

# The Mediterranean Migrant Crisis: A Critical Challenge to Global Nation-States

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## Abstract

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The present boat-migration crisis in the Mediterranean Sea constitutes the greatest test to Western values and humanitarianism in the region since World War II, an important challenge to the authority of nation-states and their role in an age of globalization. This working paper examines how the boat migrant phenomenon relates to Europe's national and recent inner developments and the significance of these events for immigrants, the possible outsiders in the formation of a new supranational Europe. The topic is investigated beyond the commonly encountered explanations of criminal human smuggling and developmental failure, placing the problem within a context of evolving nation-states, border control practices and a dominant, ruthless global economy. It is found that the phenomenon should not be understood merely as the response to unfavourable economic and political circumstances but also as being closely linked to powerful socio-cultural elements. It is argued that the Mediterranean crisis amounts to a failure to manage modern migration flows, thereby resulting in rising death tolls among boat migrants, many of whom are refugees or migrant workers on their way to the safety and an irregular labour market found in Europe. The working paper uncovers how Europe and the West are partially to blame for the tragedies and the current disorder around the Mediterranean region. It is a narrative of human history, identity and contrasts, and a Euro-centric relationship with the neighbours in Africa and the Middle East, where a one-sided immigration apparatus operates in the face of numerous refugees and expelled people with nothing to lose.

### **An Introduction: Boat Migrants in the Mediterranean**

The Mediterranean Sea is one of the great centres of human civilization. As a most dynamic place of interaction between different societies, its significant role in shaping world history is unsurpassed. Along the shorelines, cultures, ideas and identities have met and blended, often uneasily, as part of a broader Mediterranean phenomenon. In time, however, with the rise of nationalism, the cosmopolitan communities and the role of port cities as vectors of ideas and ways of life were lost (Abulafia, 2012). In its long history of human diversity, change and tension, the current humanitarian disaster taking place in the Mediterranean basin emerges as another chapter of great significance. The Mediterranean has come to represent a migration frontier, concentrating major economic, political and demographic differences (King, 1996). It is now a geopolitical and cultural space that separates the European states from the rest of the Mediterranean countries, an ocean boundary between different religions and systems of government. It is a distance many migrants willingly risk their lives trying to cover.

The Mediterranean is now considered the world's most hazardous sea route in use by migrants and refugees. Recent years have been marked by a number of serious incidents, where boats have capsized and sunk, tragically claiming the lives of hundreds of so-called boat migrants. In 2014, some 219,000 migrants and refugees attempted to make their way across the Mediterranean, with more than 3,500 lives lost en route (UNHCR, 2015b). This year is proving to be even more lethal, with numerous migrant arrivals and greater death tolls. UN Refugee Chief António Guterres (2015) has referred to the refugee crisis on the Mediterranean Sea as the greatest humanitarian disaster in the region since World War II, the sternest test to Western fundamental values and principles. This concerns especially the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees that came to after the atrocities of the second world war, when countries made solemn commitments never again to abandon people to conflict and persecution. Furthermore, the crisis challenges a long-established maritime code, imbued with humanitarian rules of conduct grounded in solidarity among seafarers (Pugh, 2004). The detections of irregular border crossings in the Mediterranean rose to an all-time high last year, with numbers above those recorded during the 2011 Arab Spring (Frontex, 2014, 2015a). Among the main reasons for the drastic increase is the combination of armed conflict, deterioration of security or the humanitarian situation and human rights concerns in several countries (UNHCR, 2015a). The tragedy in the Mediterranean should also be seen in the light of the lack of realistic legal channels for people who seek refuge in Europe from war and persecution (Guterres, 2015) as well as what is basically an open invitation to migrants from an informal European economy (Baldwin-Edwards, 2005). The dangerous boat journeys are thus a phenomenon of migration but also refugee movements. Among the people who crossed the Mediterranean last year, the UNHCR (2015c) estimates that around half was seeking refuge from persecution and war. This tendency is reflected in the nationalities most commonly registered in 2015: Eritrea, Somalia, Nigeria, Gambia and Syria (IOM, 2015).

Considerably fewer in numbers, when compared to the annual immigration in the European Union (EU), the boat crossings of migrants nevertheless generate often dramatic and oversimplified responses from the media and the political realm. It seems the European icon for "illegal immigration" has been reduced to images of cramped boats

full of African males – a visual construction, evoking both fear and compassion (Falk, 2015). This pronounced expression of modern migration represents a serious challenge to the authority and role of nation-states in today's world. In this respect, growing numbers of immigrants risk becoming the possible outsiders in a new supranational Europe undergoing significant change. It will be argued that the understanding of the boat-migrations in the Mediterranean should also include influential social and cultural factors besides solely adverse political and economic conditions. Moreover, it will be shown that the current crisis constitutes flawed and controversial border management of contemporary migratory movements, thereby resulting in deadly outcomes for many boat migrants seeking security or informal employment in Europe. The fault for the humanitarian tragedy is assigned partly to Europe and the West that remain focussed on their own security and global economic interests.

### **The boat-migration phenomenon: routes & stepping stones**

In April, the drowning of more than 1,500 migrant victims in the Mediterranean Sea resulted in strong reactions from European government leaders. However, when the EU leaders met a few days later, the response from the European Council was disappointing, holding little promise that the deadly trends would be curbed sustainably. While search and rescue efforts in the Mediterranean were raised to earlier capacities, statements focussed on controlling borders and irregular migration, with no commitments to improve the asylum system (Farugues and Di Bartolomeo, 2015). At the centre of such seemingly unambitious political workings are issues of EU burden sharing of asylum-seekers, borderline changes, the immigration-backlash in Western societies, and major contrasts across the Mediterranean Sea concerning functioning asylum systems, decent human rights records and sound political climates. In consequence, last year's tragic death toll in the Mediterranean of almost 3,300 people (IOM, 2015) is not likely to decrease, but to considerably rise in 2015 (Fargues and Di Bartolomeo, 2015).

