

Hunter and Prey: Patrolling Clandestine Migration in the Euro-African Borderlands

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ABSTRACT

In the past decade, the European Union and its member states have invested heavily in a far-reaching, diffuse, and technologized border regime targeting the elusive figure of the clandestine or “illegal” African migrant. Taking the mismatch between these large investments and the statistically small number of overland irregular migrants as its starting point, this article explores the embodied effects of illegality engendered in the policing of the Euro-African borderlands. Based on fieldwork with West African police forces, aid organizations, and migrants, it focuses on the migration circuit between the Sahel and Spain, where a joint European response to irregular flows was first tried and tested under the umbrella of the EU border agency Frontex. By highlighting the means of detection used to apprehend “illegal migrants”—from bodily signs to presumed “intentions to migrate”—the article looks at how an increasingly reified and embodied modality of migrant illegality is produced on the circuit between West Africa and Europe’s southern shores. This production of illegality crucially depends on the incentives offered to African forces for participating in European controls. Tensions among African officers over the unequal gains from such incentives and ambivalence over the rationale for controls, I argue, make the transnational policing of clandestine migration a fraught site of state investment and concern. [Keywords:

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In the summer of 2006, the Spanish Canary Islands off the African coast, a tourist haven for northern Europeans, became the unexpected stage for a spectacular form of international migration. In that year, more than 30,000 migrants—most of them West African—landed in the archipelago after having traversed the rough Atlantic in packed wooden boats or *pirogues*. Escorted to port by the Spanish Guardia Civil, assisted by the Red Cross, and filmed by the world's media, these exhausted, bedraggled arrivals from the faraway shores of Senegal and Mauritania soon became the catalyst for an increasingly integrated and far-reaching European border regime. Largely thanks to the media spectacle of such migratory “crises,” since repeated in Greece and Italy, a Euro-African border is now under construction at the southern edge of Europe.

These clandestine flows by land and sea are tiny, statistically speaking: the vast majority of irregular migrants in Europe are visa overstayers, not boat people, and most West African migrants stay within their own region (de Haas 2007). Yet, large amounts of money have been spent on radars, satellites, control centers, and patrolling operations to prevent people from leaving the African coastline in the first place. At the helm of this strategy is Europe's young and little-known border agency, Frontex, and national border guards such as the Spanish Guardia Civil. Since 2006, Frontex-coordinated joint naval operations have patrolled West African waters and the Mediterranean in the search for clandestine migrants. The latest step in this transnational integration of border policing is what is known as Eurosur, the European external border surveillance system (Andersson 2012, Hayes and Vermeulen 2012). The vision underpinning this system is a full, streamlined surveillance cover of Europe's southern maritime border and the African territories beyond it—a “virtual border” of sorts whose principal target is the clandestine or “illegal” migrant.

Europe's emerging border regime underlines the “seismic” shift that scholars have detected at contemporary frontiers (Parker et al. 2009). Ballooning enforcement budgets, new technology, and tougher migration laws are leading to a rebordering of rich states (Andreas and Biersteker 2003) even as these borders are migrating away from their territorial boundaries (Guild 2008, Balibar 1998). Borders now exist in the ledgers

of African police, in trucks scanned for migrant bodies, and in surveillance software or remote visa controls. Amid such a proliferation, the borders of Europe appear less like those of a fortress and more like a fluid Internet firewall (Walters 2006). Yet for all its recent “deterritorialized” dispersal, the border regime depends upon the Mediterranean and Atlantic waters with their ancient power to both divide and unite (Braudel 1975) while mimicking the Roman *limes*, the fortified imperial limit or buffer beyond which the barbarians awaited (Walters 2004). Crucially, it also depends upon the collaboration of those beyond the buffer—subcontracted African police, as will be seen in the coming pages.

So far, anthropology has remained on the sidelines of the interdisciplinary debates on this emerging border regime. Yet, ethnography has much to contribute to these debates—not least in questioning their parameters. A growing body of anthropological scholarship is trying to do precisely that, focusing on issues such as the production of illegality as a sociopolitical condition (de Genova 2002), the transnational formation of migration policy (Feldman 2012), the politics of refugee encampment (Agier 2011), and the “biopolitics of otherness” within European space (Fassin 2001). Pioneering ethnographers have also started taking the phenomenology of migrant illegality seriously, focusing on embodied experiences of border controls (Coutin 2005; Khosravi 2007, 2010; Willen 2007). Building on these path-breaking studies on embodiment in particular, this article will highlight not the repressive but the *productive* nature of border controls.¹ Europe’s border machinery, it is argued, creates what it is meant to eliminate or transform—more migrant illegality. In this loop, more funding is assured in a vicious circle: the more diffuse and specter-like the threat at the border, the higher the potential gains from this phantom menace.

I call the varied sectors working on clandestine migration an “illegality industry” in order to highlight the economic, material, and productive aspects of controls. Europe’s borderwork is certainly profitable, yet “industry” used as an analytical metaphor also highlights other, deeper features of the structures developing around clandestine migration. In an industry, employees and machinery work in concert to manufacture and process products across dispersed sites (factories, offices, points of sale) that add value through a division of labor. The term illegality industry, here, highlights several interrelated features of Europe’s migration response not neatly captured by rival terms such as apparatus, machine,

or regime: it foregrounds interactions between humans, technology, and the environment; it highlights how illegality is forged in concrete, material encounters; and it allows for the consideration of a dispersed “value chain,” where migrant illegality is produced, processed, “packaged,” and presented by a range of sectors.² This article will explore one crucial part of this dispersed value chain: outsourced or “externalized” policing in the Euro-African borderlands, and the absurd and distressing human consequences of this externalization.³

For all its apparent might, Europe’s emerging border regime takes on a more profane guise on African soil. In the breezy Cité Police complex in Dakar, next to the Senegalese capital’s sea-hugging *corniche*, a torn A4 printout taped to a door announces the “Division for the fight against irregular migrations.” This is the home of Frontex’s local policing partner in Senegal. As I entered the dark halls of the division in 2010, Jean-Pierre, the commissioner in charge of it, greeted me with a friendly handshake. His office was full of cartons packed with night-vision goggles and other border policing tools, gifts from the division’s Spanish partners. He started talking, unprompted, of the causes of clandestine migration. “The cause is poverty, the lack of work,” he said. But now all routes were closed. “The maritime route has been bolted up, the air route has become more and more difficult. What’s left? The land route, and this is more difficult too. They’re closing over there as well, and there are lots of deaths.” Jean-Pierre, who was of foreign West African stock himself, sounded sympathetic to the migrants’ plight. “Everything’s harder,” he said. “Everything has changed now.”

It was largely thanks to officers such as Jean-Pierre that clandestine boat migration to the Canary Islands had ground to a halt in recent years, Spanish officials kept repeating during my fieldwork along the Euro-African border. This was not only meant as praise, but also a simple statement of fact. The success in halting irregular migration did not reside in Europe’s slick surveillance machinery, but was rather to be found in the Sahel and the Sahara, where African forces had been outsourced to carry out migration controls. And it was the Spanish government, rather than Frontex or Brussels, that took most of the credit for oiling the wheels of the subcontracting machine. On a visit to Dakar in 2011, the Spanish state secretary of security asserted that “the policy promoted by Spain is a total, absolute and resounding success that everyone recognizes, and especially so the European Union” (EFE 2011). The Spanish ambassador in Senegal, interviewed during fieldwork, similarly emphasized Spain’s

attitude of “dialogue and cooperation,” which contrasted sharply with that of the old colonial power, France. While Senegalese and Malian officers sourly accepted the French presence, they talked warmly of their Spanish colleagues. But praise and dialogue were not enough to bring the Africans on board. The Spaniards rarely said as much, but key to the success of Frontex’s Joint Operation Hera⁴ in West African waters was providing incentives to local forces. Essentially, you had to outbid the people smugglers.

