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States of insecurity: Consequences of Saharan transit migration

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Abstract

As it has become more and more difficult to travel directly to Europe, by both legal and illegal means, migrants have resorted to long and frequently dangerous overland journeys as a way of circumventing migration controls. Increasingly, migrants on these routes do not make it to Europe at all but spend longer and longer periods in transit. Research on illegal migration to Europe has concentrated on those migrants who actually arrive but as periods in transit increase this is a smaller proportion of those individuals involved in processes of migration to Europe. This paper reports on research with migrants stuck in Morocco. Although their numbers are insignificant compared to total migration to the EU their presence has commanded very significant policy and media attention. The Moroccan state is now held responsible for preventing these migrants reaching Europe. This recent twist in the geopolitical significance of migration in the European neighbourhood ultimately increases the tremendous insecurity of the lives of illegal migrants in Morocco although it has so far done little to reduce the attractions of Morocco as a country of transit. These migrations are not only the result of policy changes in Europe but also developments across the Sahel region. They are therefore likely to be of more lasting significance.

Keywords: migration, transit, illegality, control, Morocco

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The drama and tragedy of illegal migration to Europe commands sustained attention from the media, policy makers and researchers alike. Yet until recently our knowledge of illegal migration to Europe was based only on those migrants who actually reached Europe, despite the evidence that many do not. Migration plans frequently change once migrants have left their country of origin. This may be due to lack of resources (Van Hear 2004), new information or some other reason that diverts them from their intended route or forces them to spend longer and longer periods of time in 'transit' countries, which they intended only to pass through. More tragically they may join the unknown but certainly significant numbers of migrants who lose their life on the journey (Carling 2004). Shifting strategies and death are features of the fragmented overland journeys that became increasingly common from the mid 1990s onwards. These lengthy overland routes usually developed as a means of avoiding migration controls on direct routes. The deaths of 16 sub-Saharan Africans at the border fences of Ceuta and Melilla in October 2005 highlighted the level of desperation of migrants involved as well as the disproportionate control strategies in operation along this border.

These events prompted the European Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council to identify Africa-Europe migrations as a priority area of EU concern for 2006 (EC 2005). Yet the attention and resources devoted to this migration already far outweighs its quantitative significance. Clandestine entry, understood as deliberate evasion of immigration controls, is relatively unimportant amongst the range of 'routes to illegal residence' in the UK (Black et al 2006) and it seems likely that this is also the case elsewhere. The current policies of European states in this area can only be understood as an expensive and relatively clumsy form of deterrence, rather than a proportionate response to the small and decreasing numbers of migrants who actually manage to get across the Mediterranean clandestinely[i]. Established strategies of extra-territorial 'remote control' (Zolberg 1998) are typically focused at particular points, such as airports. They are less effective in countries of transit where migration control must extend over large areas of territory and must be conducted in cooperation with national border enforcement officials. This

involvement of the EU in training and equipment of border enforcement personnel in neighbouring countries alters the geopolitical significance of migration.

An important aspect of this new geopolitics is that, despite the concerns of the JHA Council, the real impact of these migrations is not in Europe at all but in the countries of transit. Few of these countries have any recent experience of immigration. In return for limited financial support, they are now held accountable by the EU for controlling access to Europe. Most significantly, the consequences of these migrations are felt by the migrants themselves who, as the events of October 2005 showed, are the first victims. Due to the tremendous difficulties in moving on, these migrants now form small, highly vulnerable minorities in a variety of countries neighbouring Europe. Yet it would be an oversimplification to suggest that EU migration policy alone has caused the predicament of migrants trapped in transit countries, such as Morocco. Transit migration became noticeable around 2000 when migration control in the Mediterranean was a growing European priority. Yet transit migration also depends on other developments in the Sahel region, such as widely available mobile communications or international money transfers that were also becoming established about the same time. This infrastructure of a rudimentary globalisation supported the extension of well-established migration networks previously restricted to certain regions south of the Sahara and put Europe within reach of greater numbers of people. All this is supported by continued instability in regions of origin and the establishment of various networks to offer assistance to those migrants who are able to pay. These are not short term developments caused by the vagaries of regular policy updates, but significant, structural changes in the geography of migration to Europe and within the European neighbourhood.

This paper presents new evidence from research with undocumented migrants in Morocco. Their extended stays in transit countries have increased their vulnerability to hunger, illness and racketeering from other migrants all exacerbated by inconsistent treatment from border control

officials who frequently lack accountability to any human rights standards. The lives of these migrants is so structured by mechanisms of migration control that migration policy has become the dominant factor in understanding the options open to them. Developments in the geopolitical significance of migration within the European neighbourhood are therefore clearly relevant to individual migrants. Yet many other factors mediate the new geopolitical realities in their impact on individuals. This paper explores this relationship. The first section considers the geopolitical context, investigating recent policy developments and the growing literature on immigration in Morocco. The following section relates the research sample to what is known of the total population of undocumented migrants in Morocco, followed by an examination of experiences during the journey. The fourth section explores the survival strategies of migrants in Morocco. Despite the tremendous degree of insecurity that characterises their lives in Morocco migrants are able to survive for extended periods of time.

Migration and the new European neighbourhood

Transit migrants in Morocco are a selective group. They are probably no more representative of all illegal migrants to Europe than those who actually arrive, but they offer an alternative perspective of illegal migration to Europe that does not always coincide with established understandings. This section considers three significant debates in the literature on the characteristics of migrants in transit that may begin to distinguish them from migrants who have reached Europe: migrants' reasons for departure, their relationship with Moroccan society and their need for specific protection measures.

