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ADVANCING HUMAN SECURITY

FINANCIAL BIOGRAPHIES

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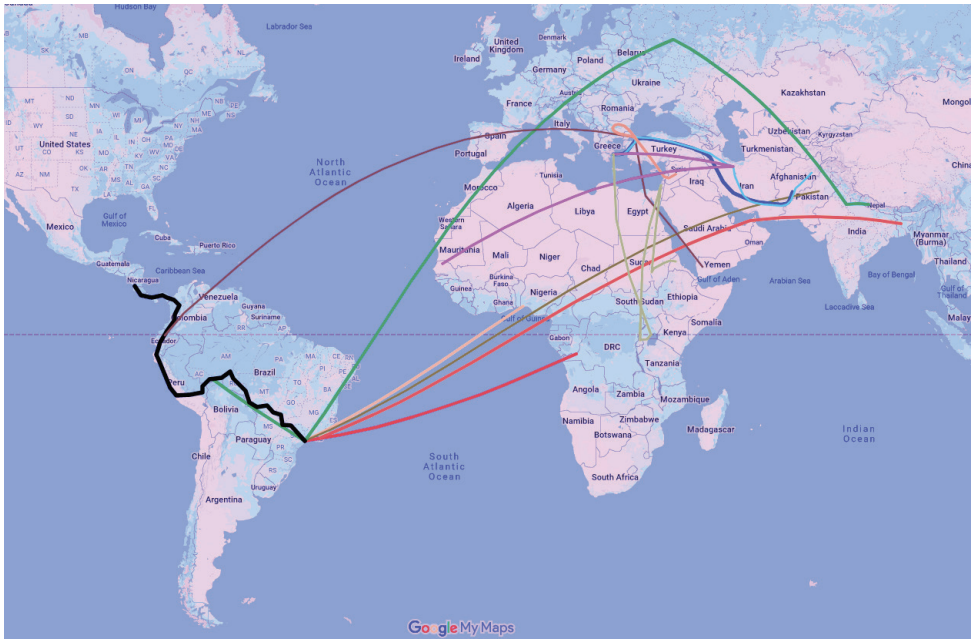
Volume 1:

Financial Biographies of Long Distance Journeyers



Henry J. Leir Institute

The Henry J. Leir Institute at The Fletcher School, Tufts University focuses on the security and protection of individuals and communities while promoting peace and sustainable development. To achieve this, the Leir Institute catalyzes collaboration between and creates synergies among the fields that place people at the center of concern: conflict resolution, human rights, humanitarian studies, and political and economic development. Our research, education, and policy engagement emphasize the following principles: protection and promotion of the rights of at-risk populations, empowerment of people, and promotion of responsible government and institutional practices.

For more information on the research project, please visit www.journeysproject.org.

KIM WILSON

Kim Wilson is a Sr. Lecturer and Sr. Fellow at the Fletcher School, Tufts University. She is the lead author for a series of studies on the financial journey of refugees and migrants.

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Introduction

This collection of financial biographies traces the ways in which extra-continental refugees and migrants finance their journeys and manage money along the way. It also highlights the importance of friendships, both old and new, in making a journey possible. Additionally, communication tools like mobile phones, WhatsApp, or Google Translate leverage friendships and kinships to help piece together successful long-distance travel.

A team of alumni and graduate students from The Fletcher School and the University for Peace recorded the stories of these extra-continentals as they journeyed from their countries of origin in Asia and Africa toward Europe and the US. With a few exceptions, we interviewed long-distance journeyers - those who traversed multiple borders, the bulk of their time spent crossing by land or sea.

In total, we interviewed 213 subjects, 162 males and 51 females, including one transgender female. The graph below summarizes the country of origin of our respondents and their gender.

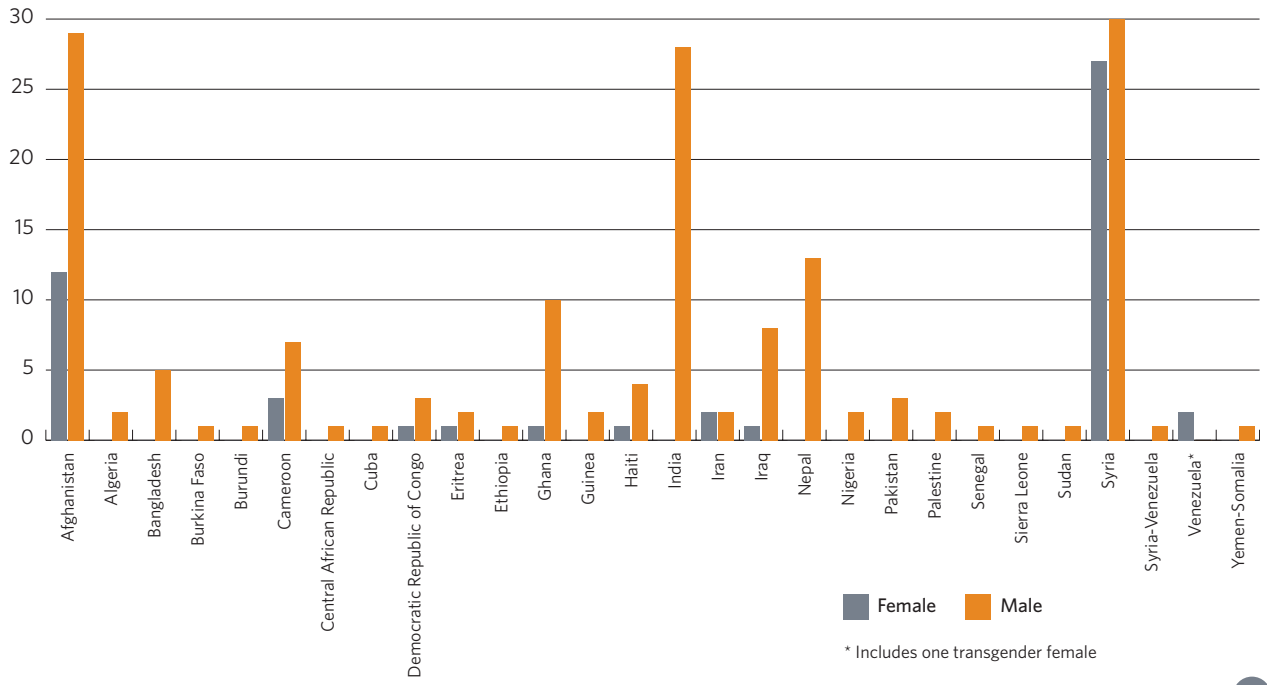
In 2016 and 2017, we held our first set of interviews in Greece, Turkey, Jordan, and Denmark where respondents were headed toward European countries, or in the case of Denmark, already residing in Europe. Our respondents in these interviews began their journeys in South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa as well as Eastern and Western Africa.

In 2018 and 2019, we held our second set of interviews in Colombia and Costa Rica where respondents were mostly headed to the US and Canada. In this set of interviews, all but three respondents began their journeys in the same regions as our first set —South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa as well as Eastern and Western Africa.

Where possible, we conducted interviews in the native languages of our respondents: Dari, Farsi, Arabic, French, Hindi, Nepali, Bangla, English, and in some cases Spanish. We also interviewed members of the communities hosting these refugees and migrants, including shopkeepers, hotel owners, financial service providers, retailers, and NGOs as well as local authorities and other informed citizens, including academics.

While interviews were semi-structured in the sense that researchers followed guidelines, the interactions between researchers and respondents unfolded more like conversations. A vibrant back-and-forth marked the most fruitful exchanges. Sometimes, respondents eagerly drew maps of their experiences. Other times, they only wanted to talk.

Figure 1: Respondents by Country of Origin and Gender.



Some interviews took place over the course of days, but a typical encounter took place over several hours. All subjects voluntarily gave their time (and patience) and seemed to enjoy disclosing what had often been lengthy, expensive, and terrifying experiences. Many commented that they appreciated being able to talk in their native languages without the interference of a third-party interpreter. Some wished we spoke their local or family language, like Twi, versus their national languages, like English, but we did the best we could.

The team worked hard to capture details of the initial segments of the respondents' journeys. Why did subjects leave? How did they prepare? What were the first steps of their journeys? The recollection of these details was often murky. The research team surmised this was owed to two things. First, their reasons for leaving included a mix of religious or political persecution bound up with aspirations for securing a better economic life. Subjects were reluctant to disclose information that would harm their chances for asylum in Europe, the US, or Canada and surely disclosing economic goals would diminish those chances.

Second, the memories of their crucibles overshadowed earlier steps in their journeys. In the Mediterranean, the true tests of their mettle were the icy climb over the 15,000-foot Zagros mountains (if passing through Turkey) or the punishing Sinai desert (if passing through North Africa). The voyage from Turkey to Greece, though relatively short, was always cited as the most terrifying passage. In Costa Rica, crossing the turbulent Bay of Urabá in unseaworthy boats followed immediately by a journey across the mountainous, thickly jungled, and gangster-ridden Darién Gap overtook respondents' memories. The bay and the jungle were their Mediterranean. As one of our researchers observed in Costa Rica: "I felt as though we were intercepting marathon runners on mile eighteen; all they could remember was the hardship of their most recent, grueling mile while anticipating the trials of the next."

Included in this report are 31 biographies that represent patterns of escape, travel, information-gathering, and financing. Some narratives may seem idiosyncratic on their surface but form a deeper truth revealed slowly over the duration of many interviews.

We give our heartfelt thanks to Catholic Relief Services (Greece), Danish Refugee Council, International Rescue Committee, Mercy Corps (Greece), the Dirección General de Migración y Extranjería de Costa Rica, the Costa Rica Mission for the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Policía Profesional de Migración de Costa Rica, the University for Peace, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, and GiZ Jordan, The Leir Institute (the Fletcher School), and the Hitachi Center for Technology and International Affairs (the Fletcher School). Most importantly, we thank the men and women who took the time to explain their journeys in great detail.

Sincerely,

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Table of Contents

Featured Maps

Part 1:

From Asia, the Middle East, and Africa through the Mediterranean toward Europe

"Unusual Under Normal Circumstances"

Afghanistan to Greece: Two young women travel with their parents via Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey, every transaction accounted for.

On July 17, 2016, we conducted an interview with two young women inside their tent at Piraeus Port, an unofficial and temporary camp at the main port of Athens where at one point thousands of asylum seekers lived in tents under bridges or in warehouses. We met the women while they were washing carpets at one of the waterspouts set up by aid agencies. Before the end of the summer, Piraeus Port would be officially evacuated by Greek authorities, and all those living there were either relocated to camps outside of Athens or had voluntarily left to find accommodations on their own. Understanding the circumstances of inevitable evacuation, the sisters were expecting to leave the port for a camp the following day.

We spoke with the two sisters, Sam (24) and Sim (21), over the course of an afternoon. The interview was conducted in Farsi and English. The women graciously served us tea inside their small tent that was tidy and neatly arranged and clustered with many other tents in a particular block of friends and relatives, covered by a large tarp. A multiple-outlet plug with an extension cord led to a power source near the adjacent warehouse through which the girls had set up a fan, charged their phones, and boiled water in an electric kettle for tea. While inside the tent, a young girl of about seven or eight joined us, drawing pictures with the pencils and paper we brought in hopes that our interviewees would draw maps.

We began the interview speaking with Sam, but the younger and more outgoing Sim took over telling the majority of the story about their journey from Afghanistan to Greece. The sisters and their family are Shia Tajiks from Afghanistan. They are both unmarried and well-educated, and appeared to be from an upper-middle socioeconomic class. The following story of their journey is told from Sim's perspective.

Note: The term saraf refers to a money agent who may operate formally or informally. Sarafs perform a variety of services. They can transfer money from one party to another. They also can hold "in trust" deposited sums of one party to be later transferred to that same party or to another party (for example, a store, a friend, or a smuggler) based on the instructions of the depositor.

Map 1: Sam and Sim's journey from Afghanistan to Iran

"We traveled here with our parents, our 14-year-old brother, and our seven-year-old brother. My eldest brother, who is 23, is in Sweden. My fourteen-year-old brother has psychological issues after witnessing a bombing in our neighborhood in Kabul.

"My family is educated. My father went to university in Moscow and was a military officer. My mother completed the tenth grade. My older sister was a language and literature teacher in Kabul, and I was studying to become a doctor. We never had financial issues—we survived the insecurity of the war, but we had to flee our home because my oldest brother had a personal clash with some people that made it dangerous for him to stay in Kabul. This ended up making our entire family unsafe. I cannot elaborate on what this was, but last Ramadan, my brother left Afghanistan. At that the time, all of the borders in Europe were open, and he made it to Sweden. After he left, his enemies started to harass our family. We did not pay much attention to the threats originally, but about six months after his departure, it was clear that it was too dangerous for us to stay in our home.

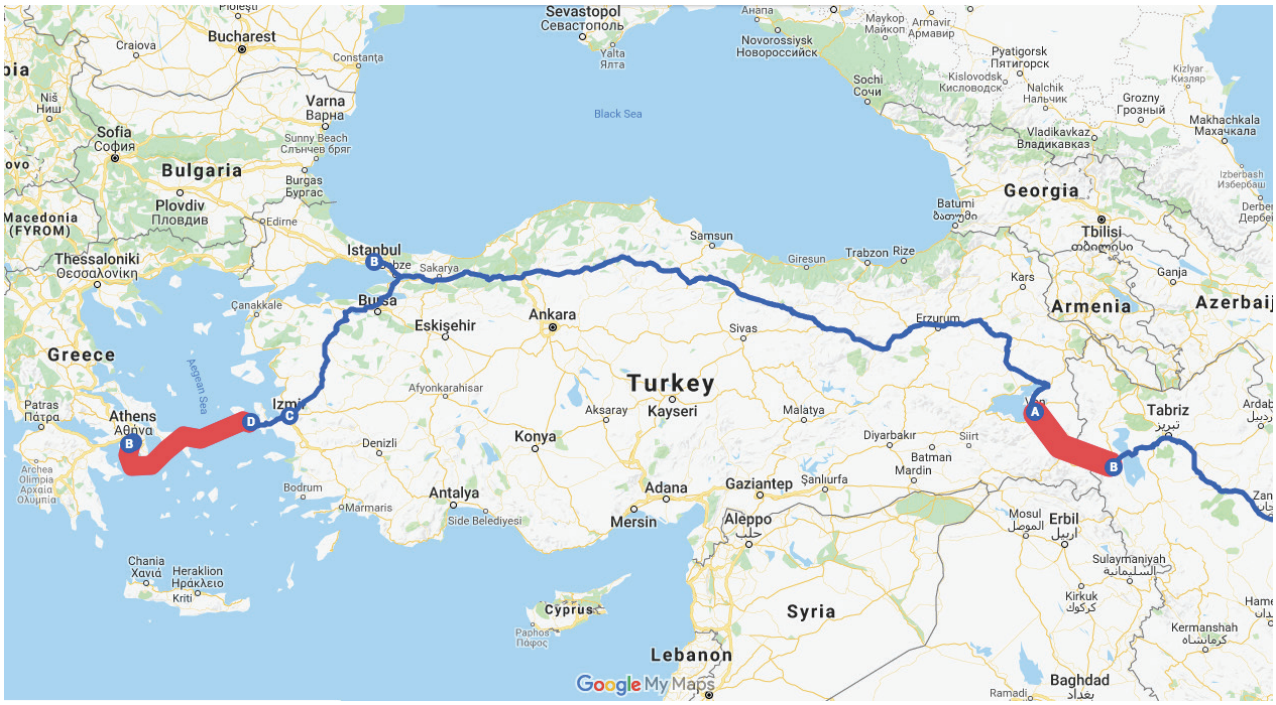
"We sold most of our assets to afford the journey, except for some of my father's property in another town. My father used information from friends and word-of-mouth to choose a smuggler for the trip, and the smugglers told us which saraf [money agent] to use. The smuggler told us not to carry any money along the way. We gave all of the money we had to the saraf in Kabul—he would hold the money and release the payments to the smugglers along the journey. The smuggling network managed logistics for each leg of the trip. The combination of the name and account number we used for the money transfer interactions was called the '*ramz*,' so every time a payment needed to be made, my father contacted the saraf, told him the 'ramz,' and the saraf would release the money to the smuggler. There are a number of different smugglers, all in the same network, each with a specific job. The journey to Iran cost $1,000 each for the six of us, and overall the entire journey to Greece cost about $3,500 per person. Now in Greece, we are completely out of money.

"We began our travels eight months ago during the winter. From Kabul, we traveled for 24 hours by bus, passing through Kandahar. We were very afraid because we heard that Daesh [ISIS] stops buses along the way looking for Shias passing through. We spent two nights in a border town, and then we made the journey across the border into Pakistan. This took about 28 hours, and we traveled sometimes by car and other times by foot. There were about eight families traveling all together, along with 13–14 single men. When we were in Pakistan, we were sometimes followed by the police, but once we reached the smugglers' safehouses, the police no longer bothered us. The safehouses in Pakistan belonged to families who had some connection to the smugglers. We had no food for the first night in Pakistan, and we had just enough cash on us to buy some bottles of water and cookies to give to the young children. The smugglers told us not to carry any cash at all because of thieves, and we were not allowed to leave the safehouses to try and access our money through the saraf.

"After spending the night, we departed at 8 A.M. to make the journey into Iran. This was a 13-hour trip, once again both by car and on foot through desert. When we were in cars, we traveled in the back of large, open top vehicles—every inch was packed, carrying 70–80 people. The young men sat around the perimeter of the vehicles, holding on for dear life, and the women and children sat towards the middle, clutching each other. The men sitting at the perimeter sometimes fall out of the vehicle and are left behind in the desert.

"We arrived across the border to Iran by 9 P.M. and slept in the desert that night. The next day at noon, the group was split up into smaller groups, each group going with a different smuggler. Sedan-sized vehicles came to pick us up and take us to Zahedan, the capital of Sistan and Baluchistan province in southeast Iran. We had to fit 14 people per car. The driver sat alone and two people sat in the front seat—one in the seat and one on the floor. These seats cost more than the others. In the back seat, four people, usually women, sat in the seat, and four more sat at their feet. The trunk was reserved for young, single men. One young man would lay down in the trunk, the two would curl up into a '*sajda*' position, the position of prayer. This journey took six hours, as we had to take breaks every couple of hours to give the boys in the trunk a break and to either change vehicles or change the license plates on the vehicles to avoid detection. The drivers of these vehicles were Baluch people, the local people who have ethnic ties to the Baluchi in Pakistan.

Map 2: Sam and Sim's journey from Iran to Greece



"We arrived at a safe house in Zahedan and crammed seven families in a dirty room of about 18 square meters. We departed the next morning at 5 A.M., this time heading towards Bam, Iran. We were in the same cramped setup in the car until we reached a desert area where the cars could no longer travel. The next leg of the journey was Bam to Kerman. The smugglers gave us an option to pay an additional $100 to fit three people on a motorcycle. While some families had enough money to agree to pay extra, our family did not, so we left some of our belongings that were too heavy to carry and walked for 30 hours. In the desert, we had no cell phone signal, plus the smugglers never allowed us to keep our phones on anyway to ensure there were no informants. This part of the journey was very difficult.

"When we finally reached Kerman, the journey across Iran became easier as we once again traveled by vehicle. We continued west towards Shiraz and stopped at Neyriz in Fars province. We were told to get out of the cars and wait under a bridge for different vehicles to come, along with dozens of other migrants. Within minutes of our arrival, the Iranian police came threatening arrest and started to beat the younger men. The smugglers spoke to the families and said that for an additional 1,500,000 ($35) rial per family, the police would let them go. We had no choice but to agree to this amount and it would be added to our overall fees. It was clear that the smugglers and the police had a deal, and this was only the beginning of many scenarios that allowed the smugglers to exploit us for more money.

"From Shiraz, we traveled another fourteen hours north to Isfehan and eventually to Tehran. In Tehran we slept in small tents on the property of a house that was reserved for the smugglers themselves. We called this 'tent city,' because the smugglers were in the large house looking over all of us refugees. Tehran was the next point at which all of the refugees were required to pay the smugglers, but we had arrived on a weekend and the sarafs were closed, so we stayed there for two nights. At this point, since we were getting closer to Turkey, the smugglers were worried that the younger boys in particular would flee without paying them, so they had guards stay up to make sure that nobody left at night. They separated the men and the women. They had the single young men call their families and then would beat them so their families could hear and promise that they would make the payments.

"On Saturday morning, the sarafs reopened—we all made the required payments and then departed at 8 A.M. towards Urmia, a city that is about 55 kilometers by road to the Turkish border. At this point, we knew the chances of being caught by authorities would be greater and it would be safer for us all to blend in with the local population—since we are ethnic Tajiks, we had a greater chance of passing off as an Iranian, whereas the Hazara people could be easily identified (and Hazara are more abused in Iran). We used buckets of water to wash ourselves and our belongings and tried to look presentable. To get to Urmia, we were finally able to sit normally in a car, with my dad in the front with the driver and the rest of us in the back, but we sped through back roads to avoid the police stations and the driver told us to pray for our lives as we were moving too fast to feel safe. We reached our destination in Urmia by 6 P.M. and rested there before heading towards the base of the mountains that would lead us to Turkey.

"The mountains were snowy and the area was inhabited by local villagers. At 10 P.M., we walked through the snow to get to the next safe house and prepare for the walk into Turkey— our feet were already soaked and freezing. The smugglers gave us a more substantial dinner of eggs and tuna to prepare for the difficult walk. We began walking at 1 A.M. and the smugglers told us it would take about 40 minutes to get to Turkey, but we had a feeling that the distance, made more difficult by the snow, would take several hours. They said that for another $100 per horse, the families could travel on horseback rather than by foot. Some of the richer families who had already been based in Iran could afford to get horses for themselves and their belongings, but our family could only afford to get one for my mother. After two hours of walking, the smugglers told us that we were moving too slowly and that the sun would start to come up at 4 A.M., increasing the likelihood that we would be caught—by their estimation we were still three hours away. So our entire group, at this point utterly exhausted, walked back to the base of the mountain. This seemed like just another tactic to force the families to pay more to ride by horseback.

"We rested for an additional two nights to regain the energy needed for the difficult trek.

"We made another attempt at the journey across the mountain, this time starting at 8 P.M. After many hours of walking, we reached a point that was too steep for the horses, so all of the travelers, including my mother, started walking by foot, relying on the younger men to help drag us up (even if we were not blood-related, which would be unusual under normal circumstances). At the top of the mountain, the smugglers said that we had reached the Iranian-Turkish border and that they were not authorized to continue the journey into Turkey. Us travelers would have to walk down by ourselves and Uzbek Afghan smugglers that were based in Turkey would meet us on the other side. My father led the way with the rest of the men and the women following behind. At this point there were about 30 of us making our way down through the snow and ice. It had only been about ten minutes of walking downhill when we heard my father call out to inform the group that we had been caught by the Turkish police.

"The Turkish police gathered us together and had us wait under a cove, joining another group of migrants that they had caught earlier. Together there were about 70 of us. The police took us in two large vehicles to a nearby police outpost. The women with young children were taken inside where it was heated while the other weary travelers had to wait outside. We were all then moved to another area that had two small, dirty rooms where we could rest, but we were too cold, wet, and scared to sleep. It was 5 A.M. and the police had us each empty our personal belongings (money and cell phones) and sealed them in plastic bags labeled with our names. Soon, more police vehicles arrived to transfer us to another shelter. We were frisked once more and separated into two rooms, one for the men and one for the women and children, where we were crammed side by side to sleep for the night. The men had a bigger room so they were a little less cramped, but the women's room had heat.

"While we were finally in a sheltered area, there were many incidents throughout the night that kept us uneasy. Initially, we could hear the police harassing the men and beating some of the younger travelers. At one point in the night, one of the police came to the women's side to tell them that their commander insisted that a young woman named Mary

join him for the night. Mary was a twenty-year-old traveling with her father and brother, trying to get to France where her fiancé had already fled. The police said they would deport her, her father, and brother back to Iran if she didn't agree. She stood up for herself and said that no matter what they threatened, she would not go with the commander. They finally conceded and admitted that it wasn't their commander but another policeman who was asking for her, so they left her alone. At 4 A.M., an Uzbek who was among the travelers woke up all of the men and started hitting them with their own belts, chastising them for not waking up for prayer. He said that he was from a group like Daesh and would slit their throats if they neglected their prayers. He made them stay outside in the snow until 9 A.M.

"During the seven days that our group waited in this police shelter, the smugglers that were supposed to have met us on the other side of the mountain kept visiting the police outpost and bringing cases of food and alcohol to bribe the police. Since they do not receive their payment until a leg of the journey is completed, it was in their interest to make sure the travelers were released so we could make it to our next destination. At this point, a new set of actors became involved in the smuggling deal—the Turkish mafia. A group, led by a tall man with light hair and green eyes, paid the police to release each of the travelers. The mafia had basically 'bought' us travelers from the police, and the only way for us to continue the journey was for us to agree to pay an additional $300 per person through the smuggler to give to the mafia. This was in addition to the $750 per person it was already costing us to cross into Turkey.

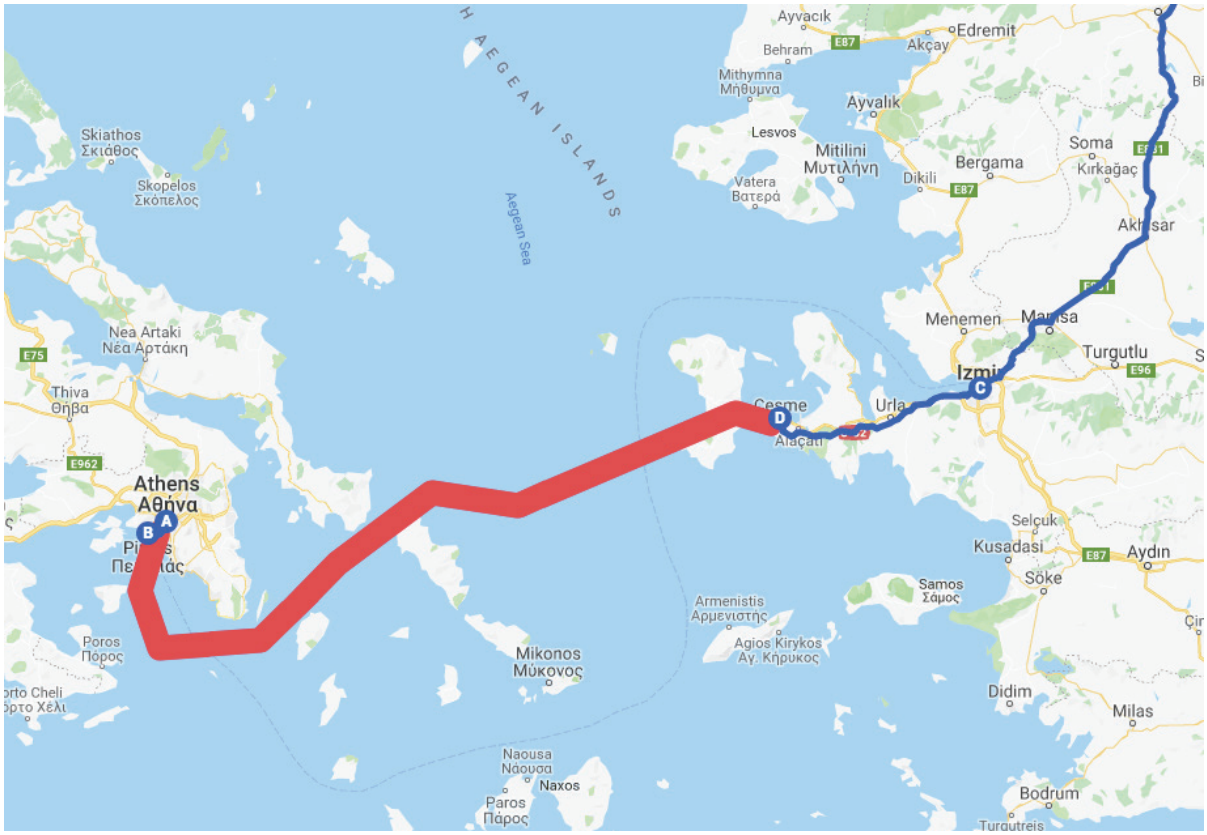
"The smugglers sent station wagons to transport us to the next destination, Van, in eastern Turkey, this time in groups of 14 per vehicle. We traveled for five hours and were in Van by midnight. In Turkey, we registered ourselves as refugees, but when we made the final payment to the smugglers, we asked them for a contact who would get us to Greece. We stayed overnight in Van with a family that was connected to the smuggling network and departed the next afternoon by bus to Istanbul. The bus tickets were paid by the smugglers (all part of the cost of operations).

"We followed the smuggler's instructions to take a taxi to Zaytoun Borno, an area of Istanbul where there are many smugglers. We met our smuggler and went to his house where we stayed for four days in his basement. The smuggler was Uzbek, as were all of the Turkey-based smugglers along the route we followed. From Istanbul, we took an overnight bus to Izmir, arriving by 6 A.M. and waiting until noon for the next smuggler. Then we were transported from Izmir to Çeşme, a small town about an hour away that is only kilometers away from the Greek island of Chios.

"We ate lunch and went to a grassy area on the shore where we were given life jackets and waited for the smugglers to blow up the rafts and insert wood panels for the passengers to sit. As we were waiting, Turkish police came and took all of the life jackets from the passengers, but left us alone. We went back to a wooded area near the shore and waited until 1 A.M. The smugglers told us we would make the journey to Chios but without life jackets. My family and the group of travelers with us refused and we were transported back to a hotel in Izmir. This was the first of four attempts that my family and I made before successfully crossing by boat to Greece. On the second night, we were transported back to the shore and we crammed 75 people in the raft. We were only in the water for 15 minutes and could feel ourselves slowly sinking when we were caught by the Turkish coast guard and told to turn back.

"On our third attempt, we went to the wooded area near the shore at 6 P.M. and waited all night for the Turkish coast guard to stop patrolling the area. By 8 A.M. it was clear that we had missed the opportunity and the smugglers decided to change the embarkation point. We traveled by car to another location that was 30 minutes away. This location was further from Chios, whereas from the previous location we were able to see the Greek island. At 8 P.M., the sea was too rough for us to make the journey so we slept outside waiting for the waves to subside. We finally set off the following night and after half an hour, the motor on our boat failed. The smugglers used pins that my sister and I had in our hair to fix the engine, and 30 minutes later we continued. My family was

Map 3: Sam and Sim's journey by boat to Greece



carrying a few personal items and the only documentation we had—our *tazkira* [national Afghan identity card] and documentation from a doctor noting that my younger brother had a psychological condition.

"It was March 3, 2016, and by midnight, we were close to the Chios shore. We were scared of drowning and we wanted to call out to the Greek coast guard when we were close, but traveling with us was one of the smugglers who was designated as the captain of the boat, and calling the coast guard would get him caught. Our raft got caught in a fishing net and at this point had holes and water filled the bottom—the documentation we were carrying was ruined. We finally reached Chios and cried out of happiness. Officials and volunteers helped us out of the boat. The smuggler/captain asked us to keep the officials distracted while he turned the raft around and returned to Turkey.

"We registered as asylum seekers in Chios which would allow us to stay in Greece legally for a year. Two days later we purchased ferry tickets for $40 per person and went to Athens, from where we planned to continue our journey into Europe to join my brother. But when we got to Athens, we learned that the borders had been closed to migrants just days earlier. That's when we set up camp in Piraeus.

"Now we do not have a plan—the plan all along was to wait for the borders to open and continue the journey. We were only in contact with my brother in Sweden twice, in Iran and in Turkey, and he didn't send any money. Often volunteers and organizations bring food or supplies and ask refugees whether they are Syrian or Afghan, and only give the food to Syrians. Even the cash programs here are only for Syrians. We have seen some friends who have left if they have money to hire smugglers to get them out of Greece. Many young men go to Patra to get to Italy, where they have hopes of getting into France or Germany. But we have no money left. Now that the Greeks are dismantling the Piraeus camp, we are getting ready to move to the camp in Oinofyta.

"We do not know what is next for us."

"First Syrians, Then You"

Afghanistan to Greece: With young children, an illiterate woman flees violence only to face discrimination in the camp.

Farzana is Hazara, an ethnic minority that is vulnerable to violence in Afghanistan. Many Hazaras are Ismaili or members of the Twelver sect, Shia groups derided by other Shias, in a country that is predominantly Sunni. Often, Hazaras have features that easily distinguish them from other Afghans, making them easy targets for abuse.

"My name is Farzana. I come from a village in central Afghanistan. I am Hazara, a group that is hated and persecuted. I have never written or read a word in my life. I lived in a village of 28 houses. Two years ago, the Taliban entered my village, making business arrangements with the landlords. The landlords grew rich but we did not. My husband had become addicted to the opium he harvested. He, his brother, and his mother would beat me when I could not care for all five of our children, milk our goats, and milk the landlord's goats. He was too drugged to do his share of the work, but not too drugged to hit. My husband would go to town once a month to buy tea and sugar, but I never did. I was never allowed to leave the village. Soon, he became deeply in debt to the landlord, because of his addiction. After a time, he stopped going to town. We had no money to buy tea or sugar.

"One night my husband announced that he would be receiving about $6,000 in afghanis, the currency of Afghanistan. I had no idea how much that was, just that it was a lot. I asked if it were a loan. He said no, he had gone to the landlord for a loan and the landlord had said, 'I will not lend you any more money, but I will pay you $6,000 to marry your daughter.' My husband agreed. Our daughter was eleven years old.

"It is custom in our village to prepare a wedding feast for the engaged couple. I had only one week to prepare. The feast would be at our house where the mullah would come and wed the landlord to my daughter. It is also custom for the wife to join the husband a week later in his home and be welcomed by a second feast. The night of the wedding came. I cooked all day. The mullah came and performed the vows. Later, I could hear my daughter screaming. She broke the door of the bedroom and ran into my arms and cried, 'Rescue me!' Before dawn I heard the landlord leave for his home. I gathered all five children, tucked as many leftovers in my clothes as

Map 4: Farzana's journey

I could, took the $6,000 from the pocket of my husband (he was in a stupor), and ran. We scrambled for hours through the wild. I found the road and eventually the town and a taxi. I told the driver to take me to my mother's town and he did.

"When my mother saw me, she said, 'I must hide you.' Your husband and the landlord will come looking for you here. She placed me with her cousin. Her cousin traded with businessmen in Pakistan and knew the roads well. The next day he drove the children and me to the border where we switched cars, then drove to Quetta. In Quetta I found work as a domestic cleaner. My patron was a professor and very kind, often buying gifts for my children. One day I bought a mobile phone, my first. My daughter showed me how to use it and I called my mother. My mother said, 'They are coming to kill you. You are not safe. You must go to Europe.'

"I did not know what Europe was nor where it was but I knew I had to leave. My cousin found an elder smuggler in Quetta. We paid a saraf there who took my money for safekeeping. As I would reach a waypoint along the route through Pakistan and Iran, with the help of my daughter, I would text the saraf a four-digit code and he would release a payment to the elder smuggler. Then a new local smuggler would show up and take us to the next waypoint. Across Iran we often traveled like this, passed from smuggler to smuggler. We traveled with other Afghan refugees. We would be jammed in a car, or in the back of a truck.

"Even though, the local smugglers were to be paid by the elder smuggler I was often harassed to pay more. So, I pretended to be married to one of the Afghan men and he would deter them from extorting more from me.

"Like this, step by step, we traversed from Iran to Turkey, over the icy Zagros mountains that took 20 hours to cross. Then we faced the chaos of the sea from Turkey to Greece—a sea where I saw death.

"In Turkey, with the help of my mother's uncle and by asking around, we left for the coast. We traveled 80 of us in a small raft. I felt certain we were going to die. We left at midnight and arrived at dawn on the island. A Greek man found us as he was walking along and alerted the police who came to us within an hour. We were completely soaked to the bone and for two weeks, did not have a change of clothes. We were told at the camp: first Syrians, then you. We stayed in a large tent, filled with angry men throwing stones, breaking glass. The only protection we had was the blankets we hung to form walls.

"Now in this camp [on the mainland] here in Greece I still have some of the money from my husband's sale of our daughter to the landlord. I am saving it to move north. My daughter, now 13, has reached Holland and I want to join her. I am able to manage on the monthly cash grant that I receive from an NGO. Many people in the camp complain that it is not enough but I am able to stretch the entire amount till the end of the month. I buy a slaughtered lamb and hang it in the hallway to dry. Every day I tear off pieces of it, wash it, and then simmer it in oil with tomatoes, onions, and herbs. My children eat meat, rice, and vegetables every day.

"As soon as our card is loaded with cash, I give the card to an Afghan friend who travels to a 'machine' in Athens. He knows the PIN numbers. He stands at the machine and asks a Greek passerby to help him. My friend says he does not understand the letters on the ATM screen, the direction of the language on the screen, or the language itself. He is better off asking a Greek. He then takes the money and the receipt and brings it to me. I can't read the receipts but I save them and ask my daughter to check the receipts against the money. We had only one problem, once. My Afghan friend went to the machine and it rejected the card. The NGO came to the camp to help us. They took out their computers and saw what had happened. They fixed the problem right there, giving me a new PIN. This was the only camp where I did not hear, 'First we help Syrians, then you.' I matter here.

"But, I do wonder what else the NGO could see when they look at their computers. They could see my name and how much money was in my account, but I wonder what else and who else can see what they see. I worry still that my husband will track me down."

Hercules

Eritrea to Greece: A man escapes Eritrea, survives kidnapping, makes it to Israel, is returned to eastern Africa, and tries again.

For about fifty minutes, Hercules and his friend Rose, both from Eritrea, shared their perspective of their country's military regime and its military system, which they described as inhumane. Conscripts study for three months in the SAWA Defense Training Center, a military academy, and then start military service, which should only last a year and a half but can last forever—unless you want to go to jail, they said. Once Eritreans complete the first year and a half of service, Hercules and Rose claimed, the government nominates some citizens to pursue traditional military service while others are selected to pursue secondary studies in a national college—the government closed the only "real" university in 2006, by which they mean non-military. The government also chooses what each citizen will study, and what position he or she will occupy within which department of which ministry. The government arranges everything for you: there is no rule of law, no freedom, only the government. Hercules and Rose described the propaganda, the spies, the lack of freedom of movement and expression, and their history. "If they catch you trying to cross to Ethiopia," Rose said, "they shoot you automatically. So everybody goes to Sudan." The following interview is from Hercules' perspective.

"Idid about one year of military service in Eritrea. Then, my friend and I wanted to study but the government had already decided our professions for all of us. They wanted to choose for us.

We were very angry. We realized we should leave the country, but we decided to study English, like the government asked, for the next two years. We thought that if we spoke English, things would be easier in our future, and it would give us time to collect money to leave. In Eritrea, the wages are very low; a doctor makes less than $15 a month. The regime doesn't want rich educated people because they are influential. It's a danger for them to have rich Eritreans in the country.

"In 2010, we started working in the fields for about three months, illegally. Whenever security came to the field we ran away—we each managed to make $350.

"A Sudanese nomad, a shepherd, would come to the fields occasionally so that his animals could drink. He had two passports, one Sudanese passport and one Eritrean passport, so he could cross easily from Kassala to Eritrea. We weren't sure he was a smuggler but we knew he would be able to smuggle us out from Eritrea, so we didn't hide from him. We would bring him coffee and tried to become friends with him. We didn't tell him we wanted to escape until very late because we were afraid he might have been a spy. When we told him we wanted to go to Sudan, he told us it would cost us $700. We said that we only had $350 each and he accepted to take us for that amount. We gave our money to a friend we trusted in Eritrea and asked him to give it to the smuggler once we made it to Sudan. We ran away the same night.

"After hours of walking with the smuggler we reached SAWA, where I had done my military service. Suddenly, a patrol started shooting at us. Their dogs were running after us—we never ran so fast. We were lucky we stayed together and didn't die.

Map 5: Hercules' journey.

"After about 20 hours of walking towards Sudan, the smuggler told us he didn't want to go to Sudan and that he would get in a truck to go back to Eritrea. We were yelling. We were very angry because he had promised to stay with us and to take us into Sudan. He said he would bring us water from a nearby village and would take only half of the money from our friend. We later found out he did not keep his promise; he had pressured our friend to give him all of the money.

"He came back with water after three hours and showed us the direction to reach the next town. We walked for hours. Our feet were hurting. We took many breaks. We arrived in the town at 3:30 A.M. We entered the first mosque we saw. The imam let us drink and shower from the pipeline. He made drawings on the sand to show us where the Eritrean restaurants were. There, we found Eritrean people who gave us clothes and took us to the UNHCR office.

"We told the UNCHR that if the Sudanese police caught us, they would take us back to Eritrea and we would be killed. We stayed in a temporary housing for vulnerable people for five days. But we had to be moved to a camp because we were 80 in the house. That camp was terrible. They didn't provide anything to us; there were no organizations helping us. I spent four months there.

"You couldn't leave the camp unless you had money because you are not allowed to leave. In 2011, the only way to leave was to pay $100 to a smuggler to cross the river that was surrounding the camp and reach Khartoum. I think it must cost $600 now. My friend managed to leave after three weeks because his older brother sent him money. He received the money on his phone and sent it to the smuggler on his phone too.

"I called some friends from Eritrea to ask them for money. They helped me." (Hercules received $200 through the *hawala*, an informal money transfer system popular throughout parts of Asia, the Middle East and Africa) "Then, I gave $100 to the same smuggler my friend had used. I was caught by the police for the first time and had to return to the camp. The police beat me with a stick in the police station. They brought me back to the camp after three hours.

"After two weeks I made a contact with someone who said he could give me a job occasionally. I worked on a farm, harvesting, in the morning for three days. The guy would take us from the camp to his land and back. We made $2.50 a day with two other Eritreans. We had to be careful not to get caught when leaving and coming back to the camp.

