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“Life on the Margin: From Denial to Invisibility”. Translated from the French by Florence Bury

« *Vivre à la marge. Du reniement à l'invisibilité* ». Article traduit par Florence
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“Life on the Margin: From Denial to Invisibility”. Translated from the French by Florence Bury

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- 1 On the Mediterranean coast of Morocco, the cities and ports of Ceuta (facing Gibraltar) and Melilla (more to the East) belong to Spain and are therefore part of the European Union, which explains the attraction they exert on migrants who want to get into continental Europe without risking their lives in hazardous crossings of the Mediterranean. Historically sub-Saharan migrants who found a way to illegally enter these portions of Spanish territory could indeed hope for an eventual transfer to continental Spain. Today, with few exceptions, the chances of being thus transported to Europe are thin: Spain mostly sends back to Morocco the rare adventurers who can get into Ceuta or Melilla at ever greater risks of injury or drowning. But the dream lives on. The very small minority who are not deported are admitted into temporary stay centers for immigrants [CETI] (Migreurop, 2011)¹.
- 2 One week after their arrival at the center, the migrants are referred to a Spanish service which will determine the protection status that might apply to them. There, they can expose the reasons for their presence on this part of the European territory. If their reasons are deemed valid, they are given a document that serves as a six-month residence permit. Otherwise, they are ordered to leave the territory within fifteen days. However, in both cases, these migrants have to learn to speak Spanish and are treated the same during their stay on the island of Ceuta. When the time comes for their transfer to the peninsula, they are given fifty to a hundred euros. As the order to leave the territory is not forcibly applied, it is tantamount to a simple administrative procedure whose goal is to mask the paradoxical role that the temporary stay centers

of Ceuta and Melilla have always played: they harness a diverse labor force for Spanish companies—mostly “latifundia”.

- 3 Thus, the border between Morocco and these Spanish enclaves was revealed in 2006 as a place where a form of so-called chosen migration was carried out by Spain, which admitted a considerable number of Asian migrants (from India, Pakistan or Bangladesh) in the temporary admission center for migrants of Ceuta, under the Ministry of Labor, with the aim to meet the need expressed by Spanish companies for a qualified workforce in new information technologies and communication. The attitude of Spanish business leaders is the evidence that the border constitutes for the populations as well as the States a rent or a resource that can be counted on in times of need (Bennafla, 2002).
- 4 Ceuta and Melilla, two Spanish enclaves on African soil, and over which Morocco has never ceased to claim their Moroccan identities, have become, within the framework of Europe’s management of its external borders, notably with Spain, a place of major geostrategic importance. All kinds of pressure and blackmailing from Morocco onto Spain around the African migrations that gravitate in those places have been going on for years. Morocco can thus express its anger following the reception in Spain, for health care, of the pro-independence Western Sahara leader, as was the case on 21 April 2021. As a consequence, Morocco opened its borders with Spain in May 2021, asking African and Moroccan migrants, young or underage, to cross into Spain. Those situations generate tensions and Morocco demands from Spain and Europe the recognition of Western Sahara as Moroccan. Morocco’s wish is to be eventually granted that portion of Western Sahara in 2022 by all the Western chancelleries, as a bargaining chip for the external surveillance of Europe’s borders, no matter the cost in human lives that this engenders among sub-Saharan migrants who come up against the brutality of the Moroccan and Spanish police at those borders, as was the case on 24 June 2022 in Ceuta and Melilla, where Moroccan civil society counted at least 37 deaths among the ranks of sub-Saharan migrants caused by live ammunition following an attempt by the migrants to cross into those two enclaves (*Le Monde*, July 1st, 2022). In the following weeks and months, a controversy broke out as to how many people had found their death on that occasion, as well as to the position of Europe regarding the status of the disputed territory, as was revealed in many media sources (*TelQuel*, June 26, 2022; *AFP*, August 21, 2022).
- 5 This chapter is the result of a personal experience as a migrant in the Belyounech forest, where I was part of the ethnolinguistic diverse communities of migrants settled in the Belyounech forest between 2005 and 2010, and subsequently in France, where personal and collective situations of wandering, confinement in detention centers continued to be part of my personal experience, while I closely followed and analyzed the developments of the migrant condition in Morocco. In this chapter I want to show how the war on migrants in the Moroccan migratory space (that European and Moroccan policies only view as a transit zone on the way to Europe) fosters chaos, and keeps the authorities from imagining a humane mobility policy. Ever since the laws governing the immigration and residency of foreigners started to multiply and further complicate the conditions for access to the European Union, the modalities of granting visas and the methods of identifying applicants have evolved accordingly, while the chances have diminished of slipping through the net of files on people who have