Early interest in transit migration in the Maghreb grew from observations of apprehension data in Southern Europe, and this provided the stimulus for policy interest such as the High Level Working Group's Morocco Action Plan (EC 1999). The Morocco Action plan was widely criticised, particularly in Morocco where it was interpreted as an accusation that Morocco was 'guilty of transit migration' (Belguendouz 2000). In 2000, an article in the Moroccan news magazine *Demain* provided first-hand information on

transit migration from the Moroccan perspective (Lmrabet 2000). Since then, media interest has grown and a number of documentary films, such as Gilles de Maistre's 2003 *Lost in Transit*, have attempted to follow migrants across the desert and even into boats on the maritime crossing. The humanitarian concerns raised by these migrations stimulated attention from international organisations and NGOs who provided the first empirically grounded studies of the phenomenon.

The first of these studies was published by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (Barros et al 2002) and reported a study of migrants in Morocco. Thirteen nationalities were represented amongst the 66 migrants interviewed. Nigerians and Congolese (DRC) made up almost half of the total, though as with all studies of this type, this sample was not representative. This study set out a series of responses to the major questions surrounding these migrations that have been debated extensively in subsequent reports and analysis. First, outlining the reasons for departure the ILO report identified the existence of mixed flows citing population growth, poverty, pressure on resources and civil war as the major set of frequently inter-related reasons for departure. This is reinforced by a more recent report for the CARIM centre by one of the authors (Lahlou 2005), which again emphasises the significance of poverty in provoking departure.

At the time the ILO report was written, migrants' relationship with Moroccan society was beginning to change due to the growing difficulty of moving on to Europe. The Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla were enclosed with a double razor wire fence in 1999. Periods of temporary transit, common in the 1990s, were replaced by longer term residence. Although the authors recognised that most migrants initially intended to get to Europe 'many expressed a feeling of peace and security in Morocco, despite the precarious situation in which they lived, compared to the regions that they left' (Barros et al 2002: 22). Other migrants who had lived in Morocco legally for a longer period of time preferred to remain there illegally once their residence permits expired in the hope of eventually reaching Europe. Elie Goldschmidt described the situation of

Congolese students in Morocco who, particularly from 1997 onwards when Mobutu was given shelter in Morocco, were unwilling to return home at the end of their studies (Goldschmidt 2004).

The ILO study does not address a third significant question, that has provoked more interest since 2003, that of the possibilities of asylum in Morocco, although work was beginning on asylum issues at the time (Lindstrom 2002). Morocco is a signatory to both the 1951 Geneva Convention on the status of refugees and the African Union's 1969 supplementary refugee definition. UNHCR has had a presence in Morocco since the early 1960s. However, until January 2005, UNHCR offices were in Casablanca and attracted relatively few asylum claims (UNHCR 2001). Lindstrom reports a widespread feeling amongst the 20 individuals she interviewed that UNHCR was not to be trusted as they worked in close cooperation with the Moroccan interior ministry. At the time Morocco relied on legislation passed soon after independence[ii] with the aim of assisting Algerian refugees. This established the Bureau des Réfugies et Apatrides (BRA) in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which was supposed to examine refugees recognised by UNHCR in order to grant them residence status in Morocco (Elmadmad 2002). However, very few individuals were recognised by the BRA and although the same ordinance set out provision for an appellate authority, this has never existed. Until UNHCR began effective operations in 2005 the possibility of receiving asylum in Morocco was extremely limited and there was no really reliable data on how many transit migrants would be eligible for protection under the 1951 Convention.

These three questions, migrants' reasons for leaving, relationship with Moroccan society and requirement for protection have received a range of other responses in the growing literature on transit migrants in Morocco. A study carried out for the Cimade (Wender 2004) reported interviews with 95 migrants of 13 nationalities, with RDC and Cameroon accounting for almost half of those interviewed. The reasons for leaving are divided into 'political persecution or war' which explained the migration of 55 of those interviewed (54%) and '"economic" reasons', relating to the remaining 40

(46%). The significance of non-economic reasons is a particular feature of this report, but amongst those leaving for economic reasons a number are cited referring to the situations of poverty in which they lived at home, large families and restricted access to resources, providing partial support for the findings of the ILO study that poverty was an important cause.

The Cimade study draws a further interesting contrast between migrants' future intentions, reasons for departure and their relationship with Morocco. The large majority of those citing economic reasons declared an intention to get to Europe. In contrast, only 27 percent of those fleeing war or persecution reported an intention to reach Europe at the point of their departure. The fact that these interviews were conducted in Bel Younech, Gourougou and Oujda, the first two locations indicating a clear intention to reach Europe[iii], highlights the extent to which their migration projects changed once their journeys had begun; 83% of all 95 migrants interviewed declared that their current intended destination was Europe.

The Cimade report also highlights both the extended duration of migrants' stay, with 25 of the 95 migrants remaining more than a year in Morocco, and the increasing difficulties faced during the stay. The difficulty of stay is obviously influenced by choice of interview locations, with migrants living rough for prolonged periods in all three locations, but is also strongly affected by the reported mistreatment migrants face at the hands of the Moroccan auxiliary forces and the Spanish Guardia Civil. Reports of violence are reinforced by Medécins sans Frontières' report (MSF 2005), which provides details on 9,350 medical consultations with migrants carried out from March 2003 to May 2005 in three centres at Tangier, Nador and Oujda. During this period 23.3% of all assistance provided was for injuries resulting from violence, sustained by migrants and more than 60% of such injuries were reportedly caused directly by Spanish or Moroccan security services. In contrast to the treatment from security forces, frequent mention is made of the positive relationship between migrants and Moroccans. In his work in Rabat, based on a small but in-depth sample of 12 migrants, Medhi Alioua describes the solidarity that

forms between migrants and Moroccan residents of neighbourhoods where they begin to establish some attachments (Alioua 2005).