"On the third day, while we had just started work, the guy told us to take a break. He gave us food and water then he disappeared. He had made a secret arrangement with white Arabs from the Sinai in Egypt, 'Bedouins' that we call 'Rashaidas' in Tigrinya. They were two and they had guns. They kidnapped us and took us to Sinai in a car. Seven other people were thrown into the van. When we reached the Egyptian border, they put us in a bigger van—us three and other Eritreans who were in three different cars. In the big van, we were almost 56 Eritrean people. The back of the van had three to four shelves. There were more than ten Eritreans per shelf. We were squeezed. There was a layer of bricks on the top of the car so that from the outside, we couldn't be seen. When the car stopped, we could not breathe anymore. We would stop and get out of the van very rarely. They didn't feed us and gave us dirty water so we got sick. Some of us died from diarrhea. This lasted for a month, until we settled in Sinai, somewhere where there were no soldiers. We were slaves. I don't want to tell you everything.

"They made me call my family. They forced me to cry on the phone and to beg them for $3,500 so I wouldn't be killed. Some were asked for $30,000 or even $40,000. I was released after two and a half months." (Hercules' family made a ransom payment through the hawala system.)

"They released me and a few other Eritreans at the border with Israel. There were three fences, one to Egypt, one international border, and a third Israeli border. The Bedouins told us to climb the fences until [we reached] Israel. Egyptian police tried to shoot us. We managed to reach Israel by going under the international fence and climbing the Israeli one. Back in 2011, it was feasible but now it's very difficult. When we put our feet in Israel, we told the military we were civilians—they saw we were very weak, we had no clothes. They arrested us.

"They took us to a refugee camp" (This was likely a detention facility for African asylum seekers). "There were doctors there that took care of us. We were like skeletons. After three weeks, I felt much better and they sent me to Tel Aviv with a few other Eritreans. There, I obtained police papers that allowed me to stay in Israel for two months—this visa had to be renewed every two months. I tried to get asylum but they told me this was a Jewish state.

"I stayed in Israel for four years. I worked in restaurants and then at a swimming pool as a cleaner. My boss would take me to renew my papers every two months. I learned Hebrew there. I was working 15 hours a day, and made 2,600 shekels per month [about $700]. I was sharing an apartment with four other Eritreans.

"But at the end of 2015, the Israeli government said they did not want Eritrean and Sudanese refugees to stay in the streets in Israel. I got an appointment with Asylum Services to get into the concentration camp in November. They told me that I had two months to choose between three options: to be voluntarily returned to Eritrea and to receive $3,500, to stay in a concentration camp forever, or to be deported to Rwanda with $3,500. I chose Rwanda. I gave all the money I had collected to my Eritrean friends so they

"Before they deported me, the Israeli authorities told me I had the right to work in Rwanda. In Rwanda we were placed in a hotel that the Israeli government paid for, and stayed there for three nights. Then we were given the $3,500 in cash." (Hercules was hiding his money in holes in his jeans, under his belt.) "And the Israeli police took our papers so we would not resell them.

"The first night in the hotel, a smuggler known by Rwandan authorities approached us. 'It's governmental work. The governments of Rwanda and Israel are doing business with us and the smugglers,' he said. He told us that if we gave him $250, he would take us to Uganda. He said it was much easier for us to work there. I said yes because I already thought that Uganda would be better for us than Rwanda.

"When we reached the border in Rwanda with nine other Eritreans, the smuggler took us to a small bridge and we crossed and arrived in Uganda together. The smuggler then took us to Kampala. Once there the smuggler asked us for $300 to take us to a hotel in which we could stay for a week. I had no friends nor family in Uganda so I said okay.

"The owner of the hotel, who was Eritrean, said I should go to Sudan because Rwanda and Uganda were difficult countries for Eritreans. I knew nothing about these countries so I wanted to go to Sudan. I had no more papers and needed a smuggler. The owner of the hotel introduced me to a smuggler who asked for $700. I agreed to pay and said I would give him the money once in South Sudan. He trusted me because it is apparently common for Eritreans to reach Sudan through South Sudan. The smuggler told me that the two other Eritreans wanted to go to South Sudan and that we would travel together. Two days later, we met in the hotel and left with the car.

"Before we reached the border, policemen in Uganda caught us and asked for $300 from each of us to let us cross. I had heard of other people who had had to give $1,500. The smugglers encouraged us to obey.

"We continued and reached the border with South Sudan. Our smuggler suddenly told us he had finished his mission. He called another South Sudanese smuggler and asked him to take us from the bridge to South Sudan. We had to give him $700.

"Once in South Sudan, three other smugglers on motorbikes came to us and told us to go on the motorbikes with them. They said that we could only avoid the patrol and police if we went through the jungle with them. They asked for another $400. However, we did not reach the capital on the motorbikes. We had to stop and get in a minibus." (This was included in the $400.) "The drivers warned us there was a checkpoint and said we had to pay them more, we gave them $100. Then, the police caught us and asked us for $500. We were forced to give it to them. All of our money was almost gone.

"Once in the capital, the smugglers showed us a hotel full of Eritreans. We moved there. Eritreans helped us find a smuggler to reach Sudan. With $900 dollars, I got a fake document valid for six months that allowed me to fly from Juba to a small village at the north of South Sudan. From there I was picked up by a Land Cruiser—there were goats, oil bottles, etcetera, in the truck. The whole trip lasted eight or nine days until I reached Khartoum.

"In Khartoum, I had to pay $30 to get a mandatory identity card. This was a valid document. But any time police arrest me in the street, they would take me to an "Arabi' [a detention center] and ask me for money to let me out. Sometimes it could go up to $200. Whenever, I saw the police I had to run away. I stopped going out. I was very careful always. I stayed in my home and did not go out for nine and a half months. I got my Eritrean friends to send me more of my money from Israel [via hawala] because I was not feeling safe and couldn't work. The government was telling the Sudanese police: 'You can take your salary off Eritreans.'

"In October 2016, I decided to go to Turkey. I found a smuggler who could make me a visa for $7,350 [for every 100 I have to pay a 5-euro charge]. My Eritrean friends in Israel paid one of the agent's smugglers in Israel."

"Worth the 500-Mile Walk"

Syria to Turkey: Straying hundreds of miles north, in no hurry to face the consequences of his escape, a young Syrian professional takes a circuitous route to reach Turkey.

In documenting this man's story, we use in quotes "the country north of Turkey" to allude to the land through which he walked 500 miles without pinpointing the country. He never referred to it as the "country north of Turkey," always to the actual country.

We have switched some of his paragraphs to maintain the flow of his journey from Syria to Lebanon to "the country north of Turkey," where he sets off on a 500-mile walk through the wilds, then finally travels to Turkey where he now has a job.

"I worked for a UN agency in Syria. It was a well-paid position. I spent days at the office working, and at night I spent time with close friends. At 1 a.m. I would go home and then rise and repeat the next morning.

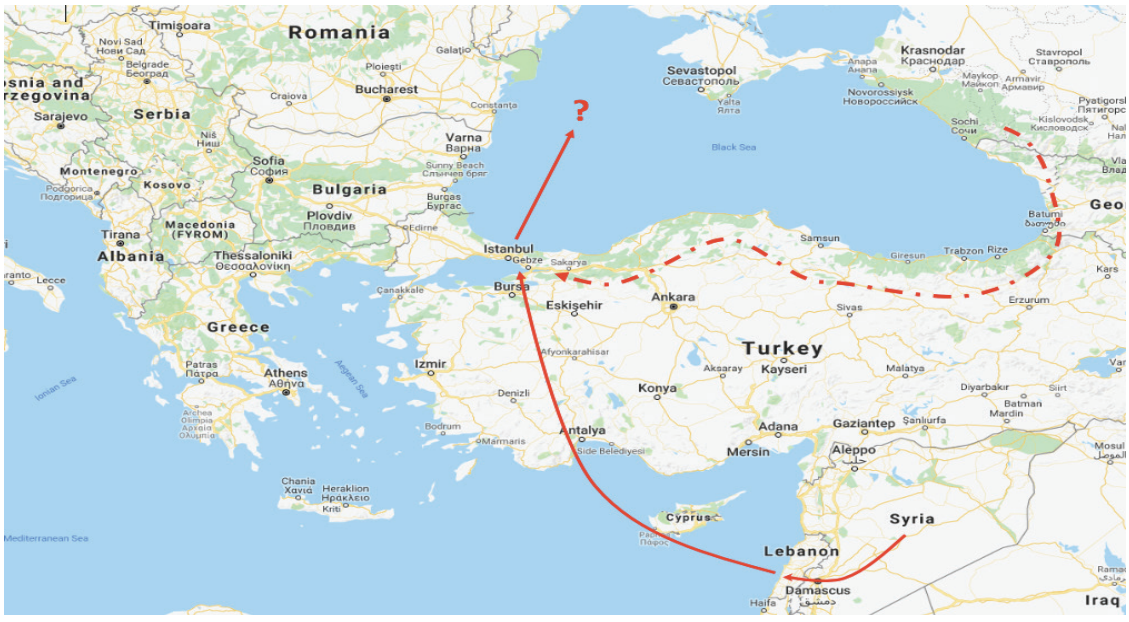
"After I graduated from university, I was looking for a job. There was a vacancy in a UN program. I interviewed for it, then realized they wanted someone with more technical knowledge, so I explained that I lacked the qualities they were looking for. I think they admired my honesty and so they offered me another position. My role was an assistant for the program. Then I had my finger in all the pies, so I moved into database management and coordinating field research.

"I left Syria in late 2012 when my job ended after the start of the uprising. I was arrested twice for participating in the protests. The organization laid some of us off, as my job required me to travel between cities and they could not guarantee our security. I faced trouble at checkpoints, so decided to travel. Turkey wasn't my destination, I decided to try a northern country. I wanted to go to a university there. I studied the language."

He explained that he traveled from Syria to Beirut and then continued: "I flew from Beirut to Istanbul, then on to 'the country north-of Turkey' that I wanted to explore. I kept my money on me the whole time I traveled. I brought winter clothes, but didn't end up needing those because the best way to fight cold is by using layers. I also brought my ID, certificates, passport military service book.

"When in the 'country north of Turkey,' I worked in a bakery when I ran out of money. My boss paid us daily wages. I got bored, and had to leave. So I used my remaining money to buy a tent and a hiking backpack." He went on to explain that there was a

Map 6: The journey from Syria to Turkey



particular city he wanted to visit and so set off on a 500-mile journey.

"Working on the farms in the towns wasn't easy. There were times when I would not find a job for a few weeks. Then I would find one, and use the money to buy bread and mayonnaise. There was one incident when I could not find work for four weeks. I hunted for food with a Swiss army knife. All my money came and went on the trip, I started the trip broke and earned enough money for each day.

"In one place, I was paid cash for day labor and spent that money on a daily basis. I spent as I earned to get some food. I had been able to save money working as a bouncer. I saved $500. I used that to buy the ticket to Istanbul, some $180. To get the ticket, I had met an American, part of a missionary group. He helped me buy the ticket online using his credit card. I paid him in cash. We are still friends on Facebook. He 'liked' my hiking experience. We were friends.

"I remember when I left Syria, I had $1,800 on me. This was a lot of money for me. It was my savings from the work I was doing. The possibility of losing it was too much. If I'd known how to wire it to a safe account and pick it up there, I would have, but didn't know how to do that. Even when I was in one place, it was hard for me as a foreigner to open a bank account with a temporary residency permit. By the time I had been there long enough, the money was gone.

"When I crossed to Turkey, the authorities stamped my passport and let me in. I slept on a bench in front of the Blue Mosque for three weeks, looking for an apartment I could afford. I found a room for 150 Turkish lira (about $30) per month, with only a mattress and a chair. On the bench, I was completely ignorant. I blocked out the existence of other Syrians. I didn't want to introduce myself to anyone else because I didn't trust them. I kept my cash with me on the bench, in my socks.

"I enjoyed the apartment with this old guy. He confused English and Russian, combining them to talk to me. I started looking for a job because my $300 was running out. I ate one meal a day, and sometimes I even forgot to eat because I got used to low food consumption. I started posting on Craigslist to teach Arabic, English, Russian to try to make some money. I asked if market shops were hiring. I found Craigslist through looking for vacancies on Google. I saw that you could post there that you were looking for a job. I had a laptop on me. The apartment had Internet.

"I had bought a smart phone in 'the country north of Turkey'" with a foreign SIM. I carried it to Turkey and tried to use the maps function but it didn't have service. Then I got a Turkish SIM card, and discovered that the phone was locked and I had to register it in Turkey. I found out online that some shops can hack a phone for a small fee.

"For phases where I didn't have Internet, there was no way to get in touch with anyone. Throughout my journey, walking between towns, for weeks I wouldn't have any contact with people I knew. I was out of units to call and out of coverage.

"I kept my old foreign number to use on Viber (a cellphone-based communication system that includes voice and text) until 2014. At that point, I was in a better position financially in Turkey, and I sent everyone a message and switched to my Turkish number on Viber. I used Viber to keep in touch with family in Syria, Europe, and Russia. Later on, I started using Skype (a communication technology) instead.

"To send money inside Turkey to people with bank accounts, like my Turkish landlord, I transfer my rent through the bank. It's straightforward and easy. But I cannot make any foreign currency transfers. I've been warned against it, told to inform the bank beforehand.

"I sent money to my family in Syria, but there is no way I could do it through an official system. Western Union can be used, but the Syrian government will give them (my family) the money in Syrian lira for a bad rate. They will lose a huge amount of money. The way we do it, the way most Syrians do it, is I give the money to someone here, they call their relative or coworker in Syria and that guy gives my family the same amount of money there. Confirmation is on the phone in the same moment.

"In my experience, it is a man who does the transfer in Syria. In my family, my father goes to pick it up and my sister goes with him as an extra pair of eyes.

"Advantages of unofficial transfer systems are that there is no fee and you can transfer US dollars. The disadvantage of the system is that it is very volatile.

If the person you're working with is not trust worthy, you can lose the money. There is no guarantee; there are no signed papers. This is because it's an unofficial system. People only use it when they've gotten very positive feedback from a trusted source.

"In my situation, my cousin gave me their information [about the person who helps me do transfers here]. I considered it for two months and decided to try it once with a small amount. It instantly went through. I handed him the cash. He called his guy. My dad was there. I talked with him and he said he received the money right then and there.

"I'm doing well financially now. I can send my family a good sum of money each month if I want to. But they resist my doing this because they want me to use it myself. I send them a sum every few months, whatever I feel is suitable. They are in an OK situation in Syria; they are not in financial need. The money I send they are saving for emergencies.

"I've never heard of issues with my dad traveling to get the money. I prefer not to send a large amount because it could be dangerous for my dad to carry it back and forth. Most Syrian families I know tend to save money at home, within the household, not in banks, so they prefer to carry smaller or medium sums. The trip is not a huge deal for my father; he's healthy, so it's not an issue.

"No major challenges come to mind about my finances here, just the Turkish banking system that prevents Syrians from transferring foreign currencies to other countries. I have a cousin in Saudi and I cannot send him money from here. The other issue is the fact that the debit cards issued to us cannot be used online. I cannot do online transactions to buy books online. I do not have PayPal because it's no longer legal in Turkey. When I had PayPal, I only used it to buy things.

"Along the way there were a few people who helped me. There was the guy who let me use his credit card to buy my airfare. Some truck drivers allowed me to ride with them for a few days.

"Hope? I had a very unexpected experience as I traveled. One day I found an isolated town on the coast in the countryside. There, I realized they are from my tribe. They hosted me there for two days. They considered me as one of the descendants of the people who fought in their wars 200 years ago. I felt like it was worth the 500-mile walk."

"Tatana Zahar"—the Blue Suit

West Africa to Greece via Iran: Two football players get their big chance, are detained through no fault of their own, and escape the harrowing ordeal.

Jean and Jerome came together to Greece. Though their country of origin is in West Africa, they never met in their home country. They met halfway, in Iran. While there are many West Africans in Greece, we are withholding their specific country of origin. We begin with Jean's interview.

"Jean: I arrived here in September of 2016. I had big problems back home. Family problems. My mother died when I was a very young. My dad got married again and then he died. My stepmother wanted to kill me. She killed my twin sister. My sister got breast surgery and my stepmother gave her poison instead of medicine after her surgery."

Jean showed me pictures of his sister after her surgery. She is almost naked. She does look exactly like him.

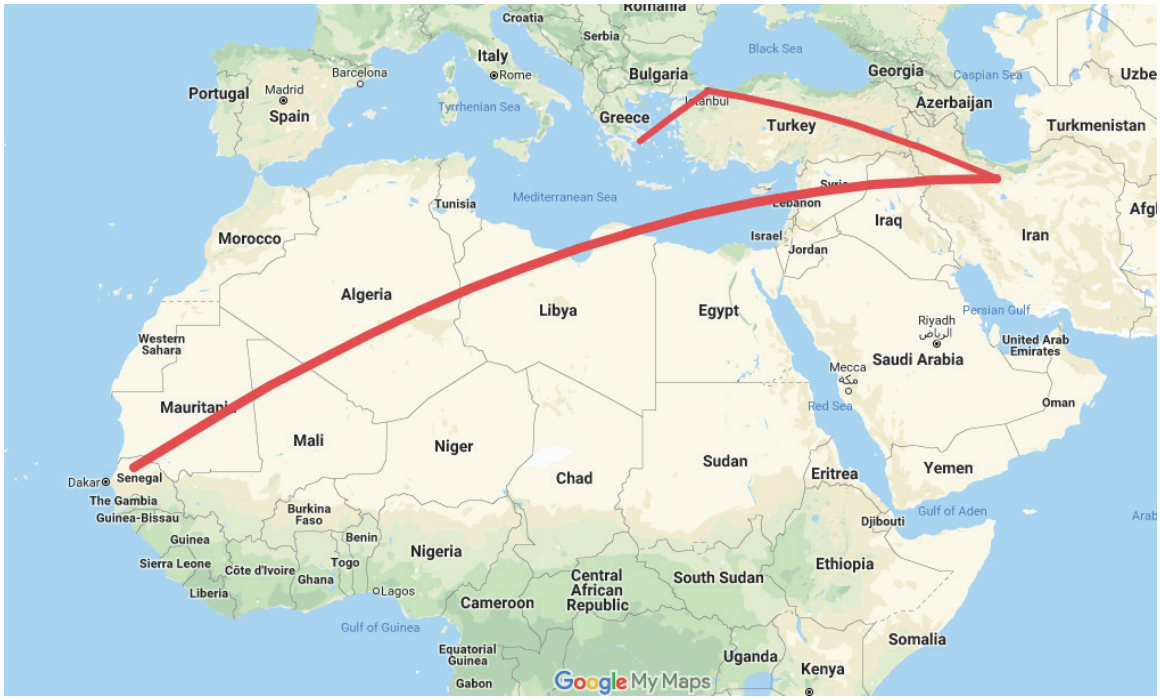
"My stepmother accused me and took me to the police—she had friends there. And they put me in jail. She did all this because she wanted all of my father's money. I stayed in jail for a month and a half and then I called a friend to bail me out. It's not my friend who paid. It was an adult whom I didn't know. When I got out of jail, it was the first time I saw him [the adult]. He told me I should leave the country. He paid for everything. He gave me a passport and a two-months visa. He arranged my whole trip to Iran. He gave me some money to stay in a hotel. He said I could play football there and have a good life.

"When I arrived in Tehran, I looked for football clubs. I found a Turkish man who helped me play for an Iranian team and paid for a hotel room for me. That's where Jerome and I met. We became good friends because we were the only ones from our country of origin."

I asked Jerome to tell me about what happened that led him to meet Jean in Iran. I told them that once I knew Jerome's past, they could then tell me together how they made it to Greece, as they had done the trip together.

Jerome: "I didn't have a mother either and in 2008 my father died during the coup because he was a policeman. Militias killed him and then they threatened the rest of our family. I have many brothers but I don't know where they are now. We lost contact be-

Map 7: Jean and Jerome's journey.



cause each of us had to flee. One of them is maybe in Tunisia, but I'm not sure. I think one of my sisters is in Germany.

"We all tried to leave very quickly because we weren't safe without our father protecting us. My oldest sister took care of dividing the inheritance. We had a lot of cash in the house. My sister gave €3,500–4,000 (about $4,000 - $4,500) to each one of us depending on our age.

"Between 2011 and 2016, I was always traveling between Mali and Senegal with my national identity card. I was making money by playing football here and there and winning games—about 1 million CFA [about $1,600] per game every month. I was saving up to go to Europe.

"I was told that from Iran I could easily go to Europe. A friend helped me get a passport and tourist visa for €2,500. I had to pay him €1,200 extra for my flight ticket. When I arrived in Iran, I met a Turkish man who said he would help me play football for the Iranian team. I told him I wasn't in Iran to play football and that I wanted to leave. He said that if I played for the team, I would be able to get legal papers in Iran and go with them to Europe easily. I said okay. And he asked me for €1,700 to arrange for the hotel and bus. I gave him the money. All my money I stored in a little pannier that I always kept with me except to play football."

On his phone, Jerome showed me pictures and videos of him playing with Jean, other Africans, and Iranians. "The Turkish man asked for our passports to register us at the immigration center and start the process for us to get legal papers—that's what he said. We did. We all trusted him. All was going well.

"After a month the Turkish man suddenly told us we had to change hotels. We learned later that the he hadn't paid the hotel and owed the owner $15,000. He had been keeping all of the money we gave him at the beginning. We got in a van and he took us to a village called Karaj. The hotel where we were living in was very bad and we hated living there. Tensions were rising.

"During the weekend, the neighbors called the cops and said there were illegal migrants in the hotel. The cops came and asked for our passports. We told them to speak to our Turkish coach as he had them all. They called him. The Iranian police put us in a van."

Jean showed a video of them in the van and of the Iranian "white men" who arrested them.

Jean: "They met the Turkish man and saw our passports. But they also saw that our visas had expired. They didn't give us back our passports. They took us to a small sort of detention center. We stayed there for 45 days. They took our clothes and forced us to wear '*tatana zaha* ['blue suit' in Farsi]. They treated us very badly, like slaves. It was terrible. We became very close to a man from Cameroon. We became very good friends." Jerome called him "*mon vieux*" or "my old man" in French, an affectionate nickname for French Africans.

"He had given us the number of another West African man that owed him a lot of money he said, in case we left the jail and wanted to go to Turkey. The Iranians asked us for money to let us out. But, after two months, they saw we had no money and they got us out anyway. They threw us at the border between Turkey and Iran. We were with other Africans, Syrians, and Afghans. We were 11. They left us there at the border without anything. It was snowing. We walked for ten days. A guy from Tanzania died of the cold."

Jean showed me videos of Jerome and him walking through the snowy mountains towards Turkey.v"It was so cold, so long, so difficult." He showed me his cut and bruised feet.

Jerome: "When we reached a small village in Turkey. We begged villagers to take us in. They asked for money but they saw we had nothing and pitied us. Once we had rested a little, we called the Senegalese smuggler that our Old Man from Cameroon told us to call if we needed to get to Istanbul. He arranged for our trip to Istanbul and took us into his house there. He introduced us to a Turkish man there who employed us to work '*kabutchabu*' [construction work in Turkish] from 8 A.M. to 4 P.M. every day. After three weeks we had enough money to go to Greece.

The Man in the Black Dress

Ethiopia to Greece: An Ethiopian protester walks, motors, and flies his way to Turkey, then, heckled and beaten, moves on to Greece.

A well-to-do Ethiopian taxi driver, Salah, finds that he is a political target. He stays in hiding with family and friends until he believes he is putting them in grave danger. His sister helps him organize his crossing to Sudan on foot under the cover of darkness. His Ethiopian smuggler then transfers him to a local passer who ferries him to Khartoum. After obtaining a fake passport and visa, he flies to Turkey where a local smuggler—the man in the black dress—takes him in and encourages him to leave Turkey for Greece. He likes and trusts the smuggler and decides to take his advice. Throughout the journey Salah's sister has been coordinating with smugglers, then paying them when Salah has successfully completed each leg.

"Iam from the capital of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa," Salah said. "It means 'new flower.' I was a taxi driver for four years there and my family and I are from there. I know the capital well. I left my country in June 2016 and arrived in Turkey in July 2016. It was very quick. I left in a hurry and didn't have time to plan much."

He showed me a nasty scar—he had been shot slightly below his chest on the left side and we could very clearly see the bullet's trace.

"I spent three months in the hospital," he said. "I was a part of the opposition party 'Ginbot Sabat.' We were in an anti-government demonstration and they shot me and other people. Too many people were injured, too many people died. Demonstrations are still happening and there is still violence.

"Three months in a hospital bed. As soon as I went back home, the government started looking for me to put me in prison. They were looking for me every day, to intimidate. I lived with my parents and every day the police were coming to find us, so we had to move from one friend's house to another. In the end, I told my parents I should be on my own because they were very tired.

"I went to the bank, withdrew all my money and asked my sister to keep it. I had money from my taxi job—about 300,000 Birr [$12,000] in my bank account. I was making good money, was working full time.

"I wanted to go to Sudan. I called my friend who lives in Germany and he gave me the phone number of a smuggler and I contacted him. There were two smugglers, actually, one from Sudan and one from Ethiopia, but they communicated with each other. The first smuggler, a go between, was very afraid because the work is illegal.

"We were communicating discretely for two weeks—we talked on the phone three times. I was always the one calling him. I told him this is an emergency—that's why I want to meet with you. The smuggler was afraid the first time so a friend of his called me and said that he would meet me that same night. I went where we were supposed to meet, but the smuggler did not show up. After three days, I called him. Same thing happens. And finally, the third time it worked; he showed up. I had sent a picture of my face so he recognized me. I met the real smuggler after two weeks. We discussed the travel—I told him: 'I have money and everything. Whenever I can leave, I'm ready.' The smuggler said okay. He asked for $1,200 to go to Sudan to which I responded: 'Okay, anywhere but Ethiopia.'

Map 8: Salah's journey.

"After three days the smuggler gave me an appointment near the stadium. He had arranged for me to leave with a car. I had an agreement with the smuggler that once I arrived in Sudan my sister would give him the money. I had told my sister. In the car, there were two other Ethiopian men. They had the same political issues.

"Someone working for the smuggler drove us to Metama (near the border of Sudan). The driver told us to get off and he left us in a small house there. He told us to wait for a Sudanese man. When the Sudanese smuggler came, we crossed the border at night with him by foot. We walked for four or five hours. Then we took a car to Khartoum.

"Along the way, the smugglers communicated through so many different channels. We don't know who the local passer is, meaning the person who actually shepherds us from point A to point B, beforehand.

"The driver didn't leave us for a second until we arrived in Metama. But I liked the smuggler [local passer]. He was okay.

"The Sudanese smuggler called the Ethiopian smuggler when we arrived. Then the Sudanese smuggler gave me a phone to call my sister so she would pay him. I think she met one of them in person but I'm not sure who or how she paid. In Khartoum I had to stay in the smuggler's house for ten days without going out. I heard an Ethiopian had been deported from Sudan to Ethiopia. I tried to collect information and when I realized it was too dangerous to stay there, I told the smuggler I wanted to leave.

"I said I wanted to travel to another country, farther away. I wanted to go to Turkey and stay there. The Sudanese smuggler put me in contact with a Turkish smuggler. I didn't speak with the Turkish smuggler, just with the Sudanese. He asked for $2,000.

"I stayed in the same house for four more days. And then the smuggler gave me a fake passport with a visa to Turkey." (He didn't know what type of visa it was.) "To go to the airport, I had to go to a square in Khartoum and look for a man in a white dress. I was told the Turkish smuggler in Istanbul would be wearing a black one. I took a direct flight to Istanbul. And didn't have any problem with security.

"I exited the airport and found the man in a black dress and went with him to the car. A Somalian woman was inside. She spoke only English, not a lot of Arabic. Same process: I call my sister and she pays. We did not speak a lot so as to not put her in danger.

"The Turkish smuggler driving took me to another smuggler's house in Istanbul in Aksarai area. There were eight or ten other people, including three women. I stayed there for ten days, but I left the house on the second day to go to church. On my way back, Turkish men hurled insults at me, then beat me. They told me not to come back to the church."

Salah showed me the marks they did to him on his cross tattoo on his arm.

"When I was back in the smuggler's house, I told the story to the smuggler. He advised: 'This country is not good for you. If you have money, you must leave.' I still had cash but I hadn't told the smugglers—I had $1,500 that I was hiding in my socks. So at that point I had to tell him I had money. I said I only had $1,100 so I could keep $400 at least. He said, 'OK.' I had to pay $1,100. I gave all the money to the smuggler right away because I trusted him. We had a good relationship. Even if I didn't trust him specifically, I trusted the system. If you trust one of them, you trust the whole network.

"In the evening a small van came in front of the smuggler's house in Istanbul. On our way we stopped at different houses to take on other people. This journey lasted six hours. I didn't know where I was going. I arrived and saw we were on the coast. There was a boat and about sixty other people from different countries. It was night. I had a bag with me. Things went smoothly. Halfway from Lesvos, the protector boat, the UK ship, came to take us here.

"Since then I cut all contact, even with my sister. I don't want to put her in danger. Money is not too important here. I have everything: a place to stay, food, a bit of money. If I really need money, I will ask my family."

"A Shot of Whiskey"

Afghanistan to Greece: A plucky, determined family transforms its identity to reach Germany, while banking on assets back home.

Interview with Rami (42) and Z (43), husband and wife, Uzbeks from Afghanistan. Rami was planning to send two or three family members at a time to Germany. They have children—five in the camp with them—under 18 years of age. One is still in Kabul with her husband. Rami's older brother has been in Holland for the past twenty years. Z's younger brother lives in Germany.

"We owned one shop and three houses in northern Afghanistan. We sold one house for about $100,000 to get money for our journey—didn't have to borrow; the second house is now being rented for $300 a month.

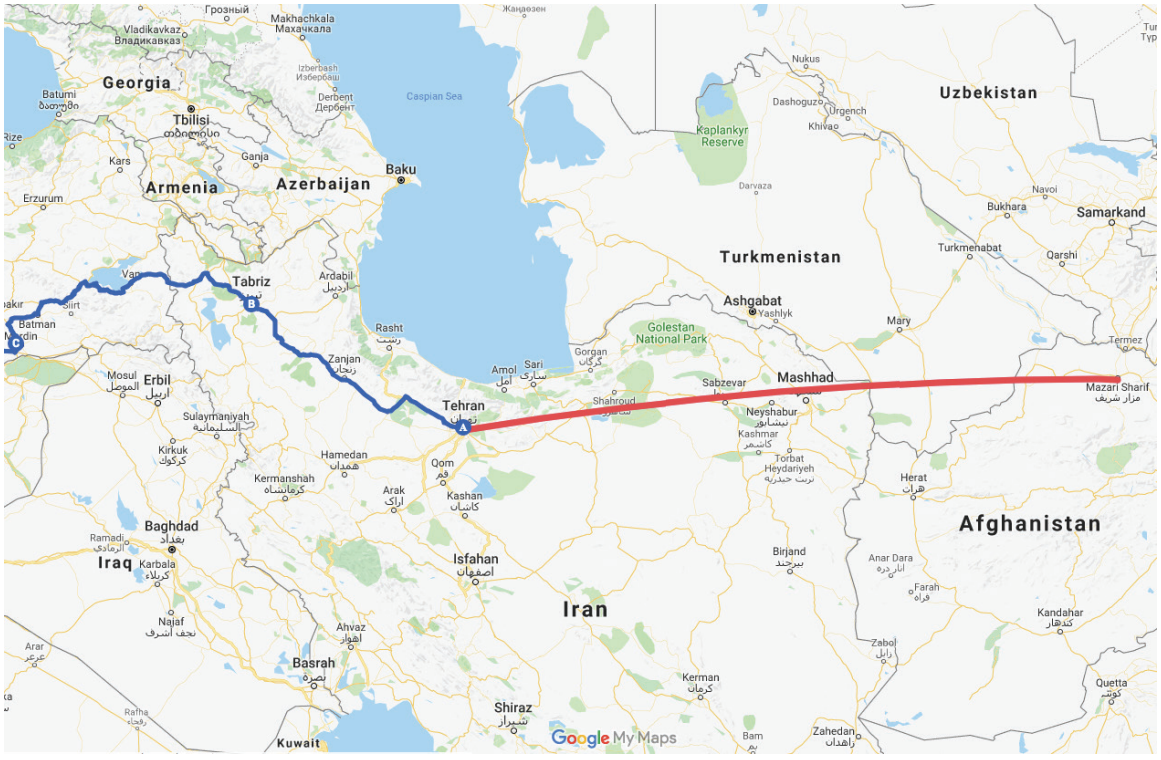
"We decided to leave due to insecurity reasons and safety of our children. We were threatened by the Taliban. They said our sons would be abducted and released for ransom because they were wealthy. We left Afghanistan six months ago through the route suggested by a smuggler we found in Mazar-e-Sharif.

"The smuggler suggests a route depending on how much money we were willing to spend. First, I wanted to go to Turkey on my own [and send for my family later] and tried to get Turkish visas for everyone in my family. Initially, I had paid $5,000 for one Turkish visa and waited for two months until it was rejected. It is very difficult to get a visa to Turkey legally.

"After failing attempt to get Turkish visas, I paid $1,000 to a smuggler for each Iranian visa totaling $7,000 for seven family members [$1,000 per member]—that included the visa fee and their flights to Tehran.

"We flew to Tehran from Mazar-e-Sharif. In Tehran, we were picked up from the airport in a car by another smuggler and were directly taken to the Turkish border. The smugglers transferred us to a van with others (20 people in total) from the Iranian border at night and drove very fast. First, we were brought to Tabriz and from there to the border town in Turkey. From there we got in an ambulance and were transferred to a town called Mardin in Turkey where we stayed overnight.

Map 9: Rami and Z's journey from Afghanistan to Iran.



Map 10: Rami and Z's journey from Iran to Greece

"In Mardin, we gave cash to the smuggler to bring us food and tea (I loved my stomach and needed to feed it with meat) and spent the night at a safe house. We washed up and rinsed our dirty and muddy clothes and prepared to depart the next day. I bought a sim card for 50 Turkish liras and used my cell phone brought from Afghanistan.

"The next day I was asked for the name of the smuggler who sent them and we were split up into different groups and cars which were assigned by smugglers' names. From the border town, it took about 22 hours to get to Istanbul by car—with stops for food and prayers on the way. We made a stop in a town called Gumruk on the way to Istanbul.

"Once we reached Istanbul, we released payment to the smuggler using a saraf in Kabul. In Istanbul we stayed for a week at a house found by a smuggler. There, we exchanged US dollars to Turkish liras and used the money, it mainly for food.

"From Istanbul we took the Bandirma-Yenikapi ferry to Bandirma." (They bought their own tickets for the ferry.) "And from there we ok a taxi in the evening to Izmir. The next day we arrived to a town called Çeşme.

"Once we reached Çeşme, we walked for about two hours and when we reached the shore, we could see the Greek island from there. The smuggler brought us to the boat. The boat was new. I inserted the wood panels [into the inflatable raft] myself with the help of four other people and got to inspect the boat beforehand.

"I took a shot of whiskey and didn't care if I died, or no . . . and drank to have some calmness on the boat. I bought life jackets for each family member for 100 lira ($18) each. There were about 45 other people in the boat and we were fortunate that our boat did not deflate or have a hole. Nobody except for me and my youngest son could swim.

"We left at night. I had a flashlight and kept flashing it so that others would notice our boat. Once we reached the territory, the Greek police saw us. They came to the rescue and transferred everyone from our boat to a ship.

"We had placed money with a saraf (*sarofee* in Dari) and the saraf released payment to the smugglers once we had reached each of our destinations. The smuggler has people in each location who transfer refugees along pre-determined routes. The smuggler

doesn't get paid if anyone is deported—only if the destination is reached.

"The saraf (or sarofee) is usually in a '*do'kon*' [store or shop].

"In Greece, we received blankets, food and shelter. We spent about $7,000 in total for all family members from Mazar-e-Sharif to Tehran and another $7,000 from Tehran to Athens."

Pointing to a safe in their tent, he said, "Here is my bank where we keep our valuables (about €5,000). Thankfully, we have been safe and didn't experience any theft. I wrapped $2,000 around the waist of my two children in order to transfer the cash as we cross the sea.

I asked, "In case you needed more money, how could it be transferred from Afghanistan?"

He replied, "I have a bank account at Afghanistan International Bank (Baynalminal) and debit card which I can use anywhere outside Afghanistan to withdraw money with my passport.

"We arrived in Greece in spring of 2016. We didn't stay on the island for more than a couple of days and bought tickets to Athens. My wife offered to show our paperwork, which has the arrival stamp on it with the date. We spent one week at a hotel in Athens (€50 per night) initially before going to the camp."

It was heartwarming to see this family's excitement after meeting me, a fellow Uzbek. (Even though I am not from Afghanistan they all admired and had very positive impressions of Uzbekistan—Rami shared his experiences time spent in Uzbekistan. One of his sisters lived in Tashkent for many years before moving to London.) I was showered with their hospitality and was even invited to a homemade dinner they had prepared on my last day at the camp. I was also touched when Z gave me a surprise gift and insisted I take it after I kindly kept saying no. It was a pair of new shiny pink shoes. She made me try them on, assuring that they fit me perfectly even though they were a size small. I was so touched. I assume they had bought the shoes as an extra pair in preparation of their 15-year-old daughter's departure to Europe (I will call her P). P had shaved her very hairy arms in preparation for her flight to Geneva, which she was soon to take along with her younger brother. Rami had paid a smuggler about € 3,000 for P and her brother to have forged passports with pictures that looked almost exactly like them. P said their father took them shopping for modern clothing so that they could blend in in the crowd at the airport—the father confirmed and joked about buying them clothes that make them look just like Europeans (knee high skirts or pants, hair down, nail polish, etcetera).

"My Sister Is My Banker"

Syria to Turkey via Lebanon and Egypt: A family man zig-zags across borders, income streams, kinship ties, banks, and modes of money transfer.

A Syrian couple with an in-law and two toddlers in tow manage to travel to Egypt via Lebanon before finally arriving in Turkey where they now live. To manage economically they patch together a jigsaw of livelihoods and modes of payment, which shifted as they moved from country to country.

"Protests in my area of Syria started late, about a month after they started in Damascus. The security situation wasn't very risky until late 2011, early 2012.

"That's when there started to be checkpoints around town. We were still able to move in and out of town. I had to move in and out every day, almost everyone did, because our jobs were downtown in the city.

"In the middle of 2012, the security situation deteriorated, with more FSA presence in town and even a new, make-shift courthouse with a prison inside. Staying felt risky. We had no choice but to move. Our city had become too expensive. Regime security forces broke in on a monthly basis to inspect every room in every house. They would execute some people to scare people off. They killed one neighbor, a shop owner, and arrested another. It was really scary. In July and August 2012, there were two or three attempts to destroy regime checkpoints in the area, in an effort to invade. We would call each other to figure out how to leave. I moved to my brother-in-law's house for a few days at a time, then we would return. The last time, almost everyone left. We were ten people in the car. My sister asked if anyone was left. I said, 'We've all left except for our father.' He was dead, so we couldn't bring him.

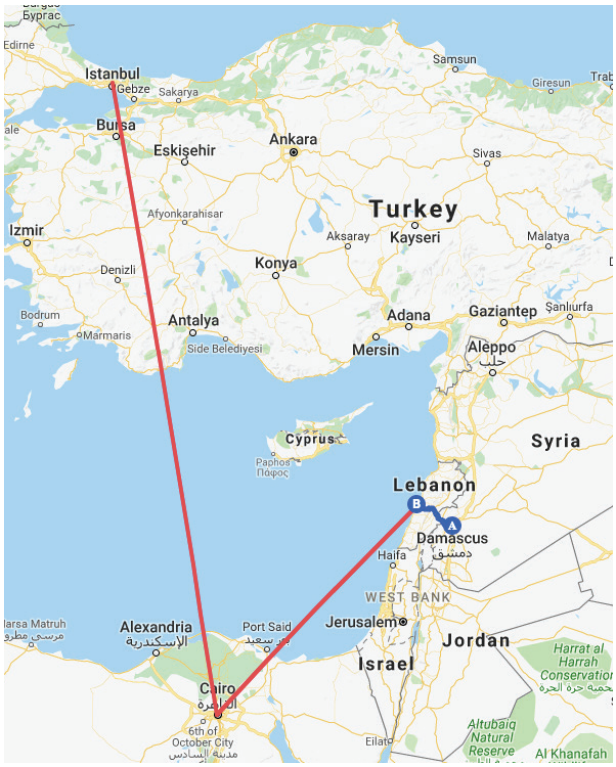
"Before our final departure, it was hard to move in and out through checkpoints so I stopped working. A friend offered me a job as an interpreter. His clients were in the Gulf. I worked for him for a while. I was paid $500–600 per month which was enough then. The client paid my friend. My friend paid me by hawala, similar to Western Union. He would send money in my brother's name. Because I didn't leave the neighborhood, my brother would pick up the money in Damascus and send it to me. There were no challenges with the transfer.

"My friend got arrested in my hometown. He was released a few hours later and his brother and father were arrested and beaten badly. My friend told me that the work would need to stop. He was too frustrated and angry to stay in the country. He wanted to move to Jordan.

"So I was out of work. I don't remember what I had saved, but it was not enough. I got some money from my family. My father had had a shop before he died and he had sold it, so we had divided that money between us.

"I decided to leave my town, knowing that I could not support my family by working in Damascus, so I went to Egypt. I asked my friends, my sister, my cousin in the Gulf for money. They gave me some that I could use for tickets to get to Egypt and rent until I could get a job. I lived in a neighborhood of Cairo. My friend had rented an apartment. It was awful, but it was ready.

Map 11: The family's journey.



"To get there, we (me, wife, twin toddlers) went by car to Lebanon, then flew to Cairo. My cousin bought the tickets online for me. He also sent $500 to me in Egypt through Western Union. My friend in the Gulf did the same. My sister gave me cash. Another friend gave me $250 in cash. A friend in a difficult situation offered to give me $200, in cash. His brother carried them to my brother who gave them to me before I left. I had about $3,000 on us. My wife hid the money in her clothes. I had some daily money in my pocket.

"We weren't very concerned about carrying the cash with us; they didn't inspect women then. It wasn't a huge amount, anyways; I mean, we would have been on the street if we lost it, but it wasn't a fortune.

"In Syria, friends and family gave me the money for traveling, mostly in dollars but some was in Syrian pounds.

