



Groundings Undergraduate Academic Journal
University of Glasgow | Glasgow University Union

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Source: Groundings Undergraduate, May 2024, Vol. 15, pp. 276-303

Published by: University of Glasgow, Glasgow University Union Publications.

ISSNs: 1754-7474 (Print) | 1755-2702 (Online)

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This article was recognised with the Journal's 'Best Paper of the Year' award.

Modern Conflict, Transnational Migration and the Experiences of a Sudanese Youth

Thomas Hutton

“But the other boat is falling ...umm... down in the water. They die I think - Or most of them or all of them... yeah [5 seconds of silence] – these the most horrible things I have seen in the sea...”

This paper explores the experiences of a Sudanese youth through interviews and analysis, tracing their journey from conflict in their home country to transnational immigration. The objective is to humanise the collective immigrant experience, particularly in the context of modern conflict and migration. Originating as an assignment on oral history, the research employs an interdisciplinary oral historical methodology for data analysis. Integration of linguistics and psychology with oral history methods is emphasised, facilitating a nuanced understanding of the interview transcripts and the socio-political implications of the discussed topics. Additionally, the paper contextualises the interview findings within relevant secondary literature to deepen comprehension. Lastly, it examines the socio-political climate of 21st-century Europe concerning immigration influx, challenging stereotypes and highlighting the complexity of collective experiences. From facing terrorisation from a tyrannical regime and its secret police to being stranded on the Mediterranean and travelling Europe, this paper examines the story of a young Sudanese man.

1. Introduction

Scholars have labelled our century as the ‘century of the refugee’¹ with Sudan considered one of the ‘world’s leading exporters of refugees’.² In the U.K., refugees are some of the most marginalised and vilified groups in our society.³ We must look at what drives people from their homes

1 Anne Ward-Lambert, *The Refugee Experience: A Legal Examination of the Immigrant Experiences of the Sudanese Population* (Florida: Nova South-eastern University, 2009), 672.

2 Jon D. Holtzman, *New Lives: Sudanese Refugees in Minnesota*, (Oxford: Routledge, 2007), 15.

3 Alice Bloch and Carl Levy, *Refugees, Citizenship and Social Policy in*

en masse to support an understanding, as opposed to the vilification of those less fortunate. With far-right groups gaining traction in Germany (AfD), the Netherlands (PVV), Italy (FDL) and France (RN) it is crucial that the experiences of immigrants are humanised against the demonising media campaigns and unsympathetic migration policies being set by western governments. This work is an extension of my original interview with a Sudanese refugee, where I got the privilege to record their story. I was enthralled and saddened by his experiences in modern conflict and his boat journey to Europe. This paper retells his story alongside the formation of an unlikely friendship, alongside thought-provoking literature and analysis to fully sympathise with his personal experiences in conflict and immigration.

2. Historical Contextualisation and Oral History

2.1 The Situation in Sudan

Since the mid 20th Century Sudan has been the invisible centre of political and economic turmoil. In 1956 after the abolition of British-Egyptian colonial rule Sudan has seen the last five leaders removed via violent coup d'état. As modern conflict is one of the key topics, this section aims to contextualise the period between 2003-2023.

In 2003 revolutionaries seized the city of Al-Fashir wanting an end to dictator Omar Al-Basheer's reign of terror, and the beginning of a democratic Sudanese state. Currently Al-Basheer is wanted by The International Criminal Court (ICC) for crimes against humanity, genocide, torture, rape and murder. According to the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) this first 2003 Sudanese War, caused '200,000-400,000 deaths and 2 million displaced from homes'.⁴ For enhancement of the seriousness of this conflict, it is estimated that 60% of Sudan's entire GDP was being funnelled into the security sector.⁵ A secondary ramification to the war with the diversion of major state

Europe (New York: Macmillan Press, 1999), 10.

4 Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), 'The World Factbook: Sudan' <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/sudan>, accessed 27th November 2023.

5 Monica Toft, A Legitimacy Chain Approach to Security Sector Reform: Working for Citizens and States, *LSE-Oxford Commission on State Fragility, Growth and Development*, (2018), 1-13.

funding from medical facilities and social infrastructure⁶ means that as of 2021, for every 1000 births that occur in Sudan, 54.9 will result in death.⁷ These deaths are often simple, preventable and treatable. For comparison, the National Office for Statistics suggested in 2021 that infant mortality rates in the UK were at ‘3.7 deaths per 1,000’.⁸

After many years of skirmishes between revolutionaries and the government, Basheer drastically reorganised his military to make himself ‘coup-proof.’ In 2013 Basheer rebranded the Arab Militia ‘Janjaweed’ as the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) (قوات الدعم السريع) as part of his campaign to consolidate power. His right-hand man Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, given the infamous pet name Hemiti, which derives from the Arabic word ‘hamiyati’ (حامياتي) meaning my protector, was given control of the RSF. Basheer simultaneously made great relations with the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) (المسلحة القوات السودانية) spearheaded by Abdal Fattah Al-Burhan. Basheer gave Hemiti control of Sudan’s gold mines, as well as the liberty exporting minerals to Chad and Libya, and gave Al-Burhan control over weapons production and telecommunications. The RSF and SAF under strict control of Basheer would crackdown on various pro-democratic demonstrations. For example on June 3rd, 2019, The Khartoum Massacre alone claimed the lives of 100 peaceful protestors as well as the rape of 70 women by the RSF.⁹

