
LESLIE
GROSS-WYRTZEN
Bordering
Blackness
MIGRATION and DISPOSSESSION
in the AFRO-MEDITERRANEAN

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Migration and Dispossession in the Afro-Mediterranean

LESLIE GROSS-WYRTZEN

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In memory of Mado

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Acknowledgments

This book is the product of life-long encounters with and across borders. I grew up about two hours from the US-Mexico border in San Antonio, a city shaped by long histories of cross-border exchange, forced and voluntary migration and labor, and Indigenous dispossession. In the San Antonio of my childhood, the border figured in everyday social and economic interactions, simultaneously producing and challenging the city's harmonious multicultural image. In 2001, I moved to Morocco to take up a teaching position at Al Akhawayn University, a small liberal arts institution nestled in the Middle Atlas mountains, about an hour's drive from Fes. Three weeks after my arrival, I stood with colleagues and students in the campus lounge watching TV in stunned silence as footage of airplanes flying into New York's Twin Towers played on repeat. In May 2003, after meeting our newborn daughter, our moms drove to Casablanca to catch their return flight home. When they arrived at the airport, the entrance was blocked by tanks and armed soldiers deployed after several downtown tourist areas were bombed overnight. The concrete barriers erected at the airport that weekend have since become permanent; worldwide, once-exceptional security protocols and restrictions to check transnational mobility are now so ubiquitous they are nearly invisible.

Moving back and forth between the United States and Morocco over the next fifteen years allowed me to witness how, in both countries, border enforcement became more heavily securitized and immigration discourse more explicitly racialized. In addition, immigration facilitation and control became a growth industry—for researchers like me, but also for humanitarian workers, defense contractors, smugglers, and even states. I decided to study the relationship between borders, race, and (political) economy in Morocco in order to better understand what I saw happening

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there but also to help me make sense of what I saw unfolding in the United States, especially in south Texas.

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INTRODUCTION

Race and the Trouble with Borders

Laila Lalami's austere novel on migrant dreams begins at night in the middle of the Straits of Gibraltar, the narrow Mediterranean passage that has long connected Africa and Europe but lately has become a deadly barrier between them. In *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, Murad, the young narrator, peers across the inky water toward Spain and wonders "how fourteen kilometers could separate not just two countries but two universes."[1] In the inflatable boat designed for nine passengers, thirty people huddle silently, hoping to evade naval patrols and sonar sweeps that would alert the authorities to their presence. Among the group of mostly Moroccan travelers is Aziz, a newlywed searching for employment; Halima, a woman running from her violent husband; Faten, an Islamist student fleeing political persecution; and an "African woman" from Guinea, with "her cornrows tied in a loose ponytail."[2] Just before the boat capsizes and all the passengers are forced to swim to shore, the woman from Guinea tosses a piece of paper onto the water—her ID, guesses Murad, so she can claim asylum as a Sierra Leonean. The first chapter concludes as the protagonists are apprehended by Spanish Guardia Civil and await processing for deportation. The remainder of the novel is divided into "Before" and "After," tracing the paths leading to and from the passage through the Straits for the four Moroccans: Murad, Aziz, Faten, and Halima. The African woman is never mentioned again.

Today, there are around three million undocumented people living in Europe.[3] While the vast majority arrived through regular channels, others, especially people from "developing" countries like Lalami's migrant protagonists, lack the same opportunities for legal movement and are forced to take clandestine and sometimes deadly routes across the militarized sea

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and land borders. The establishment of the Schengen Area in the mid-1990s made borderless travel within Europe dependent on member states strengthening immigration and border controls along Europe's edges. In addition, neighboring countries beyond "Fortress Europe" were deputized to police European boundaries from the outside to halt migrants long before they reached Schengen territories. Their participation was (and is) secured through a repertoire of financial and political incentives. In effect, Europe's externalized border program enlisted its neighbors to act as buffers, scaling up the colonial-era *cordon sanitaire* to encompass much of the southern and eastern Mediterranean and, increasingly, middle and southern Africa.[4] Today, people traveling northward from their homes in western or central Africa encounter the EurAfrican border before they have even left town in the form of police levying "taxes" on their travel, nonprofits educating them on the dangers of migration, "travel agents" offering package deals for clandestine journeys, and churches holding prayer meetings for their successful arrivals. En route, the border materializes as deserts and oceans, forest camps and urban ghettos, through local militias and state police, bandits and aid workers, drones, dogs, fences, berms, pits, and naval patrols.

Morocco was an early participant in the EurAfrican border, leveraging its position across the narrow Straits of Gibraltar and its contiguity to Spain's two enclaves on the African continent to position itself as an essential partner in policing people attempting to reach Europe through its territory (see figure I.1). In exchange, both Spain and the European Union have invested heavily in Morocco's border infrastructure and offered other financial incentives in the form of aid, special trade status, and remittance facilitation for its expatriate population, which is among the largest immigrant group living in Europe. Until recently, the majority of irregular border crossers intercepted at the fences of Spanish Melilla and Ceuta or in boats in the Mediterranean were North Africans. Nonetheless, disproportionate attention has been paid to "sub-Saharan" migrants passing through Morocco to reach Europe. As Mehdi Lahlou points out, this is curious given that "if Morocco appears to be Africa's gateway to Europe, it is a gateway that until today has been used primarily by Moroccans."[5] Despite this, in both European and Moroccan discourse, the specter of African migration is represented as a crisis and figured in the image of a black migrant.[6] The racialized figure of the "African migrant" conceals the fact of Morocco's own Africanity and the reality of its primacy as a migrant-sending country. That Murad, Lalami's Moroccan migrant

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narrator, identifies his Guinean shipmate as the sole African on board illuminates how exclusions are positioned in relation to blackness—Murad and his fellow North Africans are unauthorized, to be sure, but a more fundamental exclusion is reserved for black people on the move. *Bordering Blackness* demonstrates how this form of racial differentiation—marking who belongs and in which spaces—plays out not only among migrant groups but acts as a central logic throughout the EurAfrican borderlands.

