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Europe's security measures experienced by African migrants

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Re-imagining the ‘Area of Freedom, Security and Justice’: Europe’s security measures experienced by African migrants

Introduction

Migration continues to be one of the major topics that dictate the relations between Europe and Africa. In recent years, it has also been one of the most heated topics in the public discussion in Europe and, according to various polls and surveys, one of the biggest security concerns of European Union (EU) citizens (European Commission 2018; Laine 2020a). While new Africa strategies are being drafted and published in the EU and its member states, and there is an increased interest in forging stronger partnerships with Africa, finding solutions and EU-level consensus in issues related to managing migration seems like an impossible task. Although Africa hosts most of its own refugees, and far more people migrate inside Africa than from Africa towards Europe, the EU and its member states are concerned about this issue to the extent that most of the legal pathways to enter the Schengen-zone, especially from the formerly colonized countries in the “Global South”, have been blocked (De Genova 2018; FizGerald 2020). On one hand, this has led to asylum-seeking often being the only option for people hoping to move to Europe, regardless of their motivations and eligibility for international protection (UNDP 2019: 4). On the other, the lack of legal ways to migrate encourages irregular movement and expensive and dangerous human smuggling and trafficking.

This chapter investigates the controversial securities of migration from sub-Saharan Africa towards Europe. Building on multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in eastern Africa as well as southern and northern Europe, it reflects on the EU’s and the Schengen countries’ migration related “security measures” from the perspective of sub-Saharan African refugees and migrants. By these security measures, I refer to the constellation of policies, treaties, laws and practices, which on the EU level are gathered under the umbrella of “Area of Freedom, Security and

Justice” (AFSJ). Among other things, the AFSJ covers the management of the EU’s external borders, visas, as well as asylum and migration policies (Walker 2004: 6). Instead of analysing the AFSJ as a set of political tools and instruments as such, this chapter contributes towards building a deeper understanding of the effects of these security measures on the “everyday securities” of the people towards whom they are targeted.

Deterring “unwanted” migration is performed through various methods that are designed to make irregular entries less attractive, for instance through restraining territorial access, reducing access to social welfare, other public services and the labour market, detention during the asylum process, as well as expedited returns of rejected asylum applicants (Kent, Norman and Tennis 2019). In this chapter, I will focus specifically on how these aspects of the migration management apparatus are experienced by sub-Saharan African refugees, asylum seekers, returnees and deportees from Schengen countries. I understand the concept of experience firstly in relation to thoughts, feelings and perceptions, which are formed throughout our lives and affected by the various environments, interactions, events, actions and lessons that we encounter. Secondly, I understand experiences as things that happen – passing events and situations that give meaning and construct our lives and the world around us (Sumari 2016: 12).

This chapter draws on research material I have gathered by conducting multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in Kenya, Ethiopia, Cyprus, Italy and Finland between 2018-2020. Addressing the research problem required choosing fieldwork locations in Europe and in Africa that are positioned in variable ways in relation to Europe’s migration management. In order to acknowledge the superficial distinction between refugees and so called “economic migrants”, and to go beyond the over studied European and northern African “hotspots” to better capture the variety of aspects, I interviewed people with experiences of “irregularity” from a multitude of countries and backgrounds: 1) *en route* to Europe, 2) in Europe, and 3) after leaving Europe. Figure 1 represents the points of departure of the research participants, the interview locations, as well as the migratory journeys to the extent that they have been shared with me. The chart included gives a more specific overview of the fieldwork locations, supporting organizations, as well as the number and legal-administrative categories of the interviewees. In addition to the thirty-two semi-structured, narrative interviews, the material consists of four interviews with people working with migrants, along with field notes and informal conversations with people ‘in the field’.

The local contexts of the fieldwork environments varied greatly, as did the legal, social and economic situations and life histories of the research participants. All of these factors, along with my own positionality as a young, blonde, and in many ways privileged European woman undoubtedly influenced the encounters with the research participants in various ways. Yet, as most of the interviewees were young, highly educated people like myself, it was easy to find shared thoughts and ideas and to build trust. Many of the interviewees also expressed that it was important for them to get to share their experiences so that things could change. I stay in contact with around half of them.

