



Melilla Continues To Suffer

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June 24, 2022, will go down in history as a day of infamy. In the morning of that day dozens of persons were killed (23 according to official figures, 37 according to citizens' groups), and more than a hundred people were injured as they tried to cross the border fences separating Nador (Morocco) and Melilla (Spain). The images of their lifeless bodies, piled up as if they were animals, have been burned into our retinas. The videos recording the brutality and indifference of the Moroccan police stirred our indignation. Now, a few months after the event, we offer this reflection in order to recall that barbarity and to delve into its meaning. It was an event experienced with pain (*dolor*), borne without grieving (*duelo*), car-

ried out with malice (*dolo*), and financed with government money (*dólares*).

With pain

On that sorrowful day, the President of the Spanish Government, Pedro Sánchez, claimed that the migrants were acting “with violence.” That same regrettable expression, devoid of all feeling, was repeated by the Minister of the Interior, Fernando Grande-Marlaska, in his address to the Congress of Deputies in September. These government officials could have said that the migrants' attempt to cross were acting “with pain,” but they preferred different words: “with

violence”. All things considered, perhaps the president and the minister were right on one point: much violence had already been inflicted on the stomachs, backs, and skins of the pain-ridden bodies of the migrants who were beaten, rejected, killed, and piled up like in heaps.

Most of them came from Sudan. They carried on their bodies—with pain and violence—the harsh blows of inequality and poverty. According to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), more than 10.9 million people in Sudan, about 30% of its population, suffer from extreme hunger. According to the World Bank, Sudan ranks 186th among nations in per capita gross domestic product (GDP). The nominal income per person is \$486 a year, compared to \$27,056 in Spain. In Sudan, life expectancy at birth is about 51 years; in Spain it is about 81 years. Poverty and inequality are violence, and they also cause pain.

Norwegian sociologist Johann Galtung has stressed the importance of structural violence for understanding social conflicts and their dynamics. The bodies of persons trying to cross international borders clearly have much violence built into them. They reach the borders with the accumulated pain and violence of many years of misery, war, hunger, and illness. They are trying to hang on to hope in the future as they undertake their migratory journeys, which are themselves filled with pain and violence. Galtung describes a “triangle of violence,” which includes not only direct and structural forms of violence, but also the important but invisible violence that is cultural. We are especially aggrieved to observe that black Africans especially suffer this violence in their racialized bodies, through a combination

of xenophobia and aporophobia (fear of the poor). Yes, immigrants arrive at our borders already laden with violence and pain.

Without grieving

They arrive with pain, but we do not allow them to experience grief. According to psychiatrist Joseba Achotegui, so-called “migratory grief” has at least seven aspects. The migrants grieve for all they have lost: family and friends, language, culture, social status, the earth and their roots, and the ethnic group that gave them a sense of belonging. They also grieve the physical risks, and these were made dramatically clear at the Melilla fence. They were met with clubs, stones, rubber balls, hard whacks, tear gas, and brutal kicks. The immigrants had spent long months barely surviving on Mount Gurugú, surrounded and harassed by the Moroccan security forces. In many cases, they had made long journeys across the Sahara desert, and before that they had suffered in their own country of Sudan, a nation afflicted with endless war. All these harsh realities obviously cause tremendous pain, and those who suffer them need to be allowed to grieve.

The Moroccan authorities buried the bodies of those who died at the Melilla fence without identifying them, without performing autopsies, without contacting their relatives. They were buried in anonymous graves, with no consideration given to repatriating the bodies. And what about those who simply disappear at sea or in the desert, the ones whose bodies are never recovered? According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), at least 21,240 persons have lost

their lives on migratory journeys since 2014, and their remains have not been recovered. When the body has disappeared completely, it is difficult or impossible for the survivors to mourn. The demand of human dignity is therefore quite clear: every migrant and every family has the right to be personally recognized and treated with respect.

European policies make it difficult for migrants and their families to grieve. Not only that, but they prevent European societies from doing their own grieving. On his famous visit to the island of Lampedusa on July 8, 2013, Pope Francis reflected as follows: “Who has wept over the death of these brothers and sisters? Who has cried for the people who were on the boat? For the young mothers who took their children along? For these men looking for work to support their own families? We are a society that has forgotten the experience of weeping, of ‘suffering with’: the globalization of indifference has taken away our ability to cry!” We Europeans need to grieve over what has happened.

