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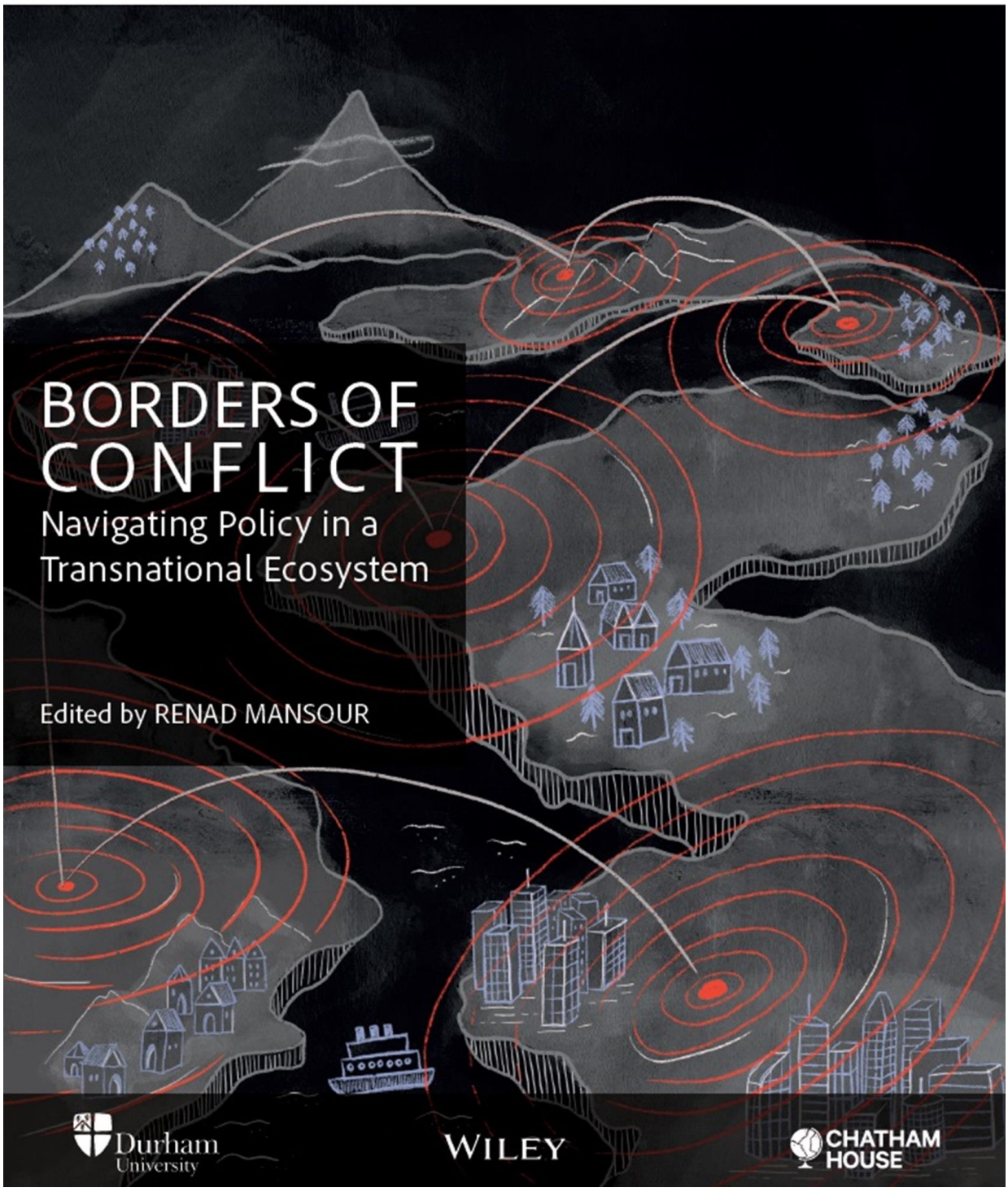

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1. Introduction: The Transnational Conflict Ecosystem

Renad Mansour

Armed conflicts are rarely confined within country borders. Flows of power, capital, services, and people connect conflicts to distant geographies. Even local or intra-state wars are symbiotically linked to transnational political, economic, ideological and military dynamics, both influencing and being impacted by neighbouring powers and those further afield. Israel's war on Gaza following Hamas' 7 October 2023 attack spilled over into Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq and the Red Sea, with extensive regional and global ramifications. The 2023 Sudanese civil war was fuelled by dynamics from across the Horn of Africa, North Africa, the Sahel, and the Gulf. Figures from the Uppsala conflict data project show that transnational conflict increased since 2009. (1)

This special issue focuses on transnational conflict in the Middle East and Africa, where the geographical borders between nation-states are porous and the institutional borders between state and non-state are blurred. Transnational conflicts are not unique to the Middle East and Africa - Russia's invasion of Ukraine, for instance, has had major ramifications in Europe and beyond – but these regions both have borders drawn by colonial powers and maintained by postcolonial governments (2), which delimited physical boundaries and divided peoples. They also brought new models of governance (3), seeking to situate authority in capital cities, bureaucracies, parliaments, and courthouses (4). But subsequent governments have struggled to fully institutionalise power and confine it away from traditional or informal forms of authority, or extend it fully across their national territory. At times, the ability of such governments to exert control has weakened with increasing distance from their capital.

This series follows Twagiramungu et al's definition of a transnational armed conflict as one "that extends or operates across nation-state borders" (5). However, transnational conflict is much deeper and broader than a war that extends across a national border or involves external actors. Transnational conflict dynamics go beyond "one-off" spillover effects – they are systemic and include multiple overlapping and intersecting networks of power which transcend the boundaries of the nation-state (6). These dynamics have wide-ranging influence in political, economic, military, ideological, social, and cultural spheres across vast geographies. Even highly localised armed conflicts exist in an ecosystem of transnational linkages operating at multiple levels and across geographic and institutional frontiers, which fuel and are in turn fuelled by local conflict.

This special issue therefore expands the definition of transnational conflict by addressing these ecosystems, and focusses on two interlinked dynamics through which the transnational aspects of contemporary conflict can be made visible: **authority** and **violence**. First, the ecosystem in which a conflict operates can be parsed through tracing networks of power and authority (7) – ideological, military, economic and political - which over time tends to settle into an equilibrium of mutually-understood rules, roles and relationships across geographical and institutional borders. Armed conflict often sparks when this equilibrium is disturbed, causing actors to break the rules of the settlement against each other or against their publics. The second key to tracking transnational conflict

ecosystems is mapping violence beyond the battlefield, particularly patterns of structural violence, such as poverty or poor access to health, education, or other essential services. As many of the papers in this special edition show, this structural violence can extend vast distances beyond the boundaries of an immediate armed conflict, linking seemingly disparate geographies through occluded patterns of trade and exploitation.

In short, the essays in this series consider the transnational dynamics of authority and violence to explain how an armed conflict in one locality exists in a transnational ecosystem that connects distant geographies. This has significant implications for the country-centric policy frameworks that predominantly characterize the Global North's engagement with the Middle East and Africa. Diplomatic strategies, such as political settlements, alongside security measures like border fortification and the imposition of sanctions, tend to be narrowly focused on nation-states and formal government institutions. This approach often overlooks the intricate interconnections of power and violence that transcend these boundaries. In contrast, adopting a conflict-centric perspective that begins to delineate the parameters of the transnational conflict ecosystem can provide a more effective foundation for formulating conflict responses.

Tracing authority in the transnational ecosystem

Conflict unfolds in an intricate ecosystem, with components that range from social institutions and actors to material objects and abstract ideas, held in fluid and dynamic relationships. Deleuze and Guattari use the term assemblages for the way these diverse elements come together to form complex systems (8). Assemblages show how power, identity, and social phenomena are continuously shaped and reshaped (9). They challenge traditional binary oppositions and hierarchical structures, such as state versus non-state, formal versus informal, and licit versus illicit, as well as country borders. A complex system is composed of a network of interconnected assemblages and transcends and transforms these traditional binaries and boundaries, rather than being confined by them. Deleuze and Guattari use the metaphor of a rhizome to explain the intricate system. Unlike a tree, which has a singular trunk and branches, a rhizome is a root system that spreads horizontally, lacking a clear beginning or end. Rhizomes emphasize multiplicity, connectivity, and the potential for continuous change and reconfiguration, thereby challenging conventional notions of order and stability. This flexibility is crucial in depicting the rhizomatic nature of the transnational conflict ecosystem, revealing the methods of expansion, the mobility of power, and the apparent instability. Tracing this network of assemblages can illuminate the rough boundaries of a transnational conflict ecosystem.

One method to do so is to map networks of authority, which are inherently dispersed, fluid, contingent, and contested. Mann argues that four sources of social authority — ideological, economic, military, and political (IEMP) — converge in the formation of the state, which he defines as a series of polymorphous power networks constituting a social system (10). However, these sources of authority rarely remain confined within formal institutions or national borders. Mitchell warns against looking at the ‘state’ as a finished product but instead focuses on its elusive and porous boundary with society (11). Highlighting specific examples in the Middle East, Martinez and Sirri argue that bakeries in Amman or checkpoints in Baghdad “are implicated in the ways the state, as “process” (Painter, 2006), plays itself out in everyday life.” (12) Haugball and Levine argue that “by examining the subtle changes in the flows and networks of

power between individuals and various social and political institutions, the state appears as an assemblage of political actors and techniques." (13)

In the Middle East and Africa, authority operates in a fluid and transnational ecosystem that challenges the geographic and institutional determinism centred on the Westphalian state, which considers power as confined to central governments and borderlands as peripheries or margins. As Mohamedou writes, "if Western statehood is inherently linked to the notion of a clearly delineated contiguous territory [...] non-Western statehood more often opens the possibility of *fluid transnational space* as *a base of political authority,* not merely social movement [...] actors sought to establish political dominion across such spaces." (14) These so-called peripheries are not ungoverned territories, and instead often reflect the transnational nature of state authority. Tejel supports this view, arguing that "borderlands are not regions within nation states, but rather *transnational spaces* whose multicultural and multi-layered dimensions are underscored by the very same borders that seek to erase the liminal identity of borderlands populations." (15) Goodhand contends that "because the nation state remains the central unit of analysis and intervention, there is a policy gap when it comes to questions of borders and borderlands." (16)

In these borderland areas, elite groups that have taken control have sought to establish authority and become state-builders. Ballvé writes that 'a major reason frontier actors are *so bent on advancing their respective state projects* is that they are instruments for determining access to and control over land'. (17) He argues that they take on the mantle of the state because they seek great social power, even if without formal recognition. This is also illustrated by Schouten who argues that "roadblocks or – checkpoints embody a form of control over circulation at narrow – points of passage, control that can be translated into other forms of power, whether symbolic, financial or political". (18) Haugball and Levine add that "governing goods and their circulation is a key state-formation activity involving coercion and capital, logistics and infrastructure, power and profits." (19)

As illustrated in several chapters of this volume, complex assemblages of political, business, military, and social networks weaves through the conflict ecosystem. These networks, vying for one or more of the four pillars of authority, operate not only within the confines of formal government institutions but also extend their influence far beyond. Elites who take control of transnational spaces not only tax and police trade, but also societies at large (20), often across multiple countries. Ultimately, the competition for authority between elites forms an equilibrium that balances power in these transnational spaces, reaching mutual understandings that connect them, allow them to share power, and govern their interactions. These become the rules of the game, held in what can be termed an 'equilibrium of authority' which can be examined and mapped. The notion of an equilibrium of authority is therefore a lens to locate the networks of power that make up a conflict ecosystem, and to enable analysts and policymakers to push past the Westphalian state / non-state binary that has often delimited understandings of and responses to conflict. These equilibria of authority are neither externally delimited nor internally stable, as groups within it invariably compete for influence and control (21), but they are resilient and a useful starting point for analysis.

Violence and the transnational ecosystem

Critically, the equilibrium of authority is intrinsically connected to multiple forms of violence in these transnational spaces. What may seem like a stable equilibrium can at times hide these other types of violence against the public. Researchers tend to focus on armed conflict as a phenomenon which occurs when "violence or military force is threatened or used for political ends, a contest between two opposing sides, each seeking to impose its will on the other. Conflict (be it inter or intra-state) may involve several factions." (22) Along these lines, Steger posits that "violence is the intentional infliction of physical or psychological injury on a person or persons." (23) SIPRI attempts to distinguish between armed conflict, defined as an event leading to at least 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year, and war, which requires at least 1,000. Most of these definitions focus on armed conflict or direct violence.

However, publics in conflict areas are harmed in varying ways that are not always deliberate or direct but can still occur under a seemingly "stable" equilibrium of authority. Buffachi argues that violence should not only be conceptualized by the notion of force, but also with the verb 'to violate'. This 'violence as violation' framing concerns three rights: the violation of political rights, the violation of the right to autonomy and self-actualisation, and the violation of human rights (24). On the latter, Salmi defines violences as "any avoidable action that constitutes a violation of a human right, in its widest meaning, or which prevents the fulfilment of a basic human need." (25) This broader approach to violence focuses on the impact or harms experienced by the public rather than an intentional act of fatal force.

Seen through this lens, people live under many varying forms of everyday violence. For instance, when elites engage in political corruption that siphons revenues from the government, their publics are deprived of access to essential goods, livelihoods and healthcare. Or an elite group's pursuit of ideological authority may require the instrumentalization of ethnic or sectarian identities and 'the mobilization of institutional bias', which leads a local council to enact laws that privilege one group over another (26). Khan argues that conflict is characterized by the political, economic, social and cultural exclusion of populations by elites (27). It ranges from lack of access to basic rights and services, lack of employment opportunities and capital, to lack of access to or violent expulsion from society. It too can spark armed conflict, as in many cases elites use coercion and violence to silence protests stemming from exclusion (28). These structural forms of violence harm the public every day (29).

These varying violences are also connected. Structural forms of violence not only kill people but also fuel armed conflict. Cockburn argues that conflict is a 'continuum of violence' which transcends the binary of war and peace to focus on processes that sustain inequalities and trigger armed conflict. An armed conflict that erupts from direct violence will be connected to a continuum of other types of violences, which include structural, criminal, state, non-state, gendered, racialised, armed, non-armed or popular (i.e. civil unrest).

Broadening these definitions, and specifically the connection between armed and other forms of violence, reveals another aspect of transnational conflict. Violence is not confined to national borders. Structural violence in one country often triggers direct violence in another. For instance, as De Haan argues in this volume, economic exclusion in Nigeria has led migrants to pay armed group to flee to Europe, inadvertently fuelling part of the Libyan armed conflict.

The transnational conflict ecosystem

Building on these debates, Chatham House's XCEPT programme seeks to interrogate and expand the conceptualisation of transnational conflict by focusing on the dynamics of authority and violence that shape the ecosystem.

Armed conflicts stem in part from the disruption of the transnational equilibrium of authority in an ecosystem. This disruption is further exacerbated when structural forms of violence in one area escalate into direct violence, either locally or in another part of the ecosystem. The equilibrium is inevitably disrupted either internally, when competing actors clash over authority, violate the governing rules of their interactions, or harm their public through direct or structural forms of violence, or externally, when an outside shock alters the rules of the game. These internal and external disruptions can ignite direct violence, and given the transnational nature of this equilibrium, the resulting conflict often transcends borders (30). Contestation for authority in political, economic, military, and ideological networks of power is explored by some of the chapters in this volume, through case studies from across the Middle East, North Africa and the Horn of Africa. Looking at the role of ideological power, Raphael Lefevre explores how militant Islam has spread so quickly across the Middle East and fuelled instances of conflict in the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli. Using the prism of a supply chain which features producers and consumers of ideology, he argues that the power of an idea and the network of actors who drive and facilitate its spread have had an external impact on conflict dynamics in the city.

Also looking at a supply chain but from the perspective of economic authority, Renad Mansour argues that the trade in tomatoes by armed groups in Iraq links them to an equilibrium of authority across Iran, Iraq and the Levant. The chapter uses the trade of tomatoes across these jurisdictions as a lens to understand the regulation of state-society relations, in which these armed groups cooperate and compete for power and profits but also end up making state power by taxing the population, regulating imports and exports, and gaining influence over government institutions. Armed conflicts are sparked in any location in this ecosystem when the equilibrium is disrupted by a contestation for power. Focusing on the disputed Welkait/Western Tigray zone of Ethiopia, Ahmed Soliman and Abel Abate argue that the Welkait Committee is not just a non-state actor but has instead developed into a key governance body with authority both inside and outside the Welkait Interim Authority. They trace how the group enjoys transnational power and how this power spreads across borders, impacting transnational conflict ecosystems.

Other contributors in this volume focus on specific hubs that connect transnational conflict across the ecosystem. Max Gallien zooms in on southern Tunisia to argue that the cross-border smuggling of consumer goods and cigarettes represent chequered value chains which operate in both formal and informal networks of power. This borderland is not merely a transport hub, but rather a transnational space where networks of power provide and mediate governance that also impact the political, social, and military equilibrium of authority across national borders. May Darwich and Jutta Bakonyi look at the port developments in Djibouti-city (Djibouti) and Berbera (Somaliland) to show external influences and pushback from local publics. They argue that the Emirati DP World and Chinese CMG not only engage in material construction but also bring their own models of development and projections of the Horn's

future into circulation, both typically built upon an idealized version of the investor's own past. However, local publics and governments react by reimagining these visions through the (re)telling of their own distinct histories. As such, this connection is continuously (and sometimes violently) rearticulated.

The other set of chapters in this series focus on the ways in which multiple forms of violence cross country borders. Deborah Cowen looks at the connection between global supply chains, the politics of circulation, and violence, to argue that conflicts over lands, labour and ecologies provoked by supply chains reveal the vulnerabilities inherent in the contemporary organization of transnational economic relations and infrastructures. Tim Eaton argues that violent disputes over authority in Libya have had pronounced impacts on the smuggling sector across the transnational conflict system, exacerbating other violences and inside-out dynamics that have spread to Niger and Nigeria. In turn, these other violences have then further fuelled direct violence back in Libya. Finally, Leah De Haan argues that structural violences in Edo State are fuelled by and fuel the Libyan conflict economy. In her essay, the exploitation of girls and women through enslaved sex work is connected to the Libyan conflict, demonstrating a continuum of violence.

Policy conclusions

The aim of this series is to explore how armed conflict in one area is connected to a wider transnational ecosystem, and what implications this reality has for the policy and programmatic interventions from the Global North. Across all the essays, a key lesson is that conflict resolution cannot be considered a domestic – local or national – matter for a given country but needs to also navigate the authority and violence that make up the transnational conflict ecosystem. As such, adopting a conflict-centric approach, as opposed to a country-centric one, which delineates its boundaries around networks of assemblages, authority, and violence, can more effectively chart the borders of conflict and address its transnational dynamics.

A wide array of diplomatic, security, and development initiatives have sought to address, prevent, and mitigate armed conflict and advance the Global North's interests in the Middle East and Africa. However, in many cases, these approaches have been locally or nationally focused and taken the nation-state as a central unit of analysis. This country-centric approach to conflict response has struggled to navigate the transnational ecosystem in which conflict operates.

Diplomatically, for instance, the UK government supported the facilitation of political settlements in several African and Middle Eastern countries (31). However, these political settlements encouraged national-level bargains between elites, often falling short of considering the wider ecosystem including actors who influenced the conflict from outside the national borders. Moreover, political settlements also failed to address the transnational continuum of violence(s), and instead focused exclusively on reducing armed or direct violence. In several cases, the new elite bargain fuelled corruption and structural forms of violence that impacted multiple jurisdictions and fuelled conflict. For instance, corruption from the informal political settlement in Libya led to a lack of essential healthcare for the public, some of whom were then driven into the cross-border smuggling trade (32).

Another area of conflict response is security, including securitizing borders, military strikes and economic sanctions, or developing or supporting an allied armed group in a conflict. However, again, these approaches have often been unable to navigate the transnational conflict ecosystem. For instance, individuals can circumvent sanctions because they operate across borders. Targeted sanctions on Iran's oil industry have impacted its trade, but Tehran has been able to overcome this partly by using oil as its currency with actors in a transnational equilibrium of authority across Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon (33). Sanctions have not reduced the continuum of violence, and have instead exacerbated harms to the most vulnerable populations across borders (34).

Finally, states from the Global North use a variety of development strategies to reduce conflict in the Middle East and Africa. This includes investing in economic development and infrastructure projects to boost growth and create jobs, governance and institutional support, including training for officials and anti-corruption measures, and humanitarian aid and social programs to improve living standards. However, once again many of these programs have been locally or nationally focused, ultimately unable to address or prevent the influence of transnational dynamics.

In short, the essays in this series show that policy responses have been geographically bounded, and that this country-centric approach has struggled to address conflicts that inherently operate in transnational space (35). As a result, networks of elites have managed to adapt to changing circumstance and respond to shocks to maintain their authority. XCEPT research instead argues for a conflict-centric approach which maps the transnational ecosystem to better guide policy and programmatic interventions, to understand the impact they have and, where it is not possible to address the full parameters of the systems and dynamics sustaining conflict, to adjust ambition accordingly.

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2. Why Jihad Goes Local: Mechanisms Behind the Transnational Spread of Militant Ideologies

Raphael Lefevre

Over the past decade, the militant Islam of jihadism has become the dominant ideological expression of rebellions in the Muslim world. After 2011, jihadi insurgents emerged as the key actors of civil wars in Syria, Iraq, Libya and Afghanistan, as well as in recent conflicts in Mozambique, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. Two different paradigms have emerged to explain the rapid diffusion of militant Islam over borders. The ideational perspective holds that militant interpretations of Islam were simply more popular than was hitherto suspected amongst Muslim communities, while the rational perspective claims that insurgents elsewhere have instrumentally emulated ISIS beliefs as a way of gaining access to its resources (1).

Both perspectives have merits, but also limits. For instance, evidence shows that the Salafi interpretation of Islam embraced by ISIS still constitutes a minority across much of the Middle East and Africa (2). This suggests that the appeal of its ideology is not as natural or evident amongst local communities as some argue. At the same time, if rational explanations held, we would expect that the post-2014 collapse of ISIS following its significant loss of territory in Syria, Iraq and Libya would have triggered a decline in its global appeal. Yet its local branches have proved resilient and indeed able to gain local allies and enter new conflicts, as shown in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Mozambique (3).

Drawing on seven years of research into the rise of militant Islam in Lebanon's second city of Tripoli from the 1980s until today, I argue that the dichotomy between the ideational and rational paradigms can be overcome by considering militant Islam – and revolutionary ideologies in general – through the prism of a transnational supply chain featuring producers and consumers of ideology who hold a variety of motivations and act across borders. This turns the question of *why* jihadi insurgencies have spread so quickly to *how* this has happened; it pushes us to consider the ways in which militant ideologies can spread across borders into local communities and conflicts. This paper presents ideational, social and rhetorical mechanisms which help explain the spread of militant Islam in Tripoli.

Tripoli, Waves of Militant Ideologies and Conflict

It is important to clarify from the outset that there is nothing especially unique in the way jihadi ideology diffuses across borders. Tripoli is a case in point. While many analysts treat it as 'the other Kandahar', some even calling it an 'extremist city' (4). because of the prominence gained by jihadi militias, what they miss is its longer and broader history of multiple rebellions inspired by many different ideologies. Local communities and conflict actors in Tripoli explicitly acknowledge this, recognising that their rebellions have surfed on a succession of different ideological waves (5).

1 Map of Lebanon and Syria.

The first ideological wave that inspired rebellion in Tripoli was pan-Syrian nationalism in the 1930s (*Map 1*). Just a decade earlier, the French colonial authorities had split what had until then been called Greater Syria into present-day Syria and the smaller state of Lebanon. This triggered mass protests in (mostly) Sunni-majority cities such as Damascus, Homs, Aleppo and Hama, driven by Syrian nationalism, which reverberated across the border in Sunni-dominated towns like Sidon and Tripoli. There, pan-Syrian nationalism as an ideology advocating for the recreation of Greater Syria became especially strong, leading to violent rebellions against French colonial troops.