The difficulty of fieldwork with undocumented migrants in Morocco is illustrated by the relatively small sample sizes of all of these studies, with the sole exception of the MSF report which was not a research report and provides no data on nationality or gender of migrants who received medical assistance. Morocco, however, is by far the easiest of the Maghreb countries in which to conduct this type of research and there is far more information available on the situation there than Algeria, Tunisia or Libya. Sara Hamood was not even able to visit Libya for her research on transit migration, though information gathered in Sudan and Italy confirms that migrants face similar barriers there (Hamood 2006). Although the empirical context, particularly in terms of policy, varies widely the situation faced by transit migrants across North Africa is strikingly similar. On the basis of research in Algeria Ali Bensaad argues that it is not poverty that provokes departure, since a certain level of resources are required to allow migration and therefore, in a finding that mirrors much of the development studies literature on migration, it is not the poorest who migrate (Bensaad 2005). As van Hear (2004) argues, financial resources are an important indicator of final destination. His argument that socio-economic class is an important influence on final destination is strongly supported by much of this work, though there is still no overall consensus on the importance of financial capital.

It is important to avoid any consideration of the situation of Morocco in isolation from the European policy environment or the developing political and economic context of migrants' countries of origin. Transit migration unifies sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa and Europe and it is important that any interpretation of migrants' journeys is able to reflect that. At a bilateral level, the rhythm of short term operations of control in Morocco has been linked to the timing of individual official visits from Spain (Cimade/AFVIC 2005). The broader policy environment affecting migrants in Morocco has been shown to result from political debates within Europe at least as much as discussions in Morocco (Schuster 2005). Events

surrounding the deaths of migrants in October 2005 and the subsequent attempts by Moroccan authorities to remove as many as 2,000 migrants to a remote desert border with Algeria generated a strong and sustained response from the international community. A range of reports from NGOs were sharply critical of the Moroccan and Spanish governments and the EU (APDHA 2005, AFVIC/Cimade 2005) though the delegation of the European Parliament was far more conciliatory and focused very much on UNHCR's changing role in Morocco as grounds for optimism (European Parliament 2005).

Beyond the immediate policy environment these migrations are also recognised as a result of broader social changes in the Sahel region. Sylvie Bredeloup and Olivier Pliez link transit migration to regional 'transit spaces' which are important for the circulation of both goods and people. Their movement is interpreted by as indicative of developing exchanges of many types in a broadly understood trans-Sahara zone (Bredeloup and Pliez 2006) that has restructured the urban environment of towns across the Sahel as migrants seek to establish a place for themselves. Rather than an epiphenomenon resulting solely from short term policy changes, recent academic analysis situates Saharan transit migration at the centre of broader long-term structural changes occurring across the region. The growing recognition that these are long-term changes makes it more urgent to identify the impact on the individual migrants concerned, as well as associated changes in countries of transit.

This paper reports on 100 interviews conducted by the author with undocumented migrants in Morocco in November and December 2005. In common with any study of illegal migrants this sample cannot be considered representative as it was not generated randomly. However, this is the largest such project to be carried out to date and every effort was made to ensure that the basic characteristics of migrants interviewed matched what is known of the population as a whole in terms of national background, gender and age. Contact with migrants was mediated by local associations with whom contact had been established for similar research in 2003 and 2004 (Collyer 2004).

Interviews were conducted in Oujda, Rabat and Casablanca, three towns with significant migrant populations, and in the Spanish enclave of Ceuta. Interviews were held with representatives of local associations in all of these locations as well as Tetouan, Tangier, Nador and Layounne. The context of interviews in each of these locations was significantly different. In Oujda all interviews were held in a forest on the edge of town. Elsewhere most interviews were held inside but this was often in cramped and noisy rooms in migrants' homes. In Ceuta interviews were held in the Centro d'Estancia Temporal d'Inmigrantes (CETI) and around town. Interviews were conducted in English, French, Spanish or Arabic. Interviews comprised an initial structured questionnaire to obtain comparable data, followed by an unstructured discussion that varied in length from 10 minutes to several hours. Migrants were highly mobile and continually concerned about any contact with the police. Due to the difficulties of maintaining contact, most migrants were interviewed only once, although nine were contacted on more than one occasion. Recording was also extremely difficult due to interview conditions and the initial reticence of migrants. Eight of the 100 interviews were recorded satisfactorily.

Origins of transit migrants

A total of 17 nationalities were represented in the interview sample (Tables 1 and 2). This does not constitute a representative sample, although considerable effort was taken to ensure that it should provide a reasonable reflection of what is known, or suspected about the overall national origins of migrants. As with previous studies, nationals of RDC and Nigeria are well represented and these are undoubtedly amongst the largest groups of undocumented migrants in Morocco, nationals of the Cote d'Ivoire and Cameroon are also highly significant. It is perhaps likely that nationals of Liberia and Bangladesh are somewhat over represented in this sample, and nationals of Senegal and Mali are rather under-represented, though given that so many Senegalese and Malians had been repatriated the previous month it is possible that, at the time of interview, this was a more accurate reflection of the size of these communities.

