

Support Migrants' Resistance to EU Funded Police Corruption in Morocco!

Imagine living for years in a country that you only ever wanted to pass through, where people throw stones at you on the street for the colour of your skin, and where you know the police will get handsomely paid for arbitrarily detaining you.

That's the situation that thousands of migrants from West Africa find themselves in currently in Morocco. Because of the proximity of the Moroccan port city of Tangiers to the European mainland, and because Spain, an EU country, is occupying two cities (Ceuta and Melilla) on the North coast of Morocco thus creating a land border, this predominantly Arab country is a major migration routes for predominantly Black West Africans seeking a better life in Europe.

The majority of these migrants intend merely on working in Europe, legally or illegally, until they have saved up enough to be able to return to their home countries and improve the conditions of life for their families. The dedication of these mostly young men to their families' future wellbeing is incredible: many of them are the sole hope for their entire extended family, which has often invested all it has and gotten into debt in order to finance their journey.

Because of this, migrants feel that turning back home is simply not an option, and for many of them after having lived in Morocco in poverty for years and had all their possessions stolen by corrupt police, it is *not* an option, as they are unable to afford the journey.

Some have even stronger reasons that they cannot return home. Though the majority of West African migrants in Morocco could be considered "economic migrants", many of them are also refugees fleeing from dictatorship or civil war. Many of those that started out as "merely" economic migrant have undergone enough persecution in the time they have been stuck in Morocco that they could now be considered refugees as well, making the "official" distinction seem pretty arbitrary.

Being "officially" labelled as a refugee by the UNHCR (United Nations High Commission on Refugees) does not do migrants much good in any case, as documents proving refugee status are not in themselves enough to be allowed over the border to Spain. Having refugee status may give individuals a relatively easier time once they make it into the EU, as it makes applying for asylum easier, but even then their movement will be restricted to the first EU country considered "safe" for them by rich white politicians far away whom they have never met.

Many migrants wish to travel to the UK but due to asylum law will be theoretically stuck in Spain, if caught there. There are many reasons why West Africans may feel they are safer in the UK than in Spain: (1) Many West African people already speak English due to the history of colonialism whereas hardly any speak Spanish, (2) there are many more Black people in the UK than Spain, again due to the history of colonialism, so Black clandestine migrants in Britain do not stand out as much to police (3) Britain's economy is much better than Spain's, which is one of the worst hit European economies by the current crisis, so migrants will find it easier in Britain than in Spain to find money to send back home, where it will be worth more.

Whether migrants currently in Morocco are labelled as refugees or not, they are still in the same situation of having to cross the border clandestinely, and then to try and continue living a clandestine life once in Europe until they reach the country they wish to stay in, usually the UK.

The European Union spends millions of euros of its citizens tax money to patrol the sea and land borders between Morocco and Spain, and on anti-clandestine-immigration police and surveillance operations throughout Europe itself, all to try and keep out these people, and people like them from other parts of the world.

But they also try to use money to extend the reach of their border policies *outside* of the EU borders themselves. Beginning in 1995 under the "Barcelona Process", the EU has been supplying the Moroccan regime with development aid and trade privileges, explicitly *in exchange* for cooperation on how to deal with migrants entering the EU via Morocco.

Perhaps the most crucial part of this is a sum of around 1500 euros that the EU pays to the Moroccan police force for every migrant they arrest. This sum of 1500 euros is supposedly given by the EU on the understanding that it will be used for the costs of transportation of the migrants back to their home country, and the costs of keeping them in a decent living condition during the time they are being detained and deported.

Migrants routinely report, however, that this money is actually being systematically stolen by corrupt Moroccan police officers. When they have detained migrants, taken their fingerprints and sent the paperwork off to the EU, they keep them detained just as long as it takes for the money to arrive, and then the migrants are either let out or sent to the border with Algeria at Oujda.

The EU's money is being used simply to line the pockets of officers of a police force already making millions from its involvement with drug smuggling into Europe. It is certainly not being used to keep detained migrants in a decent condition of living. They

report being regularly denied adequate food, water, medical care or even sleeping quarters. They are also often violently abused by officers during their arrest and detention.

