

Chapter 5



FROM ONE STAGE TO THE NEXT: TRANSIT AND TRANSPORT IN (TRANS) SAHARAN MIGRATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

At the start of the 1990s, various economic and political factors led to an increase and diversification in migratory flows towards and across the Sahara. Since that time, some tens of thousands of migrants originating in West and Central Africa have been travelling over land to North Africa, whence a small proportion of them continue their journey as far as Europe. The extent of Saharan migration, which until that time had been cross-border in nature, covering relatively small distances, was thus transformed into a more complex international migratory system, forging relationships between distant areas and peoples in a way that had never been seen before. However, it was only from the early 2000s that these migrations gradually began to move to the forefront of the political scene in southern and western

Europe, and then in North Africa, and finally in various countries in West Africa. The media on both continents concentrated initially on covering the deaths of sub-Saharan migrants in the Mediterranean, while the European authorities concerned themselves with the new arrival of these illegal immigrants on Europe's southern shores. By focusing their attention in this way just on migrants heading for Europe, the media and the authorities in the countries concerned failed to consider the diversity and complexity of these migrations in north-west Africa.

Where academic research is concerned, (trans) Saharan migrations have mainly been studied by looking at countries in North Africa, and the regions where migrants have settled – either voluntarily or by default – but much less frequently by looking at those transit areas in the Sahel-Saharan states. While from the theoretical point of view current scientific work no longer reduces migration to fixed times and places for individuals' 'departures' and 'arrivals', empirical studies of migratory phenomena, by contrast, continue for the most part to work from these fixed locations in time and space, rather than the more volatile 'transit' locations. And when one looks at transit migration, it appears that *residency situations* are almost always given a higher priority in empirical data production methods than *travel situations*. Now, *where* 'migration' as the object of study is approached empirically, the way in which the fields of study are determined and exploited will have an influence on the data produced, thus raising questions of prime importance concerning methods and methodology (Clifford 1997; Spittler 1996).

In order to look again at the place of the journey within migratory processes, we would suggest that an understanding of contemporary migration in the Sahara, which is 'migration in stages', cannot be achieved without sufficient research centred on the Saharan transit regions. How do crossings of the Sahara take place, and what do they cost the migrants? What social relationships develop during the journey, on the transport? What does what happens between the stages of migration reveal about the relationship between states, their officials and these migratory movements? What are the effects of migratory transit on the areas crossed? Based on experience from research into (trans) Saharan migrations in Niger,¹ we see transit as a significant moment in the migratory process. We shall ponder the

value and ways of working on this particular *moment* in migration, and the possibilities and prospects of involving the observer in this mobility. Through the study of illegal migrant taxation practices used by Niger state officials along the main routes in the Agadez region, we shall see that work in the transit areas, particularly in transport, can produce empirical knowledge which will add to that produced in other areas of migration.

**TRANSIT AND TRANSPORT AS A WAY IN TO
UNDERSTANDING THE MOVEMENT**

***Transit: a moment in mobility between
intention and action***

The notion of transit is frequently used in the study of migrations between sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa and Europe, and refers to a number of different situations.² This notion, which has been kept in the foreground over the past decade by international institutions, can assume a strong ideological aspect according to the targets to which it applies and the field of discussion in which it is used, particularly when it is a question of legitimising the control or restriction of migrations which are seen by the public authorities as potential offences (Perrin 2008; Streiff-Fénart and Poutignat 2008). The diversity of uses of the notion of transit and its adoption as a political tool suggest that we should explain our understanding of the term as used in this work.

Derived from the Latin word *transitus*, meaning ‘the action of crossing’, ‘passing through’, transit refers to a process of movement. While the temporal aspect originally lay at the heart of the notion, whether applied to transit areas in international airports or the transit of goods across a national territory, where transit implies the virtual lack of any interruption to the movement, the issue of the time taken has little relevance in the field of migration studies. In this field, we consider that it is the thinking of the migrants which gives sociological meaning to the notion of transit migration, and which makes it useful in understanding certain aspects of the migratory flows currently crossing the Nigerien Sahara. In fact, the act of transiting – a town, for example – inevitably requires a certain amount

of time, from a few hours to a few months, and a physical halt of movement. What distinguishes the transit town from the temporary destination town is the conscious change in the migrant's plan and not specifically the length of their stay, the physical circumstances of where they live, or their activities.

