

# **Illegality, Inc.: Clandestine Migration and the Business of Bordering Europe**

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In his debut book, Ruben Andersson engages with one of the most urgent topics within the European Union—the migrant crisis. The situation has been described as the worst crisis since the two world wars. Andersson discusses different migrant routes to Europe, one of them being by boat. According to the UNHCR (3/14/2016), the number of migrants who have come to Europe by boat in 2016 is estimated to be roughly 150,000—a number that is expected to surpass the 1,015,078 migrants that arrived this way in 2015. Given that the crisis is ongoing, the topic of Andersson’s study is timely and significant.

Andersson invites the reader to follow him and his informants on a journey through the Spanish section of the Euro-African border towards Europe. Starting in Senegal, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, and continuing past the border into the European border organization FRONTEX’s<sup>1</sup> headquarters in Warsaw, Poland. However, the focus is not on the journey, or the migrants per se, but on the industry built around illegal migration, which Andersson calls the “illegality industry.” The illegality industry consists of local police patrols, aid agencies, governments, FRONTEX, and smugglers who all benefit from each (failed) attempt from migrants to cross the European border. Each attempt results in more funding from European governments to battle migrants coming to Europe.

Andersson uses his broad ethnographic material to guide the reader through his argument about how the illegality industry functions and what consequences are imposed. The material was collected from 2010 to 2011 in the form of several hundred interviews and through the method of participant observation, including visits to border agencies (xiii). Andersson places himself within theoretical debates in anthropology concerning migration, borders, refugees, and security. Due to the book being part of the California series in public anthropology, the theory is kept on a rather light level, which works well with the dense empirical material.

The argument throughout the book is that, when Europe closes its borders by force, the migrants are criminalized and punished, but they do not stop coming to Europe. This criminalization of migration leads to migrants ending up in the hands of smugglers who facilitate their continuing migration to Europe, often under harsh conditions. The profits earned in Europe, including money paid by hopeful migrants to cross the border, is what fuels the productivity of the illegality industry (7–8). Andersson explains how European governments are illegalizing migrants, and by doing so are creating the foundation for the illegality industry. He also states that migrants will continue to move as long as the pressure and hardships they face continue in the future.

In a globalized world where information, technology, and people are moving at a faster rate than ever before, there is an increased need to understand who can and who cannot move. Andersson begins the book by defining *migrant* as a label constructed by *developed countries*, a label that only applies to the poor and powerless—those who should not move, especially not to global centers such as Europe (4). He argues that the fear of migrants in Europe does not correspond to the number of migrants who actually materialize on its soil (5). In order to mitigate a fear of migrants, the states of Europe, through FRONTEX, have enforced their borders with fences, armed guards, military vessels at sea, and other kinds of surveillance.

The main discussion in this book resonates with a larger discourse around borders, boundaries, and rituals that has developed from Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger* (1966)<sup>2</sup> as well as Victor Turner's *The Ritual Process* (1969).<sup>3</sup> Andersson does not refer to Douglas or Turner directly, but includes himself in this discourse by claiming that, because migrants are not supposed to come to Europe, they are labeled as outsiders and out of their place (180). Conceiving of migrants as a "matter out of place" may lead to a conception that migrants pollute, which serves to justify the process of "animalization" by governments who reduce migrants to mere bodies. Andersson argues this is vital in order for the border regime to work its methods against migrants trying to enter "Fortress Europe" (120). Migrants attempting to travel to Europe are thus becoming part of the ritual of the border—through their deaths, they are the sacrifices needed to sustain the ritual and strengthen the border (120). Migrants who manage to arrive in Europe are instead separated from society, because of this "polluting" nature (180). Andersson describes migrants trying to evade the all-seeing eye of the border regime as "being en route ... at turns visible and invisible to the border forces that chase them" (108). By including Andersson's discussion alongside Douglas and Turner, it is evident how the journey of the migrants can be viewed as a *liminal* phase of migration, the middle stage of a *rites de passage*. The obstacles imposed by the border regime and the danger that follows are variables that the migrant must overcome in order to reach his or her goal—Europe. The migrants are continuously in a state of not knowing what is next on their journey. They do not know when they will arrive in Europe, if they will arrive, or if they will be alive at the end. The liminality aspect is not always explicit in Andersson's text, but the ethnographic examples and the theoretical concepts used are easier to understand with this framework in mind. If we consider migrants in a state of *liminality*, as "polluting," it is possible to understand their role in the "illegality industry." Andersson's work illuminates how migrants' bodies become commodities of the industry through being packed, shipped, paid for, declined, and sent back. The industry is fuelled by funds from Europe, but it is the migrants' bodies that constitute the danger and thus trigger the response from European governments to fund fighting them off. Migrant bodies are not supposed to be on European territory, and therefore they are in and of themselves polluting when they arrive. The aspect of pollution is created by European governments as a rhetorical and imaginal tool to keep migrants at bay.

