



**HAL**  
open science

# Multicultural Policy as a Resisting Strategy of a Border Society: The Uses of Ethnicity in the Spanish Enclave of Melilla

Eduard Rodriguez-Martin

► **To cite this version:**

Eduard Rodriguez-Martin. Multicultural Policy as a Resisting Strategy of a Border Society: The Uses of Ethnicity in the Spanish Enclave of Melilla. *Borders of the European Union : Strategies of Crossing and Resistance*, 2007. halshs-01170449

**HAL Id: halshs-01170449**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01170449>**

Submitted on 1 Jul 2015

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

**Eduard RODRIGUEZ-MARTIN**

Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), France

## **Multicultural Policy as a Resisting Strategy of a Border Society: The Uses of Ethnicity in the Spanish Enclave of Melilla**

### Abstract

*The Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla are now the only borders of the European Union located on the African continent. The frontier nature of their territory has determined their whole history. On the one hand, a specific economy developed around the need for these enclaves to find the appropriate resources to live on, resources that were utterly insufficient on their limited territory. On the other hand, such dependency generated throughout the centuries constant relations with native populations and particularly Berber tribes living in the highland of the Rif. With the end of the Spanish Protectorate in Morocco in 1956 and the arrival of a standardised legal framework under the auspices of the democracy in Spain in 1978, natives became an integral part of society in both enclaves. The multiculturalism management model issued from this incorporation to citizenship has been used as a way to delegitimize the involvement of natives in politics and prevent their access to power.*

*"Melilla was Spanish.*

*18 years before the Kingdom of Navarre was;*

*162 years before the Roussillon became French;*

*279 years before the United States were born"*

*(Plaque commemorating the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Spanish conquest of Melilla, 1497-1997)*

## **From the Military Stronghold to the Multiethnic Enclave**

The conquest in 1492 of the Nazari kingdom of Granada, in the hands of the Catholic Kings, did not mark the end of the "*Reconquista*", initiated in the 8<sup>th</sup> century – it was only "*the prelude of campaigns against Maghreb, the first campaign in Africa, in fact*"<sup>1</sup>. From 1493, Spain conducted reconnaissance missions along the North African coast, which resulted in the occupation of Melilla in 1497, Mers el-Kébir in 1505, Peñon de Vélez de la Gomera in 1508, Oran in 1509 and Bejaia in 1510. A stronghold was established on a small island by the entrance of Algiers in 1511 – Peñon – and in 1510 Tripoli became occupied. The aim of these citadels was to act as a watch-keeping area against a possible attack from the Turks targeting the Catholic kingdom. They stopped being used for that purpose after the Naval Battle of Lepanto in 1571, in which the Turks lost against the Spanish and consequently changed their strategy to expand towards Asia. In 1898, Spain lost its remaining overseas colonies (Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Philippines) following the war against the United States of America. The Canary Islands, Ceuta, Melilla and West Sahara, together with many small islands along the Mediterranean coast of Morocco then became – and still are, with the exception of West Sahara – the last Spanish possessions outside the European continent.

Following the "colonial disaster" in 1898, Spain set its sights on Morocco. The Algeciras Conference in 1906 established French supremacy over the Sultanate but also acknowledged Spanish influence over the mountainous territories in the north. Subsequently to the agreements reached during the Conference, the Spanish Protectorate of Morocco was implemented in 1912 in the areas of the Rif, Ifni and Tarfaya. Although they then found themselves within the Protectorate sphere of influence, the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla and the islets were not included in Algeciras convention, for Spain considered that its rights over these territories dated from well before the establishment of the Protectorate. Spain was very

---

<sup>1</sup> Braudel F., 1996, "Les Espagnols et l'Afrique du Nord de 1492 à 1577", in Braudel F., *Autour de la Méditerranée*, Paris: Éditions de Fallois, pp.48-205.

cautious in differentiating the terms "Protectorate" and "sovereignty territories" and in emphasising that the Spanish presence there was of a different nature.

When Morocco became independent in 1956, Spain returned the territories formerly incorporated into its Protectorate. In 1958, it was Tarfaya's turn, Ifni in 1969 and West Sahara in 1975, following Moroccan peaceful occupation of this Southern area, with what became known as the "Green March". Ceuta and Melilla were removed from all negotiations concerning restitution of the territories, and the defence of "*españolidad*" (Spanishness) of sovereignty territories became at that time and until today one of the most recurring issues of the political and social life of both north-African cities, facing the Moroccan claims.

