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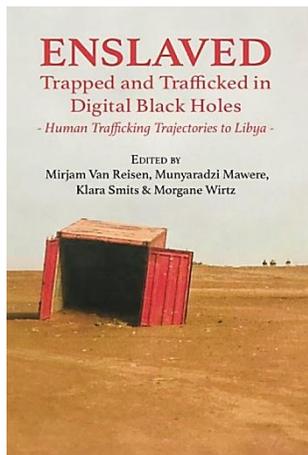
Klara Smits

Chapter in: Enslaved

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Human Trafficking Trajectories to Libya

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Chapter 11

“You are the Ball – They are the Players”: The Human Traffickers of Eritreans in Libya¹

Klara Smits

Introduction

The Eritrean smugglers take money. After that, they try to bring a thief for you. And then they send you to the road, and send you another thief, then another. That is why the Eritrean refugees pay a lot of money – a lot of money. (Interviewee 0013, interview with Smits, face-to-face, July 2019)

Many of the human traffickers preying on refugees and migrants in Libya have been named before in the literature. These names and others also came up in the interviewees conducted for this research. This chapter describes the main alleged traffickers, where they are operating, their connection with other alleged traffickers and their current status. Such information is vital to enable prosecution of the perpetrators of this heinous crime.

The interviews conducted for this research refer to Eritrean smugglers, who take a lot of money from Eritrean refugees² in a chain of events that culminates in human trafficking for ransom. The benefit of the money extracted from these people on the move goes to what can be referred to as the human trafficking network(s) that span the Horn of Africa, from Eritrea to Libya. Van Reisen, Estefanos and Rijken (2014) conservatively estimated the cumulative value of the ransoms paid in Sinai trafficking for the period 2009–2013 as USD 600 million. In 2017, Van Reisen

¹ The research for this chapter was undertaken as part of the author’s PhD thesis and will be reused fully or in part for this purpose.

² In this chapter the terms ‘migrant’ and ‘refugee’ are used interchangeably in a non-legal way to refer to people on the move, without drawing any conclusions about their legal status (see Glossary of Terms).

and Estefanos (2017) estimated that, by 2016, the cumulative value of human trafficking for ransom of Eritreans had reached a staggering USD 1 billion.

Eritrean organisations published the first lists of suspected traffickers between 2012 and 2016.³ In 2016, Sahan Foundation and IGAD ISSP (2016) identified transnational and highly-organised criminal groups, led by ‘kingpins’. Based on primary and secondary research between June and September 2015, this publication named Eritrean human traffickers Maesho Tesfamariam, Medhanie Yehdego Mered, Ermias Ghermay, Wedi Issak, and Abdurazak Esmail (working through subordinates Jaber, Hamad Omar and Jamal Saudi). It also named Abduselam as an Eritrean moving refugees from detention centres to Libya. Furthermore, it identified Kidane, Walid, Chegora, and a female smuggler, Zaid. In Sudan, it identified Eritrean traffickers feeding into the network in Libya, namely, Wedi German, Kiros, John Merhay, and Shumay Ghirmay.

Ethiopian investigators cited by Sahan Foundation and IGAD ISSP (2016) named Ali Hashia as a kingpin between Ethiopia and Sudan. These investigations identified the place known as ‘Hajar’ in Sudan as a key hub for trafficking. They also named ‘first class’ smugglers, who charge high prices for safer routes using aircraft, such as John Habtu (Habeta, also known as ‘Obama’) and Awet Kidane. It also identified Kesete Te’ame (aka ‘Asgedom’, in this chapter known as ‘Angsom’) as a trafficker involved both in ‘first class’ smuggling as well as trafficking into Libya. The same investigations also mention Efrem Misgna, who was arrested on suspicion of smuggling people; they also note that this man was often seen in the entourage of individuals from the Eritrean government.

In 2017, Van Reisen, Estefanos and Reim (2017) identified traffickers associated with human trafficking in the Sinai. Their chapter (which

³ See <https://asmarino.com/press-releases/1341-the-saga-of-the-eritrean-refugees-and-the-human-smugglers-with-a-list-of-their-names> and <https://africamonitors.org/2016/12/13/list-of-individualsallegedly-involved-in-human-trafficking-and-smuggling-in-the-sudan>

appears in *Human Trafficking and Trauma in the Digital Era: The Ongoing Tragedy of the Trade in Refugees from Eritrea* by Van Reisen and Mawere, (2017), identifies Angesom Teame (aka Angesom or Wejahy or Angesom Kidane) as a key person coordinating Eritreans in the Ethiopian refugee camps. These authors also identified Eritrean General Teklai Kifle ‘Manjus’ as a key Eritrean authority involved in the transportation of Eritreans across the border, working together with members of the Rashaida,⁴ who played a key role in the transportation and kidnapping Eritreans to the Sinai. Their chapter also cites the United Nations (UN) Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea (UN Security Council, 2011) as a source. Sinai survivors told the UN Monitoring Group that the money Manjus received went all the way to the top of the Eritrean government. Members of Rashaida and Bedouin⁵ tribes were identified as key actors trafficking Eritreans to the Sinai. Interviewees in the chapter name Abu Salem and Abu Abdellah (two brothers) as key players on the Sinai side of the Eritrean human trafficking. Van Reisen, Estefanos and Reim (2017) also identified Abu Khaled, Ismael Abderaza Saleh (Abdurazak Esmail), Kidane, and Medhanie Ydego Meredas (Medhanie Yehdego Mered), as other key players in human trafficking.

The Netherlands, during the time that it was a member of the UN Security Council, prompted the first resolution to counter human trafficking. The resolution imposed international sanctions on six human traffickers in Libya, including two Eritrean traffickers, Fitiwi Abdelrazak and Ermias Ghermay, who had been previously identified in above cited investigations (UN Security Council, 2018a). Following this resolution, the European Union (EU) adopted the same sanctions (Council of the European Union, 2018). The United

⁴ The Rashaida (also called or Bani Rashid) are a tribe of ethnic Bedouin Arabs in the Horn of Africa (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rashaida_people).

⁵ The Bedouin (also called Beduin, or Bedu) are nomadic Arab tribes that live in the desert regions of the Arabian Peninsula, North Africa, the Levant, and Mesopotamia (see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bedouin>).

Kingdom (UK) also took up the sanctions against Abdelrazak and Ghermay in 2022 (UK Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation, 2022). The UN Security Council also sanctioned Libyans involved in trafficking, notably, Ahmad Oumar al-Dabbashi (al-Amu) and Abd Al-Rahman al-Milad (al-Bija) (UN Security Council, 2018a).

There is ample evidence of the involvement of Eritreans at the highest level of the criminal organisations that traffic Eritrean refugees, a practice which, as stated previously, has considerable monetary value (Van Reisen & Estefanos, 2017). However, there has been no systematic analysis of the key persons involved in the organisation of the human trafficking networks. The aim of this chapter is to identify the persons involved in human trafficking for ransom of Eritrean refugees. The research question is: *Which persons were identified by the Eritrean refugees interviewed as responsible for human trafficking for ransom in Libya?*

The next section presents the methodology used for the research presented in this chapter, followed by a brief description of how refugees view their interaction with the people responsible for the situation they are in, which is referred to in this book as human trafficking for ransom. In the subsequent section, the alleged traffickers identified by the respondents as operating in Libya, are described, followed by a section of key operators in Sudan. This is followed by an examination of the possibility that Libya is being used as a 'black site' by the Eritrean regime, based on the empirical evidence that emerged from the interviews. The subsequent section looks at the cloaking of human traffickers – presumably to protect themselves from prosecution. This is followed by a synthesis of all the findings, in which the network for human trafficking for ransom in Libya is traced. In the discussion, the findings are compared with the findings of other researchers in earlier publications. This is followed by a brief conclusion.

The author underlines that in many cases, the persons named in this chapter have not (yet) been convicted of human trafficking or related crimes. Until such conviction, they have the right to presumption of innocence before a court.

Methodology

This chapter provides a listing of the people allegedly involved in human trafficking for ransom to Libya. It is based on ethnographic research data, supplemented by information from the literature, to give a full picture of what is known about each alleged trafficker. In this chapter, and in other chapters of this book, the authors provide the names identified as persons alleged to be in charge of and/or function at the top of the pyramid of the human trafficking networks. Most of these names are already in the public domain, some persons are under sanctions or wanted by international crime investigators. While the naming of any person in this chapter or in this book does not constitute any proof in a legal sense, it is relevant to study who are the people allegedly involved in the organisation of the atrocity crime of human trafficking for ransom.⁶ This work builds on cautiously executed previous work, already undertaken and published, and available on the Internet, which is identified in this chapter and used for the purpose of triangulation of findings.⁷ This chapter also provides images of some of the persons alleged to be traffickers. Careful note was taken to discover whether the image corresponded with the name of, and information known about, the person by triangulating information from multiple sources and resource persons.

The research was part of the collaborative efforts of the research team Social Dynamics of Digital Innovation in Remote non-Western communities (SDDI). This team worked under the leadership of Van

⁶ While GDPR regulates personal data protection, it is not intended to undermine public interest. See EU GDPR Art 85: “Member States shall by law reconcile the right to the protection of personal data pursuant to this Regulation with the right to freedom of expression and information, including processing for journalistic purposes and the purposes of academic, artistic or literary expression.” See Rucz, 2022.

⁷ The inventory presented in this chapter has been developed with caution and the author and editors request that any errors are immediately brought to their attention (contact: mvreisen@gmail.com).

Reisen, who acted as principal investigator. The full methodology of the research underpinning this book can be found in Chapter 3: *Skin in the Game: Methodology of an Ethnographic Research with Exposure to Trauma*.

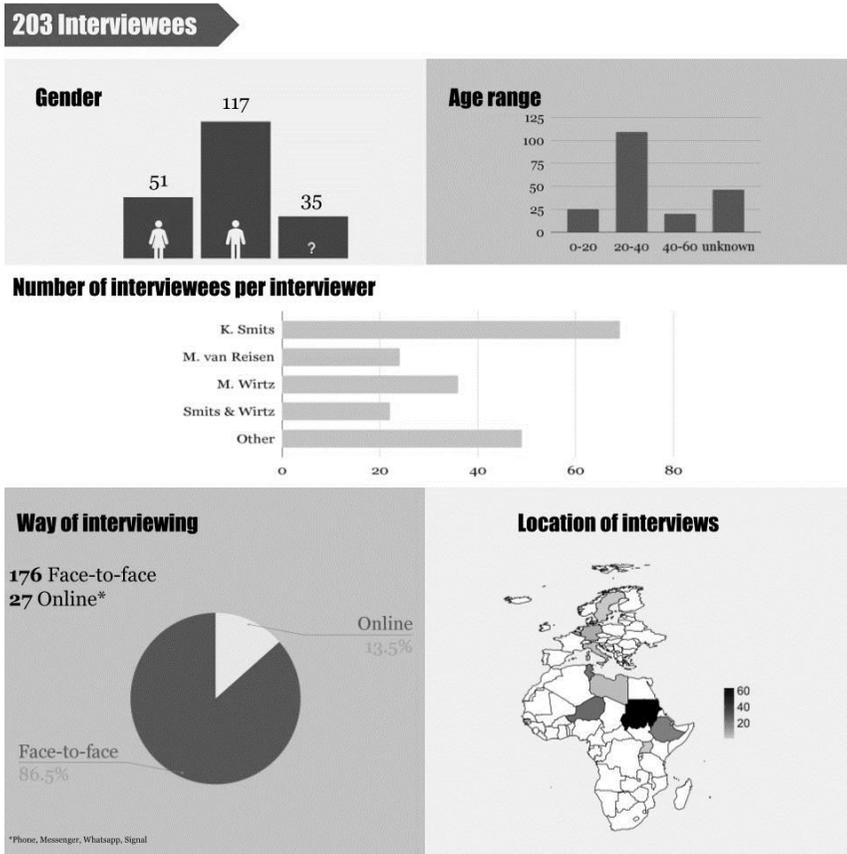
The main material obtained for the ethnographic research was collected through participatory fieldwork. Observations and other material collected in various locations, both in-person and through digital communication, informed the background of this chapter. This material included reports, videos, social media posts, photographs and other information, collected and sent to us by resource persons in social media spaces and in personal communications, using participatory ethnographic research (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016) and netnography (Kozinets, 2017).

The large majority of the interviews analysed in this chapter were carried out between March 2019 and December 2021 by Morgane Wirtz, Klara Smits and Adoum Moussa. Interviews by Mirjam Van Reisen were conducted in small focus groups and on WhatsApp, and several interviews from her previous research have been re-used. The SDDI research includes 312 participants in interviews. This chapter has analysed a subset of these interviews, namely all interviews with Eritrean participants (n=203). The interviews were held in Belgium, Italy, Ethiopia, Kenya, Libya, the Netherlands, Niger, Sudan, Tunisia, and online. All of the Eritreans who had passed through Libya were held in detention under threat of torture, or directly tortured, for the purpose of prompting payment, thus fulfilling the definition used in this book of trafficking for ransom (see Glossary of Terms).

The listing of the names is relevant and necessary in order to begin to understand the organisation of the human trafficking networks operating from Eritrea to Libya. Previous work has begun to open up understanding that the networks are well organised and have a clear hierarchy. This chapter further investigates this and is intended to give a more detailed and precise understanding of the operations of the networks and how these are directed. The understanding of the key players should also help to contextualise the information provided in

the interviews by victims of human trafficking and enable further investigations into patterns and trends concerning the operations of the networks and to investigate outliers in data provided by the people participating in the research.

Figure 11.1. Overview of interview statistics⁸



The literature used in this chapter was selected through a data search of the sources identifying human traffickers operating in Libya, as well as a specific search for sources on each individual trafficker whose name featured in the interviews. All identified literature was

⁸ Some interviewees are noted as both expert and refugee/migrant, but only counted once towards the interviewee total.

subsequently analysed for relevant information about the traffickers mentioned by name in the interviews.