The second ideological wave to grip Tripoli was pan-Arabism in the 1950s and 60s. The rise to power of Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser and his 1956 standoff against colonial powers in Suez not only made him popular at home but also fuelled a broader pan-Arab movement which resulted, for instance, in the brief unification of Egypt and Syria in 1958. The rise of pan-Arab ideology had a significant impact on Tripoli, leading to the proliferation of political parties and armed groups demanding Lebanon's integration into the Egyptian-Syrian union. Government refusal ushered in a brief but bloody civil war. Within the space of months, Tripoli had become a bastion of pan-Arabism.

The third wave to reach Tripoli and affect conflict was political Islam in the 1980s. This happened in the aftermath of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, when Ayatollah Khomeini's followers overthrew the secular

and pro-Israeli Shah to found an Islamic Republic featuring a strong alliance with the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). Tripoli has a Sunni-majority and Iran is Shia-dominated, but the effect of the rise to power of Islamism in Tehran was nonetheless significant on the Lebanese city. It inspired the creation of Tawhid, a Khomeinist armed group which took over Tripoli in 1982 and ran it as a small Islamic Republic until 1985, fighting off local leftists and protecting embattled PLO guerrillas.

A pattern emerges from these cases. Tripoli is fertile ground for revolts because of its history of rebellions and grievances around state neglect and poverty. The trigger for violence is ideational and external, driven by ideological movements rooted in other conflicts which provide both inspiration and resources to the existing pool of local rebels. This is also what explains the wave of Salafi militancy in Tripoli in the wake of the 2003 US invasion of Iraq and the 2011 Syrian civil war, when jihadi armed groups began roaming the city. But what, then, are the mechanisms explaining how waves of militant ideologies can cross borders so successfully?

Ideological Entrepreneurship: Militant Ideas Get Introduced

The first mechanism is ideational. For an ideology to cross borders and trigger or shape a conflict, it has to be introduced to local communities, typically by highly committed figures who will socialise and educate them into it – what can be termed 'ideological entrepreneurship'. The actors of 'ideological entrepreneurship' can be described as conflict elites, in that their immersion in the world of ideas and strong ideological convictions demand an education often only available to the upper echelons of local society. Whether as preachers, trainers or ideologues, they play key roles in raising awareness about militant ideas in communities otherwise more concerned with everyday survival.

In 1980s Tripoli, the 'ideological entrepreneurship' of two dozen local preachers was critical in spreading the Islamic Republic's ideas following visits to Iran after 1979. They were amongst the first to join the armed group Tawhid, organised Islamist summer camps to indoctrinate local youths, put up banners in praise of the Ayatollah throughout Tripoli and even erected a large metal statue of the name 'God' on the city's most central roundabout. While Tripoli had long been known as a stronghold for pan-Arabism, their 'ideological entrepreneurship' introduced local communities to Khomeinism.

The same mechanism explains how the sectarian and militant Salafi ideas which arose in post-2003 Iraq and post-2011 Syria spread to Tripoli shortly afterwards. Salafism had been a fringe religious and political phenomenon in Tripoli until the return of a handful of hardened locals from the sectarian battlefields of Iraq and Syria. They turned into 'ideological entrepreneurs' justifying and, in some cases, actively advocating for violence against Tripoli's Alawi minority, which makes up 10% of the local population. They transmitted their ideas through speeches in Tripoli's 14 Salafi mosques and through appearances on local radio shows and at socio-political mobilizations.

At a broader level, 'ideological entrepreneurship' is an important mechanism by which ISIS has been able to spread its unique breed of Salafi jihadi ideology. Its *takfiri* beliefs set the group apart from not only most Muslims globally but also its former jihadi allies like Al-Qaeda. ISIS used 'ideological entrepreneurship' to raise awareness of its controversial ideas and build a critical mass of followers, notably by cadres like the Bahraini preacher Turki al-Binaali, who until his 2017 killing moved frequently

between Syria's Raqqa, Iraq's Mosul, Libya's Sirte, Yemen's Abyan, or Tunisia's Bizerte to lecture on the group's ideology and spread it widely (6)

Ideological Brokerage: Militant Ideas Get Legitimacy

To reach beyond educated elites and convince parts of the broader public, militant ideas need to get local legitimacy. One social mechanism through which this happens is 'ideological brokerage', when individuals with large pre-existing followings and strong local roots embrace them. These figures are 'champions of mobilization' because of their ability to draw large crowds of followers keen to emulate them. Any state or armed group seeking to export its ideology across borders will have to rely on the brokerage of these intermediaries if it wants its beliefs system to have local legitimacy.

This helps to explain how the armed group Tawhid succeeded in spreading the Islamic Republic of Iran's ideology in Sunni-majority Tripoli in the 80s, even if only for three years. Rather than just relying on the activism of 'ideological entrepreneurs' advocating for abstract principles, Tawhid also enlisted the support of Khalil Akkawi, the popular former Marxist strongman of Bab al-Tebbaneh, Tripoli's largest neighbourhood (*Map 2, Picture 1*). His switch to Islamism and adherence to Tawhid lent legitimacy to its ideology and led many to emulate him. His funeral in 1986 was attended by 40,000 local sympathizers.

2 Neighborhoods of Tripoli.

Picture 2: Khalil Akkawi (right) and Tawhid's leader Said Shaaban (left)

Similar dynamics explain why the same Bab al-Tebbaneh neighbourhood became a stronghold for jihadi militias close to Al-Qaeda in the late 2000s and the 2010s. Syria's Nusra Front enlisted the support of a local strongman, Usama Mansour, who was so ardently admired by local (often not especially pious) youths that they called him their 'emir'. Like with Akkawi and Tawhid in the 80s, Mansour's adherence to the Nusra Front helped legitimise the group and its sectarian and militant ideology. Upon his killing in 2015 and mass funeral, al-Nusra circulated a statement praising him as a 'fearless lion' and thanking him for 'calling people to monotheism' or Salafism (*Picture 2*) (7).

Picture 2: Usama Mansour's funeral, Bab al-Tebbaneh, April 2015 (source: *Al-Jumhuriya*)

The mechanism of 'ideological brokerage', in which locally rooted 'champions of mobilization' help militant ideas cross borders and gain legitimacy, is not a dynamic specific to Tripoli or for that matter to neighbourhood strongmen. One of the keys to understand the spread of ISIS ideology into the Eastern Syrian desert, for instance, is a 2014 visit by one of its leaders to the elders of the town of al-Sukhna(8). After an hour spent flattering them as "our leaders", these elders had given their oath of allegiance to ISIS – and days later, hundreds of local men had joined ISIS too. 'Champions of mobilization' can provide the legitimacy for militant ideas to spread locally.

Ideological Provincialism: Militant Ideas Go Vernacular

'Ideological provincialism' is a rhetorical mechanism through which militant ideas can cross borders and get embedded in local communities. This sees grand ideological concepts and goals reformulated in less formal language and, even more importantly, become explicitly embedded within longer standing local narratives and priorities. The goal is to signal to local communities that new ideas that might be perceived as 'foreign' are in fact aligned with older traditions and fit to address local grievances.

In 1980s Tripoli, 'ideological provincialism' was a key mechanism through which Tawhid spread Khomeinist Islamism. For instance, the armed group advocated for the transformation of Lebanon into

an ‘Islamic Republic’ strongly allied with Iran. But rather than justifying this through the inherently Shia notion of *wilayat al-faqih*, as ‘proper’ Khomeinists would, it played on Tripoli’s sense of self-importance and history of lost glory by suggesting that the city could become the capital of this ‘Islamic Republic of Lebanon’. Tawhid frequently used local perspectives, histories and neighbourhood rivalries to disguise and sweeten its ideology.

‘Ideological provincialism’ was also used by jihadi groups in Syria to project their ideology in 2010s Tripoli, framed in a less foreign, more local way. For instance, in its eulogy of Usama Mansour, the Nusra Front praised Tripoli’s long history of rebellion, as a “city of men” and a “factory of heroes and martyrs”, and went on to address the concerns of “the Sunnis in Lebanon”, such as Hezbollah’s domination of the political system. This was not an abstract statement calling on people to blindly adopt Salafism, but a deeply local way of conveying its ideas.

The adaptation of typically universal militant ideas to local narratives and concerns is a strategy which ISIS also employed elsewhere. When securing the allegiance of village and tribal leaders in Syria’s al-Sukhna, as discussed above, the ISIS representative framed the creation of the ISIS Caliphate as an opportunity for the town to regain its lost prestige, giving al-Sukhna its old nickname back – the “capital of the Syrian desert”, a title it lost under the Baath regime to its rival Palmyra. They even allude that it could become a hub in the Caliphate by calling it “mother of villages”, Mecca’s other name. All of this might go unnoticed by the outsider but constitutes important messaging locally.

Transnational Supply Chains of Ideas and Conflict Dynamics

The ideational, social and rhetorical mechanisms explored above show the usefulness of viewing jihadi ideologies – and militant ideas more broadly – through the prism of supply chains, because it helps redirect the question from *whether/why* ideology matters to *how* it does. The notion of a transnational supply chain of ideas makes sense of complex dynamics: ideas get produced in a particular conflict hub and are embraced by actors who will then do their best to export these beliefs across borders and sell them to consumers embedded in different contexts, narratives and concerns by leveraging mechanisms such as those explored above. What, then, are the implications for how we should view the spread of jihadi insurgencies?

One important takeaway is that the *content* of the ideology only matters to an extent. Of course, militant Islam affected conflict dynamics in 1980s and 2010s Tripoli, as ‘ideological entrepreneurs’ pushed local conflict actors to engage in respectively anti-leftist and sectarian violence. But upon closer look most of the violence was unrelated to ideology. In the 1980s, like more recently, the use by jihadi groups of ‘champions of mobilisation’ as a way to broker their ideology across borders dragged them into local strongmen’s own, older antagonisms, like the neighbourhood feud between Bab al-Tebbaneh and Jabal Mohsen or the rivalry between Tripoli’s slums and wealthy districts – itself akin to a ‘social jihad’.

Similarly, it is important to question the assumption that the discourse of jihadi actors is necessarily ideological at all. Here again, there is no doubt that ‘ideological entrepreneurship’ is a key vector through which the concepts of militant Islam are made available across borders. But ideological notions will not reach local communities struggling with bread-and-butter issues unless they are

reformulated in a way that makes space for local concerns and narratives. Activating the mechanism of 'ideological provincialism' does that, but it also means that the ideological elements of jihadi discourse are often emptied of their substance. Some terms like *jihad*, *kuffar* or *hakimiya* persist, but are understood locally, not globally.

A final takeaway is that, if policymakers view militant ideologies as part of supply chains which should be disrupted, then the emphasis should be on demand as much as supply. The surges of militant Islam which Tripoli witnessed in the 1980s and 2010s must be understood as the latest in the city's long history of absorbing waves of revolutionary ideology. And Tripoli is far from an exception. Revolutionary ideologies, whether militant Islam or something else, will continue to resonate from Eastern Libya to Northern Nigeria unless local grievances creating demand for them are addressed.

Conclusion

This article revisits the puzzle of why jihadi insurgencies have spread so much and so quickly over the past decade throughout parts of the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa, and turns it into a new question – not *why*, but *how* militant ideas cross borders and with *what* effects. I identify three mechanisms: (a) 'ideological entrepreneurship' or the activism of highly committed figures who spare no efforts to socialise and educate communities across borders into their beliefs system, (b) 'ideological brokerage' or the process through which militant ideas get legitimacy because they are adopted by 'champions of mobilization' with significant local followings, (c) 'ideological provincialism' or the reformulation of grand ideas in deeply local language.

These three mechanisms go a long way to explain how militant ideologies produced in a conflict get exported across borders. They also hold important lessons on jihadi insurgencies. Viewing revolutionary ideas as part of a supply chain moves the focus away from the content of the ideology and onto the actors and mechanisms of the cross-border diffusion of beliefs. Some of these actors and mechanisms are ideological, others are much less inherently so. This suggests that the primary drivers of currently unfolding jihadi insurgencies in Burkina Faso or Mozambique might not be as ideological as they seem from the outside. To address them, more attention is needed on the demand side of the ideational supply chain.

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3. Chequered value chains: globalisation made in the borderlands

Max Gallien

For much of the past three decades, the dominant framing of the relationship between smuggling, conflict and global trade has been a story of two globalisations – of free trade and its dark underbelly. With the end of the Cold War, observing a briefly unipolar world increasingly connected through ever cheaper trade and technology, public policy concerns focused on the order that globalisation was creating, and on making globalisation itself orderly. With this came increased attention to the rules and agreements that structured trade liberalisation, alongside the regulatory efforts behind 'fair trade', global standards and the governance of global value chains, from regulating sweatshops to combatting 'modern slavery'.

In the first decade of the 21st century, as the 'war on terror' and the global financial crisis ushered in a more pessimistic public mood toward globalisation, the story of global trade began to focus more prominently on discussing its villains, the threats to its order. While these had been framed more commonly around specific states in the 20th century, they now focused more on individuals and networks. What emerged was more work on the 'dark side' or 'dark underbelly' of globalisation, (1) on the 'dirty entanglements', (2) on the smugglers, grifters, traffickers and armed groups that exploit the global trade architecture for sinister goals and illicit gains (3). This 'dark side of globalisation' is commonly both framed as a result of the technological and trade innovations, which they use and exploit, and as a threat to them and the order and regulation underpinning global trade and governance. In this way, smugglers and states, regulators and subverters, are presented as key antagonists of a battle for a regulated globalisation, and for order in the 21st century. As Peter Andreas' study on the US-Mexico border has highlighted, this has been a discourse that has been politically useful for reaching voters worried about the effects of globalisation (4). With it has come the increased politicisation of mobility and border security, of borders and borderlands as the imagined place of battle, where improvements in regulation and infrastructure can keep separate the licit from the illicit value chains, the good globalisation from its dark underbelly.

However, scholarship on smuggling has long highlighted the flaws and simplifications in this perspective. Many have pointed out that smuggling and illegal trade are not entirely separate from formal value chains, but are connected to legal markets, often moving goods that have been legally produced in one jurisdiction or are legally sold in another (5). Extensive ethnographic research has highlighted that the operation of illegal trade in borderlands is not necessarily happening under the radar of states, or due to a lack of state control, but instead is commonly tolerated by state actors and regulated through local arrangements.

This article draws on these insights to suggest an alternative to the narrative of 'two globalisations.' In doing this, it takes inspiration both from recent research on conflict value chains (6) and from a large literature on bottom-up regulation that takes a 'view from the border(lands)' (7). Drawing on the global smuggling of cigarettes and smuggling of consumer goods in Southern Tunisia as illustrative case

studies, it argues that rather than representing a wholly different type of globalisation, much smuggling is closely integrated into mostly formal supply chains. The article suggests the concept of *chequered value chains* that dip in and out of formal and informal regulatory mechanisms. It therefore argues for an understanding of illegal cross-border trade that is not only fixated on specific border crossings but considers the entire transnational value chain – in understanding their respective profit and interests, their relationship with violence and their underlying governance. Specifically, itnotes that for these value chains, borderlands are not merely transport hubs but also providers and mediators of local and more often transnational governance, organising the dipping of the value chain out and back into formal legal structures. The article concludes by considering the consequences of these global dynamics for the populations of borderlands, and the way in which we study conflict and governance.

Chequered value chains

Popular conceptions of smuggling are typically associated with a specific set of goods – with cocaine and cannabis, counterfeits, firearms, and human trafficking. However, these represent only a small subsection of the goods traded illegally across the globe. Smuggling - purposeful movement across a border in contravention of relevant legal frameworks (8) more commonly than not concerns 'licit' goods that are legally produced in one jurisdiction. Cigarettes are smuggled, and so are carpets, tea, glasses, gasoline, sneakers, microwaves – the list goes on. Similarly, we commonly associate smuggling with camouflage in difficult terrain, with jungles and rugged mountains that are difficult to control, with what Gregor Dobler called the 'green border' (9). But again, that is only a sub-section of smuggling in the 21st century: most smuggling of wholesale consumer goods operates through the 'gray' and 'blue' borders: through border crossings, ports and airports. Trade infrastructure is valuable for smugglers moving larger quantities (10). While some of these smuggled consumer goods are then sold illegally, perhaps out of the back of a car, many of them again enter the legal market in their destination country – they are sold out of supermarkets or other stores that are registered and legally operated. At times, some of the borders along a supply chain are crossed legally, while others are crossed illegally.

Electronics and textiles smuggled into Tunisia across the past few decades provide an effective example. Produced, legally, in East Asia and Turkey, they were typically imported legally into Libya, which has maintained low import taxes, via the port of Tripoli. From there on, they were packed on smaller trucks and brought into Tunisia through the Ras Jedir border crossing. Via side-payments to the customs officers, they were moved through the crossing illegally without the appropriate tariffs being paid, and then sold at markets throughout the country (11). As Hamza Meddeb has pointed out, this trade, although at some points illegal, reflects a part of the wider trend in the country's integration into global trade networks, toward Turkey and East Asia (12). What is notable here is that just a relatively small part of the product's journey is illegal. These transactions are not part of a separate illicit globalisation, but instead represent one illegal border crossing within a larger value chain that operates almost entirely legally.

Critically, however, while these illegal border crossings can seem like small moments, they can be of fundamental economic importance for the wider value chain and the actors involved – not merely the smugglers or border guards that are being paid off. In the Tunisian case, prior to the 2011 revolution, economic networks that were connected to former president Ben Ali did not just use their contacts in

the customs service to avoid tariffs and get their goods into the country cheaper, but to get an advantage over competitors and solidify domestic monopolies (13).

he tobacco industry provides even larger examples of such chequered value chains. In recent years, the biggest players in the tobacco industry have aggressively positioned themselves as a victim of tobacco smuggling, pointing to competition from a separate, illicit tobacco market (14). Some of this describes almost entirely illegal value chains – counterfeit cigarettes or cigarettes that have been produced illegally before they are smuggled and then sold outside of official stores, for example by street-vendors. Another part of this describes so-called 'illicit whites' or 'cheap whites' – cigarettes that are produced legally in one jurisdiction (for example in Vietnam or in the special economic zones on the Arab peninsula) and then moved illegally into another jurisdiction where they cannot be legally sold (15). However, all of this misses one of the most central aspects of tobacco smuggling globally – the complicity of some of the largest legal industry actors in the smuggling of their own products. In fact, many of the largest tobacco companies have had to pay enormous fines in recent decades for strategically over-supplying certain jurisdictions, to allow for their products to be moved illegally into neighbouring markets (16).

Andorra became a classic case study of this dynamic. Between 1993 and 1997, legal cigarette exports from Britain to Andorra increased hundredfold, eventually reaching a level that could have supplied every citizen of Andorra with 60 British cigarettes per day (17). The purpose, however, was their illegal export into neighbouring European jurisdictions with higher import taxes. "Smuggling, often organised in a furtive and clandestine manner, has been BAT [British American Tobacco] company policy since the late 1960s" a Guardian reporter involved in the paper's investigation into tobacco smuggling later testified in front of a Health Select Committee (18). None of this was unique to BAT – in the years that followed, tobacco companies settled various court cases around complicity in smuggling in exchange for huge payments: US$1.25 billion (PMI), US$400 million (JTI), US$300 million (Imperial) and US$200 million (BAT) (19). Further examples of similar tactics have continued to be seen in recent years (20).

The example of tobacco highlights the economic scope of smuggling as part of chequered supply chains – that these are not small parts of smuggling economies. 11% of the global tobacco market is estimated to be smuggled (21). This scope is an important feature of wholesale smuggling of consumer goods – smuggling here is often not merely a minor 'peel-off' of legal value chains, but a substantial aspect of their economic logic. Their straddling of legal and illegal is not accidental, it is a fundamental aspect of competition for markets, customers, and profit – it is large enough to tip the scales between competitors, open up new markets, drive prices and consumer preferences. As Meagher has highlighted, rather than subverting globalisation, smuggling networks can provide 'globalisation through the back door', both by moving goods past trade barriers and providing an argument for their elimination (22). In this context, the tobacco industry has commonly and explicitly referenced the 'threat' of smuggling as an argument to push back against high taxes and other restrictions on cigarette trade and sale - despite a rather weak evidence base (23).

The tobacco market is not unusual here - further examples are easy to find (24). In the early 2000s, estimates traced 5-10% of the global market for wood products to 'suspicious origins', (25) and in 2016, illicit trading in oil via under-invoicing, theft, bunkering and corruption was believed to account for nearly $100 billion a year in Africa alone (26). Looking beyond the trade in physical goods, online gambling companies drawing in customers from outside of the territories in which they are regulated, or

even marketing to them, provides somewhat of a virtual parallel to the example of cigarettes in Andora discussed above (27). Needless to say, goods and territories under sanctions are particularly prevalent – one study estimated that in the early 2000s, smuggling made up 13% of total trade in Iran, the relevance of which has been highlighted frequently in the context of sanctions on Russia in recent months (28).

It is notable here that the "chequered" nature of these value chains stands somewhat apart from the idea of 'dirty entanglements'. While "dirty entanglements" more commonly describes the idea that different types of illegal actors (armed groups, mafias, smugglers) are cooperating and networking in their joint subversion of borders and legal orders, the idea of chequered value chains recognises that while value chains might connect both seemingly legal and seemingly illegal actors, these can be linked commercially, without necessarily sharing an agenda, personnel, ideology or broader position on the porosity or solidity of borders. The primary commercial partners of smugglers might not be gangs or terrorist organisations, but multinational corporations. And while goods may pass borders illegally, they may reappear in highly legally regulated markets thereafter.

As a consequence of their sheer size and their trade in consumer products, another feature that chequered value chains commonly share is their reliance on legal production and distribution channels. Chequered value chains require complex assemblages and large-scale trade infrastructure. As the tobacco examples above have highlighted, they usually require some distance or deniability between legally and illegally operating actors within the value chain, but also demand sufficient coordination for the chain to function. They require predictability even within the parts that are illegally operated, and need the means to re-insert illegally traded goods into legally operating distribution channels. What all of this requires is a substantial amount of regulation, coordination, institutional innovation and governance. This then points to a critical aspect of the functions that borderlands perform for transnational chequered value chains (29).

Borderlands as Governance Hubs

For large global value chains, borderlands and border crossings are most commonly viewed as transport and logistical hubs, as places that manage the passing from one location into another. Occasionally, they are even presented as difficult or lawless spaces that require particular negotiation or intervention. What is commonly overlooked however is that borderlands can also perform a critical regulatory role for chequered value chains – that they operate, in a sense, as "governance hubs" (30). They do this in at least four ways. One, by providing the regulatory context to organise the labour, technology and capital needed for the transport of goods. Two, by providing the predictability that large international value chains require. Three, by organising the distribution of rents that are generated during these parts of the value chains. And four, by organising the re-entry of these goods into legal distribution channels. These dynamics, in a way, complement Peer Schouten's descriptions of 'arm's length trade' and 'logistic entrepreneurs' (31). His analysis of roadblock politics in central Africa describes the processes through which formal actors in global value chains organise the movement of their goods through checkpoints operated by non-state actors. Conversely, in the examples discussed here, state- and non-state actors in borderlands generate informal regulatory processes in order to organise the illegal movement of value chains through borders operated by state actors.

