



# THE ITALIAN CAPABILITIES IN COUNTERING ORGANIZED CRIME AS A TOOL OF STABILIZATION IN WESTERN AFRICA

MARCO DI LIDDO, FIAMMA TERENGI, ANDREA CERASUOLO, VALENTINA PIOL



**Farnesina**  
Ministero degli Affari Esteri  
e della Cooperazione Internazionale



CENTRO STUDI  
INTERNAZIONALI



**INTELLEGI+**  
Turning science into intelligence



# THE ITALIAN CAPABILITIES IN COUNTERING ORGANIZED CRIME AS A TOOL OF STABILIZATION IN WESTERN AFRICA

April 2019



The current report has been drafted thanks to the financial support of Ministry of Foreign Affairs and of International Cooperation, according to I.948/82 (art.2).

**The arguments, the vocabulary, the wording and the definitions hereby presented exclusive represent the author's standpoints and they do not necessary reflect the official stance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and of International Cooperation.**



## INDEX

<b>INTRODUCTION: THE THREAT OF AFRICAN ORGANISED CRIME TO AFRICA AND TO EUROPE</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>1 ORGANIZED CRIME IN WESTERN AFRICA</b> .....	<b>12</b>
1.1 Growth of the organized crime in Western Africa.....	12
1.2 Operational models and illegal markets of organized crime in western Africa.....	15
1.3 Nigerian mafias.....	21
<b>2 EVOLUTION AND ROOTING OF AFRICAN CRIMINAL AGENTS IN ITALY</b> .....	<b>33</b>
2.1 North-African criminal groups in Italy: evolution, rooting and structure.....	33
2.1.1 Illegal markets: drugs and human trafficking.....	34
2.3 Nigerian Mafias in Italy: development, radicalization and structure .....	41
2.3.1 The transnational illegal markets of Nigerian mafias in Italy .....	45
2.3.2 Human trafficking with the scope of sexual and labor exploitation .....	47
2.3.3. Illegal drug trafficking.....	52
<b>CONCLUSION: POTENTIAL FUTURE SCENARIOS</b> .....	<b>56</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	<b>60</b>





## **INTRODUCTION: THE THREAT OF AFRICAN ORGANISED CRIME TO AFRICA AND TO EUROPE**

Africa is a large and diverse continent, where a significant part of the population, especially in the Sub-Saharan area, unfortunately lives under conditions of extreme poverty. The low level of development in several regions of the continent is not only due to poverty, but also to lacking healthcare, to limited access to primary education and to ongoing weaknesses in governance and in the rule of law. These conditions persist in the most vulnerable regions of some countries, regardless of certain significant and fruitful reformist efforts and actions aimed at the development of national governments and international organizations. According to the UNODC, together with the explicatory and contingent reasons behind the socio-economic and political conditions of several countries, it should be added a high level of criminality– accompanied by large social inequality– rapid urbanization, high rate of unemployment amongst young people, weak judicial system, corruption, uncontrolled proliferation of weapons, social conflicts and civil wars. These, in particular, have had a primary contribution to the growth of small-scale and organized crime which, in turn, benefit from conditions of instability.

“Organized crime is a key actor in promoting and sustaining humanitarian crises in areas of conflict, as it profits from settings characterised by instability and chaos. For instance, findings from the UNODC indicate that areas of conflict are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking. Many fragile societies are trapped in a vicious circle where organized criminality creates the basis for its growth and countries are weakened in their capacity to fight against it and in their potential to ensure safety and development”.<sup>1</sup>

In this context, organized crime arose as the symptom of deep economic, social, political and cultural hardships– characteristics of some African communities. Once rooted and developed, organized crime contributed to hinder and slow down development processes, stabilization, transparency and democratisation in many countries in the continent.

There are several challenges associated with organized crime and reasons for concern linked to its growth and development. When analyzing the operational models established in the continent, ranging from highly hierarchical and unitary structures (similar to European and Asian mafias) to individuals or small non-homogeneous groups (especially in the information technology sector), it is impossible not to note the tragic mingling, in some cases, between illegal economy and legal economy and between criminal settings and institutions. In this sense, African criminal

---

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime – UNODC (2005), Crime and Development in Africa.

organizations benefit from the support of certain members of the political-bureaucratic world, they become the dark means of electoral co-optation, or they merely present themselves as *ad hoc* alliances to legal subjects which, under particular circumstances, commit repeated illegal activities. The latter case, at the moment, is the most common in the African continent and it involves some representatives of the world of politics, security and business, who diversify their activities by drawing on the illegal markets. Thus, in certain cases, the African socio-economic and political context is a gigantic hybrid of the legal and the illegal, a continuous moving in and out of legality, a perpetual graft of public interest and individual profit. And if that was not enough, African organized crime demonstrated a great and increasing operational flexibility, providing a capacity to form “strategic alliances” even within the varied scenario of insurrectional or Jihadist militias, especially when the former use the means and draw upon the illegal markets of the latter as a financing strategy.<sup>2</sup>

It appears clear how, in this social ecosystem, it is extremely challenging for the institutions, the civil society and the foreign third parties (both national and supra-national) to promote effective strategies aimed at development and transparency. Additionally, in some cases, it is the criminal organizations, rather than the state, which are effective in providing jobs, opportunities and support to individuals and communities which would otherwise be destined to deep poverty and alienation. It is this process of acquiring and building support which causes justified alarmism amongst the virtuous national forces and amongst international partners of the African countries, as it contributes to strengthening a widespread sentiment of distrust towards the institutions and to considering as legitimate several fraudulent, violent and criminal practices. It becomes evident how such a situation discourages investments and makes the African market less appealing, thus diminishing the structural interventions necessary to free Africa from the systematic deficiencies which hinder its economic growth and political stabilization.

To these elements, it should be added that massive migratory movements and the raising African diasporas abroad, which are often accompanied by a difficult integration in the economic-social context of the country of destination, have not only ensured large profit dependent on human trafficking, but they have also enabled the creation of criminal groups outside of the continent. It is exactly this latter pattern which resembles the social and economic mechanisms characteristic of Cosa Nostra in the United States of America.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, several organized crime groups, which established themselves in Africa, could move– thanks to the migration movements– to other European countries, and could expand their criminal business. Some criminal actors of African nationality, especially

---

<sup>2</sup> D. Lounnas, The links between jihadi organizations and illegal trafficking in the Sahel, Menara Working papers No. 25, Novembre 2018.

<sup>3</sup> J. Finckenauer, La Cosa Nostra in The United States, United Nations crime prevention program, 2007.

from North Africa (Maghreb countries) and Nigeria, which have a variable level of organization and structures, gradually settled and became radicalised in Italy. Police investigations in the national territory, together with judicial evidence, indicate that, amongst all the African criminal groups, it is the Nigerian ones which show mafia-like characteristics and, as of today, manage transnational markets, such as those involving narcotic substances and human trafficking.

However, it is important to specify that African organized crime, both at home and abroad, evolves in parallel to the development of society and geopolitical conditions. Its adaptability and flexibility, which have always been fundamental features of organized crime, threaten to increase the power and influence of criminal groups, thus hindering the enforcement actions of the competent institutions.

Therefore, the growth and development of African organized crime have manifold consequences on the stability, security and development of the African and European countries which receive great diasporas from the southern side of the Mediterranean. As a consequence, the enforcement actions of the Italian authorities, carried out both on the national territory and in the African setting, vitally contributes not only to raising national security levels in our country, but also to supporting virtuous processing abroad. The work of the Polizia and the armed forces of Carabinieri is fundamental to deprive the African mafias of its profits gained from the exploitation of Italian illegal markets, which contribute significantly the budget of these organizations. However, it is important to note that the efforts of the anti-mafia authorities seem fundamental to improve the mechanisms for the integration of diasporas in our society, thus avoiding that hundreds of human beings are put under the yoke of organizations which profit from hardship and which contribute to creating dangerous divisions between the different communities. Likewise, by bringing stability to areas of conflict and strengthening the power of the institutions, the involvement of the Italian military and security personnel in missions abroad deprives criminal organizations of significant room for socio-political maneuver, as well as of economic resources. In this sense, by increasing the capacities of the local authorities and contrasting human trafficking, the many Italian missions, both under the aegis of the EU, e.g., EUCAP Sahel, and of the nation, e.g., in Nigeria, hinder the illegal business of local criminal organizations.

By first looking at the literature, the reports and the secondary sources of institutions, police forces and the judiciary, the aim of this contribution is to analyse the radicalisation and growth of Western African criminal groups in Africa and in Italy, focusing especially on the so-called Nigerian Mafia, describing their organization, their structure, their principal illegal markets and highlighting the risks associated with their growth and how, as a result, enforcement activities– of which Italy is at the forefront globally– are fundamental means to provide stability and security both in Europe and in Africa.

More specifically, chapter 1, which focuses on organized crime in Western Africa, was written by Dr. Marco di Liddo and Dr. Andrea Cerasuolo of Ce.S.I.. While, chapter 2, which focuses on the activities of these organizations in Italy, was written by Dr. Fiamma Terenghi and Dr. Valentina Piol of Intellegit, a start-up of the Università di Trento.

# 1 ORGANIZED CRIME IN WESTERN AFRICA

By Marco Di Liddo and Andrea Cerasuolo (Ce.S.I)

## 1.1 Growth of the organized crime in Western Africa

In a way that is similar to all social organizations and units, both the legal and illegal ones, the structure adopted by organized crime<sup>4</sup> reflect the political, juridical and economic conditions of the context in which they develop, being it the local, national or international context. In this sense, criminal organizations such as Cosa Nostra, 'Ndrangheta, Yakuza (ヤクザ), Solntsevskaya (братва) and Triad (San He Hui, 三合会) are unavoidably the expression of a specific cultural substrate and of certain social, political and economic contradictions and vulnerabilities, which are found in Italy, Japan, Russia and China respectively.

---

4 "A criminal organization is an organization composed by more than two people, constructed over time, which operates with the aim of carrying out crimes which are punishable with a deprivation of liberty, (...) of a minimum of four years in detention, or with a more severe punishment; crimes constituting an aim in themselves, as means to gain material profits, or to influence the behavior of public authority; the crimes established in article 2 of the Europol convention, including the one attached, (severe kinds of international criminality, such as drug trade, human trafficking, migrant smuggling, the trade of nuclear and radioactive substances, of stolen vehicles, etc.) which are punishable with at least 4 years of deprivation of liberty or a more severe punishment." STATEMENT BY THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTE- the prevention of crime in the European Union- Document of reflection on the shared perspectives and proposals in favor of a communitarian financial aid.

"The definition of organized crime used in the context of the UCSR of the EU is based upon eleven fundamental characteristics. According to the EU, to satisfy [the criteria] of the definition of organized crime, six of the following characteristics have to be present, of which four are mandatory (1,3,5, and 8): 1. Collaboration among more than two individuals; 2. Each person has explicit roles; 3. It has to operate for a prolonged or undefined period of time (this criterion refers to the stability and (potential) longevity of the group); 4. It adopts certain form of discipline or control; 5. It is suspected of committing severe crimes; 6. It is operational at the international level; 7. It uses violence or other means in order to exercise intimidation; 8. It adopts commercial or corporate structures; 9. It engages in money laundering; 10. It exercises influence over politics, the media, public administration, the justice or economic system; 11. It is driven by a desire to gain profit or power." K. Verpoest, T. Vander, "The European Union methodology for reporting on organised crime", 2005.

These structures represent the highest level of capacitive and organizational paradigm in terms of functional mechanisms, control of the territory and of the population and of the national and international range of action, and they are generally referred to as “Mafias”<sup>5</sup>. Their birth, their membership and recruitment systems, their growth and their resilience arise from, and develop in parallel with, the economic and political consolidation of the countries in which they were born and in which they operate, with the nature of the identity categorization of the local communities (including, though not limited to, the ethic/family-oriented ones), and with the dividing lines between the population and the national authority. Additionally, we should not overlook the fact that the levels of sophistication reached by these criminal organizations are a response to the strengthening of the national institutions in their home countries, and of the increasing efficacy of their law-enforcing and preventive policies.

A similar systematic approach applies to the case of the African continent where, over the past thirty years, crime has grown, developed and become rooted, to the point of taking the form, in certain regions and countries, of nothing less than mafias. In Western Africa, the birth and persistence of organized crime groups are a product of the specific conditions under which the countries in the region were built and developed. The organized crime phenomena are intrinsically connected to the political, economic and social context of those countries in which the fragility of national institutions, the lack of regulations on the subject and the difficulties of the apparatuses aimed at contrasting them give room to the proliferation of criminal networks. This situation is the product of the problems deriving from colonial domination (the lack of political representation amongst local populations, the overexploitation of natural resources, the lack of endorsement of inclusive models of economic development), as well as of several ongoing difficulties experienced by the African countries (high levels of corruption, discrimination of minorities, unequal distribution of wealth and participation in the world of politics). Additionally, one should not overlook the problem of the abuse of power and illicit appropriation of national resources on behalf of some members of the ruling classes of African countries who, in many instances, have taken advantage of their role within the national decision-making process by pursuing their personal interest and make profits out of national finances.

---

<sup>5</sup> Even though the term, which has an Italian and Spanish origin, refers to the wider system present in Italian crime and, more specifically, to the one developed in Italy, it is now used to define complex organizations, numerically consistent, hierarchical, specialized and categorized by strict mechanisms of affiliation, significant control over the territory and a wide range of activity both at the national and international level. Hence, even the Bratva is now defined “Russian Mafia” despite not being associated with Cosa Nostra.

Adding to this situation, during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century new factors contributed to creating social and political division, including ethnic conflicts, civil wars and secessionist tendencies. In this sense, the instability and destruction of the economic system of already fragile regions contributed to the increase in the capacities of the criminal networks, in particular regarding the supply of goods and services to the population (black market, smuggling, patronage). In some cases, the “war” economies survived even after the hostility and the worst phase of armed violence had ended, siding the official economical activities and creating a hybrid of legal and criminal economy.

It is the existence of large areas of conflict and instability in Africa which allowed the spreading of the first, widest illegal business in the continent; arms trafficking. Indeed, although some African countries have the technical or industrial means to produce firearms and complex systems, the immense flow of imports coming from the Soviet Union during the Cold War, which was often fed by the disproportionate purchases of the dictatorial regimes like the one in Libya, resulted in the stock of rifles, rocket launchers and munitions which still today fuels the black market<sup>6</sup>. If that was not enough, in Western Africa in particular, the lack of an autochthonous arms industry resulted in the development of a flourishing local craftsmanship of weapons, which produces about 200.000 pieces per year<sup>7</sup>.

In this institutionally fragile context, which is the perfect setting for the growth of powers in parallel to the national powers, three factors have contributed significantly to widening the opportunities of entrepreneurs of crime. The first two are economic factors, and they relate to the economic growth of Sub-Saharan, which began in the mid-90s and lasts till today, with growth rates between 1.2% and 6.6%<sup>8</sup>, and to current existence of a high level of inequality<sup>9</sup> deriving from the impoverishment of the countryside and the strongly uneven distribution of wealth<sup>10</sup>. These factors have changed the African society, by creating a medium class moderately richer and prone to demand more goods and services, which, in several cases, could not be found in the autochthonous market, and by prompting the rural population to widen their activities, especially regarding the informal services<sup>11</sup>. Indeed, regardless of a moderate economic growth, in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Western Africa was still suffering from deep inequality in the distribution of wealth, as 40% of the

---

<sup>6</sup> UNDP Firearms Trafficking in West Africa.

<sup>7</sup> M. Schroeder, G. Lamb The Illicit Arms Trade in Africa, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> The World Bank data.

<sup>9</sup> UNDP Bureau Africa, Income Inequality Trends in sub-Saharan Africa Divergence, Determinants and Consequences, Dicembre 2016.

<sup>10</sup> The commitment to reducing inequality index 2018.

<sup>11</sup> The rural population, especially the semi-nomad shepherds, have exploited their non-economic expertise (i.e. capability to use fire arms and the knowledge of the territory) to offer guidance and to escort the illicit convoys, which transport migrants, drugs and arms in the Western and Northern African regions

population lived under the poverty threshold. To this, one should add a significant demographic growth (with an average growth rate of 2.3% per year, starting from 2000)<sup>12</sup> and a fast and uncontrolled urbanization (with an average rate of 3.5% per year, starting from 2000). Additionally, the criminal groups took advantage of these difficult conditions by providing services to the underprivileged sections of the population, creating nothing less than a welfare parallel to the institutional one, as a means to gain support.

The third factor is geopolitical and securitarian, and it concerns the crisis of the traditional transit points of the flow of narcotics along the Asia-Europe and the Latin America-Europe routes. In particular, starting from the beginning of the 2000s, South-American cocaine and Asian heroin bound to the European market passed through the Caribbean and Pakistan. However, due to the tighten-up of border controls and the effectiveness of international and national law enforcement policies, trafficking drugs via those routes became more challenging, as the risks and the costs of the traffickers had increased. Resulting from this process, these latter turned to Africa as the new transit point towards Europe and took advantage of the systemic security weaknesses discussed above. By turning to the African continent, the largest global criminal organizations could benefit from a market, which was expanding due to the increasing local consumption of narcotics, as well as from a pool of criminal labour with reasonable expertise and able to ensure a fairly safe traffic of narcotics. In this context, the shores and harbours of Western Africa became the central points of the transatlantic traffic of narcotics, especially of cocaine, which, coming from South-American, through this route reaches the African continent, and then Europe. The amount of these narcotics is significant: it is estimated that in 2013 about 18 tons of cocaine were transported across the Western African *hub*<sup>13</sup>.

However, it should be noted that the traffic of narcotics has not replaced, rather it has complemented, the traffic of weapons. Additionally, over time, by taking advantage of the changes in the African society, the local criminal groups have broadened the scope of their activities and the type of goods which they illegally traded. For instance, these came to include sophisticated informatics fraud, keeping up with the increasing technological development of the continent, and counterfeit commodities, like medications.