For the purpose of this chapter, all interviews were examined for the names and descriptions of the traffickers. These were listed in a database with a note of their likely nationality (if mentioned), the location where they were active, any nicknames that were mentioned, the different interviews they were mentioned in, whether the information was first-hand or second-hand, the year that the information was recorded and, if it was mentioned, the year that the alleged trafficker was encountered by the interviewee. In addition, any additional information, such as who the alleged trafficker cooperated with, was also recorded.

This information was then analysed. Due to the phonetic nature of the Tigrinya language, spoken by most of the interviewees, spelling differences occurred frequently. Names that were similar and were suspected to belong to the same person were double-checked with the original interview sources, to ensure that the information was about the same person. In addition, information was cross-checked with external sources, including reports, books and news articles. As the human traffickers often go by aliases and nicknames, and even change their names, it may be that a single name refers to multiple people, or that a single person goes by multiple names. The information, which was gathered in interviews conducted from 2019 to 2021, was compared to identify similarities in names, locations and modus operandi to assist with identification and with the mapping of operation. This chapter also provides some information on how the victims (refugees and migrants) interacted with their traffickers.

The analysis of the interviews focused on the persons who allegedly trafficked Eritrean refugees. Although Eritrean traffickers were not selected in particular, from the analysis it emerged that the main traffickers of Eritrean refugees are Eritrean. Several other key actors, who often work closely together with Eritrean traffickers, are also mentioned. For each of the alleged traffickers, we describe where they are active and what abuses were faced by the interviewees in their warehouses. The resource persons who were interviewed were in

Libya between 2014 and 2020. As the human trafficking networks are rapidly evolving and changing, also in relation to the political situation, the key actors involved and how they operate may have changed since the interviewees were in Libya.

This chapter identifies the key players in these networks, based on testimonies of victims of the traffickers. It does not present an exhaustive list of traffickers. Not all of the interviewees remembered their traffickers, and some stated that they did not know their names. Others were uncomfortable talking about their experiences. Before presenting the findings on the key human traffickers, the following section looks at how the refugees and migrants view their interaction with the human traffickers.

The relationship between refugees and traffickers

The interviews revealed a complex relationship between the Eritrean refugees and their traffickers. The research found that the first contact may be initiated by the refugee, who is trying to move away from what they perceive as a hopeless or dangerous situation. Given the few options available to them, Eritrean refugees sometimes feel that they need traffickers to start the journey from Khartoum to Libya. At other times, the refugees are actively recruited by smugglers or traffickers, and sometimes even kidnapped (see Chapter 9: *Deceived and Exploited: Classifying the Practice as Human Trafficking*).

First, we discuss with the smuggler [USD] 3,800. After that, when they send us to Sabratha, they try to send a thief. Then the thief ask us for more money. Then the thief says, don't worry, I will out you [let you out]. Just pay [USD] 1,700. So we pay [USD] 1,700. And then the thief asks us for another [USD] 5,000. That's in Sabratha. Just like a ball. We are a ball – the smugglers are the players. (Interviewee 6003, interview with Smits, face-to-face, July 2019)

The refugees usually call the persons facilitating journeys ‘samsara’ or ‘connection men’.⁹ Many of the interviewees described how they found such a person, usually via their connections or by tagging along with a friend. There is sometimes space for negotiation of the price and other things, as can be seen from the following excerpt:

We met one time to discuss about how to [do the journey] and about money – how to pay the money and how to secure your life. He talked about his work.

(Interviewee 0017, interview with Smits, face-to-face, July 2019)

The Eritrean ‘smuggler’ named by interviewee 0017, Kibirichi, delivered them to Bani Walid to the warehouse¹⁰ of Welid (also see later in this chapter), where they paid the agreed amount, but found themselves stuck for 11 months, eating once a day and enduring severe beatings. This example (one of many) shows how these ‘connection men’¹¹ are an integral part of the trafficking networks to Libya and beyond. The negotiated price was subject to arbitrary change and, in some cases, the refugees were kidnapped by or sold on to other traffickers. Some refugees, such as interviewee 1050, know this, but decide to go anyway:

[...] even if you make a deal with them, it's not the amount that they will make you pay later on – also I knew even if we had a deal, I was sure that my family would not pay a penny for me, but I didn't have a choice, so I just decided to go.

(Interviewee 1050, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, June 2020)

Once the refugees enter into the trafficking network, the name of the main trafficker becomes a code under which they are then handled (the code dictates the route taken and the warehouse, or part of the

⁹ For migrants and refugees, the term ‘samsara’ (Arabic for ‘smuggler’) refers to the person who is paid to organise an illegal journey from a point A to B. The terms can also refer to human traffickers or connection men (see Glossary of Terms).

¹⁰ The terms ‘prison’, ‘warehouse’, ‘house’, ‘hangar’, ‘store’, ‘farm’, ‘holding camp’ and ‘credit house’ are all used by migrants and refugees to refer to the places where they are sequestered and tortured for ransom (see Glossary of Terms).

¹¹ The term ‘connection man’ was widely used by the migrants and refugees interviewed to refer to both those at the top of the trafficking network, as well as the facilitators/smugglers (see Glossary of Terms).

warehouse, in which they are kept). It determines where they will be transported, and where they will be held. An interviewee explained as follows:

When I entered Bani Walid, the connection man was waiting for me there. In one compound they had four stores. Every connection man who will see you says: "You are from which connection man in Sudan?" When you tell the name, he will take you. All of them are from Eritrea. My connection man was called Welid. (Interviewee 1004, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019)

In this way, the refugees become familiar with the (nick)names of their traffickers, often without meeting them, seeing them or speaking to them. This continues throughout their transportation and imprisonment.

The human trafficking networks of Eritrean refugees and migrants in Libya are disguised as smuggling. Although the refugees often initiate contact with the middlemen (although some are actively recruited or kidnapped), once they arrive in Libya, the terms negotiated in Sudan, such as the price, often change and it becomes clear to the refugee that (s)he has little, if any, control over the situation. The refugees are at the mercy of the human traffickers. This is when the realisation hits them that they are being trafficked.

Key human traffickers and where they work

During the interviews, the researchers became familiar with certain names that were constantly repeated by the interviewees. These names will be introduced here.¹² Each sub-section describes what was already known about the alleged trafficker and what the interviewees said about him, including where they work and who they work with. This chapter focuses on Eritrean refugees, and it is significant to note that the human traffickers named here are mostly Eritreans, who

¹² Note, the names in this chapter were given in the interviews and are of alleged traffickers. The author makes no comment on whether or not they are in fact human traffickers, but is merely presenting what was said in the interviews.

collaborate with members of the trafficking networks, who may hold other nationalities. The names are listed in alphabetical order.

Abdella/Abdallah

Description

The name Abdella or Abdallah came up frequently in the interviews. It is a common name with many spelling variations. It is possible that ‘Abdella’ may refer to multiple persons. Not much is known about this person (or persons) from previous research, nor from our interviews. Most interviewees refer to Abdella as a Libyan.

There appears to be at least one particularly notorious Abdella active in Bani Walid, referred to by two interviewees as Abdella Sini (Interviewee 0014, interview with Smits, face-to-face, July 2019; 1059, Interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, June 2020). Two other interviewees were also trafficked by Abdella in Bani Walid, although they did not specify that this was Abdella Sini – however, the circumstances described were very similar (Interviewee 1024, 1049, Interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, November 2019 – June 2020).

Bani Walid

The alleged trafficker Abdella Sini in Bani Walid is notable because he appears to have a particularly violent reputation and is used by other traffickers to threaten interviewees into paying. One interviewee was in a warehouse run by his trafficker Abderazak in Bani Walid, but when he could not pay, he was taken to Abdella Sini to scare him:

They tried to scare us, to take us to Abdella Sini. So we stay for a little week or two weeks and he beat us. He tried to force us to pay. So after two weeks, they return us to our place. (Interviewee 0014, interview with Smits, face-to-face, July 2019)

Abdella Sini himself also asks for ransom:

He [Aziz] sold us to Abdallah Sini, in Bani Walid. After that, Abdallah was asking again USD 6,000. Some people died there. Abdallah is a very cruel person. He will kill people by electricity and by the gun. If you don't have the money, if you can't pay this money. Some people, I saw it with my eyes, some people died in front

of my eyes, because they could not pay this USD 6,000. (Interviewee 1059, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, June 2020)

The interviewee described that there were both Somalis and Eritreans in the place run by Abdella Sini. Translators, including an Ethiopian who worked with him because Abdella speaks only Arabic, also were present, the interviewee said.

Another interviewee was tortured by Abdella in Bani Walid and asked to pay USD 3,500. He was tortured by electric shock (Interviewee 1024, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, November 2019). Pictures were taken of the refugees and shared on Facebook. When the interviewee could not pay, Abdella let him work instead.

One of the interviewees reported that sexual violence was common at Abdella's place: "There are many women whose lives have been disrupted; like, they were underage, [and] they left [Abdella's place] pregnant" (Interviewee 1049, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, June 2020). The interviewee herself delivered a still born baby in Bani Walid. She also said that she saw people commit suicide there.

Other locations

There are references to Abdella in Tripoli (twice) and Ajmail, near Zuwara (once). In these cases, it is not clear whether the interviewees refer to the same person. However, the Abdella in Tripoli is also referred to as very cruel:

The smuggler [Abdella] asked us to pay money. We said "we don't have money". But he didn't hear us. He was beating us every night. When we slept, he came and he opened the door and he beat us. We said: "we don't have money". One time, at night, he came to the warehouse. I was near to the door and he took me and he made me sleep on the ground and he brought plastic with a lighter and he burnt me here. Then he showed the plastic on fire and he told everybody: "if you don't pay, I will do the same to you". After one day, everybody started to pay. (Interviewee 1023, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, November 2019)

Another interviewee refers to an Abdella of Gambian nationality in Tripoli. It is likely that this is a different Abdella. In reference to Ajmail (near Zuwara), an Abdallah was working with Welid to send Eritrean refugees to Tunisia.

Cooperation with other traffickers

Referring to the Abdella Sini in Bani Walid, interviewees confirm he works with Aziz (Aziz sold their group to Abdella) and Abderazak. Abderazak was said to be the main trafficker, but was in Dubai. Therefore, Abdella Sini may have been the best option to intimidate the interviewee into paying.

Abdurazak

Abdurazak, also known as Abdurazak Esmail or Fitiwi Abdelrazak, was identified in the report by Sahar Foundation and IGAD ISSP (2016) as a key trafficker in Libya. He is an Eritrean, known to travel frequently to Dubai, from where he conducts his human trafficking business. A known associate mentioned in the report is Jaber, who works in Libya to oversee his business (Sahan Foundation & IGAD ISSP, 2016). Abdurazak, identified as Fitiwi Abdelrazak, was sanctioned for human trafficking by the UN Security Council (UN Security Council, 2018c). His network was described by the UN as stretching from Sudan to Libya to Italy, via cells which he oversees: “Fitiwi Abdelrazak has been identified in open sources and in several criminal investigations as one of the top-level actors responsible for the exploitation and abuse of a large number of migrants in Libya” (UN Security Council, 2018c). It was noted by the UN that the victims of Abdurazak were numbered in the tens of thousands (UN Security Council, 2018c).

Only one interviewee testified to being trafficked by Abdurazak. This was in Bani Walid. Abdurazak himself was in Dubai, said the interviewee, but his worker Jaber was present, and they were held in a warehouse owned by a Libyan, Mohamed Musgi. He entered there in June 2017. Although he did not see Abdurazak, sometimes they spoke with him:

Sometimes he calls to us. Because if you don't pay the money, bad things happens. I didn't know in Khartoum, because I came with normal Samsara [smugglers or connection men]. But I know about him in Libya. [...] [He tells you] “if you don't pay the money, I will sell you.” He said that. If they sold you, the money is tripled.

If you came by USD 3,800 – if they sell you, it's [USD] 6,000, or 5,000 over.
(Interviewee 0014, interview with Smits, face-to-face, July 2019)

Abdurazak was also working with Abdella Sini in Bani Walid, who took the interviewee and others in his group for two weeks or so, before returning them to Abdurazak.

Abduselam

Description

One of the most notorious alleged Eritrean traffickers is known as Abduselam. In a La Repubblica article, refugees described him as around 30 years old, short, and ‘shrill-voiced’ (Palazzolo, 2020). A report by the Sahan Foundation and IGAD ISSP (2016) names Abduselam in connection with buying



Figure 11.2. Abduselam
(Source: La Repubblica (Palazzolo, 2020))

refugees to transport to Italy from Libyan detention centres. Abduselam is believed to be a key person in the network of Eritrean traffickers. La Repubblica indicates he has made his home in Ash Schwayrif (Palazzolo, 2020).

Eleven interviewees indicated that they were trafficked by Abduselam.¹³ Of those, four were in Ash Schwayrif, two were in Misrata, and five were unsure of their location or did not specify it in their interview. The interviews sketch the image of Abduselam as an interlocutor. He is mentioned in several other interviews with people

¹³ Interviewees 0002, 0008, 0009, 0010, 0011, & 0016, interviews with Smits, face-to-face and by WhatsApp, March 2019-April 2019; Interviewees 1003, 1010, 1012, 1017, 1052, & 1057, interviews with Wirtz, face-to-face, March 2019-June 2020

who have not been trafficked by him as a key connector between traffickers and authorities.

Ash Schwayrif

The group sizes in the warehouse or warehouses of Abduselam in Ash Schwayrif are large. It is unclear whether Abduselam has one or multiple locations in Ash Schwayrif. The lowest estimate was 450 people in a warehouse, all belonging to one group. Another interviewee mentioned that there were more people when they were there, one estimating 1,000, the other at least 2,000.

The treatment in the warehouses of Abduselam in Ash Schwayrif was described as very bad: “No food, no clean water [...] they beat. It’s hard to live. [...] So many people there they die. They die. They die every day; they die one person, two person” (Interviewee 0016, interview with Smits, face-to-face, July 2019).

