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Spatial Appropriations Over Europe's Borderland: El Principe's Growth as a Vestige of Colonial Urbanism

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Abstract

My work investigates the spatial transformations generated by conflicting competencies in the border city of Ceuta, a Spanish exclave on the northernmost tip of Morocco. Due to its strategic location, Ceuta became the gateway to the Spanish Protectorate over Morocco. Its implemented masterplan was rooted in the colonial urbanizing strategy of social segregation; yet failed to encompass the entirety of the territory, rendering the border area a site for informal urban settlements. Spain's 1986 accession to the EU granted the exclave a new role as an icon of Fortress Europe, hindering migration movements toward mainland Europe and, due to the municipality's neglect of the multifarious stranded migrant groups, settlements ballooned into districts along the border checkpoints. This article investigates the spatial conflicts generated by the border and how these, in turn, shape the borderland. It examines how supra-national actors manipulate urban planning to establish dominance, ostracizing the border region, and studies whether migrants' spatial practices can effectively disrupt their socio-spatial segregation. Focusing on the border district of El Principe, a twofold methodology is followed: A top-down perspective is built through mapping, examining historical masterplans, policy analysis, and interviews, and a bottom-up stance is included, grounded on participant observation and semi-structured interviews, revealing migrants' spatial appropriation tactics.

Keywords

borderlands; Ceuta; colonialism; gray spacing; urban planning

1. Introduction

At the northernmost tip of the African continent, separating Morocco from the Spanish exclave of Ceuta, the European border realizes its most fully fledged incarnation. Aiming to hinder migration movements from reaching Europe, the wall has become a powerful institution, whose main purpose is to demonstrate an imposed political order. Accordingly, the border infrastructure conveys not only a meticulously managed apparatus but also a space entirely monitored and patrolled by armed forces. Despite the heightened control, an extensive informal urban sprawl—represented by the district of El Principe—emerges as a practice of dissensus. In contrast to the thoroughness with which authorities control the border and the extensive financial sums regularly invested in strengthening it, the socio-spatial processes materializing at its feet and constituting the border districts have been blatantly disregarded, indirectly permitting the powerless to appropriate the borderland.

This article explores the power dynamics resulting from the border infrastructure and how they contribute to the formation of socio-spatially excluded spaces. Following a multiscalar approach, it explains how supra-national actors such as the military regimes, the EU, the Spanish government, or the municipality, use architecture and the built environment to establish dominance. Rather than through the imposition of architecture, this article examines the manipulation of the built environment through its perpetual neglect, intentionally excluding the border districts. From a bottom-up perspective, the article examines the spatial tactics that emerge amid that abandonment, and the subsequent construction of a community that evades the authorities' control yet further isolates itself, and in so doing, contributes to the reproduction of the border.

In the construction of urban space, architecture and urban planning can become a tool to exercise power over population groups, often serving a political agenda (Misselwitz & Rieniets, 2006; Weizman, 2007). As the scholarship on borders illustrates, the architecture of borders has been a pivotal device implemented by states to demonstrate their political power, portray their sovereignty, and justify their national identity (Balibar, 2002; Brown, 2010). However, borders not only build the identity of sovereignties but also "provide horizons and compass points for knowing and belonging" (Brown, 2010, p. 71). Therefore, they are utilized by people to construct their identity, values, and, ultimately, their sense of security and protection. The fear of the Other embodied in the border infiltrates social life, contributing to the illusion of an omnipresent yet undefinable threat (van Houtum & Strüver, 2002; van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002).

In establishing the properties of an open city, Sennet (2006; Sennet & Sendra, 2020, p. 29) defines a border as the "edge where different groups interact." Therefore, it becomes a site for unregulated development. By associating borders with medieval walls, he describes them as anarchic spaces that unfold at the limits of the central control (Sennet, 2006, p. 92). Following Sennet, and understanding the border as a space of interaction, Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) emphasize the inherent productive potential borders offer. While the term *productive* may be misleading due to its positive connotation, it rather describes the urban expansion linked to the commercial nature of borders. However, the city of Ceuta, as an icon of Fortress Europe (Castán Pinós, 2009, 2014; Ferrer-Gallardo, 2008, 2011), instead of planning the foreseeable urban growth associated with the border, has not embraced its productive potential (Cimadomo, 2023). Thus, the entire border region has been left deliberately unplanned for decades, facilitating the formation of two border districts, which, nourished by the exchange brought by the border, have grown connected to the two

border-crossings: Benzu in the north and El Principe in the south. Accordingly, they have developed increasingly excluded from the exclave and its city center.

The fact that the state authorities have dismissed the border territory is linked in this article to what Yiftachel (2009) defines as the politics of gray spacing—indefinitely positioning population groups between the security of legality and the uncertainty of eviction. Yet, the central power employing gray spacing as a control method is now subverted by its very implementation. Hence, affected marginalized communities use their displaced position for empowerment and claim of belonging (Yiftachel, 2009).

Continuing with the same binary, although architecture is used to exercise and manifest power, it can be manipulated by the powerless as a form of resistance. Thanks to their daily participation in the urban dynamics, inhabitants become producers of space, endowing them with political inclusion (Lefebvre, 1968/1996; Purcell, 2002). Thus, the difference between migrants and legal citizens is neutralized, for both are redefined as urban subjects (Sassen, 2013). As Darling (2017) states, migrants' everyday spatial practices, such as building makeshift shelters, networking, or engaging in informal employment, are understood as political acts, questioning the categorization of citizenship. Furthermore, their everyday urban practices, appropriating space and reconfiguring the city, can be read as a creative form of resistance to claim their autonomy from the prevailing forces (Hall, 2015). Accordingly, research focused on geographies of forced migration and their resulting spaces of resistance must be shielded, as it can redefine "new orders that contest the power of transversal borderings" (Sassen, 2013, p. 4).

