Breaking down the Far Southern Border of Europe:
Immigration and Politics in the Canary Islands

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ABSTRACT

Irregular immigration arriving on small boats from the African continent has placed the Canary Islands at the center of the national and European political agenda regarding immigration. It has also converted the archipelago into an observatory where the connections between migration policies and human rights can be analyzed. One of the main arguments of this article is that despite the archipelago's long history of receiving immigrants and the presence of other groups of irregular migrants, what triggered the incorporation of immigration into the regional political agenda and political rhetoric was the flow of clandestine African immigrants at the end of the 1990s. The increased frequency with which these boats began to arrive on its shores in the first half of 2006 has reignited and intensified the debate on population, territory and identity in the archipelago.

Keywords: 1. immigration policies, 2. borders, 3. ethnic identities and nationalism, 4. Spain, 5. Canary Islands.

RESUMEN

La llegada de inmigración irregular en embarcaciones procedentes del cercano continente africano a las Islas Canarias ha situado a este archipiélago en el centro de la agenda política española y europea sobre inmigración. También ha convertido a esta región en un buen observatorio para entender los vínculos entre políticas migratorias y derechos humanos. El propósito de este artículo es estudiar los vínculos entre la inmigración y la dinámica política en este contexto geográfico. Uno de los principales argumentos será que, a pesar de su larga historia como contexto receptor y a la presencia de otros tipos de inmigración irregular, la intensificación de las llegadas desde el continente africano ha provocado la incorporación de la inmigración en la agenda política regional y en el discurso público. El aumento del flujo desde 2006 ha moldeado e intensificado el debate interno sobre la población, el territorio y la identidad.

Palabras clave: 1. política migratoria, 2. fronteras, 3. identidades étnicas y nacionalismo, 4. España, 5. Islas Canarias.

Over the past few years the Canary Islands has been transformed into Europe's last frontier, a destination for numerous kinds of migratory flows and the landing point for irregular immigration arriving on precarious vessels from the nearby African continent. The aim of this article is to describe the intense relationships between this archipelago and international migration and the impact these movements have had on the extraordinarily complex internal politics of the islands where a sense of Canarian identity has emerged, raising concerns such as the fragility of the territory. But before discussing Canarian identity, a few moments should be spent on the migratory and political context of the archipelago.*

1. Introduction: the Gateway to Europe, Africa and America

The Canary Islands are located at the intersection between Europe, Africa and America, making it a hub for commerce and population flows between those continents. Because the archipelago is located on one of the main sea routes connecting Europe to America, its economy is closely tied to the Atlantic. The islands were colonized during the overseas expansion of Spain during the fifteenth century and the first few decades of the sixteenth century. In later centuries they were populated by colonists from various areas of Europe who imported slaves to work in agriculture, livestock and sugar cane plantations (see Fernández-Armesto, 1982). Strong commercial ties with Great Britain and other European countries were developed through wine production, leading to the rise of the first mercantile enclaves in the ports. While the native population was decimated by wars, disease and the slave trade, the islands were repopulated by European colonists, including merchants and missionaries, colonial civil servants and soldiers serving the Castilian Crown. The Canary Islands became one of the first, closest and smallest of the "New Europes" that would soon be found in many parts of the world (Crosby, 1986). As a "new society", the Canary Islands, as Gerard Bouchard has suggested in regard to other similar experiences, also had to appropriate a space previously settled by other people, establish a new social contract and loyalties, develop a new collective memory and imaginary, and demarcate and differentiate itself from the metropolis by negotiating a new relationship (Bouchard, 2003; Esteban Sánchez, 2006).

There are powerful, highly complex links between insular territories in general and the phenomenon of migration (Connell and King, 1999). Because the Canaries are located in the open expanse of the Atlantic, very near the African continent (only 100 kilometers from the coast of Morocco), in the past they became a crossroads for colonists, merchants, conquistadors and sailors. In recent decades, these islands have become the site of intense temporary and permanent internal and international immigration thanks to the archipelago's pleasant climate, its economic vitality and the fact that it forms part of Europe's political borders. This immigration is characterized by residential tourism and return migration, aspects that differentiate it from the kinds of migration seen in other parts of Spain.

For centuries, much of Spanish emigration originated from this region, along with Galicia, Extremadura and Andalusia. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Canarian migration to Uruguay, Venezuela and Cuba was one of the largest migratory flows originating from Spain. This flow created intense relations between the archipelago and Latin America, especially Venezuela (a country often referred to as the "eighth island" of the Canary Archipelago), and has also led to the large return migration of the offspring of Canarian immigrants going back to the islands today.

The twentieth century also saw considerable immigration to Spanish territories in Africa, a migration flow that is not very well known and has scarcely been studied. At first this flow went to Equatorial Guinea and Morocco (to the enclaves of Sidi Ifni and Villa Cisneros) and subsequently to the former Spanish colony of the Sahara, where immigrants worked in the army, construction and phosphate mines. The shorter distances, lower cost of the tickets and stable transportation allowed for temporary, circular and seasonal migrations and the maintenance of family ties (Domínguez and Guerra, 2004). Unlike immigration to Latin America, nearly all of this Spanish contingent returned to Spain.

