The Role of the Smuggler

A study on immigrants who reached Europe through the means of irregular facilitators.

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Abstract
The thesis aims to investigate the role of human smuggling in migration, and specifically, the part played by the figure of the facilitators. The study was conducted through qualitative research based on semi-structured interviews: six people who reached Europe through the assistance of smugglers were interviewed in three different countries – Germany, Italy and Sweden. The data collected reflects the opinions, experiences, and the perspectives of the migrants. Accordingly, the data is interpreted through the Rational Choice Theory that focuses on the micro-level angle, and the concept of border which intends to research the phenomenon from a macro-level viewpoint. The findings revealed that smugglers play a crucial role in migration allowing the border-crossing for those migrants who do not have regular means to travel. I suggest that smugglers renegotiate the concept of border which becomes more fluid and permeable.

Keywords: human smuggling; migration; border; smuggling of migrants; border-crossing; irregular migration
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1. INTRODUCTION

People smuggling has become the preferred trade of a growing number of criminal networks worldwide which are showing an increasing sophistication in regard to moving larger numbers of people at higher profits than ever. (Interpol Report in DeVito 2005, p. 159)

Smuggling is defined by the Oxford dictionary as “the illegal movement of goods into or out of a country” (2018). According to this meaning, smuggler is the person who “smuggles goods”. In a more recent perspective of the term, smuggling is not only limited to goods, but it also applies to people. Regardless of the designation, be it migrant smugglers, human smugglers, people smugglers, they might have different connotation, but they do have the same role: to facilitate irregular border-crossing of people in exchange of money.

While the concept was initially somehow confused with the idea of trafficking, they have now two different features. Although similarities are to be found between the two phenomena and they might possess similar characteristics, the difference between the two terms is quite remarkable. On the one hand, migrants who address smugglers, usually pay a defined amount of money to cross a border irregularly. On the other hand, in trafficking, there is no consent from behalf of the migrants who are generally coerced by traffickers who exploit their labour (ibid). From this point of departure, this thesis will focus on the smugglers as migrant facilitators and the part they play in assisting migrants to reach Europe.

It is almost impossible to estimate the total amount of this activity due to its “clandestine nature” (Kyle and Koslowski, 2011, p. 13) but the phenomenon has been increasing during the last two decades (Bilger, 2018, p. 33). At the end of 2017, EUROPOL had 65,000 suspected smugglers registered in their database, more than double compared to two years before (The Independent, 2018) although the number of migrants decreased after the peak of 2015. “Still a booming business” had declared Crepinko, head of Europol’s European Migrant Smuggling Center (ibid), and it has been considered to be “one of the largest global illicit markets” with a value of 157 billion USD annually (RHIPTO, 2016, p. 4)

An ongoing debate about the illegality and immorality of such operations is occurring, but as any other organized criminal network, this business is likely to keep self-sustaining as long as it has customers to support it (OECD, 2015, p. 10). No country nor group of countries seem to be able to
eradicate it, particularly with regard to the events that have occurred during the last years: tens of thousands of people have died in the Mediterranean Sea trying to reach the European shores (IOM 2019), and many others have risked their lives to the same purpose. Whose fault is it? Some say the European countries should take responsibility (Giuffrida, 2018). Others say the migrant smuggling lays at the bottom of the whole problem (Spijkerboer, 2018).

The literature covers the topic from different perspectives, meaning smuggling being studied and researched on a large scale from legal perspective as well as general issue as part of the irregular migration. The intention with the present work, is to provide an in depth understanding to the phenomenon through the experiences of those migrants who travelled to Europe, be it by land or by sea, through the means of those facilitators we have so far called smugglers.

1.1 Aim and Research Question

EUROPOL has estimated that between 90 and 100% of people who reached Europe during the past years payed a smuggler to cross its borders (RHIPTO, 2016, p. 4). It is therefore quite undeniable that these actors, who facilitate the trip, play a role in migration.

Hence, the aim of my research is to gain a deeper understanding about the smuggler’s role in irregular migration to Europe through the lenses of their customers. Via the narratives of migrants who reached the European territory with the assistance of smugglers, the following questions should be answered:

- What dynamics do encourage migrants to approach smugglers and what are the services smugglers offer them?

- How do migrants, who themselves reached Europe by using smugglers, experienced and value the smuggling activities?

1.2 Delimitations

To be able to conduct a rigorous research, I decided to focus on a specific context and narrow the work I do. In this sense, it is important to define what I do and what I do not investigate in this study. Therefore, I delimited the research as follows. I did conduct qualitative research based on interviews with migrants who reached Europe in the last decade (2009-2019): I was looking at the flows of migrants that have arrived on European soil with the help of smugglers. With regards to the countries of origin, I focused on African and Middle Eastern countries since these originate the majority of
migrants who moved in the past ten years. The present work set the limelight on the experiences they had, and I did not investigate the nature of the phenomenon at international level or from state’s point of view. In other words, the thesis presents a micro-level study that focuses on the experience and perception each individual had from using the services of one or more smugglers. Yet, it also offers a reflection on the macro-level scale when it comes to border-crossing based on their perspective. Further, I have narrowed the smuggling of migrants having European countries as a destination since it allowed me to investigate the matter through one-to-one interviews and meet the interlocutors in person.

It is worth mentioning at this point, what smuggling means in order to define the connotation it has in this study. Since the term is often confused with the term trafficking, a distinction between the two follows in the next section.

1.2.1 Terminology: smuggling

To get a better perspective on the research, it is crucial to have a clear understanding of the definition of the term smuggling. First of all, it is important to make a distinction between smuggling and trafficking. Since the two definitions are often used in an interchangeable way, it is worth defining the difference between the two terms. Both of them “involve the recruitment, movement and delivery of migrants from a host to a destination state” (Shelley, 2014, p. 3). However, according to the report drafted by The Global initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime in 2016, the main distinctions between the two phenomena can be explained through three key concepts: exploitation, consent and borders (p. 6-7).

First, the exploitation through abuse and profit on people is typical of trafficking and includes an ongoing process, while smuggling ends at the conclusion of the transaction when the migrant has crossed the border and reached the destination. Second, consent from the migrant is part of the smuggling while it does not apply to the trafficked people who are usually coerced or cheated. Thirdly, smuggling does necessarily involve crossing a state’s border, while trafficking can be performed internally (ibid).

In this thesis, trafficking will not be researched, and I will only focus on smuggling. The definition of smuggling can be found in the Protocol against the smuggling of migrants by land, sea and air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. The Protocol was signed in 2000 as part of the Palermo Convention, clearly stating its purpose in preventing and
combating “the smuggling of migrants […] while protecting the rights of smuggled migrants” (UNDOC, 2000, p. 54). The following article states the definition of the term:

“smuggling of migrants” shall mean the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident;

As per definition, smuggling includes illegal border crossing of a person; consequently, an illegal or irregular migrant. Illegal migration, on the other side reflects “an act of migration that is carried out against legal provisions of entry and residence”, according to the definition given by Anna Triandafyllidou (2010, p. 2).

1.3 Structure of the Thesis
The thesis is structured as follows: chapter 2. Contextual Background presents an overview of the smuggling phenomenon to introduce the reader to the topic and help understanding the broader framework of the situation of migrant smuggling in the last decades. The following chapter, 3. Previous Research, focuses on an overview of the existing literature on the topic, setting the limelight on the contributions that have already been written on the subject. The next section, 4. Theoretical Framework, introduces a discussion on the concepts used and, specifically: the first part concerns the Rational Choice Theory, while the second part relates to the concept of border. Further, chapter 5. Methodology, presents the research design and the methodological approach adopted. Lastly, chapter 6. Presentation and Analysis of Empirical Material offers report of the data collected and its analysis through the theory with the final discussion the research has led to. Ultimately, a summary and the conclusions withdrew by the thesis are included in chapter 7. Conclusion.

2. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Mobility has changed during the last centuries. The world has somehow become smaller and distances have been reduced due to easier ways to travel. The capacity to migrate, as well as the means, have increased for a part of the global population. Migration is recognized as a right by the Universal
Declaration of Human Rights of 1948\textsuperscript{1}, which states a theoretic freedom of movement for everyone. Despite this, only the 3.3\% of the world population is on the move as a migrant (IOM, 2018, p. 13). Means, policies, physical and immaterial barriers are factors that sometimes contribute in hindering this process (Morice, 2013, p. 11). People move for the more different reasons: they can be driven by “economic, environmental, family and/or protection factors […] (or) as a result of conflicts.” (Morice, 2013, p. 13). Within the total amount of migrants, though, it is challenging to really understand the numbers of irregular migration (Geddes and Boswell, 2011, p. 34) and even more complicated to understand how many of the people have travelled through the means of a smuggler. In this sense, there is a methodological reason: part of the migrants who reach a country in an unauthorised way, usually avoid any kind of interaction with the authorities since they do not want to be registered and therefore it results complicated to keep under control the actual numbers of irregular migrants (ibid). On the other side, if the migrants apply for asylum, they might fear the consequences of admitting a travel with no legal status and will be hesitant in claiming their interaction with a smuggler (ibid).

When it comes to the European scenario, first the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, and the consequent flows of people who decided to flee their countries, signed a new emerging era: an increase in migration flows, both regular and irregular. Originally, this scenario offered a fertile ground to the smuggling of migrants (Bilger, 2018, p. 33). However, the phenomenon is not new in those countries where border control is strict. Hence, what results to be innovated, is its development and expansion at a global level (Kyle and Koslowski, 2011). Indeed, flows of migrants have changed during the first two decades of 2000: the Arab spring, the Syrian civil war, but also challenging economic conditions in areas such sub-Saharan countries and South-Eastern Asia, have encouraged more and more people to flee their countries. The resources they have, do not always involve regular means and migrants often undertake irregular paths, often addressing human smugglers to assist them in the journey. It has been observed that they can be smuggled through whole regions or through continents. The following map reports the current migrant routes: the countries where smuggled migrants originate and the countries they mainly transit through.

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\textsuperscript{1} Article 13:
(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State.
(2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.
Shifting the attention to the smuggled migrants, the general profile is represented by adult males who flee their countries for social and economic reasons, as well as security issues and environmental conditions, as aforementioned. Moreover, smuggled migrants who leave their countries to reach Europe mainly originate in the Horn of Africa, West Africa, some of the Middle-Eastern countries, South and East Asia (UNODC, 2018, p. 32-33).

Although the destination in general terms is Europe, there are some challenges migrants encounter when trying to access it: the external borders of the Schengen Area which are patrolled are the main obstacle for reaching a European country. Europe includes a system based on the freedom of movement, namely the Schengen Area\(^2\), which has been incorporated into the Treaties of the European Union since 1995. The Area offers free movement to people internally but a border control is still performed at its edges (Schengen Area, 2019). Moreover, chapter 2 of section III of the Schengen Code, enables the States to “reintroduce border controls, exceptionally and temporarily, in the case of a serious threat to public policy and internal security” (Schulmann and Le Clève, 2013, p. 3). This provision was adopted by many European countries in the past years due to the increasing in migration flows that have occurred on the European territory.

