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## **In/?Visibility: Cartographing the Strait of Gibraltar**

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**Teresa Callejo-Pajares untersucht in ihrem Beitrag die Bilderproduktion an der Grenze zwischen Spanien und Afrika und wie diese Bilder nicht nur Diskurse bestimmen, sondern auch die materielle Situation der Migrant\_innen.**

**Teresa Callejo-Pajares focuses on the visual representation of the border between Spain and North Africa. The article shows how these images not only form and limit discourses on migration but also the opportunities of the migrants.**

In this article I aim for an analysis of the conditions of visibility of the border between Spain and North Africa. In other words, how it has come to be imagined not only as a national border but also as a global geostrategic site at the turn of the century. The reason I consider this topic worth exploring is the increased political, economic and social stakes that are now invested in this space as the Southern border of Europe. These stakes are being debated in terms of visual representation through the instauration of the Integral System of Surveillance of the Strait of Gibraltar (from here on referred to as SIVE). In this sense it has become a strong marker for notions of belonging, citizenship, language, and race, which are enacted at this specific site and are dispersed to both sides of the border through the media.

### **Border dynamics, context and visibility**

Up until the turn of the century the Southern Border of Europe, as it is now regarded, has been neither more nor less complex than other frontier spaces. However, today, in the context that has arisen from the Schengen Agreements and in relation to the dynamics and ideologies mobilized around the terrorist attacks in New York, Madrid, and London, the Spanish-African border can no longer be regarded as it once was; that is, as a space of separation and communication, permeable to the flows of information and the agency of their populations. Since 1997, the Schengen Agreements have provided for the removal of systematic border controls between the 25 participating European countries. Conversely, the borderless zone created by its implementation has led to an increased surveillance and control of the exterior borders of what is called the Schengen Area. The Area mobilizes many European agencies ranging from individual stateled initiatives that involve the military in many cases, to a pooling of resources into privately managed pan European corporations such as Frontex.<sup>1</sup> Hence, there has been an inescapable shift in the meaning of European borders, or lack thereof, and a quantitative and qualitative change to the political, social and economic investment in this specific border geography as a global divide of North/South and East/West relations. This fortification or frontier enforcement as a result of the Schengen Area

has come to alter radically the perception of the concept of border itself, and has redefined Spain's role as one of the Southern entryways into the European Union. Entry countries, transit countries, new settlements, deportation agreements and new production centers are some examples of the border dynamics that are transforming European and neighboring territories alike in acquiescence with European standards of security and economic agreements.

In the sources I have been studying I have found that there are a series of recurring images that dominate the arena of discussion around the border between Spain and North Africa. The most popular are the pateras - boats with a small capacity - that cross the waters of the Strait of Gibraltar area and the Canary Islands, and the arming of the Ceuta and Melilla fences, both constituting illegal entry ways into Spain on the part of African migrants. Migration is thus the main topic of discussion when thinking about the Spain-North Africa border, after which delinquency and terrorism are thought to follow as inevitable consequences. This accounts for the highly politicized treatment of this issue and accounts for the increasing predominance of the discourse generated by the SIVE as a detective and preventive technology against incoming people from Africa.

My aim is to offer a multidirectional approach encompassing the numerous debates present in the Spain and North Africa border site. Firstly through an analysis of the dominant discourses disseminated by mainstream media and the role of the SIVE in political and popular imagination; and secondly through a series of works by cultural agents that deal with specific issues of mobility, language, technology, labor and gender as they are being precluded by the SIVE.

### **Media and the Southern border of Europe**

As mentioned above the main topics that come to mind when thinking about Spain's southern border are migration related. From all the challenges entailed in being a member state of the EU, Spain's role or specialization is in controlling incoming migration from non-European countries, but mostly from the neighboring territory of Africa. Hence, it is relevant to analyze the inscription of the phenomenon of immigration in everyday Spanish politics through the main channels of communication and dissemination:

The media has played a key role in the production and dissemination of the figure of the migrant and there has been much attention granted to the crossing of the Strait of Gibraltar and to the Canary Islands, the stories, the testimonies and the means.

