Unwanted sea migrants across the EU border: The Canary Islands

Luna Vives

Département de Géographie, Université de Montréal, Pavillon 520, Chemin Côte Ste-Catherine, Bureau 331-1, Montréal QC, H3T 1N8, C.P. 6128, succursale Centre-Ville, Montréal QC, H3C 3J7, Canada

A B S T R A C T

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.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Spain’s ‘fight’ 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

E-mail address: lunavives@gmail.com.

1 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, & Carelli, 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 ephemerical 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 decentralizing 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 Brigden, 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 Subsaharan Africa (Adams, Klobodu, & Lampetey, 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
دریافت فوری متن کامل مقاله

امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات