Spring 2017

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Jeremy Vale
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The Economic Legacies of Lingering Colonialism: A Case Study in Identity and Multiculturalism in Northern Morocco and the Spanish Enclaves

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of MOR, SIT Study Abroad, Spring 2017
Submitted May 2017
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Abstract

Founded in ancient times, the twin Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla combined comprise just 11.8 square miles and have fewer than 200,000 inhabitants. Despite their rather insignificant sizes, they are important because they serve as the only land borders between the European Union and the African continent, generating a host of complicated questions. This research explores the role of smuggling as a form of micro-economy and identity. Through interviews of Moroccans with ties to smuggling as well as interviews with residents of Ceuta, this case study begins to examine the role smuggling plays in the debates about the sovereignty of the two cities, among other issues.

Key Words: Ceuta, Melilla, Smuggling, Multiculturalism, Morocco
Acknowledgments

I am deeply thankful for all of the support that I received from my family, my friends, and the staff at the Center for Cross-Cultural Learning (CCCL) among many others during the duration of this project.

First and foremost, I would like to express the gratitude I have for the support of my loving parents, Lawrence Vale and Julie Dobrow. In addition to being grateful to them for allowing me the incredible opportunity to spend the past few months away from home here in Morocco, I am profoundly appreciative for the many hours spent talking on the phone, their seemingly boundless advice, and their unwavering encouragement. It is with their support and through conversation with them that this project was able to take shape and become possible.

Also critical to this research was the assistance of Aziz Askitou. In addition to introducing me to the Arabic language at Colby two years ago, Aziz played an integral role in my actual research. I am thankful for his friendship and hospitality, and I am truly indebted to him for his help in interviewing Moroccans with ties to smuggling. Without his support, it is possible that I would not have been able to access a key population for my project, and would lack vital information presented herein.

My project was also made possible with the support of the CCCL staff, in particular Nawal Chaib and Taieb Belghazi. One of the greatest unexpected challenges of this research project was in navigating around Northern Morocco and Spain on public transportation, totaling over 1,400 km traveled in the first two weeks of study. It was at times tremendously difficult to negotiate, but would have been considerably worse without the assistance and expertise of Nawal. I am also deeply indebted to Taieb, whose many emails,
conversations, and assurances in the past few months have focused my research and kept me on an appropriate pace to finish this project on time.

I am likewise appreciative of the support I received from my advisor, Dr. Khalid Chehraoui of Mohammad V University, throughout this entire process. Dr. Chehraoui’s extensive knowledge of Northern Morocco was extremely helpful in developing my research questions, as well as in organizing my thoughts upon my return to Rabat from my time in the north.

Lastly, I would like to extend special thanks to all of the many people who were kind enough to grant me interviews on both sides of the Moroccan-Spanish borders. Though this project was not initially conceived as interview intensive, the resulting paper would not have been complete without the opinions and contributions of the public. I am particularly grateful to one Moroccan smuggler, who bravely agreed to share his stories with me for the sake of research whose rationale was not necessarily clear to him.

It is with the support of all of these individuals, and countless others, that I have completed this project. Though this research is certainly not exhaustive, I hope that I have successfully demonstrated the significance of the topics presented in this paper and that others will be encouraged to continue studying the informal economic relationship between Morocco and Spain in greater depth.
Introduction

Comprising just over 30 square kilometers combined, the twin Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla mark two of the most interesting and unique political boundaries on the planet. The two tiny Spanish enclaves in North Africa, each with populations of around 85,000 inhabitants, are encompassed by Moroccan territory, but open to the world via their ocean ports.

Pictured: Ceuta as seen from Monte Hacho.
Historically, the cities have long been of great importance to regional trade, beginning as early as the 5th century BCE with the Carthaginians. The territory of Ceuta changed hands several times in the intervening two and a half millennia, significantly falling to the Portuguese in 1415 after the Battle of Ceuta and ultimately to Spain in 1688 following the Treaty of Lisbon (Britannica, 2009). The city has been subject to Spanish sovereignty ever since, though this continues to be contested, since the Moroccan government refuses to accept Spanish hegemony. Melilla, too, has a complicated history. Originally colonized by the Phoenicians and later the Romans, Melilla fell to Spanish rule in 1497. After acquiring the nearby territory in 1909, Spain modernized Melilla’s port and turned the city into a military garrison to support Spanish Morocco. 12 years later, in 1921, the Rif War (sometimes known as the Melilla War) broke out between Spain and Berber tribes led by Abd el-Krim, which almost managed to claim the city. In 1995, Spain approved statutes of autonomy for Ceuta and Melilla, granting the cities status more akin to Spain’s
other autonomous communities (Britannica, 2010). To this day, Madrid still contends that Ceuta, Melilla, and the other plazas de soberanía (literally places of sovereignty), are an “integral part of Spanish territory” (Howe, 2005, p. 314).

Despite the international recognition of Spanish rule over the cities, it was clear from my visits to Ceuta and Melilla that the cities are still of great importance to Morocco. At each of my border crossings, as I waited in the queue to enter and exit the country through the heavily guarded and fortified borders, I was struck by the number of Moroccans bringing enormous bags of goods back from the European colonies. At certain times of day, it seems there is a near constant flow of Moroccans carrying back goods to their home country. It was this observation that led me to my research questions.

As contested colonial holdings, it seems obvious that Moroccans would side with their government in its demands for sovereignty over Ceuta, Melilla and the other populated Spanish territories, composed mostly of small islands lining the Moroccan coast. For most groups, this is probably true, yet there are some Moroccans who have much to gain from having a convenient piece of Spain on the African continent. I sought to understand the mentality of the select group of Moroccans who are perhaps most familiar with Ceuta and Melilla: the traders who enter regularly to bring back foreign goods to re-sell in Morocco. How do Moroccan smugglers feel about the issue of Ceuta and Melilla’s sovereignty? Do they agree with their government despite the fact that their economic livelihoods depend on the cities’ colonial statuses? How are trade issues related to issues of identity? Why is this trade necessary? How is it organized? Are traders bringing goods that can’t be acquired in Morocco easily? What kinds of things are they buying? What, if any, status is achieved by Moroccans who later buy these Western goods?
Literature Review

Preface

One of the greatest challenges in undertaking this research was the apparent dearth of recent scholarship, especially scholarship readily accessible in English. This review examines the existing literature and attempts to place the work of others into several broad categories. Specifically, this review will examine the history of the border disputes between the kingdoms of Morocco and Spain, review the complicated histories of Ceuta and Melilla, examine literature about smuggling between the two autonomous cities and Morocco, as well as examine other issues related to the land borders between the two countries. It is important to review and understand the historical context and intricacies of the border dynamics before exploring and examining the data gathered in the present study.

