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Social Transformations and Migrations in Morocco

Mohamed Berriane, Hein de Haas and Katharina Natter

MADE project paper 20

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Abstract

This paper analyses how fundamental transformations of Moroccan society over the past century have shaped Morocco's *mobility complex* and how migration has affected and accelerated these transformation processes in its own right. Economic transitions and the concomitant demise of subsistence-based agrarian livelihoods, urbanization processes and demographic transitions, increasing education and rapid cultural change have increased all forms of migratory and non-migratory mobility within and from Morocco, particularly through large-scale rural-to-urban migration as well as rapidly increasing emigration to Europe. While earlier patterns seem largely consistent with mobility transition theory, the predicted decrease in emigration levels has not occurred, as, since the 1990s, Morocco has entered a *migration plateau* of persistently high emigration despite significant increases in living standards, a slowing down of internal migration and increasing immigration. Continuously high levels of emigration can be explained by a growing disjuncture between sluggish and uneven economic development that has mainly benefitted certain regions and economic elites on the one hand, and fast sociocultural change across all social classes and regions on the other. This disjuncture has rapidly increased youth's aspirations for lifestyles and freedoms that they find difficult to imagine in Morocco, but at the same time reshapes Morocco's internal mobility patterns and attracts growing numbers of immigrants.

Keywords: Morocco, social transformation, development, migration, mobility transition

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1. Introduction

Since the 1960s, Morocco has become one of the most prominent emigration countries in the world. With more than one tenth of its 33 million population living abroad in 2020, Morocco exemplifies a group of countries which, according to Skeldon (1997), form part of the global 'labour frontier'. Such middle-income countries are often but not necessarily located on the geographical frontier between the global 'South' and the global 'North' and are characterised by rapid social, economic and demographic changes that generate high levels of emigration, large-scale internal migration and urbanisation. Over the last few decades, however, several 'labour frontier' countries have also become migrant destinations in their own right. Fitting with this pattern Morocco has, since the 2000s, increasingly attracted migrants and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa, Europe and Asia. Yet, at the same time, large-scale emigration from Morocco has continued unabated and has diversified beyond European destinations towards North America, the Gulf and sub-Saharan Africa. This co-existence of increasing immigration and out-migration is puzzling as it defies theoretical models that predict that emerging immigration should occur alongside decreasing emigration as part of a broader 'migration transition'.

As this paper will argue, this shows the need for better explanations for the factors and processes shaping migration processes. Conventional analyses on the causes of migration focus on a limited number of income and demographic 'migration determinants' that would supposedly 'push' people out of rural areas and poor countries. Yet, such push–pull analyses typically fail to capture the important role of cultural, political and technological change in shaping people's aspirations and capabilities to migrate (de Haas et al. 2020). Perhaps this lack of attention is explained by the apparent simplicity of the issue: is it not poverty, unemployment and the overall lack of opportunities that motivate most Moroccans to emigrate? However, if this were the case, how can we explain why Moroccan migration has been accelerating since the 1990s despite significant improvements in living conditions, declining population growth and increased freedom of expression – even though Moroccans did not emigrate in such large numbers in earlier decades when both poverty and repression were arguably much higher? What factors explain why, at the same time as Moroccans continue leaving, Morocco has become an increasingly attractive destination for European, African and Asian migrants? Such paradoxes and the complexity of real-life migration patterns cannot be explained by simplistic push–pull models, thus showing the need for better theories.

'Mobility transition theory' argues that the relation between levels of socioeconomic development and various forms of migration is fundamentally *non-linear* (de Haas 2010). Mobility transition theory was pioneered by Zelinsky (1971) who argued that 'modernisation' processes tend to initially *increase* emigration and overall levels of mobility, because economic development and demographic transitions undermine traditional rural livelihoods and increase urban employment, with young generations increasingly preferring to live in towns and cities (see also Mabogunje 1971). These transformations typically spur the large-scale rural-to-urban migration of young people seeking jobs and desiring lifestyles outside subsistence agriculture, land labour and traditional crafts. Over time, such migrants increasingly settle with their families in towns and cities and, as people gain the resources to assume the costs and risks of migrating abroad, such rural-to-urban movements would also increasingly spill over international borders. Labour recruitment by companies and governments in destination countries often plays a crucial role in creating initial patterns of international migration from rural areas in origin countries to urban areas in destination countries (see Piore 1979). These are then subsequently reproduced and amplified through migration networks and other feedback effects, which tends to decrease the costs and risks of migrating and lead to the

geographical clustering of migration linking particular origins and destinations (see Mabogunje 1971).

While economic development initially spurs emigration because it increases people's capabilities and aspirations to migrate (de Haas 2010), transition theory predicts that, beyond a certain tipping point of prosperity, emigration is expected to decrease. At the same time, increasing levels of education and specialisation will continue to generate significant urban-to-urban migration and circular non-migratory mobility such as commuting, while internal migration will increasingly occur in more-decentralised forms (focused on smaller urban centres). Mobility transition theories have been confirmed by empirical studies showing that emigration levels are typically the highest in middle-income countries (Clemens 2014; de Haas 2010). Only when countries achieve upper-middle-income status does emigration tend to decrease alongside increasing immigration. Clemens (2014, 6) estimated that, on average, emigration levels start to decrease if countries cross a wealth threshold of per-capita GDP income levels of $7,000–8,000 (corrected for purchasing power parity – PPP), roughly the current GDP level of Morocco, which stood at $7,500 PPP in 2019, up from $4,400 in 2000 (World Bank 2019).

However, contrary to the predictions of mobility transition theory, recent migration data do not seem to point at declining levels of emigration from Morocco, which have instead been *accelerating* since the early 1990s (see Figure 5 later in the paper). On the contrary, although there was a slump in emigration after the 2008 Great Recession in response to growing unemployment in European destination countries, in recent years levels of both legal and irregular emigration have picked up again. However, this trend has happened alongside a slowing down of internal migration and increasing immigration from sub-Saharan Africa and Europe. In order to make sense of these seemingly contradictory migration trends, this paper investigates the complex social mechanisms underpinning the mobility transition. It does so by (1) going beyond push–pull models focusing on a limited number of economic and demographic migration determinants and (2) looking at all forms of mobility simultaneously instead of only focusing on one form of migration – typically, international out-migration or internal migration. This paper thus analyses how social transformation, defined as a *fundamental change in the way that societies are organised and resources are distributed* (de Haas et al. 2020, 2), reshapes a country's entire *mobility complex*, encompassing not only immigration and emigration but also internal rural-to-urban, urban-to-urban and circular non-migratory mobility.

This paper studies social transformation through five main dimensions:

- the *demographic*, defined as the structure and spatial distribution of populations;
- the *political*, defined as the organised control over people;
- the *economic*, defined as the accumulation and use of land, labour and capital in the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services;
- the *technological*, defined as the application of knowledge through the deployment of procedures, skills and techniques; and
- the *cultural*, defined as the beliefs, values, norms and customs shared by groups of people.

These dimensions capture the full complexity of social transformations in order to avoid the usual bias towards economic and demographic factors in analyses of migration. Contradicting simplistic, uni-causal push–pull models, we analyse migration as an *integral part* of broader development processes rather than just as their consequence. This implies that migration is not only shaped by social transformation processes but that it also affects these very same changes in its own right. This is particularly relevant in a high-emigration country like Morocco. For instance, as we will see, it is impossible to understand the rural-urban transformation of

Moroccan society without considering the central role of rural-to-urban and international migration in this transformation process. As this paper also shows, international migration in particular has also accelerated processes of demographic, social and cultural change and affected trends of urbanisation and internal migration.

Section 2 will review migration trends within, towards and from Morocco over the past century. Since mobility transitions are not about explaining short-term fluctuations in migration but about long-term transformations that usually take generations to materialise, this paper adopts a long-term perspective in which all forms of human mobility – the entire 'mobility complex' – are seen as intrinsic and inseparable parts of deeper societal shifts. The analysis shows how internal and international mobility systems have evolved in parallel – both as substitutes and complements. Section 3 assesses the drivers of Moroccan migration by reviewing how Moroccan society has been transforming from cultural, demographic, technological, economic and political viewpoints. Section 4 analyses the mechanisms that underlie the mobility transition in Morocco and draws broader insights into how social transformation processes have shaped migration and how, conversely, migration has affected these processes in its own right.

2. Morocco's evolving mobility complex

2.1. Historical mobility patterns

The diverse cultural and ethnic background of Morocco's contemporary population reflects millennia of population movements, conquest and immigration. While Morocco has historically been populated by various *Imazighen* ('Berber') groups, *Plishtim* Jews are believed to have migrated from Palestine to the Moroccan countryside from the sixth century BC onwards (see Zafrani 1998) while, beginning in the seventh century, Arab-Islamic conquests brought Arabic-speaking population groups to present-day Morocco. While the numerical importance of the immigration of Arab populations was somewhat limited, the expansion of the Muslim faith and, to a lesser extent, the Arabic language was mainly achieved through the cultural assimilation of *Imazighen* ('Berber') populations. The arrival of Islam also coincided with Morocco's early state formation, characterised by the rise of dynastic powers alternately located in the cities of Fez, Marrakesh and Meknes. New immigration occurred with the arrival of significant numbers of Muslims and Jews from *El Andalous* (contemporary Spain) after the centuries-long *Reconquista* of the Iberian Peninsula, which ended in 1492 with the fall of Granada. This immigration gave a significant boost to the Moroccan economy and culture. Between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries, the trans-Saharan slave trade also constituted an important form of forced migration to Morocco (Becker 2002; Ennaji 1997, 1999).

Apart from these long-distance movements related to conquest and state formation, there has always been a significant mobility of craftspeople, seasonal workers and pilgrims in Morocco, particularly directed at the imperial cities of Marrakesh, Fez, Meknes, Rabat and other urban centres such as Tangier and Tétouan. In the pre-colonial period, population movements to and from Morocco were characterised by informality and circularity: merchants from sub-Saharan Africa, Europe and the Middle East, as well as Muslim pilgrims visiting holy shrines in Fez, circulated on the Moroccan territory (J. Berriane 2015a, 2016; Lanza 2015). The diverse ethnic composition of Morocco's southern oases – which were commercial and migratory junctions, with their blend of Berber, Jewish, Arab and sub-Saharan influences – also testifies to a long history of intensive population mobility (de Haas 2003). In fact, the lifestyles and livelihoods of many (semi-)nomadic ethnic groups living in the plains, mountains and deserts of Morocco's *hinterland* – the so-called *bled es-siba*, which fell outside the direct

control of the state, whose direct power was mainly limited to urban areas and the surrounding countryside, the so-called *bled el-makhzen* – have always been inherently mobile.

2.2. The rupture of colonisation

These pre-modern mobility patterns were interrupted as a consequence of the French colonisation of North and West Africa in the nineteenth century. Although Morocco was colonised only in 1912, the influence of colonisation on migration had started already in 1830, when France colonised neighbouring Algeria. This led to seasonal and circular labour migration from Morocco, particularly from the Rif mountains and south-eastern oases, to farms owned by French *colons* (settlers) and to the expanding Algerian coastal cities, mines and ports (de Haas 2003). In the late 1930s, the number of Moroccan migrants to Algeria was estimated at about 85,000 per year. These migrations were largely a continuation and geographical extension of traditional forms of circular migration within Morocco (de Mas 1978), with young men leaving their homes to work and accumulate some savings and resources, which enabled them to return, get married and start a family. In parallel, French colonial conquests in Senegal and Mali and the establishment of formal borders in West Africa contributed to the decline of trans-Saharan trade and mobility, which had connected southern Morocco to the Sahel zone for centuries.

In 1912, colonial rule over Morocco was formally established. While France gained control over Morocco's heartland, Spanish colonisation was limited to the south-western Sahara and the northern Rif zone. European colonisation implied the radical exposure of the Moroccan economy and society to capitalist modes of production, industrialisation and new ideas and information (Escallier 1981) as well as the rapid expansion of urban centres. Urbanisation and large-scale rural-to-urban migration were central to the profound social dislocations and transformations that Moroccan society went through over the past century, with the share of the population living in cities rising sharply from 8 per cent around 1900 to 25 per cent in 1956 on the eve of decolonisation, a trend that would be unaffected by independence and that would continue until the present day.

Colonial influence was also felt through the large-scale immigration settlement of particularly French but also Spanish, Italian and Algerian, migrants. In 1951, Morocco numbered 537,000 foreign residents, concentrated largely in Casablanca, Rabat and Meknes (SCS 1954). Colonisation also marked the beginning of Moroccan emigration to metropolitan France. During World Wars I and II, an urgent lack of manpower in France led to the active recruitment of tens of thousands of Moroccan men for factories and mines, as well as the French army – with 40,000 soldiers recruited during WWI and 126,000 during WWII. Labour migration to Spain remained limited, even though 40,000 Moroccans from the Rif region were employed by Franco's army during the Spanish Civil War (de Haas 2003). Most of these migrants returned to Morocco after the wars ended, continuing the largely circular tradition of Moroccan migration. However, these early experiences of recruitment for French industry and armies exposed Moroccans to new lifestyles, broadened mental horizons and started to change awareness about opportunities abroad that would leave an enduring imprint and stimulate emigration in later decades.

2.3. The postcolonial emigration boom and large-scale urbanisation

Independence in 1956 marked Morocco's transition from a country of (colonial) immigration to one of large-scale emigration. Indeed, most Europeans left in the decade following Moroccan independence. Until the 1990s, immigration remained at low levels and was mainly limited to small numbers of high-skilled workers and diplomats. At the same time, Moroccan emigration

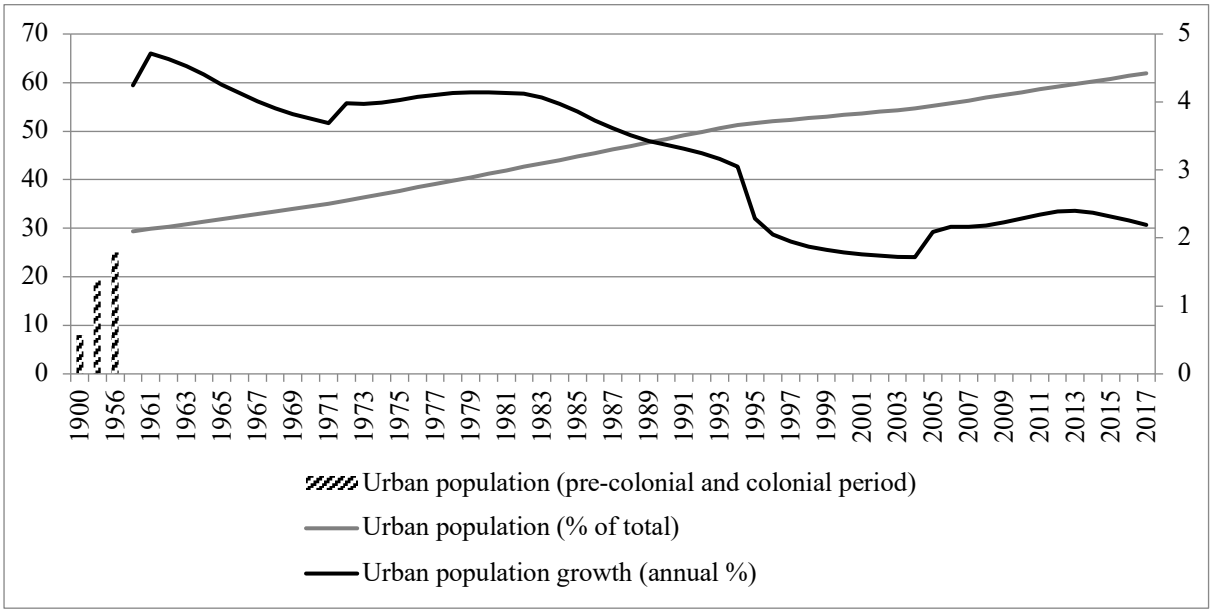
started to take off when the French recruitment of Moroccan factory and mine workers was boosted during the Algerian War of Independence, which had largely stopped Algerian labour migration to France (1954–1962). Between 1949 and 1962, the Moroccan population in France increased from about 20,000 to 53,000. However, this migration remained relatively modest compared with the following decade, when strong economic growth and labour shortages in Western Europe led to the signature of labour recruitment agreements with Morocco (former West Germany 1963, France 1963, Belgium 1964, the Netherlands 1969) (de Haas 2007a). Formal recruitment was only important in the first years of labour migration (Shadid 1979, 165), as administrative obstacles, long waiting lists and the accompanying bribery incited Moroccans to migrate as 'tourists', often assisted by already-migrated relatives or friends who acted as intermediaries between employers and potential migrants (Reniers 1999, 683). Given the high demand for migrant labour, such spontaneous migrants were generally welcomed and most undocumented migrants were able to secure residency papers in Europe. As a consequence, the estimated number of registered Moroccans living in main European destinations increased tenfold between 1965 and 1972, from 30,000 to 300,000.