It seems that in North Africa and Mauritania, transit areas are all destination areas too, sometimes chosen deliberately, sometimes by default due to the inability of some migrants to continue along their route. The description of migration from south of the Sahara as being solely transit migration has therefore taken on a strong political connotation, since it has enabled states – Maghrebian ones, in this case – not to see or think of themselves as countries where there is immigration. This is why we use 'transit area' to mean any area where migrants arrive with the intention of continuing their journey *as soon as possible* to a further destination, holding on to this intention throughout their stay in the area, however long it may actually last. The transit function of a place or territory asserts itself once a number of migratory flows come together there, and the mobility of the migrants takes on a prominent role in movements there as a whole. Therefore, not all areas crossed by migrants are transit areas in any significant way. Defined in these terms, the notion of transit enables us to single out the Nigerien Sahara in comparison to numerous other regions of this desert which are also crossed by migratory flows. What actually sets the Nigerien Sahara apart is that it has never been a destination for international migrants but only ever a space which they cross, be it quickly or slowly. And even when their stay is prolonged, with very few exceptions, they never have plans to settle there voluntarily, which throws some light on the nature of the relationships forged by migrants in the Saharan regions of Niger, both among themselves and with the native populations.

The notion of transit is therefore valuable when characterising and analysing certain social situations. Nevertheless, when one knows that the future Algerian law on 'the conditions for entry, residence and circulation of foreigners' plans to distinguish between migrants who want to settle in the country and those who start out with the intention of continuing their journey further (Perrin 2008), talk of migrants' thinking, or even intentions, remains particularly delicate. Especially as this way of designating a section of those sub-Saharan

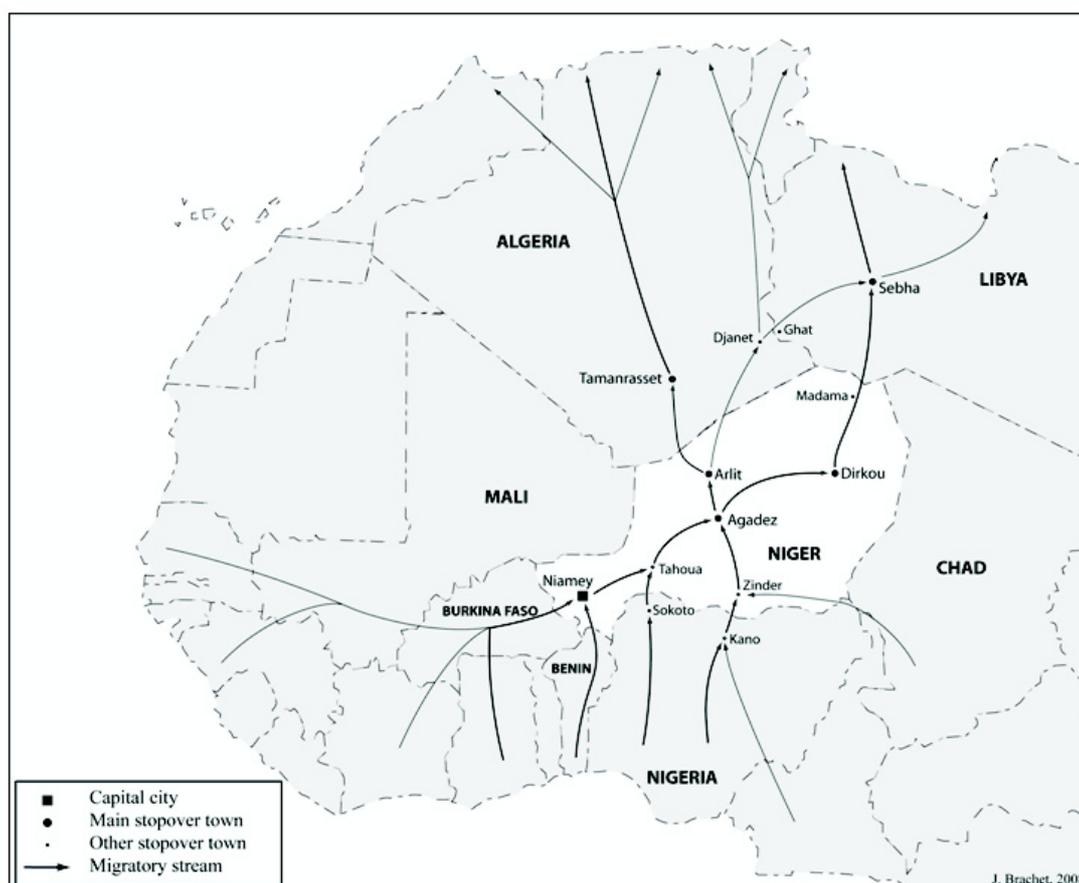
migrants who are present on their soil as being simply in transit, and condemning them on the basis of the sole presumption that their intention is to get into Europe illegally, is common to the Maghreb countries as a whole. This use of the notion of transit, linked to the policy of externalising the control and management of migratory flows which has been introduced by the European Union (Rodier 2009), forces us to remember that there is clearly no link between being in a state of transit and involvement in illegal activities. While the notion of transit – such as it has been defined by us – may be of use in the field of social analysis and particularly in micro-social analysis, it should not, however, be used in any way as a tool in the political or legal spheres.

