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Human Trafficking, Information Campaigns, and Strategies of Migration Control

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Information campaigns have been launched since the 1990s in central and eastern Europe to prevent human trafficking and undocumented migration. They attempt to reduce emigration before migrants reach the border and therefore take place within the reinforcement of migration controls. They are designed to discourage potential migrants from leaving by promoting a negative image of migration to western Europe, thus relying on the questionable assumption that information plays a key role in migration decisions. By associating undocumented migration with human trafficking, these campaigns furthermore display moral and political ambiguities. This article discusses their ideological basis and the ethical issues they raise.

Keywords: human trafficking; emigration dynamics; migration policies; central and eastern Europe

In spring 2006, the Belgian interior minister launched a campaign in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to discourage the Congolese to migrate and seek asylum in Belgium. Irregular migration from this former Belgian colony is a major source of preoccupation for the Belgian government, which therefore commissioned a Belgian Congolese filmmaker to realize a movie that will be shown on Congolese television. Entitled Vanda na Mboka (literally, “sit down in your country”), the movie depicts the unattractive fate of asylum seekers in Belgium and especially the living conditions in one of the detention camps in which they are detained while their claim for asylum is considered.

This raised major concerns among human rights organizations not only because this project contradicted the claimed liberal principles of Belgium’s foreign policy...
but also because the filmmaker was authorized to film and interview Congolese migrants in a center that is usually closed to the press, thus enabling the migrants to be identified as potential opponents by the Congolese government and exposing them to serious threats upon their possible return to Congo. The interior minister argued that it was fair to inform potential migrants of what awaited them in Belgium and to discourage them from paying thousands of dollars to human smugglers (Braeckman, 2006).

This story highlights the emergence of information campaigns in preventing undesirable migration. The purpose of this new strategy is to discourage potential migrants from leaving. People in sending regions should be sensitized to irregular migrants’ tough living conditions so that they perceive undocumented migration not as an opportunity but as a source of danger and vulnerability. One of the key justifications of information campaigns lies in the need to fight human smuggling and trafficking, which prospers on potential migrants’ false hopes of a better life abroad. By raising awareness of the risks of migration and the harsh realities of life in destination countries, information campaigns should counter these illusions and thereby jeopardize smugglers’ business. Traditional methods of migration control, such as the surveillance of borders, are thereby complemented by attempts to convince migrants not to leave their home.

There is evidence that such information campaigns are being put in place in very different countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. This article discusses this new and largely unexplored strategy of migration control, focusing on central and eastern Europe and on the campaigns coordinated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). It analyzes the arguments used by information campaigns, the media through which they are disseminated, their ideological foundations, and the ethical issues they raise. It investigates not the empirical functioning of the campaigns but the discourses, representations, and arguments mobilized to explain and justify them. Apart from IOM’s own publications, hardly any source of information exists to better understand what is at stake in these campaigns (see Andrijasevic, 2004, for a major exception). This article therefore hopes to bring attention to this emerging pattern of migration control and to its implications for the study of migration politics.

**Contemporary Strategies of Migration Control**

The context in which information campaigns take place is one of a tightening of migration control, coupled with a widespread feeling of helplessness in the face of persistent flows of people: “Paradoxically, the ability to control migration has shrunk as the desire to do so has increased” (Bhagwati, 2003, p. 99). In Europe, since the end of the cold war, issues such as the asylum crisis, irregular migration, trafficking, human smuggling, and terrorism have put migration at the heart of political debates.
Western countries are concerned with what they perceive as the porosity of their borders and elaborate new strategies to achieve a greater level of surveillance. This includes, notably, the fortification of borders, as the U.S.-Mexican or Spanish-Moroccan border illustrates, and the intensified search for undocumented migrants within states. Undocumented migrants may then be subject to detention and expulsion, measures once specific to exceptional circumstances such as wars, which illustrates the sharp turn taken by migration controls.

The success of these strategies of migration control is open to debate. Despite tight migration policies, undocumented migration persists, and the gap between what policies are meant to achieve and their actual results widens, which raises the issue of the very possibility of stopping unwanted migration (Cornelius, Tsuda, Martin, & Hollifield, 2004). Difficulties are multifaceted: Migration flows are structurally embedded in the economies and societies of most countries, making them almost impossible to stop; in an era of globalization, states face a dilemma because borders must remain open to international trade or tourism (Andreas & Snyder, 2000); through migration, countries are connected via networks that span the globe and facilitate further migration (Castles, 2004); and lobby groups, such as employers, can constrain governments to allow migration for labor market reasons. As illustrated by the contrast between Western countries and oil-exporting states in the Middle East, controlling immigration is particularly difficult for liberal democracies (Hollifield, 1992); market forces challenge states’ logic of control, and governments’ autonomy is constrained by the respect for migrants’ minimal degree of legal protection, which is sometimes enforced by courts or supranational institutions.

It should be reminded, however, that full control has historically never been the norm. One sometimes hears that open borders were a reality in the 19th century; this picture of laissez-faire is probably exaggerated but shows that states have only progressively acquired the ability and legitimacy to control the movement of people (Torpey, 2000). From this perspective, states are now more able to control migration than before, and their apparent loss of control relies on the myth of a once-perfect sovereignty that never was. Moreover, officially declared policies may be different from actual intentions: A benign neglect toward undocumented migration, for example, may fit the interests of states or employers wishing to have access to an unorganized and irregular workforce. Controls are then as much a matter of symbols as of results, with governments needing to communicate to their citizens that they control the gates (Freeman, 1994).

