



**'Carrier' women: a Grounded Theory
approach**
Porteadoras: una aproximación a la Teoría
Fundamentada

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Abstract

Abstract: This article stems from the doctoral thesis “The Situation of *Carrier* Women in the Spanish-Moroccan Border: The Case of Ceuta.” The text focuses on three specific aspects. The first part looks into the relevance of the geopolitical situation of Ceuta and the Tetouan region as factors influencing the large amounts of cross-border transport of people and commodities that take place at the *Tarajal* border. Looking at *trans-boundary* women, most of them are domestic workers, prostitutes and 'carriers' (*porteadoras*, in Spanish). This study focusses on the latter, i.e. Moroccan woman carrying commodities across the Spanish-Moroccan border. The second part of this article explains the methods used to carry out the study: strenuous ethnographic research at the border point and surrounding areas, complemented with in-depth interviews with the main agents involved in the research. Grounded Theory was the technique used to analyse the data. Finally, the last part of this article focuses on the main results obtained through the research.

Keywords: *Porteadoras*, border, Spanish-Moroccan, Ceuta, women.

Resumen

Resumen: El presente artículo proviene de la tesis doctoral: “La situación de las mujeres porteadoras en la frontera hispano-marroquí: el caso de Ceuta”. La comunicación se centra en tres puntos clave. Una primera parte en la cual se hace una aproximación al contexto en el que se enmarca la investigación, es decir, la importancia de la situación geopolítica de Ceuta y la región de Tetuán en la estructuración de un paso fronterizo –el Tarajal– con un elevado trasiego de personas y mercancías, centrandó la atención en las mujeres transfronterizas que principalmente son: prostitutas, empleadas domésticas y porteadoras, y es justamente en estas últimas sobre las que se va a centrar la investigación. En la segunda parte se explica el método que se ha llevado a cabo en la investigación; se ha realizado un férreo trabajo etnográfico en la frontera y las poblaciones objeto de la tesis que se ha complementado con entrevistas en profundidad a los agentes implicados en la investigación. La técnica de análisis de datos empleada ha sido la Teoría Fundamentada. Para finalizar, en la tercera fase se presentan los principales resultados obtenidos de la investigación.

Palabras clave: Porteadoras, frontera, hispano-marroquí, Ceuta, mujeres.

1. Introduction

This article has its origins in a reflection on the methodology that was utilised in a previous article published in the *Revista Internacional de Estudios Migratorios (RIEM)* (Fuentes, 2016a). Unlike that paper, the present one goes deeper into the process of data production and analysis, while other sections, such as contextualisation and results, are similar to those of the previous article.

In a changing environment such as the current one, which is highly marked by a globalised economy and the importance of geopolitics to decision making, it becomes relevant to pay attention to specific situations that explain global dynamics.

Ceuta is located in the Tingitana peninsula, neighbouring the Tangier-Tetouan region. It has a surface area of 19.4 km² and a population of 84.263 hab.¹. Ceuta has a particular geopolitical condition since it separates two countries, two continents, two religions, and two well-differentiated economic areas. Furthermore, along with Melilla, they are territories over which Morocco claims sovereignty, “its occupied grounds”: Moroccan authorities refuse to recognise the Spanish sovereignty on the Autonomous Cities. These particularities, along with the implementation of the Schengen Agreement in Ceuta, produce legislative eccentricities.

On the one hand, during the last decade, institutional relations between Morocco and Spain have been marked by a rapprochement in economic aspects –increase of Spanish investment in Morocco, which is the second largest European investor behind France– and political aspects –bilateral collaboration agreements in migration policy–. On the other hand, regarding the socio-economic comparison between both countries, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 2016, the Spanish economy ranked 12th worldwide, whereas the Moroccan economy was located in the 62nd position. The Human Development Index (HDI) in 2016 (UNDP, 2016) shows Spain occupying the 25th place on the ranking, while Morocco is in 122nd position. In terms of Gini coefficient, Spain is located in the 58th position², while the Maghrebi kingdom ranks 98th. Considering these numbers, it is not surprising that the FMD report points at the Moroccan-Spanish border as the world's seventh most unequal one³.

The socio-economic circumstances and the Human Rights violations on the southern border of Europe are worrying facts that organisations like Asociación Pro

¹Census information 2016.

²Information 2014.

³ The border of Mexico and the United States is the 17th most unequal in the world according to the report of FMD.

Derechos Humanos de Andalucía (APDHA)⁴, Doctors Without Borders, Human Rights Watch, UNHCR⁵ and Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado (CEAR)⁶, among others, have noticed. These organisations have made repeated demands for action against flagrant violations such as summary returns/pushbacks, the barbed-wire on the fences in Ceuta and Melilla, the lack of rigour in the asylum requests, the terrible living conditions of migrants, and the lack of protection for cross-border workers – the latter being the focus of this article.