Emigration to North African destinations remained more limited. The historically large presence of Moroccans in Algeria dwindled following post-independence hostilities and border closures, while limited numbers of Moroccans continued to migrate to Tunisia (Rouland 2018). Because Morocco was already well connected to more attractive destinations in Western Europe, the number of Moroccans who migrated to work on temporary contracts in the oil-rich Gulf countries and Libya from the 1970s onwards remained relatively limited.

Moroccan Jews followed distinct emigration patterns, as they massively moved to Israel, France and Canada after the 1948 creation of the State of Israel and the 1967 Six-Day War. As a consequence, Morocco's Jewish population dwindled from an approximate 250,000 to the current number of about 5,000 (Ben-Layashi and Maddy-Weitzman 2010). While the *Plishtim* Jewry of the Moroccan countryside – who had been an integral part of rural communities for millennia – almost completely disappeared, only small pockets of Jewish populations remained in a few big cities, mainly Casablanca. Despite this exodus, many Moroccan Jews in Israel and elsewhere have retained their attachment to Morocco on cultural and religious levels, with regular returns in the form of tourism and pilgrimage (Boum 2018; Kenbib 2018).

Despite the ample attention given to international migration in the post-independence decades, internal migration has arguably been more significant in terms of both its magnitude and its socio-economic impacts. Morocco experienced an unprecedented urbanisation from the 1960s to the mid-1980s: while only 25 per cent of the population lived in cities in 1956, 50 per cent did so in 1982 and 62 per cent in 2018 (see Figure 1). This rural-urban transformation is strongly, although not exclusively, linked to rural-to-urban migration, as the growth of urban populations also resulted from natural population growth (the surplus of births over deaths), the geographical extension of urban zones and the administrative redefinition of rural centres (*communes*) into urban centres (*municipalités*).

Figure 1. Morocco's urban population



Source: Escallier (1981) for pre-1956 data, World Bank (2019) for post-1960 data.

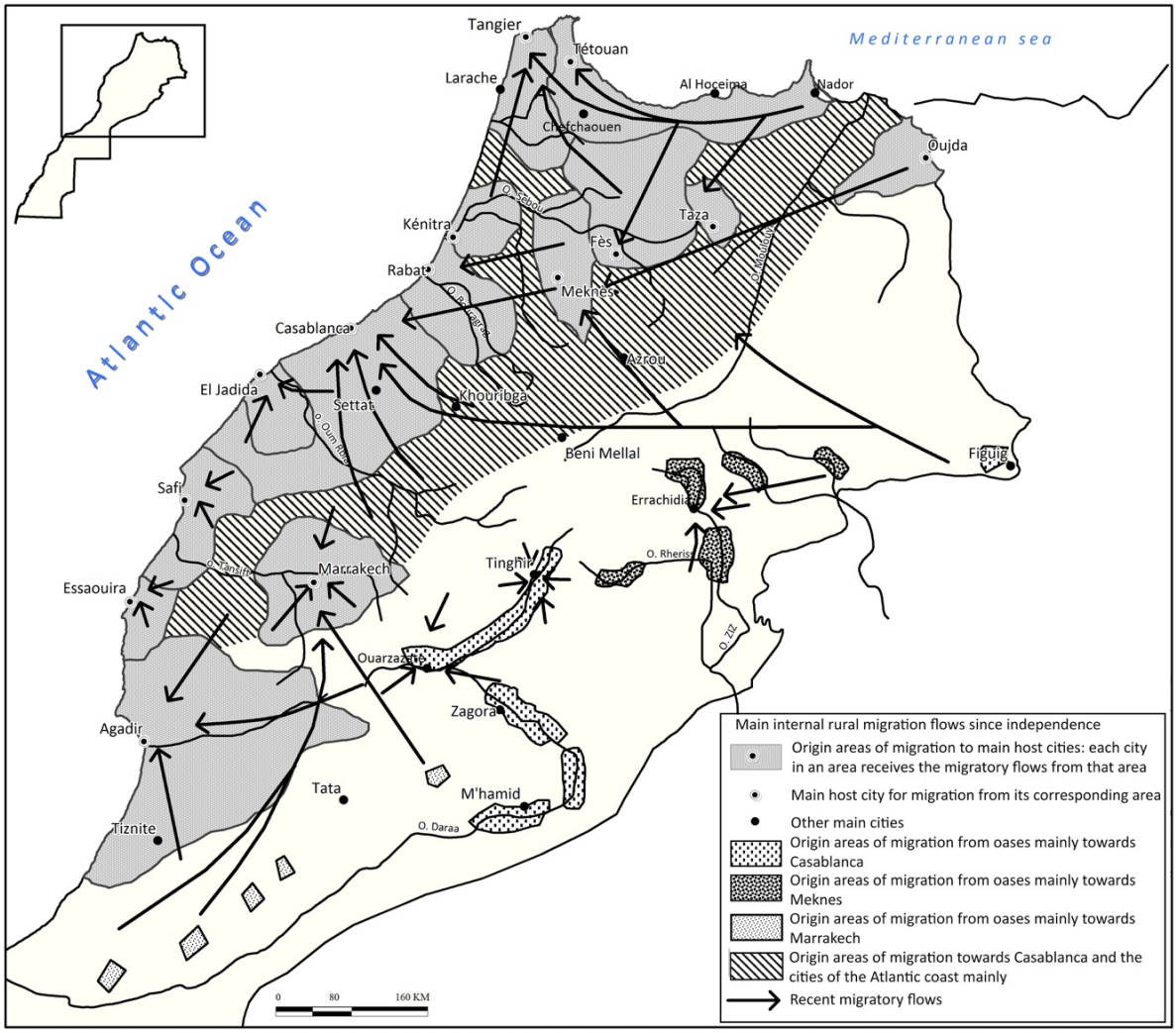
Rural-urban migration initially followed a hierarchical, multi-layered pattern, with people from villages moving towards small rural towns, people from rural towns moving to medium-sized cities and people living in medium-sized cities moving towards regional capitals and the big cities. This has led to the emergence and consolidation of large, interconnected urban zones concentrated in the Atlantic coastal zone – particularly along the axis Casablanca–Kénitra, which has geographically extended towards Tangier since 2000 – and its inland extensions Fez–Meknes and Marrakech (see Figure 2). At the same time, new urban zones have emerged in interior and previously peripheral zones, particularly around Agadir in the centre-south, Tangier–Tétouan in the north-west, Nador and its satellites in the north-east and Fez–Meknes in the Saïs region.

Internal and international migration dynamics have been closely interlinked: on the one hand, internal migration has often been a precursor and stepping stone to international migration (see Escallier 1981; Laghaout 1989; Noin 1970), as migrants obtained an education, saved money and forged social ties in towns and cities that subsequently enabled and motivated them to move abroad. At the same time, improvements in communication and transport infrastructure also increased people's ability to migrate directly from rural areas to destinations abroad, either through worker recruitment by employers or governments, or through spontaneous, self-organised migration.

On the other hand, international migration shaped internal migration dynamics by stimulating urban growth and internal migration to smaller towns. The investment of migrant remittances in housing construction and urban businesses accelerated the growth of smaller and bigger towns located in rural areas. This is especially the case in regions marked by high international migration, such as the northern Rif region, the south-western Sous region and southern oasis areas such as around the Todgha and Dadès valleys. In the Rif Mountain, for example, a region that was weakly urbanised until the early 1970s, urbanisation rates increased from around 24 per cent in 1971 to 42 per cent in 1994, corresponding to the heydays of large-scale emigration to Europe. This contrasts with the much slower urban growth of other cities of similar size located in regions without strong emigration traditions. Emigration and money remitted by migrants played an important role in stimulating urban growth. In some emerging

urban centres, the share of housing built by emigrant households represented between 75 and 80 per cent of the total housing built in the 1980s (Lazaar 1989).

Figure 2. Morocco's internal migration dynamics

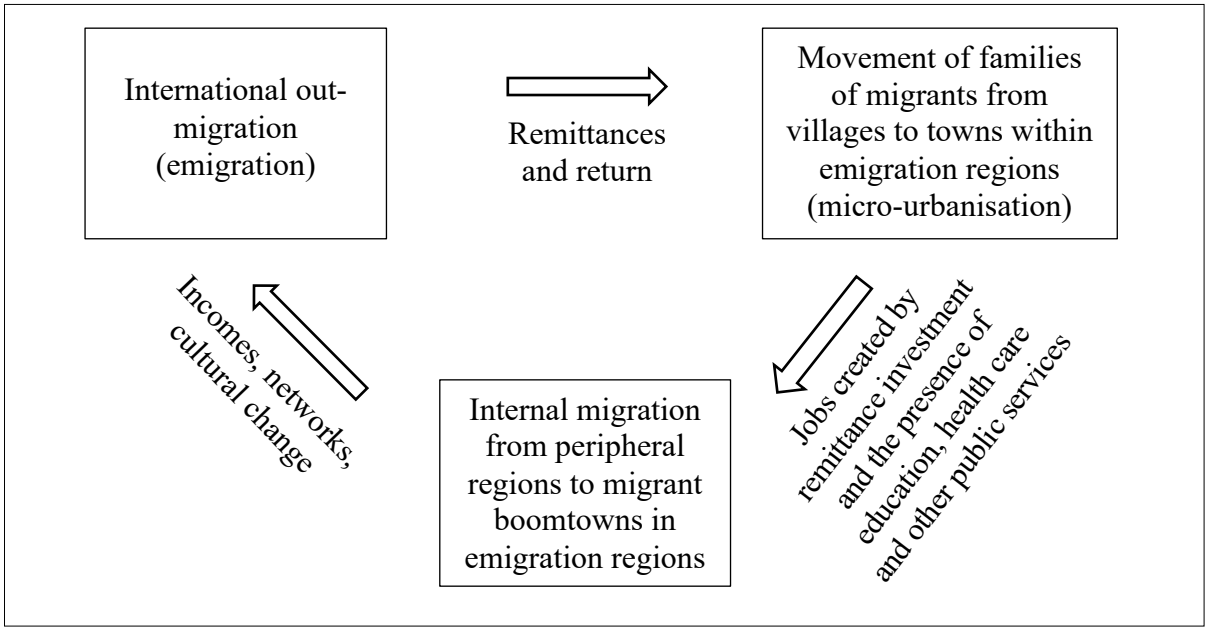


Source: M. Berriane's synthesis building on the map of definitive migration from the countryside to the cities of Morocco, based on the birthplaces of household heads born in the countryside and living in the city in 1971, established by Escallier (1981).

While the construction activities of international migrants initially focused on the origin village, migrants have increasingly preferred to build houses or set up businesses in the towns of their origin region. In the 1980s and 1990s, more and more left-behind family members and return migrants relocated from the village to towns, where they could more easily access educational, health and other government services (CERED 1993). This stimulated a pattern of 'micro-urbanisation' through the growth of migrant boomtowns within rural origin areas (Berriane 1997). Rather than driven by poverty, labour-market dynamics or the absence of livelihood opportunities, this internal migration – which is enabled by international remittances invested in urban housing – is motivated by the search for the long-term improvement of living conditions and opportunities for the family and children left behind (Berriane 1998). In turn, this remittance-fuelled urban growth created employment opportunities that attracted internal migrants from poorer, more peripheral, rural regions. Emigration has thus indirectly contributed to the intensification of internal migration and urbanisation processes in migrant

boomtowns, resulting in a complex, triangular mobility pattern connecting rural to urban areas in origin regions with a relay passing through emigration (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Triangular mobility pattern connecting emigration to internal migrations and micro-urbanisation processes



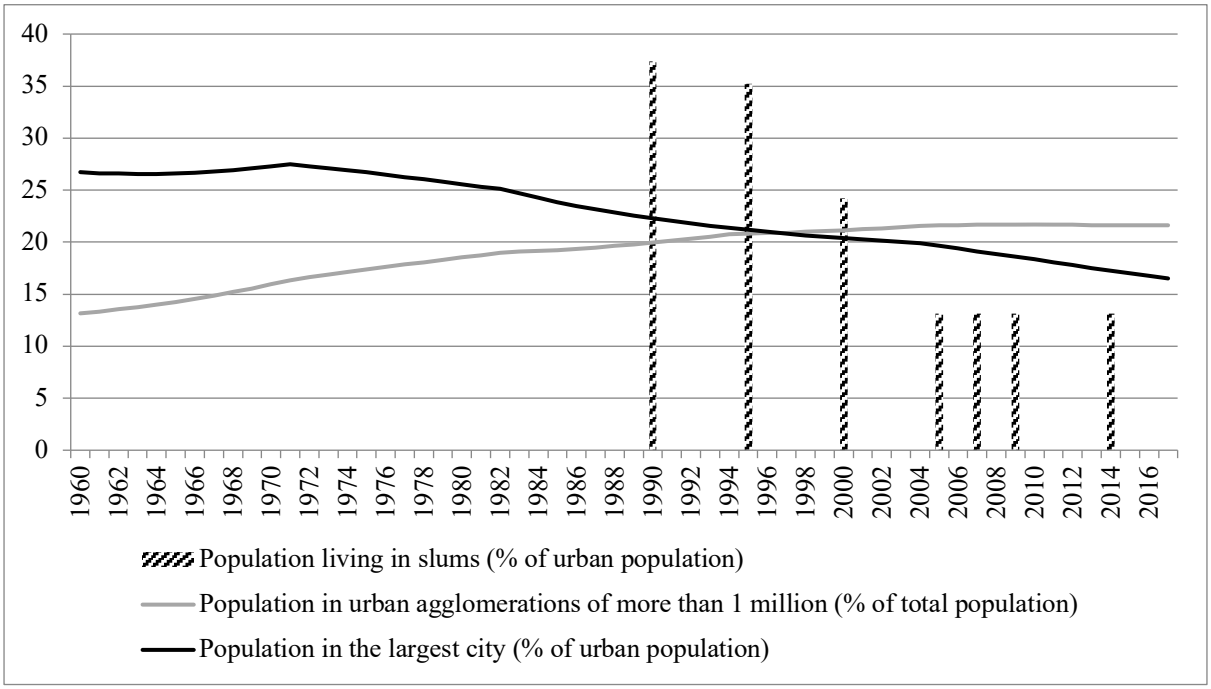
Besides emigration, domestic as well as international tourism have also played an important role in these urbanisation processes. Encouraged by public authorities, this has particularly affected small coastal towns (such as Asilah, Ksar Sghir, El Jadida, Essaouira or Al Hoceima) which are popular with domestic tourists and whose urban economy is fuelled by a strong, although largely seasonal, demand for workers (Berriane 1987). More recently, Morocco's new economic growth poles in the south around Agadir and in the north around the new Tangier Med port have attracted increasing numbers of internal labour migrants, further contributing to more-decentralised patterns of urban growth.