Securitizing migration - bordering Europe

During recent decades, migration has become almost self-evidently interpreted as a security issue. On one hand, this is related to a conceptual change in how security is understood and talked about: instead of perceiving security and threats as something objective and absolute, security theory today depicts it as a social construction, giving multiple meanings to security depending on the context (see e.g. Fierke 2007; Huysmans 2002; Spiro 2009). Securitization theory (e.g. Wæver 1993; Wæver 1995) explains the securitization of migration through rhetorical and discursive practices – speech acts – which frame migration, representing it as something dangerous, an existential threat. Once this construction is accepted, a variety of security measures and practices to contain the “threat” by dividing the “insiders” from the “outsiders” and the “welcome” from the “unwelcome” come to be justified (Walters 2010). This can seem to provide ontological security – a feeling and experience of order and reliance on the continuity of the social and material living environment – for those feeling threatened (Giddens 1991: 92&243; Laine 2020a/b).

The securitizing methods to govern migratory flows become bordering practices, which occur through filtering and sorting of people attempting to migrate. They can be understood as “biopolitical architectures” that regulate circulation of people in the aim of controlling undesired movement (Pallister-Wilkins 2016; Laine 2020b). Bordering practices are manifested through the work of the border regime, for instance in the ways fences are erected, security checkpoints multiplied, detention centres built offshore, fingerprint and passport databases created, along with “borderwork” (Rumford 2008/2012), which happens far beyond actual state borders and is not undertaken only by state officials. Through these bordering practices, borders come to be understood not only as sites of control but also as social and political frames for

setting agendas (Laine 2020a). Thus, through reinforcing the assumption of existing danger, the security measures actually re-construct the threat they aim at overcoming.

Securitization studies has centred its attention on security discourses and techniques, how something becomes framed as a security concern and for which purposes (Wæver 1995; Bigo 2002;). In these outputs, experiences of security governance ‘on the ground’ have often gained less attention (Crawford and Hutchinson 2016; Stevens and Vaughan-Williams 2016: 2). The notion of “everyday security” responds to this lack, empirically investigating the “relationship(s) between security projects and extant social practices and relationships” by tying the everyday struggles of people to macro-structural processes (Crawford and Hutchinson 2016: 1190). Asking people about their lived experiences of security measures and how they are felt and lived through offers keys towards understanding security governance and processes on a wider scale (ibid.). Paying attention to the perceptual and socially embedded nature of security enables examining the security experiences of those who are feeling threatened by migration, but also those who are being securitized. (Laine 2020a).

The various security measures and related bordering practices of the EU and Schengen countries have an enormous effect on the lives of people who are seeking or hope to seek protection in Europe – and for many others “on the move”. The mere fact that these policies and security measures make getting into Europe life-threateningly difficult and practically impossible for most migrants and refugees, speaks for the life-changing significance of how migration is managed. But how do migrants themselves think and feel about Europe’s ways to manage migration? To answer this question, I start the analysis by discussing how African refugees in Africa experience the restrictions on movement and lack of legal channels to migrate to Europe.

Experiencing Europe’s bordering practices in Africa

In the interviews and discussions with Congolese refugees in Kenya and Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia, one of the first things that became apparent was that not all refugees in Africa want to go to Europe. On the contrary, many wish to move to neighbouring countries or mention other preferable places such as South Africa, Canada, the United States and Australia. Accordingly, thirty-seven percent of the forty-five thousand respondents to the Afrobarometer of 2019 were considering emigrating but more people preferred staying on the continent (thirty-

six percent) than moving to Europe (twenty-seven percent) (Appia-Nyamekye Sanny, Rocca and Schultes, 2019). This challenges the misleading portrayal on which justifications for curtailing migration to Europe are often based: that most Africans think of Europe as a “dream destination” and hope to penetrate its’ borders by whichever means possible (Laine 2020b).