Country of origin	N
RDC	28
Cote d'Ivoire	17
Nigeria	13
Liberia	11
Cameroon	7
Togo	2
Benin	2
Ghana	2
Sierra Leone	1
Mali	1
Senegal	1
Sudan	1
Total	86

Table 1: *Nationalities of migrants interviewed during fieldwork in Morocco*

Country of origin	N
Bangladesh	6
Liberia	2
Guinea Biseau	2
Guinea Conakry	1
Uganda	1
Gambia	1
Cameroon	1
Total	14

Table 2: *Nationalities of migrants interviewed during fieldwork in Ceuta*

Previous research reports are not specific about the proportion of women interviewed, but emphasise that they are in a small minority. All other available sources, including data from MSF, UNHCR, the Ceuta CETI and interviews with local associations around the country reinforce this impression. The small minority of women interviewed (Table 3) therefore seems to be a reasonable reflection of undocumented migrants as a whole. This tremendous gender imbalance has important consequences for the experiences of both male and female migrants that become more important as the period of residence in Morocco increases.

Gender	**N / %**
Men	91
Women	9
Total	100

Table 3: *Gender of migrants interviewed during fieldwork in Morocco*

Eight of the women interviewed had children with them in Morocco and this again appears to be relatively typical. Six of the women had only one child, all less than a year old, five of whom had been born in Morocco. The remaining two women had two children each. Eight of the nine women had experienced at least one removal to the Oujda frontier and four of them had been removed twice, each time either pregnant, or accompanied by children, in a clear breach of Article 26 of Morocco's law 02/03. With the exception of these 11 young children, the age range of the 100 migrants interviewed was 19 to 47 with an average of 28.6. Almost half of the migrants fell into the 25-29 range (Table 4) and 84% were between the ages of 20 and 34. This again is very similar to findings of previous reports.

Age	N / %
Under 20	2
20 - 24	23
25 - 29	43
30 - 34	18
35 -40	11
Over 40	3
Total	100

Table 4: *Age range of migrants interviewed during fieldwork in Morocco*

Patterns of Migration: the journey so far

In common with previous studies, the huge majority of migrants interviewed had entered Morocco across the border with Algeria in the vicinity of Oujda (Table 5). The border between the Western Sahara and Mauritania is heavily mined along large sections and the density of military patrols throughout the Sahara region suggests that any crossing here would involve a degree of cooperation between traffickers and the military, so the rarity of crossing from Mauritania is understandable.

Border crossed to enter Morocco	N / %
by air	6
from Mauritania	1
from Algeria	93

Table 5: *Means of entry into Morocco of migrants interviewed*

The greatest difficulties of the journey were usually encountered during the crossing of the Sahara. It is becoming more widely appreciated that the difficulties and dangers of an undocumented crossing of the Sahara are at least as great as the more widely mediatised hazards of an undocumented crossing of the Mediterranean. Many migrants refused to speak about their experiences in the desert, preferring not to dwell on the suffering they had endured and many that did became most agitated during this part of the interview. Migrants' accounts were often confused and many were uncertain about the exact length of the crossing but experiences varied from a relatively swift five days (interview 63) to an agonising 29 days during which a number of other migrants died (interview 87). A number of migrants reported coming across groups of dead bodies in the desert yet there is no notion of the total human cost of this migration, compared to the statistics collected of deaths on the Mediterranean crossing.

Of the six individuals who entered by air, three had valid visas that they then overstayed and three had paid for appropriate forged documentation. This means that 97 individuals had entered Morocco in a clandestine manner and all inevitably had to pay considerable sums for a variety of services including assistance evading controls at borders, clandestine transport, forged documentation and bribes.

Paying for the journey

Migrants interviewed were generally not amongst the poorest sectors of their home societies. They reported paying the equivalent of anything from several months to several years average salary of their home countries for the entire journey and this clearly excluded the very poorest. This provides considerable support for those who argue that it is not poverty that forces people to leave (Bensaad 2005). Yet those who take the overland route are certainly not wealthy in their home societies either. A Congolese migrant commented that 'those who have money don't need to leave the country' (Interview 29). Given the structure of smuggling operations it is clear that those who have money and want to leave, don't get stuck in Morocco. Many migrants saw themselves as victims of a system of privilege in their home countries that did not reward ability or effort and they saw no prospects of social mobility, except through migration. In this sense, not absolute, but relative poverty also played an important role in encouraging their migration (Lahlou 2005).

The relative impoverishment of migrants interviewed is supported by the fact that only one individual reported making an attempt to get a visa for a European country, before leaving overland (interview 36). No other migrant reported even applying and all had the impression that visas were only given to an extremely small, elite minority. Migrants required both a *reason* to leave (persecution, danger or relative poverty) and the *means* to leave (financial or contacts) (Collyer 2004). This combination was most frequently found amongst individuals who at one time had access to a moderate income which they then lost, typically during political upheaval or conflict. For example, a man from Cote d'Ivoire described how he had a good job in a French company in Abidjan

(interview 12) but when the French, and other foreign nationals, left the country the company collapsed and he was unable to find any kind of employment elsewhere. He used the savings he had put aside while he was employed to finance his trip to Morocco. While this man was not directly threatened by the war, he says he left because of the war. Conflict was the most common destabilising factor in these situations and others felt that conflict, rather than economic issues were the central factor in provoking their migration.

