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## Time and the migrant other: European border controls and the temporal economics of illegality

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## **Time and the migrant Other: European border controls and the temporal economics of illegality**

The rich world's borders increasingly seem like a battleground where a new kind of 'threat' is fought back – the so-called 'illegal migrant'. At Europe's southern frontiers, sea patrols, advanced surveillance machinery and fencing keep migrants out, much like at the US, Israeli or Australian borders. Such investments have created a dense web of controls that displaces the border both inward and outwards, into the borderlands beyond it. This article, building upon recent border studies and ethnographies of illegality, explores Europe's migration controls by focusing on their *temporal* aspects. In the borderlands, it shows, irregular migrants are not only subjected to extended periods of waiting, as migrants often are; they also face an active usurpation of time by state authorities through serial expulsions and retentions. The ways in which migrants' time is appropriated reveal a complex economics of illegality, complementing existing 'biopolitical' perspectives on Europe's borders.

In the sweltering days of August 2010, I was visiting the police headquarters in Ceuta, a small Spanish enclave on the African side of the Strait of Gibraltar. Behind a cluttered desk sat the chief of Ceuta's police migration bureau, who had a big problem on his hands. One block away, irregular sub-Saharan migrants stuck in the enclave had staged a loud protest, clamouring for 'freedom'. Housed in a 'temporary reception center' (Centro de Estancia Temporal de Inmigrantes, or CETI) at the very edge of Ceuta, the migrants had marched on the central square, where they congregated in front of the Spanish government delegation. Facing riot police, they chanted a mix of *Africa, liberté* and Shakira's *waka waka* – this was the time of the soccer World Cup. Most of them were dressed in the CETI's handout jogging dress, their T-shirts torn and twisted into turbans or scribbled upon as makeshift placards. 'CETI is a prison' read one. 'CETI Guantánamo Libertad' said another. This is what their increasingly desperate protest was about: migrants' indefinite retention in Ceuta at the behest of Spanish police and European politicians.

The police chief leafed through his files and muttered a reply as I asked about any impending crackdown. 'What they're doing is perfectly legal, anyone has the right to demonstrate,' he said. As he saw it, they simply had to wait for their turn

before being sent on to *la península*, or the Spanish mainland. ‘In the meantime they will stay here, free, with the same freedom as you and I have to move around a territory of 19 square kilometers.’ But as I asked him about a recent drop in irregular migrants entering the enclave – either over its perimeter fences, smuggled in cars, or in inflatable dinghies – the police chief swiftly qualified his notion of freedom. ‘Ceuta, of course, is in plain language... almost a mousetrap [*ratonera*], migrants who arrive don’t know whether they will leave in 15 days [or whether] they will spend two years here, and I don’t think that’s in their interest.’

The protesters’ rendering of the ‘temporary’ reception centre as *Guantánamo* and the police chief’s description of Ceuta as a ‘trap’ highlight in stark fashion the central theme of this article – that is, the rising stakes over migrants’ time at Europe’s borders. Increasingly, irregular migrants trying to enter EU space – and Ceuta, like its sister enclave Melilla, is EU territory – are retained for long periods, whether in the facilities for migrant detention springing up across the continent or in the type of ‘open’ center pioneered in the enclaves. The time delay built into their migratory experience provides important insights into Western states’ response to unauthorized human mobility, on display from the Arizona desert to Australian coasts and European shores. Temporality, it will be argued, has become a multifaceted tool and vehicle – even a weapon of sorts – in the ‘fight against illegal migration’.

Of course, migrants have always been subjected to waiting and wasted time as they move across international borders. From 1892 onwards, European emigrants arriving in Ellis Island after weeks at sea endured waits for medical examinations while warehoused in bunks, hoping their relatives or ‘sponsors’ would show up and finally take them into United States proper.<sup>1</sup> Yet mobility in the pre-war years was nevertheless relatively smooth in comparison with recent decades. Ever since rich states put an end to their labor migration programs around the 1970s, controls have toughened to the point of impossibility, at least for certain *kinds* of travelers. Waiting, insecurity and eventual refusal have come to characterize border experiences for those without the economic, social and cultural capital needed to deploy ‘flexible citizenship’ in a world on the move (Ong 1999).

This link between cross-border movement and waiting – or, as one review on migrant temporalities puts it, the ‘strong relationship between power, the state and management of time’ (Griffiths et al 2013:30) – has been noted in studies of contemporary migratory regimes. Pijpers (2011), delineating the ‘political economy

of waiting' in European labor migration, has argued that 'the ensemble of border control practices finds expression in the metaphor of the *queue*' (2011:431; emphasis in original). Yet some foreigners – asylum seekers or those scheduled for deportation, for instance – would *wish* for such a queue, stuck indefinitely as they often are in detention centers run by large private corporations. Ceuta's protest against 'Guantánamo' can thus be linked to a long historical genealogy and a broad contemporary field of temporal exclusion in international migration. Yet something more sinister was also going on at the Spanish-African border – that is, something more than a simple waste or negation of migrants' time. Pijpers (2011:432) goes on to ask: 'Is waiting *just* a byproduct of state institutions and bureaucracies or might it be a tactic, a management technique that is not outside but fully part of the state, struggling as it does to strike a balance between sedentarist and flexible ideologies?'

This article will give a resounding 'yes' to this question, showing how waiting-as-technique plays out in extreme fashion among the most 'undesirable' of mobile people in contemporary Europe – the so-called illegal African migrants at the southern EU borders.<sup>2</sup> Among them, it will be seen, the authorities engage in an active *usurpation* of time for the purposes of migration control.

