

**(Re)Framing Europe's Borders: The Migration Crisis and Irregular Migrant  
Women Along the Nigeria-Libya-Italy Route**

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## Abstract

The migratory route between Nigeria and Italy spans over an approximate distance of 4,998 kilometers, connecting the region of West Africa to the southern region of the European continent. Irregular migrants along this route traverse through the Sahara Desert between Niger and Algeria before arriving in Libya to begin their journey through the Central Mediterranean route, the world's deadliest migration route, towards Europe. Scholars in the field of migration studies, international NGOs and intergovernmental human rights-based organizations are critical of the European Union's (EU) push back approach towards irregular migrants and call for the EU to be held accountable for human rights abuses occurring in transit zones along this route. This thesis is situated at the crossroads of these debates and examines modes of governmentality employed by the EU to regulate the mobility of irregular migrant women along the Nigeria-Libya-Italy migratory route and restrict their arrival in receiving countries.

Using findings gathered from fieldwork in Nigeria, I argue in this thesis that by constructing irregular migration as a phenomenon that poses a threat to the migrant subject, the EU adopts measures designed for facilitating tighter border controls and regulation of irregular migration. The EU's interventions are constructed under a humanitarian rubric, through the medium of the anti-trafficking discourse and the work of the International Organization for Migration in Libya. Nevertheless, the humanitarian nature of the EU's intervention casts a shadow on the role of the EU in the detention, dehumanization and abuse of human rights of irregular migrants in Libya. Additionally, this thesis unpacks the manner by which the EU is able to extend its territorial reign and exert control beyond its external borders in the south – stealthily creating a new locus of control in the North African territorial region.

**Key Words:** Irregular migration, European Union, Nigeria, Libya, International Organization for Migration, human trafficking, migration.

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This thesis is the beginning of a larger body of work that is and will be dedicated to ‘millions of migrants and refugees’ that are arriving at your doorstep. They deserve to be let in.

## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

Body of thesis (all chapters excluding notes, references, appendices, etc.): 24,116 words

Entire manuscript: 28,913 words

Signed,

Shreya Bhat.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

CATW: Coalition Against Trafficking in Women

DCIM: Directorate for Combatting Illegal Migration

ESTAHT: Edo State Taskforce Against Human Trafficking

EU: European Union

EUR: Euro

HVR: Humanitarian Voluntary Return

IOM: International Organization for Migration

LCG: Libyan Coast Guard

NAPTIP: National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking

NGN: Nigerian Naira

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

UN: United Nations

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

## 1 Introduction

The migratory route between Nigeria and Italy spans over an approximate distance of 4,998 kilometers and connects the region of West Africa to the southern region of the European continent. Irregular migrants along this route traverse through the Sahara Desert between Niger and Algeria before arriving in Libya which is the starting point of their journey through the Central Mediterranean route to Europe.

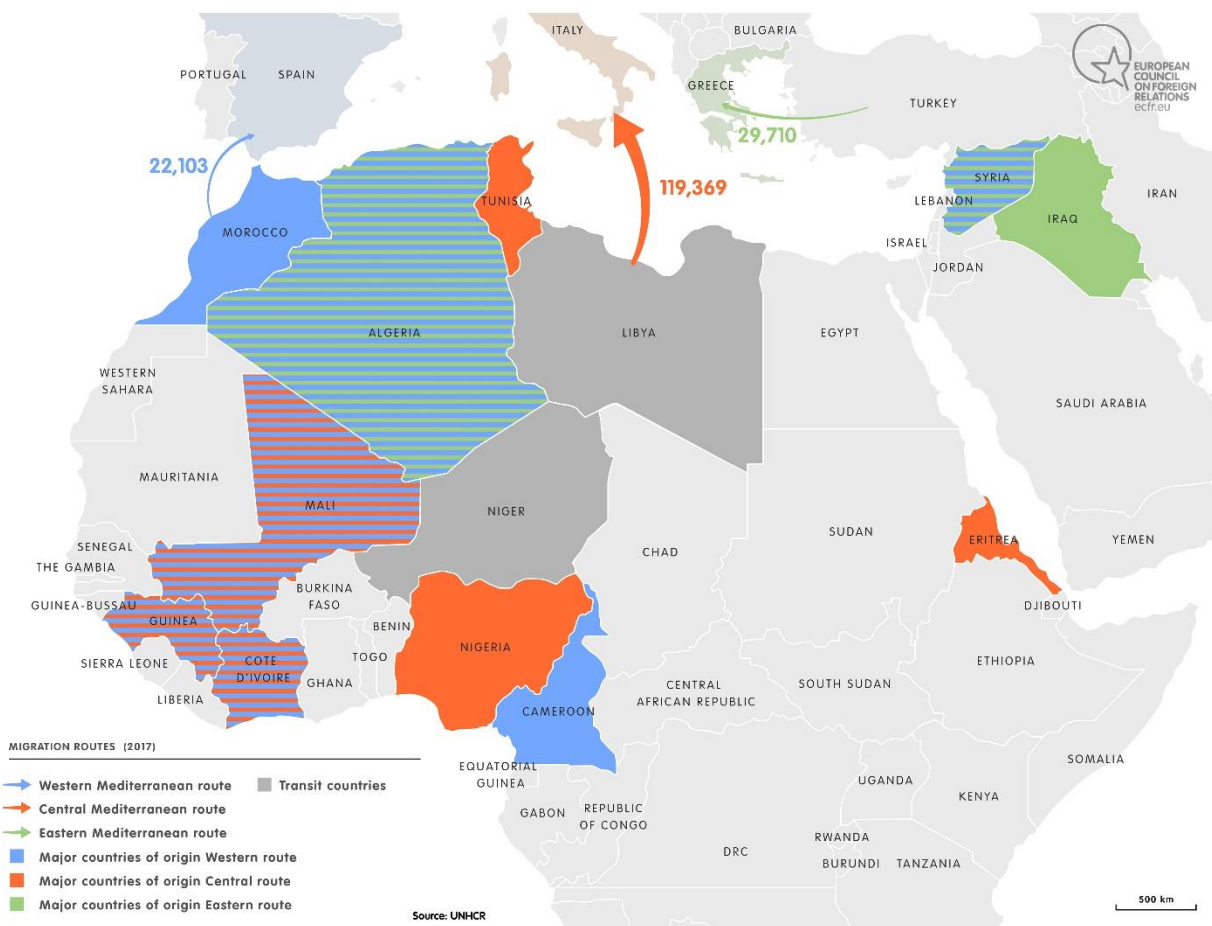


Figure 1: The Central Mediterranean route that originates in Nigeria and passes through Niger and Algeria into Libya towards Italy. Source: UNHCR, retrieved from the European Council on Foreign Affairs.

Between the years 2015 and 2016, the number of migrants recorded dead or missing along

this route reached an all-time high, resulting in the Central Mediterranean route becoming the world's deadliest migration route. Lawmakers from the European Union Member States continue to call for measures to reduce the arrival of irregular migrants along this route on the basis of claims of rise in rates of human trafficking. Scholars in the field of migration studies, international non-governmental organizations and intergovernmental human rights based organizations, however, are critical of the European Union's (EU) push back approach towards irregular migrants and call for the EU to be held accountable for human rights abuses occurring in transit zones along this route. This thesis is situated at the crossroads of these debates and focuses on the irregular migration<sup>1</sup> of women from 'underdeveloped' countries in the African continent to 'developed' countries in the European continent. It examines modes of governmentality employed by the EU to regulate the mobility of irregular migrant women along the Nigeria-Libya-Italy migratory route and restrict their arrival in receiving countries.<sup>2</sup>

I argue in this thesis that by constructing irregular migration as a phenomenon that poses a

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis uses the term 'irregular migration' to describe the movements of migrant women and men outside of the regulatory norms of source, transit and receiving countries (Ghosh 1998). The term irregular migration is preferred over the term 'illegal migration' as use of the term 'illegal migration' has been criticized in scholarship within migration studies for its tendency to associate the migrant subject with a criminal being, for further denying the migrant subject her/his humanity upon being labelled as 'illegal' and lastly, for impacting the individual's claim to asylum in receiving countries (Koser 2005). While the other possible alternatives are undocumented or unauthorized migration / migrants, this thesis deems most appropriate the use of the term 'irregular migration'.

<sup>2</sup> This thesis uses the term 'receiving countries' to describe destination countries that migrants arrive at or go to, after departing from the source countries. The term 'receiving country' is used to collectively refer to state and non-state actors and policymakers present in destination countries (Messina and Lahav 2006). While the other possible alternative is 'destination country', this thesis deems most appropriate the use of 'receiving country' in order to indicate that these are the countries wherein irregular migrants are officially registered upon their arrival, irrespective

threat to the migrant subject, the EU is able to adopt measures designed for facilitating tighter border controls and regulation of irregular migration. The EU's interventions are constructed under a humanitarian rubric, through the medium of the anti-trafficking discourse and the work of intergovernmental organizations in transit zones.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the humanitarian nature of the EU's intervention casts a shadow on the role of the EU in the detention, dehumanization and abuse of human rights of irregular migrants in transit zones like Libya. Additionally, it obfuscates the manner in which the EU is able to extend its territorial reign and exert control beyond its external borders in the south – stealthily creating a new locus of control in the North African territorial region. The key research question of the thesis will be examined in two parts. The first addresses how underscoring the active participation of women in migratory projects as irregular migrants from 'underdeveloped' countries like Nigeria can be used to develop a counter argument to the construction of irregular migrants as vulnerable subjects lacking agency and requiring protection. The second part of the analysis is focused on how the EU's neoliberal governance of irregular migrant mobilities can - and should - be challenged by critically engaging with the humanitarian nature of interventions designed as a part of anti-trafficking campaigns and the voluntary return program run by the International Organization for Migration in Libya.

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of the destination she/he chooses to travel onwards to, at a later point.

<sup>3</sup> Transit zones are points whereby transit migration occurs – signaling a combination of overland and maritime migration – as migrants begin to seek cheaper access to different routes and destination points. For instance, transit migration occurs when migrants travel through countries located on the fringes of the European Union in North Africa, Turkey and Eastern Europe, resulting in the creation of transit zones like Libya, Turkey, Hungary or Serbia (Collyer, Düvell, and de Haas 2010).

## 1.1 Literature review

For the literature review section, I will address scholarly contributions within migration studies, gender studies and border and security studies, that have been crucial for laying the groundwork for this thesis. In so doing, I systematically approach these scholarly works according to key themes addressed in the chapters following the introductory portion. I begin by focusing on scholarly works that highlight the nexus between migration and development, demonstrating a positive relationship between the two phenomena. Nina Glick Schiller in her work on migration and development identifies migrant remitters as transnational agents of international development - migrant populations become a part of capital reproduction, bring about economic and social development in source countries,<sup>4</sup> improve their own standard of living and in the process contribute towards the socio-economic development of receiving countries (Glick Schiller 2011). Furthermore, the work of Hein De Haas (2005) helps strengthen the argument in favour of the nexus between migration and development by focusing on the role of remittances, allowing us to fully understand the reasons why migrants deem it appropriate to participate in migratory projects. Remittances sent by irregular migrants residing in receiving countries are spent on securing basic services - food, schooling, healthcare – by family members residing in source countries. De Haas' work is crucial as it challenges the notion that remittances are spent on conspicuous consumption.

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<sup>4</sup> This thesis uses the term 'source country' to refer to the country from which irregular migrants depart – moving from their usual place of residence to a new place of residence (Borjas 1989). While other terms used are 'home country' or 'country of origin', this thesis deems most appropriate the usage of 'source country' over 'country of origin' or 'home country' as it can often be the case that migrants, prior to their participation in a migratory project, have migrated from their country of origin to the current place of residence before.

In fact, since the inflow of remittances takes care of basic survival needs, it ensures that families of migrants in source countries enjoy the freedom to concentrate their activities and allocate their investments towards economic sectors (H. D. Haas 2005). Similarly, Peter Sutherland's work on migration and development also underscores the resilient nature of remittances – for instance, in the year 2009, during the global financial crisis, the inflow of remittances dropped by only five percent, while Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) dropped by eighty nine percent (Sutherland 2013). However, while addressing the contribution of 'migrants' and migration to international development, it is also important to pay attention to extensive scholarship on feminization of migration. The works of numerous scholars in the realm of migration studies and gender studies underscores the pressing need to steer away from the conventional ways of viewing men as primary migrants who initiate the process of migration within family units and women as secondary migrants who migrate alongside men as wives, sisters or dependents (Wijers 1998; Harzig 2002; Sørensen and Hear 2003; Sinke 2006; Donato et al. 2006; Agustín 2007; C. Aradau 2008; Kapur 2005; R. Andrijasevic 2010; Schrover et al. 2011). Furthermore, the literature on feminization of migration offers a solid ground to reformulate our perception of the roles and duties performed by migrant men and women following their migration – disrupting notions of migrant men performing duties in the public sphere and migrant women performing reproductive duties in the private sphere. Thus, women migrate and engage in economic activities in the public sphere with the intention of bringing about socio-economic development of their families in source countries. Weaving together scholarship on the migration-development nexus, the role of remittances and the feminization of migration opens avenues for this thesis to develop a nuanced understanding of the irregular migration of women from 'underdeveloped' source countries like Nigeria. It allows us to begin to unpack why women choose to migrate – moving beyond the 'poverty as force' approach

– as the potential inflow of remittances through the act of migration allows them to bring about development of their family units.

The second important theme for the thesis is that of the discourse on trafficking in its attempt to examine the framing of irregular migrant women from ‘underdeveloped’ countries as victims of trafficking by feminists and feminist organizations in ‘developed countries’. Here, the works of two scholars are of key importance – Jo Doezema’s *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters* and Claudia Aradau’s *Rethinking Trafficking in Women*. Both Doezema and Aradau’s works address the case of women who migrate for sex work yet are presented as docile and oppressed victims of trafficking in need of protection, however, from different vantage points. Doezema’s work views trafficking as a social and political myth – one that is used as a narrative to form collectively held beliefs that oversimplify the realities of women who migrate voluntarily from lesser developed countries (Doezema 2010). Her work helps unpack the manner by which knowledge production around the issue (myth) of trafficking evokes moral panic and allows receiving countries to employ legitimized means of productive power within a larger context of global governance. From the other vantage point, Aradau’s work addresses the framing of trafficking as a security issue which results in sorting and ordering of individuals into two strict categories; the first being those who are vulnerable, at risk and therefore need protection and the second being those who pose a security threat and are risky (C. Aradau 2008). Depending upon which category individuals are assigned to, they are either offered temporary protection in receiving countries or are deported out of receiving countries. Thus, these key works highlight that, either way, the framing of trafficking as an issue that creates moral panic or as a security issue facilitates the governmentality of so-called victims of trafficking. While Doezema speaks to the moral panic created around the issue of trafficking and Aradau speaks to the concerns of security

in relation to the issue of trafficking, this thesis seeks to combine both viewing points in its analysis of framing of irregular migrant women as victims of trafficking from a moral high ground, yet a sort of framing that legitimizes the State security driven agendas of receiving countries. Besides, scholarship opposing the trafficking discourse makes a strong argument against equating the issue of trafficking with the issue of irregular migration – such an oversimplified or distorted framing of irregular migration legitimizes the belief that the only means available to controlling trafficking is to control irregular migration and dissuade women from migrating under the pretext of ‘protecting them’ (Chapkis 2003; Sharma 2005; Kempadoo, Sanghera, and Pattanaik 2005; Sanghera 2005; Brysk 2009a). Drawing from this scholarship, the thesis will demonstrate the manner by which, within a broader context of globalization, neoliberalism, tightening of border controls and deportation regimes, anti-trafficking agendas set by feminists inadvertently offer a legitimate humanitarian front for the national security agenda of the European Union, facilitating the regulation of the mobility of irregular migrant women from ‘underdeveloped’ countries under the guise of protection.

The third and final theme relevant to this research is that of border control and migration management. In approaching the issue of borders, two works of De Genova offer a well suited backdrop for this thesis – one work that describes borders as ‘spectacles’ wherein the inclusion and exclusions of migrant and non-migrant populations occurs (De Genova 2002) and the other work that describes borders as ‘deathscapes’ whereby the migration crisis arises as a result of Europe’s desire to engage in border control and migration management (De Genova 2017). Moreover, following the unveiling of a ‘border spectacle’, Susan Bibler Coutin’s work on the spaces of non-existence and spaces of violence created along borderlands allows us to witness the lives of migrants in spaces along borderlands whereby migrants are deprived of the opportunity to



work, to develop and maintain social ties and are faced with severely restricted mobility (Coutin 2003). As Coutin points out, all of this lies in sharp contrast to the ‘completeness’ of their lives in source countries. On the theme of migrant management, Franck Duvell describes a liberal approach to migration – one that includes the right to exit and the right to enter, with anything that restricts these rights to be perceived as tyranny (Duvell 2015). He perceives a tension between the migrant’s right to free movement and the nation state’s claim to defend their external borders which results in the militarization of migration control. But what are the nation states defending their borders against? In answering this question, contextualized within a broader theme of border control and migrant management, De Genova points out to the occurrence of a ‘reaction formation’<sup>5</sup> to the autonomy of migration – whereby narratives that exaggerate the lack of autonomy in the decision making processes of migrants are made more visible than before by nation states (De Genova 2017). Drawing from the work of Duvell and De Genova, this thesis will examine the response of the EU to the issue of ‘millions of migrants and refugees’ arriving at its external borders in the light of a reaction formation to the autonomy of migration exercised by irregular migrants. If one is to understand the EU’s response to migration as a form of reaction formation, then the study of border security practices along the external borders of Europe sheds a light on the manner by which specific external agencies and power-brokers become increasingly

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<sup>5</sup> According to psychoanalytic theory, reaction formations are defense mechanisms whereby emotions or impulses which produce anxiety or seem unacceptable are dealt with through the exaggeration of opposing tendencies. Thus, when a reaction formation occurs as a defense mechanism, an individual who has been accused of hostility will respond in a manner that involves a show of exaggerated levels of peace-loving behaviour (Baumeister, Dale, and Sommer 1998).

involved in securing borders, as highlighted in the work of Karine Côté-Boucher, Mark Salter and Federica Infantino (Côté-Boucher et al. 2014). Thus, the thesis drives towards examining the handing over of the responsibility of ‘securing borders’ to third party countries like Libya that lie along the fringes of Europe’s borders. In continuation with this, Franck Düvell’s work on the creation of transit zones – essentially third party countries along the EU’s external borders – provides us an insight into the manner by which the EU is able to not only externalize its borders, but also integrate non-EU countries into comprehensive migration control practices (Düvell 2012). Lastly, shining more light on the neo-liberalization of Europe’s borders, Vaughan-Williams’s work on the use of zoos as detention centers in Tripoli (Libya) sheds a light on the dehumanization and animalization of irregular migrants in spaces outside of Europe. It examines the contrast between the reality of migrant management and the EU’s rhetoric of having a ‘humanitarian migrant-centered’ policy approach (Vaughan-Williams 2015). Using this as a starting point, the thesis furthers the analysis of the EU’s interventions and externalization of borders being constructed under a humanitarian rubric through the medium of intergovernmental organizations.

