

Ph.D. project proposal entitled:

Assisted Migrants or human trafficking? Sudan's role in international migration

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1. Introduction

Eastern and Southern Africa continue to harbor big numbers of irregular migrants, featured by mixed migration flows as a consequence of multiple factors, including socioeconomic, conflicts or political instability¹.

The countries of the Horn of Africa, which include Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, and Djibouti, have witnessed many political disagreements and conflicts, in addition to the current state of turmoil and war in Yemen. These events have been reflected in the Horn of Africa to become one of the largest exporting areas of irregular, as well as illegal migrants. The destination of those migrants is eventually the European countries, after crossing the Mediterranean Sea². In 2018, approximately 117,000 migrants arrived in Europe by sea. This is a significant drop compared with 2017 (around 172,000) and 2016 when the number reached 364,000 migrants. There were approximately 59,000 by-sea arrivals in Spain (Western Mediterranean route: from Morocco, mainly to Spain) as opposed to around 23,000 in Italy. Noticeably, people who traveled through the Central Mediterranean route to Italy were mostly Tunisian, followed by Eritreans, Iraqis, Sudanese, and Pakistanis³.

There are sizeable migrant smuggling routes within and from North Africa, with smuggling increasingly concentrated among a few organized criminal networks. With the help of smugglers, migrants from countries in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, often embark on highly dangerous journeys to North Africa, including the Sahara Desert. One of the main smuggling pathways includes migrants moving from Somalia, Sudan, and Ethiopia towards Egypt and Israel. But, as socioeconomic conditions in Egypt have deteriorated in recent years, smugglers have increasingly shifted their routes to countries such as Libya; which, before 2011 was a significant destination for

¹ World migration report, international organization for migration (IOM), 2020, Geneva, Switzerland.

² Abdul Hamid Balla Alnour and Hamad Ibrahim, January 2017, Internal and External Migration in Sudan: Sources of Information, Motivation and Effects (1956-2015), (pp. 79-80), Sudan Journal of Geography, Faculty of Geography and Environmental Sciences, University of Khartoum.

³ World migration report, international organization for migration (IOM), 2020, Geneva, Switzerland.

migrant workers and, more recently has become a major smuggling hub and the main departure point for migrants trying to get to Europe via the Central Mediterranean route⁴.

Sudan had the largest number of international migrants in the sub-region, i.e., over 1.2 million migrants in 2019, followed by Libya with over 800,000 migrants. The number of international migrants in Egypt increased from 300,000 in 2010 to more than 500,000 in 2019. Sudan, also is a prominent host country of refugees, with over 1 million refugees (this number was increased since 2016), most of them were from South Sudan, Eritrea, and the Syrian Arab Republic⁵.

The last year (i.e., 2020) has witnessed remarkable events in the region. On one hand, the COVID-19 pandemic; which started last year and continues to challenge the whole world. The other hand, the Tigray region conflict (i.e., the war in Tigray region, Ethiopia) and border tension between the neighboring countries i.e., Sudan (Gadarif State) and Ethiopian (Amhara and Tigray Regions), have impacted the whole region as well. The conflict erupted on Wed 4/11/2020 between Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) and Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and is ongoing so far. The conflict has enforced thousands of Ethiopians to cross the border to reach Sudan, seeking refuge in Kassala and Gadarif States, eastern Sudan. Since then, communities in eastern Sudan bordering Ethiopia have received over 60.000 refugees fleeing the ongoing conflict. In the aftermath of the first surge of refugees, military clashes over the control of land "retake of Alfashaghah Land" in the border areas (Gadarif State and Amhara Region) have also taken place. Consequently, a tense situation has been created between the two countries, which have been considered for a long time as good neighbors⁶. The incidents, however, have had a major impact on the phenomenon of migration in the region.

Eastern Sudan is currently the most important route that is used by migrants and asylum seekers, and as a starting point for long journeys to North Africa and Europe. This route is characterized by the length and breadth of its geographical borders with foreign countries. The route is moving northward closely to Sudan's border with Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Egypt, extending along the coast of the Red sea to a length of 780km from *Shalatain* well at the Egyptian border to *Ras Kassar* at the Eritrean border, and in parallel to the kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Yemen at the other side of the sea, making the region as an African gateway to the Arab world and middle

⁴ World migration report, above reference.

