islamic teachings play a significant and

comprehensive role in the formation of Beni-Amer diasporic identity, and it informs and defines their daily spaces within the multicultural and multi-religious secular society of the UK. They explain the time spent in and around the Masjid feels secure for their children by taking them away from the street, from time spent computer gaming which many believe is against the moral values of Islam and the Beni-Amer cultural tradition. In the fieldwork it was noticed that Beni-Amer families in the UK fear their children might be influenced by the views of Western society and adopt the lifestyle of the West such as consumption of alcohol, mixing of sexes or becoming involved in premarital sexual relations. Respondents admitted bringing up children in a multicultural and multi-religious society is a great threat to their cultural identity. Moreover, it was observed most of the homes of those interviewed have access to satellite antennas and often use Arabsat satellite channels, so because of the variety of audio-visual programmes at home children and mothers are exposed to Islamic morals in a manner that is both educational and entertaining. Interviewees confessed their children are exposed to other religious festivals such as Christmas, Halloween, Easter and Diwali. Therefore, they feel they have to use satellite TV channels to teach their children about Islamic holidays and believe as far as their children are taught about Islam they do not perceive there is a problem about learning other communities' religious festivals. Thus, Islamic values are viewed as the central element in the construction of the Beni-Amer family and the Beni-Amer show strong attachment to Islam in the Diaspora. One woman respondent put it like this:

In here [the diaspora] we come to know more about Islam and obey the *Dīn* [religion] of Allah in my everyday life. Islam is the guide of my life in every matter. (BAf-Di8, interview, Birmingham, 10 May 2015)

Thus, the Beni-Amer increase in Islamic knowledge in the diaspora and the religion becomes a central element in the maintenance and reproduction of Beni-Amer cultural identity. Warner (1998, p. 17) notes how immigrants in pluralistic and secular Western countries often become more aware of their religious traditions and identities than before. Moreover, interviewees reported that teaching Islamic values helps to strengthen and maintain the transnational family networks across time and space. Respondents describe this as a cause for increased blessings in one's

provisions and age. One interviewee explained this by drawing on the sayings of the Prophet:

Whoever loves to be granted ample provisions and a long life, should maintain good ties with his or her relatives [Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī]. (BAm-Di9, interview, Birmingham, 10 May 2015)

The Beni-Amer women are busy with tasks similar to those of women back home. These include looking after the children and the family home, but the main difference from the homeland Beni-Amer is the socio-cultural environment in the UK. In addition to this, the women play a significant role to connect themselves and their children with the back-home-left-kin and the globally scattered Beni-Amer diasporic communities. Among mobile and computer-aided communication the most popular include WhatsApp, Facebook, IMO, and Viber. Beni-Amer diaspora women often socialise in the home with other women; otherwise they can be alone and suffer from isolation from the wider host community. Men's tasks and responsibilities resemble those of the home-left-kin, but in the diaspora they are not the sole breadwinners because women also work and have earnings. And even if men are unemployed they remain the head of the family with responsibility for leading it, but it is worth mentioning that unemployed men expressed feeling their role as the head of household becoming ill-fated and in limbo, affecting the integrity of the household; this a religious and cultural responsibility. Otherwise, Beni-Amer men often work in unskilled jobs, usually having two jobs, working long hours or night shifts. They often complain about the imbalance between their household life and work:

I work for two employers. In one job I work the night shift for 21 hours per week and because the income is not enough I have the second post over the weekend; that is 20 hours. You see because of this I do not have time to spend with my children. I see them when I am drained by two jobs. So terrible for them and me. (BAm-Di5, interview, Birmingham, 10 May 2015)

Among the Beni-Amer culture marriage and family took on a more conservative stance. And despite the difficulties in the diaspora life, the Beni-Amer extended family is regarded as the cornerstone of a healthy society. In its traditional

environment, the Beni-Amer family is extended, often spanning three or more generations living in one compound or practising pastoral mobility together. In the tradition of the Beni-Amer, elders gain respect with age. They are considered essential for keeping the extended Beni-Amer family intact, and are always consulted for advice on important social, political and economic issues affecting the extended family or the tribe. Respondents put emphasis on the respect of the parents regardless of where they live and regardless of whether they are alive or dead, and the friends and extended family of the parents must be complied with. Keeping good relationships with parents, extended family and the networks of parents is Beni-Amer cultural tradition and a religious obligation. In the words of respondents in focus group interviewees:

You know, to keep in touch, and good terms with our extended family members and respecting our parents and their friends is a Beni-Amer thing. And regardless of where we live we have to strive to keep our tradition alive. You know the beloved Prophet Muhammad, Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him, says "May his nose be rubbed in the dust! May his nose be rubbed in the dust! [an Arabic expression denoting degradation]. When the Prophet was asked who he meant by this, he said, "the one who see his parents, one or both, during their old age but does not enter Paradise" [by doing good to them]. This is authentic Hadith. We consider good things are respecting them and being on their side when they need you. This is a big problem for those of us living in the diaspora because it is not easy for us to be on the side of our parents when they need us. Some of us, their parents died before they visited them, because at the time of their illness they did not have a passport and they were waiting for the Home Office to decide on their asylum cases. (BAm-Di, FGD3, Birmingham, 22 May 2015)

Respondents consider the extended family structure offers many advantages that include stability, coherence and practical and psychological support in times of need. And Beni-Amer single men living in the diaspora often look for a wife from their extended family network. One respondent explained this as:

I will only get a wife from my extended family from eastern Sudan, and I will bring her here in the UK. I prefer that because I do not want to be outside my extended family. I consider that it is right for my children and me in the future. (BAm-Di19, interview, Birmingham, 16 May 2015)

And on the contrary Beni-Amer parents in their 40s and 50s living in the UK prefer to go back home to eastern Sudan or to Eritrea if the political situation were to improve, to spend the rest of their life there. And both the single men and the ageing parents consider the maintenance of the extended Beni-Amer family institution as crucial for the existence of Beni-Amer cultural identity. They treat the retention of kin relationships as a religious obligation, and no-one must break off the ties of kinship, regardless time or space. One respondent affirmed this by using verses of the Holy Quran:

And those who break the Covenant of Allah, after its ratification, and sever that which Allah has commanded to be joined [i.e. sever the bond of kinship and are not good to their relatives], and work mischief in the land, on them is curse [i.e. they will be far away from Allah's mercy], and for them is the unhappy [evil] home [i.e. Hell]. (Surah ar-Rad, 25 (BAm-Di, FGD2, Birmingham, 21 May 2015)

For the Beni-Amer the maintenance of kin relations through consanguinity (intermarriage), remittance and visits and so forth is considered integral to their cultural tradition and a command of God the Almighty and must to be followed strictly. This cultural and religious confluence is expressed by one respondent thus:

For us [the Beni-Amer] maintaining our family bond is in our culture. We dislike severing our family ties. The beloved Prophet [Muhammad] also says: "The person who severs the bond of kinship will not enter Paradise." You know this is serious, and it is authentic Hadith in the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. (BAm-Di20, Birmingham, 19 May 2015)

The above quotes encapsulate that the Beni-Amer consider Islam integral to their cultural identity. And based on the teachings of Islam they seek to construct their identity in the host country and maintain their kin relationships among themselves

in the diaspora and with back-home-left-kin. In the next section, we turn to examine how the entangled relationship between wellbeing and mobility relates to the immigrations and financial status of the diaspora and how this might impact on their sense of identity.

### **7.5. Mobility and wellbeing among the Beni-Amer diaspora**

Mobility and wellbeing are interlocked elements in diaspora lives; the presence of one facilitates the presence of the other. Respondents reported that in the diaspora mobility is intimately related to migration status. "If you have the 'red passport' it means the British passport and money, then you can travel the world". Respondents said that movement within the host country was characterised by travel between home and work with limited everyday mobility outside of that routine. Interviews revealed homeland visits by diasporic men are mainly to get wives and visit relatives, but women's homeland visits are primarily to visit relatives. This study found diasporas could be divided into two: internationally mobile diasporas and internationally immobile ones. The mobile diaspora had a successful asylum case, and through neutralisation were given UK passports. The mobile diaspora visits homeland at least once every 4-5 years and demonstrates attachment to the homeland and their cultural identity; they mentioned their lesser mobility in their host country due to work and home lifestyle.

The internationally immobile diasporas could not travel and so never visited their homeland, with consequent diminishing attachment to their past. This makes them uncertain about their future, and their daily lives can be described as in limbo, waiting in the hope of getting refugee status. This significantly impacts on their sense of wellbeing socially, physically and financially. Therefore, this study argues, the opportunity of future mobility influences their sense of wellbeing and their ability to negotiate space in both the host and homeland communities. Respondents affirmed that wellbeing for them meant freedom of movement, and any restriction placed on their mobility informed their sense of wellbeing. Sheller (2008) states that restrictions on mobility equated to loss of freedom. Respondents explained in the diaspora that their potential mobility was closely related to their immigration and economic status in the host country. Therefore, this study stated that it is worth



distinguishing between the individuals' status, because not all can become internationally mobile. Indeed, some members of the Beni-Amer diasporas cannot enjoy future international mobility due to their failed asylum cases. Consequently, those groups among the diasporas are socially, politically and economically marginalised, hard to reach and consequently often inaudible in the diaspora research. Furthermore, interviewees demonstrated that limitations to their international mobility brought about by immigration status would affect not only their own wellbeing but also the wellbeing of back-home-left-kin:

Many people from the diaspora are unable to visit their relatives because of immigration issues. Among the diaspora, it is ubiquitous for many people to wait for immigration status for decades. Indeed, they feel they wasted their life; indeed, they live a stressful life, every day waiting for a letter to drop in their letterbox with positive refugee status [granted asylum]. Sorrowfully, it is not the case for many people we know; they are waiting and waiting every day. *Ehi!* [expressing sad feeling] Waiting days became weeks, months, years and for some people even waiting, just waiting for over ten years, and they are not allowed to work, therefore they live in a difficult financial situation. We know many people in an analogous situation; their mothers are desperate every day, waiting tearfully. Their loved one may come back, but many died while in this depressing situation. *Tariff!* You know! For some people living in the diaspora waiting for the asylum case to bear fruit is like waiting for milk from a bird. (BAm-Di, FGD3, Birmingham, 22 May 2015)

This quote indicates factors of wellbeing amongst diasporas from illegalised migrants background are closely related to immigration status that influences their financial status and their overall sense of wellbeing; beside that, respondents also mentioned their in-between mobility experiences impacts on their sense of self-worth and self-esteem (see below). As discussed in chapter six, pastoralists in transition increasingly become asylum seekers and diaspora communities through illegal migration routes; and after reaching their final destination they apply for asylum but with no guarantee of a successful outcome of their cases; some get to remain while some get rejected. Indeed, the decision on their asylum case by the authority in the host country has significant impact on their ability to successfully

reconstruct their lives in their new destinations. Respondents confirmed that the result of their asylum and the length of time they spend waiting for a decision determines their potential future mobility, which in turn affects the re/construction of their identity, their attachments to homeland and overall sense of wellbeing.

For us [diasporas, formerly illegalised migrants] reaching EU means not all milk and honey; rather it means the start of a hard life away from home. Yes, it is true many illegalised migrants get a successful asylum result, but many get rejected and some nationalities are even detained and deported. For those allowed to remain they are allowed to work and can travel outside the country [UK] if they want to; you know we cannot travel to the country we claim as our country of origin; for example, an Eritrean is not allowed to visit Eritrea and the Sudanese are not allowed to visit Sudan until they become neutralised British citizens. This can take from five-ten years but after that they can visit their homeland. But for those who have been rejected and spend up to 10 years waiting it means eventually they can go visit their homeland for at least 15-20 years. (BAm-Di, FGD2, Birmingham, 21 May 2015)

Therefore, this study argues that those unable to visit their homeland demonstrated profound disappointment with life in the diaspora and their connection with the left-back-home kin and place attachments weakened over time. Respondents in similar situations reported 'losing' their sense of belonging over time and space. One respondent said:

I do not feel I belong to any country or society; the years in diaspora without going back to my homeland make me lose hope and contact. And I'm fed up from making phone calls. I want to touch the hands of my parents, not make them cry by my voice. And here [UK] I have no contact. I am not allowed to work. Most of the time I stay at home or just walk. I feel I am very excluded from my community back home and the community here [UK]. (BAm-Di16, interview, Birmingham, 15 May 2015)

This study found a diminishing sense of belonging among those who never visited homeland, mainly due to immigration issues but also because of financial problems.

