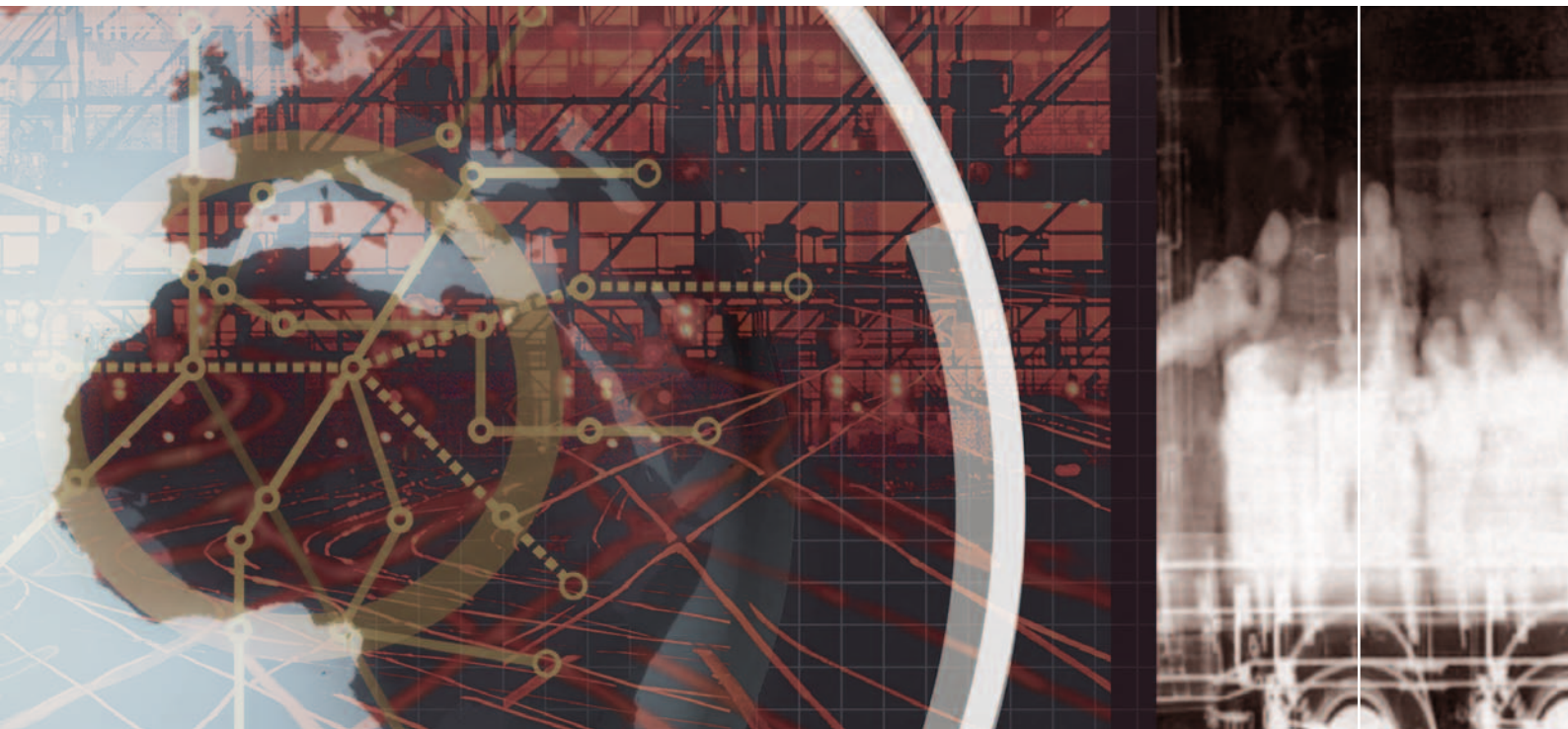




UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime



The role of organized crime in the smuggling of migrants from West Africa to the European Union



Funded by the European Union within the framework of the project “Law enforcement capacity-building to prevent and combat smuggling of migrants in the ECOWAS region and Mauritania (Impact)”

UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME
Vienna

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Sub-Saharan migrants leaving from Agadez (Niger) in order to reach the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, 2006 ©SID and CeSPI



SUMMARY

Irregular migration from Africa to Europe attracted much attention in the wake of the dramatic events of 2005 around the Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla on the Moroccan coast. In the following years, the media regularly reported the often deadly journey undertaken by young African irregular migrants trying to reach Europe by crossing the Sahara desert or embarking on uncertain journeys in flimsy boats on the Atlantic Ocean or the Mediterranean Sea.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), through the European Union-funded “Law enforcement capacity-building to prevent and combat smuggling of migrants in the ECOWAS region and Mauritania (Impact)”, undertook to investigate the role played by organized criminal groups in the smuggling of migrants from West Africa to Europe.

The present report is aimed primarily at decision makers, law enforcement and judicial officials, but also at a wider audience interested in irregular migration. It contributes to a better understanding of the underlying mechanisms and actors involved in this criminal process as a basis for policy reforms in the West African countries concerned.

This report was prepared through desk and field research, conducted in Mali, Morocco, the Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Spain. Interviews were conducted with over 200 people in Africa and Europe belonging to three main groups: migrants, national authorities and non-governmental organizations, and smugglers. Four main findings can be mentioned:

- Transnational organized criminal groups are generally involved in the smuggling of migrants from West Africa to Europe. However, there are important differences among them in terms of specialization and professionalism. With regard to trafficking in persons and the smuggling of non-African irregular migrants, criminal groups are clearly well organized and structured, and keep close contacts with operatives in several countries. On the other hand, other would-be migrants in West Africa have to deal with loose networks that are not permanently structured. Various groups of actors usually collaborate for one particular operation, and there are no exclusive relationships between those criminal groups.
- Specialization and the building of transnational criminal networks usually come as a result of increased efficiency in border interdiction. Within West Africa, freedom of movement gives little incentive, if any, to engage in the smuggling of migrants. However, the situation changes when there are natural obstacles, such as the sea, or man-made obstacles, such as surveillance systems. This creates a market, all the more lucrative when the activity is illegal and risks are high.

- In most cases, smugglers are migrants themselves. Realizing that their knowledge acquired through (often painful) experience may be used by other migrants in exchange for remuneration, some migrants decide to enter the business of smuggling of migrants. They may then become specialized professional smugglers, or they use their knowledge to finance the completion of their journey to Europe.
- Irregular migrants generally do not see themselves as victims, and smugglers do not see themselves as criminals. A complex relationship exists between irregular migrants and smugglers. The latter have an interest in maintaining the flow and feeding youngsters with dreams of success. These dreams are also kept alive in some West African countries by families and circles where important social value is attached to those who decide to leave, as well as by those who have made it to Europe, be it legally or illegally, even though their situation in Europe is often worse than it was at home.

More rigorous policies in destination countries have had unintended consequences, as they have made the market for the smuggling of persons more lucrative, thereby attracting the attention of existing criminal groups, as well as causing those already working in this sector, as they become more professional, to develop more contacts with existing criminal networks. In this respect, the development by West African countries of a balanced approach to tackle the smuggling of migrants focusing on both supply and demand reduction, with possible external support, could contribute to preventing the market from falling entirely into the hands of highly specialized transnational organized criminal groups. It may also reduce criminal activities linked to the smuggling of migrants more generally.

For matters linked to prevention, legislation, operations or prosecution, UNODC, as guardian of the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime,^{*} possesses specific expertise and experience that could be put at the service of West African States to support their reform process.

^{*} United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 2241, No. 39574.



Madrid skyline © C. Barecenilla, 2005

This report is about people who have an interest in making profits by feeding the dreams, ambitions or fantasies of would-be migrants from West Africa to Europe. It reveals how they work and how they organize themselves.

“I don’t understand why people make problems because of our work.”¹

“They are trying to take the bread from our mouths while all we are doing is helping our brothers to travel to try their luck in Europe.”²

“I saw frustration, hunger and hopelessness written all over them.”³

“Each moment they huddle at the street corners, trying to shield themselves from the prying eyes of security operatives.”⁴

“Suffering is a school of wisdom.”⁵

“If at a point in life you think of giving up, looking back at the way already taken will restore your morale. Life is a struggle. Whatever happens to us in our life, we should never give up.”⁶

¹ Said by a migrant-smuggler in the town of Agadez in the north of Niger to one of the researchers who prepared this report, while pointing to a billboard carrying an anti-smuggling poster equating irregular migration with rape, death and AIDS.

² Interview, Agadez, December 2009.

³ Orji Ogbonnaya Orji, *Inside Aso Rock* (Spectrum Books, Ibadan etc., 2003), p.112.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Written by an unknown detainee on the wall of a detention centre in Mauritania where people suspected of being irregular migrants are held.

⁶ Original quote: “*La souffrance est une école de sagesse. Si à une certaine étape de la vie tu penses désister, regarde en arrière et les étapes traversées te remonteront sûrement le morale. La vie est un combat. Qu’est-ce qu’il puisse arriver dans notre vie, il ne faut jamais baisser les bras*”. Text written on the wall of a detention centre in Mauritania where people suspected of being irregular migrants are held.



I. INTRODUCTION

The present report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) investigates the involvement of organized crime in the smuggling of migrants from West Africa towards the European Union (EU). It was realized as part of the EU-funded project “Law enforcement capacity-building to prevent and combat smuggling of migrants in the ECOWAS region and Mauritania (Impact)”.

The information in this report was compiled by a team of researchers from Europe and West Africa using both documentary studies and field research. The report is intended to be of particular interest to West African Governments and other authorities concerned with combating criminal groups involved in the smuggling of migrants. It is hoped that a survey of the available information will enable them to design more effective counter-smuggling policies.

The present study deals mainly with what are sometimes called the West African routes (from Senegal or other coastal countries to Spain, especially by sea to the Canary Islands) and the western Mediterranean routes (overland across the Sahara to Morocco and Algeria and thence to the Spanish territories of Ceuta and Melilla or by sea to mainland Spain; otherwise, overland to the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and thence by sea to Italy). A separate study commissioned by UNODC deals with migration from North Africa to Europe.

It should be said at the outset that not all migrants from south of the Sahara who head north necessarily have their sights firmly fixed on Europe as their final destination, and certainly the majority of those who succeed in reaching North Africa actually remain there rather than continuing across the Mediterranean. Furthermore, many of the sea routes taken by irregular migrants to enter southern Europe are used by both North Africans and West Africans. Together, these factors make it rather difficult to distinguish West African migration routes from North African ones, as the two merge into one skein, and as so many West Africans settle for long periods in the Maghreb, which becomes a site of complex interactions. The fact that the ultimate aim of the present report is to study the role of organized crime in the smuggling of West African migrants to EU should not be understood to suggest that the encounters between migrants and locals in North Africa itself are unimportant or unworthy of study.

The report is not concerned primarily with migrants themselves in the sense of discussing the various factors that may cause some people in countries south of the Sahara to want to migrate to Europe. On this and many other aspects of migration, information may be obtained by consulting standard published accounts, such as *Migration in Sub-Saharan Africa*.⁷ A variety of official bodies, including the International Labour Organization, the International Organization

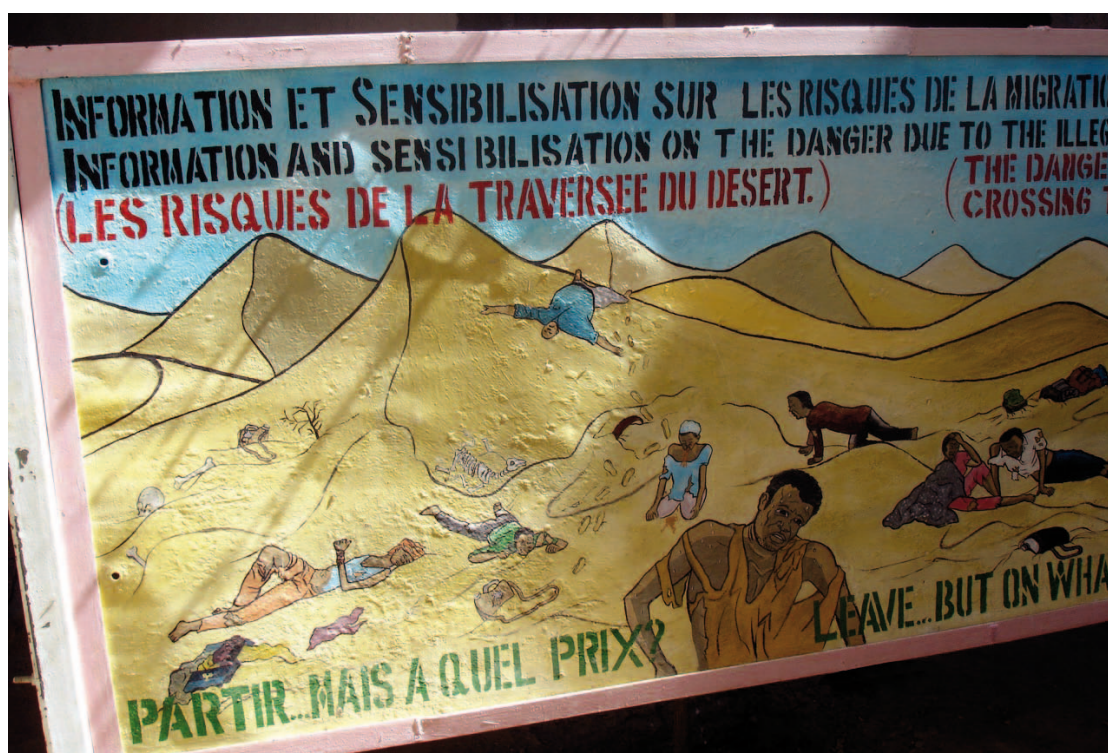
⁷ Aderanti Adepoju, *Migration in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Current African Issues, No. 37 (Uppsala, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2008).

for Migration and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, regularly publish information on all aspects of migration and migration policy. These and other organizations, such as the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), maintain informative websites.⁸ A specialized journal, *International Migration*, is published on behalf of the International Organization for Migration.

Migration is a practice deeply embedded in the histories of many West African societies, for example, in the case of cattle-herders who for generations have travelled in search of pasture and seasonal workers who seek temporary employment in the main cities and economic hubs of the area. Information on these older patterns may be obtained by consulting such works as *Migration in West Africa: Demographic Aspects*.⁹

In the past, patterns of human movement were generally restricted to the West Africa region and the Sahara. In this respect, the last two decades have seen significant changes. In regard to emigration from sub-Saharan Africa to Western Europe and the growth of the smuggling of migrants, the roots of the current situation really go back to the early 1990s. During the intervening period, as European countries have adopted increasingly robust measures to discourage migration other than in specific categories prescribed by law, many would-be migrants have resorted to various forms of subterfuge in order to reach Europe. The same is broadly true of those North Africans who aim to migrate to Europe. Over time, patterns of migration between West and North Africa and Europe have tended to overlap or even merge.

The involvement of organized crime in the smuggling of irregular migrants is a sensitive and controversial issue, as the present report will discuss at various points.



Prevention advertisement to inform migrants on dangers to cross the desert, Gao, Mali

Many researchers, particularly those whose fieldwork has concentrated on interviews with migrants themselves rather than with law enforcement officers or, indeed, with smugglers, tend to be sceptical about the proposition that organized crime plays any significant role at all in the migration procedures used by sub-Saharan Africans. De Haas, for example, observed in 2007 that “the available empirical evidence based on research among the migrants concerned

⁸ www.icmpd.org.

⁹ K. C. Zachariah and Julien Condé, *Migration in West Africa: Demographic Aspects* (New York, Oxford University Press, published with the World Bank, 1981).

strongly suggests that trafficking is rare and that the vast majority migrate on their own initiative”.¹⁰ More recently, the same author has condemned “media and dominant policy discourses” in which migrants are “commonly depicted as victims recruited by ‘merciless’ and ‘unscrupulous’ traffickers and smugglers”.¹¹ Many people who make money from the smuggling of migrants are themselves migrants. Nevertheless, only a small percentage of former migrants may become members of organized criminal groups, and very few play key roles. Most of the former migrants who have themselves become smugglers get into this business in order to survive.

Trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants are in theory distinct activities. However, in practice the two sometimes overlap. Many victims of trafficking begin their journey voluntarily, and many incidents of trafficking start out with migrants being smuggled. During the stages of transport and crossing of borders, no exploitation for financial gain may yet have taken place, and it is not yet clear that trafficking is involved. Those who are trafficked in the clearest sense are overwhelmingly women who are actively recruited for the sex trade in Europe or, in probably greater numbers, in North Africa. Although in most cases these women appear to be aware that they will be expected to work in the sex trade at their destination, it seems that they are often ignorant of the full implications. Having committed themselves to an individual trafficker or to the consortium that will transport them and control their activities, they become bond slaves without the right to opt out of their contract and are liable to be subjected to abuse of various sorts.

Generally speaking, the studies that have given substantial attention to the element of organized crime in matters of irregular migration are precisely those that address the trafficking of Nigerian women, particularly to Italy.¹² However, some authors note the involvement in irregular migration of networks that might reasonably be included in the category of organized criminals,¹³ notably in regard to transcontinental networks that have transported substantial numbers of migrants from South Asia to West Africa and thence to North Africa and Europe. The role of organized crime tends to be most explicit in certain official publications, including by UNODC.¹⁴

Some aspects of irregular migration attract extensive media coverage, especially the journeys made by migrants in often flimsy and poorly equipped boats from the African mainland to the Canary Islands or to continental Spain or Italy. A recent example is a series of articles published in April and May 2009 by the journalist Kees Broere and the photographer Sven Torfinn in the Dutch newspaper *de Volkskrant*.¹⁵ The most informative works of journalism include a book by Serge Daniel, a Beninese reporter working for Radio France Internationale who travelled with groups of migrants over many months and also interviewed various officials of State bodies or other agencies before writing his account.¹⁶ There are also some excellent shorter articles by journalists who have investigated the migration business in West Africa at the local level, which deserve to be more widely known.¹⁷

In general, the empirical basis of many popular perceptions about irregular migration, and even of official policies among EU countries, is “rather shaky”, de Haas notes, not least on account of “a lack of empirical research”.¹⁸ The

¹⁰ Hein de Haas, *The Myth of Invasion: Irregular Migration from West Africa to the Maghreb and the European Union*, IMI Research Report (Oxford, International Migration Institute, 2007), pp. 24–25. See also p. iv of his introduction.

¹¹ Hein de Haas, *Irregular Migration from West Africa to the Maghreb and the European Union: An Overview of Recent Trends*, IOM Migration Research Series, No. 32 (Geneva, International Organization for Migration, 2008), p. 9.

¹² For example, Franco Prina, *Trafficking of Nigerian Girls to Italy: Trade and Exploitation of Minors and Young Nigerian Women for Prostitution in Italy* (United Nations International Crime and Justice Research Institute, 2003), chap. 5.1. Available from www.unicri.it/emerging_crimes/human_trafficking/nigeria1/docs/rr_prina_eng.pdf; Jørgen Carling, *Migration, Human Smuggling and Trafficking from Nigeria to Europe*, IOM Migration Research Series, No. 23 (Geneva, International Organization for Migration, 2006), available from www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/shared/mainsite/published_docs/serial_publications/mrs23.pdf; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Transnational Trafficking and the Rule of Law in West Africa: A Threat Assessment* (2009), available from www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/West_Africa_Report_2009.pdf.

¹³ For example, Serge Daniel, *Les routes clandestines: L'Afrique des immigrés et des passeurs* (Paris, Hachette, 2008), pp. 113–114, 181, 195–196.

¹⁴ “Organized crime and irregular migration from Africa to Europe”, prepared by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in July 2006, available from www.unodc.org/pdf/research/Migration_Africa.pdf.

¹⁵ Door Kees Broere and Sven Torfinn, “Migratie: van Accra naar Amsterdam”, *de Volkskrant*, April–May 2009, available from www.vk.nl/migratie.

¹⁶ Daniel, *Les routes clandestines* (see footnote 8).

¹⁷ For example, Emmanuel Mayah, “Europe by desert: tears of African migrants”, *Wotclef News* (Nigeria), February 2010, pp. 25–29.

¹⁸ De Haas, *Irregular Migration from West Africa* (see footnote 6), p. 12.



Small boats, Ceuta

present study is a modest attempt to provide such data by concentrating on the element of organized crime in the irregular transport of migrants from West Africa to the European Union, including those who, as noted above, may be considered to have been trafficked. The present report uses the definition of organized crime offered by the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime,¹⁹ which states in article 2 (a):

“Organized criminal group” shall mean a structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences established in accordance with this Convention, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit.

A serious crime is elsewhere defined as an offence punishable by at least four years in prison. In regard to the smuggling of migrants, this activity is defined by the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, as: “the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident”. This Protocol requires States parties to criminalize such procurement, as well as enabling a person to remain in a country where the person is not a legal resident or citizen without complying with requirements for legally remaining in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit.

It is hoped that the present report sheds some new light on the nature and extent of organized crime in this particular branch of irregular migration. However, it should also be said that the present report does not seek to investigate the livelihoods of the many sub-Saharan migrants who stay in North Africa. Many of these lead a hand-to-mouth existence. Many experience various forms of abuse, and some earn a living by breaking the law in ways, varying from petty rule-breaking to serious crime. At the same time, there are certainly others who develop legal and respectable livelihoods in a profession, or as traders or artisans, staying in North Africa for years and even living out their lives there. The present report focuses on organized crime, but that is only one aspect of a complex situation.

¹⁹ United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 2225, No. 39574. Available from www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNTOC/Publications/TOC%20Convention/TOCbook-e.pdf.



II. THE SCOPE OF IRREGULAR MIGRATION

In Europe, harrowing images of people packed into leaky boats and of corpses washed ashore have had a great impact on the general public, shaping popular perceptions of migration from Africa. As a result, it is quite probable that many Europeans have a distorted idea of the size of irregular migration from Africa. For this reason, it is helpful to investigate the available figures in spite of their inadequacies. If this is done, several observations become reasonably clear. First, only a minority of the irregular migrants who head north from West Africa every year actually arrive in Europe, the majority of them remaining in North Africa for a longer or shorter period. Second, only a minority of West Africans living in Europe have entered illegally by sea. The United Nations Office for West Africa states succinctly that “[t]he canoes, pateras²⁰ or other means of irregular entry into Europe, although attracting the most media attention, do not account for the majority of irregular migration”;²¹ and quotes a Spanish finding that only 8 per cent of irregular arrivals in Spain are by sea.²² It seems that the majority of West Africans enter Europe legally with valid visas,²³ but that some stay on after their visas have expired, thus losing their legal status only after a lapse of time. Third, despite a recent increase, West African migration to EU is still modest in comparison to migration from elsewhere, particularly North Africa and Eastern Europe.²⁴ It is also fairly plain that most West Africans trying to reach Europe by sea are not fleeing from utter destitution, but that a considerable number are from relatively well-off households and are acting in consequence of “a conscious choice ... to enhance their livelihoods”.²⁵

²⁰ *Patera* is a Spanish word meaning a small, flat-bottomed wooden fishing boat of the type commonly used to smuggle up to around 20 migrants to Spain from Morocco or the Western Sahara. *Cayucos* are bigger, being up to 25 metres in length and able to hold up to 150 people. They are particularly used in smuggling from West Africa to the Canary Islands.

