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Sébastien Bachelet iD
University of Manchester

"Fighting against Clandestine Migration": Sub-Saharan Migrants' Political Agency and Uncertainty in Morocco

Drawing on ethnographic research in Morocco among irregular migrants from Central and Western Africa, this article shifts the exploration of what it means to be political by examining how migrants' political participation is entangled with their attempts to overcome the uncertainty inherent to their lives. Recent scholarship has exposed and decentered boundaries between the citizen and the illegal migrant, placing a prominent focus on migrants' subjectivity and the radical potential of migrants' protests. However, studies of migrants' protests have often been limited to the "West." Through an examination of the development of a migrants' association in Morocco, I show how studies of migrants' movements and protests must account for their multiple, uncertain, and sometimes seemingly contradictory claims and demands. Failing to do so risks curtailing any radical potential for political subjectivization and contributing further to migrants' marginalization. The article illustrates how migrants' aspirations cannot be reduced to regularization in a host country and, crucially, how hampered political agency is articulated with constricted mobility in a country closely cooperating with Europe in migration matters. [Morocco, political subjectivity, irregular migration, uncertainty, migrant protests]

"In Oujda we lived like kings," Moussa recalled.[1] "Now it is back to the same realities." I sat on the roof of a dilapidated building nicknamed *L'Ambassade* (The Embassy) with members of AMSAM—an association of irregular migrants from countries across sub-Saharan Africa living in Morocco. The overall enthusiasm following a forum on migration and the passionate debates we partook in with other delegates (mostly from Morocco, France, and sub-Saharan countries) was plummeting. My informants grumbled about returning to daily routine in Douar Hajja, a marginal neighborhood of Rabat.

We discussed the confusion caused by AMSAM's overall aim (i.e., "fighting against clandestine migration") among nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) practitioners in Oujda. Some joked that AMSAM would rapidly secure European funds. During the debriefing session in Douar Hajja with those who did not attend the forum, Moussa, an Ivoirian member of AMSAM's committee, said:

> My combat is . . . to fight inequalities and injustice. Regularization [of migrants] is an important idea which we did not master before the forum. Some people told us, "AMSAM, you are fighting against us migrants!" But no, we just want to reduce the percentage [of clandestine migration].

While most members approved of a change of name for AMSAM that would incorporate a focus on regularization, many of the young, mostly Cameroonian men present at the

meeting (some AMSAM members, some just residents of L'Ambassade) discussed how they mostly cared about "reaching the objective" (e.g., crossing into Europe). We were reconsidering AMSAM's name and overall aim when someone excitedly broke the silence: "We are the Association against Migrants' Rights!" There were enthusiastic cheers while some shook their heads in disapproval. I feared this added to the confusion and asked, as adviser to AMSAM, whether he meant *for* migrants' rights rather than *against*. The decision about AMSAM's name and overall aim was postponed.

AMSAM was created because irregular migrants wanted to exercise control over a precarious situation in which they seemed powerless. This article draws on research carried out from May 2012 to September 2013 in Rabat (Morocco) with mostly male Francophone migrants from Western and Central Africa. After befriending some migrant leaders, I conducted ethnographic research, mostly with participant observation in migrants' "ghettoes," which is how informants described their overcrowded accommodations. In Douar Hajja, a marginal neighborhood in Rabat, I explored how irregular migrants coped with uncertainty and immobility. During early visits, I accompanied Paul, the president of the established migrants' association that helped migrants in L'Ambassade establish AMSAM. During the creation of the committee, I was appointed as vice president, as some AMSAM members were hoping that a "white European" could facilitate relationships with NGOs. Uneasy with the ethical implications, I declined and became an adviser instead, a vague title that justified my presence in L'Ambassade. For more than a year, I participated in activities, and accompanied and helped my informants articulate their concerns and demands.

Throughout the article, I return to how AMSAM members voiced their demands within a hostile and uncertain context. As noted by Peter Nyers (2010), irregular migrants are often not perceived "as capable of making claims" (130). I also engage with the growing body of literature focusing on migrants' subjectivity and explore how migrants compromise "political moments" (Scheel 2013, 579) amid violent processes of illegalization (De Genova 2002). For instance, proponents of the "autonomy of migration" (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013) provide crucial insight into complex distributions of power by demonstrating how bordering practices respond to the movement of migrants reclaiming their "right to escape" (Mezzadra 2004). Scholars examining citizenship have also explored how movement and protests among migrants "entail a shift in what it means to be political" (Squire 2011, 5). They have drawn attention to how, regardless of status, "subjects constitute themselves as citizens—or, better still, as those to whom the right to have rights is due" (Isin 2008, 18). Such studies draw on conceptions of the political as a process of disruption. For instance, Rancière (2010) argues that politics entails not merely a confrontation of diverging interests and solutions but also a dispute over a situation itself, or what he calls "the distribution of the sensible" (36).