The pace of urbanisation has been slowing down since the mid-1990s (see Figure 1), as rural-to-urban migration has decelerated while inter-urban migrations have increased because Moroccans migrated from large cities back to medium and small ones. These patterns of decentralised urbanisation and suburbanisation reflect the increasing cost of living and congestion in large cities. For some, the return to their rural regions of origin upon retirement or the opportunity to use the land owned have become increasingly attractive lifestyles. Thus, as part of a general process also known as 'polarisation reversal' in the geographical urbanisation literature, internal migration patterns have partially reversed (Berriane and Hopfinger 1999; Shätzl 1983) with an accelerated growth of smaller urban centres and a slowing down of growth rates of bigger cities (see Figure 4). The slowing down of urbanisation in the largest cities alongside a general improvement in urban living conditions has also been manifested in the decreasing proportion of Morocco's urban population living in slums, from over 35 per cent in the 1990s to less than 15 per cent in more-recent years (see Figure 4).

Alongside a slowing down of internal migration, non-migratory mobility has increased over the decades. The rapid development of road and transportation infrastructure has facilitated the substitution of migratory mobility by various forms of non-migratory mobility, particularly of home-to-work commuting. The growing number of public and private transport links, economic modernisation and urban sprawl has increased the importance of home-to-

work commuting (Semmoud 2010). The recent construction of highways and high-speed train links linking large urban centres, together with more general social transformations, has changed residential mobility and settlement patterns towards increased suburbanisation (see Coslado 2008).

Figure 4. Urbanisation trends, 1960–2017



Source: World Bank (2019)

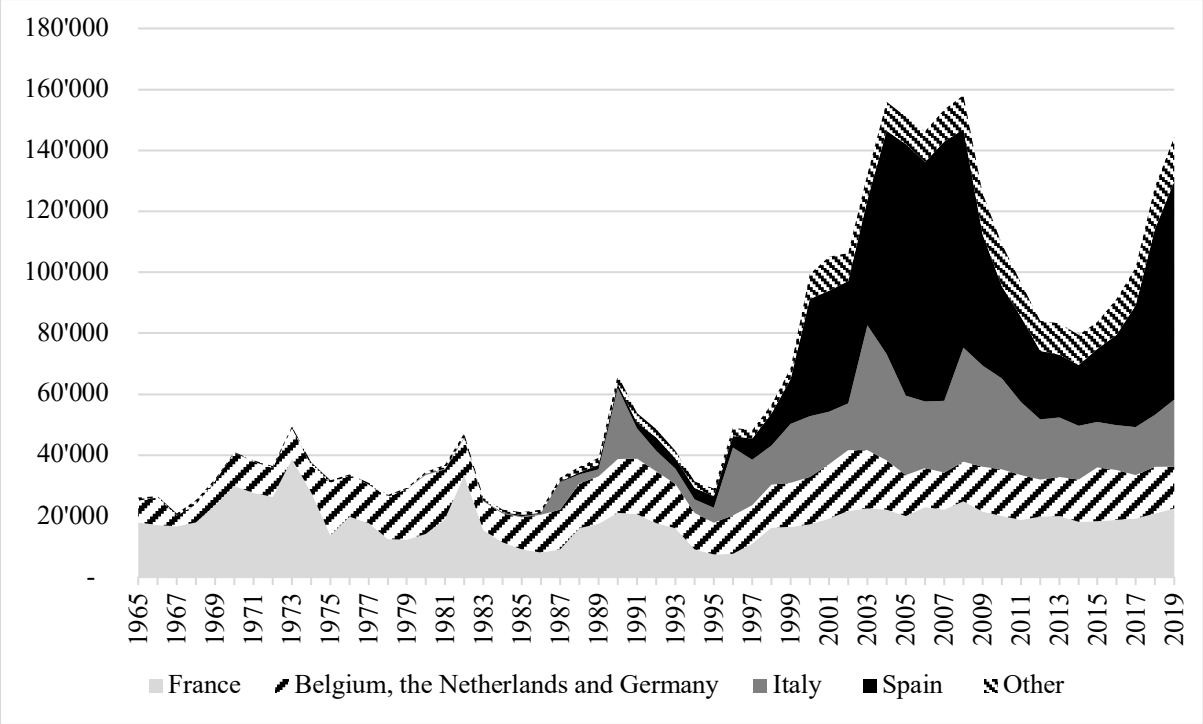
2.4 The diversification of emigration

Over the last 50 years, since the end of the guestworker era, Moroccan emigration has exponentially increased and fundamentally changed in character, through increasing family, irregular and high-skilled migration and a general diversification of destination countries. As the main European destination countries of France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany tried to close their borders to new migrant workers after the 1973 oil shock, patterns of circular migration between Morocco and Western Europe – whereby most migrants planned to return once they had saved enough money to build a house, start a small enterprise or start a family back in Morocco – were interrupted, while more and more 'guestworkers' were pushed into permanent settlement. Permanent settlement in Europe was also stimulated by developments in Morocco, as the economic situation deteriorated and the country entered a period of political instability and repression in the 1970s and 1980s, also known as the 'years of lead' (*les années de plomb*).

Migrants' decision to stay in Europe and the suspension of return plans increased the desire of families to reunite in the destination country. As a consequence, Moroccan migration to Western Europe shifted from being primarily circular and labour-based to being more-permanent and family-based. In addition, those workers who had moved to Europe irregularly succeeded in obtaining permanent residence papers through a series of legalisation campaigns in the Netherlands (1975), Belgium (1975) and France (1981–1982) (Muus 1995, 199). This also allowed their families to join them in Europe. To a significant degree, family migration explains the striking continuation of Moroccan emigration despite periods of mass unemployment in Europe, visible in the fourfold increase in the number of Moroccans living

in Western Europe – from 291,000 in 1972 on the eve of the oil crisis to nearly 1.2 million in 1992 (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Officially registered Moroccan emigration to OECD countries, 1965–2019

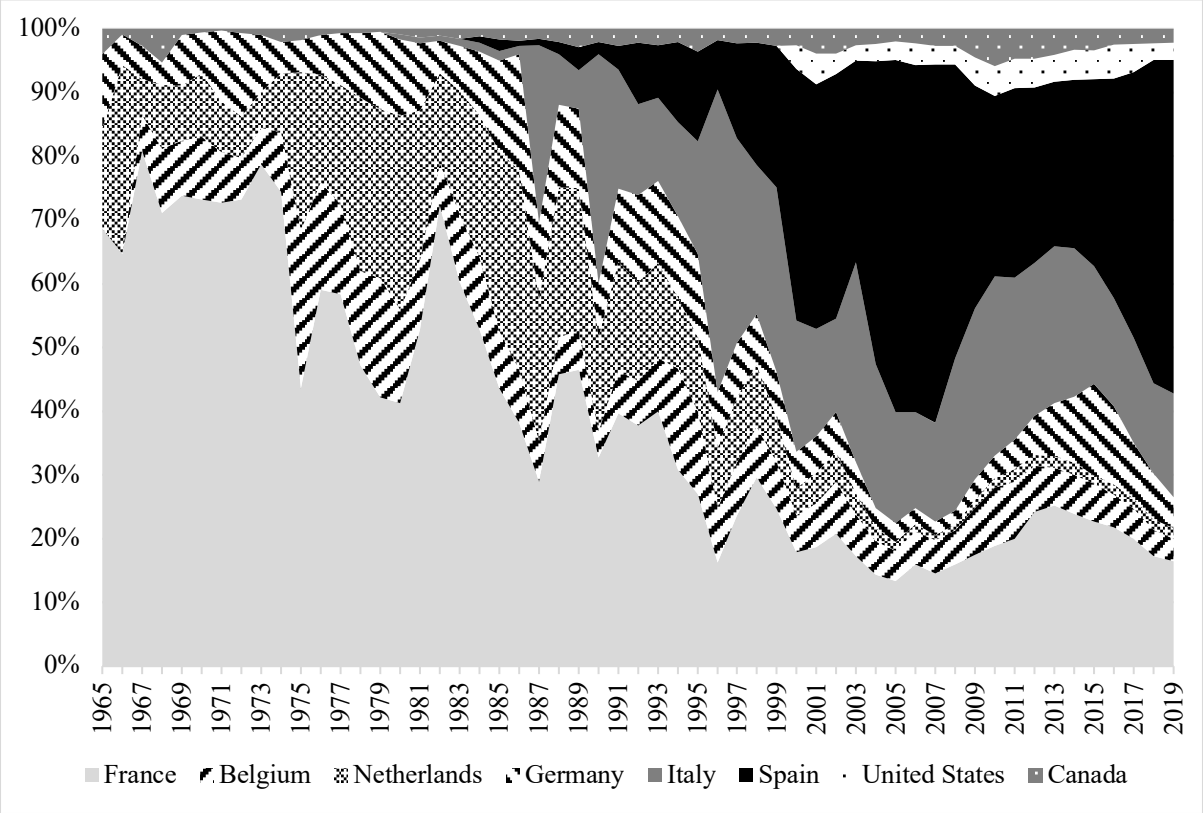


Source: *Compiled by Hein de Haas from various national sources and OECD databases.*

Another factor explaining the entirely unanticipated continuation and acceleration of Moroccan emigration was the emergence of a new labour frontier in Southern Europe. From the mid-1980s onwards, Spain and Italy emerged as new migration destinations due to a rapidly rising demand for migrant labour in agriculture, construction and low-skilled services (see Figure 6). Initially, Moroccan migration to Southern Europe was predominantly circular, as the distances were relatively short (particularly to Spain) and Moroccans could freely travel back and forth. Partly repeating earlier dynamics of the 'guestworker' generation, however, visa requirements introduced by Italy and Spain in 1990 and 1991, respectively, interrupted these circular migration patterns, while new Moroccan migrants moved irregularly across the Strait of Gibraltar using smugglers or overstayed their temporary visas upon arrival (Berriane and Cohen 2009; Cohen and Berriane 2011). During the 1990s, various regularisation campaigns by Italian and Spanish governments granted legal status to large numbers of Moroccans who were able to subsequently reunify their families.

Another trend, which was partly related to the changing nature of labour demand in Europe as well as changing gender norms in Morocco, has been the increasing independent labour emigration of Moroccan women to Southern Europe, in order to work as domestic workers, nannies and cleaners as well as in agriculture and small industries. These dynamics explain the exponential increase of Moroccans officially residing in Spain and Italy, from about 20,000 in 1980 to an estimated 1.2 million in 2017 in the two countries combined (Caruso and Greco 2018; Khaldi 2018).

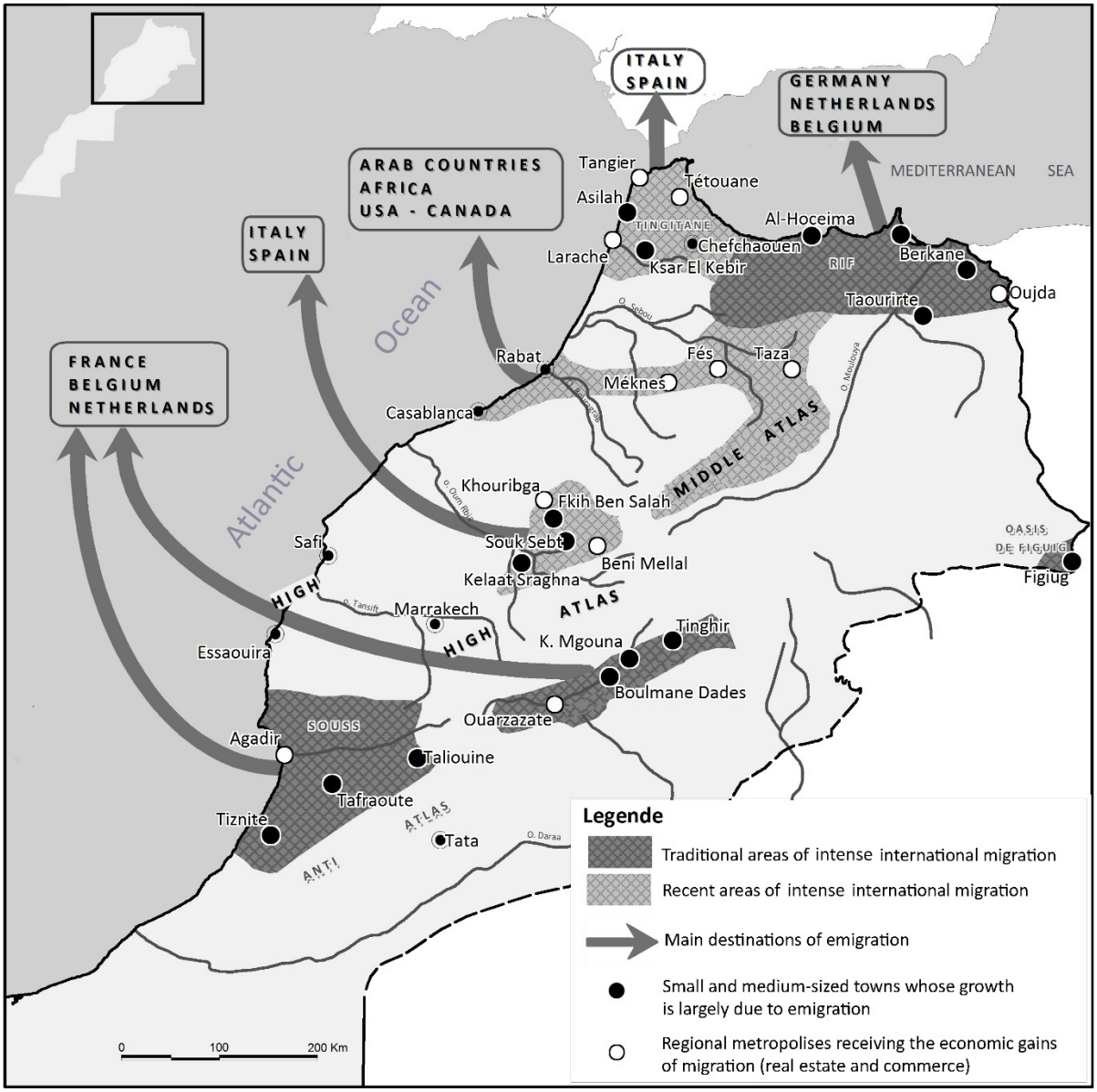
Figure 6. Evolution of the geographic orientation of Moroccan emigration, main destination countries, 1965–2019



Source: Compiled by Hein de Haas from various national sources and OECD databases.