**Figure 1: The Spanish-Moroccan Frontier**



(Source: *The World Factbook*, 2007)

***The enclave of Melilla***

In the middle of the Berber territory of the Rif, in the north of Morocco, 100km away from the Algerian border and 200km away by sea from Malaga in Spain, Melilla has been since 1497 an entirely Spanish territory, as much on the political as on the administrative level. A small enclave – 12 km<sup>2</sup> – located on the borders of a natural seaport, this town is not only unknown to Spanish from the Iberian Peninsula but also often forgotten and connoted by a series of myths that makes it a kind of Spanish "far South"<sup>2</sup>.

Together with Ceuta, the other Spanish enclave on the African side of the straight of Gibraltar, Melilla is now the only border of the European Union located on the African continent. Border town, the enclave is limited by the sea in the east and by a 6-meter-high double fence in the north, south and west (equipped with dozens of watchtowers and totally controlled by infrared and thermal cameras) that, since the signature by Spain of the Schengen Agreement in 1991, separates it from Morocco. This historical situation gave to the population of Melilla the multicultural nature typical to towns on the south bank of the Mediterranean. After the garrisons that populated the enclave for centuries, a civil society mainly composed of natives from the Iberian Peninsula arrived in Melilla at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, seeking fortune at the time of the Spanish Protectorate. They currently represent the majority of the population in the enclave. Autochthonous people, originally from Moroccan hinterland, progressively grew over the past 30 years and they now make up one third of the population. They all composed a population of 66 871 inhabitants in total during the last census in 2006.

**Table 1: Total and Muslim Population of Melilla, 1875-1986**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total population</b>	<b>Muslims (% of total)</b>
<b>1910</b>	39.852	95 (0,2)
<b>1930</b>	62.614	932 (1,5)
<b>1950</b>	81.182	6.277 (7,7)
<b>1960</b>	79.586	7.626 (9,5)

---

<sup>2</sup> At the time when military service was still mandatory in Spain, being sent to Melilla was the worst nightmare for most young men (and their families), who would do anything not to go there, including becoming conscientious objectors at the time when it was still an offence liable to imprisonment.

<b>1975</b>	-	14.174 (21,8)
<b>1981</b>	58.449	11.105 (19)
<b>1986</b>	52.388	17.824 (34)
<b>2006</b>	66.871	-

*Source: Gold (2000) and Carabaza y Santos (1992)*

One of the main historical characteristics of the population is the constant presence of army men within all areas of social life. This fact is deeply anchored in the spirit of the town, which always strongly defended the army. We must bear in mind that General Francisco Franco initiated his military career there and that the Spanish civil war started with Melilla garrisons' uprising. Today the army is a guarantor of peace in the eyes of the enclave's citizens, facing the sovereign claims of Morocco over this small territory.

## **The Contradictions Between Dependence and Resistance Strategies**

---

Turned into a free port in 1863, Melilla has enjoyed since 1955 the *Law on economic and financial system* promulgated by Spain at the eve of Morocco's independence, stating exemptions of custom duties and other taxes on goods brought into the town<sup>3</sup>. The "open-air market" formed by Melilla is mostly directed towards Moroccan domestic market, the differences in prices generating significant cargo flow into the country.

This will have inevitable repercussions on the economy of Nador, the Moroccan region where Melilla is located and where the population endeavours to benefit as much as possible from an exchange and smuggling trade system, which improved over the centuries. Close relationships between the Spanish enclave and Nador, capital of East Rif are expressed by the considerable presence of Moroccans within Melilla trade sector and the flow of goods, people

---

<sup>3</sup> Troin J.-F. (ed.), 2002, *Maroc: région, pays, territoire*, Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose.  
Rodriguez Eduardo

and services both ways as well as of family networks, often exceeding the immediate border area<sup>4</sup>.

Consequently, it was calculated that more than 20.000 people on average (i.e. the equivalent of a third of the population of the enclave) are entering Melilla every day from Morocco<sup>5</sup>. Among them, around 10.000 women work as servants in individual houses. The others are usually into small-scale smuggling or sale of brand counterfeits, bootleg records, etc. Moreover, the Moroccan Rif being one of the biggest cannabis producers worldwide, Melilla and Ceuta have become two of the main gateways to that drug in Europe. It is therefore likely that a great number of these daily transients are involved in cannabis trafficking and sale in the enclave.

All the above-mentioned activities make of the border a very lively, busy place during the daytime. With its shouts, the sound of traffic, regular forceful interventions from the police on both sides<sup>6</sup> and the highly illegal nature of most activities taking place there, the border region is a bustling, stressful place where thousands of people on both sides fight for survival every day.

