



HOW AND WHY PEOPLE MIGRATE?

AN ENQUIRY INTO VULNERABILITY AND IRREGULARITY
THROUGH MIGRANT STORIES

NASSIM MAJIDI


SAMUEL HALL

SCIENCES PO PARIS / WITS UNIVERSITY



Research 1:

A study on youth migration intentions across Somalia and Afghanistan



You ask me when and why I decided to leave but in fact I did not have any choice. I did not decide and no one else did it for me. I just had to leave Puntland because there was no other option there.

– Male, 24 from Puntland, Somalia

Research 2:

A study on migrant smuggling to Canada (Afghan, Iraqi and Syrian migrants)



THE “WHY”: LESSONS LEARNED



Migration intentions are **complex** and **intertwined**. Security and economic wellbeing are most consistently linked with migration intentions. Aid investments may be better directed toward addressing insecurity than reducing migration.



The lack of **legal pathways to migration** lead to irregular migration. Smuggling rises when borders are tightened.



The **diversity of profiles of migrants**: the educated and middle class, to the illiterate and unskilled; men and women, to children, youth and the elderly. There are migrants who could easily afford the way forward if given the chance or provided with regular means of migration, and there are those who have reached the limits of their financial resources and have become stranded, barely making ends meet, and wondering why they ever left in the first place.

1. THE 'HOW': CHANGING THE LENS

SAMUEL HALL.



An Iraqi refugee who did not want to have his identity revealed stands in Istanbul's commercial district of Gayrettepe during afternoon rush hour. Istanbul districts such as Aksaray and Beyoglu have been refugee transit hubs since at least the 1979 Iranian Revolution, with subsequent groups including Afghans, Africans, Iraqis and now Syrians.



Smugglers change, but migrants remain. There's no good or bad. They all lie to you, but you are forced to go, what choice do you have. Your only assurance is if somebody else has gone with that smuggler and you can know better what to expect. –

**Migrant C, Afghan migrant
deported from the UK,
planning to leave for Canada;
Kabul, March**

MIGRATION THRESHOLDS: A COGNITIVE PROCESS

The indifference threshold

The initial discussion of migration as a viable option

1. Initial thoughts: the hope for legal pathways plan A – smuggling as plan B
2. Family reactions to the decision to leave: from support to fear and discouragement

The locational threshold

Deciding where to go and reasons for leaving

1. Deciding on a destination – the centrality of family reunification prospects
2. Deciding while in transit – the failure of finding a ‘home’ in the first safe country

The trajectory threshold

Coming to terms with the means of travel

1. Traveling with companions
2. Preparedness and resource mobilisation: beyond “the smuggler”, a range of actors within a migrant ecosystem
3. Tipping point

TIPPING POINT, PREPAREDNESS AND RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

When not given an opportunity to migrate through regular channels, individuals resort to smugglers who provide avenues to move. Without smugglers, their journey would not have been possible. **The initial smuggler is from the community,**

I have been hearing all these horrible stories about immigrants being beaten and mugged by smugglers, but I had a different experience. They did not cause me any trouble. I guess maybe that is because I paid them well. [...] That said, you can't trust the smugglers fully. They will tell you one thing, and they will do a different thing.

– Migrant B, Afghan migrant in Toronto, Canada, February 2017

One of my relatives had used his service in the past. Haji had helped his son to get to Sweden. He had flown him from Kabul to Turkey and then from Turkey to Greece and from Greece to Sweden. So someone vouched for his credibility. Part of the reason we trust him was that he was a high-ranking government official. The other thing was that we were not giving him any money in advance. He was so confident on his service that he agreed to not take any money from us in advance.

– Migrant G, Afghan migrant in Toronto, Canada, March 2017

STEPPING INTO THE UNKNOWN

There is a clear difference between migrants who make arrangements from the origin towards a pre-determined destination, often introduced by family, friends or colleagues, as opposed to those that find smugglers ad hoc or out of desperation, and often in transit settings when stranded and without options.