Another interviewee confirmed the poor circumstances:

[...] for the guys, they were beaten and sometimes they were splashed with dirty water and they were beaten. It was so difficult for us; we were taken out and we were given to Libyans so that they can also rape us. For everyone who come when they are drunk, they take us. (Interviewee 1052, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, June 2020)

The payments demanded by Abduselam in Ash Schwayrif were USD 1,500 (in addition to another unknown payment to Abduselam made before that – the interviewee who reporting paying this amount was resold to Abduselam and held in the same warehouse in Ash Schwayrif twice), USD 3,300 and 5,000. Two interviewees explained that they were taken to Ash Schwayrif after first spending some time in Kufra (Interviewee 0016, interview with Smits, face-to-face, July 2019; 1012, Interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019). One of those interviewees indicated that he paid in Kufra, and was transported to Ash Schwayrif afterwards to wait.

Misrata

The two interviewees who testified that they had been trafficked by Abduselam in Misrata¹⁴ both indicated that he had a good relationship with the police there. The police would arrest people, give them to Abduselam for extortion:

They took me to Misrata's police station. Another connection man knew this place. His name is Abduselam. He is Eritrean. He has a good communication with the police. He asked the police to catch the people so that he could take them afterwards in exchange for money. (Interviewee 1003, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019)

Following 22 days in the police station, Abduselam transported the interviewee to Sabratha, where the interviewee and the other victims ended up in a warehouse of Al-Amu and were asked to pay USD 1,700. After paying, the interviewee was sold to another trafficker.

Another interviewee explained that his group were on their way to the sea after having paid their first ransom, but some Libyans warned Abduselam they were coming. Abduselam's men showed up and abducted all of them:

His name is Abduselam. He is from Eritrea. He caught all of us. When we arrived at the sea, the Libyan people called Abduselam, because he knows somebody living in that place. They warned him. The men of Abduselam came. Their faces were covered. They came with guns. [...] Abduselam asked for USD 5,500. In his store, in Misrata, I could not see the sun. The door was closed. I stayed there almost seven months. (Interviewee 1010, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019)

This shows that Abduselam has connections with the Libyan people (unspecified) in Misrata, who act as informants. He is then able to intercept people who arrive to cross the sea, and extort them for ransom.

¹⁴ Interviewees 1003 & 1010, interviews with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019

Connections with other traffickers and actors

One interviewee links Abduselam to the Eritrean government:

I think there was [someone working with the Eritrean government]. In Libya, maybe. Because there was a man of the government, of the power, my controller. His name is Biniam and his second name is Afro. Pseudonym. He is born in Gashbarka. (Interviewee 0002, interview with Smits, face-to-face, March 2019)

The interviewee said that Biniam ‘Afro’ was working with Abduselam in Libya. Interviewee 1012 clearly describes the close relationship between the Eritrean, Abduselam, and the Libyan, Al-Amu:

When I paid the money, Abduselam said: “You will go to the sea”. I went to Sabratha. I stayed there almost three months. The chief of the house where I stayed was called Al-Amu. He is a Libyan working for Abduselam. I stayed there three months; after that fighting started between the connection men. When the policemen came to that place, Al-Amu decided to change [our location] to another place in the desert. It was in holes in the mountains. I stayed two days there. After that, Abduselam decided to change for another house. Abduselam and Al-Amu are working together. (Interviewee 1012, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019)

After the interviewee had paid his ransom in Ash Schwayrif, he was brought to Al-Amu for the trip over the Mediterranean Sea. When fighting started, Abduselam and Al-Amu decided together what was to happen to the refugees. The two formed a kind of powerhouse in Libya at the time that the interviewees were present. One shared the following: “Abduselam is the biggest Eritrean smuggler. He is working with the biggest Libyan smuggler – Al-Amu. Al-Amu is the biggest smuggler” (Interviewee 0016, interview with Smits, face-to-face, July 2019)

Another interviewee indicated that after being arrested in Misrata, Abduselam had delivered him to a warehouse owned by Al-Amu in Sabratha. In Misrata, Abduselam was said to have good connections with the police.

Abduselam was also reported to be cooperating with the ‘Daesh man’ Mohammed Whisky. After Mohammed Whisky sent a whole group

back because some had not paid for the sea, he sold the group to Abduselam, who held them in a warehouse in Ash Schwayrif. Abduselam buys many of his victims from others. Another interviewee indicated that he and his fellow refugees were sold to Abduselam by smugglers who picked them up from the seaside, pretending to be UNHCR staff. Interviewee 0005 indicates that all big alleged Eritrean traffickers – Welid, Kidane, Abduselam, Abdella – in fact work together.

Abduselam also works with people outside of Libya. One interviewee indicated that Abduselam buys refugees kidnapped by Chadian armed groups. In addition, Abduselam works with traffickers operating in Khartoum, as the following excerpt describes:

Tinaat stayed in Sudan. He was working with Abduselam and Abduselam said: “Tinaat is not paying the money that I am asking for you”. But I had paid for Tinaat who stayed in Sudan. Then Abduselam says that I had to pay USD 2,400 again. (Interviewee 1059, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, June 2020)

This quote indicates that there are links between Sudanese traffickers and Abduselam. It is not possible to say from this quote alone whether traffickers in Sudan, like Tinaat, are not paying the money they already received from the trip, or whether this is something that traffickers like Abduselam say in order to justify asking for more money.

Al-Amu

Description

Ahmad Oumar Al-Dabbashi (aka Al-Amu, Al-Ammu, Al-Ammo, ‘The Uncle’) has earned a spot on the UN Security Council’s sanction list for trafficking (UN Security Council, 2018b). He is the commander of the Anas al-Dabbashi armed group, operating in the stretch of coast between Melita and Sabratha (UN Security Council, 2018b). He was the key trafficker in Sabratha, until his armed group was co-opted to stop the crossing of migrants and refugees (Micallef, 2021).

According to Micallef (2021), and there is evidence that Italy helped to broker a deal

with Al-Amu on this. However, two months later, the armed group was defeated there in 2017. The UN Security Council has accused Al-Amu of having ties with Islamic State in Libya as well (Micallef, 2021). He was born in 1988, according to the sanctions documents issued by the UN (UN Security Council, 2018b).

It was reported that, in April 2020, Al-Amu returned to Sabratha. His armed group emerged as one of the groups working together with the Government of National Accord, the temporary government in Libya backed by the United Nations and led by Al-Serraj (MENA Research and Studies Center, 2020).

Al-Amu receives his own sub-section in this chapter, as he is mentioned in many of the interviews as a key contributor to the suffering of refugees in Sabratha. Many of those ended up being



Figure 11.3. Ahmad Oumar Al-Dabbashi
(Source: Photograph widely circulated on social media, including Twitter and Facebook)

caught in the 2017 fighting in Sabratha. Eight interviewees testified to being trafficked by Al-Amu.¹⁵ All of them were in Sabratha.

Sabratha

From the interviews, an image of Al-Amu emerges as a trafficker who was fully involved in the business of trafficking for ransom. Not only did he house the refugees trafficked by other traffickers before pushing them out to sea, but he also extracted ransoms. One refugee summarises what happened after he was arrested by the police, then Abduselam (Eritrean trafficker) negotiated with the police and he ended up in the hands of Al-Amu:

In Sabratha, Al-Amu is the boss of all the connection men in the city. In that place there are many stores for Al-Amu. He has many guns. I stayed four months in a store of Al-Amu. We were 160 persons. Among them there were 40 girls. Some of them were young. Other were pregnant. There were also children. Three women even delivered there. It makes another three children. There was no medicines there, bad water, no food. Every time they come, they beat me. They ask for money: USD 1,700. I paid that money. (Interview 1003, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019)

Many interviewees testified they were there when the fighting in Sabratha started in 2017. An interesting picture emerges of what happened there. Some interviewees stayed in their warehouses and, although they had already paid, they had to pay again to the new armed group, sometimes after having been divided up (Interviewees 1003 & 1014, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April–November 2019). One interviewee was transported to another location:

When I stayed there three months, after that a fighting started between the connection men. When the policemen came to that place, Al-Amu decided to change to another place in the desert. It was in holes in the mountains. I stayed two days there. After that, Abduselam decided to change for another house. Abduselam and Al-Amu are

¹⁵ Interviewees 1003, 1012, 1014, 1016, 1019, 1023, 1026, & 1055, interviews with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019–June 2020

working together. (Interviewee 1012, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019)

This interviewee shows how Al-Amu, even while fighting, cooperated with Eritrean traffickers to ‘salvage’ some of the detainees. One interviewee said they had to fight:

Al-Amu had told us he would bring us to the sea. But he made fighting, among the Libyans. With Haftar or with anything. And then, we fought. Al-Amu was also a soldier. They told me: “You, you, you”, from the camp. “You go to bring the shooting guns from the underground! More shooting guns! A lot of shooting guns!” They asked us to fight. (Interviewee 1023, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, November 2019)

Some interviewees managed to escape when the fighting started (Interviewee 1014, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019). Others were sent to prison (Interviewee 1023, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, November 2019).

Cooperation with other traffickers and actors

Al-Amu has already been mentioned in this chapter as working together with Eritrean traffickers, including Abduselam and Kidane. Two interviewees also mentioned that Al-Amu worked with Aziz, even when the fighting in Sabratha started (1023, 1027, Interviews with Wirtz, November 2019 – January 2020).

Some Eritrean refugees interviewed considered Al-Amu the biggest among Libyan traffickers, working with the biggest among the Eritreans. In this sense, especially the link between Abduselam and Al-Amu seems strong: “Abduselam is the biggest in Eritrean smuggler. He is working with the biggest smuggler Libyan Al-Amu (Interviewee 0016, interview with Smits, face-to-face, July 2019). Al-Amu also ‘bought’ refugees from Daesh after they were kidnapped in Zawiya; he exchanged them for some Daesh prisoners who he held (Interviewee 1014, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019).

The interviews did not cover the period of time when Al-Amu returned to Sabratha, so his current role is not known. The interviewees also did not mention what Al-Amu did between his defeat in 2017 and his return in 2020.

Angesom

Connection to trafficking

Angesom is an alleged trafficker who has been previously described in reports and books, but has not previously been connected publicly to human trafficking in Libya. He is known under many different names: Angesom or Angosom, by his second name Ta'ame or Teame, or as Kassate Ta'ame Akolom (UN Security Council, 2013). His nickname is Wajehoy (spelt in various ways). The earliest mention that the authors could find of Angesom was from a joint statement by Release Eritrea and other organisations about human trafficking for ransom in the Sinai desert in 2011. The report states:

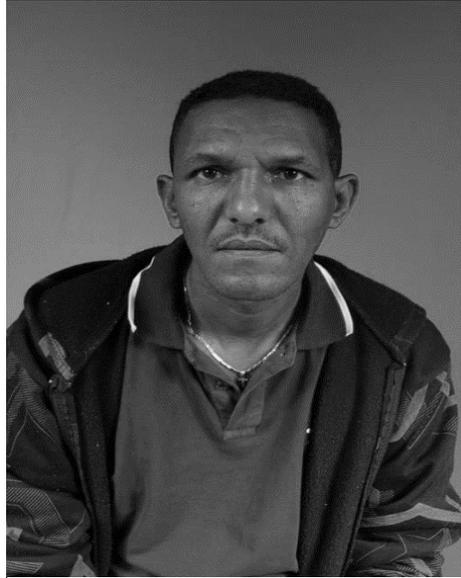


Figure 11.4. Kassate Ta'ame Akolom (aka Angesom Ta'ame)

(Source: Photograph published by the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea (UN Security Council, 2013)

Additional testimonies collected by the organizations indicate that an Eritrean man named Angosom, based in Khartoum, Sudan, is responsible for kidnapping hundreds of Eritrean refugees from Shagarab and Kassala refugee camps in Sudan and from May Aini and Shimelba refugee camps in Ethiopia and then selling them to human traffickers in Egypt. (Release Eritrea, 2011)

Later, the International Commission on Eritrean Refugees (ICER) published a report on traffickers involved in the Sinai in 2012, naming Angesom as a key actor. In February 2012, they wrote:

Angesom is well organized constantly changing his telephone number and have 9 people working for him. Informants claim that he is crucial in the overall scheme of

things and if apprehended it would be a big blow to the smuggling and extortion ring.
(International Commission on Eritrean Refugees, 2012)

The report further mentions that Angesom is based in Ethiopia and Sudan, and plays an important role in smuggling refugees across the border at Metemma and Humera (in Ethiopia), which are key crossing points from Ethiopia to Sudan. Angesom was said to be working in close cooperation with key operatives in the Ethiopian refugee camps. Furthermore, the report of the ICER speculates that Angesom may have been a prominent member of the Eritrean intelligence.

This key observation that Angesom was an Eritrean intelligence officer is confirmed by the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea (UN Security Council, 2013). In its 2013 report on Eritrea, the monitoring group investigated revenue from human trafficking. In it, Angesom (identified as Kassate Ta'ame Akolom) was said to be “leading a human trafficking and hostage-taking ring operating in Eritrea, northern Ethiopia and eastern Sudan”. He was said to have been in the Eritrean military for ten years, then operated for a period as an intelligence officer. The report of the monitoring group continues to describe how Angesom crossed into Ethiopia and pretended to be a refugee and a defector, and “as such he was allowed to join the ranks of the Eritrean Movement for Democracy and Justice (EMDJ), an Eritrean opposition group operating in Ethiopia, as a team leader” (UN Security Council, 2013, p. 36).

In 2012, Angesom was arrested in Ethiopia at the border, at Humera, with guns and a large amount of cash. He confessed to working with General Teklai Kifle ‘Manjus’, an Eritrean general heavily implicated in human trafficking (UN Security Council, 2013). Angesom also said that his EMDJ membership allowed him to travel between Shagarab refugee camp in Sudan and the camps in Ethiopia. There, the monitoring group said that witnesses described him as constantly on the phone, coordinating the trips of refugees together with Rashaida traffickers (UN Security Council, 2013).

