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Revisiting Huntington: The Morocco-Ceuta-Melilla Border Wall as a Clash of Civilizations Symbol

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ABSTRACT

This article critically reexamines the transformation of border politics in the post–Cold War global order by analysing the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, which have transitioned from military bastions into crucial nodes of migratory regulation and economic exchange. It posits that these fortified frontiers, traditionally regarded solely as pragmatic security measures, simultaneously function as civilisational apparatuses that demarcate and accentuate racially and economically defined dichotomies between northern and southern geopolitical spheres. By incorporating Huntington's theoretical framework, the study advocates for a broader application of his analytical tools in explicating the multifarious interplay between racial identities, economic imperatives, and state security concerns that collectively shape modern border governance. Through a meticulous interrogation of historical legacies, encompassing colonial subjugation, successive political manoeuvrings, and evolving trade practices, the article reveals that these borders, far from being mere physical dividers, serve as potent symbols of ideological partition that sustain enduring disparities. The research further scrutinises the reconfigurations in migratory policies and cross-border exchanges in light of recent diplomatic negotiations and geopolitical shifts, thereby offering a critical reinterpretation of conventional notions of border permeability. Ultimately, the study contends that an expansive utilisation of Huntington's framework not only enriches our comprehension of international security and national identity but also facilitates a more incisive understanding of how racially and economically charged interpretations of borders continue to influence the persistent contestation between the global north and south.

INTRODUCTION

Francis Fukuyama (1992) claimed that the world was witnessing the “end of history”. By this statement, he meant that with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the encampment around two distinct and demarcated ideologies, capitalism and communism, in the past decades has ceased to exist and the iconic separation and state of anxiety it created has ended. Fukuyama argued that liberal democracy along with economic liberalism were inevitably becoming the dominant ideologies. Characterized by globalization and the growing interconnectivity and interdependence between different parts of the world, in the international landscape of the late 20th century, the notion of borders underwent a transformational narrative: there has been a fleeting belief that the world had transcended beyond physical divides and humanity was heading into a borderless world (Vallet & David, 2012). However, the subsequent era of globalization did not erase borders; it rather led to their reemergence as crucial entities in international relations. In particular, the post 2001 world witnessed a paradigm shift where borders have been defined as essential tools for maintaining and safeguarding state sovereignty (S. Ndaw, 2022; Vallet & David, 2012). The erection of border walls and their implications was thus masked by the prevailing globalized discourse advocating for a borderless world where movements of goods and people are freely allowed. These walls can be conceptualized not

merely as physical dividers but as political demarcation lines encompassing a wide variety of technologies, legislative frameworks, meanings and discursive narratives (Bissonnette & Vallet, 2022; Saddiki, 2017). They thus transcend their immediate impact on international relations; their implications permeate society, reshaping notions of state sovereignty, international security, and human security and dignity.

Within this geopolitical context, the Ceuta and Melilla enclaves have evolved from Spanish military garrisons to regional trade hubs (Soto Bermant, 2014). After Morocco's independence in 1956, these two North African territories retained Spanish sovereignty and became pivotal instruments in regulating commercial and migratory exchanges between Europe and Africa (Saddiki, 2017). Spain's European Union (EU) entrance in 1986 further heightened their significance and promoted the fortification of their perimeters in response to irregular migration from its Southern neighbors. The double barbed-wire fences surrounding the two enclaves, – constructed in Melilla in 1993, a mere four years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and in Ceuta in 1995– represented the first European walls to appear after the demolition of the Berlin Wall (Castan Pinos, 2013). The fortification process, marked by the erection of fences and the addition of sophisticated surveillance systems such as the Integrated System of External Surveillance (SIVE) (Echeverría *et al.*, 2024; Saddiki, 2017), underscores the

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strategic importance placed on these border areas.

Despite the longstanding Spanish occupation, uncertainty looms over the recognition of Spanishness of these enclaves by Morocco, since their overtaking by European powers, in 1415 by King João I of Portugal in the case of Ceuta, which aimed at controlling the African coast, and in 1497 for Melilla which was conquered by the Duke of Medina Sidonia as part of the Reconquista and of the aim of controlling the North African coast. The Moroccan population and the political leadership have never ceased to argue for the legitimacy of Morocco over the enclaves and their return (Knoerrich Aldabo, 2011). This fostered a complex relationship marked by distrust and apprehension. Moreover, the anxiety of the population of Spanish origin persists as the Muslim population of Moroccan origin gains demographic weight (Saddiki, 2017), leading to selective migratory policies whereby culturally and linguistically similar ethnicities to Western Europeans are welcomed while migration from North Africa and sub-Saharan countries is regulated and policed. These enclaves exemplify a larger EU trend; the implementation of limbo spaces, where access to the EU is restricted and strictly regulated (Ferrer-Gallardo & Albet-Mas, 2016). In this way, the fences, while ostensibly targeting irregular migration, symbolize a civilizational divide between Europe and its Southern neighbors. The policies and barriers in place, while rigid towards certain populations, reveal elasticity in regulating desired migration, from linguistically and culturally similar backgrounds, unraveling the multifaceted nature of these border dynamics (Saddiki, 2017).