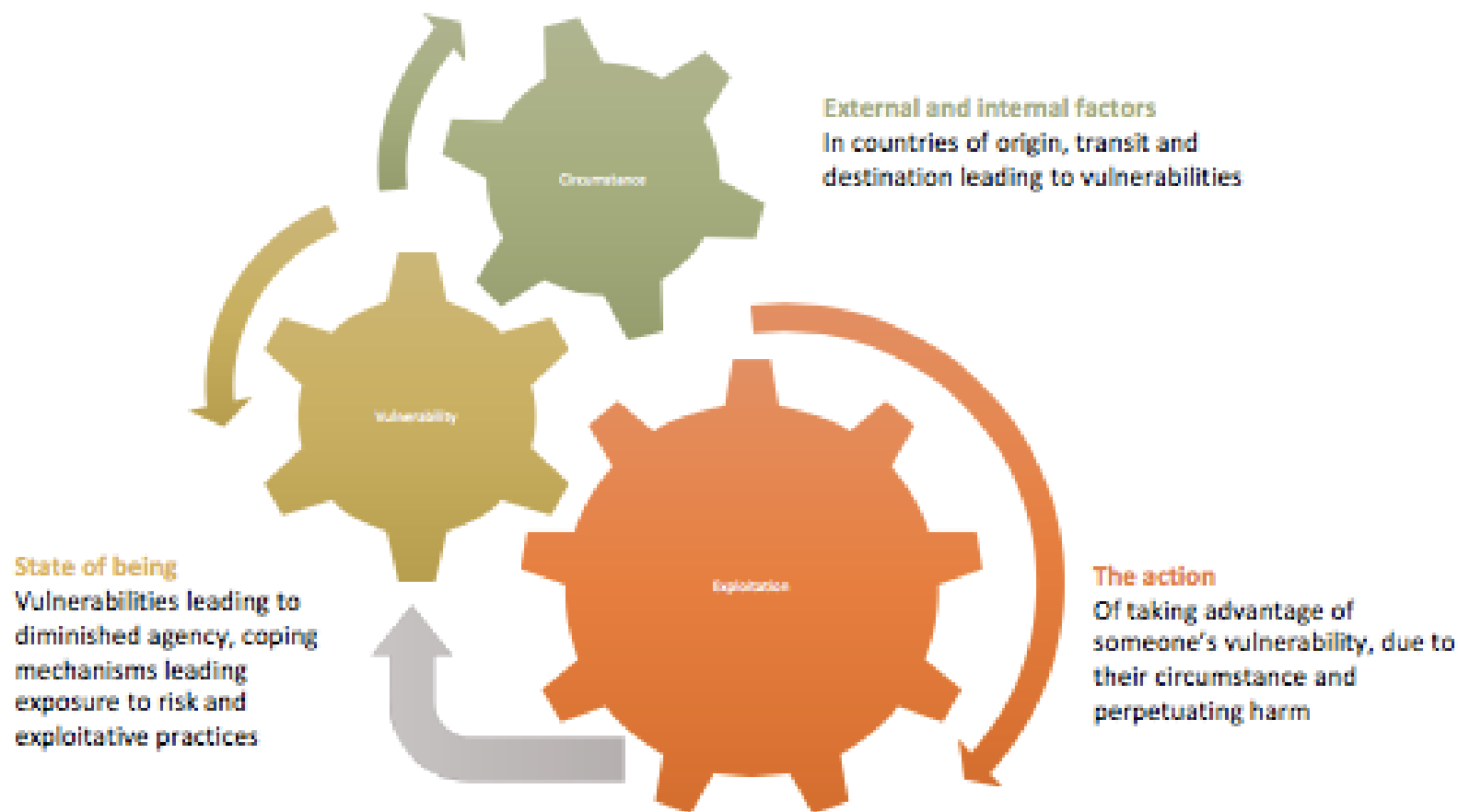
You don't ask questions. You don't know why you're waiting in guesthouses to move forward. If you ask, "When are we going?" "Where are we going?" the smuggler would just say, "Eat your bread", "Get some rest", "Don't ask".

