

Entrapped

Making Sense of High-Risk Migration through Gambling

Legal channels of geographic mobility are progressively diminishing, and a significant number of migrants try to overcome national borders in unauthorized ways. However, unauthorized migration often implies high risks. International media often report on the incredible journeys of those trying to reach Australia, Italy, Greece, or Spain in makeshift boats or on the death of migrants trying to cross the Mexico-U.S. border through the desert. Most of these attempts are commonly explained by referring to migrants' desperation.¹ However, this interpretation can only partially make sense of the motivations of those embarking on these risky ventures. Eritreans' trajectories, as described throughout this book, show that their movements cannot be reduced to simple mechanical reactions to danger. The space for choice, although often severely constrained, was evident in my informants' tortuous and fragmented journeys across borders. If a choice exists, how do refugees weigh the risk of staying versus the risk of leaving?

After a review of the main available explanations of high-risk migration,² I propose to examine refugees' decisions through the concept of entrapment, as developed in gambling studies. This idea is crucial, I argue, to understand the emic perception of mobility and immobility, because it introduces cognitive cogency to mobility choices in the presence of significant obstacles. My informants' heartfelt obligation to move on is not only the combined result of limited long-term prospects in different countries of arrival and the set of expectations, desires, and moral prescriptions—the cosmologies of destinations—they shared with their

peers and families. This obligation is strengthened by the sequential character of their stepwise migration. The concept of entrapment enables me to show how the duty to move ahead becomes more and more compelling because of the accumulating emotional and social costs of migrants' journeys.

Although it reconstructs in detail what is at stake for my informants at each step of their journey, this chapter is not meant to be a rationalistic cost-benefit analysis. Rather, it is an attempt to grasp the feelings, the values, the perceptions of those who keep migrating no matter the risks. To make sense of their journeys, it is crucial to acknowledge that each move is substantially related to and engendered by previous ones. This is not simply because they are all part of a personal, moral, and social set of expectations about migration and its goals. It is also because high-risk migrants, not unlike gamblers, are betting in a game of risk that becomes almost impossible to leave. I am in no way suggesting by this analogy that my informants' conduct is comparable to that of compulsive players. Gamblers and refugees are different in a number of aspects, ranging from the risks at stake to the conditions they face. However, they have one crucial characteristic in common: they make not only one, but many sequential risky choices. I argue that this serial aspect, widely ignored in the literature on high-risk migration, is key to making sense of migrants' determination to move on in spite of mounting losses.

THE DEBATE ON HIGH-RISK MIGRATION: TAKING STOCK AND A WAY FORWARD

One of the main explanations of high-risk migration rests on the assumption that individuals would avoid life-threatening journeys if they knew how dangerous they were. The issue is then enabling access to reliable information. Awareness campaigns organized in the last pen years by the International Organization for Migration in areas characterized by intense emigration have tried to sensitize prospective migrants to the dangers of unauthorized migration. However, even when information is available, migrants may avoid it or discredit it as irrelevant to their case, some scholars argue.³ Maria Hernández-Carretero, for instance, found that many of her Senegalese informants who were determined to attempt to cross to the Canary Islands expressly rejected information about the difficulties of the journey and just focused on the possibilities of enjoying a better life in Europe.⁴ The point is, then, not only to disseminate the information, but to make it convincing. It has also been pointed out that migrants may not find the source trustworthy.⁵ Most notably, international organizations and national authorities are not deemed credible, inasmuch as they are seen as representing less the interests of the migrants than of those who want to stop unauthorized migration.

A second trend of explanations concerns the relativistic perception of risk. Whereas the public debate and risk analysts have assumed that risks are objective and absolute facts, social scientists have often pointed out that the definition of

risk itself depends on social and cultural criteria.⁶ Therefore, perceptions of risks cannot be categorized as biased or unbiased, irrational or rational, lay or expert views, but should be analyzed against the relevant social and cultural background. Migration scholars have also used this approach to make sense of high-risk migration.⁷ As these authors claim, potential migrants may be aware of the dangers involved in unauthorized border crossing, while still perceiving them as “acceptable.” But how can life-threatening risks become acceptable?