Such was the agitation against Basheer’s regime that despite all of his efforts to concretise his violent autocracy, his thirty-year long reign would meet its end in 2019 at the hands of both Hemiti and Burhan. His reign of ethnic cleaning, genocide and war crime was stopped by none other than Burhan, Hemiti and revolutionaries. Since 2019, Hemiti and Burhan have waged civil war across Sudan in the wake

6 Anne Ward-Lambert, *The Refugee Experience*, 664.

7 United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) <https://data.unicef.org/country/sdn/>, accessed 5th February 2024.

8 Office for National Statistics (ONS), Child and Infant Mortality in England and Wales, 2021 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/>

9 Zeinab Mohammed Salih, ‘Zeinab Mohammed Salih in Khartoum’, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/11/sudan-troops-protesters-attack-sit-in-rape-khartoum-doctors-report>, accessed 5th February 2024

of this power vacuum. They have both separately attended various international political events to bolster foreign support for their regimes, as well as using their massive sources of wealth for mobilisation and suppression of democratic insurgency groups. A temporary coalition government was forced upon Sudan via international pressures and the acceptance of a power sharing agreement. This civil war has devastated Sudan, and the citizens are left betrayed by their leaders as well as international powers that claimed to support their hopes of democracy, alongside a flurry of meaningless broken ceasefires. This is just one of the world conflicts that has triggered the recent flux of transnational immigration, but it is also sadly perhaps one of the lesser-known modern conflicts.

2.2 What is Oral History?

Oral history is one of the oldest forms of historical record predating the written word. This multidisciplinary methodological approach to history can be transformative and empowering to the individual. It can give them their own central place in the historical record, giving history back to those who experienced and made it. Oral history can be used to give agency to marginalised groups and change the popular narrative; and in a world where narrative can change the lives and perceptions of millions, it is important we record the truth. Because oral history is an interactive form of history, we are forced to discover and analyse the hidden meanings between the words spoken.¹⁰ This is where the interdisciplinary approach to history begins. Oral historians consort with linguistics, psychology or even neurobiology to fully understand the source they create with the interview participant. Neuro-linguist Franco Fabbro postulated that one of the most useful strategies for survival is forecasting the future.¹¹ Through a series of external cues, reinforcement and learning, humans have adapted to utilise long-term memory as one of our defining survival traits. The sharing of memories between communities however supersedes our need for survival, and corroborates a collective narrative.

10 Lynn Abrams, “The Peculiarities of Oral History”, in *Oral History Theory* (London: Routledge, 2016), 18.

11 Franco Fabbro, *The Neurolinguistics of Bilingualism* (East Sussex: Psychology Press Ltd., 1999), 89.

In many respects, oral history embodies a post-modernist approach to history, aiming to challenge traditional narratives and ideologies with personal subjective experiences, rather than relying on the grand established narratives and systems presented by media, government, or social convention and tradition. This is significant more now than ever as the press both reflects and reinforces public attitudes, and consequently reality becomes buried under layers of myth and prejudice.¹² Subsequently, qualitative spoken word becomes our most generous source of information on a person. Their life, experiences, personality, emotions and mood all combine to create a woven tapestry of the human experience. And without a doubt, the oral historical method is the machine that spins that material together.

3. The Genesis of the Research

On January 8th, 2023, at a train station in Nottingham I was slowly approached by a tall dark man who seemed lost and confused. He asked me which train to catch showing me a rugged ticket. By coincidence he was catching the same train as me. He was clearly new to the U.K., and I invited him to sit with me on the journey. We introduced ourselves, and this is where I found out he was from Sudan. He described the country in such colour but with overshadowed tones of sadness and longing. Eventually we parted ways, but he intrigued me greatly and we decided to swap phone numbers for language exchange. At the back of my mind I knew there was more to him than met the eye.

Nine months later on the 12th of September 2023, I went and visited him in Newcastle. He introduced me to many other immigrants from all around the Arab world. It was like a silent sub-society that was all of a sudden opened up to me. Many of them escaping modern conflict and immigrating to the UK for a better life. This cultural excursion operated fortunately in coalition with my oral history studies. But at this time, I was weary of prying into his past. I knew from the moment that I had met him that his story should be more widely understood and shared. My studies and meeting this stranger, turned friend, served as

12 Roy Greenslade, "Seeking Scapegoats: The Coverage of Asylum in the U.K. Press, Asylum and Migration 5th Paper" *Institute of Public Policy Research*, 2005, 6.

some kind of transcendental destiny; I therefore decided that I would interview him and snatch at the rare opportunity to talk one-on-one with an illegal immigrant.

