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MAIN SECTION

Towards an Island-based Narrative of the Western Mediterranean Borderscape – Continental Islands as Condensers and Laboratories

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes to contribute towards this aims by analysing through a borderscaping approach the remote micro-islands and enclaves which constitute the Euro-mediterranean Southern border, namely Ceuta, Melilla, the Canary Islands, Gibraltar and the Pelagie islands. The article examines these territories as precursors and testing grounds in the implementation of 'Fortress Europe'; before focusing on their historical role as core of highly-integrated cross-border regions. It concludes on the potential of these territories as testing grounds of novel trans-Mediterranean narratives and political practices.

Introduction

"Nothing reveals the destiny of the Mediterranean better than its islands." [1]

Whether centred on (cultural, historical, identity) homogeneity or fracture, prevailing narratives of the Mediterranean tend to be prone to oversimplification and polarization, often betraying a Euro-centric mindset. A tendency that has been exacerbated in the past two decades by the rise of unwanted migration, and the ensuing intense and often-times violent re-bordering of the Mediterranean shores and sea. These narratives fail to capture the complexity and variability in time and space of both the described phenomena (re-bordering and de-bordering) and the setting (the Mediterranean Sea). There is a pressing need for a more nuanced, post-colonial narrative to emerge, able to embrace and dissect the complexity of this "cultural pluriverse."[2] This article proposes to contribute towards this aim by using a *borderscaping* and *island-based* approach to studying the bordering phenomena characterizing the Euro-mediterranean Western border. It uses as analytical framework six remote micro-islands and enclaves: Ceuta, Melilla, Gibraltar, Lampedusa, Linosa and Pantelleria.

Section 1 introduces the conceptual and analytical framework of the article. Section 2 defines and describes the common traits used to select the studied territories, grouped under the term "Continent Islands". Section 3 and 4 analyse − through the lens of Continental Islands − the development and overlap of trans-Mediterranean re-bordering and de-bordering phenomena. The final section concludes on the potential of these territories as testing grounds of novel trans-Mediterranean narratives and political practices.

1. Conceptual and analytical framework

1.1 Conceptual framework: Borderscaping

Borderscaping emerged in the 2010s in the field of border studies as a conceptual framework which focuses on the ideational dimension of borders. Namely, the way a border is enacted socially and spatially (*bordering*) varies in time and space, according notably to the way the border is perceived and experienced.[3] This explains why the current imaginary surrounding border spaces is dominated by narratives of border securitization and militarization, and the rise of an often-racialized discourse criminalizing immigrants (*re-bordering*). Conversely, it implies that everyday practices of border transcendence or resistance (*de-bordering*) contribute to creating alternative experiences and narratives of the border. The latter,

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1   Predrag Matvejević, *Il Mediterraneao e l'Europa*, trans. G. Vulpius (Milan: Garzanti, 1998), 11.

2   Paolo Giaccaria and Claudio Minca. "The Mediterranean Alternative", *Progress in Human Geography* 35 (2011): 355.

3   See, amongst others, Chiara Brambilla, "Exploring the Critical Potential of the Borderscapes Concept", *Geopolitics* 20, no. 1 (2015).

in turn, can influence the way the border is enacted, beyond / in opposition to its separating function. *Borderscaping*, as a verb, expresses this transformative potential of human agency. This conceptual framework enables to better encompass and critically question the enactment of border processes, overcoming binary oppositions and polarized narratives.