I address the research question of the thesis throughout the course of three chapters that follow the introduction. In the first chapter, I bring to fore narratives of irregular migrant women who traveled from the city of Benin in Nigeria towards Europe, addressing an important theme of feminization of migration and the historical rise of irregular migration from Nigeria. This chapter highlights different instances whereby irregular migrant women employ survival strategies and actively make informed decisions at different stages of the migratory project. This enables the thesis to develop an analysis of monetary and non-monetary resources that irregular migrant women continuedly invest into the act of migration. In contrast with the first chapter, the second chapter focuses on the framing of irregular migrant women from ‘underdeveloped’ countries as

victims of trafficking by feminists and feminist organizations in ‘developed countries’. This chapter underscores the manner by which, within the broader context of globalization, neoliberalism, tightening of border controls and deportation regimes, anti-trafficking agendas set by feminists inadvertently offer a legitimizing humanitarian front for the national security agenda of the EU, allowing the regulation of the mobility of irregular migrant women from ‘underdeveloped’ countries. With the third chapter, the focus shifts to the transit point of Libya as I assess the role of the EU in situating Libya as the gatekeeper of the ‘migration crisis’. I do so to offer a nuanced understanding of the way in which the EU regulates the inflow of migration through the prolonged detention of irregular migrants in third party countries. This chapter teases out means adopted to curb the mobilities of irregular migrant women in transit zones – through the creation of a containment zone in Libya and the offering of protection and assistance from the EU to irregular migrant women in exchange of voluntary return to the source country. I conclude the chapter by critically examining the efficacy of the reintegration assistance and rehabilitation services provided to irregular migrant women as a part of voluntary return programs.

## **2 Unpacking journeys of irregular migrants: Finding traces of choice along migratory routes**

### **2.1 Introduction**

What many migrants don't know is that their journey will drag them through several layers of hell before their toes even touch the sea (Meloni and Sakuma 2016).

In 2016, photojournalist Lorenzo Meloni and writer Amanda Sakuma published a story on how Libya had become the gatekeeper of Africa's infamous 'migrant crisis'. The photojournalistic account, titled "Damned for Trying", encapsulates the problem at hand in its brief description – a massive wave of migrants is crashing through North Africa, but there is only one major gateway to Europe, and it is through Libya (Meloni and Sakuma 2016). The issue covered by this piece resonates with the crux of this research; irregular migrants from African countries arrive into Libya having crossed national borders of their own countries, in addition to at least one other international border. Migrants traverse the unforgiving Sahara Desert as they flee internal conflict, war, indefinite military servitude, destitution, 'underdeveloped' economies and corrupt state governments. What migrants do not always realize, is that, while their journey from the point of departure into Libya is bound to be marked by many hardships, they are yet to experience dire conditions of indefinite detention, dehumanization, contemporary forms of governmentality and post-imperial control. These are imposed upon migrants under the international governance of borders and migration along the Central Mediterranean route from source countries in the African continent through Libya

towards Europe.

On the other side of the Mediterranean Sea, irregular migration from the African continent is perceived as a threat to the social fabric, political and economic systems in receiving countries across Europe (Duvell 2015). The thriving anti-immigrant rhetoric in countries like Italy, Hungary and Poland is a proof of the growing consensus over the immediate need to restrict the mobility of undocumented individuals transgressing borders of Fortress Europe (Roth 2019). This research intends to draw attention to a wider narrative of irregular migration that receiving countries propose; one that presents irregular migration as a threat to the physical safety of the migrant subject in its attempt to offer a rationale for action. This narrative is constructed around the idea that irregular migration exposes migrants to the dangers of being smuggled, kidnapped, trafficked or sold into slavery along the route. Therefore, irregular migrants need to be offered protection, and more importantly the phenomenon of irregular migration needs to be regulated. While this narrative rightfully echoes concerns that fit within the ‘layers of hell’ irregular migrants have to go through along the route (Meloni and Sakuma 2016), it also offers a new and improved justification for securitizing migration, tightening border control and improving the governance of mobilities of migrants, all of which is conducted under a humanitarian rubric. Meanwhile, equally valid concerns of indefinite detention, dehumanization at the hands of the Libyan state, and imposition of a post-imperial form of control fail to show through the oversimplified media representations of irregular migration as a social problem.

Thus, I argue that by means of presenting a pastoral form of care for ‘vulnerable’ irregular migrants through the medium of anti-trafficking campaigns and humanitarian voluntary return programs, receiving countries govern and selectively allow or restrict the

mobility of migrants. Furthermore, as I will demonstrate, receiving countries extend securitization zones beyond their territorial borders under the guise of offering humanitarian assistance. The overall aim of this research is twofold; first, the research will underscore the active participation of women as irregular migrants from ‘underdeveloped’ countries like Nigeria as a counter argument to the construction of irregular migrants as vulnerable subjects lacking agency and requiring protection. And secondly, the research will challenge the European Union’s (EU) neoliberal governance of migrant mobilities (Duvell 2015) by examining the humanitarian rubric under which anti-trafficking campaigns and humanitarian voluntary return programs are constructed.

In this first chapter, I address the first aim of the research which is to highlight the demonstration of radical autonomy (Duffield 2010) by irregular migrant women through their active participation in decision-making processes involved at different stages of migratory projects. Using excerpts from narratives of irregular migrant women who planned journeys beginning from the city of Benin in Nigeria up to Europe’s doorstep, this chapter will challenge two problematic notions within studies on gender and migration: a) that of men being primary migrants and women being secondary migrants in irregular forms of migration; and b) the undermining of survival strategies of irregular migrant women to make informed decisions throughout the process of migration.

In the first section, this chapter will address the occurrence of migration as a phenomenon and the feminization of migration within the context of globalization while encouraging the reader to reflect upon who does one intuitively view as the migrant subject. The second part of the chapter addresses the issue of the rising wave of irregular migrants from

Nigeria towards Europe, by examining the highly selective and institutionalized ‘migration process’. Following this, I elaborate on the methodological approach adopted to conduct the fieldwork for this research and create a representative profile of irregular migrant women who traverse along the migratory route between Nigeria, Libya and Italy. I examine the migratory project as experienced by my respondents and the decision making process it entailed for traces of autonomy by dividing it into two parts: a) before departure; and b) during transit. I do this with the intention of examining migratory projects as a series of decisions undertaken by migrants all along the migratory route and not just at the start and end-point. Firstly, this allows me to develop an in-depth analysis of resources migrant subjects are continually investing at different stages of their migratory project. Secondly, it allows me to underscore the ability of irregular migrant women to achieve an adaptive form of self-reliance – one that allows them to secure upward socio-economic mobility without having to rely on assistance from the state or aid agencies in source countries (Duffield 2010).

## **2.2 “The world is on the move”: Globalization and Feminization of Migration**

“The world is on the move,” wrote noted sociologist Bauman in his 1998 work on globalization and its ability to facilitate increased mobility of people, capital and information (Bauman 1998). In the early years of globalization, one would have imagined that humans and services and networks they move along with would face fewer restrictions as borders start to become less pertinent and rigid owing to the opening of economies and emergence of transnational spaces of trade. Although globalization has had a definite impact on how we perceive borders, borders have become ‘meaningless’ only for a select few (Duvell 2015). Similarly, the hope for freedom of movement across international borders materializes only for a select few (Bigo 2009).

In spite of this, according to Eurostat, a directorate-general of the European Commission, a total of 2.4 million people immigrated to one of the European Union Member States from non-EU countries in the year 2017 alone (Eurostat 2019). Therefore, regardless of how rough the process of migration proves to be for certain populations, the world continues to be on the move. People predominantly migrate from disadvantaged regions of the world to less-disadvantaged regions, from countries with fewer opportunities, lesser wages and limited freedoms to countries believed to have more of each of these features (Stalker 2000; Duvell 2015).

An important element of the discussion on the movement of irregular migrants from disadvantaged regions of the world to less-disadvantaged regions is - what constitutes our intuitive understanding of a migrant subject? To answer this question, it is imperative to go beyond an overly simplistic and gendered conceptualization of migration; one that views men as primary migrants and women as secondary migrants (Andrijasevic 2010; Sanghera 2005). There is an immediate need to disrupt the perception of men as economically motivated migrants who initiate the process of migration in households, and perform active and productive roles in the public sphere. Presumably, they are followed by women who migrate as dependents, wives or sisters and undertake reproductive responsibilities in the private sphere upon migrating. Failure to acknowledge feminization of migration that has been occurring over years and overlooking labour mobility exercised by women, particularly from ‘underdeveloped’ to ‘developed’ countries severely affects the analysis of the impact of women’s participation in migratory projects (Wijers 1998; Harzig 2002; Sørensen and Hear 2003; Sinke 2006; Donato et al. 2006; Agustín 2007; C. Aradau 2008; Kapur 2005; Schrover et al. 2011). For instance, according to the Migration and Remittances Factbook released by the World Bank Group, in the year 2016 approximately US \$601 billion were sent across borders worldwide in the form of remittances,



half of which were contributed by women as migrant workers (Ratha et al. 2016). Thus, migrant women make important contributions as they tend to remit a higher proportion of their incomes to families than men. These remittances are spent on healthcare, education and general family and community development in source countries (Vertovec 2004; Petrozziello 2013). Alongside sending money, women also contribute in the form of social remittances – by contributing towards cultural diffusion and the transformation of social and political life in source countries by facilitating the flow of ideas, behaviours, identities and social capital from receiving countries to source countries (Levitt 1998; Suksomboon 2008; Mukherjee and Rayaprol 2019). Thus, women’s engagement as migrant workers in receiving countries accentuates their role in restructuring labour forces in economies on a global scale while simultaneously boosting the development of source countries through the development of individual households.

### **2.3 The rising wave of irregular migrants from Nigeria**

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Nigerians were the most common nationality amongst irregular migrants being registered at sea ports in Italy between 2016 and 2017. Of these, thirty percent of irregular migrants were women (UNHCR 2018a). How then did irregular migration come to be popular as a viable option among Nigerian women and men? Over the course of my conversations with Samuel, the Project Co-Ordinator for Idia Renaissance<sup>6</sup>, an NGO working in Benin (Nigeria) towards eradicating human trafficking, I

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<sup>6</sup>Idia Renaissance was referred to me by the Edo State Taskforce Against Human Trafficking, the organization facilitating my research. Although the two organizations do not collaborate, they work with the same key population in Benin, Nigeria. Idia Renaissance does not receive funding from the state government and works in collaboration

was able to understand better the process of normalization of irregular forms of migration in Nigeria.

### **2.3.1 Nigeria's History of Migration**

Up until the end of 1960s, Nigeria was a colony under the protection of the British government. Nigeria became a republic in 1963 and by the 1980s, structural adjustment programs had been implemented in the country and Nigerians suffered the impacts of poverty and economic infrastructural decay. Nigerians desperately tried to leave the country and escape inflation and rising unemployment. Samuel explained to me that Nigerians started to migrate towards the Middle East and some towards the US as migration became an increasingly normalized recourse. Even though people were unclear about the course of their journeys and futures in destination countries, what was more important was that they were migrating out of Nigeria. Unskilled workers ended up moving to destination countries in huge numbers, this time in Europe, and taking up odd jobs like street cleaning, working in restaurants, washing dishes, working as domestic helpers. Regardless of the work they engaged in, they were able to make more money than they had ever been able to in Nigeria. Being able to send 'big money'<sup>7</sup> home, Samuel pointed out, meant that they were able to help their families at home in Nigeria. They began building houses, investing

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with donor organizations from several Member States of the EU, particularly from Western Europe. The official website of the organization can be accessed here: <http://www.idia-rennaissance.org/#>

<sup>7</sup> The respondent used the term 'big money' to refer to the most common occurrence in relation to currency exchange; when Nigerians work and earn an income in Euros (EUR) in countries in Europe, the exchange rate allows them to send a much higher amount in the Nigerian Naira (NGN) to their families in Nigeria. As of May 2019, the Western Union remittance EUR to NGN exchange rate was 1 EUR = 441.5 NGN (RemitRadar 2019).

in properties in their home countries and set a precedent for following generations – irregular migration came to be perceived as a way of securing upward socio-economic mobility. As Samuel explained, “It didn’t matter what the people were ending up doing, what was important was that they were moving and they were bringing money back home, contributing to the development of their families and the economy at large”.<sup>8</sup>

Saskia Sassen refers to migration as a process of certain people leaving their home countries using highly structured routes to their destinations. Rather than gravitating blindly towards a country they believe possesses abundant resources and will grant entry to them (Sassen 1999). Drawing from Sassen’s conceptualization of migration as a highly selective process, this research views the irregular migration of women and men from Nigeria towards Italy through a similar lens. Their decision to migrate arises from a process of taking calculated risks, further influenced by a history of irregular migration of Nigerians along a specific route, rather than merely a consequence of being deceived into the promise of a better life elsewhere. Although an irregular migrant’s decision to leave her/his home country first occurs under external push factors, it doesn’t end there. In the sense, I argue that irregular migrant women not only choose to depart from source countries, they continue exercising agency at different points along the route, as they move forward from one stop-over point to the next. To closely examine the nature of participation of irregular migrant women in migratory projects spanning between Nigeria and Italy, I adopt the approach of finding traces of active choice in decisions taken by migrant subjects not just at the point of departure in the city of Benin in Nigeria, but along the entire stretch of the migratory route.

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<sup>8</sup> Samuel, interviewed by author at Benin, 19<sup>th</sup> June 2018.

In the following section, I discuss my methodological approach and create a representative profile of irregular migrant women based on the information gathered through my interviews with respondents. By examining the migratory project as experienced by respondents, as well as the decision making process it entailed, I will explore what I consider to be traces of active choice by dividing the following into two parts: a) before departure and b) during transit.

## 2.4 Methodology

In the month of July 2017, precisely a year before I arrived at the city of Benin in Nigeria to conduct fieldwork for this research, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported that there had been a 600 percent increase in the number of potential sex trafficking victims arriving into Italy via the Mediterranean Sea, over the last three years (IOM 2017). Furthermore, the report also made another rather bold claim – that an estimated eighty percent of girls<sup>9</sup> arriving from Nigeria are potential victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation. As someone with a keen interest in research studies on migration and human trafficking, I fully understand the complex ways in which the lines between voluntary and involuntary forms of migration often appear blurred and same is the case of migration and human trafficking. I was suspicious of estimates stating eighty percent of women arriving from a specific source country had been trafficked, especially when empirical evidence of trafficking is known to be hard to gather (Sanghera 2005; C. Aradau 2008; Doezema 2010; Tyldum 2010; Farrell et al. 2012; Weitzer 2014). Additionally, the arrivals

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<sup>9</sup> While the report uses the word ‘girls’, in the graphical representation of statistical data, the agency refers to two distinct categories of women and unaccompanied minors. This research therefore presumes that the 80 percent mark refers only to adult women and girls, and not minors.

of irregular migrants from Nigeria at sea ports in Italy followed an interesting pattern<sup>10</sup>; while the percentage of Nigerians being registered in Italy rose from the year 2014 to 2015 (UNHCR 2015), the year 2016 (UNHCR 2016) reflected an exponential increase in Nigerian irregular migrants travelling along the Central Mediterranean route. However, post 2017 (UNHCR 2017) and into 2018 (UNHCR 2018b), these numbers reduced drastically. Thus, the year 2017 marked an important turning point – one that links the movement of irregular migrants from Nigeria to a rise in the cases of trafficking of Nigerian women for sexual exploitation, by an intergovernmental organization. A linking of this sort must have provided a rationale for action that caused a drop in the number of Nigerian irregular migrants arriving into Italy via the Mediterranean Sea. Thus, Nigeria made for a solid case selection for studying the means by which receiving countries frame problems and appropriate interventions under a humanitarian rubric to respond to a rise in the phenomenon of irregular migration from source countries. The intention of choosing Nigeria as a case study for this thesis was clear; if the IOM reported that eighty percent of women arriving from Nigeria were potential victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, my intention was to interview women migrating out of Nigeria towards Italy and bring to the fore their narrations of the journeys they undertook.