The diversification of destination countries towards Southern Europe coincided with a diversification of origin areas in Morocco. While the 'guestworker' emigration of the 1960s and 1970s mainly occurred from the Rif, the South and a limited number of south-eastern oases, a geographical diffusion process has occurred since the 1980s, in which international migration has spread to regions where migration used to be oriented towards internal destinations (Bencherifa 1996) (see Figure 7). For instance, the region of Laârache (south of Tangier) witnessed increased migration to Spain and the United Kingdom, while the Tadla plain (south of Khouribga) has specialised in migration to Italy (Costanzo 1999; Fadloullah, Berrada and Khachani 2000; Refass 1999). However, migration from some of the most peripheral and poorest zones of Morocco, particularly in the High Atlas mountains as well as the oases in the Draa-Tafilalt and Tata provinces, remained focused on internal destinations, partly because people lacked the money, qualifications and connections needed for international migration.

Figure 7. Morocco's main emigration patterns



Source: Cartographic synthesis by M. Berriane from different sources.

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, this expansion and diversification of Moroccan emigration has continued, following five main patterns. First, the importance of labour and family migration to north-west Europe decreased alongside an increased importance of labour migration to Spain and Italy. As the 'guestworker' generation reached retirement age and the second and third generations increasingly considered destination societies as their 'homes', they increasingly preferred to find marriage partners among the Moroccan diaspora living in Europe. This has resulted in decreasing family migration.

A second, and related, pattern is that return migration to Morocco has remained limited. Only about one quarter of Moroccans who migrated between 1981 and 2009 returned to Morocco (Cherti 2014; de Haas 2014). This low return rate and the permanency of Moroccan emigration is also manifested in high naturalisation rates. Between 1992 and 2001 alone, about 430,000 Moroccans living in Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, the Netherlands and Norway were naturalised. By 2016, 25 per cent of the Moroccan population living in Spain had been naturalised – compared to only about 6 per cent in Germany (Berriane 2018a).

Third, growing student emigration has increasingly diverted away from traditional destinations in Western Europe. Indeed, while Moroccan student emigration was historically focused on France and, to a smaller extent, on southern Spain, it has diversified towards countries like Canada, the US, Germany and the UK. This reflects increasing English-language skills amongst Moroccans, efforts by foreign governments and universities to attract international students and increasing aspirations amongst Moroccans to obtain foreign degrees or to use university enrolment as a way of securing visas.

Fourth, an increasing number of highly skilled Moroccans (particularly doctors, engineers and IT specialists) have migrated to France, North America, Germany and Gulf countries. This is facilitated by skill-selective immigration policies and intra-company transfers, as well as active efforts by European and North American governments and intermediaries to recruit Moroccan talent or to retain Moroccan students upon completion of their degrees. In the case of the Gulf countries, economic growth alongside the expansion of the tertiary sector (banks, IT, hotels, tourism, import-export) has fuelled the demand for skilled migrant workers. In some cases, this leads highly educated 'second generation' Moroccan migrants living in Europe to migrate to the Gulf, where they are sought after because of their diplomas, experience and command of Arabic in addition to English and French (Berriane 2018b). Today, more than 100,000 Moroccans live in the Gulf states.

Fifth, sub-Saharan Africa has become a new destination for Moroccan investment and business migration: although it remains quantitatively modest in terms of numbers of migrants, the economic, political and cultural impact and significance of this emigration of Moroccan investors, capital and companies towards sub-Saharan Africa are much larger. The expansion of Morocco's political and economic clout in Western and Eastern Africa has also started to fuel the movement of lower-skilled Moroccan workers to these destinations (J. Berriane 2018) while, conversely, intensified economic, social and cultural connections also encouraged the migration of sub-Saharan lower- and higher-skilled workers as well as students to Morocco.

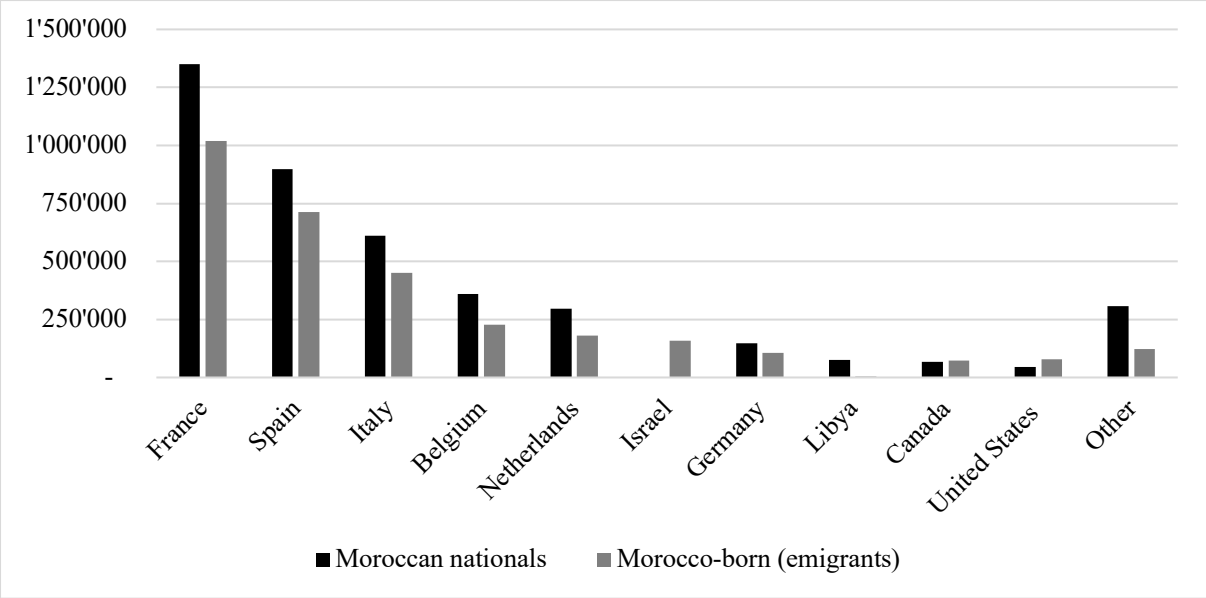
The continued economic importance of emigration is reflected in the magnitude of remittances, which have represented between 6 and 8 per cent of Moroccan GDP over the last two decades. To put this in perspective, remittances are twice the value of foreign direct investment (FDI) and by far exceed the official development assistance (ODA) provided to Morocco, which only accounts for 1 to 2 per cent of GDP. Real remittance levels are likely to be higher as remittances are also sent through informal channels or taken in cash or the form of goods. The economic importance of remittances is often very high in regions of intense emigration, as many families and communities rely on money sent back from Europe. In the south-Moroccan Todgha valley, for instance, it was estimated that, in 2000, international and internal remittances represented 33 and 10 per cent respectively of total household income, while 44 per cent came from local non-agrarian income and only 13 per cent of household income came from agriculture. Households receiving international remittances had an income which was double or higher that of non-migrant households (de Haas 2003, 2006).

Continued emigration over the last two decades consolidated this macro- and micro-economic importance of international migration. In the context of sluggish economic growth and domestic pressure for reform, which has been mounting since the 2011 'Arab Spring', emigration continues to be seen by the Moroccan state as a political and economic 'safety valve' which can relieve unemployment and frustration amongst new generations of youngsters. After a temporary dip in emigration after the 2008 financial crisis, Moroccan emigration has rebounded and plateaued at high levels (see Figure 5). This also seems to explain why the Moroccan state generally adopts a *laissez faire* attitude towards the emigration of its own citizens. While the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 initially led to a sharp decrease in cross-border mobility, the economic recession and increasing unemployment in Morocco, partly caused by the implosion of tourism, led to the increased undocumented migration of

Moroccan youngsters to the Spanish mainland and the Canary Islands.[1] Given the economic situation, this new emigration was tacitly tolerated by Moroccan authorities. This latest increase in emigration continues a decades-old pattern, in which migration has reacted to labour demand in Europe as well as the economic and political situation in Morocco.

Against initial expectations and policies that considered Moroccan emigration as a temporary movement of workers, six decades of continued Moroccan emigration and settlement abroad have created a large and permanent Moroccan diaspora. According to data from the Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, over 5 million people of Moroccan origin would live abroad in 2020, of whom 86.4 per cent in Europe (HCP 2020). This estimate includes naturalised Moroccan migrants, as well as second- and third-generation migrants with Moroccan passports registered with Moroccan consulates. This explains the discrepancy with UN statistics, which only recorded 3.1 million Moroccan emigrants in 2019 (UNDESA 2019) – which reflects the number of people born in Morocco but currently living abroad. Figure 8 shows both figures for the principal destination countries of Moroccan emigrants. After Turkey, Moroccans have become the second-largest non-EU origin group living in Western Europe. While France used to have the largest Moroccan population, Spain has been rapidly gaining ground as their main destination in recent decades. In 2016, France and Spain's Moroccan-origin population numbered 1.35 million and 900,000 persons, respectively. Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands count Moroccan-heritage populations of between 300,000 and 600,000. From 2000 to 2019, 2.33 million Moroccans officially immigrated to OECD countries – this excludes most undocumented migrants and those moving to African countries and the Middle East.

Figure 8. Moroccan-origin population living abroad, by main destination countries, 2015–2016



Sources: Moroccan nationals: DACS (2016); Emigrants, first generation: UNPD (2019).

[1] Bruselas reconoce que Marruecos necesitará más ayuda para frenar la migración (Brussels recognises that Morocco needs more help to curb migration), *El Pais*, 3 December 2020, https://elpais.com/espana/2020-12-02/bruselas-reconoce-que-marruecos-necesitara-mas-ayuda-para-frenar-la-migracion.html (accessed 19 March 2021).

2.5 Morocco as a destination country

After decades of low immigration since independence in 1956, immigration to Morocco started to increase again towards the turn of the twenty-first century. Census data indicate that 86,000 foreign citizens lived in Morocco in 2014, up from 50,200 in 2004 (Natter 2019). As many European and sub-Saharan African immigrants lack residence papers or have not officially registered as migrants, real numbers are likely to be much higher. For instance, there are an estimated 6,000 to 10,000 Congolese migrants living in Morocco (Coyault 2015) – against only 1,160 officially recorded in the 2014 census. What is more, while the same census only recorded 21,344 French citizens, the French consulates in Morocco registered 46,995 (Therrien and Pellegrini 2015). However, while many European migrants prefer to renew their tourist status every three months rather than apply for a residence permit, many sub-Saharan African migrants have no legal status at all. This explains why the large majority of the roughly 50,000 migrants who were regularised by Morocco in 2014 and 2017 were of African origin (Benjelloun 2018).

Sub-Saharan immigration has grown in absolute and relative terms since 2000 and has diversified both in terms of origin countries and of immigrants' socioeconomic backgrounds and migration aspirations. While some migrants use Morocco as a staging ground before attempting to enter Europe through Ceuta or Melilla – the two Spanish enclaves on the northern Moroccan coast – others settle in Morocco and work in niches of the Moroccan labour market, in lower-skilled jobs in construction, agriculture and domestic work or various semi-skilled and skilled jobs, such as in call centres and the (informal) service and tourism sectors (Mourji et al. 2016; Peraldi 2011; Weyel 2015). Challenging the widespread cliché of 'poverty migration', most sub-Saharan migrants have secondary or tertiary education and were members of the middle class in their countries of origin (Berriane 2020; Mourji et al. 2016).

Next to labour migration, Morocco has also attracted growing numbers of students as well as pilgrims and religious scholars, particularly from West African countries such as Senegal and Mali (Bamba 2015; J. Berriane 2015a; Lanza 2015). Student immigration, which began in the 1970s, has grown substantially since the emergence of private universities in Morocco in the early 2000s (J. Berriane 2015b; Infantino 2011; Mazzella 2009). In 2017, 20,410 foreign students were registered in Morocco, more than double compared to 2006 (Laouali and Meyer 2012; Levantino 2015; MDCMREAM 2018, 89). Thus, while ambitious Moroccan students have increasingly explored European and North-American destinations, sub-Saharan students have discovered Morocco as a destination – thus yielding a multi-layered hierarchical pattern of international student mobility with Morocco occupying an intermediate, semi-peripheral position.

Over recent years, immigration to Morocco has also been diversifying in terms of origins. While francophone West-African countries such as Senegal, Mali and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) or Niger dominated in the past, more and more migrants from Anglophone African countries such as Nigeria and Ghana, as well as Asian countries such as China and the Philippines, have moved to Morocco. Chinese labour immigration to Morocco has grown as a consequence of large-scale economic development projects and the settlement of Chinese traders and small entrepreneurs (Taing 2015). Morocco's immigrant population also includes people fleeing conflict and oppression, with 8,112 registered asylum-seekers and refugees by the end of 2018 – of whom nearly one in two came from Syria, followed by refugees from Yemen, Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Guinea and DRC (UNHCR 2019). This growth of Morocco's immigrant community also coincides with a certain geographical diffusion of settlement patterns, with more and more migrants moving beyond Rabat and the northern border areas to smaller cities in the centre or south of Morocco.

Yet Europeans remain the largest migrant group in Morocco and this population is also more diverse than often thought. Besides diplomats, consultants and the high-skilled employees of multinational companies, Morocco has become a destination for sun- and leisure-seeking European retirees who either settle permanently or move seasonally. In addition, more and more Europeans have opened small B&Bs in the form of '*Ryads*' in the old medinas of Marrakech and Fez or in the countryside, such as in the Draa oasis or the Atlas mountains (Oussoulous 2019). Lastly, young graduates and lower-skilled workers in Europe have also increasingly looked for opportunities in Morocco, such as after the 2008 financial crisis (de Haas 2014).[2] Morocco has clearly arrived on the mental horizon of Europeans as a country offering opportunities in terms of work and the living of life.

In sum, while still relatively modest in absolute size, immigration it is clearly on the rise and permanent immigrant communities are forming which could potentially lay the basis for further labour and family migration facilitated by network effects. Particularly at the local level, in the main cities, migrants are increasingly visible in public spaces and certain sectors of the labour market. The growing settlement of African, Asian and European immigrant communities confronts Moroccan society with a new set of issues such as the religious or racial diversity and discrimination typical of immigration countries but that are often overlooked by the still dominantly Eurocentric views that focus on Moroccan emigration to Europe.

3. Drivers of Moroccan migration

The continuation of Moroccan emigration over the entire 1960–2020 period challenges repeated predictions that the age of large-scale Moroccan emigration had come to an end. The remarkable increase and diversification of Moroccan emigration since the 1990s may seem all the more surprising given the undeniable improvements in living standards and reductions in poverty levels across Morocco, as well as the fact that more and more sub-Saharan African, European and Asian migrants find Morocco an attractive destination in its own right. So, given these circumstances, why have Moroccans continued to emigrate? In order to understand this phenomenon, this section investigates how demographic, political, economic, technological and cultural changes have shaped Morocco's mobility complex.