²¹ United Nations Office for West Africa, *Migrations irrégulières en provenance d’Afrique de l’Ouest: description du phénomène et analyse des causes et conséquences des flux migratoires*, études thématiques (September 2008), p. 10.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

²³ De Haas, *Irregular Migration from West Africa* (see footnote 6), p. 9.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

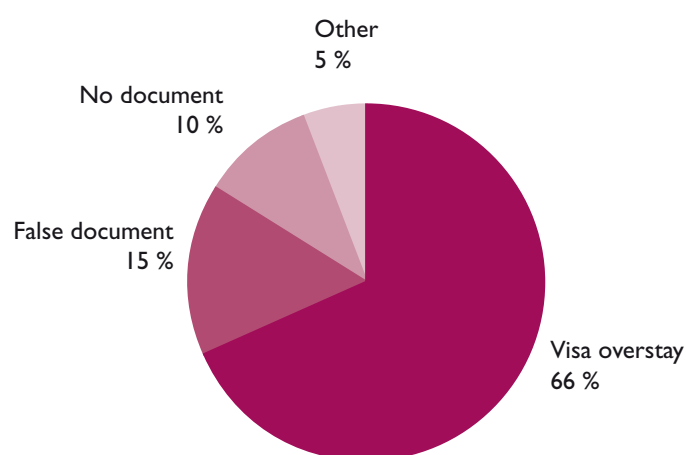
²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 10. This matter is discussed further in chapter IV of the present report.

Quantifying irregular migration flows

Researchers have developed various ways of calculating numbers of irregular migrants, although the figures have obvious deficiencies. One method is to extrapolate from census statistics or other data concerning the existing “stock” of immigrants in a given country. In Italy, some 700,000 irregular migrants of various origins presented themselves to the authorities in 2002 and 2003 with a view to regularizing their status after the Government had promulgated an amnesty. There are reasons to believe that this was a large percentage of all the illegal immigrants living in Italy at that time. As figure I shows, of these 700,000 people, three quarters had arrived legally but had remained after the expiration of their visa. A further 15 per cent had entered with false documents. Only 10 per cent had entered without any documents at all.²⁶ More recently, the Italian Ministry of Internal Affairs has published statistics showing that the number of people entering the country irregularly by sea is increasing, but is still only about 12 per cent of all those in an irregular situation.²⁷

These figures concern immigrants of all origins; it may be that Africans in southern European countries are less likely to overstay after the expiration of a legal visa than migrants of another origin. Or, put another way, irregular migrants from Africa may be more likely than irregular migrants of another origin to arrive in southern Europe without any documentation at all, on account of the proximity of southern European countries to the African continent. The argument may be taken further by looking at Spain, where there were an estimated 6 million migrants in 2009, of whom perhaps 1.4 million were irregular. About 210,000 resident foreigners, or some 3.5 per cent, were sub-Saharan Africans. West African migrants in Spain are predominantly from the Gambia, Nigeria and Senegal, although none of these nationalities represents more than 0.9 per cent of the estimated total foreign population in Spain.²⁸

Figure I. Italy: types of entry of irregular migrants who benefited from the 2002 and 2003 regularizations



There is no doubt that the number of irregular migrants from West Africa to Spain has increased enormously in recent years. However, in regard to those intercepted by the authorities, the overall number of irregular migrants arriving by sea from North and West Africa combined shrank from 13,425 in 2008 to 7,285 in 2009, a decrease of 45.7 per cent.²⁹ Only 8 per cent of all clandestine entries into Spain are by sea, according to the Spanish authorities, and the majority of irregular migrants arriving via the Mediterranean in 2009 were Algerians and Moroccans. In general, it seems clear that there is now a clear downward trend in the numbers of people arriving irregularly in Spain

²⁶ United Nations Office for West Africa, *Migrations irrégulières en provenance d'Afrique de l'Ouest*, p. 10.

²⁷ Lorenzo Coslivi, *Brevi note sull'immigrazione via mare in Italia e in Spagna* (Rome, Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale, 2007), p. 2.

²⁸ Spain, National Statistics Institute (INE), *Revisión del Padrón municipal 2009: población extranjera por sexo, país de nacionalidad y edad*. Available from www.ine.es.

²⁹ Spain, Ministry of the Interior, “El balance de la lucha contra la inmigración ilegal 2008”. Available from www.mir.es.

by sea. This follows a sharp increase in the early 1990s and a doubling of the numbers between 1999 and 2000, after which the number of interceptions remained steady at about 16,000 to 19,000 per year from 2000 to 2004.³⁰ The total jumped spectacularly in 2006, when 31,678 irregular migrants, mostly West Africans, arrived in the Canary Islands alone by sea.³¹ The trend thereafter has been downward. Seaborne arrivals in mainland Spain and the Balearic Islands peaked in 2003, when 9,788 irregular migrants of all origins were intercepted. The numbers have generally been falling ever since, although there was a slight rise to 5,039 in 2009.³² Most of these are North Africans.

There are also irregular migrants who arrive by air. Irregular migration by air normally involves abuse of official documents, such as by forgery or the use of “look-alikes”. Document abuse might involve the acquisition of genuine travel documents by bribery or other forms of corruption, the alteration of genuine documents or straightforward forgery. Corruption can involve junior staff, such as airport cleaners, but also senior staff, including immigration and consular officials.³³ According to press reports, in Senegal there have been at least two instances of staff at the consulates of two different EU member States corruptly selling visas, apparently resulting in the admission of perhaps thousands of people to EU over the years.³⁴ In the case of one consulate, the sale of visas was specifically to facilitate the trafficking of West African women as sex workers. The extent to which migrants are able to enter EU irregularly by air using false documents or other forms of deception is “difficult to ascertain”, as UNODC has noted.³⁵ The high cost both of air tickets and of documents that have been forged or obtained by deception suggests that it is a serious option for relatively few irregular migrants. Research in Senegal has found that in the mid-2000s a tourist visa for Italy could be obtained corruptly for 2.5 million CFA francs (€3,811) and a Portuguese visa for €5,000,³⁶ while a Turkish visa cost 600,000 CFA francs (€915).³⁷ Two million CFA francs (€3,049) was quoted for a French visa.³⁸ Research carried out for the present report in Mali in 2009 suggested that a corruptly acquired United States visa could be obtained for 3 million CFA francs (€4,573), compared to 1,250,000 CFA francs (€1,905) for a South African visa and 1 million CFA francs (€1,524) for a Libyan one. Combined with the cost of an air ticket, fees of this magnitude are prohibitively high for large numbers of would-be migrants in West Africa. This impression has been confirmed by field studies carried out in connection with the present report. In Spain, for example, the authorities have substantially reduced the numbers of West Africans receiving student and tourist visas, and the number of West Africans detained after trying to enter Spain by air and presenting false documents is negligible. Most of the few cases detected by Spanish air border controls appear to concern Nigerian women who are trafficked for sexual exploitation.³⁹

Some reports have suggested that there may be as many as 2.5 million irregular migrants from sub-Saharan Africa living in EU.⁴⁰ One may wonder how they got there. UNODC, basing its calculations on figures of arrests, has suggested that at least 200,000 Africans of all origins were entering Europe illegally in the mid-2000s, while a further 100,000 were intercepted en route.⁴¹ These figures were the result of multiplying by two the numbers of people apprehended by law enforcement agencies to account for undetected migrants, drawing on experience from other parts of the world.⁴² According to another international body, ICMPD, 30 per cent of the irregular migrants who are intercepted while trying to cross the Mediterranean each year are from south of the Sahara.⁴³ In 2005, the same organization estimated that some 830,000 migrants travelled annually from the African continent to the then

³⁰ Jørgen Carling, “Unauthorized migration from Africa to Spain”, *International Migration*, vol. 45, No. 4 (2007), p. 20.

³¹ Spain, “El balance de la lucha contra la inmigración ilegal 2008”.

³² Spain, Ministry of the Interior, “El balance de la lucha contra la inmigración ilegal 2009”. Available from www.mir.es.

³³ “Migrant smuggling by air”, issue paper prepared by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2010. Available from www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/Migrant%20Smuggling%20Issue%20Papers/Issue_Paper_-_Migrant_Smuggling_by_Air.pdf.

³⁴ Interview with Senegalese police officer, Vienna, 9 March 2010.

³⁵ “Migrant smuggling by air”.

³⁶ Miranda Poeze, “In search of greener pastures? The case of boat-migrants from Senegal to the Canary Islands”, Master’s thesis, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2008, p. 49.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 55.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 58.

³⁹ Meeting with representative of the coastal and border service of the Guardia Civil, Madrid, 13 November 2009.

⁴⁰ “Key facts: Africa to Europe migration”, *BBC News*, 2 July 2007. Available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/europe/6228236.stm>.

⁴¹ “Organized crime and irregular migration from Africa to Europe” (see footnote 9), pp. 5 and 7.

⁴² Ibid., p. 5.

⁴³ The figure of 30 per cent was given in United Nations Office for West Africa, *Migrations irrégulières en provenance d’Afrique de l’Ouest* (see footnote 16), p. 33; compare with the figure of 20–38 per cent estimated by de Haas, on p. 18 of the same publication.

25 countries in EU, of which some 100,000 to 120,000 crossed the Mediterranean.⁴⁴ Together these figures suggested that between 30,000 and 84,000 sub-Saharanans were entering Europe illegally per year in the middle of the last decade—many of them by sea—while up to 30,000 others were intercepted, to which figures should be added those who died en route.

However, at that time many boat migrants made little effort to avoid detection once they had reached European territory, since they would normally be transferred when apprehended to a major city for processing, in effect allowing them to complete their journey.⁴⁵ Therefore it may not be the case that there was one undetected migrant for every migrant known to law enforcement agencies and the estimates at the top of the range given in the previous paragraph may be rather high. Other sources have produced lower estimates that may be closer to the mark and that also come close to the figures given by ICMPPD. De Haas, for example, noted in 2008 that the total annual increase of the West African population registered in EU had been about 100,000 in recent years. Taking account of the considerable number of West Africans entering legally, he concluded that “the total number of successful irregular crossings [to Europe] by sub-Saharan Africans should be counted in the order of several tens of thousands, according to our estimates 25,000 to 35,000 per year, which is only a fraction of total EU immigration of 2.6 million in 2004”.⁴⁶ The same researcher has also estimated that between 65,000 and 120,000 people from sub-Saharan Africa enter the Maghreb countries overland every year, implying that only a quarter or a third of these then proceed to Europe.⁴⁷

In short, we may estimate the number of irregular migrants from West Africa arriving in Europe by sea at somewhere between 25,000 and 84,000 per year, with the lower figure probably being more credible, while smaller numbers arrive by air. In addition, there are some indications that West Africans may now be heading by air, sea or land to Turkey with a view to entering EU from the east by land. The present report has undertaken no systematic research into that route, but the numbers of West Africans who take it is probably small as yet.

It seems therefore that the great majority of West Africans staying irregularly in Europe entered legally in the first instance, almost certainly by air, before overstaying the period of their visa or other permission to remain. For some years, almost the only way for a migrant staying in EU illegally to regularize his or her status has been by marrying a citizen. Accordingly, a market in marriages of convenience has arisen in which, in northern Europe at least, the current rate is about €13,000 for contracting a marriage⁴⁸ that may subsequently be dissolved at the first legally permissible moment. It appears that many of the holders of passports of EU States entering into such fake marriages are themselves immigrants of an earlier generation who acquired citizenship when it was easier to do so. Some of the irregular migrants who pay to contract a fake marriage may have already been in Europe for many years.

In the recent past there were also significant numbers of irregular migrants from South Asia who tried to reach Europe from the south, travelling first to West Africa by air, and thence overland to North Africa before attempting an irregular crossing by sea. Four Filipinos were arrested as they arrived in a *patera* at Fuerteventura in the Canary Islands in May 2000. On two occasions in 2004, Frente Polisario troops encountered groups of South Asian migrants in the desert outside the Moroccan defensive berm that surrounds the territory of Western Sahara. The migrants claimed that they had been abandoned by smugglers.⁴⁹ Thousands of people from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan in particular appear to have taken the southern route into Europe, via Africa, in the period 2004 to 2008, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters of this report, although the numbers seem to have fallen substantially in the last two years. Chinese citizens have also entered EU by sea from Africa, some using the same routes as North and West African migrants, but a greater number using routes of their own.

⁴⁴ ICMPPD Newsletter, June 2005, cited in David van Moppes, “The African migration movement: routes to Europe”, Working Papers, Migration and Development Series, Report No. 5 (Nijmegen, Radboud University Nijmegen, 2006). Available from <http://socgeo.ruhosting.nl/html/files/migration/migration5.pdf>.

⁴⁵ Interview with UNODC official, Vienna, 8 March 2010.

⁴⁶ De Haas, *Irregular Migration from West Africa* (see footnote 6), p. 9.

⁴⁷ De Haas, *The Myth of Invasion: Irregular Migration from West Africa* (see footnote 5), p. iii.

⁴⁸ Gerrie Ter Haar, “African Christians in Europe”, in *Mission and Migration*, Stephen Spencer, ed., Cliff College Academic Series (Calver, Derbyshire, Cliff College Publishing, 2008), p. 36.

⁴⁹ Carling, “Unauthorized migration from Africa to Spain” (see footnote 25), pp. 19–20.

Regarding West African migrants who head northward but who stay in North Africa, there is some discussion as to whether they do so because they are simply unable to reach Europe or because they are able to find situations in North Africa that satisfy the needs that drove them to migrate in the first place. The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya is probably the North African country with the largest number of sub-Saharanans, in excess of 300,000.⁵⁰ In Algeria, one of the hubs of travel and commerce in the Sahara, the town of Tamanrasset, grew from just 3,000 inhabitants in 1966, of whom 10 per cent were sub-Saharanans, to 65,000 in 1990, of whom sub-Saharan Africans were half.⁵¹ The population today is much larger.

Criminal activities linked to irregular migration

Every migrant who is in an irregular situation has, by definition, to make use of some service or technique that is in contravention of the law, of which the most basic is entering a sovereign territory without the requisite permission. The assortment of people offering illegal services is varied, ranging from lorry drivers, who may be willing occasionally to take migrants over an international border without declaring their presence, to full-time document forgers, transporters and logisticians, some of whom may be involved in other criminal activities. A document produced by the Government of the Netherlands in 2005 claimed that of 5,836 irregular immigrants of all origins in the Netherlands, no less than 97 per cent had received assistance from professional smugglers. For migrants originating in Angola the figure was 99 per cent, and for Sierra Leone it was 97 per cent.⁵² ICMPD has estimated that more than half of the irregular migrants who travel from Africa to EU annually have received some help from smugglers.⁵³ In the case of the Netherlands, many of the irregular immigrants from south of the Sahara would presumably have arrived by air. The percentage of irregular migrants having recourse to the services of professional smugglers is likely to be lower in regard to those European countries that can more easily be reached directly from Africa, such as Spain. At least, this is the case for West African migrants, who are able to make use of social networks for much of their journey. On the other hand, irregular migrants from Asia who use the West African route appear without exception to make use of organized criminal networks, paying sums of €12,000 to €18,000 before the start of their journey. Asian migrants interviewed in the preparation of the present study commonly reported that entire families had incurred heavy burdens of debt to pay these fees.

Most basically, payment to providers of illegal or illicit services falls into two categories. The most thoroughgoing criminal activity is associated with the “full package” system, whereby a would-be migrant pays a large sum in the country of origin to a smuggler who, having arranged for all the intermediary services, will take him or her to Europe.⁵⁴ For irregular migrants from West Africa who wish to travel to Europe this is a very expensive option, preferred by the apparently rather small number of people who pay in advance for air tickets and travel documents that are forged or acquired by corruption or deception. It is also, however, the method commonly used by women migrating to North Africa and/or to Europe to work in the sex trade, particularly from Nigeria. Women who opt to migrate for this purpose commonly enter into a contract with a trafficker, incurring a debt that can range from €1,470 in the case of women trafficked overland to the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to €40,000 in the case of women trafficked by air to EU. The women have to pay off these debts by working as prostitutes for madams who are associated with the traffickers themselves.⁵⁵ Some Nigerian women trafficked to Spain are “bought” by Nigerian madams based in that country, who will place a call to a trafficker based in Morocco who will then go to Nigeria to recruit them. A madam will pay between €2,000 and €3,000 per woman or girl.⁵⁶ In this context, we may note that one of the differences between trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants is that in the case of the smuggling of migrants, profits are made through the fees paid, whereas in the case of trafficking in persons they stem from the exploitation of those who are trafficked. Victims of trafficking in persons, unlike smuggled migrants, either have never given their

⁵⁰ United Nations Office for West Africa, *Migrations irrégulières en provenance d'Afrique de l'Ouest* (see footnote 16), p. 17.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Van Moppes, “The African migration movement” (see footnote 39).

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Transnational Trafficking and the Rule of Law in West Africa* (see footnote 7), p. 62.

⁵⁵ These observations are based on fieldwork at various locations in the Niger, Nigeria and Spain as well as on Netherlands police sources.

⁵⁶ Interview with migrant from Côte d'Ivoire, Algeciras, Spain, 6 November 2009.

assent to the trafficker or, when they initially gave their consent, it was rendered meaningless by the deceptive or abusive action of the trafficker. In cases of transnational trafficking in persons, borders may actually be crossed legally.

The second method of payment is pay-as-you-go. This is the preferred method for the great majority of West African migrants, who pay for each leg of their journey separately. In order to do this they may spend months or even years at one location en route, making efforts to save enough money to continue their journey. Many take years to get from West Africa to Europe, and even to the Maghreb. Nevertheless, there are also smugglers in Nigeria and elsewhere who persuade some migrants to pay advance fees for all or part of their journey. Such promises may be accompanied by claims that the smuggler of migrants has connections that enable him or her to procure entrance into any country in the world. Clients may be duped into paying for poor quality forgeries.



III. THE PROFILES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF SMUGGLED MIGRANTS

Dramatic pictures of Africans struggling to reach Europe in small boats, while undoubtedly an accurate depiction of great suffering, can be misleading in certain respects.

West African irregular migrants

On the whole, West African migrants are not escaping from utter destitution. Migration is a historically ingrained practice in many West African communities and is highly valued in some contexts, yet West African countries actually have comparatively low rates of intercontinental migration. In other words, the movement of West African migrants has traditionally been within their own region, and this is still the case. Rather than being from the poorest sectors of society, quite a few irregular migrants from West Africa to Europe are relatively well educated, and some even had salaried jobs before their departure. Some reports suggest that they are also quite likely to have lived in towns rather than to have come directly from a village before setting out on their odyssey to North Africa and Europe.⁵⁷ One researcher, found in a survey of 321 sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco that 64 per cent had secondary education.⁵⁸ A smaller survey carried out in Morocco, of 95 sub-Saharan migrants interviewed in 2004, also revealed that most had a relatively high level of education, and that few among them had been unemployed prior to their departure from their home country.⁵⁹ A survey carried out among migrants in Mali in 2009 for the present study found that the majority had a secondary education. In Nigeria, a similar survey carried out in 6 of the country's 36 states suggested that irregular migrants heading north were overwhelmingly male and in the 20 to 30 age bracket, although interviews with migration officials suggest that the proportion of women is generally considerable. Of those surveyed in Nigeria, most were single, and some 62.5 per cent had completed secondary schooling, while 12.5 per cent were college graduates. More than half of those intending to migrate said they were not poor by Nigerian standards. Among those interviewed who had been obliged by the authorities to return—some of the tens of thousands forcibly removed from North Africa or Europe—96 per cent were junior siblings. Many reported that an elder brother or sister had played a key role in financing their trip. Of the Nigerians surveyed, some 66 per cent were farmers, taxi drivers or petty traders before their departure. However, more than 80 per cent had family members

⁵⁷ Sylvie Bredeloup and Olivier Pliez, "Migrations entre les deux rives du Sahara", *Autrepart*, vol. 36, 2005, p. 14; Ali Bensaâd, "Les migrations transsahariennes, une mondialisation par la marge", *Maghreb-Machrek*, vol. 185, 2005, p. 16.

⁵⁸ Claire Escoffier, *Transmigrant-e-s africain-e-s au Maghreb: une question de vie ou de mort* (Paris, Harmattan, 2008), chap. 4.

⁵⁹ United Nations Office for West Africa, *Migrations irrégulières en provenance d'Afrique de l'Ouest* (see footnote 16), pp. 21–22.

living in Europe. Yet even relatively well-educated migrants generally do not have substantial funds at their disposal, many having left home with the equivalent of just €20 or €30 in their pocket.⁶⁰ One study of boat migrants from Senegal found that many took little more than 30,000 CFA francs in pocket money (about €46), plus the precious phone numbers of contacts in Spain.⁶¹

The profile of irregular migrants reaching Europe via the Atlantic route may be different. Research in Spain suggests that many who crossed to the Canary Islands between 2006 and 2007 were fishermen or from fishing communities,⁶² and more than half of irregular migrants from West Africa arriving in Spain have never gone to school (58 per cent according to one study), and only half are literate.⁶³ However, some researchers believe that the number of migrants from fishing communities taking *cayucos* from Senegal or other points along the coast may be exaggerated, not least because of the attention that has been given to just one town, Thiaroye-sur-Mer, a coastal community from which a very large percentage of young men have emigrated to Europe;⁶⁴ Thiaroye-sur-Mer is actually a commune of greater Dakar, with a high level of unemployment, and is hardly a typical fishing community.⁶⁵

The profiles of West African irregular migrants appear to be changing somewhat, and this is inseparable from the development of new migration routes. The United Nations Office for West Africa, extrapolating from figures of migrant arrests, suggested in 2008 that there had been a marked shift in the origins of irregular migrants along both the Atlantic and Mediterranean sea routes to Europe, with a greater proportion of West Africans than before.⁶⁶ This has subsequently become less applicable, however. In regard to the origin of migrants it is useful to consider not only the statistics concerning the nationalities of those intercepted while travelling illegally to Europe,⁶⁷ but also the figures for legal migrants of sub-Saharan origin who are living in Europe, as this may throw some light on the geographical origin of irregular migrants, since, according to the United Nations Office for West Africa, “it is evident that regular and irregular migratory flows are closely related”.⁶⁸ As we have noted, EU statistics show clearly that North Africans predominate among African migrants in Europe. They also suggest that, among nationalities from south of the Sahara, certain countries, including Cape Verde, Ghana and Guinea-Bissau, figure disproportionately.⁶⁹ Others may figure disproportionately on specific routes, such as the large numbers of Senegalese attempting to reach the Canary Islands in 2006.⁷⁰ One researcher has suggested that the number of migrants from Nigeria is also disproportionately large, which he attributes to its massive urbanization and the extraversion of its economy, among other things.⁷¹ Nevertheless, the fact that Nigeria’s population is so massive, at 150 million, needs to be taken into account.

