

# **NEW ISSUES IN REFUGEE RESEARCH**

**Research Paper No. 254**

## **Refugees and the Rashaida: human smuggling and trafficking from Eritrea to Sudan and Egypt**

**Rachel Humphris**

Ph.D student  
COMPAS  
University of Oxford

Email: [rghumphris@gmail.com](mailto:rghumphris@gmail.com)

March 2013



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency

**Policy Development and Evaluation Service**

**Policy Development and Evaluation Service  
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
P.O. Box 2500, 1211 Geneva 2  
Switzerland**

**E-mail: [hqpd00@unhcr.org](mailto:hqpd00@unhcr.org)  
Web Site: [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)**

These papers provide a means for UNHCR staff, consultants, interns and associates, as well as external researchers, to publish the preliminary results of their research on refugee-related issues. The papers do not represent the official views of UNHCR. They are also available online under 'publications' at <[www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)>.

ISSN 1020-7473

## Introduction

Eritreans have been seeking asylum in east Sudan for more than four decades and the region now hosts more than 100,000 refugees<sup>1</sup>. East Sudan has also become a key transit region for those fleeing Eritrea. One route, from East Sudan to Egypt, the Sinai desert and Israel has gained increasing attention. According to UNHCR statistics, the number of Eritreans crossing the border from Sinai to Israel has increased from 1,348 in 2006 to 17,175 in 2011. Coupled with this dramatic growth in numbers, the conditions on this route have caused great concern. Testimonies from Eritreans have increasingly referred to kidnapping, torture and extortion at the hands of human smugglers and traffickers.

The smuggling route from Eritrea to Israel is long, complex and involves many different actors. As such, it cannot be examined in its entirety in a single paper. This analysis consequently focuses on the movement of people from Eritrea to east Sudan, and from east Sudan to Egypt. A review of testimonies from Eritrean refugees and key informant interviews provide an understanding of the situation from the available data.

The paper is structured as follows. Following brief contextual information the paper opens with an examination of motivations and aspirations to leave Eritrea based on testimonies collected by UNHCR and NGOs in Israel and Cairo. This includes an overview of the current situation in Eritrea and the importance of the Eritrean diaspora in decision making. Section two addresses the changing refugee dynamics in east Sudan and why Shagarab refugee camp has become predominantly a place of transit rather than refuge.

The following section examines the role of smugglers in east Sudan. One group of smugglers mentioned in many testimonies are from an ethnic group known as the Rashaida. In order to explain their ubiquity in testimonies this section places human smuggling in the context of wider processes of trade, underdevelopment in the region and Sudan-Eritrean relations. It argues that the actions of a small number of Rashaida involved in the process of smuggling Eritreans are one of the products, not causes, of insecurity in the region. However, this should not detract from or lessen the human rights violations taking place along the route. To conclude the challenges and possibilities for protection, assistance and security are reviewed.

This paper is not a definitive guide to the situation and some pertinent limitations should be stressed. The situation is highly complex, fluid and subject to rapid change. There is currently research being undertaken that will detail specific routes, locations and individuals involved whereas this paper will outline trends and historical developments from the available literature. It is also important to note the testimonies examined in this paper were collected from those who had reached NGOs and UNHCR offices in Egypt or Israel and had specific protection concerns.<sup>2</sup> There is therefore a bias within the testimonies and they do not reflect the myriad journeys and experiences of those who did not reach either of these destinations.

---

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted there is a discrepancy between Sudanese Commission of Refugees (COR) which calculates the number of Eritrean refugees is 333,500 out of a total refugee population of 615,340 and UNHCR which counts 103,798 Eritreans and a total of 178,308 refugees in the country. This has been attributed to COR including refugees living outside camps however it is unclear as to how this population has been counted. See Di Bartolomeo et al. 2012.

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR's information gathering from interviews focuses on a limited group, focused on abused women and men in need of special care. This is a small fraction of the Eritreans in Israel that successfully made it out of their country of origin with smugglers.

## Global context

There has been increasing and sustained attention to this issue over the past four years. A UN Monitoring Group on Eritrea and Somalia has been established and addresses smuggling and trafficking. An EU resolution was passed in March 2012 on human trafficking in Sinai (European Parliament 2012). The UN High Commissioner for Refugees visited Kassala earlier this year to highlight the issue (AFP 2012) coupled with increasing media reports providing global attention to the various points on the route (BBC 2012a; CNN; Independent).

The politics of the region adds to the complexity of the situation. The Sinai border area is highly sensitive from a political, strategic and security perspective. In addition to the national security concerns related to sensitive border areas, these complexities include Nile-Basin inter-governmental relations, Egyptian-Israeli bilateral relations including airstrikes in Sinai (BBC 2012c); the militarization of Sinai and its relationship to Gaza; continuing Eritrea-Ethiopia tensions; the social and economic marginalization of the Bedouin and Rashaida tribes and the wider regions in which they reside; and the lack of government control over parts of the smuggling route. To this must be added the reports of Eritrean Government involvement (UN Security Council Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea 2012: 20); the impact of Egypt's and Libya's 2011 revolutions; the tensions between Libya and the European Union regarding Mediterranean boat crossings (UNHCR 2012a) and the deteriorating conditions for asylum seekers in Israel.

Eritrea has tense relations with its neighbours which makes it difficult to address border crossings. Eritrea seceded from Ethiopia in 1991 and following seven years of good diplomatic relations, went to war over a border dispute.<sup>3</sup> There are ongoing border disputes with Djibouti (UN Security Council 2010; paras 11-18). Eritrea also exists under UN sanction due to its involvement in supporting the radical Islamist Al-Shabaab movement in Somalia.<sup>4</sup> Sudan is the exception with restoration of diplomatic ties in 2006.

In the reviewed literature there is very little information regarding smuggling journeys and no data are available to define specific changes in these routes in recent years. Eritrea and east Sudan have restricted the work of international organizations adding to the difficulty of verifying information (UN Human Rights Council 2010; para 75: Sudan Tribune 2012). With notable exceptions there has been a dearth of recent scholarly articles on east Sudan with much more focus on the south of the country (Pantuliano 2005; Young 2007, 2011).

As previously stated people from the Rashaida ethnic group are consistently mentioned in testimonies of Eritreans who have embarked on this journey. However there has previously been very little attempt to understand the dynamics of this group and their history and relationships within the region.<sup>5</sup> Also the involvement of large numbers of Eritreans in this process has also not been fully addressed. It has also been reported that human smuggling from Eritrea is one piece of a larger international, organized criminal network reaching from the ports of Eritrea to Sinai and beyond.

---

<sup>3</sup> Relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea are complex and beyond the scope of this paper. For an overview see Ambroso and Crisp 2011

<sup>4</sup> UN Security Council, Security Council resolution 2023 (2011) [on expansion of the mandate of the Monitoring Group re-established by resolution 2002 (2011)], 5 December 2011, S/RES/2023(2011)

<sup>5</sup> Rashaida are particularly difficult to approach due to their isolated position in the region. Knowledge is mainly based on an ethnography undertaken in 1978 – 1980 (Young, 1996). Notable work has been undertaken by Postma (forthcoming).

## Legal context

There are a number of legal instruments that protect the rights of migrants and refugees and impose a duty on states to respect those rights. The 1951 Geneva Convention defines a refugee as someone who has a well-founded fear of persecution. Almost all Eritreans are granted refugee protection due to the conditions within the country.<sup>6</sup> In addition, Eritreans who apply for asylum in another country are considered traitors and may be subject to life imprisonment or the death penalty. It is therefore impossible for many to return.<sup>7</sup>

The legal definition on smuggling is enshrined in the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air which entered into force 28 January 2004. It is used to supplement the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. The definition of smuggling states:

Smuggling of migrants shall mean the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident (UN General Assembly, 2000a).

The legal definition of human trafficking enshrined in the Palermo Protocol states ‘Trafficking in persons’ shall mean:

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 (UN General Assembly, 2000b).

Abduction is distinguished from smuggling or trafficking to describe a situation where there was no initial motivation on the part of the individual transported to move. In practice the distinction between smuggling, trafficking and abduction can become blurred particularly due to insecurity and conditions on the route. For example, some Eritreans may have an initial intention to leave however could quickly ‘lose control’ of what was happening to them.<sup>8</sup> Different practices of coercion and the informal nature of the movement also adds to this complexity.