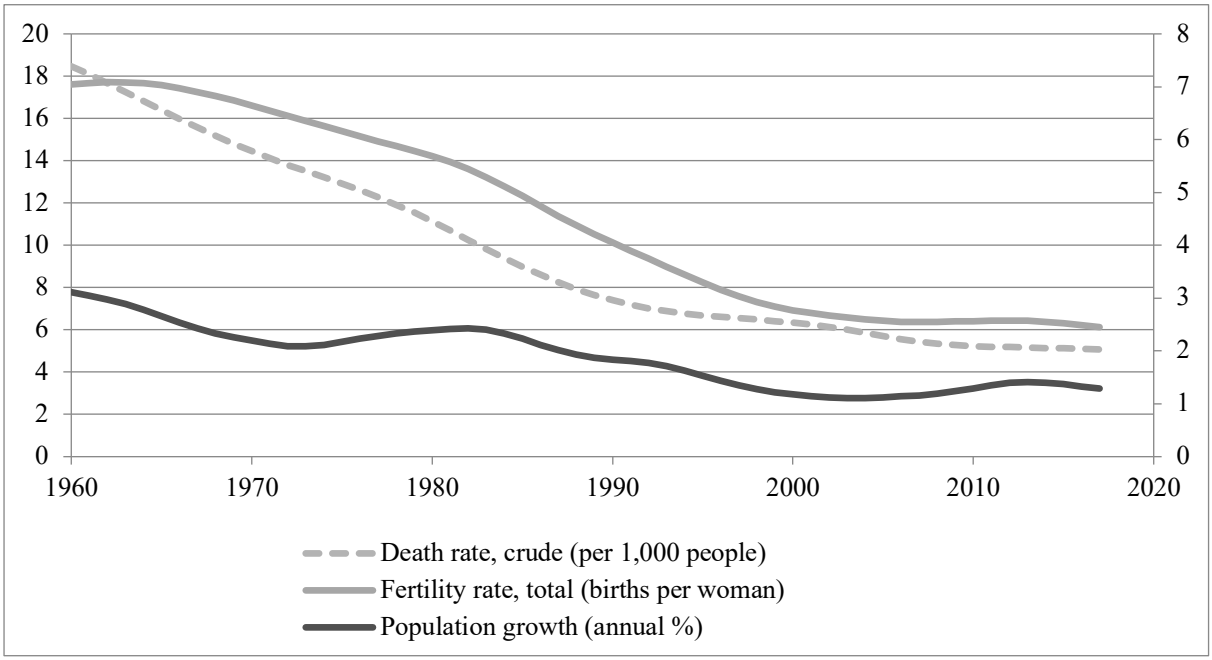
3.1 Demographic transitions

In line with conventional explanations of migration, mobility transition theory as proposed by Zelinsky (1971) focuses on demographic factors to explain migration. In Morocco, colonisation initiated the demographic transition, as the introduction of modern medicine, the development of sanitary networks and improvements in hygiene accelerated the decline in mortality levels over the 1930s and 1940s (Noin 1962). The ensuing population growth reached its peak in the early 1970s and started to decline in the early 1980s, largely as a result of fertility rates, which dropped from 7.2 in 1962 to 2.4 in 2018 (see Figure 9). Moroccan society has thus been through an almost-full demographic transition and, as a consequence, its population has started to age: while young people (0–30 years old) constituted 65.7 per cent of the population in 1960, they represented only 47.3 per cent in 2018 (HCP 2018). Besides declining poverty and improved living standards, active family-planning policies and an increasing education

[2] Les Espagnols entrent clandestinement au Maroc pour y travailler (Spaniards enter Morocco illegally seeking work), *France2*, 11 June 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XtvNZZdUNgE; Tanger: Main d'œuvre espagnole ou les 5,000 migrants irréguliers d'un nouveau genre (Tangier: the Spanish workforce or the 5,000 illegal immigrants of a new type), *Yabiladi*, 20 May 2015, https://www.yabiladi.com/articles/details/25980/tanger-main-d-oeuvre-espagnole-5000.html (both accessed 19 March 2021).

level among women have accelerated Morocco's demographic transition. Interestingly, emigration to Western European countries has also encouraged Morocco's demographic transition as it accelerated the diffusion and adoption of European marriage patterns and smaller family norms (Fargues 2011).

Figure 9. Moroccan demographic indicators, 1960–2020



Source: World Bank (2019)

Zelinsky (1971) and Skeldon (1997) have both suggested that emigration tends to be high in countries that are in the middle of their demographic transition, as these countries have large populations of migration-prone young adults. Thus, countries with a large 'youth bulge' would be the most susceptible to experiencing high emigration levels, particularly if the massive entry of young adults in the labour market is combined with high levels of domestic unemployment and access to labour opportunities abroad. Although there is no direct causal link between demographic factors and migration (de Haas 2010), emigration hikes therefore seem more likely to occur when societies go through demographic transitions. Increasing emigration from Morocco from the 1960s to the 1980s seems to fit within the predicted pattern. However, the fact that emigration has continued at high levels and even increased in more-recent decades despite a reduction in the share of the population below 30 years old shows the limitations of demographic explanations of migration as well as the dangers of demographic determinism. It also highlights the need to consider other forces of social change in explaining Moroccan migration dynamics.

3.2 Politics between continuity and change

Directly and indirectly, Moroccan migrations have been shaped by political dynamics, in particular through the consolidation of Morocco as a modern bureaucratic state in the 1912–1973 period, the intensification of the centralised state's power during the period of the so-called 'Years of Lead' between the 1970s and the 1990s and the process of partial liberalisation since the 2000s. The centralisation of the state and its quest for control in the colonial and post-colonial period interrupted historical patterns of circular mobility across Morocco, reoriented

internal migration towards new urban growth centres located on the Atlantic coast and accelerated urbanisation and emigration. Since the 1990s, political liberalisation and the geopolitical repositioning of Morocco have attracted increasing numbers of immigrants and also created a sense of hope and progress across the Moroccan population, which was accentuated through the reforms pursued by King Mohamed VI in the early 2000s. Over the 2010s and despite the royal discourse of March 2011 that triggered much hope, the stagnation of political change brought about disillusionment and, as a consequence, emigration has been rebounding after a temporary dip following the 2008 economic crisis, particularly among a new generation of educated Moroccan men and women.

3.2.1 Modern state formation and the state's quest for control

Moroccan state-formation processes started in the eighth century AD with the rise of urban-based sultanic dynasties in Fez, Marrakesh and Meknes. Although central state power – known as '*makhzen*' in Morocco[3] – had never been entirely successful in subjecting the autonomous ethnic groups of Morocco's vast hinterland, the continuously shifting alliances between the *makhzen* and these ethnic groups strongly influenced inter-tribal balances of power, commercial relations and patterns of mobility (de Haas 2003; Park 1992). Furthermore, the *makhzen*'s strategic economic interests in the trans-Saharan caravan trade required them to establish military strongholds and trading posts in the interior, structuring population movements across the Moroccan territory (de Haas 2003).

From 1912, the establishment of the French protectorate in the centre and south of Morocco and of the Spanish protectorate in the north and the Sahara fundamentally reshaped relations between centre and periphery. While it would take an armed struggle of more than 20 years to subject the rebellious *Imazighen* ethnic groups in the Northern Rif mountains and the south-east of Morocco, colonisation the consolidation of modern state structures characterised by national borders and the introduction of population registries were decisive in reshaping internal mobility almost immediately (de Haas 2003). On the one hand, the expropriation of collective grazing lands by the French colonial state and agricultural settlers (*colons*) forced semi-nomadic groups to settle down and deprived peasant communities of their livelihoods. On the other hand, the French colonial powers moved Morocco's political capital from Fez to Rabat, shifting the centre of economic and political power from the regions of Fez, Meknes and Marrakech in Morocco's interior to the Atlantic coast. Road construction, infrastructure projects such as the establishment of military garrisons or postal offices and the rapid growth of cities along the Atlantic coast boosted rural-to-urban migration within Morocco.

Colonial rule also led to the active recruitment of Moroccan men for the French army, industry and mines, which laid the foundations for accelerating emigration and permanent settlement abroad over subsequent decades. Because the Northern Rif area fell under Spanish colonial rule, migration to Europe from this region has always exhibited a distinct pattern, with relatively few people migrating to France. This remained the case in the post-independence period, with migrants from the Rif continuing to favour destinations such as the Netherlands,

[3] In the old Arab Empire, the *makhzen* or 'warehouse' referred to the place where the emirs kept the taxes intended for the Caliph of Baghdad. It has since become synonymous with 'treasure' and the house of the *makhzen* or '*Dar al makhzen*', where the treasure was stored, was assimilated to central power and served the army and the bureaucracy in particular. In Morocco, before and under the protectorate, the *makhzen* designated the government of the sultan which relied on the great Arab-Andalusian families and the religious aristocracy of the big cities. With independence and the building of the modern Moroccan state, the traditional institution of the *makhzen* theoretically ceased to exist. However, the term still designates, in everyday and colloquial language, both Moroccan power and a system of nepotism and privileges of large families based on their proximity to this central state power.

Germany and, as of the 1980s, Spain. Patterns of emigration set in the colonial era have thus been partly reproduced over time.

Independence in 1956 did *not* necessarily signify a fundamental rupture in the centralised way in which political power was organised in Morocco, as monarchic rule was reaffirmed with the establishment of a kingdom. Despite the change in name, independence in many ways implied a continuation of Morocco's historical political structure around the sultanates. The main difference was that the monarch now disposed of a modern state apparatus, bureaucracy, army and infrastructure that allowed effective control of the national territory.

After independence, the Moroccan state endeavoured to incorporate the nationalist and resistance movements into the state and national army, fortifying a national narrative to symbolise unity in an ethnically and linguistically highly diverse country. In this context, the centralised placement and deliberate circulation of civil servants, teachers, the military and the police served to integrate a highly diverse population and instil a sense of common identity and purpose. Elements of the pro-independence movement who did not accept central state control (particularly in the Rif) as well as socialist, communist and other anti-monarchic movements were repressed by a centralised state. In particular during the so-called 'Years of Lead' that characterised the reign of Hassan II (1961–1999), state violence and the oppression of left-wing political groups, student and worker unions or *Imazighen* ethnic groups were rampant. State support for Islamist (student) organisations was initially part of a strategy to weaken leftist movements. However, partly inspired by the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, political Islam would soon develop into an opposition force over the 1980s and 1990s.

The state's centralisation and control agenda went together with a political focus on Morocco's urban centres and a lack of priority for public infrastructure and economic development in rural areas. Partly in reaction to two coups organised by high-ranking military leaders in 1971 and 1972, as well as in the context of the 1975 'Green March' into the Western Sahara and the ensuing conflict with the Polisario, the authorities increased military expenditure – from around 2.5 per cent of GDP in the 1960s and early 1970s to more than 5 per cent in 1975–1985 (World Bank 2019). This stalled investments into health care, infrastructure and marginal rural areas more in general. This focus on the consolidation of state control and the concomitant neglect of rural development shaped Morocco's emigration patterns and emigration policies both directly and indirectly: in a partial continuation of colonial practices, the Moroccan state saw emigration as a political and economic 'safety valve' and therefore deliberately directed recruiters to regions with high unemployment or with a rebellious reputation, such as the Rif and Sous regions (Bouras 2018; de Mas 1978; Obdeijn 1993; Reniers 1999). The state also controlled emigration through the selective issuing of passports. Before the introduction of European visas in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the greatest legal constraint on emigration was the difficulty of obtaining a Moroccan passport. The Moroccan state using the issuance of passports to stimulate (or limit) migration from particular regions (Salih 2001, 660-661).

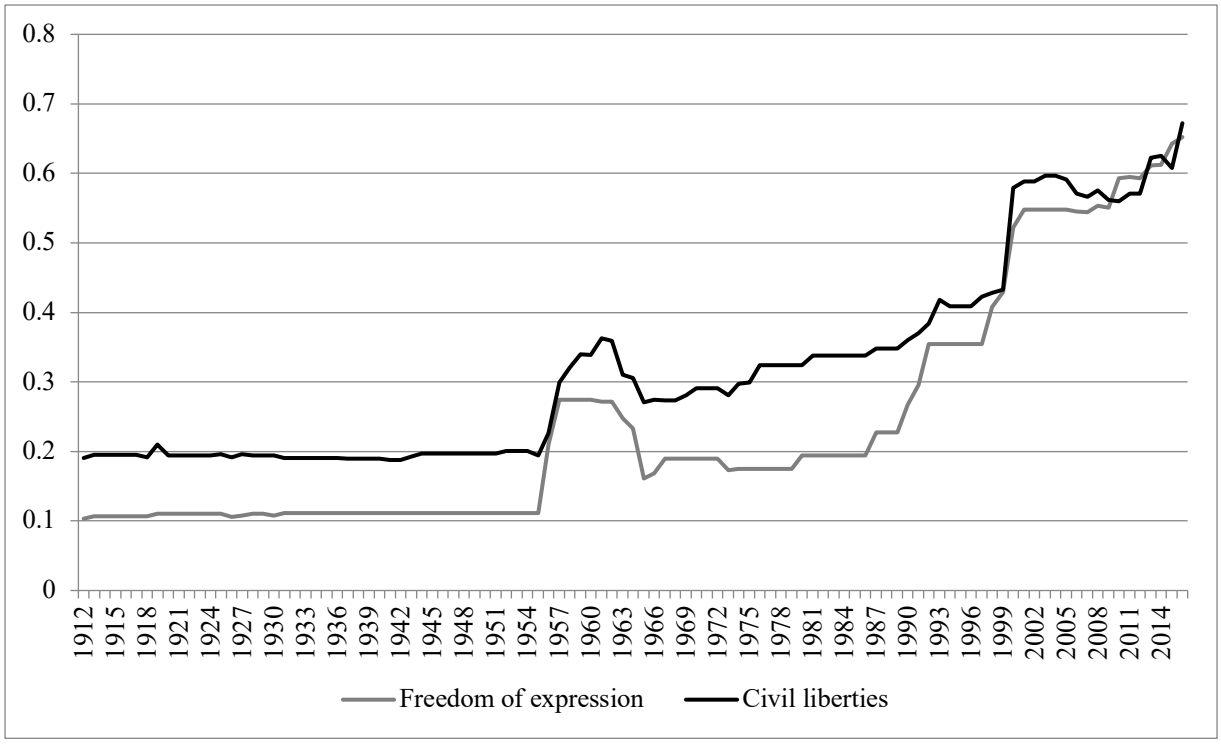
To prevent the political activism of Moroccan emigrant communities in Europe, in the 1970s the Moroccan state established a system of 'remote control' (Belguendouz 2006; de Haas 2007b; Lacroix 2005). Particularly in France, Belgium and the Netherlands, Moroccan activists were often involved in trade unions and political organisations, establishing a left-wing opposition from abroad (de Haas 2007b; Lacroix 2005). Although such activism was controlled by the Moroccan state (often in collaboration with the French state), in the long term repression had the unintended side-effect of alienating the Moroccan emigrant population and discouraging their return to or investment in Morocco. Partly because of the economic importance of remittances and partly reflecting a general liberalisation of Moroccan society, the Moroccan state progressively developed a more lenient stance towards its emigrants from

the 1990s. This new policy to court the Moroccan diaspora was characterised by the build-up of institutions and programmes to facilitate remittance investments, cultural exchanges, the support of education in the origin-country language and culture as well as state-organised holiday visits for young Moroccans residing abroad (El Qadim 2010; Sahraoui 2015).

3.2.2 Partial and stagnating liberalisation

Towards the end of the rule of Hassan II (1961–1999) and after the accession to the throne of Mohammed VI in 1999, efforts to liberalise public space and increase the freedom of expression generated socio-political activism and further grassroots demands for political opening. For instance, since the 1980s, women's associations have become a central social actor in Morocco's public sphere (see Section 3.5). In 1999, former political exiles were invited to return to Morocco and, in 2004, an Equity and Reconciliation Commission was set up to investigate human-rights abuses during the 'Years of Lead'. In addition, the politicisation of *Imazighen* populations gained force, succeeding in nominally integrating the formal recognition of the *Amazigh* culture and language in the new 2011 constitution. More generally, in the context of the 2011 'Arab Spring', Morocco's '20 February' pro-democracy movement fostered demands and hopes for more political freedom across large parts of Moroccan society.

Figure 10. Freedom of expression and civil society in Morocco, 1956–2016



Source: V-Dem dataset (Coppedge et al. 2018).

