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Abstract

What happens at European borders shapes the way we talk and think about migration flows and migrants. Borders of the European Union (EU) permeate European society even though they are constructed as a far, easily neglected fortress. Through this piece, we delve into the analysis of two Spanish - and EU - *borderscapes* beyond the European continent, located geographically on the African continent: the Canary Islands, an archipelago off the coast of northwestern Africa and the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla bordering Moroccan territory. We analyze these *borderscapes* separately to then outline similarities and differences in their development. We argue that a.) these *borderscapes*, EU borders beyond geographical Europe, are utilized by Spain and the EU as territories where they can continue experimenting a perpetrated migration management based on securitization and militarization b.) such migration management is not effective nor pragmatic, looking at most recent consequences of securitization and externalization practices at the local and regional levels, c.) national and supranational institutions' focus on border security when looking at human migration has generated a gap in the governance in these local realities. Local NGOs and other grassroots community associations have been trying to fill this gap becoming proper migration governance actors in their own right.

Keywords

Borderscapes, EU Migration Governance, Bordering Processes

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Contents

1 Introduction

The southern sea border of the European Union (EU) has become increasingly securitized throughout the last decade in an effort to stem unwanted migration flows to 'Fortress Europe' (Campesi 2021; Léonard and Kaunert 2022). What is referred to as the 'securitization of migration' refers to how receiving states frame migration as a security issue and encompasses a wide-range of practices. Such securitized framings result in a variety of harmful practices for migrants, which can include the detention and deportation of individuals to more subversive actions such as bureaucratic repression. A typical example of this is the introduction of complex administrative procedures to regularize their immigration status, temporary stay, or access their rights (Bello 2022: 1327; Mountz and Loyd 2013: 179). Such practices and discursive framings tend to result in a variety of 'collateral damages,' creating spaces in which violence, discrimination and xenophobia is further 'provoked, committed, condoned, or protracted' against individuals migrating or against ethnic minorities within host communities (Dempsey 2020: 102; Lazaridis and Wadia 2015).

This case selection of Ceuta, Melilla and the Canary Islands provides a critical and understudied case comparison of islands and enclaves - specific territories and 'convenient' (for the moment) EU *borderscapes* (Brambilla 2015; Krichker 2021). Drawing on the concept of *borderscape,* used to refer to a geographical area shaped by transnational flows that have existed and developed beyond the constructed idea of the national state and its clear-cut borders, we answer the research question: what do these *borderscapes'* characteristics and developments tell us about current EU/Spanish migration governance and their future implications? By answering this question, our paper brings forward the argument that these 'European beyond Europe' territories make the perfect *borderscapes* for the continuation of a management of migration based on securitization and militarization. Though this approach to migration management may appear to work for the moment in stemming migration flows to mainland Europe, there are far-reaching and damaging implications to consider, outlined and detailed further in this paper. Some of the key negative consequences of these policies and practices include the human cost paid by people on the move as well as by host communities residing in these *borderscapes.*

While there is growing scholarship, which seeks to spotlight the securitization of migration such as in the Balkan Route, so-called migration 'hot-spots', and the Central Mediterranean, there remain gaps in comparative research for islands and enclaves (Hess and Kasparek 2019; Vradis et al. 2020). This is particularly relevant given that recent research has indicated that what is happening in these border areas portends what is happening more broadly with migration with often ad-hoc crisis driven policy experimentation with constantly evolving practices to 'manage migration' that are replicated by other states (Mountz 2020). Such developments generate important questions related to how EU member states on the southern periphery respond to their role as migration gatekeeper and their relationships between local, national, and regional levels (Mainwaring 2019). Against the backdrop of an overburdened civil society, there are growing tensions and frustration among host communities coping with the everyday realities of migration management. The increase of migration flows in one migratory route is enabled primarily by the restrictions on other routes.

This securitized EU and Spanish approach will end up damaging people on the move as well as Europeans - not in the same way or in the same timing - and, as a result, it is not an effective nor sustainable approach. Recent developments in EU migration governance such as new agreements

with third countries (e.g. Morocco) enhanced the possibility for people on the move to opt for the Canarian route. The cases of the Canary Islands, Ceuta and Melilla allow us to further observe and explore these dynamics. Such cases may be emblematic of broader trends that can be observed in the changing social and political landscape of Southern Europe and the EU more broadly.

This working paper provides a comparative analysis of these cases highlighting some of their characteristics and explores some of the collateral damage caused by this securitized approach to migration. This has significant implications for receiving host communities and local resources who have become migration management actors, ill-equipped to provide the needed reception and inclusion conditions to migrants and asylum-seekers or respond to complex humanitarian and protection concerns.

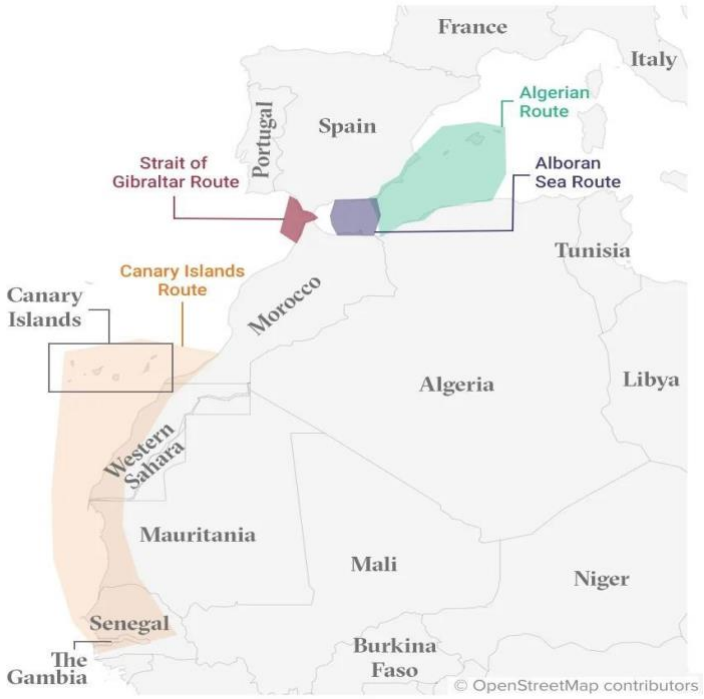

Figure 1: Key migration corridors across the Western Mediterranean and Atlantic regions

This paper presents the two cases separately to then outline a comparative analysis. In the last section, based on the findings of our comparative analysis drawing on existing literature, secondary sources and accounts of the border based on our observations and field notes, we present our argument which advances that a.) these *borderscapes*, EU borders beyond geographical Europe, are utilized by Spain and the EU as territories where they can continue experimenting a perpetrated migration management based on securitization and militarization b.) such migration management is not effective nor pragmatic, looking at most recent consequences of securitization and externalization practices at the local and regional levels, c.) national and supranational institutions' focus on border security when looking at human migration has generated a gap in the governance in these local realities. Local Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) and other grassroots community associations have been trying to fill this gap becoming proper migration governance actors.