As a result of such incentives, a hunt was on for the illegal migrant across the deserts, forests, and towns stretching beyond the Euro-African border. But this migrant is elusive prey. Who is he, and where is he to be found? How can he be distinguished from the labor migrants, merchants, and sojourners who have moved around the region freely for decades? This article will explore the complicated task of detecting migrant illegality by presenting, in a series of narrative snapshots, the interactions between police “hunters” and their elusive clandestine “prey” on the journey north through the borderlands: first on the shores of Dakar in Senegal, next at the Mauritania-Senegal border, and finally in the transit sites and dumping grounds of the Sahara and Morocco.⁵ On this migration circuit, I argue that Europe’s subcontractors do not simply detect and prevent irregular border crossings—they also help bring their target, the illegal migrant, into being.

Before proceeding, a brief note on terminology is in order. While the term “migrant” carries a host of state-centric assumptions, “*illegal* migrant” compounds the problem. It is pejorative, stigmatizing, and even incorrect, implying as it does that such travelers are criminals while they have usually only committed an administrative infraction. Moreover, it masks the complexities of legal and documentary status pertaining to entry, residence, and employment in which “migrants” are caught (Düvell 2008).⁶ In the West African case, moreover, migrant illegality is but a recent phenomenon superimposed upon older and larger patterns—including circular migration within the region, ancient trade routes across the Sahara, and transnational circuits borne of the colonial encounter. Yet, I will use “illegal migrant,” with some trepidation, as a “folk” term of social differentiation in order to explore how this imported social category comes to be *lived* in the borderlands.⁷

In doing so, I draw upon the philosopher Ian Hacking’s (1986) notion of “making up people.” Scientific and policy categories such as that of illegal migrant are not simply discursive constructs, he argues, but help

create “new way[s] to be a person” (2006). Hacking’s point, simply put, is that “ways of classifying human beings interact with the human beings who are classified” (1999:31). Such “interactive classifications” feed back into the lived experiences of people classified (the “looping effect”) through what Hacking terms the “matrix” of the social and material setting. The matrix to be explored ethnographically is what I label the illegality industry, here in the form of subcontracted policing. The interactive classification is that of illegal migrant—and, in particular, the specific modalities of illegality that are produced thanks to the incentives offered to African security forces.

A note of caution is in order. While Hacking concentrates on the creation of social categories through scientific “engines of discovery” in national settings, the making of the illegal migrant depends on the much more piecemeal endeavor of policing, assisting, and observing such travelers in Europe’s vast borderlands. The furtive nature of clandestine migration and the dispersal of the illegality industry combine to limit the degree of interaction between classification and people classified. In the borderlands, the making of migrants is thus not mainly about the assignation and appropriation of the category of illegal migrant à la Hacking; it is above all about travelers’ progressive *embodying* of it.⁸ “The border,” as Michel Agier (2011:50) says, is now “everywhere that an undesirable is identified,” including the indeterminate zone in which the traveler’s body *becomes* the border, the site of enforcement (Khosravi 2007). Walking across stretches of desert, hiding in the undergrowth next to an abandoned beach, crawling into a truck meant for merchandise, or staring at the moving sky in a wooden boat are all ways of traveling that render the journey a bodily minefield. Contorted postures, stomach aches, dehydration, shivering, and sore feet become sensorial signposts indicating the gradual crossing of borders, and attempts to avoid these ailments start signaling illegality to police. In the back-and-forth between such bodily strategies and Europe’s outsourced borderwork, it will be argued, the illegal migrant is conjured in increasing degrees of otherness, stigmatized by his very bodily presence. This process culminates in the border spectacle of European coasts, where “boat people” regularly wash up among sunbathers, aid workers, police, and photojournalists. As will be seen, these “illegals” arriving in Italy, Greece, and Spain have already been subjected to a slow-grinding process of illegalization well before appearing on the radars—both metaphorical and literal—of the West.

Rucksacks and Biscuits: Clandestine-Spotting in Dakar

In Senegal, four security forces were involved in Frontex migration patrols in 2010: the Air Force, the Navy, the Gendarmerie,⁹ and Jean-Pierre's border police (Direction de la Police de l'Air et des Frontières, or DPAF). While the Navy and Air Force monitored the seas and the Gendarmerie patrolled the coastlines, DPAF carried out migration patrols along Dakar's shores and at official border crossing points. It was, in a sense, the poor cousin of the Navy, the Guardia Civil's main partner. The border police were crucial to keep on board, but at one remove from the real action on high seas.

At sea unfolded the glamorous side to Hera patrols—roaring planes and boats aided by the technological wizardry of radars, satellites, and infrared cameras. Here was also the possibility of catching migrants in the act of setting out for Spain. The Guardia Civil or Frontex vessels would approach *pirogues* and look for signs of an imminent “illegal” trip, notwithstanding their being in Senegalese waters. Around 30 passengers was normal for a fishing trip or *mare*, in which Senegalese fishermen set out for days; lack of fishing gear in the hull raised suspicions, as did the presence of petrol canisters. The European border guards made a note of the captain and later checked if the boat had returned to coast. All this was done under the “legal cover,” as one Guardia Civil Comandante put it, of having a Senegalese officer on board. The appearance of sovereignty was still intact, national boundaries were respected, or as another Comandante put it: “We help them to fight illegal migration.”

Such “help” would look distinctly unhelpful on land, leaving patrolling Senegalese policemen—if not their bosses—at one remove from the joys of collaboration. DPAF's task was also more difficult than that of their sea-borne colleagues, since it involved stopping migrants in their tracks *before* they had even embarked towards Spain. The Guardia Civil chief in Dakar acknowledged that this was a tough brief. “We can never demonstrate that 50 people in a bus are migrants,” he said. Instead, any suspect travelers were referred to as “candidates for illegal migration.”¹⁰ The border police were assigned the crucial task of defining and conjuring “migrants” out of the broad group of “candidates” before they revealed themselves on the open seas. It was in their patrols, too, that the unequal gains from the illegality industry were most keenly felt.

The Spanish-funded four-wheel-drive bounced along the road towards the beach of Hann-Maristes. I had joined a border patrol made up of four policemen crammed into the car and one officer riding a quad bike, also

donated by Spain for patrolling the beaches dotting Dakar's Cap Vert peninsula. The officers were part of the coastal surveillance brigade, whose principal task was to patrol the shores in three shifts round the clock in search of illegal migrants.

Down on the empty beach, Alassane, a young officer with several years in the brigade, explained how to determine who was a migrant and who was an innocent fisherman. "It's very easy to catch an illegal migrant," he said. "They don't come one by one, they come ten to 15 of them together, all with a backpack." The backpack and the clustering were but two signs of migrant illegality on Dakar's beaches. The migrants, the officers explained, also stocked up on biscuits to avoid bowel movements during the crossing; they wore trainers or plastic sandals, good if the boat got wet; sometimes they dressed in several layers of clothing against the winds and kept elaborate *gris-gris* (charms) for protection or invisibility. They were also identified by their lack of movement. If a group descended on the beach and stayed there, waiting, the police knew they were migrants and would proceed to search them. Browsing through their backpacks, they would find euros, not franc CFA, and no mobile phones.

The brigade's task was to read such signs in order to spot "candidates" on behalf of Spain and Frontex. For this subcontracting to succeed, Spain had developed an intricate gift economy. First, the Spaniards provided a generous "expenses" pay (per diem or *indemnité*) for working on illegal migration. Second, they also lavished African forces with policing gear—the night-vision goggles in Jean-Pierre's corner, but also the brigade's vehicles and computers. Trips and junkets were the third incentive. High-ranking African officers attended training courses on illegal migration, traveled to Spain for tours of police facilities and stints as liaison officers, and participated in high-level conferences on border controls.¹¹

I will talk about these incentives as gifts—rather than, say, "payments" or even "bribes"—in a conscious nod to the long-running anthropological debates on modalities of exchange. Indeed, the outsourcing of migration controls involves a continuum of transactions not all that dissimilar to those once delineated by Malinowski (Parry 1986:454), ranging as they did from exchanges of border policing tools to large financial aid packages at the state level.¹² By talking about a "gift economy" around such transactions, however, I simply seek to highlight three key features of externalization in the borderlands. First of all, Spain's personalized incentives created social bonds between colleagues, as well as an "obligation to reciprocate"

for the Senegalese receivers—not in kind, but in deeds. But the gifts, as soon as they were given, nullified the supposed collegiality between the Europeans and Africans, instead creating a hierarchy of interests. This ambiguous status of the gifts helped spawn ever-increasing demands, along with tensions over who-gained-what—bringing into stark relief the unequal power relations between local police and their bosses, between competing border agencies, and between European giver and African receiver in a claims-making process carrying echoes from the colonial encounter (Cooper 2005:159).