During the first decade of the twenty-first century, reforms pushed through by King Mohamed VI with regards to women's rights and civil liberties created a sense of hope and progress, while the 2008 Global Economic Recession in Europe – which hit Spain, Morocco's main migration destination since the 1990s, particularly hard – further seemed to reinforce an impression that the heyday of emigration was over and that people could build a future in Morocco. However, although the country has undeniably gone through a liberalisation process in terms of freedom of expression and civil-society activism (see Figure 10), the nature of this

liberalisation needs to be strongly nuanced: political parties still have no broad-based support within the population and little influence over crucial political issues such as foreign policy or internal security, while autocratic political structures have remained essentially intact. Thus, liberalisation did not turn out to be the precursor of a genuine democratisation. Over the 2010s, a sense of disillusionment started to dominate again, as political reform stagnated and the recurring protests in the Northern Rif regions, led since 2016 by the '*Hirak*' movement, were met with violence by the Moroccan authorities (Bogaert 2015; Bogaert and Emperador 2011). This absence of real democratisation and freedom, in conjunction with high economic inequality (see below), has likely stimulated the rebounding of emigration to Europe, North America and the Gulf since 2015, particularly among educated populations.

Significant changes in Morocco's international geopolitical positioning also had consequences on migration patterns, particularly in the form of increased immigration from (and towards) sub-Saharan Africa. Although Morocco withdrew from the African Union, historical connections between western and other sub-Saharan African states (such as Senegal, Mali, Gabon and DR Congo) and Morocco were never completely severed and were revived in the early 2000s when King Mohammed VI intensified diplomatic ties with sub-Saharan countries and increased economic investment in the region. As a result, the number African countries whose citizens enjoy visa-free entry into Morocco, such as those from the Ivory Coast, Senegal, Congo-Brazzaville, Guinea, Niger or Mali, has been on the rise (Cherti and Collyer 2015).

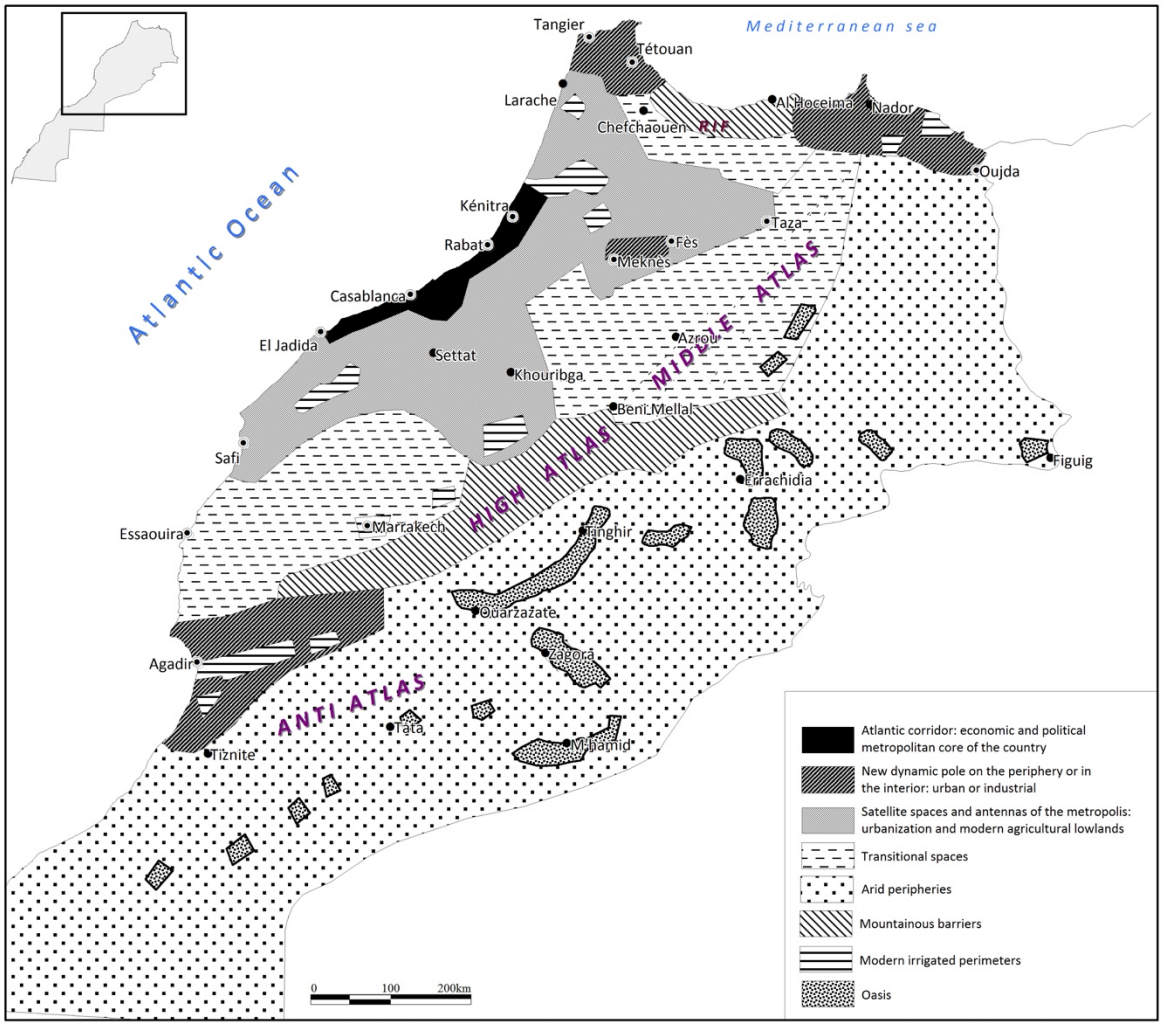
The political and economic opening towards the African continent culminated in Morocco's reintegration into the African Union in January 2017 and its (pending) application for membership in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). This was accompanied by diplomatic efforts to take up the role of mediator in Euro-African migrations – such as by hosting the summit that concluded with the adoption of the UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (or 'Marrakesh Compact') in December 2018 in Marrakech or the creation of an African Migration Observatory in Rabat (Natter 2020). To reinforce his progressive image, Morocco, under the impulse of King Mohammed VI, also broke with the country's exclusively securitised immigration policies focused on the repression of immigrant and refugee populations – which largely reflected European immigration control agendas – by launching a liberal immigration reform in 2013 that entailed two regularisation campaigns (in 2014 and 2017) as well as a range of measures to integrate migrants on the labour market, in social services and education (Benjelloun 2019). Despite backlashes, several problems with the implementation of these reforms and continued discrimination towards immigrants and refugees, these policies and the accompanying government discourses have successfully cast an *image* of Morocco as a relatively liberal, stable and attractive 'immigration country' offering safety and opportunities for work and education (Natter 2019; Norman 2016).

3.3 Bifurcated economic growth

Over the twentieth century, the state's attempts to centralise and consolidate its power have fundamentally shaped the character of Morocco's economic development, which has remained uneven, benefiting mainly certain regions and social groups. Since the colonial era, Morocco's economy has transformed from livelihoods based on subsistence agriculture, pastoralism and traditional crafts to more-capitalist economic systems characterised by the increasing specialisation and rapid rise of wage labour in urban areas. However, economic opportunities, agricultural investments and public services have largely concentrated on the western Atlantic littoral, at the expense of Morocco's 'interior', which is characterised by a large informal sector and low levels of social security (see Figure 11). This bifurcated pattern of regional economic growth has exacerbated territorial disparities in rural and urban development which would also

have a strong imprint on patterns of internal and international migration. On the one hand, it accelerated rural out-migration, particularly from semi-peripheral areas where infrastructure, education and transport links increased exposure to urban lifestyles. This also stimulated emigration abroad, initially from lower-skilled workers but, since the 1990s, increasingly also from the educated middle classes whose professional and economic aspirations could no longer be matched by job opportunities in the public or private sector. Since the 2000s, the state has attempted to stimulate rural development through a decentralisation agenda and increased investments in small farming, infrastructure and industrial development in peripheral areas. However, these have only been partly successful and have not been able to substantially diminish the huge economic gaps between urban and rural areas. Today, in terms of territorial development, northern Morocco presents important territorial disparities, with levels of development that decrease starting from the political-economic centre on the dynamic Atlantic littoral and moving towards peripheral regions (see Figure 11).

Figure 11. Morocco's main economic geographic zones



Source: Simplified and adapted by M. Berriane from Troin, Berriane, Guitouni, Laouina et al. (2002). According to a centre–periphery model, Morocco is considered a spatial system with an economic and geographical functioning which supposes a core engine – the Atlantic corridor – and transmissions towards more and more distant zones via transitional spaces. The emphasis is on distance, levels of dynamism and attraction to the central core.

3.3.1 A partial agrarian transition and industrialisation

European colonisation opened up the Moroccan economy to external capitalist influences and imposed a new model of economic-geographical organisation, which privileged coastal areas but marginalised rural and mountainous areas. In this process, traditional economic systems organised around various regional capitals (such as Marrakesh, Fez and Meknes) and the exchange of products between peasants, urban-based craftspeople and nomads and semi-nomads were gradually superseded by a nation-wide bipolar model dominated by an administrative capital (Rabat) and an economic capital (Casablanca) on the Atlantic littoral.

While investments in agriculture focused on what the French coloniser called '*le Maroc utile*' (useful Morocco) – mainly the Western plains that were suitable for large-scale commercial agriculture – small-scale peasant agriculture in ecologically more marginal mountainous and semi-arid zones, which the French did not consider suitable for commercial agriculture, were largely neglected. This has remained the pattern throughout the twentieth century, as significant land reform did not occur and Moroccan elites generally took over the lands seized from local communities by *colon* farmers after independence.

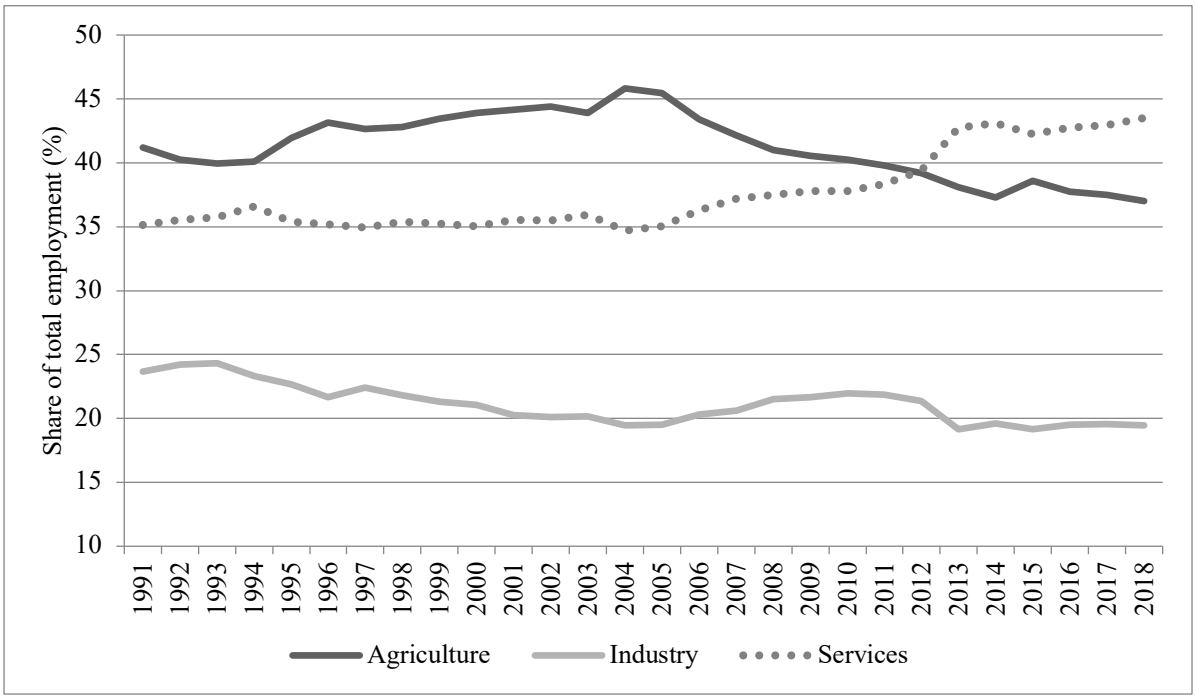
This perpetuated large inequalities in land possession and in state investments in agriculture. The capital-intense cash-cropping in the Atlantic plains, the Sous valley and the plains of Saïs between the Rif and the Middle Atlas mountains have received government support that encouraged mechanisation and huge productivity gains. By contrast, the state provided much less support for small-scale agriculture in the marginal rural areas (often referred to as the 'interior') located in the predominantly *Tamazight*-speaking Rif and Atlas mountains and southern oases. This bifurcated model of agrarian development further encouraged rural out-migration to towns and cities as well as to Europe. This reflects a more general rural development model prevalent in the Mediterranean which, over the last century, has widened the dualities between the irrigated plains – seats of intensive and export-oriented capitalist agriculture – and the 'hinterlands', characterised by small subsistence-based peasant agriculture, which has become increasingly marginalised (Berriane and Michon 2020).

The socioeconomic, cultural and political impacts of this out-migration further accelerated the undermining of traditional agrarian livelihoods. On the one hand, the departure of the agrarian workforce caused a neglect of agriculture which decreased productivity, while changes in traditional social hierarchies engendered by out-migration accelerated the disintegration of traditional villages institutions (such as the *jemâa*) for collective maintenance of land resources, grazing lands and irrigation systems. On the other hand, out-migration to cities and, particularly, Europe has been an important source of economic diversification and livelihood improvement in semi-peripheral zones such as the Sous, the Rif and south-eastern oases. Although, in various rural areas, remittances enabled people to invest in the small-scale modernisation of agriculture, such as through the purchase of water pumps, agricultural machinery and small-scale irrigation systems, out-migration did not stop the broad, long-term shift away from subsistence-based agrarian livelihoods and lifestyles – conversely, it instead accentuated and confirmed this trend. Migration from the poorest, most peripheral regions, such as in the Middle and High Atlas and the more-marginally located oases in the Tata province, the Draa Valley and the Tafilalt, has mostly focused on internal destinations, with many families still partly relying on subsistence agriculture.

