

# Migration: the world is flowing

Stories of those caught in the transit countries



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## **Migrations: the world is flowing**

### **Stories of those caught in the transit countries**

It is not possible to consider the huge flow of migration happening nowadays (more than 68.5 million persons in the world are on the roads) as being the result of various “crises”, foremost of which would be the wars and civil wars. Nor can we view it as being the repercussion of some ethnic or tribal persecutions, or as the consequence of the attractiveness of Europe and its embodiment of the “dream”.

If though all this indeed exists, it still falls short of painting the whole picture. The idea of “crisis” suggests that this would be an accidental, contingent and temporary phenomenon, which is unfit to reality.

There is another “structural” side of the problem in the existing world order itself which consists of the destruction of the living conditions in the countries of origin of those migrants.

From the expropriations of agricultural lands on which local farmers live and work for the benefit of the export-oriented industrial sector controlled by multinational corporations, to climate change and pollution and the catastrophes they both cause, to the uncontrolled pillage of those countries’ natural resources, to the congestion in slums around big cities where complete misery and despair prevail.

It is not possible to be content with the standpoint that dominated most researches on immigration and which revolved around Europe (for the migrants coming from Africa and Arab countries) or around the USA (for the migrants coming from South America) as if this was the most important given.

We consider that the fates of the uprooted ones and the distressing choice they had to resort to are at the heart of the topic. We also view that the “threat” they represent for Europe is nothing but the embodiment of the condescending and miserly view of the old colonial logic and its new version which exploits the world to benefit the powerful ones and only pays attention when something bothers its interests. Only then, it deviates the issue, exaggerates it, and centers it on its own self!

These are the stories of sub-Saharan Africans who arrive to the North of the continent: Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco in an attempt to cross towards Europe.

Only a few of them manage to do so while the rest either sink into the sea or remain in whichever country they ended up in, barely surviving in dire conditions.



**EGYPT**







## **Sinai: Migrants, smugglers and soldiers.**

**Aly El Raggal**

Researcher in Political Sociology, specialized in Security Studies, from Egypt

On the subject of migration through Sinai where the functions of the security services and their strategic and espionage roles overlap with commerce, poverty and corruption. The situation thus gets out of hand, despite the presence of the security forces and their tight control over the location.

Nothing in Sinai resembles anything elsewhere, not even the migrants. Indeed, in Sinai, migrants are more prone to suffering. Bones merge with steel and trafficking overlaps with slavery along the arduous journey in the desert. Many get killed on the road from East Sudan to Sinai. Migrants in different parts of the world are at risk of being murdered, of dying as a result of the harsh conditions they are subjected to, of being sexually exploited, blackmailed or taken as hostages. In the case of Sinai, the migrants - or the kidnapped- endure all of the above at the same time. The situation has prompted some in the worlds of academia and human rights to coin a new term in 2015: “Sinai Trafficking”.

The human trafficking to the North of Sinai began in 2009, when people were “stored” in border cities and, more precisely, in the South of Rafah and the town of Sheikh Zuweid. The journey starts in East Sudan where refugees’ camps are located. There, the traffickers seek to attract migrants or refugees who have fled their home countries because of wars, political oppressions, violence or hunger. Most of those refugees come from Eritrea and Ethiopia with the majority being Eritrean because of the political oppression, the extreme poverty and the indefinite military enlistment in their country of origin.

The trafficking route starts in East Sudan which is under the control of the Rachaida tribes and continues into the Eastern Sahara in Egypt, where other tribes are involved. Those migrants and refugees end up in warehouses in the North of Sinai hoping to get to Israel. In Sinai, members of the tribes of Sawarka, Tarabin and Ermilat handle the situation while members of the Azazmah tribe serve as linking pins with Israel due to their presence on both sides of the border. “The mingling of bones and steel” is the phrase that describes the human trafficking that is commonly combined with arms smuggling along the same journey and even inside the same containers. The crossing is more laborious during the baking hot months of summer when the risks of dying of thirst increase. Then, the steel continues its route and meets, in the desert, with the migrants whose bones remain as witnesses of the journey.

When Israel started to violently combat the arrival of both migrants and arms, the situation shifted from human smuggling to human trafficking. As the migrants became a burden to the smugglers, this trade witnessed a transformation in its nature by the end of 2010. The operations of abduction started in East Sudan, inside the United Nations refugees’ camps and in the nearby villages. The human smuggling and trafficking groups began to prosecute the fugitives from these camps, abduct them and send them

to Sinai which has since become one of the biggest sites of slave trade of the new millennium. Those groups working in organized transboundary crime demanded ransoms with amounts ranging from three thousand to forty-thousand dollars. The Eritreans were the most expensive in this trade and Ethiopians were pressured into pretending to be Eritreans. It is unclear why the Eritreans were preferred to other nationalities in this trafficking process.

The trafficking route starts in East Sudan which is under the control of the Rachaida tribes and continues into the Eastern Sahara in Egypt, where other tribes are involved. Those migrants and refugees end up in warehouses in the North of Sinai hoping to arrive to Israel.

Those who are abducted are coerced into forced labor in the sectors of construction work, excavation, everyday services, and, sometimes, in hostilities and rivalry between the different tribes. The women, the men and sometimes the children are subjected to sexual exploitation and rape. Torture was divided into two types: the first one is functional and intended to pressure them to pay the ransom, while the second one falls into the category of sadistic violence as the abductors take joy in torturing those who have become their slaves. Many international reports have shown that those kidnapped are subjected to burning, brutal beating and electrocution. Some media reports have also highlighted the intermingling between human smuggling and organs trafficking, and the linkage of these operations with an organization in Cairo that has sophisticated medical capabilities and is suspected of harvesting human organs. No side or international organization could confirm this fact and researchers from Sinai have either denied it or admitted that it might have happened on very sparse and exceptional cases.

### **Human traffickers and soldiers**

It is impossible for this long trafficking road to go its way without anyone noticing. Most of the international reports indicate the connivance and corruption of various components of the army and the police in Egypt and Sudan and their involvement in the trafficking networks. There are several stages in the human trafficking operations. Sometimes, the abducted ones are sold repeatedly along this journey or, after their families have paid their ransom, they are once again sold to another group and repeatedly exploited.

The security level owing to the issue of migrants, refugees and the



kidnapped in Sinai is complicated for many reasons. The state cannot protect them and, besides the international human rights considerations, they have no legal support and become “worthless” whenever they are subjected to torture, sexual exploitation or killing. The connivance and corruption of the army and the police with the smugglers is most visible when confronted with the requirements for providing their safety and security. The different reports show that, on many occasions, when the victims have managed to escape from the smugglers and traffickers and have resorted to the security checkpoints, those security forces have handed them back to the smugglers. And, in other cases where the victims managed to escape the smugglers, they were detained in very harsh conditions without legal or psychological support (and this is a very important point, because most of them were subjected to torture, rape and very difficult experiences). The security forces also forbid them from making any contact with civil society institutions. They are faced with extortion once again as the security forces require that they gather the necessary amount of money for their repatriation which happens in conditions that are no less harsh than those of their first journey. The detention can last for long undetermined periods of time.

**Where is the securitization? it can be found within the relation with Israel. Anything happening in Sinai, from North to South, is entrusted to one of the security bodies, or to several of them, and is engaged in complex relationships between the networks of security, crime, smuggling and terrorism...**

Sinai is one the most securitized zones in the world. Everybody is scrutinizing it; everybody is fighting over its land. And, despite that, the North of Sinai is one of the most insecure parts of the world in terms of terrorism and human and drug trafficking and a territory for security and intelligence operations.

Some researchers have pointed out that the issue of migrants in Sinai has been securitized (transformed from a political and social problem to a security one). The operation of securitization happens according to various stages and calls for exceptional policing proceedings. But it appears that this was not the case for migrants in Sinai. Not only is there no methodical security discourse concerning the issue, but there is no discourse at all around the issue of migration in Egypt, be it by the security apparatuses or by the various media institutions. The problem is neither talked about nor is it ever discussed, except one single time, in 2012, when Naila Jaber,

the president of the Committee to Combat Human Trafficking and Irregular Migration, recognized the issue in a meeting with “Human Rights Watch”.

Where is the securitization, then? It can be found within the relation with Israel. It has become a pressing security issue for Israel and the Egyptian state considers it as being a mutual security problem for both Egypt and Israel. Securitization generally derives from two things: firstly, it is a practice inherent to the successive Egyptian authorities, and secondly, there is no type of handling in Sinai outside the sphere of security interactions. Anything happening in Sinai, from North to South, is entrusted to one of the security bodies –or to several of them- and engaged in complex relationships between the networks of security, crime, smuggling and terrorism...

Some argue that the expansion of human trafficking and smuggling in Sinai happened because of the absence of security forces in the aftermath of 2011, but this, for many reasons, is untrue. First of all, trafficking in this region precedes the events of the Revolution of January and the collapse of the Egyptian police. Secondly, the revolution has not clashed with any of the following security apparatuses: General Intelligence, Military Intelligence and Border Guards which have all remained intact and in place. Their institutional establishments were untouched, while the only changes within them happened on the level of individuals. Thirdly, the whole thing was happening with the connivance of the different security forces.

### **The Egyptian authorities and the issue of the migrants in Sinai**

In 2007, the Egyptian authorities created “the National Coordinating Committee for Combatting and Preventing Human Trafficking and Irregular Migration”. This committee presented a draft law to combat human trafficking to the Egyptian Parliament in 2009, which later adopted the Law 64 of 2010. Egypt adheres to most of the International Conventions related to human trafficking and the fight against smuggling and has joined many new treaties since 2004 after having ratified the Pact on Organized Crime. So, from a legal standpoint, Egypt has the tools to deal with this kind of issues. In 2011, the National Plan of Action to Combat Human Trafficking was approved and comprised four components: 1- preventing human trafficking, 2- protecting the victims of human trafficking and society as a whole, 3- prosecuting smugglers and traffickers, 4- cooperating on a national and international level to prevent human trafficking.

As the international reports describing the ugliness of the situation intensified in 2012 and with the continued connivance of members

of the police and the army, the Egyptian authorities still denied their involvement in the operations of trafficking and smuggling. The investigation on the issue ended up declaring that most of the information were untrue, “and according to the public prosecutor, most of the bodies found were those of migrants who died from thirst”. In September 2012, Naila Jaber notified a civil society organization that she would consider that those allegations are part of a propaganda against Egypt if the names of the victims and information on them were not presented according to the report of the European Parliament. The interesting part is that the Egyptian authority has managed to get support and funds for its project of combatting human trafficking and has held international and national civil society organizations responsible for the costs needed to train judges, prosecutors and security agents who lacked previous experience in the field. It has dealt with the issue in three distinct ways: turning a blind eye on the crisis and on the connivance of its security agents, permanently denying the crisis and transforming it into a security problem shared with Israel and, then, exploiting the issue to enhance the capacity of its personnel to deal with the problem.

The crossing is more laborious during the baking hot months of summer when the risks of dying of thirst increase. Then, the steel continues its route and meets, in the desert, with the migrants whose bones remain as witnesses of the journey.

### **On the interferences of the networks: terrorism, trafficking and security agencies**

Sinai is a geographically besieged peninsula, which is also under a tight security blockade. In the East, lies Israel which occupies the Palestinian territories, the Gulf of Aqaba and the Gaza Strip. In 2012, Israel installed barbed wires along its frontiers with Egypt. In the West, lies the Suez Canal and its Gulf, in the South the Mediterranean Sea and in the North the Red Sea. Peacemaking forces have come to Sinai after the Camp David Accord of 1987. Sinai is perhaps one of the most securitized zones of the world. It is scrutinized by the security agencies and the international order to guarantee the stability of the region and safeguard the peace agreement between Egypt and Israel. All the Egyptian security services and the different forces (the border guards, units of the Egyptian army, the general and military intelligences, the state security and the police forces) are present there. The influence of the Israeli security services also extends to Sinai, as well as Hamas, Fatah, and, sometimes, security components of Iran and Hezbollah can be found. Everybody observes Sinai; everybody is fighting over its land. Despite that, the North of Sinai

is one of the most insecure parts of the world in terms of terrorism and human and drug trafficking and it is a territory for security and intelligence operations. Sinai is the biggest manifestation of the regional order which is part of the international one. Despite the amount of wealth amassed in it, Northern and Central Sinai are among the poorest regions, where development, medical services, educational services, electricity, water and nutrition are absent. In this situation, how can a commerce such as human trafficking and migrant smuggling grow? To answer this question, one must first define and chart the relationships among networks and understand the interferences, constructions and complications among them.

**There is no life in Sinai outside of illegal commerce in all its diversity. The smuggling activity partly acts as a political economy that guarantees the financial sustainability of the region fostering its daily life.**

So, what is the relationship between smuggling and security agencies, and between migrants and armed groups? There are agreements between some of the security men and the smugglers in exchange for money, and this lucrative business has allowed for the creation of massive wealth. Though, the issue is not limited to connivance and corruption. Smuggling, its routes and tracks and the men involved in it are important issues for everyone. The security agencies (Egyptian and non-Egyptian ones) rely on the smugglers who know the roads. They exploit them in various operations, from espionage to the striking of other specific networks, and even in weapon-smuggling. There is no life in Sinai outside of illegal commerce, in all its diversity. The smuggling activity partly acts as a political economy that guarantees the financial sustainability of the region, fostering its daily life. Such is the case of drugs, be it because it is a main livelihood that contributes to the creation of tourism in the South, or because it is one of the means invested by the security agencies to spy and recruit men. More ominously, in those kinds of relations of power and conflict, the chances of a brutal transboundary corruption increase and the security components of different countries overlap in becoming partners in organized crime. This is what gives smugglers immunity and protection. It is therefore no coincidence that no member of the smugglers and human traffickers has ever been caught or brought to justice before the Egyptian courts on internationally and nationally prohibited grounds. Similarly, no member of the security apparatuses has ever been considered as a suspect, not even once.

The functions of the security apparatuses, their intelligence and espionage roles intersect with trafficking, poverty and corruption. All this creates the necessary conditions for an insecure situation despite the strong presence of all kinds of security and control agencies in Sinai.

Therefore, the law is completely neutralized. The trafficking networks become an ideal device for the security agencies to infiltrate spaces, groups and communities that would have otherwise been difficult to penetrate through regular means. The various ways of trafficking and the presence of multiple networks allow the security agencies to block or trap certain networks or particular state apparatuses, either because of their rivalry or because of the lack of coordination among them. Thus, networks are created to strike others, and Sinai becomes one of the regions of the world where conflicts among security agencies is the most concentrated, inside the borders of the state and in transboundary ways, too.

