

The Spanish–Moroccan border complex: Processes of geopolitical, functional and symbolic rebordering

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Abstract

This paper aims to theorize the major aspects of the Spanish–Moroccan rebordering since Spain joined the European Union in 1986. The paper starts by providing a brief historical–geographical overview of the evolution of this border. Afterwards, the core of the theoretical discussion is addressed. The theorization follows a three-fold structure that scrutinizes the geopolitical, functional, and symbolic aspects of the Spanish–Moroccan border reconfiguration. Taking the general Spanish–Moroccan border as the point of departure, the analytical framework is gradually channeled towards the (EU)ro-African border scenarios constructed around Ceuta and Melilla, the two North-African cities under Spanish sovereignty. In doing so, the paper describes how the tripartite rebordering process has shaped the contemporary geography of these peculiar segments of the land border between the EU/Spain and Morocco. To conclude, this paper underlines how the Spanish–Moroccan border is rooted in an increasing divergence between the implementation of EU external border securitization needs and the management of free-trade.

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“Los Reyes visitarán el lunes las ciudades autónomas de Ceuta y Melilla. Se trata de un acontecimiento sin precedentes y de especial relevancia, dado que es la primera vez que Don Juan Carlos y Doña Sofía irán a estos dos enclaves desde que accedieron al trono. Fuentes de la Casa del Rey consultadas por este periódico han querido dar a esta visita

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una absoluta apariencia de normalidad. (...)La presencia de los Reyes indudablemente no hace sino remarcar la soberanía española sobre las dos plazas autónomas.” El Mundo, Thursday, 1st November 2007, <http://www.elmundo.es/papel/2007/11/01/espana/2249388.html>.

Translation: The King and Queen are visiting the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla on Monday. This is an event without precedents and is particularly relevant because Juan Carlos and Sofia have not visited the two enclaves since they acceded to the throne. Sources in the ‘royal house’ want to stress the normality of the visit. (...) Without a doubt, the visit re-proclaims the Spanish sovereignty of the autonomous cities.

“La provocation coloniale de Juan Carlos à Sebta et à Melillia suscite une vive colère et une large indignation chez les Marocains. Plusieurs sit-in ont été organisés, hier, à travers différentes villes du Royaume, pour protester contre la visite du Roi d’Espagne Juan Carlos dans les présides occupés Sebta et Melillia. Un «non» franc et massif à la visite controversée entamée, hier à Sebta, par le Roi d’Espagne Juan Carlos dans les présides marocains occupés. C’est ce qu’a exprimé, hier, l’Etat marocain, gouvernement, députés, conseillers, et acteurs associatifs compris.” Aujourd’hui le Maroc, Tuesday, 6th November 2007, <http://www.aujourd'hui.ma/couverture-details57790.html>.

Translation: The colonial provocation of Juan Carlos in Ceuta and Melilla engenders a sense of anger and indignation amongst Moroccans. A number of demonstrations have been organized throughout the kingdom in order to protest the visit of the Spanish king to the occupied Moroccan domains. A real ‘no’ has been massively expressed by the government, parliamentarians and associations with regards to the controversial visit.

Introduction

One could argue that the border between Spain and Morocco functions as a prolific “metaphor provider”. It is, indeed, built upon a complex amalgamation of clashes and alliances: Spain and Morocco; Christianity and Islam; Europe and Africa; EU territory and non-EU territory; prosperous north and impoverished south; former colonizer and formerly colonized. A wide range of geographical, historical, political, social, cultural, and economic factors are at play on the Spanish–Moroccan border landscape. The extreme symbolic power of these numerous convergences and divergences provides analytical challenges.

Nevertheless, the Spanish–Moroccan border has not been scrutinized as much as many other borders (such as the U.S.–Mexican border, for instance), although a growing number of studies have dealt with Spanish–Moroccan border affairs (see for examples: Bennison, 2001; Driessen, 1992; El Abdellaoui & Chikhi, 2002; Evers-Rosander, 1991; Gold, 1999; Hess, 1979; Lería, 1991; Morales Lezcano, 2000; Planet, 1998; Ribas-Mateos, 2005). To date, this border has attracted less critical interest than its “extreme” nature would seem to invite.

Paradoxically, it seems as if the accumulation of remarkable phenomena taking place around the Spanish–Moroccan border area has detracted attention from the border itself. Though the south–north and north–south migrations, colonialism, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, as well as the general scenario of Spanish–Moroccan relations have inspired academic research (to name a few: Affaya & Guerraoui, 2006; Albet-Mas, 2006; Damis, 1998; De la Serna, 2001; Feliu, 2003; Garcia-Ramon, Albet-Mas, Nogué-Font, & Riudor-Gorgas,

1998; Gillespie, 1999; Lacoste, 1999; López García, 1996, 2004; Martín Corrales, 2002; Morales-Lezcano, 1986), there is a relative scarcity of contributions specifically focused on the border.

This paper presents a tripartite theoretical lens that explores the geopolitical, functional, and symbolic dimensions of the Spanish–Moroccan rebordering process, which accelerated after Spain's EU accession in 1986. This theoretical framework is derived from the scrutiny of critical border theorizations, including Ackleson (2005), Anderson (2001), Andreas (2000), Coleman (2005), Donnan and Wilson (1994), Nevins (2002), O'Dowd (2003), Walters (2002), and is fashioned in accordance with the particularities of the border under review.

Within the framework of the large quantity of literature on the reconfiguration of borders within the Schengen context (for example, Bigo, 2001; Koslowski, 2000; Lahav & Guiraudon, 2000), Walters' (2002) genealogy of Schengen has motivated the three-folded analysis structure. O'Dowd's (2003) categorization of the four main functions, or ways, of understanding borders (barriers, bridges, resources, and symbols of identity) helped classify the multiple phenomena impinging on the border area. Anderson's (2001) notions of "selective permeability of borders", "differential filtering effects of borders", and "politics/economics contradictory unity" impart an understanding of the conflicting ways in which the border is currently governed. In addition, a number of scholarly contributions focused on the U.S.–Mexico border (Ackleson, 2005; Andreas, 2000; Coleman, 2005; Nevins, 2002) have been useful for situating the Spanish–Moroccan border case in what could be described in the large-scale context of "gated globalism" (Cunningham, 2001), thus widening the academic debate. Even though it does not constitute the main focus of the paper, it is worth considering transatlantic border analogies. They invite contemplation of the Spanish–Moroccan border reconfiguration in light of the contradiction between current geopolitical (security-oriented) and geoeconomic (free-trade-oriented) global border dynamics.