1.2 Analytical framework: Western Mediterranean "Continental Islands"

Etymologically, *borderscaping* interweaves the human bordering processes and the physical space in which they occur.[4] Within the scope of the paper, the latter is the Western Mediterranean, where seascape and borderscape overlap. Traditional analytical frameworks tend to consider the sea space as a mere extension or projection of the land; a two-dimensional space of transit.[5] On the opposite, an island-based approach enables us to challenge this conceptualization, emphasizing the nature of sea spaces as densely *inhabited* and *urbanized* spaces.[6]

This article identifies six remote micro-islands and enclaves which constitute what Ferrer-Gallardo and Kramsh aptly refer to as the Euro-Mediterranean *archipelago frontier*, "a smattering of territorially heterogeneous segments and fragments."[7] These are Ceuta and Melilla (Spanish semi-enclaves in Morocco), Gibraltar (British semi-enclave in Spain), Lampedusa, Linosa, and Pantelleria (Italian micro-islands near the Tunisian coast). As explored in the next section, these territories can be described as "Continental Islands." Due to their proximity to the North African coast, these territories act as both *interfaces* and *outposts* in trans-Mediterranean relations, becoming *catalyzers* and *condensers* of contending de-bordering and re-bordering phenomena. This article uses Continental Islands as a *device* to condense, isolate, and examine these bordering practices.

2. Continental Islands – A Conceptual Definition

"Continental islands are accidental, derived islands. They are separated from a continent, born of disarticulation, erosion, fracture; they survive the absorption of what once contained them."[8]

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4   Elena dell'Agnese, "New Geo-graphies of Border(land)-scapes," in *Borderscaping: Imaginations and Practices of Border Making*, eds. Chiara Brambilla et al. (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015), 53-63.

5   Ross Exo Adams, "Mare Magnum: Urbanisation of Land and Sea," in *Territory Beyond Terra*, eds. Kimberly Peters, Philip Steinberg, Elaine Stratford (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018).

6   For an in-depth analysis Nancy Couling and Carola Hein. *The Urbanisation of the Sea: From Concepts and Analysis to Design* (Rotterdam: nai010 publishers, 2020).

7   Xavier Ferrer Gallardo and Olivier Kramsch, Olivier. "Revisiting Al-Idrissi: The Eu and the (Euro)Mediterranean Archipelago Frontier," *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie* 107 (2016): 171.

8   Gilles Deleuze, "Desert Islands," in *Desert Islands and Other Texts* 1953–1974 (New York: Semiotexte, 2004), 9.

Borrowing Deleuze's oxymoron, the term 'Continental Island' (henceforth abbreviated as 'CI') has been used in literature to refer to the enclaves of Ceuta, Melilla and Gibraltar.[9] Munenzon[10] coins the term to define a specific typo-morphologic category of small and mostly autonomous territories, considerably remote from their mainland (exclaves or remote micro-islands), born from and shaped by economic and cultural transnational flows. In this article, the definition of the term is broadened, notably by implementing a borderscaping perspective; and its application is expanded to include Lampedusa, Linosa and Pantelleria. Despite the geopolitical diversity of these territories, they are linked by common historical and geopolitical traits derived from the projection of regional and global geopolitical stakes on small, remote and fragile territories,[11] as examined hereunder.

2.1 Historical overview: CIs as pawns in trans-Mediterranean (maritime) flows

The history of Mediterranean CIs is intrinsically intertwined with their role as hubs in trans-Mediterranean maritime flows. In a context where until the 19th century, maritime flows were far more developed than terrestrial ones,[12] their geopolitical influence by far exceeded their very limited size and resources. CIs were crucial both as stopovers in regional and global maritime routes, and as strongholds to ascertain military dominion over a stretch of sea. As such, Melilla, Ceuta and Gibraltar were and are crucial in the control of the Strait of Gibraltar, which is to this day the second most transited strait worldwide;[13] and the Pelagie islands in that of the Strait of Sicily. As such, they played a central role as both political catalyzers and military devices in the successive conflicts between colonial powers. During the Middle Ages, they acted as spearheads both in the Arab conquest of the Iberian Peninsula and Sicily, and in the ensuing Christian counter-offensive. With the acceleration of European global colonialism and its re-orientation towards the African continent, CIs became highly coveted pawns between the main colonial powers.[14].Ceuta and Melilla play a crucial role from the Reconquista onwards in the establishment and de-

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9   Keller Easterling, *Enduring Innocence. Global Architecture and its Political Masquerades* (Cambridge (MA): the MIT Press, 2005), 60. Dalia Munenzon, Continental Islands: Ceuta and Gibraltar. A typological research into transactional and partially autonomous territories (MIT Master Thesis, 2016).