This book maps the liminal space between Before and After that, as a result of the proliferation of border security between Africa and Europe, drags on and on. This space between departure and arrival, which migration scholars call "transit" and West and Central African migrants call "adventure," constitutes a vast landscape in which states, international and nongovernmental organizations, smuggling networks, private defense firms, and cross-border travelers assemble to produce—and challenge—the world-making project I call the EurAfrican border. In arguing that border enforcement between Europe and Africa is a world-making project, I point to the ways it expresses what postcolonial scholar Aníbal Quijano called "coloniality-modernity," a way of knowing the world that privileges certain forms of freedom, mobility, and humanity by producing unfreedom, immobility, and inhumanity. While colonialism as a political system has been (partially) dismantled, colonial epistemologies subtending fundamental Western liberal "truths" about reason, freedom, and the individual remain.[7] The division between subject and object necessary to the constitution of the reasoning, agentive self requires severing certain "genres of the human" from the ranks of Man.[8] Lalami's *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* is part of a larger body of postcolonial literature pushing back against the "official suppression of the discourse of the [North African] clandestine," but it accomplishes this by reproducing the subject-object dualism of colonial knowledge-making.[9] Murad can speak because the African migrant is silent. That she is a *black woman* underscores how racial and gendered categories structure relations of power to decide who counts and whose speech can be heard.[10]

The key questions animating this book are simple: How does the EurAfrican border work? And how does it fail? In other words, what actors, policies, practices, and logics does the border assemble and to what ends? How are the border's operations resisted, disrupted, or reworked by migrants for other kinds of projects, including migration? To answer these questions, I trace the journey that migrants make from western and central Africa, through the Sahelian states of Mali and Niger, into the Algerian

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Sahara, finally arriving in Morocco, where they often find themselves stuck for months and years. Ultimately, I argue that the EurAfrican border produces spaces and subjects of value and devaluation, humanity and inhumanity, through racial regimes of mobility and violent dispossessions. This unfolds in three movements: First, as migrants travel from western Africa to Europe they traverse a color line whereby Cameroonians, Nigerians, Ivorians, and Fula-, Wolof-, and Igbo-speaking people become black, which is to say, their status as out-of-place is read off their bodies. Second, this *racial displacement* from spaces of belonging—from human geography writ large—is necessary to expose migrants to violence and to enable capital accumulation in the border's economy. The production and coconstitution of race and space unfolds as migrants encounter fast violence along perilous migratory routes or at militarized fences and as they endure the slow violence of abandonment in urban camps and neighborhoods. Finally, West and Central African migrants draw on these newly inscribed black identities to form transnational communities, grounded in place, that enable their survival, mobility, and self-recuperation in violent borderscapes.[11] The latter is consistent with black geographic thought, which excavates the racial and gendered violence foundational to the production of space while also acknowledging the placemaking, survivance, and resistance that has always characterized the lives of those excluded from the ranks of Man. By thinking with black geographies, this book challenges theorizations of borders that privilege European political theories of sovereignty, citizenship, and resistance, instead situating border projects in larger efforts to define and delimit the boundaries of the human.

"FOR US BLACKS, LIFE IN MOROCCO IS HARD"

I did not set out to study the racial geographies of the EurAfrican border. "The issue hailed me," as Ruth Wilson Gilmore put it, speaking of her lifelong commitment to study prison and abolitionist geographies.[12] I first moved to Morocco to teach in 2001, and by the time I started fieldwork in 2016, I had lived in the country for five years and visited many summers. Moving back and forth over time I noticed changes in how western and central African migration was perceived—from a minor concern compared with Moroccans migrating to Europe to a prominent facet of state diplomacy and public discourse. As the "problem" of migration became a common topic of conversation, its distinctly racialized tenor was difficult

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to miss.[13] From taxi drivers to academics, Moroccans I spoke to framed migration as the unauthorized influx of "blacks" (*noirs*) or "Africans" (الافارقة) without seeming to register the irony of Morocco's location on the African continent or its own phenotypically diverse citizenry.

In addition, West and Central Africans in Morocco also referred to themselves as "black." Migrants often told me, "Pour nous, les blacks, la vie au Maroc est dure." Hearing race continually invoked prompted me to wonder why migrants in a phenotypically heterogeneous society like Morocco would identify as black rather than by some other marker such as nationality, religion, or ethnolinguistic affiliation. When I asked a Cameroonian friend who had lived in Morocco for several years, he replied, "OK [*laughing*]. Because back there in Cameroon [*laughs*], I know we *are*, but the word 'black'? Yeah, it is out[side]. . . . Because back there at home—all the world is black, unless there are some foreigners [around]. Yes, so the word is mostly out here."[14]

In spending time with West and Central African migrants, I heard about or witnessed many instances of racialized policing and border enforcement. Even legal residents were vulnerable to police sweeps in northern border cities where anyone read as black would be detained and displaced to towns in the interior or dumped in the desert near the Algerian border without food or water.[15] In the coastal cities of Rabat and Casablanca, there were regular reports of West and Central Africans being attacked and mugged by Moroccan teens as they walked down the street. Over coffee, several African American women studying on exchange told me stories of being followed or propositioned by Moroccans who assumed they were migrant sex workers. As we hailed taxis, passed police on the street, or waited in line at hospital reception desks, my migrant companions would comment on how much better I was treated by Moroccans owing to my "white skin." In 2014, even as Morocco was implementing a new, "humane" migration policy, West and Central African students and migrants demonstrated across the country under the slogan "My name is not *az*—" (a pejorative label for a dark-skinned person).

