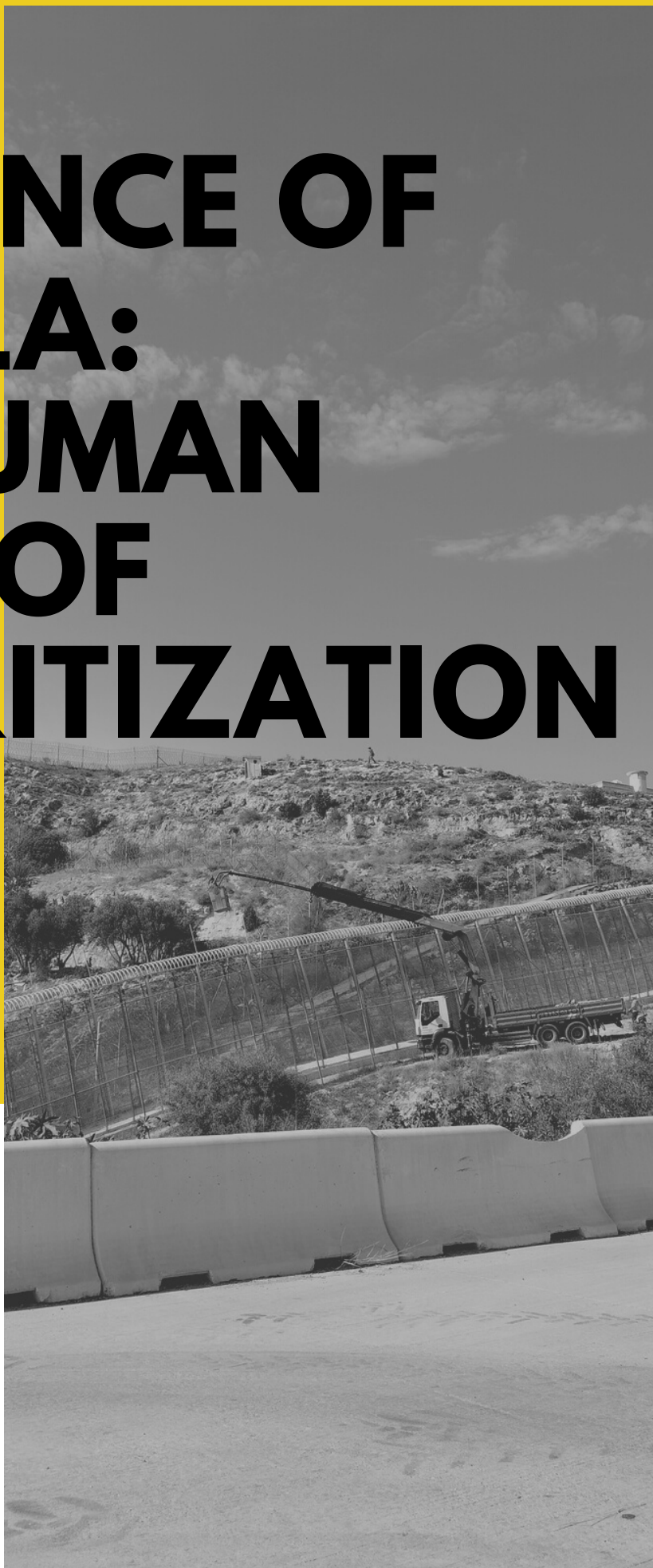


THE FENCE OF MELILLA: THE HUMAN PRICE OF SECURITIZATION

NOVEMBER 2022



Alba Dosta Valdés
Raquel Sierra Fernández



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IMAGES

Solidary Wheels No Border for Human Rights is the author of all the images in this article.

INTRODUCTION

Melilla is an autonomous city with 86,000 inhabitants (INE, 2021) that is surrounded by **one of the most fortified borders of the European Union.**

More than 12 km long and an increasingly complex border architecture (fences, wires, meshes, three-dimensional tow lines, surveillance systems, etc.) separate Morocco from Spain and establish one of the two land borders between Africa and Europe.

