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LAURE Research Process Essay

Analyzing the Research Process:

Comparing People Smuggling Operations in Afghanistan and Niger

My final research project for Dr. Tani Sebro's Global Migrations course (GIC360) consists of an

abstract and bibliography, an oral narrative interview, a policy paper, and an op-ed on a historical or

modern migratory event. The purpose of this structure is to necessitate interdisciplinary, synthesizing

library research and independently gathered data into a nuanced argument that fills gaps in scholarly

research. With advice from a librarian, I approached this project knowing that claiming authority on a

topic is impossible without recognizing cross-disciplinary intersections that weave together. My research

process, therefore, draws from a variety of subjects and mediums at Miami, and seeks to understand how

that resulting image is perceived, embodied, reproduced, and exploited.

Searching with particular interest in human trafficking, news articles and a smattering of

scholarly articles surfaced, citing specific countries where copious research had already been done.

Fortunately, Miami's online database and subscription to news sources like the New York Times allowed

me access to regional studies by freelance experts (Mogulson, Speigel). There, I decided to conduct a

focused study on the village of Nimruz, Afghanistan, a people smuggling hub for Afghans hoping to

reach Europe. With this basis, I searched the issue generally, collecting contradictions and complexities

and searching for them systematically on the MU Library website (see "General and Themes"). Nimruz

being too specific, I concerned myself with regional exigencies such as, but not limited to, conflict and

refugee history, the influence of terrorism, the economy, and the evolution of regional migration. My

bibliography therefore includes several sources used to build my own understanding and organization

process (see "Nimruz and Afghanistan"); similarly, I have added an analysis of ethnographic narrative

expression to aid my writing of the final paper (Eastmond).

Soon after, my professor and I discussed this project's longevity, using it to bolster my future

academic and career plans. I then decided to write thematically on people smuggling versus regionally on

southern Afghanistan. Returning to general online searches and following common threads, I observed a parallel process in Agadez, Niger, a smuggling hub connecting North, Central, and West Africa (see "Agadez, Niger, and French"). I wondered: what about these two villages was ideal for entrenched people smuggling operations? Do their almost uncanny similarities suggest a broader, global theme concerning South-to-North migrations? I argue through this comparison that persecuting people smuggling—which goes deeper than the clandestine shuttling of people across borders—is more harmful than beneficial considering its growing significance in social, economic, and political spheres. I began systematically cross-checking commonalities and tracking similarities and differences, attempting to situate each place within its own context based on the process, the construction of a social economy around it, the effects of European policies, the geography, and the environmental situation, to name a few parameters (Raza, Tinti and Reitano, Weber).

A variety of research materials proved useful throughout this process to achieve different ends. Four sources from our class readings serve as theoretical frameworks for ethnographic and anthropological research (see "Course Readings"). Because most articles, journals, essays, and theses are protected and inaccessible, the most efficient tactic is to search larger databases like Google Scholar for specific themes, choose the most relevant and recent of the search results, return to the MU Library website, and search the journal name to follow the article through Academic Search Complete or JSTOR; the majority of my sources were found this way (Costello, Koser, Mghir, Molenaar, Monsutti, Tober, Toktas, Tinti). This method was presented to me as a freshman by the International Studies librarian, Katie Gibson, along with how to navigate the major libguide and request resources from other schools through OhioLink or interlibrary loan, and finding books using call numbers —all of which I have used regularly since then.

For this project, I also expanded my research to French discourses which opened the subject area to native speakers of this lingua franca who are intimately familiar with what privileged English writers can only describe. That said, whereas French provides me with an invaluable access point to Agadez, my lack of Afghan Arabic forces me to rely on secondary sources concerning Nimruz.

After searching on the MU Library website, I found two books on Muslim migration and Afghanistan's colonial history in King Library (Gregory, Fábos); within the same section, I happened upon other books that not only made me consider a European counter-argument, but also further developed my thought process on the perception of migrants and the hierarchical system forcing them to risk their lives (see "Europe"). The oral narrative component of the paper will also contribute to my counter-argument as my subject's personal expression of the reality of people smuggling and human trafficking challenges the clarity and organization of secondary sources.

My positionality and relationship with my subject will predict the nature of his account. I expect that the emotion left unmentioned during asylum and refugee interviews will determine to what extent he is willing to entrust me with his story, understanding that I will serve has his mouthpiece, not as his savior. Feeling his respect for me as his teacher and authority figure conflicts with my moral instinct to protect his privacy as his confidant and "sister," which contradicts my goal, as a friend, to share his story as evidence that changes must be made. My freedom as a curious and concerned researcher is therefore constantly checked by conscious attempts to avoid "extractive" as opposed to incorporative research processes.

The evolution of my topic from people smuggling in general, to a theme coupling Nimruz, Afghanistan and Agadez, Niger, was realized through Miami Library research resources. Access to our libguide and the library itself deepened the scope and accuracy of my project, and the staff and faculty have provided me with the navigation skills necessary to take advantage of these spaces, inspiring me to look beyond in search of sources in French. This has allowed me to trace commonalities between and among disciplines, regions, source mediums, and languages while creating a space for a contemporary and urgent argument on people smuggling.