The spaces at the edge of society that gather the powerless are defined by Iossifova (2013, 2015) as borderlands. Akin to gray space, borderlands grow excluded from society and are determined architectonically by the inhabitance of out-of-use space. Although they are imposed by the powerful, scholarship has ascertained that the persistent daily practices of the powerless can remove them (Baumann, 2016; Iossifova, 2013, p. 8). In the Spanish exclave of Ceuta, the border district of El Principe, appropriated and constructed by its dwellers amid the authorities' neglect and developed at the margins of society, classifies as a borderland, in which residents, through their daily practices, have claimed their own space of community. Centered in the border district, this article explores whether the spatial practices of the powerless can undermine the constructed borders or if they are effectively reproducing them. Furthermore, it examines the gray spacing strategies employed by macro-scalar actors to promote the formation of borderlands, socially excluding and urbanistically neglecting the border territory.

Despite the varied migrant population groups Ceuta hosts, including Sub-Saharan migrants, cross-border workers, hidden or detained unaccompanied minors, or the second-generation Moroccans, this research focuses on the latter, as they represent the majority of El Principe's population, and the presence of other migrants in the neighborhood is virtually nonexistent. During my interviews with the residents of El Principe, they firmly expressed their desire to be named Spanish Muslims, prioritizing their nationality over religion. Sociologist Rantomé (2012) explains that although Catholics of Ceuta seldom engage in religious practices, they construct their identity as Spanish Christians to differentiate themselves from the Muslims and to include themselves in what they consider to be Ceuta's "unique" identity, Spanish Christians (Rantomé, 2012). This form of identification, based on religion, was confirmed in the interviews conducted during fieldwork and is, therefore, employed throughout the article.

After decades of neglect, Spanish Muslims appropriated the borderland, populating what would become El Principe, a district where currently 15,000 Spanish Muslims reside—approximately 18% of Ceuta's population. The lack of urban planning structuring the neighborhood's overcrowding and the absence of essential urban equipment have provoked structural social problems. As a result of the gray spacing policies, with the territorial border as a backdrop and excluded from the city center, El Principe has grown to become one of the most dangerous districts in Spain, with 30% unemployment and a high birth and mortality rate, paired with an inordinate school dropout rate. The alarming situation reached by El Principe stresses the need to expand research looking into the entanglement between politics and architecture, which nowadays, should incorporate a spatial understanding of borders (Schoonderbeek, 2015).

Therefore, grounded on archival research, mapping, and secondary research, the third section of the article is dedicated to understanding the border district's evolution as a neglected space since the beginning of the 20th century, covering the military regimes, its transition into democracy, and accession into the EU.

Based on ethnographic observation and semi-structured interviews conducted with the president (Kamal) and vice-president (Bashir) of El Principe's unique neighborhood association (Asociación de Vecinos Principe Felipe), the third part illustrates the tactics Spanish Muslims exercise to appropriate space and build community. From a top-down approach, the fourth section examines the urban planning strategies attempted by the municipality to regulate informality and allegedly improve El Principe's impoverished urban conditions. The methods constituting this section include policy analysis to examine the different master plans and semi-structured interviews with the City Architect (Jose Pedro Pedrajas) as well as a Technical Architect working for the municipality, to understand the reasoning behind the abandonment of El Principe.

2. Origin and Formation of a Neglected Borderland

The Wad-Ras Treaty, signed in 1860 by Spain and Morocco, established the current border, along which the urban borderlands developed. During the Spanish Protectorate (1912–1956), the territory fell under its sovereignty and the area remained largely ignored, leading to the settlement of self-built constructions and the origin of El Principe. With Morocco's independence (1956), the border delimitation was no longer recognized by the Moroccan Kingdom, influencing the power dynamics among the macro-scalar agents and altering demographic movements. The more contemporary context describes the trans-scalar impositions set by the EU and their impact on El Principe's development.

2.1. Spanish Protectorate

As the 19th century closed with Spain losing its colonies in the Americas and the Philippines, the prospect of a new colony in Morocco marked the 20th Century's beginning. The Conference of Algeciras (1906) ratified the commitment to this colonization dividing Moroccan territory between Spain and France (Bravo Nieto, 2004). Due to its strategic location, Ceuta became the door to the Protectorate of the Spanish sphere of influence.

Under Franco's regime, seeking to implement a unified colonial strategy of urban planning, Pedro Muguruza was appointed Directorate General for Architecture (Albet i Mas, 1999; Bravo Nieto, 2004; Cimadomo, 2023). Muguruza was assigned with reorganizing the public works of the Spanish protectorate and proposing a new master plan for Ceuta that could solve the ongoing urban deficiencies the city experienced

such as the lack of social housing and the informal urban sprawl that expanded beyond *Campo Exterior* and into the border districts. However, the master plan's memoranda (Muguruza, 1946), did not reference the social housing shortage or the increasing urban informality problem.

Influenced by the segregationist ideas implemented in the French Protectorate and following a colonial agenda, Maguruza employed the zoning tool (Bravo Nieto, 2004). Accordingly, he divided the territory into three distinct areas: to the east, the Monte Hacho, with an abrupt topography hosting a defensive function; the city center, with the most significant buildings and privileged housing; and the Campo Exterior, with neighborhoods for the migrant workers required to build the Protectorate (Muguruza, 1946).

In analyzing Muguruza's master plan and contrasting it with Ceuta's actual extension (see Figure 1), two conclusions come to the foreground. First, he equipped the city center with the most important buildings and privileged housing for the upper class, as it had to reflect the identity and dignify the status of the exclave as the "Door to Africa" (Muguruza, 1946). Thus, he set the basis for the prioritization of the center. Furthermore, by allocating the migrants to Campo Exterior, he prompted a socio-spatial division that today structures the exclave's social hierarchy and urban dynamics. Second, the scope of the master plan did not include the entirety of the territory. Muguruza overlooked the region surrounding the border and failed to tackle the urban sprawl growing in the border districts. Having left the neighborhoods unplanned, informal settlements expanded uncontrollably.

Muguruza's plan prioritized the city center in an effort to reinforce Spanish Christian sovereignty and ignored the social housing shortage and informal urban development at the border. Although implemented under a fascist regime and following a colonial agenda, future master plans developed under a democratic government, such as that of 1992 and the 2021 plan with its approval still pending, have failed to address the original urban deficiencies, leaving unchecked colonial dynamics established by Muguruza. As detailed in Section 4, they have allowed for the proliferation of substandard living conditions, the informal expansion of the border districts, as well as the rampant criminal activity taking place throughout them. What is more, the failure to address these issues would ultimately deepen the divide between the center and the border districts along with the gradual reinforcement of the border.