2. Contextualisation of information

This research arises from the author's approach to border studies, during which a distinct pattern was found: unequal border/women/transportation of commodities from one side of the border to the other. However, the case of Ceuta was unique in that commodities were carried in the opposite direction to the one detected in other unequal borders. Women who carry goods from Guatemala to Mexico (Quesada, 2012), from Venezuela to Brasil (Da Silva, 2012); from Peru to Chile (Tapia, Liberona, & Contreras, 2017; Inostroza, 2017) or from Bolivia to Argentina (Benedetti & Salizzi, 2011), do so from the country with lower macroeconomic indicators to the country with higher indicators. Carrier women, on the contrary, are Moroccan women who carry bundles of goods from Ceuta – the city in the country with higher macroeconomic indicators – to the nearby Moroccan border towns and cities – in the country with lower indicators. This fact sparked the interest that led to this research.

The situation of carrier women emerges from the circumstances of a social actor (carrier women) and from a context (Ceuta and its hinterland) which is subject to certain specific determinants that make possible and give shape to the actors' activities. The singularity of Ceuta as a border is caused by structural factors that derive from its geographic position, as well as other factors related to the peculiar socio-political and economic development of the enclave itself.

2.1 Context of atypical trade in Ceuta

The geographical situation on the one hand and the geopolitical on the other mark the justification and inform the purpose of this research. Ceuta and the Tetouan

⁴ Andalusian Association of Human Rights.

⁵ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

⁶ Spanish Commission of Refugees.

“*wilaya*”⁷ – Castillejos (Fnideq), Rincon (M’diq), Martil and Tetouan – are located in a 40 Km radius. This fact generates a constant flow of people and commodities across the Tarajal border every day. Up to this point there are no quirks, nothing different from what happens in a multitude of borders; the particularity is caused by two factors: a) the Spanish-Moroccan border in Ceuta is not a commercial customs checkpoint; and b) the citizens of the Tetouan *wilaya* are allowed to enter Ceuta without a visa, only needing a valid passport.

These two singularities are caused, mainly, by the geopolitical positioning of Ceuta which, along with Melilla, are the only European territories in the African continent, therefore embodying the southern European border. This has a large influence in the fact that Ceuta's legislation is treated differently from that of other territories, and dealt with in a particular manner; this is clearly seen in the Ratification of the Spanish Adhesion to the Schengen Agreement, in which a declaration regarding Ceuta and Melilla was included, in part III of article 1b, emphasising “The specific visa-exemption regime regarding small trans-boundary commerce between Ceuta and Melilla and the Moroccan provinces of Tetouan and Nador” (BOE, 1994, p. 3)⁸. The consequence of this declaration is that Moroccan nationals who do not reside in the named provinces of the kingdom need a visa to be allowed into Ceuta and Melilla, causing favourable treatment towards citizens of Tetouan and Nador, based on the argument that there are cultural and commercial links between these two areas and the European cities in Africa (Soriano & Fuentes, 2015). This is consistent with Ferrer-Gallardo (2008) who states that this particular practice of the Schengen Agreement not only was relevant in influencing the trans-boundary flow of people, but also conditioned the flow of commodities between both regions.

Another relevant moment was the entry of Spain into the European Economic Community (EEC). Ceuta, by explicit desire of the city's Chamber of Commerce, was not included in the Customs Union due to the tax advantages this would bring to the Autonomous City. Thus, the EEC determined that Ceuta would enjoy a “particular situation” (Muñoz, 1986). Nonetheless, it is worth highlighting that the greatest stimulus for the “atypical trade” comes from the fact that between Ceuta and Morocco there is no commercial customs checkpoint, which means goods cannot be exported from the Autonomous Cities towards Morocco. This situation originates from the

⁷ *Wilaya* (term in Moroccan): region.

⁸ Boletín Oficial del Estado (BOE) is the Spanish government's official bulletin.

unwillingness of Morocco to recognise Spanish sovereignty over Ceuta and, furthermore, the claim for its incorporation as part of Morocco's territorial integrity⁹. This situation affects the normal flow of exports between two neighbouring countries by curtailing freedom of movement (for goods) through the Spanish-Moroccan border, forcing goods to leave the country illegally, on the backs of *porteadoras*¹⁰ through the Biutz pass, or hidden in the vehicles that go through the Tarajal border.