The Senegalese officers said Frontex paid for their resources, but the agency denied any involvement. Any incentives, according to the former manager of the Frontex joint operation Hera, stemmed from the “bilateral agreement between Spain and Senegal, Frontex has no knowledge” of it. He also sounded a note of caution. “When we’re with the Africans and you’re about to give them money, it’s not as easy as paying European police, you don’t know how it’s been spent,” he said, hinting that some of it inevitably “gets lost.” And the uneven way money and resources trickled down, were unequally distributed, and finally disappeared was a source of resentment for the officers in the illegal migration brigade.

As I spoke to Alassane, his colleagues congregated around us. I asked them about the Spaniards. “We see them...the Spanish boat over there,” said one of them, looking out over the gray seas where the Guardia Civil patrolled, “but we have never met these people.” Alassane continued: “There are identification missions in Spain, but police agents never go! We should! But only the inspectors get to leave.”¹³ Then his boss weighed in. “If there are benefits like that,” he said, “it’s the office people who leave. But identification is the job of police agents!” The others all murmured in agreement.

Besides concerns about trips, the officers also demanded more resources. The brigade had received computers and vehicles, including a speedboat, as well as gadgets that were more easily “retrieved” into the private domain, as one of the officers admitted with a smile: torches, an iPhone, binoculars, mobile phone credit. But in 2010, funds were running dry. No more credit, no new gadgets. Vehicle upkeep stalled. The cars rusted or broke down after being exposed to sun and sand 24 hours a day. “Each brigade should have its own vehicle,” said one of them. “They should give us the logistical means to be able to work at ease.”

But the biggest source of resentment was pay. When the Spaniards and Frontex descended on Senegal in 2006, the per diem pay had been

tantalizing. But soon, all the police directorates wanted their share, and the migration brigade's extra pay was slower and slower in coming. Money from "Frontex" reached agencies and police chiefs who had nothing to do with the fight against illegal migration, the brigade chief said, while "the agents suffer a lot" on their long shifts. His colleagues chimed in, complaining about the cost of eating out during their breaks, the mosquitoes on the beaches, and the night-time patrols. The list of grievances seemed endless.

For all my sympathies, I could not help asking myself: what work? We stood around the beach chatting, watched by a few fishermen. By 2010, the brigade's job was hardly about spying for signs of illegal migrants, since no one left from these beaches any longer. The patrols were instead an exercise in what police chiefs called "visibility"—to show "candidates" that the police were ready to cut short any attempted boat journey to Europe. This was boring, to be sure, but not quite the ordeal the brigade made it out to be.

The patrols were also about visibility in another sense—as a show for the funders and the visiting researcher. In Dakar's seaside neighborhoods, former clandestine migrants deported from Spain said they never saw the patrols, despite police reassurances of their existence. Moreover, they insisted that "Frontex," which to them meant a hapless bunch of bribe-taking Senegalese state agents, could not stop them from departing. As one repatriate leader put it: "For me, Frontex is things people do to make money. Because those people are not serious people, they are there but if you give them money they let you pass. That's why, for me, Frontex doesn't exist...Those people don't do their work!" he exclaimed. But even though repatriates ironically denounced the Senegalese forces for "not doing their work," by 2010 no would-be migrants were attempting to leave Dakar's shores. Money instead circulated downwards, through payments to informers. A delicate financial balancing act was thus maintained between the European paymasters, African forces, local youth, and potential "smugglers," but how long it would last was another matter.

Gifts have, in a Maussian vein, long been endowed with a "spirit" in the anthropological literature—or, as Parry puts it, it is "because of the participation of the person in the object that the gift creates an enduring bond between persons" (1986:457). This bond is usually seen as beneficial for the donor, who retains a hold on the receiver through his largesse. This certainly appeared to be the case in the Spanish-funded subcontracting

operations, yet the Senegalese brigade's complaints indicated that the subcontractors themselves sought to *maintain* this permanent bond between gift and giver. To them, the gift remained the donor's perennial responsibility; and so did, by implication, the task of policing migration itself. The officers' critique of outsourced border controls, however faint, took the form of resentment articulated through the contradictions and inequities of the gift economy.

Beyond the unequal gains, "Frontex" was also a source of friction on other fronts. Jean-Pierre, the border police commissioner, voiced concerns about national sovereignty when discussing Frontex patrols, as did other high-ranking policemen. The unease ranged from political ambivalence at the top to financial resentment further down the pay scale, and grew in inverse proportion to the dwindling gains in the illegality industry. The Spaniards, aware of the need to incentivize, kept some funds flowing through the EU-sponsored West Sahel program in 2012, but the absurdity at the heart of cooperation was hard to ignore. The Senegalese forces were now only chasing ghosts—potential clandestine migrants and smugglers who did not materialize. The basis of their business had vanished.

Instead, this business had moved elsewhere. For, if Europe's border machinery has halted the migrant boats heading for the Canaries, it has not yet blocked the routes through the Sahara embarked upon by *aventuriers* (adventurers), as French-speaking overland migrants from West Africa call themselves (Bredeloup 2008).¹⁴ Along the desert routes, African forces face a harder task than on Dakar's beaches—detecting furtive signs of an *intention* to migrate. In the process, they add a new "piece" to the illegal migrant under production. Already provided with a dress code, belongings, and behavior that mark him as illegal, the overland adventurer will, in the border zone, be endowed with something rather more ineffable: a mind of his own.

The Mauritanian Border: Reading the Illegal Mind in Rosso

The road winds, potholed and dusty, towards the town of Rosso, where the Senegal river marks the Mauritanian border. Many adventurers have followed this route towards the distant Maghreb, often taking years to complete their stepwise journeys. As I dislodged myself from the shared taxi in Rosso to the calls of ticket hustlers, a police officer I knew from

a previous visit greeted me and immediately started talking about the “new system” for clandestine migration. Moroccan truckers bringing oranges and merchandise to Dakar allow adventurers to join them on the way up, for a fee. They get off before the Rosso jetty, cross the Senegal river alone and then rejoin the trucker in Mauritania. “It’s very difficult to control,” the officer exclaimed, “because it’s all in their head! What’s their final destination? You can’t stop them, you just can’t know. It’s just the idea,” he kept repeating.

While in Dakar, police categorized travelers into licit and illicit—above-board and below-board in Coutin’s (2005) terms—on the basis of bodily and behavioral signs, in Rosso the elusive figure of the illegal migrant also acquired a peculiar mental make-up. It was the “idea in their head” that branded travelers as illegal at this border. But the increasing essentialization of the illegal migrant en route was not just discursive; rather, illegality imposed itself upon travelers, with real effects on their mental life. As they were detained on the basis of their supposed intentionality, travelers were sucked into a circular world of detentions and ignominies, deportations and empty pockets. Pushed “below-board,” they were entering the liminal state that Coutin (2005) has labeled “being en route”: present yet absent from the jurisdictions they traverse, at turns visible and invisible to the border forces that chased them.

Rosso, a ramshackle frontier town long dependent on cross-border trade, has in recent years become a transit point—and dumping ground—for clandestine migrants. Here, Mauritanian *gendarmes* deport foreigners caught for supposedly trying to “migrate illegally” to the Canaries. It is one link in the chain of subcontracted migration controls, in which local police forces and humanitarian organizations alternately detain, deport, and care for migrants. As would soon be evident, however, it is a weak link, despite Europe’s best efforts.