In order to understand how borderlands play these functions, it is useful to revisit the case study of the smuggling of textiles and electronics into Tunisia through its southern borderlands, in particular during the pre-revolutionary era under president Ben Ali (32). As noted above, Tunisia's south-eastern borderland, and especially the Ras Jedir border crossing and the nearby city of Ben Guerdane have for some decades been central to the wholesale smuggling into Tunisia of consumer goods produced in Turkey and South-East Asia. It is worth noting that southern Tunisia is by no means a 'lawless zone', and is not controlled by non-state armed groups or gangs. The governance at play here is not under the aegis of one specific alternative actor, but is instead the product of a complex and fluid set of informal and hybrid institutions, deals and arrangements, mostly unwritten, that organise the interactions between state- and non-state actors, ranging from the Tunisian police and customs to smugglers, wholesalers and Libyan authorities. It almost always requires the coordination between actors on both sides of the border. Consequently, and notably, this mode of governance is not regulated to one national territory but is essentially transnational – it regulates what happens at the border, but often touches upon what happens on both sides of it, and has consequences that reach far beyond that.

Needless to say, not everything here is regulated – some illicit goods are moved entirely outside these regulated structures, and even within them competition within smuggling markets, like in other markets, thrives on connections and exceptions at the margins of established rules. However, the scale of wholesale smuggling in places like Ben Guerdane relies on regulatory predictability, at least in general. The precise nature of this regulation changed over the past decades, and especially with the 2011 revolution. However, the function that these arrangements have played have remained relatively stable, mapping on to the categories mentioned above.

Labour and capital. Wholesale smuggling through southern Tunisia is highly labour intensive. It requires the re-packing of goods onto smaller trucks and their distribution for sale throughout the country. To a degree, this is by design, intended to provide employment in an otherwise economically marginalised region. Throughout the region, illegal trade employs tens of thousands of people, with informal arrangements from payments to apprenticeships integrating them into the local labour smuggling market. Just as critical for wholesale smuggling is the availability of large amounts of capital, and currency exchangeability. Strict restrictions on currency exchange make this difficult within the legal system. Consequently, Ben Guerdane has developed a substantial sector of local informal providers of monetary services. Tightly clustered in booths in the city centre, they not only exchange currencies, but are plugged into large international hawala networks, arranging informal monetary transfers to Turkey or China, and providing loans and other financial instruments to facilitate wholesale trade. Informal rules not only govern the relationships on Ben Guerdane's informally dubbed "Sarraf Street", where large sums of cash are handled over with little formal security infrastructure, but also between hawala traders across the world, moving capital outside of the formal banking system and without the protection and property rights structured by the international legal system. Without them, trade at this scale in Ben Guerdane would be unthinkable.

Predictability. While the transporters that bring these goods into Tunisia illegally make use of the same physical infrastructure as legal traders, their most common concern is time. Long lines at the border crossing are common. Here, informal rules that standardise payments at the border not only provide the predictability that allows wholesalers to calculate their margins, but also avoids the time taken up by lengthy negotiations around bribes between customs officers and wholesalers and their

transporters. For example, an informal agreement in force in 2017 specified the amount of goods that could be brought through per car and the level of payment made on both sides of the border.

Distribution of rents. Aside from contributing to a normalisation and routinisation of many of the interactions between smugglers and state agents, these arrangements primarily organise and standardise payments. This contributes to some of the distribution of the rents generated through this trade. This includes the more obvious aspects – the payments made to customs and state security officials, the incomes of police officers manning roadblocks – but also help determine the profits of middlemen and wholesalers, and, crucially, consumers. For example, for many years, populations in Southern Tunisia have benefitted from access to cheap gasoline smuggled in from Libya or Algeria (33). An elaborate network of police checkpoints managed the integration of this cheaper gasoline into the Tunisian market, raising its prices and decreasing its availability in regions further away from the border.

Re-entry into legal distribution channels. Critically, if smuggled goods are to be sold to end consumers, they require large-scale, predictable distribution channels that are perceived as safe and, ideally, legal by the target consumers. In order to achieve this, regulatory institutions are required to either set up informal distribution channels, or to make smuggled goods palatable for legal distribution channels. In southern Tunisia, both can be found. Informal traditional weekly markets have developed into a hybrid institutional framework, largely regulated and taxed by local municipalities to provide a predictable and comfortable environment for the sale of wholesale smuggled goods. More strikingly, during the pre-revolutionary period, the local municipality was actively selling slips that certified that goods had been imported legally – even if they had not (34). This then made it easier for legal consumers and traders to move these goods throughout the country and across the substantial number of police checkpoints along the roads north. Besides providing a good example of the kind of regulatory innovation that is critical for the functioning of 'chequered value chains', it also provides a case study of the role of taxation and local government in moving smuggled goods into more respectable distributional channels.

Southern Tunisia then provides one example of the diversity of regulatory functions that informal and hybrid arrangements in borderlands can provide for larger global value chains. It is far from an extreme example, as it does not have a strong presence of non-state armed groups or other additional local governance dynamics that could add further institutional levels. Southern Tunisia also provides an illustration of borderlands as a 'governance hub', of the regulatory functions of what is commonly viewed as a transportation hub, and the centrality for global value chains of an area that is often primarily thought of as peripheral. Many miles from capitals or large airports, it is central to a transnational chequered value chain. However, this notion of centrality is in itself not straight forward – while some of the institutions described above can shape global dynamics to meet some local needs (the labour intensity of smuggling provides a really clear example), many of them are doing the opposite: rearranging local structures to the need of a transnational value chain.

Moreover, considering borderlands as governance hubs begs the question of who produces that governance. As noted above, this is not necessarily shaped and produced in the border regions themselves. Even if rules are conceptualised, negotiated, enforced in border regions, they do not necessarily mirror the perspectives or choices of all borderland communities – or of all members of those communities. Especially when they are dominated by trade, borderlands can be highly unequal spaces, with unevenly distributed access to economic opportunities and conversations about

governance. Here, the informality of those arrangements can have a localising impact but can also limit transparency and inclusivity. This connects directly to the effects that these dynamics have on border regions more widely.

Periphery, Fragility and Violence

It is self-evident that the effects that chequered value chains have on the social and economic life of borderlands is highly context-specific, dependent on both the borderlands and the goods transported through them. Covering these different aspects comprehensively here is impossible. Fortunately, there has been a substantial literature that has developed a wealth of case studies on the local impacts of the intersection between smuggling, globalised trade and borderland communities. Based on this literature, it is worth briefly highlighting three seeming contradictions that have characterised many borderland experiences with global value chains: centrality and periphery, fragility and stability, regulation and violence.

Centrality and periphery. The previous section has noted that borderlands can act as governance and financial hubs, as places where regulation, loans and deals are made. As Meagher and others have highlighted, however, it is important to note that this centrality of borderlands does not necessarily establish them as entirely independent power centres (35). The rules and profits made in the borderlands are still often shaped by central states, global trade and economic elites in the political centres or transnationally across other regulatory hubs within these value chains. The largest profits generated by chequered value chains, or even just their illegal links, are not always made in the borderlands – and if they are made in the borderlands, they are often not invested there. Successful smugglers in southern Tunisia have been far more likely to re-invest their profits in Tunis, the country's capital, than in the southern borderlands. A value chain perspective of smuggling in particular highlights the dependence of peripheral hubs on dynamics that are geographically far removed from them, as disruptions along the supply chain can quickly cut off critical sources of local income. This connects directly to the second point.

Stability and Fragility. The previous sections have echoed a wider conclusion in recent writing on smuggling: that smuggling can have a stabilising effect on borderlands, as it provides income, employment and opportunities to populations that are otherwise often economically and politically marginalised. This is one of the primary explanations for why states tolerate some form of smuggling and engage in its regulation. From a stability perspective, sudden collapse of a smuggling economy, that brings with it high unemployment and demands for different forms of redistribution, can be more threatening to states than its existence. However, at the same time, it is important to highlight the fragilities that an economy that is dominated by smuggling can create within borderlands. This includes not only the dependence on changeable value chains but also the often highly unequal distribution of profits and opportunities that smuggling economies can create. While at times embedded in own moral economies that provide some amount of redistribution or lower barriers to access to some activities, (36) smuggling economies are often characterised by high profits at the top and high risks at the bottom. While the role of women in smuggling is at times larger than it seems and is certainly under-appreciated in much of the literature on the topic, (37) this does not change the fact that in some regions smuggling economies are highly gendered spaces, with many roles overwhelmingly dominated

by men. While they can be a large source of employment, they often have limited knock-on effects on the economy more widely, thereby reproducing dependencies and fragilities.

Regulation and violence. The fact that smuggling is regulated, the fact that much of it is very much on the radar of state actors, and the fact that illegal trade is still often connected to large global value chains should not distract from the fact that smuggling can still include and produce a substantial amount of violence against some of those involved in it. This sits within a wider continuum of violence and indignity. The previous section mentioned the indirect and more structural forms of economic inequality and fragilities experienced by borderland communities. But it is important to highlight that this violence can also take more direct forms:daily from state agents at border crossings, the semi-regular kidnappings or beatings by militias at roadblocks, physical violence inflicted by rival smuggling groups or by state officials that need to show some kind of success in anti-smuggling operations to a visiting general. Risk is still at the heart of most smuggling operations, even if informal arrangements exist to decrease that risk, and to make the operation profitable, at least on average, for those who engage in it regularly. If chequered value chains outsource the management of these risks to borderlands, smuggling operations often further outsource these risks to their youngest, poorest and most vulnerable members. Consequently, when we think of transnational violence, it is important to both take a broad view of how we conceive of violence, but also to situate it within the logic of transnational value chains, and within the interests of centres of profit or regulation that may be geographically far removed.

Again, Southern Tunisia provides an effective illustration here. Despite the relatively high level of regulation in its smuggling economy, there have been repeated fatalities in recent years. And generally, the young men who get shot when crossing the border, who flip their cars while try to avoid a bribe, or who risk gasoline tanks catching fire in the brutal heat of the desert are not the ones standing to make the largest profit from the trade they are engaging in (38). However, the desert is not the only space that illustrates this dynamic. Just a few miles from the border crossing, the beaches of southern Tunisia have also been the space of a form of violence. Here, the bodies of men, women and children who drowned trying to get to Europe, have been recovered and buried (39). While human mobility, and especially the movement of refugees and asylum seekers toward Europe, is a very different system than the trade in goods, it is worth noting that it echoes the dynamics of chequered value chains. Here, too, some parts of the system are legal while others are left illegal or as grey areas – the much-referenced absence of a legal and safe route, in line with the interests of centres of power within the system. And here, too, the management of the riskiest parts of the system, and its violence, is outsourced to those who are most vulnerable.

Conclusion

This paper has drawn on recent scholarship on illegal trade and borderlands, and in particular on the case studies of the global smuggling of cigarettes and the smuggling of consumer goods in Southern Tunisia, in order to illustrate three main points. First, that for the vast majority of illegal trade, it is misleading to think of a bifurcated legal and illegal globalisation – that smuggling is more commonly integrated into chequered global value chains than entirely separate from legal economies. Second, that in order for these chequered value chains to function, they require informal regulation, some of

which is provided by borderlands and commonly with the involvement of state actors. Third, that this essential regulatory role does not necessarily imply that borderlands have control over these value chains or their role within them – that instead, they are still frequently exposed to fragility and violence. Needless to say, for any issue this large and heterogeneous, there are exceptions to these arguments. There are, of course, some value chains that operate almost entirely illegally – those for cocaine for example. However, their importance is not diminished by noting that these are just one type of a diverse set of smuggling economies, many of which are more closely integrated with legal trade.

The dynamics discussed here also illustrate the utility of thinking transnationally as a way to study the relationship between illegal trade, governance and conflict. Tracing logics of regulation, profit and movement across transnational territories, as this paper has done in the context of chequered value chains and as the approach of this special issue illustrates more broadly, highlights the complexities and common pitfalls in locating these dynamics in a more limited geography. Thinking of governance or even state-building in the context of smuggling and borderlands requires not only looking at the institutions of borderlands themselves but also at the context of power, interests and dependencies in which they are situated. Value chains can provide one step toward that, though they are best complemented with understanding local histories of state-building, including long-standing relationships between states and borderland communities and the histories of power, expectations and domination between them.

This is particularly relevant in the context of the current era of globalisation, which is characterised by an increasing multipolarity, the resumption of an increasing use of tariffs and trade restrictions, and the continued existence of protracted conflicts and areas of contested statehood. Assuming that chequered value chains will 'wither away' in an increasingly formally regulated global trade order seems unrealistic. The recognition of the coexistence a variety of different regulatory orders along value chains remains critical.

A transnational perspective, and a consideration of value chains, is similarly useful in looking at the role of conflict in these relationships. As noted above, regulation and incorporation into wider value chains are not incompatible with violence, and the fluidity of value chains can translate into fragilities for borderland communities. At the same time, regulation that is enacted in one place and not causing any visible or invisible forms of conflict or violence there, can have brutal consequences elsewhere along the chain. Changes far away from borderlands can translate into conflicts between highly localised actors. Looking at transnational value chains in this context can not only be a useful way to locate some of the relationships that may not be visible at first sight, but also to think more critically about how to interpret these relationships beyond the avoidance of violent conflict alone and toward questions of responsibility, accountability, inclusive governance and, ultimately, justice.

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4. Contested authority in a disputed land: the role of the Welkait Committee in Welkait/Western Tigray

Alemu Asfaw Nigusie, Ahmed Soliman

Since 2015 the fracturing of Ethiopia's ethno-linguistic political settlement has seen the authority of the central government increasingly challenged from within its federal regional states, notably during the two-year war (2020-2022) in northern Ethiopia between the government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Regional states, armed actors and emergent identity based political groups have competed for influence and legitimacy, either through armed insurgency, alliance with the federal government, or via a mixture of rebellion against and collaboration with the state at different times (as in the case of actors in Tigray and the Amhara regions). In some places these actors have been successful in assuming varying degrees of governing authority, providing security, managing and allocating resources and delivering services to local populations.

This paper explores contested authority and governance within the disputed Welkait/Western Tigray zone, (1) particularly the role of the Welkait Tegede Amhara Identity and Boundary Restoration Committee (henceforth the Welkait Committee), an organization set up in 2015 to promote the acceptance of Welkait as part of Amhara. It seeks to interrogate the governance role of the Welkait Committee in the context of its relationship with the Ethiopian federal government and local stakeholders, as well as neighbouring countries, Eritrea and Sudan, illustrating the transnational dimensions of non-state actors' authority and the centrality of these connections to competition for control and authority in peripheral areas.

Background to contestation over Welkait/Western Tigray

Welkait is located in northwestern Ethiopia and includes the territories of Welkait, T(s)egede, T(s)elemt, and Setit Humera. The zone covers an area close to 3,400 square kilometers, (2) and is surrounded by Amhara (West and Central Gonder) to the south, and Tigray (central zone) to the east. The area has geopolitical significance due to its agricultural richness – cultivating export crops including sesame, cotton and millet – and its cross-border connectivity to Eritrea and Sudan (3). Welkait is symbolically important to Amhara and Tigrayan identity – which has resulted in a history of demographic engineering on both sides, including mass displacement, ethnic cleansing, and resettlement schemes.

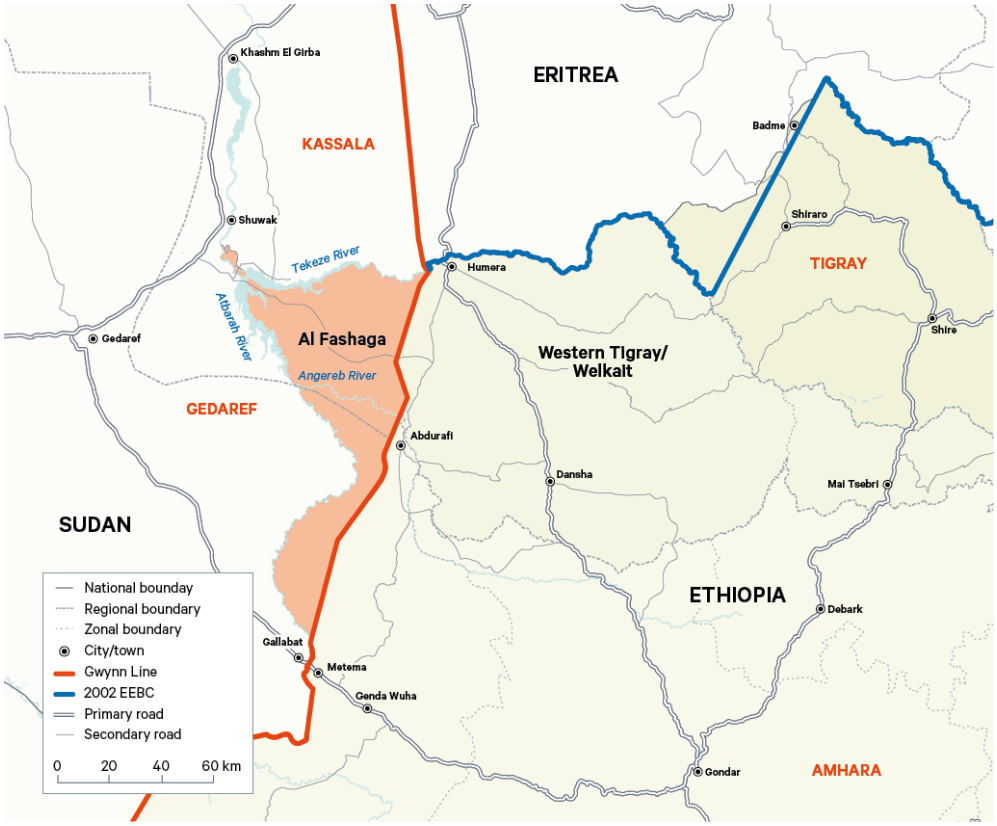

Figure 1. Map of Ethiopia-Sudan border. Sources: Vigil Monitor 2022, OCHA, UNHCR, UN Cartographic, OpenStreetMap, ArcGIS, Médecins Sans Frontières. Reprinted from Soliman, A. and Demissie, A.A. (2024), *The 'conflict economy' of sesame in Ethiopia and Sudan*. Research paper. London: Chatham House

Control over the disputed territory has shifted in recent years. Amhara security forces fought alongside the federal government and Eritrean defense forces during its war with the TPLF and took control over Welkait in late 2020. The area had been administered by the TPLF from 1991, after the ousting of the Derg regime, but was historically considered by the Amhara as part of their region. An ad hoc administration was established by the federal government which saw the Welkait Committee join with representatives from the Amhara chapter of the ruling Prosperity Party (PP) in forming the Welkait Interim Administration (WIA).

A 2022 peace agreement halted the conflict between the federal government and the TPLF, but perceived concessions to Tigray alienated Amhara groups, triggered an insurgency by an Amhara militia called Fano, and ended the federal government's tactical alliance with Amhara ethno-nationalists (4). The region was governed under a state of emergency from August 2023 to June 2024, due to a widening Fano insurgency, and strict security measures remain to date. Nonetheless, the Welkait zone remains governed by the WIA, which has been allowed a certain level of autonomy from the Amhara National Regional State (ANRS). It is more accountable to the federal government, particularly the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF).

However, there are multiple competing interests in the future governance of Welkait, both domestic and transnational. In Ethiopia, the Welkait Committee, the ANRS, the Tigray Interim Regional Administration

(TIRA), and the federal government all want to exert control (5). Externally, Eritrea and Sudan also have an interest in who governs the territory across their borders and seek to maintain alliances with subnational actors, including the Welkait Committee and TPLF. More specifically, the internal conflict over Welkait is connected to the cross-border dispute over Al-Fashaga between Ethiopia and Sudan, as well as the role of Eritrea in prosecuting the war in northern Ethiopia, and its ongoing presence and influence there.

Broadly, views are divided between continued Amhara control, a return to Tigrayan administration, or federal government administration in place of either of the two warring regions (6). The federal government sees a referendum as the long-term solution and wants the WIA to assist, counter to the Welkait Committee's interests in maintaining authority over the territory and ensuring its Amhara identity, including by pushing for its de jure recognition as part of the Amhara region.

The Welkait Committee and their ideological rationale

The Welkait Committee was established in 2015 to fight for the Amhara identity of the Welkait people. They believe that the 1991 decision to place Welkait under the administration of Tigray regional state was illegal, lacked consent from Welkait's people, and led to subsequent marginalization (7). They see the administration of Welkait not as a question of technical governance but one of identity and self-determination (8). Welkaiti grievances were ignored during the three decades of TPLF dominance, and their leaders faced threat, arrest, and displacement (9).

Colonel Demeke Zewdu, the leader of the Welkait Committee since its establishment, was the most prominent proponent of Welkait's Amhara identity during this period (10). His resistance to the federal government in 2016 fueled Amhara rebellion against perceived Tigrayan dominance in Ethiopia and connected the Welkait Committee with the Amhara nationalist struggle. There is, however, an inherent contradiction and tension in the Committee's objective – on one hand they claim Amhara identity and believe that they should be governed under the ANRS; while on the other, they argue for their own unique 'Welkaiti' identity.

The arrival of Abiy Ahmed as Ethiopia's Prime Minister in 2018 heralded a new era for the Welkait Committee, which was able to raise its concerns with the new government. A partnership between Oromo and Amhara elites was crucial to Abiy's rise to power and was also a catalyst for the breakdown in relations between the new federal government and the TPLF, resulting in the outbreak of war in Tigray in November 2020 and creating the opportunity for Amhara forces (including special forces, Fano, the Welkait Committee and other militias) to reassert control of Welkait.

The Welkait Committee's uneasy relationship with the State

The Welkait Committee has a diverse and ambiguous set of interactions with the state, including the federal government and the ANRS, and has also engaged with transnational groups including state and non-state actors in Eritrea and Sudan, as well as the influential Amhara diaspora. Since its establishment in 2021, the WIA, constituted by the Welkait Committee and the Amhara chapter of the PP, has been relatively autonomous in its authority and conduct of governing activities. The balance of

power between the two blocs that make up the WIA are not well understood, although the objectives of the Welkait Committee appear to be aligned with the Head of the zone Ashete Demlew, who represents the PP's interests (11).

Interviews suggest that the Welkait territory is being governed with little oversight or accountability to the ANRS or national government. One informant indicated the ANRS government was appeasing the WIA to prevent a breakaway movement and keep the territory under Amhara control (12). For its part, the wartime focus of the federal government was in preventing Welkait from being recaptured by the Tigrayan Defense Forces (TDF), reflecting the geostrategic importance of the border and the need to prevent the Tigrayans from bringing arms and supplies across the land border with Sudan (13).

However, the situation in the post-Pretoria landscape is markedly different. The federal government wants the territorial dispute between Amhara and Tigray to be resolved through a phased process, including the return of displaced people, disarming of militia, and an eventual referendum on the future governance of Welkait. An agreement appears to have been reached between the federal government, TIRA and the ANRS on the resettlement of internally displaced Tigrayans back to contested territories, which has begun in places such as Raya Alamata and T(s)elemt, which unlike Welkait, were placed under an existing zonal administration of the Amhara region (14). They have been replaced by new interim administrations under the supervision of the federal government, with the assumption of a future referendum to decide their status.

The vice president of TIRA, Lieutenant General Tadesse Werede, asserted that Tigrayan IDPs will be resettled to Welkait (15). This raises uncertainty over the future of the WIA, and the authority of the Welkait Committee. It is unclear whether the federal government will seek to replace the WIA as part of this process. The Welkait Committee have previously indicated to the federal government that anything less than recognition of the Welkaiti identity and its placement within the Amhara region, is unacceptable. However, Colonel Demeke has shown flexibility with respect accepting a referendum, (16) as well as lessening the Welkait Committee's allegiances towards the Fano and Amhara ethno-nationalism more broadly (17). His loyalty to the federal government, particularly considering the Fano insurgency in the Amhara region, suggests pragmatism with respect to retaining power over Welkait.

"Stately" Functions: Roles and Activities of the Welkait Committee and the Administration

Within this uncertain context, the Welkait Committee has been performing a number of state functions, as a key actor within the interim zonal administration (18). These activities include enlistment and the provision of local security, the allocation and regulation of farmland, revenue collection and mobilization (in the face of a lack of budget allocation by the ANRS or the federal government); and the creation of a supportive local constituency, in part by embedding the Welkait Amhara identity. However, in each of these cases the role of the WIA – and the Welkait Committee within it - is ambiguous, marked by hybridity, adaptability and a continual renegotiation of alliances and authority.

