

Hunter and Prey

Europe's high-tech border regime takes on a more profane guise on African soil, as I discovered back in Dakar in between visits to Yongor's repatriates and Spanish officials. Walk into the Cité Police complex along the capital's seafront corniche 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 rather was 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 recognizes, 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.¹ 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 were not enough to bring the Africans onboard, 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 Euro-African 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 travelers—the labor 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, next at the Mauritania-Senegal border, and finally in the transit sites and dumping grounds of the Sahara and Morocco. On the African side of the border, it will be seen, Europe’s subcontractors do not simply detect and prevent irregular crossings; they also help bring their target, the illegal migrant, into being.

This making of migrants is not simply about the assignation and appropriation of a social category, as was seen among Dakar’s repatriates; it is also about travelers’ progressive *embodying* of that category. Building on pathbreaking ethnographies of border controls in settings ranging from the U.S.-Mexico frontier to Israel, this chapter will thus consider how illegality comes to be lived—at times up to the point of

death. “The border,” anthropologist Michel Agier says, is now “everywhere that an undesirable is identified,” including the indeterminate zone in which the traveler’s body becomes the border, the site of enforcement.² Walking across stretches of desert, hiding in the undergrowth next to an abandoned beach, crawling into a truck meant for merchandise, and staring at the moving sky in a vast wooden boat are all ways of traveling that render the journey a bodily minefield. Contorted postures, stomachaches, dehydration, shivering, and sore feet become sensorial signposts indicating the gradual crossing of borders, and attempts to avoid these ailments start signaling illegality to police. In the back-and-forth between the bodily strategies of Africa’s wayward travelers and police patrols and detections, the illegal migrant is conjured in increasing degrees of otherness, stigmatized by his very bodily presence.

RUCKSACKS AND BISCUITS: CLANDESTINE SPOTTING IN DAKAR

Nighttime on Dakar’s shores. The headlights of the police van illuminate the lanes leading down to the beachfront. The patrol chief, dressed in a checkered shirt and relaxed trousers, steers the van with fast, careless movements that send 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 Senegalese police cells crammed with detainees almost piled atop one another. Migrants were detained for months to deter others from leaving; smugglers were sent to languish in jails.³ By 2010, the *temps des clandestins*, the “time of the illegal migrants,” 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 directorate encompassing Jean-Pierre's division for fighting irregular migration, was a European brainchild to begin with. It had been created in 2004 at 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 onboard 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. A load of around thirty passengers was normal for a fishing trip, or *mare*, in which Senegalese fishermen set out for days; lack of fishing gear in the hull raised suspicions, as did the presence of petrol canisters. The European border guards made a note of the captain and later checked that the boat had returned to the coast. All this was done under the "legal cover," as one comandante put it, of having a Senegalese officer onboard. 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 fifty people in a bus are migrants," he said. Instead any suspect travelers were referred to as candidates for illegal migration, as in Senegal's sensitization campaigns. 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.

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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 around the clock in search of 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 around to address me at the back as the car sped down a mud lane towards the beach. "We know everything that happens along the seashore."

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 ten to fifteen 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 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 travelers.

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 migra-

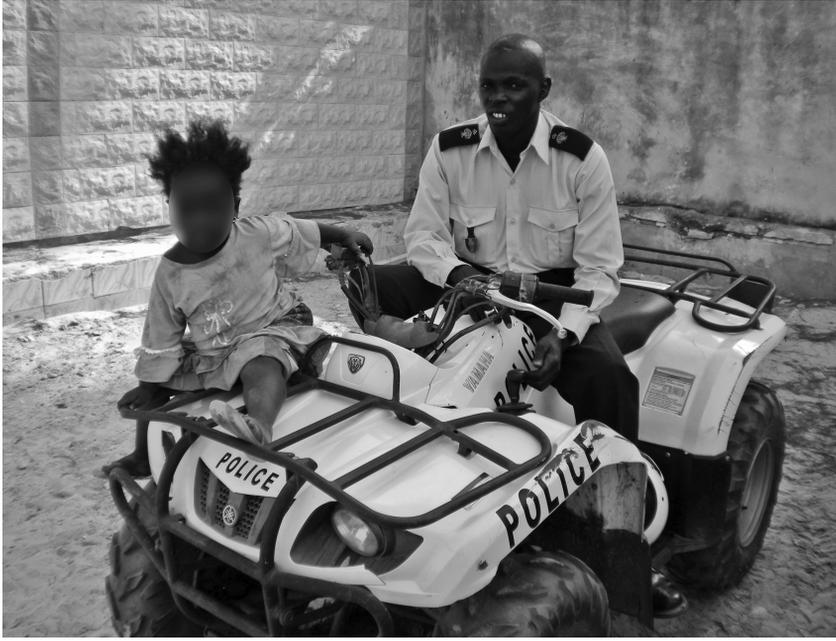


FIGURE 6. A Spanish-funded quad bike for patrolling clandestine migration. Photo by author.

tion. They also lavished African forces with policing gear—the night-vision goggles in Jean-Pierre’s corner and 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 incentives as gifts—rather than, say, as payments or even bribes—in a nod to long-running anthropological debates on gift exchange. The outsourcing of migration controls has involved a continuum of incentives, ranging from exchanges of border policing tools to large financial aid packages for the collaborating states. With this in mind, the term *gift economy* simply highlights three key features of police cooperation. First of all, Spain’s *personalized* incentives created social bonds among colleagues, as well as an “obligation to reciprocate” for the Senegalese receivers—not in kind, but in deeds. But the gifts, as soon as they were given, nullified the supposed collegiality between the Europeans and Africans, instead creating a hierarchy of

interests. This ambiguous status of the gifts helped spawn ever-increasing demands, along with tensions over who gained what—bringing into stark relief the unequal power relations between local police and their bosses, among competing border agencies, and between European giver and African receiver in a claims-making process carrying echoes from the colonial encounter.⁴

The Senegalese officers said Frontex paid for their resources, but the agency denied any involvement. Any incentives, according to Giuseppe, the former Hera manager, stemmed from the “bilateral agreement between Spain and Senegal; Frontex has no knowledge” of them. 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 gray 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” for private use, 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 twenty-four 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 tantalizing. The officers said they had initially received forty euros 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 forty-five 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 kilometers down the road.

For all my sympathies, I couldn't help asking myself: what work? We stood around the beach chatting, watched 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 as 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 among 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 center, 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 among 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 free of charge. Since 2006, this had been supplanted by Spanish largesse. The Spaniards, aware of the need to incentivize, kept some funds flowing through the E.U.-sponsored West Sahel program. But the absurdity at the heart of cooperation was hard to ignore. The Senegalese forces were now only chasing ghosts—potential clandestine migrants and smugglers who did not materialize. The basis of their business had vanished.

Instead, this business has moved elsewhere. For if Europe’s border machinery has halted the migrant boats heading for the Canaries, it has not yet blocked the passage through the Sahara. Along the desert routes, African forces face a harder task than on Dakar’s beaches—detecting furtive signs of an *intention* to migrate. In the process, they add a new piece to the illegal migrant under production. Already provided with a dress code, belongings, and behavior that mark him as illegal, this

migrant in the border zone will be endowed with something rather more ineffable: a mind of his own.

NORTHERN SENEGAL: 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 and swerves to avoid sand pits where chunks of asphalt are missing. A Saharan haze envelops us as we drive past bone-dry outposts dotting the road to Rosso-Senegal. At times youngsters appear along the roadside to scatter sand over the potholes as we pass, hoping we will chuck them some small change. The Senegal River region's employment prospects, in a rusty bucket.

Many clandestine migrants have followed this route towards the distant Maghreb. Their long, stepwise journeys partly follow a logic different from those of the boat migrants of 2006, many of whom simply sought a quick way to Europe. These travelers have been called transit migrants, but they do not simply "transit" from A to B; instead their trips of uncertain end, often stretching over several years, trace intricate lines through the Sahel and Sahara.⁵

Among the characters on this circuit is the *aventurier*. This "adventurer," a figure first seen on air routes to Paris in the 1970s, is but the latest in a long line of fortune seekers to emerge from the febrile postcolonial cities of Francophone Africa. Like his predecessors, the adventurer embraces a life of risk taking in the face of battered regional economies and closed borders. To him, the clandestine journey is not just an escape from poverty; it is also a quest for self-realization and emancipation, however dangerous and dependent on precarious family funds. By contrast, English-speaking migrants—Liberians, Ghanaians, Nigerians—do not embark on the dangerous desert crossing as "adventurers," and neither do the women on the clandestine circuit. The latter, often simplistically treated as "trafficking victims" by European states, move ahead with the help of male companions, smugglers, or "protectors" at considerable personal cost. Yet for all their differences of trajectory, background, and vision, these travelers soon come to share in the same reality: the vortex of the borderlands and the violent reduction it performs upon them.⁶

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 travelers to join them on the way up, for a fee. They get off before the Rosso jetty, cross the Senegal River alone, and then rejoin the trucker in Mauritania. “It’s very difficult to control,” the officer exclaimed, “because it’s all in their head! What’s their final destination? You can’t stop them, you just can’t know. It’s just the idea,” he kept repeating.

