

---

## Book Reviews

---

# Africa caught in the grip of drugs

by Ives Zilli

---

### La Piste Blanche

by Eric Fottorino

Edition Balland, France, 1991

175 pages, 85 French francs

---

In less than 10 years, Africa has become a revolving door for the heroin traffic, and then for cocaine, which it reexports from multiple channels on to Europe, or to the United States. Fottorino's book, which means *The White Trail* in translation, is the result of a detailed investigation, and supplies hundreds of figures relating to drug trafficking and seizures. These facts no longer allow anyone to underestimate this new plague against the African continent. Africa is a zone of transshipment, but also a center of consumption of ever-growing importance.

Heroin, cocaine, and other psychotropic substances are invading Africa, as rapidly as a cloud of locusts. In the Horn of Africa it is the "Asiatic barons" who rage; on its western flank, it is the Nigerian and Ghanaian cocaine ants who go to get their supplies in Colombia and in the islands where everything is possible: Madagascar, Mauritius, the Comoro Islands, São Tomé e Príncipe, Cape Verde. Drugs have simply take over the weapons- and ivory-trafficking routes. Already, 30% of the heroin intercepted in Europe transits through Africa.

### Lagos revolving door

Since the 1984 appearance of the Nigerian branch, the drug routes have become lost in the tropical tangle; there are links identified as going through N'Djamena, for example, or via Brazzaville and Libreville. But most of the routes lead to Lagos. Over the years, the Nigerians have come to control couriers from Benin, Togoland, Ivory Coast, and Senegal. One Ghanaian and Tanzanian channel has specialized in forwarding drugs on to Greece, Scandinavia, and Spain, while the Malis and Zaireans divide up the French, Belgian, and German markets. The airports of Central Africa—Kinshasa, Bangui, Kigali—play a greater and greater role. The Equato-

rial Guineans have put into place a heroin network destined toward Spain, and then Malabo. One circuit, additionally, starts out from the capital of Equatorial Guinea in the direction of Mauritania and Las Palmas, then continues on toward Madrid, Copenhagen, and Athens. Libreville is an important place for apportioning out the heroin from Asia which arrives there from Kenya via Luanda. Other known links connect Zambia to Pretoria, with the aid of Greeks in Lubumbashi and Johannesburg. Without forgetting the classical connections of Mauritius Island, Réunion, and the Comoro Islands, with Paris-Roissy.

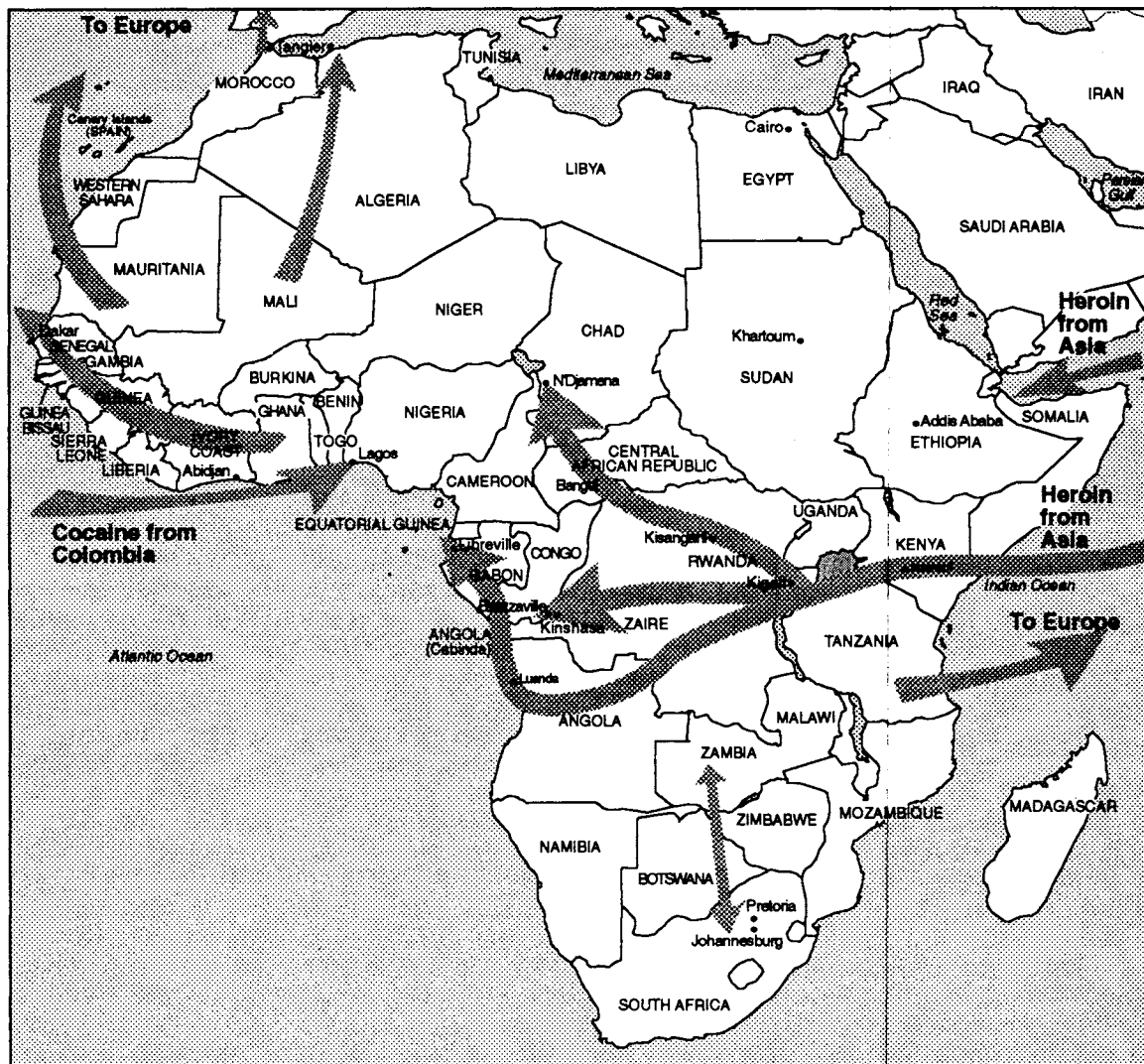
One might wonder if the maritime cannabis route from Tangiers to northern Europe is not also used for heroin trafficking. The technique of transshipping drugs in the Mediterranean in the areas where the NATO radars based in Gibraltar are blind, has been demonstrated. Flat-bottomed boats that make very few waves draw up alongside cargo ships on the high seas, take on the weed and convey it to Le Havre, Hamburg, or Rotterdam. The major containerized trade, which has been developing between Brazil and the western coast of Africa, is suspected of including a massive flow of hard drugs; some estimate even that the smugglers who use air routes are but the small hands of a considerable hidden business. On the cocaine trail, one often meets nationals of Sierra Leone and Senegal, and the Syrian-Lebanese are heavily implicated in crack trafficking in Dakar.