As a consequence of these dynamics, the proportion of Moroccans working in agriculture decreased significantly, from over 70 per cent in 1952 to 55 per cent in 1972 and 40 per cent in 1991, although this proportion has been largely stagnating since then (see Figure 12). Yet, while still employing more than one third of Morocco's workforce, agriculture only contributes 12 per cent to the country's total GDP in 2017 – a share which has remained fairly stable since 1980 (see Figure 13). This can be explained by the fact that the high-productive,

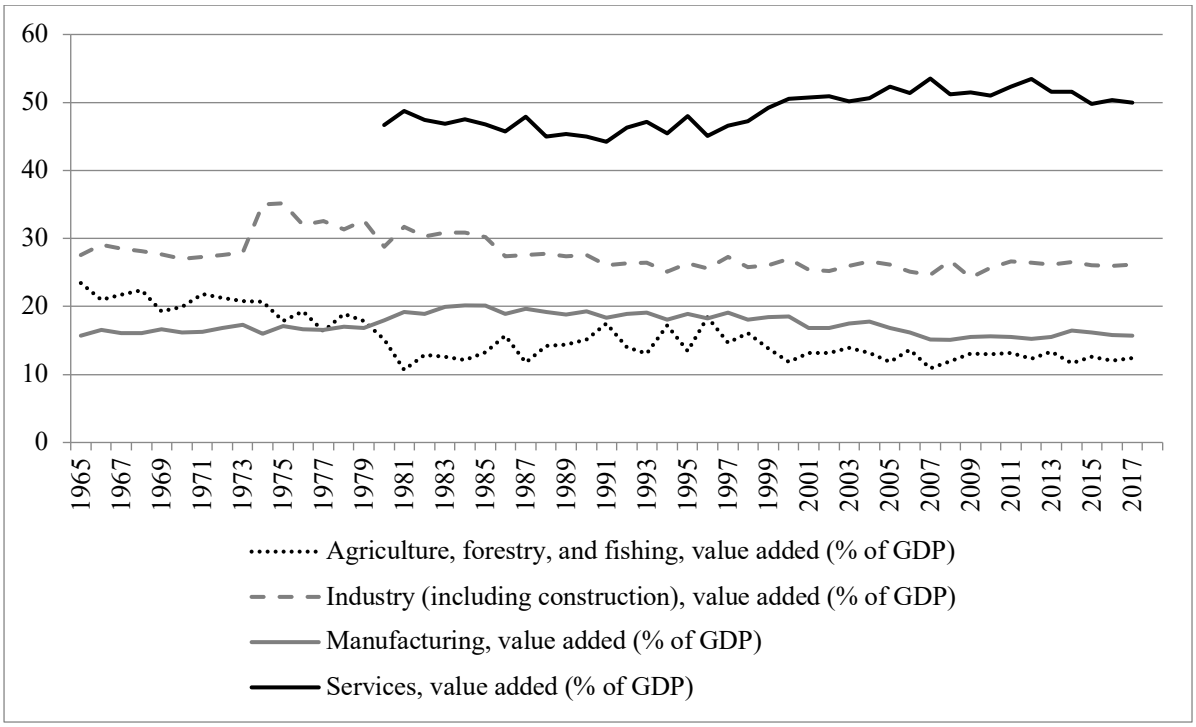
cash-generating agrarian output in Western Morocco employs relatively few people because of the high levels of mechanisation, while the bulk of Morocco's agrarian workforce is concentrated in the peripheral areas which still largely rely on low-productive subsistence agriculture.

Figure 12. Sectoral distribution of the Moroccan workforce, 1991–2018



Source: World Bank (2019)

Figure 13. Contribution of economic sectors to the Moroccan GDP (in %), 1965–2017



Source: World Bank (2019)

The divide between an economic heartland on the Atlantic coast and a rural, largely neglected, 'interior' also characterised Morocco's industrialisation. While the country has maintained a thriving traditional crafts sector, it has never developed a serious industrialisation policy. In the post-independence years, Morocco initially followed a state-led, central economic-planning approach. However, in the context of the structural adjustment programmes (SAP) implemented in Morocco from the early 1980s, austerity-driven neoliberal reforms have led to government budget cuts and decreased public investments. The same period saw a declining share of industry in total employment (from 24 per cent in 1992 to 19 per cent in 2018) and a stagnation of the contribution of industry to GDP at levels of around 25 per cent since the 1990s (see Figures 12 and 13). In Morocco's interior, industrial employment remained low and the main secondary-sector employment consisted of informal jobs in the small-scale crafts industry (furniture-making, tailoring, carpet-waving, pottery, leather and shoe production and vegetable-oil production), which is still largely manual or semi-mechanised.

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, Morocco has diversified its economic development strategy. In 2000, Morocco's Green Plan (*Plan Maroc Vert*) launched a new era in agricultural policy that targeted small-scale agriculture in peripheral zones. New incentives included subsidies and assistance for the introduction of new agricultural techniques (such as drip irrigation) and support for the cultivation of high-value crops and products – *produits de terroir* such as saffron and argan as well as dates and olives (Berriane and Michon 2020). However, despite the symbolic shift which it signalled, the policy did not lead to higher productivity or to sustainable incomes for farmers. Because the programme mainly benefited those with larger farms, it widened rather than narrowed social disparities in rural areas. Moreover, as part of a broader liberalisation agenda, these policies led to the rapid privatisation of collective lands, which posed a further threat to food security (Akesbi 2011).

In the same vein, Morocco's industrial policies led to a geographical expansion of industrial regions but did not change the overall pattern of bifurcated economic development opposing coastal growth zones and an economically stagnant interior. While industries and factories used to be concentrated in Morocco's economic heartland along the Atlantic coast, since the early 2000s the Moroccan state has massively invested in industries and infrastructure in the region around Tangier, including the construction of a new port (*Tanger Med*), the establishment of export processing zones as well as the high-speed train (TGV) linking Tangier with Casablanca. The development of the automobile industry has been particularly striking, with the arrival of Renault, PSA and the Chinese BYD having created around 158,000 jobs since 2014. In the south of Morocco, Agadir has risen as a new industrial centre, mainly concentrated around the food- and fish-processing industries; large-scale solar power stations Noor I and II were built close to Ouarzazate. Such mega projects attract rural internal migrants to work in the house and road construction industries.

3.3.2 Economic liberalisation, inequality and unemployment

In the post-independence decades, the expansion of the state apparatus meant that government jobs (ranging from the military, the police and bureaucrats to teachers) became the most important sources of stable employment and the main avenue of upward social mobility in Morocco. Because of low education levels, until the 1980s a completed tertiary or even secondary-education qualification would be a quasi-guarantee of acquiring a safe government job, which came with social security, a pension and health-care benefits. However, since the mid-1980s, IMF-led Structural Adjustment Programmes and government budget cutbacks decreased the creation of government jobs and limited the redistributive capacities of the Moroccan state.

While unemployment rates were low during the 1960s and 1970s, they grew over the following two decades, reflecting increased entries into the labour market by large young cohorts possessing secondary or higher educational qualifications in combination with low levels of job creation as a partial result of austerity measures and sluggish economic growth. This particularly affected young graduates, who used to enjoy practically guaranteed employment in the public service until the 1980s (Giubilaro 1997; White 1999). Indeed, graduate unemployment quadrupled from 6.5 per cent in 1984 to 26.2 per cent in 1993 (Sater 2016) and remained at 23.6 per cent in 2019,[4] while youth unemployment peaked in the 1990s at around 30 per cent and has since been hovering around 15–20 per cent, compared to an average unemployment rate of less than 10 per cent since the 2000s (World Bank 2019). Such high unemployment levels among educated youngsters reflect a growing mismatch between their skills and aspirations on the one hand and job opportunities on the other.

Given the limited opportunities in public employment, the educated middle classes have increasingly looked towards the private sector – and migration – as alternative ways to achieve social mobility. In combination with EU trade agreements and increased Moroccan investments in sub-Saharan Africa, the employment of Moroccans holding vocational qualifications or higher-education degrees in sectors such as engineering, IT (call centres), education (private schools and universities), medical services and tourism has been growing, which contributed to the rise of a new middle class in Morocco's big cities and burgeoning suburbs. Between 2004 and 2018, the size of the workforce in the service sector increased from 35 to 44 per cent (see Figure 12), surpassing the share of the agricultural workforce in 2011. However, employment creation in the formal sector remained very limited. Economic liberalisation mainly stimulated the informal employment of the urban poor in small commerce, transport, catering, cleaning and domestic and personal services. In 2010, 79.9 per cent of the total Moroccan workforce were estimated to work in informal jobs – 58.7 per cent in the informal sector while 19.8 per cent were doing informal jobs in the formal sector (Chacaltana, Bonnet, and Leung 2018).

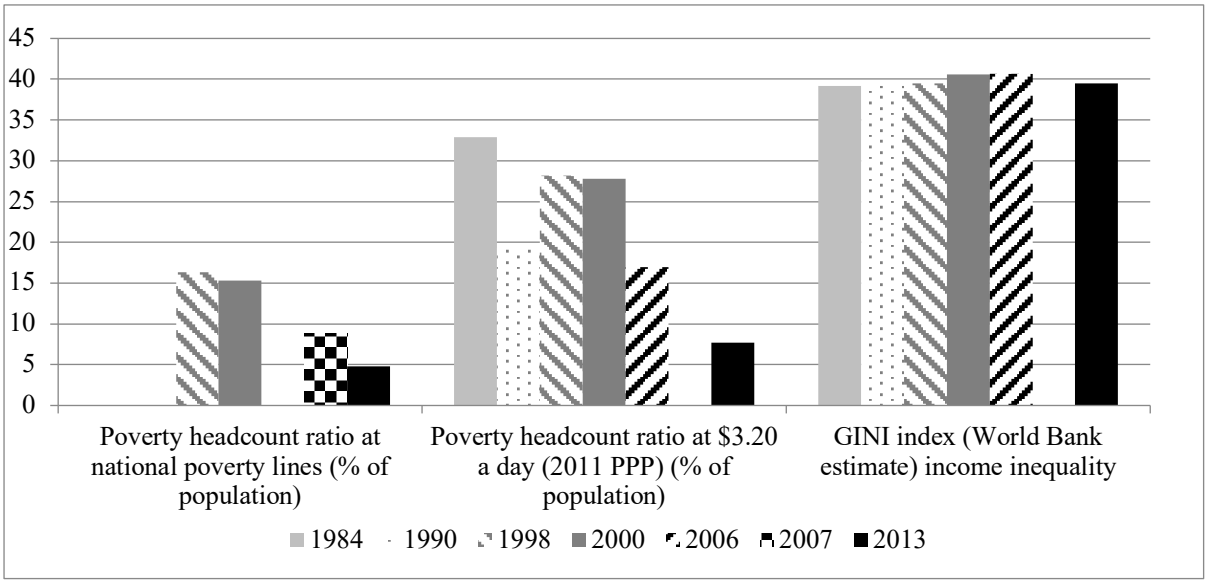
The growth of the hotel and hospitality sector, of tourism in general, of the IT sector and of call centres has also attracted growing numbers of foreigners and second-generation Moroccan emigrants from Southern Europe and, particularly, francophone sub-Saharan African countries. This coexistence of high graduate youth unemployment in Morocco and labour immigration can be explained by 'dual labour-market theory' (Piore 1979), whereby labour markets are characterised by a bifurcation between the formal sector consisting of secure, relatively well-paid jobs and a largely informal sector of unattractive, insecure jobs. Although this theory has originally been developed to explain low-skilled immigration to industrialised countries, it seems to increasingly apply to the Moroccan case as well. Lower-skilled work, such as in construction and in cleaning and other domestic work typically performed by uneducated, young rural women, is increasingly shunned by educated young Moroccans because of the poor working conditions and the low status it brings – they prefer to be not working than to be doing such jobs. With the internal labour supply for such jobs declining, employers have now started turning towards migrant workers, particularly from sub-Saharan Africa, to do such work.

Overall, internal migration has remained essential for the poorer parts of the Moroccan population in order to diversify livelihood sources away from agriculture, while urban middle classes have increasingly aspired to move abroad to access higher and more-stable incomes. Although Morocco's average GDP *per capita* growth stood at 2.9 per cent between 2000 and 2018 and general poverty levels have gone down, the GINI index, measuring income inequality

[4] https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2020/02/294060/unemployment-rate-in-morocco-highest-among-university-graduates/ (accessed 19 March 2021).

across the country, has remained remarkably stable at high levels of around 40 (see Figure 14).[5] The lack of socio-economic mobility, the high inequality and the growing mismatch between young Moroccans' rising occupational expectations and local job opportunities have contributed to increasing migration aspirations, particularly for the better-educated. This is an important insight: continued Moroccan emigration is not driven by poverty or destitution but, rather, by a lack of social mobility and the structural inequalities that have continued to frustrate young Moroccans seeking to fulfil their increased life ambitions and search for dignity and livelihood security at home.

Figure 14. Poverty and inequality levels in Morocco, 1984–2013



Source: World Bank (2019)

3.4 Technological change

Morocco's economic dynamics have been accompanied by important technological changes in infrastructure and communication over the past century, particularly in two periods: during colonisation and since the turn of the twenty-first century. Such technological shifts have been a central trigger of socio-cultural transformations, increasing the exposure of Moroccans to the outside world and new notions of the 'good life' and leading to fundamental changes in life aspirations that have also increased aspirations to migrate as a way to achieve newly desired lifestyles and income levels. Yet, the impact of improvements in infrastructure and communication on internal and international migration has been ambiguous: on the one hand, the improvements have facilitated people's access to services at home or to commutes between work and home. On the other hand, they have radically increased the exposure of rural populations to the outside world through media, travel and tourism and made it much easier and cheaper to relocate.

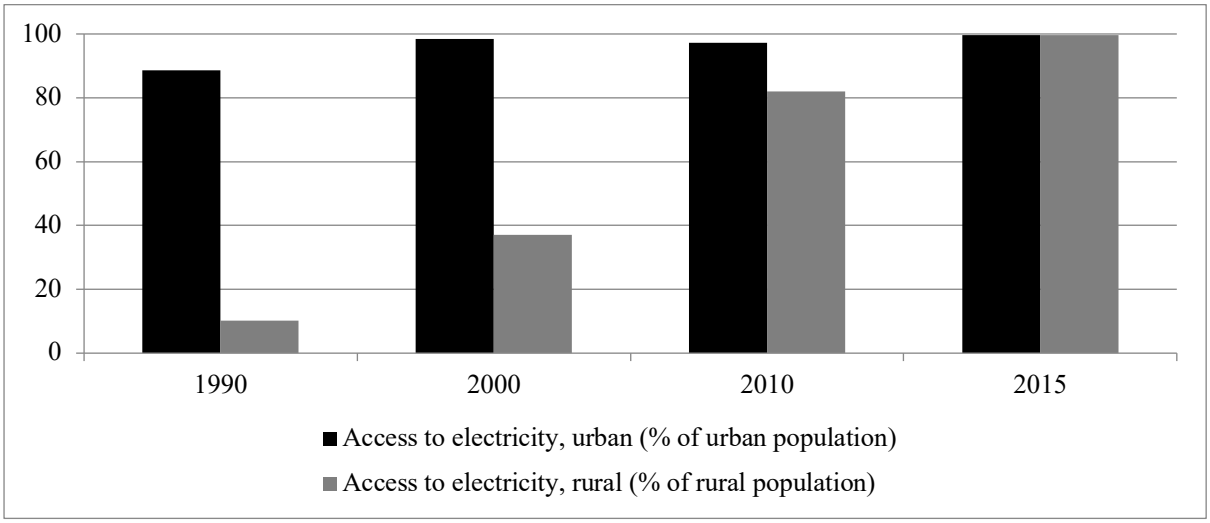
Colonisation – and its political goal to establish effective state control over the entire Moroccan territory – triggered the first wave of change with the construction of roads, railway, ports and mines as well the establishment of a national communication infrastructure through postal, telegraph and telephone services. After independence, the Moroccan state did little to further expand its infrastructure and public services, particularly in rural areas. From the 1960s

[5] This is significantly higher than GINI values in countries such as Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt and roughly comparable to income inequality levels in the US.

to the 1990s, Morocco underwent a period of relative technological stagnation. Besides their minimal access to transport infrastructure, most rural areas lacked basic public services such as electricity, drinking water, health clinics and primary schools until the early 1990s. In fact, during that period, technological improvements were initially often expanded to rural areas through remittances sent by migrants abroad (Lacroix 2005). As a consequence, Moroccans often engaged in short-distance migration to provincial towns to access public infrastructures (Giubilaro 1997, 45) and Moroccan emigrants also invested part of their remittances into moving their family members from the countryside to larger towns with better access to social services as part of the processes of micro-urbanisation described in Section 2.