As I visited on the tail-end of the migration craze in 2010, the most visible sign of Rosso’s role on the clandestine circuit was the Red Cross “operational base,” a walled-in compound next to the river jetty, funded by the Spanish official development agency, Aecid.¹⁵ The role of the joint Spanish and Senegalese Red Cross mission was to care for exhausted deportees, who were given food and drink, a wash, and a rest. Their main purpose, however, was to send migrants on to Dakar or their Senegalese home region. But since most deportees were not Senegalese, this simply meant removing them from the border zone. Before this removal, there

was also another crucial step: escorting deportees to the police post down the main road for formalities and an occasional scolding.

This collaboration between police and aid workers did not strike the head of the mission, Cheikh, a tall Senegalese man known by colleagues as Mr. Migration, as unusual. In either case, the police had little interest in detaining or harassing deportees, and no money was available for locking people up anyhow.

In his office, the deputy police chief of the border sector went up to a cabinet that perched precariously next to a pile of rubbish, browsed through it, and found a folder labeled *MIGRANTS CLANDESTINS*. Data on new arrivals were collected in such folders and sent on to the border police in Dakar, he explained. That was all they could do here—“we interrogate them,” he said, “but we can’t detain them.” He insisted that Senegal “welcomed everyone,” unlike the Mauritanian security forces, with whom relations were strained. Next he handed me his CV. “You might find me some opportunities,” he said in a hopeful tone.

The dearth of “opportunities”—jobs, money, promotions—again meant that Spain had to provide incentives to keep their African colleagues on board. In Rosso, “Frontex” (meaning Spain) had provided a speedboat and petrol for land and sea patrols, torches, and night-vision binoculars, as well as the per diem payment. The police’s task of processing deportees was easy enough; the difficult task was finding any clandestine migrants *before* they entered Mauritania, since most nationalities could cross the river with few formalities. “In Nouadhibou [Mauritania’s second-largest city], that’s where they prepare the crossing and throw away all their documents,” Cheikh said, in a comment echoed by the border police. “They want to make the task harder for the police, they don’t want to give away their secret. There’s a serious problem of categorizing them.”

In Rosso, this “hidden-ness,” the “secret” in their head, was becoming a key constitutive ingredient of migrant illegality. This was, after all, what the French term *clandestin* connoted, as did the Mauritanian term for illegal migrants, *siriyān*, derived from the word for “secret.”¹⁶ Making the clandestine migrant speak and reveal the inner workings of his mind was hard work, or as a French police attaché told me, in a sentiment echoed by other workers in the illegality industry: “*Le migrant, il est un grand menteur*”—the migrant is a big liar.

Yet in policing, the clandestine migrants’ elusiveness could also help ensure a continuous cash flow, as I discovered while riding in a patrol car

on a dirt road hugging the Senegal river. In Rosso, like in Dakar, the police were chasing ghosts—but in conjuring a menace, they would always have the ear of European funders. Before, the smuggling of rice and sugar across the river was the main concern of the Rosso police, but “Frontex” had imposed new priorities. The patrol felt strangely like a safari—but the further we bumped and wobbled our way into border territory, the more obvious it was that there were no illegal migrants in sight. We spotted cement smugglers pushing a boat into the water, kids playing by the riverbed, and lone, turban-wrapped figures. I snapped a picture of the team standing in an abandoned boat. “Now we are illegal migrants!” one of them quipped to laughter. The joke highlighted the absurd impossibility of the policemen’s brief of tracking the intentionality of travelers along a much-traversed river, and their essentialization of these travelers as a consequence. “It’s very difficult to detect the illegal migrant,” one of the officers sighed. “Just like that, he becomes a boatman, or else he appears as a simple traveler...they don’t exhibit their illegality in Senegal, it’s something that you can’t detect.” Not until Nouadhibou, he added. At that Mauritanian “gate to Europe,” police at last apprehend the travelers as what they really are—fully formed illegal migrants, ready to board their wooden boats and set off across the open sea.

Nouadhibou, Northern Mauritania: The Numbers Game

At the sandswept fringes of the port town of Nouadhibou, some 500 kilometers from Rosso and 800 kilometers from the Canary Islands, lays an abandoned school compound known as “Guantanamo.” Spanish soldiers had converted the compound into a holding center for boat migrants awaiting deportation in 2006, using Spanish official development aid. Subject to critical reports by Amnesty International (2008) and the Spanish refugee assistance organization CEAR (2008), Guantanamo housed migrants who had either been intercepted at sea or apprehended in town and accused of “trying to travel clandestinely” to Europe.

The center was the product of an unusual set of circumstances. Mauritania had undergone a coup d’état in August 2005 that triggered widespread condemnation. It was a lucky coincidence that the surge in clandestine boat departures took place soon after the coup, since this forced the Europeans’ hands. They now had to negotiate with Mauritania, thus recognizing the newly installed regime.¹⁷ As clandestine boat departures

increased over the winter of 2005-2006, so did the Spanish policing presence, leading to the official launch of Frontex operations the following summer. By then, journalists were also massing in Nouadhibou, armed with cameras and notepads and an insatiable thirst for the story of a migrant exodus. Academic observers criticized the media sensationalism while pointing out that Nouadhibou had for years been a magnet for *regional* labor migration (Choplin and Lombard 2007). Like elsewhere at the European borders, however, such critical voices were hardly listened to.¹⁸ Instead, hysteria around an African “exodus” was quickly worked up in the media, and the police crackdown intensified as a result.

Guantanamo opened its gates in the summer of 2006 to handle the growing number of detained black Africans. While the Mauritanian authorities were formally in charge, assistance for detainees was handled by the Mauritanian Red Crescent, with support from the Spanish Red Cross. The center was “a green island in the middle of the desert,” “like a hotel,” insisted the Spanish policeman who had come up with the idea for it. Indeed, it was so well furnished that Mauritanian soldiers stripped away its equipment for their own homes. “The fiasco of Guantanamo,” as one Spanish journalist put it (Bárbulo 2008), was soon complete. Stripped bare of supplies and labeled a prison by human rights advocates, the “welcoming center” (as the Mauritanian Red Crescent often referred to it) was a perfect illustration of the absurdities of the Spanish-African gift economy.

It also pointed to the increasing arbitrariness of policing clandestine migration on the adventurers’ northward journey. As the Rosso border police had said, detecting illegal migrants was easier in Mauritania than on the border. Migrants “revealed their illegality” through the same signs as in Dakar—traveling in groups and carrying small backpacks, biscuits, and euros among their belongings. But the Mauritians threw themselves into the task of detecting “illegals” with unusual frenzy. The key characteristic of the illegality industry in Mauritania was what activists have called the “numbers game” (*la politique du chiffre* as described by Migreurop/La Cimade 2010). The Rosso police distinguished between *raflés* (“raided” foreigners) and clandestins deported from Mauritania. The *raflés*, they said, were simply foreign workers picked up to inflate numbers. Sub-Saharan Africans were detained in Nouadhibou for wearing two pairs of jeans, this “proving” they were on their way to Europe (Amnesty International 2008). Once numbers of departing migrants dropped, not even this type of proof was needed as an indication of illegality: skin was enough. The Spanish

Red Cross, which collected the only reliable data available on detainees, came to similar conclusions on the numbers game (Cruz Roja Española n.d.). “Guantanamo” was first a “welcoming center in citation marks,” said one Spanish Red Cross officer, before being “converted into a detention center for anyone suspected of wanting to migrate.”

Europe’s subcontracted migration controls here threatened to undermine the already fragile relations between Mauritania’s black (*haratin*) and white (*bidan*) communities by adding a tinge of illegality to the politics of skin color. The legacy of slavery, as well as the forced expulsion of black Mauritians to Senegal following the conflict between the countries in 1999, was never far from the surface. One European migration activist in Dakar saw a shift between 2008 and 2010 towards the growing stigmatization of strangers, with cases of even black Mauritians being deported to the southern borders. “Now, all black people are susceptible to being [seen as] illegal migrants,” she said.