entered or resided illegally in Europe (Mattelart, 2008). This is how human beings get stuck in a bottleneck at the gates of Europe.

Relegation and isolation

- 6 The experience of migration is that of the roads one takes, the journeys of men and women fully committed to new forms of living. It is also the discovery of unimagined places, of invisible, different spaces that do not appear on any maps. These are places of relegation, of isolation, detention and exclusion. For an often indefinite period of time, a vast community is kept in the forest, at the edge of North Africa and Europe, following the borders and faults of the continent. It recreates miniature nation-states which develop policies that serve or aggrieve their fortuitous citizens. It is the setting for intense relations between human beings who share common hopes, as well as between those human beings and the people who witness or play a role in their dream: the civilian populations who sell the much-needed supplies, or the sentinels who straddle the edges of that "grey zone". As a matter of fact, the invisible margins where the formal and the unformal constantly intersect stand at the heart of these societies' territories, of their lives and daily preoccupations. The mostly unseen presence of this fringe of humanity defies administrative standards and social norms, acting like a mirror in which many inequalities and failings of our contemporary world are reflected.

Castillejos/Fnideq: the European dream within reach

- 7 Fnideq, the Moroccan city near the Belyounech forest, was called Castillejos back when Spain controlled northern Morocco. It sits right next to the Spanish enclave of Ceuta, a few kilometers away from the border—an asphalt road leads to it, but reaching it by sea is shorter. The terrain is mostly steep, the city beautiful although a perpetual work in progress. Many natives who emigrated to different countries of the European Union tend to build houses there that mirror western models. King Mohammed VI's ambitious program for the modernization of Morocco also contributes to the erection of many buildings, the asphaltting of roads or the construction of piping systems among others.
- 8 The view of the sea greets the foreigner upon entering the city. The signs above the stores are labelled in Spanish, and ill-informed "illegals" might suddenly think they are now in Spain although they have not undergone the strict formalities of border crossings and the securitarian measures implemented by Europe. On the bus, before they reach the bus station, they get a gorgeous first look at the nearby Spanish city of Ceuta and its beautiful multi-storied buildings. In the "illegals'" minds, the scenic view already paints a picture of what the continent right in front of him might be: a land "flowing with milk and honey".
- 9 Roughly a hundred meters from the station is the Sunday market, surrounded by a large fence with several entrances. When military and police pressure eases, this is where the illegals come to get free supplies from the vendors—farmers for most of them. The sea also provides for local populations through the activity of fishermen with more or less elaborate means. The heart of the city hosts a large shopping mall where all the administrative services are available. The architecture and urbanization

of the city illustrate how rapidly Morocco is approaching the status of an emerging country.