This usurpation – or the threat of it – occurs in different forms across the rich world today, as brief comparative examples throughout this article will show. In the U.S. 'Operation Streamline', irregular migrants are pushed through mass trials and deported back to Mexico far from their place of entry. In collectively pleading guilty to crossing illegally, they avoid a much steeper punishment – a potentially long incarceration. In Australia, meanwhile, asylum seekers arriving by boat are diverted to outsourced detention centers in Papua New Guinea and Nauru, where they face long and uncertain periods of waiting. In 2014, video footage emerged of Australia's immigration minister exhorting those held there to go home to their war-hit countries – or else face a 'very, very long time' in detention.<sup>3</sup>

Such callous warnings are rare for the simple reason that they open the state to human rights challenges, or else risk fomenting protests. Indeed, in Spain politicians have largely steered clear of overt references to the logics of retention. Except, that is, for a few unguarded moments such as the one I shared with the police chief in Ceuta, who went on to explain how migrants were quite simply blocked in order to strangle the finances of the 'mafias' who brought them there. He illustrated this by positioning himself as a hypothetical trafficker:

‘If I pick up 100 women in Nigeria to bring them from there and put them in Madrid [for prostitution], I have an estimated cost of, I guess, €6,000 for each one’ in smuggling them into Spain, he said. The women pay €3,000 each up front and the rest once they arrive, €300,000 in total; this means the smuggler needs to invest the remaining €300,000. ‘If you withhold 50 of them in Ceuta and you repatriate another 50, my business will be in ruins!’ he exclaimed. ‘I’ve lost, because the poor woman who was heading [to the peninsula] can’t pay. I’ve lost €150,000, and you’ve withheld the other women here for two years, that’s two years that I have immobilized capital, that’s another €150,000 lost.’

The strategy, then, was to remove Ceuta and Melilla from the smuggling route by selectively retaining and deporting migrants. In this policing effort, the time migrants spent in the enclaves constituted *capital* withheld from the presumed smuggling rings. However, the ‘mafias’ were not the real target of this strategy, since most sub-Saharan migrants – as the police chief was well aware – had arrived in Ceuta through their own efforts. For these migrants, retention constituted collective punishment, reducing them to indefinite confinement in Ceuta and Melilla.

To understand the predicament of the migrants as well as the logics behind their confinement, this article will draw on two interrelated fields: interdisciplinary studies of border controls, and recent ethnographies of irregular migration. As a consequence, it will move back-and-forth between the temporalities of control and of migration – that is, state time and subjective time – in order to highlight their intricate entanglements. Based on ‘mobile’ fieldwork across the Spanish-African border over 14 months in 2010-11, the article will use three scenarios to build a picture of the border’s complex ‘geography of time’ (Glennie and Thrift 1996:280), moving from the EU’s top-down surveillance vision to the migratory journey and, onwards, to the battle over time in the Spanish enclaves.<sup>4</sup>

A focus on the materialities of time-spaces of control, it is argued, may contribute with new ethnographic frames on migration by combining views from the ‘top’ of policing and politics with those from ‘below’.<sup>5</sup> This involves taking on the ethnographic challenge – formulated by Robert Desjarlais and advocated by Willen (2007:12) in the field of ‘illegal’ migration – to ‘link the phenomenal and the

political'. One way in which migration scholars have powerfully done so already is through biopolitics, drawing on the different readings of this concept by Foucault (2008) and Agamben (1998; see e.g. Fassin 2001). This article, however, goes down a slightly different route in adding an *economic* element to such existing studies. The appropriation and usage of migrants' time, it will be seen, plays into a larger economics of illegality, generating unequal gains and distressing human consequences at the rich world's borders.

### **The time of control: the border's landscape of time**

At Ceuta's border, 'Fortress Europe' appears as a spectacle of glistening steel. Twin six-metre fences undulate through the hills, cleaving the North African hillside in two. Bright spotlights, sensors, sentry boxes and cameras are strung out around the perimeter. Razor wire adorns the external fence, beyond which await Moroccan soldiers, enrolled into Europe's migration controls thanks to a complex diplomatic give-and-take between Rabat, Madrid and Brussels.

Like at the US-Mexico divide, monitored by drones and shielded by barriers, the borders of Europe increasingly seem like a battleground where a new kind of 'threat' is fought back – the 'illegal migrant' (Andreas 2003). The sight of 'boat people' packed into unseaworthy boats, or of migrants charging across the fences, has become a recurring spectacle on European TV screens, despite the statistical smallness of any supposed clandestine 'invasion' (De Haas 2007). Yet this 'border spectacle' (De Genova 2012) also encompasses the controls in their own right. Sea patrols, satellites and surveillance aircraft now scour the Mediterranean in search for migrant boats; high-tech fences keep migrants out of Greece and away from Ceuta and Melilla; and new electronic systems link security forces from Mali to Madrid and the Warsaw headquarters of the EU's young border agency, Frontex. Through such initiatives, Europe's external borders increasingly seem to be everywhere yet nowhere (Vaughan-Williams 2008): a dense web of controls that displaces the border both inward and outwards, throughout European space and into the borderlands beyond it.

An interdisciplinary literature on this fortification has emerged in recent years, often focusing precisely on the spatial arrangements of the EU border. In a recent review, Sarah Green (2013:350) has identified a 'spatial turn' in European border research, evident in the field of migration in concerns with mapping the continent's

'borderscapes' (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2007), with delineating the proliferation of spaces of control (Balibar 1998), or with tracking the border's 'deterritorialization' and 'reterritorialization' (Walters 2004). Summing up these trends, one contribution notes that critical border studies, 'rather than treating the concept of the border as a territorially fixed, static, line (as paradigmatically depicted by Mercator's map)', are increasingly 'thinking of it in terms of a series of *practices*' (Parker et al 2009:586).

This focus on the 'process of bounding' (Wastl-Walter 2011:2) is not news to anthropologists, who have long looked at forms of 'frontier praxis' around Europe's borders, to borrow a term from Driessen's (1992) seminal work in Melilla. Yet when it comes to the interdisciplinary debates on migration controls, an increasingly dominant task for border forces, one aspect of 'frontier praxis' is often left relatively unaddressed – the *temporality* of such controls (Griffiths et al 2013; Khosravi 2014). In anthropology, such temporal aspects have been tentatively explored, for instance, in works considering the time lags built into US border patrolling (Heyman 1995), the 'temporality of everyday risk' among migrants (Willen 2007:22), and experiences of waiting among asylum seekers and immigration detainees (Griffiths 2014; Rotter 2010). Inspired by such studies, this section will focus on the temporalities of border control measures, as well as their entanglement with notions of anticipation, pre-emption and risk.