---

<sup>6</sup> See UN High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Eritrea, April 2009.

<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/49de06122.html>

<sup>7</sup> Article 37(3) of the Proclamation on National Service No. 82/1995, 23 October 1995 <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3dd8d3af4.html>; Articles 296 to 302 of the Eritrea Transitional Penal Code, Proclamation No. 158 of 1957), 23 July 1957 <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/49216a0a2.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Egyptian NGO, 2 August 2012

## Secondary movement

There are a number of destinations that Eritreans use to reach safety. Yemen and Libya are both destinations for Eritrean asylum seekers.<sup>9</sup> Egypt has also increasingly become a destination with numbers steadily growing throughout the last decade. However, NGOs report that due to the harsh conditions in Egypt many Eritreans have tried to travel to Israel (Brown 2004). Recently, Egypt, and more specifically Sinai, has become a transit region for migrants travelling to Israel whereas earlier migrants to Israel had often lived in Cairo for many years.

For those who do not pass through Cairo but travel directly through Sinai there are a wide variety of possible outcomes. One scenario includes being caught at the border, placed in one of the detention centres that run from Aswan through to Al Arish and subsequently being deported either to Ethiopia or Eritrea. Those who manage to traverse the Sinai (some may be held captive and subject to torture and extortion<sup>10</sup>) may be shot or seriously wounded at the border with Israel. There are also those who are successful and make it across the border to Israel where migrants face increasingly harsh conditions.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the dangers, the popularity of this route is indicated by the numbers of Eritreans recorded crossing the border with Israel. The Population, Immigration and Border Authority of Israel states 59,858 asylum seekers entered Israel between January 2006 and March 2012. Of these 57 percent (33,912) were from Eritrea.<sup>12</sup> Smuggling of Eritreans through Sinai to Israel started in 2006 (Afeef 2009). There were 1,348 applications for asylum in Israel in 2006. By 2008 this had increased to 7,700 and by the end of 2010 almost 1,000 people were crossing the Sinai to Israel per month. The refugee context in Israel is important for explaining why Eritreans continue to use this route despite numerous awareness campaigns of the dangers by UNHCR and the Eritrean diaspora (ICER 2011).

It has become known that employment can be gained in Israel and, although the journey is arduous and involves a dangerous border crossing between Israel and Egypt (Amnesty International 2008, Human Rights Watch 2008), people may become desperate and believe this is a better option than the restrictive policies in Ethiopia, Sudan and Yemen. The swift rise in numbers has led to some particular changes in Israeli law concerning asylum seekers and refugees resulting in an increasingly harsh asylum system (Perry 2011).

The most fundamental change occurred on January 10, 2012 when the amendment to the 1954 Prevention of Infiltration Law the Israeli Parliament was passed (Human Rights Watch 2012b). All irregular border-crossers are now defined as 'infiltrators'. There is no distinction between refugees, undocumented migrants or those with an intention to harm Israel's security (Hotline for migrant workers 2012a). All infiltrators can be detained by the Israeli authorities for three years before their deportation except for unaccompanied minors.

In addition, a series of deterrence measures have been implemented including a fence along the Sinai-Israeli border which is due to be completed in October 2012 and building a 10,000-

---

<sup>9</sup> UNHCR Online Population Statistics database

<sup>10</sup> The grave acts occurring against Eritrean refugees in Sinai are not the focus of this paper. For detailed information see Amnesty International 2008., Fishbein 2010., Hotline for Migrant Workers 2011., Human Rights Watch 2008., Linders 2011., Mekonnen and Estefanos 2011., Physicians for Human Rights 2011., van Reizen et al. 2012 Weldehaimnot 2011.,

<sup>11</sup> Interview with UNHCR Cairo 8 August 2012

<sup>12</sup> Data provided by UNHCR Israel

person detention center in the Negev (Hotline for migrant workers 2012b). The most recent reports indicate that there has been a drop in border crossings from 1,706 in May to 289 in July 2012.<sup>13</sup> However it is too early to conclude whether this trend will continue. It is unclear whether the decrease in Eritreans entering Israel represents fewer people undertaking the route. Due to the speed within which the decrease in numbers has occurred this would seem unlikely.

## **Motivations to flee Eritrea**

This section will detail some of the many reasons why large numbers of Eritreans are forced to flee and seek a life outside their country of origin. Eritrea has a turbulent history. In 1952, after 10 years of British colonial rule, Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia. A decade later, Ethiopia annexed Eritrea as one of its provinces which led to the Eritrean struggle and a destructive war lasting from 1961 to 1991. After its *de facto* secession from Ethiopia in May 1991 (ratified in a referendum held in 1993 in which 99.8 percent of its inhabitants opted for full independence from Ethiopia) the Eritrean Government has remained in power since that time and has indefinitely suspended presidential and legislative elections.<sup>14</sup>

According to an official UNHCR position paper in 2004 ‘the human rights situation in Eritrea has seriously deteriorated...with regard to the treatment of opposition political groups and movements, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, arbitrary detention...and the treatment of draft evaders. There is an absence of civil society, political opposition or independent media’ (UNHCR 2004).<sup>15</sup>

Conscription is also a major component of the Government’s policy under the 1999 National Service Proclamation (NSP) which was extended in May 2002 under the Warsai-Yikaalo Development Campaign (WYDC). There is no specific definition of this campaign and no official figures regarding how many people are in active service.<sup>16</sup> However high school children must undertake one year of military school at the Sawa training camp to be able to complete their course of studies. Those formally demobilized remain members of the National Reserve Army and are frequently called up for military duty, training or work service.

There are a number of recurring reasons provided by asylum seekers to explain why they left the country. Many state the lack of political freedom, educational opportunities or freedom of movement. The most common motivation recorded by Müller in her study of Eritreans in Tel Aviv was ‘being free’ (Müller 2012, 455). This seems to refer to the restrictive and difficult conditions that many Eritreans face in their everyday lives and particularly the stipulations imposed by WYDC.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Figures gained from Saharonim prison authorities. The figure for July represents those that were registered on 17 July 2012

<sup>14</sup> See UN High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Eritrea, April 2009.

<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/49de06122.html>

<sup>15</sup> Eritrea scored the lowest globally in the Press Freedom Index between 2010 and 2012. See Reporters without Borders [http://en.rsf.org/spip.php?page=classement&id\\_rubrique=1034](http://en.rsf.org/spip.php?page=classement&id_rubrique=1034)

<sup>16</sup> For the consequences of the campaign for Eritreans see Hirt 2010 and Kibreab 2009

<sup>17</sup> For more information on conditions in Eritrea see UN High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Eritrea, April 2009. <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/49de06122.html>

## **The Eritrean diaspora**

It is difficult to get a precise picture of the Eritrean diaspora. Movement of people from Eritrea was not only integral to its formation but is one of the defining features of its survival. Diaspora remittances helped fund the war for independence and have accounted for more than 30 percent of Eritrea's GDP in every year since it was achieved.

The two percent income tax levied is still regarded as a duty at least by those who have been in the diaspora for a long time.<sup>18</sup> These diasporic connections have been instrumental in the motivations of those inside the country to migrate. Many of those living in Eritrea have family members in the diaspora who assist the movement, providing information and resources to those who are residing within the country.<sup>19</sup>

## **The migration decision**

There are myriad ways in which individuals plan to flee Eritrea. It is important to note that it is difficult to leave the country. There are also very limited options for those seeking safety outside Eritrea. As has been mentioned, the main countries of flight for Eritreans are Sudan, Ethiopia and Yemen. These countries have strict encampment policies (Yemen has also arrested and detained Eritreans<sup>20</sup>) and provide severely limited opportunities.