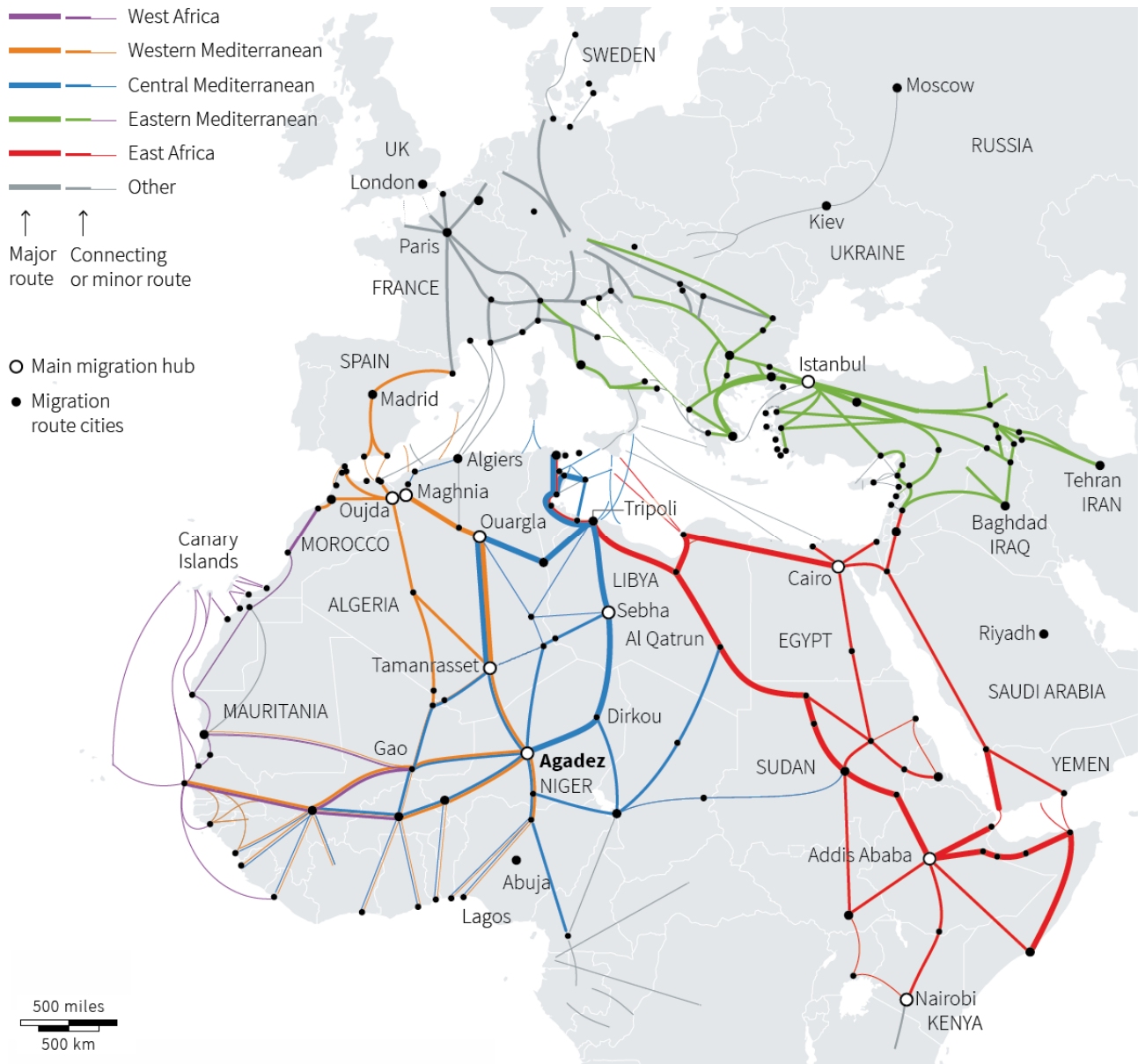
The perilous boat journey is described in a passage from a poem by Hussain after his arrival in Sicily (Reale, 2015, p. 8):

...  
Fifteen days on the water  
And the silence of two broken engines  
Nearly made me lose my mind.  
The only sound was of a Ghanian woman,  
Wrapped in the cloth of her country  
Moaning with a baby in her belly.  
I could only stare. We were all so helpless.  
...

The phenomenon of irregular sea crossings in the Mediterranean is not a recent appearance. It has been ongoing since the early 1990s, when Spain and Italy introduced visa requirements. While the places of embarkation and disembarkation typically change in relation to developments within border control operations, four sets of islands in Greece, Italy, Spain and Malta have especially been used as stepping stones to the European continent by migrants travelling in mixed flows (UNHCR, 2007; Triandafyllidou, 2014)

*Routes to Greece:* Since the late 1980s, the Eastern Aegean Islands, only a few miles from Turkey, have been popular transit points to Europe. Smuggling routes from Egypt, predominantly to Crete, have effectively been blocked by the coast guard since 2008. From 2009, intensified Greek coast guard patrols caused irregular immigration flows to shift from sea to land borders (IOM, 2008). A trend that changed again, with increasing flows crossing the Aegean Sea, after Greece in late 2012 erected a fence on its border with Turkey (Fargues and Bonfanti, 2014). In recent years, the failing Greek asylum system has received a lot of attention, highlighting the shortcomings of EU's Dublin Regulation as part of the wider Common European Asylum System (Schuster, 2011; Triandafyllidou, 2013). There have been reported cases of refugees and migrants being unlawfully pushed back across the border to Turkey by state agents, sometimes held at gunpoint (Amnesty International, 2014).

**Map 1.** *The migration routes across the Mediterranean Sea to Europe* (Reuters Graphic, 2015).



*Routes to Spain:* Spain has expanded its border operations in tandem with emerging migrant routes since the 1990s, so that the sophisticated technological system SIVE (Integrated System of External Vigilance) now covers Morocco, Mauritania and Senegal to the Canary Islands. Spain has managed to greatly reduce migration flows with Frontex (European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union) patrols along the Atlantic coast and through readmission agreements with

Mauritania, Senegal and other states in the region. In contrast to Italy's regulation of migration beyond its national borders, Spanish controls and interceptions at sea have been guided by a human rights strategy (Wouters and den Heijer, 2009). However, human rights violations have been reported by Medecins Sans Frontieres in connection with expulsions of migrants to Morocco from Spain's North African provinces of Ceuta and Melilla (MSF, 2005).

