

Book Review: Migrant, Refugee, Smuggler, Savior by Peter Tinti and Tuesday Reitano

Despite it not offering a solution to the migrant crisis, the book nevertheless provides a basis for understanding it, according to Yovanka Perdigao.

Without a doubt, *Migrant, Refugee, Smuggler, Savior* by Peter Tinti and Tuesday Reitano is a must read. This book takes readers on a journey through the highly complex business of human smuggling where the lines between savior and criminal easily blur. Each section meshes real life accounts of migrants and smugglers, giving us an intimate view into their world.

This book is the result of grueling research divided into two parts, exploring in depth the various networks and economies from West Africa to North Africa, Turkey and Eastern Europe. It reveals how vast and ingrained this multi-billion dollar industry has become. The high demand for crossing the Mediterranean has skyrocketed with the Syrian refugee crisis. For smugglers, it has become an extremely profitable enterprise that can no longer be stopped with European deals and aid. Nothing is clearer as Tinti and Reitano take us through the many towns and regions that have become central hubs of the smuggling business.

For example, in the chapter “Lybia :Out of Africa”, the city of Zuwarah, due to its geographical proximity to Lampedusa, becomes a major launching pad for boats after the fall of Gaddafi. With the influx of Syrian refugees, the city’s economy becomes centered on the illicit crossing of the Mediterranean. Meanwhile in Egypt, we see how the demand for such services pushes the smuggling industry to professionalise, giving rise to kingpins protected by local police.

In “Desert Highway: Agadez and the Sahel”, we are presented with the grim prospects that await young people in Niger, therefore tempting them to a life of riches and dangers in the smuggling industry as they pose Instagram style with guns in the desert.

Meanwhile in Turkey, president Erdogan has forced Europe to strike a Faustian pact. The mass arrival of Syrian migrants in Turkey attempting to cross illegally through Turkey into Europe, has European leaders cornered. They must now face the consequences of their involvement in Syria and subject to Erdogan’s demands.

At the same time, in the island of Kos in Greece, the racial, social and economic disparities between Syrians, Eritreans, Bangladeshis and others becomes apparent. The writers recount how in the wake of desperation and few resources, differences become paramount:

“The Syrians, Iraqis, Afghans all turn their frustration towards the Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Iranians, and the handful of Africans the queue, who they believe are not “real” refugees.”

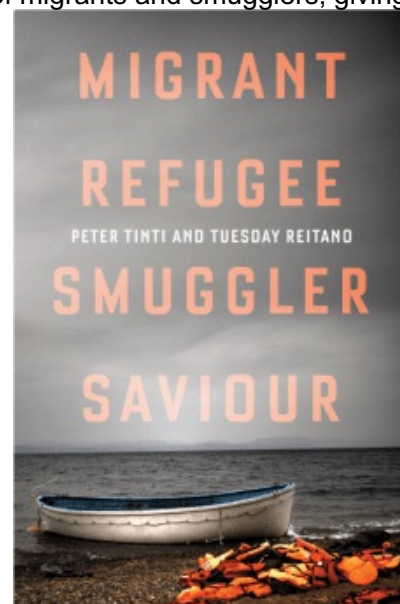




Photo of African migrant in Spain

Photo credit: John Perivolaris via Flickr (<http://bit.ly/2skpWgP>) CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

However, what is more interesting is how the writers describe the island to be alive with “travel” agencies, buses, and smugglers, all operating in broad daylight. All of this only serves to show how complex the smuggling business is as Reitano and Tinti demonstrate in the first part of the book. We learn how the industry operates, the rules and practices that govern this world. How profitable Syrian lives are, how less valuable African lives have become in the eyes of some smugglers where only top dollar counts. We learn about reputation and damaging reviews, even migrants rate like we do on yelp for smuggling services. Thankfully, third-party insurers holding their payments serve as meagre protection in case the operation fails. But more frightening, we learn how sophisticated, how criminal this industry has become with criminal businesses interacting with political and security apparatuses of many countries:

“Through reinforced borders and ever-shifting policies that no migrant can hope to navigate alone, European policy has provided the perfect environment for these types of networks to flourish. Inside fortress Europa, the criminal are king.”

However, do not expect finding a solution to the migrant crisis within this book. This is more of a somber reminder that no simplistic or quick solution will end the crisis but it provides a start to understand it.

[Migrant, Refugee, Smuggler, Savior. Peter Tinti and Tuesday Reitano. Hurst Publishers. 2016](#)

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