2 The Case of the Canary Islands

2.1 Background: Migration in the Canary Islands

Located off the northwest coast of Africa, the Canary Islands are an archipelago governed by Spain and are subject to Spanish and European border management strategies. With a population of 2.2 million they are the eighth most populous autonomous community in Spain and the most populous special territory of the EU (European Parliament 2024). Historically, the Canary Islands have been the site of temporary, permanent, internal and international migration (Esteban and López Sala 2007). Their proximity to the African continent (only 100 kilometers from the coast of Morocco) makes them a key entry point primarily for migrants, from various countries of origin, arriving from West Africa. Though it should be highlighted that geographic routes of African migration to Europe vary in terms of their starting points or countries of departure, not all of them are African, since Africa is also a transit area for people from other continents (Godenau, Buraschi, and Zapata Hernández 2020: 2).

The increase of individuals arriving irregularly on the Western Africa-Atlantic migration route has been episodic with different increases in arrivals via other migration pathways in the region depending on the closure of other migration routes and on the situation of countries of origin (Godenau 2012). In 2024, at least 46.843 people reached the Canary Islands, an "all-time record high" via irregular migration routes (InfoMigrants 2025). In the second quarter of 2024, arrivals to the Canary Islands represented 77 percent of all arrivals in Spain (IOM 2024). Migrants, with various economic and/or protection concerns, arriving on this route are primarily from Senegal, Mali, Morocco among other West African countries, though not limited to these (Godenau 2012: 11). One of the deadliest migratory routes in the world, in 2024 alone more than 10.400 people died or disappeared in their attempt to reach Spanish shores, an average of 30 people per day (Caminando Fronteras 2024).

The main ports of destination for maritime migration are primarily the islands of Lanzarote, followed by Gran Canaria, Tenerife, Fuerteventura, and La Gomera. New arrivals typically stay in temporary reception facilities with several camps located across the different islands. Though some migrants will be relocated to the Spanish mainland from reception facilities, many migrants are often stuck in the Canary Islands in a legal limbo either waiting for complex bureaucratic and administrative processes on their asylum applications or other regularization of stay (Fradejas-García and Loftsdóttir 2024). Practically this occurs due to a number of factors: misinformation or poor experiences in interacting with local authorities, difficulties obtaining documentation or other administrative hurdles prevent migrants from regularizing their situation. Legal assistance and interpreters are inadequate, which is a key issue given common language barriers among migrants (No Name Kitchen, El Taller-Frontera Sur Gran Canaria, Solidary Wheels, and No Borders For Human Rights 2025). Such resources are essential for migrants to understand and exercise their rights. Some migrants, for various reasons, are unable or unwilling to regularise their legal status with many remaining undocumented. This can be attributed to different factors but in general the long waiting periods and low reception standards create uncertainty and fatigue among many migrants (Barbero 2021: 192). Even those migrants who have obtained asylum or residency have reported informal restrictions in freedom of movement and mobility within the Canary Islands as

well as to the Spanish mainland. At the mercy of police discretion, many migrants have been confined in substandard conditions (Defensor del Pueblo, 2021: 65; Ruiz Ramos 2024: 2).

The increase of individuals arriving irregularly on the Western Africa-Atlantic migration route has become progressively framed as a security issue to be solved, often resulting in a wide-range of violence and discrimination against migrants in the Canary Islands. This reached a critical tipping point in 2021, when some Spanish residents began organising anti-migrant protests and vigilante groups through social media platforms harassing migrants and ethnic minority citizens alike (Klitgaard 2021). The *Defensor del Pueblo* (Spanish Ombudsman) highlighted that the situation of African migrants in particular was characterized by an increase in xenophobic incidents, which risk becoming a predominant trend in the Canary Islands (2021: 16). Against the backdrop of steady migration continuing in 2024, there have been sporadic anti-migrant protests in the Canary Islands among host communities (Agence France-Presse 2024). In response to these incidents, more visible forms of resistance among migrants in irregular situations against restrictive security practices and these inter-related social dynamics have emerged. These manifestations of resistance have included public protests, hunger strikes, acts of self-harm, among others, calling for solutions and the 'right to have rights' (Oberti 2021; European Council on Refugees and Exiles 2021).

2.2 The Cayuco Crisis, Evolving Security Practices and the Role of the EU

The last intensification of irregular maritime migration to the Canary Islands began in 2006 when cayucos, larger wooden fishing boats, started to arrive in the Canary Islands and the number of migrants began to steadily increase (Esteban and López Sala 2007; Vives 2017). The so-called 'Cayuco Crisis,' named after the wooden fishing boats that brought many of the migrants over, marked a new era in Spanish migration policy inducing institutional change in border management with these policies emulated and reconfigured (Godenau 2012; López-Sala and Esteban-Sánchez 2010; Esteban and López Sala 2007). One of the reasons for this increased migration to the Canary Islands in the 1990s and 2000s was that the EU had helped to enforce the northern enclave borders of Ceuta and Melilla in Morocco, as well as the Strait of Gibraltar (Dudek and Pestano 2019; Godenau 2014: 135). Consequently, migrants were searching for an alternative route to enter Europe.

Border enforcement and reception infrastructure (accommodation, services, and other resources) were inadequate to handle the number of arrivals (Dudek and Pestano 2019). Thousands of migrants became stranded in the docks of harbors in the islands, which generated social alarm, media attention and the need for the Spanish government to respond. The state response to the humanitarian situation was limited by the lack of budget and coordination (Godenau 2012). During the Cayuco Crisis, the Spanish government sought assistance from the EU and its member states via the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), and adopted the EU's externalization of migration policy with Plan Africa, an aid package to stop migration at its source (Dudek and Pestano 2019). This was done through EU policy prescriptions to promote development in the countries at the source of migration and to create bilateral readmission agreements with countries of origin and transit (Godenau 2012). As a result, the number of irregular arrivals in Spain decreased steadily after its peak in 2006 due to adopting a European migration policy that continues to be emulated (López-Sala 2009). The Cayuco Crisis was resolved through the coordinated action of

multiple levels of governments and assistance from NGOs. Although it can be seen as effective, this measure faced logistical and humanitarian challenges.

Though the resources and infrastructure in the Canary Islands for reception have been improved to an extent they remain ill-equipped and unsustainable to handle these intense peaks in migration and ongoing support for many migrants post-arrival today (Godenau and Zapata Hernández 2022). Reports of deliberate policies of inhumane detention, illegal mobility restrictions, human rights violations, and an overreliance on deportation so-called 'solutions' continue to be highlighted by activists in the Canary Islands (Spanish Commission for Refugees Aid 2024; Allan 2021). The backdrop of exceptional or securitized approach, has generated exceptional situations and spaces in which the violations of the rights of migrants take place beyond initial reception (Irídia and Novact 2023).