*Routes to Italy:* The Sicily Strait has always been a migrant route, with particularly Lampedusa as destination. It became the passage most used in the second half of the 2000s, with Libya and Tunisia, and later on also Egypt, as the key ports of departure. The rising number of arrivals in the first decade led to intensified and a controversial cooperation between Libya and Italy, which was greatly criticised by NGOs, the European Commission of Human Rights and the UNHCR for not allowing access to asylum procedures and disregarding the principle non-refoulement at sea (UNHCR, 2009a and 2009b; Hessbruegge, 2012). In October 2013, in response to numerous arrivals of especially Syrians in need of protection along with several tragic migrant ship wreckages, the Italian government commenced operation Mare Nostrum to search and rescue across the Mediterranean. The ambitious naval and air operation was stopped as EU governments decided it was unintentionally encouraging migrants, anticipating sea rescue. This made way for a more limited Frontex program (*Panorama*, 2015).

*Routes to Malta:* The island country is generally a stepping stone to the European mainland, not a preferred destination. Compared to its modest population of some 410,000 islanders, Malta has received as many as almost 2,000 irregular migrants every year since 2002. It has been a key partner in joint operations with Frontex. These have nevertheless been observed to assert international law at convenience through informal practices, thereby compromising the non-refoulement principle (Klepp, 2010).

The above-mentioned countries of Southern Europe currently constitute the most vulnerable external border of the EU, with pressures of irregular migration being intensely felt on its southern sea borders. While the Eastern Mediterranean route to Greece has been the one most used by migrants so far this year, the other main route across the Central Mediterranean to Italy and Malta remains by far the most deadly, with many border operations turning into search and rescue operations (Frontex, 2015b). A considerable change has occurred since 2000, with Africans from the sub-Saharan regions of Africa gradually overtaking the North Africans as the largest group of irregular migrants taking ship to Europe. In recent years, increasing numbers of migrants from Asian countries such as Pakistan, India and Bangladesh have also joined the boat crossings (de Haas, 2007). The majority of boat migrants are usually poorly educated men aged 20-40 years. Although, this population appears to become more diversified, with more educated individuals and women considering to cross the Mediterranean (Kassar and Dourgnon, 2014).

### **The Mediterranean high seas: perspectives on the problem**

The issue of Mediterranean boat-migration poses a dilemma of both humanitarian principles and national security (Nazarski, 2008). However, it seems many human lives perish as a consequence of realising the right to control borders and regulate migration. In an early article about Mediterranean boat migrants, Pugh (2001) presents the phenomenon as a human welfare issue in stark contrast to an often intimidating and hegemonic discourse that revolves around state security, creating hostility and confrontation through risk construction. This is arguably still the case, when an often one-sided and uncritical focus directs attention towards human smuggling activities and dysfunctional origin countries as if the responsibility were solely located on one side of the Mediterranean.

Underlying and more intricate reasons for the numerous risky boat crossings to Europe usually remain unexplored, with the in-depth accounts and individual narratives missing.

The importance of a greater understanding of the phenomenon finds its significance in the light of what may be viewed as the combat of European countries against migrations to Europe instead of the root causes of flight and crisis migration (Bade, 2003). To one observer, the phenomenon is related to the identity of Europe, facing its brutal imperialist past once again (Raeymaekers, 2014). To other scholars, it is a question of immigrants fleeing from a discriminatory neo-colonial system and a structural legacy, mainly of the Western countries' own making (Mayo, 2013). For Europe, the issue then becomes the struggle against itself and not seaborne migrants (Ferrer-Gallardo and van Houtum, 2014), against people's fear of otherness and indifference to the suffering of others, a struggle for the humanitarian principles and Western values currently under pressure in the Mediterranean.

The many tragic deaths of boat migrants raise questions of great importance in relation to European migration policies and the human security and rights of the individual migrant. This working paper views the controversies surrounding the phenomenon as emanating particularly from firmly fixed notions about the modern world, where people presumably "belong" in certain areas and national territories. These constitute generally undisputed notions about the nation-state, its boundary lines and the movements of different groups of people in age of globalization. Here, the nation-state forms a fundamental and controlling idea from which people may make sense of their lives, picturing the world's interaction and organization. Its national borders draw the contours of the map upon which the refugee and migrant journey unfolds.

The working paper thus explores the phenomenon using a more critical and comprehensive approach, which comprehends the Mediterranean as a relational space (Brambilla, 2014). This perspective allows an in-depth investigation of the interplay between changing and contrasting identities, cultures, ideas and values and an examination of the underlying themes and relationships in the Mediterranean context. It enables to determine how notions of the nation-state and recent developments within European borders and their enforcement relate to the boat-migration phenomenon. It further makes possible the discovery of the reasons and motivations behind the growing number of migrants who embark on the hazardous sea journeys to a fenced-off European continent, which may hold little promise of equal life opportunities.

The Mediterranean phenomenon of boat-migration is researched in a socio-economic and cultural context, but central historical aspects are also considered. It is dealt with by using the nation-state model as vantage point, encompassing the perspectives on modern borders and migratory flows. In this regard, the Mediterranean basin is a key site of present global contrasts in terms of cultural differences as well as social, economic and political conditions. Hence, the working paper holds considerable potential for extending the body of research on migration and asylum, thereby raising awareness and encouraging critical debate of an ongoing issue.

The following chapter is divided into three separate thematic sections, revolving around the nation-state, borders and migration flows. The sections discuss appropriate literature connected to the problem, followed by a presentation and an analysis of the collected secondary sources. To conclude, the working paper will close with conclusions drawn from the secondary data, and will finish with suggestions for policy and put forward recommendations for future research.



### The Nation-State Model

The nation-state, conceived at the time of the American and French revolutions around the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is generally understood in terms of a socially constructed and imagined political community (Anderson, 1983). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the model constitutes the main form of political organization – based on the ideal of one people, one state, and one territory. As such, the nation-state continues to have political importance as well as major cultural and symbolic purpose, by that means suggesting a close linkage between political identity and cultural belonging (Castles and Miller, 2009). A trait of the nation-state is the aspect of both inclusion and exclusion (Wimmer, 2002). This inherent capacity for rejection of otherness has from the outset preoccupied the social sciences, without them in the research on immigration really questioning the nation-state concept itself (Wimmer and Schiller, 2002, p. 325):

Describing immigration as a political security risk, as culturally others, as socially marginal, and as an exception to the rule of territorial confinement, migration studies have faithfully mirrored the nationalist image of normal life.