This continuous flow from Ceuta to northern Morocco is tolerated by both countries. Despite the lack of acknowledgment or regulation of the situation by both parties, a strong police-force display –Spanish *Guardia Civil* and National Police, and Moroccan *Gendarmerie* – can be easily seen along the “circuit” followed by the *porteadoras*. Ferrer-Gallardo (2012) asserts that “atypical commerce” is tolerated because of the economic impact it has on the region. But, how does this influence domestic economy in both scenarios? “Atypical commerce” brings big economic revenues to Ceuta, it has the status of *free port*¹¹ (Planet, 1998) and has important fiscal benefits; a flagrant example is the fact that in Ceuta the VAT¹² tax, which amounts to between 4% and 21% of the product's value, is not applied. The Autonomous City charges the IPSI¹³ tax instead, which represents a much lower burden –between 0.5% and 10%– when compared to VAT (González & López Guzmán, 2009). This means that exports to Ceuta, and their later illegal access to Morocco, are cheaper than, for example, shipping from the Algeciras Port to the Tanger-Med cargo port. In the same way, in Ceuta's budget (2017)¹⁴, 24.6% of the total income arrives through the IPSI tax on imports.

For the Maghrebi kingdom, the motivation for not acting upon this situation is not economic, because the “atypical commerce” or smuggling causes negative effects on the Moroccan domestic economy. Before Morocco's tax deregulation in 2012, as Planet (1998) points out, the African country asserted that smuggling was the cause for its protectionist economic and financial policy, with high taxes on imports. However, after taxes were brought down, a decrease on the volume of goods illegally entering

⁹ Morocco claims the so-called main squares, Ceuta and Melilla; and smaller squares, the Peñón de Vélez de la Gomera, Peñón de Alhucemas and the Chafarinas Islands, as its lawful territories.

¹⁰ This Spanish term for “carrier women” will be used throughout the article.

¹¹ ‘Puerto franco’, in Spanish.

¹² Impuesto sobre el Valor Añadido (IVA), in Spanish.

¹³ Impuesto sobre Productos, Servicios e Importación (IPSI), which may be translated as Tax on Products, Services and Imports.

¹⁴ Presupuestos de la Ciudad Autónoma de Ceuta (2017). Documentos. Secciones. Presupuestos. Ciudad Autónoma de Ceuta.

Morocco through the Ceuta border did not occur. According to Morón (2012) this happens because the Moroccan VAT tax imposes 20% and tariff rights add another 20%, while Ceuta's IPSI imposes 10% and the “*mordida*”¹⁵ does not exceed 10% of the goods' value; this allowed goods entering through Ceuta to continue being cheaper than those commercialised from Morocco (Morón, 2010). One can see how this damages Moroccan domestic economy by forcing it to compete under unequal conditions with Ceuta's tax regime (Iglesias, 2010) and hinders the development of national businesses as a consequence of this “atypical commerce” or smuggling (Pérez, 2008).

So, if this situation harms domestic economy, why does Morocco not respond to it? Because of the social consequences that this might have in this specific region of the country, historically discriminated by the Kingdom. The unemployment, poverty and social unrest that the end of smuggling could bring about are greatly feared by the Moroccan government. The image of social, political and economic stability that the country projects, is crucial to its continued functioning. The Alawite Kingdom is a privileged partner of the European Union; the advanced status between them, as well as their cooperation on migratory policies and the development cooperation funds awarded by the EU all hinge at least partially upon this image of stability. Social upheaval in the northern part of the country is thus undesirable; the negative effects of smuggling for the Moroccan economy are negligible when compared to the harmful consequences for foreign relations that its banning would cause.

The economic figures of this “atypical trade” are difficult to specify. Martín (2010) gives an econometric estimate which concludes that 46% of Ceuta's imports become exports to Morocco, an estimate of €405,285,933. Similarly, the Spanish Economic Advisor, in 2005, estimated that in Ceuta and Melilla smuggling amounted to €1 billion per year, coming mainly from food, drinks, tobacco, textiles, footwear, telephones and medicine, representing 70% of Ceuta's economic activity (Ferrer-Gallardo, 2008). According to the American Chamber of Commerce of Casablanca, around 45,000 people live directly from this “atypical commerce”, 75% of which are women; including indirect impact, the estimate rises to 400,000 people. To this, we must add something in the vicinity of €90 million in police bribes, according to estimates from the independent Moroccan weekly news outlet Al-Ayam (Ferrer-Gallardo, 2008).

¹⁵ “*Mordida*” (term in Spanish): a bite; bribe given to custom authorities for letting goods go through the Tarajal border.

2.2 Trans-boundary Women

At this point, it is essential to highlight that *porteadoras* are not the only Moroccan women who go to work to Ceuta on a daily basis. Domestic workers and prostitutes are the other two main categories of trans-boundary women.

It is true that the Schengen Agreement allows the citizens of the Tetouan *wilaya* to enter Ceuta without a visa, instead of needing only their passport. Nevertheless, this visa exemption has its limitations; they cannot spend the night in the city of Ceuta. In this way, and as Espiñeira (2013, p. 12) points out, “someone is trans-boundary between 5:00 or 4:00 a.m. and 7:00 or 6:00 p.m.; when it gets dark the visa is needed again since it is not possible to sleep in the city. The control at Tarajal changes with the hours of the day.” The reason is that trans-boundary workers or shoppers are in Ceuta for those, and only those, reasons (working and shopping). Therefore, it is not considered a need for citizens from the region of Tetouan to cross the border during those hours, since they have nothing to do there at night.

