An Institutional Approach to Bordering in Islands: The Canary Islands on the African-European Migration Routes

Dirk Godenau
Departamento de Economía Aplicada
Universidad de La Laguna
Canary Islands, Spain
dgodenau@ull.es

Abstract: Islands play a significant role in international irregular maritime migration. Frequently they are part of maritime interstitial spaces between states, and their location, combined with institutional membership, makes them part of international migration routes and subject to border management strategies. In this paper borders are analysed as social institutions used for regulating relative permeability through rules of entry and exit for persons, goods and capital. Borders institutionalize territoriality and are politically implemented by states. They are selective, also in migration, and irregular border transit is not always indicative of an inability to control. The Canary Islands are used as an illustrative example of how border management at the southern edge of the European Union has evolved towards more coercive deterrence and tighter surveillance. The Canary Islands experienced irregular maritime immigration from the west African coasts during the first decade of the 21st century and most of these migrants intended to use the islands as transit space towards the European continent. Increasing surveillance in countries of origin, enforcement of border controls and stricter return policies were used to stop flows. The so-called "cayuco crisis" in 2006 induced institutional change in border management and forced the active involvement of the EU through FRONTEX.

Keywords: border; Canary Islands; European Union; FRONTEX islands; irregular migration; social institutions

Migration in Island Contexts

Migration links places in demographic, economic and cultural terms. Migration is a sign of openness and frequently a result of up- and downturns in local labour markets. Therefore, while insularity is related to small size and difficult access or remoteness, migration indicates that islands often are not "marginal islands" (King, 2009: 63) and instead of "islands of the world" they form a "world of islands" (Hau'ofa, 1993), characterised by interconnectedness and openness. In this nodal character of islands, migration is just another symptom of embeddedness into a wider context, together with other flows like capital, goods, services and sociocultural bonds.

If islandness is interpreted as an intervening variable (Baldacchino, 2004: 278), islands are a specific research object of heuristic value (King, 2009: 55-56), but their analytical relevance in social science does not imply that we need new and different theories and instruments to

understand social realities in islands. In this sense, islands can be useful also in migration studies, but without the need for claiming a new and different mobility theory for islands.

The aim of this paper is to analyse recent irregular maritime immigration in the Canary Islands as part of the international migration routes from Africa to Europe. These islands belong to the southern border of the European Union and are subject to Spanish and European border management strategies. The border will be interpreted as a social institution and not simply as geographical line or area. By doing so, the implications of islandness for border management in maritime areas will be moved towards the institutional and political determination of relative permeability. While purely location-related benefits and costs of irregular migration through islands have not changed considerably over time, induced institutional change in border management strategies clearly influences the relative permeability and appeal of the Canary Islands as a transit area. It will be argued that their geographical status as border islands is not sufficient to explain their role in migration routes. The reactive strategies of non-state actors to maintain border porosity are not included in the analysis.

As physical and terrestrial entities surrounded by water, islands evoke perceptions of location and identity. Their shores mark visible physical limits, and the separation from other terrestrial units is easily perceived as a natural barrier which obliges the use of additional resources if it is to be crossed. In terms of human mobility, physical islandness implies that boats or planes are needed to travel to or from an island. With regards to migration, and particularly irregular migration, islandness implies a higher effort dedicated to the collective organization of movement when compared to mobility in a terrestrial context. As maritime transport is organized collectively, and air transport even more so, detection probability at island entry points is usually high.

Borders are a type of barrier (Batten & Nijkamp, 1990). They are socially constructed, have a spatial dimension and often use physical features – mountains, deserts, rivers, oceans – as a means for reducing enforcement costs. Islands tend to have borders of their own (island states) or to be part of external borders (border regions). The coincidence of natural barriers and socio-political borders leads to the question about the consequences of institutional membership for migration patterns in island spaces. Residential relocation with border crossing constitutes an international migration, with all the usual applicable controls and restrictions. In the case of small island states, this obliges border control efforts to be organized and financed with local resources; in the case of island regions, it implies being part of a national border and its homogeneous/heterogeneous implementation[1]. The combination of geographical location and institutional membership determines the positionality of islands (King, 2009: 75). For example, many southern European islands are considered to be part of the "soft underbelly" of the EU, which combines immigration pressure from the African continent with relatively lax external and internal control policies, leading to high proportions of irregular immigration, at least during periods of economic growth[2].

---

[1] Although national borders may be formally homogeneous for all regions, there may be differences in practice due to "hot spots" (e.g. drug trafficking), physical differences (land borders, maritime borders), path dependency (border history), etc.
[2] Metaphors are not neutral. A "soft underbelly" seems to indicate a vulnerable part of a larger body, with irregular immigration being the knife cutting it open, with risks to essential organs.