Developing into a more liberal design, built on universal human rights and trans-border nationalism, the organizational concept has proven remarkably flexible and adaptable in a world that never was as clear-cut as national myths will have it (Joppke, 2005; Marfleet, 2006; Brubaker, 2010). A distinction can be made between nation (i.e. a cultural and social idea) and state (i.e. a legal and institutional concept), with immigration constituting a disturbing element to the basic notion of conformity. Refugees and other migrants therefore risk being perceived as outsiders, as persons belonging in the state, but not necessarily to the nation. Doná (2002) argues that asylum-seekers and other migrants with distinctly unlike cultural backgrounds and ways of life have become the “others”, the out-group in the efforts to unify Europe's different populations and strengthen a European identity. In that regard, the fact that Europe is primarily bound together by economic and political interests (instead of deep social or cultural ties) impedes the emergence of “European-ness” (Smith, 1992).

The nation-state notion is hence highly influential on human identity and perceptions of immigration. However, it is also closely tied to the forces that generate the flows of refugees. As the major refugee-producing force (Zolberg, 1983), its partial or failed consolidation create conflicts that in turn generate forced migration flows (Bartram et al., 2014). In this respect, the effects of introducing Western ideas of nationhood to the Mediterranean regions during the age of empire are still visible, with turbulent construction processes still ongoing as part of a colonial legacy and influencing regional factors (Westin, 1999; Chatty, 2010). A testimony to these often powerful forces of nation-state building are many of the Mediterranean boat migrants who seek refuge in the safe territories of more achieved nation-states, bound to protect them, when the design fails elsewhere.

Globalization and modern migration have impacted upon the ideas of identity and belonging within the nation-state (Babacan and Singh, 2010). The contemporary nation-state is viewed by Sassen (2005, 2008 and 2014) as a

strategic institutional domain, where crucial development efforts of globalization take place. It is a site for foundational changes, encompassing a reorientation of national agendas towards global ones, and the circulation of private corporate agendas inside the state as public ones. Closely connected to a global economic system that no longer seeks to incorporate people, the nation-state is a co-producer of rising world inequality and brutal expulsions of millions of people who exist at the margins, the “systemic edge” (Sassen, 2014, p. 211), ousted from society and economic life by neo-liberal capitalism and its complexity of predatory formations. In a world of agricultural restructuring and overseas land acquisitions by private companies and foreign states, major population movements are then in fact massive expulsions, asserts Sassen (2013). And referring to them as migration, obscures the fact that outside firms and government agencies are responsible for pushing people off their land, into poverty and onto the road. It is in this light that emerging forms of migration may be understood; the flows of expelled people from rural areas to the global north, notably from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe.

### **Nation-states in a brutal global economy: all in the same boat?**

The nation-state model seeks to simplify a world that was always more complex. If the organizational idea fails to provide people with some measure of human safety and livelihood, migratory movements are no doubt set in motion. By definition, the arrival of migrants in the imagined community may result in tension since outside citizens may be basically regarded as different people from other states in a foreign territory. Their presence then leads to a negotiation of belonging, which takes place within the prevailing discourses of the national context, (Triandafyllidou, 2000), thereby determining the various levels and forms of inclusion and exclusion.

The sometimes almost impossible quest of migrants for incorporating into the national social fabric of host countries is well documented in the case of Albanian boat-migrations to Italy in the 1990s (King and Mai, 2008). Initially welcomed as “Adriatic brothers” fleeing a repressive regime, attitudes hardened, resulting in the rejection and stigmatization of Albanian nationals who became seen more as economic migrants than refugees by the Italians. Despite many Albanians being keen “Italophiles”, committed to conform to Italian ways, the migrant group suffered ostracism in several instances and on various levels. Legally accepted (or included) Albanian migrants with work permits and residence rights hence experienced serious discrimination and xenophobia (or exclusion) within different domains of social life (e.g. workplace, school, media, and public areas). There were signs of differentiated racism towards Albanians in Italy – insulting and open in the less-developed south, and more subtle, but maybe deep-rooted in the industrialized north. The rejection of Albanian otherness may be positioned within the struggle in Italy to create a unified European national identity and also the country's own racialized social order, linking it with Albania's history as an Italian colony. At a time of national identification crisis, Albanian immigrants therefore became the intruders, the colonial others by which Italy's internal differences between north and south could be resolved by projecting parts of the crisis onto an essential other.

Parallels may be drawn to present-day Europe and its “patchwork” of multiple and distinguishable nationalities, struggling with similar national identification processes as part of the European project. The challenges of uniting Europe's internal and cross-national differences throw a significant light on the rise of nationalism and anti-immigration attitudes among European citizens. In the efforts to create a unified Europe, domestic and transnational mechanisms of exclusion may easily target immigrants with pronounced different cultural traditions and lifestyles – if seeking to construct national belonging through the otherness of non-EU nationals as the opposing identity. In an age of memoryless cosmopolitan culture (Smith, 1992) and changing borders, the

connection can be made to the way refugees and other migrants from former European colonial areas in the Middle East and Africa may be perceived as trespassers, the constitutive others upon whom national identification issues are projected in order to unify Europe's contrasts and form a collective identity.

A possible alternative to such negative representations of immigrants as potential threats to national conventions is demonstrated by how boat migrants are sometimes treated upon arrival. In contrast to the approaches of official authorities, some accounts tell a different story about how empathy is shown for boat migrants among communities in coastal areas, where help is readily provided. In the autumn of 2001, on the Greek islands of Zakynthos and Evia, locals were quick to assist the hundreds of boat migrants who landed on their shores, reflecting seafarer traditions and coastal community values (UNHCR, 2001; Smith, 2001). In April 2015, similar acts of kindness in the form of donated clothes and food were shown by hundreds of islanders, when a migrant boat struck the ragged coastline of Rhodes in Greece. One fisherman, breaking down as he recalled rescuing a child, said (Smith, 2015): "They are souls, like us". Translated into the maritime code, the shown solidarity may serve as a general statement in the public debate, where the homeland is not defined in warlike terms of repelling threats. A humanitarian regime at sea thus supports a rights-based, normative treatment of boat migrants (Pugh, 2004). The examples from Italy and Greece show how in-group and out-group identities are constructed within specific contexts of nation-states, on different levels, with changing interpretations and normative boundaries. While discriminatory and nationalistic discourse characterizes the often hostile immigration attitudes in some European countries, a discourse of solidarity and humanism, based on more universal principles, also endures. One that may facilitate improved dialogue around immigration issues and can be situated well within the current global context and the mechanisms and powers in play, as it will be discussed in the following segments.