'I do not belong to anyone. I lost the feeling of belonging over time,' are the usual patterns among interviewees who have never returned to their homeland, who often also confessed they sensed rootlessness accompanied with feeling exclusion from both their sending and reception communities over time. One respondent who had never visited his homeland said: "If your freedom of mobility is limited then your life finishes and your vision is dead. *Aiwa!* Yes, to be honest that is what I feel." (BAm-Di4, interview, Birmingham, 15 May 2015)

This study concludes by contrast with the internationally mobile diaspora who can sustain contacts with homeland: the internationally immobile diasporas risk suffering rootlessness and deracination over time and space. Moreover, those who reported they are internationally immobile were asked if they can nonetheless meet and socialise with fellow Beni-Amer diasporas, and visit festivals and other social events connected with Beni-Amer communities in the UK. Respondents said that sometimes they do visit social events but they believe they do not have the 'real' test of being 'full' Beni-Amer; in their words:

Like many other diasporas do, we [Beni-Amer] also attempt to uphold our cultural traditions and pass them to the next generation. Indeed, we try hard but we understand we can never replicate or reproduce our tradition away from its place and wider community of origin. We believe the way we attempt to socialise, dance and narrate stories became influenced by the environment we live in. *Masalain!* For example, no way can we express our dance using swords on a river bank full of doum-palm trees with our Begait [Beni-Amer cattle] around us, here [diaspora]. Of course! This is impossible, so what we do here is different; something that looks like Beni-Amer culture but not exactly similar. (BAm-Di, FGD1, Birmingham, 20 May 2015)

This outlook was repeated by respondents and observed in the nine social events I observed during the UK fieldwork. It can be concluded that cultural identity does not travel across time and space; rather it 'devolves' through time and geographical distance. Indeed, for example, as represented in the figures below the sword dance in the diaspora performed by youth 'dancers' growing up in diaspora clearly shows a lack of professional cultural background; thus, cultural practices away from home form a disparate practice reproducing only an imperfect 'copy' of the original. For

example, in contrast the dancers performing a sword dance in Kassala bind holding a silted sword up to the touch the ground, reflecting the original cultural practice of a Beni-Amer sword dance in its home environment. Therefore, this study argues that Beni-Amer culture is not only ethnic group specific, it is also place specific, and outside the place of its origin it can only partly resemble the 'true' Beni-Amer cultural identity rather than perfectly replicating it.



Figure 7.3. Beni-Amer sword dance in diaspora. (Source: Arab cultural festival, San Francisco, 2012)



Figure 7.4. Beni-Amer sword dance, Kassala, 1986. (Source: Flyupindasky, 2007).

Moreover, respondents with positive immigration status who might even hold a UK passport, although codified, express that wellbeing is for them closely related to their possible mobility. Veenhoven (1991) affirms that wellbeing is relative. Respondents did indeed say they measure their own sense of wellbeing relative to others. I termed this a 'downgrading contrast example'. Indeed, this is the case where interviewees used the opportunities of other migrants they encountered during their migration from Sudan to Libya to evaluate the state of their own wellbeing. In one respondent's words:

You know! Life away from your community, your country, your family by no means can be good. It is hard to feel 'jam-packed happiness' in the *shatate* [diaspora] scattered like seed. Nobody knows your origin and nobody cares; indeed, we believe we are of no value. But you see! It is also good to see those who are worse than you. Looking down is good so you can remember those

who lost their lives in the Sahara, were jailed in Libya, sleeping rough in Italy and those many who have rejected asylum and cannot even travel home or work. (BAm-Di, FGD1, Birmingham, 20 May 2015)

Moreover, respondents who were initially illegalised migrants demonstrated how illegal mobility experiences affect their sense of wellbeing. As discussed in chapter six illegalised migrants in the fragmented in-between mobility underwent brutal treatment at the hands of their smugglers, transporters, armed gangs and prison guards; they were damaged by what they witnessed inflicted on other migrants. Their ability and desire to share their experiences decreases as a result. Individual self-esteem diminishes and the self loses the capacity to engage in conversation about themselves. Respondents testified that their 'true' experiences remain sealed not only to their host societies but also to their sending societies. Respondents confirmed that the abuse they encountered in the 'in-between' phase of their journey brought feelings of dispiritedness, restriction, and being controlled and subdued by other human beings, which they describe as going against their pastoralist upbringing as free, brave and proud people. The experience of being in the in-between impairs their ability to express themselves long into their future. Their ability to negotiate their position with the host and sending communities is profoundly hampered and many of their experiences remain undiscussed even with their close relatives, powerfully damaging their sense of identity. In the words of one interviewee:

What I have been through on my way to from Sudan to here [UK] is not good for anybody. It was an experience no human being will believe is true. It was inhuman experience. To be honest, I do not want to tell my experience in-depth. I feel if I do I will hurt the feelings of the listener. You know when some people at work ask me where I am from, I reply from Eritrea; and pray they are not going to ask me how I came and why I came to this country. I do not feel delighted to answer these questions. (BAm-Di1, interview, Birmingham, 6 May 2015)

This quote specifies the respondents' inhibition in sharing their experiences, limiting their open conversation with various others in the host country, and therefore restricting their chances of making 'open' friendships. All male

respondents were asked why they do not want to open up their 'in-between' experiences to others. Eleven out of the seventeen respondents said they are not proud of it; four explained it makes them feel down, and they believe if they do tell all that they have seen and endured in detail it will harm their listeners, adding to their language barriers. And two also stated this particular experience makes them feel down, that their experience is likely to hurt the feelings of their listeners, and that low self-esteem informs them to seal their experiences even from their relatives. Thus, the pain and despair caused by the 'in-between' experience is one of the main causes of damage to self-esteem and wellbeing among the formerly illegalised migrant diasporas. The study therefore argues that for asylum seekers who become members of diaspora communities through illegal migration their capacity to successfully reconstruct their lives in their new destinations is significantly reduced by their experiences of fragmented in-between mobility.

Moreover respondents demonstrated that having a relative in the in-between is a cause of stress that affects their own wellbeing; it means fear for the loved-ones' lives, dealing with people-smugglers and working long hours to pay them. Furthermore, interviewees explained that having a relative in the hands of people-smugglers felt like 'moving backwards' in their memory; it retold them their own past in the in-between. Interviewee BAm-Di9 related his experience when his two brothers called him from Ajdabiya (a town in Libya) to pay their smuggler (see case study, below).

#### **Case study 4. BAm-Di9**

BAm-Di9 is a 44 year old Beni-Amer male living in the UK since 2004. He explained his experience of the illegal migration of his two brothers. "My brothers agreed with smugglers in Khartoum to take them to Libya without my knowledge. The smuggler asked them to pay him \$2,800. That was \$1,400 each, to paid at once after reaching Libya. When they reached Libya, they called me and told me to pay for them, and I paid the whole amount at once. Just seven days later they called me again and explained their smuggler had sold them to another smuggler and this new smuggler was asking \$2,000 to take them to Tripoli; to speed up payment the smuggling gangs were torturing them. This reminded me of when I was at the hands of ruthless smugglers on my way to Italy. I could not bear it when I heard them over the phone crying, and I borrowed money and paid all at once. After that, we lost connection for three weeks, and my family back home called every day asking my brothers' whereabouts. It was tough to hear my mother and father crying over the phone. At the time, I was working two jobs on day shift and another night shift, leaving less than a five hour gap between the two jobs. Even in those few hours, I could not sleep, thinking about my brothers. After three weeks one of my brothers called me, apologising to me, and broke my heart. He said the smugglers are now asking \$1,500 to release him to Italy. I paid and he ended sleeping rough in Italy. I lost contact with my other brother for two months. The smugglers ignored my calls for a whole month, but after that, they replied and asked \$2,000 to release him from one of their illegal jails. I was really under stress and paid the whole amount; he was taken to Zawarah town on the northern shores of Libya and to Italy, and now he is in Norway. You see, working long hours, and great stress affected my health. I can tell you I was without enough sleep for three months; this damaged my sight. Now I have to wear eyeglasses for medical reasons.





Figure 7.5. Rome's Tiburtina station: refugees sleeping outside. (Source: Burrows, 2015).

This study shows that among the Beni-Amer diasporas the sense of wellbeing is informed in multiple ways, mainly by immigrations and financial status as these determine freedom of mobility. Therefore, this study argues the possibility of mobility positively influences individuals' sense of wellbeing while, in contrast, immobility affects wellbeing negatively. Wellbeing and mobility are entangled factors in the reconstruction of identity among the diaspora. The final section concludes this chapter by summarising its main findings.

## 7.6. Conclusion

As in pastoralism and in-between mobility, wellbeing, identity and home(land) are interlocked elements in the lives of the diasporas. This chapter has provided the key findings of the third phase of the study, analysing the reconstruction and negotiation of identities and wellbeing by Beni-Amer formerly illegalised migrants who are currently members of diasporas in their new destination of resettlement in the UK. Findings in this chapter show that the reconstruction of Beni-Amer identity in the diaspora is based as much on differences as on sameness, in constantly shifting and permeable dichotomies. This mirrors Brubaker (2005) who defines diaspora community formation as fluidity and dynamism and Mavroudi (2007) who

identifies diaspora formation as “malleable, hybrid and multiple,” and “based on sameness.” This chapter has argued that Beni-Amer diaspora formation transcends the contemporary conceptualization of the diaspora in the way they relate to their blurred homeland. For them, the ‘there and here’ is at odds with the prevailing wisdom in diaspora literature; indeed, the ‘there’ equals multiple places in the ancestral homeland. Safran (1991) labels diaspora a homeland-focused social formation infused with a collective identity and shared experiences; corresponding to Safran (1999), interviewees in this study demonstrated that their diaspora communities are grounded on commonalities and maintained by upholding their ancestral homeland and kinship ties. Interviewees elucidated that diaspora identity is informed by everyday interaction with diverse other diaspora communities. The teachings of Islam and the larger Muslim diaspora communities particularly influence their identity reconstruction; daily interaction occurs in many ways, including working together and sharing a house, and across time and space the diaspora becomes the host and influences the newly forming diaspora groups. Thus, this study argues the apparent dichotomy between host and diaspora community is equivocal and must be further examined.

Diasporas’ concept of homeland is immobile, fixed, and irreplaceable - that is, the place they insist belongs to their ancestors. In contrast, the concept of home among the diasporas is dynamic and mobile rather than fixed; home for them is continually shifting shelter; therefore, for them, the concept of home is mobile, moving with the movement of the household. For example, for married couples with children, home is where the mother and children reside. For diasporas wellbeing is related to having a successful asylum case. This determines their international mobility and possibility of homeland visits to reconnect with their past. It reshapes the diaspora’s sense of wellbeing in both host and homeland country. This study concludes there is no single word useful to indicate how wellbeing is re/conceptualised among the diaspora across time and space. The concept of wellbeing is situationally-related to time, place and circumstance, hence dynamic and fluid, constantly checked relative to other illegalised migrants’ experiences in the in-between.

The abuse suffered by illegalised migrants on their way to the EU at the hands of smugglers has traumatic impact on their future sense of wellbeing. It affects their

ability to engage with various others and kin; thus, the exact experiences of the in-between mobility remained sealed. Respondents consider that expressing themselves regarding their past might harm their listeners' feelings. Respondents explained that remembering their past in the hands of the gangs reminds them of the sense of despair; this often leaves Beni-Amer suffering low self-esteem and inferior self-worth. Thus, for them having kin in the in-between is a cause of great stress accompanied by long hours of work to pay smugglers enormous amounts of money with unreliable results. Respondents reported that stress and sleepless nights caused by supporting kin making the illegalised migration has a significant impact on the health and overall sense of wellbeing among the Beni-Amer in diasporas and the back-home-left-kin. Therefore, the study has argued that no single mechanism could describe how diasporas (re)construct identity; rather the diaspora's reconstruction of identity, attachment to homeland and societies of origin and conceptualisation of wellbeing is a dynamic process continuously reshaped in many complex ways. The next chapter presents the main findings and conclusion of the whole thesis.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

#### **8.1. Introduction**

The aim of this study has been to explore how Beni-Amer nomadic pastoral livelihoods have been transformed through various forms of mobilities and immobilities across time and space, and how this informs their contemporary constructions of identity, homeland and wellbeing. This chapter weaves together the whole story of the research and explains its main contribution to knowledge. The study has addressed its overarching theme via three sub-questions: how are identities, homeland and wellbeing constructed among Beni-Amer pastoralists in eastern Sudan and western Eritrea? How are Beni-Amer constructions of their identities, homeland and wellbeing transformed and experienced through multiple mobilities and immobilities? How are identities, homeland and wellbeing reconstructed and negotiated once new destinations of resettlement are reached? Qualitative data were gathered in three phases and thematically analysed, and four complex and interlocked themes were identified and examined in the preceding chapters: these were mobility, identity, home[land] and wellbeing. In chapter five these themes were analysed in relation to pastoralism, and the concept of pastoral mobility was subjected to scrutiny beyond its traditional meaning as merely herd movement. In chapter six the themes were analysed in relation to pastoralists in transition, leading to the conclusion that pastoralists do not give up mobility after leaving pastoralism but, rather, they engage in other forms of mobility often including illegalised migration. In chapter seven the four themes were analysed in relation to diasporas and they were found to be closely linked to the immigration and economic status of the diasporic individual in the 'host' country.

