

## Unwanted sea migrants across the EU border: The Canary Islands



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### ABSTRACT

In the early 2000s, the Canary Islands emerged as the main gateway for unwanted sea migrants from Senegal into Spain. In this paper, I draw from a year of multi-sited ethnographic work to discuss the relationship between state actions to secure the border against these migrants, on the one hand; and smugglers and migrants' efforts to subvert those actions, on the other. My argument is that the relationship between the two is mutually constitutive: anti-immigration policy is a reaction to the actions of unwanted migrants, and unwanted migrants adapt to state efforts to seal the border against unwanted migration by finding and exploiting spaces of opportunity in the border. In the context of sea migration from Senegal to the Canary Islands, 2005 marks a major shift in this relationship. That year the European Union adopted a new framework for migration control (the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility), Frontex became operational, and Spain and Senegal deepened their cooperation to stop unwanted Europe-bound sea migration. This forced unwanted migrants to find creative ways to enter EU territory. I argue that combining the institutional and migrant perspectives allows us to explore the decentering of the state in the contemporary anti-immigration border regime, the emerging spatialities of the contemporary border, and understand the migrant's journey. This perspective also illuminates the messiness, violence, and multiplicity of interests involved in the bordering of Europe.

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Spain's "fight"<sup>1</sup> against unwanted sea migrants started soon after the country joined the EU. The first of such migrants arrived from the Maghreb in the 1990s, coinciding with the entrance of international migration into the realm of high European and global politics (Collyer, Düvell, & de Haas, 2012). These sea migrants crossed the section of the Mediterranean sea between Morocco and Algeria in *pateras*, shallow vessels used to smuggle people or drugs (Gabella Maroto, 2004; Olea, 2009, pp. 8–13). The *patera* "crisis" led to the creation of the SIVE or Integrated System for External Border Surveillance in 2002 – a system that relies on advanced satellite technology to detect illegal border crossings and transmit information about the location of vessels between detection stations, control centers, and intervention units (Ministerio del Interior,

2010).

It was at this time that, fueled by the securitization of international human mobility that followed the 9/11 attacks (Huysmans, 2006; Hyndman, 2012), Clandestine Transnational Actors or CTAs (Andreas, 2003) became identified with the three big wars of wealthy governments: "the war on drugs; the war on terror; and, increasingly dubiously intertwined with the latter, the war on 'illegal' migration" (van Houtum, 2010, p. 958). Unwanted migrants and asylum seekers have increasingly become identified as a "vector of insecurity" (Hyndman, 2012, p. 246) and a source of fear used to justify drastic anti-immigration measures in receiving countries (Hyndman, 2012; Mountz, 2010).

This article focuses on the relation between anti-immigration efforts along the Atlantic route used by unwanted sea migrants to reach EU territory through the Canary Islands, and migrants' actions to cross that border. My goal is to demonstrate the mutually constitutive relationship between a restrictive structural context and the agency of migrants crossing the border.

Key to this discussion is the concept of agency. Here I understand agency as "actions, activities, decisions and behaviours, that represent some measure of meaningful choice" (Deacon and Mann, 1999; cited in Cook, Dwyer, & Waite, 2010, p. 73). This "meaningful

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the article, I will be applying warfare terms used in a variety of government reports related to the state's attempt to curb (and eventually eliminate) unwanted sea migration. However, while using analogies such as "fight", "invasion", or "crisis" helps understand the overall framework of interpretation of undesired international migration within which policy was designed and implemented, I signal my disagreement with the adequacy of these terms by the use of quotation marks.

choice” is necessarily constrained by structural factors determined, in this case, mainly by Spanish and EU efforts to stop unwanted sea migration (e.g., military presence along the border and deportation agreements with countries of origin and transit of migration). Unwanted migrants push against these structural constraints from the time they set off, and continue to do so as they cross the border and blend themselves into the socio-economic fabric of the EU. Through the exercise of their limited power to move, unwanted border crossers become a “turbulence” in the contemporary border regime, and “openly challenge, defeat, escape or trouble the dominant politics of mobility (including border control, detention, and deportation)” (Tazzioli, De Genova, Mezzadra, & Garelli, 2014, p. 26). They force the state to react. In this sense, here I explore agency as a “creative force” (Casas-Cortés, Cobarrubias, & Pickles, 2015) that is closest to the concepts of “migrant struggle” or “tactics of the weak” (using de Certeau’s term, as developed in Collyer, 2012), deployed to create even ephemeral openings in a hostile environment. Thus understood, migrants’ agency contributes to “re-drawing the cognitive and literal maps of territoriality, border, belonging, sovereignty and experience” (Casas-Cortés et al., 2015, p. 900) in the EU.

The discussion is structured in 6 main sections. The methodology section explains the procedure followed to collect the information and is followed by an overview of contemporary migration from Senegal to Spain. The theoretical framework summarizes the three areas of the literature on borders and migration most relevant to the arguments advanced on this paper (the decentering of the nation-state in the contemporary global anti-immigration regime, the spatiality of the new border, and migrants’ journeys). The empirical sections that follow present the main developments along the EU border with West Africa before and after 2005 – a year that marked a major shift in the EU’s approach to the control of unwanted migration.

## 1. Methodology

This discussion draws primarily from data collected during a year of multi-sited ethnographic work conducted in Senegal (origin), Morocco (transit) and Spain (destination) between 2009 and 2010 (for specific research sites see [Maps 1 and 2](#) below). Multi-sited ethnography is a methodological approach particularly well suited to study phenomena related to international migration, which, by definition, involves two or more socio-cultural and legislative contexts (Marcus, 1995). This methodological approach allows the researcher to study the relationship between different spaces (origin – transit – destination) and policy contexts, in this case combining the perspective of migrants and policymakers. Multi-sited ethnography is increasingly popular in border studies, particularly as the subdiscipline moves towards documenting the working of the new global border regime as it is experienced by migrants (Andersson, 2014; Mainwaring and Bridgen, 2016).

This study puts into conversation the experiences, knowledges, and interests of four main groups of participants. A first group of respondents were Senegalese sea migrants who had entered Spanish territory via the Canary Islands and had been intercepted by state/EU forces ( $n = 18$ ); these migrants had been either deported to West Africa or flown to the mainland when migrant detention centers (*Centros de Internamiento de Extranjeros* or CIES) were critically over capacity, a common practice particularly between 2004 and 2008 (Andersson, 2014). Second, there were former smugglers ( $n = 3$ ), recruited in Spain among sea migrants and through local organizations in Senegal. Third, there were representatives of state agencies or departments in charge of immigration and border control ( $n = 5$ ), such as the Spanish *Guardia Civil* and the Senegalese *Gendarmerie*, the two national military forces in

charge of border control. These respondents were recruited using a snowballing method using personal connections within political parties and national security forces as a starting point. Fourth, I interviewed representatives of organizations engaged in the development of policy targeting unwanted sea migrants, providing services to sea migrants intercepted by state forces and returned to West Africa, involved in humanitarian work, or working to support the families of migrants drowned in transit to the Canary Islands ( $n = 20$ ). These respondents were recruited through my own personal networks. All names have been changed to protect participants’ identities.