Others reported that family members had sold land, houses or valuable possessions in order to raise the money needed for the journey (Interviews 36, 85, 86). However, individuals with the resources to pay for the entire journey immediately were in a minority in this research. Apart from the six individuals who came by air, only another 18 came directly overland, taking four to eight weeks to make the journey. The remaining 76 individuals had spent various amounts of time elsewhere, as long as ten years between leaving their country of origin and entering Morocco. For many of them Morocco was not their intended destination when they left. In fact, in line with the findings presented in the Cimade report, many individuals declared not to have had an intended destination when they left. In most of these cases it would be wrong to interpret this entire period as a journey to Morocco. Individuals who were already mobile heard of possibilities of greater security and decided to act on them. These migrants moved around the Sahel region stopping to work for various periods of time before moving on, a pattern of movement evocative of Bredeloup and Pliez's 'Sahara-Sahel migration space' (Bredeloup and Pliez 2006: 4).

Working the Sahara-Sahel migration space

Given the relatively informal nature of large sectors of the labour market in the countries transited it was possible for migrants to pick up various kinds of work, often quite well paid. A migrant from Benin worked in a tailor's workshop in Algiers for two and a half years, and was paid 350 euros a month, considerably above the average per capita income for Algeria. Unskilled work is far less lucrative; several migrants reported

being paid two to three euros a day for work on building sites in Tamanrasset. Libya was another common site of employment and unskilled work on building sites paid between 100 and 150 euros a month. This type of employment is usually irregular and unreliable and in most cases there is no guarantee that payment will be forthcoming. In some cases migrants are paid barely more than a subsistence wage, but more lucrative jobs can help to build up savings and finance onward migration.

Migrants from the RDC are amongst the most widely travelled, unsurprising, given that the most direct route to Morocco is already between five and six thousand kilometres. One migrant reported travelling south initially, with the intention of reaching South Africa, but faced great difficulties at the Zambia border, so turned around and headed north, eventually arriving in Morocco three years after leaving home (interview 88). Another spent four years working as a college professor in Chad before travelling south to Nigeria and Niger to cross into Algeria (interview 51). Some migration histories only appear to be journeys to Morocco because that is where the individuals were when they related their stories. There is no linear logic to their movements. Rather, they should be understood as spontaneous circulations that have developed in response to new information and new opportunities within the migrants' social networks.

Individuals move in search of greater security. Since security from violence is only one element of the protection they require their movements are also influenced by new economic opportunities. In some cases, work is linked much more directly to migration. Several individuals recounted experiences of payment directly in kind for unskilled labour, with help in onward migration or even assistance getting into the Ceuta or Melilla. The standard price to be smuggled into the Spanish enclaves was around €1,200 at the time of research, a huge sum for migrants who had frequently exhausted all their resources just reaching Morocco. The failure to come up with this sum of money was the one factor common to all migrants interviewed in Morocco. Although resources are not essential to

successful migration it was far more common for people to rely on some form of assistance. This is where stories of abuse were far more common.

Trafficking and smuggling

As much of the research on transit migration highlights, smuggling on these routes does not fit with the common image of people smugglers as internationally organised gangs of professionals. Migrants typically report paying for one leg of the journey at a time, a difficult stretch, or an individual border. Smugglers are frequently other migrants, with some experience of particular border crossings making the most of the opportunity to make a little money themselves to fund their onward journey. A 21-year-old man from Delta State in Nigeria described his journey to Morocco

> I took what they call the 'mafia moto'. We spent about one month on the road, first into Benin then Mali and Algeria. I paid $700 to Maghnia [on the Algeria side of the Algeria-Morocco border], but now I could go back for $250, I could go the straight road, I could pass by myself, now I know how to do it, without the mafia moto (Interview 49)

After making the journey only once, he was confident that he could return using primarily local transport, and well-placed bribes at certain border crossings. This was one of the lowest prices any migrant reported paying but, if he was right in his calculations, even at such a low price, there was a considerable profit to be made and he himself would be well placed to earn some money guiding others. One individual from Cameroon had been removed to the Algerian border by the Moroccan authorities and then caught by the Algerian authorities and removed to Mali. He had then been able to get back to Morocco from Mali for almost no cost, simply by showing others the route and using the profits to fund his own migration (Interview 24).

There is perhaps an element of mutual solidarity in smuggling operations of this sort, migrants share information and the formation of collectives is

an important survival strategy along the route. But staying together is extremely difficult, many family units had been divided and several migrants interviewed were desperate from news of a brother or child who they had been separated from in a police raid. In this situation other groups of migrants have even greater problems remaining in touch and the vast majority of stories are extremely negative. Migrants are highly vulnerable during these crossings and experiences of extortion and profiteering from groups of smugglers were routinely reported:

> From Bamako we got into a pick-up, there were 17 people, we were told it would take 3-7 days. [....] After 3 days the pick up van goes, they say they have to get petrol and they say "Everyone out!" but of course it is a trick to get more money from people. We are in the middle of the desert, waiting, waiting. We stayed there 23 days, all our food and water had gone and then they returned and took all the money everyone had to continue. After 2 more nights we were pushed out and told to walk, one man said that it was the Algerian border. (Interview 87)

Local associations in the Western Sahara reported periodically being called on to assist groups of migrants stranded in the desert awaiting the return of the smugglers. The experience of small scale, almost do-it-yourself smuggling operations are the most common experiences reported by migrants interviewed in Morocco, and routinely related in published research on these topics (Barros et al 2002, Collyer 2004, Alioua 2005), but this is perhaps a consequence of the research methodologies employed in these studies. The nature of access to migrants in Morocco means that researchers typically come into contact with the independently travelling migrant, arranging things for themselves due to lack of funds. The fact that larger scale smuggling operations do not figure in the experiences of migrants interviewed does not, of course, mean that they do not exist.