This chapter is organised into six sections. Having restated the research aim and research questions in this introduction, the second section evaluates the research methods. The third section 'wraps up' the main findings of the research. The fourth offers conclusions and reflections on the study's key findings. Section five summarises the main limitations encountered and, finally, the chapter provides recommendations for future research

## **8.2. Evaluation of methods**

Fieldwork was carried out to gather qualitative data related to the experiences, emotions, imaginations and attitudes of the research participants. The study tracked thirteen Beni-Amer family networks, interviewed ninety-one respondents, and carried out thirteen focus group discussions between November 2014 and May 2015. A key feature of this study has been its use of multiple cutting-edge qualitative data gathering methods: walking-along-in-depth interviews and remote-interviewing, largely informal focus group discussions and 'dual' insider participant observation, conducted in three locations. Accordingly data gathering tasks were planned in three phases, extending from the region the Beni-Amer call part of their ancestral homeland to the in-between - from Sudan-Libya-EU - and in the diaspora in the UK. This was a process that enabled the researcher to track changes across time and space among the Beni-Amer.

The first phase of data gathering fieldwork was carried out in the Kassala area, the borderland between Eritrea and Sudan, and addressed the first research question of the study: how are identity and wellbeing constructed among the Beni-Amer in eastern Sudan and western Eritrea? In the second phase qualitative data were collected through mobile phone interviews (remote-interviewing) of ex-herder Beni-Amer undergoing in-between mobility as illegalised migrants from Khartoum via Libya to the EU; data from this phase addressed the second research question of the study: how are Beni-Amer constructions of their identities, homeland and wellbeing transformed and experienced through multiple mobilities and immobilities? In the third phase fieldwork was carried out in the UK with Beni-Amer diasporas. As with phase one, in phase three qualitative data were gathered through walking-along-in-depth interviews, largely informal focus group discussions, and 'dual' insider participant observation; and the data from this phase addressed the third research question of the study: how are identities, homeland and wellbeing reconstructed and negotiated once the new destination of resettlement is reached?

The multiple techniques of data gathering for the study were non-hierarchical and collaborative which encouraged open heart-to-heart conversation between the researcher and respondents. Moving away from the inside-sedentary-traditional interviewing techniques towards more flexible mobile outdoor techniques of

interviewing generated more ease and natural flow of information from interviewees. Focus group discussions were also predominantly informal and conducted among natural activities and settings. This was an important technique which enabled the researcher to probe without interrupting respondents' conversation and to gain clarity of information on contested issues raised in face-to-face, one-to-one-in-depth interviews. Moreover, the use of mobile phone interviewing enabled the researcher to interview respondents in remote, inaccessible and dangerous places and times. This technique allowed the researcher to live the imagined world of the interviewees, collecting real-time data as events unfolded.

The qualitative data gathered from the three phases were transcribed, translated, coded-recoded and categorised-recategorized; this led to the four interlocked themes of mobility, identity, homeland and wellbeing. As mentioned above they were analysed in chapters five, six and seven. Therefore, the data collecting process addressed the five objectives developed and stated in chapter one, and the overall qualitative data collected addressed the purpose of the study. The next section summaries the research's main findings.

### **8.3 Summary of the main findings**

#### **8.3.1. Mobility, homeland, identity and wellbeing among Beni-Amer pastoralists**

This study has argued that understanding contemporary Eritrea requires understanding of the history of its overlapping kingdoms, colonial powers and its many wars. Indeed, the sense of identity, wellbeing, homeland and mobility of its populations, inside and outside the country, are mainly related to these. Beni-Amer religious beliefs, cultural identity, modes of subsistence, and their present state of livelihood and cultural transformation meticulously replicate the socio-political history and geography of their region. Over two millennia of overlapping kingdoms cast a long shadow on local cultural identity. The study has set out a detailed history within which the transformations in Beni-Amer existence that are its focus can be understood. We can re-cap this history at its broadest as follows. Spanning the first to the seventh century the Aksumites left Orthodox Tewahido Christianity in the

central highlands; the Arab Umayyads, the Ottomans, the Funj Sultanate of Sinnar and Egyptians from the seventh century up to the 1890s bequeathed Islam and Arabisation in the lowlands. The colonial boundaries created by Italian colonisation (1890s-1941) brought together a conglomerate of different ethnic and sub-ethnic groups in their new Eritrea. The Italians not only created land boundaries but also an instantaneous and a long-lasting split of these people from their kin in neighbouring countries. Respondents affirmed that this split had weakened the Beni-Amer and caused a 'blurred sense of homeland', complicating their traditional notion of ancestral homeland.

In 1941 Eritrea became a British protectorate and after nearly a decade of debate by the United Nations it was federated with Ethiopia in 1952. The Ethiopian government of Haile Selassie oppressed and side-lined the Muslims of Eritrea, seeded religious and ethnic enmities among the inhabitants and finally unilaterally abrogated the federation. The Eritrean war for independence followed, from 1961-91. The devastating effects of the war were detailed in chapters four and five, including the impoverishment and dislocation of the Beni-Amer. Despite Eritrea gaining independence in 1991, the Beni-Amer entered the 'new era' as forgotten refugees in eastern Sudan, their return home blocked, their ability to make a living severely limited, their basic rights and wellbeing often crushed by government actions. Illegal migration grew as a means of escaping the desolate refugee camps.

As key informants explained, pastoralism among the Beni-Amer underwent several significant human-induced and natural challenges over the next five decades. Consequently, the majority of Beni-Amer societies exited pastoralism altogether, adopting alternative livelihoods in urban centres and refugee camps, becoming increasingly mobile outside pastoralism, but also often migrating beyond the region. A crucial finding of this study is that pastoralists leave pastoral livelihoods, but never stop being mobile; they develop a liminal identity connected to pastoralism by their upbringing and to the urban environment by their alternative livelihood. Leaving pastoralism does not therefore mean 'automatic' disconnection from the pastoralist culture of their upbringing: across time and space they engage in new forms of mobility beyond pastoralism. Thus, the study argues that geographers need to investigate the multiple cross-cutting factors which underpin dynamic change to

pastoral systems across time and space. In doing so, it has scrutinised the prevailing wisdom in pastoralism literature, in which pastoralism is understood as a dualism between mobility and settlement, challenging the long-standing perspective in which pastoral mobility is recognised merely as a physical movement vital to harness high temporal and spatial inconsistency of pasture across rangelands (e.g. Krätli et al., 2013; Behnke et al., 2013). This study has demonstrated that pastoralism is a multifaceted system, and that pastoral mobility is more complicated than physical movement alone: rather, it is a crucial mechanism for pastoralist societies to formulate their sense of homeland, identity and wellbeing even after they no longer practice pastoralism as their predominant livelihood strategy.

We have seen in the study that key informants explain Beni-Amer pastoral mobility as being facilitated by seasonal cyclic mobility, environmental knowledge and social relations. The available literature does not talk extensively about social relations; for example, how pastoral societies facilitate access to pasture is little explored. One school of thought considers pastoral mobility to be driven by environmental knowledge. This school of thought views pastoral mobility as ecologically rational in environments characterised by volatile natural resources (see Niamir-Fuller, 1998; Thébaud and Batterbury, 2001; Turner, 2011; Krätli, 2013; Asaka et al., 2016; Wario et al., 2016). Others view pastoral mobility as driven by a combination of both environmental knowledge and local pastoralist knowledge (Oba and Kotile, 2001; Eriksen, 2007; Martin et al., 2016). Among the Beni-Amer for example local pastoralist knowledge includes knowledge of livestock breed and of maintaining social relations such as reciprocity. In another outlook it is important for researchers to distinguish between the mobility of pastoralists and their herds: this view recognises that many pastoralist households have become sedentary while their herds remain mobile (Adriansen, 2008). Challenging some of these views, this study has found that among the Beni-Amer with dwindling herd-sizes livestock mobility has become short radius, limited to the proximity of the pastoralists' homes; livestock are usually shepherded by the elderly and young girls, and often return to their enclosure at night. Meanwhile the adult males become ex-herders, increasingly mobile in other ways and in search of alternative income-generating activities.



Adriansen (2008) regards mobility as unnecessary for ethnic identity, but the findings of this study lead us to conclude that amongst pastoralists generally pastoral mobility is not 'purely' the movement of livestock from one pasture to another; it is also a practice that influences the construction of pastoralists' sense of cultural identity and values by maintaining social networks, and it is integral to place attachments. Furthermore, key informants reported that geographically fragmented and seasonally varied areas grazed by Beni-Amer livestock were brought together through pastoral households' movement and were perceived as intact ancestral homeland. They demonstrated that their ancestral homeland had been established by centuries of pastoral mobility and because of this it was understood as a whole, connected and utilised between dry and wet seasons. And they argued that their cultural identity was closely related to their religious and herding practice while their wellbeing and the wellbeing of their livestock were integral to pastoral mobility.

This study has found that pastoral mobility among the Beni-Amer depended on several factors including variability of rainfall and drought cycles, security and conflicts, land access and tenure, herd composition and herd size, household size, age, gender and availability of labour and clan movement. Respondents identified the critical factors that culminated in the termination of Beni-Amer pastoralism. Among these were increasing drought frequencies, various forms of agricultural encroachment reducing pastoralist access to lands, expanding industrial development, such as mining, whose monopoly of land included intruding pastoralists being shot by security forces, and of course war: among its many destructive effects were enforced conscription, large tracts of land becoming inaccessible buffer-zones, and other areas unusable due to leftover landmines.

While detailing the destructive changes their lives had undergone key informants also demonstrated in great depth how at its most fundamental Beni-Amer cultural identity, religion and sense of homeland was shaped by the socio-political history and geography of their regions. The historical influences of the overlapping kingdoms discussed in chapter four for example were observed in contemporary Beni-Amer religious beliefs and cultural identity and in everyday practices. The combination of Islamic faith and cultural traditions was demonstrated by

respondents and observed in fieldwork herding practices. For example, the Islamic concept of *Barakah* (blessing) and cultural tradition dictates the day-to-day herding practices and other ways of living amongst the Beni-Amer; and this matched the findings by studies which considered mobility critical for defining pastoral identity (Cole, 1975; Dyson Hudson and Dyson Hudson, 1980; Chatty, 1986; Salzman, 1995; Loftsdottir, 2001; Igwe, 2006). Key informants demonstrated for this study the cultural significance of mobility, such as how mobility is related to wealth and to livestock breed, and that owners of large cattle and camel herds were the most mobile among the Beni-Amer. Moreover, and relevant to the developing narrative of declining pastoralism, key informants (Beni-Amer elders) indicated that mobility was the main fabric that kept the Beni-Amer socially intact under one ruling house despite geographical dispersal in the dry and wet seasons. The relationship between times of mobility, camping and social and cultural events was also confirmed. This study has therefore argued that the history, modern transformations and individual experiences and values of the Beni-Amer are all tied to and can only be understood by reference to their pastoral mobility; pastoral mobility is absolutely integral to Beni-Amer cultural identity.

This study has shown another aspect of cultural identity and pastoralism that goes against a long-held orthodoxy. In this case it is the presumption that nomadic peoples are only loosely related to the land they use. Respondents demonstrated that rangeland grazed by Beni-Amer livestock 'is land grazed by the livestock of our ancestors'. Thus, pastoral mobility plays a vital role in the imaginary demarcation of the homeland of the Beni-Amer. Key informants asserted uncontested ownership of the land that traditionally came under Beni-Amer pastoral mobility, land that now straddles three sovereign countries: eastern Sudan, northern and western Eritrea and parts of northwestern Ethiopia. Respondents stated that the Beni-Amer in Eritrea and the Beni-Amer of Sudan are *Hawo-toom*, meaning their brothers. Despite this, their 'blurred' sense of homeland cuts across national boundaries and various ethnic societies, a fact exploited by the Eritrean and Sudanese governments: the Eritrean Beni-Amer were forcibly conscripted to the Eritrean army while the Sudanese Beni-Amer were forcibly recruited to the Sudanese army as bloody war unfolded between the countries.

The concept of home is widely researched in the literature (for example Tucker, 1994; Ingold, 1995; Ginsberg, 1999; Basu, 2004; Mallett, 2004; Blunt, 2006; Ingold, 2006; Olesen, 2010; Lui, 2014). This study has gone on to build on their findings, adding that among the Beni-Amer home reflects mobility, culture and religious practices. As we have seen, key respondents reported that for Beni-Amer the concept of *mobile-home*, (for example, the *Aagnet* and *Bashor*) is influenced by nature, culture and religion, being practical, portable, and designed to allow the expression of their Islamic faith.