- 10 This small town does therefore not have much to envy certain large Moroccan cities. As for the illegals, who see it as a foretaste of the promised land, it paradoxically fortifies their determination not to stop there. To tell the truth, if the rampant unemployment which affects the city did not also force young Moroccans to line up for the race to Europe, just like sub-Saharan immigrants, most illegals would feel great there. But the poor are also there and share this space—a space constantly under construction, boosted by investments. Ironically, the proximity of the forest makes Moroccan people hit by poverty the neighbors of the sub-Saharan illegals.
- 11 The idea is really to keep the illegals at bay, under house arrest so to say, because they are seen as a threat to European serenity. Thus, reaching the European borders without having submitted to its screening procedures which aim at organizing Sub-Saharan mobilities towards the countries of the North of Africa and Europe, means to risk a refusal and a very brutal rejection manifested by the fences of Ceuta and Melilla, staging the wall between Us and Them on the one hand, and on the other hand the hypocritical position of Spain which, in spite of its official rhetoric and its policies of border controls, continues to use the centers of Ceuta and Melilla as reservoirs of cheap and diverse labor. Sub-Saharan African migrants—both in the forest and settled in Moroccan cities—serve as an “army reserve”² (*Le Monde*, May 19, 2021) for Morocco to exert pressure on Europe during talks on economic and political partnership, specifically when formulating requests for facilitating the issuing of visas to all the strata of Moroccan society or even the end of said visas (*Commission européenne*, 2013). Finally, rejection and prison stays follow a specific mode of administration and imply the exercise of a direct power, devoid of political mediation, over the lives of people who are confined to separate spaces, during separate periods of time (Agier, 2012).

Selecting and locking up people... outdoors: the forest under siege

- 12 Sub-Saharan migrants are confined between the mountains surrounding Ceuta and Fnideq in Morocco, and most specifically in the small village of Belyounech, after which the forest is named. If the media only alerted the general public to the presence of African migrants in the forest in 2001³ (Edogue, 2008), the phenomenon became an integral part of the process of preventing migrants from crossing the border between Morocco and Spain as early as the late 1990s.
- 13 Until the early 2000s, a plain wire fence—regularly flattened by flocks of sheep and men—separated those enclaves from Morocco and served as an entry point for the labor force Spain brought from Western Africa and Morocco. Today, this border is impenetrable: a fortified wall now physically separates Morocco from Spain. More than a wall, it is a complex military construction with three seven-meter-high walls surrounded by razor wire that reaches into the sky, trenches and ditches, watchtowers and dogs. The walls are fitted with radar detection equipment which can spot any human being as it approaches the fence, thermal imaging cameras as well as sensors capable of detecting heartbeats from a distance.

- 14 The Spanish Civil Guard patrols every twenty minutes during the night in order to prevent any intrusion by migrants. The Moroccan army also participates in the monitoring of "illegal" migrations and is thus reduced to a policing role instead of its normal military defensive function. The teams of border guards are renewed every three months to reinforce their efficiency and prevent the corruption produced by the different strategies of border crossing which generate a large and diverse informal economy. One example of corruption consists in letting migrants cut the wire fence at the entrance of underground tunnels between Ceuta and Belyounech with bolt cutters so that hashish, as well as Asian and black migrants can get to Ceuta by night. Conversely, smuggled goods (Légende brand cigarettes, alcohol, home appliances, electronic devices, household products, jewelry, watches, cellphones and accessories, dairy products, etc.) can enter Morocco. As Pierre Conesa explains, this physical and military apparatus implies crucial processes that consist in "manufacturing the enemy" (Conesa, 2011). Once enemies have been identified and designated as such by those who make and influence public opinion—the media, political officials, intellectuals, religious leaders—and only then can military thinking be set in motion to promote the formula deemed best suited to subduing or annihilating them (Conesa, 2011).
- 15 In the fall of 2005, in northern Morocco, Spanish and Moroccan soldiers thus shot down at point-blank range a dozen sub-Saharan Africans who were trying to scale the fence around the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla on Moroccan land. In addition, at the behest of European commissioners, Moroccan law enforcement forcibly deported the African migrants, either to their countries of origin or to the Sahara. Without food or water, hundreds of them starved to death in the Sahara desert or died victims of non-conventional landmines buried in the sand⁴ (Amnesty International, 2006). After the violent scenes and arrests of 2005 at the edge of Ceuta and Mellila, the Belyounech forest, at the time home to nearly 1,700 migrants, was almost entirely deserted. And yet, the Moroccan army continued to besiege it. And sub-Saharan migrants continued to resist in the forest, refusing to surrender. The water source, two kilometers from the forest, was under military surveillance, as well as the landfill where the migrants also obtained supplies. The inhabitants of the villages around the forest were officially called upon to take part in the hunt for migrants: they had the right to arrest and hand over to law enforcement any illegals they had captured. However, their collaboration in this manhunt remained ambivalent.
- 16 At 4 in the morning, all the migrants would get up and go to the "tranquillos"⁵. In order to identify the parts of the forest where they were hiding, the military would enlist the help of dogs and young unemployed Moroccans who better knew the terrain. In the forest, having money is not enough to guarantee that you will be able to eat. The Belyounech forest is an isolated site, eight kilometers from the city. The town center is the only place where one can buy food or beg for it. There is a high risk of getting arrested by plain-clothes policemen. As for the paths that lead from the forest to town, they are full of Moroccans young and old, formerly smugglers or unemployed who have turned to predation. They know the different mountain trails as well as the flat terrain. They know the migrants avoid the paths where plain-clothes policemen can lay in wait. This phenomenon has intensified since Europe started reinforcing security at its borders, both on land and at sea. Apart from being attacked on their way to town, the major risk migrants run is to be arrested and sent to the border between Morocco and Algeria, 800 to 850 kilometers away⁶ (Frontex, n.d.).