While in Dakar, police categorized travelers as licit and illicit on the basis of material and behavioral signs, in Rosso the elusive figure of the illegal migrant also acquired a peculiar mental makeup. It was the “idea in their head” that branded travelers as illegal at this border. The increasing essentialization of the illegal migrant en route was not just discursive, however; rather, illegality imposed itself upon travelers, with real effects on their mental life. As travelers 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 anthropologist Susan Bibler Coutin has labeled “being en route”: present yet absent from the jurisdictions they traverse, at turns visible and invisible to the border forces that chase them.⁷

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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 by the postindependence border economy. This economy suffuses everything in Rosso: 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 drowning on tattered mattresses and sipping a stronger green tea than that served farther 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



FIGURE 7. Views of Mauritania from the Red Cross base, Rosso-Senegal. Photo by author.

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 recent 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. As I visited on the tail end of the migration craze in 2010, Rosso was one link in the chain of subcontracted migration controls, in which local police forces and humanitarian organizations alternately detained, deported, and cared for migrants en route. As would soon be evident, however, it was a weak link, despite Europe’s best efforts.

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 branded 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 six hundred, seven hundred 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 of 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 to 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 available anyhow for locking people up.

Overland travelers, 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 labeled MIGRANTS CLANDESTINS. Data on new arrivals were collected in such folders and sent on to the border police in Dakar, he explained. That was all they could do here—“we interrogate them,” he said, “but we can’t detain them.” He insisted that Senegal “welcomed everyone,” unlike the Mauritanian security forces, with whom relations were strained. Next he handed me his CV. “You might find me some opportunities,” he said in a hopeful tone.

The dearth of “opportunities”—jobs, money, promotions—again meant 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 travelers from Senegal, Mali, and the Gambia needed to cross legally was vaccination papers and a *devise*, or

deposit, of fifty euros 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 categorizing them.”

This hiddenness, the “secret” in their head that both Cheikh and the border police talked about, 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, *siriyen*, 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 travelers 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 migratory toolkit, as I would discover in Rosso.

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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. Traveling 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 all countries belonging to ECOWAS, the Economic Community of West African States. These free circulation provisions were still honored by Mauritania, from where Edward and his friends had just been deported, despite the country’s exit from the regional body.⁸ In 2010, however, Mauritania had imposed entry restrictions on nationals of all English-speaking West African countries, forcing any prospective travelers to enter by air rather than overland. Anglophone travelers, 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 farther 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 the capital 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 to go back home or to settle in a place farther 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 the right thing 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 clandestine migrants 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 the 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 its 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 prioritize the clandestine migrants, 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 unique, as testified by a growing body of critical studies of international development projects.⁹ 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, as 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 farther 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’ task of tracking the intentionality of travelers along a much-traversed river and their essentialization of these travelers as a consequence. “It’s very difficult to detect the illegal migrant,” one of the officers sighed. “Just like that, he becomes a boatman, or else he appears as a simple traveler. . . . They don’t exhibit their illegality in Senegal; it’s something that you can’t detect.” Not until Nouadhibou, he added. At that Mauritanian “gate to Europe,” police at

last apprehend the travelers as what they really are—fully formed illegal migrants, ready to board their wooden boats and brave the wild sea.

NOUADHIBOU, MAURITANIA: THE NUMBERS GAME

At the sand-swept fringes of the Mauritanian port city of Nouadhibou, some five hundred kilometers from Rosso and eight hundred kilometers from the Canary Islands, lay an abandoned school compound known as Guantanamo. Spanish soldiers had converted the compound into a holding center for boat migrants awaiting deportation in 2006, again using AECID funds. Subject to critical reports by Amnesty International and the Spanish refugee assistance organization CEAR (Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado), Guantanamo housed migrants who had been either 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.¹⁰

Guantanamo, as its detractors had soon started calling it, 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 postindependence history, triggered widespread condemnation, including from the European Union. It was a lucky coincidence that the surge in clandestine boat departures took place soon after the coup, since this forced the Europeans' hand. They now had to negotiate with Mauritania, thus recognizing the newly installed regime.¹¹ 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 criticized the sensationalism while pointing out that Nouadhibou had for years been a magnet for *regional* labor migration. To no avail: hysteria around an African exodus was quickly worked up, and the police crackdown intensified as a result.¹²

The Spaniards kept tight-lipped about their work in Mauritania; the U.S. Embassy in Nouakchott complained that getting information on Spain's migration response was akin to "pulling teeth," according to Wikileaks cables.¹³ Perhaps this was because of the legal vacuum in which migration controls took place. As critical observers such as CEAR noted, 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 deportation center's moniker "Guantanamo" was in this sense apt—as a space outside the law, though with the important caveat that migrants were kept there only temporarily (a few days in principle, often longer in practice) before being bundled into a van destined towards the Senegalese border at Rosso or the Malian one at Gogui.¹⁴ 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 European Union, 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.¹⁵

While the Mauritanian authorities were formally in charge of Guantanamo, assistance for detainees was handled by the Mauritanian Red Crescent, with support from the Spanish Red Cross. The deportation center 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 center 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 center: rundown and derelict, it was something he'd rather forget about.

"The fiasco of Guantanamo," as one Spanish journalist put it, was complete.¹⁶ Stripped bare of supplies by soldiers and labeled a prison by human rights advocates, the "welcoming center"—as the Mauritanian Red Crescent often referred to it—was a perfect illustration of the absurdities of the Spanish-African gift economy.

It also pointed to the increasing arbitrariness of policing clandestine migration on migrants' northward journey. As the Rosso border police had said, detection was easier in Mauritania than on the border. Migrants revealed their illegality through the same signs as in Dakar when preparing for embarkation—traveling in groups and carrying small backpacks, with biscuits and euros among their belongings. But the Mauritians threw themselves into the task of detecting "illegals" with unusual frenzy. The key characteristic of the illegality industry in Mauritania was what activists have called the numbers game (*la politique du chiffre*). 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. 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. Guantanamo was first a “welcoming center in citation marks,” said one Spanish Red Cross officer, before being “converted into a detention center for anyone suspected of wanting to migrate.”¹⁷

Europe’s subcontracted migration controls here threatened to undermine not only Mauritania’s diplomatic relations with neighboring countries but also the already fragile relations between the country’s black (*haratin*) and white (*bidan*) communities by adding a tinge of illegality to the politics of skin color. The legacy of slavery, as well as the forced expulsion of black Mauritians to Senegal following 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 stigmatization of strangers, with cases of even black Mauritians being deported to the southern borders. “Now all black people are susceptible to being [seen as] illegal migrants,” she said.

• • •

Jacques was one of the migrants detained and deported in the crackdowns. Dressed in a shabby sports jacket and stained jeans, he waited for me at the Red Cross base back in Rosso. It was hard to tell his age, but I guessed he was in his late thirties. A broad, expectant grin spread across his face as we sat down on a bench next to the water bladder. He clutched a small, ragged backpack, that telltale 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 had only 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. Like other migrants similarly fooled before him, he was instead dropped forty kilometers away and told to walk towards the West Saharan border. There, border guards promptly packed him off to Nouadhibou for a beating and a night in the cells. He refused to eat because of a “bad stomach.” The next day he was sent on to Guantanamo.

Jacques smoked more and more while he ate less and less. “I was so afraid,” he said. “‘You have to eat!’ they told me. But I said, I can’t eat here, I can’t eat in jail, because it smelled 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 Jacques recalled, “I was a bit affected by all this anxiety, I couldn’t eat even a small piece of biscuit.” 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's 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": "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."¹⁸

This vacancy was expressed in Jacques's rootlessness and wandering (*errance*). Where would he go? Jacques had no clear answers, except for saying, "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, five hundred CFA (one dollar), "plus my cigarettes." "Once I get to Rabat, my friend can find me there," he said, before mentioning that his friend's e-mail, the only contact detail he had, was stored on his mobile phone SIM card, which he had lost. Jacques was losing everything, including his wallet on the road to Nouadhibou, where he had ended up after a police officer took pity on him and helped him into a van departing Nouakchott. Even more 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 free of charge.