This article aims to unravel the cultural, racial, and religious implications of the Ceuta and Melilla border walls, positioning them not merely as security constructs but as emblematic markers of civilisational contestation and division, while simultaneously adopting a critical perspective that refrains from extolling Huntington's contentious Clash of Civilisations theory or promulgating a bifurcation of thought with respect to the global north and south. Indeed, situated within the context of a resurgent right-wing political ethos permeating Europe and the ongoing expansion of its southern frontier in relation to non-member neighbouring states, the present study contends that Huntington's framework, despite its widely acknowledged proclivity for engendering racially and ideologically divisive narratives, thereby failing to conform to the rigour of conventional academic inquiry, may be judiciously appropriated as an analytical instrument for scrutinising Europe's persistent commitment to the securitisation of its borders and the concomitant stratification that delineates the economically affluent from the economically marginalised, a partition which ultimately obfuscates the enduring legacies of protracted colonial subjugation, political manipulation, and military intervention.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach grounded in postcolonial political theory and critical

discourse analysis to examine the symbolic, ideological, and policy functions of border walls surrounding the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. Based on a theoretical framework drawn from Huntington's civilisational thesis and its European derivatives by political actors since then, this study critically scrutinises how racial, religious, and geopolitical borders are materially and discursively consolidated in the EU's southern periphery. The article does not offer positivist generalisations but rather opts for analytical profundity over empirical comprehensiveness based on a corpus of discrete textual and visual discourses which construct and legitimate securitisation of the Euro-African border space.

The source documents are varied publicly available texts that range from political speeches to policy statements, government reports, legal documents, media representations, and academic commentary. The research picked these documents by choosing cases where discursive dynamics of exclusion, securitisation, and civilisational differentiation were most explicitly articulated. Materials were collected mainly between 1993 and 2024, with specific reference to key geopolitical events like the post-9/11 securitisation trend, the 2015–2022 migratory crisis, and the growth of populist far-right discourses in Spain and Europe. The study is underpinned by a hermeneutic framework aiming to make explicit the hidden ideological assumptions behind supposedly neutral political discourse and border politics. Focus is placed on revealing the way symbolic borders, juridico-political practices, and media representation all come together to collectively produce civilisational, racial, and economic borders, and thus make the Ceuta and Melilla fences more than mere physical segregation.

In furtherance of its analytical objectives, this research advances the following inquiry: How does the Morocco–Ceuta–Melilla border wall function as a fault line and a symbol of civilisational division, as construed through the prism of Huntington's Clash of Civilisations theory, while simultaneously influencing the cultural, religious, and identity configurations that characterise European–African border relations? By incorporating this line of questioning, the article aspires to contribute a critical perspective to the extant discourse on border politics, exposing the manner in which these demarcation structures, far from serving solely as instruments of physical separation, operate as conduits for the propagation of racial and ideological dichotomies (Haynes, 2019b, 2019a; Politzer & Alcaraz, 2023), thereby reinforcing a narrative that privileges a dichotomy between Europe and its economically disadvantaged southern neighbours over a more reflective consideration of historical processes marked by the severity of colonial exploitation and subsequent political and military manoeuvring.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this research affirm that the Ceuta and Melilla border walls operate as material articulations

of exclusionary logics grounded in civilisational differentiation, racial stratification, and postcolonial asymmetry. Researching political discourse, policy configurations, and visual-material infrastructure reveals that there is a deep-seated narrative by which Europe is being scripted as a homogeneous civilisational space, ontologically differentiated from its non-European periphery. Migrants, especially Muslim or sub-Saharan African migrants, are consistently defined as proxy targets for demographic danger, cultural conflict, and religious incompatibility. It is driven by security-discourse coming from European populist leaders and formalised by migration policies and border management systems that place greater value on deterrence and visibility rather than humanitarian responsibility.

Empirical evidence shows that these border infrastructures serve the dual purpose of geostrategic deterrents and symbolic artefacts inscribed in a broader ideological project of European self-definition. Political discourse by politicians like Viktor Orbán and Éric Zemmour, legal propositions against Islamic practices, and the politicisation of border crises for political gain underscore the discursive potency of Huntingtonian imaginaries. Media portrayals affirm this dynamic by repeatedly depicting migrants as voiceless, lawless mobs whose presence along Europe's periphery is an indicator of moral, cultural, and security deterioration. The border wall is therefore less an answer to pressure from migration than a performative object that constructs and reifies a racialized civilizational fault line on the EU's southern border.

Huntington's Clash of Civilization Revisited

The clash of Civilization thesis, which was introduced by the British historian Bernard Lewis in 1957 and later popularized by Huntington (1996), in his book "The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order", has been widely used to explain different current and past geopolitical phenomena such as civilizational groupings, Western and Islamic civilizations as a case in point, and argues that religious and ethnic conflicts such as the wars in the former Yugoslavia between Orthodox Christians and Muslims are prone to occur especially in areas the author describes as civilizational fault lines. In this sense, Huntington argues that the primary source of conflict in the post bipolar world is no longer economic or political, but rather cultural and civilizational in nature. His argument centers on the clash of civilizations at the international level, in which Western, Islamic, and Sinic (Chinese and Asian) civilizations would enter militarized conflicts due to parting ideologies and beliefs. Despite being refuted by many scholars and academicians for its lack of concrete and strong arguments, the theory that Huntington put forward is still appealing to large numbers of advocates, especially far right groups and demagogues. According to the author, civilizations are distinct from each other by different attributes, such as history, traditions, language, and most importantly to