Spain's migration management model underpinned by this securitization logic is implemented with resources and operational activities carried out by Frontex. This translates to the enhancement of security at EU external territorial borders through an increased use of coercive measures and surveillance technology, as well as the deployment of an improved system of coordinated actions or capacity support, and the implementation of agreements with the countries of origin (Carrera 2007; Godenau 2012). There are many concerns surrounding such approaches, particularly given that Frontex continues to be criticized as an overly-politicized body and for failing to take action against the deaths of migrants trying to reach Europe by crossing the sea (Léonard and Kaunert 2023; Dudek and Pestano 2019). There are many risks to consider practically and human rights implications as the externalization of border management also implies a curbing of the mobility of third-country nationals without, at times, establishing their legal status (Carrera 2007). Though Spain had achieved its goal of curbing the flow of irregular migrants, the deficiencies in such an approach and its risks in breaching human rights of migrants are well-documented and neglect the fundamental realities of Africa as a new continent of emigration (Baldwin-Edwards 2006: 311). This securitized and militarized approach continues to underpin migration management in the Canary Islands. Frontex and Spanish authorities have renewed their agreement for 2024 after a temporary suspension over concerns about the protection of migrant data amid increased arrivals to the Canary Islands (European Council on Refugees and Exiles 2024).

Securitized approaches to borders and migration are diffused, often spiralling into various manifestations that take on a life of their own (Bello 2022). This is a key point to highlight, as securitization and humanitarianism become discursively entangled here. Framing border crossing and dangerous sea migration as a 'tragedy', 'emergency' or a 'crisis' tend to justify demands for action to 'save lives' or rescue migrants from smugglers/traffickers, thereby reinforcing a securitized response (Moreno-Lax 2018). Practices of rescue and assistance based on humanitarian grounds have come to shape both state and non-state action in the construction and management of migrants (Pallister-Wilkins 2017). Securitizing borders and migrants becomes intertwined with humanitarianism, engendering a new form of 'ethical policing' that simultaneously 'cares and controls' with humanitarian organizations who may wittingly or unwittingly be implicated and who will actively fill the gaps purposefully left by states (Pallister-Wilkins 2022; Bird and Schmid 2021). Further complicating matters, bordering interventions and containment are no longer exercised at the external border of a state but are increasingly internalized through management practices directed to "where the migrant is" (Casas-Cortes and Cobarrubias 2016: 232). A wide-

range of informal practices and controls over 'suspicious' foreigners now take place before and after the person has entered the national territory containment has also been informalized: this process of bordering is undertaken by both state and non-state actors, often according to flexible and ad hoc arrangements that can be expanded, retracted or rewritten according to rapid changes in migration flows (Godenau 2012; Gazzoti 2023).

2.3 Current Developments: COVID-19 and Grievances with Host Communities

From 2019 onwards, Spain became the main EU destination for migrants and asylum-seekers amidst against the backdrop of access restrictions to Morocco and the western Mediterranean coast of Africa as well as the COVID-19 pandemic (Reuters 2024). This led to a significant strain on the Spanish Asylum system and host community infrastructure and resources (Gallinal-Arias 2021). A change in internal policies was introduced in 2019 in light of the increase in arrivals and the requirements of EU migration regulations. In order to comply with EU regulations and to avoid a 'call factor', migrants were no longer referred to the mainland for assistance, and movement limitations were established within the islands and on the mainland. Bilateral agreements with West African countries and Morocco have been arranged at different stages by Spanish authorities in order to facilitate deportations to countries of origin but these arrangements were impacted by COVID-19 and the related limitation of movements (Gallinal-Arias 2021).

During the onset of COVID-19 pandemic, thousands of migrants became stranded for long periods in the docks of harbors in the islands. The initial decision was to host migrants in hotels and tourist apartments as emergency accommodation given their lack of activity due to COVID-19 restrictions. The immobility caused by the pandemic, in an archipelago characterized by tourism mobility and labor migrants, turned the migration-tourism nexus on its head transforming irregular migrants into guests of tourist establishments (Domínguez-Mujica, Parreño-Castellano and Moreno-Medina 2022). This caused resistance in host communities and the tourism industry among host communities as it was viewed as an obstacle in attempts to revitalize tourist arrivals (Martín and Pérez 2021). This led to the development of more permanent reception facilities and camps though capacity and conditions remain insufficient. Efforts to build new facilities have been ad hoc and have sometimes faced local opposition and delays, resulting in continued challenges with overcrowding and inadequate living conditions for migrants. Many migrants live outside of the centers in towns or in cities across the Canary Islands often unable to access services. Different temporary reception options have been adopted on an ad hoc basis, including the encampments and the use of public and private buildings like hotels and private residences (ECRE 2024). This contrast between tourist and migrant mobilities in the Canary Islands highlights how different forms of movement are legitimized or criminalized, often through racialized hierarchies (Tazzioli 2022). While tourist flows are often welcomed as economic lifelines to the Canary Islands, irregular migrants are framed as threats legitimizing their violent securitization and mobility restrictions. These mobilities are not only unequally valued but co-constitutive, or in other words, the freedom of one depends on the containment of the other (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013). This serves to illustrate how mobility is governed not by movement itself, but by who moves and under what terms.

The 'Plan Canarias' established additional reception facilities in three islands (Fuerteventura, Gran Canaria, and Tenerife), where migrants are referred after initial identification procedures upon

arrival or when rescued, which included COVID-19 testing and quarantine (Dahlia 2024). Those sites are managed by different NGOs, intend to provide adequate standards of assistance to migrants, and identify vulnerabilities and those entitled to request international protection (as asylum seekers or persons of concern). The State Secretary for Migration of the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration directly manages facilities in addition to NGOs, often funded by the State Secretary for Migration to run reception centres for asylum seekers (ECRE 2024). Many of these facilities are apartments and many migrants often live in shared accommodation in apartments not run by NGOs, informal makeshift tents or other precarious informal. The Spanish Red Cross, local NGOs and other grassroots community associations play an essential role in providing migrants with legal protection, medical assistance, accommodation and other services (Defensor del Pueblo 2021).

In 2024, the number of mostly undocumented migrants arriving irregularly on Spain's Canary Islands in the Atlantic Ocean was more than five times higher than 2018 and 2019 combined (Dahlia 2024). The restrictions in other migration routes in north and sub-Saharan Africa have pushed many more to embark on the dangerous journey. Additional push factors in this case comprise of the political instrumentalization of migrants by Morocco (as it happened later in Ceuta), in the case of the departures from Western Sahara, and the fishing arrangements between the EU and some countries in Africa which affected traditional fishing practices and increased departures from Mauritania and Senegal (Black 2021: 12; Dahlia 2024). COVID-19 demonstrated many cracks in the migration reception system and complexities that can be observed at the local, national and regional levels. It has been underlined that the emergency approach adopted in dealing with the situation on the islands resulted in lack of access to information, rights and the right to asylum. This also leads to severe delays in procedures such as identification, age assessment, access to residence permits for children, enrolment in education, training and vocational courses and lack of accommodation for ageing out adolescents (Mixed Migration Centre 2021). The increase in people arriving by sea contributed to tensions between regional authorities in the Canary Islands and the central government with broken negotiations on reforming the Law on Foreigners to require regional authorities to accept migrant children and young people relocated from the Canary Islands (Human Rights Watch 2025). The regional prosecutor's office and Spain's human rights Ombudsperson expressed concern over putting children at increased risk of rights violations and about the lack of school places for migrant children arriving in the Canary Islands, with local authorities saying that they were overwhelmed (ibid).