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 organization providing the only rudimentary assistance for migrants in the capital, he now appeared as Ibrahim, not Jacques; his age was listed as twenty-two, not verging on forty. 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 traveler's intentionality as source of both suspicion and entitlement, labeling 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 wan-

dering was unlikely to lead him across the biggest hurdle awaiting West Africa's illegal travelers—the Sahara.

MALI AND THE DESERT: CROSSING AFRICA'S INTERNAL SEA

Heading north from Nouadhibou, the desert route abruptly stops. Here lies what migrants call Kandahar, a no man's land 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. But to overland travelers, the whole desert is, in a sense, such a limbo. In crossing it, they go through their next stage in the transformation into full-fledged illegal migrants. They live off *gari*, a Nigerian staple of flour mixed with water. They learn the fleeting lingo of the border, a mix of English, French, and local words that allows them to communicate across linguistic divides. They stash 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 they are lucky enough to pass the initiation rite that crossing the desert constitutes for them, their journey—exhilarating, dreary, and deadly in equal measure—will finally have been worth it.

Before Mali's conflict in 2012, the country's vast desert borders had 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 European Union, 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 programs on "migration management," and (alongside the European Union) equipped seventeen border police posts.¹⁹ 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 personalized 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, and 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.

“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 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 thirty-five [border units] are equipped, that will reinforce the control of migratory flows.” Other needs came in a thick stream: they needed computers for their border offices, and solar-powered electricity, and more vehicles, and petrol for these vehicles! All this would help cut migrant crossings “upstream.” Above all, 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 E.U. 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.

Those 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 says such crossings challenge “the sacred feature of the 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 *animalization*, Khosravi and Coutin both note, evident in the terms used for clandestine migrants and their smugglers across the world: in Morocco, sheep are at the mercy of wolves; in Mexico chickens are smuggled by *polleros* (chicken farmers) or coyotes.²⁰

The making of West African travelers as illegal migrants is, again, not just discursive but also played out on their bodies. Youssou, a Senegalese adventurer who had managed to cross the Sahara via Mali and Niger, recalled packing into a Land Cruiser 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 of hidden cash. They poured out the migrants’ water and scat-

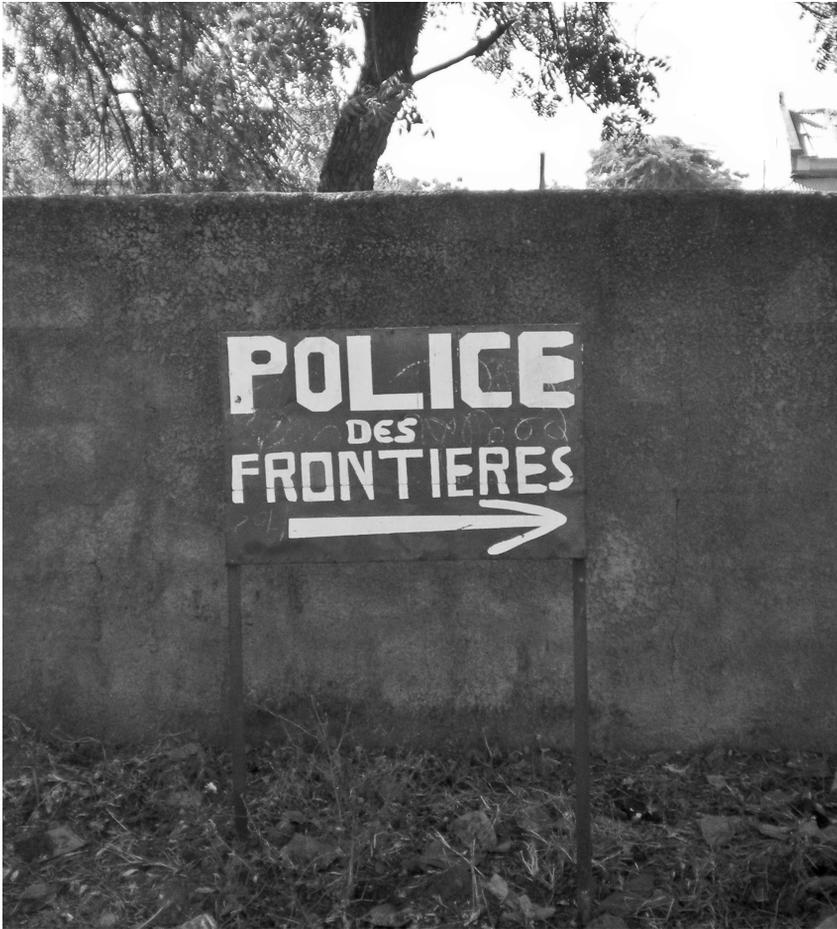


FIGURE 8. Border police post, Senegal-Mali border. Photo by author.

tered 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 clandestine migrants. 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 remarks, clandestine migrants are also rendered “thing-like” 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 racialization in Nouadhibou, and the dehumanizing experience of the desert add up to an ever more reified migrant illegality defined by the traveler’s “uniform,” his wildness, his deviousness, his blackness. It is to the refining of this crude illegality in North African policing that we will now turn; here, the definite touches are put to the making of illegal migrants in Europe’s borderlands.

MOROCCO: THE POLITICS OF RECOGNITION

Daouda and Modou had found the shortcut. I first met them in the market town of Fnideq, on the Moroccan side of the Ceuta border, making their way between the café tables and 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 Michel Agier has noted, the first North African country in being “annexed to the security policies of European governments.”²¹ 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, it was increasingly becoming a *destination*, not a “transit country.”²² Besides serving as a place where sub-Saharan migrants and refugees settled owing to the “blocked” route ahead, Morocco was also attracting executives, students, and workers 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-colored 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 businesslike 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 “multiaquarium strategy” that went beyond policing to encompass “sensitization, 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 percent 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 in which “everyone will work in the same aquarium.” Labeled PPP (prevention, prosecution, and protection), Morocco’s latest strategy covered both the country’s own clandestine migration flows—the harragas, or “burners of borders,” who have crossed the Strait ever since Spain instituted visa requirements in 1991—and the sub-Saharan migrants 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, about “confidence building” in the monthly mixed patrols of the Guardia Civil and the Moroccan gendarmerie, and

about the good relations built over several years in high-level meetings with Spain. More than money, Morocco wanted recognition and participation as an equal. I asked Mehdi about E.U. funding for the Moroccan migration response, and his reply first startled me. “What funding?” he laughed. “Well, there was a MEDA program, about €67.5 million, eh . . . I’m talking about immigration; that’s a small envelope. But we are a responsible country, we are a responsible state, we are not using this card to get finance 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.”²³

Mehdi was of course well aware that Morocco increased its political leverage greatly with Spain and the European Union thanks to migration. It would be no surprise to him, either, that the European Union was using the migration card in its development assistance strategy, with Morocco a huge beneficiary of such aid. Morocco, it is true, has long refused to sign an agreement with the European Union on readmissions of foreigners having transited through its territory, even though a deal was progressively getting closer. Until 2012 it had also refused to accept back nonnationals under such an agreement signed with Spain in 1992, with an exception being the “massive assault” at Melilla in 2005—not to mention routine *informal* expulsions through the border fences.²⁴ This diplomatic reluctance has not stopped Rabat from using and even promoting its status of “transit state,” however, whether in pushing for rights for its own emigrants, as a political pressure point in relation to occupied Western Sahara, or in negotiations on agricultural produce and foreign fishing rights.²⁵ The pressure was, of course, two-way. The E.U.-Morocco action plan, like its equivalents for other North African countries, includes clauses on “ensuring the effective management of migration flows” and readmissions, while the “mobility partnership” signed between the European Union and Morocco in 2013 has “combating illegal migration” among its objectives.²⁶ In the migration-related aid stream, Morocco received €654 million in funding under the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument over only three years. While €40 million of this assistance was earmarked for security, 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.²⁷

Starting before the Ceuta and Melilla debacle but proceeding at a quickening pace in its aftermath, irregular migration was swiftly racialized in Morocco. Blackness became, as in Mauritania a few years later, a sign of illegality. In 2003, the country's infamous law 02/03 criminalized irregular migration and introduced deportation provisions. Around that time, taxi drivers in Tangier started refusing black customers. The scruffy hostels in the city's medina closed their doors to Morocco's southern neighbors who had so far frequented them. Bona fide refugees were increasingly rounded up, bundled into police vans, and dumped in the no-man's-land of the closed Moroccan-Algerian border.