Despite their tradition of emigration, the Canary Islands were also one of the first Spanish regions to receive foreigners. Some of the oldest communities established in the archipelago came from the Middle East and East Asia. The Islamic community in the Canaries dates from the beginning of the twentieth century when the first Arab immigrants reached their shores. This was a unique type of migration within the Spanish panorama, comprising Syrians, Lebanese and Palestinians who were actually headed for the American continent. As they passed through

the island ports, some of them decided to stay and try their luck with the business opportunities offered by the archipelago and its unusual tax system (Abu-Tarbush, 2001). Fishing and maritime traffic would also later lead to the establishment of small Japanese, Korean and Russian communities in Las Palmas, the islands' main port.

Another unique ethnic community in Spain is the Canarian Sindhi Hindu community, mostly made up of immigrants from the province of Sind. The first Sindhis settled in the islands along with small groups of Arab and Jewish merchants during the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. This group was attracted by the free port system established in the Canaries in 1852. Members of the commercial diaspora that spread out from Asia to the Middle East, the African continent, the Maghrebian countries and Gibraltar settled in this region, enticed by the business opportunities it offered (Markovits, 2000; Falzon, 2004; Haller, 2003). After the partition of the Indian subcontinent, family networks and the economic advantages of the Canarian tax system attracted new members to the community. This is a community whose size has remained stable at a few thousand and whose composition has remained homogenous while controlling various sectors of the Canarian economy for decades. Despite the years that have elapsed since then, this community still maintains its idiosyncrasy within the receptor society. Although it is not a large group in demographic terms, it remains a deeply influential community in the islands' economic life.

Internal immigration caused by the transition from agrarian to industrial society was mostly directed towards the central islands, Tenerife and Gran Canaria. This change occurred even later than in the Spanish mainland and today lifestyles combining agrarian and urban identities can still be observed in the archipelago. The fact that it has modernized more slowly than the rest of Spain is also evident in its slower demographic transition: due to higher birth rates the Canarian population has grown at a faster pace and has a younger population than the rest of Spain. Economic and social change in the Canary Islands is fundamentally linked to the development of the tourism industry, which has displaced traditional agrarian lifestyles. This process occurred only a few years before the political decentralization of Spain. After Franco's death, Spain went from being one of the most centralized states in Europe to being one of the most decentralized as regional governments have acquired many areas of competence.

After this brief description of the migratory history of the islands, the following sections will focus on the dynamics of recent immigration to the archipelago. This situation has transformed the Canaries into Europe's new southern frontier, where residential flows from Northern and Eastern Europe merge with flows from Africa, returning Latin American immigrants and new sources of migratory flows. The remainder of the article will examine the political situation of this region over the past few years as well as the impact this social phenomenon has had on public discourse and regional politics. The irregular immigration arriving on small boats from the African continent has placed the Canary Islands at the center of the national and European political agenda regarding immigration. It has also converted the archipelago into an observatory where the connections between migration policies and human rights can be analyzed.

One of the main arguments of this article is that despite the archipelago's long history of receiving immigrants and the presence of other groups of irregular migrants, what triggered the incorporation of immigration into the regional political agenda was the flow of clandestine African immigrants at the end of the 1990s. The increased frequency with which these boats began to arrive on its shores in the first half of 2006 has reignited and intensified the debate. The response of the Spanish government has been to focus on fighting illegal immigration, monitoring its territorial waters and developing procedures to receive these irregular migrants. The regional administration has also begun demanding more resources and authority in precisely these areas. These demands are largely based on the concept of territoriality, the *hecho diferencial canario* (the belief that the Canary Islands are a distinct and unique society) and the defense of Canarian identity.

2. The Canaries within the Spanish Migratory Puzzle

Changes in the migratory model in the Canary Islands are closely linked to the development of a new socio-economic model based primarily on tourism during the 1970s. The growth of mass tourism has had an enormous impact on the dynamics of production and the economy, as well as welfare levels. Development during the last few decades has also increased job creation, particularly in the service sector and construction. This contributed first to the deceleration and subsequently the end of

Canarian emigration to foreign countries. This halt to emigration has been coupled with an increase in return migration from the 1990s to the present, mostly by Canarians who resided in Venezuela and their offspring due to the political crisis in that country. One should not forget that emigration from the Canary Islands to Venezuela continued until the 1980s. The return of Canarian emigrants therefore began a decade after the return migration of Spaniards that had migrated to Northern European countries. The migratory transformation of the Canary Islands is also characterized by the increase in arrivals from foreign countries, especially from Europe, Africa and Latin America (Godenau and Arteaga, 2003; Domínguez, 1996), but also from other Spanish regions.

The increase in immigration to the Canaries coincides with changes in Spain. Spain began receiving international population flows for the first time in its recent history in the mid-1980s along with neighboring Southern European countries and the rate of these arrivals has grown rapidly. In 1986 there were 250,000 foreign residents in Spain, whereas today that number is approximately three million, excluding the undetermined number that do not appear on official registers. During the 1990s, Morocco was the principle source of migration to Spain. However, the increase in flows from Latin America and certain Eastern European countries has diversified the current composition of these migrations. Today over 500,000 Moroccan citizens reside in Spain, along with 600,000 Ecuadorians and Columbians and nearly 250,000 Romanians.

