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At the Borders of the European Fortress: “Rizki”, Being a Young Migrant in Ceuta and Melilla

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At the Borders of the European Fortress: “Rizki”, Being a Young Migrant in Ceuta and Melilla

Luca Queirolo Palmas

Abstract: The focus of this article is the negated childhood and the massive presence of young migrants in transit on the streets of Ceuta and Melilla, looking by any means to cross the Strait of Gibraltar. In spite of the rhetoric on the fortress Europe which here clearly appears through dozens of kilometers of fences, the article explores the porosity of the border and focuses not only on conflicts for border crossing but also on those related to the settlement of young people and families with migrant origin. The research project originates from a visual ethnography carried out in these two Spanish enclaves in Morocco, the only existing land border between European Union and Africa. The narrative is based on several field encounters and filmed interviews with unaccompanied minors in transit, activists and volunteers, cross-border families and young immigrants in enclaves, border employees and social workers.

Keywords: migration, childhood, borders, ethnography, Ceuta&Melilla

Caballas, portguards and harragas

The focus of this article is the ‘scandalous, obscene’ presence of young migrants in transit on the streets of Ceuta and Melilla. These ‘ungrateful’ guests are often on the run from protection centers that they perceive as jails and, for this reason, they are determined to cross the sea that separates them from a desired ‘elsewhere’. Theirs are stories of non-docile subjects, kept on a ‘leash’ by the powers and institutions that want to limit the autonomy of migration (Queirolo Palmas & Rahola, 2018; De Genova, 2013; 2017). Other ‘obscene’ presences will be discussed in the following pages, along with the concrete, often exclusionary, work of the right hand and the left hand of the state (Bourdieu, 2003), that is, roughly saying, police and social services. These presences include women who cross the border every day to work, mainly to meet the care needs of Spanish families, and families of migrant origin who are trying to settle down in the two Spanish cities, enroll their children in schools and register them at the registry office. Porosity of the border and settlement clashes will be addressed in the second paragraph, while the third paragraph will focus on the negated childhood of young migrant trying illegally to reach Spain mainland by any means.

This research project originates from a visual ethnography carried out in November 2018 in these two contexts.¹ The narrative is based on several field encounters with unaccompanied minors in transit, activists, volunteers, cross-border families and young immigrants in enclaves, portguards, workers in social services or in the informal economy of migration. Like Ibra, for example, who is an unauthorized parking attendant and the first person I met as soon as I crossed the fences of the port of Ceuta, about 45 minutes and 16 nautical miles after boarding a fast ferry from Algeciras. His job consists of protecting parked cars from troublemakers, mostly Moroccan children or

¹ Starting from converging but not entirely overlapping research interests, field work was shared with the anthropologist Juan Pablo Aris Escarcena (Universidad de Sevilla) and the Italian-Argentine filmmaker Nicolas Braguinsky Cascini, who were busy finishing *20 miles*, a documentary on the criminalization of solidarity. Most of the interviews were carried out together during the final stages of filming; my ethnographic observation – which arises both from shooting and from observing the background work during production – is also turned into a specific piece of visual work (Rizki, M. Cannarella, Luca Queirolo Palmas, available at: www.laboratoriosociologiavisuale.it). Building a deep relationship with the protagonists of the visual narration is the warp and the woof of a research device that we call filmic ethnography (Sebag et al., 2018). The ethnographic process, as is well known, owes much to chance, intuition and improvisation. The making of ten video-recorded interviews with privileged witnesses – subjects who have gained an expert and practical knowledge, linked to a publicly recognized position in the field of research – was dictated by the needs of film production. Yet, the knowledge exposed in this text exceeds this plan and, using the narrative style of ethnography and public sociology (2005), also feeds on informal conversations, occasional meetings, unexpected discussions and encounters that animate the researcher’s daily life in its relationship with gatekeepers, privileged witnesses and other only apparently marginal actors. I’m grateful to Elena Boschi for her editing work on this article.

teenagers, who seek shelter in the shade of palm trees in a small garden. This is an excerpt of what he said:

I am *caballa*, from here, from Ceuta, I've been here for a lifetime even if I come from there, from Morocco. Thank goodness I got rid of the Moroccan monarchy. I'm on the other side and I don't want to hear anything anymore. When I am there, I keep the garden beautiful by keeping migrants, these children, away. I keep it clear. There, in Morocco, poor people have neither rights nor resources, you have to pay to see a doctor, you can't even talk and protest, it's normal that they come here to go to Spain, to Europe, if they manage.

I crossed the Strait of Gibraltar on a cold sunny day in early November 2018. This is Ceuta, but there is something familiar that I have already seen in the numerous border zones, in Calais like in Ventimiglia (Queirolo Palmas, 2018; Giliberti & Queirolo Palmas, 2019), where the daily battle for the right to move is fought. Dozens of street children, whose features are not unlike those of the unauthorized parking attendant, roam the streets in a time filled with wait, but also trial, effort, risk, and sudden accelerations. Waiting to get through, to jump over the fence, to get on a truck heading to the *peninsula* (a term commonly used in Ceuta and Melilla, as well as in Balears and Canary Islands, to refer to Spain mainland), to get on a ferry by any means. There are a lot of police officers of all kinds around as well as grids, barbed wires, anti-climbing plates, cameras, motion and CO2 sensors, and control rooms to protect the port area, the gateway through which people can (re)gain their freedom of movement.