In shifting the analytical focus away from the doers toward deeds themselves, Isin and Nielsen (2008) articulate the concept of "acts of citizenship" (8). They argue that to examine acts of citizenship is to highlight acts that may not initially be considered political and demonstrate how their enactment "constitute constituents (beings with claims)" (8); that is, new subjects who, while caught in modes of beings and relationships, are "engag[ed] in writing scripts and creating the scene" (Isin 2008, 38). For instance, Nyers (2010) examines how migrants who self-identify as "nonstatus" migrants in Canada have paradoxically expressed their autonomy as political beings through acts that reclaim discourses defining them. Nyers argues that nonstatus migrants' chant "Status for All" can be heard not only as moral pleas for better treatment but also as "a declaration that is generative of a political subjectivity" (129).

AMSAM members' call for "reducing the percentage" of irregular migration does not fit neatly with those studies that examine the "interruption and transformation of the political" (141). This article shifts the analysis of migrants' political participation by stressing its heterogeneity. Studies of migrants' movement and protests must account for migrants' multiple, uncertain, and sometimes seemingly contradictory claims and demands, as illustrated by the confusion over AMSAM's overall aim. The analytical perspectives highlighted above provide critical insight at a time of heightened moral panic over migration. However, they run the risk of homogenizing migrants' political subjectivity by portraying migrants' protests and movements as consistently challenging border and citizenship practices. It is vital to examine migrants' protests and movements as entangled with wider transformations (e.g., erosion of rights) over citizenship "which do not regard only migrants" (Mezzadra 2004, 271). Failing to account for and examine the diversity of migrants' political claims in favor of homogenized and abstract considerations risks curtailing any radical potential "for novel forms of political subjectification" (Nyers 2010, 138); crucially, this contributes further to migrants' marginalization. In this article, I explore how irregular migrants from Central and Western Africa navigate a hostile and uncertain context in Morocco—a partner of the European Union in the "management" of migration—while, in their own words, "looking for their lives." I focus on how AMSAM members, as illustrated above, articulate multiple political claims, including further integration into Morocco while continuing to attempt crossing into Europe.

To examine migrants' heteroclite claims, this article draws on recent discussions of uncertainty. In her examination of immigration detention, Melanie Griffiths (2013) argues that uncertainty is not simply symptomatic of chaotic processes but also serves "to keep people insecure, passive and pessimistic and to reiterate the indifference and power of the state" (280). Although uncertainty inflicts severe strains onto migrants in Morocco who work and live in precarious conditions, it is not wholly inhibiting. Scholars have examined the productive aspect of uncertainty as "a social resource" (Cooper and Patten 2015, 2).[2] Exploring uncertainty as a "ground for action" (Di Nunzio 2015, 149), this article demonstrates how studies of migrant protests require closer examination of the diversity, ambiguity, and uncertainty of migrants' claims to better account for their political agency. In so doing, they contribute to fostering any radical change about what "being political" means.

First, studies of migrants' protests have often been limited to the "West" (e.g., *sans-papiers* movement, the Dreamers, British detention centers, etc.). Examining migrants' political agency in Morocco contributes to the debunking of "conventional dichotomous, and essentially colonial, ways of conceptualising global migration" (Berriane, de Haas, and Natter 2015, 517), which posit Western countries as the only migrants-receiving countries. This is especially salient as dominant discourses on migration obscure colonial pasts and legacies. As my informants often discussed in Douar Hajja ghettoes, their journeys were also attempts to "re-claim their grandfathers' rights"—in reference to France's colonial corps during World War II—and as a response to continued meddling by European countries in African countries' politics. Second, examining political agency in Morocco also highlights how migrants mobilize themselves despite repression in a country where democratic promises have not been fully met. Last, such focus illustrates how migrants' aspirations cannot be reduced to regularization in a host country, and, crucially, how hampered political agency is articulated with constricted mobility in a country closely cooperating with Europe in migration matters. While some studies have highlighted how migrants in Morocco have formed alliances with national and international NGOs and associations (Üstübici 2016), it is crucial to examine more closely the articulation of heterogeneous claims and demands within migrants' associations such as AMSAM.

After providing some contextual elements about migration in Morocco, this article focuses on the ambiguity of "fighting migration" to examine AMSAM's shifting focus on exposing migrants' living conditions. I then discuss the articulation of multiple demands that do not solely address Morocco as a host state. Finally, I explore how continued border-crossing attempts and calls for regularization in Morocco are not a contradiction but an illustration of how migrants navigate the uncertain political realm.