There seems to have been a change over time regarding how those fleeing Eritrea plan for their lives outside the country. According to reports from a small number of interviewed refugees in December 2010 many wanted to find safety in Sudan.<sup>21</sup> However by July 2012 around half of the interviewees made a conscious decision followed by proactive plans to come to Israel while still living in Eritrea. This cannot be considered representative however it points towards a trend elaborated by one Eritrean man in Tel Aviv who said he would “die or succeed, but it was worth the risk. In Israel they treat you like a human; our government does not have even basic rights.” (Furst and Jacobsen 2011: 7)

Some decide to travel to Israel after spending a period of time in Sudan, usually in Shagarab refugee camp:

I'm Christian, single and 23-years-old. I arrived in Israel from Eritrea on November 23, 2010. I got to Israel after eight months of military service in Eritrea, during which I realized what my life would be like – no freedom, no salary, no chance of living in my home. In January 2010 I fled the army and crossed the border to Sudan. There I went to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and lived in the Shagarep Refugee Camp for ten months. Life in the camp was hard, and when I heard about the option of reaching Israel, I decided to try my luck. (Hotline for Migrant Workers 2011: 25).

---

<sup>18</sup> UN Security Council, 6674th Meeting SC/10471 <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2011/sc10471.doc.htm>

<sup>19</sup> A review of the unique characteristics of the Eritrean diaspora is beyond the scope of this study, however for an overview please see Müller 2012 and Kibreab 2007

<sup>20</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR Global Report 2008, Yemen, June 2009, p4 <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4bd800b81f.html>

<sup>21</sup> Interviews collected by UNHCR Israel



It is widely regarded that most Eritreans are aware of the dangers regarding the journey to Israel and the abusive processes in Sinai. A radio programme<sup>22</sup> promotes awareness of the situation and reportedly almost all Eritreans in the diaspora encourage their family and friends not to make the journey to Israel or Libya.<sup>23</sup> There has also been a degree of awareness-raising within refugee camps and this is expected to increase in the coming months.<sup>24</sup> Therefore it seems unlikely that those with relatives abroad or a connection to the diaspora would be unaware of the dangers. Paradoxically, those with family members abroad perhaps have a stronger motivation to leave the country.

Reportedly, many Eritreans know the stories but do not believe they will be caught in the hands of the 'bad smugglers'. For every story of torture there are still many success stories of Eritreans who have made the journey.<sup>25</sup> It is also unclear how this knowledge affects migration decisions particularly when situations are desperate and Eritrean refugees are faced with a very limited options for living a safe and secure life. This desperation can be gauged by the number of women who take a contraceptive injection prior to embarking on the journey in case they suffer rape.<sup>26</sup>

### **East Sudan: from refuge to transit**

East Sudan is made up of the states of Red Sea, Kassala and Al-Gedaref<sup>27</sup> and has particular characteristics that help shape the dynamics of mixed movements.<sup>28</sup> Relationships between Eritrea and Sudan are currently amicable. However the relationship is tenuous and complex. Those within the region see the Eritrean Government as playing a large influencing role over the politics in east Sudan and vice versa. The Government of Sudan allegedly provided support to Islamic elements amongst the Eritrean youth in refugee camps in the 1990s. Similarly the Eritrean Government supported opposition groups to destabilize east Sudan. This is an example of what Cliffe has called 'mutual interference' where governments routinely support the dissidents in neighbouring states and use these dissidents to pursue their own interests (Cliffe 1999). As Young notes the area has hardly been peaceful since the 1961 Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), originally composed mainly of Muslim lowlanders, launched a secessionist insurrection starting the war for independence.

Small numbers of Eritreans crossed the border to east Sudan at this time however the numbers dramatically increased due to escalation of warfare with Ethiopia, famine, forced conscription and fighting between the ELF and a new secessionist movement, comprised of radicalized highland people, calling themselves the Eritrean People's Liberation Front

---

<sup>22</sup> 'Voices of Eritrean Refugees' Radio Erena ([www.arena.org](http://www.arena.org))

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Meron Estafanos 18 July 2012

<sup>24</sup> Ethiopia Refugee Update June 2012 UNHCR Ethiopia <http://www.unhcr.org/4fffe9db9.html> [accessed 26 July 2012]

<sup>25</sup> Interview with UNHCR Israel 2 August 2012 and Karin Keil, Hotline for Migrant Workers 11 July 2012

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Karin Keil, Hotline for Migrant Workers 11 July 2012. Based on referrals for gynaecological treatments and pregnancy terminations arranged by PHR-Israel in 2010, more than 600 women suffered sexual assault or rape.

<sup>27</sup> See Pantuliano, 2005 for economic and political overview of the region

<sup>28</sup> These states are among the poorest parts of the country and are characterized by low levels of rainfall, chronic food insecurity, poor development indicators and limited support from central government. There have been recent initiatives to address the impact of refugees on the surrounding community in East Sudan such as the SOLSES project. <http://www.unhabitat.org/content.asp?cid=7175&catid=235&typeid=13> It is also reported that the Commission for Refugees in Sudan has also expressed plans to close Shagarab and establish a new camp along with 3 screening centres and 2 RSD centres.

(EPLF). The EPLF subsequently dominated and intensified its struggle against Ethiopia (Ambroso and Crisp 2011).

It is within this context characterised by decades of struggle for independence and forced conscription that thousands of Eritrean refugees started seeking sanctuary in east Sudan.<sup>29</sup> By the end of the 1980s there were 800,000 Ethiopians and Eritrean refugees (still at this time Ethiopians) in Sudan.<sup>30</sup> Many were Muslim lowlanders, from the Beni Amer ethnic group which straddles the Eritrean-Sudanese border. Between 1993 and 2004 around 118,000 Eritreans of all ethnic groups voluntarily repatriated from Sudan<sup>31</sup> or left for Khartoum or elsewhere. Therefore over 90 percent of the remaining camp population stems from the western lowlands in Eritrea and are very similar to the local population in east Sudan (Ek 2009).

Ninety-seven percent of Eritrean asylum seekers who arrive in east Sudan are recognized as refugees. The few Eritreans whose claims are rejected are normally allowed to stay on humanitarian grounds. While Sudan has maintained a generous open door policy towards Eritrean refugees it is a difficult protection environment. No refugee has the right to free movement within the country. Controls have become increasingly strict as a result of political tension following the separation of South Sudan; improved relations between Sudan and Eritrea; and a reinforced effort to prevent trafficking and smuggling. UNHCR estimates that approximately 3,000 persons enter Sudan from Eritrea every month. Of those on average 2,000 persons seek asylum in Sudan and are subsequently hosted in Shagarab camp located near the town of Kassala.

Due to its longevity Shagarab refugee camp has developed into a lively market and it is common for the local population to trade and socialize inside the camp. Refugees with social networks in Sudan may be able to bypass the regulations imposed by the Government, acquire citizenship, ID cards, travel permits, live in towns, and sometimes gain access to higher education. However that may not be the case for the majority of the refugee population now leaving Eritrea. Those now leaving the country are young, Christian, Tigrinya and from urban areas. Much like young Sudan-born refugees, the new arrivals are generally unwilling to remain in an enclosed camp setting without access to higher education or employment. However unlike some Sudan-born refugees they may not have the social networks enabling them to access education providing an additional reason to risk onward movement.

In some cases, particularly journalists, high ranking officers and political opponents, the camps' close proximity to the Eritrean border causes further anxiety and need for immediate secondary movement. This is increasingly pertinent when relationships between Eritrea and Sudan are amicable and where the deportations of Eritreans in Sudan over the border are becoming increasingly common (Amnesty International 2012). Furthermore, safety in the camp is reported to be an immediate concern of many 'this is very much a risk everyone is told to avoid: stories of people being abducted from the safety of their houses, let alone newcomers sleeping outside...' (Mehari 2010). This may be another reason East Sudan is increasingly a transit region. Reports of human rights violations in Sudan may also be a motivation for swift onward movement<sup>32</sup>.

---

<sup>29</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of National Service and WYDC see Kibreab 2009 and Bozzini 2011

<sup>30</sup> UNHCR Online Population Statistics database

<sup>31</sup> UNHCR Online Population Statistics database

<sup>32</sup> For documented human rights abuses in Sudan see U.S. Department of State 2011 and Human Rights Watch 2009

More than 75 percent of the new arrivals therefore remain in Shagarab camp for only a matter of weeks, in most cases just long enough to receive refugee documentation from COR. The country's strict encampment policy causes new arrivals to seek onward transportation offered by smugglers.

### **The role of smugglers in primary movement**

As outlined in the previous section movement is deeply entrenched in the history of Eritrea. Due to the tight exit controls that have been in place in the state since its inception, Eritreans have developed multiple routes and strategies to leave the country. Not all of these routes involve smugglers and it should be well-noted only a small number of smugglers commit abuses. Furthermore due to the restrictive regimes in Eritrea and the governance of refugees prevailing in Sudan many smugglers act as an important link for Eritreans to flee to safety.