The fight against smuggling has been conducted for several years with very poor results, especially with operations at sea (Kingsley, 2016, p.127). In fact, if on the one side smugglers are held responsible for deaths at sea by different states and international organizations reporting the criminal activities, it has been observed how political actions in both sending and receiving countries played

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\(^2\) Currently, the Schengen Area is composed by most of the EU States, except for Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Ireland, Romania, and the United Kingdom. Four other non-EU states are part of the agreement: Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Liechtenstein.
a crucial role in increasing human smuggling (Kyle and Dale, 2011, p. 34). The paradox is lying at the bottom: states’ actions in preventing migration through border control and stricter policies, contributed to increasing smuggling activities (ibid). The issue though, is real, and the international community seems to aim in a cooperation from this viewpoint. *The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration* signed in 2018, indeed, aims to reduce vulnerability of migrants protecting them from smuggling³, but also to strengthen the transnational response to smuggling itself⁴.

2.1 The profile of the smugglers

The profile of the smugglers varies: who operates the smuggling can be amateurs, professionals or anything in between (UNODC, 2018, p. 51). Meaning that their profile can be different according to their activities and to the areas where they operate. They can work privately or as truly organized businesses. Smuggling networks do indeed include organized crime, militant and terrorist groups but also individuals who only facilitate journeys for personal profit (RHIPTO, 2016, p. 6). According to the UNODC report, “smugglers in organizing roles are typically of the same nationality as migrants, while smugglers operating at border crossing are normally linked to the territory” (2018, p. 54). In other words, networking and cultural features play an important role in defining the relation between smugglers and their customers. On the other hand, territorial control recalls the importance of connection and interaction in the action of crossing the border. Further, also episodes of corruption were detected in smuggling and many state agents resulted to be involved in the smuggling process. Police, naval or military officers, as well as custom and border officers are often part of the smuggling business for the profits, often accepting bribes in exchange of information (EUROPOL-INTERPOL, 2016, p. 8).

In general terms, the media and State agencies often picture the smugglers as ruthless criminals (Triandafyllidou, 2018, p. 213) but this is not always the case. The relationship between smugglers and smuggled migrants is often more nuanced than that (ibid). Indeed, although violence cannot be denied (Sanchez, 2017, p. 9), many scholars highlighted how “smuggling facilitators have been throughout history key facilitators to migration flows” (Gamio 1931; Andrea 2013; Khosravi 2010; Chu 2010; Chao-Romero 2010 in Sanchez 107, p. 12) helping or supporting migrants to undertake the trip.

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³ Objective 7 of the Global Compact for Migration
⁴ Objective 10 of the Global Compact for Migration
To sum up, within this chapter, smuggling was presented in its broader environment. Having as a starting point migration as phenomenon, the chapter narrowed down the concept of irregular migration to finally focus on the specifics of smuggling, the main routes and the actors involved.

3. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Smuggling of migrants has been investigated and researched in different ways both from academics but also by international organizations. It is not a new phenomenon, but only during the last two decades scholars started raising their interest towards the topic. Some of the previous studies on the matter are introduced in the present section.

An interesting study on smuggling was conducted by Ozge Biner (2018) through qualitative ethnographic fieldwork. In his research Biner investigates the “multilayered relations between smugglers and undocumented people” focusing on the Iranian Turkish border. The focus is pointed in the triangular interaction between smugglers, state agents’ and migrants (Biner, 2018, p. 96). The analysis is based on in-depth interviews (2008-2010) with refugees living in eastern Turkey which allowed the author to draw the conclusion that the relationships between actors are fluid. In other words, the smuggling process change together with the structures of power, often shifting between legality and illegality.

Another relevant research on smuggling of migrants, was conducted by Heaven Crawley, Franck Duvell, Katharine Jones, Simon Mc Mahoc and Nando Sigona in 2016. The group of researchers adopted a mixed approach conducing both quantitative and qualitative research through semi structured interviews carried in four different countries: Greece, Malta, Italy and Turkey. 500 refugees and migrants who crossed the Mediterranean – or were about to do it - and 111 stakeholders were interviewed in 2015, during the so-called “migration crisis” (ibid, p. 7). The project aims to “understand the processes which influence, inform and shape migration” (Heaven et al., 2016, p. 74). Three key factors are investigated here: the dynamics that encourage migration through the Mediterranean; the interaction between migrants and other actors (both State and non-State actors); and how economic, security and political contexts influence decisions and journey of refugees and migrants (ibid, p. 7). The findings of this fieldwork are, in short, that conflicts in the countries of origin are the main reason driving people to flee their country; hence, categorizing them in the so-called “forced migration” while only about 30% could be considered “economic migration”. Second, not all migrants were irregular, the results showed that there was a mix between regular and irregular...
crossings, but also that all respondents have addressed a smuggler for at least a part of their journey (ibid, p. 9). Third, the report offers an interesting perspective on the smugglers activities who helped the respondents: they helped them escape dangerous conditions and they contributed to bypassing controlled borders and reach safer countries. Lastly, the report proposes five action points for policymakers and EU Member States for implementing changes in managing the flows and the irregular border crossing (ibid, p. 10).

Moving to another study, G.A. Antonopoulos and J. Winterdyk conducted a research focusing on the social organization of smuggling of migrants in Greece in 2006. The study combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches and it is the result of multiple methods and different data collection (Antonopoulos and Winterdyk, 2006, p. 440-442): interviews with the police, with migrants, with former smugglers and official statistics. The choice is not casual: Greece, indeed, has a crucial importance due to its geographic location. The country was, back then, both a destination and a transit country (Antonopoulos and Winterdyk, 2006, p. 440). After looking at push-pull factors and facilitating factors (ibid, p. 442-443), the authors drew a structure which can be identified in smuggling groups: the leader, who has a managerial position; the recruiters, who collect initial fees; the transporters/guides, who take care of transferring the migrants or just assisting them; the scouters, who have access to updated information about police check and border control; the hotel/house/apartment/ owners, who provide accommodation while waiting for the green light to proceed; the enforcers, people who have the chance of using violence on migrants to keep control on the business; the corrupt public officials, who either participate actively in the smuggling business or accept bribes in exchange of “turning a blind eye” (Antonopoulos and Winterdyk, 2006, p. 446-448). These roles can be all part of a smuggling group, but it does not mean they necessarily are. Finally, the research looks into the recruitment and payment process concluding that smuggling to Greece occurs through different means: cars, trucks, sea vessels, and “other means” (ibid, p. 452).

A similar study was conducted by Veronika Bilger, Martin Hoffmann and Michael Jandl (2005) who researched smuggling as transnational service industry with a focus on Austria. Their work is mainly based on in-depth interviews with 46 smuggled migrants, but also looking at legal and administrative documents, as well as media reports (1996-2003), analysis of court files and 22 semi-structured “expert interviews” (Bilger, Hofmann and Jandl, 2006: 9). Their conclusion is that smuggling organizations are based on layers in order for the leader to not be exposed. The authors further elaborate that “the reputation and trust in smuggler-client relationship are such important elements in the human smuggling industry from other illegal activities” (ibid, p.27).
Few years later, Veronica Bilger investigated another aspect of the smuggling of migrants industry. Having as a starting point the approach adopted by Neske (2006) who researched the organizational process of human smuggling and how smuggling impacts the migration process itself with a focus on Germany, Bilger focused on determining types and patterns of migrant smuggling (2018, p 34) providing a classification of the phenomenon. Neske conducted research adopting a mixed quantitative and qualitative approach and basing its results on 22 expert interviews combined with the analysis of 52 court proceedings (2006, p. 121). He identified three types of smuggling processes; type I: individual smuggling, characterized by a high level of self-responsibility that is usually practiced next to the borders and provides the possibility to cross via foot or by car and only for a short part of the trip (idem, p. 139); type II: visa smuggling, which provides falsified travel documents (idem, p. 140) ; type III: pre-organized stage-to-stage smuggling , that involves a network of smugglers who will accompany the migrant throughout the whole journey (idem, p. 143). This last time can be further developed in three sub categories mostly considering geographic and ethnic origin of both smugglers and migrants: in can be connected to smuggling from crisis areas, to smuggling to a specific destination country, or to smuggling as a pioneering strategy on behalf of the families (idem, p. 157).

Bilger used Neske’s research as part of her qualitative investigation. Basing her findings on primary and secondary data collected in the first years of 2000 and then in 2015, she adopted a comparative perspective to find out the developments that have occurred into the typologies of migrant smuggling (2018, p. 34). The first set of results was based on 102 in-depth interviews with migrants, while 100 semi-structured interviews with State actors, 7 with smugglers and 68 problem-centered interviews with smuggled migrants were used to test the findings of the previous research (idem, p. 37). The first three types examine the organizational environment of smuggling and they have similar features to the ones introduced by Neske, just named in slightly different ways: partial smuggling, document smuggling and organized chain smuggling (idem, p. 38-44). The following three models have been added by Bilger who considered the migrants’ point of view: service smuggling, directive smuggling and negotiable smuggling. The first one – type iv – sets the migrant in a strong position in the smuggling process, the second one – type v – involves a strong role for the smuggler and a weak position for the smuggler, and finally, - type vi – establishes an even relationship between migrant and smuggler in the negotiation process (idem, p. 45-49).

A more recent yet important contribution on the topic is given by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) which, through data analysis and review has researched on migrant smuggling globally. The report, divided in two volumes and named Migrant Smuggling Data and Research
(2016), collects a set of papers written by academics and researchers with different background and examines migration and smuggling dividing the regions of the world and looking at them from a one on one perspective. The approach the report adopts is result-oriented since its goal is to gain all the information necessary to combatting migrant smuggling and it is designed to constitute a benchmark in the field (IOM, 2016, p. 2). Each chapter contains an overview of the smuggling situation in the region, followed by review of data and review of research on migrant smuggling (ibid, p. 3). Having as a departing point the complexity of collecting data due to the illicit nature of migrant smuggling, the report underlines the limits in conducting a comparative research. The fifth section of both volumes focus on migration to Europe. On the one hand, the chapter contained in the first volume and written by Danai Angeli and Anna Triandafyllidou, focuses on migrant smuggling in Europe in a broad perspective. On the other hand, the section contained in the second volume and drafted by Elena Sanchez-Montijano and Albert F.Arcarons, focuses specifically of Southern Europe. In both cases, the approach is the same: the authors look at the phenomenon through literature review and statistical analysis underlining one more time how the results are difficult to obtain due to lack of data in research and only approximative results can be achieved (IOM, Vol 1, 2016, p. 125; Vol 2, p. 100).

