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Trust and the Triggers of Trauma. Exploring experiences of the trust between Eritrean unaccompanied minors and their caregivers in The Netherlands

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Trust and the Triggers of Trauma

Exploring Experiences of Trust between Eritrean

Unaccompanied Minors and their caregivers

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Picture, 2016, Enda Baguna reception centre (Ethiopia). Reception of Unaccompanied Minors from Eritrea. Photo by Mirjam van Reisen (copyrights)

We have made every effort to truthfully report the findings of the research. If there is any error or comment on the content of this report, we are grateful if you bring this immediately to our attention.

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Table of Content

Word of Appreciation

Trust presents a problem in the efforts to offer maximum protection to Unaccompanied Minors of Eritrea. This report investigates this situation in The Netherlands, for the organisation charged with guardianship of unaccompanied minors, the Nidos Foundation.

The research was carried out in the framework of a broader programme, identifying critical elements to help increase resilience among Unaccompanied Minors of Eritrea. The research focuses on the high incidence of Post-Traumatic Stress in relation to the lack of trust between Unaccompanied Minors of Eritrea and their caregivers. The purpose of this report is to present the findings and the conclusions that were drawn as well as a set of practical recommendations.

We are grateful for the opportunity presented to work with Nidos on this research and to help develop insight in the challenges that occur in the care for Unaccompanied Minors of Eritrea. The research has demonstrated the incredible source of resilience of the Eritrean Unaccompanied Minors and the dedication of Nidos, their guardians and mentors, to act in the best interest of their pupils.

We are especially grateful for all those who participated in this research, for their sharing and openness and … yes - their trust, to confide in us.

Prof Dr Mirjam van Reisen, research leader

1   Introduction

There is nothing natural or automatic about trust. Trust grows and develops in every individual and is shaped by the environment in which a person interacts with other people (Eisenhower & Blacher, 2006). In the circumstance where young children are exposed to violence, repression and other violations, mistrust against others can develop in children (Fink, 2001). This report focuses on trust relations of Eritrean minors who arrived without the company of their parents to The Netherlands and the people who are taking care of them. The people who take care of them are legally appointed by the Dutch government and work for the Dutch unaccompanied refugee minor organization Nidos. Caregivers are legal guardians and mentors of the minors who work for Nidos.

The United Nations estimates that every month 5.000 Eritreans are leaving the country. The main push factor is inhumane treatment in Eritrea. The United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea (COIE) Report of 2016 concluded that crimes against humanity are still taking place in Eritrea (COIE report, 2016). Young people are fleeing Eritrea because of the indefinite National Service, which is harsh and offers a brutal environment of forced labour (COIE report, 2016, pp. 83). The direct and indirect effects of it, are disrupting the social fabric of Eritrean society. The COIE pointed out: "Human rights violations are cited as the main motivating factor for departure by the consistently large number of Eritreans fleeing the country, including the rising number of unaccompanied minors" (COIE report, 2016, pp. 83).

The Unaccompanied Minors of Eritrea arrive flee to neighbouring countries, Sudan and Ethiopia. In the refugee camps correct and meaningful information is hard to obtain which distresses the minors (Schoenmaeckers, 2018). The most common route for onward traveling for Eritrean unaccompanied minors to Europe is the Central Mediterranean route, crossing the Sahara Desert, Libya and the European Union (EU) (Frontex, 2018). The trajectory of unaccompanied minor refugees from Eritrea is dangerous and many experience serious trauma. The trauma accumulates with events in the home country, in transit countries and in destination countries (Van Reisen & Mawere, 2017). Many, if not most, Unaccompanied Minors of Eritrea suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress (Kidane & Van Reisen, 2017).

Post-Traumatic Stress affects perceptions. The *feelings-as-information* concept (Schwarz, 2011) explains that negative feelings (such as those caused by Post-Traumatic Stress) affect the information processing. Trust can be affected if information processing is systematically biased by negative feelings affecting the perception associated with such information. Kidane and Van Reisen (2017) has described collective trauma in the context of information processing among (young) Eritrean refugees. Their conclusion is that collective trauma negatively affects the information processing and the decision-making based on such negatively processed information. Kahneman's theory of Thinking Slow and Thinking Fast (2011), helps explain the perpetuum mobile of a traumatised Thinking Fast Mode of highly traumatised refugees who continuously flee from ongoing dangers. Thinking Fast becomes of way of life, in which few can be trusted.

1.1   Research questions

This research has been carried out as part of a broader research project on resilience-building of unaccompanied minors with severe trauma. The purpose is to help improve the caregiving of Unaccompanied Minors of Eritrea in The Netherlands.

Lack of trust results from ongoing and untreated Post-Traumatic Stress, through the negative feelings that systematically bias the information processing. Healing trauma and building of trust between refugees and caregivers is critical to protect the Unaccompanied Minors of Eritrea in The Netherlands. To what extent is the lack of trust recognised as a critical issue between the minors and care-givers and what can be done to relief such issues of trust? The following overall question guides this research:

> *What are the experiences that undermine trust-building between Unaccompanied Minors of Eritrea and their caregivers in The Netherlands and how do they strategize to overcome such obstacles?*

The research aims to disclose experiences and perceptions of the minors' trust. The research examines how trust and the process of trust building is affected in the context of traumatised Unaccompanied Minors of Eritrea. The following sub-questions will help answer the principal question:

- RQ1.   *What means 'trust' in the context of Eritrea and in the context of the migration experiences of the unaccompanied minors?*

- *RQ2.* *What are the experiences of trust/trust building of Unaccompanied Minors of Eritrea with the guardians, mentors and other professionals and stakeholders in The Netherlands?*
- RQ3. *What strategies do Unaccompanied Minors of Eritrea use to build trust with guardians and mentors?*
- RQ4. *What are the experiences and perceptions of guardians and mentors in relation to trust building with Unaccompanied Minors of Eritrea and what challenges do they face?*
- RQ5. *What strategies do guardians and mentors use to build trust with Unaccompanied Minors of Eritrea?*

In chapter 2 the literature on the relation between trauma and trust is described. In chapter 3, the methodology of the research is described. In chapter 4, the notion of trust is explored within an Eritrean context and within the experiences of Eritrean migrants prior to their arrival in The Netherlands (RQ1) In chapter 5, findings regarding the experiences and perceptions of Unaccompanied Minors of Eritrea on trust building in The Netherlands are outlined (RQ2). In chapter 6, the strategies of unaccompanied minors are identified in their attempts to build trust with their guardians and mentors (RQ3). Chapter 7 focuses on the challenges of building trust with Unaccompanied Minors of Eritrea, from the perspectives of the guardians and mentors (RQ4). Chapter 8, highlights the strategies that the caregivers of the minors apply to increase trust (RQ5). In the last chapter, chapter 9, conclusions are drawn and recommendations are provided.

2 Research Methodology

The approach for this research was critical ethnography; the researchers investigate a situation in context by looking at every angle of it. It is assumed that investigation of the situation requires understanding of the different subjective views, perceptions, ways of feeling, understanding and doing, that make the situation.

This chapter describes how the research was conducted. The chapter is organised as follows: firstly, the research participants are described. Secondly, the different methods for data collection are discussed. Thirdly, how the data were analysed is briefly described. Finally, the ethical considerations are highlighted.

2.1 Research Participants

The research was carried out in six different locations in Utrecht and Huizen (Nidos), Breda and Etten Leur (Juzt), Apeldoorn (Lindenhout), and Leeuwarden and Drachten (Jade Friesland), all locations in The Netherlands. The locations where unaccompanied minors are offered shelter, are called KleineWoonEenheid (KWE) and KinderWoonGroep (KWG). The shelters are managed by service providers who are contracted through Nidos. The authorization to enter the facilities was provided by Nidos and by the Nidos' contract partners who are responsible for the units.

The first contacts were established through Nidos with mentors, guardians and minors. The first respondents introduced the researchers to other respondents. The data were collected from May 2017 until August 2017.

Twenty-five unaccompanied minors participated in the research, twelve girls and thirteen boys. The participants were ranging in age between fifteen and seventeen years. Almost all the minors in the research belong to the Christian Tigrinya ethnic group, coming from rural Southern and Central regions in Eritrea. A few of them belong to the Muslim Tigre ethnic group, coming from rural Western parts of Eritrea. Only two boys came from the cities of Keren and Asmara. Although the participants were not sampled on the basis of quota, the background of the minors is considered reflective of the make-up of unaccompanied minors of Eritrea in The Netherlands, the majority of which are Christian Tigrinya speakers from the Southern borders.

2.1.1 Table 1: Description of Research Participants

Location	Age	Gender	No. of participants	No. of interviews and follow-ups	No. of contact sessions
Huizen	17	F	8	3	24
	16	F	2	3	6
	15	F	1	2	2
Utrecht	17	M	4	4	16
Breda/Etten leur	17	M	6	2	12
Roosendaal	17	M	1	2 phone follow up	2
	15	M	1	2 phone follow up	2
Apeldoorn	17	M	1	1	1
Leeuwarden	16	F	1	2 phone follow up	1

	Male	Female
Guardians	3	8
Mentors	3	4
Senior managers	1	1

Besides the minors, also guardians, mentors and regional-managers were interviewed. The total number of guardians interviewed is 11 (8 female and 3 male); the total number of mentors is 7 (3 female and 4 male) and the number of regional-managers is 2 (1 female and 1 male). Guardians and mentors were interviewed in various Nidos regional offices and the offices of the contract partners of Nidos. Some guardians were interviews in public spaces if they so preferred. After the transcription of the interviews, follow up questions if any were posed via phone calls. The place of work of the interviewed guardians and mentors is not made explicit for confidential reasons because they are still working for Nidos.

2.2 Data collection

The following data were collected for this research:

- Interviews face-to-face
- Focus group meetings
- Interviews by phone
- Observations
- Social Interaction

Participant observation was especially important. The researchers were around the minors to observe how they operated together in group dynamics and how they do activities together. Social interaction with the minors also made it possible to create a good relationship with them. Furthermore, it helped contextualise the issue of trust in their own setting. Participant observations were made during and after a football match and other sport events of the minors. Participation in such activities contributed to build bridges between the minors and the researchers. Every interview was followed by at least one hour of observation. The observations were recorded with audio-recorders and notes in research diaries (O' Leay 2004, pp. 170-173).

Besides participant observations, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted concerning the life-history of the minors. Semi-structured interviews leave space for outside topics and different input from the side of both the minors and the interviewers. Interviews were conducted during the participant observation which resulted in spontaneous questions. The interviews were conducted in the mother tongue of the participants (English, Tigrinya or Arabic) to ensure the minors felt at ease. Taha Al-Qasim conducted the interviews since he speaks all three languages fluently and is Eritrean himself.

In terms of after-care for the minors, follow-up visits were organised in order to ensure and prevent possible traumatic revival. The interviews were held with a topic list concerning life in Eritrea, life in The Netherlands, minors' understanding of trust, experiences with guardians and mentors, minors' journeys to Europe, integration in The Netherlands and feeling of belonging in The Netherlands.

Interviews with the guardians and mentors were run in English and took two to three hours. These interviews were conducted in places where the participants felt most comfortable which were cafés or the offices of Nidos.

All interviews were recorded with a voice recorder after oral approval of the participants.

2.3   Data analysis

A coding-labelling technique was used to analyse the data. The following steps were taken:

- The authors collected and arranged the interviews;
- Interviews were transcribed;
- Recurring themes were distinguished and labels;
- Citations were selected and coded;
- The citations were analysed using a deductive logic (claim, explain and illustrate);
- The analysis was linked and crossed-checked with the current debate in the literature;
- The data was codified based on the topic list used during the interviews (Annex 1: Operationalised list of topics);
- The interviews were compared with one another to see the differences and similarities;
- This made it possible to make generalizations and categorize the interviewed participants based on their answers to the main topics;
- Topics and the participants' answers were linked with one another to see whether there were any connections between the topics and the type of answers.

