

Chapter 8. Cross-Border Lives in The Eyes of the Children: A Qualitative Study

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Introduction

Civil war in the countries and forced migration of local community, adverse effects brought about by the war and adaptation problems in the countries migrated to affect physical, psychological, social, economic and cultural developments of the individuals at all ecological levels. When all such unfavorable effects are considered, the age, gender and other characteristics of an individual cause level of the impact of the migration and war on the individual to increase. The individuals who essentially need to be protected from the war and migration are the women, children and elderly people.

In 1991 Somalian long last military dictatorship collapsed and gave way to a country without a central government. Therefore, the people of Somali in Sub-Saharan Africa have been struggling against domestic disturbances and war for the last 25 years (Bruton, 2010). Due to insufficient institutional state structure in Somali, unfounded civil peace and piracy, the community was forced to migrate. Somalian people have been settling in variety of countries. USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, Denmark, Italy, France, Germany, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Austria, Zambia and Tanzania are among these countries. Even Britain has the largest Somalian population. By the end of 2004 there were 36, 700 Somalian refugees living in Britain (Hoffmann, 2010).

As we consider the situation of Turkey, Somalian people requested asylum to Turkey by 1999. Actually Turkey cannot accept refugees according to Geneva Convention of 1951. It was a “geographical limitation” condition. For this reason, Turkey cannot give refugee status to Non-European asylum seekers but can offer international protection until Non-European asylum seekers are placed third country (Kahya, 2014). Therefore, Turkey have been settled Somalian Asylum seekers in Isparta province of Turkey in 2009 which was designated as one of the “satellite town for refugees”.

Satellite towns can be defined as the practice of regulating residences of asylum seekers and refugees for the time they’ve been living in Turkey. These towns are chosen by Turkish Ministry of Internal Affairs and asylum seekers and refugees are permitted to live in these towns. Before 2011 satellite towns are 30 but then this number rises to 51 (SGDD, 2011:2). Some of the satellite towns are Amasya, Çorum, Isparta, Niğde, Düzce, Mardin Yozgat, Sinop and Hatay. Placing of asylum seekers to satellite towns are regulated by Asylum Regulation of 1994 and 2006 (Turkish Official Gazette, 1994, 2006). According to this regulation, there are 2 placing criteria. These are “religious freedom” and other is “having relatives in one of the satellite towns”. Asylum seekers are generally placed by these two criteria.

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Table 1. Asylum Seekers according to country, age and sex in Turkey by the date of 30th May 2016 (Syrians not included because they are under temporary protection status)

	Age					
	0-4		5-11		12-17	
Country	Women	Men	Women	Men		
Afghanistan	4048	4324	6580	7735	4163	6184
Iran	444	514	751	829	444	636
Iraq	4901	5294	8191	8946	5018	5953
Somalia	28	34	69	68	72	47
Others	152	143	195	206	103	138
Total	9553	10309	15786	17784	9800	12958
General Total	19862		33570		22758	
	18-59		60+		Total	
Country	Women	Men	Women	Men		
Afghanistan	19234	52444	558	738	105988	
Iran	5764	10872	103	109	20466	
Iraq	22163	34173	1518	1395	97552	
Somalia	599	731	20	20	1688	
Others	2056	2701	40	61	5795	
Total	49816	100921	2239	2323		
General Total	150737		4562		231489	

Source: [http://www.unhcr.org/turkey/uploads/root/tr\(48\).pdf](http://www.unhcr.org/turkey/uploads/root/tr(48).pdf)

There are 1688 Somalian asylum seekers in Turkey according to the most recent data (Table 1). 318 of them are under the age of 18. Also there are 2199 Somalian refugees in Turkey and 792 of them are under the age 18. In total there are 1110 children asylum seekers or refugees from Somalia living in Turkey (UNHCR, 2016). According to the data of the Foreigners Unit of Isparta Police Department, the population of refugees of African and Asian origin in Isparta is 1080. That there are Somalian children migrated to Turkey with or without any company makes important that analyzing and investigating experiences of those children. Therefore, it is of great critical importance that the problems encountered by the children during the war and migration and discovering adaptation problems in the countries migrated. Also this study can contribute to psycho-social and social work intervention to be provided for asylum seeker children.