4. Methodology

4.1 Selecting a Question and a Participant

As this research was originally a part of my course on oral history, I was tasked with creating my own primary source. As described in Section 3, I had met my participant by chance which is an example of convenience sampling. Moreover, as modern conflict and immigration are both poignant topics in contemporary literature, political and cultural debate, I therefore found it opportunistic to explore these subjects through oral history. There is a significant gap in the public domain relating to the plight of the Sudanese people, who are facing genocide, war and economic failure. According to reports, Sudan's capital city Khartoum is now a lawless playground for paramilitary groups who flaunt humanitarian and international laws.¹³ Subsequently, I felt my research thesis would be able to uncover truths and raise awareness for a crises that receives very little attention.

4.2 Research Design

The case study on the Sudanese youth is in an interview form as per a qualitative research method. I prepared fourteen pre-approved open-ended questions for the interview. They covered topics such as: identity, trauma, memory, political violence, migration and conflict. Then performing thematic text coding using my verbatim transcript of the interview conducted I accurately pinpointed these themes in our conversations. The Jefferson Transcription System (See Section 10) was particularly conducive to the verbatim transcript and success of the results. Recurring instances of all the themes as mentioned above were rife in the transcript. Analysing the qualitative data produced through the interdisciplinary oral historical method, I successfully generated both a humanising and detailed experience of modern conflict and immigration.

¹³ Al-Jazeera Media Network, <https://www.aljazeera.com>, accessed 5th February 2024.

4.3 Ethical and Legal Considerations

When preparing for the interview, my primary concern was the legal and ethical implications of such a delicate socio-political topic. And while there is no law that even mentions oral history,¹⁴ my primary concern therefore was the ethics. The safety of my participant was of upmost importance as prior to the interview they had not received full British citizenship and therefore their legal status in the UK was in flux. Therefore, I offered anonymity to my participant, which was to be fully used in the interview and in any research afterward. From now on he will be referred to as his preferred title ‘X’. An equally as important approach is to recognise the participant’s feelings. Oral historian Alessandro Portelli suggested it is important that while you conduct the interview, to remember ‘the person is real, and we should relate to their humanity’,¹⁵ instead of viewing them as a faceless emotionless piece of qualitative data. This quote was most meaningful to my project, as previously stated, I had long since wanted to raise awareness of his story, and not just receive a grade for my studies.

4.4 The Interview

Understanding the gravity of the interview and its value, I planned and researched everything meticulously. I wanted the interview and questions to follow a chronological structure, starting from early childhood to present day. This was to humanise his narrative, listening to his childhood dreams and ambitions, and then juxtaposing what instead happened in adulthood.

The interview lasted 1 hour 47 minutes and 53 seconds. I went to Newcastle to perform the interview in their new home (See Figure 1). I stayed from 1:30pm until 5:30pm on a cold winter evening, which unbeknownst to me would sadly mimic the tone of the interview to come. We sat in his living room, as I wanted to make my participant as comfortable as possible in a familiar environment. We ate food, drank and smoked tobacco together like friends. Moreover, as

¹⁴ Oral History Society.org (OHS) <https://www.ohs.org.uk/legal-and-ethical-advice/>, accessed 6th February 2024.

¹⁵ Alessandro Portelli, *Oral History as a Genre* (London: Routledge 1998), 18.

aforementioned, when I transcribed the interview, I chose to do it verbatim using the Jefferson Transcription System to capture every pause, sigh and shift in tone to truly capture the rich profile of emotion in our conversation.

4.5 The Importance of Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity

Subjectivity according to Lynn Abrams refers to the participants sense of self— how their identity is shaped by experience, language, culture and environment. Whereas intersubjectivity is described as the relationship between the narrator and the interviewer and how they cooperate to create a shared narrative. X and I come from completely different backgrounds, systems and cultures. Our race, colour, religion, age and gender are important factors while exploring the themes of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, paired with our relationship as friends and not strangers. Intersubjectivity also highlights the importance of a reflexive approach, realising our effect and place as interviewers in the narrative.

In addition, historian Alan Wong’s chapter ‘*Interviewing with Friends*’, suggests that interviewing a friend can have an impact on the validity and findings of the interview.¹⁶ Both the interviewer and interviewee might have preconceived notions about each other’s perspectives and experiences, which can influence the way questions are framed and responses are given. However Tillman-Healy highlighted that with the foundation of friendship we can produce an emotionally rich and personal account.¹⁷ For me, this interview represented the creation of a historical source through the shared authority over the narrative, as opposed to a one sided narrative.

16 Alan Wong, ‘Listen and Learn: Familiarity and Feeling in the Oral History Interview’, in Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki (eds.), *Oral History Off the Record: Toward an Ethnography of Practice* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 97-112.