Female migrants

Several sources maintain that the number of female migrants is now growing in comparison with an earlier period when men predominated, although the evidence for this is largely anecdotal. One official working for a humanitarian agency in Rabat affirmed to an interviewer his impression that until the late 1990s most migrants from south of the Sahara were single men.⁷² Subsequently the number of women is reported to have increased, which one experienced researcher attributes to the improvement of education among girls and women in Africa.⁷³ It has also been argued

⁶⁰ Escoffier, *Transmigrant-e-s africain-e-s au Maghreb*, p. 47.

⁶¹ Poeze, “In search of greener pastures?” (see footnote 31), p. 53.

⁶² Interviews with West African migrants, Madrid, Canary Islands, Algeciras and Ceuta, October to November 2009.

⁶³ Accem, *Estudio sobre Población Subsahariana Llegada a las Costas Españolas 2008* (Madrid, 2009), available from www.accem.org.

⁶⁴ Emmanuelle Bouilly, “Les enjeux féminins de la migration masculine: le collectif des femmes pour la lutte contre l’immigration clandestine de Thiaroye-sur-Mer”, *Politique africaine*, vol. 109, March 2008, p. 22.

⁶⁵ Aliou Sall and Pierre Morand, “Pêche artisanale et émigration des jeunes africains par voie piroguière”, *Politique africaine*, vol. 109, March 2008, p. 39.

⁶⁶ United Nations Office for West Africa, *Migrations irrégulières en provenance d’Afrique de l’Ouest* (see footnote 16), p. 32.

⁶⁷ Coslovi, *Brevi note sull’immigrazione via mare* (see footnote 22), p. 4.

⁶⁸ United Nations Office for West Africa, *Migrations irrégulières en provenance d’Afrique de l’Ouest* (see footnote 16), p. 33.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 20.

⁷⁰ Coslovi, *Brevi note sull’immigrazione via mare* (see footnote 22), p. 4. Statistics on nationality emanating from the Spanish authorities and non-official sources need to be treated with caution, as many Senegalese migrants may claim to be of a different nationality owing to the existence of an effective expulsion agreement between Senegal and Spain.

⁷¹ Bensaâd, “Les migrations transsahariennes” (see footnote 52), p. 18.

⁷² Daniel, *Les routes clandestines* (see footnote 8), p. 127.

⁷³ Adepoju, *Migration in Sub-Saharan Africa* (see footnote 2), p. 24.

that the increased number of female migrants may be attributable to a tendency for wives to join husbands who had migrated earlier.⁷⁴ The number of West African women in the large migrant community at Oujda in Morocco is said to have increased from only 1 per cent in 2007 to some 16 per cent in 2009.⁷⁵ A significant number of female migrants are accompanied by children born en route from their country of origin,⁷⁶ contributing to the presence in Europe today of up to 30,000 unaccompanied minors from sub-Saharan Africa.⁷⁷ A disturbing element in the migration of single women or even girls from Africa to Europe is the export from Nigeria of unaccompanied females who are subsequently recruited into prostitution networks, especially in Italy. It is currently reckoned that up to 5,700 West African women, mainly from Nigeria, enter Europe each year—often by air—to work as prostitutes, contributing to a population of some 11,400 to 17,100 such prostitutes at any one time.⁷⁸ In addition, many West African women work in the sex trade in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and Morocco. A committee of the House of Representatives of Nigeria is reported to have estimated that as many as 10,000 Nigerian teenage girls could be “held captive by the sex-slave trade” in those two countries, many of them from Edo State.⁷⁹ Many accounts suggest that women migrants across the Sahara, including those who have no intention of working in the sex trade, are subject to rape and other mistreatment. Some may fall into the hands of traffickers and be “bought” and “sold” between rival traffickers.

In this regard, it may be noted that the trafficking of women for sex work is one of the few types of migration where a dominant role is indisputably played by professional criminals formed into networks that correspond to the definition of organized crime used in the present paper and by the United Nations system more generally.⁸⁰ A UNODC report published in July 2009 estimated the value of these women at their destination at up to \$228 million per year.⁸¹ An operation led by the Netherlands police in 2007,⁸² joined by colleagues from several other countries, including Nigeria, resulted in a series of arrests. In this case, police investigations established that a highly organized trafficking ring was run by a circle of professional smugglers of migrants with roots in Edo State. Not coincidentally, the leader of this group had a travel agency that served as a legal front for his criminal business.

⁷⁴ United Nations Office for West Africa, *Migrations irrégulières en provenance d'Afrique de l'Ouest* (see footnote 16), p. 43.

⁷⁵ Interview with Spanish activist from Colectivo Aljaima working in Tangiers, Morocco, 30 October 2009.

⁷⁶ Daniel, *Les routes clandestines* (see footnote 8), p. 127.

⁷⁷ United Nations Office for West Africa, *Migrations irrégulières en provenance d'Afrique de l'Ouest* (see footnote 16), p. 23.

⁷⁸ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Transnational Trafficking and the Rule of Law in West Africa* (see footnote 7), p. 41.

⁷⁹ Tordue Salem, “Reps move to repatriate 10,000 Nigerian girls from Libya, Morocco”, *Vanguard* (Nigeria), 26 June 2009.

⁸⁰ Carling, *Migration, Human Smuggling and Trafficking from Nigeria to Europe* (see footnote 7); see also Prina, *Trafficking of Nigerian Girls to Italy* (see footnote 7), chap. 5.1.

⁸¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Transnational Trafficking and the Rule of Law in West Africa* (see footnote 7), p. 41.

⁸² Operation Koolvis.



IV. OVERVIEW OF MAIN LAND, SEA AND AIR ROUTES: GEOGRAPHY AND ORGANIZATION

The aspiration of some West Africans to travel to Europe has to be viewed in the context of a world that is rapidly contracting. Changes in international or even intercontinental patterns of migration are related to events in countries that may be separated by thousands of kilometres.

Evolution of irregular migration routes

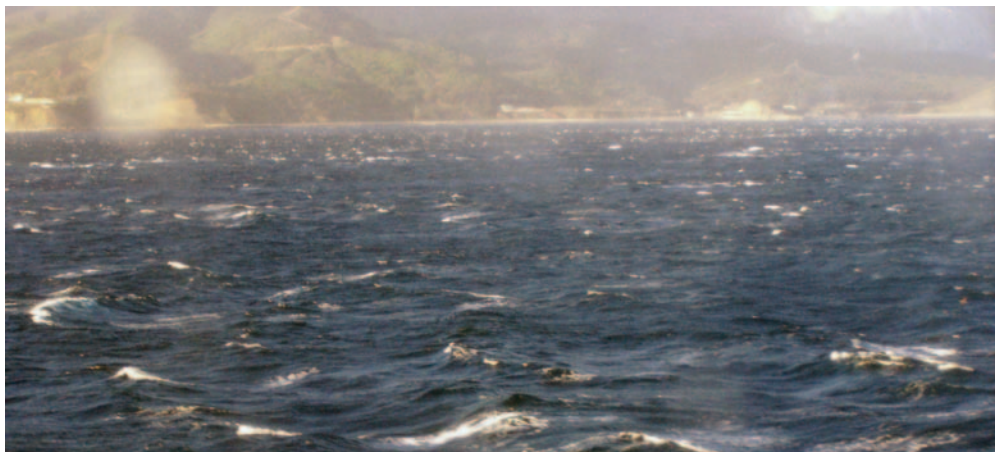
Three decades ago, there were comparatively few people from south of the Sahara living in Europe. Many of those who did spend substantial periods in Europe were students, diplomats, businesspeople or others with relatively high educational levels and often with quite high standing in their home societies. They had generally arrived in Europe by air with legal documentation. In those days, it was less difficult to get visas for European countries than it was later to become. For the relatively small number who stayed in Europe illegally, the easiest way to do this was to acquire a visa and then remain after its expiry date. It was also quite common for migrants to buy an air ticket and make a false claim for political asylum on arrival, which enabled them to enter European territory. If their asylum claim was rejected, they could simply go underground.

The growth of irregular migration to Europe by sea seems to have begun in the 1990s after Spain and Italy had introduced stricter visa regimes. At the start, those who felt the effects of this most keenly were would-be migrants from North Africa, accustomed to seeking work in southern Europe. No longer able to enter Europe by regular means, aspiring migrants from North Africa took to making irregular crossings of the strait between Morocco and Spain. At the same time, a prolonged economic downturn in West African countries that had previously attracted large numbers of immigrants from elsewhere in the region, notably Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria, caused some West African migrants to contemplate moving to North Africa, with the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya in particular becoming an attractive destination.⁸³ These more or less simultaneous developments thus had the effect of linking historic trans-Saharan migration routes with trans-Mediterranean ones. In the two subsequent decades, various routes have risen and fallen in popularity. This often occurs with bewildering speed as State authorities adopt new anti-smuggling measures and migrants and smugglers of migrants adopt countermeasures in a never-ending battle of wits.

⁸³ De Haas, *The Myth of Invasion: Irregular Migration from West Africa* (see footnote 5), p. 10.

EU policy on migration from North Africa has certainly become more rigorous over the years. Since 1999, the Spanish authorities have been setting up the Sistema Integrado de Vigilancia Exterior (SIVE), a series of fixed and mobile detection devices for early detection of vessels transporting irregular migrants combined with arrangements for the rapid deployment of interception units. In 2006 the European Agency for the Management of Operational Coordination at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (Frontex) set up an EU operation, led by Spain and coordinated by Frontex, known as Operation Hera II. This was intended to control irregular migration from Africa to the Canary Islands. In 2008 European countries carried out joint operations in the western Mediterranean. A third pillar for policing irregular migration from West Africa is the Sea Horse Network, a satellite-based communications network financed by EU.

There are activities in other fields, too. The Dialogue on Mediterranean Transit Migration, created in 2002 by ICMPD, gathers 37 Arab and European States and by 2009 also included some sub-Saharan partners situated along key migration routes, as shown in figure II.⁸⁴ In addition, individual EU countries have taken significant steps to encourage North African countries to cooperate in restricting migration. The ever-growing police cooperation between EU authorities and West African States has generated a vast network of informants in areas where irregular migrants gather, such as border crossings. Informants often belong to the law enforcement agencies and expect that the information they provide will translate into the provision of more resources (transport, weaponry, supplies) for the units in which they operate, as part of the funding provided by EU or by individual European States.⁸⁵ Italy cooperates particularly closely with the Government of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.⁸⁶ The Government of Spain too has made bilateral arrangements with African countries in an effort to halt seaborne migration to Spain at the main ports of departure. There are joint operations between the Spanish Guardia Civil and law enforcement agencies in Mauritania, Morocco, and Senegal. Measures agreed between the Governments of Mauritania and Spain in 2006 appear to have been at the origin of a detention centre at Nouadhibou in Mauritania where suspected irregular migrants have been held. Sometimes known locally as Guantanamo, the centre is situated in a former school that was restored by the Spanish authorities in 2006. The centre is not known to have any official name or to be governed by any formal regulations. According to Government statistics, thousands of people suspected of being irregular migrants were held there for a longer or shorter period during 2007. Other people suspected of being irregular migrants are detained at other locations in Mauritania or are forcibly removed from the country.⁸⁷ These and other measures have certainly had an effect on the numbers of irregular migrants heading directly to Spain. They have probably caused more sub-Saharan migrants to stay in North Africa, creating an invisible outwork of the EU frontier even hundreds of kilometres inside the African continent.



Waters of the Strait of Gibraltar

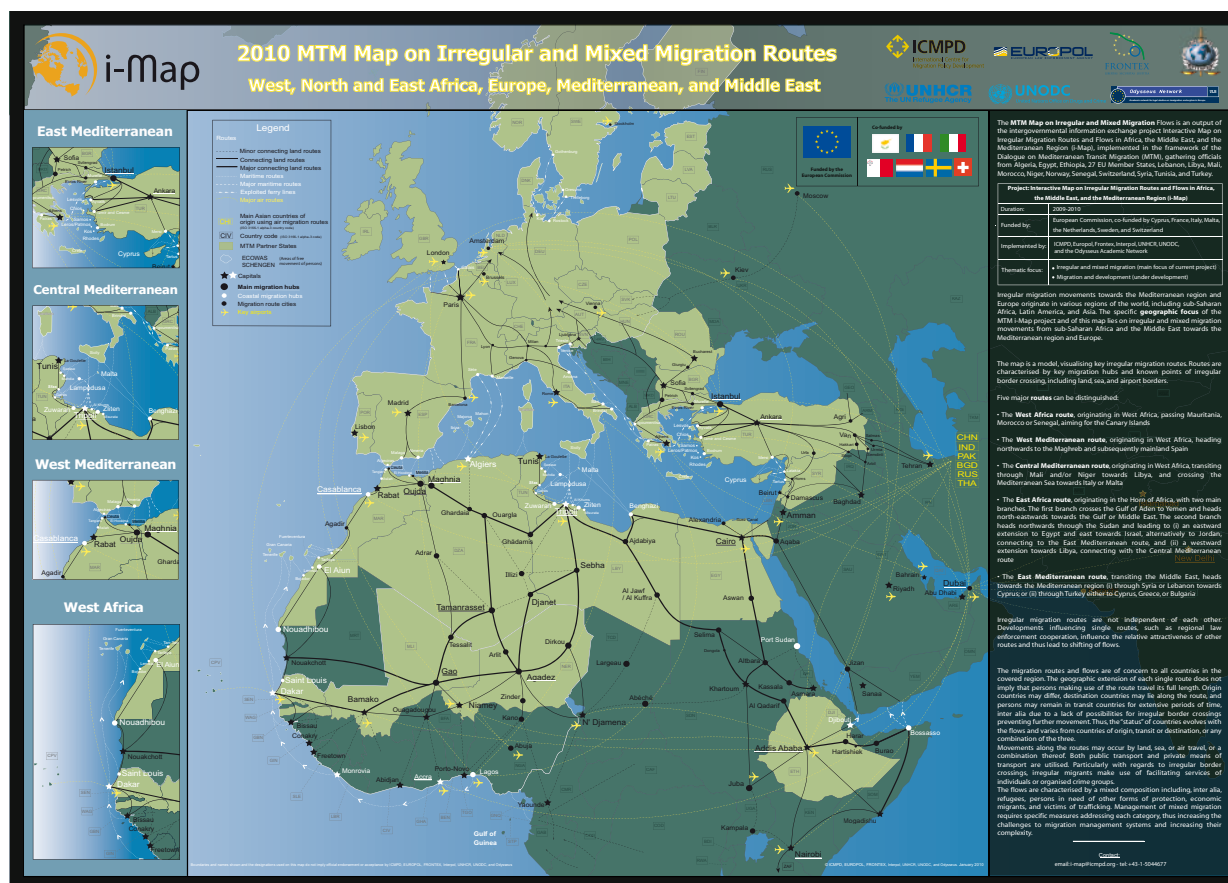
⁸⁴ International Centre for Migration Policy Development, *A Comprehensive Survey of Migration Flows and Institutional Capabilities in Libya* (Vienna, 2010), p. 17. Available from www.icmpd.org/906html?&no_cache=1&tx_icmpd_pi1%5Barticle%5D=1396&tx_icmpd_pi1%5Bpage%5D=1397.

⁸⁵ Interviews with sources from the Guardia Civil, formerly stationed on the Canary Islands and West Africa, 23 October 2009 and 12 November 2009.

⁸⁶ Investigated in the Italian film "Come un uomo sulla terra", which in 2009 won prizes at film festivals in Brazil and Italy.

⁸⁷ Amnesty International, *Mauritania: "Nobody Wants to Have Anything to Do with Us"—Arrests and Collective Expulsions of Migrants Denied Entry into Europe*, AI Index AFR 38/001/2008 (London, 1 July 2008), pp. 22–23.

Figure II. ICMPD Mediterranean transit migration map of irregular and mixed migration routes



At the beginning of the present century, most migrants heading overland from Africa to Europe aimed to cross the Mediterranean at its narrowest point, by small boat across the Strait of Gibraltar. This became more difficult as European countries steadily adopted more effective surveillance measures. Many would-be migrants then turned their attention to more southerly points from which a boat could be taken to the Spanish territory of the Canary Islands, notably from locations in Morocco or Western Sahara. The Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla, situated on the African continent, also became targets for irregular migrants, culminating in the dramatic events of October 2005, when hundreds of migrants stormed the fences surrounding those two cities, generating massive media attention worldwide and causing the Spanish authorities to take more rigorous measures to prevent entry. Thereafter, the greater difficulty in entering Ceuta and Melilla, plus stricter border controls between Mauritania and Western Sahara, as well as an improvement in transport infrastructure inside Mauritania, contributed to a growth in the importance of the Mauritanian port of Nouadhibou as a departure point for migrants seeking to enter the Canary Islands illegally.⁸⁸ A dramatic rise in arrivals in the Canary Islands in 2006 was subsequently curtailed, with the number of recorded arrivals of irregular migrants there decreasing by 71 per cent between 2006 and 2008 and a further 75.5 per cent in 2009, when just 2,246 irregular migrants were detected arriving there by sea.⁸⁹ Recent years have seen the dramatic rise of the sea route from the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to the Italian island of Lampedusa, although this route is now also in decline. The most recent reports suggest that irregular migrants from West Africa are now heading towards Egypt with a view to crossing by sea to Greece, or travelling to Turkey with a view to entering EU by land from the south-east.

⁸⁸ Armelle Choplin, "L'immigré, le migrant, l'allochtone: circulations migratoires et figures de l'étranger en Mauritanie", *Politique africaine*, vol. 109, 2008, pp. 78-79.

⁸⁹ Spain, "El balance de la lucha contra la inmigración ilegal 2009" (see footnote 27).



Ceuta fences

Many migrants to Europe from south of the Sahara have already been migrants elsewhere. Five or so years ago, many had previously lived in Côte d'Ivoire, a major pole of attraction for migrants before it experienced acute political and economic difficulties at the beginning of the present century, causing migrants to look for new destinations.⁹⁰ The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya too has played an important role. For decades, the Government of this oil-rich country has had an energetic though somewhat erratic policy aimed at increasing its influence south of the Sahara, with the natural consequence that it has become a pole of attraction for migrants from countries to the south. The growth in overland migration routes northward was enhanced at the end of the last century by the fact that the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya was at that time subject to international embargoes, greatly increasing the importance of its overland trade routes generally.⁹¹ By 1999, it was already hosting large numbers of Nigerians who, a senior Nigerian journalist noted when he met some of them, "had started on a long journey across the Sahara desert with the hope of crossing through North Africa to Europe. But on reaching there, they became stranded and the futility of their adventure dawned on them".⁹² When he visited the country in company with the President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, in August 1999, he wrote, "we came face to face with what could really be regarded as modern-day slavery. We saw hundreds of Nigerians, mainly young boys and girls who were lured with the promise of being taken to Europe but abandoned instead in Libya where they were subjected to a lot of horrifying experiences".⁹³ In the following month, September 1999, the Government of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya announced at a summit meeting of the Organization of African Unity that it welcomed immigrants of African origin.⁹⁴ At about that time, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya was estimated to be home to some 449,000 regular migrants and no fewer than 1 million irregular ones, out of a population of less than 6 million.⁹⁵ A major outburst of popular violence directed at immigrants in 2000 resulted in hundreds of deaths and caused some sub-Saharan Africans living in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to move elsewhere, splintering existing migration routes. Many of the Nigerians whom President Obasanjo had met in August 1999 were forcibly returned, allegedly after being "stripped of all their belongings before being bundled into aircraft".⁹⁶

⁹⁰ Bensaâd, "Les migrations transsahariennes" (see footnote 52), p. 18.

⁹¹ De Haas, *The Myth of Invasion: Irregular Migration from West Africa* (see footnote 5), p. 13.

⁹² Orji Ogbonnaya Orji, *Inside Aso Rock* (Ibadan, Spectrum Books, 2003), p. 112.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 113.

⁹⁴ International Centre for Migration Policy Development, *A Comprehensive Survey of Migration* (see footnote 79), p. 25.

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 22-23.

⁹⁶ Orji, *Inside Aso Rock*, p. 114.

Migrants and smugglers of migrants remain constantly alert to information about the procedures in use at border crossings and about the legal regimes in force, calculating which frontiers are the easiest to penetrate at any given moment and constantly updating their information. Regular, long-distance communication from one point of the smuggling chain to another is made easy by mobile phones. One researcher in Rabat found that just a month after a mass expulsion of sub-Saharan migrants in October 2005, a man originally from Côte d'Ivoire reported that he was in communication with friends who had been expelled but who had already reached Mali on their way back for a second attempt on the Spanish border.⁹⁷ Cameroonians, Congolese and Malians interviewed in the Canary Islands said that on arrival in Bamako they had already been in communication with the intermediaries who eventually arranged their passage, using the Internet and mobile phones.⁹⁸ Research compiled for the present report suggested that the great majority of aspiring migrants in Nigeria have some plan for securing work and residence papers before even setting out on their journey. Their knowledge comes largely from friends and family who have already made the trip as well as from those who have been forcibly removed and from voluntary returnees as well as from smugglers of persons. Yet three quarters of those who intended to migrate from Nigeria had not previously travelled outside their own region of origin, and only 7 per cent of those from the south of the country interviewed for the present study had previously been to northern Nigeria, often the first destination on their journey northward. In Mali also, among a group of 50 migrants interviewed in connection with the present report, only two had left their homes without any knowledge of the route ahead of them. But although migrants often have information about their intended destinations, the names of towns they need to pass through and even the names of specific smugglers who can help them, they are often ignorant of the precise conditions that await them.

There exists a spider's web of migrant routes throughout West Africa that intersect at certain nodal points or hubs. Some of these are on the Atlantic coast at port cities such as Nouadhibou in Mauritania or Saint-Louis in Senegal, although these seem to be declining in importance as irregular migration to the Canary Islands becomes harder. Other hubs are inland, notably at the two ancient commercial and political centres of Agadez in the Niger and Gao in Mali, gateways to the Sahara for centuries. It has been calculated that the number of migrants today passing through Agadez is comparable to the numbers of slaves transported through the town in the days when it was a centre of the trans-Saharan slave trade,⁹⁹ much less known than its North Atlantic counterpart.

Current irregular migration routes in West Africa

By reference to these nodal points it is possible to identify three major routes taken by irregular migrants from West Africa to Europe, each of them with minor variations. As can be seen in figure III, all three of them are taken by migrants travelling overland from as far away as the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We may consider them in order from west to east, which may correspond inversely to the number of people currently passing through.