– Migrant I, Afghan migrant from Kabul, deported from the United Kingdom and planning to leave for Canada, March 17

He didn't say anything. Actually, he didn't mention from which airport we will leave Turkey. He just said from Turkey. He has just told me that the passport nationality will be something from South-Eastern Europe, like the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania or Bulgaria. He did not tell me anything about arrival to Canada.

– Migrant F, migrant from the Syrian Arab Republic in Istanbul, Turkey, March 2017

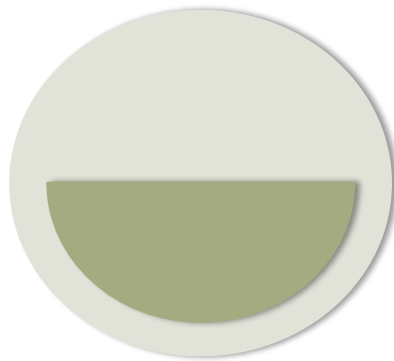
Figure 3. Exploitation, vulnerability, circumstance nexus



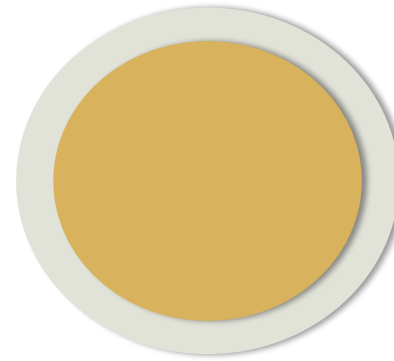
Source: Samuel Hall, 2017.

2. VULNERABILITY TO EXPLOITATION

HEIGHTENED EXPOSURE TO EXPLOITATIVE PRACTICES IN TRANSIT



Origin



Transit

Weakened Microsystem (ties with friends, family)

- Financial debts
- Trauma due to triggers
- Poor socio-economic conditions
- Journey into the unknown
- Dependency on smugglers
- Physical Abuse and humiliation perpetrated by the police
- Exploitation by smugglers, *rahbalads* and intermediaries
- Financial exploitation
- Discrimination due to undocumented status

LAW ENFORCEMENT & ABUSE

Physical abuse and humiliation perpetrated by the police

We reached another barbed wire fence. We all climbed it and jumped to the other side. Some people driving on the highway saw us, and they called the police. Half an hour later, police arrived in a few vehicles. As soon as they got out of their vehicles, their [sic] start beating us with metal rods, punches and kicks. They handcuffed us and put us in the back of a van and drove us to the nearby police station where they took everything – including the little money that I was carrying with me – from us. They force striped us. When a couple of the guys refused to let the Greek police check their rectums, they jumped on him like wolves and beat them black and blue. I took off all my clothes before they even asked me and let them check. [...] I had never felt that embarrassed. But I also did not want to be beaten by the police.

– Migrant I, Afghan migrant in Berlin, Germany (seeking to go to Canada), February 2017

Although I did not run into any trouble with different countries' police, but the law enforcement agents in different countries were the people that I feared the most. I knew that if I was caught travelling with fake documents, I would end up in jail. That was something that kept me awake in the night.

– Migrant B, Afghan migrant in Toronto, Canada, February 2017

COERCION

When smuggling turns into trafficking

Migrants reported that smugglers, intermediaries and *Rahbalads* too had their own strategies to extort money and keep migrants under their control and dependent on them. These ranged from not providing adequate information to travelling at night or when there are fewer security patrols on the way.

Often earning more on commission, smugglers and intermediaries also made migrants stop in “houses” selected by the intermediaries themselves, making them buy food and essentials from shops chosen by the intermediaries. Migrants were often kept under house arrest in these locations or deprived of food for long periods until the migrant’s focal point or lead smuggler had paid the intermediary.