## **1.2 Operational models and illegal markets of organized crime in western Africa**

The economic, political, social and security-related characteristics of Western Africa have significantly contributed to the development of operational and business models used by criminal organizations. In particular, the analysis of the patterns of the

---

<sup>12</sup> African Urbanisation

<sup>13</sup> Associated Press, UN Reports 'Alarming' Trends in Drug Trafficking in Africa, December 2018.



organized crime in Africa has allowed the identification of four main operational models based on the degree of cohesion and unity of the structures.<sup>14</sup>

The first operational model is similar to mafia criminal organizations, operating in Europe and in Asia. In this case, criminal associations are defined true “mafias” when they are characterized by secrecy, unity, oligarchy, initiation rituals, familialism or tribalism/clanism and control of the territory. These organizations systemically use violence to intimidate and impose their power over the nerve centers of the illegal market. The clearest example of this organizational and operational model in Western Africa is the case of Nigerien mafias. These, however, have one singular characteristic which makes them unique. In fact, although being well-rooted in the territory, these sophisticated criminal networks have a greater international, rather than national, profile; that is, they have their economic activities and make the most profit outside of their national borders. In the Nigerien case, the many local mafias are more influential in Italy than in their home country, due to the fact that they take advantage of the integration problems after diasporas, and of the profit derived from human trafficking.

The second operational model is difficult to define and characterized and it differs from the traditional paradigm of the European and Asian organizations. In particular, rather than being hierarchical, closed and recognizable, the criminal networks in other areas of the Africa continent tend to take the form of variable connections between individuals with heterogeneous interests and occupations, both legal and illegal, with particular focus on the transfer of illegal products and resources. For instance, the traffic of narcotics on the Western and Eastern shores is led by free connections of “criminal businessmen”, rather than by purely mafia groups. In many cases, those involved in these activities have similar interests in the legal economy and they benefit from the protection of political figures and members of the military and security apparatus. These criminal businessmen can use their own logistics networks, usually used for legal activities (trade of any kind of goods), to smuggle illegal goods. In this respect, the scandal of Orano<sup>15</sup>, in Algeria, and the involvement

---

<sup>14</sup> M. Shaw, Where in Africa is organised crime most serious?, ISS 11/7/2019.

<sup>15</sup> In particular, on the 29th of May 2018, a unit of the Algerian navy intercepted the cargo vessel Vége Mercury, anchored in Orano and meant to transport food from Brazil. They found 701kg of pure cocaine. The products were destined to reach the society of Kamel Chikhi, known as “the Butcher”, an entrepreneur close to the family of the President Bouteflika, and the major importer of food in the country. The operation of the armed forces was followed by several investigations, which revealed the existence of a wide network of individuals, members of the national institutions, which gained profit from the drug trade and its sale in both Algeria and Europe. This has been detrimental to the public image of the government, especially due to the discrepancies among the results of the investigation and the opulent electoral campaign against corruption and abuse meant to calm the anger and discontent of the people. Together with dozens of middle managers belonging to the political party and state bureaucracies, which were removed from office by Bouteflika with a direct order, this scandal led

of certain political figures in the narco-traffic in Guinea-Bissau<sup>16</sup> are the most evident examples of this mechanism. In addition to the pecuniary loss and economic impact of the criminal activities led using this operational model, one of the most dangerous risks for the African societies lies in the mixture between crime and politics, and in the capability of some administrators to use the illegal profit to gain popular support. Indeed, the political figures and businessmen involved in illegal activities can re-invest the trafficking proceeds in public works (facilities, donations, charity), thus they launder the money and, more importantly, they push the civil population to regard criminal activities as legitimate, as having positive social impact. In this respect, a particularly indicative example of this is the case of Eric Amoateng, a Ghanaian member of parliament, who was arrested in the United States for trafficking drugs in 2005. In his home country, the news of his arrest led to heated popular protests; by many, especially by the electors in his constituency, he was regarded as a benefactor. Some streets were named after him, and in 2011 the local tribal leaders thanked him publicly for his contribution to the development of the country. Indeed, he had funded the construction of streets, guaranteed jobs and gave zero-interest loans. Although these were supported by illegal profits, the protests demonstrated a genuine support.

The third operational model is a variation of the second one, as it extends the realm of the individuals involved in the criminal network, which come to include rebellious organizations and illegal armed groups. This model is mainly found in unstable regions, where the power of the national authorities is weaker in the national outskirts and is contrasted by non-state actors rooted in the territory. The clearest examples of this are from Sahel. We need only think of the enormous stretch of territory which is “non-ordinarily ruled”, located between North Nigeria and South Libya, where jihadists, criminal organizations and national Armed Forces coexist. In this region, the illegal traffic of arms, drugs, humans and counterfeit goods achieves a turnover of more than 15 billion dollars per year, equally distributed depending on the part played in the contraband. While the largest part of the profit is divided between the South-American or Asian producers, the African couriers and the retailers both in Africa and in Europe, a significant part of the money ends up in the hands of terrorist or rebel groups as a toll for letting them across the territories under their control or as a payment when an armoured transport service is performed for them. However, it should be noted that there is no evidence of an organic relationship between

---

to the resignation of the General Abdelghani Hamel, head of the Police since 2010, the right-hand man of Bouteflika and even a potential candidate to the succession, equal to the brother Said.

<sup>16</sup> The Guinea-Bissau has been, for at least ten years, one of the main logistic centers for the traffic of cocaine coming from South America, to the extent that it has been called a narco-state. Several individuals belonging to the ruling class have been involved in the drug trade. The most notorious case regards the Admiral Bubo na Tchuto, who, exploiting his status within the military, managed the transfer of cocaine from the harbors to the international airports, ensuring its arrival in Europe and dealing directly with the South-American contacts.

terrorists and traffickers, rather there is a continuous negotiation on the basis of personal relations between jihadist commanders and criminal leaders. In this context, it happens in some cases that members of the Armed Forces and of security, contrary to their own professional ethics, behave just like the rebel militia and the jihadist brigades, as they offer armoured transport service or they demand rights of way to convoys carrying illegal goods. Niger and Mali are key countries in the traffic of both drugs and migrants. As early as 2006 and 2007, 5.7 tons of hashish were seized on the Western borders. Additionally, in 2012, more than 1000 tons of cannabis and 1200 kilos of cocaine were seized (this is less than the circa 3300 kilos confiscated in 2011). With regards to human trafficking, the cities of Agadez and Gao are the main crossing points for the caravans filled with migrants which are headed to Libya and Europe.

All three of these models have in common the context in which they operate; that is, the geographical location and the physical territory. The criminal actors involved in these activities mostly take care of the commercialisation and the movements of goods through illegal economies and informal and legal economies (in this latter case via money laundering operations). Thus, regardless of the operational model and the mode of action, the activity of these organizations takes place in specific geographical lines: the Atlantic coast, the Saharan routes and the Gulf and the Guinean coasts<sup>17</sup>.

The Atlantic coast hub, including Guinea-Bissau, Guinea and, to a lesser extent, Senegal, seems to be the main bridgehead in the traffic of cocaine in the region. This drug is shipped to Guinea-Bissau from South America by sea or by land. Part of the traffic is thus rerouted to the nearby international airports (Dakar, Conakry and Bamako) to be delivered to Europe. The remaining cocaine is transported by land to the North of Mali, where it flows into the Sahel route. The latter runs along the borders between Mauretania, Mali, Algeria, Nigeria and Libya, and it is based on the knowledge of their territory of the Tuareg and Toubou tribes, who are the main providers of transport services or armed guards in the region. The Sahel route is divided into two sub-categories: the so-called “quick route” and “long route”. The former route goes through the Timbuktu and Kidal regions of Mali, and it is directed to the South of Algeria, where local criminal groups operate. As this route requires effective links with the local security forces, it cannot be operated by small-scale traffickers. The latter route, instead, is an easier, but longer, path, which goes through Northern Mali, Nigeria, Chad, Sudan and finally Libya.

The migratory routes, on which there is considerable human trafficking<sup>18</sup>, follow similar routes. These run along a long terrestrial segment, starting from the home

---

<sup>17</sup> C. Dechery, L. Ralston, *Trafficking and Fragility in West Africa*, World Bank 2015.

<sup>18</sup> The smuggling of human beings refers to the illegal transfer of one person from a place of origin to a place of destination through a place of transit after a payment from this person. In this case, there is an informal contract between the smuggler and the smuggled which entails full awareness on behalf of both sides. Hence, the smuggled is aware of the journey and wants the smuggler to help him/her. The difference between smuggling and trafficking of human beings regards the relation with the individuals

country to the North-African shores across the Sahel-Sahara transit countries, and a marine segment, i.e. the crossing of the Mediterranean Sea, until the Southern European shores. The terrestrial segment, whose starting point may be anywhere between the equator and the Tropic of Cancer, is divided into three main routes: the eastern African route, which goes from the Lakes region and the Horn of Africa to Egypt, passing through Sudan; the central African route, which starts in Congo and in Western Africa and ends on the shores of Libya, Tunisia and, to a less extent, Algeria, after having passed through Mali, Nigeria, and Burkina Faso; the Western African route, originating in western Africa and reaching the coast of Morocco, passing through Mali and Mauretania. In many cases, the migration flows on the western and eastern routes converge in the central route, due to the lack of border controls in Nigeria and to the breakdown of the state and security apparatus in Libya. These two factors facilitate the traffickers' movement and activity.

On the North-African coast, the terrestrial segment gives way to the marine segment. The latter, in turn, is comprised of two routes: the eastern Mediterranean route, which links Morocco with Spain, and the central Mediterranean route, which links Libya, Tunisia, Algeria or Egypt with Italy and Greece.

In the central African route, Nigeria and Mali are the preferred transit points. This is due to abovementioned geographical, political and security reasons, but also to fact that the migratory flux is managed by a complex system which involves corrupted political figures, members of the Armed Forces and of security, traffickers and rebel or terrorist groups. Indeed, an analysis of the central African route yields insights into the reasons behind its division into two sections: the first one is legal, and goes from the source/meeting points in Western Africa (Dakar, Abuja, Bamako, Ouagadougou, Niamey) to the points of arrival in Gao, Mali, and in Agadez, Nigeria. The second one is illegal, and goes from Gao and Agadez to Southern Libya. The illegal section of the route, in turn, goes in two different directions: one along the axis Gao, Aguelhok, Tessalit, Tamanrasset and Sebha/Ubari, the other one along the axis Agadez, Séguédine/Dikou, Tummo, Sebha/Ubari.

Agadez's surrounding area is the main logistic centre of human trafficking in the whole Sahel. The traffickers, who are part of a coalition called "Bureau des passeurs" (the office of smugglers), have large quantities of trucks and off-road vehicles (generally Toyota) and, more importantly, they have informal bureaucracies which control the rounds of illegal migrants, the hotel facilities where the migrants have to be placed before departure, and offices to give them the temporary jobs required to gather the money needed to pay the journey. Normally, at least 25/30 people are needed for a convoy to depart, and traveling from Agadez to Sebha/Ubari costs about

---

transferred. Through the process of smuggling, the person that is transported is free once he/she reaches the country of destination. Through the process of trafficking, the person is subsequently exploited against his/her will in illicit markets, despite the fact that the decision to leave was voluntary or based on false promises of future jobs.

250 dollars, excluding the bribery charges of frontier guards (7-10 dollars per migrant), the tolls or protection imposed by ethnic militia or by terrorist groups operating in the desert areas where they transit (10/15 dollars per migrant, or, in the worst cases, the theft of all the money, the documents, and valuables own by the migrant). Thus, it happens relatively often that, on the route from Agadez to Sebha/Ubari, after having payed the passeurs, the convoys of migrants meet the militia of the Niger Movement for Justice (NMJ), which is a Tuareg rebel group fighting for autonomy from the central government, or the units belonging to the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslim (GSIM), Jihadist coalition found in the whole territory of the region, or, on the border and the corridor of Tommu, the Tebu armed bands of the Movement for Justice and the Rehabilitation of Niger (MJRN), another rebel organization led by the ferocious Tcheke Koudigan.

The “Bureau des passeurs” is managed almost exclusively by traffickers of Tuareg ethnicity; often they are individuals with an history as traffickers of drugs and arms, warriors or even tour operators for Western tourists who, until the mid-90s, travelled to Northern Niger to make excursions to the dunes and the rocky plateaus of the Nigerien red desert (Tenerè). The movement of migrants is facilitated by the tribal unity between the Tuaregs of the Nigerien Kel Ayr confederation and the Tuaregs of the Libyan Kel Ajjer confederation of Sebha, Ghat and Ubari.

Finally, the hub of the Gulf of Guinea goes from Ghana to the Niger Delta. This in a highly interconnected region, where the criminal networks, under the Nigerian control, are incredibly fluid and well-integrated. This is the logistics centre through which drugs, in particular, but also oil products and humans are smuggled. The model used on the Atlantic coast is used here with regards to narcotics; cocaine reaches the cities within the region, and it is then directed towards the international airports or the Sahel “long route”, passing across Burkina Faso and Niger. With regards to human trafficking, the largest percentage of the female victims of sexual exploitation in Europe come from just outside Benin city, in the federal state of Edo. However, these victims travel to Europe via plane, under the surveillance of their trafficker, and they depart from several airports in the region, especially in Ghana. Finally, likewise, a part of the oil which is stolen and smuggled from the Niger Delta region powers the refineries in Accra.

The fourth operational model of organized crime in Africa is the one related to cybernetics and internet crime. This model is unstructured par excellence, as there is evidence and there are investigations conducted by African and international authorities indicating that cybercrime (scams, deceit, irregular money transfers) is committed by isolated individuals or small networks with low levels of unity. To date, there are two distinct groups involved in cybercrime in Western Africa; that is, the “Yahoo Boys” and the “Next-Level Cybercriminals”. These differ in their structure and in the nature of the crimes they commit. While the Yahoo Boys mainly run scams involving pre-payments (fee-scam), the Next-Level Cybercriminals make more complex attacks on corporations, and run fiscal scams, having connections both in

Africa and outside of the continent. Although nowadays cybercrime is negligible, it cannot be ruled out that, due to the spread of internet and the increase of the digitalisation level of the African societies, this type of fraud could increase, and thus attract more structured, unitary and hierarchical organizations.

### **1.3 Nigerian mafias**

Nigeria is not only a unique kind of criminal market in Africa, but it is also the only setting in which a criminal organization similar to the most famous international mafias managed to take root. Its uniqueness lies in some of its characteristics, which are a consequence of the country's specific ethnic composition, relation between political power and civil society, and natural resources.

However, it is important to note that, in general, the characteristics of the Nigerian organized crime do not largely differ from those of other Western African countries, as Nigeria faces several of the societal, political, economic and security-related challenges faced by its neighbouring countries. Thus, in this country, the abovementioned four operational crime models coexist. However, there is the possibility that, in the long run, the local mafias might take control of the illegal activities and clearly prevail over the fluid networks with variable geometry which are currently present in the country. There are several factors supporting this hypothesis, including the increasing violence and sophistication demonstrated by the Nigerian mafias and the national economic development, in terms of GDP increase and diversification, which are able to offer new financial gains in cases in which the public authorities are incapable to increase the levels of rule of law.

As noted above, in the case of Nigeria, the birth and development of organized crime are dependent on a mixture of factors related to economic, social, political, security and cultural vulnerability. In Nigeria, the political system which arose at the end of colonialism suffered from the malpractice of many members of the bureaucratic apparatus and of the national ruling class. These were guilty of several frauds and illegal appropriation of public funds, to the point that some individuals stated that corruption and misgovernment were organic and physiological elements of the practical functioning of the state machine. Similar procedures are generally the reflection of identity, ethnic and religious divisions; in the country, almost 200 ethnic groups coexist, not always peacefully. Additionally, there is a religious division between the north, with an Islamic majority, the centre, where animist cults are still present, and the south, with a Christian majority. The closer ties are represented by the family, the tribe and one's own ethnic group. In this situation, which strengthened over time and making people more untrustworthy, the illegal use of public funds did

not particularly shock people, becoming a socially accepted activity. Especially in the years following independence, to defraud the state was tolerated<sup>19</sup>.

These illegal practices have contributed, from the beginning, to hindering the building of the Nigerian state. At regional level, there are many cases of corruption: in 2016, the financial loss due to frauds amounted to 16 billion dollars. To this must be added the fact that corruption underlies the depletion of the state finances; over the past years, about 20 million dollars have been lost in the transfers between the Central Bank of Niger and the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, the State oil company. This situation is reflected in the countless legal proceedings against politicians, Nigerian public officials and businessmen for corruption and embezzling<sup>20</sup>.

The fraudulent behaviour of some members of the Nigerian ruling class is both the effect and the cause of the growth of organized crime in the country. The lack of social, judicial, economic and educational protection led an increasing number of people to create networks and informal relations which could override the legal procedures. These later became criminal groups. At this historic moment, the operational models of Nigerian organized crime were those of networks, with a variable hierarchy, of influential politicians and businessmen whose activities were in-between legality and illegality.

In the 80s, following the decline in the oil<sup>21</sup> price, which had started in 1973, the illegal and nepotistic activities began to spread and the increasing collusion with criminal groups became evident. This period was characterized by the implementation of structural adjustment programs funded by international financial institutions. The reason behind the rise in organized crime and in their interaction with the institutional apparatus is two-fold. On the one hand, the reduction in economic growth and in the expectation for future development led some members of the lower and middle class to turn to illegal practices as a means to solve political and social problems. On the other hand, the elites of the country strived for tighter relations with and support from criminals, in order to ensure a significant number of voters and a protective group, which could be used to turn against their opponents. Several

---

<sup>19</sup> O. Marenin e M. D. Reisig, "A General Theory of Crime" and Patterns of Crime in Nigeria: an Exploration of Methodological Assumptions, in «Journal of Criminal Justice», n. 6, Elsevier, Amsterdam, 1995.

<sup>20</sup> O. Marenin e M. D. Reisig, "A General Theory of Crime" and Patterns of Crime in Nigeria: an Exploration of Methodological Assumptions, in «Journal of Criminal Justice», n. 6, Elsevier, Amsterdam, 1995.