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Armed groups add to all the previous components. A researcher from Sinai established the following points to better understand the relationship between traffickers and armed groups: 1- whoever, among the traffickers, is not part of an armed group, cooperates with them in exchange for money, and, sometimes, the members of a contraband network are also members of an armed group, 2- Cooperation exists between armed groups and security services so that the commerce of the smugglers, of any kind, doesn't get disrupted, 3- Guaranteeing the smugglers' work continuity without interference from "Al-Hisbah" forces of the Islamic State, 4- Kinship. The researcher indicates that the smugglers were the ones who facilitated the access of weapons and food for the armed groups during the different periods of besiegement.

It is possible to predict what is coming despite the complexity of the security situation in Sinai. Firstly, money governs all relationships, especially in the absence of sources of livelihood and given that the security apparatuses and some of their corrupt members, encourage the smuggling networks.

Secondly, the number of networks increases with the multiplication of the



attempts to penetrate and monitor, therefore, whenever the possibility of breaching increases, the volume of trade and smuggling grows as well as the interference between security, terrorism, social and economic situations.

Because organized crimes take the form of networks, contradicting elements can easily be found inside them. It is possible for the member of a network, or even for its leaders, to be affiliated with the security agencies while others of the same network cooperate with armed groups. Also, elements from the Palestinian security apparatuses collude and turn a blind eye on human trafficking to ensure that the weapons will keep on flowing from Sudan. The unrest of Sudan, Libya and Eritrea contributes to the continuance of the flow of arms and to the abduction of people, especially that there is a high demand on arms, whose necessary funding is covered.

### **How did the trafficking and smuggling of people decrease in Sinai?**

Did the intervention of the European Union, the reports of human rights organizations and the systemic campaigns really have an effect on reducing human trafficking and smuggling in Sinai? This assertion is not true and the decline of this trade had nothing to do with the humanitarian situation or the atrociousness of the committed crimes. As the international reports indicate a significant positive evolution, we can monitor the elements that led to the reduction, and perhaps the end, of this organized transboundary crime in Sinai after 2014.

Most likely, this was due to the following factors:

- By the year 2012, Israel managed to entirely close its eastern border with Egypt by completing the barbed wire barrier.
- During the same year, the operation “Eagle II” began to counter the armed groups there.
- The pressure that Israel put on Egypt to eradicate human smuggling to its territories.
- During the years 2013 and 2014, Sinai transitioned from a highly volatile security zone that fosters the growth of organized crime into a fierce battlefield between the terrorist groups and the state, which reduced movements and resulted in a relative downsizing of corruption inside the security agencies, because of the overlapping between human trafficking, smuggling and the arms trade.
- The unprecedented tunnels’ destruction and the closure of cross-border smuggling opportunities between Egypt and Israel.
- The displacement of border villages and cities starting from the year 2014.

- The completion of a buffer zone in Rafah and of the border strip after the resolution 203 of the year 2013: it is 14 km long and goes 5 km deep into Sinai
- The escape of the smuggling lords outside of Sinai after having amassed large fortunes.



Semaan Khawam

## Egypt: Migration and Asylum from a Legal Standpoint

Ashraf Milad

Lawyer specialized in asylum law, from Egypt

The legal details surrounding the issue of irregular migration through Egypt... The status of the Sudanese and Syrian migrants and the story of those coming from African countries to sneak into Israel across the desert of Sinai.

According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), citizens from more than 38 different countries have sought asylum in Egypt. Most of those didn't come to Egypt for recreation or to lurk until they have an opportunity to be resettled in the USA, Australia or Canada, but because they are faced by death threats or arrests in their countries of origin. Of course, many of them fall into the category of "economic migrants", but this doesn't negate the fact that, in their vast majority, they came to Egypt fleeing oppression in their countries of origin.

More than 228 thousand and 941 refugees are present in Cairo under the protection of the UNHCR, according to their official report (June 2018). Around 130 thousand of them are Syrians, 37 thousand are Sudanese, in addition to smaller numbers of Ethiopians, Eritreans, Somalians, Iraqis and Yemenis. The protection of those refugees (which is the joint responsibility of the UNHCR and the Egyptian Government, according to a memorandum of understanding concluded between both sides in February 1954) is subject to the political changes on the ground and to the nature of the relationship of Egypt with the country of origin. This factor is obvious in the way refugees from Sudan are treated, which fluctuates between welcoming or deporting them.

### **Egypt's Legal Commitments Towards Refugees**

Egypt and Turkey were the only countries in the Middle East who had participated in the drafting of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, and to the Refugees Convention of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1969. Egypt has also ratified the Conventions against Genocide, the four Geneva Conventions, the Convention against Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discriminations Against Women, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, the Convention against Torture and, finally, the first and second optional Protocols of the four Geneva Conventions. Article 91 of the Egyptian Constitution states that "The right to political asylum shall be granted by the State to any foreigner persecuted for defending the people's interests, human rights, peace or justice. The extradition of political refugees shall be prohibited, in accordance with the law".

There is no legislation in Egypt that legitimizes the status of the refugees

except for a vague article in the Constitution of 2014 that allows - but does not obligate – the acceptance of the refugee, without referring to any of the international agreements.

The protection of the refugees is subject to the political changes on the ground and to the nature of the current relationship of Egypt with the country of origin. This factor is obvious in the way refugees from Sudan are treated, which fluctuates between welcoming or deporting them.

### **Who are the Sudanese Refugees?**

There were several waves of Sudanese migration to Egypt which culminated in the aftermath of the coup that brought Omar Hassan Ahmad Al Bashir to power in the late 80s of the last century. Egypt was a transit state for the thousands of Sudanese who had fled crises from the four corners of Sudan (the problems of the Nuba in the North caused by the Kajbar dam, the civil war with the South, the problems of the Beja tribes in the East, in addition to the Darfur crisis that exploded in 2003 in the West).

At that time, 80% of those who were granted asylum in Egypt had the opportunity to resettle in one of the three following countries: the USA, Australia and Canada. By 2004, the UNHCR presented a group of procedures that aimed to consolidate the application of the OAU Convention of 1969 which included a detailed classification of the different asylum cases.

This led to an increase in the number of the registered refugees in Egypt and a decrease in the resettlement opportunities. At the first symptoms of a reconciliation between the North and South Sudan, the Refugee Status Determination interviews were frozen for the Sudanese, especially given the rapprochement between the Egyptian and the Sudanese governments which was followed by a tight security cooperation and increased restrictions on Sudanese political opponents and activists in Egypt. This led to cases of infiltration into the Israeli border and resulted in the emergence of organized smuggling gangs from the Sudanese tribes and the Sinai Bedouins. The situation escalated from smuggling humans to abducting for ransoms or trafficking in human organs.

For the Sudanese refugees, Egypt is easily accessible and close (since the international law states that asylum should be sought in the nearest

safe country unless there is a good reason not to do so). There is a facility of movement across the vast borders between both countries and part of the border is practically uncontrollable by the border guards of the two states. Article 31 of the 1951 Refugee Convention provisions for the non-punishment of asylum seekers who have entered the country of refuge in an irregular manner and the UNHCR in Cairo communicates with the Department of Immigration and Passports to regulate the residency of those who stepped into the country in an irregular manner.

**Many Sudanese gather in the region of “Ezbit El Haggana” where many of their ancestors had served in the Egyptian army (the Haggana battalions; “Haggana” meaning “camel-riders”). Because of the concentration of the Sudanese population in this region, it is sometimes mistakenly described as the “Sudanese refugee camps in Egypt”.**

The Sudanese refugees belong to different tribes and come from different regions. Many opponents of the ruling class come from the North and the South (the Dinka tribes, the Shilluk, the Zande, the Bari and the Bamba, in addition to the Nuba Mountains) have fled to Egypt following the civil war of 1983. So did some of the Beja tribe members from the East (who are part of “the Beja Congress”, an independent political party). Starting from March 2003, thousands of people from the “Darfur” region arrived to Egypt, escaping the genocides and plundering that were committed by the government forces with the help of the Janjaweed militias. Up until 1995, the Sudanese exodus to Egypt didn’t systematically require the assistance of the UNHCR as the Sudanese citizens were exempted from the requirement to obtain a residence permit. But, after the 1995 assassination attempt on President Mubarak in Addis Ababa, this exemption was cancelled and restrictions were enforced on Sudanese people in Egypt. This prompted them to apply for asylum as the Egyptian authorities began to forcefully repatriate those who didn’t hold a permit in the country.

Except for the Abdeen area - in the very heart of Cairo-, the Sudanese people usually gather on the outskirts of the city. Historically, Abdeen was the favorite spot for the Egyptian and Sudanese Nubians who used to work in the Abdeen Palace in the days of the monarchy when both Egypt and Sudan fell under the authority of the Egyptian crown, until Sudan gained independence in 1956.



Many Sudanese also gather in the region of “Ezbit El Haggana” where some of their ancestors had served in the Egyptian army (the Haggana battalions; “Haggana” meaning “camel-riders”). Because of the concentration of the Sudanese population in this region, it is sometimes mistakenly described as the “Sudanese refugee camps in Egypt” (like the time when Angelina Jolie visited the place!).

The refugees, and especially the Sudanese, face many challenges in Egypt. They cannot solely rely on the assistance of the executive partners of the UNHCR in Cairo which are deficit in resources. In the context of an economic crisis, arbitrary arrests, bureaucracy and political imbalance in the country, the UNHCR only provides the minimum services to all refugees and asylum seekers. Many policemen do not recognize the residence permit and it has happened that some of them have even torn it apart asking the refugee to show them a passport. Things get more complicated still when an official letter from the embassy of the country of origin is required from the refugee to obtain marriage documentation. In other domains, like health for example, a refugee with limited resources cannot provide for 50% of their treatment costs – even though the UNHCR agents cover the other half. In the area of employment, the asylum seeker doesn’t get any concession and is treated like any other foreigner who needs to acquire a work permit.

### **Irregular Migration**

Irregular migration from the southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea towards Europe have increased, particularly from the Egyptian and Libyan shores. The latter is the largest departing point for boats carrying irregular migrants. After 2011, the militias required big payments to allow the departures of boats in direction of the Italian shores. This prompted many immigrants to sneak out of Egypt into Libya through the land border (the city of Salloum) in order to reach Europe with lower risks, as the Egyptian authorities and coast guards are more stringent in preventing the departure of such trips.

In Egypt, irregular migration has started to increase in 2013, with boats departing from the ports of Port Said, Kafr El-Sheikh, Damietta, Alexandria, Marsa Matruh and Beheira. There had been several drowning incidents of those boats which are not equipped to carry such a number of migrants. The culminant point of those tragic incidents was the

drowning of the “Rasheed” boat in September 2016, which resulted in the death of 204 of the 500 migrants who had embarked on the distressed boat. The Egyptian authorities consequently issued the “law of irregular migration” which was unanimously ratified by the Parliament.

Often, the arrested immigrants get deported, and it happens that some of those deported are immigrants who had applied for asylum in Egypt. In this case, the UNHCR addresses the Egyptian authorities asking for their release according to the 1951 Convention that prohibits the extradition of refugees or asylum seekers to their countries of origin.

The Egyptian authorities and the international organizations working in Egypt started to monitor the steady growth of those who try to leave the country by the sea in an irregular manner. In August 2013, the Egyptian authorities arrested the crew and passengers of a boat which was departing from one of the ports of Alexandria. After that, there were consecutive cases of arrest of refugees trying to depart. The state of chaos and insecurity that struck the country was a good opportunity for the smugglers, and in this context, many tried to leave Egypt, particularly the Syrian refugees who, having grasped the gravity of the situation in the country, offered smugglers huge amounts of money to get them to Europe by the sea.

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The international reports of the UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have stated that, between August 2013 and October 2014, the Egyptian authorities had arrested 6800 irregular migrants in the Egyptian ports. Those were of Syrian, Gazan, Sudanese, Iraqi, Somali, Eritrean and, of course, Egyptian nationalities. The latter were released immediately by the prosecutor’s office while those of other nationalities were detained for periods of time that may have lasted several months, in accordance with the Egyptian procedures that state that the foreigners’ cases must be presented to the National Security and the Passports Departments.



Until now, and despite the detention of over ten thousand migrants, the number of those who managed to reach the European shores over a period of 5 years is estimated to have reached 100 thousand people,

knowing that at least 1200 persons have drowned across the Egyptian coasts alone.

### **What Happens After Reaching Italy or Other European Shores?**

According to International Law, after any rescue operation, the European authorities prepare a temporary shelter for the migrants, then conduct interviews to determine their situation and whether they really are asylum seekers or economic migrants. After that, legal actions are taken. The European authorities do everything in their power to prevent the arrival of migrants to their shores, so that they don't find themselves confronted with a fait accompli and therefore have to comply with the international and humanitarian commitments that oblige their reception.

During the Gadhafi era, millions of euros were paid to "strengthen the Libyan fleet" which was precluding the crossing of those fleeing their countries to Europe through the Libyan coast.

According to the testimony of one of the detainees, when the captain of the boat arrives into the Italian territorial waters, he would send a distress signal. The captain gets arrested, as he is not an asylum seeker and cannot benefit from the same legal protection as the migrants on the boat.

Some European countries have started to conclude agreements with southern Mediterranean countries - such as Egypt-, so that the migrants who have been rejected as refugees are absorbed back in these countries. In the case of Egypt, the agreement also includes supporting the increase of the penalties on the smugglers - thus expanding the law ratified in 2016 to include a characterization of the different cases of irregular migration. If convicted, the imposed penalties can reach thousands of dollars and long-term imprisonment with the possible confiscation of the boat.

To date, no cases of returning migrants to Egypt have been recorded. It is believed that only those with unknown nationalities will be sent back, as many of the irregular migrants deliberately tear up their passports so that the authorities of the country of arrival cannot repatriate them to their

countries of origin if their situation fails to meet the required conditions for asylum seeking. The European countries have commissioned Frontex (The European Border and Coast Guard Agency) to investigate these irregular migrants in order to identify their countries of origin before repatriating them.

### **The Infiltration into Israel**

The infiltration from Egypt into Israel through the desert of Sinai started in 2004 and coincided with the frustration of many migrants with the reduction of the resettlement program and the implementation of the 1969 Refugees Convention which does not entail any relocation outside of Egypt. In addition, the interviews with the Sudanese migrants were frozen following the peace negotiations between North and South Sudan.

The cases of infiltration started slowly and culminated in 2005. Most of them were of migrants from South Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, in addition to a small number of Somalians and bearers of other African nationalities such as Liberians, Sierra Leoneans and Ivoirians. What they have in common is that they are not Arabs and therefore do not feel affiliated with the ongoing conflict with Israel. Rumors had it that high-ranking officials were involved in those migrations which became more regular. The rumors were strengthened by the fact that the route to Sinai goes through many checkpoints and that a car or a bus full of African passengers should alert suspicions unless the smuggler is an influential person. Most of the time, the migrant arrives to the border point with the help of the Bedouins, then ventures into the Negev desert where the Egyptian border guards have instructions to shoot any infiltrator. Around 230 persons have been killed until 2013. The number of those who arrived to Israel is estimated to be around 20 thousand. Israel has refused most of them because they had already applied for asylum in Egypt, the first country they had reached.