"There were no issues with Western Union in Egypt. I had to wait a long time for it, but it went smoothly. I had used Western Union before, when I was in the Gulf, but just once or twice. You didn't need an account, you just needed a passport.

"I applied for jobs, but didn't get any so used the time to learn the transportation system. A couple of months later, my friend with the translation company was settled, so we resumed the translation work. I started interpreting online again. I was also able to teach some courses online. Later, my cousin who was also in Egypt told me about a customer support company in Egypt. So I began to work in that company full time. I had three jobs: translation, online teaching, and the technical support job. After three months I was so exhausted that I resigned from the technical support job. For the translator job, I used Western Union to receive wages from the Gulf, and got the transfers in US dollars.

"Later the brother of that friend, who lived in Egypt, sent the money through bank transfer and I opened a bank account with an Egyptian bank. I used the bank to receive the transfers; I did not store any money there. For the work originating in Syria, my brother in Syria received the money in person. Payment was always delayed. We'd get the money six months after finishing. The money was paid in Syria and it stayed there. My family in Syria used that money. For my work in technical, payment was received through a bank that the company had opened for me, I can't remember why I didn't use it for the translation transfers. I would access my cash through ATMs.

"I was okay in Egypt, making enough money to pay the rent. We had moved out of that awful apartment. I lived with my cousins for a while, like 20 days; then I found a worse apartment but with a nicer landlord. Another cousin lived in the building so we felt safer. My wife and our twins were still with me. My mother joined us in the second apartment.

"A friend of mine had a job in Turkey and asked if I would be interested in a similar job. I interviewed on Skype and was offered the job.

"To work, I had to move to Turkey. My mother decided to go back to Syria because she and my wife were not on great terms, so there was a lot of fighting. At this time, the coup in Egypt had happened, and they required visas for Syrians. So I knew that the move to Istanbul would be a one-way journey with no option of returning to Egypt. There would be a two-week trial at the job. I decided to bring my wife and children after that if it was stable.

"To prepare to travel to Istanbul, I brought everything that I could within the weight allowance on the plane. I brought my desktop computer and my clothes and some of my clothes for the family. I had 45 kilos of stuff on the plane. I brought some pots and dishes, too. I brought all of the documents, my certificates, Syrian official documents. I didn't have enough money. I brought $200 only. I came to Istanbul with only $200. My wife had $300–500 with her in Egypt in cash in the apartment. At the airport in Istanbul I thought I'd lost the money. I wanted to get a luggage cart, but I didn't have any Turkish lira to get it. I looked for the $200, but I couldn't find it. I asked a police officer to allow me to exit the airport. I needed help because one of the suitcases was damaged and I needed to get the money to get the cart. He wouldn't let me. A female officer let me do it; I left my passport with her. My friend was outside, I got some lira from my friend and went back in to get the cart. Then two bags were lost. I found them and then left, three or four hours after arriving.

"Now, when a Syrian is traveling here, I tell them to keep two coins in their pocket, any currency, just to be ready for the carts. My friend that met me at the airport paid for my taxi and brought me to the hotel. The company later refunded me.

"The company had booked me a hotel. I was exhausted and very upset about the money. I got there and as I was unpacking, I finally found the money in my bag. In the meantime, I had posted an ad online asking for financial help. The guy who had posted the ad gave me $3,000. I owe him a million dollars for that. He didn't know me and he loaned me the money. I paid him back in installments over the coming months. I used the money to rent an apartment, buy some furniture and buy my wife's travel ticket. I paid cash at the airline office. I didn't have a credit card then and I don't have one now.

"For the first four months of work, I couldn't open a bank account, maybe because I didn't have a residence permit. The fixer at work was too busy to help me. I got my salary in cash but finance was upset about it. I brought the cash home and hid it there. I was paid in US dollars; I would exchange it in small increments. So, I finally opened an account at a bank and was able to receive my salary there.

"For the first few months, I was testing the waters with my work and trying to get a sense of regular expenses. Then I started to pay back the money I owed to people all around the world. I started to allocate money for the people I needed to return money to. My salary was better than before, so I could keep aside money to pay my debts. I had paid some debts in Egypt, but not all of them. I kept the money aside in my mind. To pay back the debts, first to my friend in the Gulf, who had sent me $1,000, a mutual friend of ours came from the Gulf to Turkey, and I paid him. My cousin in the Gulf came to Istanbul by chance and I gave him the cash. My friend who had been in a desperate situation and had given me money said he didn't want it back. Some others said they did not want it back. Both of them said, 'Pay it forward, if you want to.' I can't remember how I made my first transfers to Syria. I never did it the official way, through Western Union or anything. I transferred to my brother and sister the same way I do now. Which is through friends who want to move money to Turkey.

"Say a friend of mine lives in Istanbul, and his family wants to send him money from Syria. I give him the money and then his family gives my brother or sister the money in Syria. In my mind, no matter how big the amount they want to transfer is, it is better if I give it all to them, even if I have extra funds in Syria. I know I will need it in the future. My sister is my banker. She has been doing this for me for three years. I don't know how much money I have there, probably between $2,000 and $2,500. It's in cash in her husband's safe at his office in Damascus. He has a shop there."

I asked, "What are the challenges or drawbacks to using this system?"

He replied, "I wouldn't say there are any challenges. There is no commission. I trust the people involved in the transaction. I trust my contact and her family a lot. And my contact is my sister, who I trust. There are no risks at all. Other than people finding out about the transaction, like we got money from my wife's father. He's a business person. He was detained once. If my brother or sister goes to his shop several times, and he's being observed by security services, and they keep a record of who is coming and going, it could be risky. I haven't thought much about it. In a recent transaction, when I told my sister to go to my wife's father's shop in Damascus, she asked if it were safe. I told her I trusted the guy. This area is now known to be an area for these transactions, and my sister had heard of people being arrested there for doing this. I told my wife about it and she said it was still safe. My sister liked my wife's father. She liked him. Just a few days before my sister picked up the money, they owed me $4,000. I thought because he's a business man, it would be safer for a business man to have some US dollars in his safe, whereas my sister would be vulnerable because it is illegal to have US dollars on you. But my wife's father's neighbor's shop was robbed the other day and so they asked to take the money.

"In Syria, I opened a bank account for me and my father. My parents had rented the shop and so needed an account to hold the annual rent. My mother had sold a house and needed an account to hold the money. I don't remember why I opened the account, but I did. Maybe just because we were all opening accounts. I got an ATM card. I didn't use mine, but I used my father's, to draw money for him. We were only able to withdraw $500 per day. When he needed more, I would go to the bank. I used the bank several times there, but it wasn't usual to me. I had an account in the Gulf that I didn't use much.

"I started using PayPal until I moved to Istanbul. I rely on it a lot. Now, it has closed in Turkey. I use PayPal because I do not have a credit card. I have two bank accounts in Turkey. They say that foreigners cannot get credit cards. It's not because I'm Syrian, they say. They are nice, so they make it sound like a universal problem, not just for Syrians. My main bank account, where I receive my salary, is the bank in which I applied for a credit card, with the fixer at work. They needed him to get a document from the municipality in my area proving my residence. It turned out that my apartment is registered as offices, not a residential apartment, so now I'm waiting for my landlord to do it. He's in the Gulf so it's delayed. I tried again; they said they would let me know in a few weeks. Immediately after leaving, I got an SMS that my application was rejected. She said she solved the problem and then I got the same message a moment later. I decided not to go back again. I think the hold-up is the residence confirmation document.

"Money transfer is an issue for us now in Turkey, you cannot make any transfers in US dollars. It must be in Turkish lira. I've heard that we cannot use Western Union to send money from Turkey. Transferring money to Syria is still an issue through the hawala systems. I wouldn't feel confident about it; I would worry about the person receiving the money. If I'm wanted by the regime, and I don't think I am, but if I am, and someone received money from me, it would put them at risk. Regularly receiving money from someone in Istanbul would put someone at risk and they would ask why they are receiving it. The hawala system would register the transfers and security services could find out.

"Syrian refugees in Europe cannot send money, because they must declare it. My brother-in-law owes me some money, wants to send it back. We are struggling to find someone to transfer the money to me. I loaned him money for the journey, and some is left over. He's trying to send me my money that he did not need to spend. We are looking for a way to get it back. I bought tickets for his wife and children.

"Similarly, a friend wanted to give $1,200 to his nephew here. I gave $1,200 of my own money to the nephew but have no way of getting my money back from my friend unless he travels here.

"Moving money from Europe to Turkey is a problem. But it still happens through personal networks and informal hawala systems. I haven't tried it. My brother-in-law is going to try. They take 10 percent.

"There are so many people who helped me. Wow! There is my brother-in-law, actually my wife's brother-in-law received us in his house in Syria, even though we had brought the babies. He lived in a big apartment with three brothers and their families. They were generous to receive us even though they were already three families. They received us three times.

"All of my friends who gave me money; I still think of my friend in the desperate situation who gave me the money without my asking for it. My friend in the Gulf who said he didn't want the money back, he gave me even more money as a gift for the children.

"A friend who was a regime supporter gave me $250 when I was trying to leave.

"There's a guy in Egypt. I had never met him before, but a friend of mine knew him and called him. He received me at the airport, bought breakfast for us, stocking up the house with cheese, yogurt, jam and juice. That was the only time I ever met that guy. We were never able to meet again. There were a few guys who helped me when I felt threatened by the landlady. One of my neighbors, an Egyptian guy who had given me an Internet cable. He came over with an older guy and they talked to the landlady for me. They made me feel safe. I was a stranger. In Syria, if you are in trouble, your neighbors help you. I didn't have anyone in Egypt. But this guy brought an older guy, to calm the crazy lady who was threatening my wife. I wish I could thank them."

"And Now Your Son Has Sex with Old Men"

Syria to Greece: A mother worries about her son and the prospect of his livelihood as a sex worker.

A woman saw us talking to the previous research participant. She approached the interpreter to ask if I were a journalist. The interpreter said no, I am a researcher (and then had to explain the difference). The woman waited a small distance from us until the previous conversation ended. "Can I talk to you now?" she asked. She sat down and asked me a lot of detailed questions about what I do. I did mention my background was in gender-based violence. She said, "Maybe you can help the boys in this park." This became the entry point of the conversation. Her son (15 years old) is an only child. This woman is in Greece with her son alone, but she has banded together with other women.

"Afew days ago, a journalist came to the camp to ask questions about boys having sex with older men for money. I became really worried. My son goes out of the camp at night with the other teenage boys. I didn't think anything was wrong. People come in and out of the camp all the time. I worry more about the men in the camp than out. So many are troublemakers. They start fires, they pile up trash, they drink, they do drugs. Especially the Moroccans, Algerians, and Tunisians.

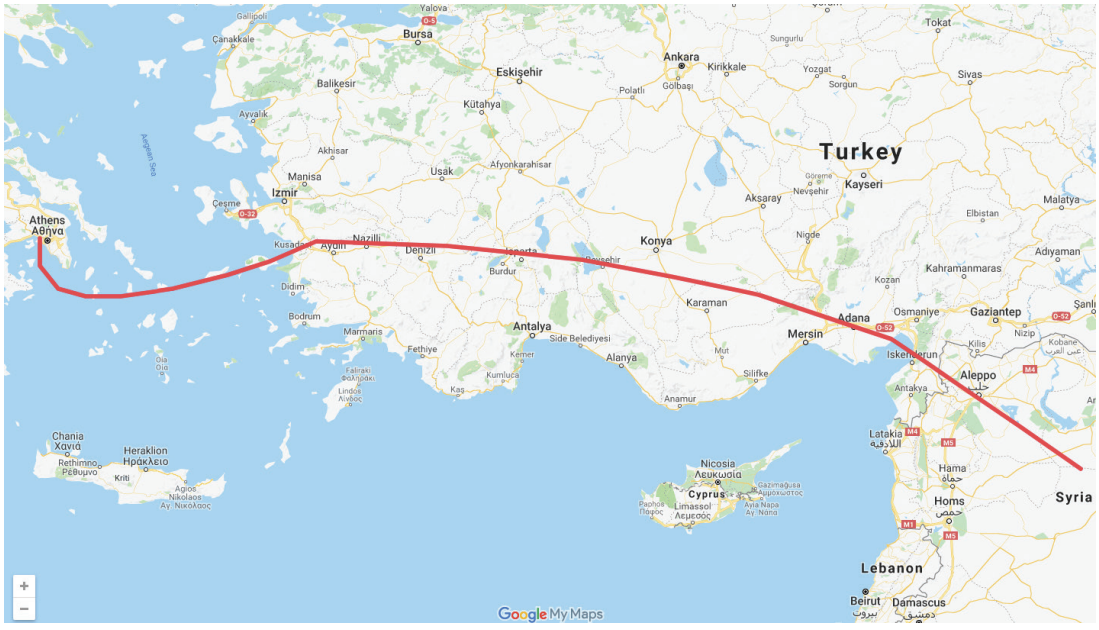
"My son was fine—he was my rock. My husband died in Syria. My sister told me I had to leave immediately or we would all die too. I didn't want to die. I didn't want my son to die. I just had to leave. We all sold things, whatever we could—we just wanted money immediately to pay to leave.

"Our neighbors left before us. We were in contact via WhatsApp (a mobile phone based communication system) and Facebook (a web-based communication system). After a while, Facebook became difficult and people got scared. But you always find a way. Our neighbors told us who would help us get here. They sent us phone numbers and updates of which borders were open. I called the man and told him our situation. My voice was shaking. I packed two suitcases and got ready to leave. I don't know if I will ever see that house again. When the man came to pick us up, he told me I couldn't bring the suitcases."

When I ask which route they took, she declined to say and seemed scared to share details.

"The first time, the driver said we had to change plans. We had to go to a nearby town and spend the night there. We were there about a week. I didn't know anybody there. Then one day, the driver said

Map 12: Journey from Syria to Greece.



we could start at the Turkish border and said, 'Now walk.' I said, 'Which way?' and my son said, 'Mum, there's GPS. Kids are always smarter than you.'

"When we walked to Turkey, they asked my son a lot of questions. They let us pass. I met some other women in the camp and they all wanted to leave. Some had family in Europe. I joined three of them. Some had husbands, some had kids. You make a lot of friends when you are a refugee. You share a misery and a joy. Where you are from matters less.

"We all tried to find smugglers. The smugglers aren't used to dealing with women. But they take our money just like other people's money. They sometimes tried to talk to my son, but I said, 'No, you are dealing with me!' The first boat we tried was a failure. We got caught by the Turkish police. They threatened to throw my son in jail and I said, 'No, he's only 14!' We went to the police station and they let me wait inside with water and food. They let us go when it was dark.

"The second time, we made it to Samos. From Samos, we took the boat to Piraeus. When I looked at the Piraeus place where all the refugees are, I knew we couldn't stay there. They offered to move us to the camps. I don't understand any of their names. Nobody knew where the camps were. A few of the other women were worried that we would be sent outside the city or that they wouldn't let us leave—that's what they heard from some of the volunteers. In the end, I decided to go into the camps because I didn't have much money left. In the camps, you get food and a place to sleep.

"I started joining the women near Victoria Square because I heard that sometimes Greeks look for help—cleaning ladies, nurses, taking care of old people. That's not what I did in Syria, though. I was a teacher.

"In Victoria Square, I noticed all the men. We don't trust them. I try not to talk to them. If one of us has to talk to them, we all go together and we bring the kids. Then one day, a journalist showed up at the camp and started asking us questions about the men in the parks. We thought she was asking about the men who help. She said she heard there were men having sex with children.

"I did not believe it, but some of the other women did. They said it happened to boys who left the camp at night and that they did it to make money to pay the smugglers and leave. Some of the women said they thought their sons did that. We all started wondering about the girls too. We all started asking our kids. 'Do you have children? No? One day you will understand. One day, you are in your house in Syria with your family. The next day, your husband dies. And now your son has sex with old men.'"

I didn't say anything and let the silence hang."I don't think my son does it. But I don't know, I'm worried. So now we are all staying up at night to see. And I wanted to come here today to see if there are old men in the park. This is what the journalist said happens. One day, I hope to get to Germany. That's where my husband wanted to go before he was killed. I want my son to be smart and finish school."

"Screw You, I'm Going to Germany"

Syria to Turkey: A physician in her mid-thirties juggles smugglers, conversion rates, and borders to face bias in her new safe zone.

We are sitting in a café in Sanliurfa, where I have spoken to others a few days earlier. It's warm, and we are both looking forward to drinking "çörçil," a drink made of fresh squeezed lemon juice and soda water.

Maha is a Syrian woman in her early 30s. She speaks quickly and has distinct, lively features. She came to Sanliurfa after Daesh took control of her hometown in northern Raqqa, in February 2014.

"I was working as a pediatrician at a hospital in my hometown at the time. I could have continued working under Daesh (ISIS), but I didn't want to follow their rules. I might be the last one who crossed the border legally—after that it became so difficult. I traveled with a close female friend and a male relative. It was difficult to convince my family to allow me to leave—in the end they let me go because I would be with my friend.

"I was able to take one bag and some money with me; I carried it in my bag. My friend and I crossed at the gate, which was just outside my town. When we arrived, we rented an apartment with another friend. My relatives had connections there, so they were able to find the apartment within one day. The friend who accompanied me from home started working immediately for a medical agency. After one month, I also found a job with the same agency in a small town. The agency was managing a hospital remotely and I did remote rounds with patients. After eight months, the office moved from that town to Sanliurfa, so I moved as well.

"During that time, the border was basically closed—it was only open for special medical cases. Eventually I lost my job with the medical agency and applied for other positions with humanitarian NGOs. I was offered a job that was actually one grade higher than the position I applied for. From the time I start-

Map 13: Maha's journey.

ed working in Turkey, I was sending money back to my family in Syria. At first not that much and, after a while, more. It's pretty easy to send money and I have always used the same method and dealer. In Raqqa, there's a shop with the same branch in Urfa. I give them the amount plus 5 to 10 TL [Turkish lira, $2–3] and they transfer it. I also provide the name of the person who will receive the money; that person will then be able to pick up the money the same day. Fees depend on the amount being sent. . . . I have never had any problems sending money this way; I have a lot of trust in the shop because the owner is a relative of mine.

"My family lives in a Daesh-controlled area and receiving money from Turkey or other countries is not a problem. I returned to Syria for three weeks in 2014 to attend my brother's wedding in Raqqa and take my final medical exam in Damascus. I was able to cross from Turkey to Syria relatively easily: the Turkish authorities let people cross back into Syria two days per week. On the Turkish side, they checked my bags and asked some illogical questions. They also tried to fingerprint me, but I resisted and didn't show my passport. The Daesh guards receiving returnees didn't check or ask any questions, but did require there to be a man to pick me up.

"I stayed in Raqqa for one week following my brother's wedding, which he had postponed so that I could attend. My uncle then took me to Damascus by bus; Daesh would not have let me go without a man. I had to pay 1,000 Syrian pounds [$6] at a government checkpoint.

"I took the exam in Damascus and didn't pass. I noticed that doctors from Damascus had an advantage because they knew the style of questions while I didn't; I remember thinking, 'Screw you, I'm going to Germany,' because I was angry about the unfairness of the Syrian medical certification system.

"I left Damascus for Raqqa, still angry. Things got worse when I realized I forgot my 'Daesh cover' [black abaya, a full length outer garment worn by some Muslim women). I put all my Daesh clothes in one bag and I forgot it—all the way back I was imagining myself beaten by Daesh. Eventually, I exchanged my pink scarf with the black one of a woman next to me and borrowed a man's black jacket to wrap around myself. I avoided detection at the first two of three Daesh checkpoints, but dreaded the third, which was right next to Daesh's 'punishment office.' The bus driver allowed me to get off before this checkpoint and I was able to rush home. Usually this neighborhood was crowded with Daesh but there was no one and I escaped.

"To return to Turkey, I had to cross illegally because the border gates were closed. I crossed with my 13-year-old brother and seven to ten other people. I paid 200 TL [about $70] for myself and my brother, and we crossed by walking at night near the official gate. Because my brother was with me, I was able to bring more stuff. My brother stayed for two days and then returned to our hometown.

"If the Turkish police catch you, they take your luggage and money and send you back. I recently heard of a family who was caught and held for six hours in a border police station before being sent back to Syria. It was really horrible because they sold their gold to be able to come.

"I seriously considered making the journey to Europe in 2015. Ten months ago, my friend and her husband planned to go, and I was really thinking, almost preparing my stuff to go with them. Eventually I decided not to go because my family was worried about my safety, especially traveling by sea. I communicate often with my family in Syria, mainly by phone, WhatsApp, and Facebook.

"People find out about smugglers through Facebook. Some draw maps and post them on Facebook to help others. If someone was stuck in Greece, they could ask for help, for example. In the beginning, it was really expensive [to cross from Turkey to Greece], like $1,500. In the end it was $700 because there were more and more smugglers. I didn't hear about any cases of fraud or exploitation, but smugglers sometimes took people almost to the coast and dropped them off [the boat].

"I applied for a visa for Germany in March 2016. My fiancé lives in Germany and I want to go there to take a supplemental course for doctors. I have never met my fiancé in person but we often speak through Skype. In order to obtain the necessary documents for my visa, I hired a smuggler, whom I had heard about through word of mouth, to pick them up in Syria. I sent him my passport and Syrian ID—he had to be my representative to pick up my transcript and other academic documents in Aleppo.

"At first, the smuggler and I agreed that it should take around three weeks, but it ended up taking three months because Aleppo University was bombed. It cost 1,100 TL [$370]. I sent the money via my usual gold shop and asked the owner to hold the money until I received my documents.

"Because I was so desperate, I paid another smuggler, who supposedly has connections within the German embassy, to expedite my visa application. I sent this smuggler my documents and paid 150 TL [$50]. So far, I have heard nothing from the embassy and feel like I wasted my money on the second smuggler. They say they will support you, but they don't do anything. To get more information, I talked to another smuggler, who said the smuggler with embassy contacts is trustworthy and that I should wait. I now contact the embassy smuggler every one to two weeks, but he can never give me any meaningful updates. It's really risky, but sometimes when you need a hope, you cannot think legitimately. . . . Now I question myself, how can I send my documents to a stranger?

"I save little money but send most of it to family and friends. I have participated in a gamia [savings collective] in Syria, but not in Turkey; however, these collectives are common among the Syrian community in Sanliurfa, Turkey. In Syria, I would put 11,000 Syrian pounds [$25] in the jame3ya pot each month. My group consisted of 10–12 people, but groups could be as small as five or as large as twenty. I don't like using the bank—I just take my salary, put it in the house, send some of it to my family, and the rest I keep.

"Some big news in my life is that two of my brothers came to Turkey from Raqqa this month. One paid $1,500 for himself, his wife, and two daughters; the money was his savings from working as a doctor. They were not able to carry any bags. The crossing was not risky and the family crossed in the daytime via a road and a canal. There was a Turkish guard in a field near them but he didn't shoot. They had to pay the smuggler beforehand, but would have been able to get their money back if the crossing were unsuccessful.

"For the second brother, however, the crossing was difficult and dangerous, especially the border between Daesh- and FSA [Free Syrian Army]-controlled areas. At this point, men and women were separated. The smuggler was not professional, so the two groups lost each other. The smuggler had told them to walk toward a light, which he said was one hour away. In fact, the groups had to walk for five to six hours, without water. The women slept in a stable, where they had to stay very silent to avoid Daesh detection. Eventually, the two groups were reunited near the Azaz border gate. My sister-in-law had a fake medical report so she was able to cross, but initially the guards said her husband and child wouldn't be able to. However, my brother called someone with money and the whole family was able to cross. They were supposed to pay $3,000 but paid $1,500 because of this relationship.

"My brothers both immediately registered for their Temporary Protection IDs in Sanliurfa; one has applied for a German-sponsored scholarship and the other has opened a dental clinic. Both are studying Turkish and highly-motivated to succeed. When they came, they had plans.

"Most Syrians in Germany transfer money to Syria. They don't use banks because it's expensive and because they don't want the German government to know that they're transferring money, as they fear this could lead to a reduction in state support. Instead, my friend transfers money through a Pakistani guy who says he's trying to help Syrians. The man charges a fee of €7 for the first €100 and €3 for each additional €100. Another agent charges €14 per €100. Funds are sent first to Turkey and then from Turkey to Syria, also using a hawala, and people find out about the agent in Germany through word-of-mouth.

"My friend says that the exchange rate is really different in regime- and FSA-controlled areas, around a 25 percent difference. My friend also knows about a man who has money in Syria, so he takes money in Germany and gives his own money through an associate in Syria, thereby avoiding any physical transfer. This man charges a 10 percent commission.

"Some Syrians have also set up businesses importing under-the-table goods, like clothes and cosmetics, from Syria to Germany and then selling them to Syrians who are uncomfortable shopping in German stores or unhappy with German products. There are Facebook groups that advertise and say how to buy these products.

"One of the biggest difficulties for Syrian families is dealing with separation, due tinternal and international displacement. Sometimes I am afraid that in the end it will affect our relationships. Another difficulty is bias—on behalf of banks, consulates, and other authorities— against people from Daesh-controlled areas. I hate Daesh and had bad experiences—to be re-victimized by this discrimination is terrible.

"It's Only Symbolic Help"

Syria to Jordan: A young man and his family face daily challenges with humanitarian cash assistance.

We exited our car and approached the home in a suburban neighborhood on the outskirts of Irbid. On the front step, at least ten pairs of children's shoes were heaped in a pile, and we stepped around them as two women, both in black abayas, greeted us warmly. They showed us to the sitting room, off to the side of what I imagined to be the main house. The thin walls barely contained the children (many popped in and out during the interview) and their noises as they played and cried just beyond our sight. We took off our shoes inside and sat down on the cushions that lined the room. Five men then entered, and the women quickly disappeared (we did not see them again until the end of the interviews, when they said goodbye to us, although they appeared at the door bearing first coffee, then Pepsi for us as we spoke with the men).

Our first interviewee, Fareed, was seated closest to us. He was dressed sharply, despite the heat. Polished shoes, dress slacks, and a casual button down that he had dressed up with a tie. His socks had one lone hole, with his toe poking out. His hair was slicked. He was eager to talk to us.

"Syria is the most beautiful country in the world, despite the ruling system. Before things started to collapse, there were no restrictions on life; people could move freely. I often took trips outside of Syria, to visit other countries, and now I regret this, since I didn't see the value of Syria while I was living there. I really want you to understand that Syrians are not 'conservative' people." By this I think he meant restrictive towards women, very dedicated to religion, etcetera. "We just like to live our lives freely.

"In Syria I was a government officer, but when things in my hometown became unsafe, I needed to leave with my family. The government began to indiscriminately shoot people in the streets, and that's what compelled me to finally go. Better to die than be captured by the government.

Map 14: Fareed's journey.

"Even people just close to demonstrations were rounded up and tortured. There was no value for people's lives anymore.

"I brought some clothes with me and the documents I still had. My other important documents were destroyed in a fire in one of my supermarkets that I owned. I also brought a little cash. My wife, four children, and I fled on foot. Along the way, community leaders were helping those on the move, opening channels and providing information about where and how to continue. We traveled on foot because I felt like traveling by car would make us easy targets. Local people helped, free of charge, especially those who were injured, when they could. We walked until we reached Wadi Yarmouk in Jordan, which is where the Jordanian army received us. The Jordanian army was humane, very gentle. They provided us with food, water, and medical treatment. From there, they took us to Zaatari, and we stayed there for 25 days. Then, we moved to a small town in northern Jordan. We have a friend of our family there. We stayed there for three years. Then, we finally came here to Irbid.

"The little cash I brought with me did not last long in Jordan. Now I keep my cash at home; I don't use a bank. In Syria, I used government banks to apply for loans and for a savings account." (Accounts were special, for government officers.) "If you wanted to save a large sum of money, however, this was a process that required a lot of vetting—you'd have to answer many questions, and the account would be scrutinized and monitored by intelligence agents. You need a security or intelligence clearance just to open a falafel shop, the smallest of enterprises!

"In Syria, I was an officer in a government ministry, and I had studied at university. But here in Jordan, I take whatever work I can get, usually labor or construction. This is usually paid under the table in cash. Since I've been here, I've been able to take a few university-level courses, but these have not amounted to any job prospects. The cash I get from my day-to-day work goes quickly to cover daily expenses for me and my family.

"You might go to a restaurant, or visit cafes, but my friends and I don't have that luxury. We simply enjoy visiting each other, since we don't have the money to do anything else."

He waxes a bit poetic, about how much Syrians love life. There is an awkward exchange, which Ruby, our interpreter, doesn't want to translate. I press. She explains he was trying to emphasize how much Syrians love life by saying that they really love their women—sexual, yes, but meant playfully, generating bashful chuckles from the other men.

"My friends and I have no use for money-transfer services—there's no money to transfer! Generally, the biggest challenge is dealing with the iris ID machines, equipment that compares images of a customer's iris with images on file to verify identity. This is the way most people receive their financial assistance, but in Irbid, there is only one machine in each bank—compared to four or five per bank in Amman—and it's usually broken or malfunctioning. Some people attempt to collect money two, three, four days in a row with no success. The four branches of the bank are very crowded come collection time. The crowds are volatile, people often physically fight in line, and it's not safe. It's not just men in the lines either—women, the sick, and the elderly have to make it through this mess as well. The bank tellers are also very rude to us [refugees]. Because of this, some Syrians don't bother at all, and just don't collect their financial aid. Bank officers never help us, either. We have to take care of each other in order to keep each other safe. I go all the way to Amman to avoid this mayhem when I need to collect my assistance. To do this, I use almost a third of the money I collect to pay for the trip back and forth. It's only symbolic help.

"Now, I receive 95JD (about $130) a month from UNHCR. In the beginning, my neighbors here helped me feel at home. I have good relationships with them, but they've never been able to help me financially, and I haven't been able to help them either. I'd say 90 percent of Syrians are working to make extra money under the table, but they can't admit this for fear it will affect the little aid they do receive. It's well known that Syrians love to work. Even if I could earn 1,000 JD just sitting on my back, I wouldn't do it.

"Living here in Jordan means better conditions for me and my family, but also more dignity. After the issues with terrorism in Europe, refugees' situations in Europe, Lebanon, or Turkey are probably worse than ours are here. Arab people are pure. The gangs you read about in the headlines are not the reality for most Syrians. I hope to one day be part of the effort to re-build Syria.

Part 2:

From Asia and Africa through South and Central America toward US and Canada

A Boat Ride to Capurganá and a Free Pass into the Jungle

Cameroon toward the US via South and Central America: A passionate teacher and his family flee conflict to face the brutality of the Darién Gap.

David's journey, like so many others, has been meandering, treacherous, and relentless. The pressure to leave his native Cameroon came in 2017 when his village was attacked and torched, causing him to lose his family's whereabouts and flee. He traveled first to Nigeria and then to Ghana before deciding to head to the United States. He flew from Ghana to Ecuador, where he slowly began making his way northward. For two weeks, David was stuck in the coastal town of Turbo, where he ended up learning some vital survival techniques that would serve him well for the challenges ahead.

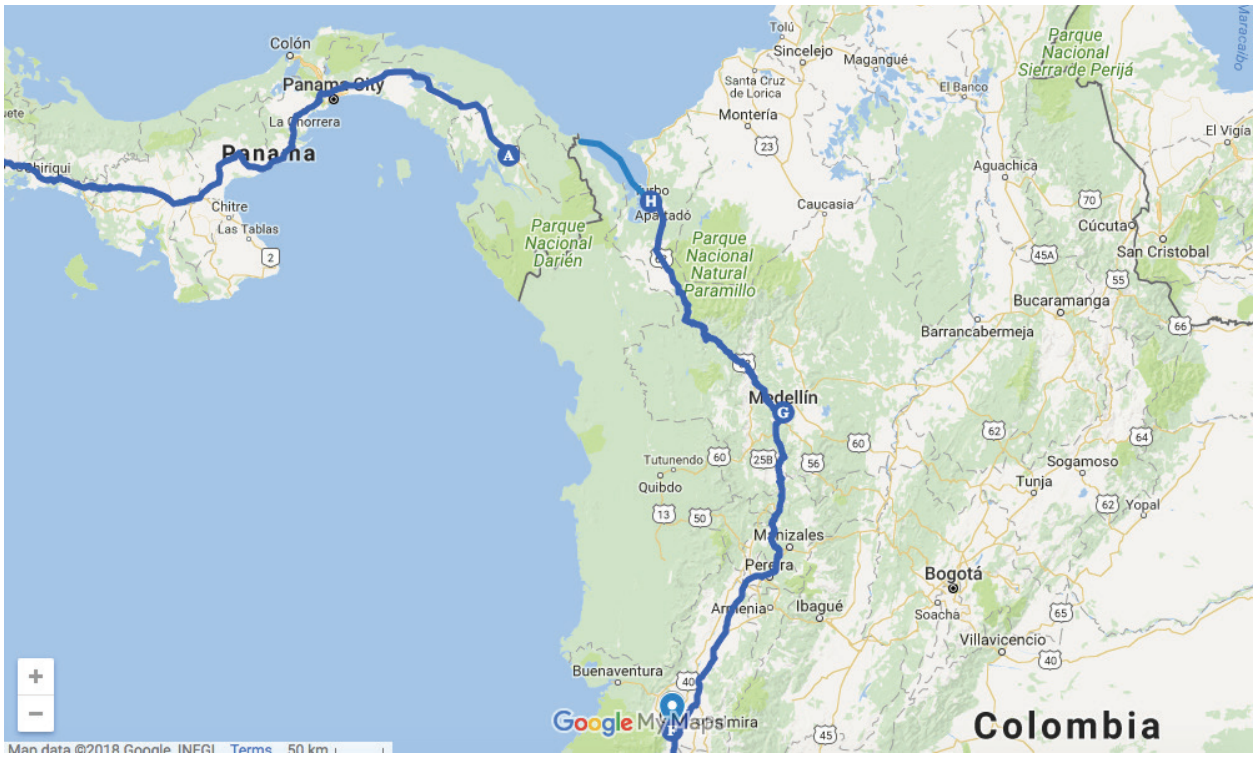
David did not want to leave his native country of Cameroon. He had a wife and a child. He relished African dishes. He enjoyed his job as an educator, teaching grade-school children African history.

"I have a passion for teaching. I like educating people, because every time I'm educating children, I'm educating myself," he said to me as we sat enjoying a cold beverage on a hot and humid afternoon at a gas station not far from Costa Rica's northern migrant camp.

He also believed that the act of migration was not something to be taken on a whim. "Only under pressure, duress, or when lives are in danger should people migrate," he said. He seemed tired, slightly irritated by how grueling his journey had been, and yet, he knew he had a long way to go before reaching his final destination.

I could sense that at various points throughout his journey David had stopped to ask himself whether he would do it all over again, whether the reasons that led to his departure validated the risks he had taken thus far. Though the final verdict is still out

Map 15: Most migrants, including David, cross from South America to Central America via the same route—a boat ride from Turbo to Capurganá, Colombia—and then set out on an arduous hike through the Darién Gap to reach Panama.



and will likely remain out for quite some time, it became evident that although what he had endured so far certainly would justify his turning back, he has chosen to press forward.

David's journey, like so many others, has been meandering, treacherous, and relentless. Even as we sat, he seemed eager to move, ready to hop on the next boat if he had to, especially if it brought him that much closer to his destination. I asked him where his story began and immediately he talked about his home: southwest Cameroon. For David, the pressure to leave came in 2017 when his village was attacked and torched, causing him to lose his family's whereabouts and flee to nearby Nigeria with just $50 in his pocket and a credit card. The turmoil started in late 2016 when Anglophone lawyers and teachers began demanding reforms to address what they say is the marginalization of the country's English-speaking minority by French-speakers. The situation spiraled into all-out conflict as separatists demanded independence for the two English-speaking regions.

The torching of villages began in late 2017, causing nearly 20,000 Anglophone Cameroonians like David to seek refuge in Nigeria.[1] Who was starting the fires is unclear; the Cameroonian military says armed separatist rebels are responsible, whereas residents say the fires were set by the military after the attackers had fled.[2]

David lasted a few weeks in Nigeria, staying just long enough to find a job selling items on commission at a local market in Lagos. He moved on to Accra, Ghana, where life was even more difficult, and after two weeks, he decided he wanted to go to a place where he could truly make a good life for himself and eventually his family. He set his eyes on the United States after learning from friends about a route that would take him from South America northward. Within days, he was able to purchase a flight from Ghana to Ecuador by contacting a friend in Cameroon who booked it online. He mentioned that he drafted a research program based on his studies in archeology in order to obtain an Ecuadorian visa.

In Ecuador, he found work at a supermarket unpacking shipments and stocking new items. For three

Figure 2: David shares his journey.

months, he worked, studied Spanish, and saved money. Then, he made his move northward. While still in Ecuador, David found an agent who would get him into Colombia. He paid the agent $250 and was escorted all the way to Posto, Colombia, about two hours from the border. To get to Cali, he paid $30 to a taxi driver, who bought a bus ticket for him. Everyone who enters Colombia illegally does it this way, David said. Again, in Cali he paid someone to buy him a ticket to Medellin. In Medellin, a Cameroonian friend who already had made it to Mexico put him in contact with an agent who could help him get to Turbo. "Turbo," David said staring directly at me, his voice growing sterner. "It was there where I discovered the true colors of Colombia."

For two weeks, David was stuck in the coastal town of Turbo, where thousands of migrants pay to take a boat across the Gulf of Urabá to Capurganá. Almost immediately, he found someone charging $2,200 to take 11 people at $200 a head. He signed up to go and on the night they were supposed to embark, someone came to them pretending to be the agent, collected their money, and ran away, never to be seen again. "It was a damn bad country," he said, visibly irritated just remembering the event. "We have to erase it from the map. Everyone there is mafia."

Devastated, David didn't know what to do. Smiling for a moment, he recalled a "kind person" giving him $20 to keep going. This small act of charity, he

1 United Nations, "Anglophone Cameroonians in Nigeria Pass 20,000 Mark," UNHCR, March 20, 2018, www.unhcr.org/uk/news/briefing/2018/3/5ab0cf2b4/anglophone-cameroonians-nigeria-pass-20000-mark.html.

2 Moki Edwin Kindzeka, "Villages Burn as Cameroon Troops Clash with Separatists," VOA, April 19, 2018, www.voanews.com/a/villages-burn-cameroon-troops-/4356309.html.

said, helped him figure out a new tactic that would enable him to withstand such setbacks in the future. He learned to employ goodwill as a way of currying favor with people. He started first by developing a relationship with the boatman, promising to bring him ten people to make the trip from Turbo to Capurganá. After two weeks, he brought him sixteen people instead, earning himself not just a discount for the boat ride but also a free pass into the jungle once they reached Capurganá. In addition, he had earned about $160 in those two weeks running errands for people on the streets of Turbo.

Even with these new coping mechanisms in hand, nothing had prepared David for what lay ahead. Describing his trek through the Darién Gap from Colombia to Panama caused his eyes to well up with tears, remembering individuals they lost along the way. "That's the worst thing I've encountered in my life. Nothing has been as deadly in my life. I don't know how to paint the picture of that jungle, but no matter how I describe it, you'll never understand because you've never been there." Like many migrants traversing this route, David had not been made aware of all the dangers he would confront along the way. The most information that anyone had given him was that it might take up to eighteen hours to cross. "We were in there for nine days," he said flatly.

For those nine days, David and his group endured various bouts of hunger, thirst, and exhaustion. At night, they feared being attacked by animals. During the day, they feared that robbers would steal their few remaining possessions. Two members of their group, migrants from India, got lost as they walked in pitch-black darkness to avoid being detected by thieves, which David called "the mafia." The most difficult moment came on the seventh and eighth days, when their guide abandoned them and they were lost. Everyone was very tired, hungry, and angered by their situation. Frustration began to set in. Then, as one of the women jumped down from a steep ledge along the path, she fell and broke her leg. She was unable to walk. In telling me this story, David paused for a moment and drew a deep breath. "It's tough because we aren't a family. We didn't know each other. We were all doing this for different reasons," he said, trying to rationalize in his own mind what had taken place. "We had spent a lot of money to do this." As a fellow African, David said he felt especially sorry for her. After a few minutes of discussion, the group was forced to leave her behind.

A long moment of silence fell between David and me as we finished our beverages. The restaurant we were in was empty, too early for anyone to be eating dinner. The sun had lowered closer to the horizon, bringing the temperature down a bit. I stopped writing and waited for David to regain his thoughts. "I don't think I can advise anyone to take this journey," he finally said. "If you know what it's like to sleep in a jungle, hearing the animals, sleeping on leaves, getting wet . . . I can't wish that upon anyone—even my enemies."

David's group eventually arrived at a camp in Panama. By working various odd jobs at nearby farms, he was able to make his way up to Costa Rica. Recently, he attempted to cross illegally into Nicaragua by boat, but was caught by authorities and sent back to La Cruz, Costa Rica. He said he would try again the following day. I asked him where he would like to end up. "I'm not sure where I'll go once I get to the United States," he responded. "I've heard Texas is a Republican state, so I've thought about going to go Maryland, because it is a Democrat state."

As we finished our beverages, I asked David how he navigates risks and how he had determined whom to trust along the way. He described how he has always known when to trust people and when to be guarded with information, such as when he was caught in Nicaragua—he didn't offer them his real name. He said he was eighteen years old. He continued, "I have always lived that kind of life, like I was hot cake. People treasure you, they like you. When you can divert people's minds, people will always want you. They'll pay you." He spent a few minutes sharing with me details about his life back home, how much he missed his family and his profession as a teacher. He recounted some side jobs he did working for a political party, boasting of his ability to draw a crowd.

For a brief moment, I noticed he was smiling, perhaps taking comfort in recounting good memories and forgetting to worry about the next leg in his journey.

"Sorry We Cannot Help You More"

Eritrea toward the US via South and Central America: A young man flees military conscription in his homeland, finds work in Sudan, but feels compelled to attempt a journey to the US.