The trans-boundary women (domestic workers, prostitutes and *porteadoras*) that go to work to Ceuta have a lot in common. Nevertheless, there are big differences among them too: their social standing, salary, working hours or legal status. Domestic workers are awarded an average social status¹⁶ in the north of Morocco. Among the trans-boundary women, they are the ones who acquire better social recognition from the society of origin. On the contrary, the prostitutes have the lowest social status – as they do everywhere – and, due to their work conditions, *porteadoras* are compared to the prostitutes by the Moroccan society. This social equivalence between *porteadoras* and prostitutes is based on the fact that the Moroccan society believe that *porteadoras* have to do all kinds of sexual favours since they work with men and even act like men. This factor makes prostitutes and *porteadoras* lie to their families telling them that they work as housemaids in Ceuta.

With regard to salary, it is necessary to point out that, most of the time, the work of trans-boundary women is connected with exploitation and in many aspects may recall slavery, especially for those women coming from the south of Morocco or from northern rural zones and who live permanently in houses in Ceuta. There is also visible mafia influence in the cases of prostitutes and *porteadoras*. This being said, it should be

¹⁶ These statements are a result of the research and the deep interviews and informal conversations with associations – both Moroccan and native of Ceuta – and with domestic workers themselves.

noted that the salary of domestic workers¹⁷ and prostitutes¹⁸ is average while the salary of *porteadoras* is extremely low, amounting to 8 to 10 euro per day. According to the working hours of prostitutes, as pointed out by the coordinator of the Cruz Blanca Foundation in Ceuta:

[They] come to Ceuta at 3 p.m., work and when the night comes, they go back to their homes. In most of the cases, their families do not know which kind of activities they do in Ceuta. The *porteadoras* are usually in Ceuta at 7:00 a.m. and leave the city at 1:00 p.m. in Spain¹⁹. The domestic workers' day begins at 7:00 a.m. when they cross the border at Tarajal and they do not leave Ceuta until 2:00 or 6:00 p.m.

To finish this comparison, the activities these trans-boundary women do vary. Domestic workers make a legal activity in both countries, even though a large part of the housemaids in Ceuta work in the informal economy. The coordinator of the programme committee of the association DIGMUN (Dignity for Women and Children) claimed:

Many of them do not have a contract and are not in a stable situation (...) the matter is that if I hire an employee for two hours per week and then other woman hires her for two hours, and then again and again, who is hiring the employee? If some kind of accident happens, who is responsible for this employee, which employer?

In the case of prostitutes and *porteadoras* they are in an illegal situation. In the first case, clients are punished; and in the second case its legality or illegality is complex and not clearly defined by legislation. From the point of view of the activities they do in Ceuta, it is not illegal for them to go shopping in Ceuta and consequently take goods to

¹⁷ According to the interviews, the domestic workers earn from 20 to 25 euro per day. But, we must bear in mind that they do not work every day, nor do they work the same amount of hours every day. Also, we must think about traveling expenses.

¹⁸ According to the interview with the Cruz Blanca Foundation (Ceuta), prostitutes can earn 25 to 50 euro in one day. Again, it is necessary to subtract the traveling expenses.

¹⁹ The working hours of the *porteadoras* are marked by the schedules of the bridge of the Biutz, through which the women take the goods from the industrial park of Tarajal to Moroccan territory. Nevertheless, when the bridge closes, many *porteadoras* try to move their goods through the Tarajal border where they await for the suitable hours: when there is a changing of the guard – Moroccan or Spanish – that allows them to cross.

Morocco. Moroccan legislation considers it legal to enter its territory with the goods that they can carry on their bodies, without weight limitation. That is why the women come to Morocco loaded like “*mules*”²⁰ with goods acquired in Ceuta.

Table 1. Degrees of differentiation between trans-boundary women.

	Domestic Workers	Prostitutes	<i>Porteadoras</i>
Social prestige	Average	Low	Low
Salary	Average	Average	Low
Working hours	Low	Average	Average
Legal status	Average	Low	Low

Source: Elaborated by the author using data drawn from research

Consequently, it is noticeable that the social/working conditions of trans-boundary women are very poor; simply having to cross a very restrictive border such as the Tarajal border every day, with its huge queues and police abuse (APDHA, 2015), greatly hardens working conditions. All for a semi-slavery-like salary that is almost always destined to feed their households. Despite these common features among trans-boundary women, the specific situation of *porteadoras* is an even worse position since they are humiliated, exploited women, badly treated in their origin society just for earning money for their families.

3. Methodology

Ethnography²¹ is the method of social research that was used in the process of producing data for this article. The methodology of the present research is qualitative in its approach: we intend to inductively look into a social reality through direct contact with the subjects that are being studied. The studied subjects of this research are the Moroccan women who regularly worked as *porteadoras* at the border of Ceuta when fieldwork was conducted, specifically those taking the goods into Morocco through the bridge of the Biutz.

