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The global front against migration

[Ruben Andersson \(http://aotcpress.com/author/ruben-andersson/\)](http://aotcpress.com/author/ruben-andersson/)

[Author's note: This is an edited version of an appendix to my book *Illegality, Inc.: Clandestine migration and the business of bordering Europe* (University of California Press 2014).^[1 (#global-front-migration-n-1)] (<http://aotcpress.com/articles/global-front-migration/#global-front-migration-n-1>) *Illegality, Inc. is concerned with the "fight against illegal migration" in West Africa and southern Europe, and follows migrants and border workers through their interactions across the emerging Euro-African borderlands. Focusing on the Spanish case, which has been held up as a "success" in the "fight against illegal migration", the book looks in turn at the trauma and drama of deportation to Senegal and Mali; Euro-African cooperation in the policing of the frontiers; and activism and aid work in the borderlands as well as in Spain's North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, tiny EU territories where many migrants find themselves indefinitely retained. While the book drills down into the Spanish section of the EU's "external borders", this article instead looks briefly towards the U.S.-Mexico frontier to unearth some deeper trends in migration controls. Prepared in 2013, it was written at a particular time, just before large numbers of refugees started arriving into southern Europe, and just as the US Senate debated ambitious immigration reforms which have since faded from view. As the article suggests, the reason for this shift away from reform may not be surprising – a politics of fear, concentrated on the border – yet to understand the implications and entrenchment of these destructive border politics, we need to unearth the logics behind "more border security" on both sides of the Atlantic. Exploratory in nature, my comments here are meant to open debate about these logics, as well as about their day-to-day workings and human consequences.]*

"God divided the sea and led them through and made the waters stand up like a wall. By day he led them with a cloud; by night, with a light of fire. He split the rocks in the desert. He gave them plentiful to drink as from the deep. He made streams flow out from the rock and made waters run down like rivers. . . . He rained down manna for their food, and gave them bread from heaven."

In late June 2013, Republican Marco Rubio stood and spoke on the Senate floor in Washington. The biblical imagery the senator had chosen for this moment – familiar to me from the tales of deliverance told by irregular West African migrants en route to Spain – revealed how much was at stake. The bill on immigration reform, opening a path to citizenship for more than eleven million irregular immigrants, was about to be voted through the Senate. While a motley coalition had supported the bill, ranging from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to migrants' rights groups, protestations came from familiar right-wing quarters. All too aware of the battles within his party on migration, Rubio had staked his future presidential ambitions on successful reform (a risky gamble, as the 2015-16 campaign was to show), and he knew that his role in forging the bipartisan bill needed a strong justification. His voice trembled as he described his own humble migrant beginnings, before gradually segueing into solemn words about the hospitality of America, "the most exceptional nation in all of human history." His voice rose as he, preacher-like, built towards his Bible quotes with these lines: "No one should dispute that, like every sovereign nation, we have a right to control who comes in. But unlike other countries, we are not afraid of people coming in from other places. Instead, inspired by our Judeo-Christian principles we Americans have seen the stranger, and invited them in."

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Photograph by the author

While my book has explored illegality as it is forged and fought in one particular setting – the Euro-African borderlands, and especially the Spanish "front" against undocumented migration – it is deeper processes at play on a *global* scale that I will briefly consider in this article. The emerging Euro-African border is but one instance of a larger bordering of the rich world. In Australia, "boat people" have been retained on distant atolls and in impoverished Papua New Guinea in a bid to deter new entrants, much as Spain has done in its small North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla; the anti-migrant fencing around the enclaves is now replicated at Israel's desert borders and along the Greek-Turkish frontier, in eastern Europe and Saudi Arabia. In part, the reason for such parallels is simple: rich states copy "innovations" and often contract the same companies and consulting firms to do the job. However, deeper *shared* logics and mechanisms are also at work at the borders. This article will throw some clarity on these by looking towards the frontier that has long provided the prototype for the "fight against illegal migration" elsewhere: the U.S.-Mexico border.

As I was putting the final touches to my book in the summer of 2013, I was intrigued by the migration battles unfolding on Capitol Hill and their parallels with the European "illegality industry"^[2 (#global-front-migration-n-2)] (<http://aotcpress.com/articles/global-front-migration/#global-front-migration-n-2>), as I have called the various (often conflictive) sectors involved in the "fight against illegal migration". For the subtext to Rubio's intervention was that the Senate bill in fact *inverted* his own biblical imagery. Thanks to a late Republican amendment, the bill – instead of opening a path through the seas or splitting rocks in the desert – outlined an unprecedented militarization of the already thoroughly militarized U.S.-Mexico border. While the bill would later stall in Congress owing to conflicts over the proposed regularisation of migrants, its thrust of "more border security" has since been continued by default, by stealth and via political interventions of all kinds, not least during the 2015 Republican leadership contest. Back in 2013, the political priorities were clear: the gods of the border had to be placated before those of capital got their due. Or as Senator Chuck Grassley, voting no on the bill, put it: "Border security first. Legalize second."

Besides the obvious parallels in escalating border reinforcement on both sides of the Atlantic, here was a more specific parallel too: between the proposed U.S. reforms and Spain's regularization of about half a million immigrants in 2005. In both the Spanish "normalization" and the Senate bill of 2013, a vocal opposition from the right claimed that more "illegals" would flood into the country as a result of reform. And in both cases, the calls to "liberalize" migration *within* the nation were accompanied by a drive to secure the southern borders. Soon after its unilateral regularization, Madrid asked for EU funds to boost its border capacity, drawing ire from other European governments. In the United States of 2013, any regularization was made conditional on a set of "triggers," the principal one of which was "effective control" at the U.S.-Mexico border – meaning continuous surveillance along its full length and the apprehension of nine out of every ten irregular migrants in "high-risk" border sectors.

This required massive new investments. Some thirty billion dollars^[3 (@global-front-migration-n-3)] (<http://aotcpress.com/articles/global-front-migration/#global-front-migration-n-3>) would be spent on nineteen thousand new Border Patrol agents over the next ten years, doubling the existing force, and more than thirteen billion dollars set aside for a "comprehensive southern border strategy" that included seven hundred miles of new fencing. No matter that migrant apprehensions were already at their lowest numbers in about forty years or that the Border Patrol had already doubled in size since 2005 and quintupled since 1993. No matter, either, that the existing border barrier already wound its way along much of the U.S.-Mexico borderline, while piles of steel needlessly purchased for the grand fiasco of the Bush-era Secure Border Initiative lay abandoned as the initiative's one-time contractor Boeing counted its dollars. And no matter that in Arizona, the principal migration battleground, a bolstered fleet of aircraft, drones, radars, and ground sensors had already been deployed and linked into a new command center in Tucson in a militarized alignment of forces. Hardline critics still said the latest "border surge" was not enough. Senator John McCain, responding to them as coarchitect of the bill, announced that the U.S.-Mexico frontier would now be the "most militarized border since the fall of the Berlin Wall." The Cold War comparison came accompanied by a brief flicker of a smile, no trace of disapproval in the senator's voice.