Whether tight policies generate the expected results, it remains that migration control strategies are innovatively searching for new tools and methods to surmount the obstacles mentioned above. Surveillance is then exercised by different actors, in different places, and through different strategies, following a trend that Lahav and Guiraudon (2000) call “away from the border and outside the state” (p. 55). Remote control is not new (as illustrated by visa policies) but is growingly put in practice through the cooperation between destination, sending, and transit states; Western
countries provide financial support to help less developed states control their own borders and to incite them to reaccept expelled migrants. Countries such as Mexico or Morocco thereby become buffer zones to contain migration from Latin America or sub-Saharan Africa. This also includes the introduction of private actors, such as airline carriers that are asked to check migrants’ right to enter destination countries. The geographical locus of control is thus displaced from the borders of receiving states to sending and transit regions.

By operating inside sending states and using the dissemination of information to incite potential migrants to stay at home, information campaigns fit into this trend. Control is thus exercised through different means, including the media and advertisement-like methods, and is partly delegated to new actors such as intergovernmental agencies and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Through information campaigns, control also takes place well before the border among potential migrants to reduce the numbers of those wanting to reach Europe.

**Information Campaigns**

Information campaigns provide information to people in sending regions on issues surrounding their potential emigration to foreign countries. In the words of IOM:

> Information campaigns aim at helping potential migrants make well-informed decisions regarding migration. Experience has shown that the most credible information is a balanced and neutral one that offers facts on the possibilities and advantages of regular migration, as well as on the disadvantages of irregular departures. . . . In the anti-trafficking campaigns, information is given about the risks and dangers involved. (“Information Campaigns,” 1999-2000, p. 1)

Since the early 1990s, IOM has launched numerous campaigns to inform the population of sending regions of the risks of migrating, mostly in central and eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, and Central America. The first ones took place in Romania from 1992 to 1996, as well as in Albania (1992 to 1995), the Philippines (1997 to 1999), Vietnam (1998 to 1999), and Ukraine (1998). There has been an increase since 2000, with campaigns throughout central and eastern Europe, Cambodia, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ghana, Morocco, and Nigeria (“Information Campaigns,” 1999-2000).

In all these regions, IOM functions as a service provider, establishing campaigns in response to the requests of its member states. Through its field offices, it offers to its partners strong local implantation and connections, thereby enabling them to reach potential migrants more efficiently. Funding comes mostly from Western states, including European governments, the European Commission, and the United
States (through the U.S. Agency for International Development, notably). In addition, the governments of transit and sending countries sometimes contribute, and so do other intergovernmental institutions, such as the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

This section analyzes the arguments and methods of these campaigns in central and eastern Europe. It relies on the documentation and presentation texts accompanying them and especially on IOM’s own publications. In addition, it uses online material and unpublished documents sent to us by IOM offices. We focus primarily on campaigns that took place in Albania, Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Moldavia, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, and Ukraine from 2001 to 2005 while also providing additional evidence from other regions.

**Trafficking and Information Campaigns**

Information campaigns largely take place within the framework of the fight against human trafficking. Since the early 1990s, there have been increasing fears surrounding new forms of migration characterized by coercion, exploitation, and the involvement of migration professionals often linked to organized crime. In central and eastern Europe, the migratory trajectories of women recruited in countries of origin by mafia-type criminal organizations and forced into activities such as prostitution has been described as modern slavery, raising considerable public emotion and political reactions (Berman, 2003). Trafficking is internationally recognized as a human rights violation by the so-called 2000 Palermo Protocols on smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons. Smuggling concerns the illegal entry of migrants, whereas trafficking regards not only the displacement but also the exploitation of trafficked persons once in the destination country. Smuggling is usually associated with men, whereas trafficking evokes women and children, who are in principle understood as victims rather than criminals (Gallagher, 2001).

These treaties illustrate the consensus on the need to fight trafficking (Lackso, 2005). Along with IOM and governments in both sending and receiving countries, antitrafficking initiatives are taken by various UN agencies, the European Commission, the Council of Europe, Interpol, the OSCE, and regional organizations. Information campaigns are considered an essential tool in fighting trafficking, as they contribute to raising awareness among potential victims regarding the risks of being caught in criminal networks and thus reduce their vulnerability. Other advocated measures usually include the following: stricter border control; increased cooperation between states, for example, within the framework of international and regional organizations or the EU (in terms of information sharing, notably); capacity building in sending and transit regions to increase their capacity to fight trafficking (training of migration officials, technical assistance, reinforcement of criminal legislation); and assistance to and protection of victims (legal and medical counseling, reception centers, return and reintegration assistance).
In central and eastern Europe, the majority of information campaigns target young women and stress the risk of getting lured into job offers abroad that eventually lead to forced sexual exploitation. Slogans are strong and unambiguous: “You are not for sale!” “Human beings are priceless” (2002), “Open your eyes” (2000), and “Don’t get hooked” (2000). Information campaigns rely on various supports, including printed materials, multimedia projects (movies, music, the Internet), and partnerships with government and civil actors.