As the crackdowns intensified, sub-Saharan travelers responded by further developing their intricate means of organization and subterfuge. A constellation of safe houses sprang up across Moroccan (and other North African) cities. These ghettos, as migrants called them, were houses or flats en route, usually based on nationality or ethnicity, to which migrants gained the right of entry through adherence to house rules and usually a small sum of money.²⁸ Conscious of how their bodies and behavior 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 in Tangier. 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: they all had the same leather jackets and sunglasses. More important, he knew that, once he spotted them, he should not turn but walk straight ahead with the air of a legitimate foreigner.²⁹

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 recognized through his "uniform"—backpacks, double pairs of trousers—in Morocco clothes and other "props" were used to *pass* as legal rather

than signaling illegality. Here blackness was enough to raise suspicion: guilty until proven innocent. With this constant threat of apprehension, the clandestine “mind” conjured at the Rosso border was also congealing into a more definite shape. In Morocco, the illegal migrant was someone who had interiorized his own illicit status and its frightening corollary, what the anthropologist Nicholas De Genova terms “deportability,” or the constant threat of expulsion faced by undocumented foreigners.³⁰ 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 Moroccan-Algerian border.

• • •

Oujda is a mythical and terrifying place in the adventurers’ world. Some French-speaking migrants refer to deportation there as “going on pilgrimage,” giving an ironic spin to the violence and despair endured by those packed off to this vortex of the border. 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, and the key overland entry point to Morocco for clandestine West African travelers. On its outskirts lies *la fac* (the faculty or “the school”), where migrants often end up after expulsion to the no-man’s-land next to the closed 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* and have even taken to confiscating visitors’ cameras until they pay up for the privilege of observing Oujda’s migratory world. This world is rough and raw, with migrants hostage to the gangs and police, who can strike at any minute. Across the forest, deportees out of luck bide their time hiding in *tranquillos* (“peaceful” places, in adventurers’ lingo). Veterans of the Moroccan migration circuits, such as Stephen, have already been deported to Oujda multiple times, some clocking 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 that year, after a Moroccan-Spanish standoff concerning the policing of the Melilla border, the Spanish interior minister had traveled 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 when 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 one hundred euros 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 seven hundred euros, my friend five hundred euros . . . 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 8:00 A.M., 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 evoked 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 somatization of migrants’ despair at an encroaching illegality, something I had already seen with Jacques in faraway Rosso.

The mental and bodily effects of the border were deepening with each year of Moroccan collaboration in European controls. Médecins sans Frontières, which cared for the beaten, distressed, and wounded *clandestins* expelled towards Oujda until it pulled out of the country in 2013, noted how deportees’ physical wounds were increasingly accompanied by grave mental health problems. Sexual violence endured by women in the no-man’s-land remained horrific, bringing cases of HIV as well as depression, posttraumatic stress, and unwanted pregnancies. The children born of these encounters often faced a dark fate, in Morocco or smuggled into Europe. While access to health care had improved somewhat for sub-Saharan Africans in the country, the vicious circle could not be fixed with plasters and wound dressings. Young men had their heads and legs bandaged before staggering back into the tranquilos and forests outside Oujda and Melilla, stuck in the vortex of the border.³¹

The psychological effects of the border were affecting me, too, in a much smaller yet similarly paranoid way to the supposed *clandestins*. In Oujda I walked with fast steps around la fac, trying—like Stephen, I later realized—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* often ended—as it eventually did for Stephen—in “self-deportation,” to borrow a term used by U.S. Republicans, via the IOM’s euphemistically named “assisted voluntary return” program.³²

In Morocco, the petty gift economy of Spanish-Sahelian relations had been almost wholly replaced by a politics of recognition, in which Rabat agreed to play its role as long as Spain and the European Union deepened cooperation. Here, visits by European officials, the signing of new accords, or simply the need for end-of-year statistics was 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—or else attempt a crossing to Spain simply to escape harassment. In 2012, an unprecedented wave of arrests of black Africans was unleashed in Mauritania, while similar roundups picked up pace in Morocco. The clandestine migrants, like currency, had to be kept in circulation for the illegality industry to keep rolling.

CONCLUSION: ILLEGALITY PUT TO WORK

The Spanish-African border business, reaching from the aid world and security solutions of the previous chapters to the police subcontracting described in the present one, is a schoolbook example of the increasing *delegation* of migration controls. As other writers have pointed out, delegation lets states work around a central border dilemma: how to appease public fears on migration while not hurting the economy or running afoul of human rights law.³³ Moreover, the outsourced border business is cost-effective, since collaboration with especially poor West African states is cheap compared with the cost of assisting, detaining, and deporting arrivals in Spain. Yet this chapter has also illustrated a larger dilemma of delegation: as too many groups become invested in fighting illegal migration, stakes grow, conflicts arise, and perverse incentives are created.

On one level, 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. Yet with each financial exchange, new facets have been added to the relations between African and European forces. The gift economy has created a social bond where before there was none; it has personalized Europe’s border regime; and it has bound recipient and giver into a tense mutual relationship of prestations and counterprestations. Such gift relations, in turn, have also added new facets to the constitution of migrant illegality in what, following Coutin, can be seen as a process of gradual *becoming* en route. Spanish per diem payments to the Senegalese police have procured an extension of migrant illegality, moving it away from actual infractions and towards material and behavioral

signs. Gifts to the Mauritians—ranging from patrol boats and cash to political recognition—have boosted the number of detainees while adding an edge of racialization to migration controls. Development aid and diplomatic favors have compelled the Moroccans to apply well-measured force to the increasingly fearful and furtive migrant body that, stripped of its rights and resources, can then be robbed at gunpoint by emboldened criminal gangs and Algerian soldiers.

But the migrant can also, through this growing vulnerability, 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 E.U. border: he is alternately a hounded but pitied prey and a ghostlike, prohibited presence.

None of this means that Europe has simply had its way with its southern neighbors, as the ambivalence and complaints of officers from Dakar to Rabat have shown. Nor does it mean that the traveler 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 suggests: by adopting the role of the adventurer, some overland travelers also forge a distinct *presence* for themselves through clandestine skills honed on the margins of the law. While some such adventurers somatize despair, others instead press ahead ever harder, taking pride in their predicament. While many travelers self-consciously start adopting the terms *illegal migrant* and *clandestin*, others do not. Yet the main point remains: Europe’s streamlined strategy on irregular migration crumbles in the borderlands, where an absurd circle is created. The more gifts and favors 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 traveler as he approaches the final hurdles on his way to Europe: the Mediterranean and Atlantic waters and the tall fences looming around the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. Their fraught crossings into European space—and the border spectacles unfolding there—are the subject of the next section.

PART TWO

Crossings



SCENE 2

The Capsized Correspondent

BRAVE HACK TAKES MIGRANT BOAT TO SPAIN, FAILS
TO SELL STORY

The blue wooden boat surges forward with each swell. The prow cuts through the heavy waves, sending up spray along the sides and rocking the African migrants who huddle aboard in bright yellow raincoats. Each on his own. One man is curled up in front, his head resting below the anchor, oblivious to the waves or just plain seasick. Next to him sits a beautiful young woman, wearing a black hat to ward off the cold: she briefly looks towards the stern, then goes back to staring ahead over the waves, clutching a wet tarpaulin spread across the boat. The tarp catches the Atlantic winds and fills with fresh, salty air. No safety to be found underneath. The only sound is the splash of the waves and the drone of the motor, which should be comforting, a sign of civilization out on the high seas, but all it produces is a sharp, incessant rumble, like a tired chainsaw. It's been only twenty-four hours aboard, and a silent stupor has already descended on the thirty-nine travelers. The skies are a compact gray; the boat lurches like a drunkard across the livid sea.

The correspondent comes into the room and puts a plate of fruit on the table. "I want to have your comments! Bad and good," he says as I pop a grape into my mouth and praise his camera work. We turn up the volume, the rumble of the motor increasing. On-screen unfolds his oeuvre: the only successful journalistic attempt to join boat migrants from West Africa towards the Canaries.