2.4   Ethical considerations and position of researchers

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from Tilburg University. Participants and Nidos provided consent to participation in the research. 'Trust' is a sensitive issue. The approach was to build natural and friendly relationship with the participants. This forced the authors to regularly review the question: "Are we trustworthy ourselves?" – a reflexive approach, in which the research approach was adapted based on the reflections of the research and its outcomes.

3   Understanding Trust

Trust is context-specific and it has many dimensions, being embedded and functional in societies. (Flanagan, 2003). Research of trust can be approached from a cultural, social and experiential perspectives. This chapter will describe how different approaches contribute to an understanding of trust.

3.1   Cultural perspective

Culture defines what is seen as trustworthy and as children we learn what to trust and what not to trust in a certain context (Dinesen, 2012; Voutira & Harrell-Bond, 1995; Daniel & Knudsen, 1995; Muecke, 1995). According to Muecke (1995) trust varies across societies because it is formed by culture. For example, in Euro-American territories the notion of trust is associated with predictability, but for Cambodian Khmer and Buddhist refugees trust is associated with less predictability and more with kinship and social status. The cultural perspective helps explain how trust moves in the sense that people tend to carry habits of trust from their home country to other countries.

Daniel and Knudsen (1995) argue that culture is the tool to interpret reality. Once someone's culture fades away due to a new environment, people have a hard time comprehending new realities. This leads to a sense of confusion and a feeling of being lost, which in turn, threatens trust of people who have a different cultural background. This feeling of being lost is expressed in terms of impotence. The various stages in the refugee minor's life cycle, which threatens life with radical discontinuity, are stages in which trust is put on trial. Therefore, as Daniel and Knudsen argue:

> *the vindication of trust depends on the creation of meaning and the survival of cultural process. (1995, pp. 4)*

In other words, culture as a concept of "giving meaning" is an essential element of trust.

Voutira and Harrell-Bond (1995) question the assumption that trust is part of being human (Daniel & Knudsen, 1995). Their research in West-Africa shows that in some cultures mistrust has become the norm. They state that the cultural background must be considered, particularly what trust means to a person. The authors challenge the validity of an unqualified acceptance of the concept "trust" as a methodological tool in the analysis of human relations, especially related to refugees. They question the notion that the

encounters between refugees and their helpers have the potential of restoring trust in any simple sense.

Dinesen (2012) argues that the roots of trust are both cultural or experiential. His first claim is that trust is stable and culturally passed on from one generation to another through parental socialization. But trust is also formed by experiences and hence it changes throughout life. Based on a Danish survey, Dinesen (2012) demonstrates that both parental transmission and experiences determine the level of trust of young immigrants. Dinesen found that the impact of the perceptions of institutional fairness on trust in care organisations was considerably stronger than the learnt or socialised understanding of trust.

3.2   Social perspective

Within a social perspective, trust is seen as malleable and shaped by external factors within the environment in which people live and interact (Eisenhower & Blacher, 2006). This implies that experiences from living in a host society can affect trust and this can shape a person's perception of the degree of fairness of state institutions. Hynes (2009) refers to the role that the asylum system plays in creating relationships of mistrust among migrants and refugees. She argues that the system of dispersing asylum seekers throughout the United Kingdom (UK):

> *… leaves little room for institutional or political trust to be restored and hinders the restoration of social trust (2009, pp. 4).*

Jabareen and Carmon (2010) define 'communities of trust' as socio-spatial settings in which there are substantial relationships of trust among people and where they feel protected (safe) from internal risks. Their argument suggests five categories of conditions that together create communities of trust: shared space, shared daily-life practices, shared basic beliefs and attitudes, shared perceptions of risks, and shared interests. Trust is shaped in shared social experiences.

3.3   Experiential perspective

The experiential perspective builds on this notion and is linked to the idea that trust is formed by subsequent life experiences. This approach emphasizes the role of past life experiences as a cause of mistrust shown by refugees. It analyses the reasons for mistrust

during the whole process of fleeing: in their country of origin, during their journeys and in the country of settlement.

In this sense, the social environment and social-political situation of a migrant's country of origin should be taken into account. For instance, an authoritarian political system in the country of origin will lead the migrant to a state of fear and repression. This creates a situation whereby the initial primary lens is suspicion and mistrust (Fink, 2001). Ni Raghallaigh (2013) explains reasons for difficulties in creating relationships of trust of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers in Ireland. These reasons include:

- past experiences
- being accustomed to mistrust
- being mistrusted by others
- not knowing people well
- concerns about the consequences of telling the truth

Particular importance is given to the experiences which learn a person whom to trust or not and why. This approach suggests that reasons for mistrust are embedded within the experiences, from which asylum seekers have come and that they are further exacerbated by the social contexts in which they are now living.

3.4   Differentiations of trustworthiness

According to the philosopher O'Neill (2013), there is a gap between the abstract general idea of trust and how we perceive and place trust in our concrete ordinary life. The generalised idea leads to the wrong generalised question: do you trust politicians, teachers, anyone? In a live day-to-day setting, we seek to place trust in a specific and differentiated way. We trust someone to do and not to do certain things. In other words, trust is contextual, situational and specific. In our ordinary life, we look for trustworthiness in a concrete way. We judge how trustworthy people are in particular aspects. Trustworthiness is what matters in the first place and trusting is the more general notion derived from our judgement. According to O'Neill (2013), people judge others trustworthiness on competency, honesty and reliability.

3.5   Agency

Trust among members of a society can be seen as the key to a healthy society, made of human relations wherein good relations arise when people trust each other. Unpredictability

and chaotic conditions lead to suspicion, fear and tension. Trust relates to the understanding of the behaviour of others and their predictability.

How do we understand a society? The capacity to understand society is called agency. It is the human condition (Ahrendt, 1958), the capacity to interpret the world and to act upon that interpretation (Kabeer,1999). Kabeer identifies that agency is expressed in all human behaviour:

> … bargaining and negotiation, deception and manipulation, subversion and resistance as well as more intangible, cognitive processes of reflection and analysis and it can be exercised by individuals as well as by collectives. (1999, pp. 438)

Emirbayer and Mische (1998, pp. 970) explain agency as the capacity for structural changes in human behaviour in places where different environments come together and people interact based on different interpretive frameworks:

> The temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments – the temporal relational contexts of action – which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations. (1998, pp. 970)

Watters, Hossain, Brown and Rutland (2009) apply the concept of 'agency' to explain how refugee minors have an idea or vision about something they want to accomplish in the new environment and that they are prepared to invest a lot in this life project. Kohli and Mathers (2003) discuss the issue of agency in psychosocial well-being of young unaccompanied asylum seekers in the context of the UK. Unaccompanied minors,, who arrived in industrialized nations, showed resilience despite their many vulnerabilities in such new environments. The authors found that unaccompanied minors are

> … carriers of capacities that can help them to recover and settle after arrival. (Kohli & Mathers, 2003, pp. 201)

Carlson, Cacciatore and Klimek (2012) also found that, despite the difficulties and predicaments which unaccompanied minors face in the post-arrival situations, they were

able to succeed and thrive. In other words, agency refers to the ability and power of a person to act in a changing situation maximising what is possible in that environment. Agency of Unaccompanied Minors may include the ability to:

- Act in relation to a changing or unknown context (e.g. minors response to interviewing at the immigration office);
- Navigate situations (e.g. minors reaction to their guardians and how they react to different social norms or rules, and social values etc.);
- Draw on inherited resources (e.g. how minors draw resources from their family, kinship etc.);
- Experience a sense of well-being, acceptance and recognition (e.g. minors make their voices heard and express their needs);
- Exercise trust in others (e.g. peers, guardian, mentors, professionals, advanced in different forms depending on the individuals involved and the context).

3.6 Trust and Trauma

In the aim to assist Unaccompanied Minors of Eritrea with planning and guiding their future, their past experiences should be reconsidered. Many Unaccompanied Minors of Eritrea suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress, due to severe experiences back in Eritrea and dangerous journeys in transit countries and towards and in Europe, followed by stressful bureaucratic processes in the host countries. Psychologists, therefore, have aimed to develop various strategies to build trust with unaccompanied migrant minors. Nevertheless, Ciaccia and John (2016) conclude that few resources exist to guide caregivers in the care of unaccompanied minors.

Post-Traumatic Stress and depression can result from severe and subsequent traumatic events such as war, torture, separation, loss and human right violations, which causes distress and enduring pain (Van Reisen, Nakazibwe, Stokmans, Vallejo & Kidane, 2018). Besides the individual issues trauma can provoke, it also has a collective manifestation. The Unaccompanied Minors of Eritrea share a common identity in which they all encountered similar experiences which are widely shared on social media and in other communications (Kidane & Van Reisen, 2017). These experiences have become keystone narratives and may result in collective trauma:

Collective trauma involves socially constructed processes with an impact on the identity of the group and its individuals (Van Reisen et al., 2018, pp. 69).

In a state of unprocessed individual and collective trauma, negative emotions are evoked. Unhealed, traumatised people have trouble engaging positively with their situation and using new opportunities that may be offered to them. Investigating the utilisation of support offered to help, it was found that it was hard to change the mindset, despite the social protection that was offered. It was found that trauma depressed the results of such support on offer (Van Reisen, et al., 2018).

Why does trauma associate with trust and with resilience? People's feelings serve as principal source of how they receive information (Schwarz, 2011). Negative feelings impact on the information received. Borrowing from Kahneman (2011), it was concluded that a negative mindset, resulting from Post-Traumatic Stress and collective trauma, negatively impacted how information about new and better opportunities is processed. This may explain that traumatized people, who receive support to their livelihoods, may not see this as a positive opportunity, but rather as a temporally relieve of a generally bad situation (Van Reisen, et al., 2018).

The negative evaluation of the situation and of the information provided to the traumatised person diminishes trust in what is offered and by whom it is offered. In this sense, trauma can hinder someone to change their mindset and to trust others. Mooren, Kleber and Ruvic (2003) analyse the connection between trauma and personal sense of trust/mistrust. The findings of their study show that painful, intrusive memories are related to feelings of distrust, lack of optimism, and perceptions of the world as malevolent. The experiences of the Eritrean minors put trust on trial (Mooren, Kleber & Ruvic, 2003; Raghallaigh, 2013). Therefore, untreated trauma can have a negative effect on the processes of improving the situation of the Eritrean minors, which requires trust and trust building (Van Reisen et al., 2018).

3.7 Conclusions

Trust has cultural and social dimensions and experiences shape notions of trust and what is considered as trustworthy. Traumatic Stress impacts on the experience of trust in that a depressed feeling negatively shades information and therefore enhances feelings of distrust.

The deeply traumatizing experiences of the Eritrean unaccompanied minors puts trust on trial.

4 Origins of the term 'trust'

The meaning of the word 'trust' is heavily dependent on context and on historic evolution (RQ1). The origin of the word trust in the English language is associated with the notion of ownership, specifically of land. Even today, a Trust fund refers to a legal financial construction. Originating from Scandinavia, the word 'Trust' is originally associated with people one can rely on to engage in a transactional arrangement. It is associated with the character of trustworthiness, someone who is reliable in long-standing commitment to what has been agreed, as in the old expression of trust: 'my word is my bond'.

In the French language trust translates as 'confiance', from the words 'con' (together) and the latin 'fidere', faith – to have faith together. This relates to word of God, the faith in a common God, but it also relates to a bond, a contract, a word, on which one can rely.

In Dutch, the word trust translates in vertrouwen, 'trouw' related to a bond, especially referring to a family-bond; the word 'trouwen' means to marry. 'Vertrouwen' in Dutch relates to an intimate relationship between two or more people in each other. It is the personal bond that is expressed in the word 'vertrouwen'. It expresses a judgement of the personal relationship, in the context of everything else that is also present. It is expressed in the moment of time, but with a time perspective associated with it that links past and future through the judgement of the relationship in the present. It is the relationship that is central in the judgement of vertrouwen, quite independent from what society or legal solutions offer and quite distinct from any societal contractual and legal arrangements.