In Ceuta, the Spanish Guardia Civil – in charge of patrolling the fence – somewhat surprisingly saw the imposing, EU-funded barrier as a mere 'obstacle'. To one officer, 'the fence has the function of giving us a few minutes extra in arriving at the place [of attempted crossing], it does not dissuade.' Those few extra minutes were of utmost importance for the sentinels at the EU's southernmost borders. In Ceuta's sister enclave Melilla, beset by desperate entry attempts by sub-Saharan migrants hiding in the Moroccan hills, the official aim was for a patrol car to arrive within a minute of a sensor detection at the fence. Such rapid detection and deployment was key for a simple, unstated reason: to enable removal from the border. If apprehended around the fences, migrants were simply sent back informally – and extralegally – into the hands of Moroccan forces. The Moroccans in turn expelled migrants to the closed Algerian border, from where they often made it back to the enclaves by foot over several days.<sup>6</sup> In this way, their entry attempts had temporarily been averted.

To explore Europe's border controls, several studies have in recent years drawn on Virilio's (1986) notion of 'dromology', or the logic of speed (see e.g. Bigo

and Guild 2005:1). For Virilio, the quest for speed is intimately linked to militarization and the reorganization of territory (Armitage 1999:6) – something that was amply illustrated in the border technology rolled out not just in Ceuta, but along the whole external EU border. While the Ceuta fence illustrated the most extreme ‘militarized’ logic of speed – a few extra seconds for the guards at the fence, culminating in long days on the road for expelled migrants – more abstract temporal features were on display elsewhere in Europe’s border control landscape.

Besides the fortified fences, Spain has been at the vanguard of sea surveillance since the installation of an advanced coastal radar system from the late 1990s onwards. This ‘life-saving’ system, known as SIVE (Sistema Integrado de Vigilancia Exterior), aims for near-instant detection and interception of migrant boats. SIVE’s aim of early interception has been enthusiastically taken up by Frontex and its partners, as I saw at the 2013 European Day for Border Guards in Warsaw. Amid the glossy stalls of border agencies and defense contractors, one Frontex officer in front of a large touch-screen map showed me, with a quick swipe, how migrant interceptions were being instantly uploaded into an interactive interface used by Europe’s new national coordination centers for border surveillance. The purpose of such ‘near real-time’ sharing, the officer explained, was the same as that of SIVE and the fences: early detection of migratory flows in order to ‘adequately and quickly respond’ – and thus, he insisted, to ‘save lives’.

In Warsaw, in short, the quest for time-space compression motivated the large investments in new information-sharing systems for the EU frontiers. Real-time intelligence, or as close to it as possible, was of the essence.

This logic is taken to its furthest yet in the ‘European external border surveillance system’, or Eurosur, an advanced information-sharing system between Frontex and national security forces. The aim of Eurosur is, again, to enhance ‘reaction capability’ through a smooth process that converts the border into a species of information channel communicating up, sideways and down in a chain of signals.

As one commentator on Eurosur puts it:

[C]ontemporary border control practices do away with the perpetual present of vigilance on the border-line and the excruciatingly slow passing of time. The key ethical premise, here, is speed, and the possibility of projecting controls as quickly as possible at any given point that is



considered problematic. Spatiality and temporality, in this perspective, are not only problematized in terms of ‘where’ and ‘when’, but also in terms of ‘how fast?’ (Jeandesboz 2011:123).

This quest for speed is intimately tied up with the concept of risk. I have discussed elsewhere how risk analysis, promoted by Frontex, has not only channelled the energies of border forces into the task of controlling migration – it has also facilitated the growth of an ‘illegality industry’ around the distribution of migratory risk (Andersson 2014). Here, however, it is worth dwelling briefly on the temporal modalities – rather than the distributive possibilities – of risk. As scholars such as Anthony Giddens have noted, risk is ‘a central tool in the modern endeavor of “colonising the future”’ (Selchow 2014:69), which involves seeing ‘the future [as] a “territory” to be “occupied”’ (Giddens 1999:5). Applying this to Europe’s migration controls, the seas are not only physically occupied by patrols, but they are also colonized in a temporal sense thanks to pre-emptive, risk-based action. The key task of speedy intervention is to prevent unauthorized movement *before* a migrant has crossed the border. In Eurosur, then, the few extra seconds that allow the Guardia Civil’s patrol cars to reach the fences in time to ‘repel’ the migrants has been replaced with a much more abstract usage of time, reaching into the ‘prefrontier’ beyond the border in order to cut short any intention to cross.

Noting these developments, Mountz and Hiemstra (2012:467) see borders as increasingly mobile in ‘enclosing’ migrant vessels or bodies in anticipation of a transgression. However, the effect of early interception, as seen at Ceuta’s fences, is simply the *deceleration* of migratory movements, as Andrijasevic (2010) has also noted at the Italian entry port of Lampedusa. Border workers themselves are aware of these dynamics, and for that reason frequently present their task as one of channelling or slowing down the ‘flow’ rather than blocking it altogether. One Spanish police officer, for instance, insisted that ‘you have to leave an escape route’ so as not to create a ‘pressure cooker’ at the border. As a consequence of such strategies, migrants are speedily diverted, deported or left stranded, only to eventually make it back again through the rugged terrains of the ‘prefrontier’, more desperate and destitute than ever.

Looking briefly beyond the European borders, this scenario should sound familiar to American audiences – and for good reason. There is a constant give-and-

take between militarized controls on both sides of the Atlantic, with European states often adopting U.S. border innovations. However, geographical and geopolitical constraints also lead to important differences (Andreas and Snyder 2000). In the States, a land border shared with a single neighboring country allows for faster interception and removal, yet also means that many more migrants make it across. By contrast, Europe's *maritime* southern borders, shared by a multiplicity of E.U. and neighboring states, complicate the tasks of joint detection and interception, yet also allows for a more effective 'buffering' of migrants on the other shore of the Mediterranean.

