Doing *bizness*

Migrant smuggling and everyday life in the Maghreb

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Abstract: Drawing on extensive fieldwork among Malian migrants and connection men, this article investigates the sociality of facilitating migrant journeys and illegal border crossings in the Maghreb. Dominant discourses portray smugglers as participating in highly organized networks of unscrupulous people taking advantage of innocent migrants. I counter such narratives by zooming in on West African migrants involved in the facilitation of illegal border crossings. This *bizness* consists of ensembles of temporary practices and relations embedded in everyday life with linkages to historical and regional practices of brokering and hosting. This perspective invites us to move conceptually from focusing on different (stereo) types of smugglers to considering smuggling practices; to make sense of the phenomenon, we need to pay less attention to fixed social positions and more to the transient social poses adopted by those involved.

Keywords: everyday life, Maghreb, migrant smuggling, transnational organized crime, West Africa

> Migrant smuggling is a highly profitable business in which criminals enjoy a low risk of detection and punishment. As a result, the crime is becoming increasingly attractive to criminals. Migrant smugglers are becoming more and more organized, establishing professional networks that transcend borders and regions. (UNODC 2019)

Popular and political narratives have long maintained that illegal border crossings are planned and carried out by unscrupulous criminals taking advantage of innocent migrants (including refugees) in search of safe harbor.[1] Especially after the surge in recent years of migrant arrivals in Europe, the smuggler has, in this context, become the main culprit in the fight against irregular migration. In the opening quotation, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) paints a grim picture of migrant smugglers that engenders a widespread concern about, and fear of, transnational crime and human smuggling. In a different report, the UNODC notes "there is a lack of consensus regarding the degree to which such people [migrant smugglers] operate in networks structured or durable enough to be called 'organized

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crime'"[2] (2011: 35), regarding the specific case of human smuggling from West Africa to Europe. The UNODC here not only counters its own (dominant) narrative about the nature of such networks and thereby underscores the (large) lacuna in our understanding of the actual practices involved in human smuggling.[3] Furthermore, as I will show, the lack of consensus about the organized nature of the migrant smuggling networks reflects not only a general lack of knowledge about the networks and practices involved in migrant smuggling but, importantly, also the amorphous nature of the networks themselves.

In this article, I look into the social lives of Malian men in the Maghreb involved in migrant smuggling from West Africa to Europe, which they often refer to as *bizness*. The notion of *bizness* (for the francophone) or business can, of course, also refer to other forms of transactions. In this article, however, I limit its denotation to activities involved in the facilitation of illegal border crossings. Many of these are criminal and can lead to harsh punishments,[4] and my intent is, of course, not to enable authorities to "catch the criminals" but rather to understand the social dynamics of this particular form of cross-border crime as it becomes embedded in the everyday lives of migrants. Through Alpha, a Malian man involved in *bizness*, I will show this type of smuggling and its organization must be understood in the context in which it is carried out—through the practices and, importantly, the relations involved, the particular sociopolitical landscapes, and the historical forms of mobility and trade it connects to.

Whether we call them "smugglers," "fixers," "handlers," "brokers," or something else, there has been a desire to represent smuggling in terms of particular characters (most often imbued with moral judgments). In this article, I try to nuance this, and by looking at the everyday lives of Malian men involved in migrant smuggling in and through the Maghreb, I argue the inherently temporary nature of their involvement and the variety of social capacities that the men draw on do not equate to typical characters or stereotypes but become more akin to elusive shapes in an amorphous network. This represents a move away from understanding migrant smuggling in terms of more or less stable positions and formations, which are fixed or only slowly reconfigured over time, and a move toward understanding these as unstable positions that are sustained for different amounts of time, which we may call social poses.

Researching human smuggling

Recent decades have seen a surge in interest in researching human smuggling. Much of the research has, broadly speaking, explored the conceptual and institutional frameworks of human smuggling (Kyle and Koslowski 2001 pioneered this effort), and the analysis and methodology have tended to approach the issue through secondhand accounts from those who have been smuggled (e.g., Koser 2008; Van Liempt 2007). But recently, an interest in those who do the smuggling has sparked a range of ethnographic works from around the world. These have underscored the way smugglers are socially embedded and pointed to much more loosely structured configurations of organizations than is often suggested by popular narratives of smuggling and human trafficking. In an American context, Gabriella Sanchez shows how the people who organize illegal travel across the US-Mexico border are not always tightly organized and how "far from being under the control of organized crime, smuggling is an income generating strategy of the poor that generates financial opportunities for community members in financial distress" (2011: i). In the same vein, the facilitating of border crossing by sub-Saharan migrants in the Maghreb can be seen as an income-generating strategy for migrants who make temporary alliances to carry out their business. In a recent issue of *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, a group of scholars came together to "present migrant smuggling as a complex and layered social process" (Zhang et al. 2018: 9). In this, they present