THE VALUE OF CONDUCTING RESEARCH IN TRANSIT AREAS

Migration is a movement, a moving of people. The observer's position along the migrants' route, on the one hand, and the categories of individuals prioritised in the survey, on the other, are two elements which will determine the view that can be formed of a migratory system. Nowadays, the majority of the research work on international migration is carried out in two categories of specific points along the route: 'departure' places and 'arrival' places. However, the status of such places may be either permanent or temporary, as is increasingly the case with migration taking place in stages. One of the great advantages of choosing these locations for surveys, quite apart from being able to study the effects of migration on the areas and the societies living there, is that one can work alongside migrants at length. If one is really to deepen the relationship with the individuals in the survey, to work in their language, to understand the workings of the networks enabling migrants to become a part of the towns where they settle, or again to get to the heart of the inter-ethnic relationships within migrant communities and between foreign migrants and natives, it may even be necessary to focus the research on one particular community of migrants caught up in the migratory process.³ This kind of approach perfectly meets the needs of some lines of inquiry. But when one wants to pin down the organisation of a migratory system in its entirety, and it is used by migrants with a multiplicity of geographical points of origin and des-

tinations (Figure 1), then how is one to proceed without basing one's analysis on too restrictive and specific a section of these migrants, which would give an excessively fragmented and partial view of the migration studied? Having dismissed the idea of a research team with sufficient human and physical resources to survey all migrant communities in their regions of origin and destination, the best way of obtaining the most complete view possible of these migratory movements as a whole seems to be to position oneself in the transit areas, where the flows are concentrated.

Figure 1. Origins and destinations of the principal migratory flows crossing Niger



While the Sahara taken as a whole is a transit area, it is noticeable that there are relatively few places which operate as transit locations without operating as destination locations at the same time. The north of Niger is the area with the greatest share of the overland migratory flows, firstly in one town, Agadez, and then along two

main routes heading for Algeria and Libya. Most ‘categories’ of (trans) Saharan migrants are likely to pass through here, regardless of their origin or destination. And those who are returning from North Africa also pass through here, finding it easier to talk about their migratory experiences here than in Algeria or Libya. While imposing particular methodological constraints, these transit areas, which are quite unique among those places affected by staged migrations, can provide some original empirical material, offering opportunities for further research to add to the research carried out at the migrants’ places of departure and arrival. Alongside this, when we consider that migration cannot be reduced to a succession of fixed stages, and that transit areas are quintessentially areas of movement, we then have to consider, at the methodological level, how we can incorporate the notion of *movement*, which is the cornerstone of migration, into our work. How can one study the physical displacement caused by migration and the transitory and unstable social structures which are generated by it? To what extent is it possible to share this experience of mobility with those involved in order to grasp its implications?

TRANSPORT AND THE ISSUE OF THE OBSERVER’S MOBILITY

As movement, migration over land implies constant change of the surroundings in which migrants find themselves. Therefore, any study of it must assume the instability of the social structures it generates and concentrate on the adaptation of behaviour, on the ongoing (re)negotiation of relationships between the individuals, or the redefinition of their plans. If one is to understand the complexity of migratory routes, taken as a combination of steps and transfers, one needs to consider this variability in the surroundings, which also form the background to any observations and statements from the players involved. From the methodological point of view, this can result in the mobility of the observer, which itself can take two forms. The first of these is to travel in the field, in other words, to work in a succession of different migrant transit locations. The other is to see ‘mobility’ itself as a field for research, integrating the times and space of physical mobility into the analysis, i.e. by seeing the transport as a field for research.

Mobility *across* the field enables one to contextualise each survey location, each observed phenomenon, and to tackle them in a slightly different way every time one returns to or re-crosses a place where one has already worked; every time one runs into a person whom one has already met, following some time away from them. This kind of large-scale multiple-location ethnography makes it easier to control the output from the research subject, because with travel between different sites, the field is of necessity perceived through its relationship with the surrounding locations, through the networks which connect it to the regional or world areas into which it fits (Hannerz 2003; Marcus 1995, 1998). At the same time, it is possible to establish 'mobility' in the field. Working from the hypothesis that movement modifies the perception of individuals (Merleau-Ponty 1999 [1945]), and modifies migrants' perceptions of the people and places that they approach, move alongside or meet, and also modifies what they say (Clifford 1997; Lussault 2005), it becomes worthwhile, or even necessary, to start moving oneself and to observe the flows from within.