Huntington, religion (Haynes, 2019a). The author argues that it is "blood, faith and beliefs" (Rizvi, 2011) that draw people closer or further apart. He contends that different people have different views of the world particularly with regard to the relationship between man and God, husband and wife and citizen and law, which he believes distinguishes Western democratic values and civilization from non-Western values and civilizations. It is within this framework/paradigm that Huntington argues that a clash between the Western world and the "rest" would entail a new world disorder and future conflicts (Haynes, 2019a). The adoption rate of the Huntingtonian discourse has witnessed rapid surge after the tragic terrorist attacks of 9/11, a period during which the binary division of the world described by the thesis was taken for granted and as self-evident. In fact, inter-civilizational "dialogue" and "clash" have become mainstream in international relations and at the domestic level as well in many parts of the world (Haynes, 2019a). This largely proves that the thesis is not only well accepted by mainstream media and popular culture, but it has seeped within political discourse and gained momentum, a quarter of a century after Huntington made his argument. He argues that nation-states will remain the dominant force in international affairs and the international scenery; nonetheless conflicts will occur between nations and groups of individuals with civilizational differences. These civilizational conflicts are bound to occur along cultural, religious and ethnic identities and demarcation lines, which he called fault lines, thus his work argues for a rupture from ideological demarcation lines that described the Cold War era.

Three issues would particularly generate clashes between the Western powers and non-Western ones: the proliferation of military superiority to non-Western parts of the globe, the spread of Western value systems such as democracy and human rights, and –most importantly for this article–, the blocking of non-Western (im)migrants and refugees at the doorstep of the Western world. According to the author, the dilution of Western population and civilization would go hand in hand with mass migration and exodus from non-Western parts of the world. This would not only cause a weakening of Western civilization and values, but also the annihilation of Western civilization itself. Such ideas presented by Huntington do not only present non-Westerners as a threat, they also encourage right-wing demagogues to use hateful populist rhetoric to point the finger at the Other as the one to be feared most and as the cause of all the societal, criminal, moral and economic problems affecting Western countries, which in turn fuels anti-migrant sentiments and the need for more border security and vigilance.

Nonetheless, such promotion of culture as the sole or rather dominant cause of conflict is not only erroneous, but dangerous, since the causes of tension tend to arise from and be rooted in factors involving economic, political and ideological issues. Most prominently, it

is difficult to differentiate civilizations and distinguish them in separate manners. As Edward Said (2014) points out, Huntington made civilizations into “shut down and sealed off” entities incapable of cross-fertilization and influence. The Western world is described as a unique civilization which boasts attributes that other civilizations lack, and the Islamic civilization as determined to regain its “rightful” place in terms of significance and prestige in the international pecking order, by seeking every possible means to achieve such an objective (Baele *et al.*, 2021; Haynes, 2019b, 2019a).

Although Huntington’s thesis centres on international conflicts, in recent years, particularly following the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the concomitant surge in anti-Muslim sentiment, a multitude of demagogues and right-wing European politicians have espoused a binary and overly simplistic rhetoric in the vein of Huntington, thereby articulating apprehensions over Muslim and sub-Saharan immigration at Europe’s borders.

Such a stance has found favour within national discourses across the continent, as evinced by the pronounced concerns in Hungary and Poland regarding the perceived perils inherent in Islam as a religion, juxtaposed with the discourse in France and the Netherlands wherein the potential subversion of secular values is invoked to justify the imposition of more restrictive migration policies. Indeed, in nations such as Austria and Switzerland, assertions regarding the dilution of local cultures and communities have further augmented these narratives. This phenomenon is highly exemplified by the case of Zell am See, a modest village in Austria which has, in recent times, attracted considerable media attention as a result of a pronounced influx of tourists exhibiting predominantly Arab phenotypical characteristics, thereby prompting a proliferation of online commentaries and journalistic articles contending that the village has ceased to offer an authentic experience of the Alpine environment, traditional Austrian culture, and local street life (Scharfenort, 2018). Consequently, local initiatives aimed at ‘educating’ these visitors on the expected standards of conduct, such as abstaining from littering, refraining from the practice of cooking within hotel confines, avoiding the consumption of meals whilst seated upon the floor, and eschewing the act of bargaining in retail establishments were necessary. Furthermore, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, policy measures, exemplified by France’s pioneering imposition of bans on the burqa and niqab in public spaces, as well as the more recent analogous prohibitive directives introduced in Switzerland as early as 2025, have underscored the enduring contentiousness of Islamic dress codes, with the hijab and burqa persisting as emblematic subjects of societal and ideological contestation. Such policy measures have reinforced the utilitarian yet problematic deployment of Huntingtonian frameworks by political actors such as Marine Le Pen, who has famously maintained that Muslim immigrants constitute an existential threat to French civilisation, and Viktor Orbán, who has characterised

migrants as “Muslim invaders” purportedly drawn not by deteriorating conditions in their homelands but by the allure of Europe’s economic advantages (Aljazeera.com, 2012; Schultheis, 2018). Thus, encapsulating the broader challenges faced by contemporary European societies as they seek to reconcile traditional cultural identities with the exigencies of modern migratory phenomena.