Having identified the city of Benin<sup>11</sup> as the migration hub of Nigeria and the source of

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<sup>10</sup> According to the UNHCR database cited in the body of the text, of all the migrants belonging to different nationalities registered upon arriving via the Central Mediterranean route at sea ports in Italy, in the year 2014, of the total number, 4 percent were Nigerians. This increased to 14 percent in 2015 and 21 percent in 2016. However, post-2016, the number of Nigerians arriving at sea ports in Italy dropped to 15 percent and further dropped to 5 percent in the year 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Hereon I will refer to it as ‘Benin (Nigeria)’ in order to ensure that it is not confused with the West-African country

development of the Edo State owing to the inflow of remittances (H. de Haas 2006; Plambeck 2014), I decided to choose Benin (Nigeria) as my site for studying the outward migration of women in relation to their point of departure. However, the process of planning fieldwork in Benin (Nigeria) was harder than I had imagined; of the several emails I wrote to NGOs that worked with individuals who had been deported to Nigeria from receiving countries, I only heard back from the Edo State Taskforce Against Human Trafficking (ESTAHT), a government run agency established in November 2017, assigned with the task of offering rehabilitation and reintegration assistance to Nigerian irregular migrants returning from Libya. The ESTAHT agreed to facilitate the research by accommodating me for a duration of seven weeks as an independent visiting researcher. My arrangement with the ESTAHT was clear – I was allowed access to the agency’s office in Benin (Nigeria), I could seek the help of staff members at the agency to establish contact with returnee women and other informants, I could attend events organized by the agency and be present at reception centers when the agency received batches of returnees from Libya<sup>12</sup>. In exchange, I was only expected to share the final output of the research with the agency.

Thus, with the help of the ESTAHT, I was able to conduct semi-structured interviews with

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of Benin.

<sup>12</sup>It is important that I use the term ‘reception centers’ to refer to venues where returning migrants first arrive at, in source countries, as per the usage of the term in Nigeria. These reception centers are managed by local partners of the IOM which facilitates the departure of irregular migrants from Libya. Reception centers in Nigeria allow local partners such as the Edo State Taskforce Against Human Trafficking to officially register returnees, document their arrival and complete the process of gathering data on arrivals. Returnees are provided with meals and free accommodation in the reception center for 2 nights, after which they are expected to make their own arrangements for the rest of their stay in Benin.

twenty five respondents in a manner such that I was able to decide beforehand the ground I wished to cover and topics I wish to touch upon, while giving respondents sufficient room to engage with my questions in a way they found appropriately comfortable (Drever 1995). I chose to divide my respondents into two groups; group A comprised of sixteen returnee women<sup>13</sup>. Group B comprised of four staff members of the ESTAHT, the chairperson of the ESTAHT who serves as the Attorney General of the Edo State, an official from the ‘Irregular Migration, Human Trafficking and Child Labour of Nigerian Immigration Services’ for Edo State, an official from the Benin command of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP)<sup>14</sup>, a staff member of the NGO Idia Renaissance<sup>15</sup> and a researcher from the University of Benin. Drawing upon

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<sup>13</sup> The term returnee is used to refer to individuals who return to a place, especially after a prolonged absence. According to the UNHCR’s glossary, a ‘returnee’ is a person who was of concern to the agency during her/his time outside of the home country and continues to be assisted by the agency upon returning to their home country for approximately two years. The term also encompasses internally displaced people who return to their place of residence. See: <http://reporting.unhcr.org/glossary/r> . In the case of Nigeria, returnee men exponentially outnumber returnee women. For instance, in July 2018 alone, the ESTAHT received a total of 184 returnee men and women from Libya, of which only 11 returnees were women. However, this research focuses only on the category of returnee women and was designed with the intention of conducting interviews among returnee women.

<sup>14</sup> NAPTIP was founded in the year 2003 as a part of the Federal Government of Nigeria’s response to addressing the problem of trafficking in persons. It operates as an agency in nine zones across Nigeria. It was established in fulfillment of the country’s international obligation under the Trafficking in Persons Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children, supplementing the United Nations Transnational Organized Crime Convention (UNTOC). The official website of the organization can be accessed here: <https://www.naptip.gov.ng/> The author was introduced to the agency by a staff member of the ESTAHT.

<sup>15</sup> Idia Renaissance is a non-governmental, non-religious and non-political organization founded with the intention of restoring the dignity of Nigerian women, youth and children. It works on a range of social issues such as human trafficking, prostitution, maternal mortality, drug abuse, HIV/AIDS and cultism. The organization does not receive funding from the State government and works in collaboration with donor organizations from several EU Member

Jacobsen and Landau's (2003) work on conducting research on humanitarian studies, I used two differently designed questionnaires while conducting interviews among respondents belonging to group A and group B in order to ensure that the language used in framing of questions was not too jargonistic or arcane for one group more than the other. While all twenty five interviews were conducted in English, respondents often switched to speaking Nigerian pidgin<sup>16</sup> in the middle of conversations. This happened more often in the case of interviews conducted with respondents belonging to group A<sup>17</sup>. However, I made a conscious decision not to seek help from a translator or a mediator for one reason - as the respondents belonging to group A were being interviewed by me, they were also undergoing the process of being officially registered as returnees into the country. I did not wish for respondents to feel they had to be cautious about the information they were providing me with mismatching the information they were submitting officially to the Nigerian government<sup>18</sup>. Thus, to ensure that respondents felt comfortable throughout the duration

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States, particularly from Western Europe, specifically for programs addressing the issue of human trafficking and trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The official website of the organization can be accessed here: <http://www.idia-rennaissance.org/#> The author was introduced to the organization by a staff member of the ESTAHT.

<sup>16</sup> This refers to a form of English-based slang language spoken in Nigeria. Colloquially it is called *Pidgin* and although it is not recognized as an official language, it is used in daily conversations throughout the country.

<sup>17</sup> During my stay in Benin, I began to work on understanding Nigerian pidgin over the course of conversations with my host family and their friends with the intention of ensuring that I would be able to engage in smoother conversations with respondents on field. Nigerians, as I learnt, speak in a distinct manner with regards to sentence construction. Although it was difficult to grasp in the beginning, I was able to work my way through it over the course of the fieldwork. I would request respondents to repeat themselves or speak in a slow manner, and then repeat my interpretation out loud to them, in situations wherein I was unable to understand them.

<sup>18</sup> For instance, during the official process of being registered as a returnee eligible to receive a stipend, the organization asked returnee women and men if they intended on travelling to Libya / Europe again, to which returnees replied negatively without a second thought. However, that was not always the case in the interviews I conducted with



of the interview, I did not approve of the presence of a staff member from the ESTAHT, even if it meant they were helping me interpret Nigerian pidgin. Arranging for an external translator would involve bureaucratic hassle<sup>19</sup>, which I wanted to avoid at all costs.

As in the case of most qualitative research studies wherein the aim is to gather a range of opinions and attempt to create a different representation of an issue instead of counting opinions (Gaskell 2000), a combination of techniques was adopted for selecting respondents for this research, particularly for group A. While some key respondents from group A were handpicked by the ESTAHT as ‘ideal cases’, I was able to establish communication with most potential respondents by spending time at the ESTAHT’s office where returnee women and men came to register themselves for the monthly stipends awarded by the government. As for respondents belonging to group B, I was referred to each of them through existing social and work related networks of staff members at the ESTAHT. The interviews were conducted all over the place, literally and figuratively. With respondents belonging to group A, I conducted interviews in any space that was available to me; sometimes in private cabins of the agency’s office or administrative spaces of shelter homes, sometimes I settled for conducting interviews in cars parked in the agency’s compound. This had a huge impact on how much at ease respondents felt - respondents sounded more expressive and less cautious during interviews conducted in parked cars as they felt

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returnees in private, as respondents engaged in serious thought and conversation before saying yes or no.

<sup>19</sup> As the office of the ESTAHT was located on the same campus as the Office of the Governor of the Edo State, the entry and exit of individuals accessing the campus was controlled and required clearance. I was apprehensive that requesting for clearance for an external translator would involve paperwork that would delay the process of conducting interviews.

less worried about staff members walking in on us. After noticing this, I pushed for interviews to be conducted in cars parked outside the agency's office. Due to time constraints and difficulties concerning reaching respondents, all respondents belonging to group A and B were interviewed individually only once, with no scope for conducting interviews in groups or for arranging follow-up sessions to interviews. Prior to starting every interview, I first introduced myself and my research topic to the respondents. I carried printed copies of consent forms to every interview, read them out to respondents, offered to provide detailed clarification if need be, offered respondents the alternative of opting for pseudonyms and started the process of recording interviews on audio only after acquiring signed consent of respondents. Lastly, respondents from Group A were offered a payment of 5 EUR in cash for their participation in the research<sup>20</sup>. Keeping in mind the cautionary tale that warns researchers of monetary incentives compromising the principle of free and informed consent in qualitative research, the decision to offer monetary compensation to my respondents from group A was an ethical one. As a researcher documenting the everyday harsh realities of deportation regimes as they unfold in source countries, I was aware of the cash-strapped situation most returnee women find themselves in. Therefore, I wished to provide them monetary compensation for investing their time in participating in this research. That said, I was cautious of what Sullivan and Cain (2004) in their work suggest; that while monetary incentives offered to respondents should compensate for their time and expertise, it should not be too high for the

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<sup>20</sup> The amount roughly converted to 2000 Nigerian Naira at the time when the interviews were conducted and payments were made. The amount is marginally higher than the daily minimum wage in Nigeria. The amount sufficiently covered for respondent's return journey to the agency's office by cab, along with a few meals in an inexpensive restaurant as the whole process often consumed half a day for respondents who were commuting long distances.

respondents to be able to refuse, such that they feel coerced to participate. Thus, I consulted with my point of contact at the ESTAHT to decide on an amount that would be appropriate for respondents to receive for their participation in interviews.

The process of having to introduce myself and my research generated interesting reactions and responses throughout the course of my fieldwork. In Nigeria, as an Indian woman studying in ‘Europe’, researching the issue of irregular migration from a migrant-centric perspective, I occupied an unusual position. In retrospect, I occupied the position of, what Abu-Lughod describes, a researcher whose national identity and cultural experience becomes enmeshed on account of being a migrant living overseas for the purpose of education - a ‘(halfie) researcher’ (Abu-Lughod 1991; Subedi 2006). For people I interacted with in Nigeria, respondents and non-respondents alike, at first glance I was an *oyinbo* – the word used in Nigerian Pidgin to refer to ‘white people’ or a person of ‘European decent’. However, upon finding out that I was an Indian, respondents readjusted their perception of me. I was pleasantly surprised to find out that Nigerians are deeply fascinated by Bollywood, the film industry based in Mumbai, India<sup>21</sup>. This resulted in respondents expressing familiarity, sometimes to an extent that would shock me, with my culture and where I came from, which helped to diminish the distance that my *oyinbo* identity created between us. I can’t help but think that the tendency of Nigerians to perceive Indians as people who like to sing and dance, like in Bollywood movies, immediately made our conversations lighter and

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<sup>21</sup> Nigerians have been exposed to commercial cinema produced in India, particularly in Mumbai, since the 1950s. Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry, is known to be heavily inspired by Bollywood (Luedi 2018). Furthermore, I was born in and have spent most of my time as a young adult in Mumbai watching commercial movies produced in Bollywood. This served as an icebreaker in most conversations in Nigeria, with host families, friends and respondents.

easier for both respondents and me to navigate through. Furthermore, my identity as an Indian living in Europe as a student played an important role in encouraging respondents to engage in conversations. As an individual who had departed from India and undergone the process of migrating into 'Europe' through legal means in search of better prospects, I was able to demonstrate understanding of difficulties legal migration entails, over the course of many formal and informal conversations with respondents. Thus, respondents viewed me as a migrant who had succeeded in crossing international borders. In other words, even though I wasn't one of them, I was like them and this established a comfortable space for them to willingly open up about obstacles they face while trying to migrate legally and the means they adopt to overcome these obstacles. Lastly, my experience as a social worker and a development worker in the past severely impacted my engagement with respondents from Group B. My personal cynicism regarding the efficacy of interventions and rehabilitation programs run by NGOs led to me entering the field with a bias, one that influenced the manner in which I steered conversations with respondents, and which continues to influence my reading of the qualitative data I gathered. Upon returning from fieldwork, I began referring to my field notes. Simultaneously I dived into the process of transcribing my interviews, using the open coding technique (Emerson et al. 2011) to organize my interviews thematically before incorporating them into the body of the thesis through the writing process.

It should be noted that like any other research, this project has its limitations. Firstly, prior to my departure for the field, I was warned by several people of the risks associated with conducting fieldwork as a female independent researcher with limited funds in Benin (Nigeria). As with any other warning, these warnings psychologically affected my approach to the field as I found myself to be defensive and cautious while interacting with respondents, non-respondents

and generally while immersing myself into the fieldwork setting. This will have impacted techniques I employed to gather data and establish communication with a greater number of respondents and sources of information. Secondly, as I was working on a limited research grant, my mobility in and around Benin (Nigeria) or to other commercial cities such as Lagos, was greatly impacted. A more sizeable grant would have allowed me to cover a larger ground or present a bigger sample size. Lastly, keeping in mind the scale and scope of the research, a duration of seven weeks proved to be insufficient for conducting in-depth interviews and follow-up interviews with respondents, which would have helped improve the qualitative analysis of this thesis.

#### **2.4.1 Profiling irregular migrant women**

The interviews reveal that all sixteen respondents belonging to Group A had departed from Benin (Nigeria). Except for one<sup>22</sup>, all fifteen respondents had left Nigeria with the intention of migrating to ‘Europe’ via the Central Mediterranean route, between 2015-2016 and had been stranded in Libya up until the end of 2017. Except for one respondent who travelled with her partner, all fifteen respondents travelled alone, but in the company of other irregular migrant women and men departing from the same source point. There are three possible routes to reach ‘Europe’ from Nigeria; through Libya, Tunisia or Morocco. However, the Central Mediterranean route into Italy through Libya seemed to be standard among Nigerian irregular migrants. Respondents departed from the city of Benin, crossed the Nigerian capital city of Abuja until they

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<sup>22</sup> Mercy interviewed by author at Benin, 11<sup>th</sup> July 2018. Respondent travelled onwards from Benin (Nigeria) to Libya with the intention of seeking employment in Libya, in 2008.

reached Kano, a city on the north-western border of Nigeria. Beyond the national borders of Nigeria, respondents recollected two important stop-over points on both edges of the Sahara Desert: Agadez in Central Niger, and Qatrun in Southern Libya. I observed that upon their arrival in Qatrun, respondents took varying routes to reach port cities. They travelled to Libyan cities like Sabha, Benghazi, Tripoli or Zuwara, depending on the network of ‘trolleys’ respondents paid money to while arranging for their journey. Respondents used the word ‘trolley’ to refer to individuals who helped irregular migrants arrange for their travel, from the starting point, through transit point, up until the end.<sup>23</sup> Thus, on an average, respondents were able to arrive in Libya within a month of departing from Benin (Nigeria). From then on, they continued to be stranded in Libya for a time period extending from seven to twelve months. Despite all respondents spending time waiting in ‘prison camps’<sup>24</sup> in Libya, only six of them managed to embark on journeys by boats from different departure points in Libya. Eventually, all six of them were intercepted at sea, returned to Libya and spent varied lengths of time in detention before they ‘voluntarily returned’ to Nigeria as a part of the International Organization for Migration’s (IOM) Humanitarian Voluntary Return (HVR) program.

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<sup>23</sup>This research presumes that trolleys are smugglers belonging to different smuggling networks. It should be noted that respondents used the word ‘sponsorer’ when referring to individuals who paid for women’s journeys. Thus, a trolley is different from a sponsorer in the same that migrant smuggling is understood to be different from human trafficking (US State Department 2017)

<sup>24</sup> Respondents used the term ‘prison camps’ to refer to spaces used by smuggling networks to house migrants in Libya until arrangements are made for their departure. These spaces are reportedly hidden from plain sight and often underground. Irregular migrants report spending varied lengths of time in these prison camps awaiting their turn to depart. The experiences of migrants in ‘prison camps’ is an area of study that requires in-depth investigation that was beyond the scope of this study, one that I wish to return to at a later stage of research in the future.

The respondents interviewed for this research were between twenty and thirty-five years of age at the time of interview, with most between the ages of 23-30 years. Regarding the level of schooling they received, six respondents had finished secondary school. However, all respondents were trained in hair-styling or braiding, a popular skill among women in Nigeria. Respondents were hopeful that they could put these skills to use so that they could earn a source of livelihood upon their arrival in receiving countries. Additionally, all respondents had been working odd jobs in Benin (Nigeria) before they migrated. While eleven respondents clearly mention having paid for their own journey using funds gathered over time,<sup>25</sup> three respondents mentioned not having paid for their journey as it was taken care of by a third party and two respondents did not wish to provide any details. Thus, the irregular migrant women I interviewed participated in migrations spanning 2,541 kilometers from Nigeria and cutting through Niger and Algeria into Libya. Beyond the Libyan borders, they prepared themselves for what is described as the deadliest migration route: the Central Mediterranean Route (Metcalf 2018).

## 2.5 Before departure

Upon arriving at the ESTAHT to commence my fieldwork, I consciously made a decision to first interview non-returnee respondents or put simply, individuals working within Nigerian state and non-state organizations who could offer me their version of the context within which

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<sup>25</sup> It is important to point out that the amounts paid by respondents remained unclear as often they would quote the tentative price in dollars, sometimes in euros, sometimes in the Nigerian naira, causing confusion in the documentation of the precise amount. However, estimates from sources like Interpol, Europol, the IOM and Reuters reveal that on an average refugees and migrants pay between \$3,200 (US) to \$6,500 for their journeys to Europe (Chowdhry 2016).