### ***Smuggling and Border-Crossing Strategies***

---

<sup>4</sup> For more details about the "porosity" of the border, see Driessen H., 1992, *On the Spanish-Moroccan Frontier: A Study in Ritual, Power and Ethnicity*, New York/Oxford: Berg; Driessen H., 1999, "Smuggling as a Border Way of Life: A Mediterranean case", in Rösler M., Wendl T. (eds.), *Frontiers and Borderlands: Anthropological Perspectives*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, pp.117-127; McMurray D.-A., 2001, *In & Out of Morocco: Smuggling and Migration in a Frontier Boomtown*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; Sorensen N.-N., 2000, "Crossing the Spanish-Moroccan Border with Migrants, New Islamists and Riff-Raff", *Ethnologia Europaea*, 30, 2, pp.87-100; Troin J.-F., 2002, *op. cit.*

<sup>5</sup> According to the Melilla Regional Government Office, 7,7 million people crossed the Spanish-Moroccan frontier in both ways in 2006, from Monday to Thursday. In 2005, they were 6,2 million. The inhabitants of Nador province are exempted from producing a visa to enter Melilla territory, however, they are not authorised to enter the Peninsula.

<sup>6</sup> Usually abusive interventions of Spanish policemen to monitor entries into Spanish territory generated on several occasions violent confrontation with the crowd, who would retort by throwing stones and heavy objects at the police forces. Occasionally, in very tense situations, the police shot

Rodriguez Eduardo

Spain's entry into the EU in 1986 did not alter the particularities granted to Ceuta and Melilla by means of the *Law on economic and financial system*, giving them many financial benefits since 1955. Indeed, both towns enjoy a special scheme related to the European legislation that, besides the notion of free port, provides for an economic activity almost exclusively based on smuggling with Morocco. The list of EU clauses on that matter, appearing on the membership form signed by Spain in 1986, can be summarized as follows: 1) Non-inclusion into the customs union; 2) Non-inclusion into the common agricultural policy; 3) Non-adoption of the common tax policy; and 4) Application of European structural funds<sup>7</sup>. The result of these agreements is the non-application to Ceuta and Melilla of the common customs tariff and community trading arrangement. Non-adoption of common tax policy is due to the maintained status of free port for both towns; its first result was the non-application of VAT.

With all these measures, the purchase of products manufactured by European companies, cheaper than in Morocco, becomes very attractive. As we mentioned before, thousands of Moroccans go to the enclave every morning to buy products on sale in the industrial warehouses surrounding Beni Enzar, the main border crossing point of the town. On the same day, these products are sold in the *souk* in the neighbouring city of Nador, giving smugglers the opportunity to earn a small margin allowing for the survival of thousands of families in the area. But the gain is only guaranteed provided that Moroccan custom duties are not paid. To avoid paying such taxes, Moroccan smugglers adopted very efficient tactics that have become a real way of life<sup>8</sup>.

Trade in Melilla entirely depends on the daily flood of smugglers<sup>9</sup> and, while making sure to get these resources inside, an exception was applied to the immigration law that Spain

---

into the crowd with real bullets, once killing a Moroccan and seriously injuring another on a different occasion.

<sup>7</sup> García Flores D., 1999, *Ceuta y Melilla: Cuestión de Estado*, Ceuta/Melilla: Ciudad Autónoma.

<sup>8</sup> See Driessen H., 1992, *op. cit.*; McMurray D.-A., 2001, *op. cit.* About Ceuta border-crossing practices and 'border talks', see also Sorensen N.-N., 2000, *op. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> According to the Melilla Regional Agency for Tax Administration, the highest income revenues in Melilla history directly bound to smuggling trade were registered in 2006, when more than €674



had to adopt in 1985 as one of the conditions to join the EU the following year. For the first time, a visa was necessary for Moroccans in order to enter the Spanish territory. This way, regulations specific to the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla authorise the entry of residents from neighbouring areas, provided that they own a valid Moroccan passport testifying residency in the Nador region in the case of Melilla. On the other hand, this permission to enter the enclave only applies for one day; all Moroccans in the enclave without a residence card must leave the city before the border crossing point closes in the night time. The opening and closing times of the border crossing points for Moroccans from neighbouring areas are the same as Melilla business hours, the entrance into the Spanish territory being therefore only allowed from Monday morning to Thursday night. Entrance is forbidden outside these times, on week-ends and bank holidays.

Owning a Moroccan passport and having legal residence in Melilla neighbouring area is thus a requisite for any Moroccan wishing to enter the enclave without a visa.