The intricate interactions between geography and temporality in migration controls create what I wish to call, building on Glennie and Thrift (1996), a peculiar *landscape of time*. In the European case, this landscape has a paradoxical quality, as seen at the fences: it is both the product of ever higher speeds and connectivity, yet also creates a migratory experience characterized by slowness and stasis. In this sense, Europe's 'fight against illegal migration' shows how globalization, if conceptualized as a reorganization of time and space (Inda and Rosaldo 2002), not only involves 'time-space compression' à la Harvey (1989) but also a potential *extenuation* of time and *stretching* of space in certain settings (cf Katz 2004). The Euro-African borderlands is such a setting, where migrants endure the physicality of border crossings and dwell in liminality for months on end, all the while tapping into transnational cash flows, smuggling rackets and mobile technologies. The official striving for a 'virtual' border has, in short, created the opposite type of border for those who traverse it: a postmodern wilderness, to which we will now turn.<sup>7</sup>

### **The time of migration: from speed to stasis**

On my last leg of fieldwork, sitting on the Dakar-Bamako bus in late 2010, I finally met that hotly sought object of study: the departing clandestine migrant. Alpha was 23 years old and had left his family home in Dakar behind the previous night, he explained on a tea stop in western Mali; his mum had made him a sandwich for the transcontinental journey ahead. His plan was to cross the desert, reaching Egypt and eventually Israel – a new route now that the European ones had closed owing to tough controls. 'I'm not afraid,' he said coolly, a cigarette dangling out of his mouth, yet his resolve faltered briefly as I warned him of the rebels, bandits and deadly stretches of

desert on the road ahead.

We reached Bamako before sunrise. ‘Everyone says this is *the* crossroads in Africa,’ Alpha whispered as we rolled into Sogoniko *gare*. As the day began, we entered a ticket office, asking for trips towards Niger. ‘We have a bus to Agadez but no further, after that you use other means of transport,’ we were told with a wink, but Alpha wanted none of the deadly Libyan desert. He scrolled over a rasta-colored map of Africa on his smartphone, tracing alternative routes via Niger and Benin, ready to decide on a whim on his next destination – the road lay open ahead.

Clandestine routes towards southern Europe have developed in the past two decades in a back-and-forth dynamic with tougher controls. Indeed, the parallel swipes across digital maps by Alpha in Bamako and by the Frontex officer in Warsaw were but a small pointer toward the *shared* notion of movement among migrants and police: the borderlands construed as a smooth space, quickly traversable from A to B. To both the border workers and the migrants they targeted, speed was of the essence, yet in quite different ways.

Alpha’s journey recalls the state of ‘being en route’ explored by Coutin (2005) on the other side of the Atlantic. Illegality, Coutin suggests, ‘erases presence and suspends time’ (2005:196). For her Central American informants, ‘time takes on a planar (as well as linear) character, making it possible to move not only from past to future but also from one present to another’ – erasing or blurring the presence of migrants in the places they traverse (2005:200). For Alpha, too, time was ‘planar’ and linear – an arbitrary line across his smartphone map, the time-space horizon still wide open. His sense of time seemed suspended, the final destination tantalizingly close despite the vast distances and dangers ahead of him.

The planar time-space of migrants such as Alpha had a rather different backstory to that of the border guards. On his mobile, Alpha had stored pictures of his father’s humble grocery store, of his mother hanging his clothes to dry before the trip, of his sleepy face in bed the day before leaving. ‘You can’t just stay at home, with mum and dad, like a boy,’ he said, motivating his decision to leave. His backpack was half-full with a change of clothes plus a pair of clean, new shoes in case he would catch the flight from Egypt to Israel with false papers. I tried to talk him out of the overland route, but half-heartedly – nothing could stop him now. That same morning Alpha left Sogoniko *gare* for Niger, and I never heard from him again, as with so many other migrants on the overland trail.

For young men such as Alpha, the road promised deliverance from a world of extended youth and lack of fulfilment in reeling home economies. Ethnographers have documented this hunger for leaving across West Africa, relating it to a sense of social death among those who can neither find work nor move. Among Soninké villagers in Mali, young immobile men are taunted by women for being ‘stuck like glue’ (Jónsson 2008). In the Gambia, their brethren experience a state of *nerve* as they hear the tall tales of success brought back by visiting emigrants (Gaibazzi 2010:220). The clandestine journey is but an extreme response to the predicament of youth in these regions – yet the hope it holds out, migrants such as Alpha eventually come to realize, is illusory. On the overland trail, speed soon withers into stasis.

This was clear just a few steps away from Sogoniko *gare* where Alpha caught his bus. Up a cracked mud lane lay the compound of the association Aracem, or the Association of Central African Deportees in Mali, a rare lifeline for deported migrants in Bamako. When I visited in January 2011, a group of young men milled about on the corner outside, sharing cigarettes, mobiles and the occasional joke. These were *refoulés* (deportees) sent back by Algeria through the desert, where they had been caught as supposed ‘illegal migrants’ on their way to Europe. The mood among them was sullen, yet Eric, a young Congolese man, was cheerier than most. ‘It was my birthday on the 10th but I haven’t been able to celebrate it, no means to do it,’ he said in a matter-of-fact way. Eric had paid someone for a fake Malian passport, ‘but they ate the money’. Now he slept on the street corner, and was lost for ideas: he might try to head to Algeria again, or Mauritania.

The *refoulés* of Sogoniko were at the receiving end of a relay race conveying unwanted human cargo southwards through the Sahara. The Moroccan security forces expelled migrants to the Algerian border; the Algerians trucked them to the desert frontier with Mali; from there, the Red Cross ferreted some southwards. However, many of Sogoniko’s stranded migrants had not yet crossed the desert – they simply lacked money to continue, often after having lost their savings to ‘fees’ levied on supposed *clandestins* (illegal migrants) at border crossings. Others yet sought a Malian passport, which would allow them visa-free entry into Algeria. In sum, Bamako had by my 2010-11 visit – before the Mali conflict – become a crossroads and a dumping ground, a trap or a trampoline, depending on what stage migrants had reached on their journey.

The deportation route constituted the rugged edge of the landscape of time

awaiting beyond the external EU border. In this landscape, migrants' knowledge of the lie of the land and its temporal rhythms was key to their success in moving forward rather than back. In Morocco, for instance, visits by European officials, the need for year-end statistics or the signing of accords with the EU were often enough to trigger fresh raids and expulsions. As a result, migrants modified their daily and weekly rhythms according to the timings of raids, and they planned 'attacks' on the fences of Ceuta and Melilla in anticipation of their reinforcement, or in accordance with the holidays and Ramadan fasting times that impacted the schedules of Spanish and Moroccan forces. For those who failed in this battle of rhythms and terrains, this is what remained: a dreary and dusty Bamako street corner, where the days dragged on, slow like treacle.