Regarding migration governance and the role of the state and the EU, the Spanish Government and EU agencies continue to be involved in managing migrant flows, but coordination and resources remain a pervasive issue. Recent efforts have focused on improving facilities and increasing transfers to mainland Spain. This is an ongoing challenge given the fragmented nature of state agencies in border and migration control (Zapata Hernández 2021). In 2024 in an effort to curb migration, Spain has asked Frontex to resume an air and maritime surveillance operation that had ended in 2018 in Mauritania, Senegal and Gambia (Al Yahyai 2024). This exceptional or securitized approach continues to generate exceptional situations and spaces in which the violations of the rights of migrants take place (Irídia and Novact 2023). More broadly, as Kemp highlights, it is worth reflecting that pursuant to Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, people have the right not only to asylum but also to seek asylum so if a state tries to push back those trying to reach its shores, it must not do so at the expense of those seeking, and entitled to, protection

(2016). It should be highlighted that in 2023, the majority of people arriving in the Canary Islands expressed their wish to apply for international protection, in contrast to previous years (Spanish Commission for Refugees Aid 2024).

Officials on the Canary Islands have asked the Spanish government for more assistance arguing they do not have sufficient resources or capacities to manage the scale of arrivals. Local state actors, NGOs, associations and citizens' grassroots movements are arguably the backbone of migration governance in the Canary Islands. Local organizations and networks of receiving host communities can support and advocate for migrants, provide services in the absence of the state, and develop relationships and solidarity with migrants. Non-state local actors typically operate in response to the state or regional level directives and policies, which often lack this local perspective, or understanding of the infrastructure, support and/or practical resources required for implementation. Against this backdrop, the presence of policy does not mitigate the persistent challenges of limited available resources, bureaucratic hurdles, and tensions within communities.

On the other side of this, migrant-receiving host communities can engage in discrimination, violence, harassment, and xenophobia towards migrants. Local host community hostilities and tensions have ebbed and flowed through anti-migrant protests. In July 2024, hundreds in the Canary Islands protested against the influx of migrants across cities and towns throughout the islands, with local media putting their numbers at several hundred (Agence France Press 2024). There are significant concerns among many host communities spanning issues of integration, employment opportunities, livelihood stability, housing, local reputation, access to rights, and social services, among other issues. This is unsurprising given the dependence on the high structural unemployment rates in the islands with youth unemployment in particular, significantly higher than the national average in Spain along with Ceuta and Melilla (Betancort et al. 2019). The economic situation in the Canary Islands in particular has seen some recovery post- pandemic, largely due to tourism, which is a key sector for the islands yet socio-economic vulnerabilities remain. In addition to anti-migrant protests among host communities and calls for more support from the central government, there have been similar demonstrations against overtourism calling for more sustainable management and coordination (Euronews 2024). Mass tourism has been less controlled by the state with host communities citing it is an unsustainable model that makes life unaffordable and puts a strain on already-overstretched resources and infrastructure.

The Canary Islands is often referenced as an emblematic case and "theatrical space" where EU governments develop and showcase their representation of state control over migration (Gabrielli 2014: 315). Here, there are complex social dynamics and daily challenges that can be observed empirically that manifest from current securitized approaches to managing migration. Such approaches have resulted in an unsustainable situation often generating social conflict and exacerbating the vulnerabilities of both migrants and host communities.

3 The Case of Ceuta and Melilla

3.1 Historical Developments of the Enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla

The two Spanish enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta, situated on the northern coast of Africa between Moroccan territory and the Mediterranean Sea, have been under Spanish control since the fifteenth

century, for the former, and seventeenth century, for the latter (González Enríquez 2007). Ceuta, a city prison, given its unique secluded geography, covers an area of 18.5 km2 and is separated from the province Cádiz by only 17 km and counts 85.000 inhabitants (Ferrer-Gallardo and Albet-Mas 2016). While smaller in size (covering an area of 12 km2), Melilla counts around 86.000 inhabitants (González-Páramo 2021). The enclaves are isolated territories, and communication between the two is complicated. There are almost 250 kilometres by sea and about 500 kilometres by road between them, and no commercial flights nor trains connect them (González Enríquez 2007). These isolated territories are also contested territories: Morocco has never recognized Spanish sovereignty over Melilla and Ceuta, and since 1975 (end of Francoism), these enclaves have remained an unsolved colonial issue. The Mediterranean Sea separates Ceuta and Melilla from mainland Spain, where they depend economically and politically. On the other hand, despite their vicinity, specific Spanish norms separated them socially from Morocco for centuries: until 1868 Spanish norms forbade Moroccans from inhabiting the enclaves despite Moroccan farmers from the neighbouring region had long been crossing the border to Ceuta and Melilla to sell their products (González Enríquez 2007). What has been through centuries the dominant group amongst the enclaves' inhabitants, the *cristianos* (Christians), share religious, linguistic, phenotypical and political bonds with the mainland and mainly settled in the two cities due to military duties, involvement in the colonization process or frontier trade activities (Karell 2015; Torres Colon 2008). Still today, military and security forces as public employees are the prevalent occupational group (for the Spanish population) in the enclaves (González Enríquez 2007). The presence of the military is dominant - as if to constantly reiterate the understanding of the border as the space where civilizations clash and are in conflict, understanding that has been often instrumentalized in recent times by the Spanish radical right forces (e.g., Vox) (de Borja Navarro 2022).

These territories' other major group are the *musulmanes* (Muslims), a population with Moroccan origins residing in the enclaves. Moroccans from the hinterlands settled in the two enclaves throughout the end of the 19th century, mainly working as servicemen. These workers had no access to Spanish nationality: until the 1980s, they were only provided with a document that would allow them to reside in the cities – a document that lacked any legal force (González Enríquez 2007). In 1985, Spain approved the Law on Aliens, which more favourable provisions for foreign residents from countries whose cultural and historical ties with Spain were perceived and defined as more substantial, which included Latin America, Portugal, the Philippines, Andorra, Equatorial Guinea, but not for people coming from Morocco, in spite of the fact that part of Moroccan territory had been a Spanish colony. The Law on Aliens highlighted how the existence of a Muslim and Moroccan community in Ceuta and Melilla had been largely ignored and marginalized by mainland Spain, facing specific ethno-culturally based restrictions throughout the centuries (Briones Gómez et al. 2013; Gold, 2000; González Enríquez 2007).