These experiences were not limited to Morocco. West and Central African migrants told me stories of being spit on by children in the streets of Oran and physically abused by "Arabs" in northern Niger. In the same month in 2014 that activists were demonstrating in Morocco, Black Tunisians were protesting anti-black racism against migrants and Tunisian citizens alike.[16] A few months after I arrived in Morocco in 2017, CNN aired a report on "slave auctions" in Libya, in which "sub-Saharan migrants" were

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auctioned off to Libyan employers to work off their smuggling debt.[17] In Mauritania, dark-skinned or black Mauritanians were experiencing a renewed wave of state-sponsored oppression, this time in the guise of policing "black migrants."[18] Though nearly all migrants and refugees moving in these borderlands were subject to violence of one form or another, for "sub-Saharan migrants" these experiences were most often expressed in anti-black or anti-African registers.

While racism was increasingly visible on the ground, the question of race was (and is) still contested in regional scholarship. In African and Southwest Asian/North African (SWANA) area studies, race has been downplayed as a category of difference in favor of religion, ethnicity, and gender.[19] The reasoning goes that postcolonial societies in the Majority World were deracialized following independence: Once white European colonizers were gone, other axes of difference came into sharper focus, leading to ethnic and sectarian violence on the national scale and women's subjugation on the intimate scale.[20] This, Jemima Pierre points out, denies how racial logics continue to operate in African states through economic, social, and political structures that position whiteness as a transnationally privileged status and blackness as a transnationally inferior one.[21] It also denies the social significance of blackness in northern Africa, where it has long been associated with enslavement and outsiderness but is also sometimes linked to prestigious religious lineages or political institutions.[22] In border and migration studies, the reluctance to impose racial categories from Euro-America onto non-white-dominant societies has led to narratives of "crisis" or discourses of "human trafficking" to explain the violence that characterizes migrants' journeys northward from their home countries in western and central Africa. These discourses have often had the effect of compounding the criminalization or victimization of migrant people and does little to explain why West and Central African migrants were unable to find jobs, why a condo association would forbid owners to rent to "Africans," or why gendarmes would stop them on the street and displace them to more remote regions of the country, sometimes regardless of their legal status. Importantly, crisis narratives imply a certain presentism that occludes the history of colonial racism and how its legacies inform the expansion of Europe's border into countries further south.[23] Ultimately, it became clear to me that racialization was central to migrants' encounters with the border in Morocco and across the region, and therefore an analysis that did not take it into account would run the risk of reproducing racial violence under the cover of colorblindness.[24] *Bordering*

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Blackness examines this relationship between bordering and race, where race is not a pre-given category but an emergent one.

BORDER POLITICS, BORDER ECONOMICS

The central object of this book is the EurAfrican border as migrants encounter it on the move and while stuck en route. When I speak of "the border" I am not referring only to lines on a map or walls of separation but rather an ensemble of relations, discourses, rules, and material configurations that regulate the status and mobility of groups of people.[25] *Border* is both a noun and a verb, and bordering can manifest through spectacular and mundane forms—from repelling would-be border crossers with batons or tear gas to excluding "aliens" from access to vital health care. Though walls and fences are still sites of border spectacle and symbols in nationalist discourses, the heterogenous nature of the border means it is not confined to territorial edges but can be diffused throughout society. Borders can also stretch beyond a nation-state's territorial limits. The EurAfrican border is a prime example of this, expanding across swaths of northern, central, and western Africa so that outside and inside lose their territorial moorings.[26] The diversity of forms and practices in the EurAfrican border adhere through "logics of governmentality and management" that enroll state, supra-state, and non-state actors from various domains and across vast geographies in bordering and migration projects.[27] It is not just border guards or policymakers who participate in the control and management of mobile people between Africa and Europe but aid workers in Morocco, local police officers in Mauritania, and consultants in Geneva.[28]

The multivalent nature of the border indicates its productive power—its capacity to make or do rather than its capacity to limit or repress.[29] Borders do more than mark absolute divisions in space; they actively produce relational spaces of connection and disconnection, inclusion and exclusion, and mobility and immobility. This relational perspective helps us understand how border regimes and political economy are intertwined. The uneven integration of national economies in the global arena through structural adjustment schemes, the growth of transnational finance, and the deregulation of markets have removed certain barriers so that capital and information can flow freely across relatively smooth regional and global space. Meanwhile, dislocations wrought by facilitating capital's

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movements around the world have spurred the displacement of laborers and the subsequent hardening of borders to constrain their mobility.[30] Scholars interested in transnational labor regimes point to how juridical frameworks—immigration laws, short-term visas, protocols for adjudicating irregular border crossings, limits or loopholes preventing people from making asylum claims—make migrant people vulnerable to exploitation by employers.[31] As William Walters explains, the proliferation of controls that criminalize migrants, pushing costs of their journey up and the wages for their labor down, evince the ways that "economic imperatives impinge powerfully on border policies."[32] The conditions of illegality and deportability that make migrant laborers exploitable also create divisions among workers that undermine political solidarities against such regimes, especially when these divisions are read through registers of race and nationality rather than class.[33]

But bordering between Africa and Europe does more than reorganize and fragment the working class. The EurAfrican border perpetuates dispossessions that open up other avenues for capital accumulation. While a minority of unauthorized migrants from Africa will eventually reach Europe, filling low-wage jobs in the formal and informal sectors, in the EurAfrican borderlands their value is not primarily as workers or consumers.[34] Instead, migrant people's destitution, vulnerability, and illegality enable the expansion of an economy built up around their care and control. The buildup of borders between Europe and Africa not only serves the interest of defense contractors selling security technologies and smugglers facilitating increasingly dangerous journeys but many others whose personal livelihood or institutional survival depend on "crises" of human mobility—aid workers, researchers like me, journalists, activists, and governments, including Morocco's. As Ruben Andersson points out, the chief commodity in the EurAfrican border is migrants' "vitality"—their fleshy bodies, their movements across and presence within various spaces, their needs and desires, their real or imagined potentials.[35] West and Central African migrants also theorize the border economy's predations in bodily terms, such that those involved in the management of migration "eat migrants," trade them "like cattle" or, as Amadou (in chapter 2) explained to me, "sell men along a supply chain."[36]

