

Nimruz and Agadez: A Comparative Study on People Smuggling on the Route to Europe

With the increasing popularity of migration as a topic of international concern, the collective tendency is to misconstrue and generalize certain concepts. This creates a narrative that fits within a predetermined framework of global understanding. That Europe's social fabric has been violently undermined due to extensive networks of human traffickers and smugglers from the Middle East and Africa is an argument that has been used to justify further militarization and heightened security in border countries, for example. This perception is detrimental not only because it undercuts the abuse suffered by actual victims of human trafficking, but placing people smuggling in the same category criminalizes a large swath of migrants and necessarily keeps the lines between the guilty and the innocent blurred. To clarify, human trafficking, usually associated with terrorism, refers to the coerced recruitment or movement of people with the intention of severely exploiting vulnerable populations; people smuggling, however, concerns facilitated, consensual, and clandestine passage across borders, with the possibility (probability) of exploitation during the journey. Both are illegal by international standards. Nevertheless, these often self-reinforcing systems persist, especially in net-emigration regions such as West Africa, West Asia, and the Middle East, which I will compare in the following analysis. This paper highlights Nimruz, Afghanistan and Agadez, Niger, which are people smuggling hubs that have both been influenced by the annual influx of hundreds of thousands of migrants on their journeys to Europe. Their growing prominence is a testament to the capacity for innovation in a corrosive post-colonial and neo-imperialist environment exacerbated by Europe's protectionist immigration policies. Nimruz and Agadez will be compared here as the starting points for twin migratory flows to Europe. They are case studies in terms of the business of people smuggling, including economic dependency and its exigencies, the constant prevalence of terrorism in both areas (which sets an even more desperate and precarious precedence), and the consequences of entire communities fleeing persecution, war, violence, and scarcity. Most of my research will be conducted through digital accounts (articles, scholarly journals, books, and theses) by either experts in the field or witnesses to this phenomenon in Nimruz or Agadez specifically. An oral narrative interview with a migrant, who has experienced both human trafficking and people smuggling in Agadez, will supplement this analysis and add a human dimension to a topic that is usually either dismissed immediately or condemned outright. People smuggling is linked inextricably to the economic, social, political, and cultural structures of both Nimruz and Agadez such that the persecution of smugglers, I argue, causes more harm than good and has the potential to generate widespread instability throughout these regions; such short-sighted policies fail to address root problems, and will ultimately force migrants to find even more dangerous ways to circumvent Europe's dominion over their movement. Given the sustained need to migrate, this would clear the path for more lucrative opportunists, potentially forming an even greater problem for Europe and the Global North as a whole—not to mention the thousands that will continue to die in the Global South as conditions remain unstable and the barriers to entry stretch ever higher.

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