- 17 The presence of men in the forest forces the numerous wild boars to withdraw further into the woods. During the day, they return to the migrants' camps: a form of coexistence, a relationship must be established. Is their new neighbor an ill-intentioned predator or is he just asking for a place to live before he can go on with his journey? From the chosen attitude depends the quality of the daily relations between men and boars. As soon as the animal realizes that the new tenants are not dangerous because they are too worried about their own safety and survival, and obsessed with the strategy they need to devise to cross the Mediterranean, then it gets closer. The boar knows there is no risk and even digs near the men to find food. The forest also harbors other "inhabitants", such as snakes, who live on the rocky terrain during the winter and only come out in the summer. They are friends neither with men nor with boars, as they are prone to hurting them indiscriminately and at any time.
- 18 Then, how can one not mention trees when talking about men's companions in the forest? They are the unwitting accomplices of the illegals⁷ and hide them during military raids on the forest. What is more, a huge quantity of wood is used in the manufacturing of ladders meant to get the migrants over the fence that divides Morocco from Spain. At night, the ladders make it possible to pass into Spain without the knowledge of the Moroccan and Spanish guards. Afterwards, the Spaniards collect all the ladders that have been abandoned and use them as firewood.

Political, social and physical architecture of the camps

- 19 Life in the forest resembles that of a refugee camp inasmuch as people regroup on the basis of nationality. The forest is divided into two sectors, separated by an asphalt road which connects Fnideq to Tangier. The first sector is on a mountain called Jebel Musa. The mountain's summit is partly covered by a forest, and another part remains slightly exposed and consists of a steep rocky relief. One of its flanks—rocky, steep and covered with trees over hundreds of meters—goes down to the Mediterranean. The direct proximity of Jebel Musa with the sea and the fact that the walls were just wire fencing motivated migrants to settle in this strategic part of the forest for years. The 2005 events of Ceuta and Mellila led Spain to request that Morocco take the migrants away from this proximity with the sea and the wire fencing. The Moroccan military asked the migrants to leave Jebel Musa and cross to the other side of the forest, which has a main entrance near the asphalt road and gives access to a quarry which dominates that part of the forest.
- 20 The quarry and the Jebel Musa parts of the forest are the two main areas occupied by the migrants during the period 2000-2005. Doctors Without Borders would park their vehicle in the quarry area when they visited to distribute blankets and the plastic sheets necessary for building tents. The military also used this route to access paths that would enable them to go down the mountain and then walk to the migrants camp inside the forest, in a bowl-shaped area. In these two parts of the forest, the migrants built their tents using branches taken from the trees, but they made sure to cut those branches away from the area where they lived, which they wanted to keep bushy and thorny in order to make it difficult for the soldiers to get to the camps. A structure made of branches tied with ropes from old blankets cut with razor blades or a rare knife was set up and fixed to the ground in small holes dug with sharp stones. A layer of plastic was spread out inside the structure to make up the walls and the ceiling, after

which one or two additional layers of blankets were hung on every side as well as along the ceiling for draught- and cold-proofing. The outside of the tent was protected by one or two plastic tarpaulins (depending on the size of the ghetto). Sometimes, the picture of a relative—living or deceased—or that of a wife and children would be tacked to the lining of a tent.