Whenever a large number of individuals from the same place engage in high-risk migration, a “culture of acceptance” may emerge. Building on Paul Slovic’s risk theory,⁸ Lynnaire Sheridan’s work on the Mexico-U.S. border illustrates how common and familiar dangers may be less worrying than those seen as rare, but memorable. She shows that migration risks not only become normalized, but may also become desirable, as a sort of rite of passage to adulthood.⁹ This is not specific to Mexico, but has been widely documented as happening in other areas of extensive long-term, widespread emigration.¹⁰

Life-threatening risks associated with migration may become acceptable when the risk of staying is perceived as even higher than the one of leaving. Whenever somebody lives in conditions of severe personal distress, socioeconomic vulnerability, with a lack of reasonable alternatives and even absence of future prospects, even high risks can be reframed as opportunities. According to Madeleine Hayenhjelm, those risks are radically distinguishable from those related to lifestyle, or large-scale technological or societal risks, and could thereby be defined as *risks from vulnerability*.¹¹ In contexts such as the ones from which unauthorized migrants originate, marked by socioeconomic stagnation and by intense emigration, geographic immobility is often equated with “social death.”¹²

The risks that Eritreans run when they flee their country can thus also be classified as “risks from vulnerability.” Their context of choice is typically characterized by poor outset conditions, by limited reasonable alternatives, and by the hope that running the risk will bring a positive change to their lives. As described in chapter 1, the everyday life of many young people in Eritrea is severely constrained by government (such as by compulsory indefinite national service) and economic deprivation, while the flow of images and information from the outside world conveys the idea that a better life is achievable elsewhere. Unable to realize their most basic aspirations regarding freedom, work, and study, as well as their hopes of having a family, young women and especially young men are often stuck in a condition of social liminality.

Although the above considerations about the culture of acceptance and the relative value of risk are useful for analyzing my informants’ attitudes to border crossings, they also have a limit: they imply that migrants just move from the origin to the destination, and that the migration decision is made at one single point. On the contrary, the cases of Eritreans and many other refugees and migrants show that migration is rather a stepwise process.¹³ Decisions to engage in dangerous



FIGURE 18. Young Eritreans in Hintsats camp (photo by the author, 2013)

journeys are made all along the way: when Eritreans decide to flee their country, when they continue their journey from the first safe African country to Libya, when they search for ways to reach Italy, and, once again, when they try to move on to northern Europe. Although their agency is significantly constrained, in every lap of their journey there is a choice to be made between the risks/opportunities to stay put and the risks/opportunities to move on.¹⁴ It is crucial, I argue, to consider these moments of decision, not in isolation, but as parts of a sequential, cumulative process, in which previous choices influence subsequent ones. In order to examine such a process, I suggest a frame of analysis drawn from the study of gambling behavior. However, before moving on to that, let me draw on the ethnographic material I collected in Ethiopian camps to show why assuming Eritreans' limited access to reliable information explains their risk-taking behavior is mistaken.

ONWARD . . . NO MATTER THE RISK

My informants across four countries were usually well aware of the potential dangers of their journeys. Eritrean refugees in Italy knew the risks involved in seeking asylum in northern Europe after having been identified in Italy, and my informants in Eritrea knew the consequences of being caught fleeing the country, but this did not stop them from repeatedly attempting to do so. After having been imprisoned for over a year after a failed getaway, for example, Paolos, Johanna's brother, mentioned in chapter 1, tried to escape twice more, and, when I met him,

he was resolved to do so yet again. Likewise, those I met in Ethiopia and Sudan were resolute in their determination to reach Europe no matter the perils.