History of the Border Disputes and Evaluating Claims

At present, Spain controls a number of small territories in North Africa, as well as the notable cities of Ceuta and Melilla. Ceuta and Melilla are considered to be the two major territories, while the Islas Alhucemas, Islas Chafarinas, and Peñón de Vélez de la Gomera constitute the minor holdings, containing military garrisons but no stable civilian population. One might also add the islet of Perejil to this list, which at present is unoccupied but has been another source of contention between Spain and Morocco.

Since Morocco achieved independence in 1956, the country has laid claim to all of what it perceives to be Spain’s lingering colonial holdings. Moroccan claims to Ceuta and Melilla have found little support from the international community, first discussing the matter in the UN on October 7, 1960, though they did not ask to have the cities included on the General Assembly’s list of non-self-governing territories (Trinidad, 2012, p. 965). It was
not until January 1975 that Morocco formally asked the UN Decolonization Committee to include the so-called colonial enclaves on their list of non-self-governing territories, which was interpreted by the Spanish government as “a threat to Spain’s national unity and territorial integrity” (Wiegand, 2011, p. 187). That summer, in June, Spanish and Moroccan troops met at the borders of the enclaves, following a series of bombings in Ceuta and Melilla, with 400 Moroccans arrested as suspects. Tensions would further escalate in November of that year when King Hassan issued a bold threat to Spain’s new king, Juan Carlos, stating that if Spain were to acquire Gibraltar from the British, Morocco would have to claim Ceuta and Melilla, stating that “no power can permit Spain to possess both keys to the same straits” (ibid). Tensions would not die down in the ensuing years, as a group known as the Moroccan Patriotic Front bombed locations in the two cities in 1978 and 1979.

Other than these occasional outbursts of violence by private citizens, the conflict between the two countries has remained largely quiet and diplomatic in recent decades, with one exception. In July 2002, members of the Moroccan armed forces occupied the islet of Perejil, and raised a Moroccan flag over the small island. Officially, the move was part of an effort to combat terrorism and illegal immigration, though the Spanish were quick to condemn this action. Feeling threatened, Madrid deployed naval units, special ground forces, as well as combat aircraft to defend what German political scientist Daniel-Erasmus Khan describes as a “virtually worthless piece of rock” (Trinidad, 2012 p. 964; BBC, 2002). Ultimately, six Moroccans were taken prisoner and brought to Ceuta before they were repatriated hours later. Spain also replaced the Moroccan flag on the island with two Spanish flags. Why spark an international incident over such a small and insignificant piece
of land? It seems likely that the then-recently crowned king of Morocco, Mohammad VI, was eager to test Madrid’s resolve, as well as to gauge the international reaction and perhaps renew the conversation about Morocco’s sovereignty claims (Trinidad, 2012, p. 964). Indeed, talking about the incident, former Spanish Prime Minister José María Aznar remarked “los marroquíes han hecho algo ilegal. Es cierto que para nosotros Perejil tiene un valor simbólico. Lo tiene para ellos y para nosotros. Pero si nosotros no reaccionamos, será interpretado como debilidad, y no sabemos cuál es el paso siguiente que darán” (Iglesias, 2010, p. 404). (The Moroccans have done something illegal. It is true that for us Perejil has a symbolic value. It has symbolic value for them and for us. But if we did not react, it will be interpreted as weakness, and we don’t know what their next step would be.)

Despite all of the political rhetoric and rising tensions, it seems unlikely for the time being that Morocco will be able to annex any of the populated territories peacefully (though it should be noted that Spain considered ceding control of Melilla to Morocco on and relinquishing Ceuta as an international zone in 1979) (Europa Press, 2017). With the implicit support of the international community, Spain negotiates from a position of power. The most difficult element in resolving the dispute over the enclaves, notes Trinidad, is the human aspect (Trinidad, 2012, p. 974). It is perhaps quixotic for Morocco to believe that it could claim Ceuta and Melilla any time soon, though there may be hope for some of the smaller Spanish territories. There is less emotional attachment to these places, and the Spanish government considered abandoning Vélez as early as 1871. Tabling claims to the major territories and focusing on the smaller ones may be the most effective strategy for Moroccan irredentism (Trinidad, 2012, p. 975).
A Brief History of Ceuta

As previously stated, the rich and complex history of Ceuta dates back to ancient times, with some sources suggesting the area was inhabited as early as the 5th century BCE. As the early Muslim conquests spread west, Arabs first arrived on the scene in present day Ceuta in the 8th century CE. Sebta, as the city is known in Arabic, maintained a strong Arab presence from then on, with the city flourishing as a critical Mediterranean port city under a series of caliphates and emirates (Gold, 2000, p. xi). Culturally, the city also prospered under Muslim domination, and by the 15th century, the city contained over one thousand mosques, 62 libraries, 43 educational institutes, and a university (O’Reilly, 1994, p. 2).

Across the strait of Gibraltar, however, Muslim domination faltered. The Reconquista efforts led by the Catholic monarchs Isabella I and Fernando II successfully removed the last political vestige of Moorish Spain in 1492 with the capture of the city of Grenada. Shortly before the conclusion of the Reconquista, Juan I, King of Portugal, crossed the Strait of Gibraltar and claimed Ceuta by force in 1415 (O’Reilly, 1994, p. 2). In 1580, the two Iberian crowns united, and upon their dissolution in 1640, Ceuta opted to remain under Spanish rule. From this point on, the city would remain under Spanish dominion, though the city’s flag to this day recognizes its Portuguese heritage, featuring the same background as the flag of Lisbon, and contains the shield configuration of Portugal. Though the city has never since changed hands, it has been subject to attack from Muslim forces, with notable sieges in 1728, 1732, and 1771 (ibid).

Even though the city has never been a particularly important population center, it has served several important roles in Spanish history. When it was initially claimed, Ceuta, along with other plazas, served as a first line of defense against Muslim incursions into the
Iberian Peninsula, supported the crusade efforts (with the *plazas* offering shelter to Christian shippers), and enhanced Spain's status as a powerful force in the Mediterranean, with military garrisons to help stage important colonial wars. Additionally, Ceuta served as penal colony in the 17th and 18th centuries before becoming an economic hub as a free port city in the 19th century.