⁵ World migration report, above reference

⁶ Adam Babekir and Abdallah Ounour and others 2021, "Rapid Assessment of trends of Ethiopian seasonal labour migrants in response to Covid 19 pandemic, Tigray conflict and border tension" unpublished summary report, GIZ organization, April 2021.

east. The region, however, has diverse socio-cultural, ethnic, linguistic customs and traditions, besides Ethiopian and Eritrean borders with eastern Sudan⁷.

From eastern Sudan, migrants move to Khartoum, where they take routes chosen by smugglers, and it could be said that certain cases enter the migration path. In addition to the three states of eastern Sudan, migrants pass through Khartoum state, and other states that share international borders with countries (e.g., Libya, Egypt, Chad), these are namely: northern state (Egypt, Libya), and North Darfur state (Libya and Chad). According to previous fieldwork data that related to the issue of migration, the Sudanese states could be classified according to their contribution to immigration into the following: entry states for immigrants from neighboring countries (eastern Sudan states), Khartoum State (coordination zone), and exit states for neighboring countries (North Darfur and Northern State).

The study is uncertain about the exact term “i.e., assisted immigrants or human trafficking” to describe these phenomena in Sudan, because the same scenarios are occurring to both refugees and migrants, and it is difficult to exactly describe the phenomenon before it happens. Therefore, the philosophy of the study is basically to understand the exact activity (or phenomenon) that is taking place in Sudan to know the exact term that describes it.

2. Human trafficking in Sudan: My previous experience:

My experience in the field of human trafficking studies has started with my master's degree dissertation in 2017 titled "The phenomenon of Human Trafficking in Sudan, the case of Kassala State". The study focused on human trafficking that took place in Kassala State, Sudan. The study particularly focused on localities sharing a border with Eritrea.

Furthermore, the study attempted to investigate the phenomenon of Human Trafficking at four levels: smugglers, human traffickers, Eritrean refugees and victims of human trafficking, and government agencies associated with the phenomenon, the community in areas where activity is common.

The main findings of the study showed that economic, social, cultural, and political factors in Sudan and Eritrea contributed to the phenomenon. Moreover, the most common forms of human trafficking were Kidnapping or luring of victims then exposing them to torture and quest for ransom to free them. Not only that, but also illegalities like fraud, deception, and exploitation of powers by officials were noticed during the study. Moreover, the Countries in the phenomenon of trafficking are either States of transit, destination or source, in this study: Eritrea constituted a country of origin; and Sudan has formed the three categories altogether (i.e., origin, transit, and

⁷ The Forgotten Territory: Proceedings of the Civil Forces Workshop on Strategic Issues of Change and Stability in Eastern Sudan, Sudan Democracy Group, October 2016.

destination). For Eritreans, Sudan represents a transit and a less preferred destination country. Harsh living conditions in *Shagarab* camp, Kassala State, had enticed trafficking networks to work, in addition to easy ways for refugees to escape the camp, all together have exacerbated the kidnapping activities. Generally, the study concluded that the Kassala State community embarks on a transitional stage from human smuggling to human trafficking.

In 2018, I conducted a study on the phenomenon of human trafficking and smuggling in Eastern Sudan. The study site was Sudanese localities sharing international borders with Eritria, Ethiopia, KSA, and Egypt, where the investigation focused on perception about migration at four levels i.e., actors who engaged in human trafficking or smuggling, victims of trafficking, and refugees, local border communities, and governmental authorities. The study compared the legal and academic concepts of human trafficking with other various interactive concepts. The study also has shown that there are two types of migration, the first is the historically known migration of border tribes, and the other is the contemporary migration.

The study indicated clearly that migrants were youths, who were looking forward to entering Western Europe as a final destination. The study also revealed there were different types of human trafficking taking place in Eastern Sudan, which was classified according to the size and activity of the trafficking process. Kassala represented the top State followed by Gadarif and the Red Sea. Moreover, the study showed that the majority of migrants in Eastern Sudan were from Eritria, Somalia, Ethiopia, Egypt, Syria, South Sudan, and other Western African countries. Our study also revealed that borders tribes were significantly engaged in human trafficking practice at two levels: the level of local community smugglers, or governmental officials' level.