Method

The study is a qualitative one to be carried out with the aim of revealing experiences of the children in terms of migration, adaptation problems in the countries migrated and being an immigrant or asylum seeker in a war environment. Data for the study was collected through focus group technique and snowball sampling was used to reach children. Children interviewed together as a focus group by using semi-structured interview form for the stories of the children.

Study Group

This study was carried out in Isparta. Firstly, a Somalian man who had a child was reached with the help of a tradesman in Isparta. This Somalian man introduced researchers to his child and their friends. The study and its aim explained both parents/guardians and children also. There were 8 Somalian children who accepted or whose parents/guardians gave permission to participate to this study. 3 of them were girls and 5 of them were boys. More socio-demographical information on participants are given in Table 2.

Nicknames	Sex	Age	Education	Place of Living	Migrated Countries
H.	Girl	13	7 th Grade	Pension/with parents	Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey
Y.	Girl	13	6 th Grade	Pension/with older sister	Syria, Turkey
İ.	Boy	11	4 th Grade	Pension/with mother	Saudi Arabia, Turkey
Z.	Boy	8	3 rd Grade	Pension/with mother	Saudi Arabia, Turkey
Ze.	Girl	14	7 th Grade	Pension/with mother	Saudi Arabia, Turkey
B.	Boy	11	5 th Grade	Pension/with mother	Saudi Arabia, Turkey
C.	Boy	12	4 th Grade	Pension/with mother	Saudi Arabia, Turkey
A.	Boy	18	-	Pension/alone	Yemen, Turkey

Table 2. Socio-demographical Information of Participants

Data Collection Tool

Data is collected by focus group techniques with the help of semi-structured topic guide. In this guide topics are grouped into 4 categories. These are socio-demographical information, experience before migration, during migration and after migration. Since the aim of this study is to reveal the experiences of migration and war of the children topic guide focused every period of migration process. During the focus groups more relevant topics were also emerged.

Data Analysis

During focus groups, voice recording machine was used. Permission from parents/guardians and from children were granted before focus group start. There were 2 researchers; one guiding the group and the one who takes notes and observe. Collected data was deciphered first and analyzed by the researcher and one specialist. Analysis conducted according to 4 topic categories (socio-demographical information, experience before migration, during migration and after migration) and after that emerging themes were determined.

Findings

First of all, important findings for socio-demographics of the participants are below. Participants' ages are between 8 and 18. Apart from the 18 years old one,

the others know Turkish and continue their education in Isparta. All the children live in some kind of pension with or without their families. Only one participant who is 18 years old has come to Turkey 1 month ago from Syria. Rest of the participants have been in Turkey at least 2 years or more.

Emerging Themes

It's found that themes of this study are statelessness, more than one migration, experience on war, being without parents and life in Turkey.

Statelessness: Only 2 of the participants were born in Somalia but they were so little when they migrated. Therefore, all of the participants have no memory of Somalia. The war and conflict in Somalia have been continuing from 1990s, it can be said that the participants are from generation of migration. They were born during migration or in other countries which were the first migrated (see Table 2 for migrated countries of participants).

When the interviewer asked how they feel about Somalia, it was observed that children were in complex feelings and did not want to speak at first. They mentioned Somalia as the lost and far away land of their parents and families.

"I don't remember Somalia. I was very little" (Z, 8)

"My mother told me she used to grow tomatoes in Somalia but then there was war, a lot of people were killed. But I don't remember and our families did not talk about that much" (Y, 13)

More Than One Migration: All of the participants have migrated more than one country (Saudi Arabia, Syria, Yemen and Turkey) and their final destinations were Turkey. The participants experienced migration more than ones as a child. Almost all of them first migrated Saudi Arabia and then Syria. According to expressions of them they had a life there where they could go to school and had friends. It can be said that almost 7 years later, unrest and conflicts started in these countries and they had to leave there.

"I grew up in Saudi Arabia and then we came to Syria. Two months later war started to begin but we stayed 7 years. There were bombs everywhere. After that we came to Turkey." (H, 14)

"We came to Syria from Somalia. I remember so little. In Syria we were going to school but when war started we came to Turkey" (C, 12)

"We escaped to Yemen but there were some kind of war in there. So we escape to Syria but again in Syria there was war. Finally, we came to Turkey by car of stranger man." (A, 18)

Experience on War: Participants experienced war during their stay on Syria not in Somalia. About war experienced. The most used themes were fear, tiredness and sadness.

