

The London School of Economics and Political Science

Clandestine migration and the business of bordering Europe

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To Cristina

Abstract

Irregular, clandestine or so-called “illegal” migration by land and sea is rarely out of the political and media agenda in Europe despite its statistically limited significance. Taking this mismatch as its starting point, this thesis explores the industry that has emerged around clandestine migration in recent years – the transnational policing networks, aid organisations and media outlets that all make the “illegal immigrant” their target, beneficiary and source. It focuses on the migration circuit between West Africa and Spain, where a joint European response to irregular flows was first tried and tested under the umbrella of the border agency Frontex. It is also here that success in “fighting illegal migration” has been most readily announced following the brief, spectacular migration “crises” in Spain’s North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in 2005 and in the Canary Islands in 2006.

The thesis explores ethnographically how clandestine migration has been constituted as a field of intervention and knowledge-gathering since this time. In this field, it is argued, the roles of policing, caring for and informing on migrants intermingle while producing shared models, materialities and classifications that impinge upon the travellers labelled “illegal”. Drawing on the dynamic nominalism of Ian Hacking, the actor-network theory of Bruno Latour and a growing body of critical migration and border studies, the thesis explores the interfaces where specific modalities of migrant illegality are produced. The exploration of these interfaces – in deportation, surveillance, patrolling, rescues, reception and activism – relies on an extended field site, with research carried out in Senegal, Mali, Morocco, southern Spain and European policing headquarters. Throughout, the thesis highlights not just the workings of the migration industry but this industry’s excesses and absurdities, which make the business of bordering Europe a fraught and contradictory enterprise.

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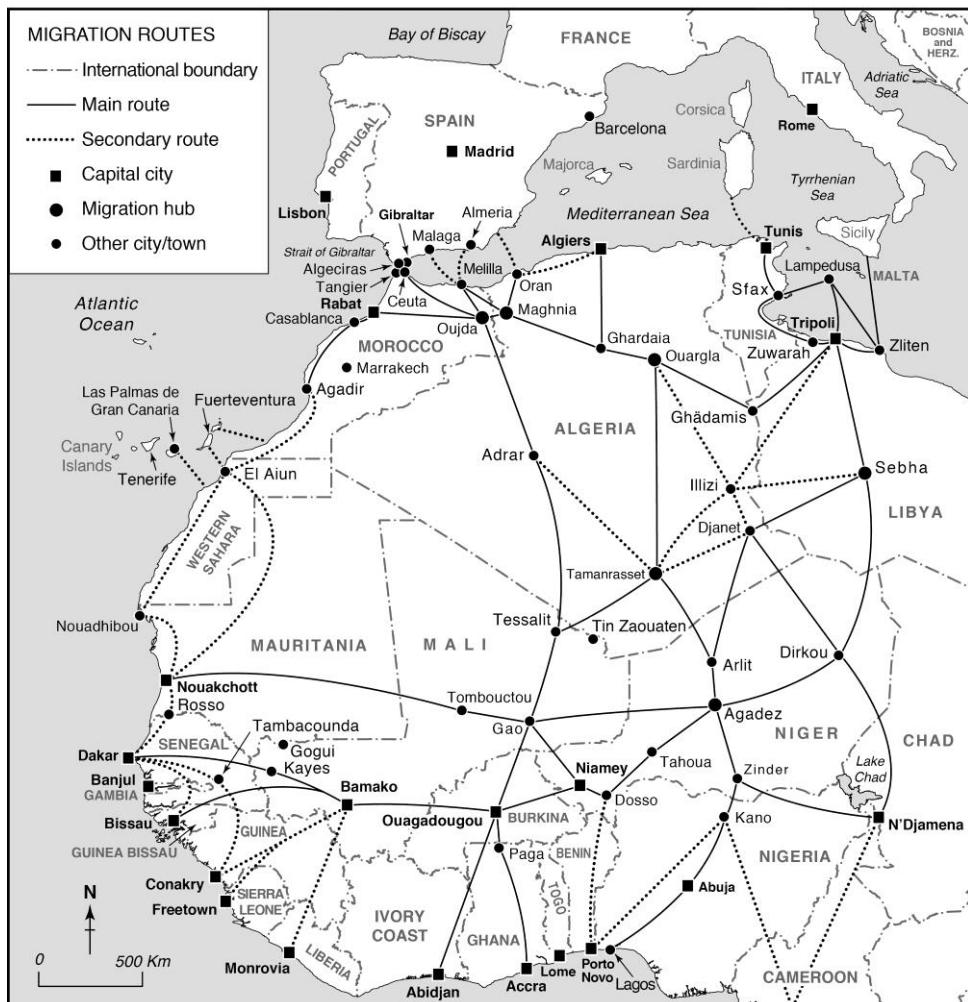
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Irregular migratory routes between Africa and southern Europe. Based on the 2012 version of MTM i-Map: imap-migration.org.

Introduction

The illegality industry at Europe's African frontier

MELILLA, NORTH AFRICA. 6 OCTOBER 2005. It was after darkness had fallen that the migrants came running towards the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. Hundreds of road-weary Africans descended from their Moroccan forest encampments, threw makeshift ladders onto the border fences circling the territories and scrambled to climb across. Silhouetted figures crowded in between the tall fences, cameras capturing their blurry movements between reams of barbed wire. Spanish border guards and soldiers rushed to the scene. Journalists called it el asalto masivo, the massive assault: newscasts and front pages showed the black migrants, many “violent” and “desperate”, advancing swiftly and silently. Then Moroccan or Spanish security forces – it was never clear who was responsible – fired into the crowds. At least 14 people died.¹ The ramshackle migrant encampments outside the enclaves were razed and burned by Moroccan soldiers; their inhabitants were rounded up, detained and put on buses bound for the faraway Sahara. Many were never heard from again. Then controls tightened, the border was cleaned up, the media moved on. But soon a new front would open up in Europe’s “fight” against clandestine migration: the sea route to the distant, improbable destination of the Spanish Canary Islands.

LOS CRISTIANOS, TENERIFE, SPAIN. 13 SEPTEMBER 2009. The holiday high season draws to a close on the southernmost fringes of Europe. At the sun-drenched seaside promenade, next to the pizza parlours and tax-free shops, beckons a vast, blue Atlantic: European Union flags and rent-a-parasols flutter in the breeze. A Fred Olsen shuttle ferry rests at the shore in between trips to other resorts in the Canary Islands archipelago. But wait – another boat, a wretched little fishing boat, is wedging its way into the port. The holidaying Britons, Germans and Swedes stop in their tracks. For the vessel, hand-painted and wooden, comes escorted by patrol boats and groans under the weight of almost 80 people: all dishevelled, all poor, all black. The unseaworthy rafts with their unlikely human cargo, beamed across the world’s media, had since the summer

¹ This officially acknowledged death tally does not include those who later perished in the desert. An investigation into the deaths has repeatedly been called for without luck (Migreurop 2006)

of 2006 suddenly and spectacularly connected an insular tourist paradise with West Africa, more than 1,000 km away across the rough Atlantic.²

This thesis is about the tragic spectacle of clandestine migration into Europe and, in particular, about the “fight” against it on the Spanish front since the debacles at the fences in 2005 and in the Canaries the following year. These are but two events in a growing tally of tragedies at the gates to the West. Gruesome tales abound of migrant deaths at the southern frontiers of Europe, at the US-Mexico border and along Australia’s Pacific shores. The scenes of this story are familiar: “illegal immigrants” crammed into unseaworthy boats, squeezed into rusty trucks trundling across the Sahara, walking through the distant deserts of Arizona or clinging onto Mexican cargo trains. Thousands have perished on these gruelling treks, but the misery does not end there. The media, populist politicians and zealous bureaucrats have seized upon the “illegal immigrant” as a bogeyman, a perennial outsider who in waves and floods invades western countries. In their accounts, an abject global figure is emerging: alternately an object of deep fascination and utter indifference, of horror and pity, he stalks the borders of the rich world, sowing panic, wrecking election campaigns and generating headlines as he goes.

Much has been written about this “threat” lurking at Europe’s borders: news reports, documentaries, policy papers, academic tracts and funding reports in which the clandestine migrant is followed, scrutinised, probed. This thesis takes a different approach. It casts an eye on the observers and investigates the workings of what I will call the “illegality industry” in the emerging Euro-African borderlands. It moves across the value chain in the production of migrant illegality – that is, to the domains where such migrants are conjured, observed, represented, controlled and ultimately rendered profitable: from the control rooms of Europe’s new border regime to the shelters where humanitarians care for migrants under the watchful eye of the state and the patrols scouring African terrains for a sighting of their elusive prey.

This cannot be done, however, without taking into consideration this industry’s “products” – the clandestine migrants themselves, who increasingly

² This vignette is loosely based on news reports of a 2009 boat arrival. See <http://tinyurl.com/nutzsv> and <http://tinyurl.com/kqpmyy>

find themselves marooned in the no-man’s-lands emerging between Europe and Africa. Running the gauntlet of border controls that now stretch across deserts and high seas, North African cities and dusty Sahelian dumps, these travellers are subject to what the director of a Spanish migrant reception centre called a Darwinian selection. It is a selection of the most brutal kind, in which shrivelled bodies disappear in Saharan dunes and bloated corpses float ashore at the Strait of Gibraltar. Thousands have died while attempting the crossing. Luckier travellers get stuck in newly cosmopolitan border towns and fringe neighbourhoods of Tangier and Oujda, Tripoli and Tamanrasset. Others get deported, time and again. Whether they succeed or fall short of their goals, these transnational travellers increasingly end up collaborating in their own making as “illegal immigrants” on the infernal production line of the illegality industry.³

My thesis is an ethnography of this production line as it operates along the western edge of Europe’s external border: between West Africa, the Maghreb and Spain. In these emerging borderlands, the thesis will show, the production of migrant illegality is a highly conflictive and contested process. Each chapter explores an interface where the illegality industry rubs against its targets, highlighting the excesses, contradictions and absurdities that define Europe’s response to clandestine migration. We will meet a bereaved Senegalese mother with her lucrative anti-migration association (chapter one); a Spanish Comandante running a state-of-the-art border operation while fantasising about complete border surveillance (chapter two); the Senegalese subcontractors who reluctantly do Europe’s dirty borderwork in exchange for cash, junkets and gifts of night-vision goggles (chapter three); the Spanish gatekeepers who drag migrants aboard their patrol boats in the full glare of the world’s media while ambivalently showing off the high-tech fences of Ceuta and Melilla (chapter four); “Mamá”, a reception camp worker caring for her captive “sons” (chapter five) who are treated as mere numbers by the police (chapter six); and activists descending on the Sahel for a show of solidarity with migrant victims and a fruitless search for Europe’s borders (chapter seven). Among these characters circulate shadowy presences – journalists and jailers, smugglers and spooks, defence industry contractors and

³ One list of *documented* fatalities due to “Fortress Europe” counts 16,000 deaths between 1993 and 2012: <http://www.unitedagainstracism.org/pdfs/listofdeaths.pdf>

policymakers – as well as the anthropologist, himself part of the industry that has grown up around the “illegal immigrant”.

Before proceeding, a brief note on terminology is in order. The term “illegal immigrant” (or “illegal migrant”, the latter used below when the traveller has not yet entered European space) takes quote marks in this introduction but not in the chapters, where it will be used as a folk category of social differentiation. I use it with some trepidation, however. The term is pejorative, stigmatising and even incorrect, implying as it does that such migrants are criminals while they have 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).⁴ Many of the travellers we will meet in the chapters exemplify this complexity – some have crossed fences and seas into Spain only to register with local authorities once inside the country, or have been rounded up in expulsion raids in Morocco despite carrying bona-fide asylum application documents.

Aware of the ethical and analytical problems with the term “illegal migration”, analysts, activists and even media-savvy border guards instead talk of irregular, unauthorised or undocumented migration. However, as de Genova (2002) has pointed out, such terms suffer from a similar state-centrism. For our purposes, too, they lose the emic connotations and implications of “illegal migration”. Willen (2007a:11), among others, gives a robust defence of the ethnographic use of illegality because of “the cross-contextual applicability of the term, its substantial material consequences, and its impact on migrants’ own experiences of everyday life”. This is a line followed in my thesis. However, I will intersperse “illegal” with another key term in the French-speaking African environs of my project – “clandestine”. The French *(im)migration clandestine* or the noun *clandestin* carry the negative connotations of the English illegal (im)migration and illegal (im)migrants, and will be translated as such throughout my thesis. Meanwhile, the less negative burden of the English “clandestine

⁴ Irregular migration has however recently been criminalised in Italy and the US state of Arizona as well as in North Africa, most notoriously in the Moroccan law 02/03 (compare chapter 3)

migration” (and its Spanish equivalent) makes the term analytically useful in, first, helping to distinguish migration via land and sea from visa overstays and other more common means of entering irregularity. Second, clandestinity, more clearly than irregularity or illegality, could be described as a mode of being-in-the-world (Merleau-Ponty 2002). It is, in other words, more 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 behaviour (Coutin 2005). Since “clandestine migration” implies such an embodied perspective – in short, a positivity implicating not just the state but also the person being labelled – I will use this term when not quoting informants.⁵

The use of “he” above is no coincidence, even as it points to a lacuna in my ethnographic data: the absence of female migrants, for which I have few excuses to offer other than their relatively small (albeit growing) presence on the clandestine circuit and the problem of access. By using “he”, however, I wish to highlight how the “illegal immigrant” is a profoundly gendered figure in the imaginaries of border guards, aid workers and journalists. Much like a mirror image of the feminised “refugee” delineated by Malkki (1995), the clandestine migrant is male, but he is a specific type of male invoking a peculiar constellation of attributes. He is anonymous and out of place, homeless and bereft of clear national belonging; he alternates between untrustworthiness and innocence, the roles of villain and victim; and he is increasingly racialised in Spain and beyond, feeding into revived fantasies of Africa as the West’s other, a hopeless continent beset by poverty and war, disease and disaster (Comaroff 2007). My thesis will focus on the emergence of these contradictory traits in the borderlands, inquiring into how the illegality industry reduces and flattens its “product” by funnelling a wide array of personal stories and cultures into the one generic mould of migrant illegality.

This mould is itself a recent historical and political creation. The next section will give a brief overview of the continuities and ruptures between clandestine migration and larger mobility patterns in West Africa and Europe, as

⁵ This analytical usage differs from e.g. Düvell (2008), as well as from the technical usage of the border agency Frontex

well as of the theoretical angles taken on such patterns by social scientists since colonial times.

Illegality in context

Myths abound in media-fuelled imaginings of clandestine migration, and the biggest of these is what de Haas (2007) calls a “myth of invasion” of desperate Africans massing at Europe’s southern borders. Amid the wild official estimates and the absence of firm statistics (Kraler and Reichel 2011), it has long been clear to migration scholars that clandestine movement towards Europe via land and sea is small relative to other means of irregular entry and residence. Spain’s latest census of immigrants, published in 2007, shows that less than one per cent of those entering Spain since 1990 have done so by means of irregular boat migration (Reher et al 2008:63). Instead the majority of Europe’s irregular migrants are visa overstayers – something even recognised by Frontex, the young EU border agency of which more will be said in subsequent chapters.⁶ In the West African case, moreover, regional mobility still predominates over intercontinental migration, with so-called “transit states” in North Africa increasingly constituting important destinations in their own right (de Haas 2007; van Moppes and Spaan 2006). The political impact of the “boat people” approaching Europe’s southern borders, in short, greatly surpasses their actual numbers.

Not only are the actual numbers minuscule. Look back only a few decades, and the “illegal immigrant” vanishes from view altogether. In West Africa, migrant illegality is but a recent phenomenon superimposed upon older and larger patterns – including circular migration within West Africa, ancient trade routes across the Sahara and transnational circuits borne of the colonial encounter. Illegality, however, threatens these older patterns. It twists aid priorities, inhibits licit movements and sours regional relations – all the while drawing upon colonial

⁶ One Frontex (2011:32) report pointedly compares detected boat arrivals with the number of unauthorised overstayers of Swedish student visas, which at 12,000 in 2010 are “roughly comparable to the 14,258 detections of illegal sea border-crossing” in that year. The latter figure increased sharply to 71,171 in 2011 (Frontex 2012:14) but still remains small in comparison with overall immigration into EU states, which Eurostat puts at about three million a year (with third-country residents making up just over half of this in 2009). See <http://tinyurl.com/ccocwja>

history and stirring memories from the darkest chapter in West Africa's past, the slave trade ferreting human chattel across the Sahara and the Atlantic.

West African mobility: from *exode* to 'exodus'

The roots of migratory movements between West Africa and Europe can be traced back to the changes wrought by the colonial order. Britain and France, largely dividing the region between them, re-routed movements of people through head taxes, access to education and forced recruitment (Wallerstein 1965). As a result, willing and unwilling workers streamed into coastal cities and cash-crop regions. Along with the cocoa and coffee plantations of the Gold Coast and Côte d'Ivoire, Senegambia's farms proved a magnet for migrant labour, and so-called *navetanes* were recruited from the inland Sahel in a seasonal pattern of *exode* that has continued to this day (Findley and Sow 1998). These changes reinforced an older pattern – West Africa as perhaps the most mobile part of the world's most mobile continent (Bakewell and de Haas 2007). In this context, it makes more sense to speak of human mobility or simply "movement" rather than migration, which carries problematic "sedentarist" assumptions about permanent change of residence while privileging the crossing of administrative boundaries (van Dijk et al 2001).

The freedom to move was never evenly distributed, however. The tension in European colonial projects between the differentiation and incorporation of the colonised Other, identified by Cooper (2005:4), was expressed in varying degrees of access to social and geographical mobility. Mobility had to be earned. While France needed educated local representatives and soldiers for its wars (the *tirailleurs sénégalais*), it also had to exclude, contain and corral its colonial subjects lest they seek material and political equality. In Senegal – the bridgehead for France's colonial expansion and the country in which this thesis begins and ends – the differentiation between citizens and subjects, between western-educated *évolués* and backward *paysans*, was particularly stark; it was also here that this French-imposed dichotomy was most strongly contested by workers in the immediate postwar period (ibid:208). These processes – the simultaneous differentiation and incorporation of colonised peoples, the hierarchised access to social and physical mobility, and the escalating claims of the colonised – have

clear echoes in the workings of the illegality industry fifty years after independence, as will be seen below.

Regional migration triggered ambivalent reactions among European officials (Rain 1999). Movement into towns, plantations and mines unlocked prosperity for the colonisers, yet migrants were also potential troublemakers supposedly bent on escaping their “tribal cages” (Cooper 2002). While this colonial-era unease was picked up in the 1960s by western development agencies and independent West African states seeking to close their newly demarcated borders (Rain 1999), booming European economies urgently needed manpower. Migrants streamed into the old metropoles, among them large contingents of Senegalese heading for France. Here, in embryonic form, appeared the social forms straddling nation-states that in a later generation of scholarship came to be labelled “transnational” (Glick Schiller et al 1995). Such a “double engagement” (Grillo and Mazzucato 2008) with Africa and Europe was exemplified by the Soninké of the Senegal river valley, who maintained parallel ties with their villages and communal Paris *foyers* in identity-forging projects of international migration (Timera 1996).

Then, with the 1970s oil crisis, Europe’s imports of labour migration came to a sudden, brutal end. Stringent entry requirements interrupted family and labour networks, leading to new strategies of mobility – and a first, tentative emergence of migrant illegality as a major theme in Europe as well as in North America.

While Nevins (2002) has explored the “rise of the illegal alien” in the US since this time, Düvell (2008:480) traces the same shift in Europe. From a few scattered mentions since the 1930s, he writes, “clandestine migration” emerged in both discourse and practice from the 1980s in a feedback loop between state enforcement and migrants’ mobility strategies that will become a familiar pattern throughout this thesis:

Only when states issued legislation that declared unwanted immigration illegal and made it punishable *and* introduced technologies (photographs, passports, visas), administrations (immigration authorities) and enforcement procedures (deportation), did migration finally become clandestine.

The oil crisis did not just close off migratory channels to Europe, but also brought hardship for West African nations in the form of soaring debt followed by structural adjustment programmes. In Senegal, Buggenhagen (2011) finds that neoliberal economic policies – including the devaluation of the regional franc CFA currency, still controlled by Paris, in the 1990s – deepened economic strife. Yet as James (2012:21) notes, the presumably global force of neoliberalism has rather different consequences in different settings. In Senegal as elsewhere in West Africa, the new economic climate brought to the fore pre-existing notions of “making do” (*se débrouiller* in French, *góor-góorlu* in Wolof⁷) and a new push for international mobility, regardless of how constrained the “exit option” (Herbst 1990) was now becoming. The result was that two-thirds of households in the Senegalese capital had by 2004 at least one member living abroad (Melly 2010:43). Access to foreign lands became, like in other postcolonial contexts, a source of increased economic polarisation, with Europe rendered as a mythical repository of wealth and transformative power (Gardner 1995:95).

As European migration policies kept changing, so did West African mobility strategies – eventually leading to the appearance of the “boat migrants” with which this thesis is concerned. While Soninké men have had to substitute masculine youth culture for their migratory rite of passage (Jónsson 2008), Senegalese networks of Mourid Muslim traders have thrived by extending their reach to “new” migration countries in southern Europe and further afield (Carter 1997). Other West and Central African groups, such as the transnational Congolese traders studied by MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga (2000), skirt licit and illicit realms in their *bizness* while drawing upon a range of instrumental relations. Such groups have in different ways adapted flexibly to a new, harsher climate of international migration in a dynamic process with deep historical links.

Dakar-Madrid: Spain between emigration and immigration

It is at this historical juncture – when postcolonial migration patterns seized up and neoliberal policies were rolled out – that West African mobilities intersected with the southern European experience, including that of Spain. Belatedly

⁷ The verb *góor-góorlu* (literally, doing one’s best) is based on the word for “man” (*góor*), highlighting the gendered nature of struggling along. See Hann (forthcoming) for a discussion

catching up with the rest of Europe after the end of the Franco era, Spain only went through its “uneasy transition” (Cornelius 2004) from labour exporter to labour importer in the 1980s. In preparation for EU entry in 1986, the Spanish government introduced the country’s first Aliens Law, which involved stringent controls modelled upon those of its northern neighbours (Ferrer Gallardo 2011). This top-down Europeanisation also entailed the fortification of Spain’s southern frontiers. It is no coincidence, as several authors note, that the first reported arrivals of *pateras* or small migrant boats around the Strait of Gibraltar occurred in 1991, the year when Spain joined the Schengen agreement for free movement within the EU and introduced visa requirements for Moroccans (Ferrer Gallardo 2008:136; Belguendouz 2007).

As such clandestine entries from the North African Maghreb multiplied in the 1990s, Brussels and northern European states put pressure on Madrid to step up enforcement (Cornelius 2004). In response, migrant routes were displaced to Morocco’s Mediterranean and Atlantic shores, and smuggling operations grew in sophistication. The origin of the clandestine crossers was also changing, with new groups gradually joining the pioneering Moroccan and Algerian *harragas* or “burners of borders”. Although sub-Saharan migrants had increased in numbers since the early 1990s, most had entered Europe through authorised means, as in the case of the Mourid traders. Then, in what de Haas (2007) calls the “watershed” year of 2000, large numbers of West African migrants started joining their Maghrebi counterparts on sea crossings to Spain and Italy.

Their rather sudden appearance again related to important changes to regional migration dynamics. In the late 1990s Côte d’Ivoire, still a large labour importer, was mired in conflict underpinned by strong nativist sentiments, making life there increasingly difficult for migrant workers. Then, in 2000, violent anti-immigrant riots racked Libya, which had become a magnet for West Africans since Qaddafi started implementing his pan-African policy in the 1990s (ibid). Spain’s economy, meanwhile, was in the midst of a boom. These factors all contributed to the connection of West African, trans-Saharan and Euro-Mediterranean migration circuits – leading to the emergence of a hybrid migration system covering patches of the Sahel, the Maghreb and southern Europe (Collyer 2007).

One key character on this new circuit was the *aventurier*, as French-

speaking West Africans embarking on the overland journey towards Europe call themselves. Bredeloup (2008) traces the ancestry of this figure from its initial appearance on air routes to Paris in the 1970s. Among its precedents are the Sahelian youth, immortalised by Jean Rouch, on a quest to become streetwise “jaguars” in colonial-era Gold Coast⁸; the Congolese fashionistas of the *Sape* movement, some of whom later morphed into the traders encountered by MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga (2000); and urban gangs in Côte d’Ivoire and the Congos, *benguistes* and *bilistes*, embracing the West (*Beng* in Ivoirian slang) and its symbols. These groups shared ideals of masculine bravery, urban street savvy and outward-oriented individualism, which the adventure crystallised in what Bredeloup calls *singularisation*, or a quest for individual emancipation, however dependent upon family funds. In making the task of fending for oneself (*la debrouillardise*) a virtue, Bredeloup suggests, the adventurer role reflects the era of economic freefall and quick-buck opportunities in which it arose – a world where ancient and not-so-ancient journeys of personal discovery and prowess have recombined with the neoliberal mores and closed borders of a new era. On a larger level, the adventure brings into stark relief the contradictory nature of migration and its transformative potential, noted by Gardner (1995) – not only is it an explicit process of transformation and emancipation ambivalently related with the world back “home”, but *control* over this transformation gradually transfers from adventurers to the illegality industry on the journey through the borderlands, as will be seen in this thesis.

The arrival of black Africans in rickety rafts along Spanish coasts became a media spectacle quite unlike that of their North African counterparts of a few years earlier. While adventurers, who usually take years to complete their stepwise overland journeys, see their treks as uphill “climbs”, European authorities by contrast conceptualise them as downhill flows, waves and avalanches. The suitably forceful response to the African “exodus” soon followed. Spain and the EU enlisted North African countries in repatriations and controls, introduced advanced border technology and stepped up patrolling – pushing migrants onto longer and more dangerous routes, including the Canary Islands path (Baldwin-Edwards 2006). Migrants initially set off for this Spanish

⁸ Jean Rouch, *Jaguar*, 1967

archipelago from the coast of Western Sahara, then from Mauritania, Senegal and even Guinea-Bissau as enforcement expanded southwards. By 2006, the Atlantic route was in full swing along a large tranche of the West African coastline.

Spain's response to this newly opened route was swift, as will be seen in the coming chapters. Its first move was to insist it was merely the "gate to Europe" for these migrants – so pushing responsibility to European quarters. In a second move, Spain's Socialist government reached out to West African countries and Morocco, which had been at loggerheads with its conservative predecessor. "Spain has for too long lived with its back against Africa," the prime minister, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, announced on a 2006 visit to Dakar.⁹ Now this historical neglect was swiftly turned into an advantage. Unencumbered by historical baggage in the region, Spain was able to sidestep the colonial legacy even while drawing upon its "politics of difference" (Cooper 2005) and forms of patronage. This uneasy replication of colonial patterns – and the claims-making and disbursement of privileges it entailed – will be a key topic of chapters two and three.

By 2010, the time of most of the field research of this thesis, there was little news from the Spanish front in the "fight against illegal migration": the denouement to the tragic spectacles of 2005 and 2006 was an apparent success story of empty detention centres, clear coasts, job done. Spain's interior minister announced that 2010 had been the best year in a decade for migration control,¹⁰ and the country's "success" was being emulated and envied by its southern European neighbours. But what, except for the deepening economic crisis, was the reason behind this success, and how fragile was the ground on which it was built?

While these questions inform the thesis as a whole, two things need to be made clear from the outset. First, the "Spanish case" concerns the EU's efforts to control migration writ large – and the contradictions bedevilling this larger effort. From 1999 onwards, Gabrielli (2011) notes, Spain went from being a passive recipient of EU dictates to playing an increasingly active and eventually leading role in the forging of a European migration response, as seen in summits from Seville in 2002 to Rabat in 2006 and beyond. In this two-way Europeanisation of

⁹ See <http://www.lavanguardia.com/waplv/51295195398.xml>

¹⁰ See http://videos.lainformacion.com/espana/rubalcaba-2010-ha-sido-el-mejor-ano-de-la-decada-en-la-lucha-contra-la-inmigracion-illegal_aDNrypz09N1gLBx7a8OcG3/

migration policy (*ibid*), the Spanish conservative government's securitarian push was continued from 2004 onwards by the Socialist PSOE with ever greater success, even as the new government embraced a discourse centred on humanitarianism, multi-culturalism and development assistance. This combination of steeliness and a soft touch made Spain a showcase for the EU's so-called "global approach" to migration, launched after the 2005 tragedies at Ceuta and Melilla that were described in my opening vignette above. In this approach, contradictions are rife: it combines repression with rights talk, sutures development aid to policing agreements, and even creates contradictions among its varied methods. Such contradictions suffuse the EU border regime writ large. This is a regime, after all, whose dependence upon repressive policing awkwardly coexists with the political leadership of a Swedish liberal and card-carrying member of Amnesty International (Cecilia Malmström, the EU Commissioner for Home Affairs). It is a regime in which development money is used to "fight migration", ignoring any ethical quandaries as well as evidence that points to *increased* migration as countries "develop".¹¹ And it is a regime that has wilfully fomented the pressure at the EU's land and sea borders by policy – most importantly through carrier sanctions and other "externalisation" measures in non-European countries as well as through the Dublin II regulation of 2003, which requires asylum cases to be processed by the first EU member state the claimant enters. A ground-level perspective on such contradictions in the EU migration regime is at the heart of this thesis.

Second, the "success" on the Spanish front is both partial and imperfect. The relative decline on the westernmost routes into Europe masked the proliferation of entries elsewhere – first at the Greek-Turkish land border in 2010 and then, with the 2011 Arab uprisings, via the older Libya-Italy route towards the island of Lampedusa.¹² Irregular means of entering Europe by air from West Africa and elsewhere also continued apace, albeit at a greater cost to prospective migrants than the boat journey. Even along Spanish overland routes, tensions kept simmering underneath the supposedly closed border, as will be seen in the protests and conflicts of the coming chapters. Crucially, the border's relative "closure" has depended upon political deals that might prove shortlived, not least

¹¹ This is known as the "migration hump" (Martin and Taylor 1996)

¹² On this route, see e.g. Pastore et al (2006)

after the Socialists that negotiated these deals lost power to the conservative Partido Popular in 2011. While PP swiftly sought to differentiate itself from its predecessor by cutting healthcare for irregular migrants and insisting Spain should “stop being the paradise for illegal immigration”, it was also careful to maintain the international policing and “humanitarian” networks detailed in the coming chapters, much like PSOE had since 2004 built on PP’s efforts.¹³ Yet regardless of the changing political winds, the problem runs deeper. Much like in colonial times, when French dominance in Africa failed to embrace the rural hinterland (Cooper 2005:239), the European border regime cannot control the borderlands despite the dazzling surveillance machinery and innovative policing networks at its disposal. The state’s “monopolisation of the legitimate means of movement” (Torpey 2000) is not just a recent historical phenomenon – it is also a maddeningly ambitious undertaking that cannot but fail in its task of controlling thousands of kilometres of coastlines and terrestrial borders.

The research frontier of clandestine migration

As European officials discovered the clandestine circuit in the 2000s, so did academics. Irregular migration, Portes (1978:469) once observed, “is one of those issues in which the interests of scholars and of government agencies converge” – a situation that, de Genova (2002:421) asserts, is not much different a few decades on. Yet while irregular migration across the US-Mexico border has long been a vast field of inquiry, the Europe-Africa frontline was, until the Ceuta and Melilla tragedies, virtually unexplored. In the words of one Moroccan academic, irregular migration was an “empty field” on which migration researchers descended in the hope of quick data for articles, theses and reports. In Senegal, Italy and Spain, the pattern was repeated: here was a wide-open research frontier, an academic Klondike where any early studies were bound to attract disproportionate attention from funders, editors and research committees.

The academic pioneers at this research frontier, much like the migrant adventurers they studied, rehearsed patterns going back to the colonial era.

¹³ Rafael Hernando, PP spokesman, cited by *El País*:
http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2012/08/07/actualidad/1344354676_754658.html

Migration had in colonial times been framed as a “problem” to be solved by decision-makers and scholars alike. This was evident in concerns with “detribalisation” in the African migration literature (Richards 1939; Schapera 1947) that were, in anthropology at least, eventually supplanted by the more complex conceptualisations of social change espoused by the “Manchester school” (Cohen 1969; Epstein 1958; Mitchell 1969). The almost ritual invocation of these rural-urban studies by generations of anthropologists contrasts with their scarcer impact on research. As Gardner and Osella (2004:xi) note, migration studies are still affected by a “northern bias” that privileges international over internal migration and western “destination” settings over so-called “sending” regions. The recent fascination with the clandestine migrant is but a poignant example of this larger pattern.

The framing of clandestine migration as a problem ripe for piecemeal “solutions” was in part underpinned by funding from European research bodies and the patronage of supranational institutions such as the ever-present International Organization for Migration. As a result, many early studies of the clandestine circuit were short, sketchy affairs lacking ethnographic grounding, historical depth or critical distance. Beneath this onward rush of policy-relevant research, however, flowed a quieter current of in-depth studies. Anthropology arrived late at this research frontier, much as it had arrived late to the topic of migration writ large (Brettell 2003), and the best ethnographically informed studies have instead largely come from its sister disciplines of sociology, political science and geography. These studies, mostly in French, have variously focused on migrants’ living strategies and networks en route (Escoffier 2006; Pian 2009); explored the humanitarian consequences of clandestine migration (Albahari 2006; Carling 2007a and 2007b); analysed it through regional and historicised accounts of movements across the Sahara (Brachet 2009; Bredeloup and Pliez 2005; Collyer 2007); or studied the economic, cultural and gendered contexts that inform the decision to migrate (Bouilly 2008a and 2008b; Melly 2011).

Yet such pioneering research, for all its value, fed into a larger stream of concern with clandestine migration that this thesis fundamentally seeks to interrogate. Through the aggregate efforts of academics, policymakers, journalists, police and aid workers, the social category of “illegal immigrant” was taking on an increasingly definite and naturalised shape across Europe. The *clandestins*,

ilegales and boat people had, in a few short decades, become a major preoccupation of politicians, a source of funding and concern for border guards and aid workers, and a fount of stories and data for journalists and academics. Amid this overproduction of knowledge on a minuscule contemporary phenomenon, it could be asked why studying it can at all be justified any longer. The next section will try to answer this question by defining the research object not as the “illegal immigrant”, but as the industry in which he is produced.

The illegality industry as research object

Several writers have sounded a note of caution on the research topic of irregular migration. De Genova (2002) says that the act of constituting undocumented migrants and “the migrant experience” as objects of study is a form of epistemic violence, reducing a wide array of people to an ethnographic gaze beholden to a state-centric vision. A standard anthropological perspective “from below” is not enough: rather, we need studies from “above” and “within” that explore the legal and historical construction of illegality. Agier (2011:68) similarly argues, in the case of encamped refugees, that studying these *qua* refugees “would mean confusing the object of research with that of the intervener who creates this space and this category” while “leaving out of the field of vision the humanitarian government that establishes, defines, controls and fixes the spaces of life of the categories that it simultaneously recognises and creates”.

Following these leads, my objective is to explore ethnographically how clandestine migration has been constituted as a field of intervention and knowledge-gathering over the past decades. In this field, careers are made, networks created, knowledge and imagery circulated, and money channelled in increasing amounts. Why this obsession with clandestine migration into Europe by sea and land? Where is this obsession produced, and what are its effects? Why and how has a range of sectors – aid and media organisations, academic and defence industries, African and European security forces – become implicated in assessing, quantifying and controlling irregular migratory flows in recent years? To answer these questions we need research on the configuration of the illegality industry, not just on the experiences of those moving within it. This thesis does

so, however, largely from an oblique angle where the migrants themselves often provide the analytical and narrative push. The aim is to bring into a single narrative and analytical frame the logics of the illegality industry's three distinct yet intermeshed fields – policing and patrolling, caring and rescuing, and observing and knowing. These functions largely correspond to three key sectors treated in the thesis: the border guards, especially the Spanish Guardia Civil; the aid workers, in particular the Red Cross; and the media and academia.

It creating this frame, there are of necessity several things that this study explicitly does *not* attempt. First of all, it is not an ethnographic study of the migratory adventure from the travellers' perspective, and little space will be spent on explicating the complex cultural and social determinants informing the decision to migrate. Instead, the focus is on the system that makes these travellers observable, interventionable, controllable – and, as migrants themselves insist, profitable. However, in my research on this system, certain strong beneficiaries and co-producers of migrant illegality also end up on the ethnographic margins. First among these groups are European employers, whose structural need for cheap and unorganised labour is usually seen as the reason why clandestine migration flows are allowed to persist (Portes 1978). Next are the smuggling (and trafficking) networks. Widely labelled “mafias” by politicians, these are nowhere near as organised as such a term implies – yet their business, which grows alongside tougher controls, generates important revenues. So do the security and defence companies handling migrant detention and deportation or developing new solutions in the fight against migratory flows. While both smugglers and private businesses will be considered in the thesis, their presence is secondary to its main concerns. So, too, is the world of politics and policymaking. Amply studied elsewhere, the swiftly developing EU policy environment on migration will be touched upon only tangentially in the thesis.¹⁴ Here, Feldman's (2012) valuable recent ethnography of Europe's “migration apparatus” ought ideally to be read in tandem with this study. Focusing on indirect policy conversations across disjointed sites, Feldman explores the growth of a nebulous, transnational migration management apparatus (in Foucault's sense of *dispositif*) that produces a profound indifference towards the migrant it targets.

¹⁴ For recent studies of Spanish migration policy, see Serón et al (2011) and Gabrielli (2011)

These conscious omissions have allowed me to focus on the “frontline” rather than directly on Europe’s dispersed policymaking. On this frontline, the “illegal immigrant” is situated at the confluence of several vectors of attraction and attention. Put in a simplified manner, for the police, clandestine migrants are of concern as a source of risk; for the media, they represent newsworthiness and drama; for aid workers, they are of interest because of their assumed vulnerability; while their marginality renders them worthy of study in academia. From this frontline perspective, clandestine migrants appear not just as bureaucratic objects of indifference of the kind Feldman (*ibid*) describes, but also as a source of fascination and preoccupation out of all proportion to the numbers. This obsession with clandestine migration is forged in a feedback loop between the patrols and pictures of the frontline and the politics of European capitals, where clandestine migration is a vote-winner in the battle Feldman identifies as “right versus right”, or neo-nationalists against neoliberals. This spiral of obsession with illegality at the border is, in fact, essential to the migration policy machinery and its production of indifference, since it ensures the political, financial and media clout needed for the sector to flourish.

Feldman (*ibid*:188) distinguishes between the “enduring (but less tangible) rationales and processes generative of an apparatus” and the “tangible (but less enduring) objects and locations symptomatic of an apparatus”. While I agree with his call for an anthropology that does not limit itself to studying direct connections in discrete sites, I maintain that Europe’s evolving border regime is not just based on “intangible” processes but is constituted through social, communicative and financial networks reaching from distant border posts to policymakers’ offices while depending on the physicality of deserts and sea borders, the geography of offshore enclaves and isles, and precarious but indispensable supplies of infrastructure and manpower. Following Mosse’s (2004:13) questioning of the policy-practice nexus, I argue that the materialities, geographies and social configurations “on the ground” are not simply temporary manifestations of a predefined discursive system but rather function as key constitutive arenas. By moving away from the nebulous world of the policy apparatus and focusing on the interfaces where the border machinery rubs against specific places, people and structures – what Tsing (2005) terms “friction” – we can hopefully produce an ethnographic account that spans the overarching logics

of Europe's response to clandestine migration and those crucial “grains of dust that jam the machinery” (Agier 2011:7).

It is to highlight the economic, material and productive aspects of controlling clandestine migration that I call the varied sectors working on clandestine migration an “illegality industry”. Some of these sectors are, literally, industries, such as the companies building surveillance systems, and make tidy profits out of migration controls. Yet while profiteering from migration is important – not least in migrants’ understandings of their condition, as will be seen in the coming chapters – “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 labour. 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 produced and forged in concrete, material encounters; and it allows for the consideration of a dispersed value chain encompassing a range of sectors.¹⁵ To analyse these aspects, I draw upon the actor-network theory of Bruno Latour and the dynamic nominalism of Ian Hacking, which will now be dealt with briefly in turn.

Actor-network theory provides this thesis with an implicit framework for grasping the emergence of a system of migration control through interactions between materialities, machines and people. It approaches human and nonhuman groups as “actants” that, in the process of overcoming resistances among them, generate apparently solid systems (Law 1992; Callon 1986) through what Latour (1993) labels the work of purification and translation. This frame allows us to move beyond two of the scientific tendencies Latour (*ibid*:67) warns against: “sociologisation” or studying people-among-themselves and “discursivisation” or the analytical privileging of language and signification.¹⁶ It also allows for shifting the focus away from the two poles of migration studies – the (political

¹⁵ Aware of the disparate nature of the sectors included under the “industry” label, I will however use “border regime” when talking specifically about the sectors involved in border controls

¹⁶ Anthropological discourse studies in a Foucauldian vein include Ferguson (1990) and Escobar (1995), both early sources of inspiration for this thesis

science) perspective that privileges policy and the (ethnographic) insistence on a grounded “migrants’ perspective” – towards the material, virtual and social interfaces of the illegality industry. From this vantage point, the fences, patrol boats, radars, TV cameras and rescue equipment can be seen as “actants” in a network or “collective” made up of human and nonhuman links. The “illegal immigrants” here function as key connectors or “tokens” in the illegality industry; their circulation is the language and currency of the network.

While actor-network theory provides the scaffold for my principal topic, the emergence and consolidation of the illegality industry, my secondary theme – this system’s production of migrant illegality – needs further theoretical elaboration. The clandestine travellers are not passive objects in circulation, as the “token” perspective above seems to imply, but actively participate in their making as migrants. To explore these dynamics, I will draw upon Ian Hacking’s (1986) notion of “making up people”. In Hacking’s take on dynamic nominalism, scientific and policy categories such as that of “illegal immigrant” are not simply discursive constructs but help create “new ways to be a person”. Hacking’s point, succinctly put, is that “[w]ays of classifying human beings interact with the human beings who are classified” (1999:31). The “interactive classifications” of social science and public policy feed back into the lived experiences of people so classified (the “looping effect”) through what Hacking terms the “matrix” of the social and material setting (*ibid*:10). The matrix or network to be explored ethnographically in the coming chapters is what I label the illegality industry; the interactive classification is that of “illegal immigrant”.

A note of caution is in order. While both Hacking and Latour go beyond “constructivist” perspectives, both largely concentrate on the creation of social categories through scientific “engines of discovery”. The making of “illegal immigrants”, however, depends on the more piecemeal endeavour of policing, assisting and observing such travellers in Europe’s extensive borderlands. This limits the degree of interaction between classification and people classified, and means that other theoretical frameworks are also needed to understand the production and productivity of migrant illegality. Most importantly, I will draw on Willen’s (2007a:10) “critical phenomenology of illegality” that investigates the “embodied, experiential consequences of being illegal”. The challenge is, as Robert Desjarlais has said, to link “the phenomenal and the political” (quoted in

ibid:12), something I will do by moving along different scales: from policy and journalistic discourses to the blips on screens in radar control rooms and a policeman's firm grip around the shoulders of a rescued migrant.

If actor-network theory and dynamic nominalism allow for a grasp of two key features of the illegality industry – the emergence of a system and the production of illegality – its third feature, the dispersed “value chain” or the distinct domains in which illegality is produced, processed, “packaged” and presented, involves further analytical and not least methodological considerations.

The extended field site

How ought one attempt to study a complex system stretching from Sahelian border posts to European control rooms without its being clearly and fully present in any of these places? While views on a nebulous transnational system are always partial, as Haraway (1988) reminds us, a standard anthropological single-sited approach can add to the frustration in its privileging of the “local”. Aware of this challenge in studying processes associated with “globalisation”, anthropologists have come to embrace multi-sited research. In migration studies in particular, researchers have for many years heeded Marcus's (1995) call to “follow the people”, especially along the US-Mexico border (Alvarez 1995; Kearney 1998; cf Rouse 2002). Multi-sited studies have transcended the anthropological focus on a single, locatable community, yet problems remain. What Glick Schiller and Wimmer (2003:598) term methodological nationalism – ignorance or naturalisation of the nation-state and the territorial limitation of objects of study – is subtly reproduced in the “community focus” of many multi-sited studies. Added to this is the ethical problem identified by Wilding (2007): while the anthropologist flits between places, the “informants” remain anchored to specific places and identities. Hage (2005) adds further practical and epistemological problems. To him, multi-sited fieldwork implies futile (and exhausting) attempts at studying the relation between each instance of a transnational “community” and its corresponding “site”. In sum, multi-sited ethnography still seems tied to community and locality even in its promise of abandoning them. Or, as Hannerz (2003) notes, the anthropological ideal of

immersion and “being there” lives on in the multi-sited world of “being there... and there... and there!” We could ask, along with Latour (1993:116): “Is anthropology forever condemned to be reduced to territories, unable to follow networks?”

One solution is to do away with anthropology’s reliance on locality altogether. This is the approach pursued by Feldman (2012:184), who argues for a “nonlocal ethnography” that goes beyond the traditional anthropological privileging of “evidence obtained through direct sensory contact”. In this, he draws upon the earlier efforts of Xiang Biao (2007), whose study of mobile Indian IT workers made a strong case for a focus on intangible social processes rather than cultural, linguistic and place-bound embeddedness. While it gains ethnographic reach, however, such nonlocal ethnography loses some of the “thick description” so cherished by anthropologists – something Xiang (*ibid*:117) himself acknowledges in highlighting the lack of a “flavour of the research sites and a sense of ‘being there’” in his excellent monograph. The anthropologist, instead of being-there or being there-and-there, is suddenly appearing everywhere yet nowhere.

There is, I believe, another option: what I would like to call the “extended field site” in a nod to the extended case method and situational analysis of the Manchester school (van Velsen 1967; Burawoy 2000). Exemplified by Gluckman’s (2002) seminal work, this approach brought groups that previously had been considered as separate – tribesmen and colonisers – into an analytical conversation that reached well beyond the confines of the geographically bounded villages that it was anthropology’s lot to study. An extended field site approach takes this focus on agonistic social interfaces and repeats it across diverse locales. Instead of multiplying sites or sidestepping localities, this rather involves a transversal relation to locales in which “the field” is not conceptualised within narrow geographical boundaries. In this, it follows attempts to move away from anthropology’s “spatialisation of difference” in “bounded fields” towards a methodological focus on “shifting locations” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997) without approaching this as a multi-sited proliferation of field spaces or a nonlocal ethnography. In a similar fashion to Hage’s (2005) “neo-Kulan” approach of focusing on transnational relations rather than their local embeddedness, I treat my dispersed research settings as a single site. The extended field site, as “one

site, many locales”, allows for the tracking, tracing and mapping of my primary unit of analysis, the *system* of the transnational illegality industry and the modalities of migranthood it produces.

This approach also draws upon the interface analysis familiar from studies of development (Long 2001). Each chapter of this thesis explores one distinct social interface where specific modalities of migrant illegality are produced in an encounter between workers and their target population. These encounters replicate across border towns, enclaves and retention centres in a pattern involving the same or similar actors: the Guardia Civil, the Red Cross, NGO workers, outsourced African police, story-hunting journalists, researchers and, of course, migrants. In reaching across such repetitive encounters, the aim is neither to flatten the account of the illegality industry, nor to essentialise and compartmentalise distinct subject positions, as interface analysis is sometimes alleged to do (Rossi 2006). The purpose is rather to explore how each interface uneasily and imperfectly superimposes a new supra-geographical function on towns, roads and enclaves in the borderlands and to inquire into the production of new subject positions *through* the encounter.

Tracing such productive encounters has largely meant doing fieldwork on the move, switching between sites of departure and deportation (Dakar and Bamako, the Senegal-Mauritania border), ports of entry and reception (the Canaries and Andalusian coasts), points of blockage en route (Ceuta and Melilla, Oujda and Tangier in Morocco) and command and control centres (Frontex in Warsaw, Guardia Civil Comandancias in Spain). The mobility of the researcher here remains as problematic as in the “multi-sited” case discussed by Wilding (2007) – yet this is itself part of my object of study. The paradox is that the border regime’s attempts to curb human movement have created vast amounts of corporeal, financial, object and informational mobility (Urry 2007). To sum up a recurring, albeit implicit, theme: the illegality industry’s workers increase what Kaufmann (cited in *ibid*:37) terms “motility”, or the individual potential for movement, at the expense of the travellers they target. In an ideological gesture, the industry masks the mobility it produces while leaving “illegal immigrants” stigmatised by theirs even as they increasingly find themselves immobile or moved by police on their journeys north.

My methodological approach also draws upon journalism. As Malkki (1997) has noted, anthropology has mainly been concerned with durable, culturally transmitted experiences to the detriment of the transitory, dramatic events commonly treated by journalists. Clandestine migration is defined by such events, created and mythologised by the media in collusion with politicians, police, humanitarians, smugglers and migrants – as exemplified by the introductory vignettes above. While a critique of this spectacularisation is key to my thesis, I do follow Malkki in using the investigative end of the journalistic spectrum to rethink the benefits of fieldwork on “unrepresentative”, dramatic and staged events. As an anthropologist, I enter an overcrowded research arena where fieldwork is indeed no longer “what it used to be” (Faubion and Marcus 2009) as I follow in the footsteps not only of the academic pioneers at the research frontier but also of NGO workers, government fact-finders, policemen and media professionals. In this crowded field, the investigative, intrepid reporters stand out. Some of these, such as Fabrizio Gatti (2007) and Ali Lmrabet, have followed migrants on their clandestine journeys; others, such as Naranjo (2006 and 2009) and Del Grande (2007 and 2010), have investigated boat tragedies through long-term engagement with migrants and officials. These immersive, investigative approaches resemble and sometimes surpass what anthropologists can achieve. A critical engagement with such efforts has therefore been a key part of my methodological approach – involving, for instance, “journalistic” persistence in negotiating access and contacts, a focus on dramatic events, and attempts to “follow the money” in the industry. These methods have been complemented by more fully “anthropological” participative fieldwork, although my intention throughout has been to work in as interdisciplinary a manner as the border professionals themselves.

Ethics and access

Fieldwork on the illegality industry also involves ethical and practical quandaries. The risk remains of repeating precisely what I set out to criticise: the extraction of value, stories and time from captive and immobilised “informants”, and their essentialisation in the process. My approach, however problematic, has here been to see migrants as co-analysts of the system in which they find themselves

stranded. The LSE and ASA ethics guidelines have been adhered to in my research, and consent has of course been sought and given among all concerned groups, from reception camp authorities to border guards and migrants, with utmost care taken not to divulge any information between these groups.

Access has been a major concern, as is to be expected in the secretive world of clandestine migration. Migrants resisted participation for reasons that will be amply clear in chapter one. Coplan (2001:83), encountering such resistance in another sensitive border setting, notes how social enquiry has “become a form of *surveillance*, the eye whose pitiless, secretive gaze the marginalised seek instinctively to avoid”. This “pitiless gaze” was, in my research, also at times avoided by the master gazers themselves – the border guards. The “state” regularly resists being studied, as Abrams (1988) noted long ago, and more so in the murky world of border controls. While Frontex and the Spanish Guardia Civil refused access to frontline officers, the latter force was however surprisingly welcoming in authorising a large number of visits that nonetheless took place under rather “controlled” conditions. My extended field site approach has allowed me to offset access limitations and potential conflicts of interest in one place with renewed access, thanks to “snowball sampling”, in another.

More importantly, these problems of access and ethics are a key part of my study in their own right. While the academics remain on the sidelines in the following chapters, the “I” of the text allows for a certain scrutiny of the role of the researcher with its doubts, tensions and mixed allegiances. For the “I”, one might substitute mentally “the anthropologist”: one minor type of worker in the illegality industry.

Thesis outline

The thesis begins at journey’s end, among Senegalese youth who embarked for the Canaries during the boat migration boom only to be swiftly sent back home.

The resentment among the “repatriates” in **Chapter one** provides a window onto the inequities and bizarre workings of the illegality industry that rolled into Dakar in 2006. The repatriates’ fruitless hunt for attention from the rich visitors descending on their neighbourhoods provides a privileged, if oblique and partial, view on the logics informing Europe’s “fight against illegal migration”. In this industry, the chapter argues, the repatriates have been put to work as human deterrents, as a source of income for European and local organisations, and as a fount of journalistic and academic material. The repatriates’ lingering resentment throws light on how their experiences are being used in an economics of affliction encompassing Spanish police, European funders, aid organisations, academics and the media. In this absurd aid economy, repatriates come to collaborate – as self-identified *clandestins* and repatriates – in their own making up as “illegal migrants”.

The perspective shifts radically in **Chapter two**, which moves away from the trickle-down economics of Dakar’s aid world and instead casts an eye on the big money in the illegality industry. Largely thanks to boat migration, a Euro-African border is being constructed at the southern edge of the EU. This border is manifested in a set of virtual and social interfaces – control centres, sea patrols, radar systems and policing networks encompassing West African and European forces. This regime, the chapter argues, renders clandestine migration as a source of “risk” both to human life and the European external border. In manufacturing such a risk that can be managed, visualised and controlled, the border regime creates a depoliticised security threat from which it can then extract maximum symbolic and financial value. I label this process a double securitisation of migration.

Chapter three shifts the focus to the African policing partners’ crucial role in the “fight against illegal migration”. By following migrants and those who police them on the overland journey, the chapter explores adventurers’ gradual transformation en route. In the borderlands, it is argued, the “illegal migrant” is conjured in increasing degrees of otherness, in ways not neatly captured by Hacking’s dynamic nominalism. Instead the chapter draws upon a phenomenological approach to illegality that considers the somatisation of despair and “deportability” (de Genova 2002) among adventurers buffeted by border controls. In toggling between the gift economy instituted between Spain and

African forces and the detection strategies this economy enables, the chapter explores the disconcerting production of illegality in Senegal, Mauritania, Mali and Morocco: the migrant here alternately appears as a hunted prey and a ghostlike, prohibited presence.

Chapter four considers the final crossing into European space and the two-faced border spectacle unfolding there – humanitarian rescues at sea versus the hidden show of force at the land borders of Ceuta and Melilla. By focusing on the overlaps between these regimes and their differing degrees of visibility, the chapter draws out the gaps, contradictions and excesses that define the border encounter. It takes as its starting point Agamben's (1998) much-cited notion of "bare life" to see how this life interacts with frontline workers in the crossing, in particular with Spain's "guardian angels" and gatekeepers, the Guardia Civil. The realities of the border encounter, the chapter concludes, cannot easily be encapsulated in Agamben's figure of *homo sacer* or in the spectacular imagery emanating from the border.

In **Chapter five**, set in the Spanish enclave of Ceuta, the adventurers have finally entered Europe. Or so they think – in fact, they soon find themselves stranded indefinitely in this tiny territory hemmed in between the sea and the fence, transformed into an offshore processing zone similar to Australia's "Pacific solution" of island detention. The chapter follows the stranded migrants as they launch a protest against their captivity in the summer of 2010. By challenging the spatial order of their confinement in a reception centre at the very edge of Ceuta, the protesters give a novel, distressing twist to the process of migrant racialisation they are already being subjected to. As their protest echoes down Ceuta's shopping street, they swiftly go from being infantilised as *negritos* by locals to embodying the role of the *negro* already glimpsed at the fences and on the high seas: wild, dangerous and out of control.

Chapter six steps back from the melee and analyses the stranded migrants' predicament in more detail. It shows how they are subject to a politics of time in Ceuta and Melilla, wherein their months or years stuck in limbo constitute, to the Spanish authorities, capital withheld from the presumed "mafias" – and, in the end, from the migrants themselves. The chapter considers the overlapping time-space regimes framing migrants' enclave life, ranging from the brief, equivocal pauses in their speech to the schedules of the reception camps

and the abstract uses of withheld time and time for surveillance. Stuck in an arbitrary landscape of time, migrants have little choice but to reach for absurd or desperate solutions, as seen in Ceuta's 2010 protest and the grace of God they keep invoking.

Chapter seven heads back south and into another confrontation sparked by the EU's border regime. Transnational activists are increasingly converging on the Euro-African border, and the chapter follows one such group on a “caravan for the freedom of movement” from Bamako to Dakar in early 2011. The activists, like the protesters in Ceuta, soon face a problem: the absence of a clear target and a concrete border at which to protest. In the absence of this, they instead lean on the stranded adventures of Bamako, deportees sent back from Algeria via the desert, as a unifier for action. In asserting the existence of victims of the invisible and diffuse border regime, the activists – like the academics, NGOs and journalists encountered en route – play into a politics of trauma that renders some migrants as better victims than others. Their “borderwork” (Rumford 2008), it is argued, dovetails with that of the illegality industry despite the best of intentions. Everyone tries to conjure a perpetrator of the violence of the border, yet this perpetrator remains frustratingly absent. As a result, the strategies for dealing with this faceless threat become increasingly absurd among border guards, protesters, migrants and aid workers alike.

These interfaces reveal the work-in-progress of the illegality industry in all its contradictions. They show how migrant illegality is not a unitary, pre-given category (Garcés-Mascareñas 2010): only by considering its contradictory and often surreal manifestations can we arrive at a full and complex understanding of the production of “illegal immigrants” at the emerging Euro-African border. They also highlight how the business of bordering Europe is a fraught and, in the end, absurd enterprise. The industry, feeding on the illegality it is meant to control, only produces more and increasingly bizarre forms of it. From the world of precarious guest workers has emerged, over barely two decades, a confusing and distressing array of migratory phenomena – wooden fishing boats packed to the brim; migrants marooned on tiny islands; bodies clinging to barbed wire or sinking on their inflatable rafts. The conclusion will reflect further on this absurdity, and what can be learnt from it.

Finally, a brief note on the style and format of the thesis. Somewhat sidestepping the long debate emerging from anthropology's crisis of representation (Clifford and Marcus 1986), I have followed a "public" or "popularised" anthropological approach (Borofsky 2011; MacClancy and McDonaugh 1996) for the sake of potential wider readability. This has meant foregrounding the narratives arising from the ethnographic material rather than the theoretical debates informing this material, with frequent quotations and, occasionally, rather stylised representations of key characters in the chapters. The names of these characters, referred to by first name or nickname, are all anonymised. While quotes are usually verbatim, they are sometimes based on fieldnotes written as soon as possible after an encounter. This applies to many discussions with migrants, as well as to quotes from Ceuta's migrant reception camp. Regarding referencing, the online links in footnotes have not been given a "last accessed" date since this would clutter up the text: they were all last accessed in October 2012.

1

Mohammadou and the migrant-eaters

Mother Mercy arrived one hour late. Her car stopped on the sandy Senegalese backstreet right outside the doorway, she stepped out of the passenger seat and strode into the bare, ramshackle locales of her collective for women who had lost their sons to boat migration. A crisp black dress laced with silvery strands flowed round her as she sashayed past, talking loudly into her mobile; on her wrist glittered a large watch. “Ah, excusez-moi,” she said, switching from Wolof on the phone to French, momentarily addressing me as I waited behind a wooden table in the corner. “The traffic jams...” She sat down and snapped her fingers to command the attention of her assistant, a rotund woman behind a rickety counter at the back of the room. The assistant promptly brought her calendar, whose pages already spoke of visits to France, Italy and Spain: Mother Mercy was a busy, busy woman. She flipped through the pages with one hand as she clutched her mobile with the other, giving orders and managing appointments in an executive stream of Wolof and French while jotting down the details of another trip abroad.

It was at this point that I realised something strange was happening in the world of clandestine migration.

Middle-aged women in flowing reds, greens and yellows trickled into the office, went up to the counter and gave 525 franc CFA (\$1) to the assistant, daily debt payments in the micro-credit scheme Mother Mercy had set up for the members of her Dakar-based collective. Many of them had, like her, lost a son to the waves. A

poster on the wall next to the counter trumpeted *Non aux pirogues de la mort!* “Say no to the boats of death.”

Eventually Mother Mercy hung up and slid a brochure across the table. “Our collective started its work with our sons losing their lives.” She had switched to a soft, maternal voice that sounded as though it had been through hundreds of rehearsals. As it turned out, this was indeed the case. Her outfit had been fêted by journalists and politicians from London to Las Palmas since the fateful days of 2006, when fishing boats packed with migrants had departed from Senegal for the faraway Canary Islands. “Mother Mercy”, as the media soon insisted on calling her because of her brave “battle against migration”, had graced the screens and pages of the BBC and France2, *Glamour* and *Elle* magazines, the Washington Post, France’s *Libération* and *Le Monde*, Spain’s *El País*... the list was endless.¹ She flicked through the brochure detailing the collective’s good works, temporarily ignoring the incessant ring of her mobile. “Our campaigns have put a stop to illegal migration,” she said, despite the “meagre means” at their disposal. “We have to work hard to *fixer les jeunes* (keep the youth in place).”

The media and politicians had praised her efforts to “keep the youth in place” through so-called *sensibilisation* (sensitisation), awareness-raising campaigns about the “risks of illegal migration”. Her work was “more effective than all the warships and planes sent to the Atlantic Ocean by the European Union”, the BBC had said in 2006. If so, Mother Mercy was a victim of her own success. By 2010, the boats had stopped departing and funding was slowly leeching away. “We have to continue our work,” she said. “If we do sensitisation here, people just depart from elsewhere,” which meant they had to spread the message across the whole country, even over the whole region! “*La sensibilisation n’a pas de deadline*,” she said distractedly while typing a number into her mobile, then calling. My brief audience was over.