**Printed Materials**

Information campaigns rely heavily on various types of printed material. An important support for communication is posters, which can be found on billboards and on city buses, notably (see Andrijasevic, 2004, for an extensive analysis). Some represent beautiful, White, and often half-naked women in states of despair or in attitudes characteristic of sex workers. They reproduce typical job advertisements, such as “Trustworthy agency offering women good work abroad” and complement them with headlines directed at the reader, including “The return home won’t be easy,” “Are you sure you know what’s waiting for you?” “Blind faith opens its eyes too late,” and “Do you think it could never happen to you?” A short text, written in first person, relates what happened to the woman on the picture: how she wanted to leave her country, was abused by traffickers, and was forced into prostitution. An example from the Czech Republic in 1999 reads as follows:

> When I finished high school, I wanted to study languages at university but I failed the entrance exams. I started looking for work abroad. Then I found an ad in a newspaper for an au-pair job in Italy. I applied for the job and was accepted. When I arrived in Italy, I was met by a couple who presented themselves as the parents of the children I was supposed to look after. I signed a contract and gave them my passport which they kept. I was taken to a beautiful villa which turned out to be a brothel. I was then forced to prostitute myself. . . . When you want to work abroad, call for advice. (“Czech Republic,” 1999, p. 9)

Others portray women in vulnerable situations, such as in a cage (with the slogan “Do you want to trade your dignity, your freedom and your health for a cage?”) or in the hands of a man exchanging her against money (“You will be sold like a doll”) (for examples, see IOM, 2002, 2003). In 2005 in Ukraine, a campaign featured large posters representing a passport, with the picture of a young women and a large stamp that reads “Sold” (IOM Ukraine, 2005a). All these posters feature the phone number of a hotline providing advice to people considering migrating abroad or unsure of the job offer they received.

The same kind of pictures and messages can be found on other supports, such as leaflets, flyers, postcards, stickers, fact sheets, or pocket calendars. In Hungary, for
example, an information card was published with the slogan “Please help, I’m in trouble” translated into several languages and accompanied by a toll-free hotline number (“Don’t Get Hooked,” 2000). In Romania, the slogan of IOM’s campaigns (“Human beings are priceless”) was published on T-shirts (“Human Beings,” 2002). The reliance on testimonies of trafficking victims and on true stories is a common feature of information campaigns. In Hungary, a photo story booklet telling the story of two girls that were forced into prostitution was published, free of charge, by women- and youth-oriented magazines (“Don’t Get Hooked,” 2000).

Other printed materials include brochures providing advice and information on how to travel and work abroad; how to check whether a contract or a recruitment agency is reliable; how to proceed with visas, passports, embassies, and tickets; how to recognize a trafficking risk, and so on. They are distributed in secondary schools, universities, cinemas, nightclubs, employment agencies, airports, police stations, and border crossing points. They are also available at the Western embassies where potential migrants come to ask for visas.

**Multimedia**

In Moldova, a movie was used to reach a wide audience of teenagers and school pupils. Titled *Lilya 4-ever*, it tells the story of a 16-year-old girl who becomes a victim of human trafficking. The movie was shown both on national television and through a special screening in cities and small towns. In addition, schools’ curricula incorporated the movie, which was also advertised through stickers and handouts distributed in cafeterias or Internet cafés. NGO members were trained to provide advice and answer questions after the performance (“Lilya,” 2004). In Ukraine, another movie (*Prey of Silence*), viewed on national TV, warned women of the risks of being trafficked and called for Ukrainian women abroad to return home (Andrijasevic, 2004, p. 162).

Multimedia also includes TV advertisements. In Ukraine, a spot was shown on TV in which one can see a potential migrant preparing his or her suitcase: The emphasis is put on the various official documents that he or she takes and especially on an open passport marked by a very visible *LABOUR VISA* inscription; one then sees the emigrant at an airport or a train station, refusing to give his or her passport to someone else (see IOM Ukraine, 2005b). In Moldova, a television advertisement was produced to promote a hotline and featured well-known local artists providing “friendly advice” to the audience: “If you want to go abroad, it’s OK. I respect your decision. But don’t hurry. Get yourself informed. Find a little time to call the hotline” (“Celebrities Spread,” 2004).

In addition, ambitious multimedia programs target youth with countertrafficking messages. Of particular importance is the MTV EXIT Programme, a multimedia campaign meant “to end exploitation and trafficking” and supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency in partnership with IOM. It consists
of a Web site (available in 14 languages from both western and eastern Europe), radio and TV advertisements, video clips, documentary films, and short dramatic films. Celebrities are relied on to reach the targeted audience of young people: Hollywood superstar Angelina Jolie, for example, presents a documentary titled *Inhuman Traffic*, which provides an introduction to the phenomenon of trafficking through real-life stories. The rock band R.E.M. was also involved, as the 2005 group’s concerts in Europe were followed by the EXIT Programme; antitrafficking NGOs were present to reach the fans and distribute awareness material, including a leaflet in which one can read alarming messages such as “If you want to see a potential trafficking victim, look in the mirror: it could be you or somebody you know” and “Trafficking is happening all around you, everywhere in Europe, probably in the city where you live.”