If “deported” to Algeria they are left in the middle of a desert without money, food, water or adequate clothing, with no realistic option but to either die or re-enter Morocco. Drug producing farms near the border with Algeria take advantage of this situation by employing many migrants as cheap labourers.

Whether they are deported to Algeria and make their way back, or just let straight back onto the streets of whatever city they were arrested in, this system of police corruption financed by EU taxpayers only keeps the migrants in Morocco and makes their determination to enter Europe even stronger.

What it certainly does *not* do, is deter them from entering Europe or make them more likely to go home and stay put. As many of the migrants themselves say, *nothing* the EU can do is going to make them do that. The economic disparity between formerly-colonised Africa and formerly colonising Europe, is simply too enormous. African migrants have simply too much to gain by crossing the border and too much to lose, including the wealth and respect of their families, by not crossing it.

But whether the EU gives up and just lets them in, granting them equality with EU citizens, or, as is far more likely, continues it’s attempts to hold back the sea of victims of centuries of European Imperialism – seeking only to work hard to earn the scant resources it will take to ensure a basic standard of living for their families – the EU’s current funding of the Moroccan police force’s corruption must end.

Whether you are a racist nationalist committed to defending borders at any cost, an anarchist revolutionary committed to destroying them at any cost, or anywhere in between, surely it can be seen that the current system benefits no one but the corrupt Moroccan police officers themselves. Don’t worry about them going hungry, they will be fine without the EU’s money. The hashish export business is still incredibly lucrative, even the King of Morocco is heavily involved in it.

The extent of Moroccan police and state corruption is so obvious that the EU bureaucrats responsible for the operation of this policy cannot seriously expect anyone to believe they aren’t already aware of it. Therefore they are deliberately maintaining a system which keeps migrants in Morocco in a situation of permanent psychological and physical oppression which seriously risks their lives.

Not only is it very easy for people to die from the effects of being detained and abused without the basic necessities of life for days before being let out in the middle of a desert with nothing in your pockets, but the conditions migrants live in as a result of the EU's policies often drive them into taking greater risks than they should in the act of crossing the border itself.

There are various ways migrants can cross the border clandestinely without risking their lives: bribing officials, paying professional smugglers or buying forged documents, but these all require sums of money that most migrants simply cannot afford.

The cheapest way migrants could try and enter would probably be to build a shoddy wooden ladder and try and climb the six meter high border fences at either Ceuta or Melilla, hoping not to get shot or have their hands completely sliced open by the razor wire at the top. Bear in mind that migrants would have to climb two such fences in a row without getting caught by regular police patrols at Ceuta, and *three* at Melilla. So this is not a very popular option, though people still do it.

Perhaps the second cheapest way to enter the EU is to club together money with other migrants and buy an inflatable dinghy called a "Zodiac". It seems the most common recommended wait for these boats is 300kg, which means they should safely be able to carry about four or five people of average weight. However, the pressures of daily life in Morocco – due to poverty, police harassment and widespread local racism – cause many groups of migrants to load their boats with far more people than the recommended amount, in order to save money and the time it takes to earn it.

It seems common practice to load boats designed for four people with eight, and of course this leads to regular sinking of migrants' boats due to overloading. The Red Cross has a permanent mission in the Straits of Gibraltar just to rescue migrants from these boats. But sometimes they are too late, or are not made aware that boats are in danger, and migrants often drown.

Is it too much of a stretch to blame these deaths on the EU's funding of corrupt Moroccan police? If migrants were not under so much pressure from police hungry to pocket the EU's money perhaps they would have more time, and money, to plan their crossings more safely. Perhaps if the EU gave up on protecting this border altogether and migrants were allowed to simply cross on the regular tourist ferries, they would save a lot of money compared with having to buy a boat of their own, and not have to risk their lives at all.

Some may say that it is the migrants themselves who are to blame for their own situation, that they should simply not try to enter Europe if they do not want to have to risk their lives, and leave Morocco if they don't like getting arrested all the time. Some of them do

in fact give up and return home, when they can afford to. But, as pointed out above, many simply cannot afford to and others would face death if they were to return home.