Instead of dreaming about “something fancy” or living on government support, most of the research participants were looking for a place to live freely and without fear – a place where it would be possible to have a “normal life” and to be able to support one’s family. For instance, the security situation of the Eritrean refugees interviewed in the Mebrat Hail Condominium housing scheme in Addis Ababa had improved significantly compared to their situation back in Eritrea, but many “building blocks” of having a normal life, like having a job or a means of living that would satisfy their basic needs, were still missing. This made them think about ways of getting to some place “better”. Instead of planning to take the irregular route through Libya to Europe, they were weighing different options of getting not to Europe but to any Western or “more developed” places through family reunification, resettlement, student visa or marriage. In addition to refugees, also many students, employees of NGOs working with refugee-related issues and people I met on the streets of Addis Ababa seemed more than ready to move out of Ethiopia to work or to study, given the chance. All of this had proven to be difficult.

In addition to walls and fences, the EU’s security measures and politics of bordering are concretized through what FitzGerald (2020) characterizes as a remote control system of cages, buffers, domes, moats, and barbicans that reflect global power dynamics and prevent irregular movement far from the actual borders. Often “paper walls” – visa regimes and passport hierarchies – are more powerful in filtering and preventing unwanted movement than concrete walls and barbed wire fences that aim to secure state borders. Although a number of African countries require visas also from Europeans, for many Africans, claiming a passport and a travel visa to Europe is a challenge. This is getting even more difficult with European fears of people overstaying the visa, disappearing from the officials, or seeking asylum. The practices of remote control are felt in Africa in various ways by people hoping to move through legal channels.

Partly for this reason, the Eritreans in Ethiopia told me that although jumping into a rubber boat in Libya was not seen as a particularly attractive option for them, they could understand the people who took the route towards Europe with no guarantees of getting there alive. According to an Eritrean refugee in his late twenties, who had escaped Eritrea with the assistance of

smugglers a year before I interviewed him in Addis Ababa, neither the dangers and obstacles on the way nor the possible challenges in the receiving country stop young people in particular from leaving as long as there is nothing to make them stay:

They take the risk. Because, if I am here doing nothing, it's better to do that route, whatever the outcome, they tell you. Here also if I'm doing nothing, I'm dying. So this is the mentality of the youngsters. They cannot stay here. Just go to college, or university, do something, just progress yourself. If you tell them this, they will not accept you. So many people are already in Europe: their friends, their families, their relatives.

Unwillingness to accept a certain destiny and the belief in a better tomorrow make people take a leap of faith and reach further. This confirms the idea of borders as unnatural and porous, and presents the border crossing simultaneously as a means for survival and a conscious or subconscious form of resistance towards migration management. When staying is experienced as “dying”, taking the risk represents itself as an individual security strategy, albeit one that also includes the possibility of dying.

Unfortunately, thousands of people die taking that risk. This became apparent in the interviews, as some of the research participants spoke about people they had known who had died on the way to Europe. The risk of border-crossing death is disproportionately high on the Central Mediterranean route from Libya to Italy, which is mostly taken by migrants and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa. The conditions for the possibility of these deaths are generated by the European border regime's restrictions on movement, which push people into irregularity and into taking bigger risks (De Genova 2018; Laine 2020b; Squire 2017). Equally, some of the respondents, such as a Cameroonian woman interviewed in Cyprus after being released from three months in detention, felt that by making crossings more difficult the EU and member states are causing deaths of people, or “killing them”.

Encountering the border and the image of Europe

Few interviewees spontaneously start talking about their actual border crossing from Africa to the EU area. Some distinctly avoided talking about it, which might be related to the traumatic experience itself, to questions of trust between the researcher and the researched, or to the fact that ‘everyone asks that question’ and the European asylum determination procedure in some

cases encourages lying in order to secure one's safety (Beneduce 2015; Bohmer & Shuman 2018: 10). At least one of the deported Ethiopians had been encouraged by his lawyer to circumvent the truth in order to build a stronger case for himself. The asylum system and encountering the border at the border and beyond affect not only the personal experiences and feelings of asylum seekers but also their perception of Europe and the EU. This is reflected in the following passage. A Cameroonian man, who I interviewed three months after his arrival to Cyprus, described an unpleasant incident with the immigration police:

When I first arrived, some experience with the immigration police reminds me of the past. I believe they were doing their job. When I got to the investigation unit, they took my bag and they empty it and shake everything out of it to try to scare me, so I told them immediately, this is exactly what we see in our country. They said if I have a problem, I can lodge a complaint on the other side. So that gives me some uncertainty. Especially when you are running from your life not being stable. You are taking each day as it comes, that maybe I can die today or tomorrow. And you manage to free yourself from that scenario. And then when you arrive, you experience a similar scenario.