The U.S. border surge illustrated with almost caricature-like clarity how "illegal migration", as I argue in my book, has been transformed into a field of large and multiple gains centered around a complex border spectacle.^[4 (@global-front-migration-n-4)] (<http://aotcpress.com/articles/global-front-migration/#global-front-migration-n-4>) As one migrants' rights group put it when withdrawing support for the bill, the amendments would lead to "the enrichment of companies that lobby for and profit from jailing, surveilling and building fences against immigrants" – among them, big defense contractors seeking new gains as the Iraq and Afghanistan wars were winding down. Even retired Border Patrol agents^[5 (@global-front-migration-n-5)] (<http://aotcpress.com/articles/global-front-migration/#global-front-migration-n-5>) agreed the surge was unnecessary. At the U.S.-Mexico border, it was clear that the rock-cleaving God of Rubio's speech would not appear to let migrants through. The "heavenly manna" raining down on the parched borderlands, instead of feeding transiting strangers, would provide a banquet for the American version of the illegality industry. And on this point, Spanish and European border politics may have a lesson or two in store for Washington in regard to both its superficial successes and deeper contradictions, as seen in the continent's chaotic summer of arrivals in 2015.

The U.S.-Mexico border is a terrifying paradox: a red line for migrants yet crossable for goods and arms; sharply drawn as a borderline yet dependent upon a diffuse borderland of outsourced controls. It cleaves the North American free trade area with fencing, walls, and barriers to vehicles as it snakes from San Diego in the west to the Gulf of Mexico. "The phenomenology of the US/Mexico frontier is martial," notes journalist Jeremy Harding in his *Border Vigils*: "A vast, straggling set of defences, edified at extraordinary cost, where America's sense that it is under siege can be properly enacted."

This is the most written-about, analyzed, and intervened-upon international boundary of our time: generator of countless metaphors^[6 (@global-front-migration-n-6)] (<http://aotcpress.com/articles/global-front-migration/#global-front-migration-n-6>) , source of visions of both horror and deliverance, the preeminent place "where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds," in the words of Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa. For this reason, it is easy to get carried away with the border's symbolic potency, whether when writing on the U.S.-Mexico *frontera* or when trying to compare it with borders farther afield. It is therefore important to be clear, first of all, about some key *differences* between the U.S.-Mexico and the Euro-African borders.

First, history and geography matter. The U.S.-Mexico border is a New World creation, drawn across conquered lands; the emerging Euro-African border, by contrast, is a maritime divide that builds upon a long colonial and precolonial history – yet with the peculiar absence of colonial ties for the Spaniards in West Africa, the case I have considered at length in my book. Second, political structures shape the "fight against illegal migration." At the Spanish frontier, the European Union is both actor and audience, allowing for the pooling of sovereignty and costs; in the United States, only federal and state governments vie for power. Third, whereas the States bills itself a nation of immigrants, as Rubio's speech made clear, southern European countries are recent labor importers. In the United States, Latinos are the low-pay workforce par excellence; in Spain, sub-Saharan migrants in particular have come to fill a racialized slot alongside or "below" much larger communities from eastern Europe and Latin America. And fourth, there has long been a difference in the magnitude of migrant flows – if not in border fatalities – even though we should recall that only about half of all irregular immigrants in the United States are estimated to have entered overland (and even though arrivals of refugees into southern Europe, mainly Greece and Italy, sharply rose in 2014-15).

The biggest parallel between the States and Spain/southern Europe on migration controls may, in fact, be the southern U.S. maritime border, scene of a media-fueled crisis in earlier decades as vessels arrived carrying "boat people" from Haiti and Cuba. Washington swiftly embarked on a broad diplomatic drive to stem these arrivals. It soon forged agreements with embargoed Cuba and went as far as forcing the end of Haiti's dictatorship to halt the threat of more migrant boats. Much like Spain's diplomacy in West Africa, these efforts soon succeeded – at a price.

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In the case of Mexico, less cooperative in migratory matters, the biggest similarities reside in the configuration of the U.S. and European illegality industries and the experiences of migrants buffeted by controls. These two features, rather than the “boat diplomacy” of earlier years, will be in focus in this article. No attempt will be made here to do justice to the vast existing literatures on U.S. border controls and wider policy trends. What follows, rather, are simply some initial thoughts on convergences at the border, based above all on the particular ethnographic perspective developed in my book.

Before looking at the illegality industries as such, the story will first rewind to southern Mexico ten years before the Senate bill. What I saw among Central American migrants there, on a research assignment^{[7] (#global-front-migration-n-7)} (<http://aotcpres.com/articles/global-front-migration/#global-front-migration-n-7>) in 2003, was the human consequences of an earlier phase in the consolidation of U.S.-Mexican border controls – a social universe that mirrored the world of endurance, suffering, and bravado among travelers on the trans-Saharan trail. The overlaps show how, as the social category of migrant illegality has gone global, the skills and experiences that define “illegal” existence likewise keep replicating well beyond the looming borderlines and the latest rounds of fortifications.

Riding la Bestia

The parallels between the American and European borders reach from the latest surveillance technology down to the most minute means of safeguarding one’s last possessions. As the West African migrant Amadou, whose climb across the tall fences of Ceuta I recount in my book, told me how he hid his last banknotes from criminals in the seams of his clothes while traversing Morocco, my mind spooled back to the Mexico-Guatemala border and the migrant shelter outside the muggy frontier town of Tapachula.

“Can you ask *la jefa* for some needle and thread?”

It is autumn 2003 and in front of me stands Carlos, a Salvadoran man with pleading eyes and a sweat-glistening face, his hand squeezing a tight roll of three hundred pesos. Like Amadou, who hid his cash as he waited to jump onto the night train outside the Moroccan border town of Oujda, Carlos wants to sew his peso notes into his T-shirt before catching *la Bestia*, the northbound cargo train. The shelter’s matronly boss only eyes me suspiciously when I ask on his behalf; still, later that day, I see Carlos sitting on the steps again, trying as best he can to wedge his roll of pesos into the folds of his clothes.

In the shelter, people are sitting and standing around everywhere, on the street, in the entrance hall, in the spacious patio. All waiting. The migrants gathered here are popularly known as *mojados*, or “wetbacks,” a term referring to the ordeal of crossing the Rio Grande or the Suchiate River between Mexico and Guatemala. These are the two wet borders that have turned Mexico into a never-ending contemporary frontier, a social desert, for transiting travelers. Tapachula could, actually, just as well be another outpost on the trans-Saharan migration trail, and the oasis-like ambience of this outpost is immediately apparent. I have arrived at one of those humanitarian rarities, the Casa del Migrante, or House of the Migrant, located on a sleepy back street at the city’s edges. In this house, run by Scalabrinian missionaries and strategically “forgotten” by the authorities, Central American migrants without papers find a place to rest for a few days outside the reach of Mexican law.