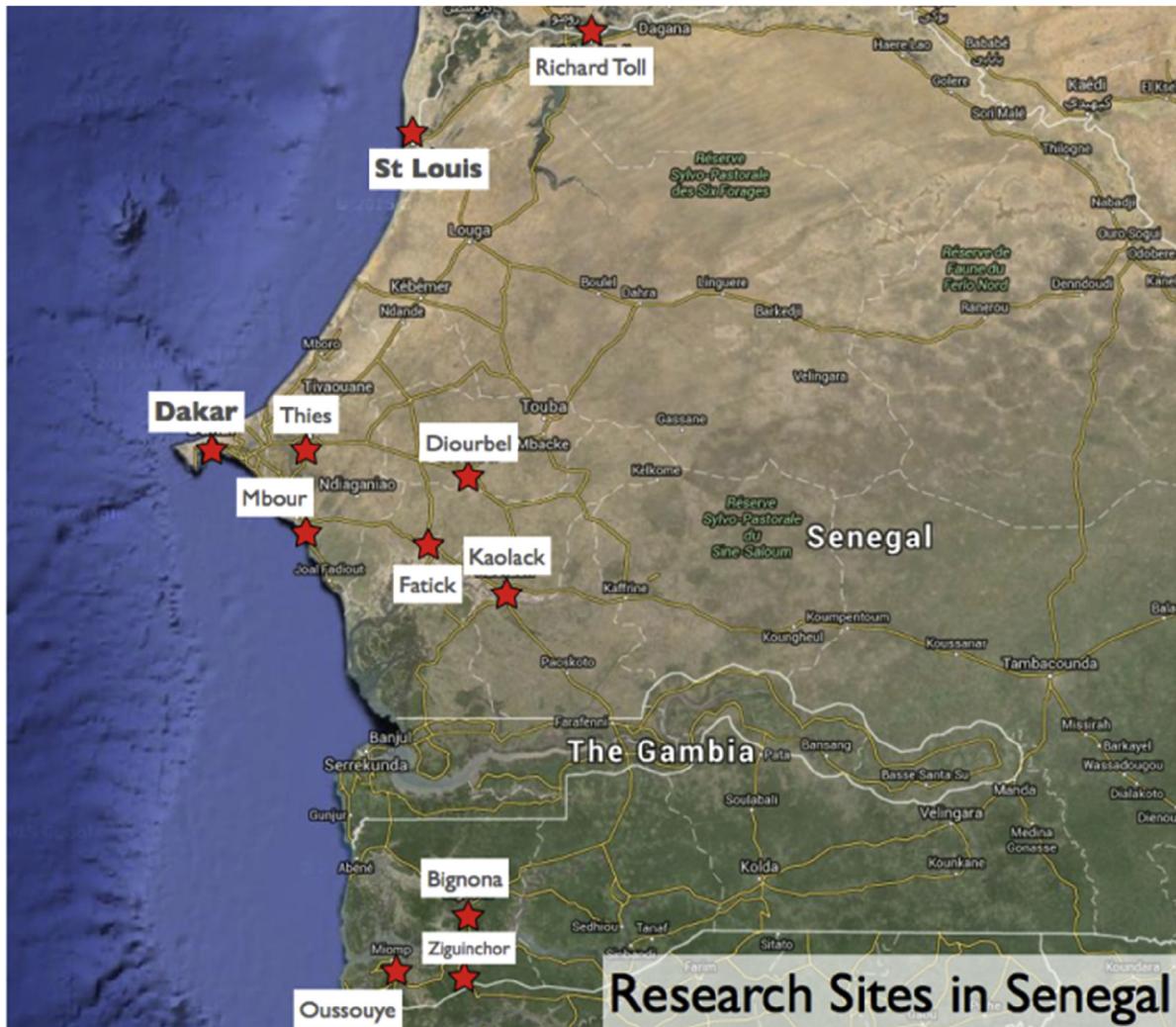
## 2. Migration from Senegal to Spain

Spain’s efforts to secure its maritime border underwent a major shift as the country became a preferred destination for migrants originating from West Africa, particularly from Senegal. A number of factors triggered the opening of the West African/Atlantic route. There is a long and rich history of international migration in Senegal, both within and beyond West Africa (Diop, 2008). The Senegalese economy has traditionally relied on the largely artisanal fishing and agricultural industries, both vulnerable to changes in climate and the international market (Dagbegnon, Djebou, Price, Kibriya, & Ahn, 2017; Nyamnjoh, 2010; Sall & Morand, 2008). Since the 1980s worsening environmental conditions, a steady decline in the country’s fisheries due to overfishing by foreign companies, and structural adjustments imposed by the International Monetary Fund have forced much of the country’s population into poverty (Diop, 2008; Fall 2010). Fishing and rural communities have been hard hit by the steady decline of the Senegalese economy. There is a particularly close link between the fishing and migration industries: between 2000 and 2010, fishermen were the main candidates to sea migration to the Canary Islands; and, because they had the skills and equipment to carry out this migration, for the first half of this period they were also the main facilitators, or smugglers (Sall & Morand, 2008). This came to a halt in 2005 with the criminalization of smuggling activities in the Senegalese legislation (discussed below).

As a result of this combination of factors, migrants have become a vital source of income for Senegalese families. The country is currently the third top ten recipient of remittances in Sub-Saharan Africa (Adams, Klobodu, & Lamptey, 2017; World Bank Group, 2016). Remittances make up somewhere between 11.9 and 20% of the country’s GDP (Daffé, 2008; World Bank, n.d. a). As a result, international migration is a family business – encouraged, sponsored, and benefitting migrants’ close and extended families (Herman, 2006; Vives Gonzalez, 2012).

In the early 2000s two main factors made Spain attractive for Senegalese migrants looking for opportunities abroad. The first factor was the high demand for cheap immigrant labour in the largely unregulated agricultural and hospitality sectors. Repeated amnesties offering undocumented immigrants the opportunity to regularize their situation in the country (provided certain conditions were met) were also an incentive. However, reaching Spanish territory was a journey full of obstacles. There were virtually no legal ways in for people who wished to resettle in Spain legally. Senegalese nationals who chose Spain as their destination worked within and against a highly restrictive structural context. They were forced to find creative ways to circumvent and, in some cases, cheat a normative environment designed to prevent their mobility – and in doing so contributed to re-drawing European borders.