Although a common perception in the Canaries is that this region is the main migratory destination of Spain, from 2001-2005 it actually ranked 5th behind Madrid, Catalonia, Andalusia and Valencia. More than 160,000 aliens reside in its territory, accounting for approximately 8% of the total immigrant population of two million (a percentage similar to that of Spain). However, during the past decade, immigration to Spain as a whole has been much greater than to the Canaries. Whereas in 1996 10.5% of the total immigrant population in Spain resided in the archipelago, this percentage has descended year after year until reaching its current level of 5.9%.[1]

In contrast with other receptor countries in Central and Northern Europe, migration to Southern Europe, which includes Italy, Portugal and Greece,

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[1] According to the Annual Statistics on Aliens (2000-2003). Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the Permanent Immigration Observatory, Secretary of Emigration and Immigration (2004 and 2005).

contains high levels of retirement migrations. Just as in other areas on the Spanish coast, the archipelago has a large community of immigrants from the various European Union member states. Almost twelve million tourists visit the islands every year, a portion of whom have become residential immigrants. The British and German communities are the largest and have settled mainly on the islands of Tenerife, Gran Canaria and Lanzarote. This international retirement immigration follows the "New Florida" migratory model,[2] made up mostly of pensioners, early retirees, permanent and long-term temporary residents found largely in tourist areas. Over the past few years, young adults from Great Britain and other nationalities have settled in the islands to work in companies that provide services for tourists and established European communities, such as satellite TV companies, health centers and alternative therapies, real estate agencies, financial services companies, rural and green tourism agencies, etc.[3]

The composition of the foreign population residing in the islands has changed since the mid 1990s, following a similar pattern to that of the rest of Spain. Until 1996 Europeans accounted for nearly 70% of the immigrant population, followed by Latin Americans (13.5%) and Asians (10.2%). Over the past decade, the percentage of Europeans has dropped considerably (43% in 2005), while the African population has grown and stabilized since 2000 (see Ferrer, Betancor and Farsi, 2005; Díaz Hernández, 2005) and the Latin American population has grown sharply, now constituting the second largest community after Europeans (López Sala, 2005; López Sala and Esteban, 2004, 2006).

3. Floating to Europe

Irregular immigration arriving on small boats from different parts of the African continent is one of the defining characteristics of migrations to Spain. The dynamic strategies and migratory routes used by immigrants trying to enter Spain throughout the last decade have continually

[2] "The *New Florida* migratory model is a type of residential immigration model where elderly residents predominate, similar to the situation in the state of Florida in the United States where the main reason for migration is the search for leisure and rest in the US Sun Belt. It is a residential model based on consumption rather than on production." (Salvá, 2002).

[3] These are called *migrant tourist-workers*, invisible workers in the service sector (Bott, 2004).

adapted to the measures implemented by the Spanish authorities to control their borders. Border control has concentrated on monitoring three entrance points: the Spanish enclaves in Africa, Ceuta and Melilla (the oldest entrance point for illegal immigration), the Straits of Gibraltar, and the waters separating the Canary Archipelago from the coast of Africa (the prevailing route in 2006). Whenever control over one of these access points is tightened, immigrants implement new strategies and use new routes; this adaptability is illustrated by the way the routes were channeled to the Canaries after control was increased in Ceuta and Melilla and the western coasts of Morocco in 2005.

In the 1980s, the Strait of Gibraltar became a migratory route, first to the nearby coasts of Cadiz (close to Gibraltar and only 14 kilometers away from Morocco) and subsequently, after the implementation of SIVE[4] (an electronic surveillance and boat interception system), to more distant Andalusian coastal provinces. The small, shallow fishing boats known as *pateras* were initially only used by adult Moroccan immigrants to make the crossing, but the readmission agreements Spain signed with Morocco have led to more minors and sub-Saharan Africans being among the occupants since they are not affected by these agreements. The increased use of the Canarian route during the first few years of this decade is a response to greater surveillance of the Straits of Gibraltar and the difficulty of entering through Ceuta and Melilla where fences have gradually been erected around both cities and electronic surveillance is used.

For years, crossing over to the Canaries by sea has marked the end of a protracted land journey for sub-Saharan Africans. These routes originate thousands of kilometers away in the interior of the African continent, coming together in Mali and Niger. From there, migrants cross the Saharan desert to reach Algeria before crossing its northern border into Morocco. Once in Morocco the routes to Spain branch out.

[4] SIVE is a high-tech electronic surveillance and interception system used by the Spanish Civil Guard to monitor the Spanish coast. It was originally implemented in the Straits of Gibraltar and in 2001 on the Andalusian coast, in the province of Cadiz; it has also been gradually implemented in other areas of Andalusia and the coasts of the Canaries. This system combines three elements: a) radar stations distributed along the coast, b) control centers where specialized agents can control the movement of the cameras and radars scattered along the coast and c) "interception units" (patrol boats, helicopters and vehicles) that receive orders from the control center.

The northern route heads toward Rabat and Tetuan where migrants attempt to cross the Straits of Gibraltar or enter Spain through Ceuta and Melilla. The southern route departs from northern Moroccan cities and once again takes migrants on a 1,000 kilometer journey south to the old Spanish Saharan territories that today make up the southern coast of Morocco. From there they took boats to the Canary Islands, at which point the sub-Saharan emigrants would have completed an arduous, circuitous route (Barrios *et al.,* 2002; Lorenzo Villar, 2004). The direct land route from sub-Saharan Africa to southern Morocco has not been used for migration because it crosses an extremely dangerous area that is heavily patrolled, militarized and full of land mines due to the conflict over the Sahara between Moroccan and Polisario Fronts.