4.1 The meaning of the word 'trust' in Eritrea

The country Eritrea is four times as large as The Netherlands and is composed of a range of different ethnic groups, languages and religious groups. For the purpose of this study we concentrate on the three main religious groups, the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Christian, Catholic and Protestant churches and Islam. Roughly it can be argued that the faith of the Tigrinya-speaking highlanders is predominately associated with the Eritrean Orthodox Church, whilst the Arab-speaking Lowlanders are mainly associated with Islam. The congregation of the Christian, Catholic and Protestant churches are predominantly found in Tigrinya speaking or minority ethnic groups, such as the Kunama.

Within a traditional Tigrinya-speaking context 'trust' would be translated as *'èmnet (እምነት).*
This is associated with the bond within families, ancestry and the bond to the community.
The Arab equivalent of this would be *Thiqa*. This concept of trust relies on the transcendent
unconditional bond of communities with their faith.

Figure 1: Trust in Tigrinya and Arabic (Eritrean context)

*Some glossary pertaining the word **Trust***

In Roman Script	Tigrinya/Arabic	Meaning (English, Dutch)
Emnet (Tigrinya) *Thiqa (Arabic)*	እምነት ثقة	Trust
Zeymeteememan (Tigrinya) *Edm thiqa (Arabic)*	ዘይመተእምማን عدم الثقة	Mistrust
Kedeat/Telmet (Tigrinya) *Khiana/ Ghadar (Arabic)*	ክድዓት/ ጥልመት خيانة أو غدر	Betrayal
Metkel/Felsefena/ Amleko/Msab (Tigrinya) *Mabda/ Falisifat Al'ietqad /Alailtizam (Arabic)*	መትከል ወይ ፍልስፍና: ኣምልኾ ወይ ምስዓብ። مبدأ أو فلسفة الإعتقاد أو الإلتزام	Principle or philosophy of belief or adherence
Mezegae (Tigrinya) *Al'ietmad ealaa 'aw al'iitkal (Arabic)*	ምጽጋዕ الإعتماد على أو الإتكال	To lean on
Wehesenet (Tigrinya) *Al-daman (Arabic)*	ውሕስነት الضمان	Assurance on

Different concepts associated with the word 'trust' can be distinguished within Eritrean culture and these concepts have historically evolved. A closer understanding is necessary in order to identify the dimensions of 'trust' that minors relate to, once they arrive in The Netherlands.

4.2 Trust *'èmnet' (እምነት)* and loyalty *'tameni' (ተኣማኒ)*

The original meaning of 'trust' within the transcended bond to a common faith was replaced by Leninist inspired meanings of 'trust'. The Eritrean authorities, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) has introduced new sources of 'trust' which heavily rely on the common political project of the people within a political interpretation.

In the context of the PFDJ, the meaning of trust evolves to a notion of 'loyalty', *'tameni' (ተኣማኒ).* This loyalty is associated with the ideology of the PFDJ and the willingness to support the political ideology of the party. Loyalty is also associated with the proximity to the source of power of the political party and the level of protection enjoyed by those at the top of the pyramid of power. A loyal person is someone to be trusted within the arena of power-structured social relations.

Loyalty, in the context of an Eritrea political and social context, is expressed in the adherence and participation in the structures that are available. Such structures include the '03' information and propaganda network as a source of information and judgement on loyalty or disloyalty – on who can be trusted and who is less trustworthy. This informal information structure, whether the information is 'fake' or not, is a reliable source of the status of someone within the party.

Given that the PFDJ is the only political party in the country and implements its power with iron hand, the loyalty, or perception of it, is a matter of survival. The PFDJ has developed a wide network of informants that cut across communities and families and which has cut through the code available to families in the concept of *'tameni' (ተኣማኒ)* – loyalty. The concept of *'tameni' (ተኣማኒ)* – loyalty refers to the obedience to the PFDJ organisation of power and who is to be trusted within those structures. Such expression of trust in the sense of loyalty is a matter of survival. *'Kdaat'* is treason as per the 2015 Criminal Code (art 112) which specifically refers to the country. The PFDJ does not distinguish between country or party. *'Kdaat'* therefore also means treason if one acts against the Party or the President

(Interview, RM, 21 May 2018, Skype, MvR). If accused with *Kdaat*, severe consequences may follow, for the person accused and for his family.

The traditional source of 'trust' as *'èmnet' (እምነት)* has further been weakened by the break-down of traditional leadership structures, which the PFDJ replaced in 1996 to create 6 *zobas* from the 10 Provinces, cutting across traditional leadership structures. The reorganisation of the administrative structures allowed the PFDJ to control the bureaucracy without interference of the original traditional organising structures of society. The bureaucracy in Eritrea organises at every level the intelligence about the members of the community.

The bureaucracy, the political party and the government are the only source of power in the country. Eritrean minors, born after 2000, do not have an alternative experience than the survival mechanisms in which families rely on publicly showing their loyalty to the administration. These structures provoke emotions of fear. The loyalty publicly shown is also associated with such fear. Any weakening of perceived loyalty removes the level of protection received by the members of such structures and can have dire consequences. Due to the diminished operative capacity of *'èmnet' (እምነት)* to protect family members, the concept of 'loyalty' has a stronger ability to protect, yet is associated with fear, rather than hope.

4.3 Leaving Eritrea

Many minors who leave Eritrea arrive in the refugee camps in Ethiopia or in Sudan. Most minors have similar stories about how and why they left Eritrea.

Those who leave through the Ethiopia border usually lived only a few hours from the Eritrean border and crossed without many problems or difficulties since they were familiar with the region. The minors interviewed in the Ethiopian camps highlighted that they did not tell anybody from their villages about their journey to Ethiopia at the time they left (Schoenmackers, 2018). This was because they were all afraid that their families would not let them go. Besides that, the fear that officials would know about their travel plan was enough to not tell anybody else, except for those who joined the journey. One girl explained that every street has a "governor" or "manager" who carefully monitored the movements in street or neighbourhoods; who is attending school and who not. If school was not attended sufficiently, the street governor could report them to the government which could result in

detention and subsequently forced military service. Many claimed that the issue of not attending school or not having a valid school- or identification card could lead to detention. This strict monitoring led to distrust against others because if issues were reported to the street or neighbourhood governor, people could be forced into the military service.

Facilitators and human traffickers target children through no-fee deals, in which the minors are only asked to contribute (by contacting members of their family) when they are trapped in ongoing journeys and have no longer the protection of people they know (Van Reisen & Mawere, 2018). While, in those circumstances, they rely on *'èmnet' (እምነት)*, they have broken the sacred code on which such trust is founded and depend for their survival on the utilitarian response of family members to save them from their situation. By acting in this way to escape from the trap, they must contaminate the power of *'èmnet' (እምነት)*, the protective force beyond the realm of PFDJ and the smuggling and trafficking networks, related to it (Van Reisen & Mawere, 2018). It is in this situation that minors may find that they can no longer rely on support of family members and find that their only solution is to actively engage with the smuggling and trafficking networks as interpretors, messengers or even worse. At this point, the minors only source of reliance is the concept of 'loyality' *'tameni' (ተኣማኒ)* to the power structures which now define their future (Van Reisen & Mawere, 2018).

4.4 Dangerous trajectories

In the conversations, some of the minors confirmed that they had difficulties with trust. Some explained the difficulties with trust as a result of the severe experiences in Eritrea and during their travels to Europe. The tough experiences affected their ability to build trust:

> *We come from long journeys, the Sahara and the Sea, you learn, and you become tough and really learn how to survive. (Interview, Al-Qasim with NK., face-to-face, 27 June 2017)*

NK carries memories of his life during a treacherous journey. Furthermore, his words highlight the deep-rooted impact of experiences on his sense of reality. The awareness of having survived but also having been transformed by such experiences make this minor claim that

Life experiences affect the judgement of the minors regarding trustworthiness of other people. Whom to trust or not to trust is a matter of life and death. It is therefore not so much the long-term predictability and intimacy of the relationship that determines trust. Trust is a very practical tool. Who is trustworthy is determined by who keeps you out of danger and solves the problems you encounter on the treacherous journeys:

> *You see horrible things. You know, when you come via Sahara or the Mediterranean Sea you almost hold your life in your hands. You don't know what you are going to become. Thus, trust is not something you can give just like this. Even your own brother betrays you in such circumstances. (Interview, Al-Qasim with NK., face-to-face, 27 June 2017)*

Trust is earned only in tested circumstances as your life may depend on it. The accumulation of treacherous experiences during the journeys to Europe make the minors prone to mistrust. In their daily fight for survival and safety, the minors have learnt to mistrust everyone.

In the difficult circumstances through which minors navigate on these dangerous trajectories, they also rely on old bonds, that help them survive. Especially closest family members are a source of support, and will send money to help pay ransoms, to be released from detention centres or to pay bribes or money demanded by smugglers or traffickers. Throughout such serious challenges the bond of *'èmnet' (እምነት)* appears as the unconditional support without which survival becomes almost impossible.

4.5   Faith as source of Trust and Loyalty

Before leaving Eritrea different sources of protection may be sought, such as reported here by Schryock (2015):

> *This 25-year-old said he spent five years in the military as part of the country's forced conscription policy. He got this tattoo of Jesus Christ before undertaking the journey. (Schryock, 2015)*

Open devotion to the power of God to help negotiate the dangerous journeys is also expressed in tattoos, the minors often get before leaving their country:

This 20-year-old said he prayed constantly during the dangerous trip from Libya. "On the boat we prayed out loud three times a day, but in my heart, there was no rest." His tattoo says: "Rely on the Cross". (Shryock, 2015)

Other minors have been told by their mother to trust the facilitators who would smuggle them from Eritrean to countries abroad. The facilitators and human traffickers are saviours in the situation of the unaccompanied minors and obedience to them is part of the social bond that helps them survive their situation (Van Reisen and Mawere, 2018).

4.6 Trust – learnt from parents

This quote shows the importance for Q of the tight social bonds. The minors spoke of the powerful role parents play in creating these attitudes of trust. Trust results from socialisation experiences, in which parents play a major role. One girl, an Eritrean unaccompanied minor in The Netherlands, stated:

You also learn from your parents how they react to certain situations and how they go about [them]. (Interview, Al-Qasim with A., face-to-face, 11 May 2017)

The survival of the dangerous trajectories presents an opportunity for boys to demonstrate their strength and ability to survive. Many minors arrive with public signs of devotion to their mothers, through tattoos, and their admiration of their mothers is expressed in social media without reservation. One of the tattoos, photographed by Ricci Schryock, reads 'I love you mum, explained as:

This 19-year-old with the tattoo "I Love Mum" said he has not been able to speak to her for six months. He said his mother cried and told him not to leave when he told her he was going to Europe. (Schryock, 2015)

Especially the boys, appearing strong and fearless, express their bond with their mother, a source of power linking them to *'èmnet' (እምነት).* They express their bond, even if they were unable to obey their mother, who was asking them not to leave or left without telling their mother out of fear to worry them:

"My mother is my star," said this 17-year-old, whose tattoo reads "I Love You Mam". He didn't tell her when he left for Italy. "I didn't want her to worry". (Schryock, 2015)

Mothers are venerated as their source of life and creation. Arrival in Europe is a vindication and honour to their mother. It is celebrated with public reverence to their mother and to the church as a contribution to the family and the community. Many wear tattoos of crosses as a sign of their devotion (Schryock, 2015).

The tattoo reads: "Home is Dessert - Without Mother" (Picture by Ricci Schryock, 2015)

4.7 Traditional spiritual practices and Gender-Based Violence

The survival of the girls is quite a different matter and raises questions of what bonds allowed them to survive the dangerous routes. Who protected them and at what cost? One may assume a strong undercurrent here of Gender-Based Violence (Van Reisen & Kidane, 2018). Women are especially vulnerable but not exclusively. The shame and trauma of such violence on routes to Europe leaves deep traces (ibid., 2018).