10   Ibid.

11   Joseph Martinetti, "Quel rôle aujourd'hui pour les grandes îles en Méditerranée? Une géopolitique «comparée» de l'insularité méditerranéenne," *Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, 89 (2014), 134.

12   Stefania Staniscia, *Islands* (Trento: LISt Lab, 2012), 69.

13   Jesús Rodríguez, "El Desafío del Estrecho". El País, March 20, 2015. www.elpais.com/ especiales/ /2015/desafio-estrecho/relato.html.

14   Anne Brogini and Maria Ghazali, "Introduction," in *Des marges aux forntières. Les puissances et les îles en Méditerranée à l'époque moderne*, eds. Anne Brogini and Maria Ghazali (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2010).

fence of the competing Spanish, Portuguese and later French dominions in Northern Africa. Gibraltar was conquered by the United Kingdom during the Napoleonic Wars, interrupting the Spanish hegemony over the Strait of Gibraltar. The Pelagic islands, for their part, are protagonists during the Italian conquest of Libya and Ethiopia during the Fascist regime.[15]

During the second half of the 20th century, as European colonial dominion retracted, these territories became detached fragments of what once was (at least legally) a border-less whole. In parallel, naval innovations enabled navigators to decrease the frequency of ship refuelling, and hence the need for intermediary ports, drastically remodelling maritime flows. These two concurring phenomena entailed the rapid wane of the geopolitical importance of CIs. No longer the anchor points of global networks of commercial, military and human flows, they found themselves for the first time largely relegated to the role of peripheries, both geographically and politically. As analysed in the following section, the reconfiguration of trans-Mediterranean relations since the start of the 21st century has upturned this situation, partially reviving the centrality of CIs, though within a much different geopolitical context.

To retain some of their appeal as maritime hubs and counterbalance the decrease of traditional income sources (port, fishing, agriculture), all the studied CIs have established advantageous fiscal and legal systems such as low taxes and freeport areas. This is evident in the cases of Melilla and Ceuta, which substantially function as points of entry of low-tax European products in the Moroccan market.[16]

The other main source of economic income is tourism. Taking advantage of their warm climate, beaches and low-cost flights, the studied CIs have (with varying success) rebranded themselves as exotic touristic destinations. As throughout the Mediterranean basin, intensive tourism has been linked with disruptive changes to these territories' fragile economy, built fabric, and (ultimately) identity, re-oriented towards the needs and expectations of tourists.[17]

15   Giacomo Orsini, Andrew Canessa and Luis G. Martinez del Campo. "Small Territories/Big Borders: Gibraltar, Lampedusa, and Melilla," in *Barrier and Bridge: Spanish and Gibraltarian Perspectives on Their Border,* ed. Andrew Canessa (Sussex: Sussex Academic Press, 2018).

16   Xavier Ferrer-Gallardo and Ana Planet-Contreras, "Ceuta and Melilla: Euro-African Borderscapes", *Agora* 12, no. 4 (2012).

17   Staniscia, *Islands*, 52.

MEDITERRANEAN
CONTINENTAL ISLANDS

PANTELLERIA

GIBRALTAR

CEUTA

MELILLA

VÉLEZ DE
LA GOMERA

LAMPEDUSA
+ LINOSA

CEUTA	MELILLA	GIBRALTAR	PANTELLERIA	LAMPEDUSA + LINOSA
5km	5km	5km	5km	5km

FIG. 1   Legend. Source: author's elaboration

2.2 Border imaginaries: Cis and identity-defining narratives

> *"As an island […] it is endowed with the indispensable elements for the construction of a mythology: it is small, it is threatened, it has to be protected, it is finite – an enclave – it is unique."*[18]