One case study (Nyamnjoh, 2010) brings to the fore, the harmful effects upon Senegalese fisheries caused by increased economic activity and government agreements granting fishing licenses to foreign industrial trawlers from the EU, China and Korea. It exemplifies how initial advantages of financial gain and job opportunities become greatly outweighed by overexploitation and destructive use of natural resources, by that means leading to a major crisis in one of the key sectors of the national economy. As a consequence of such ineffective administration, the changes to the economy create market conditions in which local fishermen cannot live or compete, thereby endangering the future and survival of a whole group of citizens. The connection between degrading fisheries and high-risk gambling on migration is explained by Gora, a 69-year-old retired fisherman from Senegal (Nyamnjoh, 2010, p. 68):

You really have to work and take care of your parents, but ... the sea on which people laid their hopes no longer has fish. That is why youths resort to clandestine migration. The government had promised to create safe areas in the sea ... where fish can reproduce, but ... the sea has been destroyed.

At the edge of the introduced economic system, a mass exodus of fishermen with little faith in their government thus occurs, some of them accepting offers to ferry migrant boats to the Canary Islands of Spain. Despite some short-term financial benefits for Senegal, the launched economic restructuring eventually ruins the fisheries, one of the country's strategic resources. A resource that provides vital protein to most citizens due to its affordability as well as employment to numerous families. As part of what is interpreted as a growing trend in African fishing regions, the case study illustrates how foreign states and corporate firms, with the cooperation of a national government, operate under an inhuman economy, causing the expulsion of entire groups of people from society

and economic life by eliminating their habitats and work places. It shows how opening up to the global economic system may involve partial denationalization within certain areas of the nation-state. As shown, this may lead to rising inequality and social collapse, environmental degradation and a devalued citizenship.

### **Modern Borders in an Age of Migration**

As territorial organizations, a key dimension of the nation-states are their borders, which guide and also constrain the movements of people on both sides of them. Borders may be perceived as a social institution, symbolizing the authority over an area (Bartam et al., 2014). As “contradictory zones of culture and power” (Wilson and Donnan, 1998, p. 26), they display the fundamentally uneasy fit between nation and state. When ideas about borders are developed by the state, it encourages notions of national belonging. This in turn heightens a common awareness of those crossing the borders and directs attention to the cultural boundaries inside. As such, the perception and establishment of borders become interrelated with the exclusionary mechanism of the nation-state as a united entity. It is a mechanism that continues to operate after transnational frontiers have taken the place of national borders (Marfleet, 2006).

International migration across borders is growingly considered one of the key threats to the political and social security of Europe (Gebrewold, 2007a and 2007b). The security dimension developed progressively in the EU after the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent bombings in Madrid and London. It caused a political paradigm shift, whereby migration policy became security policy, leading to a securitization of migration (Castles and Miller, 2009). The process of securitization relates to the way threat is socially constructed (Buonfino, 20004), thereby legitimizing extraordinary regulatory measures to address the threat. It enables the governance of migration, which is achieved through introducing a range of actors and policies that seek to implement the management of non-state approved population movements (Dimitriadi, 2014). In that regard, Gebrewold (2007a) notes that responding to real threats (such as the bombings in Madrid and London) may create perceived threats, which lead to fortress building and ethically controversial practices that compromise the central principles, cultural values and just government of Europe. The construction of risk may lead to defensive immigration responses and fear, where migrants are perceived as threats to national security and welfare. Also termed “Fortress Europe” by critics of EU immigration policy, the EU seeks to manage the migratory flows and achieve its policy on the monitoring of its external borders through several extensive restrictions – such as “non-arrival” policies (e.g. visa requirements, airline carrier sanctions), diversion policies (i.e. returning asylum-seekers to “safe third countries”), and restrictive access to and interpretations of Refugee Convention status (Westin, 1999; Castles and Miller, 2009).

In contrast to the Cold War period, the present-day borders of Europe are no longer the totally determined national boundaries, neatly circumscribing every country as depicted on school globes. They now possess an asymmetrical and elusive character, wherefore their contours may not be recognized or easily agreed upon by both government actors and migrant groups (Rumford, 2009). Some significant changes to the character of modern borders may be outlined – changes that are apparent in the ways the countries of Europe presently engage with their neighbourhood and supervise their borders. First, there has been a movement of borders beyond state territories and into the transnational realm (Collyer and King, 2015), also referred to as the *externalization* of borders (Carrerra, 2007; Diker, 2015). Second, borders have become diluted, resulting in a *multiplicity* of bordering points inside society (e.g. zones, regions, or countries). Third, a *diffusion* of borders and

entry points has taken place throughout society, thereby undermining the conception of borders as European or national borders (Balibar, 2002, cited in Rumford, 2009, p. 84-85).

These changes to borders represent the securitization strategies of “rebordering” (Andreas, 2000, p. 2) – an idea formed in Europe and North America to safeguard the national “room to manoeuvre” in spaces opened up by the easy movements and free flows of globalization. The aim is to filter the cross-border flows, thereby separating the desirables from the undesirables. With “asymmetric membranes” (Hedetoft, 2003, p. 152), the easy movement of particular people and goods is then allowed, while unwanted entrance is hindered from the other side. Here, the state reaches into transnational space through physical, symbolic and imaginative border control mechanisms (Collyer and King, 2015). In a European context, these developments are captured in the concept of the “Great Wall of Europe” (Balibar, 2006, p. 2-3) – a barrier pushed outwards to faraway regions such as the fortified Israeli West Bank Barrier in the Middle East and the heavily barricaded fences in the Spanish exclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in North Africa:

A complex of differentiated institutions and installations, legislations, repressive and preventive policies, and international agreements, which together aim at making the liberty of circulation not impossible but extremely difficult or selective and unilateral for certain categories of individuals and certain groups on the basis of their ethnic (i.e., ultimately racial) characteristics and their nationality.