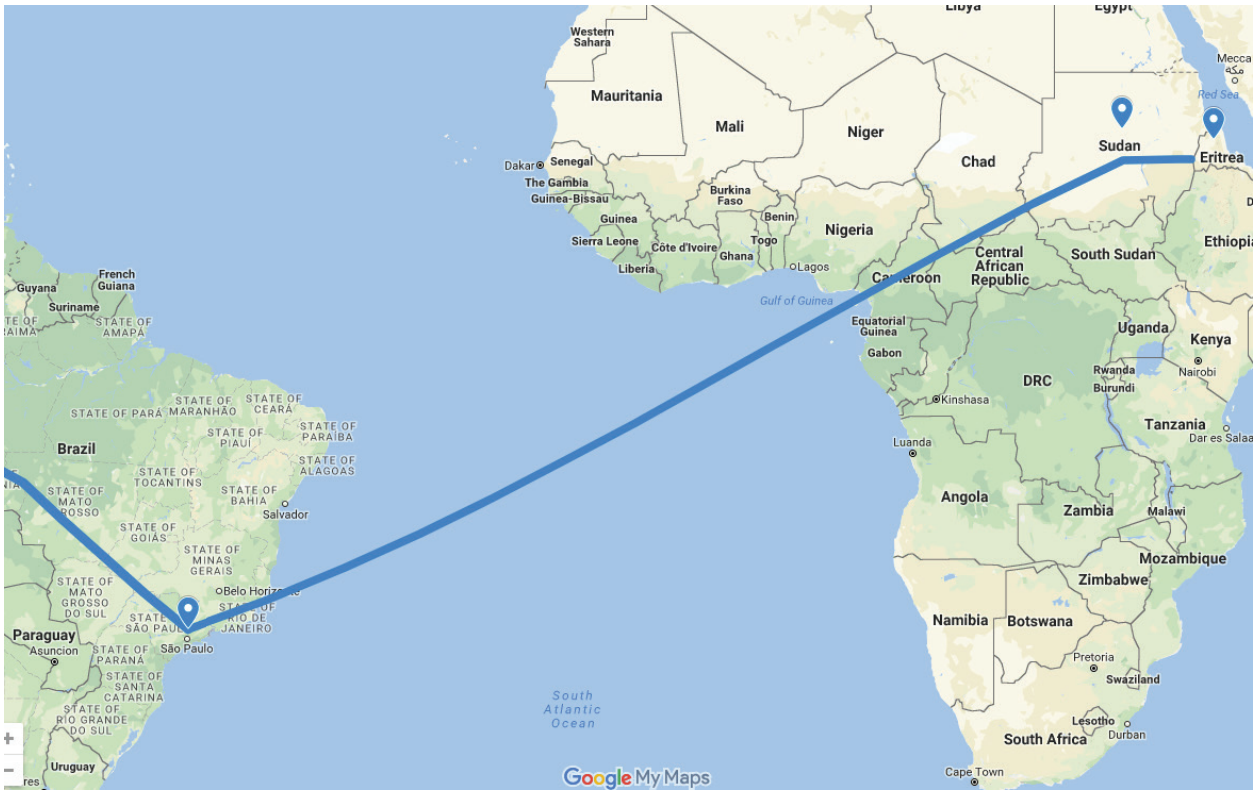
Despite the fatigue from an all-night bus trip, a frail young man in his twenties from the Horn of Africa agreed to sit down to tell his story. For an hour, he carefully narrated his journey, which began more than seven years ago in Eritrea. To avoid mandatory military conscription and seek better work opportunities abroad, he first migrated to Sudan, then to Brazil, and on to Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, and Costa Rica. He plans to end his journey in the United States.

"Iam from Eritrea. I have three brothers abroad and two that remain in the country with my mother. In 2010 or 2011, I decided to leave as my other siblings did before, because of the military service in my country, and the fact that there is no work and no possibility of having a family. I crossed to Ethiopia with the help of a dalal [intermediary or smuggler], and stayed in a camp near Addis Ababa. Life in refugee camps is difficult and does not offer many opportunities. You only wait and do nothing all day. I know few people that were offered a chance to be resettled to the United States or Canada, but not me."

"After three years, I decided to move to Sudan to look for a better life. I once again had to pay *dalals*, first to cross the border between Ethiopia and Sudan and then to be smuggled from the Sudanese refugee camp to the capital. I made it to Khartoum in a truck packed with a hundred other people. Without proper documentation, I was harassed and arrested by the police several times. Unless you pay a bribe, they will send you back to Eritrea. I have friends who were deported. They spent seven months in prison and after were sent back to serve in the military. (Military conscription is the very reason our interview subject departed in the first place.)

"In 2016, one of my brothers embarked on this same journey. He is now in the United States. He did not tell me about his plans until he reached Brazil because he did not have enough money to pay for both of us. He advised me to try this same road and another of

Map 16: A young Eritrean man's journey.



my siblings who lives in Germany sent me $3,500 to finance my own trip. With this money, I bought a Sudanese passport and an airline ticket to Brazil.

"After crossing through Brazil, Peru, and Ecuador without paying dalals and with few problems, I arrived with other Somali and Eritrean friends in Colombia. I remember that we took a bus from Medellin to Turbo then a boat to reach Capurganá. I paid the smugglers between $250 and $300 for the five-hour journey in a boat carrying twenty other people. The crossing was very dangerous and we all had to bail water from the boat to stay afloat.

"Upon arrival in Capurganá, two Colombian smugglers took us to a nearby house where we spent the night. The next day, accompanied by a dalal, my group that consisted of thirteen people of different nationalities started crossing through the jungle. After two days of walking and two additional payments, the dalal decided to turn back. He told us to continue alone through the mountain and after to follow the river for one day to reach the first police post in Panama. When we arrived at night, we were told by the police to wait outside in the jungle until morning. Then, when morning came, without much explanation, they told us to go back, to return to Colombia.

"On our way back through the jungle, making a second attempt to enter Panama, after two days of walking, we were caught by the 'mafia.' There were four men armed with guns and knives. They searched both the men and women one by one and took all our money, phones, and valuable items. They took shoes and clothes, if they were in good condition. They tore open our bags with their knives and machetes, emptied Colgate toothpaste tubes and bottles of shampoo, looking for any hidden money. Before leaving, they fired their guns into the air to scare us.

"Exhausted and afraid, we slept in the same place where we were robbed. In the morning, we resumed our walk and met two Cubans who had gotten lost in the jungle for three days, and who had not eaten for the past seven days. They joined our group and we continued walking. That same day, we also ran into an Indian man in his fifties who had been injured. He was sitting alone in the jungle for four days. We gave him a salve to heal his injuries and some biscuits to eat and said to him, "We are sorry we cannot help you more." The jungle is not straight. We could not carry him. For the next two days, we walked in the jungle without knowing where we were going.

"Finally, we reached a police station in Panama. I was injured in the feet and could walk no further. The police brought a wheelchair to assist me. This time, we were taken to a camp, where we stayed with Indians, Bangladeshi, and Nepali people. We were told to pay $1 or $2 to stay there and have access to food. The Panamanian immigration officers told me that without money, I could not go to the hospital. I remained without treatment for two days. I recovered without medicine.

"After they took our fingerprints and pictures, we were allowed to leave the camp. In the meantime, I received $150 from my brother in Germany through Western Union. A person who works in the camp helped get me the money, taking a 10 percent fee. With this money, I bought two bus tickets that cost me $20 and $25 to first reach Panama City and then Costa Rica.

"After crossing the southern borders of Costa Rica, immigration officials took us to a camp where we could stay for free, eat for free, and receive free treatment. They gave me a balm for my feet. I stayed only one day in that camp, the time needed to get the official papers.

"After leaving the camp, my friend fell sick with malaria. We rushed him to the hospital and I remained by his side for three days. Yesterday, I told my friend, 'God bless you,' and I decided to continue my journey alone to the north. Every day, I had to pay $10 for the hotel and $20 for the food. I received more money from my brother in Germany. He sent me $500 and $300 more via Western Union and 'Mama Africa,' [the name given to one of the dominant smuggling rings.] Mama Africa took 10 percent as a commission. With this money, I bought a new phone, clothes, and a bus ticket to La Cruz. I arrived this morning with Nepalis and Indians. I will wait one day only for my friends who are still in Panama and in the south of Costa Rica before trying to cross to Nicaragua." (Nicaragua closed its borders in 2015 and those trying to cross face the prospect of death and imprisonment.)

"My plan is to reach the US. I don't know the rest of the journey, but when I arrive, I will ask for refugee status and would like to go to school. I like my country Eritrea and I am willing to go back if there is democracy, but the situation there now is difficult. I miss too much about my country. I miss especially my Sudanese girlfriend who is still in Sudan. I am not in contact with her because in Sudan women's access to Facebook is controlled by their male relatives. Right now, I am only in contact with my two brothers in the US and Germany. In Eritrea, there is no Internet outside of Asmara, the capital. I also miss playing football [soccer].

"Overall, if I can deliver a message to those that maybe would like to try this journey, I would tell them: Don't come. The mafia and police are the biggest problems. Personally, if I had known the difficulty of this journey, I would not have embarked on it. My brother in the US told me his journey in 2016 was much shorter. It took him fewer days to reach his final destination."

"They Eat You"

Nigeria to Costa Rica: A young businessman leans towards a better life in Central America.

Mathew left Nigeria because government corruption was making it impossible to conduct business. A businessman at heart, he wanted to live in a country where the government could be trusted and hard work could earn you a fair wage. After spending seven months in Brazil, Mathew made his way northward until arriving in Costa Rica, where we met him. He was working at a local supermarket bagging groceries. One day he might attempt to make it to his ideal destination: Canada.

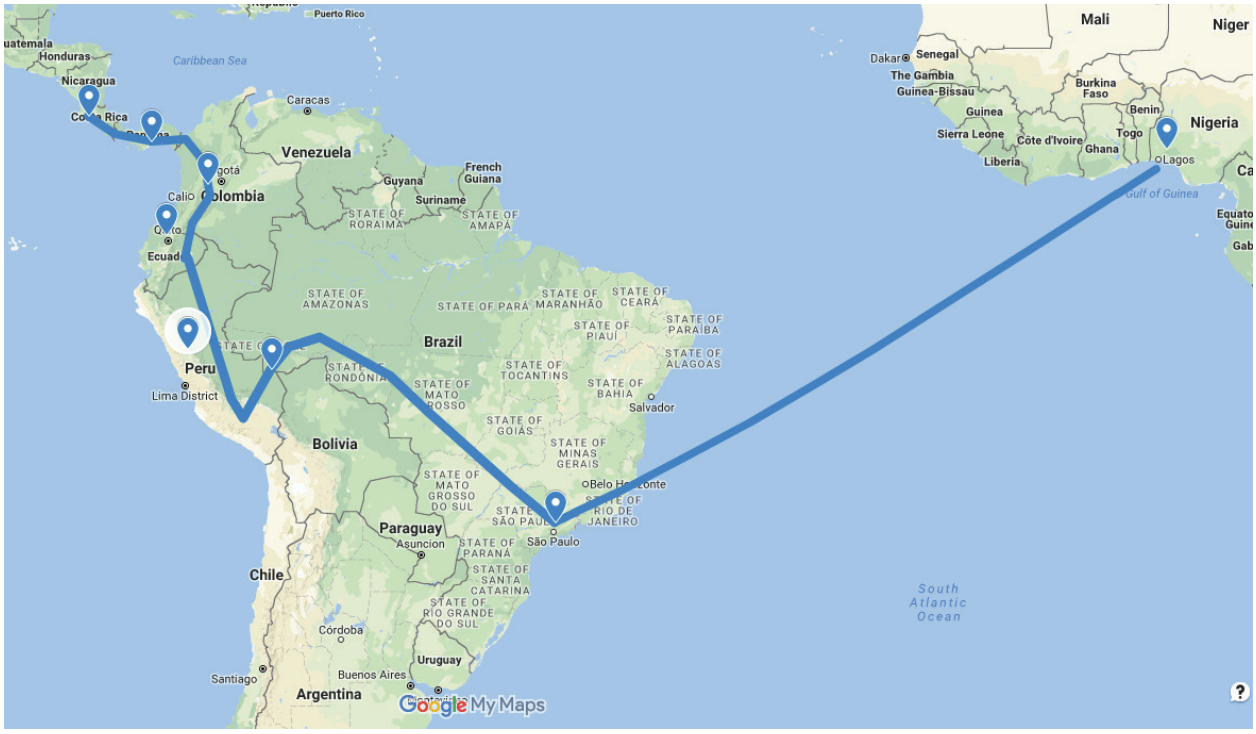
"The political situation in Nigeria had become very bad. One vicious man after another had come into power. They eat you," Mathew said when we asked him why he left Nigeria. It was noon in La Cruz. The northern migrant camp (CATEM Del Norte) was a few kilometers away. The tiny hilltop town of La Cruz lies around twenty kilometers south of Peñas Blancas, Costa Rica's main border crossing with Nicaragua.

After a couple of amicable conversations, Mathew had graciously agreed to share his story with us before heading to the local supermarket where he worked bagging groceries. We interviewed Mathew in our hotel's lobby, furnished with colorful wooden chairs and tables, while we enjoyed a refreshing beverage.

A young man in his late twenties or early thirties from Benin City, Mathew was well spoken and friendly. His English was fluent. The first time we spoke at the grocery store, we used French and Spanish. He said he had picked up some Spanish during the past two years while living in Costa Rica. As for French, at seventeen he attended university in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. For five years, he studied there, mastering French and working for the United Nations as an interpreter.

Back then, Mathew was hopeful that he could better his situation, and he started a business buying and selling food products back in Nigeria. He travelled throughout the country to service retail stores with his various commodities. "I am a businessman," he said with a smile. Even after his harrowing journey to Costa Rica, he remained strongly attached to that part of his identity.

Map 17: Mathew's journey.



"I could not stay in Nigeria," he said. For many migrants, leaving is not a decision, but rather a necessity. Mathew prepared for his journey by setting aside savings in his bank account. He recalled, "A friend of mine was doing well in Brazil, so I called him, and he said, 'Come, it is nice here. I have a job and you can find one too.' I had saved enough money from my business and flew to Brazil. In São Paulo I stayed at a church guesthouse. Guests hailed from all over the world—Pakistan, Bangladesh, other Nigerians, and other Africans. The church let us stay for free. They even fed us." A Christian, Mathew greatly appreciated the church's role in helping him and other migrants. They gave back what they could but often that was very little.

For money, he had access to his Nigerian bank account and was able to earn an income from small jobs. He even collected enough to send money home. Lacking the required paperwork for Western Union, Mathew would remit money through an "agent" in São Paulo who would forward funds directly to his Nigerian bank account via the Internet. The agent charged him 10 percent of the amount remitted.

Mathew would have liked to stay on in Brazil. During our conversations he often referenced how he could cross the street and find the same kind of foods he enjoyed back home. He emphasized the importance of the "African community" in Brazil. He said in a humorous way, "In Brazil, if you leave your seat, an African will replace you in a minute!" He then burst out laughing and suddenly appeared younger.

His outburst left us imagining that the African community in São Paulo must be quite large. It served as a valuable resource to Mathew. The community gave him valuable advice, but mainly he saw it as a way of dealing with homesickness. It was apparent that it meant a lot to Mathew to be able to access Nigerian food at food stands, restaurants, and grocery stores. The pleasure of buying African foods was absent elsewhere on his journey.

After seven months Mathew felt compelled to leave Brazil—the economy had dwindled and work prospects had worsened—and conjured new plans for another journey. Though he knows of African communities in California, New York, and Texas, Mathew said his objective was to live in Canada, which he feels would be a better fit for him.

The excitement in his eyes, so visible as he spoke of Brazil and Canada, was soon replaced by a sober look as he described his journey from Brazil to Costa Rica.

"To do this journey the traveler needs to understand there is no going back," he said. "We really did not know the route and took the journey one leg at a time. We flew to Brasilia. It is very easy to find a taxi there to take you to the border of Peru. Our taxi driver signaled his friend on the Peru side to come pick us up at the border and take us to Lima. We stayed in Lima only for a day, then traveled by bus to Quito."

Mathew learned about the journey as he travelled it, with no real knowledge in advance of the best routes. When asked how he was able pay for things in a new country with a different currency, he shrugged: dollars, of course.

He paused and sighed as he took a sip of his drink. He described the most distressing part of his journey. "From Quito we crossed the Colombian border and took a bus to the Caribbean coast. A boat took us to the northern part of Colombia, to Capurganá, where we trudged through the Darién jungle on foot. We did not have a guide. The person who says, 'I understand this forest and can guide you,' is the person you should fear. So, we went without a guide. It took us four days. We were dizzy and lost. We started shedding our clothes. We had to wade through water and mud for great distances with nothing but heat surrounding us. My backpack felt so heavy, so I tossed it into the water, glad to be rid of the weight. In the pack were my passport and my bankcard, all my money. It was a desperate journey.

"We could not stop. We lost souls in the water of the jungle. We had to move like soldiers in war. Along our march through the jungle, we came upon some women who had been lost for weeks. They could not move so we half-dragged, half-carried them out of the jungle and left them with a fisherman so that we could move on. The fisherman promised he would feed them and give them rest. When we reached the other side of the jungle, volunteers wanted to help by giving me medicine, saying that our legs were badly cut. But, I did not need medicine. I had walked with God and was not hurt."

When talking about his Christian faith, the tension in his eyes and shoulders relaxed, and he smiled with a look of relief; his faith was palpable and clearly a source of strength and perseverance. He and the group he was with then made it through Panama and to Costa Rica, mainly by bus. Some tried to cross to Nicaragua but were turned away by patrols.

Mathew is currently working on gaining residency in Costa Rica and getting the right paperwork to move to Canada. When asked about his worries, he smiled, calling us his friends, almost as if he wanted to give us comfort. He said that he believed one day he would make it to Canada and eventually be able to go back to Nigeria and see his people. He believed that his Christian faith had gotten him through this journey thus far and helped him go to the unknown, time and time again.

"Gold in Ghana"

Ghana to Costa Rica: Fleeing violence, a middle-aged man hopes to open a phone repair shop in a sleepy border town.

Peter fled Ghana over a land dispute that led to his community physically attacking him. After flying to Brazil and traveling north to Central America, Peter is applying for a work permit and dreams of opening his own computer repair shop in Costa Rica.

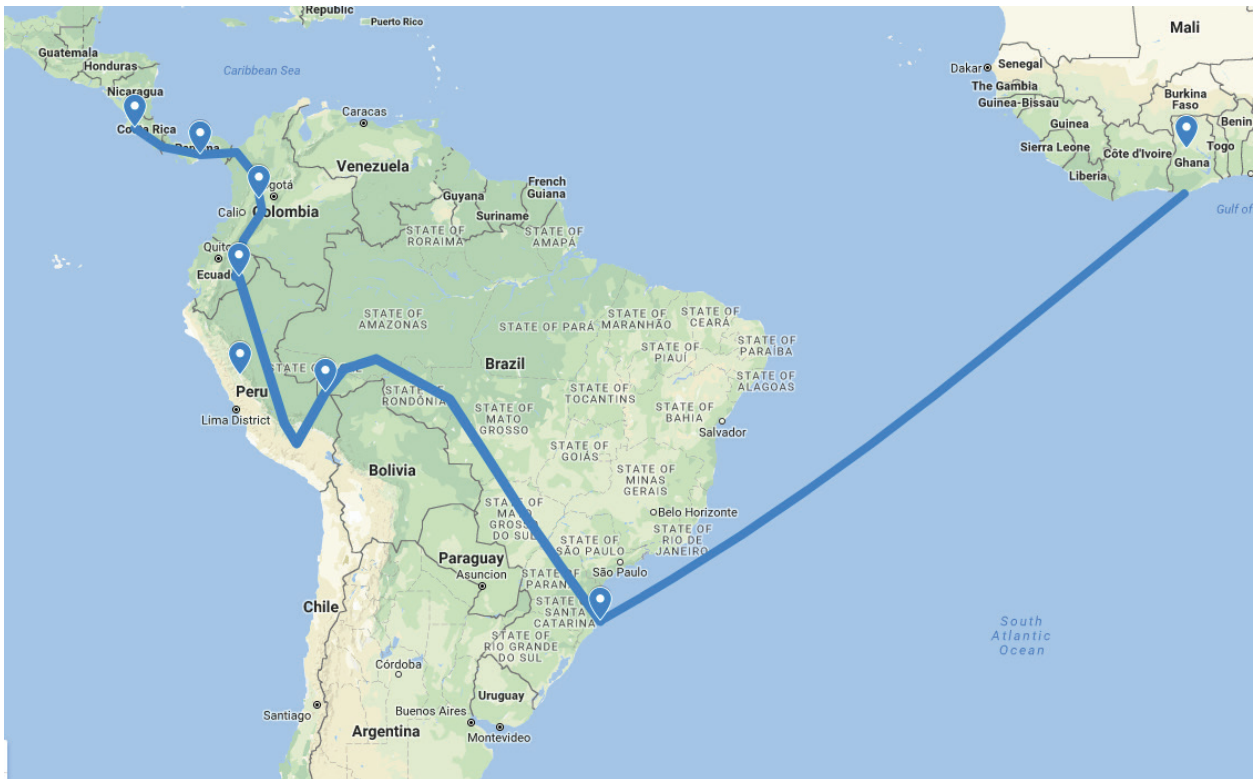
"I used to have a comfortable life back in Ghana. I graduated from a technical university and worked as a computer technician. I even traveled for work, to tech conferences in South Africa and then Israel, where I prayed at the Western Wall. I enjoyed traveling, and liked to look up places where my passport could take me for free.

"I know that when you travel, you need a passport. What I did—traveling without papers—is not good. It is not good to live in a country where you don't have papers. But when I left, it was an emergency situation. They were trying to kill me.

"Ghana doesn't have problems like other countries. But there is a religious divide between Muslims and Christians, and it can be dangerous for couples who marry outside their faiths. These marriages must be performed in secret, and if the family or community finds out, they will kill you—often by poison. Sometimes it happens that a woman from the south marries a man from the north, and when she moves to be with her husband, he may try to make sure she is cut [female genital mutilation/cutting], a reason why women, in particular, flee.

"As for me . . . there is a lot of gold in Ghana. If you inherit land with gold, the most profitable thing is to sell it to the Chinese. But many people in the community do not want this and will try to prevent it. When my father died, he left me land. I do not have any other family. People in my community tried to kill me." Peter shows me a large scar between his neck and shoulder that appears to have been made by a machete. He indicates there is similar scarring on his back.

Map 18: Peter's journey.



"There is no police station in my town, so there was no one to help me. I went to my pastor for advice. It's not everyone you tell your story to, but I trusted him. He told me it would be better for me to leave the country and he gave me $1,600. I didn't have time to do things the right way. I had to leave.

"I walked onto a ship that was going to Brazil. I had some biscuits with me. I brought a jug of water and a carton of water bottles. There were three others, two who spoke Twi. When we got close to Porto Allegre, we transferred to a speedboat that took us to shore. I don't remember how long I was on the ship.

"I traveled on a very nice minibus to reach Peru from Brazil. When I got there, I asked the driver how to get to Ecuador. The driver took me to a guesthouse, where the person there called for a taxi to take me to the bus terminal in town. But I got caught by the police. They detained me because I was undocumented but issued me a *transito* [transit] pass anyway. The police there didn't take any money, only the taxi driver did. But he got me to Lima, where I bought a bus ticket for Tumbes."

"It took two taxis to cross from Peru to Ecuador. In the first taxi, there was another person, which made me suspicious. There should only be the driver in the taxi. They wanted me to sit in the front seat but I refused and told the other man to sit there instead while I got in the back. They wanted to know if I had a phone. I asked them, 'Why do you want to know if I have a phone?' I told them I didn't have one. They told me to pay $100. I did not want to give them the money, but I did not have a choice. They eventually let me out after I paid the bribe. I found another taxi and paid $60 to cross the border. Once I was in Ecuador, I took a bus from Quito to Tulcán and then took a taxi from the bus station to cross into Colombia. I would have stayed in Ecuador, but I don't speak Spanish.

"In Colombia, the person at the bus station would not sell me a ticket. I had to go to another window. When I was traveling through Colombia, I kept hoping that someone would stop me and ask what I was doing. I wanted them to put me somewhere so they would feed me. But no one ever asked.

"You have to go to the sea [Gulf of Urabá] and find someone to help you cross to the jungle [Darién Gap]. I found a speedboat. But during the trip, some people fell into the water. Others were pushed overboard. When at last we got to the jungle, it took twelve hours to ascend the mountain and four hours to descend it. The journey was not easy at all. We had to find the river and follow it to the villages. If we saw mango or papaya, we knew that a village was close by.

"The jungle is a dead jungle. If you are unlucky, you die there. At night, if you don't make a fire, the animals come. But when you do make a fire, you must always look out for thieves. If you challenge them they can shoot you. I heard about one Cuban who was shot in the back while trying to run away from them. He survived, but then his group had to leave him behind because, so wounded, he was slowing them down.

"When I was walking in the jungle, I came across a woman from Cameroon who could not walk. Her husband was with her. They wanted to go back, but it would have been just as far. I gave them some *gari* [coarsely ground and dried cassava] and sugar to eat. In those situations, you have to go. You can't wait for the people who can't walk. You do what you can—like give them food—but even now, as I am sitting here, I still feel pity for them. She could have been my mother. (In our first conversation, Samuel reported that he had been accompanied by a friend, who had encountered this same woman, but did not know what had happened to her since.)

"In the jungle, crossing the water was very dangerous. Sometimes, it rose taller than you. We had to hold hands to ford the river. Remember, in some cultures men and women may not touch if they aren't related. And because of this, the women would be swept away as they crossed the river because men were not permitted to grip them tightly. (Peter demonstrated how the migrants would hold onto each other, by tightly grasping each other's wrists. He slackens his grip to show how the women were held.)

"When we made it through the jungle, we went to the police. They [the Panamanian authorities] would provide shelter, but not food. There's no food on that side of the border [with Costa Rica]. To reach Costa Rica, you must take two buses—one to Panama City and another to the border. I did not have the money to pay for the bus [$45], but a friend lent me the money. He has lent me $140 so far. He had a big,

heavy bag that I helped him carry. Helping people tells them that you're a good person, so that if you need something, they will give it to you. I also helped others by giving them paracetamol [acetaminophen] and water.

"At the border, we were given a free SIM starter pack from Movistar [a mobile phone service]. I like Movistar, because you can use WhatsApp for free. But the water in the jungle damaged my phone, and I haven't been able to use it since. I paid a guy here in town $45 to repair it, but he has not fixed it yet. I would try to repair it myself if I had the tools—this was my job back home. I don't like being without my phone. I don't know my pastor's number or the numbers of my friends and girlfriend back home. They don't know where I am. Before my phone was damaged, they were texting me, saying that they hadn't seen me in a while, asking where I was. I had also taken pictures of my trip on my phone and wrote down where I had stayed and all of the money I spent. It's why I can't remember specific dates or locations or amounts—all of it is on my phone. There are pictures from the jungle on my phone that I want to send back home, to tell people that it is dangerous and that it is better if they don't come.

"I want to stay in Costa Rica. Here, no one will worry you. I have a place to sleep and am given food. In the camp, the Red Cross performs a lot of jobs—food distribution, cleaning and sanitation, spraying for mosquitos—100 percent of the work. But to be frank, I do not have fun in the camp. The food rations are limited, and when people in my tent stole my food, the only thing the Red Cross could do was move me to another tent. I'm also worried about the children in the camp. I never see them in school uniforms. They should be in school.

"I appreciate all that Costa Rica has given us, but it is hard not being able to access money. I don't have documentation, so I cannot receive money through Western Union. And even if I could, the fees are very high. I can't buy credit to put on someone's phone while I wait for mine to be repaired. Normally, I like to listen to music on my phone and look at what is going on in the world and in my country. It doesn't feel good, not having access to a phone or computer.

"I would like to get a job and manage on my own. I am applying for a work permit and want to open my own computer repair business. But I want to do it the right way, so that when I have my own business, no one will hate me. Once I have my own place, I will have fun. I will go someplace and have my one beer. Only then will I have fun."

Stow-away

Ghana toward the US via South and Central America: A devout Christian escapes his tribe, heading to unknown lands with only his faith to guide him.

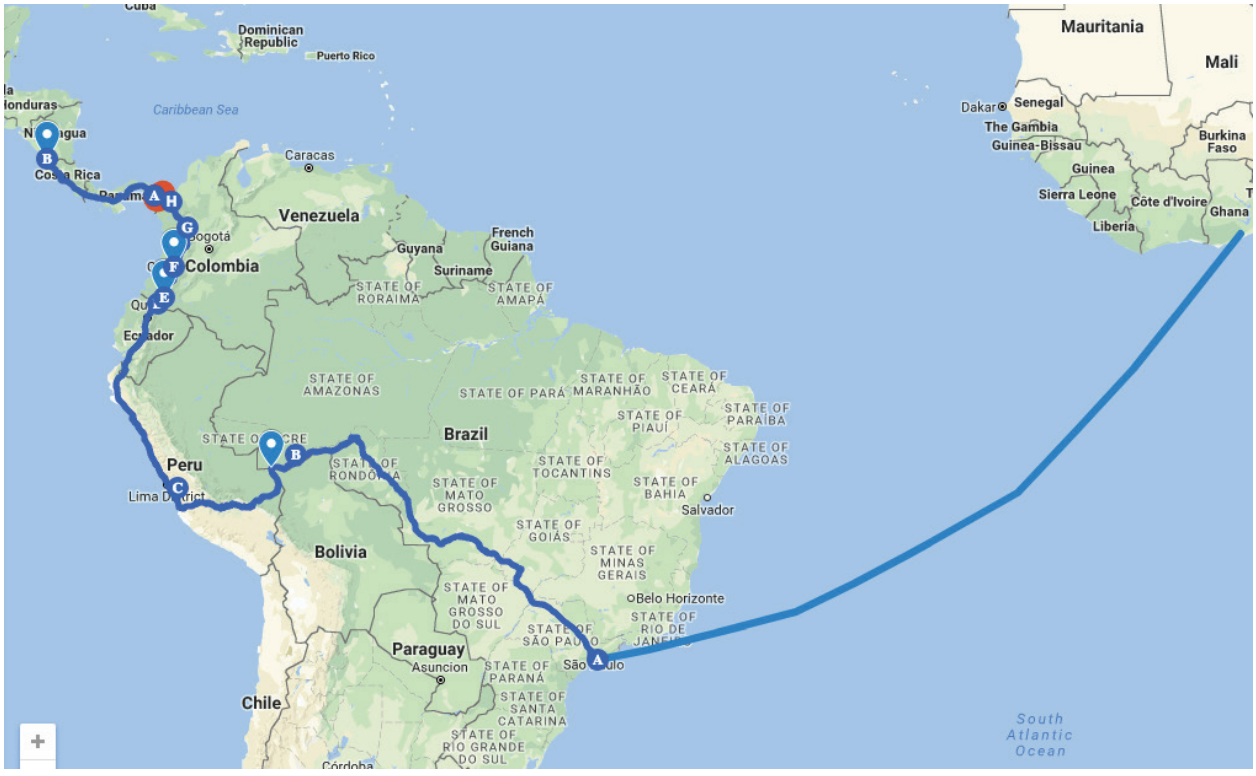
Samuel fled Ghana because of his religion. He wanted to be free to practice Christianity but his tribe did not accept his decision to become Christian and threatened his life. After being interviewed, he continued on from Costa Rica and was smuggled by boat to Nicaragua, where he was able to continue northward. He was then detained in Mexico.

"I am from a small village in Ghana. My mother and father are from different religions. In my mother's religion, people sacrifice animals and humans in order to call the souls of the ancestors. However, I do not believe in all this. I only believe in Jesus Christ.

"I was supposed to become the chief of my mother´s tribe." He used his hands to gesture a crown or a throne. "I was going to sit on a throne. People would come and give me human or animal blood, which I would have to then ritually pour on a stone. I am a true Christian and I believe in Jesus Christ. I could never possibly believe in these rituals! When the judgment day comes, I will not be able to answer to Christ if I indulged in such practices. I became a Christian when I was young and had been attending school in the city. I sought out Christ and the Bible during this time. I followed people who went to church. I read the Bible again and again and again, until something touched me. Even though my father was a devout Christian, I inherited my mother's religion. According to the *tua* lineage, I belong to my mother´s family.

"My mother died around twenty years ago. After her death, one of my relatives took over as chief. Eventually, it was my turn. However, I refused to take up this position because my faith did not allow me to perform those duties. They were ashamed of me because I wanted to abandon this way of life. Had I stayed, they would have killed me. They tried to accost me by force. This is when I fled to another city to escape their clutches. But there was no running away from them. They came to the city where I was and hurt me." He showed us scars on his hand and

Map 19: Samuel's journey.



chest from a knife or machete. "I somehow escaped and ran for my life until I reached a small village. Here, God spoke to me; he told me I must run. From this village, I walked for five days and reached an area near the ocean—the Takoradi port.

"Before I fled, I owned a small store in the city. Before leaving, I sold the store and everything in it and converted the money into US dollars. I had around $3,500 with me before I left. At the port, I helped load luggage onto ships [for pay]. However, because I was not part of a union, I had to work without people noticing me. Out of sympathy, they would give me food and a little money. I worked at the harbor for about five to six months. I slept here and there, outside on benches or in front of stores. I would use paid bathrooms to bathe. Before I left, I wanted to convert the pesewas that I had collected from wages and tips into US dollars, but the amounts were too small."

"When I finally decided to leave, I snuck onto the ship one night and hid inside its hull. I only had a gallon of water and three biscuit packets with me. When I had discussed leaving with some of my friends at the port, one person suggested I put salt in the water so that I would not consume too much. I did not do this because I thought my friend was joking. Each biscuit packet had around eighteen to twenty biscuits. I was there for two days, maybe more . . . maybe two weeks . . . I do not know." (Samuel's sense of time appeared to have been affected significantly. At different points during the interview, he recollects this time spent in the ship differently.) "I did a very good job of hiding. They never found me. When the ship docked at a port, I thought I was in Africa, but I was not. I realized I was somewhere else when I got out of the ship and could not read the signage. No one understood me! After walking around for a while, I finally met another black man like me. I asked him if he knew English and he said yes. He explained to me that I was in Brazil.

Samuel initially did not remember where he had landed in Brazil. After the interviewers listed a few ports in Brazil, he remembered São Paulo. Subsequently, he told us that it was not São Paulo, but a port near São Paulo called Santos.

"From the port, I took a bus to São Paulo, a huge city. People at the bus stop told me to go to Rio Branco. So I took another bus to Rio Branco. In Rio Branco, I met another person who knew some English. He told me to take a taxi to enter Peru. I entered Peru on my Ghanaian passport. I first went through some small towns in Peru before reaching Lima. Once I reached Lima, I took another bus to Quito, Ecuador. At all of these places, I was only able to get by with the help of God and through sign language. In Quito, God helped me find a person who spoke a little English. From Quito, I hired a taxi to go to Cali. From Cali I went to Medellin. I passed through many borders. The police or authorities at these borders let you go after searching you. They never found anything on me so they let me go.

"I did not stay at any of these places. I was always running. But it's true that I would have stayed in some of these places had I known the language. I wanted to stay in Medellin. I was not able to because they asked me for my documents. This one man was sympathetic when I told him, 'I cannot stop now; I am running for my life.' I never stayed in hotels because I did not want to waste my money. I used to sleep in bus terminals. The word 'terminal' is something I always understood—it is a common word in English and Spanish.

"From Medellin, I went to Turbo [on Colombia's Caribbean coast]. I stayed there for two to three weeks. I could not understand the language even there. While handling money, I did not know if I was being cheated. In Turbo, I met other people like me. They were from India, Pakistan, Cameroon, and Cuba. We shared our journeys with each other. They told me their story and I told them mine. We were a group of seven men and one woman; each of us had traveled by ourselves in the beginning. It was in Turbo that I was first told that I would need to wade through water. I am very scared of the water. I had no option because I was told I could not just stay in Colombia. I did not have the right documents. I wanted to turn back because of the idea of facing the sea. However, they told me I would be caught and sent back across the same sea [the Gulf of Urabá]. We finally reached Capurganá.

"At Capurganá, I was told I would have to go through a jungle [the Darién Gap]. I had only carried biscuits and they were finished in two days. This was the only food I had. I even had to throw away some because

my bag was too heavy. On one of the days when I was fording the river, the water took me in. Within twenty seconds, I was completely submerged. I shouted to Jesus in my head: 'Save me, save me.' And then something told me to jump, which I did. I was able to latch onto a rock and I stayed there for thirty minutes. My friends then rescued me from the rock. They were kind and did not just leave me behind.

"After traveling like this for a while, we found ourselves in an area where there were plantations. Here, I was able to eat some fruit. After five days in the jungle, we encountered the mafia [bandits] near the plantation. This was the first group of mafia we met and we would meet three more before leaving the jungle. A man in the first group pointed a gun at me because I was the only black person. They did not point their guns at the Indians. They robbed me of my clothes, money, bags, everything. I begged them to at least give me my Bible and passport. I pleaded with them using sign language. They did not pay any heed, stripped me of all my belongings and left me with only my underwear. The second mafia group woke us up from our sleep at around 5:30 A.M. They beat me so hard, more because I was the only person in just underwear. After encountering the third mafia, we entered Panama. It took us eight to nine days to pass through the jungle. We were a group of seventeen. The faster among us, around eight of us, led the group. The slower ones followed us."

When we requested that he draw a map of the Darién Gap, he started to draw out the mountains and forests as he remembered them.

He continued, "The jungles in Panama are not like the jungles in Ghana. In Panama, they are very dense. In Ghana, the forests have thinned from cutting. In the jungle here, you can easily get lost and it takes you six to eight hours to find the main path. You need to climb the mountains quickly otherwise you cannot climb them at all. When you are descending, you need to do this slowly so that you do not slip. It takes about six hours to ascend a mountain. Sometimes, it took only one hour to climb smaller hills. By the time we reached the camp, all our ankles and knees had swollen. From the first Panama camp to the second one, it took more than seven hours. I saw one dead body along the way."

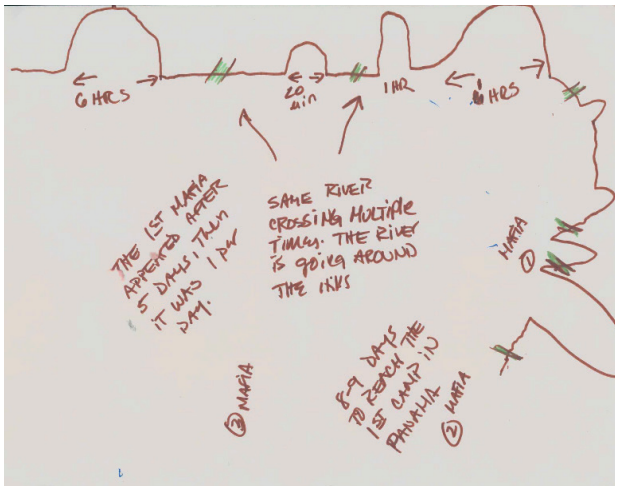


Figure 3: Samuel drew out his journey during the interview, giving ample emphasis to the mountains he had to climb through the Darién Gap.

Samuel often returned to the question of his faith without prompting. He recited parables or stories from the Bible to emphasize his faith and conviction. "Even if someone threatens to cut my head, if I continue worshipping Jesus Christ, I will let them cut my head. I will worship him until I die. He created everything—human beings, the earth, the air.

"The only place where I was able to drink good water was in Costa Rica. I can stay here for 25 days. After that I will have to move. I have eighteen days left. I am always counting the days and asking God for help. Every day and every minute, I am praying that someone will take me to the next city. I will stay in any place that accepts me. I want to live in a Christian country." Upon being told that some choose to seek asylum in Costa Rica, he paused and appeared to give this consideration.

"I want to live in a place where I can find a job. I will work hard to earn money and bring my daughters and wife here to live with me." When we remarked that we did not know that he had a family, he quietly says we never asked him. "I left my wife and two daughters in Ghana. I do not know where they are or how they are doing. I want to bring my wife here . . . I do not want a second wife. My eldest daughter is sixteen and the younger one is seven. I do not know if they are going to school or if they are getting food. I am not able to sleep because I am always thinking about my family. Sometimes I cry a lot. I have lost

everything! I am not happy at all. Every time I put food in my mouth, I think of my daughters." Samuel was visibly emotional at this point. He continued . . .

"I do not know where I am going. I am always praying to God to tell me where I will go next. I know he will guide me. He guided me from the jungle to the camps in Panama and Costa Rica. Only God knows where I will go next." Samuel talked about the story of Moses to convince us that God will show him the path. "I already know I am going to heaven. Sometimes I dream of God saying, 'Leave, leave . . .' and then I leave. I will not listen to human beings, only to God.

"I forgot all phone numbers. I only remember one number and that is of my best friend. However, I have not been able to call home because I lost all my money and the cheapest phone here in La Cruz costs around $70 to $80. In the camp, no one lends me a phone to call my friend. If I get a phone, I will call my friend and ask him to check if my wife and daughters are alive. He is my best friend from childhood and he will do this for me. I do not know where my wife would have fled—my friend will search for her. I know the country code of Ghana—I keep it in my head. Once I have a phone, my stress will go down. I am only able to sleep for two to three hours every day because I am always crying. Here, you can buy a phone without documents. I can only truly express myself in Twi. I want an interpreter so that I can express myself properly. I like speaking in Twi more than English. At the camp, no one is really my friend. Even the Ghanaians—I did not know them before. One of my friends has a Movistar chip. He does not let me use it."

Upon hearing loud thunder, Samuel grinned . . . "That is the power of God."

We were able to secure a new phone for Samuel. Since his interview he texted us from Tapachula on Mexico's southern border with Guatemala and later from Tijuana on Mexico's northern border with the US. He had made it around Nicaragua (smuggled by boat), through Honduras, and Guatemala by bus. He had struggled throughout Mexico. He was placed in detention, crammed with other migrants, with one dirty toilet in the cell. He found people who spoke enough Spanish to help him cross Mexico. At the time of this writing, he is looking for work in Tijuana but once again, does not have the right documents to work.

The Kindness of Strangers

Ghana to Costa Rica: A young Ghanaian family leaves the dangers of a deadly land dispute to make its way through South and Central America, relying on gifts from fellow travelers.