In the office, the receptionist from El Salvador is busy registering the multitude that has showed up this day at the house. Outside, on the patio, I sit down next to one of them. Hector is a middle-aged Guatemalan man with a kind and rounded face, a bit unshaven after many days on the road. Without much introduction, words start pouring out. Hector has tried to go north four times already and has been deported each time. He talks about how migrants come back, mutilated from trying to cling to the cargo trains or from jumping when the military starts to scream for them to get down at gunpoint as the train is moving. He talks about young men without legs, sent back to the border. “It was much easier a few years back,” he sighs.

Along comes Ulises, who, as far as names go, is quite consistent with the myth. With a cheery grin, he recounts his travels, which range from crashed motorbikes along the roads of his native Guatemala to studying to be a well-paid mechanic in Mexico. There he worked until the jealousy of his Mexican colleagues got him into trouble with the law. Now he is on his way again, towards New York, for the fourth time. The week before arriving at the Casa del Migrante he was robbed of everything in Tecún Uman, on the Guatemalan side of the border. Then, walking in outsize shoes donated by another migrant shelter, he followed the railway tracks to Mexico. “The stones rub against your feet, especially the big ones,” he says. The grin, again, in the midst of a migrant distress that is nothing like his once quite easygoing existence. If he makes it to the States, he will stay a couple of years and then go back to set up a business in Guatemala. Everything is planned, down to the smallest detail. As in the trans-Saharan *aventure* (adventure), as some francophone West African migrants call their long overland ordeals heading towards Europe, the perils of the journey have been taken into account.

Across the world migrants are readily associated with criminality, yet Tapachula brings home an important point: migrants are much more likely to be *victims* than perpetrators of crime. In 2003 some migrants were, literally speaking, stripped bare in Guatemala, and things got worse across the border. The state of Chiapas was a stronghold for the infamous *maras*, bands of criminals based on the paramilitary structure of the Salvadoran Contras. Their strategy was simple and, except for a small drugs and arms trade, consisted of robbing defenseless undocumented migrants, who had no choice but to cling to the moving trains.

In fact, it has got much worse on Mexican routes since I visited a decade ago. Now drug cartels and kidnapers take migrants hostage and ask for ransoms from families back home or force them to work the drug trade. More than ten thousand Central Americans are estimated to be kidnapped in Mexico each year. When they refuse to cooperate or when families do not pay up, tragedies happen, such as that of the mass murder of seventy-two migrants^[8 (#global-front-migration-n-8)] (<http://aotcpress.com/articles/global-front-migration/#global-front-migration-n-8>), left in a gruesome human pile by the drug cartel Las Zetas in 2010. Violence against irregular migrants goes unpunished – and keeps getting worse the more the border is reinforced.

At two o'clock, the Casa del Migrante closes for migrants, and we are all sent outside for a few hours. Nobody is really meant to feel at home; the house is a resting point, a place to wash yourself and get a free meal, but nothing more. The heat outside the shady patio is unbearable, humid coastline heat on a Sunday afternoon. People once again wait and talk, standing around in small groups beneath the roadside trees, everybody exchanging warnings, sharing problems, listening. As we keep talking about anything from Swedish football to shoot-outs in Tegucigalpa, night finally falls on us. A hot night, sticky, the forest around the house unquiet with noises. The bush starts to sing, and the shelter door closes for the day. We sleep early, lights out at ten. The next day is when the northbound cargo train passes.

A brief prayer inaugurates my morning, mumbled as we sit on rickety wooden benches in the dining hall next to the patio. The female volunteer serving breakfast closes her eyes tightly and calls upon Father and Son to help those present on their way today on the train. Everybody knows what is at stake, and a solemnity colors our bowls of cheap rice, plain tortillas, and watery black beans.

As the day continues, we again find ourselves out on the street. An older man has showed up, apparently from El Salvador. Two children run around him, screaming, "Santa Claus! Santa Claus!" His baggy, well-used pants and his weathered face, with its faint trace of a moustache, show little obvious resemblance to Father Christmas. Nevertheless, Santa Claus chuckles and gives one of them a peso to buy some candy. Full of stories and cheery lies, he talks to everybody and nobody about working the disco circuit of Tijuana, fighting ferocious gangs on the Suchiate River, and passing the U.S. border. "You just go 'yes sir, my daughter is in New Mexico,' and show them your passport with a straight face – that easy!" Nobody believes him.

Next to him sits a quiet man from Honduras, resting his feet on a stone. The skin of the soles is all peeled off, red flesh showing through. "That never happens to me, I always make sure to take care of my feet and hands," Santa Claus reproaches. "How far did you walk?" "From the border," the man responds, "on the rails." It took him and his travel companion fifteen hours. "I walk for fifteen hours no problem, and still fit for fight," asserts Santa Claus stubbornly, shadow-boxing to everybody's laughter.

By now, social lines are becoming blurred, and people do not seem to know how to place me. "Are you an *indocumentado* like us, a traveler without documents?" "Are you going north as well?" "How did you get here?" Am I actually going *mojado*, just another poor "wetback" on the road? Santa Claus punctures my fleeting dreams decisively. "This dollface looks like Subcomandante Marcos," he roars happily. He goes on: "Let's make our own autonomous state here in Chiapas, *Mojados Unidos* [United Wetbacks], no more *Estados Unidos* [United States]. You could be the leader!" Everybody laughs again. "Yes, a place where everybody can enter, a place with work, work with documents." There is sincerity behind his jokes, and the softness I have seen in all migrants at the Casa del Migrante until now shines through, albeit momentarily, in his otherwise so overassertive, life-torn face. Santa Claus has been here and there for years, carrying torn papers in a plastic bag in his pocket, supposedly references from all his former jobs around Mexico and its two borders. If anybody would want a *Mojados Unidos*, it is him. Nevertheless, he soon undoes his own dreams just as he undid mine. With a stern face, he removes his worn-out T-shirt. His back screams out "El Salvador" in big blue tattooed letters, like a lost lover of a distant but never forgotten youth.

After a quiet lunch, the truths of Monday afternoon dawn on the gathering. Everybody is tense, waiting for the coming trek past police outposts, to take up positions around the railway well in time for the erratic train to arrive.