In more recent years, Spain enhanced its claim to Ceuta and Melilla as a result of the country's European integration. In 1986, just over a decade after the end of the Franco regime, Spain officially ascended to the European Union, which automatically made the two enclaves part of the EU, as well. Five years later, in 1991, Spain's borders in Ceuta and Melilla were “Schengenized,” a process whose importance will become apparent later in this review (Ferrer-Gallardo, 2008, p. 305). Lastly, as part of Spain's integration into Europe, the country began the process of enhancing border security in 1995. This was in line with the immigration policies of other new-immigration countries in Southern Europe, who have shown their willingness to be 'good citizens' of the continent by raising border defenses. This should be taken with a grain of salt, notes Marenin, as the visibility of the Spanish border fence presents a façade of control yet in reality only serves to redirect the flow of migration (Marenin, 2006, p. 70).

**A Brief History of Melilla**

Like its twin, the territory now referred to as Melilla has a rich history dating back to ancient times. Between the 10th and 13th centuries, the city prospered as a fortified trade stop between Muslim Spain, North Italian city-states, as well as trans-Saharan traffic from Timbuktu (Driessen, 1991, p. 8). The city started to decay in the late 1300's, due to dynastic
struggles between the sultanates of Fez and Tlemcen, and by the time the Spanish arrived, the city was already abandoned and partly ruined (Driessen, 1991, p. 9).

In 1497, Spanish forces led by Pedro de Estopiñán took the ailing city with relative ease, beginning a period of uninterrupted Spanish control that persists to this day. In 1863, Melilla and Ceuta acquired free-port status, partially transforming the role of the garrison cities (Ferrer-Gallardo, 2008, p. 305).

After decades of European intervention in Moroccan affairs, the French established a protectorate in March 1912, capitalizing on the military and political weakness of the Moroccan state. Seeking to establish a buffer between the newly established protectorate and the British military stronghold at Gibraltar, the French granted Spain their own protectorate, with a “sublease” of some 7,700 square miles in the north of Morocco at the tail end of the year. This connected Spain’s twin enclaves and allowed the country to regain a taste of empire after their devastating defeat in the Spanish-American war at the tail end of the 19th century.
Melilla would serve as a key garrison and staging point in Spain’s ill-fated attempt to control their newly acquired colony, and it would turn disastrous with the outbreak of the Rif War, sometimes known as the War of Melilla. United Rif peoples, under the leadership of Muhammad Abd el-Krim, rose up against the Spanish in a bloody war that lasted from 1921-1926, with Abd el-Krim’s forces almost taking Melilla in 1921. Notably, the city was also the first to rise against the Popular Front government of Spain in the summer of 1936, which helped precipitate the Spanish Civil War. (Flemming, 2014; Britannica 2010).

**Smuggling**

Though Morocco remains adamant that Ceuta, Melilla, and the other *plazas de soberanía* (places of sovereignty) are inherently Moroccan, a huge number of Moroccans depend upon the colonial status of Ceuta and Melilla for their livelihoods. Indeed, as noted by Ferrer-Gallardo, some 20,000 people crossed the border into each enclave daily in 2008.
(Ferrer-Gallardo, 2008, p. 311). Despite the intense security measures in place, (including a series of metal fences 3.5-6 meters high equipped with thermal and infrared cameras, pepper sprays, as well as barbed wire) some Moroccans are easily able to enter the cities as a consequence of the “Schengenization” of the border. The Spanish border is selectively penetrable; the significant security apparatus is designed to deter “undesirable” entrants such as sub-Saharan Africans seeking passage to Europe, but allows relatively easy and open access to the permitted and “exceptionally Schengenized” Moroccans bearing passports from either the Tetouan or Nador region (Ferrer-Gallardo, 2008, p. 310).

Given the territories’ status as free ports with special tax policies, it should come as no surprise that smuggling thrives in the north of Morocco. In 1970, economic inequality between Spain and Morocco was moderate, with Spanish GDP per capita sitting at roughly four times that of their neighbor to the south. In 2004, however, Spain’s GDP per capita was 15 times larger, making it the most unequal border in the European Union, or of any Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) member state (Moré, 2011, p. 8). Reliable estimates for the value of the informal economy are hard to come by, though a 2002 study by the Ceuta Chamber of Commerce placed its lowest estimate for so-called “border trade” at 600 million Euros annually. Moré suggests that a reasonable estimate for the value of the Ceuta-Melilla smuggling operation hovers around 1 billion Euros annually, equal to half of the value of all declared exports from Spain to Morocco for which tariffs are paid (Moré, 2011, p. 41).

Additionally, considering Morocco’s political disagreements with Spain over the sovereignty of the cities, there is little impetus for the developing nation to try to rein in the widespread smuggling. As Gold notes, Morocco has little interest in improving the security
of the borders with any real ardor, as this would tacitly imply to Spain and the rest of the world that the borders with Ceuta and Melilla are indeed legitimate (Gold, 2000, p. 171). Spain, for its part, also does not wish to see the smuggling curtailed. Gold also notes that much of the commercial activity in the twin enclaves is dependent upon the ease with which duty-free products can be passed across the border with Morocco and into the rest of the African continent. Without this, Gold postulates, Spain would be forced to take on the cumbersome task of subsidizing the economic livelihood of the enclaves (ibid).

Citing the work of Hajjaji, Ferrer-Gallardo identifies three different kinds of smugglers that work between Morocco and Spain. Among them are the more casual, occasional smugglers who bring back tobacco, alcohol, or electrical appliances (a group consisting mostly of foreign workers, students, civil servants, and generally any Spaniard or Moroccan who can easily enter and exit the enclaves); regular day-to-day subsistence smugglers who bring a constant flow of consumption goods (at the time of his research performed several times daily by inhabitants of Moroccan border towns); and lastly large-scale smugglers who bring big electronic equipment such as satellite dishes and other expensive goods, performed by an organized network of professional smugglers (Ferrer-Gallardo, 2008, p. 312).