In the research on Europe, the outcomes indicate the scale of migrant smuggling in different European countries and raises the necessity of filling some research gaps as irregular child migration, cultural traits in smuggling, militarization of anti-smuggling fight (IOM, Vol 2, 2016, p. 125-126). When it comes to Southern Europe instead, three main findings emerge: smuggling of migrants is a demand-driven market, anti-smuggling policies and operations in this area target the offer/supply – smugglers – while the attention should be pointed at the demand – meaning the migrants; and, lastly, that smuggling networks do not always involve criminal activities (IOM, Vol 2, 2016, p. 111-112).

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present chapter introduces the theoretical framework used to analyse the data collected. The first part focuses on the Rational Choice Theory which has been primarily employed for economic purposes and therefore extended to the social sciences. Within this second view, the interviewees are be treated as rational agents. The second part, instead, investigates the concept of border, which takes into consideration its meaning and relevance for the interviewees in this research and the role it covered in defining the interaction between migrants and the smugglers who facilitated the border-crossing itself.
4.1 RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY (RCT)

4.1.1 Introduction to the theory - background

The Rational Choice Theory derived from the work of John von Neumann and Christian Morgenstern in the 1940s who developed a model to explain individual economic behaviours (Burns and Roszkowska, 2016: 197). Therefore, the concept originates as Neoclassical theory in the branch of economics, and it represents a microeconomic model of individual choice (Todaro, 1969; Borjas, 1989). In the same way, the Neoclassical migration theory - at the micro-level - does consider “migrants as individual, rational actors, who decide to move on the basis of a cost-benefit calculation, maximizing their income” (Castles, Haas and Miller, 2014, p. 29). In other words, migrants do operate for themselves when deciding to migrate: they make an estimation of the costs involved and compare them with the benefits they might have. The process for taking the decision will have as a primary goal the maximization of the final reward.

The theory has been further developed and applied to social sciences in terms of reconstructing models of human behaviour (Scott, 2012: 126) and expanded to many different areas to explain events, actions, phenomena in terms of actions fulfilled by individual agents (Burns and Roszkowska, 2016, p. 197). The main focus of the theory is that social phenomena originate in individual rational decisions taken on a cost-benefit calculation finalized in achieving the best possible outcome perceived for the actor (Ogu, 2013: 90). In this regard, the theory shifted its final aim from a payoff maximisation (which was purely economic) to a utility maximisation which has a broader understanding (Hodgson, 2012a, p. 94). The theory has been successively expanded to many different areas to explain events, actions, phenomena in terms of actions fulfilled by individual agents (ibid).

4.1.2 Main Assumptions

The Rational Choice Theory was first elaborated as an economic theory, as mentioned below. The application of the theory in the field of International Migration does consider that people move for economic interest (Massey et al., 1993, p. 434). In other words, potential migrants choose to flee their countries to seek for a better job opportunity that will increase their income and their lifestyle. In practical terms, it will mean that the costs for travelling, the time spent learning a new language, the costs for living and every other expense, will be “worth” the effort in terms of final economic gain. The economic loss for the new life, will be compensated by economic reward (idem). Again, in short, the net reward will be greater than the costs.
The main assumptions of the Rational Choice Theory – may it belong to economics or to social sciences - are four and they relate to its components: the actor (or agent), the alternatives, the preference ordering, the choice (or the decision) (Simon, 1997; Abell, 2000; Burns and Roszkowska, 2016).

*The actor (or agent)*

The departing point of the RCT is that the actor involved in the process is rational and fully informed (Wittek, Snijders and Nee, 2013, p. 6). By rational we mean s/he will think logically to achieve his or her goal, being coherent to the aim (Burns and Roszkowska, 2016, p. 197). In this regard, s/he will consider carefully all the alternatives. Furthermore, the actor will act individually to deem the best they can for themselves (Abell, 2000, p. 1).

*Alternatives*

The actor determines the alternatives available in relation to the information he collects. The repertoire of actions will be thereafter taken into account with regard to their consequences (Burns and Roszkowska, 2016, p. 197). In other words, the actor is considered to be fully informed about the different option and the outcomes they might have.

*Preference ordering*

The actor has, at this point, different alternatives with different (or similar) outcomes. He can now express some subjective preferences among the options, considering the consequences. The actor will be able to order them according to his desires (*ibid*).

*Maximization of utility*

The theory assumes that individuals’ actions are finalized to maximize utility. Therefore, the choice the actor will make, among the different alternatives, will reflect the best option to maximize the value function (Burns and Roszkowska, 2016, p. 197). Consequently the choice will be the optimal opportunity possible among individual’s preferences (Abell, 2000, p. 9).

Nevertheless, the theory has been addressed many forms of criticism which have led to extensions of the theory itself. The following section presents the main criticism to the theory and the way it has been developed in the social sciences.
4.1.3 Criticism to Rational Choice Theory and Extentions

The Rational Choice Theory has been considered too strict and idealized in its application. The main critiques that have been addressed are related to its difficulty of being empirically validated in the real world (Hodgson, 2012: 102). Pertaining to this, another criticisms moved to the theory is that the model is unrealistic in the sense that the individuals are considered to follow a perfect model, with no interaction and receptive of perfect information (Abell, 2000, p. 7). In this regard it is understandable that the model might appear as a simplification of actors who act and interact within a context where not all the actions and consequences can be calculated. Indeed, there are other factors influencing and conditioning the information and the options available. In this line, Max Weber (in Abell, 2000, p.8) claims that the actor needs to take into account the behaviour of others meaning both their action but also the social environment. Therefore social action and the interdependence of actors cannot be ignored since they influence the individual in many different ways: the actor should calculate others’ actors actions and the consequences of their actions, but that results challenging for a person, no matter how rational he or she could be (Abell, 2000, pp. 14–15). This rational individual action evolves then in what has been studied as Game Theory where actors have to always consider the interaction and the potential decisions made by other actors active in the same environment (Abell, 2000, p. 17).

Further, the actor is not always rational, not always fully informed about the alternatives he has, and not always aware of their consequences (Wittek, Snijders and Nee, 2013, p. 3). Having this as a starting point, the ideas of bounded rationality and subjective rationality were introduced in the social sciences. The idea of a bounded rationality was first presented by Herbert Simon in 1982 (1997) and his main assumption is that rationality needs to take into account the cognitive limitations of the actor which can involve both his knowledge and computational capacity (Simon, 1997, p. 291). On the other hand, the concept has been further elaborated by Raymond Boudon (1989) as subjective rationality where actions are carried out by actors following their understanding or perception of good and bad (1989, p. 179).

4.1.4 RCT in the Social Sciences

The Rational Choice Theory has been successfully developed in many fields of economics and social sciences. One of the most important contributions was given by Gary S. Becker (1976) who applied the economic approach to human behaviour. The idea was not fully new: Adam Smith applied the same approach to political agents and their behaviour, while Jeremy Bentham reproduced a model based on a “pleasure and pain” calculus, appropriate, he states, to be used to all human actions
Nevertheless, Becker argues that economic theory could explain a wide range of human behaviours (1976, p. 5). In this sense, he assumes actors collect information, define a set of preferences and choose among a set of alternatives. Furthermore, the decisions taken in the process, will aim to maximize their utility. Human behaviour, then, is intended as a cost-benefit calculation which can be applied on many different “markets” (Becker, 1976, p. 14).

A brief clarification is worth being made at this point. In the next sessions, when the empirical data will be presented, it will be quite clear that the interviewees are not economic migrants\(^5\). Indeed, they have all been forced to flee their countries for different reasons: war, persecution, compulsory military service and they all currently possess the refugee\(^6\) status. In this sense, the connotation used to explain the decision-making process for migrating and during the whole migration process, will refer to the Rational Choice Theory in its general sense, mostly based on the assumptions considered by the Social Sciences.

4.1.5 Conclusion

The Rational Choice Theory does basically assume every individual makes decision based on the preferences he has to reach a predetermined goal. To decide which option will have the major gain, he thinks rationally weighing the costs and the benefits. The theory, though, does not take into account people’s preferences, it only observes the decision-making process and the way actors act to maximise their payoff. Keeping this in mind, in the next chapter the theory will be applied to analyse the empirical material collected through the interviews: the aim is to look at the process migrants have followed to take decision when addressing smugglers in their journey to Europe crossing its borders.

4.2 THE BORDER

...borders are the key to understanding networked connectivity as well as questions of identity, belonging, political conflict, and societal information. – Chris Rumford, in Nail, 2016, p. 6

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\(^5\) Economic migrants, as defined by the UNHCR Master Glossary of Terms ((PIS), 2006): “persons who leave their countries of origin purely for economic reasons not in any way related to the refugee definition, or in order to seek material improvements in their livelihood.”

\(^6\) According to the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of refugees adopted in 1951 – Chapter 1, Article 1 - (UNHCR, 2010), a refugee is any person who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion”.

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The last decades have changed our idea of mobility and the potential to move: there is in fact a clear gap between the mobility of some people and the immobility of others (Sheller and Urry, 2006, p: 207), but it has also introduced growing restrictions on movement itself (Blomley et al. & Sassen in ShAimar, 2005, p. 197). There are, indeed, more walls and barriers now than ever in the history of the world (Nail, 2016, p. 2). For this reason, the second tool for analysing the data collected is the concept of border. The next sections will present what the border represents in literature. First of all, an overview on the meaning of border.

4.2.1 The Meaning of the Border in Literature

According to Etienne Balibar (2010), to mark out a border, in a simplistic way, is “to define a territory, to delimit it, and so to register the identity of that territory, or confer one upon it” (p. 76). Yet, the study of the border has changed during the past decades moving from a territorial and merely geographical perspective to a broader one which includes social, cultural political and juridical variables (Newman, 2011; Diener and Hagen, 2012; Konrad, 2015; Nail, 2016).

Nevertheless, as Balibar stated, “borders are everywhere” and we face these boundaries in our daily life: workplaces are divided into spaces, we need to trespass gates or doors to access buildings or specific areas. We are used to them because they are part of the environment we live in. We are aware that “geographic borders create and signify varied legal obligations, social categories and behavioural expectations for different areas” (Diener and Hagen, 2012, p. 2). In other words, we know that borders separate one space from another, either physically or symbolically. What turns out to be less obvious in our daily lives, is the fact that “the border is a process of social division” (Nail, 2016, p. 1), which does indeed cause a dissection. It can be represented by fences and walls but also by identification documents, checkpoints, military force (ibid). With this regard, it is important to notice how borders are also places of trans-boundary interaction. In fact, this can translate in cooperation, points of entry, visas and documentation which do represent the border that can be perceived also in situation when it is not directly tangible (Newman, 2011, p.20). In this sense, a distinction between hard and soft borders will be presented in the next section.