After 1987, the majority of the cities' Muslim residents – as they were constantly denied joining the national state –became formally stateless (Karell 2015) and confronted by a new situation due to the enforcement of the provisions of the Law on Aliens of 1985: they should become regular migrants or risk expulsion from the towns (González Enríquez 2007). It is important to underline that at that moment (1987), according to a study carried out by the Spanish National Statistical Office (Instituto Nacional de Estadística <Madrid> 1987), 32 per cent of the total population in Melilla was Muslim, while 18 per cent in Ceuta: most of these people had born in the cities. Also, with Spain entering the European Economic Community in 1986, the territories became the EU's enclaves on the African

continent (Ribas 2015; Calderón Vázquez et al. 2023). Spain being part of the EU means that Spanish borders have gone through a process of re-bordering addressing two dimensions: one bilateral (national) and one communitarian (European), accentuated by Schengen (Calderón Vázquez et al. 2023). Moreover, a corpus of literature reflected on the process of Europeanization and its role in enhancing hostility towards a constructed 'other' (De Genova 2016; Kundnani 2023). This 'other' challenges constructions of European identity building on clear ethnic/cultural ideas of Europe - what Kundnani (2023) reports as 'Eurowhiteness'. On these specific borderlands the transformation of the Spanish border into a European one can be considered as continuation of colonial practices translated from a national-state level to a supranational, regional one. Indeed, it is not only the Spanish border that is being controlled and defended here since Schengen, but the border with Europe and its constructed identity as 'Eurowhiteness'.

3.2 Current Developments: Relationship with Morocco, EU Externalization Practices and COVID-19 Pandemic Legacies on the Border

Ceuta and Melilla have been defined as *fronteras avanzadas* through centuries and are still perceived as a second border used to externalize Spanish and EU borders. These territories are asymmetric, multidimensional and conflictual borders. 'Asymmetric' because they re-enact and perform an economic, cultural and historical-political disparity; 'multidimensional' due to the diverse actors at different governance levels involved on these borders; and 'conflictual' due to the struggle brought by disparity and inequalities (Calderón Vázquez et al. 2023; González-Páramo 2021). Here, the mentioned *fronteras avanzadas* manifest non-physically through the ongoing cooperation with Morocco, which, despite being reluctant to recognize the enclaves as Spanish, increasingly collaborates with Spain regarding border controls due to concerns related to border crime and 'irregular' migration (Calderón Vázquez et al. 2023) and receives financial support from Spain and the EU to keep migrants away from their borders (Jones et al. 2022). A non-physical *frontera avanzada* refers thus to the border's extension beyond its physical location, encompassing the cooperation between Spain, the EU, and Morocco in migration and border control. It is a key aspect of the Ceuta and Melilla border situation, highlighting the complex and multifaceted nature of these territories' relationship with the EU and Morocco, territories where the tension of an environment constructed to be hostile towards specific people on the move is tangible through physical and non-physical characteristics.

Non-physical bordering is also implemented through antagonistic bureaucracy around regularization at the border and the absence of support to people on the move from national/supranational institutions. In addition, in the case of Ceuta and Melilla, evidence shows a specific hostility towards Moroccan nationals when they try to start a procedure to regularize to the point that there appears to be an unwritten rule not allowing Moroccan nationals access to the temporary stay centres for immigrants which are present on the enclaves as well as on the Canary Islands (Spanish Centres of Temporary Stay of Migrants Centros de Estancia Temporal de Inmigrantes – CETI)[1]. Ceuta and Melilla can be thus defined as *limboscapes* (Ferrer-Gallardo and

[1] Data from the investigation conducted by Marino and Hategekimana (2023) reports interviews of witnesses confirming the existence of an unwritten rule, a consequence of the regulations that did not allow Moroccan *transfronterizos* to stay overnight in the Spanish territory of Melilla and Ceuta. As mentioned earlier in this piece, *transfronterizos* were allowed – before the Covid-19 break-out – to enter Spanish territory for work reasons on the condition that they had to leave the territory on the same day they could not stay overnight. As a result, *transfronterizos*

Albet-Mas 2016), namely spaces where people on the move's trajectories towards the European continent are spatially and temporally suspended, spaces where people on the move become immobile due to difficulty of undertaking regularization processes and thus the impossibility to move further from the enclaves, EU territories where Schengen is not implemented (Briones Gómez et al. 2013; Ferrer Gallardo 2008; Gold 2000).

Looking at recent developments, it is key to underline how Europeanization and the implementation of Schengen transformed Ceuta and Melilla from Spanish border cities into borders of the European Union. One of the implications of this change was the creation of an increasingly securitized border between Spain and Morocco, enhancing the construction of an image of 'European Fortress' (Engelbert et al. 2019). The EU has been enhancing transborder security by giving support to Spanish efforts in implementing border control in the summer months through Joint Operation Minerva, a collaboration between the Spanish government and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Frontex, in border checks at ports where people arrive by ferries from Morocco. As reported by Frontex (2022), they deploy "forged document experts and border guards trained to detect stolen cars". Frontex is thus an involved actor - and in a constant way - on this border.

The securitized border (Ferrer-Gallardo and Gabrielli 2022, 2024) has seen increasing humanitarian actors' involvement, which translated into a present tension between more securitarian and humanitarian actors and, consequently, discourses and practices on the border (Ferrer-Gallardo and Gabrielli 2024). In this tense, securitized environment, we find several civil society actors that have the mission of developing a community on the border – investing in what the border has to offer but, most crucially, offering "migration governance focused on the human side of migration" which national state and EU institutions seem to have forgotten. Humanitarian actors, part of the civil society on these borders, become migration governance actors in their own right, prioritizing a humanitarian approach to the border (Okyay and Zaragoza-Cristiani 2016; Marino and Hategekimana, 2023).

Research has also investigated how a securitized border accompanied by an externalization carried out by Spain and the EU in their relationship with Morocco gave Morocco a chance to strategize the borders of Ceuta and Melilla (Ferrer-Gallardo and Gabrielli 2022, 2024; Marino and Hategekimana 2023). Another more recent development on the border is reflected in the legacies of COVID-19 pandemic regulations, which have brought disruptions to cross-border mobility between Morocco and the enclaves due to implemented lockdowns and tight controls on the Moroccan side of the border (Ferrer-Gallardo and Gabrielli 2024). The border closure implemented as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic affected cross-border trade and cross-border workers and, interestingly, still does. In fact, the Spanish-Moroccan border reopened in May 2022 but only for Spanish and EU citizens, people with Spanish residency and/or working permits, or Schengen visas: the Schengen exception that allowed cross-border workers (Moroccans residing in the Moroccan border provinces) to enter the enclaves has not been restored (Ferrer-Gallardo and Gabrielli 2024; Marino and Hategekimana 2023).