Interviews in the CETI in Ceuta uncovered a range of experiences very different from those recounted by migrants in Morocco. The different

origins of migrants interviewed in Ceuta compared to those interviewed in Morocco reflects this (Tables 1 and 2). At the time of interview, twenty per cent of the 500 migrants in the CETI were Bangladeshi, one of the largest national groups, and surprising since I had not even heard of Bangladeshis during interviews in Morocco. All the Bangladeshis interviewed related very similar migration histories: by plane to Dubai, then to Bamako, overland from Bamako to Morocco and then by sea to Ceuta[iv]. They had paid between €6,000 and €8,000 for this trip, a single price, from Dhaka. This is in direct contrast to the Sub-Saharan Africans interviewed in Morocco, none of whom had paid a single price for their entire trip. During their time in Morocco the Bangladeshis did not sleep rough in forests, but stayed in houses and were not allowed outside:

> There were 17 others in the mafia house. We stayed there three weeks. They take people away 2, 2, 2, 3, like that each night and on like this. They take you out to the water and you get on a…….like this [makes motion as if sitting on motorbike]
> MC: *a jet ski?*
> Yes, yes, jet ski, just driver and 2 people and then they say "that's it get down" and you have to swim, but many Bangladeshis don't swim
> MC: *and is it far?*
> Yes, far, further than the boat there [maybe 1km out] long way, a hard swim (Interview 85)

Local associations in Oujda described occasional contacts with migrants staying in houses in town, rather than sleeping rough, as most migrants appear to, but emphasised that these were very rare, and normally they had no knowledge of them. As the Bangladeshis describe, these individuals were not allowed out of the house, and usually did not remain long. This suggests the operation of a number of parallel migration systems which occupy the same spaces but are organised in very different ways. On the one hand is the do-it-yourself, more independent migrant and on the other, the migrant who has pre-paid for an entire package. Researchers have come into contact with members of the first group, and

our knowledge of this type of migration system is now growing, but very little is known about the operation of the second system, even how large it may be.

The nature of the independently organised ad hoc smuggling systems makes it extremely difficult for migrants to judge accurately how much their journey will cost them before they leave. Several individuals reported paying a price at first that they expected to get them far further than it did and then were forced to work or continue to borrow money from friends and family at home in order to continue. This gradual, stage by stage migration provided an important incentive not to return, but also meant that they arrived in Morocco already beyond the limits of their resources. Those with the money moved on quickly, those without, which included all migrants interviewed for this research, were dependent on luck or raising the money to continue. In the meantime they had to survive as best they could in Morocco.

Survival strategies of transit migrants

Morocco was once seen as a stage on the route to Europe, a temporary passage for migrants, by both migrants themselves and the Moroccan authorities. The tendency for this 'temporary' passage to become increasingly long term was first noted in the ILO report (Barros et al 2002) and has been reinforced in subsequent studies (Wender 2004, Alioua 2005). This research re-confirms this trend, with the tendency for migrants to stay for longer and longer periods of time. More than half of the migrants interviewed had been in Morocco for a year or more (Table 7) and one migrant from Cameroon first arrived in Morocco in 1998, though he had been removed many times, once as far as Mali (interview 24). On average migrants had spent 15.4 months in Morocco. There appeared to be no relationship between length of stay in Morocco and possibilities of moving on since many migrants interviewed in Ceuta, including four of the six Bangladeshi migrants, had spent less than six months in Morocco.

Length of stay in Morocco	N / %
0 to 5 months	20
6 to 11 months	27
12 to 23 months	30
24 to 35 months	9
36 to 47 months	7
4 years or more	7
Total	100

Table 7: *Length of stay in Morocco of migrants interviewed*

Nor did there appear to be any relationship between length of stay in Morocco and fundamental motivation for migration, as the Cimade study found; migrants with persuasive cases for requiring protection, and with self confessed economic motives for migration were encountered in both Ceuta and Morocco and right across the spectrum of lengths of stay. The only reliable indicator of time in Morocco was resources; the poorest migrants remain in Morocco. One man from Cameroon who had been attempting to reach Europe for seven years, and had broken both arms and a leg during the course of successive attempts to enter Ceuta or Melilla, commented 'If you give me €1,200, we can arrange to meet in Ceuta next week, and I'll be there.' (Interview 24).

Life for undocumented migrants in Morocco has always evolved in response to the activities of state authorities. Elie Goldschmidt relates how Congolese migrants were able to stay together in a single hostel in Sale when they first began to arrive in the mid 1990s (Goldschmidt 2004). Even in 2002 it was common to see large groups of Sub-Saharan Africans in the medinas of Tangier or Tetouan, where the cheapest accommodation is located. In the Western Sahara, local associations reported that between 2000 and 2002 migrants would come into towns such as Layounne or Smara to buy food. The geography of this presence began to change in 2003 as, in the face of growing pressure from the European

Union, improved relations with Spain and new legislation criminalising undocumented migration, controls became more and more frequent. Rather than an isolated series of incidents, the nationwide pattern of controls in September and October 2005 marked a further development in this system of controls, instituting a 'zone rouge' around the frontier points in the north and deploying the 6th mobile regiment of the army in the Western Sahara for the sole purpose of controlling undocumented migrants. The experience of undocumented migrants in Morocco is now structured in terms of contact with the authorities, and attempts to avoid that contact.