People soon start disappearing, silently, in groups of two. Those who have not yet been robbed carry little backpacks; others go with only donated, outside shoes on their weary feet. Ulises is the first to leave, with a companion. With yet another of those big grins, he stretches out his hand. No drawn-out good-byes. As he walks up the road on the hill, I ask Hector from Guatemala if he is afraid. "The first time you're afraid to get on the train, and afraid of the *maras*," he says. It is certainly not the first time now that he tries. Then comes his turn and we say good-bye. The crowd starts to fall silent, the compulsive words of the previous day and a half overshadowed by the prospect of forests, trains, military, and *maras*. The Honduran man with worn-out feet looks on as his travel companion goes ahead without him: time is too precious. More people drop off as the evening heat abates, and soon we find ourselves an exclusive little group left around the house.

That night it rained. Rain without end, a beautiful tropical shower that beat upon our roof ceaselessly after we had lined up outside at nightfall, waiting for our names to be called. It rained upon the migrants in the forest, waiting for the train that did not show up until way past midnight. The *maras*, though, arrived punctually and stole everything from their human prey. Three women returned to the Casa del Migrante, I was later told, raped. (Was it the one dressed in a long white skirt, Honduran I think, with those nervous-looking, twitching eyes?) Two men were killed, one from Honduras and one from El Salvador. Was one of them Carlos with his hidden pesos? After the killing came the police, and the American dream was yet again intercepted. The travelers were by then truly *mojados*, "wetbacks" without the faintest freedom of transit. Wet clothes, wet soles, and with humiliation soaking their bodies through and through, their dreams turned into puddles along the railroad tracks.

Back up in Mexico City, I bump into Ulises in a migrant detention center. I hardly recognize him at first – dirty, clothes worn out, but with the same death-defying smile on his face. He was caught going towards Monterrey but had by then made it up on the train, found himself a girlfriend along the road, and started working. He tells me about that rainy night on the cargo train, about the *mareros* who shot a man who refused to hand over his wallet, plundered him as he lay dying, and then killed another who started to fidget nervously. It does not, however, seem like any of our friends from the Casa del Migrante were killed. I sigh with relief, sadly enough. Ulises scribbles down his address for me before he is taken away for breakfast, in case we meet again. The address is in Mexico.

It is worth recalling the warning, voiced by anthropologist Nicholas De Genova^[9 (#global-front-migration-n-9)] (<http://aotcpress.com/articles/global-front-migration/#global-front-migration-n-9>), that tracing some universal "migrant experience" is an extremely problematic thing to do, as if "migranthood" involved an essential set of characteristics. Yet the similarities in the experiences of unauthorized travelers in Mexico and on the trans-Saharan trail are remarkable and can be explained only through the close similarities in the ordeals these travelers have faced. Three aspects of the phenomenology of illegality, to borrow ethnographer Sarah

Willen's term^[10 (#global-front-migration-n-10)] (<http://aotepress.com/articles/global-front-migration/#global-front-migration-n-10>), are worth lingering on: the experience of time, the use of the body, and the forging of new solidarities amid deep distress and danger.

Among Tapachula's migrants, I observed ways of waiting, loitering, and whiling away of time that I would see years later among, for instance, stranded and deported migrants in Mali's capital Bamako, or 'residents' of the reception camp in the Spanish enclave of Ceuta: a shift in the experience of temporality^[11 (#global-front-migration-n-11)] (<http://aotepress.com/articles/global-front-migration/#global-front-migration-n-11>) among migrants constrained by controls, in which long periods of eventlessness interacted violently with sudden bouts of activity. This temporality was often infused with a deep sense of religiosity, whether by the Christian NGOs en route or by migrants themselves, who conspired to glorify a far-ahead future of potential deliverance. In the Casa del Migrante, this future was depicted by a drawing of a shimmering U.S. border towards which all paths and people converged and was articulated in the prayers over breakfast tortillas; among Ceuta's stranded migrants, it was physically visible as the Rock of Gibraltar across the Strait and was invoked as God's grace or in the soft Christian chanting that could be heard, at sunset, among evangelical residents congregating in the backyards of the camp.

Yet regardless of their prayers and invocations, the overland travelers were also pragmatic, sharing in a skillset forged on the margins of the law. From Mali's backyards to Mexico's shelters was a mix of bravado and silent endurance among migrants facing similar dangers on the road ahead: police checkpoints, criminal gangs, kidnappers, drug runners, heavily armed soldiers. They also shared in a struggle, indeed an expertise, over minute details of body and dress: how to walk to avoid the skin peeling off your soles, into which folds of your shirt to sew your banknotes, how to improvise footwear when it wears out or is stolen at gunpoint. At times, such skills meant the difference between life and death, as in the art of grabbing on to a train that roars past a railway junction in eastern Morocco or the badlands outside Tapachula, at night, as rain pours down and criminals wait to pounce. In Mexico, migrants learn to ride *la Bestia*; some travelers who have made it across the Sahara talk of having "eaten the crocodile."

Endurance and clandestine skills can take the travelers only so far, however. As routes have closed down, migrants have found themselves increasingly relegated to the services of professional smugglers. Some of these consolidate and earn bigger fees; others are pushed aside by larger criminal gangs, who may prefer to use migrants for different lines of business, such as deadly extortions. While this is seen on the largest scale in Mexico's drug war, criminal networks have also taken on growing importance on the trans-Saharan route, sometimes aiding migrants for a fee but increasingly also trafficking or even kidnapping them for ransom. In Libya, migrants are nowadays "warehoused"^[12 (#global-front-migration-n-12)]

^[12 (#global-front-migration-n-12)] (<http://aotepress.com/articles/global-front-migration/#global-front-migration-n-12>) in hangars and derelict detention centers, preyed on by gangs, militias and security forces alike; in Morocco, gangs have taken migrants hostage until their relatives pay up; and outside Israel's fences, brutal ordeals are visited upon refugees fleeing across the Sinai Desert.

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Photograph by the author

In the face of such dangers, migrants have built intricate networks of information and mutual assistance. These makeshift social structures, often organized through mobile phones or casual contacts, are tapped into punctually and instrumentally by migrants as they head north. At times, they take the form of a mimicking – ironic or heartfelt – of long-lost national structures, such as in the "United Wetbacks" of Tapachula or the "African Unions" and "blue helmets" in trans-Saharan encampments or "ghettos" in North Africa. The latter case, in particular, shows how new solidarities can take root in the most inhospitable terrains. Similarly creative reactions to extreme adversity can be seen among other migrant groups at the gates to the West.

Despite their networks, the clandestine migrants traversing Mexico and the Sahara also share in the loneliness of the journey. Heading north you are essentially, and frighteningly, alone. As will be seen, this isolation of the individual – while actively *sought* by some travelers – is also one of the key logics shared by the U.S. and European illegality industries.

