

# THIS EUROPE WEIGHS 2,048 KILOMETRES AND A FEW ETCETERAS

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Europe is not going through the age of inclusion, but of exclusion. Us, locked as opposed to the opening to the other barbarians; what is ours is developed above what is common to exploit; what separates us on top of what unites us. Because in order to perpetuate an inequality it is only necessary to trace that line that links any two points on the map, the shortest distance to rupture, especially when the mentioned path is reinforced with concrete and barbed wire, also when the drawing is coloured by the daily occurrence of a world that is created by and for the same ones.

Inside-outside, own-foreign, centre-peripheries, correlations in which Europe prioritises the first terms, even from the impossibility of concealing so many ambivalences: the outside of the inside, what is foreign of what is own, the peripheries of the centre. Because this is how fortresses have been built for centuries, because that is how those same empires have fallen, civilisations that have disappeared because they were too strong and, ultimately, unable to combine their transformation with and from the victims created in their progress.

Some numbers serve to illustrate this, in spite of the verified inaccuracy of any figure<sup>1</sup>: border walls have proliferated ostensibly in recent times, including in the

<sup>1</sup> Few elements as inaccurate as numbers. This is exemplified in a masterful dialogue between the characters of Santa (Javier Bardem), Lino (José Ángel Egido) and Rico (Joaquín Climent), of *Los lunes al sol*, directed by Fernando León de Aranoa:

- SANTA: Eight thousand pesetas, for instance. How much are eight thousand pesetas worth?
- LINO [who looks at him not understanding what he means]: In euros?
- S: In pesetas. How much is eight thousand pesetas worth in pesetas?
- L [shrugging]: Eight thousand pesetas.

Schengen area, currently delimited by 19 separation fences totalling 2,048 kilometres in length compared to 315 kilometres in 2014. Another official fact, also offered by the European Parliament<sup>2</sup>: 13 percent of the external borders of the European Union are fenced, 1,535 kilometres of the 12,033 total. Because a dozen States from the community area have walled off some of their boundaries.

It is not a consolation, but the truth is that Europe as a fortress is no exception to a very clear trend since 1989, paradoxically the year of the fall of the Berlin Wall and, a few months later, the disappearance of another partition, one built with racist mortar, the South African apartheid. Human eagerness to open abysses has been a constant ever since and the 6 walls in the late 80's of the last century have currently become 74<sup>3</sup>, with “separating peaks” as the most recent in 2015, when the war in Syria justified the departure/arrival of more than one million people. There are quantities that are better spread with all their graphemes, to at least dilate the pain of reading: there are seventy-four walls around the world, that world in which six out of ten people live in a country that has put dams on its borders, Spain as well, the pioneer country<sup>4</sup> in Europe, that fortress Europe.

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- S: No. No. You see? They are worth much more morally, to me.
  - RICO: Ten thousand?
  - S: Much more. Ten million. More. One hundred thousand.
  - L: Fuck, Santa, what nonsense are you saying, how are eight thousand pesetas going to be worth a hundred billion?

<sup>2</sup> Dumbrava Costica: *Walls and fences at EU borders*.

<sup>3</sup> Their length in Europe varies from the three hundred metres fenced separating Norway from Russia in the town of Storskog to the 550 kilometres covered between Lithuania and Belarus.

<sup>4</sup> The Spanish State has 21 kilometres of fenced wall in Ceuta (it begins to be raised in 1993) and Melilla (1996). In the European Union there are walls that were raised before the Spanish ones. This is the case of those of Cyprus (1974), inherited after its accession to the Community bloc in 2004, and the Peace Lines of Northern Ireland (1969), which in reality are not bordering, but delimit the Catholic quarters from the Protestants', especially in Belfast, the capital.

The fences of Ceuta and Melilla, the Spanish authorities claimed in the mid-1990s, would block migratory movements from North Africa. Maybe that is why it has grown to reach six metres high and maybe that is why in 2007 those same rulers decided to crown it with the so-called three-dimensional wire rope, a technical, but no less cruel, way of preventing access by means of a twisted metal cable splattered by blades. The Spanish concertinas were not withdrawn until 2020, when Morocco sculpted its side of the border in parallel with new thorny wires. They have claimed hundreds, thousands, of torn bodies along the way, lives slanted by metal. More than 2,390 migrants died on routes to Spain last year, more than half on the Canary Islands' one, according to the group Caminando Fronteras<sup>5</sup>. They weren't our bodies, so we might not care about anything.

