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The American University in Cairo

School of Global Affairs & Public Policy (GAPP)

**Niger as a transit country for Nigerian and other  
West African migrants**

A Thesis Submitted by

Azeez Ganiyu

Submitted to the Center for Migration and Refugee Studies

[Summer 2020]

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
The degree of Master of Arts  
in Migration and Refugee Studies

has been approved by

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## Abstract

This thesis explores Niger as a transit country for Nigerian and other West African migrants and is informed by the border regime theory. This theory explains migration as a struggle on inclusion and exclusion among different actors within and across a border. These actors include migrants, states and their agencies, inter-governmental & non-governmental organizations, and individuals. This thesis uses qualitative research and relies on ethnographic research, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The thesis asks two research questions: (1) are the EU migration control agreements in the Sahel region and the Nigerien government migration law of 2015 strong enough to stop transiting migration in Niger. (2) What are the implications of the securitized migration policies on the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, economic well-being, and security in Niger. This thesis suggests two hypotheses: first, state border and migration control policy cannot stop or eradicate transiting migration because there is a strong connection between smuggling and trafficking networks and the overall functioning of Niger as a transit country. Second, securitization of migration is a threat to the ECOWAS Protocol of Free Movement of Persons of West African migrants and poses a danger to economic survival and security in Niger. The research findings confirm the thesis hypotheses. It also reveals the vulnerability of independent female migration in the Sahel region to smuggling, trafficking, and sex trade. In addition, it exposes the collaboration of state and non-state actors in undermining migration law.

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Table 1: EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa- 'migration management' projects in Niger.

### **Acronyms and Abbreviations**

APS	Alarmphone Sahara
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy.
CSDP	Common Security and Defense Policy
CSO	Civil Society Organization
ECOWAS	Economic Committee of West African States
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	European Union
EUBAM	EU Border Assistance Mission
EUCAP	European Union Capacity Building
EUTF	European Union Trust Fund
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FRONTEX	The European Border and Coast Guard Agency.
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
PAIERA	The Action Plan for Rapid Economic Impact in Agadez
UNHCR	United Nations Human Right Commission for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.
WHO	World Health Organization
WB	World Bank



# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

For centuries, Niger has been a crossroads for trans-Saharan migration caravan routes thanks to its geographic location. These routes link Africa to the Mediterranean region (Castle et al, 2013). Niger is also a landlocked country that shares its borders with Nigeria, Benin, Chad, Burkina Faso and Mali in West Africa, as well as Algeria and Libya in North Africa. Moreover, West African or ECOWAS<sup>1</sup> states (including Nigeria and Niger) have historically been transit, receiving, and sending countries for migrants, resulting in regular and common migration flows among these states (Xchange, 2019a). Conservative estimates suggested that approximately 100,000 migrants have passed through Niger each year since 2000; while about 330,000 migrants transited through the country in 2017 (Molenaar, 2017). In addition, three-quarters of all African migrants arriving by boat to Italy in recent years transited through Niger (Xchange, 2019a; Howden & Zandonini, 2018). Furthermore, according to the IOM Flow Monitoring Points (FMPs), an estimated 256,262 migrants transited through Niger to North Africa, with 93% heading to Libya and 7% to Algeria between February 1, and August 15, 2016 (Jerome et al 2018; Hall 2017; DIIS Policy Brief 2017). This data confirms the assertion that Niger's territory is commonly used as a transiting route by sub-Saharan migrants to North Africa and elsewhere (Styllanus 2017)

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<sup>1</sup> States/countries in West Africa region formed ECOWAS 1975. (Adepoju 2000: 3-28).

The diminished tourism industry in Niger due to political tension caused by the Tuareg rebellions in the late 2000s, along with the reported kidnapping cases of foreign workers in the country, significantly reduced the income of many Nigeriens whose livelihood relied on the industry (Xchange, 2019a; Bagnetto, 2012). Consequently, the dwindling tourism business forced some Nigeriens who were formerly employed in the tourism sector and possessed knowledge of the desert region to start smuggling mostly West African migrants from Agadez to Libya (Xchange, 2019a). In addition, as part of a socio-economic integration program, the Nigerien government encouraged former Tuareg rebels to resort to transporting migrants for a living instead of engaging in drug smuggling after peace talks in the 1990s and 2000s (Akkerman 2018). To bring this program to actuality, the Nigerien government provided ex-rebels with *papiers de courtoise*. These papers granted them legal permission to transport migrants from Agadez to Algeria (Xchange, 2019a). Transiting migration, particularly in Agadez, benefitted local economic sectors that sustained such migration patterns. These sectors notably include transportation, lodging, food vendors and money transfer (Hall 2017). This highlights the complex nature of transit migration activities in Niger. It involves different actors and is connected to economic, security and political factors.

However, in 2015, the Nigerien government implemented a migration law criminalizing the trafficking and smuggling of migrants (Hall 2017). This was in reaction to the widely circulated news of the discovery of 92 dead bodies (largely women and children) in the

Algerian desert after being-abandoned by smugglers (Xchange 2019a). In addition, this law was passed due to concerted pressure on the Nigerien government by the European Union (EU) (Molenaar, 2017). The law effectively made it illegal for non-Nigerien nationals to travel north of Agadez and cemented Niger's position as the southern externalized border of Europe. (Howden & Zandonini, 2018; Xchange, 2019a).

It is important to reemphasize that transporting migrants from Niger to North Africa was permitted before the implementation of the migration law in 2015. However, it became an offence to take part in such activities thereafter. The implementation of the law, therefore, had far-reaching consequences on the local economy. It majorly affected the livelihoods of Nigeriens that made their living from offering services to migrants. This includes former Tuareg rebels who were previously permitted by the Nigerien government to transport migrants. It also affected the entire Agadez region as its economy relied on the income generated by providing services to migrants transiting through the area (Akkerman 2018: 52). However, despite the law banning trafficking and smuggling of migrants in Niger, some individuals persisted in the act after 2015. These include smugglers who deploy different coping tactics to avoid being caught by security forces. The coping tactics adopted are bribing of police officers at checkpoints, relocation of the migration route, and using the services of the informants (Molenaar, 2017; Xchange, 2019a). I will later comment on this in the literature review section of the thesis.

Nigerian migrants who are transiting through Niger to North Africa, Europe, and other places are motivated by several factors. First, the economic downturn experienced in Nigeria following the introduction of the World Bank policy of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) by the Nigerian government in June 1986 forced many to migrate elsewhere (Afolayan et al, 2009). Other factors include the long reign of military dictatorship which committed human right violations and mismanaged the economy, as well as environmental/ecological issues (for instance, oil spillage in the Niger delta area and desertification along the Chad basin), and, in recent years, the Boko-Haram crisis (Comolli, 2017; Ikwuyatum, 2012; Adepoju, 2011; Afolayan, 1998). In addition, the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons within the region also boosted the number of Nigerian migrants transiting through Niger, particularly to Libya in the early 1990's. This was due to the thriving oil economy in Libya and the pan-Africanism policy of Gaddafi at the time (Barrios, 2015; Adepoju, 2000; Hein de Haas, 2006; Adepoju, 2004). This is further elaborated in the literature review section of this thesis.

Similarly, other West African states also experienced socioeconomic and political upheavals that forced some of their citizens to migrate out of their countries (Ikwuyatum, 2016, 2012; Olsen, 2011; Afolayan et al, 2009). For instance, Ikwuyatum (2012) notes that nationals of West Africa countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leon, Cote d'Ivoire, etc, experienced different waves and patterns of migration flows into diversified destinations due to civil war, political instability, and the economic crisis that occurred in

these countries in the late 1980s and 2000s. In addition, West African states also experienced labor, commercial and professional migration within the region and to various destinations and countries in Europe, South East Asia, the Arab-Gulf region and North America (See Figure 1) (Ikwuyatum, 2016, 2012; Olsen, 2011; Afolayan et al, 2009)

Fig 1: Intra-regional & international migration in West Africa



Source: Olsen 2011:6

The EU border externalization policies have also has a great impact on transit and irregular migration in the Sahel region. The EU’s attention was attracted to the North and Sahel regions of Africa due to concern over security of the EU’s borders, prevention of the alleged influx of migrants/refugees, and ensuring migrants’ safety (Reidy, 2018: Düvell, 2008). Therefore, the EU partnered with Niger, Morocco, Algeria, and Libya

toward preventing irregular migration, terrorism, and cross border banditry through its various policies, agreements, and plans. These included the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) 2004; the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (Euro-Med/Barcelona Process) 2005; the European Agenda on Migration 2015; the Valletta Agreement 2015; Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) partnership; and FRONTEX (Abebe, 2019; Mason, 2018; Akkerman, 2018; Molenaar, 2017; Cardwell, 2011; Düvell, 2008; Collyer, 2007).

A recent EU border externalization intervention in Niger is the Sahel Regional Action Plan of 2015-2020. Among the programs developed by the EU under the action plan is EUCAP Sahel Niger. This program focuses on border management, curbing irregular migration, and capacity training for Nigerien security and border personnel (Akkerman, 2018; Molenaar, 2017). The Nigerien government benefits financially from the EUCAP Sahel Niger and other EU intervention programs in the Sahel region. For instance, the EUCAP Sahel Niger budget was 18.4 million euros in 2016 (Hall, 2017). The EU also partnered with Niger through the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUFA). As indicated in Table 1 below, over 50 million Euros were provided for Niger through EUFA project in 2016 (Akkerman, 2018; Hall, 2017). The purpose was to use the funds for the prevention of irregular migration, enhanced security in Niger, and to maintain the EU border externalization in the Sahel region. Individual European countries also deployed their military personnel for migration control in the region. For instance, the Italian parliament

approved the deployment of 470 troops to Niger, 400 to Libya and 60 to Tunisia in February 2018. French President, Emanuel Macron, also proposed to increase the number of French soldiers in Niger for border control by December 2017 (Akkerman, 2018). Furthermore, French and Spanish police officers work together with the Nigerien police personnel to trail and arrest smugglers (Zandonini, 2019).

**Table 1: EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa- ‘migration management’ projects in Niger.**

Project	Funding
Setting up a joint investigation team to combat irregular immigration, human trafficking and people smuggling	€6 million
Support for justice and security in Niger to fight organized crime, smuggling and human trafficking (AJUSEN)	€30 million
Response mechanism and resources for migrants (MRRM)	€7 million
Programme de renforcement de la gestion et de la gouvernance des migrations et le retour durable au Niger (Sustainable Return from Niger- SURENI)	€15 million

**Source: (Akkerman, 2018:51)**

## 1.2 Justification of the Thesis

The dynamics of transit migration in the sub-Saharan African countries have not been fully researched and understood. This creates a wide gap in the academic literature, bearing in mind the increasing academic interest about migrants transiting through North African countries. Consequently, conducting research about Nigerian migrants transiting through Niger to North Africa, Europe or other places fills an important gap in the academic literature in Migration and Refugee Studies. This thesis, therefore, adds to the understudied literature of transiting migration in the Sahel region of Africa. It

examines the activities of actors involved in transit migration and their impacts on the migrants and transit territory.

### 1.3 Aim and Objectives

The overall aim of the thesis is to explore the dynamics of Nigerian migrants transiting through Niger as they migrate to North Africa or elsewhere. The objectives are to:

- Explore the experiences of the Nigerian migrants in the context of transiting migration.
- Explore in-depth the situation in Niger as a transit country.
- Investigate the role and action of the migrants, migrants' network-links, the government, and regional and international bodies in the dynamics of transiting migration.
- Understand the impact of the restrictive migration policies and increased securitization of migration on the feminization of migration, security, and economic activities in the transit territory.

### 1.4 Research Questions

To better explore the aim and objectives of the thesis, two research questions were developed and researched. The questions were used as a guide to understanding the circumstances surrounding the mobility of Nigerian migrants transiting through Niger in the context of the migration policies they move under. The questions are:

(1) Are the EU migration control agreements in the Sahel region and the Nigerian government migration law of 2015 strong enough to stop transiting migration in Niger?



(2) What are the implications of the securitized migration policies on the ECOWAS Protocol of Free Movement, economic well-being and security in Niger?

## 1.5 Hypotheses

To answer these two research questions, the thesis suggests two hypotheses, namely:

- (1) State border and migration control policy cannot stop or eradicate transiting migration because there is a strong connection between smuggling and trafficking networks and the functioning of Niger as a transit country.
- (2) Second, securitization of migration is a threat to the ECOWAS Protocol of Free Movement of West African migrants and poses a danger to the economic survival and security in Niger.

## 1.6 Structure of the research project.

This thesis is divided into seven chapters including the present one, which is the Introduction. Chapter 2 will examine the methods used for this research. In Chapter 3, the research will review the relevant academic literature and the theoretical framework. The literature review provides an overview of prior research that is related to transiting migration, while the border regime theory offers the relevant theoretical background for the research project. Chapters 4 and 5 will cover the results of the research project. Chapter 4 will specifically focus on the migrants' experience at the airport, land borders, and roadways; Chapter 5 will present the results on the situation of transiting migration in Agadez through fieldwork. In Chapter 6, results of the research will be discussed by summarizing the key findings and meaningfully analyze and relate them to the aims,

hypotheses, and question of the research. The findings will also be compared to the postulations of the border regime theory, literature, and/or previous research evidence. This chapter also explains the significance of the unexpected findings, limitations of the findings, improvements that could be made to the research, suggestions, and directions for future research. Finally, Chapter 7 provides the overall conclusion of the research project.

## Chapter 2: Methodology and Methods.

It is important to distinguish between Methodology and Methods. Methodology is a general orientation about how research is done, while methods are a specific research technique used to collect and analyze data for investigating a topic (Marvasti, 2004). In addition, methodology refers to epistemological questions and the underlying logic of research. A key dispute in epistemology is between positivists who claim that there is an objective world outside us as observers and constructivists, who believe that meanings are constructed, interpreted, and constantly re-constructed by people in their perceptions and social interactions (Castles, 2012).

### 2.1 Methodology:

This research project is based on the qualitative methodological approach. It relies on the philosophical orientation of constructionism. Constructionism is built on the speculations that our knowledge of social reality is thought to be subjective, situationally and culturally variable, and ideologically conscious (Marvasti, 2004). As Schwandt (2000:197) explains, constructionism suggests that as human beings, "we do not find or discover knowledge so much as we construct or make it".

Some factors influenced the use of the qualitative research approach in this thesis. First, qualitative research methods are more useful and operational for the sake of the research questions. This is most important because my interview participants were very often undocumented, vulnerable, and difficult-to-approach migrants (Mohamed & Hein,

2012; Red Cross, 2018). Moreover, due to the lack of appropriate official statistical records on migration in the Sahel region, transiting migration research in Niger is better and appropriately mirrored in a descriptive approach as offered by the qualitative research method, rather than the quantitative method (Castles, 2012; Mohamed & Hein, 2012; Green and Thorogood, 2009:5). In addition, the qualitative method provides a way for a detailed narrative that demonstrates the context and substance of the migrant's experience as indicated in the aim and objectives of my research project (Hammersley, 1992, cited in Marvasti, 2004; Patton, 1990).

## 2.2 Method:

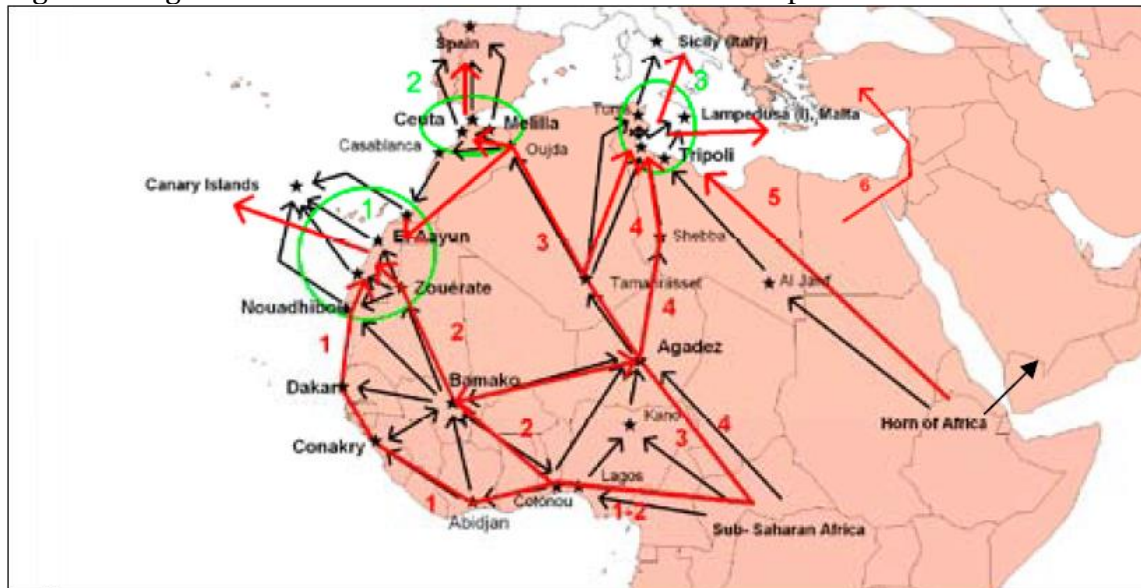
This section includes data collection; data analysis; limitation and ethical issues.

### 2.2.1 Data collection

The findings of this thesis are based on ethnographic research. The data collection methods comprise: desk research, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), as well as informal conversations. The ethnographic research, semi structured interviews and FGDs were conducted in Agadez between 25 January and 13 February 2020. The city was considered as an appropriate site for the fieldwork because of its function as a major transiting route for migrants departing Niger to North Africa and onto other places (See Figure 2). Indeed, one third of the migrants that have passed through Niger have end up on a boat to Europe (Abebe, 2019). Moreover, an IOM report indicated that over 60,000 migrants transited through

Agadez, among whom were 45,000 that traveled in the direction of Libya between February and April 2016 (Prestianni, 2016).

Figure 2: Migration Routes from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe.



Source: Van Mapps 2006 cited in Adepoju 2008

Research participants were purposely selected through the snow-ball sampling technique. This sampling method is essential when gaining direct access to the study participants is difficult, except when using the referral system from a first potential participant who recommends others (Russell, 2006). For the purpose of this research project, Alarmphone Sahara (APS), an NGO based in Agadez, served as my gatekeeper in reaching some of the interview participants.

In my research, I conducted nine semi-structured interviews of migrants as follows: (a) In Agadez I interviewed seven migrants that included six Nigerians (4 females and 2 males) and one Beninese female migrant; and (b) along the Niamey-Agadez roadway I

interviewed two participants that comprised a Ghanaian and Malian migrant. The interview sessions were held in the English language, recorded, and transcribed in English. Participants were asked questions connected to the objectives of the thesis project. The questions asked focused on issues such as their transiting experience, coping tactics, and ambition for transiting through Niger.