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were not allowed to stay in the CETIs. The rule was rapidly extended from Moroccan people living across the borders to any person of Moroccan nationality. This is not a written rule, but something summary which very much depends on the peculiar situation at the borders and on the people working in the CETI. From accounts of humanitarian workers and volunteers on this border, Moroccan people on the move's future – if on the streets or with a roof over their heads – is mostly summarily decided.

After the measures put in place regarding the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, two were the highly mediatized episodes of border disruption in the enclaves: the so-defined Morocco-Spain border incident of the 16th of May 20212 and the Melilla massacre of the 24th of June 20223. These disruptive events – 'crises' at the border – reveal – as happened in other externalization contexts (Okyay and Zaragoza-Cristiani 2016) – very tangible consequences of third-country dependency in migration governance of the EU and some of its member states. They confronted the EU and Spain with the vulnerabilities of their border regimes, especially when giving leverage and power to specific neighbouring third countries (Ferrer-Gallardo and Gabrielli 2022; Okyay and Zaragoza-Cristiani 2016; Triandafyllidou 2014).

Moreover, as argued by Baldwin-Edwards (2006), these borderland territories have been increasingly instrumentalized to foment an emphasis on the security in migration governance with a complete lack of coordination at the EU level of policy on immigration for employment, regularization of undocumented migrants and rights of long-term migrants as if movement on these borderlands is simply and uniquely related to the matter of security. Lacking coherent policy initiatives from the EU, Spain, and other border countries such as Italy increasingly started pursuing their own national agendas, resulting in an increasing militarization of migration governance in the Mediterranean area (Lutterbeck 2006).

3.3 Mobility vs Migration on the Border

Mobility on these borderlands has been increasingly mainly connected to irregular migration. However, as we already mentioned, these enclaves have dealt with immigration, emigration, and transit migration for a long time, considering their geographical and political positioning throughout history—the movement of people is intrinsic to the region; it is evident. In this piece, we mentioned data related to the Muslim population of Moroccan descent residing in the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla and the challenges they encountered in the 1980s with the Spanish Law on Aliens. The enclaves, however, are and have been through their history first and foremost regions of transit and cross-border movements: around 30,000 people in the early 2000s would come into Ceuta and Melilla daily from the nearby Moroccan provinces of Nador, Tangier and Tetouan (González Enríquez 2007). Traders from Morocco would buy goods in the enclaves and sell them in Moroccan territories, making this trade one of the most important economic activities in the region (Soddu 2006). Moroccan residents of the Nador, Tetouan and Tangier provinces who would cross the border to Ceuta and Melilla daily would have a special document provided by the Spanish authorities which allowed them to enter the enclaves on condition that they leave by midnight. As discussed in this piece, this mechanism changed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

[2] During the so-defined Morocco-Spain border incident of the 16th of May 2021, an estimated number of 8,000 migrants crossed into the territory from Morocco to Ceuta over 36 hours. The crossing was possible due to a reduction of the usual heavy militarization of the coasts by Moroccan authorities (Kassam 2021). This reduction in the heavy militarization was supposedly the result of Rabat's frustration at the Spanish government's decision to host and offer health assistance to Brahim Ghali, leader of Western Sahara (the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic). Ghali is the head of the Polisario Front, a rebel Sahrawi nationalist liberation movement claiming Western Sahara against Moroccan control of the region (Reuters 2021).

[3] On the 24th of June 2024, at the abandoned border crossing of Barrio Chino, Moroccan police brutally attacked migrants attempting to cross the border into Spain. More than 20 people on the move died, and 77 are still reported missing.

Transnational daily mobility was thus part of the daily life of these borderlands. In addition, the enclaves have shown to be more and more eager to attract tourists and temporary mobile people. Ceuta, in particular, has recently shown interest in attracting digital creators and influencers with specific financial advantages for them – while it already has privileged taxation for the gaming business/sector (Delle Femmine and Cordero 2024). Tourism has been indeed analyzed as the most important industry for several European enclaves (Timothy 1995) as "these are unique from a wanderlust perspective because of the amalgamation of different cultures and community values within a limited space" (Poulaki et al. 2023: 158).

3.4 The "Border of Distrust"

Melilla and Ceuta are territories with a history of conflicts and injustices, as is the case for all territories which inherited a colonial legacy. Their transnational characteristic developed these territories as such that they have always been scapes of encounter – even when mainly a conflictual one. The two enclaves still report and will, in the future, report a tension that reflects constant and perpetrated hostility and violence created by the then-imperial domination aims reflected in today's national state (and EU) control over its border. As Rosenberg (2022) argues, in fact, the obsession with the right to border control is not to be perceived as a feature that is inherent in sovereign states but rather as a modern consequence of White supremacy embedded in colonialism and the project of the empire. In these borderscapes, crossroads between empires and crucial areas for power assertion through centuries, we see the implications of the obsession with the right to border control in their most crude and violent forms.

Despite the challenges Spain and the EU face in reconciling their externalization project with the EU's normative mission and the so-proclaimed Western values focused on a human rights approach, this securitizing and externalizing vision continues. Diplomatic crisis at the border has earned the enclaves the concept of a "border of distrust" (*frontera de la desconfianza*) mentioned in the Spanish national newspaper *El País* when reflecting on Spain-Morocco relations and their fruitfulness and potential for the future. This phrase accurately describes the current perception of instability that such borderlands transmit and, consequently, the international relations developing when managing the border by the powers involved.

3 *Borderscapes*: What Do We Learn by Investigating These Territories? A Comparative Analysis

The geographical areas analyzed in this piece report characteristics that are described in the conceptualization of *borderscape* (Brambilla 2015; Krichker 2021), a geographical area shaped by transnational flows that have existed and developed beyond the constructed idea of the national state and its clear-cut borders. Melilla and Ceuta, in addition, have often been conceptualized as *limboscapes* (Ferrer-Gallardo and Albet-Mas 2016; Ferrer-Gallardo and Espiñeira 2015), areas where people's movement can be suspended or altered due to specific bordering practices (López-Sala and Godenau 2024). Having analyzed the peculiarity of migrants' situation on the enclaves and the Canary Islands, we argue that *borderscape* and *limboscape* are terms that describe the Canary Islands as well as borders of Spain and the EU more generally: in fact, here as well many migrants find themselves stuck due to a condition of irregularity – forced into immobility.

These *borderscapes,* Spanish due to the empire's desire of conquest, extension and control over this region of northern Africa despite its distance from mainland Spain, have witnessed transnational movement that has been the very basis for their societies today. Melilla and Ceuta's colonial legacy plays a great role still today: the two enclaves have always reported a slightly more militarized approach given their function of *fronteras avanzadas* on African land, land fortress advanced into the African continent to defend Spain from Ottomans' conquests (Calderón Vázquez et al. 2023; González-Páramo 2021). The Canary Islands, on the other hand, represented, since the 15th century, a crucial stop on international trade routes between the European continent and the Americas (Bosa 2004; Fradejas-García and Loftsdóttir 2024; Santana-Pérez 2018). Territories where the Spanish presence can be seen as counter-intuitive considering its distance which has been deeply shaped by Spanish colonial interests and where transnational movement together with discrimination, disparity and imperialist violence has characterized life for centuries.

