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Entangled Histories in a Postcolonial Border Region: Biographies, Belongings and Memory Practices in Ceuta and Melilla

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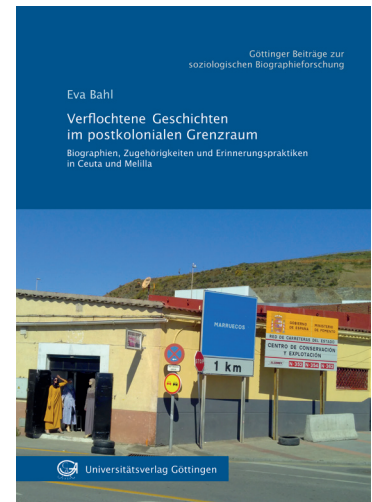


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Summary

Geographically Ceuta and Melilla are on the African continent, but they are part of the national territory of Spain and thus of the European Union. Both cities came under European domination in the context of the so-called Reconquista in the 15th century. At the end of the 19th century, they became centres of the Spanish colonial project in Morocco, and played an important role in the seizing of power by fascists who supported the later dictator Francisco Franco. Today, they are frequently in the news due to the fact that they are surrounded by EU external borders, and significant social transformation processes are taking place among the local population. These two cities and the border spaces around them are focal points where manifold processes of today's globalized world can be observed: post-colonial dynamics, North-South inequalities, migration. This book is a sociological study of figurations between groupings that have resided for a long time in this border zone between Spain and Morocco, and reconstructs transformation processes in a post-colonial border space. These processes are accompanied by slowly changing power balances in which belongings and views of history are constantly being renegotiated.

The author studies different actors in the border space from the perspective of figurational sociology, the sociology of memory and biographical research. Four detailed case analyses serve to illustrate the complexity of local social realities. These are embedded in historical and present-day social constellations in this border space between Spain and Morocco, and it is made clear that constructions of belonging and power relations in Ceuta and Melilla can only be understood in the context of colonial and post-colonial processes and events.

One result of the empirically based analysis is a typology of border interpretations or uses. It takes the different constructions of belonging and history, and places them in relation to the historical and everyday understanding of the border of the different groups and groupings.

1. The border as a frontier: old-established Christian Spaniards who preserve memories of local history
2. The border as workplace and as a place to be defended: members of the paramilitary Guardia Civil police force
3. The border runs through biographies: Spaniards with a Moroccan family history
4. The border as everyday routine: young Moroccans in the border space between Spain and Morocco

Other important conclusions are that memory practices depend on social power relations (and their transformation) in Ceuta and Melilla, and that belongings are frequently constructed in terms of historical self-positionings.

The analyses are based on a multi-method approach, including participant observation during five periods of fieldwork covering a total of seven months between 2014 and 2018, biographical narrative interviews and case reconstructions, ethnographic interviews, and group discussions.