a range of empirical studies from around the globe that all challenge the "vicious smuggler: victim migrant" dichotomy that seems so prevalent in media reports and political rhetoric.

In this article, I build on this basic challenge to the dominant portrayals of human smugglers and follow the same line of on-the-ground inquiry into the social lives of human smugglers. I add to the conversation with an empirical focus on the Maghreb, with an emphasis on not only questioning the morally loaded adjectives (vicious and victim) in the dichotomy but also challenging the basic dichotomy between smuggler and migrant. The empirical basis of this article is more than a year's multi-sited fieldwork in Mali, Algeria, Morocco, and France, among Malian men who were considering leaving or who had left Mali to go north on what, for most, became irregular migration. The bulk of the fieldwork was carried out between 2013 and 2014, and in this article, I mainly draw on the fieldwork carried out in the Maghreb in early 2014. As the people I work with are marginalized and their activities are criminalized, I have veiled not only people's names but also place names. The area of the Maghreb covered here includes both Morocco and Algeria.

Ordinary life in extraordinary circumstances

I contend that human smuggling must be understood as a variety of practices and relations that are thoroughly embedded in the everyday life of my interlocutors, and here I follow thinkers like Michael Jackson, who is concerned with "that domain of everyday, immediate social existence and practical activity, with all its habituality, its crises, its vernacular and idiomatic character, its biographical particularities, its decisive events and indecisive strategies" (1996: 7–8). Looking into this arena rather than at the "spectacular" aspects of sub-Saharan African migrants' lives in the Maghreb reveals how life and *bizness* in these borderlands is also mundane, trivial, and ordinary. It became clear how people enter and exit *bizness*, how *bizness* enters and exits their lives, and how *bizness* is one of several ways the men I work with are searching for a viable future, or "looking for life," as many described it. It is thus not a radical break with a different kind of ("normal") migrant living, as Alpha's story will show. Nonetheless, the ordinary lives of the men do play out in somewhat extraordinary circumstances. The Malian men, with whom this article is concerned, live and move in a world that is burdened and bordered by global inequalities, racism, and vulnerabilities. The Maghrebian countries in which this article is set are, as I will return to in the final part, particularly challenging places for them. But if we insist life in these places and under these circumstances is exclusively exceptional, then we risk losing sight of the everyday and the ordinary. That is not to say my interlocutors' lives are not marked by the places they live in, or that these circumstances do not negatively become entrenched in their lives, but they do, in the words of Veena Das (2007), "descend into the ordinary." Thus, following Didier Fassin, the most "spectacular discovery" (2013: 632) of this article may be the distinctly unspectacular: the "ordinariness" of life—even in the business of illegal border crossings.

"They entered last night"

In a large Moroccan city, there is a café in a poor neighborhood, known for its large population of sub-Saharan Africans, that those of my interlocutors who had a bit of money or were close to someone who had enough money to buy a coffee and maybe some cigarettes and place bets liked to visit. The café is packed with chairs and small tables. The café is usually crowded with Moroccans and West and Central Africans, and nearly everyone sits facing a small TV set high on the wall, showing horse races from French racecourses. I was meeting Alpha there one day, and when I arrived, he was on the phone with a big smile on his face, laughing as the person on the other end of the line talked. I could decipher

they were talking about a successful *tentement* (attempt)—a border crossing in large numbers.

"They entered last night. Twenty-five are already in the *campo*; the rest are still hiding in the town," Alpha told me, laughing after he had hung up. The *campo* is the Red Cross camp in Melilla where migrants who have entered the enclaves go to seek refuge. If they are caught by the *guardia* before they have made it to the camp, they risk being sent back to the Moroccan side of the border, even though this practice is in breach of international humanitarian law. Therefore, the migrants who had entered the enclave the night before were hiding in the town of Melilla. Alpha laughingly underscored the absurdity of the cat-and-mouse game between migrants and security forces in the borderlands. "Sometimes God gives you gifts," he continued. "They are going to call their families, 'I have entered!' Even if they don't stay there, they will be happy," he said about the men who had entered Melilla.