Cleansing procedures become crucial to fold back into the zone of trusted relations that is offered in *'èmnet' (እምነት)*, but they need to prove the trust can be regained. The role of the preachers and church servants offer here a way back to the unconditional power of *'èmnet' (እምነት)*, even if the Orthodox Church itself is often acting under the direct instruction of the PFDJ. Their devotion to the Church allows the girls back into the zone of 'loyalty' – a space heavily controlled by the PFDJ.

Does devotion to the church and its traditional practices lead them to a path from where they may regain access to the sacred trusted bond of *'èmnet' (እምነት)*? This question is a struggle for many girls. The traumatic experiences lead to pain and insecurity – rather than vindication, and to questions whether they have broken the sacred bond of *'èmnet' (እምነት).* Their increased existential insecurity is expressed in their vulnerability to traditional spiritual practices, such as Tzar and Buda, and their involvement in rituals to drive out the evil spirit that they believe possessed them. This emphasis on the traditional practices maybe a source of hope to connect to the trust awarded under *'èmnet' (እምነት)*, even if the realisation of the rituals requires the minors to associate with the loyalty *'tameni' (ተኣማኒ)* awarded only within the context of the PFDJ dominion (Van Reisen & Smits, 2018).

4.8   Longing for home

In The Netherlands, the minors draw from the way they have learnt what trust is and its potential to keep them safe. An unaccompanied minor in The Netherlands expressed his longing for the social bonds he knows from home:

> *I give you an example […] we grew up in very tight social bonds and we want to continue that, to keep that intact. The host society doesn't understand that. (Interview, Al-Qasim with Q., face-to-face, 11 May 2017)*

One minor highlighted another challenge which he believed resulted from prior cultural conditioning and which made it difficult for his group to socialise confidently within an unfamiliar environment:

> *You know, as Eritreans we are unable to express ourselves and it is difficult for us to speak our mind. (Interview, Al-Qasim with H., face-to-face, 6 July 2017)*

Such statements in which they highlight difficulties with expressing themselves underscores the behaviour that is expected in the Eritrean culture (i.e. to be self-effacing and indirect).

A Dutch mentor, C explained very well the delicate balance between *'èmnet' (እምነት)* – trust, and loyalty, *'tameni' (ተኣማኒ)*, which the Eritrean minors face:

> *As far as I know, Eritrea is a country where it is very difficult to trust anyone. I heard stories about the high chances that a black car stops in front of your*

door and they [the government] take you. Why? You don't know. They said
that you work against the government. So, trust is very difficult to give in
Eritrea. [...] So, I assume that trust is very difficult to give here too. So, I get
that these kids didn't have solid bases to give trust during their life. So, when
they came here, they never experienced to give trust outside their families. I
can imagine that, giving the circumstances, it is almost impossible to give
trust to someone you just met. (Interview, Al-Qasim with C., face-to-face, 26
June 2017)

This highlights the situation that trust as *'èmnet' (እምነት)* may conflict with the political
context that requires loyalty, *'tameni' (ተኣማኒ).* Yet, even if this conflict may be
uncomfortable, it is what the minors know best and what has helped them navigate their
journeys towards The Netherlands.

4.9   Conclusions

There are different connotations connected to the word 'trust'. In a traditional Eritrean
setting the word *'èmnet' (እምነት)* associates with the unconditional transcended bond of
family, community and ancestors, bound in the belief in God. The PFDJ, the only political
party in Eritrea which rules with brutal force, has replaced the traditional concept of 'trust'
with the concept of 'loyalty' *'tameni' (ተኣማኒ)* – based on the proximity and adherence to the
guidelines set out by the party.

In Eritrea and beyond - on the dangerous trajectories, the sacred and hidden bond of
unconditional trust competes with the public bond of utilitarian loyalty. Once minors arrive
in The Netherlands, neither of these two concepts apply to inform their relationship with
their new minders. The carers are, after all, not included in the sacred, life-giving and
transcended creating force of *'èmnet' (እምነት)*, nor do they qualify in the utilitarian concept of
result-driven loyalty *'tameni' (ተኣማኒ).*

5 Experiences and perceptions of the minors

How do the minors experience trust when they are received in The Netherlands? This chapter identifies those experiences and how minors understand their relations in terms of trust, or lack of it (RQ2).

5.1 Language

The minors expressed their frustrations at the specific challenges that made it difficult for them to exercise trust. In particular, all minors stressed the problem of language. For example, AZ states:

> *To trust them or not, the very first thing we need is language. To trust each other we need to talk to one another. We have serious problems with communication and language. How do you trust if you don't communicate well? There is no reason to trust-mistrust if there is a basic problem of communication. Speaking for myself, I have serious problems when it comes to language. I understand Dutch partially and I cannot communicate well. (Interview, Al-Qasim with AZ., face-to-face, 11 July 2017)*

This minor points to the key barrier to trust building as a linguistic one. Moreover, he recognizes how this is a mutual difficulty for both caregivers and minor. He linked "trust" explicitly to communication. He emphasised that the possibilities for building relationships depend on shared language. Difficulties in communication weaken trust. As AZ explains:

> *[…] there cannot be trust without a proper knowledge of a common language. (Interview, Al-Qasim with AZ., face-to-face, 11 July 2017)*

Communication difficulties lead to misunderstandings and therefore to frustrations. Such misunderstandings exacerbate issues of trust. Some minors felt that they were responsible for the poor communication, by noting their own serious problems when it comes to language.

One minor went to the extent of suggesting that trust was not the problem but rather the communication itself. He referred to the fact that guardians, mentors and the minors could not speak each other's language:

> *I don't see any problems with trust. The main problem is communication. You cannot build trust without proper communication. It is a give and take process. If you communicate well you build solid trust. (Interview, Al-Qasim with AZ., face-to-face, 11 July 2017)*

The issue of language is part of a larger cultural challenge. The minors navigate in an unfamiliar context with new expectations and values. The quotes of four minors attest to their recognition of cultural difference as a key challenge, which they found deeply frustrating and they experience as a barrier to building trust:

> *[...]but the main problem is the cultural difference [...]" (Interview, Al-Qasim with Q., face-to-face, 11 May 2017)*
>
> *[...]our Eritrean and Dutch culture is so different [...]" (Interview, Al-Qasim with F., face-to-face, 11 May 2017)*
>
> *[...]the culture here is individual unlike back home [...]" (Interview, Al-Qasim with B., face-to-face, 11 May 2017)*
>
> *[...]people live alone here[...] (Interview, Al-Qasim with M., face-to-face, 11 May 2017)*

The references here illustrate the different notions of trust in Eritrea and in The Netherlands. It further emphasizes the collective notion of *'èmnet' (እምነት)* as opposed to the idea of 'trust' in the Dutch context which is based on an intimate bond between two people, without the collective existence of the community. An individual notion of 'trust' is difficult to comprehend, seen from a culture where a collective understanding of existence is the norm.

5.2 Culture of communication

Minors expressed difficulties when interacting with professionals who were implementing procedures within the Dutch care system. The different culture of communication confuses them and they do not understand – or misunderstand, the intent of the form of communication.

An example of such communication included interviews of minors with immigration officials, mentors, nurses or doctors. For instance, one minor responded to the question: *What would you recommend to a mentor to make your life easier?* as follows:

I don't like lots of questions. I get confused and think: what do they want
from me? (Interview, Al-Qasim with Q., face-to-face, 11 May 2017)

Q's response reveals confusion. She experiences the questions as excessive scrutiny because this is something she had not previously encountered. This results in mistrust and alienation due to confusion and suspicion.

Feelings of alienation, confusion and suspicion can result from a cultural shock. In Eritrea, the tendency to talk about problems is not common, in Dutch society it is. The minor may not see the reasons why she should explain her issues. Moreover, she indicated that her sense of dignity and self-confidence were injured as she asked the question: "what do they want from me?"

5.3   Unrealistic demands from a legal perspective

Participants highlighted situations which made them feel misunderstood. The following citation is recorded in the context of two girls who were talking about their challenges in complying with the bureaucratic procedures:

There is a problem of understanding due to language. For instance, if you
question them about family reunification they say, bring the documents. But
to get these documents ... they don't understand that we can't, they don't
have a clue about the problem. Our country's situation is extremely unique.
They don't understand. (Interview, Al-Qasim with SA., face-to-face, 18 May
2017)

The quote expresses the frustration of SA, who is requested documents which are impossible to obtain. The quote also highlights the lack of understanding on the frustration caused by the lack of understanding by officials regarding the situation in Eritrea.

The impossible demands communicated to the minors rhave an effect on the minor's perception of staff members who communicate these demands. They are perceived as being ignorant of the situation in Eritrea. SI commented that:

We cannot talk to our parents, how are we supposed to get our documents
here to start the procedures of family reunification? People here don't
understand us. I don't think our mentors and guardians have the broad

picture of our situation. (Interview, Al-Qasim with SI., face-to-face, 19 May 2017)

This quote expresses disbelief and surprise at receiving such requests not only from immigration staff but also from guardians and mentors. Such an emphasis on documentation made the minors feel if their caregivers failed to recognise their reality in terms of the challenges and limitations they have in communicating with families and communities in Eritrea.

SI further expressed frustration regarding the impossible demand for the marriage certificate of her parents. SI pointed out:

> *It is a huge problem. The situation in Eritrea is very bizarre. For example: when I was asked to bring the papers to certify that my parents are married, you know, they have been married for more than 30 years they cannot even find it. They made huge problems out of it. It's really hard to explain them. (Interview, Al-Qasim with SI., face-to-face, 19 May 2017)*

The quote above shows that the procedure regarding family reunification is experienced as a big problem. The issue is mostly related to the impossibility to provide the documents required by Dutch official agencies. The lack of recognition of what is possible and what is not possible in Eritrea is a source of mistrust.

In the interview with F, he confirmed that the emphasis during family reunification procedures is on the requirement to obtain documents. He experienced this as alienating:

> *The problem of bringing papers disturbs us a lot. It erodes you [ይሸርሸረካ!] (Interview, Al-Qasim with F., face-to-face, 9 August 2017)*

F chose the word erosion to convey the negative emotional impact the procedures have on him. The bureaucratic procedures, which are impossible to abide by, make the minors feel misunderstood. Since guardians and mentors communicate – or explain, the needs of papers which cannot be met and are entirely unreasonable from the perspective of the minors, it is hard for the minors to trust guardians and mentors when there is a feeling of not being understood. They also do not understand why those in charge of caring for them, do not do more to seek reasonable solutions that can be met.

The mistrust of the political system in Eritrea is transferred to these demands onto the guardians and mentors. In his research, Ní Raghallaigh (2013) demonstrated that mistrust of authorities back home and on the move leads to the mistrust of guardians and mentors in the country of settlement.

The legal situation is a crucial determinant of the minors' future safety and matters a great deal to the minors. There are many issues of a legal nature, especially concerning documentation. The minors do not understand that the guardians and mentors can do little about the rigidity of the legal requirements. They get frustrated when this expectation is not met. The fact that caregivers are blamed for the complicated legal procedures, reveals that there is confusion in terms of roles.

The impossible demands on the minors to produce documents that are impossible to produce, exacerbates the mistrust between them and their carers, who represent the system that makes demands on the minors that cannot be met.

5.4   The rigidity of negotiating solutions

The minors expect to have some room for manoeuvring within the law. The minors are not familiar with the rigidity of European legal procedures. They compare this with the flexible procedures in an Eritrean context of along the trafficking routes, where usually solutions can be obtained by paying money. It shows that the problem-solving tools in Eritrea and on the journeys, do not match with what the situation is in The Netherlands. The ways this is plaid out creates mistrust to all sides, as recorded here in an interview with a carer:

> *They are a negotiation group, especially the girls. If they ask you something and you say no, they will go to another coach [mentor] and pose the same question in the hope they get a positive response. (Interview, Al-Qasim with S., face-to-face, 21 June 2017)*

The collective behaviour of the minors is associated with negotiation and looking for more satisfying answers. The minors seem not to accept negative answers and therefore try to do whatever they can in order to get what they want. The minors do not understand the logic of a rigid rule-based system that governs the care-regime and they try to negotiate their way around this.