Thus, a Huntingtonian discourse of civilizational difference and Western superiority is put forward by right-wing leaders who emphasize the need to defend Europe’s communities, local cultures and secular or religious traditions from being overrun by Muslim or ethnically and racially different “hordes.” In 2022, Éric Zemmour, a far-right presidential candidate in France who is known for his anti-Islam and anti-immigration views, has been fined for hate speech after having described unaccompanied migrant children as “thieves”, “rapists” and “murderers” (Schofield, 2022).

Zemmour uses French nativism and identity to rally French people against migrants he claims to want to expel from French territory. He stated that “...we must have a policy of firmness. When you hear this: “tradition of asylum, humanity and on the other hand, firmness” you can turn off your TV set, it means “bullshit”... There’s no middle ground. You have to turn the table upside down. In other words, these young people, like the rest of the immigrants, have to stop coming. Because they don’t belong here... I’m telling you... They’re thieves, they’re murderers, they’re rapists, that’s all they are. We’ve got to send them back. They’re not even going to come. And if, to do that... We have to get out of the European Court of Human Rights, which, I remind you, is the origin of evil. It’s the European Court of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child that oblige us not to expel anyone. We’ll have to get out of the European Convention on Human Rights... We must give ourselves no choice... We have to let no one in” (Euronews & Agence France-Presse, 2022).

Such erroneous interpretation of civilizational difference instigates a political rhetoric dominated by hate and blame towards Muslims and sub-Saharan migrants and their communities in Europe, and more prominently in places where the European border is closest to Muslim and other non-Western communities. Moreover, such assertions tend to associate Western communities -predominantly white- with positive attributes like liberty and democracy. This perpetuates the notion that white Europeans are more advanced and civilized than other races, particularly those from the Southern regions of the globe. Thus, the Huntingtonian paradigm provides a framework, for its proponents, where borders serve not only as instruments of territorial sovereignty, but also as markers of racial boundaries separating whites from non-whites. This perspective fuels the belief that without such separation, the ‘Other’ would dilute the native population, leading to a perceived dominance of non-white populations. As an illustration, the Spanish populist radical far-right party, Vox, has been adopting a political

stance based on othering and discrimination against non-Europeanness. Vox supports nativistic migratory policies based on exclusionary measures geared towards Muslims and sub-Saharan migrants. The party demands the closure of fundamentalist mosques, the expulsion of extremist imams, and even the expulsion of tens of thousands of Muslims in Spain in a modern form of “Reconquista” (Ferrer-Gallardo & Gabrielli, 2022). Vox is also calling for the construction of a concrete wall around the enclave of Ceuta, inspired by the West Bank walls built by Israel, in addition to more restrictive measures at the border to stop the flow of migrants. They also ask for ethnic and religious “purification” measures to stop the dilution of European civilization by Muslims and non-Westerners since, according to its leaders and followers, Spanish and European civilization is at high risk of nullification (Ferrer-Gallardo & Gabrielli, 2022). To achieve this, they depict migrants, Muslims and Islam as being a threat to the existence and survival of Spanish values and customs. If Spain had previously distinguished itself as a nation without a radical right-wing presence, the 2019 general election in Ceuta, saw the victory of Vox.

Despite it being widely contested and criticized for its lack of robust arguments and evidence, this article posits that, particularly at the Ceuta and Melilla borders dividing Europe from Africa, Huntington’s theory may shed light on the unease felt by European communities towards non-Europeans of different ethnicities, cultures, and religions. This theory provides a lens through which to view the civilizational discourse and frequently racist reasoning behind the strengthening and militarization of the Ceuta and Melilla barriers. It is essential to recognize that not only far-right but also many center-right political parties frequently engage in anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant rhetoric to enhance their political influence and garner electoral support. This, in turn, fuels a harmful cycle of attributing economic, social, and political challenges to the ‘unwanted other.’ Moreover, the narrative of fortifying Europe’s frontiers against non-European peoples and the erection of walls may be a tangible manifestation of an underlying civilizational malaise, unease and division.

Fortress Europe and the Border of Borders

Europe’s external borders have been described using different names and metaphors by scholars and journalists which have influenced their nature and meaning. Some have equated them with the Berlin Wall, while others have described them as the ultimate obstacle in the migratory journey. In the Mediterranean basin, many have described the Ceuta and Melilla border fences as the “new wall of shame”, the “European wall”, but most prominently, they associated them to the “fortress Europe” (Castan Pinos, 2009). Indeed, in the last two decades, various EU member states proposed different projects with the aim of creating a buffer migratory zone around the EU to externalize and export migratory routes and issues to neighboring southern countries (Saddiki, 2012). This does not only showcase an EU dependency on its southern

neighbors among which are Morocco, Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, and towards Eastern European countries such as Belarus, but it also sheds light on the mounting pressure from ever growing European far-right groups, such as VOX and their electoral bases which demand stricter migratory policies and border controls (Ferrer-Gallardo & Gabrielli, 2022).