In Morocco, Alpha was involved in arranging illegal border crossings. Well, he never told me he was involved in this or that he wasn't, as being engaged in *bizness*, as they say in the borderlands, is often an unstated enterprise. In these spaces, uncertainty and maintaining the tension between truth and untruth was a condition of life, and not least of the business of brokering passages for migrants. "That guy, he does *bizness*" (*Lui, il fait le bizness*) was a common way of indicating someone was involved in border crossings and hosting migrants, and was a sentence I heard a few times about my companion. "He does this," a friend said, zigzagging his hand by way of description, "to get people in" (*pour faire rentrer les gens*). When I asked Alpha how he had come to be "well placed" (*bien placé*, a phrasing he himself used), he answered:

> I was on the road you know . . . then in Algeria I was working there, earning a bit, there were people here [in Morocco] who told me to come. Unfortunately I didn't enter [Europe]. And I am in Oujda with 50 euros in my pocket. What to do after the money finishes? I couldn't even enter by water. The police caught me. We were on a *Zodiac*[5]—I paid. We were three people who went to Rabat, directly after being released in Oujda.

After the failed attempt at entering Europe, Alpha stayed in Morocco and got to know people who needed a place to stay and he organized that for them. Housing other Malians thus became his entry point into *bizness*. Alpha's own home was a small room in a building belonging to a Moroccan family. It had no windows, and condensation ran down the walls, leaving the corners black and moldy. A few cockroaches would run over the small coffee table, where unwashed plates reminded the visitor that Alpha lived alone. His large bed was covered in polyester blankets, and the drapes that curtained the bed allowed for some privacy if anyone else should be staying there. The living conditions of Alpha and others involved in *bizness* clearly showed the financial gains were modest and that they, like the migrants they assisted, were living in the shadows of Maghrebian society, rather than in some distinct—even luxurious—"underworld."

"They can call me Internet"

Alpha did what he could to get by, and housing fellow migrants was a large part of his activities. On a short trip to the north coast of Morocco, where we had visited some of the houses Alpha managed, we stopped by a café, nestled between semi-abandoned residential blocks on the outskirts of a city. The other customers in the café were also West or Central African, and we greeted some of them and proceeded to have coffee and talk in a distant corner of the café. On our way out, I went ahead of Alpha, and when he caught up with me, he told me about a conversation he had just had with some of the other customers in the café. "They asked me who you were, and if you were my wife. I said yes," he laughingly recounted while I, feeling and probably looking slightly uncomfortable, gestured

for him to expand. "They asked if we had met on the internet. Someone in Rabat also asked me this question. What is that!? Always, 'internet internet.' It's about relations. I have relations. They can call me internet!" he laughingly continued. I couldn't help but laugh too at the analogy he drew between himself and the internet, which underscored what his job mainly consisted of, namely creating relations with, and connecting, people.

Adama, who had once been involved in *bizness* in the Maghreb but was now in Paris, made the same point to me, while I was doing fieldwork in Paris. He explained the job of people like Alpha with illustrative hand gestures, holding first one hand up to one ear and then the other hand to the other ear, as if his hands were phones. "This is all they do," he said, illustrating how being connected was crucial to *bizness*. He continued to brush imaginary sweat off his forehead and said what he used to do was real work. He had brought people across the border between Algeria and Morocco, a task that was a lot more physically demanding and less profitable than what Alpha and the other guys "working their phones" did. In a similar manner, Hans Lucht (2013) aptly calls his Ghanaian interlocutors involved in brokering migration journeys in Niger "connection men." Like Lucht's interlocutors, the work of Alpha and his colleagues was about connections, such as with Moroccan landladies, taxi drivers, others involved in *bizness*, and spiritual guides (for example, Alpha orchestrated the sacrifice of a goat eaten by those who were about to embark on a *tentement*—trying to cross the border fences between Morocco and Spain). As Stephanie Maher (2018) rightly points out, we should avoid falling into the trap of viewing human smuggling as merely a way to make money, because social relations and obligations also play a crucial role.