I went outside and called Mohammadou. “Tell him you got the number from me,” Mother Mercy had said, scribbling it on a piece of paper. Soon enough Mohammadou came ambling towards the office. He was the president of the local association of young repatriates from Spain, but cut a poor figure for such a lofty

¹ Other scholars have written about Mother Mercy’s association and its media impact, but I am leaving out these specific academic references in the online version of the thesis to safeguard anonymity; her moniker has been modified for the same reason.

title in his loose jeans, plastic sandals and old jacket, a smudgy cap resting on his head. He said a brief, unsmiling hello and then led me into the sand-swept lanes of his neighbourhood. Yongor, as I will call it, was a fishing village swallowed by the urban sprawl of Dakar that had been particularly hard hit by boat migration. It was from here that Mohammadou and his friends had once set off and it was here that they now lingered, jobless and immobile, nursing the wound of their one-time deportation.²

“What can you offer us?” Mohammadou blurted out as we walked towards the beach, the stale air carrying smells of putrid fish and gasoline. “And what do you want?” The order of his questions seemed topsy-turvy, but it was so for a reason: he had seen too many visitors already. On a corner, two women in bright robes squatted next to a cart piled high with mangoes, children scuttling round them in the pale, hot sand. Walking past, I tried to think of suitable replies, but had none to offer him.

At the family home of Ali, a brawny repatriate in his twenties, the crash of the waves whispered through narrow lanes whose walls were scrawled with the phone numbers of neighbours’ relatives in Spain and France. Ali wedged a wooden bench into the sand and Mohammadou sat down and got his notebook out. He flicked through page after page of names, numbers and emails of all those who had come to see his repatriates’ association. The contact details of journalists, researchers, students, NGO workers, even an EU delegate adorned the pages. He had never heard back from any of them. “A lot of people have passed by here... But every time they go back to Europe, there’s nothing.” Ali nodded and shared out his only cigarette, Mohammadou drawing the last bit of smoke out of its dying embers. “*Ils mangent sur nous,*” Mohammadou said, his mouth twisting into what would soon become a familiar frown. “They eat from us.” Even the aid organisations ate their money, while the repatriates got nothing. “I am the president and I have to ask him for a cigarette, do you think this is normal?” Mohammadou said angrily, nodding towards his friend.

The repatriates had had enough. They did not want to speak to researchers or reporters any longer. They felt embittered and angry with the fact-finders and

² I will use “repatriation” rather than the legally speaking more correct “deportation” or “removal” here, following former migrants’ usage and the generic term (*repatriación*) applied to their return (*devolución*) under Spain’s Aliens Law (BoE 2009; EMN 2010)

delegations – not to mention with the interlocutor of these *toubabs* or white people in Yongor, Mother Mercy. “Why did she send you to us?” Mohammadou asked with a twisted smile. It was a rhetorical question that was to become a standing joke during the coming year. “Because you don’t bring any money. If you had come in a four-wheel drive, she would have invited you to her house.”

The birth of a tragedy

The wave of clandestine migration hit the shores of Senegal and the front pages of European newspapers in the summer of 2006. The sudden sight of brashly painted wooden boats groaning under the weight of dishevelled Africans had come as a shock and surprise to the news-reading public and Spanish police alike, but the signs and premonitions had been there. The previous year, sub-Saharan migrants stuck in Morocco had launched the infamous mass attempt to climb the fences surrounding Ceuta and Melilla. The ensuing Moroccan crackdown pushed clandestine routes southwards: first to the Western Sahara, then to the desert state Mauritania along the Atlantic coast, and finally southwards to Senegal and beyond. A direct route had suddenly opened up from West Africa to Europe, and youth from Senegal and further afield saw their chance to hitch a ride. In 2006 almost 32,000 people landed in the Canary Islands, 1,500 km of rough Atlantic to the northwest of Dakar (MIR 2011).

“This is the big chance, we mustn’t lose it,” young men reasoned in Senegal’s seaside fishing hamlets, according to Ousmane, a theatre producer and community leader. “It was generalised madness.” Women scrambled their savings together to finance the trip; young men bartered their family belongings. The captains of the boats became sudden heroes, and women sang their praise. Everyone wanted to leave on *mbèkè mi*, the Wolof term for the journey that literally means “hitting your head”. “At that time, everyone talked of the forecast,” Ousmane recalled: people checked obsessively for the best weather conditions in which to depart. Rumours were spreading. Spain wanted more migrants to come and work! The expressway to Europe was open! Fishermen-turned-smugglers loaded their large wooden canoes with cans of petrol, bottles of water and supplies of dry food. They consulted the *marabouts* (Muslim religious

leaders), collected the money for the “tickets” and set their GPS for Tenerife, and off they went, boatload after boatload of willing workers. *Barça walla barzakh* was their motto: “Barcelona or the afterlife”. Men who hesitated to join in the boat craze were ridiculed as effeminate and weak of will.³ People said *jéleen gaal yi, jigeen yi jél avion yi*, Ousmane reminisced. “Take the boat, [only] women take the plane!”

After the mania came the fall. Police detained and imprisoned those who had been forced to return while the death count added up at high sea. Relatives’ phone calls were left unanswered. Boats disappeared with their human cargo, never to be heard of again. Thousands died in the waves; no one knows exactly how many.

Mohammadou’s fishing village was a pioneering terrain for *mbéké mi*, and its youth suffered worse knocks than those of other coastal communities. While some local *convoyeurs* (smugglers) and *marabouts* had made good money out of the boat craze, losses were adding up across the neighbourhood. Wives, children and parents were left bereaved, and often bereft of income. Walking along the lanes of Yongor, Mohammadou invoked the dead at every turn. “Do you see her?” he said as we passed a woman in her thirties carrying a bucketful of goods on her head. “She lost her husband, she lost five family members, that’s why she has to work now.” He nodded towards friends, saying “he was in my boat” or “in his house three people died”. He had tried counting the dead, but his mother had told him to stop when he reached 475 – the effort was ripping open barely healed wounds. “Everyone has lost someone here.”⁴

If the boat arrivals in the Canaries had triggered the first media frenzy, the tragedy back in Senegal now set off another. The media descended on the country’s seaside communities in search for stories on the dead, the missing and the deported – and Yongor was at the centre of their attentions. A 2006 visit to the neighbourhood by French presidential hopeful Ségolène Royal spurred the journalists on and put Mother Mercy and her association in the spotlight. Yongor went “from dire anonymity to world fame”, as one news report put it: it was

³ See Melly (2011) and Nyamnjoh (2010:2) on the trope of heroic masculinity in boat migration

⁴ No exact figures on deaths and disappearances exist. Mohammadou estimated 1,500 youth had died (Yongor’s total population is around 40,000), though official estimates are lower

becoming a privileged stage for what the Spanish media and politicians liked to call the drama of immigration.

By 2010, the wave of clandestine migration had receded. But in its wake a confrontation had spread across Yongor and beyond, pitting mothers against sons and former migrants against each other. I had come there looking for stories about the fraught sea journeys and the brief, extraordinary arrival of Senegalese fishing boats at the heart of western leisure migration, the *playas* of Tenerife and Gran Canaria. So had hundreds of other researchers and journalists. The repatriates' tragedies had been told and retold to countless visitors, but their resentment about this retelling opened a new line of inquiry. As I left Ali and Mohammadou on their bench, I was already intrigued by their simple, recurrent question: who benefits from illegal migration, and how?

Mohammadou and his repatriated friends would in the coming year help me analyse who the winners and losers were in the illegality industry at Europe's southern frontier. This industry, built around the fight against illegal migration and drawing in the media, civil society, politicians, academics and police, has – among other achievements – put the unemployed repatriates to work. The repatriates deter any “potential candidates for illegal migration” from even trying the journey; they bring in money for local associations, NGOs and politicians; and they provide compelling stories for journalists and academics alike.

But it is not enough to consider how, in Mohammadou's words, everyone “ate” from migration. His question about illicit gains led to other, deeper quandaries. Why this fascination with the unfortunate travellers of the high seas? And why, *despite* this fascination among aid workers, hacks and politicians, were they sidestepped as the illegality industry rolled into Dakar and other West African departure points from 2006? Beyond its much-vaunted “success” in fighting migration, what social realities did this industry leave behind in Senegal's seaside neighbourhoods? During my visits to Yongor in 2010 and 2011 that structure this chapter, I would try to find answers to these questions.

Migrants as human deterrents

Mohammadou often picked me up at the highway roaring out of Dakar as I came back after my fieldwork excursions along migrant routes through Morocco, Mali and Spain. A Ford billboard towered over the fume-choked junction; “drive one” it exhorted, next to a picture of a slick four-wheel drive. If such a car ever slogged up the sand-whipped lanes of Yongor it was bound to belong to either a local dignitary, an expatriate in Dakar’s booming aid industry, or a *modou-modou*, the Wolof term for rags-to-riches emigrants who in recent decades have come to embody success in Senegal (Melly 2011; Riccio 2005). On our walks of Yongor, we sometimes met *modou-modou* back on visits from Europe, big-boned and well-fed men sporting new jeans and confident smiles. Their houses, built with remittances from Spain, Italy or France, reminded the repatriates of their failed journeys at every turn.⁵

If the *modou-modou* advertised the benefits of departure, the repatriates were their abject inverse: walking billboards testifying to the futility of boat migration. Failure was broadcasted by their sullen faces, their empty pockets, their shattered dreams. They had used up their savings to pay up to 500,000 CFA (\$1,000) for a journey in a packed boat. Their friends had died in the rough seas. Some had turned back; others, like Mohammadou, had been diverted to Western Sahara, where internment and expulsion to the Mauritanian border awaited. Mohammadou told me how he had spent days walking back and forth in the desert no-man’s-land between Moroccan and Mauritanian border posts, soldiers forcing the migrants to retreat at gunpoint, until Senegal’s president intervened. Eventually Mohammadou made it back home, penniless. The migrants’ dreams had swiftly turned into the stuff of nightmares.

The shame of return was shattering. Sometimes tricked onto their deportation flights by police who told them they were being sent to mainland Spain, sometimes promised a money envelope that ended up containing as little as 10,000 CFA, the repatriates eventually made it home. Some slept on beaches or hid with acquaintances, too ashamed to face their families. Their shame was not

⁵ The *modou-modou* image of success is not clear-cut, however, as testified by their often barely half-built houses: see Buggenhagen (2001:376)

just a family disaster, however. It was also a dissuasive weapon, as I would learn in the Spanish embassy, a world away from Yongor and its miseries.

The embassy, a whitewashed edifice in central Dakar's Plateau district, was an operation in constant expansion. As the migrant boats kept coming in 2005 and 2006, Spain suddenly "discovered" sub-Saharan Africa (Gabrielli 2008:1). The country's Socialist government embarked on a political offensive in West Africa and opened new embassies across the region. Under its first Africa Plan, launched amid the growing boat crisis in the Canaries, Madrid also doubled overseas development aid to sub-Saharan Africa between 2006 and 2010.⁶ The Dakar expansion was part of this. In the years following the visits of ministers and the Spanish premier in 2006, a new consulate had been built, an export promotion office had opened and Interior and Labour Ministry attachés had set up shop.

Raúl was one of these attachés, a friendly police officer with years of experience in migration controls in Senegal who had lived through the heady times of 2006. "The waiter in the café where I go for breakfast told me one morning, 'tomorrow I'm leaving, I'm heading to Spain!'" Raúl laughed. The media fed the phenomenon, he said, spreading rumours from the Canaries where those who had arrived "told of how you call the police as you arrive to the coast, then the police take you to a room where you get food three times a day, you can even repeat, and after some time they bring you to Spain". Then the repatriations began, tentatively in early summer and with full force a few months later. "Now you knew that you might be selected for repatriation, so will you risk losing your job here only to be sent back?"

The migration patrols launched in 2006 had of course contributed to the fall in arrivals, Raúl said, but the repatriations were even more important. According to him, these were "the principal weapon of dissuasion" in the fight against illegal migration. "It's tough but it's the best option." The repatriate "is worth much more than whatever publicity campaign you can think of doing", he

⁶ See Gabrielli (2011) and http://seekdevelopment.org/seek_donor_profile_spain_feb_2012.pdf

said. Repatriation is “very difficult, very painful, very tough”, but it “transmits the idea that you shouldn’t leave”.

His colleagues hammered home the same message. Raúl’s fellow attaché, the head of the Guardia Civil’s patrolling operations in Senegal, called repatriation an “*efecto llamada al revés*” (reverse “pull” effect). The Spanish ambassador likewise saw it as the principal form of dissuasion. “There are villages that have received people back who have risked their lives, who have risked their money, and who have failed.” Now, thanks in parts to the repatriates, he made clear, people thought twice about even trying.

The Canaries repatriations were but one instance of the rise of what migration scholars have called a global deportation regime (de Genova and Peutz 2010). In a pattern repeated across the rich world, states increasingly defend and enact their sovereignty against those who violate the boundaries of the nation – poor migrants and refugees whose subjection to discrimination, abuse and disciplinary power is being catalogued from Israel to El Salvador.⁷ The intentional use of mass repatriation as “weapon of dissuasion” in the Canaries gives a performative angle to this biopolitics of sovereignty. Rather than simply being disciplined, the Senegalese repatriates were put to work as human deterrents within the illegality industry.

To implement repatriation-as-deterrence, Spain had entered into a grand bargain with Senegal. In exchange for joint patrols and repatriations, Spain promised money and favours. This created a virtuous circle for officialdom. Development cooperation smoothed the way for police initiatives while humanising the cold, dissuasive logic of repatriation. Spain’s “new generation” of migration accords signed across the West African region from 2006 followed the EU’s so-called “global approach” to migration – a three-pronged strategy encompassing migration controls in sending countries, the promotion of legal migration and development assistance. These agreements, which soon became a model for Europe’s “externalisation” of controls (Gabrielli 2011), padded the steeliness of policing and deportation with financial rewards and warm diplomatic words. And it soon seemed to be working perfectly. Between 2006 and 2010, arrivals in the Canaries dropped from 32,000 to 200 a year (MIR 2011).

⁷ See de Genova and Peutz (2010:6) and studies such as those of Coutin (2007); de Genova (2002); Fekete (2005); Bloch and Schuster (2005); Willen (2007a and 2007b)

The path to cooperation had not been smooth, however. The Senegalese president, Abdoulaye Wade, was faced with a conundrum in the summer of 2006. Elections were approaching, and the opposition was ready to exploit the humiliation of repatriations. As more Senegalese migrants were sent back from the Canaries, the anger boiled over among them. “We called on all of the youth, everyone came out,” recalled Moctar, the president of the national association of repatriates. “We decided to make some noise... we will burn the country!” Riots raged on the roads of Dakar, and repatriates fought with police. They were finally summoned to see the president, who had briefly wavered on allowing repatriations but was now swiftly forging a coherent response to the crisis. To placate the repatriates, he had an offer: Spanish-sponsored development projects and work visas would come their way. More importantly, these deals would also help calm the opposition.

First out in this softer part of the Spanish-Senegalese migration strategy was Plan REVA (*Retour vers l’Agriculture* or “back to agriculture”). This plan, a brainchild of Wade’s, was meant to integrate returned migrants into a modernised farming sector (Pian 2010). In September 2006, Senegal’s interior minister announced a firm Spanish offer of €20m of development aid – initially broached at the time of the first repatriations in June – in part destined for this plan (Gabrielli 2011:362). REVA would be beset by accusations of squandered money, government nepotism and propaganda (Ba and Ndiaye 2008; Rivero and Martínez 2008). The repatriates, briefly wooed by the president, also refused to endorse it. They were fishermen, not farmers, and dreamt of real jobs, not tilling the soil. The Spanish money, it was widely rumoured, had instead of helping the youth funded Wade’s re-election campaign in 2007.⁸

Another aspect of the strategy was the handing out of “visas”. Spain had launched a recruitment programme (*contratación en origen*) “in order to prevent what was happening, people going to Spain by boat illegally”, as Félix, the Spanish Labour Ministry attaché, bluntly put it. But the repatriates were again sidelined, despite initial promises; they had an entry ban on Europe, and Madrid had no wish to encourage more departures by rewarding those sent back. Instead, the visa scheme became a high-stakes political game. While some relatives of

⁸ See http://canariasinsurgente.typepad.com/almacen/2007/06/informe_del_mpa.html

repatriates were quietly offered places on the flights to Spain, visas were also bartered and sold by repatriate “leaders” or offered to members of Wade’s party (Pian 2010). Soon accusations flew in all directions.

A few visas reached Yongor, where Mohammadou would play a part in selecting recipients. Sitting in his one-room home next to the beach, his little children coming and going as we spoke, he recalled the visa debacle in 2007. “One day they called me,” he said. “They told me, ‘you have won a visa, so you should come here tomorrow at 8 o’clock.’” He went to the national youth employment agency, in charge of visa allocations, the following morning. “I did the paperwork, I did everything!” Still, no news came. The next month they called him again, saying he should wait for another round of contracts, this time for fishermen. Again, he said, “I did my paperwork with the Spaniards. After that, I’ve seen nothing.” As the repatriates were sidestepped for visas, they became ever more resentful at their exclusion from which Mohammadou still smarted, four years later.

The battle over visas sometimes took bizarre turns, as in the 2008 round of *contratación* of more than 700 women to go and work the strawberry fields of Andalusia. The tricky bit was to “break with the cultural schema of Senegal”, Félix explained. The Senegalese had insisted that half ought to be male, but “we explained that a certain gentleness is needed in the harvesting of this product”. The real reason, of course, was different. The women had to have “family charges in Senegal” so that they would be sure to return, the attaché explained, as had also been the case in similar programmes between Morocco and Spain. The result was a bevy of well-connected women, all “high heels and make-up” as one Spanish NGO worker recalled, descending on the rough terrains of Andalusia. The strategy had backfired as some women even stayed on. Félix blamed the “disaster” of the Senegalese administration, whose pre-selection of candidates had been jumbled. But as could have been expected, the rich and well-connected had won out in the scramble for visas.⁹ Then the crisis hit the Spanish economy, and no more contracts were being offered. The contracts were “an emergency system”, Félix said, but “the fact that there are no contracts now doesn’t mean that we have abandoned Senegal”.

⁹ On the contracts, see http://elpais.com/diario/2008/02/13/andalucia/1202858534_850215.html

A third aspect of the strategy was the awareness-raising campaigns, promoted by overseas development agencies and the International Organization for Migration. Based in the expatriate haven of Mamelles along Dakar's shoreline, this intergovernmental body – often erroneously thought of as a UN agency – received financing for “migration management” projects aimed at halting irregular migration, including a €1m injection of EU cash in 2007. Its campaigns applied the *sensibilisation* format common across French-speaking West Africa on anything from desertification campaigns to disease prevention (Rossi 2006). In public meetings, wise words from “community leaders” were mixed with testimony from former migrants, who sometimes were referred to as having been “vaccinated” against the wish to depart. “Sensitisation shouldn’t be only about the risks, not only ‘you might die on the way,’” said one European IOM officer. “It should also be about the fact that you might not get a job in Spain, you might not have a nice life there.” This positive spin on the campaigns betrayed a common unease among expatriate workers at the anti-migration effort. In previous years gruesome images of bloated bodies and sunken boats had appeared on Senegalese television in an effort by the Spanish government to stem the flow. While the IOM had run similar television campaigns across the region, it also followed a softer strategy incorporating cartoons, theatre and speech-making competitions. It had first conducted campaigns in fishing hamlets before branching out to sending zones inland, where people still did not know much about the risks, according to the officer. “There’s never enough sensitisation,” she concluded, echoing Mother Mercy’s words.

Amid the proliferation of local actors in the deterrence game, Mother Mercy’s grassroots appeal made her stand out from the competition. After the death of her only son on his journey towards the Canaries, she had decided to convert her previous local development association into a women’s collective fighting illegal migration. Besides formal *sensibilisation*, the association’s women also kept an eye on Yongor’s youth in case they tried a clandestine journey. The association’s work was “very difficult”, Mother Mercy stated on her website, “because in fishing communities the woman does not have responsibility and should not take initiatives”. But she had strong backers. Her forceful anti-departure narrative attracted the funders – and the police. “The mothers have helped quite a lot,” quipped the Guardia Civil chief. As one academic put it

[reference removed], “the mothers can resort to two potentially lucrative and incompatible survival strategies: to live off the money transfers of an emigrant son or to live off the funds granted on the basis of an anti-migration discourse by backers from the global North.” By converting her association into a vehicle for anti-departure rhetoric, Mother Mercy had chosen the latter strategy, but her reasons for doing so were complex and sometimes at odds with those of her backers. Her collective was created “because we have lost so many youth”, she later told me, in between criticism of how Europe was closing its doors while spending all its migration money on Frontex instead of on job-generating projects. “My son left with 80 friends and they all disappeared at sea, that’s what pushed me as a woman to call on my sisters who had suffered the same [fate] to organize a structure to fight this scourge.” For a time, the priorities of bereaved Senegalese mothers and European police coincided – yet it was a fragile alliance that tragically divided families, genders and generations who in fact held a *shared* concern with the injustices behind the fatal departures.

The repatriates, seeing the rapid and unequal spread of benefits from clandestine migration, had been deported, deceived and made destitute. Now the work contracts and aid money bypassed them. The Senegalese president “has promised a lot of things that we haven’t seen”, Moctar said. “They have done nothing, nothing at all, absolutely nothing.” But the initial anger had dissipated amid the undignified scramble for visas and funds. Soon the lure of the illegality industry would prove irresistible. Mohammadou and his repatriated colleagues wanted a share of the spoils. They wanted someone to listen. Above all, they wanted funding partners from Europe, and they knew that to find any they had to obey the rules of the deterrence game. As a result, they started fashioning themselves in the very guise preferred by western donors and politicians: as real *clandestins* working to deter “potential candidates for illegal migration”.

On the corrugated iron door to the office of Mohammadou’s association, a shack doubling up as mobile phone repair shop on the main road leading into Yongor, their motto had been printed atop a painting of a wooden boat: *halte à l’émigration clandestine* (halt illegal emigration), an increasingly present and pernicious slogan in the Dakar aid world.¹⁰ “It’s thanks to us that no one is

¹⁰ The right to leave one’s country is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

leaving anymore,” Mohammadou kept repeating, as did Mother Mercy. Yet her offices, some 100 metres away from the repatriates’ shack, were a constant reminder of who the European donors believed: the logos of Spanish development agencies crowned her portico, and four-wheel-drives and taxis kept pulling up at her porch.

Mohammadou’s association had no funding partners, and so their projects – on equipping Yongor’s ailing fishing fleet, on creating chicken coops, on professional training for would-be or one-time *clandestins* – failed to take off. But in asserting their role in fighting “illegal emigration”, the repatriates signalled an awareness of their crucial role as human deterrents.

The beach, down Yongor’s maze of lanes, was strewn with litter and crammed like a car park with wooden fishing boats. It was bigger versions of such boats – known as *gaal gi* in Wolof, *pirogues* in French and *cayucos* in Spanish – that had once taken Mohammadou and his friends to the Canary Islands. The boats were long and slender, painted in brash beautiful colours: red against yellow, deep green and black. The names of Senegalese wrestlers and *marabouts* had been written on the hulls. Occasional German or Spanish flags hung limply in the windless air. Industrial fishing boats rested on the horizon. Children scuttled past, deftly skirting fish bones, nets and household debris.



Figures 1 and 1. Pirogues on Dakar’s beaches

“Look at the boat out there!” Mohammadou suddenly exclaimed. “It’s the *garde espagnole*.” The Guardia Civil’s patrolling vessel came every day, he said. It was

just sitting there, observing, like a well-trained beast ready to pounce on any trespassers. “It can’t stop us,” he said. “If no money comes soon from Europe we will set off again... This time we’ll be 100,000, or thousands of 12-year-olds.” It sounded like a warning from someone aware of both the depiction of migrants as a threatening force and the legal constraints in deporting children.¹¹ The repatriates’ effort to convince impatient youth to bide their time was the reason no one was leaving, Mohammadou made clear. This unpaid work of putting a brake on the runaway tales of the boat craze era¹² was done silently, away from the spotlight. “We are waiting now for any development projects to come through from Europe,” insisted Mohammadou. Their patience would not last forever.

Mohammadou and his friends were recoiling from the passivity of their repatriation. They placed deterrence in their actions and speech, not just their bodies. It was a message that kept falling on deaf ears, however. Despite the European largesse, no partners appeared. Instead, their attempts to share in the spoils of the illegality industry had led to their being co-opted into Europe’s human deterrence programme.

Migrants as money-spinners

It was late spring 2010, and Mohammadou and I sought refuge from the heat blowing in from the Sahelian plains in a mud-floor courtyard shaded by a *guerté toubab* tree. His friends leant against a wall, fishing nets spread out at their feet that they mended with deft movements, threading cord through the frayed edges. Fishing had long been the main *métier* of Yongor’s Lebou inhabitants who, scattered in seaside hamlets across Dakar’s Cap Vert peninsula, were the Senegalese capital’s original population. Now a fishing crisis racked their neighbourhoods. Mohammadou had once worked as a *mareyeur*, selling fish and seafood, but no longer. Stocks had depleted in part because of an explosion in small-scale fishing, caused by Senegal’s worsening economy and the motorisation of *pirogues* (Nyamnjoh 2010). The biggest culprit in the emptying of the seas, however, was the sale of fishing rights to other states, not least Spain. The foreign

¹¹ A 2010 agreement, preceded by a 2006 accord hampered by rights concerns, allowed Spain to start repatriating minors (Spanish ambassador, personal communication; Serón et al 2011:75)

¹² On these tales, see Melly (2011)

trawlers resting on Yongor's horizon swallowed tonnes of fish destined for European and Asian markets. This, Mother Mercy and Mohammadou agreed, was why so many had tried to leave in 2006, embarking in the very boats they had previously used for fishing: here there were no jobs to be had.

Mohammadou leant back, sipped some bittersweet *attaya*, and repeated what was soon to become a familiar sum of money. "Do you know how much Wade and his government have earned from illegal migration?" he asked. "Thirteen billion CFA! And what has he done for us? Nothing." The amount – referring to the €20m in Spanish aid offered at the time of the 2006 deportations – was lambasted not just by Mohammadou but by repatriates up and down Senegal's coastline. Word circulated on how much money Wade had received per repatriate. "*La migration clandestine a beaucoup d'argent,*" Mohammadou insisted: there is lots of money in illegal migration.

In Kayar, a fishing hamlet and tourist magnet north of Dakar, repatriates told the same bitter story. "Lots of NGOs came here after 2006," said the president of Kayar's repatriate association, "but we didn't realise at the time that they were just trying to fill their own bellies." We were careful to meet with his fellow repatriates in a large room, with everyone present so that there would be no suspicions of anyone receiving money for talking. "You have to say in your book that all those who have passed by here have done nothing for us!" one of them insisted. NGOs, journalists, researchers had all come. "What have we got out of it?" they asked, voices rising. "It's been four years of talking!"

An acute awareness of what they saw as the great gains from illegality pervaded the repatriates' migration experience. Mohammadou and his friends sensed that moneymakers trailed them on their journey, during repatriation and at home – "swindlers" and "liars" ready to make a killing from boat migration. They saw it in sea rescues and patrols, where boats were diverted from Spanish waters to Morocco since the latter would then "earn money from the European Union". They saw it in the visits of EU delegates who come, "promise us things" and leave. They saw it in the scrum of journalists and researchers who "take our stories". And they saw it in the western NGOs who "come here with their four-wheel-drives" only to speed off once they have received funding for their spurious migration projects.

I was no different to all those others, the more than 1,000 people Mohammadou said had visited their association since 2006. What could I offer? Money? Partners? Contacts?

All I offered was to set up a website. Nothing as slick and stylish as that of Mother Mercy's collective, however. Not even a real website, mind, but a blog. The association's IT expert typed their posts onto his laptop in his bedroom after Mohammadou's attempts at hitting the right keys had failed. One of their first and only posts, in French, read like this:

SUBJECT: LETTER ASKING FOR ASSISTANCE

First of all, please accept our warmest greetings. We would like to let you know that our association was created between 2006 and 2007 in order to try to fix the youth to stay in the country because after our repatriation we have seen that a big number of youth had died at sea, after some time of waiting we have started to do sensitisation in the surrounding localities ... but during this time we have received nothing from these promises even the European Union came to visit us last year with promises but none of that has been done. There are even people who talk about immigration without having experienced this scourge others content themselves with travelling to Europe by means of the repatriates and masquerade as people who come to find funding for the youth, while this is not the case because the money they bring in, they fill their bags with it. Even the projects and the visas that the Europeans gave to the repatriates have not even arrived to those concerned ... This is why we turn to you so that at least we will have training centres to educate the youth, schools for the children of those who disappeared and funding to find some kind of work ... We count on your understanding while waiting for assistance.

THANK YOU

No replies were forthcoming. With each attempt, and each visiting *toubab*, responsibility weighed heavier on Mohammadou's shoulders. He was the president; he should bring partners. "*Ana liggéey bi?*" members of the association asked, stopping to chat with him on the streets. "Where is the work?" Lacking a good response, Mohammadou grew increasingly bitter and angry: for, unlike some repatriate "leaders", he was sincere in seeking projects for the hundreds of repatriates in Yongor and their families, not just quick cash for himself.

Meanwhile Mother Mercy was raking in the money, as the repatriates saw it. They had initially trusted her, seeing her as the benevolent “mother of the migrants”. Some even took loans she had negotiated, with sour after-effects for both parties. As the repatriates were sidelined, acrimony grew. By 2010 the split was deep and definite. Before the boat crisis she had lived in a single room, the repatriates said; now she had a big, big house. She was driven around by a chauffeur and flew off to conferences in Europe, but she could not go down to the seafront because she would be hounded away. She was a liar. “All that she says is false,” the repatriates kept repeating, like a record stuck in the same groove. She went and met funding agencies in Europe, then took the money but shared nothing. “100,000 CFA bills, 150,000 CFA bills, she takes them out as if they were cigarettes,” Mohammadou said with his trademark frown.

The repatriates’ anger towards Mother Mercy was, of course, not the whole story. It was rather a symptom of the double trauma visited upon Yongor’s inhabitants: first the deaths at sea, then the injustice of deportation and the unequal gains that followed. Mother Mercy was herself aware of the accusations. “People here think that when you are with a white person, he brings money,” she told me later, echoing the concerns of Mohammadou with his moneyless trail of researchers and reporters. “This creates problems and tensions in the community. [People say], I collect money here, I collect money there, but this is not the case!” Unlike Mohammadou’s association, however, she maintained “vertical and horizontal relations” with Spanish organisations, who had contributed substantial funds to her collective. The biggest funder was Aecid, the official Spanish development agency, which channelled money through Spanish NGOs. Their funding priorities, as I would soon see, held further clues to the role of the repatriates in Dakar’s illegality industry.

In the Aecid offices in central Dakar, Rocío leafed through her files, looking for budget expenditure on migration-related projects that I had asked her about, with little luck. She was a Spanish development worker in her forties, brimming with enthusiasm for development. Projects were carried over from year to year, she explained; it was hard to get precise figures. I asked her why the repatriates got

nothing. She shrugged. “We’re a development agency,” she said. The funds “were for families who had lost someone, not for repatriates”. Indeed, their projects were presented as being about female empowerment, or for the “mother victims of the *cayucos*”. Brochures filled up with pictures of smiling African women sewing, dancing, shovelling and preparing fish, in what seemed a perfect example of the co-optation of once-radical development ideas by a larger state agenda (Gardner and Lewis 1996:126). Rocío was keen to stress the gulf separating development aid and migration controls, however. “We don’t want to know anything about that since it’s not our field,” she said and waved her hands as if pushing the patrols to one side. “That’s all with the Interior Ministry.”

Such purification of development aid was a major clean-up operation. Development assistance was independent from clandestine migration, the Spanish ambassador insisted, and rather depended on the Africa Plan’s aim of fostering better relations with sub-Saharan nations.¹³ Leaving aside the fact that migration was already a fundamental part of this plan, the ambassador’s view also contrasted with recent findings on Spanish aid to Africa. One comprehensive, Aecid-funded study found that the country’s NGOs had expanded strongly in sub-Saharan countries since 2006 thanks to exponentially growing official aid; that more than half of these NGOs had tenuous previous connection to the continent; and that the official funds directed especially at Senegal, Mali and Mauritania were closely related to irregular migration concerns.¹⁴ Another study focusing on these three countries similarly affirmed the “subordination of official development aid to Spain’s migration policy” there while stating that Spanish funds might even have hampered the stated policies of this aid – poverty reduction, human rights and democratic governance (Serón et al 2011:71).

In the uneasy mixing of policing and poverty reduction, Spain’s West African experiment was but an extreme case of the perils of “co-development”. This approach, initiated in France, has meant seeing migrants as a factor in developing their home countries while contradictorily incorporating attempts to constrict such development-inducing migration flows (Audran 2008). “Co-development,” Rocío quipped, “is meant to prevent... or, well...” She tried again.

¹³ The 2006-2008 Africa Plan was followed by a 2009-2012 plan, available at <http://www.casafrica.es/casafrica/Inicio/PlanAfrica2009-2012.pdf>

¹⁴ Habitáfrica, “África cuenta: reflexiones sobre la cooperación española con África”. Available online at http://archivos.habitafrika.org/pdf/AFRICACUENTA_BAJA.pdf

It “could contribute to...” She stumbled. “It may or may not halt the departures.” Migration concerns entered Aecid’s remit under “vulnerable groups such as minors”, she explained, “who could later become fodder for illegal migration” (*carne de migración clandestina*). Maybe, she suggested, the repatriates could try to attract funding by presenting themselves as being vulnerable?

Before I left, Rocío looked over her shoulder towards the corridor, making sure no one was listening. “I say this since no one is here,” she began, lowering her voice, “but obviously, what are the links between Spain and Senegal? There are none. Links usually come through a shared language, a shared history, but with Senegal and Mali there is none of that.” She continued in a conspiratorial whisper: “It’s clear there’s a relation between [fighting] illegal migration and [funding] development here for Spain... though this topic is taboo.”

As in other international aid encounters, Spain’s migration-backed development push seemed like a case of “the emperors’ new clothes” (Bending and Rosendo 2006:226). Everyone started speaking the language of fighting illegal migration, perpetuating the illusion that the emperor was fully clothed. The irony was that Spanish and EU politicians, in seeking to depoliticise their anti-migration operations through recourse to the language of drama on television and development on the ground, created a *politicised* development interface drawing in brokers, entrepreneurs and swindlers (Lewis and Mosse 2006). They were no longer in full control.

Through a trickle-down of development aid, local associations willing to take part in the fight would be co-opted and contained. This was part of a pattern of clientelism and “everyday corruption” in Senegal (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2001), to be sure, but the illegality industry extended beyond this nexus to encompass European security, media and policy sectors as well. It also depended on a signifier amenable to infinite manipulation: the “fodder for illegal migration” invoked by Rocío. It was through this figure, in its IOM-promoted incarnation as “potential candidate for illegal migration”, that the business of migration had filtered down to the Senegalese “grassroots”.

International agencies, the Senegalese state, western NGOs and local associations were all at it. On the top of the food chain were the “expatriates” parachuted in from other diplomatic or IOM missions. Tasked with tempering the illicit movements of their Senegalese hosts, they mixed in Dakar’s swish seaside

restaurants and mingled on the city's expat party scene, where Guardia Civil officers on their three-month patrolling stints also made occasional appearances.

One step down the food chain followed a range of Senegalese ministries that staked a claim in migration. While they in theory converged around the government's official line, honed over the summer of 2006, of "protecting" Senegalese citizens from the risks of the boat journey (Gabrielli 2011), economic and political incentives made them pull in different directions. Chaos, as European aid workers complained, was the predictable result. Next came the European NGOs that had followed the money scattered by western governments in the *pirogues'* wake. At the grassroots, again, the strategy was replicated. In a poor neighbourhood outside Dakar, a local development association had scribbled *migration clandestine* onto the end of its typed-up list of projects. A Senegalese human rights NGO, once of a radical bent, did *sensibilisation* with the IOM in Dakar and remote Tambacounda; it had produced T-shirts saying "There is another choice" on the front and "NO to illegal migration" on the back, and its office was plastered with stickers sporting the same message. Theatre troupes across Senegal did *sensibilisation* with cookie-cutter characters explaining the dangers of boat migration. In a Dakar fishing village, a branch of Mother Mercy's collective invoked, in a letter asking for funds to build an ice factory, "our unfailing fight to make the youth of Senegal in general, and of [our neighbourhood] in particular, say no to illegal migration". No matter that out of its local 500 members, only 20 at most had done *mbéké mi*. Most of these, after all, fitted the IOM's suitably loose profile of a potential candidate: young, male, and unemployed.

No partners came looking for Mohammadou and his friends. While aid workers such as Rocío insisted – correctly – that former migrants were not necessarily worse off than other youth struggling along in Dakar's poor neighbourhoods, the repatriates' sense of entitlement and frustration grew along with the parade of donors, brokers and visitors. However, their ire was mainly directed at Mother Mercy and other competitors, not at the funding agencies and European politicians. A quiet battle was raging among local associations about who was *really* fighting clandestine migration. Everyone bickered with everyone, not just in Yongor but across Senegal's seaside communities. Moctar, the head of the presumably national association of repatriates, was working only for himself

rather than for a broader cause, local youth and repatriates said. In Kayar, one angry repatriate leader caught up with me in the back streets of the fish market. A rival association had received €6,500, “and they ate it all”, he said while pointing at scrawled funding figures in his notebook. “Some people benefit from this money in the name of the illegal migrants,” he said, waving a bunch of papers belonging to his association’s members. The papers – presumably certificates from Spain’s migrant detention centres – proved they were bona-fide *clandestins*, he insisted. He later turned out never to have made the boat journey.

Transcending this bickering was Mother Mercy, who played the funding game to perfection. Her success, as one academic noted [reference removed], was down to the combination of western concerns that her collective represented: women’s empowerment, development and illegal migration. But she was no victim of European priorities. She had entered a virtuous circle in which media exposure, political clout and more funding fed into each other. The women’s soap-making and handicraft projects found favour with donors, combining as they did a “back to the soil” strategy against migration and female empowerment. “Sometimes misfortune is good, we had never dared to speak out in our communities before,” she told me. “It’s thanks to migration, to the disappearance of our children, that we have integrated ourselves into male society.”

We should perhaps ask, along with Mosse (2004:8), not whether aid projects such as the Spanish migration-and-development drive succeed but how success is produced – and, we could add along with Ferguson (1990), what the side-effects of such success might be. The sensitisation drive, the mothers with their soap bars and the high-heeled farmhands put success in Senegalese quarters, while diverting activist and “grassroots” attention away from the controversial European patrols and repatriations that Wade’s government had approved. The illegality industry also created a role for former and potential migrants, but not as actors, brokers or beneficiaries. Instead, the repatriates oiled the cogs of the anti-migration machinery with their tragic experiences at sea. To them befell the thankless task of repeating their stories to the visitors-without-funds descending on Yongor – the researchers, fact-finders and journalists.

Migrants as content providers

We were sitting in the “office”, people eating the peanut stew *mafe* from a shared platter, when a mobile phone rang. The association’s treasurer stopped fiddling with old Nokia SIM cards and took the phone, talking in French, and then handed the phone to Mohammadou, who went outside to continue the conversation. It was a journalist, he explained afterwards. Her reporting team would come on Sunday to discuss a documentary they wanted to film in Yongor.

I left the office with Mohammadou and Ali, walking along the rubbish-strewn railtracks that spliced Yongor in half. Mohammadou was thoughtful, silent. Then he said: “I will ask her, what will we get from participating? All the time, people come here to speak to us about migration, always migration...” Ali nodded. “It’s tiring... we need compensation, or to talk of something else.” To him, “the most important thing is what happened *after* our migration.” The debt to relatives for the journey, the loss of jobs and savings and the fruitless funding battles – not to mention the day-to-day struggles for “migrant” and non-migrant alike in Senegal’s rattled economy – were not foremost in journalists’ minds, as Ali and Mohammadou were well aware.

A few hundred metres along the tracks lay the office of Yongor’s mayor. He had lost a brother and a cousin to *mbëkë mi* after paying for their fatal journey, and was sympathetic to the repatriates’ struggles. “Tell the journalists the truth,” he advised Mohammadou as we sat in plush sofas in his reception room. Mohammadou listened and nodded, saying little more. As we walked back, Mohammadou mulled his tactics. “We will say we haven’t seen any help from Europe, but without mentioning Mother Mercy,” he said. “It’s better that way.”

The repatriates had already met hundreds of journalists, but little had come of all this attention except broken promises. “In 2007, journalists came here almost every day,” said one member of the association. “They come and do their reports, all the time they come, then they just leave and we never hear from them again.” Mohammadou used to wonder where his photo had ended up, in how many news reports. “If I go to England and I see my photo on a poster, I ask myself why.”

The poster image for boat migration was, however, not Mohammadou or his fellow repatriates; it was Mother Mercy, whose qualities made for perfect feature stories. She was the strong and steadfast mother and also the bereaved, impoverished victim. Such media portrayals, as one academic notes in an analysis of news coverage of the collective, pandered to western stereotypes of the African woman. Here the Mother Mercy moniker made perfect sense for western audiences as a “consensual figure arousing the compassion of everyone” in “fusing the charisma of the victim and the activist” [reference removed]. And the women played along, singing and showing pictures of their dead sons and husbands during journalists’ visits. Some entrepreneurial young repatriates had also found a source of income in chasing contacts for the journalists, offering up smugglers and *marabouts*, bereaved relatives and jobless fishermen, according to the needs of the story. Mohammadou and his friends had played this game too, but they were tired. Unlike Mother Mercy, they saw little outcome of the visits.

After the media stampede came the more slow-footed researchers. Many were preparing their postgraduate theses; some worked for NGOs; others might have been undercover police. “I’ll be completely honest,” a UN official in Dakar told me, relishing his moment. “Around 60 researchers have come here in the past few years to study irregular migration. You’d better think of another topic.”

The repatriates had belatedly learnt that the clandestine migrant was a valuable piece of merchandise, and now wanted their slice of the business. Moctar, the repatriate president, said they had decided not to speak about their experiences unless they got something out of it. “For a small sum, I’ll give you three or four guys,” he told me. “Maybe 10,000 CFA is enough since you are a research student.” This was a discount, he made clear – self-appointed middlemen had been given 100,000 CFA or more by journalists keen on stories. While researchers such as myself often refused, the journalists kept giving, sometimes in the form of a gift to Mother Mercy’s collective, other times as a backhand fee to the fixers.

Except for these one-off payments, the repatriates were unable to monetise their media presence. Their stereotype within the illegality industry was not that of Africans needing empowerment; it was that of wild youth in need of domestication. The only thing they could sell was their story at sea, which made for a perfect piece of journalism – a package of suffering and high drama that

worked both as hard news and feature fodder. And this story, as other researchers such as Nyamnjoh (2010:21) also attest, became shrouded in ambivalences and resistance in its telling and retelling.

One day I went with Mohammadou to see Momar, one of the association's spokesmen. He was a dreadlocked member of *Baye Fall*, the Muslim Mourid devotees famed throughout Senegal for their colourful ragged clothes and itinerant begging on behalf of their *marabout*. We sat down on a foam mattress in Momar's bare room as he emptied a "gunpowder" tea bag into a metal pot and put it on the coals. I asked if he wanted to speak about his journey. Momar was a kind man who found it hard to say no. "I do it for Mohammadou," he said eventually. "We have a policy not to speak to anyone." Mohammadou reiterated the figure of 1,000 journalists and researchers visiting them since their return. Still, they kept yielding to demands for stories.

"It's harder now than before leaving," said Momar, who was a self-employed plumber. "In 2006, I could find clients but after I left my clients found other workers. I had to start from scratch again." This lack of funds, the repatriates often said, was another reason no one contemplated departing anymore: in 2006 at least they had some funds to draw upon for the trip.

Then Momar talked of his journey. "Only the brave ones (*nit ñu am jóm*) left," he said. His *pirogue* departed on 28 July 2006 – everyone remembers the date they set off – and he summed up his ordeal in a few words: "I went on *mbëkë mi*, I lost all my money, I lost many friends, I returned with nothing, nothing, nothing."

On the seventh day water and food ran out, Momar explained as we sipped our tea. The passengers, desperate, started drinking seawater. Then the fuel tanks dried up, so they cut down the tarp covering the *pirogue* to make an improvised sail. They ripped chunks of wood off the boat's sides to make a mast and oars and spent hours rowing, 20 men on each side. There were 92 on board, lost on the high seas. Eleven people died. Several among them passed away on Momar's lap.

"The fourteenth day they started dying," added Mohammadou, who had begun filling in Momar on the details. Soon they were bouncing elements of the story off each other, talking of how Momar's *pirogue* – or was it Mohammadou's? – had been intercepted. It was the Moroccans, not the Spaniards, who finally "came to the coasts of the Canary Islands to take us away".

The more they talked, the blurrier the story became. It was a standardised account of their misery, I started to realise, a tale they had repeated so many times they knew it by heart, their individual tragedies melting into each other for the benefit of the visiting interviewers. Whose story was I hearing, and how many had heard it before me?

They had stopped speaking to visitors, Momar said, since so many had come, and because the journalists asked “if you are normal or crazy”, questioning their sanity. What most shocked the journalists, Mohammadou said, was the descent from solidarity into chaos on the boat: how “yesterday we ate together, today we throw you into the water. But if you don’t, everyone will die on board.” Yet despite their complaints, the repatriates kept talking to the journalists and researchers. Their stories were, after all, the only product they could offer the illegality industry.

The French film team arrived in Yongor in early April. I caught up with Mohammadou and his friends at the shore, where they sat atop a beached *pirogue*, blankly watching the cameraman home in on a woman doing the laundry. “She lost her husband in *mbëkë mi*,” Mohammadou said in his usual dry voice. Down at the beachfront, a *pirogue* was being prepared for a film trip at sea. The journalists had paid for the petrol, Mohammadou said. They had also paid for a meal of *cebujën* (rice and fish, Senegal’s national dish) for everyone, and had promised “something more” too. It was not clear what this was. Money? Contacts? Mohammadou said nothing more.

The conversation drifted onto the topic of funding partners. “You should help us find partners now that you’re a member of the association,” said Omar, their fast-talking, self-proclaimed spokesman who had suddenly shown up. The French documentary-maker, hearing the exchange, came out from under a shaded canopy and joined us on the boat, notepad in hand. “Could you help us find contacts?” they asked her eagerly. “You should prepare a dossier with your projects,” she suggested, looking sceptical. “We have done it already!” they insisted. Omar said an EU delegation had been there; the delegates had promised things but nothing came of it. He picked up his mobile and called the EU offices

in Dakar, but the delegate was away. Conversation died away and the repatriates sauntered down to the shoreline while the reporter lingered. “Why are they not leaving any more?” she asked me, looking out over the waters, past the *pirogues* towards Gorée island and the cargo ships. “Do people really know about the economic crisis in Europe?”

Besides their fascination with the tragedies on board, visitors struggled to comprehend migrants’ decision to depart. While academics analysed the journey as a form of collective risk-taking and an identity-forging experience (Hernández Carretero 2008; Melly 2011), their journalistic colleagues usually resorted to a quicker, neater explanation: a mix of desperation and ignorance, with Europe pictured as a shimmering El Dorado on the horizon. This vision, shared by politicians and donors, justified the need for *sensibilisation* on both the risks of the journey and the perils of life in Europe. By contrast, the migrants’ motto of *Barça walla barzakh* certainly conjured up an El Dorado, yet like the term *mbëkë mi* it also rendered the journey as an expected headache. Rather than being ignorant of the risks, migrants embraced it in a quest to affirm their masculine prowess, as Melly (*ibid*) notes. In *mbëkë mi*, Lebou fishermen out of work had suddenly found themselves as the protagonists in a national drama – the heroic seeking of European shores in defiance of the Senegalese and Spanish governments.

Now, in the aftermath of their equally spectacular failure, ambivalence suffused the repatriates’ relationship with the foreign visitors. They often evaded the questions thrown at them and at times came up with fake answers, but they still replied. Maybe this time, someone would listen. Maybe for once, the hacks could put them in touch with a partner. Mohammadou kept finding excuses for talking. “This is the last time,” he said, or he got a business card out to show me that the reporter was, for once, worth the effort: “he is from France 3!” They always hoped, against experience, that this time would be different. With the French television team, they would yet again be sorely disappointed.

Autumn had come. I was back in Dakar and Mohammadou met me as usual at the highway. On the corner someone had lined up stereos and radios, stacked a plastic

plate with detergent bottles and heaped old shoes onto a blanket. “It’s the *modou-modou* who have brought it here,” Mohammadou said as we made our way into the neighbourhood. It was the time of *tabaski*, the Muslim festival Eid al-Adha when many migrants came back to visit their families.

Outside the women’s collective a shack had been erected, its top adorned with the now-familiar logos of Aecid and Spanish NGOs. Inside sat a bored-looking woman in a blue dress, the shelves around her stacked with handmade soap, African dolls and assorted souvenirs. “They do that every year,” explained Mohammadou, “to sell to the visitors. But this year, no one is coming.” The largesse was moving elsewhere.

Mohammadou nevertheless had some good news to share. The association had joined in the preparations for the World Social Forum, the large annual gathering of activists, NGOs and politicians for an alternative globalisation.¹⁵ The turn had now come to West Africa to host this international event, and Dakar had been chosen as the venue. Mohammadou’s association would, in part thanks to my contact with the FSM, take part. “We had no idea there was a forum happening in Dakar,” he told visitors later on. “A social forum here in Senegal without the immigrants, it’s nothing at all.”

Retreating from our usual shaded courtyard to watch a Chelsea football game, Mohammadou revealed he had recently hosted another team of reporters, who had come via the Forum. “Next time I don’t want to do it,” he said, “I’ll tell the Forum that.” The association and elders from Yongor had been invited to the pre-launch of the Forum, travelling there in buses and taxis as a real delegation. “We won’t ask for money at the Forum, we’ll go there to find contacts,” Mohammadou said. “It’s like with you, do you remember the day I came looking for you at Mother Mercy’s place? And see, now you bring cigarettes!” The delivery was deadpan as usual, but there was a new humour and bounce in his voice. Maybe things were soon to change.

As we walked back to the main road across the railtracks, Mohammadou said they had still not heard back from the French reporters. One of his friends chipped in, saying his sister had seen them on TV in Tunisia. “If we don’t see a result everyone will think that we have got something out of it!” another repatriate

¹⁵ See <http://fsm2011.org/en/wsf-2011>

added. We said goodbye at the main road, where trucks roared out of Dakar and Senegal's police went past on their nightly anti-migration patrols.

As anthropologists such as Veena Das (1995) have noted, the telling of traumatic stories is often marred by silences and resistances. Survivors of conflict and disaster reel as visitors gain “fame from writing, filming or reporting about us” (Drakulic 2012). Unlike in the aftermath of war, however, the boat tragedy did not even raise the hope of bringing a perpetrator to account. There was no one to blame but the Atlantic waves, the “unscrupulous smugglers” and the repatriates themselves. With no result to show for their labours – not even a copy of the images, books or films extracted from their accounts – the repatriates’ retellings of their tragedies only mired them further in illegality, fuelling resentment and distrust at those who ate from migration.

Repatriation and the economics of affliction

In February 2011 the Forum descended on Dakar. The venue, Université Cheikh Anta Diop, had been invaded by cosmopolitan *altermondialistes*, Native American delegations, Moroccan nationalists, curious Dakarois students and an ever-growing crowd of vendors flogging straw hats, beads and postcards along the leafy roads of the campus. Amid the trinket stands and the swelling crowds, a theatre piece was taking place. A quick glance at the props spread out on the pavement – a fishing net, planks depicting a boat – gave it away as *sensibilisation* on illegal migration; so did the wail of the female protagonist. As her sobs subsided, her male co-protagonist spoke, arguing forcefully against departure: to leave for Europe “without mastering the language, without profession” did not make sense, he admonished his audience. The play was done in French instead of Wolof for the benefit of the foreign visitors, explained an Italian worker from the NGO funding the show. The actors already had multi-lingual experience: besides performing for candidates for illegal migration, they also did sensitisation shows for tourists whose solidarity trips financed the campaigns. “That way, the tourists know where their money’s going.”

Elsewhere on campus, the venerable Institut Fondamental d’Afrique Noire was to host the migration and diaspora section of the weeklong gathering. But

nothing was going to plan. Wade's government, suddenly unhappy with Forum radicalism, had deposed the university's director, and the new one withdrew his support from the event. The halls of IFAN were closed, meetings got cancelled, chaos reigned on campus.

Among the presenters was Yongor's repatriate association. The repatriates had lost their hall in the chaos, and did not know where to go. I tagged along, as did two researcher colleagues. Eventually we found an empty lecture hall. There was no one in the gloomy science classroom, only Mohammadou, two of his fellow repatriates and us. A third, rival collective of "families affected by illegal migration" from Yongor had also made it there in the form of their spokesman, Alioune, and three women dressed in their finery. They had broken with Mother Mercy because of anger over funding and were still hoping against hope for news of their disappeared relatives. Like Mother Mercy, who we had spotted earlier mingling in the migration and diaspora grounds, they also hoped to find potential partners.

The room was oppressively hot in the late afternoon. We waited: maybe more people would arrive. Mohammadou wavered, not sure whether to go ahead. They had talked about this moment for months. Then a French woman in her fifties entered and sat down. Mohammadou decided to begin.

"I know very well that the people didn't want to have a conference about illegal migration, because they know that if I speak, they will know the reality of illegal migration." Mohammadou spoke in a deep voice that receded into a murmur, resting on a school bench at the top of the room, cap on head. "There are people who earn a lot of money from illegal migration, but since 2006, the young repatriates haven't received anything from illegal migration." He found the French woman's eyes and held them as he told his story of 14 days at sea, 95 people packed together. "There are mothers here who have lost their sons... while others say they have lost relatives, and go earn money in Europe." He fixed his gaze on the woman as he talked in a calm, steady tone about the lost lives. The dirty fans did not whirr, dust stuck to the walls and sweat to our bodies. "Who is responsible, the European Union? Who?" Someone swallowed. Outside the closed door I heard the shuffle of feet, a reminder that soon this meeting would end and we could go back out to mingle among the careless students. "Here they have hidden everything, they have hidden everything, because people don't want to

understand the reality.” Still Mohammadou held the French woman’s eyes. “They don’t give any resources for keeping the youth in place,” he said. I averted my gaze, instead scanning the walls where grimy posters hung depicting uranium chain reactions. “I’m not the association,” he continued, gesturing to his fellow repatriates. “The association needs assistance… You have to go speak in Spain, in Italy, because we don’t have the means to go there.” He mentioned the journalists who had come, the French reporter team from last spring, people calling him to say they had seen him on television, books he had helped Europeans write. “But the money from that, where do they put it?” Two of the mothers of Yongor were slouching over their desks, slipping into an afternoon stupor in the airless hall. “It’s finished, talking about illegal migration… you have to help the youth and the mothers.” A soft, short applause ensued, followed by a sad silence.

Then Alioune and the mothers talked of their tragedy under the pale lights of the hall. “They are 86 families who really want to talk,” said Alioune, also addressing the French woman. As he handed out his business cards, she finally saw her chance and escaped from the room.

Amid their fruitless hunt for partners, the repatriates had been put to work in three ways in the illegality industry: as human deterrents, as commodities to be bartered by NGOs and authorities, and as an alluring presence ripe for journalistic or academic portrayal. The illegality industry was not a smooth operation forged by policymakers and politicians in their European offices, however. Instead it mutated and grew increasingly absurd as Spanish (and Senegalese) needs for depoliticising controversial border operations co-opted development aid from above – a process that was, in turn, co-opted from below in manners akin to those described by Mosse (2004:239). While Mother Mercy was an expert at this snagging and snaring of the funders, the repatriates also tried their best. Here, the voyeurism inherent in clandestine migration – a veiled presence to be discovered by police, journalists or potential partners – spurred new and shifting modes of self-presentation. Sometimes repatriates decided to render themselves visible as illegal migrants, much like they would tear off their invisibility amulets or *gris-gris* on the open sea once all hope was gone and they waited for a miraculous

rescue. They did so when calling upon the Senegalese state to do justice to the repatriates, when selling their story to journalists and researchers, or when presenting themselves as pacifiers of candidates for illegal migration to western funders. In the process, states, NGOs and repatriates all conspired in the “making up” of the illegal migrant (Hacking 1986).

What type of migrant was being made up? As Peutz and de Genova (2010:8) have said, the global deportation regime allocates individuals to their designated slots across the world, maintaining the fiction of place-bound, discrete belonging. It was such a territorial solution (Cornelisse 2010) that Spain had tried to achieve in Senegal. A brief crack had opened in the armour of the West, but by 2010 order had been re-established. The gate to Europe had slammed shut. The wild men who once steered towards European shores were back where they belonged, immobilised and resentful in their homeland.

Deportation had at first made the repatriates into tragic heroes. Melly (2011:363), commenting on tales of “missing men” during Senegal’s boat craze, says that “it was through repetition and reiteration of tales of failed migration attempts that men became spectacularly present as national adventurers, risk-taking entrepreneurs, and devoted family men who were willing to sacrifice themselves for others”. Yet their return had entangled the repatriates in a battle over funds and dignity from which they emerged as diminished figures. As they were left to scramble for the spoils of the illegality industry, the imaginary of their one-time migrations mutated. No longer simply the stuff of heroic tales, *mbëkë mi* increasingly turned into a stigma. Illegal migration, prevented in sensitisation campaigns and paraded by repatriates’ morose and idle bodies, came to resemble less a sign of bravado and sacrifice than a disease-like affliction.

This served the authorities well, but Mohammadou and his friends were nonetheless no pawns bartered between NGOs and “community leaders”, politicians and police, journalists and anthropologists. In their tragic attempts to reach the Canaries, they had thrown a line and hook across the waters to Europe. Their one-time journeys were an exercise in mutual interpellation (Althusser 1971) that not only created relations between Spanish and African politicians, journalists and NGOs, but also entitled the migrants to ask the Europeans for funds, reparations and recognition. By 2010, most of Yongor’s former migrants were firmly ensconced at home, with little thought of leaving again because of the

patrols, the poverty and the tragedy they had faced. In their never-ending attempts to find partners, they nevertheless tried to convert their boat ordeal into political and economic capital. When this failed, only a wounded, resentful pride remained.

Down at the beach, looking out over the milky waters towards the Guardia Civil boat, Mohammadou fixed his eyes on me. “No one can stop us,” he said. “We are Africans.” To prove his point he unbuttoned his shirt to show a snake-like leathery amulet wrapped round his stomach. The *gris-gris* would protect him if he were ever to leave again. It would make him invisible to the prying eyes of Senegalese police and the Spanish coast guards, the radars and the infrared cameras crisscrossing the wild waves all the way to the Canary Islands. There were new, stronger motors on the market, 60 horsepower Yamahas that would take them there even faster than in 2006. “We have no fear,” Mohammadou said. “We have no fear of the planes, we have no fear of the boats, we have no fear of the crisis.”

Mohammadou and his fellow former migrants were not just dragged into the measly trickle-down world of Dakar’s aid industry. They would also become capital in a high-stakes game of bordering Europe, whose webs of control were every bit as invisible and magical as those of Mohammadou’s *gris-gris*. This border regime, and its extraction of the very “risk” once embraced by the repatriates, is the subject of the next chapter.

2

A game of risk

Deep in the bowels of the Guardia Civil headquarters in Madrid, ten men sit around a small wooden table in an open-plan room. Uniformed marines, suited police and green-clad *guardias* clutch their phones or type awkwardly on identical laptops lined up round the table. A Baltic policeman dials head office and a stern-looking officer speaks broken English down the line. The men are East European, Icelandic, Italian, Dutch and Spanish. Their table is the nerve centre of the European border agency Frontex's migration control operations off Spain's southern coasts.

Follow the wires and satellite networks as they spin away from this room and you will reach Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. There, at the back of the Military Palace, is the regional coordination centre for migration surveillance along the Atlantic seaboard. Inside, on an electronic map in a *guardia*-manned control room, patrol boats appear as blips in the waters between the Canaries and Africa. Next door sit Senegalese, Moroccan and Mauritanian officers who communicate with their African colleagues down the telephone cables and satellite links that reach, like the translucent strands of a great spider's web, all the way to Dakar and the coast outside Mohammadou's neighbourhood.

A Euro-African border is under construction at the southern edge of Europe. Clandestine boat migration is a small phenomenon yet vast amounts of money have been spent on radars, satellites, advanced computer systems and patrols by sea, land and air to prevent migrants from leaving the African coastline in the first place. From state-of-the-art control rooms in Europe to rundown West African borderposts, from Atlantic coasts to the Mediterranean Sea, a new border regime is at work, aimed at tracking one principal target – the “illegal immigrant”.

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; Walters 2006) 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, 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; Bigo 2005). Yet for all its recent "deterritorialised" dispersal, the border regime has a distinguished historical and geographical pedigree. It actively draws upon the Mediterranean and Atlantic waters with their ancient power to both divide and unite (Braudel 1975) while mimicking the ancient Roman *limes*, the fortified imperial limit or buffer beyond which the barbarians awaited (Walters 2004). Limes is, in twenty-first century Europe, the name of a border control programme; Greek and Roman gods lend their names to joint patrolling operations.

