



**Outlining border people of the frontier
zone between Spain and Morocco.
Empirical and methodological questions**
Definiendo a las personas de frontera entre
España y Marruecos. Cuestiones empíricas
y metodológicas

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Abstract

Introduction: This work is based on a larger project that studies the identity of border people on the Ceuta/Tétouan border. The objectives include the definition of this group and the creation of an instrument to examine its process of identity construction in this scenario.

Method: In the collection of data to define this population, various sources of information were used and a network of key informants was created. Regarding the second goal, three volunteers participated in a pilot test of the instrument, and four researchers in its creation and assessment.

Results: For the first aim, our proposal involved grouping the distinct collectives into three categories: people who frequently cross the border; those who occasionally cross it; and people who do not cross. An autobiographical semi-structured interview and a field notebook of the interviews were created as a result of the second goal.

Conclusions: This type of work requires a sensitive approach to the context under study that considers the socio-political conditions and also requires support from knowledgeable informants for the introduction of the researchers.

Keywords: Ceuta/Tetouan border, border people, identity, semi-structured interview, key informants.

Resumen

Introducción: Este trabajo es parte de un proyecto que estudia la construcción identitaria de las personas de ambos lados de la frontera entre Ceuta y Tetuán. Los objetivos fueron definir dicho colectivo y crear un instrumento para abordar la construcción identitaria fronteriza.

Método: Se utilizaron diversas fuentes de información y se creó una red de informantes clave para la recolección de datos. Para el segundo objetivo, participaron tres colaboradores en una prueba piloto y cuatro investigadores en su evaluación.

Resultados: Se agrupó a los diversos colectivos en tres categorías: personas que cruzan habitualmente la frontera, aquellos que lo hacen ocasionalmente, y personas que no cruzan. Igualmente, se creó una entrevista semi-estructurada autobiográfica y un cuaderno de campo para las entrevistas.

Conclusión: Este tipo de trabajo requiere una aproximación sensible al contexto que se estudia, considerando los condicionantes socio-políticos y apoyado por informantes conocedores del mismo que introduzcan a los investigadores.

Palabras Clave: frontera de Ceuta/Tetuán, personas de frontera, identidad, entrevista semi-estructurada, informantes clave.

1. Introduction

The Spanish-Moroccan border between Ceuta and Tétouan has recently become the object of major interest for scientific research. Its political constitution makes it, along with Melilla, the only EU territories in Africa with a particular status within the Schengen agreement (Ferrer-Gallardo, 2008; Gold, 2000; Podadera Rivera & Calderón Vázquez, 2013). In recent decades, it has received attention due to its links to illegal immigration or the intense informal trade that takes place at this small crossing point (Fuentes Lara, 2016; Planet Contreras, 2004; Soddu, 2006).

The great value offered by its socio-demographic characteristics must be borne in mind since it represents a mixed population where different cultures and religions cohabit (Evers Rosander, 2004; Herrero Muñoz-Cobo, 2014; Moffette, 2013). This produces an especially interesting hybridisation, at the same time that it illustrates the difficulties these communities face in their daily lives. However, the lack of analysis regarding the psychological aspect of the experience of being a border person is observed, that is, there is no research into the deeper implications of the structural aspects of the border on individuals.

It is understood that the structural aspects that make up society frame, contain individual action. Therefore, the institutional, local, national and international policies, the economic regimes and the institutional forces, all of which characterise a border that provides structure for the interactions and actions of the population (Brunet-Jailly, 2005; Velasco Ortiz & Contreras, 2014). Likewise, this has psychological consequences on the people who live in the border zone: on their intentions, motivations, beliefs, and values; and on the whole individual meaning they give to their practices in that specific context (Marsico, 2016).

From the realisation of such activities, and the participation and interaction with others in various settings, people internalise values and ways of doing things which dynamically build their minds and themselves (Cubero & Ramírez Garrido, 2005; Wertsch, 2001). People assume the discourses of significant others and reflect them on their own personal discourses in the form of different voices involved in their own narratives (Wertsch, 1991).