Security

Colonel Demeke Zewdu, the Welkait Committee leader, is also the deputy zonal administrator and head of the security bureau of the WIA (19). He is a key figure in consolidating the security of the new Welkait zone, having led the recruitment and mobilization of a militia force, which is responsible for

protecting the area through local policing. However, in addition to the Amhara regional security force, it is the federal Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) which remain primarily responsible for the overall security in Welkait, including guarding the borders. Colonel Demeke confirmed the primary allegiance of his forces to the federal and regional government:

'It is the government which pays the salary. It [the police and militia force] will do as instructed by the government. It will ensure the security of the area.' (20)

The Welkait Committee have engaged in training and arming local people to protect the territory. They have been working to consolidate and defend their gains, with "*hulem zigiju hono megegnet*" (Always be ready) being their motto (21). Local Welkaiti and Amhara residents are happy with the security provision provided by the Welkait Committee, as they believe it best ensures their protection from criminal activity and attacks by Tigrayan forces and even local Fano forces (22). However, Colonel Demeke has also been implicated in ethnic cleansing and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Tigrayans from the area during the civil war (23). Therefore, while he is an influential figure in shaping the placement of Welkait within Amhara regional politics, he remains controversial nationally, particularly in relation to peace with Tigray and long-term stability. The TIRA has already been vocal in its demands for the return of Welkait to Tigrayan control.

Apportioning land to reinforce identity claims

Another important source of authority for the Welkait Administration lies in the allocation and regulation of arable land, particularly large-scale farms. According to one cross-border study conducted in 2016, when the area was under Tigrayan administration, there were over 400 investors engaged in large scale farming in the area, mainly producing sesame (24). The outbreak of the war saw the targeting of Tigrayan investments (both TPLF-affiliated and individual-owned), with farms and farming equipment looted and destroyed and harvests sold via illegal channels for personal gain.

The WIA took advantage of controlling the zone (and the resultant massive displacement of Tigrayans) to allocate farmlands to selected investors, political representatives and farmers with 'Welkaiti identity', both as compensation for those who suffered during the TPLF's thirty-year rule and to change the ethnic identity of those controlling land. Additionally, more than two hundred Fano members are said to have been granted farmland, mainly in territories close to the Ethiopia-Sudan border (25).

In doing this, the WIA has bypassed regional directives by the Amhara Bureau of Rural Land Administration and Use, including both investment directives made during the war (26) and a stipulation restricting the zonal authorities from allocating land above 10 hectares (27). Moreover, the Welkait Committee's influence within the WIA has led to accusations that Welkaites are favoured over non-Welkaite Amhara in the allocation of land (28) This runs counter to the regional government's resettlement plan, which sought to change the demographics of the area by bringing in Amhara from elsewhere in the region (including some previously displaced from Welkait). These actions have become a source of dissatisfaction among Amhara ethno-nationalists who believe in Amhara ethnic unity, over and above prioritizing local Welkaites. In return, there has been some frustration from local Welkaites, who see this resettlement plan as encroachment on their land (29).

This shift in the authority of the land also has transnational implications. In part, the allocation of farmland to Amhara Fano militia could serve to safeguard against possible incursion by Tigrayan forces, including those based in eastern Sudan. However, the presence on the Ethiopia-Sudan border of Amhara nationalist forces could potentially fuel further instability between the two countries, especially given Ethiopian claims on the contested territory of Al-Fashaga, which is controlled by the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) (30). This dispute, which relates to the long-running border tensions between the two countries, have to a large extent been driven by Amhara interests at the regional and federal levels. In September 2024, Fano skirmishes with the ENDF on the Metema-Gallabat crossing, spilled across to the Sudanese side of the border, resulting in its closure by the SAF (31).

Revenue mobilization and provision of services

Revenue collection has been paramount to the operations of the WIA, given the absence of federal budget allocation. However, the WIA has been accessing different kinds of support from the ANRS government, federal government, and diaspora (32). Combined together, these sources became the main sources and de facto budget for the WIA. The Amhara region has supported the payment of civil servant salaries in the zone, along with equipment and furniture for its offices. The federal government is providing ENDF support for the WIA's security apparatus (33).

Moreover, revenue mobilization has included the taxation of existing economic activities, as well as auctions – including of properties formerly held by Tigrayan businesses, or goods captured from illicit smuggling (34). There is an assertion that part of these revenues were used to run the activities of the WIA, while some was given to the government, although this process remains opaque (35).

The WIA provides services related to health and education with support from the Amhara region. However, it has not established a functional justice system, instead relying on local conflict resolution mechanisms. The lack of justice provision has negatively affected the ability of the zone to resolve disputes, conflicts, crimes, and other cases that would usually be addressed by the courts. Informal conflict resolution has also opened the system for abuse by the zonal administrators (36).

Transnational Linkages

The geopolitical significance of Welkait increased following the war in northern Ethiopia, which quickly evolved into a regional conflict with multiple layers of interest and influence. The subsequent war in Sudan, from April 2023, has further complicated relations in the tri-border area between Ethiopia, Sudan and Eritrea. During the two-year war in Ethiopia (2020-2022), the Sudanese military-led regime was seen to have been supportive of the TPLF, (37) while Eritrea backed the Ethiopian federal government (38) Moreover, the Welkait Committee have developed complex transnational relationships across Eritrea and Sudan – neighbouring states with a direct interest in influencing the governance of this territory.

Eritrea

Eritrea was deeply involved in the war, providing Ethiopia's federal government with troops and training, motivated by opportunity to strike at its historical enemy, the TPLF, alongside security and territorial interests over the shared border with Tigray, and the desire to revive its influence and economic linkages in Ethiopia (39). However, this relationship changed after the signing of the Pretoria Agreement, which angered Eritrea by leaving a weakened and divided in power in Tigray, exacerbated by the ending of Ethiopian flights and phone connectivity with Eritrea, further signifying an end to the short period of reconciliation between the two countries (40).

In response, Eritrea has quietly sought to safeguard its interests by building relations with sub-national political and military forces in Ethiopia's regional states (41). Eritrea views its influence the Amhara region as being a useful buffer against the perceived threat from the TPLF, as well as a check on growing hostility from Ethiopia's federal government.

Eritrea's wartime links with the WIA have continued, particularly through the Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF) which during the war had provided military training and intelligence services for Amhara forces in Humera (42). Significantly, field research suggests that a trade route between Welkait and Eritrea was established during the war, for the first time since before the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict of 1998 to 2000. Humera town, the seat of the WIA, serves as key hub for smuggling of cattle and other consumer goods such as coffee into Eritrea, (43) a trade controlled until recently by the Amhara regional forces and EDF (Jenner, 2022) (44). Welkait Administrators, including Colonel Demeke, and EDF personnel crossed the border to conduct business, while representatives from the WIA and broader Amhara region are also reported to have done so to celebrate Eritrea's Independence Day in May 2023 (45).

The relationship with Eritrean authorities demonstrates that the agency of authority displayed by the Welkait Committee is also transnational, particularly as it navigates an uncertain future and responds to an evolving relationship with the federal government. Significantly, Eritrea continues to provide a patronage option for the Welkait Committee and other Amhara groups seeking to secure local advantage in a highly competitive national context. If the Welkait Committee's governing authority comes under threat, it could respond by further strengthening ties with Eritrea.

Sudan

The relationship between Ethiopia and Sudan's de facto military regime, which currently controls the east of the country bordering Ethiopia, is complex. Tensions spiked when the Sudanese military invaded Al Fashaga in late 2020, closing the border and subsequently displacing thousands of largely ethnic Amhara farmers (46). Moreover, Ethiopia accused Sudan of sheltering Tigrayan forces as refugees, providing them with material support and enabling them to regroup and train in eastern Sudan (47). Longstanding tensions over the Nile waters between Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt, and the post-2023 civil war in Sudan have complicated relations still further (48). Over 100,000 people have crossed into Ethiopia from Sudan since the war began – many returning Ethiopian nationals – and arms supplies fueling the Sudanese warring parties are reported to have moved across the Ethiopia-Sudan border and through Welkait-Western Tigray territory (49).

However, while there is no indication that the Welkait Committee has established connections with either of the warring parties in Sudan, transnational dynamics have nonetheless influenced internal dynamics in Welkait. Some Amhara nationalists see the capture of Welkait as having partly offset the loss of fertile farmlands in Al Fashaga to Sudan (50). The decision of the WIA to allocate farmlands along the disputed borderlands to Fano leaders who participated in the war against Tigray was partly a security safeguard against attacks that might originate from Sudan. There is no indication that Fano or other Amhara forces will prioritize retaking territory in Al Fashaga, with eastern Sudan a SAF stronghold. However, as conflict dynamics evolve on either side of the border they will certainly have cross-border implications.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Welkait Committee and the WIA have developed into key governance actors with some autonomy and authority to administer territory, and limited accountability to the regional or federal government. They have also pursued transnational authority by developing cross-border connections as a means of competing for and asserting control in a peripheral area.

The Welkait Committee has been able to transform itself from being a civic organization to assert itself as a local political actor with a distinct ethnic based ideology. In doing so it has assumed some functions of the state, including peace and security, land allocation, revenue collection and regulating community relations. However, the authority of the Welkait Committee is also ambiguous and subject to continual renegotiation, both within the WIA and outside it. It remains dependent on the Amhara regional state and federal authorities for funding and some services and must continually renegotiate the political space within which it operates – with the state, non-state armed actors such as Fano, communities and neighbours. As such the Welkait zone lacks a clear, formal, and regulated system of governance, facilitating corruption and abuse.

To date, neither the federal government nor the ANRS has attempted to regularize the activities of the administration. But the federal government's intention to see the territorial dispute resolved by referendum and the prospect that Tigrayan IDPs will be resettled to Welkait suggest that the current dispensation may not last long. It is unclear if the federal government will dismantle the current WIA as part of this process, and there remains much uncertainty over the future leadership of the zone and the Welkait Committee's role within it.

Moreover, the relationship between the Welkait Committee and Eritrea demonstrates the transnational dimensions of this non-state actors' authority, via the committee's agency and ability to access external support. The Welkait Committee have previously maintained that anything less than resolution of the Welkait identity question and its placement within the Amhara region is unacceptable. Should Ethiopia's federal government enable the return of displaced Tigrayans and forces to Welkait, there is a potential for escalation with Amhara nationalists, which could draw in the Welkait Committee. Such conflict would have significant cross-border implications.

However, Colonel Demeke has also shown flexibility regarding a referendum and rebalanced the Welkait Committee's alignment away from Amhara ethno-nationalism and towards the federal government, which suggests a pragmatism with respect to retaining power over Welkait (51). The

Welkait Committee could transform into a political party, assimilate into a new governing authority, or be dismantled and return to rebellion. Time will tell whether it proves to be an enduring element of governance in Welkait/Western Tigray or a short-lived wartime expedient.

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4. The Fano is an informal non-state Amhara group mobilized by the people of the region during periods of acute insecurity. The notion and practice of the Amhara 'Fano' was established decades ago and is synonymous with the armed resistance against the Italian invasion from 1936 to 1941, which was defeated. It is not accountable to the government, rather to local Amhara people in their territories. The current Fano movement can be characterized as being anti-government. See Necho, A. and Debebe, Y. (2024) Understanding the Fano Insurgency in Ethiopia's Amhara Region, Briefing Paper, February 2024, Peace Research Facility, Rift Valley Institute.

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10. In keeping with the blended identities of people from the area, he also has Tigrayan heritage.

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5. Port Infrastructure and State-Building in the Horn of Africa (1)

May Darwich and Jutta Bakonyi

Africa is at the heart of an infrastructure boom. Contemporary financial and political constellations are driven by competitions between established and rising powers and accompanied by promotions of new models of development. Investments in port infrastructures along the African side of the Gulf of Aden have received particular attention due to their geostrategic significance (2). The Bab El-Mandab strait is a chokepoint formed between the Horn of Africa and the Middle East and a strategic link connecting the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden. Most crude oil from the Persian Gulf passes through Bab al-Mandab, then to the Suez Canal or SUMED pipeline toward West Asia, Europe, and Northern America. During the past decade, a broad range of actors have competed and cooperated to support infrastructure development in the Horn of Africa, including the United Arab Emirates (UAE), China, Russia, the United Kingdom, the USA, European states, and Turkey (3). Their investments targeted physical infrastructure, mainly ports, airports, roads, and railways, often following extractive purposes, but also linking extraction sites and markets across East Africa with global trade routes through the Red Sea and Indian Ocean.

Scholars have started to analyse the materiality of these infrastructural projects, exploring how they contribute to the establishment of neo-colonial elites in the Global South, (4) the development of postcolonial practices related to resource extraction, (5) the advancement of capitalism globally, (6) the consolidation of sovereignty of African states, (7) and the redistribution of military capabilities among regional and international actors (8). Infrastructures are not merely technical entities but are also deeply intertwined with and themselves capable of generating narratives, representations, and imaginaries. Given the unique ontology of infrastructure as ‘matter that enables the movement of other matter’, (9) these installations play a pivotal role in ‘future-making’ (10).

Most ports and port cities in the Horn of Africa have old roots and served as hubs in ancient maritime trade networks across the Red Sea and Indian Ocean before the arrival of European powers. Imperial powers significantly re-modelled these connections through adapting them to their own needs and visions while integrating ports into trade networks and early capitalist resource extraction (11). Today, ports are again remodelled by containerization and supply chain modernisation that structure the ongoing integration of capitalist production and circulation into lean and just-in-time production systems (12).

Current investments may bear similarities with the colonial past as outside-in interventions that create transnational spaces, change local dynamics and create conflicts between international competitors as well as between political elites in the region. However, these investments have prompted different reactions from actors in the host countries, presenting them with both opportunities and challenges for economic development and state-building. International investors tend to project models from their countries of origin and link them to narratives promising progress and a new path towards development and prosperity. Nevertheless, national and city actors in host countries are far from passive recipients but have their own stories of space, cities, and ports including interpretations of their past and future.

In this essay, we show how infrastructural development in ports and port cities is unavoidably interwoven with building the idea of the state itself. We outline how this material construction is shaped by transnationally travelling, competing narratives that intermingle with stories of the nation. On the one hand, infrastructural developments are quite forcefully homogenizing cultural differences, assimilating East African cities and economies to models of Dubai (UAE) and Shekou (China). On the other hand, national and city actors search in these projects for stories of their distinct history, thus aiming at aligning state- and nation-building in the Horn. We show that Infrastructural investments in the Horn are not just economic endeavours but exhibit attempts towards the transnational expansion of authority, with logistics companies aspiring to dominate the tighter integration of East Africa into global supply chains. We also show below how the competition between these companies to expand and exert economic authority in the region can initiate conflicts at different scales, such as the conflict (and now international court case) between Djibouti and the UAE based logistic company DP-World or the more recent repositioning of regional alliances following the announcement of a maritime cooperation between Somaliland and Ethiopia. Contemporary infrastructure development highlights the transnational character of East African cities and reveals that political power is not confined geographically inside states or centrally aligned with governments. That said, we show how political actors in both countries are pushing back and contesting the transnationalisation of authority, appropriating infrastructural developments as part of a national history and adapting or even re-inventing their stories of the nation.

We build our analysis of port developments in Djibouti-city (Djibouti) and Berbera (Somaliland) on semi-structured interviews conducted between 2021 and 2023. We interviewed various users of the port, who were either directly or indirectly engaged with the port and its facilities, among them port administrators, shipyard workers, porters, truck drivers, businesspeople, and restaurant owners. Interviews included government officials, businesspeople, governmental and other authorities. We also interviewed residents of both cities who were not directly involved in the port modernisation to capture wider city experiences. Many of these interviews showed striking similarities with respect to the stories of the history of ports and cities, as well as the vision of the future that the port modernisation instils. We, therefore, only use a few direct interview quotes as illustrations for the collective stories we found in the wake of port modernizations in both cities. To ensure anonymity we provide neither names of interviewees nor exact dates of interviews.

Djibouti: A Journey of Development and State-Building

Djibouti, a small country in the Horn of Africa, emerged as the outcome of European imperial competition in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden following the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. The strategic significance of Djibouti stems from its geographical location at the Bab al-Mandab Strait, linking the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean, which today facilitates over 30% of global shipping trade. During the 19th century, colonial powers vied for Africa's resources and established infrastructure in Djibouti and elsewhere to connect the continent with burgeoning industrial centres in Europe. Following decolonization, Djibouti sought to break free from its colonial ties with France and transformed its port into the primary entry point to Ethiopia after Eritrea gained independence in 1991, supplying the vast Ethiopian market. This transformation was driven by external investments capitalizing on Djibouti's strategic position (13).

President Ismael Omar Guelleh's authoritarian government, in power since 1999, harboured lofty aspirations to leverage the country's maritime infrastructure, strategically located near crucial global trade routes, to overcome Djibouti's developmental challenges. The regime linked its political legitimacy with its efforts to transform Djibouti into an important logistical hub. Following the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict of 1998-2000, Djibouti gained a logistical monopoly for trade with Ethiopia, a dominant economic force in the region. This unique position, termed as an 'unusual resource curse', (14) further elevated Djibouti's importance, leading to intensified geopolitical competition for military bases amid the Global War on Terror (15).

The primary international investors arrived with templates for development far beyond the physical infrastructure, first the Emirati-based global port operator and logistics giant Dubai Port World (thereafter DP World) and then the state-owned China Merchants Group (CMG). The Dubai model of infrastructure-led development evolved in the 1990s following the unprecedented success of Dubai in securing a place among the richest cities in the world (16). In the last decade, the UAE has presented Dubai as a model that can be exported to other developing countries in Africa and the Middle East. Between 2002 and 2017, DP World made large-scale investments in Djibouti's port and city infrastructure, and in 2006, they agreed on a 30-year concession to develop the port and build a free zone in Djibouti. DP World promoted the narrative of transforming Djibouti into the 'Dubai of the Horn' or the 'New Dubai', (17) where Djibouti would follow the model of Jebel Ali port and free zone in Dubai. More than a conventional container terminal, the DP World-built Doraleh Container Terminal feeds into a series of infrastructure projects designed to convert Djibouti into a maritime logistic system. This system also included Djibouti Dry Port, the Horizon Oil Terminal, and the Djibouti Free Zone. DP World projected a homogeneous path towards modernization, emulating not only Jebel Ali port but also Dubai city with shopping malls and free zones, and fostering a narrative of Djibouti as the 'protectorate of Dubai'. (18) Following DP World investments, private Emirati businesspeople started investing in real estate and tourism. In 2006, Dubai's Nakheel corporation (a DP World subsidiary) inaugurated the first 5-star hotel and resort, the Kempinski Djibouti Palace Hotel, costing USD 400 million to provide luxury accommodation for traders, investors, businesspeople, and tourists transiting through the city. Plans also included waterfront properties, tourist resorts, and shopping malls. (19)

The political regime in Djibouti has, however, not simply accepted the Dubai model, but instead developed a distinct story of the nation that speaks to Djbouti's unique history as port city. The regime framed the port and city modernization projects as a collective striving for development and prosperity, giving this small country an urban identity as it, in this story, transitions from a nomadic past into an urban present and future. The regime has attempted to construct a Djiboutian narrative that transcends the ethnic and clan-based divides that have marked political life since Djibouti's independence, (20) and the development of the container terminal under DP World provided a significant steppingstone for the promotion of this Djiboutian urban identity. New infrastructure projects were used for building one national identity, which was connected to the role of this small state as a 'carrefour/crossroad'. (21)

After a century of colonization, even if Djibouti had undermined its sovereignty in pursuit of modernization, it wished to distinguish itself from Dubai in the Horn. This emphasis on distinction was particularly present in official statements, media outlets, and public debates. Djibouti officials regularly pointed to the mutual benefit of such investments, emphasizing, for example, Djibouti's influence in the transformation of the Emirates. As the first among the ports modernized by the UAE outside its territory,

a Djiboutian official emphasized in an interview that it was Djibouti that gave Dubai its 'global outlook' (22). Official stories further stressed the country's role as natural connector and hub pre-dating the arrival of DP World. As another Djiboutian official remarked: 'Since the pharaohs, we are relays. Since the departure to Indochina, we are a relay. The good thing is that God has located us in this small place' (23). Another interviewee explained in a similar vein: 'It is in Djibouti's DNA to become a gateway' (24). Moreover, the modernization of the port has forged a socio-economic identity among a new generation of Djiboutian professionals, who perceive the port's development as a beacon of hope for a brighter tomorrow. With the port already serving as the primary source of employment in the city and generating numerous indirect job opportunities in related sectors, its expansion and the proliferation of infrastructure are anticipated to create additional jobs and enhance prospects for advancement.

But following the success of the modernization project, President Guelleh seemed to realize that the agreement did not bring enough returns to Djibouti, and disagreements emerged with DP World. By 2012, the regime became hostile to DP World and Guelleh raised Djibouti's case in international courts, which confirmed the validity and legality of the 2006 concession agreement with DP World. Nonetheless, in 2018 Djibouti nationalized DP World's assets in Doraleh Container Terminal and transferred them to a newly established public company, 'Société de Gestion du Terminal de Doraleh (SGTD)' (25). The animosity with DP World was a further opportunity for the regime to re-construct the story of the nation and mobilize society behind a national identity beyond ethnic and tribal divides. This effort seemed successful to some extent. Most interviewees in Djibouti seemed to share the official story that the UAE used Djibouti port for its own benefit and emphasised the government's success in steadily moving forward with the modernization of the port and city after it abandoned the cooperation with the UAE.

After ending DP World's presence in Djibouti in 2018, the country turned to China. Now the dominant investor and main partner in the port development, Chinese investors provided another one-size-fit-all port-city model in Shekou, one of the early Chinese free zones and industrial parks developed by the state-owned China Merchant Group (CMG), China's largest port operator and logistics company (26). Since 2012, CMG has financed and built the Doraleh Multipurpose Port (DMP) and Djibouti International Free Trade Zone (DIFTZ). In December 2020, CMG and Djibouti agreed on a USD 3 billion investment for expanding the port of Djibouti. These investments hold the potential to reshape Djibouti from a transit point for Ethiopia's trade into a leading regional hub for commerce, business, and logistics. CMG is implementing the 'Port-Park-City' model, which transformed Shekou from a small town into a bustling metropolis with a population exceeding thirteen million within a few years.

China, like DP World, promoted a model that seems to promote assimilation in East Africa. Over the last decades, China's model of state-based capitalism has seen it rapidly urbanize and become the world's second largest economy, and it is now exporting its own model of economic success to Africa (27). State-based Chinese companies operating oversees are expected to promote China's own 'model' for rapid economic and social development, with particular emphasis on the 'Shekou model' as a blueprint for maritime and port infrastructure development in Africa (28). This was clearly demonstrated in Djibouti's Red Sea Exhibition Centre (RSEC), a cultural centre inaugurated in June 2022 to show how the Shekou model will be applied to foster the country's modernization and development. The RSEC launched the vision for a 'New Djibouti' which is underscored by maps, graphs, photos, and short films promoting the idea of Djibouti as a hub sitting geographically, economically, and socially at

the crossroads between different worlds (29). The port, in this vision, forms the heart of further infrastructures that feature global connectivity and emphasize a 'win-win partnership' between China and Djibouti.

But, as with DP World, official reactions in Djibouti do not simply accept China's vision of a 'New Djibouti' emerging from an alliance with China, with CMG helping to transform Djibouti into a 'new Shekou'. Instead, Djibouti's regime has developed a narrative of an 'independent Djibouti' that can devise its own model and vision for the future aligned with its aspirations and history. The 2035 vision for Djibouti, which was published in 2014, promotes the idea of independent diversification and development, highlighting relations with China, the Gulf, and Turkey among others as 'strategic partnerships'. To date, however, the 2035 vision remains an aspirational list of goals lacking a clear strategy or vision for where the ongoing transition will lead.