With malice

Nothing that happened in Melilla was by accident. Everything was the result of a series of decisions that for decades have been outsourcing and militarizing border control. That is why, along with the pain, we feel indignation. There is pain (*dolor*) without grieving (*duelo*), but it is caused by malice (*dolo*). The Royal Spanish Academy, in its *Dictionary of the Language*, indicates that *dolo* means “deception, fraud, dissembling.” The same dictionary also includes two legal definitions: “the deliberate decision to

commit a crime knowing its illegality” and “the malicious will to deceive someone or to breach a contracted obligation.” There was malice in what happened in Melilla because both Morocco and Spain are bound by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and both nations refused to comply with the obligations of that charter.

On June 24 we saw so-called “hot deportations,” or what the governments call “border rejections.” In November 2020 the Constitutional Court of Spain allowed border rejections but not in the case of “large groups.” Border rejections are allowed only when there is “full judicial control” and full “compliance with international obligations.” There was neither control nor compliance in the events in Melilla. It was horrifying to see how the Moroccan forces entered Spanish territory to capture would-be applicants for international protection, including minors and injured people. We do not say that there was malice in the strict legal sense, but we do affirm that there was something very close to what most people understand by the word “malice”: the deliberate will to commit deception and fraud.

Regarding the Moroccan actions, there was also something close to premeditation or treachery. During the months of May and June, the Moroccan security forces increased their raids against migrant camps. Videos distributed by the Moroccan government show how one of those raids took place on Mount Gurugú on the afternoon of June 23. It is therefore not surprising that hundreds of migrants, exhausted and persecuted, tried to force the fence. We already know what resulted: many migrants dead and injured and subjected

to dehumanizing treatment. In the following days, some 1,300 migrants were forcibly removed from Nador to areas in the interior of Morocco. Another doleful operation with malice.

With government money

None of what we have described happens because of the intrinsic wickedness of politicians or police. Rather, it is the inevitable consequence of a vision that values the defense of national borders more than it does the defense of human rights; it is a vision that values the territorial integrity of a nation over the physical integrity of human beings. In 1992 Spain and Morocco signed a bilateral agreement for the readmission of irregular immigrants, and that agreement opened the way to militarization of the borders and externalization of their control. In such an arrangement, migrants are mere pawns on the chessboard of international geopolitics, interchangeable hostages of other people's interests. So sad but true.

What does Morocco get out of it? Simply money. Since 2013, Morocco has received 342 million euros from the European Union (EU) to curb irregular migration, most of it (234 million) taken from the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. In mid-August 2022, the EU announced that it will increase aid to Morocco for migration border control to 500 million euros, a 45% increase compared to the previous budget. It is estimated that, since 2007, Morocco has received a total of 13 billion euros in European aid. These funds (*dólares*) close the circle that we have seen: with pain (*dolor*), without

grieving (*duelo*), and with malice (*dolo*).

While it is true that the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) does not operate in Melilla, a word should be said about this agency since it plays a key role in controlling European borders. Created in 2004 as a mere “technical assistant” with a staff of 45, Frontex has become Europe's main policy maker and enforcer in migratory matters. It currently has 750 staff and is expected to reach 1,000 by 2027. Frontex's budget has also been increasing: between 2014 and 2020, it spent a total of 1.79 billion euros (94 in the first year, 345 last year), but the budget approved already for the year 2027 alone is 1.87 billion euros. Euros abound to close borders.

Conclusion: the “pull factor”

Governments justify militarized border fences as a dissuasive strategy, as a way to offset the “pull factor.” The experience of recent decades, however, shows that this approach simply encourages migrants to take increasingly dangerous routes, thus becoming more vulnerable to injury and death and more at the mercy of the mafias that traffic people. At the same time, the scandalous scream of the Melilla border fence can also be considered a “pull factor.” It is a loud scream that summons us to listen, to respond, to take responsibility, to act, to tear down walls, to build bridges, and to live lives of hospitality, not hostility.

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