Because of the growth of this phenomenon, the Egyptian authorities have imposed harsher sanctions on the cases of infiltration. The Act 89 on Foreigners of the year 1960 was amended by the act 88 of the year 2005 which multiplied the punishment and pecuniary fines.

On many occasions, Israel has voiced its “disappointment” with the Egyptian side “which does nothing to curb this phenomenon”. An agreement was signed between Cairo and Tel-Aviv to send back part of those infiltrators to Egypt.



## **The Shattered Dreams of the Immigrants Passing Through Egypt**

**Ahmad Shehab Eddin**

Journalist, from Egypt

The number of immigrants passing through Egypt to reach Europe has been consistently increasing for years. They come from South Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia, but also from Palestine and Syria. However, Europe's apprehension from their influx must not overshadow the tragic fates they face along this journey.

“Immigrants coming from countries that have been destroyed by wars, famine and natural disasters make deals with smugglers, only to end up drowned in the sea or slaves to human traffickers”.

This is the exclusive story conveyed by the Western media. It is a good story; it covers, in its linear simplicity, the ready views on “irregular migration” from the standpoint of the other side of the Mediterranean Sea. It also satisfies the European imagination in its portrayal of the smugglers as shadowy hard-to-apprehend accomplices to crime and of the African migrants as simple-minded adventurous people who lead themselves to tragic fates.

According to statistics issued in 2018 by the International Organization for Migration - an agency of the United Nations-, between the years 2010 and 2015, the number of immigrants arriving to Egypt has increased from 295 thousand to 491 thousand. They are coming from South Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Chad, Somalia and Sudan, but also from Palestine and Syria, making Egypt one of the main transit stations for immigrants wanting to cross into Europe.

In 2018, the Africans registered as refugees or asylum-seekers with the Office of the United Nations reached the following numbers: 14.564 Ethiopians, 12.995 Eritreans, 10.518 South Sudanese, 6.714 Somalians, while the other nationalities accounted for 6.579. The registrations of 3.118 refugees were officially accepted in Egypt according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The closure of the Balkan route and the reinforcement of the control procedures over the Aegean Sea between Greece and Turkey led to an increase in the influx towards Egypt and Libya, especially after Turkey had signed an agreement with Europe in April 2015 to take back any refugees who departed from its land.

According to the UNHCR, the number of immigrants arriving or passing through Egypt from East Africa (South Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia) didn't exceed 57 thousand in 2013.

## **Faces**

- Ali Mouki (23 years old) flew by plane from the Congo to Egypt to “study



Business at the University of Cairo”. He lived in Egypt for 3 years. His family members managed to immigrate to Europe (he doesn't say how) and he decided to complete his education in Cairo before joining them. He says that life in the Congo is extremely difficult and that everybody thinks of immigrating all the time as “the schools are bad, the economy is falling apart, most of the streets are unlit, employment opportunities are nonexistent, and young people kill time by playing soccer.” He adds that everybody wants to leave: the well-to-do families think about regular immigration while the majority considers leaving the country in an irregular manner.

- Takla (27 years old) is a Christian Eritrean from the Pentecostal Church (it is the newest Christian movement and the fastest growing nowadays) who comes from Asmara, the capital city of Eritrea. He fled his country because of religious persecution and explains that he used to pray in secret in fear of imprisonment, as hundreds of followers of the Pentecostal Church are in jails because of their religious beliefs. Takla arrived to Egypt, crossing the Eritrean border into East Sudan under the guidance of smugglers. He then took a Jeep car to Khartoum, crossing the desert to Aswan and finally boarding a train to Cairo. He is now waiting for his final departure after he paid 2000 dollars to brokers in exchange of the expected journey. The emergence of ISIL and the disintegration of the state in Libya have put the African Christian refugees under greater dangers which prompted many of them to consider traveling through the Egyptian territories which are bordered by the Mediterranean Sea, even through embarking from the Libyan coast would have been easier.

- Rahwa is a slender young woman of 16 years old who fled a small village in the highlands of Eritrea by herself. She is suffering from a parasitic infection after drinking some dirty water that the smugglers provided her and she had also been sexually assaulted by smugglers.

There are the Ethiopian refugees in Egypt too, and those are members of the Oromo tribes which constitute a majority in Ethiopia, compared to the other configurations of the country. Nevertheless, they had always been subjected to ruthless persecution (and even formed the “Oromo Liberation Front”) until a new president who is a member of this ethnic group was elected in March 2018.

## **The lifeblood between Egypt and Sudan**

The Sudanese authorities maintain strict policies regarding refugees' camps and restrict their freedom of movement. The UNHCR has condemned the deportation and repatriation of refugees, especially the Eritreans ones. Khartoum follows its own asylum legislation, derived from the Organization of African Unity Convention of 1969, that dictates the status determination procedures for "the refugee".

According to the UN report of 2017, Sudan hosts more than 793.700 asylum seekers. There is a great number of refugee camps in Sudan, such as "Khor Al Waral" where most South Sudanese refugees are concentrated. The worst refugee camp, "Shajrab", is well-known for the activity of human traffickers and kidnappers within it.

- Abdallah (23 years old) was born in the "Shajrab" refugee camp. He describes it as a prison where his movement was restricted to his trips to and from school (1). Abdallah came back to Sudan after travelling to Cairo and has been working since then with the Sudanese Red Cross. He says that the Sudanese security officers allow the kidnappers from the Rashaida tribe (which originates back to the Arabian Peninsula and spreads across the Red Sea Coast between Egypt and Sudan) to enter into the camps to abduct refugees then ask for a ransom or, sometimes, sell them to the Bedouin tribes who deport them to the desert of Sinai. Whenever the families don't pay their relatives' ransoms fast enough, the abductors torture the victims while calling the families to pressure them into paying.

In Omdurman, the "Souk Al Franji" and the "Souk Libya" are departure points for either Egypt or Libya. There, the smugglers charge between 500 and 800 dollars for a journey to the borders. Omar Al Junaid, a trafficker who has been working in the smuggling business for 6 years, says that the refugees coming from East Africa pay the least possible fees, while the Syrians pay a lot: "the African refugees pay less but they are forced to work and, most of the time, they become slaves." He adds, "the Syrians have the money and want to get to Europe as fast as possible".

- Ghimy left his country, Eritrea, at 16 years old only, behind his parents' back to protect his family's safety in case they were questioned by the authorities. He arrived to Cairo after having faced great difficulties in the

Sudanese camps. Along his journey, he passed through many checkpoints until reaching Kasla, in Eastern Sudan. The smugglers collaborate with Sudanese security officers who keep them in waiting points in a “safe” zone outside Kasla, where many members of the Rashaida tribe reside. Some refugees travel to Khartoum while others are handed over to human traffickers. Paradoxically, the safe zone is inhabited by government officials. Ghimy got stuck in the Shajrab refugee camp and was asked for 280 dollars to be allowed to leave. He was transported in a “Toyota Land Cruiser” car, which is the type of cars widely used by the Sudanese security forces. They weren’t stopped at any checkpoints. Afterwards, Ghimy lived in the “Ghreef” neighborhood in Khartoum, where most of the Eritrean refugees reside. He worked in many jobs, such as washing dishes in a coffee shop, until he amassed enough money to travel to Egypt, from where he will go to Libya.

The journey from Kasla to Khartoum costs between 300 and 450 dollars for men and around 750 dollars for women to “ensure their safety”. The smugglers try to convince the young Eritreans to leave their parents secretly and travel to Europe in an irregular manner. Those young immigrants often fall into the hands of the militias that run the slave trade in Libya (2).

The relation between the Sudanese police officers, the smugglers and the human traffickers seems shadowy, although it is clear that they share common interests. The Sudanese police officer ask to see the ID cards of the Eritrean or Ethiopian immigrants and suggest that they better pay 50 dollars because they might, otherwise, tear the ID card down and repatriate them to their countries of origin. Sudan is a transit station and not a final destination for the immigrants, therefore, they do not wish to get stuck there.

### **Between the rock of security and the hard place of smugglers**

When the African refugees arrive to Egypt, they rely on many smuggling networks mostly centralized in Cairo and Alexandria. There are also coastal platforms for trafficking towards Europe where no police patrols are present, between Damietta in the East and Marsa Matruh in the West. From there, the immigrants are transported on boats to Europe. The Egyptian authorities have arrested 7 thousand persons trying to immigrate irregularly from these points between August 2013 and the end of 2015

(according to the “Egyptian initiative for Personal Rights”).

Ali, a Somalian asylum seeker among the detained ones, fled his country during the 2007 turmoil. His journey went through Ethiopia, Kenya and Sudan before arriving to Egypt in 2014. He was arrested twice on a charge of irregular migration, once in Sudan and another time in Egypt (3). Ali had addressed the media while being detained in a poorly ventilated room of the Karmouse police station, saying that he is only looking for an opportunity to make a better life, find a good job and send money to his family, but ended up trying to leave Egypt since he couldn't find employment or get any assistance from the UNHCR.

In 2015, there were 89 persons in the detention center of “Karmouse”, of which 15 were Somalian, 16 Syrian, 58 Palestinian-Syrian and 15 minors.

**Ali Mouki, who arrived from the Congo to Egypt to pursue his education, says that life in Egypt has become increasingly difficult because of the rising prices of transportations and the depreciation of the pound. He praises Egypt for allowing players from African nationalities to join its best soccer teams and adds that his friend Kasongo has managed to enroll in the Zamalek club.**

The smuggling network in Egypt is managed by a bunch of “heads” known by the Syrians living in Cairo under the nicknames of “the whale”, “the general” or “the doctor”. It is believed that there are three of them, and some suppose that there is one Egyptian, one Syrian and one Palestinian-Syrian among them, while others claim that they are all of Libyan nationality.

The security campaigns launched to apprehend the mafia of smugglers reveal additional details. In March 2017, the Egyptian ministry of Interior announced that a gang smuggling young people from Alexandria to Italy was arrested. Most of the gang members were land brokers, or people who were previously accused of “being involved in irregular migration”. They were using boats that were unsafe and unintended for human transportation. It was also discovered that members of the gang owned residential units, including a villa in the “King Marriott” area in Alexandria.

The smugglers use big trucks meant for the transportation of cattle to hide the immigrants behind the animals' legs until they arrive to a small



rubber boat that transports 15 persons at a time to a bigger boat waiting for it in the sea.

Irregular immigration increases during the summertime on the shallow coast that spreads between the governorates of Kafr-El-Sheikh and Alexandria. The area is monitored for consecutive days by the smugglers to ensure that the border guards – which are affiliated to the Egyptian Army - are not surveilling the area. Whenever a smuggler is caught, other smugglers propose to pay off the guards in exchange for his release. If the border guard involved is from a poor social class, they would bribe him with a pack of cigarettes or 5 thousand pounds but, sometimes, the bribery amount can reach millions of pounds. To avoid this, the Egyptian authorities launch periodic unannounced inspections of the members of the security guards who are sometimes replaced unexpectedly, in an attempt to abort possible smuggling operations.

**The Egyptian authorities focus on security measures and sanction smugglers severely as a means to restrict the flow of refugees. However, the insufferable conditions that cause the immigration are still present in the migrants' countries of origin in the South and the East, which means that the influx will continue, especially given that the influential networks benefitting from irregular immigration, such as human traffickers and agents of the security services, benefit from its continuation.**

The statements by Egyptian officials insist on the efficiency of the security measures, claiming that they are successful in stopping the influx of irregular immigration to Europe from its ports. The General Ahmad Youssef Abdulnabi, previous commander of the border guards, declared in 2017 that his forces were provided with cutting-edge equipment such as “unmanned aerial vehicles and high-power tracking devices” and that “the patrolling was intensified”, though, he did not deny that the operations of smuggling persisted.

In December 2017, Egyptian governmental statements declared that the phenomenon of irregular immigration had been totally eliminated since September 2016. Tarek Radwan, the President of the Committee on Foreign Affairs in the Chamber of Deputies stated that the procedures adopted by Egypt in its war against irregular immigration protected the

borders completely, particularly from the Africans migrants who transited through Egypt en route to Europe, adding that smugglers and brokers had been caught... The Presidential Spokesman, Bassem Radhi, relied on the Italian official figures, stating that not a single case of irregular immigration was recorded from Egypt to Italy since September 2016.

### **In Conclusion**

If Egypt had indeed succeeded in stopping irregular migration to Europe through its lands, would that stop the Africans from trying to leave? Would it make them consider returning to their countries of origin, or would it push them to try and cope with the difficulties in Egypt?

Ali Mouki, who arrived from the Congo to Egypt to pursue his education, says that life in Egypt has become increasingly difficult because of the rising prices of transportations and the depreciation of the pound. He praises Egypt for allowing players from African nationalities to join its best soccer teams and adds that his friend Kasongo has managed to enroll in the Zamalek club. But, on the other hand and unlike the Sudanese, the other Africans cannot get respectable jobs like working in the official communication centers (“Vodafone” and “Etisalat”) because of the language barrier. Ali Mouki also lauded life in neighborhoods such as “Faysal” (in Giza) where many dark skinned people reside.

Most of the refugees suffer from difficulties in integrating. Ali Mouki mentioned the existence of centers dedicated to learning the Arabic language, but the immigrants lack the financial incentive, like work for example, that may encourage them to take this step. So, many of the African refugees rely either on the money sent by their families or on the assistance of the UN. Still, those difficulties are not enough to motivate Ali’s return to the Congo where the economic situation hasn’t improved at all, rather, he aspires to join his family in Europe.

The Egyptian authorities focus on security measures and sanction smugglers severely as a means to restrict the flow of refugees. However, the insufferable conditions that cause the immigration are still present in the migrants’ countries of origin in the South and the East, which means that the influx will continue, especially given that the influential networks benefitting from irregular immigration, such as human traffickers and agents of the security services, benefit from its continuation.

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1) A report by Investigative Journalist Klaas van Dijken, in collaboration with Abdel Moneim Suleiman, published by News Deeply on January 19, 2018.

2) A report published by the Irish Times, by its correspondent in Khartoum, Sally Hayden, on December 28, 2017.

3) A report published by The Middle East Eye on December 4, 2016.









## EU-Africa: Less development assistance, more police cooperation

Salima Mellah

Editor-in-chief of "Algeria Watch" website, from Algeria

The undeclared subsidiary role of the Algerian government in the European migration policy.

On March 14th 2018, the French Interior Minister Gérard Collomb met his Algerian counterpart Noureddine Bedoui in Algiers to discuss, specifically, issues of security and irregular migration. He then continued his journey towards Niger where a “conference on the coordination of the fight against smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons” was organized with representatives of 9 African countries (Chad, Mali, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Senegal and Libya), 4 European countries (France, Germany, Italy and Spain), the European Union and the United Nations.