Laurent, a French former war correspondent, had put everything at stake in his trip. He had left his base in Rabat and gone to Nouadhibou in 2007, bent on joining a migrant pirogue. Though other journalists had done the hop from Western Sahara to the eastern Canary Islands, this longer trip was something no reporter had successfully accomplished before. (One Spanish reporter's desperate call for help soon after setting off caused much laughter among border guards, who had to rescue him.) Laurent had been a sailor and knew plenty of preparations would be needed. The adventure took him two years, including two long stints in Nouadhibou, where he had to draw on the skills his experience as a war correspondent could offer. "In Nouadhibou there's nothing," he told me with a slight American drawl in his villa outside Rabat in 2010, comfortably switching among English, French, and Spanish. "There's prostitution, drugs, sand, and an incredibly rough ocean and weather conditions, very windy, and it can be very cold, and it's awesomely corrupt and beautiful at the same time." But Laurent was no poetic layabout: he was a tough-skinned hack who knew how to get a story before anyone else. Some fellow correspondents saw him as a buffoon, and he readily admitted as much. "You have to be prepared to stand on your mother's head [to get the best story]," he said, "because if you don't, someone else will. It's a cutthroat business."

In Nouadhibou the media stampede was abating when Laurent arrived for one of his stints in 2007, but he still embarked upon what he called, with a laugh, "a completely crooked strategy." He entered Mauritania with a forged journalism permit and, once installed, presented himself as an aid worker, armed with business cards for a fictive NGO. On the streets, his newly cultivated beard and Moorish turban made him blend in with the locals. In his own words, he was "incarnating different characters"—a Western reporter to security forces, an NGO paramedic to migrant acquaintances, an elderly Moor to passersby.

Laurent soon started going native. Living in a fish-smelling hovel rented from a Spaniard, his daily existence came to resemble that of the clandestine migrants he was there to report on. Smugglers took his money, and African travel companions disappeared. The venture was funded by his own savings. "Who else would pay for such a crazy thing, lasting for so long?" His wife in Rabat, six months pregnant, was angrily urging him to return home instead of risking his life on a boat. But much like his migrant contacts, Laurent saw no way of giving up. "When you're in the middle of the river you don't switch horses, because then you fall or you lose everything," he said. "I had invested so much time,

energy, and money into it, it would have been a disaster if I had given up.”

Laurent realized he had to try another strategy. In the Nouadhibou quagmire a new role was slowly creeping upon him: that of people smuggler. “I ended up being the organizer of the fight,” he said, using his favored migrant term for the sea crossing. He took his fellow travelers, a dogged bunch of West Africans, to task, asking them what they had achieved and “what was missing, what were the fears, how much we were going to give to the customs officers, and so forth.” If clandestine migration involved constant transformations, journalists such as Laurent were experts among the shape-shifters, as he himself acknowledged. His last incarnation as people smuggler highlighted how boat migration was anything but the spontaneous African “exodus” of media fame: it was rather a spectacle in which journalists, humanitarians, police, and migrants all played their converging and confusing roles.

Laurent and his passengers finally departed. They stacked petrol canisters, water supplies, a satellite phone, and two GPSs into their pirogue and set off towards the Canaries, eight hundred kilometers to the northwest. Laurent’s voice-over says they are leaving “the waste land of Mauritania” for “El Dorado.”

Social divisions were soon apparent onboard. Under the tarp in front huddled the “cattle,” the poorer copassengers, while the stern was the “VIP area.” Those skilled enough took turns at the outboard motor. Then the engine spluttered and choked. The “devils” who had sold them the petrol—corrupt Mauritanian customs officers—had mixed it with water. After the first night onboard, tensions started showing. “Every inch you abandon is taken,” says Laurent’s voice-over. Then disaster struck. Water seeped into the boat; the passengers were “bailing like robots.” They shot a flare, to no avail. Alone on the high seas, they finally spotted a big ship heading straight towards them. Laurent turned off his camera and helped the skippers, who revved the engine back into life just in time to avoid being chewed by the approaching ship’s propeller. On the third day, Laurent got hold of the Spanish emergency services over satellite phone, who obliged a Russian tanker to rescue them. As they were finally pulled aboard, Laurent again stopped filming as they ascended a flimsy ladder. The Russians were reluctant hosts: still, the Africans scattered across deck and Laurent, assigned to a cabin, sensed hope. They would be taken to Spain. A boat finally approached, without flag. Spaniards, they hoped. Then a Moroccan flag was suddenly raised. “The trap is closed,” says the voice-over. “One of my guys

hides in a garbage bin.” Diverted to Western Sahara, Laurent was again separated from the others, interrogated, and eventually set free. His companions were detained, deported, and forgotten. “Who cares about Africa?” the voice-over asks as the film comes to a sad, frustrating end.

Laurent had failed. He had not reached the Canaries, and, what’s more, he had let his copassengers down. Three years on, he struggled to hide his disappointment. A shorter version of his documentary had been aired on Spanish television, and his arrival had generated the expected sensation. His story had also traveled farther afield, to northern Europe and the United States. But “people were more interested [in] the odyssey, the explorer” than in the “backstory” of Africa’s plight. The full version of his epic journey, meanwhile, had still to find a buyer. “Un clou chasse un autre,” Laurent sighed—one nail hits another in the world of news. In 2010, editors yawned, when a few years earlier they had salivated at a juicy migrant story. “I lost so much money and reached so little, I could be bitter about it,” he said. What had motivated him was not fame and money, he insisted, but the “professional challenge” of filming the journey, and something else too: to show it as a “deterrent.” “I thought it was very important to say, ‘Guys, don’t do this.’”

Laurent’s story was meant to depict a “sinking continent” and its exodus—the film’s cover showed Africa as submerged under the ocean, with a migrant boat floating atop it—but instead became framed as a rescue. “When we eventually arrived in Dakhla there was a TV crew waiting for me, there was an ambulance waiting for me, there were two doctors and three colonels in uniforms,” Laurent said. His image—a bedraggled, bearded Westerner staggering ashore together with the black migrants—became the story, a “propaganda tool” in his words. The capsized correspondent ended up unwittingly mirroring the fate of the clandestine migrants he had first emulated and then groomed and steered towards the Canaries: he had been incorporated into the spectacle of rescues unfolding at Europe’s southernmost borders.

The Border Spectacle

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 learned everything. He knew they went on patrol for five minutes to one side, twenty to the other. He would have to time his attack just right.

Breaching the fence, this multimillion-euro armor, was a finely honed skill for Amadou. As he waited, every nerve in his body had to work in concert. 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 learned this the hard way, on one of his ten 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 learned 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 clandestine migrants, 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 journeys 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 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 or border game. To the political scientist Peter Andreas, border policing is an audience-directed “ritualistic performance” aimed at “recrafting the image of the border,” making it more solid and real. To Nicholas De Genova, building on Marxist theorist Guy Debord’s 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.”²

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 gather here 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” travelers alone. As border theorists have noted, people become part of a new system of value when they cross state boundaries. Much as sweatshop shirts become fashion items and bags of cocaine turn into gold-like dust, migrants go through what the anthropologist Michael Kearney calls “reclassification”—a pun indicating how they are both labeled anew and potentially switch social class in the crossing. While the U.S.-Mexican 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 deep economic divide loaded with symbolic, legal, and political potency for those who cross it.³

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 migrations—and especially the movements between West Africa and southern Europe—do not neatly map onto the economic terrain but rather follow their own tangled logics. While critical authors such as De Genova correctly identify the obscene, “off-scene” reality behind the larger border spectacle as the continued need for illegalized labor in the West, this chapter will reveal another “off-scene” within and on the margins of the spectacle itself, in the realities that fall outside its visual order.⁴

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 borders 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 are muddled and mixed.⁵ Yet this Spanish success is far from complete. The splitting of the border spectacle into two distinct acts veils how both settings depend upon a similar militarization 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 theater of operations.

This chapter, then, is a spectacle in two acts: sea and land, rescues and repulsion, huddle and horde. In the first act, it travels to the coasts of the Canary Islands and relives the 2006 spectacle unfolding there; in the second, it visits Ceuta and Melilla, whose steel fences stand as a monument to the 2005 “assault” on the enclaves, before returning to the present and the distressing new arrivals of 2012–14. The chapter is about the masks donned in these border encounters—not only by the migrants, but by border workers as well. Among 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*, whose captains and commanders stand center-stage in the spectacle of the border.