Furthermore, in Agadez, I conducted interviews with a migrants' rights activist, a female journalist, an ex-migrant's transporter (driver), and two staff members of an NGO.

Unfortunately, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) rejected my interview request (see Appendix III). In addition, I conducted focus group discussions with four Ghanaians (2 male and 2 female) and two Nigeriens (2 males). The interviews and the focus group discussions were conducted in the English language, recorded, and transcribed in English.

The remaining research participants were part of the ethnographic research, which included participant observation, group and individual discussions, casual conversations, and interactions. These participants were border and security officers, bus drivers, hoteliers, and two Chadian migrants. The in-depth literature review was conducted using desk research. The reviewed materials were research papers, academic journals, books, newspaper articles, institutions, and governmental publications.

### 2.2.2 Data Analysis

Based on the synthesis of data generated through ethnographic research, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, the literature review and theoretical framework (border regime theory); the main body of the thesis, particularly the result sections, were thematically derived and developed. The themes are associated with the aims and objectives of the thesis. The data was analyzed and appropriately coded in accordance with open, axial, and selective coding procedures as described in the theoretical thematic analysis (Pragna and Ria, 2011; Boyatzis, 1998).

I developed the themes by following these steps: first, I familiarized myself with my fieldwork data by reading the transcribing interviews and field note documentation carefully. Second, I assigned initial codes according to the content of the data. Third, I organized the codes into themes or patterns that addressed the research questions of the thesis. Finally, I reviewed and defined these themes based on their composition.

Analysis of each of the themes will be described in the results section by using quotations and data generated through the interviews, ethnographic research, focus group discussions, literature review and the theoretical framework (border regime theory). The final analysis of the themes is in the discussion chapter. The key findings will be analyzed and linked to the research questions, academic literature, and theoretical framework.

### 2.3 Limitation.

The 2015 migration law in Niger made it a challenge to gain the trust of the migrants for the purpose of interviews or discussion. This law made it a criminal offence to engage in irregular migration or engage in activities that facilitate irregular entry, stay, and exit of migrants in the country (Xchange, 2019a; Molenaar, 2017). Therefore, migrants transiting through Niger were in constant fear of being arrested by the police if they were identified. As a result, they were nervous speaking with someone they were not familiar with and suspicious of anyone asking questions about their movement. Their lack of trust in strangers was worsened by the presence of police informants all around the city of Agadez. Thus, there was no secure place to hold interviews. Mohamed & Hein de Haas (2012) agreed that it was tough to approach most migrants within Africa for interviews due to their vulnerability as undocumented and irregular migrants.

The obstacles in reaching the migrants, as mentioned above, restricted my sample size of Nigerian interviewees to six. However, I gained enough data for my thesis because in addition to interviewing the six Nigerian participants, I also conducted interviews, ethnographic research, and focus group discussions with other actors such as migrants from other West African countries, NGO staff, a migrants' rights activist, former migrant transporters (drivers), a female journalist, and security and border officers. It is appropriate to clarify that using data derived from other West African migrants is relevant in this research project because: (1) Nigeria and other West African migrants are covered by the same ECOWAS Protocol of Free Movement; and (2) all West African



migrants are subject to the same treatment by Nigerian border guards. Although it was difficult to get access to migrants who are transiting through Niger, I managed to conduct interviews despite these obstacles. In Agadez, I gained the trust of the six Nigerian participants because I speak their native Yoruba language. In addition, I was also lucky to have migrants who were transiting through Niger on board the same bus with me from Niamey to Agadez. These migrants comprised one Ghanaian, one Malian, and two Chadians. The long trip by road took over 20 hours (3am to 12 am). This created an opportunity for me to gain the intimacy and trust of these migrants. I subsequently interviewed two of the migrants (Ghanaian and Malian) and conducted participant observation with the other two who were Chadians. Furthermore, I conducted participant observation on the border and security officers along the roadway. In addition, the refusal of my interview request by IOM denied me the chance of making visitations to the IOM transit camp(s) in Niger.

#### 2.4. Ethical issues

In compliance with AUC thesis conduct and regulation, I obtained the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for my research project on June 27, 2019. (See: Appendix I). Participants in the study were given the consent form to read and understand. The signatures of the participants were secured after agreeing to the content of the Consent Form. (See: Appendix II)

The interviews commenced after informing the participants that their participation is completely voluntary, and coercion will be avoided. There are no risks whatsoever to the participants in the study. Also, participants could withdraw from the interview at any time without giving any reason or suffering any penalty. Participants were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality, as their identity will not be disclosed in the research project. My supervisor will have access to the anonymous interview materials. The anonymous interview materials will be kept for 3 years (as indicated by AUC IRB Policy) in a locked cabinet in my office.

## Chapter 3: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents a review of the literature on migration in the Sahel region in order to understand what is already known on the subject of migrants transiting through Niger and to identify gaps in the literature. The chapter also examines the border regime theory which provides the theoretical framework for this research project.

### 3.1 Literature Review

Transit migration refers to a kind of assumed impermanent or transient movement of migrants from one country to another. The movement might cover long distances and time. It might also be unsafe and involve constant changing of direction (Düvell, 2008). Thus, the term transit migration is complex, dynamic, fluid, and multifaceted in scope and theme (Castles, 2012; Pablo, 2012). It is significant to note that previous academic research on migration through the Sahara region mostly pays attention to countries in North Africa with less interest on transit countries in the Sahel region (Brachet, 2012). However, in recent years, the Sahel region has become an important transit territory of concern for researchers and policy makers. This was a result of various factors, namely: (1) the perceived impression of the influx of migrants from the region into North African countries with the intention of later crossing the Mediterranean sea into Europe; (2) the EU interests in the Sahel and Maghreb regions through its border externalization agreement and cooperation with some countries in the regions; and finally (3) the need

to protect the right of migrants to free movement (Xchange, 2019; Akkerman, 2018; Lois, et al 2017; Molenaar, 2017; Brachet, 2012).

This literature review will cover relevant themes that address the objectives and research questions of the thesis. The themes covered include, among others: transiting that pre-dates the colonial era; causes of Nigerian migrants transiting through Niger; securitization of migration; EU migration control and border externalization policies; ECOWAS Protocol in the context of the restrictive migration measures; economic and political unrest versus the migration law of 2015; corrupt border guards and their collaborators; migrants' experience; coping strategies; feminization of migration; and non-governmental organization interventions. The section concludes with a summary of relevant facts from the reviewed materials. Therefore, the following section of the literature review will focus on examining these themes.

### 3.1.1 Transiting migration that pre-dates the colonial era

Literature evidence shows that transit migration in the Sahel region predates the colonial era (Molanner, 2017; Ikwuyatum, 2016; Ikwuyatum, 2012; Olsen, 2011; Adepaju 2004 ,2000; Hein de Haas, 2006; Yaro, 2007; Bakewell and de Haas, 2007). Ikwuyatum (2012) and Yaro (2007) among others, explain that movement of people in the region can be classified into pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial eras. In the pre-colonial era, events such as trans-Saharan trade, pilgrimage to Mecca, and seasonal migration of nomadic herdsman influenced human mobility in the Sahel region. During the colonial

era, factors such as improvement in transport services and implementation of economic and recruitment policies encouraged migration in the period. While in the post-colonial era, the ECOWAS Protocol, economic downturns and other socio-economic factors enhanced human mobility. Ikwuyatum (2016, 2012), Hein de Haas (2006) and Adepoju (2004 & 2000), explain that in these three eras, mobility of people between Nigeria and Niger, as well as among all countries in the Sahel region, was a regular practice (NISER, 1998; UNDP and Development Prospect Group, 2005).

### 3.1.2 Causes of Nigerian migrants transiting through Niger

Literature further reveals that most undocumented Nigerian migrants transit through Chad or Niger to North Africa on their journey through the Mediterranean region to the Gulf Arab countries and Western Europe. (Adepoju, 1991 as cited in Ikwuyatum, 2016). Previous studies indicate that various factors were responsible for the migration of Nigerians out of Nigeria. One of the main factors was the economic crisis experienced in the country due to the implementation of the World Bank's Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in early 1990's (Ikwuyatum, 2016, 2012). Another related factor was the political crisis that engulfed the country due to the dictatorship regime of the military, especially since the early 1980's until the late 1990's (Ikwuyatum, 2012; Adepoju 2011; Jimi, 1997). The economic meltdown and political instability in Nigeria at the time coincided with the ratifications of the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of West Africans by the ECOWAS states in 1980, and the pan-African policy of the Libyan

government, which encouraged migration of Nigerians and other Sub-Saharan African nationals into Libya in the late 1980's and early 1990's (Lois, et. al. 2017; Ikwuyatum, 2012; Olsen, 2011). Therefore, due to the economic decline and political crisis in Nigeria, Nigerian migrants transited through Niger (an ECOWAS member state) to Libya or elsewhere, taking advantage of the ECOWAS Protocol of Free Movement. Adepaju (2011) further states that the main motivation for this type of migration is the potential for remittances and other socio-economic opportunities accessible in foreign countries. Other factors that caused an increase in Nigerian migration include environmental deterioration, such as oil spillage in the Niger Delta and desert encroachment in northern Nigeria (Adepaju, 2011 & 2004; Van Hear, 1998; Richmond, 1994). Comolli (2017) and Ikwuyatum (2012) further note that ethno-religion crises, herder-farmer conflict, and in recent years, Boko Haram insurgency has forced many Nigerians to migrate (Haruna & Nuhu, 2019). This substantiates the UNHCR (2020) report that over 20,000 migrants escaped from the north-western part of Nigeria to Niger due to violence caused by armed groups and bandits in April 2020.

### 3.1.3 Securitization of migration in Niger

Another central issue identified in the literature in connection to this research project is the securitization of migration in Niger (Abebe, 2019; Krzysztof, 2018; Buzan, 1998). According to Abebe (2019) and Krzysztof (2018), securitization of migration is the framing of migration as a threat to a state's security, economic stability, and national

identity. These issues inspire states to take measures to reduce immigration by initiating additional restrictive migration rules, which include increased surveillance, imprisonment, and expulsion (Abebe, 2019; Rogier, 2016). In addition, some states construct border walls and other deterrents to strictly control migration. Examples of such border 'walls' include the United States with Mexico; Israel with Palestine (West Bank); the EU with Morocco; India with Bangladesh; Bangladesh with Burma; Australia's sea borders; and Hungary's razor-wire fencing (Mason, 2018; Jones, 2016).

Scholars have expressed much concern and uncertainty about the fatal repercussions of securitized migration. For instance, Jones (2016) notes that such a migration approach cannot discourage migrants from attempting to cross the borders, but rather, inspires them to use extremely dangerous routes such as deserts, seas, and forests; risking their lives in the process. The author maintains that borders promote violence and approximately 40,000 migrants lost their lives while trying to cross various national borders globally between 2005 and 2014. In another study, Albahari (2015) explains that roughly 30,000 migrants have drowned in the Mediterranean since 1990. Galtung (1969) cited in Krzysztof (2018) emphasizes that many migrants from poor countries were denied access into the labor market in the global North due to the labeling of migrants as a security risk

In the case of Niger, the Nigerien government initiated the migration law of 2015 in which it collaborated with the EU on the implementation of a border externalization

policy in the country (Xchange, 2019a, 2019b). The top priority of these securitized migration measures is to regulate mobility and reduce the number of migrants transiting through Niger to North Africa and, afterward, to Europe (Akkerman, 2018; Abebe, 2019). However, authors disapprove of the policy for causing more difficulties in Niger and the Sahel region, rather than addressing the root causes of irregular migration. For instance, Abebe (2019) explains that securitization of migration is inappropriate in Niger because of three main reasons, namely: (1) a restrictive migration law cannot stop irregular migration; (2) the policy worsens the security situation in Agadez; and (3) it over emphasizes reducing the number of migrants rather than finding solutions to the main causes of the migration. The author further discloses that Agadez has been experiencing an increase in smuggling and insecurity since the enactment of the migration law in 2015. Moreover, there was an increase in arms and drug trafficking, as well as trans-national border crossing of bandits and terrorist groups in Niger and other countries in the Sahel region since 2015 (Bruno 2019; Olukayode 2018; Comolli 2017; Molenaar 2017).

This agrees with the explanation of Molenaar (2017) that the security situation in Niger became more aggravated due to the complicity of the state security agents (border guard, police, and army), politicians and other actors (transporter, smugglers, etc.) in irregular migration activities. Hence, criminal and smuggler networks continue to intensify their activities and expand their networks in Niger (Molenaar, 2017). In



addition, Akkerman (2018) and Xchange (2019a) agree that the policy violates the human rights of the migrants, inhibits their development, and encourages oppression. Literature further reveals that the EU has been the driving force behind the securitization of migration in Niger and other countries in the Sahel and Maghreb regions. The aim of the EU is to control mobility of sub-Saharan African migrants through the Sahara Desert into North Africa, and, subsequently along the Mediterranean Sea into the EU zone (Abebe, 2019; Zandonini, 2019; Akkerman, 2018; Howden and Zandonini, 2018; Lois et al, 2017; Molenaar, 2017; Rogier, 2016). For instance, an IOM survey specifies that mobility of migrants from Agadez to the Libyan border declined from 298,000 to 50,000 migrants on annual basis from 2016 to 2018 (Zandonini, 2019). Abebe (2019) and Akkerman (2018) add that the policy helped the EU actualize its short-term goal of discouraging sub-Saharan migrants into its territory; while undermining the long-term development, peace, and security in the Africa region.

### 3.1.4 EU migration control and border externalization policies

Furthermore, the EU collaborates with countries in Africa such as Niger, Morocco, Algeria, and Libya toward preventing irregular migration, terrorism, and cross border banditry through the Sahel and Maghreb region into the EU zone (EUCAP, 2020; EUTF, 2020; Abebe, 2019; Mason, 2018; Akkerman, 2018; Molenaar, 2017; Hertog, 2016; Cardwell, 2011; Düvell, 2008; Collyer, 2007). The EU spearheads and achieves this partnership through policies such as the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the

Joint Valletta Action Plan, the EU Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing the root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa (EUTF), including operational mechanisms such as FRONTEX, and the deployment of European troops in African countries (Abebe, 2019; Xchange, 2019a, 2019b; Akkerman, 2018; Hall, 2017). Hertog (2016) states that the upmost priority of these policies is to address security and irregular migration challenges. However, Abebe (2019) notes that the EU policies and agreements on migration contributes to the increased securitization of migration in the African region. Moreover, Howden & Zandonini (2019), Zandonini, (2018) and Molenaar (2017) emphasize that the implementation of the EU border externalization agreements in Niger creates economic challenges and causes expansion of smuggling and trafficking network in the Sahel region (Abebe, 2019; Xchange, 2019a, 2019b; Akkerman, 2018)

As commented earlier, the EU partnered with Niger and other countries in Africa towards ensuring security, migration control, and stability in the region through different programs such as EUCAP and EUTF (EUCAP, 2020; EUTF, 2020; Xchange, 2019a; Akkerman, 2018; Hall, 2017). For instance, EUCAP Sahel Niger, also referred to as the European Union Capacity Building Mission in Niger, was launched in 2012 (Xchange, 2019a). It is a civilian mission and one of the 16 tasks under the EU Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) focusing on international peace, stability, and security (EUCAP, 2020). EUCAP Sahel Niger aims to support and enhance Nigerien security forces

through training, strategic advice, and equipment (Xchange, 2019a; Akkerman, 2018). However, its mission was expanded over the years to cover areas such as preventing irregular migration, including smuggling and trafficking, since 2015 (EUCAP, 2020; Xchange, 2019a). EUCAP Sahel Niger has trained 25,557 Nigeriens and provided equipment worth EUR 4.9 million in 2018. It also collaborated with other CSDP missions and EU agencies that include EUCAP Sahel Mali, EUBAM Libya, FRONTEX, and include international partners such as IOM, UNHCR and UNODC (EUCAP, 2020; Akkerman, 2018).

Moreover, the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF for Africa) was launched by European and African partners at the Valletta Summit on Migration in November 2015. The EUTF for Africa agreement was signed by the European Commission, 25 EU Member States, Norway, and Switzerland on 12 November 2015. It was formed to address the root causes of irregular migration, instability, forced displacement and includes ensuring robust migration management in Africa (EUTF, 2020; Xchange, 2019a).

EUTF for Africa is applied in twenty-six partner countries across three regions of Africa: (1) the Sahel and Lake Chad; (2) the Horn of Africa; and (3) North Africa. These countries are facing challenges such as high population, poverty, poor socio-economic conditions, conflicts, and environmental crises. EUTF for Africa targets four main strategic goals, namely: (1) greater economic and employment opportunities; (2) strengthening resilience of communities; (3) improved migration management; and (4) improved

governance and conflict prevention (EUTF, 2020). The approved spending of the EUTF in the three regions is approximately €4.4 billion in 2020 (EUTF, 2020).

Niger is one of the countries in the Sahel and Lake Chad region of Africa under the EUTF. In Niger, the EUTF focuses on four areas of intervention, such as: (1) protection of migrants, advice, assistance on return, and reintegration; (2) the creation of economic opportunities and professional training in transit areas to reduce the share of the economy based on irregular migration by providing retraining to legitimate sectors and sustainable alternatives; (3) the fight against criminal networks and human trafficking, by delivering support to the government to reinforce the justice, security and border management departments; and (4) support for populations which are victims of displacement and reinforcement of institutional and community resilience in the Diffa region. (EUTF, 2020). In 2018 and 2017, the EUTF spent EUR 253 million in Niger on 12 projects covering four areas that include: (1) improved governance and conflict prevention; (2) improved migration management; (3) strengthening resilience; and (4) greater economic and employment opportunity (EUTF, 2020).

### 3.1.5 ECOWAS Protocol in the context of restrictive migration measures

In addition, it is appropriate to emphasize that border creation and demarcation during the colonial regimes have, until today, a significant impact on the transit and cross border migration in the Sahel region of West Africa (MacArthur, 2019; Molenaar, 2017; Ikwuyatum, 2012; Mahmoud, 2011; Adepoju, 2011, 2008). Ikwuyatum (2012) and

Mahmoud (2011) note that the disregard for the people's cultural, tribal, and ethnic affiliations in the delineation of the colonial borders weakens the effectiveness of the borderline. Indeed, years after colonial regime and attainment of independence, many West African migrants perceive demarcation of borderlines as artificial. They consider crossing international borders as moving within the same socio-cultural space, rather than crossing two or more different countries (Olsen, 2011; Afolayan et al, 2009; Adepoju, 2008).