As for Alpha on his line of flight towards North Africa, ordinary time was suspended among the stranded migrants of Bamako. However, for them the lines of the journey had already become tangled, twisted and torn. They were stuck in a world of endless waiting, smoking cigarette after cigarette to stem hunger or dampen anxiety. The misery among the deportees was palpable as the days dragged on, each like the next. 'Bamako, *c'est la merde*,' exclaimed one of the street corner men, looking out over the mud-cracked lane and shuttered shopfronts. Some were going mad in the limbo of the border. '*Le Mali*, remove the 'i' and it's *le mal*,' said one such migrant, his eyes wild and his voice faltering. Their travels had turned into an experience of abject *durée*, a stretch of time shorn of events, a world where birthdays might be recalled only to be instantly forgotten.

As noted in the introduction, marginalized groups often find themselves caught in what Crapanzano (1985) has labeled the 'paralytic' time of waiting. Khosravi (2014), expanding on this, writes, 'The ambiguity about the duration of waiting generates a sense of uncertainty, shame, depression and anxiety... But waiting can be an act too, a strategy of defiance by the migrants.'

There is, then, a *doubleness* to waiting. On the one hand, it constitutes an imposed state of 'stuckedness' (Hage 2009) engendered by pre-emptive controls, in which time may appear as 'sticky' or 'suspended' (Griffiths 2014). On the other, it is a bidding of time: a tactic, in de Certeau's (1984) sense, or a technique.<sup>8</sup> This doubleness – neatly captured in the title of one documentary on clandestine migration towards Europe, *Waiting for happiness* – has been noted by other ethnographers. Lucht (2012), like Khosravi, draws on Bourdieu (2000) in exploring how the

phenomenological predicament of illegality among Ghanaian migrants in Italy is intimately tied up with temporality. To Bourdieu, Lucht reminds us, ‘making people wait [...] is an integral part of the exercise of power’. Time exposure, ‘when time is either arbitrarily wasted or simply negated, is a form of nontime, a testimony to one’s social insignificance... as such, it is time to be killed’ (cited in Lucht 2012:72, 73). Lucht’s Ghanaian migrants experienced this ‘nontime’ along the highways outside Naples, waiting for employers or buses that never came. In the depths of their despair, they nevertheless held onto a notion of ‘darkness before daybreak’, how the darkest hour came just before the impending dawn. Their ‘non-time’ could in this way be temporarily infused with meaning.

Beyond the European horizon, similar examples can easily be found. In a migrant shelter on the southern Mexican border, for example, I once met Central American migrants who waited anxiously – often after having been robbed, like Mali’s *refoulés*, by bandits or border guards – for the chance to head back north (Andersson 2005). For them, like for Lucht’s Ghanaians or Bamako’s migrants, illegality involved a shift in the experience of temporality, in which long periods of eventlessness interacted violently with sudden bouts of ‘frenzied’ time (Griffiths 2014) owing to police raids, banditry or sudden openings of an exit route. And this temporal frame, more often than not, was invested with significance through religion, for instance in the humble prayers mumbled over breakfast tortillas in the Mexican shelter before migrants left to catch the northbound cargo train.

For Bamako’s stranded migrants, similarly, time was not yet wholly empty, wholly negated. Eric was 23 years old, and had left Congo at the age of 19. ‘If I’m lucky, I’ll arrive in Europe when I’m 26,’ he said. He and his friends called themselves *aventuriers* (adventurers), a figure of risk-taking and exploration that has emerged across French-speaking West Africa in recent years (Bredeloup 2008). Like Eric, most adventurers stretched their migratory projects over several years – envisioning arrival in Europe after life-changing journeys through the Sahel, Sahara and the Maghreb. Eric aimed for *le petit Espagne* or ‘small Spain’, meaning Ceuta and Melilla. But how to travel north, given that his passport money had been stolen? Eric’s daily budget was 300 CFA (60 cents) plus a couple of cigarettes, which he and his friends hoarded and exchanged like currency.

Besides such day-to-day items of exchange, other objects and technologies harbored the adventurers’ hopes for onward travel: the internet café with its promise

of tips from fellow migrants or information about ways back north; the money transfer businesses, where a relative might deposit a small sum for their next leg; their mobiles, a vital tool for connectivity and monetary transfers; and the Malian passport, which would allow for passage into Algeria. Through these means, the promise of a far-ahead future of arrival was retained, however faintly.

Eric's rugged optimism reflected what would lie in store for Alpha a few months down the errant lines of the overland adventure. Like his street corner friends, Eric displayed a great degree patience and planning despite the hardships, pushbacks and tangled lines of the journey. His short-term plans might have foiled, yet his journey retained its horizon, its promise of future liberation. For those who had made it up towards Eric's dreamed-of destination of 'little Spain', however, this horizon was beginning to cloud – culminating in the battle over time within the fortified walls of the Spanish enclaves.

### **The battle over time: Ceuta and Melilla**

Up in Ceuta's hills lay *the camp*, as clandestine migrants called their 'home' in the enclave. Its residents, largely black Africans, were an exclusive crowd. Having finally breached the EU frontier, they thought fortune was smiling at them – yet here they would face a state of 'stuckedness' every bit as despairing as that of Bamako or their home countries. This was so because Spain's North African enclaves were gaps in the border's landscape of time; that is, liminal spaces with their own, warped temporal logics. Yet in these gaps, the times of control and migration would also come to clash openly with each other.

The CETI, where I carried out fieldwork as a volunteer over the summer of 2010, was run under a mixed management system – the managers and social workers were civil servants while the Spanish Red Cross carried out most day-to-day work, besides NGOs and private contractors.<sup>9</sup> The camp was set out over two levels: office buildings upstairs, living quarters downstairs. Unlike in the foreigners' detention centers of the peninsula, the migrants who lived here could come and go before the gates closed at night. They slept in eight prefab modules of eight rooms each, eight dorm beds to a room: 512 beds in all, yet regularly pushed beyond capacity.