1. The first and westernmost of the three major routes used by irregular migrants from West Africa towards Europe is focused on ports on the Atlantic coast where boats can be taken to the Canary Islands or even to the Spanish mainland. The Atlantic route has probably been the subject of the most extensive published studies, conducted especially in the fishing communities where migrants habitually gathered, at least until very recently, for transport to the Canary Islands. A special issue of the journal *Politique africaine* published in 2008 includes an article on the fishermen of Saint-Louis and the Cap-Vert peninsula in Senegal, who supplement their income by working as smugglers of migrants towards the Canaries or who may even abandon fishing altogether for this new career.¹⁰⁰ The Atlantic route has declined rapidly in recent years. Ten years ago, the main points of embarkation for the Canary Islands were in Morocco and Western Sahara, but increased activity by both European and Moroccan authorities caused migrants to move steadily further south, to harbours in Mauritania and Senegal. The sea route

⁹⁷ Michael Collyer, "In-between places: trans-Saharan transit migrants in Morocco and the fragmented journey to Europe", *Antipode*, vol. 39, No. 4 (2007), p. 682.

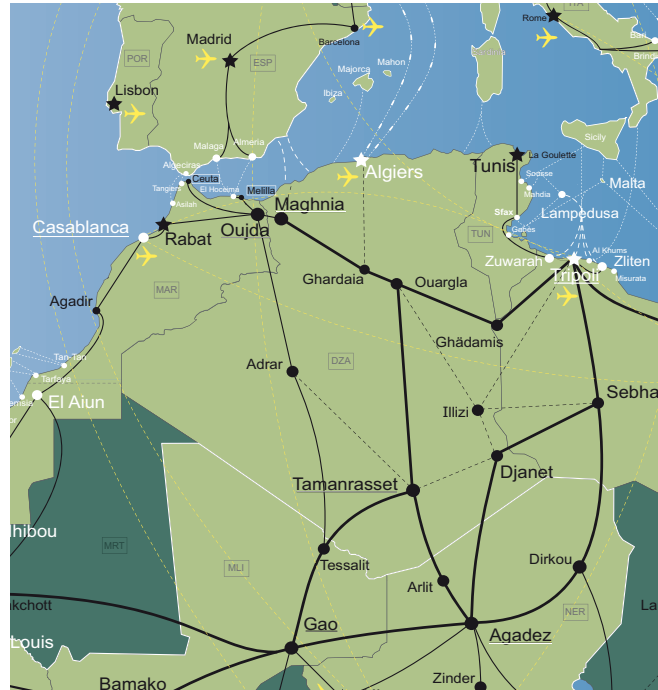
⁹⁸ Mehdi Lahlou, "Filières migratoires subsahariennes vers l'Europe (via le Maghreb)", in *Les relations transsahariennes à l'époque contemporaine: un espace en constante mutation*, Laurence Marfaing and Steffen Wippel, eds. (Paris, Karthala; Berlin, ZMO, 2004), p. 133.

⁹⁹ Emmanuel Grégoire and Jean Schmitz, "Monde arabe et Afrique noire: permanences et nouveaux liens", *Autrepart*, vol. 16, 2000, pp. 5-20.

¹⁰⁰ Jean Schmitz, ed., "Migrants ouest-africains: miséreux, aventuriers ou notables?", *Politique africaine*, vol. 109, March 2008.

from Mauritania or Senegal to the Canaries grew very rapidly, and 31,678 irregular migrants, the peak figure, arrived in the Canary Islands in 2006.¹⁰¹ Since then, the numbers have declined sharply in response to more effective security measures. There are recent reports of boats leaving ports in Senegal, manned only by their crews, and heading south in order to escape attention, as far as the Gambia or Guinea-Bissau, to pick up passengers at pre-arranged points.

Figure III. Enlarged section of map in figure II



2. A second option is the western Mediterranean overland route to North Africa. Like all migrant routes, it can be considered to begin in any of the cities in West or Central Africa that are home to people nursing dreams, ambitions or fantasies of migration. The main overland branches of the western Mediterranean route run from Senegal through Mauritania to Morocco, or via Gao in Mali north to Algeria and Morocco. Many irregular migrants from West Africa who arrive in Morocco by one of the variants of this route stay there for years without ever attempting a crossing to Spain, but many also make one or more attempts to reach Europe. In the past, one possibility was to make an irregular entry into Spain by crossing into the Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla on the North African coast, either by land, by a short boat journey or even by swimming a short distance along the coast. The peak year for entering the two cities was 2005, when hundreds of irregular migrants tried to scale the fences surrounding them en masse. Many of the irregular migrants entering Ceuta and Melilla in the 2000s were North African, but there were also hundreds of South Asians who entered after travelling by air from Asia to West Africa and crossing the Sahara. The number of irregular migrants recorded as arriving in the two Spanish cities decreased by 39.5 per cent between 2006 and 2008, from 2,000 to 1,210, with a further decline to just 1,108 in 2009.¹⁰² These days, the majority of irregular migrants entering Ceuta and Melilla are North African, with the number of Asians using the route falling towards zero and many West Africans also abandoning this route. The main reason is no doubt the Spanish policy of keeping irregular migrants in Ceuta and Melilla and not transferring them to mainland Spain, making the two cities a dead end for those wishing to reach the European continent.

¹⁰¹ International Centre for Migration Policy Development, European Police Office and European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (Frontex), *Arab and European Partner States Working Document on the Joint Management of Mixed Migration Flows* (Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2007), p. 20. Available from www.icmpd.org/fileadmin/ICMPD-Website/MTM/FINAL_Working-Doc_Full_EN.pdf.

¹⁰² Spain, "El balance de la lucha contra la inmigración ilegal 2009" (see footnote 27).

3. The third and easternmost of the overland routes commonly used by migrants from West and Central Africa—at least until very recently—is a central Mediterranean route, accessed via Agadez in the Niger and Gao in Mali. These two towns are vital staging posts for access to the Maghreb at a number of points, especially via Tamanrasset to the Strait of Gibraltar (for further progress towards Spain) or via Sebha to the Libyan coast (for those intending to reach Italy). However, there are now also reports of people leaving north-eastern Nigeria for Chad with a view to reaching Egypt and travelling from there to Greece. Moreover, there are substantial numbers of West Africans who, having reached North Africa by one or other route across the desert, move from one country to another in North Africa in search of work or on the lookout for an opportunity to find a boat to Europe.



V. THE MODI OPERANDI OF SMUGGLERS OF MIGRANTS

Perhaps the best way to describe these routes in more detail is by tracing the journey of an imaginary migrant from West or Central Africa.¹⁰³ The story may begin in one of the cities of the region that are home to large numbers of would-be migrants, such as Douala (Cameroon), Kinshasa (Democratic Republic of the Congo), Accra (Ghana), Conakry (Guinea) or Lagos (Nigeria), or in one of the small towns or villages in their vicinity. Throughout the communities of sub-Saharan Africa where would-be migrants originate, those who have already gone to Europe are generally held in high esteem. Youngsters may be urged to emulate them, not least with a view to earning income for their parents and siblings. In Senegal, it is often said that young women reserve their favours for men who have experience of migration and that they have no interest in a boyfriend without the ambition to travel abroad. In Nigeria, a researcher in the team preparing the present report found that the school dropouts who were once seen as having no prospects suddenly become respected breadwinners after their travels to Europe or the United States. Their success challenges others and motivates them to seek means of travelling at all costs.

Across the first borders

Information on migration routes may be generated by former migrants who have returned home and by others who are still in Europe, who may spend time in their home country on holiday or send news by phone or e-mail. Potential migrants often receive information in advance concerning the key destinations on their route. Researchers who have worked in coastal towns in Senegal, for example, report that people from West or Central Africa may arrive in these places knowing the names of specific individuals whom they believe will be of service to them as transporters. Individuals planning to migrate may receive financial help from a circle of family and friends. In Saint-Louis in Senegal, women were reported in 2008 to have created a savings club (*tontine*) to finance migration by their own children,¹⁰⁴ and similar arrangements no doubt exist in other cities as well.

¹⁰³ A detailed reconstruction of an individual journey actually taken from a village in southern Ghana to Italy via a traumatic sea crossing from the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya is in Paul Kenyon, *I am Justice: A Journey Out of Africa* (London, Preface Publishing, 2009).

¹⁰⁴ Bouilly, "Les enjeux féminins de la migration masculine" (see footnote 59), p. 21, note 22.



Ghana-Togo border

For aspiring migrants from Central Africa, it is common to head first towards one of the major cities of the west coast, such as Lagos, in search of work that will generate enough money for the next stage of the journey. From a legal point of view there is generally little impediment for West Africans who want to cross a national border in their own region, as all the countries except Mauritania are members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Citizens of ECOWAS member States are allowed to cross borders without a passport and to stay legally in any other member country for 90 days. Border crossing may be more difficult for nationals of Central African countries, such as Cameroon and the Congo, both of which produce appreciable quantities of irregular migrants. However, few migrants heading north towards Europe seem to experience crossing from one West African country as a major problem. It is generally only when they cross to Algeria and Morocco that West and Central Africans are likely to be in contravention of the law, since a visa or other valid document may be required. This greatly increases the motivation of migrants to approach professional smugglers or others with a sustained interest in criminal activity at the point when they cross from the ECOWAS zone into North Africa. Since this transition involves an element of illegality, it also greatly increases the profits to be made by criminal entrepreneurs.

With the important exception of the thousands of women who are trafficked to North Africa or Europe to work in the sex trade, most irregular migrants from Central or West Africa in principle prefer the pay-as-you-go method to finance their journey, although there are reports of smugglers offering full-package services in coastal cities including Lagos, Lomé and Accra.¹⁰⁵ However, as they approach the Sahara, migrants quite often feel obliged to find a major smuggler who requires advance payment for transporting them across such an inhospitable and insecure area, where expert knowledge and specialized vehicles are necessary. Their lack of the necessary documents permitting legal entry into Algeria or the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya may be a further reason for them to seek the services of specialist smugglers offering full-package services as they draw near to the Sahara. The Nigerian journalist Orji Ogbannaya Orji repeatedly found evidence of Nigerians who had paid money to what he called “syndicates”, not only in North Africa but also in South Africa.¹⁰⁶ In the great commercial centre of Kano in northern Nigeria, the smugglers who offer full-package services to the many irregular migrants who gather here on the southern approaches to the central Mediterranean route are known as “burgers”.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, some of the *passeurs* who work the route from Gao northwards towards Algeria are themselves former migrants who have turned their knowledge into a source of income, while others are professional traders who import goods from Algeria, or Algerians who regularly take goods

¹⁰⁵ Kenyon, *I am Justice: A Journey Out of Africa* (see footnote 98), p. 34; Daniel, *Les routes clandestines* (see footnote 8), pp. 24–26 and 34.

¹⁰⁶ Orji, *Inside Aso Rock* (see footnote 87), p. 114.

¹⁰⁷ The term “burger” was originally used by Ghanaians and Nigerians who had visited Germany to designate their status as successful migrants.

to market in Kidal and return with cargoes of people. Some migrants interviewed in Kidal report having been put in contact with professional smugglers of migrants by the local police. More generally, connections are made by friends or relatives or by the numerous transport touts who frequent lorry parks and taxi stations.

Entering the desert



Broken truck

At the other great gateway to the Sahara, in Agadez, northern Niger, travel agencies and brokerage businesses openly advertise their services to help migrants reach North Africa or Europe. In 2005, 12 such establishments were in existence and had been registered with the municipal authorities in Agadez as *agences de courtage*, although only 10 of these were currently active.¹⁰⁸ Most of the owners were people from Agadez itself, while other proprietors were from elsewhere in the Niger. Five years later, many more professional brokers of services to migrants are foreigners, and several such businesses are run by Ghanaians in particular. Professional smugglers of migrants rely heavily on the quality of their social contacts, including with police and other officials. In brokers' offices visited in December 2009, the interiors were often decorated with photos sent from Europe by grateful clients posing in their smartest clothes or standing proudly in front of their cars. The proprietor of one Agadez brokerage, a Ghanaian woman, proudly pointed out some of these photos to one of the researchers working on the present report. "It is a pleasure knowing that we have helped these people", she told the researcher. "If their families knew the role we had played they would thank us, because they are the real beneficiaries".¹⁰⁹

Smugglers of migrants in general are known in Agadez as *In Tchaga*, a Hausa expression designating a business operator. The main *In Tchaga* in the town are of very diverse origins, from diverse countries including Benin, Ghana, Guinea, the Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo. Most of these are former migrants who have established themselves in Agadez after returning from Algeria or the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. They impress newcomers with their expert knowledge of the route ahead and of the connections necessary to negotiate the perils of a desert crossing in which a mistake or a stroke of bad luck can mean death from thirst. In this category there are perhaps a dozen leading operators.

¹⁰⁸ Julien Brachet, "Migrants, transporteurs et agents de l'État: rencontre sur l'axe Agadez-Sebha", *Autrepart*, vol. 36, 2005, p. 45.

¹⁰⁹ Interview, Agadez, December 2009.

These leading operators own lodging houses for migrants, known as “ghettoes”, in various parts of town, as well as having offices in *agences de courtage* clustered around the lorry park or in the town centre. Known as *maassou ghetto* or *mai guida*, the leading smugglers of migrants are respected members of the local community who enjoy social recognition and have excellent relations with the local authorities. Their lifestyle is often ostentatious; a research team that visited Agadez in December 2009 witnessed some of the leading operators holding court with their entourages in the bars and nightspots of the town, surrounded by young female migrants. They are the local equivalents of the “burgers” of Kano. These are high-level *passeurs*, intermediaries or brokers who are distinguished by the range of the social relationships that they can put to use in the service of their clients. They require payment in advance for a full-package service over the Sahara or even as far as Europe, or, when dealing with young women, they may offer a full-package contract in exchange for future work as a prostitute in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya or Europe, often in the employ of a madam known to the *passeur*. In cases of this sort, female migrants may be “traded” from one network to another, with prices calculated on the basis of their future earning capacity.

A successful *passeur* sits at the centre of transnational networks of communication, able to arrange transport and false or counterfeit documents and the associated payments between locations as far apart as Asia, West Africa and Europe. The most successful *passeurs* are often Ghanaian and Nigerian former migrants who attract most of their clients from among their countrymen who are keen to emulate their success. French-speaking migrants seem more likely to continue with the pay-as-you-go system even through the Sahara. The *passeur* arranges matters with a lorry owner and with a range of police officers and other officials, delegating specific arrangements to more junior employees and rarely doing business directly with a migrant. Indeed, it is striking that, although top-flight *passeurs* in Agadez are very often former migrants, they refer to the countrymen who are the source of their income as *bagouari*, a Hausa term that has taken on a pejorative meaning.

A second category of smugglers of migrants is less prominent but is better known to the migrants themselves. These are the intermediaries who contact individual migrants, and arrange their lodging and other matters in return for payment but who are also working for the top *passeurs*, who alone have the wherewithal to make high-level arrangements between the authorities and the lorry owners that ensure passage through the Sahara. Many of these lower-level operators are themselves former migrants, who may seek out their countrymen arriving in town for the first time, offering them help but also aiming to make money from them. The lower-level touts, or *rabatteurs*, include many women, themselves former migrants, who befriend young female newcomers and encourage them to enter into full-package contracts to work as prostitutes in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, to be paid for later from their future earnings. Beyond these specialists, there are many other people providing food and other requirements to the migrants who enter Agadez every day.

In 2003, some 65,000 migrants were reported to have left Agadez for destinations in the Maghreb, an average of 178 per day. Four fifths headed towards the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and one fifth towards Algeria.¹¹⁰ More recently, police statistics collected in Agadez record 2,221 foreigners entering the town in January 2009, 1,950 in February and 2,011 in March, with the figure shrinking to 387 in July and 249 in August. Police sources confirm that the main migration season is from November to March, suggesting that the number of arrivals officially registered varies from about 70 per day to less than 10 per day during the course of the year. A researcher who took a bus to Agadez from Niamey on 24 December 2009 travelled with 45 Ghanaians, 5 Nigerians, 3 Malians, 3 Senegalese and 1 Beninese. Passage from Agadez north to Dirkou, the last major town before the Libyan border, isolated in the Sahara, has become very hazardous owing to the insecurity caused by various bandit groups in northern Niger, a vast region that is home to former Tuareg rebels and to Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, and which is also a route for the transport of cocaine of South American provenance from West Africa to the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. Owing to the dangers of the route, transport owners await the monthly arrival of a military convoy from the Niger army garrison at Dirkou, which comes to Agadez to procure supplies. On the return leg, the military vehicles are accompanied by dozens of trucks full of migrants, travelling abreast for several kilometres. The dust cloud they create is impressive.

¹¹⁰ Ali Bensaâd, “Agadez, carrefour migratoire sahélo-maghrébin”, *Revue européenne des migrations internationales*, vol. 19, No. 1 (2003), pp. 7–28, para. 10.

The prominence of former migrants among the ranks of smugglers of migrants is a reflection of the fact that a migrant passing from West Africa through the Sahel and the Sahara to North Africa, and possibly to Europe thereafter, becomes a member of a succession of temporary communities during an extended period of travel that can last for years. Arriving in a new city one step closer to Europe, a migrant tends to seek out people of his or her own ethnicity or nationality, or failing that, the same language group, as a source of support and information, and these fellow nationals are invariably migrants who have themselves made the same journey in earlier years and have now managed to establish themselves. There are significant historical precedents for relationships of this sort, for example, in the social type known as a *jatigi* (meaning tutor or landlord), a name traditionally given to an earlier traveller from a common village or place of origin to whom an incoming migrant looks for patronage and guidance. Historically, such pioneer travellers were closely connected with the spread of Islam south of the Sahara, a religion that served as the bond of communities in motion.¹¹¹

During their travels, migrants commonly spend long periods in a single location, working in temporary jobs long enough to earn money to buy their passage to the next place on their itinerary. They often make contacts in small bars or eating houses, typically run by female migrants who have established places of refreshment to help them earn a little money on their journey. These are places where information is exchanged on travel conditions, including details on where to buy false documents, which passport to use and so on.¹¹² In the Maghreb, where bars are less frequent than in West Africa, a similar function is played by small restaurants. In North Africa, Christian missions are also important as places where migrants from sub-Saharan Africa may gather and receive a minimum of hospitality, gaining useful contacts and information in the process.¹¹³



La maison du migrant (House for migrants), Gao

¹¹¹ Anaïk Pian, "Le 'tuteur-logeur' revisité: le 'thiaman' sénégalais, passeur de frontières du Maroc vers l'Europe", *Politique africaine*, vol. 109, 2008, p. 96.

¹¹² Escoffier, *Transmigrant-e-s africain-e-s au Maghreb* (see footnote 53), pp. 140-143.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 144-148.

Since the mid-2000s some migrants have made money by carrying drugs across the desert for sale in North Africa. A Netherlands journalist visiting Agadez in 2005 found that young Nigerian men especially were transporting small quantities of narcotics.¹¹⁴ Since then there have been reports of very large quantities of cocaine being transported across the desert both from west to east (Mauritania to the Niger and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) and from south to north,¹¹⁵ sometimes hundreds of kilos at a time.

At the North African coast

Finally, migrants reach the coast. In North Africa, finding sea transport is difficult. But in any event, there are jobs to be found in the major cities of North Africa. Some migrants from south of the Sahara stay there only for as long as it takes to find transport to Europe, while others stay for many years, and still others move from country to country along the north coast of Africa. Those wanting to move on need to save money for the journey and find a “connection man” whom they can trust to find them a boat.¹¹⁶ In North Africa as in Senegal, a migrant who has paid for a berth is normally given two or three attempts at reaching Europe, meaning that if a first attempt is unsuccessful, he or she can await a second opportunity with the same transporter.

Finding sea transport is not a simple matter. A key role is played by the so-called connection men, known in Spanish as *jefes*, former migrants who have lived in North Africa sometimes for more than 10 years, long enough to learn Arabic and to build up the social and financial capital they need to find a berth for individual migrants in a boat heading for Europe. It is unheard of for sub-Saharan migrants in North Africa to negotiate a sea passage directly with a boat owner, although in Senegal and along the Atlantic coast that is usual. Instead, migrants in North Africa must find a connection man.¹¹⁷ Tangier and Nador, two of the most popular points for clandestine crossings to Spain, are said to be the turf of Nigerian and Ivorian connection men, respectively, while Malians are said to be prominent in some other areas along the northern coast of Morocco.¹¹⁸

Connection men work with great discretion yet must possess “persuasive salesmanship”.¹¹⁹ Once a potential migrant has made contact with a connection man and agreed a fee, the two then designate a third person who is known to both the migrant and the connection man and who agrees to act as a banker. The migrant normally pays a third of the agreed transportation fee to the connection man and gives the remaining two thirds to the banker, to be given to the connection man only if the migrant successfully reaches Europe and announces the arrival, via mobile phone. A connection man needs to recruit enough migrants to fill the number of boats that he is organizing.

Among the connection men and high-level coordinators of the smuggling of migrants, several sources suggest that there may be some who have interests in other criminal activities as well.¹²⁰ One researcher describes a high-level *passeur* in Rabat, a 35-year-old woman from Khartoum, whose biography suggests how a high-level operative may acquire the necessary resources and, above all, social contacts necessary to operate in various sectors and at various levels simultaneously. The woman originally came to Morocco to study, on the invitation of a brother, and was married to a Chadian. She became well known in the diplomatic community, and at the same time gradually formed social contacts with women travelling towards Europe, providing them with accommodation.¹²¹ She was paid by migrants with gold and diamonds brought from the Congo, which she sold to local police in Rabat.¹²² While she assisted female migrants to move on to Europe, a Ghanaian contact dealt with men in the same group, persuading them to carry small packets of heroin with them to Spain.¹²³

¹¹⁴ Gerbert van der Aa, *Nigeriaanse toestanden: reis door het meest corrupte land van Africa* (Amsterdam, Nieuw Amsterdam Publishers, 2005), p. 21; see also Daniel, *Les routes clandestines* (see footnote 8), p. 135.

¹¹⁵ Interviews with police and United Nations sources, Dakar; cf. Stephen Ellis, “West Africa’s international drug trade”, *African Affairs*, vol. 108, No. 431 (2009), pp. 171–196.

¹¹⁶ On the search for a connection man, see Kenyon, *I am Justice: A Journey Out of Africa* (see footnote 98), pp. 72–128.

¹¹⁷ Kenyon, *I am Justice: A Journey Out of Africa* (see footnote 98), pp. 125–126; see also pp. 72–105.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Cameroonian migrant, Melilla, 24 November 2009.

¹¹⁹ Kenyon, *I am Justice: A Journey Out of Africa* (see footnote 98), pp. 125–126; see also pp. 72–105.

¹²⁰ For example, Daniel, *Les routes clandestines* (see footnote 8), p. 135.