This tripartite theoretical discussion has been channeled towards the (EU)ro-African borders of Ceuta and Melilla, and is motivated by the broader principle that states that much can be learnt about the centers of power by focusing on their peripheries (Donnan & Wilson, 1994). In doing so, this framework seeks to reconceptualise the current character of the border between EU/Spain and Morocco paying special attention to the only segments of the EU external border in the African continent.

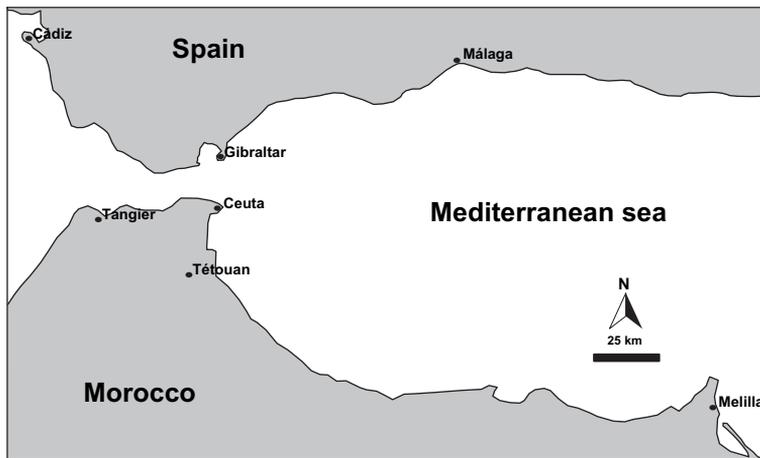
Introducing the border

The border between Spain and Morocco is essentially a maritime border. On the one hand, it is comprised by the waters of the Strait of Gibraltar, which separate the Iberian Peninsula from the African continent; on the other, it consists of the fragment of Moroccan Atlantic coast that lies opposite to the Canary Islands. However, the boundaries between the enclaves¹ of Ceuta and Melilla and their hinterlands form short Spanish–Moroccan land borders in the Maghreb, on which this paper is focused. Apart from Ceuta (19.4 km²) and Melilla (13.4 km²), the Canary Islands (7,446.6 km²), Alborán Island (7.1 km²), Peñón de Vélez de la Gomera

¹ Actually, the term 'enclave' appears to be technically incorrect when referring to Ceuta and Melilla because they both have an exit to the Mediterranean (Cajal, 2003:164). An alternative terminology is possible. Vinokurov (2007), for instance, categorizes them as exclaves or semi-enclaves. However, the common usage of the term 'enclave' for Ceuta and Melilla is widely accepted, both in daily life and in academia. For this reason, they will be referred to as 'enclaves' in this paper.

(2.2 km²), Peñón de Alhucemas (1.4 km²) and the Chaffarine Islands (Congreso 4.5 km², Isabel II 2 km², Rey Francisco 0.6 km²) complement the contested and less obvious geography of the Spanish–Moroccan border.

Often, cartographic representations of the Spanish–Moroccan border are condensed into the metaphorical image of the Pillars of Hercules on the two shores of the Strait of Gibraltar: Gibraltar on one side, and Ceuta's Monte Hacho on the other. Due to its symbolism, the Mediterranean-divide dimension of the border is especially marked in the collective imagination. However, the border between Spain and Morocco goes beyond the Herculean divide. It is configured by an extra set of border segments that confer an anomalous and fascinating character to the border scenario. The theoretical frame established in this paper mainly focuses on the land borders between the Spanish North-African enclaves and Morocco. What follows is a brief historical contextualization of the construction of these borders.



Historical overview

The end of the *reconquista*,² in the year 1492, coincided with the drawing of a rather stable frontier between Christianity and Islam in the western Mediterranean (Driessen, 1992). The Castilian and Portuguese seizure of the Maghribian territories, and consequently the preliminary setting of today's (EU)ro-African borders, took place within this historical scenario of political, cultural, and territorial delimitation. Ceuta fell into Portuguese hands in 1415 (it became Spanish in 1668), whereas Melilla was conquered by Castile in 1497. The main difference between the Iberian mobile borders of the *reconquista* and those that were established in the African continent resides in the fact that the first were borders of expansion, whereas the latter (at least in the beginning) were borders of contraction. From the Portuguese–Castilian capture of North-African territories to their subsequent development, first into dynamic trading posts

² The Spanish term '*reconquista*' refers to the historic period of struggle for territorial control between Christian and Islamic rulers in the Iberian Peninsula (from 718 to 1492). The paper will return to its contemporary resonances later.

and later into bases for colonial penetration, Ceuta and Melilla basically functioned as *presidios* (military garrisons).

In 1863, Ceuta and Melilla acquired free-port status and intense trading activity came to complement the garrison function of the enclaves. By that time, the Spanish interest in Northern Morocco had increased considerably. During the years of colonial intervention (1912–1956), despite being fully permeable, the perimeters of Ceuta and Melilla divided the North-African territories under Spanish sovereignty from the Northern Moroccan territories under Spanish “protection”. In the eyes of Spain, Ceuta and Melilla were not considered colonial territories but simply part of the wider Spanish territory. To a certain degree, this distinctiveness explains why, after the end of the Spanish–French Protectorate of Morocco in 1956, the enclaves remained in Spanish hands. Ever since then, Morocco has identified Ceuta and Melilla as an integral part of Moroccan territory, still to be decolonised. The end of the colonisation of Morocco (1956) substantially changed the meaning of the Spanish North-African enclaves and, consequently, the significance of their borders with post-colonial Morocco. Ceuta and Melilla remained under Spanish sovereignty and followed the successive political guidelines set by the government in Madrid.

With respect to the Spanish–Moroccan frontier scenario, Spain’s accession to the European Union involved another shift. After Spain’s accession in 1986, Ceuta and Melilla automatically became (EU)ro-African territories. Although the enclaves became part of the EU, their historically anomalous status was sustained and even emphasized. These peculiarities are explored later in this paper. The year 1986 is unquestionably a major turning point in the history of the Spanish–Moroccan border. The (EU)ropeanization of the border in 1986 was followed by its “Schengenization” in 1991. The next notable point occurs in 1995, when the fencing of the enclave’s perimeters started, and when, concurrently and paradoxically, the paving of a path towards Euro-Mediterranean commercial liberalization, and hence a process of economic debordering, began. This contradictory combination is returned to later in the paper.