»Although the vast majority of immigrants arrive by airplane, no day passes without extensive media coverage of how many new immigrants (successfully or

unsuccessfully) tried to enter the country in the dangerous little boats (pateras) that cross over from Morocco to the Southern tip of Spain or the Canary Islands (cayucos) - and about how many died in the process.«<sup>2</sup>

For our immediate purposes, the border as a whole is a constantly revisited theme that is very telling of the general attitudes and discourses in the media. As an illustration, the author Teun Van Dijk (Universitat Pompeu i Fabra) elaborated in 2006 a general study on racism and discourse in Spain, paying attention to the role of the media in the reproduction of certain forms of racism. When dealing with the issue of immigration he identified a set of topics in media coverage that show that the topic of Irregular Entry represents 25% of the total, with Administrative Events and Solidarity following with 17%, Europe 10%, Racism and discrimination 7% and Crime 7% (Van Dijk, 2006).

The »entry stories« appear almost daily and their general structure and meaning have become routine for the agents involved. The immigrants are the passive participants with an emphasis on their physical descriptions or capacity to endure hardships, rather than their cultural structures, relationship to one another or to their countries (their status as refugees, for example may be completely overlooked). They are »found«, tended to, sheltered, returned and homogenized as immigrants by the authorities and the NGO's (the Spanish Red Cross in particular). In this way, they are enclosed in a new-found structure of meaning with varying degrees of »interest« depending on the number of children and pregnant women, the physical state of the crew upon arrival to Spanish shores, or the type of vessel they were travelling in, generally called pateras if arriving at continental Spain or cayucos for the Canary Islands. The pateras generally range from makeshift flotation devices, to the high speed boats more often associated with drug traffic.

Also present in newspaper articles and TV stories is another matter that could be applied to other border sites; the issue of nationality. When it is not posed as a lack - in the sense that an immigrant is such because he or she lacks the host country's nationality - it is information of political relevance that can be used in the larger arena of transnational agreements. We have to keep in mind that, as is the case with Peruvians or Columbians in Mexico, many African border crossers pass as Moroccans in order to remain within the geographical vicinity of the border and not be deported to their countries of origin such as Mauritania, Senegal or Nigeria, among others. Morocco is therefore at once a transit and a host country, playing the double role of immigration sender and receiver of mostly Sub-Saharan migrants and deportees from Spain.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Integral System of Surveillance of the Strait (SIVE)<sup>4</sup>**

In the last few years, different European agencies have intensely developed the surveillance of the small seas of Europe (the Baltic, the Mediterranean) and of the straits such as Gibraltar. Spain's measures of surveillance and contention of mobility in its maritime area of sovereignty have taken form in the Integral System of Surveillance of the Strait (of Gibraltar). The SIVE is presently implemented in the Canary Islands, in the entire Andalusian coast and the Spanish enclaves in Africa, Ceuta and Melilla, but it has been projected to cover all the rest of Spain's Mediterranean coast. Its technology involves the sending of information in real time to control centers which mobilize the necessary resources according to the situation. The components of this system's information analysis are utilised on land installations, boats, aircraft and satellites and include a network of radar sensors, acoustic sensors and optoelectronic systems such as infrared cameras and continuous video surveillance.

But the surveillance by the SIVE is not only limited to the maritime areas of the border, it's technology is used in the two localized perimeters around the Spanish enclaves in North Africa, Ceuta y Melilla, which add up to 18 kilometers. These territories have become increasingly fortified in past years not only in regards to surveillance but also in their physical appearance of width and height; they have been made into veritable obstacles for both mobility and communication between two political geographies that are otherwise part of the same landscape and share a strong cultural affinity. However, the political rhetoric is very similar, if not the same, to the one deployed in the Strait of Gibraltar. I am inclined to think that this is due to the shared SIVE as a formative homogenizing technology. On one hand this general approach from the optics of state surveillance disregards the different experiences that these borders entail for the people who try or succeed in circumventing them, subsuming them into the all-encompassing category of migrants. And on the other it overlooks the actual specificities of the different borders sites that divide Spain and Africa.