To summarise, it is a question of seeing circulation, the journey, as a particular survey and observation situation which grants access to certain aspects of the migratory process which cannot be observed from a fixed point. Working on the transport allows one, for example, to observe emerging sociability within the immediate vicinity of the meetings offered by and involved in movement, or the fleeting moments when mobile individuals come into contact with state officials. These discrete contacts, whether formal or informal, can only be studied from alongside those travelling, because state officials may be control officers (police officers, soldiers, customs officers) who operate in isolated places along the routes or at location entries or exits (checkpoints), where it is not easy to observe events as an outsider. By combining these two complementary forms of mobility in the field, it becomes possible to tackle migratory phenomena really like continua, like fluid processes and no longer as a succession of independent stages.

Figure 2. Mobile research fields: the lorries which transport migrants across the Nigerien Sahara (Brachet 2009a)



CORRUPTION AND VIOLENCE ALONG THE MIGRATION ROUTES

Fleeting events and changing aspects of migratory movements towards and across the Central Sahara reveal themselves when one works in the transit areas, both in the successive stages of the journey, but also between these stages. This practical experience of the field highlights the importance of the ongoing variety of situations in which the migrants find themselves during their journey, which is an inherent characteristic of ‘stage migration’. Among these aspects concerning the dynamics, the organisation and effects of (trans) Saharan migrations in Niger, which the methodological approaches

mentioned above help to illuminate, here we shall concentrate specifically on the control and taxation practices employed by state officials along the route from the town of Agadez to Fezzan in Libya.

THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF CORRUPTION IN TRANSPORT

In Africa, the transport sector is known to be one of the areas of activity most affected by small-scale corruption. Many roads are affected by roadblocks, at the very least where they enter or leave towns, where control points are seen by state officials as an opportunity for often illegal taxation, as is also sometimes the case at border crossings or bus stations. While corruption is widespread across this sector and across the continent, it seems however that the Saharan itineraries are affected in quite specific ways. This echoes the work of Giorgio Blundo and Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan (2001), who draw a distinction between corruption in Africa and corruption in Europe, not in terms of the 'presence or absence of acts', but in terms of size ('the difference lies in the amount'); it also seems that the special nature of corruption along the Saharan routes in Niger resides in the scale and spread of the problem, and even sometimes in the forms it takes.

When a Nigerien comes to Nigeria, he has no problems, no-one asks him for his passport, he can travel freely, he has no problems. But when you travel to Niger, everyone asks for your passport, all the time. You have your passport, or you don't have your passport; either way, you have to hand over money....

(Nigerian migrant, Blima, 9 December 2004)

It is not easy to distinguish between what is due to corruption, due to the simple dysfunction of the state apparatus, or due to organised crime. So, in order to account for the overlapping of different corrupt practices within state services and the operational peculiarities of the Saharan transport sector, we have decided to adopt a broad definition of the term 'corruption', including what, in legal terms, would fall under the heading of extortion.⁴