The book is divided into three sections: Borderlands, Crossings, and Confrontations. In the first section, Borderlands, Andersson provides ethnographic descriptions of how migrants are coming to the borders of

Europe, and he shows how the illegality industry is built around these journeys. He also show how the fear of migrants in Europe results in actions of “fundamental absurdity” to keep the migrants out (5). Lastly, this section describes the expansion of Europe's borders into African territories that has instigated a hunt for the “illegal migrants.” In the second section, Andersson focuses on what he calls the “game,” which constitutes the relationship between migrants and border guards. The migrants do all they can to avoid detection, and the guards seek to detect the migrants in order to stop them from entering Europe. The third section explores the Spanish African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla by showing how a politics of containment is born as a means of making an example of migrants. This politics is acted out on migrant bodies by keeping them in one restricted area for an extended period of time, sometimes for several years. The detainment of migrants for an extended period of time is done to discourage migrants from making the journey. Lastly, this section also brings the reader back to Africa by showing the response to deportations of migrants caught in raids or trying to cross the borders of “Fortress Europe.”

Because of Andersson's vast geographical scope and multi-site method, this book is at times a bit disjointed, and unless the reader is attentive, it can be difficult to grasp where the story takes place. Andersson addresses this problem in his introduction, where he provides a time chart to help orient the reader. Furthermore, while women and children are present in Andersson's narrative, he does not address the role gender might play in their experiences of migration. This is one of the main weaknesses of the book because the number of both women and children migrating has increased dramatically compared to years before. Therefore, gender and age would have been important aspects to explain in relation to the industry's treatment of migrant bodies. Another aspect that Andersson notes is the role of smugglers in facilitating migrant journeys as part of the illegality industry, although he does not discuss this in detail. Addressing this variable of the industry more explicitly would have added another significant dimension to his analysis.

The book addresses a current and controversial human rights topic and offers a contribution to future anthropological research. Andersson's discussion of how the European border is expanded outside of Europe (see part one of the book—*Borderlands*) is an example of a broader contribution. This expansion of European borders is not a one-time development. We can see examples of these developments today with the agreements and regulations between Europe and Turkey. The deal states that Turkey will close its borders and keep refugees instead of allowing them to migrate towards Europe. In return, Turkey will continue to receive economic and political benefits from Europe. As a consequence of this deal, European borders are expanding into Turkey, a parallel pattern. The reasons for the expansions of the European government into Turkey (and the African territories as noted by Andersson in his fieldwork) are the same—the migrants are coming to Europe. As Andersson states in his conclusion, and points out throughout the book, the responses towards the migrants are often absurd due to the media exaggerating the risks migrants pose to the public. One example provided in Andersson's book of this absurd dimension is the migrants coming to the shores of Spain in sinking boats. This caused hysteria in Spanish media, and a massive response from the government ensued. All of the hysteria and money spent on stopping

these migrants suggests that the government overreacted, considering that the migrants who arrived in this way from 2005 to 2014 only constituted a mere 1% of the flow of undocumented migrants into Spain since 1990 (5).

*Illegality, Inc.* is a well written and enlightening book that I strongly recommend to anyone interested in migration studies, refugee studies, borders or questions of security. In addition, the light approach to theory and rich ethnography provides an interesting and informative reading for those outside of socio-cultural anthropology. At times the book was hard to follow geographically, and lacked a gender approach in the consideration of data, but the main arguments made by the author were clear throughout the volume. This book is a welcome addition to the field, as it illuminates anthropological issues as well as necessary avenues of inquiry for future research on this topic by students and advanced scholars alike.

### Notes

1. “European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the *External Borders of the Member States of the European Union*” (Andersson 2014, 74–75, italics in original).
2. Mary Douglas analyzes concepts of pollution and taboo. Her most well known contribution is her description of how something becomes dirty when it’s a “*matter out of place*.” This idea has been developed by numerous scholars as a way to explain why things or people are treated as less worthy because of their coming from another place.
3. Victor Turner develops the concept of *liminality* from Arnold van Gennep. *Liminality* is explained to be the second step in a *rites de passage*. The first step, *separation*, is when the individual is separated from a known environment. Step two, *liminality*, is a state of not knowing—where anything can happen. The final step is *incorporation*, when the individual once again gains a distinguished role in society. The concept of *liminality* has been used by scholars interested in rituals, border studies, and many other areas.

### References

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