The camp was a magnet for the media. When access was granted it was a dream come true: here journalists had the possibility to come and interview illegal

migrants fresh off their rafts. Documentary-makers, reporters and fact-finding delegations kept arriving at the camp gates; cameramen denied access resorted to filming the residents through the tall perimeter fence. For these visitors, the camp provided just enough of a glimpse of the veiled world of today's global outcasts.

Migrant camps such as the CETIs are not just key stages for the media spectacle of illegality; they have also become important sites for studying Europe's border regime, as this article itself is evidence of. Many of these studies take as their starting point Agamben's (1998) assertion of the centrality of the camp for an understanding of sovereignty in the contemporary world. The refugee housed in such camps, according to Agamben, appears as the 'ultimate biopolitical subject' (Owens 2009:568) governed through a permanent state of exception. However, Tsianos et al (2009), drawing on Virilio (1986), have suggested a less static – and less dramatic – view of encampment. 'Rather than stopping the circulation of mobility,' they argue, 'camps reinsert a socially commensurable time in the migrants' movements. They bring illegal and clandestine migration back into society by rendering it visible and compatible with a broad regime of temporal control. Decelerated circulation means that migration is not regulated through space, but through time' (2009:8).

In this view, migrant camps serve as 'speed boxes' (Tsianos et al 2009:8) that regulate the flow of people according to the fickle needs of the European labor market. In Agier's (2011:47) typology of encampment, the CETIs would be similarly classed as 'sorting centers' where migrants are pushed through an elaborate process of 'flow management'. As 'sorting centers' or 'speed boxes', however, the CETIs had one particularity. In Ceuta, the 'flow' had by 2010 been reduced to near-zero. In 2005, the average stay had been three months; now it was one and a half years. From having been springboards, Ceuta and Melilla had become, in the words of police, activists and lawyers alike, *ratoneras* or *trampas* – traps.

As a result, a silent day-to-day battle was being waged over time withheld and stolen, emptied time, time bought and given, time retrieved for observation, scrutiny and care. This waste of time, in turn, was predicated upon migrants' spatial immobility. In Ceuta and Melilla, a regime of interlocking time-spaces, unevenly stretched over the enclaves' tiny territories, seemed to regulate migrants as a population while disciplining them as bodies in the biopolitical fashion delineated by Foucault (2008) – a point that will be returned to in the conclusion.<sup>10</sup>



The migrants were not hapless victims of this world, however, but participated in its very creation. Ceuta and Melilla were just the most extreme example of the imposed waiting that defined the clandestine circuit, as already seen in Bamako. As a result, migrants had developed numerous *techniques of waiting*. Some launched protests or else tried to render themselves invisible; others sought to accumulate ‘good time’ and be rewarded with passage to the peninsula; yet others aimed to stretch their time in the enclaves while hoping for deliverance. This multifaceted battle over time reached from abstract time-as-capital through the camp’s schedules all the way down to the briefest of time slots: the half-second pause in speech before migrants revealed their names and nationalities to strangers.

In daytime, migrants dispersed across Ceuta and Melilla. They loitered in parking lots, occasionally waving in drivers in the hope of earning a few cents. I often sauntered up, asking questions. ‘What is your name? Where do you come from?’ There was usually a pause before the reply, a wavering, a brief silence before a West African might utter ‘Somalia’ as their country or ‘Mohamed’ as their name. I soon learnt to stop asking about country or name, and to enquire instead about the measure of all things in the enclave: ‘How long have you been here?’

Ceuta itself was a pause to the migrants – a limbo in which they could not work nor register with the local authorities, their future in hock to officialdom. Those who applied for asylum received ‘yellow cards’ (*tarjetas amarillas*) that had once promised passage to the mainland – but no longer. After Spain’s asylum process had been loosened up in 2009, police had decided not to accept the cards as identification in port. As a result, the stranded migrants of Ceuta were in a bind: if they sought asylum, they might be held indefinitely; if they did not, they faced deportation at any time, with Ceuta itself functioning as a virtual open-air detention center enabling instant police apprehension. In this context, a new origin country provided one way for some migrants to ‘stretch’ their time in the enclave, insuring them against immediate deportation to countries with which Spain had a readmissions agreement. Yet in the ensuing game of half-truths, the authorities still held the upper hand. For good reason, the migrant protesters of 2010 focused their anger on the *tarjetas*, which – like the ‘make-believe documents’ studied by Navaro-Yashin (2007) – held out a false promise of release, stirring hope and resentment in equal measure.

Their protest was far from an anomaly. From offshore Australia to Greece and Italy, migrants are launching into increasingly desperate action against indefinite

retention, from sewing together their lips to burning down ‘reception’ centers and launching hunger strikes. Aware of this tendency, Spain had during its 2004-11 Socialist years experimented with a more ‘humane’ form of containment in Ceuta and Melilla. Here, in waiting for news on their fate, the time-space gap that remained for migrants was given a sense of rhythm and purpose by activities within the camp gates: workshops, language classes and IT sessions, psychological assistance and health checks, sports and excursions. Yet while those who made an effort to participate had once been rewarded with an exit to the mainland, this was no longer the case in 2010. Instead, the courses that took place in the camps now merely filled – or killed – the time of migrants, despite the official insistence on their eventual, benevolent ‘integration’ into Spain.

Indeed, the ‘integration’ work of the camps remained an absurd exercise. How could anyone learn Spanish ensconced on a faraway hillside, suspended in time and fearful of deportation? How could you integrate while held captive as a collective punishment? The enclaves, in their extreme juxtaposition of incompatible goals, brought to a head Europe’s contradictory migratory logics on integration and control; indeed, Ceuta’s protest was itself a most tangible result of this contradiction. Yet in more subtle ways, too, this contradiction played out across the enclaves’ geography of time. If the time-space of control stretched from fence to port, camp time itself was further subdivided into fields of surveillance, integration and indifference.

In Ceuta, the camp layout helped create two distinct but complementary rhythms. Upstairs, ‘time discipline’ (Thompson 1967) reigned. Mealtimes at 1pm and 8pm, enforced by the guards; curfew at night, when everyone had to be in or else be registered as absent. In this regimented upstairs time, paperwork gave the impression of progress. New arrivals were admonished to keep their documents safely, including the *protocolo* slip listing the camp’s compulsory meetings. A stamp marked attendance for each meeting over the residents’ first week: medical screening, psychological test, a Spanish class introduction and a presentation on asylum.