B expressed a sense of feeling an outsider in the presence of Dutch mentors and guardians:

There is one bad thing about this country. They [guardians and mentors] all operate at the same level, […] they sit in a meeting and they agree on certain issues, on what to reply to us. For instance, you ask something to one mentor or guardian, they would discuss with each other and they all would come back to you with the same final answer. So, there is no other answer except that one. While in Eritrea, if one person says no to you, the other might say yes. So, you can manoeuvre. (Interview, Al-Qasim with B., face-to-face, 12 June 2017)

B is expressing frustration at the lack of space for manoeuvring when in the company of adults who are seen as a homogenous and exclusive group. B. contrasts this experience with his earlier socialisation in Eritrea where he felt there were more opportunities to enter into a meaningful dialogue.

5.5 Records of care

Mistrust increases due to stress created by the limitations of the technical procedures, such as document finding and filling out of forms. These procedures are experienced as alienating because they appear to prioritise bureaucratic requirements which do not appear to result in solutions for situations that the minors are trying to resolve. Minors do not only blame guardians and mentors. They point out that the care system is more focused on meeting the needs for documentation, rather than the feelings of the minors. This leads to emotional disconnection.

The minors feel that the circulation of information about them is intimidating and alienating. Reporting by guardians and mentors of their feelings as an object of scrutiny diminishes trust. This is similar to the reporting of intelligence experienced in Eritrea by the PFDJ and it is a serious source of mistrust:

When it comes to holding secrets, mentors or guardians do not keep them. [Laughter]. In fact, they are right, it is their job. They have to write and report everything. Personally, I don't talk about everything and share all of my secrets with them. (Interview, Al-Qasim with F., face-to-face, 9 August 2017)

The minors claim that information they share with their caregivers is spread among the other caregivers during meetings. This makes the Unaccompanied Minors of Eritrea feel like objects of study instead of valued subjects.

> *I tell you an instance, if you tell something to one mentor. She either writes it down or tells it to her colleagues, even small things. In the complex that I live there is one mentor who keeps things quiet and is trustworthy. The others on the other hand, if you tell them: 'please do not tell', they will go straight to the others and tell them: 'Bum!' But we know them one by one, who lies who keeps secrets and who is trustworthy. We study them like they study us. We know them very well. (Interview, Al-Qasim with B., face-to-face, 12 June 2017)*

These quotes reveal further that they see the professionalised focus on them as "refugees", which undermines their sense of belonging, of being part of a family. This undermines trust in the caregivers and enhances the solidarity amongst the Eritrean minors. All caregivers highlighted that Eritreans tend to form a close group with fellow Eritreans. During various observation sessions, the minors demonstrated a strong sense of solidarity with each other and care for each other's wellbeing.

5.6 The desire to be trusted

Some minors were surprised that the carers felt it was difficult to build trust. For instance, one girl typified the feelings of many minors in pointing out – defensively, the following:

> *Interviewer: "Many guardians and mentors think that it is difficult to build trust with Eritrean minors. What do you think about that statement?"*
>
> *AB: "Why they say that we don't trust them? I don't understand why and how they can say that, there are no problems about trust." (Interview, Al-Qasim with AB., face-to-face, 30 May 2017)*

AB was disappointed to hear that mentors and guardians feel that the minors do not trust them. It was a sensitive conversation and she immediately cut off the conversation affirming that there are no issues concerning trust at all. AB's viewpoint contradicts with her peers' perceptions and those of her caregivers in relation to the trust building process.

5.7 Conclusions

The following sources of mistrust were discussed in this chapter, based on the experiences recorded from Eritrean minors:

- **Language:** the inability to communicate and express information or ideas in adequate ways and the inability to understand information provided by the carers;
- **Culture of communication:** the minors experience a culture shock which undermines trust; they particularly fail to understand the culture of asking many questions and the invasion of privacy;
- **Unrealistic demands:** the minors are requested by the Dutch agencies to produce papers which they are unable to produce. The guardians and mentors are seen as complicit when they communicate or explain this and the lack of understanding of their situation is transferred to mistrust of the carers;
- **Rigidity of negotiating solutions:** the Dutch system of rule-based requirements is contrary to the transactional situation in Eritrea and on the migration routes where most solutions can be negotiated (or paid for). The minors fail to understand why the carers, who are supposed to be on their side, fail to offer practical and workable solutions for them which takes into account their real situation;
- **Records of Care:** the recording of information about the minors is a source of mistrust which reminds the minors of their situation at home in which intelligence record all daily activities – they perceive this as that the system of control is more relevant than the response to their needs. This undermines the trust they have in their guardians and mentors, especially those that seem to behave bureaucratically.
- **The desire to be trusted:** The minors express a clear desire to be trusted and are disappointed if they are confronted with the issue of lack of trust between carers and minors.

6 Strategies of minors towards trust-building

This chapter provides the perspective of the Unaccompanied Minors of Eritrea about how they look at building trust in unfamiliar environments and relationships. The chapter seeks to add another dimension to understanding the process of trust building by exploring how Unaccompanied Minors of Eritrea exercise agency. In other words, how they use their own resources, apart from the care system, to enhance their ability to cope with the new situations (Kabeer,1999; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). This chapter seeks to answers the sub-question: *What strategies do the minors employ to build trust with guardians and mentors? (RQ3)*

6.1 Providing mutual support

The minors demonstrate a high level of maturity, creativity and mutual reciprocity. This was recognized in how the minors helped each other in a variety of aspects. Such help included cooking, advise, councelling and lending money. They celebrate religious days together and support each other when someone close to them died. When one was in need of moral or mental support the minors helped in whatever way possible. Furthermore, they assisted their peers with difficult bureaucratic issues such as family-reunification applications. While they had little to offer, in situations where relatives or friends became victim to human trafficking and ransoms where demanded, all minors contributed where possible.

In all these situations, the minors showed a great capacity to support and care for each other. The sharing underscored their sense of interdependence and responsibility for each other's wellbeing. Furthermore, by offering each other hope, concern, practical assistance and solidarity, they indicated their capacity to trust themselves and each other.

6.2 Planning the future: setting goals

Setting goals is an important driver to achieve ambitions for the future. With a view to be prepared for a job, goals are set to learn the language and to go to school. For example during the interview with A (a minor):

> *"After a job interview I realized that I have goals. I said to myself that I had to speak the language, I cannot work without the language. Therefore I took my schooling very serious. I wanted to learn and to be somebody."*
> *(Interview, Al-Qasim with A., face-to-face, 11 May 2017)*

The aspiration to take advantage of educational opportunities to ensure success in the future was expressed by many minors. The ability to speak Dutch, as well as English, is a priority. They also reported the need to prepare for future work and be responsible for their wellbeing in The Netherlands. For many of the minors the capacity to share such objectives with caregivers, their peers and other professionals, was an important component of building trust in the new context.

6.3   Protecting privacy

Some of the minors spoke of their need to keep certain aspects to themselves. They did this strategically with different private issues as a means of maintaining a degree of autonomy in a context where they felt they had little.

However, Unaccompanied Minors of Eritrea also justified their approach as a strategy for managing a system of excessive scrutiny. For instance, one minor outlined that they study the mentors and guardians in the same way they studied the minors. This is a form of strategic agency that protected their privacy and therefore their dignity. Moreover, in a care system where information is shared and privacy is not always guaranteed, studying caregivers contribute to gain more control over their own life and to find ways around the system. The minor tries to return the same scrutiny he feels the caregivers are directing at him. While such behaviour may be a sign that minors are mistrustful, it may be a coping mechanism by which this group seeks to be true to themselves.

6.4   Conclusions

This chapter outlined strategies identified by the minors as helping them navigating in a challenging and unfamiliar environment, which can be alienating. Their resourcefulness and creativity in deploying different coping strategies allows them to preserve a degree of dignity and autonomy and a collective sense of well-being. The following coping mechanisms are specifically relevant:

- **Providing mutual support:** The Eritrean minors rely on each other and offer mutual support in diverse ways, ranging from cooking together to lending money or contributing to ransoms for family members who are trapped in detention;

- **Planning the future, setting goals:** The minors are keen to be independent and to ensure that they can support themselves, which encourages them to learn the language, go to school and set realistic goals for their future;
- **Protecting privacy:** The minors protect themselves in relation to issues that they feel are outside of the care-system and which cannot be resolved within the care-system. They insist on their privacy to deal with issues that are beyond the immediate care-situation.

7   Experiences of Caregivers

Caregivers experience issues of lack of trust in relation to Eritrean minors in their care. This worries them and they try to understand the cause of it. This chapter identifies the way in which the guardians and mentors experience lack of trust with Eritrean minors and their ways of understanding it (RQ4).

7.1   Communication

There certainly are issues in relation to the trust between caregivers and Eritrean minors. NK (a guardian) expressed frustration concerning the lack of progress to build a relationship with the minors, referring to the closed nature of the Eritrean minors:

> *They will not open up to us, to see us as people that want to help them.*
> *(Interview, Al-Qasim with NK., face-to-face, 1 May 2017)*

S, a caregiver, also expressed her discomfort in that she sensed the Eritrean minors in her care did not trust her:

> *I don't think my pupils trust me. I don't see it that often. Why? I don't know*
> *(Interview, Al-Qasim with S., face-to-face, 11 July 2017)*

The Eritrean minors reported that communication with their mentors or guardians is complicated (chapter 5) explain this due to the fact that their ability to speak Dutch is not good enough. The caregivers emphasise the difficulty in bridging the culture differences in communication, as stated by the guardians, K and C:

> *Sometimes we observe behaviour that we don't understand also because the environment they come from, Eritrea, is so different from The Netherlands, where I come from. So, what helps me is considering their behaviour and question myself: 'why does she/he behave like that?' For instance, I have felt like Eritrean minors were rude while talking to me, later someone explained me that in Tigrinya there is a lack of words, therefore it is normal to express yourself like: 'Do this! Do that!' This helps me all the time, I realise that this has nothing to do with me, but it is just their way of thinking or behaving. Therefore, I don't think that all the Eritreans are difficult, but I do see that*

this has become a cliché. (Interview, Al-Qasim with K., face-to-face, 27 July 2017)

W points out that carers are trained to understand cultural differences and that they should be able to manage such cultural differences as a part of social awareness:

Socially awareness is related to my ability to talk to different persons, from the higher class to the lower class, from male to female, from Gipsy to Turkish. (Interview, Al-Qasim with W., face-to-face, 4 May 2017)

An Eritrean caregiver explains that he does not have problems of communication with the Eritrean minors, observing that he has no cultural barriers to overcome:

I am Eritrean by origin and I can easily talk with them. There is no barrier. I can understand their frustrations and complains. My colleagues don't. I communicate well with them and I know exactly their frustrations. (Interview, Al-Qasim with A., face-to-face, 16 May 2017)

One mentor attempted to explain mistrusting behaviour by referring to the context in Eritrea in which the minors have grown up:

Surely, it has to do with their life experiences. Trust starts at a very young age, if you don't have it, it is difficult to build it later in life. Plus, it is essential to take into consideration what they have been gone through. Their migration experiences and all the difficult circumstances. (Interview, Al-Qasim with S., face-to-face, 26 June 2017)

The care-givers are interested to understand the reason for the lack of trust among the Eritrean minors. They are also concerned with the way in which the Eritrean minors are labelled as a group that suffers from issues of trust as this carer explains:

Yes, I do see that minors are perceived as a mistrusting group. It is a difficult thing, sometimes I feel like I am going to the same way. I am trapped in my own stereotypes. (Interview, Al-Qasim with C., face-to-face, 25 July 2017)

This citation illustrates that the guardians and mentors care about the trust between them and the Eritrean minors. They try to explain the situation to help resolve issues of communication that are associated with issues of trust and mistrust.