The SIVE's technical means of representation demonstrates the logic of the binome knowledge/power as a technology of power which manifests determined criteria of organization and classification, the same of surveillance and control. In foucauldian terms, the actual surveillance or control and documentation - the registry - is the expression of a disciplinary apparatus, and it is no coincidence that the implantation of the SIVE followed only a year after the events of 9/11. The prototype in Algeciras went into service in August of 2002, Málaga and Fuerteventura in December 2003, Cádiz and Granada in 2004, and Ceuta in 2005. This is part of what Van Dijk calls racism as institution, traditionally associated with a more general or macro approach to racism that refers to legal discrimination, exemplified in this case in the

form of restrictions to immigration and sanctioned further by a prominent political figure.

The fact that the most widely spread images of the border come from the SIVE accounts for their high politicization; in the first place by the logic of the system that contextualizes them ideologically through anchorage in the media - through captions, appearing next to statements by the Guardia Civil, accompanied by articles that set the tone, etc. - and secondly, by the actual medium that makes us both voyeurs and accomplices at the same time.

Its mechanism, the capture of the images through surveillance photography (infrared rays, night vision technology etc.) offers us a vantage perspective, presumably the perspective of the police agent, the surveyor, with whom we may identify. This perspective has a long tradition in colonial scopic regimes. It is a point of view from where we can see without being seen, sometimes in the comfort of our own living rooms, what is taking place at the scene of action and thus gives a false sense of firsthand knowledge and control of the represented space. In this respect, Allen Feldman (NYU), with his term cultural anesthesia, argues that there exists an impossibility of identification with the object of the gaze, in this case, with those who are indeed crossing - the immigrants, the crew in the patera o cayuco - and that which is being patrolled. By this logic we have a sensorial disposition, an epistemology constituted through the tradition of objective realism which renders us insensitive, anesthetized, to other perspectives present within this frame. Or rather, it prevents us from contemplating them in a different view than the one that is predetermined, in this case, the mechanisms of the images such as mediation, distancing and filtering the image of the African migrant.

»Like the normative optics of gender and gaze, objective realism, the depictive grammar of the mass media, should not be perceived as an ahistorical given; it is an apparatus of internal and external perceptive colonization that disseminates and legitimizes particular sensorial dispositions over other within and beyond our public culture.«<sup>5</sup>

Pursuing further Feldman's notion of a sensorial predisposition, I am inclined to understand that the media's fascination with this topic of the sea voyage as analysed above and the fixation by the authorities on this entry way has to do with the emphasis it places on the perilous journey by water. Subtracting Spanish responsibility on the whole matter and rather focusing on the voyage itself instead of the conditions that lead up to it, the capricious water currents are highlighted instead of the governmental policies that surround it. Flow is perceived here as something inevitable that cannot and should not be stopped much like the flow of capital in

neo-liberal economies. The flow of water as a metaphor for contemporary economically-driven mobility is used to narrate or contain the reality of these voyages. It is a persistent element in the perception of North-African immigration, as it is with the perception of Mexican (or Central/South American) immigration through Río Grande and Río Bravo.

»[...] Rio Grande may have been flowing but not the young men who drowned. Money does not flow. It is sent, and the need to send it often confines transplanted workers into veritable bondage abroad. 'Flow' disguises the fact that the world of neoliberal capitalism is run by decisions people make that have ethical dimensions.«<sup>6</sup>

These images conflate scientific observation and detection technology in a fashion that renders the cultural and political situation as a natural occurrence that can be intellectually apprehended and controlled. These images are created, or rather gathered, and disseminated in a way that is very similar to the collection and interpretation of scientific data as objective numbers; statistics and patterns to be extracted from the natural world in an effort to make sense of them. As statistics on the index of maritime traffic in the Strait of Gibraltar, the images of the assault on the Melilla fence or capsized pateras are to be read as evidence in the war against irregular mobility, and consequently acted upon as the basis for legitimate state action and violence. Images are data insofar as they are the product of scientific observation with technological means and subject to 'objective' interpretation by the institutions deemed competent. That is, in this case, the Ministry of Interior and the Guardia Civil.

### **Approaching the border**

There are multiple agents that exercise their own usage over the border landscape and the technology available, picking up on the contradictions and obscurities in the state's perspective and making them visible. Whether by appropriating the modes of visibility of the SIVE or by exercising surveillance over it, they succeed in making the border a distributed affair and offer a rich arena of practice and thought.