An important contribution which is worth being considered at this point, concerns the perspective of David Newman (2011). Newman (2011), as well as Nail (2016), does consider borders “social constructions, delimited and demarcated by people” (p. 17), but his main assumption is that “borders are institutions” (Newman, 2011, p. 14). With this definition he aims to underline the contrast with the geographic and territorial idea of traced line that might define a boundary. Hereof, Newman
emphasizes how the institutions define the degree of permeability of the borders themselves. In other words, they designate the level of inclusion and exclusion through rules for trespassing them, which comprehend the possibility of exiting or entering from or within (ibid). Furthermore, he claims, borders do define a partition between self and other, and they function as barriers, creating a clear distinction between what is inside and what stays on the outside (ibid). The segmentation, on the other hand is not only territorial but it can include “social, religious, cultural ethnic and cyber boundaries” (idem, p. 18) which develop in identity formation. Often, indeed, identity is considered to be formed within a specific context that can be defined in terms of geographical space. Nail offers a different perspective on the matter, underlining that borders do not only represent a place of inclusion and exclusion, but they are also points of redirection and circulation (2016, p. 8).

In conclusion, the border symbolizes a barrier that might or might not be crossed, because it is invisible but generally well-known. So, if on the one hand they might recall the idea of a frontier, borders are also “countless points of interaction, or myriad places of divergence and convergence”, as Donnan and Wilson (in Donnan, Hurd and Leutloff-Grandits, 2017, p. 2) highlight. Borders, by definition, set a division. But they can also mark a connecting point. They are placed in between two social constructions and they represent a bridge. They do create a demarcation underlining the differences, but they shape a sense of culture and identity (Balibar, 2010, p. 76). Either at local, regional or international level, they are both a division and a junction. In this sense, the meaning of the borders will be further taken into account in terms of border crossing and related permeability.

4.2.2 Hard borders vs Soft Borders: mobility and freedom of movement in Europe

As previously underlined, borders are no longer only geographical and territorial, they can represent a tool in the ordering of society (Newman, 2011, p. 16) and mark political boundaries such as security check-points, passport controls, and transit points (Rumford, 2006, p. 156). In this sense, it is possible to draw a distinction between hard and soft borders. On the one hand, hard borders are defined as borders that are strongly controlled and protected by state officials (Cambridge, no date) or by physical barriers (Diener and Hagen, 2012, p. 17). On the other hand, soft borders are defined as those frontiers which are easier to be crossed by people and goods with fewer controls (ibid).

When it comes to the European Union it can be observed how, through the last decades, the whole scenario has changed. The enlargement of the Schengen Area to some of the new members has challenged the mobility into its borders. To this extent there is the idea that borders between the member states and within the area itself, can be “superseded by mobility and connectivity” (Rumford,
The borders of the Schengen Area are supranational (super)borders and supervised by the European Union as a whole and mobility is monitored: the external perimeter is exposed to controls, while within the Area, freedom of movement is recognized for goods and people (Balibar, 2009, p. 193). In short, the borders to cross to access the EU member states only relate to its borderline.

4.2.3 Border-crossing

The study I conducted is mainly focused on the practice of border crossing. Trivially, it can be distinguished into two main categories: regular and irregular. The first one indicated a person who crosses the border holding valid documentation, while the second one concerns migrants who opt for “illegal” means to reach the country of destination. On this note, Khosravi (2007) stated that border crossing is “a matter of performance” with its own ritual which reproduces the dynamics of the state in reinforcing and challenging “our social and political status” (p. 330). In this regard, he claims that border crossing can be experienced in different ways by legal travellers and “border transgressors” (ibid), meaning that in the first case it is perceived as an honourable act, while in the second one it is defined an act of shame.

In general terms, border crossing is regulated by visa policies which, as Steffen Mau (2010) deems, results to be “the most popular and effective policy instrument for regulating the cross-border movement of people” (p. 353). The visa policies are important to understand the level of permeability of a country and it allows regulating the mobility flows (ibid, p. 345), not only in proximity of the borders but also from travellers moving from farther countries. It is an institution that, through approval or denial, empowers states (idem) to sort the incomers and the travellers on its territory.

4.2.4 Borders in Motion

Lastly, the study of borders in migration is important because they define and are defined by movement. On this matter, Nail stated that borders are determined by flows in a wide term and this is what he calls kinopower – the power of movement (2011, p. 25). This idea recalls the motion and the movement that happens in proximity of the frontiers in terms of migration, but also the change that occurs due to political, economic and juridical reasons.

Another notable consideration was introduced by Victor Konrad (2015) who claimed that “borders are quite simply and elegantly in motion” (p. 1). He highlights how borders are characterized by an action of construction and reconstruction, both in material and symbolic terms (ibid) in the sense that
they are always subjected to change. Along those lines, Nail similarly underlined that borders are “under constant contestation and transformation” (2016, p. 13). Further, Chris Rumford (2006) embraced the same idea stating that “borders can be created, shifted, and deconstructed by a range of actors” (p. 164) so it is not a matter of nation-state, but it can be subjected to other factors.

4.2.5 Conclusion

The first part of the present chapter introduces the meaning of border and the different denotations it has in literature. The following sections do make a distinction between hard and soft border, underlining how the practice of border crossing is performed and the consequences this movement has on the borders themselves.

Therefore, based on this definition, the concept of border will be used to analyse the data collected during the interviews. Through the perception, opinions and experiences of the participants of this study, I will draw the meaning of border. So, through the eyes of those people who have crossed the borders irregularly with the help of facilitators, I will study the role smugglers had in assisting migrants to reach the European territory.

The present chapter, in its first part, introduced the Rational Choice Theory and its main assumptions, while the second part introduced the meaning of the Border. The theoretical framework is applied on the data previously collected, in the following chapters. With this regard, the attention will be pointed on the migrants as rational actors who followed a decision-making process in crossing the borders to Europe through the interaction with the smugglers.

5. METHODOLOGY

The present section introduces the reader to the research design I adopted to reply to the research questions and, consequently, to reach my aim. In other words, in this chapter I present the way data was collected, the way the material was coded and how it was analysed and interpreted.
First of all, I adopted a qualitative approach to understanding the phenomenon of smuggling since I do consider it to be the most appropriate, if compared to the quantitative method. The reason why is that it offers a comprehension of the reality, or understanding of reality, based on the testimony of individuals who have lived certain situations (Merriam and Garnier, 2019, p. 25). Consequently, this study will focus on smuggling not as a measurable phenomenon, but through the experience and perception of the migrants I interviewed. Hereby, I adopt an inductive approach: starting from a question, I will observe and analyse the data collected to draw the conclusions (6 & Bellamy, 2012, p. 76). Further, the tool I will use for the data collection will be person-to-person interviews. The choice laying behind this method, in fact, is that it allows to navigate personal experiences, feelings and perspectives which “introduce new aspects to the research topic and shed light on aspects that would otherwise have been neglected” (Bilger, Hofmann and Jandl, 2006, p. 10), meaning that during the interview some aspects not considered by the researcher could be instead brought to light by the informants.

5.1 Method – Semi-structured interviews

The method I chose to investigate the topic is analysis of data collected through interviews, specifically, semi-structured interviews. This typology places itself halfway between highly structured/standardized interviews and unstructured/informal interviews, allowing flexibility to the researcher in framing questions and in responding to the situation/conversation “at hand”, leaving freedom to the interviewee to add new ideas (Merriam and Tisdel, 2015, p. 110-111).

Hence, the goal was formulating five open-ended questions to address to the interlocutors in order to let them express their thoughts, experiences and ideas. In this sense, the investigation is less structured then in a standardised interview. The format indeed “assume(s) that individual respondents define the world in unique ways” (ibid, p. 110). The interviewees had the chance to think and reply to the questions following their ideas and memories. The questions were not strict and the interlocutors and I shifted from a topic to another in a fluent way without rigorous order.

However, I also formulated many follow-up questions with the goal to gather specific data. These last ones helped me keeping track on the information necessary to be collected. In other words, the interlocutors were asked open-ended questions letting them reply what they considered more appropriate. Nevertheless, whenever needed, I would ask a further elaboration of the answer or of specific details to have more in-depth explanations.
Finally, the goal of the interviews is to get an in-depth comprehension of the interaction between the smuggler and the migrant, the modalities of approach of the two parts, but also how these events were negotiated and interpreted by the persons who have been smuggled.

5.2 Sample – Interviewees

The interviewees were chosen on the basis of their journey to reach Europe and the means they have used to cross the border. Meaning that, it was fundamental that they addressed to a smuggler for at least one part of their trip. The country of origin was not relevant, as long as it was a person from an African or Middle-Eastern country; and the same applies to the destination country, as long as it is a European one, which, overall limits the sample to the countries and persons I know. With this regard, the way I got in contact with the participants, is mostly through the word of mouth. I did know only one of the participants prior to starting my research, and I had the chance to meet the others through people who knew migrants with the experiences underlined in this study.

Altogether six people were interviewed, all of whom were man aged between 13 and 25 years when leaving their country. This could be a coincidence, but I consider it to be due to the fact that the majority of migrants arriving to European countries during the past years were male, and only a small minority were woman. The interviewees originated from four different countries: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Syria. Further, all the interviewees arrived in Europe through unauthorized means, meaning they used the services of smugglers for at least one stage of their trip. They have all reached different European countries and have applied for asylum: all currently possess the status of refugees. The interviewees currently reside in three different countries: Italy, Germany, Sweden.

Lastly, I further had the chance of interviewing a seventh person who was a smuggler himself. His interview, though, was not employed in this study due to the fact that his experience was not relevant to the aim of my research and his perspective could have been biased.

5.3 Setting of the interview

As aforementioned, I considered it important to conduct person-to-person interviews and therefore to meet the interviewees in this research in person, due to the fact I believe that some sensitive experiences might be easier to be described face to face. For this reason, I travelled to Germany and Italy to meet some of the interlocutors. Yet, some of them were interviewed in Sweden, my country of residency. The first connection with the interviewees was by phone. I introduced the topic and the
idea of an interview over the phone before our meeting which was set mainly according to their schedules.

The interviews were set in a neutral place, considering that the site “provides a material space for the enactment and constitution of power relations” (Elwood and Martin, 2000, p. 655). In this way, the interviewees could feel more comfortable to talk as the interview recalled a conversation between two friends. By neutral place, I mean a café or a public space which would not make the interlocutor feel under pressure or under interrogation. At the same time, it was important for the place not to be too crowded to avoid indiscreet listeners and to protect their privacy. At the beginning of our meeting I explained the purpose of my research, informing the interlocutor about aim and methodology, and asking for their consent. Should anything have been unclear, I gave the opportunity to ask any further elaboration.