Three dimensions of Spanish–Moroccan rebordering

This theorization has been structured in three parts. In the first one (*geopolitical dimension*), the double geopolitical significance of the Spanish–Moroccan border is explored. Continuities and discontinuities between the national and the (post-national) Schengen border, and also between the classical geopolitical notion of borders and the current nature of Schengen’s (Walters, 2002), are taken into consideration. By focusing on the Spanish–Moroccan fragment of the EU external border, we can examine how a national (Spain/Morocco) and a post-national (EU/non-EU) border overlap. Furthermore, in this section, the geopolitical border landscape of the colonial period is compared with that of the emerging scenario of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. The aim here is to examine the current nature of the border between an EU member and a partner (non-candidate) country, with both of them embroiled in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

The second part of the theoretical framework (*functional dimension*) explores the role of the border as a regulator of people and economic flows. This enables the study to highlight the peculiar functional management of the North-African enclaves’ borders (Ferrer-Gallardo, 2007) resulting from its post-1986 development. The anomalies and contradictions of the Spanish–Moroccan land border regime are analyzed in light of the “selective permeability and differential filtering effects of borders” (Anderson, 2001). The impact and use of a fortified and fenced border that must remain permeable are discussed.

The third part of the theoretical framework (*symbolic dimension*) deals with the impact of the geopolitical and functional reconfiguration of the Spanish–Moroccan border in terms of national and post-national identity. The role of the Spanish–Moroccan border as an instrument of national and post-national identity formation is briefly examined. The Spanish–Moroccan border (and to a larger extent, the Moroccan borders with Ceuta and Melilla) harbor symbolically acute historical, political, geographical, and economic reconfigurations and contradictions.

Geopolitical dimension

The dual geopolitical significance

The dual geopolitical significance acquired by the Spanish–Moroccan border in 1986 constitutes a key aspect of its redefinition. Spain's accession to the European Union implied that the Spanish–Moroccan border also became the border between the EU and Morocco. Subsequently, this was also the case at the eastern limits of the European Union, such as the Polish–German border before the 2004 enlargement or, currently, on the border between Poland and Ukraine. The setting of the EU external border implied that two different perimeters overlapped and two different and meaningful territorial lines were superimposed. The drawing of the EU–Morocco border did not erase the border between Spain and Morocco. Instead, the EU and Spanish borders intertwined to generate a two-fold amalgam, containing the border between two state territorial containers on the one hand, and the perimeter of a “post-national” territorial unit (understood as a supranational territorial container) on the other. For this reason, although still relevant, classical geopolitical interpretations of borders fail to grasp the current significance of this border because they can only partially explain it. They need to be complemented with flexible approaches sourced in social constructivism (see [Berg & van Houtum, 2003](#); [Newman & Paasi, 1998](#)) that are alert to new socio-spatial and reterritorialized scenarios. In doing so, a wider and clearer picture of the geopolitical implications of the Spanish–Moroccan rebordering is obtained.

Furthermore, it is important to draw attention to the fact that (embedded in this national/post-national duality) colonial and post-colonial echoes are also present in the Spanish–Moroccan scenario. For this reason, it is useful to take into account the voice of those scholars who have attempted to situate the EU outer border within a wider theoretical frame of colonial and post-colonial boundary-drawing (see [Balibar, 1998](#); [Kramsch, 2006](#); [Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2006](#)). Therefore, it seems appropriate to consider that, as [Kramsch \(2006: 290\)](#) argues, “in the context of an enlarged EU-25 whose newly minted external border now abuts the ex-colonial contact zones of some of its oldest member states (...), a social constructivist lens applied to an understanding of cross-border dynamics has become increasingly problematic, on both theoretical and political grounds. For an exclusive analytical focus on socially constructed representations of nationalizing Self/Other relations risks reproducing (perhaps unwittingly) a form of culturalized racism now commonly accepted on the political Right in Europe (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1991)”.

The European Union itself is embroiled in a duality related to the one presented above. The scenario produced by the intergovernmental–supranational tension entails the co-existence of national and post-national notions of territoriality under the same roof. As [Anderson \(1995: 71\)](#) points out, in some ways “nation-states and its borders are as firmly rooted as ever.” At the same time, supranational EU building dynamics have shaped and forged a new post-national territorial unit. Within the EU, national and post-national territorial units coexist and,

consequently, so do their respective national and post-national borders. On the Spanish–Moroccan border, they coincide and overlay each other.

Interestingly, Walters (2002: 564) argues that the Schengen Process “is not about political power understood as confrontation between territorial power containers.” Consequently, the nature of the Schengenland borders is far from the notion of borders held by classical geographers like Curzon and Ratzel. Walters identifies Schengen as an attempt to accommodate political borders to a new spatiality that does not necessarily equate space with the fixed territories of modern statehood. Notwithstanding this observation, it could be argued that the external borders of Schengen/EU are entangled with previously existing borders.

From 1986 onwards, the Spanish–Moroccan border has set limits between the EU and non-EU territories and, therefore, constitutes the external border of an emerging political spatiality. Nonetheless, it has not ceased to be a traditionally contested border between two states with past and present territorial disputes, which might be partly explained by classical geopolitics. Such disputes are important enough to instigate military performances like the invasion/liberation of Perejil/Tora island (near the Ceuta coast) on July 2002 (see Cembrero, 2006; Hernando de Larramendi, 2004; Planet & Hernando de Larramendi, 2003; Szmolka Vida, 2005). Although this incident had a high impact in the media, its real importance, beyond the inevitable diplomatic storm, was low. The episode was, however, highly significant in as much as it revealed classical territorial disagreements that were not resolved after the Spanish Protectorate of Morocco ended. Until 1956, Spain occupied northern Morocco and, consequently, the border between the two states, though existing, was blurred. The northern part of Morocco had been colonized by its neighbor, and the geopolitical line that currently divides the two territories had a much weaker profile. As Driessen (1992: 36) writes, “ever since Spain gained a foothold in Morocco relations between them had been strained, constantly alternating between open confrontation and delicate entente”. Ever since this event, the geopolitical nature of the Spanish–Moroccan border has been elastic and contested.

The triangular geopolitical discussion between Spain, Morocco, and the UK regarding the sovereignty of Ceuta, Melilla, and Gibraltar (see Ballesteros, 1990; Cajal, 2003; Cárdenas, 1996; García-Flórez, 1999; Lazrak, 1974; López García, Planet, & Bouqentar, 1994; Remiro Brotons, 1999; Rezette, 1976; Zurlo, 2005) provides the Spanish–Moroccan border with some classical geopolitical content. Together with the influence of the complex intertwining of territorial claims across the Strait of Gibraltar, the echoes of the Spanish colonial presence in Morocco (1912–1956) are also geopolitically relevant and need to be taken into consideration. In doing so, approaches that stress post-national (and less classical) aspects of the border are complemented.