The novelty of the Euro-African border, it will be argued, lies in a gradual process of abstraction of both the border itself and the clandestine traveller who approaches it. This process in turn hinges on the rendering of the migrant and his boat as a peculiar kind of risk. The language of risk, as Ulrich Beck (2009) notes, is spreading globally – it fuels financial market panics, terrorist fears and apocalyptic visions of climate change. While Beck's early conception of risk has been widely criticised by anthropologists for being universalistic, reified and ignorant of power (see e.g. Caplan 2000:24-25; Vera-Sanso 2000:128), his more recent work sees risk as the *anticipation* of catastrophe (Beck 2009): it is manufactured, staged and acted upon, in the process becoming ever more real. The "game of risk" played out by Europe's border agencies on high seas and in control rooms is such a staging, in which experts and security forces labour under the sign of looming catastrophe. In doing so, they remove the migrants and their rickety boats from the political field and treat them as something new, something abstract: a security threat approaching the external EU border.

This process is known as "securitisation", of which more will be said below. Securitisation has two distinct meanings in international relations and global finance but both, as will be seen in Frontex headquarters and Spanish

control rooms, try to disperse and reduce risk (Gledhill 2008). Yet risk cannot be contained by the border regime – and neither can the conflicts spawned by the ever-higher stakes in the business of bordering Europe.

Joint Operation Hera: drawing the line

Madrid, June 2010. Europe's border regime remains largely unknown even to law enforcement officers, tucked away as it is into the far corners of distant cities and historic buildings. At the fortress-like Guardia Civil headquarters in Madrid, none of the *guardias* manning the gate knew about the International Coordination Centre (ICC) for migration controls. “Ah, is that Indalo?” one *guardia* asked, finally dialling the Comandante in charge. Indalo was one of two migration patrol operations along Spanish coasts, covering the Mediterranean coasts of Andalusia and Murcia. It took its name from an ancient good-luck charm from Spain's southern Almería region, said to ward off evil:



A *guardia* took me across the courtyard, up a flight of stairs and down a corridor from the ICC control room with its table of wired-up officers. Comandante Francisco sat behind his polished wooden desk, a large Spanish flag hanging in the corner. Francisco led the Guardia Civil on Indalo, and also oversaw the second Frontex joint operation in Spain: the patrolling of the Atlantic Ocean between West Africa and the Canary Islands.

The mass arrival of migrant boats in the Canaries had first taken Spain by surprise. “We weren't geared up in the beginning,” Francisco said. “These were islands, an archipelago,” said a *guardia* colleague in Tenerife. “What problems could we have? There were just no serious problems in border control here.” But the Guardia Civil, responsible for patrolling land and sea borders in Spain, soon found their feet. By the time of the “boat crisis” in 2006, the building blocks of the new border regime were already being put in place. The Spanish government scrambled for EU support and signed secretive patrolling and readmissions

agreements with Mauritania, Cape Verde and Senegal.¹ Soon it also had Frontex, Europe's young border agency, on board. Francisco had left on a mission to the windblown port city of Nouadhibou in Mauritania, from where migrant boats had set off that summer, earning it the nickname *la ville des clandestins* (city of illegal migrants). His objective was the launch of unprecedented anti-migration patrols along African coasts. The Atlantic waters lapping against the Canary Islands would become the laboratory for a “migration management” model soon to be exported across Europe’s southern borders.

Hera was the name given to the Frontex joint operation in the Atlantic. Erstwhile wife of Zeus, Hera is the Hellenic goddess of love and marriage, and she has achieved a perfect union between Spain, the EU and West African states. Hera I, launched in July 2006, brought experts to the Canaries to help identify the nationalities of detained migrants. Frontex later claimed “100 per cent success” in this operation. Hera II, launched a month later, brought Frontex-funded and Guardia Civil patrol vessels to African coasts. For the first time, European and West African states were patrolling the EU’s borders together.

Hera has pride of place in the Frontex pantheon. In the Frontex booklet *Beyond the Frontier*, a sepia-tinted stocktaking five years on from the agency’s creation, Hera is described as “pivotal in achieving success. Before Operation Hera everything was theory. But after Hera the way forward was clear... [it was] the birth of sea operations” (Frontex 2010:37). Hera, Comandante Francisco said, was “the prototype that Frontex would like to export to the other joint operations”. They work “in the jurisdictional waters from where they are leaving, it’s the ideal operation”, he said. “You have to prevent them leaving, you can’t wait for them to arrive... That way you save many lives.” Early interception meant you saved money as well, he added: if migrants arrive “you give them food, you have to take care of them”.

The numbers reveal why Hera was so popular. Arrivals in the Canaries fell from around 32,000 in 2006 to 2,200 in 2009. By 2010, the flow had virtually stopped. Moreover, none of the recent arrivals were sub-Saharan Africans, and none had departed from Mauritania and Senegal, instead using the shorter route

¹ Mauritania already had a 2003 readmissions agreement, which was reactivated in 2006

from Western Sahara to the eastern Canary Islands. The direct passage from West Africa to Europe had effectively been “closed”.

Hera was a first, successful attempt at a Europeanised border regime, and “Frontex” soon became a shorthand for this attempt. One former *guardia* explained the process to me in a café with the use of two tapas plates: “First came the *pateras*,” he said, using the generic Spanish term for migrant boats, as he moved a plate across the table. “Then they put Frontex here.” Another plate on the table, blocking the route. Among border workers in the Canaries, the migration control centre created in Las Palmas was known as *el Frontex*. This agency, like a concrete obstacle, had through Hera halted the migrants boats. It had also – for the first time – drawn a clear borderline across the seas, separating Europe’s southernmost reaches from the African coasts.

Yet the line, as soon as it was drawn, was already becoming diffuse; it was but the first step in the business of bordering Europe in the boats’ wake.

Risk to life: rescues in the border zone

Las Palmas, January 2010. Comandante Ignacio greeted me on the steps of *el Frontex*. The CCRC (Centro de Coordinación Regional de Canarias), as his domains were formally known, occupied the back offices of the Military Palace in central Las Palmas while waiting for new locales out of town. Inside, the corridors were adorned with pictures that would soon become a familiar sight in other Guardia Civil control centres – drowning Africans being pulled onto patrol boats, detained Moroccan migrants squatting next to a wall, patrol vessels racing through the waves. Upstairs, strung around a Canarian patio, lay offices for the chiefs of operations, intelligence gathering, international liaison officers and command and control. In the command and control centre, two young *guardias* manned the twin terminals. “Thanks to their work, no *pateras* arrive now,” said Ignacio with pride. A large electronic map projected on the wall showed the six Canary Islands and a scattering of Guardia Civil boats and vehicles on sea and land. Numbered sections of the seas indicated zones assigned to military planes monitoring the Atlantic under the Defence Ministry’s Operation Noble Sentry.²

² “Noble Centinela” ended in 2010

The control centre oversaw the whole operational zone, about 425,000 square kilometres of open sea between the Canaries, Cape Verde and Senegal (Arteaga 2007:3).

The Hera deployment had been impressive. By the summer of 2006, Guardia Civil vessels patrolled first the Mauritanian and then the Senegalese coasts in alliance with their African colleagues; Frontex-funded and Spanish military planes circled the open Atlantic; and the Spanish sea rescue service Salvamento Marítimo scoured the high seas in search for boat migrants. The proliferation of agencies involved in patrolling needed a coordination centre, and this took the form of the CCRC. This centre was to be run by the Guardia Civil, which as Spain's military-status police force was an ideal choice according to one *guardia*: “The military won't get upset and the civilians won't get angry since the Guardia Civil has a civilian scope.” One security analyst called the CCRC “an experiment in security that is ahead of its time... its mission represents a new generation of security: one that goes beyond what can be defined as purely internal or external, national or international, civilian or military” (*ibid*:6). The CCRC's “multi-disciplinary” model, since exported and updated in the form of the ICC in Madrid, enabled an unprecedented visualisation and control of the southern maritime border.

The CCRC's very architecture highlighted how migration has in recent years emerged as what Didier Bigo (2001) calls a “global security problem” situated at the threshold of internal and external security. As states have shifted from “war fighting” to “crime fighting” at the borders, Andreas and Price (2001) assert, the roles of security forces have become increasingly mixed. In this new security landscape, Bigo (2001:121) stresses that, contrary to much popular and academic opinion, “migration control is not an *answer* to a security problem.” Instead, security agencies nervous about their future relevance “compete among themselves to have their objectives included in politicians' platforms”. The CCRC stood not just as a monument to the winners in this battle on the Spanish front, the Guardia Civil. Rather, its placing at the back of the Military Palace, its new technology and multi-agency staff proved a *catalyst* in the shift towards a “militarisation of policing and domestication of soldiering” (Andreas and Price 2001:31) around the figure of the illegal immigrant.

A worthy cause was needed to justify this militarised deployment. The solution was, as indicated by Comandante Francisco and confirmed by the pictures in the CCRC corridors, the crucial task of “saving lives”. The legal scholar Matteo Tondini has argued that Frontex maritime interceptions “may be in principle legally justified only if retained [as] rescue interventions” (2010:26) and this seems to be a lesson that high-ranking border guards have taken to heart. In the words of Giuseppe, an Italian coast guard and former project manager of Hera, “the priority is to save human lives, and this entails intercepting all the boats that try to arrive in Spain before they reach the coasts”. The basis for interceptions, Giuseppe confirmed, was “rescuing lives” based on SOLAS, the international convention for the safety of life at sea.

The bordering of southern Europe was aided by the fact that maritime borders are by their nature diffuse and governed by a patchwork of rules under international law.³ While humanitarianism provided a legal justification for interceptions on the open or “free” seas (*Mare Liberum*), it also lent a pre-emptive rationale to the controversial policing of African territorial waters, where Spanish memoranda of understanding signed with coastal states allowed the Europeans to patrol as long as local officers were formally in charge of the decision to intercept.⁴ “What matters is helping people,” said one *guardia*, “whether it’s at one [nautical] mile, or 15, or 30, or 200... when helping a boat there is no limit.”

This humanitarian urge seems at odds with the boat tragedies in the Mediterranean, where at least 1,500 migrants died in 2011 alone (HRW 2012). Here loopholes in the international search and rescue regime (SAR) and SOLAS, Gammeltoft-Hansen and Aalberts (2010:17) assert, mean that European states can heave off responsibilities for rescuing migrant boats to their neighbours. The search-and-rescue laws, Human Rights Watch (2012) notes, are moreover unclear

³ Under international law, national sovereignty extends for 12 nautical miles from the coasts; next follow a “contiguous zone” of limited sovereignty for another 12 miles, the “exclusive economic zone” of up to 200 miles and, finally, *Mare Liberum*

⁴ The agreements, which have not been made public, differ from country to country. Senegal allows non-Spanish Frontex boats and planes to patrol in the exclusive economic zone; Mauritania allows only the Guardia Civil to patrol, and only in the contiguous zone (Guardia Civil, personal communication)

on the concept of distress at sea, “allowing ships to ignore dangerously overcrowded and ill-equipped migrant boats”.

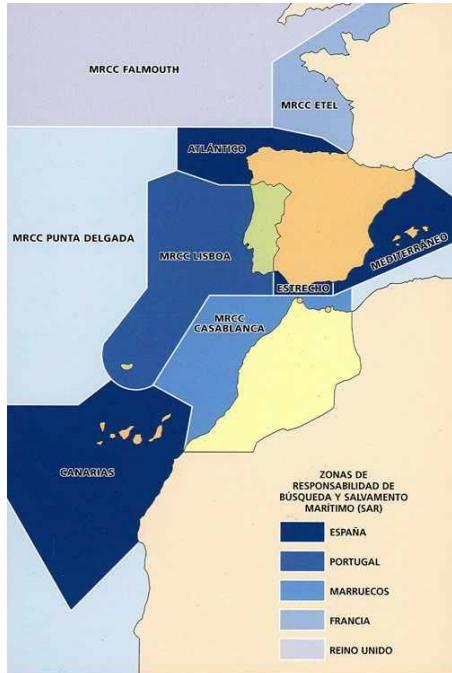


Figure 3. Spain's SAR zones (deep blue)



Figure 4. Sea surveillance areas in Hera, 2009 Guardia Civil

In contrast to states such as Malta, however, Spanish patrols saw any migrant vessel as a virtual shipwreck (*náufrago*). In the words of one Spanish sea rescue chief, a *cayuco* was a “danger for navigation” by definition, akin to a coach racing down a highway “without brakes”. Such reasoning enabled early interventions across Spain’s vast SAR zone of more than 1,5m square kilometres, with the Canaries zone constituting two-thirds of this and reaching the African coastline. In the Mediterranean joint operation Indalo, too, the patrolling area followed the Spanish SAR zone rather than limiting itself to territorial waters. Yet Spanish boats also went beyond these limits, Guardia Civil chiefs conceded, and not only in West African coastal zones covered by the patrolling agreements. Around the Spanish enclave of Ceuta and in the Strait, *guardias* said they would enter Moroccan waters for a rescue when life was in danger – overriding the otherwise tense and militarised border.

In short, humanitarianism enables what Guild (2008) terms a “migration of sovereignty” away from European shores by dissolving the patchwork of

maritime boundaries. Arteaga (2007:6) argues that “police units both intercept and rescue, which undermines their image as a dissuasive force”, but this very humanitarian-policing nexus is what legitimises and lends efficacy to migration control operations in African and international waters.

The Euro-African border might have started life as a line, but the rescues and patrols soon subverted this linear logic. Sea and air operations diced up the open sea into surveillance areas dependent on the patchwork of SAR zones and the African patrolling agreements. Surveillance was not an exercise in “holding the line”, as the name of a border control operation in the US once had it, but in monitoring a grid (Feldman 2012:95). This monitoring exercise depended upon a framing of boat migration as dangerous by definition, a “risk to life” in the words of one Guardia Civil captain. Migrants had to be “prevented from leaving” for their own good. Yet migrants were not only rendered a risk to themselves on the open seas, but also to the integrity of the external EU border – and it fell upon Frontex, Europe’s elusive border agency, to conceptualise them as such a risk.

Risk’s golden arrow: Frontex and the border business

Warsaw, July 2011. Frontex headquarters are far from the African coastlines and deserts, far from the Mediterranean and Atlantic seas. Its home, the Rondo1 skyscraper, is all sheer glass surfaces set in the corporate post-Communist landscape of the Polish capital, its façade sporting the logo of accountancy firm Ernst & Young. *Libertas, Securitas, Justitia* reads the Frontex motto on a limp flag at the entrance.

Frontex is an elusive agency. Still little known among European publics, it is charged with managing “operational cooperation” at the EU’s external borders. Its main task is halting irregular migrant flows, and for this it has been provided with an exponentially growing budget, going from €19.1m in 2006, its first full year of operations, to €84.9m in 2012.⁵ Criticism has mounted over the legality of Frontex patrols and the pushback of asylum seekers (Migreurop 2010; Tondini 2010), while activists have increasingly decried the agency’s “war” on migrants.

⁵ Frontex (2010:10) and draft 2012 budget:

<http://www.frontex.europa.eu/assets/About%20Frontex/Governance%20documents/Budget/Budget%202012.pdf>

But Frontex, it soon became clear on my visits, is both more and less than this militaristic view would allow for.

The glassed-in elevator rose swiftly and pinged open on the 11th floor, where a Frontex doormat welcomed me onto a walkway leading to the agency's swipecard-entry offices. On the wall behind reception was the Frontex logo, tastefully engraved in a wooden panel. A glass cabinet displayed Frontex T-shirts, Frontex torches and Frontex ties nicely folded in their boxes. THINGS *NOT FOR SALE*, said a notice. I sat down and browsed Polish policing magazines on the coffee table as a female staffer walked past, beeping her entrance card on a reader at the end of the room. A glass door slid open and let her into what looked like a decompression chamber. She looked towards the ceiling, where a camera read her face before the inner door let her through. This "mantrap", as workers called it, plus the policing magazines and the NO SALE sign: these were the only indications this was not the headquarters of an accountancy or law firm, but the brains of Europe's border regime, a "cop shop" in the words of one staffer.

Alessandra, the Frontex spokeswoman, met me in reception and led me to the offices of the deputy director. Spain had proposed Gerardo, a soft-spoken man with a background in the Spanish national police, as director when Frontex was in its infancy. A Finnish border guard, Ilkka Laitinen, secured the position but Gerardo's being second in charge was still a coup for Madrid. Gerardo had a Spanish secretary, a strong Spanish accent and Spanish priorities, talking warmly of his country's success in combating clandestine migration. As the interview unfolded I glanced at a poster of the sunny Pyrenees on his wall: its postcard rendering of Gerardo's faraway home seemed an apt metaphor for the continued dominance of state loyalties in a supposedly Europeanised border regime.

The Spanish experience underpinned all subsequent Frontex operations. Its first mission was to Ceuta and Melilla in 2005, followed by Hera in 2006. While Gerardo called this operation the "benchmark" for all future joint operations, he immediately downplayed Frontex's role in the success. "The joint operation might have helped," he said, "but [this] was also the time when Spain was negotiating agreements" with African states. These deals for border surveillance, policing cooperation, repatriation and "arresting smugglers" had a drastic impact, he insisted. "We do not pretend to be the key players in this success." Afterwards

Alessandra echoed Gerardo's comments. "We have to be very careful when we talk about the reasons for the reduction," she said. "We can't take the glory."

This was surely a communications strategy that aimed to strike a balance between visibility and invisibility – promoting Frontex just enough while letting it work in the shadows, leaving both glory and blame to the host state. But Frontex had indeed been a hanger-on, not a leader, in Hera. As one Frontex officer put it, the police officers who arrived to interview migrants "took it as vacations, going to the Canary Islands.... We had to guide them." This was not just a temporary state of affairs. Giuseppe, the former Hera manager, recalled the 2010 deployment of an Icelandic patrol boat to Senegal. "They asked for a Frontex delegate to be with them [and show] how the operations are carried out. For them it's a completely different reality, nothing in common with Iceland at all!"

Criticism of Frontex often single out the blurred limits to its responsibilities in sea operations, but this contrasted with the clear view given by Gerardo. "Once the operational phase is implemented," he said, "the national authorities are the ones who have the command and control of the assets."⁶ Future Frontex agreements with third countries might not even change this, Gerardo indicated. Governments were too reluctant to let go of control over their slice of Europe's southern maritime border.

The borders, then, remain a largely bilateral business, as Frontex's full name indicates: "European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the *External Borders of the Member States* of the European Union". In the words of one commentator, "Frontex is still an agency that lacks independence, whose performance depends on the political agenda of states such as Spain, who in this way transfer their domestic interests to a European level" (Hernández i Sagrera 2008:4). Indeed, Spain leads Hera patrols on the basis of Spanish bilateral deals; the CCRC is not run by *el Frontex* but by the Guardia Civil from the back offices of a Spanish military palace. Frontex here seems reduced to being a funnel for European funds and a megaphone for member states.

Yet this conclusion would miss Frontex's main impact in rethinking the border. Its "thought-work", as Heyman (1995) terms the routine bureaucratic production of thoughts on a target population, has helped redraw the patchwork of

⁶ These comments resonate with the controversy surrounding Frontex operations at the Greek-Turkish border. See HRW (2011)

borders in southern Europe within a larger narrative of the external border of the EU. Spain-Morocco, Italy-Libya, Greece-Turkey and, to a lesser extent, the eastern land borders: these are now frontlines in a common European endeavour, and Frontex provides the language to make sense of and operationalise this frontline in terms of migration. The agency's thought-work, as will soon be seen, again frames migration as a risk – although no longer just to human life, but to the security of Europe's external borders.

For Frontex, the border means business. In the words of one commentator, “Frontex wears suit not uniform”.⁷ Its operations are organised along the lines of corporate ventures. “Project teams” handle joint operations (JOs), drawing in staff from most Frontex units: analysts from the Risk Analysis Unit (RAU), a support team from the admin division, maybe someone from “returns” (forced deportation) and staff from “ops” (operations) including the project manager. RAU’s tailored risk analyses (TRAs) on regions or topics of concern help define the area and focus of new operations. Next follow meetings with member states and the preparation of a TFA, or tactical focused assessment, identifying the “main themes and risks”. Member states decide whether to participate, and an operational plan is drafted on “who can provide what, when and where”, explained one risk analyst. The plan is circulated internally, “to legal, PR and so on”. The host state gets a say, and the end result is a final draft and a full operational plan. “After this the real hard work starts,” said the analyst. Operational area, timeframe, assets member states can contribute – patrol boats and planes, for example, or human assets – are set out. The JO is ready to go.

JO and RAU, TRA and TFA, assets and ops: Frontex lingo is as impenetrable as any business jargon. Its reports speak of “business fields” active in the (military-style) “operational theatre” of the external border. The “operational portfolio” includes delivery of “strategic and operational risk analysis products” to “customers”, also known as the border guards of member states (Frontex 2009a:16-17, 20 and 2009b). Despite Alessandra’s protestations

⁷ See <http://w2eu.net/frontex/frontex-in-the-mediterranean/>

(“business implies a profit, right?”), Frontex’s business language with its splash of military metaphors points to the agency’s dual view of itself: as a purveyor of “solutions” and “best practice” on the one hand, and as a quick-footed emergency deployment force on the other.

Frontex, as the fulcrum in the EU’s strategy of “integrated border management”, reconceptualises the border through a range of tasks: it trains border guards, creates arenas for officers to talk shop in joint operations and exports its jargon to member states for statistics collection. But it is risk analysis that is at the heart of Frontex’s thought-work, underpinning all operations. RAU collects intelligence via the Frontex Risk Analysis Network, whose nation-state contributors in turn gather data from immigration liaison officers stationed in “transit countries”.⁸ As the language of risk spreads across these networks and filters down to border patrols, Frontex reprioritises borderwork towards halting migration.⁹ Anything else – detecting oil spills, assisting boats in danger, intercepting drugs – is subordinated to that goal. As Alessandra put it: “[Joint Operation] Indalo [is] interesting in terms of... side products. Our mandate is border controls as such, controlling illegal migration,” but in Indalo they “seized four tonnes of hashish while they were at it”. Border controls *as such* mean irregular migration, first of all, and Frontex as an intelligence-driven agency has made it its task to define and understand this object through the concept of risk.

Risk, to Frontex, is defined as “a function of threat, vulnerability and impact”:¹⁰

[A] ‘threat’ is a force or pressure acting upon the external borders that is characterised by both its magnitude and likelihood; ‘vulnerability’ is defined as the capacity of a system to mitigate the threat and ‘impact’ is determined as the potential consequences of the threat.

Through this three-pronged risk concept, Frontex is providing one key piece in the “securitisation” of migration. In international relations, securitisation refers to taking an issue out of politics and framing it as a security threat, whether through

⁸ Spain’s Frontex focal point is the national police’s Comisaría General de Extranjería y Fronteras

⁹ A secure web-based system, ICONet, is used for sharing such sensitive information

¹⁰ This definition is part of the updated Common Integrated Risk Analysis Model (CIRAM) used by Frontex analysts (Frontex 2012:9)

enunciation or practice.¹¹ Migration has long been securitised, of course: first tentatively embraced by European policing networks in the late 1970s, it was made into a “justice and home affairs” concern in the EU’s 1993 Maastricht Treaty and has been subject to member states’ eagerness to police the borders ever since (Gabrielli 2011:170; Huysmans 2000). Frontex simply builds on this process, as Léonard (2011) notes in a recent assessment of the agency’s varied tasks of patrolling, training and intelligence-gathering. However, her study pays relatively little attention to the organising concept of risk. Risk bridges humanitarianism and crime-fighting, enunciation and practice, politics and patrols: it provides the language shorn of politics needed to make migrant boats an abstract threat to the external border. As will be seen, risk also allows for thinking of migration in terms of a second “securitisation” – in the banking sense of pooling and profiting from financial risk.

Risk is made real through a world of arrows in which the migrant boats, still visible and tangible in sea patrols and rescues, reach a new level of abstraction. In a Frontex meeting room, one risk analyst spread printouts of a map for tracking clandestine migrant routes across the table. On the “i-Map”, developed by the migration think-tank ICMPD, arrows pointed across the deserts of Libya, Niger, Algeria and Mauritania before converging on migrant nodes such as Nouadhibou, Oujda and Agadez. In Frontex lingo, the routes are closed, displaced and reactivated, while “transfers” of “pockets” of migrants are talked about in the imported academic language of push and pull factors. Here migrant routes morph into sharp arrows – “forces or pressures”, as the Frontex risk definition puts it – threatening the EU’s “vulnerable” external borders.

If migrants are rendered as risk, sub-Saharan migrants are riskier than others. Frontex and the i-Map delve into the trans-Saharan trails more than the air routes and shorter hops used by North Africans:

[fig5 removed: i-Map screenshot of African routes, available at imap-migration.org]

¹¹ The original “Copenhagen School” formulation of securitisation as a speech act (Buzan 1991) is complemented by Bigo’s (2001) focus, followed here, on securitisation through *practice*

The risk analyst traced her finger along the arrows, from Mauritania on the coast to the Algerian desert. “There was a displacement effect” in 2009 “from the Atlantic to the Western Mediterranean route”, she said. “Up to 2009, this was the most dangerous route migrants could take, the West Saharan route.” With increasing pressure on both the Atlantic and eastern fronts – the route from Niger to Libya and onwards to Italy – this was the only route left. “The only way was going up,” she said. The “pocket” had to be transferred; Spain’s Indalo area of operations was being reactivated.

Those who do the transferring and reactivation – the people smugglers – are known in Frontex parlance as facilitators. This covers anyone who has “intentionally assisted third-country nationals in the illegal entry to, or exit from, the territory across external borders”, ranging from taxi drivers on the Greek-Macedonian frontier to organised trafficking rings.¹² Through “debriefings” with migrants in detention, Frontex finds out about their routes and facilitators’ *modus operandi*, data that are later synthesised in risk assessments.

The gradual abstraction in risk analysis – evident both in the i-Map visuals and Frontex glossary – flattens the complex realities of the border. Is an Afghan refugee as much of a risk as a Senegalese boat migrant?¹³ Are Macedonian taxi drivers and Nigerian trafficking gangs equal threats? Frontex lingo, through its neutrality, facilitates the swift translation of border terminology. When smuggling networks professionalise in response to increased controls, this change is also masked by the i-Map arrows and the Frontex jargon of reactivation and facilitation. Frontex thought-work, through its very neutrality, furnishes a unitary vision of the border as the place where homogenous migrants and facilitators are fought back and apprehended.

This unitary vision contrasts with the reality of boat migration, as the Spanish police know. The migrant networks of Senegal in 2006 and 2007 were spontaneous, according to Raúl, the Spanish police attaché in Dakar. “These were Senegalese fishermen who often wanted to migrate themselves. They had the boat, they had the motor, and clients offered themselves up.” In fishing neighbourhoods such as Yongor, a whole chain of workers was involved. The

¹² Definition provided by Frontex via e-mail

¹³ Frontex risk analyses talk of “risk countries” in contexts where such countries are likely to refer to senders of refugees. See e.g. Frontex (2011:50)

coxeur found clients on behalf of the *convoyeur* or *borom gaal*, the trip organiser and owner of the boat. Once all “tickets” were sold, the *convoyeur* contracted a *capitaine* or *guide* for the boat, who would handle the GPS on board, as well as several *chaffeurs*, who piloted the boat in exchange for free passage. To Frontex, the *convoyeur*, *borom gaal*, *coxeur*, *capitaine* and *chaffeur* are all facilitators that, in Spain, can be denounced in the media as “mafias” and sentenced as *pasadores* (smugglers).

The framing of migrants and facilitators as sources of risk, then, “securitises the Other” (Martin 2004) through a process of visual and linguistic abstraction. But risk is not just the anticipation of danger, as Beck (2009:4) notes; it is also the source of potential profits and opportunities. To understand this flipside of risk, it is useful to think about the second, financial meaning of “securitisation” together with the term’s policing sense, along lines similar to those of Martin (2004) and Gledhill (2008). To bankers, securitisation refers to the bundling, slicing and trading of debt. In the financial derivatives at the heart of the 2008 credit crunch, risky subprime mortgages were packaged into a bundle, pushed into an off-balance-sheet vehicle and traded on global markets in “tranches” with different levels of exposure to risk (Tett 2009). The trick was an unprecedented *dispersal* of risk; yet this very dispersal proved the system’s undoing.

Disconcertingly, the border regime seems to disperse and distribute risk in a similar fashion. It first securitises migratory flows as a threat through Frontex intelligence networks and tools such as the i-Map, whose golden arrows let experts envision new “solutions” in a graphic interface. Here risk is securitised in the second, financial sense – bundled into pockets, routes, flows and vulnerabilities and assigned to police forces and external investors. And this distribution, like that of financial securitisation, generates new risk and ever-growing tensions among its “junior” and “senior” investors, as will soon be seen.

Frontex, much like a fast-moving financier or the “facilitators” it targets, both shuns and embraces risks. To keep up to date with their routes it needs a lean, fast-moving and flexible operation. Five offices in a Warsaw skyscraper will do just fine for this purpose. Frontex has – for now, at least – no clumsy

infrastructure to handle.¹⁴ It is free to act along the whole EU border in quick, sharp interventions. Instead of the stiff and clumsy working arrangements of Europe's old border guards, it provides a lean, flexible operation across the whole external border. "Frontex", then, is not *el Frontex* – a control room in Las Palmas, a militarised border force. Like the blue Frontex armband its seconded officers wear in joint operations, it is flexible, moveable and removable. In this lightweight fashion, in the shadow of still-powerful states, it quietly goes about its business of bordering the continent.

Seahorse: hardwiring the African frontier

Las Palmas, April 2010. It was the time of the big yearly gathering. Suited police, marines in white uniforms and green-clad *guardias* congregated in the halls of Hotel Meliá in the Gran Canarian capital. The Euro-African policing conference on migration, attended by 89 security chiefs from 25 countries, was redolent with the power of the state: straight-backed men, flags on tables, glossy police posters galore. Behind the podium was a large banner of a sun setting at sea, a potent symbol of Europe's external border; outside the big windows, sunbathers lounged on the city beach a few steps away.

Presentation followed presentation. Comandante Francisco spoke excitedly of "the surveillance system of the future" through a complete integration of sea border controls and "compatibility between all systems". The discussant, a tall Dutchman from Europol, exhorted African police in the hall to target human smugglers and "send us the information you have on these networks". "There's a model law on people smuggling for downloading on the UNODC [UN Office on Drugs and Crime] webpage," he said, encouraging the Africans to promote it in their capitals. "As we're building up so-called Fortress Europe, it's getting harder to get to Europe... [so] you face the same problem with illegal migration and illegal stayers," he said in a nod of sympathy to his North African colleagues.

In the break, African marines mingled with *guardias* on the hotel terrace, sipping coffee and tea and digging into patisserie trays. I went about collecting

¹⁴ In its revised 2011 mandate, Frontex was given powers to co-lead joint operations and the right to purchase or lease its own equipment (EU 2011). However, its deputy director indicated in interview that co-ownership of assets was the likeliest option because of budget constraints

business cards: the general director of the Malian Gendarmerie, the Senegalese Navy's chief of operations, the Gambian immigration commissioner. They were all there, the top brass of Africa's border forces. Two officers – North African and Greek – snapped pictures of each other as souvenirs. The real action was in backroom talk: Malians laughed hard with *guardias* in the halls, a Mauritanian *gendarme* took down phone numbers on his battered Nokia mobile.

Journalists were let into the conference hall for the concluding session. They congregated at the back as the general director of the Spanish police and the Guardia Civil strode to the podium. He spoke fast and assuredly of “the excellent climate of confidence that has prevailed at the conference”. Illegal migration had gone down by 70 per cent, he said, and the fight against this “scourge” was proceeding apace thanks to “the collaboration between all the institutions represented here”. They need to “persecute this crime” of “commerce with other people”, he said, referencing the smuggling networks. It would be wrong to indulge in a “false sense of triumphalism”, he warned, but his speech was strident. The view from the top was bright and shiny, the battle was being won. But at what price?

In the beginning, getting the Africans on board had been difficult. “Maybe they didn’t understand very well what we were trying to do,” said the Guardia Civil chief in Dakar in a rather diplomatic understatement. In the first years, “there would even be policemen or *gendarmes* who would send their children” if they knew a boat was leaving, he said. “They saw it as a bus trip.” Stories circulated about African officers absconding from policing conferences and migrant identification missions, never to be heard from again.

“All member states are aware that there’s no other way to fight migration than to cooperate with third countries,” insisted Comandante Francisco, and this was a lesson the Spaniards took to heart before anyone else. At the root of the migration agreements between West Africa and Spain discussed in the last chapter was policing cooperation. Enrique, a tough-talking Spanish policeman based in Morocco, had worked on pushing through these deals with state after state. “First there is always an accord between the foreign ministries on cooperation,” he said,

“something to cover things up” (*para tapar*). Next came the memoranda of understanding between interior ministries. “Let’s see,” he said, remembering the countries where he helped push these through: “Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Morocco already had one, Cape Verde, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, what else... oh yes, Niger. They are basically all the same, you cut and paste from one to the other.” Through these deals, a vast policing network was quickly being built up around Europe’s southern border.

Key to this network was the Seahorse project. Starting in 2005, it received more than €6m of funding as part of the EU’s €120m Aeneas programme to establish “an effective policy to prevent illegal migration” (MIR 2011).¹⁵ Seahorse, managed by the Guardia Civil, aimed to tie police forces into a tighter network through conferences, training and the increased deployment of liaison officers and joint patrols. The Seahorse secretariat had organised the Las Palmas conference for the fifth year running, in what was fast becoming a “tradition” according to the concluding remarks of the Spanish police chief. Spanish officers also trained African police on illegal migration in West African capitals and invited high-ranking officers to Spain for tours of control rooms and police academies. The conferences, courses and visits served not only “to see how other countries work on migration”, as the Spanish police attaché in Mali put it: they were also junkets for African officers that fomented a shared vision of the border while creating informal connections. In Las Palmas, cakes and coffee did as much to boost the border network as endless PowerPoint presentations.

But Seahorse was, above all, a high-tech venture. It would not only expand the transnational policing networks around the figure of the illegal immigrant; it would also hardwire these networks into a secure communications system via satellite. Technology triggered cooperation. The secure system, the Seahorse Network, had by 2010 pulled in Spain, Portugal, Mauritania, Cape Verde, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Morocco (*ibid*). This is how the Guardia Civil depicted the arrangement, bolts of lightning shooting out from a satellite that spans the seas of Africa and Europe:

¹⁵ Aeneas, which ran from 2004 to 2006, has been superseded by a “thematic programme” on migration and asylum

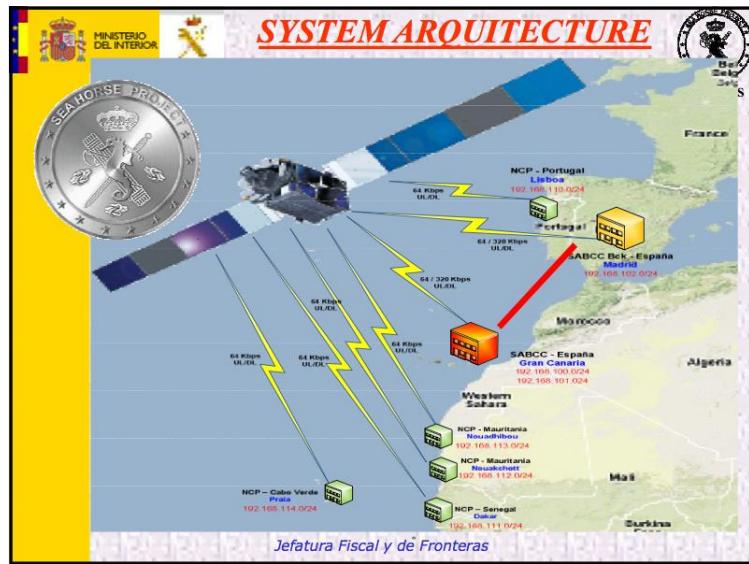


Figure 6. The Seahorse network Guardia Civil presentation: imp-med.eu/En/image.php?id=125

Hera built on this network, which spun out from the CCRC in Las Palmas in a widening web. Senegal, Frontex's most eager collaborator, had created a national coordination centre in Dakar's Navy base, where a joint chiefs of staff communicated with Las Palmas via a second control centre in the Senegalese Interior Ministry, as well as with the Spanish embassy attachés. The information did not stop in Las Palmas: by 2010, a steady stream of real-time information was funnelled from the CCRC, Dakar and elsewhere along the African coast into the control room in Madrid. Via daily briefings, flash reports and teleconferences, the ICC team there sent the information on to Warsaw, providing the Frontex Situation Centre with another piece in the full surveillance picture this control centre was building of Europe's border operations.¹⁶ Through such day-to-day contact the communications network grew ever more intricate, its transnationalism increasingly taken for granted.

One thing stands out in this regime, and in the Seahorse sketch above: all information travels through Spain. No lines of communication unite Mauritania and Senegal, or Senegal and the Gambia. The information network was a one-way street.

The border theorist Ladis Kristof long ago drew a distinction between boundaries, which are “inner-oriented”, distinguishing insiders and outsiders, and

¹⁶ The ICC is located in Madrid when both Indalo and Hera are active, otherwise in Las Palmas

frontiers, which are zones of contact and “the spearhead of light and knowledge expanding into the realm of darkness and of the unknown” (cited in Donnan and Wilson 1999:48). Ironically, to close off, Spain first had to reach out. It had to create a zone of contact – that is, a frontier. In doing so, the Spanish government had used copied-and-pasted memoranda of understanding to impressive effect. It had knocked on all the right doors in order to close its own. But Spain’s frontier-making only got it that far: the smooth satellite channels generated friction. And these tensions, however slight and brief, sometimes broke into the open.

Before the Guardia Civil chief stepped onto the conference podium to declare that the battle against illegal migration was being won, before the journalists were let in to the hall, there had been a brief time for questions. One African officer spoke. “The police response is not the only approach to resolving the phenomenon of illegal migration,” he said. Another West African officer also raised his hand. He spoke softly in eloquent French that was promptly translated. “The exchange of information should be reciprocal,” he said, otherwise it was not “cooperation”. The Europol officer at the podium replied. He fully understood the frustrations about access to confidential information, he said, but there were strict rules for sharing. Maybe an open version could be made available, he thought out loud. Then he realised there was something the African officers could use. The previous year’s report from ICMPD was comprehensive, he said; what’s more, it was available to the public, “free and available to download” from their website. If they wanted, he offered, he could send his African colleagues a link.

The Euro-African border was in Seahorse no longer – or not only – a line across the seas, a search-and-rescue area or a complex field of risk management. It was morphing into what Walters (2004:682) calls a “strategic node within a transnational network”, where Spain – unburdened by a colonial past in the region – was perfectly placed to create alliances with West African states around a shared concern with migratory risk. Yet instead of a smooth “risk community” across the maritime divide of the cosmopolitan kind envisioned by Beck (2009:188), here re-emerged the asymmetrical relation familiar from the days of Empire. Returning to the financial analogy, if the border regime apportioned risk,

the African partners in the fight against illegal migration were left with the most risky, “junior” tranches. In Beck’s (*ibid*:169) terms, risk was “exported” from rich to poor. This is what the Europol officer acknowledged with his sympathetic words on the side effects of Fortress Europe; it was also implicit in the questions voiced by the African delegates. The larger gains in securitising migration, meanwhile, went elsewhere – into Europe’s security industry with its technological “solutions” to the risk posed by clandestine migration.

Surveillance: the men who stare at screens

If risk analysis is the brains of Europe’s border regime, as Frontex (2010:62) would have it, the screens and surveillance machinery are its eyes. In the control rooms in Warsaw, Madrid and the Guardia Civil Comandancias dotting the Spanish coastline, the border is made visible, legible and operational. In this endeavour, Spain is again in the vanguard. Its “integrated system for external surveillance” or SIVE (Sistema Integrado de Vigilancia Exterior) combines radar, hi-tech cameras and patrols in a powerful surveillance network that is credited with the sharp decline in migrant boat arrivals. SIVE has also boosted the fortunes of the developers, the companies Siemens, Amper and Indra. Indra, named after the Hindu god of war (who is, as it happens, cognate to Hera’s husband, Zeus), has exported SIVE to destinations as diverse as Romania, Latvia and Hong Kong.¹⁷

Walk into a SIVE control room and you will see rows of computer terminals manned by *guardias* staring at their monitors. Facing them are wall-mounted screens that project a real-time electronic map and camera shots of the coastline and high seas. The operator monitors the SIVE map on his terminal, looking for signs of migrants approaching the coastline. Suddenly something might appear: a pixellated boat, with a vector attached indicating its speed and direction. The *guardia* brings the map up on the wall projection, takes a closer look. It could be nothing, the *guardia* knows. Maybe the radar has just detected the crest of a wave, a small fishing boat, or even a whale. The radars detect

¹⁷ See <http://www.indracompany.com/en/sectores/seguridad-y-defensa/proyectos/1876/sive-at-romania's-black-sea-border>

objects up to 20 nautical miles from the Spanish coast: software helps filter out most large waves, but other indications of a *patera* are down to experience. What is the weather like? If the hard, easterly Levante wind blows across the Mediterranean, migrants rarely set out from Algeria and Morocco. How does the object move? A sinuous, zigzag path, represented by a trail of pixels, means it could be a *patera*. Is it moving fast? In the Canaries, where the large wooden *cayucos* groan under the weight of perhaps 100 passengers, a slow speed gives migrant vessels away. In the Strait, if the object is small and moves fast, it could be drug smugglers or migrants in a lightweight *zodiac*. With a right-click on the mouse, the *guardia* can “identify” the *patera* by assigning it a name. When it gets closer, he will do a follow-up. As the *patera* approaches the coast, the high-definition cameras get to work, or the infrared ones if it is misty, rainy or dark. The *guardia* steers the camera with his joystick into line with the object, as in a computer game: he then brings the image up on the wall projections. If it is a “*patera* sighting” he activates the protocol and a Guardia Civil patrol boat shoots out, followed by a Salvamento Marítimo rescue ship. The patrol boat approaches the *patera* on screen and the *guardia* clicks on both to read off distance and direction: 287 degrees, 3.2 Nmi (nautical miles), 11min estimated to target. The four steps of an intervention are about to be completed: detection, identification, follow-up, and “interception or rescue”. Finally, a crosshair marks the spot of a *patera* interception.

The Euro-African border on the SIVE screens appears as a diffuse area of intervention, devoid of clear borderlines.¹⁸ What counts is the range of your radar, the specs of your cameras, the reach of your patrols – all represented visually on screen. In this borderless world, the “abnormal vessel behaviour” gives the *patera* away, seen in stops and starts or a zigzag, errant course.

SIVE seems a roaring success: not only does it broadcast the border, promote Spanish technology and stop *pateras* in their tracks, it also renders migrant risk as an on-screen abnormality. But the SIVE screens blind visitors to how surveillance of the seas has changed the cat-and-mouse game (Donato et al 2008) of the sea border. Most sub-Saharan migrants know that they might be spotted by the SIVE. Moreover, and unlike their Moroccan and Algerian

¹⁸ SIVE screens covering the Strait do indicate “borderlines” in the form of edges delimiting the *autopista del Estrecho*, the passage designated for commercial vessels

counterparts who fear immediate deportation, they *want* this to happen. In the border game that ensues, everyone – facilitators, migrants, rescue services, *guardias* and police – have their assigned role. Migrants or their associates call for help before departure, sea rescue boats search for them, and once found bring them to port for a medical check followed by detention and the hope of eventual liberation. Other migrants, at much greater risk, try to skirt the radars and limit costs by using tiny, inflatable “toy” boats to traverse the deep, rapid waters of the Strait. They, too, are usually detected. Again, their detection is often down to a simpler solution than the expensive SIVE, since the Spanish authorities encourage the thousands of ships passing through the Strait each year to inform them of any *patera* sightings. The result of this combination of high and low technologies meant that, by 2010, most migrant vessels were intercepted. The impromptu arrivals among sunbathers on Spanish beaches were a memory of the past.

Manning the SIVE could be stressful: the lives of dozens of travellers in a sinking boat depended on reading the on-screen signs correctly. During the mass arrivals of earlier years, reports surfaced of depression among *guardias*. As the arrivals dwindled, the main problem might instead be boredom: staring at screens, waiting for migrants to appear in their pixellated boats. The nationwide Guardia Civil workers’ association denounced the lack of SIVE staff and the working conditions in the control rooms, while aid workers whispered that the lack of manpower made the SIVE much less effective than it used to be.¹⁹

The solution to these limitations was, like Bigo (2005) has noted across Europe’s border regime, more technology. “We have to extend it much further,” said Comandante Francisco, outlining his vision of border surveillance in three layers. First, the SIVE and patrols covering the coasts. Second, planes, ocean-going ships and satellites monitoring the high seas. And third, joint patrols scouring African territorial waters, as in Hera and to a lesser extent in Morocco.²⁰

[fig7 removed: the full surveillance vision of Euro-African borders]

¹⁹ See <http://www.laverdad.es/alicante/v/20110211/provincia/augc-denuncia-falta-personal-20110211.html>

²⁰ The Guardia Civil and the Moroccan Gendarmerie exchange liaison officers, hold two annual high-level meetings and carry out monthly joint patrols on the basis of a bilateral agreement

This full surveillance vision is already becoming reality. The European Maritime Safety Agency is providing satellite coverage in the first Frontex multi-agency operation, Indalo. GMES, the European programme for Earth observation, has launched a collaboration with Frontex under its €15m G-MOSAIC programme for “situational awareness” of regional crises, its website showing footage of car tracks in the Algerian desert and colour-coded maps of “border permeability”.²¹ GMES and other publicly funded initiatives have pulled in defence companies such as Indra that develop the technology at a healthy profit. And Frontex, through its research and development unit, is in the thick of it, coordinating research and linking up academia, EU authorities, security companies and border guards. Electro-optical sensors for sea, land and air surveillance, smaller sensors “for detecting humans and objects inside closed compartments”, advanced command and control systems (C4I) and vessel tracking tools are all on the cards in a fruitful back-and-forth between the security industry and Europe’s border regime (see Frontex 2010:55).²² In the words of one commentator, migration control is “an opportunity for our industries to take advantage of an unbeatable laboratory to develop new research and development products” (Arteaga 2007:5-6). The creativity the Euro-African frontier has unleashed seems endless.

This full surveillance vision is based upon two features: a dynamic visualisation of risk and a powerful rendering of the surveillance system itself as a generator of spatial order. In one virtual demo of a new border control system seeded by the EU’s generous FP-7 funding stream, an intruding clandestine traveller is spotted inside a circular sensor area, highlighted as a threat and targeted by an unmanned vehicle shooting out in a line of interception, much like the SIVE’s radars, cameras and boats follow the errant *pateras*.²³ “Freeze!” the unmanned machine calls out; the traveller stops in his tracks, gripping his suitcase, until the border patrol arrives and the words “mission accomplished” light up on screen.

Satellite systems and aerial drones are at the pinnacle in this drive to visualise the border, attracting policing dreams and triggering activist ire. With “camera technology from the US or Israel”, Comandante Francisco mused, “we

²¹ See <http://www.gmes-gmosaic.eu/node/112>

²² For one such initiative, see http://www.ed4bg.eu/files/files/Tarchi_JRC.pdf

²³ The Talos project: <http://talos-border.eu> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jpxZ24Daxlk>

could cover maybe 1,000 square kilometres with a small unmanned plane”. The vision, in his words, is a complete surveillance cover of the border region and beyond.

This will be achieved through a project known as Eurosур, or the “European external border surveillance system”. Pushed by the European Commission and member states such as Spain, Eurosур is moving ahead at breakneck speed, going from a 2008 roadmap to a draft regulation and “big pilot” in 2011 and planned operational roll-out by 2013. In support of Eurosур runs another project, Perseus, endowed with €44m in European funding. Taking its name from the heroic slayer of the snake-headed gorgon Medusa in Greek lore – or, more prosaically, from “Protecting EuRopean SEas and borders through the intelligent USe of surveillance” – Perseus will integrate national surveillance systems and enhance them with what its website calls “non-stop avant-garde technology”.²⁴ The multinational Perseus consortium is led by familiar names: Spain’s Indra and the Guardia Civil. Thanks to Eurosур and Perseus, the policing dream and activist nightmare of an omnipresent surveillance system for Europe’s frontiers could soon become reality. But this all-seeing beast of the border, I was soon to find out, had an unlikely nemesis waiting for him in Frontex headquarters.

Kill the cyclops: Eurosур and the informatised border

Warsaw, July 2011. Back in the Rondo1 skyscraper, the elevator sped past the offices of Credit Suisse and Ernst & Young and stopped on the 22nd floor. This was, finally, the beating heart of Europe’s border regime: the management and operational offices of Frontex across two conjoined floors. Glass walls rose high above the reception, revealing elevators on their race up and down the skyscraper. On a video screen, a Spanish *guardia* flung a water bottle towards a migrant boat. Internal stairs rose at the side of the flag-lined room, giving easy access between the managers on the 22nd floor and “ops” on the 23rd while enclosing the heart of Frontex in a safe bubble. At the centre of it all was the Frontex Situation Centre, the all-seeing eyes of the border.

²⁴ See http://www.perseus-fp7.eu/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/2011_PERSEUS_Overview_v2.6.pdf

The FSC was the latest generation of border control integration, a control-room-of-control-rooms that monitored all operations off Greek, Italian and Spanish coasts. One of the screens showed a large map of operations around the Italian island of Lampedusa, listing deployments and delineating patrol areas; another screen covered Greek operations. “Once a week we update the maps,” said the commander in charge. No real-time information was displayed, though this was in the pipeline. A third screen was blacked out. “Is this for Spain?” I asked. “No, it’s just down,” the commander said with a chuckle. There was no real-time communication with Spain from the FSC. The terminals stood empty, his colleagues had gone for lunch. Work hours were eight to five Monday to Friday, with an officer on call the rest of the time. Europe’s virtual, all-seeing border still seemed a far cry.

And so it was likely to continue, at least according to Antonio, a bearded Spaniard with a Frontex badge round his neck and an endearingly brusque manner. As one of the principal architects of Euros-sur, his excitement for the next generation of border controls was palpable, but his take on advanced technology was less than enthusiastic.

“Let me tell you an anecdote,” he said while sipping coffee in the breakout area, looking out over the rainswept expanse below. “I went to Spain, to the navy control centre in Cartagena, [and] they showed tracks of AIS [sea vessel tracking] on screen. ‘How nice!’ I said. ‘But what is the use of this?’ ‘Oh, we show it to the visitors,’ they said!” He shook his head. “Why should we be exchanging this [information]?”

Industry lobbying was to blame for this excess of technology, according to Antonio. “Satellites are useless,” he said, then told me of how GMES had recently sent around an email with satellite pictures of the Libya-Tunisia border. “But I’ve just seen this border on Al Jazeera, I’ve learnt they’ve been there for three days and don’t have water, that is a *push!*”²⁵ And you know what they did? he asked with a laugh. They inserted “and” into their name, changing it to Global Monitoring for Environment *and* Security. “They need customers!” Unmanned flights were just as useless, Antonio continued, since they could not yet fly in

²⁵ This quote highlights several discursive elements in the border regime: the conceptualisation of people on the move as a source of risk, the scramble to monitor their movements, and the rendering of a desperate humanitarian situation as a so-called “push”

civilian zones because of safety regulations. The key to border monitoring, he said, was to “establish Frontex liaison officers and give them money to bribe [local] authorities to give them information”. Human intelligence provided 95 per cent of the results, Antonio said, while satellite might provide just 5 per cent – at a cost inverse to its proportion. “But the industries are happy and the Commission is happy because they are subsidising them.” He finished his coffee. “The Emperor is naked!” he exclaimed.

Other officers similarly called for caution in the rush towards new technology. The FSC and similar systems are, like SIVE, resource-heavy and labour-intensive, while satellites still do not provide real-time information. “In Hera, maybe the information can be of some use if it gets to you within six-seven hours,” said Giuseppe, the Italian ICC manager, “but in Greece or Italy, the [migrant] boat can cross the sea in this time, it doesn’t have added value.”

The “myth of mastering the frontiers”, according to Bigo (2005), is perpetuated in the hopeless striving for full electronic security. Yet this striving achieves something else too, as Antonio made clear. In the double securitisation of migration, Europe’s industrial giants can be seen as the largest investors, buying the most “senior” tranches carrying next to no risk. For them, the dream of a virtual border is creating a free-for-all where the risk represented by an errant migrant *patera* has become big business. Eurosur is at the pinnacle of this process, as a recent independent report notes. While criticising the “technocratic process” shorn of political control behind Eurosur, the report’s authors denounce the “blank cheque” given for its development, which could end up costing several times the conservative official estimate of €339m between 2011 and 2020 (Hayes and Vermeulen 2012:75).

In this frontier economy, information means both power and money. The result, as with African states under Seahorse, is factionalism among competing border agencies and states. “Nobody wants to give up anything,” Antonio sighed. “If I give up the information,” the border agencies reasoned, “I will give up responsibility and my funding will be diminished.” In Spain, the divide between the surveillance community, centred on the Guardia Civil, and the intelligence community, mainly the Spanish police, was deep at times. “Often they don’t talk to each other,” he said.

Border officers were aware of the skewed incentives and the constant threat of politicking. In fact, Eurosur was tailored to overcome these problems. Its first trick was to focus even more strongly on that one precious target at the border: the clandestine migrant. If the border was a field for information-sharing and information was an expensive commodity, it had to be shared in just the right doses. Eurosur did so by filtering out most information as noise. While it was in theory meant for any risk factor around the external borders, from environmental disasters to drug smuggling, in practice member states only agreed on sharing sea borders and boat migrants. Yet even this was proving tricky, Antonio noted. “It’s not a technical problem, it’s a political problem, a will problem,” he said. This is why he always emphasised to national security forces that Eurosur was a decentralised network. “There’s no central node,” he said, no trace of irony in his voice, “because they don’t want to have a Big Brother.”

Rumours that “Frontex will see everything that is happening in the border” were crazy, according to Antonio. “That system will be... what do you call that monster with one eye here?” he said, touching his forehead. “A cyclops... we’ll be a hated cyclops!” Wanting to see everything was akin to the fate of a one-eyed monster who only saw what his single eye allowed him to see.²⁶ “So let’s make it decentralised!” Antonio’s face lit up. “We will not exchange drugs”, he said, just “illegal immigration plus other common interest information” such as “a ship on fire”. The decentralised system, he exclaimed, “kills the cyclops!”

To Antonio, if technology was part of the problem, it was also part of the solution. He took me to a small room where fans whirred frantically: in it stood three big cabinets with glass doors, reaching almost to the ceiling. Inside each was a stack of black computer consoles, red lights occasionally blinking. These were the “nodes”, the electronic hearts of Eurosur, allowing for the sharing of sensitive border information in a vast network eventually covering all European states. One of them, the “mother node”, was producing two copies of itself – one for Frontex, one for Poland. Next others would follow. If Hera had been the birth of sea

²⁶ Frontex was until the revisions of its mandate unable to process personal data, and is not allowed to send data to third countries

operations, it seemed we were witnessing yet another birth here: that of a fully integrated border surveillance system for Europe.

In Euros-sur, each country will have one national coordination centre (NCC) for border surveillance, “a very difficult thing to achieve”. Antonio’s strategy was to confront them with a choice. “I ask them, so where do you want the Euros-sur node? Then I force them to fight between them.” Technology, as with Seahorse, triggers compliance. In Spain, the new NCC will be located in the courtyard of Madrid’s Guardia Civil headquarters, surely to the chagrin of the national police, which will be invited to participate in it.

Through a seamless link between NCCs and Frontex, complete surveillance of the Euro-African border is for the first time a possibility. Antonio sketched his version of the Euros-sur border regime. The two upward-facing triangles represent member states with a shared border, the arrows are information flows, and the downward triangle is Frontex:

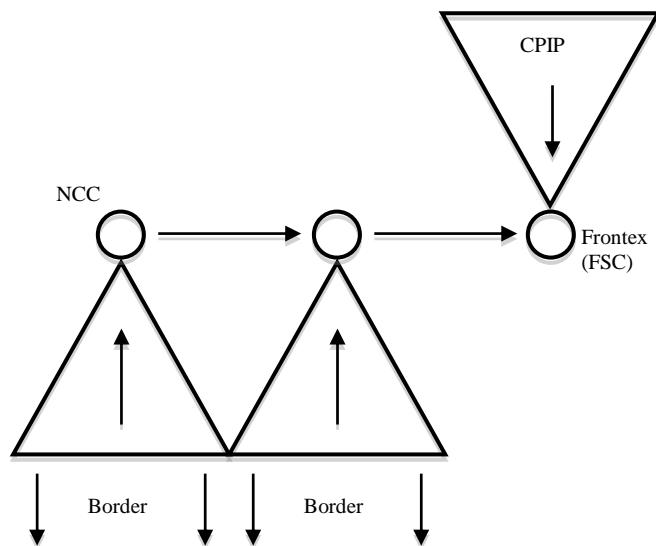


Figure 8. Information flows in Euros-sur

“Frontex doesn’t have a border but it has another requirement,” Antonio said while drawing the pyramid labelled CPIP, the “common pre-frontier intelligence picture”. The “pre-frontier”, in keeping with the technological obliteration of the borderline already seen on SIVE screens, refers to the areas lying beyond the

surveillance reach of the border regime – African territorial waters, trucks traversing deserts, smugglers running a safe house or *ghetto*.

Look at the bottom arrows: they refer to maritime sensors, radars and other surveillance, Antonio explained, but they point outwards, towards African states. Sharing of information with African forces is already happening, of course. Spanish cameras spot a migrant boat setting off from Morocco, and notify the Moroccan Gendarmerie. Its surveillance systems locate a boat on open seas: the ICC calls the Algerians, who “rescue” the migrants if the boat is still close enough to their coasts. To Frontex, however, the pre-frontier is still anathema. Although the agency’s risk analysts gather data on migrant routes through Africa, its official mandate, staffers insist, ends at the external border. Eurosур will change this. Through its novel interfaces for information-sharing beyond the border – and a planned future integration with Seahorse²⁷ – the pre-frontier will finally be made palatable.

The border, in Antonio’s Eurosур vision, is a channel for the smooth exchange of information. It appears as something akin to a cell membrane, a selectively permeable surface that communicates with nearby cells sideways, downwards and upwards in a chain of signals. These signals are selective; there is symbolism aplenty in the software that sifts, filters and chooses before presenting its data in a graphic interface.

In the room next door to the node factory sat six young computer programmers in front of their terminals. They worked for GMV, the Spanish company that had won the contract to set up the pilot version of Eurosур and its interface. This interface provides a new visual language that combines layers of risk analysis, operational information and irregular migration “events” on an electronic map, thus finally integrating the intelligence community’s notion of risk with sea surveillance in a forest of digitised symbols. Among the icons is the sign for “illegal entry”, used to indicate where a significant attempt at crossing the Euro-African border is taking place. Officers can add comments about the event in a chat box, as in Facebook or Messenger. It is a potent Keep Away sign, a modern equivalent of the ancient Spanish Indalo:

²⁷ A “Seahorse Mediterranean” system is also being planned, based on Spain’s Atlantic system



The interfaces and symbols – not least the illegal entry icon – hint at the magic of statecraft at work in Europe’s border regime. As if by a conjuring trick, a wooden boat on the high seas has become a source of risk sold on to African partners and industrial investors. This risk has been rendered on screen as golden arrows and zigzag lines interrupting the straight logics of border controls, before finally being abstracted into the amorphous, three-dimensional fields of information and risk flows of the Eurosур interface. Risk is here dispersed, but not obliterated. Beyond the neat interfaces, migrants face the opposite type of borders to those built in Eurosур: untamed frontiers, rough seas and scorching deserts, through which only the luckiest and toughest emerge unscathed. In their search for a virtual border, Europe’s border workers are creating a new, postmodern wilderness.

Conclusion: the making of a Euro-African frontier

Madrid, June 2012. Amid the deepening eurozone crisis, the Spanish capital seemed to have come to a standstill. The scaffolds, skips and caterpillars – such a frequent sight during Spain’s property-fuelled boom – had long since been removed from the city’s streets. But in one site, at least, the construction industry was defying the gloom. In the fortress-like headquarters of the Guardia Civil, cranes and excavators were at work digging up the vast courtyard to make space for the new NCC under Eurosур. A sparkling regional coordination centre had been inaugurated in the southern port of Algeciras, where Comandante Francisco had jetted off to receive the Spanish King. Algeria had signed a new cooperation agreement, and so had the Spanish Navy. Here was one sector that seemed to have escaped the age of austerity – the European security industry and its “fight against illegal migration”.

In the control room next to the courtyard, Guardia Civil officers were already feeding live data on “illegal entries” into the recently installed Eurosур interface, to which more member states were now connecting by the month. Soon

even African states might be able to join, any political qualms brushed aside by the technical language of the Eurosur interface, in which migration “events” were created as the “property” of one state that could then be “ceded” to another. In the words of one officer, “you’d just have to create another user”. On the Eurosur monitor, illegal entry signs were scattered across the Mediterranean. “It’s a bit slow,” sighed the *guardia* at the terminal as her screen temporarily froze. *Another brick in the wall* by Pink Floyd rang out from her colleague’s computer: it was just another day in the business of bordering Europe.

The emerging Euro-African border is an elusive creation of multiple logics. It is sharply drawn through the seas, but the closer you look the more it dissipates. It is fixed in place – in control rooms, patrol bases and surveillance systems – while constantly bleeding outwards. At times, the border appears as an Indalo or as the illegal crossing sign: here but no further. Other times, it appears in its guise of frontier, ever extendable and stretchable. It is everywhere and nowhere. In this way, “the borderwork of Frontex produces a border that is no longer at the border” (Vaughan-Williams 2008:77; Balibar 1998).