A multi-perspectival (Rumford 2012) approach to these borders allows us to analyze form of bordering that go beyond the physical: in this sense, the concept of *borderscape* is additionally useful because it allows us to underline how boundaries do not need to be visible to be effective by reflecting on ways physical and ideological/symbolical/cultural (non-physical) borders are set (Balibar 2013). *Borderscapes* are surely physical but there are non-physical aspects to their existence that we find in both cases analyzed in similar and different ways. For example, evidence shows non-physical bordering manifesting through the hostility of the residents and institutional presence in these territories from residents' anti-immigration protests in the Canary Islands to the increasing presence of police forces in the last decade in already highly militarized Ceuta and Melilla (Aris Escarcena 2022; Carr 1997; Fradejas-García and Loftsdóttir 2024; Queirolo Palmas 2021). In addition to a climate of palpable tension, detachment from the people considered as 'immigrants' and violence, there are clear bureaucratic barriers for people of the move on these territories: many are the people that give up on regularization in both cases (Queirolo Palmas 2021; Marino and Hategekimana 2023; Fradejas-García and Loftsdóttir 2024). A recent study conducted by non-governmental organizations working on the ground in the Canary Islands, Ceuta, and Melilla highlights lack of adequate information and advice; obstacles in obtaining documentation that prevent migrants from regularizing their situation; a lack of legal assistance and interpreters that hinder their understanding and exercise of their rights; as well as impediments to applying for international protection due to misinformation and administrative barriers (No Name Kitchen, El Taller-Frontera Sur Gran Canaria, Solidary Wheels, No Borders For Human Rights 2025).

In Ceuta and Melilla, we reported instances of a specific hostility towards Moroccan nationals when trying to access the CETIs. Taking into consideration that it is from the CETIs that the regularization procedure starts (through which the migrants would be or not allowed to proceed to travel to mainland Spain) the people that cannot access these centers resort to the streets and to an irregular condition. This hostility created at the physical and non-physical levels is linked to an increasingly alarmist anti-immigration narrative shared in other EU member states and connected to what happens on their borders (Bello 2022; Indenkleef, 2019). Narratives about border events are alarmist and representing disruptions as caused by migration on the border and criminalizing specific movement and people on the move in these territories (Bassi 2018; Carr 1997; Cuttitta 2014; D'Amato and Lucarelli 2019; Diaferia 2022; Marino et al. 2024; Pécoud 2015).

Nevertheless, despite evidence showing that migration on these specific contexts might be used as scapegoat channeling other deeper issues of these territories with their conflictual history rich in injustices perpetrated by the supranational and [once-imperial and then] national powers in the region, civil society does not only report hostile behavior in these contexts. Civil society in general has been increasingly studied as a relevant if not key actor in migration governance especially in border contexts (Ambrosini and Van der Leun 2015; Calarco 2024; Cuttitta et al. 2023). On these *borderscapes* as well, evidence shows that specific actors of the civil society (actors meant as both individuals and organizations) challenge an approach that sees migration as solely an issue and a disruption and in addition challenge the national and EU approach in their governance of migration (Fradejas-García and Loftsdóttir 2024; Marino and Hategekimana 2023). In particular, we see civil society actors transformed – by necessity – into mobility experts to challenge the migration governance in place that enforces detention and deportations together with the creation bureaucratic hurdles and evidence of racial profiling (Fradejas-García and Loftsdóttir 2024; Marino and Hategekimana 2023). We contend, supported by existing scholarship, their role in challenging the status quo of governance and aiding people on the move dealing with it is crucial and makes these actors – individuals and organizations – migration governance actors in their own right.

Having zoomed in to discuss civil society action at the local level, we conclude going back to a regional view. As we mentioned, these *borderscapes* have a peculiar geography which is counter-intuitive and contested by actors in the region. They represent Spain and the EU on African territory, which can be considered controversial – to say the least – by some local, regional and global political actors. Naturally, the relationship constructed with the national state of Morocco and in general the actions of Spanish, EU and Moroccan institutions have crucial implications for these EU territories beyond the EU. Through the examples such as the response to the Cayuco Crisis which took place in 2004 in the context of the Canary Islands, to the Ceuta so-called border crisis of 2021 and to the Melilla crossing of 2022 which resulted in the massacre of at least 23 people on the move with more than 70 still missing we see the involvement on these borders of actors beyond the Spanish national state.

In the case of the Cayuco Crisis, Spain looked for the support and collaboration of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Frontex, and launched the Africa Plan in order to involve the national state of West Africa and the Maghreb in the response to the events of 2006. Development projects started under the plan in Morocco, Mali and Senegal, but most importantly, in the name of stopping migration at its source Spain started through this plan the cooperation in the region to build capacity and provide equipment to implement border control through agreements that would allow Spanish Guardia Civil personnel in coastal regions of West Africa and the Maghreb to carry out patrols and gather information and connecting liaison officers from West Africa and the Maghreb with the Frontex office in Las Palmas (Kemp 2016). The Africa Plan made Spain, EU and West African powers on the coast collaborators, meaning Spain becoming dependent on these actors regarding the control of its borders.

Tight dependence on unpredictable non-democratic powers can be tricky, as the Ceuta so-called Moroccan-Spanish border incident proved in May 2021, when Morocco suddenly reduced the promised heavy militarization of its border due to its frustration at the Spanish government's decision to offer health assistance to Brahim Ghali, the head of the rebel Sahrawi nationalist liberation movement Polisario Front claiming Western Sahara against Moroccan control of the

region (Reuters 2021). In the same way, the cooperation in excessive violent border militarization is visible through the reported events of the Melilla massacre of June 2022 where evidence shows Moroccan police forces brutally attacking unarmed people on the move causing the death of many and Spanish forces allowing illegal pushbacks letting Moroccan forces on their soil to bring back migrants to Morocco at gun-point (Sapoch et al. 2022; Sánchez 2022; Marino 2023). If these border events were not distressing enough, in July 2022, the EU agreed on a new partnership with the Kingdom of Morocco, an Anti-smuggling Operational Partnership (ASOP) to deal with irregular migration and criminal networks on the border (StateWatch 2022; Marino 2023). In this context, it is worthy underlining the Spanish government's additional collaboration with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Frontex, at the Ceuta border through Joint Operation Minerva, which takes place every year during the summer months with the goal of assisting Spanish authorities in border control, "support border checks in the Spanish ports of Algeciras, Tarifa and Ceuta, which are handling summer passenger traffic to and from Morocco" (Frontex 2022).