The regional instability, particularly after the fall of the Libyan regime in 2011, allowed Europe to impose its migration policy, within the framework of the war in Mali and the “fight against terrorism”. Algeria is involved in this affair.

While Niger is set as an example in terms of the containment of the refugees’ outflow to the Mediterranean Sea, Algeria appears to be critical towards the European migration policies and seems reluctant to integrate the programs or comply with the European Union’s agenda. Yet, it pursues devastating policies for migrants inside Algeria and also for the populations in the neighboring countries, particularly those in Mali and Niger.

### **Niger: pivot of the “borders externalization” policy**

Determined to prevent the arrival of refugees in Europe, EU officials develop migration policies which are increasingly onerous for the Southern Mediterranean and Sahel states. The agreement signed with Turkey in March 2016 to restrict migration to Europe and return the refugees who had arrived to Greece is set as an example intended to inspire other regions. The EU builds upon it to initiate new programs under the guise of “fighting the illicit smuggling of migrants and human trafficking”. In reality, security remains the top priority: controlling the flow of migrants, creating transit camps, militarizing the borders, setting up checkpoints, forcing repatriations, etc.

For the purpose of reinforcing these measures, especially at the Libyan borders, the European policies target both regions (Horn of Africa, Sahel, Maghreb) and countries. In the recent months, successive summits between European and African countries have been held: at the end of August 2017, the leaders of France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the EU on the



one side and those of the Niger, Chad and Libya on the other agreed that “hotspots” (identification and registration centers aimed at distinguishing political refugees from economical exiles) would be installed in the African countries. However, to disguise their intention of selecting, the expression “hotspots” was replaced by “protective mission”. The European states have presented themselves as humanitarian “missionaries”, protecting against the smugglers, the trafficking and the slavery, barely concealing their cynical intents.

In November 2017, during the 5th African Union – European Union summit in Abidjan which focused on the youth, images of a slave market in Libya were released, diverting the attention from the subject of the meeting and orienting it towards the French president’s call for “a close cooperation to be established with an operational task force combining police agencies and intelligence services (...) to dismantle the networks and their financing” . In the end, the main point was to set up forces of police and gendarmerie, to help in monitoring border control and create identity files.

In line with the two previous summits, the meeting of March 2018 in Niamey was devoted to the fight against networks of smugglers and traffickers. The summit planned to reinforce national legislations and consolidate police and legal cooperation between the countries. The development aid was increasingly being channeled towards migration management policies and the legal or police mechanisms put in place to contain them . The French Interior Minister Gérard Collomb, who was present at the summit, visited a center managed by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Agadez, a region at a crossroad between Algeria and Libya. Its local economy which had, for years, been dependent on the thousands of migrants who gathered there before continuing their journeys, collapsed when the state started to follow the European directives. On the migration routes, on the border posts, in the coach stations, and even inside the “ghettos” where they hide, the Nigerien security forces, with the help of the mission of EUCAP Sahel (European organism of police cooperation), hunt the refugees, the carriers, the lodgers, etc. Repression doesn’t prevent migration but makes it more expensive and multiplies its dangers; the number of deaths in the desert has increased significantly. This policy violates the principle of free movement inside the country and in the ECOWAS (The Economic Community of West African States) region, of

which Niger is a part. Once arrested, the migrants are transferred to 5 “transit centers” managed by the IOM whose main purpose is to deter departures and encourage repatriations in exchange of a small financial assistance. However, this limited aid doesn’t deter prospective candidates from immigrating to Algeria where they either work or resort to begging .

### **Algeria: the bad good student**

In 2014, an agreement had been reached between Niger and Algeria allowing the latter to organize the expulsion of the Nigerien migrants who were involved in organized begging networks. In fact, since 2016, all the sub-Saharan migrants have been living in fear of expulsion. Around 100 000 migrants used to reside in Algeria and a significant number among them had come from the neighboring countries fleeing wars, conflicts and the consequent deterioration of economic conditions. Some of those were in a temporary stay, trying to gather the sufficient amount of money to cross into Europe.

The Southern borders, traditionally open to the Tuareg populations, gradually closed with the many crises occurring across the Sahel region. Despite all, cyclic migrants were still tolerated in the last few years. Forceful deportations had not been implemented yet, but the migrants could face a two-month jail sentence for their “illegal entry” into Algerian territory. A majority of those in exile, particularly the Sub-Saharans, live in Algeria on abandoned construction sites, under bridges or in slums in the margins of urban areas, in extremely precarious conditions and outside any legal framework. They rarely get employed and, when they do, they are exploited or underpaid. Even though education and basic healthcare are still provided to them, the migrants do not dare to go to hospitals or send their children to schools anymore, after the government’s strict reinforcement of the law in 2017.

During the past three years, according the Minister of the Interior, 27 000 migrants were “repatriated at the request of their countries of origin” . In reality, the exact number is not made public and, in practice, these are not organized repatriations but heavy-handed expulsions of people, including women and children, seized from the streets or from construction sites on the basis of “ethnic profiling”, regardless of their nationalities or status. Raids have increased in the past months, on all the territory. The arrested migrants, taken to the North of the country, are first rounded

up in the summer camps of Zeralda - in the Western suburb of Algiers - before being transported in buses to prefabricated camps in the city of Tamanrasset where they spend a few days of confinement. They are finally taken by night to the other side of the border, into Niger or Mali. Sometimes abandoned in the desert, in a hazardous environment, they often need to reach the nearest town by their own means. A rally was held on the 12th of March 2018 in front of the Algerian embassy in Bamako to condemn these illegal expulsions.

It seems that the time for “zero tolerance” has come. While the Algerian government pretends that it won't allow the European Union to dictate its actions to reduce migration , the methods it resorts to actually produce the same results desired by the latter, under inhumane conditions. Without burdening themselves with the legal framework of protecting the rights of refugees or migrants and through impenetrable cunning procedures, the Algerian authorities repress to deter, criminalize and expel. Along these lines, the circular of September 2017 provides for the withdrawal of the right to work from private companies, taxis and minibuses transporting persons in an irregular situation. This reinforcement of governmental policies comes with shameful commentaries from politicians and racist campaigns on the social media which have prompted a series of physical attacks on migrants . Under the pretext of the fight against trafficking networks, the victims themselves are the ones being prosecuted and expelled.

If the government really wants to stand out from the European policies, it should not resort to serious human rights violations. Accepting the externalization of the European borders and endorsing the role of the policeman is a short-sighted approach which overlooks the human, economic and cultural exchanges between populations that share common values and experiences of liberation struggles against colonialism.







## Algeria can expel migrants but can it change its DNA?

**Daikha Dridi**

Journalist and Researcher from Algeria. Co-founder of “International Boulevard” website and author of: “Algiers, Wounded and Luminous” (2006, in French)

Algeria “has not recently become a land of immigration, it has been one for more than half a century”. In fact, the difference between the Algerian people’s reaction towards sub-Saharan migrants and that of the authorities in the country is palpable.

“Dear brothers, welcome to Algeria. Long live Africa, united and strong”. Dark humor? Profound cynicism? It is difficult to decrypt the intentions of those who ordered the painting of those slogans on the freshly whitewashed walls of the accommodation center for migrants awaiting their deportation from Algeria. Why would we welcome guests we have decided to force quit a country where they had made their homes?

Those slogans, like a subliminal message failing at subtlety, are in the backgrounds of the pictures of migrants published, a few days ago, in the Algerian daily newspaper “Liberté”, as part of a report entitled “the repatriation of migrants in images”.

Reporters from this Algerian newspaper were authorized to follow and photograph all the steps of a collective deportation of sub-Saharan migrants to Niger: from the capital Algiers in the North to Tamanrasset, the largest urban area in the Algerian Sahara.

So, the “welcome” message is not really subliminal! Though, it is not directed towards the sub-Saharan migrants but to all those who accuse Algeria of mistreating migrants and infringing its international commitments.

Those who accuse abound: the Algerian League of Human Rights, the Algerian journalists, hundreds of Algerians who signed a petition entitled “We are all migrants”, Malian associations for the defense of migrants, Amnesty International, Associated Press, CNN, Reuters and the UN whose high commissioner for human rights publically demanded Algeria, in May 2018, to stop the collective expulsion of migrants.

The Malian consular officials in Algeria announced to the press that on the 5th of October 2017 a large-scale campaign was launched by the Algerian security services to arrest migrants. Sub-Saharan migrants who mostly worked on construction sites in all the big cities of the country were hunted, arrested and gathered in centers before being shoved into buses or trucks that took them in the direction of the Saharan borders.

The 2017/2018 campaign against migrants had reached unprecedented proportions in Algeria, it had been preceded by an attempt by the authorities in charge of public transportation to forbid bus and taxi drivers from transporting “migrants of irregular situations”.



On September 27th 2017, the HuffPost Algeria narrated the content of a surreal ministerial briefing note: “the Transportation Directorate of the governorate of Mostaganem informs all bus and taxi drivers of long distance trips between the different countries’ governorates that, from now on, it is strictly forbidden to carry irregular migrants”. The ministerial instruction “ends by threatening to retire transport licenses from the drivers who would fail to comply to this rule,” writes the website which reveals, in the same article, that in the main bus station of the capital, the reaction of all transportation professionals, drivers, conductors, bureaucrats, is unanimous: they are scandalized, unbelieving: “Now, they want us to ban black people from taking the bus! Why are they doing this? Do they want to exclude foreigners? Why do they want us to remain apart?”, says an Algerian bus driver.

The ministerial note was eventually withdrawn the very next day, after provoking a general outcry on social media in addition to the anger of transporters themselves, but the policemen continued their arrests nevertheless.

In Oran, the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights condemned, on November 2017, the confinement of a hundred migrants for three days on trains serving two major cities of the West of the country: Oran and Tlemcen: “a hundred migrants forcibly confined in the carriage of a train connecting Maghnia and Oran. The doors of the carriage were closed from the outside, the food was being passed through the windows at night to the passengers who were being treated like criminals, like social plague-bearers, because of their nationalities and the color of their skins. It is those shameful scenes that the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights has witnessed yesterday”, describes another article on the HuffPost which denounces “sweeps” and “racial profiling”.

The Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights also gave the local press videos that were filmed by the migrants themselves during their transportation, while they were conducted like cattle, inside trucks, to the borders with Niger and Mali, in the middle of the Sahara, in the South of Algeria.

These expulsions and their scandalous brutality soon started to alarmingly impact Algeria’s biggest southern neighbor, Mali, where Algerian

Consulates were being attacked, and sometimes ransacked, by groups of angry Malians who protested the ill treatment they – or their relatives – had previously received in Algeria.

In Mali, the violence of the collective expulsions conducted by the Algerian security services fueled anger and an enormous strain that eventually exploded in April 2018 into a diplomatic outrage that Algerian diplomats tried to contain: Abderahamane Sylla, the Minister of Malians Abroad and African Integration announced that Mali recalled the Malian ambassador in Algeria in protest against the mistreatment of Malian citizens in Algeria.

This announcement (duly recorded) and reported by a BBC journalist was indirectly denied the very next day by the Algerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs which clarified that the ambassador of Mali was present in Algeria and that the relations between the two countries were in a really good place.

In fact, never before in the history of Algeria have the relations with a neighboring country as important as Mali gone this bad. But, instead of worrying about the undermining of its popularity among the citizens of this brotherly country, the Algerian officials only presented multiple denials, counter-accusations and “campaigns” against the “western detractors”.

“Algeria has been the subject, for many weeks, of a spiteful campaign orchestrated by some non-governmental organizations falsely accusing it of failing in its international obligations regarding solidarity, welcoming and hospitality to sub-Saharan migrants”, churns out, in May 2018, yet another statement by the Algerian Ministry of foreign affairs which reveals a government’s obsession with “outside instigations aimed at destabilizing Algeria”, inherited from the civil war period of the nineties.

Instead of putting an end to the infernal spiral caused by the violence of the arrests and the racism inherent in the collective expulsions, and rather than giving time to think strategically about a long term plan on the question of refugees and migrants, the Algerian government kept going, like a brainless machine, agitating itself against “the malicious forces trying to tarnish its reputation”.

On the pictures taken by reporter Louiza Ammi from the newspaper

“Liberté”, we see the Algerian Red Cross staff getting busy helping, all smiles and full of sympathy, the children of migrants. The doctors and Algerian volunteers are wearing brand new red vests, latex gloves, respiratory masks, as if, unconsciously, they wanted to imitate the images of European rescue workers taking care of the migrants stranded on the northern shores of the Mediterranean, well wrapped in their sanitized suits.

Imitating the Europeans, what for? Algeria “has not become a land of immigration” as the Algerian researcher Ali Bensaad explains, because actually “it has been one for more than half a century” (as he states in an interview given in August 2017 to the daily newspaper “Al Watan”). The sociologist adds: “During the liberation war, of a population of around 9 million inhabitants, 200 000 Algerian refugees were officially recorded in the UN camps in Tunisia and Morocco, this is without taking into account those who migrated on their own depending on their personal capabilities or family connections in Morocco and Tunisia. While the border troops were not always respectful of the authorities of those countries, the refugees were not always “angels”, exactly as we would say nowadays of the sub-Saharan migrants. In comparison, we are talking about 90 000 sub-Saharanans” concluding that “the humanitarian dimension (of the question of the sub-Saharan migrants in Algeria) is a fundamental component of our national history”.

While Algerian officials chose to shrivel up aggressively invoking security-related alibis, like Donald Trump does when he closes the door on Syrian and Iraqi refugees pretexting a fear of terrorism, it is remarkable to note that apart from the authorities, more and more Algerians consider that sub-Saharanans choosing to reside in Algeria are a formidable asset for the country.

For example, building contractors are among those who publically demand from the authorities to stop chasing migrants and ask the police to give them residence permits: “We have gone to the police station numerous times to ask them to let the workers go”, says a works foreman in an investigation by the HuffPost Algeria on the working conditions of sub-Saharanans in the construction industry.

“Us, contractors and foremen, would like their situation to be regularized. It would allow us to declare them instead of employing them illegally, and they would be able to lodge complaints against the “hogra” (contempt

abuses)”, sums up Issam, an Algerian building contractor.

Issam is not alone in his request. Small businesses led by Algerian-Malians, mostly women, spread in the city of Algiers and the products they sell, from textiles to jewelry and furniture are very popular, while a group of Algerian-Malian feminists has launched a “culinary catering” initiative responding to the demand for Malian and West-African dishes and food. Such signs of the Algerian – sub-Saharan mix which have existed for a long time in the cities of the south of Algeria have started to become a reality in the North of the country and its coastal cities as well.

Algerian officials, headed by the Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia, himself a relic of the sinister nineties, have neither the willingness nor the capacity to see and acknowledge those signs. It will probably be too late when they finally understand that the ones whom they are cynically “welcoming in Algeria” are, already, part of Algeria.