### ***Fortress, Barbed Wire, Fences and Separating Wall***

The double fence currently separating the enclave from Morocco was built in 1996 as a result of a historical process that took various forms throughout the centuries. The first line physically separating both territories was created in 1972 when a cholera epidemic in the Moroccan area near Melilla forced the Spanish authorities to take specific measures in order to prevent contamination in the enclave. The army then placed barbed wire along the border area, which was until then only controlled by a few soldiers, not over concerned about stopping Moroccans from accessing the Spanish territory. Reinforced inspections of people wishing to enter Melilla and especially those working in the enclave led to the more or less stable implantation of a population of Moroccan origin in Melilla trying to escape the obstacles imposed by Spanish authorities in order to access Melilla and develop their professional activity without restraint.

---

million were estimated as incomes by this Agency. This number was €590 million in 2005, €544 million in 2004, €568 million in 2003 and €604 million en 2002.

As a candidate State to the European Union, Spain had to reinforce the control of its external frontiers. Until 1986, the only places subjected to a permanent control between Morocco and Melilla were the four border crossing points. From the end of that year, the barbed-wire fence was progressively reinforced with the installation of sentry posts every few hundred meters and monitoring cameras. The inefficiency of the measures taken to restrain Moroccan entry into Melilla gave the idea in 1990 to build a separation fence. One year only after the fall of the Berlin wall, however, the project did not arouse a great enthusiasm. Notwithstanding, the barbed-wire fence was further reinforced in 1993 and ultimately, in 1996, the double closure that now stands started to be erected following the massive arrival of African immigrants in the enclave in 1995. The fence became operational in 1998 and underwent improvements in 2000 and 2006, following the massive assaults on the wall by sub-Saharan immigrants trying to reach Europe. It cost 45 million US\$ (for Ceuta and Melilla) and two-thirds of it were funded by the EU<sup>10</sup>.

### *The future of Melilla*

"The future of Melilla" has been tackled in hundreds of pages of local newspapers for over 20 years; it is one of the most recurring concerns of any conversation. The pessimism implied has been intensified over the past few years due to the signature of the free trade treaty between Morocco and the EU. This partnership provides for the progressive reduction of custom duties between both regions until they disappear completely in 2010. The enforcement of that treaty implies mid-term suppression of smuggling in Melilla, together with an unprecedented trade crisis in the enclave. The effects are already quite clear and many companies have already transferred their activities into the free zone built on the other side of the border, near the Moroccan port of Beni Enzar.

Always linked to the discussions about "the future of Melilla", immigration has become one of the most significant and explicit problems in the eyes of the inhabitants of the enclave.

---

<sup>10</sup> Gold P., 2000, *Europe or Africa? A Contemporary Study of the Spanish North African Enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Like its sister Ceuta, Melilla has become a controller of the arrival of new immigrants in Spain and Europe. Faced with a massive problem exceeding by far their resources, the inhabitants of Melilla feel totally abandoned to their fate by the central government in Madrid that does not want and/or cannot interfere too much without reviving Moroccan sovereignist claims over the enclaves.

## **Ethnic Construction and Internal Borders**

---

Until the first immigration law was approved in Spain in 1985, the inhabitants of Melilla with Moroccan origins were subject to a legal vacuum regarding their civil status, which did not allow them to be considered as real citizens of the enclave. The only legal document they had was what was called the "statistical card". As its name suggests, the sole purpose of that document was to add a number to the statistics of the enclave. Apart from that, that card did not allow its holders to access essential services available to other citizens such as public health, social or unemployment benefits. They were also denied access to the Peninsula or, for that matter, the European continent.

**Table 2: Muslim Population of Melilla by Identity Document Owned in 1986**

	<b>Spanish Identity Card</b>	<b>Statistical Card</b>	<b>Other documents</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Male</b>	1.680	2.435	4.193	8.308
<b>Female</b>	1.298	3.042	4.379	8.719
<b>Total</b>	2.978	5.477	8.572	17.027

*Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística (1986)*

The New Alien Law (LOE) in Spain was the result of the EU requirement for the country to adopt an immigration control law before becoming a member in 1986. Consequently, a law was approved in 1985 that regulated for the first time in the country's

history the necessary conditions to obtain Spanish nationality and be able to live and work in Spain. This law provided for preferential treatment for peoples historically and culturally bound to Spain such as Latin Americans, Portuguese, Filipinos, Andorrans, Equatorial Guineans, Sephardis and people from Gibraltar. On the other hand, the law did not make any reference to Morocco and Western Sahara, the other two former Spanish colonies. Suddenly, 82,5% of the Melilla population of Moroccan origin (approximately 14.000 people at the time) had become foreigners given that, even though they had lived there all their lives, they had never requested Spanish nationality (nor Moroccan nationality in many cases); consequently, they had to face deportation<sup>11</sup>.