These personal narratives become one of the pillars of identity. On this level, identity is understood as narrative and dynamic (Bruner, 1991, 1997; McAdams, 2001; McAdams & McLean, 2013): Narrative, since this construction about of oneself life meaning is built on a narrative shape; dynamic, because it changes over time

through its contact with the different social and cultural settings, and because it depends on the practices developed. These personal stories are influenced by social, and cultural aspects, and by memories and personal experiences; all shaping the discourse and the selection of significant experiences (Bruner, 1997).

In this way, identity becomes both individual and cultural, as these two areas are closely intertwined: personal aspects are culturally moulded, and, at the same time, cultural aspects become part of the constituent elements of a personal story. This is especially true where, as in this case, cultural and institutional aspects constitute the differences between border people. It is understood, therefore, that both constructions are indivisible and influence each other.

With this background and with the consideration of the social and political scenario where this issue takes place, it is seen as an example of a *sensitive topic* (Lee & Renzetti, 1990). This implies the need for a comprehensive approach based on a dedicated and respectful methodology, since any possible repercussions of these results could affect the target population. To this end, the present study is developed from a qualitative social research point of view, based on a devoted methodology, and is respectful towards the phenomenon under study, with special care taken regarding the treatment of data.

In view of the relevant differences between the two sides of the frontier and the impossibility of comparing the population by the conventional socio-demographic variables, other variables closer to that reality needed to be found. To this end, the quasi-ethnographic models (Silva Ríos & Burgos Dávila, 2011), and the methodological proposals (Cornejo & Salas, 2011), have provided the framework for the development of this work. Diverse tools, such as triangulation techniques (Denzin, 1989), the back-translation process (Chapman & Carter, 1979), and consultations with key informants, have helped to maintain accuracy for the entire investigative process.

This methodological approach enables the study of identity of the border people who live in the proximity of the international frontier between Spain and Morocco. However, due to the huge volume of people who cross the border daily, all of whose many reasons and purposes may differ widely, it is expected that numerous ways of being a border person and multiple border identities are to be revealed. Prior to analysing the identity, delimitation of the target population is required. The first step, therefore, is to define who border people actually are.

In this regard, this work has the purpose of exploring both empirical and

methodological aspects in order to define the border people of the Ceuta/Tétouan frontier. Therefore, two main objectives are proposed: firstly, to define the several groups of people who comprise the borderland population, which is linked to a secondary aim of creating a network of key informants; and secondly, to create an instrument to study the border identity.

2. Method

2.1 *1st objective: Description of the border people*

In this first phase, data collection required various complementary resources to offer a broad perspective of the object under study. These sources included: accounts by key informants, informal interviews, in situ observations at the border checkpoint, and official reports. The characteristics of each source of information and the gathering process in each case are reported below.

2.1.1 Participants

Twelve key informants were interviewed. The sample was obtained based on the criterion of accessibility, and on respecting the participants' wish to collaborate in the study. Most of the participants either have been or are involved with higher education and are familiar with the research process. This involved the collaboration of many other informants with whom interviews and informal talks were also held; it must be stated that these interviews were not recorded. A brief description of the contributors is then carried out. The highlighted characteristics include: age; gender; occupation or other relevant factors that make them experts in the context; years of performance in the context; their origin; knowledge of languages; and other features relevant for the inclusion as informants in this study.

The names provided here are invented and the personal data given does not identify the respondents, thereby maintaining and respecting their privacy. This data protection also shields them from harm since some participants have an illegal fiscal situation. It is understood, therefore, that the disclosure of this data and the relationship established with them are solely for research purposes and, consequently, their identities must not be revealed.