Sudan's eastern border with Eritrea extends over 660 km with legal entry points at only three locations (Awad, Lafa, and Gergif). Not all of those making the journey use smugglers. Most of those who live in the lowlands, in particular those who live relatively close to the border reportedly trek the whole distance until they reach the Sudanese territories. Sawa, the military training camp, is 18 miles away from the Sudanese border and some may use this as an opportunity to evade national service. For example 30 percent of teachers assigned to Sawa reportedly use this route to leave the country (Müller 2012: 458). Those travelling from further afield may have a permit to travel by bus closer to the border areas such as Tesseney or Golluj while others walk the whole distance (reports suggest from as far as Keren, Asmara and Ghindae).

Where smugglers are used to cross the border, people from the Rashaida ethnic group are mentioned with particular frequency. This leads to a concerning tendency in the literature to brand all Rashaida as involved in committing abuses against Eritreans fleeing to safety. It is necessary to stress only a small number of people from the Rashaida ethnic group are involved in this type of smuggling and an even smaller number commit abuses<sup>33</sup>. An explanation of their history and way of life indicates why they might be so ubiquitous in testimonies and have gained this particular reputation in the area. It also illustrates how this group is not a cause of the problem (and could potentially be stopped if there was the political will) but more a logical participant given their particular history, skills and lack of other economic opportunities in the region.

Thought to have originated from Saudi Arabia in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>34</sup> the Rashaida, as late arrivers to the continent, did not have access to regular water sources.<sup>35</sup> They became nomadic camel pastoralists confined to the more arid, inner areas of east Sudan but used their connections with Gulf States and later with Egypt<sup>36</sup> for trade and employment. Those that

---

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Metje Postma June 5 2012

<sup>34</sup> This is a view that is now propagated by some Rashaida namely, Mubrouk Mubarak Salim, from the Rashaida tribe he is the leader of a political opposition group the Rashaida Free Lions. In 1996 Mabrouk Mubarak Salim had published a study, on the genealogy, history and 'folklore' of the Rashaida: *The Rashaayda, the descendants of the Abbs, between past and present*. According to research undertaken by Postma, Rashaida are aware of this book even though many of them cannot read. Interestingly according to Postma, Rashaida can relate their distant history but were hesitant to relate their more recent migration history to the continent.

<sup>35</sup> This has had long standing implications as local administration in east Sudan is based on land ownership.

<sup>36</sup> The only camel meat market in the region is situated in Egypt and therefore when there was a surplus of camels families grouped together to make the journey and share the risk of travelling from the Red Sea to Cairo. Other goods would be brought back to sell in the markets in Sudan.

remained on the coast traded Sudanese goods across the Red Sea. They have been described as the 'axis of movement all the way from Tesseney to Hailaib'.<sup>37</sup>

Labour migration to the Gulf beginning in the mid-70s, *de facto* freedom from conscription in Eritrea and their sophisticated trading and smuggling networks have allowed some to become highly self-sufficient and independent.<sup>38</sup> They have maintained a way of life despite draughts, conflict and political repression. Rashaida are endogamous, the majority are isolated, and their predominantly nomadic lifestyle has not previously emphasized the need for education.

For the most part the Rashaida have avoided fighting in the many conflicts<sup>39</sup> that have beleaguered the region and avoided affiliation to any political group.<sup>40</sup> They are easily identifiable by their appearance and are usually heavily armed. Rashaida are mostly nomadic and therefore reside for varying amounts of time in many different areas of east Sudan. There are increasing numbers of Rashaida located in an area to the west of Kassala called Mastora with smaller numbers reported in Gederef, and the coast of the Red Sea around Port Sudan.<sup>41</sup> They also reside in the border area with Eritrea and are active in smuggling goods between the two countries.<sup>42</sup>

The small numbers of Rashaida who are smuggling Eritreans are not the only group involved. Eritreans from ethnic groups other than Rashaida have an important role acting as brokers. Some of the brokers have links with those Rashaida who are acting as smugglers inside Eritrea:

Smugglers take you from Asmara and then drop you a few kilometers before Massawa (port in Eritrea). Then a Rashaida guy takes you from there at 10pm. Then you walk all night until 9 in the morning. By that time you will leave Massawa to your right and get to the middle of the desert where no one can spot the Rashaida because they are supposed to come there on a pick-up truck.<sup>43</sup>

While some arrangements seem very informal, other elements of the route seem to be part of a highly organized criminal network. The Bedouin in Sinai have been reported to ask for ransom money to be deposited in many countries throughout the world, with brokers complicit in each country<sup>44</sup> indicating a highly organized and large global network.

---

<sup>37</sup> I am grateful to Sara Pantuliano for this phrase

<sup>38</sup> There are three groups of Rashaida who reside in different areas of east Sudan and west Eritrea. Different families differ in their adherence to traditional values and have differing levels of political affiliation and power.

<sup>39</sup> During British administration of the region the Rashaayda were allowed to continue their trading activities in return for non-interference. This immunity from government interference seems to have continued.

<sup>40</sup> With the exception of the formation of the Rashaida Free Lions headed by Mabrouk Mubarak Salim

<sup>41</sup> Despite building houses, for the majority of the year Rashaida do not live in them. Either the women are left behind if the man is in Saudi Arabia or the whole family is absent and is travelling. Men are definitely very mobile and will be absent during rainy season (from May/June to October, however this is becoming more unpredictable because of climate change). More often than not they are considered storage spaces. Interview with Metje Postma June 5 2012

<sup>42</sup> Number of Rashaida are notoriously difficult to gauge. The leader of the Free Lions Mabrouk Mubarak Salim believes there are half a million Rashaayda in Sudan. However it is more likely to be around 50,000. Metje Postma June 5 2012

<sup>43</sup> Eritrean Youth that fled from Eritrea in 2010. Interview with Metje Postma June 5 2012

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Meron Estefanos 18 July 2012

Smuggling people seems to be just one piece of a wider smuggling network that extends from Eritrea to Sinai and beyond. One testimony states:

On my way to Israel in 2011, I spent 20 days in the Sinai. I worked as a translator for the smuggler Abu Ahmed. Abu Ahmed is the boss of his family of smugglers. He brings people from Libya and Sudan to Israel and charges them \$15,000 each, no more, no less. He also smuggles weapons. The way he brings them is through Sudan but their journey starts in a place called Allai, in the highlands of Eritrea. From Allai they are taken to Tesseney, which is the exit town of Eritrea.

From Tesseney they go to Wadi Sharifay in Sudan, which used to be a refugee camp. From Wadi Sharifay to Sitau Ashrin; which is also a refugee camp... The main man who is in charge of all of this is Manjus. The other two are the ones working. They bring the weapons in their cars to Wadi Sharifay. Then Manjus calls the Rashaida and they come and there is a handover — the smugglers take the weapons. These are the same gangs that smuggle people. (UN Security Council Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea 2012: 20).<sup>45</sup>

A further concern is the increasing reports of abductions from within Eritrea by some Rashaida who live in the border area. These are small in number and difficult to verify. However one testimony from Tel Aviv states that four of his brothers and cousins were kidnapped by Rashaida from Forto Sawa (Eritrea) on their way to work in a farm. Another youth whose brother is an Israeli resident was kidnapped from Gebmaica (Eritrea) on his way to Sudan. All were asked to pay \$4,000 for safe exit to their destination. However, after paying the amount demanded they were sold to another smuggler who asked a further \$30,000 for their safe conduct to Israel (ICER 2012).

There are also many reports of brokers operating at many different points within Eritrea. ‘There are brokers everywhere inside Eritrea so there is no problem – you will know someone who knows someone – these networks have been established for a very long time’.<sup>46</sup> Müller notes from a recent visit to Eritrea that ‘there is a significant group of young people on the streets of Asmara, who are well heeled and spending money freely with no apparent danger of being sent to Sawa...their existence is a visible sign of how certain shadowy networks dominated either by the PFDJ, the military or a combination of both, demarcate spheres of political and social life’ (Müller 2012: 460).