## The Transformations of Migrations in Algeria: political stakes and humanitarian issues

Salim Chenna

Researcher from Algeria, author of "The Migration Flows in Contemporary Algeria" (Karthala, 2016)

Determinants of those migrations are multiple and it is useless to value one more than another as their flows have gotten increasingly complex over the past decades. Africa's growth didn't change the socio-economic conditions of a large portion of the population... Poor governance persists and, in the context of globalization, the individualization of societies and the weakening of the traditional support systems add to it.



Between 2014 and 2018, Algeria has expelled more than 30 000 persons from various Sahel and sub-Saharan African countries; the Algerian authorities have announced that, every year, around 500 persons enter the Algerian territory illegally, arguing that they represent a threat to the national security to justify their deportation. In the contemporary period, sub-Saharan migrations in Algeria find their origins in the Sahelian climatic and political crises of the 70's. In parallel, the presence of dark-skinned Algerians – notably the descendants of slaves, called “Hartani” - is important in the Southern region, but, as Salim Khiat noted, the representations differ between those two categories of dark-skinned people: while the first are valued for sharing the same cultural, political and religious heritage with the rest of the nation, the others are depicted in a disparaging way which attribute them with many “social scourges” as called by the media, accusing them of theft, drug trafficking, prostitution, illnesses, etc.

Nevertheless, the sub-Saharan migrants with an irregular status only represent a small minority of the population and of the 140 000 foreign workers of 125 nationalities who are legally employed. In comparison, Ali Bensaâd estimated the number of sub-Saharan migrants, either those settled in one place or circulating in the country, to be around 75 000 in 2019, while the authorities announced the yearly expulsion of nearly 10 000 persons between 2006 and 2008 and 41 000 between 2009 and 2011. The researchers of the European University Institute in Florence have estimated the number of “sub-Saharan migrant workers” to be around a hundred thousand in Algeria in 2013 .

In December 2012, the Ministry of Interior declared that, in the context of political and security crises in the region, there were 25 000 sub-Saharan migrants in Algeria. It therefore announced the reinforcement of the hosting capacities of the Department of the Deep South where most of the migrants were allegedly from Mali and Niger or from Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Those migrants have fled the conflicts and political instabilities that disturbed the traditional migratory routes and limited employment opportunities, or have moved because of the poor harvests caused by a climate factor. It is notably the case for the southern regions of Niger that were affected both by the activities of Boko Haram and a period of drought. Other numbers issued by the same Department mentioned that 30 000 “Maliens” fled combats in the wake



of the Franco-African intervention in Sahel but few information was given concerning the assistance that was provided to them or their legal status (many Northern Malians also have an Algerian nationality).

In May 2018, the European Union, in its Neighboring Policy with Algeria's report, estimated that irregular migrants were "more than a hundred thousand", including Syrian and Yemeni migrants .

### **Increasingly complex migrations**

Beyond the numbers, which are questionable with regard to status definition or sources and their possible instrumentalization, this political reaction was prompted by the development of Nigerian migratory channels in 2013 which implicated men, women, children and elderly people destined to beggary. Until then, the trans-Saharan migrations concerned mainly young men of working age who principally stayed in the popular areas of the Mediterranean metropolises, avoided public spaces and either circulated in the whole region (between Morocco, Algeria and Libya) or remained in the southern regions of Algeria. This new channel, probably linked with organized crime, dispersed those migrants - often coming from South Niger - into different regions: 250 in Mila (north-east Algeria), 850 in Ferdjioua, 200 in Constantine (the third largest city in Algeria) and more than 2000 in the province of Bejaia (with its important oil port on the Mediterranean). The working permit policy in the most strained sectors, such as construction, has given way to arrests and collective evictions. In Autumn 2014, following a visit by the Nigerian Minister for Internal Affairs, the government responded in favor of the request, formulated weeks earlier by the Nigerian Minister of Justice and spokesperson for the government, of "repatriating" their nationals who had entered Algeria illegally. These operations, sometimes aided by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), primarily concern the women and the children and mobilize the Ministries of Solidarity, Health, Internal Affairs and Transportations (which provides the buses that transport them) so that the human dignity of those who are repatriated is respected. These operations are sometimes supported by the army. Yet, for slightly over a year, those evictions were intensified and generalized to involve every migrant coming from sub-Saharan.

Determinants of those migrations are multiple and it is useless to value one more than another as the migratory flows have gotten increasingly

complex over the past decades. The African growth, unevenly distributed over the continent, didn't change the socio-economic conditions of a large portion of the population... Poor governance persists and, in the context of the globalization, the individualization of societies, the weakening of traditional support systems and the decrease in the fund transfers from the second and third generation migrants to their families, a desire for emancipation and empowerment rises, that can sometimes be concretized through migration.

Migration is often presented as an "adventure" that forges a strong character out of its difficulties and allows to develop oneself as a financially and culturally independent individual. The experience is lived as a rite of passage or an initiation rite, especially for the youngest among the migrators. However, it is no longer an immigration restricted to the youth from the countryside, of the poorly educated or low-skilled men registering in channels established through the family, the village or the social enterprise known as the "Noria"; the social trajectories of migrants have become individualized, non-linear (they circulate more than they immigrate) and outside of the legal frameworks as the conditions to migrate or study in Europe have become more difficult. Those migrants often come from the cities, have a high school education or more, belong to the middle-class rather than the disparate poor. Of course, the political and security crises of the Middle East have contributed the escalation of the phenomenon.

### **The politicization of migrations**

But, this does not yet correspond to the image that the people and the authorities have of migrants. The popular xenophobia persists and is sustained on social media while the authorities blow hot and cold, alternating between reaffirming the Algerian politico-diplomatic principles (favoring a "global approach" of the question, refusing to become the policemen of Europe, privileging a humanitarian treatment) and reviving the most hackneyed stereotypes on dark-skinned Africans. The transporters (taxis, bus drivers) from Western Algeria have therefore been asked not to take sub-Saharan clients in order not to facilitate their movement, since those migrations have become a political issue in Algeria.

The president of the National Advisory Committee on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (NACPPHR) has proposed to prohibit access

to the national territory to the sub-Saharanans and Syrians. In an interview with the newspaper “Al Mihwar Al Yawmi”, published on September 6th, 2014, he stated that he wished to “preserve their dignity” while requiring “rigorous measures to limit their numbers” because of the “risks of the spreading of disease and criminality haunting our society”. The association “Algiers the White”, through Abdelhafidh Sellami, defended the arrest and eviction of the “Africans” from the capital. This cell, close to the Salafist and conservative movements, had already manifested itself in the countryside, calling for the closure of the bars and drinking establishments. Lakhdar Benkhellaf, an Islamist deputy from the Front for Justice and Development, supported national preference in access to employment and expressed concerns about public health and safety while calling for the grouping of the exiled and the organization of their assistance .

Afterwards, in 2017, members of the government deemed the sub-Saharan migrants as “threats” to “the national security” before being contradicted by the Head of the National Security who indicated that no link had ever been established between criminality and migration, which raises questions about the existence of a real immigration and asylum policy in Algeria that the state agrees on adopting.

These systematic expulsions are however justified by the risks encountered by the migrants, especially since small disputes or rumors have escalated into confrontations between Algerians and sub-Saharanans in Oran in 2005 and in Ouargla and Bechar in 2016. We should notably recall the death of 92 persons, principally women and children, during their traversal by foot of the Algerian – Nigerien Sahara in October 2013, and the passing of a 2 year-old struck by a car while his mother – who was also killed – was begging in Bejaia in November 2014. Despite the precautions, a road accident in the South of Ghardaia claimed the lives of 9 persons - among them 3 children and 2 Algerians - and severely injured 16 people on December 14th 2014 during a repatriation operation that was bringing migrants to Tamanrasset before sending them to Niger. In November 2015, a fire in an Algerian Red Cross warehouse hosting migrants took the lives of 18 persons in the city of Ouargla.

Among the Algerian population, some attitudes and representations have persisted, and were put forward, for example, during the Ebola epidemic in 2014. “Liberté” disclosed in its “Radar” supplement a conversation

attesting to the pervasiveness of the association between the dark-skinned population and infectious diseases: an inhabitant of Algiers pestering a sub-Saharan about his alleged contamination with the Ebola virus was answered by the latter: “We all are the Ebola for someone else. You, yourself, are the Ebola!” In Guezzam, a border town in Niger, the simple rumor that infected migrants were arriving has created such a panic that the local authorities were forced to publicly deny the rumor. Among others, the daily tabloid *Echourouk*, has kept the traditional editorial line assimilating sub-Saharan migrants with diseases, criminality and prostitution, producing many racist front pages while most of the media, printed and online, had started to give a voice to migrants, to question their living conditions and to criticize the institutional and popular xenophobia.

The majority of the population, on the contrary, interrogates the visible and rapid evolution of this new presence of the migrants in the media, which had long been hidden and repressed, but this population remains concerned about the degrading living conditions of entire families and the lack of schooling for children – which constitute an important part of these “refugees”. The collective rape of an undocumented Cameroonian in Oran in 2015 caused widespread concern among the people while other incidents of the same kind have happened in the area. In Bejaia, the associations have demonstrated to demand the decent assistance of the families of migrants engaged in beggary. There are also small local associations where individuals organize assistance, especially during the month of Ramadan. The Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights (ALDHR), the independent unions (notably the SNAPAP in Oran) and the youth associations are increasingly committing to the protection of migrants, while Amnesty International Algeria worries about the lack of an asylum policy. In an unprecedented event, the Algeria Migrants Platform was constituted in December 2015, as an organization that aims to raise awareness among the public and influence the authorities, particularly on the questions of discrimination and holdings; bringing together many organizations of the civil society, it demands a new law on asylum to update the existing legal framework, established by a decree in 1963.

It is mostly the Algerian deportation policy, although not new, that has been the subject of several criticisms not only from Algerian NGOs who care about the issue but also from international organizations and NGOs.

The Nigerian government has complained that some of the migrants deported to its borders were not of Nigerian nationalities and did not fit within the scope of the repatriation agreement. Amnesty International has warned of the hard conditions of detention and refoulement - in the middle of the Sahara Desert - of men and women migrants, condemning the indiscriminate raids that push the authorities to sometimes expel people in a regular situation based only on the color of their skins (sometimes even expelling dark-skinned Algerians). The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has criticized the unclear procedures and their harshness. The rejected migrants have themselves expressed their resentment by demonstrating in front of the Algerian Consulate in Gao (Mali) in March 2018 to protest the ill-treatments which they had allegedly suffered in Algeria during their expulsion, notably the fact that they were released in a no man's land in the middle of the desert.

In the middle of a region affected by the impacts of international political turmoil and projected into a Sahara going through economic and ecological mutations, Algeria is witnessing a change in the human mobility traversing its soil which is believed to be, rightly or wrongly, an island of stability in the region. Migrations have become politicized or are perceived through a political lens. The official and dominant discourses do not hesitate to link the origin of those populations' movements with the consequences of the political adventurism of neighboring peoples and of the western powers during the "Arab Spring". The underlying politicization, or the sub-text, of these new representations and of the highlighted visibility of sub-Saharan and Syrian migrations, has raised questions for the ordinary citizens who were used to sub-analyze socio-political facts and translate public discourses and actions into profane language. Therefore, the diaspora of those new "crisis migrants", from Adrar to Tebessa and from Algiers to Ghardaia, is perceived by some as a warning sign against the risks that might manifest in case a brutal overthrow of the regime occurs. Those new migrations prompt the population to question the consequences of a regional political instability - violence, economic crisis, accelerated pauperization, displacements - and the ruling power seems to be sardonically asking them the question: "And you, where do you think you would go then?"







**Tunisia**





## Tunisia and the migration of sub-Saharan Africans: Multiple Roles

Mohammad Rami Abdelmoula

Researcher, from Tunisia

Far from Europe's exaggerations, this article draws a general view on the issue of the sub-Saharan African migrants in Tunisia. The fates of those who came to study or work in a regular manner, and of the "others", whether they cross to Europe or decide to stay in the country.

“Africa” is the old name for the South of Tunisia and a part of Algeria, from which the “dark continent” derived its appellation.

Historical ties connect Tunisia and North Africa with the countries and communities of the sub-Saharan region. Those ties are economic (commercial convoys and slavery), religious (the Islamic Call (Da’wah) and the Sufi currents) and historic (the European colonialism). Despite the fact that most of the African people suffer from similar problems (the consequences of colonialism, corruption, impoverishment, unemployment and the suppression of freedoms), despite the solidarity that used to exist between the different African national liberation movements, and even though the hemorrhaging phenomenon of migration affects every country in Africa, the Tunisian people still have a superiority complex towards the sub-Saharans. Many harbor an “exotic” image that reeks stereotypes: “Les Africains”, as they are usually referred to in French by many Tunisians, practice dark magic, dance a lot, like civil wars, have epidemic diseases and famines.

These relationships started to change in the wake of the twenty first century when the number of sub-Saharan migrants began to increase. Many of them come to study or seek employment while others consider Tunisia to be a transit country on their migration route towards the Northern shores of the Mediterranean.

Many factors contributed to the evolution of this movement, some of them related to Tunisia, others to the economic and security conditions of West Africa and to the rising of the “Fortress Europe”. According to official figures (the General Population and Housing Census), the number of Africans (excluding those from North African and Arab countries) in Tunisia attains 7524 persons: the citizens from Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Mali and Senegal emerge as the top five among them. But this number is not precise, as it only considers those who carry a legal residence permit issued by the Ministry of Interior and ignores the thousands who reside in Tunisia in an illegal manner because of the difficulty they face to regularize their status.

### **I. Tunisia as a hosting country or an “intermediate solution”**

Despite the economic conditions and the increased unemployment, the situation in Tunisia is still better than in many other African countries

where conflicts and civil wars are devastating human lives. The relatively evolved infrastructures in Tunisia, the economic fabric and the educational institutions prompt many Africans to choose it as a destination for education and work, especially given the inward-looking policies adopted by the European Union.

### **The student migration: welcome, however...**

Tunisia started opening the doors of its universities in 1968. Up until the mid-nineties of the last century, the number of migrant students only reached a few hundred - coming from the Maghreb and, to a lesser extent, from the Orient and the sub-Saharan countries. Most of them benefited from scholarships provided either by the governments of their countries or by the Tunisian state within the framework of bilateral cooperation agreements. The presence of these foreign students started to gain new features since the late 1990s and the beginning of the third millennium. With the apparition of private universities, the number of foreign students increased and reached thousands, with the vast majority coming from sub-Saharan countries.