Nigerian women were increasingly departing from Benin (Nigeria). This, I believed, would offer me an insight into the local context as I proceeded to interview returnee women and understanding their experiences of the process of migration. Therefore, during my first few days of fieldwork, I spoke at great length with Catherine who oversaw the operations of a shelter home that provided temporary assistance to returnee women who had little recourse to support from their families in Benin (Nigeria). Catherine, a trained lawyer, started the conversation by mentioning a time when she switched to social work after being concerned with the scale and extent of human trafficking in Nigeria. I jumped at the opportunity of talking about the issue of human trafficking in Nigeria and encouraged her to elaborate on this point. By way of explanation, she offered the following:

In the 90s, that [human trafficking] was happening...Girls, they were recruited and taken to shrines or juju places<sup>26</sup> to prepare them so that they travel with their madams and work under them until they can pay whatever amount they are supposed to pay. But these days, people would just tell you what you are going for. Because when you look around at people's family situation, there's really

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<sup>26</sup> Juju refers to a spiritual belief system prominent in traditional African religious systems. It is a form of witchcraft, most commonly used in West Africa. It has reportedly been used to ensure compliance and enslavement among women who are trafficked from West Africa into countries in Europe by transnational organized crime networks. Trafficked women report undergoing juju oath-swearing rituals before their departure from source countries. These rituals use menstrual blood, nail clippings or pubic hair belonging to the women and commit them to repaying the money they owe to their smugglers and failing to do so, they fear the threat of death or insanity cursed upon them. Juju rituals are believed to be the most central element of sex trafficking occurring from Nigeria (Dunkerley 2018; Ruhfus 2013; BBC 2014).



no money and you see someone is thinking I can go make money...Now, these youth, these migrants, they sell off their personal belongings, make money and leave for their journeys. So, what we are seeing now is that trafficking does not occur from home countries, although there are few cases. What we see is that they [Nigerians] move. I mean they prepare to go on their own.<sup>27</sup>

In our conversation, Catherine made a crucial point – that undeniably human trafficking was a commonly occurring phenomenon in Nigeria, wherein women were being sworn into an oath by priests who practiced witchcraft and forced to engage in sex work under madams until the point they were able to repay the debt of their journeys to receiving countries. However, this was an occurrence in the 90s. Speaking of current times, Catherine pointed out that Nigerian women and men gather funds for migrating outside of Nigeria upon failing to improve their state of well-being in the country. Combining her inputs with the insight into the rising popularity of irregular migration amongst Nigerians that Samuel<sup>28</sup> had offered, I was able to develop an outline of how lines between migration and human trafficking were blurred during the period from the 1980s to the early 2000s. Nigerians were increasingly irregularly migrating towards Europe from the early 1980s which likely gave rise to human trafficking networks that dominated movement in the region by the early 1990s (Babatunde 2014). Exploiting and abusing women who were eager to leave but not well versed with the alternatives available was relatively easy in Nigeria. However, my research suggests that in the next two decades there were a greater number of Nigerian migrants

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<sup>27</sup> Catherine, interviewed by the author at Benin, 28<sup>th</sup> June 2018.

<sup>28</sup> Samuel, interviewed by the author at Benin, 19<sup>th</sup> July 2018.

living in Europe and establishing contact with, and providing assistance to, those in Nigeria through channels such as remittances.<sup>29</sup> This sets a kind of precedent for women and men in Nigeria as they begin to reflect upon the disparity in terms of the well-being of those who migrated and those who did not. Following this, potential irregular migrants organize their journeys out of Nigeria by arranging for funds, establishing contact with family members, friends or acquaintances in Europe, or getting in touch with ‘trolleys’ who will help them leave.

As I started the process of interviewing returnee women, the question occupying my thoughts was - how I could prevent this research from simplistically identifying extreme poverty as the main external push factor when examining the contexts within which women opted to migrate. In no way do I undermine or regard as false the linkages between migration and poverty. I fully acknowledge that migration opens up avenues to job markets in well performing economies and is thus a doorway to escaping poverty, especially for women within context and sector specific labour markets (Hugo 1998; Harris 2001; R. Andrijasevic 2010). What I seek to do here is to complicate the link between migration and poverty. It is misleading to simply understand

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<sup>29</sup> Here I make a reference to the datasheet on international migrant stock as of 2017, released by the UN Population Division (UN 2017). The number of Nigerian migrant women and men living in Europe reflects a sharp increase from 1990 to 2017, according to this data set. I tracked the migrant stock of Nigerians in Europe for the following years;

- 1990: 88,170
- 2000: 163,640
- 2010: 366,003
- 2017: 395,050

Additionally, I also make a reference to data that reflects a steady increase in remittances flowing into Nigeria from 1991 to 2010 (Williams et al, 2014).

migration as being driven by extreme levels of poverty and economic incentives alone. If that were the case, then one would witness only those in extreme poverty using migration as a strategy. However, the poorest are often left out of the process of migration due to low levels of human capital that result in lower rewards (De Haan and Yaqub 2010). Furthermore, the cost of leaving is high, and many cannot afford this option even when they enter into an indentured relationship with ‘trolleys’. For instance, eleven out of sixteen respondents interviewed for this research could participate in migratory projects by pulling together saved funds, taking loans or borrowing money from those within their social networks. Thus, skilled or semi-skilled individuals with educational qualifications and previous experience in the labour market are more likely to be the ones migrating as they find themselves in a better position to capture more rewards that take the form of financial security or upwards socio-economic mobility (Safa 1982).

Often, individuals, after conducting an assessment of their capabilities and available alternatives, implement strategies developed along with families such that the costs of migration and rewards resulting from migration will be shared by all the family members (Stark 1993). That is, families take a collective decision as to which member(s) will migrate using the pooled financial resources. Irrespective of which member is chosen to migrate, the money she/he is able to send back will be shared by all the members who stayed back in the source country. When my respondent Gaby decided to leave Benin after weighing her options and giving a good amount of thought as to how her decision to migrate might indeed benefit the whole family. In our interview, she told me that:

I decided to travel after looking at my mother’s condition and family’s condition.

We don’t have somebody to help us, just felt like let me try to help my family.

That's why I left Nigeria. I just asked my mother to pray for me so that this poverty can go away.<sup>30</sup>

Gaby spoke of being trained in tailoring, a skill one would presume helps secure a source of livelihood in Nigeria. However, she was unable to find a sustainable way of providing for her family. She felt helpless about her family's condition and upon reflecting on the continued state of poverty that her family lived in, she made an active choice to leave in order to offer better support to her mother and family. Another respondent, Anna who was 20 years old herself, made an active decision to leave upon realizing that after the death of both her parents, somebody in the family would have to provide for her and her younger siblings. As nobody in her immediate family had travelled to Europe before, she chose to leave to take on the responsibility of providing for her younger siblings and finding a way of enrolling herself into high school.<sup>31</sup> The respondents I was interviewing had all experienced varying degrees of poverty. They had attempted to make the most of skills they possessed, be it hair-braiding or tailoring, to push back against this poverty. Upon failing to make a living using the skills that they already had, they took action and decided to leave.

When the decision was made to leave, the respondents contacted friends or family members in Europe. As we know from the rich literature that explores workings of transnational migration networks, these play a key role in an individual's decision to leave and the viability of their migration (Donato et al. 2006). Instead, as potential migrants, individuals will select destinations where their friends, family members or other acquaintances have settled, initiating chain migration

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<sup>30</sup> Gaby, interviewed by the author at Benin, 18<sup>th</sup> July 2018.

<sup>31</sup> Anna, interviewed by the author at Benin, 13<sup>th</sup> July 2018.

(De Haan and Yaqub 2010). Following this, irregular migrants enquire into alternatives of earning an income available in receiving countries for incoming migrants. Therefore, the idea is not to simply leave, but also to engage in income-generating activities that enable them, as irregular migrants, to sustain themselves and their families by sending back remittances to Nigeria (Haas 2005; Schiller 2011; Sutherland 2013; De Haan and Yaqub 2010).

Mimi, a thirty-three year old single parent, tapped into her network of friends who had successfully crossed over from Libya into Europe and were able to find employment opportunities. In our interview, she commented that: “I was planning to go to France. I have friends in France, we talk through Facebook. I decided to go there myself. I don’t know what work my friends do in France. I asked one, he said he works in a supermarket. I was also thinking I will work in the supermarket. Or I could also use my styling work.”<sup>32</sup> Whereas another respondent, Maria, was aware that she would have to take up menial work like cleaning public spaces upon her arrival in Europe.<sup>33</sup> And as respondents Rose and Rebecca explained, irregular migrants used migration networks to establish contact with trolleys who help them plan their journeys. Rose “knew people, who knew trolleys” and Rebecca had travelled safely to Libya without proper documentation through the same trolley who helped her friend successfully reach Italy a couple of years ago.<sup>34</sup>

As Andrijasevic’s work on migrant sex workers has highlighted, agency in the decision making processes of migrant sex workers reveals itself in two ways: a) women, prior to their

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<sup>32</sup> Mimi, interviewed by the author at Benin, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2018.

<sup>33</sup> Maria, interviewed by the author at Benin, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2018.

<sup>34</sup> Rose, interviewed by the author at Benin, 8<sup>th</sup> July 2018 and Rebecca, interviewed by the author at Benin, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2018.

migration, had established contact with other women who had migrated successfully; b) it is through the act of establishing contact that women, prior to their migration, were aware of the nature of work they would be required to engage in. What they were unaware of is the intensity and poor state of working and living conditions in receiving countries (Andrijasevic 2010). Drawing parallels with Andrijasevic's work, I highlight a key finding in my own research; in the case of irregular migrant women travelling upwards from Nigeria, women actively develop a strategy to leave, tap onto migration networks in receiving countries to access information, get in touch with trolleys to set the ball rolling and gain an estimate of prospects available in receiving countries.

## **2.6 In transit**

Prior to conducting fieldwork, I read numerous accounts of hardships migrants face as they cross international borders between Nigeria, Niger and Algeria. Between the years 2017 and 2018 alone, mass expulsions from Algeria resulted in 13,000 migrants being abandoned in the desert. Since 2014 a total of 30,000 migrants have reportedly gone missing in the unforgiving Sahara Desert (Laurent and O'Grady 2018; Hinnant 2018; McCarthy 2018). To be able to document firsthand accounts, I requested that respondents describe their experiences of travelling for weeks on end in groups. When asked about the weeks they spent travelling across the Sahara, most respondents were reluctant to speak about their experiences, and frequently only made references to key stop-over points. Rebecca was the only respondent who spoke about this specific part of the journey:

If you fall down [from the vehicle], they [drivers] won't pick you up again. They will just be going...you will be shouting please stop, they won't stop, they will

be going going going. They would drop us in one place, we would sit outside and rest for some minutes. We would be hungry, there would be no water, no food, nothing to eat and in that they would come back to arrange us inside [the vehicle]. They would be beating us, they would be pushing us. They would be beating the men, they would be beating the women, some would be crying. Lots of things happened, some die...some lost their loved ones, some lost the people they came with, some lost the ones they followed on the road.<sup>35</sup>

Her erratic and disjointed account focuses on the violence that is well-documented along this route. As she explains, migrants travelled in a state of malnourishment and despair, and not all made it to the destination. The journey through the Sahara Desert is unsurprisingly difficult. If the excruciatingly high temperatures did not make it difficult enough, migrants face a complex combination of obstacles as they decide to continue journeys from one stop-over point to another. Travelling in cramped vehicles that are over-capacity, migrants are allowed to carry only fixed amounts of water and food supplies for a journey that can last for two weeks. There is an impending fear of the vehicle breaking down, of sandstorms making it impossible for vehicle drivers to navigate, or worse, of the travelling group either running into tribal militia or being kidnapped by rival smuggling gangs.

There remains an assumption – driven by popular media reports - that migrants emerging from several African countries in the West and East travel through the Sahara Desert with the sole

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<sup>35</sup> Rebecca, interviewed by the author at Benin, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2018.

intention of migrating to Europe.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, a frontier zone has been created in the Sahara (Brachet 2018). This means that migrants are exposed to random security checks and face the threat of being arrested anywhere and at any time. The intensity of hardships migrants face while in transit through the Sahara has remained high, if it hasn't gotten worse, since the 2000s. And these hardships are more or less known to the migrants who rely on experiences of those who have previously crossed the stretch. Despite this, I believe migrants engage in a form of calculated risk taking behavior;<sup>37</sup> migratory projects require migrants to make steep financial investments while weighing the risk of death at sea or during journeys by land (De Genova 2002). Thus, migrants make an investment into migratory projects, while weighing risks associated with challenging journeys against what they stand to gain upon being successful. Rose's words echo a similar sentiment:

It's risky, but people don't care about the risk. All they care is about trying. They want to try. Through trying you succeed. You can't stay in one place without doing anything. You can't stay in one place and at the end of the day you get food to eat. So, people try. I can try again.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> This notion has been proven incorrect using empirical evidence gathered by studies on patterns, trends and drivers in African migration (Flahaux and De Haas 2016; Brachet 2018). 80 percent of the Sub-Saharan migrants in fact traverse through the desert to arrive to other African countries.

<sup>37</sup> This research uses a Foucauldian understanding of 'risk' as 'a family of ways of thinking and acting, involving calculations about probable future in the present followed by interventions into the present in order to control that potential future' (Beck 1999).

<sup>38</sup> Rose, interviewed by the author at Benin, 8<sup>th</sup> July 2018.



Upon her arrival in Libya, Rose spent a year waiting to depart for Italy, during which for a brief period she was kidnapped and locked up by a gang. However, she witnessed people crossing the Mediterranean Sea successfully, and was certain she could too, one day. Her comment on risks and the tendency of irregular migrants like her to overlook the risks involved, and also in the process to take additional risks, requires further examination with regards to autonomy in migration. The calculated risk that irregular migrants take can be explored with regards to the following: a) framing the irregular migrant as a risky being; b) framing the irregular migrant as being at risk on account of being exposed to circumstances under which she/he may be forced to engage in risky behavior; c) framing the irregular migrant as an agential risk taking individual.

The first approach of framing an irregular migrant as a ‘risky being’ validates the need to securitize migration,<sup>39</sup> turns the migrant subject into a securitized object and a security threat through the association of risks with threats (Aradau 2004). The second approach of framing the irregular migrant as being at risk is what feeds the governmentality of migrants through the politics of pity (Aradau 2004) and the logic of masculinist protection (Young 2003), two key aspects I deal with in the chapters following the first one. The third approach, that of framing the irregular migrant as an agential risk taking individual is of most relevance to the argument of this chapter. It adopts a rather refreshing perspective on migration; one that allows us to see how migrants, through their migratory projects, engage in a form of resistance despite all the risks involved. By

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<sup>39</sup> The term securitization refers to the process of presenting a particular political and/or social issue as a security threat that necessitates a military response (Wæver 1993). Thus, securitizing migration involves treating the migration of an individual or groups of individuals as a threat to internal and external state security (Huysmans 2000).

taking risks, irregular migrants actively voice their dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in home countries and participate in an alternative form of dissent against structural and global inequalities that otherwise restrict them within national borders. Through the very act of taking risks and exiting their homes, irregular migrants indeed engage in political processes in an independent manner (Hirschman 1970; Rodriguez 1996). Thus, in Rose's willingness to take risks and transgress national borders I caught a glimpse of the expression of radical autonomy, a form of adaptive self-reliance (Duffield 2010) whereby individuals discover effective means of existence divorced from assistance offered by states or aid agencies in source countries.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

I began this chapter with the intention of underscoring two key aspects of examining the phenomena of migration from 'underdeveloped' countries to 'developed' countries. Firstly, I sought to underscore the rise in feminization of migration and reformulate our perception of who a migrant subject is. Secondly, I sought to acknowledge the ability of women to enact survival strategies through their participation in migratory projects. By means of creating a profile of irregular migrant women from Benin (Nigeria) departing towards Europe and examining testimonies of their experiences along a migratory route through Libya, I found out that irregular migrant women were engaging in a process of weighing their alternatives before making the decision to migrate. Possessing qualifications, skill sets and previous work experience, they were assessing the state of their well-being and that of their families and taking on the role of primary migrants. They were investing thought and resources into the process of migration – they were following a highly structured migratory route, they were getting in touch with acquaintances in Europe, they were organizing funds for journeys and contacting third party agents who would help

them facilitate these journeys. While in transit, they engaged in calculated risk-taking behaviour and continued undertaking treacherous journeys from one stop-over point to the next towards Libya to secure upwards socio-economic mobility of their families and themselves. Thus, irregular migrant women departing from Benin (Nigeria) demonstrated traces of active choice in their decision to migrate upon experiencing dissatisfaction with the state of being in the source country by opting to rely on their partial ability to migrate to Europe. As a concluding remark to this chapter, I point out that in the next chapter, by means of focusing on the narrative of victimhood created by the trafficking frame, I will examine the contrasting manner by which irregular migrant women are presented and addressed by the international community of policymakers.

### 3 Framing and Beyond Framing: Critiquing the Trafficking Discourse

#### 3.1 Introduction

Notably, a rise in irregular migration from ‘underdeveloped’ to ‘developed’ countries has occurred within the context of globalization and steadily growing neo-liberal economies. Globalization contributes – and has contributed over the past century - to the re(bordering) of states, resulting in what Andrijasevic and Walters have termed ‘gated globalism’ (Andrijasevic and Walters 2010). By way of diffusion, dispersal and re-formation of borders under a political dynamic of fear, unease and insecurity, globalization brings about a systemic process of development and change involving state and non-state actors (Moghadam 2005). Within such a global system, the governance of migration and migratory flows encompasses multiple sites of power and involves the deployment of tactics and manoeuvres on the part of receiving countries. Control is exercised in discursive ways; not always through the use of disciplining tactics or coercion. In fact, one of the key tactics employed is a contemporary form of governmentality involving the calculated construction of states and other collectivities as subjects who bear an ability and a responsibility towards shaping their futures through informed choices and strategic decisions (Andrijasevic and Walters 2010).