In fact, most Senegalese citizens living in Spain in 2009 had entered the country as tourists, or had accessed the territory through another EU country and resettled in Spain, eventually becoming undocumented (Vives Gonzalez, 2012). This is consistent



**Map 1.** Research sites in Senegal (Richard Toll, St Louis, Dakar, Thiès, Diourbel, Mbour, Fatick, Kaolack, Bignona, Ziguinchor, Oussouye). Modified map, original map data ©2016 Google Maps.

with observations on the phenomenon of irregular migration to Europe, where only a small minority of undocumented migrants had crossed the border illegally at that time, either by land or by sea (de Haas, 2008). The routes unwanted migrants used to reach Spanish territory illegally changed between 2000 and 2010, demonstrating the “troubling” (Tazzioli et al., 2014) and “creative” (Casas-Cortés et al., 2015) of migrants’ agency, as well as the impact that their quick response to a rapidly evolving institutional context had on the closing of Spain’s borders. Before 2005, illegal crossings happened primarily through the land border separating Morocco from Ceuta and Melilla, two Spanish enclaves in northern Africa. The border “crisis” in the fall of 2005 (when large groups of unwanted migrants attempted to jump over the fences in large groups) led to the reinforcement of the land borders (El Mundo, 2005; Collyer, 2012). Following these events, the Spanish government escalated surveillance of the land border, advanced cooperation with Moroccan state forces, and made the fences separating both countries taller and harder to climb (Ferrer-Gallardo, 2008). Increased security along the land border between Spain and Morocco motivated unwanted migrants to look for another way into the EU: this is how the Atlantic (or West African) route gained relevance in 2005 (APDHA., 2007; Collyer, 2012; Keygnaert et al., 2014). Senegalese migrants (particularly, young men from coastal

fishing communities) took to this route in earnest, in turn forcing the Spanish government and the EU to find ways to seal that section of the border against unwanted migration.

The Spanish government and the EU responded to the emergence of the Atlantic route by expanding the SIVE to the Canary Islands in 2007 and 2008 (Ministerio del Interior, 2010) and developing a multi-faceted anti-immigration strategy along and beyond the border (Vives, 2017). Unwanted sea migration from West Africa to the Canary Islands is a rare occurrence nowadays. This is a result of anti-immigration efforts, but it also reflects Spain’s loss of status as a country of immigration. The economic crisis Spain has been immersed in since 2008 has had a tremendous impact on labour niches traditionally occupied by undocumented immigrants. The maps produced by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) have gone from depicting the archipelago at the receiving end of a series of arrows to surrounding the Islands with calm-looking waves – the area under SIVE surveillance and monitored by the EU’s external borders agency, Frontex (see Map 3, below).

### 3. Border Encounters: the state and the migrant

In recent years, researchers have expanded the areas of inquiry



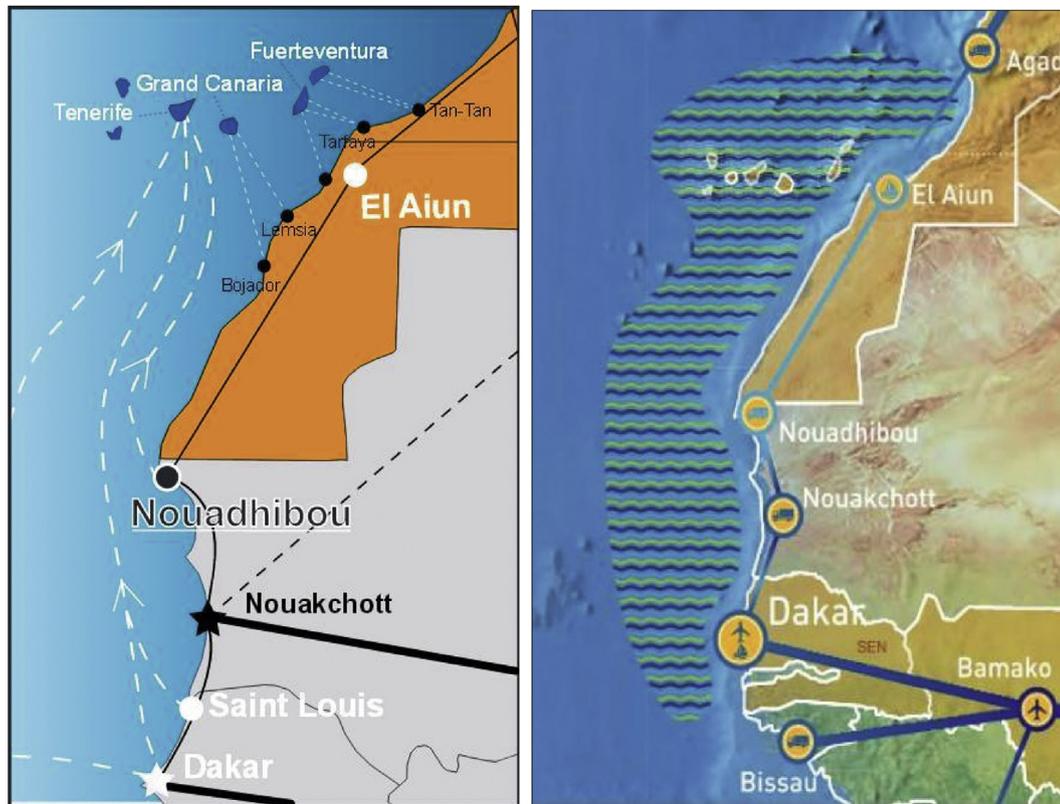
**Map 2.** Research sites in Spain (Madrid, Granada, Roquetas de Mar, Ceuta) and Morocco (Tangiers). Modified image, original map data ©2016 Google Maps.

at the overlap between border and migration studies, with a focus on how borders are increasingly designed to prevent the arrival of unwanted migrants to countries in the Global North. These are usually migrants from racialized groups originating from poor countries; sometimes their religious affiliation (real or perceived) contributes to making them unwanted. Three areas of focus are key to the arguments that will be developed in this article: the decentering of the nation-state in border studies, the exploration of new spatialities of the anti-immigration border, and the exploration of migrants' journeys/itineraries.

First, scholars have observed the emergence of a new global border regime for the control of unwanted migration (Anderson & Bigo, 2003; Burrige, Gill, Kocher, & Martin, 2017; Johnson et al., 2011; Walters, 2002). The state continues to play a key role in the coming into being of this regime. Upon close scrutiny, however, the figure and workings of the state at the border reveal far more internal dissonance than a Westphalian vision of the state would allow for. In these studies, the state emerges as a fragmented actor plagued by internal contradictions and conflicts (Gupta, 2006; Mountz, 2010; Mountz & Loyd, 2013). Anti-immigration policies

are a result of risk management calculations, financial incentives, and political interests and reveal a new form of border sovereignty that involves a large number of stakeholders and interests (Andersson, 2014; Andrijasevic & Walters, 2010; Mountz, 2010; Vives, 2017; de Haas, 2008). These stakeholders are based in countries of origin and transit (Andersson, 2014; Kaytaz, 2016; Mainwaring and Brigden, 2016; Üstübcü, 2016) as well as in destination countries (Vives Gonzalez, 2012; see also articles in Burrige et al., 2017), challenging the idea of the state's exclusive sovereignty of/at its territorial border. The decentering of the state has been particularly pronounced in the context of the EU, due to both efforts to standardize migration policy throughout the Union and to the supranationalization of some border surveillance and control efforts along the external border (e.g., the creation of Frontex).