Those that could give up but don't do not seem like reckless idiots in my eyes. A lot of my best friends are reckless idiots, and I know how to spot them. The migrants that know the risks and cross anyway do not seem like people about whom I could just say "oh well, it's their own fault" when they die. They seem like people making great sacrifices for the benefit of others – their families back home. They seem like heroes, people about whom I would say *great* things when they die. And these are heroes that need support.

Basic humanitarian and psychological aid to migrants suffering from police abuses during detention and deportation to Oujda can save lives, and there are already several small NGOs trying to provide such services. They should certainly be supported and assisted in their fundraising efforts and practical activities. But we should never be blind to their inherent limitations, as they are legal entities which must not be seen to break the law by directly helping migrants to cross the border.

But lives can also be saved in Morocco through donations of money or resources aimed at making sea crossings safer: by being able to provide enough boats that migrants do not feel like they have to risk their lives by overloading them. Good quality lifejackets can also play a crucial role, as many migrants cannot swim, being from countries without municipal swimming pools in places without natural access to seas or rivers. Solidarity activism can also potentially play a role in sea crossings, with solidarity activists acting as look outs or distractions for the police.

Such solidarity activity which aims at directly helping migrants to cross the border in as safe a way as possible must be as clandestine as the migration it assists. It is not merely humanitarian aid but political solidarity with people actively resisting oppression, by defying the very existence of the border-control structures that oppress them. It may sometimes consist of cheerfully organising fundraising activities in rich European countries amongst sympathetic people, and then simply handing over the boats, lifejackets and other resources to the migrants that need them with some friendly words of advice, but it may also sometimes involve solidarity activists risking arrest, abuse by police and ridiculous Orwellian charges in unfair Moroccan courts.

Nonetheless I believe that we in European Anti-Border movements should begin to organise projects in Morocco aimed at carrying out the above-mentioned forms of solidarity. Such projects should be provided with appropriate resources for activists to be able to carry out solidarity activities in relative security and stability. To achieve this, Anti-Border activists in many different European cities must be involved in both directly

carrying out these activities in regular visits to Morocco and in more indirect fundraising and information spreading activities back in Europe.

To build up public support for migrants' actions of defying the border by crossing it, we must expose the corruption of the Moroccan police and the fact that it is being funded by the EU as much as possible, because it is in the context of this corruption that it truly can be seen as righteous defiance of an unjust system, rather than anything else the right wing press may portray it as being.

As awareness raising activities, symbolic demonstrations around the demand for the EU to stop funding the Moroccan police may have significant roles to play, but only if they remember not to take themselves too seriously as *lobbying tactics*, which in any case is not their proper role. No-one can claim to "lobby" on behalf of hundreds of thousands of migrants who mostly keep have to keep their identities secret. Anyone claiming to be such a lobbyist is likely to be acting entirely in their own interests by cynically exploiting the struggles of others, and should be regarded with extreme suspicion by genuine Anti-Borders activists.

It must always be remembered that the *direct action* of the migrants themselves in the *act of crossing borders* is what is at the heart of defying and defeating borders. Defiance, rebellion and direct action, free from illusion, are what get results against Nation States, not politely asking them to stop being oppressive. We must aim to make their system unworkable, through our own actions and the building up of our own power as insurrectionary populations, to make the slogan "Freedom of Movement for All" a reality in the here and now, *despite* the State.

This is a call out to anti-border activists in Europe to start a network for solidarity with migrants crossing the Straits of Gibraltar, along the theoretical lines outlined above. The above analysis is that of myself as a lone insurrectionary anarcho-communist activist on the basis of what I have learned about the border situation here in 5 months of living in Tangiers, reading academic literature relating to the border and becoming close friends with several West African migrants.

If you feel you have any time, effort or resources to put into such a project, or if you have any questions or comments, we beg you to get in touch, at nobordersmorocco@riseup.net.

Source: <http://beatingborders.wordpress.com/2013/02/14/support-migrants-resistance-to-eu-funded-police-corruption-in-morocco/>, 14.02.2014