Music festivals were organized in 2004 and 2005 under the MTV EXIT umbrella, in Serbia and Montenegro and Croatia, notably. In Romania, the Trafic [*sic*] Tour was organized by IOM and the MTV EXIT Programme in 2005, presenting a free, interactive show centering on the story of a trafficked girl and featuring young local actors. The Web site provides a list of organizations that provide help and advice to both victims and people considering applying for a job abroad ranging from IOM offices in central and eastern European countries to local NGOs.

**Partnerships and Cooperation With NGOs**

Information campaigns rely on partnerships established with a wide range of social actors. As mentioned, IOM campaigns use schools and universities to reach the young audience that is considered most susceptible to migrating abroad and to getting trafficked; teachers are trained to introduce the issues of trafficking and irregular migration in their curriculum, and summer camps are organized to raise awareness among young people. Churches sometimes also cooperate; in Romania, for example, an agreement was signed between IOM and the patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church to introduce countertrafficking information in religious schools (“Human Beings,” 2002; “Lilya,” 2004). Along with media enterprises, other private actors also participate, such as the bus company Eurolines, used by Eastern Europeans traveling to western Europe, which distributed antitrafficking flyers on board (IOM, 2005).

IOM is also involved in so-called capacity-building activities, whose purpose is to enable sending regions to better address trafficking challenges by themselves. This includes training of social workers, journalists, civil servants, and members of government agencies as well as workshops and roundtables putting together various state and civil actors to increase the level of awareness surrounding trafficking. This can lead to the creation of institutions such as advice centers: With funding from the European Union, IOM has, for example, established Centres for Migrant Advice in Ukraine and the Czech Republic. These are run by NGOs whose staff received
training by IOM and Western embassies, and they organize both face-to-face consultations and info lines through which migrants are told how to migrate safely and legally; advice includes checking with embassies and making sure job offers are realistic before leaving (“Migrating Safely,” 2005).

In all these initiatives, NGOs play a key role. IOM’s campaigns are almost systematically established in partnership with NGOs, which are trained and funded to run advice centers, answer hotlines, distribute booklets, organize drama tours, and so on. IOM has created and supports international networks of NGOs with the purpose of exchanging experience and information between NGOs in different countries and distributes awards to the most active ones. Of particular significance is the EU-sponsored La Strada, a network of associations present in the Netherlands, Poland, Bulgaria, Belarus, Moldova, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Ukraine.7 Although counter-trafficking initiatives are presented as joint IOM-NGO projects, Andrijasevic (2004, p. 151) notes that civil society partners sometimes complain about their little influence on their conceptualization; Schwenken (2005) also stresses how human rights and feminist NGOs active in women’s protection find themselves in an uneasy and imbalanced relationship to the governments and intergovernmental organizations they work with on trafficking issues.

**Trafficking and Migration**

As the material presented above makes clear, information campaigns focus heavily on trafficking and the risks it represents, especially for young and female central and eastern Europeans. Yet as the Belgian Congolese story above indicates, information campaigns may also be used to deal with irregular migration, although in a much less visible and publicized way. In Morocco, for example, an IOM project funded by the Spanish government aims at preventing clandestine immigration by disseminating information on “the risks and hazards of irregular migration” through methods that resemble closely those used in central and eastern Europe (“Information Programme,” 1999). The message then focuses not on trafficking risks but on the dangers for migrants of trying to reach Europe and on the unattractive fate of undocumented migrants.

The message may also concern the consequences of not respecting European countries’ migration and asylum laws. In Romania, for example, a campaign funded by the Belgian government presented information on “the risks and consequences deriving from violations of legal immigration procedures in force” (IOM, 2005, pp. 1-2). It is interesting that this may even apply to legal migration. The United Kingdom, for example, which is one of the few countries to authorize migration from new EU member states, asked IOM to establish regional campaigns in the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, and the Slovak Republic to “clarify the myths and realities of immigration to the United Kingdom” and to “provide objective information on immigration and working in the UK, the rights and obligations of
immigrants, and the risks and consequences associated with abuse of UK laws and the social security system” (IOM Prague, 2004; IOM Slovakia, 2004). Funded by the U.K. Home Office, the campaigns took place immediately after the EU enlargement in 2004 and relied on the same methods as antitrafficking campaigns, including posters, “boomerang” cards, hotlines, and so on. The warning here is that migrants who abuse immigration laws, asylum procedures, or welfare schemes are exposed to severe consequences.

More broadly, one should note that many of the messages that lie at the core of antitrafficking campaigns are equally relevant to irregular migration. The need for obtaining a visa and a work permit before leaving, the advice to present oneself to the embassy of the destination country, and the general insistence on the need to think carefully before emigrating are arguments that could easily be interpreted as preventing all forms of migration. Distinguishing between campaigns targeting trafficking and irregular migration is therefore difficult, because both the messages and the methods closely resemble one another. Even if the presentations of the campaigns insist on their antitrafficking component, their messages may also be compatible with the fight against irregular migration, thus fitting into both issues.