3.1 Techniques of data production

The techniques used to produce information for this research were based on primary or direct sources. The data-collecting instruments of observation and in-depth

²⁰ Mules (*hamala*) is how *porteadoras* are called in Moroccan dialect.

²¹ We follow the definition of ethnography as “the description / interpretation made through a process-product that stems from a systematic and transparent work referred to a context of study” (Mora, 2010, p. 2).

interviews were utilised. Observation took place in different relevant points where social action was developed (Díaz de Rada, 2011), and it was based on repeated observation, taking information from different hours and days in order to distinguish between repeated and random incidents (Valles, 1999). The observation points were:

- The Tarajal border: a physical space that separates the Moroccan and Spanish territories. It is located between Castillejos (Morocco) and Ceuta (Spain), these municipalities being separated by less than two kilometres. The border was the most favoured observation point, since it is the place where the women do their work. Observation in this point was regular, two days a week during 3 months – *porteadoras* work from Monday to Thursday, alternating the days of observation²²; and at different hours during the *porteadoras'* schedule – from 7:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Spanish time.
- The industrial park of Tarajal: a private zone of Ceuta located on the Tarajal border which is connected with the bridge of Biutz. Here, *porteadoras* take the goods from the warehouses in the industrial park and take them to Moroccan territory through the Biutz bridge. Observation in this site took place at several times changing days and hours to gather wider information. In fact, some observation took place on a Friday²³, the day in which carriers and *porteadoras* are not employed because the Biutz pass is closed. This was needed to properly observe the infrastructures and to verify the actual dependence of the industrial site on the activity of *porteadoras*.
- Biutz bridge²⁴: crossing point that connects the industrial park of Tarajal with Moroccan territory. This place is unlike any regular border post, in fact there is no Moroccan *gendarmérie* controlling the bridge. Spanish²⁵ national police, for their part, are there merely to organise the *porteadoras'* passing. Here, observation was performed on both sides of the bridge, the Spanish side and the Moroccan side. Observation was not regular because the researcher's presence changed the dynamic of the observation point.

²² The method of observation was as follows: the first week observation took place at the border on Monday and Wednesday; the second week, it took place on Tuesday and Thursday, and so on.

²³ Friday is the holy day in Islam, when Muslims do not work at the site of Tarajal, where most of the workers and traders are Muslims.

²⁴ “Biutz bridge” or “Biutz pass” refer to the same border crossing point.

²⁵ Specifically, the one that takes charge of these works is the Unit of Police Intervention of the National Police (UIP).

- Souk of Castillejos: Castillejos is the village where most of the goods that *porteadoras* carry arrive at, so the souk is a big market where there is a huge variety of Spanish products. Observation was undertaken repeated times, while bearing in mind the timing: early in the morning, before the goods were brought from Ceuta, and later, after the goods arrived.
- Other places: there were several other spots in which observations were made such as in the Medina of Tetouan, on line 7 of the bus that connects the Spanish-Moroccan border with the city of Ceuta, on taxis and generally throughout Ceuta, where the researcher talked to *porteadoras* who were either working at the time or had personal conversations with her.

The observation process was initially registered in notebooks, recordings of agents involved in the research or photos that illustrated the situations that were witnessed. Later, at the end of each day, these notes were reworked into more concise entries in the field diary (Velasco & Díaz de Rada, 2006).

In-depth interviews were another investigation technique used. According to Rubin & Rubin (1995), in-depth interviews are the preferred data production technique for Grounded Theory²⁶, since they are actually intended to produce theory through their thick descriptions that favour the researchers' interpretive work (1995, p. 58-61). In the context of this research, an in-depth interview is understood to be individual –since the conversation includes only one researcher and one interviewee–; holistic –for the researcher's goal is to go over the interviewee's life, perspectives and experiences–; and unguided – i.e., semistructured (Ruiz-Olabuénaga, 1996, p. 168).

The central topics that were going to guide in-depth interviews were prepared in advance (Kopinak & Soriano, 2008). During the research process, interviews were made to the different subjects of the border area. Although the subjects of focus were *porteadoras*, other people have been interviewed too on both sides of the border in order to know the social, economic and political context in which these women work.

Among these other actors that were interviewed are Moroccan associations, Spanish associations – mostly from Ceuta, Moroccan domestic workers who work in Ceuta, former *porteadoras*, taxi drivers who travel from Tetouan to Ceuta with *porteadoras*, traders of the industrial park of Tarajal, Ceutan academic experts in the

²⁶ Wengraf (2001) also supports the idea that in-depth interviews are particularly suitable as a data production technique for Grounded Theory.

border situation, social, economic, and political actors in Ceuta, and political personalities of the *wilaya* of Tetouan.