Alpha's own idea of himself as internet offers me a way to think about *bizness* as a particular form of brokering. Brokers, as Katherine Stovel and Lynette Shaw (2012) point out, bridge and trade on gaps in a social structure. As internet, Alpha is able to bridge gaps between people across time and space. This was further underscored by the way he (and the other men) was constantly on the phone, speaking a variety of languages (more or less proficiently) making arrangements about this or that. But being "like internet" also emphasizes the abstract localization of *bizness*, which, like the internet itself, may not reside in particular people but rather in particular access points. When I asked Alpha one day if he would go to Mali on vacation soon, he said he would like that but it would be difficult: "It is not easy, if I go back it is only for one month or two. I cannot be gone for longer. Then I have to give someone my SIM card. And it isn't sure that they can answer. Or that they can do the job." The SIM card here became a materialization of *bizness* and confirmed how *bizness* is not only about the person but to a high degree also about knowing how to use connections and how these can be stored and potentially transferred to someone else. To stay within Alpha's cyber metaphor, in IT, "ad hoc networks" describe self-configuring networks where nodes are free to move. This enables devices to create and join networks "on the fly." The idea of ad hoc networks fits quite well with the way Alpha and others doing *bizness* would create and join networks as they went along—networks that were often more temporary than permanent, sometimes difficult to pinpoint, and which individuals frequently joined and left.

In and out of the Maghreb

Strikingly, most of my interlocutors involved in *bizness* expressed a desire to leave for Europe, although most of them said they would never attempt taking an illegal route again (often scarred by failed attempts, like Alpha, who sometimes said how lucky he was that the *gendarmes* and not the roaring sea had gotten a hold of him). And none of them wanted to stay in the Maghreb, although many probably would. Some of them, like Adama, did manage to leave: in the dead of a cold fall night, he rowed his way on an inflatable boat into the Spanish enclave

of Ceuta, and finally, after seven years in the Maghreb, reached European territory. When we talked about his journey, Adama said he had spent seven years shuttling between Algeria and Morocco, working alternately as a guide bringing people across the border, as a farm worker, and sometimes as a hairdresser. The latter was his preferred *métier*, and from time to time, I would see him taking great pride in carefully sculpting his friends' hair into the latest fashionable styles with electric hair clippers.

The seven years in the Maghreb was not that long, he added, as something between a statement and a question when we talked about it. There might have been a slight hint of irony in his voice, but the truth is, for many of the Malian men, seven years is not an unusual amount of time to spend in the Maghreb. Life in these spaces does have a sense of temporariness, and for Adama, it led him to a new life in Paris, but for many, like Alpha, it comes to be more or less permanent (see also Richter 2016). Alpha and Adama thus tell two different versions of what could have potentially been the same story. When I met them, they were both engaged in *bizness* in the Maghreb. They had both tried to cross into Europe, although Adama had tried more determinedly, making repeated attempts, and they had both spent many years there pursuing different avenues for advancing or "making it" (*réussir*) as the Malian migrants would term it.

Lives in the borderland

Bizness was, and for some still is, an inherent part of the everyday lives of many of my interlocutors, who have been involved in it for shorter or longer periods of time. But certainly not all get into this line of work. All the Malians I have met in the Maghreb, however, doing *bizness* or not, were part of the particular social organizations distinctive of these places. In locations across the Maghreb, groups of sub-Saharan travelers are organized by nationality. Thus, you will find the Malians in one group, the Nigerians in another, the Cameroonians in a third, and so forth. In "towns made of plastic," as one interlocutor poetically called the destitute tent camps where sub-Saharan Africans live close to the borders, as well as in the cities, these groups are organized in what they term ghettos. Each ghetto is ruled by a chief or *thiaman* (from the English chairman), who may or may not be the head of the community as a whole (the president). He collects the tax of each person residing in his ghetto. Each national unit has a president and a council, which includes one or two treasurers and some police officers. The treasurers guard the money collected for the community (tax, fines, and fees collected from travel facilitators). The tax is paid only once and upon arrival. The police uphold law and order in the ghetto, and ensure the newly arrived pay their taxes and fines. The law of the ghetto is a codex that cannot be transgressed. If it is, the transgressor pays a fine or gets a physical punishment. If a Malian arrives wanting to leave for Europe, their *thiaman* will usually facilitate the travels or point to someone who can (see also Gnes 2013; Pian 2008, 2009). At the time of my fieldwork, this journey often started in Algeria and moved into Morocco and from there into Europe through one of the Spanish enclaves, Ceuta and Melilla.