Jacques, a Guinean man in his late 30s, was one of the clandestine travelers detained and deported in the crackdowns. He waited for me at the Red Cross base in Rosso, dressed in a shabby sports jacket and loose, stained jeans. A broad, expectant grin spread across his lips as we sat down to talk. He clutched a small backpack, that tell-tale sign of migrant illegality, in which all his belongings were gathered: a toothbrush, a grubby towel, and little else except a blanket and a soap dish given to him by the Red Cross during detention in Nouadhibou. Jacques wished to enter Europe, perhaps with the help of a French friend who had promised to meet him in Morocco. In Nouadhibou, he had paid a driver for a clandestine trip to Tetuan, an unlikely destination in northern Morocco. Instead, he was dropped 40 kilometers away and told to walk towards the West Saharan border. There, border guards promptly packed him off to Nouadhibou for a beating and a night in the cells. He refused to eat because of a “bad stomach.” The next day he was sent on to Guantanamo.

Jacques smoked more and more, while he ate less and less. “I was so afraid,” he said. “‘You have to eat!’ they told me. But I said, I can’t eat here, I can’t eat in jail because it smelt so badly there.” After a few days, the police sent Jacques and other deportees to Nouakchott, the capital. The policemen offered food but “I was a bit affected by all this anxiety, I couldn’t eat even a small piece of biscuit,” Jacques recalled. Finally, he was sent on to Rosso-Mauritania, where he again refused food. Deported across the river at night, Jacques was turned back by Senegalese border

police since he lacked a “piece of paper,” he said vaguely. By the time the Mauritians sent him across a second time, the Senegalese police had left their shift, so Jacques went ashore and headed for the Red Cross.

Jacques and many others were not registered in the Rosso police chief's dusty ledgers of illegal migrants. They were invisible. This invisibility and indeterminacy, in which authority was exercised upon the migrant body randomly, suddenly, and arbitrarily, took a big toll on the physical and mental health of deportees, sometimes manifesting itself in distressing “somatic modes of attention” (Csordas 1993).¹⁹ Over a plate of food in the local canteen—Jacques now ate big mouthfuls, slowly and methodically—the smile stayed on his lips. “In Senegal, there's freedom,” he said. “After you pass the border, there's no place where they'll hassle you.” But when someone dropped a plate behind him, Jacques suddenly twitched with startled eyes. Tensions seemed to simmer underneath his taut smile and briefly burst forth in his twitchiness, queasy stomach, and cigarette cravings.

To understand Jacques' experience, it is worth returning to Coutin (2005:196, 198), who sees migrants en route as experiencing an “erasure of presence” in which they undergo a “physical transformation”:

When they are clandestine, migrants embody both law and illegality. Absented from the jurisdictions that prohibit their presence, migrants disappear—whether by hiding, assuming false identities, or dying. By disappearing, migrants become both other (alien) and thinglike (capable of being transported)...Although they “cannot be,” migrants continue to occupy physical space. Their bodies become a sort of absent space or vacancy, surrounded by law. (Coutin 2005:198-199)

This “vacancy” was expressed in Jacques' rootlessness and wandering (*errance*). Like many other deportees, Jacques did not know where to go. All he said was “I won't go back...my objective is to reach Morocco, I'll find a solution in order to continue.” But this was utterly unrealistic. Jacques was down to his last savings, 500 CFA (\$1 USD) “plus my cigarettes.” “Once I get to Rabat, my friend can find me there,” he said, before mentioning that his friend's e-mail, the only contact detail he had, was stored on his mobile phone SIM card, which he had lost. Jacques was losing everything, including his wallet on the road to Nouadhibou, where he had ended up after a police officer took pity on him and helped him into a van departing Nouakchott. Everything about him was fleeting

and unsure; everything he said blurred the lines between truth, lies, and daydreaming. That night, he would sleep atop his spare shirt, hoping no Senegalese gendarme would wake him up. Maybe the next day a boatman could punt him across the river for free. But his aimless wandering was unlikely to lead him across the biggest hurdle awaiting West Africa's adventurers—the Sahara.

Mali and the Desert: Crossing Africa's "Internal Sea"

Heading north from Nouadhibou, the route abruptly stops. Here lies what migrants call "Kandahar," a stretch of desert between Mauritania and Morocco-occupied Western Sahara. It is a limbo in which deportees once got stuck, forced to retreat from the border posts at gunpoint. But to overland adventurers, the whole desert is, in a sense, limbo. In crossing it, they go through their next stage in the transformation into full-fledged illegal migrants. They live off *gari*, a Nigerian staple of flour mixed with water. They learn the fleeting lingo of the border, a mix of English, French, and local words that allows them to communicate across linguistic divides. They stash their money away from the sight of border guards; in Niger and northern Mali, road checkpoints have become a source of easy income for state forces targeting the illegal migrant. If lucky enough to pass the initiation rite the desert constitutes for them, their long adventures will finally have been worthwhile.

Mali's vast desert borders had, before the country's conflict in 2012 and 2013, become the latest frontier in the drive to control migration, thanks to stiffer controls along the shores of Senegal and Mauritania. But the desert was anathema to Frontex since it was away from the "external border of the EU," so Spain had to rely on other funding instruments here. On the basis of a 2007 migration accord with Mali, Madrid had increased official development aid, funded various programs on "migration management," and (alongside the EU) equipped 17 border police posts.²⁰ The Malian border police, the Gendarmerie, and the country's official migration delegations had also received Spanish-funded computers, generators, fingerprint-reading equipment, cars, and gadgets. As in Senegal and Mauritania, such gifts made for good relations. The Spanish police attaché had taken the family name of one of his Malian colleagues in a sure sign of affection, while the Gendarmerie colonel in charge of migration tapped his laptop contentedly, saying "this came from Spain." But, as on the beaches

of Dakar, while gifts created tenuous moral bonds, they also created a mechanism for articulating ever-growing demands.

The director-general of the Malian Gendarmerie, who I had first met in the annual Euro-African policing conference on illegal migration in 2010,²¹ had gathered his top officials on migration for my visit, and all had a word or two to say on the need for more equipment vis-à-vis their colleagues in the border police. “Until now, the Gendarmerie Nationale has not been equipped,” said one of the colonels. “If our 35 [border units] are equipped, that will reinforce the control of migratory flows.” Other needs came in a thick stream: they needed computers for their border offices, and solar-powered electricity, and more vehicles, and petrol for these vehicles! All this would help cut migrant crossings “upstream.” Above all, however, they insisted on the need for development projects. The chief of the border police hammered home the same point. “Europe needs to help us with projects in villages, that way people can become sedentary,” he pleaded, complaining that EU money was “only” for fighting illegal migration. Then he proceeded to ask for funds on both fronts. “If you want to fight effectively against illegal migration in the north [of Mali], you have to create a system in the style of Frontex [*à l’image de Frontex*],” he said, invoking the joint operations at sea. “But we too,” he exclaimed, “we have an internal sea, our sea is the Sahara!” The gifts generated ever more requests, articulated through the language of the Euro-African border and the fight against illegal migration.

The adventurers adrift on the “internal sea” are not just subject to the aimless *errance* of migrants such as Jacques. In his “auto-ethnography” of clandestine crossings, Shahram Khosravi (2007:322) says such crossings challenge “the sacred feature of the border rituals and symbols.” To him, migrants play the role not of initiates but of “sacrificial creatures for the border ritual” (2007:324). This involves their “animalization,” evident in the terms used for clandestine migrants and their smugglers across the world (Khosravi 2007, Coutin 2005)—in Morocco, “sheep” are at the mercy of “wolves” (Driessen 1998); in Mexico, “chickens” are smuggled by *polleros* (chicken farmers) or coyotes (Kearney 1998).