Isabel fled Ghana with her husband and newborn child due to a land dispute with her extended family. After a treacherous journey through the jungle, they arrived in Costa Rica. Isabel wants to continue to the United States, but they are out of money, so her husband is working to save enough to get them there.

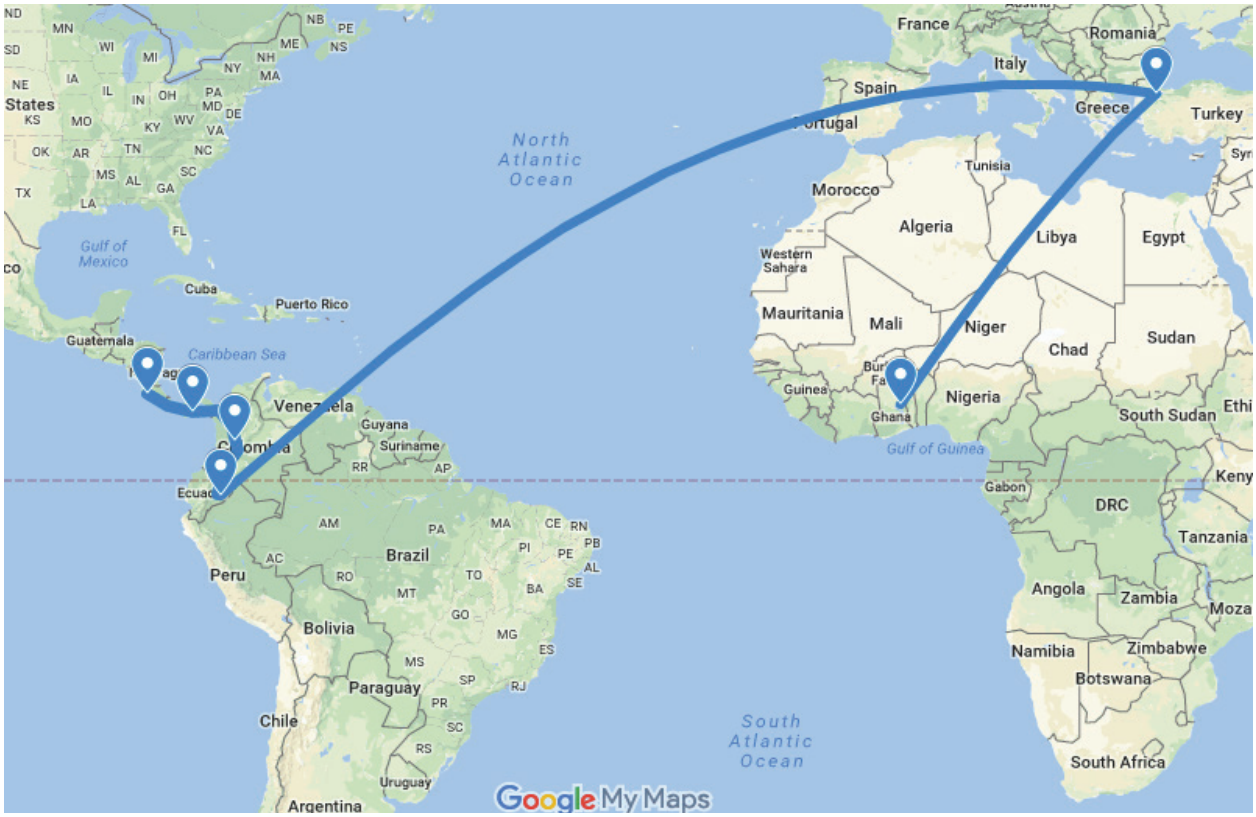
"We are from Ashanti region in Ghana. Before leaving my country, I had a small hairdresser salon. My husband was a designer [tailor] in the market. My father was a teakwood farmer. He had fourteen children and could not send us all to school, but he did his best. I did attend training college and after my marriage, my father gave my husband and me a small house.

"Later my father passed away and in less than two weeks, my eight siblings whose mother is different from mine, took everything. My mother, who is getting old, tried to help me. She fought my siblings in court and spent a lot of time traveling and paying for the judicial procedures. When my husband tried to intervene in court on behalf of my mother and me, he was threatened and attacked. Look at what they did to him." Isabel showed us her husband visible scars from the attack on the back of his neck. She also attempted to lift his shirt to show us additional scarring on his back, but André was uncomfortable with this and waved her off. "At that time, I was pregnant with a baby girl. I lost my pregnancy from the stress.

"My cousin—a police officer—told us that the family hired some people to eliminate my husband and that we needed to leave the country. He searched on the Internet and recommended that we go to Ecuador. He also helped us with money." (Ecuador at that time did not require an entry visa.)

"On November 26, 2017, we took a flight from Accra through Istanbul to Ecuador and then we crossed to

Map 20: Isabel's journey.



Colombia. We stayed in Colombia for three months. Nobody could exit. After, we paid $150 per person to the smuggler, who took a boat from Turbo to Capurganá. Unfortunately, we were intercepted by the patrol and sent back. For the second attempt, we paid $180 per person. If we were allowed to take the official boat, it would have cost us $20 per person, but we did not have the right documents to take that boat. At that point in Colombia, we had run out of money.

"To continue our journey a friend of my father who lives in the US sent us $150 through Western Union. He is a good person. We asked a Colombian to help us to withdraw the money. Other Ghanaians who were traveling with us also gave us money. On March 10, 2018, we started the journey through the jungle to Panama. We walked through the jungle for one week. We met people from Pakistan and Sudan. The Pakistanis carried with them tents and food. We did not have anything to shelter us, or anything to eat. We walked and climbed in the rain. It was very difficult. We saw graves for people who had been buried in the jungle. We saw one man and a child taken by the waters on the shore of the river. We drank water from the river and we received some food from the villagers. We were afraid of the mafia [thieves]. We put all our money in Daniel's diapers."

"In Panama, immigration officials helped us. They took us to the hospital to treat my son who was sick because of the water that he drank in the jungle. My leg was swollen, too. Once we recovered, we paid $25 per person for bus tickets to travel to the border of Costa Rica. We arrived too late and had to sleep in a garage, using cardboard as a makeshift bed.

"In the morning, we crossed into Costa Rica. They took our fingerprints and photos and gave us documents that allowed us to stay in the country for 25 days. When we arrived here in the north, we stayed for one month in the camp. We decided to leave because we are a couple and there is no space or privacy in the camp. We found this place through a Nigerian friend.

"Now, we don't have enough money to continue. My husband works to pay the rent and food. Daniel needs special food and diapers. Since we arrived in La Cruz, I received money two times through Western Union. My husband is in contact with a guy in Iowa and other Ghanaian friends through Facebook who traveled like us to the US. They can help us. We want to go to the US but we don't know how.

"From Ghana and my previous life, I miss my house, my siblings, and my mother in law.

"We don't advise people to take the same road and go through the jungle. No."

"A Hat, Leather Shoes and a Nice Jacket"

Burkina Faso to Mexico: A young man from Burkina Faso orienteers his way across South and Central America in search of a better life in the US.

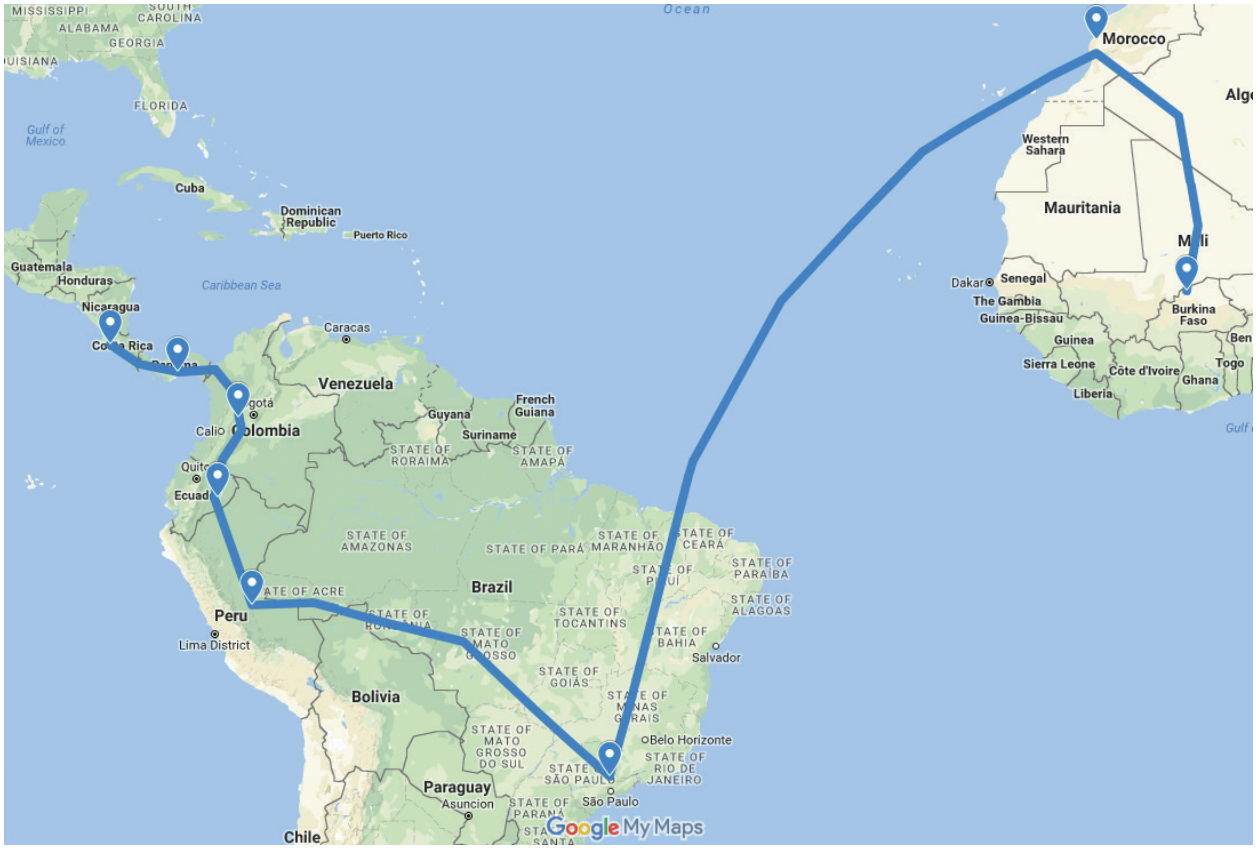
Aziz left Burkina Faso because he wanted to travel and see the world. He told his family he was going on a trip and left for Brazil. In striking contrast to other migrants, he describes his journey as having few major obstacles with the exception of crossing the jungle, which was difficult. From Costa Rica, Aziz plans on heading for the United States.

"I'm from the west of Burkina Faso. It was good, I had no problems, but I wanted to travel. I got a visa for Brazil in January 2017 from the embassy in Ouagadougou. I originally tried to go to the Netherlands but that embassy denied me a tourist visa. They gave me back the application money and I traveled throughout West Africa, but I could not find work. When I went to Brazil, I traveled alone, but I knew a few people who had gone to Brazil and had stayed on. My younger brother gave me 1 million CFA [West African francs, about $2,000] and I told my parents I was going on this trip. I still stay in touch with my mother. I don't miss anything about Burkina Faso except her.

"I flew to Casablanca, Morocco, and then on to São Paulo in Brazil. When I arrived, my brother [close friend] picked me up and brought me to his house, but I stayed at Casa del Migrante [a migrant shelter]. They gave me papers to come and go and I worked in a factory making clothes. My friends, three other Burkinabés who I met in Brazil, worked there, too. In Burkina Faso I had 15 cows and that was my work. Now my father tends to them.

"In July 2017, after I worked for seven months, I decided to make the trip north." (The following timeline does not make sense given his departure date but this is what he claimed, even after we asked for clarification.) "Four of us from Burkina Faso trav-

Map 21: Aziz's journey.



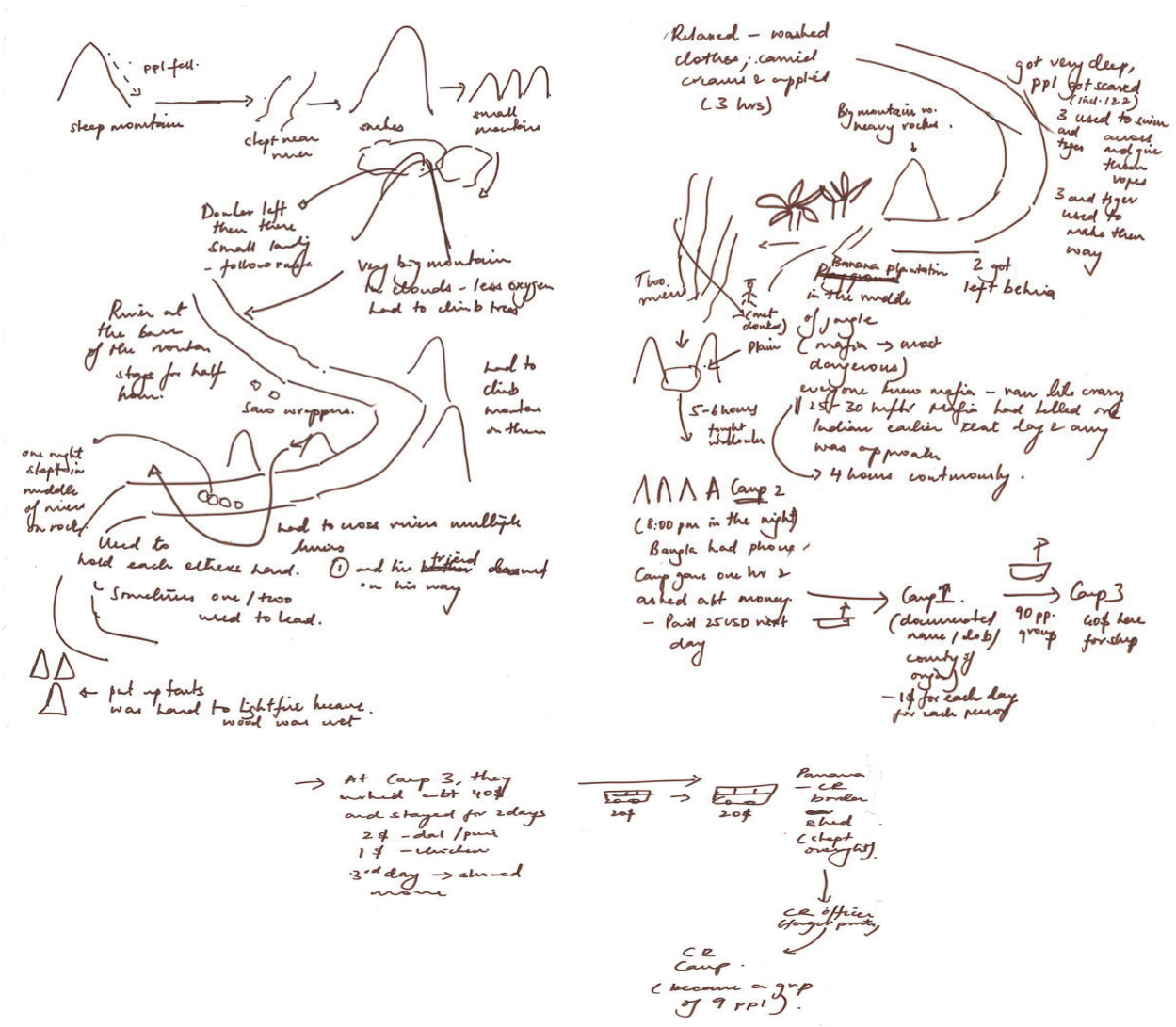


Figure 4: Hand-drawn maps by Aziz showing parts of his journey.

eled together. We got information from friends who had already made the journey. We have WhatsApp so we can talk to them when we have Wi-Fi.

"First, we took a bus to Rio Blanco in western Brazil; from there it took us three days to get to Peru. The border crossing was normal and we only had to present our Burkina Faso passports. We passed through Lima and stayed three days before continuing on to Ecuador. We paid $30 [as a bribe] to cross that border—we didn't know that we didn't need a visa in Ecuador until later. Then we spent a week at the Ecuador-Colombia border. All the money I had saved had run out by the time I got to Colombia. We had encountered trouble with Western Union in Ecuador on the border. My friend in Brazil had wired us $500, but it was blocked. The hotel helped us with a second money transfer by giving us ID cards but my friend still hasn't gotten his first $500 back. We didn't try Western Union again until Costa Rica."

"We crossed the Ecuador-Colombia border easily. Passing through Colombia was fine; we just took a bus to the edge of the jungle and stayed in a hotel. My phone was stolen in Turbo so I had to buy a new one but I had enough money. We paid $200 each to take a boat—it was during the day and wasn't overloaded, and it took us three hours to get to Capurganá. Then, we walked through the jungle with other people from other boats. There were 47 or 48 total in our

group. Some were from India and Pakistan, and others were Africans. The boat drivers had left us on the beach where guides were waiting to take us through the jungle, so lots of boats joined together as a big group. It took eight days to cross the jungle. All we had was biscuits to eat and we drank water from the river. We slept at night but it rained. There were lots of mosquitos and biting insects, and lions but we didn't see them. Lots of people got hurt—one of my friends dislocated his ankle and had to go back to Turbo. He's still there. This part of the journey, the jungle in Panama, was the most difficult part. We suffered so much. When we finally got out of the jungle, we were a group of three from Burkina Faso and six from India and Pakistan.

"The police in Panama arrested us and took us to immigration and then the hospital. The police stayed while we were getting treated medically. (I didn't need treatment but others did and they brought everyone to the hospital for a few hours.) They took us back to immigration. There were about 60 people there and it was good, similar to this CATEM [Costa Rica's temporary camp for migrants], but we had to clean in the morning and pay for food from a local canteen. Meals were $3 and everyone shared food if someone couldn't afford to pay. We stayed there for one week and immigration officials were always there. We paid $40 to take one bus to Panama City and another bus to Costa Rica, which took just over twelve hours.

"The police in Costa Rica welcomed us at the southern border and brought us in a bus to the CATEM. They gave us papers and food and we didn't have to pay. We bought new SIM cards. (We had bought new SIMs in every country except Panama so we could make calls.) We spent $14 and $10 to take two buses here. Immigration told us which buses to take and it was easy. We've been here for two weeks. It is easy to get money here if you have a passport [and my friend did] . . . I don't have one. But my friend from Brazil sent money again and I was able to receive it.

"We are now waiting for our friend, the fourth person, to arrive here before we continue, but he just left Turbo yesterday, so . . . Also, one of my friends doesn't have enough money to continue yet. I do and one of my friends does.

Aziz showed me a video sent to him on WhatsApp by a friend in the US. His friend is posing with a car and wearing very nice clothes—a hat, leather shoes, and a nice jacket—and says America is very good but cold. Aziz replayed it and noted that the things his friend has in the video are not available for people like him in Burkina Faso. This trip has been fine, he says. The only remarkable thing is how difficult the jungle was.

Note: We heard from Aziz again. He texted us while he was moving through Mexico. He had worried that we had been affected by the earthquake in Guatemala as he knew we were traveling there from Costa Rica. At the time, he and his Burkinabe companion were doing well.

"Where I Come from It Is Better to Be a Man"

DRC to Costa Rica via South America: A 36-year-old Congolese woman flees violence at home, crossing the Darién jungle with her children, to seek asylum in Costa Rica.

Jolie was forced to flee the Democratic Republic of Congo when the father of her two-year-old son was being hunted by the authorities. Fearing that the authorities would want to catch her as well, Jolie took her two children and ran without notifying anyone. She traveled to Brazil and then followed the well-trodden path to Central America. After arriving in Costa Rica, she applied for asylum and hopes to stay.

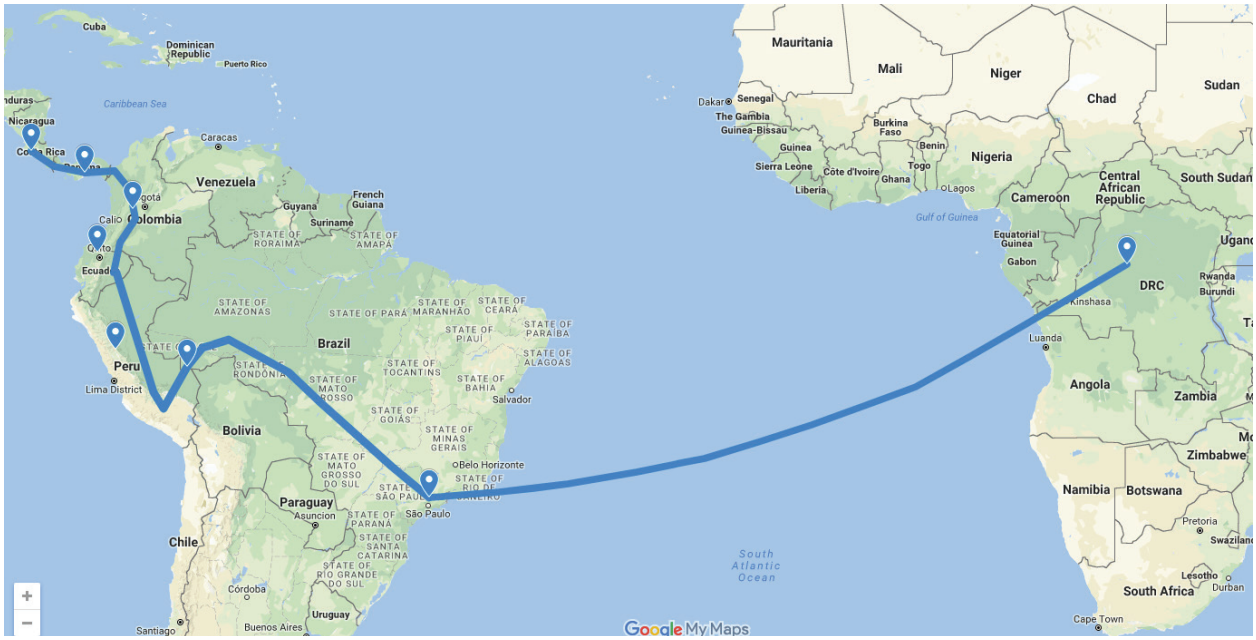
In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Jolie had studied about "Côte Riche" in her history classes, without her ever thinking that she would end up in Costa Rica one day. She says she misses the small things about home such as having the privilege to take care of herself, looking pretty, or doing her hair and nails. Her desire is to stay in Costa Rica to build a life for herself and her two children. She believes this is her destiny.

In the Congo, she used to own a store and sell clothes for a living. It did not earn her a lot of money but was enough to help her get by. Her father died after a serious illness. When we spoke, she said she hadn't had the time to mourn his passing yet. She could not think about him because she has so many problems. Now, she doesn't have a phone and cannot contact anyone in her home country. She has one cousin in Brazil and one in the US.

Jolie ran away with her two children because the authorities had threatened her partner, who is not her husband. He is the father of her son. Her daughter has a different father. Jolie flew to Brazil after a friend told her he'd help her arrange her travel. She speaks Portuguese, which she learned back in the Congo. Her friend bought the air tickets for her and her two children at an agency in the Congo. The tickets for all of them cost about $3,000.

Along the journey, she never needed to convert the dollars she had brought with her into local currency. In each country, she paid in US dollars. Merchants would return the change in local currency. She did not have the identity documents she needed to legally convert money. Her cousin in Brazil was still in possession of their IDs at the time of the interview, and she had no idea if he would send them to her. To retrieve them she would need to advance him money for the cost of postage, money she did

Map 22: Jolie's journey.



not have. (It's not clear why so many of our subjects left their documentation with relatives. Some mentioned that they thought it would be better to leave them for safekeeping versus losing them to theft. We also suspected that many did not want their stories traced through their IDs either because they feared the prospect of being involuntarily returned or of being tracked by those threatening them.)

It was really important for her to tell us about her country's history. A large measure of our interview time was dedicated to her explanations of the political structure of the Congo and its dictatorship: "Mobutu is a dictator. The Congo should be democratic. It was divided and it's now a mess. The family has been in power for decades and they won't stop. He is buried in Morocco, your country. [The interviewers were from Morocco.] We are very poor in Africa. It is very hard for us. We just want to be somewhere where we are free."

The mother and children traveled from Brazil to Colombia by bus, then took another bus to Turbo, and then crossed the Gulf of Urabá by boat to traverse the Darién jungle on foot. They traveled to Panama by bus. Many people helped them with great sacrifice, she explained. But, Jolie and her children also had to make sacrifices. Sometimes they wouldn't eat so that they could save the money that they would need for border crossings. Other migrants took pity on her because she was a woman traveling alone with two children. She says they all "have a union" now, like a big family—they understand each other (and communicate via WhatsApp).

Jolie and her children were walking in the jungle for eleven days. For four of those days they were sustained only by water and went without food. At one point in the jungle crossing, Jolie lost track of her son. She was terrified. He was traveling with a group just in front of hers, but then the groups separated. When they reunited, she felt lucky, and also very lucky that she didn't meet the mafia (thieves). "We did not meet them because I prayed not to meet them," she said. The group just behind them did meet them and the mafia took everything from them.

Jolie wore a backpack through the jungle and from which she had to shed many possessions. It had grown too heavy and she no longer felt safe carrying such a weight. "One wrong step and you die here," she recalled. "If you miss a rock, you die." She had

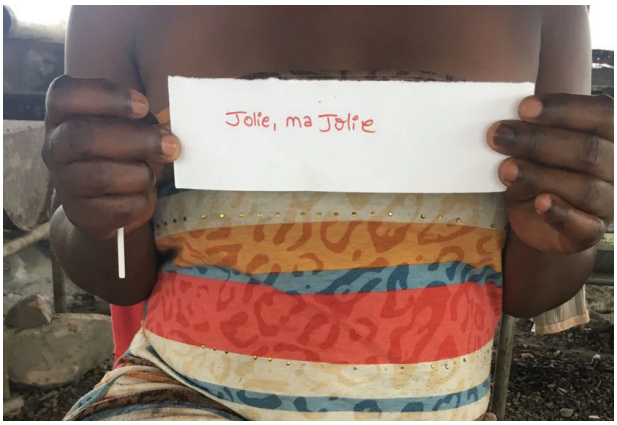


Figure 5: Jolie's name reflects her personality.

to lighten her load by tossing whatever she could afford to part with from the pack.

She has applied for asylum in Costa Rica. After going through the worst—including the Darién jungle—she doesn't think she can continue onward to the US with her two children. In the jungle, "I saw death one million times. I saw God everywhere." In the jungle, she prayed for God to help her. She believes he answered her prayers and this is why she is still alive.

Now and then, Jolie regrets her decision to travel on this journey and thinks about going back. But she says she cannot. Sometimes she says she thinks she would rather die back in her home country. Then she considers the situation. She had no choice but to run. If authorities look for her partner, they will also look for her, and she will not put her children at such risk.

When she was learning about "Côte Riche" in history class, she never thought she would actually be in Costa Rica one day. And yet, as she says, "I am in Costa Rica." She believes "this is destiny." She had no idea about what the journey was going to look like before her departure. Had she known, she would not have made it with her children.

She was not confident in the least. She was scared and appeared lost and unsure about what to do next. She asked the interviewers a lot of questions regarding Mexico and the United States, such as how big and how dangerous it is. She looked like she wanted to stay here in Costa Rica. She was not necessarily in a hurry to go elsewhere because of how exhausted she felt both mentally and physically. She also said that sometimes she wishes she were a man because things would be easier.

Princess

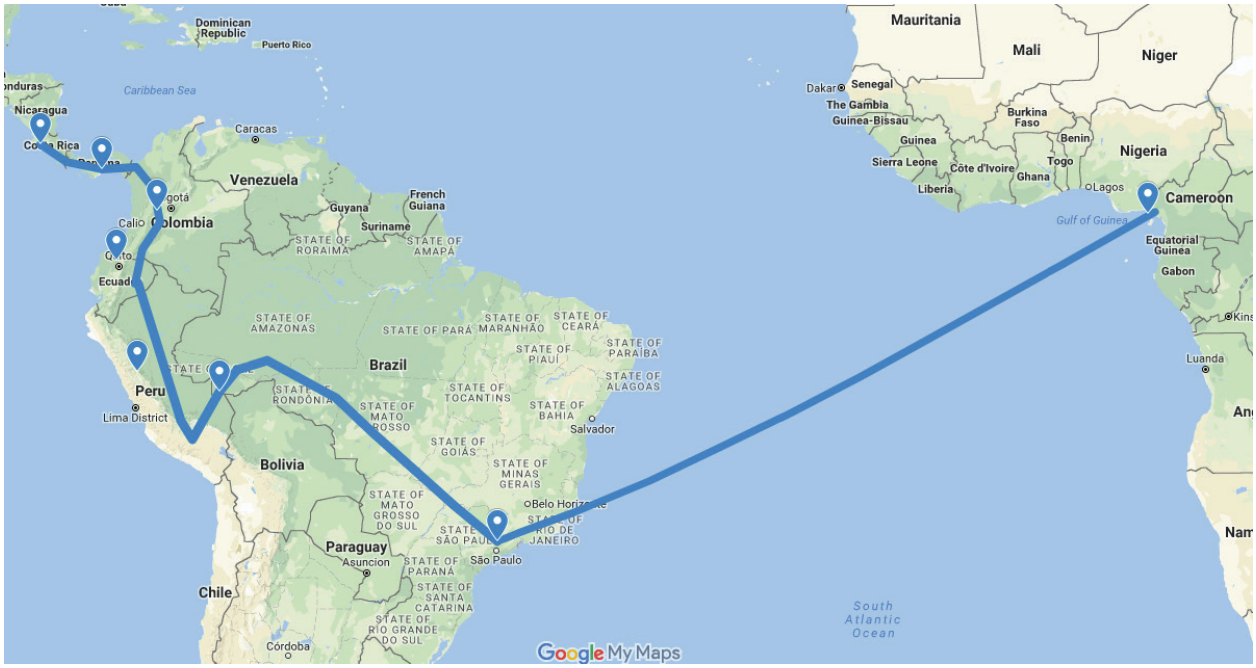
Cameroon toward the US: Juju, political persecution and domestic violence cause a blind mother of three to leave Cameroon in search of safety.

Charm and grit allowed Princess, a nearly blind, single mother of three, to make her journey to Costa Rica and beyond. She had left her children home in Cameroon in the care of her mother. Political persecution, fear of ritual spells, and economic survival propelled Princess toward the United States. She found her way through Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, and Panama, making friends along the way and enduring an extraordinary passage through the Darién Gap. There, in the Darién Gap she meets "blacks and whites" whom she clings to for survival. She remains unflinching in her determination to go north.

"I had to leave Cameroon. I protested in the marches and the government began to search for me, hunt me down. I have been beaten and tear-gassed many times. I am English-speaking, and the government is French-speaking. The government treats us like animals."

I met Princess the day before she uttered these words. At our first encounter, she had one hand wrapped around a dipping spoon, and the other shaking a packet of Maggi into a cauldron that simmered with potatoes and carrots. The cauldron rested on three large stones over an open wood fire. We could have been in any of a thousand African villages, except we were near Costa Rica's border with Nicaragua. Behind us rose the Orosí volcano and in front, across a distance of a few kilometers, the sun lowered into the Pacific. Rows of three-stone fires blazed under blackened vessels just like the one Princess was using. Next to them stood an array of barbecues, their grills set into simple concrete structures. Behind these and toward the fence that marked the western boundary of the camp was a broken line of narrow, high-top tables and benches. The crude furniture and kitchens were protected by a corrugated aluminum roof forming what camp officials called the "cooking and dining area." Lanes of weathered tents, torn and sagging, ran between this back area and the camp entrance. Marking the entrance was a boulder painted with the greeting "Welcome to Africa." Called the CATEM del Norte, this camp could house up to 1,500 migrants, but when I met Princess, its numbers were far fewer.

Map 23: Princess's journey.



Princess flashed an easy smile as she motioned me toward her, inviting me to taste her stew. I admired how she could turn the sparest camp offerings into a delicious meal. Over the course of the next several days, I came to understand that transforming basic materials or meager amounts of money into something of considerable valuable was Princess' stock in trade. Her ingenuity and considerable charm had gotten her from Cameroon to Brazil and onward through South America.

At the close of our initial encounter in the camp, I asked if she wanted to accompany me the next day into town for a snack. My hope was to find a locale where Princess felt she could talk freely about her experiences: What brought her here, how did she finance her journey thus far, and what were her plans for moving north?

She agreed. The following morning, I arrived at the camp, handed my passport over to the guard, and made my way to the dining area. This time several men were rolling dice on one of the wooden tables. Someone had etched a game board into a rough tabletop with whatever carving tool had been on hand—maybe a pocketknife. The players were intent. One of them tossed a die, a small cube cut from stone with pips notched into its six faces, onto the table. As it landed, he moved his makeshift token, a bottle cap, around the board.

Princess—skin luminous, hair shining—saw us and greeted me with a warm hug. She asked if I would wait while she put on more comfortable shoes. She returned in a pair of sneakers, then sat on the bench next to another Cameroonian. He muttered something under his breath.

"I won't be coming with you," Princess said. I asked if she were sure. She hesitated and then said, "I changed my mind. I will come with you."

We took a taxi to La Cruz. The CATEM itself stood isolated along a country road so that the only way to travel into town was to walk, hitch a ride from a passing vehicle, which the camp managers disapproved of, or take a taxi.

Our driver dropped us in the square. We decided to search for a nearby phone repair shop. Princess had been curious about replacing the broken glass on the face of her smart phone. The shop was shuttered so we walked a few blocks to Soda Abigail, a hole-in-the-wall family restaurant.

Despite my offering to pay for her, Princess refused to order a meal. I coaxed, "At least order a beverage." She chose an orange-flavored Fanta from the refrigerator, searched the menu listed on a whiteboard, then decided that fried plantains would go well with the Fanta. She further examined the menu, asked a few questions in Spanish to Arnoldo, the waiter, and then announced that the fish, beans, and rice plate would go well with the plantains and the Fanta. So would an extra portion of salad.

When the food was served, Princess began to talk with gusto.

"A friend had told me that in Brazil life was better than in Cameroon. One night when I knew the police were looking for me I took a bus to the border of Nigeria. From there I traveled to Abuja and met with a pastor we called 'the Bishop'. I had learned about him through a friend. The Bishop also told me that Brazil would be a better place for me. He arranged and paid for my bus trip to Lagos and my flight to São Paulo. I took only US dollars with me. Once in São Paulo, the authorities kept me for one week at the airport. I slept on a bench while they questioned me. But, really, though I did not like being in detention, they were very nice and fed me three meals a day. I kept saying, 'If you return me to Cameroon, you have killed me.' After being released from the airport, I stayed in São Paulo for two months. A friend who I had been staying with became pregnant. I later learned that she had the baby many months prematurely. But I had to leave her in her pregnancy and move on. There was no work for me in Brazil.

"I left Brazil with a Cameroonian guy and his older brother. It was the three of us traveling together. We went by bus and it took about a week to reach the border of Peru. In Lima at the bus station we met up with another group of Africans—including a Ghanaian and a Togolese. We had not known each other previously. There were about seven of us traveling together to Ecuador by bus."

"In Ecuador I had to stop. My glaucoma was getting worse. As you can see I am blind. I found a landlord in an Ecuadorian town who was a Senegalese soccer player. I now like to call him 'Footballer'. Footballer had no money, but he was very kind. I had no money

either. Up to that point, my traveling companions had helped pay for everything but they too had to move on. So they left me in the care of Footballer. He was so nice. He liked me for me and we fell in love. But I was determined to keep moving. Footballer helped me. He found—I don't know how—the money for my bus ticket across Colombia to the Caribbean coast. So I left. In Colombia, the authorities stopped me: I had no visa. They told a similar thing to a man on the bus. The man and I bonded on the ride back to the Ecuadorian border. The man—I call him 'Prof'—had money and so he helped me out. He wanted to go to Peru. I said, 'No, no, not Peru, Prof. We mustn't go there. We must go to Ecuador. You can stay with Footballer and me.' He agreed and we returned by bus to meet up with Footballer. Prof and I stayed there for a few weeks until we formed a new plan.

"Footballer told Prof: 'You must take care of her. She cannot see. She is blind.' Prof and I set out for Colombia again, this time we knew whom to pay [presumably whom to bribe]. We went through Colombia fairly quickly, stopping in Medellin to change busses. From Medellin we made our way to Turbo. By then I had heard news of the guys I had traveled with—the two brothers—from Brazil to Lima. The older brother had lost his younger brother in the jungle [the Darién Gap that divides Colombia and Panama]. Their guide had spotted the army coming and so hid them both. The younger brother developed great stomach pains while in hiding and they could not save him. He died there. I was so sad to hear this news.

"From Turbo, Prof and I took a boat to Capurganá [crossing the Gulf of Urabá]. There, we found a guide to take us through the Darién jungle. We walked for two days and came upon a woman with a broken leg. She was also trying to travel north over the same mountains as we, but with her leg broken she could not move. She had slipped while trying to scramble over an enormous, slick boulder. She had been left for dead. Prof said he could not leave her and would not. He urged me to go on. I could not. I was too alone. Prof found a group of 'blacks' and 'whites'. The blacks were a group of five—a family from Cameroon. The whites were from Ethiopia. They were traveling as a group of ten and Prof convinced them to take me through the jungle. I wished he hadn't. I could not see and the whites wanted to move faster. The blacks began to hate me. 'Go, go, faster, faster, move, move,' they would say. 'You *are* blind.' I sang my song to God: 'Lord, I really know you.'"

Princess began to sing the song and then sung it fulsomely in its entirety, drawing looks from those seated nearby. She finished the song and burst into tears.

"One day, we had to ford the river." She explained, tearfully, "The current was swift—too strong. The blacks told me to cross on my own. I could not see so I clung to them. They got very angry. But, I would not let them go. I could feel their hatred as we waded into the current, me clutching them. Once on the other side, I began to crawl along the bank when I tripped over a snake. The whites laughed at me." Her face simulated a jeer. "They called me 'stupid' but I had to follow them, else I would be stranded there.

"We made our way walking. The mafia [armed bandits] stopped us and robbed us of everything we had. They took my phone and all my money. When I emerged from the jungle, I had nothing. In Costa Rica, a soldier helped me out. He gave me $21, enough to buy a bus ticket to La Cruz, where we are now. A woman at the bus station gave me $40 and told me to buy a phone. I called Prof—I had memorized his number—and learned that he had made it back to Capurganá with the woman with the broken leg. She is now in the hospital. The army in the jungle brought in a helicopter and flew them to Capurganá." She had no idea if it was the Panamanian or the Colombian army. "They are like that, the army. They turn us back, but they also help us. They are our enemy when we don't want them and when we need them, they are our friends."

The next day, Nabil, a member of our research team, texted me to let us know that Princess had tried to leave the night before but was turned back. I met her at the hostel across from the bus station and asked if she would like a refreshment. She seemed eager to see me and tell me her news. We strolled along a broken sidewalk toward the park and chose a small soda—a snack shop—where we bought more Fanta.

"I don't feel comfortable here," said Princess. "I feel people around me are straining to listen in." I paid for our drinks and we moved on. After walking a half block, we stopped at a chicken rotisserie where Princess ordered fish, frijoles, and rice. I ordered a plate

of fried chicken and salad. We ate, but Princess still did not want to talk. "I feel like people are struggling to hear us, even here." We finished our meal and walked to my hotel, Casa De Los Vientos. The hotel's open bar and reception area gave way onto the street. We seated ourselves in the airy lounge area among cheerfully painted chairs and wooden tables. Princess seemed to like the place and at last looked relaxed.

"Last night I made another attempt to cross into Nicaragua but I would like to tell you about my attempt last week, first. Then I would like to tell you more about my life in Cameroon."

"Last week I negotiated with my contact [smuggler] that I would pay $150 to get through Nicaragua to Honduras. He was charging everyone else $330. I convinced him that I could recruit more clients for him. In both the CATEM and my hostel, I found him fifteen people willing to pay $330 each. They were from Angola, Congo, Ethiopia, Cameroon, and Eritrea. We gathered at the hostel across from the bus station at the appointed time, when our guide contacted us. They came to pick us up in cars and took us to the bay [Puerto Soley]. We walked on foot for a while till we got to our boats. There, I huddled in a small fishing vessel with about half the others. We traveled for four to five hours in the dark and finally reached the shore. We exited the boats, then walked through a forest for about an hour. Waiting for us at the end of our walk was a large truck. Also, two men on bicycles were circling the truck. One of them was talking on his mobile, and kept staring at us." Princess mimes a furtive glance. "The driver did not appear to know these guys. We got into the back of the truck and the driver drove us for about thirty minutes when we were intercepted by a patrol car. The next thing we knew was that we were surrounded by police or immigration officers, or both." Princess described that they appeared to be authorities but she did not know from which government entity.

"I think Mama Africa's men [a local smuggling ring] were the ones on the bicycles. Someone in La Cruz had tipped them off, the bicycle guys, and alerted them that we were coming. Mama Africa is very competitive. In the end, I did not select her because her prices were too high and she was not willing to negotiate.

"They asked us to get out of the truck and then one by one snapped our photos. Then, they brought us by bus to a camp where they took our fingerprints. I was menstruating heavily and I asked if I could please go to the hospital for some supplies. The pharmacies were closed. I had only a sheet wrapped around me, by then soaked in blood. The authorities said no. When the men in our group asked if they could use the toilet, the police said, 'Pee in your pants.' They are never like that in Costa Rica. Everyone here is always nice to us.

"They returned us by truck to the border and once across it, we took taxis back to La Cruz and the CATEM." She showed me the red bracelet that the CATEM had issued her when she first registered. "They know me there and I still wore my bracelet. It was about 8:30 at night and they let me back in." Princess seemed to like wearing the bracelet. She had shown it to me multiple times, as if it were some form of identification that pleased her.

"I let my smuggler know that we had been returned. He seemed to have this information already and promised that without paying more, I could try again. He told everyone who had paid $330, that they would have to pay another $80. He asked me to pay another $150—for a total of $300—but I said no. I would only pay $50 more. When we met up to make the crossing attempt, he said that I would have to wait because he had customers who were willing to pay more. He was very nice and said, 'Don't worry, I will take you, just not tonight.' That was last night and I will try again tonight.