The previous studies have also assessed the effectiveness of laws and legislations formulated against smuggling and human trafficking in the three states of Eastern Sudan. However, the results highlighted the various and diversified connections between smugglers or traffickers with other research community.

In our 2019 study, which was entitled: *Artisanal Gold Mining Camps in Butana as Migration Hubs*", we concluded that some migrants take Artisanal mining jobs and markets thereof as a first step or stage to pursue their dream of migration to Europe.

I have been engaged in a current study, entitled: "local perceptions and experiences about smuggling and human trafficking in Sudan, the case of northern Darfur and the Northern state of Sudan". This study, in particular, encouraged me to choose the geographical location of my next study, which will compare the field-obtained information with the currently available theories and data about migration.

Our previous studies on the subject of trafficking and smuggling have highlighted the lack of linking or relating together the various studies to get a comprehensive picture, in addition to the lack of conducting intensive fieldwork to understand the new changes in the areas that have already been studied. Additionally, by looking at the global theoretical heritage of the phenomenon of

migration, the study aims to disclose the theoretical vision of Sudan's contribution to the phenomenon of international migration by focusing on the local perception.

3. The main focus of the study:

Sudan is characterized by a distinctive position, bordered by several countries suffering from numerous crises, which led to the emergence of the phenomenon (i.e., assisted migrants or trafficking of people across borders), hence considering Sudan as a transit point for people of those countries. Likewise, Sudan is considered a destination country for many migrants. Earlier migrations of Eritreans and Ethiopians (i.e., the late 1960s and early 1970s) had resulted in establishing a permanent Eritrean or Ethiopian milieu in Sudan, or at some point, the formation of transient communities waiting to cross to other destinations. Moreover, Sudan itself is a source of migrants, as well as many people in Sudan benefit from that activity.

This study will decipher the phenomenon of "Assisted migrants or human trafficking" in Sudan by focusing on the five elements —Assistant migrants or human trafficking networks, refugees and victims "or migrants", the local community of border villages, government agencies, and Civil society organizations working on migration

Therefore, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent does the phenomenon of globalizing migration affect the different levels of the study population? Past, present, and future? The phenomenon has known global terms such as human trafficking or smuggling; so, what are the prevailing (local) terms circulating among the study population that match these globally used terms, and what is the relationship between the two sets of terms (local and global)?
2. In essence, the study examines the globalization of migration phenomenon by taking the globalization process *per se* as one of the causes leading to migration, and likewise investigates migration as one of the indicators of globalization among the first and third world countries. How these two points could be investigated at the level of the study population? For example, previous fieldwork data showed that social media applications (i.e., Facebook, WhatsApp, etc.) have been used in the migration process; so, to what extent does this practice affect perceptions of the study population?
3. What is the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on migration as a global threat? What are the particular effects on migrants' perceptions?
4. Migration has been described abundantly as a business or investment. Which appropriate term that could be applied to the case of our study population? Also, what is the impact of *ethnic economy* in the migrants' countries of origin, crossing/transit, or destination on the phenomenon of migration at the various levels of study population?
5. Most migration theories focus on countries of origin or destination. But, what about countries of transit or crossing? What does it mean to be a country of both origin, transit, and destination concurrently (e.g., Sudan)?

6. What are the responses of Sudanese authorities concerned with migrants to the policies adopted or implemented by the European Union for migration? The same question for the rest of research community: migrants, smugglers, border villagers, and civil society organizations.

7. Does the circular and cumulative causation of migration make it self-sustaining?

8. Does it appropriate to use the theoretical framework known as "Push-pull plus"⁸? This approach deals with migration as a process derived by interactive push-and-pull factors rather than taking these factors separately. Moreover, this approach entails the incorporation of all migration dynamics, which goes in line with migration as a process, and the concept of mixed migration.

9. Is it the right time to indicate migration as an ideology (i.e., migration ideology)? Or is it appropriate to view it as a culture (i.e., migration culture)? Or to use the term "community of practice"?