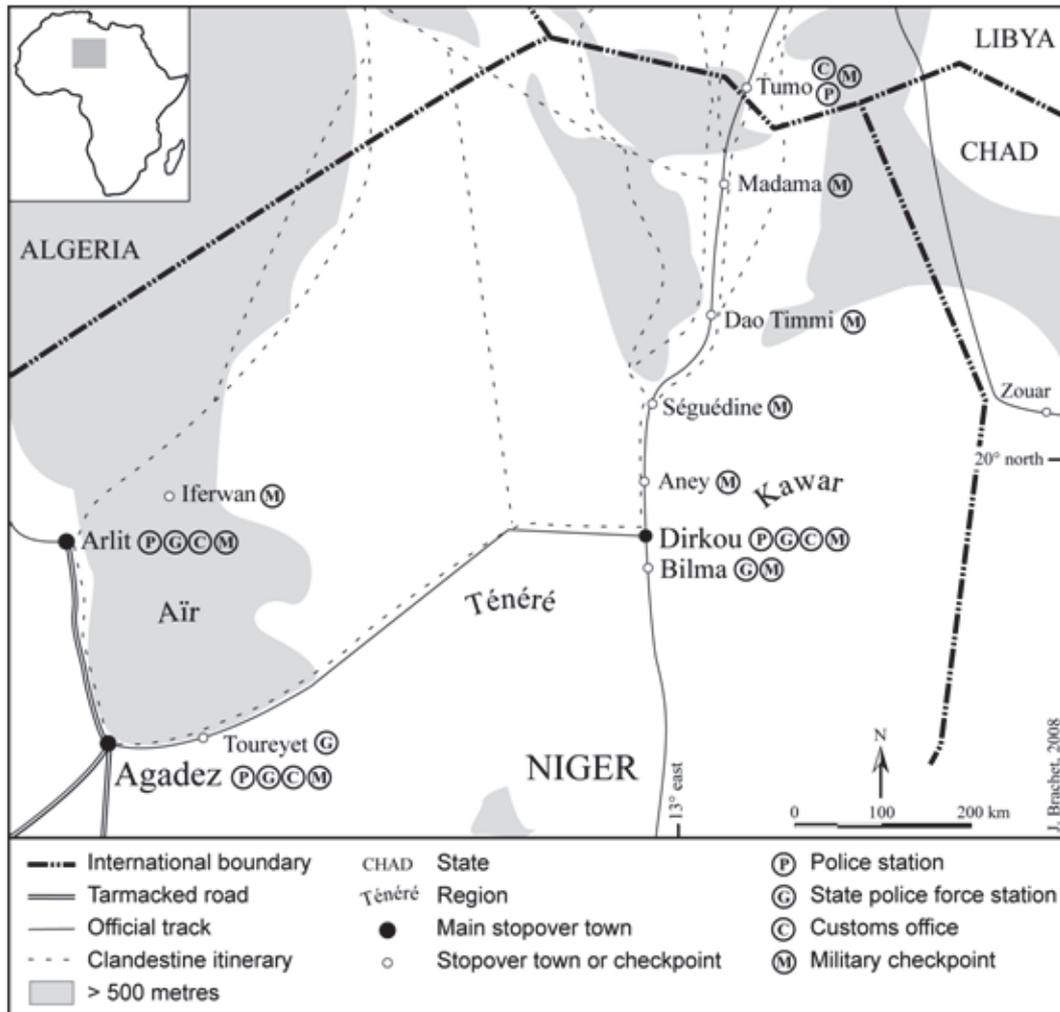
Over the field as a whole, transport operators find themselves obliged to pay illegal taxes or to pay commission to control officials in order to be able to continue their business. Nigerien travellers may

circulate freely in the country, while foreign migrants, whether or not they are in a regular situation under Nigerien law, may not cross the country unless they pay these arbitrary taxes, sometimes as soon as they set foot on Nigerien soil. But when carriers and travellers journey along Saharan routes leading to Algeria and more particularly to Libya, they are confronted by state officials whose illegal practices dwarf those of officials working in the rest of the country. Yet despite this general absence of recognition and legitimisation through a legal institutional framework, which could also be explained by socio-cultural and economic factors (Dahou 2002; Olivier de Sardan 1999), this does not lead to a state of anarchy within the goods and passenger transport sector, because the informal regulatory bodies are produced by the players themselves (control officers and transport operators). Within these informal frameworks, the application of the (formal and informal) rules is variable, which involves and allows their regular redefinition, by negotiation, encouraging the development and endurance of corrupt practices. In this sense, corruption has become institutionalised in the transport sector in Niger, inasmuch as it is more the rule – statistically speaking – than the exception, and it has echoes of both a cultural and an organisational dimension (Médard 2006).

**FROM AGADEZ TO THE LIBYAN BORDER:
A CONTROLLED ROUTE**

The journey from Agadez to Dirkou (650km), much of which is taken up by crossing the Erg of Ténéré, takes between two and four days depending on the season and the type of vehicle used, and sometimes longer because of the frequent breakdowns affecting vehicles on this route. Migrants, of whom you might see 30 piled into the back of a pick-up truck, and even 150 on tipper trucks, are checked for the first time just a few kilometres out of the town of Agadez. Local police officers will then take an arbitrary tax ranging from 500 to a few thousand CFA francs. The next checkpoint, which is run by the state police, is located 80km further on, near the Toureyet wells.⁵ Here, migrants pay a toll of around 1,000 CFA francs. Then comes the long crossing of the Ténéré, to Dirkou.

Figure 3. Locations of checkpoints between Agadez and Libya



Arrival in Dirkou is always by day, because it is forbidden to enter and leave the oasis at night. As soon as the migrants arrive within the military compound at the entrance to the village, the first mandatory staging post for lorries carrying passengers, they are immediately hemmed in by armed soldiers, who make them get down from the vehicle and who demand a lump sum from the driver (which works out at between 500 and 2,000 CFA francs per migrant). Then they are driven to the state police post where they are taxed once more (1,000 to 3,000 CFA francs per person), sometimes violently, and where their identity papers are seized by an officer. They must then go and collect them from the police station in return for the payment of a few more thousand CFA francs. Here again, there is no relation between the amount of tax they need to pay and the legality of their situation. These arbitrary taxes imposed by the forces of law and

order place a heavy burden on the migrants' budget, and they may then have difficulty in continuing their journey.