<sup>21</sup> Nigeria went from extracting around 2,5 million barrels of oil per day in the late 1980s to 1,8 million in 2007. The commercialization of oil constitutes 35% of the GDP and contributes to 75% of the state revenues. To study this further, Oil Dependence Hindering Nigeria's Emerging Economy, Giugno 2013.

Nigerian administrators have used illegal networks not only to make money, but also as a means of political influence and informal welfare<sup>22</sup>.

It appears that these illegal practices have benefitted a large number of public figures. Indeed, over the past two decades, although being involved in judicial investigations or being sentenced for illegal activities, many national governors managed to gain the support of the electors within their districts, and to get elected to the federal parliament<sup>23</sup>. These patterns have been exposed in the case of the imprisonment in London of James Ibori, the former Delta State governor, his wife and his sister, as part of an investigation into money-laundering and corruption<sup>24</sup>.

As noted above, in the current Nigerian context, there are fluid criminal networks, as well as mafia-like organizations.

The criminal groups with variable geometry are generally organized based on bloodlines or ethnicity, and often the recruits are acquaintances or relatives of the original members of the organizations and they hold different political and economic positions, in order to create synergistic and varied illegal systems. In most cases, these criminal groups do not have a rigid organization, rather they appear to be functional organizations, with a minimal and essential chain of command. These groups form alliances only to collaborate on individual operations in order to increase the profit and dividends of their legal activities. To clarify, smuggling is the typical business model of these organizations. They are individuals who have the legal authorization to trade specific goods (e.g., fuel, tobacco, medicines, commodities) within the borders of a country and the logistical means to do it (e.g., warehouses, means of transport, supply chain), and continue to do the same trades, illegally, in the neighboring countries.

A greater concentration of illegal organization has been reported in the southern areas, both in the South-Western and the South-Eastern areas, where the ethnicities of Igbo and Yoruba, which represent 13% and 21% of the Nigerian population respectively, are predominant. This does not mean that organized crime is only present amongst these ethnic groups: it should be noted that the Southern regions of the country are the most populous and densely populated, facing a significant immigration coming from within the country and from the neighbouring countries. The high population density and the downturns of the economy have contributed to

---

<sup>22</sup> A. Alkholt, *Nigerian Criminal Networks: a Comparative Analysis*, University of Bergen, Bergen, 2010.

<sup>23</sup> In several cases, the judicial procedures regarding politicians and public administrators have been subject to significant delays and deferrals. To counter this phenomenon, an ad hoc body was established; the Commission for the Economic and Financial Crimes (EFCC). With the contribution of this organizations, many arrests have been carried out, which contributed to the detention of those living abroad, who were responsible of fraud.

<sup>24</sup> A. Rabasa e al., *Counetnetwork: Countering the Expansion of Transnational Criminal Network*, Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, 2017.



the making of a context where criminal groups could flourish as the life prospects offered by illegal activities were immeasurably better than what Nigeriens could achieve in the legal realm<sup>25</sup>.

When it comes to mafia-like criminal organizations, during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in Nigeria, the so-called cults, or confraternities, started to develop.

These organizations were, at first, nothing more than student associations with a more or less structured political agenda. The first confraternity, the Pyrates Confraternity, was founded in 1952 in the University campus of Ibadan. The confraternity was open to any male student of any ethnic group, as long as he would comply with the strict regulation of the association. The Pyrates Confraternity strongly criticized the national middle class, to which, however, many of its members belonged; thus, this was a movement of rupture and renovation within the ruling classes of the country. For almost 20 years, this was the only confraternity. Then, between the 70s and the 80s, the cults began to spread to many universities in Nigeria<sup>26</sup>.

The transformation of the cults from university associations with political aims to complex criminal groups began after the coup in December 1983. Since then, the activity of the confraternities became more violent. This shift was prompted by soldiers who considered the cults as means to fight their political opponents who, at that time, were concentrated in the student unions and the university staff. Due to this reason, they began to provide funds and arms to confraternities. However, many cults did not only go after the people indicated by their military referents, rather they also clashed violently with members of other confraternities. Up to this day, there are reports of rectors protecting members of some cults, as a means to attack other university activists who hindered the university governance<sup>27</sup>.

In the 90s, the confraternities moved a large part of their criminal and political operations outside of the university setting. At the same time, there was an increase in the use of violence between confraternities, as well as against non-members of these organizations. The cults gradually became criminal associations conducting several illegal activities, including exploitation of prostitutes, drugs trafficking, political kidnappings and violence under the request of some members of the institutions. Between the late 1990s and the early 2000, as the cults had become more active, the government increased the repression of these cults and started a cultural and social fight against the confraternities. In 1999, at the start of his term in office, the former president Olusegun Obasanjo ordered the security forces to eliminate all

---

<sup>25</sup> L. Koni Hoffmann e al., *Tracing the Origins of Nigerian Organized Crime: Politics, Corruption and the Growth of Criminal Networks*, Royal Institute of International Affairs, Londra, 2016.

<sup>26</sup> E. B. Omobowale e A. Abimbola, *Higher Education and the Challenges of Secret Cults*, in «Africa Research Review», n. 36, Bahir Dar, 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem.

cults within six months. However, the effort of the Nigerian authorities proved ineffective: in 2005, most confraternities were involved in at least one criminal practice. Of these practices, the most common were, and still are, armed robbery, narco-traffic, kidnapping and exploitation of prostitution. The clashes between different cults over the control of the illegal activities resulted in approximately 40 deaths per month between 2008 and 2009<sup>28</sup>.

The success of the cults up to this date is due to the profit resulting from illegal activities as well as to the connections with members of the military and political apparatus: quite a few public officials are picked from the members of the confraternities. Indeed, the cult Supreme Vikings leaked information that about twelve of its members, or former members, have been part of the local parliament of the Rivers State. However, the success of the cults is not only due to the political cover that they have. Their survival is also due to the attraction that they exert on the Nigerian youth, which sees in these organizations the possibility to assert themselves or, more simply, as a solution to an uncertain and unrewarding future<sup>29</sup>.

Indeed, although the Nigerian GDP increased by more than 300% between 2004 and 2014, there is still an extreme wealth distribution disparity. The increase in GDP per capita was slowed down by a massive population growth, which undid the general macroeconomic results<sup>30</sup>. To this, it should be added that the Southern countries, where cults are more widely present (Oyo, Osum, Lagos, Ekiti, Edo, Enugu, Imo, Cross River, Delta, Rivers), experience unemployment rates which, due to overpopulation, remain over 20%. Under these circumstances, young people from the lower and middle classes often live an extremely difficult reality and are thus easy prey to the propaganda and charm of the cults<sup>31</sup>.

Due to these socioeconomic conditions, and thanks to the help of some complacent politicians, the cults could flourish and spread in the country and abroad, by taking advantage of the large migration of their compatriots. To date, several tens of cults are operating in Nigeria; of these, the most important are: the Pyrates Confraternity (also known as the National Association of Seadogs), the Buccaneers Association of Nigeria (also known as Alora Sealords), the abovementioned Supreme Vikings, the Aro Mates, the Black Axe Confraternity (also known as the Neo-Black Movement of Africa), the Mafia Confraternity, the Eternal Fraternal Order of Legion Consortium and the Eiye Confraternity. Some of these have experienced internal divisions over the increasingly violent aims and means that many members have, over time, began to use. For instance, until the mid-80s, the Neo Black Movement of Africa was affiliated with the Black Axe. However, starting from the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there

---

<sup>28</sup> L. Zannin, *La mafia nigeriana e le confraternite*, "Per il mondo" Onlus, Padova, 2017.

<sup>29</sup> I. O. Albert, *Explaining "godfatherism" in Nigerian Politics*, in «African Sociological Review», n.9, Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, Dakar, 2005.

<sup>30</sup> World Bank Group, *National Accounts Data: Nigeria GDP*, Washington D. C., 2018.

<sup>31</sup> National Bureau of Statistics, *Labour Force Statistics 2017 Vol 1*, Abuja, 2018.

was a clear division between the two groups. The New Black Movement is today a legal, registered association; it claims to be politically impartial, a-religious, detached from tribal dynamics, and it dissociates itself from the violent and illegal activities of the Black Axe<sup>32</sup>. This latter name refers today to the part of the confraternity which more strongly joined the networks of the Nigerian organized crime<sup>33</sup>.

In terms of structure, the confraternities are hierarchical and unitary organizations, which are characterized by symbolic initiation rituals. Generally, they are governed by a national leader, called “Capon”<sup>34</sup>, to whom the leaders of the individual local sections of the confraternity are subordinated (these are also called “Capon”). The national Capon is like a Commander in Chief, the local Capons, instead, are like commanders in the field. Competition for all these positions is openly fierce and, to be chosen, the candidate ought to take audacious actions of bravery and brutality. In turn, the local Capons manage a complex system of cells, called the “forum”, which operate locally and are well interconnected, even outside of the Nigerian national borders<sup>35</sup>.

Of all the Nigerian confraternities, the Black Axe has become the primary example of the distortions and the growth of a subset of Nigerian cult associations. This is partly due to its power in the country and its widespread presence abroad. This confraternity was founded between 1976 and 1978 at the University of Benin City, in the federal state of Edo. At the beginning, its aims were similar to those of the other confraternities; that is, fighting students’ oppression, awakening citizens’ consciences, fighting for the dignity of Africans and for freedom from neo-colonialism. From Benin City, it first spread to the Calabar Campus and then, after approximately 10 years, it was present in all the main universities of the country. As was the case with most cults, in the 80s the Black Axe as well began to change their goals; violent actions against students and members of the university staff became more frequent, clashes with other confraternities became more violent, and most of their activities were taking place outside of the university campus<sup>36</sup>.

The Black Axe cult became famous due to its well-known brutally violent actions. Violence has turned into its policy; it is used to frighten its potential rival whistle-blowers and to present themselves to future political protectors. The members of this cult have to live by a very strict code: this entails wearing specific clothes, especially

---

<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, it is important to notice that the Federal State of Rivers issued the “Secret Cult and Similar Activities Prohibition Law”, which identified both the Neo Black Movement of Africa and the Black Axe as illegal, secret cults and prohibited its activities.

<sup>33</sup> L. Zannin, *Op. Cit.*

<sup>34</sup> As a tribute to the Italian-American gangster Al Capone.

<sup>35</sup> Nigeria: The Eiyé confraternity, including origin, purpose, structure, membership, recruitment methods, activities and areas of operation; state response (2014–March 2016). Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Aprile 2016.

<sup>36</sup> Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, *Responses to Information Requests n. NGA43277.E*, Ottawa, 2005.

within the university. The members wear amulets, and they engage in ritual fetishes to gain power and influence. It is estimated that, in 2005, the organization had two hundred active members, but over the years this number has increased by several hundreds of people. Although most of the Black Axe members belong to the Igbo and Yoruba ethnic groups, which are located in the Southern regions of the country, the confraternity does not have a unique ethnic connotation. However, it has been noted that its cells tend to attract new members from the ethnic group which represents the majority of a certain city or region where the organization is about to spread<sup>37</sup>.

However, regardless of their ethnic groups, new members ought to subject themselves to initiation rituals, which have been described by witnesses as bloody, gruesome and barbaric. These ceremonies often take place at night in forests or cemeteries, where the members of a specific local branch of the organization, together with their future affiliates, dance and sing, after having taken drugs. The rituals sometimes involve the ingestion of human blood, and a kind of “test of manhood” which consists in raping a young woman. The new members are whipped and beaten repeatedly with belts and bats as they stand naked. After the beating has ended, the future members have to recite an oath of secrecy, before they can wear the typical clothes of the confraternity. Often, after this first ritual, the new axemen (name used to refer to the members of this confraternity) are introduced to the whole local group. The ceremony is ended at dawn by a procession (called with the jargon “jolly”) towards the new accommodation of the affiliate<sup>38</sup>.

To defend itself against criticism, the confraternity has often asserted that membership to the cult is on a voluntary basis. However, over the past years there has been increasing testimony of boys who were forced to join. It should also be added that those who had asked to join, but then changed their mind, are systematically threatened. Additionally, in 2015, there have been cases in which the family members who were opposed to their child joining the confraternity were subject to threats and violence. Indeed, the Black Axe’s recruiting process involves the use of propaganda, misinformation and terror. In particular within universities, the targets are first year students who are promised solid protection against a hostile university environment. Additionally, since the mid 2000s, there is evidence of proselytising in high schools. In most cases, freshmen are responsible for gathering information and helping the senior members<sup>39</sup>. Abroad, the recruiting system involve different social and

---

<sup>37</sup> Regional Office of West and Central Africa, *Organized Crime and Irregular Migration from Africa to Europe*, UNODC, Dakar, 2006.

<sup>38</sup> Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, *Responses to Information Requests n. NGA104208.E*, Ottawa, 2012

<sup>39</sup> A. Zubairu Surajo e A. H. M. Zehadul Karim, *An Assessment of Black Axe Confraternity Cult in Nigeria: Its Impact on the University Educational System*, in «South Asian Anthropologist», n. 17, Sarat Chandra Roy Institute of Anthropological Studies, Ranchi, 2017.

anthropological dynamics, as the confraternity recruits its new members from migrants, who are older individuals, whose problems differ from those of high school and university students.

Over the past years, there has been an increase in the use of violence and illegal activities of the Black Axe, and more generally of other cults. Since 2008, the Nigerian authorities have declared to be facing an increment in violence, due to the fact that the cults had started to operate outside of the university settings as well. In 2009, the Black Axe was also charged with two attempts of kidnapping the same number of ministers. Additionally, in October 2011, several local newspapers denounced the increasingly stronger influence of the confraternity on the Delta State institutions. To this, it should be added that between 2009 and 2013, in the state of Edo, and in particular in Benin City, a “mafia war” began between the Black Axe and the Eiyé Confraternity, killing tens of people on both sides (some estimates speak of 103 deaths). Allegedly, the fight was not only over the control of illegal traffics, but also over the (more or less occult) distribution of the funds which several local and national politicians provide to the cults in order to gain electoral support and to use the cults for criminal intimidation during the party nominations or other political consultations<sup>40</sup>.

Since 2008, the federal government of Nigeria has urged university rectors to repress or discourage the growth of the cults. However, it seems that these appeals were vain. Additionally, in several cases the arrests following clashes between confraternities, or the detection of illegal activities, come to nothing and those who had been arrested are, in most cases, released. This casts shadows and suspicion of complicity on the security apparatus.

The confraternities, and the criminal networks with variable geometry as well, operate in various sectors and have several sources of financial supply; from the clandestine production and smuggling of light weapons to drugs trafficking, from stealing crude oil to financial frauds, from smuggling stolen cars to human trafficking. The groups involved in these smugglings are not only located in Nigeria; indeed, over the past years, the strong emigration from the Western African country has contributed to the diffusion of criminal networks abroad<sup>41</sup>. It is estimated that, for decades, the Nigerian criminal groups have operated in approximately sixty countries. These activities are shaped by the national context in which they operate: money-laundering operations in Hong Kong, drugs trafficking with Latin American countries, prostitution and gambling in Italy and Spain, financial frauds in London<sup>42</sup>.

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>41</sup> T. Le Pichon e A. Mazzitelli, *Cocaine Trafficking in West Africa: The Threat to Stability and Development*, UNODC, Vienna, 2007.

<sup>42</sup> <sup>42</sup> S. Adamoli e al., *Organised Crime around the World*, European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control, Helsinki, 1998.

In a number of areas, for instance in the smuggling of migrants, the internationalization of the illegal activities is inevitable, and the Nigerian organizations have proved to be able to build contact networks and collaborations in all the countries which are affected by the flux of migrants. In fact, Nigerian traffickers operate and are based in Benin, Togo, Ghana, Guinea and Mali. Additionally, they have contact people in almost all the countries in the Sahel strip, the strategic area for the migration flow to the North African shores and then to Europe<sup>43</sup>.

However, it would be wrong to claim that the Nigerian criminal groups manage only migration flows directed outside of the country and the nearby areas. Although with ups and downs, Nigeria is also a destination of migrants. Although Nigeria faces many problems and it relies on the price of oil in the international market, the economic stability of this country is still better than those of the other states in that particular geographic region; between 2003 and 2017, more than 3 million foreigners arrived in Nigeria, in 2017 this number was approximately 570000<sup>44</sup>, with most people coming from other African countries<sup>45</sup>.

The exploitation of prostitution is strictly connected with human trafficking. Many criminal groups take advantage of it; in Europe, and in particular in Italy and in Spain, there are many criminal networks of Nigerian origins which exploit the prostitutions of their compatriots or of women from other African countries. Many of the young women involved in prostitution come from the federal states of Edo and Rivers, as well as from the urban area of Lagos, the former capital. There is also evidence of groups who kidnap newborns under monetary reward, and then use them for child labour (both in their home country and abroad) or, in the case of girls, for child prostitution. This happens more frequently in the Southern areas of the country, where 2,000-2,300 dollars are enough to steal a boy, and 1000 dollars to steal a girl<sup>46</sup>.

The international contact points of the criminal groups have contributed to making this country the central nerve of various illegal international traffics. From the mid 80s, for instance, in Nigeria international drug trafficking has grown to the point that Nigeria has become one of the main transit points for the cocaine from South-America and the heroin from Central and South-East Asia directed to Europe. In 1993, a wide transnational network with its main pivots in Nigeria was discovered; the

---

<sup>43</sup> EASO COI Meeting Report, *Practical Cooperation Meeting on Nigeria*, European Asylum Support Office, La Valletta, 2017.

<sup>44</sup> Nigeria Immigration Service, *Annual Report 2017*, Abuja, 2018, <https://immigration.gov.ng/publications-newsletters/>.

<sup>45</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>46</sup> G. Terzi e S. Near, *Trafficking of Nigerian Girls in Italy: The Data, the Stories, the Social Services*, UNICRI, Torino, 2010.

traffic passed through Colombia and Brasil, to then reach Nigeria and finally the main European centres. This was led by Nigerian citizens, and the inferior positions were occupied in particular by Ghanaians<sup>47</sup>.