The importance of islands in international irregular migration routes is related to their geostrategic position as part of the external border of continental states or supranational entities. Why do those who organize human trafficking include islands as points of entry? According to Carling (2007: 324), controlling a maritime border is fundamentally different and more difficult than a land border because it requires surveillance of an area (the sea) rather than just a line. This is debatable. First, because the argument that maritime borders are areas and land borders are lines is conceptually wrong, as one can draw control lines on both shores and even at sea. Migrants always have to pass a line and terrestrial contexts are also areas. Maritime areas are plain and relatively easy to screen if compared to a mountainous jungle. Second, travelling on the high sea obliges journeys in groups: one cannot walk alone. Groups of migrants (vessels) are easier to detect than isolated individuals. Third, control costs vary due to many reasons, not only the length or extension of the border itself. For example, remote control in countries of origin can be relatively cheap. Detection probabilities depend on available technology (radars, satellites and others) and these technologies may have other parallel uses (e.g. detection of drug trafficking)[3]. Fourth, maritime borders can be too dangerous during part of the year and this natural impermeability lowers control efforts and costs. We may also add to these general aspects of maritime borders that the smallness of islands increases the probability of detection after arrival (rat-hole effect), while continents offer more diversified possibilities of getting away from the border. Islands are only attractive as transit areas if transport to the continent is guaranteed and financed after interception.

Another hypothesis about irregular migration in islands is related to their possible use for blocking migrants in their transit to continents. This type of selective impermeability for transit migrants can be accomplished formally, as occurs in the case of Australia when "the Australian legislature amended the Migration Act in order to limit the country's obligations with respect to migrants: it did so by designating portions of its sovereign territory as 'non-Australia' for the strict purposes of claiming asylum. These portions include Christmas Island, Ashmore Reef, Cartier Islands, and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands" (Baldacchino, 2010: 130). Another possibility is to keep migrant transfers to the mainland low, thereby building up pressure in reception areas. This confinement strategy would use the islands' geographic position to prevent irregular migrants from reaching the mainland.

Borders as Social Institutions

We will use the term "border" and not "frontier" as the line of demarcation. As Anderson (1997: 9) points out: "three words are in common use – frontier, boundary and border – and a fourth, now archaic, term – march – which are applied to these outer limits. Frontier is the word with the widest meaning, although its original meaning was military – the zone in which one faced the enemy. In contemporary usage, it can mean the precise line at which jurisdictions meet, usually demarcated and controlled by customs, police and military personnel. […] The

---

[3] The European Commission (2011: 9) indicates that "synergies have been identified between two major initiatives on operational cooperation at the maritime external borders – the control of persons under the umbrella of FRONTEX and combating narcotics trafficking in the framework of the Maritime Analysis and Operation Centre-Narcotics (MAOC-N) and the Centre de Coordination pour la Lutte Anti-Drogue en Mediterranée (CeCLAD-M)".

term border can be applied to a zone, usually a narrow one, or it can be the line of demarcation."

If we do not accept the explanation of the function of islands in migration routes as a result of the nature of maritime borders (areas that are more difficult to control), what can be the alternative? We propose an institutional analysis of borders (Godenau, 2009)[4]. The argument is as follows: borders are social institutions; their permeability is socially constructed and politically managed by states; establishing a border is an act of power; borders institutionalize territoriality; border permeability is multidimensional and multilateral; borders do not only restrict mobility, they also promote it; borders are selective, also in migration; permeability is constructed not only by the state, other actors also matter; irregular border transit is not always unwanted or indicative of an inability to control; borders adapt to new situations through institutional learning.

Social institutions are compounds of rules established by societies or organizations which channel and promote the creation of relatively stable expectations which actors may maintain in their interactions with others (North, 1990; 2005). Markets, private property, and the family are examples of behaviour-guiding social institutions. Borders may be added to the list, as they are socially constructed and enforced rules:

> The frontier is the basic political institution: no rule-bound economic, social or political life in complex societies could be organized without them (Anderson, 1997: 1).

Their function is to condition the trans-border mobility of incoming and outgoing flows. The emergence of borders is linked to power. Establishing a border is always an act of power (Paasi, 2001: 23), and asymmetry in power between territorial units tends to provoke asymmetry in bilateral border conditioning[5]. These differences are clearly visible in how borders treat international migration (e.g. Fortress Europe). Borders, states and societies reinforce each other mutually, because borders are a constitutional element of territorial entities. In this sense, states and societies are contained within their territorial borders. As an identity-forging device, border permeability tends to be a politically sensitive issue: migration is once again an example of how the purity of the centre is presented as threatened by immigrated otherness (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999: 596).

---

[4] In terms of migration theory, when focusing on borders as determinants of migration flows, we stress the importance of what Lee (1966) called "intermediate obstacles" between origin and destination; although "intermediate variables" would probably be a more adequate expression, because borders not only restrict flows, they also selectively promote them. The interpretation of borders as social institutions is in line with Hollifields (2000) claim for migration theory to "bring the state back in", because borders are clearly conditioned by states and international policy. The institutionalist analysis of borders is compatible with social networks and transnationalism approaches to migration, although it places more emphasis on structure and less on agency. By focusing on borders, we obviously do not imply other determinants of migration are not important (such as push and pull factors in origin and destination countries).