This EU’s obsession with border security and fencing has deepened the North-South divide. EU citizens and legislators tend to see the Mediterranean border as an ideological and moral frontier shielding democracy from secularism and religious fanaticism from personal freedoms (Driessen, 1998; Sahraoui, 2023). Fortress Europe can be labeled in the case of Ceuta and Melilla border walls as a filter restricting access to the discomforting Other who challenges the “borders of comfort” (Castan Pinos, 2009). In this regard, the southern border of Europe materializes the idea of an edge and a hard physical limit, an impermeable external shell meant to stop a racially, religiously, ethnically and undesired Other (Castan Pinos, 2009). Such a double standard discourse and policies could be also observed in the fact that the EU is expanding at its eastern border, yet it is erecting a hard shell at its southern frontier (Loshitzky, 2006).

Decades before the fortification of the Greek islands, the mentality of exclusion surrounding fortress Europe turned the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla into de facto exclusion islands with the main role of deterring unwanted migrants from North African and sub-Saharan countries. With a financial contribution of 200 million euros, which constitutes 75% of the total costs to fortify the enclaves between 1995 and 2000, the EU is the main benefactor of the erection of the border walls surrounding Ceuta and Melilla and thus taking a main role in the safeguarding of its southern borders against irregular migration (Saddiki, 2012). As a matter of fact, these enclaves, being at a unique point of terrestrial contact between the two continents of Europe and Africa, are deeply imbued with their role as gateways and as ramparts to fortress Europe with what it holds in terms of the borderization of everyday life, in terms of the movement of goods and people, for their citizens and the marginalized communities surrounding the enclaves and the systemic exclusion of people from North African and Sub-Saharan countries (Sahraoui, 2023). As mentioned by Isabella Alexander (2019), among the main instructions given to the Spanish Guardia Civil guards is to “keep all Africans out at all costs”.

Another important note to consider is the role Ceuta and Melilla and other European outposts assume in the externalization of the EU border. With the application of the Schengen Agreement, internal EU borders disappeared, thus a delegation of border policy occurred from inner states to outer states. The Schengenization of the EU has thus implied that internal states such as Austria now share a border with countries such as Morocco. Therefore, the Spanish enclaves in Africa are no longer mere outposts of Spanish sovereignty but are

de facto gateways towards the world's richest and most developed countries (Castan Pinos, 2009). Moreover, the multiplicity of ethnic, religious and cultural divisions makes the enclaves, as argued by Xavier Ferrer-Gallardo (2006), a border of borders in the sense that a multitude of opposing parts encounter. As a case in point, the two enclaves represent a crossroad between the EU and the African continent, the “developed” and the “under-developed world”, the Christians and the Muslims, the whites and the non-whites, the “civilized” and the “barbarians” as contended by Jaume Castan Pinos (2009). Regarding this, the border separating the two enclaves from Morocco and from the whole African continent could be viewed as fault lines (Saddiki, 2012; Salam & Kiron, 2024) spanning along culturally, economically and politically different sides of the Mediterranean sea.

According to Huntington's theory, the fault line between civilizations is the battleground of future wars. José Maria Aznar, the former prime minister of Spain, in a lecture at the University of Georgetown in Washington DC in 2004, stated that the clash between Morocco and Spain began in the eighth century, when Tariq Ibn Ziyad and his Muslim army invaded the Iberian Peninsula. Aznar then asserted that Spain's battle with terrorism was not recent and had not started with the terrorist attacks in Madrid on March 11, 2004, where 192 people were killed, but rather started centuries ago with the invasion of Spain by the Muslims (Saddiki, 2017). This statement by the Spanish former prime minister sheds light on the long history that has united and separated the two shores of Morocco and the Iberian Peninsula. This duality between the two shores of the Mediterranean highlights the duality between two discourses and views on race, colonial past and nativist migratory policies in Europe. It is within this context that the borders of the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla do not only separate Morocco from Spain, but they separate the African continent from Europe, Muslims from Christians and the “undesired” from the “desired”.

Ceuta and Melilla as Racial and Ethnic Demarcation Lines

The fencing of the borders surrounding the Spanish enclaves could be viewed as an othering project, a process through which the other is demarcated from the native, where the other is separated, distinguished and given geographic space of its own, separate from the desired native. It does constitute a redrawing of the global color lines as argued by Nicholas De Genova (2018), separating browns and blacks from whites and thus engendering a new euro-centric and euro-sponsored apartheid, walled/protected space, which has transformed the shores of the Mediterranean Sea into a mass grave. The borders around the enclaves highlight the callous indifference of states whose primary goal is to reduce and stop migratory flow into Europe. It also shows the militaristic view European leaders adopt when faced with an influx of migrants at their gates. In fact, Europe's borders, during the last decade, became the deadliest border crossings in the world with

an estimated 28,645 deaths since 2015 (Johnson & Jones, 2018; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2024). It is much harder to cross this physical border now than it was two decades ago, which could be regarded as a partial, yet macabre, success of the bordering policies instigated by Europe to counter irregular migration.