As has been seen, this dispersal is accompanied by a distribution and management of migratory risk that breeds ever larger risks. “The hazardousness of risk analysis,” Beck (2009:14) cautions, “consists in the fact that imagining dangers that were previously unthinkable can inadvertently help to bring them about.”

At first glance, Hera seems to disprove this conclusion. While the operation was devised as an emergency response it had, by 2010, become permanent. A “recovery of the territory by law enforcement agencies” had fast been achieved, in the words of a Senegalese border police chief. No one left along these routes. The border was, as his words indicated, partly militarised. Hera the divine match-maker had successfully tied the knot between police, military and industry in Africa and Europe.

Hera might be the goddess of marriage in Greek lore, but her main traits are jealousy and vindictiveness. She had, as Frontex itself acknowledged, displaced routes into the even more dangerous Sahara desert, punishing migrants

for their transgression in crossing her seas. This way, Hera also brought trouble upon her fellow deities further east – Hermes, Nautilus and Poseidon, the Frontex operations in the eastern and central Mediterranean. Migration controls remain a zero-sum game, where the gains of one are the troubles of others. Mass arrivals hit the Greek land border with Turkey in 2010. In 2011, it was Italy's turn to see an unprecedented influx of boat people following the Tunisian and Libyan uprisings. “Migration is something that will never stop,” said Comandante Francisco, echoing a sentiment often repeated by border officials. So why impose such a vast system to deal with the few brave men and women who try to arrive in Europe, cost what it may, by land and sea?

One reason was the pre-emptive task of “preventing people from leaving”. “We can't leave the deployment we have in Mauritania and Senegal,” said Francisco. “If we leave, the avalanche will return in two days' time.” Giuseppe agreed: “Both Spain and the African countries have said several times that it would be a big error to withdraw the deployment because this could give a signal to the candidates for migration to try to leave again from there to the Canaries.” Indeed, Hera operations in African waters were previously vaguely referred to as diversion and sometimes as interception: Frontex now labels them deterrence.

Such deterrence is not the whole story, however. As this chapter has shown, the Euro-African border is generating its own momentum, its own sense of necessity. Frontiers have always attracted entrepreneurs: gold-diggers, bandits and self-appointed sheriffs on the hunt for the bounties of a recently discovered wilderness. The Euro-African frontier is no different. Along with the smugglers and swindlers, the *passeurs* and *coxeurs*, the security and defence industries have marched into the frontier, sensing a great business opportunity. The border has become a site for ever-growing investments, a place where frontiersmen can look for quick gains and where European leaders can project their fears and visions. The African security forces and the Guardia Civil do not want to let Hera and the CCRC go, say bemused policemen: too much money and influence is at stake, too many agencies have tapped into the treasures buried in the borderlands.

There are deeper reasons too. The nascent Euro-African border is the result of a symbolic and political urge to define the outer frontiers of the Union – and, for Spain, a chance to reaffirm its European identity through a combination of humanitarianism, technological mastery and political acumen. This double-

edged Europeanisation of the borders was, of course, always a fraught enterprise, as shown in the summer of 2011 when the Schengen agreement was coming under unprecedented strain because of the migrant boats leaving Tunisia for Italy. In Warsaw, the Frontex deputy director did not want to be drawn on the consequences. “We are not an actor in this debate,” he sighed. The idea of the space of free movement was that it “gives the feeling that you are an EU citizen”, he added, pointing at his heart. But “as long as elections are approaching, everyone has to play this game”.

It is a commonplace observation that a constitutive outside is needed to bind a polity, but the EU’s way of doing this is nevertheless a most peculiar enterprise. Its target is, as in the illegal entry sign, people on the move, and it has created a complex industry for the purpose. While states such as Spain provide the parts and build the machinery, Frontex edits the manuals, oversees the work, evaluates the results. Pushing the securitisation analogy, the agency works in some ways as the “special purpose vehicle” used in derivatives banking before the financial crisis – spreading risks off balance sheet, diffusing accountability away from sovereign states and their elected governments. In this double securitisation of migration, the junk risk is heaped onto the African borderlands. Here risk is reproduced and magnified, or as one European police attaché put it: “We’re in the eye of the cyclone now... When you bolt all doors, you’ll have a pressure cooker.” It is to this pressure cooker, and the fraught task of putting the lid on African mobility, that we will now turn.

3

Hunter and prey

Europe's high-tech border regime takes on a more profane guise on African soil. Walk into the Cité Police complex along the seafront *corniche* in the Senegalese capital and look out for a torn A4 printout taped to a door two floors up announcing the "Division for the fight against irregular migrations". This is the home of Frontex's local police partner in patrolling Senegal's coastline. Inside the dark halls of the division, I knocked on a door with a broken handle indicating the offices of the research group on migrant smuggling networks. Jean-Pierre, the commissioner in charge of the division, opened and 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. A large copy of the i-Map familiar from Frontex's Warsaw offices lurked in a corner. Jean-Pierre 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 are 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 boat migration had ground to a halt, Spanish officials never tired of repeating. This was not only meant as praise but was also a simple statement of fact. The success in halting irregular migration did not reside in slick Frontex machinery but was rather to be found in the Sahel and the Sahara, where African forces had been subcontracted 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 waxed lyrical on policing cooperation on migration. “The policy promoted by Spain is a total, absolute and resounding success that everyone recognises, and especially so the European Union,” he said. “In 2006, I think we came here with an attitude that they were very thankful for,” agreed the Spanish ambassador. Spain’s attitude of “dialogue and cooperation” contrasted sharply with that of the old colonial power, France, which kept strong-arming its way into its former African dominions. While Senegalese and Malian officers sourly accepted the French presence, they talked warmly of their Spanish colleagues. Praise and dialogue was not enough to bring the Africans on board, however. The Spaniards rarely said as much, but key to the success of Frontex operations such as Hera was not just disbursing aid money but also providing incentives to local forces. Essentially, you had to outbid the smugglers.

As a result of such incentives, a hunt was on for the illegal migrant across the deserts, forests and towns stretching beyond the EU-Africa border. But this migrant is an elusive prey. Who is he? Where is he to be found? How can he be distinguished from his fellow-travellers – the labour migrants, merchants and sojourners who have moved around the region freely for decades? This chapter will seek to answer these questions by following the 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. On this migration circuit, it will be argued, Europe’s subcontractors do not simply detect and prevent irregular border crossings – they also help bring their target, the illegal migrant, into being.

In the borderlands, the making of illegal migrants is not simply about the assignation and appropriation of this social category à la Hacking (1986), as was seen among Dakar’s repatriates; it is also about travellers’ progressive *embodiment* of it. A growing critical migration literature has started taking the phenomenology of migrant illegality seriously, focusing on such embodied experiences of border controls (Coutin 2005; de Genova 2002; de Genova and Peutz 2010; Khosravi 2007 and 2010; Willen 2007a and 2007b). Building on these path-breaking studies, I will consider not just how migrant illegality is assigned but how it comes to be lived by migrants. “The border,” as Michel Agier (2011:50) says, is

now “everywhere that an undesirable is identified”, including the indeterminate zone in which the traveller’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 vast wooden boat are all ways of travelling 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 signalling illegality to police. In the back-and-forth between the bodily strategies of Africa’s wayward travellers and police patrols and detections, the illegal migrant is conjured in increasing degrees of otherness, stigmatised by his very bodily presence.

Rucksacks and biscuits: clandestine-spotting in Dakar

Night-time on Dakar’s shores. The headlights of the police van illuminate the lanes leading down to the beachfront. The patrol chief, dressed in a chequered shirt and relaxed trousers, steers the van with fast, careless movements that sends it jolting and bouncing to the rhythm of Arabic music streaming out of the speakers. “Only the night guards are out now!” the chief shouts, honking his way towards the beach. His is one of the patrol units dedicated to tracking down illegal migrants on Europe’s behalf. We step onto the abandoned beach, the officers leading me to a rocky section of the shore next to a French-owned hotel. “The illegal migrants were hiding here,” they say while pointing to the undergrowth, as if on an archaeological tour. The hotel owner used to inform on the migrants-to-be, as did paid-off local informers. “In general, we take them before they depart,” says one of the officers. “All the clandestine passengers, regardless of their nationality, we bring them in.” In 2006 journalists published pictures of crammed Senegalese police cells with detainees almost piled atop each other. Migrants were detained for months to deter others from leaving; smugglers were sent to languish in jails.¹ By 2010, the *temps des clandestins*, the “time of the illegal migrants”,

¹ The strategy later changed to one where migrants were seen as victims of smugglers, bringing the Senegalese approach into line with Spanish priorities

was over, as one of the officers put it, not without a note of regret. Only this memory of departures and detentions remained in Dakar: a hiding place amid rocks and shrubs on a darkened beach. The border police's task had been accomplished.

The Direction de la Police de l'Air et des Frontières (DPAF), the Senegalese border police encompassing Jean-Pierre's division for fighting irregular migration, was a European brainchild to begin with. It had been created in 2004 on the insistence of the French, "as if all this had been anticipated", said one inspector in reference to the 2006 boat crisis and the Frontex response that ensued. Since then, Spain had taken over as DPAF's main partner. Four Senegalese forces were involved in Frontex patrols in 2010: the Air Force, the Navy, the Gendarmerie and DPAF. While the Navy and Air Force monitored the seas and the Gendarmerie the coastlines, DPAF patrolled Dakar's shores and Rosso and Oussouye near the Mauritanian and Guinea-Bissau border respectively. DPAF was, in a sense, the poor cousin of the Navy, the Guardia Civil's main partner. Its officers were, crudely put, the spivs, sweepers and back-office staff in migration control – 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 on end across open sea; 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 the boat had returned to coast. All this was done under the "legal cover", as one Comandante put it, of having a Senegalese officer on board. The appearance of sovereignty was still intact, national boundaries respected. "We help them to fight illegal migration," said Comandante Francisco, no tongue in cheek.

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 seaborne

colleagues since it involved stopping migrants in their tracks, *before* they had even embarked towards Spain. The Guardia Civil chief in Dakar acknowledged this was a tough brief. “We can never demonstrate that 50 people in a bus are migrants,” he said. Instead any suspect travellers were referred to – like in Senegal’s sensitisation campaigns – as candidates for illegal migration. DPAF’s patrols had 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 also here that the unequal gains from the illegality industry were most keenly felt.

The Spanish-funded four-wheel-drive bounced along the road towards Hann-Maristes. I had joined a daytime 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 beaches in three shifts round the clock in search for illegal migrants. “There’s no police or Gendarmerie brigade that’s more skilled than us on the theme of illegality [*clandestinité*],” said Abdoulaye, the gangly head of the unit, turning round to address me at the back as the car sped down a mud lane towards the beach. “We know everything that happens along the sea shore.”

On the beach, *pirogues* were pulled up in the white sands and locals occasionally sauntered by. No illegal migrant in sight. Alassane, a young officer with several years in the brigade, explained how to determine who was a migrant and who an innocent fisherman. “It’s very easy to catch an illegal migrant,” he said. “They don’t come one by one, they come 10 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 *clandestins*, Alassane explained, also stocked up on biscuits to avoid excessive 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, Alassane knew they were migrants and would proceed to search them. Browsing through

their backpacks, he would find euros not franc CFA, and no mobile phones. All these signs were giveaways for police on the trail of today's footloose travellers.

[Fig9 removed: a Spanish-funded quad bike for patrolling clandestine migration]

The brigades' patrols were not concerned with the surveillance of abstract risk patterns familiar from the control rooms in Las Palmas, Madrid and Warsaw. Instead, their task – as Alassane made clear – was to read embryonic *signs* of potential threats 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. 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. The third incentive was the trips discussed in the last chapter. To get the anti-mobility machine rolling, Europe had to invest in the mobility of the higher echelons of African forces, who flitted between policing conferences and study visits the better to police the cross-border movements of their countrymen.

I will talk about these resources destined for African forces as gifts rather than as payments or even bribes in order to highlight how Spain’s *personalised* incentives created social bonds and an obligation to reciprocate. But such gifts also generated ever-increasing demands – as well as tensions over the question of who-gained-what in a pattern reminiscent of colonial-era disbursements of privileges (Cooper 2005).

The Senegalese officers said Frontex paid for their resources, but Frontex denied any involvement. Any incentives, according to Giuseppe, the former Hera manager, were down to 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 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 grey still seas where the Guardia Civil patrolled, “but we have never met these people.” He continued: “There are identification missions in Spain, but police agents never go! We should!” Then Abdoulaye weighed in. “If there are benefits like that, 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 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, two pairs of binoculars, mobile phone credit. But now 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, according to the officers. “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.”

The biggest source of resentment, however, was pay. When the Spaniards and Frontex descended on Senegal in 2006, the per diem had been tantalising. The officers said they had initially received €40 per person per day – a fortune in Senegal. This only lasted for the first two months. “Afterwards everyone got implicated,” said Abdoulaye. All the police directorates wanted their share of the illegal migration spoils, and the brigade’s extra pay was slower and slower in coming. They had started receiving it once a week, then once a month, then once every 45 days or every two months. Money from “Frontex” reached agencies and police chiefs who had nothing to do with the fight against illegal migration, Abdoulaye said, while “the agents suffer a lot” on their long shifts. The others chimed in, complaining about the cost of eating out during their breaks, the mosquitoes on the beaches, the night-time patrols. The list of grievances seemed endless. “In illegal migration, it’s the police agents who do the bulk of the work but they haven’t gained anything at all,” said one officer, sounding strangely like Mohammadou and his repatriate friends a few kilometres down the road.

For all my sympathies, I couldn’t help asking myself: what work? We stood around the beach chatting, watched upon by a few fishermen. By 2010 the brigade’s travails were no longer 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 and their families that the

police were ready to cut short any attempted boat journey. 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. Much like the Guardia Civil's patrol boat rarely failed to rumble past the European tourist haunts of Gorée island, the DPAF patrols were at least partly a show for the funders and the visiting researcher. Yongor's repatriates said they never saw the DPAF 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. "For me, Frontex is things people do to make money," Mohammadou said with his trademark frown. "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. 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 maintained between the European paymasters, African forces, local youth and potential "smugglers", but how long it would last was another matter.

Beyond the unequal gains, Frontex was a source of friction on other fronts too. Jean-Pierre voiced concerns about national sovereignty when discussing Frontex patrols. So did Moussa, one of the jet-setting chiefs the coastal brigade looked upon with envy. Moussa was nearing retirement, and his regular trips to the Las Palmas coordination centre, where I had first met him, were a boon at this stage in his career. The Senegalese forces involved in the Frontex mission rotated the liaison officer role between them, spreading the joy of a few months in the Gran Canarian capital equitably. To Moussa, it was "better for everyone" that boat migration had stopped because of the risks to life at sea, but he added a critical observation: frustrated youth stuck at home could spell trouble for those in power.

Moussa had other concerns as well, however subtly voiced. "It's very hard in Africa now," he said. "People have studies, diplomas and so on, but afterwards there's no work." He was advising his sons, who studied in France, to stay put there. Life had become harder since the devaluation of the CFA franc in the 1990s. "We're not independent, the currency is still controlled by France," he complained, mentioning the strong French military presence in the capital. "Dakar

is a strategic point, including for the Americans, the Arabs and so on... They come here, and afterwards they expand into the region. It's the same thing with Frontex," he concluded.

Moussa, Abdoulaye and Jean-Pierre all expressed unease at their predicament as subcontracted policemen working on Europe's behalf in catching *clandestins*. This 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. When *clandestins* had been bountiful on Dakar's beaches, officers had first been able to cash in by demanding bribes or even embarking their relatives for free. Since 2006, this had been supplanted by Spanish largesse. The Spaniards, aware of the need to incentivise, kept some funds flowing through the EU-sponsored West Sahel programme 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 materialise. 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 desert embarked upon by West Africa's overland *aventuriers* (Bredeloup 2008). 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 behaviour 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.

Reading the illegal mind at the Rosso border

The road winds, potholed and dusty, towards the border. The cramped car lurches over holes gouged out of the tarmac as we drive past bone-dry frontier outposts enveloped in a Saharan haze. Our destination is the town of Rosso, where the Senegal river marks the Mauritanian border.

Many adventurers have followed this route towards the distant Maghreb. Their long, stepwise journeys follow a different logic to those of the boat migrants

of 2006, many of whom simply sought a quick way to Europe. The adventurers have been called transit migrants, but they do not transit from A to B – instead their trips of uncertain end, often stretching over several years, trace intricate lines through the Sahel and Sahara.²

As I dislodged myself from the *sept-place* taxi at Rosso's flyblown bus station to the calls of hustlers ("Nouakchott? Nouakchott?"), 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 categorised travellers into licit and illicit – above-board and below-board in Coutin's (2005) terms – on the basis of bodily and behavioural 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 travellers as illegal at this border. The increasing essentialisation of the illegal migrant en route was not just discursive, however; rather, illegality imposed itself upon travellers, with real effects on their mental life. As travellers were detained on the basis of their supposed intentionality, they were sucked into a circular world of trips cut short, detentions and ignominies, deportations and empty pockets. Pushed "below-board", they were entering the liminal state that Coutin has labelled "being en route" (*ibid*): present yet absent from the jurisdictions they traverse, at turns visible and invisible to the border forces that chase them.

Rosso has everything you could wish for in a border town. Turbaned Moors sit back in shacks lining its potholed lanes, half-heartedly trying to flog Mauritanian *ouguiyas* for franc CFA or euros, while their nomad compatriots take camels across the river for grazing in an ancient arrangement that is nowadays dwarfed

² See Collyer (2007) and Düvell (2006) for a critique of the "transit migration" concept, widely used and promoted by especially the IOM

by the post-independence border economy. This economy is on display everywhere: vendors vie for space along the road leading up to the river jetty, selling cheap electric gadgets, packets of Argentinian *gofio* flour, Spanish quicklime and Mauritanian biscuits tasting of caked sand. And water, Mauritanian bottled water, drunk in one clean gulp to momentarily quench the thirst. Rosso is parched and hot: this is the border of the Sahara. The sun screams down through a haze of dust. Migrants stuck here complain of the heat, the dry air, the clouds of fine sand. You choke on flies and hide from the heat by drowsing on tattered mattresses and sipping a stronger green tea than that served further south in the Sahel. Cheikh, a tall man with sugar-rotted teeth, sat on one such mattress, pouring his potent brew of *attaya* as the pot hissed on the coal stove. Known by colleagues as Mr Migration, Cheikh was in charge of the Rosso Red Cross, whose Spanish-funded mission was to provide humanitarian assistance to migrants.

Rosso has in the past years become a transit point – and dumping ground – for clandestine migrants. It is where “white” North Africa and “black” West Africa meet, and it is where Mauritanian *gendarmes* deport foreigners caught for supposedly trying to migrate illegally to the Canaries. Rosso is one link in the chain of subcontracted migration controls, in which local police forces and humanitarian organisations alternately detain, deport and care for migrants en route. As would soon be evident, however, it is a weak link, despite Europe’s best efforts.



Figure 10. Views of Mauritania from the Red Cross base, Rosso-Senegal

After finishing his customary third glass of tea, Cheikh took me to the Red Cross “operational base”, the most visible sign of Rosso’s role on the clandestine circuit. A Spanish Foreign Ministry logo adorned this humble humanitarian space: a stretch of land adorned with a tent or two, with views of the border river through a frayed fence. “In 2006, we would have a hundred a day here, up to 600-700 a week, wounded and in all kinds of states,” Cheikh said. Next to us, a slight European woman squatted on the ground, smoking a hand-rolled cigarette. This was Belén, the representative for the Spanish Red Cross in Rosso. 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. Since most deportees were not Senegalese, this simply meant removing them from the border zone – often against their will. 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.

The Red Cross and the border police were both subcontracted by Spain to perform different but complementary functions: treating migrants as victims in need of humanitarian assistance on the one hand, and processing them as lawbreakers on the other. This collaboration between police and aid workers did not strike Cheikh as unusual. In either case, the police had little interest in

detaining or harassing deportees – in their offices, the business of the border went on in its messy, languid way, and no money was anyhow available for locking people up.

Overland travellers, Moors with weather-beaten faces and money-changing hustlers converged around the police building down the main road. Inside, the deputy police chief, a gaunt man in his fifties, went up to a cabinet that perched precariously next to a pile of rubbish, browsed through it and found a folder labelled 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 Spain had to provide incentives to keep their African colleagues on side. In Rosso, “Frontex” (meaning Spain) had provided a speedboat and petrol for land and river patrols, torches and night-vision binoculars, as well as the per diem payment. The task of questioning and processing deportees before the Red Cross sent them on was easy enough; the difficult task was finding any clandestine migrants before they entered Mauritania. All that travellers from Senegal, Mali and the Gambia needed to cross legally was vaccination papers and a *devise* or deposit of €50 worth of Mauritanian *ouguiyas*. Other nationalities simply paid small bribes to the officers on the jetty in Rosso-Mauritania. “In Nouadhibou, that’s where they prepare the crossing and throw away all their documents,” Cheikh said. “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 categorising them.”

This hidden-ness, the “secret” in their head that both Cheikh and the border police invoked, was in Rosso 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. Making the illegal migrant speak and reveal the inner workings of his mind was hard work. Moreover, he lied; he was untrustworthy as if by nature. As a French police attaché told me: “*Le migrant, il est un grand menteur*” – the migrant is a big liar. This sentiment, echoed by other workers in the illegality

industry, was not just a representation of a key imagined trait of illegal migrants, however. For travellers stuck in limbo, buffeted by Africa's subcontractors and their hopeless dreams, the blurring of truths and lies was part of their everyday experience. It was also part of their toolkit as adventurers, as I would discover in Rosso.

Cheikh had summoned three Liberians to talk to me in the bare Red Cross office across the road from the base. Edward was one of them, a well-dressed young man who sat waiting for me in the office's only plastic chair. "It's very difficult here with an English passport," he sighed. By this he meant documents from an Anglophone West African country. Travelling the region had never been that easy for English-speaking nationals, with especially Nigerians subjected to high "fees" at borders despite the free circulation accords covering the West African ECOWAS region. These free circulation provisions were still honoured by Mauritania, from where Edward and his friends had just been deported, despite the country's exit from the regional body (Serón et al 2011:51). In 2010, however, Mauritania had imposed entry restrictions for nationals of all English-speaking West African countries, forcing any prospective travellers to enter by air rather than overland. Anglophone travellers, increasingly seen as "illegal" by definition, were targeted in crackdowns accordingly. Edward and his friends had been expelled from Rosso-Mauritania across the river, he explained, and never made it further north. As we talked about this ordeal, his friends arrived. He introduced Alan as his brother, and Clara as a relative. Clara soon added a dissonant note to Edward's story. They were detained and jailed in Nouakchott, she said, while trying to find work. Their purpose there was not all that clear – they alternately said they wanted to "see Mauritania" or try to go to Europe – and their prospects now were vaguer still. Why not take the Red Cross money and go to Dakar, I asked? "We don't have anybody in Dakar," said Alan. "It's hard," said Edward, "I don't know where it'd be preferable for us." Since the Red Cross could not help them, they needed to call a relative who could send them cash for going back home, or to settle in a place further south. Could I give them money for a calling card?

Afterwards I met Cheikh at the base, who shook his head at the Liberians' story. They were "potential candidates" who just wanted to cross the border again, he said, adding that I did right in not giving them money. "They say they are brothers or that she is their sister," he said, "but no one travels with their sister in that manner." He did not believe any aspect of their story. Neither did I know what to believe. The Liberians were in a liminal zone where truth and falsehood had lost their definite edges, fraying with each passing day. They acknowledged that what they said had little value beyond the instrumental, laughing embarrassedly as they recalled telling the local imam they were Muslim so they could sleep for a night or two in the mosque. Everything they did was tinged with illegitimacy and suspicion. When I returned to Rosso a month later they had finally found a way to cross the river, one by one, back into Mauritania.

The more adventurers such as the Liberians circulated in the system, the more money became available for the subcontractors, as Belén hinted over dinner in a plush hotel nearby. She looked frail and emaciated, constantly on edge, smoking cigarette after cigarette. She had no time for the politics of the Red Cross mission or for pondering the border patrols running in parallel to it – there were accounts to complete, constant requests from head office in Madrid, and the Senegalese didn't lift a finger! Sometimes she got into a panic, she said, and simply froze with stress. The migration project had underspent because so few deportees had arrived lately, making for an accountancy headache and fresh pressure from her bosses. The Spanish Red Cross, contracted by Aecid, depended on their own subcontracting to – or "partnership" with – the Senegalese, and here there was ample scope for improvement. Belén felt she always had to chase, prod and remind her local colleagues to do something, while they kept asking her for things, "folders, papers, pens..." She saw them as little birds constantly opening their beaks and wanting to be fed. They were even using up the water in the tarp-covered "bladder" in the base, which was specifically meant for migrants! Belén shook her head, exasperated. The migrant project would soon close for lack of arrivals and because of the end of the funding cycle; she looked relieved that she was about to get out.

Cheikh and his volunteers saw little reason to prioritise the adventurers, who might have been through a bad spell but were still probably better off than the deprived residents of Rosso. This uneasy interface between western aid

workers and their local counterparts is of course far from new, as attested to by the work of Long (2001) and other development scholars. In Rosso, however – as elsewhere along migrant routes – the tense interactions absurdly depended upon the elusive presence of migrant illegality. Without it no interface could exist, no aid would be forthcoming and the industry would come to an end.

In policing, by contrast, this elusiveness could help ensure a continuous cash flow, as I discovered while riding in a patrol car on a dirt road hugging the Senegal river. Here, like in Dakar, the police were chasing ghosts – but in conjuring a menace they would always have the ear of European funders. “Illegal migration has become our principal task,” said one of the four police officers as we rolled out of Rosso. None of them wore a uniform; the only indication this was a police patrol funded by Spain was a sticker saying POLICE taped to the car. Before, the smuggling of rice and sugar across the river was the main concern here, 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, sending up clouds of sand as we went, the more obvious it was that there were no illegal migrants in sight. We spotted cement smugglers pushing a boat into the water, a man with a suitcase, kids playing by the riverbed and lone, turban-wrapped figures. I snapped a picture of the team standing in an abandoned *pirogue*. “Now we are illegal migrants!” one of them quipped to laughter. The joke highlighted the absurd impossibility of the officers’ brief of tracking the intentionality of travellers along a much-traversed river, and their essentialisation of these travellers 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 traveller... 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 travellers as what they really are – fully formed illegal migrants, ready to board their wooden boats and brave the wild sea.

Nouadhibou: the numbers game

At the sandswept fringes of the Mauritanian port city of Nouadhibou, some 500 km from Rosso and 800 km from the Canary Islands, lay an abandoned school

compound known as Guantanamito. Spanish soldiers had converted the compound into a holding centre for boat migrants awaiting deportation in 2006, again using Aecid funds. Subject to critical reports by Amnesty International (2008) and the Spanish refugee assistance organisation CEAR (2008), Guantanamito housed migrants who had either been intercepted at sea and sent back to Mauritania under the readmission agreement signed with Spain, or increasingly apprehended in town and accused of trying to travel clandestinely to Europe (Migreurop/La Cimade 2010:18).

The centre was the product of an unusual set of circumstances. Mauritania had undergone a coup d'état in August 2005 that, while hardly the first in the country's turbulent post-independence history, triggered widespread condemnation, including from the EU. 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 recognising the newly installed regime.³ As clandestine boat departures grew over the winter of 2005, 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 criticised the sensationalism while pointing out that Nouadhibou had for years been a magnet for *regional* labour migration (Choplin and Lombard 2007). To no avail: hysteria around an African exodus was quickly worked up, and the police crackdown intensified as a result.

The Spaniards kept tight-lipped about their work in Mauritania – the American embassy in Nouakchott complained that getting information on Spain's migration response was akin to pulling teeth, according to Wikileaks cables.⁴ Perhaps this was because of the legal vacuum in which migration controls took place. As critical observers such as CEAR noted (2008), trying to migrate clandestinely to another country was not an infraction in Mauritanian law, which meant no sanction of detention or deportation could be applied to it. The moniker Guantanamito for the deportation centre was in this sense apt – as a space outside the law, though with the important caveat that migrants were only kept there temporarily (a few days in principle, often longer in practice) before being

³ Spain was also aided in negotiations by the weak position of Mauritania's post-coup government
⁴ See <http://dazzlepod.com/cable/09NOUAKCHOTT379/>

bundled into a van destined towards the Senegalese border at Rosso or the Malian one at Gogui.⁵ Mauritania's government had passed a law in 2010 on migrant smuggling and was in the process of passing another on migration that would give legal gloss to the response already under way. Its eagerness to collaborate was perhaps unsurprising, given that Mauritania's new "migration strategy" was largely financed by the EU, as were the country's recently constructed border posts, whose staff were trained by the IOM and the Guardia Civil and whose colleagues on the coast had received Spanish vessels and pay.⁶

While the Mauritanian authorities were formally in charge of Guantanamito, assistance for detainees was handled by the Mauritanian Red Crescent, with support from the Spanish Red Cross. The centre was the brainchild of Enrique, the Spanish policeman who had negotiated bilateral migration accords with West African states. He still took pride in his role in creating it, despite the harsh critique and calls for its closure. The centre was "a green island in the middle of the desert", he insisted, "like a hotel". It was created for "humanitarian reasons" and was so well furnished that the Mauritanian *gendarmes* started stripping away its equipment for their own homes. By 2010, Enrique did not care to hear more about the current state of the centre: rundown and derelict, it was something he'd rather forget about.

"The fiasco of Guantanamito", as one Spanish journalist put it, was complete.⁷ Stripped bare of supplies by soldiers and labelled a prison by human rights advocates, the centre 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 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 when preparing for embarkation – travelling 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

⁵ With the migrant handovers money changed hands from Mauritians to Malian officers, according to Migreurop/La Cimade (2010:32), though the exact arrangements are unclear

⁶ For more on EU/Spanish involvement, see Serón et al (2011:51-60)

⁷ See http://elpais.com/diario/2008/07/10/espana/1215640817_850215.html

game (*politique du chiffre*: Migreurop/La Cimade 2010:19). The Rosso police distinguished between *raflés* (“raided” foreigners) and *clandestins* deported from Mauritania. The former, they said, were simply foreign workers picked up to make up numbers, not migrants intent on migrating clandestinely to Europe. Sub-Saharan Africans were detained in Nouadhibou for wearing two pairs of jeans, this “proving” they were on their way to Europe (Amnesty 2008). Once numbers of departing migrants dropped, not even this was needed as an indication of illegality: skin was enough. The Spanish Red Cross, which collected the only systematic data available on those detained, came to similar conclusions on the numbers game (Cruz Roja 2008). Guantanamito was first a “welcoming centre in citation marks”, said one Spanish Red Cross officer, before being “converted into a detention centre for anyone suspected of wanting to migrate”.

Europe’s subcontracted migration controls here threatened to undermine not only diplomatic relations with neighbouring countries, but also the already fragile relations between Mauritania’s black (*haratin*) and white (*bidan*) communities by adding a tinge of illegality to the politics of skin colour. The legacy of slavery, as well as the forced expulsion to Senegal of black Mauritanians following a conflict between the countries in 1999, was never far from the surface. One civil society firebrand in Dakar saw a shift between 2008 and 2010 towards the growing stigmatisation of strangers, with cases of even black Mauritanians being deported to the southern borders. “Now all black people are susceptible to being [seen as] illegal migrants,” she said.

Jacques was one of the clandestine travellers detained and deported in the crackdowns. He waited for me at the Red Cross base in Rosso, dressed in a shabby sports jacket and stained jeans. It was hard to tell his age, but I guessed he was in his late thirties. A broad, expectant grin spread across his lips as we sat down on a bench next to the water bladder. He clutched a small, ragged 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. He only had a spare shirt besides the clothes he was wearing, which under the circumstances looked

relatively clean. “They stole my bag at the border between Guinea and Senegal,” he said. “I arrived in Senegal with nothing but a plastic bag in my hands.” Still smiling, he told me his story of growing up in Guinea; however, he said he hailed from Guadeloupe, the French overseas department in the Caribbean. He wished to enter Europe. In fact, he had a French friend who had promised to meet him in Morocco and help him sort out his papers. These he had lost somewhere en route – it was not quite clear where – and he had failed to get new ones when approaching the French embassy in Dakar. After this far-fetched attempt at getting travel documents, he had gone north. In Nouadhibou, Jacques had paid a driver for a clandestine trip to Tetuan, an unlikely destination in northern Morocco. Instead he was dropped 40 km 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 Guantanamito.

Jacques smoked more and more, while he ate less and less. “I was so afraid,” Jacques 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.” Guards accompanied him when he had to go to the toilet. A “Spanish lady” from the Red Cross was there, Jacques said, but did little to help. After a few days, the Mauritanian Red Crescent came to obtain information, asking how much he had paid for his clandestine journey, if he had a relative abroad... 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. Over a plate of *mafe* stew in the local fly-infested 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 towards Dakar, there’s no place where they’ll hassle you.” But when someone dropped a plate behind him, he 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, who sees migrants en route as experiencing an “erasure of presence” in which they undergo a “physical transformation” (2005:198):

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.

This vacancy was expressed in Jacques’ rootlessness and wandering (*errance*). Where would he go? Jacques had no clear answers, except saying that “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 (70 cents) “plus my cigarettes”. “Once I get to Rabat, my friend can find me there,” he said, before mentioning that his friend’s email, 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. Even more so than with the Liberians, everything about Jacques was fleeting and unsure; everything he said blurred the lines between truth, lies and daydreaming. That night, he would sleep as he always did, 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.

Back in Dakar two weeks later, I bumped into Jacques again; he had heeded my advice to catch the Red Cross van. In the ledgers of Caritas, the Catholic organisation providing the only rudimentary assistance for migrants in the capital, he now appeared as Ibrahim, not Jacques; his age was listed as 22, not verging on 40. I had tried to put in a good word for Jacques/Ibrahim, saying that

he had indeed tried to migrate to Europe, which meant he was entitled to assistance. This way, I was playing the same game as everyone else in the illegality industry – invoking a traveller’s intentionality as source of both suspicion and entitlement, labelling my friend an illegal migrant in the process. The last time I went looking for him, around the Laboratory for Research on Social Transformations, a university research outfit that proved a fitting place for him to seek shelter at night, he was nowhere to be found. Maybe he had gone back north for lack of options. But his aimless wandering was unlikely to lead him across the biggest hurdle awaiting West Africa’s adventurers – the Sahara.

The dehumanisation machine: 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 such as Mohammadou once got stuck, ping-ponged between the border posts and forced to retreat at gunpoint. To overland adventurers, the whole desert is, in a sense, such a limbo. In crossing it, adventurers 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 what little money they have 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 presumed illegal migrant. If lucky enough to pass the initiation rite that crossing the desert constitutes for them, their adventure – exhilarating, dreary and deadly in equal measure – will finally have been worth it.

Mali’s vast desert borders had before the country’s conflict in 2012 become the latest frontier in the drive to control migration, thanks to stiffer controls along the shores of Senegal and Mauritania. 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 its 2007 migration accord with Mali, Madrid had increased official development aid, funded various programmes on “migration management” and (alongside the EU) equipped 17 border police

posts.⁸ 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 personalised 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.



Figure 11. Border police post, Senegal-Mali border

"Take me to Europe!" exclaimed a Malian *gendarme* with a chuckle before showing me into the AC-blasted offices of his boss. The director-general of the Gendarmerie Nationale 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 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

⁸ See Serón et al (2011:74-75) for details on this cooperation

“upstream”. Above all, they insisted on creating 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 Hera 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.

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) says such crossings challenge “the sacred feature of border rituals and symbols”. To him, migrants here play the role not of initiates but of “sacrificial creatures for the border ritual”. This involves their animalisation, evident in the terms used for clandestine migrants and their smugglers across the world (*ibid*; Coutin 2005) – in Morocco, sheep are at the mercy of wolves (Driessen 1998), in Mexico chicken are smuggled by *polleros* (chicken farmers) or coyotes (Kearney 1998).

The adventurers’ making as illegal migrants is, again, not just discursive but played out on their bodies. Youssou, a Senegalese adventurer who had managed to cross the Sahara 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. As the migrants marched through the desert Tuareg bandits appeared, tipped off by the gathering’s guide. “They took our money, our clothes, our bags,” Youssou recalled. They 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. As soon as the bandits left, Youssou set out again. No time to lose in the desert. 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, transported in cattle trucks across the desert that sent his body rocking from side to side with each bump in the road. “Am I really a goat? A cow?” he asked angrily.

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 in their making as illegal migrants. The clothes and accoutrements spotted on Dakar’s beaches, the migrant “mind” pondered in Rosso, the racialisation in Nouadhibou and the dehumanising experience of the desert add up to an ever more reified migrant illegality defined by the traveller’s “uniform”, his wildness, his deviousness, his blackness. 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.

Oujda and the Strait: the politics of recognition

Daouda and Modou had found the shortcut. I first met them in the market town of Fnideq on the Moroccan side of the Ceuta border, 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. They had not even had to resort to cargo-like transport in fruit or cigarette trucks; as Senegalese nationals they could enter Mauritania and Morocco visa-free, as long as they paid a “fee” for the stamp after crossing Kandahar into Western Sahara. They were both in their early twenties, on their first trip abroad, and lit up as soon as I greeted them in Wolof. They both 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) says,

the first North African country in being “annexed to the security policies of European governments”. Seeing the country as a springboard to Europe for streams of illegal migrants from south of the Sahara, 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 events of autumn 2005 outside Ceuta and Melilla. After the intense media scrutiny that followed, Rabat cleaned up its act. No more negative headlines, no wanton brutality. As a privileged partner under the European Neighbourhood 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 Direction de la Migration et de la Surveillance des Frontières (DMSF), based in the town-within-a-town of cream-coloured buildings and manicured lawns of the Moroccan Interior Ministry. Mehdi, the director of DMSF, navigated with expert ease between the politics of a new Moroccan era under King Mohammed VI and the mixed European calls for a business-like discourse on migration and a simultaneous tough policing response. In a sparkling conference room, he 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. Morocco had first followed what Mehdi called, somewhat puzzlingly, a “multi-aquarium strategy” that went beyond policing to encompass “sensitisation, communication, development, security, [and] legislative and institutional reforms”. Thanks to this strategy, he said, Morocco “had reached an incompressible level of ameliorations since we have narrowed by almost 90 per cent the arrivals of illegal migrants to Europe”. As the old strategy reached its “maturity level” in 2007, DMSF embarked on a new process-oriented approach where “everyone will work in the same aquarium”. Labelled PPP (“Prevention, Prosecution and Protection”), Morocco’s latest strategy covered both the country’s own clandestine migration flows – the

harragas or “burners of borders” that have crossed the Strait ever since Spain instituted visa requirements in 1991 – and the sub-Saharan adventurers whose journeys were to be “aborted upstream”.

The key element in Mehdi’s discourse was what was left unstated: coercive border policing. He talked warmly about the Directorate’s work with Moroccan NGOs 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 Mehdi about EU funding for the Moroccan migration response, and his reply first startled me. “What funding?” he laughed.

Well, there was a MEDA programme, about €67.5m, eh...⁹ 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 or... today we are combating networks that are active in this business because 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.

Mehdi 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.¹⁰ Morocco, it is true, has long refused to sign an agreement with the EU on readmissions of foreigners having transited through its territory, and has consistently refused to accept back non-nationals under such an agreement signed with Spain in 1992. This 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 (Bensaad 2005; Gabrielli 2011). The pressure was, of course, two-way. The current EU-Morocco action plan, like its equivalents for other North African countries, includes clauses on “ensuring the effective

⁹ This is a financial assistance programme for the EU’s southern neighbors:
http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/external_relations/relations_with_third_countries/mediterranean_partner_countries/r15006_en.htm

¹⁰ Aid figures also include €390m under a 2003 Spain-Morocco agreement: see
<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67566/behzad-yaghmaian/out-of-africa>

management of migration flows” and readmissions.¹¹ In the migration-related aid stream, Morocco received €654m in funding under the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument over only three years (EMHRN 2010:61). While €40m of this assistance was earmarked for security (*ibid*), the aid money was generally clean, and so was the Moroccan strategy that Mehdi 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 racialised in Morocco. Blackness became, as in Mauritania a few years later, a sign of illegality. In 2003 and 2004, taxi drivers in Tangier had started refusing black customers. The scruffy hostels in the city’s medina closed their doors to Morocco’s southern neighbours 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 travellers responded by developing intricate means of organisation 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 2009).

Conscious of how their bodies and behaviour betrayed them, migrants also developed techniques for “passing” as documented visitors rather than deportable *clandestins*. 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. More importantly, he knew that, once he spotted them, he should not turn but walk straight ahead with the air

¹¹ See http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/action_plans/morocco_enp_ap_final_en.pdf

of a legitimate foreigner. In Zygmunt Bauman's (1997) terms, he tried to enact the role of the "tourist", not the unwanted "vagabond".

Daouda and his friends did not yet have to resort to such authority-eluding performances. They laid out their skin creams on white sheets around Tangier's Casabarata market while chatting with their Moroccan colleagues. Maybe they wanted to try going to Europe, Daouda said, but seemed in no rush. He was learning the ropes of being an itinerant vendor, living abroad for the first time in a basic flatshare with fellow Senegalese and Guineans. But soon enough, his time would come to taste migrant illegality.

While in Senegal and Mauritania, the illegal migrant was recognised 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 interiorised his own illicit status and its frightening corollary, what de Genova (2002) terms "deportability". 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 bustling university town is both the site of expulsion or *reconduite à la frontière* (return to the border), as Mehdi and his forces called it,¹² 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. Here, western journalists and researchers have congregated in recent years in their quest for a glimpse of the illegal migrants dwelling in shacks on a field shielded by crumbling university walls. Nigerian gangs hold sway around *la fac*,

¹² This term is used for similar purposes in France

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 *tranquilos* ("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. In recent years a drip-drip of deportations had replaced the previous mass expulsions, leading to less negative media coverage if not a sharp fall in numbers. In August this year, after a Morocco-Spanish standoff concerning the policing of the Melilla border, the Spanish interior minister had travelled to Rabat. 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 skin-cream salesman, to experience the violence of expulsion.

Daouda had been caught up in a raid (*rafle*), he told me as I finally 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 at the Mauritanian border, but this was too far and 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. "The Algerians took all the money, *tout tout tout*," is all he could tell me before hanging up. His friend Modou was out at the time of the raid, but had panicked and left immediately. I caught him on a bad line in Dakhla, halfway down to the Mauritanian border where a payment of €100 would give him a *laissez-passer*. He was heading home, the adventure over.

I met Daouda a week later in Tangier, neatly dressed in what was probably loaned gear, for a meal near the port. He told me how the Moroccans had taken him to the no-man's-land outside Oujda at night and indicated the direction for heading back to Morocco. "We didn't know, we went there, but it was Algeria," he said. Next, things got worse as for many before him. The "bandits" came:

They were Algerian soldiers, and they stole everything, everything. 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 mobiles, but they left the SIM card for us. They took our clothes. They left us in our underwear, and it was very cold. We walked barefoot until 8am, through the woods. Then we got to *la fac*, but we didn't even sleep there... it's not safe in Oujda, at any time the police may come, ask for papers and expel us again.

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 chimed in, who had just been through deportation and was now afraid of the Nigerian gangs that had helped him back to Tangier. 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 somatisation of migrants’ despair at an encroaching illegality, something I had already seen with Jacques in faraway Rosso.

I was entering the clandestine experience too, in a similarly paranoid way. In Oujda I walked with fast steps around *la fac*, trying – like Stephen, I later realised – to perform the role of tourist or student. I saw secret police everywhere, or potential informers. I had my reasons. In Tangier I had been filmed by a suited man in a café while interviewing an activist; at another time, a Cameroonian asylum seeker was stopped, searched and interrogated after talking to me. The border regime was producing mental and bodily effects in those it drew into its orbit, forcing the free lines of flight of the adventure into a tunnel of state-controlled movements and surveillance. This battle of attrition against supposed *clandestins* sometimes ended – as it eventually did for Stephen – in “self-

deportation” via the IOM’s euphemistically named “assisted voluntary return” programme.¹³

In Morocco, the petty gift economy of Spanish-Sahel relations had been wholly replaced by a politics of recognition, in which Rabat agreed to play its role as long as Spain and the EU deepened cooperation. Here, 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 fitted the “illegal” profile, the profile could simply be expanded along racial lines without much regard for the foreigners’ legal status. 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 clandestine 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. With each financial exchange, however, 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 personalised 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 behavioural signs. Gifts to the Mauritanians – ranging from patrol boats and

¹³ On “self-deportation” in the US, see http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-self-deportation-fantasy/2012/01/25/gIQAmDbWYQ_story.html. On the IOM’s returns programmes, see Hein de Haas: <http://heindehaas.blogspot.co.uk/2012/10/ioms-dubious-mission-in-morocco.html>

cash to political recognition – boosted the number of detainees while simultaneously adding an edge of racialisation to migration controls. Development aid and diplomatic favours 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 emerges not just as a discursive but above all as an embodied figure 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 neighbours, 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 chapter has presented the becoming en route as linear, with illegal elements gradually added to the migrant “product”, the process is more intricate than this – and so are migrant adoptions of illegality. The migrant’s presence is here not simply under erasure, as Coutin (*ibid*) suggests: by adopting the role of the adventurer, the overland traveller also forges a distinct *presence* for himself through clandestine skills honed on the margins of the law. While some such adventurers somatise despair, others instead press ahead ever harder, taking pride in their predicament. While many adventurers self-consciously start adopting the terms illegal migrant and *clandestin* en route, 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 favours for the outsourced African manhunt, the stronger the pressure to find fresh prey. Border controls perpetuate, thanks to their very success, the “problem” they are meant to combat. In the process they also produce a lived modality of migrant illegality, embodied in the figure of the clandestine traveller 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.

4

The crossing

Amadou had spent many days lying in wait on the rocky slopes outside Ceuta.¹ He was observing, his eyes scanning the fence like a camera. He would lie in hiding for two or three nights, watching the Guardia Civil officers on the other side, their routines, their comings and goings. All he had to eat were a few dry dates and a handful of sweets. In the end he learnt everything. He knew they went on patrol for five minutes to one side, 20 to the other. He would have to time his attack just right.

Breaching the fence, this multimillion-euro armour, was a finely honed skill for Amadou. Every nerve in his body had to work in concert. No movement. No stray thoughts. Full, absolute concentration. No fear. If you are afraid, the Moroccan soldiers' dogs will bark and attack. But fix your eyes sternly on the dog's eyes, and it will stay calm. Amadou had learnt this the hard way, on one of his 10 attempts to climb the Ceuta and Melilla fences: a fellow adventurer took fright while they hid in the bushes and they were promptly detected, beaten and imprisoned. Amadou learnt with each attempt, each expulsion to Oujda, each endless walk back by foot to the fences. He was training himself. Sooner or later, his time would come.

For the adventurers, Europe's external border is a threshold between worlds. Behind them, the violence of the borderlands they have trudged through for months or years; ahead, a space of "human rights" and the promise of freedom. As they prepare for the final crossing, in silence or in hiding, they know that success depends upon their adventurer skills, their cool-headedness and the "grace of God". This is their chance, the one moment their long adventures have been building towards. They must not miss it.

For the border guards, Europe's external border is their workplace. Their patrol boats speed across vast stretches of sea; their sentinels look out across

¹ This story is based on one of the interviews undertaken during fieldwork in 2010 with migrants who had managed to cross into Ceuta

fences for sightings of approaching intruders. As they scan the horizon, they know success depends upon reaching out to their colleagues across the border and to aid workers, journalists and politicians within. In these interactions, the border becomes a resource in which the avowed business is to make sure no one enters. They must not lose it.

Migrants and border workers are bound together in what has been called the border spectacle (de Genova 2012) or border game (Andreas 2000). To Andreas, border policing is an audience-directed “ritualistic performance” aimed at “recrafting the image of the border”, making it more solid and real. To de Genova (2012:492), building on Debord’s (2004) notion of the society of the spectacle, it is a show of enforcement in which migrant illegality is made spectacularly visible. Through the interplay between enforcement and an excess of discourses and images, he says, the border spectacle “yields up the thing-like fetish of migrant ‘illegality’ as a self-evident and *sui generis* ‘fact,’ generated by its own supposed act of violation”.

The crossing offers a first glimpse for European audiences of the clandestine migrant who has until then remained hidden beyond the border. This is where illegality is transformed into something different, something bigger; what in Spanish media and politics has come to be known as the *avalancha*. The prey-like migrants of the borderlands here gather into two distinct human “avalanches” – either a huddle aboard sinking boats or a frightening horde “assaulting” the fences of Ceuta and Melilla. This chapter is about this double transformation, and about the similarly two-faced spectacle within and without which it unfolds.

The transformative power of international borders is not reserved for “illegal” travellers alone. As Donnan and Wilson (1999) note, people become part of a new system of value when they cross state borders. In Heyman’s (2004:324) terms, such crossings are sites where value “steps up or down” in the world system. Much as sweatshop shirts become fashion items and bags of cocaine turn into gold-like dust, migrants go through what Kearney calls “reclassification” (cited in Donnan and Wilson 1999:107) – a pun indicating how they are both labelled anew and potentially switch social class in the crossing. While the US-Mexico border is the classic site for the study of such shifts, its emerging Euro-African counterpart is perhaps the steepest value threshold in the world right now: a vast economic divide loaded with symbolic, legal and political potency for those

who cross it.

This chapter will delve into these transformations and the scene on which they occur, but it does so by complementing the Marxian perspective on value underlying the perspectives just cited. Clandestine migration away from official crossing points does not neatly map onto the economic terrain, but rather follows its own surreal logics. While de Genova (2012) – and, in a similar sense, Andreas (2000) and Heyman (1995) – identify the obscene, “off-scene” reality behind the border spectacle as the continued need for illegalised labour in the West, this chapter will seek to locate another “off-scene” within and on the margins of the spectacle itself, in the realities that fall outside its visual order.

In Spain, the border spectacle is fundamentally double-edged, in accordance with the peculiar geography of its southern frontier: the dispersed border at sea versus the sharply demarcated land border of Ceuta and Melilla. These borders, in turn, are endowed with distinct humanitarian and military logics. In enforcing this conceptual divide between land and sea, the Spanish state has since 2005 largely avoided the fate of Italy and Greece, where the “tough” and “humane” sides to the border spectacle, identified by Cuttitta (2011), are muddled and mixed. Yet this Spanish success is far from complete. The splitting of the border spectacle into two distinct acts veils the fact that both settings depend upon a similar militarisation and mixing of agencies in the border encounter. Moreover, the spectacle cannot detach itself from what falls outside its visual order – a visceral backstage world that sometimes escapes from the wings and intrudes into the theatre of operations.

This chapter, then, is a spectacle in two acts: sea and land, rescues and repulsion, huddle and horde. It is about the masks donned in this encounter – not only by migrants, but by border workers as well. Amid these workers are the journalists, the Red Cross emergency teams, the sea rescue service Salvamento Marítimo and not least the security force charged with securing Spain’s land and sea borders: the once so fearsome Guardia Civil.

[removed fig12: An award-winning picture of a sea rescue in the Canaries]

The spectacle, Act one: guardian angels of the high seas

*¡Oh ciudad de los gitanos!
La Guardia Civil se aleja
por un túnel de silencio
mientras las llamas te cercan.*

*Ai, city of gypsies!
The Civil Guard saunters away
through a tunnel of silence
leaving you in flames.*

Federico García Lorca, *Romance de la Guardia Civil Española*

Heavy is the gate to Europe, and hunched under the weight of history are the gatekeepers, the Guardia Civil. Spain's military-status police force calls forth images from Spain's darkest decades: the regime of Generalísimo Franco, the attempted coup in the fledgling days of Spain's democracy and the persecution of gypsies and the poor invoked by Lorca at the time of the Spanish Republic. But something has happened in the past two decades. The Guardia Civil has fanned out across the world, its *Comandantes* and *Coroneles* talking warmly of humanitarian missions. And clandestine migration plays no small part in the security force's revived fortunes.

There were few better representatives of this brave new era for *La Benemérita* (the force's nickname, the “noble” institution) than Comandante Francisco and his maritime surveillance colleagues. Francisco had even made a video, called *The drama of immigration*, that illustrated this transformation to visitors and fellow security professionals perfectly.

Francisco pressed play, and familiar images flicked by on screen to West African guitar music. Wooden boats groaning under the weight of their human cargo. Black Africans scattered across the deck of a Spanish rescue vessel. Unmarked graves dug in Mauritania. Migrants suspended atop the water surface, balancing on the submerged remnants of their boat. *Afrika-a-a-ah* sings Senegal's Ismael Lô on the soundtrack, in a bluesy voice. *Nous sommes des enfants d'Afrique*. Another packed boat in the crosshairs of a Guardia Civil camera, half the deck covered by a makeshift canopy. A patrol boat pulls up, edging closer

with each swell. The migrants squeeze against the side, reach for the hands of the *guardias* and are dragged aboard the patrol vessel, one by one. “The Guardia Civil has carried out a job that has often gone unnoticed,” says Francisco as his soundtrack segues to the New Age songs of Sheila Chandra, a melancholy voice atop an Indian drone. A uniformed *guardia* holds a listless African woman in his arms; another officer cradles a baby; a third carries a child on his back. Bloated corpses on Spanish beaches. A man on his knees in the Canarian sands, oblivious sunbathers blurred in the background. A corpse in silver wrapping. A drenched body, stiff with rigor mortis, pulled onto an inflatable raft. *I ride the waves... of each deathly breath*, sings Chandra. Then, in the night waves, the eyes and heads and arms of four drowning men grasping for the hands of their saviours. “We’ve saved lots of lives,” says Francisco, almost sounding defensive. “You have to avoid them putting themselves in danger.” The final text rolls, in Spanish, French and stuttering English: the Guardia Civil, together with its African colleagues, has since 2006 “rescued more than 20,000 people preventing them from putting in danger their lives embarking in small and dangerous canoas towards Europe”. *La Benemérita*’s emblem lingers afterwards: the crown of Spain, a sword and a fasces. Comandante Francisco pressed stop.

Since the time of the boat crisis in the Canaries, a flurry of images has brought the distress of clandestine migrants to a global audience. An exhausted African on his knees in the sand, motioning for something to drink; a white girl in a bikini, her hand on the shoulder of a male migrant tightly wrapped in a Red Cross blanket; a gaudily painted *cayuco* packed with people as it glides into port. The spectacle played out in these pictures provides a window onto the first act in the Spanish border spectacle: humanitarianism and its Guardia Civil protagonists.

Many commentators have looked at Europe’s border regime through the rather distressing lens provided by Giorgio Agamben (1998). Clandestine migrants are, thanks to the externalisation of controls, subject to a state of exception in which the sovereign power to “let die” is exercised. Or so goes one line of argument (see e.g. Albahari 2006). But as was seen in chapter two, border controls are as much about the power to “let live”, the other side of Agamben’s notion of bare life – a vulnerable life that can be rescued in action, just as it can be killed by omission. And high-ranking Guardia Civil officers are consistently on-message on the importance of saving lives. They are the “guardian angels of the

high seas”, in the words of a Socialist government delegate in the Canaries, whose recollection of the 2006 boat crisis was encapsulated in the picture of the drowning migrants towards the end of Francisco’s video, shot by the award-winning Reuters photographer Juan Medina. In the photo, one of the migrants was being sucked into the night-time waves “with a face of fright, his eyes almost out of their sockets, clinging onto the hands [of his saviour],” the delegate recalled. “They drown, they are drowning, and you stretch out your hands to whoever you can.”

In rescues, the illegal migrant appears not as the abstract flow of risk of Frontex maps, nor as the hounded prey of the borderlands, nor as a naked life that can be killed but not sacrificed. On the high seas emerges, rather, a body in need, stiff with cold and fear, whose image can be captured, circulated, sold and shown. The images, much like their cognate pictures of African refugee flows depicting a “sea of humanity” without a past (Malkki 1996:377), fix the notion of the clandestine migrant as a helpless, nameless body, sinking into the dark waters. In rescuing this drowning body a virtuous circle is born, where the tasks of patrolling, caring for and informing on clandestine migration blur into each other.

The production, distribution and appropriation of images – what I will call the visual economy of clandestine migration – mirrors and even facilitates this mixing of roles.² The mixing was on display in Francisco’s video, in the rescue pictures adorning Guardia Civil corridors and in televised snippets of sea interceptions; on the walls of the Tenerife Comandancia, it was even spelled out in a framed Red Cross letter thanking the security force’s maritime service (SEMAR) for its “humanitarian assistance”. Through such mixing, the *guardias*, African forces, journalists and Salvamento and Red Cross workers forged what Calhoun (2008:85) calls an “emergency imaginary”. This imaginary, Calhoun says, is activated when officialdom “takes hold” of events such as refugee crises in such a way that these emerge as a “counterpoint to the idea of global order”. This is what happened in the *crisis de los cayucos* in the Canaries in 2006.

Part I: symbiosis

² Like Poole (1997:8), I use this term to highlight the transnational social relations and channels of communication implicated in a particular organisation of the visual field

The full-blown emergency was preceded by a drip-feed of arrivals. In the late 1990s, pioneering *pateras* had started reaching the easterly Canary island of Fuerteventura, where at night the locals “heard the screams of people as the *pateras* turned over”, recalled Emilio, a Red Cross worker. “The next morning bodies appeared on the shore... People wanted someone to do something.”

In 2003 the authorities asked the Red Cross for assistance, and soon Emilio’s emergency response team (ERIE) rushed to the beaches and ports to wrap migrants in blankets, give them first aid, a hot drink and a medical check-up. The rough terrains of Fuerteventura made Emilio’s work even more taxing. “We had to traverse a dirt track for eight kilometres, set up motors, field hospitals and everything else,” he said. “This was something that I thought of in terms of work in the field, as in the earthquake in Haiti.” Like in such a natural-disaster scenario, the Red Cross had to create an emergency protocol for intervention. “The field came to us,” Emilio said. But for a time, the outside world did not seem to bother.

Then Emilio had an idea: call the media. He started contacting journalists, without telling the authorities, each time a *patera* arrived. “We did everything we could so that this would be broadcast to the world,” he recalled. “No one knew what was happening there until we created a Red Cross-press symbiosis, though we kept it quiet... the Guardia Civil asked, ‘but who the hell called the journalists?’ I said, ‘how would I know, maybe they tune in on the radio’.” Emilio recognised that his efforts only paid off in part, however. It was not until large *cayucos* started arriving on the bigger islands that a wider emergency imaginary was activated.

Emilio recalled some roughness in relations with the Guardia Civil, with overworked *guardias* “screaming and pushing” the migrants. He took a forgiving view, however, and insisted that the *guardias* “had the same heart” as Red Cross workers, with many of them traumatised by what they had seen. “The Guardia Civil assisted a lot of immigrants in their quarters, they paid for sandwiches with their own money and their wives brought clothes for the immigrants.”

On high sea, the situation was even more delicate. Utmost coordination and professionalism was needed to intercept and save dozens of migrants, stiff with hypothermia, from a sinking wooden boat at night amid raging waves. This was the drama played out in the photos circulated by *guardias*, the government

and the media: the *performance* – in both the sense of spectacle and of professional task – of the rescue.

As Guardia Civil launches reached a *patera*, frayed nerves and hot tempers initially often led to disaster. Migrants stood up in fright or expectation of a rescue, making their boat overturn. Specialised Guardia Civil divers had to throw themselves into the cold waters or search for hands to grasp, hoping to drag drowning migrants aboard. It was such a capsized boat that Juan, the Reuters photographer, had shot in the waters off the Canaries. Soon staff were trained and risks minimised, heralding a first, strange sight of Europe for boat migrants: rescue workers bedecked in full protective gear who took them on board, isolated them as pathogens and safely steered them to port. As a young Senegalese boat migrant, Mamadou Dia (2011:52), recalled in a book about his 2006 ordeal in the Canaries: “The Salvamento Marítimo boat approached the *patera* and out came a man wearing a protective white dress, with gloves and a mask. The protections that man took towards us surprised me and made me worry about my future life in this country.”³

Before their arrival, someone always called the journalists. Contacts were close between aid workers, border guards and select reporters and, by 2010, the sight of arrivals had become routine on Spanish television. First, shots of a Salvamento boat gliding into port. Next, rescued migrants streamed off the deck under the watchful eye of the Guardia Civil to the snaps and flashes of photojournalists. Finally Red Cross volunteers wrapped migrants in blankets and lined them up for a medical check followed by transport to detention. The moral narrative of a professional, streamlined labour of rescue – the reassuring end to the emergency imaginary – was repeatedly broadcast and brought to its expected denouement, just as it had at the end of Comandante Francisco’s video.

³ Workplace health regulations also included special insurance covering tropical illnesses for Salvamento staff and separate ventilation for rescued migrants on large Guardia Civil patrol boats



Figure 13. A rescue in the Strait of Gibraltar, September 2012

Salvamento Marítimo

The port spectacle showed how the “symbiosis” invoked by Emilio did not just concern relations between aid workers and journalists. Along with the humanitarian protocol first developed on Fuerteventura and around the Strait came an increased mixing and blurring of roles between the different agencies working on migration. A few examples of this mixing should suffice.