"I am also going to explore whether I can flag down a truck." She motioned with her hands the secret signal to a driver that you would like to stow away on board. "I hear that the trucks hide you and bring you straight through Nicaragua to Honduras. I heard this from my friend who had her baby in Brazil. By the way, she was able to get to the US before me. She had brought her baby with her and everyone along the way, of course, sympathized with her. She was able to pass ahead of me because people, including her brother in the US, either sent her money or gave her money as she traveled."

Princess and I left the hotel. She wanted to shop for travel clothes in the event she would be hiding inside a truck. We found a shop just down the street from my hotel. It was a discount store. Princess tried

on three pairs of jeans. Nothing fit. The shop assistant found a pair of tan pants that stretched. I found her a cotton shirt with black horizontal stripes. She emerged from the makeshift changing room looking 100 percent American only more chic—sporty, casual, and very put-together. She no longer appeared like a migrant from Africa. Her new outfit matched her shoes and purse. We paid for the clothes and continued to stroll lazily down the street to the park.

"I would like to tell you more about my life back in Cameroon. I was a protester but also the mother of three children." Princess relayed some background about the protests and later that day I used my university's online library to learn more.

Formerly an emirate, in 1886, Cameroon became a German colony, then after World War I separated into two colonies, one under British and the other under French rule. Today, after decades as an independent country, Cameroon's regions are either English speaking or French speaking for the most part. As the ruling party, the French speakers hold the power and have been accused of abusing it while the Francophone regime accuses Anglophone elites of using identity divisions to their advantage.[3] Sparked by politics at the time of the country's independence and stoked later by student protests,[4] the clashes around identity continue today,[5] with many of the attacks brutal.

Princess emphasized her role as a political protester, showing me video clips on her phone of her village under siege. I could not see Princess in any of the footage. But, she was vehement that she was there. As she rehearsed in front of me, I knew this story would play well at the US border when she sought asylum there, a plan she had confided to me but also to pretty much everyone who she had met up with.

Princess continued: "My youngest child was in my belly for twelve months. My other children were born after eight-month terms. This happened because Rofina, my husband's girlfriend, went to a priestess who performed juju.

When I was newly pregnant and beginning to show, Rofina called me from my husband's phone. 'You will never see this child born,' she screamed. She was so jealous that my husband had had sex with me. She called me again and said, 'Look at the phone.' There was a picture of her with my husband naked on a bed. In my eleventh month, my husband came to me and told me to kill the child; then he bit me. He was possessed by Rofina.

"In my twelfth month, I could bear the weight of the baby no more. My belly was enormous. I was becoming a freak to the hospital staff. They wanted to study me, but would not offer me the surgery to remove the baby. I did not have enough money for the procedure. I had become a Christian many years before and decided to visit a pastor who had been to see Prophet TB Jeshua. My pastor had on hand some holy water blessed by the prophet, which he sprinkled over my belly. The next day I gave birth to a boy weighing five kilos. Rofina still had spells cast upon me. She told me I would go blind and I did."

Princess and I decided to visit a pharmacy in La Cruz to buy eye drops to salve her glaucoma. The pharmacist explained that the only cure for glaucoma was surgery, which Princess already knew. He recommended two different types of eye drops to be taken in sequence that would offer some comfort.

Again, later that night, I turned to the online university library to find if there were similar stories of sorcery and magic as forces that drove people to embark on such a punishing journey. I learned that juju is indeed a force in migration, but more as part of an oath that a traveler (or trafficked victim) makes to her smuggler versus a reason for flight.

According to one source,

> *Parties to the oath-taking directly submit to the supernatural tribune to settle disputes before the deity. The tribune's verdict is final. The oaths are worded in such a way that the swearer invokes a conditional curse upon himself/herself which may include death or illness. It is often believed that swearers, should they default, the misfortune agreed to will befall them through the powers of the 'gods'.*[6]

3 T. Oben, "Cameroon: Exploiting Anglophone Identity in State Deconstruction," *Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture, Social Identities* 8, no. 3 (2002): 431–38.

4 P. Konings, "University Students' Revolt, Ethnic Militia, and Violence during Political Liberalization in Cameroon," *African Studies Review* 45, no. 2 (2002): 179–204.

5 "22 Killed in Clashes in Cameroon English-Speaking Region," Agence France Presse, May 27, 2018.

6 May Ikeora, "The Role of African Traditional Religion and 'Juju' in Human Trafficking: Implications for Anti-trafficking," Journal of International Women's Studies 17 no. 1 (2016): 1–18. Available at http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol17/iss1/1.

Ben Taub, writing for *The New Yorker* explains:

> *In Benin City, important agreements are often sealed with an oath, administered by a juju priest. The legal system can be dodged or corrupted, the thinking goes, but there is no escaping the consequences of violating a promise made before the old gods. Many sex traffickers have used this tradition to guarantee the obedience of their victims.*[7]

He reports further:

> *One afternoon, I met an elderly Edo juju priestess who maintains a special relationship with the god who lives in the Ogba River. She wore a white sheet and a red parrot feather, and carried a wand decorated with charms, to detect any "demon priest" who challenged her spiritually. When I asked her to explain juju contracts, she said that all parties must obey them, "because the solution is from the gods."*

"You say that when you get there you will not run," Sophia, a young woman who had come back from Europe, told me. In exchange for the madam covering travel expenses, the girl agrees to work for her until she has paid back the cost of the journey; the madam keeps her documents, and tells her that any attempt to flee will cause the juju, now inhabiting her body, to attack her. "If you don't pay, you will die," Sophia said. "If you speak with the police, you will die. If you tell the truth, you will die."[8]

But this was not Princess' story. She was not claiming that a juju ritual was an oath to guarantee her debt repayment to a smuggler.[9] She had emphasized that it had been a pastor in Nigeria who helped her get to Brazil and he was not expecting payment for her air tickets. Princess had described the dreadful effects of juju as another reason for her departure and, I thought, perhaps the most important. She went on to say that Rofina was making her life miserable, that she believed the various spells performed by Rofina's priestess had made her own efforts to find work impossible. The only way out for Princess was to leave Cameroon.

Princess and I said our goodbyes and I wished her luck with her travel that night.

The next morning, I went looking for her. She was gone. But she had texted a member of our research team to say that she had made it to Honduras. A boat had taken her around Nicaragua to Honduras where she would rest till Monday then head through Guatemala to Mexico.

We heard from her again from the town of Tapachula, Mexico. She had obtained a pass to move north but it would expire in a few days. That was the last time we heard from her.

7 Ben Taub, "We Had No Choice," *The New Yorker,* April 10, 2017.

8 Ibid.

9 This opinion in *The New York Times* sheds light on how pervasive the practice is and how to resolve it: Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani, "A Voodoo Curse on Human Traffickers," *The New York Times,* March 24, 2018.

"All I Could Do Was Give Her Food"

Yemen to the US: A highly educated Yemeni flees war, lands in Egypt, travels through South America then awaits a boat to smuggle him around Nicaragua.

The gregarious, chain-smoking Jalal left Yemen for Egypt in January 2018. In Cairo, a generous friend gifted him $3,000, which he used to book a flight to South America. With a Yemeni father and a Somali mother, Jalal has spent a lifetime straddling two worlds in terms of identity. Now, as a migrant, he again finds himself geographically straddling two worlds as he makes his way to the United States, "the country of freedom." Not entirely Middle-Eastern and not entirely African, his unique background reflects the unique journey he's had thus far.

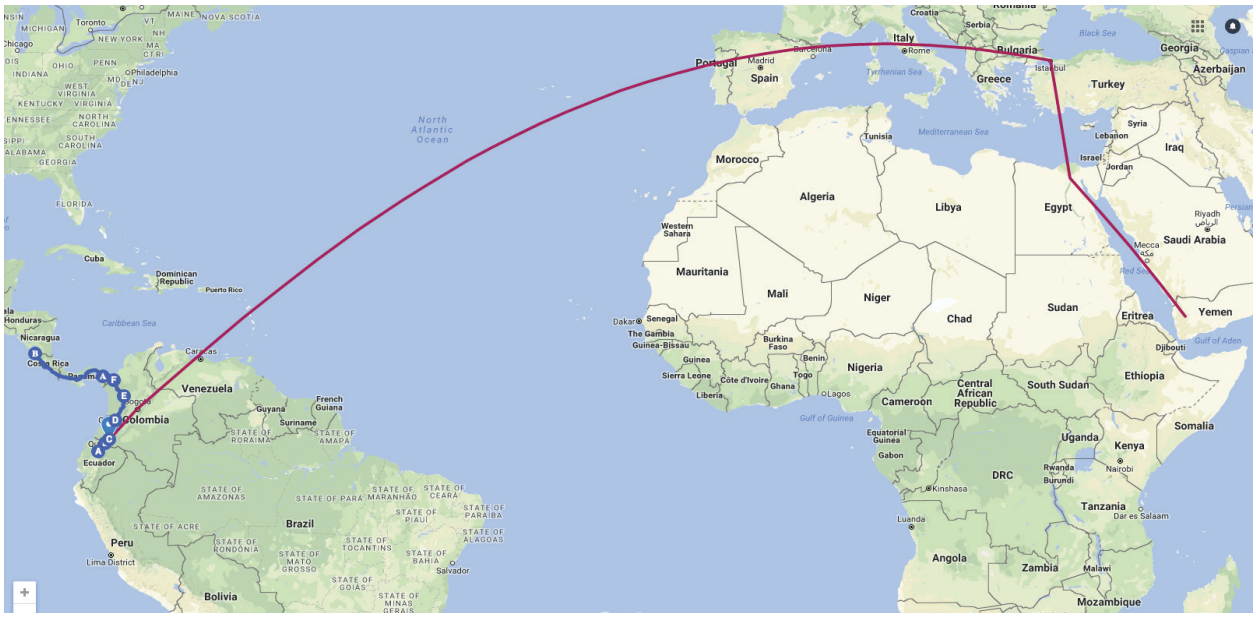
"My mother was Somali and my father was from Yemen. I grew up in Somalia and got a bachelor's degree in economics and Italian. But I left in 1992 and went to Yemen. I had a family, but one day in 2015 I came home from work and found that my wife had left me. She had taken our son [14] and daughter [12]. I don't know where they are. I heard maybe Saudi Arabia or Iran. I'm still trying to find them."

Jalal was in his early fifties, rail-thin, and sporting salt-and-pepper hair. He wore a blue and white striped polo shirt with blotchy stains and beige slacks. He smiled with his eyes, which he immediately greets you with upon striking up a conversation. He grew anxious when he had gone too long without a cigarette. He took multiple breaks over the course of the (multi-hour) interview to step outside to smoke.

"I didn't plan on leaving [Yemen]. I was just trying to get away. All my life was difficult; there was no security. There was no safe place in Sana'a. The Houthis were placing arms in mosques, hospitals, and schools. There were no jobs but plenty of weapons. They threatened me, saying, 'You are Somali, not Yemeni.'

"I left in January 2018 and went to Cairo, where I stayed six months. Yemenis under the age of 45 cannot go to Egypt because they think they could be terrorists. I was able to get a six-month visa at the airport, but after it must be renewed every month for $100, which is too expensive. I went to the airport to buy a plane ticket to Israel, because I heard that Yemenis are given free access. Two of my friends made it to Israel by crossing through the border with Lebanon. But the person at the airport wouldn't sell me a ticket and told me I needed to go to the embassy first to get a visa. When I got to the embassy, the Egyp-

Map 24: Jalal's journey.



tian authorities would not let me pass. They wanted to know what business a Yemeni had at the Israeli embassy and wouldn't let me pass to ask for a visa."

I was unable to determine what Jalal meant by "free access." This was possibly a reference to the 1949–50 airlift of Yemenite Jews to Israel. Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that Jalal's friends crossed into Israel via the (closed) border with Lebanon. Prior to the completion of the Egypt-Israel barrier in 2013, African migrants were commonly smuggled from Egypt into Israel through the Sinai Desert.

"After that, I met a Yemeni who wanted to go to Ecuador because you didn't need a visa. I was renting a place in Cairo, so I couldn't sell off the furniture, only the appliances and electronics. But while I was in Cairo I met a former classmate who was now living in the UK. He gave me $3,000 as a gift. I booked a Turkish Airways flight, which took me from Cairo to Istanbul and then Istanbul to Bogotá and finally Bogotá to Quito. When I arrived in Ecuador, the authorities asked me if I had a hotel booking and if I had any money.

"I stayed in Ecuador for five days. A Pakistani man told me I needed to go to Tulcán to cross to Colombia. I took a bus there, and then crossed the border on foot. No one stopped me because I looked like a local. When I got across the border, I paid a taxi driver $5 to take me to the bus station in Ipiales, where I took a bus to Cali.

"In Cali, the police stopped me because I didn't have an entry stamp or visa. They took me to immigration, where they had my fingerprints and photo on file from when I transferred planes in Bogotá. They were going to deport me back to Ecuador, but I told them that I am a refugee. They decided to let me go, but didn't give me any papers.

"I went back to the bus station to buy a ticket to Medellin for 85,000 pesos, but they wouldn't sell me a ticket without papers. I went back to the immigration office and told them they needed to help me. An officer went back to the bus station with me, and I was able to buy a ticket. In Medellin, I did the same thing because I couldn't buy a bus ticket to Turbo without papers. I went to the immigration office and told them they had to help me because I am a refugee. An officer came with me to the bus station and told them to sell me a ticket to Turbo.

"I stayed in Turbo for five nights, at Hotel Good Night. Indians, other Asians, and Africans were staying there. I arranged to leave on a boat for Capurganá for $230. It left at two in the morning to avoid the police. There were three boats total, holding 50 people each. When we got to Capurganá, we had to pay $20 each for verbal directions on how to cross through the jungle. They told us it would take seven hours to climb the first mountain, then nine hours to cross the second. After we climbed the second mountain, we had to find the river and follow it. We set off, but then walked back an hour to the supermarket to buy lamps, rain gear, machetes, food, medicine, and other supplies."

This was the first of several instances throughout the interview in which Jalal refers to "Africans." It was clear from the conversation that he did not consider himself part of this group.

"I spent five days walking through the jungle. I would walk for three hours at a time and then take a cigarette and juice break. I walked by myself, but was always around other people and 20 to 30 would pass by whenever I stopped. Most people walked in groups of three or four. I would see 150 to 180 people in the jungle every day, mostly from Bangladesh, India, and Cameroon, but also Somalis, Sudanese, Senegalese, Eritreans, Ethiopians, and other Africans. The Bangladeshis and Indians told me to throw away my passport but I refused. My passport is my Jalal. This is how people will know me. If I die, this is how they will Jalal me. I want to be sent back if I die."

Jalal was very proud of his Yemeni passport, and voluntarily produced it to show this researcher.

"When we crossed the river, 100 percent I thought I was going to die. I wrapped my documents, phone, and keys in three different plastic bags to keep them dry. At night, I would wear double trash bags over my head and feet to keep out insects, and would try to make a basic shelter out of branches. I had a lot of allergic reactions to bug bites in the jungle, and got sick from drinking water from the river. Many people in the jungle were hungry, too.

"I met an Eritrean woman who was stuck between the first and second mountain. Her leg was broken. She couldn't go back, and she couldn't continue. No

one else would help. Africans and Indians don't help people. I couldn't carry both her and her bags. All I could do was give her food. As Muslims, you cannot eat when others do not have anything to eat, so you must share with them. I also met two Indians with broken legs, who were trying to climb the mountain using their hands.

"When I made it to Panama, I met Indian [indigenous] villagers, who told me where the camp was. They wanted to call the police for us, thinking that they could give us a ride so we wouldn't have to walk the rest of the way. But when I was at Hotel Good Night, the Africans told me to avoid this first camp [Camp 1], because we would be deported. To not be deported, we had to make it to Camp 2. We went back into the jungle and walked for three or four more days following the river. We would hide from the police if we saw them.

"Finally, we made it to Camp 2 and we told them we were refugees. They searched us for weapons and held us for two days before we were taken to another camp near Meteti. They took our fingerprints and gave us vaccinations.

"I spent eight days in that camp, because there were more security checks for Yemenis. There were four Americans—three men and one woman—who were screening us. Because I had a passport my check didn't take long, but there were three other Yemenis who were younger and did not have their passports. The Americans asked if they had ever served in the military, what education they had, where they were going, and other information. These other Yemenis did not like me, because I drink alcohol and smoke. It took three extra days for the other Yemenis to be processed, and then they released us as a group to Costa Rica.

"I stayed two days in the camp [southern CATEM], where they took my fingerprints and took me to the hospital for my allergies. Other migrants had broken bones, fevers, and other injuries from the jungle. The camp felt like a prison. I would sneak out so that I could smoke and drink. There was a woman who worked there who caught me. She spoke French, English, and Spanish. I could communicate a little with people who spoke Spanish, because my bachelor's degree was in Italian. She asked me why I was smoking and drinking, and I told her it was because I want to be free. She arranged with the guards to let me pass so I could drink and smoke just outside the gate. She was a very good woman.

"The Costa Rican authorities gave us a 25-day pass, and I went with other migrants to the bus station to buy a ticket for San Jose. We slept outside the station when we got there, and then bought a ticket for La Cruz. When I got there, I shopped around town for hotels and found one for $10 per night. The taxi drivers told me about it. I did not want to go to the camp because I heard it was crowded and dirty with bacteria, and I did not want to become sick."

Initially, Jalal was reluctant to discuss why he chose not to go the camp. It is this researcher's suspicion that this decision was due in part to the prohibition on drinking and smoking in the camp.

"Once I got to the hotel, I arranged to go to the beach [to be smuggled] for $300. I would take a five-and-a-half-hour boat ride to Honduras. In all, there were 30 people—mostly Africans—in two boats, with two conductors in each boat. I think they were from Nicaragua. They wore life jackets, but they did not offer them to us. It's an ocean, so it is very dangerous. It is not the sea.

"When the boats landed, they told us we were at the border between Nicaragua and Honduras, and that we would need to walk for 40 minutes. After walking, we met up with a group of 30 Cubans, and all of us were loaded into a trailer. We drove for two hours, but then were stopped by police. They loaded us onto buses, and drove us back to the border with Costa Rica. They took our photos, and recorded our names and nationalities."

Jalal was unsure whether he was in Nicaragua or Honduras when the group was apprehended.

"I plan to go to the beach again, perhaps with a different smuggler. I plan to apply for asylum in the United States, where I will be welcomed. I will go to the camp after crossing the border to the United States. The woman who worked at the camp in Costa Rica told me that if I want to apply for asylum there, I have to apply in San Jose. But I did not want to seek asylum in Costa Rica because we don't know the language. We don't know the situation. We don't have any information about Costa Rica. We know the United States—the United States is the country of freedom. It is democratic. There is justice.

"Today, I am getting a lot of calls and texts [via WhatsApp] from other migrants asking where I am, how I traveled, and when I'm moving on. The man at Hotel Good Night is a bad man—he is giving my number to any Somalis who pass through. I got a call from five Somalis in Capurganá who wanted to know where I was. I told them I was in Mexico, because if I said I was here [in Costa Rica], they would ask for the phone number of traffickers. Because if something bad happened . . . I tell them, 'No, don't come. It is dangerous for us, dangerous for your life.' If you tell people to come and they die, you will be responsible. Do you want them to be killed or die? I cannot."

Note: We heard from Jalal that he had made it safely to the US. We were relieved of this news: the last we had seen of him was in the park in La Cruz. He reported that he had gotten drunk the night before and did not feel it was safe to be smuggled by boat around the sealed borders of Nicaragua to Honduras. When we did not see him a day later, we hoped that he felt sufficiently sober to take a very dangerous voyage.

"In the Jungle, Everyone Believes in God"

India to the US: Three young men from the Punjab find new friendships as they are smuggled to South America and northward.

Sunny and Dharampreet are two enthusiastic young men who left their families to make something of themselves. They appeared determined to stick together along with the rest of their group in the journey ahead. After multiple flights through Moscow, Milan, and Brazil, they arrived in Ecuador, where they began making the dangerous journey north to the United States.

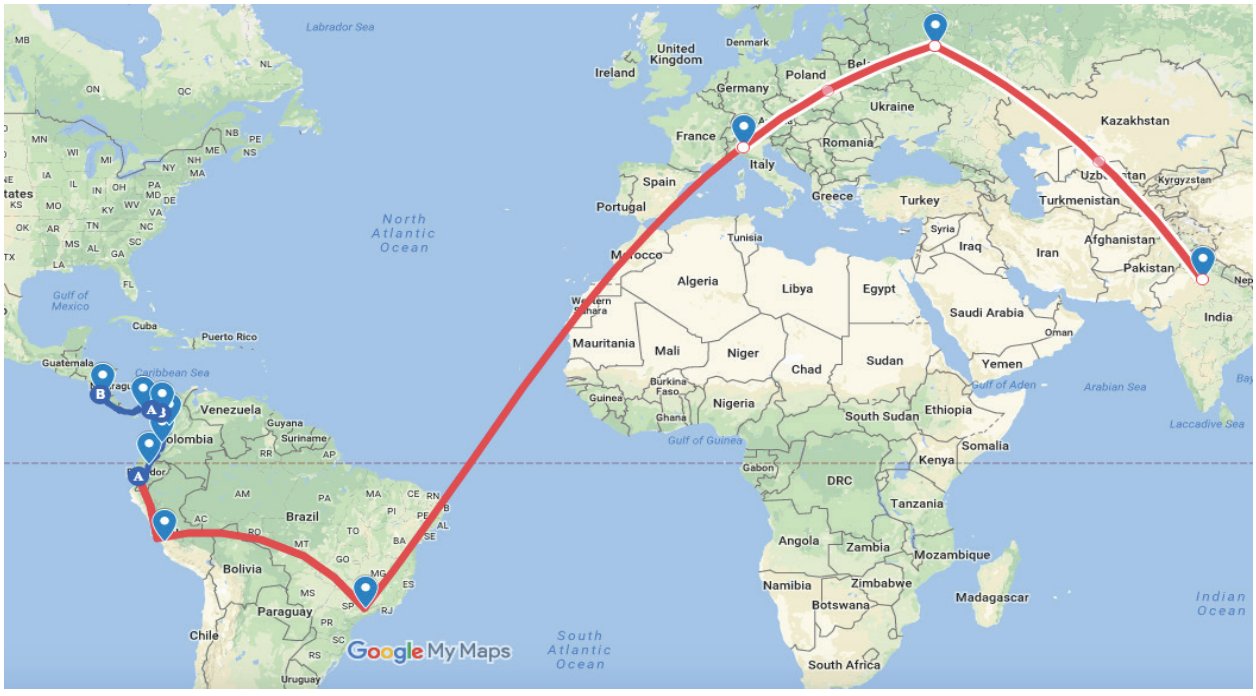
Sunny spoke first: "I was traveling alone in the beginning. Even though my first cousin is also on the same journey, he started off later. He has now reached the Panamanian camps and I am here [in South CATEM, a temporary shelter for migrants]. I had applied for visas to many countries including Germany, the United States (thrice), France and even Mexico. I had worked as a salesman for three years and was earning between 10,000 and 12,000 Indian rupees per month [approximately $150–175]. At home, I have a handicapped brother. My sister is married. I eventually set off on this journey because my family was keen that I do something with my life. I was working while I was applying for visas.

"I have friends in California and Chicago—these were friends from my childhood and school. One of them is an American citizen—his parents had worked in the US for many years and then took him there when he was around eighteen. My friend in Chicago undertook this journey when he was just fourteen in 2008! Don't ask. It took him some six months to get to the US."

Dharampreet said, "I too, have a relative in the US—my aunt. I do not know how long it will take from here to the US. We already spent some 22 days in the jungle. The *donker* [local smuggler] at Capurganá collects 25 to 30 people and then takes them across the mountains."

Sunny continued, "From New Delhi, I took flights through Moscow, Milan, São Paulo, Lima, and eventually landed in Guayaquil. At the airport in Peru, the police took $100 from me. They pull aside people who they know might be migrants—like me—and demand money. I have heard from other people in

Map 25: Sunny's journey included more flights (designated by the color red) than most of the migrants interviewed, including two in South America: one from Sao Paolo, Brazil, to Lima, Peru, and then from Lima to Guayaquil, Ecuador.



my group that the immigration officers in Guayaquil sometimes demand bribes of $3,000 to let you through. They know why we are here and know how to take advantage of us.

"When I landed in Guayaquil, I had a donker's number. I reached out to him and with his help, then headed towards Tulcan, Ecuador. The donker had sent me a photo of the hotel so that I could identify it. From there, the donker arranged for me to go to Cali. We took a taxi that sped through Ecuador to Cali at 200 kilometers per hour. We reached the donker's house from where we took an overnight bus. On this bus, the police took $30 from me. I then reached Cali. At Cali, a woman who had my photo got onto the bus and took me to her house by taxi. She gave us food and a place to shower. From there we went to Medellin, where I stayed overnight in a hotel. It was in this hotel that I met Dharampreet for the first time. There were other Punjabis in this hotel and we soon formed a group of nine. The nine of us stayed in this hotel for three nights. We next went to Turbo and stayed there for three days. Here, we were told we would have to cross the sea. On the last night, we were taken by a very fast bus (it was moving at 120 kilometers per hour!) to the coast where we traveled across the bay to Capurganá."

Sunny said, "Once we had boarded our ship, we reached Capurganá in just a few hours. In Capurganá, we were made to stay in a shed—here we met about 25 Haryanvis [referring to people from the neighboring state of Haryana in India]. We were given two packets of biscuits, one crunchy [chips], two power energy bottles, one bottle of water, two lollipops, and four candies before we were sent off to the jungle.

"The donker took $20 per person. He first took $10 at the beginning of the jungle and later another $10 at the mountain. There was one donker in front of the group and one behind us. The first one carried a rifle as he led the way. The first mountain was very steep and took us four hours to climb. From the second mountain onwards, we started following the river. It took us six hours to climb the third mountain and three hours to get down the mountain. Here, the donker killed around four to five snakes!

"After three days, we reached the Panamanian border—the donker left us here and told us the way forward. He said he would get shot by the police if he were to accompany us. We followed the river and old package wrappers tossed along the path by previous travelers, indicating that others had used this route. We slept on the drier patches of the jungle."

Dharampreet continued, "We carried *channa* [chickpeas] packets from home—some in our group also carried *badam* and *khishmish* [cashew] packets. The next day, the rain was strong—so we ended up waiting until the next day before moving. On that day, we met a foreign couple that had been accosted by the mafia [armed bandits]. We gave them some of our biscuits and channa.

"We also met a Haryanvi who had been affected by polio in one leg and had lost all hope of surviving. When he asked us to convey his love to his parents, we stopped to pray for him. He had taken a loan of 10 lakh rupees [about $15,000] to undertake this journey but had given up all hope of surviving. When we met him, he had been there at that spot for four days. After giving him some of our biscuits and channa, we left. After another six days in the jungle, we met another donker who asked for $200 from the whole group. He got us to Camp 2 in Panama in eight hours. At Camp 2, they checked our bags and medicines. They make us throw away our medicines. They checked everything including our clothes and shoes and ask us to reveal the amount of money we had.

"We did not encounter the mafia because the mafia had killed one Indian earlier that day and the army was in pursuit. Some people drown themselves from depression in the jungle. The mafia also shot people in the leg—we heard of one person who was shot by the mafia and is still in the Panamanian hospital. This person was from an Indian group with four to five Pakistanis and one woman from Cameroon. This happened because the Indians started throwing rocks at the mafia when they started harassing the Cameroonian woman. This group took eight days to pass through the rest of the jungle.

"At Camp 1, we saw two dead bodies of Indians in the river. The soldiers asked us to take them out of the river. At this camp, they did not give us any food. We had to buy food from shops outside—we got puri and dal [fried bread and lentils] for $2 to $3 in these shops. We spent six days in the first camp where we were essentially made to spend all of our money."

Sunny returned at this point after reporting that he was able to speak to his mother. He was extremely happy and took off from where Dharampreet left off, "We heard from another group that they were made to spend $3,000 in fifteen days in this camp. If you indicate to them that you have that much money, they will somehow make you spend it. They have fixed deals with the shops and get a cut from the shops outside. We were asked to pay $25 to move to the next camp.

"At Camp 3, they took our fingerprints. We stayed here for three days. Here they asked us if we had $40 (i.e., $20 for each bus ticket). We received money at the nearby Western Union. Many of the shopkeepers outside of the camp would give us use of their phones to call home to ask for money. They take a 15 percent cut of the money received."

Dharampreet continued, "Some mountains only had snakes and the children of snakes! It was terrible. The donker gave us a kirpan or talwar (sword or machete) for $4 and tents for us to sleep in. In the tents, some people stayed awake while the rest of us slept on huge tree leaves. At times, we used to feel very cold—we had after all been in water for seven to eight days. We were constantly crossing rivers. The bags become much, much heavier when drenched by the water. We only had two shirts and two pairs of pants. We even had to throw some of these clothes away because our bags had gotten too heavy. The mountains were very steep.

"In the jungle, everyone starts believing in God."

Sunny said, "There are videos online on YouTube—look up 'USA Donkey Punjabi Boy.' I looked up these videos before leaving India. The visa process in Delhi is extremely disturbing. I had shown them assets and savings worth $40,000–$60,000 [presumably in his bank account]. Another time, I had shown 25 lakh rupees. Yet, they never issued me a visa. This was in 2016.

"At the counters in Delhi, all they do is say, 'sorry-next, sorry-next . . .' Even old men who have no one left but children in the US do not get visas, and they have to take a similar route through Mexico to join their families. In Mexico, I have heard you can pay $200 to immigration, $200 to police, and $100 to cross the border. There were Indian donkers in Guayaquil and in Lapa near Peru. I think I have spent between $400 and $500 on police officers, and between $2,000 and $3,000 on donkers. From Quito to Mexico, I expect to be spending between $7,000 and $8,000."

Dharampreet said, "I had arranged $10,000 in total for the journey. For the tickets, I spent 2,200,000 rupees [approximately $3,200] for round-trip tickets. I had taken a mortgage on my farm and the mortgage plus the savings financed this trip. I have a friend in the US from my village who works in a store. He had taken the journey one year ago and took four months to complete it. He had given me the donker's number. The journey I took was slightly different from that of Sunny. I took off from Delhi. I landed in Quito and then went to Tulcan. From there I went to Cali, then on to Medellin (where I met Sunny), then to Turbo, and from there to Capurganá. In Delhi, I met two other people at the airport. In Quito, we became a group of three. In Tulcan, we became five. In Cali, we became eight and in Turbo we became nine. In Capurganá, we met sixteen Indians and four Bangladeshis. We had become a group of twenty-nine people at the beginning of the jungle [the Darién Gap].

"While in the jungle I lost my passport in the river. I had an Aadhaar card [India's national ID card] in India but did not carry this with me. Someone told me that I should not carry any documents. I know only one other person who has taken the journey. My family does not know how bad it is. Even though I knew how bad it was before I left, I would not do it again. I didn't really fall behind in the jungle. I tried to help people along the way."

Later, when the interview expanded to include Balbir and Gatsharan, they spoke about how Sunny fell behind a couple of times and how Balbir had to carry him.

Dharampreet continued, "The Costa Rican camp is the best in terms of facilities. The Panama camp was not clean. The mattresses were extremely dirty and it was very, very hot. For very serious injuries, they used to take them to the city hospital.

"We haven't had to convert any currency anywhere. I know that Nicaragua has a small jungle, which is not as bad. I expect to gather information on the

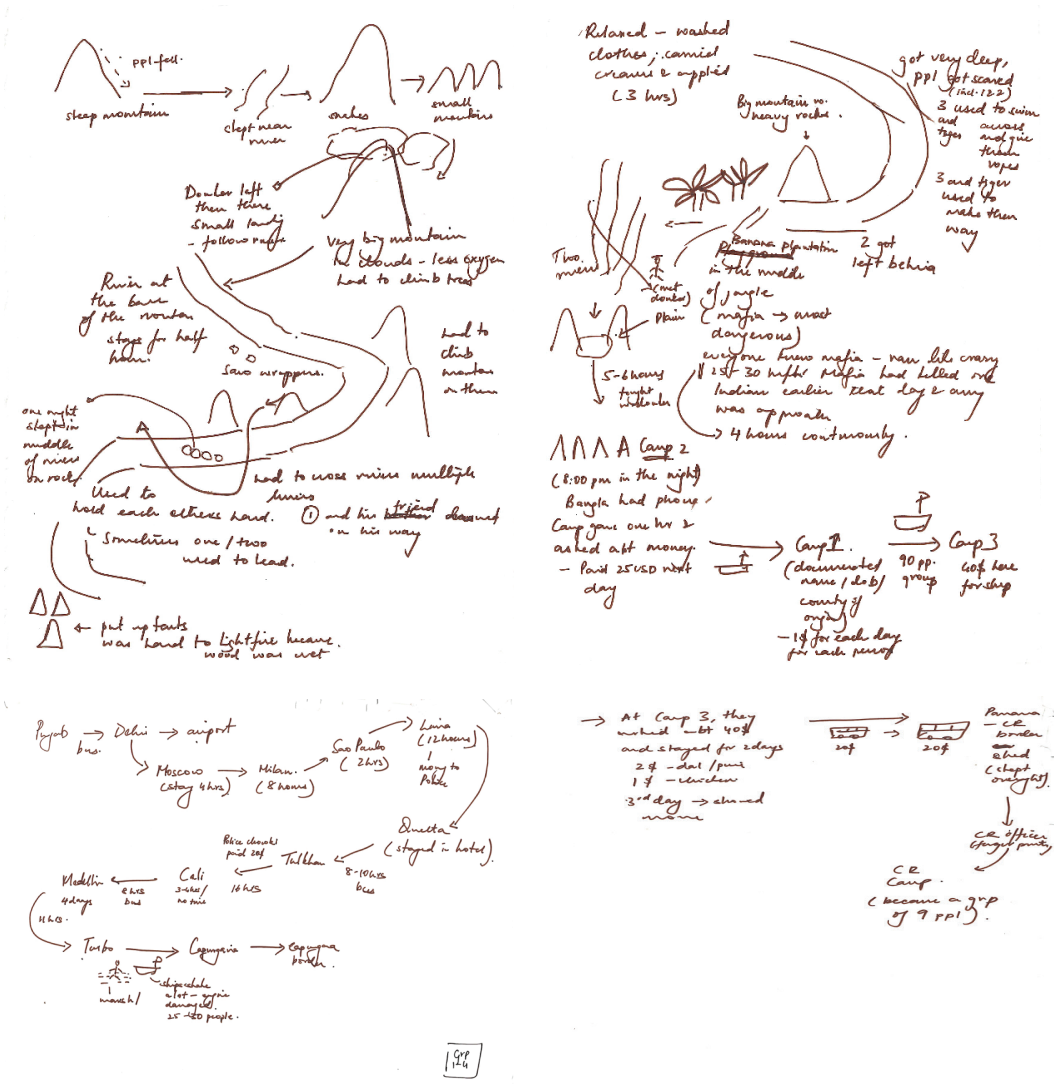


Figure 6: Maps of the jungle and camp as remembered by the four men.

way. I have not been in touch with my friend since I got here. I lost my phone on the journey. I spoke to my family last at the Western Union in Panama.

"God has helped me find friends along the way. Whenever I met Indians on the journey, they became my friends. We met Bangladeshis on the way (in Capurganá). We haven't really interacted with Nepalis. In camps, I have had to fill out forms in English—I have been able to manage because I passed Plus 2 [Grade 12 equivalent in India]. At home, I have had to handle things because sometimes my father was not able to."

At this point, Balbir and Gatsharan joined the conversation. They mostly sat quietly and sometimes chimed in.

Dharampreet continued: "I heard there is a group of eleven Punjabi men and eight Gujarati women on the way. I have not met them. At Western Unions, it took me between one and three days to get the money. I have learned a few words in Spanish on the way. I wouldn't recommend this journey to my friends. Or, I will tell them that I cannot be responsible for any injuries or deaths that they are likely to experience and that they should do it on their own risk.

"The donkers have photos of me. That is how I have managed. Some people have a lot more information than we did. They carry maps and other information with them. I did not have Internet to use Google maps, and not even paper maps.

"*Baat hi saari paise ki* . . . [Everything is about money . . .]. I had arranged for a particular budget beforehand. I am solely relying on Western Union to get mon-

ey along the way. In Panama, we used IDs of Western Union employees in the shops. I carried around $3,000 from home. At the camp, I received around $2,000 from home (in one transaction). Everyone in our group (including Balbir and Gatsharan) has received money from home along their journeys."

Sunny continued: "Balbir was a national-level *kabbadi* player." Balbir nodded slightly and blushed. "Dharampreet on occasion fell behind—he had low blood pressure. Balbir went back with water and got Dharampreet back "on sticks" (with the help of a third person)! Balbir's brother reached America end of March after taking a similar journey.

"We have heard of the Nicaraguan jungle. We will carry between $100 to $150 to give to the mafia there. We are bound to meet mafia at least three times."

Sunny continued: "My cousin's father is already in the US. He has been there for twenty-five or thirty years. He owns a truck and has arranged for his son, my cousin, to be brought there. The son was sent back twice—he has spent already $30,000 trying to get there. His first son has already made the journey, successfully.

"I had actually studied in the University of Hampton in the UK for one and a half years before dropping out. My father could not pay the fees. But I was able to work for two years using my student visa. I was getting around $2,000 per month and had a great life. I even tried to join the army—my friend after joining the UK army got a passport after waiting for four years. Now he has no visa issues and is getting a pension."

I requested the four men chart out their route. Dharampreet helped map out his journey from Delhi. All four drew maps of the jungle and the camp as they remembered them. Once again, Sunny used gestures and body language to convey his message of how they were forced to run at high speeds to escape the mafia.

The Deadly Darién

Pakistan to the US via South America: A Christian man dodges religious oppression and physical perils to make his way to Brazil, then Costa Rica.

After being charged with blasphemy under local laws in Pakistan, Michael's church helped him flee the country and migrate to Brazil. With two other Pakistani men who fled for the same reason, he worked in construction for nearly half a year before deciding to migrate to the United States to seek asylum. Trying to get away from a threat-filled life in Pakistan, Michael endured even more threats on his journey to the US. He has dealt with corrupt police, armed bandits, and the dangers of a deadly jungle. As he marches toward the US, he is wary of the road ahead.

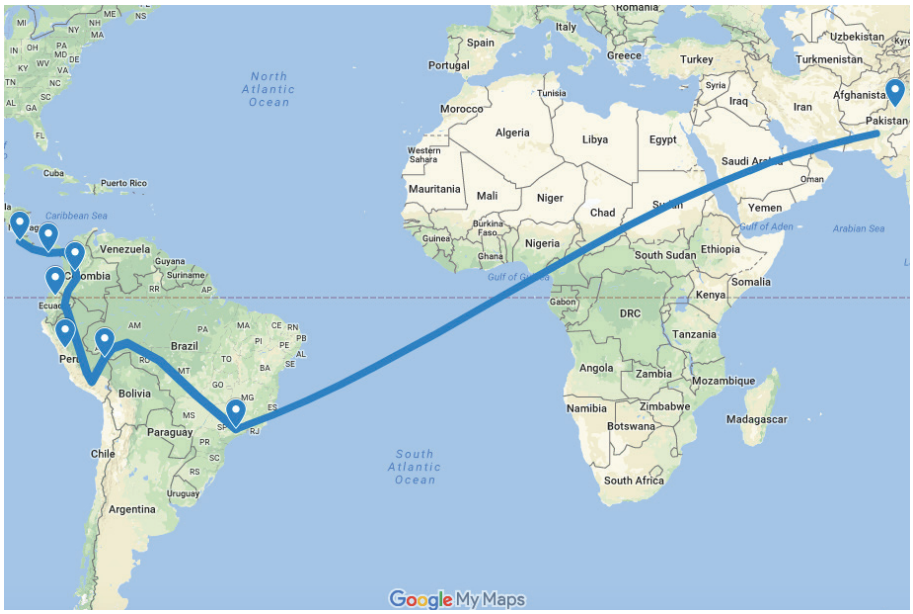
Once the government of Pakistan enacted a law on blasphemy, Christians living there felt targeted. Michael, too, our interview subject, was charged with blasphemy and experienced the wrath from locals soon after the law passed. In order to easily identify Christians, the government mandated they write "Masi" (which denotes their religion) before their surnames. As a result, they found it difficult to get decent jobs. Despite impressive qualifications, they were relegated to low-paying work.

Michael was a devout Christian. After his church was attacked twice and having moved his family more than once, he worried about the safety of his wife and children. He needed a way to support them. He did not have enough money to go abroad on his own so he contacted his church for support. The church then helped him leave the country.

It cost him $2,000 to get a visa for Brazil. Half of his trip to Brazil was funded by the church. He had to fund the rest—$1,500, which he did not have—so he took out a loan. He travelled to São Paulo with two other Pakistanis. When they left Pakistan, they did not know how long they would be staying in Brazil. Getting to São Paulo was not difficult, as the agent in Pakistan had gotten all the documents ready, including the visa. While in Brazil, Michael and his traveling companions worked for a construction company for seven months as laborers. They were paid 70 to 80 reals (roughly $18) per hour for their work. Even though they were making good money, they did not have enough to bring their families to Brazil. Michael's family was still on the run in Pakistan and he was desperate to have them in a safer place. All of three of then decided to go to the US and claim asylum.

They took a flight from São Paulo to Brasilia, then on to Rio Branco. The first flight cost 1,200 reals (about $300) and the second to Rio Branco cost 150 reals per person. After landing in Rio Branco, they took

Map 26: Michael's journey.



a taxi to Peru for $200. Since they did not have US dollars, they paid the amount in reals. After crossing the Peru border, they had to walk for some time, after which they were stopped by the police and asked for US dollars. They showed their CPF[10] papers to the police and gave them reals instead. Each of them was charged 400 reals (about $100) by the police.