17 Lisa M. Tillman-Healy, *Friendship as Method* (California: Sage Publications, 2003).

5. Interview Transcript Analysis – Modern Conflict and Transnational Immigration

5.1 Introductions – Home and Conflict

[00:00:53]X:

My name is 'X'(.). I grow up in - (0.4) – I born in Sudan in small uh- (0.3) city, (0.3) It's called Nertiti and is located in the centre of the Darfuri State (0.5), we have like five state of Darfur (.), West and North and South and East and middle (0.2).

I born in middle of Darfur which is Nertiti, which is beautiful city (.) have uh- (0.3) like you know when the water fall from the mountain? [T: Yeah] and to ((*unintelligible*)) (0.2), we have like this view(.) we have like three. Martigolo, Galol, and- Jabal Marrah Mountain as well (0.3). Jabal Marrah mountain is one of the most famous places in Sudan [T: Yeah]. People come to visit and enjoy the view.

hhh and, our- our city is contains different of tribes (0.5) based on uh- # African race (0.3) or- other race as well. They- they used to live together in peaceful (.) without – without uh- problems^o or fighting or conflicts. But, -uh (0.3) since 2003 (0.5) (T: Yeah^o) -uh (0.3) our last -uh president of Sudan Omar Al-Basheer (T: yeah, yeah, yeah) have -uh support the Arab tribes in Darfur -um (0.3) for the reason of a – stop – uh (0.5) the you know the (*clears throat*) (0.5) the group of people when the group of people have weapons against the -uh (0.5) -the country or the government –

Within the first minute of X introducing himself, the narrative quickly shifts to war. The intertwining of his environment and identity is so crucial here. This compliments historian Lynn Abrams assertion well, suggesting: 'his or her identity is informed and shaped by experience, perception, language, and culture – in other words an individual's emotional baggage...'¹⁸ The juxtaposition between the 'beautiful city... the water fall from the mountain' versus the past tense clause of 'they used to live in peaceful without uh- problems^o or fighting or conflicts' – is a use of coded subliminal language . There seems to

18 Lynn Abrams, Self and Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity: in *Oral History Theory*, 54.

be an inextricable link between his working memory of home, and conflict.

When my participant is addressing his memories on the subject of conflict, he will be working from a 'larger framework of collective memory'.¹⁹ My participant's stressful experiences, according to Abrams, will extend 'far beyond the personal' and gravitate towards a cohesive historical, familial, social and cultural framework of which to structure his response and recollection within. As suggested by Thomson (*Popular Memory*, 1990), memory reconstruction and maintenance are very public, and not private.²⁰ This is because individuals in a community or group wish to adhere to the wider recognised experience. Recollection needs acceptance from the community. His plural use of 'they' and 'we' are indicative of his community's collective memory, and the impact of this shared experience on the construction of identity and narrative.

5.2 Militia Violence

[00:16:16]X: <I was like 15, when I'm 15 – when I'm working on building, I see the first time. People – uh some people. Doing you know, that- that things, like hiding them face, you can just see them eyes, and they #-uh on the bike, they riding a bike -uh the driver and behind him is the -uh other partner holding the gun, and they stop in front of like 50 years old guy. And they ask him to give money. Like to you know? And he didn't -uh give it to them, and then they kill him - # <they give him like two shots here [points to each side of his chest] his chest.>

[00:17:12]T: °To the chest.

[00:17:13]X: # Yeah – and they took uh- his bag and then, # go to the bike – the uh motor, and gone.

19 Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950).

20 Alistair Thomson, *Popular Memory* (London: Routledge, 1994).

[00:17:22]T: So what happened to his body afterwards?

[00:17:24]X: [*clears throat*] The people come, uh, all the people come, they're used to seeing it, the people in the area, used to hear the gun shot and these things. They coming and running to the guy, and they look at him still alive at that time, # ↓

after 10 or 15 minutes (.) he gone. (.) he passed away.

And then, the woman cry and people cry and these things happen. and uh- many many many of bad things happen in Darfur – because - because our government, we have – have police in the area, police centre, we have -uh like -uh like what I will say in English? – we have army as well – but the army and police they don't solve these problems, it's bigger than them you know?

The RSF or Janjaweed (جَنْجَوِيد) is the aforementioned Arab militia group responsible for the rape, brutalisation and tribal sterilisation of countless Sudanese people. This excerpt is just one tragic case of the many traumatic events that X witnessed. The narrative and memory features are most interesting here too. A study by G.W. Beatie in 1978 on hesitation and pauses in speech found these language features to be a form of temporal planning structure for their sentence, at the same time forming ideas and retaining attention from the listener.²¹ Noam Chomsky in 1959 during the cognitive revolution in the field of psychology suggested that speech must be explored further, designing neural and behavioural mechanisms specific to linguistics.²² Qualitative spoken word is our most generous source of information on a person. All languages have a way of encoding this information, and we can turn to the transcript to properly digest what was said to us.²³ This excerpt from the transcript not only observes the experiences of one individual, but the collective experience of those suffering under

21 Brian Butterworth, *The Psychological Laboratory: 'Pragmatic Constraints on Linguistic Production'*, (London: Academic Press, 1980).