The Spanish ‘Lebensraum’ and the EU’s ‘Post-National Lebensraum’

The final collapse of Spanish empire in the Americas and the Pacific after the defeat by the United States in Cuba and the Philippines in 1898 implied the refocusing of Spanish geopolitical interest across the Straits of Gibraltar. The necessity of recovering a colonial space, or “vital space”, was understood as a way to ensure Spain’s independence and prestige (Riudor, 1999: 255). In this context, and under the influence of Friedrich Ratzel’s contributions, North-Africa appeared within the Spanish geopolitical debate as an alternative ‘lebensraum’ (Nogué & Vicente, 2001: 59). The geopolitical claim on northern Morocco therefore represented a way to reinvigorate the traditional and already vanishing imperialism of Spain.

In the beginning of the 20th century, the diplomatic weight of Spain in the international arena was certainly weakened. Therefore, the State was weakly positioned in the African

colonial race. However, the British–French balance of power enabled Spain (already present in Ceuta and Melilla) to “protect” the northern part of Morocco and partly fulfill its “Africanist Dreams” (Riudor, 1999). These visions revived the legacy of the Castilian Catholic Queen, Isabella, and her desire for an African extension and prolongation of the *reconquista*. After the Treaty of Algeciras (1906), Morocco was divided into two Protectorates, “with France seen as the main protector while Spain occupied Tarfaya, Ifni, and the Río de Oro in Western Sahara and, in the north, most of the region of the Rif and Yebala” (Gold, 2000: 1). Spain obtained part of its African *lebensraum*; France “protected” the rest of Morocco, and the coastal city of Tangiers became an international enclave. As Morales Lezcano (2000: 244) explains, the Spanish area of the Protectorate was of low economic value, though it was strategically very important. It was placed “in a cultural crossroad, between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, between Christian and Islamic worlds, between Europe and Africa” (Nogué & Villanova, 1999: 103). To a certain extent, during the years of the Protectorate (1912–1956), Spain was expanding its geopolitical influence across its southern border and materializing the idea of Morocco as a Spanish *lebensraum*.

This logic of expansion was sharply cut by the end of the Protectorate. In the course of the subsequent decades, there was less Spanish–Moroccan interaction due to the weight of economic protectionism both in Franco’s Spain and post-colonial Morocco. In 1986, the Iberian EU enlargement reinforced the role of the Union’s Mediterranean dimension. Although subsequently weakened and counterbalanced by the EU’s eastwards enlargement, the starting of the Barcelona Process in 1995 signified the renewal of the European Union’s interest in the Mediterranean. Within the Barcelona Declaration (1995) the Euro-Mediterranean Partners agreed on the gradual establishment of a Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area (EMFTA) by the target year of 2010.

In this light, it could be argued that this move resembled the building of a “post-national (EU) *lebensraum*”. Contemplating this geopolitical picture of a ‘post-national EU *lebensraum*’ might contribute to the mapping of the emergent nature of the EU outer border drawn between Spain and Morocco. Also, it might facilitate a better understanding of the character of the borders between the EU and its non-candidate neighbors. The analogy between the present scenario and the days of Spanish colonialism in Morocco evokes the idea of a border that, within the context of a certain economic permeability/integration, still preserves a political/institutional difference between territorial units. During the years of the Protectorate (1912–1956), despite the functional blurring of the border associated with the colonial relationship, the border preserved the clear difference between the “protector” and the “protected”.

Within the context of the European Neighborhood Policy, the EU seeks to strengthen economic and institutional links with its Mediterranean partners, amongst others. But, the efforts being made to economically bridge the two shores of the Mediterranean, despite their intrinsic managerial political dimension, are not complemented by the possibility of EU political enlargement towards the south. Simply put, Euro-Mediterranean Partnership does not mean Euro-Mediterranean political integration. Thus, where the northern and southern Mediterranean tend towards the relaxation of economic borders and market integration, other issues are still fragmented at the EU external border, including democratic political institutions and citizenship, as well as associated rights and obligations. In relation to this, Peter Gold argues that ‘it may be too fanciful to see the “European” Union extending so far to the north, east and south that the northern African states, Russia and the Middle East are all virtually part of “Europe”, although a free-trade area stretching from Mauritania to (and possibly including) Russia

and the Ukraine is already seen as an ultimate goal' (Rheing, 1999: 3, quoted in Gold, 2000: 173). In this light, referring to present European Union border dynamics, Kramersch (2006: 292) observes that "in the workings of the EU today, a deep and meaningful continuity exists between current practices of European enlargement and a certain mode of colonial governmentality."

The next section of the paper considers what this "continuity" might mean as it addresses the functional dimension of the Spanish–Moroccan border reconfiguration paying particular attention to the specificities of how Ceuta and Melilla's perimeters are managed.

Functional dimension

Selective border management

The functional reconfiguration of the Spanish–Moroccan border and its new role as a regulator of flows is characterized by what Anderson (2001) describes as the 'selective permeability' of borders and their 'differential filtering effects'. On the one hand, the border is becoming more permeable to the flow of goods and capital, due to the logic of globalization and the prospective Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area. On the other hand, the border is becoming less permeable to the flow of some types of labor migration, in the context of 'Fortress Europe', and via the implementation of the SIVE (System of Integrated External Surveillance, see Migreurop, 2004). Additionally, other securitization measures are now coordinated at the EU level by the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders (FRONTEX). Clear similarities can be found by comparing the Spanish–Moroccan border with the U.S.–Mexico case. In this respect, it could be argued that the Spanish–Moroccan border is involved in a process of early *NAFTAization*.

Regarding the contradictory logic of U.S.–Mexico border management, Coleman (2005: 189) states that 'U.S geopolitical and geoeconomic practice, rather than the coherent product of a properly sovereign center of policy power capable of balancing and managing diverse security and trade agendas, is a field or network of policy designs whose exercise over space is far from orderly'. Clearly, this also applies to the Spanish–Moroccan case. Both U.S.–Mexican and Spanish–Moroccan contemporary border regimes entail, as Nevins (2002: 7) points out, 'maximizing the perceived benefits of globalization while protecting against the perceived detriments of increasing transnational flows'. As Anderson (2001) observes, this logic 'seriously impedes the free movement and exchange of labor and is generally accepted by neo-liberals despite the fact that it contradicts their free-trade, anti-state ideology' (2001: 30).

The reconfigured Spanish–Moroccan border regime, as is the case of the general EU external border landscape, is becoming increasingly selective. In this scenario, although entrenched in the same logic, the peculiar border regimes of Ceuta and Melilla emphasize this selective profile. That is, they seem to be giving rise to more intense patterns of border selectivity. Since the economic sustainability of the enclaves depends on their interaction with their hinterlands, cross-border flows of people from the surrounding Moroccan provinces of Tetouan and Nador (excluding those who do not have documents indicating residence there) are permitted. These flows are allowed under the legal framework of an exception to the Schengen Agreements. The deployment of this exceptional judicial umbrella implies that, on a daily basis, Ceuta and Melilla import labor force and consumers from Morocco. The barrier effect of the African Schengen borders is thus selectively lowered for (some) people, which implies that the two (EU)ro-African cities benefit from a regulated cross-border flow of people (and people

transporting goods), sourced in the massive economic asymmetries between the two sides of the border.