Somaliland's Dreams of Prosperity: Port-Building as Nation-Building?

The port of Berbera is situated along the southern shores of the Gulf of Aden. Historically, smaller ports on the Somali side of the Gulf have served as key trading centres for exporting livestock from the extensive nomadic pastoralist networks in the Horn of Africa, along with imports of goods needed for daily consumption. Berbera port underwent initial development under Egypt's control (1870-84) and later by Britain (1884-1960), (30) which expanded the port to facilitate livestock shipments to its colonial base in Aden (Yemen), a pivotal hub for maritime trade with India (31). Global powers invested in Berbera's port infrastructure, including the Soviet Union in the late 1960s and the USA in the mid-1980s, reflecting Somalia's shifting Cold War alliances.

Berbera port served as a primary centre for livestock exports, contributing significantly to Somalia's revenues. However, escalating political tensions in the 1980s led to a decline in the port's activities. Eventually, the port ceased operations at the onset of the civil war in 1988. Following the collapse of the Somali state, Somaliland declared independence in May 1991, leading to the reopening of Berbera port. However, international trade continued to face challenges due to political rivalries among new governing elites, clan-based tensions, sporadic violence, and rampant banditry.

Today, the port in Berbera is deeply intertwined with Somaliland's official story of successful statebuilding. Berbera hosted the first of a series of peace conferences that established the path for the consolidation of the state between 1991 and 1995. Berbera port became the object of power struggles and violent confrontations between the newly established central government and local clans in early 1992 until the state managed to bring the port under its control. Customs and fees from the port contributed significantly to the establishment of a state apparatus, including security and administrative infrastructures and services. Interviewees, therefore, referred to the port as 'the only true resource' of Somaliland (32) or used somatic metaphors that depicted the port as the state's 'main artery' (33) or 'beating heart' (34).

After Djibouti ended cooperation with DP World, the logistics giant turned to Somaliland. In 2017, Somaliland signed a 30-year concession agreement with DP World to expand and modernize Berbera port. The details of the deal were surrounded by secrecy. The central government ignored clan-based power arrangements in Berbera and enacted the agreement without consultation with local power

holders. This unique move in a country that gains its legitimacy from balancing clan interests and close cooperation with powerful business tycoons attests to changing dynamics in ongoing state-building processes (35). During the early stages of this deal, there was public wariness and critique, in part about the loss of sovereignty and suspicion that government officials were selling Somaliland's 'greatest economic asset' (36) to a foreign country, considering that DP World holds 51 per cent, the majority of the port's shares. In 2022, after Ethiopia did not take up its agreed percentage of the shares, the British governmental finance institution British International Investment (previously CDC) partnered with DP World. It brought in new investments, and, according to a governmental interviewee, received a 6.5 per cent share of the port (37). The Somaliland government holds the remaining 43 per cent. In January 2024, Somaliland and Ethiopia signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in which Somaliland gave Ethiopia access to its port and to a strip of land on Somaliland's western shores to provide its navy with access to the sea. Ethiopia promised to consider the recognition of Somaliland as independent state. The MoU sparked protest across Somalia and beyond, (38) and reconfigured regional alliances, diminishing political cooperation between Ethiopia and Somalia while strengthening Somalia's (military) ties with Egypt (39).

Today, the public perception of the port and infrastructural development seems to have altered, at least in the Western part of Somaliland where infrastructure development is concentrated (40). Even though DP World has again sought to project its model of development, its relationship with Somaliland remains interwoven in the unique dynamics of local history. The agreement with DP World is interpreted by Somalilanders as proof of the de-facto sovereignty of Somaliland and a further milestone for the country's path towards recognition. After all, DP World has not only provided the largest investment Somaliland has ever received but has also made it the first 'unrecognized country in the world [that] has ever received such a crucial and long-term investment' by another country (41). Such investments show 'the world that Somaliland is stable, peaceful, can be invested in and is worth recognition'. The agreement was described by a large majority of interviews as an opportunity to increase international attention toward Somaliland.

DP World's swift remodelling of the port and free zone, along with the visibility of modern cranes and expansion of the road network between Berbera, Hargeisa, and Toc-Wajaale, the border crossing to Ethiopia, have contributed to the shift in public perception. Photos of modern cranes along Berbera's shores, containers piled up and large ships docking at the port circulate on social media, usually accompanied by patriotic statements. Interviewees expressed similar sentiments: 'Upon entering the city, the container cranes of the port are visible. In the past, the port never had such equipment' summarized a city official in Berbera in describing the success of the collaboration and later explained that 'anyone who travels on the new Berbera Corridor realizes that the Somaliland from yesterday no longer exists and that what we have now is a new Somaliland' (42).

The narrative of the new Somaliland reflects that of Djibouti, highlighting especially the strategic location of Berbera at the crossroads between Africa, the Middle East and Asia. The port was depicted as a central gateway to Africa, and Somaliland's future was as a 'logistics nation', (43) providing services and delivering consumer goods to its landlocked neighbours. The country was also envisioned to become the 'Dubai of Africa' and among the 'biggest and busiest port in the region' (44).

Interviewees frequently pointed to economic changes as source of hope and development, citing the port's generation of significant stable employment and the potential for further infrastructure

development to create new jobs and foster fresh business opportunities for citizens. The trend towards urbanization and the corresponding rise in land prices in Berbera were seen as evidence of Somaliland's growing value, reinforcing the belief that infrastructure development will lead to prosperity.

The port modernization also illustrated processes of identity consolidation and state-building. Somalilanders highlighted their long history of maritime trade and the cultural and economic closeness between the Arab World and Somaliland. The country was described as open, welcoming to foreigners and full of untapped opportunities. In this respect, the speed of Dubai's urban transformation, which many Somalilanders have experienced while living in or visiting the Emirates, was considered a confirmation of Somaliland's potential for success. Somalilanders often narrated their wish to emulate Dubai or Singapore, even in smaller cities such as the border town Toc-Wajaale, which, as one businessperson explained, might soon look like Dubai and where people from all over the world will come to do business. Future visions for Somaliland were in this way closely aligned with those of their Emirati counterparts: 'DP World's vision for Berbera is to develop it into a trade hub, taking advantage of its strategic location along one of the busiest sea routes in the world and access to the vast hinterland in the region, including Ethiopia' (45).

Conclusion

Infrastructures, and especially their potential to increase (global) connectivity and speed up circulation, play a central role in the imagination of state space. International investment and management of ports, freezones and transport-corridors reveal how infrastructures drive transnationalisation of authority, for example by outsourcing previous state functions to international logistic companies. They are also inviting the travelling of narratives and the diffusion of models of development from the investor's country of origin. At the same time, as we have shown in the comparative analysis of international port investments in Djibouti and Somaliland, infrastructures are used to foster nationalist ideologies and emotions, (46) which feed into state-building processes and, in the case of Somaliland, also contribute to the centralization of authority.

So far, few studies have shown how state and national stories are constructed when infrastructural development relies on international investments, and when crucial infrastructural installations, such as ports, are not only developed but also directly managed by foreign companies for longer periods. We have shown that both the Emirati DP World and Chinese CMG not only engage in material construction but also bring their model of development and their projections of the Horn's future into circulation, both typically built upon an idealized version of the investor's own past. Such models reveal competition and conflicts between international investors to exert material and ideational authority in East Africa and beyond; between Djibouti and Somaliland to reach the Ethiopian market; between city and state authorities on the control of ports and distribution of resources. We have mainly attended to the transnational travelling of narratives, Model 'Shekou' or model 'Dubai (Jebel Ali)', which are also confronted with and forced to adapt by local histories and stories, thus revealing contestations at the local level. Infrastructure, in this way, evolves through social, material, and discursive connections, the latter mobilizing an imagined past which it brings in line with an expected and aspired future, a connection that is continuously rearticulated, while it materializes in installations that are themselves

shaping state-building processes, social trajectories, and lifeworlds at local, transnational and international scales.

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6. Trading “tomatoes” in Iraq: how regulating a supply chain produces authority and fuels transnational conflict

Renad Mansour

Every summer, social media is awash with videos of Iraqi farmers throwing away truckloads of their tomato crop. They say that the import of tomatoes from neighboring Iran has driven prices so low that it is impossible to make a living. On paper, Iraq imports an annual average of 1500 kilograms of tomatoes per person – far above global norms. In 2017, for instance, Iraq imported about 6.5 billion kilograms of tomatoes from Iran, at a cost of 1.6 billion US dollars (1). In reality, the tomato supply chain has often been used as cover to bring goods ranging from medicine to weapons into and through Iraq and onwards to Syria and the Levant. In Iraq, these products are at times sold for U.S. dollars, which are then used to fund armed actors across the region.

Although it may seem to be a mundane and uncommon example in the study of conflict economies, where the focus is often on illicit commodities such as drugs or weapons, the tomato supply chain is connected to the same networks of power that challenge the geographic and institutional borders of the nation-state. The central governments in Baghdad or Tehran are not the only ones governing this trade. Instead, political parties, armed groups, businesspeople and traders, and religious and tribal leaders all play a role (2). Sitting inside and outside government and operating across national *de jure* borders, armed elites and tribal leaders secure the routes, political parties use their influence to permit products through checkpoints, bureaucrats in formal government institutions award contracts from their government offices and provide lines of credit from national banks to companies involved in this trade.

In regulating the supply chain, these elites also *make* their own authority. They become the decision-makers over key issues that the formal government would expect to regulate, such as which products are imported, which routes are used, who can pass through these routes, and how much tax is paid. Their actions not only govern the tomato supply chain, but also the social systems that the trade traverses, impacting the everyday lives of the publics who live along the way. In focus groups along the supply chain, residents say that they are more likely to turn to these elites than government authorities to achieve simple bureaucratic tasks, because power ultimately lies with them (3).

And as this trade often freely transcends national borders, these elites also enjoy authority in the wider transnational conflict ecosystem. The tomato supply chain challenges where one state ends and another state begins. While on paper national borders between countries are clearly demarcated, actors who govern the trade freely move across the Iranian-Iraqi border and then onwards towards the Levant.

Critically, the pursuit of economic authority is underpinned by coercion, as violence becomes a tool to negotiate power over the chain. The trade fuels conflict between the elites and against their publics, who often suffer negative consequences stemming from the trade. Farmers are harmed when the supply chain devalues their crops or when armed groups burn competing tomato farms and damage the region’s agricultural lands. The public often falls ill from spoiled produce because of a lack of

quality control. The tomato supply chain represents varying interlinked forms of structural and direct violence that embody a continuum of violence which stretches across borders. (4)

This paper uses the tomato supply chain moving from Iran into and across Iraq towards the Levant as a lens to understand the transnational conflict ecosystem in which the networks of power that make up an equilibrium of authority and the continuum of violence operate. It argues that power is diffused across formal and informal spaces and includes an array of political, business, security, and social elites who derive authority by performing basic state functions, such as regulating international trade. Revealing the limitations of the 'neo-Weberian' (Westphalian) state construct, the formal government institutions are not the only decision-makers in this trade or the social system which it traverses. Ultimately, the authority that is made through the supply chain does not fit neatly in geographic or institutional boundaries of the nation-state.

This reality has implications for international policy and programming aimed at reducing conflict in the region. First, diplomatic protocols based on Westphalian assumptions often engage along official government channels and may be blind to powerful elites shaping society and the social contract from outside these institutions. Second, policy teams are often focused on one country and may miss elites who live on the other side of borders but nonetheless control supply chains with enormous impacts. In short, the transnational nature of trade shows us that power and conflict are not confined either to formal government institutions or national boundaries, complicating responses to conflict. It is a critical lens to understanding the nature of conflict and to formulating effective policy.

Reproducing state authority along a transnational supply chain

In their pursuit of profit, political, business, armed and social elites take over supply chains, which allows them to regulate both trade and social systems. Acquiring territory and administrative control along a supply chain leads to greater opportunities to generate rents. Along the chain, an elite group can tax a production hub (such as factory or mine), a transit hub (such as checkpoints, ports, seaports) or a distribution hub (such as marketplaces). It can also gain influence over local governments, which then offers access to mechanisms that license the trade, including procuring contracts, assigning letters of credit, signing import deals, and granting waivers.

The array of political, business, and security elites who enjoy territorial and administrative control along the route do not all sit in formal government institutions. Instead, private companies, armed groups, and political elites can control territory and formal administrative mechanisms. This reality does not fit the neo-Weberian state model, which is defined as "a set of administrative, policing, and military organizations headed and more or less well coordinated by an executive authority." (5) Instead, elites across state and non-state lines are involved in the supply chain.

Recent accounts on Central Africa, (6) North Africa, (7) Somalia, (8) or Liberia, (9) for example, argue that these elites not only tax and police the supply chain, but societies at large. As Lund argues, "public authority does not always fall within the exclusive realm of government institutions." (10) This lens recognizes that authority is often claimed and practiced by actors who do not hold formal government positions, blurring the lines between formal and informal institutions. Haugball and Levine write that "governing goods and their circulation is a key state-formation activity involving coercion and capital,

logistics and infrastructure, power and profits." (11) These authors follow the work of sociologist Tilly, who looked at state formation in 19th century Europe to argue that war made states and that "banditry, piracy, gangland rivalry, policing, and war making all belong on the same continuum [...] mercantile capitalism and state making reinforced each other." (!2)

Whether inside or outside formal government institutions, the elites involved in regulating economic processes do not only exert state power, but they also *make* it. According to Mitchell, looking at the 'state' as a finished product impedes understanding its nature. Instead, he argues that understanding the state as contingent and fluid can offer a more accurate picture of "the power of the political arrangements that we call the state and at the same time account for their elusiveness." (13) Martinez and Sirri argue that bakeries in Amman or checkpoints in Baghdad "are implicated in the ways the state, as "process" (Painter, 2006), plays itself out in everyday life." (14) Haugball and Levine argue that "by examining the subtle changes in the flows and networks of power between individuals and various social and political institutions,' the state appears as an assemblage of political actors and techniques." (15)

The authority and violence that make up transnational trade are not confined to national borders. Cowen writes that "the making of logistics space challenges not only the inside/outside binary of national territoriality but also the "tidy" ways that modern warfare has been organized along national lines." (16) Extending the notion of elusiveness between state and society to borders, Haugbolle and Levine argue that "individual states do not exist separate from each other, but rather that the difficulties in identifying where one state begins and another ends is a central feature of how power functions within and across the global political imaginary." (17) A supply chain offers a critical lens for the transnational nature of the contestation for authority which sits in an ecosystem traversing national borders.

Across these borders, the techniques of taxing trade, or policing transit hubs, or licensing companies, do not only regulate trade, but they also condition and administer the everyday lives of people along the way. In other words, these are the techniques of the state performed not only by those sitting in government buildings but by elites across society. They shape the social contracts. Critically, public authority and the state are never a finished product but always in the making and embodied in this transnational ecosystem. The tomato supply chain is a lens to chart out the authority and violence that form the borders of the conflict ecosystem.

Regulating "tomatoes" and the social systems they traverse

Large trucks carrying tons of tomato crops arrive daily from Iran into Iraq. Trading tomatoes – real or as a cover – at the hub in Iraq is heavily regulated by political, business, armed and social elites, who enjoy territorial and administrative influence despite not being exclusively confined or accountable to local or federal government institutions. Some of these elites are connected transnationally through the 'Axis of Resistance' network, which includes the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) in Iraq, the Assad regime in Syria, and Hezbollah in Lebanon. These groups are not only embedded in their own states, but they also operate across nation-state borders in their pursuit of profit, which includes the tomato supply chain. Their transnational military, economic, and

political authority allow them to control varying forms of trade across this region. As they regulate the trade, then also gain public authority over the social systems in the areas.

For instance, hundreds of Iranian companies compete for authority in supply chains running in and across Iraq towards the Levant. Habibi argues that the "participation of the IRGC [Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps] in foreign trade began in the 1980s during the Iran-Iraq war but it expanded significantly under Ahmadinejad in response to growing international sanctions that disrupted Iran's normal trade relations. The IRGC played an active role in covert procurement and smuggling of sanctioned products." (18) In Iraq, Syria, or Lebanon, Iranian trading companies are tied to their elites' pursuit of power across borders.

A key border crossing for the transnational tomato supply chain is the Shalamjah transit hub on the Iraqi-Iranian border. Consisting of both a land bridge and a port, this hub connects tomatoes coming from the Iranian province of Kohgiluyeh-Boyer Ahmad to Iraq. It is also a transit hub connecting to other Gulf countries in the region.

According to a merchant who regularly trades at the crossing, a 40-foot container usually costs him around $50,000 USD. When he moves his container into the port, he is faced with two different types of interlocuters or taxers: private political parties (and their armed groups) and government institutions. In almost all cases, he is sent to pay the parties, which come from across the Shia Islamist spectrum. As these parties compete for and cooperate over the trade of tomatoes coming into the port, their decisions on what comes through (and what does not) impacts the everyday lives of the publics in Iraq and the wider Levant where the goods end up. Their influence is transnational.

These groups are involved in the 'formal' part of this trade, which is facilitated by several Iraqi government institutions that play varying roles along the supply chain. For instance, the ministry of transportation is tasked with approving all transportation companies (land, air or sea), the ministry of planning awards contracts for standardization and quality control, the ministry of agriculture awards contracts to the tomato importer, the ministry of trade checks imports linked to the ration card, the ministry of interior polices the route, and the intelligence agency (INIS) and the Government Border Authority monitor the border with Iran. Each one of these institutions plays a role in regulating the tomato supply chain and therefore represents opportunity for capture by elites seeking profit and power.

Elites compete for influence by installing loyalists or acquiring the allegiance of a senior bureaucrats in the formal institutions that facilitate the supply chain. Shia Islamist armed groups have gained leverage over 'special grades' senior civil servants in the ministry of agriculture, where they then divert contracting to preferred companies importing tomatoes from Iran. These civil servants are often more powerful than the minister. On several occasions, they have even stopped the minister of agriculture from changing contracts because it went against the interests of their patron party (19). As an official from the Ministry of Finance told the author, "a big problem facing the Iraqi government are bribes offered to senior officials in the Ministry of Agriculture, as these officials grant access to Iran. In some cases, Iranian companies can even operate without licenses. I saw one tomato company with a license that was expired for three years, but it was still allowed to operate with knowledge of the ministry [of agriculture]." (20)

According to a member of the Finance Committee in the Iraqi Parliament, "the 2021 budget allocated two trillion Iraqi dinars [1.5 billion US dollars] to support farms and the agricultural sector, and to purchase seeds, agricultural materials and machinery for local farmers, but only 50 billion Iraqi dinars were spent on this. The rest was re-diverted by influential people in the Ministries of Finance and Agriculture. We do not know where the money went." (21)

Similarly, the elites' leverage over senior civil servants in the ministry of transportation means that preferred trucking companies are awarded contracts, and compliant officials in the Trade Bank of Iraq (TBI) means that selected traders are awarded letters of credit. Influence in the Central Bank of Iraq (CBI) offers control over the companies that are allowed access to US dollars, which they can then use to trade more generally.

These elites are unaccountable to the government institutions meant to regulate the supply chain. At times, the tomato trade is used to illegally or unofficially import other products, including weapons, drugs, and medicine. An official at the border point explained to the author that up to 30 trucks weighing more than 80 tons pass each day but the tomatoes are "placed in the front of the truck, and the rest of the truck is filled with materials that are not allowed to be imported, as the rest of the smuggling operations are done." (22) However, the Government Border Authority, which was established in 2016 to seize illegal shipments, is unable to properly function. An official at the Shalamjah transit hub told the author that he is unable to stop any shipments linked to the parties in control. "Even if we find other products, the parties just use their connections with the governor or Baghdad to move their goods." (23)

The transnational Iranian authority is felt across the border in Iraq. An official from the ministry of finance said that Iranian "representatives, businessmen and economic offices supervise the projects of Iranian companies in Iraq such as factories, fields, oil companies, banks, food trade, gas, energy and electricity projects, infrastructure and construction." (24) This extends to Iran's trade of tomatoes – or products disguised as tomatoes – across Iraq. One member of the Iraqi parliament claimed that "the suspicious tomato import operations reflect a plan to smuggle US dollars back to Iran through their armed factions that oversee the protection of the 'tomato' import trucks across Iraq." (25) As Iran seeks its economic interests in Iraq, it has to make its own authority through political, business, armed, and social elites that supervise the tomato supply chain. These elites influence the Iraqi government and as such represent Tehran's transnational pursuit of authority.

The tomato trade reveals the elites across the formal and informal government space regulate trade – at the hub in Iraq but also at varying government offices along the way across the Levant. These elites rely on their capture of government institutions at the local and federal level and their impunity from prosecution.

The tomato supply chain and violence

As these elites regulate the trade, they also become responsible for the violence it produces in transnational social systems across Iraq and the Levant. They govern the everyday lives of the public, who are exposed to varying forms of violence. Iraqi farmers, for instance, are no longer able to profit from their crops because the import of tomatoes has distorted the price. Speaking to this structural form of violence, an official in the Union of Peasant Associations told the author that "although the

Ministry of Agriculture issued directives banning the import of 23 agricultural crops due to self-sufficiency, farmers still complain that these directives are simply not being followed." (26) In many cases, these farmers have lost their livelihoods because of this supply chain.

Imported tomatoes do not have to pass the government's quality control but instead the elite's own version of this control, which then affects the public. In many cases, spoiled tomatoes end up harming communities in Iraq and across the Levant. For instance, in 2017, 800 displaced people in Mosul fell sick with food poisoning from tomatoes and tomato sauce that had not been properly quality controlled. (27) Corruption and the supply chain means that government is unable to protect its public from structural forms of violence.

The trade of tomatoes also sparks armed violence. An official from the Iraqi ministry of planning told the author that that armed groups linked to Iran "deliberately burn agricultural lands in Iraq, in order to weaken agricultural development plans. This is what happened in 2020 when fires devoured more than 20 dunums of land which primarily consisted of tomatoes in the areas of the Baghdad belt, Diyala and Kirkuk. The security investigations ended without mentioning the arsonists." (28) This harmed the livelihoods of the farmers, the health of residents suffering from the fumes, and the agricultural lands which are often not repaired.

Despite the varying forms of violence that this trade causes, many residents still treat the elites in control of supply chains as the ultimate authorities in their areas. According to focus groups, although many Iraqis view these elites as corrupt, they still admit that they are more likely to go to them, and not government officials, when they want to get something done. (29) One respondent along the border town of al-Rutba claimed "in the centre we might go to the state but in border towns, it is either political parties or tribes. Sometimes the tribe would interfere to get something out of the state." Another respondent said, "in the government, you have to go and wait and get through bureaucracy and maybe bribe some people and sometimes we don't get what we want. So, we have to go to stronger parties, such as political elite or tribal leaders." (30) This is because by regulating the trade, elites do not only exert power, but they have also made for themselves authority over social contracts in these areas.

Conclusion

The tomato supply chain is marked by two transnational processes: the pursuit of authority and the continuum of violence. As elites move freely across national borders to generate profit from the tomato supply chain, they also end up regulating the everyday lives of publics. This forms a transnational ecosystem in which authority and violence are not confined to nation-state borders. This has two key implications for policy making and development programming.

First, the tomato supply chain shows that policy or programming cannot be country-specific, because the borders of conflict are not. For international policy to become more sustainable, then, a move away from state-centric or country-centric approaches is necessary. The supply chain connects a range of actors across Iran, Iraq, and the Levant. Targeting only one part of this ecosystem – for instance by banning a specific company from trading or sanctioning a specific individual – does not take account of or engage with this wider connectivity, and thus has not been able to fundamentally reform the conflict supply chain or the transnational ecosystem which it traverses. A conflict-centric approach can offer a

clearer understanding for policy and programming approaches, which should then be based on minimizing the violence on the public that the supply chain produces across the region.