The interviews were made in *porteadoras'* homes, since a) being in their comfort zone made it easier for them to express their opinions and experiences. This is thoroughly important when complex topics are being studied, especially one so full of dramatic and personal content (and which moreover has to do with an activity that is considered illegal); and b) it often helped to gather more information about the interviewee. Exhaustive research regarding their life conditions and their lifestyle was conducted, since they were visited several times before and after being interviewed.

Firstly, the structure of the interview was explained to the interviewee, all the while restating the goals of the research and asking for natural, honest answers. Once this introduction was over, the interviewee was asked for her consent to being interviewed and for it to be recorded on audio. Throughout the interview, the interpreter would never interrupt the *porteadoras'* answers in order to translate them to the researcher; instead, the women were allowed to develop their discourse and it was translated once they were done speaking.

An interview with a *porteadora* consisted of two or three sessions, each of them lasting for about an hour. The first session was a “pre-appointment”, so to speak; the second was the actual in-depth interview. Subsequent sessions were used for testing and monitoring of the woman's situation. For example, if a woman, during the in-depth interview, stated her intention of quitting her work as a *porteadora* and starting up a business endeavour, after a year a new interview would take place in order to know whether she had met her goals and, generally, what her situation was.

A total of 21 active *porteadoras* were interviewed in depth, totaling over 13,000 minutes of recorded audio. To this we must add 5 interviews with domestic workers and 29 interviews with social agents from both sides of the border (politicians, union representatives, experts, journalists and activists).

3.2 *Techniques of data analysis*

The technique of data analysis used in this research was Grounded Theory, which has been defined as “a general method of compared analysis (...) and a combination of procedures that can generate a theory based on the data” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As it is required by Grounded Theory, no initial hypotheses were devised, since the aim is for the inductive methodology to cause the theory to surface

(Glaser, 1978), although hypotheses and theoretical stands have been a part of the research. What is essential to this instrument is to understand how the relationship between theory and empirical research flows. Research was conducted thus: once an interview was finished, the process of transcription and open coding started. In that way the research received feedback.

Theoretical sampling was the type of sampling used in the research: the “compilation of information guided by the concepts derived from the theory that is based on the concept of doing comparisons” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 121). It is for this reason that the number of interviewed subjects or their randomised selection is not the most important thing; rather, what is crucial is finding relevant information for the theory you have already generated (Carrero, Soriano & Trinidad, 2012). The criteria used to know when to finish the sampling was theoretical saturation: when the researcher finds that the new information that is being gathered is redundant and do not generate any new theory. In the case of this research, after the second round of fieldwork (March-July 2015), the researcher deemed that the categories she was working with had reached the point of saturation, and were now part of a new emerging theory. Sampling was therefore terminated. However, during the phase of selective coding, it became clear that certain categories were not actually saturated. This prompted a new round of fieldwork (June-July 2016) that eventually led to theoretical saturation.

Since data production and data analysis were simultaneous, once an interview was transcribed, coding began. At first, open coding was used: the data was analysed line by line so as to pick up on the appearances of each sentence. Categories then surfaced: a total of 201, of which 22 were in-vivo codes and the remaining 179 were sociological constructs.

Later, categories were grouped into families, i.e. associations of categories “that are interrelated either by theme, process, time, degree of relation, cause or effect, etc.” (Carrero et al., 2012, p. 42). This led to the creation of 15 families of categories²⁷, most of them substantial –selective coding–.

The process of theoretical coding enabled the researcher to pinpoint relations and connections between the substantive categories. In this phase, the number of

²⁷ For *porteadoras* these families are: I.D. information; family interactions; reasons to begin working as *porteadoras*; border mechanisms; law enforcement authorities and security; work mechanics; commodities; consequences of the job; involved agents' perspective; and recent changes on the border. For social agents, the families are: economic determinants for carrying; Tarajal; domestic workers; law enforcement and customs quandaries; and perceptions about *porteadoras*.

substantive categories diminished due to combination or reduction, “which made possible the discovery of underlying uniformities in the original set of categories and properties, thus elaborating theory from a concept that is smaller, yet conceptually grander” (Carrero et al., 2012, p. 142). This process led to the emergence of the central category of the research: the institutionalisation of the *porteadoras'* circuit in Ceuta or, in their own worldview, “if I don't enter [Ceuta], I won't have enough to feed my children.” This category results from the combination of the in-vivo code “if I don't enter [Ceuta], I won't have enough to feed my children” and the sociological construct “the institutionalisation of the *porteadoras'* circuit in Ceuta.”

The central category explains and gives meaning to the other categories and their relations as a whole, and therefore “explains the greater variability in the pattern of social behaviour of the studied subject” (Trinidad, Carrero, & Soriano, 2006, p. 34). After finding the central category, theoretical ordering began, by only taking into account the concepts that were in some way related to the said category.