The narcotics are smuggled to the western markets mostly by couriers, who hide the drugs in their luggage or, more often, swallow them in packages made of condoms or other plastic material. This method was widely used by the Nigerian organizations, to the point that, between 2006 and 2007 when this problem started occurring in large scale, of the couriers who were caught 57% were Nigerian. It is often the case that there is more than one courier on the same flight: between 2006 and 2007, more than 30 couriers were caught on a flight to Amsterdam<sup>48</sup>.

Regarding the illegal production and smuggling of light arms, Nigeria is, together with Ghana, one of the most important regional points. This trafficking is operated both at the national and at the international level. At the national level, in Nigeria many officials of the Armed Forces have illegally sold weapons to fighting political groups, as well as to criminal organizations. The international smuggling of arms, instead, should be linked to the international illegal trafficking of arms; Nigeria is a focal point and it is the destination of a sustained traffic coming from the neighbouring countries (especially Ghana), as well as from the illegal flows coming from clandestine factories and the interests of criminal and insurgent groups<sup>49</sup>.

A further area targeted by the Nigerian organized crime is that of frauds involving pre-payments (also known as “419”, from the title of the section of the Nigerian penal code with deals with this crime) or of other financial frauds. These frauds have a turnover of several billion dollars. The frauds with pre-payments first appeared between the late 70s and the early 80s when Nigerian and foreigner businessmen engaged in illegal actions consisting in asking “administrative requirements” during the importation of the goods. This procedure reflected the widespread corruption in the country and it involved businessmen and government officials overbilling some imported goods; this resulted not only in the fraudulent profit of some individuals, but also in the fact that significant amounts of resources left the country without the needed resupply of goods and services<sup>50</sup>.

A further area in which Nigeria differs from other countries in the area is the so-called “oil bunkering”, or the theft of crude oil from terminals, oil pipelines and pumping stations. In Nigeria, there are more than six hundred oil and gas fields, a network of oil and gas pipelines which extends for seven thousand kilometres, ten

---

<sup>47</sup> D. Destrebecq, *Cocaine Trafficking in Western Africa*, UNODC, Vienna, 2007, <https://www.unodc.org/pdf/dfa/Cocaine-trafficking-Africa-en.pdf>.

<sup>48</sup> M. Shaw, T. Reitano e M. Hunter, *Comprehensive Assessment of Drug Trafficking and Organised Crime in West and Central Africa*, African Union, Addis Abeba, 2014.

<sup>49</sup> *Transnational Organized Crime in the West Africa Region*, UNODC, Vienna, 2005.

<sup>50</sup> T. Le Pichon e al., *Crime and Development in Africa*, UNODC, Vienna, 2005.

terminals for the export and more than 270 intermediate plans. Most of these infrastructures are located in the Southern part of the country, onshore and offshore. The Nigerian oil wealth has attracted both claims and operations for political purposes, like those of Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) and of the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), and criminal groups operating with the goal of making profit. Although for different reasons, eco-terrorist and insurgent groups and criminal organizations very often cooperate. While the formers steal the oil and destroy the infrastructures as an act of sabotage and for political aims, they need the latter to sell the stolen goods and make the money required to fund new activities. The mixture of insurgent groups with criminal organizations has become extensive, to the point that it is really complicated to determine where the cut-off between the two is.

After being illegally extracted, the oil is resold both within the country and abroad. The Nigerian organizations managing these operations are strictly connected to the criminal groups owning the ships on which this oil can be embarked; these are Moroccan, Venezuelan, Lebanese, Chinese and Russian. When it is not illegally refined in Nigeria, the crude oil is transported to Ghana, Cameroon and Ivory Coast, where there are refineries operating in an illegal normative context. There are studies suggesting that the oil which was illegally extracted in Nigeria has been sold in the spot markets of Amsterdam<sup>51</sup>.

It is estimated by the federal government of Nigeria that approximately 300,000 barrels of crude oil are smuggled every day; some more conservative estimates suggest that the actual number is near to 80,000 barrels. The smuggled oil is exchanged not only for money, but also for arms and drugs. In these latter cases as well, there are investigation indicating that there is a strong connection between the institutional structures and the oil traffickers; between 2005 and 2007, several officials of the Nigerian navy have been put under investigation for helping the smuggling of oil<sup>52</sup>.

However, the waters in front of the Nigerian shores have not only been the setting of the activities of oil traffickers; the Guinea Gulf is one of the sea areas where pirates are now more active. Between 2005 and 2021, their attacks, and attempted attacks, have increased steadily; in 2009, 48 were recorded, and in 2011 this number increased to between 58 and 64<sup>53</sup>. The pirates' preferred targets are oil tankers and container

---

<sup>51</sup> H. U. Ikoh, *Organized Crime in the Gulf of Guinea with a Focus in Nigeria*, in «The Impact of Organized Crime on Governance in West Africa», a cura di E. E. O. Alemika, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Bonn, 2013, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/nigeria/10200.pdf>.

<sup>52</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>53</sup> International Maritime Organization, *Reports on Acts of Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships. Annual Report – 2017*, Londra, 2018, <http://www.imo.org/en/OurWork/Security/PiracyArmedRobbery/Reports/Documents/258%20Annual%202017.pdf>.



vessels; to the former, the pirates steal crude oil which is then moved to smaller boats, to the latter, they steal precious cargos which are resold on the Nigerian illicit market or in the other states of the Gulf. After a reduction between 2012 and 2014, the attacks escalated; in 2016, 36 were counted and in 2018 this number reached 48, returning to the levels of 2009<sup>54</sup>.

---

<sup>54</sup> International Maritime Bureau, *Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships. Report for the Period 1<sup>st</sup> January – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018*, International Chamber of Commerce, Londra, 2019, <https://www.icc-ccs.org/piracy-reporting-centre/report-an-incident>.

## 2 EVOLUTION AND ROOTING OF AFRICAN CRIMINAL AGENTS IN ITALY

By Fiamma Terenghi and Valentina Piol (Intelligit)

### 2.1 North-African criminal groups in Italy: evolution, rooting and structure

Most of the African criminal agents in Italy come from the Great Maghreb area (Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Mauretania, Western Sahara), and they are responsible for the transnational management of the illicit markets, in collaboration with criminal agents from Italy (e.g., Camorra and 'Ndrangheta clans) and from abroad. They are now basically rooted and permanently present on the whole territory, thanks to their integration into the social and criminal fabric, even in areas where autochthonous organized criminal groups operate. Investigations in the regions where these groups are present suggest that, in the North, they are in the regions of Piedmont, Liguria, Lombardy, Veneto, Friuli Venezia-Giulia, Trentino Alto Adige; in the Centre, they are present in regions such as Emilia-Romagna, Marche and Abruzzo. In the South, they are in Campania, Apulia, Calabria and the islands of Sicily and Sardinia. The North-African criminal groups operating in the North are in many cases made of individuals from Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya and Mauritania<sup>55</sup>.

Similar to the case of other criminal agents, e.g., the ones from Albania, the (operational) organization of the North-African criminal groups in Italy has developed, assuming a different structure between the years before and after 2000. Indeed, the first phase of the stabilization was characterized by small units working on their own or in collaboration with other units (made of people of different ethnic groups), to commission illegal activities. In this phase, there was no structured and stable organization unifying these agents, no integrated criminal network, and no organized hierarchy managing their cell-based system.<sup>56</sup> “Despite this structural elusiveness, or exactly because of it, North-African criminals’ capacity to adapt to changing circumstances and contexts is significantly smaller than that of the Nigerian or Central African groups”<sup>57</sup>. Additionally, anyone could easily become part of the network, if he has connections and depending on the availability, but he can also operationally get out of it. This structure is reflected in the weak control of the

---

<sup>55</sup> Direzione Investigativa Antimafia, Relazione del Ministro dell’Interno al Parlamento. Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia. 1° Semestre 2018, 2018; Ministero dell’Interno, Relazione sull’attività delle forze di polizia, sullo stato dell’ordine e della sicurezza pubblica e sulla criminalità organizzata, 2017.

<sup>56</sup> Direzione Investigativa Antimafia, Relazione del Ministro dell’Interno al Parlamento. Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia. 1° Semestre 2014, 2014.

<sup>57</sup> Osservatorio sulla Criminalità Organizzata, Quarto rapporto sulle aree settentrionali, per la presidenza della Commissione Parlamentare di inchiesta sul fenomeno mafioso, 2017, 95.

territory, consisting in the mere surveillance of the areas where illegal activities are carried out. Indeed, these groups do not even exert any form of power or control over the social life of their compatriots. However, they are characterized by a high level of aggression, which results in acts of violence (disputes and fights) inside and outside of the groups.

“In the past years (until 2000) North-African crime– which is present not only in Italy, but also more generally in the European Union– tended towards instable structures, mainly aimed at carrying out one or more illicit plans, with criminal ties which are occasional and not formalized in the typical associations. To date, there has been evidence of qualitative elements of evolution which should be attributed to the dynamics of associative crime”<sup>58</sup>. The main elements of evolution are: 1. The presence of structured and complex groups in the international traffic of drugs. 2. The capacity to offer legal support to their members. 3. The taking of lead roles within transnational and multi-ethnic criminal organizations. 4. Capacity to carry out coordinated illegal activities and corruptive practices in prison facilities. 5. The increase and the establishment of lead roles taken by female figures. These transformations could be partially due to collaborations with other autochthonous or foreign groups.<sup>59</sup> To date, north-African criminal groups are characterized by a cell-based structure; these cells operate in various countries in Europe (England, the Netherlands and Germany) and outside of Europe (South America, United States of America and Canada), and they are incorporated in criminal networks which manage at the transnational level all the steps of the traffics. Amongst all the ethnicities, the Maghrebin groups have gradually formed a more articulated structure based on cells operating both in Italy and abroad (Europe, Africa, Middle East) and operationally autonomous in their area of interest. These cells are inserted in a criminal network, which is horizontally-structured and fluid, allowing to control various illegal markets<sup>60</sup>.

### **2.1.1 Illegal markets: drugs and human trafficking**

In Italy, the North-African criminal groups are particularly involved in the trafficking of narcotics, in the promotion of clandestine immigration, in the smuggling of humans to be used for sexual, in labour exploitation, and in other crimes such as the

---

<sup>58</sup> Direzione Investigativa Antimafia, Relazione del Ministro dell’Interno al Parlamento. Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia. 1° Semestre 2014, 172.

<sup>59</sup> Osservatorio sulla Criminalità Organizzata, Quarto rapporto sulle aree settentrionali, per la presidenza della Commissione Parlamentare di inchiesta sul fenomeno mafioso.

<sup>60</sup> Ministero dell’Interno, Relazione sull’attività delle forze di polizia, sullo stato dell’ordine e della sicurezza pubblica e sulla criminalità organizzata; Direzione Investigativa Antimafia, Relazione del Ministro dell’Interno al Parlamento. Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia. 1° Semestre 2016, 2016.

counterfeiting of ID documents. They operate at the transnational level and are capable of collaborating with Italian organized crime groups, like the Camorra and 'Ndrangheta clans. As indicated by investigative evidence, the link with these latter groups changes constantly and it is often based on a mutual exchange of illegal services. The North-African criminal groups located in our country often interact with agents from Italy or from other countries, especially in the context of drugs trafficking and dealing<sup>61</sup>.

Since they settled in Italy, the North-African agents have first been involved in the retail distribution of cannabis and hashish. In this, they were also facilitated by the key role played by their home countries in the production of these substances. To this date, there is investigative evidence indicating that the hashish coming from Morocco reaches the Italian market via well-established routes, with Spain playing a key role in the reception of the drug coming from Morocco and in its subsequent storage. Thus, at the beginning, the involvement of North-African agents consisted in becoming part of criminal organizations made of members of Italian or foreign criminal groups, and their position was medium-low (pushers). Several acts of violence have been reported over the control of the points of sale. This is due to the fact that the division of the territory is a fundamental means to claim, in a given region, autonomy and authority. The participation in the local markets allowed these groups to take management roles in the cocaine and heroin markets as well; these drugs are not produced in their home country, rather they are bought from compatriots located in transit zone (North Africa). As a consequence, these groups have developed a more articulated and complex structure<sup>62</sup>. These agents “appear to have given up on subordinate roles in order to gain larger autonomy in the drugs traffic, assuming the control of the whole supply chain, from the production in the countries of origin, to the distribution in the national territory, especially in the Central-North areas<sup>63</sup>. In particular, the Maghrebini

---

<sup>61</sup> Direzione Investigativa Antimafia, Relazione del Ministro dell'Interno al Parlamento. Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia. 2° Semestre 2016, 2016; Direzione Investigativa Antimafia, Relazione del Ministro dell'Interno al Parlamento. Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia. 1° Semestre 2018; Ministero dell'Interno, Relazione sull'attività delle forze di polizia, sullo stato dell'ordine e della sicurezza pubblica e sulla criminalità organizzata, 2016; Osservatorio sulla Criminalità Organizzata, Quarto rapporto sulle aree settentrionali, per la presidenza della Commissione Parlamentare di inchiesta sul fenomeno mafioso.

<sup>62</sup> Ministero dell'Interno, Relazione sull'attività delle forze di polizia, sullo stato dell'ordine e della sicurezza pubblica e sulla criminalità organizzata; Direzione Investigativa Antimafia, Relazione del Ministro dell'Interno al Parlamento. Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia. 1° Semestre 2014; Direzione Investigativa Antimafia, Relazione del Ministro dell'Interno al Parlamento. Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia. 1° Semestre 2018.

<sup>63</sup> Ministero dell'Interno, Relazione sull'attività delle forze di polizia, sullo stato dell'ordine e della sicurezza pubblica e sulla criminalità organizzata; Direzione Investigativa Antimafia, Relazione del Ministro dell'Interno al Parlamento. Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia. 2° Semestre 2016, 2016.

groups created a large criminal network made of cells operating in Italy and abroad (Europe, Africa and Middle East) in production, transit and destination areas, such as Spain, France, the Netherlands and Belgium. To date, they are capable of controlling all phases of the traffic (importation, wholesale and distribution), also by collaborating with Albanese and Italian groups. Thus, they play an important role in the international drugs traffic. Generally, they exploit one of the main routes which allow to transport narcotics from the Maghreb (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia) to Italy, passing through Spain and the Netherlands (storage places) and then through France and Germany<sup>64</sup>.

Various, and sophisticated, techniques are used to transport the drugs. In addition to using trucks driven by European citizens to better avoid the law enforcement action of the police force, passenger cars crewed by unsuspected people (e.g., children and women) are also used. For instance, in the Checkmate operation, a group of Moroccan and Italian people was found to be involved in the traffic and retail distribution of cocaine and hashish. These substances were transported every two days from Morocco, by “luring tourists under the pretext of hosting them, while in fact, unbeknownst to them, the traffickers would place in their cars the drugs, which they would then retrieve once they had reached Italy, passing through Spain”<sup>65</sup>. The commercial sea route linking Tangier to Genoa is mostly used to import hashish into Italy, which is directed to the Central-North regions. In this case as well, passenger cars, trucks and campers, mostly driven by people from Morocco, are used to transport the drugs, and there are investigations pointing to high levels of corruption amongst custom officers and Moroccan members of police in Tangier. In a similar way to the Nigerian ones, North-African criminal groups use ovulator drug couriers, or individuals often with no police record and who are given a moderate sum to transport drugs by ingesting them.

A further business in which North-African criminal groups are involved is the aiding of clandestine immigration; that is, offering travel services and documents to those who want to emigrate to Italy, and to other European countries. Within the national territory, these groups also exploit migrants to use them in the illegal markets of sex, undeclared work and begging (i.e., human trafficking), or they are not interested in that (i.e., human smuggling). Additionally, they are capable of controlling the regularization of illegal migrants, by means of family reunifications, combined marriages or fake job contracts. These former two techniques are used to allow girls

---

<sup>64</sup> Direzione Investigativa Antimafia, Relazione del Ministro dell’Interno al Parlamento. Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia. Gennaio-Giugno 2017, 2017; Direzione Nazionale Antimafia e Antiterrorismo, Relazione annuale sulle attività svolte dal Procuratore Nazionale e dalla Direzione nazionale antimafia e antiterrorismo nonché sulle dinamiche e strategie della criminalità organizzata di tipo mafioso nel periodo 1 luglio – 30 giugno 2016, 2017.

<sup>65</sup> Direzione Investigativa Antimafia, Relazione del Ministro dell’Interno al Parlamento. Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia. 2° Semestre 2011, 2011, 244.

coming from Eritrea<sup>66</sup> to enter Italy. For instance, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 2017 the tribunal of Milan issued an ordinance of preventive detention against a criminal organization made of three Italians, a Serbian and a Moroccan, in order to promote the entering and staying of several migrants in Italy. Additionally, the perpetrators were providing fake employment records to obtain a residence permit and they arranged combined marriages with Italian citizens. The cost of these services ranged “from 1,500 euros to buy a fake employment contract, to 4,000 euros for a fake marriage, to 10,000 euros to organize travels to Italy”<sup>67</sup>.

---

<sup>66</sup> Commissione Parlamentare, Relazione su mafie, migranti e tratta di esseri umani, nuove forme di schiavitù, 2017; Ministero dell’Interno, Relazione sull’attività delle forze di polizia, sullo stato dell’ordine e della sicurezza pubblica e sulla criminalità organizzata; Direzione Nazionale Antimafia e Antiterrorismo, Relazione annuale sulle attività svolte dal Procuratore Nazionale e dalla Direzione nazionale antimafia e antiterrorismo nonché sulle dinamiche e strategie della criminalità organizzata di tipo mafioso nel periodo 1 luglio – 30 giugno 2016.

<sup>67</sup> Direzione Investigativa Antimafia, Relazione del Ministro dell’Interno al Parlamento. Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia. Gennaio-Giugno 2017, 182.