Second, power is diffused across state and society and challenges the state / non-state binary. Many elites with authority over the supply chain do not sit in government offices or operate exclusively within the confines of national borders. In many cases, formal government offices – the facilitators of the trade – are not the ultimate decision-makers. Instead of sticking with an idealized state as confined to formal government institutions, policymakers should focus on engaging with those who are performing or *making* the state – a process which the tomato supply chain had highlighted.

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7. Violent conflict in Libya and its transnational impacts on the movement of people

Tim Eaton

While there is acceptance among policymakers that intra-state conflicts and civil wars produce transnational impacts, analysing these impacts presents a steep challenge given the complexities of understanding how societies interact across large geographies. In the context of this special issue's focus on transnational conflict ecosystems, this article applies systems analysis to distinct geographies that are connected transnationally by patterns of trade and social interactions. Such analysis can provide important insights for policymakers: first, it can aid in better understanding the cascading transnational effects of violent conflict; and second, it can help to identify points of entry to mitigate these effects.

To do this, the article presents a systems analysis of the evolution of irregular migration (1) of migrants (2) and refugees (3) via human smuggling (4) and trafficking in persons (TIP) (5) in three locations, Sebha in southern Libya, Agadez in northern Niger, and Edo State in southern Nigeria from 2010-2022. The findings of the Chatham House systems analyses illustrate how the second order effects of violent conflict in Libya have reshaped this process in the places through which the people move, stimulating a surge in smuggling activities which created a set of effects that have in turn exacerbated conflict in Libya. The article illustrates that violent disputes over authority in Libya have had the most pronounced impact on the smuggling sector, exacerbating other violences in Niger and Nigeria through a series of systemic transformations, supporting the special edition's conclusion that a transnational continuum of violence is present.

While detailed political economy analyses of human smuggling and TIP have been undertaken, (6) the application of a conflict lens to studies of human smuggling and TIP along this route has been rare (7). Notably, such an approach differs from the assessments of human smuggling and TIP from the perspective of organized criminality, (8) which has been a dominant feature of public discourse on the issues in European states. (9)

Systems analysis: a necessary compromise to deal with complexity?

Assessing the impact of a violent conflict across a range of geographies over a decade is a complex task, requiring an inter-disciplinary and flexible approach. Giorgio Gallo criticises simplified assessments of conflict and strategies that adopt linear forms of reasoning as unfit for purpose, arguing that conflict is best understood as a complex system that contains adaptive structures and evolutionary mechanisms. (10) The Collaborative for Development Action presents systems analysis as a diagnostic approach that can be used to examine "the dynamic relationships and causalities between different conflict factors, and the interconnectedness between conflict factors and stakeholders." (11)

Systems analysis seeks to plot these structures and their evolution, through the qualitative identification of causal relationships, feedback mechanisms and boundaries. For example, a unidirectional causal relationship may be a simple case of *x* resulting in *y,* such as a government implementing a policy which leads to opposition from certain segments of a population. In other cases,

the causal relationship may create a cyclical relationship. An example of such a feedback loop might be a force mobilised to put down a local rebellion instead creating a cycle of violence in which the two forces continue to fight. Feedback effects, meanwhile, can be seen as equivalent to second-order effects. In the example above one of those effects may be the significant increases in food prices due to disruption to supply chains caused by the conflict. It should be noted that the systems created are social constructs that are defined by the researcher, and it is for the researcher to define the system and its boundaries. (12)

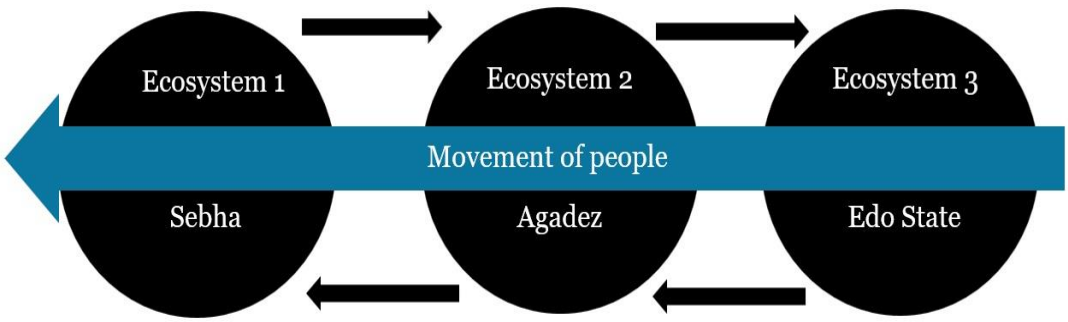
A range of academic studies have deployed systems approaches to model conflict dynamics. (13) However, the development and application of the approach with relation to conflict remains largely qualitative and based on participation and debate among practitioners. Practitioners adopt a community-led approach to understand community perspectives with the goal of supporting peacebuilding. Systems approaches have been used by peacebuilders to understand how to reveal the structures of conflict, including hidden aspects, in order to support systemic conflict transformation. (14)

There are steep challenges that come with the attempted application of systems analysis of conflict on the transnational level. Foremost among the challenges is the management of the scope of enquiry. This article suggests that such a challenge can be navigated by bounding the systems analysis to a) one sector (in this case migrant smuggling and human trafficking) that connects the conflict affected area with other transnational geographies, and b) three distinct geographic locations in different countries (Sebha, Agadez and Edo State). (15)

Second, and closely connected, comes the challenge of developing a robust empirical base to enable systems-based conclusions. Here, this article suggests that a methodology that pairs a political economy of conflict approach with systems concepts can produce the best degree of robustness as practicably achievable for such a complex set of dynamics.

The approach of the article is summarised in Figure 1 below, where the impacts of conflict traverse social systems and are manifested in the physical movement of people through these social systems.

Figure 1: Comparative systems analysis exploring transnational movement of people S



Conflict in Libya and the transnational effects on migrant smuggling and human trafficking: a combined systems analysis

Over the course of the last three years, Chatham House research for the XCEPT programme has sought to understand how the outbreak of conflict in Libya in 2011 impacted the transnational movement of people through research in three case study locations: Sebha in Libya, (16) Agadez in Niger and Edo State in Nigeria. The case study locations were chosen as they are all significant transit points for transnational smuggling and trafficking routes, while Edo State has also been a prevalent point of origin for those travelling.

XCEPT research sought to enable a systems analysis by creating a research framework that allowed for detailed study of the relationship between migrant smuggling and human trafficking and the ecosystems of the case study locations. Data collection incorporated mixed methods, including in-depth interviews with those engaged in the sector, local officials and community members, economic assessments of the case study areas and the use of satellite data to monitor changes in security infrastructure. The detailed findings of two of these studies have been developed as standalone analyses but are summarised here to present a combined systems analysis that tracks the sector over time.

Part one: 2011-2015 – Conflict in Libya: expansion and boom

The collapse of the Gaddafi regime and the ensuing and ongoing governance crisis led to an effective localization of governance dynamics within Libya. This provided an environment which would lead to the rapid expansion of migrant smuggling networks based in Libya to facilitate maritime passage to Europe (17). The numbers of migrants entering Italy across the Mediterranean increased from around 28,500 in 201 (18) to nearly 163,000 in 2016 (19). On the other side of the border in Agadez, an estimated 333,000 migrants passed through the city in that same year alone (20). ECOWAS citizens were permitted to undertake visa-free travel to Libya, where costs for crossing the Mediterranean were falling dramatically; (21) this permissive environment for travel via Niger sparked a surge in irregular migration via Agadez to Sebha.

Diagram 1: Causal loops & feedback cycles driving the securitization of Sebha's market after 2011 and the subsequent expansion of human smuggling and TIP.

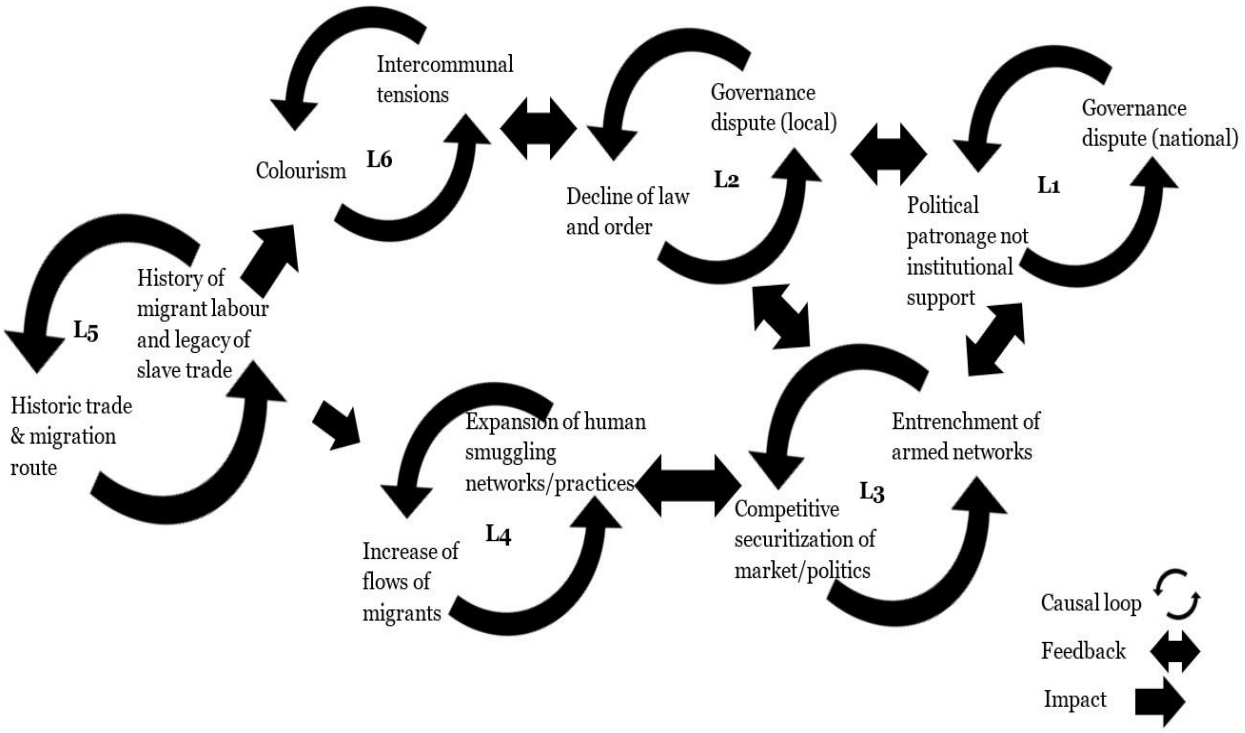


Diagram 1 shows Chatham House's systems analysis of the growth of migrant smuggling and TIP in Sebha. For the purposes of clarity, the processes have been simplified as much as possible to enable broad conclusions. At the national level, Loop 1 (labelled L1 above) contends that ongoing competition for the state has led to rival actors to seek to sustain local alliances through patron-client relationships rather than through the delivery of public goods to the population more widely. In the case of Sebha, this has led to local actors bargaining with Tripoli and eastern-based authorities for material support in return for allegiance, as a form of forum shopping. This led to a situation where some actors in the city were aligned with the authorities in Tripoli and others with rival eastern-based authorities. Critically, those relationships were channelled through individuals. In one case, a key armed group commander, Masoud Jeddi transferred his allegiance from the Gaddafi regime to the revolutionary camp after 2011 and later to the eastern-based authorities before reverting to alignment with the Tripoli-based authorities in 2021(22). The ongoing presence of these disputes creates a cyclical relationship whereby patronage networks are sustained which further inhibits the institutionalisation of power through state building. This is mirrored at the local level in Sebha (Loop 2), where disputes are ongoing over who has the right to govern the area, leading to a fragmentation of legitimate authority and a relative decline of law and order (23). Again, this is seen to be a cyclical relationship which inhibits state building at the local level. These two loops have the effect of driving the fragmentation of the Libyan security sector and the development by local Sebha-based communities of their 'own' armed factions, which have subsequently led to the development of a competitive security sector and a securitization of economic practices, illustrated in Loop 3(24). The analysis contends that this, again, is a cyclical relationship as the ongoing presence of localised armed factions necessitates further community mobilisation to obtain resources from the economy.

Together, Loops 1, 2 and 3 create a feedback mechanism with the governance crisis at local and national level, making a transition to coherent national governance a distant prospect. Conflicts between rival armed factions over economic interests (i.e. distributive conflicts) have become an enduring feature in Libya (25). Examples range from battles over strategic transport routes to the capture of economically valuable infrastructure and competition for indirect influence over state institutions (26).

Amid this context, the illicit economy has boomed, with human smuggling and trafficking one of its principal components (Loop 4). The movement of people along the route from Nigeria is not new – these routes existed for trade in the precolonial era, (27) were entrenched by European colonialism's transatlantic slave trade (28) and the closely-connected 'white slave traffic', (29) and were used by people over the past fifty years to find employment opportunities in North Africa or Europe, including the migration of low-skilled agricultural workers and, subsequently, (forced) sex workers to Italy (Loop 5)(30) (31). Pre-existing infrastructure and connections were scaled up significantly in the aftermath of the collapse of the Libyan state's oppressive security structures after 2011. However, these historical legacies when combined with local disputes over land ownership and governance—most notably in the context of the return from exile of communities from other areas of the Sahel region to Sebha—and the social engineering of the Gaddafi regime in Sebha and the Fezzan more widely (32) have created a hostile environment for foreign nationals in Libya (Loop 6). Many Sub-Saharan African people experience racist abuse and discrimination in Libyan towns and cities due to the colour of their skin (33).

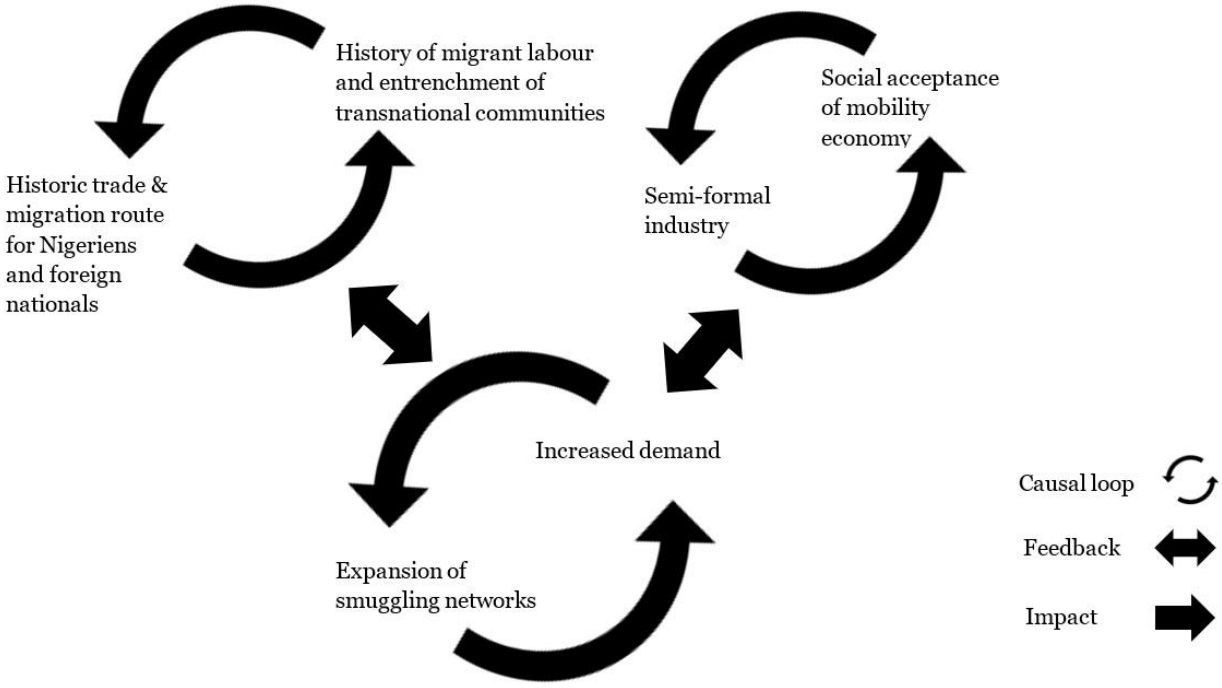
It is against this complex backdrop that the exploitation of and violence against people moving became a defining feature of post-2011 Libya's vibrant illicit marketplace (34). In so doing, it became an important source of revenue within Libya's illicit sector. A Chatham House study estimated that human smuggling and trafficking generated $978 million in revenues within Libya at the height of the movement of irregular migration in 2016 (35).

Agadez, Niger: the development of a transit hub

The above-mentioned dynamics in Libya had reverberations across the southern border in Niger. Yet the expansion of Agadez's mobility economy did not come as the result of a breakdown of law and order or an expansion of a competitive security market, as Chatham House's systems analysis of developments in Agadez indicates. In fact, as Loop 1 shows below, the practice of smuggling was socially accepted as being part of a mobility economy, leading the smuggling sector to hold a status akin to semi-formal industry. In addition, Agadez possesses a long history of transnational trade and the presence of transnational communities, alongside the longstanding existence of labour migration (Loop 2). Thus, as the barriers to travel through Libya eased, Agadez was presented with increased demand for smuggling services and smuggling networks expanded as a result (Loop 3). By 2013, there was a noticeable influx of nationals from throughout West Africa coming to Agadez to reach Libya, a greater percentage of which did so with the primary purpose of onward travel to Europe. These were different cohorts from those who traditionally sought to go to Libya for employment opportunities and who engaged in seasonal or circular migration. The trend accelerated through 2014 and 2015, with thousands of

migrants departing Agadez for Libya every week, an explosion in activity that was a boon for the economy of Agadez (36).

Diagram 2: Causal loops & feedback cycles driving the expansion of Agadez's mobility economy, 2011-2015



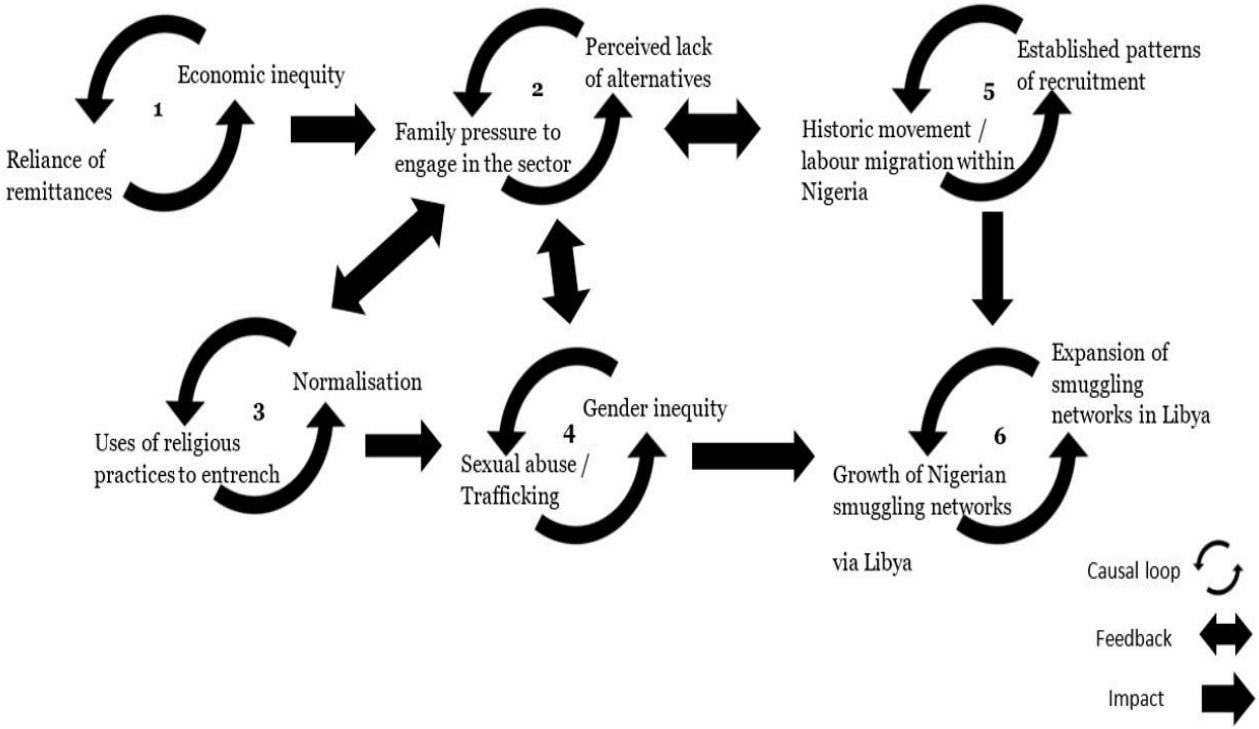
Government officials in Agadez openly celebrated the prosperity associated with the migration economy, as everyone from drivers, fixers, landlords who ran migrant houses in neighbourhoods known as *ghettos*, shop owners, currency dealers, mechanics and restaurant owners benefited from the industry. (37)

Edo State, Nigeria as a point of origin for migrants

Study of Edo State, a region in south-south Nigeria, illustrates the cascading impacts of the development of Libya's conflict economy. Smuggling networks operating in Nigeria, a point of origin for many of those on the move, expanded in conjunction with the shifts in Niger and Libya, which were further along the route of travel. Incredibly, in 2017 one in four households in Benin City, the regional capital of Edo State, had at least one family member who had sought to travel to Libya. (38)

Chatham House's systems analysis of the expansion of human smuggling and TIP in Edo State seeks to examine these developments. It identifies six feedback cycles that interacted to expand the sector.

Diagram 3: Causal loops & feedback cycles that connect manifestations of structural violence in Edo with the movement of people via Libya



Source: Chatham House XCEPT Research

The movement of people to and through Libya from Nigeria's Edo State is not a new phenomenon. Following the route's entrenchment during colonialism and Nigeria's subsequent independence in 1960, the movement of people along this route became primarily focused on the search for economic opportunities (39). Libya's civil war and the subsequent breakdown in the rule of law, fragmentation of state authority and the proliferation of armed groups created the perfect environment for a rapid increase in the movement of people from Edo State to Libya and their exploitation in a developing conflict economy, as the systems analysis in Diagram 3 seeks to illustrate.

Migration and trafficking practices in Edo are underpinned to significant degree by economic inequities (40). Limited economic opportunities in Edo State are directly reflected in the rates of un- and under-employment, particularly among youth (41). These economic inequities have created a reliance on remittances and loans, as shown in Loop 1. Notably, this reliance has become part of a cycle whereby debt bondage has become prominent, with people travelling from Edo State taking out loans to fund their movement. The resulting reduction of the agricultural sector has created a vicious cycle: farming does not allow parents to afford decent schooling for their children, who then lack an agricultural education, compounded by a lack of funding available to support young people to work in the sector.[1] The result of these dynamics is shown in Loop 2, where family pressure to engage in the migration and trafficking is driven by a perceived lack of alternatives. Nonetheless, Chatham House research

indicates that these families are deeply conflicted in their attitudes to smuggling and trafficking, seeing it both as problematic but also a necessary survival mechanism.

Within the context of familial pressure, the other key influence that must be considered is the use of religion as a coercive tool. Loop 3 shows how engagement in the migration and trafficking has been normalised as a result of its scale and further entrenched at times through religious practices. Though Edo State is a majority Christian region, the practice of African Traditional Religion (ATR) is widespread. ATR oaths are used to bind people to their journeys and ensure women and girls comply with both the trafficking and forced prostitution. (42) (43)

Chatham House research identified a highly gendered dynamic to the functioning of the sector. Loop 4 seeks to illustrate how the trafficking of women and girls by is done in the knowledge that they will be used as sex workers by families who see no alternatives for making ends meet (44). Here, gendered exclusion in Edo State has a co-constitutive relationship with the prevalence of sex work, sexual violence and forced sex work in Benin City (45). This not only demonstrates how gendered structural violence creates direct violence to women and girls,but links it to trafficking.

