



Welfare, crime and society

Migration: personal stories

RAMON CORTES (SPANISH SPOKEN)

Well, there is one thing for sure, borders have to be controlled. If border controls were removed, what is for sure is that there would be a 200 per cent increase in the immigrants entrance. That is clear, that is clear.

To see how border control has developed in Europe, we need to look back to September 11 in New York. That was the beginning of an international approach to border control. The different EU agencies dealing with borders, immigration and terrorism etc, became more integrated as part of an EU agreement and began working towards a combined European border control. The result at the end – or the beginning of this new stage – was the creation of an EU border control agency, called Frontex.

Frontex coordinates all the different countries' activities around border control. When you control borders you are actually controlling all the traffic passing that border.

SALIF (SPANISH SPOKEN)

There have always been investments in projects to stop immigration. Because European policy is not about opening up immigration, it's about stopping it. So they are trying different ways to do it.

Even with the SIVE, people still come, they just have to look for different strategies to come. Because if SIVE detects every ship, imagine the amount of boats and staff will be needed the day 80,000 open boats arrive. SIVE will detect them, but it won't stop them arriving.

VOICEOVER COMMENTARY

Despite this surveillance system stretching along the coast of southern Europe, undocumented migrants and those who transport them found new routes to cross the EU border.

FIONA BRUCE

Good evening. For months they have been arriving in their thousands from Africa to the tiny Canary Islands, the new gateway into Europe. Now boatloads of Asians have started arriving there too, and the authorities in the Canaries have attacked Europe for failing to help them as they are overwhelmed by the sheer numbers reaching their shores.

VOICEOVER COMMENTARY

In 2005 and 6, record numbers of immigrants arrived in the Canary Islands after making a treacherous journey across the Atlantic Ocean from Africa.

Mohammed is 19 and from Guinea, West Africa. After witnessing his father's death in the civil war in Sierra Leone he decided to head to Europe in search of a better future. He made the crossing to the Canary Islands on a cruise ship, working as a cook on board to pay his passage.

MOHAMMED (SPANISH SPOKEN)

I stayed on the boat at sea for twelve days. The last day we slept at the Tenerife port and the thirteenth day in Tenerife, the Guards came, everybody, the civil police, local police, secret police.

The police came there, looked at the five black people on board and said "We are taking these five people to the civil guard."

I went to prison for a month. In there I ate and slept well, showered, I played football there with the people there.

I got out of prison and I was sent to the foreigner centre in Tenerife and stayed there twenty-five days.

I was scared about my life because I took a risk for my life. To cross the Atlantic Ocean to come to Europe, it's very serious.

JOSE ANTONIO (SPANISH SPOKEN)

I have been told that any morning, in just one hour, up to four hundred illegal immigrants in different boats have left the Moroccan coast heading to the Spanish coast. Imagine four hundred people distributed in different boats. It's like an uncontrollable avalanche ...

The idiosyncrasy of the Civil Guard is that we have love for the fellow human, an urge to save human lives.

I mean, when a cayuco crashes into the rocks with twenty people on board, and you know that when you arrive just five or six would be saved, the others are dehydrated on the boat and the rest are dead in the rocks; if you get involved, you get involved and do all it is possible.

You can't think about it. Of course it makes you sad, people dying, of course. These people you don't know where they come from, why they come here, you don't even think of these questions in that moment. Is it a human life requiring help, meaning you must risk your own life? Yes, we must do what we can.

RAMON CORTES (SPANISH SPOKEN)

We realised we couldn't be waiting for an illegal immigrant to arrive in a small boat, with the cayuco; we had to try to stop him as early as possible.

If people enter Spanish waters we are obliged to save them. What starts as a borders control operation ends up being a salvage operation.

That is what made us think that the operation had to be taken to African waters.

VOICEOVER COMMENTARY

Following these new routes into the EU, Frontex have now begun to push their border operations south, keeping the coast of West Africa under surveillance to prevent immigrants getting into European waters in the first place.

LIZA SCHUSTER

Because controls are not nice, European states have been very concerned to move these unpleasant aspects of border controls completely away from European territory. It's quite difficult to see these overcrowded boats and they would engender quite a lot of sympathy were they to arrive in Europe, so it's much better to try and stop these people arriving, because it will be hard to control them once they're inside Europe and there are these porous borders.

So you now have the external borders of Europe where control is becoming very sharp, but in turn you also have less visible borders which decide who's entitled to what once they're in the country.

Mohammed (Spanish Spoken)

These are my papers from Tenerife. The authorities there told me I had to leave Spain and not return for 3 years. Extradition. It says here. For 3 years. This is my paper from the foreigners centre. It says I'm illegal, you know? If the police ask me anything I show them this paper, they say OK, no problem. I say look this is my paper, from Tenerife.

SALIF (Spanish Spoken)

It is said people travel with no papers, but it is because they do not need them as they can cause harm. If you are caught in Spain with a passport from Senegal, the next day you can be deported to Senegal as there is justification. But if you have no paper and they get caught and ask what your name is, you can say "My name is ... 'Moon tower', or 'Muddy water'". "And where are you from?", "Me? I am from Darfur" or "I am from Somalia" or "I am from Rwanda". They will write down whatever you say.

VOICEOVER COMMENTARY

Mohammed is able to stay in Europe because he has no documentation showing where he should be deported to. But without a valid visa he's not authorised to work and can't access any benefits. To make enough money to live, he volunteers as a car park attendant and lives off the tips he gets from drivers.

MOHAMMED (Spanish Spoken)

If I work really hard, per month I can make good money, for example I might earn 400€, I could earn that. Whatever I get per month, I send some of that to my mum's family. I have to send good money. But I'm not earning much now. Hopefully that will come. To get the papers here is very difficult, you have to wait three years. I don't have an equal life, I am not an equal. If you have the papers, you can work, have the papers for your children, you are working, getting good money. But I can't work properly. That's why I have to go to the car park. It's very difficult but also I cannot leave it. If I do I cannot get my food or cigarettes.

VOICEOVER COMMENTARY

Mohammed lives in a hostel for irregular migrants that's run by a Catholic priest.

MOHAMMED (Spanish Spoken)

Each of us has a bed, that's my bed. Over there. I sit here, and I think.

VOICEOVER COMMENTARY

Legal status determines what migrants can do and what kinds of protections and benefits they're entitled to. But for many migrants, legal status is not fixed and they move between being legal and illegal in the eyes of the state. Salif now has legal residency in Spain but when he first arrived he was 'illegal'. Like many other undocumented migrants, he was unable to get a work visa and did cash-in-hand work, selling clothes in the market. Now he helps newer arrivals, offering them advice and support.

[SALIF talks to man in Senegalese]

SALIF (Spanish Spoken)

He's got a problem with his papers. He's legal here, he has a work permit and residency. But he's on a temporary contract with a construction company. It turned out he's worked less days than he was supposed to and when he tried to renew his papers he was refused, because he's only paid national insurance contributions for 117 days and he was supposed to pay NI for six months.