When I asked refugees in Adi Harush camp in Ethiopia if they were aware of the dangers awaiting them on the way to Europe, I always received the same answer: "Yes, we know." The tragic 2013 Lampedusa sinking was still fresh in the minds of the camp inhabitants: some of the people who died there had lived with them in Adi Harush, and others had been friends of theirs in Eritrea. Their knowledge of the risks wasn't necessarily secondhand either. Some of those I met had already experienced failed journeys. Still, they were ready to try their luck again.

While conducting my small survey on migration aspirations in the camp, Jeremiah, my interpreter, and I entered a little mud hut with a low ceiling and colored posters of Bollywood actors on the walls. Welcomed by the smoke of coal and the smell of roasted coffee beans, we sat inside facing a small crowd of young men waiting to drink their coffee. Saleh and Mukhtar, two young men in their late twenties, were our hosts. They had been in the camp for a year and eight months respectively. I started asking everyone my usual questions about their plans for the future, but they were usually received with a sarcastic smile. Sure, they all wanted to move on from the camp soon. Saleh liked Canada, but was not sure how to reach it; Mukhtar was planning to go to Germany. The others did not say where they wished to go.

"We just want to get away from here," one of them said.

"I understand," I replied. "But are you aware of the risks that you could face on your way?"

"Yes, we are," he answered, and hugging the man on his right, said by way of explanation, "He come from Sinai." The Sinai desert, as I reported before, is probably the most horrific site of Eritrean migrants' suffering. Those who survive it tell horrific stories of kidnappings and torture and show scars on their bodies as proof.¹⁵

The man who had been to Sinai was called Bere. He had escaped from Sa'wa in 2010 with some of his companions and reached Shegarab camp. He wanted to get to Israel, but things did not go as planned. While he was trying to reach Israel with the help of smugglers, he was sold to a Bedouin Rashaida criminal gang in the Sinai and imprisoned there for two months until his family in Eritrea paid a ransom of U.S.\$2,500 (125,000 nakfa). Released by the traffickers at the border with Israel, he was caught by the Egyptian police and beaten so badly that he had to be hospitalized for a week. Then, he was taken to prison in a nearby Egyptian town, where he stayed for four months before being returned to the camp in Ethiopia in September 2010.

Overwhelmed by Bere's misfortunes, I stammered: "I am so sorry . . . maybe now the UNHCR will consider you for some kind of resettlement process." But Bere promptly replied: "I have no process. I stayed here three years and now it is time to leave. There is no future for us here, and our families are waiting for us. God will be with me."

The perceived lack of future, the need to migrate for the family's sake, and seemingly fatalistic acceptance of God's will were not new to me.¹⁶ I encountered them whenever I talked to Eritreans about their aspirations to migrate. However, I was surprised to hear such determination from somebody who had already gone through so much suffering. And Bere was not an isolated case. In Mai Ayni, Adi Harush, and Addis Ababa, I met ten refugees who had undergone similar experiences in the Sinai and Egyptian prisons. Some of their stories were so brutal that my interpreters could hardly keep translating. In spite of all that, six of them were ready to move again after resting for a while.

Bere's instance blatantly points to the inadequacy of blaming the decision to engage in high-risk migration on lack of information about risks. This determination to move on seems to indicate that the dangers of the journeys, even the most fearful ones, have become normalized as part of a sort of subculture of risk. Is it possible that, as Lynnaire Sheridan has argued in the context of Mexico-U.S.¹⁷ border crossings, my Eritrean informants had come to accept the risks as an ordinary—perhaps even a necessary—part of their migration experience?

GET RICH OR DIE TRYING

I met 40-year-old Jeremiah the day after my arrival in Adi Hurush camp. Jeremiah had a house to himself in zone 1, the nicest area of the camp. He had been granted such privileged accommodation because he was HIV-positive, had had TB for a long time, and was cyclically sick. He coughed the entire afternoon while talking to me about his life before and after becoming a refugee. Jeremiah had read a lot and was interested in politics, religion—he was an evangelical Christian—and music. He kept quoting the Bible, Dan Connell's investigative journalism,¹⁸ and songs by Tracy Chapman and 50 Cent.