Ceuta and Melilla are part of Europe and yet they are not. Here, in fact, Schengen agreements do not apply and free movement towards the peninsula and the 'real' Europe is valid only for some categories of subjects. What had been in operation for a long time in Ceuta and Melilla, in the rest of the continent has only appeared in 2015 with the hardening of the internal borders of the European Union (Giliberti, 2017; Hess & Kaspark 2017; Babels, 2017) as one of the institutional approaches to managing the so-called "migration crisis" of 2015 (De Genova & Tazzioli, 2016). The two enclaves work as confinement zones to trap young migrants in transit who continue, despite everything, to consider them as a springboard toward that global modernity from which they feel excluded. In Morocco, and throughout the Maghreb, these young people are known as *harraga*, a term evoking the act of burning borders and documents (Pandolfo, 2007). Vacchiano (2018) also underlines how, in a context of exclusion, this type of migration is turned into a rite of passage into adulthood:

Beyond the dimensions of desperation and *déracinement* (uprooting) that are often attributed to them in Morocco, the *hreg* (burning, the most common colloquial term for irregular migration) appears rather

as a claim of skill and courage, an exaltation of individuality, an act that brings into play a responsibility toward others and an imaginary healing of a wounded masculinity. In many places of urban marginalization, the hreg supports a project of symbolic and material redemption (ibidem, 2018, p.164)

According to Ibra, the parking attendant, harraga are a problem, although obviously his work – like that of many other inhabitants of the Spanish enclaves – depends precisely on making these people and these lives problematic. Yet, there is a tenderness in his words, the tenderness of those who see in these children's lives a piece of their own history, a closeness despite the distance, a common origin that creates a relationship, and an ambivalent symbolic collocation. In the quick jokes I exchanged with Ibra in the time it took to give him a few coins as a tip for his work, not only a description of the place which the young harraga are fleeing emerges, but also the naturalness of the right to escape (Mezzadra, 2001) an authoritarian space and the right to search for a better life.

The caballas² are the inhabitants of Ceuta who were born there and are long-term residents, but they are also the descendants of a more hybrid 'elsewhere' where the colonial history of the Spanish settlers got mixed with that of the colonized. Ibra, proudly introducing himself as a caballa, is a marginal subject within a broader economy based on the illegalization of transit (Andersson, 2014). His relationship with those whose mobility is contested is mediated by his feeling that he is part of a story that transcends hispanidad, a cultural legacy that people in these territories are constantly reminded of by the numerous Spanish flags and the thousands of military uniforms that crowd everyday spaces. His native languages are darija or tamazigh, the same that is spoken on the other side of the Tarajal border crossing; his religion is Islam, the same belief of the young harraga that he confronts himself with; his skin is olive-colored, not unlike that of the boys he chases away, as if they were flies, from the parking lot he manages.

A few days later and over 400 km away in Melilla I brought food and drinks to a sort of tribe of kids camped on the cliffs as they waited to cross the fences that protect the docks and I stopped to talk to two young police officers at the port – both white, 'real' Spaniards, as they had come from the peninsula to work on this side of the Strait.³ If Ibra, a caballa, protects cars from the danger posed by unaccompanied minors (referred to as MENAs in the jargon of the Spanish institutions), security officers protect the gates to the port and the ferries from the same danger. We could say that their jobs

² The term evokes the name of fish found in abundance in the Strait of Gibraltar.

³ Thanks to the special economic and tax regime in the two enclaves, residents get a 25% bonus on their salary.

are similar, as they are working in the same economic sector. However, their perspectives are different:

Figure 1. On the fences. The port of Melilla



Source: Courtesy of José Palazón

We are the true victims. If you spend one night with me, you won't be feeling compassion for these children anymore. They throw stones and bottles at you and you can't touch them because you run the risk of being fired. My children are not free to go around at night, the MENAs rob people on the street. We're the victims, we are! Ask the citizens, ask them, they'll all tell you the same thing. You don't have to feed them. At the Center for Minors they have everything, a roof over their head and food, they should stay there ... and be grateful. Instead... they get away and we have to deal with them. If you feed them – like NGOs who spend every night here do – you help to keep them on the streets, keep them around the port fighting with us. I guess you're Italian? You're tired of having migrants there, rightly. It seems to me that now you want to change policies ... or am I wrong?

Here there is no tenderness or pity towards the *harraga* (some very little, under ten years of age, and marked by the harshness of life on the streets), even if, given their age, they could be the port guards' own children. These officers' job consists of blocking the repeated attempts to breach border crossings by these small, annoying 'flies'. In this game of snakes and ladders, all players often return to square one – the *harraga* jump across and sneak

into every possible vector of hope, the guards chase them away and repel them. The behavior and the words of the port guards give away their annoyance and anger, but also a pinch of envy and admiration when they mention the racism that in Italy has become an institutionalized part of daily politics.

From this side of the waterfront, the site of the formal labor market, the state speaks and acts in the name of white citizenship, white families and white children. On the other side, Ibra speaks as a *caballa* from an ambivalent position, caught between Ceuta's *mestizo*, colonial history and his marginal job in the migration and security industry. Ibra and the port guards are pawns in a greater game, crowded with a multiplicity of figures that keep daily life going in Ceuta and Melilla – the guards and the thieves, those who jump across borders and those who reject them, those who wait and those who force them to wait, but also those who cross the border every day to work or trade.

Porous borders and contested settlements

In this article I will focus only indirectly on the great fence that separates Ceuta and Melilla from Morocco and which is commonly seen as the most evident sign of the consolidation of Europe as a fortress. Rather, I am interested in observing the porosity that affects this area. For instance, the fact that those living in the provinces of Nador and Tetouan have the right to enter without a visa by day but must return to Morocco in the evening.⁴ Much of the workforce in these Spanish cities is thus relocated flexibly, on an hourly basis, to a non-EU country.