### **The rule of borderlines: migrant protests against immobility**

In Europe, changes to national boundaries and rising concerns about immigration have led to novel exclusionary mechanisms as well as ethically dubious border practices. Disproportionate to the right to regulate state borders, the course of events calls into question the humanitarian principles and values of Europe. The shift towards securitization through threat construction, brought about by the global challenges of migrant mobilities, enables the governance of modern migration through various restrictive measures. Also termed Fortress Europe, this Euro-centric security perspective on immigration serves to justify the combat against irregular border crossings and human smuggling. However, it obscures the fact that, in consequence, many refugees and asylum-seekers are prevented from presenting their claims (Carling, 2011). Intensified border controls, restrictive access policies and counter-smuggling measures effectively drive refugees and other migrants into the arms of human smugglers (Nadig, 2002), causing increased suffering, risks and costs for migrants seeking passage to Europe (de Haas, 2007). Furthermore, Southern Europe's sizeable underground economy, in demand of cheap migrant labour and attracted to the very informal status of irregular migrants, basically welcomes these migrations (King, 1996; de Haas, 2008; King and DeBono, 2013). Lastly, it is important to note that European countries (as signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention) are required not to penalise refugees for illegal presence in Europe or unauthorised entry, provided such persons can show good cause for their entry and present themselves to the authorities upon arrival (UNHCR, 2010).

That migrant smuggling may be characterized as an also humanitarian and informal service and not the ruthless dealings of powerful criminal cartels is well documented by numerous empirical works (Monzini, 2007; Poeze, 2010; van Liempt and Sersli, 2012). Human smuggling activity can then hardly be deemed criminal in every respect, as mafia-like organizations and “a crime crying out for justice” (UNDOC, 2006, p. 1). The observations indicate rather a mismanagement of complex migratory movements in the Mediterranean region, thereby contributing to the current crisis through the evasion of international obligations to refugees and asylum-seekers

and the lack of legal opportunities to acquire safe access to Europe. It suggests the indirect limitation of rights of forced migrants and the exploitation of irregular migrant labourers who help oil the wheels of the European economy.

While the projecting of Europe's borders by creating a "buffer zone" (Baldwin-Edwards, 2005, p. 8) clearly might benefit Southern European countries in terms of their great immigration burden, major problems pertaining to issues of asylum, the rule of law, and human rights arise from such rebordering practice. Firstly, the policies of the EU and its member states remain focussed on security and migration control in the transnational realm, while de-emphasizing the protection of refugee and migrant rights. Secondly, European border practices now partially extend into South and East Mediterranean countries (SEM), many of which, according to secondary sources, display little concern for the rights of migrants and fail to translate their international obligations towards the protection of refugees into national policy and capable asylum regimes (Lindstrom, 2003; Planes-Boissac et al., 2010). In this regard, a framework adhering to European values and international commitments has yet to be implemented. An approach with corresponding actions of developmental, human rights and humanitarian aspects (van der Klaauw, 2007; Hamood, 2008). The controversial aspect of extending European authority into externalized border areas is demonstrated by a recent case study updating the situation in Libya (Naik et al., 2015). It finds that the country's present disarray and fragmentation create deplorable conditions for migrant and refugee populations, clearly in violation of international human rights law and contributing to the increasing migration flows bound for Europe. Libya is currently a place to escape from, a departure point for the safety found on the other side of the Mediterranean. In this regard, however, European countries remain solely focused on securitization of potential migration inflows, when extending their powers into transnational space, not the implementation of human rights principles. If European responsibility comes with exercising its authority offshore, it is practically absent in the SEM.

Physically challenging the integrity of Europe's externalized borders, the boat-migrations on the Mediterranean Sea as well as the climbing of barricaded fences in Ceuta and Melilla represent highly visible manifestations of changing migration patterns (Baldwin-Edwards, 2006). These migration flows are an integral part of wider economic and social transformation processes, not the result of development failure (de Haas, 2007). In Senegal, the processes have been observed to thrive specifically at the social margins in the run-down and abandoned neighbourhoods inhabited by fishermen, where people consider themselves as marginalized. These areas become a springboard for organizing boat-migrations to Europe – undertakings that come to symbolize resistance to repressive state authority and control at local and global levels (Nyamnjoh, 2010). This contesting of authority is clearly a reaction altogether shared by conveyors, middlemen and migrants at the margins of society. It is the revolt against their exclusion and the failure of the government to support the fishing sector and prevent visa restrictions to Europe. In the African country, with a long-established cultural tradition of migration, migrants thus refuse to acknowledge the national government's authority over borders, which only enable a one-sided flow of people. It adds up to a protest movement against the selective design of the "Great Wall of Europe" – the cause of "involuntary immobility" (Carling, 2002, p. 1) for certain individuals and population groups in a time of globalization, when mobility has come to be a highly significant stratifying factor (Bauman, 1998).

Although many boat migrants frequently have biased and unrealistic expectations about the life in Europe, believing in the possibilities for economic and social advancement (Hernández-Carretero and Carling, 2012;

Mbaye, 2014), strong personal connections to individuals already living informally in the West may modify an overly positive picture of “the migrant”. Empirical research by Poeze (2010) suggests that the stronger the ties an individual has, the more realistic the image of Europe will be, and, in consequence, the expectations of living informally as a migrant will probably be lowered. Other research finds that 77 % of potential irregular migrants, aware of the danger of undertaking a boat journey and the precarious life in an underground economy, are prepared to risk their lives to migrate (Mbaye, 2014). In that regard, awareness campaigns about the imaginable perils of maritime crossings (usually initiated by the EU, NGOs and origin countries) do little to change people's minds to emigrate to Europe (Poeze, 2010; Townsend and Oomen, 2015) as they are often considered untrustworthy and distorted by political interests (Hernández-Carretero and Carling, 2012). For forced migrants on the move, this risk of injury or death at sea may appear fairly abstract in comparison to the existing hardships and threats encountered in the origin country (Khachani, 2008, cited in Townsend and Oomen, 2015, p. 5). One should also consider that the countries crossed by migrants in transit may be equally or more dangerous compared to the Mediterranean (Hamood, 2008; De Bruycker et al., 2013). For those migrants who have been expelled by a brutal economy, similar notions may be at stake. The necessity of risk-taking, when trying to escape the life situation not only in the country of origin but also transit, is expressed by a Somali refugee in Cairo (Hamood, 2008, p. 8):

I knew my life would be in danger but I had no other choice. Either I would die or reach another life elsewhere. It would be better to die at sea than endure life in my country.