A key contention in *Bordering Blackness* is that the border's economy works to subject racialized people to displacement, expropriation, and exploitation, a violent trinity I gloss as dispossession. While analyses of

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the "business of borders" draw our attention to the production and management of insecurity as a means of accumulation and control, *economies of dispossession* are predicated on valuations and devaluations wrought through racialization. Economies of dispossession link the accumulation of capital to regimes that racialize groups of people in order to authorize the theft of land, labor, and livelihood and to dispossess people of their rights—including the right to move or stay put. In the EurAfrican border, the criminalization of unauthorized migration and racialized discourses that link blackness to out-of-placeness devalue West and Central African migrants as individual people and revalue them in abstract or dehumanizing terms: as "cargo" for transport, "beds" in detention centers, bodies for rescue, objects of research, and vectors of risk.[37] Across the various industries implicated in the border's economy, West and Central African migrants are frequently approached not as subjects of value but sites for value's extraction.

RACE, PLACE, AND THE BORDERS OF THE HUMAN

Locating the EurAfrican border within an economy of dispossession points to the broader stakes for race, embodiment, and geography in border projects. Borders spatialize belonging by producing subjects and places as included and excluded, inside or outside at multiple scales. Belonging is cartographically rendered as a system of discrete nation-states, a global patterning of people (the nation) and place (state territory) based on what Liisa Malkki calls a "sedentarist metaphysics" of roots and soil.[38] Though the Rights of Man are supposedly universal, in reality they are conferred through the institution of citizenship. As Hannah Arendt observed in the wake of mass displacements of people in the mid-twentieth century, refugees and other migrants are dispossessed of the "right to have rights" when they are ejected from the state that is supposed to guarantee them.[39] In political terms, personhood (having the right to have rights, being a political subject) is precarious for noncitizens—for refugees and migrants and also for "citizen outsiders" who, by virtue of their ethnicity, culture, or other markers of difference, are perceived as perpetually out-of-place in the nation.[40] The implications for these political displacements extend beyond the domestic sphere. Citizenship does not just signify membership in the nation; rather, as the locus of rights and personhood, it also signifies

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membership in humanity.[41] These displacements from humanity are felt more acutely when noncitizens or citizen outsiders' bodies or behavior makes them legible as "other" to the racial imaginary of an ethnically and culturally homogeneous nation. In Europe's spatial imaginary, speaking a non-European language, wearing hijab, or having dark skin become visible markers of non-belonging regardless of one's legal status or country of birth.

Across the EurAfrican border, blackness is produced as a metonym for noncitizenship and illegality so that West and Central African migrants are out-of-place even before they show an ID, climb a fence, or board a boat.[42] But their racial displacement is not just a product of the present, nor is it limited to the scale of the nation. Other, older cartographies of exclusion are mobilized in the border to displace blackness—and black subjects—from human geography. In the early nineteenth century, Hegel wrote that "Black Africa" had no place on the map of human progress, an erasure of people and place that authorized the ongoing commodification of African people through chattel slavery and the subsequent European "Scramble for Africa."[43] Centuries before the Atlantic slave trade, caravans crossed the Sahara Desert bearing captives from the "lands of *as-Sudan*" (literally "lands of the blacks") to markets throughout the Mediterranean region so that even now a dark-skinned North African might be hailed as '*abid* (slave) or by the geographic designation *Sahrawi* (person from the Sahara).[44] Colonial ethnologists and mapmakers codified the division between "the Maghreb" and "Black Africa" in ways that reverberate today when Moroccans tell me they sympathize with the plight of "Africans" they see on the street or when they assume that people from Mali, Guinea, or Nigeria are non-Muslims.[45] Within Morocco, French colonial scholars imposed discrete taxonomic designations on the more fluid identities of Moroccan colonial subjects, which were operationalized in a divide-and-rule strategy that aimed to pit supposed rural, heterodox Muslim Imazighen against urban, orthodox Muslim Arabs.[46] This ethno-spatial fix failed spectacularly, galvanizing Tamazight- and Arabic-speaking Moroccans across the country to unite beneath the banner of Arabo-Islamic universalism, an idea that became central to Moroccan (and other northern African countries') decolonial struggles.[47] The fallout of Moroccan universalism expressed through Muslim Arab identity was decades of violent suppression of Amazigh struggles for recognition and the ongoing displacement of black and non-Muslim Moroccans from social and political belonging.[48]

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Bringing these histories into our present-day analysis emphasizes the border's world-making capacity as well as its violence. Where border studies often theorize race and racialization through European political theory and questions of citizenship and national identity, black geographies offers a different approach, siting race and racialization in the histories and sociomaterial afterlives of slavery, colonialism, and (racial) capitalism. Building on Black feminist and postcolonial scholarship, Katherine McKittrick maps alternative coordinates from which modern human geography emerged: not the barricades nor the factory but the hold of the slave ship, the colonial plantation, the native reservation.[49] Bringing these sites back into view exposes the extent to which the spatial practices of oppressed and racialized people are integral to the very geographies that simultaneously enclose and exclude them.[50] Further, tracing the entanglements of human geographies—the nation-state, the city, the body, the family, the market—with sites of racial violence deconstructs a cartesian epistemology that fixes such inhuman(e) spaces at a physical and temporal distance from our lived present.[51] The racist colonial logics that designated certain lands "uninhabitable" (and its inhabitants therefore nonexistent) persist today when certain spaces are pathologized as unlivable: "war-torn countries, reservations, ghettos, what is referred to as 'the global South.'"[52] In the EurAfrican border, racialized discourses of African places and societies invoke underdevelopment, criminality, and cultural incommensurability to produce migrants from "sub-Saharan Africa" as undesirable and risky others.