MacArthur (2019) clarifies that colonial borders are porous, ill-defined and alter the internally diverse practices of mobility and belonging among the people of sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, borders reshape the nomadic spatial and social relationships and organization of the region. Adepoju (2008) verifies that colonial borders challenge free mobility of traditional seasonal and frontier workers, like pastoralists and farmers, and necessitates contractual agreements for non-permanent movement of contract workers across national boundaries in the sub-Saharan countries (Adepoju 2008). Consequently, colonial borders confront the historical pre-colonial unrestricted mobility of the people in the Sahel region of Africa. In addition, the borderline disrupts the social and economic life of sub-Saharan people that rely on kinship affinity and communality relationship, rather than official boundary demarcation (MacArthur, 2019; Molenaar, 2017).

However, independent West African states have made efforts at reviving the traditional cooperation among the people in the region through the formation of ECOWAS. To

address the shortfalls of colonial borders and to promote regional mobility within the Sahel region, West African states implemented the ECOWAS Protocol. As explained by Lois et al. (2017) regional mobility in West Africa was enhanced through the regional body called ECOWAS and its 1979 Protocol. Article 59 of the Protocol states that “citizens of the community shall have the right of entry, residence and establishment and member states undertake to recognize those rights of community citizens in their territories in accordance with the provisions of the Protocols relating thereto.” (Lois et al., 2017:5:3). Although, to date, only the first phase relating to the free movement of persons has been fully implemented by all ECOWAS countries. Therefore, citizens of the ECOWAS states in possession of valid travel documents and health certificates can enter any ECOWAS member state visa free for up to 90 days (Lois et al., 2017). The upmost objective of the Protocol is to recreate a borderless West Africa region with an ECOWAS passport, prohibit stiff border procedures and dismantle security roadblocks on international main roads to avoid interruption, harassment, and extortion (Adepoju, 2005).

Although people in the Sahel region are historically known to be highly mobile, the ECOWAS Protocol of Free Movement further invigorates regional migration and subsequently contributes to migration outside the region. For instance, Lois, et al. (2017) explains that the West Africa region has the highest rate of migration in Africa with very high intra-regional migration that accounts for 70 to 83% of total West African

migration. In addition, 30 million West Africans have settled in another country between 1960 and 1990 (OECD/SWAC, 2006 cited in Lois, et al., 2017). Furthermore, an increase in regional migration was recorded with more rights granted to the migrants. According to Touré (1998) cited in Adepoju (2011), immigrant workers from Burkina Faso, Mali, Nigeria, Liberia, Senegal, and Ghana working in the Côte d'Ivoire's plantations constituted 17% of the total population in 1965; 22% in 1975; 28% in 1988; and 25% in 1993. As at 1995, out of a population of 14 million in Côte d'Ivoire, 4 million were immigrants and were granted the right to work, vote, marry the natives and own property (Adepoju, 2011). Moreover, the Protocol provides a viable space for circular and mixed migration of traders, workers, refugees, and displaced persons common in the Sahel and Sub-Saharan region. It encourages intra-regional and international mobility that has made most countries in the region serve simultaneously as territories of origin, transit, and destination (Adepoju, 2008).

However, the current migration policies in Niger sharply oppose the ECOWAS Protocol provision for free movement of West African migrants across the Sahel region. Two main restrictive migration policies are identified in Niger, namely: (1) the Nigerien government migration law of 2015. The law made it illegal for non-Nigeriens to travel north of Agadez and, therefore, positioned Niger as the Southern border of the EU (Xchange, 2019a; Howden & Zandonini, 2018); and (2) the border externalization and migration control agreement between the EU and some countries in Africa, including

Niger (Akkerman, 2018; Lois, et al., 2017). These migration policies resulted in some shortcomings in Niger and the Sahel region. For instance, the policy frames migration from the Sahel region to Morocco, Algeria, and Libya as a possible onward trip to Europe and, therefore, disrupts the previous mobility patterns from the Sahel region to North Africa or elsewhere. (Lois, et al., 2017; Walton-Roberts and Hennebry; 2014; Brachet, 2012). In addition, the restrictive migration policy in Niger challenges the circular migration of traders and artisans commonly practiced in the Sahel and sub-Saharan region of Africa (Molenaar. 2017).

It is essential to emphasize that circular migration is central to the economic survival of the Sahel region. This is due to the continued short fallings in the agricultural sector and the unstable economic situation in many West African countries since the 1990s.

Therefore, more people from the region were drawn into circular migration as traders and artisans travelling across the region (Adepoju, 2008). Conservative reports show that the majority of these cross-border migrants were traversing the Sahel and North Africa region with no intention of crossing to Europe as shown in Figure 3 (Molenaar, 2017).

Therefore, a very small proportion of these migrants continue their mobility to Europe, contrary to the EU claim that a large number of migrants from the Sahel and sub-Saharan region are attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea to Europe (Lois, et al., 2017; Brachet, 2012).



Figure 3: Migrants' origins and destinations- the Agadez-Sebha route

<b>Origins</b>		<b>Destination</b>	
Niger	36%	Libya: 81%	Europe: 18%
Nigeria	26%		
Senegal	12%		
The Gambia	9%		
Ivory Coast	5%		
Other	13%		

Source: IOM, Niamey, 2016 Cited in Molenaar, 2017.

Additionally, Nigerian, and other West African migrants encounter challenges while transiting through Niger, despite the ECOWAS Protocol that ensures their free mobility (Abebe, 2019; Xchange, 2019a; Red Cross, 2018; Akkerman, 2018; Molenaar, 2017; Ikwuyatum, 2012; Adepoju, 2005). For example, Red Cross (2018) and Akkerman (2018) emphasize that the restrictive migration policies that brand migration of sub-Saharan Africans beyond Agadez as illegal hinder the free mobility of these migrants. Moreover, Lois et al. (2017) note that some West African migrants travelling in the region are undocumented and, therefore, not able to prove their ECOWAS citizenship status, nor enjoy the rights attached to such status. Consequently, these migrants are likely to use smugglers' services and are more vulnerable to pay bribes while crossing the borders (Akkerman, 2018; Molenaar, 2017; Xchange, 2019a; Brachet, 2012).

Furthermore, the restrictive migration policies have made living situations extremely problematic and much tougher for migrants and Nigerien citizens (Xchange, 2019a, 2019b; IOM, 2018). According to Xchange (2019a) all sorts of migrants are stuck in

Agadez, among whom are economic migrants, migrants in transit, asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants driven back from North Africa, including migrants from the central and eastern regions of Africa. The conglomeration of static migrants in Niger, predominantly in Agadez, overwhelm the already worn-out safety-nets provided by the care giver and humanitarian organizations and puts serious pressure on the local economy (Xchange 2019a; IOM, 2018)

### 3.1.6 Economic and political unrest versus the Migration law of 2015

Additionally, the poor economic situation and political unrest in Niger have made the implementation of the migration law in the country inconsiderate to the needs of Nigeriens. According to the World Bank (2020) report, Niger is one of the poorest countries in the world with a very high poverty rate at 41.4%, affecting over 9.5 million people in 2019. Moreover, according to the World Food Programme (2020), over 1.5 million Nigeriens were affected by food shortage since 2017. The food insecurity in the country has been caused by factors such as poor agricultural yield due to climate change, poor rainfall, and desertification, security challenges, as well as an increasing population (World Bank 2020; Amladi, 2017; Hall, 2017; Molenaar, 2017).

It is important to mention that many Nigeriens are able to survive the poverty challenges because of the income they make by providing services to migrants (EuroNews, 2019; Howden & Zandonini, 2018; Molenaar, 2017). For example, migrants in transit contributed 100 million euros (\$113.8m) into the local Niger economy as

indicated in the IOM study in 2016 (Zandonini, 2019). Indeed, on a weekly basis, a Nigerien woman providing food service to migrants earned 35,000 CFA (\$60) before 2015, while she barely earns 2000 CFA (\$3.4) a week by selling peanuts since the implementation of the migration law in 2015 (Zandonini, 2019). Barrios (2015) adds that drivers who can transport 30 to 40 migrants in their pickup truck from Agadez to Libya earned 4,000 euros per month before the adoption of the migration law in 2015. This encouraged the emergence of underground networks that continue to smuggle and traffic migrants from Niger to North Africa in more dangerous ways (Molenaar, 2017; Xchange, 2019a, 2019b)

Similarly, the political crisis in Niger necessitated that the government reach agreements with former rebels in transporting migrants from Niger to North Africa before the adoption of the migration law in 2015 (Akkerman, 2018). Unfortunately, following the ban on migration, the compensation scheme aimed at creating alternative economic opportunity for these former rebels and smugglers has been poorly managed and inadequate (Zandonini, 2019). Therefore, it is perfectly reasonable to suggest that the migration law in Niger drastically diminishes Nigeriens source of livelihood, increases the poverty rate, and creates loopholes for probable future political unrest (Xchange, 2019a, 2019b; Howden & Zandonini, 2018; Akkerman, 2018; Molenaar, 2017).

### 3.1.7 Corrupt border guards and their collaborators

Furthermore, the restrictive migration policies in Niger have made migrants vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. For instance, migrants are exposed to the manipulation and unscrupulous behavior of the border guards, bus drivers, smugglers, and traffickers (Xchange, 2019a; Brachet, 2012). Akkerman (2018) and Molenaar (2017) further note that in order to avoid being caught by the law, smugglers, including bus drivers, charge migrants higher fees so as to meet the inflated bribes demanded by the Nigerien border guards. Moreover, Xchange (2019a) and Brachet (2012) maintain that the collaborations of the border guards, smugglers, and bus drivers in collecting bribes from the migrants is a common and normal practice in Niger.

The implication of this is the continuous expansion of the criminal network involved in the smuggling of migrants, arms, and drugs (Akkerman, 2018; Molenaar, 2017). In addition, migrants are susceptible to all sorts of harassment, such as forceful payment of bribes, torture, rape, detention, and desertion in the Sahara Desert (Akkerman, 2018; Brachet, 2012). The evidence in literature justifies the criticism against the practice of tightened border control and restrictive migration policies (Adepoju 2011). Akkerman (2018) further raises concerns over the fallout of security and border officials who have thrived on bribes. For instance, should the flow of migration and extortion for bribes stop, the border guards might result to other criminal ways to extort money (Akkerman, 2018).

### 3.1.8 Migrants' experience

Another important subject worth discussing in this literature review is that of the migrants' experience (Haggi, 2013; Blackwell, 2005; Ager, 1999). According to Haggi (2013) and Blackwell (2005) migrants' experiences cover every aspects of migrants' lives including socio-economic conditions, freedom of mobility, and health, among others.

Literature shows that restrictive migration policies in Niger significantly shape the experience of migrants travelling through the country (Zandonini, 2019; Howden and Zandonini, 2018; Hall, 2017). These policies expose migrants to all kinds of abuse, such as detention, extortion for bribes, including falling into the hands of smugglers and traffickers (Xchange, 2019a; Akkerman, 2018; Molenaar, 2017; Collyer, 2007).

It is important to note that since migrants are consistently crossing borders despite the state's restrictive migration policies, understanding migrants' experiences is essential (Tobias et al, 2018; Mainwaring, 2016; Collyer, 2012; Tsianos & Karakayali, 2010; Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2008). For instance, Tobias et al. (2018) explain that comprehending migrants' experiences is a necessity because as states implement policies to restrict migration through their borders, migrants are also formulating new, trickier techniques and strategies to avoid being trapped, stopped or caught by the law. Collyer (2012) agrees and adds that by absorbing migrants' experiences into migration policy and political processes, migration challenges will be better managed because there will be proper insight into the problem. The author further explains that the gap

between the objectives and results of migration policies will be blocked if the migrants' experiences are considered as strategic in formulating migration policy (Collyer, 2012).

### 3.1.9 Coping strategies

Moreover, it should be mentioned that migrants' experiences significantly influence their coping strategies (Pragna and Ria, 2011). For example, migrants in transit adopt coping strategies that are most suitable for their transient and temporary and mobile lifestyles (Xchange, 2019a, 2019b; Lois, et, al. 2017; Brachet, 2012; Collyer, 2017).

Literature shows that migrants transiting through a territory cope with government regulations by using smugglers' services and bribing border guards (Zwick 2019; Mallet and Hagen-Zanker 2018). Molenaar (2017) clarifies that migrants transiting through Niger pay bribes to border guards and security officers in order to continue their journeys. Brachet (2012) adds that Nigerien border guards and smugglers are collaborators in extorting money from migrants transiting through Niger, even before the implementation of the migration law in 2015. Moreover, Zwick (2019) and Mallet and Hagen-Zanker (2018) identify the role played by smugglers in ensuring smooth mobility of undocumented migrants. For example, smugglers ease migrants of geographical, economic, and legal obstacles restricting mobility (Lois, et al., 2017).

However, it is important to highlight that smugglers expose migrants to higher risks.

Smugglers normally take extremely dangerous routes in order to avoid being caught by the security officials, migrants are often abandoned by smugglers in the Sahara Desert,

and migrants often lose control over their trajectories, which make differentiating between smuggling and trafficking highly problematic (Xchange, 2019a; Akkerman, 2018; Molenaar, 2017; Lois, et al., 2017; Kamouni-Janssen, 2017; Carling, et al., 2015).

Undocumented migrants also take advantage of technology to cope with challenges along their journey (Zwick, 2019; Mallet and Hagen-Zanker, 2018; Collyer, 2007; Papadopoulos, et al., 2004). For example, Collyer (2007) reports that during the trans-Saharan Desert crossing, migrants seldom lose signal on their mobile phone. This helps them connect with their kinsmen and social networks throughout their journeys. Zwick (2019) agrees and adds that internet availability provides opportunity for financial transaction which helps migrants cope with their financial needs during their journeys (Mallet and Hagen-Zanker, 2018).

On a general note, migrants and refugees commonly use religious beliefs, cultural practices, and support from friends and organizations (including faith-based organizations) as coping strategies. Khawaja et al. (2008) and Schweitzer et al. (2007) note that migrants cope with unfavorable situations through the adoption of cultural practices, religious beliefs, self-appraisal and rationalization, and by comparing their situations with others who are less fortunate than them (Haggi, 2013). Schweitzer et al. (2007) and Whittaker et al. (2005) report that other migrants are selective in who they confide in and seek help from. Moreover, some migrants hardly use formal support agencies due to their reluctance to seek support from outsiders and for the fact that

these migrants feel that most support agencies are not always sensitive to their situations. When these migrants do receive support from humanitarian agencies, they are reluctant to openly disclose it (Haggi, 2013). This is in agreement with Red Cross (2018) assertions that it is difficult to access migrants transiting through Agadez as they increasingly go into hiding. They are reluctant in seeking humanitarian services and use more dangerous routes. Vigneswaran (2012) further states that being elusive is a coping tactic adopted by undocumented migrants to avoid being spotted by security officials and hostile citizens.

### 3.1.10 Feminization of migration

Additionally, there is growing evidence in the literature emphasizing a rising, independent and female migration in sub-Saharan Africa, which goes against the previously recognized male dominant nature of migration (Ikwuyatum, 2016; Adepoju, 2004, 2008 & 2011). The causes of this change are the changing configuration, complexity and dynamic nature of migration in the region, as well as the economic pressure that forces females to migrate and engage in commercial activities in order to provide for their families (Ikwuyatum, 2012). According to Adepoju (2004, 2008, 2011), the major impact of the increasing female migrant population in the region is the emergence of females as the main source of income and providers for their families. However, due to the vulnerability of female migrants, literature links feminization of migration to trafficking, smuggling, gender-based violence, forced labor and



prostitution (Lois et al., 2017; Ikwuyatum, 2016; Adepoju, 2008). For instance, as more females migrate, they are increasingly prone to sexual assault, trafficking and smuggling, forced sex trade, and domestic labor (Lois et al. 2017; UNICEF, 2017; IOM, 2016). Adepoju (2008) explains that trafficking in girls is allegedly widespread on the Niger/Chad/Nigeria border (referred to as 'triangle of shame'). The author further narrates how trafficking syndicates use different tactics to lure their victims from Africa into commercial sex trade and forced labor in Europe. UNICEF (2017) and IOM (2016) add that due to the vulnerability of female migrants, traffickers and smugglers sexually assault and force them into the sex trade to pay for the subsequent stage of their journey (Lois et al., 2017).

### 3.1.11 Non-Government Organizations' Interventions

Moreover, there are different non-governmental organizations working in Niger on migration and related issues as indicated in Figure 4 (Hall, 2017). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is a major intergovernmental organization working in the field of migration in collaboration with governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners (IOM, 2020). One of the strategic objectives of IOM is to ensure the satisfactory respect for the human rights of the migrants is in accordance with international law (IOM, 2020). However, literature reveals that the IOM office in Niger is under constant criticism for supporting the EU and Nigerien government in enforcing restrictive migration policies, rather than encouraging free mobility of migrants as

recognized in international law (Xchange, 2019a; Akkerman, 2018; Howden & Zandonini, 2018; Hall, 2017; Prestianni, 2016).

Xchange (2019a) mentions that IOM is operating transit centers in Niger to temporarily host rejected asylum seekers and migrants who find it difficult in continuing their journeys. Therefore, the only option offered by IOM to these migrants and rejected asylum seekers is voluntary repatriation to their countries of origin (Xchange, 2019b; Molenaar, 2017). Howden & Zandonini (2018) and Prestianni (2016) note that IOM is a major beneficiary of EU funding and suggests that the organization must consider and protect the EU border externalization agenda in its operations. Evidence in the literature shows that IOM repatriated 7,000 African migrants back to their countries of origin from Niger in 2017; and over 2000 migrants were returned to their countries in the first three months of 2018 (Howden & Zandonini, 2018). Consequently, the collaborations between the EU, Nigerien government, and IOM have inspired migrants to lose confidence and trust in IOM in supporting them in actualizing their overall goal of transit migration (Xchange, 2019a, 2019b; Red Cross, 2018).