Ill-treatment from officials had made him feel suspicious toward "Europe" because he had been treated in the EU in a way that he could have expected to happen more likely "back home". This pattern was repeated in other interviews as well. In particular, those who had already arrived to Europe reflected the EU's and its member states' actions and policies, comparing them to those of their countries and places of origin. When asked about the EU's policies towards restricting migration, their attention turned towards the security measures of their own national contexts: how the governments of their countries had made them insecure through forced confiscation, arbitrary arrests, violence from authorities, and different forms of structural violence and persecution that are meant to keep people afraid of questioning their governments. Controls of borders were also often more violent in African contexts, evidenced for example by the shoot-to-kill policy on the Eritrean-Ethiopian border mentioned by one of the Eritrean refugees. The EU's migration policies were in this way put into a wider perspective, which takes into account the political and cultural contexts in the places of origin of the respondents. Yet, when expectations of a "fair" European system based on the rule of law were not met, the understanding of Europe of the participants was shaken.

The EU's security measures and restricting movement from Africa also made the research participants consider European-African relations and the EU's role in the global world order. Some of the respondents felt that the EU and the international community were "turning a blind eye" to conflicts and human rights atrocities in Africa, and even fuelling conflict towards their own ends. Others thought of Europe as a value leader who should intervene and advocate for peace and democracy in Africa instead of closing borders. In some interviews, the EU was also spoken of together with the UN, which elaborates the political and soft power given to the EU in the perceptions of the research participants. However, by publicly supporting humanitarian and development goals and at the same time building walls and criminalising movement, the EU's contradictory narratives and actions erode this soft power and hollow out the values the EU claims to stand for (Laine 2020b). The EU's controversial actions in relation to its values were reflected also in the interviews.

The EU was described as "sly" or as a "hypocrite" for portraying itself as a protector of human rights, while simultaneously closing borders and continuing colonial endeavours in Africa and elsewhere. It was retained in some of the interviews that as long as Europe continues to be "a part of the problem", migration from Africa would not end. A man from Senegal who was now living in Cyprus as an asylum seeker described the relationship of migration and the colonial echoes in the current relations between Africa and Europe, namely France:

France and EU have to leave Africa and let Africa make its own decisions. As long as it is like this, you cannot stop the migrants. This is the problem. France makes people corrupted and takes our money. In Senegal we have many natural resources, but France takes all the riches, billions and billions put in Swiss banks. The only truth is that Europe knows it would be in trouble without Africa, that's why they do not leave, but then migration will not end either.

In the passages above, the current and historical relationships between Europe and Africa are being problematized, given meaning, and used to make sense of the interviewees' own situation, as well as the global power asymmetries shaping it. The postcolonial mindset, which challenges Europe's actions in Africa, also reflects his frustration towards Europe's way of responding to migration. If the political, economic and historical drivers for migration are to a certain extent created by forms of domination of the "Global North" towards the "Global South", taking this into consideration in the response to migration seems like an understandable request, especially

when non-Western regions have been carrying the heaviest burden in hosting refugees with lesser resources (World Bank 2020).

Security measures in the everyday

Security measures and related bordering practices do not end once a person has crossed a state border. On the contrary, these technologies of filtering and division extend far beyond physical borders and are experienced by migrants in their everyday lives, making it hard for them to build new lives in Europe and elsewhere (Laine 2016; Nail 2016: 4). Power dynamics are largely forged and reproduced through these kinds of policies of everyday life (Crawford and Hutchinson 2016). In fact, security procedures deterring “unwanted” migration happen largely through practices of bordering that do not attract much attention, far from the governmental authorities and formal power, hidden and invisible to the eye of an “average citizen”.