Everything was carefully calculated. They kept us hungry and thirsty to control us and force us to buy their stuff inside the numerous safe houses that we stopped at on the way to the Turkish border.

– Migrant G, Afghan migrant in Toronto, Canada, March 2017

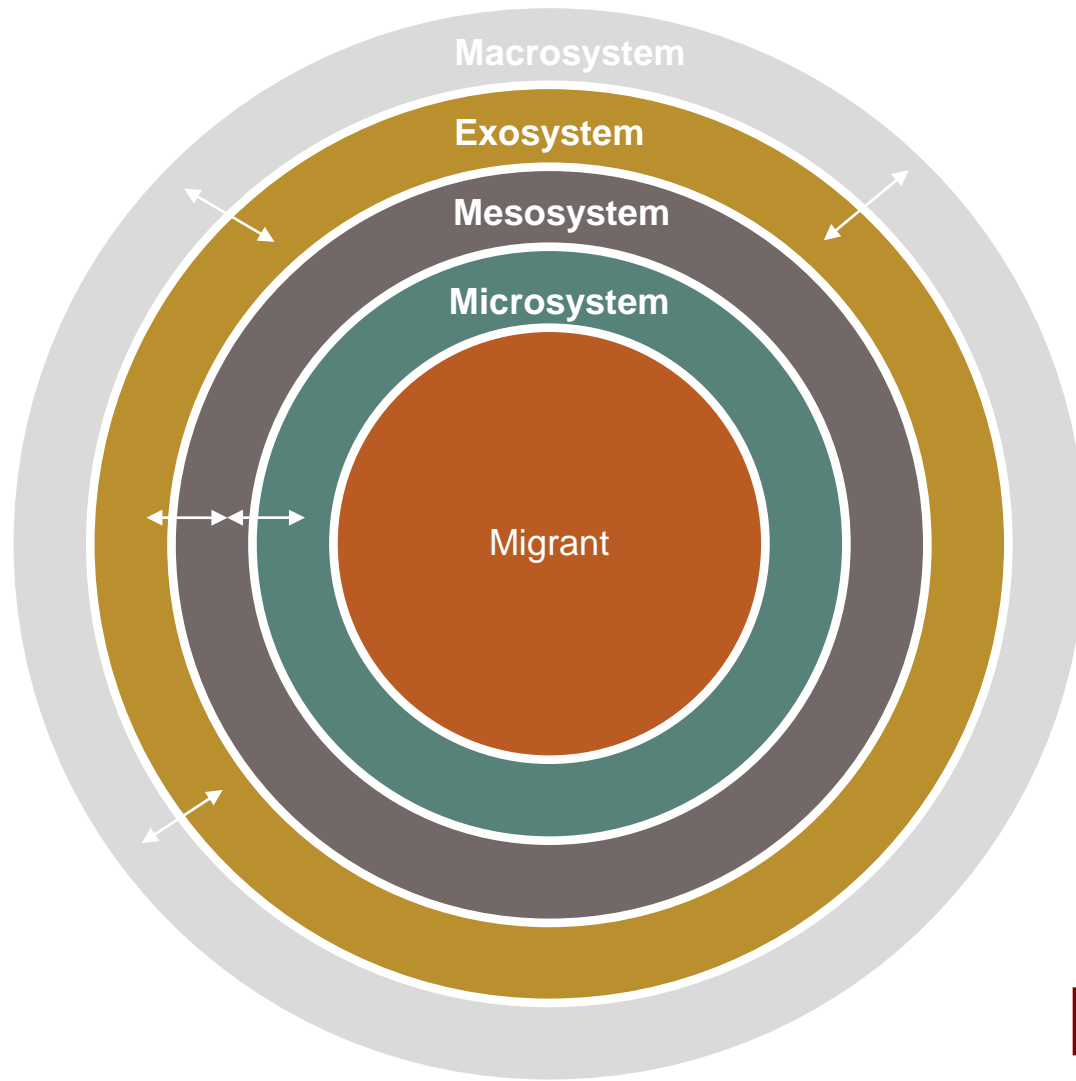
FINANCIAL EXPLOITATION

Respondents reported being asked for bribes at checkpoints and for trying to acquire documentation and services in transit countries, especially once the other party realized their vulnerability as an undocumented migrant.