7.2   Group-dynamics

While some carers attributed the mistrust to the prior experiences of the minors back in Eritrea and during their journeys, many guardians and mentors argued that the groups' attitude was hard to understand for them. The guardians and mentors felt the minors were beyond their reach. Many guardians and mentors perceive this group-behaviour of the Eritrean minors as a challenge. M (a guardian) said:

> *How I felt about the Eritrean minors was that they are a mistrusting group. At the beginning, it was very difficult to build relationships. (Interview, Al-Qasim with M., face-to-face, 25 May 2017)*

A perception is that Eritrean minors tend to be 'followers'. One mentor outlined this as follows:

> *In my experience, what I have observed is that Eritreans are always following. What I mean is they always tend to follow someone else. […] If the person that they are following [usually older] is negative, they all tend to be negative towards you. You need to surgically enter, study them and find out who is influencing who. (Interview, Al-Qasim with A., face-to-face, 21 June 2017)*

Carers see Eritrean minors as easily influenced by their peer group leaders. Such behaviour provokes negative responses and frustrations among the carers.

7.3   Secrecy

In parallel to the strong group dynamics, Eritrean minors are sometimes experienced as secretive by the caregivers. The caregivers may feel it is useful to connect around individual issues but this may not always be welcome as stated by a caregiver in the following statement:

> *"Sometimes their families are directly involved in the decisions they make here. Unaccompanied Minors of Eritrea do not want to tell us the reasons of*

that, they don't want to talk about their families. So, when we say let's call the family together, they don't want to do it." (Interview, Al-Qasim with M., face-to-face, 25 May 2017)

Issues to be dealt with in this way, may be a legacy of the minors' experiences of the political and social situation in Eritrea, where choosing secrecy and silence is considered a safer strategy than talking and exposure.

7.4   Elasticity of truth

Truth is an important ingredient of trust. While truth may seem a one-dimensional concept, it may also be a very elastic concept. Some carers understand that 'truth' is complicated in the world of the minors. During the interview with W this was highlighted:

First, those [stories] aren't lies. Lying means putting 'too much' in your story. Sometimes, children have been sent away with a particular story which, as time passes, ends up being real in their mind even though the truth is different. When you know it, you can work with it. I give you an example. Once a boy died, in one hour we got phone calls from anywhere; Italy, Austria, [...], all asking what happened to the boy. When the boy was with us he stated: 'I don't have family, I am alone, help me.' When we received all those phone calls, I was not shocked, but some of my colleagues were. When a boy claims that he doesn't have any family, I doubt about it as I know it might not be true. Again, once you know that it might not be true, you can work with it, otherwise you will just be shocked. (Interview, Al-Qasim with W., face-to-face, 4 May 2017)

Sometimes there are different levels to the truth. People can make up stories to get help and end up believing them. Their stories become their truth even if these stories are not real. According to W, only when you are aware of the different levels of truth, you can work with it. Therefore, building a relationship of trust requires being aware of the different levels of truth. The main point is that if a young person is perceived as someone who lies or who is secretive about the truth, the consequences can be that he is not trusted and that he has difficulties with trusting others (Ni Raghallaigh, 2010).

7.5   Lack of quality time

Implicit in all the mentors' statements about communication – as well as the other challenges highlighted so far – is the need for spending time with the minors. But this is not always easy, as highlighted by B, a caregiver:

> *What is important to build trust is spending quality time with our pupils. The main problem that we are currently facing is time. We have too many responsibilities and too many pupils, we are overwhelmed to spend much time with them. (Interview, Al-Qasim with B., face-to-face, 27 June 2017)*

Many guardians and mentors highlighted that spending more time with their pupils is difficult due to lack of time and the heavy workload. K and G (guardians) confirmed this view:

> *In order to build trust, it is important to have time. Sometimes there are so many problems to solve and you end up being constantly in a rush, the meetings are always too short. Also, we need time to do extra things, like having ice cream together etc. We need time to make true contacts, to build true relations. (Interview, Al-Qasim with K., face-to-face, 27 July 2017)*

All the caregivers indicated that the bureaucratic workload must be lowered as it takes away time that can be spent with the minors.

> *The workload needs to be lowered and there needs to be less paperwork. We need to bond with the minors and we cannot do that by simply working in front of the computer screen. (Interview, Al-Qasim with G., face-to-face, 11 May 2017)*

There is consensus among guardians and mentors that their obligation to fulfil complex and time-consuming demands hampers their commitment to build trust relationships which need time and energy. For instance, S (mentor) outlined the following:

> *In order to win and build trust you need to go to the base, not to the surface. You might have also problems at the surface, but you need to get to the bottom, find out the problem and start from there. (Interview, Al-Qasim with S., face-to-face, 26 June 2017)*

However, this desire to build a meaningful relationship with the minors was sometimes made impossible due to bureaucratic, time-consuming processes, they feel.

Trust, as we showed before, is something that arises over time. Additionally, it requires quality time. The mentors and guardians also claimed that because of the high number of minors they have to take care of, quality time is minimal.

7.6 Insufficient clarity of responsibilities

Minors seem to be confused about whose task is what and who they should talk to when they need something. The following quote demonstrates the confusion of roles, recognized by the caregivers:

> *It is a constant process of defining whose task is it, whose role is it. And this is a constant struggle in our job. This leads to tensions with the pupils because they come to you with questions and you cannot reply anything else but: 'it is not my task' and this brings frustration because when children ask important questions they need empathy. (Interview, Al-Qasim with E., face-to-face, 15 June 2017)*

This confusion can be frustrating and can cause suspicion amongst the minors towards the care-givers.

7.7 Conclusions

Caregivers feel that the lack of trust in their relationship with unaccompanied minors from Eritrea is a big problem. The problems identified are different from the problems identified by the minors. The issues identified by the caregivers are categorized as follows:

- **Communication:** the main problem identified by the caregivers is not the level of Dutch language skills but particular problems in communication, attributed to cultural differences related to the situation in Eritrea;
- **Group dynamics:** these are related to the Eritrean minors perceived as operating within closed groups, with leaders and followers, which are difficult to penetrate;
- **Secrecy:** A legacy of the situation in Eritrea may be a strong dependency on private and secret communication with family to protect them, which can be misinterpreted as mistrust by the caregivers;

- **Elasticity of the truth:** care-givers find it difficult to relate to the different levels of truth communicated by their pupils;
- **Lack of quality time:** the caregivers feel that their schedules are too rushed and that these do not allow them adequate time to spend time with the minors which they see as necessary to be able to build trust;
- **Insufficient clarity of responsibility:** the caregivers find that the organisation of their responsibilities lacks clarity and that this interferes with their attempts to build trust with the Eritrean minors.

8 Strategies of caregivers to build trust

The caregivers are aware that trust is an issue in their relationship with the Eritrean minors. What are the strategies of guardians and mentors to overcome these problems? *(RQ5)*

8.1 Communication and dialogue

Guardians and mentors emphasized the need to construct and maintain clear channels of communication with the minors. One represented the views of many in stating that:

> *It is all about better communication and reaching out. (Interview, Al-Qasim with S., face-to-face, 27 June 2017)*

The care-givers emphasise that simple and two-way communication helps to strengthen the relationship and build trust. According to G, the ability to greet in the local language contributes to the establishment of friendly and meaningful relationships.

> *Eating together or talking small talks in Tigrinya… For instance 'Kemey alleka' – means how are you doing? 'Kemey haderka' – How was your night (did you sleep well). This usually helps with getting close to each other. (Interview, Al-Qasim with G., face-to-face, 11 May 2017)*

Additionally, the need for intercultural listening and active listening was mentioned:

> *We are in the position to understand that children might not understand us, who we are, what we do, what we are talking about. Children haven't seen a guardian before; therefore they might be confused if we simply say: 'I am your guardian; I am here to help you'. Therefore, it is crucial to ask them if they did understand what a guardian is and what they want to do... (Interview, Al-Qasim with W., face-to-face, 4 May 2017)*

Some caregivers spoke of the importance of cultural awareness during insignificant situations. For instance, G (guardian) pointed out the following:

> *There is a need of injecting culture in every bit of our thinking from the top-down. If you want to understand these young people you need to understand their needs and behaviour, and this does not have to be through paperwork only. [...] we need to inject into honesty a cultural flavour. For instance, if my*

pupil comes to me showing his newly bought shoes, red and shiny, even if I don't like them, but my pupil do, I have to respect his or her opinion and stand on their side. Being honest but within limited parameters is a crucial value that a guardian needs to uphold. (Interview, Al-Qasim with G., face-to-face, 11 May 2017)

Caregivers used such communication strategies in developing empathetic relationships with Unaccompanied Minors of Eritrea. G. (guardian) continued:

Another important quality to have is empathy, we need to understand and walk in the same shoes that these young people are walking in, including what is going on in their head, their feeling, their pain and what they are going through. That is crucial in my opinion. Dialogue is very crucial in my opinion. There is nothing called absolute true. What is true for me is different from what is true for you. Thus, we need to see things in a relative and dialogic way. (Interview, Al-Qasim with G., face-to-face, 11 May 2017)

This quote expresses the belief that through good dialogue and empathy regarding the painful histories of the minors, good relationships can be established. This will have a positive effect on the trust building process. Additionally, the role of cultural mediators can contribute to achieving good relationships. As K (guardian) noted:

I also read in the reports that for Syrian people it is easy to find their way in our society. I see that for most of the Eritrean people it is harder. The more vulnerable ones need a cultural mediator, because they don't trust me. Maybe when they see somebody who comes from the same country, had the same journey and has made it, they feel more at ease and find it easier to trust them. (Interview, Al-Qasim with K., face-to-face, 27 July 2017)

Caregivers also warned against labels and judgements that were too much derived from a Dutch context:

You know, in Holland we have the system based on talk and talk and talk... I came from a country where we do not talk, we don't! And if I look at my family, none of the members have been to a therapist, nothing like that and

yet they have experienced a war. I think it is important to realise to not push
people, let somebody be. Simply labelling a person as traumatized can be
dangerous. It is not always a trauma, maybe it is something else, maybe they
don't feel that well. I think the Dutch people have a hard time to understand
that other people might be able to put their suffers aside, and not talk about
it. Putting suffering aside is also a way to accept them. And I see with
Eritrean pupils that they accept what they have been through. They accept
the fact that they had to move away. Some of them will have to go to a
therapist but others won't. And this might derive from their culture, and it is
OK, we have to accept it. (Interview, Al-Qasim with E., face-to-face, 15 June
2017)

A more appropriate communication that is more in line with the pupil and does not force Dutch values on the minors is important for a dialogue to succeed and for communication that enables the building of trust.