The Red Cross is another important international organization operating in Niger. The aim of the organization is to support vulnerable groups of people and enhance their resilience, among many of whom are migrants. The Red Cross in Niger underscores the protection of migrants as they make their way across the country. According to the Red Cross (2018), due to the lack of proper documentation and loss of social networks,

migrants transiting through Niger are extremely vulnerable to intimidations and abuse. Therefore, the organization has been providing medical and psychosocial services to migrants transiting through Agadez since 2013 (Red Cross, 2018)

Figure 4: Intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations working in the field of migration in Niger

Stakeholder name	Type	Activities in Niger			Presence in Agadez	
		Funding	Policy	Programming	Migrant-related	Host community-related
Ministry of Justice	Gov't		✓		✓	✓
Ministry of Labour	Gov't		✓	✓		✓
Conseil Régional d'Agadez	Gov't		✓	✓	✓	✓
Municipality of Agadez	Gov't		✓	✓	✓	✓
Sultanat de l'Air	Traditional	✓		✓	✓	✓
European Union	Int'l Gov't	✓		✓	✓	✓
Stakeholder name	Type	Activities in Niger			Presence in Agadez	
		Funding	Policy	Programming	Migrant-related	Host community-related
GIZ	Aid	✓		✓	✓	✓
AFD	Aid	✓		✓		✓
USAID	Aid	✓		✓		✓
UNDP	UN	✓	✓	✓		✓
UNHCR	UN	✓	✓			
UNOCHA	UN		✓		✓	✓
UNODC	UN		✓	✓		
UNICEF	UN					✓
ILO	Int'l Org		✓			
IOM	Int'l Org		✓	✓	✓	✓
ICRC	Int'l Org			✓	✓	✓
Nigerien Red Cross	NGO			✓	✓	✓
French Red Cross	NGO			✓		✓
Mercy Corps	NGO			✓		
HELP	NGO			✓	✓	
Oxfam	NGO			✓		✓
MSF	NGO			✓	✓	✓

Source: Hall 2017:53

Furthermore, Alarmphone Sahara (APS) is a major non-governmental organization operating in Niger with the concern of assisting migrants in their journeys. The APS mission is to sensitize, document and rescue migrants travelling across Niger and Sahara Desert territories (APS, 2020). The organization achieves its objectives by providing a toll-free telephone line for migrants in anguished situations. Upon receiving the distress

call from the migrants, the organization facilitates rescue teams within the area to assist the stranded migrants. For instance, APS rescued 25 migrants travelling to Libya when the truck they were travelling in broke down in the Tenere desert in south central Sahara in March 2019 (MacGregor, 2019). Moreover, the organization provides migrants necessary information about the dangers of desert trips (APS, 2020; MacGregor, 2019)

In addition, UNHCR also has a presence in Niger. The organization is providing humanitarian supports to migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees who are forcefully displaced from Nigeria and other countries in the Sub-Saharan region due to conflicts (UNHCR, 2020).

### 3.1.12 Summary

The literature review provides information about migration in the Sahel region. The reviewed materials help to contextualize and put into perspective the dynamics of migration in the region and of migrants transiting through Niger. Overall, the literature review shows that the EU border externalization agenda, the Nigerien government migration law, and ECOWAS Protocol of Free Movement significantly influence the experience of migrants transiting through Niger. It also demonstrates how migration policies affect the rising feminization of migration, as well as socio-economic, security and political stability in Niger and the Sahel region. It also reveals the involvement of smugglers, traffickers, border guards, bus drivers, as well as migrants in border crossing. In addition, the literature review illustrates gaps that merit further research. For instance,

it is essential to better understand and explore the experience of migrants travelling through Niger and the overall circumstances of their mobility in the face of restrictive migration policies. Hence, it is obvious that conducting research on the dynamics of Nigerian migrants transiting through Niger is desirable in order to expand the scope of migration study in the Sahel region. In the next section, the thesis examines the theoretical framework.

### 3.2 Theoretical Framework: Border Regime Theory

This research project adopts border regime theory as its theoretical framework. Border regime theory has become an interesting topic for scholarly research and debate in recent years (Tobias et al., 2018; Collyer, 2012; Mainwaring, 2016; Mezzadra & Brett, 2013; Nail, 2016; Tsianos & Karakayali, 2010). This theory postulates that the constant interplay of multiple actors occurs during the crossing of a border region. It further indicates that migration is “a conflictual field of interests, discourses, struggles, negotiations and interdependencies on inclusion and exclusion among different actors” (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015; Papadopoulos, Stephenson, and Tsianos, 2008; Sciortino, 2004 as cited in Tobias et al., 2018:2718:2). These actors include migrants, facilitators, private companies, and state agents. The separate intentions of everyday actions and practices of these different actors contributes to the dynamic and inconsistency of border regime formation. The main intention of migrants in these circumstances is to undermine

border control and achieve mobility by avoiding being stuck in the transit territories (Tobias et al., 2018; Corporatewatch, 2018).

Border regime theory is relevant in my research due to the following reasons: (1) it provides a strong framework to identify the interaction of all the actors involved in transit migration in Niger; (2) it offers an insightful basis appropriate for analyzing my data; and (3) it presents suitable analytical perspectives to synthesize and synchronize my data in order to achieve my thesis objectives, answer my research questions and argue my hypotheses; (4) it helps in analyzing mobility challenges beyond the physical barrier of border and on the outcome of the interplay of different actors that prevent and challenge the crossing of the border.

Border regime theory extrapolates on certain issues that are applicable in understanding the configuration of migration. These are: (1) the non-physical function of borders; (2) the state migration policy; and (3) the security fallouts of migration policy (MacArthur, 2019; Mezzadra & Brett 2013; Bruno, 2019; Collyer, 2012; Mainwaring, 2016; Mathew, 2005; Dina and Jasnea, 2019).

### 3.2.1 Non-physical border

The theory further analyzes borders not only from the geographical margins or territorial edges, but also from the interplay of actors within and across the border region (Nail, 2016). The interaction of these actors has become essential devices for clearly understanding migration issues. According to Mezzadra and Brett (2013) and

Mathew (2005), borders are complex social institutions which are marked by tensions between practices of border reinforcement and border crossing. Therefore, isolating a single function of a border (as providing a physical barrier) does not allow us to grasp the flexibility and complexity of the border system and function. Nor does it facilitate an understanding of the diffusion of practices and techniques of border control within territorially bound spaces of citizenship and their associated labor markets. (Mezzadra & Brett, 2013; Tsianos & Karakayali, 2010).

It is worthy to mention that various scholars in their studies and policies adopt the non-physical concept of the border. For instance, Mathew (2005) in their study of taxi drivers in New York City, illustrates four categories of borders, which include: (1) the linguistic borders that divide the taxi drivers due to their multi-cultural diversity; (2) the urban borders they routinely cross as part of their working lives; (3) the international borders they crossed to reach New York City; and (4) the social borders that divide them from their clients and the owners from whom they lease the cabs. Thus, this study demonstrates how these borders configure in the composition, struggle, and organizational forms of the labor force in that sector. Issues of territory, jurisdiction, division of labor, governance, sovereignty, and translation were all connected into the urban spaces that these drivers traverse (Mezzadra & Brett, 2013; Tsianos & Karakayali, 2010).

In addition, the phrase 'European Border Externalization' is another example of using the concept of border for political and ideological purposes. Although the EU border is spatially outside Africa, it is ideologically and politically extended throughout Africa through the adoption of the 'European Border Externalization' agreement with some countries in the Sahel region.

Therefore, the border is far from serving merely to block or obstruct global passages of people, money, or objects, but has also become a central device for its articulation.

Borders play a key role in the production of the heterogeneous time and space of contemporary global and postcolonial capitalism (Nail, 2016; Mezzadra & Brett 2013).

### 3.2.2 State migration policy, migrants' coping tactics and experience

Border regime theory provides reliable insights to understand the impact of state immigration control measures on the experiences of migrants, as well as the interdependencies of migrants' tactics in border crossings (Tobias et, al., 2018). The theory emphasizes the necessity of considering migrants' maneuvers in the political processes towards formulating migration policy (Mainwaring, 2016; Collyer, 2012).

### 3.2.3 Security and criminality

Border systems are identified with conflict and struggle, thereby making it a source of security and criminal concerns. As MacArthur (2019) explains, the security apprehension is overwhelming and obvious because post-colonial borders are artificial, porous, and ambiguous. Hence, borders encourage dissidence, disorders, resistance, and contribute



to the transnational nature of conflict dynamic (Bruno, 2019). Indeed, the high level of violence along the borders of US-Mexico, Palestine-Israel, and Kashmir-India emphasize the implication of border crossings and transiting on security and criminality. Through the multifarious practices by which migrants regularly challenge borders, it becomes clear that border struggles are all too often matters of life and death (Mezzadra & Brett, 2013).

Relating this discourse to the dynamics of Nigerian and other West African migrants transiting through Niger, the conceptual framework of the border regime theory provides structure and guidance that is applicable in organizing and analyzing the findings of this thesis. For instance, the enforcement of the securitized migration policies that include the EU migration control agreements (such as EUCAP and EUTF) with Niger and other countries in Africa, with the aim of stemming migration into the EU zone and the Nigerien government migration law 2015 that banned the migration of the sub-Saharan migrants beyond Agadez, negatively affects the migration configuration and other socioeconomic activities in Niger and the Sahel region (Abebe,2019; Akkerman, 2018; Molenaar, 2017). The policies disrupt free mobility, especially of West African migrants that are protected under the ECOWAS Protocol. They also affect the source of income of individuals engaging in migration activities and cause the expansion of smuggling and trafficking networks in Niger.

As Tsianos & Karakayali (2010) explain, since migrants regularly cross borders despite states' obstructive migration policies, understanding the situation influencing the borders permeability is a necessity. Hence, border regime theory guides the conceptual framework of this thesis and provides structure in order to identify different categories of actors (such as migrants, states and its agencies, facilitators, smugglers, traffickers, etc), involved in the dynamics of transit migration in Niger. It also synthesizes the overall picture of the findings in order to answer the research questions and argue the hypotheses.

In this context, the Nigerian transit migrants' motivations and decision-making processes in the backgrounds of the ECOWAS Protocol of Free Movement, the EU border externalization agenda, and the Nigerien government migration law 2015, will be better analyzed and understood.

## Chapter 4: Results I

### 4.1 Themes of the results

Based on the aim of the research project, theoretical framework, literature review and empirical data derived from the fieldwork, three main themes in the results section have been analyzed and developed. The chapter unfolds in this order: (1) participants' background; (2) migrants' experiences at the airport, land-border, and roadway; and (3) the situation of transit migration in Agadez. Each of these themes are sub-topics to accommodate the scope of the overall theme. To maintain anonymity, participants are identified by pseudonyms and their personal backgrounds are made anonymous. Quotations are derived from interviews, focus group discussions and ethnographic research (participant observation and casual discussion) in order to explain the themes.

### 4.2 Participants' background

This section examines the research participants' backgrounds. It is divided into three sub-topics: (1) participants in interviews; (2) participants in focus group discussions; and (3) participants in ethnographic research.

#### 4.2.1 Participants in interviews

There were six Nigerian research participants interviewed. They are identified by the following pseudonyms: Biyi, Akin, Salome, Buba, Iyo and Mero. They consist of 4 females and 2 males making up 66.7% and 33.3%, respectively. Moreover, interview participants also comprised of three migrants from other West African countries. These participants

consisted of a Ghanaian, Malian, and Beninese. They are identified by the following fictitious names: Bismark, Ismaila, and Margret. They are all males except Margret. Another group of interview participants consists of five non-migrants. They include the following: a migrants' rights activist, a female journalist, a former transporter (bus driver), and two staff members of an NGO. They are identified by the following pseudonyms: Jalingo, Titi, Bako, Aliyu and Mubarak. Titi was the only female among them. Overall, there were 8 males and 6 female interview participants, accounting for 57.14%, and 42.85%, respectively.

#### 4.2.1.1 The background characteristics of the Interview participants

The background characteristics of the interview participants are described below:

##### **Biya:**

At the time of the interview, Biya was a male Nigerian migrant in Agadez, Niger. I met him in a restaurant in Agadez. He agreed to participate in the interview because I speak his native Yoruba language in Nigeria. The interview was conducted in English. Biya disclosed that he was a businessman, but the Nigerian government accused him of human trafficking and smuggling. He revealed that he was jailed for one year in Niger.

##### **Akin**

At the time of the interview, Akin was a male Nigerian migrant in Agadez, Niger. I met him in the motor park while travelling from Agadez to Niamey. I communicated with him in English and he willingly accepted my interview requests. Akin maintained that he

came to transact business on cows in Agadez, but was suspected of being a migrant in transit by the border guards along the Niamey-Agadez road. He disclosed that the border guards extorted bribes from him.

### **Salome**

At the time of the interview, Salome was a female Nigerian migrant stuck in Agadez, Niger since 2019. I met her in a bar in Agadez. She agreed to participate in the interview because I speak her native Yoruba language in Nigeria. The interview was conducted in English. She maintained that she was presently working in a bar and hoped to transit to Algeria or Libya by using smugglers' services.

### **Buba:**

At the time of the interview, Buba was a female Nigerian migrant stuck in Agadez, Niger since 2018. I met her in a restaurant in Agadez. She granted her consent to participate in the interview because I speak her native Yoruba language in Nigeria. The interview was conducted in English. Buba declared that she and two other girls were smuggled from Lagos, Nigeria to Agadez, Niger. She maintained that the smuggler promised them jobs in Libya but brought them to Agadez. She added that the smuggler transferred them to another person in Agadez and demanded payment of 1 million CFA from each of the girls. She maintained that they were forced into sex trade to make the payment. She added that she knew smugglers/traffickers that can facilitate her transit to Libya.

### **Iyo**

At the time of the interview, Iyo was a female Nigerian migrant in Agadez, Niger since May 2019. I met her in a food vendor's shop in Agadez. She agreed to participate in the interview because I speak her native Yoruba language in Nigeria. The interview was conducted in English. She was working as a food vendor in Agadez. She mentioned that she was aware of some Nigerian migrants who were transiting through Agadez to North Africa despite the restrictions. She explained that her friend facilitated her journey to Agadez and demanded 500,000 CFA from her as the cost of bringing her to Agadez. She added that she was not transiting because she had two kids with her she had to take care of. She added that underage girls were trafficked from Nigeria to Agadez for sex work until some of the traffickers were arrested by the Nigerian government in October, 2019.

### **Mero:**

At the time of the interview, Mero was a female Nigerian migrant stuck in Agadez, Niger since 2018. I met her in a neighborhood in Agadez through Iyo. She agreed to participate in the interview because Iyo referred her to me. The interview was conducted in English. She mentioned that she attempted to transit to Libya before, but returned to Agadez because the journey was tough for her as a female due to security surveillance, excessive heat, and abuse. She stated that some migrants at the time continued their journey to Libya despite the difficulty involved. Mero worked in a bar and received

support of consumable items (rice, spaghetti, cooking oil, sugar, milk) from a non-government organization because she said she was not going to Libya.

**Bismark:**

At the time of the interview, Bismark was a male Ghanaian migrant transiting through Niger. I met him in a bus travelling from Niamey to Agadez. He agreed to be interviewed because I gained his trust during our long road trip that lasted over 20 hours (3am to 12am). The interview was conducted in English. Bismark maintained that he crossed the Ghanaian border to Burkina Faso then to Niger one day before the interview. He had no international passport except a Ghanaian ID card. Nigerien border guards extorted bribes from him in all the 15 checkpoints spread across the roadway from Niamey to Agadez. He explained that he was transiting to Libya and this was his second attempt; his first attempt was in 2018. He explained that he returned to Ghana because of the crisis in Libya at the time.

**Ismaila:**

At the time of the interview, Ismaila was a male Malian migrant transiting through Niger. I met him in a bus travelling from Niamey to Agadez. He accepted to be interviewed because I gained his trust during our long road trip that lasted over 20 hours. The interview was conducted in English. Ismaila disclosed that he crossed the Malian border to Niger one day before I met him. He did not have an international passport, but possessed a Malian ID card. He was extorted for bribes at the first checkpoint.

Thereafter, he disguised himself as a Nigerien by covering his head with a veil and putting on tiny shaped eyeglasses. This concealed his identity as a migrant in transit and protected him from further extortion. Ismaila said his intention was to travel to Algeria. He added that this was his third attempt to reach Algeria. He was not successful in the previous attempts because he could not afford the fund demanded by the smugglers and traffickers. However, he was well prepared now.

### **Margret**

At the time of the interview, Margret was a female Beninese migrant in Niger. I met her at the commemoration program organized by Alarmphone Sahara (APS) in Agadez on February 6-7, 2020. The program was intended to remember the migrants who had lost their lives while crossing the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea. She willingly granted her consent to be interviewed. The interview was held in English. She travelled to Niger from Benin with the intention of transiting to North Africa in 2018. She was presently stuck in Agadez and working in a bar to survive.

### **Bako:**

At the time of the interview, Bako was a former migrant transporter (driver) in Niger. I met him at the Alarmphone Sahara (APS) office in Agadez. He voluntarily accepted to be interviewed. I conducted the interview with him in English.



**Jalingo:**

At the time of the interview, Jalingo was a Nigerien migrants' rights activist. I met him at the commemoration program organized by Alarmphone Sahara (APS) in Agadez in February 2020. He willingly granted his consent to be interviewed. The interview was held in English.

**Titi:**

At the time of the interview, Titi was a female Nigerien journalist. I met her at the Alarmphone Sahara (APS) office in Agadez. She willingly granted her consent to be interviewed.

**Aliyu:**

At the time of the interview, Aliyu was the coordinator of Alarmphone Sahara (APS) in Agadez. He generously accepted to be interviewed and the interview was conducted in English.

**Mubarak:**

At the time of the interview, Mubarak was the public relations officer of Alarmphone Sahara (APS) in Agadez. He kindly accepted to be interviewed and the interview was conducted in English.

## 4.2.2 Participants in focus group discussions (FGDs)

A total of 6 participants partook in the FGDs. There were four Ghanaian and two Nigerien participants. They are identified by the following pseudonyms: Kofi, Nene, Aminu, Sabo, Juliet, and Angelica. They comprised of 4 males and 2 females, making up 66.7% and 33.3%, respectively.

### 4.2.2.1 The background characteristics of the FGDs participants

I contacted the FGDs participants and gained their consent for the discussions through one of the interview participants (i.e. Bako). The discussion was conducted in English and held in the compound of the Ghanaian participants for 58 minutes. The background characteristics of the participants in the FGDs are described below.

#### **Kofi:**

At the time of the discussion, Kofi was a male Ghanaian migrant in Agadez. He and his wife (Juliet) are operating a canteen in Agadez. Kofi complained that his younger brother (Nene) was released a day ago after being detained by the Nigerien police on the allegation of attempting to transit to Libya.

#### **Nene:**

At the time of the discussion, Nene was a male Ghanaian migrant in Agadez. He was in Agadez to visit Kofi. He was arrested by the Nigerien border guard for attempting to transit to Libya. He was released a day before the FGD.