### **A Nexus of Asylum & Migration**

Today, the drivers of modern migration take form in an interrelationship between several factors such as poverty, underdevelopment, human rights abuses, defective governance and armed conflict. These factors create an overlap of economic and forced migration, thereby giving rise to the notion of a nexus of migration and asylum. The concept of the asylum-migration nexus is used to describe the growing recognition of the difficulties in distinguishing between forced and economic migration because of their linked root causes, the similarities between the migration processes, and the failing of policies to discern in the response to the two migrant categories (Castles and Van Hear, 2005). In this regard, Western countries have progressively taken to increasingly restrictive policy manoeuvres in the attempt to untangle growing numbers of forced and economic migrants – limitations, which have deterred, prevented or punished the entry of both migrant categories indiscriminately (Gibney and Hansen, 2005). The close link between forced and economic migration is an expression of increasing North-South inequality and societal crises in a post-Cold War world, according to Castles (2003). It is coupled with a Western discourse that aspires to certain economic, political and ideological goals. The nexus is hence an instrument of power and knowledge, designed to justify strict border administration and effective deportation, even to countries with a case history of human rights abuse. It is the tool of a paradoxical policy that intends to both welcome and expel migrants (Castles, 2007).

Van Hear et al. (2009) explore how the chosen strategies followed by migrants take shape in an interplay between agency and structure – people's capacity and inclination to act, and their contextual milieu. The idea of being in possession of different types of “capital” (Bourdieu, 1986, 1987, cited in Van Hear et al., 2009, p. 5) that may be converted into another provides a fitting framework for understanding this interaction. Accordingly, undertaking migration involves the mobilization and holding of capitals in different combinations: *social capital* (i.e. human networks), *cultural capital* (i.e. knowledge and information), and *economic capital* (i.e. financial assets). Here,

*symbolic capital* acts as the value the various types of capital holds in a group or culture. When the framework is applied to the asylum-migration nexus, the implications for forced migrants in need of refuge are quite disturbing. As a result, only the persons with access to certain quantities of resources (mainly economic and social capital) will be able to afford a greater quality of protection.

In a paper by Stewart (2008), the disproportionate representation of those from an advantaged background in their origin country is observed among the refugees arriving in the UK. She too identifies the asylum-migration nexus as the product of a selective and restrictive Western immigration regime that looks favourably upon highly skilled migrants (i.e. with cultural capital), capable of contributing to the advanced economies. As a result, the current immigration system leads migrants from conflict zones to seek alternative routes to reach safety (instead of claiming a right to asylum) and stimulates the use of irregular routes. The outcome is the criminalization of refugees and asylum-seekers as well as the encouragement of a “migration industry” of human smuggling gangs and other illegal service providers. The author is hence concerned that the refugee regime of Western countries fails to meet its moral obligations to protect asylum-seekers, and, in the same process, carelessly contributes to “brain drain” migration.

After initially embracing the idea of the asylum-migration nexus, the UNHCR now insists that an essential distinction between refugees and other migrants can be made (Crisp, 2008). The agency has however acknowledged the growing phenomenon of mixed flows by adopting an overarching approach: the “10 Point Plan of Action on Refugee Protection and Mixed Migration” (UNHCR, 2007). The IOM likewise prefers to speak in terms of mixed migration flows and refers to them as “an everyday reality” of “complex population movements” (Cholewinski, 2010, p. 5-6). The organization predicts that the capacities of countries to deal with irregular migration and mixed flows, with the support of global partners, are likely to be challenged in the future – perhaps severely. For those in mixed migration flows who may require international protection, the EU emphasizes the need to ensure access to asylum procedures (EC, 2006 and 2013) as part of the comprehensive framework of its external migration and refugee policy: the “Global Approach to Migration” (EC, 2011). This externalization of the EU's asylum and immigration system began, in cooperation with third countries, when the high-visibility boat crossings in the Mediterranean directed attention to the outer aspects of asylum and refugee protection (Haddad, 2008).

### **The mixed flows: past solely economic & political motivations**

In the tension between the forces of capitalism and human rights, the difference between economic and forced migration is clearly not as straightforward as governments will have it look to legitimize what can be viewed as a discriminative and selective asylum regime. Although Western government policies of today tend to focus on economic migration, the major entry categories in most developed countries are nevertheless family reunification, education and people seeking refuge from war and persecution (Castles and Miller, 2009). Moreover, the 218,000 Mediterranean boat crossings last year (UNHCR, 2015a) should be held up against the EU's annual immigration average of more than 1,3 million non-EU nationals in the years 2009-2012 (Eurostat, 2014). It may also be noted that despite a rise in refugee numbers and asylum claims in recent years the vast majority (86%) of the world's 16,7 million refugees is hosted by the developing countries (UNHCR, 2013). This trend continued in 2014, when Syrians were the main nationality among asylum-seekers in the industrialized countries with an estimated 149,600



refugee status requests as opposed to the more than 3,9 million Syrian refugees hosted by the surrounding countries: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey (UNHCR, 2015a).

The boat crossings in the Mediterranean are but one example of the mixed nature of modern migration movements. In Senegal, a country of relative stability since its independence in 1960, the phenomenon has been shown to be closely related to other factors apart from the purely economic and political motivations described in the asylum-migration nexus. These factors help elucidate the underlying reasons for the continuous high risk journeys to the fenced-off European continent. Several case studies (Nyamnjoh, 2010; Poeze, 2010; Hernández-Carretero and Carling, 2012) explain the decision-making process and the motivation to undertake a dangerous migration journey by also incorporating socio-cultural elements such as status, power relationships, and desires. The approach reveals additional, important influencing elements. In the setting of Senegal, peer pressure from friends and neighbours with plans to migrate is reported as well as the perceived duty to one's family who frequently provides the funding for the trip, wishing to improve its neighbourhood social status by expected remittances. It further shows how the decision to migrate is often underpinned by notions of masculinity, with boat-migration being a sign of manhood, a way of proving (or protecting) one's worth as a strong, forceful man. It describes an unwillingness among young people to accept a culture that teaches communal life and collectivism instead of individual lifestyle, which would allow space for more personal choices and desires. It makes visible the way boat-migration becomes the active engagement, a movement of protest against oppressive policies in a society, where the government does not seem to take any notice of the socially marginalized people. Lastly, it points to the often pivotal role of religion and spiritual beliefs that provide solace and justification for actions with perhaps fatal consequences, bringing martyrdom to those who drown and sacrifice their life in the efforts to improve the family's living standards. For boat migrants, embarking upon the dangerous sea crossings may then also represent glory, hope and ambition, even the possibility of death. For many, the risk of dying becomes formulated in a narrative of honour and sacrifice (Hernández-Carretero and Carling, 2012, p. 7):

Those who died over there – well... it's like, maybe the soldiers who are dead on the battlefield. Because they had their aim, their destiny, and their ambitions. And they died – they did not die because they were stealing and were lynched... It is like they died in the battlefield. In the field of honour.