First, information-gathering. The Red Cross conducted short interviews with recent arrivals, and Salvamento Marítimo took pictures of *cayucos* during rescues. “Often we compared [data] with the Guardia Civil next day or at the end of the week,” Emilio said. “Data were contrasted and we interlaced and cross-checked and this was sent to Madrid in order for there to be overlap.” This meant the Red Cross headquarters in Madrid – as well as the Interior Ministry. Salvamento provided the Guardia Civil and police with their footage so that these could ascertain the “captain” for detention, as well as the possible origin of the boat. In this way, the images attained value as evidence, temporarily exiting the larger media circuit of border imagery to which the agencies all contributed.

Second, the circulation of staff, know-how and resources. In their spare time, *guardias* on Fuerteventura volunteered in Red Cross emergency operations. Roles were more clear-cut on the bigger islands and along Spain’s mainland coasts, but there too staff switched agencies and roles. A former ERIE team leader on Gran Canaria was now a policeman; a long-time Red Cross worker in Tarifa became a Salvamento captain; a Red Cross spokesman became a renowned reporter on boat migration. Equipment circulated as well. The Red Cross did not

only take over old Yamaha motors from the *cayucos*, but also Salvamento and Guardia Civil launches in a sharing and recycling of resources that mirrored the circulation of border imagery. The Red Cross, Salvamento and sometimes the Guardia Civil also held joint exercises, contributing to what one Salvamento chief called a “feeling *diferente*” between the agencies working on migration.

Third, translation and interrogation. A former Red Cross volunteer in the Canaries, Senegalese by origin, recalled rushing across the island in 2006, often attending to one boat arrival after another the same night. He translated for the Red Cross since “they came to me and spoke, they weren’t reticent”. He then found out where the migrants were from, or took an educated guess. Relations between the Red Cross and police were friendly thanks to an understanding commissioner, he said. “He gave me a job in the end, when you finish you go straight to the police and you have work, you collect data [do interviews] and the government pays, and they paid me *very, very well*.” Here the police could tap into the goodwill generated by an African Red Cross volunteer to retrieve information from boat migrants. Similar set-ups facilitated the sharing of tasks across agencies in other settings too.

Fourth, migrants’ perceptions of these mixed roles. It was hard to develop trust with migrants, Emilio said; in the beginning they mistook Red Cross workers for police. Around the Strait, migrants often said they had been picked up by “the Red Cross”, which usually turned out to mean Salvamento Marítimo or, at times, even the Guardia Civil. In Nouadhibou, Spanish Red Cross efforts to disown “Guantanamito” clashed with the Mauritanian Red Crescent’s referring to it as “our centre” or the “welcoming centre”. Red Cross volunteers in Rosso-Senegal said that deportees often refused to go see them since they saw the organisation as part of the coercive state apparatus they had already encountered in Nouadhibou.

Part II: transformation

The Red Cross brand had been identified with Spain’s humanitarian regime – and had, as the Tenerife delegate insisted, received a huge boost to resources for this reason. In the Spanish migration response as a whole, the Red Cross had come to

embody the concept of *acogida*, translated as welcoming, reception or sheltering. The Socialist government put *acogida* into practice through a reception and integration fund by which NGOs gave recent boat arrivals shelter, food and support for a short initial period. Several civil society groups turned down participation because of the fund's short-termism "even though it would have sorted our accounts out quite well", as one NGO worker put it. The Spanish Red Cross embraced it, however, alongside longer-term reception, assistance in port, and humanitarian aid in Rosso, Nouadhibou and select migrant reception and detention centres (CIEs, Centros de Internamiento de Extranjeros). Its large body of volunteers, its established role as auxiliary to the state and its institutional imperative of discretion were all factors that soon helped make the Red Cross indispensable. As its role grew, however, so did a muted critique. Some activists and policemen dismissed the Red Cross as only "putting on plasters", while others highlighted the organisation's role in legitimising controversial policing operations. The Red Cross was aware of these dilemmas, and was only present in a few CIEs for this reason. In such centres "roles can become confused", said one officer in Madrid. "To work as the auxiliary to public powers has its pros and cons."

One international Red Cross representative in West Africa was blunter. "The Red Cross has become the jailer," he said, adding that national societies worked on "projects that are not always humanitarian... This is a problem within the movement." His comments illustrated an unease that was usually expressed more diplomatically by his colleagues in the International Committee of the Red Cross, the custodian of the Geneva conventions at the heart of the movement, about the role of national Red Cross societies in Europe's migratory operations. A different concern was voiced by North African Red Crescent societies: like good auxiliaries to the state, they – unlike their European counterparts – saw no need to prioritise foreigners on their soil.

While these clashes reflected long-standing differences, highlighted by Forsythe (2009:74), between a cosmopolitan ICRC and the "patriotic" national societies, they also highlighted a larger humanitarian dilemma. A grey zone has in recent decades emerged in war zones between combatants and aid workers – as seen, for example, in the military appropriation of the Red Cross emblem in Iraq and Afghanistan (Pandolfi 2010:227). As a result humanitarianism finds itself,

according to anxious voices, at a crossroads. While some trumpet a golden era brought on by the multiplication of aid into billions of dollars and of agencies into the thousands, others see humanitarianism politicised, its universalism questioned and its workers ambushed (Barnett and Weiss 2008:3). According to Ticktin (2006:33), humanitarianism has been transformed into a form of politics – an ethical configuration and mode of governance whose efficiency draws upon its very apolitical guise.

Humanitarianism has however, as many scholars note, *always* been political. Moreover, it has also been intimately linked to militarism ever since Henri Dunant founded the ICRC after witnessing the bloody aftermath of the battle of Solferino in 1859.⁴ The symbiosis between humanitarians and coast guards was thus not an anomaly; what was unusual was the degree to which humanitarianism transformed the militarised aspects of Spain's sea operations, rather than the other way round. This was evident in comments by the Tenerife delegate in 2010 as he attacked the then conservative opposition's calls for implicating the army in stopping the *cayucos*, before acknowledging that “it's true that the Navy, collaborates, but in a humanitarian sense”. They were guardian angels watching out for huddled boat people, not soldiers pushing back an invasion.

Among the guardian angels, the Guardia Civil underwent the biggest transformation. In combining the ancient moral benefits of being *la Benemérita* with the pictures, videos and performances of sea rescues, the Guardia Civil, so laden with a heavy historical baggage, was reinventing itself within the framework of a state-sponsored emergency imaginary. Spain's grizzled border guards of yore had morphed into humanitarians. This was the story on display in Comandante Francisco's video, in the photos and plaques in the Comandancia corridors. It was a compelling narrative that would look suspect, however, without the accompanying bright orange colours of Salvamento's rescue vessels and the Red Cross brand.

Salvamento's fortunes had also been transformed. “The Spanish sea rescue service is among the most highly valued in the world right now,” said the Tenerife

⁴ The larger debates on the politicisation of humanitarianism will not be discussed here: see Fassin and Pandolfi (2010) and Weizman (2011) for two recent interventions, Nyers (2006) on refugees, and Collinson and Elhawary (2012) for a policy perspective

delegate, explaining this in reference to clandestine migration.⁵ The same could not be said for the Red Cross, however, since its role at the border was constantly under threat from the “humanitarian” conflicts within the movement, criticism from without and funding cuts from above. The organisation had certainly proved helpful in branding Spain’s migration operations but as its usefulness declined it could be cast off like migrants’ Red Cross-emblazoned blankets.

Not only were the agencies transformed in the border spectacle, but so was their target – the *subsaharianos* (sub-Saharan Africans) and *magrebíes* (North Africans) rescued at sea. This typology was based on the only easily observable fact from afar, workers insisted, yet these groups were also differentiated as *kinds* of migrants. The *subsahariano* was seen as orderly, rule-obeying, even docile; the *magrebí*, meanwhile, was a potential troublemaker. The *subsahariano* would sit down on the beach and wait for the rescue workers to arrive, while the Moroccans and Algerians disobeyed orders, self-harmed and tried to run away. While workers alternately grumbled and took a forgiving view about the North Africans’ behaviour, black migrants were often talked about with notes of respect and awe. “Sub-Saharan are super-strong in character,” said one Red Cross coordinator, talking about their lack of agitation despite the hardships on their journeys. “They don’t cave in the way we do.”

These complex frontline categorisations were brought into sharper relief by the border imagery, where the *subsaharianos* not *magrebíes* were the chief humanitarian subjects. The pictures that acquired high iconic, symbolic and financial value in the visual economy were those of black migrants on rickety boats, hands outstretched towards their European saviours. The Red Cross blankets, clothes and kits provided the uniform of these new boat arrivals, the guise in which migrants were seen on television screens – huddled and wrapped up, sandals or clumsy plastic shoes on their feet, all alike, perfect images of the anonymous rescued migrant.

In one journalist’s words, the potency of the images beamed out from the Canaries in 2006 lay in the surreal encounter of “Stone Age man” and 21st-century bikini-clad girl on a tourist beach. Wild-eyed with salt-streaked hair, clothes wet and in tatters, speechless on his knees in the golden sands of Tenerife,

⁵ Spain’s national sea rescue plan received €1bn for 2006-2009, six times its previous allocation. See <http://www.salvamentomaritimo.es/sm/conocenos/plan-nacional-de-salvamento/?ids=1628>

the boat migrant in these pictures briefly appeared as a primitive man rescued from the seemingly most irrational of journeys.

Part III: the rescue image

The extraction of such images from the complex realities of boat migration is at the heart of the spectacle of the border. As Robinson (2000) notes in other humanitarian settings, the “emergency” needs a visual and narrative frame. The images and headlines are, in a word, agentive not descriptive: where the media look, money and official attention follows. It was in the largest circuit of the visual economy – where rescue pictures circulated as news commodities – that the emergency imaginary found its frame; it was also here that the gaps and cracks in this frame were most clearly beginning to emerge.

The media’s power to force political action on emergencies is often referred to as the “CNN effect”, and its existence is still widely debated (Forsythe 2009). In the chaos of the Canaries in 2006, however, the process seemed inverted – politicians actively *sought* to create the emergency frame. For the Canarian and national opposition, the rescue imagery was an indictment of a floundering government; for the Socialists, it was a means to pressure the EU into action. The journalists came to play a role in these battles, at times as hapless extras, at times as active protagonists, alongside the other workers in the illegality industry.

The “guardian angels” and journalist did not just share in the emergency imaginary; they also mixed and depended on each other to do their job. Journalists embedded themselves aboard patrol boats, were called by police contacts to quays and piers and mingled with aid workers on beaches, at times lending a helping hand. This mingling applied in particular to the journalists who tried to go beyond the “avalanche” story. The media fascination with boat migration has reached its apogee among this intrepid breed of journalists who have disguised themselves as clandestine migrants and embarked on journeys in trucks and boats, camera in hand. They have travelled to migrants’ home villages with news of deaths and tracked deportees to deserts and detention centres on African soil. Members of this intrepid reporters’ club seek not quick scoops but the recognition of their

peers, among whom the skill in chasing a story is what counts, much like the qualities admired among the migrant adventurers.⁶

For all the reporters' efforts, the "emergency" kept framing their interventions. One British reporter sighed at the fact that migration only sold if it was "something about us being under siege", exasperated at editors who changed his programme titles to invoke this fear. Others had their book titles tweaked, with "African" becoming "illegal" migration, or their investigative pieces on migrant abuse in the borderlands framed by scare stories on an impending invasion. Rafael, a Spanish correspondent in Morocco, took a pragmatic view after his many years of "doing migration" for a conservative daily, insisting he got the leeway he needed despite the paper's official line. Others were not so understanding. These included Juan, the Madrid-based photographer whose iconic pictures from the Canaries had graced countless front pages, Francisco's video and the Tenerife delegate's recollections.

Juan insisted he was an immigrant himself, hailing from Argentina; and like the immigrants he photographed, he also became a focus of the media's attentions. A documentary for Al Jazeera, "photographing the exodus", presented Juan as someone who "has taken the plight of these desperate souls to heart" not only in "photographing their misery" but also in keeping contact with them long afterwards. On screen, Juan and a *guardia* thumb his award-winning pictures from the capsized boat; next Juan travels to Mali and shows the pictures to the families of the survivors. The *guardia* and family members react in the same fashion: voices lowered, eyes softening. "This is utter desperation," says the brother of one of Juan's survivor friends, shaking his head. Another cries inconsolably.

Juan's work was a conscious critique of the "speechless" (Malkki 1996), one-dimensional depiction of boat migrants in the mainstream media. Yet his work also seemed to be the most striking manifestation of the role assigned to this migrant: a bare, naked, drowning life. Juan knew this. "The photographer is like a remote control," he told one conference gathering: editors could make his images

⁶ Much of this in-depth journalistic material is not available in English. Spanish books include Naranjo (2006 and 2009), Pardellas (2004) and Fibla and Castellano (2008). See Gatti (2007), Kenyon (2009) and Del Grande (2007 and 2010) on the Libya-to-Italy route

appear instantly on their homepages or newscasts at the press of a button, without context and without consideration of the photographer's intentions.⁷

His comments highlighted how the rescue image was alienated from its producer and "object" alike. This alienation of course applies to any commodity, as Marx long ago noted, yet strange things happened once the rescue image was put into circulation in the visual economy of clandestine migration. Juan's image-as-commodity mingled with imagery from mainstream broadcasters, humanitarian organisations and security forces, and was appropriated by these image-producers in turn. This way, the Tenerife delegate and Comandante Francisco could present the rescue image as evidence of humanitarianism, not of what Juan denounced as the "cruel and macabre obstacle course" created by the government and *guardias*' very efforts. While their framing indicated that the government had taken control of the story of clandestine migration since 2006, the imagery escaped any easy encapsulation. As it circulated, it took on a range of complementary and at times competing values. It served as memento for traumatised Red Cross volunteers, *guardias*, survivors and their families; as iconic sign of humanitarianism in Guardia Civil corridors; as glue for a collegial experience among agencies; and as evidence in interchanges between Salvamento and police. At other times, the image took on qualities of self-perpetuation and agency, as predicted by Debord's (2004) notion of the spectacle and by the Marxian theory of the fetishism of commodities that underpins it. One Guardia Civil captain had asserted this fetishistic potency in saying that one of the most iconic Canaries photos, of "the blonde girl embracing the black man... had a tremendous pull effect on would-be migrants in Africa". To counter this potency, Spain had in turn broadcast images of death in Africa as deterrence.

The rescue image, like a *patera* filling with water, struggled to contain all it was assigned to do; the visual order of the border spectacle was bursting at its limits.

Part IV: the backroom of migration

⁷ Conference appearance at Encuentro de Fotoperiodismo de Gijón, 2010 (website now defunct). For Al Jazeera documentary, see <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/witness/2007/04/200852519420852346.html>

One hot summer afternoon I went to a Red Cross *asamblea* (local headquarters) to watch videos of rescues. “Ah, those were my times,” said a Salvamento captain who had joined his Red Cross colleagues to watch the footage: *guardias* aboard Salvamento launches, beached *pateras*, corpses pulled aboard rescue boats, plastic gloves inflated as balloons for migrant children. The captain knew everyone, trading anecdotes about Guardia Civil sergeants appearing in the videos. But as we saw a *guardia* carrying a child on his back, he snapped. “It’s not real!” he exclaimed. “That’s what I don’t like about all this.” What, I asked? The captain mentioned examples: *guardias* putting their three-cornered hats on children’s heads, or on adult migrants to protect them against the sun. He had videos of the “backroom of migration” (*la trastienda de la migración*), what happens after the journalists leave – shoving, shouting and violent beatings.

The border spectacle, as Juan and other journalists were well aware, revealed but a small slice of the border encounter. It left out the “backroom” or backstage world of violence shielded from view by the state, as well as the trauma and drama at sea. It did not fulfil Debord’s (*ibid:17*) prediction for the society of the spectacle – that is, replacing the real world with “a selection of images which are projected above it, yet which at the same time succeed in making themselves regarded as the epitome of reality”. The harrowing truths of the border were instead relegated from the visual realm to the visceral backstage world of smells, touches and noises. And this world both reinforced and undermined the forms of “bare” migrant life seen in the border spectacle.

Emilio, the Red Cross emergency chief, had desperately wanted the media’s attention, but was still not happy with the slick images churned out by the news organisations he had summoned. He took friends and family along to make them experience how different the realities of a boat arrival were to the “cold” representations on television. Waiting on the seafront to begin an intervention, he recalled, “people readied themselves, with the smell of the sea on the pier before they arrive, the sound that grew stronger because you could hear the patrol boat at a mile’s distance, you knew they were arriving...” Besides the noise, the adrenaline and the whiff of the sea, the strongest memory was the smell of the *patera* itself. Emilio talked of the “characteristic smell of the paint of the *patera* impregnated in their clothes”:

Many times we knew. We went somewhere and those smells might be there, on a beach, and there's an abandoned *patera* there and we arrive, smell it and say, it smells of intervention. It was a special smell, everything smelled the same, of people in an enclosed space, it smelled the same, something like patchouli perhaps, something characteristic and people of black race have a characteristic smell, the interventions had their characteristic smell, it was the mix of the paint, the gasoline and well, the situation in which they arrived, they basically relieved themselves where they sat.

The *patera* smell haunted Emilio's memory and helped create a special space for interventions in his mind. It also marked out the characteristics of boat migrants as rescuable and racialised: the heady brew of salt water, gasoline, paintwork and strong bodily odours also recognised by Guardia Civil and Salvamento colleagues. It was a "concentrated human smell", one *guardia* told a Spanish journalist, that reached them before they saw the boat: "it smells of misery" (Aldalur 2010:164).

Another aspect of rescues beyond the spectacle was the migrants' gaze, their *mirada*. "They don't say anything, but [the *mirada*] is super-expressive... it says 'help me,'" one Red Cross volunteer said. To Emilio, the *mirada* "told you a lot, it told you that this person has just left their whole life behind, risking many things and losing so much, for nothing."

The *mirada*, the smells, the noises – these impressions could not be neatly encapsulated in the border spectacle, nor distributed within its visual economy. However, they were indispensable, contributing to the images' aura. Juan recalled how he took the iconic picture of the drowning men. "I heard how the *patera* capsized, the memory I have is of the sound," he told his conference audience. It was utterly dark, he staggered up a ladder on the patrol boat and snapped pictures with his flash on, without seeing anything. The most iconic picture of boat migration was, then, a glimpse of the unseen, of something beyond the journalistic and humanitarian gaze. In the Al Jazeera documentary, his *guardia* colleague recalled the shouts – of "resignation", not desperation – from the pitch-black water. His memory of rescues was "how they grip on to you, how tightly they grab your hands and arms". Touch, noise, smells – this was the harrowing backstage world, the very human side to the border encounter only hinted at by the humanitarian spectacle.

This darker side would however become central to the second act at the border. This is where the backstage world of violence had been relegated, and where the spectacle once began: the tall fences around Ceuta and Melilla and the tragic mass attempts to climb across them in the autumn of 2005.



Figure 14. Between Ceuta's twin fences, July 2010

The spectacle, Act two: keepers of the gate

CEUTA, JULY 2010. It was a dazzling day, the light breeze pungent with the smell of wild herbs. The patrol car had swerved through the hills, leaving zone Bravo and entering Charlie. It stopped at the highest-lying sentry box, with breathtaking views in all directions. “Take pictures!” exhorted the Guardia Civil officer in charge of Ceuta’s border barrier. As I snapped away, Teniente Federico gazed across the twin fences dwarfing our car and slicing the North African hillside in two. To the left they undulated down into the valley, disappearing at the official Spanish-Moroccan border of Tarajal next to the sea. To the right, they snaked towards the fishing hamlet of Benzú, on the other side of the enclave, at a steep angle. Here as in Melilla, thermal cameras and sound and motion sensors tracked movement on Moroccan territory. Guardia Civil vehicles and officers patrolled the Spanish side; through the steel mesh, it was just about possible to make out the Moroccan soldiers and auxiliary forces, known by migrants as the “Alis”, ensconced in whitewashed, EU-funded sentry boxes. The *valla* or *perímetro fronterizo*, as the Guardia Civil interchangeably called the barrier, seemed unconquerable.

Before the humanitarian spectacle, the Euro-African border had first been a fence. Until the early 1990s only patches of tangled and weed-strewn coils of barbed wire had marked the international boundaries round Ceuta and Melilla, but as Spain joined Schengen they now became the EU's only terrestrial borders in Africa. With the EU-Africa border arrived new, Europe-bound migrants, who were quite unlike the Moroccan labourers, Indian merchants and Andalusian workers who had entered the enclaves in an earlier era: bedraggled, poor, black, of uncertain origin or destination. As their numbers grew, so did the fences. First they were flimsy affairs, easily cut open or washed away by the rains. As more migrants arrived, the fences were slowly fortified with the help of EU money (Ferrer Gallardo 2008). Galvanised steel mesh eventually rose more than three metres above ground, undulating across Ceuta's hills and Melilla's plains. Sensors, cameras and bright spotlights were strung out around the perimeters. Migrants were pushed onto other routes, across the Strait and to the eastern Canaries, where Emilio and his Red Cross colleagues tended to them. Then came the 2005 *asaltos* with which this thesis began: hundreds of migrants "storming" towards the fences, leaving at least 14 dead in soldiers' gunfire and many more expelled to the desert. Soon after, the barrier was strengthened yet again. The *valla* – triple fencing in Melilla, double in Ceuta – eventually towered six metres above ground, enclosing the enclaves in a perfect armoury. There is a before-and-after 2005 in Ceuta and Melilla, with the fence as its memento, like a vast scar etched into the hills.

Walls and fences increasingly circle nervous polities, attempting to guard against the "lawlessness lapping the edges of nation-states" (Brown 2010:83). The US-Mexico border is now sealed by physical barriers and "virtual" fencing that stretch from the Pacific Ocean to the mouth of the Rio Grande. The Israeli "security barrier" undulating through Palestinian olive groves seeks to keep terrorists out (Calis 2011), while its more recent counterpart between the Sinai and Negev deserts targets African refugees and migrants.⁸ On the Greek-Turkish land border, a similar anti-migration fence is being built. These fortifications are not meant to keep out the armies that traditionally threatened the polity, but

⁸ See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/video/2012/mar/28/israel-border-fence-video>

instead target transnational threats – including, most strikingly and prominently, the clandestine migrant (Andreas 2003).

In Spain, the *vallas* are a key part of the border spectacle. To Andreas and Snyder (2000) the main purpose of such barriers lies in broadcasting deterrence at the border rather than in guarding against the dangers lurking outside them. Brown (2010) goes further, seeing them as monuments of folly to the waning sovereignty of nation-states and, with a Freudian twist, as a “psychic defence against systemic failures”. In unsuccessfully defending against the dangers that threaten to penetrate the nation, these barriers reinstate the sacred aspects of sovereignty in producing “an *imago* of the sovereign and his protective capacities” (ibid:131). Nation-state walls, Brown concludes, are “modern-day temples housing the ghost of political sovereignty” (ibid:133), conferring magical protection against incomprehensible powers.

The awe-inducing *vallas* seem, at first glance, to prove Brown right – as a show for anthropologists, EU delegates, the media and other select visitors they were unbeatable. Yet like at the sea border, their show was partial and incomplete. It was in fact what fell outside the spectacle that rendered the *vallas* so effective.

Ceuta and Melilla’s history in walling out unwanted outsiders goes back to the times before the *vallas*. As garrison outposts and penal colonies (*presidios*) since before the Spanish colonial period in northern Morocco, the enclaves have as Driessen (1992) notes always been sites where central state ideology clashes with “frontier praxis”. From within Melilla’s medieval city walls, the Spaniards organised raids on Rifian Berbers who in turn raided and laid siege to the enclave. Despite these *razzias*, intense cross-frontier trade also developed between enclaves and hinterland (ibid:189-190). Since Morocco’s independence, tension and trade have likewise fluctuated, with one constant: Rabat’s non-recognition of Spanish sovereignty over the enclaves. This is the context in which the *vallas* incongruously emerged in the past two decades as a protection against the “transnational threats” delineated by Andreas (2003): unlike the old city walls and moats, they defended not against Moroccan tribesmen or soldiers, but against the sub-Saharan (and Asian) *avalancha*.

For migrants, politicians and police alike, the *valla* was indeed a near-sacred object of the kind invoked by Brown. For migrants, it was so in the most concrete sense: like the West Bank barrier studied by Calis (2011:155) or the old

Berlin wall, it was surrounded by lethal prohibitions. “It’s untouchable,” said Pepe, an NGO leader in Melilla and one of the foremost enemies of the border regime. If a migrant approached it, the Moroccan soldiers would shoot; if he managed to breach it, he would be informally returned to Morocco through doors in the fences. This was so because of the immense symbolic power of the *vallas* to Brussels and Madrid, Pepe said: “If we cannot safeguard 10 km of *valla* [Melilla’s approximate terrestrial perimeter], how will you be able to control all of the EU’s terrestrial borders?” There, “the only objective is that not a single one passes,” he said. “The statistics have to say zero entries when they send it up high”.

As a result, the *vallas* were the dark side of the double act at the border. Here militarisation took on its violent guise, inflected by the enclaves’ martial past rather than by Red Cross humanitarianism. This militarisation of the border incorporated not just the Guardia Civil and Moroccan forces, but also the fearsome Spanish Legion and the *Regulares del Rif*, an indigenous force stemming from Spain’s colonial past in northern Morocco; in the 2005 crisis at the *vallas*, both these forces were mobilised to seal the border.

Part I: mimesis

MELILLA, OCTOBER 2010. “It was here that it happened.” Ramón had driven his Guardia Civil car to the edge of Melilla, where the enclave’s border fence suddenly forked in two and then ended abruptly at a sheer drop down to the waves and coastal road far below. This was “A0”, the final section of Melilla’s fence, more commonly known as *hito 18* (boundary post 18) in reference to the official border radius traced by cannonballs fired in 1862 from central Melilla. Ramón was standing at the spot that Spain’s Socialist vice-president, María Teresa Fernández de la Vega, had visited five years earlier, on the eve of the 2005 *asaltos*. She was escorted round the fence when the *guardias* suddenly sensed imminent danger. Migrants were waiting in the undergrowth brushing against the Moroccan side of the fence. “Because of the smell we knew that people were hiding there,” said Ramón. It could be “thousands of them”, they advised the vice-president, who was promptly escorted off-site. After her dramatic experience at the border, the government had decided to make new fencing at an initial cost of €20m that would swiftly rise even higher (Ferrer Gallardo 2008:143).

As border controls and discourses have become militarised in Ceuta and Melilla (ibid:142), so has migrant praxis in a play of reflection and mimesis ricocheting from forest hideouts on the Morocco-Algerian border to the control rooms of Madrid and Rabat (cf Taussig 1993). *Guardias* noted how the early arrivals of the 1990s gradually lost their fear, their tactics changing along with those of border guards and the gradual growth of the fences. The adventurers created intricate communities in the hills outside the enclaves, with structures of *chairmen* or rotating leaders for each national community, UN-styled “blue helmets” to keep the peace, and democratic structures for decision-making (Laacher 2007). As Moroccan security forces stepped up harassment in 2005, the adventurers’ organisational prowess was diverted towards the border. Here the very materiality of the fences helped trigger the *asalto masivo* since a critical mass – a horde – was now needed to climb them. “The only way to enter is on a mass scale, if not they cannot climb the fences,” acknowledged one Guardia Civil Comandante. The word migrants, *guardias* and journalists used for these attempts was, incidentally, the same – “attack” or *asalto*.

Pierre from Cameroon was one of the organisers of the *grande attaque* in 2005 from the slopes of Mount Gurugú, the mythical hill outside Melilla. It was the Spaniards who rigged the trap, he said, retelling his story in Mali’s capital Bamako, where he and many other adventurers had ended up after the ensuing ordeal. The Alis came to speak to their *chairmen* in the hills, assuring them that the next morning the coast would be clear. They should know – they were in constant contact with the *guardias*. Migrants started preparing. “We gave the Alis some whisky and Nigerian women,” said Pierre, with no signs of remorse. It was the law of the jungle. Then they made their way downhill. First went the *cibleurs* (scouts, “targeters”) who recce the terrain, then came the men with the ladders, then the women. They went in stages, advanced a bit at a time. When they arrived close to the fence, helicopters were circling above. Someone had betrayed them that night. Someone, they never knew who, had called the *guardia* chief, selling the information for passage to Spain. Then the Moroccan forces pounced. The migrants fanned out, Pierre escaping into the underbrush and onwards to the border village of Farhana. He tried to hide inside a black refuse sack, but someone was already inside. It was an *ancien soldat* (old soldier), Pierre explained, the term for those who had tried to attack the *valla* several times without luck. He

chose another refuse sack, and next day the two decided to “attack the town”. The metaphor points to how far adventurers have militarised the simplest daily acts, such as crossing a residential area without being detected. They made it into the forest, though their safety would not last. The Moroccans were searching the bushes and border hamlets, eventually catching Pierre in a shop. Forced expulsion awaited in one of the big buses he had seen leaving the forest in the aftermath of the *attaque*. Activists and journalists trailed them, trying to record their forced removal. They were told to get off in the Sahara, and two pieces of cloth were laid on the ground. “Walk between them, straight ahead,” the soldiers said, “and you will get to Algeria.” The sands to the sides were mined. Pierre’s tragic adventure had just begun. It would continue through Western Sahara, Mauritania, Senegal and Mali, where he was still stranded five years on.

Pierre’s recollections, however partial, point to the shared militarism of the border language among security forces and migrants, as well as to their intricate social links. These were not the only groups acting in agonistic concert across the *valla*, however. The Red Cross attended to the wounded at the fences and in the enclaves’ reception centres. In 2005 activists and aid workers such as Pepe had entered the hills of Gurugú and Ben Younech outside Melilla and Ceuta with provisions, and soon news teams arrived as well. Demand was rocketing for images and stories such as the one Pierre had told me. As the attacks reached their denouement, seemingly tipped-off journalists were already mingling among the soldiers (Migreurop 2006:31). One Spanish journalist had come to Gurugú before the *grande attaque* and offered to pay migrants if they would go and attack the fence so that he could film it. “He went to speak to the Cameroonians, who do anything for money,” recalled one Melilla veteran in Bamako. The Cameroonian adventurers agreed, attacked and failed, their bruising filmed by the cameraman, like tragic reality show contestants.

As controls extended away from the *vallas* with greater efficacy after 2005, other militarisation effects also appeared on migrant circuits. Sites of departure were called striking points; migrant ghettos became known as bunkers. “The adventure, it’s like going to war,” said one Melilla veteran, “and we’re like soldiers.” Militarisation also reached into the social circuits of the adventure. Nigerian smuggling rings – known as the “task force” or the Taliban, replete with fearsome “commandos” – had set up their own bunkers, including a “prison” in

Rabat where migrants were taken hostage until relatives paid up. The “mafias” that officials kept invoking were coming into existence thanks to the very controls supposed to fight them. The only routes that remained relatively free from organised smugglers, however, were precisely those were the government accused them of dumping migrants – the short sea route into the enclaves or across the Strait, and the fences of Ceuta and Melilla. Here a crossing attempt was mainly dependent upon the adventurer’s own wit, strength and cunning.

The *vallas*, seemingly a sharp divide, had with the help of European money become a medium for increased cross-border cooperation. They acted as a catalyst in a militarised alignment of fence technology, Moroccan forces, *guardias*, journalists and migrants. Yet, unlike at sea, this mixing and hybridisation was hidden from view. Here the show was wholly the fence itself, its glistening and tall steel divide, its promise of absolute separation.

While showing it off, *guardias* constantly had to shield its darker workings from view by escorting the audience off the scene, much like they had done with the Spanish vice-president before the 2005 “assaults”. Once the audience departed, a visceral reality replaced the visual splendour of the *vallas*. The smell of migrants, the touch of their hands on the cool steel mesh or the sound of their advance became incorporated into the very fabric of the fence; and so was the *guardias*’ ambivalence in their double role as guardian angels and gatekeepers of the external border.

Part II: ambivalence

What one *guardia* called a double standard (*doble moral*) suffused the show of force at the border. He did not elaborate on what he meant, but he hardly had to. Locals still reminisced about how, during the 2005 *saltos* (jumps) preceding the final autumn attacks, black men staggered into central Melilla with gaping wounds. In Ceuta, aid workers had seen migrants arrive with gashes that looked like “when you slice a chicken fillet”. Rafael, the Spanish correspondent, pegged his memories of 2005 on the deadly razor wire. “Some of them were just hanging there, looking like chorizos.”

Melilla’s new *valla* was the star in the range of “advanced security solutions” offered by the Spanish company Proytesca; it was, in the words of the

Socialist vice-president, not only “more efficient” but also less harmful and aggressive than the one it replaced.⁹ Planned for both enclaves, the “humane” fence was eventually only erected in Melilla, leaving Ceuta with its newly fortified but still “aggressive” razor wire. Thankfully, there the border was hidden from view in hilly terrain traced by the *guardias*’ closed perimeter road.

[Fig12 removed: Spanish newspaper depiction of the Melilla fence]

The “double standard” was built into the very fabric of the Melilla fence. As in Eurosur and the Spanish radar and satellite systems, technology was waved as a magic wand, promising migration controls shorn of violence and politics. The external fence was inclined outwards, making climbing it more difficult and limiting the need for razor wire, most of which had been removed in 2007 to media fanfare.¹⁰ Those who still managed to climb the outer fence faced a moveable upper panel that, once movement was detected, descended and trapped the climber underneath. If they made it into the middle section, they soon found themselves snared in an intricate mesh of metal cables known as the *sirga tridimensional*. The *sirga* tensed upon contact, immobilising the migrant like an insect in a spider’s web. If the intruder against all predictions got past this mesh, next was a lower middle fence; then, finally, the inner fence, again six metres high. “It’s sold as not being harmful,” said Ramón about the *sirga*, adding defensively that “those who would have to make sure it isn’t are the politicians or the company [Proytesca]”. Sensors and cameras (104 in total) detected any movement along the fence. Peppered water would be sprayed upon the attackers at a time of a bigger *asalto*, accompanied by disorientating sharp flashes of light. “It has never had to be used, thank God,” said Ramón.

Along sea routes, humanitarianism – on display in the rescue images – helped border guards overcome any qualms about having to play “the role of the baddie”. Enrique, the Spanish policeman stationed in Africa, recalled a row with a Red Cross worker. “I asked her, who has saved more lives, you or me? You give them blankets, something to eat and so on when they arrive in the Canary Islands,

⁹ Citations taken from old Proytesca website: compare <http://www.proytesca.net/valla-tridimensional-fronteriza-proytesca-proytec.html>

¹⁰ See <http://www.publico.es/espaa/17862/retiradas-todas-las-cuchillas-de-la-valla-fronteriza-de-melilla>

but we are out there rescuing people.” The police work was “99 per cent humanitarian”, he said: “What I want to do is to save lives... I might have been the baddie but my conscience is clear.” The *guardias* along the fences, however, could not invoke such a humanitarian role. From the *valla*, no Comandante-edited video collages emerged trying to put the record straight.

Attempts to gloss over the cracks between humanitarianism and violence, between the guardian angel and gatekeeper roles, took unexpected expression at times. Along the restricted road at *hito 18*, cut-off water bottles had been tied to the fencing. “It’s something they [*guardias*] put there for the birds to drink,” Ramón explained. The tenderness of the gesture contrasted brusquely with the three layers of fencing, the razor wire and soldier cubicles, and the grills blocking rivulets and streams flowing into the enclaves. In its privileging of wildlife over people it also recalled other attempts to humanise the walls around the West, whether in concerns over the free flow of animals across the US-Mexico barrier or over the threat that Australia’s refugee detention centre on the remote Christmas Island poses to the welfare of migrating crabs.¹¹

The cables, wires, sensors and cameras – not to mention the bird’s water bottles – did not remove violence from border controls. “They market the *valla* as an obstacle,” said Pepe, in reference to Guardia Civil claims that the fence only gave them a few extra minutes. “But it’s not an obstacle, it’s a hunter’s trap.” Migrants had fallen onto the *sirga* and been ripped open; ambulances could not enter between the fences. Instead the new *valla* achieved something else. It grasped the intruder via the smallest bodily signs – footsteps, breath, odours, noises, hands on wire. Unlike at sea, these physical and visceral signs fell within not without the border regime. The migrant’s hand was not there to grasp, but set off an alarm in the control room; his smell signalled not misery but danger. The visceral and the visual here combined in a backroom show only meant for the *guardias* in the Ceuta and Melilla control rooms, who saw red lights illuminated on their digital maps once a furtive bodily sign activated the *valla*’s sensors.

¹¹ See http://www.wilderness.org.au/campaigns/marine-coastal/detain_ci



Figures 15 and 16. The Ceuta fence: view towards Tarajal and from the Moroccan side

The *valla* was sensitive to the smallest poke or caress, like a skin tingling with nerve ends. Along Ceuta's fence, a *guardia* watchman had opened the doors and let us into Morocco. Razor wire adorned the outer fence: coiled into concertinas of knife-sharp spikes, it staggered up for several metres. Teniente Federico pointed to the sensors snaking through the layers of steel mesh, cables and military-grade razor wire. They set off the alarm easily, he said, so they would use cameras or binoculars “to see whether it is an animal, a *negro* (black man) or a *mokhazni* (Ali)”. If the thermal cameras spotted an intruder at night, the *Alis* would be contacted to scour the bushes with patrol dogs. Sometimes they “pass right by without seeing them”, he said. But the *guardias* guided the Moroccan soldiers with their night vision: “you have them at your feet now, you’re almost stepping on them!”

The fence technology and its networked manpower – the “living system” of the *valla*, as Ramón called it – provided more than just the “magical” protection Brown (2010) invokes. It was effective, but only in a peculiar manner intimately related to the border spectacle. Above all, the *vallas* had steered the horde away from the land border, making it reappear instead as a huddle of rescuable migrants at sea. It had also reproduced the prey-like presence familiar

from the borderlands in the internal workings of the *vallas*, where the traces left by lone migrants were easily confused with those left by gusts of wind, wild animals or straying Moroccan soldiers. The *vallas* had moreover fomented a trickle of clandestine entries into the enclaves by sea and via the official border posts. However, images depicting such methods – heads sticking out of car seats, the migrants’ bodies replacing the upholstery; barely glimpsed body parts soldered into the underbelly of trucks; migrants on jet-skis or hydropedals in the Strait – were but part of the border workers’ curiosity cabinet. The spectacle was under control.

This success came at a substantial cost. “The *valla* is almost a bottomless pit,” Teniente Federico said in Ceuta. No matter how much money was poured in, more was always needed for the constant upkeep – bringing big profits for security companies, as well as more staff and resources for the *guardias*, whose primary task in the enclaves was the “sealing” (*impermeabilización*) of the border.

There were also social consequences. If the EU increasingly resembles a gated community, as van Houtum and Pijpers (2007:1) have asserted, Ceuta and Melilla are its most concrete manifestations. The gating of wealthy enclaves round the world is, as Low (2003) observes, a contradictory enterprise. Aimed at shutting dangers out, they help foment the very fears they guard against. Among these fears was not just an impending avalanche, but also growing tensions with the walled-out neighbours. In Melilla, Pepe explained with some relish, the boundary markers or *hitos* were now outside the fence. Because of Moroccan protestations on entering “their” territory to construct the *valla* – notwithstanding the no-man’s-land officially circling the enclaves – Spain had had to cede ground. This meant, Pepe said, that when a migrant ran towards the fence and started to climb it, the *Alis* would shoot or fight him back in what was, really, Spain.

These problems added to the Guardia Civil officers’ ambivalence in showing off the *vallas*. While Federico had reeled off a list of official visits, he admitted he might not last long in Ceuta because of the claustrophobia produced by this very barrier. In Melilla, Ramón remarked that some people compared the *valla* with the Gaza-West Bank wall. “I don’t think so, there’s no other way to...” His sentence tailed off, unfinished. Heading away from the cliffside, he talked about the Melilla of his childhood, pointing to the pristine coves across the fence. “There I used to go swimming as a child,” he said, “we caught fish with our bare

hands.” He fell silent for a moment. “Migration has closed this city a lot, it has transformed it.” Relations with Morocco had worsened because of the *valla*, he acknowledged, even though the fence was only meant against the *subsaharianos* and *asiáticos*. Then Ramón switched gear, with a newfound certainty. “It seems we are always on the defensive,” he said. “But well, get rid of the fence then, let millions of people come!”

Ramón had confirmed Pepe’s talk of the *valla* as the new “de facto border” without much elaboration as he drove along it. Up against the Melilla fence on the Moroccan side were the sentry boxes of the Alis. The Moroccans had advanced, snapping up the few metres of ceded territory. The same process was under way at the official Beni Enzar crossing, where the no-man’s-land had been gradually occupied. A *Forces Auxiliaires* sign even hung on the Spanish side of the dry Río de Oro, just outside the official entrance to Spain. And this is where the next instalment in the spectacle at the *vallas* would play out in the summer of 2010.

Part III: the spectacle hijacked

As Ramón’s drove along the fence, the noise grew louder and louder. Suddenly we turned a corner and there it was, in all its glory: *Barrio Chino*, “Chinatown”, a zone of warehouses and hangars on the outskirts of Melilla. The whole zone heaved with adrenaline-fuelled waiting, walking, packing, shouting, queuing and scuffling. Walkways undulated along the fence, and along them old women staggered double-bent towards the gates with huge bundles on their backs and parcels roped to their bellies: coiled-up mattresses, bulks of toilet rolls, packets of underwear. A young man tried to squeeze past and a scuffle ensued; one *guardia* hit out with his baton indiscriminately. Further ahead, another *guardia* shouted at a restive congregation of men perching on top of their parcels. Once they got the go-ahead they would roll bundles of blankets or tires coiled into one another uphill, like huge dice. Ramón sighed. “*Sin novedades en el Barrio Chino*” (no news from Barrio Chino) is the best thing you can hear when returning to the Comandancia.

The *porteadores* (porters), like the day labourers streaming into the enclaves, were allowed to enter without a visa in what was an exception to

Schengen rules for residents of the neighbouring Moroccan provinces of Nador and Tetuan. They queued from early morning at special entrances in the fences and would then be sent through walkways to the shopping hangars on the Spanish side. The ensuing pandemonium was on display not just in Melilla's *Barrio Chino* but in Ceuta as well. "Atypical commerce", Ramón labelled it, using an official euphemism. "If they don't do this, what would they live off?" Their illicit trade was also the lifeline of the enclaves, and of bribe-extracting Moroccan officers.¹² The value of the border trade only in Ceuta has been estimated at €1bn-€1.5bn a year, or up to 70 per cent of its economic activity (Ferrer Gallardo 2008:138).

The arrangement by which goods moved out without Spanish controls while Morocco was meant to curb any illicit movement of people on their side was, to say the least, unbalanced. The *valla* tipped the scales further, yet not in the negative economic sense at times asserted for other fortified borders (Brown 2010:95). By channelling the border trade, the *valla* had boosted business in making the step in the value chain even steeper, in Heyman's (2004) terms. The point of tension rather concerned its effect on the workers, carriers and traders – in short, the humiliation of the *valla*.

The *valla* was a tale of two animalised flows: domesticated herds at officially sanctioned crossings, feral hordes away from them. "Look!" exclaimed an NGO worker as she drove past the fenced-in walkways in Melilla. "We are not animals!" The ignominy of being forced through such corridors "like cattle" affected Moroccan nationals rather than Spaniards, and some of the latter defended the fences as a necessary evil. The aid worker's "we", however, referred to a cross-border identity underpinned by the enclaves' official view of themselves as havens of *convivencia* (peaceful coexistence) between their Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Hindu communities. While this view had always contrasted with a reality of discrimination, as Driessen (1992) points out, things were hardly made better by the *valla*. The setting was ripe for protest.

In July 2010 it came. Moroccan activists decried racist mistreatment of their countrymen at Melilla's border post of Beni Enzar, and promptly launched demonstrations at the *valla*. Civil society organisations, which many observers suspected of being agents of the Moroccan secret police, blocked the entry of

¹² For an ethnographic perspective on this trade, see McMurray (2001)

cement, bricks and fresh produce. Activists plastered posters across the border area that mocked Spanish policewomen, who they accused of insulting its citizens.¹³ Spain's conservative opposition leader and premier-to-be, Mariano Rajoy, visited Melilla, journalists thronging round him and hunting angry activists at the border. Meanwhile, in an unusual move, Morocco accused the Guardia Civil of abandoning sub-Saharan migrants in a raft outside Ceuta.¹⁴ Along with these tensions came an influx of clandestine migrants into Melilla at a rate not seen in years, prompting speculation in the Spanish Congress and media about Morocco letting them through, flung like projectiles into the enclave in their improbable, inflatable *toy* boats.

If so, it was hard to know exactly what the Moroccans wanted. The status of Ceuta and Melilla, as well as of Western Sahara, remained open wounds in Spanish-Moroccan relations. Added to these concerns were rumours of outstanding EU aid, as well as royal whims. The Moroccan King, holidaying near Melilla, had been molested by the military helicopters roaring past towards the Spanish-occupied islands and outcrops scattered around the northern Moroccan coast. These tiny *plazas de soberanía* ("sovereign places") had, like Ceuta and Melilla, been held by Spain for hundreds of years yet had long been claimed by Rabat. To these political issues were added the smaller ones at Melilla's border, where alleged mistreatment was not the only problem. The *valla* imperilled the old order of small bribes and big gains, the lifeblood of the frontiersmen around Melilla. For the protesters, the Spanish policewomen were a convenient target in representing the Europeanisation of Melilla's border; the sub-Saharan migrants, meanwhile, could serve as a weapon to enforce their aims. At the *valla*, uninvited actors were hijacking the border spectacle for their own purposes on behalf of a larger geopolitical order.

By late August, the Spanish interior minister had visited Rabat and mutual "misunderstandings" had been corrected. Upon this followed the expulsions in which Daouda the skin-cream salesman was caught up in the previous chapter, as well as protests reverberating *within* the enclaves, as will be seen in the next.

Despite the Spanish security forces' insistence that relations with their Moroccan colleagues were excellent, they often repeated that "if migrants pass,

¹³ See <http://www.maroc.ma/PortailInst/Fr/evenements/D%C3%A9rives+racistes.htm>

¹⁴ See <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/DEPAFP20100806T175949Z/>

it's because they want them to pass". Mehdi, the Moroccan director of border controls, diplomatically made clear the enclaves were pull factors [*facteurs d'appel*] for migrants. "They can put cameras, they can put whatever they want. But the truth is that it's not sufficient if you cannot stop these flows upstream... Once you have them in Melilla and Ceuta, that's it, you get stuck with them, that's it."

The *valla* did not detract from the enclaves' attraction; instead, it raised the stakes. Like the gating round a community (Low 2003:131), it marked out Ceuta and Melilla as wealthy havens and potential sites of protest. As a spectacle in itself, it attracted not only migrants but also groups with varied grievances – including, besides the Moroccan nationalists, transnational activists protesting against the EU border in annual commemorations of the 2005 tragedies.

In guarding against the migrant horde, the *valla* had created a new set of problems. Placard-wavers, marchers and merchants could now deploy the ancient technique of the siege at the fences (Pallister-Wilkins forthcoming; Brown 2010:120). This did not deter the *valla*, however, which simply drew more groups into its embrace. The *Alis*' sentry boxes snugly up against the fences, the journalists, activists and agitators congregating near it, the restive crowds at *Barrio Chino* or gathered along the border walkways all became participants in the network created by an ever more intricate anti-migration barricade. The insatiable *valla* kept growing; the spectacle unfolding in its shadow was increasingly no longer under the control of its presumed directors.

Part IV: backstage entrance

It was Amadou's final attempt at the Ceuta fence. He had guided a group of four over the mountain passes at night. By now he knew everything. The weather had to be right. It should be raining or cold, since the soldiers were then less likely to be out; windy, so that the dogs do not smell you; and foggy, to reduce the guards' visibility. They should climb one of the highest passes, where not even soldiers enter but where falling means death. They had to be utterly silent, Amadou admonished his companions. Look, the fence! It was so close. A noise escaped one of the nervous migrants, limiting their options and forcing them to attack even though the guardias were patrolling along the other side of the razor wire.

By now, Amadou had understood each component part, each sense, of the valla – sniffing guard dogs, the watchmen’s routines, the yielding razor wire, the sensors and poles and doors, the concertina and wire mesh. He was ready to take the valla system apart as a skilled car mechanic dismembers a vehicle.

Amadou and his companions went one by one. To cross, you need to put on old clothes. New garments snag on the razor wire. You must wear cotton, not nylon. You have to use gloves push the concertina, then you put your foot on top of it, to avoid it catching your clothes. Blades may cut into your arms or legs, but you have to avoid getting caught in the stomach or crotch. On the top, the razor wire can entangle and kill you, but there’s a trick for getting through. Then you need to find a pole along the inside of the fence instead of getting nervous and jumping, breaking bones. It is a six-metre fall. Amadou slid down a pole. He looked around quickly. Where was the door? In the prison in Tetuan, the nearest Moroccan city, other adventurers had told him about the doors in the inner fence. Amadou had not been sure they existed until, on an earlier attempt, guardias had entered through a door and expelled him back to Morocco. Now he spotted such a door. The trick, he had been told, was to find a small opening in it, big enough for your head. If the head goes in, the body does too. Amadou crawled through. He had heard of a dog kennel, la perrera, where migrants used to hide from the guardias. In search of the kennel, he made his way into the hills, finally in Spain. He had crossed the most difficult of borders.

Curtain call: beyond the spectacle

This chapter has shown the spectacle of the crossing in its double act. In the first act, it is a rescue of the huddle sinking below the diffuse sea border. In the second act – in fact the primordial border act – the crossing is a violent repelling of the horde at the sharply drawn land border. Between the acts, chairs have been shuffled. Some actors have been relegated to the wings and others have entered for a heroic appearance. Yet the cast is nearly the same. What changes are the props, and the scenery, and the modalities of illegality that are produced in the encounter.

It is worth dwelling for a moment on the visual order of the spectacle, and on what it leaves out of the realities of the crossing – the central theme of this chapter. The spectacle can be split according to the spatial dichotomy of officialdom, and so can its intended audiences. On the sea border, the spectacle is

not only centred on the rescued migrant but also on the hybrid arrangements enabling his rescue: the overlap of Red Cross emblems, Guardia Civil launches and Salvamento boats spectacularly rendering up the life-saving state at its maritime limits for a domestic and international audience. On land, both the migrant and the mixing are off-scene, save for a Red Cross cameo or two. Here, instead, the spectacle is the border itself – the fence in all its awesomeness, not the intricate social network of the *valla* – and its foremost audience are the European paymasters. In Latour's (1993) terms, at sea the work of translation and its hybrid creations is put on display, on land the work of purification, while the two are kept apart through yet another purification separating sea and land borders. At sea the border imagery circulates widely, on land its circuits are circumscribed and tabooed. At sea appears the rescuable huddle, on land the frightening horde.

These categories are far from static and clear-cut, however. They change according to electoral cycles, media storylines and migrant routes, and in accordance with differing terrains and technologies. In Spain's crisis-hit summer of 2012, rescue imagery had briefly been reduced to the simplest of messages – Red Cross volunteers wrapping migrants in blankets in an upbeat Coca Cola-sponsored advertisement, encouraging TV audiences to get the country moving.¹⁵

Such rescue images render up the “fetish” of migrant illegality, in de Genova's (2012) term, through two complementary transformations depending on the potency – itself fetish-like – of the image. The double act of the border spectacle here seems to create Agamben's twin figures of *homo sacer*, the vulnerable huddle and the rights-less horde, those who can be saved and those left to die. Yet Agamben cannot get us far here. As Lemke (2005:8) notes in a critique, “Agamben is less interested in life than in its ‘barenness’”. This bareness says little about either the differentiations in migrant illegality at the border or its economic and spectacular uses explored in this chapter.

The spectacle is further complicated by what remains outside the visual order – the illicit mixing, the smells and noises, and the fantasies and fears that cannot be fully captured on screen. These backstage features highlight how the spectacle is incomplete, conflictive and always in excess, as de Genova (2012) notes. No single story triumphs. Unwelcome actors – Moroccan nationalists,

¹⁵ See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FTHn8X895cI>

transnational activists, critical aid workers – stand ready to jump onto the stage. Journalists, the tricksters of the illegality industry, always seek new angles to expose and complicate the official story – yet always risk being framed by that same story, or by a new version of it. The travellers and smugglers of the borderlands, trickster-like too, at times seek the border spotlight for a *coup de théâtre*, at other times a silent backstage entry like Amadou.

Aid workers and border guards also struggle with what is left in and out of the spectacle, and their own roles in it. They recall the reek of an approaching *patera*, the haunting *mirada*, the screams and the outstretched hands of boat migrants. For the most fundamental mixing in the crossing is that which escapes both the spectacle and any bare formulations of life in its bareness: the brief encounter of the drowning or climbing or running man and the person in his path, who meet not as border guard and *illegal*, humanitarian and huddling sub-Saharan, but as two people joined in the strangest of encounters beyond the full grasp of either.

In the summer of 2012, something disconcerting was happening at the Melilla fence. Seven years after the “massive assault”, the migrants were back again. In the dead of night, Spanish media reported, up to 500 sub-Saharan migrants approached the fence en masse, only to be “repelled” at the last minute by Moroccan *gendarmes*. The Spanish government delegate thanked Morocco for its “magnificent collaboration” while warning that the mass entry attempts would continue. And they did: in early July, one Moroccan *gendarme* was reported as having died in altercations at the fences amid accusations by migrants of fatal, unreported violence against them.¹⁶ In August and September, the mass attempts continued. The horde had returned, thrusting the *vallas* back in the spotlight.

The attacks, as in 2005, had been preceded by months of raids and expulsions. Moroccan commentators had even accused sub-Saharan Africans in the country of being mercenaries, invoking the Libya uprising and tapping into the

¹⁶ See <http://www.elfarodigital.es/melilla/sucesos/101560-marruecos-repele-un-nuevo-asalto-masivo-de-inmigrantes-a-la-valla-fronteriza.html> and <http://www.rtve.es/noticias/20120711/fallece-militar-marroqui-tratar-impedir-entrada-emigrantes-melilla/545059.shtml>

militarised discourse of the border. In late September, Moroccan nationalists congregated at the Melilla fence; two weeks later, Spain's now conservative prime minister was due in Rabat for a bilateral summit.¹⁷ The pattern from 2005 and 2010 was being repeated.

If the horde was back, so was the huddle. Yet it was no longer playing the role assigned to it in the border spectacle.

In early September 2012, an absurd sight greeted beachgoers and journalists outside the Moroccan seaside town of Al Hoceima. On the tiny, Spanish-held Isla de Tierra, within swimming distance from the beach, 81 *subsaharianos* loitered in the sweltering sun. Clustered around the Spanish flag crowning the island, they were thrown food and drink by Spanish soldiers, snapped by photographers and bartered by politicians, who for several days did not know what to do with them.¹⁸ If they were transferred elsewhere in Spain, more would come; if the government asserted that the migrants were *not* in Europe, this backed up Morocco's claim to the "occupied" territories. Rabat had already protested at a Spanish plan to post Guardia Civil officers to its *plazas de soberanía* for migration control. The situation was delicate.

Isla de Tierra, "island of land", was an aptly named setting for a brief third act in the border spectacle. The migrants had sought out a border space combining the logics of sea and land, where the careful split of humanitarian and militarised borders no longer applied. The Spanish government denounced the "humanitarian blackmail" of the "mafias" it accused of having dumped the migrants there. Besides a hard conservative line on migration, this accusation also revealed a growing frustration at how the state's co-optation of humanitarianism, so carefully constructed under the previous Socialist government, was itself being co-opted from below in a radical new fashion.

Thanks to the Moroccan King's intervention, a solution to the standoff was finally reached. Under cover of darkness, Guardia Civil officers hauled the migrants off Isla de Tierra and into Moroccan hands. The usual deportation route ensued, to Oujda with its waiting Spanish journalists. In the media's blurry pictures from the darkened beach, however, the violent backstage workings of the border had finally been rendered visible, if only for a brief moment.

¹⁷ See http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2012/09/22/actualidad/1348312673_493550.html

¹⁸ See http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2012/09/03/actualidad/1346679500_929352.html

Not only did activists and migrants upstage the double act of the border, but so did the authorities. Migrants kept filling the reception centres of Ceuta and Melilla – with many of them, in the case of Ceuta, having been *diverted* there after trying to reach the Spanish mainland across the Strait. Those so “rescued” soon found themselves incorporated into the enclaves’ new role on the migratory circuit: as offshore processing centres. Fences and walls, as Pelkmans (2012) observes in the case of the old Iron Curtain, might shut out the unwanted but can also serve to keep people in. This is what was happening in Ceuta and Melilla.

The *guardias* manning Madrid’s control room had made note of a strange border crossing in 2011. In February that year, a Malian migrant in Ceuta had tried to climb the fence, bent on re-entering Morocco. The migrant, detained by the Guardia Civil, said he had spent four years in the enclave and just wanted to go home.¹⁹ It is to this entrapment within the *valla*, and the unbearable tension it created, that we will now turn.

¹⁹ See <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2011/02/04/espana/1296817060.html>

5

White mother, black sons

The summer of 2010 had begun hotter than usual. The easterly *Levante* winds enveloped Ceuta in a humid haze for days, and the Rock receded from view across the Strait of Gibraltar. All people talked about was the muggy, relentless heat. The *caballas* (mackerels), as the enclave's inhabitants are known, laid themselves out to sunbathe on the beaches facing the Mediterranean to the east or the windswept Atlantic towards the west. But up on the hill, far beyond the prime stretches of sand and the whitewashed town centre with its tapas bars and churches – as far as way as possible on Ceuta's seven square miles of land – a different reality was unfolding. The eight prefabricated modules hastily erected back in 2000 to cater for a growing number of clandestine migrants kept the heat in and its residents out in daytime. And the temperature was inexorably rising.

The adventurers' tragic mass "assaults" in autumn 2005 had not only reconfigured the policing of the fences, but had also sparked a new strategy for fighting illegal migration *within* the enclaves. Instead of sending migrants on to mainland Spain and setting them free with an expulsion order, as had been the norm during the economic boom, a politics of containment was born. The idea was to "avoid making Ceuta and Melilla a trampoline towards the [Iberian] peninsula", according to one migration lawyer. "Migrants here are being used as an example so that those who wish to enter do not do so." From having been springboards, Ceuta and Melilla became, in the words of police, activists and lawyers alike, *ratoneras* or *trampas*: traps.

Entrapment makes Ceuta a prime migration laboratory for the authorities, journalists, aid workers and researchers who converge there. Ceuta is a key site for regulating the irregular flows of people across the southern border of Spain, and thus into the EU. The brake put on migrants' mobility here makes them

readily available for police raids, as well as for researchers and hacks on the hunt for stories, humanitarians seeking needy beneficiaries, and diplomatic missions enlisted to identify their citizens for deportation.

But in laboratories, experiments can go wrong.

The summer of 2010 was to be the moment when Ceuta's clandestine migrants – almost all black Africans – invaded the city, bringing a loud protest to the heart of this European outpost. It was not to last long. But Ceuta's brief summer of discontent reveals the contradictions in the EU's migration policies: on humanitarianism versus control, on locking people up or setting them free, on hiding or parading society's undesirables, on fear or pity towards Europe's ultimate Other. This chapter is about the protest and its backstory of containment and despair among the immobilised migrants at Europe's southern borders. It is also about the progressive racialisation and infantilisation of illegal immigrants, and the shades of black that defined their life in the enclave.

The camp

The road wound uphill, past rubbish-strewn slopes lined with flattened Landerbräu beer cans, chocolate drink bottles, fag ends and plastic bags. A long climb ensued, heavy steps in humid African heat, before reaching the hilltop gate. Flowerbeds and eucalyptus trees lined the perimeter fence. Next to the sun-flecked entrance with its security booth, a big sign indicated who was in charge of the reception centre inside: the Spanish Labour and Immigration Ministry and the State Secretariat for Immigration and Emigration, with financial support from the EU. Three flags fluttered atop the fencing: blue-and-yellow for Europe, red-and-yellow for Spain, black-and-white for Ceuta. Migrants walked up to the turnstiles, swiping cards and resting their fingers on a reader. This was their home, the home of the homeless, where clandestine migrants found themselves stranded on their long, fraught journeys toward the north.

Migrants called it the Camp. The CETI or Centro de Estancia Temporal de Inmigrantes – temporary reception centre for immigrants – was separated from the rest of Ceuta by acres of forested hills and a few miles of coastal road. Unlike in the foreigners' detention centres of the Spanish peninsula, the CIEs,

the clandestine migrants and asylum seekers who lived here could come and go before the gates closed at night. They slept in eight prefab modules of eight rooms each, eight dorm beds to a room: 512 beds in all. In early summer 2010 about 400 people were staying in the camp, many of them for two-three years or more. By the end of the season, fresh arrivals would push the number over 500 and beyond capacity.

Almost all of the residents were black Africans who had arrived after arduous journeys by foot and truck through deserts, by dingy and makeshift rafts across the sea, using infinite cunning and determination. These adventurers had been through what the camp's director called a "Darwinian selection" along the clandestine routes stretching deep into the Sahara. Only the strongest would arrive, or even survive. Many had died in the desert, found themselves stranded in Morocco's *ghettos* and *bunkers* or been deported, penniless and paperless, to the dustbowl of northern Mali. The adventurers in Ceuta were thus an exclusive crowd. Having finally breached the EU frontier, they thought fortune was smiling at them – but Ceuta, they soon found out, would only flash a grim grin of irony. Here a new role was designated for them, a new modality of migranthood that stood in sharp contrast to both their earlier adventurer selves and their wild incarnation on the other side of the border. As prime objects of scrutiny, intervention and pity, they would become Europe's most abject Other, fully formed "illegal immigrants".