It is unclear exactly what the effect of this expansive informal trade has been on the Moroccan economy. Though it is clear through the demographic and urban expansion of Moroccan border towns like Nador that the particular border dynamics have generated seriously lucrative opportunity in a region of the country especially crippled by the poor economy, this growth is not without its detriments to the national financial systems. It is impossible for Moroccan manufacturing to compete with the prices generated by the free
ports of Ceuta and Melilla. With Spanish smuggled goods making it at least as far as south as Casablanca, the trade deeply affects many aspects of Morocco’s national economy. Indeed, as noted by Mateos, at least two factories that produced televisions in Casablanca have ceased production due to their illegal competitors (Mateos, 2005, p. 249).

Lastly, it is important to review how it is that Morocco’s massive smuggling industry operates above the law. According to Mateos, getting past customs with goods involves first establishing specific police contacts to facilitate the process. Once contacts have been established, smugglers pay bribes to police officers, as well as offer them “gifts,” which include various household items. The gifts can vary to a great degree, with smugglers who bring in more expensive items often having monetary commission or more valuable gifts demanded of them by customs officials (Mateos, 2005, p. 249-250).

Mateos also notes that, rather oddly, male smugglers mostly work alone whereas female smugglers work together. Women apparently work together to protect themselves from the police, and to ensure they have enough money to pass through customs. Working together has its benefits, according to Mateos’ smuggler contact, as he believed that women profit more than men by using their feminine charm to cut better deals at every obstacle (ibid).

Bribery, it seems, does not end at the border. Writing about his experience in Nador, scholar David A. McMurray observed that smugglers often sell their own wares to retailers or hawk their products on the street in regular locations so that their clients would be able to find them. Spending so much time in the public eye came with a cost, as hawking required a steep bribe to the mukhazni (local police agents). McMurray estimates that these bribes could cost vendors more than 10 percent of their take (McMurray, 2001, p. 110). (It
should be noted that since McMurray’s estimates were made more than a decade ago, it is possible that traders now lose even higher percentages of their take to bribes).

Other Issues of Transnationalism

As one might suspect, smuggling is far from the only problem created by the unequal borders between Spain and Morocco. Migration, particularly of sub-Saharan migrants seeking passage to Europe, has proven to be a major challenge to manage, despite the intense security measures and precautions at the border described above. Tensions rise and fall, though perhaps the worst incident occurred in June of 1996. Following the election of a conservative government led by José María Aznar, Spain committed one of the most heinous operations in the country's modern history when 103 African illegal immigrants living in Melilla were taken across the Strait to Málaga, where they were drugged and placed on military planes before being deported to assorted African countries, regardless of where they had actually come from (Carr, 1997, p. 61). Despite intense criticism from various human rights organizations, the Spanish government was largely unrepentant for their actions, with then-Interior Minister Jaime Mayor Oreja describing their deportations as “disagreeable” and “unaesthetic.” Aznar more coldly declared, “we had a problem and we solved it” (ibid).

For those migrants that do make it to Ceuta or Melilla, life is rarely easy. Many of the migrants who reach the cities have traveled thousands of miles by land, but without proper documentation they become effectively stateless in their new foreign home. Here they are denied permission to cross to the mainland, but also cannot be turned back, as the Moroccan government will not accept responsibility for them, citing the fact that there is no official evidence proving that the migrants entered the cities from Morocco. This is pretty
clearly politically motivated, as accepting these migrants would reflect a tacit acceptance of Spanish sovereignty over the enclaves (Carr, 1997, p. 64-65).

Unable to leave or to work in the cities, many migrants survive on occasional charity provided by relief organizations. In October 1995, around a hundred migrants attempted to draw attention to the appalling conditions in which they lived by blocking streets and throwing stones at passing traffic. The police and civilian population were quick to respond, and many of the immigrants were forced to jump into the ocean to avoid being lynched by enraged mobs hurling racial epithets. The mayor of Ceuta, Basilio Fernández, defended the actions of the civilian population as "legitimate self-defense" and subsequently called for authorities to deport all illegal immigrants from the city (Carr, 1997, p. 65-66).

Beyond the issues of migration, Ceuta and Melilla must grapple with a heightened risk of terrorist activity. As of Spring 2015, it is estimated that Ceuta and Melilla have contributed more recruits to ISIS per capita than any other town in Europe (Frayer, 2015). As Ceuta is plagued by steep unemployment (over 30% officially as of May 2015), the threat is heightened, especially as the Arabic-speaking half of the population is disproportionately poorer (ibid). The security forces of the cities remain on high alert, and occasionally do make arrests of individuals suspected of ties to the terrorist organization (El País, 2017).

Integration between ceutíes of European origin and North African origin is severely limited. According to Felix Arteaga, a researcher at Spain’s Elcano Royal think tank, “There are very few mixed marriages. Integration isn’t working at all. And the Muslim birth rate is double or triple the Spanish average... That’s becoming a problem for public services,
housing, water, electricity and schools” (Frayer, 2015). Indeed, Spain spends more money on welfare per capita in the two enclaves than in any other Spanish cities (ibid).

Conclusion

For two cities composing fewer than 200,000 inhabitants and occupying less than 15 square miles combined, there is quite a lot worthy of study and discussion. The twinned cities are steeped in rich history, with power shifting between regional rivals over thousands of years. With the cities currently under Spanish control, a fascinating border dynamic has emerged with the only land border between the European Union and the African continent. The multicultural society within each city is plagued by myriad problems, ranging from issues related to immigration, terrorism, and trade with Morocco, whose effects penetrate deep into Moroccan society. This mélange of conflicts and quandaries sets the stage for the research presented herein, looking at personal accounts of smuggling in Morocco and Spanish perceptions of their cities to better understand some of the dynamics inherent in this form of commerce, what smuggling might mean to the informal economies in Morocco and Spain, and how it contributes more broadly to issues of national identity.
Methodology

Introduction

In an attempt to answer the questions posed in this paper's introduction, my research employed a mixed method approach involving participant observation paired with a series of in-depth interviews as well as casual conversations with Moroccans. This project took me around Northern Morocco and into Spain, where it was primarily conducted in five distinct settings: Ceuta, Melilla, the border crossings for each city, and in Zaio – a small city near Nador on the Moroccan side of the border.

Observation and Discovery

The first week of my research was conducted on site in Ceuta. In an attempt to understand the culture of the city, I first visited a number of historic locations in the town including the Fortaleza de Hacho (Hacho Fort), the Arab Baths, and the Royal Walls. These visits, coupled with tours of the Museo de Ceuta (Ceuta Museum) and the Museo Histórico Militar del Desnarigado (Desnarigado Military History Museum) supplemented my firsthand knowledge of the city.