Table 1. Summary of the key informants personal data

Border side	Name	Age	Genre	Profession/Relevant factor	Years in the context	Origin	Languages
Ceuta, Spain	Pedro	37	Man	Sanitary staff at Ceuta's Hospital	5	Cádiz	Spanish
	Adela	46	Women	NGO Coordinator A Ceuta's cultural institution representative	5	Cádiz	Spanish
	José Antonio	67	Man	Native of Ceuta. 2 nd generation	67	Ceuta	Spanish
	Mohammed	30	Man	State security agent with a responsibility position	30	Ceuta	Spanish
	Juan Carlos	58	Man	State security agent	20	Cádiz	Spanish
	Manuel Álvaro	50 37	Man Man	State security agent University Professor	5 7	Cádiz Cádiz	Spanish Spanish
Tétouan, Morocco	Ben	25	Man	European Government collaborator	25	Tangier	Bilingual Spanish / Arabic
	Youssef	50	Man	Journalist and political activist	50	Tétouan	Bilingual Spanish / Arabic
	Amir	49	Man	Social educator and field agent	49	Tétouan	Bilingual Spanish / Arabic
	Younes	28	Man	Native of Tétouan and research collaborator	29	Tétouan	Bilingual Spanish / Arabic
	Omar	45	Man	University Associate Professor	10	Al-Hoceima	Arabic, French (2 ^a language)

Source: Elaborated by the authors

2.1.2 Other sources of information

Informal interviews

These were spontaneous everyday conversations with both key informants and other informal informants. These interviews occurred in the course of a casual conversation in everyday situations, without planning. Similarly, interviews were neither developed with a prior script, nor were they registered with any digital recording device. The information provided was registered as notes in the field notebook.

Observational sessions at the border

Three observation and recording sessions of the activity of the border crossing were made. Of varying length, these took place at different times and on different days of the week. In each of these observational sessions, information was noted regarding: the date, time and duration of observation; the people who were at the border; what happened; and the impressions of the researcher.

Official reports

Official reports from certain administrative institutions connected with the border were used. The institutions consulted included:

Delegación del Gobierno en Ceuta (National Government in the Autonomous City of Ceuta)

Jefatura Superior de Policía (Police Department of Ceuta)

Ayuntamiento de Ceuta (City Council of Ceuta)

Cámara Oficial de Comercio, Industria y Navegación de Ceuta (Chamber of Commerce of Ceuta)

2.1.3 Instruments and materials

A semi-structured interview was created ad hoc in order to collect general information on border situation and the description of the border population; it was used as an instrument to collect information from the key informants. Composed of five main questions, it inquired into the following topics: 1) general description of the border; 2) description of the activities of border people; 3) crossing reasons of border people; 4) other academic and official resources about the topic; and 5) proposals regarding how to contact the target population.

During the data collection process, a digital recorder and a field notebook were used to gather information. Other resources facilitated the researchers' stay in Tétouan, such as the availability of financial resources, accommodation in the city, institutional permissions, and a valid passport.

2.1.4 Procedure

The first step included the creation of the aforementioned social network of the key informants in order to remain in contact with reality and the population under study. To this end, a snowball effect was produced. Researchers triggered this effect by contacting other researchers involved in work associated to this context, who subsequently introduced them to other researchers or professionals who were in direct contact with the actual borderland situation.

Once the researchers were introduced, the aims and the terms of the collaboration were explained, including the study's objectives, the questions of the interview, the uses of the information provided and the rights concerning the data offered. This information was given both orally and in writing on an information

sheet. On agreeing to the terms proposed, the participants were then required to sign a formal consent form.

The interviews were conducted in person or on-line, adapted to the circumstances of each participant. The particular conditions forced the interviews to be carried out at locations and times proposed by the participants. In this way, each participant felt more at ease, which in turn, assisted in the progress of the meeting.

During the conversation, other complementary questions apart from those originally proposed were asked in order to clarify the information and data the participant had provided. While the participant was speaking, one of the researchers wrote down the most relevant information. The interview ended with the establishment of a future meeting to continue onto the next stage of data collection.

The recorded interviews were then analysed, and the most relevant aspects related to the questions were selected: those regarding the characteristics of the Ceuta/Tétouan border and its borderland population. Each of the groups identified by the participants within the border people was registered.

After the interview, the researcher made additional visits to the key informants, in order to preserve the relationship, make it as empathic as possible, and to review with them the preliminary results, as another accuracy strategy of the study. Recognition was given to show appreciation for the help and dedication offered, and to maintain contact for future requirements.

2.2 2nd objective: Creation of an autobiographical semi-structured interview

2.2.1 Participants

Two Moroccan men, aged 25, both bilingual in Moroccan Arabic and Spanish, who were in direct contact with the reality of the border, collaborated in this stage. They volunteered to perform the pilot test of the interview in its Spanish version.