But black geographies are not, in fact, uninhabitable nor uninhabited, as people living in them well know. As an analytical framework and spatial epistemology, black geographies holds together the racialized violence of the production of space with the myriad ways that racialized people live lives "in the break" of oppressive geographies.[53] Mapping black geographies requires attending to the material, social, and imaginative processes that render the landscape complex, uneven, and in flux rather than fixed or unchanging. Informed by the poetics of black geographies and the internationalism of the Black Radical Tradition, a collective of scholars have taken up the Black Mediterranean as a means by which to contextualize the "crisis" of postcolonial migration and the citizenship struggles of "European others" within the *longue durée* of mobility, exchange, and expropriation in the region.[54] As an analytic, the Black Mediterranean disrupts simplistic narratives

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of the Mediterranean as the birthplace of the Enlightenment and its subject, Universal Man. Instead, following Cedric Robinson, the Black Mediterranean indexes the ways in which the invention of Man was bound up with the dehumanization and dispossession of other humans, a process that originated in the Mediterranean but reached its horrifying crescendo in the western Atlantic world. In connecting present-day political activism by African migrants and Afro-Europeans to these earlier diasporic histories and geographies, the Black Mediterranean exposes the limits of national citizenship and imagines a more expansive vision of the human that includes racialized and formerly colonized others.[55]

In *Bordering Blackness*, I suggest that the EurAfrican border is another Black Mediterranean geography, one whose center of gravity is in northern and central Africa rather than southern Europe. So far, the bulk of Black Mediterranean scholarship has analyzed African diasporic struggles over identity and citizenship in liberal Europe, expanding and adapting black geographic analyses from a focus on "New World" geographies and relations.[56] Black Mediterranean studies demonstrate how Africa continues to be projected as Europe's racialized Other and how this geographic othering produces African and African-descended people as impossible subjects in European political and social space. In turn, the erasure of Black and African political subjectivity in European spaces conditions the possibilities for heterogenous political projects of national citizenship and broader diasporic belonging.[57] Re-siting the Black Mediterranean to its African shores forwards an even more complex terrain where citizenship is not primarily expressed through utopic liberalism (nor whiteness) and where Africa is not only the origin of diaspora in a distant or not-so-distant past but a site of diaspora's becoming in the present. European struggles over identity and belonging intersect in this Afro-Mediterranean geography alongside postcolonial politics of recognition for religious and ethnic minorities, uneven development and forever wars by former and current imperial powers, and African political and economic internationalisms (to name but a few). The conjunction of these struggles and structures reveals the EurAfrican border as a site of contestation and difference beyond a Euro-American binary of black and white, beyond national political categories or economic relations, beyond teleologies of Africa mired in the past. As a still-contingent space, its boundaries are not set in stone and "more humanly workable geographies" are still possible.[58]

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So how does one map the contested, heterogeneous geographies of the EurAfrican border? Ethnography provides a method for apprehending the border as it actually exists, especially from the vantage of its targets. It is particularly suited to examining how geopolitics touch down in the lives and bodies of marginalized people and how intimate encounters constitute and are constituted by economic and political processes long thought to operate at "higher" scales.[59] Ethnography gives us a fine-grained account that fleshes out migrants' experiences as bordered subjects while also exposing the heterogeneity of the border as a series of "power-laden processes of constitution, connection, and dis-connection, along with slippages, openings, and contractions."[60] In other words, focusing on migrants' everyday lives en route or stuck in place tells us something not just about how migration works but also how borders work and how they sometimes fail to work as migrants subvert them through movement and placemaking. As an ethnography of the border, *Bordering Blackness* casts a wide net to capture the social relations that reproduce and undermine border enforcement and boundary-making across various sites and scales.

This is not to suggest that ethnography as a method of research is outside of relations of power. Ethnography as it has been traditionally defined is the study of the specificity of a group of people (the *ethno*) by the invisible observer whose culture and membership are presumed universal. Feminist and postcolonial studies scholars critique traditional ethnography in which scholars traveled to "remote" areas in order to fix "natives" in an earlier time and place, writing them out of human history and geography.[61] Gillian Hart observes that this form of ethnography reproduces cartesian space and advocates for critical ethnography to chart the struggles across discursive, affective, and material fields that make up three-dimensional space or, as Doreen Massey and other geographers would have it, relational place.[62]

Studying racialization in the EurAfrican border then is to attend to how blackness (and other racial formations) is produced and mobilized as a means of sustaining colonial modernity and its corollaries, liberalism and capitalism.[63] In this view, blackness is neither merely coextensive with a particular identity, group, or culture, nor is it ontological in the sense of an unchanging and inescapable antagonism in the world. Instead, blackness is a *site of struggle* in which determinations about who can speak, who can have rights, and who belongs are continually fought. These struggles,