[5] "Frontiers are clearly used to maintain global inequalities. Stronger powers may respect the location of frontiers but may not respect the sovereignties which the frontiers are supposed to delimit. In circumstances where there are gross inequalities of wealth and military capability, attempts to reassert sovereign authority by weaker powers may seem unwarranted and even an act of aggression by the stronger powers" (Anderson, 1997: 191).

Borders are multidimensional and multilateral. They regulate flows of goods through trade agreements, tariffs, quotas and product specifications; capital flows through restriction or promotion of foreign investment; and they determine who is allowed to cross the border freely or under what kind of conditions (tourists, residence or work permits, etc.). These dimensions are not independent from each other, as capital flows may induce migration, trade negotiations may influence possibilities of migrant readmission agreements, etc. Borders are not one-faced walls designed only to restrict entrance, because they are a part and manifestation of the general political, social and cultural relationships between states. In this sense, they are multilateral devices and have to be looked at from at least two sides. In terms of migration policy analysis, flows are not only the result of immigration policies; they are also affected by conditions imposed on out- and transit migration. Borders are designed to be selective (Massey *et al.,* 1998: 13-14). They restrict and promote flows as a result of classification and resource assignments (López-Sala & Esteban-Sánchez, 2010: 86) and through controlling accessibility into and out of certain areas (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999: 598).

Borders have their history (path dependency) and are inserted in a political, economic and social setting (embeddedness). In temporal terms, past migration flows and networks may explain, in part, present selective migration policies, as is the case in Spain with Latin American countries (double nationality, etc.). Another example is decolonization; the Canary Islands are close to the former Spanish territories in south Morocco/western Sahara and decolonization provoked outmigration towards the Canaries in the 1970s. These links still influence current migration patterns and perceptions. The embeddedness into a specific geopolitical context, like being part of the Southern EU border, also has implications for border control efforts. Joint border patrolling through FRONTEX is an example.

Although nation states are the main actors in conditioning border permeability, other actors also matter. Just as there is migrant transnationalism from below (Smith & Guarnizo, 1998), and a debate about whether it is significant or not (Waldinger & Fitzgerald, 2004), non-state actors also play an active role in creating and maintaining border permeability. As happens with black markets, a sharp contrast between restrictive regulations on the one hand, and existing demand on both sides of the border on the other, makes maintaining irregular permeability tempting and lucrative. Migrant networks, NGOs, smugglers, and firms act in the context of these opportunity structures created by border regulations. The intricate interplay of various types of actors on both sides of the border should not be reduced to an explanation of irregular migration as exclusively run by organized cartels (mafias).

Irregular migration is frequently presented as a sign of political and organizational incapacity, as ineffective and inefficient border control. It seems that the optimum amount of irregular migration should be zero. But the significant difference between formal impermeability and informal *de facto* permeability may have other determinants. Perhaps the economic optimum of irregular migration is above zero for the receiving society and maintaining a gap between formal and informal permeability can be used to lower labour costs through irregular migration. If this is the case, we can expect more efficient border controls during economic crises and relative inefficiency during economic booms: "… important interests inside the country may have a use for illegal immigrants and find them valuable" (Anderson, 1997: 150).

As social institutions, borders "learn", because they (are) adapt(ed) to new circumstances and can develop new organizational structures and control measures. Technology tends to play a central part in institutional change. Episodes of intensive irregular migration are supposed to accelerate these adaptations: in the Canary Islands, these changes can be observed and contextualized as part of the evolving Integrated Border Management (IBM) strategy of the EU[6]. This strategy involves "a process of externalisation or 'extra-territorialization' of the EU border as a consequence of an IBM concept expanding the control beyond the EU towards the maritime territories of African countries" (Carrera, 2007: 2). Although Article 2 of the Schengen Borders Code defines external borders as "the Member States' land borders, including river and lake borders, sea borders and their airports, river ports, sea ports and lake ports, provided that they are not internal borders", strengthening thereby the principle of territoriality and its securitization (Carrera, 2007: 5), the IBM strategy includes surveillance of space outside the EU and the implementation of agreements with the countries of origin (Council of Europe, 2011: 2; European Commission, 2008b: 14).

The European IBM strategy is markedly influenced by the use of modern technology and highlights the importance of preventive sea border surveillance. EU border control practices move towards higher degrees of proactivity and instantaneity (Jeandesboz, 2011: 122-124) through the European border surveillance system (EUROSUR), upgrading and integrating control technologies in a common framework to be applied in the southern and eastern external borders of the EU. The EUROSUR initiative "focuses on enhancing border surveillance, with the main purpose of preventing unauthorised border crossings, to counter cross-border criminality and to support measures to be taken against persons who have crossed the border illegally" (European Commission, 2008a: 2), with control of irregular migration at the heart of its objectives. Apart from security motives, the initiative is justified by reference to saving lives through preventive control of sea areas:

> The recent practice of travelling on board of unseaworthy and overcrowded boats, has multiplied the number of unfortunate migrants who continue to lose their lives by drowning in the Atlantic Ocean between Africa and the Canary Islands and in the Mediterranean Sea (European Commission, 2008a: 4)[7].