The schedules held out the promise of accumulating ‘good time’ for those who played by the rules. This was most visible in the dossier held on each migrant that, workers insisted, *might* help them eventually reach the peninsula. This upstairs time regime was a fragile construct, however. Frontline workers complained about the arbitrariness of sanctions and the randomness of appointments, with residents made to

wait for long times before seeing a state official. The *protocolo* slips sometimes stayed unstamped for weeks.

If paperwork, clockwork and compulsory meetings at least created a distinct upstairs temporality, time downstairs sagged and melted like a surrealist clock. The sleeping modules were alternately hot and freezing, with mold stains across the bare walls adding to the atmosphere of neglect. Here, in the fleeting, endless present of downstairs time – reminiscent of the ‘pragmatics of time’ found by Desjarlais (1994) in shelters or the ‘heavy’ time encountered by Goffman (1961) in mental asylums – hope took on a phantasmatic quality. Much like the phony promises of upstairs time, migrants harbored rosy thoughts of the future once they made it ‘up’ (*en haut*) to the peninsula: they would find work, call friends, move on. Their adventures would then finally have been worth the long, painful wait for deliverance.

In Ceuta, the migratory time-space regime stretched from the minuscule pauses in migrants’ speech through the schedules of the camp system and onto the abstract economy of time used by the police. If the police ‘stole’ time collectively from migrants, the emptied time slots that remained could then be filled with the rituals of the camp or dedicated to the information-gathering efforts of the authorities, researchers and the media. In this complex geography of time, the ‘illegal’ migrants appeared as people without a past or future, stuck in an endless, anxious present, in hock to the enclaves’ time-space regime and their own impossible dreams.

While Europe’s border forces ‘colonized the future’ in sea surveillance, Ceuta’s police engaged in a more specific colonization – of migrants’ vital experience of time, including their hopefulness or longing. Through various temporal and material strategies – thick dossiers, random rewards, potential switches in policy – the authorities maintained a faint promise of liberation while minimizing the ‘pressure cooker’ effect of indefinite encampment. In this way, Ceuta was but the clearest example of how security forces and migrants jointly invested in the deferred hopes of the border’s labyrinthine landscape of time, as already seen above among police concerned with channelling a migratory trickle through the borderlands.

In Ceuta, the resulting predicament has echoes with temporalities elsewhere in the contemporary world. Guyer (2007) has suggested a temporal shift towards a long-term time horizon and the ‘evacuation of the near-present’ in US society. For Ceuta’s migrants, their immediate future had rather been vacated *for* them while their past had been temporarily disowned. Like for Guyer’s evangelical informants, the far-ahead

future of deliverance instead became all the more real; their fate was down to the ‘grace of God’ they constantly invoked.

At the same time, migrants used waiting to their own advantage, as a conscious *technique* to stall deportation. They also short-circuited the official usage of migratory time-space, as was seen in the 2010 protest. As the din grew ever more raucous on Ceuta’s streets, journalists alleged that the protesters had in fact not been stranded in Ceuta for long. This might have been true, yet missed the main point – that is, how migrants tried to take back their colonized future, rather than recuperate a lost past. They did so by challenging the discrete time-spaces afforded migrants in the enclave’s landscape of time. By rejecting their containment on a faraway hillside and marching on the city center, the protesters challenged the time-space regime by which they were rendered as separable, pitiable and researchable. Their protest would eventually fail: ‘instigators’ were detained, some of them deported. Yet in a trickle, migrants eventually made it out of Ceuta, through luck, cunning or to ease the burden on the camp. The battle over time remained, for both sides, unwinnable.

### **Conclusion: the temporal economics of illegality**

This article has highlighted the complex landscape of time jointly created by migrants and border guards at Europe’s fringes. The border’s temporal topography here emerges as jagged and irregular, split into overlapping areas of control, surveillance and (im)mobility that sometimes clash with each other. As has been seen, nestling within the full surveillance vision are other temporal manifestations of the border, where clandestine migrants are not merely anticipated as a risk but rather put to use for localized border control purposes, or left adrift. The frictions, gaps and overlaps between the border’s distinct temporalities produce, in sites such as Ceuta’s camp and Bamako’s backyards, seemingly arbitrary landscapes of time, in which migrants find themselves marooned, looking for an exit sign.

Their immobility should give researchers – not least anthropologists such as myself – pause for thought. Anthropology has traditionally depended not only on a ‘denial of coevalness’ (Fabian 1983), but also on the relative immobility of research subjects. US anthropologists had their Native American reserves; their European colleagues had colonized natives. The clandestine migrant at Europe’s fringes may not be the exclusive reserve of anthropologists, as seen in the steady stream of other

researchers to the enclaves. Yet regardless of their background, scholars can only satisfyingly study the clandestine migrants when they remain immobile, when their time can be freely taken and used. Captivity, in short, makes the researcher complicit with contemporary regimes of migration control.

Besides the politics of captivity, a temporal perspective may also highlight another key feature of contemporary controls: an intricate economics of illegality at play in the ‘fight against illegal migration’.

On a financial level, the quest for time-space compression and for anticipating migratory risk has spurred technological innovations and new policing mechanisms, bringing more resources to defense companies and border agencies. The time delays of encampment, meanwhile, also produce significant economics benefits. In the States, the vast, privately run migrant detention estate is proving a lifeline for deprived communities (Barry 2011); in Italy, reception centers are run by large consortiums under often shady financial arrangements (Cosentino 2014); and in Australia, offshore detention is doubly outsourced to poor neighboring states and to private contractors (Mountz 2011). In Ceuta, migrants themselves were the first to notice the economic gains of encampment, in labeling (as some did) migration a ‘business’ and their protest a ‘strike’.

Yet while such financial aspects are important, ‘colonizing the future’ can also be its own reward, as was seen in Ceuta. The ‘time capital’ held by migrants – rather than their labor power – was in Spain’s crisis-hit summer of 2010 the most valuable asset that those stranded within the walls held in the eyes of their hosts.