Many of the boats that have arrived in the Canaries over the past few years were launched from the area surrounding Tarfaya and El Aaiun in southern Morocco. Although this ocean voyage is long and difficult, it is relatively easy to accomplish without knowing much about navigation because of the favorable currents and the ease of maintaining the boat's bearings; once the African coast is no longer visible the coast of the island of Fuerteventura (the easternmost island in the Canarian archipelago) comes into view, at a distance of 100 km.[5]

In 2004 and 2005, the number of boats arriving via the Canarian route from the Sahara decreased for two reasons: the Moroccan authorities increased patrols along their western coast as a result of improved diplomatic relations with the new socialist government in Spain and also because it became more difficult to complete this route undetected due to the expansion of SIVE along much of the archipelago's coast. However, since 2005, the strategies used to enter Spain from Morocco have once again adapted to the new situation. *Pateras* began arriving at the islands furthest away from the African coast, such as Gran Canaria and Tenerife, where SIVE has not yet been implemented. This means that the routes are now much longer since these boats have to reach islands that are more than 300 km from the southern coast of Morocco.

The increased difficulties in crossing over from Morocco have led sub-Saharan Africans wishing to reach the European Union by sea to launch their boats further south. These new departure points are located in Mauritania and Senegal and even further south. This shortens the

[5] In the SIVE control centers hundreds of the outboard motors used in the crossings are stored as legal evidence. The boats themselves are regularly destroyed.

land journey while drastically lengthening the sea voyage which can last up to five days. The resources used in this new route are also different. The new boats arriving on the Canarian coasts are called *cayucos,* boats once used by fishermen in Senegal and Mauritania. They are built out of wood and glass fiber, painted in bright colors and are much more solid, longer and most importantly, deeper than the *pateras* used to cross the Straits of Gibraltar. These boats are capable of carrying dozens of passengers and completing much longer sea voyages.

Over the last few months, the number of boats arriving in the archipelago has increased dramatically,[6] particularly in Tenerife. Approximately 10,000 people arrived in *cayucos* during the first five months of 2006. Arrivals were especially intense in May due to improved weather conditions. In the second weekend of May alone, 900 people reached the islands.[7] There is reason to believe that a large percentage of migrants that take this journey die in transit. Despite the difficulty of quantifying this tragedy, if we consider the number of dead bodies washed up on the coasts, reports by the Red Cross and the Red Crescent and the testimony of both the migrants that do manage to arrive and the family members of the disappeared, this number may be as high as several thousand in the last few months; a terrible, largely unreported tragedy. This dramatic increase has created an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in the archipelago and severely tested all the institutions and civil society involved in this area. In addition, it has shed light on the opinion of Canarian society, sparked a diplomatic blitz by the Spanish government with the countries where these flows originate and in the European Union, altered relations between central government and the autonomous government of the Canary Islands and had a tremendous impact on the national political agenda.

In an attempt to resolve this crisis, the Spanish government has focused on three groups of initiatives. First of all, government has signed new readmission agreements, improved bilateral cooperation in border control, significantly increased development and humanitarian aid and improved multilateral cooperation with the countries of origin through

[6] In May 2005 security forces intercepted 218 immigrants in the Canaries. In May 2006, they intercepted 4,792, a twenty-fold increase.

[7] The number of arrivals has continued to increase throughout 2006, with a surge during the summer due to the good maritime conditions. The total number of arrivals at the end of the year surpassed 30,000 people according to the data provided by the Ministry of the Interior (Home Office) and the Government Delegation in the islands.

the enactment of the new *Action Plan for sub-Saharan Africa* (which will open consulates in various sub-Saharan countries in which Spain currently has a minimal presence). For the first time in the history of Spanish diplomacy Africa has become a priority.

One of the objectives of the *Action Plan for sub-Saharan Africa* or *Africa Plan* is to promote cooperation with the countries of origin and transit in order to regulate migratory flows and combat illegal people smuggling. The plan includes internal actions such as reinforcing border controls, obtaining information on the routes used by illegal immigration networks, reducing the red tape involved in the deportation process and fostering the social integration of migrants that have already arrived in Spain. These multilateral initiatives have focused on fostering cooperation between Europe and Africa on migratory issues and increasing the number of agreements adopted during the Ministerial Euro-African Conference on Migration and Development held in Rabat in July 2006. Bilateral measures include a series of cooperation agreements with priority countries[8] on migration and readmission together with an increased Spanish diplomatic presence in the area (see Africa Plan, 2006). These initiatives were crucial to the diplomatic management of the crisis caused when the vessels *Marine I* and *Happy Day* were detained early in 2007.