¹²¹ Escoffier, *Transmigrant-e-s africain-e-s au Maghreb* (see footnote 53), pp. 113–116.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 114–115.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

Some days before the departure date, the clients are taken by employees of the connection man (“guidemen”) to a safe house and relieved of their mobile phone SIM cards to prevent communication. Usually, more people are taken to the safe house than there are places available as a guarantee that every place will be filled. The prospective passengers may wait in the safe house for days or weeks, still not knowing the date of their departure, still not having met the actual owner of the boat they will be taking or even not knowing whether such a boat really exists, since cheating is common. On the day of departure the guidemen escort the requisite number of people from the safe house to the point of embarkation, normally a lonely beach. The guidemen are also migrants, employed by a connection man in return for being given a free berth on a boat to Europe once they have served their time. West African migrants taking a boat from the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya or Morocco to Europe often do not meet any of the North African nationals working for the smuggling consortium until the very evening of their departure, and even then may do no more than catch a fleeting glimpse at night. They may arrive in Europe knowing little or nothing about who has actually put them to sea. They have no time to take adequate clothing or supplementary provisions.

The connection man has a professional relationship with a boat owner, invariably a North African (an “Arabo man”, in migrant jargon), who usually has to arrange safe passage for an emigrant boat by negotiating with the relevant authorities. A successful transporter owns the rights to a particular beach. There are reported cases of territorial disputes between rival smuggling networks over the control of specific beaches.¹²⁴ One Ivorian migrant, interviewed in Algeciras, Spain, in November 2009 shortly after crossing without being detected, reported that he had made the crossing with 67 others in a boat piloted by a Senegalese. In this case, the Nigerian connection man he had used regularly brought in experienced sailors from the Gambia and Senegal specifically for the purpose of acting as pilots. Also in this case, the boat was scrutinized shortly after departure by a patrol vessel of the Moroccan navy and allowed to continue its journey after the naval personnel had verified that the smuggler was not attempting to deceive them by sending several vessels after negotiating payment for only one.¹²⁵ In other cases, migrants have asserted that the vessels they used were actually owned by officers of the Moroccan navy.

Successful connection men have durable partnerships with shippers and reach detailed agreements on sharing of profits and on specific responsibilities. One Nigerian connection man working out of Tangier pays half the fee to the Moroccan shipper, who in turn uses part of this money to bribe the navy and police.¹²⁶ The connection man has to cover operational costs including the price of a boat and one or two engines. In addition to paying the cost of their passage to Europe, the migrants pay €20 per day for food and accommodation in the safe house where they await departure, and €40 for the bus journey from the house to the point of embarkation, resulting in additional profits for the connection man.

At the West African coast

In the case of the Atlantic route to the Canary Islands, which was in its prime before 2007, the system in operation is rather different from that in North Africa. In the early years, the transporters were usually just fishermen, experienced sailors who simply made extra money by taking people in their boats. When they were successful in taking a boatload of migrants to the Canary Islands, skippers could opt either to stay in Europe themselves or allow themselves to be repatriated. From the mid-2000s onwards, the operation tended to fall into the hands of organized groups of smugglers, generally Senegalese. Later, businessmen without backgrounds in the fishing industry became involved.

Reportedly, a pioneering businessman was a Malian entrepreneur who in 2004 hired a boat from a Senegalese fisherman at the Mauritanian port of Nouadhibou to take 20 Malians to Tenerife.¹²⁷ Since around that time, the principal of a smuggling business has generally been a wealthy businessman, often but not always Senegalese, who buys *cayucos* from fishermen and uses a network of touts to recruit potential migrants. Since the early days of the Atlantic route, the migrants have increasingly come from all over Senegal or from farther afield. The head of a smuggling

¹²⁴ Interview with Guardia Civil, Madrid, 8 November 2009.

¹²⁵ Interview with Ivorian migrant, Algeciras, 7 November 2009.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Sall and Morand, “Pêche artisanale et émigration des jeunes africains” (see footnote 60), pp. 37–39.



Fishermen and boats in Saint-Louis

organization along the Atlantic coast normally has a second-in-command, a professional fisherman who coordinates the operation of loading the boats and managing the touts, known locally as *coxeurs*. The deputy is paid a percentage of the total income received by the principal. The *coxeurs* are usually allowed to keep one full fee for every five or six migrants they recruit.¹²⁸ It is unnecessary to assist West African migrants in arriving at the Atlantic coast departure points, as they arrive by their own devices.

On the Atlantic route, as in North Africa, elements of the national security forces may actually connive with smugglers. For example, a joint United Nations and ECOWAS fact-finding mission is reported to have found in May 2009 that “rogue elements of the Gambian security services” had been involved in a scheme to transport migrants to Europe by sea.¹²⁹ Since the peak year of 2006, smuggling organizations using the Atlantic route have increasingly switched to Mauritania. The heads of the smuggling organizations in Mauritania are generally Beydanes or white Moors, drawn from the country’s ruling group. They buy *cayucos* from local fishermen and bribe the authorities.¹³⁰ Some law enforcement officers reportedly sell to smugglers the engines or fuel from boats that have been previously seized and confiscated by the authorities.¹³¹ The *coxeurs* who recruit migrants are normally black Mauriticians.

A recent trend towards leaving for the Canary Islands from farther south along the Atlantic coast of West Africa has led to longer journeys. This could well imply the proliferation of organized criminal groups with a more complex structure, able to invest in the resources needed to make longer journeys.¹³² Since 2007, more and more inflatable motorized boats or other vessels have been purchased specifically to smuggle irregular migrants,¹³³ indicating that it is a distinct business and not merely a profitable sideline for fishermen. Multinational involvement is demonstrated by a breakdown of the nationalities of the 208 people prosecuted by the Spanish courts in 2008 for their role in the smuggling of migrants to the Canary Islands. Of those prosecuted, 72 were Senegalese citizens, 37 Gambian, 25 Mauritanian and 14 Guinean.¹³⁴

¹²⁸ Interview with Senegalese migrants, Gran Canaria, Lanzarote, Canary Islands, 9, 11 and 12 November 2009.

¹²⁹ “Gambia: fifteen years of one-man rule”, *Africa Confidential*, vol. 50, No. 15 (24 July 2009), p. 5.

¹³⁰ Interview with Senegalese migrants, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Canary Islands, 10 November 2009.

¹³¹ Amnesty International, *Mauritania: “Nobody Wants to Have Anything to Do with Us”* (see footnote 82).

¹³² Interview with source from Guardia Civil, formerly stationed in the Canary Islands, 23 October 2009.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Spain, *Memorias de la Fiscalía General del Estado* (annual report of the office of prosecutors of immigration affairs, 2008), available from www.fiscal.es/cs/Satellite?cid=1240559967921&language=es&pagename=PFiscal%2FPage%2FFGE_contenidoFinal (accessed on 21 November 2009).



Shuttle between Senegal and Mauritania

Between three and five pilots, who take turns steering, are normally recruited for each *cayuco* in return for a free passage. The pilots are normally local fishermen with experience in piloting boats of this kind who are also hoping to go to Europe.¹³⁵ As we have seen, Senegalese fishermen may even be hired by shippers in Morocco specifically for their navigational skills. In their absence, migrants who have knowledge of navigation or can be trained will be selected to pilot the boats. As many as four people may be needed to bail water out of the *cayuco* en route, and those selected for this are usually minors.

The role of organized criminal groups

The literature contains a striking range of opinions on the role of organized crime in the transport of irregular migrants. Most academic researchers make little or no mention of this matter, and at least one author specifically contends that there are actually few large-scale organizations concerned with transporting migrants to Europe.¹³⁶ No one doubts the existence of people who make money by helping irregular migrants to find lodging and transport and to evade border controls. However, there is a lack of consensus regarding the degree to which such people operate in networks structured or durable enough to be called “organized crime”. A fairly typical opinion in this context is that of a researcher who found from enquiries among West African migrants who had reached North Africa that “without exception, the assistance provided to sub-Saharan African migrants had been small scale, focused on a single border or short leg of the journey which had to be paid for separately. None of them had paid a single price for the journey and none had encountered ... internationally organised criminal operations.”¹³⁷ Official bodies, on the other hand, tend to attribute rather more importance to organized crime in the movement of irregular migrants from West Africa to Europe. For example, a report by the European Police Office (Europol), the European Law Enforcement Agency, states:

In the majority of cases, facilitated illegal immigration is organized by smaller criminal groups lacking the capacity to plan and execute a complete trip from the source country to the intended destination. These

¹³⁵ Interview with Mauritanian and Senegalese migrants, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Canary Islands, 11 November 2009.

¹³⁶ De Haas, *The Myth of Invasion: Irregular Migration from West Africa* (see footnote 5), p. iv.

¹³⁷ Collyer, “In-between places: trans-Saharan transit migrants” (see footnote 92), p. 678.

OC [organized crime] groups facilitate the illegal immigrant in steps, arranging each step on an ad hoc basis, utilizing contacts with other small criminal groups.¹³⁸

To some extent, the lack of information concerning organized crime may be attributed to a lack of research, which the present report hopes to rectify at least in part. Nevertheless, clearly it is also due to differences of emphasis between researchers from various professional backgrounds concerning organized crime. The passage cited in the last paragraph is a good illustration of this point. Europol is technically correct, in terms of the standard United Nations definition, in describing as “organized crime” small groups that combine to facilitate irregular border crossings by migrants in exchange for money. However, such a bald description does not give much of a clue to the social context that produces smugglers of migrants in many cases. As we have noted, a significant number of the people who make money from irregular migrants are themselves irregular migrants, but ones who have been in a single location long enough to acquire substantial local knowledge. Some of the most experienced migrants are those who have been intercepted by the authorities in the course of an earlier journey and forcibly returned to West Africa, from where they have recommenced their journey, sometimes as many as three or four times. In this way, they have built up expertise over a period of sometimes several years, and they may turn this expertise to profit by offering services to novice migrants.

Others who help migrants with border crossing or other logistical requirements in return for payment are local residents who may be accustomed to making money from any source available, quite often in violation of the law. In regard to the Sahara, many of the small groups of smugglers alluded to by Europol as organized crime groups are former nomads from communities that lost the livestock that was the basis of their livelihood in the great droughts of the 1970s and never recovered their old way of life. Many people in this situation have developed other ways of making a living, notably in transportation, and some have managed to acquire vehicles and sophisticated communication equipment, including global positioning systems and satellite phones. Thus equipped, former nomads live by transporting over long distances any merchandise offered to them, including people. In many cases they work with police and border officials who are prepared to facilitate their movements in return for payment.¹³⁹ Formally speaking, this constitutes the illegal practice of bribery and corruption with a view to evading State laws regarding the transport of people or goods across frontiers—smuggling.

In short, networks of transporters that an official body such as Europol may classify as organized crime, correctly according to the United Nations definitions, may appear to anthropologists, sociologists and other academic field researchers as elements in local communities, part-timers rather than professional criminals.

In the case of the Sahara, the very existence of States and formal borders in this inhospitable region actually constitutes a resource that Saharan populations can put to use. The fact that large areas of the Sahara are outside the effective control of Government agencies facilitates more or less lucrative contraband trades. From time to time explicitly political organizations come into existence, such as during the Tuareg rebellions of the early 1990s and subsequently as represented by Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, inaugurated in 2006 by members of an existing Algerian Islamist movement. Such militarized organizations may levy fees on commercial vehicles or even attack them. They may themselves develop interests in smuggling. Like the smugglers themselves, they often have ambiguous relations with police and Government officials.

The contexts in which smugglers of migrants operate can vary greatly. South of the Sahara, in the ECOWAS region, transporting passengers from one location to another is in principle entirely legal, and transporting migrants is a legitimate business. Illegality is most often associated with crossing a border, in particular between the Sahel and North Africa or between Africa and Europe, and this is where migrants are most in need of the services of someone with the knowledge and resources required to circumvent the laws in force. The great paradox of enhanced migration controls is that they increase the need for irregular migrants to have recourse to professional smugglers and criminals. As with any illicit market, the more rigorous the official controls, the greater the profit to be made by those who are prepared to take the risks necessary to evade the controls.

¹³⁸ European Police Office, “Facilitated illegal immigration into the European Union”, March 2008, available from www.europol.europa.eu/publications/Serious_Crime_Overviews/Facilitated_illegal_immigration_2008.pdf.

¹³⁹ De Haas, *The Myth of Invasion: Irregular Migration from West Africa* (see footnote 5), p. 25.

Smuggling of Asian irregular migrants

The element of organized crime is most evident in the case of the Asian (and, reportedly, occasionally Latin American) migrants who enter Europe via West Africa and the Sahara. A person or group of people capable of organizing a full-package network from Asia to Europe via Africa is clearly in a different category from a lorry owner or a driver who may transport migrants in addition to, or instead of, consumer goods. The organization of transcontinental migration requires considerable sophistication, a substantial capital investment and, by definition, global connections. Asian smuggling syndicates that had previously conveyed migrants overland to Europe via Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Turkey seem to have begun using the West African and Sahara routes in the early 2000s. By the middle of the last decade, Asian migrants who had contracted for full-package services, having arrived in West Africa, could travel relatively fast and comfortably in saloon cars from Gao to North Africa, and some are known to have proceeded from there by sea to Spain, completing their journeys in weeks rather than months. An international smuggling ring broken up by the Moroccan authorities in 2006 habitually arranged for each car containing high-paying Asian clients to be preceded by a lorry full of West African migrants who in effect acted as pathfinders, being at greater risk of detection than those in the cars behind.¹⁴⁰

According to information collected in Spain, most of the South Asian migrants who have travelled along the South Asia/West Africa/North Africa route are from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. The migrants are invariably young men, often from families in which an older relative has previously worked in Europe, who are urged by their families to earn income in Europe.¹⁴¹ In general they are from families of modest income, and in many cases their parents have sold land or borrowed money from banks or from informal moneylenders to pay a €15,000 to €18,000 fee to a smuggler situated in one of the main Asian cities. In the most distressing cases, young men have been provided with air tickets and travel documents to Burkina Faso or Mali but have then taken years to travel over the Sahara, often in harrowing circumstances, becoming virtual hostages at the mercy of local traffickers who use them as bargaining chips in negotiations with the South Asian smugglers who have received advance payment for their clients' journey to Europe. Hundreds of Asian migrants over the years have become stuck in North Africa, unable either to go on to Europe or to return to Asia. Some have been abandoned by their South Asian smugglers and have had to get more money from home to continue.

Trafficking in persons

Another situation in which organized criminal groups can clearly be detected concerns the trafficking of women, especially from Nigeria. The trafficking networks are centred in Edo State, and many of the women also come from this same place, just one of Nigeria's 36 federal States. The strength of the traffickers is their knowledge of Edo State, which enables them to control women even in Europe through pressures exerted on the women's families back home. Trafficked women work in Europe under the control of madams who are former prostitutes.¹⁴² The element of trafficking can occur when a Nigerian-run sex ring in North Africa or Europe orders a new girl or woman from Nigeria. She is recruited in Edo State and may travel by air or, if she travels overland, be escorted by a courier known as a "trolley", perhaps in company with other women destined for the sex trade. Immediately after being recruited, women are obliged to swear an oath at a traditional shrine, and this oath is regarded as solemnly binding.¹⁴³ Sometimes local churches in Nigeria also administer rituals binding the women to the pimps and madams who will control their fate for the next few years. There are even cases of Christian pastors encouraging their own daughters to work in the sex trade in Europe.¹⁴⁴ Knowledge of this business is very widespread, although it is usually spoken about in euphemisms.

¹⁴⁰ Daniel, *Les routes clandestines* (see footnote 8), p. 131.

¹⁴¹ Interviews with Indian migrants in Ceuta, 5 November 2009.

¹⁴² Prina, "Trafficking of Nigerian Girls to Italy" (see footnote 7); interview with representative from Red Acoge, Madrid, 30 September 2009.

¹⁴³ For an eye-witness description, see Mayah, "Europe by desert: tears of African migrants" (see footnote 12), p. 26.

¹⁴⁴ Information gleaned from research in Edo State in late 2009.

When a Nigerian woman trafficked in this way is housed in a reception centre in Europe, she will be visited by a member of the trafficking ring who often has legal documentation. Pretending to be a friend or relative, the trafficker leaves with one or more women, who simply disappear from official view.¹⁴⁵ Members of trafficking networks staying in the reception centres have also approached some female Nigerian migrants in this way. For instance, in June 2009 a Nigerian woman made an official complaint to the Spanish authorities after a male Nigerian migrant in the Centro de Estancia Temporal de Inmigrantes (CETI) in Ceuta tried to force her to prostitute herself in order to pay the debt she had incurred after she had been helped to enter Spain.¹⁴⁶ In this particular case, her family home in Nigeria was burned down in revenge after she had made her complaint.¹⁴⁷ Sometimes traffickers recruit Nigerian women on the way to North Africa in the hope of “selling” them to other traffickers needing women for prostitution in Spain or the rest of Europe.

The role of chairmen

There is no doubt that the smugglers’ modes of operation have changed over the years. The fact that there are increasing numbers of West African migrants who have gained experience of travel to North Africa and Europe and the fact that official restrictions have become more onerous have combined to make knowledge of irregular migration routes steadily more lucrative. As we have seen, connection men in North African ports, *passeurs* in Agadez and Gao and burgers in Kano are often former migrants who have discovered that they can make a good living as professional smugglers of migrants. By the same token, the growing monetary value of personal knowledge has transformed the role of “chairmen”, the semi-official leaders of national groups who are a feature of the temporary migrant communities outside the ECOWAS region. Such communities have sprung up in every town on the main migration routes, especially in North Africa. The chairmen are themselves migrants who have lived in a particular place for long enough to establish a degree of authority over the ever-shifting communities and who have also been able to acquire a degree of credibility with local authorities. There are no known cases of the chairman of a migrant community being formally elected, although this may have occurred on occasion. Most often, a chairman seems to emerge through a mixture of personal qualities, technical knowledge, and his or her degree of social acceptance. One Nigerian woman interviewed in Spain¹⁴⁸ described how the chairmanship of a Nigerian community at a town in Morocco rotates between the Yoruba, Edo and Igbo, giving each ethnic group its turn.

A chairman is perceived by the migrants living in a foreign land to be one of their own. A chairman can indicate to newcomers how to behave in their temporary home and how not to attract the wrong sort of attention, and can also advise migrants on the choice of a *passeur*. A chairman may be advised by a council, sometimes known as a “political bureau”, consisting of aides with specific roles. The chairman receives payment from the mass of migrants of his nationality in the form of an obligatory—though technically illegal—tax, known in French as *droit de ghetto*, and these payments are integrated into the fabric of a social relationship.¹⁴⁹ One former chairman interviewed by Anaïk Pian in Morocco was entrusted by the migrants within his group with the money that they had set aside both for their lodgings and for their eventual crossing to Spain.¹⁵⁰ The chairman also incurs expenses, not least as he has to pay for the services of the *rabatteurs*, or touts, who direct migrants to him.¹⁵¹ Chairmen both cooperate and compete with each other, sometimes even resorting to violence to settle a dispute.¹⁵² An effective chairman develops contacts with local officials and mediates with local authorities. It has been reported that in Mauritania people of each migrant nationality are officially encouraged to organize their own national committee and chairmanship, which may then be held responsible for the conduct of members of their community.¹⁵³ Various nationalities have their equivalent of the chairman, and the word has been absorbed into the Wolof language of Senegal as *thiaman*, (although many Wolof-speakers still prefer the traditional term *jattigui* (also spelled *jatigi*)).

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Spanish Red Cross representative, Algeciras, 3 November 2009.

¹⁴⁶ *El Faro de Ceuta*, 10 June 2009.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Spanish Red Cross representative, Ceuta, 4 November 2009.

¹⁴⁸ Algeciras, 3 November 2009.

¹⁴⁹ Mehdi Alioua, “La migration transnationale des Africains subsahariens au Maghreb”, *Maghreb-Machrek*, vol. 185, 2005, pp. 44–45.

¹⁵⁰ Pian, “Le ‘tuteur-logeur’ revisité: le ‘thiaman’ sénégalais” (see footnote 106), p. 99.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 96.

¹⁵³ Choplin, “L’immigré, le migrant, l’allochtone” (see footnote 83), p. 81.

A 27-year-old Nigerian man explained the situation among the Nigerian community on the Algerian-Moroccan border, where substantial numbers of sub-Saharan wait for a crossing, in this way:¹⁵⁴

Each nationality has its own area to put up their shelters. They say ‘That’s the Nigerians’ camp, that’s the Ghanaians’ camp, that’s the camp for the Senegalese’ ... and each camp has its own governor. They have a full government, there’s a prime minister, a finances minister ... that’s what they call them. Every three months the government will leave, and before they go they will designate the next government. They collect money from people coming in and, when they have enough, they leave for Europe.

This quotation perhaps exaggerates the precision with which a migrant community organizes itself in the difficult conditions of the Algerian-Moroccan border. It is perhaps more accurate to regard these temporary communities as requiring everyone to contribute for the purpose of survival, with some people being tasked with fetching water, for example, and everyone contributing financially to the costs of lodging.

As is made clear in the passage above, published in 2007, the chairmanship of a temporary community of West Africans in North Africa was in the past regarded as a temporary fixture. A chairman was expected to move on to a new destination within quite a short time, probably to Europe, entrusting the leadership of a local community to a successor. However, not only has it become more difficult to reach Europe, but the position of chairman of a migrant community has in some cases become sufficiently lucrative that an established chairman may be tempted to stay in one location and become in effect a professional smuggler of migrants. He or she negotiates with professional transporters or *passeurs* and may receive a fee from them. A chairman may also develop a profitable sideline in renting lodgings: research at Gao (Mali) in 2009 indicated that a chairman charged a flat rate of 2,000 CFA francs (about €3) for a berth in a ghetto for up to a month; a person staying only one night paid the same amount as someone staying for 30 days, generating extra profit in the case of people taking up short-term residence. Needless to say, ghetto lodgings are generally squalid and shared by dozens of migrants, requiring little investment in maintenance.

A successful chairman needs to maintain contacts with family, friends and business acquaintances in key locations in his or her country of origin, from which new recruits will come. The best chairmen will actually have contacts in countries throughout the Sahel and North Africa. Some are also said to make regular payments to security officers at airports in Morocco, for example, bringing them closer to the level of connection men. In fact it is very likely that some connection men are former chairmen who have created such lucrative businesses in North Africa that they have no interest in proceeding to Europe. A West African *passeur*, such as one of the Nigerian connection men in Morocco or one of the Ghanaian travel “brokers” in Agadez, might make a substantial amount of money. Most probably, their family and friends at home have little idea exactly what they do or even where they are. If they were to return to their families and friends with a substantial amount of money, they would be regarded as conquering heroes, with no one asking questions about the source of their wealth.

The whole range of smuggling professionals, from transport touts and various part-timers at the lower level, to professional transporters and high-level brokers, exists to service (or exploit) the basic needs of migrants. Migrants are considered to be like cattle heading to new pastures, in the sense that they can be milked throughout the length of a journey; while some migrants may die along the way, the important thing for those who make money from them is to maintain the flow.

¹⁵⁴ Collyer, “In-between places: trans-Saharan transit migrants” (see footnote 92), p. 681.