Van Reisen, Estefanos and Reim (2017) spoke to several witnesses who referred to Angesom as a major trafficker who started in the Sinai. Communications received by these authors state that Angesom did not just work for the Eritrean intelligence, he was in fact the head of security for the Eritrean Intelligence Ministry for 10 years (Van Reisen, Estefanos & Reim, 2017).

Connection to Libya

None of the interviewees in this research had been directly trafficked by Angesom to Libya, but several stated he had a key role in setting up the networks. Although Angesom is a well-known name in the Sinai context, some key interviewees state that his connections and routes still exist:

I have talked before about Angesom Te'ame, he is the father of all traffickers. [...] The branches he made, they are still working. (Interviewee 0022, interview with Smits, telephone, November 2021)

This interviewee and two other interviewees (Interviewees 0023-2; 0022, interviews with Smits, face-to-face, December 2021) state that Angesom set up the branches to Libya, and controlled the trip from Ethiopia to Sudan and from Sudan to Libya. One shared the following:

Angesom controlled both the trips from Ethiopia to Sudan and Sudan to Libya. You would pay [USD] 1,700 from Addis to Sudan. Jonas arranges Addis to Sudan and then gives you to Angesom. Angesom arranges Sudan to Libya, you pay [USD] 1,700 in Libya. Then Angesom gives you to a trafficker in Libya to cross the sea. (Interviewee 0023-1, interview with Smits, face-to-face, December 2021)

The interviewees also speculate that Angesom may continue to play a role in trafficking in Libya through a representative.

Connections with other traffickers and actors

Angesom was mentioned by other sources as having connections to many traffickers operating in the Sinai, including other Eritreans (Van Reisen, Estefanos & Reim, 2017), but also traffickers from the Rashaida tribe (UN Security Council, 2013). The ICER report (ICER,

2012) mentions that Angesom worked in close cooperation with his former underling, John Merhay (discussed later in this section).

Angesom was said to be working with Medhanie Mered in the Sinai (Interviewee 0023, interview with Smits, face-to-face, December 2021). According to one interviewee, another partner of his was Jonas Tsegai (Interviewee 0022, interview with Smits, telephone, November 2021). This interviewee states that although Jonas was a key partner of Angesom in Ethiopia, he was later hunted by Angesom as Jonas tried to set up an independent network. Jonas ended up in prison.

Angesom is described by one interviewee as having powerful connections with the Eritrean government and intelligence, which allows him to control other traffickers, mostly by controlling the money:

Even the capture of Kidane was by [Angesom's] band. He works with security personnel of Eritrea, so if you go your own way, he can make them catch you. No smuggler is not controlled by the [Eritrean] regime. Otherwise, the money cannot go. If you use the wrong bank and you are trying to keep the money from them, they will hunt you. (Interviewee 0022, interview with Smits, telephone, November 2021)

The involvement of Angesom raises further questions regarding the involvement of the Eritrean intelligence apparatus in the human trafficking of Eritrean nationals.

Current status

Interviewees state that Angesom was brought back to Eritrea by the Eritrean government. They said that he played a key role for the Eritrean and Ethiopian governments in identifying crossing points and the location of Tigray leaders in the war in Ethiopia, as he had lived there for an extended period of time (Interviewee 0023, interview with Smits, face-to-face, December 2021).

Aziz

Description

Aziz is a name that came up frequently in interviews with Eritrean refugees. The context described by the interviewees, in interviews that

were taken independently from each other, makes it likely that the interviewees are referring to the same person. Aziz's main location is Brak Shati. He is described as working together with big Eritrean traffickers and Chadian armed groups. According to the interviewees, he is around 40 years old. He dresses "like an Arab, in traditional clothes and a turban" (Interviewee 1054, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, June 2020). Most interviewees agree that he is Sudanese. One interviewee mentioned that his name is Abdel Aziz, although this could not be confirmed through other interviews or sources.

Six interviewees testify to being trafficked by Aziz.¹⁶ Of them, five were in Brak Shati. One interviewee was first in Al Manara before being transported to Brak Shati (Interviewee 1019, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, November 2019). Several interviewees were pushed to the sea at Garabulli or Sabratha after being held in Brak Shati by Aziz (Interviewee 1019, 1023, 1028, Interviews with Wirtz, face-to-face, November 2019 – January 2020). One interviewee was held in Kufra (1028, Interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, January 2020).

Brak Shati

Aziz detains people of multiple nationalities. "I saw many people: Eritrean, Somali, even from Madagascar" (Interviewee 1019, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, November 2019). The abuse faced by detained is severe. There is no space to move, little food and water, no hygiene, and there are many beatings. Women, men and children are all packed together.

Interviewees paid high ransoms to Aziz, mostly between USD 5,000–6,000. Hundreds of people were said to be in Aziz's warehouse. One interviewee estimated that there were 900 persons in one place (Interviewee 1054, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, June 2020). He described the warehouse as containers, where a single person may have one square metre to himself.

¹⁶ Interviewees 1019, 1023, 1027, 1028, 1051, & 1054, interviews with Wirtz, November 2019-June 2020

Interviewees describe the torture in Aziz’s warehouse in a lot of detail. The abusers are said to be mainly Libyans, but also Sudanese and Eritreans. They shoot the walls to threaten the detainees. They take women away to abuse them. They tie them up to the wall with their heads down. They hit people’s knees. Also when the detainees call their families to ask for the money, shots are fired in the air to scare the family members. They tie people up with electric wire in ‘helicopter’ position. They beat the hands and feet of people. “They cuff your hands and your legs and then they lay you on the ground then they beat you” (Interviewee 1051, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, June 2020). In addition, detainees are burned with molten plastic. In the summer, it was so hot that one interviewee described people fainting (Interviewee 1028, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, January 2020). There is also rape of both men and women, perpetrated by the guards, mostly Libyans. When asked whether Aziz would hit people, one interviewee said:

Aziz is the boss, big boss, he can sit in the chair. The person who works with Aziz, they have the shooting guns with them. They come inside the apartment. If Aziz says: “hit this person”, it is not Aziz who will hit him, but Aziz’s “hitters”. Aziz is the boss; he didn’t hit us, but he said: “hit them”. (Interviewee 1054, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, June 2020)

People also died from diseases in the warehouse of Aziz:

I tried to fly away from the camp because they died; about four people because of disease; every disease, except corona, is there in Aziz’s camp. (Interviewee 1054, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, June 2020)

After people had paid their ransom, they were transferred to another warehouse. One such place is nicknamed ‘Canada’, explained an interviewee.

Many people under Aziz ended up paying more than once (Interviewee 1051, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, June 2020). Interviewee 1051 paid USD 5,500 to Aziz in Brak Shati, and was then transported to another warehouse. There, Aziz told them they had been kidnapped by other traffickers and they would have to pay another USD 5,500. However, it was Aziz asking for the money.

When asked if others have a similar experience, she said yes: “There are people who paid 10,000 to 20,000 [US] dollars, yet they still couldn’t make it alive” (Interviewee 1051, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, June 2020).

Other locations

One interviewee was trafficked and held for ransom by Aziz in Kufra:

The first time that I arrived at Al-Koufrah, they brought us, 70 people, in this kind of room [around 10m²]. 70 people! It is not enough, this kind of room for 70 people! The owner of that place, the smuggler, is calling people one by one, in order to ask them for the ransom. His name is Aziz. [...] He is working with Libyans, with Sudanese. He has a lot of guards. They have strong weapons. They are slaughtering a goat or a sheep in front of the refugees and they eat it in front of the refugees and the refugees they are feeling hungry. (Interviewee 1028, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, January 2020)

The interviewee was Somali. The ransom demanded for him was USD 8,825. His family collected the money from different clans in Somalia. Aziz severely beat people:

He starts to beat you with a big stick. If the blood is not coming from your head, he will continue to beat you. When the blood is coming from your head, he will say: “Go and sit there, you will send me the money, as soon as possible”. But if you are not bleeding, he will just continue to beat you. [...] There are so many people that they took in picture and make video calls, and again, when they call our parents, they call them on video calls to ask for the ransoms. (Interviewee 1028, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, January 2020)

Connections with other traffickers and actors

Aziz is said to be Sudanese, but has good connections with other traffickers. “[...] he has Eritrean smugglers with him” (Interviewee 1019, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, November 2019). One interviewee mentioned that Aziz worked with an Eritrean intermediary called Dagusha to ask ransom from his family (Interviewee 1019, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, November 2019). Another interviewee mentioned that Aziz had contacts in Khartoum with whom his family dealt (Interviewee 1023, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, November 2019).

Aziz worked together with others in Brak Shati. One interviewee said that he shared a warehouse there with Kidane (Interviewee 1054, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, June 2020). He sold another interviewee to a trafficker called Aforki (Interviewee 1027, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, January 2020). Aziz was also working with Al-Amu in Sabratha (Interviewees 1023 & 1027, interviews with Wirtz, November 2019 to January 2020).

Aziz was mentioned several times in connection to Chadian armed groups. Chadian armed groups would kidnap interviewees while they travelled from Sudan to Libya. There, Aziz would buy them:

After that, when I travelled from Sudan to Libya, at the border the Chadian soldiers, they surround me. They arrested the 25 with me, and the 25 from other groups. They collected all of us in one group. After that, they divided us in two groups: one group about 100 something and the second of 90 persons. Then somebody came to buy me. His name is Aziz. He is working in Libya. He bought me, the other people in my group and the other 100 persons. He bought the two groups.
(Interviewee 1023, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, November 2019)

Aziz was exclusively mentioned as the link with the Chadian armed groups. Afterwards, some kidnapped interviewees were then sold to Eritrean traffickers. It is not clear from the interviewees whether they are official troops or independently-acting armed groups.

Medhanie

Description

Medhanie Yehdego Mered is an alleged human trafficker who became widely known after a person named Medhanie was arrested in Sudan and extradited to Italy. This Medhanie spent three years in an Italian prison, before the court ruled that there had been a mistake of identity: the arrested man, Medhanie Tesfamariam Berhe, was not the notorious trafficker (The National, 2021). Medhanie is also known as ‘The General’. He was accused of being the trafficker behind the

Lampedusa disaster in October 2013 (BBC, 2016). He is also rumoured to be very wealthy.

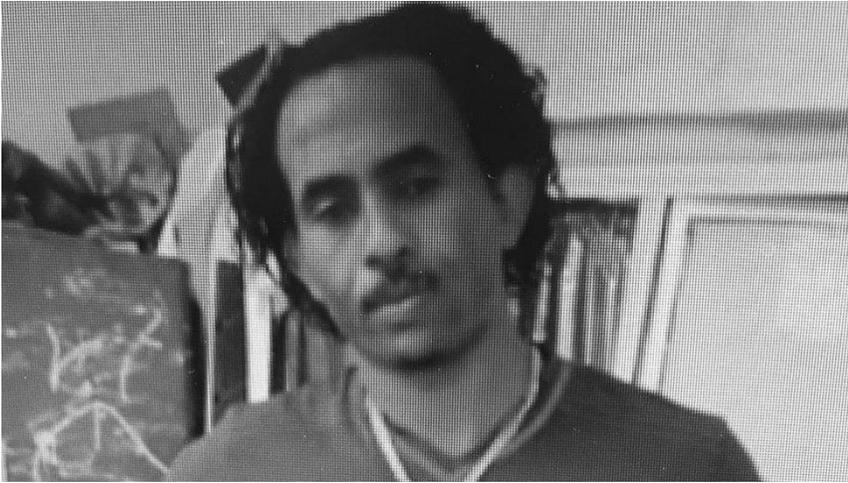


Figure 11.5. Medhanie Yehdego Mered (aka The General)

(Source: Photograph posted by BBC (2016), see <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36478210>)

Previous research mentioned Medhanie as a key player in the trafficking networks (Van Reisen, Estefanos & Reim, 2017). He was named as having strong connections with Bedouins¹⁷ and traffickers accused of perpetrating trafficking in the Sinai (Van Reisen, Estefanos & Reim, 2017). In addition, he has been alleged to be connected to Eritrean ransom collectors in Sweden (Van Reisen, Estefanos & Reim, 2017). Following the release of Medhanie Tesfamariam Berhe, it can be concluded that the ‘real General’ is still in the field. A report by the Sahan Foundation and IGAD ISSP (2016) stated that the international investigation has prompted Medhanie to go into hiding.

¹⁷ Bedouins are nomadic, Arabic-speaking peoples of the Middle Eastern deserts, North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula (see <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bedouin>).

Among the interviewees, two were trafficked by Medhanie.¹⁸ Both were in Tripoli. Both were in Libya relatively early, compared to other refugees interviewed – around 2014/2015. Some of the interviewees mention Medhanie, but were not trafficked by him. One other person who submitted a testimony had helped to pay ransom for people trafficked by Medhanie.¹⁹ It might be that following the international investigation, Medhanie is laying low or has changed his identity or the name under which he conducts trafficking.

Tripoli

The two interviewees that were held by Medhanie were located in warehouses in Tripoli.²⁰ In both cases, Medhanie was said to be working together with another trafficker: Welid in one and Wedi Isaac in the other. Both interviewees held by Medhanie paid twice, once for the desert (USD 1,600 in both cases) and once for the sea (USD 1,600 in one case, USD 2,000 in the other).

The circumstances in Medhanie's warehouses were described as terrible, especially for those who could not pay:

Mostly if the people don't pay, at times, they get raped, they get tortured. Almost all the detainees. It is a harsh, terrible centre. (Interviewee 0001, interview with Smits, face-to-face, March 2019)

The detainees in Medhanie's warehouses were threatened with knives and tortured with electric wires. The torture took place in front of everyone. It was mostly the Libyans doing the torturing, says an interviewee, but Medhanie would come to survey his warehouses:

0001: One night, he came – so many loudspeakers, "Medhanie, Medhanie", but he's a very big man.