Likewise, four renowned researchers in the field of qualitative research and in the field of identity studies provided assistance in the assessment of the instrument created.

Finally, a Moroccan Arabic native woman collaborated as a volunteer for a pilot test of the interview once it had been translated into Moroccan Arabic (Darija).

2.2.2 Instruments and materials

A previous interview on the study of identity at the Mexican border formed the

basis for the method to achieve the proposed objective. The interview was then modified for the aims of the present study.

2.2.3 Procedure

An initial version of the interview was first proposed based on the Mexican border interview that explored the same objectives, although certain questions were adapted to fit the context and the aims of this study. This interview was reviewed by experts and a number of verbal expressions and technical words were changed so that it would be more understandable to the target sample.

Secondly, a pilot interview was conducted with two participants. They pointed out the less understandable aspects and requested further explanations regarding a number of the questions they were being asked. These commentaries were useful in the identification of the weak points of the instrument and hence changes could be made in the questions proposed.

Once those changes have been made, four experts reviewed this second version of the interview script. Their suggestions and proposals were incorporated to create an ultimate version of the interview, which would then be used to examine the border people identity.

Finally, the interview script was translated into Moroccan Arabic (Darija) by a back-translation process (Chapman & Carter, 1979), and thanks to a bilingual collaborator. Similar to the case of the Spanish version, the instrument was tested in a pilot study with the participation of a Moroccan Arabic native interviewer and interviewee. The participant suggested certain changes in the script in order to adjust the linguistic and cultural keys to the context investigated.

3. Results

3.1 *1st objective: Description of the border people*

Following analysis of the interviews and the other sources of information, several groups of people influenced by the Spanish-Moroccan border were found. A first classification could then be provided in accordance with a first criterion of whether the border was crossed, and a second criterion of the crossover frequency. This typology is as follows:

- Crossing people
 - Frequently

- Occasionally

- Non-crossing people

In Table 2, various groups are listed. However, only the most frequently referenced are described. The origin and the crossing direction and/or the side of the border where the people remain are also indicated.

The typology presented is a first proposal and it is understood that the aforementioned groups may be subject to other classifications. However, for the objective pursued in this work, this organisation has been found to be the most enlightening.

Moreover, this classification aims to be as exhaustive as possible, based on the data provided by the various sources used. Nevertheless, other groups who are also related to the border have probably been omitted. In the same way, it is important to bear in mind that the groups are not static and people can, and ultimately do, carry out activities identified as belonging to other groups.

Table 2. Classification of border people related to Ceuta/Tétouan border

Crossing people						Non-crossing people	
Frequently			Occasionally			Side	Activity/Group
Cross direction	Nationality	Activity/Group	Cross direction	Nationality	Activity/Group		
From Tangier-Tétouan Region to Ceuta	M	Porteadoras (carriers)	From Tangier-Tétouan Region to Ceuta	M	Leisure, purchases	M	Border guards
		Traders/smugglers			Use of medical services (pregnant women)		Sub-Saharan immigrants
		Domestic workers		S	Leisure, purchases, administrative paperwork, use of medical services		Minors
		Construction workers	From Ceuta to T-T Region	S	Leisure; tourism; visits to relatives		Taxi drivers
		Service sector workers	Both directions	Several	Migrants during “Paso del Estrecho” summer operation		Food/objects stand owners
		Prostitutes			Tourists		Border-crossing document sellers
		Drug dealers					Participants of the informal commerce/smuggling network
	Beggars				Beggars		
	M/S	Primary education students					Other Moroccans
		Higher education students					
Public servants and white-collar professionals							
From Ceuta to T-T Region	S/M	Public servants and white-collar professionals				S	Border guards
							Taxi drivers
							Moneychangers
							Food/objects stand owners
							El Tarajal commercial estate wholesalers
							Other participants of the informal commerce/smuggling network
							Shop owners
							Public servants
							Other natives from Ceuta

Source: Elaborated by the authors

3.1.1 *People who frequently cross the border*

This category refers to those people whose lives revolve around the border, that is, their daily activities or work are linked to the border or imply having to cross it. Several groups are included in this category.