An intrinsic characteristic of isladness (as defined by Staniscia[19]) and its inherent introversion and isolation is the development of a strong identity, distinct from both its hinterland and its mainland. An identity which is often composed of a distinct language or dialect, identity-defining narratives and myths. The military disputes to which they gave rise, the feeling of David resisting against Goliath, has been a determining element in shaping CIs' self-narrative, and reinforcing their bond with the mainland. In this sense, Gibraltar is exemplary: in its recent history, it has overwhelmingly voted twice to stay under full British sovereignty, with 99.64% in 1967, and 98.97% in 2002.[20]

Yet, in the general narratives this individual identity is overshadowed by

18   Rem Koolhaas, "Singapore Songlines: Portrait of a Potemnkin Metropolis […] or Thirty years of Tabula Rasa". In *S M L XL*, ed. Rem Koolhaas, (Cologne: Taschen, 1995), 1008.

19   Staniscia, *Islands*, 40.

20   Peter Gold, *Gibraltar: British or Spanish?* (Oxford: Routledge, 2005).

the mainland's disproportionate projection of its own identity and national pride over CIs. Their fragility, military vulnerability and elevated exposition to international human flows turns them into easy footholds to (polarised) narratives on (threatened) borders, "race, national identity and strangers."[21] Though not a Mediterranean CI, the Falkland war should be referred to. Its importance was so overblown that the British Prime Minister Thatcher stated that its victory enabled the "Great" to be put back into "Great Britain."[22] To this day, the three studied semi-enclaves (Ceuta, Melilla and Gibraltar) are actively disputed between their mainland and their hinterland. Political tensions have more than once escalated to military interventions, most recently the short-lived Moroccan invasion of the Spanish Perejil island in 2002. As examined hereunder, within the contemporary Mediterranean context, these re-bordering dynamics are disproportionately projected on unwanted migratory flows.

3. Re-Bordering: Continental Islands as Theatres to "Fortress Europe" Enactment

Since the turn of the century, two main factors have come to drastically re-shape trans-Mediterranean relations. First, in the aftermath of 9/11 and the rise of jihadism in the Sahel region, the USA and NATO have re-instated their military presence in the Mediterranean, causing the specular militarization of the Moroccan coast.[23] Second, the exponential rise in unwanted migration has led border securitization to become the dominant aspect of Mediterranean geopolitics. Both these phenomena have revived the geopolitical centrality of CIs. This is illustrated notably by the active role that their military bases played during the intervention of NATO in Libya in 2011.[24]

3.1 CIs as principal theatre of the 'immigration crisis'

Within the context of unwanted migration, CIs have regained their role as hubs in trans-Mediterranean human flows. Their proximity to the North African coasts turns them into "extraterritorial gateways"[25] to Europe, more easily accessible points of entry in migration routes. The objective smallness and fragility of these territories means they are easily overwhelmed by relatively large flows of migrants, which they are not given the necessary resources to welcome. This, coupled with the increase in dramatic

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21   Klaus Dodds and Stephen A. Royle, "The Historical Geography of Islands. Introduction: rethinking islands," *Journal of Historical Geography* 29, no.4 (2003): 492.

22   Ibid., 491.

23   Rodríguez, «El Desafío».

24   Martinetti, «Grandes îles,» 11.

25   Munenzon, *Continental Islands*, 52.

causalities caused by the re-bordering process, has turned CIs into the sadly perfect stage for "sexy, crisis-riddled media topics, such as boat arrivals and shipwrecks."[26] These images are easily manipulated to illustrate polarized and inflated narratives on immigration, particularly ones which present a Europe overwhelmed (if not invaded) by huge flows of unwanted immigrants. Elevated to the role of "monument to the margins of the nation,"[27] CIs have unwittingly become the highly publicized symbol of the 'migration crisis' brought to its paroxysm; the backdrop to the too often deadly confrontation between hegemonic border enforcement and counter-hegemonic border transcendence. The iconic status of CIs was confirmed by the visit of Pope Francis to Lampedusa in 2013, a visit especially meaningful considering it was the first since he ascended to the throne.[28]