Maribel, a retired headteacher, is the spokesperson for Digmun (Dignidad de mujeres, niños y niñas) an association that has been working in Ceuta since 2005 with migrant women and minors through social, educational and language-focused support projects. As she says, the activities take place in a climate of growing hostility: “they accuse us of taking advantage of public subsidies and not taking care of Spanish citizens”. For a part of the local population, the solidarity initiatives aimed at Moroccan women and their children contribute to generating a pernicious “call effect”, when in actual fact it is precisely the reproduction needs of Spanish families that constantly attract Moroccan women to this side of the border – women whose presence is much needed but not welcome (Zolberg, 1997). This is how Maribel describes cross-border women working in domestic service and in the hotel sector in Ceuta:

⁴ In this respect, Ceuta and Melilla have been exempt from the Schengen agreements since Spain joined the EU in 1991, as *ad hoc* clauses have enabled them to keep cross-border relations with Morocco open to protect the economy of the two cities.

... they sleep in the city irregularly, where they are working or at the homes of friends and neighbors. I call these women invisible because they take care of all domestic work and they're trapped. They cook, clean, wash, look after children and the elderly. Thanks to them, the women of Ceuta can work outside their homes. They are the ones who do everything, they do everything! They are the most vulnerable, they don't know the language, they don't know their rights, then they're women and they're poor. In short, they have all the characteristics to be fully exploited by people here. If I want, I won't pay you, I won't give you any holidays. The offer is very broad. Are you not OK with these conditions? Well, I have all the provinces of Tetouan and Nador at my disposal.

For these women, the border opens during the day and closes at night. They do not need a visa, they just need to show their residence card. Then, from 7pm the visa becomes necessary again and cross-border workers can enter a state of irregularity by seeking refuge at a friend's house where they wait for the end of the curfew.

Something similar happens to another category of subjects that feed the economy of Ceuta and Melilla. The two autonomous cities are free ports that enjoy special tax breaks; every day thousands of women carry on their shoulders up to 80 kg of Spanish and European goods which will then be resold on the Moroccan side. It is largely work on commission in which traders on both sides of the border are male, while the most dangerous work is taken on by poor Moroccan women from rural areas and with a low cultural capital, who guarantee the only income in their households. The *porteadoras* women (carriers) are present only in the marginal areas of Ceuta and Melilla, the industrial estates close to the border crossings where many large retailers like Mercadona, Lidl, Decathlon, and Carrefour have strategically settled and where the goods are packaged and prepared to be carried. Fuentes Lara (2017) underlines the analogy between cross-border trade in the two enclaves and industrial *maquilas* on the Mexican-US border, as both are characterized by the exploitation of a racialized female workforce and by juridical devices which put the merchandise under a duty-free regime. The political and economic actors in Ceuta and Melilla defend the prerogatives of this so-called atypical trade as, on the one hand, they hinder the proposals to improve labor standards and the civil and social rights of the *porteadoras* and, on the other, they support the need to make the border more fluid and safer for the passage of goods. Housekeepers, service workers and *porteadoras* invisibly meet reproductive needs of the primary labor market (mostly white, public sector employment) and support the development of profitable commercial exchanges. The secondary labor markets, which are localized and de-localized on a flexible and temporary basis, represent the 'virtuous and useful circulation', whose fluidity is sought and publicly supported, as

opposed to the ‘vicious and dangerous circulation’ of the young sub-Saharan males trying to jump over the fences, which nonetheless generates important economic flows.⁵

According to APDHA (2018), out of a total of 85,000 residents in the city of Ceuta, there are a daily average of 20,000-25,000 cross-border workers coming from Morocco; similar figures are reported from the same source about Melilla. If, on the one hand, the spectacle of the great fence symbolizes the dream of a fortress, the need for protection and the alert about an invasion at the gates on which the possibility of a subsidized labor market for white people is based, on the other hand, the economic life of the two enclaves depends on the permeability of the border and on a limited freedom of movement for the Moroccan residents of Nador and Tetouan (Vacchiano, 2013).

As far as our informants can remember, the border has always been porous, at times indistinguishable, as the cultural and commercial exchanges have been permanent. The construction of the fences in the mid-1990s has generated the figure of the cross-border worker, turning into migrants people who, until Spain’s entry into the EU in 1986 and also by virtue of the colonial history of the Spanish protectorate up to 1956, had moved more or less freely between the two sides of the border. Fatima, a young educator in a Center for MENAs in Melilla, sums up the mental transformation induced by the material appearance of the border:

... My father tells me that when he was young there was only a kind of low barbed wire that he simply crossed with a little jump. It was easy, and nothing happened, nothing happened. The misery continued to exist on the other side, but the Moroccans could come and go and so could we, we came and went ... without checks, without problems. If it were up to me, I’d knock the *valla* [fence] down immediately, totally ...

Redouan, an activist involved in many solidarity projects in Ceuta and promoter of Alarmphone, an independent helpline for those who try to cross the Strait of Gibraltar by sea, reports the normality of exchanges related to small businesses, schools and family visits:

I clearly remember. The valla was built from 1994 onward. I remember how the traders came from Ben Yunes to bring sour milk or other produce from the country here to Benzù, to Ceuta. And Moroccan children came to school here because the village where their national school was located was very far away, in Castillejos. People came to

⁵ On this issue, see the documentary *Les Sauteurs*, an extraordinary film by Moritz Siebert, Estephan Wagner, and Abou Bakar Sidibé. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LCv-ipG8O-ZM>.

Ceuta to do the shopping, to go to school. Yes, there was a small guard post, but no one paid any attention to it ...