"Between a Rock and a Hard Place"

Irregular migrants live within what Susan Coutin (2000) calls the "space of nonexistence" (27), meaning they are physically and socially present in Douar Hajja despite lacking a meaningful legal status: nonexistence is never complete. In ghettoes such as L'Ambassade, my informants would talk about arduous living conditions, describing Morocco as "a prison." Those who could find casual work, such as at construction sites, complained about working long hours, without contracts and sometimes without pay, performing repetitive, menial, and dangerous tasks in conditions they compared to slavery. Although most were likely to remain in Morocco indefinitely because of tight border controls, many kept trying to cross into Europe. "The condition of migrant illegality" (Willen 2007, 8) was deeply uncertain and full of anxieties, as seen in the outcomes of border-crossing attempts. Faced with institutional violence and regular racist attacks, migrants were busy making escape plans while also attempting to make their everyday life more viable: opening make-shift and temporary restaurants, managing crowded ghettoes, and creating groups like AMSAM in order to make their voices heard.

My informants set up AMSAM in summer 2012, a period marked by heightened institutionalized violence as well as mobilization by civil society (Bachelet 2013). A new generation of leaders was emerging, creating new migrants' associations to work alongside those established following the 2005 deadly incidents at the Moroccan–Spanish border known as the "Ceuta and Melilla events" (Migreurop 2007).

As Martin Baldwin-Edwards (2006) puts it, migrants in North Africa are stuck "between a rock and a hard place" (311). The creation of a European area of free circulation for people, goods, capitals, and services has led to "a strong focus on external control" (Cross 2009, 171). Migrants are subjected to myriad hostile processes aimed at organizing and categorizing them "on a curve from normal to abnormal, legal to illegal, desirable to undesirable, and productive to subversive" (Feldman 2012, 57). Border controls, a lucrative "industry" for state and nonstate actors such as security companies (Andersson 2014), rely on the co-optation of neighboring countries (often in exchange of financial incentives) such as Turkey, Libya, or Morocco. In these places, migrants live in conditions described as "at best inadequate, at worst profoundly inhuman" (Baldwin-Edwards 2006, 312).

Often accused of acting as Europe's border guard (Belguendouz 2005), Morocco has recently been undergoing a shift from a country of mostly emigration to one of transit and immigration, notably for sub-Saharan migrants (Cherti and Grant 2013). It should be noted that in September 2013, following calls for a "radically new" politics of asylum and migration among Moroccan civil society (e.g., Conseil national des droits de l'Homme 2013), King Mohamed VI announced "a new vision for a national migration policy, that is humanist in its philosophy, responsible in its approach and pioneering at a regional level" (Maroc Portail National 2013). However, as this article charts migrants' own involvement in fostering such change, an analysis of those recent developments (e.g., the two "regularization" processes since 2014) remains beyond its focus.

In 2012–2013, the consensus among NGOs and researchers was that there were around twenty thousand irregular sub-Saharan migrants. However, such figures are notoriously

unreliable.[3] In the 1990s, it would take a few days to cross into Spain; now, sub-Saharan migrants often take several years to climb over the razor-wire topped fences around the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla and to cross the Strait of Gibraltar on unseaworthy rubber-dinghies. Migrants refer to border-crossing attempts as "attacks" and describe the encounters with Spanish and Moroccan authorities as *le choc* (the shock), in reference to the violence and infringement of migrants' rights regularly denounced in NGO reports (Human Rights Watch 2014; Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders 2013). Following the 2003 terrorist attacks, Morocco adopted the repressive Law 02–03, which criminalized undocumented emigration and immigration and was widely seen as emulating hostile EU migration politics, with the little provision for migrants' protection routinely overlooked by authorities. As argued by Katharina Natter (2014), Moroccan authorities have "used irregular migration as a 'geographical rent' to restore the country's role in regional politics" (18). It is important to note that the Spanish–Moroccan border is "the pivot of complex bilateral relations" between Europe and Africa (Carling 2007, 338), because it entails trans-Mediterranean negotiations over a range of issues such as the Western Sahara dispute, trade, and terrorism.

"Exposing The True Realities"
AMSAM's puzzling focus on "fighting migration" is better understood in the light of the moral dilemmas faced by migrants. During their first meeting, AMSAM members enthusiastically discussed the importance of "exposing the true realities" of their violent predicament—especially to people in their countries of origin. They were concerned that deceptive pictures published on social media by migrants pretending to have comfortable lives encouraged others "to take the road." They wanted to document through pictures and videos their squalid living conditions in the forests near the Spanish enclaves and in urban ghettoes like L'Ambassade, where migrants are subject to regular attacks by "unpredictable" Moroccan neighbors. My informants wished to reveal how daily life was riddled with arbitrary detention, police brutality, and deportation as Moroccan and Spanish authorities joined efforts to thwart migrants' movement. In lieu of migrants' prevalent self-descriptions as "adventurers" defiantly hopping over borders, they wanted to highlight the almost-insurmountable and deadly obstacles along their uncertain journeys.