Preventive maritime surveillance is defined by the technological possibilities of detection and distinguishes between coastal waters[8] and the open sea[9]. The European Union financed a series of research and development projects to improve surveillance technology[10].

---

[6] "The notion of 'integrated border management' was initially coined in a communication drafted by the Commission's DG Justice and Home Affairs in May 2002" (Jeandesboz, 2011: 116).

[7] As Jeandesboz (2011: 123) points out, this justification is questionable: "the practices of surveillance that are called upon to save lives are simultaneously putting the persons in question at risk. […] it is the initial deployment of the Spanish maritime surveillance system SIVE in the strait of Gibraltar that led the persons who were using this itinerary to seek longer and more perilous routes – for instance through the Canary Islands, which subsequently triggered the launching of the first major Frontex operation and the extension of SIVE to this area".

[8] Defined as "maritime areas of mainland and islands which can have adequate surveillance by land based infrastructure" (European Commission, 2008b: 79).

[9] Defined as "the sea out of range of adequate coverage by land based sensors" (European Commission, 2008b: 81).

[10] Among these (European Commission, 2011: 7-8): AMASS (Autonomous Maritime Surveillance System), OPERMAR (Interoperable Approach to EU Maritime Security Management), WIMASS (Wide Maritime Area

The proactive character is reflected by the objective of obtaining a Common Pre-frontier Intelligence Picture (CPIP), which "should provide the national coordination centres in a frequent, reliable and cost-efficient manner with effective, accurate and timely intelligence on the prefrontier area, which is of relevance for the prevention of illegal immigration and related cross-border crime" (European Commission, 2009: 8). This broad and integrated surveillance approach is moving control *beyond* the border-line and *before* the border crossings as such (Jeandesboz, 2011: 120). "The process of prevention which underlines this kind of border presupposes a practice of labelling an individual as an 'irregular immigrant' even before s/he leaves the country and enters EU territory" (Carrera, 2007: 25).

The EUROSUR initiative is heading towards the creation of a common monitoring and information sharing environment for the EU maritime domain (Mediterranean Sea, the southern Atlantic Ocean [Canary Islands] and the Black Sea). "The objective of this phase is to integrate all existing sectoral systems which are reporting and monitoring traffic and activities in sea areas under the jurisdiction of the Member States and in adjacent high seas into a broader network" (European Commission, 2008a: 9). The EUROSUR framework should be consolidated by 2013 (European Commission, 2011: 2).

Bordering in the Canary Islands

The Canary Islands are one of the Spanish Autonomous Communities and an "Outermost Region" of the European Union[11]. Both in the national and in the supranational European institutional setting, the Canaries are integrated with several basically economic particularities. Most of the Outermost Regions in the European Union, located far away from their continental counterparts but institutionally embedded in them, are islands. Their borders acquire specific strategic value if living conditions inside are very different from those in neighbouring regions.

A European citizen can migrate to these regions under conditions of free mobility, while citizens from their neighbouring states normally cannot. Once nationals from Third Countries gain residency status and citizenship in these border regions, the EU institutional framework, including free movement, applies and outmigration to the European continent is relatively easy. In this sense, outermost regions can be interpreted as points of entry and may be attractive for transit migration.

The institutional setting clearly influences the position of the Canary Islands in terms of international migration. Someone migrating to the Canaries is entering Europe and Spain, crossing a border that is defined by Spanish immigration policies and coordinated with a

---

Airborne Surveillance), OPARUS (Open Architecture for Unmanned Aerial Vehicle-based Surveillance System), SEABILLA (Sea Border Surveillance), I2C (Integrated System for Interoperable Sensors and Information Sources for Common Abnormal Vessel Behaviour Detection and Collaborative Identification of Threat), and PERSEUS (Protection of European Seas and Borders through the Intelligent Use of Surveillance).

[11] "Article 299(2) of the EC Treaty and the two Communications adopted by the Commission in 2004 stress the need to recognize the special nature of the outermost regions and to put in place a genuine European strategy to support them. The Outermost Regions (the Azores, Madeira, the Canary Islands and the four French overseas departments) face specific problems listed in the Treaty: remoteness, insularity, small size, difficult topography and climate, and economic dependence on a few products" (European Commission, 2007: 3).

supranational European framework. Situated near the West-African coast and belonging geographically to the African continent, the Canary Islands are a south-European border region and part of "Fortress Europe".

Although news in the mass media about immigration in the Canaries has been dominated by boat people arriving from west African countries, the composition of flows and stocks of migrant population shows a completely different picture. More than half of the foreign population is of European origin and their share increased during the last 10 years. Their growth rate is second only to that of foreigners from American countries, who reached a share of 29% in 2009. The African and Asian populations have also grown, but at a slower pace and with decreasing shares; in 2009 only 10% of the total foreign population was African and 5% Asian (see Table 1). Therefore it is incorrect to assume that the Canary Islands would have a large population of African origin; 30,000 in a total population of more than 2 million is less than 1.5%.