- 21 A member of the community who was insubordinate to the authority the “chairman” represents, might be allotted fewer blankets and tarpaulins to build his tent. The chairman also assigned the tents, so that two or three people sometimes shared one between themselves. The basic idea was to avoid building too many tents: if they took up too much space, they might be spotted from a distance. On the asphalt road, the military used binoculars to try to locate the migrants.
- 22 The Cameroonians numbered twenty men, plus two women. One, a Nigerian, was the chairman’s⁸ wife; the other was the spouse of the only English-speaking Cameroonian. Three hundred meters from the Cameroonian camp were mixed groups of “Ouestaf”⁹—thirty people. The camp, place or space occupied by a national group (community) or a transnational one is also called a ghetto. A migrant may therefore say “I’m going to the Malian or Nigerian ghetto” in reference to that camp. A camp’s territory is not limited to the site where people sleep or cook and eat. Every camp respected a territorial division on which its sovereignty applied, which permitted to organize space based on the places dedicated to the settlement of conflicts within the community or to hiding various equipment, as well as on the *tranquillos* near the camp and other functions such as receiving a Moroccan smuggler to negotiate passage to Spain.
- 23 The “Ouestafs” of the quarry part had their palaver tree, away from their sleeping quarters. Under that tree, seats on stilts had been built from tree branches. There was also a space where a mosque had been erected. For a long time, the Moroccan soldiers refused to destroy the mosque, although they would wreck all the makeshift tents, often setting them on fire. Finally, the space for the nightly ritual was devoted to the sacrifices people had to make to cross to Spain, in accordance with the recommendations of the marabout from the country of origin. Almost all the “Ouestaf” chairmen lived in the Jebel Musa part of the forest to better control and follow everything linked with the different opportunities of crossing to Spain. For even during the military siege of the forest, moneyed migrants would cross to Spain. On Jebel Musa lived the biggest number of Ouestafs—almost ninety people. A small group of Malians between the ages of 50 and 55, sent back by France and waiting to enter Ceuta by car in exchange for three thousand euros, lived deep in the Jebel Musa forest, where trees and the undergrowth were tightly entangled. This kind of precaution aimed at avoiding getting chased by Moroccan soldiers. Their age exempted them from the usual forms of allegiance. Although they absolutely refused to get politically involved in the life of the forest, when a crisis arose between chairmen, they could be asked to intervene to help them find a common ground.
- 24 Groups were thus formed and structured as communities with a vertical hierarchy of power and a supranational institutional framework to regulate relations between communities. In addition, there were also isolated groups, often made up of migrants who had long been living in the forest without almost ever leaving it, except to go to Rabat for a while to get their strength back before returning to the forest.
- 25 Mostly, in the Belyounech forest, people did not settle at random. Each group picked a specific space on the basis of a number of criteria: safety, national or ethnic origin,

religion, age or more simply language. Thus the Senegalese, Guinea-Bissauans, the Guineans from Conakry and the Gambians for example, who all spoke Fula, lived together. Malians, Ivorians and Guineans (Conakry) united by the Dyula dialect and Fula formed another distinct group. The connection based on ethnolinguistic identity went beyond the sense of national belonging. The Malians were the most numerous. Some chose to live outside of these mixed groups and made up several other groups scattered across the forest. The Nigerians—English speakers and also numerous—lived in multiple sites: in the forests near the town as well as in the buildings under construction in the outskirts. They were constantly looking for a quick point of entry, very mobile, and thus became nomadic-like.