Another of the key themes this study has addressed is wellbeing. Wellbeing is a growing research area, yet lacks universally agreed definition. Little has been written on what attributes wellbeing possesses among pastoralist societies (see McFadden, 1995; Lesorogol, 2008; Zinsstag et al., 2011). Focus group respondents stated that 'Beni-Amer without livestock mobility is like birds without wings'. Thus, pastoral mobility is central to animal wellbeing, and that is closely related to the wellbeing of pastoralists themselves in the form of status and reciprocity, food and transport provision. This study has therefore argued that restricting pastoralist mobility jeopardises the wellbeing of pastoralist families and their animals. Elements of wellbeing among the Beni-Amer relate to their opportunity for movement: the combined data from this study revealed that lack/restriction of mobility led to poverty and disconnection among the Beni-Amer at home and in the diaspora; and im/mobility in the in-between had a significant impact on the lives of the illegalised migrants.

### **8.3.2. Identity, mobility, homeland and wellbeing among Beni-Amer in the in-between**

The steady disappearance of pastoralism in western Eritrea and eastern Sudan led to what we call Beni-Amer 'pastoralist in transition' societies, who used their non-pastoral mobility to pursue alternative livelihoods. This study has added to understanding of the departure from pastoralism to alternative lifestyles by showing how the processes of non-pastoral mobility are integral to the formation of pastoralists in transition identities. It has shown how that process itself converts herders into asylum seekers and diaspora communities, hence leading to the (re)construction of their sense of identity across time and space. Interviewees

among youth ex-herders affirmed that migration is considered as a pathway out of their economic and political hopelessness. The multiple forms of im/mobility this entails match what Collyer (2010) terms 'fragmented journeys'. Interviewees' explanations of these journeys gave us illuminating ways of defining varied aspects of their experience: these 'fragmentations' are characterised by multiple 'stillness', 'stuckness', 'waiting' and 'uncertainty'. We saw how for many interviewees their degrading and humiliating experiences of fragmented journeys significantly impacted on their lives, crushing their sense of individuality in the long-term. Often, they do not want to share their fragmented mobility experiences with back-home-kin, fellow diasporas and the host societies, considering them a source of shame which goes against their pastoral cultural identity, an identity associated for them with strength, courage and bravery. Therefore, most of what they encountered in the in-between remains private.

Another crucial finding from discussions with respondents has been that many pastoralists leave pastoral livelihoods, but never stop being mobile; they engage in new forms of mobility. Mobility outside pastoralism becomes their ultimate life strategy driven by necessity. In the early stages after leaving pastoralism ex-herders would become mobile between local towns for day-wage jobs and the villages in the rangeland, thereby connecting pastoralism and the urban centre; hence, they retained some aspect of their pastoral identities while gradually 'assimilating' into the urban societies. Interviewees demonstrated that because of their everyday rural-urban and urban-rural mobility across time and space they developed a liminal sense of identity between pastoralist and urban wage worker. Thus, this study has argued that for pastoralists in transition everyday mobility is not merely physical mobility, it incorporates a profound cultural transformation. Again opposing the prevailing wisdom in the migration literature, we have seen that the decision to migrate among ex-pastoralists is little encouraged by relatives at home and by those already in the diaspora; rather the diasporas recommend ex-pastoralist kin not to pursue illegalised routes. Ex-pastoralist respondents reported the warnings they received from their diaspora-kin, and were acutely aware of the perilous journey between Khartoum and Lampedusa. Yet they still follow illegalised migration routes at the hand of human smugglers; therefore, this study argued

illegal migration is self-motivated migration while often resulting in being ostracized by kin.

The case of the Beni-Amer ex-herders has demonstrated how identity often complicates mobility: indeed, usually identity informs the (im)mobility of individual and group. For example, as found by Paul (2011), mobility among Philippine migrant workers journey was characterised as step-by-step, or step-wise mobility towards their desired destination in the EU, USA and Canada. By contrast this study has presented the Beni-Amer ex-herders' mobility as characterised by multiple 'unwise and desperate steps' towards intra- and international migration. Ex-herder respondents outlined how migrating beyond their homeland involved illegalised mobility even within Sudan: 'we may travel between the villages and Kassala town as we want but from Kassala town to Khartoum needs a Sudanese ID card and most don't have Sudanese ID'. Although they had been in Sudan since birth they had no mobility rights. Thus, this study has shown that for Beni-Amer without Sudanese ID cards intrastate movement is more difficult in Eritrea and Sudan than in the EU. Illegalised migrants without documents can travel within EU countries and can even work in the illegalised labour market. Since for Beni-Amer ex-herders legally entering countries with better economic opportunities is impossible, many feel they must surmount legal requirements. The study has argued therefore that the identity and wellbeing of illegalised migrants are factors in their choice to take the illegal route.

In the available literature, illegal migration is extensively researched, but illegalised migrants' experiences and practices of in-between mobility are not. This study has argued that within their in-between mobility illegalised migrants' journeys are complex and cannot be understood using traditional migration dichotomies between im/mobility, pull/push and start/destination. Interviewees demonstrated the 'in-between' phase of their journey: they used their pastoralist resilience, for example, resistance to thirst, and capacity for long-distance walking, to endure extreme physical and psychological hardship on their journey, and in some instances drew on their pastoral experiences to journey northwards using the stars or following birds to discover an oasis. Bissell and Fuller (2011, p. 3) explain that transport geographers regard stillness as 'dead time'. Contrary to this

understanding discussions in this study revealed that stillness is not all negative and empty, but crucial in the lives of illegalised migrants. Indeed, it can also save a life. Some ex-herder respondents acknowledged that they achieved their dreams because of still moments. For example, particularly when crossing the Mediterranean and from Calais to the UK still moments were important in the lives of many illegalised migrants. This study has therefore argued that awareness of stillness could help understanding of how illegalised migrants experience mobility, though methods to examine such stillness remain difficult to formulate. Indeed, it is extremely challenging for research to be present and observe the still moments experienced by illegalised migrants as they unfold. Often, still moments are perilous moments for illegalised migrants; they usually occur away from the eyes of authorities and involve breaking the law, in dangerous places. Thus, they are not easily accessible to researchers.

Interviews revealed how illegal migration routes operate in accordance with regional and global geopolitical circumstances; and this study has argued conflict is not only a major cause of people's displacement, it also shapes the illegal migration routes by which migrants escape it. Moreover, discussions illustrated illegal migration routes operate in line with gender and sexuality, religion and country of origin. Respondents said that in-between illegalised migrants purposefully distanced themselves from their homeland; they distanced 'themselves from true themselves' by changing their names and country of origin, while women pretended to be men to avoid abuse. Therefore, illegalised migrants in the in-between continually rewrote themselves in relation to the situation they encounter. Ex-herders retain some of their pastoral identities while constantly adopting cultural shifts across time and space.

This study has found that in the context of illegalised migrants wellbeing is relative: that is, situationally-related to time, place and circumstance. Interviewees explicated what wellbeing meant for them when they were in Khartoum before setting out for Libya differed from when they were in the Sahara desert, in a Libyan jail, when they were on a sea journey or in the EU. However, even with this relative sense of wellbeing across time and space for illegalised migrants, their wellbeing was always intimately related to unconstrained and unfragmented mobility: less

fragmentation meant fewer stopping places, less financial extortion and reduced physical and psychological abuse. Certainly, in the experiences of many illegalised migrants fragmentation does not mean stillness, it means disjointed, uncertain and broken journeys. The wellbeing elements mentioned by interviewees could be summarised as financial, spiritual, social and physical wellbeing, all combined to facilitate mobility away from the hardships encountered in the in-between mobility. Even a slight change constitutes an element of wellbeing.

### **8.3.3. Homeland, identity, mobility and wellbeing among Beni-Amer diasporas**

This study has argued that Beni-Amer diaspora formation transcends the contemporary conceptualization of the diaspora as bounded based on sameness: thus for example cultural, homeland and religious boundaries are impermeable (see Safran, 1999). Unbounded transit means boundaries are maintained but are highly permeable (see Brubaker, 2005). Diaspora is a process not an entity but a process shaped across time and space (Mavroudi, 2007). For example, interviewees explained that they were not only linked with their homeland but also with other widespread Beni-Amer diaspora networks; therefore, diasporas are not only sensed as a collective responsibility to the ancestral homeland but also to members of Beni-Amer societies scattered worldwide. It has been explained how several of this study's findings regarding the Beni-Amer diaspora have mirrored key conclusions by eminent scholars on the topic. For example, Safran (1991) labels diaspora as a homeland-focused social formation infused with a collective identity and shared experiences; Beni-Amer interviewees demonstrated that their diaspora communities are grounded on commonalities and maintained by upholding of the ancestral homeland and kinship ties. These include sustaining their loyalty to their people and place of origin through their economic contribution to fellow-travellers in their time of need. Clifford (1997) conceptualises diaspora as an experience of fluidity and hybridity; hence, diaspora formation is the product of social interaction in space and time. Interviewees elucidated how their diaspora identity is informed by their everyday interaction with diverse other diaspora communities: thus, this study has found diaspora identity and sense of wellbeing to be informed by daily interaction with fellow diasporas. This demonstrates that the contemporary dichotomy between host and diaspora community is ambiguous and must be further

scrutinised to state the distinction between who is the diaspora and who is the host: the diaspora across time and space becomes a host community for other newly-forming diasporas.

This study has built on the definitions of diaspora given by Brubaker (2005) and Mavroudi (2007), which emphasise its fluidity and dynamism, the latter describing it as 'malleable, hybrid and multiple', and 'based on sameness'. Findings in this study show that the reconstruction of Beni-Amer identity in the diaspora is based as much on differences as on sameness, in constantly shifting and permeable dichotomies. For example, amongst the Beni-Amer diaspora communities start in smaller groupings based on a single region, ethnicity or religion who consider themselves alike; they are therefore based on sameness but, also, it is a sameness they perceive as being brought about by their difference from the rest of the Eritrean ethnic groups. Therefore, the study has argued that no single mechanism could describe the way diasporas (re)construct identity; rather the diaspora's reconstruction of identity, attachment to homeland and societies of origin and conceptualisation of wellbeing is a dynamic process continuously moving back and forth between the 'home/host and self/other'; diaspora is not only about dispersal but also about refiguring, negotiation and mobilisation of the dispersed population across time and space.

Mobility and identity are entwined factors that determine diaspora (im)mobility. According to respondents, diasporas could be divided into two: internationally mobile diasporas and internationally immobile ones. Often the internationally mobile diaspora had a successful asylum case, and through neutralisation received UK passports, meaning their mobility was not restricted to the UK. The internationally immobile diasporas could not travel and so never visited their homeland, with consequent diminishing attachment to their past. Respondents said that the possibility of future mobility influenced identity reconstruction and wellbeing in the host country and their negotiation of space in their homeland communities. For example, members of Beni-Amer diasporas visiting their homeland have been observed socialising with fellow home-visiting diasporas, and certain restaurants, cafés and shops have become common meeting points for these visitors. Therefore, this study has shown that wellbeing and mobility are entangled



factors in the reconstruction of identity among the diaspora. This study has argued that mobility, identity and wellbeing are three distinct yet highly interconnected aspects of diaspora lives, and these themes are closely related to the individual's immigration and economic status in their host country. It is therefore worth distinguishing between diasporas' status because not all diasporas can become internationally mobile. Those groups among the diasporas who are socially, politically and economically marginalised and cannot enjoy future international mobility are often invisible in diaspora studies.

#### **8.4. Conclusion and implications of this study**

This chapter has provided the main findings of the study across the three analysis chapters. Data gathered in the first phase revealed dynamic political, social, economic and environmental changes in the last five decades in the lands inhabited by the Beni-Amer people, effectively ending 'traditional' nomadic pastoralism among them, and generating a new sense of their relation to place and history based on their experience of transition. Data gathered in the second phase of this study revealed that pastoralists in transition develop a liminal identity linked to pastoralism by their cultural identity and upbringing and also to city life through day-wage jobs and their connections with diverse others. Ex-herders were found to be frequently mobile between local towns and villages in their rangelands; this gradually extended to main cities, and often involved them ultimately becoming illegalised migrants. Data collected about the fragmented journey undertaken by many such individuals in the in-between phase of this study revealed that ex-herders, while moving from their homeland to a new destination, experience multiple mobilities and immobilities that impact on their ability to reconstruct and negotiate identities in new destinations. Ethnographic observation and interviews in the diaspora in the study's third phase confirmed that cultural identity does not travel across time and space as some sort of stable and unitary condition; rather it 'devolves' through time, and under the influence of such experiences as social exclusion and geographical distance. Furthermore, respondents in the diaspora explained the feelings of homeland, belonging and identity overlap and interact with their ongoing, changing sense of themselves rather than being replaced across time and space. The combined data from this study have revealed that construction of

identity, sense of homeland and conceptualisation of wellbeing differ situationally across generations of Beni-Amer and can transform across time and space. This research has found that since the 1950s the Beni-Amer have experienced sudden and profound socio-political and geographic change that has brought their mobile pastoralism to an end. The study concludes that the themes of the thesis - mobility, homeland, identity and wellbeing - are complex and cannot be easily untangled; the presence or absence, alteration or limitation of any one of these themes affects the rest.