The organization of these communities is not self-evident but something that has emerged in the specific context of Western North Africa. When and how these ghetto structures were created and established as institutions across the Maghreb is uncertain. One explanation I heard, from someone who had talked to a Congolese *thiaman* about it, was that there were so many problems in the late 1990s between "blacks" in Morocco that the police were constantly interfering, which led to expulsions and imprisonment of the migrants. They therefore had to organize in some way to maintain a sense of order and avoid the local authorities. So, the *thiaman* system was established. Whether this captures the genesis of the system is uncertain, but it points to the fact that the system developed in a context where the state was either predatory or absent (in terms of offering protec-

tion) and where conflicts were immanent. The lack of protection from the state was at the time of fieldwork still a pressing concern for many migrants in the Maghreb who did their best to "stay under the radar," avoiding encounters with the authorities. They feared both "expulsion," which would usually be to a border or a large urban center, and being stripped of their possessions in these borderlands, where the police were known for taking "fees" from migrants. The men also, to some extent, feared encounters with local Algerians and Moroccans (save employers, "friendly minded" neighbors and shop owners, and people involved in arranging transport and passage). Racism marred much of the migrants' existence and had become an ingrained part of their everyday lives, where derogatory comments made by strangers passing by yielded little more than a shrug, and where discriminatory practices such as the refusal to serve "blacks" in restaurants or in public transportation led the men to seek these services elsewhere or not at all (for a thorough account of migrant experiences in Morocco, see also Bachelet 2016; Richter 2018).

In these landscapes, the Malian men can roughly be divided into two groups, which they call *les nouveaux* and *les anciens*. The division of these groups follows gerontocratic lines, where *les anciens* (seniors) hold a certain amount of authority over the juniors. There are many overlaps, and people can move between the two groups quite fast. *Les nouveaux* mainly live in rudimentarily structured campsites (see Richter 2016) and are also sometimes called "passengers" as they are often waiting for an opportunity or for money to arrive from their families enabling them to cross the nearby borders. The lengths of their stay vary greatly, but many end up staying for quite a while, often moving between points along the migration routes. *Les anciens* started out as *nouveaux* but have become more fixed in the Maghreb, where they earn a living and often live in apartments in residential neighborhoods. The ghetto leaderships are comprised of members of this group. The social structure builds on West African modes of travel, where solidarity between compatriots (usually based on ethnic, village, or national ties) is maintained through generational arrangements (see also Manchuelle 1997), where *les anciens* are in charge of *les nouveaux* (for more on the *noria* system, see Timera 2000). This means those who are senior are responsible not only for the leadership of the community as a whole but also for the well-being of those who are junior to them.

It is within these migrant communities, which are quite well organized, that *bizness* takes place, but this does not mean *bizness* follows the same structured logics or that the leadership of the community consists of those men who are doing *bizness*. Instead, *bizness* is carried out in ad hoc networks that are constantly shifting. Some, but certainly not all, *les anciens* were or had been involved in *bizness*. At times, the idea of *bizness* when it was used in everyday language seemed to include both the facilitation of illegal border crossing, as well as other kinds of illegal or "gray zone" activities such as handling contraband or selling gold, while it could, of course, also refer to legal business transactions. Even though many *les anciens* earned money, it seemed the cost of living meant they had difficulty in saving or sending money to their families in Mali.

Familiar figures

The generational agreements I have outlined are interwoven with host-guest agreements. The notion of *jatigi* surfaced quite regularly during fieldwork, when people referred to the person in charge of their housing situation. The *jatigi*[6] is a figure known throughout Mandé-speaking West Africa. A *jatigi* is a particular kind of host who not only ensures guests a roof over their heads but also takes on a broader responsibility for the life of the guest, for example, by ensuring social, as well as physical, needs are met (see Hill 1966; Launay 1979). Like Robert Launay's (1979) landlords, the role of the *jatigi* in the borderland can only be understood relationally. You are someone's *jatigi*; only if you have people in your foyers are you a *jatigi* to someone. Alpha

was a *jatigi*: he was in charge of *foyers* and, to an extent, responsible for the well-being of the migrants under his roofs. Walking down the street with Alpha in his neighborhood, I often observed this when he was called out to by Malians who either lived in or had lived in one of his *foyers*. He would ask them about their well-being, and they would usually ask him for some kind of favor—most often monetary—which he generally had a hard time refusing, sometimes stressing to me how difficult it was to see his "brothers" suffer like that.[7]