Although undocumented migrants are the least protected group in the EU (Kmak 2020), in many countries asylum seekers’ rights and freedoms related to working, studying and access to services are limited in various ways. These restrictions have impacts on their emotions and opportunities in different arenas of the daily life. The policies and practices vary on a country level and some countries have stricter limitations than others. Yet, these measures invade and disrupt the lives of asylum seekers, affecting their everyday experiences of security. When it comes to physical security and bodily integrity, most of the people interviewed in Europe considered Europe to be quite safe compared to the circumstances in their home countries. However, straight after stating that Europe is safe, many of them claimed that for an asylum seeker Europe is not safe in the same way as for others living in Europe. The border regime and the asylum system produce insecurities and inequalities between the “deserving” and “undeserving” migrants, and often asylum seekers seem to be regarded as undeserving. This was pointed out by a man from the Anglophone part of Cameroon, who had come to Finland as a professional football player but ended up seeking asylum after the circumstances in Cameroon had deteriorated and he could no longer consider going back. He described how life in Finland was completely different as an asylum seeker and as a professional athlete. Among many other interviewees, an Ethiopian woman who had chosen voluntary repatriation after a negative asylum decision was disappointed by Europe and advised no one to go irregularly:

So as Ethiopian, I don't advice anyone to go to Europe. From my experience, I never thought that Europe is like this. Because if you get the paper it's ok, but to get the papers, it's very hard so I don't advice anyone to go. Legally, for education or family, if you can get paper, it's ok. But crossing the sea and sacrifice your life going to Europe is nonsense for me.

Her experience elaborates on how she felt some migrants are more welcome than others. She emphasizes being Ethiopian, because, according to her, being from Eritrea would have made a difference in the asylum process. Other returned Ethiopians interviewed in Addis Ababa also mentioned this. Their perception was that Eritrean nationality would have made them eligible for protection, which was felt to be unfair, because firstly, although the situation in Eritrea is bad, some Ethiopians also have severe problems; and secondly, Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia are sometimes “better off” than Ethiopians in Ethiopia due to receiving remittances, which offer them a relatively good living standard.

Most concerns and worries that the migrants I interviewed in Cyprus and Italy expressed concerning policies that affect their everyday lives were related to limitations to working, finding a place to stay, studying, as well as securing access to various services. As these restrictions to their freedom were related to the status of an asylum seeker, being recognized as a refugee was seen as a solution. This was put into words by a Senegalese man interviewed in Cyprus:

Before you are accepted as refugee, you cannot go to school, you cannot work, you have no chance showing your experience. I have studied and worked my whole life. Now imagine my situation. It hurts me, I have experience and I am educated, it hurts me that I cannot use my skills and they do not let me work.

This passage brings forth how many of the migrants who had a higher education felt like they were in a way “losing more” because they could not use the skills they had acquired. They felt that all the money and effort that had been put into their education and the years of training had been wasted. When asked about how the system should be changed, practically all the people I interviewed in Europe expressed a wish that asylum seekers could work without limitations.

The restrictions and limitations related to being an asylum seeker in Europe make the life of some asylum seekers so unbearable that they consider ever having gone to Europe to be a mistake. Many also stressed how much they loved Africa and how they would have never come if they would have known the reality in Europe. About a year after I met him in Cyprus on his second day there, a Cameroonian man expressed the regrets of his fellow asylum seekers for coming to Europe in a WhatsApp message in the following way:

Most of us regret ever embarking on this journey to Cyprus because we don't even know what is going on. They don't give us documents, no jobs. Even monthly benefits from the government have become a problem, as it is no longer regular but house rents and bills are increasing on daily basis. This frustrates us, the asylum seekers.

As there were very few reception centres in Cyprus at the time, most asylum seekers had needed to find apartments for themselves. This required money, connections and resourcefulness, and in addition to demanding guarantees, apartment owners were often perceived as reluctant towards making contracts with asylum seekers. Consequently, many were sleeping in the parks or were temporarily accommodated by churches or charitable organizations. Those who had managed to get rental contracts easily got into trouble due to helping other asylum seekers by letting them sleep in their apartments.