This study has scrutinised pastoral mobility beyond its contemporary theoretical and conceptual framework and concluded that pastoral mobility has a deeper meaning to pastoralist societies beneath its merely practical determination of how they live their lives. It can be characterised as a survival system in environments distinguished by transient concentration of pasture and water across time and space, certainly, but is also an important mechanism through which pastoralists formulate their sense of homeland, identity and wellbeing. This is a significant conclusion and challenges the contemporary understanding of pastoral mobility as a lifestyle based merely on physical movement, defined as a binary opposite of settlement. It could help pastoralists to debate and establish rootedness and attachment to the land and could contribute to future action intended to enhance their wellbeing. As part of the analysis, the study has argued that those binary boundaries between the sedentary and the nomadic are fuzzy. Thus, irrespective of whether the people concerned are practising pastoralists or have dropped out of that way of life, mobility happens in all cases and everywhere, but its purpose and practice differ across time and space. The proposed dichotomy between mobility and settling down is untenable and should be subjected to further investigation by geographers.

Drop-out pastoralists' mobility is invisible in the available literature. These people are perceived as becoming sedentary communities; leaving pastoralism is equated with leaving mobility. This view masks their lives after leaving pastoralism. Challenges encountered by these people have remained untold and little-researched. Respondents in this study reported that their mobility increased in frequency and distance after they left pastoralism; they affirmed their engagement

in non-pastoral mobility in search of alternative livelihoods in new, often urban environments and away from home. Therefore, this study concludes that leaving pastoralism does not mean leaving mobility, it means engaging in multiple im/mobilities beyond pastoralism, with many individuals gravitating towards illegal migration we shall come to this later. This thesis speaks to the available literature on home/land, fragmented journeys and diaspora and has made a potentially significant contribution by subjecting the prevailing conceptualisation of those concepts - i.e. home/land, fragmented journeys and diaspora - to thorough scrutiny.

In pastoral societies, the home/land is the produce and product of everyday practice and interaction with the environment. For instance, pastoral mobility underpins pastoralists' everyday existence, and across time and space, the rangeland is internalised valued and sensed as home/land and becoming an unexchangeable part of their identity. Conceptually this thesis has stated that every part of the home/land could be felt like home but not every house is felt like home/land. For instance, pastoral societies formulate home/land, identities and well-being within the two extremities of nomadism and sedentarism; therefore, the intimacy of home/land is about neither fixity nor fluidity, but is, rather, connected with confidential feelings of the self, including the sense of identity, culture, history and belonging. As we have seen in chapter five, the Beni-Amer refer to the entire rangeland as their home/land regardless of the presence or absence of a house. As a geometric figure, home/land is formulated through centuries of im/mobility. Indeed, across time and space, the Beni-Amer become an integral part of their environment.

Home is not synonymous with a house; home holds deeper status in the heart of the self. Thus, it is the product of a sense of historical belonging that can extend back several centuries to the lives and experiences of the ancestors regardless of whether they were/are sedentary or nomadic. Therefore, making sense of the environment as home/land is not merely the 'lived-experienced' of the individual but is also inherited from the legacy of the ancestors. In the available literature the concept of home has been conceptualised and theorised as a haven; a place of rest, enjoyment and comfort; a physical structure where the dwellers have privacy away from the public; visibly marked as inside and outside. This study rejects that Anglo-European

sedentary-Western-capitalist conception of home as inside/outside, home as synonymous to house as a roof over one's head. Instead, it argues that home/land encompasses the soul and the soil, the feeling of intimacy between people and their environment which emerged from their historical, lived and experienced processes.

Besides, this study explained for nomadic pastoralists home is not synonymous with being 'housed and settled' nor is it clearly segregated from the surrounding environment. Thus, for nomadic pastoralists the concept of home as house is inherently intangible, fluid, characterised by multiplicity and complexity, rather than being based on fixed physical location and distinguished by dualisms such as insideness/outsideness, private/public and so forth. Hence, this thesis maintains that home is not only the inside nor the outside of defined spaces and barriers but both, and the fuzzy boundary between the inside/outside, thus the contemporary inside/outside segregation of the enclosed home and the open environment dichotomy is irrelevant among pastoralists. Moreover, regardless of it being the place of security or insecurity, of comfort or discomfort, the sense of home/land is connected to the core feelings of those who call it home/land. Indeed, people might get displaced from the place they name home/land physically but emotionally they remain associated with their home/land.

Therefore, emotionally and in terms of identity, departure from the feelings of the home/land is not really possible even after generations. Those from Africa will remain Africans, those from Asia will remain Asians, those from Europe will always remain Europeans, and so forth, regardless of the decades they may have lived away from their home/land. For example, those living or even those born in the diaspora mention their belonging to their ancestral home/land as the primary element of their identity, and their belonging to the host country second. It is common among the diaspora in the UK to firstly affirm I am Eritrean, I am Pakistani, or Sudanese and so forth, and then identifying the UK as a felt home/land comes second or is not mentioned at all. In many case the sense of belonging to the UK is reduced to nothing beyond the helpful capacity to possess a UK passport. However, determining the reasons behind such senses of belonging is outside the scope of this study. It is worth noticing, however, that the feelings and belonging to root home/land can only be expunged and replaced on paper, but in the feelings of the 'self' the ancestral

home/land cast a long shadow on the lives of people living away from it regardless of the extent of time and space by which they have been absent from it. For many respondents, despite dropping out of pastoralism and having moved away from the ancestral home/land the 'true feeling' of their Beni-Amer home/land cannot be exchanged, reproduced or replaced. Indeed, it is not possible to *inhale and exhale at the same time*; thus, reproducing home/land away from the home/land is a rejected practice, perceived by respondents as no more than a vain and imperfect replication. It is the struggles of the 'Self' to establish existence in a 'new place' with a *deficient sense* of belonging, where the self continually exists with a 'rift-feeling' between the here and now, and the there and away.

Respondents defined illegalised migrant journeys as fragmented im/mobilities, characterised by multiple returns, stillness, stuckness, waiting, fear and uncertainty. While respondents have no legal means of migration out of Africa, as this study has shown, pastoralists in transition increasingly become asylum seekers and diaspora communities through illegal migration routes; and their experience of the fragmented im/mobility affects their ability to successfully reconstruct their lives in their new destinations. This thesis has developed thematic understanding of movement in illegalised migration and identity; identity and mobility cannot easily be untangled. In the context of illegalised migrants' identity, this is underpinned by the particular mobility system of transport and migration trajectories that they undertake to make the journey from their homeland. Therefore, holistic understanding of mobility and migration requires paying attention to the entanglement of 'mobility and identity'. In the context of current migration regimes some mobilities are therefore valid and others not: indeed, as Blunt (2007) observed, mobility is inseparably bound up with the 'embodied politics of differences': the traveller's identity - who is moving, where from and where to - is at the centre of migration regimes in the contemporary mobile world. This study has argued that boundaries and borders are tremendously relevant to the dynamic world of movement in the twenty-first century, and so the state is very much a strong agent in dissuading or permitting mobility. Accordingly, membership of a particular society, country and social class among other things plays a crucial role in the mobility undertaken by the individual. As we have seen throughout the thesis, for the disadvantaged societies, mainly from the global south, mobility is bounded

by significant risk to human life, including death and torture, and is characterised by delays, blocks, stopping and long waits. Indeed, mobility and identity are intertwined: mirroring Cresswell (2006) this study argued that 'mobility is a resource that is differently accessed' in relation to the economic and class status, and citizenship and identity of the individual. For those who cannot secure legal entry in the existing 'thicker, taller, and more highly securitised', borders and strict state-controlled visa administrations, fragmented journeys are the desperate options for them in their last option as illegalised migrants.

This study has further revealed that while illegalised migration has been extensively studied, it is largely only done so by investigating the immigrants' receiving countries with the aim of increasing measures to deter their unauthorised entry. Much policy attention is given to where illegalised migrants arrive and how they can be stopped, and therefore the individual suffering endured by those illegalised people, or what pushed them out of their home in the first place, is of no relevance to some policymakers. Contemporary narration of Europe's migration and the kind of refugee undertaking it is dominated by the language of 'crisis'. This is intended to traumatise and enforce public opinion by portraying migrants and refugees as an overflow, a swamp and a flooding that encompasses tremendous risks to the receiving societies; and this discourse is currently holding the political ground in the EU. Consequently, right wing anti-immigration politicians are increasingly elected for office. For instance, recent elections in Poland, Italy and Austria have primarily been based on anti-migration rhetoric. As a result, following arrival in the EU migrants are treated as 'unwanted identified marginalised'. Hence they must open a new file of suffering in the land they have fled to in hope of finding a 'good life'. Because these migrants are socially constructed as illegal their mobility is uninterruptedly blocked. Likewise, finding themselves to be culturally, socially and economically at odds with their new environment, their identity often complicates their social and economic mobility. Thus even after having been granted leave to remain they form inward-facing community groupings that further impair their capacity to be opening and trusting of the other. And of course this works the other way round too, with communities remaining suspicious and closed to their new arrivals. Therefore, this thesis argues that identity informs the (im)mobility of the individual and the group.

Furthermore, this study has challenged the longstanding dichotomies around pull/push factors, political/economic, refugees/migrants, transit/settlements and trafficking/smuggling, and starts/ends. In this study fragmented journeys are viewed as never-ending chains of movements. Fragmented journeys can therefore be understood as a continuation of much longer life histories embodied in a much longer chain of events in the life of the individual. For example, as we have seen in chapter five, the Beni-Amer displacement from their homeland in Eritrea started in the 1950s and those born in the refugee camps in 1980s and 1990s undertake illegal migration routes towards the EU. Thus, the roots of the current migration go back to the events of the 1940s and 1950s. This study argues therefore that solutions to the current migration crisis from Africa and elsewhere requires solving the structural political and economic glitches that originated during the colonial era and the problems such as civil wars and corruption that were created by the dictatorial regimes that replaced colonialism. Indeed, the political hopelessness underpins the economic hopelessness in the top refugee- and migrant-producing countries today. Therefore, this brings us to conclude that the current categorisation of displaced people as economic/political refugees is ill-considered, ineffective and irrelevant to formulating an analysis that is capable of addressing migration issues for both the sending and receiving countries.

As discussed throughout the thesis, whether in pastoralism, in the fragmented journey or amongst the diaspora, mobility is *far more than* getting from A to B regardless of whether this takes the form of a straight line or other patterns. Indeed, revealing what is the *far more than* will engage social scientists for many years to come. In the relevant literature movement is the central idea in mobility and migration research. However, socially insignificant movements from departure to a destination are represented on a map by straight lines and arrows, circles and curves and even zigzag lines to show returns and so on. It is worth noting, however, that at best these lines being straight, circles or zigzags only provide some vague directions on the map. This study has argued that mobility is not merely about these lines and arrows, but is socially, economically, politically and geographically significant. At best, for example, lines on the map of the Sahara desert representing the fragmented journeys undertaken by illegalised migrants could help us to describe the relationship between the locations and directions of illegalised

migrations, but these lines cannot shed any light on the how, why and who that we need to know to understand why this particular mobility is happening. The fear, uncertainty, abuse, stillness, waiting, stuckness and death and experienced by those undertaking the journey is invisible when the journey is reduced to those simple indications on a map, as if mobility is happening in political and social nothingness.

The fragmented journeys are of course more interesting and important than mere lines. They are a socially and politically rich practice which leaves a lasting impact on the individual illegalised migrant's body and emotions. Fragmented journeys are complex power relations in which illegalised migrants often lose agency to traffickers, smugglers and transporters, enduring abuse that crushes their identity with significant long-term impact on their confidence and self-worth. Indeed, the fragmented journeys leave their dent in the topography too; for example, routes crisscrossing the landscape alter its shape and use by other people. Scars on the skin and broken bones on the body due to torture and unwanted pregnancy due to sexual abuse, or witnessing such inhuman treatment, all have a long-lasting psychological impact on the mind of those enduring them long afterwards. Therefore, the fragmented journeys are fragmented not only because they involve broken, convoluted and unpredictable journeys over geographical distance but mainly because they fragment the ability of the illegalised migrant to reconstruct his/her identity and self-worth long after the journey is over. It is worth noticing, however, that fragmented journeys are also platforms where illegalised migrants pull on their cultural background to show creativity and flexibility in the face of hardship. For example, as we have seen in chapter six, the ex-herder respondents showed resilience in the face of difficulty by enduring thirst and reading their environment. For instance, they observed the stars to navigate northward and found an oasis in the Sahara desert by watching the movement of birds. Ex-herder respondents in the remote interviewing demonstrated that those from a pastoralist background were better able than their urban-based counterparts to endure the perilous fragmented journey in the Sahara.