ACT I. THE CANARY ISLANDS: 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 evoked 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 has played 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 or “meritorious” institution) than Comandante Francisco and his maritime surveillance colleagues. Francisco had even made a video, called *The Drama of Immigration*, illustrating this transformation to his visitors.

Sitting in his Madrid office, 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-ab*, sings Senegal’s Ismael Lô in a bluesy voice on the soundtrack. *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



FIGURE 9. An award-winning picture of a sea rescue in the Canaries. Photo courtesy of Juan Medina.

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 saviors. “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 twenty thousand 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 man 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. These pictures provide 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 the philosopher Giorgio Agamben and his influential reading of the ancient Roman figure of *homo sacer*—the banished, “sacred” man who can be killed but not sacrificed. Like a modern-day *homo sacer*, one argument goes, the clandestine migrant is subject to a state of exception in which the sovereign power to “let die” is exercised. But as was seen in chapter 2, 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 one former Socialist government delegate in the Canaries, whose recollection of the 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 (figure 9). 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 savior],” the delegate recalled. “They drown, they are drowning, and you stretch out your hands to whomever you can.”⁶

In Spain's sea rescues, the illegal migrant appears not as the abstract flow of risk of Frontex maps, or as the hounded prey of the borderlands, or 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 cognate pictures of African refugee flows depicting a “sea of humanity” without a past, fix the notion of the clandestine migrant as a helpless, nameless body, sinking into the dark waters.⁷ In rescuing this drowning body a virtuous circle is born, where the tasks of patrolling, caring for, and informing on clandestine migration blur into one another.

The production, distribution, and appropriation of images—in short, the visual economy of clandestine migration—mirrors and even facili-

tates this mixing of roles.⁸ The mixing was on display in Francisco's video and many others like it, in the rescue pictures adorning Guardia Civil corridors, and in televised snippets of sea interceptions. On the walls of the Tenerife Comandancia, it was 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 sociologist Craig Calhoun 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."⁹ This is what happened in the Canaries boat crisis of 2006, to which we will now return.

Part 1: Symbiosis

Abdou had tired of talking about his amputated feet. "I have four articles and three DVDs, and it hasn't helped me at all," the young Malian told me in a charity-run migrant shelter in Gran Canaria, where he had arrived after a brutal ordeal on the open Atlantic. "You can look me up on the Internet; it's all there. I have talked a lot, and it doesn't help me. I'm tired of all that." We looked down his legs, towards the Spanish-provided prostheses hidden under trainers, socks, and jeans that I had already seen in a TV documentary. His despair had dripped off the screen as the camera tracked his hands seeking out a picture of his mother or his eyes as he recalled the toxic mix of gasoline and saltwater that had destroyed his feet in the hull of the boat. "I spent seven months in hospital," he told me as other migrants crowded in around us. "I spent four months learning to walk. Since I came to Spain, I haven't worked a single day." A tone of despair infused Abdou's voice, just as in the documentary. I had long since stopped taking notes; we fell silent and the drizzle subsided in the gray patio.

For a few years after 2006, the tragedies of Abdou and other capsized West Africans were the most poignant example of the spectacle of clandestine migration into southern Europe. Yet the full-blown emergency they represented had been preceded by a drip-feed of no less tragic arrivals to the easterly Canary Islands. And it was there, partly outside the media spotlight, that a coherent humanitarian response to clandestine migration was initially forged in the archipelago, providing the groundwork for the symbiosis among the media, police, and aid workers that was to follow on Tenerife and Gran Canaria a few years later.

Emilio, a Red Cross worker now based in Las Palmas, was a veteran of this early era and looked back at it with something akin to nostalgia. In the late 1990s, pioneering pateras had started reaching the island of Fuerteventura, first with Sahrawis and later with sub-Saharan Africans and even Asians onboard. At night, the locals “heard the screams of people as the pateras turned over,” Emilio recalled. “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 (Equipo de Respuesta Inmediata en Emergencias, ERIE) rushed to the beaches and ports to wrap migrants in blankets and to give them first aid, a hot drink, and a medical checkup. The rough terrains of Fuerteventura made Emilio’s work even more taxing. “We had to traverse a dirt track for eight kilometers, 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.” As 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. “No one knew what was happening there until we created a Red Cross–press symbiosis, though we kept it quiet,” he recalled. “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 recognized that his efforts only paid off in part, however. It was not until large cayucos started arriving in Gran Canaria and Tenerife 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 traumatized 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 the 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 the sense of both spectacle and 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. Specialized 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 captured in the waters off the Canaries. Soon staff were trained and risks minimized, heralding a first, strange sight of Europe for boat migrants: rescue workers bedecked in full protective gear who took them onboard, isolated them as pathogens, and safely steered them to port.¹⁰

Before their arrival, someone always called the journalists. Contacts were close among 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 streaming off the deck under the watchful eye of the Guardia Civil to the snaps and flashes of photojournalists. Finally, Red Cross volunteers wrapping migrants in blankets and lining them up for a medical check followed by transport to detention. The moral narrative of a professional, streamlined labor of rescue—the reassuring end to the emergency imaginary—was repeatedly broadcast and brought to its expected denouement, just as it had been at the end of Comandante Francisco's video.

The port spectacle showed how the “symbiosis” pinpointed by Emilio concerned more than just 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 among 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. Emilio and his team shared and contrasted data with the Guardia Civil—information that was then sent on to the Spanish 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



FIGURE 10. A rescue in the Strait of Gibraltar, September 2012. Photo courtesy of Salvamento Marítimo.

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 took over not only 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*” among 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 in the same night. He translated for the Red Cross, explaining, “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 setups 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 Guantanamo clashed with the Mauritanian Red Crescent’s reference to it as “our center” or the “welcoming center.” Red Cross volunteers in Rosso-Senegal said that deportees often refused to go see them, since they saw the organization as part of the coercive state apparatus they had already encountered in Nouadhibou.

Part 2: Transformation

The Red Cross brand had been identified with Spain’s humanitarian regime—and had, as the Tenerife delegate insisted, received a huge boost in resources for this reason. In the Spanish migration response as a whole, the Red Cross had come to exemplify 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 other support for a short initial period. Several civil society groups turned down participation because of the fund’s short-term nature, “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 centers (CIEs). 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 criticism. Some activists and policemen dismissed the Red Cross as only “putting on plasters,” while others highlighted the organization’s role in legitimizing controversial policing operations. The Red Cross was aware of these dilemmas and was present in only a few CIEs for this reason. In such centers “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 (ICRC), 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 prioritize foreigners on their soil.

While these clashes reflected long-standing differences between a cosmopolitan ICRC and the “patriotic” national societies, they also highlighted a larger humanitarian dilemma. A gray zone has in recent decades emerged between combatants and aid workers in war zones—as seen, for example, in the military appropriation of the Red Cross emblem in Iraq and Afghanistan. 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 politicized, its universalism questioned, and its workers ambushed. Humanitarianism has, critical voices allege, been transformed into a form of politics—an ethical configuration and mode of governance whose efficiency draws upon its very apolitical guise.¹¹

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 1859.¹² The symbiosis between humanitarians and coast guards was thus not an anomaly; what was unusual was the depth of participation of wildly different agencies and the ensuing transformation of their respective roles.¹³ This was evident in comments by the Tenerife delegate in 2010 when he attacked the then conservative opposition’s calls for implicating the army in stopping the cayucos, before acknowledging, “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 colors 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 delegate, explaining this in reference to clandestine migration.¹⁴ 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 organization 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 were their targets, the *subsaharianos* (sub-Saharan Africans) and *magrebíes* (North Africans). The racial 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' behavior, black migrants were often talked about with notes of respect and awe. "Sub-Saharanans are superstrong in character," said one Red Cross coordinator, impressed with their lack of agitation despite the drama at sea. "They don't cave in the way we do."

These complex frontline categorizations were brought into sharper relief by the border imagery. Whether in Guardia Civil videos, border surveillance brochures, or news reports, it was the subsaharianos, not magrebíes, who 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 saviors. 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.¹⁵

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

Part 3: 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 noted in other humanitarian settings, the "emergency" needs a visual and narrative frame.¹⁶ 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 in response to emergencies is often referred to as the "CNN effect," and its existence is still widely debated. 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 European Union into action. The journalists came to play a role in these battles, at times as hapless extras, at other times as active protagonists, alongside the other workers in the illegality industry.