**Juliet:**

At the time of the discussion, Juliet was a female Ghanaian migrant in Agadez. She and her husband (Kofi) are operating a canteen in Agadez.

**Angelica:**

At the time of the discussion, Angelica was a female Ghanaian migrant in Agadez. She was working in the canteen.

**Aminu:**

At the time of the discussion, Aminu was a male Nigerien living in Agadez. He was a friend of Kofi. He was working as security personnel in a bar.

**Sabo**

At the time of the discussion, Sabo was a male Nigerien living in Agadez. He was a friend of Kofi and is a fruit seller.

4.2.3 Participants in ethnographic research:

Ethnographic data was derived from the remaining participants through participant observations, casual conversations, and interactions. These participants included the border and security officers, bus drivers, hoteliers, and two Chadian migrants. The two Chadians are recognized by the following fictitious names: Idrisi and Gambo.

4.3 Migrants' experience at the airport, land-border, and roadway

Understanding migrants' experiences at the airport, land-border and roadway are central to achieving the aim of this research project. (i.e., exploring the dynamics of

Nigerian migrants transiting through Niger along their routes to North Africa or elsewhere). Airport and land-borders are the entry locations into Niger and the first points of contact for migrants. This is where the inclusion or exclusion of migrants into the transit territory is first determined. Migrants who are denied entry at the airport or land-border are excluded from the border, while those that are accepted into the border region have hope of continuing their journey. It is imperative to note that most migrants within the Sahel region cross the border by land (Xchange, 2019a, 2019b; Molenaar, 2017; Ikwuyatum, 2016; Adepoju, 2005). Moreover, Ikwuyatum (2012) notes that air transportation in West Africa is facing many challenges, such as a lack of passengers and cancellation of flights. In another study, Xchange, (2019b) mentioned that none of the interviewed migrants from the Sahel and other sub-Saharan countries travelled by air to Niamey or Agadez along their journey to North Africa.

Additionally, roadway transportation is essential for migrants transiting through Niger. This is because transportation by road is the main mode of transportation which links Niamey to Agadez, which is the major crossway to North Africa (Xchange, 2019a, 2019b; Akkerman, 2018; Molenaar, 2017; Hall, 2017). Indeed, it was revealed in a study that all the interviewed migrants from the Sahel and other sub-Saharan countries covered their journey by road from origin to transit (Agadez) until their arrival in Libya or Algeria (Xchange, 2019b).

To fully explore this subject, this section is divided into three main parts: (1) Niamey Airport experience; (2) Border crossing experience; and (3) Roadway transportation experience.

#### 4.3.1 Niamey Airport experience

To address this theme, I will give insights into the discussion by using my own experience during my research trip to Niger. I believe my experience is relevant in this circumstance because I am Nigerian and carry a Nigerian passport. I travelled by air from Cairo and transited through Addis-Ababa to reach Niamey in Niger. My final-destination in Niger was Agadez. Thus, I satisfied the conditions necessary to be assumed or suspected of attempting to transit through Niger to another location.

Moreover, my expectation was that I would be granted free visa entry into Niger at the Niamey Airport based on the ECOWAS Protocol of Free Movement for West African citizens.

On arrival at the Niamey Airport in Niger, I presented my Nigerian international passport and health certificate (yellow card) at the ECOWAS designated counter. Afterward, my passport was stamped, and I was granted free visa entry into Niger. This experience demonstrated that the ECOWAS Protocol for visa free travel for ECOWAS citizens is enforced in Niger (Lois et al., 2017; Ikwuyatum, 2016, 2012).

After that, I filled out the mandatory arrival form. I indicated in the form that I am a Nigerian, travelling from Cairo and my destination in Niger was Agadez. I specified that

the purpose of my trip was to visit a friend in Agadez. Then, I was cleared to proceed to the main hall of the airport. At the main hall, I was singled-out for a special security check. One of the security officers directed me to a special room. There were 5 security officers in civilian clothes in the room. Among them was a female officer.

The following conversation ensued between me and the security officer that led me into the room:

Security Officer: "We were directed to conduct a special check on you".

Azeez : "Is this the situation for every Nigerian migrant?".

Security Officer: "It is normal for us to conduct such a check at random for newly arrived passengers, we were suspicious for whatever reasons".

My two bags were properly checked by the security officers. They asked me to taste from the menthol candy/sweetie I had in my bag. They even suggested testing my urine for drug sampling. I was eventually allowed to go after almost one hour.

What has been less understood so far was the specific reason(s) why I was singled out for a security check. However, this experience suggested that, first, Nigerian migrants going to Agadez were held under suspicion of drug trafficking and/or attempting to migrate irregularly. Second, my travelling from Cairo to Niamey, and/or desire to visit a friend in Agadez might have inspired and influenced such a suspicious attitude. Based on this encounter, I confirmed my hypothesis that securitization of migration is a threat

to free mobility (Abebe, 2019; Xchange, 2019a, 2019b). It revealed that restrictive migration laws stimulate oppressions, struggles, and conflicts between practices of border reinforcement and border crossing (Mezzadra & Brett, 2013). For instance, migration policies in Niger have labelled West African migrants beyond Agadez as illegal; therefore, empowered border and security guards oppress and indiscriminately abuse the rights of these migrants without justification (Abebe, 2019; Xchange, 2019a, 2019b; Molenaar, 2017). Similarly, the exclusion and suppression of the migrants from border crossings triggers desperate struggles and conflicts that inspire migrants to use the services of the smugglers and traffickers at great risk and high cost (Akkerman, 2018; Howden and Zandonini, 2018)

However, a Nigerian participant, (Akin), who also travelled by air from Lagos, Nigeria, to Niamey Airport in Niger, had a different experience. I asked Akin about his airport experience. He told me he had no problem at the Niamey Airport. Akin had a free entry at the airport and was not subjected to any special security check or interrogation. Therefore, as previously suggested, my travelling from Cairo to Niamey might have created a suspicious mindset towards me by the border guards. The border guards might have assumed that I could not transit from Cairo to Europe and I opted to transit through Agadez.

### 4.3.2 Border crossing experience

Over three quarters of the research participants mentioned they crossed into Niger through overland borders. This concurs with the widely held assertion in the literature that cross-border migration in the Sahel region frequently occurs by land (Molenaar, 2017; Ikwuyatum, 2009, 2011; Adepoju, 2008).

It is also important to emphasize that many of the research participants crossed the border into Niger from different countries that share a border with the country (Figure 5). For instance, among the Nigerian participants were those that transited from two or three West African countries before arriving to Niger. An excerpt from an interview with Buba and Mero confirmed this assertion:

Azeez: How did you reach Agadez. Buba?

Buba: I first passed through Benin to Togo. From Togo, we reached Burkina Faso, then we went onwards to Agadez.

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Azeez: How did you reached Agadez, Mero?

Mero: I left Nigeria and headed first to Benin. From there, I went to Niamey and then onwards to Agadez.

Ghanaian Migrants (Bismark and Kofi) also mentioned that they transited from Burkina Faso to Niger. This confirmed the claim in the literature that a country in the Sahel region can simultaneously serve or function as an origin, transit, or destination country for migrants (Adepoju, 2008). It also reflects the practice of free mobility of the Sahel



people before the colonial era changed the border scheme of the region (Ikwuyatum, 2012).

There were also Nigerian transit migrants that crossed the Nigerian border directly into Niger as shown in this excerpt:

*Azeez: How did you arrive in Niger, Salome?*

*Salome: I went from Nigeria to Maradi and then to Agadez in Niger.*

*Azeez: How did you come to Agadez, Iyo?*

*Iyo: I went from Kano to Maradi, and then to Agadez.*

Similarly, study participants from Benin (Margret) and Mali (Ismaila) mentioned they crossed their respective countries' borders into Niger.

This pattern of mobility reemphasizes the erratic, wandering, interwoven, intermittent, dynamic, and complex nature of mobility in the Sahel region (Ikwuyatum 2016; Adepoju, 2008). It suggests that the practice of free mobility is part of life of the Sahel people and thus emphasizes their view of crossing colonial borders as mobility within the same socio-cultural space, rather than crossing demarcated territories (Afolayan et al, 2009; Adepoju, 2008).

Figure 5: Countries sharing borders with Niger



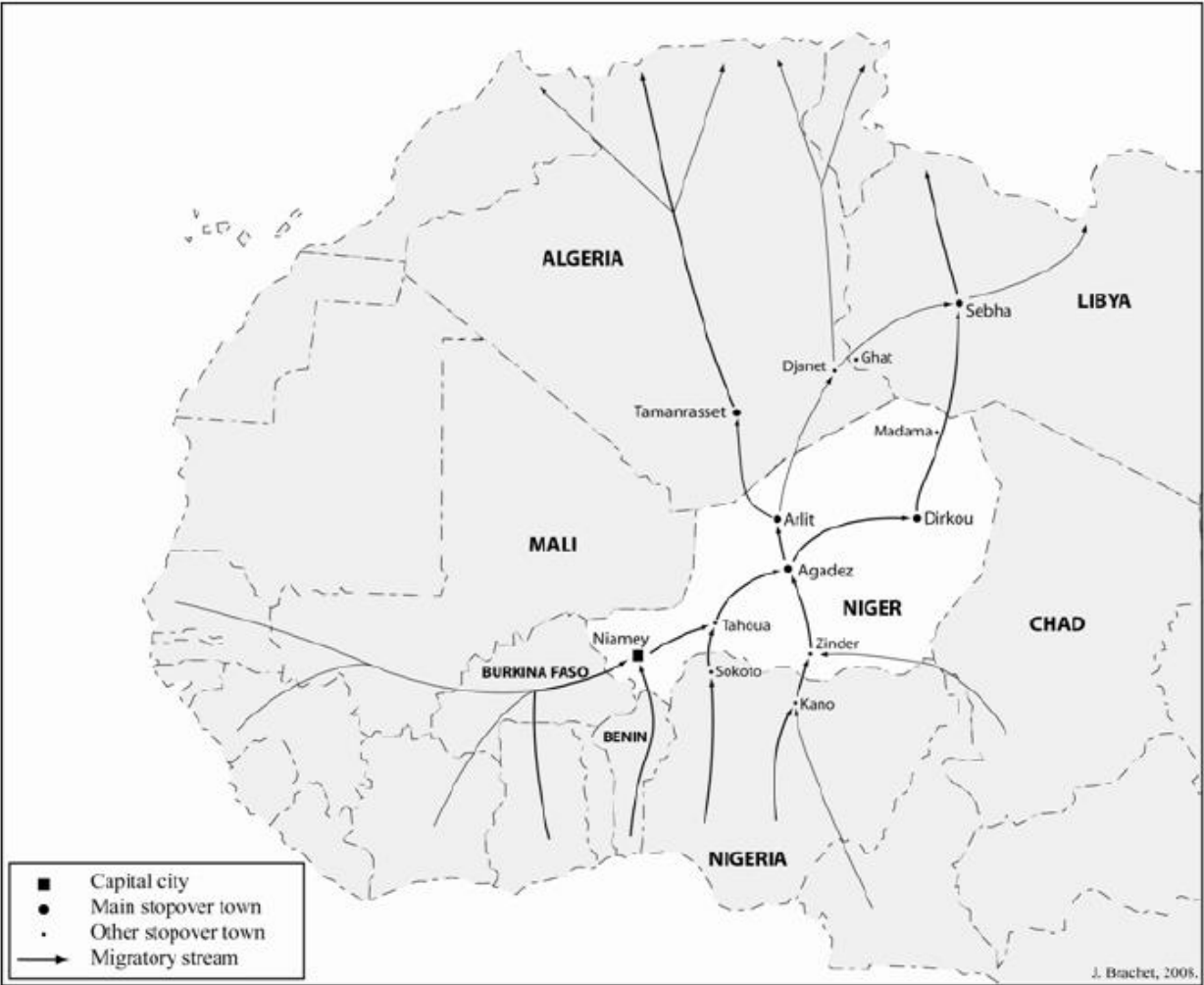
Source: Abebe 2019

#### 4.3.3 Migrants' roadway transportation experience

After arriving by air or crossing the land-border into Niamey, migrants transiting through Niger to North Africa must travel from Niamey to Agadez (Figure 2 & Figure 6). There are two main modes of transportation to Agadez from Niamey. The first is by air. Based on my personal experience at the Niamey Airport, migrants transiting through Niger are unlikely to travel by air because of the fear of being easily identified as irregular migrants. In addition, transiting migrants in the Sahel region might be discouraged from air travel because of the high cost; therefore, these reasons account for the low patronage of air travel in the region (Ikwuyatum, 2012). The second mode of transport is by road, which is commonly used by migrants transiting through Niger. For instance, Molenaar (2017) notes that the bus companies collaborate with border guards to ensure free mobility of irregular and transiting migrants from Niamey to Agadez.

Hence, in this section I explore the transiting migrants' experiences along the Niamey to Agadez road and Agadez to Niamey roadway.

Figure 6: Origins and destinations of the principal migratory flows crossing Niger.



Source: Brachet, 2012

#### 4.3.3.1 Roadway transportation experience: Niamey to Agadez.

In order to observe and participate in the real-life roadway experience of migrants, I boarded a bus leaving from Niamey and headed to Agadez. Using participant observation and casual discussion techniques, I identified four transiting migrants on the bus. They were one Ghanaian, one Malian and two Chadians. They were all males. I identified them in this research project as Bismark, Ismaila, Idrisi and Gambo.

I interviewed Bismark and Ismaila because they speak a certain level of the English language. I conducted participant observation with Idrisi and Gambo because of the language barrier, as they speak only French.

The security officers stopped and checked our bus at 15 different checkpoints between Niamey and Agadez. At each of the checkpoints, identification documents of all the passengers on board were checked by the security officers. Transit migrants were identified through such checks. At all 15 checkpoints, Bismark, Idrisi and Gambo were asked to follow the security officers. In all cases, the driver of our bus followed the migrants to meet and discuss with the security officers. After some minutes or an hour of waiting in the bus, the driver and the migrants returned. Afterward, we continued our journey. It is important to note that the Malian migrant (Ismaila) was identified by the security guard only at the first checkpoint. Thereafter, he disguised as a Nigerien by using a veil-like piece of white cloth to cover his head and put on tiny shaped eye

glasses. This concealed his identity as a migrant in transit because he was not identified again throughout the journey by the border guards.

Our bus stopped at the motor park, and I used the opportunity to conduct interviews with Bismark and Ismaila. The following excerpts were from the interviews:

#### Interview with Bismark:

Azeez: Why are those security officers asking you to come down all this time?

Bismark: They are collecting money from me...they are just asking for money....money..oo. They have collected all my money!

Azeez: Approximately how much are they collecting from you?

Bismark: I paid 15,000 CFA at the first checkpoint. At the second checkpoint I paid 5,000 CFA, and like that at every check point. They have collected all the money I have with me. At the last check point, Bismark said he paid "10,000 CFA"

Azeez: But you said you are from Ghana?

Bismark: Yes, I am a Ghanaian.

Azeez: But you are protected by the ECOWAS Protocol for Free Movement.

Bismark: I know..I know...But I don't have travel documents.....I don't have a Ghanaian passport. I only have a Ghanaian ID card.

Azeez: Why don't you have it? It is your right as a citizen of Ghana to have it.

Bismark: I went to the Ghanaian immigration office in Ghana, but they did not give it to me.

Azeez: Okay....

Azeez: So, where are you going from Agadez?

Bismark: I am going to Libya.

#### Interview with Ismaila:

Azeez: But why did the security ask you to follow them at the first checkpoint?

Ismaila: You know I don't have a passport. I only have a Malian ID so they want money and I have to pay them.

Azeez: Like how much?

Ismaila: They say 15,000 CFA...I don't have 15,000 CFA but I gave them 10,000 CFA.

- Azeez: Where are you moving to from Agadez?

Ismaila: I am going to Algeria from Agadez

Azeez: Have you try to go Algeria before?

Ismaila: I tried before...this is the third time.

Azeez: What happened before?

Ismaila: I didn't have enough money to pay smugglers at the time.

The above interview excerpts generate two important matters: First is the identification issue. Bismark and Ismaila had no international passport, except for the ID cards from their respective countries. Afterwards, I asked myself some questions, such as: do they have international passports but keep them or hide it? Is this a new strategy adopted by migrants transiting through Niger to present ID cards instead of international passports? Is it to safeguard seizure of their passports? Or they are using fake names to transit through Niger? All these questions are necessary and relevant in this circumstance. However, I later discovered that Idrisi and Gambo had Chadian international passports and vaccination cards. This finding corroborates literature evidence that some West African migrants travelling across the Sahel region are not in possession of relevant identification documents as stipulated by the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement (Akkerman, 2018; Molenaar, 2017; Xchange, 2019a). Consequently, lack of proper documentation exposes migrants to further exploitation and extortion by the border guards and smugglers (Akkerman, 2018; Molenaar, 2017; Hall, 2017). Moreover, the findings demonstrate the interplay of migrants, border guards and bus drivers in border crossings (Tobias et al., 2018; Nail, 2016; Mezzadra & Brett, 2013; Tsianos & Karakayali, 2010).

The second issue is the bribery and corruption practices of the border and security officers. The problem of bribery shows that transiting and/or irregular migrants who have the resources to pay bribes will easily transit through Niger and go onwards to

North Africa. Migrants like Bismark and Ismaila that did not have international passports were allowed by the border officers to continue their journey after paying bribes. This finding agrees with the literature that the collection of bribes from migrants transiting through Niger is a common practice among the Nigerien border and security guards (Akkerman 2018; Hall, 2017; Brachet, 2012). Thus, this practice undermines the efficacy of the restrictive migration policies in addressing irregular migration and justifies the claim that the EU border externalization program assists in promoting corruption in the Sahel region (Abebe, 2019; Akkerman, 2018; Molenaar, 2017).

My personal encounter with the border guards occurred at the 15<sup>th</sup> checkpoint, which happened to be the last security checkpoint before Agadez. At this checkpoint, all passengers were asked to disembark from the bus for the security check. I disembarked from the bus and gave my passport and vaccination card (yellow card) to the security officer for inspection. He looked at the two documents critically. He then put them into his trousers' back-pocket. Thereafter, I had the following conversation with the security officer:

Azeez: Why are you pocketing my documents?  
Security officer: You need to see our senior officer.

Azeez: Why?  
Security officer: He will ask you questions.  
Azeez: Okay....

Comment: Another security officer (probably the senior officer) asked me about my trip?

Security officer: How did you arrive to Niger?

Azeez: I traveled by air from Cairo to Niamey. And I have my return ticket back to Cairo. I am protected by the ECOWAS Protocol of Free Movement in Niger.