**Table 3: Muslim Population of Melilla by Place of Birth**

	Male	Female	Total
<b>Born in Spain</b>	6.336	5.691	12.027
Melilla	6.281	5.633	11.914
Another town	55	58	113
<b>Born abroad</b>	1.968	3.022	4.990
Morocco	1.954	2.998	4.952
Another country	14	24	38
<b>N/A</b>	4	6	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	8.308	8.719	17.027

*Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística (1986)*

There was a wide reaction from the community of Moroccan origin against the application of the law in the enclave and several demonstrations were organised to show their anger. The largest one gathered between 15.000 and 20.000 people, marching "for the

---

<sup>11</sup> Planet Contreras A.-I., 1998, *Melilla y Ceuta: espacios-frontera hispano-marroquíes*, Ceuta/Melilla: Ciudad Autónoma/UNED.

Constitution and human rights: No to the LOE". The Spanish community actively defended the LOE and a few days later, 40.000 to 45.000 people demonstrated "for the Constitution and human rights: Yes to the LOE", which is known as the widest gathering ever held in Melilla. Following several months of demonstrations and counter demonstrations, often violently repressed by the police, and several business shutdowns and hunger strikes from members of the Muslim community, ethnic confrontations broke, causing the death of one person and some casualties during a night of intense tension and violence. A few weeks later, the Minister for Home Affairs decided to put an end to the conflict by offering permanent residence cards to people who had lived in Melilla before the law was applied and Spanish nationality to those who were born there or had been living there for over ten years.

This conflict marked a before and an after in the life of the enclave for two reasons:

1) It created an identity link between the Muslims of Melilla, who started to organise themselves around several very active associations acting as the representatives of the Muslim communities with the Spanish authorities, negotiating with the latter the issue of nationalities and residence cards;

2) It acknowledged the existence in law of the population of Moroccan origin in Melilla by granting access into the political scene of the enclave to 14,000 new voters.

In other words, the crisis resolution represented the end of the historical process which brought the autochthonous population from the status of indigenous (stateless person) to the status of citizen (national). Shortly after the Muslims were granted access to the political visibility, some of their members were incorporated into the political life of the city. Traditional political forces quickly understood that they had to make their lists available for Muslim representatives in order to cast the votes of 14.000 new citizens.

### ***Multicultural Policy as a Resisting Strategy***

In parallel with this light political integration of the Muslims of Melilla, an institutionalised discourse was developed, tending to represent the multiethnic fact of the

enclave with a motto that then became very popular and was imposed for any tourist or commercial promotion of the city: 'Melilla, the city of the four Cultures'. The word "Culture" was used here to define each ethnic group populating the enclave, i.e. by decreasing number: Christians, Muslims, Jews and Hindus. Despite the recognition granted by this discourse to the Jewish and Hindu communities, their number is largely below that of Christians and Muslims. This discourse thus treats as equal currency in its multicultural policy populations of widely different size<sup>12</sup>.

The constant communication around the "discourse of the four Cultures" from the institutions of the enclave facilitated its reification. Indeed, in the past twenty years, all tourist brochures state this slogan on their front cover; Melilla's official logo mixes four letters corresponding to four alphabets: Latin, Arabic, Hebrew and Sanskrit; a square in the city centre was given the name "Square of the four Cultures", and so was an international art festival; for a few months now, the main tourist activity has been the "Road to the temples", a guided tour showing in the same day the main church, the great mosque, the synagogue, and the Hindu temple. For a few years, the town has been planning the creation of a "Museum of Cultures" that would allow turning an intangible fact into heritage: the cultural diversity of Melilla. On the same basis, one of the most ambitious projects of the town, which involves significant political and economical stakes, is the request formulated by Melilla to be acknowledged as "UNESCO World heritage", due not only to its richness of architecture but also to its multicultural nature. Indeed, in the eyes of its political leaders, and as the mayor likes to remind regularly, Melilla is a unique example of cultural diversity and, at the same time, of tolerance. It is not without reason that a plaque in the entrance hall of the town hall, offered by the city of Toledo, shows the symbolic links which by analogy unite both cities. Needless to say that Toledo is often idealised as one the greatest historical examples of multicultural and tolerant societies at the time of Muslim Spain.

---

<sup>12</sup> According to Driessen, the number of Jews living in the enclave was about 1.100. He also estimated the Hindu population at 110 people. As it was said above, in the same year, there were 17.824 Muslims and about 33.000 Christians. It is, however, very difficult to establish more precise and evolutionary figures of the different populations, since the census of population in Spain does not include ethnic categories. The data presented here have been established following the figures provided by representatives of every community. See Driessen H., 1992, *op. cit.*

The word "Culture" in this discourse is surprisingly efficient to define in the simplest way a reality that has been changing since the access to citizenship of the Muslim community. In the last years, for example, "the city of the four Cultures" has become that of the "five Cultures", the Gypsies having recently obtained "membership". At the basis of such histrionic and stereotyped aggregation of "Cultures", and acting as the keyword supporting and balancing the political local arena, there is the word "*Convivencia*". While not having a direct translation in English, it can be defined as "living together in harmony". And it is this "living together in harmony", dramatically emphasised by the press, politicians, institutions and even the representatives of different communities that has become the main value by which the town of Melilla endeavours to express officially its collective identity<sup>13</sup>.