Borders are spaces which by nature lend themselves to interruption, re-appropriation and subversion, all practices that allow a rearticulation of the terms of engagement and the conditions of existence beyond the idea of border as an agreement between two governments on socioeconomic policies. Thus, traditional political maps and other conventional representations cannot take into account the full complexity of this space because the drawn lines that constitute them are unable to grasp the multiple dynamics that have come to articulate the broader geography

of the border.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, a new cartography is needed in order to navigate it, one that will account for new conceptions of belonging on both sides of the border and for the strategies that are being deployed in order to circumvent it and make it into a livable space, both physically and discursively. This new cartography is being constituted through alternative maps that invert the power relations between Europe and Africa; singular experiences as opposed to broad narratives; and fiction as an entryway into reality.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Political Equator**

Teddy Cruz's (UCSD) collaborative project 'The Political Equator'<sup>9</sup> (2007) in San Diego and Tijuana maps out the North/South divide in the 28<sup>o</sup>-32<sup>nd</sup> parallel which interestingly falls on this and other border spaces that have become highly relevant for policy making around the globe. It traces a complex cartography for re-envisioning global relationships where frontier territories have been urged to speak to each other, made their dynamics relatable and relative. It can serve as a tool to think specifically about what the US/México, Spain/North Africa, Palestine/Israel, India/Kashmir/China borders have in common with each other and with others around the Political Equator, and if so, what can be useful about these similarities, as well as what are the grounds of their differences.

Albeit the flourishing of »border studies« in Spain as a theme and as a discipline - inspired no doubt by US border studies - there is still a lot of work to be done in this area, with special attention to its evolution from a more local experience, pertaining mostly to Morocco and Spain, into a transnational border of cosmopolitan dimensions and made to engage in a broader framework of global relations. Some of the conditions are very specific to this particular border space, whereas others might be expanded to other border spaces.

### **Fadaiat**

While it is important for me to refer to the general notions that can be applied to a number of border spaces - as part of the North/South divide for example - it is also crucial to enter into their own particularities; only in this way it will be possible to let these particularities speak for themselves. Being as they are de facto influenced by the general dynamic of contemporary globalization, they still constitute and articulate a world of their own. I hope the examples in this section are of use to illustrate the limitations of the border as a political project.

The Fadaiat project is an anthology of documents related to border activism in the space between Spain and North Africa and its theories.<sup>10</sup> What is of most value for

the purposes of undermining conventional perspectives is their contribution to cartographical experiments that suggest alternative relations of power and perspectives between Europe and Africa and, much like Teddy Cruz's project, theorize the global relations between the First and the Third World.

Their proposal is that technology's power relationship can be re-appropriated and imagined in a way that accounts for the human dimension of the border. Hence, the project deals with the affective uses of technology as opposed to the effective usage by surveillance and detection mechanisms as deployed by the state. The democratization of electronic media has allowed for the border to be reinterpreted and appropriated thus offering a viable alternative usage of the same technologies that usually exert unilateral control over the border site.

Projects like Fadaiat, the Political Equator, and many others, aim for more plural modes of engagement with the border, circumventing the strict mapping of the SIVE and contributing to alternate experience and knowledge of the border.<sup>11</sup> They aim to show the human scale in the monolithic concepts and landscapes insistently drawn by polity and conventional maps.

## Conclusions

The popular claim is that the border is constituted by crossings; that the experience of the border is one of migration and of entailing directionality - usually to the North. However, this claim comes to reinforce the hierarchical disposition of the cultures and communities on either side, perceived to be of more or less value according to where they fall after the border division. Furthermore, it privileges one type of experience of the border over others by which the border-crossing voyage is the epitome of migration, exploiting the facile humanitarian angle and facilitating its containment into a recognizable story of doomed human struggle. What are consciously left out of this perspective, however, are the everyday lives of those that come to inhabit the border: Yet, as the artist Antoni Muntadas suggests in his mosaic of interviews, all of us inhabit the border in one way or the other. Even those who are not thought to be affected at all by the border are in fact inadvertently crisscrossed with the limits of its discourse. For the absolute terms of engagement in border geography, this side or the other, evidence our own necessarily complicit spatiality with it.