Throughout the entire process, the constant comparison method was used: the categories, properties and hypotheses were developed through the analytical comparison procedure (Glaser & Strauss, 1999), which prompts “the search for resemblances and differences across the analysis of the incidents found in data” (Trinidad et al., 2006, p. 28). The constant comparison method has four phases: 1) comparing incidents applicable to every category; 2) integrating categories and their characteristics; 3) outlining the theory; and 4) writing the theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this way, the creation of theory is a spiral process; according to Galeano (2004: 166) “every phase or moment transforms into the following one, the previous phases keep on operating simultaneously along the analysis, and each one provides a continuous development for the subsequent phase until the analysis finishes.”

4. Analysis results

The information in this article is the result of the observation and of the in-depth interviews carried out with *porteadoras* who are currently working on the Spanish-Moroccan border of Ceuta, focused on their profile and typology.

All the women who work as *porteadoras* cannot be bundled into the same group, since the interviews differed depending on the marital status. This category is very significant because it tells whether *porteadoras* are divorced, widowed or have to feed their families. Nonetheless, it wasn't the only relevant category. There is not a

significant majority of women in any particular marital status. Conversely, age is a more circumscribed category; *porteadoras* are mostly 35 to 55 years old.

However, it is important to bear in mind that there are *porteadoras* who are a lot younger –according to the data gathered in this research, they are the ones who suffer most of the cases of sexual abuse on the border– and there are older women too. The *porteadoras'* place of origin also marks a difference. As was pointed in the contextualisation section, the citizens of the *wilaya* of Tetouan do not need a visa to enter Ceuta and, therefore, women from the south of Morocco – for the most part from the Casablanca area – tend to move to Tetouan and obtain a Tetouani passport to work on the border. This profile is increasing very fast. The *porteadoras* coming from the south follow different dynamics; they travel to the border on Sunday nights and remain up to the closing of the pass of the Biutz on Thursdays. They spend the night, eat and live there throughout the whole week in order to be the first ones to enter Ceuta every morning so they can work more.

Despite the differences between the *porteadora's* profiles, there are two factors they all have in common. First, *porteadoras* are women who have familial burdens: some are widows with children; some are married but their husbands are either unemployed, in jail or physically incapacitated to work; others have parents without economic resources; etc. The second factor, which is related to the previous one, is that they are in an extreme situation of social exclusion and socioeconomic poverty.

With respect to differences regarding their journey, as can be seen in *graphic 1*, there are five main routes:

1) Women who live in Tetouan start their day at 6 a.m. Small groups of *porteadoras*²⁸ meet and walk together on their way to catch a taxi that will take them to the border; they wait until they can cross the border and go to the industrial park of Tarajal. They take the goods (*porte*)²⁹ through the Biutz bridge, give the goods to the buyers in Moroccan territory in a plain near the border, and after that, at 12 a.m.³⁰, they

²⁸ In Tetouan, *porteadoras* live either in the outskirts (near the mountains) or inside the Medina of Tetouan.

²⁹ Nowadays, *porteadoras* do this once or, exceptionally, twice a day. A couple of years ago they could do it up to three or four times; this is not possible anymore because of the reduction of the opening hours of the Biutz bridge and also because of an order of the Spanish police that regulates the number of women who can come through the “tunnel” of the Biutz.

³⁰ Once the Biutz pass closes, *porteadoras* have to cross the border through the Tarajal crossing point, with or without a *fardo*. If they are in fact trying to carry goods, they must risk requisition from the police – Spanish or Moroccan. Alternatively, they have to wait for hours or even spend the night waiting for a changing of the guard that will allow them to cross with the goods.

take another taxi back to Tetouan. They earn 8 to 12 euro a day, depending on the weight of their *fardos*³¹ and the value of the goods.

2) *Porteadoras* from Martil.

3) *Porteadoras* from Rincon (M'diq), who follow the same process as the Tetouani *porteadoras*.

4) *Porteadoras* from Castillejos (Fnideq), a village that is about two kilometres away from the border. The interviews show that 80 % of the women from Castillejos are trans-boundary workers³² in Ceuta so they are completely dependant on this city. In Castillejos, there are different types of *porteadoras* a) those who take the goods crossing the Biutz pass as in the previous cases; b) those who work as freelancers³³ and sell the goods in Castillejos and c) those who work as freelancers and sell the goods in Tangier. *Porteadoras* of this type usually work with their own cars. They cross the Tarajal border and usually are in company of a male member of their family – husband, father or son.