Michel Agier has discussed a "return of the camps" to the borders of Europe, as well as a worldwide "extension and greater sophistication of various forms of camps that make up a mechanism for keeping away undesirables and foreigners of all kinds – refugees, displaced, 'rejected'" (2011:3-4). In these camps, care and control interact in intricate ways through what Agier labels humanitarian government. The CETI, which employs more than 80 people under a mixed-management system where the authorities leave much of the care work to aid organisations (particularly the Spanish Red Cross), is a "sorting centre" in Agier's terms. Here migrants are screened, recorded and assigned identity categories in an elaborate process of "flow management" (*ibid*:47). The sorting centres serve as airlocks (Rodier and Blanchard 2003) or speed boxes (Papadopoulos 2011) that regulate the flow of people according to the fickle needs of the European labour market. But in Ceuta, the flow had by the summer

of 2010 been reduced to near-zero. Almost no one was sent on to “the peninsula”, as migrants and *caballas* referred to mainland Spain across the Strait.

In calling it “the camp”, the adventurers explicitly likened the CETI to the refugee camps of Africa. They had a point. As noted by Malkki (1995) and Turner (2010), refugee camps are usually characterised by their remoteness, their ambiguous status as transitory spaces, and the tight control over the movement of their residents, who are all presumed to be vulnerable. The same was true of the CETI. Malkki (1995) observes that refugees are people out of place, an aberration in the “national order of things”. Because of this “polluting” nature they are relegated to the margins, the threshold of their host society. And on this threshold, the camp resident comes to be *constituted* as a refugee, that peculiar contemporary “object of knowledge and control” in humanitarian government (ibid:52). The Ceuta camp, as will be seen in this chapter and the next, worked similarly upon its reluctant residents; only it was not producing the refugee role to which many adventurers aspired, but rather an even more aberrant figure in the national order of things – that of the illegal immigrant.

In the summer of 2010, adventurers stuck in Ceuta would challenge the logic of the camp, but in doing so they flipped the coin of their nascent migranthood, embodying and confirming fears and stereotypes of the Other lodged deep in what Trouillot (2003) has called the western “geography of imagination”. In Agier’s (2011:32) terms, they went from being tolerated and contained to being rejected and deportable. Rather than being seen as innocent victims in need of education and integration, they came to incarnate European fears of the not-so-noble savage already glimpsed on the high seas and at the enclaves’ fences: wild, dangerous and out of control. Clues to the sudden switch in their fortunes will be sought in the contradictory interplay of fear and charity, camp space and city space in Ceuta’s summer of discontent, in which journalists, police, camp workers and migrants were all to play a part.

Spaghetti and cigarettes

3 JUL 2010 – EL FARO DE CEUTA – LATEST HEADLINE: “TWO IMMIGRANTS INTIMIDATE AND HURT CETI SECURITY GUARDS AFTER URUGUAY-GHANA MATCH”. NEXT DAY’S FRONT PAGE: “THE RINGLEADERS OF THE DISTURBANCE IN THE CETI WANTED TO STIR UP A REVOLT, ENCOURAGING OTHER MIGRANTS”¹

The trouble had started with a cigarette. It was the time of the 2010 World Cup and football fever was gripping migrants and *caballas* alike. Big plasma screens, affixed to the ceiling of the camp’s canteen, had been showing the Uruguay-Ghana game. A spat erupted between a guard and a migrant who was smoking, and a brawl ensued. That, at least, was what migrants said. Ghana lost, tempers flared and security guards were attacked, was how the local media portrayed it. Security guards had been hurt and prosecutors were calling for stiff sentences against the supposed instigators. Meanwhile, a dozen or so failed Congolese asylum seekers had decided to camp outside the police *jefatura* (headquarters) in town, demanding transfer to the peninsula. The protesters curled up on cardboard spread across the pavement, in front of a row of suitcases covered by more cardboard to protect against the rains. “We would rather die than go back to the CETI,” said their protest signs.

Discontent was brewing but calm had been restored back at the camp. It was set out over two levels: upstairs lay the offices and down two flights of steps, with dazzling views across the Strait and the taunting sight of Gibraltar Rock, lay the living quarters and a sports pitch. The upstairs parking lot was as desolate and sun-drenched as a de Chirico painting, furnace-like, the sun pounding down through the wispy clouds onto the asphalt. Round it lay an office building labelled *control*, classrooms, a health centre, showers and the canteen with its metal wipe-down tables and plasma screens. Occasionally a migrant would saunter up to the phone booths outside the canteen, put a hard-earned euro coin into the slot, and speak for a minute to relatives at home or future destination, in Cameroon or Catalonia. Messages rang out on the speakers set up round the camp. *Ding-ding-dong... attention s'il vous plaît* in French or

¹ See <http://elfarodigital.es/ceuta/sucesos/12134-dos-inmigrantes-acorralan-y-lesionan-a-vigilantes-del-ceti-tras-el-uruguay-ghana.html> and *El Faro* front page, 4/07/2010

“attention please” in English, followed by a list of migrants called to the office or to a class.

Mamá, as the residents called her with a fair amount of affection, sat at her desk in a bare office inside the *control* building, a map of Africa covering the wall behind. Her kind, tired eyes scanned documents on the desk: lists of the living modules below and the residents of each module scribbled into the appropriate slots. There were reports to send off, new arrivals to tick off, *bajas* (residents who had escaped to the peninsula) to cross out. She was one of three *técnicos*, as the female workers who did the rounds of the living modules were called. They were collectively known as the *madres* by camp colleagues and migrants, but none was more motherly than Mamá. Stern, smiling and stressed in equal measure, she navigated a steady stream of nationalities, defused rows, sorted out residents’ cleaning rotas and accommodated new arrivals.

Mamá heated her coffee in the microwave and went out to smoke a cigarette on the landing behind *control*, looking down across the fence encircling the camp, where a steep slope gave way to the road below. “So you are here to study migration?” she asked me. “They are an object worthy of study,” she said of the residents. She did not mean this in the sense of “guinea pigs”, but because of their experiences. “You could see everything here”: the best, the worst. She had a final puff on her cigarette, flung her small bag over her shoulder and took me downstairs. As a camp volunteer, I would get a rare view of that hotly sought object of study for journalists, researchers, police and NGOs alike – the recently arrived illegal immigrant.

Downstairs, Cameroonian *makossa* music streamed out of speakers resting on the windowsill of a men’s dorm, young men dancing to the beat in the doorway. Mamá went up and confronted one of them. She called him *Comando* or *Guevara*. He looked the part, all rebellious cool in black beret and shades, balancing a plastic glass with one hand as he swung the other in a lethargic dance move. Here he will be called *el general*, echoing the journalists’ epithet for him during Ceuta’s impending protests.² “You are endangering the special curfews for the *feria!*” Mamá exclaimed. This was Ceuta’s party week of the year – a seven-day extravaganza of *sevillanas*-dancing, *fino*-swigging and funfair rides

² Journalists said this was the term by which the other strikers addressed him, but showed delight in using this military terminology themselves

down at the port. The director had extended the curfew – normally it was back at 11pm, doors open at 7am – for the residents. *El general* did not care. His voice was a drawl, his breath smelled of alcohol. “I don’t want to go to Spain, I want to go to the United States,” he said in French. I translated. “Go wherever you want but in here you have to follow the rules,” Mamá said, pursing her lips. A friend intervened and pleaded: “We have been here a very long time,” he said, “without girls, without drinking... at least a little bit of music!” The party people more or less fit the profile of the average camp resident: a 26-year-old man, single, sub-Saharan, asylum seeker, and a *balsero* (having arrived in Ceuta by dingy), with a stay of over one year. In 2005, the average stay had been three months. Now it was one and a half years.³ It was a long time, and was growing longer.

Mamá sniffed their drinks and inquired sternly if they had been drinking alcohol. No, they said. Her friendly face shrunk into a sour grimace. She had moved into their room, a damp eight-bed dorm with scribblings from previous residents on the bare walls: *la vie est un combat*, “Kurdistan”, “Love Jesus”. She confronted the circle of Cameroonians around her. They were lying! “Are you Christians?” she asked. “Why are you doing this?” She threatened them with sanctions and went off, but only after doing a few impromptu dance moves. *Ah, maman!* they exclaimed. “Tell her how much we like her,” quipped *el general*. A confrontation had been temporarily averted.

Mamá fought such small battles every day. Next to music, laundry was a major bugbear. Washing hung everywhere: on the railings next to the eight living modules and above the sports pitch, along the fences encircling the camp and draped over the wooden benches, tables and shrubberies scattered round the central courtyard. Mamá removed every piece of washing she found, day after day. She left towels in piles and waved bras in the air, and sometimes dropped trousers onto the sports pitch to teach residents the house rules once and for all. But next day the laundry was back. Its constant reappearance hinted at protest and at the residents’ wish to occupy the space of this anonymous camp, making it the most unlikely of homes. “It’s for the sun,” the camp’s female residents pleaded, but Mamá would have none of it. In Ceuta the state ran the show: migrants were no longer adventurers dependent on their own wit and cunning.

³ Figures provided by the CETI director

Instead they were objects of state intervention in the uneasy mix of coercion and charity seen on Mamá's daily rounds.

While applying sanctions, calling the guards and waving clothes about were coercive sides to the *madres'* work, tobacco was in the camp a symbol of charity and a sign of freedom. On her tours of the living modules Mamá pulled out her silver cigarette case and roommates queued up, each waiting for his turn. "I'm not permitted to give them anything," Mamá said. "No clothes, nothing. So at least I give them cigarettes, what else can I do?" Migrants soon learnt the game. "*Cigarillo por favor, no trabajo, no dinero*" (cigarette please, no work, no money), they said as Mamá meandered her way round the lower reaches of the camp. Sometimes she had to correct them, telling them that, next time, say "*mamá, un cigarillo, por favor*". The young migrant would repeat with an unsure smile and pronunciation. "*Mama cigari-lo por favor.*"

Mamá finally made her way up after our round of the modules. "I'm dying for a cigarette," she said. A final cigarette was getting soft in her hand. She never had the time to smoke it.

The work of the *madres* was hard and often thankless. Most *caballas* had little interest in the migrants' plight. Unlike the Red Cross emergency teams along the coasts, NGOs labouring both outside and inside the gates had problems attracting volunteers. One worker said she had sometimes cried at night because of the impotence of seeing police deport residents they had worked with for months or years. Mamá and her colleagues, though, found the energy to continue. She had learnt much during her six years in the camp. "I have changed as a person, I am not the way I used to be," she said. Then small things kept the mood up. In her office, she flicked through her grey steel cabinet, looking for letters from former residents. There it was. A handwritten letter from a migrant who was now in Madrid. In a sprawling hand, it thanked everyone working in the camp. Now he was writing a book about "sub-Saharan migration" and wanted replies from the camp workers on topics of interest: the idea that migrants take Spanish jobs, racism, and so on. Mamá treasured this handwritten letter. It was special. There was a second letter too, written on computer, that all workers had received a copy of. It was from an Indian migrant, who thanked everyone in perfect Spanish. The camp psychologist had helped him write it, Mamá explained. These were the only letters she could find.

The CETI, to Mamá and her colleagues, was not a camp. She saw it as an *albergue*, a hostel. Migrants were there so they did not have to sleep on the streets. Workers simply referred to them as *residentes* or *usuarios*, residents or users. New arrivals signed a paper saying they were in the CETI of their own free will because they were unable to provide for themselves. This legal mechanism meant the camp, as an open centre, was not covered by the same restrictions that applied to the CIEs in mainland Spain, where migrants could only be held for 60 days. The migrants received clothes upon arrival, free meals three times a day, clothes and a bed free of charge. Even language courses, workshops and sports were on the menu. “They have everything here,” quipped a guard. Camp workers said the residents “don’t know how bad things are in the peninsula”, where *la crisis* was ravaging Spain’s economy and social services.

As the CETI director put it, Spain gave a much better reception or *acogida* than its neighbours Italy and Malta. And only Spain, he said, carried out humanitarian rescue in the Strait. The CETI was a manifestation of the benevolent Spanish approach to migration honed in the Socialist years – humanitarianism not crackdowns, dialogue not dictates, integration instead of rejection. The implication was, simply put, that staying in the CETI was better than going hungry on the streets of Madrid, and both were preferable to being left to Berlusconi’s devices.

Many residents appreciated the effort. “They are trying,” they would concede. “The camp is not the problem,” said one, “the camp is taking care of us but not of all that we need”. Praise was showered on the new director, a former diplomat appointed after the demotion of his unpopular predecessor. Residents said he was an educated man. He wanted to help them. He took pregnant women to the hospital in his own car. He addressed migrants in French as *vous*, and just as politely in English. He inquired about their health, organised sports sessions and *paella* outings, allowed soft drinks into the compound and added some spice to the bland canteen food. But to the adventurers fresh off their boats, the goodwill was dwarfed by their misery. They had just made it to Europe, and expected the freedom to work, travel and send money home. None envisaged

idly living off handouts for years, or spending their time on sexual health courses, drawing workshops and *clases de alfabetización* (literacy classes), as the near-compulsory Spanish lessons were often called. At the camp, said one migrant, “you sleep, you eat, maybe you go to a Spanish class, you sleep a bit again...” It was not enough. “We are not newborns,” he said angrily. “We are men.”

The camp residents were in a bind: they were not permitted to work or move on, and so had no choice but to accept any handouts coming their way. They had become charitable objects in the eyes of the *caballas*, and any discontent was interpreted as ingratitude. In a clumsy stab at affection, they had become known in town as the *negritos*, a diminutive of *negro* that reflected their racialisation and growing infantilisation. This race talk accompanied the migrants’ transformation into passive welfare recipients. “We are paying big amounts of money to knock them to bits, little by little”, said Paula, a nun who was among the few critics of migration policy in Ceuta. “We are teaching them to become dependent on the Spanish benefits system.”

The adventurers navigated this terrain of pity, charity and rejection by accepting the cigarettes while complaining of the food. The food at the camp was bad, they said. The rice was hard or overcooked. The fries were stale. The fruit juice was artificial. There was no spice. Always spaghetti, spaghetti, spaghetti. The ignominy of accepting handouts was most evident in the daily ritual of lining up in the canteen, beeping the entrance card, and getting a fill of bland slop – as they saw it – while watched upon by matronly kitchen staff and baton-equipped security guards. As a result African women’s makeshift restaurants, offering tastier fare, were thriving in the hills outside the camp gates.

Food was state-sanctioned charity that, along with the bed and assistance offered up by the camp, was near-compulsory. Like the sacks of rice and cans of cooking oil handed out in African refugee camps, it reduced residents to passive, reluctant recipients (Turner 2010:68). But cigarettes were outside the state domain. Through tobacco and other little gifts, camp workers tried to personalise and counter the power relations inherent in humanitarian government. In this uphill task, family provided a useful organising metaphor to counteract the rhetoric of camp or prison. New arrivals were told to cooperate with the camp mothers. Cigarettes changed hands daily to friendly calls of *maman, por favor.*

Tensions were thus kept in check, but at a price: the camp was now reproducing the unequal power relations in an incipient infantilisation.

Broken slippers

14 AUG 2010 – EL FARO SPLASH: “UP TO 17 SUB-SAHARANS HAVE ARRIVED IN RUBBER DINGHIES IN LESS THAN 24 HOURS”. INSIDE THE PAPER: BIG PICTURES OF RED CROSS WORKERS AND MIGRANTS IN CEUTA’S PORT, TOPPED BY THE TEXT “FEAR OF PRESSURE FROM MOROCCO ON MIGRATION”⁴

The long walk up the same rubbish-strewn road got hotter and more tiring as the summer wore on. Heading uphill, I often had company. There were women carrying crates of beer cans on their heads, disappearing up the forested slopes; Punjabi migrants who had been smuggled into Ceuta via the Sahara and were now hiding in the hills, fearful of deportation; and an Algerian migrant, tall and well-spoken and utterly out of place. He had been expelled from France to Algeria and was now trying to make it back to his family and home by land. Would he need to join the language classes, sports sessions and disease prevention workshops of the camp? We walked up the hillside and discussed ways of leaving clandestinely via the port. Why did he not arrange to see the camp lawyer? I suggested. He saw no point to it. “They just want us to sign their papers so they get paid,” he said. “Migrants are merchandise... If they let the migrants go, unemployment would spike in Ceuta,” he added. “It’s big business here.” He had a point. About 80 people were employed at the camp, not counting the plentiful private contractors. The high unemployment rates in both Ceuta and Melilla meant that the camps were seen as “something positive” among locals, in the words of a migrant lawyer.

There was a shortcut leading up to the cliffs and promontories above the road. A dreadlocked Liberian showed the way, jumping up the slope with deft movements, gripping branches as he went. It took 43 minutes to walk to the city centre, he had explained on the bus, where he had paid the driver with the 10-cent coins he earned by begging and carrying shopping bags outside a supermarket. I followed him up the slope, slipping in my sandals. The path carved its way through the dry cracked mud towards a clearing. There, on plastic

⁴ *El Faro*, 14/08/2010

chairs atop a mat of leaves, rusty tins and plastic bottles, sat three adventurers. One was eating spiced rice cooked and served up for a euro by one of the women of the camp. Others held beer cans. They all stared at the impromptu visitor. Here they were in charge. The tables were turned. It was a brief glimpse of a space more akin to the migrant ghettos or bunkers of Tangier, Rabat and the forests outside Ceuta and Melilla than to the regulated regime of the camp. Here no one would ask *mamá* for a *cigarillo*.

During the summer new migrants arrived at the camp in a steady trickle. Whether Morocco was sending them across, as Spanish news reports alleged, was hard to know. Whatever the reason, tension was building at the border and the camp was filling up. A small group of adventurers had been rescued on the Strait this August afternoon, and were now fresh out of the shower in their CETI-provided jogging suits. “Addadis”, said the fake-brand label. One of the newcomers was Algerian, the others sub-Saharan or – as camp workers called them – *morenos* (dark-skinned). Normally applied to a sun-tanned Spaniard or a North African, the term *moreno* has started to be used across Spain to describe black Africans, especially in the context of migrant assistance. Through this term, camp workers tried to avoid the negative connotations associated with *negros* or blacks. Migrants soon caught on, and the French-speakers among them starting referring to themselves as *moriños*, surely inspired – football fans as they all were – by Mourinho, the Real Madrid coach.

The *morenos* clutched black refuse sacks stuffed with the damp clothes from the sea crossing they had just attempted. Their first steps on Spanish soil were eased by the smooth procedure for new arrivals, in which all participants played their roles in a professional relay race. First a police visit downhill, followed by entry to the camp and a shower. Then a health check. Next, registration – fingertips gently pressed down on a scanner, photo snapped. After this, a meeting with *social*, the state-employed social workers who explained the running of the camp, admonished migrants to follow Spanish classes and listen to what the *mamans* told them. Finally, out of a machine popped the green CETI entrance card that would be the new arrivals’ only form of identification in the enclave. Over the next week followed a series of meetings that residents were required to attend and tick off on slips of paper, known as the *protocolo*. This

way a dossier was built up for each arrival: step by step, the hitherto anonymous and unknown migrant became categorisable and interventionable.

Unlike the segregation by nationality so common in the administration of refugees, noted by Malkki (1995:137), in Ceuta the camp workers mixed nationalities in the dormitories to avoid creating “ghettos”. Whereas the ghetto in the adventurers’ world referred to safe houses based around nationality, in Spain it came to connote a negative communalism. Mixing people of all backgrounds and breaking up close-knit groups was a liberal gesture, but in its liberal individualism it also made people anonymous, substitutable. Incidentally, this was an important step in the crafting of the migrant illegality sought by journalists, researchers and politicians in Ceuta. The camp’s very spatiality, in splitting linguistic groups and assigning adventurers to non-negotiable slots and bunks, did the groundwork for a reconfiguring of the adventurer as a generic illegal immigrant.

If the “no ghetto” policy rendered residents both individual and replaceable, the next step – according to the logic of a sorting centre – was nevertheless to differentiate and classify. The four main migrant categories, a Red Cross worker explained, were Moroccan, Algerian, (South) Asian and sub-Saharan. Moroccans fell outside the scope of the CETIs thanks to their government’s non-recognition of Ceuta and Melilla and thanks to the ease of repatriation. As a result, some Moroccans claimed to be Algerian. Among sub-Saharan came a further division: Anglophone versus Francophone. Another categorisation followed the psychological (or intelligence) test: educated versus illiterate. Courses were organised along the intersecting vectors of colonial language and literacy levels. The typology also generated informal assessments. The *anglófonos* had been upset about the earlier camp brawl, workers said, because they were afraid of repatriation. “It’s harder here for the *anglófonos* than for the *francófonos* because of the language,” Mamá said. “They find Spanish difficult.”

The Francophone *morenos* came out of *control* and took their first steps in a process that would construct them as a new type of migrant, assembled from materials that defined their existence in Ceuta: CETI card, *protocolo* slip, cigarettes, blankets, slippers. Mamá took toilet rolls, bedsheets and shower cream out of a cupboard, and the migrants stuffed the items into a second black refuse

sack. Then, in a small troupe, they headed downstairs, a sack flung over each shoulder.

As the troupe made its way down the steps, the camp appeared in a new light alongside the big-eyed adventurers finally entering Europe: the unfamiliar familiarity of this tucked-away place, this strange raucous mix of African youth and music and laundry and barracks that came at us suddenly, hidden behind the somnolent parking lot and the empty canteen. The dream of a clean, modern West, evoked by the name “Hilton” that road-weary migrants had at one point given to the camp, was dissipating with each step. The migrants remained silent, fretful and amazed, clutching their sacks. “A lot of foreigners here,” observed Emmanuel, one of the youngsters from Cameroon, the home country of those in today’s troupe of black African arrivals, and of most of those waiting below. “It’s like a boarding school.” “People are nice here,” was all I replied with tenuous reassurance as we made our way downstairs, into the swirl of football and ping-pong players, African women doing their laundry, and screams and banter emanating from wide-open doors.

Emmanuel and his companions peeked inside a room. It was the standard layout: three bunks, eight beds in all. Metal cupboards with locks bought by migrants in Ceuta’s Chinese one-euro shops. A small table and a chair. Residents had found ingenious ways to establish privacy by tying sheets to the bunks’ poles, screening the beds from view. Bits of broomsticks served as support for the top-bunk sheets. This was prohibited, Mamá said, but she let it be. Posters and cut-outs were taped to the walls – scantily dressed western women and a random selection of news clippings. An African woman leant in through the small window, inspecting the beds. Emmanuel’s young face twitched. “Is this a room for women?” It was not, Mamá assured him; women had separate dormitories. She told a resident to remove the luggage piled onto the top bunk, and then inspected the foam mattress. It was dirty but it would serve for the time being. “When will everything start here?” Emmanuel asked, still hopeful. “Now it’s still like vacation.” He must have seen it as the strangest sort of boarding school, where they would be waiting for the director’s good word to be able to leave.

These hot days in August, it did not take long for new arrivals to figure out how things worked at the camp. Rumours spread from bunk to bunk, room to

room, community to community. People stayed here for three years, Emmanuel and his friends were told. It's like Guantánamo, said another. It's a prison. "Why do they keep us here?" asked some *anciens*, as French-speaking long-termers were known. There were two simple replies. *La crisis* – the economic crisis throttling Spain's economy and squeezing any need for unskilled migrant workers – was said to be the reason they could not be sent on to Seville, Madrid or Barcelona. But many believed that something rather more sinister lay behind their predicament. The Algerian gentleman was not alone in seeing migrants as a lucrative business. "Human trading", one migrant called it. They "consume" thanks to us, said another. *Ils travaillent sur nous*, said a third, echoing Mohammadou in faraway Dakar: they have work thanks to us.

This was the logic of the march on the city centre that would soon follow. Migrants called it a "strike" not a protest. This made sense since they saw themselves as *working for* the camp and the authorities, who in turn saw themselves as working for the migrants. The strike was to be a rare reckoning with the absurdity of the illegality industry and its abiding assumptions about its captive human material. According to the camp's logic, residents' undocumented status signalled a larger social, psychological and cultural "lack" that needed time and treatment; the residents were their product. To the strikers, however, the camp produced nothing except illicit profits thanks to their own unpaid labour of doing time. These antagonists, as will be seen, were both right and wrong: the camp and its residents *did* produce something, but not what the workers – or the strikers – wished.

In short, the scope for misunderstanding between workers and residents was acute, and became more so as tempers flared in the summer heat and the rumour mill started processing the news from across the border.

For the time being, however, direct confrontation gave way to petty annoyances. Slippers broke. Sheets were not washed on time. T-shirts frayed. They had no money for calling home. The food was bland. More slippers broke. Every day, these slippers – residents would come and show Mamá, look, it snapped! Could I get a new pair? Mamá sighed. "We spend a fortune on slippers here. What do they do with them?" Often the residents would dutifully find some needle and thread, sowing the toe-strap back on so the slipper would last another few weeks. The 43-minute walk to the centre and the climb up the forested

shortcut were taking their toll. Even when going to the police commissariat for interviews the migrants had to walk for miles, carving the ignominy of camp life into their footwear. But by complaining about clothes and slippers, migrants had come to collude with the official view of them: as needy people who lived off charity. These were the *negritos* of the popular imagination, poor black people who did not have it easy, who always asked for help. *Los pobres* (poor things), workers, *caballas* and even police would say, shaking their heads in pity.

A few days later, Emmanuel cornered Mamá on her daily round of the modules. He had questions. Would he get some skin cream? He showed his compulsory TB injection, looking a bit inflamed. Suddenly he looked insecure, twitchy. “How long will we stay here?” That depended, said Mamá. Did it depend on good behaviour? Yes, Mamá confirmed, good behaviour was important. She added that they – it was not clear who “they” were – might also look for a particular profile instead of sending away the well-behaved ones. Politics, nationality, many things played a part. Emmanuel nodded. “But one day we will leave this place?” he asked. “We will not stay here forever?” “Yes, you will leave,” said Mamá, “but we don’t know when”. Emmanuel said he had heard of people staying here for three years. It could be one week, one month, two years, said Mamá. As we left, Emmanuel flung another question at me: “how does one do to live here?”

The yellow card

6 AUG 2010 – MOROCCAN FOREIGN MINISTRY’S LATEST COMMUNIQUÉ ON THE OCCUPIED CITIES OF CEUTA AND MELILLA: “MOROCCO VIGOROUSLY CONDEMS THE ABANDONMENT OF EIGHT SUB-SAHARAN IMMIGRANTS BY THE SPANISH CIVIL GUARD ALONG ITS COASTLINE”⁵

Rumours stirred in the camp. Moroccan newscasts that residents watched on the canteen screens, over their mobile internet-connected laptops or on television sets they had affixed to their bunk beds showed Spain abandoning black migrants in a raft outside Ceuta. The migrants had later been rescued and hospitalised and recounted their stories – true or fabricated – to Moroccan journalists. Someone

⁵ See <http://www.aufaitmaroc.com/actualites/maroc/2010/8/6/le-maroc-condamne-vigoureusement-labandon-par-la-garde-civile-espagnole-de-huit-subsahariens-au-large-de-ses-cotes>

had also started talking about an EU delegation's impending visit, and soon the camp swirled with questions. Would they come tomorrow? Would they listen to our problems? The camp was like a pressure cooker simmering with rumours and resentment.

Emmanuel's face had changed. He looked surly, bitter, standing outside the canteen and looking out over the Strait. "Here we do nothing," he said. "We're adventurers, we're used to struggling for our survival". The camp was the opposite of the adventure, I suggested. Yes, Emmanuel said, "here it's like staying with daddy and mummy". He grimaced. "To me, the adventure is not yet over."

A few residents had gathered on the benches behind a module, next to the sports pitch and the camp's swings. *El general* was among them, decked out in his usual sunglasses and beret. My Algerian friend hovered in the background. One resident, a well-spoken Cameroonian I had previously met for discussions outside the camp gates, asked me: "If you come back after a year and I am still here, would you be happy?" "It's a prison," another chimed in. "We are treated like savages." "It's the slave trade all over again." An older man spoke up. He was a veteran of the migrant circuit: he bared his thigh to show two big round scars from a bullet fired during the *asalto* in 2005. "Look above," he said, pointing towards the horse-riding centre that had been constructed right above the camp and regularly sent clouds of dust down over the parking lot. "Here they keep some beasts next to others." "*Aucun blanc peut vivre ici*" (no white person can live here), they said.

Mamá had arrived, and questions and accusations flew in her direction. Why, the gathering asked, if our *tarjetas* are valid in all of Spain, can we not travel to the peninsula?

The Spanish authorities gave the *tarjetas amarillas*, the yellow cards, to asylum seekers whose applications had been accepted for processing. In earlier times, the *tarjeta* had been a passport to the peninsula. Then, in late 2009, the situation changed. Spain's new asylum law made it much easier to have one's application considered, and the national police in Ceuta promptly decided not to accept the cards as identification at the port. As a consequence, the previously much-desired yellow cards came to threaten stagnation rather than promising

mobility. Asylum seekers felt cheated, and newcomers suddenly thought twice about even applying.

Mamá had disappeared upstairs but came back, waving a printout with information she had found online. Ceuta and Melilla were Schengen territory, she read out to the eager and ever-growing gathering amid the swings, but they had a special disposition to carry out passport controls at the port. I translated into French. Questions were fired rapidly at her. “Why can’t we leave?” Europe wanted to halt migration at its external borders, explained Mamá. So the camp was the responsibility of the EU? asked residents, confused. No, it was Madrid’s responsibility, said Mamá, “but Madrid depends on Brussels, and there they are afraid you will continue north and spread across Europe”. “Why can’t the Europeans speak directly to us?” asked the veteran of 2005. And why, “if the camp depends on the EU, do we need to learn Spanish here? Why not another language?” “Anyway, why have they taken us here? We did not ask Spain to rescue us at sea!” One resident after another chimed in, in a furious, unstoppable barrage of questions.

The biggest problem in the camp, residents said again and again, was the lack of information. While this will be looked at in detail in the next chapter, suffice to say here that this predicament seems endemic to sorting centres, as Agier (2011) notes. In Poland, a doctor in one such centre deplored “the detainees’ lack of information about their rights, and the fact that they do not understand why they are detained for so long” (*ibid*:49). In Ceuta, residents experienced a similar silence. Everyone even seemed confused about who was in charge. Some migrants had heard in Morocco that the Portuguese ran the camp, and would channel workers to Lisbon. Many knew that the EU gave Spain money for running the camp thanks to the flag at the gate. But who to call, who to plead to, who to criticise? No one could say. Even the camp workers seemed unsure. It was “Europe” that wanted to keep migrants here, not they or even Spain, they often said. Was it the Spanish government delegation in Ceuta that was in charge of assuring this, however? One worker had even insisted, erroneously, that the Interior rather than the Labour Ministry ran the camp. Confusion reigned.

El general finally spoke, and all listened to his whispery voice. He called for a big meeting at the camp, to air all concerns. The authorities shouldn’t worry

about money, he said. If they were permitted to leave they would go back to their homes clandestinely, with an inflatable *zodiac*. Mamá nodded, then warned them their stay would be *para largo* (for long). All listened attentively for the final word on their fate. Maybe one day the politics would change and they could go, Mamá added. No one could say when. The silence broke, and her explanations drowned in a tide of exclamations. “*Racistes!*” a young man screamed. The mood was changing. Mamá retreated, anthropologist and residents trailing her. One pointed at a little girl; “Why is she here?” “Well, her parents shouldn’t have entered without papers,” said Mamá. “Would you leave your son here?” they asked. “I send my son to places like this for 15 days, but *paying*,” retorted Mamá, referring to a *campamento* (holiday camp) rather than the *campo* for refugees that the residents saw themselves as inhabiting. But this was no time to debate the semantics of makeshift lodgings. “Leave!” someone screamed behind Mamá. He seemed unhinged, angry beyond measure. “We will close this place down!” Mamá went upstairs, lips pursed, fast steps. There would be no big meeting, that much was clear.

Upstairs new arrivals were waiting in the classroom building, sitting in sofas with the usual plastic sacks in front of them. Mamá opened a cupboard and handed out the kit, mechanically, in silence. Blanket, jogging suit, T-shirt, hygiene kit, slippers. On the way to the shower, an *ancien* sauntered up. “*Ici c'est Guantánamo!*” he screamed to the new arrivals. Outside the canteen, the residents had gathered, dozens of people sitting on windowsills, loitering in the doorway. It was mealtime but they were not eating. No more spaghetti. Instead they occupied the dining tables and watched a Barça game in silence, interspersed with commercials. It was the quintessential camp protest: occupying space and refusing food, the poisoned gift that was their due. Security guards hovered in the wings.

It was the night before the strike began.

A cardboard rebellion

27 AUG 2010 – EL PUEBLO DE CEUTA – FRONT PAGE PICTURE: NAKED TORSOS, ANGRY MEN MARCHING. “FROM THE CETI TO THE CENTRE: SUB-SAHARAN IMMIGRANTS SHOW THEIR ANGER OVER A STAY OF SEVERAL YEARS IN CEUTA”. EL FARO: “ABOUT A HUNDRED SUB-SAHARANS, WELL COORDINATED, ORGANISE A DEMONSTRATION ASKING FOR FREEDOM”⁶

It had started to the tune of whistles and slippers hitting the pavement as a stream of strikers came running up Ceuta’s sleepy shopping street. They gathered at Plaza de los Reyes, the seat of their target: the grey bulk of a building that housed the Spanish government delegation. The square was the leafy heart of Ceuta where the children of the local elite used to play under the watchful eyes of their nannies. Now riot police formed a neat line of helmets and shields against the waves of protesters clad in their “Addadis” jogging trousers and often little else, bare-chested or stripped to their underwear, their camp T-shirts torn and twisted into turbans or scribbled upon as makeshift placards. “CETI is a prison” read one. “CETI Guantanamo Libertad” said another.

The final spark for the strike had come from the arrival, that very morning, of the much-awaited EU fact-finding delegation. Its intention was to question migrants on the topic of sexual violence endured en route, but as the delegates’ car pulled up at the camp the strikers were already massing at the gate. The delegates took fright and sped off downhill, trailed by a horde of screaming migrants, as the camp director later explained with an ill-suppressed chuckle at the bizarre imagery. The research site must have looked ideal: a camp where migrants were gathered, immobile and ready to interview. It was not to be. “They’ll never come back to Ceuta now,” the director said.

The protesters had gathered round the square’s central fountain, arms aloft or wrists crossed, as if shackled. *Ooh-oh Afri-cah, oh-oh-Africa, oh-oh-liberté*, they sung in a melodious chorus, mixing in football chants and Shakira’s *waka waka*. The whine of whistles mixed with loud claps; a beat was coaxed out of plastic water bottles transformed into makeshift drums. The *caballas* and tourists stopped to look and listen, snapping pictures at a safe distance. Hacks with cameras and notepads milled with the crowd, trying to pry quotes off migrants but without much luck. They had their spokesmen and leaders.

⁶ *El Pueblo* front page, 27/08/2010

One of them, a bespectacled English-speaker, laid out the strikers' case for the benefit of the TV cameras. "After two, three months we should be liberated," he said, like in "all the other camps", meaning the closed CIEs in the peninsula. Protesters gathered into a knot round him, screaming agitatedly, one of them waving a broken slipper in front of the camera. The speaker pushed it out of sight. Here the issue was freedom not handouts, he said. "Prison!" shouted someone next to him. "You as a journalist," the speaker finally asked, "could you live here for 10 months with one set of clothes and one pair of sandals?" The life of the slippers, from camp gifts fresh out of the plastic packaging to grubby footware that snapped apart, had become a metonym for the degradation of the strikers' hopes and their impoverished life after entering Ceuta.

El general led a chant at the fountain: *Gouverneur! Gou-ver-neur!* They wanted the Spanish government delegate, but he was away. His holidays had begun. Getting hold of someone responsible for their predicament would prove impossible. But except for the delegate, everyone was there. Representatives of all sectors in the burgeoning illegality industry had finally gathered: a mix of journalists, aid workers, police and the odd anthropologist congregating round the dishevelled migrants. On this square, the finishing touches were being put to the construction of Europe's illegal Other. An NGO worker from the camp stood by, shaking her head. "In the end, it makes me sad," she said. "What will they achieve?"

"You know they met yesterday in the hills," said a journalist with one of the local papers who stood observing the throng of protesters from behind police lines. She had a scoop from last night's forest get-together, where migrants had debated their options for action. "It's normal, they have been here for three years, nothing more than eating and sleeping, eating and sleeping." On the whole, news reports were sympathetic. The carnivalesque nature of the strike, the splashing of water and the football chanting mitigated the discomfort of naked torsos lined up against riot police and the piles of cardboard now cluttering the neatest, nicest square of the city. But the goodwill was not to last.

PRIMETIME NATIONAL TELEVISION: MIGRANTS WITH BANNERS IN CENTRAL CEUTA. THEY FIND THEMSELVES VIRTUALLY “IMPRISONED”, ACCORDING TO THE VOICEOVER. IN *EL FARO*, ANOTHER CORD IS STRUCK: “THESE, THE PAPERLESS, WITHOUT PLACE, WITHOUT NAME NOR SURNAME, EVEN WITHOUT CLOTHES, EXUDING AN AIR OF RESTLESSNESS AND UNTRUSTWORTHINESS, TO THE POINT WHERE THE PEOPLE SITTING IN THE CAFÉS GET UP AND REORGANISE THEIR CHAIRS, SCARED, UNSURE, SURPRISED, ASHAMED.”⁷

On Monday morning, Ceuta woke to the sound of pistol-shots. Down the somnolent shopping street they came, a ragtag contingent of angry black men, to the loud clack-clack-clack of folded pieces of cardboard hitting the pavement, slapped down with force and anger. *Caballas* looked out of their windows; Moroccan daytrippers stopped and stared; housewives and flaneurs quickly gulped down their coffee.

The weekend had passed and something had changed. The police chief had come out to talk to the migrants on the square, but had given no ground. They would have to wait in Ceuta. Soon after, the fervour of the first days had been whipped into a frenzy. The cardboard that the protesters slept on and that had served as canvas for their scrawled messages had acquired a new function: that of a soundbox, or a weapon. The protesters were militarising, the media said, and their leader was *el general*. He did military salutes outside the national police *jefatura* and his soldiers responded, some face-painted, most still dressed in their CETI jogging suits. “*Assis!*” a helper screamed out, and all sat down. The German journalist capturing these scenes said it reminded her of images of Africa’s civil wars. Rebel armies run wild. The camera zoomed in on a red-eyed, bare-chested man, his face contorted into a grimace, banging away on a makeshift drum.

The militarisation of the protest was, of course, no accident. To the authorities and the media, it was a sign that the leaders of the strike were former guerrilla fighters or paramilitaries. What they failed to see was that the salutes and mannerisms above all pointed to the larger militarisation of clandestine migration circuits discussed in the previous chapter. The strikers only had to dip into the existing imagery and paint an image of themselves that suited their objectives. In the process they fuelled the latent militarised discourse in the

⁷ *El Faro* front page, 27/08/2010 and <http://www.elfarodigital.es/blogs/jorge-lopez/17535-entre-pitos-y-flautas.html>

press, which was swiftly switching from depicting migrants as victims to portraying them as a menace.⁸



Figure 17. Strikers in front of the government delegation in Ceuta Cristina Vergara López

The change in coverage brought new, fruitful angles for the press. Police released files showing the “hard core” of strikers had in fact not been stuck in Ceuta for years. Their calls for transfer to a CIE and then even deportation were read as a devious tactic; they knew full well they would be released once on the mainland. News spread that they had roughed up fellow residents who did not want to participate and threatened “camp workers”, which turned out to mean the previous director. The German journalist had also been threatened. “Destroy her camera!” they had screamed, but she kept filming. She knew some of them well, but they had changed. I knew *el general* and the others too, their doubts and frustrations. Now I peered out of balconies and bars, hovered round the scene. I was not to be trusted, some of them said. “Why should we speak to you? You will leave, and you will earn money from your report, you earn money from us but you give nothing. What will you do with our story?” Of Emmanuel up at the camp, I would see little more. His sullen face would occasionally flash by before quickly disappearing out of sight, avoiding any small talk.

⁸ CAC (2006), in an exhaustive study of the media treatment of the 2005 tragedies, detects an oscillation between depictions of migrants as helpless victims and dangerous aggressors

The German journalist's camera trailed a striker rushing towards a newspaper kiosk. He furiously hit the pavement, his cardboard fraying more with each sharp slap. "Guantánamo!" "Liberté!" his brothers-in-arms screamed. Another striker followed and soon, in a circle, they were beating the ground in unison. Locals looked on in anger. "¡Echadlos a todos!" an old woman shouted to the camera. Throw them all out.

But police stood by. The aggression was only against the asphalt, against the very soil of Ceuta. "If I knew what door to knock, I would knock it" one Cameroonian had said before the protests. There was no door to knock, no one who listened, nothing on which to vent this unbearable frustration. So they pounded this ground, as if to punish it. This is what they hated, this African soil, this fake Europe on display along the shopping street targeting Moroccan daytrippers and transiting tourists – Zara boutiques, electronics shops, Supersol supermarkets, Cortefiel clothes, outdoor *terrazas* and bars where tourists sipped cold beers. The protesters moved on down the road, their noise receding in the distance.

The politicians woke up late to the severe sense of crisis sparked by the strike. "With *cartonazos* no one is going to the peninsula," warned Spain's government delegate, using the by now oft-heard term for cardboard-on-pavement.⁹ The media had turned on the strikers, and reserved a fair amount of vitriol for the politicians too. A veteran journalist bemoaned that "we find police who don't even know what to do: they put on their helmets, they take them off, they take up their shields, they circle the square, they come and go". Spain's migration policy was going up in smoke, ended her piece, one of many scathing assessments.¹⁰

Yet the wavering between laxity and repression – and the latter finally came – was not a failure: it was a *result* of a policy straining under its own contradictions. Spain's supposed soft touch – its propensity to engage in

⁹ José Fernández Chacón cited in *El Faro*, 2/09/2010. See <http://www.elfarodigital.es/ceuta/politica/18035-fernandez-chacon-a-los-inmigrantes-a-cartonazos-nadie-se-va-a-la-peninsula.html>

¹⁰ See <http://www.elfarodigital.es/blogs/carmen-echarri/18553-con-la-resolucion-en-la-mano.html>

dialogue, to extol humanitarianism, to care for migrants – was paired to a rather steelier set of objectives coming from both Madrid and Brussels. Care and control both fuelled and fed off each other, much like they did on the high seas and in other instances of “humanitarian government” noted by Agier (ibid:144). As was usually the case on the clandestine circuit, the migrants were the first to grasp these contradictions. One latecomer to the strike, banished from the camp for violence against a guard, said that migrants in Ceuta were like a sacrifice giving “a good image for Spain in all of Europe.” A Cameroonian asylum seeker similarly put the finger where it hurt: “France seems nasty with migrants,” he said, “but they treat them well in the end. In Spain they seem nice with migrants but then they leave us like this!”

The mix of directives tied the hands of Ceuta’s decision-makers and stirred a growing frustration shared by journalists, camp workers, the public and the migrants. What could they do? The strikers could not be imprisoned, not all of them: what would be the point, how high the cost? They could not be sent on to the peninsula, or the wrong signal would be sent out to other migrants. They could not be fined, because they were penniless. One police chief couched the dilemma in the inclusive language so characteristic of the Socialist government’s migration response: “What they’re doing is perfectly legal, anyone has the right to demonstrate,” he had told me as strikers chanted at the *plaza*. “We have to tolerate it … [and] maintain the rule of law, the strict rule of law.” The further the strike went, the more this façade started cracking. Migrants and authorities were stuck in the same frustrating limbo, of which the protest was simply the culmination and catharsis. But in giving an absurd riposte to absurd policies on behalf of everyone, the strikers also risked fast becoming the fall guys of Ceuta’s summer of discontent.

On veut le responsable!

“THE SUB-SAHARANS TURN DOWN THE DELEGATE, TEAR UP HIS RESOLUTION AND WILL PROTEST ‘UNTIL DEATH.’” EL FARO, 8 SEP 2010. PICTURE UNDERNEATH: A BLACK HAND HOLDS UP THE YELLOW CARD TO THE CAMERA, WITH THE INSCRIPTION “THIS DOCUMENT IS VALID ONLY IN SPAIN” VISIBLE, THE PHRASE ASYLUM SEEKERS INVOKED FOR THEIR RIGHT TO TRAVEL TO THE PENINSULA¹¹

The sub-Saharan crisis, as the media dubbed it, was increasing the temperature across Ceuta. The Spanish government delegate had finally penned a resolution banning the protests, invoking insecurity and danger for Ceuta’s inhabitants. The strikers first signed it, then threw it onto the tarmac, ripped it apart and streamed down the street to loud cheers and shouts. “Heated spirits, tribal chants and a lot of pressure” was how the media summed up the standoff. To some *caballas*, memories were stirred of violent conflicts between migrants and authorities before the camp existed. It was, as Ferrer Gallardo (2011:30) notes, a riot by African migrants in 1995 that had sparked the initial fortification of the border, while smaller protests in later years had hardened the resolve to maintain migrants on the geographical margins of the enclave. One local woman remembered being trailed by black men in town in the late 1990s. “It made me afraid, above all for my daughter, you know.” Similar sentiments were now resurfacing across the city.

Up at the lofty heights of the camp, tension was everywhere, eroding workers’ motivation like a toxin. They had tired under the weight of incessant demands. For those on the frontline, camp practicalities, residents’ wishes and fears, and the differing objectives of the Interior and Labour ministries had to be juggled every day. Mamá, an expert in such juggling, kept sending off her weekly reports, checking on modules and assisting new arrivals. After many years in the camp, a protest would not shake her resolve. She greeted the strikers when passing them in town, but snapped and confronted anyone accusing workers of racism. The strike did not lead her to question the camp’s mission nor the needs of its beneficiaries. She rather split the good from the bad – the instigators from the integrated. Other workers and the authorities did likewise, in an emerging categorisation that would soon have consequences for the strikers.

¹¹ *El Faro* front page, 8/09/2010

One of the Spanish teachers, David, called for migrants to congregate in the big hall of the camp for an announcement. About 20 of them showed up, taking their place in the school benches. On the walls hung residents' drawings from a disease prevention workshop: condom exhortations competed for space with a map plastered with AIDS ribbons. "They think all illnesses come from Africa, just look at the map," said one of the men in the benches, twisting his face into a grimace. Another promptly went up to the map and moved a few ribbons from African to European countries. Now it was more equal, they said. "They make all types of tests on us when we arrive here," they exclaimed. "AIDS, syphilis, tuberculosis... but when white people go to Africa, they are not even asked for vaccination papers!"

David entered and announced he would open the camp gym, one hour two times a week. He explained the rules and took questions, which came thick and fast. What did they need to bring? Their green CETI card and covered shoes, for safety. So would they get shoes, since they didn't have any? No, David said, "well if you don't have any it's OK, just be careful." But why did the football players get shoes, not those using the gym? David could not say, he was not responsible. People in the audience laughed, a flat bitter laugh. "*On veut le responsable!*" There was no one responsible, David said. He was opening the gym as a favour. For longer opening times or shoes or anything else they would need to speak to *social*, it was an interdepartmental thing, he could not do it. The meeting closed.

David lingered in the parking lot, smoking a cigarette and shaking his head. A resident came up, asking for one. "But it's bad for your health," said David. The resident insisted, got one, left. David sighed. Before it had been different: he took people to the cinema, to Ceuta's aquatic park, on excursion. He organised a book fair right next to *control!* But now nothing interested them, he said. All they did was ask for things, all the time more things. Camp workers talked wistfully about how the new arrivals were somehow different from the gentler migrants of earlier times. The new ones would refuse slippers or food. Some flirted with the female staff. Others created trouble from the first day. *Ya vienen aprendidos*, said Mamá: they arrive having learnt the rules of the game in Morocco, where NGOs or "mafias" or fellow-travellers tell them all about Ceuta.

I left the camp in David's car, speeding past the steady streams of migrants making their way into town. David had had enough, and the protest was proving the final straw. "You know, they have always been the *negritos del CETI*," he said. "Ay que pena (what a pity) people would say," how good they are, these poor people. "But that is when they are ensconced in the CETI. Now as they have come to town, they have become *negros*," he said. Where would this rancour, newly stirred in Ceuta's inhabitants, lead?

In town, the strikers seemed to be losing the battle. Their cardboard and whistles had been impounded. Still, camp residents kept coming: a rumour had spread that police identity checks on strikers would lead to people being ticked off and sent to the peninsula.

Shorn of whistles and carton, the strikers came singing in a tightly packed group down the shopping street teeming with *caballas* fresh from their holidays. They stopped in front of an ice-cream parlour and faced a growing police contingent, still singing. Later one striker told me they had tried to say sorry to the *caballas*. This the media ignored. The female journalist of the other day had lost sympathy for the strikers. The authorities would open public order cases against them, she said. "If you had seen the state in which they left the square..."

Two strikers silently held a white cloth banner towards the passers-by. It read, in rather good Spanish:

We are like you, we are not evil nor wild animals, but a reflexive and conscious generation. We only claim our rights. We are tired of stay in prison, please government. FREEDOM – FREEDOM !!!

Three young policemen in discreet vests and fashionable hair approached the strikers, motioning to them with black-gloved hands. They carried out an identity check, calling forward a handful of protesters at a time, eyeing their camp cards, patting them down and depositing them some 30 metres ahead. The singing had died off, and an expectant silence reigned. Onlookers were congregating – reporters, passers-by, Moroccan daytrippers, policemen. All watched the same

proceedings, in which the hidden phenomenon of clandestine migration was made visible. It was hard to tell who was a bystander, who a journalist, who an undercover police. Cameramen sat atop a statue and lingered on terraces above; photographers snapped pictures. Surveillance was everywhere. The strikers with the banner dutifully folded it, went up for the body search, and unfolded it again on the other side. Finally the police read out names from a list. A handful of strikers went up and were put into waiting police vans. The vehicles filled up and sped off, leaving the remaining strikers and police standing silently in front of each other for a wavering moment. Then, tentatively, the chanting picked up again in the remaining crowd – *CETI no bueno, CETI no bueno*. They moved forward slowly, squeezed into a tight procession behind their banner. Finally they turned the corner round the Plaza de la Constitución, waving their yellow cards in the air and leaving an indeterminate feeling of sadness and futility in their wake.

As the strikes started unwinding, Europe’s “deportation machine” (Fekete 2005) was revving into gear. A police van took the detainees to the camp, where they sat for an hour in the heat waiting for their belongings to be picked up from their rooms. A worker peeked inside: they looked like wild animals, she said, tucked into that small hot space, starving, thirsty... They pleaded for food, and finally got a sandwich that they tore into like “wild dogs”. Fourteen detainees were sent on to the peninsula. The reason they took these 14 was because they did not have the asylum-seeker’s yellow card, which meant they could be transferred to detention in a CIE. From there, the next step was deportation.

The protest seemed to have failed, but maybe success or failure was not what mattered. The strike bore witness to the “climate of exceptionality” that, according to Agier (2011:52), reigns in the camps and their environs. “Protest has no proper place in these sites,” he says, “and itself takes exceptional and exacerbated forms, before being rapidly and violently repressed”. The repression came slowly in Ceuta, however, and in the meantime the strikers had managed to craft another form of migranthood out of the meagre resources at their disposal – the stuff of pitiable *negritos* and interventionable *morenos*. Their fake-brand “Addadis” clothes, a supreme sign of their neediness and anonymisation, made a perfect uniform for a ragtag army. The handout T-shirts morphed into bandanas and placards. And the cardboard, the free cheap cardboard they slept on as

dejected migrants out on the square became, temporarily, a weapon against the invisible enemy of EU migration policy. Their street performance distinguished them from the apolitical *clandestins* spotted in other camps across Europe who, according to Papadopoulos (2011), only want to travel on, invisible, imperceptible, unmolested. They were stepping into the realm of politics as subjects not objects. The strikers were interpellating the state rather than the other way round – a state that was not even their own – to see them, to detain them, to *do anything*.

This situation recalls Butler's (1995:24) corrective to Althusser's (1971) theory of interpellation. To her, the subject is not only hailed by the state but is in “passionate pursuit of the reprimanding recognition by the state” in a process that she terms “subjectivation”. In their attempts at hailing the state, Ceuta's strikers followed a similar logic to that of the *sans-papiers* on the streets of Paris or the Latinos with their million-strong marches across the US. McNevin (2007:671), commenting on the latter, sees irregular migrants as situated at the “frontiers of the political in the context of neoliberal globalisation”. Their political claims, she argues, “challenge those sovereign practices through which they are constructed as apolitical and illegitimate intruders”. This was true in Ceuta as well, yet the strike there took the challenge to the state one step further, or one step back. It was simply over the right to leave, and even the right to be deported. While the adventurers had already had to assume their own “deportability” (de Genova 2002) in Morocco, here they sought to *deploy* it, calling the illegality industry's bluff in the process.

The strikers' appropriation of space spoke of a similar story. By rejecting their containment on the faraway hillside and marching on the pristine city centre, they challenged the spatial order by which illegal immigrants were rendered as separable, pitiable and researchable. But in doing so, the strikers had recreated the flipside of the helpless and innocent clandestine migrant, the *negrito*. They had become the wild and dangerous *negro*. To quote Fanon (1967:112, 129), one “galaxy of erosive stereotypes” had been substituted for another – “the Negro's *sui generis* good nature” replaced by “Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!”

The cordon

EL PUEBLO DE CEUTA – FRONT-PAGE PICTURE OF WORKERS IN PROTECTIVE GEAR AND FACE MASKS ON THE CENTRAL SQUARE, CAPTIONED “THE CITY CLEANS A SOURCE OF INFECTIONS GENERATED BY THE IMMIGRANTS WHO SLEEP IN THE PLAZA DE LOS REYES”¹²

The road to the camp wound uphill, past the same old rubbish-strewn slopes. I walked it as so many times before, heavy steps set in humid African heat, until reaching the hilltop gate. Two riot police vans were parked in the shade. At the turnstile stood a young security guard with muscled, tattooed overarms. He was squeezing a hand exercise gadget, producing a squeaky repetitive noise.

Residents walked up to the turnstiles, swiping cards and resting their fingers on the reader. When they entered, the guard stopped squeaking, put their bags on a table inside the gates, and rummaged through them with black-gloved hands. Out came three black guys, one dressed in a beret and sunglasses. It was *el general*. He looked subdued. “The only thing left for us to do now is to swim,” he mumbled hoarsely.

The turnstile stopped one member of the party from getting through. The guard’s colleague in the booth opened the gates, and the friends headed downhill. “Fuck!” exclaimed the reception guard: that one’s card was disabled. “*Curva* (curve), do you copy?” The walkie-talkie crackled. “Look,” the guard told his colleagues manning the length of the fence, “*El general* is heading downhill with two *morenos*”. One had a deactivated card, he said: “send him back up”. The *moreno* with the blocked card came dutifully clambering back up the sun-drenched hill.

After the protest, a *cordon sanitaire* had been set up around the camp, and another one was firmly in place in the centre. Ceuta’s spatial order was swiftly being re-established. Late at night uniformed police kept watch on a huddle of protesters who stood in a corner of the square, motionless. Their cardboard had been confiscated. Outside the police *jefatura*, a zigzag of riot fences had been put up, blocking the sleeping space of the Congolese. A police car sharked up behind them, the officer pointing at a small piece of cardboard that they dutifully deposited in the rubbish bins nearby. They slept straight on the

¹² *El Pueblo* front page, 5/09/2010

asphalt until Ceuta's cleaning brigade descended in the early mornings in their unending task of polishing the town centre. "Here the *moriños* are treated differently!" exclaimed one of them, dirty and agitated from lack of sleep and excess adrenaline. "But our force is here, in our heads," he said, pointing to his temples. They would not be defeated.

Next morning, the strikers were gone from the square. Space had been reclaimed for the Spanish kids, the elderly flaneurs and the Moroccan shoppers, and the stone benches where migrants had slept had been put in nice symmetrical order again. But the whiff of illegality would linger. Two impressions stayed, however unfairly. A group of posh schoolkids had gathered in town: one of them, a teenage boy, picked up a piece of cardboard from a skip and proceeded to slap it against the pavement to the laughter of his friends, slapping and slapping until it echoed in a faint reminder of the strikers' *cartonazos*. An old couple was talking at one of Ceuta's frequent military parades: "Let's see if they do anything with the *negros*," said the wife. "What they should do is circle them all in the square and bang-bang-bang," replied the man.

Mamá sat in her office with a handwritten list on the table. It enumerated the strikers who had persisted despite the official resolution. "They have taken them all to the *calabozo de Tarajal*," said Mamá, the prison next to the border. They were back on the threshold of thresholds, ironically enough, the limbo of the *frontera* they had desperately tried to escape. Their bedding and clothes had to be collected downstairs, Mamá said. She got out her typed-up list of rooms, scribbling notes on it in an ever-more complicated mesh of doodles. It was in a mess, she said. The migrants who just arrived this morning after a dramatic sea rescue still had to be added.

Nine of the 14 strikers previously taken away in vans and transferred to the peninsula – the "bad ones", as the authorities saw it – were deported back to Cameroon thanks to an impromptu bilateral deal. The strikers who had remained in Ceuta were released and prosecuted, but the case failed in the courts. Meanwhile, a new strategy was unveiled at the camp. Migrants' good behaviour was now going to be rewarded by their being sent to *centros de acogida* – reception centres run by NGOs – in mainland Spain. The sorting mechanism of the camp was being refined. Nationality took on a new importance, since most of the strikers had been Cameroonian. The good and bad elements were sifted. The

presumed ringleaders (*cabecillas*) were sorted under “bad”, and were scheduled for removal or simply left in place, more stuck than ever.

Despite this *el general* managed to escape, the local papers reported during the autumn. How he had done it no one knew; maybe he had stowed away in a lorry, as had many before him. Ceuta calmed down, and the camp launched new activities for residents: more workshops, on-the-job training in the camp, sports and cultural interchanges with *caballas*, and even a special course at the local university. The crisis had officially been wrapped up and resolved.

Barely a month after the strike, some of the deported Cameroonian had already made it back to Ceuta. As hardened adventurers, they fast-tracked through the borderlands, despite the fences and radars and subcontracted police blocking their path. Perhaps the returnees sought to follow *el general*’s example, but the threat of stagnation in “Guantánamo” still made their return seem surreal, inconceivable. Like with the strike, the logic of the return has to be sought in the battle over migrants’ time, the subject of the next chapter – their captive present, their past on the road and their imagined future. There was simply no going back for the adventurers of Ceuta.

The strike and its aftermath had shown that the products of Europe’s illegality industry were not simply the rationally classified subjects of a sorting centre; they were also redolent of fears, myths and magic. Here it is worth returning to Malkki’s (1995) observations on refugee liminality, how camps can conjure new roles out of the old. Ceuta is nothing if not a liminal space, an “out-place” in Agier’s (2011) terms, artificially construed as the ultimate threshold of Europe – and the camp is a limbo-within-a-limbo. “It is in liminality that *communitas* emerges,” Victor Turner (1974:97-100) once said, referring to the sense of togetherness forged outside the structures, hierarchies and normative orders of society. Turner would, perhaps, have found that Ceuta’s migrants were in the liminal middle-stage of a rite of passage much like the kind Malkki (1995) describes for Burundians-turned-refugees. The “elders” of their host society kept them separate, as initiates often are: far away in their camp and on the threshold

of both Ceuta and Europe, suspended in time and place until their turn came to be incorporated into or rejected by Europe's symbolic order. But the rite had broken down. Liminality had switched to stasis. And then, the strikers – as a group of initiates rebelling against the prevailing order, a “generation” in their own words – created their own rite and their own *communitas* by marching on the town centre. The result was a downgrading of the migrants’ status, not incorporation into Europe. The strike and its structural causes in containment, policy contradictions, media attention and policing prerogatives had turned needy subjects into savages. It had made *negros* of the *negritos* and *morenos*. Mamá’s stray children had finally abandoned the nest.

6

Stranded in time

Darkness falls over the shacks in Melilla. John takes another swig of his lukewarm whisky mixed with cheap energy drink and sways to the mix of Fela Kuti and hip hop streaming out of a speaker atop a rickety bench. “Fela was a *prophet*,” he says. “He stood up for Africa.” The whisky glass circulates among his Nigerian friends in our little circle, seated on ripped-out car seats and plastic petrol cans. Around us, women stir black metal pots, dragging children along with them wherever they go. These are the *chabolas* or shanties, as migrants call their makeshift dwellings, which they have furnished out of pallets and tarp. Like Ceuta’s hillside forests, the *chabolas* offer a brief reprieve from the observatory of the enclave – the turnstiles and camp cards, the patrols and surveillance cameras. Reprieve, but no escape. From here, Melilla unfolds as a world of multiple fences: the fence around the migrant camp downhill, the mesh shielding the golf course next door, the high-tech *valla* separating the EU from Morocco around a bend in the border road. “This place they call Europe, but I think it’s Africa,” says John, his hand fanning out over the dust-coated misery of the *chabolas* and the distant Mount Gurugú from where migrants once descended en masse towards the *valla*. The whisky glass is filled and shared out again. John’s friend, sporting fake Raybans and a neatly trimmed beard, raps along to the hip hop. “We are like convicts,” he sings. A captive colony: the *chabola* dwellers have been stuck in Melilla between one and three years, waiting for their chance to go to the Iberian peninsula.