Jeremiah had led a very adventurous life: he was born to an Eritrean father and an Ethiopian mother in Addis Ababa, moved to Eritrea after independence, and became an important manager of Assab Port. After revealing and denouncing corruption in the administration of the port, he became unpopular among political cadres and had to flee the country. Then he lived in Uganda, South Sudan, Kenya, and Ethiopia, continually trying to reach the First World in any way possible—by resettlement process, study visa, fake papers, transnational marriage, or smugglers—all in vain. Finally, sick and tired, he had somehow “retired” to the camp, where he was able to get some free medical care (although limited) for his condition.

“I was one of them once,” Jeremiah said, referring to those young refugees who were doing their best to leave the camp to reach Europe or other developed countries. “I would have done anything to get there. . . . Indeed I tried everything . . . but now I am tired, my time is finished. I am out of the game.” Then he tried to explain the mentality of the young refugees on the move: “Do you know 50 Cent?

The title of one of his albums is *Get Rich or Die Tryin'*. Do you know it? We have a similar expression in Tigrinya, "Wey keb, wey geb." It means "Either you rise or you fall." That is what they think. They know about the danger of Sinai, they know about the danger of Lampedusa, but they see their friends who made it to Europe; they see their neighbors leaving from the camp and reaching Sweden or Norway. They cannot wait here; they want to have the life they see on TV. They will not stop until they do." After all his experience, Jeremiah was advising Yohannes, his young friend and brother in faith, not to follow the flow of those who were chasing after success. "I told him to get married here in the camp and start a family while he is here. In the camp he can slowly develop his artistic skills [Yohannes was a very gifted painter] and wait for some opportunities in Addis Ababa or in other countries."

Jeremiah's remarks indicate how Eritrean migration is embedded in a complex set of collective images, societal expectations, and personal desire to be part of the imagined outside world. This is also what I have tried to highlight throughout this book, using the concept of "cosmologies of destinations." Moreover, Jeremiah's account underlines the role of peers in reciprocally reinforcing motivations to migrate, as well as the imitation mechanism among travelling partners, kin, and acquaintances as crucial in the decision to do so. Jeremiah's words illustrate the mentality of a sort of subculture of migration in which risks are elaborated through cultural categories, normalized and accepted as inevitable. Trained in the military, often accustomed to challenging environments and even to punishments, many Eritreans may have developed a sort of acquaintance with risk. Moreover, as I illustrated in previous chapters, the practice of unauthorized border crossing belongs to the history of the Eritrean people and is today a pervasive practice, involving thousands of them every month. However, even if Eritreans are used to even the most extreme risks, they are still scared by them—and for good reason.

Many of my informants in Ethiopia and Sudan were fearful about their prospective border crossings. In Addis Ababa, Adonay was extremely scared when he thought his departure to Libya was approaching. He could not concentrate on his studies thinking about the journey and was extremely emotional during our conversations. When I met Hagos (spokesman for a small community of southern Eritreans in Addis Ababa) again in Khartoum, he told me that considering the favorable conditions provided by Italy's Mare Nostrum ("Our Sea") operation,¹⁹ his brother was pushing him to go to Libya. But Hagos was hesitant and frightened. Dani, a freshly arrived refugee in Addis Ababa, told Violetta and me before moving on: "I am terrified . . . I don't want to go, I know all the risks, it is so dangerous, but I have to go, I have no choice. I don't have any process here." These instances suggest that the decision to engage in difficult journeys is not so much the result of an increased tolerance of risk, but rather the consequence of feeling they have no reasonable alternative. Eritrean refugees felt "entrapped," caught in a condition that obliges them to keep moving onward, no matter the risks.