The men who ran the *foyers* in the migrant communities were, like Alpha, often involved in brokering *bizness* arrangements. Again, the linkage to the broker-landlord known across West Africa as a central actor in trade networks is noteworthy. In the borderlands, however, the trade is not in cattle or other commodities (cf. Launay 1979) but in border crossings. This underscores how the specific relationships that are developed in the borderlands draw on well-known forms of relations and social obligations. This in turn challenges the popular description of smugglers as people who operate (solely) on capitalist logics and confirms migrant smuggling is socially embedded as proposed by several anthropologists (cf. Zhang et al. 2018). However, as I will return to, the *jatigi* and the migrant smuggler are not interchangeable terms.

Another related but more ambiguous figure is the *coxeur*. In conversations with Malian migrants, the *coxeur* would be evoked as a description of someone involved in *bizness*, most often with a negative ring to it—for example, when someone would say, "The *coxeur* stole all of my money." None of my interlocutors doing *bizness* would describe themselves as *coxeurs*, probably because of these negative connotations. A well-known figure across West Africa, the *coxeur* (presumably from the English "coax") connects people across different (language and moral) divides, and as pointed out by Ba in Jean Schmitz (2008), the *coxeur* holds an ambiguous position where he "can be both a crook and a savior" (14, my translation). Similarly, the men doing *bizness* told me one had to be both "good" and "bad" in the borderlands and, to reiterate, this used a range of metaphors, often along the lines of being crooked and straight. But this type of moral "adjustment" did not necessarily preclude fulfilling their social obligations (both as seniors and as *jatigis*). Adama elaborated on his relations to members of a particular ghetto: "Everybody, they respect me. Even if I have done something bad to them, it is true, they will not question me," he said, referring to how even though he "had done something bad" to the members of that ghetto, he still upheld his responsibilities toward them, and they could not question his authority.

In a setting close to the one I am dealing with in this article, based on work among Senegalese migrants in Morocco,the anthropologist Anaik Pian emphasizes how the figure of the *thiaman* (the head of the ghetto) is related to the *jatigi* and the *coxeur*, and claims "the current figure of *thiaman*, smuggler [*passeur*] between Morocco and Europe, is not a simple transposition of the historical figure of *jatigi*." Instead, she claims "the activities of the *thiamen* resembles more that of the figure of the *coxeur*," which she attributes to the secrecy and illegality involved in smuggling (2008: 105, my translation). The landlord/broker or *jatigi* and the *coxeur* are historical social institutions known under a range of different names throughout West Africa, closely connected to the organization of trade and markets. As François Manchuelle (1997) and James McDougall and Judith Scheele (2012), among others, show us, historical and contemporary northbound migration from West Africa takes place along established trade routes that once catered to salt caravans, labor migration, and so on. Finding parallels in the organization of trade networks and labor migration networks thus comes as no surprise. It reminds us migration to Europe is an example of a (fairly new) response to economic/market conditions in a world in which people have long been striving for opportunities and possibilities. Two assumptions in Pian's work, however, were challenged during my fieldwork. The first one is that there is a clear connection between *passeur*

(smuggler) and *thiaman*. I found this connection far from evident. In fact, among the more established *anciens* involved in *bizness*, *thiaman* seemed to be an undesired position to hold. Several people I talked to rejected being *thiaman*. This was primarily explained by the *thiamen* being too exposed—to bad talk, witchcraft. and conspiracies and not least to "dethroning." But there was also an element of undesired stability in the position, which is, although temporary, more or less fixed and identifiable. In *bizness*, as mentioned earlier, ambiguity is inherent and can be used to the men's advantage. Keeping things open and opaque leaves more room for maneuvering (see also Richter 2018). Secondly, Pian says there is a correlation between the smuggler (which she claims is the *thiaman*) and the *coxeur*. *Coxeur* was seldom used in quotidian language, and when it was, it was mainly applied to people far distanced in space or time. This does not mean that in the daily activities of men involved in *bizness* there are no linkages to the *coxeur*, as I also pointed out. It does, however, question whether it is helpful to make an either-or distinction between a smuggler as *jatigi* and as *coxeur*.