There are also some reports of families in the diaspora who pay a broker to smuggle a family member out of Eritrea only to be told that the person has subsequently been kidnapped by a member of a Rashaida group who is operating as a smuggler.<sup>47</sup> They believe the brokers are complicit in abduction as they always manage to avoid being caught themselves. It is reported that if there was the political will the particular Rashaida traders who are involved in these processes could be stopped. However, as the main movers of goods and hard currency within Eritrea, the political will might be lacking.

---

<sup>45</sup> It should be noted that these reports are strenuously denied by Tesfamariam Tekeste Debbas, Eritrea's ambassador to Israel. Avi Granot, head of the Africa division in Israel's foreign ministry, also denied any knowledge of Eritrean arms entering Israel (Sydney Morning Herald 2012)

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Jemal Ferah 27 July 2012

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Meron Estefanos 18 July 2012

## **The role of smugglers in secondary movement**

East Sudan is not the final country of destination for the majority Eritreans currently leaving the country. The motivations of Eritreans to flee and the changing demographics of those crossing the border have already been established. However there are a number of different routes Eritreans utilize in order to leave Sudan. Each route involves different levels of awareness and volition at each stage. Also changes can occur many times along the route, with an individual moving across migration categories.

### **At the border**

UNHCR Kassala stated they receive between 30 and 50 cases a month of people claiming that they had been kidnapped at the border<sup>48</sup>. These individuals have been caught by the police. Claims of kidnapping have only emerged slowly over the past five years and ransoms have steadily increased with amounts up to \$16,000<sup>49</sup>. The amount demanded continues to increase.

Some of those who are abducted reported they were given the option of release in Sudan or can 'chose' to be taken to Sinai for a smaller amount of money. This is usually a false promise as even if the ransom is paid for release in Sudan, individuals are nevertheless forcefully taken to Sinai. However this depends on the particular smuggler (Fishbein 2010).

The purpose of the capture is to extort money as quickly as possible. If an individual cannot raise the funds they may be sold to another group in Sudan or taken to Sinai:

People crossing the border on foot are especially vulnerable to the very mobile, organized and flexible Rashaida...They would offer to give them a ride or force them on board their pick-ups. Hoping to find people that would travel to Israel, they subject people to interrogations and extreme tortures until they would be 'forced to plan' to go to Israel (Mehari 2010).

Consistently NGOs and UNHCR offices in Israel and Cairo report a small number of testimonies that state there was no intention to travel to Sinai and that abduction had taken place around the border area. Kidnapping from the Eritrea-Sudan border was reported by four of the 70 individuals interviewed by UNHCR Israel between September and December 2011. They claimed that they were kidnapped shortly after crossing to Sudan while they were making their way to Shagarab refugee camp. Also, more than half those identified during the March visit to Saharonim detention centre claimed they had not planned to travel to Israel, but rather to the Sudan area (Shagarab refugee camp, Khartoum, or South Sudan).<sup>50</sup> It should be noted that this is not representative of Eritreans in Israel however does indicate that these actions are taking place.

It seems as though the small number of Rashaida smugglers who engage in this practice are becoming less wary about their activities and this may be adding to the ubiquity with which they are mentioned in testimonies. Recently there are increasing reports that asylum seekers are taken whilst en route to Shagarab refugee camp. For example there was recently an incident in the south between the border and Shagarab camp. A COR bus was taking between

---

<sup>48</sup> Interview with UNHCR Kassala 28 June 2012

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Natalie Smith 19 November 2012

<sup>50</sup> Interview with UNHCR Israel 2 August 2012

10-15 asylum seekers. A group of heavily armed Rashaida approached the bus and took everyone on board apart from one boy.<sup>51</sup>

I did not plan to come to Israel. I left Eritrea in November 2011 for Khartoum, Sudan, where my aunt lives. I planned to work with my aunt. But I could not reach Khartoum, because in Kassala, Sudan, the rashayda (smugglers) kidnapped me. They took me to the desert, where they held me for a month. The smugglers called my aunt and demanded that she pay \$10,000 to release me to Khartoum. My aunt told them that she would pay them once they brought me to Khartoum. The smugglers did not take me to Khartoum; they kept me there and raped me. After a month, the smugglers told me that they were transferring me to Khartoum, but they lied and transferred me to Sinai'.<sup>52</sup>

### **In Shagarab**

From the available literature it is not possible to accurately evaluate all of the differing reasons why an individual embarked on a particular journey from Shagarab refugee camp and how they became involved with a specific group of smugglers. However there are some characteristics of the refugee camp and related processes that are important to highlight.

One important feature is the role of the security and border forces. From testimonies regarding experiences in Shagarab there seems to be very close relationships between some Rashaida acting as smugglers, security, border guards and some of those working within the camp. The threat of being abducted or sold to smugglers from within the camp is feared by many.

Testimonies also state the involvement of both Eritrean and Sudanese military and border patrols in the smuggling route.

I'm 21-years-old. I worked my entire life as a shepherd in my village in Eritrea, and I never went to school. In April 2010 I left Eritrea for Sudan, hoping to find a good job. I didn't plan to come to Israel. I hadn't heard of this country when I was in Eritrea. When I crossed the border between Eritrea and Sudan, a soldier caught me and demanded money. I had no money, and that soldier transferred me to Bedouin smugglers, who transferred me and many other people to Sinai. (Hotline for Migrant Workers 2011: 18).

It was also noted by Pantuliano (2005) in her interviews with local youth in Kassala and Port Sudan that some government members might be trying to ignite tribal tensions along the border to their advantage. This was particularly in reference to assistance offered to pro-government Beni Amer militia to patrol the border. This group of Beni Amer is of Eritrean origin and is now living in Sudan. This might have repercussions for their relationships with other Beni Amer groups in Sudan and how the border between Eritrea and Sudan is controlled.

---

<sup>51</sup> Interview with UNHCR Kassala 28 June 2012

<sup>52</sup> Female, from Eritrea, arrived to Israel in February 2012, was kidnapped to Sinai and held there for three months, paid \$3,000 for his release (interview conducted by the Administrative Tribunal in the Saharonim prison in February 2012)

A second important feature of the process is the involvement of Eritrean brokers to arranging onward movement from within the camp:

Many of those that decide to stay in Shegerab for a longer time are engaged in the business of trafficking people out of Eritrea to Khartoum or Israel. In fact, the scale of this business astonished me. Most of the people that stayed here over 6 months and that I spoke to are one way or the other engaged in this business mostly as middlemen (Mehari 2010).

The economic problems people face in the camp are stated as one reason why some people become involved as brokers: 'mostly these people do this as a temporary solution to their financial problems in Shegerab. Yet, after a couple of rounds, few quit the business' (Mehari 2010). Brokers may perform many different tasks and have differing levels of involvement in the onward journey:

Those from the border regions, with knowledge of all routes and with personal networks may work as smugglers and then sell the 'clients' on to the Rashaida or other traffickers. They are able to speak both fluent Tigrinya and Arabic. They work as the middle men in the sense that they scout for people wanting to travel to Khartoum, to Cairo or to Israel in the camps. They gather the people for the trips and sell them on to the Rashaida after exiting the camps. They may simply also give people information on when the next car will be leaving the camp (Smith 2011).

Furthermore, life in Shagarab refugee camp is characterized by ethnic divides. Different ethnicities are thought to have different aspirations. One testimony states that people from Akele-Guzai region are thought to have strong connections abroad and to be most likely going to Israel. Those from Maekel region are believed to be going to Europe, while those from Gash Barka are simply associated with smuggling people out of Eritrea and settling in Sudan (Mehari 2010). This has important implications as facilitators in the route are usually of the same ethnicity as those embarking on the movement (Hamood 2006: 50). It has also been reported that Eritreans seeking safety in Ethiopia arrange their onward transport with someone who speaks the same language, comes from a similar area in Eritrea and is persuasive regarding the potential opportunities in different towns and cities.<sup>53</sup>

Testimonies state they have been told they are being taken to Khartoum or other Sudanese towns for the purposes of finding work and money is not demanded immediately. Refugees interviewed in detention in Israel by UNHCR seemed to think the smugglers operating from within the refugee camp were more trustworthy. New arrivals are reported to be particularly vulnerable due to the disorientating nature of arriving and existing in a camp environment.