The selective management of the Ceuta and Melilla borders with Morocco (Ferrer-Gallardo, 2007) simultaneously embraces EU guidelines regarding the securitization of its external border, as well as the special regulation that the sustainability of the enclaves requires. It is the result of a *mélange* of security, economic, and political needs that originated at different scales. The co-existence of cross-border flows of (permitted and “exceptionally Schengenized”) Moroccan citizens from Tetouan and Nador only, the strengthening of border policing measures (for “non-desirable” migrants), as well as the development of intense and lucrative smuggling activity, gives rise to a paradoxical logic of border management. This is why, in the particular cases of Ceuta and Melilla, the ‘selective permeability’ of borders and their ‘differential filtering effects’ (Anderson, 2001) can be categorized as distinctly selective.

The securitization of the Spanish–Moroccan border

In economic terms, the gap between Spain and Morocco has greatly widened since Spain joined the European Union in 1986. In turn, the resulting structural asymmetries have stimulated the illegal flow of goods and people across the Strait of Gibraltar and the borders of the North-African enclaves. Spain’s new condition as a EU member, and also as a country of immigration as opposed to emigration, required the reconfiguration of its border controls. As a result of this, from 1986 onwards, immigration and asylum policies became increasingly strict.

When Spain joined the Schengen Agreement in 1991, its visa regime adjusted to the new situation. The strengthening of border controls began, and the rules of the game changed. From that moment on, Moroccan citizens were not allowed to cross the new Spanish/Schengen–Moroccan border without a visa, with the exception of citizens from the Moroccan provinces of Tetouan and Nador. On the 19th of May of that very same year, the first victims of clandestine migration would die whilst trying to cross the maritime border of the Straits of Gibraltar. The range of legal readjustments associated to the Schengenization of the Spanish–Moroccan border, and the arrival of newly perceived threats, notably in the form of illegal immigration, came together with the implementation of securitization techniques and the physical reshaping of the border, most notably in Ceuta and Melilla. It is important to highlight that, as Ackleson (2005: 168) states regarding the U.S.–Mexico case, ‘the very act of declaring something a security threat is what is key. In addition, when an issue is securitized, it becomes raised to a new category of importance on the political agenda, thereby justifying extraordinary policy responses.’

This is the context in which the heightened policing of the border began. In order to prevent the entrance of illegal immigrants, security controls were reinforced all along the border with the financial assistance of EU institutions. The Spanish–Moroccan maritime border was sealed off electronically by the SIVE (Integrated System of External Surveillance), which allowed the monitoring of illegal immigration towards the Iberian Peninsula and the Canary Islands (see Migreuop, 2004). The SIVE was gradually implemented by means of fixed and mobile radar, first along the coasts of Andalusia (2002), and later around the Canary Islands (2005). Border controls are now highly technologically developed and even include sensors that are able to detect heartbeats from a distance (Clochard & Dupeyron, 2007). However, despite the SIVE, the number of people trying to reach the Spanish coasts onboard small fishing boats (*pateras* and *cayucos*) is not decreasing. The first notable consequence of the implementation of the SIVE

was the change in the trajectories of many of these small boats. Increased surveillance brought with it alternative, and more dangerous, immigration routes through unsurveilled fragments of the Straits of Gibraltar. After the early implementation of the SIVE, extremely perilous routes through the Atlantic Ocean towards the Canary Islands also became popular. Some clear analogies might be drawn with the fortification of the U.S.–Mexico border, and the alternative immigration routes taken by those migrants through the desert of Sonora.

The following section underlines how the securitization process was conducted in the specific border segments of Ceuta and Melilla, as well as how, in this case, the selective militarization of the border coexists with the legal flow of people and irregular flow of goods.

Particularities of Ceuta³ and Melilla⁴: the Gates of the Fortress

Flow of people

In Gold's (2000: 120) words; 'as the only territories which provide a land border between the EU and Africa, the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla act as magnets for would-be illegal migrants to continental Europe from all over the African continent'. In order to stop immigration, the perimeter of these two cities has been physically reshaped through the building of a twin metal fence (now triple in the case of Melilla), from 3.5 to 6 m high, equipped with high-tech surveillance systems, such as thermal and infrared cameras, and less sophisticated elements, like pepper sprays and barbed wire. Nevertheless, the militarization is not stopping people from attempting to cross the border by hiding inside vehicles, jumping or opening holes in the fences, mixing with those who are allowed to cross the border legally, or swimming from Moroccan beaches to the enclaves. Despite the efforts made to tangibly seal off the borders, the European Union external borders in Africa remain semi-permeable.

The semi-permeability of the sealed off perimeters of Ceuta and Melilla is highlighted here, not only by the failure to stop the entrance of illegal immigrants, but also by the existence of a daily cross-border flow of thousands of Moroccan citizens who enter the enclave legally without a visa requirement. Moroccan citizens registered in the provinces of Tetouan and Nador are allowed to enter the enclaves only by showing their passports indicating residence there. As a consequence, after the "Schengenization" of the border, internal Moroccan migration towards these provinces increased, and so did the price of "Schengenized" Moroccan passports in the black market. The daily cross-border flow of approximately 20,000 people in each of the enclaves certifies the existence of a cross-border labor market, as well as a stable cross-border commercial circuit, which is indicative of strong transboundary socio-economic linkages.

Flow of goods

The notion of semi-permeability also becomes evident in the analysis of the massive non-legal flow of goods across the enclave borders. The free-port status acquired by Ceuta and Melilla in 1863, beneficial tax conditions and the strategic location of their harbors, have gradually given rise to what Planet (2002: 268) calls the 'hypertrophy' (an abnormal growth) of the

³ The surface area of Ceuta is 19.48 km². Its total perimeter has a length of 28 km, eight of which constitute the land border with Morocco (*Instituto Geográfico Nacional*). It is inhabited by 75,861 people (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística*, January 2006).