Its function is to slow down the traffic of migrants as much as possible under the guidelines of the European Union. This Spanish enclave, together with the Autonomous City of Ceuta, **is a danger to the physical and psychological integrity of the people** who try to cross it.

Although the first known division dates back to a wire fence placed in 1971 (El Plural), it was not until 1998 when the construction of a single initial 6 m high fence, what we know today as the Melilla Fence, began.

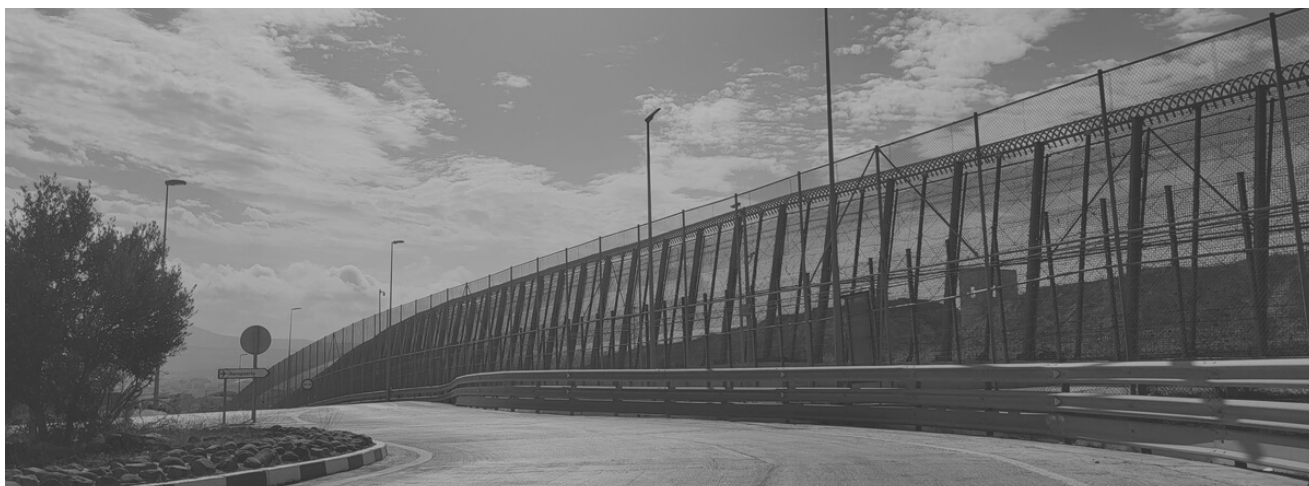


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THE ANATOMY OF THE FENCE: THE SURROUNDING TOXIC BUBBLE

The border fence of the city of Melilla, built with steel wire, is in turn composed of 3 fences of different characteristics. In order, from Spanish territory to Moroccan territory, the first one is a 6 meters high mesh fence, followed by the second fence which is 3 meters high and has around **300 numbered green gates along it, prepared and used to carry out pushbacks** (illegal returns) when people cross them, by means of a computerized system of remote closing and opening. Some of these gates coincide with a second and third gate in the following fences, which were built with Spanish funds. The last mesh is again 6 meters high, but with an inclination of 15 degrees towards Moroccan territory and the unusual feature of an inverted comb structure on top that prevents passage through it (El Diario, 2013).

In 8 different areas of the Melilla border **new fortification works** are observed right now in which they are installing 1 more meter of mesh on the inverted comb, with a sector of 50 meters already installed, although the largest of them coincides with the area of the passage of Chinatown.



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The fence infrastructure has been a source of controversy since its establishment. In 2007 and thanks to the **complaints of several human rights organizations** (HR), the removal of the barbed wire installed two years earlier was achieved, however these were placed again in 2013 (El País, 2013) and replaced in 2020 by a structure of steel bars.