8.2 Flexibility to follow instinct

The minors reported that the rigidity of the application of the rules in The Netherlands was a source of tension and mistrust (chapter 5). Interestingly, many caregivers highlighted the need to be flexible in interacting with the Eritrean minors, in the sense that they should adapt rules and regulations in response to particular circumstances. One mentor outlined the following:

> *"It is about being flexible when you handle problems. You do not have to*
> *make things worse and very tense using rules and regulations. As guardian*
> *or mentor, you need to trust your instinct. Not everything is regulated by*
> *rules." (Interview, Al-Qasim with S., face-to-face, 26 June 2017)*

It is a fine line for the caregivers to present a clear and transparent regime on the one hand, based on clear rules and without favour, while responding to the particular circumstances presented to them. S draws attention to the need of the guardians and mentors to navigate between protocols that they are expected to adhere to and to the particular situations they face with the minors. For example, C (mentor) said:

"I see this especially with Eritrean children. In fact, when I have to step in, because they did something really wrong or something they won't benefit from and I tell them you have to do this and that, I feel that the trust is going away." (Interview, Al-Qasim with C., face-to-face, 26 June 2017)

Some mentors pointed out that an overly rigid approach to apply rules might be counterproductive in relation to trust building. K (a guardian) explained the benefits of flexibility to building trust by avoiding an overly authoritarian and rule-bound approach:

"I had to struggle with myself as on one hand the rule is that children have to go to school. On the other hand, it was good that he contacted me. He was maybe dealing with a huge amount of stress, therefore staying at a friend might help. In the end, I decided to call him and said: 'Thank you for contacting me, but you know the rules.' Nevertheless, I asked him how it was going at his friend's. He replied that it was relaxing. So, I decided to make an exception and I arranged with him: he could stay at his friend only if he contacted his teacher explaining that he was staying at his friend and that he would have been back in time to talk to me and make further plans. And I kept all my fingers crossed. But on the day we had the appointment, he was half an hour earlier and he looked very good and proud of himself because he made it. And his behaviour changed also at school. […] this was an example for the mentors too. Because this boy was a very difficult boy. And his mentors, like lots of mentors, just stick to the rules. This didn't work out at all with this boy. Sometimes you have to go above the rules. Sometimes you have the lead, but this cannot be expressed in an authoritarian way." (Interview, Al-Qasim with K., face-to-face, 27 July 2017)

This story demonstrates the attempts to strike a balance between the application of clear rules and offering space to allow the minors to settle and possibly heal – as a basis for building trust as carer with the pupil. From the vantage point of many mentors, trust building with the minors begins with finding the right balance between rules and bonding.

8.3 Offering care with honesty

Some guardians also emphasised the importance of demonstrating professionalism in their interaction with the Eritrean minors:

> *"I think a good guardian has to be professional, for instance being on time at the meetings, not being late in your answers." (Interview, Al-Qasim with W., face-to-face, 4 May 2017)*

Many guardians and mentors addressed that their own attitudes and behaviour are an important basis for building mutual understanding. They are aware that can only achieve to build trust if they themselves behave in trustworthy ways. For instance, one guardian said:

> *"For me, a good guardian is someone who possesses qualities such as clarity, structures, and someone who is driven by care. These qualities lead to building trust. As you see, it is something that you give and take. It is not one-way lane, it is a double one." (Interview, Al-Qasim with G., face-to-face, 11 May 2017)*

A (mentor) pointed out that honesty with care in communication is an important basis for building trust:

> *"I think that being there for them, listening to them and being honest, even when what you have to say is something which is not what they want to hear, are good ways to building trust." (Interview, Al-Qasim with A., face-to-face, 16 May 2017)*

Communicating with authenticity and honesty, based in a genuine interest of care is seen as an important way to negotiate the question of rules on the one hand and not to lose trust of the pupils on the other hand.

8.4 Offering trust

On the note of trusting the pupils, C (mentor) made a very interesting remark, in pointing to the idea that giving trust creates trust. If trust is offered by the caregiver, trust can be returned by the minor:

"You have to create circumstances to be trustworthy and meanwhile show the children that you trust them, that you trust their own decisions. Usually, if you show that you trust them, they trust you too." (Interview, Al-Qasim with C., face-to-face, 26 June 2017)

Another strategy is to emphasise the qualities of the minors as a contribution to the process of trust building. By recognizing their qualities, caregivers a genuine interest in their lives and demonstrate that they trust their qualities. The commitment of guardians and mentors to ongoing dialogue to listen to the pupil and to be there for them is paramount. In such a context, a reciprocal relationship can be built:

"At least you have good reasons to be trusted. Because you are giving them a lot. Trust in this sense is reciprocal – meaning give and take. You cannot take anything that you have not given. If you fulfil these conditions, then you can make a good argument that you are trustworthy. If I have any doubt that my pupil is not trusting me, I sense that I am having some issues with trusting him/her myself." (Interview, Al-Qasim with B., face-to-face, 27 June 2017)

This mentor draws attention to reciprocity, the need to give trust in order to receive it. It emphasises the two-way relational dynamic of trust-building.

8.5 A safe environment

All guardians and mentors stress the need to provide a safe environment. As E (guardian) pointed out:

"Someone needs to feel safe in order to trust. If there is no safety in the environment, there is no trust. You can't expect someone to trust you if they don't feel safe. Sometimes we observe behaviour that we don't understand; maybe it is because they don't feel safe." (Interview, Al-Qasim with E., face-to-face, 15 June 2017)

The emphasis on safety needs to be understood in relation to the prior experiences of the minors. Additionally, it should be taken into account that they lived life-threatening traumatizing situations which affected their ability to feel safe.

8.6 Conclusions

The caregivers employ various strategies to broker trust with their pupils. These strategies align to some degree with the concerns identified by the minors, undermining their trust in the carers.

The strategies of the guardians and mentors relate to the following areas:

- **Communication and dialogue:** the caregivers prioritise the communication and dialogue, emphasising the investment in the dialogue must be a two-way stream in which caregivers should be present as active and culturally sensitive listeners;
- **Flexibility to follow instinct:** the caregivers stress the need to balance rules and clarity with responsiveness to the pupils and flexibility;
- **Offering care with honesty:** caregivers try to balance a caring attitude with an honest and sincere approach to the minor, in order to build predictability and clarity as a basis for trust-building;
- **Offering trust:** caregivers have positive experiences in offering trust to the Eitrean minors as a way of inviting reciprocity of such trust;
- **A safe environment:** trust requires a safe environment, which is a challenge with minors who may have experienced very traumatising situation. The caregivers try to do everything in their ability to create a safe environment.

9 Conclusions

This study compares the ways in which 'trust' or lack of it, is experienced by the minors and the caregivers is experienced. The study was based on interviews, conversations and participatory observation. The study was commissioned by Nidos, the organisation which is in charge of the protection of the Unaccompanied Minors in The Netherlands. The study was carried out to understand whether the perception of problems of trust between Eritrean minors and their caregivers is right, to explain these problems and to identify strategies to overcome such problems.

Nidos has a long experience in supporting unaccompanied minors in their care and that most unaccompanied minors arrive in The Netherlands with difficult histories of war, losses and experience of traumatic circumstances. This justifies the research focus on what is additionally problematic in terms of the relationship of trust (or lack of it) between Eritrean unaccompanied minors and their carers.

The participants were selected from six different locations in Utrecht and Huizen, Breda and Etten Leur, Apeldoorn (Lindenhout), Leeuwarden and Drachten (Jade Friesland). Twenty-five minors participated and eleven caregivers; guardians and minors.

There is a specific problem in relation to trust-building between Eritrean unaccompanied minors and their caregivers and they struggle to understand it and to define strategies to cope with the situation or help improve it. The following concerns were raised by the Eritrean minors in the care of Nidos and the caregivers:

- Language difficulties
- Communication and Cultural Differences
- Meeting Unrealistic Demands
- Rigidity of Negotiating Solutions
- Recording of Care
- Group Dynamics
- The Desire to be Trusted

The following table sets out the comparison of experiences recorded from both groups (minors and caregivers) and their strategies to address these problems.

	CONCERNS REGARDING TRUST		STRATEGIES FOR TRUST-BUILDING	
	MINORS	CAREGIVERS	MINORS	CAREGIVERS
LANGUAGE-DIFFICULTIES	Language: The inability to communicate and express information or ideas in adequate ways and the inability to understand information provided by the carers;		Planning the future, setting goals: The minors are keen to be independent and to ensure that they can support themselves, which encourages them to learn the language, go to school and set realistic goals for their future;	
COMMUNICATION AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES	Communication: The minors experience a culture shock which undermines trust; they particularly fail to understand the culture of asking many questions and the invasion of privacy;	Communication: the main problem identified by the caregivers is not the level of Dutch language skills but particular problems in communication, attributed to cultural differences related to the situation in Eritrea;		Communication and dialogue: the caregivers prioritise the communication and dialogue, emphasising the investment in the dialogue must be a two-way stream in which caregivers should be present as active and culturally sensitive listeners;
MEETING UNREALISTIC DEMANDS	Meeting Unrealistic Demands: The minors are requested by the Dutch agencies to produce papers which they are unable to produce. The guardians and mentors are seen as complicit when they communicate or explain this and the lack of understanding of their situation is transferred to mistrust of the carers;	Secrecy: A legacy of the situation in Eritrea may be a strong dependency on private and secret communication with family to protect them, which can be misinterpreted as mistrust by the caregivers;	Protecting privacy: The minors protect themselves in relation to issues that they feel are outside of the care-system and which cannot be resolved within the care-system. They insist on their privacy to deal with issues that are beyond the immediate care-situation.	Offering care with honesty: caregivers try to balance a caring attitude with an honest and sincere approach to the minor, in order to build predictability and clarity as a basis for trust-building;
RIGIDITY OF NEGOTIATING SOLUTIONS	Rigidity of Negotiating Solutions: The Dutch system of rule-based requirements is contrary to the transactional situation in Eritrea and on the migration routes where most solutions can be negotiated (or paid for). The minors fail to understand why the carers, who are supposed to be on their side, fail to offer practical and workable solutions for them which takes into account their real situation;	Insufficient clarity of responsibility: the caregivers find that the organisation of their responsibilities lacks clarity and that this interferes with their attempts to build trust with the Eritrean minors.		Flexibility to follow instinct: the caregivers stress the need to balance rules and clarity with responsiveness to the pupils and flexibility;

	CONCERNS REGARDING TRUST		STRATEGIES FOR TRUST-BUILDING	
	MINORS	**CAREGIVERS**	**MINORS**	**CAREGIVERS**
RECORDS OF CARE	Recording of Care: The recording of information about the minors is a source of mistrust which reminds the minors of their situation at home in which intelligence record all daily activities – they perceive this as that the system of control is more relevant than the response to their needs. This undermines the trust they have in their guardians and mentors, especially those that seem to behave bureaucratically.	Lack of quality time: the caregivers feel that their schedules are too rushed and that these do not allow them adequate time to spend time with the minors which they see as necessary to be able to build trust;		Offering trust: caregivers have positive experiences in offering trust to the Eritrean minors as a way of inviting reciprocity of such trust;
GROUP DYNAMICS		Group dynamics: these are related to the Eritrean minors perceived as operating within closed groups, with leaders and followers, which are difficult to penetrate;	Providing mutual support: The Eritrean minors rely on each other and offer mutual support in diverse ways, ranging from cooking together to lending money or contributing to ransoms for family members who are trapped in detention;	-
THE DESIRE TO BE TRUSTED	The desire to be trusted: The minors express a clear desire to be trusted and are disappointed if they are confronted with the issue of lack of trust between carers and minors.	Elasticity of the truth: care-givers find it difficult to relate to the different levels of truth communicated by their pupils;		A safe environment: trust requires a safe environment, which is a challenge with minors who may have experienced very traumatising situation. The caregivers try to do everything in their ability to create a safe environment.

9.1 Language difficulties

The difficulties in language comprehension was only offered by the minors as an explanation for the lack of trust with the caregivers. In their conversations, the minors showed an interest to set goals to help improve their future situation in The Netherlands. It was also noted by caregivers that minors, once they settle down and are able to set goals, become more responsible in terms of school attendance and schoolwork.

9.2 Communication and Cultural Differences

Both minors and caregivers attributed problems of trust to communication problems explained by cultural differences. The minors felt the Dutch way of asking many questions intrusive. The caregivers find the minors evasive and experience difficulty in conversations because of the short answers they receive back. The caregivers were particularly recorded as trying to understand the reason for the difficulties in communication. Understanding the background of Eritrean refugees in their home-country and on the migration trajectories offered some explanation to caregivers. They also felt that techniques such as cultural listening and active listening assisted in overcoming communication problems. They emphasised the need to find ways of engaging in two-way communication and not expect the minors to do all the cultural bridging. Caregivers reported positive results with this approach.