The second group of initiatives is aimed at monitoring the waters that separate the African continent from the Canary Islands in conjunction with the European Union. To accomplish this, eight EU member states will participate in a permanent naval and aerial patrol system that will guard the coasts of Morocco, Mauritania, Senegal and Cape Verde. The EU border control agency will also set up a European center for regional border control in the Canaries. During the first half of 2006, initiatives focused on bolstering the activity of FRONTEX (the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation and the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union) in the region and since July 2006, they have included the development of joint operations between various European Union member states, known as the Hera I, Hera II and, more recently, Hera III operations. The first of these operations, carried out from July until October 2006, focused on interviewing irregular immigrants arriving in the Canaries on boats in order to find out if their crossings were facilitated by smugglers. The

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[8] These countries include Senegal, Mali, Ghana, Cameroon, the Ivory Coast, Cape Verde, Guinea-Conakry and Gambia. Previous agreements already existed with Nigeria and Guinea-Bissau.

objective of Hera II, which lasted until the middle of December 2006, was to exhaustively patrol the water separating the Canary Archipelago from the western coast of Africa and, when necessary, to intercept vessels in the territorial waters of third countries, thus allowing illegal migrants to be swiftly returned to their point of departure. The last operation, implemented in the middle of last February (2005), includes both objectives. The increase in flows has consolidated the externalization of border control as a priority for the European Union, as evinced by the text of the European Commission's November 2006 Communication, *Reinforcing the Management of The European Union's Southern Maritime Borders.*[9]

The third group of initiatives focuses on providing urgent medical and legal assistance for the irregular immigrants arriving in the archipelago on boats and their transfer to other Spanish provinces.

4. Final destination, Europe (with stopovers in the Caribbean and Africa): the rise of Canarian nationalism

The administrative and political situation in the Canaries is extremely complex due to the high level of political decentralization in Spain, their insularity and the fact that the regional government is dominated by a nationalist party with unusual characteristics. As we shall see, these traits have had a significant impact on the recent immigration debate.

The current political system in Spain was established during the democratic transition period initiated after the death of Franco in 1975. The Spanish Constitution of 1978 implemented a highly decentralized political system based on autonomous communities. These autonomous communities were legally constituted as territorial entities endowed with legislative autonomy through their own parliaments and extensive executive powers. The new structure of the Spanish state acknowledged and ensured that the nationalities and regions that constitute it have the right to autonomy (Aja, 2003; González Trevijano, 1998; Loughlin, 2001). In the following years, this led to the creation of 17 autonomous communities and two autonomous cities (Ceuta and Melilla) once their statutes of autonomy[10]

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[9] COM (2006) 733 final, Brussels, 30.11. 2006.

[10] Nominally, a statute of autonomy is a law hierarchically located below the constitution of a country, and above any other form of legislation. This legislative corpus confers a degree of autonomy on a sub-national unit, and the articles usually

(estatutos de autonomía) were approved. Decentralization occurred more quickly in the cases of the historical nationalities (Catalonia, the Basque Country, Galicia and Andalusia) whose uniqueness had been acknowledged by statutes enacted before Franco's military coup in 1936.[11] The rest of the autonomous communities, including the Canaries, whose first statute was enacted in 1982, were forced to accept statutes that granted them less authority at first, although they did attain certain key competences such as the administration of education, health services and universities.[12]

Within the Spanish legal system the Canary Islands also has a special economic regime due to their distinctiveness, insularity and remoteness from the Spanish mainland. This economic regime began centuries ago with the creation of free ports and was maintained during Franco's dictatorship, despite the fact that it was one of the most centralized regimes in Europe at the time (López Aguilar, 1998). The special condition of the Canaries has been consolidated during the democratic period through Article 138 of the Spanish Constitution (which guarantees the principle of solidarity, with special attention being paid to insularity), the Statute of Autonomy of the Canary Islands and the application of the Canary Islands Economic and Fiscal Regime (REF) which has regulated special conditions for investments and taxes in this region since 1994. The European Union has also acknowledged their uniqueness by including the Canaries among the ultra-peripheral European regions,[13]

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mimic the form of a constitution, establishing the organization of an autonomous government, electoral rules, the distribution of competences between different levels of governance and other regional-specific provisions, such as the protection of cultural or linguistic realities.

[11] The military coup was plotted in Santa Cruz de Tenerife, where General Franco had been stationed as *Commander General* of the Canary Islands after he was dismissed as *Head of the General Staff* when the Popular Front (*Frente Popular*) of Manuel Azaña came to power. From the very beginning of the Spanish Civil war, the Canaries would form part of the territory under "nationalist" control. Ironically, the route Franco took to Morocco to take command of the troops that had revolted in the Spanish Protectorate of Morocco is very similar to the one used by many immigrants, but in the opposite direction

[12] The new socialist government in power since the spring of 2004 has begun to increase this decentralization by promoting new statutes of autonomy.

[13] The rest of the ultra-peripheral European regions are Guadalupe, Martinique, Guyana and Reunion, belonging to France, and the Azores and Madeira, belonging to Portugal.

which allows for special actions regarding European structural funds and policies, particularly economic ones.[14]

The democratic political situation of this autonomous community has been characterized by fragmented, unstable coalitions in the regional government, despite the fact that for more than a decade it has been governed by the Canarian Coalition *(Coalición Canaria),* a party that has taken up the nationalist banner by grouping together a variety of factions seeking greater autonomy and even independence from Spain.