Most of the foreign students in Tunisia come from the countries of Sahel and West Africa in general, firstly by virtue of the geographical proximity of this region with the Maghreb and, secondly, because the citizens of those countries are exempted from entry-visa requirements to Tunisia and allowed to remain in the country for 90 days without needing any residence permits. Even those who come from countries that do not have a bilateral cooperation agreement with Tunisia can easily obtain a visa as soon as they present a proof of their enrolment in a Tunisian university. The fact that some private Tunisian universities offer programs in French has contributed in attracting the francophone among the Africans while other universities teach in English to attract the English-speaking among them.

### **However, there are many other pull factors to consider:**

- the security and stability (especially before the revolution of 2011) and the relatively evolved infrastructures in the capital Tunis and in other major cities such as Sfax and Soussa where the private universities are mainly concentrated.
- the diverse range of disciplines offered by these universities which provides the students with a large margin of choice.

- the development of higher education in Tunisia and the international recognition of the Tunisian university diplomas.
- the flexible criteria of acceptance into Tunisian universities compared to the European ones.
- the low costs of living in Tunisia compared to European countries.

The number of students coming from the sub-Saharan countries reached 12 thousand in 2010 and the Tunisian universities are willing to receive more. Many of those institutions send delegations to African countries in order to promote their courses and diplomas. Most students are males even though the number of females is significantly and rapidly increasing. The universities offer various disciplines and diplomas (license – equivalent of a BA, Magister – MA), but there is a particular focus on the sectors of Electronics, Media, Economy, Administration and Architecture.

Even at the official level, there is a desire to attract an increased the number of African students into Tunisian Universities. Months ago, the Tunisian Foreign Minister stated that the country ambioned to welcome 20 thousand students by 2020. This wish seems unrealistic given that the number of these students has been steadily decreasing for the past 5 years (6000 students in 2017 according to the Student Assembly) for many reasons: the political and security unrests that accompanied and followed the fall of the Ben Ali regime had a significant role in this decline, the competition among the Moroccan universities which had become fiercer especially given the country's stability and the facilitations in obtaining residence permits. Though, the main reasons for this decreasing number are the Tunisian migration policies and racism.

The racist acts perpetrated against those students are multiple, starting with verbal abuse and mockery, but spiraling out of control in the past years, both in terms of numbers and nature. A violent racism has emerged and has dangerously escalated from throwing stones and eggs to attacks with knives, attempted murders (as in the case of some Congolese students), sexual harassments and rape attempts. Those assaults may happen for a reason or without any. For example, the defeat of the National team in sports against a Sub-Saharan team can result in a wave of racist attacks against the migrants, and this was exactly what happened on the 31st of January 2015 after the Tunisian team lost to Equatorial Guinea in a football match, thus withdrawing from the Africa Cup of Nations.



The African students started to protest against those racist practices after the revolution. On one side, there is a climate of freedom that allows for expression, organization and action, and on another front, the aggressions have continued to increase. Moreover, part of the dark-skinned Tunisians and the defenders of minorities' rights have launched campaigns to raise the issue of racial discrimination which was, until recent years, a forbidden subject that remained outside media coverage. The "African Students and Trainees Association" has mobilized, together with Tunisian organizations, a number of demonstrations and actions, last of which were a protest in March 2018 and a demonstration in May 2018.

**After the opening of private universities, there are 12 thousand sub Saharan students in Tunisia. At the official level, there is an ambition to increase the number of registered African students in the Tunisian universities to 20 thousand by 2020. But this wish is hampered by a growing racism, increasingly complex administrative requirements and the unrest in Tunisia itself.**

If the students succeed to escape the racist practices, or somehow manage to "cope" with them, they would still find themselves facing other difficulties that would inevitably make their stay in Tunisia complicated... and their leaving it even more so!

The problems start right after the arrival in Tunisia. To get a residence permit, the student has to present a university enrolment certificate, a paper proving their diligent attendance to classes, a residential lease and a certificate of financial status. Even when students manage to present all the needed documents in time, they might receive their residence permits only a few weeks prior to the end of the academic year, knowing that its validity only spans over a year and that they will therefore have to renew it at the beginning of the following academic year.

Renewing the residence permit is costly (150 Tunisian Dinars upon application before the end of its validity and double that sum after the expiration of the previous permit) and exhausting for the foreign students, who are demanding an extension of its validity from one year to two in order to save time and money. For every week of irregular stay in Tunisia, the student is fined 20 Tunisian Dinars at the departure from the country. If the student fails to pay, he would be detained at the airport. The increasingly

high cost of studying, the accumulation of irregular residence fines and other problems that the students might face (such as the disturbances in their countries of origin, the interruption of their grants or of their families' remittances) force many of them to work in the informal economy sectors.

### **Labor migration: poor people elbowing poor people?**

Talking about a migration of workers and professionals to Tunisia might sound comical or even surreal to most of the Tunisians. Indeed, the country is going through a chronic crisis of unemployment and thousands of its young (and even elderly!) people of both genders, wait in line in front of the embassies of European and Gulf countries, hoping to receive a visa. Others embark on the “death boats” and sail the Mediterranean Sea in the direction of the opposite shores.

According to the official figures of 2015 (from the Ministry of Vocational Advancement and Employment), the number of foreigners working in Tunisia is estimated at approximately 8000 persons, mostly Europeans (French and Italians), Moroccans and other Arab nationalities. The number of African workers doesn't exceed 2000, mostly coming from Senegal and Cameroon.

The fraudulent recruitments of women migrant workers have similarities, which suggests the existence of national/international networks. In the beginning, the women are offered a decently paid job in Tunisia. As soon as they arrive, they are taken to the wealthy homes where they will work in domestic service. Their passports are retained to ensure that they won't run away and to force them to work for free as the facilitator has already received the installments of the first six months, without them knowing.

It is impossible to measure the true extent of the African employment in Tunisia. A great number of migrant workers lives in the country without any residence permits, for either a short or a long period of time, and works in the different sectors of the informal economy. Others, such as the students for example, bear residence permits which do not allow them to work officially and also resort to the informal economy to improve their living conditions.

Only a limited number of Africans manage to obtain legal work contracts in Tunisian factories and institutions and therefore benefit from the rights guaranteed by the Tunisian Employment Act and hold a regular residence permit. It is very rare to find African investors, business or workshop owners in Tunisia. The vast majority of them works in the sectors of the informal economy. The men work on construction sites, in agriculture, factories and craft workshops. As for the women, they usually work as domestic servants in wealthy households, as cleaning ladies for companies or as assistants in beauty salons or restaurants.

The protectionist work and residence laws in Tunisia impose several conditions on the migrants seeking employment. Things are even more complicated for the poorest and least qualified among them who come mostly from the sub-Saharan African countries.

Besides the obligation of having a contract certified by the Ministry of Vocational Advancement and Employment, the migrant workers cannot search for another job during the first contractual period, neither can they work outside of the province where the institution mentioned in the contract is located. It is true that the official departments often overlook some of the conditions or grant exceptions for the migrant workers coming from specific countries (mostly France and Maghreb countries), but many legal provisions allow these administrations to either adopt selective policies or close the job market completely in front of foreigner workers.

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The active players in Tunisia have different standpoints towards economic migration. The human rights organizations defend it from the standpoint of the freedom of movement and work. The authorities exaggerate the issue and tend to discourage it to avoid any possible subsequent problems. The trade unions, however, have conflicting attitudes: while the employers welcome this migration and call for more flexibility in handling

it, the workers' unions are less enthusiastic as migrant workers usually accept lower wages and tolerate harsh working conditions.

The Tunisian laws on migration and foreign employment are being more strictly enforced, especially for non-European and non-Maghrebi migrants. In most cases, this leads to disastrous consequences. For some of the African migrants, the doors close on all prospects of a decent work and on the possibility of ever obtaining residence permits in Tunisia, while, at the same time, they cannot or do not want to return to their countries of origin. Therefore, some of them consider irregular migration to Europe, thus risking their lives or falling victims of organized human trafficking networks.

Local and foreign media have uncovered numerous cases of exploitation of African women employed as domestic workers in Tunisia, to the extent that their treatment can nearly be considered as human trafficking or slavery. Most of the women who are vulnerable to these conditions come from the Ivory Coast or Senegal. The different cases have many similarities which suggest the existence of national and international organized networks.

First, an African intermediate lures those women in their countries of origin (many of them hold advanced degrees), and promises them a decently paid job in Tunisia, which they accept because of financial or security reasons. Upon arriving at the Airport of Carthage, they are transported to the villas of wealthy families where they would work in domestic services or as baby-sitters. Upon their arrival, their new employers confiscate their passports to guarantee that they would not run away and to force them to work for months without payment, as the intermediate has already received the installment of their first six months of labor without their knowledge. The phone number of the intermediate will of course stop functioning at this point, and the victim will not find any kind of support in her new situation. Those women receive an inhuman treatment and are forbidden from going out for long periods of time. When the phase of "forced labor" is over, they are offered to continue working for a meagre monthly allowance. Most of them accept this offer for many reasons: the need for money, the difficulty to get legal residence permits, the impossibility to pay the fine of an irregular stay, the ignorance of their working rights, the lack of trust in the authorities and the fear of complaining to the police who might arrest them on insufficient grounds.

## **II – The road to Rome passes through Carthage: Tunisia as a transit country.**

Tunisia plays almost every “migratory role”: it is a country that exports and receives migrants and it has also been, for the past two decades, a transit station for thousands of Africans coming from the sub-Saharan countries and planning on embarking on the Mediterranean Sea in the direction of the “European heaven”.

The phenomenon that began at the end of the twentieth century evolved in the beginning of the new millennium and its magnitude increased grandly with the uprisings of the “Arab Spring” and the tightening of the European immigration policies.

### **Why do they choose Tunisia?**

It is necessary to clarify an important point: most of the time, the African migrants do not have a clear and definitive “road map”. Many of them come from villages and towns in West Africa, and their first objective is to cross the Sahara and then to enter into the countries of the Maghreb. After that, they decide their next steps depending on chance and circumstances. Their journeys last for months, sometimes years and their trajectories might repeatedly alter. Some migrants might choose to stay in Tunisia because they happened to meet with a Tunisian facilitator in Libya or in Algeria, or stay by necessity like when the war broke out in Libya in 2011. Of course, things don’t always happen by chance and many factors make Tunisia a transit country in the migratory movement from Africa to Europe.

- The easy access to Tunisia: There are almost a hundred countries whose citizens are exempted from visas to enter Tunisia and can stay in the country for a maximum period of 3 months. More than twenty African countries (including the countries of the Maghreb) are on this list: Ivory Coast, Senegal, Gambia, Gambon, Mali, Niger, the Comoros, Cape Verde, Seychelles, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Namibia, South Africa, Guinea, Central Africa. This means that migrants aspiring to reach Europe can access the penultimate stage (Tunisia) within hours, which buys them time and allows them to avoid the dangers of the desert land route.

- Multiple small ports: the long Tunisian coastline and its proximity to the European shores and especially the Italian ones. The island of Lampedusa for example, is less than 150 miles away from the Southern, central and Eastern Tunisians shores (Medenine, Sfax, Mahdia and Monastir) and the

island of Pantelleria is 50 miles close to the Tunisian South-Eastern shores (Nabeul governorate). This proximity means faster access and lower risks, especially that the means of transportation usually involved are unsafe and not made for long-distance travels.

- The rigidity of the European Union's migration policies and the many agreements / deals it has passed with governments of countries of the Maghreb to ensure that they control their borders more tightly and address the African migration flows "properly". In the beginning of the third millennium, Europe and its Mediterranean "allies" started to close all the maritime roads to which the smugglers and irregular migrants had resorted: The Strait of Gibraltar between Morocco and Spain, the Atlas road which binds West Africa with the Canary Islands, the Libya-to-Italy road, etc. The boat owners have therefore looked for alternatives. One of their options was the Tunisian-Italian route which was, until the late nineties of the previous century, mostly used by the Tunisian and Moroccan border-burners (Harragas).

- The increased number of African residents in Tunisia since 2003, after the relocation of the central headquarters of the "African Development Bank" from Abidjan to Tunis (as a consequence of the highly volatile environment in Ivory Coast since 2002) and the influx of thousands of students to the Tunisian private universities. These factors have contributed in favoring a "nurturing environment" for the migrants in transit.

Most of the time, the African migrants do not have a clear and definitive "road map". Many of them come from villages and towns in West Africa, their first objective is to cross the Sahara and then to enter the countries of the Maghreb. After that, they decide their next steps depending on chance and circumstances. Their journeys last for months and sometimes for years.

**All those pull factors don't mean that Tunisia is a golden destination:**

- 1- Border-burning costs most in Tunisia compared to other countries of the Maghreb. It costs one to two thousand dollars depending on the season, the number of migrants and the state of the boat used, while the price in Libya, for instance, does not exceed one thousand dollars.
- 2- Tunisia is going through a harsh economic crisis resulting in higher



prices of consumer goods, services and rents.

3- The emergence of terrorist organizations in Tunisia has provoked a security unrest in Libya, the Sahel regions and the sub-Saharan regions and put the security services on alert in the border areas and cities (raids and verification of identity and permit papers).

4- Of course, one cannot forget the pressure exerted by Europe on Tunisia to address migration which translates into stricter domestic laws and an enforcement of the security services patrols.

### **How do they come and where from?**

They mostly come from the Sahel countries and West Africa. Many of them fly to Tunisia. A lesser number arrives through land border crossings and especially through the Tunisian-Libyan border (the Ra's Ajdir crossing point, the Medenine governorate in the South West of the country) and, on rare occasions, through the Tunisian – Algerian border in the West of the country.

Despite the exaggerations of the European Union, and Italy in particular, the number of irregular migrants who reach its shores departing from the Tunisian coastline remains limited if we exclude the year 2011 which witnessed the arrival of more than 25 thousand Tunisian border-burners and thousands of foreigners to Europe. The approximate number does not exceed a few thousands a year (between 4 and 8) which only represents 5% of the overall number of migrants arriving to Italy.

Libya remains the main route from which almost 90% of immigrants depart. There are Tunisians who take to the sea from Libya (just like citizens of other transit countries such as Libya and Morocco depart from Tunisia). Like other Africans, they take advantage of the security chaos and the better prices.

During the year 2017 for example, almost 10 thousand persons attempted to embark on boats to Italy. 6151 of them arrived to the European shores and 3178 were arrested by the Tunisian security forces. No information is available on the number of non-Tunisian Africans among them or their nationalities. Though, according to the figures published in the report of “the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights”, among the 3178

who were arrested, 271 were foreigners and most of those (78%) were sub-Saharan Africans coming mostly from Nigeria (72 migrants) and Ivory Coast (50 migrants). The Tunisian Institute for Strategic and Development Studies confirms the limited incidence of the phenomenon of transit through Tunisia: the percentage of foreigners among the migrants who departed from Tunisia did not exceed 9% in 2016 and 12% in 2017. Of course, some of the migrants are overlooked by the Italian security forces but the number of those does not exceed a few hundred or a few thousand.