A large part of the everyday processes of bordering are felt and “managed” by individuals through mundane activities and day-to-day routines and practices people engage in to “foster security for themselves and for others while striving to live with insecurity” (Crawford and Hutchinson 2016: 1188). To cope with the everyday insecurities related to the life of an asylum seeker, support from other people was essential to the research participants. Many of them talked about the relevance of fellow migrants, especially other Africans. Encountering the various levels of insecurity produced by the migration policies that restrict the lives of asylum seekers was easier together than alone. Making friends and connections helps in a situation where a person is unaware of the future and the duration one has to wait for a decision from the immigration authorities. Such an uncertainty, a “slow torture” (Könönen 2014: 13), holds one’s life back and nurtures frustration, shame, fear, and insecurity (Khosravi 2011: 93-97). In addition to social connections and helping and supporting each other, many interviewees

emphasized the significance of spirituality and religion in not giving up hope and dealing with insecurity. Some were also volunteering in NGOs helping migrants, and trying to keep themselves busy in other ways, such as getting involved in solidarity initiatives or doing sports.

Detention and deportation as forms of violent migration management

Detention and deportation are some of the most violent forms of the EU's migration management. Although they are examples of security measures, which deprive people of their basic liberties, they have become naturalised as almost self-evident consequences of "violating" the law. Securitizing discourses on migration justify detention as a legitimate measure to control the EU's external borders, but the increased use of detention actually manifests the EU's failure to control entries. Additionally, the increased "deportability" of migrants in the past couple of decades has led to detention being an ever-expanding feature of migration management, although there is no evidence that it would discourage people from migrating or seeking asylum (De Genova 2019; Del Gaudio & Phillips 2018). Migrants can be captured at the border at the point of entrance and taken to detention merely for crossing the border "illegally", while others are taken into custody for over-staying their visa or after a rejected asylum application to wait for voluntary return or expulsion (Könönen 2014: 76; Del Gaudio & Phillips 2018). One of the research participants in Cyprus, as well as six out of the seven Ethiopians who had been in Europe and were now back in Ethiopia after voluntary return or forced removal, talked about their experiences of being held in detention centres or prisons, which was the word that they mostly used to refer to them. The way they talked about their experience differed, for instance, based on how long had been spent in detention in relation to the whole time spent in Europe. For those who had been in Europe for years undocumented and had made a mistake and thus been noticed by the police, or had been stopped by the police without a specific reason, detention had been more of an experience they could already have anticipated, and thus they seemed mentally more prepared for it. As for those who had been taken into jail or a detention centre directly from the border or soon after arrival, all the money and effort that had been put into the attempt to migrate to Europe was lost, which created emotions of regret and deep frustration.

An Ethiopian woman and a mother of two, who I interviewed at ARRA's office in Addis Ababa, had spent most of her time in Europe in detention. After her arrival to Norway, she had travelled to France and Belgium, where she was captured and held for five months before being sent back

to Norway to wait for an asylum decision, which was denied soon after with a decision of forced removal back to Ethiopia. She recalled that in detention she had not been given access to healthcare while being sick, she had only been given food once a day, and she had encountered acts of racism and aggressive behaviour from the authorities in Belgium and Norway. The detention and deportation characterize her whole experience of Europe, and that experience was, in her words, “very bad”. Answering my question about her expectations of Europe, she described her experience in the following way:

I expected better chances for education, for work, everything. More human rights and freedom. That was my expectation before exile. All Europe, they don't have even human rights. If you are not willing to go back to your country, they force you, they give you injection, inject you and you wake up in your country. I have friends who have been to Belgium and they forced them, took their hands and covered their eyes and sent them by force. And the police beats people. They tied their legs with a rope and they covered their eyes and after they arrived in Ethiopia.