By moving beyond commonly held views on the phenomenon as merely a response to unfavourable political and economic circumstances, the decision to undertake boat-migration can thus be further understood by applying a broader perspective. As such, the discourse developed around the nexus fails to consider other important contextual elements of migrant decision-making apart from skills and access to financial resources, smuggling networks and transnational ties – such as power structures, self-interests and the symbolic value of migrating. In the SEM, the merging of forced, economic and also transit migrants into one category currently represents an emerging trend of irregular migration. A statistical study (Fargues, 2009) finds that, while EU governments rightly estimate a major rise in irregular migration at the gates of Europe, the mixed flows of migrants initially headed for Europe constitute a significant minority (about 5 % of an estimated minimum of 3,6 million irregular migrants in the SEM) due to visa restrictions. Irregular migration has thus become the norm in the SEM, where no policies or institutions exist, which would allow migrants to integrate. Recently, the countries have experienced economic growth and turned into receivers of migrants, attracted to the work opportunities in the informal sector. This

situation leaves the migrant group very vulnerable in terms of protection, welfare services and labour rights. A total of approximately 1,5 million de facto refugees in the SEM suggests that many (if not most) abandon the possibility of claiming asylum in the enclosed Europe. In the SEM, the global trend of widening economic and political divides between North and South as well as the colliding of international labour movements with the nation-state's rejection of otherness is thus reflected in the local reality. Evidently only a smaller group among the mixed migrant population in the SEM puts the restrictive and selective immigration regime of the West to the test.

## **Conclusion**

A significant finding of the working paper was the challenge to the authority of nation-states by globalization, from below and above, representing a serious test to humanitarian principles and Western values. As part of Europe's progressing supranational project, the nation-state mechanism of exclusion conveniently singles out non-EU nationals, thereby projecting parts of a European identity crisis onto migrants as the significant others through whom internal differences may be resolved. Here, the high-visibility boat-migrations in the Mediterranean stand out, making apparent the major contrast found in the region concerning population, disproportionate economic growth and development. The boat migrants tend to originate in less developed, former colonial areas with recognizably different cultures and ways of life, where a European-established model of nation-state has either generally failed to provide for the citizens or produces forced migration flows due to unfinished formation processes. Into the nation-states, the global economy has introduced a savage mindset, which sets profits above citizens, expulsion over incorporation. This new international geography reveals an adaptive and flexible nation-state with unequal and exploitative relationships in a North-South divided world, indicating the strong fusion of political and decisive economic power.

On a basically uncontested world map of mainly nation-states, the migrant journey unfolds. The European challenges of taking responsibility for refugees from the "defective elements" of the nation-state system and simultaneously safeguarding economic interest in an age of migration are mirrored in a selective and restrictive externalized immigration apparatus that remains focussed on securitization instead of protecting human rights and democratic values. The governance of migration is thus achieved, in a time of peace, at the expense of the safety of boat migrants by constructing threats. Its implementation encourages high-risk human smuggling to Europe, thereby making the strategy of national governments a significant part of the problem and clandestine activity ethically sound in some instances. However, the approach fuels xenophobia, racism and rejection attitudes towards certain individuals, stemming from the rebordering practices that cause refugees and other migrants to be criminalized and the existence of an informal economy, where irregular migrants are neither deported from the imagined community, nor in it. A humanitarian discourse of solidarity may cut across such discrimination and racialized nationalism and inspire negotiation in better tune with Western ideas, principles and values.

The analysis of the secondary sources revealed how people at the social margins revolt against negligent national governments and a brutal economy, which push them to the societal edge. Unable to make a livelihood in origin countries and restrained from moving elsewhere to enjoy the benefits of the economic system in a time of global mobility, boat-migrations in the Mediterranean form part of this resistance movement against Euro-centric immigration policy and practice. Seeking not only the favourable economic and political conditions of Europe but also the symbolic status attached to boat migrants, the people do not acknowledge the physical manifestations of what must represent unreasonable borderlines. In this broader context, encompassing social and cultural aspects

of boat-migration, desires and power structures in the form of peer pressure from family and friends, social status, self-interests and gender roles influence the decision to become a boat migrant. For all migrants alike, driven by hope, glory, sacrifice, ambition and protection needs, the high risk involved is relative to the lack of reasonable alternatives. It is an option fraught with danger for those who are able to accumulate and combine the necessary resources that in turn are contingent on a European immigration regime.

The introduction of Western neo-liberal capitalism has caused a destabilization of the SEM and a disarray at Europe's gates. As main actors in the global economy, Western countries of "the North" become partly responsible for the producing of migration flows from "the South", where thousands of ousted people decide to embark on perilous boat journeys, one of the few current ways of reaching the European countries. With no conceivable life prospects elsewhere, Europe naturally come to represent a land of security and possibilities. The disorder in Europe's buffer zone in the SEM has meant the break-down in local authority, by that means preventing a push-back against the migrant flows headed for Europe. However, considering the large number of irregular migrants in the SEM region, the numerous boat migrants still constitute a minority – a small number compared to the EU's annual immigration of non-EU nationals as well as the large numbers of refugees worldwide and in the Mediterranean region. The rebordering practices integrated in Europe's "Great Wall" entail some controversial ethical aspects concerning the exercise of governmental authority beyond the territorial fringes in transnational space, involving former colonial areas. It may be viewed as expanding and establishing authority in one territory by influential, foreign political and economic powers, suggesting a surfacing neo-colonialism. The outcome is a mismanagement of modern migration by Europe's divided political domain that fails to respond comprehensively, pragmatically and sincerely to current global challenges and ongoing identity crises in changing nation-states, thus turning the Mediterranean tragedy into a European one.

As part of an improved European corporation, new policies should therefore be implemented, allowing both refugees and labour migrants to arrive safely, legally and unharmed in Europe. Finally, how national identity and belonging may be imagined and formed, as in the case of contemporary Europe, in other ways than by othering especially immigrants in the community, emerges as an important problem to respond to academically.

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## List of Illustrations

### Maps

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