Comparatively speaking, Canarian nationalism is relatively recent, less defined and has less scope than the other peripheral nationalisms in Spain. The concept of nationalism emerged relatively late in the islands and at first had little socio-political impact. For example, the explosion of nationalisms in the Basque Country and Catalonia at the end of the 19th Century barely caused a ripple in the archipelago. The first chapter of Canarian nationalism took place among emigrants in Venezuela around the ambiguous figure of Secundino Delgado and the magazine *El Guanche* (the term used for natives of the islands). The second chapter occurred in Cuba, resulting in the creation of the first Canarian nationalist party in 1924, which disappeared only three years later. In the past, Canarian nationalism was known for its weak arguments, marginality (since it was largely tied to emigration), and lack of sustained, stable leadership, as well as for being sporadic, disperse and organizationally fragmented (Hernández Bravo, 1999). This early version of nationalism sought to incorporate the Canary Islands into the struggles of former Spanish colonies in Latin America, in particular by espousing an affinity with Caribbean nations based on the fact that Canarian emigration had mostly targeted that region.[15]

[14] In Spain, the Canary Islands are considered unique because of their insularity, the fact that they are an archipelago and their remoteness from the Spanish mainland and the European continent. This geographic isolation has had historical implications affecting the identity of the islands, and early on was legally acknowledged through the Canary Islands Economic and Fiscal Regime (REF), among other legal measures. The central government, through the Constitution and the Statute of Autonomy of the Canary Islands, has also given the region a great deal of latitude to negotiate the distribution of competences (see López Aguilar, García Andrade, Carballo Armas, Rodríguez Drincourt and Moreno Almeida, 2001).

[15] Consequently, the term still used to refer disparagingly to Spaniards from the mainland –as well as the inhabitants of the Balearic Islands- is "godos", coined in Venezuela during the fight for independence. Furthermore, amongst the many nationalisms that compete in today's Spain, only the Canarian nationalism uses the term "Peninsular" in its political rhetoric, which has a long tradition in Latin American history.

During the next phase of Canarian nationalism, the Movement for Independence and Self-Rule of the Canary Archipelago (MPAIAC) led by Antonio Cubillo emerged in opposition to the Francoist regime. This movement established a radical separatist political party with a pro-indigenous, pro-African platform that sought recognition as a national liberation movement from the Organization of African Unity, based on the idea that the original inhabitants of the island were North African. Inspired by neo-colonial African struggles and the ideas of Frantz Fanon, this independence party engaged in a few minor terrorist bombings.[16] For all intents and purposes, this organization has disappeared although other radical nationalist parties have inherited its ideology.

With the advent of democracy and Spain's admission into the European Community, a new political situation emerged that led to the diversification of nationalist ideology, ranging from pro-independence and self-rule to pro-autonomy and center-right and center-left regionalism. There are three reasons that help explain why Canarian Coalition was successful in launching a new nationalist party in 1993 and why it has managed to maintain power in the regional government ever since. First of all, it incorporates many of the nationalists who were disappointed by the failure of the pro-independence nationalisms linked to Latin America and Africa and who have adapted to a new reality more in line with the thinking of the rest of the population who have never seen an advantage to direct confrontation and a hypothetical exit from Europe which would entail the loss of vast subsidies. Secondly, it provides an operating base for traditional oligarchies linked to tourism, construction and commerce that had been deprived of political representation in Madrid after the fall of Franco's regime and the failure of center-right parties. Thirdly, following the lead of Basque and Catalan nationalisms, it has gained control of the regional government's powerful political and economic institutions. The groups included in the Canarian Coalition are extraordinarily heterogeneous, with political interests covering a broad range of ideologies and classes. The disparate interests of these nationalists, communists and conservatives are only able to coexist thanks to the control and distribution of autonomic institutions and local

[16] The last of these terrorist attacks, in March 1977, had tragic consequences. Various airplanes had to be diverted from Las Palmas Airport to a small airport in Tenerife that was not prepared to deal with so much traffic. Two jumbo jets filled with tourists collided while maneuvering on the runways on an extremely foggy day, leading to the worst air traffic disaster in history.

power networks based on a system of patronage. In other words, by redistributing the enormous resources of the regional and local administration, this system of patronage consolidates a constituency that is fragmented in terms of social and geographic interests. In this situation, a vague, nebulous nationalism provides a veneer of legitimacy for its actions and unity within its organization without creating over-rigid dogmas.

For all its talk of national unity, the Canarian Coalition has failed to overcome traditional insular rivalries or the distrust between the various political and economic groups within the party. This is perfectly illustrated by the long-standing dispute between the interests of the two main islands, Tenerife and Gran Canaria, which has made it impossible to fix a single capital for the region and, as a consequence, has led to numerous redundancies between administrative institutions. Despite the efforts of the executive branch of the Canarian government, regional politics is characterized by the powerful centrifugal tendency common in archipelagic systems (La Flamme, 1983).

In contrast to the belligerence of Catalan and Basque nationalists, the Canarian Coalition has adopted a non-confrontational approach in national politics, supporting the party in power in different legislatures. In this way, it has served as a swing party in the creation of alliances and the adoption of legislation in return for the patronage of central government.