- 26 On the margins, the Ghanaians lived in isolation at the heart of a nearby forest. They were very few and collaborated for certain tasks with the Moroccan smugglers dealing with the Afghan, Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Indian migrants. Originally, the Ghanaians were meant to provide round-the-clock assistance on the camp site of these South-Asian populations in order to ensure their safety and guide them in case the military came near their hiding place. Later, the Ghanaians also specialized in smuggling South Asians who no longer had enough money to cross via the Moroccan networks. They operated on inflatable boats to reach the shore of Ceuta by night. But in December 2006, more than fifty Ghanaians and South Asians died in a shipwreck, which put an end to their operations—at least for a time¹⁰.
- 27 The Afghan, Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Indian migrants lived either in the forest or in houses in downtown Fnideq. Their network was exclusively Moroccan-Spanish because they paid between five and six thousand euros for crossing to Ceuta. As the inhabitants of the forest put it, it was “the network of networks”.

The ghetto: a political organization

- 28 The chairman for these different groups is chosen according to his seniority in the forest but also his religiosity in the case of Ouestafs. That kind of people command particular respect. Thus among the West African Muslim groups they are generally called “Karamoko”, which means “imam” in Dyula. When he is present, the chairman leads the congressional prayer. The other members of the community respect his word. Ouestafs hold their elders in considerable respect. Just like the Malians, the Ouestafs also regroup depending on their village of origin. For every village, there is a leader who is the eldest and who can report to the village of origin on the situation of one of the members of his community if asked about him. This Malian social structure is also a bedrock of solidarity. The different leaders communicate together, even if their group’s chairman does not share the same nationality. This does not apply to the Fula, whose unity is cemented by their transnational linguistic belonging and their nomadic character, as mentioned above.
- 29 In the forest, there was little interference in the life of a “community” from other communities. The African Union played its role as an arbiter between communities. As long as this authority was not solicited by a community or one of its members, the Union considered that everything was for the best. The community rules imposed that the name of any new arrival be written in a record kept by the prime minister. The new arrival also had to pay a ghetto fee of twenty euros. Later on, the resistance fee was established; it amounted to twenty euros for the migrants who didn’t have much

money, and up to fifty euros for others—at the chairman’s discretion. The idea of a resistance fee emerged when elders who had resisted the pressure the military exerted after the events of Ceuta and Melilla judged that the forest had only continued to exist as a passage point between Morocco and Spain thanks to them. For this reason, the new arrivals had to accept this tax in recognition of their sacrifices—on top of the ghetto fee, which was mandatory anyway. The collection of these fees made it possible to buy food for the camp and top-up cards for the chairman’s phone. In the forest, the batteries served for charging cell phones on the one hand, radios and flash lights on the other hand. To keep in touch with the world, radios and cell phones were the migrants’ main allies. Sometimes, during calm periods, Radio France Internationale would talk about arrest of illegals in the forest although nothing had happened. In these moments, the migrants realized that they were a major stake in the relation between Morocco and Europe.