What had happened to her had made her, in her own words, to “hate Europe”. If this is the aim of the security measures of the EU and Schengen countries, the price to pay in individual suffering and trauma is very high. Although her characterization of the behaviour of Norwegian and Belgian authorities was the most violent of the detention and deportation-related experiences shared with me in the interviews, others had also encountered different forms of “bullying” and trying to scare the detainees on purpose, for instance by banging on doors and barging into rooms unexpectedly, making loud noises. This kind of behaviour kept the detainees on their toes and made it difficult for them to sleep and handle the already intensely stressful situation.

De Genova characterizes the susceptibility to deportation as “a virtually universal feature” of the non-citizen status of migrants: they ‘always remain more or less deportable’ (De Genova 2019: 93). However, research on experiences of deportation remains scarce. Deportation is a process far more complex than relocation of a person back to the country of citizenship. Involving various institutions and people, it stretches over several geographical locations and spans over long periods of time (Khosravi 2018: 2), as was the case for many of the research participants. Being sent back was the biggest fear and mentioned most often when I asked about

the fears of the interviewees, especially for those who had been living in Europe undocumented. For six people who I interviewed at ARRA's Returnees' Reintegration Project in Addis Ababa, including the woman mentioned in the passage above, this fear had concretized through forced return to Ethiopia. They had been sent back against their will from three Schengen countries, in this case Sweden, Norway, and Switzerland, but some had been attempting to seek asylum in various countries, namely Denmark, Germany, France, and Belgium, and had been sent back to the first country of entrance to the Schengen area according to the EU law. Their time spent in Europe varied from a couple of months to more than ten years.

The deportees attach multiple feelings and thoughts to the deportation depending on various intersecting cultural categories, as well as their own situation in Ethiopia and in Europe. They also have various methods to deal with the experience of having to come back involuntarily. For those who had family members or some attachments in Ethiopia, the return had been easier, although one of the deportees had been abandoned by his wife and children after returning penniless after ten years in Europe. The experience of a deportee can be that of a "double abandonment", being "expelled from one country and outcast in another" (Khosravi 2018: 2). The effects of forced return are often negative, both for the deportees as well as for the receiving communities, which commonly struggle with unemployment, political instability and social insecurity. The post-deportation condition is in many cases characterized by the same emotions of fear, anxiety and insecurity as the condition before the return (ibid: 2-4). Although some of the deportees had found jobs after the return, and as a part of the returnee programme funded by the EU they had received some form of support, all of them were struggling in one form or another with re-starting a life in Ethiopia, and some were hoping to go back to Europe. They also had trouble accepting the cause for the return, or felt that their rights had not been respected in the way the return had been executed in practice. For instance, a woman had not been allowed to collect her belongings from the place she had been staying, although she waited for two months in detention before the forced removal. Upon arrival, she had been left at the Addis Ababa airport without anything, although she had been promised two nights in a hotel. Another man had been celebrating the new year with his friends when he had been captured, and had not had time to prepare for leaving after years spent in Sweden.

Concluding remarks

Securitizing discourses and related bordering practices that see migration as a security threat overshadow the multiple benefits of migration. They also polarize societies, which creates ontological insecurity in the migrant receiving communities and makes it more difficult to solve migration-related challenges inside, as well as between, continents. (Laine 2020a/b). This obstructs alternative imaginations that would make it possible to overcome the dualistic binaries like “us” and “them”, or “national” and “foreigner” (Walters 2010). Experiences of bordering and securitizing create new knowledge. Migrants are an important but underused resource of knowledge and information when it comes to European-African relations, and finding solutions to the issues linked to migration.

As has been elaborated in this chapter, Europe’s security measures produce multiple forms of suffering, fear, hate, uncertainty, and insecurity in the people towards whom they are targeted. This affects their everyday lives in various ways, but it also shapes the ways migrants understand and perceive Europe. As Laine (2020b) depicts, my research shows how Europe’s reaction towards migration actually tells more about Europe itself than about the migrants: by aiming at securing itself, the EU ends up producing insecurities both to itself and to people on the sending and receiving end of migratory patterns by acting against its own proclaimed values. Changing this course would benefit both Europe and Africa in the future. Ending in the words of Tickner (1992), security means nothing if it is built on others’ insecurity.

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