Conversely, at the regional level this party has managed to maintain a public discourse that demands recognition of the differences between the Canaries and the rest of Spain. Most of the population is satisfied with this nationalism since it acknowledges the *hecho diferencial canario* while side-stepping the highly complex geo-political issue of independence. Instead, it favors a bi-continental or tri-continental position, in which direct relations with Europe play a key role in separating it from riskier alternatives while reserving a role for itself that marginalizes Spain. In regional politics, it depicts itself as somewhat of a victim of central government while maintaining the simple yet effective message that everything that has been accomplished for the community is the result of their hard work, while all the problems in the Canaries are due to central government. Canarian Coalition has become one of the most effective tools in the archipelago in the creation of a new nationalism with conservative, and nativist tendencies. Because the Canary Islands lack traditional cultural anchors such as a distinct language[17] of their own, this nationalism has begun creating and codifying its own cultural catalog derived from its not too distant

[17] Although Canarian Spanish can be distinguished from mainland Spanish by its accent and certain popular lexical contributions (or vocabulary) from various sources, this is not a sufficient basis on which to establish a national identity.

agrarian past. It achieves this by combining and exalting various elements drawn from the traditions of different islands while constantly referring to its own identity (supposedly the result of a unique ethno-cultural mix derived from the original Guanche bedrock and the contributions of Europeans and Latin Americans over five centuries). This discourse simultaneously serves to create a unique Canarian identity and defend it from centrifugal insular tendencies and the rootless cosmopolitanism of the tourist. It also seeks to create barriers to protect itself from the threat of an immigrant invasion and to emphasize the uniqueness of the Canaries as means of protecting themselves from being absorbed into the whole of Spain.

Thanks to the control of the Canarian government's television networks and the cultural apparatus of the municipalities and inter-island councils, the social imaginary surrounding the uniqueness of the Canarian identity has easily taken hold of a population far removed from the Spanish mainland. Furthermore, the claustrophilia of the nationalist imaginary has cast the Other as a threat to the fragility of Canarian territory. This is an extremely complex otherness which, in its most extreme versions, not only includes immigrants from the Third World but also Europeans, mainland Spaniards and even Canarians from other islands. The immediate need to defend the territory has obviated the difficulty of reaching a consensus over a highly problematic national narrative. The political minimalism of Canarian nationalism serves as a perfect counterbalance to this extremely effective social closure.

5. Defending the Imaginary: immigration and politics in the Canaries

Immigration entered the regional political agenda at the end of the 1990s, just a few years after this occurred in the rest of Spain. At that time, a regional policy on immigration began to be developed which led to the creation of specific institutional agencies, while various sectors of Canarian society adopted different positions on how to deal with this new situation. The following analysis will focus on the administration and claims of the main parties represented in the Canarian Parliament.

Other Spanish autonomous communities with strong nationalist sentiments have used the *hecho diferencial* and their cultural identity as political arguments to express their position on immigration, especially in Catalonia with regard to Muslim immigration in that region. Both

Catalonia and the Canaries have been demanding the transfer of additional jurisdiction for dealing with migration, such as the control over the amount of immigration and the selection of immigrants. These demands have been significantly weaker in Galicia and the Basque Country due to the limited amount of immigration these regions receive.

In addition, the uniqueness of the Canaries and the fragility of its territory have been a key argument in the debate on migratory policy. For much of the political class and the Canarian population, this argument justifies the need to enact special measures. Long before the arrival of Latin American and African immigration, a cloistered mentality became evident during negotiations over the archipelago's special status with the European Community during the 1980s. In 1984 the Canarian Parliament proposed a bill (that was never passed) seeking to establish a transition period of ten years on the issue of free movement (see Comité de Expertos, 2003).

Ever since, there have been repeated attempts to pass a residence law in the Canaries that would restrict foreigners and Spanish citizens from other autonomous communities from settling in this region because, as the argument goes, the territory is unable to cope with the rate of population growth and economic exploitation that has occurred over the last few decades. Despite the fact that the Canaries are not the most densely populated Spanish region, Canarian public opinion strongly believes that the islands are over-developed and that population growth is out of control. The supposed link between population growth and the economy has been the subject of a number of opinions published by the Canary Islands Economic and Social Council and has also been discussed at length in the local press (see Comité de Expertos, 2003; Dictamen Consejo Económico y Social de Canarias 1/2004, 2004; Zapata and Godenau, 2005).[18] The notion of the territory's "carrying capacity" has been widely used in this debate, as opposed to the "reception capacity" used in the national debate. This proposal has been submitted in a climate where urban growth has been increasingly identified as unsustainable and irregular immigration is believed to have a negative impact on tourism.

[18] Limiting growth in the archipelago's population was still one of the core issues of the political debate leading up to the regional elections of May 2007. Paulino Rivero, the Canarian Coalition's presidential candidate for the government of the autonomous community, has declared on numerous occasions that one of the main objectives of his government will be to implement measures to contain population growth. The candidate has insisted that alliances between his government and other parties would be contingent on their acceptance of his proposal on population. These statements have been published in the regional press and can be consulted on the Canarian Coalition's website.

This residence law debate was once again in the spotlight prior to the 2003 regional elections. The government of the autonomous community, controlled by the Canarian Coalition, even created a committee of experts to study the issue,[19] but they concluded that such a law would violate the Spanish Constitution and the right to free movement protected by the European Union. Despite all this, the debate remains part of the regional political agenda, and has even gained prominence once again as a result of the upcoming reform of the statute of autonomy.