9.3 Meeting Unrealistic Demands

The legal situation of Eritrean minors is precarious, especially in relation to family-reunification and at times in relation to their own asylum request. The perception of the minors is that many requests for documentation are simply unrealistic. These unrealistic demands create a feeling that the request of such documents is done in ignorance or, worse, in bad faith. The caregivers often have to deal with these emotions. The negative feelings about these requests, which undermine the minors sense of safety and clear prospect for the future, burden the relationship of the minor with the caregivers, as the main messengers of such information.

The caregivers do not identify the issue in the way the minors describe it. The minors describe the unrealistic demands in terms of not being understood. The caretakers describe the issue from the perspective of the secretive nature in which minors deal with such

delicate issues, as they respond to the system that, in their view, makes impossible demands.

The care-givers emphasise that building trust demands they act professionally, and requires them to be clear and honest in terms of informing the minors about their situation. The caregivers identify that their sincerity is the best strategy to not lose trust and help the minors with the situation they face.

9.4   Rigidity of Negotiating Solutions

The ways of dealing with negotiations are a source of tension that has the potential to undermine trust. The Eritrean minors have survived in situations that are entirely transactional – if you give something, you may be able to negotiate a situation. The caregivers operate in a rule-based Dutch system in which predictability of rules and rights guide interactions and favour is not for sale.

The minors do not have consciously expressed strategies to help resolve the situation. Many of the caregivers deal with this problem by trying to bring in flexibility and it was commented that using instinct is important to bridge the entry points for negotiating in situations.

In addition to the different approach to negotiations, the caregivers also identify that problems exist because the minors are insufficiently clear of the responsibilities and roles of the caregivers. This leads to further frustration on the part of the minors. Caregivers feel that it is up to their organisation to ensure that there is sufficient clarity for the minors to understand the roles and responsibilities of people in their environment.

9.5   Records of Care

The records of care is one way of coordination and avoiding confusion or duplication in the organisation of care, to record communications and events helps to ensure that requests are picked up by the right person.

However, for the Eritrean minors, the system of recording actions and communication is reminiscent of the intelligence operation in Eritrea where deep community infiltration is the basis of a system in which all private and personal information can be used against you, or your family members. For any Eritrean, with the government or in opposition to it, this is a source of fear. As one resource person explained:

You see the Local Administration has all your data - how many people in the house, what they do; where they go and the use of the data is not in the interest of the people but is used against them and their families as a weapon (RM, Skype, May 2018, MvR).

The record-systems of information in the care system of the minors is perhaps a serious source of mistrust and a reason for the silence of Eritrean minors, their secrecy, privately and in groups and their reliance on their groups. The records of care, as perceived through an Eritrean lens, are critical to explaining the mistrust of the Eritrean minors over other minors.

The caregivers have not identified the issue of recording of information as a source of mistrust. The caregivers feel that the systems in which they need to operate are rigid and that it leaves them with little quality time. In terms of a strategy, the caregivers believe that they can show their trustworthiness by offering trust to the minors. In their experience, by offering trust, the trust may be reciprocated by the minors.

9.6   Group Dynamics

The differences between caregivers and minors is probably most visible in the issue of group dynamics. Whilst caregivers identify the group dynamics as a source of problem in trust – building, the minors identify the group dynamics as a source of support. The caregivers point to the hierarchy in the groups, the – to them, unhealthy nature of the leaders and followers within the groups and the secretive nature of the groups. The minors see the groups as mutual support systems to help solve practical issues, such as cooking, give mutual support to overcome barriers, such as filling out of forms, and to feel at home by celebrating or supporting religious events, losses of friends or family and celebration of joyful achievements.

9.7   The Desire to be Trusted

Both minors and caregivers want to be trusted and failure to establish trusted relationships are painful. The caregivers point to the difficulty of understanding the elasticity of the truth, while also pointing to their experience as a basis for understanding that truth appears at different levels within the lived reality of a minor. Caregivers emphasise their efforts to build

a place of safety, in the best interest of the minor, as the main task they have that may contribute to building trust – eventually…

9.8 Trust versus Loyalty

The above analysis requires further understanding in what trust means in different circumstances, especially in Eritrea and in The Netherlands.

In Eritrea, there are different connotations connected to the word 'trust'. The word *'èmnet' (እምነት)* refers most directly to 'trust', understood as the unconditional, non-transactional and transcendent bond of family, community and ancestors, bound in the belief in God. A concept that is relevant to 'trust' is 'loyalty' *'tameni' (ተኣማኒ)* – understood in the political context of Eritrea with a one-party political system; 'loyalty' is based on the proximity and adherence to the instructions of the PFDJ.

In the Netherlands 'trust' refers to an intimate understanding, in which 'truth' and confiding truth is an important element of the bond. In the non-confessional Dutch society, 'trust' refers to a social bond between people in which information is shared, understanding is created within the safety of a relatively intimate relationship.

On the dangerous migratory trajectories between Eritrea and the Netherlands, the sacred and hidden bond of unconditional trust, referred to as *'èmnet' (እምነት)* - trust, competes with the public bond of utilitarian *'tameni' (ተኣማኒ)* – loyalty, to help minors survive.

However, once the minors arrive in The Netherlands, neither of these two concepts apply to inform their relationship with their new minders. The Dutch caregivers are, after all, not included in the sacred, life-giving and transcendent creating force of *'èmnet' (እምነት)* – trust, nor do they qualify in the utilitarian concept of result-driven loyalty *'tameni' (ተኣማኒ).*

The process of trust-building is therefore a new discovery.

The activities that are known to the minors as dangerous to them reinforce the transactional idea of trust as loyalty or disloyalty. The records of their activities and conversations are a clear example of where the system they encounter in The Netherlands appears fundamentally untrustworthy to them, looked at through an Eritrean lens. The system, through their eyes, can only be approached from the transactional logic of *'tameni' (ተኣማኒ).*

Additionally, the sensation of deliberate exclusion, a feeling that may appear as a result of the impossible demands on them in terms of providing documentation to settle their legal status and those of family members, may undermine the trust, understood as *'èmnet'* (እምነት).

The minors and caregivers address very similar issues which undermine trust, and this points to the conclusion that they share a common understanding of their situation and how to resolve it. Both minors and caregivers feel that the inability to establish trusted relationships is painful and there is a clear willingness to search for ways to overcome the obstacles to establishing trust. Caregivers identify more strategies to deal with the problems than the minors do. The minors identify the problems, but do not always have clear strategies as to how to address these. This may create a sense of helplessness.

9.9 Feelings-as-Information – avoiding traumatic triggers

Feelings determine the way information is processed. Within the analysis several sources of negative feelings are identified. In order for trust to be built, the sources of such negativity should be addressed and where possible removed or replaced by actions that provide less negative connotation.

In this study, the caregivers are aware of the traumatic events that he minors have experienced. The minors also refer to their situation as particular and difficult.

Unhealed trauma is a source of negative information. Interventions to help minors understand trauma, how to deal with it in practical ways and how to use it in terms of helping themselves and others is a precondition to building trust. Trauma is a critical obstacle to building trust and caregivers cannot be expected to resolve the trauma.

The ways to address trauma need to be practical and geared towards the situation of the minors. Re-narration can be re-traumatising and it may not be necessary. Narration-based counselling may not be safe for the Eritrean minors. In the Eritrean Hitsats camps could results were obtained with a short smart phone based APP that provided an EMDR Self Help based intervention, called SHLCPTS). The practical nature of it and the privacy of using it on the phone was experienced as helpful by the young people who participated in the test of it.

The experiences of the minors are deeply troubling; the collective nature of the trauma has been carefully documented. The relationship between trauma and trust is well established.

In order to build trust investments in treatment of trauma, adapted to this specific group, will be indispensable.

In this context, to build trust, requires that triggers of trauma are avoided. From this study, the records of care may appear as a critical source of mistrust, as it triggers the dangers from an intelligence system that systematically invades the privacy of the home and the community in Eritrea – and through its long arm. Through Eritrean eyes the care records may appear as a replication of this system and would trigger the traumatic feeling of danger that such information presents to the minor and his family.

9.10 Recommendations

What can be done to help the efforts of building trust between Eritrean minors and their caregivers.

Based on this research, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Explore options to change the perception of the records of care

The records of care are identified as a major source of mistrust, serving as a trigger to traumatic experiences, based on the deeply entrenched information systems of intelligence in Eritrea and beyond.

In order to avoid such triggers, the records of care should be reconsidered, while maintaining the institutional integrity and communication needed to offer a coordinated care for the minors.

2. Feelings of being misunderstood due to unreasonable legal demands re documentation

Trust-building efforts are undermined by legal procedures beyond the control of caregivers. The impossibility of minors to respond to demands within the legal system pertaining to documentation, undermine trust in the caregivers.

Clear division of responsibility and additional capacity in Nidos to address legal issues and fight for unreasonable demands with the minors, may help reduce tensions around legal procedures as a source of mistrust between minors and caregivers.

3. Flexibility and offering trust

Caregivers identify that they have a pretty good sense of how to balance a safe and clear system with the needs of flexibility and offering trust to the minors. The appreciation of such judgement as a tool of caregivers to build trust is important.

An approach to give more space to caregivers to respond to the needs of the minors in the way that they feel is post appropriate could be prioritised in the procedures that guide the caregivers.

4. Background of the situation in Eritrea and beyond

Caregivers make considerable efforts to understand problems in communication from the perspective of an Eritrean experience. However, tools are often lacking and there are few accessible resources that provide accessible information on the situation.

Providing adequate information on the situation in Eritrea and beyond may help caregivers to orientate their discussions in more relevant ways to the minors and to understand triggers that may, inadvertently, create tension and mistrust.

5. Addressing Trauma with appropriate tools

Traumatic mindsets are a source of mistrust. Negative feelings provoke negative reception of information.

Traditional methods of counselling may not be appropriate. Cultural misgivings regarding mental health may discourage participation in counselling programs. Re-narration of traumatic events may be re-traumatising.

New approaches of interventions that support Eritrean and other youth with simple tools, based on their phone, provide the intimacy needed for engagement in such tools. They were readily taken up and provide a good opportunity for further orientation on adequate support to address trauma in appropriate ways.

6. Reducing Triggers of Trauma

The purpose of approaches to reduce trauma should include strategies to reduce traumatic

Traumatic stress causes a trap, which undermines trust between minors and their caregivers. Removal of the traumatic triggers is a first responsibility of the caregiving organisations.

Supporting healing of trauma will protect minors better against such triggers. Trust-building will be enhanced, with the reduction of triggers of traumatic events.

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Annexes

Annex 1: Operationalised list of topics

Research questions	Labels
Conceptualisation of trust	Culture
	Experiential
	Relational
Problems of building trust	Perceptions towards Unaccompanied Minors of Eritrea
	Country of origin
	Transitions
	Settlement
Strategies of building trust	Trustworthiness
	Flexibility
	Safety
	Communication
	Sensibility
Building trust as a form of agency	Mistrust as coping mechanism
	Self-presentation
	Negotiation
	Agency & trust

Annex 2: Ethical protocol

- We adhered to the sanctity of protecting the names and identities of our respondents by using pseudonyms and assuring respondents that everything they said remains confidential. We also paid much attention to the code of conduct based on the principle of mutual consent and understanding.

- Accordingly, pseudonymous and acronyms are used in this report.

- We have informed participants that nothing they say will be used against them and neither will anything said be cited without their permission. Whatever they shared has been summarized and reported back to them to verify that the information was correctly understood. We also made sure all data is stored in safely and is protected using password-protected documents.

- To be extra vigilant regarding data storage process, the members of the research team were not allowed to keep the confidential data on laptops or removable USB to avoid loss and theft.

- Additionally, since this research involved dealing with a group who have suffered considerable hardship in their lives, we knew engaging with them required personalized empathetic consideration and awareness that went beyond conventional ethical procedures during data collection. The researchers have put forward an empathic relation with the minors by carefully listening; by cultural and linguistic sensitivity; respecting emotional and other boundaries; communicating with professionals e.g. medical /psychological if in doubt about particular issues and conducting the research in line with an ethic of care and consideration.