### **The National Segregation of the Muslim Community**

Some authors<sup>14</sup> have suggested that in multiethnic societies with inegalitarian conditions for accessing power, ethnicity becomes the main principle structuring the social world. Such hypothesis would suggest, on the opposite, that under egalitarian conditions of access to power, ethnicity would not act as a principle for social division. In the case of Melilla, however, the access to political power was "objectively" facilitated by the grant of nationality to almost every person concerned by the immigration law. Nonetheless, society stratification continues on clear ethnic criteria which place within the most disadvantaged sectors most of the members of the Muslim community.

Muslims' access to the political sphere created a new scenario in which the analyses on social and economic exclusion of Muslims from the enclave based on racial criteria no longer make sense. With the recognition of a legal status for the Muslims, exclusion was not pursued in a colonialist background based on racial criteria but on criteria that amplify and

---

<sup>13</sup> In their attempt to establish an anthropology of borders, H. Donnan and T. M. Wilson emphasize the importance of culture in the study of border societies: "The real predicament of culture for anthropologists is not that the usefulness of the concept of culture as an analytical tool is at the end. Rather, it is precisely because it, like the concepts of nation and identity, is recognised by most people to be a charter for behaviour, a marker of social membership, a matrix for changing meanings and relations, and a metaphor for the values and actions of everyday life that the discipline must continue to examine human life through its lens". Donnan H., Wilson T. M., 1999, *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State*, New York/Oxford: Berg.

<sup>14</sup> Gossiaux J.-F., 2002, *Pouvoirs ethniques dans les Balkans*, Paris: PUF.

overemphasize the cultural differences of each community. These differences would be what would explain, according to this new rhetoric, the incapacity of minorities to adapt to the majority group and not the discrimination of some on the others.

Stolcke<sup>15</sup> or Hall<sup>16</sup> have observed changes in the rhetoric of new forms of exclusion that, below a level of legal and racial equality, support the fact that the respect due to cultural specificities of minorities living among a majority culture makes it naturally impossible to assimilate such communities. Simultaneously, they underline the fact that society therefore perceives the integration of minorities, without assimilation, among the majority group as a real danger for the preservation of its identity<sup>17</sup>. Stolcke called this rhetoric "cultural fundamentalism" and Yuval-Davis<sup>18</sup> "ethnic fundamentalism". For these authors, it is the excess of "culture" which is at the basis of a new form of exclusion tending to separate the groups according to ethnic factors, which relate more and more to those ruling the socio-economic stratification of society. As Yuval-Davis<sup>19</sup> points out, "total separation, preferably spatial, is considered to be vital for the common human welfare, in total contradiction to social and economic reality". In Melilla, a striking example of such declaration is found not only in spatial segregation in areas at the periphery of the enclave but also in another highly symbolic fact, the location of the Muslim cemetery of the town. In spite of being a large-sized community in Melilla, until 1993 Muslims had to bury their dead in the neighbouring community of Sidi Guariach, in Morocco. After many years of high pressure and social tensions, a Muslim cemetery was finally built in the enclave. It has to be mentioned that

---

<sup>15</sup> Stolcke V., 1995, "Talking Culture: New Boundaries, New Rhetorics of Exclusion in Europe", *Current Anthropology*, 36, 1, pp.1-23; Stolcke V., 2000, "Cultural Fundamentalism", *World Culture Report 2000: Cultural Diversity, Conflict and Pluralism*, Paris: UNESCO.

<sup>16</sup> Hall S., 1996, "Who needs 'identity'?", Introduction to Hall S., Du Gay P. (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity*, London: Sage, pp.1-17.

<sup>17</sup> On the conflicting construction of the identity of Zimbabwe's female cross-border traders and the accusations of 'unpatriotic citizens' put on them by the Zimbabwean State, see Cheater A.- P., 1998, "Transcending the State?: Gender and Borderline Constructions of Citizenship in Zimbabwe", in Donnan H., Wilson T. M., 1999, *op. cit.*

<sup>18</sup> Yuval-Davis N., 2004, "Borders, Boundaries and the Politics of Belonging", in May S., Modood T., Squires J. (eds.), *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Minority Rights*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.214-30.