VI. SMUGGLING FEES AND PROFITS

From Asia

The migrants travelling the greatest distances, and therefore paying the highest fees, are the thousands of Asians who have made use of the West African route, especially between 2004 and 2008, and who, moreover, are the only irregular migrants consistently reported to entrust their journeys to sophisticated international criminal networks rather than to a series of local contacts generated in the course of a lengthy journey across the Sahel and the Sahara. Asian migrants interviewed during research for the present report had paid €12,000 to €18,000 in advance to Asian smugglers for full-package contracts. Elsewhere it has been reported that Asian migrants heading to Europe via Africa have paid between €4,180 and €5,575 for flights from Dhaka to Ceuta via Dubai, Bamako and Morocco.¹⁵⁵ In January 2006, a few months after intensive attempts by large numbers of irregular migrants to climb over the border fences into Ceuta and Melilla had made headlines throughout the world, the Moroccan national security service, the Direction générale de la Sûreté nationale (DGSN), arrested a ring of smugglers bringing people from the Indian subcontinent to Europe and Canada via sub-Saharan Africa and Morocco. They had charged fees of some \$10,000 to \$12,000 (€7,353–€8,824) per person.¹⁵⁶

Within West Africa

In addition to these overall estimates, there are many individual reports of fees paid at particular points of the migration chain. In the literature, there are few estimates of charges paid in the southern countries of West Africa where migrants often start their journeys, which is probably a reflection of the fact that the initial stages of a journey do not entail high risk or illegality, and therefore transport charges are relatively low. It is when migrants gather at the key transport hubs, on the Atlantic coast or at inland centres such as Gao and Agadez, that there are more regular reports of the fees they are required to pay. Thus, migrants passing through Agadez were reported in 2004 to be required to pay a “tax” to the police of about 20,000 CFA francs (€30).¹⁵⁷ In the same year, the cost of passage over the Sahara to the Libyan town of Sebha varied according to the type of vehicle, but was generally 40,000 to 80,000 CFA francs (approximately €62–€124).¹⁵⁸ In December 2009, migrants arriving in Agadez were stopped at a police roadblock outside the town and required to pay 10,000 CFA francs (€15). Of this, 1,000 CFA francs (€2) was paid to the municipal authorities.

¹⁵⁵ United Nations Office for West Africa, *Migrations irrégulières en provenance d'Afrique de l'Ouest* (see footnote 16), p. 28.

¹⁵⁶ Daniel, *Les routes clandestines* (see footnote 8), p. 131.

¹⁵⁷ Brachet, “Migrants, transporteurs et agents de l'État” (see footnote 103), p. 46.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 47.

Apart from bribes, each migrant passing through Agadez is reckoned to pay between 100,000 and 120,000 CFA francs (€152–€183) to *passeurs* and transporters. Of this, perhaps 15,000 CFA francs is retained by the *passeur* and 35,000 CFA francs by an agent, and 70,000 CFA francs is received by the transport owner. Those who opt for a full-package contract from Agadez to the northern part of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya or even Europe may pay \$2,000 to \$3,000 (€1,471–€2,206), the equivalent of 1 million CFA francs or more.

Continuing towards Dirkou, the Sahara garrison town en route to the Libyan border that is reached by migrants in a huge monthly convoy, immigrants pay a further fee of 9,000 CFA francs (€14), of which 5,000 CFA francs goes to the police, 2,000 CFA francs to the gendarmerie, and 1,000 CFA francs to the municipality. Extrapolating from the number of migrants entering Dirkou in the first quarter of 2009 suggests that the authorities collected some 55.6 million CFA francs (€85,000) in that period, or €324,000 per year in bribes alone in one single city. The amount of bribes paid to various Government authorities in northern Niger in 2009 may be compared to data collected in the same region in earlier years.¹⁵⁹ Informants interviewed in Mali for the present study reported that the normal rate for bribes ranged from about 22,500 CFA francs (€34) on the Algeria-Mali border to larger sums at the Morocco-Algeria border, which is legally closed. Migrants interviewed in northern Mali estimated the total costs of travel to North Africa as between 90,000 and 225,000 CFA francs (€137–€343), although there were a few higher estimates. Two out of a sample of 50 people estimated costs as high as 1,350,000 CFA francs (€2,058). The average was some 720,000 CFA francs (€1,098). Three women had paid for nothing except their own food, most probably because they had taken out full-package contracts to be repaid through future earnings in the sex business.¹⁶⁰ Information collected in the Niger suggests that the price of transport from Agadez to the Libyan border is a standard 150,000 CFA francs (€229), of which the vehicle owner receives half and travel agents and *passeurs* the remainder.

Sea crossings

For migrants who move on to Europe, the sea journey is the most expensive single part of their odyssey. In 2006, the boom year of the Canary Islands route, UNODC quoted \$1,260 (€926) as the fee generally obtained, but pointed out that the sum could vary according to the type of transport, with a berth on a cargo ship—relatively comfortable and safe—costing up to twice that sum. A Senegalese researcher cited figures of €2,500 to €3,000 for a berth on a ship to the Canaries. For those preferring to stow away, the cost paid to the skipper of a canoe aiding a night-time embarkation was €500 to €1,000 at that time.¹⁶¹ By 2009, the cost of a berth in a *cayuco* was still about €1,000, despite the decline in the numbers of people taking this route.



Boats at the border between Senegal and Mauritania

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 43–62; Bensaâd, “Agadez, carrefour migratoire sahélo maghrébin” (see footnote 105), pp. 7–28.

¹⁶⁰ This illustrates how the boundaries between trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants may be indistinct, as the case of these three women could be considered one of trafficking inasmuch as the women are liable to be kept in debt bondage.

¹⁶¹ Cheikh Oumar Ba, “Barça ou barzakh: la migration clandestine sénégalaise vers l’Espagne entre le Sahara occidental et l’océan Atlantique”, paper presented at a roundtable organized by Casa Árabe, Murcia and Madrid, 7–8 June 2007, p. 7. Available from www.casaarabe-icam.es.

There have been some particularly detailed investigations of the finances involved in sea crossings from Senegal to the Canaries. According to research carried out before 2008, a single voyage in a smaller boat might involve an average of 80 passengers paying some 500,000 CFA francs each, or 40 million CFA francs in total.¹⁶² More generally, the total income generated by a single boatload of migrants could be 35 million to 50 million CFA francs (€54,000–€77,000), depending on the size of the boat and the number of passengers. Of this sum, some 8 to 9 million CFA francs (€12,300–€14,000) went to the shipper, of which half was earmarked for the boat-builder, 30 to 40 per cent for the skipper and crew, and the rest to the carpenter who prepared the vessel. In the event that the shipper was using an intermediary—usually an experienced fisherman, required to oversee the operation—the latter would also receive a fee, from which he had to pay for two motors, fuel, food and other equipment and, last but not least, sacrifices by a *marabout* (a Sufi cleric), to ensure the success of the operation. Total costs could thus amount to some 9 to 11 million CFA francs, which still left a profit of perhaps between 15 million and 30 million CFA francs, or €23,000 to €46,000 per boat.¹⁶³ Another source gave roughly comparable figures, claiming that 60 passengers might typically pay 400,000 CFA francs each, although the sum could go as high as 1 million CFA francs.¹⁶⁴ In the case of the smaller *pateras* leaving from Western Sahara, the cost was between €800 and €1,000 for West African or Asian migrants and as little as between €400 and €600 for Moroccans. For the luxury of stowing away on a ship, a West African migrant would pay up to €1,800.¹⁶⁵

By 2009, costs on the Canary Islands route could be estimated as follows: a second-hand *cayuco*, able to hold up to 150 people, cost between €4,500 and €12,000. Engines cost about €1,500 each.¹⁶⁶ The cost of fuel for a sea journey from Mauritania to the Canary Islands was about €1,000. The pilot of a *cayuco* leaving Mauritania or Senegal for the Canary Islands was paid about €500, as well as being offered up to two free berths, which a pilot might either give to a friend or relative or sell to someone. The total cost of fitting out a 25-metre *cayuco* was therefore about €27,500 including equipment, pilots' fees, bribes and food and water for up to two weeks.¹⁶⁷ Migrants on this route paid between €800 and €1,000, payable about a week before departure, the price range depending on such factors as whether departure was guaranteed. There were no refunds for those who changed their mind. The organizer's income might be close to €135,000, allowing for free places taken by crew members and perhaps some free berths for family and friends. The net profit for a smuggler was about €107,500, or over €700 per migrant.

Crossings from Morocco to Spain cost between €1,500 and €4,000 by 2009. This is considerably more than in earlier times. In 2002, for example, it was reported that a trip across the Strait of Gibraltar cost \$1,000 to \$1,200 (€735–€882) for a *patera*, and more for a Zodiac, a fast rubber dinghy.¹⁶⁸ In 2005, it was reported that francophones, considered the poorest migrants, paid the equivalent of €800 to cross to Gibraltar or southern Spain, while anglophones paid €1,200.¹⁶⁹ Other sources confirmed similar figures, quoting about €1,000 as the price of a passage from Morocco to Spain.¹⁷⁰ On the whole, prices seem to be rising, and there is no reason to disagree with the opinion of one migrant that this is due to tighter controls on immigration.¹⁷¹ It is because of the increased likelihood of interception that boat owners no longer aim to deliver migrants and then bring their boat back to Africa, but instead consider each boat a write-off, since it is likely to be confiscated by Spanish authorities. They therefore incorporate the cost of the boat into the price charged, effectively selling the boat to the migrants.

¹⁶² Sall and Morand, "Pêche artisanale et émigration des jeunes africains" (see footnote 60), pp. 40–41.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁶⁴ Ba, "Barça ou barzakh: la migration clandestine sénégalaise" (see footnote 156), pp. 9–10.

¹⁶⁵ Francisco Javier Vélez Alcalde, "Pateras, cayucos y mafias transfronterizas en África: el negocio de las rutas atlánticas hacia las Islas Canarias", ARI No. 14/2008 (Madrid, Real Instituto Elcano, 5 February 2008).

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Guardia Civil officer, formerly assigned to the Canary Islands, 23 October 2009; group interview with Senegalese migrants, Gran Canaria, 10 November 2009.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Guardia Civil officer, formerly assigned to the Canary Islands, 23 October 2009.

¹⁶⁸ Lucile Barros and others, *L'immigration irrégulière subsaharienne à travers et vers le Maroc*, International Migration Papers, No. 54 (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2002), pp. 31–32.

¹⁶⁹ United Nations Office for West Africa, *Migrations irrégulières en provenance d'Afrique de l'Ouest* (see footnote 16), p. 8.

¹⁷⁰ Pian, "Le 'tuteur-logeur' revisité: le 'thiaman' sénégalais" (see footnote 106), p. 95, note 14.

¹⁷¹ Interview with migrant from Guinea, Melilla, 24 November 2009.

In 2009, crossing to Ceuta or Melilla hidden in a car cost between €3,000 and €4,500,¹⁷² although some migrants who took a car into Melilla in October 2009 claim to have paid just €1,000.¹⁷³ During the heyday of South Asian irregular migration, migrants paid an advance sum of €12,000 to €18,000, including a flight ticket and visa. However, the journey became progressively more difficult, and by 2008 many Asian migrants had to pay other smugglers an additional €3,000 for a crossing to Spain.¹⁷⁴

Within Europe



Migrants hidden in a car in Ceuta

Once in Spain, many migrants still find themselves paying for illicit services, although there is no evidence that the providers of such services belong to organized criminal groups. A West African migrant wishing to obtain a work permit in Spain must have an offer of employment. Businessmen in the Canary Islands are known to sell irregular migrants bogus offers of employment in agriculture, construction and other sectors for about €1,200.¹⁷⁵ Migrants in Spain who have been given an expulsion order and had their passports retained by the Spanish police can reportedly obtain a new passport by paying bribes of about €150 to €200 to civil servants in their country of origin.¹⁷⁶

The fees that West African women who are trafficked for sexual exploitation are charged to pay for the facilitation of their travel to Spain are considerably greater than those paid by other irregular migrants. The accumulated debt they are told they need to repay by prostituting themselves is about \$40,000 to \$55,000 (€29,412–€40,441).¹⁷⁷ Trafficked women normally take about two years to repay the debt. If this is the case, they repay in excess of €1,225 per month,

¹⁷² Interview with Spanish activist from Colectivo Aljaima working in Tangiers, Morocco, 30 October 2009.

¹⁷³ Interview with migrant from Cameroon in Melilla, 24 November 2009.

¹⁷⁴ Interviews with Indian migrants in Ceuta, 4 November 2009 and Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani migrants in Melilla, 23 and 24 November 2009.

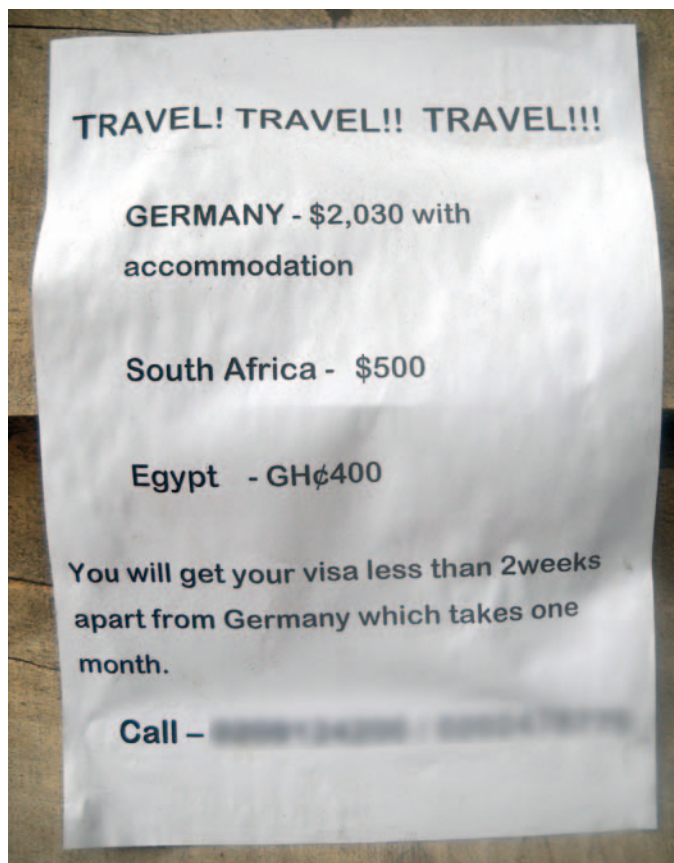
¹⁷⁵ Meeting with representative of the Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado (CEAR), Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Canary Islands, 10 November 2009.

¹⁷⁶ Meeting with CEAR representative, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Canary Islands, 10 November 2009.

¹⁷⁷ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Transnational Trafficking and the Rule of Law in West Africa* (see footnote 7), p. 43.

which, at an average of €15 per client, means that they need to find over 80 clients every month,¹⁷⁸ although they may well have money deducted from their bond repayments as a consequence of other charges levied by their madams for food, clothes and lodging, causing the final settlement of the debt to recede constantly like a mirage in the desert. In other places, sex comes much cheaper: an African prostitute working in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya may charge less than €2.50 per client and have a bond of €2,000 to pay off, often to a Nigerian madam who is in league with one of the main *passeurs* along the Kano-Agadez-Libyan Arab Jamahiriya route.

Overall market size



Advertisement on visa and accommodation in Europe

There have been attempts to calculate the overall value of the smuggling of migrants. According to calculations made by UNODC in 2006, the volume paid in transfer fees alone for smuggling people from Africa to Europe could be as much as \$300 million per year.¹⁷⁹ ICMPD estimates that more than half the irregular migrants crossing the Mediterranean have had help from smugglers, paying fees of as much as €9,333 per person.¹⁸⁰ As discussed in chapter III above, the number of people making this crossing is between 25,000 and 84,000, with figures towards the lower end of this scale being the most credible. If these figures were accurate, they would imply that the fees generated by irregular immigrants from West Africa crossing the Mediterranean are between €233 million and €781 million per year, assuming that all of these people paid smugglers for their services. However, as discussed, figures obtained by taking the number of people intercepted while crossing the Mediterranean irregularly and multiplying this figure by a factor

¹⁷⁸ Interview with representative from Women's Link Worldwide, Madrid, 2 October 2009.

¹⁷⁹ "Organized crime and irregular migration from Africa to Europe" (see footnote 9), p. 19.

¹⁸⁰ Van Moppes, "The African migration movement" (see footnote 39).

derived from research elsewhere¹⁸¹ seems, in retrospect, to produce unfeasibly high estimates. The estimates of the amount of fees paid per migrant are also high. On balance, therefore, the total turnover produced by the smuggling of migrants is more likely to be at the bottom than at the top end of this scale of estimates. Moreover, if it is assumed that most migrants actually pay much less than €9,333 in smugglers' fees, the total sum is even lower, although still massive by African standards.

It is possible to make some fairly accurate estimates of the value of specific routes, such as the €700 profit per migrant on the Africa-Canary Islands route taken by 2,246 irregular migrants in 2009,¹⁸² which may therefore have yielded a total profit of €1,572,200 to shippers. Similar calculations could be made concerning crossings from Morocco to the Spanish mainland. If these are reckoned at an average cost of €2,000, that figure may be applied to the 5,039 irregular arrivals by sea in 2009,¹⁸³ yielding an income of €10 million. However, most of these arrivals were Moroccans and Algerians rather than West Africans, while an unknown sum for expenses has to be deducted from the fee paid by migrants if smugglers' profits are to be calculated.

Given the multiplicity of routes and the length of time taken by West African migrants who may spend years travelling to North Africa and beyond, it seems impossible to arrive at a global figure for the value of the smuggling of migrants. Nevertheless, it seems safe to conclude that the sector yielding the greatest profit is probably the trafficking of women from Nigeria to southern Europe. If the estimated 10,000 to 20,000 Nigerian sex workers in Italy each have to pay a bond of €30,000—a conservative estimate—that implies an income for the trafficking networks of as much as €600 million over several years. From this amount overhead costs must be deducted, including for travel and upkeep.

Connections with profit in other crime areas

The extent to which professional smugglers of migrants also profit from other types of crime is an unknown factor. In the case of prostitution, there is a clear connection between leading traffickers and the madams who manage the girls who work for them and who constitute multinational networks. For example, in the case of the woman staying at a reception centre in Ceuta whose family home in Nigeria was burned down in retaliation for a complaint to the police, Spanish investigators believed that the man who had threatened to force her into prostitution was working with his sister, who ran a prostitution network; their connections to Nigeria were clearly good enough to effect instant reprisals.¹⁸⁴ In general, Nigerian networks for trafficking in women, centred in Edo State, are strikingly well-organized, with tentacles extending into EU. Some traffickers make extensive use of forged documents, and Lagos has a thriving forgery industry, providing another source of revenue from the smuggling of migrants. Reports by African journalists who have posed as migrants suggest that criminal operations in Nigeria involve prostitution, car theft, fraud and the smuggling of migrants simultaneously.¹⁸⁵ Forged documents are sold to would-be migrants, or even a "world passport" purported to be valid at every frontier, which is a pure fabrication. Clients expressing an interest in migration might be directed to a school where, for a fee, they can learn the techniques of Internet fraud, known in Nigeria as "Four One Nine".¹⁸⁶

A major question is whether there is a connection between the smuggling of migrants and the rapidly growing trade in cocaine¹⁸⁷ across the Sahara to North Africa and Europe. In 2005, there were already indications that some migrants were trading small quantities of cocaine over the Sahara.¹⁸⁸ Since then there have been well-attested reports

¹⁸¹ "Organized crime and irregular migration from Africa to Europe" (see footnote 9), p. 5; interview, UNODC headquarters, Vienna, 8 March 2010.

¹⁸² Spain, "El balance de la lucha contra la inmigración ilegal 2009" (see footnote 27).

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Interview, Ceuta, 4 November 2009.

¹⁸⁵ Mayah, "Europe by desert: tears of African migrants" (see footnote 12).

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁸⁷ Ellis, "West Africa's international drug trade" (see footnote 110). See also *Crime and Instability: Case Studies of Transnational Threats* published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in February 2010. Available from www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/Crime_and_instability_2010_final_26march.pdf (accessed 27 May 2010).

¹⁸⁸ Van der Aa, *Nigeriaanse toestanden* (see footnote 109), p. 21.

of convoys of 4x4 vehicles transporting large quantities of cocaine from west to east, fighting pitched battles with security forces in the Niger on occasion,¹⁸⁹ while the crash of a Boeing cargo jet in Mali in November 2009,¹⁹⁰ which may have imported a cargo of cocaine, has indicated the possible size of the south-north trade in Latin American cocaine. It is not clear who the key intermediaries in these cocaine trades are. However, the prominence of the main *passeurs* and their relations with the security forces suggest that it is quite likely that, at the very least, their businesses sometimes intersect with those of the major drug traders.



Advertised price list for fake visas



“World passport”

¹⁸⁹ Interviews with police and United Nations officials in West Africa.

¹⁹⁰ “Sahara cocaine plane crash probed”, *BBC News*, 17 November 2009. Available from: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/8364383.stm>.

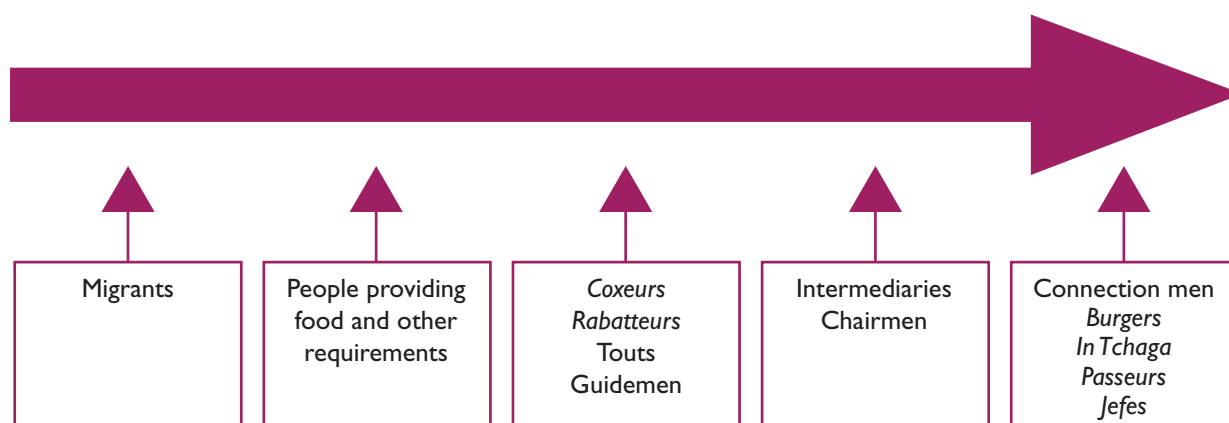


VII. THE SMUGGLERS

Typology of smugglers

Professional smugglers of migrants could be placed on a spectrum calibrated according to the nature of their activities, as shown in figure IV. At one end—the low end of the range, as it were—are migrants who are themselves en route to North Africa or Europe and who, staying for months in one of the towns along the way, such as Agadez or Gao, work as touts or agents for established operators. At the same end of the scale are local residents who are able to make money by providing services to migrants. A newcomer arriving by bus in one of the towns on a migrant route is immediately identified by touts who haunt the lorry parks, known in African French as *rabatteurs* and *coxeurs*, who induce the new arrival to accompany them to a lodging place. The key asset of those offering services to incoming migrants is simply knowledge, both of the migrants' life—since it is usually also their own experience—and of the local networks that may facilitate the newcomer to move on to the next destination. Higher up the range of specialization are local business-people or entrepreneurs who may use their existing resources for the purpose of smuggling migrants. This is the case with the professional transporters who own the vehicles that the migrants need in order to move on. When migrants reach the fringes of the Sahara, not all forms of transport will suffice. They need sturdy vehicles or even 4x4s, driven by people with a knowledge of desert conditions and of the smugglers' routes, who enable travellers to avoid official border crossings or who have good enough contacts with the police to pass through official controls.