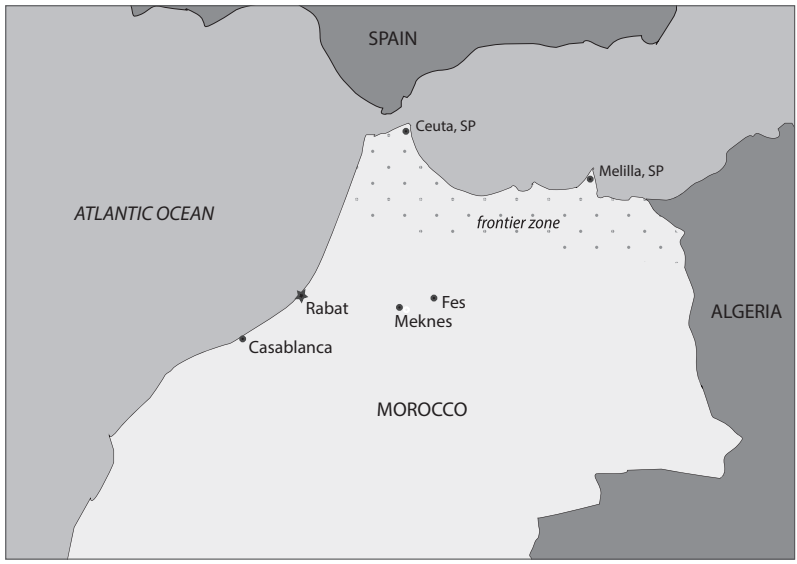
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Black geographers remind us, are fundamentally spatial ones.[64] In *Bordering Blackness* I employ ethnography not primarily to examine how black subjects experience the border but to expose how the border produces West and Central African migrants *as* black in an effort to enclose them beyond the realm of the human. Migrants' lived encounters and embodied knowledge reveal the extent of the border as violently dehumanizing regardless of European and Moroccan disavowals. At the same time, I heed Cedric Robinson's call for studies of regimes of racial violence to attend to the "ontological totality"—that is, while blackness is shaped by centuries of oppression and violence, it "also eludes these and makes its own terms of history."[65]

To understand how the border works from the location of the people it targets, I spent nearly a year getting to know West and Central African migrants living in or moving through Morocco between 2017 and 2018. I came to the project already acquainted with some members of the migrant community from my years living in Morocco and met more people on subsequent visits in 2019, 2022, and 2024. While in "the field," I spent most of my time with migrant communities living in informal camps and working-class neighborhoods in the central Moroccan cities of Meknes and Fes, and later Casablanca on the Atlantic coast (figure I.1). I got to know some people through church connections (many of us attended the Protestant church), volunteering with an NGO, teaching free English classes that provided notarized certificates of completion (for some, this was their only documentation), helping out with medical clinics, and just "hanging out."[66] I spent countless hours driving people around town on errands, listening to music or watching Nollywood films in crowded apartments, or in the camp, chatting about Premier League matches with aspiring footballers. My whiteness, "Americanness," femaleness, and age (advanced, according to them!) influenced how I was received and participated in the community and spurred people to initiate conversations about race, the uneven global economy, and legacies of white intervention in Africa that ultimately steered the course of my research.

Though I spent most of my time with West and Central African migrants living in central Morocco, I traveled to cities in the northern frontier and visited migrant friends in Casablanca, Rabat and, on one occasion, Paris. When I was not moving around, my interlocutors were spending time in interior cities to rest and save money, only to return to the northern frontier to try and cross again. I met people who had been deported to western Africa only to take the land route to Morocco all over

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1.1 Map of research area. *Source*: Author.

again. Some had also spent time in other northern African countries before I met them in Morocco. A few of my interlocutors made it to Europe. Speaking with them gave me a good picture of how the EurAfrican border works in Morocco and across the region and how migrant communities were similar or different throughout. Overall, I was surprised at how often I heard similar stories or perspectives from migrants in different locales, and many of my findings have been confirmed in conversations with other migration scholars in the region or were validated by migrants themselves when we discussed them in person or via WhatsApp.

Finally, even though my fieldwork amassed hundreds of pages of notes, interview transcripts, and other documentation, I limit my discussion to a small group of people with whom I have remained in contact and have stronger relationships and obligations. Undocumented migrants have been the subject of exhaustive scrutiny—in scholarship, news articles, NGO reports, documentaries, and artistic representations—often produced by white, privileged migrants such as myself.[67] *Bordering Blackness* is not a comprehensive account of migrant suffering or migrant resistance; neither is my task to catalogue all the injustices of EurAfrican border enforcement. Examining how the border works and fails is a way of outlining the transparent geographies of racial-economic domination organizing

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human mobility *and* the subaltern placemaking that persists in spite of it.[68] Where I include a story or a quotation, I do so only to concretize how the border works and fails. While news or humanitarian reports often focus on the fast violence of the border at the fence or in the boat, this book also documents the slow violence that migrant people experience in the EurAfrican borderlands: bored in the city, stuck in an unhappy relationship, enduring the drudgery of constant hustling to make ends meet. Such stories give more accurate accounts of the daily operations of power and, I hope, draw out the very human way that people endure in spite of the border's relentless dehumanizations.

GUIDE TO THE READER

The book's chapters map out various spaces of the EurAfrican border to show how it works and fails to contain West and Central African migrants beyond European territory. Each chapter illuminates how the border's economy of dispossession is predicated on black people's racial displacement from "human" geographies—from the continental to the embodied. The chapters are roughly grouped into pairs, with each pair sharing a specific spatial and temporal focus: the relational histories and cartographies of the transcontinental border (chapters 1 and 2); the present, lived experiences of the border in cities (chapters 3 and 4); and the emergent Black political geographies of the Afro-Mediterranean (chapter 5 and conclusion). While it is any author's desire that their book be read in its entirety, each chapter or pair of chapters offers stand-alone insights into the racial and economic workings of the EurAfrican border and migrants' resistance to or reworking of it.

The first two chapters zoom out to chart the transcontinental and historical scope of the EurAfrican border as it exists today. Chapter 1 chronicles how, in the 1990s, European border policy broke loose from its territorial moorings to first envision, then enact, expanding zones of racial containment across the Mediterranean, northern Africa, and eventually much of the African continent. Intensive EU budgetary commitments over the past twenty-five years brought new actors on the scene, including states like Morocco, which leveraged Europe's racial anxieties about "hordes of African migrants" for its own political and economic purposes. Shifting from a focus on border politics to border economics makes visible the heterogenous actors, sites, and practices implicated in the ongoing

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racialization and dispossession of black people on the move. In contrast to the EU's transnational divisions of space and race, the border's economy of dispossession produces more intimate racial geographies characterized by distance and proximity, accumulation and dispossession.