22 E. Remez and B. Pisoni, *The Handbook of Speech Perception* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2008), 653.

23 Suzanne Romaine, *Bilingualism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1989), 270.

oppression. The saddest fact from this section of the transcript is the length of time it took the man to perish, lying helpless in the street, another soul in the hundreds of thousands claimed by the tyrannical regime. Yet more destroying is how this death is one of the few that gets recorded. To quote Kurt Tucholsky: ‘The death of one man: that is a catastrophe. A hundred thousand deaths: that is a statistic!’.²⁴

5.3 National Sudanese Security Agency (NISS)

(Note: The Sudanese Security Agency (جهاز الأمن والمخابرات الوطني السوداني) is Sudan’s equivalent of the CIA or the U.K.’s Security Service MI6).

[00:28:20]T: Okay, so how long were you in the prison for?

[00:28:26]X: I be like three weeks.

[00:28:26]T: Three weeks.

[00:28:27]X: ٣three weeks - ↑ So, they – they talk shit (.) with me, they talk- they talk racist speech with me.

[00:28:36]T: What did they say to you?

[00:28:38]X: Like, you are -uh (0.2) أنت عبد [you are a slave] like you are a slave, and you, - like that you know.

[00:29:05]T: So these were Arabs saying this to you?

[00:29:06]X: Arabs used to say these things to the black people in Sudan, (0.3) so that, - this word it mean we are higher than you, and you are just slave- slaves, and these things. And he say that for me, and -uh – he talk -uh bad about my family, about me, my race. And -uh as well as .hhh they hitting me, using -uh (0.2) stick- a stick, and -uh belt of the- the military clothes, they hit me as well. And they do many things to make me speak, you know. (0.3) –

24 Kurt Tucholsky, “Französischer Witz,” *Vossische Zeitung* 23, (1925).

All the time, I have just one thought (0.2), I am just selling tyres – I don't- I'm not a part of any movement (0.1), I do my own business. I don't have any things. (0.1) And then after -uh after three weeks, someone else, some -uh someone else come in to do investigation with me, and then he said -uh (0.2), you are free, we – we will let you go, but we have conditions. Like -uh you will work for us, like you gonna tell us -uh, about the people (0.2) – uh – who – who – who let the people – the people who support the-uh, like -uh burning wheels on the street, like resistance you know. The people who support resistance and do these things, and who is behind them, who is supporting, who is plan for them, and the time they will go out again, and these things.

And then, you have to come every week, sign up, and to tell us information. I said 'okay, I will do.' £ I just want to go you know [laughs lightly]

[00:31:33]T: Yeah.

[00:31:34]X: And then – and if you don't (.) do these things we gonna ↓ kill you. Like, (0.1) these the conditions. # And then they took me in the car, and hiding my eyes, and threw me in the part of our Nertiti Market, big market. And then I go, I was so tired and all my body was swollen, ↓# you know, from the hit. And then, hhh, and then I go home (.) I told my father (0.2) ↓# I was in the prison and they do one, two, three with me. And then they said you have to leave this area, <'they will not leave you, they will come again, and they're gonna take you'>. # °And then, he advise me to leave – to move, from the area or the country. And then I travelled to Libya.

This passage demonstrates Sudan's secret police (NISS) terrorising a civilian through torture, coercion and death threats. Historians and linguists alike regard narrative as a 'communication strategy',²⁵ with the verbatim transcript capturing the subliminal. Defined by J.J. Grumperz, code switching is defined as 'the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two

different grammatical systems or subsystems'.²⁶ The code switch to the Arabic derogatory phrase 'أنت عبد' [you are a slave]' should be examined. The indexical phrase of 'you' demonstrates how he recollects experience as it was, quoting them, feeling the pain all over again. His identity was indelibly marked by this experience, recollecting it in his native language, reliving the experience perhaps. Moreover, code switching serves as an expressive function and has pragmatic meaning, because expressing oneself in a second language is not always as meaningful as the mother tongue.²⁷ This is an excellent example of the autobiographical or episodic memory. The episodic memory refers to the individuals near memorisation and conscious recollection of a unique personal experience.²⁸ For example, many people can recall exactly what they were doing when they found out about the 9/11 attacks. This is a powerful testament to how X was profoundly affected by this experience from such a young age.

5.4 The Trauma of Migration

[00:48:36]T: What was the most memorable thing? (0.2) – that sticks in your memory, from that time.

[00:48:42]X: Ohh. <hhhh, Okay from that time> (0.5) [*long pause*] Okay, when we are in our boat we see from too far area, there is other boat going down to the water.

[00:49:02]T: Sinking?

[00:49:04]X: Yeah. ↓° People are dying in front of us as well.

[00:49:07]T: The other boat sank from Libya?