The burden of debts incurred to pay for hidden and unforeseen costs exposed migrants to further exploitation.

They (Greek police) took our fingerprints and gave us a departure letter, telling us that we have to leave Greece within a month. They also made us pay EUR 60 each for the letters. You have to pay that from your own pocket. They do not care where and how you find it, but you have to find it and pay them. Those who could afford, they would let them go, but there were some who couldn't pay the EUR 60, and they stayed behind. In the hotel (in Greece) I met people, some of them Afghans, who owed so much money to the hotel that they couldn't move anywhere. They did not have a choice but to stay there for months.

– Migrant I, Afghan migrant in Berlin, Germany (seeking to go to Canada), February 2017



3. PROTECTION

*SMUGGLED MIGRANTS DO NOT SEEK OUT SUPPORT,
CRIMES AND ABUSE ARE UNDER REPORTED*

SUPPORT IN TRANSIT

Fragmented institutional support in transit and ad-hoc informal assistance

FORMAL SUPPORT

- Most migrants interviewed had not been aware of their **rights** in transit or legal services available
- They were shy, **scared of being detained and deported** if they did not possess legal status
- Many had had **negative experiences with formal institutions and law enforcement agencies**
- Finding institutional support came down to **chance encounters** – NGOs, lawyers, practitioners, activists
- **Cities** were key areas where assistance was difficult to access for migrants, where migrants interacted more with government officials and law enforcement agencies and were prone to abuse and exploitation and where they were most likely **to go invisible**.

INFORMAL SUPPORT

- **Churches and families** on the way that gave them food and water. In Europe, the church was identified by two migrants as a place where people were distributing food.
- Those interviewed also reported getting ad-hoc assistance **smuggling intermediaries**, who provided them with food and shelter, but these instances were rare.
- **Family back home** came to the financial rescue of migrants through money transfers and *Hawala* systems.
- **Information** was cited as a powerful tool towards developing coping mechanisms and solutions and the use of Facebook, twitter and news sites to keep up with the most recent developments, find other migrants or simply to negotiate their way in new geographical areas using GPS.

COPING

SAMUEL HALL.

For many, a breaking point came when they can no longer advance. This could manifest as jail or detention. Whether it was being faced with walls of barbed wire, barking dogs, and police violence, or being stranded on an island. When they could no longer see a way forward, when they felt their dream of reaching safety, security and opportunity was no longer attainable, when their only way out was through costly clandestine alternatives with smuggler they did not know, many hit a low point and broke down.

- Use of technology to keep in contact with family and friends and for information**
- Travelling companions as a coping mechanism**
- Use of existing skills as an opportunity**
- Soft skills and aspirations: Hope as a coping mechanism in the face of adversity**



CONCLUSION

The “Why” and “How” – Three messages:

1. Individual agency and autonomy, communities of origin and transit -

Smugglers are part of the social process of migration, with deep roots in communities of origin, transit and destination. They provide a vital service where structural systems for regular migration are absent, lacking or unequal.

2. Vulnerabilities are created in transit – new forms of forced migration, exploitation, new complications in the migrant-smuggler, migrant-state relationship. There is a correlation between what is legal and permissible, and the perpetuation of irregularity, vulnerability and the nature of smuggling.

3. The support system in transit is what needs to be addressed if we do not want to create new forms of structural inequalities. The amount of time spent waiting, wondering, not knowing who to turn to, not being able to turn to law enforcement, mean that migrants are not protected and unable to claim their rights.