The case of Gibraltar differs from the other studied CIs, since its asylum system is separate from the UK. Hence, Gibraltar does not function as extraterritorial gateway towards the UK. Furthermore, the peninsula is very difficult to be reached using illegal boats, since most of its littoral is made of cliffs. Instead, the way Gibraltar is used in migration routes, is as access point towards Spain: having obtained a tourist Visa, illegal migrants reach Gibraltar by ferry or plane, before being smuggled into Spain.[29]

CIs further condense the paradoxical and cynical juxtaposition between unwanted migratory flows and touristic ones which have come to characterize the Mediterranean borderscape. Considering the vital importance of tourism, locals have quickly learnt how to orchestrate these two human flows to minimize overlap.[30] Nevertheless, these processes do not prevent the spontaneous sprouting of local solidarity networks throughout CIs. Lampedusa is iconic in this regard: its population's engagement in sea rescues and first aid was crowned by numerous awards, including a nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014.[31]

3.2 CIs as testing grounds in the construction of "fortress Europe"

Mediterranean CIs served as precursors and testing grounds for the implementation of several of EU's tangible and intangible border filtering mechanisms commonly referred to as "Fortress Europe." The sadly iconic twin wired fences which run along the terrestrial border of Ceuta and

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26   Alison Mountz, "Invisibility and Securitization of Migration, Shaping Publics through Border Enforcement Islands," *Cultural Politics* 11, 2 (2015): 158.

27   Munenzon, *Continental Islands*, 50.

28   Marxiano Melotti, "The Mediterranean Refugee Crisis: Heritage, Tourism, and Migration," *New England Journal of Public Policy* 30, no. 2 (2018): 13.

29   Royal Gibraltar Police, "Joint RGP Policia Nacional Operation dismantles Migrant Smuggling Organised Crime Group". January 14, 2020 www.police.gi/news/joint-rgp-policia-nacional-operation-dismantles-migrant-smuggling-organised-crime-group-297.

30   Melotti, "Refugee Crisis", 14.

31   Ibid, 12.

Melilla, built in the early 90s, are the precursors of the border fences built by seven member states in Eastern Europe.[32] Likewise, Ceuta and Melilla were among the first places where the Spanish SIVE (Sistema Integrado de Vigilancia Exterior) was implemented, a remote detection system aimed at controlling territorial waters. The SIVE was later extended to great lengths of the Spanish Southern coast, and served as model for the EU-wide EUROSUR (European Border Surveillance System).[33] Likewise, FRONTEX naval border protection operations were deployed to replace and expand geographically Italy's Mare Nostrum, a sea rescue mission launched in 2013 following a dramatic shipwreck off the Lampedusian coast.[34]

Even more alarming, CIs are the stages of systematic violence and breaches to migrant human rights. Though this is a recurring phenomenon throughout Europe, CIs are particularly susceptible to these breaches, first because of the sheer quantity of flows, and second because States take advantage of the remoteness from public scrutiny. Thanks to bilateral agreements, in Ceuta, Melilla and the Pelagie islands, migrants are repatriated en masse before being registered (also called hot push-back), violating national and international law.[35]

3.3 CIs as territory-scaled 'limboscapes'

Mediterranean re-bordering practices confront migrants with "several processes of physical, political, mediatic, and aspirational stillness and interruption."[36] These take a physical, territorial dimension in CIs. In the past two decades, CIs have become "buffer zones" where migrants undergo the lengthy (sometimes year-long) European in/exclusion screening process far away from the public eye. This mechanism well testifies Europe's strategy of invisibilization of migration, and its progressive externalisation to the periphery of and outside Europe. CIs thus become what Ferrer-Gallardo and Albet-Mas, referring to Ceuta, have dubbed territorial-scale limboscapes: "a transitional zone, a threshold or midway territory between two different borders, where the migrants' trajectories towards the 'European-EU' are spatially and temporally suspended, confined."[37] It is in this context that CIs geopolitical ambiguity is most violently expressed: migrants are geographically, legally and psychologically in a territory-scaled

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32   Greece, Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovenia, Austria, Croatia and Lithuania. Migreurop, *Atlas des Migrants en Europe*. 3rd ed. (Paris: Armand Colin, 2017), 107.