Trying to make sense of my informants' attitudes, I came across the scholarship on gambling. The concepts I found there—among them, entrapment—resounded with my informants' ways of framing their attempts as games of risk, chance, and fate. In referring to their migration attempts, they often defined them as lottery draws.²⁰

REFUGEES AS GAMBLERS: A NEW APPROACH TO MIGRATION TRAJECTORIES

What do Eritrean refugees' migratory practices and gambling have in common? Although this parallel is admittedly unusual, it has, I argue, the potential to uncover neglected aspects of contemporary forced migrants' complex and lengthy trajectories.

Gambling and high-risk multi-step migration share several characteristics. First, these two activities both involve chance, investment, risks, and opportunities. They are both games of chance in which individuals willingly risk money, time, energy, and personal security to win a prize or attain a goal. Second, my informants, like regular players, tend to bet more than once. They are serial riskers. Here, I am not trying to suggest that migrants' attempts to migrate are compulsive behavior. What I am interested in here is to show the common sequential feature of my informants' trajectories and gamblers' bets. Migration trajectories to Europe can entail several wagers. They risk once when escaping their country, twice when moving on to Libya, three times when they cross the sea to reach Italy and four times when they attempt to obtain asylum in northern Europe. This would apply to a successful, extremely lucky trajectory, but migration pathways are usually far from linear. Rather, they correspond to the "fragmented journeys" that Michael Collyer sees as a common feature of global migration systems.²¹

One's escape from Eritrea may be the last of a series of attempts. As described in chapter 1, many of my informants had tried to flee more than once and were sometimes severely punished for doing so. The passage from Ethiopia to Sudan and Libya often involves betting that their relatives will be able to pay for their journeys. As noted earlier, relatives were often reluctant to pay for these risky journeys; thus, many of my informants negotiated their passage to Libya with their middleman without telling their families. A phone call asking for payment for past (travel to Libya) and future (travel to Italy) services may catch relatives, often in the diaspora and unprepared and unable to pay, by surprise. Inability to pay can result in long periods of waiting in harsh conditions, and sometimes in deprivation and torture.²² The sea journey across the Mediterranean is also likely to be the last of many failed tries.²³ Finally, attempts to seek asylum in northern Europe are usually repeated more than once when refugees are returned to Italy under the Dublin Regulation. My informants share a systematic tendency to take repeated risks with regular gamblers.

Yet high-risk migration and gambling differ on several crucial points. First of all, the conditions in which refugees and gamblers “bet” are drastically different. As already mentioned, the risks run by refugees could be defined as “risks from vulnerability,” since they are characterized by poor outset conditions, lack of reasonable alternatives, and hope of a positive change. Refugees’ ability to choose is thus limited, whereas gamblers’ bets may be seen as an unconstrained leisure activity on the part of quite well-off individuals.²⁴

Above all, the risks and rewards involved in gambling and in high-risk migration differ in quality. A gambler primarily risks money; a refugee primarily risks his/her life. What is at stake for migrants is the possibility of safety or a better life, whereas the expected reward of gamblers is eminently money. Compulsive gamblers can certainly reach the point of risking their social status, even their lives to some extent, at the final stages of their pathological compulsion to bet, but these are not the first stakes of the game. For many refugees—this is certainly the case of Eritreans—migration is instead a life-or-death game from the outset. Moreover, the numerous cases of Eritreans kidnapped in Sinai remind us that not only death, but also extreme physical suffering can result from a wrong step in high-risk migration journeys. No matter how relativistic perceptions of risks may be, it is undeniable that loss of life and physical suffering still have an ultimate value for human beings. Thus, even if refugees have arguably higher probabilities to succeed compared to gamblers,²⁵ they risk something that is incommensurably more valuable. Nonetheless, the parallel between gamblers and Eritrean refugees still has the potential to uncover some important mechanisms underpinning refugees’ attitudes to risk.²⁶ The concept of entrapment is particularly interesting in making sense of why migrants take risks no matter the cost.