## Focus 1: Operation “Black and White” and operation “Oasi”

In the Black and White operation, the Provincial Command of the Customs corps of Lecce arrested Italians (from Naples, Brindisi, one from Lecce and one from Taranto), Moroccans and Albanians, who were investigated for criminal conspiracy, aiming to trafficking, importing and selling narcotics. The investigation, which had started in August 2006, has proved the existence of three different associations involved in this illegal activity: one was Italian-Albanian, operating in Lecce and Brindisi, and it imported large quantities of heroin and marijuana from Albania, using motor-ships on the Valona-Brindisi route; one was made of Italian citizens, operating in Brindisi and Naples, and one was made of Moroccan citizens, rooted in Lecce, and which was involved in transporting large quantities of hashish and cocaine from Tangier (Morocco) to Genoa via couriers.

Collaborations between North-African criminals and criminals of other ethnic groups have been reported by the Oasi operation, which ended on September 8th 2011, by the Carabinieri of Genoa and was conducted against a rather complex criminal associations made of Maghrebi, Albanian and Italian citizens. The first group was comprised of people from Morocco who trafficked the substance (hashish) from Spain to the Ligurian main town. The second one, made of Slavic people and based in Genoa and in Spain, was mostly involved in the purchase of cocaine and it was mainly rooted in the East of Genoa. The third one was made of people from Genoa, who bought the drug from the first and second group.

Source: Elaboration Intellegit of DIA (2011)

The ethnic groups which are mostly victim of trafficking are those from the Maghreb, Sahel, Ethiopia, Africa’s Horn and the middle-east area. The preferred trafficking route reaching Italy is the African one, starting from the Horn of Africa, passing through Sudan and Chad, and terminating in Libya. From there, it is possible to reach the southern coasts of the countries on the Mediterranean (Spain, Italy, Greece). The Sicilian Strait is crossed via boats (fishing vessels, motorboats, rafts) which do not have access to the sea within national territory and are often driven by migrants who take up the role of occasional boatmen; that is, with no previous experience in navigation. The migrants are then moved to smaller boats directed toward the coast

or cast out on the sea. Due to its social-political instability, Libya<sup>68</sup> is the area where most migrants arrive to then be sent off to the island of Lampedusa, the southern coasts of Sicily, of eastern Calabria, and of Apulia (Salento)<sup>69</sup>.

In most cases, the North-African groups are made of actors of various ethnicities and they are organized as to control all the steps of the traffic, which are four main ones. Ethnic groups are involved in the first step, with the job of organizing the travel from the country of origin to the country of arrival. The second step involves organizations operating in the border areas between the countries of passage or arrival; the members of these organizations have operational tasks, including providing fake documents, deciding the routes, housing the migrants before they are transferred. The third step involves groups taking care of the crossing through the borders, and they connect the traffickers with the agents involved in the exploitation of the migrants in country of arrival. In this case, it was found that Ethiopian and Eritrean groups are involved in gathering people from Nigeria, South Sudan or Ghana to be transferred. The travels are then managed by criminal agents from the Horn of Africa and Nigeria. The Libyan criminal groups, instead, are responsible for boarding the migrants; to do this, they cooperate with agents from Ethiopia, Nigeria and Eritrea, who manage the travel by land. Finally, the fourth level involves individuals who make a profit by exploiting the victims in the country of destination<sup>70</sup>.

Regarding the exploitation of migrants in the sex market, the North-African groups differ from other foreigner criminal groups, like the ones from Albania or Romania, as they have not yet reached their expertise level, which they have instead reached in the traffic of drugs. For instance, the Maghrebies exploit victims within large criminal groups involving different ethnicities, and including Albanians, Romanians and Italians. In this case, they manage and control prostitutes especially in East Europe, and they are also involved in the distribution of drugs<sup>71</sup>.

---

<sup>68</sup> Ministero dell'Interno, *Relazione sull'attività delle forze di polizia, sullo stato dell'ordine e della sicurezza pubblica e sulla criminalità organizzata*; Commissione Parlamentare, *Relazione su mafie, migranti e tratta di esseri umani, nuove forme di schiavitù*.

<sup>69</sup> "In regard to the trafficking of migrants via sea, the routes of the smugglers often equate the ones of asylum seekers, coming from areas of conflict or regions with heightened security issues. This is due to the operational choices and dynamics of the groups involved. In the instance of human trafficking both the strategies of transporting the victims and the routes change accordingly to the international climate. If Italy draws an agreement with a North-African state to regulate the routes and to prevent irregular migration, these groups change their journey and pass through another country." (Commissione Parlamentare, 2017: 31)

<sup>70</sup> Commissione Parlamentare, *Relazione su mafie, migranti e tratta di esseri umani, nuove forme di schiavitù*, 2017; Ministero dell'Interno, *Relazione sull'attività delle forze di polizia, sullo stato dell'ordine e della sicurezza pubblica e sulla criminalità organizzata*.

<sup>71</sup> F. Terenghi e A. Di Nicola, "National criminal markets and finances: cocaine trafficking. Italy: an increasingly competitive market", in CSD (ed.) *Financing of organised crime*, Sofia: CSD, 2015, 78-105;



## Focus 2: Ordinance of preventive detention by the Court of Milan

An investigation conducted by the DDA of Milan indicated the existence of a complex criminal organization involved, in a stable way and with the goal of making a profit, in the trafficking of citizens from Syria, Egypt, Eritrea and Sudan, with its operation and logistic base in Milan and with branches in Ventimiglia and Nice. The criminal network is made of Egyptians and Maghrebies, holding a regular residence permit and residing in the Lombard city, and of other agents of Afghan, Sudanese, Albanese, Romanian and Italian nationality. Within this organization there was a clear distribution of role between those who were leading, and the drivers and recruiters. From the city of Milan, the leaders controlled the traffic of illegal persons coming from Syria and travelling to the north of Europe, helped by other members or through direct connections with the North-African and Turkish traffickers, and with the boatmen. Through these contacts, they were capable of knowing in advance about the arrival of the migrants, and the number of disembarking, as to organize their reception in Sicily, and then the travel to Milan, passing through the Central station, to the final destination. Indeed, the group intercepted the clandestine individuals when they were in the reception facilities, and from there they directed or accompanied them to Milan, where they organized their transfer to other countries of the European Union. Following negotiations, the immigrants reached the border through the pass of Ventimiglia. The leaders of the groups used tested routes and a large network of *passeur*. The transfer of the migrants took place on trucks, lorries and cars under conditions of extreme degradation.

Source: elaboration Intellegit of DIA (Gennaio-Giugno 2017) and Commissione Parlamentare (2017)

The less structured and smaller North-African groups are also involved in theft and robberies, often involving minors. These activities mostly consist in thefts in public places and apartments, extortions, robberies in villas. There have been cases of thefts of photovoltaic panels and brass carried out in construction sites, on railway lines and even in cemeteries. Additionally, the investigations indicated that Maghrebi groups were involved in the recycling of vehicles in the countries of origin, by counterfeiting or altering plates to later sell parts or ferrous wreckages in the Maghreb or Sub-

Sahara countries. Finally, the North-African groups are involved in the smuggling of tobacco products from abroad, and in the trade of counterfeit goods<sup>72</sup>.

### **Focus 3: Operation Scorpion Fish 2**

In April 2018, the Customs corps of Marsala arrested 17 Italian and Tunisian members of a criminal organizations involved in managing travels via sea between Tunisia and Italy, targeting migrants who were able to bear the high transportation prices. The navigation was meant to be carried out on safer vessels than the old boats. Additionally, the migrants would receive support to avoid the identification procedures and the expulsion proceedings, thus being able to travel to other European countries as their final destination. The traverses were also used to import in the national territory large quantities of smuggled tobacco products from abroad which, together with the profit coming from the migrants trafficking, guaranteed large proceedings, which were then reinvested by the Italian members. The investigation led to the discovery of a second criminal organization, mirroring the first one, made of Maghrebi and Italian members (with their base in the municipalities of Palermo, Mazzara del Vallo and Marsala), also operating in the trafficking of migrants and tobacco products from abroad.

Source: elaboration Intellegit of DIA (2018)

## **2.3 Nigerian Mafias in Italy: development, radicalization and structure**

Starting from the 1980s, the Nigerian criminal actors initially moved in small groups to Northern Italy. They then relocated in larger scale in Palermo, in the area proximate to Cagliari and across the Via Domiziana, which skirts the sea from Mandragone to Caserta. Subsequently, in the last 10-15 years, they moved again to the North, mainly in the cities of Turin and Milan, but also in smaller cities across the province and in former industrial areas such as Novara, Padua, Bresa, Rimini<sup>73</sup>.

---

<sup>72</sup> G. Conzo, *La criminalità nordafricana. Una premessa*; Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia di Napoli, 2006; Direzione Investigativa Antimafia, *Relazione del Ministro dell'Interno al Parlamento. Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia. 2°*

<sup>73</sup> F. Floris, "Mafia nigeriana alla conquista del Nord", in Osservatorio Diritti, 31 Maggio 2017.

Nevertheless, the Italian police forces reported a linkage among secretive Nigerian confraternities in 1995; until 2000, however, the situation remained rather stable, also because at the operations adopted to implement prevention. In 2005, the Italian secret services disclosed how the illicit activities carried out initially by isolated Nigerian groups, without a strong organization, came to obtain a more prominent role in the national criminal market, imposing their presence in certain grey areas dominated by Italian organized groups. Six years later, the Nigerian embassy in Rome communicated the presence of Nigerian groups belonging to secret sects, which relocated to Italy so as to carry out criminal activities. It is possible to identify this moment as the starting point for the rhetoric of “the Nigerian mafia, arrived in Italy by boat, which established a strong hierarchical structure, and which continues to hire workforce from the migrants”.<sup>74</sup>

The gradual radicalization of Nigerian criminal actors in the national territory and the development of their structure, just like their *modus operandi*, became clear from several reports, some of which highlighted the mafia component of certain groups, as corroborated from various sentences<sup>75</sup>. In fact, starting from the 2000s, there have been numerous criminal investigations against Nigerian nationals for offences such as criminal association, enslavement, human trafficking, exploitation of prostitution, drug and arms trade, extortion. However, in these court rulings, it is difficult to determine the linkage with the mafia<sup>76</sup>. The first sentence highlighting this process was ruled by the Brescia Tribunal and dates back to 2009. 12 Nigerian individuals were then convicted for the use of both intimidation and criminal complicity, and subjugation and forced conspiracy of silence. Those convicted obliged victims to devolve a certain amount of money in order to sustain the criminal activities of the local group and the one in Nigeria<sup>77</sup>. Subsequently, other compelling sentences are:

- The Turin Tribunal in 2010, in which 36 individuals belonging to the cults of Black Axe and Eiye were convicted following a gang-related confrontation. This incident, even if initially regarded as a conflict among Nigerian groups, allowed to carry out an investigation and to determine whether these groups are present in Turin, with ramifications in Palermo and other places in the national territory<sup>78</sup>.

---

<sup>74</sup> F. Parbuoni, “La mafia nigeriana arriva con i barconi: l’ambasciatore avvertì l’Italia nel 2011”, in *Secolo d’Italia*, 22 Ottobre 2018.

<sup>75</sup> Direzione Investigativa Antimafia, *Relazione del Ministro dell’Interno al Parlamento. Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia. Gennaio-Giugno 2017*.

<sup>76</sup> F. Terenghi e A. Di Nicola, *Financing of trafficking in human beings in Italy*, Sofia: CSD, 2018, 261-294.

<sup>77</sup> G. Pipitone, “Mafia nigeriana: il patto con Cosa Nostra, agguati con l’ascia e sangue bevuto. A Palermo prima inchiesta sulla ‘Cosa nera’”, in *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 19 Ottobre 2015.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*.

- The Turin Tribunal in 2018, 21 individuals belonging to the Eiyé and Maphite are convicted for criminal complicity and Mafia methods<sup>79</sup>.
- The Palermo Tribunal, in 2018, where 14 people of Nigerian ethnicity were convicted with the accusation of belonging to the Black Axe, an organization which, according to public opinion, operates similar to the “octopus”.<sup>80</sup>

Several sources report the presence in Italy of cults such as the Black Axe, Eiyé, Mephite, Vikins, Black Cats, whose members have similar geographical and tribal original<sup>81</sup>. This characteristic ensures a strong degree of internal cohesion and operational efficacy within the groups, even though these groups are structured according to separated units operating in different locations. These associations, or cults, operate independently, horizontally and, because of their specific function as nodes of a net and hierarchical structures, they create criminal holding. The characterizing factors are: activities in diversified sectors, the sharing of units, which reflect the versatility and flexibility of the structure, or the capacity to manage transnational illicit markets and the exercise of violence within groups and, externally, towards their compatriots for the control over the territory. An example is the operation implemented by the Police in Cagliari, which was called Calypso Nest, from the name of the Nigerian unity identified. This unit was operational on two levels: in the international realm through the Eiyé and a national one through the Calypso Nest, which was then divided in two groups, which were managerial and executive<sup>82</sup>.

The location and radicalization of Nigerian criminal groups in Italy became clear from several investigations and court proceedings. In the North, these groups appeared to have significant presence in the regions of Piedmont, Liguria, Lombardy, Veneto; in the Center, in Emilia-Romagna, Marche, Abruzzo, Umbria and in the city of Rome; and, finally, in the South, in Campania (especially the area of Domiziana), Sicily (Palermo), Sardinia, Apulia and Calabria. For instance, the Black Axe established themselves and radicalized in the cities of Turin, Novara, Alessandria, Verona,

---

<sup>79</sup> F. Cravero, “Ventuno condanne per due gruppi della mafia nigeriana a Torino”, in *La Repubblica*, 12 Gennaio 2018.

<sup>80</sup> *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, *Mafia nigeriana, sgominato a Cagliari gruppo criminale accusato di tratta di esseri umani, prostituzione e droga*, 21 Novembre 2018.

<sup>81</sup> Direzione Investigativa Antimafia, *Relazione del Ministro dell’Interno al Parlamento. Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia. Gennaio–Giugno 2017*; G. Pipitone, “Mafia nigeriana: il patto con Cosa Nostra, agguati con l’ascia e sangue bevuto. A Palermo prima inchiesta sulla ‘Cosa nera’”; A. Vannaroni e E. Levantini, “La tratta di esseri umani e le mafie nigeriane. Un mondo criminale tra antichi riti e modernità”, in *Articolo 21*, 28 Maggio 2018; V. Iurillo, “Castel Volturno, viaggio nella capitale della mafia nera”, in *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 3 Gennaio 2019.

<sup>82</sup> Agenzia Informazioni e Sicurezza Interna, “La mafia nigeriana fra voodoo e computer” in *Gnosis 2*, 2005, *Rivista Italiana di Intelligence*; *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, *Mafia nigeriana, sgominato a Cagliari gruppo criminale accusato di tratta di esseri umani, prostituzione e droga*.

Bologna, Rome, Naples and Palermo. The Malaphite are located in several territories within Italy with ramifications and linkages with other European and non-countries, such as the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Germany, Malaysia, Ghana and Canada. The Black Cats are instead predominant in numerous areas of Italy and they operate mainly in the regions of Principe, Aversa and Padua<sup>83</sup>.

One of the key locations where the Nigerian community has strong control over the territory is the province of Caserta and mainly in the area of Castelvoturno, characterized by conditions of social, environmental and urbanistic degradation, allowed these groups to radicalize in the area and to administrate certain illicit markets: ranging from the distribution of cocaine, to the arrival of young girls, which are exploited for prostitution either in apartments, also known as connection houses, or sent to other areas in Italy (especially in the North), to the administration of illegal workforce employed in the harvesting of tomatoes, fruits and sheep farming, to a presumed organ trafficking<sup>84</sup>. A precautionary measure established by the GIP of Naples described the cult Black Cats as “very affluent, due to criminal acts and other commercial activities seemingly legal, such as supermarkets for Africans, import-export shops or connection houses. Through their business of import-export, they import from Africa drugs and other goods<sup>85</sup>.”

---

<sup>83</sup> Direzione Investigativa Antimafia, Relazione del Ministro dell’Interno al Parlamento. Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia. Luglio-Dicembre 2017; Direzione Investigativa Antimafia, Relazione del Ministro dell’Interno al Parlamento. Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia. Gennaio-Giugno 2017; F. Terenghi e V. Piol, Finanziamento e uso dei fondi nella tratta di persone in Italia. Dai modelli di business all’attività di prevenzione e contrasto, Trento: eCrime, Università degli Studi di Trento, 2019; F. Floris, “Mafia nigeriana alla conquista del Nord”, in Osservatorio Diritti.

<sup>84</sup> Direzione Investigativa Antimafia, Relazione del Ministro dell’Interno al Parlamento. Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia. 1° Semestre 2016; Camera dei Deputati – I Commissione Permanente, (2019), Interrogazione a risposta immediata sulla diffusione della mafia nigeriana nella zona di Castelvoturno, 2019.

<sup>85</sup> Direzione Investigativa Antimafia, Relazione del Ministro dell’Interno al Parlamento. Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia. 1° Semestre 2016, 191.

#### **Focus 4: Castel Volturno, a journey in the capital of the African mafia**

In the last 30 years, Castel Volturno has become the ideal location to hire workforce at the service of an illegal network. It is possible to exploit individuals from the almost twenty-five thousand Nigerian and Ghanaian undocumented migrants which live in the Domiziano area, by inhabiting irregularly houses abandoned following the earthquake in 1980. Among them, some rent a mattress in the several, unfit for use, houses. They have limited space available, as usually ten migrants have to share a space of 10 squared meters, paying 150 euros per person. Compared to the opportunity of picking tomatoes for 20 euros a day, the idea of joining an organized group is promising. Their mapping is illustrated from Shule (first collaborator of justice within the Nigerian criminal network of Castel Volturno, previously member of the *Eiye*): there are several groups, which are in collusion with one another, such as the *Black Cats*, the *Eiye*, and the *Vikings*. He further describes the transnational linkages of these groups, which have connections in almost all the European countries, ranging from Spain, the Netherlands, France to Denmark, the United Kingdom and Italy.