2.2. Entrance Into the EU and the Establishment of the European Border

Throughout the first half of the 20th century, as the entire territory fell under Spanish authority, the border territory had been largely ignored and was generally assumed to belong to the Ministry of War. With Morocco's independence (1956), tensions at the border arose, reinforced by the Moroccan Kingdom's claim of Ceuta as Moroccan sovereignty and the consequent refusal of the border's legitimacy. As of the 1960s, Moroccan migrants seeking improved living standards found the unclaimed borderland a convenient location for settlement due to its proximity to their country of origin and easy access to a stable residency for the undocumented. Moroccans took advantage of the ambiguous situation and occupied the borderland, progressively converting it into a point of first entry.

Ultimately, with Spain's accession to the EU, the borderland received increased attention, for it was no longer the border between two countries but two continents, representing one of the most contested borders in the world. Despite the strategic situation of the borderland and the time, resources, and funding invested in

the erection of the border infrastructure and its securitization, the indifference towards the border district persisted. Moreover, the unpredicted consequence of European legal requirements on the development of the border district further situated it as an excluded borderland.

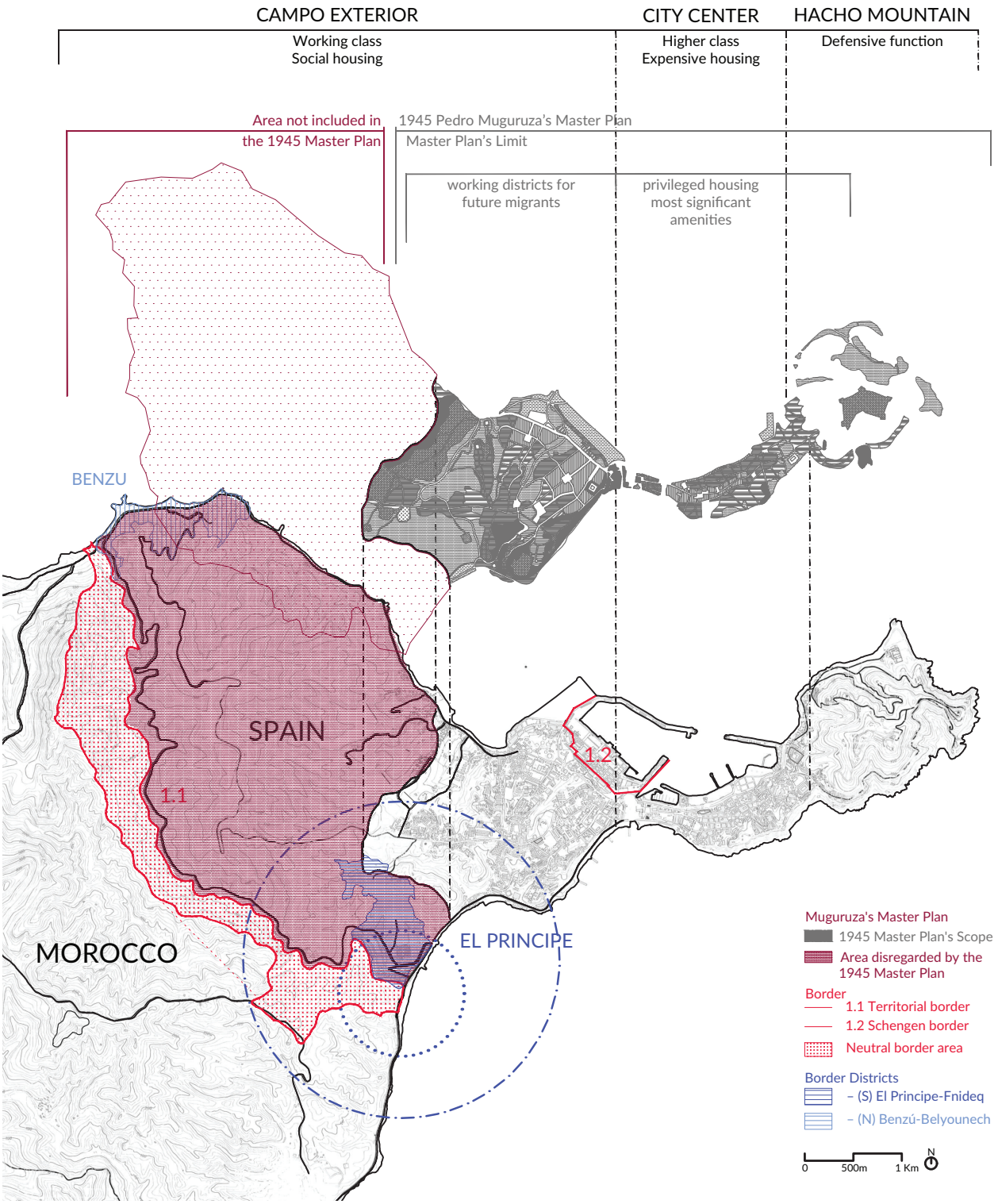

Figure 1. Muguruza's master plan overlapping Ceuta's current socio-spatial division, border-districts, border-crossings, and military expansion. Made by the author.

2.2.1. Ley de Extanjería (Law on Foreigners)

After Franco's death (1977) and under a democratic government, Spain requested accession to the EU. Yet, before being admitted (1986), Spain had to comply with the European legal requirements, which demanded the draft of a law on foreigners to reassure other European members of their control over migration (Freeman, 1995; Geddes, 2005). The enactment of the 1985 law on foreigners meant a major social upheaval, and its outcome mainly affected Spanish Muslims (Castán Pinós, 2014; Rantomé, 2012). It was the first Spanish migration law passed to regulate the status of foreigners in the country. It offered migrants from countries with colonial ties to Spain, such as the Philippines, or the Americas, the possibility of rapidly gaining Spanish nationality (Boletín Oficial del Estado, 1985). Nevertheless, despite Morocco's proximity to Spain, geographically and historically, the law did not include it, effectively discriminating against the African country (Castán Pinós, 2014; Planet Contreras, 1998; Rius Sant, 2007). Therefore, Moroccan migrants, who had been living in the exclave for decades, were forced to decide whether to initiate the naturalization procedure, which could take up to 10 years, or remain illegally in Ceuta.