Security officer: My friend, you are right. But you need to pay for a permit to enter Agadez.

Azeez: Which permit?

Security officer: It is a government permit

Comment: The driver of our bus was with us, he instantly intervened, and supported the security officer.

Bus driver: It is true. The permit is compulsory for migrants entering Agadez.

Azeez: How much am I supposed to pay?

Security officer: 5,000 CFA.

Bus driver: It is true.

Azeez: What about the receipt?

Security officer: You will fill a form out in front of me and I will stamp and sign it.

Comment: I paid the 5,000 CFA and was about to fill the form.

The security officer now changed his statement. He now said;

Security officer: I am the one that will fill and sign the form. The driver will keep the form for later use in Agadez.

Bus driver: The security officer is right.

Comment: My travel documents were returned to me by the security officer. I was told that I am free to go, and that I should go and join the other passengers in the bus until they clear the other detained migrants. After 49 minutes the bus driver, Bismark, Idrisi and Gambo joined us in the bus. Then we continued our journey. I later asked Bismark about the situation:

Azeez: How much did you paid?

Bismark: I paid 10,000 CFA.

Azeez: What about the two Chadians, how much did they pay?

Bismark: I don't know the amount they paid because they were speaking in the French language.

This result substantiates previous findings that bus drivers are colluding with the border guards along Niamey-Agadez road checkpoints to collect bribes from the migrants. For example, Molenaar (2017) mentions that bus drivers collaborate with the Nigerien border guards to collect bribes from both documented and undocumented migrants transiting through Niger. While the documented migrants paid 43,000 CFA, the undocumented paid 86,000 CFA (Molenaar, 2017). This further highlights the



postulation of the border regime theory on the interactions of different actors surrounding border crossings (Tobias, 2012). In this situation, state agents are represented by the Nigerien border guards and are actively involved in encouraging irregular migration, rather than stopping it (Abebe, 2019).

In a separate interview I conducted with Margret (a Beninese participant), the issue of bribery allegations against the Nigerien border guards was also mentioned. This is shown in this interview excerpt:

Azeez: Your experience from Benin to Niger and to Agadez, was it very good or very bad?

Margret: The Niger police collect bribes by force from us (migrants) after showing them our passports and vaccination documents.

Similarly, Akin (a Nigerian participant), related his unpleasant experience on Nigerien security guards while travelling by road from Niamey to Agadez. Excerpts from the interview are shown below:

Azeez: Your experience while going to Agadez from Niamey, was it by bus?

Akin: The experience was not without complaint. The border guard at the last check point to Agadez collected 10,000 CFA from me. Despite having all travel documents, they still collected a bribe from me by force.

Azeez: What is your thinking about such bribery activities of the police in Niger?

- Akin: I feel very bad. I am in constant fear and panic on Niamey-Agadez road whenever I see those police. This is due to the way they treat migrants. And if I am going to Agadez next time, I will go by air from Niamey.
- 

Azeez: Please, do you have any other comments?

- Akin: The only problem here is the migration stuff. Otherwise they have good security. Our bus is moving along the desert without any security threat. I can say someone can walk alone in this desert without any security threat. They should maintain that. But they need to respect migrants, especially the police.

The research findings thus present overwhelming evidence to show that the collection of bribes from migrants is a normal practice by the Nigerien border guards. The major consequence of such a practice is that if irregular migration is eventually stopped in Niger, the border guards who have thrived on bribes might initiate other criminal ways to extort money (Akkerman, 2018). This underlines the fact that restricting migration policy in Niger might work against the long-term goals of stability and development in the country and the Sahel region (Peter Tinti as cited in Akkerman, 2018). In addition, it suggests that a certain proportion of the huge resources spent in Niger by the EU through EUCAP Sahel Niger and EUTF in restricting migration could have been used in developmental programs in the country, rather than in restricting migration (Abebe, 2019; Molenaar, 2017).

#### 4.3.3.2 Roadway transportation experience: Agadez to Niamey

After completing my fieldwork in Agadez, I boarded another bus back to Niamey. My aim was to reassess my first trip experience and compare it to my return experience. However, the comparison is not similar. This is because, whereas we had 15 security checkpoints while travelling from Niamey to Agadez, we had just 1 checkpoint on the return journey (i.e. Agadez to Niamey). At the only checkpoint, no passenger was asked any questions by the border guards.

In summary, this chapter reveals that to travel by roadway from Niamey to Agadez is a big task because of the numerous security checkpoints and the bribery collection

practices of the border guards. However, the return journey to Niamey from Agadez is free of checkpoints and extortion for bribes. Moreover, the collaboration of the border guards and bus drivers in collecting bribes from the migrants and facilitating their mobility will continue to undermine the restrictive migration agenda and encourage the expansion of smuggling and trafficking networks in Niger. It further suggests the involvement of the border guards and bus drivers in aiding irregular migration and smuggler networks in transit regions. This finding supports the thesis hypothesis that state migration control policy cannot eradicate transit migration because there is a strong link between smuggling or trafficking networks and the functioning of the transit country. It further demonstrates the struggles among different actors (border guards, migrants, and driver) surrounding the inclusion and exclusion into the transit territory.

## Chapter 5: Results II

### 5.1 The situation of transit migration in Agadez

This section analyzes the situation of transit migration in Agadez. The town of Agadez is central to this research project because it is the main route that connects Niger to North Africa (see Figure 1). Therefore, migrants transiting through Niger must pass through Agadez in order to reach North African countries. To fully explore this migration route the section is sub-divided into eight sub-topics. These are: (1) terms used by transiting migrants in Agadez; (2) motivation for the Nigerian migrants transiting through Niger; (3) migration policy causing migrants to be stuck in transit territory; (4) economic impacts of the migration law; (5) coping tactics of the migrants; (6) feminization of migration in the context of vulnerability; (7) non-government organizations interventions; and (8) securitization of migration.

### 5.2 Terms used by transiting migrants in Agadez.

Based on the data derived from the interviews including participant observation, I identified terms used by migrants in Agadez to communicate amongst themselves. It is important to describe these terms because they are mentioned during the interview sessions. It also indicates that migrants have coined ways of sharing information, perhaps to avoid being too open about their affairs. The terms include uptown, downtown, connecting center, and burger.

Migrants referred to Libya, Algeria, and other North African countries as uptown, while Agadez is downtown. Smugglers and traffickers are called burger (e.g. Libya burger, Agadez burger). Connecting center is a bar, restaurant or other locations or premises where migrants, smugglers and traffickers meet, network, and socialize.

### 5.3 Motivation for Nigerian migrants transiting through Niger

Findings reveal that those seeking better economic opportunities under the free mobility guaranteed by the ECOWAS Protocol is the motivating factor for Nigerian migrants transiting through Niger to North Africa or elsewhere. The finding agrees with previous research on the subject (Lois, et al., 2017; Ikwuyatum, 2016). Indeed, all Nigerian research participants mentioned that they were transiting through Niger to seek better economic opportunities outside Nigeria. This result implies that until the root cause(s) of irregular migration are addressed, migrants will continue to challenge the restrictive migration policies in order to cross the border region (Abebe, 2019; Akkerman, 2018; Molenaar, 2017). Additionally, it casts doubt on the viability of the EU border externalization program in stopping irregular migration through the Sahel region into North Africa and later to Europe (Abebe, 2019; Zandonini, 2019; Howden and Zandonini, 2018; Akkerman, 2018; Molenaar, 2017; Hall, 2017).

Moreover, four of the Nigerian research participants maintained that they utilized the advantage of the free mobility to crisscross two or three West African countries before arriving into Niger. This agrees with other studies that Nigerian migrants cross through

the Republic of Benin and other West African countries along their journey to Niger (Xchange, 2019a). This emphasizes the practice of free mobility commonly practiced in the region in the precolonial era (Ikuyatum, 2016; Adepoju, 2011; Yaro, 2007). It also shows that some countries in the region serve as territories of origin, transit, and destination at the same time (Adepoju, 2008).

#### 5.4 Migration policy causing migrants to be stuck in transit territory

The 2015 migration law and the EU border externalization policy in Niger have disrupted the past practice of unhindered mobility of transit migrants from Agadez to North Africa. Consequently, most of the transit migrants are stuck in Agadez. This is mainly due to the fact that they must strategize by consulting with traffickers before continuing their journeys. In order to avoid the law, traffickers operate underground networks to secretly traffic migrants to the North Africa region.

Nigerian migrants such as Salome, Buba and Mero expressed deep frustration and concern over their experience in Agadez. They upheld their plan of transiting from Agadez to Algeria or Libya. But in the meantime, they must wait and negotiate the next level of their mobility with the smugglers. Salome and Buba expressed their mobility plan from Agadez to Libya or Algeria as shown in this excerpt.

Salome

Azeez: Are you going to Libya or Algeria?

Salome: I have my plan to go.

Azeez: Which plan please?

Salome: I have a burger (Smugglers) waiting for me there.

Buba

Azeez: Please if you eventually decide to go to Libya, how will you go there?

Buba: I have someone here in Agadez and another in Libya who can help in that...

Apart from the transit migrants I met in the bus along the Niamey to Agadez road, the remaining participants seem to be already stuck in Agadez. Due to their current situation, the supposedly transient lifestyles identified with the migrants in transit have been altered or changed to temporary or semi-permanent lifestyles. Over four-fifths of the research participants claimed to be living in a rented quarter or apartment and engage in one economic activity or the other, while still planning to transit. This finding corroborates previous research that many migrants were stuck in Agadez due to the migration policy in Niger (Xchange, 2019a). In addition, the situation of these migrants contradicts the widely held perception that transit territories provide a temporary and passing sojourn for the migrants (Hall, 2017; Brachet, 2012). Furthermore, due to their experiences, some of the migrants who are vulnerable use the services of the smugglers (Akkerman, 2018; Molenaar, 2017). This creates an opportunity for smugglers to operate and charge higher fares, take dangerous routes, expose migrants to various risks, and above all, migrants completely lose all self-control and direction of their journey (Xchange, 2019a, 2019b; Lois et al., 2017; Molenaar, 2017). All these points play into the interplays of different actors surrounding the inclusion and exclusion of border crossings (Tobias et al., 2018; Collyer 2012; Mainwaring, 2016; Mezzadra & Brett, 2013; Nail, 2016; Tsianos & Karakayali, 2010). It further emphasizes the unpleasant repercussions of the

Nigerien government's migration law and the EU border externalization agreements in Niger.

## 5.5 Economic impacts of the migration law

The imposition of the migration law in Niger further challenges the already poor economic situation in the country. This is worsened due to the over reliance of many Nigeriens on the income made through providing services for transiting migrants (Zandonini, 2019). This agrees with the explanations made by Aliyu (staff of a local NGO) and Jalingo (a migrants' rights activist) during an interview session. Aliyu and Jalingo disclosed that restriction on free mobility of migrants due to the migration policies has had detrimental effects on the socio-economic situation in Niger. For instance, based on Aliyu's years of work experience with a non-governmental organization that protects the right of migrants in Niger, he maintains that the migration law in the country has made Nigeriens poorer. He mentioned that the taxi drivers, hoteliers, the restaurant service providers, and motorcycle riders that relied heavily in providing services to migrants, but are now finding it difficult to survive economically due to the halt in transit migration. Aliyu expressed dissatisfaction about the impact of the migration law on Niger's economy as shown in this excerpt:

Interview: Aliyu

Aliyu: Before 2015 when you came to Agadez no one would ask you for a coin because everyone is self-sufficient. You see. But nowadays these people who used to take care of tens or hundreds of people around them now become some kind of, let me say without exaggerating, some kind of beggars.



Aliyu added that the reconciliation program organized by the Nigerien government in collaboration with the EU to economically empower Nigeriens formerly working in migration activities is not efficient. He expressed his view in this excerpt:

Interview: Aliyu

Aliyu: Some actors were asked to leave migration and convert their activities to new ones. Like I was a driver and now I must not drive anymore across the desert. Therefore, I must become a trader. Imagine at my age! I have never been connected to trading and suddenly you say stop driving, become a trader and I will fund you. And the funding...when I drive, I can make for example 2 million or 3 million CFA per month or per week and you give me 1 million and half for the whole rest of my life to operate another activity. With the 1 million reserve for life, do you think that it is possible to keep me from my previous activities? No.

Similarly, Jalingo who happens to be a migrants' rights activist in Niger expressed concerns and worries about the imposition of the migration law in the country. He noted that the law diminishes the standard of living of the people, especially in Agadez where the local economy thrives on migration. He revealed that after the unrest in Niger, the Nigerien government allowed rebels to transport migrants to North Africa. But, at the same time, the government now categorizes migration as an illegal act. Jalingo expressed his frustration over the migration law in Niger as indicated in this excerpt:

Interview: Jalingo

Jalingo: After the rebellion in Niger, the government allowed each rebel to have transport to build their economy and do the transport of migrants. It is allowed. It is free to do it. But what happened? Now they say stop. They are criminal. And they take some guys, they put them in jail. And they take their cars, they sold them. And they said no, this is no good, this illegal economy. But is not true. It is not true because Agadez has been since the beginning the economy of travelers. But what happens now? They stopped it and everybody sees that the economy of Agadez weakens. This is a problem.

Aliyu and Jalingo's statements corroborate the evidence in the literature that the migration law in Niger destabilizes the main source of income and impoverishes many Nigeriens (Zandonini, 2019; Barrios, 2015). The continuous downfall in the Agadez local economy encourages expansion of smuggler and trafficker networks and inspires many Nigeriens to embark on irregular migration to North Africa in order to seek economic opportunity (Xchange, 2019b).

In addition, Akin, a Nigerian migrant participant, maintained that his trip from Nigeria to Agadez was for business purposes. He explained that he was appalled and discontent about the way the Nigerien border guards perceived non-Nigeriens as potential transit migrants to North Africa. He noted that his experience with the Nigerien border guards might discourage his business proposal in Agadez as shown in this excerpt:

Interview: Akin

Akin: They think everyone that comes here want to move to Europe. No. They are scaring investors away, especially businesspeople from Africa.

Akin's declaration is a clear signal that the migration law challenges the circular migration of traders in Niger. This suggests that, despite the provision for free mobility of ECOWAS citizens, circular migration of West African traders is under threat in the Sahel region. Molenaar (2017) and Adepaju (2008) warn that the disruption of the circular migration of traders will negatively affect the economy of countries in the Sahel region. More importantly, the Niger local economy will be at the brink of collapse without circular migration of traders due to climate change that intensifies desert

encroachment, drought, and famine in the country (World Bank, 2020; Akkerman, 2018; Hall, 2017). Therefore, securitized migration measures in Niger are a threat to circular migration that sustains the livelihoods and economic wellbeing of many Nigeriens (Molenaar, 2017).

## 5.6 Coping tactics of the migrants.

In order to achieve a better understanding of this theme, findings on the migrants' coping strategies are divided into two parts. First, the coping strategies adopted while travelling along Niamey-Agadez road. Second, the coping strategies adopted in Agadez.

### 5.6.1 Coping strategies along Niamey-Agadez roadway.

My experience on board a bus along the Niamey-Agadez road shows that migrants adopt different coping strategies to deal with border guards that enforce the state migration law. The most commonly adopted coping strategy is the bribing of the border guards. This is a common practice, especially among transit migrants with incomplete or missing traveling documents. I also witnessed how Ismaila (a Malian transiting migrant) disguised as a Nigerien migrant in order to avoid being spotted or identified by the Nigerien border guards. Moreover, two of the transiting migrants (Bismark and Ismaila) on board the bus claimed they did not have an international passport, but only an ID card from their respective countries. I suggest this is a coping tactic used by these transiting migrants to hide their identity (see section on roadway transportation experience). All these coping strategies underscore the strenuous struggle made by

migrants to pass through border reinforcement and avoid being trapped in the transit territory (Mezzadra & Brett, 2013; Mathew, 2005).

### 5.6.2 Coping strategies in Agadez.

Transiting migrants in Agadez use various coping strategies that reflect their situations.

For instance, support from different organizations, deriving motivation from personal religious beliefs, and becoming involved in the sex trade are coping strategies identified among transit migrants in Agadez. For example, I witnessed a situation whereby certain organizations came along (visited migrants in a neighborhood) and presented certain consumable items (spaghetti, rice, cooking oil, milk, and sugar) to a Nigerian research participant (Mero). I asked Mero about the organization as revealed in this interview excerpt:

- **Azeez:** Please, who are these people?  
**Mero:** They first came here two weeks ago. You see all those gifts are for me because I told them when they came that I am not going to Libya or Algeria. I just moved into this house...so someone living in this area told them about me, that I am a migrant. So, they came two weeks ago and advised me not to go to North Africa. I said I am not going, so, they brought gifts for me.
- **Azeez:** If a migrant said he is going to Libya or Algeria. What will happen?
- **Mero:** They will not write down the name of the person and the person will not get any support from them like these gifts they gave me. They might also report the person to security. Last week some migrants were given 45.000 CFA each by these people. They asked me to inform them if I needed health support or if I experienced any abuse.

Mero did not know the name of this organization. However, it is clear that the primary agenda of the organization is to discourage transit migrants from migrating to North Africa. This reveals one of the reasons why most migrants in transit seldom confide in

humanitarian and non-governmental organizations. They believe these organizations are not supportive of their migration plan; they prefer to hide and refuse to seek or accept support from non-government organizations (Red Cross, 2018).

Another Nigerian research participant, Biyi, mentioned that he used to help the Red Cross organization in distributing money and relief packages to migrants in transit in Agadez. He also acknowledged that he sought emotional and prayer support from a faith-based organization when he had problem.

Furthermore, utilizing bribes as a coping strategy is also identified in Agadez. Certainly, the situation of the migrants has made them an easy target for police harassment and extortion for bribes. Salome, a Nigerian participant, narrates her experience on the issue in this excerpt:

Interview: Salome

Salome: You see at this connecting center police come to harass people. They arrest girls and anyone they see around. This time last year they arrested everybody, this was in December 2019. The people that had 20,000 CFA to bail themselves out were released in the morning. Those who paid 10,000 CFA were released later in the night.

This finding supports the literature that Nigerian police officers extort migrants for bribes due to their vulnerable situation (Molenaar, 2017; Brachet, 2012).

In addition, Bako, a former driver, mentioned that he knew some Nigerian male transit migrants who were engaging in odd jobs such as cleaners and shop attendants to cope financially. I could not reach this potential study group because of the security situation in Agadez. Moreover, engaging in the sex trade is also a coping tactic used by some

female transit migrants to survive their financial difficulties in Agadez. I will further analyze on the sex trade in the next theme.