K: So he came to your centre at some point?

¹⁸ Interviewees 0001 & 0007, interviews with Smits, face-to-face, March 2019

¹⁹ Interviewee 3002, testimony received by Van Reisen by e-mail, 2017

²⁰ Interviewees 0001 & 0007, interviews with Smits, face-to-face, March 2019

0001: *One day. It was at night time. Speakers say “Medhanie, Medhanie” ... we heard this. He was loudly announced.* (Interviewee 0001, interview with Smits, face-to-face, March 2019)

Another interviewee describes how the hands of detainees would be beaten with iron sticks and that detainees would get little food. There were no sanitation or hygiene facilities in Medhanie’s warehouses (Interviewee 0007, interview with Smits, face-to-face, March 2019).

Connections with other traffickers and actors

The interviewees mentioned that Medhanie directly cooperated with Wedi Isaac and Welid in trafficking. For example, they used the same boats to send their victims across the sea and shared a warehouse. An interviewee also mentioned that Medhanie would pay a big chief in Libya, said to be the chief of the navy (Interviewee 0008, interview with Smits, face-to-face, April 2019).

A testimony submitted by interviewee 3002 alleges that Medhanie had strong connections to the Eritrean government, and that Medhanie was active in the Sinai before moving to Libya. The testimony also indicates that Ermias was another alias of Medhanie.

Medhanie Mered, whose other alias is Ermias, used Eritrean passports of many names, and whenever he was in the Sudan, he would take a recommendation document from the Eritrean Embassy and travelled to any country he wished to travel to. He used to travel repeatedly to Egypt, Libya and Ethiopia. He used to receive a lot of cooperation from the Eritrean Embassy. From 2006/2007 up to 2010, Medhanie committed many crimes in the Sinai desert (Egypt) against Eritreans and other refugees, including trafficking people to Israel, kidnapping and hostage-taking and theft of body organs. But sometime after 2010, Israel started watching its borders closely and even returning refugees who had entered to Ethiopia, Egypt and other countries that they had started from, and also the crimes of Sinai became publicised more and the people who reached Israel got less and less and more and more people were getting stranded, so Eritrean refugees almost stopped using the route and turned toward the new country of South Sudan and to Libya. Medhanie then, after conferring with Abrham, left the Sinai and returned to the Sudan, and he went to Juba, South Sudan. But because it didn’t work out there as they had hoped, he returned to Sudan and met with his associate Abrham. And, in accordance

with Abrham's instructions, he went to Libya. Since 2011, he has been continuing all his criminal activities in cooperation with Abrham. (Interviewee 3002, written testimony, collected by Van Reisen, 2017)

The testimony describes in detail how the Eritrean Embassy supported Medhanie and that Medhanie held multiple passports in different names. The testimony goes on to describe how, in 2015, a group of Eritreans were kidnapped by Abrham, an associate of Medhanie, and taken to Libya. The person who communicated with them, the testimony alleges, was Medhanie. Medhanie was also tied to trafficking in the Sinai by two interviewees (Interviewees 0023-1 & 0023-2, focus group interview with Smits, face-to-face, December 2021), who stated that he worked together with Angesom in the Sinai.

John Merhay

Several interviewees were trafficked by 'John' in Libya. The report by the Sahar Foundation and IGAD ISSP (2016) also referred to a John – John Merhay – active in Libya. A list of traffickers compiled by Africa Monitors also refers to John Merhay, specifying that he was also active in Sudan, around Hamdayet (Africa Monitors, 2019).

One interviewee said he was trafficked by John (Interviewee 0004, interview with Smits, face-to-face, March 2019). He described him as a person in his mid-thirties and said was from Gashbarka in Eritrea, and that he used to live in Sweden before coming to Libya (Interviewee 0004, interview with Smits, face-to-face, March 2019). In the warehouse, he was beaten and women were raped when John's men were drunk. He also said that John worked with Kiros and someone named Freselam. One of the interviewees trafficked by John was in a warehouse in Kufra (Interviewee 1016, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019). They were then transferred to Welid's warehouse in Kufra. John was also linked to Angesom, and was said to be a former underling of Angesom.

John Habeta

John Habtu (Habeta, also known as ‘Obama’) has been described as facilitating ‘first class’ smuggling, charging high prices for safer routes by plane, often through complex journeys involving multiple stops at multiple continents. This is why it is presumed that the refugees in Libya mentioning ‘John’ were referring to a different John – presumably John Merhay, mentioned above – and not John Habeta. John could also be operating under multiple names.



Figure 11.6. John Habtu (Habeta, also known as ‘Obama’)
(Source: Photograph sent to Van Reisen through WhatsApp communication)

Prosecution and conviction

John Habeta is a Dutch national of Eritrean descent. He was previously living in Amsterdam, but was arrested in Kenya and repatriated to the Netherlands in early January 2022: “a Dutch national of Eritrean descent wanted for human trafficking with Interpol red notice had been deported to the Netherlands” (Wasiki, 2022). The press report stated:

John Habeta, 53, had been on the run for four years and was believed to be running an underground international human smuggling network for the trafficking of people from Africa to Europe, according to a statement by the Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI) in Kenya. He was arrested in Nairobi following a covert operation by DCI detectives. He is linked to at least four different operations where groups of Eritrean nationals were smuggled into Europe through Asia. Immediately after his arrest, he was extradited to the Netherlands on orders from the Ministry of Interior,’ the statement read. (Wasiki, 2022)

Information received by WhatsApp and shared with the researchers suggested that John Habeta was associated with the PFDJ.

John ‘Sina’

Via a contact who interviewed many survivors of trafficking for ransom in the Sinai, a third ‘John’, was identified. This John, who may or may not be the same as John ‘Merhay’ or John ‘Habeta’, is identified as ‘John Sina’.

The Eritrean collaborator in Sinai torture camps was called by the people here John Sina. I suspect that they added the Sina and that maybe they never knew his real name. (S., WhatsApp exchange with Smits, October 2022)

As identified by the resource person, John ‘Sina’ was active as Eritrean collaborator in the Sinai torture camps. It is not known if this same ‘John’ now operates in Libya.²¹

Kidane

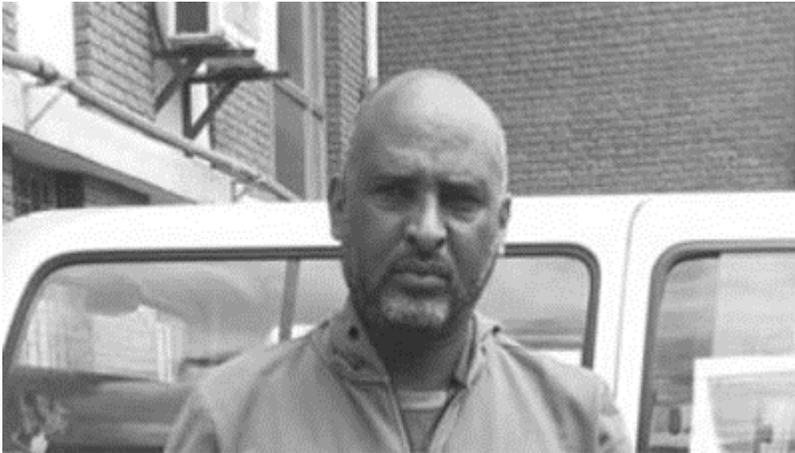


Figure 11.7. Kidane Zekarias Habtemariam, at the time of his arrest in Addis Ababa

(Source: Photograph published by the Dutch police; Politie, 2021)

²¹ A fourth ‘John’ came up in the research in relation to the deportation of Eritreans from Israel to Rwanda and Uganda. However, it was determined that this ‘John’ was not involved in trafficking, and was not Eritrean.

Description

Kidane Zekarias Habtemariam, who is of Eritrean nationality, is one of the key alleged traffickers in the human trafficking of Eritrean refugees. Kidane operated in several locations throughout Libya. Seven interviewees reported that they were trafficked by Kidane to Libya: three were in Bani Walid, two were in Sabratha, one was in Brak Shati and one was unaware of his location.²² As we have not been able to triangulate the information on Brak Shati, the focus will be on Bani Walid and Sabratha, which appear to be his main strongholds. Kidane's name was also mentioned by several other interviewees, in connection to their own traffickers or because they witnessed or heard of abuses by Kidane.

In the interviews, Kidane is reported to be cooperating with other traffickers, Libyans, and Daesh (Islamic State or ISIL). The interviewees mention hundreds of people in his warehouses – up to 900 people.

Bani Walid

Three interviewees were trafficked by Kidane in Bani Walid.²³ They paid him between USD 2,400 and 7,000. The witnesses described being severely beaten and tied up while in the hands of Kidane. The man who paid USD 7,000 was promised by his 'connection man' in Khartoum, who was nicknamed Muhari, that he would have to pay USD 3,500 from Khartoum to Italy. However, Kidane doubled the price once he arrived.

Another witness described how he ended up in the hands of Kidane after being kidnapped and forcefully taken to Libya by a Sudanese policeman:

In Khartoum, I started working with an electrician. One day, when I finished work, a policeman caught me on the way home. He sold me to another person. That one is

²² Interviewees 1005, 1009, 1011, 1014, 1015, & 1054, interviews with Wirtz, face-to-face, March 2019-June 2020; Interviewee 0008, interview with Smits, face-to-face, April 2019

²³ Interviewees 1005, 1009, & 1011, interviews with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019

a Sudanese. On the 7 August 2016, he took me to Libya through a group of other persons. In Bani Walid, he sold me to a guy called Kidane. Kidane said: "I will buy all the persons". He asked for USD 5,000 from everybody. (Interviewee 1011, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019)

However, that was not the end of the interviewee's interaction with Kidane. As he was travelling to the sea towards Zawiya, he was kidnapped by Daesh. Kidane bought back the group from Daesh and extorted them again for another USD 2,000.

The interviewees reported suffering abuse from Kidane in his warehouse in Bani Walid. One interviewee said that it was too painful to talk about. Another interviewee, who was also in Bani Walid, witnessed Somali refugees being beaten in the camp that belonged to Kidane.

Sabratha

Two interviewees testified that they were held by Kidane in Sabratha.²⁴ One interviewee testified that he was bought by Kidane from a Libyan chief in Zawiya, who captured them on the road to the sea. The interviewee was then brought to Sabratha, where Kidane tried to obtain ransom from the interviewee:

He asked us to pay USD 4,300. We refused to pay. Then he asked for USD 3,500. We refused again. Then, he gave us to Wedi Isaac. That one asked USD 1,500. (Interviewee 1015, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019)

Another interviewee reported how Kidane 'took' him after he had been captured by Daesh, a story similar to the interviewee who had the same experience between Zawiya and Bani Walid.

Al-Amu, a Libyan, the main smuggler in Sabratha, managed to take us out of that place. He had prisoners of Daesh. They made an exchange. Kidane, an Eritrean smuggler working with Al-Amu took us in charge. (Interviewee 1014, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019)

²⁴ Interviewees 1014 & 1015, interviews with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019

This interviewee was first asked USD 3,500 by Kidane; just like interviewee 1015, he was sold to Wedi Isaac when he could not pay.

Connections with other traffickers and actors

Kidane's network is described as extensive, reaching all the way "from Eritrea to Europe" (Interviewee 1009, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019). In an unknown location, one interviewee was held by Kidane, who was working together with another notorious Eritrean trafficker, Abduselam (see next section):

We can pay to Kidane. Kidane, at that time, was working with Abduselam.
(Interviewee 0008, interview with Smits, face-to-face, April 2019)

The interviewee clarifies that someone else, nicknamed Medhanie (although not the infamous trafficker Medhanie Yedhego Mered, known as "The General"), was in charge of the warehouse. The money was paid to Kidane. He explained that the warehouses of the traffickers Kidane and Abduselam were separate, but they were cooperating.

Wedi Isaac is also mentioned by two interviewees as associated with Kidane. Kidane sold them to Wedi Isaac, who was operating in Bani Walid, when he failed to extract money from them. Wedi Isaac and Kidane were said by one interviewee to be pooling refugees to cross the sea.

After 10 months the money was paid. Kidane and Wedi Isaac, another Eritrean connection man, grouped 400 persons together. These 400 persons were going to go to the sea. We took big trucks from Bani Walid to Zawiya. (Interviewee 1011, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019)

Kidane also works with non-Eritrean chiefs and traffickers. The main connection there is Al-Amu, a Libyan and a big name in the trafficking business. Kidane was said to be working with him in Sabratha, although they each had their own warehouse. Kidane is also mentioned by one interviewee as cooperating with Aziz (1054, Interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, June 2020). Kidane is known to cooperate with Welid, who unlike Kidane, remained in prison following his arrest in Ethiopia (Girma & Hayden, 2021a), but Welid and Kidane were not linked by those interviewed for this book.

Interviewee 1011 indicated that Kidane had bought him back from Daesh after being kidnapped by the terrorist organisation on the way to Zawiya.

Many smaller ‘connection men’ were mentioned as working in Khartoum, whose victims ended up in the hands of Kidane. They include Michiele and Muhari.

Prosecution and conviction

Kidane was first arrested after having been spotted on the streets of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in February 2020 (Hayden, 2021a). However, after one year in prison, he escaped from the court and disappeared (Hayden, 2021a). In absentia, Kidane was sentenced to life without parole (Hayden, 2021b). After his escape, Kidane became the focus of an international investigation, and Dutch prosecutors put Kidane on the ‘most wanted’ list (Politie, 2021). Kidane and a group of collaborators were arrested by the Middle Eastern Chapter of Interpol on 1 January 2023 in the airport of Khartoum, Sudan. He was taken to the United Arab Emirates, where he is expected to be tried. The accusations leading to the trial are understood to be in any case financial malpractice and whitewashing (Personal conversation, phone, M. Van Reisen, 5 January 2023). The Netherlands has requested extradition to the Netherlands for the crimes of smuggling and human trafficking. The Netherlands is part of an international team leading the investigation of human trafficking in Libya together with Italy, the UK and other international partners (Personal conversation, phone, M. Van Reisen, 5 January 2023).