Non-state actors have necessarily been integrated into these analyses of the anti-immigration border. In the context of the EU and Spain, the politization and securitization of migration (Huysmans, 2006) has provided financial and political incentives for research institutions such as the Swedish Defence Research



**Map 3.** Migration routes by sea between West Africa and the Canary Islands in 2006 (left) and 2014 (right). Source: Mediterranean Transit Migration i-Map, maps on migration routes (ICMPD, 2006; 2014).

Institute or International Centre for Migration Policy; private security companies such as Airbus, Indra, or Proytexsa; and humanitarian groups such as the Spanish Red Cross to become involved in the management of the border with Africa (Ferrer-Gallardo, 2008; Jones, 2017; Vives, 2017). As Andersson (2014) demonstrates in his exploration of the EU-Africa border, the control of unwanted migration has become a business with many interested partners – and the “illegal” migrant is its central commodity to be produced and exploited.

Second, scholars have kept a close eye on the new spatialities exhibited by the new global border regime within and beyond the sovereign territory of the receiving state (Johnson et al., 2011; Burrige et al., 2017). In particular, researchers have explored the impact of processes of militarization of the border (Carrera, 2007a, 2007b; Vives Gonzalez, 2012; Vives, 2017); externalization of border responsibilities and deterrence strategies (Ryan, 2010; Vives, 2017; Watkins, 2017); excision of territories from national migration policy (Hyndman & Mountz, 2007; Mountz, 2004; 2011); the use of islands as test sites for anti-immigration initiatives (Bernardie-Tahir & Schmoll, 2014; Coddington, Catania, Loyd, Mitchell-Eaton, & Mountz, 2012; Cuttitta, 2014; Loyd & Mountz, 2014; Triandafyllidou, 2014); and the increasing reliance on detention and deportation of unwanted migrants (Coddington et al., 2012; Coleman, 2009; Ferrer-Gallardo & Albet-Mas, 2013; Hiemstra, 2013; Migreurop, 2012). The Europeanization of migration policies within areas covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy and beyond, and the supranationalization of border and migration control has received much scholarly attention (see for example Bialasiewicz, Giaccaria, Jones, & Minca, 2012; Casas-Cortés, Cobarrubias, & Pickles, 2013; Dünnwald, 2011; Jones, 2006; Jones et al., 2011; Mountz & Loyd, 2013). In particular, geographers have

been keen to analyze the ways in which Frontex, the Union's Global Approach to Migration and Mobility, and technology have transformed the national border, in fact triggering a transition towards a more supranational one (Amoore, 2006, 2007; Amoore, Marmura and Salter, 2008; Carrera, 2007a, 2007b; Casas-Cortés, Cobarrubias, & Pickles, 2016; Ferrer-Gallardo & van Houtum, 2014; Vives, 2017). Throughout these processes, the border emerges as a practice more than a site: borders become through their ongoing re-creation through performance of both mundane and exceptional tasks in response to so called migration crises (Amoore, 2006; Cuttitta, 2014; Mountz, 2010; Salter, 2011).

Scholars have attempted to capture these transformations of the EU's anti-immigration border using a number of metaphors that emphasize the role of security and the threats racialized migrants supposedly embody. For example, these studies compare the EU's anti-immigration border with a network (Rumford, 2006) or a firewall (Walters, 2006). The resulting Europe resembles a fortress (Carter & Merrill, 2007; Geddes, 2000), a gated community (van Houtum & Pijpers, 2007), or a contemporary global Apartheid (van Houtum, 2010). While all of these metaphors add to our understanding of the EU border, none of them capture a new border that is, by all accounts, a “territorially extended, increasingly informal and itinerant bordering assemblage of institutions, state authorities, and policies that react to dynamic and turbulent migratory movements” (Casas-Cortés et al., 2016, p. 232). Moreover, these scholars (whose work focuses, for the most part, on border governance from an institutional perspective) have struggled to integrate the role that unwanted migrants have had, and continue to have, on the process of bordering the EU.

The figure of the unwanted migrant as a “troubling factor” (Tazzioli et al., 2014), or a “creative force” redrawing the borders of

the EU (Casas-Cortés et al., 2015) has been the focus of a third area of the literature relevant for this discussion. This literature examines the ways in which migrant agency is exercised through migrant journeys/itineraries, articulated around the moment of the border crossing. The experiences of unwanted, racialized, and undocumented migrants involved in precarious travel are central to these discussions (see for example Andersson, 2014; Casas-Cortés et al., 2015; Collyer, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2012; Kaytaz, 2016; Vives, 2017; Vives Gonzalez, 2012). A foundational concept is that of the journey, understood not as a linear travel from A to B, but as a fragmented and discontinuous experience “constituted of long periods of immobility punctuated by shorter instances of travel” (Kaytaz, 2016, p. 285). The concept of itinerary, although less developed in the literature, is relevant here as well. The itinerary can be drawn on a map: it links places of origin and destination, indicating specific routes migrants used to get from one to another and stops along the way (see for example Casas-Cortés et al., 2015). Unwanted migrants’ itineraries towards and across the border of the EU are a crucial instrument deployed by European governments in emerging anti-immigration institutional responses to this phenomenon, such as for example the 2005 Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (discussed below).

The concept of the journey builds onto that of the itinerary. However, while an itinerary can be shown in a map, re-creating a journey requires a narrative rich in details about the whos, hows, whens, and whys of unwanted migrants’ strategy to reach and cross the border. In other words, migrant journeys point to key moments where migrants are able to exercise their (limited) power in a repressive structural context; these are the moments when migrants emerge as agents of transformation of European territorialities along the border. Thanks to the concept of the journey, we witness how migrants as well as smugglers develop an intimate knowledge of, engage with, and adapt to the various spaces and geographies they encounter (Mainwaring and Bridgen, 2016). Importantly, migrants’ journey narratives problematize some of the central categories exploited by the state to enforce the anti-immigration border. An example is the concept of smuggling, and the distinction between smuggling and trafficking (van Liempt & Doornik, 2006; van Liempt, 2007, 2011; van Liempt & Sersli, 2012). Focusing on migrants’ journeys also allows us to understand the contrasting timelines and strategies used by the state and the migrant. Whereas the former is limited by their vision of the space “from above” and a multiplicity of legal and jurisdictional constraints, the migrant and their transnational network can quickly adapt to cracks in the EU’s anti-immigration architecture with a practical, intimate, and networked knowledge of the geographies of the border (Mountz, 2010).