I noted that the emphasis on "fighting migration" mirrors European hostile migration politics. The focus on informing would-be migrants about dangerous journeys though videos is reminiscent of campaigns highlighting risks funded by Western governments in countries of origin. This often elicited, at least initially, puzzled and hostile reactions from NGO practitioners and other migrants. Alex, a Cameroonian founding member of AMSAM, clarified: "We do not want to stop all emigration [but] to highlight the risks to avoid our brothers becoming *clandestins*, [to stress] that they can emigrate legally [instead]." Everyone acquiesced. Shortly after, AMSAM produced a leaflet titled "The West: The End of Misery," intended for migrants in Morocco as well as people in home countries.[4] The document draws a causal relationship between migrants' deaths and lack of information, lack of immigration documents, lack of work, and lack of money. The principal cause of death listed on the leaflet is the "dream of a better life; the West as 'the Eldorado on earth.'" The leaflet states that clandestine migration can be "reduced" thanks to testimonies showing migrants' precarious living conditions and calls for a shift from "clandestine migration to *immigration choisie* [chosen migration]." This refers to migrants choosing between migrating legally or not legally.

The term "immigration choisie" usually refers to quotas and criteria set by a country of immigration. It is set in contrast with *migration subie* [inflicted migration], which

refers to other migrants, for example, asylum seekers, who are deemed an undesirable burden (Lochak 2006). For the "undesirable" migrants within AMSAM, immigration choisie instead highlighted choices made by migrants. Although it is crucial to recognize that migrants exercise agency, it is important not to overlook how their choices over whether to move or to stay are constrained by states and other actors, for example, security companies. Some informants disclosed they had unsuccessfully applied for visas to reach European countries before "taking the road." For the European Union and its member states, securing borders to monitor and intercept migrants remain an essential concern that permeates relationships with third countries such as Morocco, as illustrated by the externalization of EU migration politics (Boswell 2003). Refuting the metaphor of a Fortress Europe, Henk van Houtum and Roos Pijpers (2007) argue that Europe is more akin to a "gated community," as the deadly "walls of conservative solidification [around the EU] also contain neoliberal mazes and conscious blindness for specific (illegal) labour forces that help to sustain the ease and comfort" (306). Depending on their country of origin, class, religion, gender and race, migrants are categorized as either "a productive force to be managed" or "a destructive force to be controlled" (Squire 2011, 2).

AMSAM members' allusions to "fighting against irregular migration" demonstrate how discourses and practices are entangled in complex "workings of power" (Abu-Lughold 1990, 42), whose analysis requires more than a romanticized account of resistance. As Squire (2011) argues, an analytical focus on irregularity requires an exploration of "how productive powers of (ab)normalization continuously encounter resistances, contestations, appropriations and re-appropriations of irregularity" (10). Such analytical focus is necessary, but I argue that it is crucial to give more analytical space to the exploration of complex and ambiguous "objectives" in migrant protests in order to look beyond the "hopeful confirmation of the failure—or partial failure—of systems of oppression" (Abu-Lughold 1990, 53). As Sherry Ortner (1995) states, creative and transformative potentials are better grasped "if one appreciates the multiplicity of projects in which social beings are always engaged, and the multiplicity of ways in which those projects feed on as well as collide with one another" (191). In the remainder of this section, I examine how this focus on the exposure of irregular migrants' precarious lives took on an additional meaning following interactions with other established NGOs.

As AMSAM collaborated with Moroccan NGOs and other migrants' associations, it became clear to others what members meant by "fighting migration." AMSAM members became acquainted with the vocabulary employed by advocacy NGOs, such as Moroccan antiracism organization Groupe Antiraciste de défense et d'accompagnement des étrangers et Migrants (GADEM), notably during events such as the Oujda forum. As Fabien, a founding member of AMSAM, said: "Before I did not even know that migrants had rights."[5] AMSAM joined international networks of practitioners, researchers, and activists elaborating joint actions to defend migrants' rights through platforms such as Migreurop. Shortly after the meeting mentioned in the opening of this article, a consensus was reached: AMSAM's overall aim became "shedding light onto clandestine migration to Morocco."