[00:49:09]X: Yeah. Because of uh- hhh, I think they are not balancing the boat – °something happen for them and they go down into the water. And the second day, we have a big wave, you know, but -uh يا عني الهمدالله [*I mean... thank God*] we are safe and – Because our

26 J. J. Grumperz, *Discourse Strategies*, (University of Cambridge Press: Cambridge, 1982), 59.

27 Suzanne Romaine, *Bilingualism*, 259.

28 Franco Fabbro, *The Neurolinguistics of Bilingualism*, 97

boat was big, like 86 passengers, and we sitting like balance the boat, that's why we don't fall this side or that side. But the other boat is falling #umm down in the water. They die I think. °Or most of them or all of them... yeah [5 seconds of silence] hhh – these the most horrible things I have seen in the sea. ↑ But, I think I am lucky, there is many people who try to get to Europe many times, I just once- I did once, it was horrible, but I arrive... °I arrive.

To contextualise, X had no prior intention of coming to Europe, but Libya had become too unsafe for him. He paid a human trafficker 1000 USD after months of exploitative labour just to escape. The boat ran out of diesel and the GPS signal was lost; they were destined to drift on the vast expanses of the Mediterranean until death. This part of the interview left me in a state of shock. At this stage we had superseded the bounds of the oral historical methodology and instead our personal relationship was brought to the forefront of discourse. This passage also finds ground with Phillip Marfleet's observation that 'people do not willingly undertake long and dangerous journeys to unknown or uncertain destinations, abandoning their material, social, cultural and other resources, unless they are under extreme pressure'.²⁹

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM- 5) defines post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) under section A as: 'Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence in one (or more) of the following ways: 1) Directly experiencing the traumatic event(s). 2) Witnessing the event as it occurred to others.'³⁰ In a study by Hadden, Rutherford and Merret (1978) investigating the effects of political violence during The Troubles in Ireland. They investigated 1532 patients admitted to the accident and emergency unit of Belfast hospital after an explosion. Strangely however, they only found 50% of the witnesses to have

29 Phillip Marfleet, *Refugees in a Global Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

30 American Psychiatric Association, "DSM-5 Diagnostic Criteria for PTSD," *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th ed., (Washington D.C: APA, 2013), 271-272.

sustained psychological shock.³¹ This number seems worryingly low, and it is hypothesised that they were simply desensitised to such events as over 16,000 bombings occurred during this dark period.³² When interviewing X there was sorrow in his voice but no visible trace of trauma, as it is no doubt hidden within. His entire life has been overshadowed by the parlous nature of a post-colonial state in the midst of conflict. Consequently he was forced to immigrate and undertake the most treacherous of journeys, slowly floating to uncertain death or salvation. Akin to the Greek mythologue of Charon ferrying poor souls across the black waters to eternal peace. But what all of these unfortunate souls come to discover is a mirage on the horizon. The opulence of the white marble pillars of European egalitarian society shimmering in the intangible distance – a miserable hellscape of yet even more trials.

5.5 An Immigrant's Account: Politics and Refuge

[00:55:05]T: It's getting worse?

[00:55:06]X:   Yeah. (0.5) [*silence*] - And then, what do you think? Because its getting worse – because of war you know. I think – I think uh – ↑ America and the West did nothing for us. And till now they are watching, just watching. # Sudan is dying every day and they are just watching. Just that.

[00:55:42]T: Like they are watching فلسطين?
[*Like they are watching Palestine?*]

[00:55:43]X: Yep. Or – uh Palestine, and the bombing.

[00:55:50]T: And no one is watching Sudan, you feel like no one cares?

31 Stephens et. al., *Understanding Post-Traumatic Stress: A Psychological Perspective on PTSD and Treatment* (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 1997), 59-60.

32 Conflict Archive on the Internet (CAIN), Security Related Incidents in Northern Ireland, shootings, bombings and incendiaries, 1969 to 2003, <http://cain.ulster.ac.uk>, accessed 6th February 2024.

[00:55:52]X: ʔhahaha – they are not watching, yeah. £ But -uh no problem hahaha. ↑ But you know why I say no problem!? Because even if they watch, they won't do anything. # That's why. Now they are watch Gaza and won't do anything. So... That's the game. [Silence]

[00:56:20]T: The game?

[00:56:21]X: # Yeah. That's the game of politics. They just say we condemn, we do – they don't do anything, they just talk – we don't need your talk, just your action.

Since the 90's Sudanese have been living in periods of exile from their home country. Specifically, those living in Cairo in this time defied the contemporary stereotypes that immigrant diasporas from third world countries are uneducated and ignorant. Social anthropologist Nadjé Sadig Al-Ali described this diaspora as “highly educated and politically aware”.³³ This finds common ground with X, his education is minimal, yet he still is able to talk to me on a deep socio-political level. The founders of a centre for Sudanese refugees in Cairo were convinced that the national crisis in Sudan was being further fed by ignorance, suspicion, distrust and fear. The long-term solution they felt therefore was to change people's attitudes.³⁴ This statement said in 1997 still rings true today, for both modern conflict and the flux of migrants it produces, yet we are still in the same position of prejudice and intolerance.