Eventlessness defined migrant life in the enclaves. Ceuta’s strike in the summer of 2010 was an exception – the migrants in Ceuta and Melilla were above all sucked into an endless, dreary, patient process of *waiting*. The days ground on, each like the next. Yet the long wait endured by the “convicts” was

not simply an empty period of time, at least as far as the authorities were concerned. Migrants were, police said, blocked in the enclaves in order to strangle the finances of the “mafias” who brought them there. Marcelo, the chief of the police immigration bureau in Ceuta, illustrated this by positioning himself as a hypothetical trafficker. “If I pick up [*capto*] 100 women in Nigeria to bring them from there and put them in Madrid [for prostitution], I have an estimated cost of, I guess, €6,000 for each one” in smuggling them into Spain. The women pay €3,000 each up front and the rest once they arrive, €300,000 in total; this means the smuggler needs to invest the remaining €300,000. “If you withhold 50 of them in Ceuta and you repatriate another 50, my business will be in ruins!” he exclaimed. “I’ve lost, because the poor woman who was heading there [to the peninsula] can’t pay. I’ve lost €150,000, and you’ve withheld the other women here for two years, that’s two years that I have immobilised capital, that’s another €150,000 lost.” The strategy, then, was to remove Ceuta and Melilla from the smuggling route by selectively retaining and deporting migrants. In this policing effort, the time migrants spent in the enclaves constituted *capital* withheld from the presumed smuggling rings. What Marcelo failed to mention, however, was that most sub-Saharan migrants had in 2010 arrived through their own efforts, rather than with the help of professional smugglers. For these adventurers as well as for their trafficked or smuggled counterparts, retention constituted collective punishment, reducing them to indefinite confinement in ways akin to the “island detention” practices in Australia and elsewhere along the fringes of the West.¹

As a result a silent battle was being waged in the enclaves over time withheld and stolen, emptied time, time bought and given, time retrieved for observation, scrutiny and care. Yet as theorists of temporality have long noted, time cannot be separated from space (Munn 1992; Massey 1994; Thrift and May 2001). Migrants’ waste of time was predicated upon their spatial immobility. Ceuta and Melilla were gaps in the migration circuit, in which a regime of interlocking time-spaces, unevenly stretched over the enclaves’ tiny territories, seemed to regulate migrants as a population while disciplining them as bodies in the biopolitical fashion delineated by Foucault (2008). Their time-space of

¹ See Mountz (2011) on such detention practices elsewhere

confinement, ephemeral yet inescapable, soon became a burden weighing heavily on their shoulders.

This time-space regime did not simply confine migrants in what activists called the “sweet prison” of the enclaves.² Like ship castaways, they rather seemed stranded in a topsy-turvy world with its own rules and routines, a world of mimicry and make-believe. In its strangeness, this world was not only reminiscent of the refugee camp existence invoked by migrants, but also of the “total institutions” of western social states. Like the mental asylums and prisons once studied by Goffman (1961), enclave confinement inserted the reluctant “inmates” into an institutional order with its own logics. Like in prisons and asylums, these inmates went through a process of “mortification” that sought to eradicate their previous adventurer selves: they were cleansed, checked for diseases and sparsely clothed and accommodated, their camp life documented in thickening files. And again like in these institutions, their recalcitrance was interpreted along moralistic lines suitable to the authorities’ objectives. They were, like John’s friend had hinted, captives in an offshore, self-contained world.

The adventurers were not hapless victims of this contradictory world, however, but participated in its very creation. After all, Ceuta and Melilla were just the most extreme example of the imposed waiting that defined the migration circuit: waiting for contacts, for money transfers, for a clandestine crossing, for papers. If the migrant strike had hinted at a new impatience among the hardened adventurers of Ceuta, there were numerous other strategies – techniques of waiting – in the migratory repertoire. Some tried to render themselves invisible to avoid apprehension; others sought to accumulate “good time” and be rewarded with passage to the peninsula; yet others, such as John and his *chabola* friends, aimed to stretch their time in the enclaves while hoping for deliverance. This multifaceted battle over time in both Ceuta and Melilla, the subject of this chapter, reached from abstract time-as-capital through the camp’s day-to-day schedules all the way down to the briefest of time slots: the half-second pause in speech before migrants revealed their names and nationalities to strangers.

² This was the term used by Ceuta’s nuns. See Asociación Elin (2010)

Buying time: pauses, lies and parking lots

A THURSDAY IN AUGUST, 1.30pm. *Ding-ding-ding-dong* rang the microphone of the Ceuta camp as I called out for the five latest arrivals of an increasingly busy summer. They had already showered with an anti-parasite shampoo while one of the camp security guards kept watch, as was the routine, and had then been escorted to the camp clinic for a medical check-up and the mandatory TB test, indicated by inked squares on their upper arms. Eventually they came into the reception and sat down, waiting for a meeting with the social workers. Four of the migrants, whose natty dreads hinted at their rough living in the forest of Ben Younech outside Ceuta before departure, had come together in an inflatable boat. The fifth had set out alone, seeking to paddle across the Strait in a tiny raft before being spotted by a commercial ship and picked up by Salvamento Marítimo. He was called Patrick, a 29-year-old Cameroonian in shorts, slippers and a sun hat. “I don’t know why they sent me here, I was trying to go to Algeciras,” he said. His voice stayed calm, but he was visibly frustrated. He had good reason to be. This was his second time in Ceuta. He had first come eight years previously, in 2002. Deported back to Cameroon, he had set out again and been on the road ever since. “Now they conserve people longer here,” he remarked. Before, it had been a matter of weeks not years before people were sent on. Patrick was unique in having tried to paddle alone across the Strait, but in two other respects he was typical for the African migrants arriving in 2010 in Ceuta and Melilla: he had spent many years on the road and had not making use of the smuggling rings invoked by the police chief. As a bona-fide adventurer, he took pride in his skills in skirting borders without assistance; he also lacked funds for expensive smuggling trips. The time he was losing in Ceuta was his own.

The microphone that had summoned Patrick was at the heart of camp life, its amplified *ding-ding-ding* and “attention please” lending an uneven daily rhythm and sense of purpose to the long, hot days of summer. Lurking in a corner of the reception, it was a source of banter and ambivalence, an instrument of camp authority occasionally subverted when migrants grabbed it and called out names to everyone’s laughter. Usually workers would reluctantly go up to the

mike, press the red button and call out names for workshops or meetings in basic French or English. Often no one would show up despite the repeated calls of names. “It’s because they haven’t memorised them yet,” said Mamá with characteristic frankness. The migrants were not used to hearing the names “they had been assigned” by the smugglers. “Many times you ask for their names and there’s a pause, then they look it up on their [camp] card.”

Captivity yielded knowledge. The immobility of migrants in Ceuta and Melilla meant collecting data on them should be easy: names and nationalities, backgrounds and biometrics, routes and destinations. But the authorities faced a formidable adversary. The lies and pauses, the microphone and its unheeded calls, were symptoms of the war over time and knowledge that was silently waged between the Spanish state and the adventurers, with the camp workers as uneasy go-betweens.

In daytime, migrants dispersed across Ceuta and Melilla. They loitered in parking lots in the merciless sun, occasionally waving to drivers who were trying to park. This work they called *tira-tira* (“pulling”). Besides waiting in shop doorways to beg and help customers with their bags – or, in Melilla, “doing *limpiacoches*” (washing cars) to remove the dust blowing in from Morocco – *tira-tira* was all they could do to make a few euros. I often sauntered up, asking questions. “What is your name? Where do you come from?” There was usually a pause before the reply, a wavering, a brief silence before a West African might utter Somalia as their country or Mohamed as their name. In this pause lay the silence of their predicament, their thoughts and doubts bundled into a half-second. I soon learnt to stop asking about country or name, and to enquire instead about the measure of all things in the enclave: “How long have you been here?”

The pause, often accompanied by a brief quiver across the lips, hinted at the fear of not being believed, of being caught lying. And many migrants lied. How could they not? The goal was the peninsula, and the end justified the means. The twisting of truth arose out of their captive predicament but to

workers and locals it became, rather, a sign of their migranthood, just as it had for the police on the hunt for adventurers across deserts and seas. Everyone knew that migrants invented nationalities and names. They claimed physical symptoms and diseases according to what might take them to the peninsula, camp workers said. If there are no good dentists in Ceuta, everyone suddenly had a rotten tooth.

To the migrants, Ceuta itself represented a pause, a holding of breath before their push across the final hurdle into Europe. This was so in a strictly official sense. Migrants were not permitted to join the municipal register (*padrón municipal*), which meant the time they spent here did not easily count towards the Spanish *arraigo social* (social embeddedness), whereby irregular migrants may apply for a residence permit if they can prove they have lived in the country for three years.³ The migrants were acutely aware of this, complaining of having to start from scratch if they ever made it to the peninsula. “You have to remember that one year is a long time for them,” said Luis, a ponytailed lawyer at the camp, whose office was bedecked with pictures of the West Bank wall and magazine cut-outs about the Senegalese “mother victims of the *cayucos*”. “These are their best years.”

The pauses were ambiguous. On the one hand, migrants aimed to reduce them. They did *tira-tira* for this reason – to get away from their doubts and from “only thinking”, as one documentary on Ceuta’s migrants put it.⁴ If the pause swallowed your whole world, you would go crazy. “There are mad people up there,” migrants said of the camp: listless, absent, psychotic. They had succumbed to the pause, fallen into the crack that constituted their existence. On the other hand, the invocation of Somalia or Sudan was itself a way of *extending* the larger pause of Ceuta. In this effort, migrants’ make-believe nationalities interacted with the paperwork produced about them. Foremost among these documents was the yellow card that had been held aloft by Ceuta’s strikers.

Asylum seekers filed their demands with the Immigration Office in the centre soon after arrival. The yellow card they then received was valid in all of Spain – so it said on the card – and inserted the paperless adventurers into a

³ In 2011, the new conservative government swiftly moved to curtail this right. See http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2011/11/24/actualidad/1322125831_984714.html

⁴ “Only Thinking” by Gabriel Merrún: <http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/disciplines/socialanthropology/visualanthropology/archive/mafilms/2009/>

documented order. But since police, following Spain's new asylum law, no longer accepted the cards as documentation in port, the freedom of movement promised on the cards was phoney. In this sense, the cards were what Navaro-Yashin (2007) has called "make-believe documents", or a phantasmatic form of state-produced certification. While Navaro-Yashin's case from northern Cyprus concerns documents not recognised beyond the (unrecognised) state producing them, in Ceuta the failure of recognition occurred between two authorities within the same state. To complicate matters further, the yellow cards were a fake-upon-a-fake, based as they often were on invented nationalities. Ceuta's asylum seekers remained, in the words of the police chief Marcelo, "completely undocumented".

If fake nationalities and asylum applications held little promise, they at least insured migrants against immediate deportation and kept the hope of a *laissez-passar* (safe conduct) to the peninsula alive. This was the strategy of the Nigerians, whose government had a readmissions agreement with Spain. Asylum seekers from other nationalities coveted what was known as the *fuera* (out); the word used by migrants in Ceuta to refer to the steps of their expulsion order following a refusal of asylum. After three *fueras*, migrants hoped for transfer to detention on the mainland, followed by deportation. Like Ceuta's strikers, they *sought* rejection of their claims and transfer to the CIEs, since they knew deportation was unlikely to be carried out for lack of readmission agreements between their countries and Spain. However, even this was denied them: in 2010 the *fueras* were painfully slow in coming.

John, who had a family in the *chabolas*, had little reason to invent a nationality. Instead he hoped for papers, an impossibility in the crisis-racked Spain of 2010. Patrick, who went by several names, sought none of the above: he neither applied for asylum nor invented a nationality. Instead he was biding his time, waiting for the possibility of a clandestine passage to Europe.

The mystery of migrants' origins, journeys and stratagems was a source of banter and intrigue among camp workers, who used the extended pause of Ceuta to

guess and classify at leisure. How could they not? This was after all their task in a sorting centre, and like any professionals they wanted to understand their “users”, categorise them, and assist them accordingly – here with the added challenge of the truth being hidden. Yet in their search for truth they became, for migrants, complicit in the regime that kept them stranded and deportable. Mamá’s attempts to list the camp’s Muslim residents for special Ramadan mealtimes were hampered by suspicion; anxious residents inquired whether new faces in the camp, such as myself, were really undercover police.

Theories and tricks for ascertaining nationalities were often aired during breakfast breaks in the coffee room. Some so-called “alleged nationalities” were easy to expose, said Luis. Nigerians might say they are from Sudan, then “you ask them about the capital, Darfur and *janjaweed* and they don’t know anything”. Mamá read nationalities off residents’ gait and bodies – the tall, long-limbed and lanky ones were Senegalese, the Cameroonians thick-boned and broad-faced, the Nigerians similar to the Cameroonians but louder, “very Anglophone”. Almost despite myself, I too had started taking a forensic approach to nationalities. Why did that Gambian speak French not English? Do Ivoirians have that type of tribal scar on their cheeks?

Such guesswork was constant among camp workers, and involved defining not only physical but also temperamental traits. One day I entered the coffee room and there was the big, friendly head of *social* together with the former director, now relegated to an administrative role. A map of Somalia was spread across the table. “And the African stuff, have you learnt it yet?” the former director asked me, meaning whether I had started to recognise different nationalities by their traits. He gave me a crash course, contrasting the “docile” and easy-going migrants from Côte d’Ivoire, Mali and Senegal with the Nigerians and Cameroonians, who “create more trouble” (*dan más guerra*). The new director added a more analytical angle: the Congolese and Cameroonians were well-organised, the former outside and the latter inside the camp, while the Nigerians had lost dominance and instead engaged in shady “business”.

This game of guessing and classification could, once frustration was factored in, easily take on the more sinister air of intelligence-gathering. “They lie about everything,” said one camp psychologist. Migrants started “playing the victim” in one-to-one sessions, he said, inventing mental and physical ailments,

“but I start noticing incoherencies quickly”. Stories circulated of a resident who had taken to reading the newspaper upside down, and another who just stared listlessly in front of him. Eventually these migrants had been sent on to Red Cross reception centres on the mainland. “They are faking it, but you can’t have people like that in the CETI,” said one worker. Others were more sympathetic, even attributing migrants’ madness to their captivity. “I’ve seen people who are OK, normal, when they enter,” said one workshop leader. “Then they change completely, it’s like they are a different person.” Even the symptoms of the fakers could start to become real the longer their performance went on and the longer the pause of Ceuta was extended.

The guessing game clashed with camp procedures, which depended on *certainty* in pinpointing migrant identities. And such pinpointing was central to camp life; how else could entry cards be produced, forms filled in, data collected, names called out? The result was an awkward splintering between the documented existence of residents and the hidden truth about them, a game of make-believe played out both inside and outside the camp. In the *tira-tira* world, the Francophone migrants complained that the Somalis and Sudanese had all the best parking spots. Camp workers invoked fictitious nationalities in discussing slots for using the gym with migrants, and bantered with them about the threat of deportation for Somalis. The game went beyond jokes and gym times to encompass central aspects of camp organisation. The green camp cards – key in allowing for exit, entry, meals and any interaction with the workers, who relied on cards rather than name or facial memory as means of identification – listed the “alleged nationalities” and names. In such interactions, workers and migrants soon became uneasy accomplices in the game of make-believe played out in the time-space gap of Ceuta.

The documentary practices in Ceuta exemplify the power of documents, noted by Pelkmans (forthcoming), to forge or impose state-sanctioned identities in interaction with their holders. Also noting this disciplinary importance of documents, Kelly (2006:103) argues in his West Bank study – like Navaro-Yashin (2007) – that documentation may serve to *increase* rather than reduce uncertainty. By opening a gap between legal and physical status, he says, documents allow for degrees of manipulation that produce fears and anxieties among their holders, who in this way come to embody the indeterminacies of

their documents. In Ceuta and Melilla, documents did both produce new identities and uncertainty around these, yet with a twist. Here, the “gap” between legal and physical status was built into documented reality itself, with the connivance of the authorities. Anxiety resulted not from uncertainties in the interpretation of documents, but from the *certainty* that documented reality itself was arbitrary and devoid of meaning. The documents’ imposed identities were shallow, instrumental and phoney; no one would destroy them, in the way Pelkmans (forthcoming) describes passports being torn at the Georgia-Turkey border; no one would ask, as Israeli soldiers did at the Israel-Palestine checkpoints discussed by Kelly (2006), whether the identity given by the document was *really* in correspondence with its holder.

One day Mamá wanted to show me a newborn baby. We went into the camp clinic and met an Anglophone West African woman in the corridor. “Congratulations!” Mamá called out and hugged her. On a hospital litter inside lay the little newborn girl. We inspected the newborn’s camp card with its photo of her small, sleepy baby face. The card stated her name along those of her parents, as well as her country of origin: Somalia.

The African women were in the worst bind of all. Their bulging bellies, a common sight in the camp, attested to the fluctuations in the Spanish policy on detaining, liberating and deporting pregnant women. When they realised pregnancy no longer guaranteed transfer to the peninsula in late 2008, the psychologist said, several of them suddenly carried out abortions. In 2010 pregnancy insured women against deportation – but by cutting short the transfer to a CIE, pregnancy could also keep them stuck in Ceuta for even longer. One male resident pointed to a pregnant woman walking past. “She’s been here for three years, now she’s pregnant, which means she’ll be here for five years! Everyone teases her about it, but she just cries.”

If migrants emerged from this make-believe world as untrustworthy figures, so did the authorities. One of the Congolese protesters, a musician and holder of a yellow card, had seen his high regard for Europe shattered during his seven months in Ceuta. “The Spaniards lie a lot,” he said: the police promised them decisions and meetings but nothing came of it. The institutional side of the camp was eyed with a similar mistrust to the police, especially under the previous director, who some residents scolded for his alleged close links to

security. And then there were the journalists, in cahoots with the state. I had bought the local rag and walked past a Ugandan friend tending to a supermarket entrance, and he shouted out: “That paper is no good, it’s all lies!” He pointed at the front page, scolding the paper’s journalist who always wrote bad things. “Every Wednesday he comes, when they prepare rice, and they take photos.” Nice food called for promotional shots. The seemingly arbitrary decisions that kept him stuck in Ceuta added to his anger. “We have no facts,” he said. “They don’t tell us the truth because we are immigrants.”

The lack of information was endemic, and made worse by the camp policy of using Spanish even with the most recent arrivals. The pause when asked about names and in heeding the microphone’s calls was as much about the pitfalls in easing residents into the pidgin Spanish of the camp as it was about lies and outright evasion.

One day, a new resident came to reception, upset. “I’ve signed a piece of paper, but I don’t know what it means,” he told me, “it’s only in Spanish.” He wanted to see the social worker who made him sign it. “She explained something in French but she doesn’t speak it well, so I didn’t understand.” We went into the *social* office, where one worker was adamant her colleague had translated it, “well, I was here and I heard it! But of course I can explain it again.” So she did, along these lines, and I translated: the paper said only that the migrant was at the camp voluntarily, that he would follow the camp rules, and that all he had told the workers was true. It was “nothing strange”, everyone signed it as they entered, and it would not affect him in any legal way. “Okay?” The resident nodded, asked me to offer his excuses for taking up her time, and left without asking for a copy of the text he had signed.

Camp life ticked over through the circulation of make-believe documents: the signed entry forms, the yellow asylum cards that gave phoney access to the whole of Spain while offering little chance of a full asylum procedure, the green camp cards with their mix of fictitious and real nationalities and names. Meanwhile the black migrants of the camp could use their generic categorisation as *subsaharianos* in inventing nationalities, and their bodies as defence when they invoked health problems or sought pregnancy. But if camp life was a game, it was one of “who blinks first”. In mouthing half-truths and lies, migrants risked

being found out or getting stuck even longer. In pushing the make-believe further, camp workers risked the captives' wrath, as had happened in the strike.

The make-believery and arbitrariness, codified in documents, created real effects in camp relations and in the lives of migrants, as attested to by the real-fake bouts of madness, the pregnancies, the Somali parking monopolies, and the chance of being sent to the peninsula. It also impinged upon that more formal circuit of information – the regular reports sent by workers and police to the ministries in Madrid. A constant production of information, including the psychological questionnaires amassed on new arrivals, data provided to the police and *social*, and any incidents registered by the *madres*, accompanied the circulation of half-truths within the camp itself, remaining out of reach of migrants yet helping to structure their daily rhythms in the camp.

Killing time: schedules and dossiers

A TUESDAY IN AUGUST, 5.45pm. The smell of fried potatoes wafted out of the room next to the canteen. Inside, a group of residents stood around a table, catering hairnets on their heads, chopping tubers for a Spanish tortilla under the stern gaze of two women from the NGO Accem, a major contractor in Spain's outsourced migration assistance programmes. "What's this called?" one of the workshop leaders inquired while waving the skimming ladle. She looked from face to face before homing in on an unfortunate African woman. The woman did not know. "An *espumadera*," the leader said, admonishing her pupil. The workshop leader pointed at objects in the small makeshift kitchen, making the woman repeat vocabulary – *aceite* (oil), *patata* (potato), *sartén* (frying pan). The head of *social* had come along to watch proceedings, in a welcome relief from the tensions generated by the strikers. "They've spent three weeks here and then start screaming 'Guantánamo,'" he said, standing on the ledge behind the cooking room and observing a ping-pong game outside the residential modules below. Finally the tortilla was ready, and the head of *social* and I joined the director, camp workers and kitchen helpers to eat the moist, golden slices.

This was the good work of the camp that had been overshadowed by the strike. Workshops, language classes and IT sessions, psychological assistance

and health checks, sports and excursions: the opportunities served up by the Spanish authorities for irregular migrants were unmatched by any other southern European country. The first task at the camp was a “recuperation of human dignity”, the director had explained, followed by social integration through learning Spanish and other skills. But the picture had grown more complex the longer migrants were stuck in limbo. During the Spanish economic boom, migrants were taught how to register with local authorities and where to look for work once in the peninsula. Those who made an effort to participate in courses “were rewarded with exit to the peninsula, [but] from 2006 onwards, this was cut,” said one Red Cross officer in Melilla. “The work of integration got somewhat lost.” With the withdrawal of the reward of exit, the courses that took place in the camps in 2010 merely filled – or killed – the time of migrants. As one worker put it: “There’s little hope for them at the moment, but we do what we can. At least the things they learn here are something they can take with them. We have to encourage them but without giving any expectations.”

This logic of passing time through what Goffman (1961) calls “removal activities” is familiar from other modern, total institutions. The “sense of dead and heavy-hanging time” in asylums or prisons, Goffman says, might lead to a premium being placed on voluntary, unserious pursuits among inmates: “If the ordinary activities in total institutions can be said to torture time, these activities mercifully kill it” (*ibid*:67).

Even allowing for this distractive function, however, the integration work of the camps remained an absurd exercise. How could anyone learn Spanish ensconced on a faraway hillside, suspended in time and fearful of deportation? How could you integrate while held captive as a collective punishment, unable to work or register with the local authorities? The enclaves, in their extreme juxtaposition of incompatible goals, simply brought to a head Europe’s contradictory migratory logics on integration and control, as already noted in the strike. These contradictions were unevenly played out across the enclaves’ “geography of time” (Glennie and Thrift 1996:280). If the time-space of control stretched from fence to port and forest to camp, camp time itself was further subdivided into fields of surveillance, integration and indifference.

In Ceuta, the camp layout – offices upstairs, residential modules downstairs – helped create two distinct but complementary rhythms.⁵ Upstairs, time discipline reigned. Camp life was defined by schedules and governed by the clock, much like in the regimented school and factory settings once studied by Thompson (1967). Mealtimes at 1pm and 8pm, one hour each, with the guards congregating at the door once the canteen was about to close, to make sure it was emptied on time. Curfew at night and early morning, when everyone had to be in or else be registered on their cards as absent: three nights of absence and the resident lost their bed, as well as *antigüedad* (“seniority”) once they came back. And they always did come back: banishment meant sleeping rough in the forests with little chance of an income or even nourishment.

In this regimented time, paperwork gave the impression of progress. As migrants arrived fresh from being rescued, they were admonished to keep their documents safely. These included the “affiliation” paper, a thin slip given to new arrivals by the police listing their temporary identification number (NIP); the medical card, another flimsy piece of documentation cataloguing the compulsory medical tests and other notes from the camp clinic; a paper delineating the camp rules; and the *protocolo* slip with its list of compulsory meetings. A stamp marked attendance for each meeting, which were all to take place in the new residents’ first week in the camp: medical screening, a psychological test, a compulsory Spanish class introduction and a presentation on their rights to claim asylum.

If paperwork, clockwork and compulsory meetings created a distinct upstairs temporality, time downstairs in the dorms sagged and melted like a surrealist clock. This world, visited only by the *madres* and the guards, was bereft of routines, if not of activity. The sleeping modules, exposed to the scorching sun and the winds and rains lashing the hillside, were alternately hot and freezing. They were also cramped and claustrophobic. In one female dorm, water had been seeping in from the next-door shower, creating a puddle under one of the beds. A baby cot stood next to the bunk. “The baby can’t sleep like that!” the women complained, asking Mamá for another dorm. But the only empty module in these busy August days was closed because the ground below it

⁵ The Melilla camp, unlike Ceuta’s, was not divided into upstairs and downstairs spaces

had cracked and sunk, in part thanks to the construction of the horse-riding centre above the camp. In other rooms, the electric sockets were coming loose, exposing live wires. Black mould stains spread across the cracks between wall and ceiling. “They shower with hot water in here in winter,” Mamá offered as explanation. “I tell them that can create problems with humidity.” The modules had no running hot water, so the women resorted to boiling water themselves. Eventually sockets would be fixed, floors cleaned and rooms fumigated, but the atmosphere of neglect was evident in the futile attempts at keeping the decay of the modules at bay.

ANOTHER WEDNESDAY, 5.30pm. It was the hottest time of August, a couple of weeks before the Ceuta strike begun, and I was loitering in the camp courtyard. An elderly Moroccan gardener hosed the trees in the yard while sipping mint tea from a plastic glass. Many of the camp’s contract workers hailed from across the border, with its plentiful supply of licit and illicit labour. “This tree,” the gardener said, pointing to the large poplar in front of us, “I planted it in 2002.” This was the year that Patrick, the lone boatman of the Strait, had first arrived in Ceuta. As the gardener moved on, Patrick sauntered up. He had not been feeling at ease since arriving. “I feel lazy and I don’t know why,” he said in his usual manner, thoughtfully and slowly, as if weighing every word in his mouth. Could it be the heat? No, he said, “maybe it’s the food, though sometimes the food is good, you don’t know, all we can do is wait and see what they give us. All I want to do is sleep.” He was starting to doubt himself. Like the other residents, he was “thinking too much”, especially when stuck inside the camp, going over the lost decade of his adventure. “I keep asking myself, why me?” he said. “Trying, trying, trying to become something, but it’s impossible.”

The “pragmatics of time that comes with living in shelters”, identified by Robert Desjarlais (1994:895), was already taking its toll on Patrick, the disjointed rhythms of camp life triggering a bodily unease in him much as it led to bouts of madness among others:

The episodic quality of shelter life, where you need to live one day at a time and not get ahead of yourself and where nobody does anything, fixes time as a diffuse and sporadic order. There are eddies when the mundane occurs, and whirlpools

when someone is restrained or hospitalised, but much of the day, week, and month consists of a vast ocean of routine...

In this fleeting, endless present – again reminiscent of the “heavy” time encountered by Goffman (1961) in asylums – hope took on a phantasmatic quality. Much like the phoney promises of upstairs time, adventurers harboured rosy thoughts of the future once they made it “up” (*en haut*) to the peninsula. These make-believe futures festered in the gap of the enclaves, in the empty time-space wedged between the rough world of the adventure and crisis-hit Spain.

As hope dwindled with each passing month, the effort to enforce upstairs time became more difficult. Instead, workers used what Goffman (*ibid*) calls a “privilege system” – nudges, rewards and punishments – to sort and sift good from bad migrants. The nudge was the dossier kept on each resident that *might*, after all, enable one’s passage to the peninsula. Good behaviour was not just rewarded with free cigarettes but, the *madres* insisted, led to a thick dossier listing a resident’s attendance at the compulsory Spanish classes and *protocolo* meetings. Spanish course attendance was rewarded with access to the camp’s computer hall and workshops such as the oversubscribed cooking class. The punishment, meanwhile, were the *partes* (reports) filed by social workers and *madres* for bad behaviour. After the strike, nudges and punishments mixed in strange new ways. “Many people have been penalised,” Patrick explained, “and the penalty is Spanish classes.” If residents did not attend, their card could be withdrawn and they would be stuck inside the camp. This was in keeping with the make-believe integration work of the enclaves, attesting to the absurdity of language learning among deportable migrants. Patrick, like many other adventurers, had no concentration for attending the course, which the students anyhow saw as sub-standard. Besides, he still had the Spanish diploma he received from the camp in 2002 in his family home in Cameroon. “What has that helped me?” he asked. Diploma or not, Patrick had still been deported.

Language, instead of aiding integration or allowing passage to the mainland, rather became the measure of all things in the camp. Those who dominated Spanish got to participate in upstairs time, while those who resisted or failed to learn were marooned in downstairs time. The latter applied, above all, to

the women. Sitting in their cliques around the downstairs tables, braiding hair, playing board games or washing clothes, they were admonished by Mamá for failing to learn Spanish during their long time in Ceuta. One woman snapped back. “You’ve been here for seven years and you haven’t learnt any English yet!” Some workers said the women *did* understand Spanish, but simply pretended not to know. In either case, their refusal to participate, at least in part related to their frustration at losing the most important years of their lives, marginalised them in the camp.

Language learning also played a large role at the two other establishments for migrants in Ceuta. On the edge of town, a humanitarian association run by Ceuta’s nuns provided language exchanges while running workshops in making handcrafted candles, much as the camp had its cooking and Spanish classes. Another centre also run by a Christian NGO, Centro San Antonio on the slopes close to the camp, offered internet access and Spanish courses, with class participation again the prerequisite for screen time. In these sites, a certain subject was being promoted and produced: the good, integrated immigrant, who was kept busy and connected in exchange for his linguistic efforts.

Among the “good immigrants” with reassuringly thick dossiers, the Red Cross volunteers stood out. Amadou, the adventurer who climbed the *valla* alone in chapter four, was one of them. He spent his days helping the frail and elderly, his bus pass paid by the Red Cross, and even assisted relatives of Guardia Civil officers, the gatekeepers he had once eluded. “I’ve been in almost all the media here, on television, photos in *El Faro* and *El Pueblo* [the local newspapers], while helping out as a volunteer,” he said. Amadou’s accumulation of virtue meant he was showered with attention, but his main reward as a model migrant was a busy schedule. He clocked up hours as a volunteer, attended first aid courses and participated in Red Cross outings. For him, in contrast to Patrick and the majority of residents, time moved purposefully ahead.

The schedules and dossiers held out the promise of making time move, accumulate, produce something. This upstairs time regime was a fragile construct, however. One camp worker, frustrated with the arbitrariness of rules and punishments, grabbed hold of a *protocolo* schedule, pointing at the time slots for meetings that residents had to tick off. “Look, here it says they have to go at 11am but it’s not at 11am, it’s whenever they [the workers] feel like it! The

residents go there at 11am and no one is there, and lose confidence.” The rules said residents should be expelled after three nights away, she noted, but sometimes they were expelled after only one night. The strikers, meanwhile, had not been expelled even after several nights outside. “Someone comes and asks me whether they can go out and I can’t say ‘yes’ because if they throw him out afterwards, he will blame me for it. There’s no coordination, everyone does what they feel like. For the residents it’s very negative.” The residents’ *protocolo* slips sometimes stayed unstamped for weeks.

The camp time of rewards and punishments, schedules and dossiers, created a make-believe sense of progress that helped disguise the fact that migrants were, to the authorities, mere numbers and their time capital withheld from the smugglers. As such mediators between neglect and due process, the documents played a large role in a bureaucratic “production of indifference”, in Herzfeld’s (1992) term. Feldman (2012:6), picking up on Herzfeld’s ideas in the context of migration control, contrasts the policy world’s production of indifference about migrants – the focus of his valuable study – with the “face-to-face interaction among and between migration officials and migrants”, which he sees as a secondary manifestation of deeper processes. Yet Ceuta and Melilla show how bureaucratic indifference was dependent upon a peculiar social interface. Indifference could only be produced thanks to the intricate entanglement of workers, migrants and police in the circulation of documents and the layered time-space regimes of the enclaves.

The make-believe documents also sparked strong emotional reactions, as already noted. The thick dossiers, ticked-off *fueras*, protocol stamps and signed forms stirred hopes of release or, in contrast, fears of confinement or deportation. When the paperwork refused to veil the callous confinement of the enclaves – when protocol slips stayed unstamped or yellow cards failed to work their magic – it could trigger anger and rage, as a sign of the “lies” to which migrants felt themselves subjected. This is what had happened in Ceuta’s strike.

Stretching time: surveillance and escape

A WEDNESDAY IN JULY, 4.30pm. It was the month before the strike, and I was talking to Jean the protester in a café in central Ceuta. He had already been sleeping rough outside the police *jefatura* together with his fellow Congolese asylum seekers for several weeks, and looked increasingly haggard. Suddenly a moustachioed Spanish man came up, flashed a badge, asked for our papers. Police control. He eyed Jean's camp card briefly, then paid my passport considerably more attention. He asked questions, took down my address, phone number, profession. A "neighbour" who had seen us talking had tipped him off, he explained. "You never know, this might be about smuggling or something illegal." After he left, Jean shook his head. "I'm not afraid of him," he said. "They always control us." He knew why the undercover policeman had checked on us: because I am white and Jean is black, his colour marking him as "illegal" in the enclaves' social order.

Ceuta and Melilla, tiny militarised territories hemmed in between the *vallas* and the sea, were perfect spaces of surveillance. Their delicate geopolitical situation meant that undercover police and informers were everywhere, or as graffiti on a Melilla wall put it: "If snitches [*chivatos*] could fly, we would no longer see the sun." In Melilla in particular, police also enlisted *chivatos* among the migrants, who were quietly offered possibilities of a *laissez-passer* for gathering intelligence. As for the concerned "neighbour" informing on me and Jean, this was surely one of the many local informers eavesdropping on strangers in Ceuta's cafés.

The captive migrants, singled out by their skin, constituted readily available objects for raids, checks and deportations. The time lag between searching for and apprehending them was minuscule. "Here they don't have to detain anyone," said Luis. The police only needed to go and search for them in the camp. The camp, he clarified, "is not a detention centre, but Ceuta in itself is a detention centre". The port was closed, all exits were blocked. There was no escape. This is why the undercover policeman took more interest in my passport than in Jean's camp card – he knew he could find, detain and deport Jean whenever expedient. The police, preparing "the deportation of one, two or 150"

simply “proceed to detain them”, Marcelo explained. “You call them in and they show up, no problem.” Court summons and police notifications, written in obscure Spanish legalese, were posted on the camp noticeboard, next to leaflets for *sevillanas* dancing workshops and the like. Most residents had nothing to lose in trudging all the way down to the police offices or the courts in the hope that they would be taken to the peninsula. If they failed to show up or were to be deported en masse, the camp could be raided at any moment, a round-up yielding dozens of co-nationals at a time.

The camp itself was a machine of surveillance, albeit a creaking, imperfect one. A private security company – since censored by the authorities for malfeasance – kept order in the camp.⁶ Some guards walked their daily rounds of the living modules with a swagger, their trousers tucked into heavy black boots and batons at the ready. Others joked and chatted with the migrants, and even befriended them on Facebook. One female guard had found love in an African camp resident; a male colleague of hers had improved his English by “listening to their stories for hours at a time”.

In the weeks before the strike climaxed and the policing of the camp was ratcheted up several gears, the status of the guards often seemed suspended. In daytime, they ensconced themselves in the air-conditioned cubicle at the gate or manned the reception desk when the female receptionist was off duty, cracking jokes with staff and residents; guarding the canteen entrance at night, they clapped out a flamenco rhythm with the kitchen staff while the migrants looked on bemused. But suddenly it might all change, for no apparent reason: camp cards checked, doors closed, patrolling routines reinforced. I had constant trouble being allowed past the turnstiles even though I came several times a week; there was always someone new manning the security booth, or they wanted authorisation yet again. “See, it’s a prison,” smiled my Algerian friend as he saw me negotiating the gate.

⁶ See <http://www.elfarodigital.es/ceuta/economia/16148-el-misterio-de-economia-y-hacienda-prohibe-la-contratacion-de-serramar.html>

If the camp was a prison, it was so only in a peculiar, postmodern fashion. As punishment for any misdemeanours, individual migrants could either be shut inside or banished from the camp. Locked in or locked out, it did not matter: the divide between inside and outside was flexible, and the police could reach both those banished into the forest and those stuck inside.

In the living modules, too, the boundary between neglect and surveillance was flexible despite the official insistence on residents' privacy. The guards, police or *madres* were able to enter a room at any time, peek behind the tied-up bedsheets and ask dozing residents for their cards or for a hand in clearing a bed. Despite this "mortification", in Goffman's (1961) sense, of having their intimate spaces invaded, some residents contented themselves with the phoney privacy of the modules. Others countered their availability and deportability by stretching the time-space of surveillance as far as they could. The Algerians spent all day in port, trying to stow away on boats. Sub-Saharan migrants such as Patrick, aware of their instant availability to police, instead followed the strategy within institutions that Goffman (*ibid*:70) calls "playing it cool" – they tried to render themselves invisible by not participating in camp life, or by participating just enough. For this reason, too, Patrick kept his involvement in the strike half-hearted. His strategy was to elbow into the Algerians' space in the port, hoping to stow away or get on the ferry with a lookalike friend's passport.

Melilla's *chabolas* and Ceuta's hills provided a temporary respite and repose for the African camp residents, and especially so for the women with their restaurants. The open gates also allowed temporary escape from the reach of the police. If any foreign commissions came to identify their nationals for deportation, rumours would precede their arrival. The residents could escape up the hill in time, or else just stay silent, feigning ignorance. Migrants kept vigil at night, ready to jump across the fences if police vans approached. "They know everything," said the director with a note of respect.

The most radical way of stretching the time-space of surveillance was to abandon the camp and its comforts altogether. This was the path taken by Ceuta's Indian migrants. They had left the camp for fear of police raids and deportation more than two years ago, and had since constructed their own community of shacks in the hills. Locals, activists and camp workers alike urged me to go and see the *indios del monte* (Indians on the hill), among them the

camp's medical assistant. "They called me the mother of the CETI," she said wistfully as she recalled being invited by them for lunch. "They put a tablecloth on the ground, it was whiter than in my home, and they used disposable plates, all so hygienic," she said. "Ask them to prepare the chickpeas and aubergines for you!"

The *indios* lived far uphill, past the luxurious villas of Ceuta's wealthy Indian merchants, beyond the loud barks of the *perrera* (dog kennel) and onwards into the thick underbrush. Then the first shack appeared, perched atop stilts furnished out of branches, its roof a patchwork of blankets and discarded plastic. In a clearing stood the cooking tent. Inside, five Punjabi men stooped over a big pot, slicing cauliflower, chilli and garlic that they proceeded to deep-fry for their visitors. With me was another visitor, a turbaned Sikh temporarily on shipping work in Ceuta's port. We waited for the food seated on the forest floor; smells of spicy *sabji* wafted among the trees. "I had never thought I would meet my people living in the jungle like this!" the visiting Punjabi *sardar* laughed.

There had been 72 of them to begin with. The *indios* had come to Ceuta through pre-paid smuggling packages from the Punjab at the time of Spain's migratory frenzy in 2006. They had paid more than €20,000 each for their clandestine journeys across the Sahara, only to be dumped in Ceuta by the "mafias", who told them they had now reached Europe. Some had died on the way, in trucks crossing the desert or squeezed into Ceuta-bound dinghies. Unlike most of the sub-Saharan adventurers, they had been wholly at the mercy of their smugglers. Deprived of their documents en route, they were now in hock to the Spanish authorities because of their undocumented status. "Losing your passport is like having your hands cut off," they said. While some had been taken to the peninsula and released without papers, 20 of them still remained on the hillsides.

During their long wait for any news on their fate, they had constructed a society in the hills, much as the African adventurers had once done in Mount Gurugú and Ben Younech outside the enclaves. The Indians worked in teams at Ceuta's Eroski hypermarket. They bought groceries together, cooked together,

lived together in shanties scattered across the forest. In the process, they had earned an enormous amount of goodwill. “The locals support us,” explained Raju, a former university student and their sometime spokesman because of his Spanish skills. He and his friends were different in this respect from the *subsaharianos* or *negros* who, Raju said, were especially disliked after the protest.

Their escape did not, however, put them out of reach of the police. In the enclaves, all strategies of escape were largely illusory. The sub-Saharan were marked by their physical appearance and could be apprehended at any time, as in the case of Jean. So were the *indios*, who the police visited regularly in the hills, exchanging pleasantries in a courteous game of make-believe freedom. Their “escape”, then, was not ultimately about avoiding the time-space of surveillance. Instead it was a conscious tactic based upon yet another contradiction: the fluctuation between indifference and fascination towards the stranded migrants of Ceuta and Melilla.

Taking time: life in the observatory

WEDNESDAY IN MID-AUGUST, 6pm. Lola, one of the three camp *madres* in Ceuta, was fuming. I had bumped into her outside *control*, where a verbal fight had erupted with a female security guard. The guard had called Lola earlier that day, saying she wanted clearance from the director for a list of female residents who should be allowed to leave the camp before the morning curfew, to do some sports. Lola had slammed down the phone. “You can’t hang up the phone on me like that!” the guard now exclaimed, waving the list of residents. In response, Lola let out a stream of angry words and stormed into the office.

Lola’s fight with security and *social* over the rights of the women to leave was nothing unusual. She seemed constantly on the warpath, her steps brisk and her temper flaring. In part, her antagonism towards the guards was down to the “moral division of labour” in the camp (Hughes in *ibid*:107). In this division – again similar to those in total institutions – the social workers were aloof, the guards were alternately coercive and friendly, the director was avuncular and the *madres*, nurses and teachers were sympathetic though temperamental flak-

catchers. Tensions between these groups usually took the form of occasional mutterings, but Lola wanted to show loud and clear that she was on the migrants' side, unlike the guards or social workers. "Many times my eyes fill with tears," she said. "I've been here for six years now. I've often thought I will leave it, but I can't!" Her relatives asked why she stayed, since she always kept talking and worrying about the camp. "It's just that I can't stop thinking about it," she said. "I *live* with them."

Lola was not the only one to be captivated by the captive migrants of Ceuta. Her words were echoed by Paula, the steely elderly woman in charge of the nunnery's assistance programme. "We work *together* with migrants," she emphasised. This was a credo taken on board by the young women and men with dreadlocks and African-style plaits who came and went in the nuns' cloisters, djembes in hand and bells round their bare ankles. These volunteers came to Ceuta to spend a couple of weeks in solidarity with migrants, playing beach ball, organising outings and celebrating Christmas or Easter. Then they left, taking pictures and memories, while the migrants stayed behind.

The fascination with the fate of the migrants was premised on their immobility. Their empty time in the enclaves was there for the taking. The illegal immigrants, stigmatised by their mobility, ironically stayed immobile while their visitors came and went, taking their time and stories away with them. And none did so more successfully than the journalists.

The camp was a magnet for the media. When access was granted it was a dream come true: here journalists and researchers had the possibility to come and interview illegal immigrants fresh off their rafts, almost in their natural habitat. Documentary-makers, hacks, feature writers, authors, research students and fact-finding delegations all made the pilgrimage to the heights of the camp, paying their respects at the gates before being let in and put in front of their research object, the illegal immigrant. Cameramen denied access resorted to filming the camp residents through the tall perimeter fence. Journalists came every other day, said Mamá. In order to shield the privacy of residents, cameras were

allowed only upstairs. There the migrants would stand and mouth their “half-truths” for documentaries, newsreels and research projects, presenting themselves as the victims the media wanted to see. Mamá said this in an affectionate way, taking the residents’ part. Often they spoke too openly, she said. They should be careful. What they said might be used against them. People at home or in Spain might find out where they were, against their wishes. But after all, this was what tempted anthropologists, authors and hacks alike to study clandestine migration – its hidden-ness, its ripeness for revelation. And the camp provided just enough of a glimpse of the veiled world of today’s global outcasts.

The authorities in Ceuta and Melilla were ambivalent about the media. On the one hand, journalists spread uplifting news about the nice food and good work; on the other hand, they loved the story of a migrant invasion. The result was yet another make-believe game – this time of media management. In the Melilla camp, where the growing number of arrivals in the summer of 2010 had led to canteen and workshop halls filling up with temporary litters, access was denied to external visitors, as usual for privacy reasons. “The ministry doesn’t want to get the tents out,” one camp lawyer giggled, because then the media would report on a “failure of the [government’s] migration policy”. And if there was one thing that could not be jeopardised, it was this: the *mediatisation* of Spain’s successful response to clandestine migration.

The game of make-believe was usually lost on the journalists, who faithfully regurgitated the stage-managed efforts of officials and migrants alike. Somalis appeared in videos and newspaper features, their stories of suffering taken at face value. “In Ceuta the government tries to help you,” one such Somali told a journalist. “In Somalia everything’s corrupt and since there were no possibilities there [to work] I decided to leave and look for a better future.”⁷ One reporter filming in Ceuta recognised that everything that migrants said to camera might not be true, but neither were journalistic techniques in staging, for example, migrant attempts to escape Ceuta via the port. Sympathy with migrants’ plight and awareness of the hatred they faced from xenophobes in Europe also played a role in downplaying doubts. But above all, the media ignored the pauses in performance because they usually had to slot the migrant story into either one

⁷ See <http://www.elfarodigital.es/ceuta/sociedad/15925-camiones-rumbo-al-sueno-europeo.html>

of empathy and victimhood or rejection and menace. Doubts about nationalities and brief quivers across lips made the picture too complex, too deep and disturbing.

Along, too, came the academics. Ceuta and Melilla presented enviable research laboratories: the clandestine migrant finally pinned down, immobilised, bored and ready to talk in a setting that presented few difficulties, give or take some undercover police checks. Here, colonial-era academic history threatens to repeat itself. Anthropology’s “savage slot” (Trouillot 2003) depends not only on what Fabian (1983) calls a “denial of coevalness”, but also on the relative immobility of the object under study. US anthropologists had their Native American reserves; their European colleagues had colonised and corralled natives. If the clandestine migrant is the new savage at Europe’s margins (Andersson 2010; Silverstein 2005), he can only be satisfactorily studied, observed and written about when immobile, when his time can be freely taken and used, much as Radcliffe-Brown was able to carry out his kinship studies on Aborigines thanks to their being forcibly kept in camps on an island off the Australian coast (Lindqvist 2008). The “savage slot” might no longer be the exclusive reserve of anthropology, as shown by the steady stream of political scientists, geographers, law students and others in Ceuta and elsewhere along migrant routes. Yet regardless of the disciplinary outlook, all research efforts – not least my own – depended upon the migrants’ captive condition. Such observation-in-captivity nevertheless held a possibility for the stranded migrants, and gave a clue to why some of them had staged an escape into Ceuta’s hills.

The full glare of the spotlight of Ceuta shone upon the most reluctant of latter-day “savages”, the Facebook-connected *indios* ensconced in their hillside shacks. The nunnery’s hippies camped with them in the forest, and film-makers and reporters made their way uphill to document their tragic journeys. The journalists behind one award-winning documentary, called *Los Ulises*, had even gone to their homes in the Punjab, filming their families and bringing news back and forth. Raju and his friends welcomed these contingents of fact-seekers and

sympathisers to their weekly lunches, speaking openly about their ordeals. They willingly let journalists take their time, since they had nothing to lose. Thanks to their escape up the hill, the *indios* had made themselves the protagonists of a transnational media spectacle with a wide, sympathetic audience of nuns and hippies, camp workers and police, journalists and academics, foreigners and locals. This spectacle suffused their time in the enclaves with the promise of something bigger, of a future deliverance.

The spicy cauliflower and puffed *puri* bread was finished, the plates cleared away from the forest floor. After a plastic glass of milky *chai*, we sat down in front of their temple, white kerchiefs covering our heads. The Sikh *gurudwara* was furnished out of branches, carton, pieces of fabric and plastic sheets. Garlands and bells hung from the ceiling inside; underneath, images of one of the Sikh *gurus* had been placed on a small table. In front of it, one of them read from the holy *Guru Granth Sahib*. Occasionally he launched into chanting, and those seated next to me joined in. The sunlight shone mottled through the filigree above us. In the “jungle” of Ceuta, in front of this shrine made up of the junk of postmodernity at the fringe of Europe, a stillness descended, offering a glimpse of something beyond the Trap. We stood, clasping our hands in a *namaskar* greeting, and then holy *prasad* was served: sticky balls of godly food made of breadcrumbs, coffee and sugar.

Ceuta’s Indians were the good immigrants *par excellence*. This was in no small part down to the prominence of the enclave’s Indian merchants, for whom some of the *indios del monte* even worked, undocumented. However, the differing racial schemas applied to *negros*, *moros* and *asiáticos* were sharpened by the latter’s escape from the camp. Visiting reporters, volunteers and researchers had filmed, danced and slept in the hills, sharing the Indians’ food, pain and moments of worship. In Melilla, a contingent of Bangladeshis had similarly won the hearts of visitors and locals, only to be rounded up and sent to detention centres in 2010 after five years in the enclave. The outrage among *melillenses* that followed was, however, selective. The captives in the enclaves alternated between being good and bad, visible and invisible, objects of fascination or indifference. The fluctuation between invisibility and hypervisibility that Coutin (2005) has identified in the clandestine migrant experience was in Ceuta and Melilla portioned out to different categories of

migrants. If the *indios* were hypervisible in their “hidden” hillside shacks, so were the dangerous *negros* in the strike. The majority of illegal immigrants, by contrast, remained invisible and neglected. Patrick was among them, as were the Nigerians in the *chabolas* of Melilla; even more so were the sub-Saharan women.

On Mamá’s afternoon rounds of the dorms in August, a West African woman confronted her. “When will the EU delegation come?” she asked. “They couldn’t enter because of your Cameroonian friends,” Mamá said, referring to the confrontation at the gate that had sent the researchers speeding away downhill. “But who will listen to us then?” the woman asked. “There are many of us here who don’t agree with the strike, what will happen to us?” Mamá blamed the Cameroonian, and another woman propped up on the windowsill shouted back: “Cameroonians! I’m Cameroonian! It’s not about Cameroonians, it’s because we have stayed here for so long, one and a half years, is that normal?” While they wanted to voice concerns over their captivity in Ceuta, the delegation had rather been planning to interview them about abuse suffered en route. As with refugee populations elsewhere, the visitors sought stories of the women’s traumatic *pasts*, ignoring their main concern over an anxious present and indeterminate future.⁸ In either case, their worries would remain unheard: the delegation had left the enclave, and was not coming back.

Waiting for deliverance: the time beyond

The enclaves’ time-space regime stretched from the minuscule pauses in migrants’ speech through the schedules, protocol slips and microphone calls of the camp system and on to the abstract economy of time used by the police. In the complex geography of time produced by this regime, the illegal immigrants appeared as people without a past and future, stuck in an endless, anxious present. If the police stole time collectively from migrants, the emptied time slots that remained could then be filled with the rituals of the camp or dedicated to the information-gathering efforts of the authorities, researchers and the media. These make-believe games, in turn, created their own rhythms – and their own reality.

⁸ For a discussion of this focus on past traumas in the official construction of refugeeness, see Mann (2010:235-242)

Here appeared the good and bad migrants, visible and invisible, in hock to the contradictory time-space regime and their own impossible dreams.

This regime has echoes with temporalities elsewhere in the contemporary world. Guyer (2007), in an influential article, suggests a shift in public notions of temporality towards a long-term time horizon and the “evacuation of the near-present” in US society. For the stranded migrants in Spain’s enclaves, their immediate future had rather been vacated *for* them while their past had been temporarily disowned. Like for Guyer’s evangelical informants, the far-ahead future of deliverance instead became all the more real; their fate was down to the “grace of God” they constantly invoked.

While the strike still raged in central Ceuta, I got on the bus heading towards the camp. At the back sat five migrants, all Anglophone sub-Saharan in camp parlance. None of them participated in the strike. I asked how they were managing, and their voices rose in raucous reply as the bus wound its way along the shore towards the camp and the border hamlet of Benzú. One of the migrants, a guy with natty dreadlocks who I knew from my journeys on foot to the camp, stood and spoke while pacing up and down the aisle. A white plastic crucifix dangled around his neck; the topic turned to God and the Bible. “There’s only one God, *un Dios, cristiano musulman!*” he shouted with joy. Headscarfed female passengers turned their heads, bemused. “Will a saviour come?” his friends wondered out loud. “How can we leave the camp?” “Ask and it shall be given,” one of them intoned, “seek and you shall find!” Did Moses go from Egypt to Israel or the other way round? they asked each other. “In the Bible it says the waters parted for him,” one of them shouted to cries of joy. “It could be like that for us here, the waters parting, opening a road to Europe!” Through the windows, Gibraltar Rock could just be made out in the distance.

In addition to the time of deliverance, godly time, yet another frame has to be added to time-as-capital, paused time, camp rhythms, surveillance time and visitors’ time: the electoral cycle. After the conservative Partido Popular won Spain’s general elections in November 2011, it quickly removed “immigration” from the name of the Labour Ministry in charge of the camps. In 2012, job cuts for camp workers were announced, with the camp’s intricate ecology – its rhythms, its paperwork, its guessing games – hanging in the balance.

The camps, as workers and locals noted, nevertheless remained a necessity for political left and right alike.⁹ This usefulness stemmed from a final act of make-believe: they were, contrary to the Foucauldian view suggested at the beginning of this chapter, barely *masquerading* as centres of discipline. Like the migration policies underpinning their existence, they were contradictory creations made on the hoof. Cheap and outsourced, they helped produce the utter indifference of officialdom towards their residents, and hid the calculated use of confinement underneath a veneer of half-hearted regulations and schedules. Again, however, their ad hoc character did little to mitigate their very concrete effects. Like the “total institutions” they only imperfectly resembled, they helped create an arbitrary landscape of time whose spaces of punishment and privilege, visibility and invisibility heralded an absurd disconnect in migrants’ experiences, only imperfectly mediated by their invocations of God.

In this arbitrary landscape of time and the phoney battle staged upon it, there were no clear “winners”. The migrants – invisible and visible, good and bad, God-fearing and not – eventually made it out of there, despite their months or years lost to waiting. Amadou and the other “good immigrants” were sent on to reception centres on the mainland after the strike. The *indios* returned to the camp after the director had promised to help them. They were eventually sent to CIEs and set free. As their epic quest for survival ended, the audience dissipated; Raju was unhappy, finding racism stronger on the mainland than in Ceuta. In 2011, the Indians’ abandoned hillside shacks were taken over by African migrants arriving in unprecedented numbers.

The Nigerians, not least the women, were in a worse position. In early 2011, a shack in Melilla burned down, killing three and triggering protests akin to those of Ceuta in 2010. Thankfully, my Nigerian friends were unharmed. They were still there, waiting for divine or state intervention to take them to Europe. A year later the *chabolas* were destroyed by the police. The authorities cited local complaints, the fire hazard and the fact that all migrants had a bed assured for them in the camp as reasons for the long-awaited intervention.¹⁰

⁹ See, for example, a diatribe by the camp doctor at <http://www.elpueblodeceuta.es/201201/20120115/201201158203.htm>

¹⁰ See <http://www.europapress.es/ceuta-y-melilla/noticia-desalojan-melilla-campamento-medio-centenar-chabolas-inmigrantes-levantado-hace-ocho-anos-20120529161926.html>

Patrick had used his invisibility to the full, sneaking into a ferry and making it to a friend's house in Seville. "I told you I would make it," he said. As with *el general* and many others, the controls in port proved less stringent at times than the full surveillance the enclaves promised. Soon Patrick left Andalusia for Bilbao, the main destination for Ceuta's migrants in 2010. "You know, Seville is Andalusia, it's close to Africa," he explained. "Life is difficult there, so I decided to climb."

While Patrick climbed, I descended, heading for Bamako. The Malian capital, through which most of the adventurers in Ceuta and Melilla had once travelled, has become a crucial site for the illegality industry in recent years: it is, again, a crossroads where its workers clash and mingle with the stranded migrants of the clandestine circuit.

7

Marchers without borders

Gogui, western Mali, January 2011. The activists come marching towards the camera, down an empty Sahelian road, holding their banner for the freedom of movement as a collective shield against the invisible enemy ahead. The enemy is Frontex, and Frontex shall fall, they chant: “*À bas, à bas, à bas le Frontex! À bas, à bas, à bas le Frontex!*” Fists are raised, calls for *solidarité* ring out, the clacks and thuds of djembe drums pierce the dull desert air. Then the chanting again, European and African voices in unison, waving “global passports” and anti-Frontex banners: “no borders, no nation, stop deportation!” But no one hears their chants, except for the camera-wielding participants in the march, a few villagers and a border policeman or two. The road towards the nearby Mauritanian border lies empty ahead, lined with hardy shrubs and dust-dry stretches of earth. No signs of Frontex, no deportees. What on earth are these transnational activists doing here, in a border hamlet on the potholed road between Nioro du Sahel in western Mali and Ayoun-el Atrous in Mauritania?

“The border of the European Union has arrived in Gogui,” explained one of the marchers, Aboubacar, in his offices in the Malian capital. His brow frowned, his small frame tensed up and his voice rose in indignation each time he denounced the “externalisation” of policing to the European visitors frequenting the airy offices of his organisation, the Association Malienne d’Expulsés (AME, Malian association of expelled migrants). Standing at the whiteboard, he drew maps of Mali’s border areas, an X marking the spot of Nioro and arrows showing the lines of expulsion from Mauritania. Because of these expulsions, AME and its European partners had decided to make Gogui their first site of protest against Europe’s border regime in the fraught roadshow that is the subject of this chapter: the “Citizens’ Caravan for Freedom of Movement and Equitable Development”

from Bamako to Dakar and the World Social Forum in February 2011. Aboubacar's AME was the key Malian partner in this unprecedented collaboration, grandly named Afrique-Europe Interact, between European activists and Malian associations around the EU border regime and its “war” on the irregular migrant.

Transnational activists are increasingly converging on the Euro-African border, confronting security forces and contesting state and media narratives of migration. Among these are grassroots “noborder” camps springing up across Europe, anarchist mobilisations and direct action under the “No One is Illegal” and “Frontexplode” banners.¹ Border theorists have in recent years opened their eyes to such making and unmaking of borders by citizens, with Chris Rumford (2008:2) applying the term borderwork to ordinary people's acts of “envisioning, constructing, maintaining and erasing borders” (see also Donnan and Wilson 1999). The borderwork of Aboubacar and his transnational colleagues would prove to be fraught with contradictions, however. How to enrol disparate activists, migrants and NGOs in the common task of protesting against the border regime? And how to locate this diffuse regime, stretching as it does from the Atlantic to the Sahara, from Canaries control rooms to scattered radar systems? Here the empty Malian border road was but a foretaste of the quandaries to come en route to Dakar. In Gogui, the only visible tokens of this regime were a few signs wedged into the dry earth. One sign – “STOP IRREGULAR MIGRATION, A DANGER FOR THE POPULATION” – was adorned with the EU flag and the logo of Bamako's EU-funded migration management centre, CIGEM. Another announced Gogui's defunct Red Cross mission of humanitarian assistance to deportees, modelled on that of Rosso-Senegal and financed by a Spanish regional government. Both signs were soon covered in anti-Frontex stickers and graffiti.² The activists would repeatedly try to locate and mark the border in this fashion in Bamako, en route through the borderlands and in their final march in Dakar against Frontex.

¹ See <http://noborders.org.uk> and <http://www.noborder.org> on “no border”, <http://www5.kmii-koeln.de/?language=en> on No One is Illegal and <http://frontexplode.eu/> on Frontexplode

² I stayed in Bamako during the Gogui march; this section is based on recollections of participants and audiovisual material. See http://www.afrique-europe-interact.net/index.php?article_id=384&clang=1

The activists did not only search for and conjure the EU's borders, but also enlisted the stranded adventurers of Bamako in this enterprise. The figure of the irregular migrant, obsessed over by western states, has also become a source of inspiration for radical intellectuals, journalists and activists in recent years. In their accounts and campaigns, the migrant often appears as a heroic figure: a symbol of "cosmopolitan citizenship", a rebellious burner of borders or a repository of the dream of free worldwide movement.³ The irregular migrant and the border here become the twin rallying points for a cosmopolitan or anarchist project, linked by the latter's unjust violence upon the former.

In the caravan, this relation between activists, borders and migrants would be put under increasing strain. In Gogui on the Mauritanian border and during the journey to Dakar, the deportees of Bamako were to become a unifier for the activists bereft of a border at which to protest. To Aboubacar and AME, they were living proof of a violent and inhumane border regime; to the European marchers descending on Bamako, they were its victims. As the caravan rolled towards Dakar, the deportees themselves increasingly participated in their own making as migrants, with quite different results to their repatriated brethren in the Senegalese capital. As will be seen, the caravan protests highlighted the fundamental *absence* – of location, of visibility, of responsibility – at the heart of the violent experience of clandestine migration, and the efforts of everyone in the illegality industry to fill it.

To understand the dynamics between marchers, victims and their borders, we first have to consider the migratory geography of Bamako, where the deportees found themselves stranded. Mali's capital is now the first and last safe place en route towards the desert; it is also an increasingly strategic point for the policing of migration in the Euro-African borderlands.