Reinforcement of control between the Spanish fences took place with the installation of a three-dimensional towrope in 2007 worth more than 20 million euros, which proved to be unsuccessful in preventing the passage of migrants (20 minutos, 2006, 2013). This braided steel cable actually was a major obstacle to the work of the police



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guard, which is why it was removed under orders of Grande-Marlaska in 2019 after 14 years in use and under the narrative of "achieving a safer and more humane border" (La Información, 2019).

On the Moroccan side appears, first, a large artificial mountain that precedes an imposing ditch of about 2 m deep and 4 m wide, followed by another large mountain of earth. The fence continues with a barbed wire covering an area of 3 meters high along the entire length of the border (El Diario, 2013). There are 4 border crossing points created to transit between the two territories, of which only 1 is currently in use. The first border crossing point in the northern part of the city is the Mariguari crossing point, where arduous fortification work is currently underway (El Faro, 2022) and where possible fence crossings are foreseen.



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Continuing along the road is the Farhana border crossing, which also carries a large Spanish flag renovated 1 year ago (El Faro, 2021), very close to a large tree-covered mountain behind which there is a road restricted to the civil guard. On the other side of the road is the correctional center for minors "Baluarte" and, next to it, the CETI, where **there are currently less than 50 people, with a capacity of 782** (El Faro, 2020) which exposes a traumatic parallel reality of about 150 people, many of them young adults, doomed to survive and remain on the streets. The premise to justify their rejection in any of the reception centers to which they apply is their nationality: Moroccan.

Continuing south along the fast road to Melilla, one can see a Cemetery in use, divided by the fence into two confronting realities and just in front, the controversial center for minors named La Purisima, former fort of Sidi-Guariach built in the nineteenth century to confront the hostility between Melillians and Rifians (Chronology of the Rif War, 2013). This same center was the protagonist of an **investigation by the Guardia Civil last June where 24 people were arrested for belonging to a criminal organization which recruited minors** in vulnerable situations to use them for illicit purposes related to drug trafficking (Melilla Hoy, 2022).

Following the road, one can see the airport and the next border crossing, Barrio Chino, a former road used for the work of the "portadoras" (merchandise carriers), however, it is currently not in use. In addition, this is also the border crossing where the massacre took place in Melilla on **24J, tragic events that are still not accounted for by the administration as well as the absence of reparations to the victims** (El Diario, 2022).



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The last border crossing point is that of Beni Enzar, located to the east of the autonomous city and the only one to reopen on May 17 after the closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic two years ago. It is the busiest border crossing point in the African continent, together with the Tarajal crossing point in Ceuta. **This month the Council of Ministers has approved the installation of a 10 million euro entry and exit system at Beni Enzar and 6.8 million euro one at El Tarajal** (Europa Press, 2022). Also, in recent months, a fence with a peculiar structure has been built near the Melilla border crossing: the barbed wire becomes a closed pipe, the mesh is opaque and about 7 meters high, apparently infranchissable, the space is finite and cold.

THE RENTLESS SECURITIZATION AND MILITARIZATION OF THE BORDER

All these investments in the militarization of the border are intricately woven into the theory of securitization: **calling immigration a threat to national security turns immigration into a high-priority (emergency) policy concern requiring extraordinary measures** (Eroukhmanoff, C. 2017, p. 104). Taking as a starting point the attacks of September 11, 2001 and culminating with those in European cities in 2015 the securitization of borders began to infiltrate the political discourses of southern European countries, including Spain. In other words, security issues are socio-political constructs that change the priority of the issue at hand.

As mentioned above, investments into the border by the Spanish government are continued and go years back. However, **one only needs to look at the last three years to see a disproportionate investment.** For example, 3 years ago the Spanish Home Office approved a budget of over 9 million euros for the modernization of the Melilla fence. This modernization included the replacement of the barbed wire and other elements due to pressure from human rights organizations (El Faro de Melilla, 2019). The budget was 18 million, split between Ceuta and Melilla.