Wedi Isaac

Description

Wedi Isaac (also spelled Issak) is another alleged trafficker from Eritrea, whose name occurs many times. The report by Sahan Foundation and IGAD ISSP (2016) included a photograph that they claimed was of Wedi Isaac, showing off his muscles. In the report, he was said to be working with Medhanie before the arrest of the other ‘Medhanie’, which was confirmed by one of our interviewees



Figure 11.8. Wedi Isaac

(Source: Photograph from Sahan Foundation and IGAD ISSP, 2016)

(Interviewee 0001, interview with Smits, face-to-face, March 2019). The report also indicated that it was Wedi Isaac who took over from Medhanie when he went into hiding.

Five interviewees testified that they had been trafficked by Wedi Isaac.²⁵ Two of those interviewees were together and met in his warehouse.²⁶ The locations were Tripoli (Interviewee 0007), Bani Walid (Interviewees 0011, 1014, 1015, 3003) and Sabratha

²⁵ Interviewee 0007, interview with Smits, face-to-face, March 2019; Interviewees 0011, 1014, & 1015, interviews with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019; Interviewee 3003, interview with Van Reisen, WhatsApp, continuous from February 2019

²⁶ Interviewees 1014 & 1015, interviews with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019

(Interviewees 1014, 1015)²⁷. Wedi Isaac was mentioned in several other interviews by refugees who had not directly been his victims.²⁸

Bani Walid

Wedi Isaac is one of the big names allegedly active in trafficking in Bani Walid. From the interviews, it also appears to be his main base. Two of the interviewees, who met each other in his warehouse in Bani Walid, reported that his warehouse is large. They saw Wedi Isaac only when he came to ask for money. They paid USD 2,200 “for the sea” (Interviewee 1014, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019).

Another interviewee was also in a warehouse run by Wedi Isaac. He stated that Wedi Isaac organised his whole journey, from Sudan to Bani Walid (where he paid USD 7,500). In Zawiya, he had to pay another USD 3,500. The first amount, USD 7,500, was paid in Dubai. The exact way in which this was paid, and by whom, was not specified by the interviewee (Interviewee 3003, interview with Van Reisen, WhatsApp, February 2019).

Other locations

One interviewee was held in a warehouse shared by Medhanie and Wedi Isaac in Tripoli. His main ‘boss’ was Wedi Isaac. He was the one who came to ask him why his mother had not paid yet. He was beaten and deprived of food. He heard about one person who died because he was poor and had no mother or father to pay for him. His mother paid the ransom in Asmara. He paid USD 1,600 twice, once in Tripoli and once to cross the Mediterranean Sea (Interviewee 0007, interview with Smits, face-to-face, March 2019).

The other location where two interviewees were held (together) was Sabratha (Interviewees 1014 & 1015, interviews with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019). They were in a warehouse that belonged to Wedi Isaac, but Wedi Isaac himself was in Bani Walid. He asked USD 1,500

²⁷ There two interviewees were also both in a warehouse of Wedi Isaac in Bani Walid.

²⁸ Interviewees 0002 & 9001, interviews with Smits, face-to-face, March 2019; 1003, Interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019

from each of them. They were there until conflict broke out in Sabratha in 2017.

Connections with other traffickers

Two interviewees both reported that they were held first by Kidane in Bani Walid, but were eventually given to Wedi Isaac, who asked for less money when they could not pay (Interviewees 1014 & 1015, interviews with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019). Cooperation with Wedi Isaac is also mentioned by another interviewee trafficked by Kidane, who said that Wedi Isaac and Kidane mixed together their victims on one boat (Interviewees 0011, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019). Wedi Isaac was reported to be working with Medhanic, sharing a warehouse in Tripoli. He was also mentioned in the report by the Sahar Foundation and IGAD ISSP (2016) to have taken over from Medhanic when he went into hiding.

Wedi Isaac is also working with Libyan traffickers, but according to the interviewees, he is the one in charge. He also works with traffickers in Sudan. One interviewee said that when the money is paid in Sudan, these traffickers bring the money with them when they come to Libya, so that they can pay the trafficker in charge (Interviewee 0002, interview with Smits, face-to-face, March 2019).

One interviewee speculated on the connection between Wedi Isaac and Eritrean generals (Interviewee 0007, interview with Smits, face-to-face, March 2019). As his family paid his ransom in Asmara, he stated that this (the collection of the money) was the work of generals in Eritrea. However, he said that asking about that in Eritrea was much too dangerous:

If you want water and you ask for it [in Eritrea], you are put in prison. If you ask this, then your whole family [is put in prison]. (Interviewee 0007, interview with Smits, face-to-face, March 2019)

Current status

It was reported on social media that Wedi Isaac died in an accident in Libya in September 2021. Such rumours are hard to verify, and some experts warn that ‘staged deaths’ could be a way for traffickers to disappear.

Wedi Babu

Description

Another name that came up in many interviews is Wedi Babu. Nothing about Wedi Babu is known from previous reports or news articles. His name is not mentioned, although it is possible that he operates under other names as well. Interviewees state that he is Eritrean. Wedi Babu is active in Bani Walid. Four of the interviewees for this research said they were trafficked by Wedi Babu.²⁹

Bani Walid

The ransom amounts, which were named independently by all four interviewees trafficked by Wedi Babu were almost the same: three paid USD 3,800 and one paid USD 4,000. Wedi Babu's warehouse in Bani Walid is large, as described in the following:

In the store of Bani Walid it was very difficult. There were a lot of people in one store. Almost 600 persons in one room. Women and men are mixed together. In that place there are children, pregnant women [from rape]. It is very difficult in that store. There is no food. If somebody cannot pay, they were beaten by the connection man. (Interviewee 1010, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019)

Interviewees describe being beaten while on the phone with their family in the warehouse of Wedi Babu. Interviewees paid ransom in Khartoum and in Eritrea.

Another interviewee explained that he did not see Wedi Babu there, but “there are some persons responsible for phone calls, they're [saying], you are from Wedi Babu” (Interviewee 0010, interview with Smits, face-to-face, July 2019). The interviewee paid Wedi Babu USD 4,000, but after waiting for a long time, Libyan traffickers came and demanded that he pay again:

²⁹ Interviewees 0010 & 0013, interviews with Smits, face-to-face, July 2019; Interviewees 1003 & 1010, interviews with Wirtz, face-to-face, March to April 2019

The Libyan smugglers say that Wedi Babu left. If you offer money, you can escape from that. Until you do not offer the money, you will die there. (Interviewee 0010, interview with Smits, face-to-face, July 2019)

Connections with other traffickers

Wedi Babu has connections with traffickers in Sudan and Eritrea, as ransoms were paid there. Interviewee 1010 explained that his family paid his ransom in Eritrea, after making contact with a trafficker in Eritrea working with Wedi Babu. Wedi Babu is also mentioned as working with Libyan traffickers:

The Libyan man working under him was called Moussa. Moussa was the big boss in this store. (Interviewee 1003, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019)

Welid

Description

Welid or Walid is the nickname of Tewelde Goitom, another alleged Eritrean human trafficker. Girma and Hayden (2021b) say that Welid was particularly notorious for raping his victims. He would also threaten to release recordings of the rapes. A report by the Sahar Foundation and IGAD ISSP (2016)

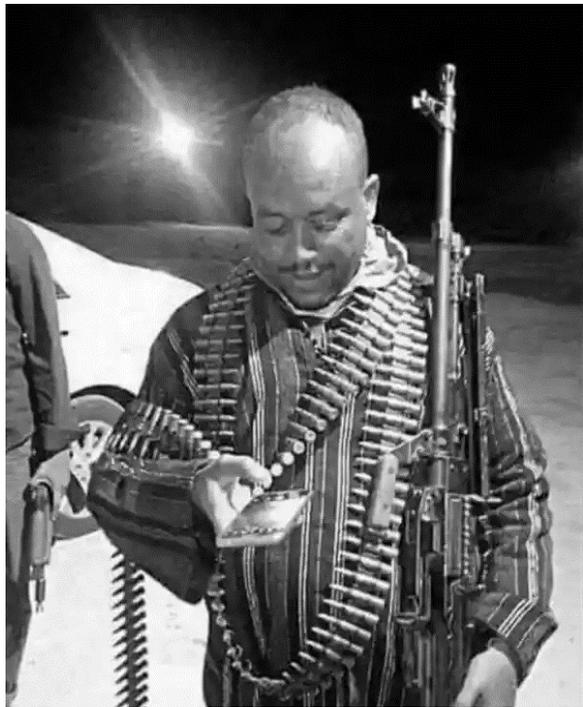


Figure 11.9. Tewelde Goitom (aka Welid or Walid) (Source: Photograph received from a refugee; also published on Facebook and image triangulated with resource persons)

also mention the activity of Welid (next to Kidane) in Libya.

Nine interviewees³⁰ testified to being held in the warehouses of Welid in various locations in Libya. One was held ‘close to Tripoli’, one in Aljmail (close to Zuwara), five in Bani Walid, one in Kufra, and one in Nasmah (a small village about 100 km from Bani Walid). Various other interviewees mentioned his name, but had not been held by him.

Bani Walid

The interviewees³¹ testify that, at least on some occasions, Welid was personally present in his warehouse in Bani Walid. They also testify that the warehouse held a large number of people, over 1,000. Two interviewees held together in Bani Walid said that the numbers were even greater, at least 1,500 or 1,600.

The interviewees testified to severe torture at the hands of Welid in Bani Walid. Two persons who were able to pay immediately said that they were not beaten, but that they saw those who could not pay being severely beaten. Every morning, he would make them call their families while beating them. The ransom amounts demanded ranged from USD 3,000–5,500 in Bani Walid under Welid. One interviewee stayed in the hands of Welid for one year and three months, because he could not pay. The torture he endured was severe:

He called somebody working for him, took him outside in the sun. He makes milk and sugar. He shakes it. He ties my hand and legs. He puts the sugar and milk on me. After that, there is the sun, also flies. They beat me. (Interviewee 1004, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019)

The interviewee was asked to pay USD 5,500, but he had only USD 4,500, as he had agreed in Sudan that he would make the trip for USD

³⁰ Interviewees 0001, 0017, & 0018, interviews with Smits, face-to-face, March-July 2019; Interviewees 1004, 1008, 1013, 1016, 1017, & 1023, interviews with Wirtz, face-to-face, April-November 2019

³¹ Interviewees 1004, 1008, 1013, & 1016, interviews with Wirtz, face-to-face, April-November 2019; Interviewees 0017 & 0018, interviews with Smits, face-to-face, July 2019

3,800. Finally, Welid agreed that he could pay USD 4,500, if did so immediately. “Okay. Today, I will give you the phone. When you send me this money, no problem, you will go to Italy. But if you cannot pay money, I will kill you”, Welid told him (Interviewee 1004, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019).

Not only Eritreans were held by Welid in Bani Walid, but also Ethiopians and Somalis. Food was in short supply in Welid’s warehouse, according to the interviewees. It was also withheld as punishment for not paying:

K: Was there any extra food for you because you were pregnant? They didn't give anything?

0018: Nothing. You get the stick [gestures getting beaten]. If you paid you get a little.

K: If you pay they don't beat you so much?

0017: No pay: every day without the sun, without food, water, stick.... get telephone... Ohhhh, every day. (Interviewees 0017 and 0018, interview with Smits, face-to-face, July 2019)

Interviewees explained that beatings were carried out with iron sticks, and were forceful enough to break bones. One interviewee testified that people frequently died at the hands of Welid.

Other locations

Other refugees detained by Welid were held in various places. This included one person in Kufra, one person near Tripoli, one person in Nasmah, and one in Aljmail, near Zuwara.³² Zuwara appears to be the place from which Welid would send the refugees out to sea, as it was mentioned in several interviews.

One interviewee said that he was held near Tripoli, where he was asked to pay USD 2,000, after he had already paid USD 1,600 when he entered Libya at Ishlavia. In Tripoli, he was held by Medhanie and

³² Interviewee 0001, interview with Smits, face-to-face, March 2019; Interviewees 1016, 1017, & 1023, interviews with Wirtz, face-to-face, April-November 2019

Welid. He estimated that there were over 1,000 people in the warehouse:

[...] in the detention hall, in one day they were shooting guns to make us stop talking. We have children, women, a lot of children – about 1,000 people were there together. And I saw that a lack of... how do you say that? There wasn't enough food. We have, what do you call that? ... A skin condition? Itchy skin. Some of the women were pregnant and they gave birth at that time. (Interviewee 0001, interview with Smits, face-to-face, March 2019)

Another interviewee stayed for one year and five months in Welid's house in Kufra. The size of the place was not described by the interviewee.

They use to beat us with electric wires or with sticks. We had problem of memory as well. Women and men were in the same room. I was not that much beaten. My husband has been beaten. They wanted us to see him being beaten. In that house they also do sexual abuse. They do it all the time. Maybe one day, one night, three women and then another day, another one. (Interviewee 1016, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019)

A person who was held by Welid in Nasmah described the experience as “the worst”:

Everybody knows about Welid. He used to rape every women. A lot of women who passed through his warehouse got pregnant. So he asked us to pay USD 6,000. But we didn't have any possibility to do so, so he beat us with sticks while we were on the phone with our relatives, family members or husband. This happened to me as well. I was beaten. He broke my arm. (Interviewee 1017, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019)

This interviewee stressed that it was Welid personally who did the raping. If he was not present, there were no rapes. Other torture included beating with shower hoses. The torture was filmed by traffickers in this warehouse in Nasmah, and the videos shared on the Internet. The interviewee ended up paying USD 6,000 to get out.

One interviewee was in a house of Welid in Aljmail, near Zuwara. He was living in Tripoli when he paid Welid USD 2,500 to take him across the Mediterranean Sea. However, he ended up in the store of

Abdallah, who worked with Welid, and Abdallah sent him to Tunisia instead.