Table 1: Foreign resident population in the Canary Islands by nationality, 1998 and 2009.

Nationality	**1998**	**2009**	**Annual growth rate**	**% of total foreign population in 1998**	**% of total foreign population in 2009**
European	30,454	169,003	41.4%	55.2	56.1
African	6,770	30,664	32.1%	12.3	10.2
American	10,984	86,502	62.5%	19.9	28.7
Asian	6,586	14,910	11.5%	11.9	5.0
Total	55,218	301,204	40.5%	100.0	100.0

Source: INE. Population Register (Padrón Municipal). Calculations by author.

Another of the public opinion myths (Haas, 2007) one may encounter involves irregular immigrants and their supposedly predominant African origin. Once again, it is probably the impact of news in the mass media that created this idea. A survey of irregular immigrants in Tenerife conducted in 2005 (Godenau & Zapata, 2007) showed that nearly all migrants in irregular administrative situations (without a residence permit) had entered by plane with tourist visas and overstayed afterwards. It is true that, among African immigrants, illegal maritime border crossing has been more frequent; but their absolute number in terms of resident population is low, because of repatriation to countries of origin or transfers to mainland Spain after staying in retention centres. This can be illustrated by the fact that only 15% of the 23,211 irregular immigrants who applied for regularization during the extraordinary amnesty in 2005 were of African origin.

The more restrictive and enforced the border, the higher the cost for maintaining irregular permeability. In this context, crossing the border physically without permission is only one of many options. If borders become more impermeable due to tighter controls, fake documents may become more attractive. And, if borders become more difficult to cross in certain countries or regions, other parts of the border may achieve feasibility in the cost-benefit

analysis of intermediaries. This happened in the Canary Islands during the last decade when the Mediterranean crossing to Spain became more impermeable due to increasing control efforts. The migration route shifted from a short maritime passage to a longer one, with higher risks and costs for migrants, because the SIVE (Integral System for External Surveillance) had already been implemented in the Mediterranean but not in the Canary Islands (European Commission, 2008b: 13).

The irregular maritime border crossings between west African countries and the Canary Islands started during the nineties and little attention was paid at the beginning to the arrivals of small wooden boats from Morocco (the so-called "pateras"). After this initial period of sporadic arrivals, the 21st century brought the intensification of flows and a southward shift from the Moroccan departure points to others like Nouadhibou, Saint Louis, Dakar, Conakry and Freetown. For these longer journeys a different type of boat was used, the "cayuco", with a larger number of passengers (some of them with more than 200 occupants) of sub-Saharan origin. From 1994 to 2010, 96,239 people entered or tried to gain access to the Canaries via illegal entry points, using to this end 2,899 vessels (accumulated annual data of the Spanish Ministry of Home Affairs).

Table 2: Illegal border crossings detected at land and sea borders.

Route	2006	2007	2008	2009	% change 2008/2009	2010	% change 2009/2010
Greece Sea (all areas)	n.a.	n.a.	31,729	28,841	-9%	6,175	-79%
Greece Land with Turkey	n.a.	n.a.	1,448	8,782	-39%	47,706	443%
Greece Land with Albania	n.a.	n.a.	38,573	37,898	-2%	33,704	-11%
Italy Sea (all areas)	n.a.	2,158	36,947	957	-74%	44	-54%
Spain Sea Canary Islands	31,678	12,478	9,181	2,244	-76%	196	-91%
Spain Land Ceuta and Melilla	7,502	408	65	1,639	-75%	1,567	-4%
Malta Sea	n.a.	913	2,798	1,473	-47%	48	-97%
Others	n.a.	n.a.	18,884	14,152	-25%	10,253	-28%
Total	n.a.	160,132	159,092	104,599	-34%	104,049	–1%

Source: Frontex Press Pack, May, 2011: 9.

The maximum intensity was reached in 2006 (the "cayuco crisis"), with more than 30,000 boat people arriving at the shores and ports of the Canary Islands (see Figure 1). After 2006, the numbers dropped rapidly as the surveillance system became increasingly efficient (including joint patrols in origin countries), bilateral agreements for readmission were signed with west African countries, and boat captains were systematically arrested and jailed, creating a deterrence effect. These measures stepped up border enforcement and improved the impermeability of this Atlantic part of the Spanish border. During 2010 and 2011, most of the irregular maritime arrivals took place on the Mediterranean shores and the Canary Islands lost, temporarily at least, their importance as a node in African-European migration routes (see Table 2). While in 2006 more than 81% of all irregular maritime intercepted arrivals in Spain took place in the Canary Islands, in 2010 this proportion was only 11%.
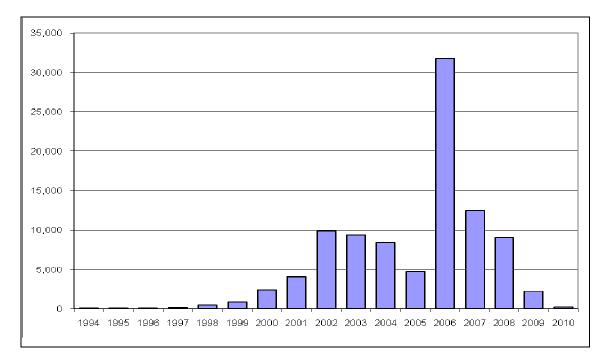
Figure 1: Immigrants arriving in the Canaries through illegal entry points, 1994-2010.