The "guardian angels" and journalists did not just share in the emergency imaginary; they also mixed and depended on each other to do their jobs. 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, like Laurent the cap-

sized correspondent, disguised themselves as clandestine migrants and embarked on journeys in trucks and boats, camera in hand. They have traveled to migrants' home villages with news of deaths and tracked deportees to deserts and detention centers 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.¹⁷

For all the reporters' efforts, the "emergency" kept framing their interventions. One award-winning British TV reporter sighed at the fact that migration sold only if it was "something about us being under siege," exasperated at editors who changed his program 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 featured on countless front pages, in Francisco's video, and in 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 criticism of the "speechless," 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 appear instantly on their homepages or newscasts at the press of a button, without context and without consideration of the photographer's intentions. The most extreme example of this was

perhaps the Guardia Civil's numerous "humanitarian" videos, set to soft music to differentiate them from heavily soundtracked drug interception clips. By appropriating and reframing Juan's rescue image, the Tenerife delegate and Comandante Francisco could present it as evidence of humanitarianism, not of what Juan denounced as the "cruel and macabre obstacle course" created by the government and the guardias' very efforts.¹⁸

Juan's feeling of being a remote control—like Abdou's tragic and tired recollections—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 organizations, and security forces and was appropriated by these image producers in turn. While the confident "humanitarian" framing in Guardia Civil videos 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 traumatized Red Cross volunteers, guardias, survivors, and their families; as iconic sign of humanitarianism in Guardia Civil corridors and brochures; 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 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 blond 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 4: The Backroom of Migration

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 from the sun. He had videos of the “backroom of migration” (*la trastienda de la migración*), what happened after the journalists left—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. In part, this chimes with Debord’s prediction for the society of the spectacle—that is, replacing the real world with a narrow selection of images that “succeed in making themselves regarded as the epitome of reality.”¹⁹ The violent backroom of the border, excised from the visual realm, was instead relegated 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 organizations he had summoned. He took friends and family along to make them experience how different the realities of a boat arrival were from 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 arrived, 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 racialized: the heady brew of saltwater, gasoline, paintwork, and strong bodily odors also recognized by Guardia Civil and Salvamento colleagues. As one guardia told a Spanish journalist, it was a "concentrated human smell" that reached them before they saw the boat: "It smells of misery."²⁰

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 or distributed within its visual economy. In the film produced by Laurent, the capsized correspondent, the camera was off at the most dangerous and defining moments—during the night when the migrants scrambled to fix the motor as a ship approached and when they clambered up the ladder to the waiting Russian tanker. "You don't film when you're dying," he told me. However, the resulting gaps were indispensable, contributing to the aura of his video and persona.

Juan similarly 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 onto 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 rel-

egated and where the spectacle once began: the tall fences around Ceuta and Melilla and the tragic mass attempts to climb over them in the autumn of 2005.

ACT 2: CEUTA AND MELILLA: 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 in 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, E.U.-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 around Ceuta and Melilla, but as Spain joined Schengen, they now became the European Union’s only terrestrial borders in Africa. With the marking of the E.U. border arrived new, Europe-bound migrants. These migrants—bedraggled, poor, black, of uncertain origin or destination—were quite unlike the Moroccan laborers, Indian merchants, and Andalusian workers who had entered the enclaves in an earlier era. As their numbers grew, so did the fences. First these 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 E.U. money. Galvanized steel mesh eventually rose more than three meters above the 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 Canarys, where Emilio and his Red Cross colleagues tended to them.



FIGURE 11. Between Ceuta's twin fences, July 2010. Photo by author.

Then came the 2005 *asaltos* with which this book began: hundreds of migrants “storming” towards the fences, leaving at least fourteen 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 meters above the ground, enclosing the enclaves in a perfect armory. 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.²¹

Walls and fences increasingly circle nervous polities, attempting to guard against the “lawlessness lapping the edges of nation-states,” as the border theorist Wendy Brown puts it in her seminal study *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*. The U.S.-Mexican 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, while its more recent counterpart between the Sinai and Negev Deserts targets African refugees and migrants. On the Greek-Turkish land border, a similar anti-migration fence has been erected. These fortifications are

not meant to keep out the armies that have traditionally threatened the polity. Instead they target transnational threats—including, most strikingly and prominently, the clandestine migrant.²²

To some critical border scholars, the main purpose of such barriers is broadcasting deterrence rather than guarding against the dangers lurking outside them. Brown goes further than this, seeing them as monuments of folly to the waning sovereignty of nation-states and, with a Freudian twist, as a “psychic defense 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.” Nation-state walls, Brown concludes, are “modern-day temples housing the ghost of political sovereignty,” conferring magical protection against incomprehensible powers.²³

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

Ceuta and Melilla’s history in walling out unwanted outsiders goes back to the times before the vallas. As African garrison outposts and penal colonies (*presidios*) since before the Spanish colonial period in northern Morocco, the enclaves have always been sites where central state ideology clashes with the messy realities of the frontier.²⁴ From within Melilla’s medieval city walls, the Spaniards organized 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. Since Morocco’s independence, tension and trade have likewise fluctuated, with one constant: Rabat’s nonrecognition 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 new transnational “threats”: 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 evoked by Brown. For migrants, it was so in the most concrete sense: like the West Bank barrier 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 you cannot safeguard ten kilometers of valla [Melilla’s approximate terrestrial perimeter], how will you be able to control all of the E.U.’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 militarization took on its violent guise, inflected by the enclaves’ martial past rather than by Red Cross humanitarianism. This militarization of the border incorporated not just the Guardia Civil and Moroccan forces but also the troublesome 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 mobilized to seal the border.

Part 1: 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 “Ao,” 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 decided to make new fencing, which would initially cost twenty million euros and would swiftly rise even higher.²⁵

As border controls and discourses have become militarized in Ceuta and Melilla, so has migrant praxis in a play of reflection and mimesis ricocheting from forest hideouts on the Moroccan-Algerian border to the control rooms of Madrid and Rabat. 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 migrants 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. As Moroccan security forces stepped up harassment in 2005, the migrants’ organizational 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 words that migrants, guardias, and journalists used for these attempts were, incidentally, the same—*attack* and *asalto*.²⁶

Pierre from Cameroon was one of the organizers of the 2005 *grande attaque* 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 (Moroccan auxiliary forces) 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 surveyed 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 in 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 clandestine migrants have militarized 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 attack. 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 centers. 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.²⁷ One Spanish journalist had come to Gurugú before the grande attack 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 militarization 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.” Militarization 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 referring to were coming into existence thanks to the very controls supposed to fight them. The only routes that remained relatively free from organized smugglers, however, were precisely those where the Spanish government accused them of dumping migrants—the short sea route into the enclaves, or across the Strait over their fences. Here a crossing attempt was mainly dependent upon the traveler’s own wit, strength, and cunning.

With the help of European money, the vallas, seemingly a sharp divide, had become a medium for increased cross-border cooperation. They acted as a catalyst in a militarized alignment of fence technology, Moroccan forces, guardias, journalists, and migrants. Yet, unlike at sea, this mixing and hybridization were 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 as they had done with the Spanish vice president before the 2005 “assaults.” Once the audience departed, a visceral reality replaced the visual splendor of the vallas. The smell of migrants, the touch of their hands on the cool steel mesh, and 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 2: 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 saw 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 Proytecsa; 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.²⁸ Planned for both enclaves, the “humane” fence was eventually erected only 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.

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.²⁹ Those who still managed to climb the outer fence faced a moveable upper panel that, once movement was detected, descended and trapped them underneath. If the climbers 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 in order to immobilize the migrant, like an insect in a spider's web. If against all predictions the intruder got past this mesh, next was a lower middle fence; then, finally, the inner fence, again six meters tall. "It's sold as not being harmful," said Ramón about the sirga, adding defensively, "Those who would have to make sure it isn't are the politicians or the company [Proytecса]." Sensors and cameras (104 in total) detected any movement along the fence. In the event of a bigger asalto, peppered water would be sprayed upon the attackers, 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, but we are out there rescuing people." The police work was "99 percent 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, the gesture also recalled other attempts to humanize the walls around the West, whether in concerns over the free flow of animals across the U.S.-Mexico barrier or over the threat that Australia's refugee detention center on the remote Christmas Island poses to the welfare of migrating crabs.³⁰

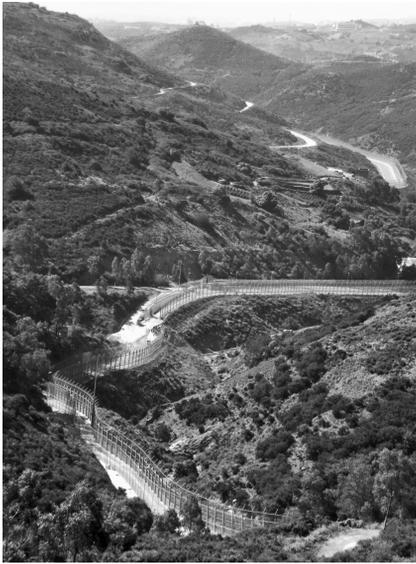


FIGURE 12. The Ceuta fence: view towards Tarajal. Photo by author.