The Muslim population collectively refused to apply for residence permits. They rejected being regarded as "foreigners" and the 10-year naturalization mandate. Hunger strikes and demonstrations ensued, alleging the exemption to the law in the exclave ("Musulmanes de Ceuta y Melilla se unen," 1985). The Christian population considered the protests a provocation. Hence, to counteract Muslim pressure, Spanish Christians took to the streets, demanding the law's implementation (Planet Contreras, 1998; Rius Sant, 2007). Tensions escalated until the government agreed to grant Spanish citizenship to those who could demonstrate proof of residence in Spain for over 10 years. Thus, 10,000 Spanish Muslims were naturalized in Ceuta (Castán Pinós, 2014; Gold, 2000; Planet Contreras, 1998; Rantomé, 2012).

Although the confrontations derived from the law on foreigners made the Spanish Muslim community visible, it stirred profound animosity between the two communities. Moreover, despite the large number of naturalizations, many Spanish Muslims continued to live unregistered, excluded from social life. Naturally, El Principe, as the migrants' first point of entry, was directly affected by the law's enactment. On the one hand, from 1986 onward, make-shift constructions spread exponentially. The assumed public character of the land and its resulting economic advantages attracted migrants, who continued to reside in the borderland undocumented. On the other hand, the status of El Principe consolidated as an arrival neighborhood, where an ethnic concentration established itself.

According to the 1986 census, prior to the law, 50% of inhabitants stemming from both ethnic groups lived together in the border district (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 1987). However, the exemption to the foreigners' law and the extensive naturalization of migrants generated an interurban migration phenomenon. Rantomé (2012) explains that the expansion of the Spanish Muslim population in areas where they were formerly a minority, as was the case of El Principe, provoked the departure of Spanish Christians, who, triggered by a racist sentiment, relocated to districts where the presence of the Muslim population was negligible. He defines this phenomenon with the widely used term *white flight*. This theory is underpinned by the access to subsidized housing Spanish Christians were granted, for the vast majority worked in public positions for the state or the military, whose service was compensated with accommodation. The ultimate conclusion of white flight was the homogenization of the districts, which in Ceuta fostered the growth of prevailing racial segregation, with a Spanish Christian majority in the city center and the formation of ethnic neighborhoods in the border districts, populated by Spanish Muslims.

2.2.2. Exemption From the Schengen Agreement

As Spain was required to comply with legal modifications to access the EU, a similar process ensued with the Schengen Agreement. Although it was signed in 1991, for it to be enforced (1996), Spain had to establish a border infrastructure in order to meet European standards. Precisely in this in-between period, the border construction began. Despite the immense impact the Schengen Agreement had on Ceuta, with its 10-meter-high wall and the widespread border control, the exclave remained partially excluded from the Schengen zone in order to facilitate a more fluid movement of persons and goods between the Spanish exclave and the Moroccan hinterland, exempting the trade of goods from customs controls and Moroccan residents of the province of Tetouan from visa requirements. Furthermore, Ceuta remains partially excluded from the free movement Schengen endowed the European territory to allow the continuity of identity checks and border controls for travelers coming from the exclaves (Boletín Oficial del Estado, 1994).

The erection of the wall has brought to the foreground the prioritization given to European securitization and the control of migration, disregarding legitimate and urgent urban demands. Despite the substandard housing conditions and the lack of urban equipment from which the border district suffers, these shortcomings remain overlooked, while extensive sums of money and cutting-edge technology continue to be invested in the border's improvement. The construction of the first fence and the following renovations in 2005 and 2014 alone totalled €95.932 million (Akkerman, 2019).

Furthermore, the legal requirements of National Defense require the border infrastructure and its surrounding area to maintain a width of 300 meters (Articles 3, 7, and 9 of the law), as a "security area," where no work or activity may be carried out without the express authorization of the minister in charge (Boletín Oficial del Estado, 1978). Consequently, the area included between the border and the 300-meter offset line is subject to this law. Although parts of El Principe overlap with the defined security zone (see Figure 3c), the land had remained unclaimed and its occupancy ignored, indicating the intentionality in leaving the district at the margins of authority.

3. Gray Spacing Tactics by Spanish Muslims

Amid the neglect experienced by the district over the past century and its banishment to the margins of authority, Spanish Muslims exercise daily spatial tactics demonstrating that they are active in the construction of their own spaces of resistance. Thus, through their spatial practices, they have created an organically expanding district comprising a maze of narrow alleys and characterized by a Moroccan influence.

3.1. Moroccan Influences Circumventing the Border

Traditionally, Moroccan homes follow a typology centered around the courtyard. Natural ventilation and illumination are sought in the interior space, whereas the outer facades are essentially closed to the outside. Underlying this housing typology is a sense of privacy in which domestic life unfolds in the interior courtyard. Housing constructions in El Principe are cramped, and many do not have the space to accommodate an interior courtyard. However, this sense of privacy is depicted by the small number of windows on the outer facades and the tendency to protect them with metal lattices.

This model of constructing intimacy from the outside to within is also reflected on the urban scale. In navigating the district from the outside, familiarity with the layout is essential, as there are several layers to be penetrated from the main streets. One needs to understand the entry points in the district that connect the labyrinth-like system of alleys. Despite the alleys being public spaces, their closely knitted network and narrowness provide a domestic feeling leading into the district's center. Thus, it is as though El Principe had organically fenced itself off.

Despite the border presence, the tight social grid Spanish Muslims have woven reaches into the neighboring Moroccan provinces. Several territorial continuities challenge the border infrastructure, such as language or religion. The predominant language in El Principe is Darija, a vernacular form of Arabic widely spoken in Morocco. In the Muslim religion, residents look toward Morocco to determine dates for religious festivities, which fluctuate yearly across the Muslim world, such as Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, or Eid al-Adha. Furthermore, to maintain the connection with Morocco and ensure the further reproduction of Spanish Muslims' religion, marriages tend to be arranged with relatives living in Morocco. Thus, Spanish Muslims have forged a solid and complex network of connections among the neighbors of El Principe that stretch across the border into Morocco. The influence of the Muslim religion has altered the urban landscape, for there is a strikingly high number of Mosques in relatively compact space, which characterize the outline of the district and distinguish it from the rest of the exclave.