They then reached a bus station at the border where they exchanged all their remaining reals into US dollars. Many people at the bus stand approached them and offered to help them find the right bus to Lima. They found a microbus for $200 and got into it. After traveling for eight hours they took another bus to Cuzco, which was part of the same fare. This ride was supposed to last eight to twelve hours. But a landslide had happened near Cuzco, so they had to spend a night while they waited for the road to be cleared. They finally reached Cuzco the next day where they took another bus to Tulcan via Tumbes, Quito, and Ibarra for $400. At Tulcan, they crossed the border to Colombia. Immediately upon arrival, the police arrested them. They paid $300 so that the police would let them pass. They took another bus to Apartador via Cali and Medellin, a twelve-hour ride. This cost them $600. They changed again in Medellin. From the station near the coast, they took a taxi to Turbo for $300, which was a 20-minute ride. Then they took the boat to Capurganá across the Gulf of Urabá.

Unfortunately, the boat engine stalled, forcing them to stop at Trigana. The boat was stuck in the water for twelve hours. The passengers were afraid it would capsize. They were allowed to make minimal movements, but were without life jackets so feared too much movement. Finally, they were able to go ashore in Trigana, a beautiful, touristy place with fancy hotels. They spent three nights, but could not afford the hotels and thus spent the nights outside foraging for coconuts and mangoes. They made their way to Capurganá where they stayed for 15 nights. In Capurganá, they came across many people who promised to get them through the Darién Gap to Panama. A woman told them that it would cost them $80 and they would reach the first camp in Panama in a single day (technically impossible unless by helicopter, which is not an option). Another person offered food and shelter for free, but later charged them $70 for the food and for the room.

Finally, a person in a local church who seemed trustworthy told them it would cost $100 to cross the jungle on foot or $200 by boat per person. The same person offered them shelter for four nights and treated them with great kindness. They did not have enough cash with them so they requested that their friend in Brazil send them money in their host's name. He went to Apartador to receive the money but said that he was caught by the police and had to bribe them $150. He also charged the travelers a commission of $30.

The *donker* (local smuggler) bought them boots, three packets of biscuits, four cans of tuna, two loaves of bread, two energy drinks, and two packs of juice in addition to fruits and tents. He told them that the journey would be three to four days long but they were skeptical. People in the village had contradictory claims about the duration of the journey. Thus, they prepared for at least ten days by packing more food.

On day one, they walked for three hours with a donker to get to the top of the first hill, to meet other group members. They were now a group of 40. An old man and woman who were also showing the way to migrants accompanied the donker. After fording a river in the dark, they could see some people waving torchlights in the jungle. The donker informed them that these were the lights of the mafia (armed bandits), and instructed them to fall back and return to the other side of the river. The donker then took them along another route where they walked past a barbed wire fence into a swamp and climb another steep hill, a mountain. After descending and walking for almost ten hours, they could finally sleep. This was only their first day.

After paying $20 each to the donker, the second day was equally tough. They had started their journey early in the morning to climb another mountain. On the third day, they climbed yet another mountain. Day four was similar as they ascended and descended yet one more enormous hill (they referred to them as hills but they are better understood as mountains). On the fifth day, after charging them each $20, the donker abandoned the migrants. He instructed

10 This is the tax payment document in Brazil.

them to go on their own. They forded the river again, but this time they had to hoist their bags onto their heads to keep them from getting wet. After walking for about twenty-five minutes, they encountered the mafia. This was a strategic place for the mafia to rob them. The robbery was quick and the thieves simply stole their bags. Most of the group had put all their money and cell phones into their bags, as their clothes were soaking wet from the river crossing. Michael and his friends still managed to salvage some money by virtue of having hid it inside the heels of their shoes and the elastic of their trousers.

They continued the journey by following the river, eating raw plantains and raw fish. While trying to cross the river, one man in their group hit his head against a rock and died instantly. The river swept his body downstream. They continued their journey and at last reached the first camp in Panama. In the first camp, they were made to sleep on the floor and were charged $1 per night but were provided no food. They then took the boat to the second camp and then busses onward to Costa Rica.

Trying to get away from a threat-filled life in Pakistan, Michael endured even more threats on his journey to the US. He dealt with the corrupt police, usurious agents, and the dangerous jungle mafia not to mention the heat and relentless rain of the Darién Gap. He survived to tell the tale but as he marches toward the US, he is wary of the road ahead. He expects even more threats in Nicaragua, but he knows he cannot stop now.

"Enough Is Enough"

Nepal to Costa Rica: Passed from smuggler to smuggler, a married man escapes floods and earthquakes to make his way to Brazil, then northward.

In 2014, Ghanshyam's family lost everything after heavy rains caused a dam to release its water and wreak havoc on his community in Nepal. A few years later, the family was still struggling to recover. Desperate for change, he decided to seek out an agent who specialized in smuggling Nepalis to the United States. He was told it would cost him $30,000, and within a few days he sold his land and agreed to pay it. His journey has taken him across nearly every continent.

Ghanshyam, a man in his forties, comes Tatopani, Sindhupalchok, a district in Nepal. His family for which he is the sole breadwinner consists of his widow mother, his homemaker wife, and eight- and six-year old sons. The daily quest to survive had not been easy, but they were making ends meet as Ghanshyam worked on the farm he owned.

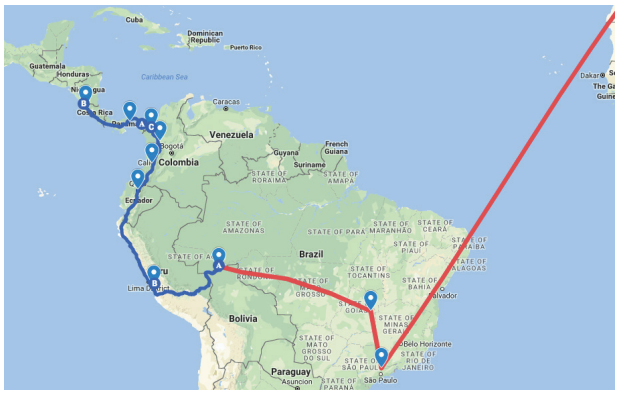
Things took an unfortunate turn after the flood of August 2014 in which an artificial dam upstream released its waters after days of heavy rainfall. The flood and the resulting landslide destroyed Ghanshyam's farm and made traveling to the city extremely difficult. Fortunately, their house and farm were left intact but the livelihoods of people in that area, including Ghanshyam, had been hampered immensely. The suffering escalated after the twin earthquakes of April 2015. They lost everything. Their house was completely destroyed, and for the next few months, they had to live like slum dwellers inside temporary tarps provided by humanitarian organizations.

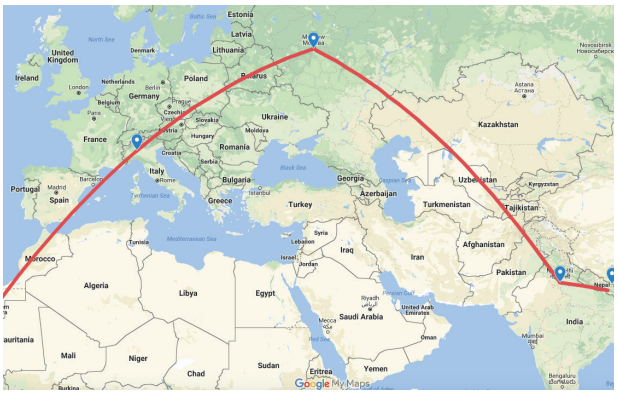
Earthquake victims were promised relief and reconstruction by the government and so Ghanshyam and his family waited for relief materials to arrive. They also learned that the government had plans to provide interest-free loans of $15,000 to help families reconstruct their destroyed houses. However, Ghanshyam did not get the relief measures on time, and his family spent almost a year sheltering under temporary tarps, including during the cold winter and the wet monsoon. Finally, Ghanshyam thought, "Enough is enough," and decided to wait no more for the government relief money. He wanted to construct the house himself with any materials he could find.

The government had imposed strict standards for construction of new houses after the earthquake, which made it even more difficult and expensive to build a house. A year after the quake, Ghanshyam finally received the first installment of the earthquake

Kathmandu → Delhi → Moscow → Milan → Sao Paolo → Brasilia → Rio Branco

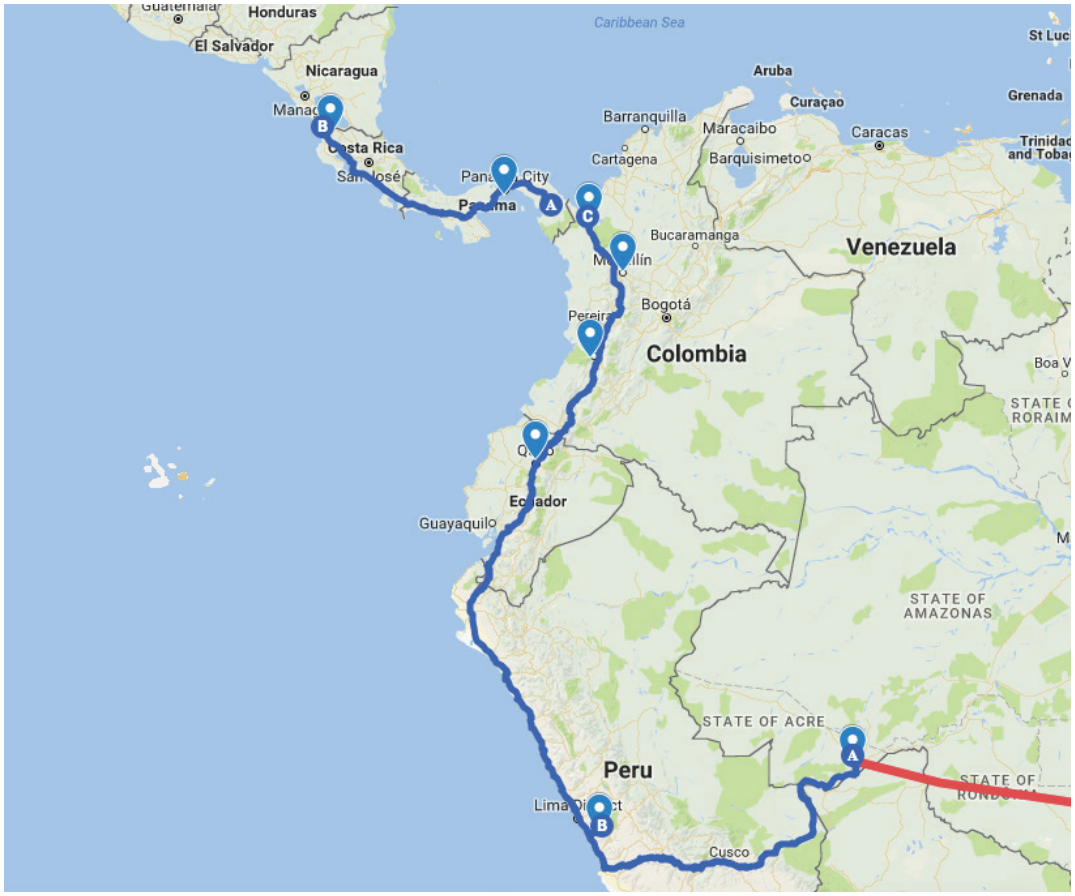
Map 27: Ghanshyam's flight route.





Rio Branco → Peru → Ecuador → Colombia → Panama

Map 28: Ghanshyam's land route.



relief money: $3,000. With this, he built a temporary shelter for his family. He still could not afford to construct a government-standard house. Getting a loan was also next to impossible, as the financial institutions did not provide loans against land in the earthquake-affected areas.

The elections soon followed. Local elections had not taken place for almost twenty years, and all parties wanted to win. All three major parties coerced non-partisan citizens including Ghanshyam to vote for their respective party. Some party members even threatened to harm Ghanshyam and his family if he did not vote for their party. There were frequent incidents of fighting and conflicts between party members. The unsafe political environment and the absence of any economic means to earn a livelihood made him want to leave the country.

Many people in his village were leaving for the US, and some had been doing really well there. He got in touch with a person in the village who had helped others go to the US. Soon he found out about an agency in Kathmandu that helps people get to the US. He approached them and got his ticket to Brazil. He found out that it would cost him $30,000. Since he could not get any loan, he sold his land. He was told that he had to pay the total amount for the journey in different installments to the agent's bank account in Nepal. His family would be required to pay the money while he was traveling after reaching certain destinations. The agent also instructed him to carry around $2,000 for the road and an equal amount for extra, unexpected expenses.

He had no idea how difficult the journey would be. After flying to Delhi, he met other fellow migrants and was grouped together with them. There were six Bangladeshis and four Nepalis. He flew to two more cities (Moscow and Milan) and finally São Paulo. He had not been told how many flights he would have to take to get to Brazil, but he knew what he needed to do when he got there. His passport had the visa stamp of Bolivia but he still flew to São Paulo and managed to

exit there. As instructed by the agent, he then claimed asylum and shared his story with the immigration authorities at the airport. They detained him and others in his group for eighteen hours and finally granted them asylum. They had the papers they needed to be mobile in Brazil but had no intention of staying there. After reaching Rio Branco, a city in western Brazil, they got in touch with another agent, who took them to a hotel and gave them a proper Nepali meal. The agent appeared to have their pictures in his phone and thus could identify them when they exited the airport in Rio Branco.

The next part of the journey was all by road and the first obstacle was crossing the border to Peru. Close to the border, the agent put them in the bus and left them. During the journey, the Peruvian police stopped them in a few places and extorted money from them, and they had to pay the police the amount they asked in order to get through. They made a stop in Peru and were again fed a proper Nepali meal in the hotel. They did not have to pay for the hotels or the food. These expenses were taken care of by the smugglers and were part of the package.

The next hurdle was crossing the Peruvian border into Ecuador. They were traveling in a microbus. The agent had instructed them to bribe the border police if stopped. The agent left them just before the border and told them to meet the other agent just after. Right after they got to the Ecuadorian border, they were stopped by the immigration officials and subsequently detained. In the detention center, they had to give statements and a formal case was registered against them. They had been detained for four days and during that time, their agent came to the detention center to try to convince the officials to let them go. Inside the cell, they were told that "the mafia" had been involved, and for them to be let free, their agent needed to give some money to the mafia. The authorities threatened them that if found guilty, they would be imprisoned for two years. Ghanshyam did not even know what crime he had committed and worried only about his family. On the fifth day, he was taken to the district court in Loja. He was asked why he came to Ecuador and he replied truthfully. The interview went on for thirty minutes and the judge finally decided to let him free.

After the travelers were released, a few policemen approached and offered them food. They treated them really well and offered to get them the asylum documents of Ecuador for $200. They decided against taking this offer and headed to Colombia. Crossing the Colombian border was not difficult as an agent dropped them close to the border so they could walk across. But then, they had to face the menace of the Colombian police. While trying to reach Turbo by bus, they were stopped by the police in three places and had to pay $20 each to get through. Even though the police knew that they did not possess passports, they still asked for their passports.

After arriving in Turbo, they were put in a small boat with 30 other migrants. After traveling for an hour, an empty boat of equal size approached. They were told to transfer all their bags to the other boat. Thinking that they were being transferred to the other boat, all of them threw over their bags. However, the boat absconded with their bags. Ghanshyam had put some of his money, his passport and other legal identity documents in the bag.

After reaching Capurganá, he was put in touch with another agent, who took him across the Darién Gap. It took seven days to cross the jungle. Each traveler was charged $20 per day by the donker. They had to pay an advance of $70 that also covered the fee for the first two days, and from the third day on they had to pay $20 every morning. After getting to the first camp, he got to the second camp by taking a boat for which he paid $25. Then he took two different buses to get to the Costa Rican border. The first bus cost him $20 and the second $25.

Ghanshyam and his traveling companions had already paid $25,000 to the agent back home and were confident about getting to the US within the next two weeks. They thought that the hard part of the journey was over and a better life awaited them in the US.

"I Don't Want Anybody to Take this Path"

Bangladesh to Central America: Aided by his uncles, a Bangladeshi student leaves school to journey to the US, via Central and South America.

Many young men from Bangladesh are full of spirit, energy, and confidence. Abdullah is no exception. And yet, his journey has certainly tempered his exuberance. Each time he described how he moved from one border to the next, his voice trembled. He fought back tears as he spoke about the path from Panama to Costa Rica. Nevertheless, he intends to finish his journey and reach the US. Abdullah does not self-identity as an economic migrant.

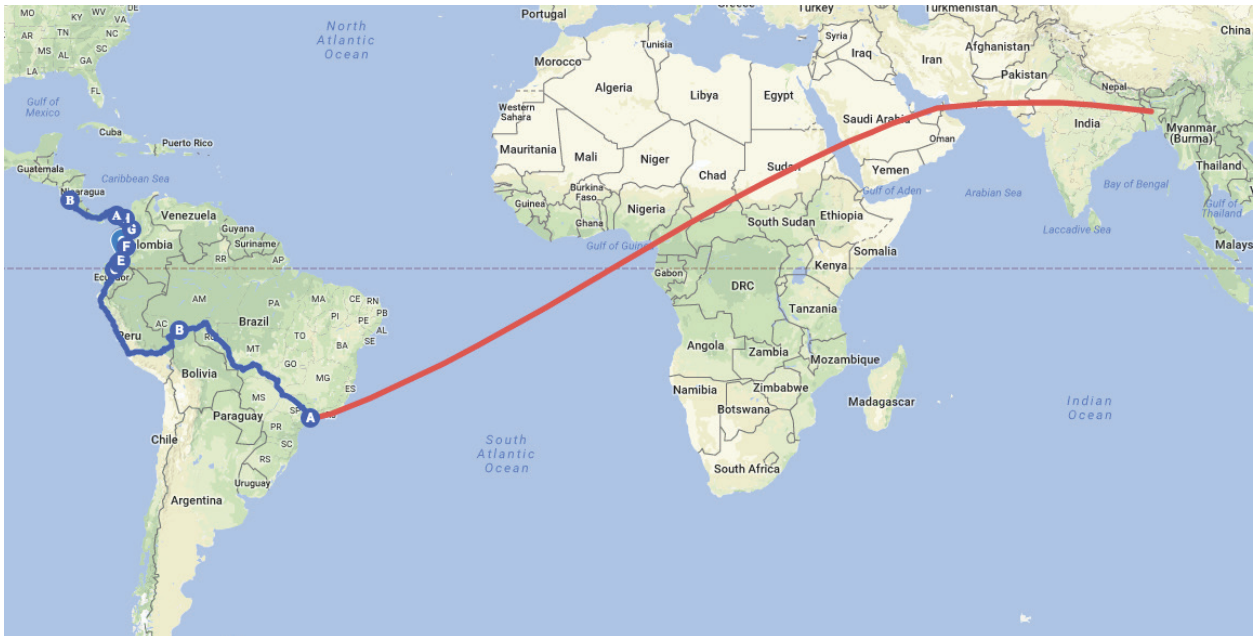
"Several of my uncles and cousins live in US. They convinced my parents to allow me to go to US through the same channels that they had used. So, my parents were encouraged to let me go. I was studying in school. I was in the middle of a higher secondary examination when an uncle from the US and the agent [smuggler] from Bangladesh called and instructed my father: 'Go to Dhaka for the visa and passport.' My family had set aside savings for this purpose. My father had become sick a few years ago. So, we sold some of our land. After spending some money for my father's treatment, we had some left over. We kept this money in the bank and thought that when I go to USA, we can use it. Though this was not sufficient because the contract with the agent was for about $26,000. My father borrowed some money to add to the savings and fund my journey.

"I flew to Dubai first, then to Brazil. I arrived in Rio de Janeiro on April 7." (The time of the interview was mid-May.) "I travelled to Brazil alone. An agent received me at the Brazilian airport and helped me shop for food and clothing. He left me at the airport after I boarded the plane to São Paulo. From there, we were taken to Peru by bus. The agent was waiting for us at the airport. Three Nepalis joined me at the airport.

"We were taken to a hotel in Lima, Peru. At the hotel, the agent had identified us by matching our photos on his phone with our faces. He visited our rooms to check. I saw Bangladeshi people from Noakhali and Sylhet districts in that hotel. I met people from India and Pakistan as well. We were 21 in total. The agent took us to a mini-bus and we started our journey by road from there.

"When I started traveling, I started out alone. I made some friends when I arrived at different destinations. We were taken to Ecuador from Peru by bus. And then we crossed the border to reach Colombia. At the Peruvian border, the police arrested us and

Map 29: Abdullah's journey.



looked for our identity papers. As we didn't have any papers with us, the police asked us to give them our valuables, so they would let us go. I had to give my iPhone [6s]. My group mates also handed over their valuables. I also had to bribe the Colombian border police.

"I will never forget the journey from Colombia to Panama and then Panama to Costa Rica; the journey from Panama to Costa Rica was particularly horrible. I never thought that I would be able to come out from there [the Darién jungle] to talk to my family again. The agent took the money from us by saying that he would accompany us up to the border. But then he left us and told us to follow a walking trail. We lost our way. We kept walking for two days. One of our group members got sick. We encountered another group of people, mostly from India. They were also seeking to find the Costa Rican border. We had to leave one of our group members on the way, as he was too sick to walk. The jungle was full of snakes and other poisonous insects. Yet we continued our journey. Once I started to think that maybe I would never be able to get out of it. Maybe I would have to die here. I cried . . . every night. Actually, all of us cried together every night. Then we managed to reach the Panamanian camps. We also had to pay for food and accommodation at those camps.

"After staying there those few nights, we were handed over to the Costa Rican police. The Costa Ricans treated us well. They were really nice. We were taken to an office where they gave us papers that permitted us to stay in Costa Rica for 25 days. One lady mentioned that we could stay longer if we wished." (And we later found that often this is the case.) "But I wanted to go to Mexico, and then to USA."

Asked what he should do if he gets arrested at Mexican border with the US, Abdullah replied, "I will have to go to jail. But my agent and cousins will help me to get out of the jail, hopefully."

However, in the end, Abdullah said, "I wouldn't advise anyone to go through the jungle because it is a life-and-death experience."

Out of a Hopeless Island: A Man's Journey out of Cuba

Cuba to Costa Rica via South America: A determined Cuban man is forced to cross the Darién Gap twice after Panamanian authorities send him back to Colombia.

With 13 Cubans, Omar left the island on a plane and landed in Guyana before finding his way to Brazil by bus and Peru by boat. From there he made his way to Panama before being caught by authorities and sent back to Colombia, forcing him to cross the Darién Gap a second time. His plan is to go to Honduras—where his family awaits him—and eventually make his way to the US.

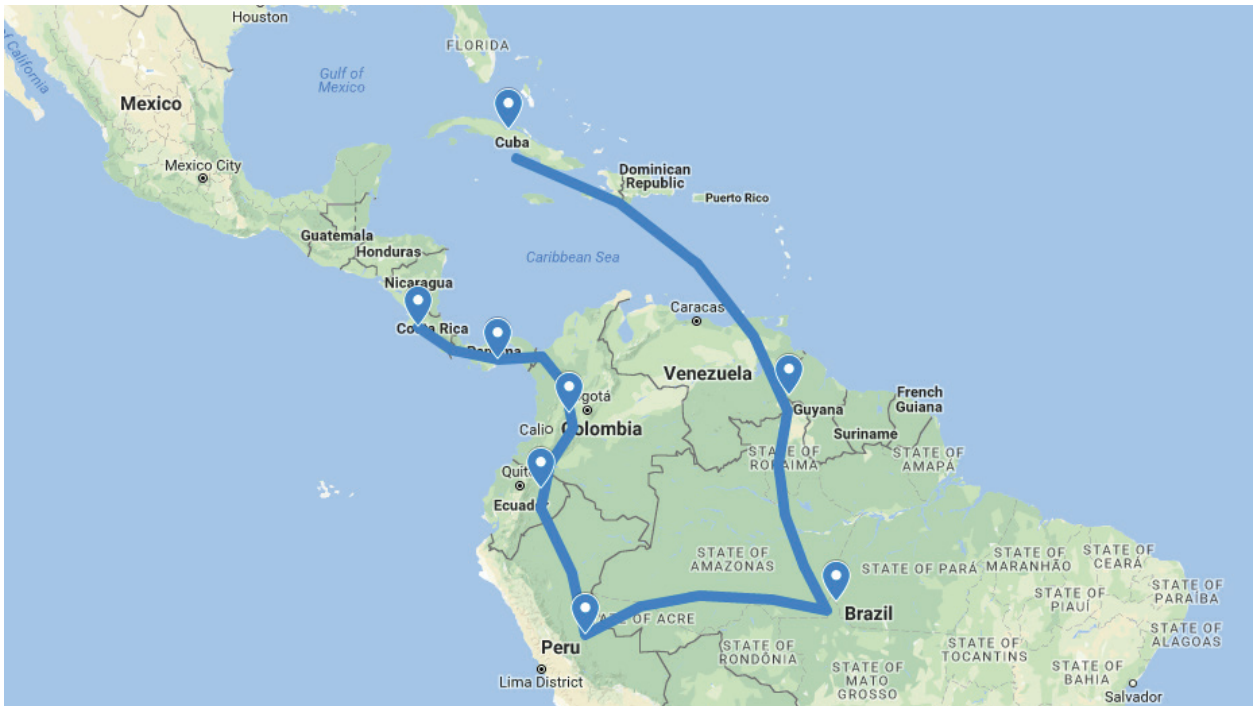
"Can I get the time?" the young man asked with urgency. The owner of the bakery said it was a quarter to three. I asked the owner if he knew him. "No, he's one of the migrants staying at the hotel next door. He spends his day here usually," he responded. I approached the young migrant, introduced myself, and told him about the research we were conducting. He agreed to an interview as he waited for a man who would help him access money from Western Union. This is his story.

"I don't need a pseudonym. Tell them my name. Let them know who I am. I am Omar Perez Ivañez. I was born in Cuba and have lived there my entire life. Life in Cuba is very hard. Everyone there is a government puppet. My dad and brothers could no longer stand it and left for Honduras in 1998, and now I'm trying to follow in their steps. I tried really hard to make it back home, but the government made it impossible for me to stay there. I used to work in construction and agriculture. I even rented my house out to make some money on the side, but last year the government revoked many of the renting licenses as a measure of economic reform, and I became unable to make ends meet.

"I visited my dad once in Honduras and was able to see what life was like outside of Cuba. There is no comparison. Besides, my son lives there now. The time I visited my father I fell for a Honduran woman and now we have a son together. That is another big motivator for me to leave the island in search of a better life. I need to care for my son.

"My journey to Costa Rica was treacherous. I, along with 13 Cubans, left the island on a plane and land-

Map 30: Omar's journey.



ed in Guyana. From there, we took a bus to Brazil and then a boat to Peru." (They likely traveled from Manaus to Iquitos, as that is a common journey among locals. It typically takes three days.) "We rode a bus from Peru to Ecuador and another bus to Colombia.

"Colombia was difficult to navigate, given the corruption and extortion that take place in that country. I damn those people every day for the pain and suffering they put me through. There is so much I wish I could express, but after three days without food and an exhausting journey behind me, it is difficult to relive those haunting memories.

"Eventually, the others and I managed to get on a boat that took us to Capurganá. Once in Capurganá, we came across four Syrian men who had been lost in the Darién Gap for ten days. Two were elderly and too tired to continue the mountainous journey through the tropical jungle. Another had suffered serious injuries on both legs and feet and could no longer walk. The fourth man made the difficult decision to leave his group and join ours.

"The Syrian man shared his story with us and explained that his group, while lost, had reached out to the indigenous people who reside in the jungle. Initially, the natives had acceded to helping the Syrian migrants navigate the jungle; however, this kindness was only a façade. After guiding them for a few miles, the natives turned the migrants in to the Panamanian police, who deported the group and forced them to repeat the journey once more. Our group of 14 spent 17 days in the Darién Gap. Seventeen days in that jungle is far too long for anyone to remain sane.

"Once in Panama, we found a taxi driver who offered to drive us to Panama City for $300 each. Four of us—myself included—paid the man what he requested, only to watch him drive away with our money. He left us with nothing. We shook off the anger and borrowed money from others in the group to take a bus to Panama City and another to David. Regrettably, I was caught in Panama City and sent back to Colombia. Panamanians are offered $50 to rat you out. Those bastards have no soul!"

"I repeated my journey again on a boat to Capurganá and crossed the Darién Gap for the second time; though this time, I was alone and had no money. Once in Panama, I stayed at one of the shelters offered to transiting migrants. They had no food, or at least none I could afford. A kind truck driver gave me $20 to continue my journey. Again, I took a bus to Panama City and, this time, managed to get on the bus to David. Once in David, there were many cabs offering to drive migrants to the border. My friends had warned me these cabs could cost anywhere between $80 and $220. I managed to get one for $80, paid for with money I gathered along the way. That night, I slept in Paso Canoas on the Panamanian side of the border and then found another cab to take me around the border into Costa Rica in the morning.

"My plan is to stop by Honduras, work for a while, and eventually make my way into the US. Migrating used to be simpler for Cubans, as we could just go straight to the US. Nevertheless, when this immigration policy was scrapped, so were the chances of a humane route into the US. Now we are left with this: a journey out of misery that costs many their lives and cost me my sanity."

"Our Destinity Is Written on Our Foreheads"

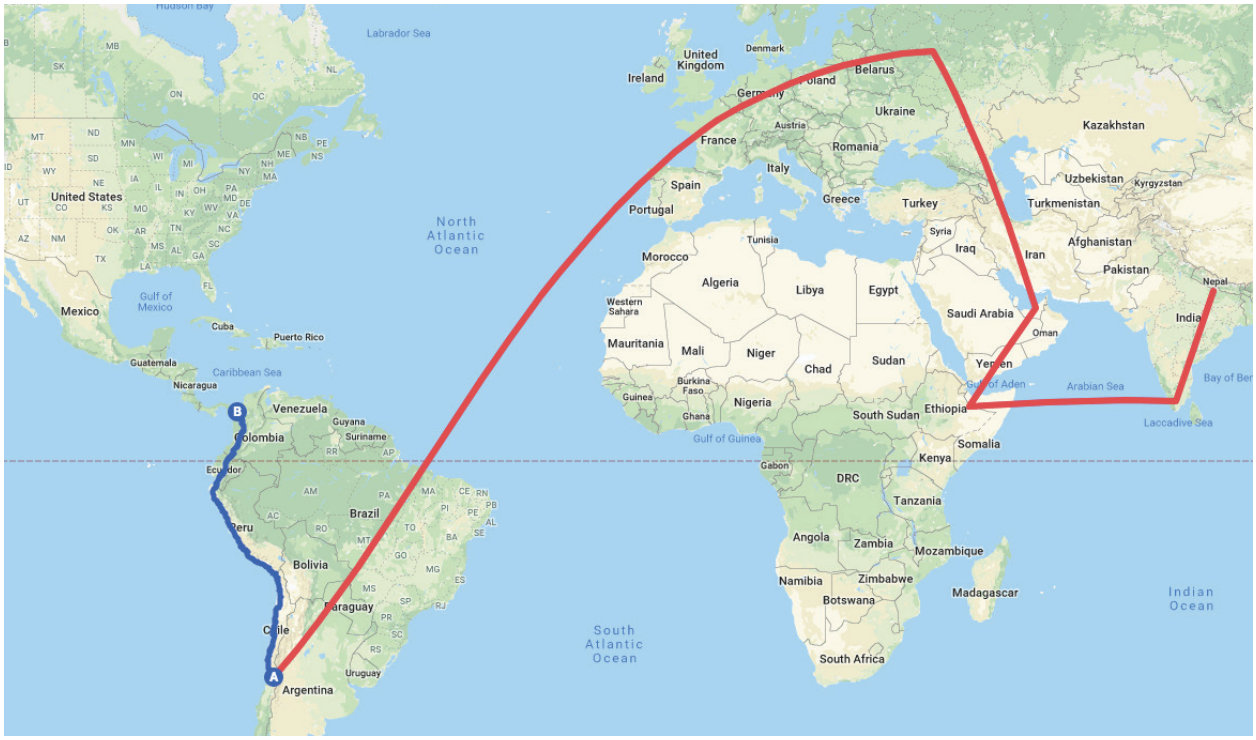
Nepal to Colombia: A 22-year-old man leaves an illiterate family, threatened by political violence, to venture toward safety and a better life.

A young male from Nepal attends university in Kathmandu, a great achievement as his family members are illiterate. Heckled and threatened by political leftists, he leaves to join a friend in Kerala, a southern state in India. There he makes his plans to make his way toward the US.

Abhas stepped out of the Hostel Marcelas, a tiny, crumbling residence like so many others in Turbo, a busy industrial town on Colombia's Caribbean coast. Of the group of five Nepali migrants sitting and playing cards on that hot summer afternoon, he was the only one who responded to my greeting in Hindi and agreed to speak to me. There was a trace of nervousness in his posture, and he seemed unsure of which way he wanted to go with our conversation. For the interview itself, we settled for a nearby restaurant, and it was only after taking a small sip of lemonade that he relaxed a little. He is young and appears even younger than his twenty-two years. Fiddling with his smartphone, he listened patiently as we explained what we were hoping to learn from him. Even before I could complete my initial question—Why did you leave home?—he launched into his story, speaking in rapid, sprawling Hindi.

Abhas is from a farming family and, before his journey, lived with an ailing grandmother, his mother and a brother. They are all illiterate. His father had, according to him, been killed by members of the communist party in Nepal, and he is the only one in the family to have completed school. He was a bachelor's student in Nepal and, despite the blood toll that politics took from his family, became active in student politics in his university. He was a member of the opposition Congress Party and had suffered the inevitable consequences of not following mainstream political rhetoric. "I have been beaten up twice by the communists," he shrugged, "and one day, I learnt that they had put out a call for me to be killed. That was it for me. I immediately ran to India." He has a friend in India, and he lay low in the southern state of Kerala for a while: "My friend

Map 31: Abhas' journey.



was very helpful. He explained that I needed to move to a place where there was greater respect for human rights. He told me that I should move to the USA, which places a high value on these rights." His friend then introduced him to one of the most crucial actors in this journey—the agent. Abhas himself has not met the agent but, following his advice over the phone, he headed to the Nepal border to collect his passport and to arrange the finances for the journey. This was in October 2018.

He said, "$25,000. That's how much I had to arrange. I had to sell all my land." He was a little vague about the details of how he arranged for the money. He said he was helped by friends and family, who lent him the money, and did not elaborate on the matter. "So I came back to India and then flew out from Kerala to Dubai. Dubai! It was incredibly difficult for me to convince the immigration people that I was a tourist. I had to beg and plead my case and finally he let me through. I suspect he let me through because I speak Hindi." He did not have fond memories of Dubai, where he was unable to eat well or speak to anyone. From Dubai, he moved to Ethiopia at the advice of his agent and stayed there for a month. "At least Ethiopia has Indian food," he laughed, "I could eat!" After the month, on instruction of his agent, he flew back to Dubai and did not linger, catching an onward flight to Chile via Moscow and Paris. He did not have a high opinion of either city and only remembers the acute stress of the journey. "The agent arranged for our visas for this whole trip," he recollected. He was joined on this leg of the journey by two other Nepali migrants who have become his friends and travelling companions.

He continued, "I had around $900 with me when I reached Chile, given to me by my agent's local handler. He also got me a sim card." He recounted taking a bus from Chile to Peru: "The desert was endless! I was excited to see it at the beginning but soon got tired of it all." In Peru, a couple—a man and a woman—were supposed to assist them in the border crossing. They had a car, which transported all of them to the actual border. The three migrants were then asked to put their bags in the car, and give $200 each to the couple as a bribe for the police. "We got out of the car and watched as the couple attempted to drive through to the other side. We were told to hide and go around the fence through a patch where it was broken. There was a park on the other side of the border, and we hid there till we saw the car emerge." They had made it to Peru.

After passing a day in a local hotel, they were to take a 16-hour bus ride to Lima. They were met by the local handler who took them to a hotel room and locked them up, asking for $600 each for the remainder of the journey. Being short on cash, they tried to bargain it down to $550. While he was suspicious, initially, he accepted those terms. The handler then put them on a bus to a town closer to the Ecuador border. This took two hours. Abhas added that an Ethiopian migrant joined them at this point: "He tried to pretend that he was also an agent's handler. It took us some time before we realized he was lying to us (we did not know the reason) and was actually also a migrant." They reached their destination at 11 P.M., and he remembered being severely short on drinking water for most of the journey. The bus dropped them off, and a taxi picked them up and took them to a place closer to the border between Peru and Ecuador: "Three Bengalis joined us at this point. The three of us [presumably the Nepalis] were made to crouch in the trunk of the car, covered by a flimsy blanket." He shuddered as he recollected the journey: "There was so much dust. I was in discomfort." Right at the border, an agent's handler picked them up. They walked a bit, crossing a stream on foot. The border crossing was relatively simple, and a taxi picked the seven of them up. "We were then locked up in a room for five days, with nothing to do. The Bengalis took the bed. We slept on the floor," he recalled. After the fifth day, the person who had been bringing food to them on behalf of their "landlord" informed them that they were stuck so long because the agent's handler in Lima had been arrested. (Abhas confirmed that the Ethiopian and the Nepalis shared the same handler, despite having different agents coordinating their overall trip.) He demanded $20 each as payment to enable them to cross to Ecuador. After some deliberation, they decided to trust him and paid the amount. "We never saw him again," he said ruefully. "The landlord came to us the next day and said that the man was gone. He helped us board a bus. The other man just took advantage of us." They were joined by another Indian on the bus, a Gujarati man.

It was evident from his demeanor, that Abhas was not a fan of his fellow Indian traveler. "He is the reason we got into trouble with the police," he said, "right after we got lunch. The bus had stopped for the afternoon. The place where we were eating had a waitress, and the only English she knew was 'I love you!' She said it to all of us. Now which one of us did she love?" he laughed. "There was free juice with our meal, but we had no time to collect it because the bus was on the move. The Gujarati man began making a fuss about leaving behind something that he was getting for free—he was so cheap!—and in the confusion, we caught the attention of some police officers who were nearby." The police made the eight migrants deboard the bus and took away all the passports and cell phones that they could access. "I had hidden my phone, wallet, and passport inside a packet of noodles and stuck it together with superglue," Abhas said, looking pleased by his innovation, "So they never got around to taking my things away." The cops meant business—they asked for $60 from each member of the group: "We had no money. The Ethiopian man lent us $180, and we somehow managed to leave the police behind." They flagged down a bus and made it to Quito by morning.

A woman who was also working for Abhas' agent met them at the Quito bus stop and handed them eight bus tickets for the next leg of the journey: "The Gujarati man gave us some trouble at this point. He refused to travel with us. This was a problem because the woman was reluctant to give the tickets to just seven of us." However, since the Gujarati was not willing to continue to Tulcan with the group, the girl eventually relented and gave them taxi fare for seven and asked them to go to the hotel at Tulcan. "At Tulcan, the Ethiopian wanted to go his separate way and asked us for his money back. By this point, we only had $90 between us and paid him the entire amount. He was very rude to us after that. I was sad—he seemed to lose sight of his humanity," he recalled.

They (the three Nepalis) soon after left for Colombia by taxi, and the border crossing was fairly straightforward. They hid in what Abhas described as "a room near a church." While he spoke affectionately of the family of the agent's handler in Colombia—"They talked to me, and were very sympathetic."—he did not have pleasant memories of the stay itself: "Eight days. We were locked up for eight days in a room with one bucket to pee in between us. It was torture." The handler in Lima was eventually able to send money to the handler in Colombia. They then took a bus at 1 A.M. to Cali, where they were joined by two Punjabis. They spent twelve days in Cali, suffering critical food and water shortages. Over this period, two more Nepalis joined their group. They moved from Cali to Medellin after twelve days, and within a couple of days (he did not specify how many), they reached Turbo.

"We are only waiting, and waiting, and waiting now," he said, in response to my question about what the plan is, going forward. "We don't know when and how we will reach Capurganá. And everyone says that the journey through the forest is dangerous. But I don't know. We have been living off the kindness of others. Some migrants from India left me with $40, and that's what I've been using to sustain myself in Turbo." He sighed, fatalistic, and gulped down the remainder of the lemonade in one swoop.

"Our destiny is written on our foreheads. Whatever happens, has to happen."

Epilogue

While I was unable to interview Abhas again, he left me a series of voice notes on WhatsApp right before and after he crossed the Darién gap. He was taken on a boat to Capurganá, where he had to pay $20 to a person he suspected was a migration officer. He tried to say that he had no money, but the "migration officer" threatened to invalidate his documents entirely. "They are all in this nexus together, I think," he said. He sounded nothing if not confident. "The smugglers took away everything from us in the forest. It was a terrible experience. I have barely any clothes, and no shoes. But I made it to a refugee camp in Panama." He does not know what the future holds, but he has promised to stay in touch.

Feliz, Which Means Happy in Spanish

Cameroon to Colombia: A married tailor, traveling alone, finds himself stuck in the Spanish-speaking Americas, longing to reach a place where people speak English.

We saw two men standing on the second-floor balcony of one of the migrant hostels in Turbo. It was mid-day and sweltering. The men were leaning on the railing, staring at the road below, one of them wearing a white and red Los Angeles Angels baseball cap. I yelled up to the men in French: "Hey! Your cap is for a Los Angeles team! We're from the United States. You?"

The men invited us up to the balcony. They were from Ghana and Central African Republic. They introduced us to their friend Feliz, a middle-aged man from the Anglophone region of Cameroon.

He had been in Turbo for a few days and was struggling. He didn't speak Spanish and said he was frustrated by South America because of the language difficulties. "It's impossible to get work!" he said several times during our conversation.

In Cameroon, Feliz, which means happy in Spanish, had been a tailor. He said he made African-style clothing but was skilled in many types of designs; he had sewn the pleated khaki pants he was currently wearing. But the conflict in the Anglophone region of Cameroon forced him to leave. Fighters had entered his region and killed several people he knew. Feliz described hearing of people who were decapitated in their homes, their bodies dragged into the road and then set on fire. "It's better to die somewhere else, in some other way. I'll take the risk," he said. He heard that fighters would soon be approaching his town, so he left at dusk. His wife didn't travel with him.

He hiked through a forest until he reached a nearby city where he was able to get a moto (motorcycle) taxi. He used moto taxis to cross several countries until he reached Nigeria. He knew he could communicate with others in Nigeria, and that he would find ample travel opportunities. He had a passport and some money saved from his clothing business and knew he'd be able to buy a plane ticket to a place like Brazil cheaply.