These campaigns thus illustrate how information has become a tool in fighting trafficking and irregular migration. Through the dissemination of information, policies attempt to address migration pressure at its roots, in the country of origin and among potential migrants. Instead of targeting the people who have left (at the border or inside countries of destination), they aim at reaching all those who could potentially leave through “prevention” and “awareness raising,” thus positing that it is both possible and desirable to dissuade potential migrants from leaving:

IOM shares the view . . . that the best way to contain the problem [of irregular migration] is to discourage both the smugglers and the migrants in their countries of origin or in countries of transit, before they reach their destination. (“Indonesia Asks,” 2000)

**Information and the Darkness of Migration**

Information campaigns rely on the principle that providing information to migrants will contribute to reducing unauthorized migration and trafficking. They assume that if people leave, it is because they do not know what awaits them; if they know, they will not leave. This reasoning implies at least three assumptions worth discussing: first, that migrants lack information on migration; second, that their behavior is based on available information; and third, that information on migration is dark enough to discourage them from leaving.

Information campaigns assume that potential migrants cannot correctly assess their situation because of a lack of accurate knowledge. In particular, they know nothing of the countries they wish to go to and of the dangers and obstacles that
would characterize their journey, which makes them vulnerable to dishonest promises of a better life. Alternatively, if migrants do have information, it is described as incorrect, as they are exposed to traffickers’ claims regarding attractive jobs abroad and to widely circulated images of a wealthy Europe. “Unbiased,” “objective,” and “reliable” information is therefore needed to correct these misleading pieces of information: “The programme focuses on the need for migrants to obtain accurate information and base their expectations on hard facts. It further exposes the risks and consequences of irregular migration” (“Migrating Safely,” 2005, p. 25). Information is thus at the heart of the decision making:

The underlying assumption is that migrant perceptions and motivations are important components in the decision to migrate. It is therefore crucial that accurate information is given to potential migrants. The keys to successful information campaigns are objectivity, reliability and timely delivery. (‘Information Programme,” 1999)

The key feature of “objective” information is darkness: “IOM information campaigns aim to raise the awareness of some migration issues and sensitize the public towards the dangers and suffering which may be connected with migration” (IOM Slovakia, 2005). The “realities” of migration are almost exclusively described as negative; all forms of unauthorized movement—be it undocumented migration or trafficking—are assimilated to the atrocities of human trafficking. The diversity of experiences and the possibility of “making it” are seldom mentioned, and only one migratory experience exists, leading to failure, misfortune, and exploitation. Unauthorized migration is contrasted with legal migration channels, which are presented as the unique alternative; potential migrants would wrongly believe that only clandestine channels exist and need to be informed of the legal options to migrate.8

Generally speaking, information campaigns disqualify migration at large and present it as the choice of the ignorant, the stupid, the lazy, or the old-fashioned. In a campaign in Ukraine, one can read that “the consequences of not doing one’s homework properly can be dire. People can either end up as victims of human trafficking, lured by false promises of jobs or end up in poorly paid jobs with similar working conditions” (“Migrating Safely,” 2005); in Bulgaria, a booklet targeting young women is titled Guide for the Modern Girls (“Open Your Eyes,” 2000). In other words, migration is an option only for the losers; clever and hard-working people stay at home.

Migrants’ ignorance goes along with their victimization. This is particularly visible in the role played by women who, as indicated, are traffickers’ main prey and therefore constitute key targets. They are described as naive and defenseless victims of cruel male traffickers; being ignorant, they are unaware of what awaits them and therefore vulnerable. By contrast, women who have experienced the horrors of trafficking and managed to escape know and, as illustrated above, play a key role in information campaigns, as they are to convince fellow young women of not leaving.
IOM publications are full of “happy-end” stories of women who safely returned home with IOM’s help. In Kosovo, IOM even contributed to the creation of a fictional character called Maria, who embodies all possible traumatisms and atrocities of trafficking and who was used as the main character of a radio drama (“To Free Maria,” 2000).

These representations also lie at the core of voluntary return programs. As mentioned, return and reintegration assistance is considered an important measure in fighting trafficking, and IOM runs programs to help migrants go back to their country: It contributes to their reintegration through medical, psychological, and legal help; family and housing allowances; educational grants; and microenterprise training and grants. Such policies postulate that people have migrated on the basis of erroneous information and that, having realized their mistake, they will reconsider their choice and return. Although mostly targeting trafficked persons, return programs also concern irregular migrants; both groups are understood as “victims” of migration, abused by smugglers, disillusioned by their experience, and therefore wishing to return home.

Networks, Information, and the Decision to Leave

This representation of the migration process and of the role of information therein run against a wide range of theories stressing the collective dynamics behind migration decisions. Since the 1970s, migration theories have developed to incorporate not only individual interests but also family and group strategies as well as networks (Massey et al., 1998). Families function as units of which a member leaves to guarantee the prosperity or survival of the whole and to diversify its sources of income. The role played by networks in migration flows has also been substantially documented: From an individual perspective, migrating is risky, implying important costs and generating uncertain benefits, but the existence of transnational ties and networks reduces the risk while facilitating adaptation in receiving countries. Moreover, a “cumulative” approach to migration stresses how a range of social, cultural, and economic factors converge to create a social dynamic and a migration culture, in which migration becomes a socially structural and normative behavior. From this perspective, the role given to information implies an individual and rational migration process that ignores the embeddedness of such decisions in collective strategies and social structures; these may create strong incentives to leave through mechanisms that may not be affected by the diffusion of negative information on migration.