ENTRAPPED

The emotional condition experienced by Eritrean refugees once they have left their country can be associated with the feeling of *entrapment* typically documented among gamblers.²⁷ Entrapment defines the psychological condition of gamblers who feel obliged to continue betting both time and money owing to the perception that they have gone too far to give up. Individuals may feel compelled to bet repeatedly in order to win a higher stake and then repay previous debts. According to Jon Elster, entrapment could be caused by a high level of tolerance for risk developed after serial gambling and the thrill connected to it; however, it could also simply be analyzed as a causal mechanism whereby individuals continue betting in order to pay previously contracted debts.²⁸ This, as Elster suggests, can be considered a rational mechanism, since a possible disaster is preferable to a certain one. For instance, if an individual has already lost a lot of money and has to face major negative consequences as a result, he/she may keep betting the money left in the hope that it will enable the gambler recoup his/her losses.

The word “entrapment” is often used in migration studies, at times as a stronger synonym of being stuck, to highlight those structural process—legal, economic, and political—that immobilize migrants in a place or condition. Steff Jansen employs this term to describe the spatial immobility produced by bureaucratic paradoxes of visa regimes.²⁹ Guillermina Núñez and Josiah Heyman call enforcement at the Mexico-U.S. border “entrapment.”³⁰ Although these analyses and the cases they describe largely overlap with the instances and processes of immobilization that I describe throughout this book. The notion of entrapment as drawn from gambling studies adds an important dimension to this debate. Entrapped individuals not only feel immobile, they also feel caught in a loop of actions from which there is no way out except “winning.” The idea of entrapment thus is not only descriptive of a condition, it also implies a course of action. For Eritrean refugees to feel entrapped means that they feel obliged to keep trying to move on to their final destinations in spite of the risks and the losses. The idea of entrapment can, thus, play a crucial role not only in unfolding the manifold meanings of mobility and immobility, but also for the investigation of migration dynamics.

In order to leave Eritrea, many of my informants spent significant amounts of money—several thousand euros—usually borrowed from their family back home or from relatives abroad. This does not mean that refugees will be indebted at the end of their migration, as described for other immigrant groups,³¹ but they are expected to start contributing to their families’ incomes back home by sending remittances and helping other members of the family to leave the country. While they are in Ethiopia and Sudan, they nonetheless remain heavily dependent on their families, sometimes even for their daily survival. Even if they manage to get a job there, their salary is usually not enough to help their families back home; rather, it is barely sufficient for their own survival. As a result of their migration, then, they have worsened both their social status and their dependency on their families.

On their way out of the country, Eritreans have not only invested a lot of money. The journey has also cost them a lot in several other aspects—in a way they have lost their entire world, including their dear ones and their familiar life environments. While crossing the border, they endured significant physical challenges and risked being arrested by Eritrean police or dying. In Ethiopia or Sudan then they have faced hostile environments and accumulated stress partly connected to the past they left behind and partly to the future they have not yet reached. All these costs have been paid, not simply to escape conscription in Eritrea, but to win the prospect of a decent life for themselves and their families. This is deemed possible only outside Africa and beyond southern Europe. This socially defined goal is reciprocally strengthened and emotionally reproduced through moments of “collective effervescence” in their dwelling places. If the jackpot defined by the cosmology of destinations is not won, all the huge investments up till then become worthless. This is why the only perceived solution to solve their situation and to

justify previously accumulated losses is to face risks even higher than those run to escape from Eritrea by moving on to Libya and then to Italy.

The condition of “entrapment” assumes many other meanings in the passage from Ethiopia/Sudan to Italy through Libya. First, entrapment is not only a psychological condition here, but a physical one, inasmuch as the journey to Europe entails several steps of forced immobility. As I explained earlier, migrants often willingly accept the possibility of being imprisoned by smugglers for the time needed for their kin to pay for the journey. These moments of forced immobility do not emerge from lack of agency. As argued by Noelle Brigden and Cetta Mainwaring in their analysis of migrants’ journeys across the U.S.-Mexico and southern European borders,³² these periods of involuntary immobility are strategic choices enacted by migrants in order to fulfil their migration project. It is at this point of the journey that the paradoxes and complexity resulting from the interplay between choice, aspirations, and constraints are mostly evident. Bound to the idea—and moral obligation—that there is no other alternative but moving on, migrants choose temporarily to give up their freedom to achieve their goals. By doing so, they force their relatives, mostly living abroad, to come up with the necessary resources for travel they often did not agree to. Entrapment here does not define only the physical experience of migrants and their psychological status, but also the condition of their families and kin, who are bound to finance journeys that may lead to the deaths of their loved ones. Once they have reached Italy, achieving socioeconomic integration remains very difficult.