Fonte: elaboration Intellegit di Iurillo (2019)

#### **2.3.1 The transnational illegal markets of Nigerian mafias in Italy**

The Nigerian organized criminal groups in Italy are mostly involved in human trafficking for sex and job exploitation, in the transnational market of drugs and in favouring clandestine immigration. Several factors have contributed to their involvement in these illegal markets more than in others: 1. The geographical position of Nigeria, which is a central transit point in the route used for trafficking cocaine from South America to Europe. 2. Some gaps in the African investigative systems, which allow some members of these groups to create and control some African territories in an almost “free and autonomous” way. From these areas, great quantities of drugs are divided and then trafficked to Europe via sea or land. 3. The radicalization and the integration of Nigerian individuals who provide practical and business-related support in several European countries, as well as in Asia and South America. These factors have allowed the Nigerian groups to broaden their criminal interests to the traffic of cocaine as well. Additionally, human smuggling is connected to drugs traffic, as it is often the case that the same means and structures are used for different criminal markets and services. Although they are not their core business, these groups are also involved in the fraudulent currency market, in the cloning and illegal use of electronic payment instruments, in scams via mail order and telematics. In the

so-called Milord operation (June 2006), carried out in the city of Turin by the Customs corps, they identified a Nigerian criminal group made of forty members and with a sectarian and very complex structure, which was involved in the exploitation of prostitution and in activities related to clandestine immigration, the trafficking and selling of drugs, the production of fake documents, and frauds<sup>86</sup>.

These features have allowed the Nigerian agents to break free from the control of other Italian and foreign criminal groups. To date, they hold a degree of autonomy allowing them to manage their own illegal business. They have also been able to develop relations based on mutual agreement and interest with Italian criminal groups. This does not rule out that, in some cases or in the recent past, they had to pay money to the latter to be able to use parts of the local territories to manage, as an example, the retail distribution of drugs or prostitution. Indeed, in the Southern regions, where the most sophisticated illegal activities are controlled and managed by the traditional criminal organizations, the activities in which they are autonomous are restricted to clandestine immigration and the illegal offenses connected to it, such as the making of fake documents, as well as sex and job exploitation<sup>87</sup>. In the province of Caserta, for instance, the exploiters and prostitutes are tolerated by the local organized criminal groups as the prostitutes and their exploiters are a means of revenge of the Camorra, and the exploiters pay a “rent” of the territory to their individual referent clan. Additionally, the Italian organized criminal groups are not directly involved in human smuggling, nor in the subsequent sex and job exploitation, as these are considered similar to drugs trafficking, but having a worse cost-effectiveness than the latter. Indeed, the risk that the victims rebel and sue the exploiters is considered real and taken into consideration<sup>88</sup>.

---

<sup>86</sup> Direzione Nazionale Antimafia e Antiterrorismo, Relazione annuale sulle attività svolte dal Procuratore Nazionale e dalla Direzione nazionale antimafia e antiterrorismo nonché sulle dinamiche e strategie della criminalità organizzata di tipo mafioso nel periodo 1 luglio – 30 giugno 2016; Ministero dell’Interno, Relazione sull’attività delle forze di polizia, sullo stato dell’ordine e della sicurezza pubblica e sulla criminalità organizzata; Commissione Parlamentare, Relazione su mafie, migranti e tratta di esseri umani, nuove forme di schiavitù.

<sup>87</sup> Direzione Nazionale Antimafia e Antiterrorismo, Relazione annuale sulle attività svolte dal Procuratore Nazionale e dalla Direzione nazionale antimafia e antiterrorismo nonché sulle dinamiche e strategie della criminalità organizzata di tipo mafioso nel periodo 1 luglio – 30 giugno 2016, 383; F. Terenghi e V. Piol, Finanziamento e uso dei fondi nella tratta di persone in Italia. Dai modelli di business all’attività di prevenzione e contrasto.

<sup>88</sup> F. Terenghi F. e A. Di Nicola, *Financing of trafficking in human beings in Italy*, Sofia: CSD; G. Conzo, La criminalità nordafricana. Una premessa, Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia di Napoli.

### 2.3.2 Human trafficking with the scope of sexual and labor exploitation

The Mediterranean central route, which connects Africa to Italy, plays a key role in the arrival of African citizens in our country and it is used by Nigerian organized groups for human trafficking with the scope of sexual and labor exploitation. The migrants, arriving in Italy, can be exploited in our country or relocated in other European countries. As the data provided by Frontex in 2017 shows, since 2014, the number of illegal migrants entering Italy through this route consisted of over 100.000 individuals. This increase was also due to social and political instability in Libya, which represents both the arrival point for migrants originating from several African states and departing point for those who aim at reaching Italy and Europe. In more recent years, especially between 2017 and 2018, there has been a decrease in the arrival of irregular migrants, which is in line with the lower number of foreigners arrived in Italy and Europe. In 2018, the arrival of migrants from Libya decreased by 99 per cent and only 56 per cent of those arriving were aiming at reaching Italy. Other countries of departure include Tunisia, Turkey, and, on a limited scale, Algeria and Greece. The motives are mainly related to internal changes in Libya starting from 2017, on the departure of migrant boats from Tunisia and Algeria directed towards Sicily and Sardinia, and at the usage of the route Turkey-Italy, still available to the traffickers<sup>89</sup>.

Given the covert nature of these activities, it is complex to determine a specific number of migrants exploited with sexual and labor purposes among those who arrive to Italy. Adding to this, up to date, there is still no centralized system which keeps track of the victims identified within the national territory<sup>90</sup>. The data is therefore speculative. Human trafficking with the scope of prostitution mainly regards Nigerian women and girls (significantly young), while those with the aim of labor exploitations aims at guys of different African ethnicities, as it currently happens in the illicit market of the begging<sup>91</sup>. The factors that lead to migration are conditions of poverty in the native country, socio-political instability and ethnical discriminations, which facilitate the activity of the recruiters and of the same Nigerian criminal groups.

The Nigerian actors involved in human trafficking with the scope of sexual and labor exploitation in Italy have a varying organization and structure: ranging from medium-sized criminal group to associations based upon horizontal and flexible networks. The

---

<sup>89</sup> European Border and Coast Guard Agency – FRONTEX, Risk analysis for 2017, 2017; European Border and Coast Guard Agency – FRONTEX, Risk analysis for 2018, 2018; International Organization for Migration – IOM, Flow Monitoring Europe, 2018.

<sup>90</sup> Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings – GRETA, Report concerning the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings by Italy. Second evaluation round, 2019.

<sup>91</sup> Dipartimento Pari Opportunità, *Dati – Contro la tratta*, 2018; Save the Children, *Piccoli schiavi invisibili. I minori stranieri vittime di tratta e sfruttamento in Italia*, 2017; C. Bertolotti, “Come funziona il racket dell’elemosina della mafia nigeriana”, in *Panorama*, 26 Dicembre 2017; Tanassi F., “Piccole schiave invisibili, l’intervista di Meteora all’associazione on the Road”, in *On The Road*, 30 Marzo 2018.



dimension and degree of organization depend upon several factors: the operational activities established, the number of women trafficked, the financial means available and the degree (weak/strong) of relationships with the functionaries (especially in the areas of departure and transit of the victims). For instance, certain groups manage flexible and parceled networks, which recruit victims through contact with their relatives. Others, instead, are much more structured and rely on several individuals, with different tasks, in order to manage the trafficking. Starting from the recruiters in the countries of origin of the victims, travel agencies and civil servants, to professional counterfeiters, financiers (or sponsors) and abusers. In Italy, the several trials show the presence of a criminal network, based on ethnic/family ties and/or trans-national ones. These elements, beyond the share of cultural values and regional beliefs, make the criminal network cohesive and they have permitted throughout time to established strong organizational capacities and management of illicit business initially in the North and Center and, more recently, in the regions of the South<sup>92</sup>. These groups still manage all the different stages of the human trafficking through a consolidated and recurrent scheme.

The stage of recruitment of the victims in the countries of origins is often carried out through deception, as the victim is promised a legitimate job, adequately compensated, in the countries of destination. This is often carried out through the Internet and social networks (i.e. Facebook) with certain websites containing advertisements<sup>93</sup>. Before the departure, the potential victims undergo a voodoo ritual carried out by a local holy-man or priest in order to create a condition of suggestion and psychological subjugation, which obliges the victim to carry out the contracted debt (i.e. costs of the journey etc.) “The degree of subordination of the individuals forced to prostitution is perceivable from the low number of allegations, in comparison with the high number of women involved”.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, the debt does not reflect the real costs the organized groups undertake, but it is organized arbitrarily, amounting to 25.000-40.000 euros<sup>95</sup>. Throughout the recruitment, a key factor is constituted by the family linkages in both cities, such as Benin City (a place with the highest numbers of victims), and rural villages in Nigeria. In fact, in many instances, the recruiters are friends or acquaintances of the victims or their relatives. Often it is the same relatives that encourage their children to migrate, also because

---

<sup>92</sup> Direzione Nazionale Antimafia e Antiterrorismo – DNA, Relazione annuale sulle attività svolte dal Procuratore Nazionale e dalla Direzione nazionale antimafia e antiterrorismo nonché sulle dinamiche e strategie della criminalità organizzata di tipo mafioso nel periodo 1 luglio – 30 giugno 2016; Ministero dell’Interno, Rapporto sulla criminalità in Italia. Analisi, prevenzione e contrasto, 2006.

<sup>93</sup> F. Terenghi e A. Di Nicola, *Financing of trafficking in human beings in Italy*; A. Di Nicola et al., *Surf and Sound. The role of the internet in people smuggling and human trafficking*, eCrime Research Reports 03, Trento: Università degli Studi di Trento, 2017.

<sup>94</sup> G. Conzo, *La criminalità nordafricana. Una premessa*, 7.

<sup>95</sup> F. Terenghi e A. Di Nicola, *Financing of trafficking in human beings in Italy*; Tanassi F., “Piccole schiave invisibili, l’intervista di Meteora all’associazione on the Road”.

this increases the esteem within the community. With lower frequency, the victims are recruited in the streets by strangers or individuals who returned to Nigeria in wealthy conditions, or they are kidnapped<sup>96</sup>. Lastly, in more recent years it became clear how Nigerian organized groups moved from a casual recruitment to a more targeted one, which aims at selecting specific categories of victims and at answering the requests of the illicit market or to elude the control checks at the borders of the transit countries<sup>97</sup>.

The stage of transport of the potential victims, which demands the organization of the journey and the securitization of the necessary resources, such the documents required and the accommodations at all the different stages. In the coastal cities of Libya and while waiting their departure towards Italy, migrants are often kept as hostages and prisoners by militant groups/ local criminals, which are linked with the Nigerian organized criminal groups, in dilapidated buildings (also known as connection houses or ghetto houses) where they are subject to any kind physical and psychological abuse. The journey can be paid by Nigerian organized groups, as sponsors in contact with the local criminal, or by the relatives through intermediaries. In the former circumstance, the family has to seek loans and go into debt, with the aim that they will receive this money back once the victims start working in Italy<sup>98</sup>.

The stage of exploitation is when the potential victims have reached Italy and are forced to prostitution or to work in the black market. Once they arrive in our county, there are several ways to ensure they reach final destination. They can be taken by members or intermediaries of the several criminal groups at the arrival points or accommodation centers, or they can receive instructions and travel tickets through mobile phone. Often, they are instructed and supported in their requests for political asylum<sup>99</sup>. Recent investigations have highlighted how, in the last two years, there has been an illegal use of the asylum system on behalf of those organized groups involved in human trafficking, this would ensure international protections to individuals who would then be exploited by the criminal associations. The threat of the voodoo ritual and the debt ensure that the victims remain subjugated and obey. When this is not sufficient, the organized groups resort to physical and/or psychological

---

<sup>96</sup> UNICRI-PARSEC, Trafficking of Nigerian Girls in Italy. The data, the stories, the social services, 2010.

<sup>97</sup> F. Terenghi e V. Piol, Finanziamento e uso dei fondi nella tratta di persone in Italia. Dai modelli di business all'attività di prevenzione e contrasto; On the Road, Tratta e sfruttamento, 2019.

<sup>98</sup> Direzione Nazionale Antimafia e Antiterrorismo – DNA, Relazione annuale sulle attività svolte dal Procuratore Nazionale e dalla Direzione nazionale antimafia e antiterrorismo nonché sulle dinamiche e strategie della criminalità organizzata di tipo mafioso nel periodo 1 luglio – 30 giugno 2016; Commissione Parlamentare, Relazione su mafie, migranti e tratta di esseri umani, nuove forme di schiavitù; F. Terenghi F. e A. Di Nicola, Financing of trafficking in human beings in Italy.

<sup>99</sup> F. Terenghi F. e A. Di Nicola, Financing of trafficking in human beings in Italy.

intimidations, also towards their relatives<sup>100</sup>. The stage of money laundering of all the revenue gained from prostitution or irregular labor.

### **Focus 5: Koolvis Investigation on behalf of the Dutch police**

The Amsterdam police started an investigation, called Koolvis, in June 2006, as a consequence of 90 improper removals of foreign minors from reception facilities for migrants. The investigation allowed the discovery of the activities carried out by Nigerian organized groups, which took advantage from the Dutch asylum scheme. This scheme was organized in the following order: subsequent to the denunciation of trafficking, the migrants can receive a temporary document required for the stay and they can be hosted in appropriate facilities. The *modus operandi* envisaged the transfer of young individuals across the Netherlands (usually female and intended to be exploited for prostitution). Once they arrive at Schiphol Airport, the minors declare to be victims of human trafficking, without providing further information. Therefore, they are located in the facilities from where they would get away. Under the threat of *voodoo rituals*, the victims reach the contact persons of the organizations, who then transfer them in the locations requested from the *maman* in order to exploit them. The Dutch police, through wiretapping, came to the understanding that many of the victims were being transferred to Italy.

Source: elaboration Intellegit di Conzo (2006)

This profit is used to either finance illicit activities (drugs trade) or they are re-invested to buy real estate and/or commercial properties mainly in Nigeria but also in Italy (for instance, African markets or beauty/phone centers). The methods most used entail services of money transfer (also present in ethnic shops, both Nigerian or others) and the Hawala system. The latter, which has roots from the Middle East, is an informal bank system where the transactions are carried out on the basis of a compensation mechanism and through a network of intermediaries or hawaladar. The subjects of the network do not use cash for the transfer but numerical codes. For instance, if a person in Rome wants to send money in Nigeria, he/she can deposit the amount at a local hawaladar from which he/she receives a code. Through the use of

---

<sup>100</sup> On the Road, *Tratta e sfruttamento*; Ministero dell'Interno, *Rapporto sulla criminalità in Italia. Analisi, prevenzione e contrasto*; Manisera S., "Dopo la Libia, l'inferno è in Italia: le donne nigeriane di Castel Volturno", in *Open Migration*, 9 Agosto 2018; Tanassi F., "Piccole schiave invisibili, l'intervista di Meteora all'associazione on the Road".

code (over the phone, through an intermediate person in Nigeria or someone in loco), another individual receives the cash from a second hawaladar.<sup>101</sup> “Often the hawaladar are merchants. Hence, they can deal with significant amount of money, even in cash, without causing doubts. This was the case for the investigation of the DDA in Palermo [2016], called Glauco 3, which allowed the confiscation, at a small commercial activity, of 526 thousand euros and 25 thousand dollars in cash, together with a ledger containing the number of the individuals involved and their contacts”.<sup>102</sup>

The network structure of the Nigerian criminal groups and the role of the members in managing the trafficking are described in two main investigations. In the first, the active members in Nigeria were in charge of making sure the victims would reach Italy and/or Europe. Hence, they acquired the necessary documents, they organized the stay for the victims in the different stops of the journey and they would carry out the voodoo ritual. The members in Italy, instead, contributed towards easing the illegal entry of the victims, they identified the maman with the task of managing prostitution, they organized the allocation of the victims in adequate facilities, they would collect their profit and intimidate the victims if necessary.<sup>103</sup> In the second case, (the operation False-Hope) a group of eleven Nigerians active in the tracking operated in the following scheme; some members worked in Nigeria so as to identify the women or girls to whom they could offer a legitimate job opportunity, others had the task of managing the victims, also with physical abuse if they were reluctant and if the voodoo ritual did not succeed. Furthermore, the group had support (intermediary) for both the organization of the journey through Libya and the management of victims at the asylum facilities until the transfer to the city of Bologna.<sup>104</sup>

The figure of the Maman (or Madam) plays a key role within the Nigerian criminal network. He/she is often a former victim, who manages almost all the stages of trafficking, sometimes even financing the journey of potential victims. “They give orders to the girls and, in some instances, they recruit them. They often overlook the various stages of the trafficking and they coordinate the entire criminal journey”.<sup>105</sup> In

---

<sup>101</sup> F. Terenghi F. e A. Di Nicola, *Financing of trafficking in human beings in Italy*; F. Terenghi e V. Piol, *Finanziamento e uso dei fondi nella tratta di persone in Italia. Dai modelli di business all'attività di prevenzione e contrasto*; Ministero dell'Interno, *Rapporto sulla criminalità in Italia. Analisi, prevenzione e contrasto*; Direzione Investigativa Antimafia, *Relazione del Ministro dell'Interno al Parlamento. Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia. 1° Semestre 2016*.

<sup>102</sup> Commissione Parlamentare, *Relazione su mafie, migranti e tratta di esseri umani, nuove forme di schiavitù*, 42.

<sup>103</sup> F. Terenghi e V. Piol, *Finanziamento e uso dei fondi nella tratta di persone in Italia. Dai modelli di business all'attività di prevenzione e contrasto*.