The two divides

Ever since the 1970s, the bordering of Europe has trailed that of the United States. Operation Hold the Line was launched in Texas in 1993; in the same year, construction of the fences around Spain's North African enclaves began. In California, yet another migration "crisis" soon led to even stronger enforcement, in the form of Operation Gatekeeper, the erection of border barriers and tougher migration laws. In his book on Gatekeeper, political scientist Joseph Nevins has traced the intimate link between the "rise of the illegal alien" in the United States and the spectacular fortification of the southern borderline since the 1970s. "The state did not simply respond to public concern with the supposed crisis of 'illegal' immigration," he says, but

has rather “helped to *create* the ‘illegal’ through the construction of the boundary” and tougher enforcement. As I have explained in my book, this is also what has happened in Spain (and elsewhere in southern Europe).

By the time of the 2013 Senate bill, Europe’s illegality industry was catching up via more and more “border security” initiatives, including the highly ambitious European External Border Surveillance System^[13 (#global-front-migration-n-13)] <http://aotcpress.com/articles/global-front-migration/#global-front-migration-n-13>], or Eurosur, which was linking up European border forces in a network-of-networks. The European and U.S. fences, “virtual” frontiers, new border technology and cooperation with “transit countries” all point towards a convergence around certain modes and logics of border control in the West, seen from Ceuta to the Sinai, from El Paso to northern Australia (and so some extent beyond the West itself, including in Saudi Arabia and South Africa). I will discuss four aspects of the convergences at the border here – spectacularization, delegation, militarization, and criminalization – before digging further to unearth some deeper trends and logics.

Scholars have for years wrestled with the question of a “policy gap” between the official aim of tough migration controls and the frequent permissiveness that nevertheless results. Despite the cost and the perennial lack of efficacy, the “why” of border security is nevertheless rather straightforward on a political level: it is *spectacularly* effective. Numerous analyses of U.S. border operations – from 1990s-era Hold the Line and Gatekeeper to more recent measures – have shown how these fill political and psychological functions in broadcasting controls and pushing routes out of sight rather than in reducing migrant numbers. To theorist Douglas Massey, vigorous border enforcement and similar measures “serve an important political purpose: they are visible, concrete, and generally popular with citizen voters. Forceful restrictive actions enable otherwise encumbered public officials to appear decisive, tough, and engaged in combating the rising tide of immigration.” That is, the border spectacle is its own end.

Such enforcement increasingly takes place through delegation. In fact, police subcontracting of the kind seen in West and North Africa was first pioneered in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Already in the late 1970s, Mexico was courted to cooperate in crackdowns on “illegal” entries, and soon U.S. staff and resources poured into the country in a pattern of “remote control” that keeps expanding. The Immigration and Naturalization Service – until 2003 the parent organization of the Border Patrol – launched Operation Global Reach in the late 1990s, in which it opened thirteen new offices in Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The U.S.-Mexican Border Enforcement Security Task Force keeps growing in size, as do the Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s communities of Mexico-based attachés and “border liaison officers.” Grupo Beta, a Mexican “migrant protection” task force, which has extended the state’s reach along irregular routes, was from early days supported by U.S. donations of surplus equipment, recalling the Spanish gift economy with subcontracted police in the Sahel that I have identified in my research.^[14 (#global-front-migration-n-14)]

<http://aotcpress.com/articles/global-front-migration/#global-front-migration-n-14>] Through Plan Sur in the early 2000s, the Mexican government again sought to safeguard the lives of migrants but in practice pushed them towards more dangerous routes. Mexico has itself also helped expand controls southwards, through commissions and return agreements with its Central American neighbors. Thanks to such regional “cooperation” as well as shared intelligence, sharpened legal instruments, and an influx of funds, the borderlands have been stretched southwards at the bidding of the U.S. government – a process that has sharply expanded since the 2014 “humanitarian crisis” of Central American arrivals at the U.S. borders, via bolstered cooperation with Mexico through the “Mérida initiative” and the country’s “Southern Border Program.”^[15 (#global-front-migration-n-15)]

<http://aotcpress.com/articles/global-front-migration/#global-front-migration-n-15>]

But it is in domestic delegation that the U.S. government really excels, providing a model for the European securitizations that I have discussed more in depth in my book. As in the European Union, the number of agencies with a finger in the border pie is growing along with the expansion of funds. At the border, ICE and its sister agency, Customs and Border Protection, are now accompanied by a range of actors: among them, the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the FBI; the National Guard and Texas Rangers; sheriffs and state public safety departments; and, not least, private groups ranging from consulting firms to security businesses and sheriffs’ volunteer “virtual deputies.” A range of obscure initiatives for collaboration has broadened the anti-migration front down to the level of traffic police, volunteers, and “experts” of all kinds: S-Comm, 287(g), Operations Linebacker, and Border Star. And one part of this unholy alliance of advocates, profiteers, and enforcers in particular keeps deepening: “interagency collaboration” between the Departments of Homeland Security and Defense.

A creeping *militarization* of the “battle” against illegal migration was evident already in the 1990s, when army surplus landing mats were stood on their end outside San Diego to form the first rudimentary border barrier. Activists have long accused the U.S. government of waging a war against migrants, yet as border tactics keep changing, “war” now veers dangerously between the literal and the metaphorical. Predator-type drones – already used to deadly effect in Afghanistan and Pakistan – are now deployed (albeit unarmed) in the Arizona desert, inspiring the EU border agency Frontex’s push on unmanned vehicles in the European context. Declassified U.S. documents^[16 (#global-front-migration-n-16)] <http://aotcpress.com/articles/global-front-migration/#global-front-migration-n-16>] show border surveillance maps and scenarios for drone use that replicate those of the EU’s Eurosur system, accompanied by the same talk of “situational awareness,” “interoperability,” and layered controls stretching far beyond domestic space. Moreover, the specific surveillance technology overlaps with European systems such as Spain’s coastal radars (SIVE) and is set to become even more entwined now that the U.S.-led drone business has taken off.

The cost for these new systems is substantial. In the United States, the expensive drones have not even been proven effective; moreover, many of these remain idle, since the DHS already has more than it can deploy. Even if new technology does succeed in leading to more detections – as has been the case with the menacingly named “Vader” sensor system of Arizona – this hits the “effectiveness” ratio of apprehensions, thus raising calls for even more boots on the ground. As for these, critics note how the hugely expensive doubling of Border Patrol agents is being proposed at a time of austerity and of a sharp drop in apprehensions per deployed agent. In fact, Border Patrol staff are already almost “tripping over themselves” at the border, according to Tom Barry^[17 (#global-front-migration-n-17)] <http://aotcpress.com/articles/global-front-migration/#global-front-migration-n-17>], author of the aptly titled *Border Wars*. To him, the Border Patrol finds itself trapped in its own military rhetoric, in which “any measure of border security short of shutting the whole thing down leaves room for people to demand more money.”