Contact with authorities: growing insecurity of residence

It is now the norm for migrants to have been taken to the frontier more than once. On average, migrants interviewed reported being removed to the frontier near Oujda 1.73 times, with a range from 0 to 7 times. The frequency of this experience highlights the extreme and growing insecurity of migrants' residence in Morocco. Although migrants are typically able to return following removal, this is not always certain and the trip presents many dangers and difficulties, not least of which, the possibility of being caught and removed to the border again. A receipt of asylum request typically offers no protection against removal. Although several migrants in Rabat did report that they had been stopped since October 2005 and on production of their UNHCR receipt they were freed, such individuals were in a small minority.

When migrants are arrested, they are usually first taken to the nearest police station. A migrant in Oujda who had just returned to town following his fourth removal to the frontier described the situation:

> There are up to 50 people in one cell, and you can stay for three or four days. […] They give you one bread each day, and some water. When they take people to the border they go in groups of 30 so if you are amongst the first to be taken, you're lucky. At the border there are all the Moroccan police who brought you on one side, then the Algerian police on the other and you just have to try and find a gap somewhere. Some people go onto the Algerian

side, others come back into Morocco, but it's just wherever you can get through. (Interview 52)

Young male migrants would often describe their experiences at the frontier with bravado, others had clearly found it much more frightening, particularly women with children who had been taken to the border just as frequently as anyone else. One Congolese woman interviewed in Rabat commented 'I hate it in the forest in Oujda. Last time we spent three days there and there are all sorts of men who treat you badly. It's terrible there. I had to get out' (Interview 90). A Liberian man had been taken to the border with his brother directly after being rescued from a boat that had capsized, killing 26 of the 34 people aboard, despite the obvious trauma of the situation (Interview 77). The law 02/03 offers a number of protections against this treatment, but if reports from migrants are correct, they are regularly ignored by state authorities[v].

The reported frequency of removals is significant in estimating the size of the total population of undocumented migrants in Morocco. On the basis of estimates from local associations in various regions of Morocco at the time of research the total population of undocumented migrants in Morocco is estimated to be between 6,900 and 12,900 individuals. Estimates of undocumented populations in Europe are typically constructed on the basis of apprehension statistics and a multiplier based on the probability of apprehension (Black 2003). Assuming that the average number of 1.73 apprehensions of this sample of 100 migrants is typical of all migrants in Morocco (and there is no obvious methodological reason for thinking that it is not), the multiplier should be smaller than 1, meaning that the total number of apprehensions is greater than the total number of migrants. According to Moroccan police statistics for 2004 16,311 sub-Saharan Africans were removed to the border in 2004 (Lahlou 2005). This suggests a population of 9,428 Sub-Saharan Africans, right in the middle of the estimate range provided by local associations. Recent data on the locations of refugees in Morocco support the overwhelming concentration in Rabat (UNHCR 2004). Previous estimates have suggested in the region of 10,000 undocumented migrants in Morocco (Barros et al

2002) and it appears that this has not changed significantly in the last few years.

Employment, Housing, Health and Education

Most migrants had not expected the social situation in Morocco to be as difficult as they found it. Many had expected to be able to find work and to acquire a degree of social protection. This is not the case. Despite their growing length of residence it remains exceptional to find any migrant with any sort of regular employment. Several migrants working in the market in Rabat had established a reasonable level of Arabic. However, they reported that they were not paid for the work they did, but were given some of the left over vegetables at the end of the day, or sometimes a meal. Those working in other areas, such as repairing shoes had a similar arrangement. Although this is hardly a sustainable existence, it is evidence that migrants are beginning to become involved in the economic life of working class Moroccans, albeit on a tremendously unfavourable level. The only migrants who succeeded in making any money for themselves were those with particular skills that they could employ under their own terms, such as repairing electronics or teaching.

Another source of revenue was offered by family or friends elsewhere. Those with family in Europe could rely on relatively regular sums from Western Union. It is common to see sub-Saharan Africans in queues outside the Western Union offices of Rabat, which are located even in the poorest neighbourhoods where migrants tend to live. This included those who had reported that they received no money from overseas. Even when receipt is admitted, few are prepared to disclose how much they receive. Obligations of solidarity mean that anyone receiving significant sums could quickly lose it buying food for compatriots who do not receive money and any saving for onward migration would be destroyed, so under reporting of amounts received is common, even amongst close friends. Those people who admitted receiving money from Europe typically reported irregular and relatively small sums, one Nigerian said he received only €50 every three or four months from his sister in Holland, which he described as 'not enough to live on, and not reliable' (Interview 49). Of

more concern are transfers from migrants' countries of origin, since they appear to be far more regressive. Some people received money from family or other institutions at home. One man from Cameroon received money regularly from collections at his local church (Interview 59) which was not enough to contribute to his onward journey but enabled him to live in some security in Morocco

The cost of living for migrants in Morocco varied considerably. The most significant expense was usually housing, which was typically far more expensive than for Moroccans, apartments rented to undocumented migrants for double or triple the price that Moroccans would pay. Some landlords would not fix limits to the numbers of people who could share an apartment and several people described living conditions of 20 people or more in one two bedroom apartment, with a rent of €200 a month. It was more common for landlords to fix strict limits on the number of people per room to avoid attention from the police and several migrants reported having to enter apartments with care since they were the third person in a room limited to two. Individuals typically paid between €10 and €30 a month for rent in various configurations of shared rooms. Assistance could be found for health problems, though support rarely covered the full cost of medication. The final element of social provision that concerned migrants in Rabat, was education. As the duration of residence in Morocco increases the problem of children's loss of schooling becomes more serious and the question of education for children born in Morocco will begin to arise. Currently schooling is only offered in Rabat, in French 2 days a week. A number of migrant initiatives have attempted to improve on this but face considerable barriers.