Finally, the adoption of Moroccan traditions is ubiquitous throughout the district. In fact, during my interviews, El Principe was always associated with Morocco and even referred to as a "Little Morocco," both by Spanish Muslims and Christians.

3.2. Constructive Tactics

Settlers of El Principe chose to reside by the borderland for several reasons. As a neighborhood of arrival, it provided proximity to their relatives in Morocco and a familiar safety net. Due to the limited availability of urban land in the exclave, the cost of living is unaffordable for low-income citizens. Therefore, the unclaimed land of El Principe poses an economic advantage, for by informally settling, they would avoid submitting to the urban discipline and the remittance of licensing fees.

During my interview with Bashir, Vice President of El Principe's neighborhood association, he illustrated the tactics employed to build the district's houses without the authorities' knowledge. He emphasized that the construction process needed to be hidden, to avoid a potential eviction. Hence, to conceal the construction site, migrants would fence the area with corrugated metal sheets. After establishing the first floor, the metal sheets would be removed, revealing the improvised façade raised undercover. The erected house constituted a residence, legally impeding the authorities from forcing eviction.

The community support played a fundamental role. The constructions were achieved collectively, with the assistance of the neighbors in finding, assembling, and transporting materials, sharing tools or their constructive expertise, and offering temporary lodging to the family whose shelter was under construction. Furthermore, the dialogue among neighbors is essential to introduce one's house within the urban maze of El Principe. In the neighborhood, the streets do not have names, and the numbering of the houses is informally defined by the residents. Aligned to the organic shape of the improvised streets, newcomers

would occupy the next available land plot. Should they have relatives, the new family members would be offered a division of the preexisting family plot or an extension of the construction. Thus, as depicted in Figure 2, unfolding along the main streets crossing the district, the neighboring communities constituting El Principe were formed.

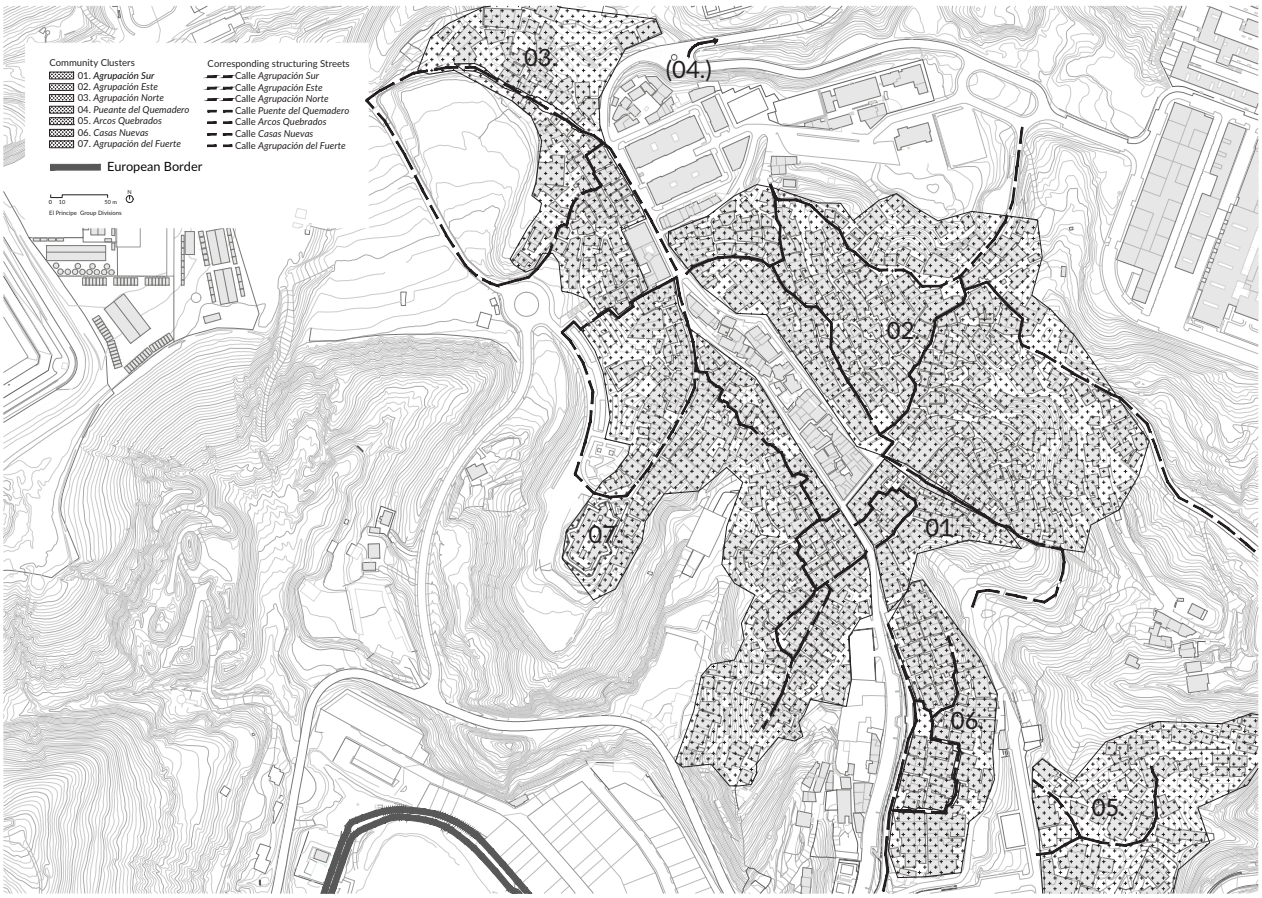

Figure 2. El Principe's expansion and formation of the neighborhood communities constituting it. Made by the author.