<sup>19</sup> Yuval-Davis N., *Ibid.*, p.220.



despite the low number of Jews and Hindus, they have always had their own cemetery and crematorium respectively.

To go back to the basis of this new rhetoric on exclusion, it must be pointed out that in Melilla, the logic behind the alleged incapacity of the Muslim community to adapt to the national community, represented by the Christians, was built based on Melilla's specificity: its status as a cross-border society and a territory whose sovereignty is a cause of dispute between Spain and Morocco. In that way, Driessen<sup>20</sup> has noticed that "there have been few studies of international borders as frontier zones where the process of making nations into categories of 'us' and 'them' have their origins". The case of Melilla is however an example of how this process is able to define the social structure of a whole society. Within such scope, the categories defining the national identity in the enclave have a strength that cannot be compared with the rest of the Spanish state. The exclusive attribution of categories ruling national identity offered by the multicultural discourse to the members of the Christian community represents the criterion that legitimates them being at the top of the social scale.

Therefore, the help of Melilla's authorities for all Catholic celebrations, the participation of the army during the Holy Week processions, the amplification of all Christian festivals, the ecclesiastic and military representation in all public events and the praising by those organising such events of the Spanish flag and national anthem, are extremely strong symbols in a border town where defending Spanish sovereignty is a predominant issue<sup>21</sup>. Catholic religion thus becomes a meaningful value for the definition of national identity in Melilla and is imposed by its own political institutions. In that manner, only Christians consider themselves as "real" Spanish, the Muslims being looked upon as foreigners or even Moroccan despite their Spanish nationality<sup>22</sup>. The suspicion on the Muslims' loyalty to the

---

<sup>20</sup> Driessen H., 1998, "The 'New Immigration' and the Transformation of the European-African Frontier", in Donnan H., Wilson T. M., 1999, *op. cit.*

<sup>21</sup> Donnan and Wilson remind us that "the investigation of the symbolic reveals the cultural characteristics that local people use to define their membership in local, regional, national and supranational entities. Ultimately, anthropological research on border cultures contributes to our knowledge of identity formation, maintenance, adaptation and disintegration". See Donnan H., Wilson T.-M., 1999, *op. cit.*

<sup>22</sup> As Driessen has remarked, "there is a strong tendency, both on the European and African sides, to define the Mediterranean frontier in religious terms. In Morocco the notion of 'Europe' is inseparable from the notion of 'Christian' in the same way that 'Moroccan' and 'Muslim' are used interchangeably". In fact, "the Hispano-African frontier, however, is not only constructed from the

Spanish sovereignty in Melilla is a weapon often used to delegitimize the intention of the political parties with a strong Muslim presence to gain political power in the enclave. That suspicion makes people believe that a government with a prevailing number of Muslims would imply abandoning Melilla in the hands of Morocco. In fact, Muslims in Melilla are usually considered as a sort of "fifth column" in the service of Morocco in the enclave, but at the same time they are qualified as "traitors" by the Moroccan state<sup>23</sup>.

## Conclusion

---

In September 2005, a report from the CNI (National Intelligence Centre) – the Spanish intelligence unit – on Melilla was filtered by the press. It informed on the population forecast stating that by 2010 the population of Moroccan origin would form the majority in the enclave. The report claimed that this situation, new to the history of the town, involved a real risk as far as maintaining the Spanish sovereignty in Melilla was concerned. Indignant, representatives from the Muslim communities immediately replied to these words questioning their loyalty to the Spanish state, of which they were nationals. On the other side, twenty years before, in 1985, during the crisis induced by the application of the immigration law in Melilla, the Moroccan Nationalist Party – Istiqlal – had threatened with death all Melilla residents of Moroccan origin applying for Spanish nationality. Moreover, they misled many of these residents, for the most part illiterate, into believing that, by accepting Spanish nationality, they relinquished Islamic religion and being buried in Morocco, at a time when Melilla did not even have a Muslim cemetery. These both examples explain quite clearly the

---

inside out but also from the outside in". See Driessen H., 1996, "At the Edge of Europe: Crossing and Marking the Mediterranean Divide", in O'Dowd L., Wilson T. M., *Borders, Nations and States: Frontiers of Sovereignty*, Aldershot: Avebury, pp.179-198.

<sup>23</sup> On the importance of emotions in the construction of the otherness, see Svasek M., 2000, "Borders and Emotions: Hope and Fear in the Bohemian-Bavarian Frontier Zone", *Ethnologia Europaea*, 30, 2, pp.111-126.

difficulties encountered by Muslims in Melilla to find a place in a social order where membership to the nation is the main value for integration.