When we arrived in Dirkou, there were more check-points... at the police station, they took our passports and searched our bags, and we paid 2,000 CFA francs... then we had to see the local police next door. We told them we didn't have any money, and they held us until evening. They were saying that they'd release us and give our passports back if we paid 5,000 CFA francs. Everyone paid 5,000 CFA francs. And that's how we arrived in the town; we didn't have any money left, we had our international passport from Nigeria, but we didn't know what to do or where to go any more. (Nigerian migrant, Bilma, 9 December 2004)

It's because they'd taken all our money. When we arrived here in Dirkou, we paid 2,000 CFA francs. Then they told us to go to the state police station, there we were asked for 5,000. I said I didn't have 5,000. That was at four o'clock in the afternoon. By seven o'clock I was still there. They told us 5,000 was their last offer. I slept there. It was the first time I'd spent the night in a police station, the first time. In the morning another one came to see us. He said to hand over 1,000 francs. We gave him 1,000 francs and we got out. [...] It was my first time in Niger, there in the middle of the desert, and it was also the last... the first time and, I swear to you, it will be the last. Even when I return from Libya, I'm going to fly if I can.... I never want to come back here. (Migrant from Benin, Dirkou, 20 December 2004)

Many migrants find themselves stuck like this at some stage on the Nigerien migratory routes, lacking sufficient funds to continue on their way. These are generally individuals who have planned to work in Libya and who, having set off on their migration with capital ranging from one to several hundred thousand CFA francs, cannot keep up with the many expenses incurred while crossing Niger. Unable to go further or to return home, these migrants may stay for several weeks, or even several months, there where their journey has momentarily ground to a halt (Brachet 2009b).

Leaving the Dirkou oasis, and passing through the military checkpoints at Aney, Séguédine, Dao Timmi and Madama, the migrants are systematically relieved of several thousand CFA francs

in a similarly authoritarian manner. If they refuse to pay, or cannot pay, Nigerien soldiers will not hesitate to use force to achieve the desired result.

In this country, everyone's poor, the people from this country are suffering, so when they see foreigners with a bit of money, they think of every possible way of taking it from them... when they see foreigners here, they know we're going to Libya, they know we've got money on us, and not just a little money. They do all they can to take it from us, they even beat us in Dirkou because we didn't want to pay... They took our Ecowas⁶ passports, they said that we were breaking the law because we didn't have a visa... that's why they asked us for money, but with Ecowas passports you can come to Niger legally.
(Nigerian migrant, Bilma, 8 December 2004)

So, from Agadez to the Libyan border, every control situation has become an opportunity to squeeze more money out of travelling individuals. And there are no fewer than seven checkpoints on this route, leading to around ten checks. In total, the amounts which have to be paid frequently add up to several tens of thousands of CFA francs per migrant. On the basis of direct observation of these taxation practices (observations made possible by travelling alongside the migrants on a number of occasions), and working from interviews on this subject in a number of Saharan locations, it appears that the specific nature of the corruption and illegal taxation problems facing migrants in the north of Niger derives from three main characteristics. First, it is their systematic nature, regardless of the migrants' situation in respect of the law; second, it is the size of the amounts to be paid, regardless of the individual's nationality and resources; and third, at times, the violence they occasion.

Observing this little-known side of migratory movements in Niger enables us to shed light on other aspects of their own organisation and their effect on the transit areas. For example, the money extorted by state officials from the individuals travelling the tracks across the Sahara represents a considerable proportion of their own earnings and is an injection of currency which can revitalise the economies of the towns and villages which serve as stop-overs for the migrants (particularly Agadez and Dirkou). This partly explains why state officials do not try to apply the official legislation con-

cerning the circulation of people in these regions and, similarly, why the Nigerien state, which pays its officers very little, does not watch their work more closely. Nevertheless, talking about the amount of resources drawn from corrupt practices and migratory circulations more generally suggests that the approximate amount is known, and therefore raises the issue of how to arrive at a quantitative evaluation of the volumes of migratory flows concerned.

WHY, HOW AND HOW FAR SHOULD WE QUANTIFY (TRANS) SAHARAN MIGRATIONS?