From Tangier-Tétouan region to Ceuta

4. *Porteadoras (carriers)*

These are middle-aged Moroccan women with an average age of between 35 and 55 years old, who are residents in the adjacent area of the border. They are dedicated to transporting large bales of goods from the commercial estate from Ceuta (close to the border checkpoint) to the Moroccan side. This is a job with very low prestige in Morocco, sometimes compared to prostitution, and it is usually reserved for women who have no other resources. These carriers tend to be women from low-income families who can be widowed, single or simply lack the support of their husband's job. Their work is paid for on every crossing of goods they make from one side of the border to the other, earning about 3 or 4 euros per trip.

5. *Traders/smugglers*

These are often men who work near the border or in the commercial estate (close to the border checkpoint at the Spanish side); they form part of the informal trading network, and transport goods from Ceuta to Morocco. These men differ from those of the previous group, since they rarely perform the same duties nor do they carry the same type of goods. On the one hand, they usually travel in vehicles, often in cars that have modifications for the transportation of more and bigger goods. On the other hand, these traders commonly carry goods of greater value than those of the *porteadoras*, ranging from electrical appliances to small but valuable items such as jewellery and gold.

6. *Domestic workers*

These are middle-aged women who work as maids in private homes in Ceuta, either with or without a formal work situation. In Morocco, this position is recognised as a better job than that of the *porteadoras*.

7. *Construction workers*

These workers are mainly Moroccan men working in the construction sector in unskilled duties; and, as in the cases of the domestic workers, their work situation could be formal or informal. The population from Ceuta use this service due to its

lower cost compared to the rates for Spanish construction workers; this can occur due to their legal situation in that they might not be regularised or, even when formally employed on lower rates, these workers would earn enough to live comfortably in Morocco.

8. *Service sector workers*

These are Moroccan men and women who work as employees of businesses in the service sector. Although they enjoy a formal work situation, it is stressed that the salary and the number of hours they work are not equivalent to the average salary in the sector. It was noted that there are some cases of Moroccan people who are also the owners of such businesses.

9. *Public servants and white-collar professionals*

These are mainly Spanish men and women who live in Morocco and work in Ceuta. The difficulty and high cost of housing in Ceuta compared to the low prices in Morocco are the main reasons that push the population to shift their residence to the Moroccan side, although they are officially registered as Ceuta residents and are thus, infringing the law.

From Ceuta to Tangier-Tétouan region

10. *Public servants and white-collar professionals*

Entrepreneurs from Ceuta who own their businesses on the Moroccan side mainly make up this group. Other professionals, such as journalists and civil servants of the Spanish Consulate, could be added.

10.1.1 *People who occasionally cross the border*

This includes the various groups that sometimes cross the border, and present very heterogeneous motives. The border crossing is a circumstantial phenomenon in their daily lives.

From Tangier-Tétouan region to Ceuta

11. *Moroccans*

These border crossers are usually relatively wealthy Moroccans whose main reason to cross the border is for leisure activities or the consumption of products that do not exist in Morocco or that are cheaper in Ceuta. By the same token, there are others who cross to make use of medical services or study at the higher educational system.

12. Spaniards

These are Spanish people who live and work in Morocco. In addition to shopping and doing various leisure activities, this group often crosses the border to perform other actions such as administrative procedures and banking purposes, and to benefit from the health services.

From Ceuta to Tangier-Tétouan region

13. Natives from Ceuta

Natives from Ceuta usually cross to Morocco to purchase quality fresh food, which is cheaper than that in Ceuta. A number of these natives may enjoy a second home on Moroccan soil for the holidays or during the weekends. Similarly, another group with Moroccan origins exists, among whose reasons for crossing we can also find visiting relatives.

13.1.1 Non-crossing people

These are people whose lives or professions are strongly influenced by the border. Although they work and live near the border, they do not cross it either because they cannot or because they do not need to cross in order to perform their professional activities.

Moroccan and Spanish side

14. Border guards

These are men and women from either of the two nationalities who work at the border post as state security agents. Their work is limited to the control of the people and goods crossing from one side to the other.