3.3. Seeking and Customizing Space

The spatial limitations shape construction, lending buildings a constant "work in progress" appearance. Spanish Muslim families are typically numerous and present a higher birth rate (32,5%) than Spanish Christian families (7,8%; Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2023). Often, to accommodate large or expanding families, spatial extensions to buildings are required. The building typologies of El Principe reveal two constructive techniques that demonstrate spatial expansion, both in the open possibility of developing in height or horizontally. Constructively, to have the option to raise the building one floor to host future generations, rebar is left exposed, protruding out of the concrete for future structures to eventually be attached. Making complete use of the space is evidenced in the floorplan, as distances between houses barely reach 80 cm, forming corridor-like allies throughout El Principe. Generally, additional stories expand on the surface area covered by the ground floor in search of a horizontal expansion, further constraining the narrow alleys.

Other spatial appropriation and belonging tactics can be observed through El Principe's construction. Since the district has grown as an informal settlement, it is not determined by any compulsory typology or urban alignment. Accordingly, residents are unrestrained in personalizing their houses and, in doing so, claim the space as a product of their own. However, in many cases, it does not rely on the dwellers' design inclinations but on the availability of materials, largely smuggled from Morocco, or repurposing discarded material from the streets.

Constructive elements utilized to customize the dwellings are diverse, including metal window lattices ranging from simple, vertical bars to the more intricate with golden, organic shapes. The houses' skirting represents another customizable element, often adorned with glossy tiles, bricks or stone cladding, or coarse plaster painted in vibrant colors. Here and there, doors and window frames are carefully enhanced with stone-like materials, tiles, or covered by an array of shingles.

Figure 3. Constructive tactics at El Principe. (a) El Principe's eastern sight depicts its under-construction character and alley, (b) revealing the horizontal expansion thanks to cantilever beams; (c) exposed rebars; and (d) the corrugated metal sheets concealing the construction process. Photos by the author.

3.4. Illegal Activity and Drug Smuggling

The Spanish Muslim community, isolated from the rest of the exclave, together with the closed urban structure of the district, has enabled the spread of illicit narcotics trafficking. Hashish is transported from Morocco to the Peninsula, whereas benzodiazepines travel from the Peninsula into Morocco. Moreover, the district hosts the traffic of weapons and humans. Due to the steep school dropout rates (54,8% according to the EPA; Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2023), and the meager employment opportunities available to the youth, they fall prey to drug related activity, where there are higher possibilities to earn money and the required skill set is minimal (Jiménez Gámez, 2019). Alas, two dominant drug gangs proliferate in the impenetrable urban maze of El Principe. The fight between the gangs to gain territorial control takes an urban character as it involves street confrontations with firearms and bladed weapons, shootings of rivals' families, or setting fire to urban equipment, such as garbage containers or abandoned cars and vans. Thus, along with this illegal activity comes a high level of violence, which has progressively embedded itself in the district, ultimately hindering its potential re-integration into the exclave's urban structure.

Despite the urgent need for security, in 1998, the municipality eliminated the police station from the district, provoking a gradual rejection of the security forces. Should the police enter El Principe, they are often ambushed and pelted with a barrage of stones (Testa, 2022). The intricate urban structure of the neighborhood, with its narrow streets and dead ends, does not facilitate the officers' actions. The defying attitude towards authority has increased proportionally with the establishment of the drug gangs and the removal of the police station. The lack of protection there, where it is most needed, stands in stark contrast to the extensive police presence in the city center, where violence is the exception. The elimination of the police station further demonstrates the municipality's contempt towards the border district, allowing the spread of violence and relegating it to the margins of authority.

4. Gray Spacing Strategies Implemented by the Municipality

Having disregarded the borderland for so long, the expansion of the district has devolved into an increasingly convoluted challenge to address on an urban and social scale. Since the 1992 master plan, the municipality has superficially attempted to provide a solution to the district's segregation, rather than structurally addressing it. As explained in the following points, the lack of an accurately defined land registry or the implementation of partial plans and master plans, inherently represent gray spacing policies and contribute to the general neglect of the borderland, exacerbating its socio-spatial segregation.

4.1. The 1992 Master Plan

Almost 50 years after the implementation of Muguruza's master plan, corresponding with the aftermath of the law on foreigners (Cimadomo, 2023), the 1992 master plan was enacted. The plan's memoranda criticized the obsolete conditions of the housing stock and described the dwellings' constrained size which ranged from 30 to 60 m^2. Striking was the uninhabitability of the homes. A significant number lacked the bare minimum of amenities: 21% did not have a bathroom, 10% were missing a toilet, and 35% did not have hot water (Ayuntamiento de Ceuta, 1992).

As aforementioned, Muguruza's plan did not pay particular attention to the soaring number of shanty towns developed in Campo Exterior. Consequently, in 1992 the problem of urban informality was still present. Although it was widespread, it was particularly acute in the border districts of El Principe and Benzu. Furthermore, the memoranda highlighted the absence of essential municipal utilities in the border district, which provoked serious social problems: cultural exclusion, a rising level of delinquency, and a decline in formal education standards (Ayuntamiento de Ceuta, 1992). Seeking a solution, the municipality regarded eradicating shanty towns and substandard housing as its primary goal, explicitly stressing the urgency in El Principe. Regardless of the determination with which the municipality endeavored to improve the district's conditions, the border remained excluded from the analysis (Cimadomo, 2023), and these plans never surpassed the paper format. Accordingly, the shanty town of El Principe consolidated itself and continued growing informally.

4.2. Partial Plans Blocking the District's Expansion

Seeing the difficulty in addressing El Principe's informality and improving the social housing shortage the city still encountered, in 2007, the Spanish government, through its prime manager of public land at a national level (SEPES), and in collaboration with the municipality of Ceuta, approved the construction of subsidized housing, "Loma Colmenar," at the northeast side of El Principe (SEPES, 2015).