### **The route to Sinai**

Although the locations and way Eritreans enter the route differ, the route through Sudan to the Egyptian border seems similar. Smugglers gather people in groups and then make the journey when they have the amount of people they require.

---

<sup>53</sup> Report from UNHCR Protection assistant in Ethiopia Melaku Gutema December 2010.



When one lands on an agreement with one group (of brokers) he or she is made to stay in one particular place, mostly in houses in the outskirts of Shegerab, along with fellow travelers. When enough people are gathered, they are then handed over to the Rashaida who in turn transport them to Kassala. Finally a convoy of 7-10 pickups – each carrying around 15 people... 4 fully armed vehicles at the front and back of the convoy set on a 4-7 days journey to Sinai and Israel (Mehari 2010).

The most common place where people are kept is Mastora, an increasingly developing area of west Kassala home to a primarily Rashaida community (Smith 2011). Other locations are further along the main highway between Khartoum and Kassala. Halfa, Al Jedida, and Port Sudan are mentioned but with less frequency (ICER 2012).

The Rashaida put us into a building, where we stayed for 17 days, while others were brought. Everyone was then put into 6 open trucks. It was to take a day-and-a-half to cross the desert to Egypt. But it took 2 additional days, because the trucks broke down – and they would get bogged down in the sand, and the refugees would have to push the truck to free it. After getting loose, any refugee that didn't make it back into the truck right away was left behind in the desert. At the Sudan-Egypt border, the Rashaida turned the refugees over to Egyptian Bedouins in exchange for payment (Free Eritrea 2011).

The group I tried to reach Israel with had four trucks, with 25 Eritreans on each one. There were 14 women and four children in the group. The journey from Sudan to the Sinai Desert took one week. Every night the smugglers stopped the cars and told us to sleep somewhere. The smugglers had weapons and would forcefully cover us. If we moved they would beat us. They were violent before we reached the Sinai Desert. (Hotline for Migrant Workers 2011: 20).

The journey to Sinai is long and difficult and could not be undertaken lightly. In addition to the harsh conditions faced by those travelling through the desert with inadequate food and water many state severe forms of harassment, extortion and torture on the route through Sudan. Women are also often victims of rape and sexual assault.

One concerning trend is reports of abuse similar to those taken place in Sinai to Eritreans held in east Sudan. More concerning are reports that when exact locations and people are identified to the police, no action is taken (Smith, 2011). According to UNHCR Israel, the first documented abuse of this type was recorded in Saharonim detention centre in February 2012.

The IC was put into the back of the car and driven to a compound in the wilderness. He was tied with chains to a tree, arms stretched and legs clipped with another set of chains. He was given some water and little food. Every day, he was beaten and tortured. Some the men used their knives to dig at his flesh or cut any part of his body. His clothes were filled with blood (Smith, 2011).

## **Possibilities and challenges for protection**

There are many separate issues that make protection for Eritreans on this route difficult. It is evident that the route operating within Eritrea and stretching to Sinai and beyond is composed of groups of networks containing actors with varying levels of organization and experience and using different levels of coercion and violence. There are some members of the network, such as those acting as guides along the Eritrean-Sudanese border or operating as brokers inside refugee camps who are using the smuggling route as an opportunistic and short term strategy to make money. Similarly it is reported there are varying levels of experience and organization within the groups of Rashaida who engage in taking Eritreans to Sinai.

The amount of ransom money demanded is also increasing. Demands from smugglers ranged from \$3,500 to \$5,000 in 2011 however testimonies now report ransoms in east Sudan of up to \$16,000 and are continually increasing. Furthermore, on release individuals may be transferred to another smuggler and forced to pay a further ransom. As stated above, there is an increasing trend of Eritreans being held captive in Sudan for these purposes.

There are a number of steps currently being taken. The Sudanese Government is currently drawing up anti-trafficking legislation which is being consulted by IOM. However it must be ensured that the legislation is effective and enacted.<sup>54</sup> Currently the Sudanese Government does not categorise this movement as trafficking and therefore it remains to be seen whether this will have an effect on the situation for Eritreans caught in these processes in east Sudan.

Increased security is also a key issue in this route. The Sudanese Government frequently calls for monetary support to help police the border between Sudan and Eritrea. However as has been noted by many testimonies, many border guards, police, security and those at check points on the route may be benefitting considerably from the movement of Eritreans through the country. This could make capacity building at the local level highly problematic.

It has been demonstrated that multilateral measures are key to addressing smuggling across borders (Long and Crisp 2009). This seems particularly challenging considering the countries involved in this route, their diplomatic relations and the history of the region. This makes it even more important to act whilst relations are amicable between particular countries involved in the process.

It is also clear that for anti – smuggling measures to be effective they must be complemented by opening up legal migration channels. This poses a particular challenge in Eritrea where the current regime exercises strict control over its population. There are tight restrictions to obtain passports and exit visas which are unlikely to be significantly relaxed, forcing Eritreans to use illegal routes. The situation is similar in Sudan. The strict encampment policy currently prevailing in Sudan may encourage those desperate to leave into dangerous and exploitative situations. Eritreans have very few options other than to embark on dangerous routes and place their lives in the hands of smugglers in order to reach safety.

It is well established that measures to combat smuggling and trafficking should focus on the perpetrators and wider processes linked to these activities. Some smugglers are from the Rashaida ethnic group. Their role in the process should be placed with reference to recent political history and the lack of economic developments in the area.

---

<sup>54</sup> Egypt has comprehensive anti-trafficking legislation but it is rarely implemented. United States Department of State, 2012 Trafficking in Persons Report - Egypt, 19 June 2012

In order to understand the Sudanese and Eritrean Governments' response to the Rashaida and other groups in the region a brief overview is important. As mentioned earlier the various groups of Beja, Rashaida and Beni Amer peoples live on both sides of the Sudan-Eritrea border. They pursue pastoralist economy and are very combative (Young 2007: 17). Under such conditions, these borderlands and border peoples have become transit belts for conflicts.

The East Sudanese Peace Agreement forms the basis for the power agreement in the east and determines government relationships with Rashaida. Signed in October 2006 it brought to an end the opposition of the Eastern Front which was an alliance between the Beja Congress and the Rashaida Free Lions. The Free Lions, spear headed by Mubrouk Mubarek Salim, organized those who held grievances against the Government.

This disillusionment had been growing since 1991 and was based on some Rashaida's increasing allegiances with the Gulf States.<sup>55</sup> Police also reportedly took livestock or equipment and generally harassed some of the Rashaida population.<sup>56</sup> Coupled with depleting livestock, draught and constriction of nomadic lands those with few other options joined the opposition Free Lions.<sup>57</sup> The Eritrean Government mobilized this group between 2000 and 2006 in order to destabilize Sudan through disrupting the oil pipelines that run through the east of the country.

In order to bring this situation to an end the signing of the peace agreement ushered in numerous changes. Rashaida were given positions in the police force and Mubrouk Mubarek Salim was given a position in the Government as Secretary of State for Bridges, Roads and Transport. However the Eastern Peace Agreement did not benefit all Rashaida. Many of the Free Lions' fighters who lived in camps around Tesseney that came to Sudan within the frame of the Peace Agreement returned to Eritrea as they didn't find any support or work in Sudan. It is not clear how many are still inside Eritrea or at the border. Also since the signing of the Peace Agreement there are many displaced pastoralist Rashaida, who never settled in one of the camps, still living on the border between Eritrea and Sudan. It is thought some went to the smugglers-camps at Ali Gidr.<sup>58</sup>

The leadership within the Rashaida population also is far from clear. From the 1980s the Rashaida requested from the Government the appointment of their own Nazir, the highest tribal authority, which would give them authority in local administration. However, Nazirates are linked to the possession of tribal land and historically the Rashaida have no claim to land in eastern Sudan (Pantuliano 2005: 15). In 1989 the Government of Sadiq el Mahdi decided to grant the Rashaida a Nazirate, but this provoked heated reaction and the Government downgraded the Nazir to the rank of Rais al Idara (Head of Administration), a de facto Nazir without land. The dispute is still not settled today and Rashaida claim that they have a full Nazirate with land that has been granted to them by the current government. The nominated