The existence of borders seems to be an issue of migration and crossing, of labor and advancement, or merely of more or less accidental lines in maps dividing the globe. However, the physical border travels on to the imaginary and necessarily precludes emotional, affective, landscapes. It is a generative geography of structural

invisibilities that constructs the South as an exotic and menacing fiction leaving little room for actual knowledge of, for example, Moroccan culture or Islam.

The border is the space where ideologies that exist more or less hidden in society are proven and physically become put into practice. Moreover, precisely because it is such - a representational space, a stage, a battleground - its terms are more flexible, or rather, more easily re-imagined, than for any other geography.

Movements, air, sea and water resources, economic dependencies, Diaspora, familial groups, emotional affiliations and settlements etc. cannot be contained in the border, as it is known - through fear, through estrangement. Rather, the realities and processes occurring in and around the border necessitate a different visibility, a fresh imagination. They necessitate political and cultural projects that will interpolate the constructed discourse and materiality of the Strait of Gibraltar.

#### Autorin

Teresa Callejo Pajares (lebt und arbeitet in Madrid) studierte Kunsttheorie und Geschichte an der Universidad Autónoma in Madrid und Visual Culture Theory an der New York University. Sie arbeitete für zahlreiche kulturelle Institutionen u. a. das International Studio and Curatorial Program (ISCP) und die Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts in New York City. Ihre Arbeitsschwerpunkte sind Politik der Vertreibung, Diasporic Literatur und postkoloniale Räume. Geographisch konzentriert sie sich hierbei auf Spanien, Lateinamerika und den Mittleren Osten.

#### Fussnoten

1 Frontex, the EU agency based in Warsaw, was created as a specialised and independent body tasked to coordinate the operational cooperation between Member States in the field of border security. [www.frontex.europa.eu](http://www.frontex.europa.eu)

2 Van Dijk, Teun A. ?Racism and Discourse in Spain and Latin America?. John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2005.

3 There is an ongoing conflict over Moroccan sovereignty in the Sahara region very much worth exploring in relation to the issues in this paper. [www.saharalibre.com](http://www.saharalibre.com)

4 Sistema Integral de Vigilancia del Estrecho

5 Feldman, Allen. ?On Cultural Anesthesia: From Desert Storm to Rodney King?. American Ethnologist, Vol. 21, No. 2 (May, 1994).

6 Pratt, Mary Louise. ?Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation?. Routledge, 2008.

7 »Maps report existing territories, but they also construct them; thus territory lives

in the mind and is constructed as knowledge.« Editing collective in 'Technological Observatory of the Strait' Fadaiat (2006)

8 The New Cartography suggests alternative relations of power and perspectives between Europe and Africa and re-imagine global relations between the First and Third Worlds. But more importantly, these maps explore the juncture between 'real' landscapes and virtual datascares, both of which being representations.

9 [www.politicaequator.org](http://www.politicaequator.org), Cruz, Teddy. 'Border tours : strategies of surveillance, tactics of encroachment?'. In Michael Sorkin, *Indefensible Space: The Architecture of the National Insecurity State*. New York: Routledge, 2008.

10 Fadaiat is a virtual platform modeled after Indymedia. It presents an open space of interaction and connection between programmers, activists and thinkers akin to contemporary social movements. Their work develops in three main areas: new geographies or Madiaq, a critical cartography of the Strait of Gibraltar; what they call the border factory, related to issues of migration and labor; and the development of democratic communications technologies. Their proposal is that technology's power relationship can be re-appropriated and imagined in a way that will account towards the human dimension of the border. Hence, the project deals with the affective uses of technology as opposed to the effective usage by surveillance and detection mechanisms as deployed by the state. The democratization of electronic media has allowed for the border to be reinterpreted and appropriated thus offering a viable and alternative usage of the same technologies that strive to exert unilateral control over the border site. [www.fadaiat.net](http://www.fadaiat.net)

11 Another example of this new cartography is Gold Extra. Gold Extra is a team of artists based in Salzburg, Austria, whose projects pertained mostly to the field of fine arts, performance and music. Since 2006, however, they have teamed with other media artists and come up with *Frontiers*, a multiplayer video game designed for users to experience life at Europe's borders. As of now they have finalized a version of the game covering the border between Spain and North Africa but they are working to portray the experience of other 'hot spots' of the pan European border. It is free and accessible to anyone with a computer. [www.frontiers-game.com](http://www.frontiers-game.com)