#### 4. The years before the “crisis” sea migration to the canary islands between 2000 and 2005

Between 2000 and 2005, the number of undocumented sea migrants intercepted by the Spanish Guardia Civil in the Canary Islands oscillated between 5000 and 10,000 per year (Ministerio del Interior, 2014) (see Graph 1). This migration was often arranged informally by fishermen who had the skills and the equipment to smuggle their neighbors and relatives into Spain by *pirogues* (the traditional Senegalese wooden fishing boat used to smuggle migrants by sea). One of these boats is pictured in Image 1.

The data available on Senegalese migrants who reached (or tried to reach) the Canary Islands by *pirogue* has been compiled by the Spanish Ministry of the Interior and from the Red Cross, the humanitarian organization in charge of processing migrants forcibly returned to Mauritania and Senegal. Between 2006 and 2010 most of these returned migrants were sea migrants, although a number

of them had been apprehended inland by Mauritanian authorities under the premises their intention was to migrate to the EU illegally (see for example Amnesty International, 2008; CIMADE, 2010). According to a report published in 2010, 99.6% of the more than 5000 returned migrants that passed through the different processing camps run by the Red Cross/Red Crescent in Senegal were men; 56.7% of them were Senegalese, mostly from urban areas with large fishing communities (Ziguinchor, Dakar, and Saint Louis; Red Cross, 2010).<sup>2</sup> The vast majority of these migrants were employed prior to their departure with an declared average salary of 101.66 Euros/month — an amount below the average monthly income for the country, but above the poverty line established by the World Bank for Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, n.d. b).

After the land border with Ceuta and Melilla was closed in late 2005, the Canary Islands emerged as the back door to Europe for young Senegalese men. These migrants reached the Canary Islands by hiring smugglers. The following extract from an interview with a former fisherman-smuggler captures the informal and occasional nature of this early smuggling industry:

When we went fishing, sometimes we went quite far. So when all this fuss about migrating to Europe started we [I and other fishermen] thought we could make some money taking people from our village, relatives, neighbours, friends and friends of friends. It was our way of making some money on the side. Things are hard here in Senegal, it's not easy to support one's family (smuggler 1, interview, 2009; my translation).

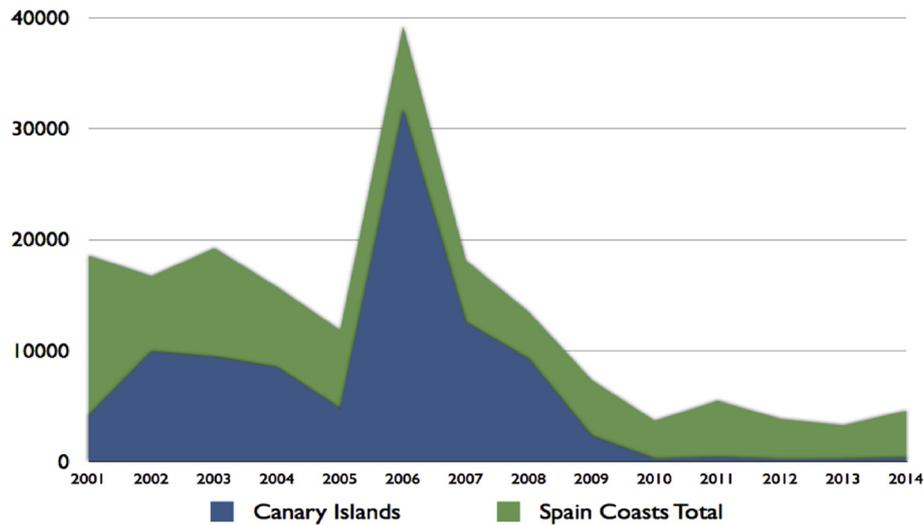
This was the time when graffiti sprung in the poor fishing communities of Dakar and Saint Louis (the hotbeds of sea migration) with the motto “Barça ou Barsaax”: to go to Barcelona or die (for a discussion see Tandian, 2007; Schmitz, 2008). These men were often encouraged by their families to leave (women were not allowed in the *pirogues* because they were considered unclean, and believed to put others at risk for this reason) (Vives Gonzalez, 2012). Sea migration was, in fact, a “family business” (Herman, 2006). In return for their in-cash and in-kind investment in the migratory project, family members expected a high return in the form of remittances from Europe; and, because their contribution to the wretched local economies, migrants were model relatives, admired husbands, and coveted husbands. The pressure on young men to migrate increased exponentially as neighbors’ success stories spread through the impoverished neighborhoods of the Senegalese coast (Tandian, 2007; Vives Gonzalez, 2012).

This pressure provided huge incentives to fishermen who had the knowledge and expertise to smuggle themselves and others into the Canary Islands and often worked with businessmen (Senegalese or otherwise) to organize the trips. As the respondent above mentioned, trips in this early stage of sea migration to the archipelago were organized and funded through personal connections — usually through extended kinship networks. This quote from Mayecor (a sea migrant I met in Southern Spain) was typical of the way these trips were arranged:

My mother explained to the owner of the *pirogue* [her brother's nephew] that I wanted to go and arranged for me to be on the boat. Each person paid a thousand euros, 750.000 CFA francs. I had my store and some savings. So he said, “give me 1.000 euros and I'll take you.” (...) I arrived in Spain 8 days later. (Mayecor, interview, 2010; my translation).

The price of the ticket could be paid in cash or in-kind: in these early stages, migrants who could not afford to pay for their travel

<sup>2</sup> The remaining 43.3% migrants were nationals of other West African countries. These migrants were taken to the Senegalese border closest to their country of origin and given pocket money to return home (Andersson, 2014; Vives Gonzalez, 2012).



**Graph 1.** Number of sea migrants intercepted by state forces when trying to reach Spanish territory by place of entry, all Spanish coasts (green) and the coasts of the Canary Islands (blue), 2001–2014. Source:Ministerio del Interior (2014). (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)



**Image 1.** Traditional fishing boat (pirogue) arriving at Nget Daar, Saint Louis. Photo by the author (2009).

still got a spot on the boat, either by recruiting other migrants or by performing certain tasks during the trip (e.g., assisting with the distribution of food and water onboard).