---

<sup>55</sup> Mubrouk Mubarak Salim has been instrumental in propagating the idea of a 'Pan-Rashaayda movement'. This movement has developed since the nineties in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Sudan where there are Rashaayda that acknowledge their mutual kinship. Rashaida sided with the United Arab Emirates in supporting Kuwait in the Gulf War. Sudan, supporting Iraq at the time, subsequently confiscated 400 vehicles given to Rashaida from Kuwait in gratitude for their assistance causing tension in the region.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Sara Pantuliano 27 July 2012

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Metje Postma 5 June 2012

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Metje Postma from field notes collected in 2007

Nazir, who is also a member of the national assembly, Ahmed Hameed Berki is more closely allied to the Government than Mubrouk Mubarak Salim.<sup>59</sup>

It is therefore important to note that the Rashaida are not united under one leader and there are important circumstantial, political, intergenerational and gender differences. Some divides exist as there are beliefs the Government favours some lineages over others politically. There are three lineages in Sudan (with sub branches) and all are very aware and very proud of their own lineage and may not support other groups.<sup>60</sup>

It is reported that the nominated Rashaida Nazir cannot prevent the young men from smuggling activities, as this is the only form of income they have. The large 'Rashaida Market' on the highway between Girba and Kassala is highly active, however the police now have a specific 'anti-trafficking' unit and are regularly seen towing large loads of electronic goods into their compound. However the less money Rashaida traders and other traders are able to make in electronics and other illicit goods, the higher their demand for human life (Smith 2011).

Another element in the politics of the region is the little mentioned border with Egypt. In 1994, Egypt co-opted a piece of land called the 'Halaib triangle' and has kept it under its control, building infrastructure and services there. In the view of those in the Red Sea State this further underlines the Government neglect of the area. This piece of land is located along one part of the smuggling route demonstrating the complexity of increasing control in the area.

The strength of the Eritrean diaspora must also be considered. Routes of movement have to be seen within the context of wider social frameworks, of which the smugglers only form a part. Family, friends, and peers have a role in supporting those in transit either with financial resources, information or contacts, including on smugglers. The informality of this part of the movement makes it highly challenging to combat smuggling activities and in particular those at the early stages of the smuggling route (ICMPD 2008: 30).

As highlighted in a paper addressing mixed movements to South Africa (Crisp and Long 2009), governments cannot just respond with enforcement measures and efforts to obstruct or deter movements. As can be seen with the tightening of the route to Europe through Libya, or the prevailing conditions in Egypt the resulting flows can be more dangerous and drive refugees further underground.

Currently there is a need for a continued transport route to help asylum seekers flee from this region.<sup>61</sup> Some members of the Rashaida ethnic group who are participating in smuggling are currently providing this needed transport. However as outlined above due to the complex political, economic and social situation, this method is placing those fleeing human rights abuses in increasing danger. However, as has been highlighted above, the Rashaida

---

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Metje Postma 5 June 2012

<sup>60</sup> It is important to note that the genealogical history of Rashaida is unclear and conflicting. However this does not mean that Rashaida are unable to place their genealogy. As Postma says 'Bedouin oral tradition as a form and mode of representation should be perceived more as a way of affirming social ties, than as factually accurate chronological history'. Rashaida has become somewhat of an umbrella name that offered a form of protection in times when it was crucial to belong to a strong tribe. The political leaders however also represent the Rashaida history in Sudan, in a nationalistic political context, as part of Sudanese history.

<sup>61</sup> The other movements in the region are beyond the scope of this paper however there are similar routes which require research including Ethiopians to Yemen; Sudanese travelling to Libya; and Somalis going through Egypt.

smugglers involved in these actions are not a cause of the problem but are a participant in wider processes that link back to the structural inequalities and neglect in the region. Despite this the suffering that a small number of smugglers inflict on Eritreans seeking safety should not be underestimated.

This paper has reviewed the reasons Eritreans flee and the changing refugee dynamics in east Sudan. The role of some Rashaida traders in this route has been examined and placed in the context of their particular history, the current regime in Eritrea, diplomatic relations between Sudan and Eritrea, and underdevelopment providing few options for the long standing and new populations in east Sudan.

This paper has not sought to offer definitive answers to cease practices of smuggling but instead tries to place these practices within the history and politics in the region. It has offered some explanations into the underlying dynamics of the route and the environment through which these processes have developed. It is hoped that it will provide some insights and possibilities for alternative solutions to alleviate the shocking and concerning conditions faced by those fleeing Eritrea.

## REFERENCES

- Afeef, K. F. 2009. 'A promised land for refugees? Asylum and migration in Israel' *New Issues in Refugee Research* Research paper no. 183. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Geneva, Switzerland
- Agence France Presse 2012. *Eritrean refugees kidnapped, killed: UNHCR chief* 12 January 2012 <http://www.rnw.nl/africa/bulletin/eritrean-refugees-kidnapped-killed-unhcr-chief>
- Ambroso, G. Crisp, J. and Albert, N. 2011. 'No turning back A review of UNHCR's response to the protracted refugee situation in eastern Sudan' *Policy development and evaluation service PDES / 2011 / 12* United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Geneva, Switzerland.
- Amnesty International 2008. 'Egypt: Deadly journeys through the desert' *Amnesty International* <http://www.amnesty.org/ar/library/asset/MDE12/015/2008/en/3254d528-6ae8-11dd-8e5e-43ea85d15a69/mde120152008en.pdf>
- Amnesty International 2012. 'Sudan must end forced returns of asylum seekers to Eritrea' *Amnesty International* <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR54/039/2012/en/7d51d7af-4028-45c0-9631-bf0816e57b2a/afr540392012en.html>
- BBC 2012a. *Eritrean refugees kidnapped in Sudan* 6 February 2012 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-16903627>
- BBC 2012b. *Egyptian police killed in attack on Israeli border* 6 August 2012 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-19142882>
- BBC 2012c. *Egypt Launches Sinai air raids* 8 August 2012 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-19174773>
- Bozzini, D. 2011. 'Low-tech Surveillance and the Despotic State in Eritrea' *Surveillance & Society* 9 (1/2) 93-113
- Brown, N. R. et al. 2004. 'The Insecurity of Eritreans and Ethiopians in Cairo' *International Journal of Refugee Law* 16 (4) 661-701
- Cliffe, L. 1999. 'Regional dimensions of conflict in the Horn of Africa' *Third World Quarterly* 20 (1) 89-111
- CNN Freedom Project *Death in the Desert: A CNN Freedom Project Documentary* <http://cnnpressroom.blogs.cnn.com/2011/11/03/death-in-the-desert-a-cnn-freedom-project-documentary/>
- Di Bartolomeo, A., Thibaut, J., Perrin, D., 2012. *Migration Profile: Sudan* CARIM [http://www.carim.org/public/migrationprofiles/MP\\_Sudan\\_EN.pdf](http://www.carim.org/public/migrationprofiles/MP_Sudan_EN.pdf)
- Egypt Independent 2012. *Israeli soldiers preemptively arrest African migrants in Egyptian territory* 10 August 2012 <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/israeli-soldiers-preemptively-arrest-african-migrants-egyptian-territory>
- Ek, R. 2009. *UNHCR's Operation in Eastern Sudan 1967-2009 Lessons Learnt* (Internal document) United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Geneva, Switzerland