Spain's entry into Europe and the construction of the valla (the fence) since the mid-1990s have changed the urban space and the logic of mobility, generating segregations based on ethnicity and residence status in Ceuta and Melilla, and giving rise to a new migrant condition. This is what José Palazon, a famous photo-activist whose shots have traveled around the world, tells us:

When I arrived in Melilla, the valla did not exist. And there weren't any mobility problems. We always went to Morocco, we crossed and just said "hello". Then we came back to sleep on this side. And the Moroccans did the same. They came, went, looked for work, tried to sell something, and finally returned to their homes in the evening. There were no problems. When the valla was built, many Moroccan border workers changed their minds ... "but if I get out of Melilla tomorrow, they won't let me in again to work" and so many people started to stay over on this side, in situations of hardship, in the disadvantaged neighborhoods where they were forced to concentrate.

In 1986, a strong mobilization of non-Spanish residents developed in the two cities to claim their right to citizenship. Back then, Muslims were 32% of the population in Melilla and 18% in Ceuta. Most of them had been born and raised in the enclaves, without any right to nationality (Instituto Elcano, 2014). Their struggles were successful and led to the amendment of the *ley de extranjería* (migration act) and the granting of over 10,000 naturalizations (Planet Contreras, 2004).

Since then, thanks to the settlement of Moroccan migrants, access to citizenship and the birth of second generations,⁶ the local newspapers are beginning to publish alarmist reports on data that shows the growing Moroccanization of a society that previously was and imagined itself only white and Catholic. The Real Instituto Elcano (Arteaga, 2014), a think tank close to the *Partido Popular* (the main right wing party in Spanish political system), has claimed, with palpable concern, that half the population in the city of Melilla is now of Arab and Berber origins and of Muslim religion; in Ceuta the process is only slower. The analysts of the Real Instituto conclude in an alarming tone that "The most important problem is the demographic one, because it alters the political and social balance of the population (...)" (*ibidem*, p.154).

⁶ The first works of fortification of the border began in 1995 in Ceuta and in 1998 in Melilla. According to INE (Instituto Nacional de Estadística), in that period Melilla had 63,989 inhabitants and Ceuta 69,735. Since then, the population has begun to grow at a rapid pace, reaching the roof of 85,000 people in 2018 in both contexts.

Thus, Ceuta and Melilla have become not only post-colonial outposts populated by soldiers, public sector workers and their families, and economic and political testing grounds where the industry that seeks to illegalize migration, despite its failures (Andersson, 2016), attracts significant flows of money and investments,⁷ but also complex societies which are internally stratified along class, national and racial lines (Balibar & Wallerstein, 2010). The two cities therefore boast different records in terms of unemployment and the spread of poverty.⁸

The growth of the *valla* and of sophisticated and intrusive border checks has pushed many Moroccans to settle, in an attempt to become Spanish citizens and full residents. Yet, according to Redouan, “the rights (of the population of migrant origin) have been suspended on the other side of the strait”, by which he means to highlight how here the process of rooting migrants in the two enclaves, their transformation into regular immigrants and then into Spanish citizens, is particularly long and difficult. This process is persistently hindered by administrative procedures aimed at dissuading that are enforced only in these two autonomous cities to prevent a new, mass naturalization like the one that took place in the second half of the 1980s, which has radically changed the social composition of the local population. Schools and the condition of young people are two of the main issues in these conflicts. Redouan’s account, for instance, draws a connection between personal biography and educational rights:

I’ve always lived here, we’re from the outskirts of Ceuta. My father did some work in fishing, some on construction sites, he was unemployed for a while... He couldn’t study in Morocco, my grandparents were from the countryside, they forced him to go to work as a child, then they sent him over here. There are many different opinions on a lot of topics, even among us Muslims... but on this we agree. Why can’t a boy who was born here go to school? Why hasn’t he got any right to register at the municipal registry office? Why can’t he have a regular job? Why can the children of immigrants born on the other side of the strait go to school and ours can’t?

⁷ More than half of all employees work in the public sector in the two enclaves (56% in Melilla, 52.6% in Ceuta). According to analysts at the Instituto Real Elcano (Arteaga, 2014, p.153), “the economic viability of Ceuta and Melilla is supported only through a high state subsidies”.

⁸ As of December 31st 2018, the unemployment rate was 24% in Ceuta and 23.9% in Melilla (respectively first and second highest of all the Autonomous Regions – see *Encuesta de Población Activa*, INE, 2018). Also, the risk of poverty had reached a record high, affecting about one third of the population in Ceuta and one fourth in Melilla, according to the *Encuesta de Condiciones de Vida* carried out by INE (see: <https://datosmacro.expansion.com/demografia/riesgo-pobreza/espana-comunidades-autonomas/ceuta>)

Bea and Maria are two social workers in a low-income neighborhood of Melilla. I met them during an educational workshop. At the time, they were in charge of a baby who was just a few months old and they were desperately struggling against the municipal officers to register him at the registry office, even though he was born at the city hospital. This is how they described the paradoxical situation they were facing:

Many public sector workers and social workers are actively and consciously promoting exclusion. To avoid having to register the new born, they ask for sets of documents that are impossible to put together. There are children who were born here but can't go to the hospital, get vaccines, go to the registry office ... that in so many words don't exist – a grotesque, but tragic situation. It's impossible to become a resident, it's difficult to enroll in school, and it may even happen that some parents and teachers' unions oppose the schooling of undocumented children, saying that they lower the quality of education for their children.

The fear of a growing Moroccan population and of their influence on the local politics, a discourse that has repeatedly featured in the local press, explains how white people of Spanish origins use the levers of the local administration to slow down the ongoing demographic transformation. In this scenario, as José tells us, every desk, every public sector worker becomes a border, a device of exclusion and production of widespread illegalization and marginalization.