Source: Government Office in the Canary Islands (various years).

As López-Sala & Esteban-Sánchez (2010: 86) point out, the intensification of irregular maritime migration to the Canary Islands marked a new era in Spanish immigration policy in general, and particularly in border management. The new policies reinforce border impermeability through tighter deterrence measures, before migrants reach the border (joint control in origin and transit countries), at the border (intensification of control) and after having crossed the border (repatriation, return, expulsion). These changes were implemented gradually, starting in the late 1990s with the implementation of the integrated external border surveillance system (SIVE) on the Mediterranean border, which was extended afterwards to the Southern Atlantic border (Canary Islands). This permeability gap between different parts of the Spanish border is one of the mayor determinants in the temporary shift of migration routes from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic.

Reinforced border surveillance, in particular, and deterrence, in general, were complemented with bilateral cooperation agreements with Morocco, Algeria, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania, Gambia, Guinea Conakry, Cape Verde, Mali, Niger and Senegal. Enhanced cooperation with these states included readmission agreements, boosting direct police cooperation in border patrolling in origin and transit states, and reinforcing Spanish intelligence in west African countries. The most critical program is the SEAHORSE Network, financed by Spain and managed by the Civil Guard, with the participation of Spain, Portugal, Cape Verde, Mauritania, Morocco, Senegal, Gambia and Guinea Bissau[12].

---

[12] The European Commission (2011: 7) recognizes the value of the SEAHORSE network experience for the EUROSUR initiative: "SEAHORSE could be used as a model for setting up a similar network between Member States and neighbouring third countries in the Mediterranean Sea".

The arrival of more than 30,000 irregular immigrants in 2006 created an organizational overload in the interception, retention and return provisions. This massive influx conditioned the need for organizational innovation so as to improve the coordination among the actors involved in the different stages of the process. Spain responded with the creation of the Canaries Regional Coordination Centre (CRCC) in 2006. The CRCC is headed by a Civil Guard General reporting directly to the Directorate General of the Police and Civil Guard. It is tasked with integrating, coordinating and centralizing the operations and actions of the State and of local administrations in terms of border surveillance and control, particularly that pertaining to irregular maritime immigration. The CRCC hosts the joint operations with FRONTEX in the west African area.

All these changes can be summed up as a shift in border control towards: (a) more coercive deterrence through controlling transit and stay after arrival; (b) more repressive deterrence through stricter return policies and fewer transfers to the mainland; (c) tighter surveillance of maritime areas and stricter identification protocols; and (d) deterrence through information campaigns about the risks of irregular maritime migration. The new profile of maritime irregular migration control is characterized by higher detection probabilities at points of origin, transit and destination; higher return probabilities; and higher risks for intermediaries of being accused of human trafficking and imprisoned (López-Sala & Esteban-Sánchez, 2010: 91).

The sharp reduction in irregular maritime arrivals in the Canary Islands since 2007 is due to several reasons. First, the economic crisis drastically reduced employment opportunities in Spain, with fewer arrivals at all parts of the border. Second, equalizing the relative permeability along different parts of the Spanish maritime border lessened the appeal of the Canary Islands as a transit area, contributing thereby to a shift back to the Mediterranean route. Third, the new political situation in the north of Africa temporarily reduced the efficiency of Mediterranean border controls in some origin and transit countries. As a result, Mediterranean routes once again dominate maritime irregular migration to Europe. This should be labelled as "back to normal", the extraordinary growth of the Atlantic route being the exception. Under conditions of similar permeability levels, the Atlantic route is less attractive: more risky, more expensive and lacks the advantages offered by territorial continuity in continents.

The example of the Canary Islands shows how changes in political priorities alter the way maritime borders are controlled and how these new practices have to be analysed in the wider context of migration policy[13]. The expansion of control efforts to other countries, with the Spanish (European) police patrolling west African coasts, is an example of how control efforts may shift from focusing on maritime areas to controlling lines drawn on the shores of origin countries. On the one hand, this shift saves the lives of migrants under risk at sea; on the other hand, this control in origin countries may limit the fundamental right of free movement, which includes the freedom to leave a country (Carrera, 2007: 25; 2011: 5).

---

[13] "It is striking to see how the fierce struggles that were taking place in the Spanish political arena between the government, the then opposition (Partido Popular) and the Canary Islands Government about the context, response and implications of the constant inflow of irregular immigrants translated themselves into a 'call for the EU' to act. FRONTEX was presented as the solution to the constructed spectacle which was qualified as 'a European problem'. The EU was used as the perfect scapegoat for a highly politicised and 'mediatised' state of affairs over the field of immigration in Spain" (Carrera, 2007: 13).