Nonetheless, while such border reinforcement and security measures may seem effective at stopping migrant flows and may give the impression that authorities are taking action to halt migrants, they do not solve this problem in the long run since more migrants are gathering in Morocco and other countries and taking alternate migratory routes to attempt the crossing. In fact, the number of irregular migrants at the gates of Europe has seen a sharp increase in 2023 compared to previous years as table 1 showcases. It is within this context that in 2015, the Mayor-President of Melilla, Juan Jose Imbroda Ortiz, announced that new migratory measures would be taken to prevent migrants who have entered the enclave irregularly from receiving the “prize” of having their asylum requests being processed. Within this push back policy, irregular migrants who enter the Spanish territory, instead of being repatriated to their countries of origin, will be returned to Morocco which has minimal migrant reception capacity.

Table 1: Showcases an increase in the number of illegal migrant arrivals and fatalities (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2024)

Period	Arrivals	Dead and missing
2024	199,400	2,844
2023	270,700	4,110
2022	160,070	3,017
2021	123,540	3,231
2020	95,666	1,881
2019	123,663	1,510
2018	141,472	2,277
2017	185,139	3,139
2016	373,652	5,096
2015	1,032,408	3,771

This measure ignores Spain's legal argument that every individual has the right to apply for asylum. Moreover, the deportation of migrants to Morocco violates article 3 of the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment of which Spain is signatory. This does signal the country's willingness to violate international conventions and basic human rights for the sake of reducing the number of migrants at its gates and reducing the incentives of migrants to leave their countries of origin and thus countering their push factors. In addition, Spain's stance on irregular migration highlights Europe's migration policies and its usage of the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla and of North African countries as buffer zones and “cordon sanitaire” (Johnson & Jones, 2018).

Although the expression “cordon sanitaire” may borrow from the medical world since the French government closed in 1822 its borders with Spain to stop the spread of the yellow fever (Radil *et al.*, 2021), it does hold connotation and meaning for the tightening of Europe’s borders and the restrictive nature of its migratory policies to only allow the desired migrants and refugees from Post-Soviet states, and keep the undesired away from its borders. As part of the externalization of EU migration policy, Morocco has started to erect its fences around the enclaves starting 2014 with European funds. To add more, the EU has increased political pressure on neighboring states in the management of irregular immigration. As a case in point, during the 2002 Seville summit of the European Council, EU states concluded that any further association agreements with non-EU states should include a clause on the management of migratory flows and compulsory readmission of illegal migrants (Ferrer-Gallardo & Gabrielli, 2022). Nonetheless, unlike the borders on the Spanish side, the Moroccan borders surrounding the enclaves boldly display, in a more intimidating manner, their purpose since they are equipped with guard posts every few meters, a ditch to slow down irregular migrants in case of a rush to jump the fences and razor sharp concertina and barbed wire to coerce any crossing attempts (Johnson & Jones, 2018). The racially charged fortifications that delineate the Spanish enclaves have been erected not with an overarching policy of open borders, but rather with the express purpose of curtailing the ingress of sub-Saharan migrants while permitting the temporary entry of citizens from Tetouan and Nador, whose passage is accorded in recognition of their substantial economic and cultural contributions to Spanish interests. The visa exemption afforded to these two Moroccan urban centres does not reflect an unrestrained border regime, since citizens of these cities are still not allowed in mainland Spain, but is instead a calculated provision rooted in historical contingencies and, more prominently, in economic exigencies, as the Spanish enclaves have long sustained their economies through the regular and significant exchange of goods and services with neighbouring Moroccan provinces. (Ferrer-Gallardo & Gabrielli, 2024; Saddiki, 2017) For decades, both formal and informal trade practices, including the routine crossing of labourers and the transport of substantial quantities of goods, have constituted a central component of the socio-economic fabric of these border regions; however, the imposition of border closures in March 2020 amid the COVID-19 crisis, which persisted until May 2022, precipitated considerable economic disruption. Subsequently, following diplomatic discussions, largely influenced by issues pertaining to the Western Sahara dispute, and the implementation of policies by Moroccan authorities to curtail non-standard trade practices, the re-establishment of cross-border passage in May 2022 signalled a reconfiguration of established trade modalities in a manner that reflected both evolving political considerations and enduring economic imperatives (Ferrer-

Gallardo & Gabrielli, 2024).

Violence against migrants is perpetuated around the enclaves in total disregard to human life and dignity, such as the deadly events at the Melilla fence in June 2022 (Ferrer-Gallardo & Gabrielli, 2022). The objectification and exclusion of migrants and the dehumanization they undergo demonstrate how EU’s border regime only seeks to outcast the undesired and immunize native residents of Spain and Europe from irregular immigrants and to showcase them as unfortunate side-effects of human tragedy. To add more, there is a clear dichotomy in how the EU deals with the migratory syndrome since it advocates for an open-door policy vis-à-vis the flow of capital and information, while it implements a closed door policy when it comes to the flow of people and the free movement of migrants such as Romanians and Slavs (Saddiki, 2017). In this sense, with globalization, national economies are being denationalized and internationalized; in contrast, immigration is leading to the renationalization of politics, thereby revitalizing the Westphalian model of state sovereignty, which emphasizes the paramount power of the state within its national boundaries. Benedict Anderson (2016) argued that nations are imagined communities, they are held together by a vision of commonness and shared past and future. In this regard, the Ceuta and Melilla borders serve a double purpose, that of creating a civilizational divide, between brown and white, and that of holding a common ideology of Europeaness together and to immunize it from the threat of the different other. In a Huntingtonian fashion, the fences around the enclaves are a bold reminder that Europe is different from its brown neighbors, that the discourse of open doors is a mere deception meant to perpetuate a colonial, though concealed, present and purpose, where economical and strategic goods are extracted from Southern states while few benefits are reaped by their citizens, yet these same citizens are denied basic freedoms and recognition of their suffering and struggles at the very gates of the Europe that so desperately require their resources and so desperately does not want them on its soil.