But again, the adventurers’ making as illegal migrants is not just discursive, but played out on their bodies. Youssou, a young Senegalese adventurer who had managed to cross the desert via Mali and Niger, recalled packing into a Landcruiser heading north into the desert, only to be forced to abandon it to shake off the police. Tuareg bandits appeared, tore all

clothes off the migrants, and made them lie naked in the sand. They ripped up soles, seams, and gris-gris in search for hidden cash. They poured out the migrants' water and scattered their last gari. They took away four women: one never came back. But as soon as the bandits left, Youssou set out again. He came to a waterhole, shoved a few goats aside, and drank. By then, Youssou had been reduced to a savage existence readily invoked by those who have survived. "We lived like animals" was a common remark among adventurers. One survivor recalled being deported from Algeria, imprisoned with murderers, forced to drink dirty water in deportation camps, and transported in cattle trucks across the desert that sent his body rocking with each bump in the road. "Am I really a goat? A cow?" he asked angrily.

But as Coutin (2005) remarks, clandestine migrants are also rendered "thinglike" on the journey. Masquerading as cargo, they might manage to cross the desert. This is how Youssou finally left the Sahara behind. Smugglers told him to lie down under the tarpaulin of a truck, tucked in like merchandise in a convoy for contraband cigarettes. Arriving in this fashion in North Africa, adventurers such as Youssou have already gone through several stages of their "making up" as illegal migrants. The clothes and accoutrements spotted on Dakar's beaches, the migrant "mind" pondered in Rosso, the racialization in Nouadhibou, and the dehumanizing experience of the desert add up to an ever more reified migrant illegality defined by the traveler's "uniform," his wildness, his deviousness, his blackness. But it is to the refining of this crude illegality in North African policing that we will now turn: here, the definite touches are put to the making of illegal migrants in Europe's borderlands.

Morocco: The Politics of Recognition

Daouda and Modou had found the shortcut. I first met them in the market town of Fnideq close to the Spanish enclave of Ceuta, making their way between the café tables armed with skin creams they were trying to sell. They had used the "new system" mentioned by the Rosso border police, going by land from Senegal to Morocco. But they had not even had to resort to cargo-like transport; as Senegalese nationals, they could enter Mauritania and Morocco visa-free, as long as they paid an informal "fee" at the West Saharan border. They were both in their early 20s, on their first trip abroad, and lit up as soon as I greeted them in Wolof. They seemed

at ease in Morocco, learning some Arabic and moving freely from their flatshare in Tangier to Fnideq's weekly market despite their uncertain legal status as itinerant vendors.

I was surprised at this ease. Strong diplomatic bonds between Dakar and Rabat mean Senegalese benefit from preferential treatment in Morocco, but this only partly explained their relaxedness. Morocco was, as Agier (2011:31) notes, the first North African country to be "annexed to the security policies of European governments." Seeing the country as a springboard to Europe for streams of illegal migrants, Spain and France in particular had long pushed for a strong policing response there. As relations between Rabat and Madrid thawed following the Socialist victory in Spain's 2004 elections, migration cooperation grew quickly, culminating in the tragic mass entry attempts of autumn 2005 at the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, where at least 14 migrants were killed by gunfire from security forces (Migreurop 2006). After the intense media scrutiny that followed these tragedies, Rabat cleaned up its act—no more negative headlines, no wanton brutality. As a privileged partner under the European Neighborhood Policy, Morocco was keen to be seen as trustworthy and clean. At the same time, the country was increasingly a destination for business visits and students from fellow African states. As a result, Morocco had to walk a tightrope between clean controls, flexible entry rules, and tough crackdowns.

At the heart of this strategy was the Directorate of Migration and Border Surveillance (Direction de la Migration et de la Surveillance des Frontières, DMSF), based in the town-within-a-town of cream-colored buildings and manicured lawns of the Moroccan Interior Ministry. Khalid, its director, explained how Morocco's thinking on migration had proceeded from a "global" to a "process-oriented" strategy. "We've seen an activity that is highly controlled by the mafias. We've seen lots of money involved, so it was very, very crucial to us to have a global strategy," he said in American-accented English as his aide pushed a printout with statistics on dismantled smuggling networks across the table. The result of the twin-track strategy was, in his words, "an incompressible level of ameliorations since we have narrowed by almost 90 percent the arrivals of illegal migrants to Europe."

Morocco's strategy covered both the country's own clandestine migration flows—the *harragas* or "burners of borders"—and the sub-Saharan adventurers, whose journeys were to be "aborted upstream." But one key element was left unstated in Khalid's discourse: coercive border policing.

Instead, he talked warmly about his Directorate's work with Moroccan civil society and about "confidence-building" in mixed patrols and high-level meetings with Spain. More than money, Morocco wanted recognition and participation as an equal. I asked Khalid about EU funding for the Moroccan migration response, and his reply first startled me. "What funding?" he laughed.

Well, there was a MEDA program²² of about €67.5 million, eh...I'm talking about immigration, that's a small envelope. But we are a responsible country, we are a responsible state, we are not using this card to get finance...first we have to assume our regional responsibility, we have to protect our nationals, OK? We cannot accept that we become a transit country for migrants or drugs or for whatever, so we have to play our role.

Khalid was, of course, well aware that Morocco increased its political leverage greatly with Spain and the EU thanks to migration. It would be no surprise to him, either, that the EU was using the migration card in its development assistance strategy, with Morocco a huge beneficiary of such aid. The EU-Morocco action plan, like its equivalents for other North African countries, includes clauses on "ensuring the effective management of migration flows" and readmissions, while the "mobility partnership" signed between the EU and Morocco in 2013 has "combatting illegal migration" among its objectives.²³ In the migration-related aid stream, Morocco received €654 million in funding under the European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument over only three years (EMHRN 2010:61). While €40 million of this assistance was earmarked for security (EMHRN 2010:61), the aid money was generally clean, and so was the Moroccan strategy that Khalid had delineated. But beyond its smooth surface lurked a rougher reality, tucked away in the backstreets and forests of northern Morocco.

Starting before the Ceuta and Melilla debacle but proceeding at a quickening pace in its aftermath, irregular migration was swiftly racialized in Morocco. Blackness became, as in Mauritania a few years later, a sign of illegality. In 2003, the country's infamous law 02/03 criminalized irregular migration and introduced deportation provisions.²⁴ Around that time, taxi drivers in Tangier started refusing black customers. The scruffy hostels in the city's medina closed their doors to Morocco's southern neighbors who had so far frequented them. Bona fide refugees were increasingly rounded

up, bundled into police vans, and dumped in the no man's land of the closed Algeria-Morocco border.

As the crackdowns intensified, sub-Saharan travelers responded by further developing their intricate means of organization and subterfuge. A constellation of safe houses sprung up across Moroccan (and other North African) cities. These *ghettos*, as migrants called them, were houses or flats en route, usually based around nationality or ethnicity, where migrants gained the right of entry through adherence to house rules and sometimes a small sum of money (Laacher 2007, Pian 2008).

Conscious of how their bodies and behavior betrayed them, migrants also developed techniques for "passing" as documented visitors rather than deportable "illegals." One expert on such subterfuge was Stephen, a Liberian asylum seeker. He dressed in crisp shirts and adidas trainers, sometimes donning what English-speaking migrants called "schoolboy glasses." As he walked through town, he pushed his weight onto the front of his feet, propelling him into a focused, fast gait. Stephen made sure to carry a bottle of mineral water in his hand, "like the tourists have." He knew who the secret policemen were in Tangier—they all had the same leather jackets and sunglasses. But more importantly, he knew that, once he spotted them, he should not turn but walk straight ahead with the air of a legitimate foreigner. In Zygmunt Bauman's (1997) terms, he tried to enact the role of the "tourist," not the unwanted "vagabond."

While in Senegal and Mauritania, the illegal migrant was recognized through his "uniform"—backpacks, double pairs of trousers—in Morocco, clothes and other "props" were used to *pass* as legal rather than to detect illegality. Here, blackness was enough to raise suspicion: guilty until proven innocent. With this constant threat of apprehension, the clandestine "mind" conjured at the Rosso border was also congealing into a more definite shape. In Morocco, the illegal migrant was someone who had interiorized his own illicit status and its frightening corollary, what de Genova (2002) terms "deportability" or the constant threat of expulsion faced by undocumented foreigners. Moroccan forces had the power to block and move migrants while sowing fears for further interceptions. Nowhere was this circle of fear and forced mobility more evident than in Oujda on the Morocco-Algerian border.