Connections with other traffickers and actors

Welid was another well-connected trafficker. One confirmed associate of Welid is Shishay Godefay Demoz, who was arrested and sentenced as an accomplice; he assisted Welid in Libya (Girma & Hayden, 2021b).

Welid is also connected to Abduselam. After a group of refugees was captured by bandits, they asked the bandits to call their trafficker, Abduselam, to free them, however, it was Welid who showed up. Welid also has a connection with 'John' in Libya, another Eritrean trafficker (possibly John Merhay). Interviewees were transferred from John to Welid in Kufra. It was also mentioned that Welid was working with Abdallah in Libya, at a place close to Zuwara. This is probably a different Abdallah than the one described earlier in this chapter. Other interviewees mention unnamed Libyans cooperating with him.

Welid also worked with traffickers in Khartoum and Egypt. A trafficker called Alex was mentioned, who promised one interviewee that he could make the trip for USD 3,800. However, Alex took the money and the interviewee ended up having to pay another USD 3,800 to Welid. Another trafficker mentioned was Take, who took one interviewee from Cairo to Bani Walid, where he ended up being held by Welid.

One interviewee links Welid to the trafficking in the Sinai desert:

I heard it with my ears when he said: "I was working in Sinai before!" When they are together, the smugglers, he said: "I was working in Sinai before". Like that. When they are drinking, they are talking like that. (Interviewee 1059, focus group discussion with Wirtz, face-to-face, June 2020)

Although this information was coincidentally overheard by one interviewee, it provides a line to trafficking in the Sinai, in which a very similar modus operandi was used.

Prosecution and conviction

Welid was arrested in Ethiopia in March 2020, following the arrest of Kidane (Girma & Hayden, 2021a). The two were said to be cooperating, particularly in Bani Walid. Girma and Hayden (2021a) report that Welid was convicted under the name Amanuel Yirga Damte, but the victims indicate this is a false name. Welid was sentenced to 18 years in prison for trafficking (Girma & Hayden, 2021b).

In October 2022, Welid was extradited to the Netherlands to face trial (Netherlands Public Prosecution Service, 2022). The Dutch prosecution said that the 38-year old Eritrean was:

[...] suspected of smuggling Eritreans to the Netherlands on a large scale and under life-threatening circumstances between 2014 and 2020. On their way to Europe, victims were beaten, tortured and raped, while they were held in camps in Libya with hundreds of others. (Netherlands Public Prosecution Service, 2022)

At the time of writing, Welid has not yet been convicted in the Netherlands.

Other traffickers

Several other alleged traffickers mentioned by the interviewees appeared to play an important role in the networks, at least at the time the interviewees were in Libya. Some have also been mentioned in previous reports. Their roles will be briefly described in this subsection.

Chegora

Chegora was mentioned in the Sahan Foundation and IGAD ISSP (2016) report as one of the Eritrean smugglers operating in Libya and Sudan. Confidential interviews by Sahan Foundation and IGAD (2016) in Libya indicated that boats belonging to Chegora were in conflict with Kidane's on the high seas at one point.

One interviewee for this research was trafficked by Chegora (Interviewee 1023, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, November 2019). The interviewee contacted him by phone from Khartoum in 2017 in order to arrange his trip to Libya. The interviewee said that

Chegora is called Tuemuzgi and confirms that he is Eritrean. According to the interviewee, Chegora lived in Kampala, Uganda, at that time. Chegora and the interviewee agreed on USD 3,500 for the desert and the sea, but he was kidnapped by Chadian armed groups before reaching Libya.

Another interviewee who knows of Chegora, but was not personally trafficked by him, said that Chegora worked together with Kiros, John, Abduselam, Welid, Kidane, and Abdella (Interviewee 0004, interview with Smits, face-to-face, March 2019).

Mohammed Whisky

One man referred to by several interviewees is Mohammed ‘Whisky’. Mohammed Whisky was also referred to by Eritrean refugees in interviews with Camilli (2018). According to the Eritreans she spoke to, Whisky was particularly notorious for being part of the Islamic State (Daesh). He was referred to in the article as a Libyan, who was holding refugees in an underground prison, and was said to have killed some Eritreans who would not convert to Islam.

Two interviewees were trafficked by Mohammed Whisky. One paid him USD 5,000 (Interviewee 0009, interview with Smits, WhatsApp, February 2019). Another interviewee was held by Whisky in Bani Walid. She referred to him as a “Daesh man” (Interviewee 1017, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019). She described how her group was kidnapped by him on the way to the sea, and that the warehouse where they were detained lacked food. The detainees were subjected to “a lot of violence” (Interviewee 1017, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019). She paid him USD 2,500 and was sold to Abduselam in Ash Schwayrif:

The Daesh man and Abduselam they knew each other, but I don't know what kind of relationship they have. This Abduselam requested us for more money, USD 1,500, because he said that he bought us from Mohammed Whisky. (Interviewee 1017, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019)

Keshi

Two interviewees (who were together) were held by Keshi (also spelt as Kashi) in Bani Walid:

The chief there was Keshi. He comes from Ada Hagusha, near Asmara, in Eritrea.
(Interviewee 0004, interview with Smits, face-to-face, March 2019)

Another interviewee added that he worked together with a Libyan named Diab (Interviewee 0005, interview with Smits, face-to-face, March 2019).

One interviewee said he was trafficked by Kashi in the Sinai around 2009/2010 (Interviewee 1013, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019). He does not refer to being tortured, but was taken from Sudan to Israel via the Sinai through Kashi's network. He said Kashi was an Eritrean. However, it is not clear from the context whether this may be the same person as the one operating in Bani Walid.

Traffickers in Sudan

Unlike the top-level traffickers operating the warehouses in Libya, the traffickers in Sudan are more numerous and the same names rarely reoccur twice. Names recorded in the interviews include Alex, Tinaat, Mikele, Wedi, Wassie (all Eritreans), Tadese (Ethiopian), and Abo (Sudanese), to name a few. Some interviewees did not know the names of the traffickers, because they were in a group, and did not have personal contact; others have forgotten or never knew their names. These traffickers often informed the refugees about the journey. Most did not ask for payment in Sudan:

He informed us that we would have to pay once we arrive in Libya and if we pay that we would be sent to the sea. (Interviewee 1051, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, June 2020)

In most of the interviews, the refugees do not put any blame for their mistreatment on the traffickers in Sudan. Most of the key actors remain relatively hidden. It may also be the case that they operate under different names to avoid detection or a 'bad reputation'.

Libya as a ‘black site’ for Eritrean government’s nefarious activities

The suspected links between trafficking and Eritrean officials run back to the Sinai trafficking times. A report by the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea reads:

People smuggling is so pervasive that it could not be possible without the complicity of [Eritrean] Government and party officials, especially military officers working in the western border zone, which is headed by General Teklai Kifle “Manjus”. Multiple sources have described to the Monitoring Group how Eritrean officials collaborate with ethnic Rashaida smugglers to move their human cargo through the Sudan into Egypt and beyond. This is in most respects the same network involved in smuggling weapons through to Sinai and into Gaza. (UN Security Council, 2011, p. 110)

In a book by Van Reisen and Mawere (2017), the same conclusion is drawn. The book describes how refugees are driven out through policies of deliberate impoverishment and human rights abuses, and the involvement of officials, military staff and gangs in trafficking for ransom. This takes place, at best, with the tacit approval of the Eritrean government and, at worst, with its involvement (Van Reisen & Mawere, 2017).

This brings us to the current situation in Libya. Some of the interviewees stated that they suspect that some of the Eritrean traffickers in Libya have connections with Eritrean authorities. Furthermore, recently, there are indications that governments such as Eritrea’s may be able to use Libya in more structured way, namely as a ‘black site’, through their connections with such traffickers. A black site is a secret jail, where prisoners are held (and sometimes tortured) without trial. In the case of Eritrea, early warnings suggest that the Eritrean government may be using traffickers in Libya to punish dissidents.

An interviewee stated that more direct contact between human traffickers in Libya and authorities in Eritrea was happening, since the conflict in Tigray, Ethiopia, started. Since the start of the war in Tigray, the presence of Eritrean intelligence has been growing. One

interviewee with many contacts in Addis Ababa goes so far as to indicate that the Eritrean government is virtually in control of some parts of the Ethiopian government, such as the Ethiopian National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) (Interviewee 5031, interview with Smits, face-to-face, October 2021). This has led to Eritrean involvement in identifying Tigrayans, but also Eritreans, for arrest in Addis Ababa.

One interviewee located in Europe indicated that a family member of his was taken directly from Addis Ababa to Libya with the cooperation of Eritrean authorities in Addis (Interviewee 0021, interview with Smits, face-to-face, date withheld for security reasons). The interviewee, who was politically active in opposition to the Eritrean government, had received threats, indicating that his political activity was the reason that his family member was taken forcibly to Libya. He was then extorted to pay ransom for his family member. The interviewee also stated that many more people from a specific neighbourhood in Addis Ababa had disappeared – some were taken to prison or other locations, many to Eritrea as well.

Then suddenly, a bit over a week later, I got the call that he was in Libya. They let me hear his voice for a few seconds. The whole time he was there, they let me hear him twice. [...] I understood that he was captured by [human trafficker]. [...] He [the intermediary] said that “I shouldn’t make this political” – that way, he let me know that it was because of my opposition to the regime in Eritrea that my [family member] was there now. [...] I came to the conclusion that Libya, at the moment, also is a prison camp for the Eritrean government. (Interviewee 0021, interview with Smits, face-to-face, date withheld for security reasons)

This, according to the interviewee, is possible because of the cooperation between Eritrea and Ethiopia in the Tigray conflict. Hence, Eritreans in Ethiopia are now vulnerable:

The people who fled to Addis are all from national service. They know exactly how the military people are. They were also tortured and abused in Sawa [a military camp in Eritrea]. So they know how the people torture – they have experienced it. So they knew exactly that these people were the guards of Sawa, the same people who

abused soldiers in Sawa. It was exactly the same. (Interviewee 0021, interview with Smits, face-to-face, date withheld for security reasons)

There are, at the time of writing, three cases known to the researchers of well-known political activists who have had a close family member abducted, two of which were taken to Libya. One of those was eventually released and arrived in Europe in a serious medical condition (Interviewee 3014, personal communication with Van Reisen, October 2020).

Although these allegations have not yet been thoroughly investigated, there is a possibility that Libya could be being used by the Eritrean government as a ‘black site’ or secret prison, where people are held without charge, with cooperation by the human traffickers, to punish those who are opposed to the regime.

Åsa Nilsson-Söderström, Former Member of the Liberal International Human Rights Committee, referred to this type of harassment by the Eritrean government as ‘borderless harassment’ (Erisat, 2022). The operation of black sites is in line with the ‘borderless harassment’ engaged in by the Eritrean government, which was also described in Chapter 9: *Deceived and Exploited: Classifying the Practice as Human Trafficking*. This includes repression of Eritrean opposition, anywhere in the world, forced payment of 2% tax and other contributions by members of the Eritrean diaspora, and intimidation of all those who have fled Eritrea.

Cloaking of human traffickers

The traffickers identified in this chapter have become well-known figures. Although they do not always use their real name, and may in fact use multiple names, they have become recognisable. In some cases, pictures of them are freely available. However, some interviewees who are following the situation in Libya state that this is changing:

0022: Most of the smugglers [in Libya] now try to hide, but they are still there.

K: Do you have any idea why they try to hide?

0022: *I believe the Eritrean government may want to kill smugglers because they could speak on the role of the Eritrean government [in the trafficking].*
(Interviewee 0022, interview with Smits, face-to-face, December 2021)

The interviewees state that new names are now mentioned when people are being trafficked for ransom in Libya:

Now there are new names, most of them changed to Muslim names. Like Ibrahim, Abubaker, Adi Hanum, Aman... Lines are scattering, and they are making a new one. They are trying to hide it [trafficking]. It started only this year [2021]. But all the things are the same. People are still being held, and need to pay ransom.
(Interviewee 0022, interview with Smits, face-to-face, December 2021)

Hence, there are early indications that the traffickers in Libya might be attempting to go into hiding and are taking new names, in order to divert attention.

Synthesis: Tracing the trafficking network

The interviewees consistently named the key actors who played a leading role in their trafficking. As one informant for this book explained, the networks go all the way from Eritrea to Italy, and even beyond, and in each location the top-level trafficker is working with subordinates and with local people to manage the trafficking line. For Eritrean refugees, these are usually top-level Eritrean traffickers. In this synthesis, some of the key names, locations and relations will be linked together.

The list of alleged human traffickers described in this chapter shows that the names of key actors were mentioned multiple times in the interviews. The information from the interviews both corroborates and extends what was already known about these traffickers. Some traffickers whose names emerged from the interviews have not previously been extensively described in the literature, reports or news articles. The locations in which these traffickers were active was described by the interviewees. The bigger actors were often active in multiple locations. In addition, from the interviews, some links between traffickers, and between traffickers and other actors, such as armed groups and authorities, can be established.

The locations in which human traffickers are active include a few ‘hot spots’ (see Figure 11.10). Bani Walid appears to have the highest concentration of human traffickers, perhaps due to its location – relatively remote, yet close to key coastal hubs. The traffickers at the top control the warehouses, although they are often run by Libyans, with the help of other smaller actors (Eritreans, Somalis, and Sudanese). Some traffickers were physically present in their warehouses, at least some of the time. For example, Welid was described as present in his Bani Walid warehouses, where he also personally engaged in sexual and other abuse. Others, such as Abdurazak, seem to have left the business to others, while they stay in other locations such as Dubai or Uganda.