The promotion of these housing blocks aimed to widen the inventory of public housing in Ceuta. Allegedly there should have been an open process by which citizens with disadvantaged social backgrounds could apply to rent an apartment for an affordable price but not purchase it, for the Ministry of Development, would retain possession. However, the regional Deputy Minister of Housing ignored it and opaquely manipulated the list of housing beneficiaries, causing tremendous controversy, for he disregarded citizens with legitimate housing demands ("La asamblea impulsa una comisión de investigación," 2015; "Loma Colmenar: Legalidad, transparencia y justicia," 2015). Moreover, many residents of El Principe were unable to access subsidized housing, for they remained unregistered, thus unable to leave the district.

Loma Colmenar's location followed the urban equipment demands expressed in the 1992 master plan, destined to overcome the deficiencies of El Principe (Ayuntamiento de Ceuta, 1992). In addition to increasing the social housing offer, and providing urban equipment, as the technical architect mentioned during our interview, "Loma Colmenar attempted, in a structured manner, to set limits to El Príncipe." As Figure 4 illustrates, the northeast side of El Principe is effectively blocked by Loma Colmenar.

Thanks to the state's assistance, the project Loma Colmenar increased the social housing offer in the exclave, for the municipality alone could not have provided the financing. Although the project tackled the social housing shortage, rather than fundamentally addressing the urban deficiencies in El Principe, it functioned as a superficial solution, for it did not grapple with the informal urbanism. Moreover, the municipality's mismanagement heightened the project's failure and demonstrated its inability to include the border district.

4.3. Who Owns This Land? The Military or the Municipality?

During my interview with the City Architect, Jose Pedro Pedrajas, he explained that the municipality had permitted the widespread informal urbanism simply because they did not know which territory belonged to

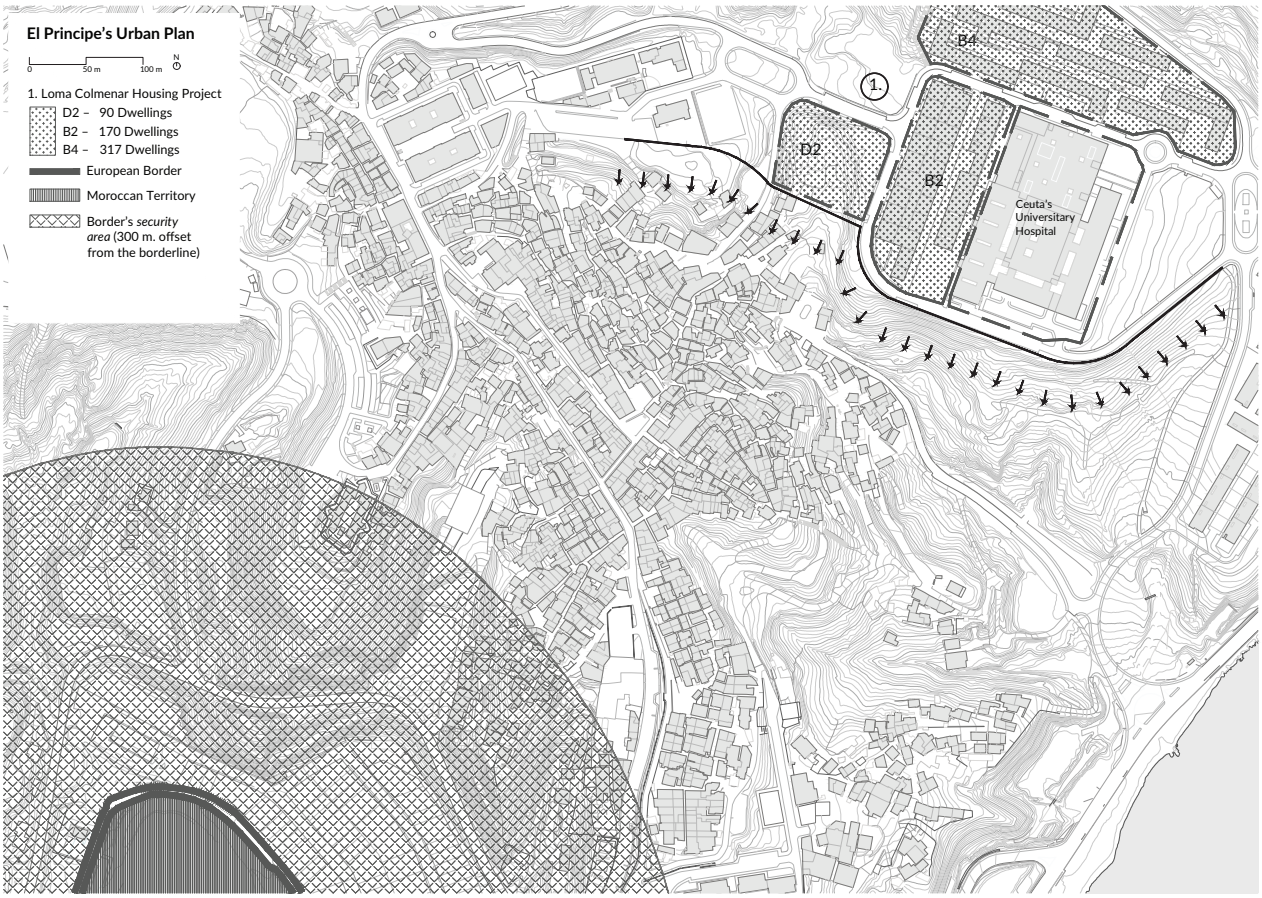

Figure 4. El Principe's urban plan, the Loma Colmenar project, the border, and the border's security area. Made by the author.

them. Referring to El Principe, he stated: "It was a disaster. The city could not exercise its power of urban discipline over their territory because there was no municipal inventory defining what our properties were."

He further clarified that the municipality's lack of awareness resulted from the district's situation at the borderland, for allegedly, during the Protectorate, the Ministry of War had control over it. Therefore, the municipality neglected any responsibilities over the land. Analyzing the evolution of the land registries focused on El Principe, Jose Pedro Pedrajas' statement is called into question.