Discussion

The findings of this research underscore the symbolic significance of the border walls as more than technocratic solutions to migratory streams but as ideological forms that institutionalize civilisational hierarchies and operationalise the myth of European exceptionalism. The empirical evidence aligns with Huntington’s thesis inasmuch as borders are not only depicted as spatial boundaries but also as ontological fault lines between civilisational archetypes. But instead of confirming Huntington’s arguments of cultural incompatibility embedded within, analysis shows that his paradigm is reappropriated to legitimate state exclusionary practices that are historically located in the *longue durée* of colonialism and racial capitalism. This reappropriation makes the theory analytically useful, not for predictive

purposes but in how it uncovers the underlying presuppositions of Western political imaginaries in the governance of difference.

It is here that the southern boundary of Europe becomes a site of condensed historical remembrance, securitarian tension, and postcolonial reckoning. The double function of Ceuta and Melilla as economic interfaces and exclusionary gateways illustrates the contradictory logics of globalisation, in which capital and commodities travel ever more easily while individuals are subjected to selective immobilisation. This bifurcation reactivates colonial modalities of movement regulation, based on differential valuation of human life on racialised and civilisational grounds. The EU's investments in the border externalisation policies and the financial backing of Moroccan enforcement capacity also evince the institutionalisation of these exclusionary priorities within multilateral orders. Therefore, the border fences serve as necropolitical borders marking whose lives are grievable and whose mobility must be policed, and in this way, materialising the post-Huntingtonian fantasy of a civilisational clash by means of spatial and biopolitical technologies of rule.

Huntington's 'Other' at Europe's Gates

The Spanish decision to erect fences around the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla did not only faced opposition from Morocco, who considers the territory to be an unresolved colonial issue, but also from the EU. Indeed, several EU diplomats and non-governmental organizations working on human rights issues argue that such edifices are ineffective at best at stopping migrants from finding alternate routes in their migratory journeys to Europe. They argue that walling down Europe should not be resorted to and seen as the only option and solution to stop the flow of migrants to its southern borders. They contend that long lasting efforts should be undertaken by the rich EU zone to help in economic and political development on not only neighboring countries, but sub-Saharan states as well. Such alternative measures could be further reinforced with strong and effective economic partnerships and trade; they could also involve better distribution of development aid. More effectively, Europe should encourage good governance and political reforms to prevent instability and unrest such as civil wars which stir up more migratory tendencies for local populations to look for better and more prosperous environments and living conditions (Saddiki, 2012).

In the age of digitization and the free flow of goods and services, European states still maintain a rigid Westphalian mentality of sovereignty and a 'closed door' mentality towards asylum seekers and migrants (Rizvi, 2011; Saddiki, 2017). Border walls and fences, although serving as security instruments as advocated by their proponents, are also used as identity instruments serving as ideological barriers to institutionalize differences (Rizvi, 2011) among population, Africans vs Europeans in the case of the fences separating Ceuta and Melilla.

Moreover, border walls are internalized as valid instruments of public policy, whether at the national or international level. It could be argued that border walls are physical representations of deep-seated civilizational differences and divisions that separate Europe and Africa, a Huntingtonian manifestation of 'us' vs. 'them', Westerners vs non-Westerners, visual separations of the 'global rich' from the rest of the world as Said Saddiki (2017) argues. In this regard, Saddiki maintains that walls and border separations are never built against a similar power in terms of capital and military strength, they are often built against unequal powers. In fact, as discussed by the scholar, when power dynamics are similar on both sides, such as the case of Canada and the U.S., border agreements and a common border policy is established bilaterally, however, when an asymmetry exists, borders are then imposed on the weaker side. In fact, we could argue that the main function of the EU borders in Ceuta and Melilla is to appeal to a common European ideology of race, beliefs, history and wealth, a unified political myth of sorts, Europe vs. the undesired.

Chiara Bottici (2007) posits that political myths serve as narratives individuals and groups use to orient themselves in an increasingly complex political landscape. Based on her arguments, we could argue that border walls serve a dual purpose of "protection" against irregular migrants and against the shattering of a common European political myth of historical, political, cultural and economic superiority.

The function of the fences aids in the understanding of complex political dynamics such as globalization and migration. The fences act as de facto separations between the past colonizer and the colonized and could be viewed as remnants of an orientalist and colonial past that is still persistent in the political imaginary of Europeans through various forms and interpretations, among which is a civilizational difference/superiority, a past where they used to have significance over certain races and peoples. In this context, one could contend that the fences of Ceuta and Melilla, along with other European-funded and endorsed borders that divide the North from the South, represent an extension and adaptation of political myths, including colonialism, orientalism, and racist ideologies. This political myth, which underscores the necessity of a boundary between the rich and poor, white and brown, civilized and uncivilized, continues to persist due to the perpetuation of a colonial and racist mindset that has dominated the European political and racial imagination. This myth, which is predicated on and sustained by the notion of civilizational difference/superiority, continually evolves and assumes new forms and interpretations. This myth of Western superiority, rooted in a colonial history that dismisses other races and ethnicities, accentuates Western civilization as superior, democratic, secular/Christian, and technologically and economically advanced. Nowhere is such a political imaginary involving the undesired Other coming from the other shore of the Mediterranean Sea to invade Europe more vividly

and actively discussed than in European media where stereotypes of African migrants, especially sub-Saharan ones are depicted and detailed.