Moreover, the idea that migrants make rational decisions on the basis of available knowledge is problematic. Laacher (2002) shows, for example, that undocumented migrants’ predeparture information on destination countries amounts to very general and common-sense knowledge that is hardly useful in preparing their trip; it is not that they know nothing but rather that they bother so little that even if they receive information, they do not retain it. This raises the issue of the way in which the social
context and the information at hand influence individual decisions and, accordingly, the way in which migrants perceive their environment. The work of Bourdieu (2000), which stresses the interpenetration of mental dispositions and social structures, is useful here and may be fruitfully applied to migrants’ behavior. In this vein, Kalir (2005) proposes the notion of a “migratory disposition” to describe the way in which migrants develop the resolution to leave on the basis of a subjective and partial understanding of the surrounding reality; it is their exposure to strong socioeconomic inequalities and to expressions of wealth sometimes connected to migration experiences and their perception of the constraints characterizing their own situation that creates a mental disposition favoring emigration.

In other words, it is not really the objective knowledge that counts but rather migrants’ interpretation of it. Because this interpretation is grounded in a social context characterized by socioeconomic dead ends and exposure to signs of a better life, it becomes difficult to modify what migrants want—or need—to believe. This is powerfully illustrated in Partir, a recent novel by the French Moroccan writer Tahar Ben Jelloun (2006), which describes the aspiration of Tanger’s youth to reach Europe: Although knowing people who died on a smugglers’ boat crossing the Strait of Gibraltar and conscious of the hardship of undocumented migrants’ situation in Europe, these young men and women become obsessed by emigration as their only hope to escape the stagnation of their lives.

This points to what Bourdieu (2000) calls illusio, that is, the adhesion to a corpus of ideas and beliefs that, given the constraints and functioning of a given social milieu, enable individuals’ participation and investment. Illusio should not be confused with illusions: One may perhaps dissipate the illusions of migrants hoping for a better life abroad, but it is much more difficult to question the premises of their behavior—the corpus of values that they have incorporated and that provide deep motivations for their departure. It is precisely thanks to the illusio that illusions do not appear as illusions and that migrants are ready to invest themselves in the migration process. One should indeed keep in mind that if migrants were really looking for safe and attractive living conditions abroad, spontaneous returns would be much more frequent.

Research Evidence and Policy Development

One may therefore wonder on what research basis information campaigns are elaborated. Although their clear-cut representation of trafficking and undocumented migration is certainly part of a strategy to convince IOM’s member states, partners, and funding agencies of the usefulness of its activities, the lack of evaluation remains puzzling. This is all the more so because other IOM documents provide more comprehensive analysis, mentioning the impact of wars, conflicts, poverty, and persecution on human trafficking as well as the role of restrictive migration policies in increasing undocumented migration (see, e.g., McKinley, 2000). Even more surprising,
IOM’s regional offices, closer to field realities and more realistic about the impact of information campaigns, sometimes provide critical perspectives: their reports regularly mention the possibility that migrants know what awaits them but nevertheless decide to leave—a fact corroborated by several independent researchers (Agustin, 2006, pp. 36-37).

For example, in 2003, more than one third of the women staying in an IOM victims’ assistance center in Albania had been trafficked more than twice; IOM (2004) notes that, whereas in the past the vast majority of victims were not aware of the dangers of trafficking, an increasing percentage of the victims assisted in recent years were in such desperate situation that they were willing to take a calculated risk. (pp. 21-24)

Even though “policy-relevant” research is often called for to improve policies (Lackso, 2005), IOM’s analysis of the situation seems to ignore available evidence and to develop regardless of available research. As Kelly (2005) notes, research on trafficking is largely performed, commissioned, and inspired by states, which leaves little space for critical perspectives and encourages research only meant to justify preestablished policies.

The Political and Moral Ambiguities of Trafficking

Aside from research issues, information campaigns also display a high level of moral and political ambivalence. Although trafficking is an unquestionable human rights violation, its emergence as a major policy issue and the role it plays in migration policies inspire mixed feelings. This section outlines four major issues that pervade the campaigns described above.

Prevention Versus Repression

The first regards prevention. Information campaigns are presented as preventive in the sense that they address trafficking before it takes place; they are supposed to complement repressive policies that criminalize trafficking and increase penalties. Yet prevention is understood in a narrow sense; it focuses exclusively on the need for people to be aware of the dangers surrounding trafficking and much less on the broader context. Trafficking and smuggling are indeed partly the product of tight border policies, which prompt migrants wishing to enter a country to rely on the help of third parties. IOM rightly calls for an increase in legal migration opportunities, but the decision rests in the hands of reluctant receiving states, leading to unbalanced situations in which much more is done to fight irregular migration and trafficking.
The root causes of trafficking and irregular migration are therefore hardly addressed. For example, few efforts are dedicated to the reduction of the demand for cheap labor and services as well as to the improvement of living conditions in migrants’ regions of origin (Taran & Moreno-Fontes Chammartin, 2003). Moreover, information campaigns focus not only on trafficking but also on unauthorized migration at large, thus also fitting into the repressive context of the fight against irregular migration. As the Belgian Congolese story makes clear, preventive campaigns then rely heavily on the repressive policies designed to fight irregular migration. European politicians very often justify tight migration policies by the need to send a clear message to potential migrants; indeed, information campaigns use the punitive measures directed toward undocumented migrants to discourage clandestine migration.