The focus on exposing the true realities in order to inform people in home countries remained but coexisted with an emphasis on denouncing the infringement of rights. The multiple meanings AMSAM members attributed to "shedding light on clandestine migration" are illustrated by the Number 9 campaign. In March 2013, AMSAM member Yvan visited the migrants' forest camps near Nador in northern Morocco with Sarah, an intern at *Forum des Alternatives Maroc* (Morocco Alternatives Forum). They met migrants tending to wounds received from the Spanish and Moroccan authorities during a recent attempt at climbing the fences around the Spanish enclave of Melilla. The so-called field mission

resulted in a dramatic video, entitled *Number 9*, depicting the last moments before Clément, a Cameroonian migrant, died from his head wounds.

The video received international coverage as the centerpiece of a campaign led by AMSAM, GADEM, and AMDH (Moroccan Association for Human Rights), to denounce violent infringements of migrants' rights by Morocco and Spain (Bachelet 2013). Fabien argued the video should be an instrument to denounce hostile politics of migration. Others, especially Alex, insisted the original focus on raising awareness in countries of origin should prevail. Eventually, the emphasis on denouncing the infringements of migrants' rights predominated in this campaign. This collaboration between AMSAM and GADEM on advocacy work for migrants continued with the compilation of a report (GADEM 2013), published in summer 2013 during a time of heightened brutality against migrants and increased mobilization amongst civil society.

The Number 9 campaign illustrates how AMSAM's focus on exposing the true realities, an approach not unusual for migrants' protests (see Cabot 2014), materialized in multiple projects. Concerns with exposing the infringement of migrants' rights and "reducing the percentage" of irregular migration were intertwined. Number 9 demonstrates the radical potential of migrants' political agency as they strive to overcome the uncertainty of their lives. Nevertheless, they protested when I used the term *political*. Most AMSAM members associated the term with partisan maneuvering. When setting up AMSAM, members shared their distrust of established migrant leaders and accused them of exploiting other migrants. Mehdi Alioua (2009) discusses how, after the 2005 events, there was a "*passage au politique*" (a shift to the political) when some migrant leaders, along with European and Moroccan activists, took part in workshops on EU politics of migration (293). Without claiming that migrants were not engaged in political activities simply because they did not use the term, it is clear that most AMSAM members started employing the term political as their interactions with NGOs and activists increased. However, tensions over the meaning of political as deceitful maneuvering endured as members worried others would in turn accuse them of exploiting migrants' suffering for their own gain. As with the Number 9 campaign, AMSAM members often had debates over whether they should focus more on politics or social work—without the members necessarily agreeing on what the limits of such categories were.

What it means to be political is a key concern in migration and citizenship scholarship, as it explores the radical potential of irregular migrants' movements and protests. AMSAM members' focus on exposing the true realities echoes Rancière's (2010) articulation of politics as "an intervention in the visible and the sayable" (36). For Rancière, there is no preexisting political subject, because being political entails "a capacity for staging scenes of dissensus" (69), which disrupts what can be heard and seen and what cannot by refiguring space. Politics is the institution of a dispute over what he calls the "distribution of the sensible"; that is, "the manner in which a relation between a shared common and the distribution of exclusive parts is determined in sensory experience" (36).

However, studies of migrants' protest demonstrate the tension between conceptions of the political as disrupting established hierarchies and as participating in them. For instance, Anne McNevin (2006) shows the paradox of the *Sans-Papiers* movement in France as migrants demanded the removal of boundaries for membership but also sought "formal inclusion within France via regularization in such a way as to accept and reinforce its existing boundaries" (146). In exemplifying this tension, AMSAM's focus on exposing the true realities—that is, their uncertain lives—also illustrates how scholars looking for the political among the excluded must focus on how the latter address and overcome the uncertainty that imbues their lives. In exposing their uncertain and precarious living

conditions, AMSAM members were disrupting what could be seen and heard in Morocco. They were pursuing their initial aim of reducing the percentage of migration and taking part in rights-based protests. Despite notable achievements, including international coverage in the media, the Number 9 campaign rapidly dwindled, and AMSAM members were left feeling they could have done a lot more, and that the video—like the death of the Cameroonian man it documented—was almost pointless. In the next section, I examine how AMSAM's articulation of political demands to reclaim their rights was not confined to Morocco as a host state.

"Getting Our Rights"

Shortly after the first AMSAM meeting in summer 2012, a series of violent assaults against sub-Saharan migrants, some of whom suffered serious stab wounds, led to a protest march by approximately one hundred migrants (including representatives of AMSAM and other migrant associations) from Douar Hajja to the adjacent neighborhood of Souissi. Moroccan police let them pass when migrants explained they were heading toward Cameroonian and Malian embassies. The latest casualties from attacks in Douar Hajja were mostly Malian and Cameroonian. Only vague promises resulted from the encounters at the embassies.