Some locations appear to be dominated by one trafficker, at least when it concerns the ‘niche market’ of trafficking Eritrean refugees. These include Aziz in Brak Shati and Abduselam in Ash Schwayrif. Most extort the ransom from the refugees in Brak Shati, Bani Walid and Ash Schwayrif, also occasionally in Kufra, before transporting them to the coastal cities. Refugees reported often being stuck for months in the hands of traffickers, waiting for a boat. This makes them vulnerable to kidnapping, reselling, and other abuse.

Coastal cities also have their dominant traffickers. Al-Amu was the most frequently mentioned in this regard, in his stronghold of Sabratha, until he was expelled from there in 2017. As the interviews show, Al-Amu was fully engaged in trafficking for ransom. It is unknown what his current engagement is, after his apparent return to Sabratha in 2020.

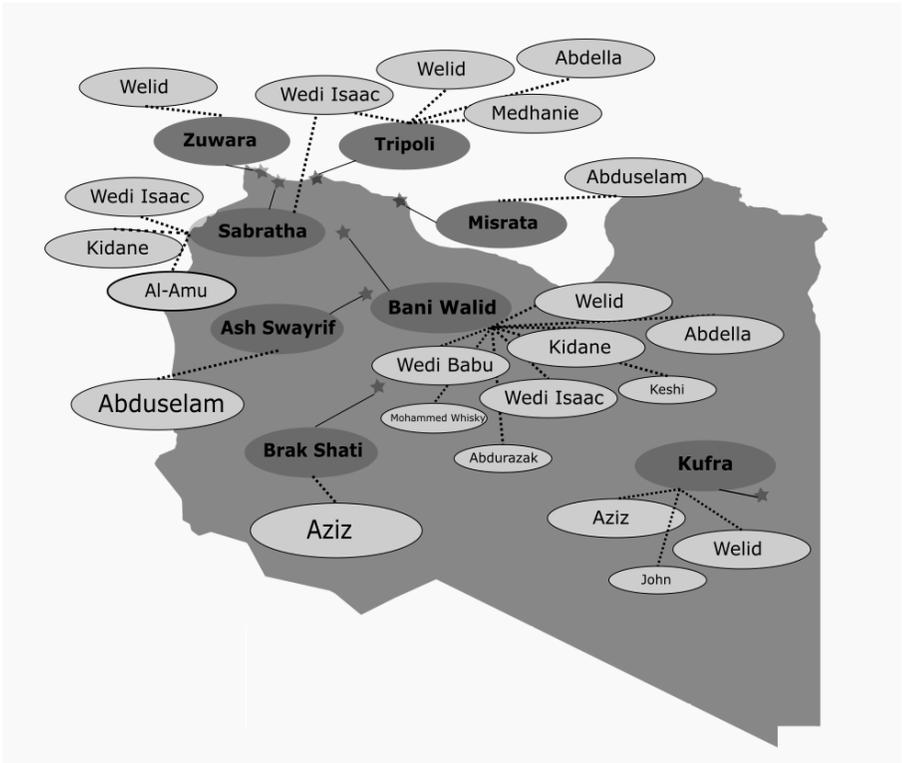


Figure 11.10. Main locations of alleged human traffickers in Libya discussed in this chapter, based on the interviews
 (Source: Adapted by Klara Smits from Libya map by Free Vector Maps.com)

Some alleged traffickers described in this chapter are well known to the authorities, but pursuing any kind of justice is almost impossible, because of their connection with top government officials. Of the traffickers named in this chapter, only Welid and Kidane are in prison. Only recently has the international community become bolder in pursuing international traffickers, with Dutch prosecutors putting Kidane on their ‘most wanted’ list. Other traffickers on the list have been sanctioned by the UN Security Council (Al-Amu, Abdurazak), but this has not led to accountability or justice.

The challenge of bringing the top-level human traffickers to justice has a lot to do with the freedom they have to operate their networks in Libya. As seen from the descriptions above, the traffickers have

well-established networks and work with armed groups and local authorities. Figure 11.11 summarises these connections.

What this figure shows is the complexity of the networks, and the practice of frequent kidnapping and reselling. When one trafficker falls away, for example, Medhanie, another takes over, for example Wedi Isaac. Within these complicated networks, the refugees become “like a ball”, as described by interviewee 6003.

This system can also be exploited at a higher level. For instance, since the start of the Tigray war, the Eritrean intelligence has gained a stronger foothold in Addis Ababa, as reported by one interviewee, and are now practically in charge of arrests of Tigrinya-speakers in Addis Ababa, including in some cases Eritrean refugees. One member of the Eritrean opposition in the diaspora has indicated that his nephew was kidnapped from Addis Ababa and taken directly to Libya with the involvement of the Eritrean intelligence. Although this requires further investigation, it shows that Libya might be being used as a ‘black site’ for the Eritrean government to punish citizens, with the help of human traffickers.

Upon reading the interviews, it is striking how much “like a ball” the refugees are treated. The cases where refugees have been in the hands of only a single trafficker are the exception, rather than the rule. Many have experienced the warehouses of multiple traffickers named in this chapter, sometimes without knowing where they are in Libya, or how long they will stay. They tell long stories of kidnapping, arrest, escape, failed sea crossings and imprisonment, all the while facing torture and inhumane circumstances. For some, their imprisonment spanned years. By naming these traffickers, this chapter contributes to the documentation on the people who have committed these crimes.

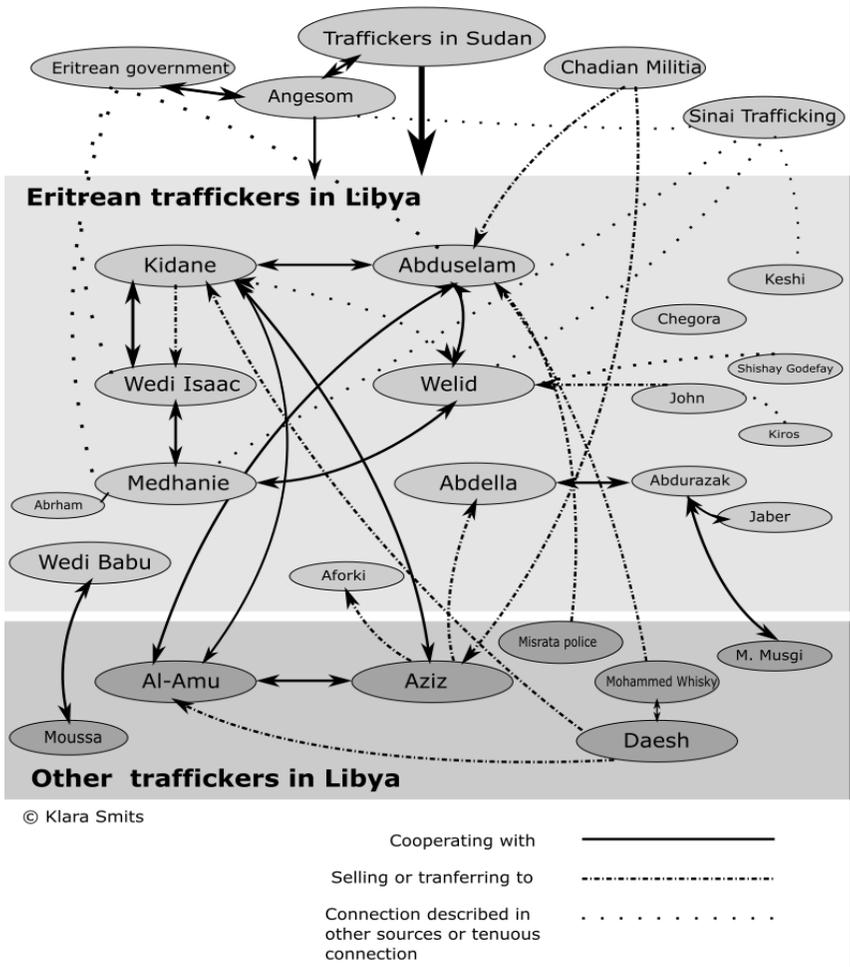


Figure 11.11. Relationship between alleged traffickers inside Libya (Eritrean and other)
 (Source: Based on interviews and other sources)

Discussion

The investigation of the trafficking networks that operate in Libya has led to sanctions, arrests and investigations. Notably, the criminal investigation conducted in collaboration between the Netherlands, United Kingdom, Italy, Europol, Interpol and the International Criminal Court (ICC) has led to the arrest and extradition of people such as Welid. Others on the list remain relatively unknown.

An overview of those previously named in the literature (key actors), those named in this work, and those arrested or sanctioned are presented here. The names in the table marked with an asterisk (*) are those where it is uncertain whether or not it is indeed the same person as previous named, arrested or sanctioned.

Table 11.1. Key actors named in this chapter, named in the literature, and those arrested or sanctioned

Previously named	In this chapter	Arrested or sanctioned
Abu Abdellah* and brother Abu Salem	Abdella (Abdallah)	
Abdurazak Esmail - Ismael Abderaza Saleh	Abdurazak (Abdelrazak)	Fitiwi Abdelrazak
Abduselam/Abdelselam	Abduselam	
	Al-Amu	Ahmad Oumar al-Dabbashi
Kesete Te'ame (aka 'Asgedom') – Angesom Teame (aka Angesom or Wejahy/Angesom Kidane)	Angesom	
	Aziz	
Medhanie Yehdego Mered – Medhanie Ydego Meredas	Medhanie	

Previously named	In this chapter	Arrested or sanctioned
John Merhay*	John 'Merhay'	
John Habeta	John 'Habeta'	John Habeta; arrested in Kenya in 2021, extradited to the Netherlands
	John 'Sina'	
Kidane	Kidane	Kidane Zekarias Habtemariam; arrested in Ethiopia in 2020, escaped in 2021. Re-arrested in Sudan in January 2023.
Wedi Issak	Wedi Isaac	
	Wedi Babu	
Walid	Welid	Tewelde Goitom; arrested in Ethiopia in 2020, convicted in 2021. Extradited to the Netherlands in 2022.
Chegora	Chegora	
	Mohammed Whisky	
	Keshi	
General Teklai Kifle 'Manjus'		
Maesho Tesfamariam		
Ermias Ghermay		Ermias Ghermay
Zaid		
Wedi German,		

Previously named	In this chapter	Arrested or sanctioned
Kiros		
Shumay Ghirmay		
Efrem Misgna		
Abu Khaled		
		Abd Al-Rahman al-Milad (al-Bija)
		Mus'ab Abu-Quarin
		Mohammed Kachlaf

The names that came forward from the work of the Sahan Foundation and IGAD ISSP (2016) and Van Reisen, Estefanos and Reim (2017) focus primarily on the early networks in place. However, this table shows that there is considerable overlap between the work of these authors and the findings of this chapter. In addition, action has already been taken, in the form of arrests or sanctions, to bring some of those traffickers to justice. What can be seen from the list of sanctions and arrests, is that many of the traffickers who have been caught were using their own name or a version of it. This chapter has shown that this may now be changing, with the traffickers feeling the consequences of prosecution coming closer. This may mean that the trafficking networks in Libya may move more underground and hidden.

This chapter has also shown where the traffickers operate, and what the interlinkages between them are. These networks include cooperation, selling and transferring from one trafficker to another. The traffickers on the list have been accused of severe human rights abuses, however, many have not yet been arrested or sanctioned.

Conclusion

This book set out to describe the cycle of human trafficking for ransom in Libya. A key part of this is an in-depth description of how the trafficking networks function in the case of Eritrean refugees, which was described in this chapter. As seen in Chapter 10: *Straight Lines in the Sahara: Mapping the Human Trafficking Routes and Hubs through Libya*, the trafficking networks and locations in Libya are extensive. Key traffickers manage such networks. These traffickers operate with others, including Libyans, and also cooperate in some instances with other traffickers.

Although the trafficking took place in Libya, the vast majority of key traffickers mentioned by the interviewees are Eritrean. This means that the control over human trafficking networks transporting Eritreans across Libya is in the hands of other Eritreans. These alleged human traffickers have been connected to Eritrean authorities in Eritrea.

This chapter has presented the names and aliases of the people mentioned by the interviewees as having arranged their trafficking trajectory, and details the abuses they committed, including torture, and extracted ransoms. In some cases, the information corroborates what was already available in the literature, reports and media. In other cases, names, as yet unreported or little reported in other sources, were uncovered.

The analysis shows the key locations in which these traffickers are active, including Bani Walid as a primary location, but also Tripoli, Kufra, Brak Shati, Ash Schwayrif, Misrata, Sabratha and Zuwara. In addition, the analysis highlights the intricate network of interrelations between the traffickers, among each other and also with other actors. The most often recurring names are described as transferring and selling trafficked persons, and cooperating in other ways – for example, by sharing warehouses.

Where it concerns Eritrean refugees, many of them come under the control of alleged Eritrean traffickers in Libya. Many of those actors are well known, including Abduselam, Kidane (Kidane Zekarias

Habtemariam), Welid (Tewelde Goitom), Medhanie (Medhanie Yehdego Mered), Al-Amu, and Abdurazak. Some of these actors have since been arrested, prosecuted, or sanctioned. There are also lesser known names of people who, nonetheless, were described as playing a key role in the torture of the interviewees, such as Wedi Isaac, Wedi Babu, Abdella, the Chadian armed groups, John (Merhay), Chegora, Mohamed Whisky, and Keshi.

The trafficking networks described by the interviewees start in Sudan and, in a few cases, Ethiopia. The networks include alleged linkages with the Eritrean government, which requires further in-depth research and analysis. The networks also include others, such as top-level Libyan armed group actors, Libyan police, and Chadian armed groups, who kidnapped and sold some interviewees to traffickers – mainly Aziz, who is presumed to be Sudanese.

The men described in this chapter have mostly been able to operate with impunity. As shown by the arrest of Kidane Zekarias Habtemariam, they have even been using their own (first) name in the process. More recently, however, their operations seem to have become more clandestine, and the much-used names are disappearing, replaced by names that are unknown or less known. Further research and investigation by international police and prosecutors is, therefore, urgent to ensure that victims can access justice.

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Author contributions

Klara Smits is the sole author of this chapter.

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