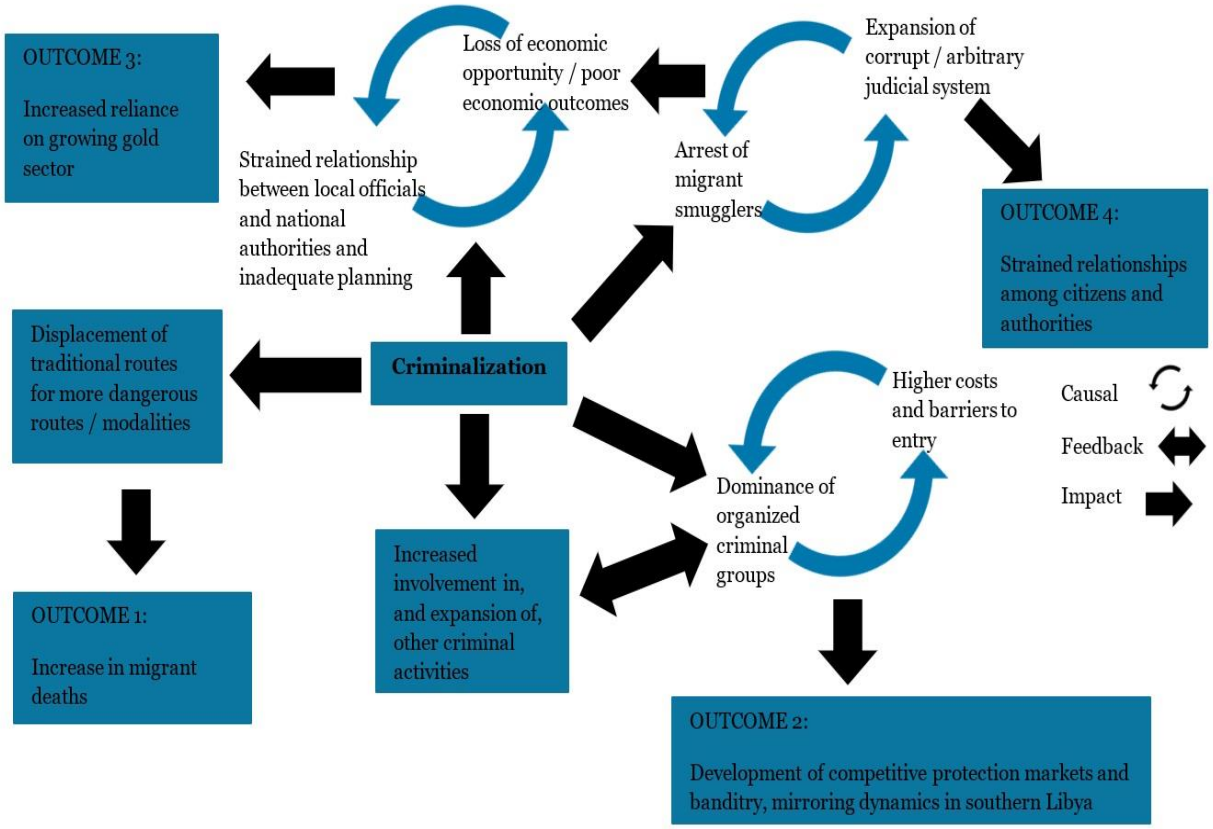
Together, Loops 1, 2, 3 and 4 create a system which feeds the development of human smuggling and TIP. When combined with the pre-existence of smuggling activities and the fact that Nigerians have long traversed the transnational route to Libya (Loop 5), the shifts in Libya and then Niger led to the swift growth of smuggling activities. In the period of rapid expansion of the sector, movement to the Libyan border was relatively affordable, while prices paid to cross the Mediterranean had also fallen dramatically — anecdotal evidence suggests prices paid may have gone from $1000 in 2013 to as little as $60 - 90 in June 2017 – as smugglers used ever cheaper inflatable boats and the sector continued to expand (46). Nigerian smuggling networks operating in and via Libya have combined to increase the flows of those from Edo into Libya (Loop 6).

Phase two: External intervention, impact of criminalization and clampdown: 2015-2018

By 2015, the impact of arrivals of migrants and refugees via Libya (Central Mediterranean Route) and Turkey (Eastern Mediterranean Route) had led to a growing hostility within Europe among governments and populations alike. Discussion of a “migration crisis” emerged, and European policymakers sought means to stem the movement of people. Subsequent interventions were developed targeting the movement of people in northern Niger, and on the northwestern Libyan coastline. These interventions would succeed in their primary objective of stemming the movement of people but would have significant second-order effects in further endangering those on the move, entrenching Libya’s conflict economy and criminalizing historic and long-standing cross border movements via Niger.

A major turning point for the migration economy in Agadez came in May 2015, when the government of Niger, in consultation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and with technical and financial support from the EU and individual EU member states, passed Law 2015-36.(47) Often referred to as ‘Law 36’, the legislation outlines clear punishments for those engaged in human trafficking. (48) The criminalization of the mobility economy in Niger was in effect an effort by European policymakers to sidestep the policy quagmire it faced in Libya. The ensuing intervention had deep consequences in Agadez, as the systems analysis in Diagram 4 seeks to illustrate.

Diagram 4: Systems analysis of the impact of criminalization on the mobility economy in Agadez



One clear and widely predicted humanitarian cost to anti-migrant smuggling policies is the increase in migrant deaths in the desert (Outcome 1). The crackdown on the migration economy in Agadez displaced traditional migration routes to Libya and Algeria (49). As early as 2017, IOM and the Nigerien Red Cross reported an increased number of deaths due to smugglers reportedly abandoning migrants in the desert when detected by Nigerien authorities, and because smugglers were taking more perilous routes to avoid detection (50). According to IOM's Missing Migrants Project, "northern areas of Niger... can be hazardous for [migrants] due to the increased securitization of many border regions used for trans-Saharan migration." (51)

Anti-smuggling interventions also contributed to the development of protection markets and a rise of banditry (Outcome 2). The growth of banditry throughout northern Niger is linked to the increasing presence of armed actors from southern Libya and Chad who travel to Niger to engage in predatory activities (52). These bandits, who are active along key transit corridors linking gold sites to trading and logistics hubs have access to heavy weaponry and materiel from Chad and southern Libya. Their military capabilities combined with their knowledge of the area enables them to operate across northern Chad, northern Niger and southern Libya. (53) The rise of heavily armed 'Chadian' bandits in northern Niger functioned as a source of resentment among local communities, particularly ethnic Tuareg whose ability to move throughout the region and exert control over licit and illicit activities is

constrained by their presence. Several Tuareg leaders interviewed by Chatham House stressed that there is a need to 'securitize' or even 'militarize' northern Niger to restore order to the region (54).

At the time of criminalization, migration was estimated to provided direct employment for more than 6,565 people (55) and indirect incomes to more than half of all households in Agadez (56). However, the crackdown in Agadez happened to coincide with a gold rush throughout much of northern Niger. The gold economy came to be a coping mechanism and resilience strategy that has likely eased some of the economic pressures and second-order effects that many feared would take place after the arrests and crackdowns of 2015 and 2016 (Outcome 3). (57) According to Secretary-General of the Governorate of Agadez, gold "saved" the region, and many of those affected by Law 36 found another way to make a living thanks to gold (58).

Efforts to curb migration through criminalization eroded trust between local populations and their government, as well as between local officials and the national government (Outcome 4). (59) The crackdown disproportionately affected Agadez, home to communities that have traditionally felt marginalized and discriminated against by the government in Niamey. This in turn has reinforced narratives that the national government is willing to sacrifice the economic well-being of northern communities to ensure that the international funds tied to cooperation continue to flow. (60)

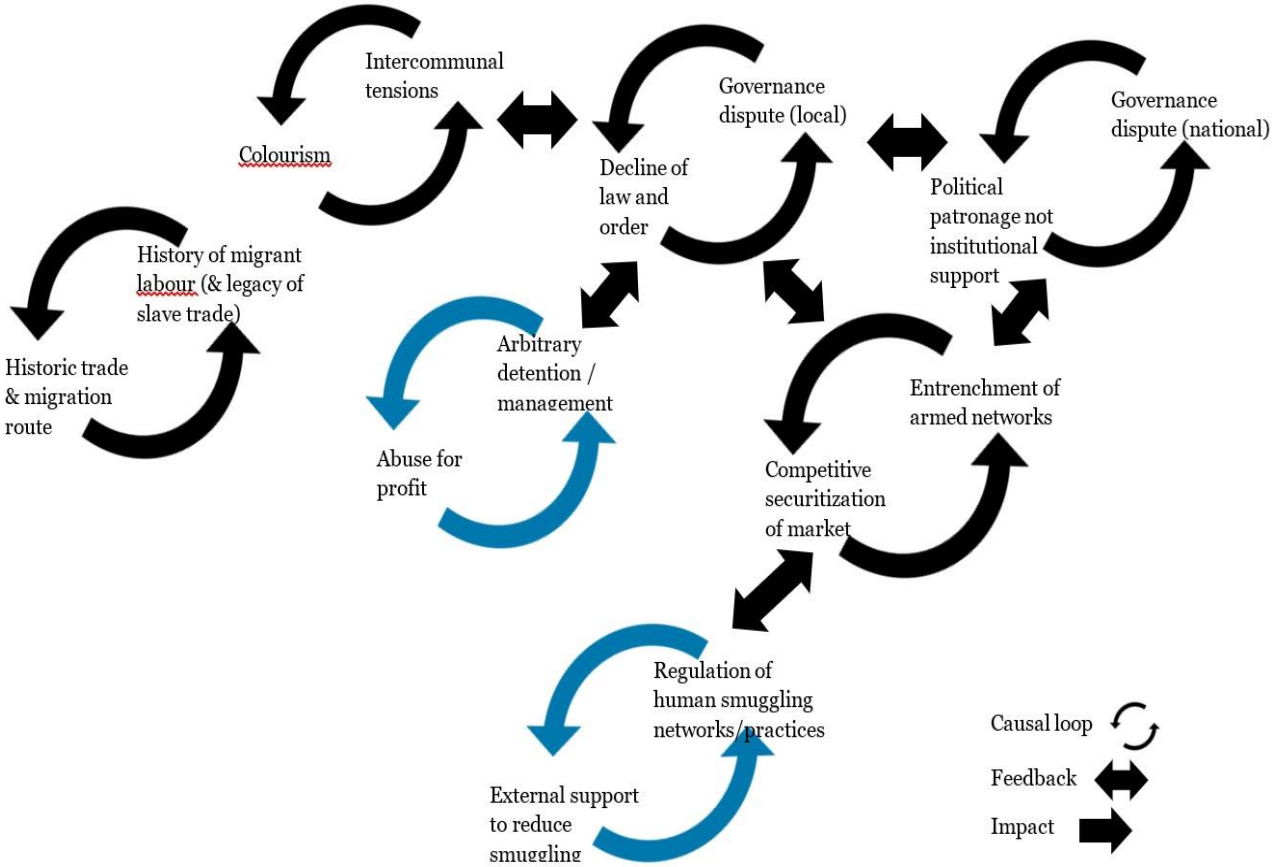
Intervention in the Mediterranean and engagement with Libyan authorities

Despite being a key transit hub of human smuggling and trafficking, Sebha was subject to few meaningful interventions, domestic or foreign, to reduce the practice. Instead, it was dynamics further afield that constrained the growth of human smuggling and TIP within Sebha. In addition to the criminalization of the sector in Agadez, two sets of interlinking dynamics would significantly shift the status of human smuggling and trafficking on the Libyan coastline and had a cascading impact on the development of the sector in Sebha. First, on 2 February 2017, Italy agreed a memorandum of understanding with the Government of National Accord in Tripoli, followed by the Malta Declaration signed by EU leaders in Valletta just a day later. Over the course of 2017-2018, the Libyan Coast Guard became responsible for the search and rescue missions near the Libyan coast. Over this same period, European state rescue missions withdrew from Libyan waters, while NGO rescue missions were prevented from operating in Libyan waters. (61) The European naval mission Sophia, which had rescued approximately 48,000 migrants in the Mediterranean between 2015 and 2018 (62) was replaced by a new mission, Irini, in 2020. Irini suspended naval forces and instead relied solely on unmanned aerial vehicles, which were not equipped for sea rescues. (63)

Second, a market for "anti-smuggling" emerged on the northwest Libyan coastline over the summer of 2017. (64) Armed group leaders that had been actively facilitating human smuggling and TIP sought to evade an emerging threat of being placed under UN sanctions for their complicity, and rumours (never substantiated) swelled that some armed actors had received covert funding from Italy to halt human smuggling (65). These events would spark conflict among armed groups in the Libyan coastal city of Sabratha that lasted 19 days and result in armed groups complicit in smuggling seeking to position themselves as the very actors that were preventing it, a pattern that has continued to the present (66).

The result of these developments was that the number of arrivals to Italy from Libya fell from 162,895 in 2016, to 108,409 in 2017 as the changes took effect, falling again to 12,977 in 2018 (67). In the years since, numbers of migrants arriving in Italy have rebounded, reaching 49,740 in 2023, though they are still well below the 2016 high (68).

Diagram 5: Entrenchment of Libya's conflict economy



Mirroring broader dynamics in Libya, those in Sebha received little in terms of funding or support to reduce irregular migration, with resources remaining largely captured on the northwest coast. The European Union has defended the partnerships it developed with Libyan authorities as being in support of the rule of law and compliant with EU legislation (69). However, the reality of these interventions has been decidedly murkier. In particular, the penetration of Libyan state institutions by armed groups and the developing conflict economy meant that the partners EU policymakers were seeking were also themselves deeply involved in illicit activities. The Libyan Coast Guard and the Department for Countering Illegal Migration were widely viewed as complicit in human smuggling and trafficking (70). Movement through the waters and lands that armed groups controlled came with their acquiescence (71).

These changes had the effect of providing financial support for migration management without removing the financial incentives for continued engagement in human smuggling and TIP practices. As

Loop 7 in diagram 5 above indicates, this created a degree of regulation in the practices of human smuggling and trafficking practices which contributed, in combination with the changes in Niger, to a sustained fall in the numbers of those traversing through Sebha. However, it also created a further set of rents for the armed actors and their partners through the provision of significant financial support for detention centres and the provision of training and equipment. A rise in arbitrary detention and 'abuse for profit' emerged, as illustrated in Loop 8 (72). Locally, these groups have taken a Janus-faced approach, claiming to be the ones ensuring that migrants do not remain in communities while also cutting deals with the smugglers that are bringing the migrants to the community in the first place (73).

Conclusions: informal regulation of human smuggling and TIP

Systems analysis of the development of human smuggling and trafficking in amid Libya's enduring conflict shows how second order effects of conflict can condition developments thousands of miles away, producing a dynamic interplay of cascading transnational dynamics that evolve over time. The attendant rapid rise of crossings of the Mediterranean resulted stimulated policy responses from European actors to target key transit points in the Mediterranean Sea and in Northern Niger. Framed as rule of law interventions, these approaches addressed the symptoms rather than the causes of the increase in human smuggling and trafficking to Europe via Libya ignoring the continuum of violence that shapes the chain. Flows have been reduced through a series of transnational bargains that entrench conflict in Libya through the further empowerment of armed actors acting unaccountably. In the context of broader political negotiations, this makes a sustainable and equitable solution to Libya's conflict harder to achieve, as Libyan actors leverage flows of migrants in return for financial and political support, heightening a sense of impunity. The growth of state-affiliated armed networks is one of the greatest impediments reaching a political settlement that would provide for stable and accountable governance in Libya. Ultimately, policies that empower these actors and shield them from accountability—as European support has done—leads to the undermining of state building efforts. In this sense, European policies formed to counter-migration are, at best, poorly aligned with stated political objectives to achieve accountable and sustainable governance.

In recent years, the above dynamics have generated a de facto regulation of the crossings of the Mediterranean through stimulating the emergence of a new equilibrium in the transnational movement of people. This is regarded as a relative success by EU policymakers, but has not prevented regular disasters from occurring in the Mediterranean and demonstrably avoidable loss of life, and may in any case prove to be fleeting. In November 2023, the Nigerien government announced the repeal of Law 2015-36, which is likely to have a profound impact on the political economy of Agadez as migrant smuggling activity resumes within a geopolitical context that is markedly different from 2015. It may well lead to a fresh expansion of the sector, and yet another round of transactional dealmaking.

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3. According to the UN Refugee Convention, a refugee is someone who has fled his/her country because of a well-founded fear of persecution and should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom. Refugees are defined and protected by international law.

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'The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.'

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13. See, for example, Coyle, R.G. 'A system description of counter insurgency warfare. Policy Sci 18, 55–78 (1985). https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00149751; and Gallo G, Marzano A. 2009. The dynamics of asymmetric conflicts: the Israeli-Palestinian case. Journal of Conflict Studies 29: 33–49.

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15. It is evident that the societies in the three locations (Edo State, Agadez and Sebha) or indeed any location do not have boundaries that begin and end within the territorial limits of those locations. The systems approach adopted focuses on examining the principal socio-political, economic and security developments within those locations, recognizing that elements of these are driven from factors emanating from outside of the locations themselves.

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8. The continuum of violence and transnational conflict response: the importance of stories from Edo State for understanding the conflict in Libya (1)

Leah de Haan

A young man in Edo State, Nigeria, tells us his reason for leaving. 'I don't have anybody, I am an orphan. [My parents,] they are no more, they are dead. I thought, let me just move on with a group of friends. There was a group of us. We are six.' (2) He stares off into distance as he retells how a journey to escape poverty became entangled with conflict and violence in Libya.

Since 2011, the Libyan conflict has been characterized by three episodes of national conflict and many eruptions of violent confrontation at a more localized level. The country has experienced the popular uprising against a dictator, the proliferation of conflict actors and associated violence, and cooperation and competition over territory, resource and authority. (3) According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program this conflict has resulted in approximately fourteen thousand deaths, the displacement of over a hundred thousand people and an explosion of harms experienced by the Libyan people (4) (5) (6).

Adun's (7) experiences are intimately tied to conflict in Libya (8). After being smuggled to Libya via Morocco, by a 'Bini boy' – someone also from Edo State – Adun and his friends were left with Libyan men. And as they waited to be moved, they faced increasing violence: 'they were keeping us, beating us, we couldn't eat – [the pain] in my stomach and in my eyes. They would use us…' (9) Adun clenched his arms around him as he details the pain in his stomach. Then, he and one of his friends were moved again: 'They take us to a farm, a very big farm. We are working there, they don't give us food to eat, they harass us'. (10) After a month of being closely watched, forced to work for no pay, they manage to escape and travel back to Nigeria.

Adun and his friends' experiences of beatings, sexual harassment, imprisonment, enslaved labour and starvation occurred in Libya within a conflict economy described as deriving profit from abuse or the exploitation of people moving to and through the conflict. (11) But there is often limited room within understandings of conflict to adequately conceptualize how forms of violence away from the battlefield, such as these, relate to a conflict and why it is important to consider them in conflict response policy – despite the fact that this happened to young men, who tend to be centre stage in our conceptualization of conflict. Attempts to understand and address conflict, including in Libya, have often resulted in clear categorisations being made as to which deaths and harms, which methods of killings, which people and which locations, are considered part of a conflict. (12)

This paper works to question some of the assumptions used to define conflict. It draws on experiences of people from Edo State who felt the impacts of the Libya conflict – either because they travelled to and through Libya or saw the effects in Nigeria – to test the lines drawn around 'conflict' and 'non-conflict' violence and the assumptions on which they are based. In doing so, the paper builds on extensive critical work, including by decolonial, feminist, anti-racist and Marxist scholars, which highlights how these lines are often a mechanism for maintaining certain structures of domination, whether economic, gendered, racialized or heteronormative, and has widened traditional security studies' designations of conflict and violence. (13)

This paper contributes to this work by drawing on the experiences of people moving through the Libyan conflict to highlight to why policymakers should consider how violence is interconnected across geographies. The 'continuum of violence' approach is a useful tool to demonstrate the links between violence and conflict across borders. (14) It has both been used to interrogate prevalent assumptions underlying traditional and hegemonic security studies' conceptualization of conflict, and to broaden such conceptualizations in a way that can be practical for policy responses.

The paper is made up of four sections. First, it describes the movement of people from Edo State, Nigeria, to Libya and asks for this decades-old practice to be put in the context of the ongoing, violent and armed conflict in Libya. Second, it describes the continuum of violence approach as a lens of analysis used to broaden conceptualizations of conflict hitherto often (exclusively) centred on principles of battlefield deaths and state boundaries. In doing so, the discussion creates a framework for considering the movement of people from Nigeria within understandings of the Libyan conflict. Third, the paper shows how a continuum of violence analysis demonstrates the transnational nature of violence by linking experiences described in Edo State with the Libyan conflict. And, finally the paper builds on the above three sections to argue that a broadened and transnational understanding of conflict in the Libyan case could help policymakers understand the movement of people beyond the lens of migration.

The movement of people from Nigeria to Libya: considerations for conflict

Ada (15) had been struggling for a while before she left Nigeria. (16) Her parents had died and she had younger siblings to support. With intermittent and informal employment and limited familial support, there was never enough money for food or clothes. Eventually, a man she was somewhat familiar with offered her a job abroad, as a hairstylist, something she had done before. She travelled with a group of people, men and women, to Libya. This journey included a desert crossing in a packed Hilux that was bookended by police and border officials mostly interested in assaulting the girls and making some money.

In Libya, they were taken to 'connection houses' – she never says the word brothel. 'There were many of us in small rooms, and during the day we were told to be quiet' (17). In the evenings, men would visit them and the money from their forced sexual labour went straight to other men overseeing the *business*. Some of the men were Black like her, but those truly in charge appeared to be Libyans, men who spoke Arabic and who she could not understand.

There are many stories of people leaving Edo State in search of employment, remittances for their families or in an effort to pay debts. They tend to be variations on a theme: a local smuggler or trafficker as a first point of contact; an intended journey through Niger and Libya and onwards to Europe, often with detours or alternative destinations and, increasingly, a final stop in Libya where they face increasing amounts of violence (18).

For centuries, a trade route has existed from Edo State, Nigeria – famed for its Benin Bronzes – to Italy, and for decades people have used this route in search of employment and remittances. It has created

opportunities for smugglers and traffickers, the latter often with the object of trafficking women and girls into enslaved sex work. The eruption of violent armed conflict in Libya and more restrictive and violent European border regimes have contributed to the development of an increasingly illicit sector centred on the exploitation of the people being moved (19).

Over the last decade people from Edo State have been significantly overrepresented among those moving to and through Libya, but their experiences of absorption into a conflict economy is shared by many people moving from Sub-Saharan Africa. Stories about such movement to Libya are predominantly told as part of one of two narratives surrounding migration, either by much of the 'media [as] migrants scaling fences or crossing deserts and seas' ([20) to change host countries' way of life with racist overtones or in humanitarian or human rights publications stressing the sexual abuse, poor living conditions and deaths as a result of migration (21) (22). In this paper these experiences are framed within the context of the conflict in Libya.

A continuum of violence: broadening what is considered conflict

Centring the experiences of Ada and Adun within a discussion on conflict and violence challenges many mainstream assumptions about conflict. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a literature review of mainstream conceptualizations of conflict, this work has been done convincingly elsewhere (23) with two key assumptions prominent – the focus on battlefield deaths, and on the state and its boundaries. First, '[w]hen thinking of war and peace and national security, many picture a uniformed soldier – [a man] – lying dead on the field of battle' (24). The severity of a conflict is determined by counting the number of battlefield deaths – and all other descriptions of a conflict flow from it (25)(26). Attention has been on the 'scale of "blood spilt and lives lost" as the proper location of concern for security studies', (27) policymaking, budget allocation and knowledge production (28).