Social poses

During the fieldwork, I found it very difficult to identify continuous overlaps between different roles, the *jatigi* was not necessarily a *thiaman*, who in turn was not necessarily a smuggler (and a smuggler was certainly not necessarily a *thiaman*), and *coxeur* seemed to be more descriptive of ways of doing things, and of a particular stance toward the social world, than of a particular position or role in it. The figure of the smuggler as used not only in popular narratives (often preceded by the adjective "unscrupulous") but also in academic texts is a particular (type of) person who holds a particular (more or less stable) position in a network or a figure that can be equated with other social roles such as, in this case, the *jatigi*, the *coxeur*, or the *thiaman*. However, as I came to know people involved in *bizness* it became clear how they would move in and out of networks, engage in one aspect of the journey at one moment, and, in the next moment, be working in the gardens or be on their way to a new destination. They could take on parts of the aforementioned roles or not; they had to assume some of the characteristics of these figures, but not all of them. Being somewhat "crooked" did not mean one did not fulfill obligations to the migrants in one's care. Smuggling seemed more to be a pose, taken up for shorter periods, than a position that was held on to. Rather than smugglers as typical characters or stereotypes, it may be more helpful, in this case, to think of smuggling as a set of particular practices and particular relations that come together at particular moments in particular people, or through particular access points as Alpha underlined with his internet metaphor.

Conclusion

If one follows dominant narratives about human smuggling, it is easy to believe it is carried out by well-organized, unscrupulous individuals making large sums from innocent migrants. And although there is an emergent research field on the facilitation of illegal border crossings, there is still a large gap in our knowledge of the actual social dynamics involved. The simple yet important empirical contribution of this article has been to show that human smuggling in and through North Africa is not that spectacular, is tied into the everyday lives of those who were once or still are, themselves, on the move, and involves complex social relations founded in traditions of brokering, hosting, and established mobility trajectories. In doing this, I add to the emerging scholarship that emphasizes the very socially entangled nature of the facilitation of illegal border crossings.

Bizness, as I have explored in this article, is embedded in shifting or ad hoc networks. Here people are constantly moving in and out, engaging with *bizness* to varying degrees. Doing *bizness* is no path to riches, and being highly

criminalized, it entails risks of imprisonment and of repatriation. Nonetheless, I met many men involved in it. Marginalized in the Maghreb, at the bottom of an extremely racialized social hierarchy, the men involved in *bizness* did it to make a living and hopefully one day to "make it" elsewhere. Alpha and Adama tell two versions of the same story, of *bizness* in the borderlands, involved in a range of different practices and relations, which they partook in at various times and in various places. Had Alpha been successful in reaching Europe, he would have left the borderland *bizness* behind like Adama.

Set within a fairly structured migrant community, doing *bizness* is a matter of tapping into a relatively amorphous network. It is not just a matter of delivering a service but also draws on a social repertoire found in generational agreements and in the figures of the broker-landlord and the *coxeur*. Thus, rather than seeing smuggling through *specific* figures or positions, as is the most common approach, I argue it may be fruitful to see smuggling as an ensemble of practices and relations which for the most part is a temporary engagement with various degrees of intensity. Thus, rather than think of what the men do as positions in a more or less stable network, it may be more fruitful to think of them as social poses in ad hoc networks.

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Notes

1. This article is based on chapters from my PhD dissertation (Richter 2018).
2. There is a wide debate about how to define organized crime; for example, Varese (2017) identifies 115 different definitions that have been in use between 1915 and 2009.
3. And accordingly, how much writing, policy work, and concrete politics, including their own, is based on more or less speculative narratives that may be further from the reality on the ground than most involved in the whole of the "migration industry" care to admit (cf. Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sørensen 2013).
4. For example, according to the Moroccan penal code (*Dahir n° 1-03-196 du 16 ramadan 1424 (11 novembre 2003) Titre II, article 51*), facilitating non-sanctioned border crossings can be punished with up to five years imprisonment.
5. A brand of small inflatable boat, used by most of my interlocutors to denote any small inflatable boat.
6. Also spelled *djatigi* or *diatigiya*. The latter is also used about the act of hosting. The term literally translates as "head of hosting": *ja* = hosting, *tigi* = head/chief.
7. This may remind the reader of Hobsbawm's (1959) classic treatise on "primitive rebels," but it is important to note my intention here is not to "romanticize" *bizness* or the people involved in it but rather to broaden attention to the way this is socially and locally configured.

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