Militarization accompanies a steady *criminalization* of migration from southern European shores to Arizona by way of Algiers and Rabat. In the States, leading the way on such measures, migrants are increasingly seen through a fuzzy term that justifies their incarceration and deportation: *criminal alien*.

The “crimmigration”^[18 (#global-front-migration-n-18)] <http://aotcpress.com/articles/global-front-migration/#global-front-migration-n-18>] complex, as it is often called, is much more far-reaching in the States than in Europe. Since the 1980s, the country’s large prison conglomerates have pulled into the growing market for migrant detention, setting up shop in poor border communities that see a lifeline in the incarceration business. As Barry says, this is “the new face of imprisonment in America: the speculative public-private prison, publicly owned by local governments, privately operated by corporations, publicly financed by tax-exempt bonds, and located in depressed communities.” The number of immigrants in detention has increased fivefold since the mid-1990s, bringing record profits for big operators such as CCA and GEO Group. This looks like an example of what I have called the “double securitization” of migration – that is, the treatment of human movement as a security threat or risk, along with the profitable “portioning out” of this risk to various sectors. Here, local authorities are saddled with debt while the gains in dealing with the “criminal alien threat” are spirited off to large, state-supported corporations.

This model is increasingly filtering into Europe. GEO Group runs Europe’s largest migrant detention center, Harmondsworth in the United Kingdom; in Greece, the outsourcing of migrant detention to private operators has been greeted as a way of getting jobs to crisis-hit communities. While Spain has so

far opted for state-run and mixed models, the employment arguments are similar for the country's detention centers (CIEs) and reception facilities (CETIs). As the migrants of Ceuta and Melilla saw it, the beds of their "camps" had to remain occupied to keep "business" going.

Besides the advanced prison business, another factor fuels criminalization in the United States in particular: the merging of migration controls with the twin "wars" on drugs and terror. In fact, the country's border fence, like Spain's SIVE radar system, was initially meant to keep drug smugglers out; yet the blurring of lines between drugs, terror, and migration enforcement is much more evident in America than in Europe. After 9/11, the federal U.S. immigration architecture was dismantled and rebuilt, with the result that the Border Patrol, now under the DHS, has as its priority mission the prevention of "terrorists" and "terrorist weapons" from entering the United States. "National security" has come to define border enforcement, making the annual fifteen billion dollars in investments there near-sacrosanct, as Barry points out.

If these factors set the United States somewhat apart, the rationale for criminalization is the same as that for draconian measures in Spain or elsewhere: deterrence. Along the U.S. border, federal courthouses now regularly resound with the soft clinking of chains and the shuffle of feet as groups of border crossers are frog-marched, handcuffed and shackled, into the courtroom. They silently take their seats, wait for their turn in front, and are handed down their sentences one by one with the most rudimentary legal assistance. For many, short incarcerations await, followed by deportation through sites far from where they entered. Such mass imprisonments and deportations are extremely costly. "Operation Streamline" – the courtroom spectacle – is however justified in the same way as European deportation campaigns, including the Spanish boat migrant repatriations discussed in my book: the stigma of criminalization and abject failure outweighs the financial costs.

With these convergences in mind, the United States may learn a thing or two from the Spanish case, which has often been held up – not least within Europe – as a rare "success story" in "combating migration", especially as regards the closure of the route between West African and the Canary Islands from 2006 onwards. First, Spain's "success" in cutting this route was principally the result of diplomatic and gift-giving efforts rather than new technology. Second, the Spanish borders had not already been wholly fortified, so any initial payoffs from technology were much more likely than in the U.S. case. Third, to the extent that technology and deployments succeeded, they largely did so by pushing routes into more dangerous areas or into the hands of Spain's European neighbors, an option that does not exist for the States. Fourth, "closing" a *maritime* border through deployments and diplomacy is easier than sealing a land border, as Washington would know after the Cuban and Haitian boat crises. And fifth, the most apt comparison in enforcement that remains – the fences of Spain's North African enclaves, with all their particularities – should give pause for thought. In Melilla, triple six-meter-tall fencing and all the latest surveillance technology have not been able to stop migrants, who by 2013-14 were charging across it every month in an ever more desperate manner. A reinforced borderline, in the United States in particular, might instead hit U.S.-Mexican relations – which, as was the case in Spain, would be the crucial factor in any "success" at curbing migratory flows.

Producing such cost-benefit analyses is easy enough, and here lies one danger for critical analyses of migration controls. In fact, such analyses – which draw equivalences across large, abstract areas of surveillance or control and speak the dominant language of migrant numbers and of euros and dollars – are at the source of thinking about controls, as is evident in debates on the Senate bill of 2013. They also point to underlying trends in political and economic life that have made the growth of the illegality industries possible, and it is to these trends that we will now briefly turn.

The illegality industries emerge at a particular juncture in the world economy. "Globalization" was long supposed to inaugurate a borderless world, but by now it is amply clear that it is producing anything but. The illegality industry is simply an outgrowth of this apparent paradox: it has turned new, globalized forms of bordering into its line of business.

One obvious factor informs the industry's swift growth: corporate lobbying. In the European Union, Brussels is proving a one-stop-shop for security businesses seeking to expand across the continent. In the United States, powerful security conglomerates are similarly contributing to the border surges. Prison conglomerates helped draft Arizona's infamous Senate Bill 1070^[19] (<http://aotcpress.com/articles/global-front-migration/#global-front-migration-n-19>), which requires local law enforcement officers to carry out immigration status checks, and these business groups donated funds to state politicians who later voted in the bill's favor. The trend repeats with defense manufacturers, whose specific makes of border equipment are listed for purchase in the amendment^[20] (<http://aotcpress.com/articles/global-front-migration/#global-front-migration-n-20>) to the 2013 immigration reform bill. Yet it is too simplistic to talk of a one-way business influence. The political paymasters in fact want to promote "their" security and defense companies as flagship employers, in competition with other states and regions. Advanced forms of security "dialogue" on both sides of the Atlantic indicate the increased blurring of lines between the public and private spheres, which is also seen, to some extent, in the "maximizing" logics of nonprofit and state entities involved in migration controls. Such a blurring of both roles and aims has contributed to the swift growth of the illegality industry over the past two decades.

The industry also benefits from the increased mobility of the state's functions. Migration theorists have remarked on how those functions are "globalizing" and even migrating away from state boundaries, and the same is true of the nonstate sectors involved in migration controls. The paradox is that the industry, an "anti-mobility machine" of sorts, depends upon and creates vast amounts of mobility for its staff, funds, equipment, and intelligence. At times, the industry's workers even increase their mobility at the expense of the migrants in their sights – as was evident, for instance, in the deployment of European and African "liaison officers" to combat migration, or in efforts among police in the Sahel to get larger fuel allowances from their Spanish donors.

The latter example points to another key trend: the reframing of relations between rich and poor countries as the global economic divide deepens.