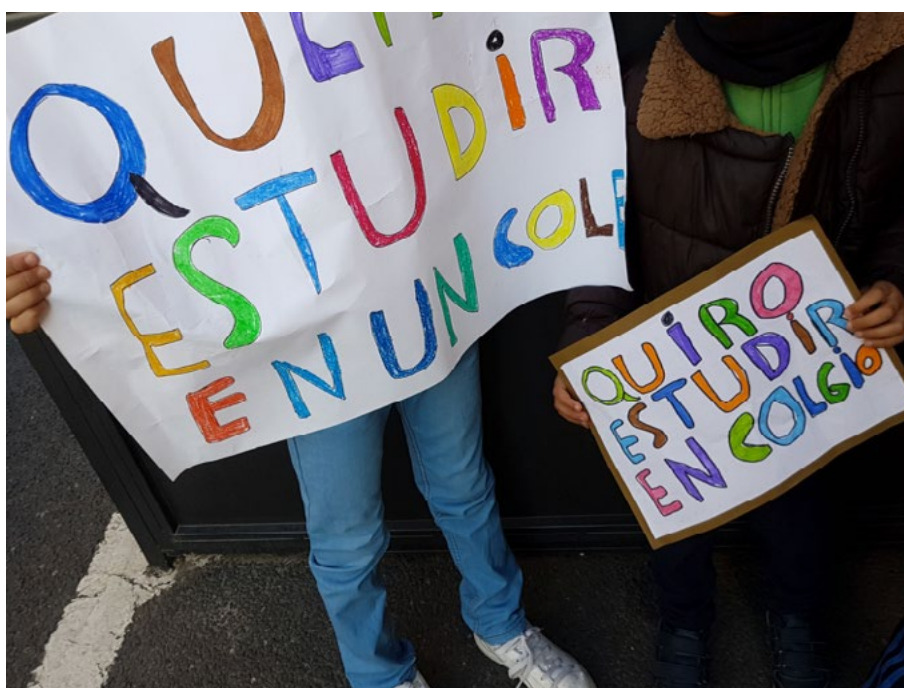
There must be 7,000-10,000 people living here in Melilla, they were born here or have been here for a long time and. If they were living in the peninsula, they would already be Spanish citizens, not by birth, but because their parents would already have Spanish citizenship! I'm not from here, but I'm white and I'm not considered a foreigner. They call them foreigners, even if they were born here. It's curious and crazy. Every three or four years the scandal of children appears again, children born here who are not admitted into schools because they have no documents. Children who have to demonstrate for their right to attend to school ...

In recent years, solidarity movements have often been engaged in political disputes to force local administrations and the state to recognize immigrant children and admit them into schools. After protests and legal complaints, children born in the enclaves but without regular documents were able to enroll and attend school in several waves. This is José's account of the most recent fight of 2018 of which he was one of the organizers:

One year, the children went in front of the school, in front of the Court of Justice, in front of the Government Delegation (the Prefecture) to protest. Even when it rained and when it was cold, they were

always there, even in rainy or cold weather, shouting: “We want to go to school”. In the end, the new socialist government in Madrid caved in and 160 children were able to enroll. I don’t know, it seems almost absurd ... children who have to protest to go to school. Perhaps something similar happened in South Africa during the apartheid ... It seems absurd that today in Ceuta, in Melilla, a government run by white people on African land doesn’t want to educate children of Moroccan origin...

Figure 2. *Quiero Estudiar* (I want to study). Demonstration in Melilla



Source: Courtesy of José Palazón

According to De Genova (2013) the counterpoint to the border spectacle is precisely that of an obscene inclusion, a subaltern inclusion along color lines and that is also evident in the public authorities’ incessant struggle against attempts by cross-border workers and second generations to settle in these urban areas. In this sense, the public debate that condemns and tries to prevent cross-border women from accessing hospitals in the enclaves to give birth to their children in Spain, thus threatening the ‘whiteness’ of the border, is an example of this phenomenon.⁹

⁹ In fact, the two autonomous cities have the highest rates of births and weddings of all the Spanish regions, which is a clear indicator of de-bordering practices. See: <https://datos-macro.expansion.com/demografia/natalidad/espana-comunidades-autonomas> and <https://>

The porosity of the border is always precariously balanced between de-bordering tactics and re-bordering strategies (Ambrosini, 2018; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013) in which administrative law and politics play a central role. Local political actors are constantly bargaining to have the central government pass and guarantee exceptional legislation on access to nationality, the registry office, schools, healthcare, on the deportability of minors, and so on. Their aims are to resist, channel and slow down “excessive” mobility and settlements. Those who escape the status of cross-border worker, conquering that of legal immigrant in Ceuta and Melilla, in fact become entitled to free movement towards the peninsula, thus breaking the blocking and filtering mechanisms of these two borderlands. Those who become citizens therefore threaten the reproduction of local political power held by white and Catholic politicians in the two cities.¹⁰

On the waterfront

Port infrastructures in Ceuta and Melilla defend Spain and Europe from young *harraga* whose presence is hyper-visible on the streets and in media representations. They live in groups, in camps near the port. I joined Eli and other Melilla volunteers in the distribution of food and medicines that takes place every night at 7pm under the fortress. Approximately one hundred children of different ages gather there. This is how Eli describes their stories and living conditions:

They come from the Rif, or from the slums of the big cities, Fez, Rabat, Casablanca ... they're dirty, little, hungry, and cold, with unsuitable clothes for winter and some without shoes. They live scattered on the cliffs, many sniff glue to deal with the hardship of life on the streets. They're covered in skin and genital infections, they often carry the signs of wounds from jumping over the fences or from being beaten by the port police. Even Mosques reject them when they ask to take a shower, even though they're Muslim. We know that Mosques have received pressure from the Municipal Council. And even we, white volunteers, are not welcome ...