33   Ibid., 86.

34   Ibid., 113.

35   Ibid, 68.

36   Laura Lo Presti, "Like a Map Over Troubled Water: (Un)mapping the Mediterranean Sea's Terraqueous Necropolitics," *E-flux journal* (2020): 4.

37   Xavier Ferrer-Gallardo, Abel Albet-Mas, and Keina Espiñeira, "Euro-African Invisibilisations in the Border(land)scape of Punta Tarifa". In *Borderscaping: Imaginations and Practices of Border Making*. eds. Chiara Brambilla, et al. (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015): 528.

grey zone, neither fully in, nor out of Europe. CIs hence become one further gradient in Fortress Europe's multi-scalar system of borders: buffer zones of the coastal mainlands, which in turn act as buffers to the interior EU States.

In this regard, in 2021, the (immediately withdrawn) proposition by the British Home Secretary Priti Patel to send migrants to Gibraltar or the Channel Islands while their asylum demands are being processed[38], resonates as a bleak proof of the role Europe would gladly assign to its CIs in migration management. A model inspired by the Australian and American use of extraterritorial and/or remote islands to detain migrants.[39]

Hence, CIs can be read as the tangible manifestation of a complex web of re-bordering processes which have turned the Mediterranean into a vast and legally opaque border space. This has not succeeded in reducing flows, but rather in making the trans-Mediterranean journey more dangerous and dominated by human trafficking networks, turning the Mediterranean and its shores into what Lo Presti's describes as a *terraqueous necropolis.*[40]

3.4 CIs as Foucauldian mirrors

CIs historically emerges as the projection of a State where it would otherwise be absent. A projection of its sphere of influence, a form of extra-territorial sovereignty. This legislative, and (more importantly) ideational projection can be read through the metaphor of the Foucauldian mirror. In his article "of Other Spaces," Foucault describes the mirror, as "a form of utopia, in that it is the non-place of a place. In the mirror, I see myself in a place where I am not,"[41] a description which well resonates with CIs. The mirror metaphor is particularly meaningful if applied to the type of attitudes and narratives which too often dominate trans-Mediterranean geopolitics. Attitudes based on EU's "chronic inability to see the 'Other' other than as a reflection of the European Same."[42]

Once again, CIs act as condensers of these dynamics. The reticence of Spanish authorities to give citizenship to Muslim Ceutans and Melillans until the mid-1980s is telling. Similarly, it is no surprise that the increasing share of Muslim inhabitants in Ceuta is considered as a threat to local and

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38   Peter Walker, "UK Considers Sending Asylum Seekers Abroad to be Processed," *The Guardian*. March 18, 2021. www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/mar/18/asylum-seekers-could-be-sent-abroad-by-uk-to-be-processed.

39   Mountz, "Invisibility and Securitization," 178.

40   Lo Presti, "Terraqueous Necropolitics."

41   Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16, 1 (1986): 23.

42   Ferrer Gallardo and Kramsch, "Revisiting Al-Idrissi," 156.

national identity by many inside and outside the city.[43] This phenomenon is not limited to the Spanish enclaves: Gibraltar's Moroccan population faces severe difficulties in obtaining local citizenship and equal treatment, despite the territory's self-narrative of tolerance and inclusivity.[44]

Yet, CIs aren't (nor were historically) solely spaces of re-bordering. On the contrary, as analysed in the next chapter, they were historically at the core of highly integrated cross-border regions.