In addition to studying the official histories presented in these locations, I spent much of my time in Ceuta observing how people interacted in public. Specifically, I listened carefully to the languages people used, whether they spoke in just Spanish or Arabic or both. Did people I perceived to be of North African origin (based on their usage of Darija and style of dress) interact with people I perceived to be of Iberian origin, and if so, in what ways?

Lastly, on my observation days I spent time looking for indicators of the multicultural identity of the city. I looked for any signs of North African identity, in the
overwhelmingly Spanish city. This included looking at (and photographically documenting) signage, graffiti, and street art, as well as seeking out centers of Muslim culture like mosques. Though my time in Melilla was limited to just one day due to time and budgetary constraints, I employed a similar methodology in getting to know the other enclave.

Time spent crossing the borders was not squandered. While entering and exiting Spain, I paid special attention to the other people coming and going. I lingered for as long as I could without raising suspicion from the border authorities, and in both cities I spent time observing the people just beyond the crossing. I had hoped to establish contact with smugglers in this setting, though it was very apparent while there that it would be difficult to do so without raising the suspicions of the many security officers watching.

Back on the Moroccan side of the border, in Zaio, observation took place primarily in grocery stores. To see the true extent of smuggling, it was critical to see where a large percentage of smuggled goods end up before disappearing into people’s private homes, and since a significant amount of the goods appeared to be food or toiletries sold in groceries, this seemed a logical site in which to conduct research.

**Interviews and Casual Conversation**

Interviewing and casual conversation proved to be the most challenging part of this research. Despite being armed with intermediate Modern Standard Arabic and fairly strong Spanish, communication proved rather difficult. With more patient speakers of Spanish, however, I was able to conduct 7 formal interviews in Ceuta as well as countless casual conversations around the north of Morocco and the enclaves. The purpose of these interviews and conversations was to glean background information and uncover the feelings of individuals about a wide range of topics, ranging from the sovereignty question...
to smuggling to their personal relationship with Morocco. (See appendix section for a complete list of questions).

In Morocco, I hoped to have a chance to interview at least one smuggler. With the help of a friend from the area, I was able to establish four possible smuggler contacts, though three of them refused to answer questions. The smuggler who did agree to answer questions, however, was not willing to meet with me personally, so the interview was conducted through a mutually trusted third-party. I supplied all of the questions for the interviewer, who was gracious enough to take diligent notes, which made this research possible. Through the same friend, I was also able to establish contact with a grocer in a Moroccan border town.
Findings

In Search of a Smuggler

Though I was only able to establish solid contact with one active smuggler, the results are no less fascinating. This individual, who I will refer to as Youssef, bravely provided me with a tremendous amount of detail about his routine and daily life, which I will retell as faithfully as possible. Youssef’s story, I’m told, fits in well with the greater narrative of Moroccan male smugglers, but I will make note of details that make him an exceptional case. It also needs to be said that within this case study, I cannot know for sure the extent to which Youssef’s story is similar to that of other smugglers’.

Life of Youssef

Youssef has worked as a smuggler for between 3-5 years. The focus of his work is on smuggling small comestibles and household products, unlike other smugglers who focus on more expensive items like clothing (or in some rarer cases, narcotics).

Most of the time, he works four days a week, from Monday through Thursday. His day begins quite early, leaving home around 4:30 AM and the days run long with him often not returning to Zaio until 7:30 or 8:00 PM. Working a 15-hour day or longer, one might be surprised to learn that Youssef only spends one hour each day in Melilla; it takes him 4 hours waiting in line to cross the border with his car, so most of the day is spent waiting around.

Like many other smugglers, Youssef works as an informal supplier for four or five groceries. Youssef’s clientele are scattered around various towns near the Spanish border. This is the common practice among his peers, because the price of goods becomes less competitive if they have to be transported to larger urban centers, like Oujda, which are far
from their source. In this line of work, smugglers will pay visit to their stable network of clients at night, and be given a list of goods that the grocers need purchased the next day. Youssef is paid by his clients after certain goods are solid in the grocery store. On occasion, smugglers like Youssef will return from Melilla with goods that were not on any client’s list. When this happens, smugglers ask around to see if any groceries need their goods, and if not, they offer them to their regular clients, with an agreement that they will receive payment if the product is sold. Using this method, smugglers also navigate any potential conflicts with grocers who refuse goods that are brought to them.

Unlike many smugglers, Youssef is unique in having his own car to aid in his work. Smugglers with cars, I’m told, typically remain in this line of work longer, though it comes with certain added difficulties. The majority of smugglers do not own cars, so they either carry their goods on their backs, or they carpool and cooperate with other smugglers. To aid in this process, there are also smugglers whose job is strictly focused on the transportation of goods to the border crossing where they are then taken to Morocco by other smugglers. For the car-less variety of smuggler, everything is smaller. They pay less in bribes to authorities, bring back smaller amounts of goods, and earn less money. They do, however, have the ability to make 2-3 trips daily, unlike their automobiled counterparts who can only make the trek once a day (though it should be noted that in the past, when transnational smuggling was in a more inchoate stage, smugglers with cars could make 3-4 trips a day and earn a lot of money).

For those smugglers fortunate enough to have their own cars, Youssef informs me, a bribe must be paid to police on the Moroccan side of the border twice daily. Bribes are variable in cost depending on the type of good being transported. For his particular set of
goods, including food, toothpaste, chocolate, and soap, among other items, Youssef pays bribes of 50 dirham (roughly 5 USD) at each of the two checkpoints. If smugglers like Youssef do not pay their dues to police, the potential repercussions are serious, as they may be stopped and have their goods seized the next time they try to pass through (arrests are typically only made if they are smuggling alcohol or other drugs). With an established set of clients and the cooperation of his police contacts, Youssef is able to turn a profit of roughly 200 dirham ($20) per day.

Another distinction that sets apart Youssef from his peers is his level of education. While most smugglers have a high school education or less, Youssef managed to obtain a bachelor’s degree in law. He felt his country had failed him, having wasting his time and effort when he was unable to secure a job after graduation. As a smuggler, he feels, he has taken charge of his own life and is proud to be getting by without the assistance of the government.