FIGURE 13. Close-up of the Ceuta fence from the Moroccan side. Photo by author.

The cables, wires, sensors, and cameras—not to mention the birds' 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 gave them only 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, odors, 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 signaled not misery but danger. The visceral and the visual here combined in a backroom show meant only 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.

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 meters. 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 the guardias 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 the Moroccan soldiers “pass right by without seeing them,” he said. But the guardias guided the Alis 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 explored by Wendy Brown. 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 Guardia Civil, whose primary task in the enclaves was the “sealing” (*impermeabilización*) of the border.

There were also social consequences. The low-ranking guardias charged with keeping the migrant avalanche at bay grumbled about tough working conditions and the uncertain legal status of their interventions. Besides such professional complaints, the sealing of the border has also created larger dilemmas. If the European Union has increasingly come to resemble a gated community, Ceuta and Melilla are its most concrete manifestation. As ethnographers have noted, the gating of wealthy enclaves is a contradictory enterprise: aimed at shutting dangers out, they may help foment the very fears they guard against.³¹

Among these fears was not just an impending avalanche but also growing tensions with the walled-out neighbors. 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 trailed 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 meters 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 3: The Spectacle Hijacked

As Ramón 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, a zone of warehouses and hangars on the outskirts of Melilla. The whole

area heaved with adrenaline-fueled waiting, walking, packing, shouting, queuing, and scuffling. Walkways undulated along the fence, and along them old women staggered towards the gates, double-bent with huge bundles on their backs and parcels roped to their bellies: coiled-up mattresses, bulks of toilet-paper 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 laborers streaming into the enclaves, were allowed to enter without a visa in what was an exception to Schengen rules for residents of the neighboring 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 labeled 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. The value of the border trade in Ceuta alone has been estimated at €1–1.5 billion a year, or up to 70 percent of its economic activity.³²

The arrangement by which goods moved out without Spanish controls, while Moroccan forces were meant to curb any illicit movement of people on their side, was unbalanced to say the least. The valla tipped the scales further, yet not in the negative economic sense at times asserted for other fortified borders. By channeling the border trade, the valla had boosted business in making the step in the value chain even steeper.³³ 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 animalized 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 *con-*

vivencia (peaceful coexistence) among their Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and Hindu communities. While this view had always contrasted with a reality of discrimination, 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 organizations, which many observers suspected of being agents of the Moroccan secret police, blocked the importation of cement, bricks and fresh produce. Activists plastered posters across the border area that mocked Spanish police-women, whom they accused of insulting its citizens.³⁴ Spain's conservative opposition leader and premier-to-be, Mariano Rajoy, visited Melilla, journalists thronging around him and hunting angry activists at the border. Meanwhile, in an unusual move, Morocco accused the Guardia Civil of abandoning sub-Saharan migrants on a raft outside Ceuta.³⁵ 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 this was so, it was hard to know exactly what the Moroccans wanted. The status of Ceuta and Melilla, as well as of Western Sahara, remained an open wound in Spanish-Moroccan relations. Added to these concerns were rumors of outstanding E.U. aid, as well as royal whims. The Moroccan king, holidaying near Melilla, had been annoyed 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 imperiled the old order of small bribes and big gains, the life blood of the frontiersmen around Melilla. For the protesters, the Spanish policewomen were a convenient target in representing the Europeanization of Melilla's border; the sub-Saharan migrants, meanwhile, could serve as a weapon to enforce their aims. At the valla, uninited 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, "If migrants pass, 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 around a community, 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 E.U. 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. This did not deter the valla, however, which simply drew more groups into its embrace. The Alis' sentry boxes snuggling 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 no longer under the control of its presumed directors.³⁶

Part 4: 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 did not smell you; and foggy, to reduce the guards' visibility. They should climb one of the highest passes, where not even soldiers entered but where falling meant 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 needed to put on old clothes. New garments snagged on the razor wire. You must wear cotton, not nylon. You had to use gloves to push the concertina, then you put your foot on top of it, to avoid it catching your clothes. Blades might cut into your arms or legs, but you had to avoid getting caught in the stomach or crotch. On the top, the razor wire could entangle and kill you, but there was a trick for getting through. Then you needed to find a pole along the inside of the fence instead of getting nervous and jumping, breaking bones. It was a six-meter 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 went in, the body did 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 into 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 centered not only 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 is the European paymasters. 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.³⁷

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 was briefly 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.³⁸

Such rescue images render up the “fetish” of migrant illegality, in De Genova's term, through two complementary transformations depending on the potency—itsself 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 one critic has noted, “Agamben is less interested in life than in its ‘bareness.’” This bareness says little about either the differentiations in migrant illegality at the border or its economic and spectacular uses explored in this chapter.³⁹

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. No single story triumphs. Unwelcome actors—Moroccan nationalists, 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 travelers 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 with 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 five hundred sub-Saharan migrants approached the fence en masse, only to be “repelled” at the last minute by Moroccan gendarmes. The Spanish government delegate in the city thanked Morocco for its “magnificent collaboration” while warning that the mass entry attempts would continue. And they did: by autumn, it was clear that the horde had returned, thrusting the vallas back into the spotlight. Over the coming year, at times this horde came in the form of “kamikaze” cars packed with migrants, ramming their way through Melilla’s border crossing; at other times, it appeared in ever-more spectacular entries across the fence as migrants stripped off their clothes, ran through the streets, and sought refuge in public buildings—and even an opposition politician’s home—to avoid capture and expulsion back into the Alis’ hands. And then, in July 2013, two migrants died in yet another mass entry attempt, one on each side of the border.⁴⁰

The tenor of the “attacks” was easy to explain. Just as in 2005, they been preceded by months of raids and expulsions. Moroccan media had fanned a moral panic with talk of a “black peril,” with some commentators even accusing sub-Saharan Africans of being mercenaries, invoking the Libya uprising and tapping into the militarized discourse of the border. As relations between Madrid and Rabat improved in 2012, repression kept increasing—as did the desperate entry attempts. The pattern from 2005 and 2010 was being repeated, culminating in the Melilla fence yet again being festooned with razor wire in late 2013.⁴¹

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 Moroccan beach, eighty-one 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. 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.⁴²

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 militarized 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 stand-off was finally reached. Under cover of darkness, Guardia Civil officers hauled the migrants off Isla de Tierra and into Moroccan hands, invoking the countries' bilateral readmissions agreement from 1992, which was now finally entering into force. 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.

Backstage violence was soon to become constant prime-time news. In December 2013, Madrid was again festooning the "humane" Melilla fence with razor wire, to protests from Brussels. Two months later, fifteen migrants drowned as they tried to swim around Ceuta's fence; then citizen videos emerged, showing how guardias had fired rubber bullets into the cold February waters. Unapologetic, the interior minister claimed 80,000 migrants were waiting to cross into Spain and asked for

more E.U. funds to stop them. As word circulated of further reinforcements, migrants launched the largest entry attempts since 2005 in Melilla. Some of them lingered for hours atop the fences, where they chanted and waved to cameras and guardias, briefly putting off their inevitable expulsion. Straddling worlds, they—like Isla de Tierra’s migrants or Ceuta’s tragic swimmers—were neither huddle nor horde, stuck on the threshold of the border in its deadly double act.⁴³

Another limbo awaited those who breached the frontier. For if migrants kept filling the enclaves’ reception centers, creating a headache for the authorities, many of them had in the case of Ceuta in fact 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 centers. Fences and walls, border theorists have observed, might shut out the unwanted but can also serve to keep people in. This is what was happening in Ceuta and Melilla.⁴⁴

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 reentering Morocco. The migrant, detained by the Guardia Civil, said he had spent four years in the enclave and just wanted to go home.⁴⁵ It is to this entrapment within the valla, and the unbearable tension it created, that we will now turn.



PART THREE

Confrontations

