

### *The Joy and Hardship of an African Immigrant in Spain*

An athletically-built Senegalese man in his late twenties walked confidently into the dark Irish bar in Northern Spain. He carried a bag full of knock-off watches and bootleg DVDs. After my friends and I declined to buy a watch or DVD, the African sat down with us because he was done working for the night.

We recognized him from our three-month tenure in Oviedo and offered him a drink. He declined because his Islamic devotion prohibits intoxicants.

The African spoke to us in decent Spanish, which, due to our study abroad classes, we reciprocated. He didn't know Spanish before he arrived in Spain five months ago, though he found comfort in speaking his native Arabic with other Senegalese gentlemen in the neighborhood.

The immigrant's parents died when he was a young man. His brother lives in France (he thinks) with a wife and child. He said that it was impossible for him to find a job in Senegal, a common feeling among other Senegalese men.

Through a mutual connection, the African encountered a program through which he could illegally migrate to a western European city, live in an apartment with other Africans from Darfur and Cameroon, and land a semi-secure job.

The African sells DVDs, watches, statues, and CDs made by Spanish people, he said. He has no passport. According to a Spanish classmate, the operation's chief oversees the less-than-legal travel and housing for all workers in his program.

The immigrant spent three months moving from Senegal to Morocco. Then, he spent one week traveling through France and six days in Italy. He went to Madrid and finally settled in his predetermined northern Iberian city.

Why Spain? The African said that the police in Spain are much more tranquil. The police in France and Italy would have him arrested quickly and he would be sent back to Senegal. As long as he doesn't cause trouble, the police seem to look the other way.

The local Spaniards have mixed feelings about the growing Senegalese immigrant presence in their city. My Spanish tutor doesn't mind them and thinks they are friendly, polite, and simply trying to earn a living like everyone else.

Another tutor advised me to avoid certain parts of my neighborhood because "immigrants live there", which she insinuated to be a dangerous notion.

Bartenders welcome them into their establishments, though most customers brush them off. The owner of the bar we were in seemed to have a mutual respect for the immigrant, razzing him about his name, while the immigrant fired back with references to the bartender's height.

Alex, a Venezuelan bartender, said he didn't mind the salesman entering his bar. It didn't take away from business and it helped the men in their efforts to pursue a living.

We saw the African a few more times before our departure from our program. He constantly smiled and said *hola* every time we crossed paths.

He and his wife lived in my neighborhood and seemed genuinely happy. As for his future plans, he hopes to remain in Spain and receive legal residency some day.