### Local consumption explodes

But the old continent is not any longer only a transshipment route, it has also become a place of consumption. Barbiturates and amphetamines smuggled in from western and eastern European and Indian laboratories, when they are not produced on the spot with the help of European chemists, ravage the populations which have already been decimated by malnutrition and epidemics. It is the most disinherited area of the planet that is targeted, and hence the least equipped in troops and equipment for detecting the drug traffic. Psychotropic substances are also causing millions of Africans to gamble with death. International diversions, thefts committed to the detriment of illicit factories by clandestine laboratories—the traffickers have no shortage of ideas nor of means for attaining their objectives and destroying the youth of the continent. Capable of producing phony import licenses, and of masking their products as emergency medical aid, they are a terrible threat to public health.

West and Central Africa are especially inundated with stimulants: aspirin, amphetamines from Bulgaria up to 1987, Yugoslavian pemoline which is run through the United Kingdom, Switzerland, and the Netherlands to enter into Nigeria, Guinea, and Togoland. Several million ephedrine pills were seized in Conakry between 1985 and 1989, coming from Europe and Asia; an old stock of Bulgarian amphetamines is still circulating in Ivory Coast, Mali, and Burkina Faso; the presence of precursors—chemicals known to be needed to

**FIGURE 1**  
**Drug**  
**running**  
**in Africa**



make narcotics—has been noted. An important network was dismantled in Abijan. North Africa, for its part, is a hotbed of traffickers in methaqualone, a depressive drug, also called Mandrax, which plunges the user into a twilight mood. Southeast Africa is the main market for consumption of this substance; a clandestine laboratory discovered in 1987 has allowed the seizure of 14 million doses, or 90% of the world seizures of methaqualone. Mandrax continues to flow in, coming from India, via Nairobi and especially Malindi, a Kenyan city where old Red Brigaders, Italian mafiosi, and a few French criminals all hang out together. The quantity of seizures is terrifying. For example, 20 tons of amphetamines have been seized in the capital of Benin.

### Drugs and Structural Adjustment Plans

The economic situation of the African continent offers an open field to drug trafficking. More than 20 countries are applying the draconian austerity plans (called Structural Adjustment Plans, SAP) imposed by the International Mone-

tary Fund and World Bank. For some of them, like Senegal, this involves a treatment which has been going on for more than ten years. These plans, whose aim is the maximum repayment of debts in the shortest term, take no account whatever of the country's development needs. In a context where there is no longer any investment policy, where unemployment has never reached such catastrophic proportions as now, and where a country must find a maximum of hard currency to pay its debt while its raw material prices are sinking on the international markets, the drug economy offers all kinds of racketeers (who are taking the lead in promoting the opening of the African economies) a rapid and easy gain.

Africa, faced with this new scourge, can do nothing alone; the international community must come to its aid and rapidly reestablish the conditions for a true economic growth, lest, in the wake of famine, epidemics (of which AIDS is the gravest), and desertification, drugs—the "Fourth Horseman of the Apocalypse"—will end up wiping out the continent's youth and leaving it no chance for a future.