The tight personal connections that were typical of the early smuggling industry in Senegal meant that smugglers could be held accountable by their own communities. Smugglers had an incentive to prepare the trip well to make it as safe as circumstances allowed, or they would face consequences. The experience of a young man from a fishing community near Saint Louis illustrates this point:

My friend gave me an address in Saint Louis, close to my home. I went to ask about the trip, but the captain said there were no boats leaving: the next trip was to leave Dakar in a couple of weeks. (...) When we left it was very, very windy, and there were heavy seas. We continued to the border with Morocco and then realized that the fuel container was pierced: all the gas had leaked out of it and

we had none left! We were too far from Spain and too far from Senegal. What were we going to do?! (...) We saw a [Moroccan] fishing boat and after much negotiating they sold us some fuel. So we returned to Dakar and when we arrived we went straight to see this man who had organized the trip. (...) He was scared. He paid for all of us to get back home by bus and gave us back our money – most of it, anyways (Pape, interview, 2009; my translation).

After this failed attempt Pape and his brother (both fishermen) decided to organize a trip to Spain on their own. They fixed their old *pirogue*, bought some equipment, and recruited clients among their relatives and neighbours. Their boat left Senegal a few weeks later. This spontaneity was characteristic of early sea border crossings: these were ventures organized informally and they were conceived more as a risky adventure than a crime. The anti-immigration border was still in the making. The *Guardia Civil* and Frontex were not part of sea migrants' equation, and neither were the more

anonymous international criminal networks that would enter the smuggling industry upon militarization of the border.

Prior to the emergence of the West African route as an object of Spanish and European anti-immigration efforts, then, sea migrants' journeys were shorter; they involved less stops and safer routes. If we pay attention to the intermediaries involved, we see that less intermediaries were involved, and they were usually close, both socially and geographically. Typically, members of sea migrants' extended kinship networks in their communities of origin organized the trips. All this meant that (male) sea migrants had more power to make choices about who would smuggle them, and this leverage was also translated into relatively less vulnerability – although the threat posed by travelling deep into the Atlantic Ocean in wooden boats meant for artisanal fishing remained.

Moreover, since repatriation agreements with Senegal were not fully formalized at this point, most sea migrants intercepted near the sea border managed to stay in Spanish territory. Typically, these migrants would be detained for a period of time in one of the detention centres for immigrants (CIEs or Centros de Internamiento de Extranjeros). Then, when the maximum period for lawful detention ended or the detention centre was critically over capacity, those migrants who were not seen as a serious threat to the national security were flown to the mainland and left there to fend for themselves. Other potential migrants at the time were aware of this situation, which became in fact an incentive until repatriation agreements were formalized between Senegal and Spain.

## 5. The inflection point: 2005–2009

Developments in anti-immigration border picked up pace in late 2005. One of the first and most important developments took place in the Spring of 2005 – before the “attacks” on the fences surrounding Ceuta. As a result of the negotiations with Spain and the EU, in May the Senegalese Parliament passed the country's first anti-smuggling legislation (*LOI n 2005-06 du 10 mai 2005 relatif à la lutte contre la traite des personnes et pratiques assimilées et à la protection des victimes*). This legislation punished human smuggling with hefty fines and prison time. The passing of this legislation is an example of the Europeanization (Jones, 2006) of legislative frameworks in territories outside the EU that were seen as key in the control of unwanted migration.

This legislation was an effective deterrent for local fishermen who had been taking people to the Canary Islands up until that point, as the following quote by Djibril, a former smuggler, illustrates:

[T]he [Senegalese] government passed a law that meant we could go to prison for taking people across the border. A few people, some of them fishermen like me, went to prison for taking people to the Canary Islands. I didn't want to go to prison. Many others didn't. So they got people like me out of the way, but young men still wanted to migrate. They looked for people who would take them to Spain and stopped thinking about the price they had to pay or who was going to take them there (Djibril, interview, 2009).

The new legislation, combined with increased efforts to militarize the border and deepen cooperation between Senegal and Spain with the purpose of migration control (discussed below) had, as Djibril noted, the effect of moving the business underground. This former smuggler's impressions on the impact that the legislation had on Senegalese fishermen-smugglers supported the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) argument that the criminalization of local smuggling activities led to the involvement of criminal networks based outside of Senegal without experience

at sea (UNODC, 2011). Other migrants and NGO workers I encountered in Senegal shared stories of points of departure moving farther away from migrants' communities of origin, making sea migrants more vulnerable in the process.

The thing we know for sure about the impact of FRONTEX on migration is that departures have moved South. Before they left from the Straits of Gibraltar, there were 9 kms to cross. Then it moved to the Canary Islands, this is 1700 [kms] if one leaves from Nouadhibou. Later it was Casamance, 3–6 days by *pirogue*, later it was Guinea Bissau, then Guinea Conakry, and routes just got longer and riskier, and there are more and more deaths each time. That is Europe's responsibility, the responsibility of European states (CIMADE, interview, January 2010; my translation).

As this humanitarian worker noted, points of departure of sea migrants moved south, meaning itineraries became more sophisticated and dangerous; but they also moved outside of spaces that migrants could control and manage, complicating their journeys and constraining the spaces available to exercise their agency. The experience of Senegalese nationals who tried to migrate by sea after 2006 is in sharp contrast to the one discussed in the previous section. Alioune's experience illustrates some of the consequences that this turn on smuggling practices had on sea migrants. This participant started contacting neighbors and enquiring about migrating to the Canary Islands by boat in late 2006. He found that local fishermen had stopped smuggling migrants to the Canary Islands, arguing that the risk was too high. Forced by his family's desperate financial situation, he took a bus to Mauritania, where he learned of a boat that was scheduled to leave a few weeks later. Alioune paid half the price of the ticket in advance. He was told to return to Mauritania the day of the departure and wait at the beach with the rest of the money. However, when he got there he only found a group of other would-be migrants shivering on a desert beach in the middle of the night, waiting with the other half of the money to pay the smugglers. They stayed there for the night and the following day, until they decided to go to the building where they initially met the smugglers: it was empty. Some neighbors said the smugglers had been detained by the police, but Alioune suspected they had simply run away with the money. To his despair, his wife replied: “At least you didn't drown in the ocean, alhamdulillah!”. Indeed, the increasingly dangerous routes that boats followed in order to avoid detection, combined with the ever more common absence of experienced captains on board during these trips, led to a sharp increase of deaths at sea (Clochard and Migreup, 2013).

During the early stages of the closing of the Atlantic route, the main developments included the passing of an anti-smuggling law in 2005, the formalization of bilateral cooperation agreements with Senegal and Mauritania in 2005 and 2006 (readmission agreements and joint anti-migration operations *Atlantis*, *Goree*, and *Cabo Blanco*), and the signing of a first bilateral agreement between Senegal and Spain for the readmission of unaccompanied minors in 2006.