Oujda is a mythical place in the adventurers' world. Some French-speaking migrants refer to deportation there as "going on pilgrimage." This university town is both the site of expulsion or return to the border

(*reconduite à la frontière*), as Khalid and his forces called it,²⁵ and the key overland entry point to Morocco for adventurers. On its outskirts lies *la fac* (the faculty or “the school”), where migrants end up after expulsion to the no man’s land next to the Algerian border a few miles away. In recent years, Western journalists and researchers have congregated here in their quest for a glimpse of the illegal migrants dwelling in a small shanty settlement on a field shielded by crumbling university walls. Nigerian gangs hold sway around *la fac* and have even taken to confiscating visitors’ cameras until they pay up for the privilege of observing their world. This world is rough and raw, with adventurers hostage to the gangs and police, who can strike at any minute. Across the forest, adventurers out of luck bide their time hiding in *tranquillos* (“peaceful” places, in adventurers’ lingo). Veterans of the Moroccan migration circuits such as Stephen have already been deported to Oujda multiple times, some clocking up more than a dozen.

As I arrived in Oujda in late summer 2010, such deportations were increasing. After a Morocco-Spanish spat about the policing of the Melilla border, the Spanish interior minister had traveled to Rabat for talks. Deepened migration “cooperation” was swiftly announced, followed by a renewed crackdown on black Africans across Morocco. And now it was the turn of Daouda, the Senegalese skin-cream salesman, to experience the violence of expulsion.

Daouda had been caught up in a raid, he told me as I got hold of him over the phone. His Moroccan entry stamp had run out in the preceding days. To renew it, he would have had to go back to his entry point on the Mauritanian border, but this was both too far and too expensive. After the Moroccan police stormed his flat, he and his friends were detained and “returned to the border”—only the wrong border: not the Mauritanian but the Algerian one. When I met him a week later back in Tangier for a meal, he told me how police had taken him to the no man’s land outside Oujda at night and indicated the direction for heading back to Morocco. “We went there, but it was Algeria,” he said. Next, things got worse, as it had for many before him. The “bandits” came: “they were Algerian soldiers, and they stole everything,” he said. “They asked us, why have you entered here? They said we had to give them everything and if not they would kill us. They took all the money—I had €700, my friend €500...They took our watches too, our clothes and our mobiles, but they left the SIM card for us.”²⁶

Daouda and his friends finally made it to a village, where a friendly

policeman paid for their bus trip to Tangier. Daouda was back, but something had changed. Unlike earlier, he was twitchy. His eyes kept darting towards the entrance of our restaurant. He talked freely but with an unusual alertness, constantly on guard. As he swallowed a piece of chicken, his eyes suddenly moved towards the entrance without his head moving at all. The effect was disturbing.

Thanks to the arbitrariness of policing, Daouda was falling into illegality at a dizzying rate. This dizziness was invoked by a more prosaic English term for Oujda expulsions than “going on pilgrimage.” “They [head]butt you,” Stephen called it. “It’s like internal bleeding,” his cousin, himself recently expelled, chimed in. Stephen continued: “You feel confused inside, your head spins, you start thinking, why is this happening to me? I’m getting old and am doing nothing, have no future, why?” Stephen’s vocabulary and Daouda’s bodily reactions both pointed to the somatization of migrants’ despair at an encroaching illegality, something I had already seen with Jacques in faraway Rosso.

In Morocco, the petty gift economy of Spanish-Sahel relations had been almost wholly replaced by a politics of recognition, in which Rabat agreed to play its role as long as Spain and the EU deepened cooperation. This more subtle form of subcontracting was, in Spanish quarters, simply explained as a function of Morocco’s superior resources relative to its southern neighbors, yet more was at stake in the official rejection or embrace of the gift economy—albeit in a rather counter-intuitive manner. The West Africans’ participation in the gift economy provided them with a hold on the donor and distance towards their task, while Morocco’s reluctance paradoxically helped tie its forces into an even tighter, and just as unequal, embrace—with suffocating consequences for the West African traveler. Its quest for recognition meant that visits by European officials, the signing of new accords, or simply the need for end-of-year statistics were enough to trigger fresh raids, detentions, and forced displacements. As in Mauritania, if not enough migrants were found who fit the “illegal” profile, the profile could simply be expanded along racial lines. This meant migrants, whether on their way towards Europe or not, had to constantly recalibrate their own bodies to disprove their supposed illegality. It was a tawdry game, set on repeat. In 2012, an unprecedented wave of arrests of black Africans was unleashed in Mauritania, while similar round-ups picked up pace in Morocco. The adventurers, like currency, had to be kept in circulation for the illegality industry to keep rolling.

Conclusion: Illegality Put to Work

The irregular migration circuit between West Africa and Spain can crudely be seen as a simple exchange relationship, with presumed illegal migrants alternately functioning as human merchandise and cashpoint. But with each financial exchange, new facets were added to the relations between African and European forces. The gift economy had created a social bond where before there was none; it had personalized the cold logics of Europe's border regime; and it had bound recipient and giver into a tense mutual relationship of prestations and counter-prestations. Such gift relations, in turn, also added new facets to the constitution of migrant illegality in what, following Coutin (2005), could be seen as a process of gradual "becoming" en route. Spanish per diem payments to the Senegalese police procured an extension of migrant illegality, moving it away from actual infractions and towards bodily and behavioral signs. Gifts and favors to the Mauritians—ranging from patrol boats and cash to political recognition—boosted the number of detainees while simultaneously adding an edge of racialization to migration controls. Development aid and diplomatic deals compelled the Moroccans to apply well-measured force to the increasingly fearful and furtive migrant body that, stripped of its rights and resources, could then be robbed at gunpoint by emboldened criminal gangs and Algerian soldiers.

But the migrant can, through this growing vulnerability, also become a recipient of kindness from ordinary people, aid workers, and police. In this gradual, complex manner, the illegal migrant is "made up" while approaching the external EU border: he is alternately a hounded, but pitied prey and a ghostlike, prohibited presence.

None of this means Europe has simply had its way with its southern neighbors, as the ambivalence and complaints of officers from Dakar to Rabat have shown. Nor does it mean the adventurer readily gives in to or unquestioningly appropriates the imposed category of migrant illegality. While this article has presented the "becoming" en route as linear, the process is more intricate than this—and so are migrant adoptions of illegality. The migrant's presence here is not simply under erasure, as Coutin (2005) suggests: by adopting the role of the adventurer, the overland traveler also forges a distinct *presence* for himself through clandestine skills honed on the margins of the law. While some such adventurers somatize despair, others instead press ahead ever harder, taking pride in their predicament. While many adventurers self-consciously start adopting the

terms illegal migrant and clandestine, others do not. Yet, the main point remains: Europe's streamlined strategy on irregular migration crumbles in the borderlands, where an absurd circle is created. The more gifts and favors there are for the outsourced African manhunt, the stronger the pressure is to find fresh prey. Border controls perpetuate, thanks to their very success, the "problem" they are meant to combat. In the process, the externalized controls also produce a lived modality of migrant illegality, embodied in the figure of the clandestine traveler as he approaches the final hurdles on his way to Europe: the Mediterranean Sea and the tall fences looming around the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. ■

Endnotes:

¹This focus on the production and productivity of illegality means that other issues more commonly discussed in ethnographies of migration will not be considered, including the economic and social conditions at "home" and the closure of visa and air routes into Europe—all factors that push people to attempt clandestine journeys. For West African perspectives on these issues, see, e.g., Lucht (2012) and Nyamnjoh (2010).

²Through this material perspective on border controls, inspired by actor-network theory (Latour 1993), I approach the materialities, geographies, and social configurations "on the ground" as key constitutive arenas of the illegality industry rather than as by-products of political and policy decision-making.