The first land registry, dated in 1868, clearly illustrates the territorial limits of each plot, demonstrating the distribution of the land among several owners, whose names were handwritten, as is the case of the municipality (Ayuntamiento) and the engineer military troops (Cuerpo de Ingenieros). The 1922 land registry followed a color code in which yellow represented the city council and gray identified the military. As Figure 5 demonstrates, the land distribution and the plots' geometry hardly varied from 1868 to 1922. Again, in the following land registry (1934), the division of the territory remained unaltered. Although the land limits of both the military and the municipality were well-determined from 1868 until 1934, after the civil war, the forms of government alternated from a military regime to a democracy. Also, Morocco shifted from a subject of the Spanish government to an independent nation. However, the fact that the plot geometries were clearly delineated challenges the City Architect's statement regarding the municipality's lack of clarity.

Figure 5. Land registries' evolution based on the municipal archive's maps, delineating military and municipality territories, illustrating the border and superimposing El Principe's current extent. Sources: Espinosa de los Monteros (1868); Alto Comisariado de Ceuta (1922); Instituto Catastral Geográfico y de Estadística (1934); Ciudad de Ceuta (2007). Maps edited by the author.

Finally, in 2007, the last land registry was drafted. For 73 years, Ceuta depended on a parcel plan defined before the civil war. How could it be that despite the almost unaltered state of the plots, no authority claimed the territory? Also, why was no effort made to draft a land registry that could define sovereignty over the property?

One possible answer could be that no government agency was interested in land adjacent to the border, spatially excluded from the city center, covered with barracks and shacks. No authority desired to recognize El Principe as theirs, for then they would be forced to confront the inherent problems at the borderland. Naturally, this consolidated the district's situation at the margins of authority and paved the way for increased gray spacing policies to be implemented in El Principe.

4.4. The 2021 Master Plan

The lack of interest the municipality has shown in its property has contributed to the ongoing abandonment of El Principe. Residents will continue to appropriate the space irregularly and reside in informal settlements at the borderland, further reproducing the social deficiencies associated with the lack of urban planning.

The problem can no longer remain unchecked, and action to address the situation is urgently required. The new master plan (whose final approval is still pending) has acknowledged the scale of the problem. To provide a plausible solution the municipality has divided the area into 14 sub-sections and plans to build a constructive dialogue with the neighbors (Ayuntamiento de Ceuta, 2021). However, its effective implementation remains in question. In the following excerpt from the interview with the City Architect, he reveals his doubts: "It is going to require extensive management. And I don't know if we're going to be able to move it forward because there's no precedent, there has been no planning in the past years."

Other supra-municipal agents, such as the EU, the Moroccan, or the Spanish government, influence the municipality. While, admittedly, their leverage is minimal, it is also their responsibility to firmly demand change to eradicate Ceuta's socio-spatial segregation. Despite acknowledging the urgency with which the district's urban problems should be addressed, the architect's excerpt questions the municipality's capacity, which suggests the lack of hope in El Principe's potential to improve and its resulting virtual abandonment.

5. Conclusions

By acquiescing to the policies derived from Ceuta's border character, the municipality has completely submitted to Fortress Europe's agenda. In doing so, it has devoted itself to maintaining the border infrastructure rather than exert its potential to address urgent issues affecting the borderlands' residents. Having surrendered El Principe to the border, the district has virtually become an extension of it, as it is spatially segregated, and host to an excluded and stigmatized population group.

Considering the socially reproduced phenomena borders generate, embodying the threat of the Other (van Houtum & Strüver, 2002) and segregating society, in the eyes of Spanish Christians and even the municipality, El Principe is no longer part of Ceuta but an extension of Morocco. This shift of the social boundary, from the border to El Principe, is confirmed by the sentiment of otherness the city center experiences towards the border district. What is more, the presence of the wall, reinforces the notion of the perceived otherness the wall itself purports to protect the exclave from.

By living informally, citizens of El Principe remain unregistered, disenfranchised, and de facto ignored by the government and the municipality. However, in the authorities' abandonment, they have constructed a community and a self-sufficient district. Moreover, in the face of its ongoing exclusion, inhabitants of El Principe resort to the Moroccan hinterland for the support they do not receive from the municipality or the Spanish government, overlooking the authorities and gradually isolating the district. Thus, Spanish Muslims' informal daily practices proved their complete emancipation from the municipality, socially and spatially. Understood as political acts (Darling, 2017, p. 189), migrants' spatial appropriation and construction of their community space suggest "minor critiques of the categorization of citizenship" and the question of who is legitimate.

As opposed to the municipality seeking dialogue with the border districts to address their many urban and social issues, as have been described in master plans such as the 1992 or the pending 2021 proposal, it only puts forward superficial urban policies to contain its growth, as the Loma Colmenar project demonstrates. What is more, its inactivity has left colonial urban policies in place and unchecked, prioritizing the center to validate the Spanish Christian dominance and neglecting the border districts. This ultimately contributes to the formation of a segregated society and confirms that urban planning can be manipulated to exclude populations. Amid the exclusion El Principe citizens experience, they have developed an autonomous community and, in the words of Baumann (2016), constructed their ethnonational space, yet, simultaneously, they have gradually fenced themselves off from the rest of the exclave.

In view of the fact that the population of El Principe has expanded exponentially, it is striking that the municipality has altogether relinquished its authority over the borderland. Naturally, this demonstrates a form of victory for the weak, for migrants, with their flexible spatial tactics, have seized control over the border district, adjusting to the opportunities found in the fissures of the imposed power and manipulating space to their needs (De Certeau, 1984). However, rather than undermining their socio-spatial exclusion (Baumann, 2016), migrants' everyday spatial practices have added to their further seclusion from the center and the reproduction of the border.

This reveals the intentionality of the authorities in constructing borderlands. Maintaining the infrastructure of the border and thereby further reproducing the problematic conditions that define El Principe's abandonment is a more sustainable, cost-effective mode of conduct than addressing the deep-rooted issues of the border districts. The authorities' prioritization of the border infrastructure, in contrast to the deliberate deprivation of the districts of much-needed aid, only stands to bolster the wall as an object emanating representative power (Brown, 2010). Sennet's (2006) position on borders as spaces that unfold at the limits of central control is thus confirmed and expanded, for it is precisely at the limits of Ceuta where authorities scramble to impose a representative infrastructure for their central dominance. The wall and the implementation of gray spacing policies will, in time, uphold the alienation of the borderland and socio-spatially multiply the polarizing effect of the border.

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