Where chapter 1 traced the expansion of the EurAfrican border south into Africa, chapter 2 charts migrants' movements north against the tide of that expansion. In contrast to humanitarian discourses decrying the violence that migrants experience in their journeys as human trafficking or "modern-day slavery" perpetrated mainly by other Africans, this chapter considers migrants' adventures through the border in relation to the various passages that have shaped the region: from local practices of migration as a rite of passage to captivity and forced passage across desert and sea. Taking account of the deep spacetimes of racialization, devaluation, and social survival illuminates migrants' encounters with the EurAfrican border through the lens of transformation rather than trafficking.

Chapters 3 and 4 zoom in to focus on a particular site in the EurAfrican border: the Moroccan city. While "fast" violence plays out as migrants move through the EurAfrican border, in chapter 3 I detail the "slow" violence that racialized and gendered migrants experience after humanitarian reforms left them stuck and destitute in cities in the Moroccan interior and devolved costs for their care from the state to NGOs or migrants themselves. The physical displacement of migrant people from the frontier to the interior, the dispossession of their few material belongings by border police, and their abandonment in city centers under the guise of tolerance compound their racial otherness in Moroccan social space so that they carry the border with them wherever they go. Abandonment is not only an effective mode of control in the neoliberal border but a means by which its economy of dispossession can expand to new locations and enlist new actors.

While chapter 3 emphasizes how the border works in cities, chapter 4 examines how migrants sometimes disrupt and sometimes reproduce it in these same urban spaces. The production of West and Central African women and men as black migrants through encounters with the EurAfrican border forms the basis for new relations of care and exploitation among heterogeneous African and African diasporic populations. Emerging from and against the border's economy of dispossession, migrant moral economies are locally mediated, transnational spaces that engender collective practices of survival and continued mobility across violent borderscapes.

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Chapter 5 and the conclusion reimagine the EurAfrican border as an emergent Black political geography. In chapter 5, I critique political theories of migration that center either migrants' victimization or autonomy in our bordered world. In distinction to representations of migrants' political subjectivity in academic discourse, migrants' songs and poetry express how racialized people—as fully human subjects—move through and reshape the world that has dehumanized and objectified them. Fugitivity brings a different temporality to the understanding of human mobility as a practice of freedom, a now-and-not-yet spacetime that echoes the experience of historical fugitives on both sides of the Atlantic.

Finally, the conclusion explores how the book reorients the map of the Black Mediterranean to its African shores. It looks at how contemporary migration from Africa to Europe prefigures new diasporic political imaginaries that resuture Africa to the modern world and rescale political geography from the nation to the (Majority) world. This Afro-Mediterranean political geography invites us to think relationally about antiracist, anti-colonial, and anti-capitalist struggles as broadly transnational and trans-temporal. It also recuperates the *Global Southness* of the Black Internationalist vision that Cedric Robinson put forth when he theorized what has become the Black Mediterranean.

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Notes

INTRODUCTION

1 Lalami, *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, 1.

2 Lalami, *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, 6.

3 "Home," Migration Data Portal, accessed May 26, 2023, https://www.migrationdataportal.org/.

4 Van Houtum, "Human Blacklisting," 961.

5 Lahlou, "Morocco's Experience," 99.

6 Unlike in the United States, in Africa not all people racialized as black claim blackness as an identity. I leave *black* uncapitalized to signify this and capitalize it where it is used by a group or individual to self-identify. I also follow Katherine McKittrick's usage in referring to black geographies without capitalization.

7 Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality"; see also Khatibi, *Plural Maghreb*; Migñolo, "Epistemic Disobedience"; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Coloniality of Power*.

8 Mindful of Wynter's critique and building on Katherine McKittrick's engagement with it, I use the term *human* to refer to the narrowly defined subject of humanity in (liberal) modernity, the white Man. Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being," 269; McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*. For discussion of race in the construction of human-as-subject in liberal modernity, see Lowe, *Intimacies of Four Continents*; and Mills, *Racial Contract*. For a review of feminist critique of humanism and liberalism, see Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*.

9 Pieprzak, "Bodies on the Beach," cited in Abderrezek, "Burning the Sea," 462.

10 Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity*.

11 The borderscape, as a conceptual and spatial analytic, was first put forth in Rajaram and Grundy-Warr, *Borderscapes*. It expresses how borders become spaces in themselves rather than divisions between spaces. More discussion of the border-as-landscape appears in chapter 1.

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12 Gilmore, "Forgotten Places," 31.

13 Faouzi, "L'immigrant africain subsaharien."

14 L., interview with author, April 18, 2018. See also Adichie, "How I Became Black."

15 MSF, *Violence, Vulnerability and Migration*; GADEM, *Coûts et blessures*.

16 Mzioudet, "Mobilizing for Social Justice"; Abdelhamid, Alargi, and El Waer, *Être noir*.

17 Nima Elbagir, Raja Razek, Alex Platt, and Bryony Jones, "People for Sale: Where Lives Are Auctioned for $400," CNN, November 14, 2017, https://www.cnn.com/2017/11/14/africa/libya-migrant-auctions/index.html.

18 Andersson, "Hunter and Prey"; Ould Moctar, "Proximity of the Past."

19 Southwest Asian/North African Studies was formerly referred to as Middle East/North African Studies. SWANA is preferred as it challenges mainstream geographic imaginaries in which Europe is the center and the rest of the world is east, west, or south of it.

20 Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*.

21 Pierre, *Predicament of Blackness*.

22 El Hamel, *Black Morocco*; Gross-Wyrtzen, "'There Is No Race Here.'"

23 Gross-Wyrtzen and Gazzotti, "Telling Histories of the Present."

24 Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists*.