Although all those facts do not explain why socio-economic inequalities of the Muslim community remain so important twenty years after Muslims were legally recognised and incorporated into the political sphere of the enclave, they show that solving the conflict over the immigration law in Melilla had an unexpected outcome. Managing the city multiculturalism quickly turned out to be a double-edged weapon because, while claiming to have an egalitarian framework, it delegitimized Melilla's Muslims for the exercise of power in the enclave. In that way, the relation between multicultural policy and ethnic demographics appears in this context as a clear issue of power. National membership being the final criterion justifying the legitimacy of a group over another, it thus seems legitimate to ask ourselves what is the impact of mechanisms ruling the access and exercise of power in maintaining and reproducing an economic model supported by the stratification of society into ethnic groups of widely different size. The hypothesis we defend is that national segregation of the Muslim community is linked to the reproduction of the conditions of its own economic exploitation.

## References

---

Braudel F., 1996, "Les Espagnols et l'Afrique du Nord de 1492 à 1577", in Braudel F., *Autour de la Méditerranée*, Paris: Éditions de Fallois, pp.48-205.

Carabaza E., de Santos M., 1992, *Melilla y Ceuta: Las últimas colonias*, Madrid: Talasa.

Cheater A.- P., 1998, "Transcending the State?: Gender and Borderline Constructions of Citizenship in Zimbabwe", in Donnan H., Wilson T. M. (eds.), *Border Identities: Nation and State at International Borders*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.96-116.

Donnan H., Wilson T.-M., 1999, *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State*, New York/Oxford: Berg

Driessen H., 1992, *On the Spanish-Moroccan Frontier: A Study in Ritual, Power and Ethnicity*, New York/Oxford: Berg.

Driessen H., 1996, "At the Edge of Europe: Crossing and Marking the Mediterranean Divide", in O'Dowd L., Wilson T. M., *Borders, Nations and States: Frontiers of Sovereignty*, Aldershot: Avebury, pp.179-198.

Driessen H., 1998, "The 'New Immigration' and the Transformation of the European-African Frontier", in Donnan H., Wilson T. M. (eds.), *Border Identities: Nation and State at International Borders*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.96-116.

Driessen H., 1999, "Smuggling as a Border Way of Life: A Mediterranean Case", in Rösler M., Wendl T. (eds.), *Frontiers and Borderlands: Anthropological Perspectives*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, pp.117-127.

García Flores D., 1999, *Ceuta y Melilla: Cuestión de Estado*, Ceuta/Melilla: Ciudad Autónoma.

Gold P., 2000, *Europe or Africa? A Contemporary Study of the Spanish North African Enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Gossiaux J.-F., 2002, *Pouvoirs ethniques dans les Balkans*, Paris: PUF.

Hall S., 1996, "Who Needs 'Identity'?", Introduction to Hall S., Du Gay P. (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity*, London: Sage, pp.1-17.

Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 1986, *Estudio estadístico de las comunidades musulmanas de Ceuta y Melilla, 1986*, Madrid: I.N.E.

McMurray D.-A., 2001, *In & Out of Morocco: Smuggling and Migration in a Frontier Boomtown*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Planet Contreras A.-I., 1998, *Melilla y Ceuta: espacios-frontera hispano-marroquíes*, Ceuta/Melilla: Ciudad Autónoma/UNED.

Sorensen N.-N., 2000, "Crossing the Spanish-Moroccan Border with Migrants, New Islamists and Riff-Raff", *Ethnologia Europaea*, 30, 2, pp.87-100

Stolcke V., 1995, "Talking Culture: New Boundaries, New Rhetorics of Exclusion in Europe", *Current Anthropology*, 36, 1, pp.1-23.

Stolcke V., 2000, "Cultural Fundamentalism", in *World Culture Report 2000: Cultural Diversity, Conflict and Pluralism*, Paris: UNESCO.

Svasek M., 2000, "Borders and Emotions: Hope and Fear in the Bohemian-Bavarian Frontier Zone", *Ethnologia Europaea*, 30, 2, pp.111-126.

Troin J.-F. (ed.), 2002, *Maroc: région, pays, territoire*, Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose.

Yuval-Davis N., 2002, "Some Reflections on the Questions of Citizenship and Racism", in Anthias F., Lloyd C. (eds.), *Rethinking Anti-Racisms: From Theory to Practice*, London: Routledge, pp.44-59

Yuval-Davis N., 2004, "Borders, Boundaries and the Politics of Belonging", in May S., Modood T., Squires J. (eds.), *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Minority Rights*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.214-30.

Zurlo Y., 2005, *Ceuta et Melilla: Histoire, représentations et devenir de deux enclaves espagnoles*, Paris: L'Harmattan.