Eli keeps talking while treating a cut wound. She comes from the Basque country and is part of a solidarity group that for over ten years has been

datosmacro.expansion.com/demografia/matrimonios/espana-comunidades-autonomas. In the media debate, the term *avalancha* is normally used to refer to the concentration of mule-women in back-breaking trade at the border or to sub-Saharan Africans jumping over the fences as well as to express criticism on the phenomenon of Moroccan women giving birth across the border.

¹⁰ Historically, political power has been in the hands of the Partido Popular. The political parties that represent the Muslim population have begun to appear in the 1995 local elections and currently attract one quarter to one fifth of the vote (Arteaga, 2014).

caring for the young *harraga*. This activity is often opposed by the City Government, that has accused the group of keeping children on the streets by providing services; in a curious inversion of causes, it is the free distribution of food on the streets that is to blame for the street children's situation, a rhetorical mechanism similar to that which identifies the origin of *pateras* crossing the Mediterranean in the existence of independent search and rescue operations. Eli's group seeks to reduce the damage, support the transit and accompany the choices of these young people. The volunteers, almost all women, have a close relationship with the boys, they know them by name, and support them emotionally, not only materially, keeping themselves informed about who has managed to cross, and they refuse to cooperate with the municipal officials who want them to convince the boys to return, against their will, to the centers from which they escaped. These evening meetings with Eli in Melilla and with Redouan on the cliffs beside the commercial port of Ceuta, constitute small safe spaces, moments of care, protected time along a turbulent route. Fatima adds that, working in such facilities as she did for a long while, the motivations behind the *harraga*'s preferred options are evident:

They don't have access to public services in the city. They can't go to the cinema, even if they have the money for the ticket, because they don't let them in. They can't play soccer in a pitch, because the other kids call the police to send them away. The same goes for pools, showers, schools, hospitals, and libraries. Occasionally politics does a *limpieza* (clean-up) and brings them to the centers. Those who are considered adults, after a brief "age test", are thrown back to the other side of the border.

In Fatima's words, the *chicos-calle* (street children) are counterbalanced by the *chicos-centro* (children living in centers for unaccompanied minors). As Vacchiano reports (2018), young Moroccans use the term *khayriyya* to refer to these institutions in Europe, linking them to the state-run centers in their country where a variety of dangerous and vulnerable subjects are detained. Many young people I met during my ethnography spoke about their migration as a way to access a global modernity, represented by consumption and fashionable goods. Nonetheless, as Zygmunt Bauman has taught us, the ability to move has become one of the main factors for social stratification in the global world. Their stories and their ways of life also evoke their attempt to escape the humiliation of empty waiting time in marginal neighborhoods without opportunities as well as their determination to save their families by supporting them financially.

Being stranded in Ceuta and Melilla, a few miles from an 'elsewhere' that is almost within reach, also makes the poor social and educational programs that these centers can offer very unattractive. However, Bea and Maria ac-

curately describe the aims of the local policy framework within which they have been operating as social workers:

The Municipal Council asks educators and social workers to do *limpieza*. This means bringing these children to the centers, getting them out of people's sight, expelling them, preventing them from registering at the *padrón* (registry office). But we reject this racist role.

Although they are barred from having any possible relationship with their peers, these kids remain hyper-visible in the urban space, embodying the scandal of subjects who anywhere else would be in school, but here are trying to cross the Strait, risking their lives. What local governments want is for *chicos-calle* to turn into *chicos-centro*, to adapt to and accept life in overcrowded centers that often have no educational resources, are located on the edge of town, and whose main purpose is essentially to contain their presence. Maribel, who has been cooperating with the Center for Minors in Ceuta for a long time, explains that:

Of course, we give them a roof, a bit of food, a bed, a doctor, some language training. At least when they run away they have some more resources available. But their dream is to leave, to cross the border, I mean, cross the port and go to the other side. They'd rather stay on the cliff in the cold and keep trying ...

The Centers for Minors are meant to block and filter mobility, detain the kids until they are of age, when their residence cards expire, and they are no longer eligible for protection. The destiny of many of them is to become future deportable irregular immigrants. The imposition of indecipherable and exhausting temporalities for those who manage to get across the walls of the two enclaves turns out to be a crucial power device. The wait, a pervasive horizon in the stories of migrants in transit of all ages, is in fact a kind of weapon, as Andersson (2014) reminds us, in the fight against illegal migrations. It is a capital that the authorities have at their disposal to slow down flows and build bottlenecks to redirect travel routes. Turning Ceuta and Melilla into unpredictable waiting places decreases their 'passage value' in the overall migration industry.

Fatima, who has experienced work in one of these centers from within, clearly explained this process:

When you turn 18 you get out and you often find yourself with an expired residence permit that's no longer valid. At that point, you're asked to register at the *padrón* [registry office], but you can no longer provide this document, you need a work permit to get a residence permit ... and in the end you find yourself on the streets. Inside the center, kids try to get the right documents, so they can get out with everything in order when they turn 18. However, often they don't

manage to do it, so many of them would rather get out before on their own, leave the center and pursue the dream of reaching the peninsula. Some tell us that on the streets they feel safer, less exposed to the abuse and violence that occur in overcrowded spaces with poor infrastructures. Then some centers function as punishment centers for the unruliest youths...

For this reason, many boys run away and would rather live on the streets, constantly trying to cross. Carlos, a social worker in a Center for Minors in Ceuta, sums up the thoughts of the many young people he has met: "Why do I have to learn Spanish or do any kind of training, if when I turn 18 they throw me out and make me go back to Morocco?". The lives of these runaway boys are similar to those of the migrants in transit in Calais and Ventimiglia, with constant and frenetic attempts to hide on trains, in trucks, in cars, and on ferries. Crossing the Strait is often just a stage in a journey toward family members or family networks that have been settled in France, Belgium, Germany, or Italy for a long time. Every borderland along these routes – be they external or internal borders – once again becomes a similar battlefield on which transients, both minors and adults, are exposed to a series of risks due to their willingness to keep moving on.