25 Jones and Johnson, "Where is the Border"; Parker and Vaughan-Williams, "Critical Border Studies."

26 Casas-Cortés et al., "New Keywords."

27 Casas-Cortés et al., "New Keywords," 57.

28 Andersson, *Illegality, Inc.*; Gazzotti, *Immigration Nation*; Ould Moctar, "Autonomy Within Entanglements."

29 Andersson, "Europe's Failed 'Fight,'" 1056; Walters, "Europe's Borders."

30 Sassen, "When National Territory Is Home"; Mezzadra and Neilson, *Border as Method*.

31 De Genova and Peutz, *Deportation Regime*; Mountz, *Death of Asylum*.

32 Walters, "Europe's Borders," 497.

33 De Genova, "Migrant 'Illegality' and Deportability."

34 Sassen, *Expulsions*, 4.

35 Andersson, "Profits and Predation."

36 Andersson, "Profits and Predation"; Andersson, "Bioeconomy and the Birth of a 'New Anthropology.'"

37 Andersson, *Illegality, Inc.*; Hiemstra and Conlon, "Immigration Detention"; Martin, "Carceral Economies of Migration Control"; Vogt, "Crossing Mexico"; Williams, "From Humanitarian Exceptionalism to Contingent Care."

38 Malkki, "National Geographic," 31.

39 Arendt, "We Refugees."

40 Beaman, *Citizen Outsider*. See also El-Tayeb, *European Others*.

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41 Balibar, *We, the People of Europe?*; Mills, *Racial Contract*; Nyamnjoh, *Insiders and Outsiders*.

42 Cresswell, *In Place/Out of Place*; Walcott, "Problem of the Human."

43 Meziane, "Invention of North Africa."

44 El Hamel, *Black Morocco*.

45 Hannoum, *Invention of the Maghreb*; Young and Weitzberg, "Globalizing Racism."

46 Wyrtzen, *Making Morocco*.

47 I borrow the term *ethno-spatial fix* from Moore, *Suffering for Territory*. For the history of Moroccan popular resistance to France's divide-and-rule colonial strategy in Morocco, see Hart, "Berber Dahir of 1930"; Wyrtzen, *Making Morocco*.

48 Aïdi, "National Identity in the Afro-Arab Periphery." As Brahim El Guabli has argued, the categories of "Black" and "Amazigh" are not separate from each other. Rather, blackness marks both internal distinctions within Imazighen and intersects with multiple identity positions across language, culture, religion, genealogy, and location. He argues that the presence of "sub-Saharan" migrants complicates what was already a complex, diverse, and unstable set of imaginaries. El Guabli, "Racial Transitions."

49 McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*; McKittrick, "On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black Sense of Place."

50 McKittrick and Woods, *Black Geographies*.

51 McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*.

52 McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," 7.

53 Moten, *In the Break*.

54 Black Mediterranean Collective, *Black Mediterranean*; El-Tayeb, *European Others*.

55 Hawthorne, *Contesting Race and Citizenship*; Smythe, "Black Mediterranean."

56 Black Mediterranean Collective, *Black Mediterranean*.

57 Hawthorne, *Contesting Race and Citizenship*.

58 McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xxvii.

59 Mountz and Hyndman, "Feminist Approaches to the Global Intimate"; Pratt and Rosner, "Introduction"; Wilson, "Intimacy."

60 Hart, "Denaturalizing Dispossession," 982; Hess, "De-Naturalising Transit"; Schapendonk, "Turbulent Trajectories."

61 Hart, "Denaturalizing Dispossession," 993; Appadurai, "Putting Hierarchy in Its Place"; Mudimbe, *Invention of Africa*; Strathern, "Artifacts of History."

62 Hart, "Denaturalizing Dispossession"; Massey, "Global Sense of Place"; Martin, "'Place-Framing' as Place-Making."

63 Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*; Moten, "Black Op"; Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*; Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*.

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64 McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xii; Hawthorne, "Black Matters Are Spatial Matters."

65 Cheng, "Strategic Orientalism," 148; Moten, "Black Op"; Robinson, *Black Marxism*.

66 Rodgers, "Hanging Out with Forced Migrants."

67 See Nora El Qadim's excellent piece on "border voyeurism" for critique of how white migration scholars appropriate the experiences of racialized migrants in knowledge production. El Qadim, "From 'Border Spectacle' to 'Border Voyeurism'?" The situation that El Qadim describes echoes Saidiya Hartman's critique of white abolitionism's preoccupation with desire and horror in *Scenes of Subjection*.

68 Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*; McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*.

CHAPTER 1. NEOLIBERALIZING THE EURAFRICAN BORDER

1 Cobarrubias and Casas-Cortés, "Genealogies of Contention."

2 Council of the European Union, "Strategy Paper on Immigration."

3 Tatham, *Enlargement of the European Union*.

4 Barutciski, "*EU* States and the Refugee Crisis," 32–35

5 Council of the European Union, "Strategy Paper on Immigration," §4.1, para. 51.

6 Cobarrubias and Casas-Cortés, "Genealogies of Contention"; Council of the European Union, "Strategy Paper on Immigration," §4.1, para. 60.

7 Council of the European Union, "Strategy Paper on Immigration," §4.4, para. 88, 91.

8 Council of the European Union, "Strategy Paper on Immigration," §5.4, line 1. As El Qadim has pointed out, despite decades of the *EU* beating the drum concerning readmission agreements, partner states have often refused or delayed signing such agreements while managing to extract promised benefits from the *EU* anyway; El Qadim, "Postcolonial Challenges."

9 Council of the European Union, "Strategy Paper on Immigration," §4.1, para. 60.

10 Council of the European Union, "Strategy Paper on Immigration," §4.1, para. 60.

11 Statewatch, "*EU* Migrations."

12 Council of the European Union, "Strategy on Migration."

13 Council of the European Union, "Tampere European Council," para. 59–60.

14 King, "Southern Europe in the Changing Global Map."

15 Council of the European Union, "Strategy Paper on Immigration," §4 heading, §4.1, para. 52.

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