When asked about the issue of sovereignty over the enclaves, Youssef expressed indifference towards the matter. He felt like his home country had let him down, and that he didn’t care what happened because he knows he is exploited by both Morocco and Spain. Youssef, along with many thousands of other smugglers, contribute to the Spanish economy, but receive no help along the way. The only “support” he receives is the relative indifference from Spanish authorities. It is unclear if Youssef has any legal job prospects for the future, but for now, at least, Youssef knows what he has to do to take care of himself.

**At the Grocery**

I was also fortunate enough to ask questions to a grocer who works with smugglers like Youssef. Hicham, as I will call him, operates a modest independent grocery store in
Zaio, a small city around an hour by car from the Melilla border. Hicham’s grocery sells a wide variety of comestibles, with products produced both in Spain and in Morocco.

Interestingly, Hicham notes that sometimes his clients will ask him if he has any other brands of a product when they notice the one they picked out was made in Morocco. He usually does, and reports that his clients are pleased when he informs them that he also has a version of the same product produced in Spain. “Made in Spain” is something of a magic phrase for Hicham. Clients are most often intrigued by the Spanish alternative, and are usually willing to pay a little bit extra for the Spanish version of the same product.

When asked about why this preference for Spanish goods exists, Hicham stated he believed it had to do with quality standards. There is a general consensus among his customers that goods from Spain can be presumed to be of a high quality, based on the assumption that they conform to EU regulations of health and safety.

As noted earlier, all sorts of goods are brought back from Spain to be sold in Morocco, but Hicham’s primary Spanish goods are food items. Shopkeepers do sell the whole gamut of Spanish merchandise, but have a tendency to tailor their selection to a particular type of business. Even selling just food and other household products, Hicham estimates that up to 40% of the goods in his store are Spanish in origin.

In order to keep his business operating smoothly, with a constant flow of Spanish imports, Hicham employs two permanent smugglers. His “employees” trek back and forth from Melilla daily to acquire a predetermined list of goods, in the same way that Youssef does for his grocer-contractor. Many grocers, notes Hicham, employ several smugglers to keep their shelves stocked, but there is always one primary smuggler who acquires the bulk of the goods needed by the grocery on any given day. Even with the failsafe of
employing multiple smugglers, however, grocers still run into problems with their runners. Sometimes smugglers are unable to acquire certain goods on their lists, causing periodic outages of certain products. Other times, there is discord between smugglers and their contractors as to how much a product should be sold for, as grocers will complain that other smugglers charge less for the same product.

Relying on smugglers to obtain up to 40% of his wares introduces a fair amount of uncertainty in the day-to-day operations of Hicham’s business. Asked about the question of Melilla’s sovereignty, Hicham was hesitant to give an answer. Clearly, he understood the potential repercussions if Melilla were to join Morocco and the flow of Spanish goods to Zaio would at very least be interrupted. After some hesitation, however, Hicham responded that the enclaves “are parts of Morocco, of course.”

**Across the Border: Impressions of Spaniards in border territories**

While Youssef, and thousands of others like him, struggle to get by through smuggling, the Spanish look on from their clean, orderly, and well-developed enclaves. The cities obviously have a strong economic relationship with Morocco, but does the relationship extend beyond the informal trade? I spoke with a number of Spanish residents of Ceuta to inquire about the dimensions of the Moroccan-Spanish relationship.

**Perceptions of Smuggling and Migration**

At Ceuta’s city tourism office, I spoke with an employee, herein referred to as María. Originally from peninsular Spain, María has lived in Ceuta for nearly two decades. With her extensive knowledge of the city and its history, I was able to glean some important information. In trying to broach the polemical subject of smuggling with her, we spoke about the problems facing Ceuta. She was eager from the outset, it seemed, to downplay the
myriad problems of migration, smuggling, and terrorism addressed elsewhere in this paper. The biggest problems, according to her, were the cost associated with visiting the enclave, as well as the difficulties in reaching it when the weather is poor. When bluntly asked about the issues of smuggling and migration, however, María opened up. She understood smuggling to be an important activity at the border, but described the conditions that smugglers work in as “inhumano” (inhumane). Seeing these people carry twice their body weight on their backs made her sad, though it does not seem to her like the Spanish government cares to curtail this practice beyond current regulations (she believed that the officials only do not permit smugglers to carry back bags that touch the ground). Asked about why migrants seek to enter to Ceuta, María suggested that they come to Spain seeking somewhere “más civilizado y desarrollado” (more civilized and developed).

I also spoke with Carlos, a man in his 50’s, who operates a souvenir shop in Ceuta. Discussing the problems facing the city, Carlos was quick to note the major issues the enclave faces with unemployment, which as noted earlier, sits at a staggering 30%. With unemployment figures so high, Carlos felt that Moroccans were in part to blame, as he believes that many Moroccans work illegally in the city as day laborers on construction sites, as waiters in restaurants, and as housecleaners. The Spanish, for their part, do not do much on the other side of the border. Mostly, he thought, Spaniards crossed the border to buy cheaper produce and occasionally to rent houses on the beach during vacations.

Despite his reservations about Moroccans coming into Ceuta, however, he personally benefited from the existence of the smuggling industry. In his souvenir shop, Carlos sold a wide variety of keepsakes, but the most eye-catching items for sale were of Moroccan origin. Just beyond the doorway of his shop, Carlos advertised the many
Moroccan goods for sale, including multicolored Moroccan slippers, hamsa necklaces, and beautiful kaftans (a type of traditional Moroccan dress). The dresses, Carlos informed me, he purchased in bulk from a Moroccan smuggler who brought them into the city, which he then resells to visitors for a small profit.

Pictured: Moroccan style kaftans for sale outside of Carlos’ shop.

Perceptions of Multiculturalism

Asked about the North African culture of the city María informed me that Ceuta does indeed serve as a metaphorical bridge between cultures, reflected in the city’s Andalusian culture and cuisine. Despite her insistence that the city embraced its multiculturalism, some other statements and facts seemed to contradict this. For example, María is one of nine employees at the tourism office, yet only one of her colleagues spoke any Arabic at all.

Others were less certain that the city had any sort of multicultural identity. One interviewee remarked that, with regards to the Muslim inhabitants of the city, “somos
hermanos, pero ellos tienen su propia lengua y cultura” (we are brothers, but they have their own language and culture). Also revealing, this interviewee added that if I wanted to talk with some Muslim residents of Ceuta, he could direct me to a neighborhood where they live, suggesting the ethnic segregation of the city. In a different encounter, one interviewee suggested that any notion of multiculturalism in the city was a sham, though rather ironically, he occasionally inserted Arabic words into his speech.