This system implies a disproportionate investment in border infrastructure without taking into account the real needs of the migrant population.

A year later the Government declared that it would invest 850 million into the two autonomous cities as part of a seven-year plan to renovate police stations, borders, prisons and barracks (Digital Melilla, 2020). In October 2021 the Ministry of Interior (Home Office) announced that it would initiate the second phase of the project (the first phase being the removal of the barbed wire) with the installation of inverted steel combs and new long-range cameras to increase surveillance at the fence separating Morocco and Melilla (Sánchez, P. 2021).

A couple of months ago, Newtral published a news article stating that between 2019 and June 2022 the government had invested a total of 48 million euros in the border of Ceuta and Melilla (García, L. 2022). That is, **48 million in 3 years.** In fact, the investment continues to increase: recently the government has approved 10 million for the installation of the Entry/Exit/System at the Beni Enzar border crossing (EFE, 2022). It is a system adopted by the European Council in 2017. It aims to reduce the waiting time at border checkpoints and the automatic calculation of the maximum permitted stay of each traveler, as well as to combat the fraudulent use of documents (European Council, 2022). In addition, law enforcement authorities will have access to travel history records.

In practice, this system implies, once again, a disproportionate investment in border infrastructure without taking into account the real needs of the migrant population. No matter how much they invest in the fence or in the automation of the border crossing, the migration trend will not be stopped, since they are not approaching the problem from a human rights perspective, but from a securitization one. Consequently, the migrants' population search for dangerous alternatives in order to gain access to Spanish territory.



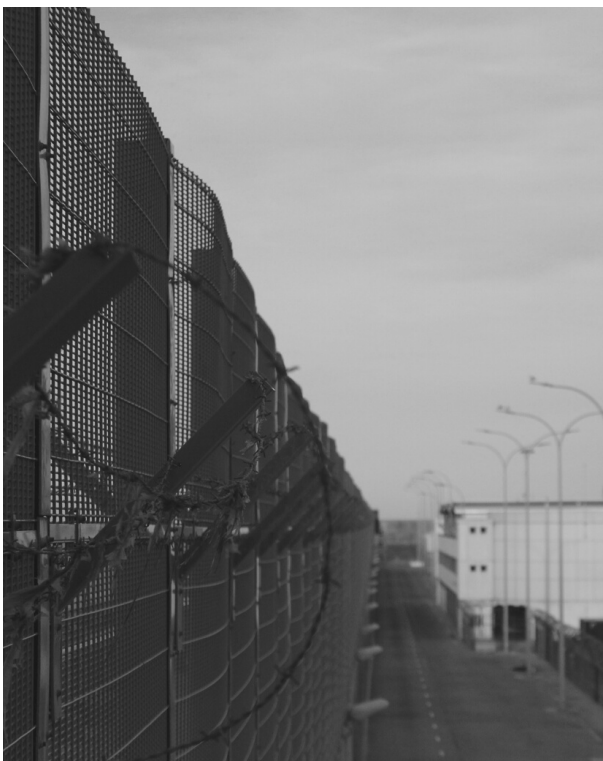
MARCH, 2022

SOLIDARY WHEELS NO BORDERS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

This brief compilation of news is only a small sample of the discourse that is spreading in the socio-political sphere: **securitization and militarization of the border, but also of the city itself**. Economic investment and work on the fence is being continuously carried out, making it higher and more inaccessible, in short, more dangerous.

WHAT DOES THIS IMPLY FOR PEOPLE ON THE MOVE?

These macro-investments are partly changing the patterns of entry into Spanish territory. Migrants joining Solidary Wheels' spaces mostly arrive by swimming. The vertical extension of the fence does not prevent their entry, but rather encourages the search for alternatives that lack security.