This study, in line with the available literature, maintains that diaspora involves the dispersal of people from the place they call the historical ancestral homeland to a 'new' place that is a host country of the 'other'. That is, a place of 'floating



destination' where they perceive themselves as separated from their societies of origin, scattered and diluted among the 'other' host societies. In the contemporary literature diasporas are understood as lives straddling between 'here and there'. Indeed, however, this study revealed that the 'here' and the 'there' are not often clearly visible distinguished; rather, for some diasporas the concept of 'there' overlaps. For instance, respondents explained an awareness of identities straddling what I have termed "multiple there'-and-here' across time and space. As we have seen in chapter five the ancestral home of the Beni-Amer is a 'blurred homeland' of which their consciousness involves aspects of collective memory, passion and vision which span a single national identity in its present arrangement.

Therefore, their conception of diaspora challenges the prevailing idea of 'here' and 'there' in diaspora literature. Indeed, although the 'here' is used by interviewees to describe the host country the concept of 'there' relates to more than one country. It meant Eritrea or eastern Sudan, or Eritrea and Sudan, precisely meaning the traditional ancestral homeland as it was formulated through pastoral mobility over vast geography which spread across formal national borders created by colonialism. Thus, this study revealed colonially-imposed national boundaries were largely irrelevant in the awareness of some respondents. Indeed, as it has been detailed in chapter four and chapter five these borders were established with no regard to the local inhabitants' history and way of life; ethnic groups and their historical ancestral homeland have been split between colonially-created artificial neighbouring countries. Thus, colonial borders are irrelevant for some respondents hence their collective memory oriented towards their ancestral homeland as it was formulated through pastoral mobility challenges the prevailing wisdom 'here' and 'there' in diaspora studies.

I confess reading chapter seven of the study could have an unsettling effect on the reader. Admittedly, chapter seven uncovered commonly untold, and little-researched concepts connected with deeper feelings kept private by many respondents in the diaspora. Being an insider researcher, I had come closer to the heart of the respondents. Indeed, as discussed in the methodology chapter heart-to-heart conversation can be established when the researcher is the researched and researcher, part and parcel of the communities they are studying. It is worth

noticing, however, being an insider does not mean an advantage over an outsider but rather a different stance from which thick analysis can be produced. This study revealed being British, and the feeling of Britishness, whatever it might be and embrace, only slightly touched the heart of the diasporas. In other words, respondents see that there is no explicitly defined British identity to frame themselves around; instead, they see Britishness as multicultural heterogeneous identities and belongingness. Consequently, it does not require them to remove from themselves their current identity and sense of belonging in order for them to put on a 'new' identity that is felt to belong exclusively to the host country.

Therefore, identity construction among diasporas revolves around religion, country of origin and ethnic groupings. Pre-existing diaspora groupings much influence the newly forming diasporas; thus, this study has argued that the host/diaspora dichotomy as it is specified in the contemporary diaspora literature is better understood as a fuzzy boundary. Diasporas often are oriented to ancestral homeland and belongingness to the host country is often reduced to having or not having its passport. Indeed, the discussion in chapter seven showed that diaspora identities and Britishness are two dissimilar things. For that matter diaspora communities are inward-oriented multi-layered groupings. Religion, ethnicity and country of origin form key such layers among diaspora community formation; while cross-cultural, particularly cross religion, community formation is rare. For instance, community formation containing same sex partners, white and black Christians and Muslims are unthinkable for such diasporas. Therefore, this study has argued that diasporas and Britishness are unlikely to be compatible; across time and space several diaspora groupings forming on the basis of shared religion might be the central aspect of the emerging reality in the current divided sense of belonging and identity in the UK.

Furthermore, this study has argued that in diaspora as in pastoralism and the in-between mobility, wellbeing, identity and homeland attachment are dynamic and interlocked elements in the life of the diasporas. Current diaspora scholarships show much interest in what it means to be a diaspora and how diasporas are formed, mainly by employing examples of the Jews, the Armenians and the Greeks as a benchmark. While several authors including Johnson (2007), Axel (2004), Baumann (2000), Vertovec (2000), Butler (2001), Van Hear (1998), Cohen (1997), Tölölyan

(1996), and Safran (1991) identify diaspora by listing their typological characteristics, one common assessment among all the works by these prominent writers is that they treat diaspora as a homogenous group. This is done regardless of the history of their dispersal; members of the diasporas are viewed as if they all face a common fate in their host countries. On the contrary to this view, this study has argued that diasporas cannot be generalised as one homogenous community sharing a common fate in this way. Instead, diasporas are constituted by multiple heterogeneous groups, and their fate in their host countries cannot be generalised. Moreover, there is no linear process through which diasporas move from their ancestral homeland to their host country. Thus, diasporas across time and space establish themselves in multiple places that spread between countries and continents. For example, the Beni-Amer diasporas in the UK were diasporas in Sudan and other countries. Moreover, the process through which diasporas become citizens of their host country is complicated and may take decades, and even then it might prove impossible for some. For example, respondents explained that rejected asylum seekers in the UK awaiting deportation could wait for up to ten years or more in a limbo-like state, all the while being forbidden to work or travel of their own accord outside the UK. Therefore, diasporas can be divided into two groups based on their mobility rights: those unable to move or visit their homeland, and those who were able to maintain that access. Those unable to visit their homeland demonstrated profound disappointment with life in the diaspora, and their contact with the left-back-home kin and place attachments weakened over time. They reported an anomic sense of not belonging - 'I belong to no one' was a prevailing view among them in interview - and confided that they felt excluded from both their sending and reception communities over time. This study concludes that internationally immobile diasporas risk suffering rootlessness and deracination over time and space, in contrast with those internationally mobile diasporas who can sustain connections with their past through homeland visits.

### **8.5. Limitations**

Several significant limitations have been encountered in this study. The first drawback was related to snowball referral, in which some respondents referred their friends and family members to the researcher rather than the researcher

finding the respondents himself; this occasionally meant the process of recruitment became out of the researcher's control. However, as discussed in chapter three, this limitation was surmounted by contacting respondents in person, over the phone and by conducting a pilot study. The second major limitation was related to the number of female participants: only 15 out of 91. Although the number of women was less than a quarter of the total number of respondents the researcher considered it a success because of his knowledge of the cultural and religious complexity of recruiting female participants for studies in the traditional Beni-Amer society. Finally, as discussed in the preceding chapters the largest part of the Beni-Amer homeland falls under present-day Eritrea. Indeed, the centre of Beni-Amer history and culture must be there, but sadly it was impossible for the researcher to carry out fieldwork in Eritrea because of its political problems. Fieldwork could only be conducted among Beni-Amer near the border between eastern Sudan and western Eritrea. Nevertheless, the researcher believes this research is an important starting point for future investigation into scarcely-explored Beni-Amer society.

## **8.6. Recommendations for further research**

The research undertaken for this thesis has emphasised a number of research areas in which further investigation would be beneficial. Several topics where information is lacking or particular questionable understanding has prevailed were thoroughly highlighted in the literature review. Whilst some of these proposed themes were addressed by the research in this thesis, others remain. In particular, this research has been stressing the need for pastoral mobility to be scrutinised beyond its current theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Significantly this research has pioneered and called for a further investigation into how mobile pastoralists formulate their sense of homeland, identity and wellbeing across time and space. Besides, this thesis has addressed the large issue of what happens to pastoralists after leaving pastoralism, where they go and in what form of mobility they engage in a fresh territory. Certainly, this is a suitable topic for geographers to investigate further. Illegalised migrants' im/mobility has been extensively discussed in this research, but it has unlocked more questions than answers, particularly regarding the lifetime impact of the inhumane treatment migrants suffer in their fragmented journeys. The study has also called for further research on the role of stillness on the

illegalised migrants' mobility. It has pioneered and investigated how diasporas' identity, wellbeing and homeland have been transformed across time and space while calling for further research to understand how those from blurred homelands maintain a relation to the place they call their ancestral home.

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### Appendix 3a. Research participants profile (in eastern Sudan, in-between and the UK).

geographical area and data collections methods		Demography and Number of participants				Key issues discussed and method of analysis
Sudan/Eritrea border In-depth interview Participant observation Focus group discussion	East Kassela	11 Elder participants				With elders; Personal history, experiences, imaginations, the history of the Beni-Amer, homeland livelihoods, herding practices, livestock the war, droughts displacement. Identity, culture, religion, homeland and contemporary livelihood, dwellings and everyday practices. Livestock mobility past and present, impacts on livelihoods, well-being, family and social networks. (Thematic analysis)
		17 Male, 65-86 years old		4 Female 60-73 years old		
		14 Herder participants				
		21 Male, 19-33 years old		0 Female		
	Gash basin	8 Elders participants				With herders; Personal history, experiences, imaginations, everyday herding, identity in the context of Sudan and Eritrea, family attachments and social networks. Livestock herding practices, staying/leaving pastoralism, everyday mobility. Thoughts about wellbeing, homeland and belongingness attachments to ancestral homeland and history. (Thematic analysis)
		6 Male, 59-71 years old		2 Female 60-73 Years old		
		7 Herder participants				
		7 Male, 19-33 years old		0 Female		
In-between In-depth interview Participant observation Focus group discussion	In Kassela city	24 Ex-herder participants				With ex-herders; Personal history, experiences, imagination, identity and belonging in the context ancestral homeland, religion, factors of wellbeing, everyday practices, work, mobility. Peer and kin influences decisions to go back to pastoralism, stay in Sudan or migrate, thoughts about the risk of illegal migration routes, reasons for migration, knowledge of migration routes, financial issues, thoughts about life in diasporas. (Thematic analysis)
		24 Male, 23-37 years old		0 Female		
In-between Remote-interviewing	Out of Khartoum to Libya and EU	11 out of the 24 Ex-herders Participants				In the in-between; The moment and the nature of the movement in the in-between, feelings, experiences and imaginations. (Thematic analysis)
		11 Male, 23-37 years old				
In Diaspora (UK) In-depth interview Participant observation Focus group discussion	Birmingham	15 Diaspora participants				With diasporas; Personal history, experiences, imaginations, everyday life in diaspora, homeland attachment, mobility and travel, homeland politics, family attachments and wider social networks, ways of communication, belonging, identities, religious and other social events, factors of wellbeing. (Thematic analysis)
		9 Male, 37-55 years old		6 Female 33-47 years old		
	London	8 Diaspora participants				
		7 Male 37- 55 years old		1 Female 41 years old		
Total number of participants in three areas	Kassela area	In-between	Diaspora in (UK)		Total	The total is 91 participants because those 11participants in the in-between are out of the 24 ex-herders interviewed in Kassela city.
	68	11	23		91	

### Appendix 3b. Key informants walking-along in-depth interview in Kassela area

Total no. of key informant participants	Code given to elderly interviewees	Description of recruitment activities	Interviewees demography		place of interview	Total number of interviews	Average Length of interviews
			Age range	sex			
23	KI 1up to KI 17	Recruited from extended family networks and snowball effect. 13 out of the total 23 key informants were interviewees contacted on the phone before the actual interviews.	65-86 years	Male	East Kassela rangeland	11	1hour
			59-71 years	Male	Gash basin	6	
	KI, BAf 1-6		60-73 years	Female	East Kassela rangeland	6	45 minutes



### Appendix 3c. Herders walking-along in-depth interview in Kassela area

Total no. of herder participants	Code given to herder interviewees	Description of recruitment activities	Interviewees demography		place of interview	Total number of interviews	Average Length of interviews
			Age range	sex			
21	KI 1up to KI 17	Initially, 6 recruited from extended family networks and friends and the rest recruited using snowball effect. 11 out of the total 21 herders were contacted on the phone before the actual interviews. Their numbers were numbers collected from their relatives in the UK	19-33 years	Male	East Kassela rangeland	14	1hour
	KI, Baf 1-6				Gash basin	7	

### Appendix 3d. Ex-herders walking-along in-depth interview in Kassela area

Total no. of key ex-herders participants	Code given to ex-herder interviewees	Description of recruitment activities	Interviewees demography		place of interview	Total number of interviews	Average Length of interviews
			Age range	sex			
24	Eh 1-24	Initially, 9 recruited from extended family networks and friends and the rest recruited using snowball effect. 9 out of the total 24 ex-herders were contacted on the phone before the actual interviews. Their numbers were collected from their relatives in the UK.	23-37 Years old	Male	Kassela city	24	1hour 20minutes

### Appendix 3e. Ex-herders remote-interviewing in the in-between Sudan-Libya-EU.

Total no. of ex-herder participants in the in between	Code given to ex-herders in the in-between	Description of recruitment activities	Interviewees demography		place of interview	Total number of interviews	Average Length of interviews
			Age range	sex			
Those are not new participants but 11 out of the 24 ex-herders	Eh	The researcher knew the relatives of the six out of the total 11. Their relatives mentioned their kin desire to migrate. They were recruited through their relatives who relatives and friends to the researcher, thus were in contact with the research before actual fieldwork. Five recruited in Kassela city during the face-to-face in-depth interview after they disclosed their desire to migrate and gave informant consent to be tracked while in their way from Sudan-Libya-EU. Interviewees contacted on the phone before the actual interviews.	23- 37 years old	Male	East Kassela rangeland Gash basin East Kassela rangeland	19 interviews. these interviews were short. Because participants were in the move and in dangerous places.	30 minutes