This chapter explores one such contemporary form of governmentality exercised by receiving countries on irregular migrant women arriving from ‘underdeveloped’ source countries like Nigeria. The chapter engages the deconstruction of the framing of irregular migrant women as vulnerable trafficked victims in anti-trafficking campaigns. The chapter focuses on the framing of irregular migrants from ‘underdeveloped’ or ‘Third World’ countries as victims of trafficking by feminists and feminist organizations in ‘developed countries’. I argue that within the broader

context of globalization, neoliberalism, tightening of border controls and deportation regimes, agendas set by feminists inadvertently offer a legitimizing and humanitarian front for the national security agendas of receiving countries in the European Union (EU) that are directed towards governing the mobility of irregular migrant women from ‘underdeveloped’ countries like Nigeria.

The first section of this chapter lays out the broader conceptual framework for the thesis. I begin by addressing the process of de-territorialization of Europe’s borders (Guild and Bigo 2003), and demonstrate how I develop my ideas using the theory of framing (Goffman 1986) and the conceptual framework of logic of masculinist protection (Young 2003). The second section of this chapter focuses on the framing of trafficking as a form of human rights abuse and gender-based violence by feminists who are a part of anti-trafficking campaigns and coalitions (Barry 1981). As I discuss, this ‘framing’ draws heavily from an imperial form of feminism that relies on the creation of gendered imaginaries of victims and perpetrators from the ‘Third World’ countries. The concluding section of the chapter addresses limitations of this approach despite the possibility of constructing an alternative frame by highlighting how it transforms the manner in which we view an irregular migrant woman and arrive at appropriate rationales for action.

### **3.2 Laying out the framework: Interweaving diffused borders, framing, and masculinist protection**

In his earlier work, Didier Bigo describes a three step approach implemented by the governmental policies of European countries with respect to migration: a) that of dissuading individuals from leaving the country of origin; b) of closely filtering asylum seekers at borders, by segregating the good refugees from the false refugees; and c) employing a repressive course of action towards candidates who are within borders and qualify to apply for asylum (Bigo 1995).

This gives us a sense of the visible and invisible internal and external borders that an irregular migrant must surpass before being allowed to integrate herself/himself into the receiving country. Guild and Bigo examine the practice of dissuading individuals from exiting their home countries in greater detail (Guild and Bigo 2003). They refer to this as the act of remotely policing individuals in source countries without having to wait until irregular migrants arrive at the borders of a neighbouring nation-state. Guild and Bigo conceptualize the act of remotely policing irregular migrants carried out by actors such as consular authorities or private actors who perform policing functions outside of their national territories. Using the example of the process of granting visas, Guild and Bigo demonstrate the importance of the position of consular authorities who make decisions on cases where visas (and entries into receiving countries) should be granted or denied, versus that of border control authorities who are more likely to perform the function of simply verifying travel documents. This makes possible the control of migrant mobility even before they enter the territory of the receiving country through the medium of non-security, non-police, non-military authorities. Thus, Guild and Bigo's conceptualization of the de-territorialization of Europe's borders forms a broader analytical framework within which this study is situated (Guild and Bigo 2003). I employ the conceptual framework of remote policing in source countries and transit countries to examine the role of feminists and intergovernmental organizations as non-security, non-police and non-military actors involved in legitimizing the push-back approach adopted by the EU towards irregular migrant women.

More specifically, to follow a line of enquiry that examines the attempt at controlling the mobility of irregular migrants through the building of a narrative on trafficking, I use the theory of framing. Sociologist Erving Goffman began to explore the theory of framing in order to examine the ways in people engage in a process of meaning-making (Goffman 1986). Thus, framing entails

a conceptualizing of an issue through efforts taken to persuade the audience of its implications (Chong and Druckman 2007). Frames can work on either or all levels; they can make new beliefs available for the audience, they can make specific available beliefs accessible to the audience or they can make specific beliefs seem more applicable or stronger in the audience's evaluation. In contexts wherein the audience does not participate in political processes, their opinions are likely to be shaped by how an issue is presented to them. For instance, in the case of trafficking and other forms of transnational organized criminal activities, empirical evidence is often either hard to gather or simply not available (Sanghera 2005; C. Aradau 2008; Doezema 2010). Therefore, public opinion and recommendations of advocacy groups for policy-making are heavily dependent on the manner in which the issue of trafficking is narrated or framed by key actors. Thus, I regard the theory of framing as an important tool to critically analyze the construction of the discourse on trafficking furthered by feminist coalitions like Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW) and governmental actors within the EU. Since narrating human trafficking involves separate feminist groups and state actors to shape a specific version of the truth around regular and irregular forms of migration, this research uses the framing theory to unpack the consequences of framing trafficking as a form of human rights abuse and a form of gender-based violence. Furthermore, the creation of gendered imaginaries of victims and perpetrators inform the excessive emphasis on the physical suffering and vulnerability of migrants as opposed to their sustained fight to survive.

Drawing upon the logic of masculinist protection developed by Iris Marion Young (Young 2003), I employ a conceptual framework to examine the role of intergovernmental organizations in controlling the mobility of irregular migrant women. While feminist theory has in the past examined a model that presents masculinity as self-consciously aggressive and dominative, Young draws our attention to a particular form of masculinism – one that associates the male head of a

single family unit with the role of a protector, and by extension, male leaders as protectors of entire populations. In the 1980s, feminists such as MacKinnon and others began to document the rationalizing means of asserting the superiority of men over women and sexually mastering them (MacKinnon 1987; Pateman 1988). Associated with the idea of chivalry, Young's form of masculinity distances itself from the need experienced by male heads to enslave or overpower other subjects for the sake of enhancing their self-image. Thus, Young helps us construct the image of a loving and self-sacrificing man, specially in relation to women and children, who is always prepared to shield women and children from harm or from the possibility of harm. Moreover, the logic of masculinist protection focuses on internal and external threats against which it assumes the role of a courageous and virtuous protector. However, a key element of this form of masculinist protection is the sub-ordinate position occupied by those who are being protected; women and children within the family and marginalized and vulnerable communities in the larger national contexts. When this form of masculinist protection unfolds between the protector and the protected, it continues to operate within a framework of power. While the protector does not employ a repressive form of power or control over those being protected, through the act of offering protection against threat the protector exercises what Foucault termed as pastoral power (Foucault 1982). Pastoral power differs from a repressive form of power in that it is more gentle and benevolent. By agreeing to be protected, those occupying a subordinate position in exchange agree to forego their autonomy over decision making. Although they may not be submitting themselves to a violent and overbearing power, they do indeed submit themselves to the protector's judgment of what is best for them. In exchange, they receive the promise of security in the face of threat. Young refers to this arrangement between the protector and the protected as a 'protection bargain' (Young 2003). Drawing upon Young's conceptualization of masculinist protection and



the protection bargain, I will critically analyse the EU's engagement with irregular migrants who are stranded, rescued, intercepted or detained in Libya as a form of protection bargain through the examination of internal and external threats being invoked as a part of a specific narrative. Furthermore, it offers a framework for conducting an assessment of Humanitarian Voluntary Return (HVR) programs as a form of protection offered to irregular migrants through the International Organization for Migration (IOM). This in turn shines a light on what irregular migrants are expected to forego in this system of exchange.

### **3.3 21<sup>st</sup> century feminists, civil democracies and trafficking**

In 2004, Phyllis Chesler and Donna Hughes, two prominent spokespeople for CATW published an op-ed in the *Washington Post*, titled “Feminism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” calling for readers and feminists to rethink feminism. In a single sweep, Chesler and Hughes remind readers of the role of American women in liberation movements associated with freedom and equality, position the ‘modern West’ on a pedestal, hint at the banality of feminists glorifying anti-colonialist movements from the ‘Third World’, address the issue of an exponential growth in the global sex trade and the emerging international human rights crisis that needs to be met with ‘feminist moral clarity’ (Chesler and Hughes 2004).<sup>40</sup> While the op-ed received strong criticism the authors

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<sup>40</sup> Two quotes from the piece “Feminism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” are most relevant to this chapter: a) “Twenty-first-century feminists need to become a force for literate, civil democracies. They must oppose dictatorships and totalitarian movements that crush the liberty and rights of people, especially women and girls. They would be wise to abandon multicultural relativism and instead uphold a universal standard of human rights. They should demand that all girls have the opportunity to reach their full potential instead of living and dying in the gulags of the sex trade; b) “Twenty-first-century feminists need to reassess the global threats to women and men, rethink their vision, rekindle their passion

opinions resonate with the abolitionist ideology of US-based CATW, which has, since 1980s, strived to make anti-trafficking an important issue among feminist and governmental circles (Burk 2004; Sharma 2005). CATW currently enjoys a consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council. During the drafting of the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons in 2003, CATW continued to propose an abolitionist approach to the issue of trafficking and was successful in ensuring that prostitution and sex work would be included in the definition of ‘trafficking in persons’ (Leidholdt 2004; Ditmore 2005). Closer to the context within which this research is situated, CATW offers consultations to the EU on policymaking with regards to migration and has a strong influence as a coalition. *Iroko Associazione Onlus*, the only organization listed under CATW’s regional network within the EU, focuses on the Nigeria-Italy migration route and adopts the abolitionist model as a part of its fight against trafficking. CATW as a coalition of individuals who identify as feminists, plays a crucial role in formulating strong anti-trafficking campaigns. It takes an ideological stance that reflects disregard for consent within trafficking and influences policymaking related to migration within the EU.

I argue that the dominant conceptualization of the trafficking frame, one that CATW utilizes to influence policy making on the issue of trafficking and migration, reflects traces of two forms of feminism: an imperial form of feminism, and a form of missionary feminism (Khader

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and work in solidarity with pro-democracy forces around the world to liberate humanity from all forms of tyranny and slavery.” (Chesler and Hughes 2004). I draw from these sections of the piece to formulate my understanding of CATW’s ideological positioning as a feminist coalition that works against trafficking in women.

2018). I suggest that to assess imperialist feminism is the first step to assessing the trafficking frame as an embodiment of an imperial form of feminism. Feminists have been strongly critiqued for attempting to articulate experiences of black women and ‘Third World’ women, although from a racist perspective and reasoning (Amos and Parmar 1984). The underlying assumption of this form of feminism is that pre-capitalist economies suffer from backwardness and are often the root cause of oppression of women. By that logic, ‘Third World’ women have a hope of experiencing liberation only upon entering capitalist relations (Amos and Parmar 1984). By measuring and articulating experiences of non-Western women against their own experiences, feminists have in the past formulated ethnocentric and Eurocentric theories of women’s oppression. Failing to acknowledge the differences in the historical and cultural traditions and contexts they come from while celebrating sisterhood and solidarity towards non-Western women, feminists in the West develop analysis and interpretations of other cultures (Amos and Parmar 1984). These interpretations project characteristics of naivety upon the ‘subject’ and perverseness upon the subject’s culture, continuing to approach the subject with a post-imperial outlook. Additionally, feminists who endorse justice monism and adopt morally influenced ways of viewing issues at hand and developing perspectives propagate a missionary form of feminism. Thus, a trafficking frame resulting from the combination of imperial feminism and missionary feminism has an ideologically and morally rigid character – one that associates morality, civility and liberty with the Western culture and considers as its object the ‘victim of trafficking’ from ‘non-Western’ and ‘developing’ countries (Sharma 2005; Agustín 2007; Doezema 2010). Thus, feminists within groups like CATW not only endorse this frame, but also consider anti-trafficking measures as tantamount to the fight for civility and liberty (Chesler and Hughes 2004). If principles like civility and liberty are believed to be deeply rooted within Western democracies, it reinforces the

stereotypical presentation about ‘other’ cultures, ones that resonate with colonial and historical interpretations of women’s role in these societies. These stereotypes are most visible in the trafficking frame – a passive woman, oppressed by a male member (a boyfriend, trafficker or pimp) or her family, belonging to a lesser developed country of origin that fundamentally seeks to exploit her, now seeks helps from the West and wishes an end for her pain and suffering through the act of being rescued from her trafficker (Sanghera 2005; C. Aradau 2008; R. Andrijasevic 2010). The trafficking frame makes it clear who is the savior and who is the one being saved.

### **3.3.1 Trafficking as a part of regime of truth**

Trafficking is dominantly framed as a form of human rights abuse and a form of gender-based violence that disproportionately affects women (UN Women 2011; EIGE 2018). The framing of trafficking as a form of human rights abuse results in the inclusion of trafficking in the ‘regime of truth’ that is considered to be part of a ‘natural order’, and supported by the broader discourse on human rights. Here, I draw from Inder Grewal’s work that speaks about the manner in which human rights are considered universal and the abuse of these rights regarded as an issue that requires to be dealt with on priority basis (Grewal 2005). Since trafficking is framed as a form of human rights abuse, I argue that, by extension the issue of trafficking also falls under the category of social issues that need to be dealt with on priority basis. However, the presumption of universality prevents the audience from questioning how did something come to be considered universal in the first place. It is only by critically examining power structures and processes that assigned a universal character to a specific discourse that we can nuance the way we think about anti-trafficking campaigns. The framing of trafficking as a form of violence against women serves two important purposes; firstly, it taps into the most marketable form of feminism that attributes

grievances to oppression under patriarchal structures in home countries, and secondly, it presents oversimplified explanations of problems that are of a socially and economically complex nature (Brysk 2009b). Thus, by aligning itself with the human rights abuses and the violence against women frame, the trafficking frame is able to generate imaginaries of victims of human rights abuse and violence and their so-called perpetrators. By this reasoning, irregular migrant women from 'Third World' countries are identified as victims and traffickers/smugglers/pimps are identified as perpetrators, who are also from 'Third World' countries (Sharma 2005; R. Andrijasevic 2010; Doezema 2010).

But how do imaginaries of victim and perpetrator created by the trafficking frame come to impact irregular migrant women? Women and men, through their legal or illegal migration, occupy different positions within social, political, legal and economic contexts of both source and the receiving countries. As subjects who migrate, they are governed by migration laws in receiving countries. If they migrate for work, they are governed by laws for migrant workers. As subjects of labour markets, they are governed by different categories of labour laws. If they engage in sex work, for instance, they are governed by the laws on prostitution in the respective country. However, if they are identified as victims of international organized crime, they are bound to be governed by policies on trafficking. Their identities as victims of organized crime override other identities.

Thus, if the trafficking frame helps 'identify' victims from among migrants, migrant workers or migrant sex workers by creating imaginaries of victimhood, it influences the rationale for action taken towards these individuals by receiving countries. Furthermore, these imaginaries of victimhood are gendered. Women are perceived to have been trafficked, and men are presumed to have been smuggled (Sanghera 2005; Ditmore 2005). This denies agency to one group and

places responsibility of choices on the other. Therefore, the trafficking frame develops a gendered narrative: the feminine virtue of a woman is destroyed by the masculine evil of a trafficker or the pimp through the process of trafficking (Doezema 2010). Despite the presence of scholarship that proves the increasing extent of feminization of migration (Wijers 1998; Harzig 2002; Sørensen and Hear 2003; Kapur 2005; Donato et al. 2006; R. Andrijasevic 2010; Schrover et al. 2011), the trafficking frame regards the element of consent of the female subject as irrelevant in the presence of any form of abuse, threat, force, deception, exploitation or upon the involvement of a third party (Doezema 2010; Truong 2015). In fact, throughout the course of fieldwork conducted for this research, I have observed that making an argument proving the presence and importance of consent in abuse testimony is extremely challenging. Opponents of the trafficking frame point to the repeated use of emotive stories of physical pain and suffering experienced by victims of trafficking as an ‘ace in the pack’ by proponents of the anti-trafficking rhetoric every time an argument favouring consent is made (Kelly 2003). Even as I say this, I am careful as to not undermine realities of those who experience physical, sexual and emotional abuse as victims of trafficking. However, what I wish to do is to complicate the dominant narrative of trafficking and victimhood and shine a light on alternative narratives.

Stock stories of women who are kidnapped, drugged, and trucked across borders are used to create a representative imaginary of victims of trafficking across all geographic contexts. The logic of pain and politics of pity (Arendt 1963; Sawchuk 2002; Claudia Aradau 2004) becomes a central element of this representation. In so doing, the trafficking frame follows a process of social construction of suffering and the emotional responses it generates. It conveys suffering by translating it in a form easily recognizable to its audience – narratives create a description of women being uprooted from their homes, beaten and bruised, sexually assaulted, sexually made

vulnerable, degraded, physically and verbally abused, starved for days, chained to beds and isolated. The audience is encouraged to identify with the pain and suffering that women experience, and to associate it with the process of trafficking (Claudia Aradau 2004; Doezema 2010). Since feelings of pity cannot be generated without making the suffering seem undeserved, the trafficking frame dis-identifies its object (the victim) as dangerous or posing a threat (Lobasz 2009). Instead the victim is presented as an individual who is too weak to speak or demand human rights, calling for an intervention on humanitarian grounds.

### **3.4 Fixed Vulnerabilities, the Politics of Pity, and ‘White Saviour’ Complex**

By focusing on aspects that highlight the physical and sexual vulnerabilities of women, the trafficking frame in fact employs a disempowering definition of vulnerability, one that denies an individual agency in addressing her/his own vulnerabilities. For women who claim to have voluntarily migrated and engaged in sex work in receiving countries for the purpose of seeking upward socio-economic mobility, the trafficking frame dismisses the agency in their decision-making as false consciousness (Lobasz 2009). A focus on physical pain fails to be a fitting representation or explanation of complex socio-economic problems ‘victims’ suffer from in their home countries. The frame fails to address forms of vulnerability which the state can be held responsible for – vulnerabilities that arise when push factors are strong and regular migration is not possible, resulting in women opting for clandestine movements (Sanchez 2017). For instance, most developing countries, including Nigeria, have been subject to structural adjustment

programs<sup>41</sup>. These programs serve as shock absorbers of neoliberal economic policies being implemented in Western countries (Moghadam 2005). They have led to loss of jobs in domestic sectors in ‘developing’ countries, causing women to consider migrating towards countries where there is a demand and lack of supply of labour (Konadu-Agyemang 2000; Agustín 2007). Thus, by failing to address push factors, the trafficking frame captures only some forms of suffering, and overlooks or fails to capture other forms of suffering. By focusing on sufferings women undergo at the hands of traffickers, the trafficking frame either fails to or chooses not to address suffering women undergo upon being caught in the nexus between the state and capital processes (Sharma 2005; Suchland 2013).