Discussion

The Canary Islands are an example of how permeability is conditioned by border practices and not just by natural border attributes. When islands are mentioned as being something special in migration analyses, we should be aware of the dangers of exceptionalism (King, 2009: 55-56) in island studies. Of course, there are some geographical considerations to be taken into account: islands are only reachable by boat or plane; islands are frequently "outposts" of continental states, so they may be closer for some wishing to enter the country. In any case, geographical considerations should not be overvalued; it is precisely the combination of institutional membership (the island is part of the country the persons wants to enter) and geographical position (periphery) that transforms some islands into what López-Sala & Esteban-Sánchez (2010:78) call "interstitial spaces" where migrants arrive and peripheral border control takes place. It is not the spatial configuration in itself that explains high migration intensities on some European islands. The case of the Canary Islands shows how the same geographic position may change its strategic value as a part of migration routes over time. They became more attractive because of asymmetrical border enforcement; once symmetry is re-established, the cost-benefit analysis of migrants and intermediaries adjusts its relative appeal as a node of transit.

Islands, as with other geographical entities, can be used to block transit. This can be done in several ways: through detention without transfer and by not admitting undocumented persons on transport services which link islands to the continent. In these cases undocumented migrants can enter, but they cannot leave again unless they are returned to their country of origin or transit. If the quantitative relation between immigration flows and island size implies strong impact and visibility, the local population may develop negative reactions towards migrants and particularly to their being kept on the island after detention. During the years of high arrival intensity in the Canary Islands, both returns and transfers to the continent were used to avoid further accumulation of irregular migrant populations in detention centres. Those who were not returned or taken to the Spanish mainland faced the problem of how to use air transport without documentation if they wanted to leave the islands. Occasionally local governments, in order to remove immigrants from public parks (visibility), contributed to airlifting irregular migrants to Madrid or Barcelona (note that this is not a transfer from one detention centre to another). All in all, the case of the Canary Islands does not support the hypothesis of islands being used as a deterrence mechanism through geographic confinement. After 2006, with rapidly dropping arrivals and higher proportions of returns, this transfer policy might have changed gradually towards lower levels of territorial redistribution from the border areas to other Spanish regions (López-Sala & Esteban-Sánchez, 2010:91), but in the present context in the Canary Islands this does not imply a build-up of pressure in or outside the detention centres[14].

---

[14] The situation is different in other Spanish territory, particularly in Ceuta, where low redistribution rates place permanent stress on detention capacities. In this sense, Ceuta is a European "island" within Africa where the confinement strategy is applied; while in the Canaries a different cost/benefit balance is in place, possibly because specialization in international tourism makes them very sensitive to the impact of a "prison for Africans" image.

Conclusions

Borders are socially constructed institutions which regulate permeability for flows of people, goods and capital. They institutionalize territoriality by establishing rules of entry and exit. Borders are an important determinant of international migration. Their analysis should go beyond their representation as geographical lines or areas, and include their institutional determination as a key element of migration policies. Islands, be they island states or border regions of larger states, comprise an area of research that is of heuristic value when analyzing how bordering takes place and evolves during episodes of irregular immigration.

The case of the Canary Islands demonstrates that the effective control of maritime borders is feasible if it is politically expedient. Changes in Spanish and EU immigration policies, along with a mix of deterrence measures, have progressively reduced the permeability of maritime borders, extending border control to the Atlantic. Most important among these have been the completion of border surveillance, joint patrols in origin and transit countries, increasing the likelihood of repatriation and the imprisonment of boat captains for human smuggling. The tendency toward de-territorializing border enforcement through bilateral agreements, more diplomatic activities in origin countries and information campaigns contributes clearly to the objective of sealing maritime borders, but limits the fundamental right of free movement by hampering the possibility to leave certain countries.

Although the geographic status as European border islands influences the probability of receiving irregular maritime migration, the institutional determinants of border permeability are more far reaching. The case of the Canary Islands shows how the social construction of borders can evolve when political priorities change. The geographic status remains the same, but the role these islands play in international migration routes has changed (and may change again in the future).

Although all islands receiving unwanted migration could be used to hold and block migrants in their transit, in the case of the Canaries this was not the case during the years of massive arrivals. The deterrence effects which reduced the migration flows are not linked to their geographic status as islands. At present low frequencies in transfers from the Canaries to the Spanish mainland are due to fewer interceptions and free capacity in detention centres and do not correspond with the aim of blocking transit migration.

Border management in the EU is heading towards a more intensive use of modern technology before, at, and after the border. Southern European border islands will be part of this proactive "smart border" (Council of the European Union, 2011: 2). Satellites, radars, sensors and unmanned aerial vehicles will increasingly control maritime areas, also above and around islands. This technological wall against irregular maritime migration will alter entry modes in irregular international migration, particularly if remote control is progressively extended to the shores of origin countries. The Canary Islands are illustrative of this generalized trend.

References

Anderson, M. (1997) *Frontiers. Territory and State Formation in the Modern World*, Cambridge, Polity Press.