This research relies on an approach whose dominant characteristic is qualitative because of the themes studied and the conditions under which the empirical data are produced. Working in the north of Niger, in the absence of precise pre-existing data about the phenomena studied, it proved very difficult to find and determine a sample of individuals for inclusion in the survey who would be statistically representative, and to apply one or more questionnaire-based study protocols which would enable us to obtain well-delimited and quantitatively representative information on the official part of the migratory flows studied. The favoured approach should therefore allow us to be as close as possible to the situations in which the people lived, in order to be able to reveal highly personal points of view, hidden, illegal or clandestine practices, as well as the public statements and official actions of the players. Alongside what amounted to a slow immersion within the heart of the migratory networks and groups of migrants, an 'active impregnation' with a clear sense of direction, we also used classic data production techniques in a combined way (participant study, interviews, reviews). These two more or less structured sides of empirical data production clearly cover a great diversity of variants which are linked to one another in practice. Indeed, the work on the ground takes place in a space which is not controlled and requires the constant employment of *tactics* in order to be able to launch into suitable openings at the slightest opportunity, at the slightest indication, while employing pre-established techniques (De Certeau 1990; Ginzburg 1980). However, the effect of the migratory flows in the Saharan transit regions, for example at the economic level via the corrupt practices of control officials, cannot be appreci-

ated without, as the very minimum, evaluating the volume of these flows.

The quantification of transit migrations implies that one should be preoccupied with flows of migrants, rather than stocks. Talking of 'stocks' or 'flows' does not mean there are just two types of quantitative data concerning migrations, but that there are two ways of looking at them, the one being static, the other dynamic. In general terms, migratory studies rely on the analysis of stocks of migrants, i.e. on the number of individuals living outside the country of their birth at a given moment. While this approach to international migration is valuable in some fields, its limitations must however be stressed, because migration, as the transfer of people, can and must also be studied starting with data concerning the flows of migrants. Stocks of migrants, which are sometimes the only source for comparison between countries, do not allow us to distinguish between or establish a relationship between emigration and immigration for a given country, nor to differentiate between current flows and former flows (expatriate populations, diasporas etc.). By contrast, information on flows, in other words on entries and exits from national territories over a given time (a month, a year), makes it possible to give a clearer picture of the dynamics of the circulation of individuals, where stocks only reflect the net difference between entries and exits, without taking into account the period during which migrants remain there, and without taking into account the movements which take place between two census periods. All depends of course on the questions one asks, but the fact of the matter is that working on stocks does not give a picture of the very essence of migration which is of interest to us here, its dynamic in space, its movement. Quantification of transit migrations with a view to evaluating the economic effect of the charges levied by Nigerien state officials on the migrants is therefore necessarily a quantification of the flows. Now, given the shortcomings of national statistical apparatuses and the limitations of official sources concerning migratory flows in the Sahara, how is one to produce reliable figures on the increasingly clandestine circulation? Given that there is no epistemological incompatibility between the quantitative and qualitative approaches, it is not a question of setting these methodological currents one against the other, but rather of fitting them together (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). The question therefore is not whether or not to use quantitative data

in an exclusive manner, but rather about the nature and degree of precision in quantitative data concerning the volume of migratory flows which may enhance their qualitative analysis.

In order to get over the problem of reliability in official data, which affects most migratory movements on the African continent, it is possible to produce one's own figures, or at least to try to quantify the flows as observed, and then to suggest extrapolations on the basis of varying criteria. Where migratory flows from sub-Saharan Africa to North Africa via the Agadez region are concerned, the Saharan transit towns provide favoured observation locations, in that they concentrate flows which may take different routes on either side of them. Long-term empirical work, particularly in the transport centres of transit towns, makes a partial evaluation of the circulation of persons possible. Counts (number of passengers per vehicle and number of vehicle departures per day) carried out in sessions lasting several days at a time and at different times of the year, when combined with the patchy official data (from the border police and state police force in particular) and the accounts of various players in the migratory system, make it possible to obtain a very general idea of the size of migratory movements. These may be calculated at several tens of thousands of persons per year; in the opposite direction, i.e. from North Africa towards sub-Saharan Africa, the flows transiting through Niger seem to be slightly smaller (Brachet 2009b).

Based on different hypotheses concerning the number of migrants and the taxes they have to pay, it can be seen that the total amount of currency extracted illegally from migrants by state officials in the Agadez region lies somewhere between 850 million and 3.5 billion CFA francs every year (Table 1).

The accuracy of this estimate is considered sufficient to give an idea of the economic stakes involved in the corruption phenomena we have studied, especially since a more precise extrapolation would necessarily involve a considerable speculative dimension.