By steadily focusing on the imagery of suffering, the trafficking frame runs the risk of ‘neutralization’, that is, reaffirming the belief that a specific kind of problem is always occurring in a specific place or to specific communities, resulting in growing feelings of indifference over time (Cohen 2001; Aradau 2008). For instance, in an interview I conducted with a Nigerian immigration official, he pointed out that among the circle of immigration officials in Italy, Nigerians were nicknamed as “Lie-gierians” for having a reputation of lying their way through the asylum seeking process. According to Italian officials, Nigerian irregular migrant women either falsely claim to

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<sup>41</sup> Structural adjustment programs refer to the practice of providing loans to countries in economic crisis, sponsored by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. As a part of this arrangement, countries who were receiving loans were expected to implement certain policies in order to qualify for additional loans. As demonstrated in the work of Konadu-Agyemang, structural adjustment programs have stabilized economies of countries like Ghana, caused a growth in GDP, reduced inflation rates and facilitated improvements in the economy at a macro level. However, structural adjustment programs also result in disparities in the distribution of resources related to health, education and basic services at the micro level and create unequal development within nations (Konadu-Agyemang 2000).



be queer or interestingly, claim to have “migrated illegally voluntarily” when applying for asylum.<sup>42</sup> Preconceived notions of this nature often result in officials not paying attention to what the applicant is saying and rejecting pleas for asylum regardless for specific nationalities (Jubany 2017).

The tendency of proponents of the trafficking frame to focus on a fixed set of vulnerabilities and sufferings ties in well with the critique of politics of pity.<sup>43</sup> The demonstration of pity upon subjects of trafficking results in the erasure of political agency exercised by the subject. It positions the individual in a non-flexible context wherein the suffering of the individual was undeserved, and consequently the actions resulting from the suffering were ‘forced’ and not voluntary (Aradau 2004). An apt illustration and extension of this politics of pity is the ‘poverty as force’ approach adopted by several ‘progressive’ feminists in the West. This approach refuses to acknowledge the choice of a woman from a ‘developing country’ – if a subject is poor, then choice is irrelevant and the subject is automatically categorized as an ‘innocent’ trafficked victim (Doezema 1998). Problematising the presentation of suffering and the resulting demonstration of pity, is essential because it leads us to questioning the overarching politics of representation upon which humanitarian interventions resulting from the discourse on trafficking are based. By creating a one dimensional imaginary of a suffering individual ridden by passivity and victimhood, the

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<sup>42</sup> Richard, interview with the author at Benin, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2018.

<sup>43</sup> The concept of “politics of pity” was first diagnosed by Hannah Arendt in her work *On Revolution* (Arendt 1963). However, I primarily draw from Kim Sawchuk’s critical analysis of Boltanski’s work “Distant Suffering” (Sawchuk 2002) and Claudia Aradau’s work on the securitization of human trafficking (Aradau 2004), both of whom offer an analysis of the politics of pity borrowing from Arendt’s work.

representation makes invisible the social, economic and political driving factors of migration. This is to say that while the trafficking frame makes visible some forms of vulnerability and suffering and informs specific kind of interventions, it invisibilizes other crucial aspects of the problem at hand. Focusing on suffering associated with physical pain allows the trafficking frame to influence policies on migration in a manner that it offers a sound rationale for receiving countries to impose tighter border control. However, addressing suffering rising from complex socio-economic problems offers the trafficking frame a potential to push for implementation of policies that transform economic structures on a global scale through the creation of employment opportunities, facilitation of safer and smoother migration across borders in response to fixing wider structural inequalities.

It is also crucial to specifically examine the role of feminism in producing and sustaining the trafficking frame by focusing on wider political implications it has. If feminists fail to problematize aspects of an ideological approach such as this one, the element of moralism in the trafficking frame draws a clear line between the morally correct West and the perverse non-West. Anti-trafficking measures resulting from this bifurcation implement a top-down approach that manages and controls ‘victims’ of trafficking, rescuing them and making decisions of reintegration on their behalf. In the absence of critical reflection, feminists who endorse this paternalistic frame contribute towards the act of governmentality, seeking to manage and control an object – the irregular migrant woman from the ‘Third World’ (Sharma 2005; Agustín 2007; Aradau 2008). In so doing, they fail to reflect upon the violence their objects of control are bound to face when transforming into another way of life (Abu-Lughod 2013). For instance, the trafficking frame presents the ‘home’ as a static and fixed place, a natural place of belonging wherein an individual flourishes, in the source countries of course (Malkki 1995; Sharma 2005; Agustín 2007; Aradau

2008). Any individual who is away from home is seen as needing assistance for being ‘out of place’, becomes an object of humanitarian assistance and is subjected to deportation or return to the respective home country. Any of these options can be devastating for the migrant subject who sought to escape ‘home’ in the first place. This element of the trafficking frame is rationalized and interwoven into new technologies of governing populations through deportation practices (De Genova 2010). Thus, receiving countries no longer have to deport individuals for being illegal entities or living outside of the law, instead are now able to ‘send people back home’ as a part of their rescue-reintegration-rehabilitation programs, often called as ‘voluntary return’ programs, an issue dealt with in great detail in the third chapter of this thesis.

Lastly, while the unquestioned application of the trafficking frame reinforces the alignment of the West alongside notions of morality, civility and liberty, it simultaneously shields Western societies from the scope of criticism. Therefore, if the discourse on trafficking speaks to women from ‘developing’ countries being exploited for sex work in receiving countries, then a proportionate amount of attention should be paid to the rise in demand for commodified bodies from within receiving countries that results in a rise in supply of women (Konstantopoulos et al. 2013; Weitzer 2014).

### **3.5 Constructing an Alternative Frame**

In conclusion, it is important to point out that trafficking among women, men and children is a commonly occurring social and political problem, occurring as much in the West as it does in the non-West. However, if trafficking is a multi-million dollar industry, the anti-trafficking industry is also growing steadily owing to the resources being directed towards taking anti-trafficking measures. It is more crucial than ever to develop a nuanced and critical understanding

of the problem of trafficking. The first step in doing so is to develop an alternative view, rather one that counters the dominant view on trafficking. This can include repositioning the identity of the irregular migrant and closely examining the response of the receiving countries while trying to find traces of active participation in decision making processes. De Genova's work on reaction formations to autonomy in migration (De Genova, 2017) gives us an interesting perspective, one that can be applied to the trafficking frame. Autonomy in migration is demonstrated by irregular migrants. This is often perceived as a threat to the sovereignty of nation-states and a 'reaction formation' occurs. Narratives that exaggerate the lack of autonomy in the decision making processes of migrants are made more visible than before, echoed by the trafficking frame and backed by receiving countries. Once we are able to prove or disprove the extent (or lack) of agency demonstrated by irregular migrant women rather than taking the trafficking frame at face value, it opens up avenues to examine other claims made by coalitions and feminists organizations that endorse the trafficking frame. For instance, the notion of vulnerability as a fixed label for a subpopulation from start to endpoint can be critiqued, as there exist 'layers of vulnerability' in developing countries, some of which arise out of economic, social and political exclusion (Luna 2009), a framework of thought applicable to the case of irregular migrants. Lastly, by reorienting our attention towards a transnational frame, we can apply theories of migration and feminism that allow us to recognize the differences in histories, colonial pasts, race, class and ethnicity markers and contexts of women as migrants.

## 4 The EU's protection bargain in Libya: Curbing Irregular Migrant Mobility

### 4.1 Introduction

In June 2018, *The Guardian* published an article covering several means that the European Union (EU) was adopting to address the issue of “the arrival of millions of refugees (from the African continent) in Europe and the deaths of thousands more attempting the crossing (of the Mediterranean Sea)” (Wintour 2018). According to the article, the means adopted by the EU included sending irregular migrants and refugees to several EU Member States, facilitating the return of those whose claims for asylum are rejected and finding means to reduce the incentives to travel towards Europe. Furthermore, the EU attempted to control what it deems are chaotic migration patterns by proposing to establish asylum processing centers within the Sahel belt (Wintour 2018; Witschge 2018).<sup>44</sup> Most importantly, the EU's long-term budget for the period 2021-2027 reflects an increase in spending on migration control in comparison to its spending on the development of the Sub-Saharan Africa (Valero 2018).<sup>45</sup> I suggest we view these changes in

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<sup>44</sup> The Sahel belt refers to the region south of the Sahara Desert, stretching east-west across countries of Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Sudan and Eritrea. The Sahel belt marks the transition in the landscape and cultures between the southern and northern part of the African continent (Suleiman 2017).

<sup>45</sup> According to the European Commission's multiannual framework, for the upcoming years of 2021-2027, the Commission increased allocation of funds for Sub-Saharan Africa from €26.1 billion to €32 billion. However, taking into account inflation over the years until 2021, the actual amount allocated for Sub-Saharan Africa stands at €28.3 billion. Meanwhile, the Commission's funding allocated for activities related to migration control and border management stands at €30.8 billion, despite taking into account inflation. This means that the budget allocation for migration control and border management exceeds the budget allocation for development of Africa by €2.5 billion (Valero 2018).

the long-term budget of the EU within a context wherein the EU prides itself for being the world's leading provider of official development assistance (European Commission 2019). Given the presence of strong empirical evidence of a positive relationship between migration and development (Sørensen and Hear 2003; H. D. Haas 2005; Schiller 2011; Sutherland 2013), I consider it crucial to be critical of the EU's commitment towards development of 'underdeveloped' countries on one hand and the EU's consistent efforts at curbing the inflow of irregular migrants from the African continent on the other hand. In so doing, I examine the manner in which the EU responds to the 'migration crisis' rising from the African continent prioritize migration and border management over its commitment to development of source countries.

For the EU to effectively curb the inflow of irregular migrants and refugees from the African continent, it would have to enter into friendship agreements and strike deals with key actors from third party countries, as it has done in the past through the EU-Turkey deal in 2016.<sup>46</sup> This chapter assesses the role of the EU in situating Libya as the gatekeeper of the 'migration crisis' in order to nuance our understanding of the way in which the EU regulates the inflow of migration through the prolonged detention of irregular migrants in third party countries and the

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<sup>46</sup> The EU-Turkey deal was signed in March 2016. Under this deal, irregular migrants arriving into Greece through the Eastern Mediterranean route would be sent back to Turkey. In return, Turkey would receive aid and political concessions from the EU (BBC 2016). The EU Members States additionally promised to accelerate visa liberalization for Turkish nationals (Van Liempt and Zoomers 2018). The EU-Turkey deal is an illustrative example of the EU's attempt at externalizing its migration policies along the eastern borders and pushing the responsibility of dealing with the 'migration crisis' upon transit or source countries. Referring to the EU-Turkey deal is important as in the case of the Central Mediterranean route, the EU seems to be adopting a similar approach of externalizing its migration policies by striking a deal with Libya.

externalization of its borders. In the first section, I address the rhetoric of ‘migrating well’ advanced by state and non-state actors in Nigeria, which resonates with the migration policies of receiving countries. In the second section of the chapter, I begin by piecing together the story of how Nigerians began moving along a migratory route over the last two decades, passing through Niger, Algeria and Libya on their way to Europe, tracing the transition of Libya from a destination to a transit country. In the third section of this chapter, I unpack the systematic process of creation of a containment zone in Libya and the unravelling of a protection bargain between the EU and irregular migrants stranded in Libya, orchestrated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). I conclude this chapter by closely examining the IOM’s intervention – its Humanitarian Voluntary Return (HVR) program - in Libya and offering a critique of the efficacy of reintegration and rehabilitation programs directed at irregular migrant women who ‘voluntarily return’ to Nigeria.

## **4.2 The Rhetoric of “Migrating Well”**

Over the course of fieldwork in Nigeria, I broached the issue of the push-back approach adopted by the EU against African immigrants during conversations with immigration officials and staff members of NGOs in Benin (Nigeria). My intention was to gauge the extent to which source countries were cooperating with the EU. The responses I received emphasized the EU’s need to restrict the inflow. Samuel from the NGO Idia Renaissance offered a rather simplistic understanding of why the EU wished to curb the rising surge of immigrant bodies from the African continent:

If they [European Union Member States] take more people than they can accommodate, their facilities start to break down and people who pay taxes, who

want to enjoy the facilities would start to rebel. They would criticize them [the EU] for making their system fail. So they have to have a way of controlling the number of people they can take and those they don't want to take.<sup>47</sup>

Samuel's response resonates the concerns typically present in most anti-immigrant rhetoric - that irregular migrants do not fulfill their contribution towards the welfare state system in receiving countries yet continue to reap benefits of the system. The space for enjoying benefits of a welfare state or distribution of rights and resources independent of the cultural identity of immigrants has been constructed concurrently with the increase in the inflow of immigrants arriving to Europe. Since this space already exists, receiving countries are now attempting to regulate the inflow using a valve like mechanism. This is done by allowing the entry of skilled immigrants who contribute to the system alongside reaping benefits from it and severely restricting the entry of 'unwanted' and unskilled immigrants.

In an interview with Josephine, the Chief Superintendent of the 'Irregular Migration, Human Trafficking and Child Labour of Nigerian Immigration Services, Edo State', was clear about the unwanted presence of irregular migrants from Nigeria in European countries:

If you don't have anything to do there, if you're roaming the streets, begging for money, then why be there [in Europe]? If Nigerians have the money and go to embassies [of European Union Member States] with good reasons, they will get

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<sup>47</sup> Samuel, interviewed by the author at Benin, 19<sup>th</sup> July 2018.



visas and then they can be there.<sup>48</sup>

Josephine's opinion echoed two messages receiving countries continue to communicate regarding irregular migration; firstly, even if migrants enter the EU without visas, they are likely to face difficulties accessing labour markets. The unemployment rate for migrants remains higher than those for native born populations (Eurostat 2018). It would thus seem logical that irregular migrants are wastefully investing their resources reaching receiving countries. Secondly, if migrants have financial resources and 'good reasons' for legitimate entry into the EU, they will always be welcome, irrespective of the country they arrive from. And for those who do not have the financial means to migrate legally, there are other alternatives available, explained Grace, Attorney General of the Edo State, Nigeria, and the Chairperson of the ESTAHT. She laid stress on the notion of 'migrating well', meaning through regular and legal forms of migration from Nigeria into 'countries that want Nigerians'. In an interview, Grace commented that:

If they want to migrate, they should migrate properly, migrate legally and migrate well. If that [migrating legally] is a problem, well they don't have to go there, that's the thing. They don't have to go to those [European] countries. They need to go to countries that want them in the first place. If you say you are going to migrate well, then prepare yourself for migration. Give yourself the necessary skills that will make you welcomed in the other country. Most of them have gone with some sort of skills. A lot of them are artisans who have technical skills.

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<sup>48</sup> Josephine, interviewed by the author at Benin, 5<sup>th</sup> July 2018.

There's space in Nigeria to accommodate them [in the job market], there's space in Africa and there's space in some other countries. For example, in the Middle East they need a lot of people.<sup>49</sup>

As I listened to Grace stress on the idea of 'migrating well', it made me consider how difficult this must be for irregular migrants to achieve. This is especially true within the context of the EU, whereby economies operate in a neoliberal mode and strive to maintain social and geographic divisions by gendering, racializing and territorializing humanity (Mahler and Pessar 2001). A framing of migration that lays stress on migrating well (legally) draws heavily from a neoliberal understanding of migration. Firstly, a distinction is made between 'wanted' and 'unwanted' migrants on the basis of economic considerations and racial categorization. A thoroughly developed migration regime and exclusionary migration policies help maintain these divisions, control migrant mobility, and regulate which racial and ethnic categories are allowed to enter territories and gain access to social and cultural capital. If populations belonging to the Black, Asian and Slavic world are perceived as detrimental to the social and economic fabric of Western societies they are bound to face difficulties even when they attempt to 'migrate well' (Duvell 2015). Redirecting these populations to 'countries that want them' does not resolve the problem. In fact, it only contributes to maintaining social and economic hierarchies between the 'West' and the 'non-West' and most importantly, within the 'non-West'. By encouraging its citizens to migrate to countries that would be willing to accommodate them, the Nigerian state thus becomes

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<sup>49</sup> Grace, interviewed by the author at Benin, 19<sup>th</sup> July 2018.

party to what the EU has been accused of; shifting the burden of handling irregular migrants to other regions, say the Middle East, instead of sharing it. Thus, seemingly pro-migrant messages communicated by respondents like Josephine and Grace cast doubt on the tendency of migration policies of receiving countries to help maintain racial divisions in social and economic ordering on the global level through the selective inclusion and exclusion of populations.

#### **4.3 Transitioning Libya from Destination Country to Transit Country**

As I engaged returnee women, I attempted to piece together the story of how Nigerians began moving along the migratory route over the last two decades, passing through Niger and Algeria into Libya on their way to Europe. In 1992, the United Nations (UN) imposed sanctions on Libya for not co-operating in an investigation concerning the bombing of a US civilian airliner over the United Kingdom (Lewis 1992). Colonel Muammar al-Gaddafi, who was the ruler of Libya up until 2011, felt resentful about the lack of support his country received from other Arab countries in this matter. He instead decided to direct his attention towards developing foreign policy relations with other African nations, giving shape to a pan-African dream. This meant that Libya opened its doors for citizens of several African countries. Encouraged by the country's open-door policy, Africans began entering Libya and seeking employment opportunities without obtaining visas (Bredeloup and Pliez 2011). My interview with Mercy, a respondent, gave me an insight into what Libya was like before the ongoing civil war commenced in 2014. Mercy, at the age of 18, departed from Benin in 2008 with money she had managed to save. She continued boarding connecting buses with the intention of going as far as she could, before she reached Libya and decided to stay in the country and seek employment. She remembered her time in Libya rather fondly, having lived in the country for a total of ten years.