Second is the conceptualization of conflict as being either fully restricted or at least primarily located within a country's borders (29) This state- and border-centric approach is so pervasive that it is hard to imagine a language on conflict outside of it (30). The result is a statist and patriarchal orientation, which not only shapes the way we understand conflict but determines where we draw our boundaries around it (31). For instance, the experiences of women and girls trafficked to or through the Libyan conflict are often not centred, or even visible, within such understandings of conflict.

Instead, a 'continuum of violence' approach can emphasize Ada and Adun's experiences of the Libyan conflict. The notion of a continuum of violence is often first tied to Kelly's work linking sexual violence to structural gendered violence and discrimination (32). Similarly, anthropologists like Bourgois have drawn transnational connections between violence, in this case, in El Salvador and the United States and making inferences about causation being linked to patriarchy and inequality (33).

The continuum of violence approach links different types of violence to each other, with patriarchy as the organizing principle that drives this connectivity (34). The unequal distribution of power (re)produces and favours what Cockburn calls 'cultures of masculinity prone to violence' (35). It provides a framework for understanding how the sexual abuse experienced by Ada is linked to organized crime and trafficking, which are in turn connected to repressive governance and eruptions of

violent, armed conflict. In Cockburn's explanation of this phenomena, she describes different forms of violence as both interconnected (by a 'thread') and as productive (as a 'fuse') of, for instance, armed conflict: 'These gender relations are like a linking thread, a kind of fuse, along which violence runs. They run through every field (home, city, nation-state, international relations) and every moment (protest, law enforcement, militarization), adding to the explosive charge of violence in them.' (36)

Crucially, these violences are not confined to a state's borders. They create a complex web of interconnecting and different types of violence. In borrowing from Lawrence and Karim's metaphor, a continuum of violence is made up of chains of violence spanning borders, both inherently spatially and temporally characterized and existing 'everywhere and always'. (37) Examples of the transnational nature of this violence are current global imperial relations, including the legacies of colonialism. Such chains of violence can span vast geographies: 'Feminist postcolonial theorists and transnational feminist activists draw attention to intersecting identities and the historical contexts of colonial relations that reinforce continuums of violence as a global phenomenon embedded in every institution.' (38)

Bellamy, amongst others, cautions against defining conflict through an ever-broader lens joining it to non-conflict related violence and deaths, warning that it can lead to empty concepts and wicked problems linked to global structural inequity. (39) This concern is often raised in response to feminists' efforts to broaden understanding of violence, politics, the economy and, indeed, conflict. It is, in turn, challenged by feminist researchers who stress that it does not create empty concepts, but instead – a challenge that is taken up in this paper – creates 'holistic thinking' (40) or 'realistic' (41) approaches which can adequately address the interconnectivity of global expressions of violence.

A continuum of violence: lessons on violence and transnationalism for conflict

For the purposes of this paper, a conceptualization of conflict through a continuum of violence lens allows for the consideration of the movement of people from Nigeria to Libya as an important feature of the conflict. First, it highlights the causal and co-productive linkages between the types of violence experienced: it connects the exploitation of girls and women through enslaved sex work to the Libyan conflict – as an *industry* which provides resource to the conflict, as a *practice* that relies on fragmented authority and control, and as a *violence* that is facilitated by and productive of a general increase in structural violence, direct violence, conflict and exclusion within society. In this manner, Adun's enslavement and starvation, and Ada's sexual abuse and captivity can both be viewed as part of wider societal conflict dynamics.

Moreover, this understanding of conflict highlights that these interlinkages are inherently transnational. An experienced gynaecologist working at a state hospital in Edo State illustrated this when, in a small office between rooms of labouring mothers, he described the condition of a previous patient: 'a woman that came, she was pregnant, she was HIV-positive, and we had to take care of the whole treatment. Put her on treatment against HIV, give her the highly active antiretroviral drugs.' (42) Not an uncommon occurrence, he has treated many women who have returned from Libya with life-long physical impacts from the violence they experienced. Many of his patients came to him with unwanted pregnancies or

having previously undergone abortive processes which left them unable to have children, with chronic health conditions and in menopause.

The experiences detailed by this physician show how these violences, regardless of where they occur or start, have impacts that cascade across borders. Many of the women he described travelled to Libya to send remittances back to their families. The exploitation of their labour – often through enslaved sex work – has become part and parcel of the Libyan conflict system with reverberating impacts and intergenerational harm. (43) And while significant scholarship exists on the harm people experience in detention centres, due to human trafficking for the purposes of enslaved sex work and as a result of modern slavery within Libya's conflict economy. The continuum of violence lens allows for these experiences to become more than externalities of the conflict – or ripple effects further down the line – but instead be seen as a key driver which will need to be addressed in order to mitigate or address the conflict. (44)

The manner in which these violences are related to and drive conflict is, for example, highlighted in a working paper prepared for the EUNPACK project by Loschi, Raineri, Strazzari in considering the EU's interactions with the Libyan coastguard: 'the dramatic increase in the number of people in custody in Libyan detention centres (OHCHR 2017c) is fuelling a criminal economy of exploitation and traffic[king, which], in turn, has the potential to further empower non-state armed actors and militias, given the reported collusions between security officers and trafficking networks'. (45) (46) Leaving aside the complexity of differentiating between non-state and state actors, the chain of causation described by Loschi, Raineri, Strazzari shows how the detention of people moving through Libya is connected to the conflict economy and, crucially, how it has changed and entrenched conflict dynamics. (47)

Policy beyond migration: the opportunities of a continuum of violence approach for the Libyan conflict

Drawing on the continuum of violence approach, the ability to trace and link different forms of violence to conflict in Libya is also important for policymaking. Much of the policy discussion on the people moving from Nigeria to and through Libya within international and European policy circles are from the perspective of Europe's external border and migration management. In describing this phenomenon, Spijkerboer has stressed that '[s]ince the end of the Cold War, migration law and policy of the global North has been characterised by externalisation, privatisation and securitisation'. (48)

The particulars of such approaches have been discussed in detail elsewhere and include domestic policies and laws on migrants and migration; the funding of infrastructure for migration management across borders; and both EU and member state policymakers signing agreements with so-called transit countries on the borders of the EU to externalize migration management'. (49) Direct and indirect funding from European governments and inter-governmental organizations has supported Libya's Directorate for Combatting Illegal Migration (DCIM) and the creation of detention centres, conducted capacity-building for the Libyan coastguard and heavily pressured countries to criminalize the movement of people towards Europe's borders in order to prevent so-called irregular or illegal migration. (50)(51) However, these measures have also contributed to funding some of the most

prominent examples of the violence and abuse perpetrated against people moving, which has become a tool for extortion and revenue extraction from enslaved labour. (52)(53)

Kirby discusses this connectivity as follows: 'Leaked internal EU assessments likewise cite evidence of abuse, slavery, forced prostitution and torture in DCIM detention. Extensive analysis by UN missions and agencies have found reports of rape and sexual violence in detention, including sexual slavery rings overseen by guards, to be credible. Torture in detention has been described as systematic, and encompasses rape and sexual violence against both men and women as tools to humiliate or extract "confessions". Clear evidence existed from at least as far back as 2015 that there was a pattern of sexual violence against migrants at official facilities, linked to broader practices of coerced labour, extortion and the normalization of violence and abuse.' (54) Such statements pick up on many of the themes in Adun and Ada's experience, demonstrating the link between current policy approaches and the violence they detailed.

A policy approach based on a continuum of violence interrogates which violences, people, geographies and temporality are implicated in our understanding of a conflict. It is a broadening of conflict far beyond borders and battlefield deaths. Beyond aiding our understanding of conflict, the concept can be operationalized as a practical tool. The rationale for such an analysis, and the strength in the continuum of violence approach, lies in two elements. The first is its explanatory power. Hudson et al ventured into this space and, in what they call a 'preliminary excursion into a methodologically conventional research agenda linking the security of women and the security of states', (55) determined 'a strong and statistically significant relationship between the physical security of women and three measures capturing the relative peacefulness of states'. (56) Cockburn illustrates this interconnectivity when highlighting that the societies that saw eruptions of violent conflict in the 1990s all experienced increasing levels of structural inequality in the preceding decade. (57)

The second element is centred on potential impact. A 'continuum of violence'-based analysis would not simply indicate how these violences are interconnected to each other and to eruptions of violent conflict, but consider how this violence and conflict is changeable across borders and through a range of approaches. The metaphor of interrupting or cutting a chain effectively demonstrates this: violence is 'always a chain that is constructed. It can therefore be modified or adjusted or imagined anew.]...[Violence is always and everywhere a chain because chains are always and everywhere subject to change, whether from below or above, by actors or by observers'. (58) (59) While the continuum of violence should not be approached as a tool that predicts conflict or illustrates a unidirectional and uncomplicated line between different types of violence and armed conflict, it helps identify transnational chains of conflict which are a useful tool for policy analysis. Therefore, linking violence and conflict, along a thread or a fuse, creates potential planes of dissection for interventions. For example, policy and programmatic approaches which support ongoing development programming in Edo State could work to address the underlying issues which make people vulnerable to trafficking and smuggling. (60)The impact of such interventions could cascade transnationally and reduce the number of people from Edo State exploited in Libya and, as a result, alter a key financial and political dynamics fuelling the Libyan conflict.

In conclusion, viewing the movement of people from Nigeria to Libya within the parameters of the Libyan conflict and, for policymakers, as relevant outside of policy on migration, leads to a number of conclusions. Generally, it shows that the violences highlighted in a transnational analysis approached through a continuum of violence lens should be considered when we are trying to understand the nature and dynamics of conflict. The experiences of Ada, Adun and physicians in Edo State show a plurality of violences and harm that – beyond requiring attention in their own right – tell us something about the conflict in Libya, and can inform policy to address it. And, as it concerns the links between Nigeria and Libya, seeing the movement of people from a 'migration management' perspective rather than through a conflict lens can lead to policies that may not be adequate – or that can even have unintended, negative and harmful consequences (61)(62). Policymakers would benefit from considering continuum of violence analyses more centrally in their understandings of conflict across borders, to avoid worsening the level of violence and exacerbating conflict further down the chain.

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9. Mapping Conflict in Contemporary Supply Chains: Lessons for Public Policy

Deborah Cowen

The world emerges slowly from the COVID-19 pandemic with a new keyword in its popular lexicon: 'supply chain disruption'. No longer of concern only to technical and policy experts, frequent disruptions have catapulted supply chain vulnerability to centre stage(1). Pandemic pedagogy saw rapid mass education on the basic tenets of global logistics, yet the re-organization of production into long distance, high speed, complex networks of 'making and moving' has taken shape over many decades. The 'revolution in logistics' and the rise of supply chain management underpins the enormous growth of cross border circulation of the last half century, which involves both the disaggregation of production and its deepening integration across transnational space(2). The factory' has been broken down into specialized components and stretched through networks that cross borders and span vast distances.

The expanding spatial scale and accelerating pace of trade combine to make supply chains highly vulnerable to disruption. This context produces elevated concern for the *security* of trade networks, with state and corporate response framed through the lens of 'resilience'. Borrowed from the biological sciences, 'resilience' draws attention to the capacity for organisms to survive daily and catastrophic threat, (3) but typically remains agnostic regarding its causes. Applied to logistics systems and infrastructures, resilience considers how supply chains can endure disruption and restore speedy circulation in its aftermath (4). This paradigm assumes that conflicts are *exogenous* to supply chains and interchangeable; weather events, technical failures, labour actions, and other political disruptions are all governed as threats to resilient systems (5).

However, supply chains are not simply collateral damage in pre-existing disputes or natural disasters but are often a *source* of transnational conflict. For the people who build, operate, and maintain supply chains and the communities that live in the path of their infrastructures, supply chains can cause economic precarity, land dispossession, and ecological destruction. In this context, supply chain disruption can be the intentional strategy of groups struggling for self-determination and even survival.

In other words, this paper examines how attempts to make supply chains secure can themselves enact violence and may contribute to transnational conflict in pronounced yet understudied ways. It examines how efforts to secure supply chains can be a source of transnational conflict, rather than simply an attempt to resolve or manage such conflict. This approach is particularly prescient given its relative invisibility in mainstream political and policy debate, and because 'Supply Chain Security' can compound already existing forms of violence and transnational conflict in the initial making of supply chain infrastructures. Thus, this paper insists that any attempt to understand the transnational dynamics of authority, violence and armed conflict must start from the most basic material forms and points of connection across seemingly distant geographies: supply chains and their physical and digital infrastructures.

Along the way, This brief paper attends to conflicts over lands, labour and ecologies provoked by supply chains to provide a fuller picture of the vulnerabilities inherent in the contemporary organization of

transnational economic relations and infrastructures. It suggests a vital role for apprehending the violent impacts of supply chains towards more effective public policy response.

Violence in and of Supply Chains

Since 2001, public and private efforts to engineer resilient supply chains have created new national and international policies, programs and regulations that aim pre-empt disruption and secure circulation in its wake. A new field of supply chain security has taken shape, transforming logistics systems to protect smooth circulation. Underpinning this paradigm is an assumption that supply chains connect people to the networks, resources, and opportunities they need to flourish. However, logistics infrastructures may cut people off from their lands and livelihoods while degrading both. Supply chain security assigns jurisdiction over the governance of circulatory systems to a narrow notion of economic efficiency, at times quite literally weaponizing trade. Governing disruption as a threat to the security of supply chains can institute illiberal and even authoritarian logics that seem technical and apolitical, and thus can serve to naturalize those relations. (6) In this way, 'resilient supply chains' may compound violence that already animates logistics infrastructures.

A very different set of concerns about supply chains animates scholarly research and social and environmental movements. Here, economic flows and their material infrastructures are understood as unavoidably political. The brief case studies below draw attention to specific causes and contexts for disruption, offering alternative ways to understand how conflict defines global logistics systems.

Lands

Supply chains create conflict when their infrastructures displace established communities. Moving the world's goods requires roads, rail, ports, and distribution centres in large quantities and in standardized form. Land dispossession for infrastructure expansion is endemic to the assembly of supply chains around the world, (7) and logistics infrastructures are typically located in sites that are already stigmatized because of the class or racial composition of residents (8). Contemporary supply chains often took shape historically through imperial trade, and their expansion can impact the very descendants of enslaved and colonized peoples (9). Supply chain infrastructure projects continue to displace Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and other marginalized people around the world, while corridor projects wrap state surveillance around circulatory infrastructures, sometimes criminalizing Indigenous people who resist "invasive infrastructures." (10)

Colonial Corridors: #ShutDownCanada

In February 2020, just weeks before the world locked down with COVID-19, Canadian supply chains were brought to a halt by Indigenous peoples and their allies. (11) The traditional leadership of the Wet'suwet'en Nation issued public calls for support after the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) forcibly entered their lands, breaking down barricades erected to block the construction of a gas pipeline on their territory. In response to their call, blockades appeared on railroads, highways, and bridges across Canada and beyond, stalling commuter travel and cargo movement, in a massive

international action that came to be known as #ShutDownCanada. Canadian security services deliberated on whether to classify the blockades as terrorist acts, (12) as today international trade is often governed as a matter of national security.

Disturbing images of police violence shocked audiences internationally, yet the RCMP has a long history of displacing Indigenous peoples from the path of infrastructure projects. The national police force was founded in 1873 to clear Indigenous people from the path of a massive transcontinental railroad project, (13) and to assert colonial authority over millions of acres of multinational Indigenous lands. Today, energy infrastructures are at the center of struggles over settler colonialism in North America, but railroads remain vital to transnational supply chains and to Indigenous peoples' ongoing experience and memory of colonial violence (14). By connecting contemporary supply chain disruption to the foundational violence of the railroad, #ShutDownCanada offered a compelling account of the long histories and vast geographies of colonial conflict supply chains.

Ecologies

Supply chains create conflict when they degrade terrestrial and marine environments and threaten the lives and livelihoods of humans and other beings. Supply chains contribute centrally to the planet's warming and impact the local ecologies through which things move. Logistics infrastructures take up space and can also draw further development to sensitive lands and waters. Expanding road networks in the Amazon, for instance, create direct deforestation but also spur settlement and industrialization, fragmenting vast natural environments. (15) Fossil fuel pipelines emit carbon when they work, and when they fail, leaks and spills can devastate ecologies. Ports are notorious for consuming energy resources and pumping toxins into surrounding air and waters. (16) The degrading of marine and terrestrial environments has pronounced impacts on Indigenous peoples, fishing and farming communities, and others who live off the land. Toxicity created by logistics infrastructures enters the body and becomes a major social determinant of health, for instance, elevating asthma rates in children living in the shadows of shipping terminals.

Chokepoints within Chokepoints: Maritime Security Transit Corridor

The 2021 obstruction of the Suez Canal by the Ever Given container ship was likely the most spectacular of global supply chain disruptions in recent years. The Canal carries 12% of global cargo traffic, thus the lodging of this massive ship across the narrow waterway for six days had ripple effects that reached into the lives of industries and consumers around the world. Despite the scale and visibility of this disruption, it is one among many in a critical maritime transit zone defined by myriad chokepoints (17). Beset by risks to smooth circulation, the entire waterway from the Suez Canal through the Bab Al Mandeb, the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden is newly governed as the 'Maritime Security Transit Corridor' (MSTC). Announced in 2017, the MSTC constitutes a zone of heightened patrols by a 34-nation naval partnership. Devised to protect merchant ships as they transit this vital shipping route, the corridor was assembled specifically in response to rising numbers of attacks by 'Somali pirates' in and around the Gulf of Aden. The MSTC aims to keep the flows of trade moving. As Dua writes, "policing for

pirates is not simply about finding pirates "out there," but "constructing a physical and social seascape within which good circulation (shipping) is separated from bad circulation (piracy)." (18)

The difference between good and bad circulation is contingent on perspective in a geopolitical context where accounts are not equally audible. Somali coastal residents have self-identified as 'coast guards' working to protect maritime waters and resources. In the midst of civil war and the state's incapacity to regulate the sea, foreign ships illegally dumped toxic waste and trawled Somali waters for fish, harming fishing grounds and the communities that relied on them. Initially with state sanction, Somali coastal villagers fished and enforced maritime licensing. But things changed when that sanction dissolved. As Dua argues, "'piracy' and 'legality' are loaded and polemical terms that legitimize certain actions while condemning others." Supply chain security initiatives led by international bodies and foreign states have served to criminalize Somali coastal communities while also impacting the livelihoods and supply chains of other actors in the region. (19) Global supply chain security regulations defined over the last 20 years like the International Ship and Port Security (ISPS) code, impose technical standards and surveillance technologies that favour corporate scale, design and practice. Expelled from ports certified under this code, locally powerful traders who cannot meet these criteria lose access to longstanding trade networks, fueling conflict between local elites and between local and transnational power brokers.

Labour

Supply chains create conflict when they impose dangerous conditions of work on logistics labour and when they try to pre-empt worker resistance. From spectacular actions like Korean welder Kim Jin-suk's 309-day occupation of a Hanjin gantry crane in 2011 to protest mass layoffs, to the everyday potential disruption associated with collective bargaining, logistics labour actions impact circulation through ports, railways, trucking systems, warehouses and other key nodes in global logistics systems. As Wypijewski suggests, "the people who move the world can also stop it." Yet, this capacity to disrupt is compromised by supply chain securitization, where workers are subject to new forms of surveillance precisely because of their disruptive power (20). In fact, labour actions are also often used as a metric for costing the impacts of other forms of disruption in industry analyses of threats to supply chain security (21).

Disciplining Logistics Labour: Dubai's Reach

In April 2022, 786 British workers were fired over Zoom in a display of labour relations that transgressed legality in the United Kingdom, but which is common practice in their employer's parent company's home state of Dubai. DP World subsidiary, P&O Ferries, replaced their entire UK-based crew with 3rd party contracted, low wage, foreign workers. The company acknowledged the trespass of British labour law, but insisted it was necessary because "no union could accept our proposals." A public inquiry found that the action was "necessary for the long-term financial health of the business," and dismissed any significant penalty (22)> Yet, these events created significant social conflict within Britain, perhaps especially among elites, whose allegiance to British workers and national legal frameworks were put in question.

DP World began as Dubai's public Port Authority, but as Jacobs & Hall (23) explain, has "pursued an aggressive strategy of horizontal integration, merging, acquiring and leasing port terminals well beyond their home base." This has resulted in 80 facilities in 40 countries, giving it reach that is redefining supply chain labour management. As Ziadah argues, "Dubai's repressive labour regime underpins its role in the logistics industry internationally." (24) She describes the racial and national hierarchies that define Dubai's workforce and the regime of labour management that includes banning unions and public protests, surveillance of workers through a population registry and the linking of legal residency status to employers through the kafala system. Together these constitute "a strict matrix of control that severely curtails labour contestation." This emphasis on labour discipline has also made Dubai a global leader in security. In a context where disruption is understood as a threat to the security of supply chains, labour actions figure as potent and perennial threats to resilient systems. Unprecedented experiments with master planned environments like 'Dubai Logistics City' emphasize surveillance and containment through physical and digital infrastructures. (25) Dubai's impact has been most profound in the United States, which in turn shapes global standards and regulations for container and port security. The fear of disrupted circulation prompts supply chain security policy to be replicated almost seamlessly across borders.

Conclusions

These brief case studies draw attention to diverse ways in which supply chains fuel transnational conflict. Perhaps most visible is the role of supply chains in producing or sustaining systemic injustice. Socio-technical systems can organize inequity and subject people and their environments to toxicity, dispossession, injury, and exclusion. Supply chain infrastructures can displace established communities and First peoples. Labour management within logistics systems is a frequent source of disruptive conflict as workers refuse the downward pressures on their working conditions and wages that characterize recent trends in this sector. Supply chains also create division and conflict through their impact on terrestrial and marine ecosystems and the livelihoods of the people that rely on them.

These cases also index how supply chains can fuel competition and conflict between powerful actors. Elites often struggle for control over circulation or to assert jurisdiction over the infrastructures and spaces that support it. Conflict can also emerge between elites with allegiance to different jurisdictions and sectors over competing paradigms of labour management and control, and efforts to secure supply chains can intensify this conflict rather than mediating it. For instance, transnational efforts to secure chokepoints in logistics systems can lead to the criminalization of local elites and their exclusion from supply chain spaces and infrastructures.

As supply chains become more elaborate in their organization and more essential to sustaining everyday life, the protection of their speed and integrity has taken on greater urgency. Disruption has reached into every sector that relies on systems of supply, making the resilience of supply chains almost common sense as a transnational public and private priority. Yet initiatives to protect these supply chains are often built upon an impoverished understanding of the context and causes of disruption. With the rise of a global field of Supply Chain Security over the last two decades, national governments and transnational governing bodies have worked to make the massive tentacles of transnational trade networks stable and free from disruption, yet in contexts where trade disruption is

an act of resistance to violence and dispossession, this emerging paradigm of security is ironically a major and sometimes invisible source of transnational violence. Much like the history of counterinsurgency warfare, organized efforts to 'secure supply chains' can fuel a continuum of violence and serve as hostile acts of aggression rather than outside efforts to mediate struggle.

Supply chains and their circulatory infrastructures are not just impacted by transnational conflict but are key in producing it. Historically and in the present, conflicts over lands, labour and ecologies have all been fueled by physical infrastructures of circulation and the management and surveillance systems organized through them. Looking at how supply chains cause conflict is vital for understanding global and local political life today, and for conceptualizing and responding to the systemic violence that is organized by material systems of trade and commerce. If economic life is to contribute to rather than corrupt the flourishing of human and other life on earth, emphasis must shift from the current focus on *the resilience of supply chains*, to instead centre on the health, sovereignty and livelihoods of the people implicated in and impacted by supply chains and the wider ecological integrity of circulatory systems.

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