Nativism vs. the Invading Hordes

Nativism is a political ideology that is constructed on the exclusion of the Other, it is based on a discourse that shares ideas from racism and capitalism, where migrants are constructed as culturally different and inferior and as a drain on the economy. Nativism demands a culturalization of politics where political issues are seen and treated in terms of cultural appropriateness and a reduction of cultures and people. It often blames socio-political problems such as terrorism and crime on “culturally inferior” aliens and argues for the promotion and exclusive adoption of a nativist culture (Chen, 2023; Dechaine, 2009). It is within this paradigm that far-right groups and political demagogues in a multitude of European countries warn of the “dangerous” intercultural differences and the need for a homogenous European culture and its essentiality for the survival of Western culture. They warn of a “clash of civilizations” à la Huntington, portray the Others as rapists, criminals and terrorists and they claim the urgent need to “wise up” to “keep the barbarian hordes away at the gates of Europe” (Haynes, 2019b). Nativism demands the reduction of the alien’s culture and its abandonment, it aims at taking what is only beneficial for the native, that is what is economically appropriate while simultaneously erasing the Other as a culturally significant individual. It could be argued that nativism is a reductionist movement where the Other is only seen in economic terms and is often labeled as dangerous and outlaw.

It is within a nativist framework and ideology that the Other, the non-European and non-Western, is often portrayed in news outlets and media coverage. The aim is to represent the bare imagery and news, devoid of meaning and give free reign to the imagination of the reader to interpret the imagery presented to him or her. Indeed, the press and news media outlets possess power over their audiences since it chooses to transmit different news and scenes it judges most appropriate for its audience. This gives the press power over its audience and thus, each linguistic component or imagery is selected by media agencies with a definite purpose to cause the largest impact on the audience.

María Martínez Lirola (2017) contends that Spanish media discourse tends to reproduce the white elite’s superiority by portraying the migrants at the gates of Europe as inferior and illegal. She posits that the general public often lacks the requisite understanding to comprehend the complexities of migration issues at Europe’s doorstep, particularly in Spain. The media, she argues, capitalizes on this knowledge gap to impose an elitist narrative on migrant populations. The media’s role in shaping reality, both nationally and internationally, is pivotal as it influences individual perceptions and thought processes. Martínez Lirola (2017) asserts that media

coverage often frames the influx of migrants as a threat rather than an opportunity for cultural exchange and enrichment. Migrants are frequently depicted as savages, outlaws, and invaders.

Particularly in the context of the migrant crisis at the Ceuta and Melilla enclaves, media bias tends to portray them as burdensome “problem people” with nothing to contribute to Spanish society. This narrative dilutes the individual experiences of migrants, reducing them to a faceless “horde.” The media employs a Huntingtonian paradigm to underscore the separation between the “civilized” West and the “uncivilized” Other. Migrants are depicted as invaders who have arrived illegally, effectively stripping them of their rights and reinforcing their marginalization, dehumanization, and discrimination. Consequently, the media’s biased reporting perpetuates a vicious cycle of civilizational debate.

Media images often dehumanize migrants, focusing solely on their negative aspects which contribute to the process of othering, denying them existence beyond their illegal status. Media representations often depict migrants, predominantly young men, as violent outlaws engaged in criminal activities. For example, they are shown in conflict with security forces, visible but voiceless. Martínez Lirola (2017) notes that migrants are frequently photographed alongside police forces, reinforcing their status as criminals. This portrayal accentuates the “us” versus “them” dichotomy and, given the human tendency to remember negative imagery, denies migrants their dignity and silences their voices. Such representations fail to provide a comprehensive picture of migrants’ experiences and their challenging living and psychological conditions.

CONCLUSION

This study situates itself within a specific theoretical framework to examine the fences of Ceuta and Melilla. Drawing upon Huntington’s clash of civilizations theory, it interprets these fences not merely as physical barriers, since many migrants often opt for alternative, albeit riskier, routes to reach Europe, but as symbolic divides that reinforce a civilizational dichotomy. These fences, therefore, contribute to the construction of a collective European imaginary, underscoring the perceived cultural and civilizational differences between Europe and those attempting to cross its borders. In the span of five years, from 1999 to 2004, Europe spent 150 million euros on the SIVE system to keep a small fraction of migrants away from its soil, with an average cost of around 1800 euros per intercepted migrant (Saddiki, 2017). This showcases the generosity the EU demonstrates when it comes to militarizing its southern borders, yet such a generosity is often lacking when it comes to maintaining human dignity. Moreover, such investments could have been better spent on education, health and political programs in migrants’ countries of origin, where development money is desperately needed and where political instability, often caused by Western greed, is often the root cause of so many people deciding to come knocking at the gates of Europe.

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