It was very nice. Everything was very good, cheap accommodation. We would find a job [in Libya] very easily. When a Libyan tries to assault you, you can go to the police and make a complaint and they will arrest the Libyan. Everything was free, you can go outside, you can go to the bank and withdraw money or send money to your parents. It was thousand times better than Nigeria. They have free water, free electricity for twenty-four hours. There's no electricity cut. The country was very good, the money was quite okay.<sup>50</sup>

However, as time passed and increasing number of refugees escaping internal conflicts and persecution from other Eastern and Western African countries began travelling to Libya, the country decided to discontinue its open-door policy and began imposing visa regulations on nationals coming from African countries, except for those belonging to the Maghreb countries (Hamood 2006).<sup>51</sup> Additionally, the country refused to recognize refugee status and up until 2010 resisted the presence of the UNHCR even (Edwards 2010). Furthermore, with the assassination of Gadaffi and the overthrow of his government in 2011, Libya collapsed into a civil war and fragmented rebel forces fought to gain control of different regions in the country. Mercy was in Libya when the war started. In our conversation together, she revealed the following about the period of civil war to explain why she was compelled to leave:

But after the war and everything, there was unrest and everything...it was

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<sup>50</sup> Mercy, interviewed by the author at Benin, 11<sup>th</sup> July 2018.

<sup>51</sup> Maghreb refers to a region in the northwestern and northern part of Africa and comprises of countries of Mauritania, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco.

insecure. Everyone was dying, there was kidnapping and stealing. I was working as a nanny for a Libyan family. I had difficulty sending money out of the country. The banks stopped working. The banks, they all bust down. If you saved money in the home, the hoodlums would come and break into your house. I lost so much money.<sup>52</sup>

Mercy's time in Libya during the years of the civil war mirrors the experience of several irregular migrants caught in the crossfire between fighting rebel forces; the Tuareg tribal militia who control the South-West part of the country and the Tebu tribal militia who control the East. Mired in conflict and offering little scope for incoming irregular migrants and refugees, Libya became more of a stop-over point than a destination country. Irregular migrants and refugees continued to trickle in from several countries within the African continent and began entering a state of limbo (Wheeler 2011; Human Rights Watch 2011). The waiting period varied from a few months to years, depending on the ability of irregular migrants to arrange for finances to pay for journeys to Europe. However, living in such a state of limbo proved to be a difficult experience for irregular migrants for several reasons. Since Libya has consistently refused to sign or ratify the 1951 Refugee Convention, irregular migrants and refugees cannot apply for asylum in the country till date (Green 2006). They are forced to live an illegal existence throughout their stay in the country. If arrested living outside of detention camps or rescued or intercepted at sea, irregular migrants and refugees are treated as criminals. Returnee women referred to these detention camps

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<sup>52</sup> Mercy, interviewed by the author at Benin, 11<sup>th</sup> July 2018.

as prisons in their interviews. My interview with Rebecca shed a light on the human rights abuse that irregular migrants and refugees are exposed to - which includes but is not limited to forced labour, sexual violence and physical and psychological abuse (Chynoweth 2019; Sunderland and Salah 2019; Amnesty International 2017). Rebecca spoke of the one year she spent in Libya, recollecting and recounting pieces of information in a hurry, showing reluctance in answering follow-up questions.

So, I was arrested...I wanted to cross over, the Libyan police stop the boat and take us to prison. So they put us in a house. People from the UN come to check our blood for drugs and to give clothes. So they [Libyan police] won't give us clothes. They only give us clothes that the UN brought for us. Yes, so the UN would come, the white man will come with clothes. They would give clothes to the Libyan people to give to us. Even baby milk, they won't give baby milk unless they get what they want from the woman. They won't give us baby milk to feed our daughter or our son. Some of the boys and girls try to escape, some of them die inside. Many things happened inside prisons. They [Libyan police] were taking the men to do outside work. After they use them to do outside work, they would bring them back, they would collect all the money and won't give the men any money for work. They would just give them little food, they would be beating them. While with the ladies, they [Libyan police] would come there, they would rape some and do what they want to do with them and then they go

back to their guns. Because they are Libyans with guns.<sup>53</sup>

Rebecca's time in the detention camp in an unknown destination in Libya highlights the approach of Libyan authorities towards detained irregular migrants and refugees. Since 2007 Libyan authorities, in complete disregard of international law, have been using detention as a viable means of regulating and restricting mass migrant flows (Global Detention Project 2009). This exposes irregular migrants and refugees within the country to indefinite detention. It results in the suspension of the human rights of individuals who are being detained as they are emasculated and turned into bare life living at the mercy of the Libyan state's power (Agamben 1998; Butler 2004). Once irregular migrants are captured and detained in Libya, they have little or no access to legal representation or other forms of support. Non-state actors such as NGOs, international organizations or civil society organizations are rarely allowed to operate in Libya. The only intergovernmental bodies allowed to conduct operations, although with restrictions, are the IOM and the UNHCR (Hamood 2006). Thus, resources like food supplies and toiletries being provided to detainees by the UN are strictly controlled by the Libyan authorities, creating space for unequal power dynamics between the authorities and detainees. This results in acts of sexual violence being committed on irregular migrants and refugees by authorities with impunity within spaces of detention.

However, the containment zone extends beyond the detention centers, beyond the external borders of Libya even, spilling onto the Search and Rescue Area between Libya and Italy. The

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<sup>53</sup> Rebecca, interviewed by the author at Benin, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2018.

Search and Rescue (SAR) area indicates the area of conducting search and rescue operations for people in distress or imminent danger. Interestingly, Libya has been allowed a SAR area in the Mediterranean Sea only since June 2018 (European Parliament 2018). Maria, a respondent who spent a total of 8 months in Libya thought she had almost made it to Italy. She spent her time waiting, living with a Libyan man who agreed to pay for her journey to Italy. However, despite being in a boat on the sea for three days, Maria was unsuccessful in her attempt as the boat's engine failed midway.

I was on top of the sea for three days, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Nobody came to rescue us so that our boat could come back. There was no way. Every way was full of water, we don't know how to escape. We called the [Libyan] police, tell them we are on the top of the sea. They said they would come and rescue us. We told them where we are, but nobody came. Then we call even in Italy. They sent us a number to call...it was the number of the Libyan police. They [Italians] don't come to help us, they said they cannot help us. So we start to look for ways to return back to Zuwara.<sup>54</sup>

Maria's narration of the time spent stranded on sea, calling for help, matched that of other respondents whose phone calls for help to the Italian coastguards were futile as they were being redirected to the 'Libyan police' instead. Furthermore, irregular migrants and refugees are fully aware of the futility of seeking help from the Libyan police, even during periods of distress. Since

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<sup>54</sup> Maria, interviewed by the author at Benin, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2018.



the outbreak of the civil war, the Libyan government has failed to regain stability. As of 2017, the country stands divided and is managed by three governments with differing ideological leanings. Since state institutions in Libya lack a general protection framework, irregular migrants and refugees are left at the mercy of whims and fancies of multiple state actors (Human Rights Watch 2019). For instance, when irregular migrants like Maria are rescued or intercepted at sea, they are detained and managed by the Libyan Coast Guard (LCG) and Directorate for Combatting Illegal Migration (DCIM). However, considering that armed groups and militia were incorporated into ministries of interiors and defense following the breakdown of state security institutions (Assad 2019), both the LCG and the DCIM currently collaborate with the militia and smugglers for the operation of detention centers across the country (Mattes 2014; Amnesty International 2017). This means that once irregular migrants and refugees are ‘rescued’ or intercepted at sea, they are brought back to detention centers and continue to live precariously and face human rights violations at the hands of militia up until the point they agree to participate in voluntary return programs.<sup>55</sup>

#### **4.4 Libya: Creation of a Containment Zone and New Locus of the EU Control**

During the 1990s, Libya underwent a transition from a destination country to a transit country. It is now considered the gatekeeper of Africa’s migrant crisis. Libya’s transition needs to be understood in relation to the volatile period the country experienced between the Arab Spring

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<sup>55</sup> The IOM defines a return program as the process of orderly and humane return and reintegration of migrants who do not qualify for or are unwillingly to continue their stay in either a host or transit country and wish to return to their country of origin (IOM 2016).

in 2011 and the Libyan Civil War in 2014 (Rowen 2019). In the section that follows, I assess the role of the EU in the shaping of Libya as the gatekeeper of the migration crisis in order to sharpen our understanding of the manner in which the EU regulates the inflow of migration through the prolonged detention of irregular migrants in Libya before introducing a protection bargain.

In 2008 Libya and Italy, with the intention of resting disputes related to colonialism, collaborated and entered into a treaty of friendship in order to deal with illegal immigration via the Mediterranean Sea (Ronzitti 2009). Having understood well the anti-immigrant approach of the EU, particularly towards Africans, Gaddafi used this as a strategy against the EU. In 2010 he demanded that the EU pay Libya at least five billion euros a year to contain illegal immigration emerging from the African continent. During a visit to Italy in 2010, he threatened that if the EU did not do so, then Europe could turn into Africa (BBC 2010). Gaddafi was able to use the threat of ‘million Africans who want to come in’ as a way of pressuring the EU into withdrawing their support for revolutionaries prior to the Arab Spring. What might have seemed like an arm-twisting tactic in the start was conveniently adopted as practice by the EU. Italy continues to stealthily conduct operations with Libya on the Central Mediterranean route. In 2019, the LCG were reportedly using boats ‘gifted’ to them by France and Italy to intercept irregular migrants and bring them back to Libya (Jeannerod 2019). In August 2018, the Italian government approved of a plan to donate twelve patrol ships to the LCG (Dahan 2018). Whereas, a year before that in August 2017, the Italian government illegally diverted a 2.5 million euro grant from a special development aid, ‘Africa fund’, towards the maintenance of Libyan boats and training for the LCG (Heller and Pezzani 2018). Emerging reports such as these illustrate how receiving countries like Italy, and by extension the EU, play their part in emboldening a complex web of actors within Libya – the LCG, the DCIM and the militia, in routinely pulling back irregular migrants who attempt to cross the

Mediterranean Sea. Furthermore, it is also reflective of two crucial aspects of the EU's migration policies that are framed with the intent of governing migration and mobility - the deterritorialization of European borders (Guild and Bigo 2003) and the de-localization of control (Rigo 2005).

Guild and Bigo's work on deterritorialization of the EU's borders demonstrates the shifting and reshaping of the external borders of Europe such that the EU's control extends well beyond its fixed geographically marked borders. By means of offering crucial forms of support to the LCG in the management of irregular migrants such that they are prevented from disembarking at Italian ports, the EU deterritorializes its borders and its control, thus expanding its reach over the Mediterranean Sea to the Libyan coast. This creates a new locus of control (Rigo 2005). Not only is the EU able to regulate the entry and facilitate the deportation of Nigerian immigrants at its southern borders in Italy and Spain, it is also able to oversee the regulation of migrant inflow far outside of its territory. By working in collaboration with the LCG and the DCIM, the EU is able to use detention centers in Libya as 'speed boxes'— by making an attempt at regulating the time of migration by decelerating the speed of migratory flows through the prolonged detention of irregular migrants in Libya (Papadopoulos et al. 2008). However, the EU does more than simply regulate the speed of migratory flows inching towards its external borders. Given the treacherous conditions under which irregular migrants and refugees continue to live in across Libya, the containment zone created within Libya and its detention centers provides a suitable climate for a 'protection bargain' offered by the EU to irregular migrants to start emerging as a lucrative offer. This protection bargain is constructed under a humanitarian rubric and offered to stranded irregular migrants through intergovernmental organizations such as the IOM. The next section of the chapter will examine this protection bargain using the conceptual lens of the logic of masculinist protection

(Young 2003) to offer a critique of how the push-back approach adopted by the EU towards unwanted immigrants takes a new form – that of humanitarian voluntary return programs implemented by intergovernmental organizations in transit zones.

#### **4.4.1 The IOM in Libya: Constructing threats and Providing Protection**

As Walters reminds us, when phenomena such as irregular migration are presented as a ‘crisis’ and border crossings start to become more lethal than before, then the presence of humanitarian agencies begins to gain more importance (Walters 2011). This is precisely because in the face of crisis, supranational organizations like the EU approach intergovernmental collaborations in two potential ways: the EU either deals with the crisis through specialized agencies such as Frontex, or through intergovernmental organizations such as the IOM (Brachet 2016). Among the two alternatives available, I argue that by opting to deal with the crisis through the IOM, the EU is able to utilize an opportunity to demonstrate pastoral care in border management instead of exercising a repressive form of control that invites criticism from the international community. The case of the Libyan migrant crisis is illustrative of this – the EU demonstrates pastoral care in the management of the crisis through the IOM. The management of the crisis through the IOM offers a basis for the EU to create a narrative and a rationale for governing the migrant crisis in Libya – one that repeatedly highlights the desire of irregular migrants to actively seek protection and be voluntarily sent to a place which is more secure than Libya.

#### **4.4.2 The International Organization for the Management of Migrants**

The IOM Libya office was established in 2006 and since then has been the only other

intergovernmental organization - apart from the UNHCR - to successfully run operations in the country. According to the official website, it takes the lead in responding to the ‘urgent need of humanitarian assistance related to the country’s migration crisis’.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, the website boasts of increasing numbers of ‘vulnerable migrants’ the organization has helped in returning voluntarily; 2,777 migrants in 2016, 4,030 migrants in 2017 and by the year 2018, 14,622 migrants.<sup>57</sup> I suggest we view these within the frame of a protection bargain. Since the brief outlines internal threats an irregular migrant is exposed to, it also includes smuggling networks, human rights abuses, general exploitation, arbitrary arrest by non-state authorities, indefinite detention, bonded labour, harassment, and frequent outbreaks of armed confrontations in the country. Simultaneously, it also outlines external threats that await irregular migrants who decide to move north of Libya. These threats include dangerous journeys across the Mediterranean Sea, supported by empirical data on migrants reported dead or missing along the Central Mediterranean route, and a mention of ‘constant tragedies’ in the Mediterranean. Having outlined internal and external threats that ‘vulnerable migrants’ are exposed to within Libya, the IOM’s HVR program offers migrants an opportunity to escape the misery and seek a legitimate form of protection from threats.

The HVR program has four components; the first includes offering migrants pre-departure assistance in contacting embassies, obtaining travel documents and exit visas for their return

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<sup>56</sup> See: <https://libya.iom.int/about-us>

<sup>57</sup> It is of additional relevance to this research that of the total number of migrants who were provided assistance as a part of the Humanitarian Voluntary Return program in 2018, 3,503 were Nigerians; the most common nationality among returnees from Libya (IOM 2018).

journeys to home countries. The second component includes providing the returnees with easily identifiable IOM bags and non-food item kits and ensuring that the returnees are helped by an IOM staff member when they arrive at airports in Libya to board outgoing flights. The third component includes offering the returnees assistance upon their arrival (rather, return) to the source country and informing them about the reintegration process. The final component includes monitoring the progress of the returnee's reintegration, in the first month and then the fourth month.<sup>58</sup>

#### **4.4.3 Fooled by a Mirage: Assistance in Exchange of Voluntary Return**

Researchers, working on the issue of migration – myself included - consider the role of the IOM as pivotal in being a mediator between receiving countries and source countries, between receiving countries and transit countries and most importantly, between governments and migrants. My understanding of the IOM's work in Libya, prior to the fieldwork, was grounded in the informational material published on their official website. According to this information, the IOM is a leading intergovernmental organization in the field of migration, which works in collaboration with other intergovernmental, governmental and non-governmental organizations and promotes 'humane and orderly migration for the benefit of all' (IOM 2014). The IOM claims to achieve this by offering services and advice to both governments and migrants and its activities seemingly cover all crucial aspects of migration one can name – international migration law, policy debates on migration, protection of migrant's rights, migrant's health and even the gender dimension of migration. However, as I began interviewing returnee women, problematic aspects

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<sup>58</sup> See: <https://libya.iom.int/humanitarian-voluntary-return-hvr-and-reintegration-assistance>

of the IOM's engagement in Libya began to surface. My conversations with Rose shed a light on aspects of the IOM's engagement the website did not provide a picture of. Having spent a whole year in Libya, Rose had returned to Benin through the IOM's HVR program in late 2017. While trying to gain a sense of the point at which Rose decided to choose the voluntary return program, I steered our conversation towards support the IOM had offered or promised to offer irregular migrants such as herself.