As an inhabitant of L'Ambassade explained, they had gone there "to get their rights." These rights pertained to being treated by sub-Saharan consulates and embassies on an equal basis with sub-Saharan students and businessmen in Morocco. Migrants appealed to a broad sense of justice, not to specific treaties and conventions. The focus on sub-Saharan diplomatic representatives was not surprising. Besides institutional violence and racism in Morocco, discussions within AMSAM and migrants' houses were focused on the lack of support, or overt hostility, from diplomatic representatives.[6]

Scholarship in citizenship studies focus prominently on the "host" state. However, as I have demonstrated here, it is crucial to account for the ways irregular migrants articulate political claims to different authorities. Sub-Saharan migrants addressed their own diplomatic representatives to denounce their treatment as second-class citizens. They were subjected to manifold forms of irregularization as their own diplomatic representatives routinely denied them assistance or even collaborated with Moroccan authorities. The coordinator of the support NGO Caritas recalled to me how he was puzzled by sub-Saharan ambassadors showing contempt for irregular migrants, even referring to them as criminals. Through AMSAM, members also often expressed the wish to denounce the general political and socioeconomic environment in their home countries and point to the responsibilities of their own representatives.

In spring 2013, after brutal incidents including violent arrests and deportations of migrants—including Senegalese migrants who held valid visas—a group of Senegalese organized a sit-in at their embassy to protest their diplomats' silent complicity with Moroccan authorities. The embassy called for the intervention of the Moroccan police, who violently arrested some of the participants within the grounds of the embassy. Almost a year after the march in Douar Hajja, AMSAM members joined other migrant associations and NGOs in June 2013 for several sit-ins to denounce the collaboration of Senegalese representatives in Rabat with Moroccan authorities in the mistreatment of migrants. Migrant associations wrote letters to sub-Saharan embassies to complain. Rather than simply decrying injustice, the letters of protest, following suggestions by a member of GADEM, referred to the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations and highlighted diplomats' duty of care for all conationals.

The arrest of Senegalese migrants was another example of the risks involved in political participation. Reconsidering what it means to be political in the light of irregular migrants'

demands and claims must not be equated with idealizing their political subjectivity. As cautioned by Coutin (2000), when analyzing tactics surrounding illegality, one must be wary not to romanticize "the space of non-existence" (28).[7] As illustrated above, despite articulating claims to address their predicament in Morocco, migrants continued to live uncertain and precarious lives. Some migrant leaders were arrested and detained on dubious charges by Moroccan authorities.

The collective mobilization following the arrest of Senegalese migrants further exemplifies the shift toward a more prominent focus on rights within AMSAM through collaboration with NGOs. However, such cooperation was similarly contested. In response to NGOs inviting migrants to share information, such as about violence in the borderlands, AMSAM members ironically commented that "we are the evidence" while hinting that NGOs (and anthropologists by extension) were making a living from their precarious conditions. In its early days, AMSAM's emphasis on exposing the true realities was also strongly associated with denouncing perceived injustices from NGOs, accused of privileging certain nationalities. Migrants sought to obtain more control over their dealings with NGOs because how decisions (e.g., over support) were made affected their lives greatly. Also, their grievances could be more easily articulated to NGOs than to Morocco or Europe.

As members canvassed Douar Hajja to increase AMSAM membership, they would often capitalize on resentment against NGOs and stress the importance of collective mobilization to obtain fair treatment. As AMSAM and NGOs started collaborating, members stated stressing that one of AMSAM's objectives was not only to act as "a bridge between migrants and NGOs" to ensure fair treatment but also to share information in order to improve support services. AMSAM members were concerned with being treated as citizens by their own diplomatic representatives as well as being treated fairly by NGOs supporting them. It is crucial for studies of migrants' protests, which often focus on the issue of citizenship in a host country, to also account for heteroclite political claims that are only addressed to the host state. In the next section, I explore how the uncertainty over AMSAM's multiple objectives paralleled its members' manifold migratory projects. I focus on the seeming contradiction between calls for regularization in Morocco and continued border-crossing attempts.

"A Migratory Association"
Although an exploration of sub-Saharan migrants' journeys is beyond the scope of this article, it is important to stress that many migrants in Douar Hajja had reached Morocco after long, nonlinear journeys.[8] The concept of a fixed destination was often a fallacy because their dangerous itineraries followed unexpected opportunities while circumventing obstacles. Challenging persistent categories such as forced-voluntary migration, my informants would explain that they were on "a quest for a life more bearable." This quest was also described as the need to *sortir* (exit) in order "to reach for the objective"—loosely explained as *se chercher* (looking for oneself) or *chercher sa vie* (looking for one's life). My informants would stress that this objective could be realized in Europe or elsewhere, including for some in Morocco itself if conditions improved. Hence, they often expressed the wish to return to their home countries, stay in Morocco, or move to Europe or elsewhere. They were "always in the process of feeling [their] way through the immediate convulsions of a fluid environment whilst simultaneously trying to gain an overview and make [their] way toward a point in or beyond the horizon" (Vigh 2009, 430).