The parallel economic problems besetting "sending" regions are startling. In 1994, the Mexican peso was devalued; in the same year, so was West Africa's franc CFA. While the latter region still depends on the old colonizer, France, for its monetary policy, Central American economies have in recent decades been "dollarized". Moreover all these sending countries, from Mali via Mexico to Honduras, depend upon remittances sent from migrants abroad. Then there are the trade deals. In Mexico's rural hinterland, the cheap U.S. maize that flooded into the country with NAFTA has put smallholders out of business; in West Africa, similar problems beset both fisheries and farming. Such trends have pushed new groups of migrants onto the road, facing new obstacles built to keep them out.

As economic dependence has grown, so have revived forms of exclusion. Just as NAFTA has been accompanied by the closure of borders, so have EU trade partnerships smuggled in migration provisions, from the Cotonou Agreement with African and Pacific nations in 2000 to the EU "mobility partnerships" with states such as Morocco^[21] (<http://aotcpress.com/articles/global-front-migration/#global-front-migration-n-21>) and Tunisia, which include provisions on combatting irregular migration. In this new political climate, "development" is being reconfigured by donor states. No longer a lofty promise of economic betterment, it has been chopped up, made conditional, and instrumentalized as a medium for policies that are in the donor's "national interest." As seen most starkly in the Spanish "emergency" systems of labor importation in Senegal and Mali following the Canary Islands "boat crisis" of 2006, the dependent backyards to the West here become reframed, first of all, as a potential threat.

This catastrophic imagination relates to another trend informing the border surge – the partial reinvention of race. At the southern U.S. border, sadistic sheriffs or vigilantes loudly proclaim they are not racist but merely act against "illegals" and criminals; in Europe, similar arguments are made by

xenophobic politicians calling for military interventions against migrant boats. In such all too frequent examples, racism is intimately related to mobility – that is, selectively applied to the poor who dare to move. This mirrors the deepening world divide between rich and poor. No longer between the global North and South, the faultlines instead run within nations, and illegality serves as a gloss for this divide, hiding the new configuration of race on display among shuffling and clinking feet in a U.S. courtroom, in European or Moroccan roundups, and in the images of border and boat crises broadcast from the Canaries, Australia, and Arizona.

The economics of illegality

“The paradigmatic scene of the world today is undoubtedly a picture of bodies, squeezed between pallets inside a truck.” Such images – detailed by the anthropologist Shahram Khosravi in his autoethnography of “illegal” crossings – are replicated along the borders of the West. In the summer of 2010, Ceuta’s local newspaper carried an endearing picture of pets in a basket on the tarmac; the caption explained that they had been removed from stationed trucks in port so that the heartbeat-detection equipment used to search for irregular migrants would not go off. In Melilla, migrants are regularly pulled out of trunks and the underbellies of trucks and cars. One Central American migrant interviewed by ethnographer Susan Bibler Coutin^[22 (#global-front-migration-n-22)] (<http://aotcpress.com/articles/global-front-migration/#global-front-migration-n-22>) recalls being smuggled into the United States in a station wagon: “I was hardly breathing. I had somebody else’s legs right on top of my nose. I was hardly, not breathing in there.”

While the previous section looked at the trends behind the illegality industries’ growth, this final part considers, in brief, their shared logics. One such logic concerns the *isolation* of the individual, as already noted. To Coutin, as migrants cross clandestinely “it is as though a border forms around them, alienating them from their social surroundings and making their very humanity questionable.” They are reduced to the most basic existence: that of the living, shallowly breathing body.

Critical migration theorists have drawn on the ideas of Michel Foucault to grasp the consequences of border controls, often using his intertwined concepts of “biopolitics” and “biopower.” Biopower points to “more or less rationalized attempts to intervene upon the vital characteristics of human existence”^[23 (#global-front-migration-n-23)] (<http://aotcpress.com/articles/global-front-migration/#global-front-migration-n-23>) through techniques that regulate human beings, individually and collectively, as living creatures who are born, mature, sicken, and die. Another reading of biopower has been suggested by Giorgio Agamben, to whom the modern “biopolitical space” of the camp reduces people to a state of “bare life” where they can be killed or left to die. Yet as I have shown in my book, the illegality industry does not govern individuals in either of these total manners; it is neither wholly disciplinary nor a harbinger of death. Instead it keeps bodies in selective circulation where they may fill prison beds, add to deportation numbers, be spotted on surveillance screens, or kept immobile as a form of deterrence.

Anthropologist Didier Fassin^[24 (#global-front-migration-n-24)] (<http://aotcpress.com/articles/global-front-migration/#global-front-migration-n-24>), building on Foucault, takes us closer to the workings of the illegality industry. In his writings on migration in France, he has identified a double-sided “biopolitics of otherness” that renders the migrant as either a suffering or a racialized body. The former figure invokes universal, naked humanity; the latter, illegitimacy and “insurmountable difference.” Yet at the border even this biopolitics collapses, and not just in the sense of the simultaneously suffering *and* racialized body seen in sea rescues. For this body is also put into circulation in an economics of illegality – a “bioeconomics,” perhaps – that informs the multiple logics of intervention at the border.

Illegality is “incorporated” in a double sense in the borderlands: it is turned into a business and embodied. Let us take the example of a migrant pulled out of a trunk at Melilla’s border. The traveler’s payment to a Moroccan smuggler, who put him in touch with the driver, has come to naught. The latest generation of detection equipment has registered his pulsating heart or bodily heat, and he is now filmed by the Guardia Civil as he is eased out from his hiding place, his driver detained for a “crime against the rights of foreign citizens,” the catch-all used against presumed human smugglers in Spain. The civil guards put his image in circulation in the Spanish media and hand him over to the police, who process him and send him on to the camp. There he is kept stranded to deter more entries, given a bed and attended to by the Red Cross and NGOs while journalists or academics interview him about his ordeal. He is eventually taken to a detention center on the mainland, where his nationality is confirmed by subcontracted African officers. Once the requisite number of conationals has been amassed, deportation awaits on a flight organized by Spain or chartered by Frontex, removing our migrant – temporarily – from circulation and leaving him as an example of failure for others who may wish to try the journey.

In the U.S. case, a similar example can easily be drawn. A Central American such as Carlos has finally crossed the U.S. border with the help of a *coyote* or drug-runners, for lack of other options. He is detected via border sensors, apprehended by the Border Patrol, and sent back, only to try again, each time losing money or being robbed by the cartels. On his third attempt, he is “streamlined” in front of a judge and imprisoned as a deterrent to others, either in a complex run by an incarceration conglomerate or in an open-air “tent city” visited by the news teams. His ignominy, he knows, will eventually end just as it did for Melilla’s smuggled migrant: in deportation.