Moroccan side

15. Sub-Saharan immigrants

These are usually young men from sub-Saharan countries such as Mali, Senegal, and the Ivory Coast. Their desire is to cross to Spanish, and therefore, European territory; they live in the immediate vicinity of the fence in the adjoining forests at the Ceuta/Tétouan border.

16. Minors

These are children, mostly male, who often travel in groups unaccompanied by their legal guardians. They mostly come from different parts of the Tangier-Tétouan region, but they could also have their roots in other parts of Morocco. They live around the border waiting for the opportunity to cross into Ceuta and migrate to the

peninsula. Cases of children who come and go are also given, and these have crossed the border several times in both directions.

16.1 2nd objective. Creation of an autobiographical semi-structured interview

In order to gather some data, an autobiographical semi-structured interview was designed, which analyses different aspects of the border experience. It explores five topics: 1) general socio-demographic data, which involves general questions about the participant's life and situation; 2) border crossing, questions about frequency and causes for the crossing and about the typical crossing journey itself were asked in this section; 3) border Self, which involves questions about autobiographical memories and personal experiences related to the border, and the relationship with "the other"; 4) reflexion about border people and the border experience, which is comprised of questions about the general experience of the border from an abstract point of view; and, 5) evaluation of the border, which enquires into the personal assessment about the fact of living near the border.

At the same time, a field notebook on the interviews was planned in order to register the situational aspects in which the interviews would take place. Among the notes, it is proposed that certain factors should be recorded: 1) contextual elements, such as place, time, people and characteristics of the situation; 2) the participants' previous data, as a way to access each participant or the information given by them to the researchers; 3) the researcher's perceptions and reflections regarding the interview.

17. Conclusions

The purpose of this paper is twofold: descriptive and methodological. Firstly, to identify the several groups living in direct contact with the actual borderland situation of the Spanish-Moroccan border in their daily lives; and secondly, to create an instrument that would help to examine identity in such individuals.

In order to provide specifications for a larger study that aims to describe the identity of border people, the description of the population should constitute the first step. Given that around twenty thousand people cross the border on a daily basis, outlining these individuals was seen as a pre-requisite to tackle the whole study.

However, this work has its difficulties and limitations. One of the biggest complications is the complexity of the context of this study and the lack of

categorisation of the groups who frequent the Ceuta/Tétouan border. This is in part due to the intricacy that constant changes in migration and socio-political situations generate, which renders this issue a *sensitive topic* (Lee & Renzetti, 1990). This situation also complicates the possibility of intervention and attention to the needs of these groups. This paper has striven to reduce these gaps in the information available and to enable differential treatment to such diverse groups.

To this end, triangulation techniques in data collection (Denzin, 1989) and the inter-analysis meetings between researchers and key informants (Legrand, 1993, quoted in Cornejo, Faúndez, & Besoain, 2017) were essential. In particular, the creation of a network of informants defined a second methodological objective, without which it would have been impossible to put the researchers in contact with the social reality under study.

This network has experienced certain limitations, such as the difference in the number of informants from either side, which is mainly marked by the knowledge of the language; or that most informants present a very similar profile in that they are all highly educated, with knowledge of Spanish, and familiar with the process of social research. This could mean that the information is, in some ways, biased. However, it should be understood that part of the inherent limitations of this type of work involves the recruitment of the informants, since they have to be found in the immediate environment of the researcher, and must be willing to participate in the research process. The positions of the participants allowed them to provide a broad view of the border phenomenon.

At the same time, this network could help to make better contact with the target population. The fact that the interviewer is a foreign woman who does not know the Arabic language, and asks questions that might be interpreted out of context can elicit the reluctance in the population who are under study. It is for this reason that this network of key informants facilitates this contact and helps to create bonds of reciprocity and trust with participants. This means, in certain cases, the creation of personal ties to the same informants, which build close, reciprocal and empathic relationships.

By the same token, it is impossible to demarcate the study of the socio-political situation that exists in the context of study, which influences the research at all levels. The border has been and still remains a source of conflict between Spain and Morocco, and the people involved suffer the consequences. Similarly, the vigilant

state in which Morocco exists can make the people suspicious about the intentions of the researchers and their objectives, thereby affecting the confidence with which these people could approach the researchers. This is inevitable and forms part of the phenomenon under study. Therefore, the task as social scientists is to earn the trust of people, and to break away from the differential power that is set in the relationship itself.