Deported, globalised, trafficked: producing migrant victims

It all begins at Sogoniko *gare*. This vast, smog-filled bus station in southern Bamako with its dozens of bus companies, hawkers and hustlers and revving

³ The aim here is not to simplify the sophisticated arguments put forward for the subversive potential of irregularity, however. See Papadopoulos et al (2008) and Kalyvas (2010), who uses the term "cosmopolitan citizenship", for intriguing explorations of this theme

engines is a key transport hub for West African travellers setting out on their adventure towards the north. It is also the end point for those who have already crossed the desert and failed: the *refoulés* detained in Algeria or Mauritania and dumped at the Malian border sites of Tin Zaouaten deep in the Sahara and Gogui in western Mali respectively. An industry has grown around the stranded adventurers of Sogoniko – a world of aid workers, policemen, information-seekers and activists replicating the structures already put in place in Ceuta, Melilla, Morocco, Dakar and elsewhere in the borderlands. CIGEM, the migration management centre founded on the back of the irregular migration “crisis” in 2008 with €10m in EU funding, had by 2010 developed working relations with about 80 migration-related associations, which seemed to multiply by the day now that funding was available. So did policing initiatives, growing along with Bamako’s role as crossroads on the clandestine circuit.

Sogoniko seems far away from Ceuta and Melilla, but the tragedies at the fences in 2005 lay at the heart of Bamako’s strategic role in the illegality industry. Despite the Malian government’s refusal to sign repatriation agreements, the country has long been a dumping ground for those caught in raids under France’s increasingly strict migration regime. Such deportations, along with expulsions of Malians from Angola, had led to the creation of Aboubacar’s AME in 1996. The symbolic start to the latest expansion of Mali’s illegality industry, however, came with the expulsion of adventurers following the *attaques* at the Spanish fences. Here was a global, collective victim of Europe’s border regime: the deportee.

As deportees arrived at Bamako’s airport or made their way back through the desert where the Moroccan soldiers had left them, one woman rose to action. This woman was Aminata Traoré, alter-globalisation politician and activist extraordinaire, who in early 2006 hosted the Malian version of that year’s multi-sited World Social Forum. On the anniversary of the tragedy, Aminata – a former Malian minister of culture and tourism – organised the first *Journées Commémoratives* for Ceuta and Melilla, where deportees mingled with journalists and activists flown in from Europe. She also set about mobilising the returnees, as she was to call those forcibly deported. The result was the association Retour-Travail-Dignité (return-work-dignity), which sought to reconnect returnees with their African heritage through agriculture, handicrafts

and political action. Under her patronage, Ceuta and Melilla returnees tilled the soil together in far-flung rural areas, with some receiving Spanish development funds to do so. Though the original RTD proved shortlived, with accusations flying over who-gained-what, Aminata's charisma contributed to a larger ferment centred on the figure of the irregular migrant. She was now one of the figureheads of the official Bamako-Dakar caravan, despite growing tensions with the more hardline activists in AME.

In Aminata's view, the migrants made visible the malaise of Africa under neoliberalism. "When you ask those returned from Ceuta and Melilla why they left, their replies speak volumes about the real state of the continent," she said in 2008.⁴ Or as a banner at Aminata's December 2010 conference on migration expressed it: "THROUGH MIGRANTS, THE WHOLE OF AFRICA IS HUMILIATED." To her, they were victims of the injustices of neoliberal globalisation and should be reincorporated into a proud Africa embracing its traditions.

In a similar vein, the migrants were seen as victims by the caravan activists about to descend on Bamako. Whereas Aminata focused her critique on neoliberalism, the Europeans and AME homed in on Frontex and the border regime, whose violent workings they would seek to make visible in Gogui and en route to Dakar. The core of the activists hailed from German anti-racist and anti-deportation groups; some were neophytes, others grizzled veterans on the anti-Frontex circuit. It was a motley crowd, united in its purpose of showing solidarity with African associations and the victims of Europe's externalised borders.

The victimhood of the returnees had a global, if recent, pedigree. In their study of the "politics of trauma", Fassin and Rechtman (2009) have identified "a new configuration of victimhood" in the West. Whereas victims of war or disaster were once eyed with suspicion, they have in recent decades come to symbolise "the very embodiment of our common humanity" (*ibid*:23). And this new potency of victimhood, they say, stems largely from the legitimating power of trauma. It is this trauma – the bodily, mental or collective scar – that proves one's victim status and points a finger at the perpetrator.

⁴ See <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/5/63/41682765.pdf>

The clandestine migration circuit disproves what Fassin and Rechtman call the “cruel gap” (ibid:183), borne of racial assumptions, that long left black Africa out of humanitarian trauma interventions. Indeed, migrants’ victimisation was, besides the activist denunciations, also the focus of aid interventions in the borderlands, with projects ranging from psychological assistance in the Red Cross Rosso mission to the AME’s trauma counselling service for deportees.

Perhaps surprisingly, the irregular migrant was not only seen as a victim by Aminata, the aid workers and the activists, but by Spanish police as well. “We don’t consider the migrant as a criminal, therefore he is a victim of the human trafficking networks,” Spain’s police attaché in Bamako said. While this non sequitur imputed the existence of criminal traffickers from that of victims, it also allowed for a slippage between the categories of migrant and criminal, as would be evident among the stranded migrants of southern Bamako.

Not far from Sogoniko *gare*, up a mud lane from the Beijing IV Hotel, lay the compound of the association Aracem, a rare lifeline for migrants in the city. On the corner outside, a group of young men milled about, sharing cigarettes, mobiles and the occasional joke. These were the *refoulés* sent back by Algeria through the desert. They were the quintessential victims of migration, whether for political back-to-the-soil activists such as Aminata or freedom-of-movement voices such as Aboubacar. In the impending caravan, this was a role some of them would play to the full.

Aracem, the French acronym for “Association of Central African Deportees in Mali”, was set up by Cameroonians veterans from Ceuta and Melilla after Aminata’s commemoration in 2006, though its founders had since broken with their former patron. The association was at the end of a relay race of transport and care after deportation. From Tin Zaouaten on the desert border with Algeria, the ICRC trucked a minority of deportees to the nearest towns of Kidal and Gao. After three days in Gao’s *Maison des Migrants* (House of Migrants), funded by Caritas and a French NGO, the *refoulés* were sent out of the desert zone, towards Niger or Bamako. In 2010, Aracem received about 110 deportees a

month in two batches. After three days at Aracem, many languished in Bamako for months or even years, waiting for money to return home or head back north. In January 2011, Aracem, together with AME, was getting ready to host and accommodate the European caravan contingent that would soon descend on Bamako.

The victim role of deportees attributed by activists, NGOs and Spanish police alike was based on genuine victimisation in the Algerian desert. In Aracem's patio, Alphonse from Cameroon sauntered about dressed in thick socks and plastic sandals, his foot inflamed after beatings endured in Algerian detention. "I had a good passport and a good visa," he said as we sat down to talk. "The Algerians, even if you have papers in orders, they round you up." Sent back from Alger on a well-trodden deportation route south, he was eventually dumped in Tin Zaouaten. He had seen mothers with children in detention and had, like other deportees, been forced to sign papers in Arabic before deportation. The officers refused his demands for a French translation, and "if you don't sign, you get a beating." He spent weeks in cells while the police waited to fill their "freight trucks", as Alphonse called them: "they put you inside like cattle". All he was given to eat was a piece of bread and powdered milk at noon. The police took his Algerian money and phone, leaving him with the SIM card – the same procedure reported by those expelled into the Moroccan-Algerian border area, though this treatment was not common to all deportees in Bamako. "I don't have the right to have Algerian currency, the Africans come here bringing diseases, that's what they told me," he said, no trace of anger in his voice. "I don't know why they do this."

Aracem's compound was not just for the beaten, dumped and robbed. Here was Didier, a Cameroonian "guide" who had just come down from Morocco, promoting his smuggling services and bragging about his exploits up north. Here too was his countryman Stéphane the intellectual, with a half-finished degree and ideas of joining his sister in Canada; Pierre, the *ancien* caught up in the 2005 Ceuta and Melilla expulsions and since then chief of the now derelict *ghetto* for transiting adventurers in Bamako; and Eric, a young Congolese with three years on the road, his loud, grumpy voice adding a touch of comedy to the gathering. These street corner guys were what have in recent years become known as stranded migrants – a new policy category to worry about for

police, aid workers and experts. Some were stranded because they had lost everything during deportation; others because they lacked funds to continue their journey, often after having been frisked off their money by border guards targeting *clandestins*. They all found themselves fighting for their day-to-day survival. And they all coveted one key possession: a Malian passport.

These *pièces* (documents), which enabled adventurers to travel into Algeria visa-free thanks to a bilateral friendship agreement, were one of the main reasons why the deportees stayed on in Bamako. They were also a prime catalyst for the slippage between migrant-as-victim and migrant-as-criminal hinted at by the Spanish police attaché. This slippage was spelt out in big, bold letters on the façade of Mali's border police in central Bamako:

THE MALIAN PASSPORT IS A NATIONAL DOCUMENT. IT SHOULD ONLY BE DELIVERED TO NATIONALS. ANY AUTHOR OR ACCOMPLICE IN THE DELIVERY OF A MALIAN PASSPORT TO A FOREIGNER WILL BE SEVERELY PUNISHED

The passport trade was a main target for policing cooperation, with Canada and Spain helping Mali set up a national identity database to combat it. Malian officers, aware of the thriving trade and its ramifications, were keener to stress the criminal than the victimhood discourse. “We can’t reject them,” said the *gendarme* colonel in charge of irregular migration, but went on to link the “threat” of stranded migrants to their victimhood – and the need for more resources. “We need to have a transit centre in Kidal or Gao and another in Bamako, it’s what we told [the Spaniards]. If not, once they arrive here they have nothing, they’ll steal, rob, even kill, or they can be recruited by AQIM [Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb]. It’s a big problem.”

The repercussions of this criminalisation were felt on the Aracem street corner, where most adventurers had either paid someone for a passport or helped fix one. Cyrille, a Cameroonian veteran of the 2005 events now responsible for the welcoming of deportees, despaired at the police raids without warrant during the autumn. “They searched through everything!” he said, his soft voice momentarily rising. They threw documents on the floor, accusing Aracem of forging Malian passports. “That day, I really thought I would leave,” he said, in

anger over their unrecognised humanitarian work for deportees. “You know, we’ve even assisted Malians here.”

From the Aracem street corner, Bamako looked grim, poor and dusty. Eric and his friends complained of the fine dust and thick fumes cloaking the city, the heat and the food, the police and *gendarme* harassment. We looked out over the late-afternoon street as a golden haze descended over the city, as it always did at sundown. The mud road was strewn with flattened garbage coloured ochre by the dust: water bottles, old flip-flops, plastic sachets. Children played at the shuttered shopfronts. Three Malian girls walked past, swinging their hips lazily. “*Bamako, c'est la merde*” (Bamako is crap), exclaimed one of the stranded Cameroonian. The misery among the deportees was palpable as the days dragged on, much as they did for the captives of Ceuta and Melilla. But the street corner guys knew what they were in for and took pride in their survival. They did not see themselves as victims or villains.

At the other end of Bamako in Djelibougou, AME had gathered representatives from the numerous Malian associations and NGOs that were meant to join the caravan. The European activists, who had raised money to cover the Malians’ participation, were about to arrive and seats needed to be allocated in the half-dozen buses bound for Dakar.⁵ Associations that had not participated in caravan preparations had suddenly showed up, and Aboubacar was busy at the whiteboard in the packed hall, whittling the number of Malian participants down to 230. Aracem voluntarily offered a cut, while newcomers clamoured and pleaded to keep their allocations. Mouvement des Sans Voix, a Malian activist group, squealed when Aboubacar crossed out 10 of their allotted 40 places. “You’re going to leave the victims behind!” As in the funding game, so in the battle for caravan seats – the more victims, the better.⁶

On the Aracem street corner, rumours were swirling about the impending caravan. “We’ll have visitors tomorrow,” confided Stéphane. “I think it’s people

⁵ The caravan was funded by individual fundraising efforts and support from charitable foundations and NGOs (AEI 2011:119)

⁶ MSV focuses on evictions, and so their “victims” were not necessarily migrants

from the United Nations.” Another adventurer had heard the Europeans would offer work on international construction sites in Bamako. They would get something else altogether, however – a motley crowd of German radicals assigned to sleep in Aracem’s compound.

We want the victims! Mobilising against the border

The international delegation was delayed. The “interactive space” set up by AME on a field in Djelibougou – white tarps shielding clusters of metal chairs – was empty. The Europeans had found themselves on a connecting flight in Paris with that all-too-common cargo: a migrant about to be deported. They had protested and been given the full riot police treatment and taken off the flight. Already tired and some bruised by police, dressed in caravan T-shirts with mosquito spray at the ready, they finally descended on the Djelibougou field for several days of caravan preparations. Most of the activists spoke no French and certainly no Bambara; many had never visited Africa before. One of them confided he “would never come here unless it was for the caravan”: the poverty on display in the mud-cracked lanes of Djelibougou shocked him and his friends.

The caravan was but the latest and most striking example of the gradual growth of activism along the Euro-African border after the Ceuta and Melilla tragedies. In November 2005, the transnational network Migreurop set up operations in Paris, eventually incorporating 43 associations including AME and Aracem. Migreurop’s international mailing list, to which German and Malian *caravaniers* contributed, linked up activists who posted news on boat tragedies and Europe’s externalisation of borders. Activists also increasingly staged “counter-summits” in opposition to EU-Africa summits on migration. In Rabat in 2006, a Euro-African manifesto was launched denouncing “the war that is increasingly being waged along the Mediterranean and Atlantic coastlines” and “the division of humanity between some who may freely move about the planet and some who may not”.⁷ More events followed during further summits as well as outside Frontex headquarters, in Oujda and on Greek islands (Gunsser 2008). One of the foundations for the caravan was the “call of Bamako for respect and

⁷ See <http://www.manifeste-euroafricain.org/IMG/pdf/manifesto-english.pdf>

dignity for all migrants” of 2006, which decried the “murderous policies” behind the Ceuta and Melilla tragedies while urging the creation of an international migrants’ rights network.⁸ By the time of the caravan, the German and Malian organisers knew each other from previous counter-summits and had developed a sophisticated understanding of the need for transnational opposition to the EU border regime as well as of the hard work involved in consolidating disparate African and European networks. But they had perhaps not anticipated the difficulties that awaited them in Bamako.

The new arrivals gathered in the shade under the canopies and took turns at the microphone to deplore the police on the flight and discuss the logistics of the caravan and the marches ahead. What about accommodation? A film projector was needed! More than beds for the night and equipment, however, they needed what scholars of activism call a “master frame” that would help them define the issues, actors and events to mobilise around. This frame would then serve to underpin shared meanings and ideas (della Porta 2006:67). The activists had already started to forge such a convergence of ideas, as shown on a banner strung between two trucks next to the tents: “externalisation endangers the freedom to circulate in the African space”. This was what Snow and Benford (1998) label the diagnostic dimension to the frame – spelling out the problem the caravan was addressing. The prognostic element was reflected in the caravan motto, “for the freedom of movement and equitable development”, which tried to suture the development-oriented goals of especially the Malian partner associations with the migration and anti-Frontex focus of the Europeans and AME. Finally there was the motivational dimension of the frame. To boost morale and mobilise activists, the Europeans had prepared a caravan song, which was sung in a jumble of voices each day of the assembly meetings:

⁸ For the history of AEI, see http://www.afrique-europe-interact.net/index.php?article_id=38&clang=1

<i>J'aime bien la caravane</i>	<i>I like the caravan</i>
<i>J'aime bien le mouvement</i>	<i>I like the movement</i>
<i>J'aime bien la liberté</i>	<i>I like freedom</i>
<i>J'aime bien la resistance</i>	<i>I like resistance</i>
<i>Et ce que j'aime mieux</i>	<i>And what I like the most</i>
<i>c'est la solidarité</i>	<i>is solidarity</i>
<i>Solidari-solidari-solidarité-é-é</i>	<i>Solidari-solidari-solidarity</i>
<i>Solidari-solidari-solidarité-é-é</i>	<i>Solidari-solidari-solidarity</i>
<i>Nous nous battons pour un monde sans</i>	<i>We are fighting for a world without</i>
<i>frontières</i>	<i>borders</i>

Solidarity was a powerful motif for the Europeans, who distributed their song's sparse lyrics on slips of paper to participants under the canopy. So were its accompanying terms, the somewhat uneasy bedfellows freedom and resistance. But as is often the case in emerging social movements, these motifs uneasily disguised the disparities among those they yoked together (James 2007:29). Solidarity – “a signifier of the impossible fullness of society if ever there was one” (Žižek 1999:178) – both meant supporting African activists in their various struggles and solidarity with the deportees. These aims, and the power relations each implied, overlapped awkwardly on the Djelibougou field. “I'd like to speak to the *expulsés*, that's why we have come!” said one of the visitors during the endless canopy meetings. “When is it that we get to see them?” The AME chairman assured the visitors that “here we are all *expulsés*”, including him (though not Aboubacar). This was true, but not quite what the Germans had in mind: what they wanted were the victims of Europe's externalisation policies. They wanted the street corner guys of Sogoniko.

If the activists saw the deportees as victims of Europe's externalisation policies and local police often saw them as potential criminals, these categories proved increasingly irrelevant in the gritty environs of Sogoniko. Here was the dreariness of Aracem's street corner society, but also hotels and “hustling

places” frequented by sharp dressers of uncertain occupation. Mistrust marred the adventurers’ world, sometimes running along national lines. The Cameroonian were particularly singled out, amid talk of spectacular money-making frauds of the kind popularised by the country’s notorious conmen (*feymen*; Malaquais 2001). “The Cameroonian are crooks,” said a Guinean friend of Eric’s. Whereas he had worked in construction earning 700 CFA a day, the Cameroonian just sat around, asked for “loans” and created trouble.

Didier was one the adventurers whose varied roles on the migration circuit straddled the victim-villain dichotomy. He had jumped on the deportation wagon voluntarily, getting himself detained in Algeria in order to travel for free down through the desert. While insisting that he had lived rough for years in Morocco, he also kept up a running sales pitch to the street corner gathering on how many Cameroonian he had helped into Spain as a guide between the Algerian border and Melilla. His tall tales were not just for adventurers’ ears, however: he had guided journalists through the no-man’s-land between Oujda and Algeria for a fee, and had received a juicy journalistic offer of filming along the desert routes from Bamako. Now he wanted to work, of all things, on preventing illegal migration, perhaps with an international NGO.

These paradoxical pursuits made sense in the surreal world of the clandestine circuit. As routes into Europe have closed up, stranded adventurers have sought other means of fending for themselves (*se débrouiller*). While some tinkered with petty fraud and others did menial jobs, the most astute adventurers monetised their migratory project itself. Theirs was a warped, reflexive inversion of the standard aim of international migration: instead of migrating to *find* work, their migration had itself become a job. At the top of the pecking order among such “professional migrants” were the leaders of migrants’ associations in Morocco. European and Moroccan NGOs active in the country – themselves lambasted as a “humanitarian mafia” by academics and migrants, much like their counterparts in Senegal – called upon these leaders to provide testimony (*témoignage*) in donor’s conferences, or else as project brokers; their countrymen approached them for advice and assorted services; journalists hungered for their stories and expertise. Some published books on their ordeal, or donned titles such as “consultant on sub-Saharan migration”. Didier was simply trying to tap into this market in his own small way, moving easily between Sogoniko’s hotels-

cum-brothels and Aracem, between Ceuta and Oujda, between journalists and smugglers. In the German *caravaniers*, he would soon find a new and eager audience.

Activism unleashed: the protests begin

Chaos reigned in the Djelibougou field, where any European hopes for efficiency seemed to melt away with each day of meetings in the suffocating heat. Moreover, everyone had to be heard. The *caravaniers* had adopted the cherished assembly format pinpointed in della Porta's (2006) study of recent transnational activism, but assembly-based consensus democracy was proving achingly hard to practice among the disparate caravan groups. The street corner guys had finally made it to the field, where they now stood studying anti-Frontex posters taped to the walls of the AME-run restaurant. "Why is everyone so nice here?" asked Eric, looking at the Europeans who kept smiling and offering him their seats. Still, he was not carried away with excitement. The caravan's citizen-journalists had filmed at Aracem, he said, but he had refused to participate unless they paid him. "After, they'll sell that and make money!" The wariness was to be expected: stories circulated about journalists and researchers visiting with hidden cameras or offering money for dangerous trips into the desert.

Under the canopy, debates had been heating up for several days. A contingent from the French *sans-papiers* (undocumented migrants') movement had arrived in day-glo vests, and had mobilised the *caravaniers* for a protest at the French embassy. Malians in the gathering had voiced concern about protesting without a permit, a reservation ignored by the more hardline elements in AME and in the overseas factions. The protest had ended in police beatings and bruising. Undeterred, the activists went about organising their next demonstration before heading off on the caravan – to the EU Delegation in central Bamako. A flyer circulated among those attending, announcing the aim of the march – *contre l'expulsion des aventuriers et aventurières et contre les deguerpissements*. A French Bamako resident and AME collaborator saw the flyer and sighed. "Aventuriers, that means nothing!" No local would understand it, she said. Neither would they understand *deguerpissements*, which referred to

the evictions campaigned against by one of the caravan organisations, the Mouvement Sans Voix. A friend of Eric's looked at the flyer and shrugged, too, pointing at the word *aventurière*, the female form of "adventurer" that had been inserted in accordance with the gender equality aims of the activists. "They need to take that out," he said. Such disparate concerns pointed to the failure in creating a master frame able to unite not only the factions in the activist network but a larger audience of migrants and Malians as well. The stakeholders were increasingly antagonistic, the local audience nearly non-existent. Except for the association representatives under the canopy, the only Malians circulating among the metal chairs were a ragged bunch of local children and the occasional trinket vendor. Not surprisingly perhaps, since almost all speakers resisted using the local languages. "They should speak Bambara," said one bemused Cameroonian adventurer. "See, there are no locals here!"

These tensions did not deter Aboubacar and his fellow *militants*. He had failed to show up at the march on the embassy but now he increasingly grabbed the microphone, calling for more radical action. "It's important for us to do a march here in Bamako," he said, his voice growing louder. "We're into concrete activities because we're activists!" One of the German organisers asked if the march had been announced to the authorities. "We'll pass on that question," said Aboubacar curtly. "We're not going to spend our time on authorisations." He headed off for meetings elsewhere, to coordinate with Aminata's section of the caravan as well as with another Forum caravan approaching Bamako from Benin, leaving participants to voice unease at the radical turn and the growing dissent between the factions.

As tensions grew among the *caravaniers*, their target nonetheless acted as a unifier. For the core participants, the target was the EU border regime or, more specifically, Frontex. This was an example of what Tarrow (2005) calls frame condensing – combining several grievances into one "supertarget" (della Porta 2006:70). Europe's whole migration management strategy, stretching from Bamako's CIGEM to the violent Algerian deportations, was in this way being framed as the enemy. And now the enemy had arrived at the Djelibougou field, in the form of a motorbike with a CIGEM numberplate. The CIGEM spokesman, who I knew from a series of unsuccessful interview attempts at the migration management centre's offices, skulked around the tents without having announced

his presence to the *caravaniers*. One of the Germans spotted the motorbike and slapped an “Abolish Frontex” sticker on the numberplate. “Direct action,” chuckled a colleague, looking on. More radical anti-Frontex action was about to come, both at the border in Gogui and at the caravan’s destination in Dakar. In the assembly, a plan was hatched for Dakar protests aimed at “the police where Frontex is based”. The activists had done their homework, pinpointing Jean-Pierre’s border police office. The march on Frontex “against the death of thousands of migrants at the external borders of Europe” would be the climax of their transnational caravan to the Forum.

There were smaller protests to organise before this distant goal: first Nioro and Gogui, then the EU Delegation in Bamako. Aboubacar rallied the *caravaniers* around the marches in the Mali-Mauritanian borderland, and the buses set off for the gruelling journey towards Nioro. Once there, angry debates ensued on whether to continue all the way to the border. Some opposed this initial plan because the kidnapping and terrorist threat against Europeans. “There’s nothing in Gogui, there’s no danger in Gogui,” the AME chairman assured his visitors. He was right on both counts: there was no danger for the marchers, but there was also “nothing” there. Camouflage-clad Malian border officers showed the marchers around what were supposedly empty huts for deportees. Activists stickered the road signs marking the EU border regime and sprayed anarchist symbols on a building. After all the protestations and debates, their target had proved illusory.

The logic of this march might be found in the “protest repertoires” of transnational activism. Della Porta (ibid:238) identifies three forms of activist action: the logics of damage, of numbers and of witnessing – the first aims to destroy property, the second to achieve a critical mass of supporters and the third to engage in direct action with high symbolic impact. A few graffiti-ed border signs aside, the logic in Gogui was neither that of damage nor that of numbers. Afterwards, participants struggled to define the purpose of the march. Some rationalised it as a show of support to Malian authorities against the Mauritanian policing of the border, others as an attempt to listen to local concerns about poverty. But the purpose of the march had been to target the EU-Africa border invoked by Aboubacar. As such, it was a form of witnessing, but it went further in *enacting* the border for subsequent broadcast on the movement website and

other visual records of the caravan. To an outside observer, however, their borderwork seemed as absurd as that of the migrant protesters of Ceuta: the anger of both was directed at an invisible enemy, which failed to appear however much it was summoned.

The marchers were back in Bamako where, on the last day of January, the Benin caravan arrived. *Caravaniers* new and old gathered at *Maison des Jeunes*, the youth cultural centre in central Bamako, where speech after speech denounced Europe's border regime. Even the deportees' usual role of providing testimony was absent; looking on, one of the street corner adventurers complained about those who "speak in our name". Local associations sought to prolong their moment in the limelight, resulting in an endless talk-fest that tired European and African participants alike. One of the Germans, a big moustachioed man, shouted to camera in frustration: "always this blah blah and no action, *das ist scheisse!* (that is shit!)" Finally, the drums began tapping a restless beat for the march on the EU Delegation. The marchers snaked their way down the road, blocking traffic as they went. A French activist spray-painted the walls outside the EU building as people stormed towards the gates. The moustachioed German did a victory sign to camera. But it ended there: no police violence, no further activist damage.

Back on the Aracem street corner, Eric was getting anxious about the caravan. He was on the list of participants, but had now been told only those who had joined the Nioro escapade would be allowed to go. "I want to move on, I'll hang onto the back of the bus!" he exclaimed. He was growing restless in Bamako and hoped an expenses-paid trip to Dakar might propel him onwards on his adventure. Stéphane showed me a lucid analysis he had written for the Forum workshops in Dakar on the fate of migrants and the inequalities of globalisation. His paper denounced "internal borders" created in Africa and the contradictions arising out of the disjuncture between ECOWAS freedom of circulation accords and EU-imposed controls. "Our economy moves, but the people don't," he summed it up. "And the adventurers are victims of these contradictions."

It was the eve of departure. Cyrille looked out over the Aracem compound from the rooftop sleeping space. He had been assigned to stay behind in Bamako, but was pondering trying to join anyhow and then get an empty seat on another freedom-of-movement caravan, from Morocco to Dakar, as it headed back up north. “I need to think of myself a little,” he said. He was annoyed with the way that unequal gains of money and attention were straining relations between the Malian associations in the caravan. Political splits were widening as well. Aminata’s caravan contingent, whose political objectives sat uneasily with the Gogui and EU Delegation marches, was now set to depart later than the buses of the more radical activists on the Djelibougou field. Despite the efforts of the Germans and AME to rally around the supertarget of Frontex, the caravan was fracturing and splintering even before leaving Bamako.

Bamako-Dakar: searching for the border

The day of departure finally came. The Djelibougou field filled with expectant travellers, who stacked foam mattresses on top of their buses and put banners and backpacks in the boot. Eric had called me before departure, desperate. He was off the caravan list. Cyrille was left behind too, but Didier and Stéphane were there with the Aracem contingent. Soon after departure, they would both try to make the most of their time with the Europeans. As the buses were boarding, delegates and unannounced travellers scrambled for seats despite the best efforts of the organisers with their official lists of participants. It was to prove a small taste of things to come in this jumbled escapade into the West African hinterland, looking for the elusive EU-Africa border.

The buses ground their way out of Bamako slowly, caught in the usual traffic jams and the smog-packed heat of noon. I found myself squeezed into the back of the bus designated for the members of Mouvement Sans Voix, who turned out to be anything but voiceless. A cohort of djembe drummers launched into caravan songs, and the stuffy air of the bus soon reverberated with shouts, chants and drum beats. I had managed to get into the caravan in the role of scribe, documenting the trip for AME. Besides me and other record-keepers, the caravan had welcomed a few journalists of an activist bent: an Italian reporter,

two Spanish documentary makers and the German filmmaker I had first met in Ceuta. But no big media organisations were present. Except for the Malian journalists who appeared during the initial Djelibougou days, the caravan would attract little media attention. It was instead the *caravaniers*' reflexive self-presentation that, like in the online shots from Gogui, gave credence to the caravan as an event. Much as the Frontex maps and control room screens it targeted, its connection to any external referent was getting increasingly tenuous.

Soon after leaving Bamako, one of the Benin buses broke down. As the *caravaniers* streamed out of the bus for greasy road-stop mutton and rice, Didier leapt to action. "I'm an illegal migrant," he said, presenting himself and his Moroccan adventures to other *caravaniers* before pitching an idea for a film on migration. The European journalists he had met in Bamako for a report on migrant routes had offered too little money, so now he was trying his luck with the activists before returning to Morocco via Dakar, he told me later. Stéphane was getting excited too, trying to make me introduce him to some German women. I interviewed him for the AME caravan record, and he launched into a political discourse: "we are about to show to the eyes of the world, to the eyes of the United Nations, to the eyes of the whole European Community, that we can change things." As we travelled on, he used any opportunity to speak up in meetings and to the Europeans, alternately presenting himself as a deportee and an Aracem spokesman.

Lacking a clear border and a visible supertarget, activists increasingly leant on migrants such as Stéphane as an alternative unifier for action. The humiliated, robbed and victimised deportee was, after all, living proof of the existence of the elusive border they sought. Clandestine migration also proved to be the glue among *caravaniers*. Once the drums fell silent in the MSV bus, a heated debate started raging on women's rights, with the young Europeans on board growing increasingly frustrated with their male Malian co-passengers' views. "The only thing we can agree on is migration!" one of them later said in despair.

Tensions were not limited to intellectual debates about gender equality. Increasing animosity between youth of different West African nationalities erupted once the caravan pulled up at the stadium of Kayes in westernmost Mali around midnight. Tired passengers fought and scuffled for the mattresses, then

scrambled to get some food, pushing the caterers aside. Next day, in a morning meeting on the lawn, the caravan organisers insisted that violence among the *caravaniers* was not acceptable. “Everyone should know that we’re together!” The Germans took up the caravan song, their weak voices chanting *solidarité*. The huddle of activists on the lawn looked increasingly unsure, their big hopes for the caravan crumbling further with each stage of their journey.

The day that followed, with its endless talks interspersed with theatre and music, failed to inject the necessary *solidarité*. Aboubacar’s admonishing that his Malian co-participants should stop stoking tensions with fellow West Africans fell on deaf ears. Back at the stadium, a fight suddenly broke out. A young Malian from our bus cracked a branch off a tree: people thronged, shouted and scuffled. The No Vox bus, part of the Benin caravan, was broken. “They don’t want anyone else to leave,” someone explained. Now they threatened to block the route with their own bus, creating a border in our midst. Aboubacar tried to mediate, to no avail. Camera-armed *caravaniers* filmed the youngsters fighting in front of the parked buses. Fists and branches, Malians against Burkinabes. Most of the Germans were ensconced in their bus, suddenly reduced to the role of onlookers, like tourists happening upon a street rebellion.

“Frontex is in our heads,” one of the *caravaniers* had quipped before the fight. “Between the idea and the reality, there’s Frontex.” His remark seemed to be an ironic reflection both on the failure to find a physical border at which to protest and on the tense faultlines that had appeared between caravan participants.

The No Vox passengers were finally taken aboard the remaining nine buses, which slowly snaked their way towards the Mali-Senegal border. Next beckoned Tambacounda, Senegal’s easternmost city and like Kayes a big “sending region” for migrants.

The activists streamed out of the buses in central Tambacounda, taping anti-Frontex posters to railings and steeling themselves for another day of talks. To

boost flagging spirits and launch into the action they kept invoking, the *caravaniers* decided to march through the city. Two Germans mounted their stilts, dressed as human fence-cutting shears and holding a banner calling for a world without borders between them. A sound system was heaved onto a donkey-pulled cart and the marchers streamed down the main street, into Tambacounda's market, denouncing migrant expulsions over their megaphone. A few children in rags trailed behind the protesters, and market women looked on perplexed. Stéphane held the megaphone, launching into a call-and-response with gusto. "Open the borders!" he shouted, the marchers echoing his words. "No more expulsions!" A group of emaciated building workers, perhaps regional labour migrants themselves, looked at this confident, educated Cameroonian with glazed eyes. He was the migrant with the European megaphone; they the silent, impoverished bystanders.

The Germans had taken an increasing interest in the Aracem *caravaniers* since the bus left Bamako. After the march, the Germans gathered in the shade, discussing the need to record the deportees' testimonies, which would later pepper the caravan documentary. There was one story that had rattled the gathering in particular. One of the Aracem deportees had told them migrants had been executed by the Spanish Guardia Civil in the forest outside Ceuta, on the Moroccan side of the border, in 2009. He had also talked about German, French and Moroccan police firing on migrants in the forest hideouts. The Germans were troubled by this. I and the German reporter joined their circle, voicing concerns about the plausibility of the story based on our research in Ceuta. The Germans did not want to let it go, however, discussing how to verify the claim and what action they could take. One of them finally drew a conclusion. Even if the story was mixed up with rumours, he said, there could still be a kernel of truth to it, a trauma embedded in these stories, which the migrant used to make sense of it all. The gathering nodded and assented.

While this idea of the scar left by trauma rendered migrants worthy of attention, care and assistance (Fassin and Rechtman 2009), for the activists in Tambacounda it was also the clearest *sign* of the existence of the border they protested against. In their view, the migrant had mixed the general tragedy of the border regime with the individual psychological shock experienced outside Ceuta in order to cope better with the latter. Then I found out that it was Didier, the

professional migrant, who had told them of the killings. I kept quiet about the fact that the story had probably been fabricated to arouse the attention of the Germans. Didier surely knew that they, as activists, needed a story “designed to generate outrage and action” (Merry 2005:241), and that he was the man to deliver it.

After another round of delays, the caravan rolled out of town for its next stop. The road to Kaolack wound westwards for hours, before we pulled up late at night, exhausted. No Vox and the Bamako caravan had fallen out again, this time over sleeping spaces, and Aboubacar stood looking lost and tired among the parked buses. I saw my chance to escape the chaos of it all, saying furtive goodbyes and catching the night bus to Dakar. I arrived, dirty and bleary-eyed, just in time to attend the first global declaration on freedom of movement “by and for migrants”. This was the World Charter of Migrants, finalised on the island of Gorée. Those summoned for this historic occasion included the AME leader (“as migrant, not as chairman”) but he was now marooned in Kaolack, unable to attend. They also included Pierre, Bamako’s veteran *ghetto* chief; a clique of professional migrants who had helped organise the caravan from Rabat; free movement advocates from West Africa, the Maghreb and Europe; and Mohammadou, my old repatriate friend, who sat silent in a corner listening to the deliberations. As the charter was joyously signed off to drumbeats and slogans, I felt a long-lost sense of relief: the journey was over, and the international civil society extravaganza of the World Social Forum was about to begin.

Finding Frontex at the Forum

The caravan I had abandoned in Kaolack finally rolled into Dakar. Its exhausted participants dusted themselves down, donned their stilts and banners and joined the inaugural Forum march. Central Dakar was heaving with the international NGO elite: slogans were shouted, hands shaken, banners held high, flags waved, contact books filled. Excitement was in the air, but would soon dissipate amid the orchestrated chaos that followed upon the sudden about-turn at Université Cheikh Anta Diop, the Forum venue. The withdrawal of support by the university director and Senegal’s government was, as noted in chapter one,

leading to chaos on campus.

In the tent village for diaspora and migration set up in the university grounds to deal with the lockout, I met Mohammadou and Omar, the repatriate association's sunglassed and smooth-talking spokesperson. They were trying to organise another session on repatriation after the spectacular failure of the first one in an empty university hall, but no audience appeared. Finally Mohammadou spotted someone with a video camera and the reporters, three European university students, powered up their equipment. They asked the usual questions and got the usual answers on how the association had fought illegal migration, on the need for partners, on the false claims of the likes of Mother Mercy. Then the reporters asked Omar about his boat journey. As he launched into a tragic account of his trip to the Canaries, people started gathering around our chairs. "Were you not afraid?" asked the reporter. No, said Omar, his voice rising: "You have to throw your brother overboard..." The audience kept growing, almost all of them European, leaning in to hear the story. "We're doing testimonies on illegal migration," Mohammadou explained to the swelling crowd, handing out flimsy business cards and finding more chairs for the newcomers. Recording devices were thrust towards Omar as he talked of his second journey and final failure; a reporter from the caravan was snapping pictures. There was a hitch, however. Rumours, unknown to Omar's eager audience, had it that he had not done the clandestine boat journey at all. Mohammadou later admitted to doubts surrounding Omar's migration story. "But he can speak if he wants to," he said with a tired smile. As in the stories of Didier and Stéphane, the narrative of the violence of the border was taking on its own life, regardless of who told it. Clandestine migrants' traumatic stories stirred the Europeans' curiosity while the realities reflected in the Sogoniko environs and the battles of Mohammadou's association – not to mention the larger inequalities underpinning these – remained unheard and unreported.

All along, the Germans had wished to connect the story of the sea border and the repatriates with that of the deportees they had met in Bamako. As in the caravan writ large, they sought a "convergence of struggles" among migrants and in solidarity with them, and had gone to one of Dakar's fishing neighbourhoods to organise a joint cultural soirée for the purpose. Stéphane had come along to the preparatory meeting as representative for Aracem. But he was something else

too. “I’m a victim of illegal migration,” he said when introducing himself to the circle of local association representatives and visiting *caravaniers*. By now, the complex migrant victimhood he had written about in Bamako – the adventurer at the receiving end of the contradictions of globalisation and migration policies – had been reduced to a convenient label for the activists’ consumption.

In the Saudi-funded tent city (“Saudi Arabia, Kingdom of Humanity” read the logos, much to the activists’ dismay) for all Forum participants, the *caravaniers* were busy preparing for the Frontex march, the climax of their caravan. The offices of the Senegalese border police, pinpointed during the pre-caravan talks, were a good target since they lay outside the “red zone” of central Dakar where the authorities had prohibited protests. But no permission was forthcoming for the short march down to the Cité Police complex on the seafront either, and feeling was running high about what should be the next step. Mohammadou and his repatriate friends had been roped in as well, and stood discussing plans for participation with the Germans. He asked for 20,000 CFA to bus people from Yongor to the protest, but the *caravaniers* insisted participation should be voluntary. “We can get youth from Soumbedioune otherwise,” said one of them, referring to the neighbourhood around the corner from Cité Police. “Have you seen any [repatriates] there?” Mohammadou snapped back with newfound confidence. Suddenly, an announcement stirred the gathering: the authorities had given their go-ahead for the march.

On the morning of 10 February 2011, a knot of activists clustered outside the post office of the neighbourhood Medina. Most of them were Europeans; among the few Africans present was the AME chairman. Mohammadou had arrived alone, and stood talking to a woman about the destination of the impending march. “Where are we marching?” she asked. “To the university,” replied Mohammadou. “Oh, I thought it was to the French embassy,” she said. “Frontex” remained an elusive target and destination even for the marchers. As the crowd slowly grew with the *sans-papiers* activists and German *caravaniers*, so did the police presence. Officers in full riot gear descended from vans and positioned

themselves around the crossing that the marchers had to pass on the short stretch of road leading to the *corniche* and Cité Police.

Finally, the placards started appearing – *Abolir Frontex* (abolish Frontex) – and two Germans got on their stilts, holding the usual banner. The crowd moved towards up the road, chanting *solidarité, solidarité*. The riot police moved ahead of them, while a police van and an ambulance secured the rear. European citizen-journalists snapped pictures and filmed their slow progress. Finally, the goal of the caravan beckoned: “Frontex” and the seafront *corniche*.

It starts with tentative steps, in a shy dance between security forces and protesters. Police take up positions, safeguarding the front gates and perimeter wall of Cité Police. Workers gather on the balconies, looking down on the marchers. The second floor of this building houses Jean-Pierre’s division; this is where Frontex has been located by the activists. The crowd starts chanting *à bas, à bas, à bas le Frontex* to the wild *tam-tam-tam* of drums. “Sit down!” someone screams into the megaphone, and the protesters start their sit-in, blocking access to the *corniche*. The police keep their distance and so do I, gravitating towards the big mosque across the road. An old man in *boubou* and skullcap asks bemused what it is about, and the man next to him replies on my behalf: “You want a world without borders!” I feel increasingly awkward in this delicate balancing act between my police and activist contacts, but it is impossible to act the role of bystander: there are no onlookers except for us and a few itinerant sunglass vendors. “They want a world without borders but they’re creating a border right here!” the older man retorts with a smile, looking at the road blocked by sitting activists. Some of them have strung a banner along the perimeter wall of the Cité; then suddenly a dreadlocked German unfolds another banner on the balcony of the third floor of the DPAF building. “FRONTEXPLODE” it says, referring to the European anti-Frontex network. He had sneaked in for a relaxed chat with a high-ranking police officer, he later explained, and unfolded the banner on the way out. “It’s the second floor that is Frontex really, but anyway it doesn’t matter,” he said, proud of his achievement.

“So you’re hiding here!” Mohammadou spots me on the sidelines outside the mosque. He comes up waving an anti-Frontex poster, holding a marker pen and flashing a smile. “Help me to write Yongor here,” he says, turning the poster over on the ground. I sigh. Am I with him and the protesters, or am I not? I say I

have to leave, and saunter back up the road towards the post office. On the way I meet a local man, who snaps angrily: “The Forum is not for the Senegalese, it’s the foreigners who come to see each other here. They come and block the route like this!” The next day, I find no news of the protest in the papers, and even the Forum publications kept total silence, according to the marchers.

While this mainstream lack of interest was perhaps to be expected, the Frontex protest still brought to a head the larger conundrum already observed in Gogui, in Tambacounda, in Bamako. Europe’s nebulous border regime was, as seen in chapter two, producing a border that was no longer “at the border”. It could only be located with difficulty and through painstaking research. Yet despite the activists’ deft groundwork in pinpointing “Frontex”, the border regime remained elusive. By locating the border regime in the DPAF offices, they pragmatically stayed out of the “red zone” of central Dakar – but it was still not clear why “Frontex” was faced down there, rather than in the Senegalese Navy base, the Spanish embassy, or indeed away from Dakar, at the Military Palace in Las Palmas or the Guardia Civil headquarters in Madrid. The marchers’ difficulty in locating the border and its regime pointed to a larger absence of responsibility for the tragedies of the borderlands. It is this absence at the heart of the violence of clandestine migration – and the absurdity it engenders among those who try to confront it – that this chapter has tried to pinpoint, and to which we will now briefly turn.

Conclusion: the absent perpetrator

This account of victimhood and borderwork during the Bamako-Dakar caravan might seem overly critical, an exercise in the “misplaced cynicism” so carefully avoided by Fassin and Rechtman (2009). As academics and activists increasingly step on each other’s toes in both their fields of travel and of expertise (Merry 2005), it might moreover seem an unfair attempt at promoting the perspective of the scribbling, sweaty anthropologist on the back of the caravan bus above those of his sloganising fellow passengers. It is important, then, to emphasise that the marchers were not simply tilting at windmills. Theirs was an audacious attempt at taking transnational activism on free movement to a new level. Given this

ambition, the chaos, infighting and outreach troubles were acutely felt by many of the participants. Evaluating the caravan for the in-house documentary, one of the Germans called it a “glass both half full and half empty”. “A good many of our political plans that were a bit ambitious such as establishing contact with the local populations and exchanging viewpoints about their and our experiences, have naturally only functioned in part,” he said. Others criticised the unequal gains of Malian associations involved in the caravan and the communication problems that had marred it. What was not salient in their internal critique, however, was the deeper issue of how to mobilise protests on behalf of a particular kind of migrant at this peculiar kind of border. In taking as their rallying points the illegal migrant and the Euro-African border, the activists joined the police, the aid world and the media in making these twin spectres increasingly real. Their mobilisation inadvertently confirmed the official obsession with illegality while cementing its importance in relations between European and African nations. This was the tragedy of solidarity in the borderlands: the opposition to the illegality industry could only take place on the “factory floor” of this industry itself.

The borderwork of the activists overlapped with that of the police in a play of reflexive performances-upon-performances. They both marked out the territory of the border – the marchers’ anti-Frontex stickers, banners and graffiti superimposed upon the anti-migration signs and property of EU-funded officialdom. With their placards, banners and spray cans, the marchers located and fixed the diffuse border regime in sites such as Cité Police and Gogui. Here lay the irony of their efforts: the marchers for a world without borders first had to create the walls they wanted to break down.

The activists, like their opponents within the illegality industry, also had to conjure a certain type of migrant in this contradictory borderwork. In the caravan, the figure of the clandestine migrant underwent an inversion, from threatening villain to globalised victim. Cleansed of the dirt and dust of the border, the migrant’s new victim role was, moreover, selective. As in other rallies for broad causes (James 2007:48), the most articulate and perhaps *least* victimised by the border regime took the metaphorical and literal megaphone: strident leaders such as Aboubacar, Didier the professional migrant and Stéphane the student rather than the limping deportee Alphonse or, of course, any

impoverished *regional* migrants spotted on the sidelines. In this way, the illegal migrant was made up (Hacking 1986) as a victim in a collaborative exercise between adventurers and their activist interlocutors. As Fassin and Rechtman (2009:279) note with survivors of disaster and war, the adventurers quite logically “adopt the only persona that allows them to be heard – that of victim”.

As already noted, however, the perpetrator of the victimisation was more difficult to identify. For the activists it was Frontex, whereas for the Spanish police it was the smugglers; for African police and migrants, it often seemed to be wild, untamed nature itself. At other times, these antagonists followed Stéphane in glossing over the question of the absent perpetrator when he said he was a “victim of illegal migration”. Illegal migration itself here appeared as an increasingly reified and violent force. Absent yet present, much like the border it depended upon, it was becoming a faceless perpetrator all actors in the industry – police, activists, migrants, aid workers and journalists – could rally against.



Figure 18. Anti-Frontex graffiti outside the agency's headquarters in Warsaw

The story does not end with the Frontex anti-climax. Most of the *caravaniers* returned to Bamako, the deportees now with new journalists in tow. As I left the gathering in Dakar, Aboubacar had seemed deflated, a far cry from his strident caravan self. His firebrand performance was ending. Meanwhile, Stéphane's making up as migrant victim was becoming painfully real. A few months after

the caravan, he emails me from Bamako. He has been deported, thrown in prison, and seen friends die in the desert. In early 2012, we get in touch again after I have seen his eloquent testimony in an email sent around by a “professional migrant” on the Migureurop mailing list. He is now in northern Morocco with Eric, waiting to cross into Ceuta. Mohammadou is still in his neighbourhood, ever on the lookout for partners but more hopeful than before thanks to his growing network of contacts after the Forum. Cyrille finally escaped from Bamako. Rumours had it that he stole money from the street corner guys, but he told me he had to run away after being threatened by the returning Aracem *caravaniers*. The European activists, meanwhile, geared up for the next big protest against the border regime – Boats4People, a transnational “solidarity flotilla” between Italy and Tunisia in the summer of 2012. The migration story continues, in circles of absurdity and tragedy into which the illegality industry taps at the points of its convenience.

For another actor, Mother Mercy, this industry was no longer what it once had been. Before leaving Dakar, I met her for an interview at the Forum. Accompanying her was a young Belgian research student who had found out about Mother Mercy’s association via a Red Cross contact. It had looked perfect for her research project, as it had for many others before her: “migration, women and development, the three issues that interest me!” Her insecure demeanour and bewildered look indicated, however, that her first impressions were already falling short of expectations.

Times were dire for her reluctant host. The Spanish money had stopped coming and Mother Mercy had had to close her office, the sight of which had taunted Mohammadou and his friends in the years following their repatriation. “We have no more electricity, no more internet, no more water!” she complained. “It’s a real pity for our women because we wanted to show another side of the Senegalese woman.” Her main role at the Forum now concerned women’s rights rather than migration, and she was soon to encounter that other symbol of female empowerment, Aminata, on the beach of Mohammadou’s neighbourhood. Women from Yongor who had lost their sons on the sea journey, dressed in white for mourning, met with Aminata’s *caravaniers* to light candles for their relatives as darkness fell over Dakar and the sea with its invisible border. At night, on the main Forum stage close to the “Frontex” offices,

Aminata's theatre troupe acted out the journey through the desert, to the fences of Ceuta and Melilla. As the adventurers were sent back to Bamako, their elders danced, sang and cleansed them, reincorporating them into Africa like long-lost children. "Ceuta Melilla Lampedusa Canaria" intoned a female voice, evoking those European slivers of land where the violence of the border was finally, unequivocally made real. "Ceuta Melilla Lampedusa Canaria."

Conclusion: the absurd battle

Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose (Ionesco in Esslin 1972:23)

The workings of the illegality industry, it has been repeatedly stated in this thesis, are absurd. Absurdity covers a range of meanings, from existential predicament to colloquial dismissal, but what will initially concern us here is the absurd in its guise of purposelessness pure and simple. The illegality industry's sectors work according to their own institutional logics, and quite rationally so. Yet taken together and assessed over a wider temporal and geographical perspective, these efforts serve little evident purpose. The illegality industry is like a sledgehammer that fails even in its basic task of cracking a nut. Attempts to combat illegality only generate more illegality.

Not only do clandestine migrants keep coming, controls or no controls, but their routes and methods take increasingly surreal forms. To briefly recapitulate, it was thanks to increasing police harassment and the fortification of Ceuta and Melilla that the small, harmless groups of sub-Saharan adventurers in Morocco in the early 2000s morphed into a seemingly frightening horde. Further crackdowns proved the catalyst for the opening of a route to the Canaries, and suddenly packed wooden *pirogues* appeared among European holidaymakers. The closure of the Atlantic route piled pressure on Greece and then Italy, whose neighbour Libya had perfected the political art of using clandestine migrants as a bargaining chip. The blanket control of the Mediterranean also strengthened smuggling networks and gave rise to ever stranger, and more dangerous, entry methods. The illegality industry and its contradictions – on humanitarianism and violence, visibility and hiddenness, outreach and closure – has moulded its raw material of illegality into ever more distressing forms.

Yet on the frontline and in European capitals, it is business as usual. Illegality is now hardwired into institutional arrangements, from Red Cross

rescue operations to Frontex risk analysis networks. It materialises in detention centres, hi-tech fences and coastal radar stations. It is paraded in broadcasts, broadsheets and border guard videos. It is counted, calculated and stacked up in ledgers by Frontex and European and African interior ministries. As the stakes grow higher, illegality is reified and refined. It also becomes ever more absurd, in the various meanings of the term listed by Luper-Foy (1992:97): ridiculous, incongruous, senseless and futile. Like Sisyphus in Greek mythology, the illegality industry rolls its boulder up a hill every day only for it to roll back down again.

This might be too neat a conclusion, however. My thesis has followed migrants' own analysis in focusing on what the illegality industry *does* achieve, and on who benefits from these achievements. In fields such as development aid, sea surveillance and humanitarianism, illegality is not just produced; it is also productive. As a "problem" to be solved, it sparks new security "solutions", NGO projects, professional networks, activist campaigns, and journalistic and academic engagements that might otherwise remain unfunded and ignored.

Coplan (2001) observes, in his study of the Lesotho-South Africa border, how the border is above all a *business* in which officials, police, smugglers and criminals have staked a claim. As was seen in Chapter two, this is similarly the case at the Euro-African border, on a much larger scale. The business of bordering of Europe, however, is simultaneously a political project that might be more rational – and cynical – than this thesis has seemed to suggest.

Gabrielli (2011:341) has convincingly argued that Spain and the EU have, by focusing on statistically minuscule flows of clandestine migrants from south of the Sahara, engaged in a spectacular show of force that hides, by sleight of hand, a continuing influx of workers and tourists from economically more important regions. Sub-Saharan Africa here appears not even in its commonly invoked guise of reserve labour pool, but as a frontier zone for a projection of fears and visions that obscures the real situation, thus serving the electoral interests of European powers.

These political and economic rationales explain, in part, the continued funding of the illegality industry. But the efforts soon backfire, as should be clear from the preceding chapters. Europe's externalisation of controls creates what can be conceptualised as negative externalities, in the sense familiar from

environmental economics. The plans for the illegality industry might have been costed and evaluated, but their insidious social, political and human effects are rarely taken into consideration. As has been seen in this thesis, these “side-effects” constantly threaten to overrun the workings of the industry. This, in turn, leads to more complex expressions of absurdity than mere lack of purpose.

One of the principal externalities was seen in the borderlands in Chapter three. In framing clandestine West African migration as a risk and heaping the “junk” risk onto North African partners, unforeseen tensions are stoked. This has often been starkly spelt out by the Moroccan authorities, who insist that they pay a high price for cooperating in controls. The externalities of externalisation – worsening relations with fellow African states; social malaise caused by migrant destitution and blockage; a dented image of Morocco abroad – are adding up. For the migrants, needless to say, these externalities are even more acute.

For the third sector, the negative externality might similarly be one of credibility. The lack of accountability and transparency among NGOs, as well as their dependence on funders’ priorities, has been noted across contemporary Africa and beyond. These features of the global NGO expansion, however, are thrown into particularly stark relief by the fight against illegal migration, where non-profits and international organisations such as the Red Cross and the IOM function as a buffer between the steely core of the border regime and its human interfaces. The rancorous funding battles, replicated from Senegal to Morocco and even Spain, show a tawdry scramble for funds disbursed according to warped short-term priorities. In these battles, local resentment builds over the inequitable distribution of provisions, as exemplified by the repatriates’ struggles in Chapter one and the Rosso quandaries in Chapter three.

In these two forms of subcontracting – policing and aid – migration is turning into a privileged language for exchanges between the West and its “others”. Migrants become tokens of communication in a claims-making process through which a small, containable “problem” is hugely inflated, as was absurdly

illustrated by Libya's Gadaffi who in 2010 asked for €5bn a year to "stop illegal migration" in order to prevent Europe "turning black".

Those labelled "illegal migrants" are increasingly participating in these games themselves, using their imposed status to receive recognition. Their participation brings yet another externality for European powers, however minor at present. The migrants encountered throughout this thesis exhibit a growing disillusion with the European dream that once motivated their adventures. This disillusion is paired with a searing critique of the illegality industry itself – whether by repatriates in Dakar, deportees in Bamako or strikers in Ceuta – which they see as illicitly profiteering from their misfortune. In their protests and grievances, such "illegal migrants" are neither the seekers of the European favours or rights amply studied by migration scholars, nor the invisible, apolitical *clandestins* glimpsed by Coutin (2005) and others. Here appears, rather, what Kalyvas (2010) calls the "rebellious immigrant", an unexpected and bitter fruit of the illegality industry's labours.

The emerging clandestine lingo reflects the radical twist to migrants' perceptions. As seen in Chapter four, this lingo increasingly mimics the larger industry under whose shadow the illegality industry labours, the "war on terror". Terms such as "Guantánamo", "Taliban" or "bunker" highlight how adventurers increasingly ironise their subject position as that of the most-wanted Other of the contemporary West: the terrorist. This new border vocabulary confirms yet subtly undermines Europe's invasion myth; more importantly, however, it frames Europe as a wretched empire victimising African travellers through military means. As anger and disillusionment spreads through migrants' social networks and even filters into the illegality industry itself, fragments of a shared narrative of the Euro-African borderlands emerge. The end result is not pretty: Europe here emerges as a dark, cynical force finally robbed of its once so shiny allure.

To explore the world of migration controls along Spain's coasts is to travel through a landscape of ruins, structures set up only a few years ago that are already falling into disuse thanks to the changed migratory landscape. In the

Canaries, the CIEs stand empty, their detainees long departed. In Tarifa, the debris washed up by waves of arrivals has made Red Cross workers ponder creating a museum to clandestine migration, with artifacts displayed as in an ethnological exhibit: inflatable boats, car tyres used as life vests, a migrant paddle sculpted out of a single piece of wood. But the Red Cross offices are themselves museum-like; made for migrant rescues, they stand empty, unused.

Even when the illegality industry succeeds, in its repressive guise, in re-routing migrants, the remnants it leaves behind hint at the futility of its efforts. These efforts are, by necessity, always in excess and never quite suited to their target. Steel fences, detention centres and rescue facilities remain among the few tools available for politicians to signal decisiveness in the “fight” against fluid, fickle migrant routes.

The illegality industry’s efforts are in excess in a more human sense as well. I began this thesis by tentatively suggesting that the illegality industry acts reductively: travellers with diverse origins, stories, aims and legal statuses are gradually reshaped to fit the generic mould of migrant illegality. Yet this imposition of a one-dimensional illegality is not the whole story. As the chapters have shown, the illegality industry’s workers constantly dress up the “naked” notion of illegality. In part, they do so to target and tailor their interventions – after all, everyone cannot be asked for papers, detained, deported, rescued, observed, cared for, filmed or written about. But such instrumental aims combine with deeper reasons. The illegality industry needs something to fundamentally motivate and justify its workers’ efforts, which many of them openly recognise as futile. In the borderlands, backpacks and black skin hint at a dangerous, hidden illegality that calls for prompt detection. In Ceuta, lack of documents implies an essential condition of vulnerability that justifies “treatment”. In policing and aid work, the secrets and traumas in migrants’ heads motivate interrogation or therapy. These excess attributions, in Derrida’s (1976) sense of the “supplement”, come to the aid of something that had increasingly seemed so natural, so common-sense, so black-and-white – migrant illegality.

From the material perspective of this thesis, this “will to meaning” (Robbins 2006:213) is simply another factor fed back into the illegality industry’s hybrid functioning. The excess attributions materialise in the iconography of Frontex operations, in the “humanitarian” Melilla fence, in

rescue imagery and in the make-believe paperwork of Ceuta. Here absurdity is more than just purposelessness: it becomes an incongruous, even grotesque split between reality and representation, set in a feedback loop that generates ever stranger *real* results.

One of these real results concerns the lived experience of migrants, who have to endure the contradictory attributions with which their illegality is crafted. The illegal migrant is defined by the stigma and promise of mobility yet regularly rendered immobile; he is a threatening, cunning invader but also an innocent, ignorant victim; skin and clothing make him visible, but he is still endowed with an authority-eluding invisibility. Out of these contradictions emerges an elusive essence of migrant illegality, produced by the mere absence of documents-in-order. This “illegal immigrant”, as Coutin (2005) hints, is however an impossible presence. Living through this impossibility, migrants at times come to experience the absurdity of their predicament in its existential sense of radical unmooring – or, in the words of Camus (1942:18), of “irredeemable exile”.

Incongruousness is also on display at the border. This thesis has asserted that clandestine migration is a spectacle and a staging, and as such it might give a brief glimpse of truths otherwise left hidden about the workings of the contemporary world. Seen through such a lens, the strange show – discussed in chapter four – of migrants congregating round a Spanish banner on Isla de Tierra in September 2012 under the gaze of sunbathers and journalists seems, like the 2006 spectacle on Tenerife’s beaches, to fulfill the task once envisioned for the mid-century Theatre of the Absurd (Esslin 1972:400):

The means by which the dramatists of the Absurd express their critique – largely instinctive and unintended – of our disintegrating society are based on suddenly confronting their audiences with a grotesquely heightened and distorted picture of a world that has gone mad.

Perhaps it is here that the illegality industry finally finds its wretched purpose.

The illegality industry is in a constant state of disequilibrium. In 2012, Mali had undergone a coup and seen its vast desert north claimed by separatists, sparking a refugee crisis that soon set alarm bells ringing in Madrid and Warsaw, while the violent aftermath to the “Arab spring” saw mass displacements further north. In Senegal and Spain, new governments promised a different political era, and perhaps different priorities on migration – as seen in the large cut in development aid for sub-Saharan Africa announced by the Spanish conservatives. The illegality industry grinds on, despite these changes, yet its configuration is amenable to change at a moment’s notice.

One catalyst for change is economics. As the eurozone crisis deepened, southern European countries were again being seen as nations of emigrants, not immigrants. Angola offered to help Portugal in mitigating the crisis, and Portuguese workers streamed back into the former colony. Jobseeking Spaniards travelled not just to northern Europe but also to new destinations such as Brazil, where tougher border controls in a tit-for-tat between governments eventually forced Madrid to ease checks on Brazilians entering Spain. “One day Europeans will come to Africa to look for work,” an adventurer in Tangier had angrily predicted in 2010. That day might well come sooner than he expected.

Perhaps one day, the inhabitants of what was once the rich world will look back at the early twenty-first century and wonder why so much time, energy and money was spent on controlling the movements of so few. Perhaps then, decision-makers will realise the folly of controlling human movement at any cost, of labelling certain travellers illegal, and of parading these “illegals” in elections, broadcasts, surveillance rooms, NGO pamphlets and theses such as the present one. But for that to happen, the illegality industry first needs to be dismantled and the product on which it works seen for what it is: nothing more, and nothing less, than people on the move.

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