Table 1. Estimate of the average annual total of currency illegally taken from migrants by state officials in the Agadez region (2003–2008)

	Conservative estimate	High-end estimate
Agadez (town)	Number of migrants: 40,000 Taxes levied per migrant: 10,000	Number of migrants: 70,000 Taxes levied per migrant: 15,000
Route from Agadez to the Libyan border	Number of migrants: 26,667 Taxes levied per migrant: 6,500	Number of migrants: 46,667 Taxes levied per migrant: 22,000
Route from the Libyan border to Agadez	Number of migrants: 21,334 Taxes levied per migrant: 13,500	Number of migrants: 37,335 Taxes levied per migrant: 31,500
Route from Agadez to Algeria	Number of migrants: 13,333 Taxes levied per migrant: 0	Number of migrants: 23,333 Taxes levied per migrant: 5,000
Route from Algeria to Agadez	Number of migrants: 10,667 Taxes levied per migrant: 0	Number of migrants: 18,667 Taxes levied per migrant: 5,000
Total (CFA francs)	861,344,500 CFA	3,462,726,500 CFA

Calculations were made on the basis of a number of migrants going from Niger towards North Africa in the range of 40,000 to 70,000 annually, with an average distribution of one-third on the Algerian route and two-thirds on the Libyan route. We considered that on average 80 per cent of migrants travelling to Algeria and Libya return to their country of origin by the same route. It should be noted that the number of migrants being subjected to illegal taxes has no doubt reduced over recent years due to the development of clandestine transport within Niger. *Sources: Surveys 2003–2008.*

The very desire to quantify illegal migratory flows poses a certain number of ethical and political questions. Is it the researcher's job to produce precise figures on the matter when the authorities under whose jurisdiction it falls do not do it, or rather do not have the

necessary means? To what is one committing oneself, given that these migratory movements are subject to growing attempts at control by the public authorities in the countries which are involved or feel they are involved? And at the same time, a number of media outlets and public bodies will not wait for results from scientific studies before releasing figures whose origins are uncertain and which are often quite unreliable, for the purpose of sensationalism in the first case, and for political reasons in the second. To ignore the importance of the quantification issue when considering migration between sub-Saharan Africa, the Maghreb and Europe would then play into the hands of these people, whose portrayal of events is based on representations which are partial, in both senses of the word. Especially as, despite the uncertainties mentioned above, the quantitative analysis of migratory flows – both departing and returning – across the Sahara shows that these migrations are first and foremost intra-African. Even if one accepts the highest estimates, illegal migration from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe appears marginal in comparison to the size of these two continents and all the other migratory flows affecting them. Thus the quantitative approach allows one to demolish those arguments which talk of immense crowds of migrants attempting to leave sub-Saharan Africa, and to banish the myth of a migratory danger knocking at Europe's southernmost doors.⁷

CONCLUSION

By highlighting certain dynamics and certain economic stakes affecting transit areas as a result of Saharan and trans-Saharan migration, this work seeks to encourage these areas to be included systematically in the thinking about the migration–development relationship or the effect of migration policies. At the same time, working in the transit areas, and more particularly on transport, enables one to see migration not as a monolithic phenomenon, nor as a succession of fixed stages, but as a fluid process which spreads over time and space. Ultimately, understanding *movement* implies being immobile and observing those who pass by; being mobile and observing those who, through their immobility, appear to pass by; being mobile and observing those who, caught up in the same movement, appear immobile. These three approaches to migration, to movement in migration, are

aimed at deciphering the tension between mobility and immobility, between travel, retention and temporary settlement, which is fundamental to all present-day migratory phenomena in North-West Africa. Since these moments in migration are not opposed to one another, but rather make up different facets of a single process, it is not a question of favouring research in the transit areas over that in the departure and destination areas, nor of favouring multiple-site or moving work over work which is fixed in a single location, but rather of stressing the complementary nature of these approaches with a view to gaining a general understanding of migratory phenomena.

Notes

1. This work is based on field research carried out over more than two years in Niger, between 2003 and 2008. During these visits, complete or partial audio recordings of 119 interviews (with migrants, transport operators and state officials) were made. Nevertheless a great proportion of the data from this work were gathered in an informal manner, from observations, reviews and simple discussions.
2. See in particular Bensaâd 2009, Choplin and Lombard 2008, Collyer 2006, Hamood 2006, Nadi 2007, Nyberg-Sorensen 2006, Pian 2007, Streiff-Fénart and Poutignat 2008.
3. Concerning trans-Saharan migration, see for example Bredeloup and Zongo 2005, Goldschmidt 2002, Pian 2007.
4. The crime of extortion consists of receiving or demanding amounts which are not due during the exercise of one's duties, without any service being rendered in exchange.
5. Due to disturbances linked with the resumption of the Touareg rebellion in February 2007, it seems that the state police have left the Toureyet site and there is no longer a checkpoint at this location.
6. Economic Community Of West African States.
7. Also see de Haas 2007, Le Cour Grandmaison 2008.

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