Despite the exaggerations of the European Union, and Italy in particular, the number of irregular migrants who reach its shores departing from the Tunisian coastline remains limited if we exclude the year 2011. It does not exceed a few thousands a year (between 4 and 8) which only represents 5% of the overall number of migrants arriving to Italy.

The studies and reports which address the phenomenon have managed to draw an approximate “portrait” of the African migrant who crosses from Tunisia to Italy: most of the time, he is a single man (even though the number of women has increased, especially those originating from the Ivory Coast), coming from one of the countries of West Africa, aged between 20 and 40 years.

### **What do they do as they wait for the “big day”?**

The number of migrants in Tunisia, and especially the Africans among them, is so small that it doesn't enable to draw a clear pattern of the method they use to manage their stay in the country.

Some of them arrive to Tunisia after having made contact with an intermediate who arranges things in advance with a smuggler, so that their stay in the country doesn't exceed a few days or weeks before they embark on a boat. In these cases, the migrants are hidden in a residence or a place close to the seashore from where the boat will depart and, during this time, they are prevented from communicating with the outside world.

Others come to Tunisia without having communicated with anyone in advance. They rely on finding an easy “burning plan” (an irregular migration plan). While looking for this “lead”, they reside at the houses of their relatives or friends who are studying or working in Tunisia. Those

who seek to immigrate either head to the capital where the greater number of Africans live or go directly to the coastal cities known for being bases for border-burners and smugglers (Sfax, Mahdia, Monastir, Nabeul, Jarjis). They live in the popular neighborhoods and in the poverty belts surrounding big cities where rent is lower and where they are close to all kinds of job opportunities: construction sites, commerce, coffeehouses and restaurants.

A few arrive to Tunisia possessing the required amount of money to embark on a migration boat, so many are forced to work in the sectors of informal economy to gather the sum. These workers are exploited by their employers but remain silent to avoid drawing any attention to them.

There had been recurrent drowning boats incidents, the last of which happened in the Kerkennah province on the 3rd of June 2018 where 81 victims died, 20 of whom were originally from sub-Saharan countries. Therefore, some of the migrants have decided to renounce burning the borders and to establish themselves in Tunisia.

The lucky ones arrive safely to the Italian islands but hundreds are arrested by security forces, either on land or in the middle of the sea. Most of them are without legal residence permits which means that they have committed several legal violations. They are detained in undeclared prisons, dubbed “reception and orientation centers” (the most famous of them is the “Al Wardiyeh” Center, in the South of the Tunisian capital), pending deportation. The state does not support the cost of the expulsion to the country of origin, which means that the migrants, who are almost always out of money, are not allowed to leave the detention center until they are able to afford a plane ticket and pay the penalty for their irregular stay in the country (20 Tunisian Dinars for each week of irregularity).

In some cases, the Tunisian authorities get rid of the detained migrants by abandoning them in border villages near Libya or Algeria. The authorities deny resorting to those practices but many reports and testimonies confirm this.

### **In Conclusion**

There is no typical “portrait” of the sub-Saharan African migrant. The

situations are multiple and might change repeatedly for the same person during their stay in Tunisia. Contrary to the belief of most of Tunisians and foreign beholders, most of the migrants who arrive to Tunisia seek to reside there for an extended period of time (for studying, work, asylum, medical treatment, investment) and do not necessarily plan to cross the Mediterranean Sea.

The Tunisian Parliament has passed, in the recent years, several progressive laws intended to protect the Tunisian and African migrants. For example, on the 3rd of August 2016, the law on “counteracting the trafficking of people” was approved and the “national anti-trafficking council” was dispatched in 2017. On the 6th of June 2018, the “Rights and Freedoms Committee” has also approved a draft law on the “Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination”. Tunisia has also been signing, with other African countries, bilateral conventions which include the facilitation of citizens’ movements and economic cooperation.

All that is good, but it might lose its meaning in the face of all the public and secret agreements that the Tunisian governments sign with member countries of the European Union to counter the phenomenon of irregular migration of both Tunisians and Africans coming from the sub-Saharan countries.

Nothing indicates that the African migration will halt any time soon. There is no indication either that Tunisia will ever gain anything from following the European Union’s directives by accepting to play the role of the “Coast Guard” patrol. The most logical position would be to strengthen the relationship with the sub-Saharan countries and to move towards an African Union. Any prospect for such a union should be founded on equality, instead of viewing Africa as being nothing but a market for Tunisian goods and competencies.

That means that the Tunisian state should amend its laws on migration, residence and work to make them more flexible. It also means that the Tunisian society must rid itself of the geographical and historical delusions which make it believe that it is “closer to Europe and better than Africa”. It is truly shameful to have one fifth of your people living as migrants all over the world and still manage to oppress migrants in your own country and restrict their freedom of movement.









## **Sub-Saharan migrants: surviving in Morocco while waiting for the European “Eldorado”.**

**Said Oulfakir**

Writer and Journalist, from Morocco

Who are the sub-Saharan migrants? This article profiles some of the places where they reside, humanizing what has been often approached collectively in generalizations, as the issue of these migrants has been considered as a problem for the neighboring transit countries and for Europe who fears an “invasion of the wretched people”.

After repeated failed attempts,, “David” realized he must not continue to take the risks of migrating towards Europe. He decided to settle in Morocco, perhaps temporarily, just like the other sub-Saharan migrants who are estimated to be around 30 thousand. The journey leading to Morocco was not an easy one. It was, actually, hell on earth, shared with his peers, along distances that started from the departure point, his country, “The Democratic Republic of Congo”.

He is now settled in Morocco, not out of love for this country, but because the prospects of migrating “beyond the sea” have become minimal.

### **The European “Eldorado” closes its doors.**

During the last decade, accessing the European Eldorado (1) has become almost impossible. The European Union has adopted very strict security policies to avoid infiltrations. The doors have been locked. The high fences erected in Ceuta and Melilla, the two Moroccan cities occupied by Spain, are symbols of that. The double barbed fences, equipped with sound and motion sensors and powerful flashlights, are 6 meters high and extend over 12 kilometers around Melilla and 8 kilometers around Ceuta. The construction of the first one started in 1998 and of the second one in 2001. It was financed by the European Union through “Frontex” which is “the European border and coast guard patrol Agency”. The overall cost was 66 million Euros. In a report published on November 2015, the American newspaper “Wall Street Journal” demonstrated how those fences were extremely effective. Embarking through the Gibraltar strait – which separates Africa from Europe by a mere 14 kilometers – has also become impossible due to the accurate technological means, the thermal detection cameras and sea patrols. The Wall Street Journal stated that Morocco was a laboratory in the field of limiting irregular immigration. The total number of immigrants who has managed to cross towards Europe has been almost halved in 2017 if compared to the numbers of 2016. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) recorded the arrival of 171635 migrants to Europe by boat in 2017, while 363504 migrants were recorded in 2016.

But those surveillance policies, in spite of successes, did not eliminate the infiltration of migrants, or at least, didn’t deter their attempts to reach the opposite shores. Each year, recurrent breaches are registered in the two border crossings of Ceuta and Melilla. The events of the 26th of July 2018 (\*) were, until now, the most spectacular, as more than 800 migrants

tried to collectively cross the security fence in the occupied city of Ceuta. The Moroccan authorities arrested a hundred of them, while others were arrested by the Spanish forces who repatriated them. However, more than 600 persons managed to cross over the doubled barbed fence. Press sources have reported that, while facing the Spanish border guards and to impeach their arrests, the migrants had resorted for the first time to “violent means”, such as throwing limestones, flammables and stool.

## **Why do sub-Saharanans come to Morocco?**

### **Mamadou: fleeing war**

Mamadou (2) (a 30 year-old who has fled Mali) recounts his sufferings due to the reigning insecurity in his country of origin after the growing activity of the extremist “Boko Haram” group in 2011.

He says: “I have seen with my own eyes pieces of my father. His body was cut into pieces after a bomb fell into our home... The view was terrible... It was then that I decided to save my own life”. For Mamadou, leaving did not have anything to do with making a better life for himself as much as it was a question of life or death. The destination is not important; whether Morocco will be his final stop or just a transit country doesn't matter to him as he is only interested in finding a secure and stable place. Like other sub-Saharan migrants, he went on a long journey fraught with hardships, dangers, difficulties and police chasing. Now, he would rather stay in Morocco: “Despite the difficulties in managing to put a roof over my head, some food on my table or getting a work in the beginning of my stay in Morocco, I have now acquired a certain security that allows me to stay here and live peacefully without feeling threatened”.

### **David: not running away from war**

David (28 years old) (3) did not come to Morocco from the Democratic Republic of Congo because of war or ethnic conflicts. He came because of the difficult life conditions resulting from the exploitation of multinational companies. He says: “We used to own a lands as far as the eyes can see, we would eat the food we produced and live from its blessings. The lands were sold and we became homeless”. He describes the hardships he had faced after his family lost their lands which were not officially documented in the government services and were given to a Chinese corporation after a deal was done with the Moroccan government. David's family migrated

to the city hoping to find an opportunity there while he decided to leave and risk his life in order to reach Europe. The dream came to a stop in Morocco. After two years of failed attempts to reach Spain, David took the decision to stay, even if temporarily, in Morocco.

### **The origins of the problem**

David is not the only one whose land was sold, exploited or acquired. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) registered that around 115 million acres (an acre equals 4200-meter square or 0.42 hectares) were rented or invested in countries such as Ethiopia, Congo, Sudan and Madagascar, by Chinese corporations. A study published by the FAO in 2012 (entitled “trends and impacts of foreign investments in developing countries”) states that the total area of land deals in Africa reached 56.2 million hectares. (4)

The organization’s report warned that the majority of foreign investments does not target the local market but the export ones or biofuel production, which represents a threat to nutrition security in countries suffering from hunger and an ongoing food crisis as the new production replaces the essential food crops of the local market. The Organization added that this trend was resulting in the displacement of the small-scale farmers, the loss of cultivable lands and living revenues for the rural inhabitants and the degradation of natural resources such as water and land.

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The Oxfam organization states that the investors were targeting the most vulnerable countries to acquire land for prizes as cheap as 1 dollar for each rented hectare. It added that the 23 poorest countries in the world had provided for more than half of the done deals between the years 2000 and 2011. It is believed that the transactions which involve nearly 200 million hectares of land advantaged, in most cases, the speculators over the local communities.



Starvation, land deprivation and impoverishment are crimes that fall under the responsibility of the powerful and economically wealthy countries. This is not a myth but a reality confirmed by the American environmental expert Lester R. Brown in his book “World on the Edge” (5), where he states that European countries encourage investors to take possession of agricultural land in Africa to produce biofuel for the European market (6). Lester also reveals that “in January 2009, Saudi Arabia received the first cargoes full of uprooted cedar trees from Ethiopian exploited lands while, at the same time, the World Food Program was feeding 5 million starving Ethiopians”. The same thing happened in the Democratic Republic of Congo where China took possession of 7 billion hectares of land to produce palm oil while millions of people from the Democratic Republic of Congo rely on international assistance to cover food shortage.

### **Less than a life in Morocco**

In 2013, Morocco opened a new chapter in the folder of sub-Saharan migrants. It enacted a new law to grant regular residence for all migrants and asylum seekers. Thus, it was no longer a temporary transit country and became a country of permanent residence for migrants. By the end of 2014, the situation of more than 18 thousand migrants had been regularized and in 2016, the situation of 25 thousand others was also regularized while the government promised the treatment of all remaining cases.

Sub-Saharan migrants are underemployed and engaged, daily, in activities of the parallel economy. In most cases, they work as unlicensed hawkers on street sides and corners or in undeclared jobs in the construction sector and in other arduous labor. In other cases, they take up begging to afford their stay in the country or to collect enough money to pay for their journey to Europe.

### **Moussa: Life in Morocco is not easy**

Moussa (7), born to a Cameroonian father and a Guinean mother, recounts his attempts to reach the European Eldorado and the responses of the Moroccan and Spanish security forces. He says: “I have tried irregular immigration by boat, but even when I managed to cross the peninsula of Melilla, I was sent back to Morocco”. 5 years after the refusal of his political asylum application in one of the European countries, he gave up on the idea, just like many other irregular migrants who were frustrated by

their failed attempts to cross the border.

Moussa gave in to the situation and stayed in Morocco, resisting and seeking survival in the country in any way he can, despite all the problems he may face. “I do simple small things. Today, I try to live as I can according to my traditions and inside my own circle and community. But despite that, life in this country remains very difficult, we are not welcomed by the Moroccans, we cannot integrate smoothly here.”

Migrants often face difficulties in their daily lives, Moussa says: “I do small jobs here and there. I had a job earlier where the employer seemed very happy with me in the beginning, but after using me, he refused to pay for the work I had done, pretexting that I was an irregular migrant and did not hold any official documents”.

### **Frank: humiliations and insults**

Frank (35 years old) (8), a Nigerian migrant who fled the slaughtering of Boko Haram, says: “In Morocco, they put us in places where mentally ill people or people with infectious diseases reside. When we complained about this situation, the policemen answered: you are complaining about this situation but who do you think you are? You came to my county with your filth.” And he adds: “some taxi drivers refuse to take us in. They do not treat us in a respectful manner here, they insult us and talk about us in very bad racist terms like the word “Azi” which means “negro”. The beggars also despise us because they consider that we are less than them. To them, we are just trash.” (9)

### **David: no alternative to Morocco**

“Today I work as an assistant to one of the Moroccan technicians specialized in telephone-repair, and because I have a diploma in informatics, I am proud to say that I am good at what I do. Some Moroccans are happy to see me in the store and praise my work, but others tend to not like me and, sometimes, even make fun of me. I have started a new life. This year, I will apply for residence in Morocco... Yes, I am Christian and not Muslim and that constitutes a stumbling block in integrating with the Moroccans, as some of them do not accept to deal with Christians so, most of the times, I don't show my beliefs. I respect Islam and the Moroccan traditions. And, as you can see, I talk the Moroccan dialect which, in itself, helps me to integrate. The difficulties that I face sometimes bring me to think about



escaping to Europe but not now because the journey is too risky. So despite all the problems, today, I have no other options than staying in Morocco”.

### **Mamadou: Despite everything, Morocco is more merciful**

“After my painful experience in my country of origin, I don’t think of returning there nor do I even think of risking my life to go to Spain. To me, Morocco is more merciful at the moment. One day, I will go back to my country but not before the situation stabilizes. I am kind of integrated here since I have learned the Moroccan dialect and I can talk Arabic in addition to being of Muslim confession. All this has facilitated my life in this country. Still, the high cost of living is a problem, especially that it was quite difficult for me to find a decent work. I have a Masters in Economy but companies refuse to hire me as my situation is not regularized”.

### **How Moroccans view sub-Saharan migrants and the problems of integration**

Sub-Saharan migrants integrate among Moroccans but they remain cautious. In the beginning of the millennium, it was not accepted for a Moroccan to share their lives with a dark-skinned person. Today, the situation has relatively changed even though the majority still looks at them with contempt and racial discrimination.