5.4 Collection of data

As Robert Stake claimed, “qualitative researchers seek data that represent personal experience in particular situations” (2010, p. 88). Keeping this in mind, I collected the information necessary for my research during one-to-one interviews. The data gathered, as per definition in a qualitative study, consist of “direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings and knowledge” (Patton, 2015 in Merriam and Tisdel 2015, p. 105). The interviews (one to two hours) were recorded during our meetings using a mobile phone, after asking for permission to do so, as researchers should always do (Lapan et al. 2011, p. 97). When it comes to the language of the interviews, two informants were Italian speaking while the other participants had a very good knowledge of English. During all the meetings it was easy to communicate with the interlocutors thanks to a common language we were speaking. Afterwards, I transcribed the whole interview in order to be as loyal as possible to the answers the interlocutors gave me. Further, I translated the interviews held in Italian into English to have a homogenous set of data.

Over the six people I interviewed, one person refused to be recorded during our conversation and I therefore took notes of the answers received. When it comes to the seventh interview, the smuggler, our conversation was conducted over a phone-call since the person preferred to keep anonymity.

5.5 Coding, Presentation, and Analysis of Material

After the interviews were transcribed and translated, I proceeded with the codification of the data collected. In this regard, consequently I grouped the keywords into categories always keeping in mind
the aim of this study. The keywords were selected among on the basis of their meaning, the relevance the interlocutors were giving to them, in relation to the theories, but also connecting them to the research questions. Much non-relevant information for the purpose of the study were dispensed, so it was important to always remember the aim of the research and avoid going out of topic. The codified transcripts were therefore used for analysing the content in order to reach the conclusions of my thesis.

5.6 Ethical considerations
Prior to conducting the interviews and during the writing of the thesis, I had to take into account some fundamental ethical considerations, specifically: consent, harm, privacy and deception (Swedish Research Council, 2017).

Before the interviews, I informed the informants about the topic and the thesis explaining to them aim and research questions. In this sense, I have conducted the interview with their consent to use the information afterwards and to analyse it when writing my thesis. It was important to get the authorization of my interlocutors to collect the data and I made sure their participation was voluntary. Also, the interviewees were given the right of withdrawal, meaning that they have had the chance to retreat their declarations. Secondly, in terms of harm, I did my best to avoid any distress recalling painful or traumatic situation. Thirdly, I was careful to protect the information received and not to spread sensitive data nor information about the interviewees always being aware on my confidentiality responsibility. Also, I anonymised the interviewees with pseudonyms and made every effort to ensure that the data provided could not be traced back and reconducted to the individuals. Fourthly, I made sure to be clear about my aim explaining the purpose of my work to avoid any kind of deception. Lastly, I will destroy all the material concerning the recordings in order to keep private their testimonies since they can only be used for this particular study.

5.7 Validity and Reliability
Validity and reliability are the standards for determining if a research is successful or unsuccessful. It is important to try to reach a high level of both elements to enhance the objectivity of a study (Kirk and Miller, 1986: 20). Thus, particular attention was addressed to the way data was collected, analysed, interpreted and presented to assess the trustworthiness of this thesis.

On the one hand, an important part of my research was trying to reply the research questions in order to increase validity. 6 and Bellamy (2012, p. 21) defined validity as “the degree to which our
statements approximate to truth”. In other words, how the results are interpreted in a correct way. Accordingly, I reported direct quotes from the interlocutors when focusing on the analysis. Since it is difficult to achieve “perfect validity” in qualitative research (Kirk and Miller, 1986, p. 20), my goal was to obtain the highest possible level. To do so I considered both internal validity and external validity. The first one refers to the study itself, while the second one refers to the applicability of the specific study to other cases, giving the researcher the possibility to generalize (6 & Bellamy, 2012, p. 22). Yet, it is important to remember that what was investigated are people’s construction and understanding of reality and therefore it could be challenging to claim the accuracy of the data.

On the other hand, reliability is defined as “the extent to which a measurement procedure yields the same answer however and whenever it is carried out” meaning that the research should give the same results, if repeated (Morse 2008, p. 1214). Keeping this in mind, in the present thesis I tried to describe the process with details about every step of the research in order to allow transparency about the procedure, consenting therefore replicability and the possibility to conduct again the same study.

A further relevant factor that could impact validity and reliability and therefore could condition the results of this study, is the role of the researcher and the bias that could originate from it. For this reason, my role is further discussed in the following section.

5.8 Role of the Researcher
Entering the European Union has become more and more challenging, especially after the introduction of common policies and the strengthening of the Schengen borders. I have experienced it myself. I have, indeed, been a client of a person smuggling in migrants, a person who helped me crossing Schengen area’s border 20 years ago in exchange of money. Although it is not my story to be told in this thesis, here is the reason why I have chosen to research it in the first place. Considering my position as a researcher, I am fully aware that my previous experience could reflect some of my views. However, thanks to this awareness I tried to remain self-reflexive (Pezalla, Pettigrew and Miller-Day, 2012, p. 165) through each stage and be as neutral as possible in order to avoid biases due to my personal experience. Although I cannot be absolutely objective, I did my best to do so.

Prior the interviews I shared my experience with the participants, adopting a self-disclosure approach (Pezalla, Pettigrew and Miller-Day, 2012, p. 167). I noticed that my background helped me creating a trusty relationship where the interviewees were feeling comfortable to talk about their journey as
irregular migrants without any sign of discomfort, due to the fact that I was non-judgemental considering my position as a researcher.

5.9 Philosophical Considerations

There is a further element that could influence this study and that is worth mentioning, namely my philosophical standpoint. Taking a position on philosophical matters, indeed, defines the way I formulated my research which is the result of my understanding of the world we live in. The present section makes a clarification in terms of epistemology and ontology.

Epistemologically, I define myself to be a “social constructivist” that means reality is socially constructed and therefore the study intends to describe “how individuals develop understandings, misunderstandings and ways of framing issues” (6 & Bellamy, 2012, p. 56). In other words, this work does not only illustrate my comprehension of the phenomenon studied, but it also reflects my interpretation of the understanding of the world from the perception of the interviewees. Likewise, the data collected is based on the construct of their own reality, as well as my own.

From an ontological viewpoint, I consider myself a relativist. Unlike realists, relativists deny the existence of an absolute truth, yet they claim it is the way “in which we recognise, classify, code and analyse our observations” (6 & Bellamy, 2012, p. 55). In this regard, I consider that the truth of statements is relative to the research I conducted and strictly related to the way data was collected and consequently analysed.

5.10 Presentation of the interviewees

The interviewees who participated in the study are shortly presented in this section. The names used here are all pseudonyms in order to preserve anonymity and confidentiality.

*Interview number one – Aimar*

Aimar is in his twenties, originally from Syria. He did not want to enrol in the army, so, in 2015, Aimar left his country travelling along the Eastern Balkan route, and in about one month reached Germany, the country where he applied for asylum.
Interview number two – Barre

Barre is in his thirties, originally from Somalia. His trip to Sicily lasted seven months and his fingerprints were taken in Italy right after his arrival in 2009.

Interview number three – Dawud

Dawud is in his twenties and he is originally from Pakistan, country he left at the age of 17. He reached Greece in a couple of months. After getting a negative response to the asylum application in France, he decided to apply again in Italy. He received humanitarian protection in 2016.

Interview number four – Ehsan

Ehsan is in his twenties and he left Afghanistan, his native country, at the age of 13. He reached Greece’s shores through the Eastern European route after a long trip. Ehsan obtained international protection and currently lives in Sweden.

Interview number five – Fathi

Fathi is in his thirties and he left Syria in 2013 due to the civil war occurring in his country. He first moved to Russia and then to Egypt, and lastly he decided to reach Europe. To do so, he travelled the Eastern European route to get to Greece. He currently lives in Sweden where he applied for citizenship.

Interview number six – Ghaith

Ghaith is in his twenties and he is originally from Syria. He left his native country in 2015 and travelled through the Eastern Mediterranean route. In nearly one week he arrived in Sweden. Here, he applied for asylum and received a positive response.
6. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF EMPIRICAL MATERIAL

The present chapter consists of presentation and analysis of the material collected from the field. The responses of the participants in the study are hereby reported in relation to their perception, opinions and experience and hence analysed through the conceptual framework previously discussed. Further, the chapter aims to reply to the research questions meaning that it focuses on the factors that encouraged migrants to flee their countries with the help of smugglers and what were the services they were offering to them. As well as, how these migrants have experienced and valued the smuggling activities that helped them in achieving their goal. To this purpose, the first section will look into the decision-making process of the participants and the reasons that led them to address smugglers, while the second section will consider more carefully the interconnection between the smuggling activities and the border crossing of the migrants that have experienced it.

6.1 The decision to migrate and the goal to be achieved

The meetings with the interviewees were all developed in similar ways. It was clear I was interested in their experiences with the smugglers, but to get to that point I did consider important to contextualize their journey. What was immediately obvious, is that all the participants started introducing their experience talking about the reasons that led them to migrate. So, when asking to talk about his experience in general terms, Aimar replied:

_After finishing my studies, I was supposed to join the military service. And because my war is not clear for me and is not my fight, I didn’t want to go to the military service and kill people.... We don’t have a clear enemy to defend our land from. I don’t want to be part of this war. A lot of young people decided to leave for this reason I was forced to move from Syria. I tried to stay next to my family until the very last moment [...] people here don’t understand because they think we escape because we want money, or to have a nice life. No, 90% of my people are not looking for a better life, we are just looking for life._ (Aimar)

In many occasions he repeated he did not have a specific destination in Europe, but he was looking for a place to feel safe. The same reasons encouraged Fathi to flee Syria, but he is more discreet when it comes to his reasons:

_The first time I got the idea to leave I was already in Lebanon, I travelled to Russia before in the attempt to study, which didn’t go well. I went there legally. I couldn’t go back to Syria, so I heard about the fact that people can travel to Europe illegally._ (Fathi)
Fathi stressed the impossibility of getting back to his country and the goal he had in mind was to migrate. That was the moment he decided to gather all he information necessary to try to move to Europe. Similarly, Barre decided to flee Somalia because of the civil war, as he stated:

*I first saw war when I was three years old, and I have experienced it for 16 years of my life. I am the elder son of a big family, I had responsibilities. I said to myself “It’s enough!” I was escaping the war, not only for myself, but also for my family. [...] I didn’t plan to arrive to Italy, I just planned to go to Europe.* (Barre)

Likewise, the idea of aiming to a safe place was recalled by Ghaith, who had to leave Syria for being an activist against the regime and having a bounty on his head on behalf of Assad’s army. He declared:

*I was persecuted for my political views and I was detained. That’s why I decided to migrate: my life was in danger. [...] it was not my plan to move to Europe, initially I was planning to go to Turkey, but the situation there was horrible, so I decided to come to Europe instead.* (Ghaith)

In the same way, Dawud left Pakistan because his life was in danger due to family disputes:

*...after my father’s death I was being threatened with my life. I was imprisoned, there was no future there for me, it was over. [...] When I left Karachi, I knew my only alternative was to stay there and die. [...] I didn’t know if my life would have been better in Europe, I was looking for a place to be safe.* (Dawud)

Further, Ehsan explained that he was a child when his mother sent him away from Afghanistan because he was in danger after his father’s death. He was entrusted to a person who was supposed to take him out of the country and to take him to Europe, the farther away possible from his hometown. Here it is possible to understand that his main goal was to feel secure, although he did not have a specific destination:

*It was not my intention to go to Germany, to Sweden or anywhere specific, but to be alive... we have almost 50 years of war in Afghanistan. When you come from hell, nothing can be worse than that.* (Ehsan)

The goal, once again, is to seek a chance to be safe.