<sup>104</sup> Direzione Investigativa Antimafia, *Relazione del Ministro dell'Interno al Parlamento. Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia. Luglio-Dicembre 2017, 2017*

<sup>105</sup> Direzione Nazionale Antimafia e Antiterrorismo – DNA, *Relazione annuale sulle attività svolte dal Procuratore Nazionale e dalla Direzione nazionale antimafia e antiterrorismo nonché sulle dinamiche e strategie della criminalità organizzata di tipo mafioso nel periodo 1 luglio – 30 giugno 2016*, 382.

addition, the Maman is “at the same time recruiter, organizer, exploiter, head of an operation unit, connection point for the various layers of the organization, provider and investor of the profit”.<sup>106</sup> The Mamans manage the prostitution activity of the victims, they monitor each service carried out through the request of messages via mobile phone after every operation and they collect the profits. They are assisted by their husband or partner, or other individuals, female (petit maman) or male. The formers belong to cults and offer their support to both protect the business from rival groups and to violently coerce victims when necessary.<sup>107</sup> “I crossed Libya and ended up in a ghetto. There were Nigerians, Gambians and Ghanaians. The Libyans would kill and rape the women. They put us in cages and they would oblige us to call our family so as to ask for money [...]. Then I arrived in Italy, first in Sicily and, subsequently, in Bologna. The Maman told me to go to Turin and I joined her. I ended up on the street. I did not have any other choice. The first day I came back without money and I was beaten up. I was afraid of her, she would call my mother in Nigeria and threaten her. She said that I had to become a prostitute in order to pay the debt. The following day I went back to the street and I did what I had to do”<sup>108</sup>.

### 2.3.3. Illegal drug trafficking

The other major criminal activity carried out by Nigerian organized groups in Italy is the import and distribution in bulk or retail of drugs such as heroine, cocaine, syntethic drugs, adopting the same structure and organization previously explained for human trafficking (through horizontal criminal networks, which are flexible and built upon units present in Italy other European or non- countries). Through the transnational traffic of drugs, similar to human trafficking, these actors have reached a wider operational capability not only in regard to their internal structure, but also due to the increased availability of financial resources. If, in Italy, Moroccan and Tunisian criminal groups have always had a key role in the trafficking respectively of hashish and heroine, Nigerians have always maintained and continue to have maintain an essential role in the trafficking of heroine. In the same areas where prostitution is

---

<sup>106</sup> Direzione Investigativa Antimafia, Relazione del Ministro dell'Interno al Parlamento. Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia. 1° Semestre 2016, 191.

<sup>107</sup> E. Baldoni, “Scenari emergenti nella tratta a scopo di sfruttamento sessuale verso l'Italia” in *Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana – REMHU*, 19(37), 2011, 43-58; M. Mancuso, “Not all madams have a central role: analysis of a Nigerian sex trafficking network”, in *Trends in Organized Crime*, 17(1-2), 2013, 66-88; Carchedi F. (2016), “La criminalità transnazionale nigeriana. Alcuni aspetti strutturali”, in S. Becucci and F. Carchedi (eds.), *Mafie straniere in Italia. Come operano, come si contrastano*, Milano: FrancoAngeli, pp.29-55; F. Terenghi F. e A. Di Nicola, *Financing of trafficking in human beings in Italy*.

<sup>108</sup> Manisera S., “Dopo la Libia, l'inferno è in Italia: le donne nigeriane di Castel Volturno”.

carried out, there is often the import and distribution in bulk or retail of cocaine: Piedmont (especially in the city of Turin), Lombardy, Veneto, Liguria, Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, Umbria, Lazio, Campania (in particular the province of Caserta), Apulia, Sicily and Sardinia. In those areas where Italian criminal groups are also present, there are forms of co-existence dictated by agreements or exchanges, or it is on the basis of reputation and autonomy gained throughout time by the Nigerian actors. An example is the direct management of the distribution of drugs at Castel Volturno<sup>109</sup>.

Even though Nigeria is not a country of production, it is a key area of arrival and storage of cocaine, not only directed towards the local market, but also at those of other European countries. Two environmental circumstances have favored this situation: 1. The social dimension oriented at individual profit despite the type of means used and with the precondition that this profit is shared with the family unit. This is the result of political (unstable and inefficient governments) and economic factors (high levels of poverty), which led to a vast availability of young workforce to be employed in the trafficking; 2. The elevated degree of corruption within the social and political system, which do not allow successful counter-measures. As a consequence, the transit of drugs coming from Brazil, Colombia, Pakistan and Thailand, aimed at reaching Europe and the United States, witnessed a radical and exponential growth. The Nigerian traffickers are capable of identifying the most profitable markets and exploiting their potential. This skill is the result of a strongly centralized, criminal structure which is able to obtain in adequate time the information on the fluctuations of markets of drugs.<sup>110</sup> For instance, the arrival of cocaine in Africa and then in Europe is guaranteed by the presence of active units in the countries of origins in South America and by strong linkages between these units and criminal groups. The substances, before arriving in Italy/Europe, are kept in storages in Western Africa. Countries such as Cape Verde, Gambia, Togo, Ghana, Nigeria and Guinea Bissau represent privileged areas of transit where socio-political instability and widespread corruption are reflected in the controls carried out by the police. Furthermore, the historic relationship among these countries and certain European states constitute other elements facilitating the operations of the transferring of cocaine from Africa to Europe. From Western Africa, the shipments reach directly Italy, through aerial, maritime and territorial routes, exploiting paths commonly used for the smuggling of arms, ivory and precious stones. In more recent years, there has been an increase in number of trafficking on the maritime route with the direct arrival of drugs in Italy and not through transit points such as Spain and

---

<sup>109</sup> Direzione Nazionale Antimafia e Antiterrorismo – DNA, Relazione annuale sulle attività svolte dal Procuratore Nazionale e dalla Direzione nazionale antimafia e antiterrorismo nonché sulle dinamiche e strategie della criminalità organizzata di tipo mafioso nel periodo 1 luglio – 30 giugno 2016; Ministero dell'Interno, Rapporto sulla criminalità in Italia. Analisi, prevenzione e contrasto; Direzione Centrale per i Servizi Antidroga – DCSA, Relazione Annuale 2017, 2017.

<sup>110</sup> G. Conzo, La criminalità nordafricana. Una premessa; Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia di Napoli.

Northern Europe, which have always been points of entrance, stocking and transit of cocaine directed at the European markets.<sup>111</sup>

The strength of the Nigerian criminal groups consists also in the methods of transporting the substances. Rather than relying upon large-scale transfer of drugs through the use of boats and container, they hire ovulatory carriers who leave from several international airports and arrive in Italy. This strategy is sometimes aimed at diminishing the impact of the loss of shipment: if one carrier is arrested, many others enter the country of destination.<sup>112</sup> The carriers are often uncensored individuals who only work for a limited number of journeys and that are only in contact with those organizing the travelling and those receiving the drugs in the countries of destination. Initially, most of these ovulatory carriers were Nigerians. Now, following the identification and the adoption of counter-measures on behalf of the policy-makers towards Nigerian criminals, the organized groups started employing mainly women, Eastern Europeans (Polish, Moldovans, Romanians) or south-American (Brazilians).<sup>113</sup>

---

<sup>111</sup> Direzione Centrale per i Servizi Antidroga – DCSA, *Relazione Annuale 2017*; G. Conzo, *La criminalità nordafricana. Una premessa*; Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia di Napoli; Direzione Investigativa Antimafia, *Relazione del Ministro dell'Interno al Parlamento. Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia. Gennaio-Giugno 2017*.

<sup>112</sup> F. Terenghi F. e A. Di Nicola, *Financing of trafficking in human beings in Italy*; Direzione Investigativa Antimafia, *Relazione del Ministro dell'Interno al Parlamento. Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia. Gennaio-Giugno 2017*.

<sup>113</sup> G. Conzo, *La criminalità nordafricana. Una premessa*; Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia di Napoli.

## **Focus 6: The invisible drug. Here is how the traffickers manage to elude the police controls**

The drug is so-called invisible because of an expedient adopted by traffickers in order to avoid that the carriers are intercepted through the x-rays controls. The new ovules are small, amounting to only 5 grams, black, insofar as they are processed with coal, bicarbonate, water and hard as rocks. The police forces in airport began to easily identify the previous ovules, which were white and accounted for 15 grams. Hence, this led to many arrests and loss of substances.

These carriers leave from Africa, especially Ghana, Ivory Coast, Libya, Nigeria and Burkina Faso, and they often live in Italy, where they organize the journey. The journey is financed by the organizations, which prefer the use of aerial routes rather than maritime ones in order to avoid losing the substances. The compensation they receive amounts of around 6000 euros.

Source: Elaboration Intellegit di De Simone (2015)

In several instances, the Nigerian groups pay the suppliers (in both the countries of production and the countries of destination) with cash transfers carried out through services of money transfer. These operations are managed by “members of the main ethnic communities, which are present also Italy and which operate in countries where there is no legislation against money laundering and there is no regular bank system. Similar to financial facilities, they allow the transferring of cash through individuals connected among themselves and located in [several] geographic areas”.<sup>114</sup> This method is employed also to pay the couriers and the costs of their journey, as well as to transfer the profit to Nigeria. Other methods are, similar to human trafficking, the physical delivery of cash and the Hawala system.

---

<sup>114</sup> Commissione Parlamentare, Relazione su mafie, migranti e tratta di esseri umani, nuove forme di schiavitù, 40.



## CONCLUSION: POTENTIAL FUTURE SCENARIOS

The analysis of the evolution that African organized crimes undertook, teaches us that it managed to establish itself rapidly, developing in parallel to severe economic, social and political changes within the continent. Hence, it proved in many instances to be more avant-gardist than many public institutions. Furthermore, the strong operational adaptability and flexibility that characterize African crime has allowed its network to exploit illicit markets in any political situation with any security circumstances, in countries generally regarded as stable, such as Ghana, and those marked by enduring contradictions, such as Nigeria, and those torn by violent internal conflicts, such as Mali and Libya. Hence, despite the kind of operational model adopted, African crime has always managed to adapt, establishing networks and structures of common benefit with both the most corrupted sides of public institutions and with proper illegal movements such as jihadist groups or of ethnic insurgency. The endurance of the hybrid ecosystem in the continent allowed the operational adaptability and flexibility of the African organized crime, as the legal and illegal worlds are too often overlapped and intertwined. Furthermore, the general popular opinion, disillusioned with the public institutions and the flaws of *governance* and *rule of law*, tends to distrust the authorities and to consider legitimate and acceptable the criminal practices.

The accentuated Darwinism demonstrated by the African organized crime represents one of the most threatening factors for Africa and Europe, especially in virtue of its rapid social, economic and political transformations, which began at the start of the new millennium.

In Africa, the economic, demographic and urban growth is destined at altering human geography in the continent, allowing for numerous opportunity of prosperity and amelioration of the living standard for the local population. In the future decades, we will witness the rise of a new African bourgeois, more educated and cosmopolitan due to the increase in the spread of laptops, smartphones and better internet connection. This social class will inevitably carry out new and tumultuous political and economic demands. At the same time, the massive afflux of people from the countryside into the city will lead to an enormous pool of urban workforce, which might enlarge the ranks of the African proletariat and sub-proletariat. These transformations will impose new challenges to the African institutions, in terms of absorption of the workforce, the heightening of the standards of living, a transparent, democratic participation, an increase of the social and legal fair rate. To summarize, if the public authorities and the economic actors will not be able to overcome the vulnerability that currently slow down and delegitimize the action (corruption, abuses, waste, nepotism, inefficiency), the African societies might be rattled by entropic phenomena of varying nature, able to minimize its stability. In the specific, the countries characterized by economic growth, scarce capability to slow down social processes, high levels of inequity in the

redistribution of wealth and institutional deficits constitute a perfect ground for different forms of political (violent radicalization) and economic (illegal activities) subversion and as an incentive for migration.

The analysis of these trends showed how organized crime has been able to exploit, catalyze and coopt the general discontent of the African public, allowing them to camouflage in the diverse national contexts. Thus, in the absence of adequate structural interventions, which would entail inclusive and efficient national policies, the Nigerian crime could increase its range of action and its influence, strengthening its role as a necessary, and at times legitimate, alternative to the institutions.

Nevertheless, the study of the structure of African organized crime and its increased presence in Europe allows to comprehend how, beyond the internal dynamics of the African continent, it will be necessary to monitor the developments of illicit activities outside of the continent; especially, in those regions where there is a consistent diaspora, such as in Europe. In fact, based upon the current predictions of demographic growth in Africa and on the projections regarding the migratory flow departing from Africa towards the European shores, it is arguable that, in the next years, we could witness an increase in the African diasporas directed at the North of the Mediterranean. The lack of adequate integration policies and management of the migratory flow, the increase of foreign communities might exacerbate certain social and economic difficulties, which were already experienced also in the aftermath of mass migrations post-Cold War from the Eastern European Countries and the Afro-Mediterranean ones in 2000 and 2010. It regards hybrid migratory flows, which are caused by both political (asylum and international protection) and economic (strive towards a better standard of living) reasons. However, these flows are all likely to cause negative effects on the countries of arrival, if there is no precise policy on the management of this phenomenon. The relation among an increase in the migratory flows and the diasporas, and the growth of the organized groups' capabilities constitutes a sufficient prognostic based on all the different factors previously mentioned. In fact, human trafficking constitutes one among the most profitable businesses for African organized crime, meanwhile the increase of the diasporas, especially those to those countries where the integration policies are particularly weak, can increase the number of individuals willing to join an organized group, favoring the exploitation of prostitution, illegal employment and the sub-contracting of illicit activities from the local mafias. It is necessary to point out that an increase in the strength of African organized crime abroad will inevitably lead to a growth of their influence in the countries of origin.

Adding up to the previous elements, the increase in workforce for the African criminal groups abroad could lead to a change in the current equilibriums and the relations among them and the local mafias. If, until now, the African organized crime accepted a subordinate role in comparison with the local organizations, due to economic and numeric inferiority; in the future, it could be possible to witness an attempt of vindication so as to gain a strong operational autonomy. If the members of the African

mafias in Europe were to increase, and subsequently also the illicit activities carried out by them would increase, it is arguable that there could be transnational rivalries among the different mafias in both Italy and Europe. Within these circumstances, similar events such as the massacre of Castel Volturno<sup>115</sup> (18<sup>th</sup> September 2018)<sup>116</sup>, and the many clashes between groups in Sicily<sup>117</sup> and Emilia Romagna<sup>118</sup>, are particularly worrying.

The hypothetical growth of the African organized crime will not only depend upon potential opportunities of a rather geopolitical character, such as the ones previously explained, but also on their capability to adapt to these new dynamics and adjust the illicit markets according to the different needs.

Regarding the illicit markets, they have to be divided accordingly to a geographical categorization. In Africa, the socio-economic changes previously explained could increase the demand of counterfeit goods, starting from medicines and technological goods, to drugs and human trafficking. Another illicit market which is potentially in a phase of expansion is the one of online scamming, even though this will depend upon the digitalization of the African society and the increase of internet connection in the big cities. It is more complex to determine the trend related to arms smuggling, which is influenced by the unpredictable nature of conflicts within the continent, and to the smuggling of oil and rare earth element, connected to the development of the market for hydro-carbon and of the Asian demand linked to the necessities of high-tech industries. A similar logic is applicable to the smuggling of waste, which is intertwined with the political choices adopted by both the African and the developed countries in matter of disposal and recycling.

Concerning the operational models, their evolution could be linked to the geographical context. However, a major risk is that the experience of the Nigerian mafia might provide an example for hybrid criminal networks, promoting its unified and hierarchical structure. In fact, the Nigerian groups increased drastically their profit and their political influence, hence they provide a model for those groups which are still under development.

The current evolution of the Nigerian cults constitutes an evolutionary leap in the criminal dynamics of the country and, especially, of Western Africa. If the criminal groups pre-existent to the transformation of these cults had a slim organization and

---

<sup>115</sup> Strage di Castel Volturno, arrestato un sospetto, La Repubblica, 22 settembre 2008.

<sup>116</sup> In this instance, the clan Casalesi from the Camorra killed 6 migrants with African origins in retaliation to the activities carried out by the Nigerian mafia in the Northern part of Campania, which was accused of handling drug trade autonomously and without its authorization

<sup>117</sup> D. Nalbone, Vikings contro Black Axe: la guerra tra i clan della mafia nigeriana per le piazze dello spaccio, TPI News, 27 Febbraio 2019.

<sup>118</sup> Scontri tra bande a Ferrara, Balboni (Fdl): "E' mafia nigeriana, Governo intervenga subito", Estense.com, 1 agosto 2018.

could adapt according to the needs, the confraternities created structures that, without losing their flexibility, are much more solid and cohesive. The organic relation among these cults and the Nigerian political world leads into thinking that the radicalization of these groups is extremely spread across the society of the country. The extensive presence of these criminal organizations in several states worldwide is the sign that this dynamic can challenge the most famous and structured mafia organizations such as the Italian, South-American, Russian and Chinese. Similar to those organizations just mentioned, the Nigerian confraternities are often difficult to analyze and to identify, presenting a dramatic challenge not only to Western Africa but also for the broader global scenario.

The progressive establishment of mafia structures within hybrid criminal networks could originate not only from the desire to imitate the success of the Nigerian example, but also from the possible qualitative growth of the African political institutions and the authorities committed to the fight against the mafia. To summarize, the more the political organizations will heighten their standards of transparency and responsibility, the more the others will have to adapt in order to survive and to provide a credible alternative. Therefore, the behaviors of the leading class will significantly determine the future of organized crime; if they decide to rely upon criminal groups for electoral aims or as a hidden support for specific intimidation actions, the African mafia will become an essential element in the political sphere. It is also arguable that, once the African mafias will have reached a strong social influence and control over the territory, they would decide to become political actors by supporting certain agendas in line with their objectives, such as separatist groups or secessionist militias, which aim at creating autonomous criminal states.

When facing these scenarios, it becomes clear that Italy could play a primary role in countering this criminal phenomenon, so as to improve European security and contribute towards stabilizing processes in Africa. In fact, our country continues to be on the front line in regards of the fight against the mafia and can claim a historical struggle of contrasting the mafia and the resulting experience that only those countries, which experiences in their territory the danger of the mafia, can claim. This experience and capability baggage, symbolized by the excellency of the armed forces of the Carabinieri, the Police, the judicial system and the broader institutions, act with a triple direction. First of all, they carry out initiatives at the national level, where the fight against the African mafias and their illicit activities is able to weaken the criminal structures, reduce their sources of financing and protect the rights of the victims. Secondly, an international action carried out with other countries or within the context of the Interpol or Europol, aims at neutralizing the transnational networks of African crime and the sectors linked to their illicit markets. The last strategy regards the development of bilateral agreements and agreements regarding military and security cooperation with the African countries most struck by the organized crime, in order to strengthen their investigative tools, share the operational experiences and support their contrasting skills.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adamoli S. e al., Organised Crime around the World, European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control, Helsinki, 1998.