⁴ Melilla comprises an area of 13.41 km². Its total perimeter has a length of 20 km, 11 of which constitute the land border with Morocco (*Instituto Geográfico Nacional*). It is inhabited by 66,871 people (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística*, January 2006).

commercial sector. Planet (2002: 269) explains how the extraordinary commercial activity of the enclaves is organized through a binary scheme of legality and illegality that benefits from enabling tax structures. Legal economic activity, related to the redistribution of goods to locals and tourists, exists alongside illegal (or informal) economic activity, through which goods are redistributed outside the enclaves. The enclave's exceptional tax regime, which is associated with the deep economic asymmetries that exist between the two sides of the border, provides the grounds for intensely developed smuggling activity between Ceuta and Melilla and their hinterlands (Aziza, 2006; Driessen, 1999; McMurray, 2001; Planet, 2002). This situation is accentuated in Ceuta, due to the inexistence of official commercial customs regulating trade flows between the two countries: the fact that Morocco perceives the enclave's borders as illegitimate has so far not enabled the establishment of commercial interactions that are fully 'normalized' and agreed upon.

Through the work of a number of scholars who have explored the enclaves' border relations, three different types of smuggling practices can be identified. This categorization applies to the period after 1986 until the present moment. Hajjaji (1986) categorized smuggling into Morocco via the Spanish enclaves under the following categories: (a) occasional smuggling of tobacco, alcoholic beverages, or electrical household appliances, performed sporadically by foreign workers, students, civil servants, and generally those (Spaniards and Moroccans) who can easily enter and leave the enclaves; (b) subsistence smuggling consisting on the illicit cross-border flow of consumption goods such as batteries, chocolate, canned milk, perfumes, etc., executed by inhabitants from the surrounding Moroccan cities going back and forth across the border several times a day; and (c) large-scale smuggling of electronic equipment, like satellite dishes and other expensive goods, carried out by organized networks of professionals. This typology roughly coincides with the three varieties of smugglers described by McMurray (2001: 116, 117) regarding the smuggling activity between Melilla and Nador, which can be extrapolated to the Ceuta–Tetouan case. He differentiates between: (a) weekend smugglers or amateurs; (b) everyday smugglers; and (c) the 'big boys'. He points out (2001: 123) that "it is difficult to name an item that is not smuggled across that border into Morocco". Aziza (2006), also speaking of the Melilla–Nador case, categorizes only two types of smugglers – *petits contrebandiers* and *grands contrebandiers* – by using different methods and focusing on different products.

The peculiar status of the enclaves and their paradoxically semi-permeable but fortified borders seems to be highly beneficial for some, given the fact that they are the cornerstone of the economic sustainability of the enclaves. However, this peculiar situation has uneven impacts. In the north of Morocco, as Planet (2002): 275 points out, these illicit cross-border flows entail 'unfair competition for the national production, obstruction of the creation of industrial units, discouragement of foreign investment and loss of jobs'. Notwithstanding these negative consequences impinging on the Moroccan side of the border, other indicators seem to be pointing in a different direction. The demographic and urban expansions of the Moroccan border towns of Nador and Finideq, for instance, suggest that the impact of the enclaves' border regimes on the other side has also generated fruitful economic opportunity. However, this economic opportunity mostly occurs in a semi-illegal and arguably precarious way.

Attention needs to be paid to the fact that this model of border economy is rapidly evolving. The current progressive commercial debordering between the EU and Morocco, free-trade agreements signed by Morocco, notably with China and the United States, as well as large economic investments and infrastructural transformations developing in northern Morocco, may lead alternative legal entry points for goods into a more 'liberalized' Moroccan economy.

Two decades after the (EU)ropeanization of the borders of Ceuta and Melilla, their well known ‘smuggling industry’ seems to be evolving into a less important ‘smuggling industry of subsistence’.

Nevertheless, it is clear that in the cases of Ceuta and Melilla, the high permeability associated with the illegal flow of goods and the selectively Schengenized flow of people collides with the idea and practice of an intensively securitized and sealed off border. This raises questions about the effectiveness of militarization and establishes a clear differentiation between the functional and symbolic purposes of border securitization. The growing importance of immigration issues in recent European (Union) debates indicates the extent to which the future of Europe is linked to the future of its migration policy. In this sense, the increasingly restrictive migratory legislation, which goes hand in hand with the physical hardening of the EU outer border, is providing the framework for the symbolic delimitation between those who are in and those who are out. The very idea of Europe, the way it functions and what it represents, seems to be dependant on the way its space is (b)ordered, not only in a functional sense, but also in the symbolic terrain. The symbolic dimension of Spanish–Moroccan (Fig. 1) rebordering is approached in the following section.

Symbolic dimensions

Inside–outside

As previously pointed out, the physical reinforcement of the perimeters of Ceuta and Melilla represents not only a functional manifestation of EU legality into tangible reality, but also



Fig. 1. The Ceuta-Morocco Border. February 2006. Source: Xavier Ferrer-Gallardo.

a symbolic performance aiming to (re)mark and (re)mind the limits of the socio-spatial identities delimited by the border. O'Dowd (2003) argues that borders function as barriers, bridges, resources, and also as symbols of identity. In this section, the last of these functions is explored. It is argued that the Spanish–Moroccan rebordering seems to fit within the traditional logic of the 'us-them' delimitation associated with place-making dynamics, and that the border itself seems to entail the symbolic representation of this delimitation. However, the added value of the Spanish–Moroccan case, that is, what makes it go beyond the so-called traditional logic of 'us-them' delimitation, rests in its dual character as an identity marker. Derived from its geopolitical reconfiguration, the border not only discerns between Spanishness and Moroccanness, but also between (EU)ropeanness and non-(EU)ropeanness.

After its (EU)ropeanization, Spain's fast economic growth, together with its close proximity to the Maghreb, implied that it became a country of immigration, and indeed a key country for Moroccan migration. In some areas, economic transformations were remarkably intense. The southern province of Almería, for instance, is no longer the poor region of exported labor described by Juan Goytisolo (1959) in his book *Campos de Níjar*. The development of EU-subsidized agricultural activity brought rapid economic growth, as well as the arrival of migrant workers, notably from Morocco. New wealth and new (EU)ropeanness have decisively contributed to the reconfiguration of the way Spain sees Morocco and vice versa (Goytisolo & Nair, 2000). It seems that, after 1986, the shift in mutual perceptions has been sharp.