He flew from Nigeria to Istanbul, Istanbul to Lima, Lima to Buenos Aires, and Buenos Aires to Sao Paolo. He said it exhausted all of his money. While in the Sao Paolo airport, he met a local woman and they chatted about his travels, how he didn't have a

Map 32: Feliz's journey.

plan or anywhere to stay. She owned a nursing home and offered him an empty room there.

Feliz lived in the nursing home for a week while he tried to learn more about Sao Paulo. He laughed about the experience and said it was unpleasant because the elderly people around him were incredibly old, spoke a language he didn't understand, and weren't fully coherent or mentally stable. During his time in Sao Paulo, with the help from someone undisclosed, he applied for protected status in Brazil and received it.

He lived in Sao Paolo for an unspecified amount of time ("very, very short") and quickly grew intensely frustrated by communication difficulties. He was unable to find work due to language barriers, so he decided to move on. He traveled by bus to Colombia—four days to Peru, three days to Ecuador, one day to Medellin, one day to Turbo. He was unable to explain how he knew to follow this route or what happened at border crossings. He didn't use an agent or smuggler. He said he did odd jobs along the route—cleaning shops, sweeping sidewalks—which gave him enough money to buy a ticket to the next location.

Now in Turbo, he is still frustrated by language barriers and unable to find work. He showed me his wallet and said he currently has $2,000 Colombian pesos ($0.63): "It's not even enough to buy water." The beer I shared with him was his first sustenance in more than a day. He said he's headed to Capurganá next but has no end destination in mind, except that he wants to reach "anywhere that speaks English." He's undaunted, he said, by what he's heard of the Darién Gap, the punishing jungle that divides Colombia from Panama, because a death in the jungle would be preferable to the death that is waiting for him at home.

He said he hasn't spoken to his wife since starting the journey. He can't afford to refill the credit on his cell phone and thus has no idea if she made it out of Cameroon alive.

"Everything Fell Apart, Boom!"

Venezuela to Colombia: An LGBTQ+ woman finds her way—first with friends, then alone—ending up in the grim town of Turbo.

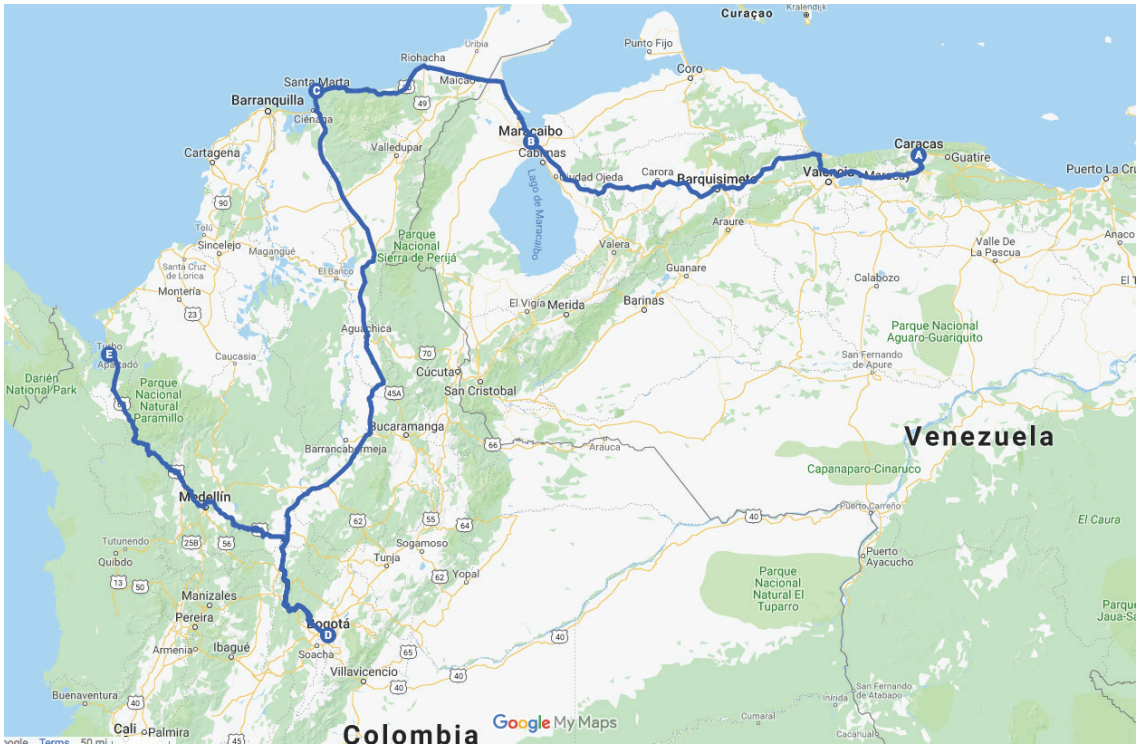
A colorful, larger-than-life woman leaves her beloved family in Venezuela to find employment and personal fulfillment in Colombia. Zigzagging from Santa Marta on Colombia's coast to Bogotá, the country's capital in the Andes, back to Santa Marta, and eventually to the coastal town of Turbo, Roset juggles friends, work, and lodging. Though she is able to cobble a life together, she is not, as she relays, really living. For that to happen she needs to feel a sense of dignity. Clothes, travel, and meaningful work would contribute to that dignity but for the moment feel out of reach.

The interview was held in Glamour Salon de Belleza, a beauty salon where Roset works as a hairdresser. The salon is brightly lit by fluorescent lights. Jersey Shore, British edition, plays on a small flat-screen TV on the back wall, and the faint mist of hairspray hangs in the air. A manicurist and the salon owner, who is also the receptionist, joke in the background. A day earlier, Padmini, a member of our interview team, had her hair cut here. When we returned later that night, her hair was still on the floor. Photos of glamorous women with edgy haircuts line the walls and small bins on the floor hold nail supplies and store-bought hair creams and soaps. A lone sink stands against the back wall, and a few black pleather chairs line the edges. When I entered, Roset was giving a client a hair-smoothing treatment. Upon finishing, the client grabbed a magazine and went to sit under the hair dryer for what would become two hours. Roset suggested that we talk from her beauty chair, blow dryer in hand. However, the noise from the street—the endless honking of cars, the commotion of mango carts, and women chattering loudly in Spanish—made hearing difficult, so we headed into a small rectangular room in the back reserved for waxing. Roset sat uncomfortably on a footstool while I plopped down next to her on the pale, flecked linoleum floor. The entire room smelled vaguely of wax and hairspray.

Roset preferred that I use the pronouns "her" and "she" when referring to her. Roset openly identifies as a transgender woman. She also described herself as gay. Her birth name is Hector, but another transgender friend in Spain gave her the more feminine name Roset, which is roughly Hector backwards.

"Roset is currently alone in Colombia. She is the

Map 33: Roset's journey.



child of humble parents, both fishermen, and her father was ex-military. She said that she had always felt more feminine than masculine and grew up feminized, always buying traditionally feminine things. In secondary school, between classes she would even hide in the bathroom to secretly apply powder and other makeup. When her mother saw her buying these things, and realizing that she had a feminine bearing, she came to talk to Roset. At first it was difficult for Roset's mother to accept that she was transgender, and for a while she saw her child's gender as merely an impulse to cross-dress. She would not let Roset leave the house in feminine attire. However, by watching a show called Caso Cerrado—popular in Venezuela and throughout Latin America that is very similar to Judge Judy in the US—Roset's mother changed. Some of the cases tried on the show dealt with LGBTQ+ people. Roset's mother observed that members of the gay community were accepted, and even defended, on TV. Over time, she became more comfortable with the idea of Roset's gender and came to accept and even embrace it.

Roset's father, however, had an entirely different reaction: pure shock. He was a serious, stern man—perhaps, Roset said, due to his military background. He never told Roset to change who she was, but she believes that he was very uncomfortable with her gender and sexuality. It took him time to accept her orientation, but he eventually came around. Roset explained how when she told her family she was leaving Venezuela to migrate to Colombia, her father cried. It was the first and only time that Roset has ever seen him cry. He calls her frequently to tell her he loves her and is proud of her. Her migration has been very tough on the whole family.

Roset left Venezuela about three years ago. She did not want to leave but felt she had to; there was no work for her, especially in the wake of President Maduro's election and subsequent tenure. Prior to the economic meltdown, Roset said that she had lived well. She worked for a chemical and petroleum company called Maritime, cleaning as part of the custodial staff. On the side, she pursued her passion for doing beauty treatments. In 2013, she began working on the side as a makeup assistant in Venezuela, living in a small village called San Timoteo. Wanting more opportunity, she moved to Caracas to fulfill her dream of being fully immersed in the beauty business. Life in Caracas, according to Roset, was spectacular. She would go out often, making herself up, and had a healthy dating life within the gay community. During this time, she also began to experiment with her sexuality—something liberating and confidence-building for her. She found romantic success within the gay community, quickly learning the ropes—both romantic and sexual—of being openly gay and dated many men her own age. After this initial period of experimentation, self-discovery, and self-love, she began to settle down with more serious partners. She experienced her first relationship when she was 20 years old. She described all her relationships as stable, live-in partnerships where she could openly express herself and live her gender identity and sexuality. She said she "fell in love and suffered" with three different partners. Afterward, she decided to be alone, at least for a while.

With the rise of Maduro, it soon became evident to Roset that the Venezuelan economy was sinking. Recognizing that the situation was not going to improve anytime soon, Roset made the tough decision to leave Venezuela for Colombia. Through friends, she had heard of opportunities in the beauty business. To enter Colombia, Roset first traveled from Caracas to Maracaibo, Venezuela. She then crossed the Maicao border in Maracaibo. She had gathered funds to make the journey. It cost about $250 to take a taxi from Maracaibo to the Maicao border, a ride which lasted nine hours. Roset was traveling with three others, all gay men from Venezuela. They split the cost of the taxi. The trip involved more than the cost of transportation; the taxi driver helped them make the border crossing, for which he demanded more money.

Her friend and fellow traveling companion, Javier, was in charge of administering the money for the group of four. None of them had proper entry documents; although Roset has a passport, it had not been stamped, so she is in Colombia illegally. It then cost 25,000 Colombian pesos (approximately $9) to get from the border at Maicao to Santa Marta, Colombia, a sum that was again split four ways. She said that here again the taxi driver took advantage of their situation. He knew, she sensed, of their desperation and demanded more money, an additional 6,000 pesos (approximately $2). The Venezuelan police also asked for bribes, though she did not disclose the amount. However, neither the Venezuelan police nor the taxi drivers stole from them, though she admitted they

had nothing worth stealing. Furthermore, the Colombian police did not ask for money.

In Colombia, Roset first lived in Santa Marta, where life was very hard for her. On the advice of a friend of one of her traveling companions, she stayed in a private home, sleeping on a sheet on the bare floor of the hostess' living room. As difficult as the situation was, their hostess did not ask for any payment. Yet, even though the lodging was free, it was unbearably hot. She would wake up as early as 5 A.M. The friends who lived in the house were all men. Few jobs were available in this coastal Caribbean town, so Roset often did not work at all. If and when she did, she arranged hair in her hostess' house. Lack of income was not her only challenge: she was often harassed, with people calling her a *maricón* (a derogatory term for LGBTQ+ people in Latin America) and degrading her in other verbal and physical ways. She also faced a lot of racism for being Venezuelan. She had heard stories of some people being taken, burned, or killed because of their race and was very afraid of both sexual and physical abuse.

Her three traveling companions sold *arepas*, a popular street food in Colombia, while Roset arranged hair. She could make 10,000–20,000 pesos (approximately $3–6) per haircut. For a while they were managing, but as time wore on small bouts of infighting among various members of the foursome worsened into serious disagreements. They decided to go their separate ways. Though they could not live together, Roset is still in contact with them and they are on good terms.

Santa Marta's slack economy offered even fewer opportunities for work than Venezuela did. Roset felt compelled to try something new and so moved to Bogota. A friend of hers in Bogotá gave her bus tickets to travel and opened her apartment to Roset, charging her nothing.

However, in Bogotá, life was even more difficult than in Santa Marta. Competition for hairdressers, especially within the Venezuelan community, was tight. Prices for beauty and hair products were higher, and she had even fewer clients than before. She left after three months, returning to Santa Marta where she found work in a beauty salon. But despite working in the line of activity—beauty—that she loved, she did not find employment in the salon fulfilling. "I like to experiment with hair and beauty," she said. "It is an art!" In Santa Marta she had very little freedom to be creative.

Through a personal connection, she was referred to the Glamour Salon in Turbo, a town 277 miles west on the same coast. The job is not great, but "for now, I must just keep fighting." Though many of her LGBTQ+ friends and acquaintances have had to take on sex work to survive, Roset insists she has never had to enter into any form of prostitution. The only way she is getting by, she believes, is because she has a skill set—hairdressing, styling, and esthetics—that she is good at, and has had the immense fortune of having friends who look out for her.

Roset said she feels more serious now than before she departed Venezuela—her life has changed. In love and in friendship, she wants to be with those who value her and can understand the life she has lived, which has been difficult. She admits she is her own worst critic. She judges herself for having "a too-feminine personality" or for being "too overweight." During our conversation, she paused and looked briefly at the floor of the waxing room, eyes downcast: "I have not accepted myself," she said, the weight of her words falling hard and cold in the pale fluorescent light. Her eyes began to water as she said—emphatically gesturing toward herself with her short hands, fingernails unpainted—that Colombian men are distinct from Venezuelan men. In Venezuela, she would have been fabulously dressed just the way she was, in a grey T-shirt, charcoal sweater, and leggings, with pin-straight, jet-black, mid-length hair. But in Colombia, men are different. They judge her. The men in Colombia are vain, she said, and very strict with what they consider physically attractive. If Colombian men were her fantasy, she was their nightmare. To be accepted, she felt a pressing need to be "spectacularly *wow*." She could do this with her personality, she said, but couldn't physically change who she was.

Her situation in Turbo breaks her heart. She was used to having a lot of friends, providing the "wow" factor with her personality. But now she is not even given a second look and feels very alone. In Turbo, she couldn't live how she wanted to, as she did not make enough money to meet her basic needs. She currently makes only 10,000 pesos ($3) per haircut; even in Turbo, the economy used to be better than it

is now, and that she used to move a lot more money through the salon even six months ago. Now, she doesn't go out but goes from work directly home.

She tries to relax in Turbo, but she wants to do more than relax—she wants to really *live*. She dreams of traveling, buying material goods, buying necessities. She wants to look pretty, be pretty. She wants to send money to her family, all of whom are still in Venezuela, but cannot do this. Life in Turbo is expensive. Roset lives in a guest house that costs 20,000 pesos ($6) daily, though she receives a discounted daily rate of 15,000 pesos ($4.75), thanks to her friendship with the owner. However, when she cannot pay her rent, the owner imposes a fine and, as a result, she has incurred significant debt. At one point, she owed 80,000 pesos (approximately $25), but now, after paying it down, she only owes 25,000 pesos ($8).

As for her other basic needs, the local restaurant owners are her friends and sometimes when she does not have money, she fixes their hair for free and they feed her as an exchange. She receives loans from friends, which creates more debt for her, but as she notes, it is good debt as it is with friends. Much better, she added, to be in debt to friends than to a landlord and fear losing her room. When she cannot repay her friends with cash, she often pays them with free hair and beauty treatments.

Upon thinking about the future, Roset mentioned that she does not have a lot of hope or expectations. She thought that Colombia would be a better place to live than Venezuela, but it hasn't been.

"Everything fell apart, boom!" she exclaimed. She is in debt and does not know how to pay the rent Meanwhile, she can't feel good about herself as it is "terrible" to not have enough to live with dignity. Yet most crucially, Roset noted, her migration experience and living in Turbo has "destroyed my self-esteem and sense of being." In Venezuela, she described herself as having been well put-together and made up. Now, she looks in the mirror and doesn't recognize herself and is jealous of others who have the ability to make themselves up and *live*. She sighed as she stated that she has gone two years without a romantic partner of any kind. Her lack of money and her migration journey, more than impacting her ability to access basic goods and services, has impacted her ability to buy the things she needs—clothing, makeup, simple jewelry—that help her to transform into the *woman* she wants to be and really is. It has destroyed her gender identity.

Yet, as Roset made sure to point out, she has other dreams. She wants to meet the love of her life. She wants to live a proud and dignified life, and to travel. Her hope is to go to Spain, Mexico, and England, Newcastle in particular, a place that appeared on her travel radar after watching *Jersey Shore*, British edition, on TV. "I would like to go to New York, where I can feel like a queen, or like a Kardashian," she said. Yet most of all, Roset would like to be an entrepreneur—again, like a Kardashian, she said with a wink and a flourish of her hands, eyes turned upward to an invisible God. She would like to have her own salon or chemical makeup company that would manufacture creams, makeup, and hair treatments. It might take 40 or 50 years, she said, but, "I will make it happen."

Roset wants to work in Turbo until March, after which she hopes to leave for Ecuador where any income she earns would be in US dollars and where she could begin to save for travel to Spain. Friends have already offered to gift her a ticket to Quito, and a friend in Quito from her life in Venezuela has offered her a room.

Carrying so much burden so often, and living the life she has lived is horrible, Roset concluded. But, she said with a smile—"I am strong and I can overcome all."

"Superwoman"

Cameroon to Colombia: An Anglophone woman hopscotches through Africa and South America as she moves north

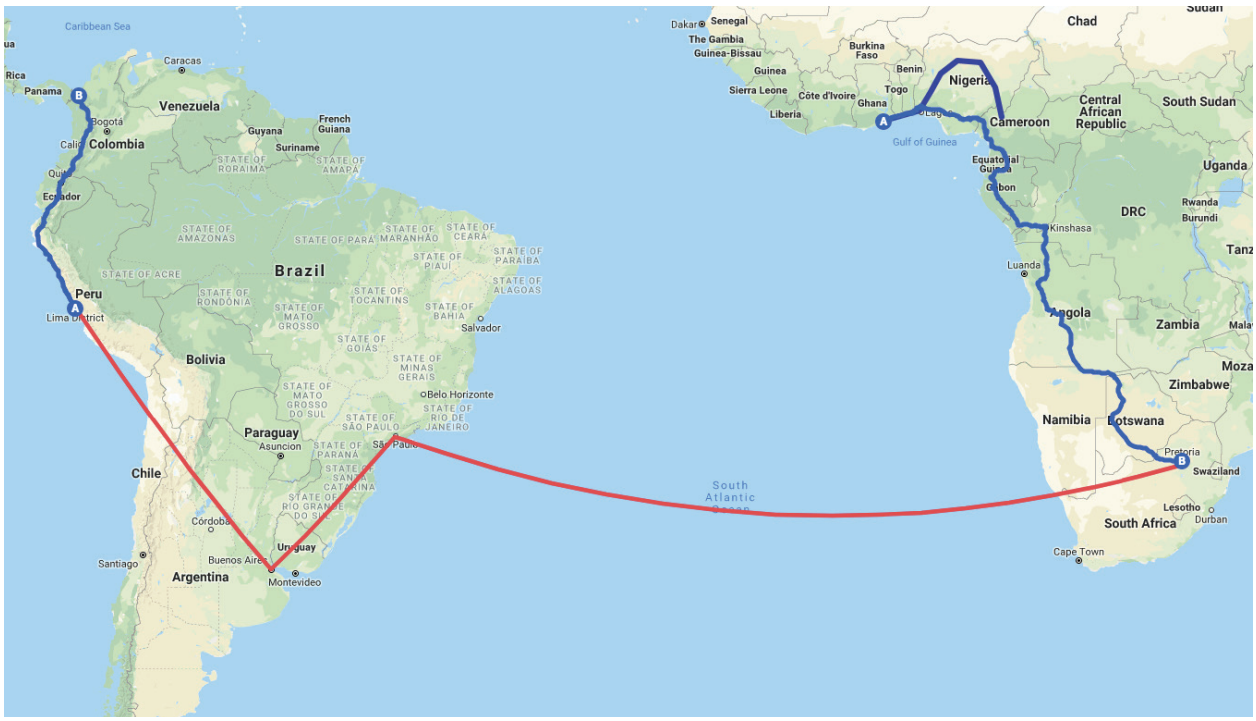
After fleeing her village under the threat of rage and torture, this 36-year-old entrepreneur, stays in a camp in Nigeria, but without food and surrounded by illness, she leaves in search of work. After a string of odd jobs, she is able to save enough to take a bus to Ghana. From there a close childhood friend helps her reach South Arica by bus, and then arranges multiple flights for her to and within South America. Upon reaching Quito, she moves north by bus to Turbo, then Capurganá, the fishing village that fronts the DarieÐ Gap, a 60-mile stretch of jungle that links Colombia to Panama. Upon reaching the Panamanian border after days of walking, she is turned back to Colombia by the Panamanian police.

"I am from Cameroon, and am 36 years old. I speak English, so am from the Anglophone part of the country. I have a daughter, who is about 15 years old, a young woman. At home in Cameroon, I had my own little business. I did not have any business partners helping me and mostly traded things, like cotton, to Nigeria. In Cameroon, there is no life. The military controlled by the Francophone section tortures you. You are tortured by the government for being Anglophone. They burn down your houses. You become homeless. They rape you.

"I ran empty handed from my village when they came. I had no time to take money or any of my belongings. Not even my Visa card. So, I fled on foot from the Anglophone section of Cameroon to Nigeria, where I stayed in a community school that had been converted into a camp. It was free to stay there, but it was crowded, with up to 600 people inside. There was no support and a total lack of food, and people were sick all around me. People even died from lack of food and from diseases, and there was no water. In Nigeria, I decided I couldn't be in the camp any longer. I had heard and seen people being extracted from the camp and sent back to Cameroon. I was scared of being sent back, so I decided to travel across Nigeria—foot to car, foot to car—always between being on foot and riding in a car.

"In the north of Nigeria, I had to work to make some money for myself, because I had nothing and had no way of receiving money from home. I left all of my family behind in Cameroon, including my mother.

Map 34: Superwoman's journey.



My mother is still there but can't do anything. Nobody can. They all stay inside their homes, doors locked. My mother can't even go outside to send me some money.

"In the north of Nigeria, I helped fix hair, I washed clothes, I watched over children, I babysat, I did other little jobs and saved a very little bit of money that helped me to leave Nigeria. I didn't want a long-term job there because I knew I would not stay. But the money I saved was enough for me to leave. I would maybe get 1,000 Nigerian naira [approximately $2.75] for washing, which is less than even $5 maybe. But I did it. I also helped a little bit with farming when I could and when I saw the chance. Finally, I had enough to leave.

"From Nigeria I traveled to Ghana by bus. It cost about 12,000 naira, or about $20 [officially, approximately $33]—it was not very expensive. Someone gave me money for the trip. I can't say who it is, but it is someone I met in Nigeria, not in Cameroon, and they were not from Cameroon. They continue to help me travel. I have to pay him back one day, but there is no contract or written note, just a verbal promise. This person helped me. I was in a bad situation and needed the money. I am a single woman, traveling alone. When I got to Ghana, I stayed in a safe house, but it was just somewhere to put my head. It was not comfortable, and there were between twelve or maybe even fifteen people in the house. I didn't get to know any of them, and was there for over a month. I felt safe in Ghana, but there was no work there for me, and I wanted to move on. A childhood friend from school, also in Ghana, sent me some money, about $400 to make the rest of the journey. I decided to come to Latin America.

"I spent two days and two nights in transit, always moving. First, I took a bus to South Africa and flew from there to Sao Paulo, Brazil. The same childhood friend from Ghana helped me with all of these expenses by sending me money through Western Union. I then went directly to Buenos Aires, Argentina, and from there to Lima, Peru. I finally ended up in Quito, Ecuador. The same friend helped me with all of the flight payments—I do not know how much he spent—and he doesn't expect to be paid back, because he is a friend. But I had no more money, so this long journey made me tired. There was some food on the flight but I could never buy anything in the airport, because I had no money.

"In Quito, I finally stopped my transit. I stayed in a hotel in the city for just a few nights, and it cost about $125. Someone helped me to pay for this too . . . I will call him (her eyes narrow and she becomes apprehensive while saying this) a *businessman*. Someone connected me to this businessman and he helped with my hotel. I then had some cash with me and felt a bit safer with some cash, I do not remember how much, but not very much. I then moved on to Colombia.

"After Quito, throughout Colombia, I was on my own. I had to prepare a bag, water, and food and made it to Turbo. I took a bus, bus, bus all the way from the Colombian border to Turbo, which the businessman helped me to buy my ticket. I then took a boat to Capurganá. Now I am here in Capurganá. I tried to enter the Darién jungle, and made it a few days in, but the Panamanian police turned me back. Now, I am back in Capurganá for the second time, and I have no money.

"I am not surprised that I am doing this on my own, as I am responsible. But no one warned me about doing this journey as a single woman. It is terrifying—scary to walk all day and night, and if you are tired, you just have to sleep on the leaves on the jungle floor. My feet are swollen and my legs and feet are in so much pain from walking, walking. And I am alone. If I am a woman, I have to fight for myself and do everything by myself, to fight. I don't have a shoulder to cry on. I have family and a partner in Cameroon that I miss, and I miss my daughter. She is still there, and it is very hard to be far away from her. She is a very good girl, but I was worried. I had her transferred to the French zone so she would be safer. She is staying with a relative and going to school, because I wanted her to have an education. I had some money saved up in my bank account from having my own business, so after I left, I found a way to contact my mother with my Visa card and PIN information. I told her to take that money out and use it to pay for my daughter to be safe and educated. That is why I have nothing saved for myself. I've always been a single mother. It is hard to migrate, but I have to make do. And I am glad that my daughter is safe. I talk with her sometimes on WhatsApp.

"There is always danger in being a woman. I remember when I was a young girl, my mother asked me to go to secondary school in the English zone and to stay with an uncle of mine. My uncle was living with his friend at the time, and we all lived together in a single room of the same house. One night, my uncle's friend wanted to touch me in the middle of the night, and I screamed and screamed. My uncle chased him out of the house. So of course I fear rape. It is hard to have all of the safety and security you need as a woman when you are on your own.

"I do not use contraception while migrating. Whether I am raped and become pregnant or not is between God and me. This is not a woman's journey, though. Women do not have the physical strength of men, so if someone wanted to rape me it would be hard for me to fight. I don't have money, which can sometimes make you safer if you can pay people off. I am not that physically strong, so if an obstacle comes, I may not be able to face it. For men it is easier, they are physically stronger and don't have to fear sleeping outside, like I did in the jungle. Women can't sleep outside—too many dangers—so I always have to pay for and find a place to sleep. This is not always easy. I just have God and me, in the jungle, to keep me safe.

"I am going crazy, especially when I think of having to go back to the jungle. I have no money—I don't know what to do or even where to start. I just have $1." (She pulls out a crumpled $1 bill from her dress—the only money she has.) "Getting Wi-Fi is also hard but you need Wi-Fi because it is important to connect with people for money and also to be able to tell them that you are okay.

"My biggest challenge is that I have no money and am here illegally, so I can't stay— I only have no passport. I don't want to go back to the jungle, and I think this will be the hardest part. In the jungle, having no money is a problem because you have to pay bribes. You can negotiate on your own, but you have to pay them. The businesspeople can help you pay the bribes, if you pay them cash first. Or a friend, like mine, can help you pay for travel tickets. I have no health issues but my feet hurt, I have pain all over my body from the jungle, I am homeless, frustrated, broke, and stranded. But you have to laugh [*laughs*]—you have to laugh a lot. It is funny for one person to go through so much!

"I keep going then. I have to fight, for my daughter, and for her future. I want to go to America, where I will have a better future for myself, my mother, and my daughter. I seek guidance and prayers for my trip, as I am a Catholic. I sometimes go to church in the different towns, but not always. But I always have my Bible, even in the jungle. When I left Cameroon, I took my Bible—it was important and the first thing that came to my mind, safety and my Bible, because God is always there.

"You can call me Superwoman, for sure. My mother always called me that when I was younger—she even thought that I was a male when I was in her stomach because I was so strong, and was confused when I came out and was a woman. Anything that a man does, I always do it. I am always walking on my own, I had my own business, I am not afraid. Men are not scared, and they have big hearts—they can do anything. That's me."

Superwoman took a deep, slow breath and shifted her gaze to the sky. "My God, I need your presence now," she whispered. She looked out to the distance, and started to silently weep.

"You Must Move; You Keep Going..."

Cameroon to Colombia: An Anglophone man flees violence in Francophone-dominated Cameroon toward the US, only to be intercepted by Panamanian authorities.

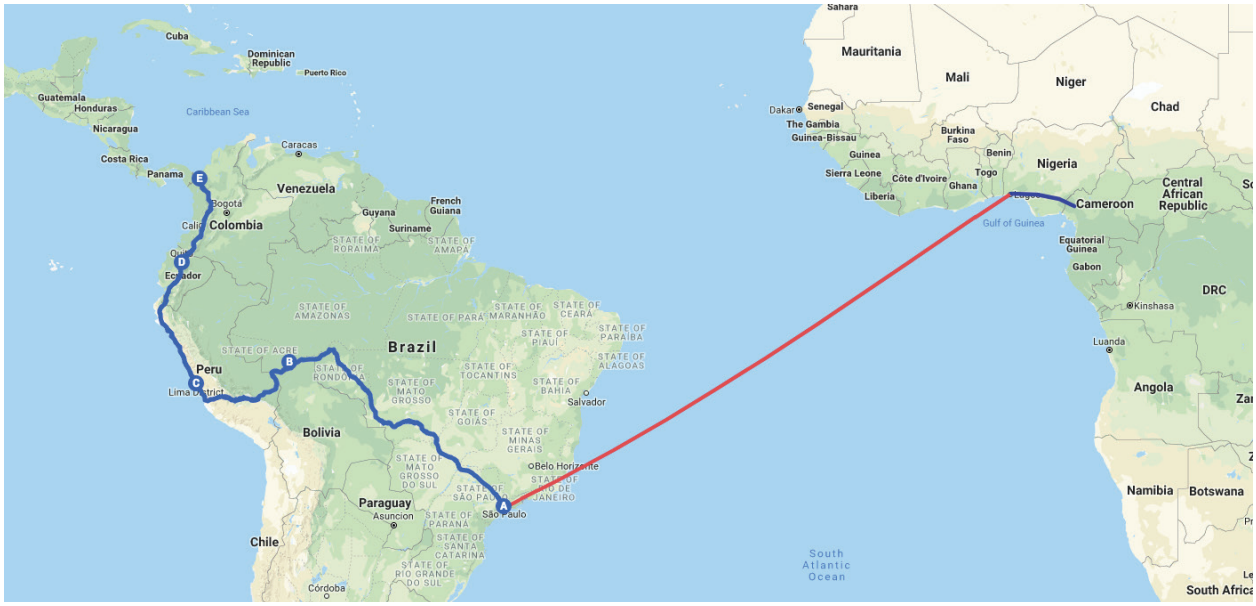
Franklin, a male Cameroonian, leaves a comfortable job as an accountant to evade mounting threats against him by Francophone authorities. Leaving behind a family, he makes it as far as Colombia, South America, where he joins a group of Cameroonian men interested in crossing from Colombia to Panama. But in the Darién jungle—an expanse of swamps, mountains, rivers and forests—Franklin is apprehended by Panamanian authorities. He is returned to Colombia where he plots his next steps.

"Even as he braced for the most dangerous leg of his journey northward, perhaps of his life, Franklin could burst into a hearty laugh that transported everyone to a future he had clearly imagined multiple times for himself since fleeing Cameroon. It is a future in which he rejoins his wife and two-year-old son who have been in hiding since he fled to seek asylum. A future free from the violence he faced back home. Free from smugglers whose services he has come to rely on for survival on his journey through Latin America.

Just 24 hours before, Franklin and a group of fellow Cameroonians he met along the way had been returned by Panamanian officials to Colombia after four days trekking through the Darién Gap. They were back in Capurganá, a remote tourist destination known for its picturesque, white-sand beaches. Now, they bantered in pidgin English, laughing and teasing one another, having bathed and consumed their first meal in days. Another Cameroonian mused that if he makes it to America and starts a new life there, he'll teach his kids their dialect to keep their culture alive. "It's how we knew we were from the same place when we first found each other. You can immediately tell if someone is from Anglophone Cameroon," Franklin explained.

Meanwhile, a few meters away a group of Colombian men on motorbikes carried out a tense negotiation with other migrants staying in the house behind us on the cost of getting smuggled into Panama that evening. As the sun inched closer towards the horizon, Franklin and his companions were thirty minutes away from making a second attempt at crossing through the Darién Gap into Panama. But somehow the nightmare that awaited them for a second time in the jungle was momentarily outweighed by something far more powerful—their dreams for what lay beyond.

Map 35: Franklin's journey.



For more than three years, the Isthmus of Darién, linking North and South America, has served as a crucial passageway for migrants from around the world trying to reach the US southern border. Franklin was joined by migrants hailing from such countries as Haiti, Ghana, Nepal, India, and Pakistan. Even as the US government remained closed, with lawmakers battling over whether to fund a border wall along the US-Mexico border, migrants pushed forward, confident that the challenges that awaited them, both legal and physical, were preferable to the ones they left behind.

For Franklin, those challenges began one evening in October 2017 more than six thousand miles east of Capurganá in his native country of Cameroon when he went to retrieve medicine from a pharmacy for his seven-month-old son. As we sat outside, shielded from the hot Colombian sun, he described how that fateful night set in motion a series of events that led him to one of the world's most dangerous jungles.

On his way back from the pharmacy, he noticed a military vehicle driving erratically in his direction. At first, he assumed it was speeding to face off with Anglophone separatist groups in the area, but the vehicle soon lost all control and careened into oncoming traffic. The accident landed Franklin in the hospital for two weeks. In November, he was called in for questioning where a government official asked him questions in French despite his limited understanding of the language: "Are your cars documented? Do you have a license?" Franklin politely complied with the officer's inquiries, but towards the end he interjected, asking why a military vehicle was driving so erratically. The officer did not answer and sent Franklin home.

Franklin did not hear from the government for some time. Then, he received another court summons and in September 2018, almost a year after the accident, was called in for additional questioning. The officer ordered him to sign a statement saying separatists were responsible for the accident. When Franklin refused, they threatened him with jail and locked him in an office for two hours to reconsider his decision. Franklin tried explaining that he was merely a witness but did not know what exactly happened. They said he was a witness and a claimant. Eventually he was released, but upon returning home, he found himself unable to fall asleep. With his sick mother and sister living with him as well as his infant son, he felt their security was no longer guaranteed. A few days later, his house was surrounded by police who broke in and beat him severely. The next day, he and his family fled. He quickly arranged for his wife and child to live somewhere they would not be found by government officials.

At this point in the story, Franklin paused and put his head down. I got the feeling this was the first time he had spoken about this in a while.

"My mother told me, 'You have to leave,'" he said. "So I went from Cameroon to Nigeria. I got support from a friend from Douala [a coastal city in southwest Cameroon]. With $500, I went from Buea [the capital of the Southwest Region of Cameroon] to Nigeria dressed, foolishly, in a tracksuit and glasses so that they couldn't recognize me." Passing through war-torn areas, where killings and kidnapping were increasingly common, he said he kept his hood up the entire bus ride to avoid detection. He tried to remain as lowkey as possible. "I haven't spoken with my family since I left," he said.

Here, another Cameroonian male, Joseph, about five years younger than Franklin, joined us at the table. He listened intently.

Within a few days, however, Franklin realized that Nigeria would not be a long-term solution. If discovered, he would be deported to his home country. "Nigeria and Cameroon governments are working together," the other Cameroonian, Joseph, interjected. "They both want us out. If you are in Nigeria, they'll send you back no matter what." Joseph described how he had fled Cameroon after being threatened by both Anglophone separatist groups and the Francophone-majority government. He left behind a thriving clothing business. He said hearing gun shots in the streets became the new normal almost overnight, either from separatists or from the government trying to crack down. His tone was much more severe than Franklin's. He was visibly angered by the set of circumstances that led him to the situation he presently found himself in. "You can't even wear a black T-shirt now," he said pointing to Franklin's shirt. Franklin laughed, responding, "It's true! I would be shot wearing this shirt by the government. This is what the separatists wear."

Worried that other African governments would treat him similarly, Franklin decided he had no choice but to leave the continent. He flew to Brazil, from Lagos to Sao Paolo, where he was told he would be sent back unless he applied for asylum. Despite worrying that he would be unable to thrive in a place where he did not speak the language, he chose to seek asylum. He commented on how open and cooperative Brazil had been for him, how Brazilians tried to understand and listen to his story. "They ask you, can you be in Brazil and study the language?" he said. He told them yes, but had already set his eyes on the United States, where he could seek asylum without having to learn a new language. "I received help from some people who would transport me to Lima, Peru," he said.

Of all the countries he has passed through, Peru, Ecuador, and Colombia have been the most difficult. "They don't care. Their concern is, 'Where you are going?' and once you succeed to fulfill their requirements, they tell you to move," he said. Colombia has been the most expensive. "Of $1,000, you will pay $800 in Colombia," he said. For Franklin, the expenses started as soon as he crossed the border between Ecuador and Colombia by bus. In an armed robbery, he lost nearly everything, including most of his money, his passport, and other belongings. Bribing Colombian officials had also become requisite for moving forward. He said officials would never accept payments directly but would instead send a surrogate to receive the cash. In Cali, Colombia, for example, he described how he went to a migration office where he stood in line to receive a transit visa. When he got to the front of the line, they told him he was ineligible and sent him outside. A few minutes later, he was approached by a child on a bicycle who had a picture of him standing in line at the migration office. He gave the child some cash who returned minutes later with a transit document. "It's a very strong and sophisticated network," he said.

Franklin did not go into detail about how he financed each part of his journey, other than to say that he used some savings, borrowed a bit from a friend, and that "sometimes you have a good Samaritan who gives you something that should have been a cost." Working had not been an option for him thus far, even in the informal economy. He said it had served him well to be frugal, leading him to eat just one meal a day. Joseph added that many Cameroonians they knew had borrowed money from friends and family, used savings, or—for those who had more time to prepare—pledged some physical asset that possessed liquid value, such as property or livestock.

I asked Franklin what the most difficult part of the journey had been. "Today," he responded almost immediately. "In the forest, we fell into the hands of the Panama military, who sent us back on the boat." I recalled that I had encountered Franklin's group just as they had been returned, and at that time, they all seemed agitated and defeated, having endured several days in the jungle where they had been robbed and where they struggled to stay nourished. The thought of doing it all over again must have been demoralizing. They had been leaving the Migración Colombia office located in downtown Capurganá, to make their way back to the hostel they had stayed at before when I introduced myself. One young man—who I would later find out is Joseph—was about to pay a visit to the agent who arranged their passage into Panama.

Now, having showered and eaten, both Franklin and Joseph were significantly more upbeat but remained anxious about whether they would be able to renegotiate another trip into the jungle, especially since they had already paid and had nothing left to offer. Joseph's visit to the agent didn't seem to have resolved anything. They were also anxious about speaking with me. "They don't like that we're speaking with you," Franklin said. I asked who he was referring to, and he said, "The guys who are helping us get to Panama. They think you're going to ruin their business. This is very dangerous research that you're doing, you know. But it's important."

When I asked them to describe the journey they took into the jungle earlier in the week, they started by sharing their experience at the Migración Colombia office in Capurganá. They were instructed not to move 200 meters from the place they were staying and that they had just two days to leave. After finalizing plans to enter the forest, they left at night by boat: "You go to the ocean, and they yell, 'Enter, enter!' It's about a 100-to-125-minute boat ride, and then they yell, 'Jump out! Move, move!'" The landing fee was $50. As soon as they hit the ground, they began hiking and did not stop until dawn the next day.

Joseph, I could tell, wanted to change the subject. He wanted to return to what had driven him to leave Cameroon in the first place. Somehow, he had been implicated with the Anglophone separatists in his town and was targeted to be shot. He fled to Ghana, where he could pretend to be Nigerian. "They have a distinct of talking; they are like 'Oh boy, how far?'" he said. Joseph reached his hand out to me to imitate the popular Nigerian greeting he had come to master. One night he met someone in a bar who said he could get to the US through the Americas. All he needed to do was look up a few tourist destinations in Ecuador and apply for a tourist visa. Within a few weeks, he had made arrangements and arrived safely in Quito, Ecuador, where much to his surprise he met dozens of Cameroonian families also fleeing to the US. "I thought I was the only one! But there were many people running," he said.

Franklin interrupted, "And most of them are young men. Let me ask you, what country wants its young able men to move out like this? We are young men with energy. My friend [pointing to Joseph] had a business. I was an accountant." Joseph then began talking about how Cameroonians perceived the United States: "Growing up as children, we viewed the US as a model for the world. And when Obama was elected, we saw this and said, 'Wow, that place is really fair.'" He lamented how the U.S. appears to be retreating from the African continent over the past few years and that optimism for more-accountable local government was fading among people his own age. "Now the US is increasingly absent from Africa and China is taking its place. And they are exploitative."

At this this point in the interview, a young, fashionably-dressed Colombian man approached Joseph and quietly asked him for something. Joseph got up from the table and did not return for the remainder of the interview. When I asked Franklin who that man was, he said he was part of the group helping them reach Panama.

Franklin picked up where Joseph left off: "I'm very appreciative of the US because it is the only country that will accept us. The USA is a safe haven on earth. But there should be a safer way for people to get there and keep them safe." Franklin proposed an access point for people like him, where he could be processed. In this case, "there would be no need to go through the jungle . . . if I had a camp, where people reviewed my case, you would reduce the number of deaths in the jungle. Some get lost in there, including parents of little children. I believe there can be a better way of doing this that would end the movement through the jungle."

. . .

The following day I stopped by the hostel and saw Franklin again. He was with his fellow traveling companions, belting his hearty laugh that seemed to lift everyone up even as they prepared to reenter the jungle. I asked if he had anything else he'd like to tell me. He paused and looked up, "You must move; you keep going, to a land that will accept you and you can be free."

I left him my WhatsApp number in case he had questions about the research. He said he'd let me know when he made it to Panama.

I have not yet received a WhatsApp message.