Many Eritrean refugees in Italy face multiple challenges in integrating into the Italian labor market and starting to send remittances back home. Thus, their social status in their community of reference back home is arguably even lower than when they were in Africa. Although they have reached Europe, they are not able to help their families and prove their manhood. Even in Italy, then, Eritrean refugees are entrapped between mounting losses and the hope of achieving a better future by running more risks. Moving inside Europe, in their eyes, is simply one more step forward. They have already gone so far—not only in terms of distance from home but also in terms of money and time invested—that they simply cannot give up at this stage. Despite the legal residence they have gained, their lives in Italy are unexpectedly hard, while the lives of their friends who made it to Norway, Sweden and other northern European countries seem easy and comfortable.

In the case of secondary movements within Europe, refugees usually no longer risk their lives, but failed asylum applications generate psychological stress, a significant expenditure of time (two to three years on average), and, to a lesser extent, a loss of money. The psychological stress is owing to living in an unstable condition for long time—sometimes detained—without knowing the result of their bureaucratic process; and being obliged, after their return to Italy, to start their lives anew, such as obtaining legal papers again and finding accommodation and a job. However, most of the trauma is caused by the failure of their migratory plans,

the same plans that pushed them out of their homeland and kept them moving on to Europe.

In a way, one might say that the power of their families' and their own cosmology is even stronger in the last step of the journey. In spite of safety and legal residence, individuals' aspirations and family expectations become more pressing. The feeling of being so close to the final destination, the First World, but not able to reach it, elicits even stronger desires to move on and led my informants to attempt again and again to seek asylum in northern Europe, in spite of the low odds of success. In fact, it should be noted that although the risks involved in failed asylum attempts are not perceived as particularly high, the odds of success in this last lap of the journey are dramatically lower than in previous crossings. If refugees' biometrics have been recorded in the European biometric database, EURODAC, the migration gamble becomes comparable to a lottery in which the odds of winning are extremely limited and investments are low.

This chapter has analyzed my previous ethnographic material through an analytical frame that can make sense of widespread, ongoing, and resilient migration in the face of huge obstacles. Drawing from the study of gamblers' behavior, I argue that refugees' commitment to keep migrating on progressively increases, in spite of mounting losses and high risk, mainly owing to the social and emotional condition called entrapment. To talk about entrapment here is another way of looking at immobility, not only as a structurally determined physical state, but also as an emotional condition, which is typically experienced by those migrants who repeatedly take risks in searching for their new homes. While summarizing the geographic, social, economic, generational, gender, and emotional dimensions of (im)mobility, the notion of entrapment points to the cognitive aspect of feeling stuck and its implications for migration dynamics, attitudes to risk, and resilience to mobility barriers.

Although the case of Eritrean migration is specific for a number of historical and political reasons, my informants' trajectories may be considered as exemplary of refugees' reactions more generally against the increasingly restrictive structure of opportunities they face. The idea of entrapment could potentially be applied to asylum migration dynamics on a larger scale. Through this framework, it is possible to better understand why a number of asylum seekers repeatedly run very high risks in order to reach developed countries, and why migration and asylum flows have not significantly decreased, despite increasingly tightened immigration policies. It is crucial to take into consideration here the cumulative stepwise character of their migration. Previous choices, the risks already run, and the strong personal and family investments all affect subsequent decisions, which, from an emic point of view, often become obliged choices.