- European Parliament 2012. *Resolution on human trafficking in Sinai, in particular the case of Solomon* W (2012/2569 RSP)  
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/summary.do?id=1198074&t=e&l=en>
- Fishbein, E. 2010. 'Desert Hell - The Journey of Refugees through the Sinai Desert' *Yediot Ahronot*  
[http://www.phr.org.il/uploaded/Article\\_DesertHell\\_EinatFishbein\\_Yediot\\_19.11.10.pdf](http://www.phr.org.il/uploaded/Article_DesertHell_EinatFishbein_Yediot_19.11.10.pdf)
- Free Eritrea 2011. *An eye witness account of human trafficking of Eritrean refugees in Sudan and Egypt* [http://freeritrea.org/files/Transcript\\_of\\_Human\\_Trafficking-1-4-2011.pdf](http://freeritrea.org/files/Transcript_of_Human_Trafficking-1-4-2011.pdf)
- Furst-Nichols, R. and Jacobsen, K. 2011. *African Migration to Israel Debt, Employment and Remittances* Tufts University Press
- Hamood, S. 2006. 'African Transit Migration through Libya to Europe: the Human Cost' *Forced Migration and Refugee Studies*. Cairo: American University in Cairo
- Hirt, N. 2010. "Dreams Don't Come True in Eritrea" Anomie and Family Disintegration due to the Structural Militarization of Society' *GIGA Research Programme: Violence and Security Working Paper No. 119*
- Hotline for Migrant Workers 2011. *The Dead of the Wilderness. Testimonies from Sinai Desert* Hotline for Migrant Workers  
[http://www.hotline.org.il/english/pdf/Testimonies\\_from\\_sinay\\_122010.pdf](http://www.hotline.org.il/english/pdf/Testimonies_from_sinay_122010.pdf)
- Hotline for Migrant Workers 2012a. *The Prevention of Infiltration Law* January 2012  
[http://hotline.org.il/english/pdf/Prevention\\_of\\_Infiltration\\_Law\\_Eng.pdf](http://hotline.org.il/english/pdf/Prevention_of_Infiltration_Law_Eng.pdf)
- Hotline for Migrant Workers 2012b. *Briefing regarding the situation at the Sinai* June 2012 personal communication
- Human Rights Watch 2008. *Sinai Perils: Risks to Migrants, Refugees, and Asylum Seekers in Egypt and Israel* Human Rights Watch November 2008  
<http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/egypt1108webwcover.pdf>
- Human Rights Watch 2009. *The Way Forward Ending Human Rights Abuses and Repression across Sudan* Human Rights Watch October 2009 <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2009/10/06/way-forward-0>
- Human Rights Watch 2012a. *Jordan: Don't Deport Eritrean Refugees to Yemen Group of Nine at Risk of Persecution in Eritrea* Human Rights Watch May 2012  
<http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/05/15/jordan-don-t-deport-eritrean-refugees-yemen>
- Human Rights Watch 2012b. *Israel: Amends 'Anti-Infiltration' Law* Human Rights Watch June 2012  
<http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/06/10/israel-amend-anti-infiltration-law>
- ICER 2011. *Warning issued by international commission on Eritrean Refugees*  
[http://freeritrea.org/files/ICER\\_Warning\\_August-2011.pdf](http://freeritrea.org/files/ICER_Warning_August-2011.pdf)
- ICER 2012. *Action Alert: Ransom at Sinai reached 60,000 USD* Volume 2012, Number 10
- Independent 2012. *Forgotten: The stolen people of the Sinai* 20 January 2012  
<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/forgotten-the-stolen-people-of-the-sinai-6292201.html>
- International Centre for Migration Policy Development 2008. *East Africa Migration Route Initiative: Gaps and Needs Analysis Project Country Reports – Ethiopia, Kenya, Libya*. Vienna ICMPD

IOM 2004. 'Types of Irregular Migration' *International Migration Law: Glossary on Migration* IOM Geneva, Switzerland

IOM 2009. 'Irregular migration and mixed flows: IOM's approach' *Ninety-eighth Session of the IOM Council October 2009* (MC/INF/297) IOM Geneva, Switzerland

Mehari, K. 2010. 'Desert in Disorder' *unpublished paper*

Kibreab, G. 2007. 'The Eritrean Diaspora, the War of Independence, Post-Conflict (Re)-construction and Democratisation' in Ulf Johansson Dahre (ed.) *The Role of Diasporas in Peace, Democracy and Development in the Horn of Africa*, Lund University Press p 97 – 116

Kibreab, G. 2009. 'Forced Labour in Eritrea' *Journal of Modern African Studies* 47 (1) 41-72

Lijnders, L. 2012. 'Caught in the Borderlands: Discursive, Bodily, and Collective Frontiers of Violence Experienced by Eritrean Refugees in Israel' Master Thesis University of Utrecht <http://igitur-archive.library.uu.nl/student-theses/2012-0110-200641/UUindex.html>

Long, K. and Crisp, J. 2011. 'In harm's way: the irregular movement of migrants to Southern Africa from the Horn and Great Lakes regions' *New issues in refugee research*, Research paper no. 200. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Geneva, Switzerland

Pantuliano, S. 2005. 'Comprehensive Peace? Causes and Consequences of Underdevelopment and Instability in Eastern Sudan' *International Rescue Committee*

Perry, A. 2011. 'Solving Israel's African Refugee Crisis' *Journal of International Law* 157 2010-2011

Physicians for Human Rights, Israel 2011. 'Hostages, Torture, and Rape in the Desert: Findings from 284 Asylum Seekers about Atrocities in the Sinai' <http://www.phr.org.il/uploaded/Phr-israel-Sinai-Report-English-23.2.2011.pdf>

Postma, M. 2012. *Rashaayda Representations: ethno-political, humanitarian and ethnographic forms, modes and ways of representing social crisis* (forthcoming)

Mekonnen, D. and Estefanos, M. 2011 'From Sawa to the Sinai Desert: The Eritrean Tragedy of Human Trafficking' Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2055303>

Müller, T. 2012 'Beyond the siege state – tracing hybridity during a recent visit to Eritrea' *Review of African Political Economy* 39 (133) 453 – 466

Smith, N. 2011 *The Value of Life. A review of human trafficking in the east of Sudan* (Internal document) United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Geneva, Switzerland

Sudan Tribune 2012. *Government suspends seven aid groups in eastern Sudan* 1 June 2012 [http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?iframe&page=imprimable&id\\_article=42773](http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?iframe&page=imprimable&id_article=42773)

Sydney Morning Herald 2012. *Eritrean general named as boss of arms, kidnap trade* 19 July 2012 <http://www.smh.com.au/world/eritrean-general-named-as-boss-of-arms-kidnap-trade-20120718-22akm.html>

Times of Israel 2012. *Israel denies sending soldiers into Sinai to prevent migrants from entering* 10 August 2012 <http://www.timesofisrael.com/human-rights-groups-israel-sends-soldiers-into-sinai-to-prevent-migrants-from-entering/>



UN General Assembly 2000a. 'Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime' 15 November 2000 <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/479dee062.html>

UN General Assembly 2000b. 'Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime' 15 November 2000 <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4720706c0.html>

UNHCR 2004. *Position on Return of Rejected Asylum Seekers to Eritrea*, January 2004 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Geneva, Switzerland

UNHCR 2011a. *Refugee Protection and Mixed Migration: The 10-Point Plan in action* February 2011 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Geneva, Switzerland

UNHCR 2011b. *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Eritrea* 20 April 2011 (HCR/EG/ERT/11/01) United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Geneva, Switzerland

UNHCR 2012a. 'One survivor, 54 die at sea attempting the voyage to Italy from Libya' Press Release July 10, 2012, <http://www.unhcr.org/4ffc59e89.html>

UNHCR 2012b. Ethiopia Refugee Update June 2012 UNHCR Ethiopia <http://www.unhcr.org/4fffe9db9.html>

UN Human Rights Council 2010. *Report of the Working Group on The Universal Periodic Review. National Report of Eritrea (A/HRC/13/2)* United Nations Human Rights Council, Geneva, Switzerland

UN Security Council Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea 2012. *Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea pursuant to Security Council resolution 2002 (2011) (S/2012/545)* United Nations Security Council, Geneva, Switzerland

UN Security Council 2010. *Report of the Secretary-General on the Eritrea* 22 June 2010 (S/2010/327) United Nations Security Council, Geneva, Switzerland

United States Department of State 2011. '2010 Human Rights Report: Sudan' *Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor* <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/160477.pdf>

Young, J. 2007. *The Eastern Front and the Struggle against Marginalization* Small Arms Survey, Graduate Institute of International Studies, Geneva

Young, J. 2011. 'Local conflict, marginalisation, and the threat to regional security' *Institute for Security Studies*

van Reisen, M., Estefanos, M., and Rijken, C. 2012. 'Human Trafficking in the Sinai: Refugees between Life and Death' *Tilburg University/Europe External Policy Advisors* [http://www.ehrea.org/report\\_Human\\_Trafficking\\_in\\_the\\_Sinai\\_20120927.pdf](http://www.ehrea.org/report_Human_Trafficking_in_the_Sinai_20120927.pdf)

Weldehaimanot, S. 2011. 'Kidnapping, Hostage-Taking and Ransoming of Eritrean Asylum Seekers in the Sinai Desert' Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1932457>