6. Discussion - Immigration Politics in the 21st Century: Arguments and Analysis

6.1 The Rwanda Plan

In the wake of what has been recorded, transcribed and analysed, what we are left with is a highly valuable historical source. It demonstrates

33 Nadjé Al-Ali and Khalid Koser, *New Approaches to Migration? Transnational communities and the transformation of home* (New York: Routledge Ltd., 2002), 48.

34 Ibid., 49., citing: Taybah Sharif and Jane Lado, in *Survey of Sudanese and International Organisations Serving the Displaced Sudanese Community in Egypt* (1997).

the multifaceted complexities of 21st century immigrant experience, demystifying and uncovering new perceptions. What remains however is to place the latter part of his immigration into our current political context, and argue for a humanist approach to the immigration dilemma. By examining current political debate and dogma, I aim to use the full force of the emotional impact of the interview on the reader as a form of soft power for the re-evaluation of immigrant perceptions.

We begin with The Collingridge Dilemma. The Collingridge Dilemma is an example of humans attempting to forecast outcomes of technological advancements.³⁵ While at the beginning controlling those new technologies is very easy, for example, how user interface will look on the newest smart phone; the future ramifications, however, of such inventions are often unknown and unpredictable.³⁶ This idea finds common ground now with the socio-political ramifications of mass deportation of immigrants from Europe and blockading immigrant routes. We cannot tell in what ways our decisions now will manifest, especially in regard to policy making and border control. This paper does not pretend to hold all the answers to immigration and modern conflict, but any humanist approach would immediately denounce the fortification of Europe as a credible longstanding solution.

For example, the case of the UK government's Rwanda Plan. In an interview with the BBC on January 7th, 2024, Rishi Sunak stated: "I absolutely believe in the value and importance of having deterrents and Albania and Rwanda are linked because they're both returns agreements".³⁷ One can suggest at early stages it will deter illegal immigration, but what of the future ramifications for the globe and our own society in doing this. From the Hansard parliamentary archives however I found a logical response. Similarly to when Karl Marx wrote upon the completion of his magnum opus *Das Kapital*, stating it "is without question the most terrible missile that has yet been hurled

35 David Collingridge, *The Social Control of Technology* (Frances Printer, 1980).

36 David Edmonds and Hazem Zohny, *Future Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 7.

37 Rishi Sunak and Laura Kuenssberg, Sunday with Rishi Sunak and Laura Kuenssberg *BBC One*, 7th January 2024 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001v6j0>, accessed 5th February 2024.

at the heads of the bourgeoisie”;³⁸ I find MP Patrick Grady’s response equivalent to that in its impact and social critique. MP Grady is quoted in the transcript as stating: “if the risk to life of crossing the channel is not a deterrent—why should the prospect of being sent to Rwanda be a deterrent? If Rwanda is a safe and secure country where they can have a comfortable life, why should the prospect of being sent there be a deterrent”.³⁹

6.2 The Media and Immigration

The 2005 London Bombings were a dark day for Great Britain. On the 7th of July as four British Muslim suicide bombers blew themselves up on a bus and three tube trains, fifty-two lives were claimed. Of the fifty-two victims, many were foreign to the U.K, and whose residence ranged from short to long term. This event was as tragic as it was eye opening. The blast and those it claimed however is an interesting snapshot demonstrating the diverse and historically cosmopolitan city that London has been for centuries. Amongst the dead were a 48-year-old Iranian biomedical officer at Great Ormond street hospital, a 46-year-old Romanian dental technician and a 55-year-old cleaner of Ghanaian origin who had spent half her life in London.⁴⁰ ‘These immigrants were not the lazy, dishonest scroungers of tabloid flare; they were the lifeblood of a diverse and dynamic global city’.⁴¹

For western media and political leaders, immigrants make convenient scapegoats. Following the aftermath of the 7/7 attacks, a percentage increase of 35.42% of hate crime incidence against Asians and Arabs in the U.K. occurred.⁴² Despite the attackers being born and raised

38 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels - *Collected Works (MECW)*, (Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), 358.

39 Patrick Grady, Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration Bill), *Hansard* January 16th 2024, [https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-16/debates/6EF16CCA-91F1-469C-BC41-1D01B1FD888D/SafetyOfRwanda\(AsylumAndImmigration\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-16/debates/6EF16CCA-91F1-469C-BC41-1D01B1FD888D/SafetyOfRwanda(AsylumAndImmigration)Bill), accessed 5th February 2024.

40 Phillipe Legrain, *Immigrants Your Country Needs Them* (Great Britain: Little, Brown & Company, 2006), 3-136.

41 Ibid.

42 Emma Hanes and Stephen Machin, *Hate Crime in the Wake of Terror Attacks: Evidence From 7/7 and 9/11* (London: University College London), 15.

in Leeds, retaliation is felt by immigrants, minorities and second-generation citizens. This demonstrates the cynical manipulation of public opinion, that people only care that the perpetrators were foreign and not the victims. It shows how easy it is to pollute the narrative; this wasn't foreigners or migrants killing British citizens, this was British citizens killing hard working migrants as well as British citizens. Linking back to X, this exemplifies how migrants are consistently demonised in the media, but it is work like this that consequently rehumanises the experience of immigrants to ameliorate some level of compassion and understanding.