³For a discussion of another part of the "value chain," the hi-tech surveillance systems of Europe, see Andersson (2012).

⁴Joint Operation Hera, initially launched as Hera I and Hera II in 2006, involves the joint patrolling of the waters between West Africa and the Canary Islands. Coordinated by Frontex and the Spanish Guardia Civil, Hera has also seen a range of European vessels patrolling the West African coastline in "collaboration" with West African forces. See Carrera (2007) for a discussion of Spanish, EU, and African cooperation under Frontex joint operation Hera.

⁵The findings here build upon research across an "extended field site" along the Euro-African border, approached as a set of antagonistic social interfaces, where the illegality industry rubs against its target population. Research on these interfaces has involved fieldwork "on the move," mirroring the experience of migrants and border workers. I have carried out participant-observation and interviews with the Senegalese border police, extensive field visits to the Spanish Guardia Civil as well as to the Malian Gendarmerie and Moroccan border directorate, and engaged with numerous migrants and aid organizations in Dakar, Rosso, Bamako, Tangier, Rabat, Oujda, and elsewhere on the clandestine circuit.

⁶Irregular migration has, however, recently been criminalized in Italy and the US state of Arizona, as well as in North African countries such as Morocco, as will be seen later in this article.

⁷I use "migrant" rather than "immigrant" throughout since the travelers in question have not yet entered European space, and will talk about the "illegal migrant" as a "he" since it is a profoundly gendered figure not just statistically speaking but in the imaginary of police, aid workers, and journalists as well (for a longer discussion of terminology, see Andersson 2010; for the ethnographic usage of illegality followed here, see Willen 2007). I will also intersperse "illegal" with another key term in French-speaking West Africa—"clandestine." While the French noun *clandestin* carries the negative connotations of "illegal migrant" and will be translated as such, the more neutral connotations of the English "clandestine migration" make the term analytically useful. Clandestinity, more clearly than irregularity or illegality, could be described as a mode of being-in-the-world rather than just a discursive and legal inscription defined through a state-imposed negation. The clandestine migrant *hides* from police, *evades* border checks, and *disguises* his legal otherness through recourse to false documentation, ad hoc dress codes, and furtive modes of behavior (Coutin 2005). Since "clandestine migration" implies such

an embodied perspective—in short, a positivity implicating not just the state but also the person being labeled—I will use this term when not quoting informants.

⁸In other settings, discussed elsewhere in my work (Andersson in press), the discursive appropriation of this category is more clear-cut, for example, among deportees in Senegal.

⁹The Senegalese Gendarmerie, a militarily organized police force, stems from French colonial times, like elsewhere in West Africa; the Spanish Guardia Civil is a similarly “mixed” security force.

¹⁰This term was also used in “sensitization” campaigns against the risks of clandestine migration run by NGOs, local associations, and the International Organization for Migration. As Melly (2011) notes, it also came to be used by local youth themselves during the boat craze era.

¹¹Many such trips took place as part of the Guardia Civil-managed “Seahorse” project, funded by the EU Aeneas Programme. More information available at <http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/infopoint/publications/europeaid/documents/aeneasoverview.pdf>.

¹²A discussion of such large state transactions, including development aid, remains outside the scope of this article. For the Senegalese case, see Gabrielli (2011).

¹³These missions were for ascertaining detained migrants’ nationalities, enabling deportation back to Senegal.

¹⁴Bredeloup (2008) traces this figure from its initial appearance on air routes to Paris in the 1970s to a range of postcolonial ancestors: the Sahelian youth, immortalized by Jean Rouch, on an overland quest to become streetwise “jaguars”; the Congolese fashionistas of the *Sape* movement; and urban gangs in Côte d’Ivoire and the Congos (*Benguistes* and *Bilistes*) embracing the West and its symbols. These groups shared ideals of masculine bravery, urban street savvy, and outward-oriented individualism that the *aventure* crystallized in what Bredeloup calls *singularisation*, or a quest for personal emancipation, however dependent upon family funds. By contrast, English-speaking migrants—Liberians, Ghanaians, Nigerians—do not embark on the dangerous desert crossing as “adventurers,” and neither do the women on the clandestine circuit. The latter, often simplistically treated as “trafficking victims” by European states, move ahead with the help of male companions, smugglers, or “protectors” at considerable personal cost. As will be seen, all these groups, however, face similar trials on the road as they move stepwise towards North Africa and the external EU borders.

¹⁵Spanish Red Cross participation ended in 2010 due to a lack of funds and new arrivals.

¹⁶The term clandestine was also frequently used by police when speaking in Wolof (Senegal’s main language).

¹⁷Spain was also aided in negotiations by the weak position of Mauritania’s post-coup government.

¹⁸On the exaggerated figures regularly given on “potential” migrants waiting to cross from North Africa into southern Europe, see especially de Haas (2007).

¹⁹To Csordas (1993:139), a somatic mode of attention “means not only attention to and with one’s own body, but includes attention to the bodies of others”—that is, it is intersubjective. This intersubjective element is an especially fruitful field of inquiry for the critical phenomenological approach (Willen 2007) pursued here.

²⁰Spain signed a raft of migration accords with West African states after the “boat crisis” of 2006. See Serón et al. (2011:74-75) for details on Spanish cooperation in Mali and elsewhere.

²¹This gathering of high-ranking border guards, convened by the Spanish Guardia Civil, is usually held in the Canary Islands.

²²This EU program has provided “financial and technical assistance” to Europe’s southern neighbors. More information available at http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/external_relations/relations_with_third_countries/mediterranean_partner_countries/r15006_en.htm.

²³Morocco has long refused to sign an agreement with the EU on readmissions of foreigners having transited through its territory, even though a deal was progressively getting closer. It had also until 2012 refused to accept back non-nationals under such an agreement signed with Spain in 1992, with an exception being the “massive assault” at Melilla in 2005—not to mention routine informal expulsions through the border fences. This diplomatic reluctance has not stopped Rabat from using its imposed status of “transit state,” however, whether in pushing for rights for its own emigrant population, as a political pressure point in relation to occupied Western Sahara, or in negotiations on agricultural produce and foreign fishing rights. See Bensaad (2005) and Gabrielli (2011) for a discussion. For the Morocco action plan, see http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/action_plans/morocco_enp_ap_final_en.pdf (last accessed

November 6, 2013). For the mobility partnership, see http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-is-new/news/news/2013/docs/20130607_declaration_conjointe-maroc_eu_version_3_6_13_en.pdf (last accessed November 6, 2013).

²⁴For law 02/03, see http://www.justice.gov.ma/fr/legislation/legislation_.aspx?ty=2&id_l=140.

²⁵This term is used similarly in France.

²⁶The return of SIM cards from stolen mobiles seems to have been a systematic practice among Algerian soldiers, with similar cases reported by deportees in Bamako, Mali during fieldwork.

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Foreign Language Translations:

Hunter and Prey: Patrolling Clandestine Migration in the Euro-African Borderlands

[Keywords: Irregular migration, phenomenology of illegality, border policing, embodiment, West Africa, Spain]

Caçador e Presa: Patrulhando a Migração Clandestina nas Fronteiras Euro-Africanas

[Palavras-chave: Migração irregular, fenomenologia da ilegalidade, policiamento fronteiriço, corporalização, África Ocidental, Espanha]

猎人与猎物：在欧亚边界监控秘密的移民活动

关键词：非正常移民，非法行为的现象学，边境管辖，物化，西非，西班牙

Охотник и добыча: Патрулирование нелегальной миграции в пограничной зоне между Европой и Африкой.

[Ключевые слова: неорганизованная миграция, феноменология незаконности, воплощение, Западная Африка, Испания]

الصيد والفريسة: دوريات الهجرة السرية في مناطق الحدود الأوربية الأفريقية
 كلمات البحث: الهجرة غير النظامية، ظاهرة عدم الشرعية، الشرطة الحدودية، تجسيد، غرب أفريقيا، إسبانيا