Conclusion

Lengthy and frequently dangerous overland journeys have been a feature of migration to Europe only since the mid 1990s. Migrants on these journeys fall into three sets of circumstances, those who have given up and gone home, or died, those who have successfully reached their objective and those who are blocked somewhere on the journey. Research on undocumented migration has typically focused on the second

group of migrants, those who have reached their destination. Although migrants interviewed for this research may now be in any of the three groups, this research concentrated on the third group, those who have yet to reach their intended objective.

The first important finding of this research is that despite their very significant media and policy profile, this is not, numerically, a significant group of migrants. Although precise knowledge of undocumented migrants remains impossible, this research has reported evidence that the number of illegal migrants in Morocco is not greater than 10,000. To put this in context, this represents one thirtieth of a percent of the population of Morocco and slightly over one percent of the population of illegal migrants to have benefited from the two amnesties in Spain since 2002. This is also the same number as the 2002 ILO study estimated, suggesting that the population of illegal immigrants has not increased significantly in the past four years, despite the huge growth in media coverage and policy attention that the issue has received over that period.

The main change that has occurred over this time is the difficulty and danger of survival as an undocumented migrant in Morocco. From the mid 1990s until shortly before the passage of the Moroccan law 02/03 in November 2003, migrants were able to find a degree of respite in Morocco, even as the passage on to Europe became more and more difficult. During 2004 residence in Morocco was increasingly difficult, as the military were deployed to search for migrants across the Western Sahara and Morocco began joint naval patrols with Spanish forces around the Mediterranean. From October 2005 the military were also deployed in the north of the country, occupying water points in the forests around Tangier, Ceuta and Melilla. The intensity of this control is reflected in the reported frequency of arrests of migrants involved in this research, just under two arrests per person, on average. Despite the frequency of arrest, the average length of stay of migrants remained high at 15.4 months.

This suggests that regular arrests are having little impact on the presence of migrants in Morocco, but simply making life much more difficult for them with regular removals to the frontier at Oujda. There is also little evidence that these removals are having a deterrent effect, even though removals direct to migrants' countries of origin became more widespread in October and November 2005. Several migrants reported returning to Morocco following removals to southern Algeria and Mali. Migrants also reported that Nigerians who had been removed to Lagos in 2004 had already returned and described conversations with individuals who had been removed as far as Senegal in November 2005 who were already on their way back when research was conducted the following month.

This type of circular migration, and the extended length of time that many migrants had spent on reaching Morocco calls into question the strict linear notion of 'transit migration'. As the interviews in Ceuta reveal there are still migrants who are able to transit relatively quickly through Morocco into Europe, but these individuals had access to considerable financial resources, either from their country of origin, or through work that they were able to find on arrival in Morocco. The huge majority of migrants interviewed in Morocco had exhausted all of their resources on the journey and had very little prospect of moving onwards. For the majority there were few opportunities in Morocco although there are limited indications of the beginnings of economic integration into the Moroccan labour market.

As these migrants stay for longer and longer periods of time it would be more accurate to characterise recent movement to Morocco as an extension of sub-Saharan African migration systems, rather that solely a passage to Europe. Changes in communications and financial infrastructure in the Sahel region now allow migrants to move in both directions across the desert whilst remaining in contact with family members back home, and with each other, as the characterisation of a 'transit space' suggests (Bredeloup and Pliez 2006). Morocco offers the attractions of a potential crossing to Europe and in this sense it remains involved in the Euro-Mediterranean migration system, as it always has

been. Morocco is the point where these two migration systems now overlap. Wealthy migrants are still able to pay for the assistance required to shift from one system to another but the two systems do not join as seamlessly as notions of transit migration may suggest. Those migrants who cannot afford to make the change must negotiate the varying states of economic, civil and political insecurity as best they can.

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Endnotes:

[i] The number of illegal migrants apprehended in the Straits of Gibraltar fell from 19,176 in 2003 to 15,675 in 2004 (Ministerio del Interior 2004, Lahlou 2005), the first fall in a decade.
[ii] Ordinance no. 2.57.1256 of August 12th 1957
[iii] Bel Younech and Gourougou are informal camps in forests adjacent to Ceuta and Melilla respectively. The populations there reached a peak of approximately 1,500 in each camp in 2003 but in December 2005 the Moroccan army occupied all water points and individuals who had been there recently estimated that there were no more than 20 or 30 individuals remaining in each camp.
[iv] This was widely known to border control officials so this information is not confidential
[v] The standard process by which undocumented migrants are removed to the Oujda frontier is contrary to at least four separate articles in the law 02/03. Article 23 recognises the right of foreign nationals to challenge a decision to remove them in front of an administrative tribunal, during which they will be provided with an interpreter, if necessary, and can request magistrate to designate a lawyer to act for them. Article 26 states that pregnant women and minor children cannot be removed, amongst others, although Article 27 allows for derogation from Article 26 'in cases of state security'. Article 29 stipulates the country to which foreign nationals must be removed: a. the country of their nationality, unless they have refugee status or if a refugee claim has yet to be determined b. a country which issued travel documents which are still valid c. another country in which they are legally allowed to go. This article repeats that no pregnant women or minor children may be removed and no foreign national may be removed to a country where they face cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. There is no possibility of derogation from this article.