The same indifference habitually inhabits one of those lines that link any two points on the map, the 35°50 parallel, an imaginary and arbitrary route, without walls or pits or controls, that separates two countries, Spain and Morocco, two continents, Europe and Africa, two realities, us and them. A stretch in the salt water, an infinite fence<sup>6</sup>. The Mediterranean is the great pit of African migration to Europe without having to use bricks; it is sufficient to torpedo humanitarian assistance to weave a context of death. Of the more than 50,000 deaths documented by the International

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<sup>5</sup> *Derecho a la Vida-Año 2022*. The most serious case in recent times was revealed by the British BBC (and systematically denied by the Minister of the Interior, Fernando Grande-Marlaska): on 24 June 2022, at least 23 people died in their attempt to cross the border of Nador with Melilla. See Thomas Ed, Adam Walker et al: *How Spain looked on as dozens were crushed to death at its border*.

<sup>6</sup> The documentary *Paraíso 35°50*, by Sergio Rodrigo and Lucía Muñoz, runs along this imaginary line revealing the bad practices of humanitarian rescue.

Organization for Migration since 2014<sup>7</sup>, more than half took place on routes to and within Europe, while at least 25,104 deaths were reported in the Mediterranean. There are plenty of figures. And the cartography of death also criminalises women defenders of the right to migrate, including activists Helena Maleno, Katrin Schmidt and Anouk Van Gelsen<sup>8</sup>.

Governments offer varied excuses to pierce so many divisive precipices, mainly irregular migration (32 percent of the cases analysed worldwide by the Centre Delàs d'Estudis per la Pau<sup>9</sup>, which speaks of “global apartheid”) and terrorism (18 percent). That is, the walls that the world is building today, and Europe with it, are not meant to protect us, the insiders, from foreign tanks and armies, but to prevent the arrival of other human beings, refugees and migrants.

Politicians assure and repeat that it is for our good and, to the delight of the industry that benefits from it<sup>10</sup>, some claim that the European Commission itself finance these physical barriers<sup>11</sup>. Poor. Not the so-called leaders, not even the direct victims, but us, poor us Europeans. Because decadence works like this, from the exclusion of diversity, with the erection of walls that prevent the arrival of otherness;

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<sup>7</sup> Julia Black y Zoe Sigman: *50,000 lives lost during migration: Analysis of Missing Migrants Project Data 2014-2022*.

<sup>8</sup> The three of them are the main characters in the docuweb *Defensoras en el laberinto*, by Lucía Muñoz, Ruth de Frutos, Cristian Pirovano and Jenny Tsiropoulou.

<sup>9</sup> Ainhoa Ruiz, Mark Akkerman and Pere Brunet: *Mundo amurallado. Hacia el apartheid global*.

<sup>10</sup> Who wins with EU border policies? Research “The migration control industry”, by Fundación PorCausa Foundation, part of this question.

<sup>11</sup> The European People’s Party (EPP) argued in January that European funds should cover the construction of such infrastructure. A request which centred the discussions at the February European Council, where the Visegrad Group (Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary) called for funding, which was also supported by Italy, Greece and Austria. For now, the European Commission has refused to take a step that the ambiguous European directive does allow. See the article published in *El País* by María Martín, Silvia Ayuso and Yolanda Clemente.

from the typecasting in what is one's own, with the criminalisation of the different; from the blindness of the absolute self, with the artificial justification of greater security.

### **A confused identity**

Europe forges its identity from its navel, a sinkhole through which the few peripheries that appear sink, when paradoxically it is those very margins that sustain Europe. Europe suffers from a Eurocentric depersonalisation disorder, identity breaks free from it among powers: it wants to be the United States but it does not know how, it underestimates China but it cannot resemble it, it despises Russia but it is not aware of the consequences, it continues to exploit Abya Yala and does not even blush. The most important drift from this confused and decaying identity is not to ignore who we are, but rather what we want to become. What does Europe want to be on the dash (geopolitical, social, economic) of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? And from there, so many uncomfortable questions. A Europe of the people or of capital? Is it possible to have a green Europe embraced by the nuclear component? Can Europe advocate non-violence in symbiosis with NATO?...

Humanity exists through a time and a space. European Modernity began this way, from the creation of its own space-temporality, in particular, when space and time merged (and they continue this way) to the Eurocentric self and its exclusive

reason, to the dimensions of the privileged European man. To be European or not, that is the question. That is how the West imposed its vision, through the universalisation of the western being as a temporal-productive and spatial-urban measure of existence. But that same understanding/annihilation of space and time is unequal: it mainly affects spare lives. Borders are insubstantial formalities for those who have valid documents, only the privileged can go beyond the barriers; the tides in Mediterranean waters do not matter to those who fly on the back of an airplane. The identity of this Europe is a dystopia enjoyed by them and a nightmare for the victims.