When I was caught on the sea, I was sent to Tripoli by IOM and they informed us we would be sent back to Nigeria...I was very happy because they said they are going to set us up in a business, there will be a job for us. But now I think there is nothing like that. I have not seen anything like that yet. Like I am now, I am still suffering. If I see any opportunity to travel again, I will because the suffering is too much.<sup>59</sup>

It is important to pay close attention to Rose's words. Upon being intercepted at sea, presumably by the LCG, she was sent to the capital city of Tripoli by the IOM. It flags off the presence of an arrangement between the LCG and the IOM concerning the 'management' of detained irregular migrants. Rose, who spoke fluent English and was well articulate throughout our conversation, used the word 'informed' when describing the process of her return to Nigeria. That a detained or stranded irregular migrant was 'informed' she was being sent back to Nigeria sits uncomfortably with the 'voluntary' nature of the return program the IOM claims to be running

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<sup>59</sup> Rose, interviewed by the author at Benin, 8<sup>th</sup> July 2018.

successfully. Interviews with 14 other returnee women revealed a pattern; none of them either mentioned having approached the IOM asking to be sent back, neither did they mention being asked if they wished to return to Nigeria by the IOM.<sup>60</sup> It is important to note that the IOM conducts three kinds of returns: a) returns which are voluntary without compulsion when migrants at any point decide to return home at their own cost or violation; b) returns which are voluntary under compulsion when migrants who are at the end of their temporary protected status, have faced rejections with their application for asylum or for legal reasons are unable to stay decide to return; and c) returns which are involuntary for those whose deportation has been ordered by the state. Thus, the IOM's engagement in return of irregular migrants in transit zones such as Libya does not occur on humanitarian grounds alone. Irregular migrants are registered in the IOM's voluntary return program under compulsion as well. Moreover, human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have challenged the IOM for presenting returns belonging to the categories of (b) 'voluntary under compulsion' and (c) 'involuntary' as belonging to the category of returns which are voluntary without compulsion (a) (Koch 2014). The basis for this challenge is that, considering the conditions under which irregular migrants continue to live in detention centers in Libya for prolonged periods and with the passage through the Central Mediterranean route becoming (or being made) particularly difficult, irregular migrants are often not left with a choice but to opt for the HVR program. However, this lack of choice does not and should not be translated into a state of voluntary action. The IOM plays its card well in an

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<sup>60</sup> The count here excludes respondent Mercy who did not return to Nigeria via the HVR program yet was registered by the ESTAHT as a returnee.



environment of prolonged detention and hopelessness resulting from the lack of choice.

Andrijasevic, Walters and Duvell among others have criticized the IOM for employing a neoliberal and post-imperial mode of operation by working against migration and facilitating the return/removal of unwanted migrants (Pécoud 2018; Andrijasevic and Walters 2010; Duvell 2015). The IOM, in Libya offers returnees two kinds of assistance; firstly, every returnee is offered cash assistance of 100 euros at the time of boarding outgoing flights in Libya, to cover for their expenses after they arrived (returned) in the respective source country. Secondly, the returnees are assured they would receive in-kind assistance, that is, they would be offered an opportunity to enroll for business management and skill training programs and would be given a chance to establish small-scale businesses in Nigeria upon their return.<sup>61</sup>

As I went through the process of developing my own assessment of the assistance the IOM claimed to provide to returnees, I began to feel less convinced about the efficacy of the intervention involving cash and in-kind assistance. Having spent time at reception centers in Benin (Nigeria) observing two batches of returnee women and men arrive from Libya, I realized that returnees often came back having spent indefinite number of days in detention, with few or no personal possessions. Therefore, they ended up spending a major portion of the cash assistance of 100 EUR buying toiletries, undergarments, clothes, calling credit for phones or cigarettes. As a result, they often did not have enough financial resources to sustain themselves for the days to come. Other

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<sup>61</sup> In the twelve months between 2017 and 2018, the IOM reported that 8000 Nigeria women and men had returned to their home country through its HVR program. Of this number, 7000 returned from detention centers in Libya alone. The reintegration assistance included the plan to establish a platform where returnees could meet each other and pool in their in-kind assistance, skills and other resources to open businesses together (IOM 2018).

monetary support, if any, that the Nigerian state could offer would take months to come through.<sup>62</sup> As for the in-kind reintegration assistance that the IOM promised returnees, it proved to be a mirage. At the time of interview, it had been eight months since Rose returned from Libya. Even on the day of the interview, she was on her way to attend a training session organized by the IOM. But she was far from satisfied by how her reintegration process was going as she had been unable to secure a source of income.<sup>63</sup> Upon her arrival, she had been enrolled into a training program for making liquid soap. After the completion of this training program, she was given a total of 7 EUR to set up her ‘small scale business’, a venture that would take a minimum of 125 EUR to 200 EUR<sup>64</sup>. Of all the respondents I interviewed, Rose was in a relatively better off situation. She had at least attended more than one training program. The other respondents, even after three to five months of returning to Nigeria, had never come around to being enrolled into a training program. Lastly, irregular migrants who agree to become a part of return programs and accept the reintegration assistance are most likely unaware of the cost at which this assistance is offered. The

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<sup>62</sup> The ESTAHT runs its own rehabilitation program of providing every returnee woman and man arriving from Libya a stipend of 20,000 Nigerian Naira (NGN) every month, for three months. The amount roughly converts to 50 Euros (EUR), per month. This program is funded by the Governor of the Edo State and is aimed at helping the returnees settle down in the first few months of their return. Returnee women with children and pregnant women receive additional 10,000 NGN per month, which roughly converts to an additional 25 EUR. The stipend amount is paid to the returnee women through bank transfers. Since returnee women are expected to create fresh bank accounts and deal with paperwork, it causes unprecedented delays in the payment of stipends.

<sup>63</sup> At the time of the interview, the respondent reported earning an income, enough to get by, by hawking on the streets.

<sup>64</sup> The amounts have been quoted in EUR for the readers to be able to have a precise estimate of the monetary support offered to the respondent. The respondent, in her interview, mentioned the support offered and the actual cost of setting up a business in the local currency which is NGN.

return assistance provided often entails a temporary ban on re-entry into the country the migrant had voluntarily left (Koch 2014). In my view, this remains the most important part of the bargain as it ensures that irregular migrants who participate in the protection bargain also agree to face harsher legal consequences should they decide to withdraw from the bargain and attempt to migrate towards Libya again.

The key argument I make here is; while the IOM presents its intervention as having a more migrant-centric focus, the underlying truth remains that by offering migrants the opportunity of setting up small scale businesses in their home countries, the IOM is able to regulate the choice of migrants such that they opt for voluntary return instead of spending time living in limbo in Libya. In this manner, the IOM does not impose ‘return programs’ on stranded migrants, but migrants themselves voluntarily choose to return, as was the case with respondents interviewed for this research. However, it is only months after returning that respondents began to see through the false claims of reintegration made by the IOM. Thus, the IOM through its HVR program is stealthily able to facilitate the removal of migrants whose presence is deemed unwanted and temporarily ensure that these unwanted migrants do not begin inching closer to the EU’s external borders.

#### **4.4.4 Reintegration and Rehabilitation: Full circle to Misery.**

The final section of the chapter will explore the efficacy (or lack thereof) of reintegration and rehabilitation programs. The issue of reintegration and rehabilitation was a common thread that ran across the length and breadth of this research, particularly during my conversations with returnee women. The one thing all respondents were uniformly angry, dissatisfied, unhappy and feeling helpless about was how little their situation had changed since they had returned from Libya. Having made steep investments or borrowed money for their migratory project, respondents

had suffered a financial loss. Upon leaving detention camps in Libya, some of the returnee migrants had also been separated from partners and friends with whom they formed close relationships. They had been unable to find a job in Benin (Nigeria) since their return and spent most of their time making rounds of the ESTAHT office to obtain or enquire about stipends. Listening to respondents express their frustration about the disoriented states they were in, I couldn't help but think that it seemed like the respondents had come a full circle, in spite of having reached a point where they should have been successfully rehabilitated as part of the bargain. While voluntarily returning from Libya, they had been promised opportunities in Nigeria. But the process (or the absence) of reintegration and rehabilitation had pushed them into another spiral of misery, only this time they had fewer financial resources left to invest into leaving Nigeria.

While the IOM's reintegration program refers to training programs, these training programs do not have concrete outcomes, as demonstrated in an earlier section. As a part of the rehabilitation process, local NGOs and agencies working with returnees often insist that younger returnees resume their education at the local University. Rose could not have been more explicit in stating what she understood to be the real problem with this approach:

They [ESTAHT] want me to go to school and I can't go to school when I don't have handwork.<sup>65</sup> When I have a business and I go to school, I would have money to spend on transport to go to school. Then I would come back from school, pull off my uniform and go to sell something in the market. Tomorrow

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<sup>65</sup> By the term 'handwork' the respondent is referring to manual work that serves as a source of livelihood or income.

morning, I would have money to take transport to school again. I would be interested in school. But if you are not working, then I would not be okay with going to school because going there every day means I spend my own money.<sup>66</sup>

Even if the intention behind encouraging returnee women to resume attending University is well meaning, Rose's account demonstrates that such a solution is impractical for someone struggling to survive from one month to the next. In such cases, respondents were forced to rely on family members or partners for food supplies and everyday travel expenses, which results in them developing dependency. "Can you help me? To find money to start my business?", asked Mimi at the end of our interview,<sup>67</sup> leaving me feeling as utterly helpless as the returnee women I had been speaking to. The question also raised further doubts in my mind. For example, if not timely provision of enough stipends, are there other non-monetary support systems in place for returnee women? I raised this in my conversation with Catherine, who oversees the social work and aftercare related aspect of the ESTAHT's work.

We are really not able to provide support. Because after two or three days they return to their families and though we have their contacts and all, when they are far away, it is really difficult for us to do anything for them.<sup>68</sup>

Catherine's tone echoed my own feelings - she sounded empathetic but was unable to

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<sup>66</sup> Rose, interviewed by the author at Benin, 8<sup>th</sup> July 2018.

<sup>67</sup> Mimi, interviewed by the author at Benin, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2018.

<sup>68</sup> Catherine, interviewed by the author at Benin, 28<sup>th</sup> July 2018.

provide efficient support in the absence of institutional and structural resources. The inability of the Nigerian state to provide for well-functioning shelter homes in Benin results in returnee women and men being dropped in the middle of nowhere upon their sudden return into the city. As they start to disperse and reach out to networks of friends and family members who can accommodate them, they often leave Benin (Nigeria), travel to more commercial cities like Lagos, or return to their villages outside of Benin. This makes it extremely difficult for organizations to keep track of their well-being, help them find jobs, or offer psychosocial support. Although none of the returnee women interviewed for this research spoke about it, Catherine made another crucial point: a rise in criminal activities in the city is attributed to the return of irregular migrants. It often leads to returnee women facing stigmatization, further adding to their failing state of well-being. Catherine's point resonates with findings from Sine Plambech's work among migrant sex workers in Benin (Nigeria) – deportation is highly stigmatized in Benin as it is unambiguously perceived as downward social mobility (Plambech 2017).

As a researcher, I kept oscillating between interviewing returnee women who spoke of being in a continued state of suffering and interviewing respondents working within governmental structures who insisted that whatever path of action they take, they would ensure that returnees are treated with dignity and respect. The Nigerian government was without a doubt working on the Sisyphean task of managing the inflow of returnees while ensuring the outflow of migrants remains under control, but it was returnee women and men who were left feeling short-changed in the process of entering a protection bargain with the IOM and the EU.

## **4.5 Conclusion**

In the concluding section of the last chapter of this thesis, I seek to lay out findings in an

orderly manner to construct a narration of the regulation of irregular migrant women from Benin (Nigeria) travelling towards Europe. As for the Nigerian state, the message for irregular migrant women was clear; the emphasis was on opting for legal forms of migration to countries, equipped with resources and valid documents. The alternative being, irregular migrants travelling towards Europe could instead migrate legally to regions such as the Middle East where there was a demand and acceptance. However, since 2016 countries in the Middle East like Israel have been clamping down on African migrants and as recently as 2018 threatened to carry out forced deportations of 30,000 illegal African migrants (Harcombe 2016; Dahir 2018). With Europe and Middle East adopting a push-back approach against those who do not migrate legally, irregular migrant women from Nigeria are bound to be left with little recourse than to try irrespective of the outcome.

In the case of Europe, the push-back approach is employed in Libya, since 2008 when Italy and Libya entered into a friendship treaty to control the rise in illegal migration via the Mediterranean Sea (Ronzitti 2009). Not only did this lay the foundation for Libya becoming the gatekeeper of the ‘migration crisis’, it was also the beginning of the process of creating a containment zone in Libya that would prevent irregular migrants from embarking on journeys to Europe via the Central Mediterranean route. The creation of this containment zone reveals the extent to which the EU Member States like Italy and France aid the Libyan Coast Guard in pulling back irregular migrants who embark on journeys by boats. Furthermore, for irregular migrant women who have been detained / intercepted / rescued at sea and brought back to detention centers in Libya, the EU – through the medium of the IOM – offered assistance in exchange for ‘voluntary return’ to source countries. The circumstances under which the offer of voluntary return is made provides grounds for challenging the voluntary nature of return programs. Irregular migrant women stranded in Libya spent varying lengths of time in detention centers or underground cells.

Upon realizing that they are least likely to be able to cross the Mediterranean Sea successfully, irregular migrant women saw potential and hope in the reintegration and rehabilitation assistance offered to them by the IOM's HVR program. While the assistance offered included cash assistance, in-kind assistance, and the promise of training programs and the opportunity to establish small scale businesses in source countries, respondents interviewed for this research were far from enjoying the gains of the reintegration and rehabilitation assistance. They thus found themselves completing a full circle of misery - lacking alternatives to secure a sustainable source of earning a livelihood in Nigeria and providing for themselves and their families.



## 5 Conclusion

Findings from this thesis come in a timely manner. In May 2019, Matteo Salvini, the Deputy Prime Minister of Italy and the Minister of the Interior, announced a new security decree that aid groups referred to as a declaration of war on NGOs working towards rescuing irregular migrants and refugees stranded along the Central Mediterranean route (Tondo 2019). According to the security decree, Italy plans on placing a hefty fine on NGOs for conducting rescue operations – one of €5,500 per migrant they rescue and help disembark on Italian shores. Not only did Italy call an end to its military-humanitarian rescue operation Mare Nostrum in 2014, it has also been creating obstacles in operations conducted by non-profit organizations by impounding rescue vessels or preventing them from docking (ECRE 2014; Al Jazeera 2019; Serrano-Conde 2019). Meanwhile, this has culminated in the European Union (EU) being sued at the International Criminal Court collectively by international lawyers over its migration policy in the Mediterranean. A section of the international community is calling for the EU and some of the EU Member States to face prosecution for enacting migration policies that sacrifice lives of irregular migrants and refugees at sea with the hope of deterring more migrants from crossing the Mediterranean Sea (Stierl 2019).

However, it is not just the Mediterranean Sea which transforms into a warzone marking a struggle between the two camps – the EU and its Member States on one hand and on the other hand international human rights based organizations and networks of individuals functioning from a migrant-centered perspective. As this thesis has demonstrated, the EU employs a range of tactics to control, contain, regulate and curb mobilities of irregular migrants along the entire stretch of the

migratory route that begins in Nigeria and ends at the Italian shores. In following a line of enquiry, the thesis trailed the migratory route of its subject, literally and figuratively. Beginning at the starting-point in a source country, the thesis sought to foremost bring to the fore testimonies of irregular migrant women departing from the city of Benin in Nigeria. Testimonies revealed that irregular migrant women were weighing their alternatives before making the decision to migrate as primary migrants. Despite possessing skills and sources of mediocre levels of income, they were dissatisfied with the state of their well-being and that of their families. They were investing thought and resources into the process of migration – opting for a highly structured migratory route that passes through Niger, Algeria and Libya, getting in touch with acquaintances in Europe, organizing funds for journeys and contacting third party agents who would help them facilitate these journeys. All of this was done with the hope of putting an end to the state of suffering and misery they found themselves to be living in. Trailing the departure of irregular migrant women from Nigeria, the thesis changed its vantage point – by examining the manner by which migratory projects undertaken by irregular migrant women are framed as human trafficking by a range of actors like feminists, feminist organizations, feminist coalitions and policymakers who are situated within receiving countries. By means of engaging in discussions centered around the gendered creation of imaginaries of victims and perpetrators from ‘underdeveloped’ countries, the excessive stress on physical pain, suffering and specific kinds of vulnerabilities, the thesis unpacked means by which feminists enact politics of rescue in response to irregular migrant women from source countries like Nigeria. This in fact offers a rationale for action enabling receiving countries to deport irregular migrant women or restrict their mobility under the guise of protecting them from being trafficked.

In the final part, as the irregular migrant subject traverses across the Sahel belt and arrives

into a transit zone, the thesis followed suit - by examining the becoming of Libya as the gatekeeper of the African migrant crisis from 2008 until 2019. Unable to leave Libyan shores, the irregular migrant subject gets captured in a complex system of detention centers, prison camps, militia and smugglers, up until the point she/he is offered assistance in exchange for return to the source country. The thesis revealed the creation of a containment zone in Libya – one involving the Libyan Coast Guard and the Directorate for Combatting Illegal Migration, both of which are supported by the EU and its Member States like Italy and France. By means of examining the protection bargain which unfolds between the EU and irregular migrants in Libya, the thesis shed a light on the role of the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Humanitarian Voluntary Return program. Viewing the IOM's humanitarian intervention through a critical lens, findings from the thesis flagged off the presence of a bargain - if the irregular migrant subject agrees to exit Libya 'voluntarily' and surrender her/his intent to migrate towards Europe, she/he will be offered a monetary incentive along with the promise of an opportunity to start a small scale business in the source country by the IOM. However, as the thesis documents the experiences of irregular migrant women who 'voluntarily' returned to Benin (Nigeria), the promise of reintegration and rehabilitation assistance proved to be a mirage. Returnee women were struggling with loss in financial investments made towards migrating out of Nigeria. Besides, they also felt short-changed as neither were they receiving adequate (or any) reintegration support, nor were they able to find jobs to sustain themselves from one month to the next. Thus, they found themselves completing a full circle of misery upon their return to Benin - lacking alternatives to secure a sustainable source of earning a livelihood in Nigeria and providing for themselves and their families.

The broader aim of this thesis was to give ground for looking beneath and beyond the 'humanitarian' nature of the EU's intervention in the migration crisis that emerges from the

African continent. Findings from this thesis sought to contribute to developing a nuanced understanding of the stealthy manner by which the EU externalizes its borders and creates a new locus of control in the North African territorial region through its intervention in Libya. As a concluding remark, challenging such a reframing of borders of Europe in relation to the African continent is only a starting pointing of a larger body of work that will be designed to systematically contest the EU's commitment to the development of 'lesser-developed' regions of the world and its attempt to curb the inflow of African immigrants.

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