4. De-Bordering: Continental Islands as Imperfect Interfaces

4.1 CIs as cores of virtually borderless regions during the 20th century

What makes Mediterranean CIs specific within the wider panorama of trans-Mediterranean interaction, is that they have been in the very recent past the core of cross-border regions, where – given European colonialism in Northern Africa – the border was very porous, and cross-border interaction and integration was strong. For most of the last century, the analysed CIs were spaces of exchange, active co-habitation, and interface with the neighbouring North African hinterland. Cross-border living was common, as were cross-border families, creating cultural, identity and family ties. This situation was drastically modified with the entrance of CIs in the Schengen area and the ensuing re-bordering. The most integrated regions were (and continue to be) the ones orbiting around Ceuta and Melilla. Indeed, from 1912 to 1956 (Morocco's independence), Northern Morocco was part of the Spanish protectorate of Morocco, and the border between the enclaves and their respective hinterland was extremely porous. This was a period of intense migration and integration, from which Ceuta's and Melilla's vast Moroccan communities mainly originate. Even after Morocco's independence, the border continued to be porous. It was drastically re-established in 1985, when Spain joined the EU. Many Moroccan residents who didn't have Spanish citizenship and couldn't prove that they had been long-term living in Spanish territory were forced to leave, causing uprisings.[45] Notwithstanding the borders' successive hyper-militarization, both regions continue to be highly integrated.

The Strait of Sicily islands (Lampedusa, Linosa, and Pantelleria) also enjoyed a virtually inexistent border with Tunisia from 1868 to World War II, under the Trade and Negotiation Agreement. Sicilian fishermen could freely fish in the waters of Tunisia and use its ports and beaches. Many fisher-

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43   Xavier Ferrer-Gallardo, "Territorial (Dis)Continuity Dynamics Between Ceuta and Morocco: Conflictual Fortification Vis-à-vis Co-operative Interaction at the EU Border in Africa," *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie* 102 (2011), 28.

44   Giles Tremlett, "Between the Rock and a Hard place," *The Guardian,* March 28, 2009. www.theguardian.com/money/2009/mar/28/work-discrimination-gibraltar-morroco.

45   Xavier Ferrer-Gallardo, "Territorial (Dis)Continuity," 28.

men would migrate seasonally to Tunisia, others permanently. Cross-border interaction slowed down following the decrease of fishing in favour of the tourism industry in the 1980s. The border was reinstated when Italy joined the Schengen area in 1990 and heavily deployed security forces in the following decade. Today, cross-border interaction is reduced to the minimum, though cross-border fishing persists (despite its being illegal).[46] If Gibraltar's cross-border integration with Spain is more evident, the one with Morocco is far from being uninfluential. During World War II, when the Gibraltarian civilian population was evacuated, 13,500 Gibraltarians were initially sent to Morocco (then a French protectorate), before being displaced when France surrendered to Germany. Following the closure of the border with Spain in 1969, ca. 2,600 Moroccan workers emigrated to Gibraltar to compensate for the loss of the Spanish workforce.[47] If many have returned to Morocco following the border re-opening in 1982, others have stayed, and today 1.6% of Gibraltar's residents are Moroccan.
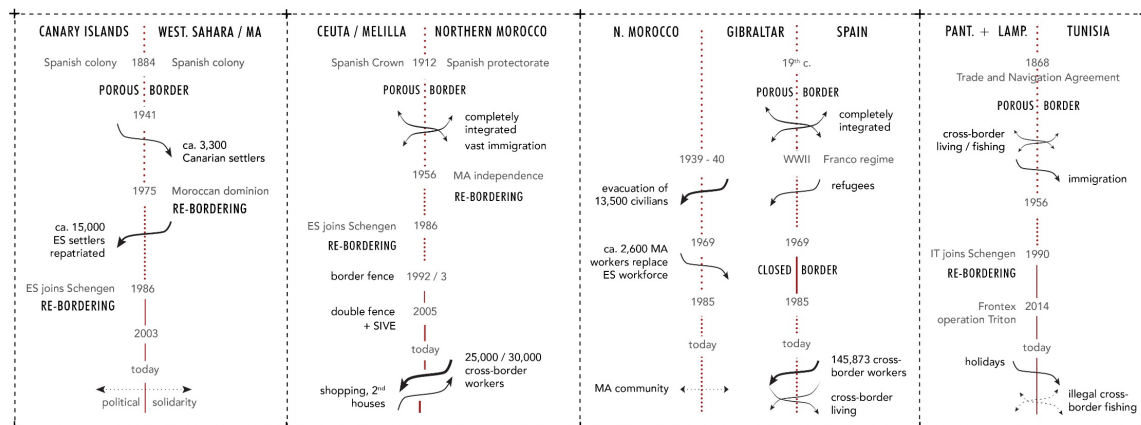