One day, while we were distributing food with Eli just a few meters from dozens of Spanish and European flags waving on the fortress, the boys repeated jokingly: "O llego a peninsula, o me muero!" (I'll either make it to the peninsula or I'll die). The scandalous activities of the young *harraga* evoke a practice of 'edgework', a voluntary risk-taking (Lyng, 2005) that cannot simply be reduced to a condition of victimhood. In their conversations, they use the invented term *rizki* to define themselves and the extreme 'sport' they practise around the port. Fatima told me that:

They always do *rizki*, all day, and they're always talking about *rizki*. There have been many deaths and many children have gone missing. We don't know how many bodies have been recovered on the other side. It's the boys who tell us that many of them have left and no one has heard from them again. I know guys who have lost the use of their legs due to falls and are now disabled. As the term suggests, doing *rizki* puts them in a very risky situation. They know it, they accept it. They don't want to set foot in hospital, because they know that doctors will call the police to take them back to the centers or expel them. At the same time, doing *rizki* is also a way of playing. This is my theory. They're driven by the adrenaline of this deadly game. Every time they see the police they run away, they get on trucks, on ferries ... and it's some kind of video game ... with a clear goal ... making it to the peninsula where they have friends or family. And to do *rizki* you need drugs. When you take them, you're not cold, you're not scared,

you're not hungry ... Are they doped? Yes, they are... but it's their way of dealing with life on the streets and keeping doing *rizki*.

Doing this requires tenacity, courage, strength, intelligence, cunning, commitment – all qualities that remind us of the importance of body and warrior capital (Sauvadet, 2006) and almost evoke a rite of initiation into adult masculinity. To do *rizki* you need to travel light, with just a small backpack. Living in transit means that your personal belongings are reduced to little more than your own body, which means being reduced to 'bare life'. Any objects and clothing needed for subsistence are abandoned when they are worn out and then found again along the way, often through encounters with humanitarian workers and volunteers. The life of things is fragile and ephemeral. As Redouan points out, there is another element in the moral landscape of *rizki*:

Once a migrant told me “the fight is not about being the strongest, the fight is about being lucky”. You can be strong, brave, and reckless, but that's nothing, you can get stuck. Fate – that's a reality. You can try for months on end without managing to cross. And then one comes along and at the first attempt he finds himself on the peninsula ...

Individual fortune fuels collective hope. Knowing that many have succeeded, that it can be done, generates energy and a mood of resistance among all those who try, who accept the risks that this way of crossing involves.

The transgressive attitude of these unaccompanied minors has gradually become the focus of the media panic. They embody the perfect monster, the scapegoat, the source of all perceived insecurity, the ungrateful and vengeful guest. The biggest demonstration that was ever held on the streets of Ceuta took place in December 2016 to denounce the growth of crime committed by *harraga* and other young migrants. Maribel, from her past experience working in the school field, told me how parents often use the expression “es una zona de MENAs”, “cuidado, que se vienen los MENAs”¹¹ to talk about a dangerous place or a dangerous situation. Minors in transit resist institutionalization and, at the same time, represent an easy target. The panic surrounding their presence is highly productive. As José highlighted, they generate billetes, hard cash:

Local authorities are constantly trying to spread panic among the population with stories about these children, which have become the most criminalized group in the city. The problem must always be visible and present, so they can negotiate, negotiate future subsidies with the central government to eradicate the problem. In Melilla we make money from borders and migrations. It's one of the few clean sources of money – compared to drugs, smuggling, and money laundering.

¹¹ “This a zone of MENA” and “Attention, the MENAs are coming”

The port is half-dead, commercially and in terms of tourism, but it stays alive thanks to the needs of security, agents, cameras and barbed wire. So, it's really good that the MENAs are a problem! The more there are, the better! More panic means more money that the city can ask the state for. Before the MENAs there were black migrants assaulting the fences, who allowed us to cry 'invasion' because there were a few thousand people. Today black migrants have more problems jumping over the fences, so the minors have replaced them ...

In November 2018, while I was carrying out this research, there was an animated discussion between local politicians and the central government on the distribution of 38 million euros destined to the 12,437 unaccompanied minors present on Spanish territory. The issue was the funds assigned to Melilla (1.3 million for 1,118 minors), which were deemed insufficient and unfair compared to what was received by other Autonomous Regions.¹² Around the same time, the president of the autonomous city in Ceuta denounced the minors crisis and their hugely increased presence, inviting the central government to implement without delay the readmission agreement signed in 1992 with Morocco, even to this specific target. Meanwhile, social services councilors in the two cities denounced the impossibility of managing the unaccompanied minors crisis in front of a delegation of MEPs, saying that it had caused 'social and economic pressure that is now unbearable for public life'.¹³

The young *harraga* have been entering the enclaves through tactics that have made the border porous, such as coming with relatives, using false documents from Nador and Tetouan, corrupting guards at the border crossings, swimming or entering through the sewers, and hiding in the cars of smugglers. They remain until they manage to cross over to Spain, adding without knowing it to the nightmare of the local white population: the 'Moroccanization' of the city. Time is a crucial device of power and resistance. The stagnation of movement imposed by the authorities generates temporal