**Appendix 3f. Beni-Amer diaspora walking-along/sedentary in-depth interview in UK.**

Total no. of Participant in diaspora (UK)	Code given to elderly interviewees	Description of recruitment activities	Interviewees demography		place of interview	Total number of interviews	Average Length of interviews
			Age range	sex			
23	BAm-Di 1-16	Most of them are known to researcher and Recruited through personal contact. 8 were participated in a pilot study in September 2014. They were the core of in the establishment of the network of all the respondents.	37-55 years old	Male	Birmingham	9	1hour
	London				7		
	BAf-Di 17-23		33-47 years	Female	Birmingham	6	40 minutes
					London	1	

**Appendix 3g. Focus group discussions (east Kassela rangeland, Gash basin, Kassela city, Birmingham and London).**

Number of focus groups	Code given to focus groups	number of participants	Focus group participants' demography	participants' geographical area and date of FGD	Length of FGDs	Description of recruitment activities
1	KI, FGD 1	6	BA male aged between 65-86	East Kassela rangeland	1 hour and 30 minutes	Nominated and asked in the face-to-face in-depth interview.
2	KI, FGD 2	7	BA male aged between 65-86	East Kassela rangeland		
3	KI, FGD 3	8	BA male aged between 65-86	East Kassela rangeland		
4	KI, FGD 4	6	BA male aged between 59-71	Gash basin		
5	KI, FGD1 (BAf)	6	BA female aged between 60-73	East Kassela rangeland	1 hour	Through Researcher's female relative.
6	Hr, FGD 1	6	BA male herders aged between 19-33	East Kassela rangeland	1 hour	Nominated and asked in the face-to-face in-depth interview
7	Hr, FGD 2	7	BA male herders aged between 19-33	East Kassela rangeland		
8	Eh, FGD 1	6	BA male ex-herders aged between 23-37	Kassela city	1 hour and 30 minutes	Nominated and asked in the face-to-face in-depth interview
9	Eh, FGD 2	6	BA male ex-herders aged between 23-37	Kassela city		
10	Eh, FGD 3	8	BA male ex-herders aged between 23-37	Kassela city 03/02/2015		
11	BAm, FGD 1	6	BA male in diaspora aged between 37-55	Birmingham	1 hour	Nominated and asked in the face-to-face in-depth interview
12	BAm, FGD 2	6	BA male in diaspora aged between 37-55	London		
13	BAf, FGD 1	6	BA female in diaspora aged between 33-47	Birmingham	45 minutes	Through Researcher's female relative.

## **Appendix 5a: Writing the Yore and Imagining the ‘Lost’.**

### **Geography of the Beni-Amer Ancestral Homeland:**

#### **Narrated by Key informants [Summarised by the Researcher]**

We (Beni-Amer) inhabited a large part of Eritrea, eastern Sudan and Setiet in the present western Tigray province of Ethiopia for over two millennia, but since the 1960s we reside in cantons of refugee camps, hotspots of poverty and hopelessness. We were obliged to follow the grass on which our existence depended. Grazing lands were only defined by traditional agreements, and Beni-Amer livestock were grazed extensively between Sahel, Baraka and Gash. We used to be nomads. Seasonal migrate east towards Tokar in the Red Sea coast, to the west towards Sabderate and Hamdaite, towards the south-west to the Setiet, and towards the south-east to the borders of Seraëa, Hamasien and Akkele Guzai. Our mobility cycles were closely linked to climate and geography and seasons of our homeland. Our cultural identity revolved around our pastoral mobility. We were strong and uncontested, wealthy, dignified and united people, before our migration to the *kerban* [desolate] refugee life here [eastern Sudan]. We have seen our heydays and our down times; by the compassion of Allah we will also see our way back to our ancestral homeland, and our heydays are not far. We had enough from being forgotten refugees here in Sudan, and exiled from our beautiful homeland [Sahel, Gash, Baraka and Setiet] in Eritrea. By Allah the Almighty! How can one of us [elders] ‘sleep at ease’ [pass away peacefully] while our children are spread all over the world like a dry seed blowing in the wind and our homeland and history is at risk of disappearing. (KI, FGD3, January 2015, east Kassala rangeland)

One 81-year-old key informant described Beni-Amer ancestral homeland topography and river catchments in highland-Eritrea as ‘*an ox- back*’ [resembles gambrel roof shape]. In Eritrea the highland mass is situated in the middle; the eastern coastal plain stretches parallel to the Red Sea shore, while the western lowlands roll westwards towards eastern Sudan and north-western Ethiopia. The

highland mass rises over 2,000 meters above sea level around Nakfa town and over 2,600 meters above Sea level to the west of Massawa; the mountain ranges dip slightly downwards towards the north and rise over 3,000 meters above sea level around Senafē town in the south-east of Eritrea. The highland mass slopes sharply downhill east and west; its steep slopes in the foothills form the eastern lowlands towards the Red Sea, and the Western lowlands towards Sudan. The hill massif of the highland forms entire watersheds for all seasonal rivers and numerous streams in the country. The sides of the slopes are steep and stony, and erosion processes commonly outstrip the rivers' catchment area. Storms on the mountain ranges cause rivers and streams to flow rapidly and to flash-flood in the lowlands; this is particularly common on the eastern plains. Rainfall on the eastern slope west of Massawa brings extensive watering to the numerous eastern lowland *wadis* [valleys]; this attracted some Beni-Amer clans: Saho, Tigré and Tigrinya, agro-pastoralists from the highlands. Hence the geography created intermixing among the ethnic groups. The Tigré and Beni-Amer graze their livestock, mainly sheep, goats and camel herds, in Wadi-Falcat, the Naroo plains, Wadi-Hedai, Sheeb and Sabah plains.

In the border area between the north-western Sahel of Eritrea and the Red Sea province of Sudan some Beni-Amer graze their cattle, sheep, goats and camel herds, and cultivate crops such as pearl millet and sorghum in the Khor Baraka delta around Tokar. The delta is around seven hundred thousand *feddens* [acres], situated at the Red Sea coast and the northern Eritrean hills, running parallel to the coastal plains. The delta floods yearly between August and September by the river Khor Baraka, whose waters flow from farther south in the mountainous Eritrean central highland. The presence of the delta attracted some sections of the Beni-Amer to adapt sedentary livelihoods. However, the majority grazed their livestock by small radius migration between Karora and the Eritrean hills, south up to Agra and Hasta on the north-western slope of the Eritrean Sahel highlands. Currently only short radius nomadic mobility remains among the Beni-Amer in this area. The area of the border surrounding Tokar is dry and hot with sparse vegetation cover. Less than a mile from the delta, the area contains vast dunes of shifting sand, close to the shore extensive salt marsh, bare compacted sand plains and stony hills towards the Eritrean border. Nonetheless, the area contains some vegetation, among the most

important a scrub called ādlib. This scrub tolerates the harsh environment and intense heat; it is/was the backbone of camel-grazing in the area. For example, some Beni-Amer, such as Ādd Okud, predominantly camel-owners, used to migrate from middle Baraka and Keru more than 243km north to graze their camel herds in winter across the border around Tokar.

Beni-Amer homelands in the western lowlands of Eritrea are characterised by vast plains and rugged mountains. The open savannah plains start in the foothills of Loōgo Anseba; the slope of the west begins from around Mensoura, 35km to the west of the capital city Asmara. Rolling plains cover western and south-western Eritrea, to the south-west bordering the Tigray province of Ethiopia, and to the west bordering the Kassala area of Eastern Sudan. The vast plains of western lowlands - Areād Baraka or Medrē Baraka - are intersected by the seasonal Khor Baraka [river Baraka] and its fourteen major tributaries. The broad sweep of Khor Baraka raises its waters in the central highland west of Mayē Nafehe, near Hamberte, Telala, Dāda and Habala and, in its 640km course across the western lowland, it is joined by several large khors. In its middle course Khor Baraka is joined by six large tributaries: Mogorayb, Hādendāme, Hawashyt, Alet, Homib and Kerebet; in its final section in the south Khor Baraka is joined by the Anseba River, Hareb, Lukeyb, Ambucta, and by Langeb from Sudan.

The vast plains of the Baraka area are semi-desert from November to June; all the streams and the tributary rivers including the Khor Baraka dry up. In the dry season, water becomes a scarce resource in central and northern Baraka; it is found only in scattered water holes and wells in the many river beds. The eastern part of Baraka encloses well-watered delta around Tokar and fertile, densely wooded river banks. Towards the south of the Baraka area, water and pasture were abundant around the rivers Gash and Setiet throughout the year, which was a dry season grazing-place for the Beni-Amer and home to the agro-pastoralist Kunama and Nara tribes. In the rainy season between June and early October Khor Baraka and its tributaries flow into semi-desert Baraka plains intermittently, turning them into healthy pastureland when it rains, and abundant vegetation flourishes on the river banks. In the rainy season, the majority of Beni-Amer would camp around central Baraka, from Dāgga south of Akardate up to Khor Hombōl. Most of their festivals took place



in the rainy season when livestock wellbeing was at its best. Most of the key informants were teenagers in the 1940s, displaced from the places they name their homeland in the 1960s-70s, and since resided in refugee camps and town outskirts in eastern Sudan. For this study, they were interviewed in the Kassala area. Among many questions they were asked to discuss pastoralism among the Beni-Amer. Through nostalgic memory, they reconstructed details of their pastoral mobility (see appendix 5b). In contrast with pastoralism before their migration, key informants explained: *“la bader la-alate adea hataha ma eeyhelate”*: “what used to be in the past now has nothing left of it.”

Towards the south-western plains, Beni-Amer ancestral homeland in the Eritrean lowlands starts in the foothills of the Safāa Mountains in the former provinces of Seraēa and the Hazamo plains in Akkele Guzai, and extends as far as north-western Tigray and eastern Sudan. The south-western plains are the most fertile part of Eritrea, and host its two largest rivers, the seasonal Mereb River and the perennial Tekeze River. The Mereb River in its middle course changes name to the Gash River. The Gash River is a lifeline for the Beni-Amer and other pastoralists and agro-pastoralists in the Gash plains. The Mereb River raises its headwaters in the foothills of Emba-Takera around Gabra-Kafalte in the central highlands, 27km south-west of Asmara. It flows over 525km from its source in the central highlands to Sudan. In its final course the Gash river’s waters sink in the sand around Aroma, Oleb, Wagga and Eriba, 135km north-east of Kassala town. In its upper course it forms the border between Eritrea and Ethiopia, at the confluence of the Basala-muna and Mai-Ambassa, south-west of the Shambuko. The riverine forests of the Gash River and the open savannah in the Gash plains were refuge locations for the majority of Beni-Amer and homeland for the agro-pastoralists Kunama and Nara tribes. These plains and their riverine forests were also grazing land for transhumant Tigrinya highlanders.

In the south-western lowlands around the Gash River, Beni-Amer grazed their sheep, goats, and camel and cattle herds. From September to February they used to shepherd their livestock in the Eritrean hills east of Kassala town, the plains around Lebanyiei, Aikota, Albuo, Tessenei, Alighidir, Golij and Chichi. In the south-western lowlands, Beni-Amer used to encounter the agro-pastoralist Nara tribe in south-

west Akardate around Bisha, Attai, Mogolo and Aradda plains; farther west around the Gash River Beni-Amer nomads would encounter the sedentary agro-pastoralist Kunama around Foda, Tole, Shambuko and Anāgolo plains. Camel-owning Beni-Amer particularly used to contact the Kunama tribe west of Barentú around Tagowda, and Gogne. In the dry season between March and June Beni-Amer, mainly cattle-herders, would migrate towards the north-western Tigray and north Gonder provinces of Ethiopia across the Tekeze River. This is the only perennial river in the area; its waters, and the Wilkeite forests around it, attract nomadic pastoralists during the dry season. Predominantly cattle-owning Beni-Amer grazed their cattle herds in the Setiet plains around the Tekeze River south of Um Hāajar, Himora; they migrated over 378km to Mai Kuhili, Mai Gaba, Birkuta, Adi Ramets and Mai-Tsemre in the north-west of Tigray. In the Setiet plains, Beni-Amer used to encounter transhumant Tigrigna from Habala, Dāda, Telala, Dake-Shai, Adi-Takelāi and Milazanaye from Eritrean central highlands, and Walkotote (the inhabitants of the Wilkeite forests) from the western Tigray and north Gonder provinces of Ethiopia. Some Beni-Amer, particularly camel owners, used to migrate in three directions during the dry season. Some clans migrated towards Kola Seraäa (Seraäa lowlands) and Hazamo plains: Akkele-Guzi, over 300km from the central Gash and upper Baraka plains. Some sections stay in the Baraka and Gash plains, while some Beni-Amer migrate north towards the Sahel to graze their camel herds around Tokar.