Similarly, AMSAM members often described the association as having three "dimensions": to support all irregular migrants whether they wished to return, stay, or move on. However, the actual aims of AMSAM remained very much elusive, including to members

themselves. In this section, I discuss how members called for the regularization of migrants in Morocco while continuing to attempt crossing the border into Spain. This was apparently only a contradiction since it fit with AMSAM's dimensions and members' quest for the ambiguous "objective."

AMSAM is "*une association migratoire*" [a migratory association], Alex said, when his tongue slipped as he was promoting the association in Douar Hajja. Members often invoked the three dimensions and stressed that migrants should get involved, whatever their migratory plans. For them, fighting for migrants' rights and articulating political claims in Morocco was not contradictory with border-crossing attempts. Political mobilization was inscribed in their attempts at navigating everyday life and the hostile politics of migration while on their quest for the unclear objective. Many of those still trying to leave would explain that they might stay in Morocco if "conditions were better." The articulation of migrants' and AMSAM's ambiguous objectives is illustrated by how some of my informants transformed their failed attempts into what they called field missions. Upon returning to Rabat following unsuccessful crossings in the borderlands, some AMSAM members would write up "mission reports" documenting brutality by the authorities and share them with NGOs and other migrants' associations.[9]

Heath Cabot's (2014) analysis of the asylum system in Greece explores how "in part, both native Greek citizens and 'alien' subjects share in a similar political milieu: a newly emergent polis, a shifting landscape of citizenship" (199). In Morocco, the theme of the forum AMSAM members attended in Oujda ("another Maghreb and a different politics of migration are possible") illustrates the links between advocacy for migrant' rights and the building of a state of rights more broadly in Morocco. As Hicham Rachidi, a founding member of GADEM, put it to me, his advocacy work about migration "was also for his children in Morocco." Migrant leaders and civil society actors in Morocco "performing human rights" (Slyomovics 2005) together illustrates how citizens and "aliens" participate in transforming the Moroccan polity.

In discussing acts of citizenships, Walters (2008) stresses that focusing the analysis on "acts of citizenship" runs the risk of overlooking other kinds of politics "in which subjects refuse the identity of citizen" (193). Also as illustrated above, many AMSAM members simultaneously sought regularization in Morocco, requested to be treated as equal citizens by their diplomats, and attempted to cross into Europe. This exposes how migrants' mobility should not be overlooked when scholars focus on mobilizing politics; that is, by both examining how mobility is constituted as an object as well as rendering "politics mobile" (Squire 2011, 5). This seeming contradiction among AMSAM members illustrates further how social realities belie the apparent coherence inherent to how migration is conceptualized, since "nations can be interspersed, boundaries can be relocated, membership can be partial, 'citizenship' can be multiple, and movement can be multidirectional or even, at times, stationary" (Coutin 2007, 5).

From early on, Alex anticipated the mobility of AMSAM members throughout Morocco and beyond. He hoped that the association would have "offices" in other Moroccan cities for sub-Saharan migrants as members moved throughout the country, including in Fez, Nador, and Oujda. When two inhabitants of L'Ambassade decided to return to their home countries through Algeria and the Sahara, there were talks of them founding AMSAM offices in Cameroon and Nigeria. However, like many people who left Morocco, they cut off contact with acquaintances in Douar Hajja. Some AMSAM members expressed the wish to get involved with other issues, wherever they would be next if they left Morocco. Discussing what he had experienced and learned with AMSAM, Cameroonian Hervé explained he wanted to set up an organization for homeless children, as he had himself lived on the street

as a child in Cameroon. Many also expected that in Europe they would face difficulties and hoped to get politically involved once there. Through their involvement in uncertain politics, AMSAM members were also broadening the scope of their own objectives by considering new paths, such as more active political mobilization, for "finding their lives."

Conclusion
Exploring uncertainty as "a productive and investigative cue" (Cooper and Pratten 2015, 3), this article has examined the heterogeneity of multiple and seemingly contradictory claims articulated by irregular, sub-Saharan migrants within AMSAM. Recent scholarship in citizenship and migration studies emphasize how irregular migrants, subjected to processes of abnormalization, are nevertheless capable of agency. Political subjectivity is not limited to ritualized enactments stemming from formal belonging to a polity. Being a citizen is not a prerequisite to be political because irregular migrants retain their "faculty of action" (Arendt 1967, 179). Hence, migrants' movement and protests require a reexamination of "the political in relation to the unrepresentable" (Nyers 2010, 31). Scholars have highlighted the radical implications for migrants and others. In discussing the protest by *Sans-Papiers* at the Saint-Bernard church in 1996, Étienne Balibar (2000) argues what "we"—the political community—"owe" them. He argues that the protest of those irregular migrants has "recreated citizenship among us, insofar as it is not an institution, nor a status, but a collective practice" (42). Further, Mezzadra (2004) stresses that a focus on "the immanently political character of the mobility of migrant labour" can be "a decisive theoretical step for articulating a critique of capitalism" (175).