I also spoke with Juan, who is an employee in the Museo de Ceuta (Ceuta Museum), which is housed in a pavilion of the city’s old barracks constructed by the Corps of Military Engineers. Offering exhibitions on the enclave’s ancient, medieval, and modern history, the museum is one of the most important cultural hubs of the city. Juan is a lifelong resident of Ceuta, and his family has lived in the city for over a century. Citing his lifetime of experience and career in the museum, he confidently stated that “la vida cotidiana de la ciudad es como cualquier ciudad Europea... No parece que sea África ni Árabe” (the daily life of the city is like any European city... it doesn’t seem African or Arab).

**Thoughts about National Identity**

On the issue of sovereignty, María was adamant that Ceuta was an integral part of the Spanish state and could never be ceded to Morocco. “Una cosa que nunca ha sido tuya no se puede devolver.” (Something that has never been yours cannot be returned.) She also compared Spain’s control of Ceuta to the existence of countries like Monaco and Lichtenstein: countries whose independence is not geographically logical but persist because of their unique histories, cultures, and identities. While he did believe the culture and the daily life of the city to be very European, Juan acknowledged that the city faces legitimate challenges of coexistence between people of North African origin and Iberian
origin, not unlike the sectarian conflicts in the United States. In addition to this problem, Juan was gravely concerned about immigration issues. Spain, he noted, “es un país que no puede admitir inmigrantes porque España no está preparada económicamente para aguantar esta presión... España no está preparada para recibir...” (is a country that cannot admit immigrants because it is not economically prepared to endure that pressure... Spain is not ready to receive...).

**Observations**

Walking around Ceuta and Melilla, it was quite difficult to get a sense of a genuine multicultural identity, from the perspective of an outsider. Official signage around the cities – in museums, on street signs, and in public advertising – rarely appears in languages other than Spanish, and when it does, the alternative is almost never in Arabic. Public spaces that should suggest a multicultural identity, like the Arab baths in Ceuta, do indeed exist, though they are not prominent attractions of the cities (when I visited the Arab baths at midday, I was the only person there). On the streets, people in European dress with physical traits associated with European heritage talked among themselves in Spanish. Others, dressed in a more conservative, North African style with North African traits usually spoke in North African tongues (Darija in Ceuta, Tarafit in Melilla) and only rarely switched over to Spanish, at least as far I was able to observe.

In most public places, Ceuta and Melilla do not appear any different from the archetypal Spanish city. One of the most prominent distinctions, however, is the existence of graffiti in Arabic, abundantly found in Ceuta. Graffiti, which some researchers have explored as an alternative art form, is often used to express social and political messages
outside of mainstream venues. It is therefore of interest to not the presence of graffiti in border cities like Ceuta and Melilla.

In a tunnel outside of a prominent church in Ceuta, I found the word “Spain” painted on the wall in Arabic. There was clearly more written beyond this simple word, though somebody else had noticed this, and painted over the rest of the phrase and rendered it inscrutable.
Discussion

Clearly, there is no consensus among Spanish residents of Ceuta about the identity of their city. For some, Ceuta is a veritable melting pot of Andalusian culture. For other, any notions of a multicultural identity are wreathed in issues of segregation and fears tied to African migration. It is hard to say for certain, from the perspective of Spanish ceutíes, whether their relationship with Morocco and Moroccans is anything more than strictly economic. In wandering the cities’ streets and museums, it does seem as though Spanish culture is predominant in both places. Without official signage in Arabic, and with the shrouding of monuments to the cities’ North African heritage, like the Arab baths, it is hard from an outsider’s perspective to see anything other than the supremacy of Spanish culture and relegation of other cultures to the periphery. I cannot say for certain what the significance is, but it is important to note the way that Spanish has officially (through language designation and signage) and unofficially (through erasure of graffiti in Arabic) asserted itself as the dominant cultural force in the two enclaves, despite the considerable percentage in each enclave of people of non-Iberian origin.

Across the borders, in Northern Morocco, there is not a sizeable permanent population of Spaniards. But clearly, there is some desire to appear as though there is a real link with Spain (as well as the rest of Europe and the West) proven by the simple existence of the smuggling economy. Certain goods, especially technology, can be hard to acquire in Morocco, but comestibles and other household products can be found with ease, yet the bulk of Moroccan smuggling concerns these items. Without a doubt, competitive pricing on duty-free smuggled goods is a factor in explaining the popularity of Spanish goods, but that does not tell the full story. In every conversation I had in Zaio about Spanish imports, the
same simple belief kept popping up in conversation: “if it comes from Spain, it is higher quality.”

What does this reveal about Moroccans in the country’s north? Perhaps there is a certain status attained when one can fill their homes with Western products. Resulting from decades of colonialism and subsequent central neglect under Hassan II, Northern Morocco lags considerably in terms of development when compared to Rabat and other major cities further south. Smuggling not only provides the north with the goods it needs, but perhaps it allows the people of the north to feel empowered and have a (sometimes literal) taste of the “good life.”

Anthropologists theorize that sometimes consumer goods have meaning beyond economic exchange. For example, the Marcel Mauss believed that “value” is essentially a social construct; goods that are bought, traded, or given need to be examined within the context of the cultures or subcultures in which they exchanged to truly understand their real and symbolic value (Mauss, 1922). In the context of smuggling goods from border cities into Morocco, it would be critical to conduct further in-depth research to form better understanding of why it is that Moroccans wish to purchase Spanish goods and what they mean to them.

While some of the goods smuggled into Morocco allow citizens to live their lives like their European neighbors, it is important to note that this dynamic is exploited by a number of companies. Moroccans want to purchase “higher quality” goods from Spain, but sometimes the goods they import are not even consumed by Spaniards. One prime example of this is the line of cacao products produced by Borras S.L. in Ceuta. A popular treat found all over Morocco, their Maruja bars are not commonly found in Spain, and their website
even notes their strong presence in Northern Africa, especially in Morocco and Algeria (Maruja, 2017). Equating a product’s European origin with higher quality is a dangerous assumption, as Maruja has not officially been marketed as “chocolate” since 1952. In that year, the company decided on a “strategic change,” and switched their production from chocolate to a chocolate sucedáneo (substitute), whose primary selling point appears to be that the product is less susceptible to melting under heat (ibid).