Victimhood Versus Emancipation

A second issue lies in the understanding of trafficked persons as victims. Although one cannot contest the human rights abuses generated by trafficking, this victimizing approach is problematic. It indeed extends to all potential migrants, viewed as ignorant victims deserving help rather than as social actors endowed with strategies and agency. This neglects the possibility that people choose the trafficking option to leave their country. In a context of tight migration policies, for example, escaping one’s country and seeking asylum abroad may be possible only through trafficking or smuggling (Koser, 2001). According to Andrijasevic (2004), trafficking and prostitution are for some women a (more or less freely accepted) step in an itinerary that enables them to flee the misery and stagnation of their lives. Trafficking may then create emancipating opportunities for some migrants.

This victimization is all the more ambiguous because of the vagueness of several notions used to define trafficking: Concepts such as exploitation or vulnerability, for example, depend largely on social norms, individual appreciations, and moral or political contexts. This is especially the case with sexual work, a field in which the very definition of what constitutes exploitation is strongly and often emotively debated (Anderson & O’Connell Davidson, 2003). Information campaigns aim to address this victimhood by empowering potential migrants; raising their awareness would contribute to their emancipation and enable them to better resist traffickers’ offers. Again, this is problematic. Andrijasevic (2004, pp. 149-180) thus argues that the campaigns’ sensationalized and sexualized presentation of women clashes with their empowerment ambition.

Most important, information campaigns convey a negative image of migration as a harmful and threatening process, thus encouraging people to stay at home or supporting them to return, as if the human rights violations and exploitation that characterize trafficking never took place in countries of origin (Sharma, 2003). As a matter of fact, ethnographic research sometimes shows that there is a continuity between trafficking and exploitation in home countries, either because migrants
caught in trafficking were precisely trying to escape situations of vulnerability or because trafficking is grounded in premigration power relations and injustices, such as between men and women (Moujoud & Pourette, 2005). Yet although some states have established temporary residence permits for trafficked women, the main feature of the assistance to victims remains repatriation.

Security Versus Rights

A third issue concerns the respective importance of security and human rights in antitrafficking policies. As mentioned, information campaigns are supposed to protect people, thus focusing primarily on their physical and moral dignity. This contrasts with migration policies in Western countries, which explicitly claim their ambition of controlling borders in response to the “threat” represented by migration to the stability of European countries and their social cohesion. This tension between human rights and control points to the ambivalence of the notion of security; since the end of the cold war, the concept of human security has challenged the classic notion of national security by stressing a wide range of threats to the integrity of people rather than of states (environmental disasters, underdevelopment, famines, etc.). Although valuably focusing on human emancipation and rights, this approach has ambivalent consequences for migration, as it perceives it as a security threat, which makes it unclear whether one is talking about public order, social cohesion, or migrants’ integrity (Graham, 2000). This confusion between security and human rights notably enables the inscription of antitrafficking campaigns in humanitarian and development policies and budgets, despite the other security goals they also aim to achieve.

Trafficking Versus Migration

A last issue regards the relationship between trafficking and other forms of movement, including irregular migration and asylum. Information campaigns are ambiguous in this respect: On one hand, they rely on the principle that trafficked persons are, unlike undocumented migrants, victims rather than lawbreakers; on the other hand, they tend to include all forms of unauthorized migration in their fight against trafficking. Indeed, the boundaries between these categories are porous: Although legally different, their consequences in terms of migrants’ rights and vulnerability may be very similar; moreover, trafficked migrants may wish to seek asylum or may be treated as undocumented migrants if they are caught outside a trafficking context. Yet it remains that all forms of unauthorized migration end up being condemned on the basis that it leads to human rights violations. In other words, the necessary recognition of trafficking as a human rights violation appears to be abusively used to legitimize the control of undocumented migration at large. These campaigns rely on—and feed—a conceptual confusion between immigration and trafficking; the crime represented by trafficking eventually ends up criminalizing all forms of unauthorized migration.
These ambiguities are a constitutive feature of antitrafficking policies. They enable a compromise between the interests of the different actors involved, including, notably, governments of sending and receiving countries and NGOs. These have different interests and concerns: Some want to provide a humanitarian support to trafficked women, whereas others aim to remedy the porosity of the EU’s eastern borders or to fight transnational criminal organizations. In this context, the fight against human trafficking serves as a federating issue that can be presented in different ways according to the audience. It enables a high degree of rhetoric flexibility, which ensures an adhesion that would not be the same if policies only aimed to reduce undocumented migration.