- 30 In the distribution of the smuggling networks towards Spain, sometimes a community establishes a monopoly over a route while other communities vegetate. Such a situation can spark off crises where communities demand that the chairman should take into account those who are ready to give him money to let some of their members cross into Spain. As a matter of fact, when a Moroccan smuggler discovers an entry point such as an open tunnel, he informs the chairman he is in contact with in the forest. And if Spain takes more than a week to realize there is a flaw in its security system, a group of people or a small community can disappear from the forest and then report to the rest of the forest by phone once they are admitted into the temporary stay center (CETI) of Ceuta.
- 31 One can observe that when migrants reach a migration crossroad where illegals converge, such as Agadez for instance, solitary journeys come to an end. Crossing the desert or entering the Maghreb tends to constrict the spectrum of affinities between migrants, which necessarily becomes national and therefore communitarian. The national community then becomes a haven, a source of support in front of the hostility of Maghreb countries. The forest/border as a margin at the very edge of Morocco is also the place where society rejects the stain which no one wants to see in the public space and needs to remain hidden from the collective gaze, relegated to spaces that do not appear on any GPS unit, confirming its heterotopic form. What can be done for all those people? Driven out of their homes by asymmetrical wars between jihadist groups and nation-states of Central and West Africa whose national borders inherited from colonization are being challenged by the jihadist groups which brutalize, pillage and kill populations refusing to let themselves be enrolled in their movement of unlimited violence. Those new forms of asymmetrical warfare, taking place far from developed countries, are causing population displacements in all directions, beyond limits that unimaginable only a few years back. The numerous wars taking place in our world today make the study of migratory movements all the more complex. What was seen yesterday as an invasion of migrants, has turned today into a major crisis of hospitality that many rich countries still find difficult to admit. The politics of ambush as deployed to track down migrants they are, no longer induce the creation of a margin only at border places, like the Belyounech forest. In the big cities of countries such as Morocco, France and elsewhere in Europe, self-made camps are now part of urban reality although it was still recently considered a stain that one could not let reach the city center. This margin of the social and urban margin in the heart of our big transnational cities questions the modalities of the hospitality-hostility pair such as they are today:

for some, large possibilities of arrival and of being welcomed; for the others, administrative obstacles and physical procedures aiming at hindering their projection toward a new horizon. The current war which opposes Ukraine and Russia shows it vividly¹¹: in the case of refugees fleeing the same bombings, some are welcomed and others rejected because their dark complexion makes them economic migrants instead of war refugees (Chebil, 2022).

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NOTES

1. It is worth noting that CETI are centers for the transit and employment of migrants run by the Spanish ministry of Labor and Immigration, hence their paradoxical status on the repressive border which separates Spain from Morocco.
2. "In less than 24 hours, more than 8,000 (eight thousand) migrants have crossed the borders of the Spanish enclave in northern Morocco. This crisis arises following weeks of heightened tensions between Morocco and Spain: 'A serious crisis for Spain and for Europe', Spanish Prime minister Pedro Sanchez said about the arrival of 8,000 migrants, among whom approximately 2,700 minors, in the Spanish enclave of Ceuta, in northern Morocco, between May 17 and 18, 2021".
3. In 2001, a Moroccan news magazine reported that sub-Saharan migrants were feeding on rats in the forests of Fnideq and Nador, respectively located near Ceuta and Melilla, both Spanish enclaves on Moroccan soil.
4. Accounts by migrants who were thrown into the desert and came back to the forest after walking more than two thousand kilometers, and Amnesty International, "Spain and Morocco: Failure to protect the rights of migrants—Ceuta and Melilla one year on" (Amnesty International, 2006).
5. A "tranquillo" is a place deep inside the forest which offers more safety, where migrants feel secure. To get there, they would sometimes follow a very narrow pathway lined with deep pits, the bottom of which they could barely see in the dark. It is also a place where wild boars abound. Since Moroccans fear wild boars, the Christian migrants would use the shelters of these loathed animals which symbolize sin in the Muslim faith to protect themselves from the Moroccan soldiers.
6. With the establishment of Frontex, the European border and coast guard agency created in 2004 to ensure the safety of the external borders of the EU and which associates countries in the direct vicinity of the EU, cooperation with Morocco has increased concerning the arrest and refoulement of sub-Saharan migrants to the closed border between Morocco and Algeria or to

the sub-Saharan African countries who have signed return agreements and accept migrants regardless of their nationality in exchange for European funding (Frontex, n.d.).

7. "Illegal" is the term governments use to designate the so-called "undocumented" migrants. It has become part of our everyday vocabulary.

8. In a group of migrants, the "chairman" is the leader of the community (my own experience).

9. "Ouestaf" is the term the Cameroonians used to designate French-speaking West Africans. It did not apply to English-speaking West Africans (my own experience).

10. This tragedy took place one night in December 2006, at the time when I lived in the forest. To my knowledge, it was not reported by international news organizations, as were numerous tragedies also caused by the Spanish coast guards and hidden from Moroccan and European public opinion.