Whereas the eastern limits of the European Union are still undergoing negotiation, and even though Europe appears to flow and mutate geographically, historically, politically, and culturally, its south-western edge seems to be set and well defined. Despite the fact that Spain's southern neighbor is only 13 km away from Europe (even closer if we take into account its land borders with Ceuta and Melilla), there does not seem to be room for Morocco in (EU)ropean imagery. Morocco is not in Europe and, apparently, it is never going to be in (EU)rope. Paradoxically, the European Union has fragments of its external borders in the African continent, via the Spanish North-African enclaves. In 1986, the Spanish–Moroccan border became a part of the EU perimeter, and new elements were added to the existent Europe/Africa, Christianity/Islam, and wealthy North/developing South divides. As Driessen (1996) indicates, new metaphors were invented to designate the strengthening of the divide including: 'new wall of shame', 'gold curtain', 'European wall', and 'moat of Fortress Europe'. The territories of Ceuta and Melilla, however, complicate these divisive metaphors because, as border spaces themselves, they are right in the middle of those divides, and they enable the simultaneous embrace of (EU)ropeanness, Africanness, Spanishness, Moroccanness, Islam, Christianity, and other poles of identity. Additionally, they provide the grounds for ambiguous, complex and hybrid identities.

Formation of collective identities and othering

Benedict Anderson (1991) described nations as imagined political communities that are inherently limited. He argued that 'the nation is imagined as limited, because even the largest of them has finite boundaries beyond which lay other nations' (1983: 7). As pointed out by Heffernan (1998: 2), 'the idea of an imagined European community, which, for instance, would allow us to cheer enthusiastically for a European soccer team, is difficult to envision'. However, it is true that European building dynamics have something in common with other processes of collective identity formation. Reicher and Hopkins (2001) stress the importance of symbols in these processes. For instance, they remark that, 'whether through the introduction of a single

currency, the production of a common European flag, the adoption of a European anthem, or through the commemoration of community history in postage stamps, the European Commission is actively seeking to construct a sense of a European identity' (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001: 80, 81). According to James Anderson (1995: 71), 'sense of identity, unifying symbols, or criteria of belonging in the particular history and geography of a territory are typical elements of nationalism'. He states that 'nationalisms are internally unifying: they play down the divisions and conflicts of the imagined community, partly by externalizing the sources of its problems. However, in doing so they are externally divisive with respect to people defined as other and, hence, they create or exacerbate divisions between different peoples and territories' (Anderson, 1995: 71). Similarly, van Houtum and van Naerssen (2002) point out the decisive role of othering and observe that 'the making of a place must be understood as an act of purification, as it is arbitrarily searching for a justifiable, bound cohesion of people and their activities in a space that can be compared and contrasted to other spatial entities' (2002: 126). In this line, they argue that 'others are needed and therefore constantly produced and reproduced to maintain the cohesion in the formatted order of a territorially demarcated society' (2002: 134). So, even though it would not be correct to say that the European Union building process is an attempt to shape a new nation in its traditional sense, many analogies might be drawn with regard to nation building processes. The complex process of othering might constitute an illustrative commonality. As O'Dowd (2003: 4) argues, 'borders are integral to human behavior — they are a product of the need for order, control and protection in human life and they reflect our contending desires for sameness and difference, for a marker between "us" and "them"'. As is the case for Spain and the European Union, the demarcation of limits by means of borders enables both the formation of collective identities and the creation of others.

The factory of otherness

The case of the Spanish–Moroccan border allows us to examine two different processes of collective identity formation (national and post-national) that have taken place in the same space and are necessarily interrelated. To some extent, the 'collateral' effects of the European (Union) building process could be linked to the exclusionary legacy of the making of Spain. In this light, the Spanish–Moroccan border could be interpreted as a past and present 'factory' of otherness. In the present context, the rebordering of Southern Spain, having 'helped reaffirm the country's new identity as part of the "inner club"' (Andreas, 2000: 128), is also playing a key role in the process of European (Union) building. Marking and reinforcing the border with Morocco (and consequently strengthening otherness) has historically been used as a tool for binding together the 'Spanish People'. Similarly, the current efforts made towards the 'protection' of the EU external border (particularly at the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla) might be used to upgrade the homogeneity of the emergent EU socio-spatial identity. Therefore, rather than a product of rational border regulation, the militarization of the Spanish–Moroccan border might be interpreted as a symbolic performance for domestic consumption, attempting to mark the limits (and hence shape the identity) of the European Union.

Driessen (1992: 17) highlights how 'in its origins, the idea of Spain and its nationalism were clearly shaped as an opposition to the "Moors"', and that 'inspired and forged by the spirit of the *reconquista*, the Spanish State was built on a policy of ethnic, religious and cultural homogenization'. He argues that 'the failure of assimilation and the fate of Jewish and Muslim minorities indicate how strongly the formation of Spanishness rested on Catholicism and xenophobia' (Driessen, 1992: 17). For centuries, the Strait of Gibraltar symbolized a bridge between

the Iberian Peninsula and the Maghreb, but, after the defeat of the Kingdom of Granada in 1492, the meaning of the ‘salted river’ of the Straits of Gibraltar changed. The successive expulsions of Jewish and Muslim inhabitants entailed the cultural symbolic closing of the border, at least in the Iberian Peninsula. The border was then intended to separate Christianity from the North-African Kingdoms that received the Muslim and Jewish exiles (Morales-Lezcano, 2001). For many former inhabitants of the Peninsula, the coasts of Andalusia would become a distant ‘line of remorse’ (Maalouf, 2002: 115). The *presidios* of Ceuta and Melilla would become, in turn, peculiar strongholds of the *reconquista* across the Mediterranean.

The *reconquista* entailed what Morales-Lezcano (2001) calls the purification of Iberian Christianity’s systems of representation. Martín Corrales (1999) explains that, beyond the Christian *reconquista* of the Iberian Peninsula, the Spanish vision of Morocco is closely related to future confrontations between the two countries, such as: the Spanish offensive in the North-African coasts at the beginning of the sixteenth century; the pirate confrontation and the siege of Spanish enclaves in Moroccan shores during sixteenth to eighteenth centuries; the ‘Africa War’ in 1860; the War of Melilla in 1893; the ‘Africa War’ in 1909 and the Moroccan wars from 1914 to 1927; as well as the Ifni–Sahara War in 1958–1959 and the Saharan decolonization. These conflicts would indeed add negative connotations to the Spanish vision of Moroccans and to the religious divide. Moreover, the years of the Protectorate (1912–1956) helped shape the idea that Moroccans were not able to attain development without the assistance of colonizers. Some periods of fruitful trade relations in the late eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, as well as other moments of peaceful interaction, softened the vision of Morocco in Spanish imagination. However, events like the chaotic decolonization of Western Sahara in 1975 or current immigration flow continue to add new elements to the largely negative Spanish vision of Morocco (Martín Corrales, 1999: 396) and have obviously reshaped Moroccan perceptions of Spain (Affaya & Guerraoui, 2006). Without a doubt, the shift in mutual perception linked to the EU/non-EU divide is fundamental.