Other efforts tackled unwanted sea migration from a more comprehensive perspective. In 2005 the EU adopted the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM) framework, which linked migration management (of both legal and illegal flows), development policy, and international relations with countries of origin and transit (European Commission), and marked a new era in migration control in the EU. The focus from then on has been not on arrivals at the border, but on the harnessing of (dynamic) migration routes (or itineraries). Spain's multi-faceted strategy with Senegal was designed within that overarching framework. It approached unwanted sea migration from a combination of defensive measures aimed at sealing the border (e.g., militarization); and preventative measures aimed at preventing future departures (e.g., the creation

of jobs at origin) (Vives, 2017). Both defensive and preventative measures assumed the integration of non-EU territory into the realm of EU anti-immigration policy and praxis. This flexible understanding of border spaces beyond the external perimeter of the EU amenable to intervention was enacted in specific actions at the time – for example, the permanent presence of Spanish military vessels in the port of Dakar, or the opening of branches of several Spanish ministries in the capital's neighbourhood of the Plateau with the explicit purpose of “Europeanizing migration policy” in Senegal (MAEC., 2006, p. 75) and stopping unwanted migration to the EU.

Within a few months from the peak in arrivals to the Canary Islands in 2006, the EU carried out “an accelerated implementation of the Seahorse Project, a multi-lateral program which established the initial experiments in a multi-partner state series of joint patrols by border and coast guards, police training missions, and donations of equipment” along those routes (Casas-Cortés et al., 2016, p. 8). The creation of Frontex (already on the works) was similarly expedited to respond to the so-called “invasion”: the agency became fully operational in 2005 and in 2006 launched joint-operation HERA, which aimed to detect, detain, and deter undocumented migrants traveling to the Canary Islands by sea (Carrera, 2007a, 2007b).

These developments marked an unprecedented (in the area) involvement of actors beyond the Spanish state in the reinforcement of the border, both at the supranational level and from non-governmental sectors (notably humanitarian agencies and private security companies). The emergence of the anti-immigration border around the Canary Islands further changed the spatialities of the border in fundamental ways, expanding it into key sites of the Senegalese territory.

## 6. Settling on the anti-immigration border (2009–2010)

Sea migration to the Canary Islands continued at least until 2009 – although, as Graph 1 above shows, the number of migrants caught crossing the border illegally decreased sharply from 2006 onwards. As the border became harder to cross, migrants' itineraries towards and across the border became more creative, and their journeys more precarious. Three developments related to this evolution of the relationship between anti-immigration efforts and migrants' EU-bound journeys across along the coast of West Africa are of particular importance for the arguments advanced in this paper.

The first development was the emergence of returned sea migrants as actors shaping the EU's anti-immigration border through their involvement in national politics. The loosely organized lobby of forcibly returned migrants (which lacked clear and stable leadership and included actual returned migrants, potential migrants, and others) was estimated to be about 13,000 strong (interviews, IOM, 2009 and ILO, 2010). Deportations happened right before and during the campaign for the 2007 presidential elections. There was a general perception that young men (the prime socio-demographic group migrating to the Canary Islands by boat, being sent back to Senegal, and organizing politically as part of the lobby of forced returnees) would decide the outcome of the election. These men were, in general, quite negative about the Senegalese political establishment – in particular of the President at the time, Abdoulaye Wade, who they blamed for perpetuating the country's economic situation which had forced them to migrate illegally. They became a “troubling factor” (Tazzioli et al., 2014) in both Senegalese and Spanish politics. Representatives of the ILO and the IOM recounted that Wade felt he needed to win over the lobby of returnees in order to be re-elected. At the same time, Spain was pressuring him to take back migrants deported from the

Canary Islands.

This gave returned migrants great leverage, amplifying the opportunities to exercise their agency to open up spaces for their departure to Europe. Senegal and Spain agreed to offer forcibly returned migrants a temporary visa to enter Spain as seasonal agricultural workers (interviews, IOM, 2009 and ILO, 2010). This was not allowed under Schengen regulations, which stipulate that migrants caught while attempting to enter the EU illegally cannot enter the EU space for a period of 5 years. To circumvent this, Spain proposed that returnees nominated someone else to migrate to Spain on their behalf. According to observers, “migrants were selling their spots, plus the whole thing was not carefully organized, so there were a lot of strange situations like migrants who disappeared or were not informed [they had a visa], and others who didn't have the professional qualifications for the position they were hired for” (IOM, interview, 2009). The process “did not make any sense” (ILO, interview, 2010) and in the end Spain and Senegal agreed on a temporary migration scheme modeled upon previous experiences with Morocco (Vives, 2017). Although this program was short-lived, this example highlights a crucial way in which migrants found opportunities to “challenge, defeat, escape or trouble the dominant politics of mobility” (Tazzioli et al., 2014, p. 26). The fact that these gains were ephemeral does not invalidate this argument. Moreover, these migrants' experience highlights the complexity of the migrant journey: far from being a linear transition from origin to destination, returned migrants went on a circular journey that involved not only themselves, but also others in the social networks they were able to nominate to migrate on their behalf.

Along the way, the number of stakeholders involved in creating an anti-immigration border around the Canary Islands increased: along with the state and the migrant, a new army of governmental and non-governmental organizations became engaged in the design, policing, administration, and legal and technical operation of the border (Andrijasevic & Walters, 2010). Some of these actors were closely linked to migrants, or tried to represent their best interests. This is for example the case of the French humanitarian organization the CIMADE, which worked in the region to document the dangers and abuses undocumented migrants faced on their way to Europe; Amnesty International, whose work at the time focused on the incarceration of deported West African migrants in Mauritanian prisons; the Spanish Red Cross/Senegalese Red Crescent, who received government funding to receive and process deported migrants in a small facility in the Senegalese city of Richard Toll, and helped them return to their communities of origin; and the COFLEC (Collective of Women against Clandestine migration), a group of mothers and wives of migrants drowned at sea. Together with other actors, these groups represented the voice and struggles of migrants as they tried to cross the EU's increasingly hostile border architecture (Vives, 2017) and reach the Canary Islands.

These were the actors involved in the routine every day performance of the border – and who, in doing so, reinforced assumptions about a new form of territorial sovereignty of the state. This sovereignty emanated from and extended beyond the border. It applied not only to the space within those borders, but to spaces and relationships that enabled unwanted migrants to cross them, challenging the power of the sovereign state within its territory by doing so. This growing group of stakeholders were involved in the daily performance of the border, and thus in its coming into being. Salter highlights that

[s]overeignty, like gender, has no essence, and must continually be articulated and rearticulated in terms of “stylized repetition of acts” of sovereignty. The state, through its policies, actions, and customs, thus performs itself as sovereign – and this is

particularly visible at borders when the self-evidence of the state's control over populations, territory, political economy, belonging, and culture is so clearly in question (Salter, 2011: 66).

However, when we look at this border and the actors involved, it becomes clear that we need to problematize this assumption about the state as *the* sovereign, and examine the role of others that (to continue the metaphor) are part of the sovereign's court. Only by doing so we will be able to identify the spaces that are articulated in the new spatialities of the territorially extended anti-immigration border, and understand the relationship between these spaces.