¹² Ceuta let 360 minors in in November 2019. This data comes from statements made by local politicians to the city press and from the declarations by the Ministry of Health, which are based on the Register of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors. These figures are higher than those recorded by Save the Children in a 2018 report (261 in Ceuta; 917 in Melilla), according to which the two enclaves receive about 20% of all unaccompanied minors in Spain. This report denounces the precarious reception conditions and the progressive tendency to consider minors as outright irregular migrants. In relation to this, government politicians in Ceuta and Melilla often use the term "early migrants" to define this group. See https://www.savethechildren.es/sites/default/files/imce/los_mas_solos_vok.pdf. On the rejection and abandonment of minors in Melilla see also the 2017 report by the Universidad Pontificia Comillas: http://www.bienestaryproteccioninfantil.es/imagenes/tablaContenidos03SubSec/INFORME%20RECHAZO%20Y%20ABANDONO%20vMarzo%202017_ver%20definitiva.pdf

¹³ This view was expressed in different articles I consulted on the *Faro de Melilla* and the *Faro de Ceuta* in November 2018. Migration, minors, and the state of relationships with Morocco are the most recurrent themes in the local media.

counter-practices, of which the flight of minors from the centers, to experience the playful and transgressive thrill of doing *rizki*, is a prime example.

Disrupted gazes

In order to counteract the settlement of families, on the one hand, and repel the young *harraga* in transit, on the other, local authorities have used administrative and political tools affecting different aspects of their lives, such as making it difficult for the children of irregular immigrants to access schools, restricting access to registration for illegal immigrants, criminalizing informal solidarity, reducing family reunification, attempting to prevent cross-border female workers from giving birth in hospitals, and devising new legal solutions for the immediate expulsion of minors. Fatima drew a connection between these practices and the fear of the ‘call-effect’, an excessive hospitality which is perceived as counter-productive:

Behind the border, we have Beni Ansar, Nador, the Rif, an impoverished area where there’s no future for young people, they feel that there’s no future for them in Morocco. It’s obvious that, if there’s a way out right on their doorstep, they’ll go for it right away. And if they know that those who managed to cross before them have also improved their lives, they’ll keep going for it. This is obvious and it’s right. We’d all do the same. Go to the other side where we know we could be better off. This is the fear of the call-effect. It applies to *harraga*, but also to Sub-Saharan Africans, Syrians, everyone ... for every migrant who arrives in the city, the locals fear that they’ll achieve their goal and, for this reason, more of them will arrive ...

Bayat (2010) has studied agency processes in the Arab world describing the rhizomatic and hidden nature of resistances and changes. His research has highlighted the modalities of a quiet and constant rebellion in which people’s claims are embodied by their individual actions that are not necessarily coordinated and avoid the language of ideology and mobilizations. In these cases, multitudes of single subjects on the move force the border regime to face recurrent, persistent, and often unsurveillable transgressions. Usually, those who are poor and subject to domination do not engage in reforms or revolutions; they cannot afford to be ideological, caught in the constraints of everyday life, in immediate concerns. In this setting, they perform what Bayat calls ‘a quiet encroachment’, a tenacious, intrusive action that seeks to redistribute social assets and broaden the spaces of freedom and autonomy.

In local discourse and politics, the gaze cast on the condition of the families who are attempting to settle and the young Moroccans in transit is imbued with panic and rejection. Adults are represented as welfare freeloaders, while narratives on women’s emancipation often stop on the doorstep of the

Spanish homes where cross-border workers are employed or crack under the weight of the European goods carried in the widely-tolerated smuggling business. The associations that try to take charge of the educational and socio-recreational needs of Moroccan women are accused of not caring for poor Spanish white people. Children have to protest to enroll in schools or access other public services, while the *harraga* and unaccompanied minors are confined to *ad hoc* facilities whose aim is more detentive than educational and from which they escape, preferring freedom on the streets to the risk of deportation¹⁴ or the ‘leash’ of the institutions. When talking about the neighborhoods and situations they had left behind in their countries, they used this metaphor: “fish are better than worms” – that is risking by jumping over the fences or crossing the Strait is better than slowly dying in a land that offers no opportunities (Queirolo Palmas & Stagi, 2017).

Figure 3. Waiting the good moment to jump



Source: Courtesy of José Palazón

The Centers for Minors are a different version of the migrant camps, a limbo with uncertain temporalities time frames and unpredictable rules, a ‘definitely temporary’ area to which excess humans are confined (Rahola, 2003) and over which the sword of Damocles of expulsion hangs from the moment they turn 18. Here, waiting turns into a permanent condition while

¹⁴ Morocco acts on behalf of Spain and the European Union, obviously bargaining for huge economic resources. At the end of 2018, the EU approved an investment of 140 million euros to support Morocco in the fight against irregular migration.

Spain and Europe become a mirage. Located few tens of meters from the fences – a constant reminder of the temporary nature of border crossing – these centers try to hold in unaccompanied minors, preventing them from living and being perceived as free subjects in the urban space of the two enclaves. When they act by escaping and doing *rizki*, their presence in the public space is stigmatized and made hyper-visible to fuel insecurity among the good citizens.

In this landscape, an inversion of the gaze becomes evident. The children in transit or the families of immigrant origins who are attempting to settle are not included in the discourse or in common representations that ultimately only apply to white citizenship. Here, the positive value, protective attitude, and promotional momentum that in many societies of arrival are normally reserved to childhood, youth and the condition of women, is removed. These subjects, marked by the stigma of migration, are forced to re-live the same subaltern spatiality they thought they had escaped in their homeland (Vacchiano, 2018). It is no coincidence that they try to break free from these spaces, burning and ripping apart the web of discriminatory devices in which they find themselves entangled. Fatima used a metaphorical expression to convey the strength and autonomy of migration (De Genova, 2017) in the face of the European border regime: “A vallas más altas, escaleras más altas” (the higher the borders are, the higher the ladders will be). And yet, the Gramscian optimism of the will must always be connected with the pessimism of the intellect that made José put this so clearly: “Cada mesa es una valla” (every bureaucrat’s desk is a border).

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