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In Melilla two locations can be identified where the "risky" practice is carried out. That is in the port of Beni Enzar (from Morocco to Melilla) and in the commercial port of Melilla (to reach the Spanish peninsula). These routes are used by both minors and adults. On the one hand, **the port of Beni Enzar is a significantly militarized port, with the presence of patrol dogs and motion sensors**. Those who try to do risky in Beni Enzar swim for 5 or 6 hours at night until they reach the Spanish coast. Although the distance between the Moroccan port and the coast of Melilla is relatively short, it is a heavily guarded part of the sea.

Migrants who arrive to Solidary Wheels' spaces report mistreatment by the coast guards when they find them swimming. Also, young people arrive in Melilla with dog bite wounds on their legs and injuries from batons from when they come into contact with the Moroccan police device in the port of Beni Enzar.

On the other hand, in the port of Melilla it is also usual to see kids doing risky, hiding in the cargo containers of the ships or climbing up the ropes that tie the ship to the port. The adults are doing risky because they do not want to wait for the asylum process in the city, yet even so, after several unsuccessful attempts, they opt for seeking asylum (and even though they have a departure date to the mainland, they continue to do "risky"). However, it is the minors who generally do risky because they cannot apply for asylum and the conditions in the minors' center are highly questionable.

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The infrastructure of the port of Melilla has become increasingly militarized: a greater presence of security forces, barbed wire with strips of clothing stretched out from those who have tried to do risky, new systems that detect heart rhythms, etc. Those who have unsuccessfully tried to risky warn that when they are found in the attempt they are taken to a place without any cameras, where physical and verbal violence is inflicted by the security forces and all their belongings are thrown into the sea.



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FINAL CONCLUSIONS

We, the Solidary Wheels No Borders For Human Rights Association, want to denounce the urgent **need for a change of perspective in the way migration is addressed** in the North African enclave. Huge amounts of money are spent on fencing material and high-tech for the registration of movement while public administrations do not invest in the real needs of migrants in the city, such as the regularization of minors, support for the emancipation of adults previously minors in state custody, as well as the lack of resources for the arrival of Moroccan migrants. While you read this, investment continues to



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be made in the border, the division that separates families and opportunities continues to grow. We advocate for a human rights-based approach, we work for **a future in which the system is built by serving people, not attacking them**. The fortification of the border does not solve the issues of conviviality, on the contrary, it is perceived as a particularly monitored territory with a high influx of police who strive to restrict the right of passage.

This materialized political boundary is nothing more than an artificial tool created to achieve segregation, separation and confrontation between communities. Cities like Melilla have no border, but are themselves a border. Behind the rise of walls lies a manipulative narrative that migrants are a threat to the way of life of some countries, rather than victims of economic policies perpetrated and promoted by richer countries.

Using the language of fear to persuade people to support security-based measures, particularly the militarization of borders, and to ignore their deadly consequences. It thus seeks to distract people from the real causes of insecurity: the concentration of power and wealth in the hands of a few, a system that only exists at the expense of the exploitation of other populations.

As stated in the manifesto "Melilla, place of a massacre" (Marie Cosnay, Mireille Grubert and Jane Sautière, 2022), it is urgent to understand that **migration is a right and not a crime**, that we must overcome the discourse of "mafias" as if this could absolve States of any guilt. Europe is changing, criminalizing immigration increasingly, controlling its borders, outsourcing control to other countries, creating hotspots, collaborating with the guards of neighboring countries, denying entry to surviving migrant boats and tightening the conditions for regularization. We know that those responsible for these murders are not the human traffickers' networks, we know that Europe has waged an **invisible war on those who come from the countries whose resources they exploit**.

The historical experiences of the fall of the Berlin Wall and Apartheid 30 years ago show that walls are not impermeable. Shifts in public opinion, as a result of successful social mobilizations, can undermine even the strongest systems of oppression. Education and political action can bring down the walled world that serves only a small elite and betrays the hopes of the vast majority of humanity seeking to live with dignity (Walled World Towards Global Apartheid, 2020).



OCTOBER, 2022

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