In conclusion, all the interviewees share the same objective: safety in Europe. It is possible to observe here the rationality factor, in the sense of acting for a reason (Hodgson, 2012a, p. 94), that pushed him to leave his country in the first place.
According to the Rational Choice Theory, every actor makes a decision making process in order to maximise his outcome (Ogu, 2013: 90). Linked to that, Simon (1982 in Boudon, 1989) stated that “rationality denotes a style of behaviour that is appropriate to the achievement of given goals, within the limits imposed by certain conditions and constraints” (p. 173). In other words, the agent is supposed to have a consistent way of acting when deciding the moves to make for realizing the predetermined objective. In this sense, when I conducted the interviews, it was important to define what was the goal of the interviewees, to be able to analyse what was driving their actions. It was not a question I have addressed directly, but the interlocutors did consider it relevant for contextualizing the conversation we were having. What can be observed at this point, is that all the interviewees have in common the goal to save their lives. The idea of a safe place is recurrent during the interviews and in their interpretation, Europe is a safe place to move to. In fact, the objective in all the cases results to be fleeing their country and trying to reach Europe.

In short, the interlocutors defined safety and migration to Europe as the utility to be maximized. Keeping this in mind, in the following section I look into the different alternatives they faced and the cost-benefit calculation they went through in the attempt to maximise their utility (Abell, 2000, p. 9).

6.3 The alternatives – the cost benefit calculation

This section analyses the different options the interviewees had in order to reach their goal. It is worth noticing that the interviewees automatically named the smugglers as a compulsory step in the journey. I quite immediately realised that, when they were describing the different alternatives, the choice was mainly focusing on one smuggler or the other. In some occasion they had the alternative between a route or another, but they were all, one more time, concerning smugglers. When I was pointing at the fact that they were only mentioning journey facilitators among the options, they told me that was the only alternative they had. Not because they did not consider other possibilities, but because they did not have any.

In a following stage of the interview I asked the participants what were the potential alternatives they had when they decided to migrate other than addressing a smuggler. And the replies they gave me were all quite similar. Ghaith told me he took a plane for the part of the trip he could choose that option, he did not want to travel illegally but then he continued:

*From Izmir [Turkey] to Greece it’s impossible to go without someone helping you, there is no other way! In other parts, maybe I could do it: with the smuggler it would be 20 minutes, by*
myself it would be 20 days [laughs]. Completely without a smuggler it is impossible at least in my experience. (Ghaith)

He underlines how some parts of the trip can be managed individually or in groups, but he also emphasizes that there is no way to make it without the services of smugglers, at least for the part that regards entering in Europe, accessing its shores through Greece. Roughly the same answer was stressed by Fathi who told me he addressed a facilitator:

Basically, it was the only way to go to any country that would give me a moment to pick myself together and start a new life. I could have stayed in Turkey, but I would never ever in a million years be at home. My grandfather\(^7\) was kicked out of Turkey in a mass massacre I don’t reckon that it would have been possible for me […] The only chance for me to start a proper life was to find a place for me in Europe and that was probably the only possible way, so I risked it. (Fathi)

Clearly Fathi repeats in different occasions that using the means of a smuggler was the only way to be safe, which was his goal. Later, he further explained that there was a legal way to go specifically to Germany, but it was not really an alternative:

Actually, there was one [other] option, at that time. A way that could take you to Germany, but… let me explain. You could apply for a German university. It would cost 8000 euros that you would deposit in a German bank wait for a year until the process would be completed, you would get the visa and then you’d get the money back as a monthly payment or something and then it would be your responsibility to support yourself. Of course, most of the people file for asylum, but I didn’t want to do that for several reasons. I didn’t’ want to start my life in a country in a deceiving way, I know the way I got here wasn’t legal either, but it was out of desperation, you see the point? The second was that I didn’t want to wait a whole year, and I couldn’t go back to Syria to apply for that, so I had no place to sit and wait. I could stay in Turkey for a year and wait, without even knowing if I was going to get it. I would have wasted a lot of time and money for nothing. The final reason was I didn’t want to go to Germany. If you’ve never been to Europe before, you get affected by the stereotypes and I was afraid by the stereotypes about racism, the language and such issues, and I didn’t know people in Germany. (Fathi)

It is possible here to observe how Fathi did consider the opportunity to get to Europe through a visa student. Yet, he did non consider it as a valuable alternative for the lack of time, money and because

\(^7\) Fathi explained that his grandfather was Assyrian.
the destination was not what he would consider optimal to his purpose, as he well argued. On the other side Aimar, prior his departure made this attempt:

*I tried to get a visa as a student, as well as many other friends of mine. As a master student, but they rejected us. [...] I applied for visa, and I was ready to pay that money, but they rejected me, so I didn’t have another chance. I tried another way*[^8]  [...*] *because it was the only way I had. I tried to be a legal person, but they rejected me... they forced me to go this road.... In general, before we had another option: going to the Gulf countries; but, after war started, the Arabic countries closed the borders. (Aimar)*

Aimar underlines that he has tried to reach Germany through legal means, but his application as a student was denied. So, when he realised he did not have another way out, he decided to approach a smuggler. The visa is also recalled by Barre:

*The easiest option was, and I would have loved to, just catch a plane to Italy, to arrive in Europe. But it was not possible because I didn’t have a red passport, a European passport, that would have offered me that opportunity, that freedom of movement ... Not having that passport, would have meant no access to the visa...which means no access to a legal procedure and not having the opportunity to undertake a safe journey [...] There was an alternative and it’s the illegal way or trusting people and organizations that do not respect human rights, but still offer you the chance to have make that trip ... I could have the papers, I could have the money, but not the visa. I had to address these people because I had no other choice. (Barre)*

Similarly, Dawud is aware of the possibility to apply for a visa, but as he explained:

*For me, it wouldn’t have been possible without them[^9]. If I tried to apply for a visa, at the embassy, they would have asked me questions. And I did not have replies. Everyone there has connections with the police. It was too risky. (Dawud)*

With this last sentence, Dawud recalls the dangers he was facing in his hometown where he was threatened with his life. Analogously, Ehsan had the hurry to leave the country and he was running out of time, but the decision was made by his mother since he was still very young.

*I didn’t know what was to be safe, but my family decided so. The smuggler was responsible for that, for my journey [...] it was not me who made the contact; it was my mum in*[^8] *[^9]*

[^8]: He refers to addressing a smuggler.
[^9]: Dawud refers to the smugglers.
Afghanistan who found this person. I know it was a man who took me. I don’t know the agreement between them, but I know it was for money. What I remember my mom told me: he will give you food, he will keep you safe. I was a kid, I didn’t know anything about anything. (Ehsan)

Once their objective was defined, all the interviewees were facing the issue of how to reach their goal after collecting all the information necessary and choosing among a set of alternatives. As Friedman (1953) stated “an individual acts as if balancing costs against benefits to arrive at action that maximizes personal advantage” (in Ogu, 2013, p.90). Meaning that the decision maker is supposed to make a calculation based on the means he has to reach his goal, and he will choose the path that allows him to obtain the better outcome possible according to his means. On the basis of the information they had, the actors made a choice “in relation to both their goals and the means for attaining these goals” (Scott, 2012, p. 127). In this case, their goal was safety, as underlined in the previous part. What results to be relevant in this section, is the set of alternatives, which is very small. Although the agents have considered the possibility of obtaining a visa, they did not have that one among options and the means they possessed were quite reduced. In fact, it can be noted that the only means available for reaching their goal was with the support of irregular facilitators. It is possible to observe the consistency of behaviour (Boudon, 1979, p.173) they had throughout the decision-making process and the fact that they excluded the possibility of undertaking the journey through legal proceedings because it was not an option pertaining to their means.

6.4 The journey to Europe: how does one find a smuggler?

After defining what pushed them to flee their countries, the interviewees explained to me the different stages of their trip. Indeed, all of them have crossed many countries with many kinds of transportation. I asked them to describe the phases of the journey. I will hereby mention some extracts of their trips.

I left from Pakistan to Iran, by foot and by bus and we were on a van with 25 people. Arrived in Iran. The border Iran and Turkey: I think it was one month waiting there, eating grass, eating anything we would find. Walking three weeks. I have been beaten by smugglers, they broke my foot, I was too tired, too hungry, I was crying, I was a kid. I went to the border to Turkey. We spent a week or more in Turkey. And then we took a boat to Greece. (Ehsan)

Ehsan underlines he travelled with different means: by walking, by bus and by boat. A different start was adopted by Aimar who explained to me he first took a plane from Lebanon to Turkey, specifically to Izmir:
[Izmir] is a famous point to go to Greece. This option was not so new, I know a lot of people who went this way. Before it was more dangerous because people from Turkey were walking their way to Hungary in the forest and it was very dangerous. I heard from friends, Facebook, but also in the news. (Aimar)

Aimar highlights in this part that he had the possibility of undertaking the journey both by land and by the sea, but he chose to take the second option due to the fact the information he had was indicating that one as safer. He also stresses the fact that it was easy to gather information of any kind and then he continued:

*Here in Izmir we had to look for a smuggler. You will find them. They will come to you, like a dealer does. You just have to stay on the streets and they will come to you. I knew we would find them there. It’s the starting point. [...] We met a lot of smugglers, they usually give you the same options, but with different details... the truth is they don’t care if you arrive or not, they’re just giving you a service...* (Aimar)

Aimar explained that the differences were laying in the amount of money requested or in the amount of time necessary to reach Greece. The first attempt he made, failed, because the boat sank while they were in high waters. Therefore, he told me:

*... then we had to find another smuggler. (Aimar)*

This statement makes it quite clear he did not give up, but decided to make another attempt through the same means. Yet, the fact that Turkey was a “smuggler’s place” was stated by all the interviewees, and for instance Ghaith stressed:

*I had a lot of options in Izmir, it’s full of smugglers, it is a smuggler city. In 2015 just by walking the streets you could get some offers.* (Ghaith)

It was though a matter of choosing the best possible option, as he continues:

*But you have to trust a smuggler, maybe they will take your money, and after that what are you gonna do? Do you wanna go to Greece? Are you Syrian? It’s so obvious, not under table. You could find anything there. So you need to trust the person...The first smuggler, from Turkey to Greece to a place called Mytilene¹⁰, was a friend’s relative, I made a deal with him and I payed 1500 dollars.* (Ghaith)

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¹⁰ The informant, Ghaith, refers to the island of Lesbos.
The idea of trust and reputation, which differentiates human smuggling from other illegal activities (Bilger, Hofmann and Jandl, 2006, p. 27) is also recalled by Dawud to elucidate how he chose to travel with that specific facilitator:

*I payed the journey to a smuggler, known by hearsay. In Pakistan you won’t pay stage by stage: they say, for example, they will take you all the way from Pakistan to Greece. No time limit, no warranties of any kind. The only agreement was to pay through a friend who was supposed to give him the money once I arrived to Greece.* (Dawud)

Dawud explained he did not have many options, he did not consider them, because his network allowed him to know the person who facilitated his journey. A different situation was experienced by Fathi who carefully considered the different possibilities at every step of his journey.