Anderson, J. & O'Dowd, L. (1999) 'Borders, Border Regions and Territoriality: Contradictory Meanings, Changing Significance', *Regional Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 7, pp. 593-604.

Baldacchino, G. (2004) 'The Coming of Age of Island Studies', *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Soziale Geografie*, Vol. 95, No. 3, pp. 272-283.

Baldacchino, G. (2010) *Island Enclaves: Offshoring strategies, creative governance and subnational island jurisdictions*, Montreal QC, McGill-Queen's University Press.

Batten, D. & Nijkamp, P. (1990) 'Barriers to communication and spatial interaction', *Annals of Regional Science*, vol. 24, pp. 233-236.

Carling, J. (2007) 'Migration Control and Migrant Fatalities at the Spanish-African Borders', *International Migration Review*, Vol. 41, No. 2, pp. 316-343.

Carrera, S. (2007) *The EU Border Management Strategy. FRONTEX and the Challenges of Irregular Immigration in the Canary Islands*, CEPS Working Document No. 261/Marco 2007.

Carrera, S. (2011) *The EU's Dialogue on Migration, Mobility and Security with the Southern Mediterranean Filling the Gaps in the Global Approach to Migration*, CEPS 'Liberty and Security in Europe' publication series, June 2011.

Council of the European Union (2011) *Council Conclusions on Borders, Migration and Asylum. Stocktaking and the way forward*, 3096th Justice and Home Affairs Council meeting Luxembourg, 9 and 10 June 2011,

European Commission (2007) *Strategy for the Outermost Regions: Achievements and Future Prospects*, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, COM(2007) 507 final, Brussels, 12.9.2007.

European Commission (2008a) *Examining the creation of a European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR)*, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, COM(2008) 68 final, Brussels, 13.2.2008.

European Commission (2008b) *Examining the creation of a European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR): Impact assessment*, Commission Staff Working Document accompanying document to the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, SEC(2008) 151, 13.2.2008.

European Commission (2009) *Report on progress made in developing the European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR)*, Commission Staff Working Paper, SEC(2009) 1265 final, Brussels, 24.9.2009.

European Commission (2011) *Determining the technical and operational framework of the European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR) and the actions to be taken for its establishment*, Commission Staff Working Paper SEC(2011) 145 final, Brussels, 28.1.2011.

Godenau, D. (2009) 'Las migraciones internacionales. Un enfoque institucional', en J.A. Galván Tudela (coord.), *Migraciones e integración cultural*, Academia Canaria de la Historia, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, pp. 65-94.

Godenau, D. & Zapata Hernández, V.M. (2007) (eds.) *La inmigración irregular en Tenerife*, Observatorio de la Inmigración en Tenerife, Área de Desarrollo Económico del Cabildo de Tenerife, Santa Cruz de Tenerife.

Hass, H. de (2007) *The myth of invasion. Irregular migration from West Africa to the Maghreb and the European Union*, Oxford, International Migration Institute, October.

Hau'ofa, E. (1993) *A New Oceania: Rediscovery of our Sea of Islands*, Suva, Fiji, University of the South Pacific.

Hollifield, J.F. (2000) 'The Politics of International Migration. How can we 'bring the State back in'?', in C.B. Brettell & J.F. Hollifield (eds.), *Migration Theory*, New York, Routledge, pp. 137-185.

Jeandesboz, J. (2011) 'Beyond the Tartar steppe: EUROSUR and the ethics of European border control practices', in J. P. Burgess & S. Gutwirth (eds.), *Europe under Threat? Security, Migration and Integration*, Brussels, VUB Press, pp. 111-132.

King, R. (2009) 'Geography, Islands and Migration in an Era of Global Mobility', *Island Studies Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2009, pp. 53-84.

Lee, E.S. (1966) 'A Theory of Migration', *Demography*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 47-57.

López-Sala, A. & Esteban-Sánchez, V. (2010) 'La nueva arquitectura política del control migratorio en la frontera marítima del Suroeste de Europa: los casos de España y Malta', en Anguiano, M.E. y López Sala, A.M. (eds.), *Migraciones y fronteras. Nuevos contornos para la movilidad internacional*, Icaria Antrazyt CIDOB, Barcelona, pp. 75-102.

Massey, D.S., Arango, J., Hugo, G., Kouaouci, A., Pellegrino, A., & Taylor, J.E. (eds.) (1998) *Worlds in Motion. Understanding International Migration at the End of the Millennium*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.

North, D.C. (1990) *Institutions, institutional change and economic performance*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

North, D.C. (2005) *Understanding the Process of Economic Change*, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press.

Paasi, A. (2001) 'Europe as a Social Process and Discourse. Considerations of Place, Boundaries and Identity', *European Urban and Regional Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 7-28.

Smith, M.P. & Guarnizo, L.E. (eds.) (1998) *Transnationalism from Below*, New Brunswick NJ, Transaction Publishers.

Waldinger, R. & Fitzgerald, D. (2004) 'Transnationalism in Question', *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 109, No. 5, pp. 1177-1195.