#### **Appendix 5b. Pastoral Mobility among the Beni-Amer Before the 1990s:**

##### **Narrated by Key informants [Summarised by the Researcher]**

##### **Predominantly cattle-owning Beni-Amer sections**

Ädd Humbierra cattle-owners lived scattered over the middle Baraka and the Gash near Aikota. In the rainy season the majority camp in middle Baraka near Keru, Khor Sawa and Wākai. In winter the majority move south towards the Gash, while some spend the winter near Khor Sawa and Khor Homib. Some Ädd Humbierra had small permanent villages near Sawa and cultivated crops near Khor Homib. The majority of migrated to Sudan between 1967 and 1988, and in 1994 the Eritrean government evicted the rest. Khor Sawa and Khor Homib became the largest military training camp in the horn of Africa. 76-year-old Sheik key informant, an Ädd Humbierra

currently living in the refugee camp east of Kassala, explains the situation of his clan: "*Ardna bada, Ahana badet Sbna shetata wa Hiana badana*": "we lost our grazing land, we lost are cattle; our people scattered and we are lost".

The Algaēden warriors' section of Beni-Amer cattle-owners lived as nomadic herdsmen between the Sudan border and middle and upper Baraka. They fought against Dervishes and Abyssinian warlords. In the oral history of the Beni-Amer the Algaēden section they became sedentary in the Algaēden hills near Fortōo Sawa, Kolontābai and mountain Doōbalote. Currently the warlike Algaēden no longer exist in Eritrea and only a few maybe living in eastern Sudan; some members left middle Baraka in the early 1950s after the disposal of Eritrea by the UN.

Some of the Ädd Sheikh Garābit, like the Ädd Humbierra, were sedentary at Shaālab near Akardate, but the majority were cattle-herdsmen in the winter, moving towards Gash. During the rainy season they stayed in Baraka in the north-east of Akardate. The Ädd Sheikh Garābit left Eritrea around 1967 after the start of the war for independence, and in the extreme droughts of 1984 and 1988 almost all their clans of Ädd Sheikh Garābit left Eritrea, becoming refugees in eastern Sudan. Pastoralism has ended among the Ädd Sheikh Garābit and the majority of its members live in refugee camps in eastern Sudan, or in towns and small villages in eastern Sudan.

The Fāidāb and Ädd Nāseh were cattle-owners in Baraka. During the rainy season the Fāidāb camped in Khor Hombōl near Khor Sawa, and on the Gash, while the Ädd Nāseh would stay on Khor Wākai; some clans stayed on Khor Sawa. In the winter Fāidāb moved north-east towards Debrāsala near Shaāsha, while Ädd Nāseh moved south to the Gash near Tessenei and Gabel Hamid. The Fāidāb and Ädd Nāseh left Eritrea between 1970 and 1986. Some left amid the 1984 drought, substantial numbers migrating to Sudan between 1984-1985. Since then they have lived in refugee camps or towns in eastern Sudan. Apart from a few families in the rangeland east of Kassala town and near Wadi Hileau and Al Qadarif there is no pastoralism among the Fāidāb and Ädd Nāseh.

Both the Ädd Gultāna and Beit Awat were cattle-owners. Beit Awat share a border with the Belin tribe of Sānehte around Keren. In the rains the Beit Awat stayed in

the middle and upper Anseba near Keren; in the winter they moved south to the Gash near Aikota. Ädd Gultāna stay on the Gash in winter, the majority near Kuörkuji, but during the rains, unlike Beit Awat, the Ädd Gultāna camp, scattered between Khor Baraka and Khor Mogrāaib in the middle Baraka. The Ädd Gultāna and Beit Awat sections left Eritrea in the 1960s for Sudan; some settled in eastern Sudan.

Ädd Assālā, Ädd Tauliab/Tāule and Ädd Towas sections of the Beni-Amer were mostly cattle-owners living in scattered villages in the upper Baraka. They were semi-sedentary in villages around Mansura, Eiān and the grassland around Ghergher in the foothills of Loōgo Ansaba. In the dry season between November and May their cattle herds moved to Kola Seraäa, though some families with bigger herds went towards the rivers Gash and Setiet. In the rainy season between June and October they would return to their grass huts between Mansura and Ghergher. These sections were the outermost of the Beni-Amer; towards their south they bordered the predominantly Christian plateau of Eritrea. With Emperor Haile Selassie's annexation of Eritrea they experienced cattle raids and most of their villages were burned down. In the 1960s they gradually moved to lower Baraka and Gash. In 1967 due to increased hostilities from the Ethiopian occupation and drought some sections migrated west to Hamdait or into Sudan. Some settled around Wadi el Hileau.

Ädd AbSheneiāb, Ädd Hāssal and Lēbet, like Ädd Assālā, Ädd Tauliab/Tāule and Ädd Towas were largely cattle-owners. These three sections were the most westerly Beni-Amer, bordering the Hadendowa and the Rashida in Sudan and the Kunama and Nara in the Gash. Ädd AbSheneiāb lived scattered in the middle and lower Baraka and on the Gash. Some clans of Ädd AbSheneiāb were partly sedentary cultivators on the Gash at Endrāeb, while the majority were nomads. In winter, some clans moved to Khor Wākai and Khor Akārur; in the rainy season they remained close to the Hadendowa near Carcabat. Ädd Hāssal were cattle-owners. This section was one of the most scattered among the Beni-Amer. Some clans during the rainy season camped scattered over the Gash, at Tessenei, Khor Gārsāt, farther south at Um Hāajar and across the Ethiopian border on the Setiet; a few clans moved north-east towards lower Anseba. In the winter, a few sections of Ädd Hāssal moved

400km north-east to Tokar in Sudan, but the majority remained on the Gash and Setiet where families stayed close to each other in semi-permanent villages. Other predominantly cattle-owning Beni-Amer sections were the Lēbet, who lived close to the Hadendowa, though during the rains some lived widely scattered over Khor Gārsāt, Idris Dārit and Khor Sawa. In the winter, the Lēbet moved to the south-west, widely scattered over Khor Gārsāt, the Gash, and Setiet.

### **Predominantly camel- and cattle-owning Beni-Amer sections**

The Ädd Hāssrai, Sinkāt Kēinaāb, Aretaga, Ädd Hāshish and Ädd Ali Bākhīt owned camel and cattle herds and a few sections lived in seasonal and permanent villages. Sinkāt Kēinaāb camel and cattle-owners stayed scattered during the rainy season in central Baraka on Khor Awashaite, Hemarate Kolboy and Alet. In the dry season, the camel herds moved north towards Carcabat, Sala and Zāra; cattle herds moved south-west towards the Gash and the plains near Tessenei, Golij, Um Hāajar and sometimes across the Ethiopian border on the Setiet. Sinkāt Kēinaāb sections were all nomads before the 1960s but some sections cultivated seasonally on the river banks at Gērger at the Sudan border without having any known sedentary villages. Ädd Hāshish owned camel and cattle herds, but unlike the Sinkāt Kēinaāb, in the dry season they moved north-west across the Sudan border. In the rains the Ädd Hāshish camp in lower Baraka at the plains near Shāgalobā and along Khor Lukeyb. Ädd Hāssrai were camel and cattle-owners inhabiting the middle Baraka and Gash. Before the 1960s their seasonal villages were widely scattered along the tributaries of Khor Baraka; the majority were on Hādendāme, Shākat Bellāu, and Khor Wākai on Baraka and near Aikota in the Gash. Ädd Ali Bākhīt, like Ädd Hāssrai, Sinkāt Kēinaāb and Ädd Hāshish, owned camel and cattle, but unlike the former the latter lived in upper Baraka in semi-sedentary villages at Shotat near Mansura. In the rainy months cattle-herding clans of Ädd Ali Bākhīt stayed in the upper Baraka, but in winter some went to the Gash and Setiet. In the winter the camel herds migrated north towards Keren, though some moved towards southern Akkele-Guzai at Hazamo.

The Ädd Alāllam, Ädd Ali and Ädd Elāmean were predominantly camel-owners, nomads living between Setiet, Gash and Baraka. During the rainy season they were widely scattered over the Gash at Aikota, and Tessenei. Ädd Alāllam sections

remained in middle Baraka during the rains, widely scattered over Hādendāme, Kure and Khor Awashaite, and in winter the majority travelled short distances to stay in the riverine forests along the Gash River between Tessenei and Aikota. The Ādd Elāmean, likewise migrated short distances between the rainy and dry seasons. In the rains Ādd Elāmean sections camped in the middle Baraka at Khor Awashaite, while in winter they travelled less than 100km west to the edges of the lower Baraka on Khor Hombōl. The Ādd Ali were predominantly camel-owners, but unlike the Ādd Alāllam or Ādd Elāmean they remained dispersed throughout the year over the middle Baraka at Khor Bāahr, Khor Jāmeal Shefeāl and Keru.

The Dagga, one of the largest sections of Beni-Amer, predominantly camel and cattle-owners, lived widely scattered over the lower and middle Baraka up to the Gash and Setiet plains in the south, and to the west as far as Sabderate at the Sudan border. Dagga cattle-herders in the winter mostly migrated towards the Gash and Setiet while some moved to the border of Hamasien and Kola Seraëa. Some sections of the Dagga were camel-owners; in the winter they went north across the Sudanese border for the rains in that region. They grazed their camel herds around Tokar and in the foothills of the Red Sea coast. Some Dagga sections combined nomadism and crop production, mostly cultivating pearl millet and sorghum. Their villages were scattered around the banks of Khor Baraka, Tokalaie, Takerarate and Bisha, on the banks of Khor Afdob and around Keru. They left their villages in Baraka for Sudan from the 1960s to 1984; now there are no nomadic pastoralist Dagga in Eritrea. The Ādd Hamad Awat, Ādd Okud, and Ādd Shāerif were mostly camel-proprietors living widely spread between the middle Baraka and Gash. During the rainy months between June and October the Ādd Hamad Awat were strewn around the middle Baraka, along Khor Awashaite, ilit, Bitama and south of the Gash river around Fōko. In the winter months between November and May the majority of them camped there; only a few cattle-herding families moved to the Setiet, crossing the Eritrea-Ethiopia border at Um Hāajar and Himora. The Ādd Okud were spread during the rains too, over the middle Baraka, the majority around Keru between Khor Hambōol and Khor Giāge, but a few went east to Anseba. In the winter months the Ādd Okud, unlike the Ādd Hamad, would go north to Tokar in Sudan, while some stayed on the lower Anseba. Unlike the Ādd Hamad Awat and Ādd Okud, they travelled the short distance between the rainy and dry seasons, during the rains camping along Khor

Homib, in the dry season shifting less than 150km, spreading over Titai Damer, Khor Sala, Carcabat and Khor Lukeyb.

### **Predominantly goat- and sheep-owning Beni-Amer sections**

Ädd Ibrahim predominantly owned goats though a few sections also owned sheep, camels and cattle. In the rainy months, the majority of Ädd Ibrahim stayed on the central Baraka at Khor Awashaite, Khor Sawa, Jebel Adal and Jebel Omal; two sections stayed near Akardate at Sheglët, Bisha and Mogrāaib. In the dry season, the majority went south-west to the Gash at Dukāmbiā and near Awgārōo. The rest of the clan remained at middle Baraka. Ädd Ibrahim faced several atrocities at the hands of Ethiopian rule and under the current Eritrean government. The majority of the clan left Eritrea between 1967 and 1981 after the Ethiopian peasants' army raided their villages in Baraka and Gash. The rest migrated to Sudan between 1994 and 1998 after being forcibly evacuated by the Eritrean government from the Bisha mining area, and from Sawa and Awashaite for military camps.

### **Sedentary sections of the Beni-Amer; the Beit-Juk**

Originally the Beni-Amer were entirely nomadic herdsmen. Some parts, as mentioned above, migrated seasonally over a long distance across the border of three countries (Eritrea, Sudan and Ethiopia); others made short radius movements between the rainy and dry seasons. Exceptionally, the majority of the Beit Juk and a few sections of Ädd Ali Bākhīt, Ädd Assālā, Ädd Tauliab and Ädd Towas were sedentary, combining seasonal crop production and livestock mobility. These sections lived in the south-west of Keren at the frontier with the agriculturist Bélyāin tribe. As the Beit Juk elderly mention, their clan were nomads before they adopted permanent villages and agriculture, influenced by their agriculturalist neighbour. Like the rest of the Beni-Amer, the Beit Juk evacuated Eritrea between the 1970s and 1988. Currently some of their sections still live in their villages and at Keren in Eritrea, while the majority are living in Sudan at Kassala, Wadi Hileau, Showak, Al Qadarif and Kishm Al-Gearba. A considerable number of Beit Juk are in the Diaspora.