FIG. 2   Legend. Source: author's elaboration

4.2 CIs as imperfect interfaces

Today, despite three decades of re-bordering practices, some cross-border interaction inherited from the past century has persisted, not the least because CIs are dependent on cross-border flows and workforce. Thus, CIs embody the paradoxical tension between border securitization and permeabilization. Despite being selective and unbalanced, these human and economic flows engender nonetheless cross-border integration transcending (in)tangible borders. Ferrer-Gallardo[48] identifies four interlinked forms of integration: labour, economic, co-operative and social. Workwise, despite sometimes high unemployment rates, the analysed CIs tend to have a stronger economy than their hinterland, and a high demand for unqualified labour, creating an attractive cross-border labour market.

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46   Orsini, Canessa and Martinez del Campo, "Small Territories/Big Borders," 38.

47   Gold, *Gibraltar*, 185.

48   Ferrer Gallardo, "Territorial (dis)continuity".

Economically, reciprocal advantage creates legal and illegal cross-border flows from which, to some extent, both sides of the border profit. Politically, despite geopolitical skirmishes, national and local authorities are forced to co-operate on everyday matters ranging from tax payment and healthcare provision for cross-border workers (in the case of the three enclaves) to cross-border infrastructure. Socially, cross-border living, marriages, and media inevitably lead to reciprocal contamination and the deconstruction of some cultural barriers and othering narratives.

What is of particular interest from the borderscape perspective, is how this integration is made possible by the emergence of mainly bottom-up border-specific solutions and realities, which resist or ignore wider political tensions. This confirms the role of CIs' as incubators of alternative, counter-hegemonic practices and imaginaries. Morocco's collaboration in securing the Melillan and Ceutan border, and its tolerance of cross-border flows, is in this sense telling, considering that it officially doesn't even recognize these borders.[49]

Conclusion: CIs as Fertile Terrain for the Creation of an Alternative Mediterranean Narrative

Continental Islands emerge as a trans-Mediterranean contact zones, which – despite the exponential increase in military, geopolitical and ideological re-bordering – have retained part of their historical role as interfaces. Analysing local cross-border practices enables to give a more nuanced narrative of the region's borderscape, providing a fertile terrain for the creation of novel imaginaries. They act as laboratories proving the feasibility of basing trans-Mediterranean relations on pragmatic co-operation and co-habitation, rather than solely on uneven and Euro-centric politics centred on border securitization. Naturally, this by no means excludes socio-political and cultural discontinuities, but puts them in perspective. Whilst beyond the scope of this article, this theme would deserve further study, analysing best case practices and policies frameworks.

In this regard, CIs have the potential to fulfil the role which Ferrer-Gallardo and Kramsch yearn for the Southern Mediterranean archipelago-frontier: a "space of […]dialogue with Europe's extra-territorial Other,"[50] "less as an object to be acted upon by an external power (be it the EU or any other hegemon), less as a border between sovereign geopolitical blocs, than as a frontier made up of islands, an archipelago-frontier capable of assimilating forces and energies from either side without being reduced to them in any singularity."[51]

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49   Ibid., 29.

50   Ferrer Gallardo and Kramsch, "Revisiting Al-Idrissi," 172.

51   Ibid., 167-168.

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