It may be worth briefly unpacking the notion of time capital in relation to the specific sense of ‘economics of illegality’ proposed here. The point is not to downplay either the economic usefulness of irregular migration or the disciplining function of camps in preparing migrants for the lowest rungs of the labor market. Rather, the aim is to highlight the discrete logics of exchange, consumption and production being developed within the smaller, yet increasingly important circuit of what I call the ‘illegality industry’ engaged in migration controls (Andersson 2014) – and how these logics at times clash with larger labor needs, as in Ceuta in 2010. Seen as a form of capital, migrant time was here withheld for a deferred future gain – that is, for purposes of deterrence, whether to discourage more arrivals or to produce a chilling effect on asylum applications. This abstract ‘capital’ was however also constantly transferred across to the ‘real economy’ via the distribution of funds for

camp management. Finally, time capital could also be ‘cashed in’ at given moments. This occurred in the organization of deportation flights, in which indefinite retention allowed for round-ups yielding dozens of co-nationals at a time. It also occurred when European governments sought to use mass encampment in broadcasting an ‘emergency’ at the border, thus bolstering calls for more implication from Brussels.

A temporal take on the Euro-African borderlands of the kind proposed here, in sum, suggests other ways of thinking about migration controls than those offered by the biopolitical accounts alluded to earlier in this article. Walters (2011) has asserted that we may need to think beyond Foucault’s (biopolitical) ‘toolbox’ to grasp contemporary controls, and the appropriation of migrants’ time pushes exactly at this limit. Instead of intervening upon migrants’ vital characteristics, as biopolitics does, controls of the kind seen in Ceuta *extract* vitality. Instead of subjectifying or subjugating bodies, border guards put them into uneven circulation. In this way, Europe’s ‘illegality industry’ usurps (or consumes) migrants’ mobility, and puts it to use for its own ends. It deposes or retains their bodies in a show of deterrence. It stretches their experience of time, either by keeping them stranded or by slowing them down through expulsion or removal from the border. This extractive process – this economics of illegality in the broadest sense – helps structure the peculiar temporalities experienced by clandestine migrants at the edges of Europe.

The industry, then, is also *productive* – throwing further light on the relation between this article’s juxtaposed temporal frames, a coldly calculating ‘time of control’ on the one hand and a rugged ‘time of migration’ on the other. To the authorities, Ceuta was a trap; to migrants it was a pause. To the police, Bamako constituted a buffer, while to migrants it was akin to a swamp, dragging them down. Returning to remarks above on time-space under globalization, the possibilities of anticipation, interception and deferral opened up by compression and speed have led to precisely the opposite reality for those who are targeted: a world of slowness and stasis. One mobile assemblage, that of control, feeds off and perpetuates the increasing immobility of its necessary Other.

However, it is worth complicating this picture. Migration controls are far from a unified field – rather, they are ad hoc creations developed in accordance with political and media priorities, the constraints of geography and geopolitics, and the supple tactics of migrants and smugglers. Moreover, their productivity is always in excess to the industry’s needs. When the Melilla border fence was fortified in 2013,

new spectacular entry attempts picked up pace. And as retention grew longer in Ceuta, new techniques of waiting emerged, in a game of make-believe played out with increasingly frustrated officials.

If the control mechanisms in place from the Sahel to southern Spain can be approached as an economics of illegality, then, it is an economics beset by a fundamental circularity. For the fight against illegal migration does not just come with a steep price tag; it also creates what can be conceptualized as negative externalities, in the sense familiar from environmental economics. The controls might have been costed and evaluated, but their insidious social, political and human effects are rarely taken into consideration. And these ‘side-effects’ constantly threaten to overrun the workings of the illegality industry, whether in raucous protests such as those of Ceuta, in new techniques of waiting, or in ever-riskier entry attempts. Or to frame these dynamics through this article’s temporal lens: the constant *deferrals* produced by border controls incur a ‘debt’ that will eventually have to be repaid at the frontiers of Europe.

Back in 2010, barely a month after the deportation of nine of Ceuta’s protesters to Cameroon, some of them had already made it back to the enclave. As hardened migrants, they fast-tracked through the borderlands, despite the fences and radars and police blocking their path. Their return to the ‘Guantánamo’ they had protested against might seem inconceivable. Yet like with the protest itself, the logic of the return has to be found in the struggle over migrants’ time – their captive present, their past on the road and their imagined future. There was simply no going back for the clandestine migrants of Ceuta.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> See [http://blog.eogn.com/eastmans\\_online\\_genealogy/2010/07/ellis-island-and-your-ancestors.html](http://blog.eogn.com/eastmans_online_genealogy/2010/07/ellis-island-and-your-ancestors.html) (accessed 1/2/2014)

<sup>2</sup> Like Willen (2007), I use the term *illegal* as a 'folk' term of social differentiation; see Andersson (2014) for a terminological discussion.

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/25/morrison-asylum-seekers-should-go-home-or-face-very-very-long-detention> (accessed 7/25/2014)

<sup>4</sup> For more on my research across an 'extended field site' in Senegal, Mali, Morocco and Spain, see Andersson (2014).

<sup>5</sup> My 'material' approach is inspired by Munn's (1992:104) notion of (spatio)temporalization and Thrift and May's (2001) ethnographic focus on concrete aspects of (multiple) time-spaces.

<sup>6</sup> Morocco suspended such expulsions in 2013, instead sending migrants to Rabat and Casablanca.

<sup>7</sup> The Euro-African borderlands here add another sign to Smart and Smart's (2008) 'time-space punctuation' typology of full stops, commas and semicolons – the ellipsis.

<sup>8</sup> To de Certeau, *tactics* are a form of (temporal) 'calculated action' and 'art of the weak' exercised vis-a-vis (spatially organising) state strategies (de Certeau 1984:36-37). However, to my mind *tactics* marginalizes the temporal elements of state enforcement too much, while *techniques* better captures the ad hoc, piecemeal nature of most migrant actions in response to controls, with exceptions such as Ceuta's highly 'tactical' protest.

<sup>9</sup> Fieldwork was carried out with formal approval by the authorities, and both my colleagues there and the migrants with whom I had regular contact were kept informed of the purpose of my work.

<sup>10</sup> My usage of *regime* here is inspired by Schiller and Salazar (2012:189).