But human existence is not possible without the others. We cannot be without the others, hence in Spanish the first person of the plural, we, includes, and even without being aware of this, the otherness, “*nos-otros*”. Another Europe is possible because other existences are unavoidable. Luckily, even without Europe realising—it is so self-centred—the otherness is also (it has never ceased to be) not only outside but within this fortress Europe. The writer Eduardo Galeano already warned us about this: “We are a civilisation of solitudes that meet and continually disagree without recognising each other. That is our drama, a world organised for the deviation, where the other is always a threat and never a promise”<sup>12</sup>. And maybe that is why, or precisely why, when Europe claims its purity, when it hoists the values of freedom, peace and development as its own, it strives to be something it is not.

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<sup>12</sup> An interview published by Inma Sanchís in *La Vanguardia*.

## Unnoticed borders

“Whenever I arrive in my neighbourhood —San Francisco, Bilbao— I get the feeling of crossing a border, of entering another world. On the one hand, I am happy to see how different my neighbourhood is, its movements, its rhythms, its colours, its smells. But this throbbing tension, where does it come from? This fear that I often notice in my breathing, what is causing it? With so much police around me, my neighbourhood is the safest in Bilbao: vans, cars, canine brigades, plainclothes police. All that police with the watchful, attentive, direct, penetrating look, I don’t know why they’re so mad at me. Over time, I have learned not to stare at the police, so as to ‘not provoke them’ and to then have to look away at the end, thus avoiding any incident. But fear is deeper, it is part of my body, my features, my colour, my gait. My body is always on the other side of the border, in the former colony, in the space of no right, no law land. Any policeman can cross over to me, at any time of the day, to stop me, ask for my papers, see what’s in my backpack, frisk me, and neither before nor after have to explain anything. Who am I to demand anything, with papers or without papers, with or without a nationality? We must keep our distance, above all, our borders”.

Omar Boudaaoui, from SOS Racismo Bizkaia-Bizkaiko SOS Arrazakeria, is one of the bodies that has been subjected to violence and which sustains Europe from within. Living in the postal code 48003, district of Ibaiondo, to experience it even for a few

hours, is to enter a melting pot of cultures grouped in just a handful of streets. At least three out of four of its inhabitants have a foreign origin, as opposed to the 10.2 percent global recorded in the Biscayne capital, according to the latest data from the Observatorio Urbano de Barrios de Bilbao. Formerly known as the Soho of Bilbao, it is not unusual to come across patrol cars here combing one of the corners of the city with more past of the Basque Autonomous Community and which still lies in the collective imagination as a focus of problems, prostitution, illiteracy and poverty, including drug addiction and crime.

It so happens that precisely in San Francisco, as in other corners that are spread throughout the Spanish geography, as are the cases of Lavapiés in Madrid, the Gothic neighbourhood of Barcelona or many of the transport stations, it happens, for instance, on a daily basis in the bus station in Burgos, that discriminatory police stops increase, an adjective that is not exempt from controversy, until one realises whom those wearing a uniform require documentation from. Borders, some will say that invisible, perhaps it is most accurate to say unnoticed, within that fortress Europe. Precipices such as those portrayed by the National Institute of Statistics, at one end, Pozuelo de Alarcón (26,009 euros of average net income per inhabitant per year), in Madrid, and at the other, El Palmar de Troya (6,785 euros), in Seville.

In the end, it will be true to state that one's place of birth strongly determines the future, that the postal code conditions health, that social class defines the possibilities of prospering in this world where there are too many people. And that is



precisely what borders are for, including those that are built on the basis of deficiencies: the absence of basic infrastructure, the lack of services of what is still available in public health, the deprivation of employment opportunities. Cultural, language and care fences, along with a long etcetera of casuistries that may not affect us, but are an insurmountable obstacle for others: inabilities to access the Minimum Living Income, difficulties in validating professional qualifications, racist filters when renting a home, cumbersome bureaucratic procedures and the digital divide, so on and so forth, the use of racial profiling as a police control routine<sup>13</sup>, the widespread tightening of policies on foreigners, migration and asylum...

Reality TV shows emphasise that people are expendable in a business that ends in the proclamation of a single winner. Faced with the inclusion imposed by punishments of the Orwellian and Foucaultian vigilance, the exclusion imposed through controls (physical, economic and social) by postmodern vigilance. The replacement of one Big Brother by another is not however complete, because at present both systems coexist, establishing a complex matrix that makes it difficult for outsiders to enter, while encouraging the exit to the residual resources of the interior. Inside and outside as necropolitical borders (the power to manage not life but death) built on the geographical space of the everyday. Forms of control that identify and exclude spare lives. European production of human waste as a *fait accompli* policy.

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<sup>13</sup> Racial profiling by law enforcement agencies violates human rights, as the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination points out. Projects like *Pareu de parar-me: l'aparença no és motiu* (Stop stopping me: appearance is no reason), by SOS Racisme, make police malpractices visible.

Mere survival replaces living with dignity in each fence. Europe ends and begins with a fence.

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