...there were other alternatives that I didn’t accept to take, which were even cheaper and easier to do. Here I’m talking about the boats that sail from Egypt or Libya. Directly all the way to Italy. I knew about it, but I didn’t take it because it’s extremely dangerous. Every other boat sinks; it’s a very long trip and they use very old ships and they stuff hundreds of people on them. (Fathi)

Although Fathi decided to not undertake this alternative because he considered it to be dangerous, it was the one adopted by Barre. In fact, moving from Somalia, this was the most common path and he took a boat from Libya to Italy. He pointed out that, in his experience though, it was not the most dangerous part of the journey:

*Everyone thinks the most dangerous part [of the travel] is the sea. The truth is that it’s the desert. You cannot see anything. On average, it takes one week to cross the desert from Sudan to Libya. In the Mediterranean it’s 24 hours, if everything goes well. But seven days when you don’t see anything else than sky and sand... it was the moment I thought “who made me do this? I didn’t know all this”. (Barre)*

When fleeing his country, Barre did not know all the dangers he was about to undergo. He did not have many resources, nor information. But he trusted the people he was meeting and travelling with. It was 2009 and many factors have changed since then; the information you can collect, for example:

*When you’re gonna migrate, you’re not gonna migrate by yourself. You will always meet other people, be it 3 or 4. In 2015 there was a lot of people. You start calculating your journey a hundred times. You plan your expenses day by day, you have the information to do so. You*
have full access to information, it is not updated day by day, but hour by hour. About everything. (Ghaith)

According to Ghaith, it is easy to gather the information necessary, due to the flows of people who share their experiences on Facebook and other social media. The same aspect was underlined also by Aimar and Fathi. On the one hand, in most of the situations, they were well informed about the alternatives available to reach their goal. Thus, the actors had the chance of choosing the best alternative possible to fulfil their ambition (Wittek, Snijders and Nee, 2013, p. 6). In other words, they could choose the smuggler that best suited their necessities and their means to reach their destination: the Greek shores, in Europe. However, the access to information, was not perfect for everyone. Ehsan, Barre and Dawud, indeed, had a different approach and did not have the same opportunities. In their experiences, it can be observed there was a lack of access to information, factor that recalls one of the criticisms addressed to the Rational Choice Theory (Abell, 2000, p.7). In fact, the alternatives were fewer compared to the other interviewees and they resulted in either staying in the country or leaving with the only resource available: the support of one specific smuggler.

6.5 Types of borders encountered

During the interviews, I could notice how the interlocutors were referring to diverse approaches to overcome the border. By border in this case, I mean both the physical frontier, but also the symbolic obstacle it represents when an undocumented person wills to migrate, as visas and other types of documentation. All the interviewees faced the Mediterranean Sea, and they all crossed it on board of a boat, be it fishing boat or a rubber boat, they all payed a facilitator to get in it in the attempt of reaching European shores. It is, indeed, the natural boundary that separates the European countries from Middle East and Africa. The sea, nevertheless, does not only constitute a tangible borderline, but it can be perceived in a different way, as Fathi stated:

... a memory I will never forget there... I was with a friend and just sitting on a platform by the sea, where there is a small marina. From there we could see by naked eye the Greek island of Kos. Where we wanted to go. It was like a mirage and there were like other people who had papers, like European passports. They were just passing next to us to the marina and taking a boat for 17 euros and safely taking the trip to Greece in 20 minutes while we had to pay thousands of euros and risk our lives just because we didn’t have a piece of paper. At least I knew that once I crossed that line, I would have been one of those people. (Fathi)
Fathi compares here the Mediterranean Sea with a “line”: it is indeed the element that can be viewed as the borderline to the European Union, and a passage that all the migrants in this study crossed at some point. Furthermore, in numerous circumstances, the interviewees named the documents as an obstacle in undertaking a safe journey. One more time, the difference between a legal and an irregular journey. This difference was pointed out by Ghaith:

_We are migrants, we cross the borders without nothing. A lot of people are undocumented. But also those who have the papers...some of them have to cross the border illegally, you are an illegal migrant, so there are a lot of checkpoints. We crossed the border from Serbia to Hungary facing the checkpoint. Here it was very easy in Serbia. We just went to them and they let us pass for a fee. They opened the checkpoint: this is corruption and I consider him a smuggler as well! (Ghaith)_

In this short excerpt, Ghaith stressed how the borders were controlled. Some of the checkpoints encountered were patrolled by police and state authorities who often seem to be somehow involved. As Ghaith underlined, he considers these kinds of services part of the smuggling activities and he values them as such. Although, through the payment of an amount of money, the checkpoint was overcome. Likewise, Barre reported a similar situation, this time referred to Italy, where, once again, it seems very easy to find a facilitator who can provide you the means to continue the trip:

_Here in Italy as well, there are people who can help you in your journey...they will get you the papers necessary and trip to proceed towards other European countries. In Bardonecchia or Ventimiglia there will always be someone ready to help you. Everyone knows, authorities included. It can be either Italians or other foreigners who can facilitate the way to continue. I had the documents at that point, so I was not interested to go any farther. (Barre)_

As Barre emphasised when authorities are not directly involved, but they are responsible for the border control, they can turn a blind eye. In this case he knew there was the possibility of trespassing the regular controls and that someone would have been able to provide either with transportation or the necessary papers. A similar circumstance was also marked by Ghaith to get safely on a plane, without being tracked down by the police:

_I also payed money to cross the airport, to get a fake stamp. My name is in the borders, so I cannot cross it or just go to the airport. So, I have a good network in Syria and through someone I know I got this connection. It was very easy. When I got to the checkpoint, and put my name in, they were not supposed to check my name in the system, that’s why I payed him, to just put the stamp on the passport, without actually checking. (Ghaith)_
This kind of approach could be adopted to mislead the controls. The price to pay is very high, and not everyone can afford it. Yet, Ehsan described his experience stressing a different way to cross the border:

... at the border with Macedonia... smugglers are getting money to put you into those trucks for goods. They told me more than 100s of people are travelling this way. The risk was very high. (Ehsan)

His testimony highlights the contrast between the possibility of crossing the border at the checkpoint or doing it through bypassing it.

When it comes to the physical barriers, the most evident one, is the Mediterranean Sea which constitutes a benchmark (Newman, 2011, p. 17) and all the interviewees have perceived it as very tangible (Khosravi, 2007, p. 331) because it required a smuggler’s support to be able to overcome it. Also, when the border was less concrete than the sea, though, it was still present through the checkpoints (Nail, 2016, p. 19). However, in some occasions, smugglers offered the possibility to trespassing them in irregular ways as Ahsan did in a truck or just overcoming the checks at the airport as both Gaith and Fathi did. In addition, as Nail underlined, borders can also signify identification documents (2016, p. 2), and this was Fathi’s perception of it who experienced the lack of papers as being the biggest barrier. Furthermore, the borders crossed by the interviewees had different features, and they had different means to cross them. In some occasions, the same person experienced multiple ways of crossing a border: it could be by plane, with fake documents, by boat, by foot, or hiding in a truck. These can be categorised as sets of services offered by the smugglers which are also considered in the next section of this chapter. They offered the chance to undertake the trip through different kinds of transportation, according to the permeability of the border at the specific moment and to the economic possibilities of the migrants. In other words, the main borders encountered, were related to physical/natural barriers - as the Mediterranean Sea; checkpoints – managed by police and state authorities; and documentation. The smugglers provided to overcome them by allowing means to literally cross the border (eg. the boat for the sea), points of irregular transition to overstep the checks, and fake papers to circumvent controls.

In conclusion, borders are points of division, but also points of connection (Paasi, 2011 in (Donnan, Hurd and Leutloff-Grandits, 2017, p. 160). In this regard, one of the key points of their journeys to Europe, was the stage involving the border crossing and the smuggling activities rendered it possible.
6.6 The performance of the border and the role of the smuggler

As aforementioned, during the interviews, I had the chance to note the different kinds of services and support the smugglers were offering to their customers. I hereby underline some of the most significant statements according to the purpose of this study. At the moment of crossing the border, though, it was interesting to notice how the smugglers often were giving instructions, as Aimar stressed:

...when we left, the smuggler told us to follow the light, that it was Greece, so we followed it, after 4 hours we arrived, at 6 in the morning in Nira, a small island. (Aimar)

A different kind of information was given to Ghaith, who stated:

This smuggler told us: guys, the border is closed. Do you wanna go to Croatia instead? We knew the border was closed and we also checked on the Facebook group that was set for this kind of information. (Ghaith)

In this case, the role of the smuggler was to provide information for the success of the journey. He previously also underlined that they had connections with the authorities and knew the right moment for crossing a border. The same situation was also stated by Aimar and Fathi. A likely approach was experienced by Barre:

It took me 7 months, instead of the two I planned at the beginning. But you cannot plan something like this, you can’t decide when it’s the moment to cross the desert, or the borders, or the Mediterranean, because you entrust yourself to people who will take these decisions for you. (Barre)

The smugglers in this care result to be crucial both for informing but also for deciding when and where to get across the border. In this sense, Ghaith’s journey was also facilitated in a direct way by the smuggler who offered him the chance to overstep the checks at the airport:

I just payed money to cross the security and reach the airplane. Even my bag was not put in the check machine, if I had a bomb, I could carry it with me. In Syria it’s okay, but I also know people doing the same in Europe. He was a security boss of something like this. I could see his authority there, we skipped the lines, and my luggage was not checked. I payed a lot of money there. Just in advance was 2000 euros. (Ghaith)