Figure IV. Range of professional smugglers of migrants



One researcher working in the early 2000s recorded his conversations with a professional transporter of migrants, a Tuareg working for an Arab from the Niger. The Tuareg driver had for 15 years made his living by hauling millet over the desert roads from Bilma to Dirkou and returning with salt. Since the 1990s his boss, like many others in his line of business, had switched to transporting migrants, hiring his lorry out to the travel agencies that had already sprung up in Agadez. “Since then”, the driver stated, “I have transported more people in my lorry than all the grains of salt I carried in 15 years”.¹⁹¹ Professional drivers and transporters along the trans-Sahara routes are often Saharan nomads who have adapted to the new demand represented by increased migration.¹⁹² Examples include many Tuareg in Mali and the Niger, Toubou in Chad and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, and Zaghawa in Chad and the Sudan. It was said some years ago that key figures controlling the trans-desert trade were former participants in the Tuareg insurrections of the 1990s.¹⁹³ In regard to the Agadez-Libyan Arab Jamahiriya route, many were veterans of Colonel Al-Qadhafi’s Islamic Legion, who not only know the terrain intimately, but have invaluable contacts with Libyan officials.¹⁹⁴

During his fieldwork between 2004 and 2007, the Beninese journalist Serge Daniel described the different categories of smuggler operating along the Morocco-Algeria border, many of them from south of the Sahara. At the lowest end of the pecking order were “several hundred”¹⁹⁵ sub-Saharanans who made only small profits. Almost all of these would have themselves been irregular migrants who had been in the Maghreb long enough to acquire some local knowledge. These touts or fixers received newcomers and showed them to lodging houses or ghettos, generally grouping people together by nationality. The ghettos are generally owned by professional *passeurs* who have invested some of their profits in this sector. Another and more prestigious category consists of more experienced professional guides, who are often integrated into well-organized trafficking networks. Working along two distinct routes, one to Morocco and one to Tamanrasset in Algeria, Daniel found that “they form a sort of mafia which controls the flow of border crossings, has its own rules and controls a territory the size of the European Union as though this was their exclusive right”.¹⁹⁶ Guides such as these, routinely equipped with satellite phones, are figures of considerable influence. At the requisite moment, a guide will take a group of migrants from their lodging to the vehicle arranging their transport (if they are to be driven across a border, rather than passing on foot) and they are then taken across the frontier, often by an unofficial path or in such a manner as to avoid detection.

Involvement of some national authorities

In addition to the various professional smugglers, it is important to note the role of State officials at all stages of the route, but particularly during the desert crossing. Research in Mali reveals the role of State officials in corruptly providing passports, identity cards and various other documents to migrants. These may then be sold on by migrants to others. A Malian passport is particularly useful, as it gives rights to entry to Algeria that are not available to other ECOWAS nationals. Of 50 migrants interviewed in Mali in preparation for the present report, 22 men and 3 women said that they were aware of corruption enabling them to acquire documents. Women tend to have less direct knowledge of this, as a significant proportion of female migrants are escorted by Nigerian facilitators (known as trolleys), who deliver them to brothel keepers or pimps in Morocco and who pay all the fees en route. At borders, police, immigration and customs officials routinely demand bribes for allowing migrants to pass without documents.

Both migrants and academic researchers have alleged that Government officials from Agadez northward openly and routinely solicit bribes. They are expert in searching for hidden money and will even administer a laxative if they suspect a migrant of carrying cocaine or other drugs in packages that they have swallowed. It is also alleged that female migrants who arrive in the isolated desert town of Dirkou in the Niger are routinely required to perform sexual services for soldiers of the military garrison. “The problem there is that if you are at all good-looking, if the soldiers see you and want you then your madam has to give you to them to avoid problems ... You may even have to

¹⁹¹ Bensaâd, “Agadez, carrefour migratoire sah lo maghr bin” (see footnote 105), para. 22.

¹⁹² De Haas, *The Myth of Invasion: Irregular Migration from West Africa* (see footnote 5), pp. 12-13.

¹⁹³ Bensa d, “Agadez, carrefour migratoire sah lo maghr bin” (see footnote 105), para. 23.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 24.

¹⁹⁵ Daniel, *Les routes clandestines* (see footnote 8), p. 112.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

stay a week. You will be fed but you will suffer ... At the end they give you 10,000 CFA at best".¹⁹⁷ Conditions at Madama, the last town in the Niger, even more remote than Dirkou, are reputed to be similar. Many sub-Saharan migrants who have stayed in North Africa give accounts of beatings, imprisonment and bribe-taking by police officers and complicity between officials and smugglers to the point that migrants may even be "sold" from one to the other.¹⁹⁸ In his study of the route from Agadez to North Africa published in 2005, Brachet describes officials as constituting one of the three main actors in the trans-Saharan migration process, the other two being the migrants themselves and transporters. These three groups coexist, involved in seemingly endless negotiations at each stage of a migrant's journey.¹⁹⁹

The relationship between irregular migrants, local businesspeople and officialdom has become so entrenched as to take on a strategic dimension. In his introduction to a special number of the journal *Maghreb-Machrek* published in 2005, Bensaâd argued that the Maghreb countries in effect use migration from sub-Saharan Africa northward in order to generate what he terms a "geographic income" ("*rente géographique*"), referring not only to the money that can be made directly from the streams of travellers, but also to the strategic possibilities offered to North African Governments in their dealings with the European Union. A good example concerns the mass arrivals in the Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla in 2005, which occurred during a crisis in diplomatic relations between Morocco and Spain. Observers interviewed in 2009 had little doubt that the migrants' activities enabled Moroccan authorities to exert pressure on the Government of Spain.

In sum, it is clear that the people who profit financially from the presence of irregular migrants belong to a great number of categories, and that few are professional criminals or members of organized criminal groups in any normal sense. Indeed, many of the profiteers are themselves aspiring migrants struggling to earn the money they need to continue their journey. Some migrants may actually make enough money from charging fees to fellow migrants that they decide not to continue to Europe, since they have already found a lucrative niche elsewhere. In regard to local populations, researchers on both the Atlantic routes (by sea from Mauritania, Senegal or points further south to the Canary Islands) and the western and central Mediterranean routes (overland via Gao and Agadez to Algeria and Morocco or to the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) have found that the people most immediately responsible for transporting migrants to the next stage of their journey are local people, generally with an appropriate professional background, who may combine the profits they make from exploiting the needs of migrants with income from a more conventional, legal source. These are the drivers of desert vehicles or the skippers of fishing boats from Senegal. In regard to the latter, there is a vigorous debate as to the extent to which Atlantic fishermen may be turning to smuggling people as a consequence of overfishing by foreign fleets in their waters.²⁰⁰

South Asian smugglers

The smugglers who most closely conform to a definition of organized criminal operatives are those integrated into major transnational networks. The most obvious of these are the Asian smugglers of migrants, who, from the early 2000s at least until very recently, took advance fees of up to €18,000 to send migrants to countries in the Sahel with a view to their proceeding to Europe. Many migrants from Bangladesh, India or Pakistan who attempted the West African route before 2008 testify to the capacity of West and North African smugglers to collaborate with each other and with smugglers back home in Asia with whom they have phone contact. South Asian smugglers have on occasion travelled to West Africa to facilitate journeys made by South Asian migrants, or have worked with South Asians resident in West Africa.²⁰¹ These testimonies reveal the existence of West African smuggling organizations as far south as Burkina Faso.²⁰² Especially between 2006 and 2008, many Asian migrants were flown, sometimes with forged visas, into West Africa. On arrival, they would be picked up at the airport by West African smugglers who had

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Nigerian woman, Agadez, December 2009.

¹⁹⁸ See for example the accounts in *Come un uomo sulla terra*.

¹⁹⁹ Brachet, "Migrants, transporteurs et agents de l'État" (see footnote 103), pp. 43–62.

²⁰⁰ Sall and Morand, "Pêche artisanale et émigration des jeunes africains" (see footnote 60).

²⁰¹ Interviews with Indian migrants in Ceuta and Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani migrants in Melilla, November 2009.

²⁰² Ibid.

been contracted by smugglers back in the migrants' countries of origin, or by South Asian residents in West Africa linked to South Asian smuggling networks, who would attempt to obtain visas and onward flights to Europe for them.²⁰³ Some Pakistani smugglers reportedly flew with the migrants from Pakistan or would meet them in person when they arrived in West Africa.²⁰⁴ On arrival, the smugglers—whether West African or South Asian—exerted complete control over the migrants by taking their passports away.²⁰⁵ Migrants were kept in private houses by West African or South Asian smugglers while the latter tried to find a way of getting them on planes to Europe.²⁰⁶ This could mean attempting to obtain a visa in more than one country. In other cases, smugglers arranged for migrants to fly directly to North Africa and be taken into Spain by North African transporters for a fee, paid by the South Asian bosses who had received cash for full-package arrangements.²⁰⁷

When South Asian smugglers resorted to the trans-Saharan routes, South Asian migrants would use the same routes and smugglers as West African migrants. However, most South Asians were transported separately which indicates that West African smugglers viewed them as a specific market. One Indian migrant interviewed during the research for the present study made his entire journey across the Sahara and into Melilla with a mixed group of South Asian and West African migrants, but his case appears to be exceptional.²⁰⁸ Migrants who had been dispatched from South Asia by different smuggling networks at times travelled together on the trans-Sahara route, clearly indicating contact between different South Asian networks, as well as with the West African networks organizing onward travel. For example, a group of migrants from Bangladesh were kept in the same house in Mali as other migrants from Punjab, India. The Bangladeshi and Indian smugglers who had organized their journeys visited them together in the house, the groups travelled together, and both groups were asked by the smugglers to pay extra money for their onward journey at the same time.²⁰⁹

There is clear evidence of contact between South Asian and West African smugglers along the whole route. On each leg of the journey, the local smugglers, *passeurs* or those supposed to provide transport, food and accommodation would ask the migrants for the name and contact number of the smuggler back in South Asia. They would then contact him, via mobile or satellite phone, to negotiate their fees. Each time a payment to a local smuggler was due, the smuggler in South Asia would have to use part of the full-package payment that he had received from the migrants prior to their journey, thus reducing his profit. The South Asian smuggler would therefore try to bring down the prices for the African smuggler's services to the migrants.²¹⁰

Over the years, as entry into EU from Africa by sea became more difficult, South Asian migrants have been reduced to the condition of hostages; they could be kept confined for months, on the verge of starvation, while those in control of their fate bargained over payment. Being dependent on the ongoing interest of their original South Asian smuggler, South Asian migrants travelling through West and North Africa are in an extremely vulnerable position, without passports, without knowledge of the area and without a social network of countrymen along the route to protect or assist them. Moreover, as all their money has already been used for the full-package fee, they do not have the means to pay for extra services needed along the way. Some are reduced to drinking their own urine. Delays in communicating and more particularly delays in payment explain the extraordinarily long journeys—up to three years—that most South Asian migrants who have attempted the trans-Saharan route in later years have had to endure. Some Bangladeshi and Indian migrants interviewed for the present report were, for example, left stranded for days or weeks at the point of handover between Malian and Algerian smugglers until money arrived from South Asia.²¹¹ Groups of African smugglers are known to have occasionally “sold” Asian migrants to other groups, probably when their contact with the South Asian smuggler has broken down. Such cases have been reported in Burkina Faso and Mali.²¹²

²⁰³ Group interview with Pakistani migrants, Melilla, 24 November 2009.

²⁰⁴ Interview with Pakistani migrant in Melilla, 23 November 2009.

²⁰⁵ Interviews with Indian migrants in Ceuta and Melilla, November 2009.

²⁰⁶ Group interview with Pakistani migrants, Melilla, 24 November 2009.

²⁰⁷ Interview with Indian migrant who had flown into Morocco, Ceuta, 5 November 2009.

²⁰⁸ Interview with Indian migrant in Melilla, 24 November 2009.

²⁰⁹ Interview with Bangladeshi migrants in Melilla, 23 November 2009.

²¹⁰ Interviews with Indian migrants in Ceuta, 5 November 2009; and Pakistani migrants in Melilla, 23 November 2009.

²¹¹ Interviews with Indian and Bangladeshi migrants in Melilla, 24 November 2009.

²¹² Interviews with Indian migrants in Ceuta, 5 November 2009; and Pakistani migrants in Melilla, 23 November 2009.

In cases where South Asian smugglers are known to have contacted smugglers along the whole length of the trans-Saharan route and to have paid each one in advance, migrants' journeys have been much smoother and quicker. Thus, a number of Pakistani migrants were transported from Burkina Faso to Nador in Morocco via Mali and Algeria in just 18 days, travelling mostly in cars driven by local smugglers and changing vehicles upon arrival in the next country. The smugglers communicated with walkie-talkies and there was good coordination for dropping and picking up the Pakistani migrants at every stage of the journey.²¹³ In January 2006, Morocco's Direction Générale de la Sûreté Nationale broke up a smuggling ring of this type in which Malian businessmen had contracted to transport Asian migrants overland by car from Gao to Morocco as part of a larger transnational network. The transporters also owned trucks that they used to carry sub-Saharan migrants.²¹⁴

The strength of the international links developed by some South Asian smugglers may also be illustrated by the case of one Bangladeshi migrant who, after being expelled by the Moroccan police to the border with Algeria, called his contact back in Bangladesh and paid extra money for him to contact an Algerian smuggler in Maghnia who was known to the Bangladeshi smuggler. The Algerian smuggler received a mini-full package to take his new client all the way to Spain. Accordingly, the migrant was taken in short order to Oujda, the main Moroccan border town, then to the Moroccan port of Nador, and finally by boat to Melilla. In other cases, where migrants do not have a contact phone number, relatives visit the smuggler back in South Asia and request intervention.²¹⁵

The most unfortunate Asian migrants—other, that is, than those who lose their lives en route—are the substantial numbers who have been dropped by their original South Asian smugglers once the migrants have arrived in Morocco, forcing them to look for other smugglers and pay additional fees for the final crossing to Spain or simply to remain in limbo.²¹⁶ A likely explanation for this breach in communication is that, after several years of trying to facilitate the journey of South Asian migrants through West Africa, South Asian smugglers decided in around 2008 to close this route and try other ways of sending migrants to Europe. Since that moment, South Asian smugglers have had no interest in promoting the West African route, having reportedly turned their attention to a new route into Europe via the Russian Federation. The fate of the Asians stuck in Africa is no longer of concern to them.

Chinese smugglers

Until 2007 there were also Chinese rings involved in the smuggling of migrants, bringing Chinese migrants into the Canary Islands in large fishing boats. Their smuggling route also included West African countries, as journalist Serge Daniel detected when he met African officials who confirmed the existence of such networks, notably at the Mauritanian port of Nouadhibou, an important point of departure for migrants to the Canary Islands as well as a major harbour for long-distance fishing boats from Asia and elsewhere.²¹⁷ In its heyday, the main organizers of this smuggling were generally Chinese citizens residing in the Canary Islands working in conjunction with Chinese citizens in China and in some places in West Africa. Each migrant paid between €10,000 and €20,000 for the full package to Spain, receiving a visa (either a tourist visa or one valid for a ship's crew) for a West African country before departure from China. Migrants would fly to Guinea, Mauritania or Senegal, where Chinese smugglers would be waiting. Migrants would then be hidden in fishing boats bound for the Canary Islands, each boat carrying 100 to 200 passengers. Equipped with Chinese passports but without Spanish visas, they would then fly on to mainland Spain, where many would have relatives or friends, normally taking regular night flights, since travel documents are often not checked on flights from the Canary Islands to mainland Spain, especially at night.²¹⁸

²¹³ Interview with Pakistani migrant in Melilla, 23 November 2009.

²¹⁴ Daniel, *Les routes clandestines* (see footnote 8), p. 131.

²¹⁵ Interview with Bangladeshi migrant in Melilla, 23 November 2009.

²¹⁶ Interview with Indian migrant in a reception centre in Ceuta, 5 November 2009.

²¹⁷ Daniel, *Les routes clandestines* (see footnote 8), pp. 195–196, 197–198 and 201–202.

²¹⁸ Interview with lawyers of irregular migrants, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Canary Islands, 9 November 2009.



VIII. THE MIGRANT-SMUGGLER RELATIONSHIP

The ambiguity of the relationship

During the months or even years that they spend on the road, migrants from south of the Sahara form social and economic relationships with others that are ambiguous, in the sense that these relationships provide the means by which migrants are exploited at the same time as they provide companionship, psychological comfort and sources of information. Whereas the full-package system used by Asian migrants to enter Europe does not require cultivating social relationships along the route for as long as the contract is faithfully executed, the great majority of sub-Saharan travellers use the social relationships they forge as a way of gaining access to the facilities and contacts they require to cross borders illegally. (A substantial number of African women who contract a full-package debt that they have to repay through earnings in the sex trade also use social relationships, although in a different way.) Since many of the services required by irregular migrants are supplied by fellow migrants, often of the same nationality as themselves, friendships and business relationships become hard, or even impossible, to disaggregate.

Different types of migrants have different sorts of experiences. Asian migrants, probably not speaking any African languages, are the least likely to form durable relationships with the smugglers or with others whom they encounter en route. On the basis of their experiences, some develop a deep fear of Africans, whom they have come to know mostly as people likely to maltreat and exploit them. Many Africans have only a slightly less negative view of Moroccans and Libyans. “Nigerians who travel to these countries find it extremely difficult to have a meaningful breakthrough, especially the non-Muslims”, Nigerian journalist Orji Ogbonnaya Orji observed.²¹⁹ However, sub-Saharan migrants who stay long enough in North Africa to learn Arabic and form social relationships with local officials may develop a way of life that makes it unnecessary for them to travel further.

Thus, there is evidence that the chairmen who govern small groups of migrants are tending to become more professional, and perhaps even to develop the wherewithal to become connection men. The latter are somewhere near the most profitable end of the commercial chain. To be successful, a connection man must have relations with people in the communities formed by African migrants, but also with local officials and with the array of document forgers, transporters and others necessary for the successful conveyance of migrants, who together constitute networks that may reasonably be described as organized criminal networks. The importance of connection men varies from one route to another. They were less important on the sea route from Africa to the Canary Islands before 2007, when it was at its peak, than on the land routes through Gao and Agadez to the North African coast, simply because migrants

²¹⁹ Orji, *Inside Aso Rock* (see footnote 87), p. 112.

passing from Senegal to the Canaries have only one border to cross, whereas those passing from the Sahel to Spain via North Africa are confronted by a series of borders.

The ambiguity of the relationships between those who profit from the smuggling of migrants and those who pay them results in relationships with a wide range of moral valence. Sometimes the relationships that develop as a consequence of the shared experience of clandestinity can be surprisingly durable. Serge Daniel, finding in Paris some Africans who had worked as *passeurs* and had themselves migrated to Europe, noted that “illegal migrants never lose all contact with the *passeurs*. It is like a love affair: one attracts the other, and it is reciprocated”.²²⁰ Research for the current report confirmed this intimate connection in some cases, such as the case of the travel brokers in Agadez who decorate their offices with pictures that their most successful clients have sent from Europe, or the Ivorian national encountered in Algeciras who remained in phone contact with the Nigerian connection man who had secured his berth from Morocco as well as with a Togolese “guideman” who had served his apprenticeship to the same Nigerian connection man and been rewarded with a free berth, enabling him to make his way to Paris.²²¹ But these may be exceptional cases. Out of 50 migrants interviewed in Mali, for example, 16 described the touts whom they met along their journey as “criminals” and 10 saw them as profiteers, while six said they were merely doing their job.

As for the *passeurs* themselves, many profess to be proud of their trade. Some interviewed in Agadez were indignant that they should be represented as criminals, claiming that they were aiding people in their fundamental right to travel. However, there are grounds for questioning this point of view. Those who claim to be unable to understand objections to their line of work, since they are merely providing a service fail to mention that smugglers of migrants, who generally know from their own experience what difficulties lie in wait for travellers, feed their clients’ illusions, sometimes quite artfully and often cynically. They have a financial incentive to keep the whole system in operation.

Only rarely do we hear of smugglers making special efforts to help clients in distress. One such example was in June 2009, when 22 sub-Saharan migrants were in an inflatable motorboat that got into difficulties in the Strait of Gibraltar. The Spanish rescue service was called out from a base near Tarifa after the Spanish Red Cross had received a text message sent by a Nigerian connection man in Rabat, giving the approximate location of the boat, which had departed from Punta Malabata near Tangier. The connection man had himself received a text message from a member of his network in Tangier who had been in contact with the migrants travelling on the boat. The message received by the connection man, in an SMS version of Nigerian pidgin English, was as follows:

Bros ur friend smart deh among people who travel to spain, they say their engine off ontap of water uptill now nobody hear from them. so u people should try to call spanish rescue, from tanger yesterday. Okey.²²²

In other cases, relationships developed by migrants on their way through Africa are characterized by coercion and violence. Serge Daniel recounts a story told to him by a young Malian who had been forcibly removed from Ceuta to Morocco. In Casablanca and Fes the Malian had become associated with a gang of Nigerians whom he described as “very tough”, and they forced him to sell drugs.²²³ Smugglers of migrants working on the route through the desert from Gao to Algeria sometimes confiscate migrants’ passports and force the migrants to work for them, even for months, at such remote locations as Kidal and Tessalit²²⁴—a further illustration of the unclear distinction between smuggling of migrants and trafficking of persons. The medical charity Médecins sans Frontières has noted that some migrants come to them bearing marks of violence inflicted by smugglers who impose what is described as “iron discipline” and even terrorize the migrants under their control. The same organization also refers to feuds, disappearances and torture in this context. Orji wrote in 2003, concerning gangs that smuggled migrants to South Africa, that “the relationships between these Nigerians and the syndicates, I learnt, were characterized by exploitation and forced labour”.²²⁵

²²⁰ Daniel, *Les routes clandestines* (see footnote 8), p. 261.

²²¹ Interview, Algeciras, 7 November 2009.