Moroccans do not accept that the sub-Saharan migrants can benefit from all the rights that the Moroccan people enjoy, as they believe that the migrants must not be a priority given the socio-economic conditions that every Moroccan with low-income endures. Many consider that migrants are elbowing them for their daily bread and for their work in the informal activities in which more than 2.4 million Moroccans are involved.

Moroccans also consider that the presence of sub-Saharan migrants causes “an increased sense of insecurity, theft, beggary and squabbling”, according to the answers given by Moroccan interviewees in a survey conducted by “Sunergia Organization” in collaboration with the Moroccan review “L’Economiste” (published in March 2018). Another part of the population sees that the influx of migrants to the country has caused “competition in the labor market and provided a skilled labor force less expensive than the Moroccan one”. What statistics say is that: the uneducated Moroccans are the most welcoming to sub-Saharan migrants (44%), followed by those with a primary education (42%) while 36% of those

with university degrees have expressed their support to the integration of sub-Saharan migrants.

At the same time, according to a report issued by “the Moroccan Organization for Human Rights”, hatred and racism towards migrants are increasing after the occurrence of bickering and violent clashes between them and Moroccans in the city of Casablanca in November 2017. Just as the Organization sensed what it considered “a growing manifestation of social stigma and racial discrimination against them, as well as their privation from fundamental rights such as the right to health, water, food, housing, education and work”.

A study conducted by the German Institute “Heinrich Boell” in collaboration with “the Rabat Social Sciences Institute” and a group of Moroccan researchers (2017) confirmed that the policies of openness towards sub-Saharan migrants adopted in the previous years by Morocco neither guaranteed the protection of the migrants, focused on giving human, cultural, economic or social capital to them, nor contributed to integrating them into the Moroccan social, economic and cultural dynamics, adding that “the objectives of those policies are still shrouded in mystery, both at the administrative level and for the migrants themselves”.

In general, the sub-Saharan migrants have dreams bigger than remaining in Morocco and the image of the European paradise is still entrenched in their collective consciousness, even if those who have preceded them there have lived through conditions worse than those they are currently enduring in Morocco. They are not discouraged by the stories of the failed attempts and the deaths in the Mediterranean Sea; they still want to take their chances. Perhaps not all of them will take the risk eventually, but some of them surely will... For those whose conditions have worsened in Morocco, the country is narrowing down on them, exactly as it is narrowing down on the Moroccans who are also complaining from their own miserable life conditions.

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1) *Eldorado or the myth of the Lost City of Gold in Latin America, which is a name commonly used among sub-Saharan immigrants and refers to the meaning of paradise or heaven.*

- 2) *An exclusive testimony for Assafir Al Arabi, all the names in this text are pseudonyms.*
- 3) *An exclusive testimony for Assafir Al Arabi.*
- 4) *Trends and Impacts of Foreign Investment in Developing Countries, part 1, introduction, page 5.*
- 5) *World on the Edge: How to Prevent Environmental and Economic Collapse, published by Routledge 2010, 144 pages.*
- 6) *Same source, page 65.*
- 7) *From “Le Monde” newspaper, part of a reportage titled “A Tanger, des migrants subsahariens racontent”: « Ici, même les mendiants nous insultent » Le Monde Afrique, 10-11-2017.*
- 8) *Same source.*
- 9) *In his testimony, he used the words “sous-hommes”.*





## **African Migrants in Morocco: Steadfast on the road to the European dream.**

**Aicha Belhaj**

Journalist and human rights researcher, from Morocco

Morocco has gone back to its African roots after having, for a long time, aspired to a European horizon. The African migration to Morocco is not only related to its geographical proximity to Europe but is also linked to the exponentially growing number of sub-Saharan Africans residing in the country.



Morocco, which has, for a long time, chased after the dream of King Hassan II to become part of the European Community, found itself facing its African reality and the consequences of its geographical location, which not only gives it one sole view on the European continent but also makes it the broadest African portal to Europe... However, Morocco's aspirations seem to be shared by many others. Many dreamers take a trouble they believe is worth pursuing, thinking that the 14 kilometers that separate Morocco from the "other side" are not impossible to cross, only to discover that distance doesn't really matter that much. They also find out that the hardships of the long distance marathon they had run to arrive to this point are nothing compared to the crossing of the few remaining kilometers safeguarded by an impenetrable barrier.

Some migrants are adamant on crossing at all costs, taken by the arduous journey they have gone through and their closeness to the arrival point, while others chose to remain there for some time. If those who stay manage to get a residence permit, it would save them from much trouble if they are caught afterwards in a European country, as their repatriation will be to the country of residence, Morocco, and not to their countries of origin... This way, they can try again, with less effort.

### **A winter and summer journey**

Issa sits on the "Meagazine" fence (its name means "fence of the workless") in Tangiers, facing his European dream beyond the sea ahead of him. Only 14 kilometers separate him from his dream, which is the same distance that separates him from where he came from in the depth of the African continent. When he decided to leave everything behind and jump into the unknown towards the North of the continent, he didn't know that the journey would be this difficult or that the road to heaven would be paved by so many hardships.

The lucky ones among the migrants take a bus, the others patch the road on their feet, determined to walk forward no matter how bumpy or precarious it gets, or how uncertain its end might be.

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if they are caught in a European country, as their repatriation will be to the country of residence,

### **Morocco, instead of their countries of origin...**

Issa's two-week journey took him from Mali, through Algeria and finally to Morocco, where he arrived on his feet. He shared the road with dozens of others. After reaching Morocco, the last point on the continent that he wants to leave, Issa discovered that before the long-awaited crossing, his life could be improved if he first gets a residence permit. He could bargain time while waiting for an opportunity to migrate as, when you have nothing but time, you spend it generously.

On these trips, the suffering of women is multiplied. They go through sexual exploitation, which often comes from fellow travelers whose sexual instincts are not deterred by the severe conditions and the total deprivation, and who would resort to violence when their female counterparts refuse them. Many of the women arrive with a round belly and irreparable psychological wounds. Sometimes, exploitation comes from others who happen to cross their road during their summer and winter journeys.

### **Difficulties and attempts to integrate**

After arriving to Morocco, migrants have to travel other distances from the east to the north of the country where they will be able to cross towards Europe. There, they scatter in the woods, far from the policemen's sight. Living out on the plain, they merely manage to survive, setting up tents out of reeds, cartons and plastic bags or sleeping in unused sewer tunnels... In other cases, they head straight to the big coastal cities, which brings them closer to their migration point. They are usually housed in small apartments, rented by friends or family members who have already obtained legal residence. Dozens of bodies crumple in few meters in no decent living conditions. They eat whatever they have gathered from the waste containers, or what is given to them by charitable people or, like Issa does, they carry boxes for the greengrocer in exchange of some vegetables. They all live without any kind of healthcare.

In Tangiers, where migration is deemed possible, you would find migrants of all ages but mostly young people, even though some are over forty. The majority is men, yet there is an augmentation of the number of women who,

in their miserable conditions, give birth and care for children. The secret migrants who give birth in Morocco, can obtain a residence permit more easily and the policemen bother them less when they are pregnant. The newborns sometimes become a device that might be used for begging. The police agents go after migrants, cram them into trucks and push them to the border. The population doesn't accept them well, and observes them with apprehension. Fatima from Guinea-Bissau, says "even the children harass us".

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The situation of sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco raises questions for those who don't manage to cross the Sea and who are an increasing majority. How do they integrate into the Moroccan society which is not used to host foreigners in difficult conditions? How will the Moroccan state and its social and administrative institutions treat them? The Moroccan society, despite its openness, has mostly welcomed wealthy Europeans in the past decades, rich Arabs, or Syrians in difficult conditions who are not looked at with skepticism as they share with Moroccans the same religion and a physical resemblance.

Despite the coexistence in the Moroccan society, there are broad categories of racists in it. The sub-Saharans who own nothing are seen as an additional burden. The Moroccans who consider themselves veterans of the migration-related issues, know that most of those migrants will fail at crossing the Mediterranean Sea and stay there as they cannot go back to their countries of origin. This reality is difficult to accept for the Moroccans, particularly because it becomes combined with the countless socioeconomic problems they face.

Some of those migrants manage to find a little job that allows them to provide for the bare necessities. It usually ranges between "selling

counterfeit jewelry by installments” and manual labor whenever they find someone who agrees to employ them. The graduates or those who have migrated legally manage to find real work in the big cities where the society is more likely to embrace foreigners.

“Mon ami” (French for “my friend”) is how Moroccans address sub-Saharan migrants when they talk to them. While the migrants call all the Moroccan men “Mohammad” and the women “Fatima” or “hejja”. Those among them who practice beggary, have a recurrent preferred phrase, “As-salaam-alaikum hejja – or Fatima or Mohammad – a dirham please, for God’s sake”, and this is often all they know in Arabic. Most of the migrant women who have kids choose strategic points and practice beggary with their children in their hands while conversing among each other. They request charity with a low voice, almost inaudible, as if the fact that they are foreign women in a distant country were sufficient to indicate their need for charity.

### **Invent what you can’t find**

When you have nothing to lose or gain but your life, you become creative and adventurous and accept whatever opportunity comes your way. Many sub-Saharan migrants have taken the path of beggary but lots of them have tried to explore other ways to earn their livelihood, either because they have stayed longer than expected or because beggary was not sufficient to start anew or because their pride stood in the way of this practice.

This is how migrants came to invent new professions, such as cleaning alleys and neighborhoods, in exchange for small amounts of money required from the inhabitants after the task is completed. They also sell African clothes on the street or place a small bench in a popular market to propose forged accessories to a network specific to Africans. Others do African hairstyles in women’s esthetic salons located in neighborhoods where many legal sub-Saharans reside, or at the corners of markets. Sometimes they offer all the possible beauty services in the street, like a manicure for cheap prices (50 dirhams for example, when it costs 150 dirhams in other salons). Some others work as car-minders in the streets after having gradually integrated into the Moroccan society.

### **Staying in groups to integrate**

Because it is difficult to integrate in the Moroccan society, sub-Saharan migrants stay together and move together. The ones who came to Morocco to study or work are able to better integrate and are more accepted by the Moroccan society. The latter opens up its doors to irregular migrants from their countries of origin and allows them to stay and benefit from the stable conditions in marginal neighborhoods where apartment owners go easy on them. This becomes totally impossible in the downtowns, to the point that apartment owners often forbid sub-Saharan migrants to even receive visitors. Therefore, sub-Saharan migrants (both regular and irregular) find in agglomerating in certain neighborhoods a way to create a possible life and a compensation for the difficulty to integrate by creating their own miniature African society.

In Tangiers, the Boukhalef neighborhood, next to the Faculty of Law, has the advantage of being both distant from downtown and a place where many African students reside. With time, the number of African residents has increased until they constituted half of the inhabitants of the district, either legally through renting or illegally by occupying empty apartments whose owners had left for certain reasons, only to find them overcrowded with migrants once they get back. This neighborhood has one of the largest sub-Saharan migrant populations in Morocco and has become famous especially after violent incidents occurred among the migrant population and between migrants and the local population.

**In return for Morocco's protection of the European borders through tightening control, Morocco receives important financial assistance. In 2013, the country launched a "national strategy for migration and asylum" which enabled around 23 thousand migrants to regularize their situation and which developed in 2016.**

One of the solutions that sub-Saharan migrants have resorted to, is to seek refuge in the churches which have become less empty with their presence, especially on Sundays. There, they meet and share experiences and advices and receive food and clothes aid which are gathered for this purpose on Mondays and Thursdays. They have also managed to establish a cultural club and a weekly musical festival in the "Villa de France" hotel, famous for inspiring Matisse's painting "Window at Tangiers".

## **Fraternity**

Lately, Morocco has gone back to its African roots after having, for a long time, aspired to the European horizon. Therefore, the sub-Saharan migration to Morocco is not only related to its geographical proximity to Europe but is also linked with the exponentially growing number of Africans residing in the country, principally students who benefit from scholarships allocated to them by the Moroccan government in the framework of partnerships with their countries of origin. They numbered almost 16 thousand students in 2017. This was further reinforced by the new steps taken by the Moroccan Ministry of Health, which included the recruitment of Senegalese doctors to overcome the lack of doctors in some remote areas in the South of the country, because of the reluctance of Moroccan doctors to fill the vacant posts. 32 posts remain vacant to this day in these regions because of the difficult climate and the limited infrastructure. The Ministry has started with twenty doctors, and if the attempt succeeds in the Tata region in the South of Morocco, it will be followed by further recruitments of doctors from Senegal, Ivory Coast and other countries, to fulfill the needs of these remote areas.

## **Interim adjustment**

Transforming migration into a Moroccan problem is a situation that benefits the African migrant, Europe and Morocco (on a short term, as on a longer term the country has the most to lose). The residence permit allows the migrant who manages to cross to Europe to return to Morocco if expelled. In return for Morocco's protection of the European borders through tightening control, Morocco receives substantial financial assistance. Bilateral agreements, such as the one between Morocco and Spain, makes it host the migrants arrested in Spain which subjects the country to more economic, social and security problems. In November 2013, the country launched a "national strategy for migration and asylum". This strategy includes programs to facilitate the integration of migrants in Morocco in the educational system, to guarantee their access to treatment in Moroccan hospitals, to grant them the right to housing according to the Moroccan laws, to offer them juridical and humanitarian assistance, to facilitate their access to vocational trainings, in addition to fighting human trafficking and combatting human smugglers. And indeed, around 23 thousand irregular migrants benefitted from the program before it was stopped in 2016. This operation included granting residence permits for one year, later extended to three.

According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Morocco, the “national strategy for migration and asylum” was successful after the fourth year of its launching, at least for migrants, as it guaranteed their physical and juridical protection. The number of migrants registered with the UNHCR in Morocco reaches 5 thousand who have the right to health, work and education (82% of the children are registered in public schools).

Though, the attempts to cross to Europe persist. And because this crossing has become almost impossible, migrants resort to embarking on rudimentary boats, on rubber boats or even to swimming or sneaking aboard cargo trucks in the port of Tangiers. Only a few of them reach the imagined heaven.



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# Migrations: The world is flowing

## 1- Stories of those caught in the transit countries

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These are the stories of sub-Saharan Africans who arrive to the North of the continent: Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco in an attempt to cross towards Europe.

The researchers have tried to focus on the “structural” side of the problem in the existing world order which consists in the destruction of the living conditions in the countries of origin of those migrants.

We consider that the fates of the uprooted ones and the distressing choice they had to resort to are at the heart of the topic. We also view that the “threat” they represent to Europe is nothing but the embodiment of the condescending and miserly view of the old colonial logic and its new version which exploits the world to benefit the powerful ones and only pays attention when something bothers its interests.



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