In general, these findings agree with other studies that migrants use various available methods within their capacity to survive along their journey (Zwick, 2019; Mallet and Hagen-Zanker, 2018; Collyer, 2007).

### 5.7 Feminization of migration in the context of vulnerability

It is worth mentioning that feminization of migration is not about comparing the figure of female and male migrants, rather it is about the increase in independent female migration (Ikwuyatum, 2016, 2012; Adepaju, 2011). Findings of this research project reveal the occurrence of independent female migration in some significant ways. First, all female migrant participants in the research project granted their consent to participate without seeking approval from anyone. Second, despite being stuck in transit, all the female participants mentioned they were fending for themselves without relying on any male support. These are indications that they are independent migrants and can take decisions on their own. The case of Iyo, a female Nigerian participant, is remarkable in this regard. In addition to providing for herself, she was also taking care of her two kids as shown in this excerpt:

Interview: Salome

Iyo: I have two kids with me here in Agadez. I am the only one taking care of them.

This finding suggests the occurrence of independent female migration in the Sahel region. However, there is a need to conduct further research on this topic in order to actually confirm the rise in independent female migration in the region.

However, due to the vulnerability of females on migrant routes in the Sahel, the feminization of migration is of concern. For instance, the interview and ethnographic data acquired for the purpose of this research project revealed some critical issues connected to the vulnerability of female migrants. These issues are trafficking of girls, sex trade, and forced labor. These problems are linked to the precarious situation of these transit migrants as a result of the migration law in Niger.

It is necessary to note that the challenges of trafficking, sex trade and forced labor in the transit territory are complex, interwoven, and interconnected. For instance, one of the Nigerian research participants (Buba) mentioned that she and other girls were promised in Nigeria to be smuggled to Libya. However, on their arrival in Agadez, they were forced into prostitution. This is because the smuggler demanded 1million CFA from each of them as a cost of smuggling them to Agadez. The excerpt from the interview conducted with Buba revealed all these issues:

Interview: Buba

Azeez: Please can you share your experience on the difficulties you have faced?

Buba: There was one woman in Lagos, Nigeria that informed me that she needs someone to work in her shop in Libya. She is the one that faked documentation for us and brought us here.

Azeez: Please how many are you?

Buba: We are three. I later learnt when we reached here that the woman worked in trafficking. She collected 250,000 Naira from me in Nigeria. I sold some of the things in my shop. I thought she was telling the truth, that we are going abroad.

Azeez: Are you the only one she collected money from?

Buba: The two other ladies when they reached here were told to will pay 1 million CFA. For me, as someone that paid some money in Nigeria before, they told me to go pay 750,000 CFA.

Azeez: Did you pay?

Buba: Yes, we paid.

Azeez: You paid the money directly to her?

Buba: She transferred us to another person here. It is the new person we pay.

Buba's explanation reveals the use of force on her and other girls to pay the smugglers.

Certainly, the use of force on the migrants demonstrates the conflation or blurring of

smuggling and trafficking in Agadez as widely reported in Libya (Lois et al., 2017:9;

Kamouni-Janssen, 2017; Carling et al., 2015). In addition, the findings also support

previous research that traffickers and/or smugglers force female migrants into the sex

trade to pay for the next stage of their trip (UNICEF, 2017; IOM, 2016; Lois et al., 2017).

Moreover, findings show that trafficking in girls for commercial sex is active in Niger.

Indeed, the transfer of the girls from one trafficker to another in Agadez and the

exorbitant financial gain involved corroborates previous research that trafficking

syndicates are operating a network in the Sahel region (Adepoju, 2008). Furthermore,

the interaction of these migrants and the traffickers emphasize actors' confrontation and

struggles over border crossings (Zandonini, 2019; Tobias, et al, 2018; Mezzadra & Brett,

2013; Barrios, 2015)



In addition, Iyo, a female Nigerian participant, noted that underage girls were trafficked into Agadez from Nigeria for the sex trade until recently, when the Nigerian government arrested and jailed some of the traffickers. She expressed her opinion in this excerpt:

Interview: Iyo

Iyo: These burgers (traffickers) are bad. If you see small, small, girls they were trafficked from Nigeria. Small, small, secondary school girls for prostitution work, can you believe that. That is too bad!

In addition, Aliyu, (staff of a local NGO) opined that before the implementation of the migration law in Niger, it was hard to see prostitutes in the streets of Agadez. But presently, prostitutes from different countries are noticeable around all the streets in Agadez, especially during the night. Aliyu maintained that the migration law disrupts free mobility of the migrants and has resulted in immoral behaviors, such as the sex trade and smuggling.

Findings of this theme suggest that trafficking in girls for prostitution and forced labor is active in transit regions (i.e. Niger). It also suggests that the migration law in Niger did not discourage trafficking in girls until recently when some of the traffickers were convicted. The finding supports the literature that the Niger/Chad/Nigeria border was notorious for trafficking girls (Adepoju, 2008). It also underscored the interplay of smugglers/traffickers and migrants in border crossings (Zandonini, 2019; Tobias et al., 2018; Barrios, 2015). Finally, it asserts that restrictive migration policies, lack of economic opportunity and poor governance expose female migrants to further manipulation and

mistreatment (Akkerman, 2018; Adepoju, 2008). However, there is need for more research on this theme in order to have a clearer understanding of the situation.

### 5.8 Impact of the Non-Government Organizations Interventions:

Many non-governmental organizations focusing on migrants and refugees are operating in Niger (See Figure 3). Understanding the impact and relevance of these organizations in the country is essential. The initial aim of the research project was to interview the staff of the Alarmphone Sahara (APS) and International Organization for Migration (IOM); but the former accepted the interview request, while the latter rejected it (See: Appendix III). Therefore, in this section of the research, the role of APS in Niger is highlighted. To achieve this, an interview was conducted with two staff members of APS. They are represented by the fictitious names Aliyu and Mubarak.

According to Aliyu and Mubarak, APS encourages migration because it is the right of everyone to migrate. They disclosed that APS discourages embarking on dangerous migration journeys. Aliyu maintained that APS is a network that involves African and European partners that are saving migrants lives at sea and in the desert as indicated in this excerpt:

- Interview: Aliyu  
Azeez: Tell us about your organization (Alarmphone Sahara)  
Aliyu: Alarmphone Sahara (APS) is a network in which we have European and African country activists. There is a lot of death and other circumstances occurring in the Mediterranean Sea. The Sahara Desert is also a criminal because it can kill its victims, bury their bodies forever, and no one will know what happened. So, this is why we try to join our movement to the Alarmphone Mediterranean and now we make the same group. So, they work on the sea and we work on the

sand. That is the difference. Our role is to sensitize, document, and rescue. We don't discourage migrants. We don't encourage them. They know what their rights are.

This shows that APS's central aim is to support migrants in exercising their right to freedom of movement without prejudice. In addition, Aliyu and Mubarak explained that APS was not collaborating with IOM and other INGOs in Niger. This is because APS encourages the right to movement of migrants, while some of the INGOs, including IOM, are supporting the state migration policy in preventing and restricting mobility.

The following excerpt further reveals their comments on the subject:

Interview: Aliyu

Aliyu: IOM is in Niger. It has its headquarter in Agadez and transit camps in Agadez, Airlit, and Dirikue, which are parts of Agadez region. But the problem with IOM is that they just give one possibility to the migrants. Either they want them to return to their countries, in which they can help them to return. Whereas for us, a person willing to go somewhere must not be discouraged. Don't say I will not help you in continuing with your way forward, I just want to help you go back to your country. You know the reason why this person has left their place. There is climate change, there is insecurity, there is bad governance, and there are diseases. Plenty of things that contribute to this situation of why people have to leave their original homes for new places. According to us you should not force someone to return to their place unless we have alternatives for him or for them.

Interview: Mubarak

Mubarak: APS cannot collaborate with IOM and other INGOs. We encourage free migration while IOM's main approach is to repatriate migrants back to their country of origin. We are against this.

Although IOM declined the interview request, the above excerpt and literature shows that IOM's activities in Niger are more favorable and generous towards the EU and the Nigerien government's restrictive migration policies (Xchange, 2019a; Akkerman, 2018; Howden & Zandonini, 2018; Hall, 2017; Prestianni, 2016). For instance, the organization's

sole response of repatriating migrants back to their countries of origin is a point of reference to substantiate this assertion (Red Cross, 2018; Barrios, 2015; Zandonini, 2019). Therefore, the findings suggest that APS's response to the migration crisis in Niger is conscious of migrants' right to freedom of movement, while IOM's response is the opposite.

Moreover, it is appropriate to understand the views of the migrants surrounding the activities of these organizations. The research data shows that some migrants misconstrue the roles of these organizations, while some are uninformed about their operations. These create weaknesses and gaps that seem to make the impact of these organizations less effective. To further explore this theme, the research presents the excerpt of the interviews conducted with Biyi, a Nigerian participant and Margret, a Beninese participant.

For example, Biyi maintained that he used to assist an INGO in distributing money and relief packages to Nigerian migrants. He disclosed that when he was arrested by the Nigerien security, the INGO did not intervene to assist him as revealed in the following excerpt:

Interview: Biyi

Biyi: Those European INGOs used to come to my home to seek information about migrants transiting through Niger and even organized the distribution of money to Nigerian migrants. But when I had a problem they abandoned me. I was arrested and detained by the Nigerien security forced and no one was there to help me except my wife who stood by me with prayer. I spent one year in detention before I was released last month.

Azeez: What might have been your offense?

**Biyi:** I used to assist and help migrants, but they set me up as being involved migrant smuggling, trafficking, and terrorism.

Biyi's statements show the kind of expected support migrants believe INGOs and NGOs should provide. The inability to provide such assistance makes migrants feel disappointed, betrayed, and rejected, whereas such expected support might not be within the objectives of the organizations. This is an indication of a wide gap between the expectation of the migrants and the mission of these organizations.

Another gap identified is the lack of awareness about the operation of these organizations among the migrants. For example, Margret, a female Beninese participant, expressed her lack of knowledge about the existence of an NGO that provides support services for transit migrants in Agadez. She voiced her remarks in this interview quotation:

Interview: Margret

**Azeez:** Did you know about the organizations working for migrants?

**Margret:** No! No! This is the first time I know about it.

This is an indication that some migrants are not well informed about the existence and operation of these non-governmental organizations working in Niger. This creates a wide gap between the migrants and the organizations. These gaps must be lessened in order for these organizations to achieve closer relationships and ties with migrants.

## 5.9 Securitization of migration.

Securitization of migration empowers governments to arbitrarily label migrants as potential threats to state security (Abebe, 2019; Buzan, 1998). This puts migrants under

undue supervision, suspicion, and stigmatization, including the risk of constant harassment, detention, and deportation (Abebe, 2019; Akkerman, 2018; Hall, 2017). Indeed, empirical evidence reveals that defining migration as a security risk encourages abuse of power by the state agents and promotes corrupt practices (Molenaar, 2017). For instance, despite the provision of the ECOWAS Protocol of Free Movement for West African migrants, my personal experience at the Niamey Airport and along the Niamey-Agadez roadway mirrored the traumatic challenges faced by the migrants in a state that securitizes migration. My experience reveals that migrants are vulnerable to unnecessary security checks and extortion for bribes by the border guards.

Moreover, participants in the FGDs expressed various abuses they suffered at the hands of Nigerien police because they were suspected of attempting to transit to North Africa. For example, Kofi, a Ghanaian participant, explained that his brother (Nene) was recently arrested and detained by the Nigerien police on the allegation of attempting to transit through Agadez to Libya. He clarified that he was released a day before the FGD. Therefore, securitization of migration is a threat to free movement of people and exposes migrants to all sorts of abuse and intimidation. Rather than securing the territory from insecurity, it further exposes it to more danger and crisis

The research further interviewed Aliyu, a staff member of an NGO and Jalingo, a migrants' rights activist, to investigate their views on the securitized migration measures in Niger. Aliyu and Jalingo expressed their displeasure over the securitization of

migration in Niger. For example, Aliyu maintained that securitization of migration in Niger is unrealistic because the main source of livelihood in Agadez is through migration activities. He believes that classifying migration as a security risk will scare migrants away and divert Nigeriens who are engaging in migration activities into smuggling and other illegalities in order to earn their livelihood. Aliyu expressed his opinion as shown in these excerpts:

Interview: Aliyu

Aliyu: Agadez citizens don't have other jobs except these migration activities. And nowadays they think that migration is a crime. They think that we should stop this migration. You can easily understand that there are obstacles in this. And then if nothing is done it means there could be insecurity problems because there are now people who graduate without jobs. And because all these kinds of activities are conducted in the desert you cannot excluded the possibility of bringing gangs into the city and young people can become involved in kidnapping or influence and make their own money from vulnerable people.

As for Jalingo, he argues that many countries of the world achieve their development through migration. Therefore, it is wrong to label migration as a lawless activity. He makes his remarks in this excerpt:

Interview: Jalingo

Jalingo: Immigrants built Italy. At the beginning, the movement of people-built America. The resources of the migrants build the economy of their land. Now, if you go to Kai in Mali you will see a big town. But this big town is built not by Malians at home but Malians in Europe and in America. They send money to their families and their families pay for scholarships and to build the economy. It is not true that money of migration is illegal.

This finding demonstrates that securitization of migration hinders free mobility of the migrants, encourages criminality, and hampers economic growth and development in

Niger. This result supports the literature that securitization of migration in Niger promotes expansion of trafficking and smuggling networks and exposes migrants to all sorts of abuse and intimidation (Abebe, 2019; Xchange, 2019a, 2019b; Akkerman, 2018). Instead of securing the territory, it further exposes it to more danger and crisis (Abebe, 2019; Akkerman, 2018). In addition, it has negative impacts on the economic development of Niger. For example, according to Zandonini (2019), migrants in transit contributed 100 million euros (\$113.8m) into the local Niger economy as reported in an IOM study in 2016 (Zandonini, 2019). This demonstrates that the implementation of securitized migration measures in Niger disrupts free mobility of migrants and hampers the economic benefits it generates (Abebe, 2019; Zandonini, 2019; Howden & Zandonini, 2018; Molenaar, 2017). Thus, the research findings validate the hypothesis that securitization of migration is a threat to free mobility, economic well-being, and the security of the state.



## Chapter 6: Discussion

In this chapter, the key findings of the research project are analyzed and linked to the research questions, hypotheses, academic literature, and theoretical framework. First, this research project draws on the theoretical framework of the border regime theory (Tobias et al., 2018; Mainwaring, 2016; Nail, 2016; Mezzadra & Brett, 2013; Collyer, 2012; Tsianos & Karakayali, 2010). This theory explains the configuration of migration beyond the physical barrier of borders and focuses more on the actions and interactions of different actors that encourage or discourage border crossing (Dina and Jasnea. 2019; Mezzadra & Brett, 2013; Bruno, 2019; Collyer, 2012; Mainwaring, 2016; Mathew, 2005). These actors include migrants, the state, and its agents, e.g. the Nigerien government, border guards, police officers, facilitators (the EU, ECOWAS), media, surveillance devices, and others (Corporatewatch, 2018; Tobias et al., 2018; Rogier, 2016; Mezzadra & Brett, 2013). Hence, this theory provides an appropriate background that helped me identify and understand the roles of all the actors involved in the dynamic of Nigerian migrants transiting through Niger. This assisted me in exploring the interactions of the migrants, border guards, bus drivers, etc., and recognized the problems confronting the migrants in the context of the migration law in Niger.

Overall, the results reveal relevant facts that help actualize the aim and objectives of the thesis. For example, the thesis identifies the motivations behind Nigerian migrants transiting through Niger. They are searching for better economic opportunities and free

mobility as recognized in previous studies (Lois et al., 2017; Ikwuyatum, 2016; Adepoju, 2011). This suggests that until the root causes of irregular migration are addressed, people will continue to migrate and challenge the restrictive immigration policies without minding the consequences (Abebe, 2019; Barrios, 2015; Tsianos & Karakayali, 2010).

Moreover, the huge resources spent by the EU in restricting migration from third countries (including Niger) into the EU zone could have been better used in developmental projects that would have promoted better economic prospects and opportunity in these countries. For instance, the EU spent €15.3 billion outside Europe to restrict migration into the EU zone between 2014 and 2016 (Cosgrave et al., 2016). This fund, if well managed and closely monitored, could have been used to enhance economic development in Niger and other third countries, thereby helping to create economic opportunity in these countries and discourage the excessive desire to migrate. Moreover, there is a necessity to develop robust migration agreements between African countries and the EU that will promote legal pathways for the migrants into the EU zone (Abebe, 2019).

In addition, the research findings show that Nigerien border guards and police officers stationed on the check points along Niamey-Agadez roadway regularly collect bribes from the migrants in collaboration with the bus drivers as illustrated in earlier studies (Xchange, 2019a, 2019b; Akkerman, 2018; Molenaar, 2017; Brachet, 2012). My personal

experience along the Niamey-Agadez road revealed that undocumented West African migrants paid approximately 75,000 CFA, while documented migrants paid 10,000 CFA in bribes to security officers in all the check points along the road. This suggests that border guards and police officers are all implicated in encouraging irregular migration and indirectly aiding smuggling and trafficking networks. Thus, this highlights the failure of the Nigerien border guards to enforce the migration law and undermine the integrity of the state's immigration enforcement agency (Vigneswaran, 2012). This finding further reveals the collusion of border guards, police officers, bus drivers, smugglers, and migrants in border crossing. The interaction of these actors will consistently subvert the migration policy in Niger and elsewhere (Mezzadra & Brett 2013). In this circumstance, the border control policy cannot eradicate migrant transit activity in Niger.