4. The significance and objectives of the study:

Sudan has long been a transit point for individuals and groups of the Horn of Africa on their way to North Africa, Europe, or the outside world, but the phenomenon has increased significantly in recent years. Therefore, the study focuses on the importance of Sudan as a destination or transit source area for international migrants, particularly from the countries of the Horn of Africa (Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia), as well as West and Central African States (Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, and Kenya).⁹

Different methods or models were used previously to understand the migration phenomenon. On one hand, numerous studies focused only on the countries of origin or destination. On the other hand, other studies elaborated on the different levels of the migration process. Additionally, some studies focused on migrants' behaviors, networks, and migration policies. Methods that have been used were diverse in addressing different topics, starting from definitions to much focus on the origins of migration, and its causes at the individual and comprehensive level; or analyzing the effects of migration economically, politically, socially at the same two levels; or addressing the migration policies¹⁰. But the modern methods prefer the diversified method, which, the current study will use by trying to compare field information with the hypothesis to refute or support

⁸ Nicholas Van Hear and Others 2018 'Push-pull plus: reconsidering the drivers of migration' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*.

⁹ Hassan Abd al-Ati, 2016, research paper entitled "Smuggling and Trafficking in Human Beings in Eastern Sudan", Regional Workshop on Border Issues, Kassala State

¹⁰ Victor Piché, Translated by Catriona Dutreuilh 2013, *Contemporary Migration Theories as Reflected in their Founding Texts*, Population (Vol. 68) , p. 141-164

known theories, or either formulation of a new direction towards the current theoretical hypotheses of the migration phenomenon.

This study aims to:

1. Clarify the current situation of "Assisted migrants or human trafficking" in Sudan, and investigate its correlation with the various international theoretical hypotheses pertinent to the migration phenomenon.
2. To match the information obtained from fieldwork with the already known theoretical models that globalize the phenomenon of migration and the rights of migrants.
3. To propose a new conceptual or theoretical framework for future studies of the phenomenon based on the information that will be collected from the field.

5. Methodology:

At the beginning of this research, I will extensively collect a literature review to better understand the theoretical aspects of migration. The literature review will also enable me to grasp the epistemological foundation of migration. As an anthropologist, I will proceed to conduct extensive ethnographical fieldwork in Gadarif, Kassala and Red Sea, Khartoum, North Darfur, Northern States of Sudan to establish an empirical foundation for this research. The fieldwork will predominately depend on the qualitative methods of data collection; namely in-depth interviews, group discussions, and participant observation, in addition to analyzing the content of trials in human trafficking cases in the study area. The interview and group discussion will be employed to gather data from migrants (refugees, victims), members of the local community in the border villages of the five states and Khartoum (Capital of Sudan), Assistant migrants or smugglers and traffickers (former, imprisoned on trafficking charges, "prison interviews", government agencies with jurisdiction in the six states (Refugees Authority, Anti-smuggling, Human Trafficking court., Border Guard), and Civil society organizations working on migration.

The areas that cannot be covered by interviews and group discussion will be accessed through participant observation.

In addition to the ethnographical data, I will include written materials that are relevant to the study. In this regard, I will review reports written by government institutions, NGO agencies, and United Nations organizations (UNHCR, IOM), and other international organizations. To make use of the collected data, I will employ the qualitative methods of data analysis. In accordance, all interviews and group discussions will be transcribed and categorized to write down

my dissertation. Additionally, fieldwork conducted in previous studies will be used especially from areas that are difficult to be covered.

6. Work-plan and timetable, 2022 – 2025

Assuming the program starts in October 2022, I suggest the following plan-work and timetable:

Time	Activities
Phase 1 from October 2022- December 2022	<i>. Developing proposal+ Methodology Courses, Preparation for Fieldwork</i>
Phase 2 from January 2023- January 2024	<i>Fieldwork in Gadarif, Kassala and Red sea, Khartoum, North Darfur, northern States.</i>
Phase 3 from February 2024- July 2025	<i>Data Classification and Analysis+ Reading (Theory and Methodology).</i>
Phase 4 from August 2024- January 2025	<i>Fieldwork2</i>
Phase 5 from February 2025- October 2025	<i>Writing the Final Report+ Submission of Final Thesis+ Defense.</i>

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