²²² SMS provided by a Spanish Red Cross representative in Ceuta, 5 November 2009. See also www.elpais.com, 4 June 2009.

²²³ Daniel, *Les routes clandestines* (see footnote 8), p. 181.

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 176.

²²⁵ Orji, *Inside Aso Rock* (see footnote 87), p. 114.

Relationships between smugglers and female migrants

Women are vulnerable to particular forms of violence, as female migrants are at high risk of sexual abuse almost from the moment they leave their countries of origin. It seems that the great majority of women who contract a full-package arrangement to go to North Africa in the company of a courier, or “trolley”, know that they will be required to work in the sex trade to repay their debt. There exists a fundamental difference between female and male migrants as regards payment of full packages. Whereas males are required to pay the whole fee upfront, females are usually asked for only a small first instalment or nothing at all, thus making the travel more attractive. As a result, the possibility of exploitation through debt bondage is present from the very beginning of the migration process.

One prospective sex worker from Nigeria encountered in Agadez in 2005, travelling on her own, even expressed amazement on being told that there were women who were lured into prostitution,²²⁶ as she had thought that all such women went knowingly into this type of work. Nevertheless, many women may have little idea of the actual conditions that apply in sex work abroad. They are vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation almost from the very start of their journey. One migrant from Côte d’Ivoire claimed that the first time he set out from Gao, the Tuareg driver had clearly tipped off police, who stopped their vehicle some distance north of the town and proceeded to take money from the passengers, stripping and raping several of the women.²²⁷ Women who are trafficked may be forced by their traffickers to have sex with law enforcement agents to facilitate their journeys or otherwise be forced to prostitute themselves throughout the journey.

Whether or not they intend to work in the sex industry, all female migrants are particularly vulnerable in Algeria and Morocco, in the last stages of their journey. West African migrants often lack legal protection in the Maghreb,²²⁸ whereas as long as they remain in the ECOWAS zone they may enjoy a regular legal status by virtue of the agreements binding its Member States. It is common for migrants to be expelled from North Africa again and again, obliging them to restart their journeys from Mali or Nigeria. In North Africa, even independent women migrants run the risk of being recruited by traffickers if they have run out of money entirely. A migrant from Côte d’Ivoire interviewed for this study said: “When I lived in Rabat, my neighbours were Nigerians. They held a woman in their house for some three months, handcuffing her and raping her repeatedly. Nigerian girls are bought and sold, and there are places where they are kept in Oujda and Maghnia.”²²⁹ In a study of 130 sub-Saharan women in Morocco and Spain, Women’s Link Worldwide found that 63 per cent of the women interviewed in Morocco had experienced violence and 17 per cent claimed to have been raped. Of those in Spain, 17 per cent claimed to have been raped by a police officer in Morocco.²³⁰ These figures may actually be rather low, owing to the reticence of migrants about such matters.

Many women who have experienced the desert crossing and have suffered sustained sexual abuse become noticeably aggressive in speech and demeanour. When women are forced into foreign prostitution, “their perception of the world changes inexorably”, according to a specialized study. “Only a major personality change can enable them to face this kind of life ... they must quickly learn to use coarse and aggressive forms of behaviour—and to rely on themselves alone.”²³¹

Relationships between smugglers and male migrants

Men also have stories of robbery, imprisonment and abuse. One Nigerian migrant who had returned from the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya reported how “some drivers deliberately take migrants to rebels to be robbed and later abandoned in the desert to die”. Conversely, some migrants abandoned in the desert are reported to have been recruited by Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb or another outlaw group and offered safe delivery in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya

²²⁶ Van der Aa, *Nigeriaanse toestanden* (see footnote 109), p. 23.

²²⁷ Interview with migrant from Côte d’Ivoire in Algeciras, 6 November 2009.

²²⁸ United Nations Office for West Africa, *Migrations irrégulières en provenance d’Afrique de l’Ouest* (see footnote 16), p. 61.

²²⁹ Interview with migrant from Côte d’Ivoire in Algeciras, 6 November 2009.

²³⁰ Women’s Link Worldwide, “Los derechos de las mujeres migrantes: una realidad invisible”, available from www.womenslinkworldwide.org.

²³¹ Paola Monzini, *Sex Traffic: Prostitution, Crime and Exploitation* (London, Zed Books, 2005), p. 40.

in return for taking part in a number of operations.²³² The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya is particularly feared as a place to be imprisoned. A travel agent interviewed in Agadez commented: “The conditions are truly inhuman. I visited [a prison] but when I saw the conditions where Blacks are held I had tears in my eyes. I saw Senegalese, Cameroonians, Gambians. It was really difficult to bear.”²³³ There are accounts of traffickers and connection men in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya purposely delivering migrants into the hands of the police. Another Nigerian who had returned from the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya described how more than 20 people he had met were now serving life imprisonment there after being accused of drug trading or other offences, and another 15 were dead, of whom six had died in fights. “The Nigerian embassy does not care because they are illegal migrants,” he said.²³⁴ In July 2009, there were reported to be 20 Nigerians awaiting execution in Libyan prisons.²³⁵

While many current or former migrants have clearly suffered all manner of abuse during their journeys, and even those who have succeeded in entering EU may continue to live in conditions of extreme poverty, it is striking that few, if any, speak of themselves as victims. They may testify to the callousness of transporters and the brutality of police officers while continuing to regard themselves as ultimately able to determine their own fate, subject to the will of God. To readers accustomed to thinking in terms of rights, and of those whose rights are flouted as being victims, this position may seem puzzling. Generally speaking, West African migrants are much less inclined to speak of their experiences than South Asian migrants, who have often had experiences at least as traumatic.

Many migrants from sub-Saharan Africa come from communities in which entry into adult life is traditionally marked by formal ritualistic initiation over an extended period, often involving physical hardship. Initiates undergoing the experience of a change in phases of life have classically been described by anthropologists as being in a “liminal” condition, between two different states of being,²³⁶ such as youth and adulthood. Many West Africans seem to experience migration as a sort of liminal period, of exceptional duration, from which they hope to emerge onto a higher plane of existence. Some Nigerians who have reached the isolated town of Madama, where communication with the outside world is possible only by satellite phone, are said to regard their new existence as “a total rebirth”.²³⁷ As written by an unknown detainee on the wall of a detention centre in Mauritania where people suspected of being irregular migrants are held: “Suffering is a school of wisdom. If at a point in life you think of giving up, looking back at the way already taken will restore your morale. Life is a struggle. Whatever happens to us in our life, we should never give up.”²³⁸ In general, sub-Saharan Africans experience the crossing of the Sahara as a trial both physical and spiritual in nature.²³⁹ Sub-Saharan migrants use distinctive vocabularies for various aspects of their experience, usually referred to in French as an *aventure*, while the migrant is an *aventurier*. In Lingala, the most widely spoken language in Kinshasa, the various stages of migration are expressed by a range of terms. A migrant beginning on his or her adventure is referred to as *likoko* (an insect), in time becoming a *muana Poto* or *benguiste* (European).²⁴⁰

Feeding illusions

A Moroccan expert, Mohamed Khachani, describes migrants as being victims of “a trade in illusions”.²⁴¹ While the factors that induce migrants to leave their homes to undertake a long and dangerous journey to Europe fall outside the scope of the present report, it is clear that migrants’ motives are not purely economic or political. Complex ideologies have formed over time to become possibly the most powerful inducements of all to people from sub-Saharan

²³² Information provided to researchers in Agadez, December 2009.

²³³ Interview, Agadez, December 2009; cf. Kenyon, *I am Justice: A Journey Out of Africa* (see footnote 98), pp. 60–71.

²³⁴ Interview with male returnee from Anambra State, 22 December 2009.

²³⁵ Mayah, “Europe by desert: tears of African migrants” (see footnote 12), p. 25.

²³⁶ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1969).

²³⁷ Interviews with returned migrants, Nigeria, December 2009.

²³⁸ Original quotation: “La souffrance est une école de sagesse. Si à une certaine étape de la vie tu penses désister, regarde en arrière et les étapes traversées te remonteront sûrement le morale. La vie est un combat. Qu’est-ce qu’il puisse arriver dans notre vie, il ne faut jamais baisser les bras”.

²³⁹ C. Escoffier, “La traversée du Sahara: une expérience initiatique?”, in *Les relations transsahariennes à l’époque contemporaine: un espace en constante mutation*, Laurence Marfaing and Steffen Wippel, eds. (Paris, Karthala; Berlin, ZMO, 2004), pp. 141–148; cf. Lamine Ndiaye, “L’émigration ‘clandestine’ au Sénégal: acte criminel ou éthique ‘moderne’ d’une société en panne?”, *Ethiopiques*, vol. 80, 2008, pp. 255–267.

²⁴⁰ Escoffier, *Transmigrant-e-s africain-e-s au Maghreb* (see footnote 53), p. 150.

²⁴¹ Quoted in Daniel, *Les routes clandestines* (see footnote 8), p. 131.

Africa to try their luck at migrating to Europe. It is these complex ideologies that Khachani describes as “illusions”. However, it is also possible to detect a self-serving and cynical element in the manner in which people who derive financial benefit from irregular migration help to maintain the myth of wealth in Europe, which in the great majority of cases turns out to be illusory. For example, a *passeur* in Agadez interviewed by one of the researchers for the present report protested being represented as a criminal. Pointing to a billboard carrying an anti-smuggling poster equating irregular migration with rape, death and AIDS, he said: “I don’t understand why people make problems because of our work.” He claimed that he and his colleagues were merely helping migrants to realize their dreams. All manner of connection men and smugglers might well make similar justifications if challenged. It is very much in their interest to maintain the illusions that are such a basic motivation for people to migrate.

The smugglers of migrants, so many of whom have themselves started off as migrants, make money out of the myth of Europe as a continent where good money is to be made by anyone who is prepared to work hard. Although Europe is undeniably richer than Africa, this image of a land of plenty is at odds with the difficult life of irregular migrants who, even if they reach Europe, may be obliged to live from hand to mouth, unable to find decent employment owing to their lack of papers, frequently spurned by European societies. So powerful is the myth of Europe that not only are fresh cohorts of migrants ready to start their journeys every year, but those who arrive in Europe but fail to prosper may still refuse to return to Africa, for fear of the shame they would incur at coming home empty-handed. The more difficult it becomes to reach Europe, the greater the myth of this promised land.



IX. THE HUMAN AND SOCIAL COSTS OF THE SMUGGLING OF MIGRANTS

The most obvious measure of the human cost of the smuggling of migrants is the number of people who lose their lives every year while attempting to travel from West Africa to Europe. Among their stories of violence and deceit, most migrants also have a story of death, of bodies seen in the desert or of friends who have disappeared after going to sea.

Fortress Europe, a website that gathers information on immigration to the European Union, calculates on the basis of press reports that 14,797 people died on Europe's frontiers in the 21 years from 1988 to 2009. Of these, 10,816 died or went missing on sea crossings via the Atlantic or the Mediterranean, of whom 4,445 died on the routes from Algeria, Mauritania and Morocco towards Spain, either direct to the mainland or to the Canary Islands; 4,176 perished in the channel between North Africa and Malta or Italy; and 138 died sailing from Algeria to Sardinia. These statistics do not distinguish between North African and West African migrants. Since the figures gathered over a period of 20 years, they imply an average of fewer than 1,000 fatalities per year on the sea routes from Africa to Europe. If a third of these were sub-Saharanans, it would imply some 300 to 350 deaths of sub-Saharan migrants per year on the sea lanes. However, during this period, the numbers of migrants travelling by sea increased greatly before declining in recent times, and the number of deaths would vary proportionately. In other words, at peak times the number of migrants lost at sea may have been over 1,000 per year, including hundreds of sub-Saharan Africans.

The figures produced by Fortress Europe are based on press sources only, which no doubt report only a fraction of actual deaths at sea. The United Nations Office for West Africa quotes an estimate of the Global Commission on International Migration that 2,000 migrants lose their lives each year trying to cross the Mediterranean.²⁴² These figures apply not only to sub-Saharan Africans but also to the many North Africans and others who make such journeys. If one third were sub-Saharan migrants, this would imply a figure of close to 700 losing their lives in the Mediterranean each year, to which casualties on the Atlantic route must be added.

In regard to the Sahara, at least 1,691 people are reported to have died since 1996 while attempting desert crossings. This figure is likely to be a serious underestimate.²⁴³ According to a migrant interviewed in Niamey, conditions after leaving Dirkou towards the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya are very difficult. "Entire lorries full of migrants disappear.

²⁴² United Nations Office for West Africa, *Migrations irrégulières en provenance d'Afrique de l'Ouest* (see footnote 16), p. 9. The same figure is quoted by Adepoju, *Migration in Sub-Saharan Africa* (see footnote 2), p. 23.

²⁴³ <http://fortresseurope.blogspot.com/2006/01/fortress-europe.html>.

People who cross the border are sometimes picked up by the army on the border. It is a tragedy, a real tragedy.”²⁴⁴ While many migrants claim to have seen corpses in the desert or to know of friends who disappeared en route, the evidence is anecdotal and cannot easily be translated into figures.

One authoritative source suggests that the quoted mortality figures should be multiplied by three to obtain a more accurate estimate.²⁴⁵ Catholic church sources in Nouadhibou and the Mauritanian Red Crescent have both estimated that as many as 20 to 30 per cent of migrants attempting sea crossings from Mauritania to the Canaries may have died in 2006, or even 40 per cent in the worst period, February and March 2006. Since some 20,000 people left Nouadhibou for the Canary Islands that year, this implies a death toll on this one route of as many as 4,000 to 8,000 people in 2006 alone.²⁴⁶ Another estimate is that between 1999 and 2002, up to 10,000 irregular migrants may have died crossing the Strait of Gibraltar.²⁴⁷ Continuing to assume that about 30 per cent were from south of the Sahara, this implies some 3,000 deaths of sub-Saharan migrants in that period, or 1,000 per year.

None of the above figures can be regarded with complete confidence. They are estimates based on the best indications available. Figures for deaths in the desert are particularly difficult to come by. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to suggest that an average of over 1,000 West Africans die per year trying to cross the Sahara or to reach Europe by boat, or about 3 people per day.

²⁴⁴ Interview, Niamey, 23 December 2009.

²⁴⁵ United Nations Office for West Africa, *Migrations irrégulières en provenance d'Afrique de l'Ouest* (see footnote 16), p. 61.

²⁴⁶ See also Choplin, “*L’immigré, le migrant, l’allochtone*” (see footnote 83), p. 85, note 34.

²⁴⁷ International Organization for Migration, “Cooperation between countries of origin, transit, and destination: Mali-Morocco-Belgium and other European countries”, unpublished memorandum (n.p., n.d.), p. 1.



X. INTERACTION BETWEEN SMUGGLING OF MIGRANTS AND COUNTER-SMUGGLING APPROACHES

There is no doubt that official measures to repress migration provoke countermeasures. Thus, as noted by ICMPD²⁴⁸ after the mass attempt at forced entry in Ceuta and Melilla in October 2005, and ensuing action by the Moroccan and Spanish authorities, there was a decrease in the number of people using the western Mediterranean route and a corresponding shift to the West Africa route. In effect, migrants seeking to reach Spanish territory were pushed further south. Despite the length and danger of the sea journey from Senegal or countries farther south, arrivals in the Canary Islands increased to 31,678 people in 2006 before falling off rapidly as conditions changed. More recent years have seen the rise and fall of the route from the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to Italy, especially to the island of Lampedusa, where the number of arrivals reached over 31,000 in 2008.

It is largely the wish to evade official controls that causes migrants to have recourse to the services of professional lawbreakers. The migrants who are the best connected with criminal networks become the ones most likely to succeed in their aim of getting to Europe.²⁴⁹ The rise in demand for services provided by smugglers increases the profits associated with this activity, thereby causing casual lawbreakers, such as the chairmen and other migrants who themselves make only small amounts of money from the smuggling of migrants at the outset, to become increasingly professional. The smuggling of migrants takes on the features of a vast industry that depends on keeping the flow of migrants moving. Hence, at the heart of the relationship between migrants who aspire to enter Europe and authorities seeking to apply increasingly rigorous laws designed to restrict the opportunities for migration to people belonging to legally designated categories, there lies the paradox that an increase in the rigour with which laws are made and implemented translates into a rise in criminal activities associated with irregular migration.

It is possible that smuggling of migrants, as it becomes more lucrative, may actually attract the attention of transnational organized criminal groups with no previous interest in migration but with expertise in other branches of crime, although there is no clear evidence of this. There are some signs, however, that smugglers of migrants in the Sahara may also be profiting from other forms of illicit trade, notably of cocaine destined ultimately for the European market, although hard evidence of this is also lacking.

²⁴⁸ International Centre for Migration Policy Development, European Police Office and Frontex, *Arab and European Partner States Working Document* (see footnote 96), p. 20.

²⁴⁹ Bensaâd, "Les migrations transsahariennes" (see footnote 52), p. 18.

A related effect of policy is to stimulate the rise of new smuggling routes. Thus, the fact that EU has intensified its cooperation with Governments in North and West Africa with a view to repressing the smuggling of migrants appears to be pushing the main route eastward, as sub-Saharan migrants increasingly view the eastern Mediterranean as the gateway to Europe. This is a significant observation, as it implies not only that official attention will increasingly be focused on Egypt, Greece and Turkey in the future, but also that these and other countries on developing routes may face a new range of problems associated with irregular migration.



Senegalese police station at the border with Mauritania



XI. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The focus of the current report has been on the role of organized crime in irregular migration rather than on the countermeasures taken by Governments. Nevertheless, a number of salient points emerge clearly from the data.

In the first instance, few irregular migrants, if any, can be considered to have been trafficked in the sense of being physically compelled to undertake their journeys. However, many have been put in a position where they come under such intense moral pressure to migrate as to amount to compulsion. Perhaps the most notorious example concerns those Nigerian women, mostly from Edo State, who are pressured into putting themselves in the hands of organized criminal networks that earn substantial sums of money in the sex trade in North Africa and Europe. It is said that some parents browbeat their own daughters into working in the sex trade in Europe. Research carried out for the present study even found cases of church pastors whose own daughters were working in Italy, most probably in the sex trade.

The existing literature suggests a fairly high degree of consensus as to the historical development of migration from sub-Saharan Africa towards Europe. Although the present report does not seek to investigate long-term historical patterns, it has been compiled in the knowledge that many West African communities have a historically ingrained experience of migration. Various networks of relationships, such as between those who have migrated from a particular settlement or region and those who follow them, may nowadays be reproduced in radically different circumstances, such as the historical relationship between a *jatigi* and later migrants from his or her region.

There is general agreement in the literature on the chronology of recent irregular migration from West Africa to Europe. Overland migration from West Africa to North Africa, and from there to Europe, increased considerably in the early 1990s. Trans-Saharan and cross-Mediterranean migration routes merged as people from south of the Sahara increasingly sought to enter Europe by its southern frontier.

It seems clear that the increasing severity of laws on migration, including the countermeasures taken by EU member States, have been successful in reducing irregular migration directly into Italy and Spain, although the number of West Africans using irregular routes into these countries has never been as high as media reports might suggest. More rigorous policies have had the unintended consequence of making the market for the smuggling of persons more lucrative, thereby attracting the attention of existing criminal groups, as well as causing those who already work in this sector, as they become more professional, to develop closer contacts with existing criminal networks. The repression of irregular migration into Italy and Spain is also leading to the development of a new route from West Africa to Europe that passes through Egypt.

There is little systematic research on the use by organized criminal groups of air routes to transport migrants. Some work has been done on Nigerian women who fly to Europe for eventual work in the sex trade in Italy,²⁵⁰ either voluntarily or under the control of traffickers, and UNODC has also published a short report on migration by air,²⁵¹ but these are rare exceptions: as a rule, the subject is poorly understood. Furthermore, rather little research appears to have been done into how ideologies of migration are formed and transmitted, although that subject has not been a focus of attention in the current report. This too is a matter for further investigation.

Overall, this research suggests that the following avenues could be considered by countries in West Africa with a view to improving their anti-smuggling policies and to combating organized crime more generally:

(a) Enhancing the oversight of law enforcement agencies. As shown in this research and as reported by irregular migrants, law enforcement agencies play a key role in irregular migration either by curbing irregular flows or by letting them through. According to some accounts, individual elements within law enforcement violate human rights, ask for bribes and confiscate the few belongings of irregular migrants. It is believed that those elements represent only a small fraction of national law enforcement contingents. Yet this minority has the potential to discredit the entire security apparatus.

As a result, establishing or strengthening existing internal oversight mechanisms could be considered. This would apply especially to forces based in remote areas.

Besides the absolute need to have non-corrupt law enforcement acting in full observance of human rights and national laws, this approach would need to be coupled with an appropriate anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking legal framework in line with the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime,²⁵² and the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

In addition to this, strengthening the operational capacities of law enforcement agencies and, more generally, of the entire criminal justice system, through increased resource allocation and external technical assistance would provide the necessary elements for an effective response to (organized) criminal groups involved in the smuggling of migrants.

(b) Increasing awareness of the dangers of irregular migration. In general, would-be migrants have only a rather vague idea of what the journey to Europe could be like from the accounts of lucky or unlucky forerunners. In some countries, awareness-raising campaigns have been conducted on the dangers of embarking on an illegal underground “adventure”. Such initiatives should be considered, encouraged and/or expanded.

Disrupting the market of smugglers selling lies and illusions of a future life of wealth in Europe is a factor that can reduce demand. In parallel, exposing the truth about how difficult life can be in Europe when one lives in illegality, vulnerable to all kinds of abuse and psychological trauma, would appear to be a good complement.

This approach, aimed at changing mentalities, takes time and requires constant effort. However, curbing demand for smuggling services is the most effective way to combat (organized) criminal groups involved in the smuggling of migrants in the long term.

(c) Providing alternatives to would-be migrants. Although economic reasons do not account for all the push factors, at least in West Africa, and the reality is more complex, fostering socio-economic development in the countries concerned would help to further reduce demand for smuggling services. Though economic development falls outside the scope of the present research and of the UNODC mandate, it should be mentioned as an additional way to prevent and counter the smuggling of migrants over the long term.

²⁵⁰ Prina, *Trafficking of Nigerian Girls to Italy* (see footnote 7).

²⁵¹ “Migrant smuggling by air” (see footnote 28).

²⁵² United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 2237, No. 39574.



RESOURCES

Websites

Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration (CARIM)
www.carim.org/

European Police Office (Europol)
www.europol.europa.eu/index.asp?page=publications&language=

European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (Frontex)
www.frontex.europa.eu/newsroom/news_releases/art40.html

International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)
[www.icmpd.org/706.html?&no_cache=1&tx_icmpd_pi1\[article\]=922&tx_icmpd_pi1\[page\]=923](http://www.icmpd.org/706.html?&no_cache=1&tx_icmpd_pi1[article]=922&tx_icmpd_pi1[page]=923)

Interactive Map on Migration (i-Map)
www.imap-migration.org/
 (interactive map on irregular migration)



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