Immigration is not just a modern problem though; it is seen throughout the historiography. Alison Mountz suggests that 'for as long as nation-states have asserted control of mobility along their borders, people have employed assistance to cross them'.⁴³ Moreover, because of the sensationalism surrounding human trafficking, immigration and people smuggling, the media partakes in and promulgates these events as crises.⁴⁴ Moreover, it is even easier in the wake of this technological revolution for political campaigners, through social media manipulation, misrepresentation, distortion and bots.⁴⁵ Subsequently, the escalated media coverage 'heightens public fears about sovereign control of migration'.⁴⁶ Again, what my work aims to do in part, is humanise this experience better, and surmount the grand media narrative that would have these people seen as invaders, and otherwise expunged from society and sent back to conflict or death.

7. Conclusions

X's journey to the U.K. is Homeric in its design. To me, X is like the legendary Odysseus coming home from a long tiring war, albeit with a sadistic twist as X finds even more misery and pain in Europe. X

43 Alison Mountz, *Seeking Asylum: Human Smuggling and Bureaucracy at the Border* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 2.

44 Ibid., 4.

45 Meiqing Zhang et. al., "Social Bots and Social Media Manipulation in 2020: The Year in Review," *Handbook of Computational Social Sciences*, Vol.1 (London: Routledge, 2021).

46 Alison Mountz, *Seeking Asylum*, 4.

had told me many times, he wants to be remembered as the hero of his story, and not an example of misery in the world. It is my hope that this paper has demystified the immigrant experience and raised awareness for an ongoing humanitarian crisis. I consider myself honoured for the opportunity to have sat down with an asylum seeker, one-to-one, and asked them questions.

What remains still is the debate on immigration and the responsibility the western world must accept. Many of the problems suffered by the global south and eastern immigrant diasporas are a result of historical and contemporary western imperialism and interference. It is a sad reality that western governments are unwilling to accept this responsibility, and instead demonise and label migrants as dissemblers.⁴⁷ No more true a word has been said on the issue of immigration than from Economist and US diplomat J.K. Galbraith: “Migration is the oldest action against poverty. It selects those who most want help. It is good for the country to which they go; it helps break the equilibrium of poverty in the country from which they come. What is the perversity in the human soul that causes people to resist so obvious a good?”⁴⁸ Every day, thousands die from conflict, starvation and disease, therefore it is no wonder why ‘for centuries parents have opted for migration’⁴⁹ to protect their loved ones. Consequently, it has become more necessary now than ever in this globalised integrated world that prejudice and intolerance are left to history. And that the plates of tectonic political discourse and narrative shift towards ameliorating this goal.

47 Philip Marfleet, *Refugees in a Global Era*, 16.

48 J. K. Galbraith, *The Nature of Mass Poverty* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1979).

49 Christiane Harzig and Dirk Hoeder, *What is Migration History?* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2009), 135.

X: Yeah, like- £ like, you are just [laughs], you know? -uh the feeling of if you don't know how to swim and you are just like dying inside the water and someone threw the -uh, what you call in English? The life... [T: Life Jacket] Life jack- et for you, to save your life. We feel just like that you know -

When see the border, and we see the -uh, it was white, £ I still remember. When you are coming in the sea, you will see the border of Dover is too high from the sea, and it was white like mountain. And we see that, I still remember...

Appendix



Figure 1: Thomas Hutton, 'Interview Setting', 24th November 2023.

Abbreviation Symbol Area – Jefferson Transcription System

- [word] = Overlapping Talk.
- (.) = Brief Pause between 0.08 seconds and 0.2 seconds.
- (1.4) = Time (in absolute seconds) between end of a word and beginning of next.
- ↑word or ↓word = Marked shift in pitch, up (↑) or down (↓).
- °word° = Degree sign indicate syllables or words distinctly quieter than surrounding speech by the same speaker.
- word- = A dash indicates a cut-off. In phonetic terms this is typically a glottal stop.
- >word< = Right/left carats indicate increased speaking rate (speeding up).
- <word> = Left/right carats indicate decreased speaking rate (slowing down)
- .hhh = Inbreath. Three letters indicate ‘normal’ duration. Longer or shorter inbreaths indicated with fewer or more letters.
- hhh = Outbreath. Three letters indicate ‘normal’ duration. Longer or shorter inbreaths indicated with fewer or more letters.
- £word£ = Pound sign indicates smiley voice, or suppressed laughter.
- #word# = Hash sign indicates creaky voice.
- ~word~ = Tilde sign indicates shaky voice (as in crying).
- (word) = Parentheses indicate uncertain word; no plausible candidate if empty
- (()) = Double parentheses contain analyst comments or descriptions

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