On the other hand, the second objective, that of developing an autobiographical semi-structured interview to study identity, was attained. This interview explores the influence of the most important aspects of the border scenario on the identity construction. This will reveal the relationship between the structural aspects that make up this reality and the construction of personal meanings of this experience.

The main difficulty to be tackled was that of building an instrument tailored to the population other than those of the middle-class with higher education studies (Boesch, 1996; Rogoff, 1980). While the procedure has not been without its difficulties and potential biases, such as the language or the selection of the target population itself; we believe it has enabled us to develop a tool of greater reliability.

In this regard, the main concern was focused on the process of self-reflection itself, which is known to be complex and to require the specification and construction of a story that is not always achieved. Moreover, these issues are not usual everyday questions since they demand people to reveal their most personal, deep and emotional aspects. Therefore, the questions have been made as close to an everyday language as possible, by eliminating the more conceptual aspects, so that they are easily understood by the general population, regardless of their participants' educational level or previous training. Therefore these questions can elicit narrative thinking, in the terms of Bruner (1988), which constitutes the basis of identity.

Equally, in order to ensure the validity of the instrument, a translation of the interview into Darija (Moroccan Arabic) is to be carried out by means of a back-translation process (Chapman & Carter, 1979). Similarly, the instrument was tested in a pilot study with the participation of a native interviewer and a native interviewee. This pilot study allowed us to adapt the instrument to the linguistic and cultural keys of the context under investigation, which in turn enabled interviews to be conducted in the mother tongue of the population and the expression of personal meanings to be facilitated.

Likewise, an interview notebook was created as a listening device (Cornejo et al., 2017). This notebook will allow the researchers to write down all the data not only related to the context where the interviews will take place and their development, but the reflexive process of the researchers. In this way, it is intended to reflect contextual issues, the researcher's prior knowledge about the participants and the reflections about the interviews themselves. This is in line with a proposal to make the research process more explicit (Cornejo, Besoain, & Mendoza, 2011) and to understand the interview as "a reconstruction done at the right time of the narrative and the specific relationship with the *narratario* (interviewer)" (Cornejo, Mendoza, & Rojas, 2008). This data collection will support the interviews' analysis and will contain information on the participants' narrative production.

Additionally, the proposed definition of the border population strives to reconstruct the diverse views offered by the various sources. The major differences identified between the two sides of the border, as well as the different connections it has with the population on one side and on the other, prevented us from attaining a definition of the population that follows the typical demographic variables. Consequently, the proposal of this work is to describe the population based on their activities and reasons for crossing. This description was closest to the reality of the different functions that the border offers to each group, and it formed the basis for the interpretation of the personal meanings given to their border experience.

Starting from the proposed classification, the population in proximity to the border could be distributed into three groups: people who frequently cross the border; people who occasionally cross it; and people who do not cross. Although there may be other possible classifications, this has enabled us to specify the target population under study in the project to which this paper belongs. Equally, and despite the typology presented, the whole set of people identified is seen as representing border people, simply because they live and develop their activities near the border; whether it be to a greater or lesser extent, we consider that their lives and experiences are conditioned by the existence of the border itself.

This work was, therefore, necessary in order to make a delimitation that guides the subsequent study, whose aim is to understand the process of the identity construction of border people. The present study allows us to concentrate specifically on certain collectives from among the general group of border people.

Furthermore, this analysis has helped to change the researcher's conception of

who the border people really are. Beyond the images and stories widely reported in the mass media, this analysis has helped to create a more faithful image of the different groups living near the border, and the considerable influence it has not only on its more immediate context but also on the whole surrounding region.

Finally, it is noted that the border or the *douane*, as Moroccans call it, has been fully present in the lives of the people of both sides for decades, so much so that it is no longer seen as a problem. The repeated jumps over the fence extensively covered by the media, and even the fear that the registration or the police control at the checkpoint can entail, could be perceived as a concern, but not the border itself because it is not a social element that worries the population. Two burning questions remain: to what extent is the nature of the border assumed by border people? To what degree is it shaping the reality of these people and their meaning making?

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