Furthermore, relevant facts have been revealed to substantiate the hypothesis that the securitization of migration is a threat to free mobility, economic well-being, and security of the state. First, Nigerian and other West African migrants who ought to have been protected by the ECOWAS Protocol are being denied free mobility through Niger to North Africa and other places. This is due to the implementations of the EU border externalization agreement and the Nigerien government migration law of 2015 (Abebe, 2019; Xchange, 2019a, 2019b; Molenaar, 2017). The negative impact of the migration law was extremely harsh in Agadez and migrants are in constant fear of being harassed and arrested by security forces. Therefore, migrants are always mindful of their

movement and frequently remain hidden to avoid being identified (Red Cross, 2019). For instance, Nigerian participant Akin and Ghanaian participants Kofi and Nene expressed their displeasure about how migrants are being maltreated, harassed, and detained by the Nigerien police and border guards. Akin specifically maintained that he was always in fear whenever he sighted Nigerien police officers. It is also important to note that the only option offered by the IOM to transit migrants in Niger is voluntary repatriation to their countries of origin (Akkerman, 2018; Hall, 2017). Thus, the unfavorable situation in Niger inspires migrants to use the services of smugglers and traffickers to evade being stuck in transit, and, consequently exposes them to further exploitation (Howden and Zandonini, 2018). Therefore, securitization of migration in Niger denies Nigerian and other West African migrants the right to freedom of mobility as granted by the ECOWAS Protocol (Xchange, 2019a; Akkerman, 2018; Molenaar, 2017). Similarly, literature shows that the Niger economy has been negatively affected due to the diminished tourism industry caused by the kidnapping of foreign workers and the Tuareg uprising in the late 2000s (Xchange, 2019a; Bagnetto, 2012). However, this result demonstrates that the crackdown on migration as a result of the implementation of securitized migration policies further destabilizes the economic well-being in Niger (Abebe, 2019; Molenaar, 2017). First, the total collapse of migration activity in Niger resulted in a wiping out of the main source of income for many Nigeriens, particularly in Agadez, where many Nigeriens earned their livelihood by providing services to migrants

in transit (Zandonini, 2019; Howden & Zandonini, 2018; Hall, 2017; Lois et al., 2017).

Findings show that the hoteliers, ghetto accommodation providers, desert guides, food vendors, bureau de change and truck drivers lost their sources of income after the passing of the 2015 law. For instance, Aliyu explained that the migration laws that clampdown on transit migration through Niger badly affect the country's economy, especially in Agadez. Aliyu added that the reconciliation program organized by the Nigerien government in cooperation with the EU to relieve the economic effect of the migration law was poorly managed. Moreover, Jalingo clarified that the law makes the people become poorer, especially in Agadez, where the local economy flourishes from migration. These findings are comparable to previous research. For instance, a pick-up truck driver that transported 25 migrants from Agadez to Libya earned 1,500 euros (\$1,706) monthly before 2015; while those that transported 30 to 40 migrants made 4,000 euros in the same period (Zandonini, 2019; Barrios, 2015). Zandonini (2019) furthered analyzes that a food vendor that serves migrants earned 35,000 CFA (\$60) weekly before the migration law, while she made 2,000 CFA (\$3.4) by hawking peanuts after the introduction of the law in 2015. In addition, projects such as PAIERA (the Action Plan for Rapid Economic Impact in Agadez) implemented by the Nigerien government in collaboration with the EU to relieve the economic impact of migration clampdown in Agadez and provide compensation for ex smugglers ended in shambles (Zandonini, 2019; Howden & Zandonini, 2018). Therefore, securitized migration policies further

destabilize the Niger economy, especially in Agadez where the local economy relies on migration (Zandonini, 2019; Molenaar, 2017; Hall, 2017).

Another important point in connection to economic well-being is the interruption of the circular migration of traders, artisans, and seasonal workers in Niger and the Sahel region. This result reveals that the Nigerien security guards branded Nigerians and other West African citizens as migrants in transit, thereby exposing them to scapegoating, unwarranted interrogation, and extortion for bribes. For instance, Akin said that he was in Niger to transact farm business with Nigerien herders without the intention of transiting to North Africa. But the Nigerian border guards forcefully collected bribes from him while travelling along the Niamey-Agadez road, despite having his travel documents. Akin complained that this experience frightened him and he might look elsewhere to buy cows. This corroborates earlier studies that securitization of migration is a stumbling block for the free mobility of cross-border traders and seasonal workers in the Sahel region (Molenaar, 2017). This development is detrimental to the economic growth of Niger because the country is a landlocked country and its economic survival depends more on the interchange of commercial and economic activities with other countries in the region (Xchange, 2019a; Hall, 2017; Molenaar, 2017). Moreover, the Niger economy would be in a disadvantaged position without circular migration due to the adverse effect of climate change and the dwindling economic crisis since the Tuareg uprising in late 2000s and the introduction of the migration law in 2015 (World Bank,

2020; Xchange, 2019a; Hall, 2017; Lois, et, al., 2017; Molenaar, 2017). However, it is not proper to overlook the reality that the Nigerien government also benefiting financially and in other ways from its collaborations with the EU in border and migration control. For instance, the EU allocated 230 million euros (\$261.7m) through its Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) for projects in Niger since 2015 (EUTF, 2020; Zandonini, 2019). In addition, EUCAP also supports Niger through the training of Nigerien security officers in preventing and combating trans-border banditry, terrorism, smuggling, and trafficking, including providing equipment worth 4.9 million Euros to the country in 2018 (EUCAP, 2020). In addition, the High Authority for the Consolidation of Peace, a Nigerien government and EU initiative to reduce conflicts in border regions, introduced an eight million Euro (\$9.2m) project known as PAIERA to relieve the economic impact of the migration clampdown in Agadez, as well as provide compensation for ex-smugglers (Zandonini, 2019). Furthermore, the European Development Fund awarded \$731 million to Niger since 2014 (Howden & Zandonini, 2018). Perhaps, if these funds and other benefits have been fairly and judiciously used for developmental projects in Niger, the country would be in a better economic situation.

It is also worth pointing out that the securitization of migration is instrumental to the trapped experience of migrants, especially in Agadez. Findings reveal that this situation disrupts the transient lifestyle of the migrants and their contribution to the local economy in Niger (Xchange, 2019a; Hall, 2017). For instance, an IOM study reveals that

migrants in transit injected 100 million Euros (\$113.8m) into the local economy in 2016 (Zandonini, 2019).

This research project further reveals that the securitization of migration is closely linked to the security problem in Niger and the Sahel region, more broadly. Research participants such as Aliyu and Jalingo maintained that Agadez has been experiencing increased insecurity since the enactment of the migration law in 2015 as the law criminalized migration beyond Agadez. Aliyu specified that many Nigeriens rely on migration activities as their source of income and the outlawing of migration blocked these earnings. This is because the number of incoming migrants to Niger has drastically been reduced and the few migrants that eventually reach Agadez are always in hiding. This forces jobless Nigerien youths into smuggling of migrants, drugs, and arms. Aliyu added that the collaboration of the EU and Nigerien government through the reconciliation program to empower ex-migration workers failed because of challenges related to poor coordination and inconsistency. Therefore, the program was unsuccessful in dissuading people from trafficking and smuggling activities. Moreover, Jalingo noted that migration is not an illegal activity but rather a way of achieving growth and development as has happened in the US and Italy. This hypothesis agrees with previous research. For example, Abebe (2019) indicates that restrictive migration policies in Niger disrupts the source of livelihood of many people and encourages underground human smuggling and trafficking networks (Demuyne & Coleman, 2020).



Moreover, the consolidation of peace projects organized to empower ex-migrant workers in Niger was a failure due to corruption, poor management, and lack of funds (Zandonini, 2019). Hence, some Nigeriens resulted to smuggling and trafficking to survive economically (Zandonini, 2019; Howden & Zandonini, 2018; Hall, 2017; Molenaar, 2017).

Furthermore, findings of this research reveal occurrences of independent female migration in Niger. First, all female migrant participants in the research project granted their consent to participate without seeking approval from anyone. Second, despite being stuck in transit, all the female participants mentioned they were fending for themselves without relying on any male support. These findings suggest that they are independent migrants and can make decisions on their own. However, further research is required to better understand if independent female migration is actually on the increase in the Sahel region as suggested in the previous studies (Ikwuyatum, 2016, 2012; Adepoju, 2011).

Findings of this research also reveal the problem of trafficking girls for the sex trade in transit territories. For instance, Buba disclosed that a smuggler promised her and two other girls' job opportunities in Libya before leaving Nigeria. But they were eventually trafficked to Agadez and forced into the sex trade in order to pay the sum of 1 million CFA demanded by the trafficker. Another female Nigerian participant (Iyo) mentioned that trafficking of young girls from Nigeria to Agadez for the sex trade was rampant

until recently when Nigerien security arrested and prosecuted some of the traffickers. Moreover, Aliyu clarified that the sex trade in Agadez has increased since the implementation of the migration law in 2015. However, there is need for further research on this topic in order to have a clearer understanding of the situation. Furthermore, interventions of international and local non-governmental organizations are identified in Niger. For example, IOM, UNHCR, APS, and the Red Cross are operating in the country. However, findings of the research reveal that the missions of the international and local NGOs are in sharp contrast. The case of IOM and APS is relevant in this context. While IOM is concerned with providing repatriation assistance to migrants, APS encourages the right of free movement of migrants. Moreover, there is a wide gap between migrants' expectations and the missions of these organizations. Thus, migrants' beliefs about the operations and activities of these organizations are so often misinformed and misunderstood that they find it difficult to confide in these organizations. Consequently, many of the migrants result in self-help coping mechanisms (Red Cross, 2018).

In general, findings of the research project acknowledge the relevance of the border regime theory in analyzing transit migration discourse. The interplay of actors surrounding the inclusion and exclusion in the transit or border region is on full display in Niger (Mezzadra & Brett 2013; Tobias et al., 2012). For example, findings show the collaboration of the EU and countries in the Maghreb and Sahel region, including Niger,

through programs such as EUCAP and EUTF restrict migration from Africa into the EU zone (EUCAP, 2020; EUTF, 2020; Molenaar, 2017). It further demonstrates the collaboration of the EU and the international non-governmental organizations, such as IOM, in actualizing a restrictive migration agenda of the EU. For instance, IOM offers only repatriation assistance to migrants in Niger (Akkerman, 2018; Hall, 2017). Additionally, findings reveal the collaborations of the border guards and bus drivers in aiding the undocumented migrants to access the transit territory. This is possible because the undocumented migrants pay the bribes demanded by the Nigerien border guards as witnessed along Niamey-Agadez roadway. Similarly, smugglers are actively involved in smuggling migrants from Nigeria to Agadez, and later to North Africa. In this scenario, state agents (border and security guards) and individuals (bus drivers and traffickers) are all involved in encouraging irregular migration and undermining migration law. This shows the direct involvement of state agents in transit migration activities in Niger. It also emphasizes the main reason why the imposition of the migration law cannot stop transit migration in Niger (Abebe, 2019; Molenaar 2014; Xchange, 2019a). This evidence validates the thesis hypotheses that the collaboration of different actors such as the border guards, bus drivers, migrants, smugglers, traffickers, among others, will continue to make the state border control efforts less effective. Thus, the interaction of these actors has become an essential device for clearly understanding migration issues and demonstrates the importance of absorbing migrants' experiences

into the formulation of migration policy (Tobias et al 2018; Nail, 2016; Mezzadra & Brett, 2013).

However, findings of the research project might not represent the entire context of the migration situation in Agadez due to some reasons, namely: (1) first, the security situation in Agadez inhibited the researcher from reaching out to other potential participants. Probably these potential participants might offer different perspectives that would have altered the findings. (2) Second, to fully assess and understand the transit migration configuration in the region, a comprehensive study that will encompass a sample size from other West African states will be required. (3) Third, the reluctance of IOM to partake in the interview is unsatisfactory. It denied the researcher the opportunity of incorporating the organization's perspective into the findings. It also made it challenging to hear and access the view of the organization on the allegation of colluding with the EU and the Nigerien government in restricting migration. (4) Fourth, it is very challenging to split and differentiate among stuck, transiting, economic, regular, and irregular migrants in the Sahel region. (5) Likewise, the blurring or conflation of smuggling and trafficking in Agadez made distinguishing between the two a challenge. (6) Sixth, there is need for further research on the feminization of migration and female migrants' vulnerability in transit countries, i.e., Niger. Nevertheless, despite these restrictions, the research project accomplished its aim of understanding the dynamics of Nigerian migrants transiting through Niger along their journey.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion.

This thesis explores the dynamics of Nigerian migrants transiting through Niger along their journey to North Africa and elsewhere with the border regime theory providing the theoretical foundation for the research. This theory offers an appropriate background that helps identify and understand the roles of all the actors involved in the Nigerian migrants' transit mobility through Niger. This further assists the research in exploring the interactions of these actors that include the migrants, Nigerian government, the EU, ECOWAS, border guards, bus drivers, non-governmental organizations, etc., and recognizing the problems confronting the migrants in the context of the migration law in Niger.

The results show that the motivation for Nigerian migrants transiting through Niger are economic pressure under the free mobility offered through the ECOWAS Protocol. However, securitized migration policies in Niger implemented through the EU border externalization program and the Nigerian government migration law of 2015 make this increasingly difficult. The impacts of these migration policies on free mobility, the economy, and security have been recognized and discussed. In addition, independent female migration has been identified and the roles of the non-governmental organizations are highlighted in the transit territory.

Overall, the results offer strong support for the research hypotheses. For instance, the securitization of migration in Niger due to the implementation of the Nigerian

government's migration law and the EU border externalization agenda drastically hinder and limit the right of the Nigerian and other West African migrants to free mobility as provided by the ECOWAS Protocol. It also destabilizes the economy, especially in Agadez, and contributes to the insecurity in Niger and the Sahel region due to the expansion of trafficking and smuggling networks. In addition, the securitized migration policies in Niger create opportunities for border guards to extort migrants for bribes and expose them to harassment and detention. Moreover, the roles of the non-governmental organizations in Niger have been examined. For instance, international organizations such as IOM offer repatriation possibility to migrants, whereas local non-government organization like APS encourages the right of migrants to free mobility. Additionally, mobility of the migrants further north of Agadez to North Africa or elsewhere is facilitated through the smuggling and trafficking networks. The networks provide an alternative for migrants to cope with and undermine the restrictive migration law in Niger. However, migrants use the services of the smugglers and traffickers at higher fees and at great risk because they lose the control of their mobility. Moreover, the involvement of trafficking and smuggling networks increases trafficking girls for sex in the transit territory.

The findings demonstrate that the EU collaborates with Niger and other countries in the Sahel and Maghreb regions to address the issues of trans-border security, as well as to manage and control immigration. However, it is important to emphasize that relying on

migration policies alone cannot address the issues of irregular or transit migration through the Sahel region to North Africa and later towards Europe. Rather, efforts should be made by the EU in collaboration with African countries towards addressing the root causes of the irregular migration in the regions. The main cause of the problem is poor governance which leads to other crises such as civil unrest, war, human rights abuses, poverty, corruption, unemployment and lack of economic opportunity.

Therefore, the EU should encourage and facilitate better governance in its collaboration with African countries. This will help to promote concrete socio-economic development and deliver basic economic prospects and opportunities for the people in the region.

This will assist in genuinely discouraging and limiting irregular migration from the regions into the EU. Thus, emphasizing the importance of understanding migrants' experiences in formulating developmental and migration policies. Moreover, legal pathways of sub-Saharan migrants into the EU, especially in the areas of labor, commercial, professional and educational migration, should be encouraged between African states and the EU.

This research lessened a significant gap caused by the under-researched area of transit migration in the Sahel region. It revealed empirical evidence on the interplay of actors surrounding the inclusion and exclusion of Nigerian migrants in border crossings and transit through Niger. Moreover, the results paved the way for further research. For instance, more research is required to understand the smugglers' influence on migrants

in the countries of origin to properly contextualize their operation in the transit territory. Furthermore, issues such as trafficking of girls and women, the vulnerability of female migrants, rising independent female migration, as well as distinguishing between smuggling and trafficking in the Sahel region demand further research. Additionally, a comparative analysis of West African and other sub-Saharan African migrants transiting through Niger is also desirable.



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## Appendix

### Appendix I

CASE #2018-2019-148



To: Aziz Ganiyu  
Cc: Eman Moursey  
From: Atta Gebril, Chair of the IRB  
Date: June 27, 2019  
Re: Approval of study

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This is to inform you that I reviewed your revised research proposal entitled "Niger as a transit point for Nigerian migrants" and determined that it required consultation with the IRB under the "expedited" category. As you are aware, the members of the IRB suggested certain revisions to the original proposal, but your new version addresses these concerns successfully. The revised proposal used appropriate procedures to minimize risks to human subjects and that adequate provision was made for confidentiality and data anonymity of participants in any published record. I believe you will also make adequate provision for obtaining informed consent of the participants.

This approval letter was issued under the assumption that you have not started data collection for your research project. Any data collected before receiving this letter could not be used since this is a violation of the IRB policy.

Please note that IRB approval does not automatically ensure approval by CAPMAS, an Egyptian government agency responsible for approving some types of off-campus research. CAPMAS issues are handled at AUC by the office of the University Counsellor, Dr. Ashraf Hatem. The IRB is not in a position to offer any opinion on CAPMAS issues, and takes no responsibility for obtaining CAPMAS approval.

This approval is valid for only one year. In case you have not finished data collection within a year, you need to apply for an extension.

Thank you and good luck.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Atta Gebril".

Dr. Atta Gebril  
IRB chair, The American University in Cairo  
2046 HUSS Building  
T: 02-26151919  
Email: [agebril@aucegypt.edu](mailto:agebril@aucegypt.edu)

## Appendix II



### Documentation of Informed Consent for Participation in Research Study

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**Project Title:** *Niger as a transit country for Nigerian migrants.*

**Principal Investigator:** Name: *Azeez Ganiyu.* Contact information: [ganiyuazeez@aucegypt.edu](mailto:ganiyuazeez@aucegypt.edu)  
01032677862 Center for Migration and Refugee Study, AUC, Research Center Building New Cairo  
11835, Egypt. P.O. Box 74

\*You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of the research is to examine how Nigerian migrants are using Niger as transit point in achieving their migration goal, and the findings may be published, presented or both. The expected duration of your participation is a day or two.

The procedures of the research will be as follows: The Principal Investigator will firstly seek for the writing consent of the interviewee after reading and understanding the content of the consent form. After the signing of the consent form by the interviewee, then the Principle Investigator will commence the interview. The interview will focus on questions relating to the experience of interviewee as migrants using Niger as transit point. The questions will include, the purpose behind using Niger as transit country; is reality in transit country meet the expectation of the migrants; what benefits, and challenges are involved in using Niger as transit country, and related questions,

\*There will be no risks or discomforts associated with this research.

\*At present there will not be direct benefit to you from this research but in future the findings of the research might help the policy makers in addressing the issue of irregular migration.

\*The information provided for this research is confidential

\* All inquiry about this research, the rights of the participant and other related issues should be directed to **Azeez Ganiyu** at **+201032677862**

\*Participation in this study is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or the loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature

Printed Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix III

Appendix III: IOM interview declined email.

**MEWISSEN Celine**

Mon, Feb 10,  
11:22 AM

to me, CHIRIAC

Dear Azeez,

Thank you very much for these additional information. Unfortunately, we will not be able to support you further. We receive many requests to visit the transit centers and we can't answer them all. Indeed, we must protect the well-being, tranquility and privacy of the migrants who reside there as well as possible. However, we wish you good luck and much success with your research.