Similarly, Fathi explained his experience when he was on European soil. He clarified it was the fastest way to reach his destination and he received a good offer. Further, he considered the trip by plane to be safer:
He [the smuggler] got me an authentic British passport, of a person I still remember the name, with his picture on it. He didn’t look anything like me, but the passport was original and it had a lot of visas and a lot of stamps so it was really convincing. (Fathi)

Due to the fact the document offered was “convincing”, Fathi decided to undertake this way but he was informed that it would have been necessary to mask any kind of fear to erase any kind of suspicion at the security controls in the airport:

I did everything I can not to look Arab in any possible way. I used a trick, out of my understanding of the time, I thought it would be really helpful to have a book in English with me, which I still have now. That would help to look less suspicious. Just a way to show that I’m reading... I succeeded at the first attempt. What helped me, I think, are two factors: the first is that my document was very strong... All my emotions were numb, totally dazzled. That was the second factor that helped me. I was poker face when I talked to the police. I didn’t show any fear, I was completely emotionless... (Fathi)

In the present sections, what appears to be interesting is the fact that the smugglers have provided the tools to perform the border crossing in different ways: they gave instructions, they procured fake documents, they have offered transportation to the other side of the border. The experiences lived by the interviewees recall what Khosravi (2007) names the performance of border rituals, namely “…passport, applying for a visa, security checks and the performance of going through specific places and spaces of border control and customs” (p. 330). In other words, all the procedure to follow as a secular ritual that repeats itself over and over again. It is notable here how, the migrants were given instructions by the smugglers they were meeting: in Barre’s case, for example, the facilitators were deciding the moves to make to perform the border crossing, in Aimar’s case they were giving directions to ride the boat, while in Fathi’s case they instructed him on “the body performance” (Khosravi, 2007, p.330). He was holding a powerful passport, he knew the importance it had, and it helped him hide his emotions, to be relaxed and not to panic at the moment he was undergoing the controls. Moreover, his experience underlines how “bordering is selective and targeted” (Rumsford, 2006, in Khosravi, 2007, p. 332) due to the fact he managed to pass the security checks because of the British passport and his “western features”, although he did not look like the person in the document he was travelling with.
6.7 Concluding views on smuggling practices

Lastly, I reported here some of the general comments the interviewees made with regard to the smugglers and their activities, considering good and bad shades of the overall phenomenon that resume their opinions.

You have to undertake this journey, you don’t have alternatives; and they give this chance to you. It’s not like they tell you “this boat is safe or be careful ‘cause it’s risky”, that’s your business, but they prepare you for the trip…. I made the choice to make this trip and they simply gave me this opportunity. (Barre)

Barre underlines in many occasions that things have changed since 2009, when he made the trip, especially after the Arab Spring. But later on, in our conversation he tells me:

They [the smugglers] shouldn’t be hold responsible, I don’t have any issue with who organizes this trip…they don’t respect human rights, but they are an alternative and people trust them. There is no other possibility. Without these organizations, I wouldn’t be here talking to you today. Why is a young European able to move where he wants, while a young African doesn’t have this right? It is unfair… Smugglers exist also for this reason. (Barre)

He explains to me that he considers there is a lack of political will, because politics need someone to blame. A similar approach was adopted by Dawud who added:

There are good smugglers and bad smugglers. Some of them have saved lots of lives. It is a job, and they are working. It is true: they don’t care about other people’s lives, but if 9 out of 10 persons are safe and have a chance of living thanks to them, then well done. I don’t agree with what smugglers do. But what is the alternative? (Dawud)

Dawud is glad he had the chance to save his life through their services but he also underlines it is a huge phenomenon that involves all the migrants who do not have different options. Likewise, Ghaith compares the whole system with a business mechanism that plays an important role in migration:

There is no smuggler for charity, sure. They will make good money, it’s their business. But they’re really facilitating the journey for migrants. We are forced to be migrants, without the smugglers the journey would be super hard and a lot of people would die. This is very important! Without them it would be much more deaths. I’m not saying they are angels, nor saviours, but they are very useful in migration. There is no doubt about it. I studied law, I’m super strict about it, I don’t want anyone to break the rules, but sometimes it’s very hard. Even if I’m a law person, I’d say don’t do anything to the smugglers. Without smugglers there
is no migration, and a lot of people would die again and again, and more and more. And smugglers...well they are very useful, they can provide information, and facilitate and reduce the cost of migration and the journey. (Ghaith)

In this excerpt Ghaith highlights that smugglers cross the line between legality and illegality but they play a substantial part in facilitating. Also, his idea recalls the fact that smuggling of migrants is a demand-driven market (IOM, Vol 2, 2016, p. 111). And after that he continued, with a response that represents a key to this research:

*Smugglers actually fill the gap between borders, so by closing the border they [the governments] encourage the smuggling. But migration cannot stop, it can be reduced or increased, and smugglers are not going to vanish from the world.* (Ghaith)

In this last part of the analysis, I had the chance to underline how the migrants interviewed did value the experience they had with the smugglers they have encountered. It can be observed how they do consider their activities to be crucial to be able to fulfil their ambition. In this sense, the figure of the smuggler who facilitates the journey and makes it possible. In many occasions they have used expressions such as “it was the only way”, or “it was the only option”. Not all the experiences were evaluated as positive and the participants of the study have faced different kinds of violence, as Ehsan, Barre, Dawud, Fathi, and Aimar noted in many occasions. However, not all the experiences were bad, and some of the interviewees are grateful they had the intervention of facilitators. In conclusion, all the people interviewed did state that the smugglers played a fundamental role to the fulfilment of their ambition and that without them it would have not been possible to cross the borders.

6.8 Final discussion

As a point of departure of the final discussion, it is worth recalling the research questions. Indeed, the first part of this chapter helped me reply to the first one relating migrants who reached Europe with a help of a smuggler:

*What dynamics do encourage migrants to approach smugglers and what are the services smugglers offer them?*

In this sense, the Rational Choice Theory allowed me to illustrate that the migrants are rational actors who have a consistent behaviour choosing among alternatives to maximise their utility (Gintis, 2006 in Hodgson, 2012, p. 96). The opening part of this chapter examines what dynamics did encourage migrants to approach smugglers in the first place. I could observe that the main reason why lays in
the factors that force them to flee their countries with the major goal of saving their lives and reaching a European country which means, according to their understanding, a chance to have a future. I have considered the agents to be rational actors according to the broad understanding of the Rational Choice Theory (Burns and Roszkowska, 2016, p. 197). In this regard, I argue that the dynamics that mainly encouraged them to approach smugglers, was due to factors relevant to their specific situation: they felt forced to flee their countries, they did not have legal options to adopt, and consequently they have addressed smugglers to reach a goal. In short, migrants have used smugglers as a mean to an end. They had a goal, which was reachable only with the services of smugglers.

When it comes to the second part of the question, the one that relates to the services offered, it is possible to observe that smugglers provided different kinds of means to cross the borders and, therefore, to reach the goal the migrants interviewed had. First of all, smugglers provided transportation: boats to cross the sea, but also cars, buses and the possibility to walk across the border. Secondly, the smugglers could offer fake documentation: id cards, passports and visas. Lastly, smugglers had an important role as informants: they were giving instructions about the chance of crossing the border and the controls performed; they were providing guidance on how to act and how to react at the moment of the border crossing. But the main service, concerned the chance of crossing the border itself.

When it comes to the second research question, meaning:

How do migrants, who themselves reached Europe by using smugglers, experienced and value the smuggling activities?

I suggest that migrants did not experience the smuggling activities in a positive way, but they value it successful due to the fact smugglers allowed them to reach their goal: the border crossing. Indeed, many occasions the interviewees underlined the fact that they would not have been able to cross the borders and reach Europe without a smuggler. Although the participants were aware of risking their lives accepting to undertake the journey with the means of smugglers, they still did consider that was a resource to trespass the frontiers. In this sense, I argue, smugglers redefine the idea of border, which throughout their services, becomes more permeable.

As Khosravi (2007) underlined, the border can be experienced as “tangible, powerful and distressing” (p. 331) but the smugglers do allow migrants to overcome them. They do indeed offer an alternative to all those migrants who do not have “any other way” to cross the borders.

A further consideration, is the impact the smuggling activities have on the border itself. According to Rumford (2006) borders are subjected to the pressure of many different actors who determine a
change and a renegotiation. I suggest that smugglers, and smuggling of migrants, more in general, is one of them, as shown by the results of my study. Within this view, the distinction between hard and soft borders (Diener and Hagen, 2012, p. 17) itself results to be weak. In fact, although borders are generally monitored, through the services of a smuggler they can be traversed. Moreover, as a matter of fact, visa policies as an instrument for regulating the border crossing, are quite effective (Mau, 2010, p. 357). Nevertheless, the level of permeability of borders increases on the irregular market where smugglers do operate for example providing fake documents and offering ways to trespass the borders without necessarily holding a regular visa.

In summary, it is with noticing how the role of the smuggler can be interpreted in both from micro-level and macro-level perspective. If on the one hand, the micro-level angle recalls the fundamental role smugglers had in crossing the borders in the perception of the migrants; on the other side, from a macro-level viewpoint, I could be observed how, through the study of the role of smugglers, that the borders are in motion (Konrad, 2015) and how they are subjected to the pressure of many different actors. I finally suggest that smugglers redefine and reshape the idea of border as such, allowing borders to become a more permeable and fluid concept.
7. Conclusion

According to Scott, “complex social phenomena can be explained in terms of elementary individual actions of which they are composed” (2012, p. 128). In other words, through the individual human action, I considered the role of smuggling as a social phenomenon that can be partially understood through the narratives of the migrants who experienced it. The thesis, therefore, focused on the role of the smugglers in migration, specifically in irregular migration. Via semi-structured interviews, I had the chance to collect the data necessary to study the phenomenon from migrant’s perspective. Throughout the experiences of the interviewees, it was possible to investigate what was their goal and the decision-making process they applied to achieve their goal. In this sense, I looked at the alternatives and the means they had to arrive to Europe. The overall conclusion was that they all had to flee their countries because they felt forced to do so. Further, when looking at the alternatives, they often had the perception that there was only one mean to their end: the services offered by smugglers. Meaning that they had no other choice but paying someone to help them migrate in an irregular way.

The second part of the analysis provided an overview of the services offered by smugglers and the part smugglers played in the process of crossing the borders. It highlighted in what way smugglers helped them to reach their goal by crossing the borders in different ways: they gave instructions and played the role of guidance, they offered documents, and transportation.

According to the findings in this paper, I argue that smugglers play a crucial role in migration. They indeed allowed the actors to fulfil their goal, through their services in crossing the borders. As Ghaith also underlined: smugglers fill the gap between borders. For this reason, my main assumption is that smugglers reshape the idea of border as we know it, offering the chance to overcome the limits imposed by both hard and soft borders. In this sense, smugglers enhance the mobility of migrants and remodel borders transforming them in fluid concepts.
8. List of References


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