Although an important cultural and symbolic divide has existed between Spain and Morocco since the *reconquista*, it is also true that communication continued, moving beyond the interaction on the frontier zone that was particularly intense in Ceuta and Melilla. This communication could also be described as a mutual presence in each other’s space, which moves the border (translated across a multiplicity of social and cultural boundaries) from peripheral to central areas. This can be illustrated by a few examples: the immigration to northern Morocco of ‘Spanish’ Muslims expelled from the peninsula by the Catholic Kings in what might be considered the first Spanish Civil War (Mechbal, 1998: 219); the Spanish Protectorate of Morocco (1912–1956); the increasing number of Spanish companies moving their production to Morocco; the increasing number of Moroccan citizens moving to Spain; the legacy of Al-Andalus in present-day Spanish culture; and the influence of Spanish culture in present-day Morocco. These are mostly beyond the scope of this paper. However, as previously suggested, in the specific cases of Ceuta and Melilla, daily frontier practice and historical socio-cultural interaction challenge the notion of a precisely set symbolic border. The idea of a clear symbolic border, ‘the finite, if elastic, boundary beyond which lie other nations’ (Anderson, 1991: 7), drawn (from above) by the (EU)ropean external (b)ordering, is renegotiated (from below) by the border communities. The sharp symbolic border envisioned from the center of the bounded communities is transformed at the periphery, where it is split into a multiplicity of boundaries, sometimes reinforcing, sometimes blurring, and always reinterpreting the ‘us-them’ divide. The very existence of a flexible border regime (Ferrer-Gallardo, 2007) has given rise to the existence of a complex cross-border society. Increasing social interaction across the (EU)ro-African

borders challenges what, from a distance, might be interpreted as a civilizational clash, that is, a profound cultural symbolic division between Spain (EU) and Morocco (non EU).

Interaction and complex identification processes at the Ceuta and Melilla borders show that (b)ordering processes have differential impacts in the core and at the periphery. The desire for an impermeable militarized border at the core contrasts with the border permeability that is required for the sustainability of the enclaves and their populations. In turn, on the Moroccan side of the fence, the impact and understanding of the border is also different at the core than at the periphery, where direct social interaction with the enclaves is possible. On the one hand, at the core of the Moroccan state, the contested character of the enclaves implies that the claim for the disappearance of their borders, and not their symbolic remarking, constitutes an element of national cohesion. On the other hand, the viewpoint at the periphery is not necessarily the same. In addition, although also belonging to the Moroccan ‘imagined community’, those who directly benefit from border trade might have different views regarding the status of the border.

The implicit bordering, ordering, and othering (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002) that are associated with national/post-national building dynamics carry a considerable amount of arbitrariness, which flourishes in border areas and is negotiated by the borderlanders. They are, indeed, on the front line of place-making dynamics. As observed by O’Dowd (2003), ‘some actors have a vested interest in maintaining borders as barriers; others wish to develop their bridging role; others still use borders as a positive economic resource in ways which seek to benefit from their bridging and barrier functions simultaneously’ (2003: 25). In this context, it seems appropriate to bear in mind that mixed, contradictory, hybrid, complex, ambiguous, and complementary identities and loyalties in border areas cannot be understood without focusing on emotions (see Svasek, 2000). In the cases of Ceuta and Melilla, the Spanish–Moroccan rebordering takes place within the fascinating merger of the notions of European-ness, African-ness, Islam, and Christianity that rework the idea and meaning of Europe. Since they provide a large amount of raw material for debates about identity and difference, the contested status of the enclaves and their condition as a Mediterranean cultural crossroad provides the grounds for the analysis of a significantly complex place-making (and, therefore, identity-making) process.

Conclusions

This paper has argued that the reconfigurations that have affected the Spanish–Moroccan border since 1986 can be read as a three-fold process of geopolitical, functional, and symbolic reshaping. Despite the fact that the establishment of parallels was not a priority of this paper, the tracing of transatlantic border analogies has invited contemplation of the Spanish–Moroccan border reconfigurations in light of a large-scale collision between geopolitical and geoeconomic needs that impinge on contemporary border dynamics (Coleman, 2005).

With regard to the geopolitical reshaping of the border, this paper has highlighted how the drawing of the external EU border has engendered the overlapping of two different and meaningful territorial lines: the border between Spain and Morocco, and the border between EU and non-EU territory. It has given rise to a frontier scenario where the boundaries of two traditional territorial units (nation states) meet with the line that marks the limits of a new territorial container that is characterized by its supranational (or post-national) nature. It has also been argued that some continuities can be found between the old Spanish (national) lebensraum of North Africa and the EU (post-national) space represented by the future Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area. The logic of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the European Neighbourhood

Policy bears a certain resemblance to the Spanish geopolitical expansion experienced during the years of the Protectorate.

Moving on to the functional dimension of the rebordering process, the growing divergence between the regulatory needs of EU external border securitization and the requirements of “free-trade” globalization has been charted. It has also been argued that the specific situation of the North-African enclaves accentuates the selective model of external border management deployed by the European Union. The border regimes of Ceuta and Melilla represent an extreme form of the Gated Community model described by van Houtum and Pijpers (2007) as an alternative narrative to the ‘imprecise’ metaphor of ‘Fortress Europe’. Here, we have observed that the peculiar and progressively technologized border regime of Ceuta and Melilla is rooted in flexibility between the bridging and the barrier functions of the border. Through the notion of a sealed off permeability, it has been pointed out that, as is the case for the U.S.–Mexico border, ‘it is not immediately evident that technology can resolve the tension between trade and security at the border’ (Coleman, 2005: 199).

In relation to the symbolic dimension of its reconfiguration, the Spanish–Moroccan border has been identified as an instrument of national and post-national identity formation. In the scenario created after its (EU)ropeanisation, the symbolic remarking of the border contributes to the deepening and (re)production of the developing EU post-national collective identity, as it also concurrently contributes to the (re)production of the Spanish national identity. In relation to the specific cases of Ceuta and Melilla, it has been argued that the policing of their borders might be interpreted as a symbolic performance aimed at reinforcing the limits of the emergent EU socio-spatial imagery.

The land borders of Ceuta and Melilla exemplify how the current EU (b)ordering model influences border agency. This draws attention to the fact that, beyond its instrumental dimension, reinforcement of the external EU border control also seems to be subject to far-reaching practices of political and symbolic delimitation. The result of the Spanish–Moroccan rebordering process shows us how, as seems to be a general contemporary trend, this particular reconfigured border regime has been engendered, developed, and rooted in an environment of contradiction between geopolitical and geoeconomic priorities. In the conviction that much can be learned about the centers of power by focusing on their peripheries (Donnan & Wilson, 1994), further critical scrutiny of European borders might contribute to the debate over whether the EU is being built with the same conflicting schemes.

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