Albert I. O., Explaining “godfatherism” in Nigerian Politics, in «African Sociological Review», n.9, Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, Dakar, 2005.

Alkholt A., Nigerian Criminal Networks: a Comparative Analysis, University of Bergen, Bergen, 2010.

Agenzia Informazioni e Sicurezza Interna, “La mafia nigeriana fra voodoo e computer” in Gnosis 2, Rivista Italiana di Intelligence, 2005, <http://gnosis.aisi.gov.it/Gnosis/Rivista3.nsf/ServNavig/15>.

Amnesty International, ‘Libya is full of cruelty’. Stories of abduction, sexual violence and abuse from migrants and refugees, 2015,

[http://www.amnesty.eu/content/assets/Reports\\_and\\_Briefings\\_2015/Libya\\_is\\_full\\_of\\_cruelty.pdf](http://www.amnesty.eu/content/assets/Reports_and_Briefings_2015/Libya_is_full_of_cruelty.pdf)

Baldoni E., “Scenari emergenti nella tratta a scopo di sfruttamento sessuale verso l’Italia” in Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana – REMHU, 19(37), 2011, 43-58.

Bertolotti C., “Come funziona il racket dell’elemosina della mafia nigeriana”, in Panorama, 26 Dicembre 2017, <https://www.panorama.it/news/cronaca/come-funziona-il-racket-dellelemosina-della-mafia-nigeriana/>.

Camera dei Deputati – I Commissione Permanente, Interrogazione a risposta immediata sulla diffusione della mafia nigeriana nella zona di Castelvoturno, 2019, <http://www.interno.gov.it/it/sala-stampa/sindacato-ispettivo-parlamentare/interrogazione-risposta-immediata-sulla-diffusione-mafia-nigeriana-nella-zona-castelvoturno>.

Carchedi F. (2016), “La criminalità transnazionale nigeriana. Alcuni aspetti strutturali”, in S. Becucci and F. Carchedi (eds.), Mafie straniere in Italia. Come operano, come si contrastano, Milano: FrancoAngeli, pp.29-55.

Commissione Parlamentare, Relazione su mafie, migranti e tratta di esseri umani, nuove forme di schiavitù, 2017, <http://www.senato.it/leg/17/BGT/Schede/docnonleg/35400.htm>.

Conzo G., La criminalità nordafricana. Una premessa, Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia di Napoli, 2006, [http://www.distretto.torino.giustizia.it/documentazione/D\\_1953.pdf](http://www.distretto.torino.giustizia.it/documentazione/D_1953.pdf).

Cravero F., “Ventuno condanne per due gruppi della mafia nigeriana a Torino”, in La Repubblica, 12 Gennaio 2018, [https://torino.repubblica.it/cronaca/2018/01/12/news/ventuno\\_condanne\\_per\\_due\\_gruppi\\_della\\_mafia\\_nigeriana\\_a\\_torino-186351046/](https://torino.repubblica.it/cronaca/2018/01/12/news/ventuno_condanne_per_due_gruppi_della_mafia_nigeriana_a_torino-186351046/).

Dalla Casa S., “Realtà o leggenda del traffico d’organi”, in Wired, 12 Gennaio 2019, <https://www.wired.it/play/cultura/2019/01/12/leggende-traffico-organi/>

De Simone A., “La droga invisibile. Ecco come i trafficanti riescono a eludere i controlli di polizia”, in Corriere della Sera, 26 Febbraio 2015, <https://www.corriere.it/inchieste/droga-invisibile-ecco-come-trafficanti-riescono-ad-eludere-controlli-polizia/070afae-bcdf-11e4-ad0c-cca964a9a2a1.shtml>.

Dell’Olio T., Quando le mafie parlano africano, Libera Approfondimenti, 2019, <http://www.libera.it/schede-690-quando-le-mafie-parlano-africano>.

Destrebecq D., Cocaine Trafficking in Western Africa, UNODC, Vienna, 2007.

Di Nicola A., Baratto G., Martini E., Surf and Sound. The role of the internet in people smuggling and human trafficking, eCrime Research Reports 03, Trento: Università degli Studi di Trento, 2017, <http://www.surfandsound.eu/>.

Dipartimento Pari Opportunità, Dati – Contro la tratta, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8eB8uiDCLS8&feature=youtu.be>.

Direzione Investigativa Antimafia – DIA (2018), Relazione del Ministro dell’Interno al Parlamento. Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia. 1° Semestre 2018, <http://direzioneeinvestigativaantimafia.interno.gov.it/semestrali/sem/2018/1sem2018.pdf>.

Direzione Investigativa Antimafia – DIA (2017), Relazione del Ministro dell’Interno al Parlamento. Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia. Gennaio-Giugno 2017, <http://direzioneeinvestigativaantimafia.interno.gov.it/semestrali/sem/2017/1sem2017.pdf>

Direzione Investigativa Antimafia – DIA (2017), Relazione del Ministro dell’Interno al Parlamento. Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia. Luglio-Dicembre 2017, <http://direzioneeinvestigativaantimafia.interno.gov.it/semestrali/sem/2017/2sem2017.pdf>

Direzione Investigativa Antimafia – DIA (2016), Relazione del Ministro dell'Interno al Parlamento. Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia. 1° Semestre 2016, <http://direzioneinvestigativaantimafia.interno.gov.it/semestrali/sem/2016/1sem2016.pdf>

Direzione Investigativa Antimafia – DIA (2016), Relazione del Ministro dell'Interno al Parlamento. Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia. 2° Semestre 2016, <http://direzioneinvestigativaantimafia.interno.gov.it/semestrali/sem/2016/2sem2016.pdf>.

Direzione Investigativa Antimafia – DIA (2014), Relazione del Ministro dell'Interno al Parlamento. Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia. 1° Semestre 2014, <http://direzioneinvestigativaantimafia.interno.gov.it/semestrali/sem/2014/1sem2014.pdf>.

Direzione Investigativa Antimafia – DIA (2011), Relazione del Ministro dell'Interno al Parlamento sull'attività svolta e sui risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia. 2° Semestre 2011, <http://direzioneinvestigativaantimafia.interno.gov.it/semestrali/sem/2011/2sem2011.pdf>.

Dipartimento Pari Opportunità, Dati – Contro la tratta, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8eB8uiDCLS8&feature=youtu.be>.

Direzione Centrale per i Servizi Antidroga – DCSA, Relazione Annuale 2017, 2017, <http://www.carabinieri.it/Internet/ImageStore/Magazines/DCSA/2017%20Relazione%20Annuale/mobile/index.html#p=1>.

Direzione Nazionale Antimafia e Antiterrorismo – DNA, Relazione annuale sulle attività svolte dal Procuratore Nazionale e dalla Direzione nazionale antimafia e antiterrorismo nonché sulle dinamiche e strategie della criminalità organizzata di tipo mafioso nel periodo 1 luglio – 30 giugno 2016, 2017, <http://www.avvisopubblico.it/home/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/RELAZIONE-DNA-1.7.2015-30.6.2016.pdf>.

EASO COI Meeting Report, Practical Cooperation Meeting on Nigeria, European Asylum Support Office, La Valletta, 2017.

European Border and Coast Guard Agency – FRONTEX, Risk analysis for 2017, 2017, [https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk\\_Analysis/Annual\\_Risk\\_Analysis\\_2017.pdf](https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Annual_Risk_Analysis_2017.pdf).

European Border and Coast Guard Agency – FRONTEX, Risk analysis for 2018, 2018, <https://frontex.europa.eu/publications/risk-analysis-for-2018-aJ5nJu>.

Floris F., “Mafia nigeriana alla conquista del Nord”, in Osservatorio Diritti, 31 Maggio 2017, <https://www.osservatoriodiritti.it/2017/05/31/prostituzione-in-italia-mafia-nigeria-conquista-nord/>.

Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings – GRETA, Report concerning the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings by Italy. Second evaluation round, 2019, <https://rm.coe.int/greta-2018-28-fgr-ita/168091f627>.

Ikoh H. U., Organized Crime in the Gulf of Guinea with a Focus in Nigeria, in «The Impact of Organized Crime on Governance in West Africa», a cura di E. E. O. Alemika, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Bonn, 2013.

Il Fatto Quotidiano, Mafia nigeriana, sgominato a Cagliari gruppo criminale accusato di tratta di esseri umani, prostituzione e droga, 21 Novembre 2018, <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2018/11/21/mafia-nigeriana-sgominato-a-cagliari-gruppo-criminale-accusato-di-tratta-di-esseri-umani-prostituzione-e-droga/4780686/>.

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Responses to Information Requests n. NGA43277.E, Ottawa, 2005.

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Responses to Information Requests n. NGA104208.E, Ottawa, 2012.

International Organization for Migration – IOM, Flow Monitoring Europe, 2018, <http://migration.iom.int/europe?type=arrivals>.

International Organization for Migration – IOM, Mixed migration flows in the Mediterranean, Compilation of Available Data and Information. November 2018, 2018, file:///Users/fiamma/Downloads/Flows\_Compilation\_Report\_November\_2018\_0.pdf.

International Maritime Bureau, Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships. Report for the Period 1st January – 31st December 2018, International Chamber of Commerce, Londra, 2019.

International Maritime Organization, Reports on Acts of Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships. Annual Report – 2017, Londra, 2018.

Iurillo V. (3 Gennaio 2019), “Castel Volturno, viaggio nella capitale della mafia nera”, in Il Fatto Quotidiano, <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/in-edicola/articoli/2019/01/03/nella-capitale-della-mafia-nera/4871466/>.



Koni Hoffmann L. e al., *Tracing the Origins of Nigerian Organized Crime: Politics, Corruption and the Growth of Criminal Networks*, Royal Institute of International Affairs, Londra, 2016.

Lemahieu J. L. e G. Murray, *Annual Report 2017*, UNODC, Vienna, 2018.

Le Pichon T. e al., *Crime and Development in Africa*, UNODC, Vienna, 2005.

Le Pichon T. e A. Mazzitelli, *Cocaine Trafficking in West Africa: The Threat to Stability and De-velopment*, UNODC, Vienna, 2007.

Leogrande A., *Uomini e caporali. Viaggio tra I nuovi schiavi nelle campagne del Sud*, Giangiacomo, Milano: Feltrinelli Editore, 2016.

Manisera S., “Dopo la Libia, l’inferno è in Italia: le donne nigeriane di Castel Volturno”, in *Open Migration*, 9 Agosto 2018, <https://openmigration.org/analisi/dopo-la-libia-linferno-e-in-italia-le-donne-nigeriane-di-castel-volturno/>.

Mancuso M., “Not all madams have a central role: analysis of a Nigerian sex trafficking network”, in *Trends in Organized Crime*, 17(1-2), 2013, 66-88.

Marenin O. e M. D. Reisig, “A General Theory of Crime” and Patterns of Crime in Nigeria: an Exploration of Methodological Assumptions, in «*Journal of Criminal Justice*», n. 6, Elsevier, Amsterdam, 1995.

Ministero dell’Interno, *Rapporto sulla criminalità in Italia. Analisi, prevenzione e contrasto*, 2006, [http://www.ristretti.it/areestudio/stranieri/zippati/rapporto\\_sicurezza\\_2006.pdf](http://www.ristretti.it/areestudio/stranieri/zippati/rapporto_sicurezza_2006.pdf).

Ministero dell’Interno, *Relazione sull’attività delle forze di polizia, sullo stato dell’ordine e della sicurezza pubblica e sulla criminalità organizzata*, 2017, [http://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/relazione\\_al\\_parlamento\\_anno\\_2016\\_-\\_definitiva\\_1.pdf](http://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/relazione_al_parlamento_anno_2016_-_definitiva_1.pdf).

Ministero dell’Interno, *Relazione sull’attività delle forze di polizia, sullo stato dell’ordine e della sicurezza pubblica e sulla criminalità organizzata*, 2016, [http://www.camera.it/leg17/491?idLegislatura=17&categoria=038&tipologiaDoc=documento&numero=005v01\\_RS&doc=pdfel](http://www.camera.it/leg17/491?idLegislatura=17&categoria=038&tipologiaDoc=documento&numero=005v01_RS&doc=pdfel).

National Bureau of Statistics, *Labour Force Statistics 2017 Vol 1*, Abuja, 2018.

Nigeria Immigration Service, *Annual Report 2017*, Abuja, 2018.

Nofori F., “La mafia nigeriana balza ai primi posti nella classifica mondiale della criminalità”, in *Africa ExPress*, 2 Gennaio 2018, <https://www.africa-express.info/2019/01/02/la-mafia-nigeriana-balza-ai-primi-posti-nella-classifica-mondiale-della-criminalita/>.

Omobowale E. B. e A. Abimbola, Higher Education and the Challenges of Secret Cults, in «Africa Research Review», n. 36, Bahir Dar, 2015.

On the Road, Tratta e sfruttamento, 2019, <http://www.ontheroadonlus.it/aree-di-intervento/tratta-e-sfruttamento/>.

Osservatorio sulla Criminalità Organizzata, Quarto rapporto sulle aree settentrionali, per la presidenza della Commissione Parlamentare di inchiesta sul fenomeno mafioso, 2017, <https://www.cross.unimi.it/wp-content/uploads/Quarto-Rapporto-sulle-aree-settentrionali.pdf>.

Iurillo V., “Castelvoturno, viaggio nella capitale della mafia nera”, in Il Fatto Quotidiano, 3 Gennaio 2019, <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/in-edicola/articoli/2019/01/03/nella-capitale-della-mafia-nera/4871466/>.

Parbuoni F., “La mafia nigeriana arriva con i barconi: l’ambasciatore avvertì l’Italia nel 2011”, in Secolo d’Italia, 22 Ottobre 2018, <http://www.secoloditalia.it/2018/10/la-mafia-nigeriana-arriva-coi-barconi-lambasciatore-avverti-litalia-nel-2011/>.

Pipitone G., “Mafia nigeriana: il patto con Cosa Nostra, agguati con l’ascia e sangue bevuto. A Palermo prima inchiesta sulla ‘Cosa nera’”, in Il Fatto Quotidiano, 19 Ottobre 2015, <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2015/10/19/mafia-nigeriana-il-patto-con-cosa-nostra-agguati-con-lascia-e-sangue-bevuto-a-palermo-prima-inchiesta-sulla-cosa-nera/2105873/>.

Rabasa A. e al., Counternetwork: Countering the Expansion of Transnational Criminal Network, Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, 2017.

Regional Office of West and Central Africa, Organized Crime and Irregular Migration from Africa to Europe, UNODC, Dakar, 2006.

Save the Children, Piccoli schiavi invisibili. I minori stranieri vittime di tratta e sfruttamento in Italia, 2017, <https://www.savethechildren.it/sites/default/files/files/uploads/pubblicazioni/piccoli-schiavi-invisibili-2017.pdf>.

Shaw M., T. Reitano e M. Hunter, Comprehensive Assessment of Drug Trafficking and Organised Crime in West and Central Africa, African Union, Addis Abeba, 2014.

Tanassi F., “Piccole schiave invisibili, l’intervista di Meteora all’associazione on the Road”, in On The Road, 30 Marzo 2018, <http://www.ontheroadonlus.it/news/piccole-schiave-invisibili/>.

Terenghi F. e Di Nicola A., “National criminal markets and finances: cocaine trafficking. Italy: an increasingly competitive market”, in CSD (ed.) Financing of organised crime, Sofia: CSD, 2015.

Terenghi F. e Di Nicola A., Financing of trafficking in human beings in Italy, Sofia: CSD, 2018, <http://www.csd.bg/artShow.php?id=18388>.

Terenghi F. e Piol V., Finanziamento e uso dei fondi nella tratta di persone in Italia. Dai modelli di business all'attività di prevenzione e contrasto, Trento: eCrime, Università degli Studi di Trento, 2019.

Terzi G. e S. Near, Trafficking of Nigerian Girls in Italy: The Data, the Stories, the Social Services, UNICRI, Torino, 2010.

UNICRI-PARSEC, Trafficking of Nigerian Girls in Italy. The data, the stories, the social services, 2010,

[http://www.unicri.it/services/library\\_documentation/publications/unicri\\_series/trafficking\\_nigeria-italy.pdf](http://www.unicri.it/services/library_documentation/publications/unicri_series/trafficking_nigeria-italy.pdf).

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime – UNODC, Crime and Development in Africa, 2005, [https://www.unodc.org/pdf/African\\_report.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/pdf/African_report.pdf).

Vannaroni A. e Levantini E., “La tratta di esseri umani e le mafie nigeriane. Un mondo criminale tra antichi riti e modernità”, in Articolo 21, 28 Maggio 2018, <https://www.articolo21.org/2018/05/la-tratta-di-esseri-umani-e-le-mafie-nigeriane-un-mondo-criminale-tra-antichi-riti-e-modernita/>.

Wittenberg L., Managing Mixed Migration: The Central Mediterranean Route to Europe, International Peace Institute, New York, 2017, [https://www.ipinst.org/wpcontent/uploads/2017/04/1704\\_Managing-Mixed-Migration.pdf](https://www.ipinst.org/wpcontent/uploads/2017/04/1704_Managing-Mixed-Migration.pdf).

World Bank Group, National Accounts Data: Nigeria GDP, Washington D. C., 2018.

Zannin L., La mafia nigeriana e le confraternite, “Per il mondo” Onlus, Padova, 2017.

Zubairu Surajo A. e A. H. M. Zehadul Karim, An Assessment of Black Axe Confraternity Cult in Nigeria: Its Impact on the University Educational System, in «South Asian Anthropologist», n. 17, Sarat Chandra Roy Institute of Anthropological Studies, Ranchi, 2017.