According to Turnbull (1999), “One essential characteristic of the trafficking issue which greatly facilitated efforts to develop cooperation is the issue’s pertinence to both migration and crime issues” (p. 208). It is thanks to the ambiguities of trafficking—and, more broadly, to the fusion of crime and migration issues in European policies—that an opportunity to address trafficking emerged. This fusion is problematic, as it contains migration in a narrow and restrictive security framework (Huysmans, 2000). But it could be viewed as the price to pay to address other issues, such as the human rights violations surrounding trafficking. It is therefore difficult to assess whether these ambiguities are deliberate: They may well be voluntarily and cynically designed by some policy makers who want to confer a sympathetic and human face to their migration-control policies, but they also constitute an almost structural by-product of the cooperation between sending and receiving states and nonstate actors, which need to find a common ground to develop common actions and hence to make compromises.

The need for such cooperation is increasingly acknowledged and inspires calls for what is usually labeled “migration management.” The idea is that multilateral and coordinated migration policies would avoid the pitfalls of national and unilateral approaches, thus enabling migration to benefit both sending and receiving countries as well as migrants themselves (Castles, 2004, p. 875-878; Ghosh, 2000). Countertrafficking policies display this kind of cooperation between state and nonstate actors at both ends of the migration process under the umbrella of an intergovernmental organization. They may therefore prefigure what migration management could look like and the way the necessary compromising process may lead to imbalanced situations in which, behind a superficial rights-based agreement, reinforced security and control objectives are met. Interstate “cooperation” on migration may further imply a globalization of migration control, as similar policies are established (or imposed) in very different sending countries by supranational actors acting with the political and financial support of destination states. Although not all forms of migration management should be dismissed on the sole basis of antitrafficking campaigns, one should nevertheless be aware that multilateral migration policies may merely perpetuate a restrictive spirit, thus limiting their possible improvements to the current system.
Conclusion

This article has made three main points. First, information campaigns represent a new form of delocalized migration control that stems from the shortcomings of traditional border surveillance: Faced with a perceived inability to fight trafficking and irregular migration, policies develop new tools to prevent people flows, including attempts to convince potential migrants not to leave. Second, these campaigns rely on a fragile connection between the information available to migrants and their decision to leave. This focus on individual decisions largely ignores the root causes and the structural dynamics at stake in migratory processes. They also underestimate the psychosociological complexity of the relation between social contexts, information, and individual behaviours.

These campaigns, finally, highlight the ambiguities of the categories used by migration policies. We are indeed faced with a confused situation in which security and humanitarian considerations, undocumented migration and human trafficking, national and human securities, immigration and asylum, and criminal and victim statuses get inextricably mixed. This moral and political ambivalence is necessary to ensuring the consensual cooperation of all the actors involved in “preventing” trafficking. Existing research unfortunately does not provide independent and reliable assessments of the success of these campaigns, yet one cannot help thinking that like many migration-control policies, they will have limited results. These campaigns indeed raise once more the question of the possibility of fighting undesirable migration without a thorough rethinking of the restrictive premises of contemporary migration policies.

Throughout the cold war, Western European states and their American ally sought to disseminate an image of the West as the “promised land” characterized by freedom and wealth, targeting the same audience—the populations of Eastern Europe—and using roughly the same methods—advertisement and mass media products—as the campaigns described in this article. Communist countries’ efforts to stop the emigration of their citizens were condemned, notably on the basis of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose Article 13-2 states that “everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.” This not-so-distant past should be remembered. Although not coercive, the discouragement of potential migrants indeed raises the issue of the boundary between dissuasion and interdiction. Information campaigns may prefigure an era of control in which a kind of interdiction to leave, through subtle and hidden pressures on sending countries and social actors involved in migration, will be indirectly reintroduced. It is too early to assess whether this pessimistic interpretation is grounded but not too late to carefully analyze the current evolutions of migration policies.
Notes

1. Established in 1951, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is an intergovernmental organization based in Geneva; although not part of the United Nations System, it is the most important organization active in the field of migration. Its self-presentation states that “IOM is dedicated to promoting humane and orderly migration for the benefit of all . . . by providing services and advice to governments and migrants.” In the absence of independent studies on IOM’s functioning and activities, IOM’s Web site (www.iom.int) and publications remain the main sources of information on the organization. See Loescher (2001, pp. 57-59), however, for a study of how and why IOM was created in the context of postwar Europe.

2. IOM’s 2006 call for extrabudgetary funding confirms that antitrafficking prevention, information campaigns, and awareness raising are planned in nearly all countries (IOM, 2006).

3. These include Migration, IOM News, and Trafficking in Migrants.

4. IOM’s bulletin Trafficking in Migrants is a useful source of information on the numerous meetings, measures, agreements, and publications surrounding trafficking. The European Conference on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, jointly organized by IOM and the EU in Brussels in 2002, provides an overview of the initiatives and of the actors involved (see http://www.belgium.iom.int/STOPConference/).

5. See http://www.mtvexit.org/.

6. In Colombia, Ricky Martin got involved with IOM to raise awareness about trafficking (“An Interview,” 2006).


8. Although legal channels are not abundant, IOM has been active in the establishment of short-term labor migration schemes, for example, between Albania and Italy (“Albania/Italy,” 2001).


10. For example, return programs were established for undocumented migrants from Honduras in the United States (“IOM Assists,” 2000) as well as for Malians stuck in Morocco after failed attempts to reach Europe (“Marooned,” 2005).

References


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