The issue of controlling population growth and creating a residence law also reappeared during one of the periods that saw a dramatic increase in the number of irregular immigrants arriving in Tenerife. At the end of October 2006 a protest organized by the Confederation of Residents' Associations and the Canarian Identity group *(Identidad Canaria)* was held in the island's capital under the slogan "Enough's enough, there's no more space", which was attended by the CCN and PNC nationalist parties. This protest, which was also attended by the radical extreme right group National Democracy *(Democracia Nacional),* stirred up a great deal of controversy and was decried as racist and xenophobic by a large portion of Canarian society since it echoed the slogans of the Spanish ultra-right.[20] This controversy has caused the Canarian Coalition to temporarily revise its political strategy by avoiding all discussion of a residence law, although they continue to promote issues such as limiting population growth and increasing the regional government's authority over alien residents as priorities of their political agenda.

Since the mid 1990s, on a number of occasions, the two main national parties, the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) and the People's Party (PP), have been minority partners in regional governments with Canarian Coalition. These parties have reacted differently to the proposed residence law. The PP (incorporated into the European People's Party) believes in a strong central government and has openly opposed such a law. However, the Canarian PSOE has been less decisive. The Socialist Party has a federal structure that is open to different sensibilities and recognizes that there are different kinds of problems in the various autonomous communities. This has led the Canarian PSOE to adopt an erratic, ambiguous position on the residence law, particularly in municipal governments, which changes according to political circumstances.

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[19] Official Bulletin of the Canary Islands No. 132 and 133, October 7, 2002.

[20] Among the slogans chanted were: "Enact a residence law now", "Canarians, fight for your land", "The island is sinking, there's no more space", "130,000 on welfare" or "Stop the invasion".

Beyond enacting a controversial residence law as a definitive solution to the threat that immigration poses to this fragile territory, an immediate compromise action is the transfer of sub-Saharan immigrants that arrive by boat to other autonomous communities. This solution is a result of the good relations the Canarian Coalition has always maintained with Madrid, regardless of which party is in power. The application of this "redistribution policy" explains why very few of the irregular immigrants that arrive by boat end up settling in the region. But applying the principle of solidarity at a national level has also meant that for the first time the different islands have had to admit immigrants that arrived in other islands in the archipelago. At the beginning of this decade the redistribution to other regions of Spain of irregular immigrants who arrived in the archipelago and who could not be repatriated was carried out informally. However, since 2005, this has become a routine measure thanks to the agreements reached between the central and regional governments through the Canaries-State Sub-commission. This has also been the policy established since the middle of last year regarding non-accompanied alien minors, as can be seen in the data provided by the Government Delegation in the archipelago.

In keeping with its general politics, the Canarian PP proposes to stop irregular immigration by exhaustively patrolling the borders; it also opposes any legal amnesties for immigrants since it believes that this will only attract more irregular immigrants to Spain. The Canarian PSOE defends the actions the current Socialist government in Madrid has taken to resolve this crisis; national government has concentrated on efficiently controlling flows, protecting the human rights of migrants and increasing cooperation with the countries of origin through the *Africa Plan* described earlier.

The Canarian Coalition has demanded increased vigilance of the waters separating the archipelago from the nearby African continent, appealing to the government in Madrid and the European Union to intervene on this issue. During the crisis that occurred in May 2006 it was agreed (with the support of the Canarian Coalition and PP) to ask the Spanish navy to patrol these waters and to send immigrants found on the high seas back to their countries. At the behest of PSOE, they also requested the creation of an extraordinary European fund to deal with the humanitarian crises these flows create in European Union member states. The Canarian Coalition has defended its right to negotiate directly with the European Union on these issues and also wants to take part in discussions on developing cooperation with the African continent. Additional regional jurisdiction is included in

the draft of the next autonomy statute that is currently being negotiated while authority over ports and Canarian territorial waters is also being demanded in order to control irregular immigration. The Canarian government has also called for the power to regulate the internal job market through control over issuing residence and work permits. And lastly, it has taken advantage of the current situation to change the official Canarian flag to a traditional Canarian nationalist flag and to request jurisdiction over police-related matters.

Certain members of the Canarian Coalition and left-wing nationalist parties (minority parties but with an effective populist message) have adopted even more extreme positions. They want to prohibit or severely limit the right of EU residents, non-EU immigrants and even Spanish citizens from other autonomous communities to settle in the territory and obtain access to the regional labor market. This demand is based on the argument that external flows alter and threaten Canarian identity and that the local job market should be reserved for Canarians. Many of these flows are seen as mechanisms that allow globalization to penetrate the territory and as forms of colonial domination by central government.

The region's political agenda unquestionably reflects the priorities and the nativist social imaginary created by Canarian Coalition. Nationalism and migration have often gone hand-in-hand, but Canarian nationalism has been reversed evolving from a nationalism created by emigrants to a nationalism whose message and imaginary are based on reactionary responses to all forms of immigration. For the time being, issues such as Canarian distinctiveness, the need to protect the cultural identity of the islands and the fragility of their geographic location next to the African continent have managed to marginalize other important considerations such as human rights and the social integration of immigrants reaching the "far southern border of Europe".

The escalation of irregular immigration flows to the Canary Islands has heated up the already impassioned internal debate on population, territory and identity in this region. The issues of immigration and nationalism have become intimately linked in the public sphere and this marriage will significantly shape future public policy through agreements reached by the government after the upcoming regional elections. In the medium term, the combination of political forces in the regional government, new jurisdiction over residence and work permits for aliens in the reformed statute of autonomy and increased vigilance over migratory routes from the African continent

will determine the political profile of the links between immigration and identity in the archipelago.

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