These trajectories involve a range of sectors: smugglers and their helpers; manufacturers of surveillance and detection equipment; the border agencies and police; aid workers and state officials; journalists and academics; and the deportation and detention business. These groups are not interested in the migrant’s whole life-course, as William Walters has noted in his writings on Europe’s “humanitarian border”^[25 (#global-front-migration-n-25)] (<http://aotcpress.com/articles/global-front-migration/#global-front-migration-n-25>), in which he cogently urges us to look beyond “Foucault’s toolbox” when trying to understand the dynamics around the West’s frontiers. Instead, they use only one migrant “part,” or the migrant in one incarnation – the monitored migrant, the detainable migrant, the information-bearing migrant, the deportable migrant, the treatable migrant, the rescuable migrant – and then link their work to others in a chain of interactions. Instead of “subjectifying” or subjugating bodies, the illegality industry puts them into circulation and “refines” them in scattered sites before presenting them, “wholesale” as it were, for a deportation flight or to be paraded in front of the public or the media.

The point can be pushed further. Instead of intervening upon migrants’ vital characteristics, as biopolitics does, the illegality industry *extracts* vitality. It usurps the travelers’ 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 temporary removal from the border. It grasps the smallest bodily and vehicular movements, labels these abnormal or illegal, and creates through its success ever more detailed needs for detection. It mines the migrant mind for stories, lies, routes, and intelligence. This extractive process – this primitive frontier accumulation – helps structure the peculiar temporalities and bodily dispositions experienced by migrants from southern Mexico to the Sahel.

This particular perspective on the economics of illegality – highlighting the use of the migrant body and mind, rather than just profitability – is only one of many lenses that can be applied to the “fight against illegal migration.” Another, already discussed and worth touching upon again, is that of war.

A war perspective seems particularly apt at the militarized borderline and in the African or Mexican borderlands, where security forces and criminals pillage the migrants’ pockets, often leaving them reduced to the “naked life” invoked by Agamben’s dystopian visions. Here, the chain of anti-migration interventions resembles a battle of attrition against hapless travelers who can be moved and shuffled and harassed until they give up, leave, or perish. In fact, this is increasingly the stated or unstated aim of migration policy initiatives, from the serial expulsion tactics of Morocco to the “hostile

environment” policies thought up from Arizona to Britain. From this perspective, migrants appear not as “products” but rather as waste matter left piled up and forgotten until its eventual disposal.

All these perspectives – biopolitics in its different guises, “bioeconomics,” and war – grasp something fundamental about the fight against illegal migration. For the “fight” follows not one neat logic but rather competing or complementary logics at different stages: whether inland, at the land or sea border, in the borderlands, or in offshore processing zones. Migrants may be left to die in the desert yet be rescued at sea; they may remain forgotten in their faraway camps yet suddenly and spectacularly thrust into the spotlight; they may hold up a mirror of a common, naked humanity yet also represent something utterly other, frightening, and wild. These logics also clash in the same geographical sites, which may simultaneously function as incubators for cheap labor; as “traps” for deterrence purposes; as humanitarian laboratories; and as stages for a media spectacle, as seen, for instance, in Spain’s enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla or on the Mediterranean islands of Lesbos and Lampedusa. And the migrants themselves participate in their multiple makings, complicating the chain of actions even further through the dynamics of interactive classifications (which I have explored elsewhere by reference to Ian Hacking’s^[26 (#global-front-migration-n-26)] <http://aotepress.com/articles/global-front-migration/#global-front-migration-n-26>) work on “making up people”). This is where the notion of an “illegality industry” remains useful – taken not as an old-fashioned factory with its assembly line but rather as a set of interests converging upon the same raw material, which it detects, extracts, molds, sells, and disposes of in a complex web of interactions. Seen from this perspective, the principal “product” of this industry straddling the realms of the licit and the illicit, the public and the private, then becomes not the migrant but something much simpler: its own perpetuation.

Here lies a final Spanish lesson for Washington. Whereas spending on the illegality industry along southern European shores has been constrained by the economic crisis, no similar limit exists as pressure builds on Congress to open its purse. And whereas Spain in particular has wisely used state and nonprofit resources for its response to clandestine migration, the U.S. systems of control, surveillance, and detention are to a large extent in the hands of powerful, profit-seeking corporations. These twin factors give the U.S. illegality industry an even larger incentive to maintain that which guarantees an income: the “illegal immigrant threat” at the border.

In early July 2013, barely two weeks after Rubio’s Bible-infused Senate speech, came yet another religious homily on migration. Pope Francis^[27 (#global-front-migration-n-27)] <http://aotepress.com/articles/global-front-migration/#global-front-migration-n-27> had chosen Lampedusa for his first official visit out of the Vatican after learning of the recent death of migrants clinging to a tuna net at sea – a harbinger of what was to come amid the mounting number^[28 (#global-front-migration-n-28)] <http://aotepress.com/articles/global-front-migration/#global-front-migration-n-28> of sinking boats and mass drownings around the Italian island over the next two years. Arriving in port aboard a coast guard vessel, he condemned the “globalization of indifference” towards the unfortunates washing up dead or alive on southern European shores. “We have become used to the suffering of others,” he said, dressed in penitential purple. “It doesn’t affect us. It doesn’t interest us. It’s not our business.”

If clandestine migration is not our “business,” this article – and my book – has argued that it is indeed someone else’s: the illegality industry’s. And this industry has globalized as much as the indifference denounced by the pope has. How much further it can grow will depend upon the wisdom of politicians and their electorates, as well as on those two fundamental drivers of irregular migration: the globalization of demand for disposable labor and the thirst for betterment and safety that will keep travelers such as Carlos and Amadou grabbing on to the trains roaring through the borderlands.

[For a fully referenced and footnoted version plus more information about Illegality, Inc. (including on purchase), see <http://www.ucpress.edu/book.php?isbn=9780520282520> (<http://www.ucpress.edu/book.php?isbn=9780520282520>) (US) or <http://rubenandersson.com/claandestine-migration/> (<http://rubenandersson.com/claandestine-migration/>) (international).]

[1] <http://rubenandersson.com/claandestine-migration/> (<http://rubenandersson.com/claandestine-migration/>) (#to-global-front-migration-n-1)

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[3] http://www.salon.com/2013/07/06/an_ungodly_stupid_get_rich_scheme_the_real_border_security_story/ (http://www.salon.com/2013/07/06/an_ungodly_stupid_get_rich_scheme_the_real_border_security_story/) (#to-global-front-migration-n-3)

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[8] http://www.nbcnews.com/id/38867434/ns/world_news-americas-t/migrants-killed-refusing-be-assassins-teen-says/#.V13L-IRkroN (http://www.nbcnews.com/id/38867434/ns/world_news-americas-t/migrants-killed-refusing-be-assassins-teen-says/#.V13L-IRkroN) (#to-global-front-migration-n-8)

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