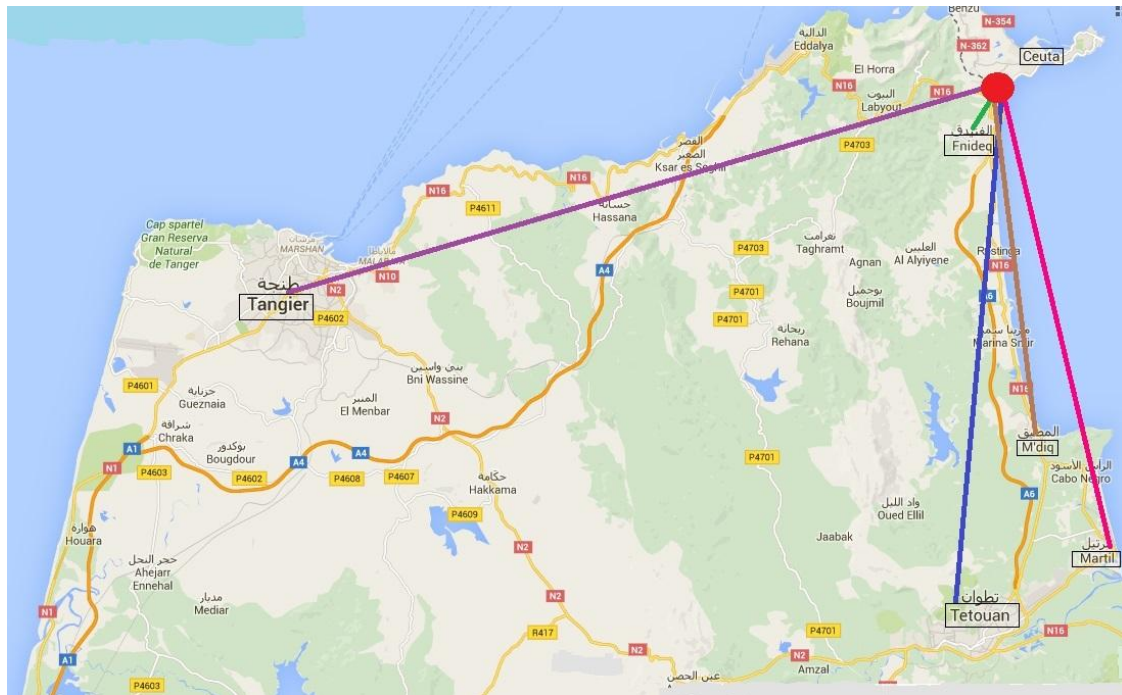
5) *Porteadoras* from Tangier, who make the journey in their cars, and usually go on their own. They cross the Tarajal border and go to the supermarkets of Ceuta and to the industrial park of Tarajal to fill their cars with goods which they either resell in Tangier as freelancers or give on commission to traders. In this second case, they take the goods to Tangier or to Castillejos. Tangier *porteadoras* are not the majority, because in Tangier this type of work is more male-dominated.

Moreover, it is important to emphasise that *porteadores* and *porteadoras* who carry goods in their vehicles pay generous bribes to the Moroccan *gendarmerie* to be able to drive the highway loaded with goods.

³¹ “*Fardo*” (term in Spanish): a bundle, which in this case they must carry on their bodies to comply with Moroccan customs jurisdiction.

³² *Porteadoras*, domestic workers or prostitutes.

³³ There are two ways of working as *porteadoras*: a) when working on commission, as soon as the work is done, they get paid according to the weight of the *fardo* and the quality of the carried goods; b) when working as freelancers, *porteadoras* buy the goods and resell them themselves.



Map 1. Porteadoras' journeys

Source: Elaborated by the author using information on Google Maps.

These are the most common cases of *porteadoras*. Nevertheless, there are numerous different cases, ranging from Tetouani women who buy goods in Ceutan supermarkets to resell them in small Tetouani shops, to *porteadoras* that take the goods from Castillejos or the plain near the bridge of the Biutz and distribute them throughout the centre and south of Morocco.

5. Conclusions

The conclusions that can be drawn from this research take as a starting point the existence of a global context in which all the causes and the effects seem to be interrelated. The International Community is perfectly aware of these women's situation, yet they are not helping them. The situation on the Spanish-Moroccan border, specifically in Ceuta, shows that inequalities are not being reduced no matter how globalised the context is. From an economic point of view, *porteadoras* are women who live in poverty; their living conditions are far from the minimal benchmarks of economic well-being. They are pushed into a job that its origin society considers illegal and disgraceful, and which gives them nothing but a small economic retribution for carrying enormous bundles of goods that in some cases weigh more than themselves. They must endure extremely poor working conditions; if they get sick, or if they break

their arms or legs, as is sometimes the case, they still have to go to work on the same day that the accident happens to be able to feed their families.

From a social perspective, Human Rights violations on the Tarajal border and in the industrial park of the same name, as well as on the bridge of the Biutz, are daily and extreme. They suffer physical violence, assaults and sexual abuses; brutal psychological pressure; and even stampedes like the one that caused the death of Busrha and Zhora who died in 2009 of suffocation on the stairs of the industrial park of Tarajal.

All of this happens because of the passivity of the political and economic agents on the border area, who just stand and look.

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