While they highlight the tension and ambivalence between mechanisms of exploitation and migrants' "autonomous" movement, these studies run the risk of romanticizing and homogenizing migrants' political subjectivity. AMSAM members' call for "fighting against clandestine migration" does not fit neatly with those studies that examine how migrant protests "respond to and expose the abject politics of citizenship, often by *harnessing abjection as a form of politics*" (Tyler 2013, 74). When examining violent processes of exclusion, scholars "owe" it to migrants to account for and engage with their heteroclite demands. Failing to respond to this ethical imperative while studying the political demands of migrants, "whose lives and miseries provide us with a livelihood" (Scheper-Hughes 1995, 420), would render scholars complicit in those same processes of exclusion.

Political participation among my informants from Central and Western Africa in Morocco does not fit well with conceptions of the political that privilege radical disruption over participation in an established order. Some of the activities carried out by AMSAM members (e.g., the emphasis on "exposing the true realities," especially in its primary articulation) seem estranged from what might be expected from irregular migrants when looking for disrupting acts. This article shifts the exploration of what it means to be political among migrants by examining how migrants' political participation is entangled with their attempts to overcome the uncertainty inherent to their lives. AMSAM members pursued overlapping and sometimes conflicting claims, as illustrated by the Number 9 campaign and the shifting meaning of the impetus to "fight clandestine migration." For migrants, like other subjects, being political does not equate with a uniform set of demands. In exploring the US sanctuary movement, Coutin (1993) illustrates how a "movement's stated goals are not always as coherent or undisputed as researchers assume" (170). Beyond migration studies, scholars have explored how ambiguities and contradictions are inherent to social movements (Rubin 1998). Examining migrants' political subjectivity requires engagement with how migrants attempt to overcome the uncertainty that permeates their lives by making multiple demands and claims. In this article, I explored how such claims are addressed not only to the

host state but also, in the case of AMSAM, to diplomatic representatives and NGOs. Further, the uncertain set of multiple objectives within AMSAM mirrored how members were constantly gauging opportunities, as they often simultaneously considered staying on, moving elsewhere, and returning home. That some AMSAM migrants held banners asking for regularization in Morocco and attempted to cross the border to Spain is not a contradiction but an illustration of how migrants navigate the political realm to "find their lives" in an uncertain political context.

Notes

1. All names of individual persons are pseudonyms. AMSAM (The Association of Migrants from sub-Saharan Africa in Morocco) is not the real name of the migrants' organization.
2. On the role of doubt to reach decisions in law and ritual, see Berti, Good, and Tarabout (2015).
3. The countries of origin most cited, which matched my own observations, were Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Senegal, Guinea, Mali, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Migrants were predominantly male and of working age. Other scholars have noted an increase in female sub-Saharan migrants (Escoffier 2008).
4. I printed the leaflet at my expense after members expressed the wish to produce one. They hoped the leaflet would help increase membership and enable them to obtain funding from NGOs. Although AMSAM did collaborate with NGOs, they did not receive regular funding. Small expenses (e.g., transport to conferences) were sometimes covered. There were, however, constant accusations among members about withholding money from NGOs. As an advisor, I contributed modest sums for printing and Internet credit to circulate press releases and reports. AMSAM members routinely incurred expenses and sometimes missed work opportunities to carry out the work of their association. Many resented being "voluntary" while NGO members received salaries.
5. To ensure the anonymity of my informants, I refrain from stating their position within AMSAM, and also titles and positions were confusing. AMSAM had several types of secretaries and spokespersons, and most positions were also doubled. The uncertainty over AMSAM members' roles was an early strategy from the founding president to multiply opportunities for migrants to be included in the running committee of the association and to ensure participation from as many sub-Saharan nationalities present in Douar Hajja. However, this was often a source of arguments among AMSAM members.
6. The places migrants lived in bore symbolic names (e.g., L'Ambassade), which illustrate both the omnipresence of politics in migrants' lives and the pervasiveness of their discontent with their diplomatic representatives.
7. On migrants' spatial tactics of [in]visibility, see Barenboim (2016).
8. On migrants' published accounts of their journeys, see Traoré and Le Dantec (2012).
9. The continued mobility of AMSAM members was not always beneficial as projects often stopped when members left.

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