Third, during the period between 2000 and 2010 we witnessed the increasing interconnection between the different migration routes (by land, sea, and air) in West Africa. Senegalese sea migrants deported to West Africa (usually Mauritania or Senegal, which were the main partners in the "fight" against unwanted sea migration in the region) often attempted a second trip to Spain immediately or shortly after deportation. However, because these migrants had often exhausted their resources, they traveled by land – a much cheaper, but also more dangerous, journey. I encountered several Senegalese men in this situation both in Tangiers and in Ceuta. Their stories were similar: they had been caught by the Spanish *Guardia Civil* on their way to the Canary Islands. These (5) men had been either deported to Mauritania right away (and from then to the border with Senegal); or taken first to a detention center (CIE) in the Canary Islands, and then back to West Africa. They felt, in their words, "ashamed" to face their families, and in particular their mothers, who had made great investments and in some cases taken personal loans to pay for their sons' trip. For that reason they chose to take to the road without telling their families about their deportation. This second attempt by land was both longer and riskier than the journey by *pirogue*. It took them months to get to northern Morocco, instead of the few days they spent to get near the Canary Islands during their first attempt. Along the way they had traveled through the desert, hired smugglers, begged, stayed in towns and cities along the way where they took on a number of jobs (all underpaid, if paid at all) while they made enough money to pay for the next leg of the journey. They had been robbed, beaten, and mistreated by state forces, civilians, and smugglers. Two of them had also been apprehended by Moroccan state security forces and deported to the desert near the Algerian border. When I met these migrants they were living in garages and shanty towns throughout the city of Tangiers waiting for an opportunity to cross the Straits of Gibraltar; some of them had been in Morocco for over four years by then and had made several attempts to jump over the border fence. Their experience was similar to that of other *Trans-Saharan* migrants at the time (see for example Andersson, 2014; Collyer, 2006; 2012).

## 7. Conclusion

In this paper I have provided an overview of the evolution of the border that was built between 2000 and 2010 to seal the West African/Atlantic route against unwanted migration. My argument is that this evolution is the result of the back and forth between unwanted sea migrants' efforts to cross the border, on the one hand; and institutional approaches to respond to those efforts and close the border, on the other. In other words, the border is a response to migrant agency, and in specific to the evolving border-crossing strategies of the unwanted migrant. In my analysis I have engaged with three main arguments on the contemporary border literature: the need to problematize the role of the nation-state as the sole or even the main actor shaping the border; the new spatialities of the anti-immigration border, which is more of a set of

inter-connected spaces of migration than a continuous line demarcating the limits of territorial sovereignty; and the importance of engaging with migrant agency – as it is exercised through migrant itineraries and journeys – to understand the intimate geographies of the border.

Migration is an inherently political act, different groups of people enjoy diverging mobility rights (Massey, 1994). But, as recent efforts to seal borders throughout the world have shown, human mobility is also a force that cannot be fully contained. Unwanted migrants and smugglers look for, and find, the cracks in the system; when they succeed, the state interprets it as a threat (particularly in the current context of securitization of international migration) and acts to fix that crack. The playing field for this relationship between unwanted migrants, smugglers, institutional actors (e.g., the state), corporations in the security sector, and others is by definition uneven. However, unwanted migrants are more than just victims of structural conditions designed to stop them from crossing the border. The literature on migrant journeys is a testament to the extraordinary resilience, creativity, and determination that these people deploy to subvert efforts to contain them. By documenting and analysis migrant journeys it becomes clear that, although limited, migrants' agency is a disruptor of contemporary attempts to contain human mobility through policy.

The current trend to contain and manage the migration of unwanted migrants from poor countries in the Global South (usually from racialized groups, and sometimes from countries with a Muslim majority) has important political implications. At a policy level, it has triggered the appearance of more stringent immigration rules for people belonging to these groups (e.g., new visa requirements), the creation of temporary migration programs to ensure these migrants return to their countries of origin, and the routine disdain of international conventions design to protect the basic rights of vulnerable migrants (e.g., refugees), among others. At a time when migration from the Global South is used as a proxy for insecurity, fear, and religious extremism, these measures are justified on the basis of the threat it assumedly poses to the receiving country.

The securitization and criminalization of international migration has also had a profound impact on the ways international borders are governed. It is hard to overemphasize the implications that the shift in focus – from the border to the spaces migrants move through to arrive at the border – has had on the control of unwanted migration from and through the African continent. This shift, coupled with the use of new surveillance technology (e.g., the use of sensors and satellite communication) and collaboration with countries of origin and transit, has enabled the integration of spaces outside of Spain and the EU into their migration control efforts. On the one hand, this shift in focus has transformed the spatiality of the Spanish/EU external maritime border. As Casas-Cortés et al. (2016) have argued, today the border resembles an assemblage of spaces – it is nothing like the classic border of the Westphalian state. On the other hand, the externalization of the border to territories in the Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa has resulted in the delegation of migration control responsibilities to countries with poor human rights records who are not held accountable for their abuses. Unwanted migrants have become more vulnerable in the shift of focus from the border to the route that has prevailed since the adoption of the GAMM framework.

The implications for research are also important. Here I have discussed a case study (that of the sea border between Senegal and the Canary Islands, or the closing of the Atlantic route) that is the seed of the anti-immigration border along the maritime overall borders of the EU. Many of the approaches that are now routine elsewhere were first tested along this border. For example GAMM

framework, and in particular a specific way of developing collaborative relations in countries of origin and transit for the control of unwanted migration where the use of development funds to smooth that collaboration is key; joint operations led by Frontex, which require fluid communication and cooperation among EU member states; the use of satellite communication shared among countries to control unwanted migration (e.g., Seahorse operation); etc. Current scholarship on EU borders would benefit from a critical genealogy of its current anti-immigration sea strategy, born in the Canary Islands circa 2005.

The case of the Canary Islands is of particular relevance for research for other reasons. It is, much like Lampedusa and Lesbos, a “spectacular border” (Cuttrita, 2014), heavily mediated and dominated by the discourse of invasion (Mamadouh, 2012). These are sites (or stages) where fear of the unwanted migrant is produced. What follows is a declaration of crisis, which creates the favorable conditions for exceptional policy responses that would, in other scenarios, be unacceptable (Hyndman, 2012; Mountz, 2010; Mountz & Loyd, 2013). Border and migration scholars are ideally situated to interrogate the practices that emerge from the so-called crisis, and their human cost. We must continue to ask questions about the legitimacy of the EU's anti-immigration efforts, challenge the rationale behind the becoming of the anti-immigration border, and denounce the abuses that it justifies. At the same time, it is imperative that we build on existing concepts to address the specific ways in which human mobility and, in particular, migrant struggles at the border as the main creative force shaping contemporary border and migration policy – and, along the way, the spatialities of the EU's southern border.

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