"When we were in Syria I was going to school but someday a bomb blew at the school. We were living and working in school cafeteria. My mom had injuries and one of my brother died. After that my father decided to go to Turkey" (H, 14)

“In Syria there were a lot bombs everywhere. We found shelter on a mosque but bad soldiers came one night and attacked. There were gunshots but we managed to escape and then we walked to Turkey” (Z, 14)

“While we were coming to Turkey, it was very hard. There were a lot of cars and people and dogs. I was so scared but I was children back then” (H, 14)

Being without Parents: Only one participant came to Turkey with her father and mother. One of them came with only his mother. Rest of the participants came to Turkey without their parents. They were with relatives or acquaintances. It is obvious that these children have been traumatized lot. Also it can be said that they wanted to go back Syria or Saudi Arabia if the war was over. They considered their first migrated country as a homeland. But if the war was not end soon they would like to go to Europe or USA as they heard the life in these countries better than Turkey. None of them want to return Somalia.

“My father and mother have been lost at war. We couldn’t find them. Me and one of my brother managed to come to Turkey but we lost our older brother on the way” (A, 18)

“My parents are still in Somalia. We came here with my sister.” (Y, 14).

“Our father died and our mother is here with us” (I, 8)

Life in Turkey: About their lives in Turkey; participants did not state a lot of problems. Since they learnt Turkish and could go to school they were happy. But according to children the most important problems of Somalian older people are language barrier and income.

“My big brother doesn’t know Turkish. So he can’t buy bread alone” (I, 8)

Conclusion

Being a refugee is by definition a traumatic experience especially for children because the suffer displacement, loss, grief, and forced separation from family (Olliff, 2008). Further when the refugee children finally are located a new “safe” environment, troubles do not end. The adjustment problems to new physical and social environment, recovering from past experiences and trauma are among the most important difficulties that children faced (Whitley & Gould, 2010). In this research most of the Somalian children are separated from their families which means they also carry the burden of being unaccompanied. It is also observed that some children mentioned their passed fathers and fathers like they were lost. It’s understood from the contradictory comments and expression of them.

Mental health problems are very common among refugee children (MacMillan, Ohan, Cherian & Mutch, 2015; Jeppsson ve Hjern, 2005; Heptinstall, Sethna & Taylor, 2004). Refugee children might suffer from depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder etc. (Heptinstall, Sethna & Taylor, 2004). In our study it’s observed that Somalian children were quiet, shy and abstain from talking too much. These traits can be interpreted as they were suffering mild or severe mental health problems. Also these refugee children do not receive any kind of psychological support.

According to literature on this subject, refugee children may experience culture shock, separation from family and friends, the inability to communicate, feelings of helplessness and vulnerability, unexpected fears, and the loss of their homeland (Coventry, Guerra, Mackenzie, & Pinkney, 2002 cited in Whitley & Gould, 2010; Lubben, 1996; Yau, 1996). This is coherent with this research as the children had difficulties in communication during focus groups as mentioned above. Also they feel nostalgic towards pre-migration life for example the desire to return Syria and their friends if the war was over. Furthermore, the children expressed their fears as they heard planes flying or sudden loud noises.

Another important point is some conflicts in families or acquaintances may arise because children learn more quickly the language than adults (Zhou, 2001), which can lead to blurring of family roles as their parents' or adults rely on the child's interpretation skills. This can also lead dysfunctions in family dynamics (Anderson, 2001). It's also apparent in focus groups as the children mentioned that their big brothers or close relatives could not go to a store to buy a bread. The children expressed that they helped them and some even did the daily chores outside the home. It's obvious that this kind of role change can be very dramatic for child development.

Suggestions

It's not surprise these children said that they wanted to be soldier, police and doctors in the future to help those who are in need. Also they were aware of the realities of war. When they were asked "Why do you think there are wars in the World?" They immediately gave the answer of money and selfishness. When they were asked "If you were a president, what would you done to help children in wars?" they gave almost same answers like these ones:

"I wouldn't only help children. I would help all of the people" (H, 13)

"I would open a lot schools, hospitals." (C, 12)

"I would put a lot of good soldiers who would protect all the people. So everyone could be safe"(Ze, 14)

Consequently, migration process has affected the Somali children negatively in terms of their social, physical and psychological well-being. Since war and migration affect physical, psychological, social, economic and cultural developments of the individuals at all ecological levels; psychological support must be the first priority for local authority and government. Especially there is a need for appropriate social services and psychological support for Somali children asylum seekers.

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