These instances show how involved the EU, its member states and its agencies are – in addition to Spain as a power involved at the border due to its geography – in the strengthening of the militarization and securitization of the border in a violent and aggressive way. The implications of the EU and Spanish collaboration with third states such as the Kingdom of Morocco show how the human rights of people on the move are put in danger due to the very choices in governance of democratic states of the EU, a supranational power that likes to present itself as founded on the values of human dignity, equality, rule of law and human rights, amongst others.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

This piece has presented the case of 'European borders beyond Europe' under the jurisdiction of the national-state of Spain and has carried out a comparative analysis of these borderlands to advance a specific argument: these *borderscapes,* EU borders beyond geographical Europe, are utilized by Spain and the EU as territories where they can continue experimenting a perpetrated migration management based on securitization, militarization and externalization. Such governance has been defined as effective by Frontex in 2024, which declared that crossings from January to November 2024 fell 40 percent overall, including a noteworthy decrease in crossing from the borderlands of Ceuta and Melilla (Aljazeera 2025; Espinosa 2025). However, we contend that it will have long-lasting damaging consequences not only when looking at the human cost paid by people on the move (as we can see through the occurrence of humanitarian crises and massacres), but also for these territories' residents and, as a result, for the very member state of Spain and the EU as a whole.

Data has shown how securitizing borders does not stop people on the move from initiating their journeys, but rather forces them to look for alternative routes and ways to cross borders (Shah, 2020). Spain and the EU have been increasingly investing into strengthening cooperation with Morocco on migration through a. the implementation of the EU Trust Fund devoting a total of €234 million (from 2015 to 2025) towards "integrated border management and fight against smuggling and trafficking in human beings, protection and community stabilization, support to labor migration and to improved migration governance and assisted voluntary returns" (European Commission 2023), b. the more recent €152 million cooperation comprehensive program aimed at "strengthening Morocco's border management actions" (European Commission 2023) and c.

Spanish €30 million package for migration control purposes agreed to be sent to Morocco in October 2022 (Statewatch 2022). Despite these increased efforts in effectively externalize EU borders and their control making them more securitized, militarized and consequently dangerous for people on the move, the example of the Canary Islands show how securitizing specific routes will make people on the move try to cross alternative, more dangerous routes: the vast majority of migrants that arrived in Spain in 2024 arrived through the Atlantic Archipelago with crossing growing 19 percent on the Atlantic route (Aljazeera 2025). Externalization and securitization of specific Spanish borders through cooperation with Morocco and Frontex have forced people on the move to opt for the more dangerous, perilous routes of the Atlantic.

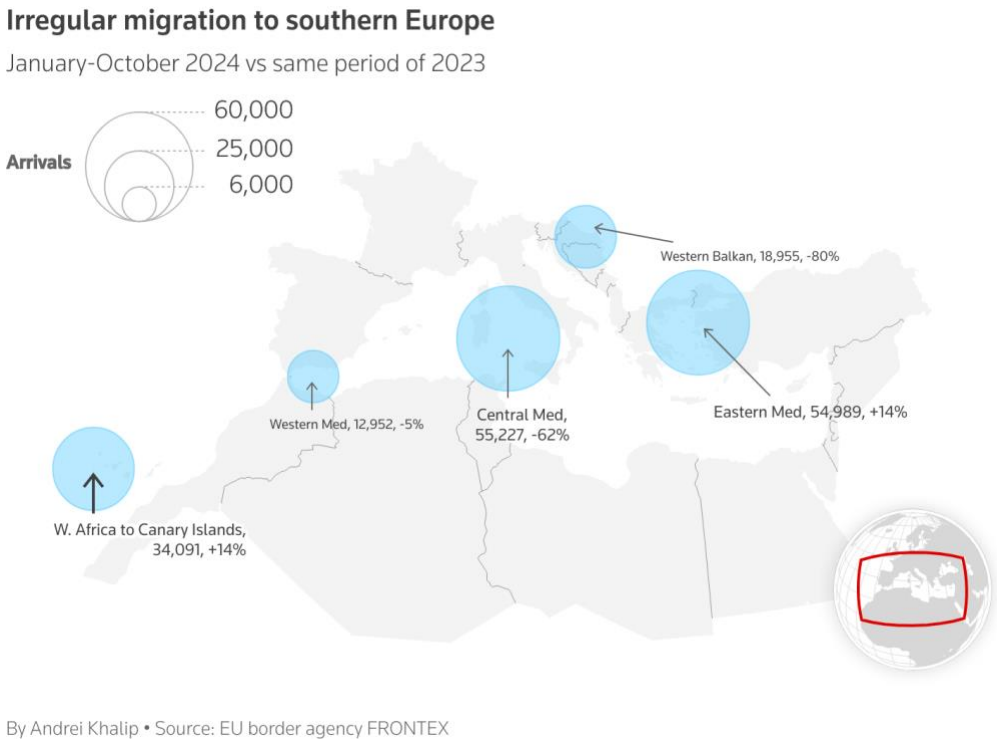

Figure 2: Graph indicating the increase of immigration to the Canary Islands and the decrease of people trying to cross through the Western and Central Mediterranean routes

While Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez has envisioned a future where the Spanish migration governance could set an international and regional example in the protection of human rights and strengthening of the nation system of reception and integration (La Moncloa 2024), when analyzing the border, reality seems quite far from this hopeful discourse. We see a clear trend shared at the EU level when looking at the management of borders and Spain seems to have jumped on this trend quite comfortably. Firstly, these borderlands have been transformed into *limboscapes* (Ferrer-Gallardo and Albet-Mas 2016; Ferrer-Gallardo and Espiñeira 2015), areas where border infrastructure excludes people on the move both through institutional and physical borders making these *borderscape*s places in between: people on the move on *borderscapes* are neither included nor excluded rather immobilized in the 'in between'.

The Canary Islands and Ceuta and Melilla as *borderscapes* have a specific geography that makes it easier for Spanish and EU border management to carry through a migration governance of

exclusion and immobilization of people on the move, a governance based on the securitization and externalization of borders. We witness clear gaps in migration governance offered by the state and the EU beyond border controls: NGOs working on the ground in the Canary Islands, Ceuta, and Melilla have shown evidence of lack of adequate reception of people on the move and the several obstacles people on the move have to go through to obtain specific documentation to regularize. In this tense and securitized context, due to the absence of national and EU institutions, NGOs take here a role of actual migration governance actors. Societies at these borders have already increasingly shown the consequences of such a securitized approach only involved in border control and not investing in border societies life and development beyond the border. Lastly, externalizing control to third states and collaboration with Frontex have shown the high risk of the implementation of illegal pushbacks on these borders. While it is already evident that people on the move's human rights have been under threat through the implementation of such governance, the argument presented here is that this border control approach will end up damaging border societies, border countries and consequently the EU as a regional power whose so-defined 'pragmatic approach' in migration governance has proved to be nothing but pragmatic especially when looking at these peculiar borders.

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