



MIGRANT ROUTE OPERATOR I URSULA BIEMANN

Adawa is a former rebel leader and now director of the clandestine migration route from Niger to Algeria, in Uranium mining town Arlit.

If we want to understand what makes this emerging migration system work, we need to look at is the history of the region. The immense Saharan territory of the Tuareg tribes was split in five by the Empires at the Berlin Conference in 1884. Since then, their space of mobility and livelihood has made up substantial areas of Algeria, Libya, Mali, Niger and Chad. Denied a proper state, the Tuareg constitute a minority within these national cultures and are granted fewer civil rights than native citizens. Nonetheless, as a distinct linguistic and cultural entity, they maintain their identification as a people across the boundaries. Tuareg territorial structure is, by definition, transnational. The role of these nomads is central to the transnational process of repurposing their old caravan routes as highways for illicit migration. Their unique topographical expertise and tribal ties are in high demand as a steady flow of sub-Saharan migrants pass through Agadez and Arlit.

The Tuareg rebellion in Niger in the mid 1990s made another attempt at consolidating their tribes into a nation state. For lack of better opportunities, the returning former rebels saw a possibility of making business with the transit migrants. Transportation services were needed; besides, Arlit, like Agadez, is a desert gate that can be controlled and taxed, but the desert border is a vast terrain and roving border patrols are few and far between. Some passengers were documented, many not. Deploying rebel tactics, they swarm out in jeeps at night and bypass the border checkpoints with their full charge of migrants before melting into the dark dunes.

The regional authority of Agadez saw the need to intervene in these opportunistic developments and formally mandated Adawa to manage the semi-legal transport of migrants in an organized fashion. The local authorities may have welcomed the fact that this locks him into a criminalized position which compromises any further rebellious plans. Semi-legal, yet authorized, the business keeps the rebel pacified while generating extra income and power for the officials: a well-planned, if precarious, balance. This solves two problems at once: putting an experienced man in charge of logistics and keeping him occupied and accountable. Should Adawa ever prove to be uncooperative, the authorities can put him away without much ado. He understands that he has been taken hostage and that his status as a semi-citizen of Niger is directly

linked to his guidance of more and more people into a terrain of bare survival in which citizenship is suspended. When so many people are beyond, between or on a waiting list for citizenship, there is a need to conceive of a different mode of dwelling in this world. Trans-local existence brings to light this unfinished side of citizenship.

/ub

Cluster: Sahara Chronicle ? Agadez

Source URL: <https://www.worldofmatter.net/migrant-route-operator-i>