Even goods produced in Morocco will sometimes try to pretend to be European in origin. In supermarkets all across the country, one can easily find a popular brand of juice sold under the label of “Valencia.” Produced in Meknès, it is unclear what, if any, tie the brand has to the city on the east coast of Spain, but this serves to further the notion that there is some sort of value ascribed to products associated with the West.

The smuggling trade into Morocco clearly plays an important role in the country’s national economy. What the goods themselves mean, however, is more ambiguous. Looking at which products are brought into Morocco, and what value Moroccans ascribe to them, could help uncover more about the complicated ways in which people in this region of the world define themselves and live in multicultural societies. By attempting to understand the underground economy, one can better understand the relationship between different but interrelated cultures.
Limitations

After discussing the findings of this research, it is important to acknowledge the basic limitations of this study. The data presented herein was collected over the course of just one month, and further research is required to draw larger conclusions. While I faced many challenges in undertaking this project, there are four main limitations, which absolutely must be addressed. First, the sample I have drawn from is small and the data presented in this study may not be indicative of the various populations I describe. With more time and resources, I would have tried to obtain a larger sample to draw from.

Second, there was a considerable language barrier to my research. Though I speak fairly advanced Spanish and intermediate Arabic, there were moments in nearly every interview where I would either not understand what was said to me, or I would be unable to ask certain follow-up questions.

Additionally, it is important to consider that on several occasions, I was not present for the interviews I describe. Direct quotation is mostly impossible, and the nature of these interviews force me to trust the accuracy of another individual’s notes and memory. Related to this point, researching sensitive topics is difficult, and it was critical for the sake of this project that I made any concessions asked of me by people engaged in sub-rosa activity of questionable legality to ensure their comfort as well as the candor of their responses. It would have been helpful to interview these people myself, but establishing these types of trusting relationships take time, which unfortunately I did not have much of.

Finally, as with any research that partially utilizes a participant/observer methodology, my data is subject to my own inherent biases. Even the photographs I took literally are through my own lenses: just as I selected certain things to capture visually and
framed the shots as I did, I also no doubt saw, heard, and interpreted interviews within the context of my own background.

Given the significant limitations of this research period, I am cautious to generalize from the data I have collected.
Further Research

Given the scale of this subject matter, and the myriad dimensions deserving of exploration, further research is undoubtedly needed. As stated earlier, this project was conducted over the course of just one month of study, and I was not able to obtain as many interviews as I would have liked.

One possible direction for further research involves returning to Ceuta and Melilla to conduct more interviews. With more time, I (or any other researcher for that matter) could get a clearer picture of the internal and external relationships of the enclaves by interviewing a larger number of Spanish and North African residents of the cities, as well as potentially incorporating some elite interviews from Spanish officials.

At the borders and beyond, it would also be beneficial to continue interviewing. Perhaps future scholarship will engage with police officers who work on the border to get a another perspective on the dynamics described in this study. While I was quite fortunate to have one smuggler who was willing to divulge so much information to me, it would be great for future research to also include the thoughts and stories of more smugglers, both male and female. As I learned, there are gender differences with regard to the type of goods smuggled and the methods used to get goods across the borders. Interviewing more grocers in the towns scattered around the borders could also yield more interesting revelations, and interviews with their customers could provide greater insight into why Spanish goods are so desirable and what they mean to those who purchase them given the extraordinary and arduous measures required to bring them to market.

It would be useful for future researchers to delve more deeply into some of the highly nuanced issues on which I scratched the surface. For example, trying to understand
the ways in which language use and code-switching, or the formal and informal use (and erasure) of Spanish/Arabic in these border cities, could be highly useful in trying to better assess the meaning of the informal economy and identity.

Finally, having more time to conduct this type of research would be helpful in furthering understanding of the complex nature of trade and what it means in both economic and social senses on both sides of the border. One of the most important things I've learned from doing this research is just how time-consuming it is to do research at the granular level.
Appendices

Appendix A – Interview Guidelines for Smugglers

1. Goods

A. What do you trade?

B. Are the goods you trade items that cannot easily be acquired in Morocco?

C. If not, why do you go through the hassle of getting ___ in Spain?

D. Why do you think Moroccans are interested in goods from Spain?

E. What kinds of things do Moroccans like from Spain?

2. Background/ Daily Life

A. What can you tell me about your daily routine?

B. How often do you work?

C. How long have you been doing this for?

D. Have you ever done another job?

3. Organization

A. How is your work organized?

B. Do you alone or work with others?

C. Do different people specialize in different types of goods?

D. Do other members of your family also trade?

4. Other

A. Have you ever had anyone question you when you go across the border? If so, what sort of concerns do they have?
B. Do you think Ceuta and Melilla should be part of Spain or Morocco? How would you react if Spain agreed to cede control of the cities to Morocco?

Appendix B – Interview Guidelines for Ceuta/ Melilla Residents

1. Background

A. How long have you lived here for?

B. What languages do you speak?

C. Do you know any Arabic? Is it useful? Why?

Do you have family here? How long has your family lived here?

2. Multiculturalism/ Trade

A. In many ways, Ceuta serves as a bridge between Africa, the Arab World, and Europe. How does that influence daily life in the city?

B. Have you ever been to Morocco?

C. Do you ever buy goods that come from Morocco? What kinds? Are these things you can’t get in Ceuta?

3. Politics

1. The Moroccan government as well as the Arab League have called for Ceuta and the other plazas de soberanía to be returned to Morocco. Is this something you agree with?

2. Is there a comparison to be made with Spanish claims to Gibraltar?

3. Do you feel that the Spanish government treats Ceuta as a full part of Spain?
4. What are the biggest problems facing Ceuta?

Appendix C – Interview Guidelines for Moroccan Grocers

A. Products/ Smuggling

1. Are the items you sell ones that cannot easily be acquired in Morocco?

2. If not, why do you go through the hassle of getting ___ in Spain?

3. Why do you think Moroccans are interested in goods from Spain?

4. What kinds of things do Moroccans like from Spain?

5. Roughly what percent of your goods come from Spain?

6. How do you get them? (How many traders do you employ to get these goods? Are there ever any problems with them?)

7. Do you think your customers are more likely to buy something if it has a label that’s in Spanish? Why is that?

8. Are you aware of any Moroccan goods that get sold in Spain? What kinds of things?

B. Politics

A. Do you think Ceuta and Melilla should be part of Spain or Morocco? How would you react if Spain agreed to cede control of the cities to Morocco?
Reference List