11. "Ils nous refoulent juste parce qu'on est Noirs !" (Chebil, 2022).

ABSTRACTS

On the Mediterranean coast of Morocco, the cities and ports of Ceuta (facing Gibraltar) and Melilla (more to the East) belong to Spain and are therefore part of the European Union, which explains the attraction they exert on migrants who want to get into continental Europe without risking their lives in hazardous crossings of the Mediterranean. Historically sub-Saharan migrants who found a way to illegally enter these portions of Spanish territory could indeed hope for an eventual transfer to continental Spain. Today, with few exceptions, the chances of being thus transported to Europe are thin: Spain mostly sends back to Morocco the rare adventurers who can get into Ceuta or Melilla at ever greater risks of injury or drowning. This chapter is the result of a personal experience as a migrant in the Belyounech forest, where I was part of the ethnolinguistic diverse communities of migrants settled in the Belyounech forest between 2005 and 2010, and subsequently in France where personal and collective situations of wandering, confinement in detention centers, and suffocation continued to be part of my personal experience, while I closely followed and analyzed the developments of the migrant condition in Morocco. In this chapter I want to show how the war on migrants in the Moroccan migratory space (that European and Moroccan policies only view as a transit zone on the way to Europe) fosters chaos, and blocks the authorities from imagining a mobility policy. Ever since the laws governing the immigration and residency of foreigners started to multiply and further complicate the conditions for access to the European Union, the modalities of granting visas and the methods of identifying applicants have evolved accordingly, while the chances have diminished of slipping through the net of files on people who have entered or resided illegally in Europe (Mattelart, 2008). This is how human beings get stuck in a bottleneck at the gates of Europe.

Sur la côte méditerranéenne du Maroc, les villes et les ports de Ceuta (face à Gibraltar) et Melilla (plus à l'est) appartiennent à l'Espagne et font donc partie de l'Union européenne, ce qui explique l'attrait qu'ils exercent sur les migrants qui veulent se rendre en Europe continentale sans risquer leur vie dans des traversées périlleuses de la Méditerranée. Historiquement, les migrants subsahariens qui trouvaient le moyen d'entrer illégalement dans ces portions du territoire espagnol pouvaient en effet espérer un éventuel transfert vers l'Espagne continentale. Aujourd'hui, à quelques exceptions près, les chances d'être ainsi transporté en Europe sont

minces : l'Espagne renvoie le plus souvent au Maroc les rares aventuriers qui parviennent à entrer à Ceuta ou Melilla au prix de risques toujours plus grands de blessures ou de noyade. Ce chapitre est le résultat d'une expérience personnelle d'observation participante en tant que migrant dans la forêt de Belyounech, où j'ai fait partie des communautés ethnolinguistiques diverses de migrants installés dans la forêt de Belyounech entre 2005 et 2010. L'expérience migratoire s'est poursuivie en France à partir de 2010 jusqu'en 2022 et mon arrivée au Canada comme doctorant. J'ai donc vécu des situations personnelles et collectives d'errance, d'enfermement dans des centres de rétention, d'étouffement, tout en suivant de près l'évolution de la condition des migrants au Maroc. Ce chapitre rend compte de la manière dont la guerre aux migrants s'opère dans l'espace migratoire marocain (que les politiques européennes et marocaines ne considèrent que comme une zone de transit vers l'Europe), favorise le chaos et empêche les autorités d'imaginer une politique de mobilité. Depuis que les lois régissant l'immigration et le séjour des étrangers ont commencé à se multiplier et à compliquer davantage les conditions d'accès à l'Union européenne, les modalités d'octroi des visas et les méthodes d'identification des demandeurs ont évolué en conséquence, tandis que les chances de passer entre les mailles du filet des fichiers de personnes entrées ou résidant illégalement en Europe ont diminué (Mattelart, 2008). C'est ainsi que des êtres humains se retrouvent coincés dans un goulot d'étranglement aux portes de l'Europe.

INDEX

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