Starting in the 1990s, infrastructure again became a central target of Morocco's economic development policy. This implied massive investments in paving rural roads, constructing a national highway system and implementing a rural electrification programme (PERG) (see Figure 15) which increased the share of rural populations having access to electricity from 10.1 to 99.6 per cent between 1990 and 2015. The liberalisation of Morocco's bus sector since the mid-1990s also radically improved the connectivity between cities, towns and their hinterlands at reasonable prices, offering alternatives to short-distance rural-to-urban or urban-to-urban migration. The current upgrading of the railway system and the high-speed train network (which is planned to be extended towards Agadir in the south and Oujda in the east) is likely to further speed up non-migratory mobility – such as commuting and tourism – within the country.

Figure 15. Access to electricity in rural and urban zones (in % of the population)



Source: World Bank (2019)

The expansion of low-cost airlines connecting an increasing number of places in Europe and Morocco has brought down costs, boosted tourism and facilitated holiday visits by Moroccan emigrants. This is reflected in the number of yearly tourist arrivals, which skyrocketed from 2.6 million in 1995 to 11.3 million in 2017. While, for decades, only foreigners were considered as 'real' tourists, from the 1990s onwards, Moroccan second-generation 'emigrants' started to behave more and more as persons 'on vacation', having largely adopted European norms, preferences and expectations about 'holidaying' (Berriane 1992, 1993). In 2000, the agencies compiling tourist statistics decided to include visits by Moroccan diaspora members in their figures, converting emigrants into tourists overnight: of the 10.2 million arrivals in 2005, 49.3 per cent were Moroccans living abroad (Berriane 2009). Tourism has been a crucial factor exposing more and more areas across Morocco to 'modern'

and European lifestyles and a diversity of consumption goods. Obviously, the material success and prestige which emigrants 'broadcast' during their visits to Morocco continue to fuel a strong desire to emigrate amongst new generations of ambitious Moroccans as part of a generalised 'culture of migration' (see Bakewell and Jolivet 2015).

This increase in terrestrial and air connectivity has been accompanied by a veritable 'media revolution' in the span of less than two decades. Rural access to news, information and ideas from abroad radically expanded with the rapid diffusion of satellite television from 1993 onwards, which meant the end of people's almost exclusive reliance on state media. Also, while access to a telephone line was often impossible and reserved for a small minority in the past, the liberalisation of the mobile phone market in 1999 triggered an extremely rapid diffusion of prepaid phones deep into rural areas: in 2000 there were 8.1 mobile phones per 100 inhabitants while, in 2017, this proportion had risen to 122.8, with 99.8 per cent of households having access to phones in both urban and rural areas.[6] Similarly, the mushrooming of internet cafés since the late 1990s and the expansion of 3G/4G coverage in recent years has led to a near-ubiquitous access to instant messaging and phone services on social-media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp, with voice messaging and similar systems making such technology increasingly accessible even to the illiterate and semi-illiterate.

This 'media' or 'communication revolution' has increased the possibilities for maintaining social relations with family members abroad and has opened a new window onto the outside world – a world free from political or social control – triggering a 'mobility of the mind' (see also Zelinsky 1971). This exposed Moroccans across the social classes and across the entire territory to higher living standards, alternative lifestyles and, importantly, higher expectations of governments in terms of their responsibility in delivering good education, health care and social security. This broadening of imaginary horizons has, in turn, lead to higher life aspirations and greater frustration about stagnation, corruption and inequality in Morocco. While such discontent can increase people's urge to protest, it may also convince them to 'vote with their feet' through migrating.

However, radically enhanced media access also contributed to better information about the real circumstances in potential destinations. Previously prospective migrants were strongly dependent on family and social networks to receive information about opportunities abroad, with migrants often concealing negative experiences. Nowadays, access to satellite television and social media allows new generations of literate youngsters to obtain much more diverse sets of information and become aware of both the opportunities and hardship involved in migrating (Aderghal 2014; Berriane 2014). This has, for instance, arguably decreased emigration aspirations since 2008, during the economic crisis in Europe, as information about hardship and unemployment in Europe also filtered back to Morocco (see Bakewell and Jolivet 2015). So, as with technological change in general, the specific influence of media access on emigration aspirations is theoretically ambiguous.

Rather than affecting the number of people on the move, this media revolution seems to have reshaped migration opportunities along class and education lines. For instance, it has reduced the costs of migrating, particularly for higher skilled Moroccans, who can now apply directly for jobs or register with universities abroad and thus have become less dependent on traditional intermediaries. However, the lower-skilled poor can benefit much less from such opportunities in view of the difficulty and significant costs required for obtaining a visa and their lack of low-cost migration opportunities provided by European industries and mines that recruited low-skilled workers directly from the Moroccan countryside in the 1960s and early 1970s. This highlights the ambiguous impact of technology in development processes: rather

[6] Yearly surveys of the *Agence Nationale de Réglementation des Télécommunications* or National Telecommunications Regulatory Agency (ANRT).

than ‘equalising’ access to migration opportunities, the media revolution in combination with skills-selective immigration policies in destination countries may have exacerbated such inequalities. This exposes the fundamentally mixed blessings of technological ‘progress’ on people’s capability to use migration as an avenue of upward socio-economic mobility.

3.5 Cultural life between modernity and tradition

Parallel to the role of transport, media and communication revolutions, the rapid expansion of access to modern education has played a central role in reshaping Moroccan lifestyles, consumption patterns and value systems, which has reconfigured social mobility dynamics, raised new expectations and prompted the emergence of an increasingly dissatisfied aspiring middle class. It has also increased the role of young people and women as vectors of socio-political change in Moroccan society. Internal and international migration has been an important consequence as well as an independent driver of these profound socio-cultural transformations. In general, increasing exposure to the outside world and to new notions of the ‘good life’ – be it in the city or abroad – has increased people’s mobility aspirations. Particularly in a context of economic stagnation and persistent pessimism about whether new life aspirations can be fulfilled in Morocco, these profound cultural transformations are a central factor in explaining the remarkable persistence of Moroccans’ migration aspirations over recent decades.

3.5.1 Women, migrants and educated youth as vectors of change

Since Morocco’s independence in 1956, the expansion of the civil service, education and the private sector generated wage labour and gradually replaced old social hierarchies based on ethnic, linguistic and religious affiliations. Partly in response to social unrest in the 1970s, the state launched a deliberate policy of social mobility through measures such as the massive recruitment of civil servants and housing programmes catering to this group (Tawfik and Lazrak 2005). This prompted the formation of a middle class and the emergence of new forms of internal migration through the circulation of teachers, police and other civil servants across the national territory. Until the end of the 1980s, massive job creation in an expanding state apparatus made education an attractive and viable avenue for upward social mobility and raised a general expectation amongst Moroccan parents and children that completing secondary and university education guaranteed lifetime employment and social security.

However, rapid increases in education levels – with net enrolment into primary education growing from around 60 per cent in the 1980s to over 90 per cent in 2010 and into secondary education from 40 to 65 per cent in the 2005–2018 period alone (World Bank 2019) – in combination with austerity-driven cutbacks in government expenditure, have increasingly obstructed such upward class mobility. Stable civil-service jobs were no longer guaranteed and, hence, education was no longer a secure path to upward mobility. Rising unemployment partly reflects a decline in employment creation in the public and private sectors as well as the substandard quality of public education, which is plagued by high drop-out rates, low achievement and low actual skill levels amongst graduates (see Ibourk and Amaghouss 2014; Sobhi et al. 2010). The substandard quality of public education has stimulated private education, which has been mushrooming – particularly in urban areas – and has contributed to a widening gap between the majority of people relying on public education and those who have the means to enrol their children in private schools (Conseil supérieur de l’Enseignement 2009). This growing disjuncture between fast-rising professional and material aspirations and professional opportunities in Morocco has also affected migration patterns: while emigration in the 1960s and 1970s was dominated by low-skilled workers from rural areas, since the 1990s

the Moroccan middle class has increasingly used emigration as a way to achieve upward socio-economic mobility in order to access better professional opportunities as well as different lifestyles.

The rapid expansion of access to modern education in combination with the lack of career opportunities has increased frustrations among the growing sections of the population eager to maintain or attain middle-class status. Rather than a homogeneous group, the middle classes and aspiring middle classes are in reality composed of several categories of people who differ significantly in their socioeconomic conditions – including teachers, traders, entrepreneurs, farmers and artisans – and their sociocultural orientations, ranging from cultural progressives to more-conservative elements and fundamentalist religious groups. In fact, large parts of these middle classes are adhering to rather conservative cultural norms and do not play an *avant-garde* role in fuelling processes of cultural and political modernisation. This latter role is, instead, played by the highest educated and relatively well-off parts of the Moroccan upper-middle classes and more particularly by women and youth within these groups, who have become key political actors in Morocco's public sphere, by asking for freedom and equality and challenging traditional value systems such as family dynamics and levels of religiosity.

While, during the Years of Lead, the Moroccan state used to be somewhat suspect towards the idea of citizens forming independent associations, from the mid-1980s onward, the state changed its attitude to civil society: between 2006 and 2016, the number of associations in Morocco mushroomed from 30,000 to 130,000 and the amount of public subsidies granted to civil-society associations exceeded 2 billion DH in 2014 (Tawfik and Lazrak 2005). On the one hand, the growth of civil-society activism reflects the partial liberalisation of Moroccan society following a reduction of internal political repression. On the other hand, the state started to consider the associative movement as a potential service-provider and driver of local development in a context of economic liberalisation and the austerity-driven defunding of government services.

Migrants have played a significant incubating role in the establishment of this associative movement. As mentioned earlier, during the Years of Lead, migrants living in Europe set up associations, labour unions and political movements. While the Moroccan government has feared and actively controlled political activism from abroad (de Haas 2007b), this could not prevent Moroccan migrants in Europe from establishing a dense associative fabric that has since moved 'back' to Morocco (Zibouh 2018). From the 1980s onwards, particularly in rural areas marked by high emigration, return migrants often drove the growth of the associative movements. Based on their social status, economic weight and experiences abroad, emigrants often assumed the role of local leaders in the establishment of businesses and associations to build facilities such as electric generators, collective wells, schools, mosques and roads, public roles that the state was not able or willing to assume at the time (Lacroix 2018). Although the active role of emigrants in rural development seems to have decreased in the last few years, particularly because of the state's recent effort to improve public infrastructure, emigration remains an important accelerating factor in Morocco's extraordinarily rapid cultural change, particularly through the new ideas, norms and lifestyles which the emigrants take back to Morocco.

Morocco's women's-rights movement also started to gain force in the 1980s, reflecting a more general liberalisation and growing adherence to human-rights principles amongst the population. These developments culminated in the 2004 reform of the family code (*Moudawana*) – which considerably improved women's position both within and outside marriage by granting them the right to file for divorce – as well as in the 2007 reform of the nationality code, which gave the children of Moroccan mothers the right to automatically acquire their mothers' citizenship (Cavatorta and Dalmasso 2009). Today, Morocco's

women's-rights movement is strongly present – in the street as well as on social media – and is putting topics on the agenda that were once taboo, such as sexual harassment, abortion, free and out-of-wedlock sex, equal inheritance between women and men or the status of single mothers. Although authorised and even partly subsidised by the state, the increasingly active associative movement struggling for democracy, equality and human rights is also challenging Morocco's state structures, which are still largely authoritarian.

3.5.2 Transformations of lifestyles and the value system

Rapid increases in education levels, a growing connectivity through transport and media links, political changes and exposure to the lifestyles of tourists and Moroccan emigrants have all fuelled quick changes in consumption patterns, value systems and cultural norms across Morocco's population. Firstly, particularly between the 1960s and 1980s, the demographic transition, rapid urbanisation and large-scale rural-to-urban migration implied radical changes in reproductive patterns linked to the socio-cultural emancipation of women. This has been particularly visible in the growing labour-market participation of Moroccan women, from under 10 per cent in 1960 to 25–30 per cent since the 1990s (World Bank 2019). Family structures have been changing, moving away from the extended-family model characterised by the authority of the male household head and towards nuclear family models. The number of single-person households, single-parent families and female-headed families has been increasing as well. In 2017, 18.4 per cent of household heads in Morocco were women, of whom 22.8 per cent lived on their own (HCP 2019). These structural changes have had repercussions on internal family dynamics: processes of individualisation and the growing autonomy of young adults undermine the traditional authority of the father. Marriage practices are also changing, with younger people having more control over the choice of their partner and the average age at first marriage increasing from 17.6 years in 1980 to 22.3 in 1992 and 23.9 in 2004 (UNDESA 2013). In 2011, the median age at first marriage of Moroccan woman rose further to 26.3 years (Ministère de la Santé 2012). However, this growing individualism does not imply complete independence as, in the absence of state-provided social security, the family remains the primary place of intergenerational socioeconomic solidarity, as is generally the case in many other Mediterranean societies.

Changes in value systems also relate to Moroccans' relationship to religion. While Islam continues to be the central component of Moroccan religious identity, religion today is at the centre of social and political debates, with some youth claiming the right to approach religion independently from traditional religious authorities, either by adhering to more-liberal or, alternatively, more-fundamentalist visions. Although the King's role as the 'Commander of the Faithful' remains a source of legitimacy of his authority and religious unity as well as political stability, since the 1990s traditional attachments to religion have been challenged by influences from the Middle East and the Gulf, influences such as Shi'ism, Wahabism and other forms of radicalism. This influence has spread through satellite channels, cassettes, books and the Internet. As a result, the religious fabric of Moroccan society has become more diverse, sparking intense debates between those advocating the need to Islamise all levels of society and those calling for the secularisation of the state.

Emigration and immigration have *both* played significant roles in these developments. While some Moroccan emigrant youth have aligned with the secularism of the European host countries, others adhere to traditional religious values or have joined more fundamentalist – and sometimes radical – movements abroad, either based in Europe or in the Middle East. In parallel, increased immigration from Africa and elsewhere has confronted Moroccan society with a new set of socio-cultural dynamics. In particular, the revitalisation of Christianism by migrants from West Africa raised the question of religious pluralism, which was no longer seen

as significant since the massive departure of Jews in the 1950s and 1960s reinforced a religious perception of Moroccan identity as being homogeneously Muslim.

Comparison of the World Value Surveys conducted in Morocco in 2001 (Wave 4) and 2011 (Wave 2011) highlights some of these shifts: parents increasingly value imagination and independence as important qualities in their children, while obedience and religious faith have become less important. Various surveys also show that young Moroccans give increasing importance to human-rights principles (Berriane, Aderghal and Jolivet 2012). The World Value Survey also gives insights into the fundamental shifts in Moroccan lifestyles over past decades: while, in 2001, 7.3 per cent of respondents were categorised as 'very materialist' on the post-materialist index, by 2011 this proportion had doubled to 15.8 per cent (Inglehart et. al. 2014). Household consumption surveys (HCP 2014) largely confirm these observations, showing a significant change in Moroccans' expenditure patterns manifested by a rapid increase of income spent on health care, leisure, education or tourism instead of basic necessities such as food.

The rapid spread of new ideas of the 'good life' and the concomitant increase in perceived needs for consumer goods have permeated the entire Moroccan society. Education and exposure to modern media and the lives of emigrants in Europe changed the new generations' expectations and ideas of social justice. Despite objective successes in poverty reduction and improvements in general living standards across Morocco, rapidly rising expectations in terms of lifestyles and material standards have therefore fuelled persistent feelings of relative deprivation and, thus, migration aspirations. Persistent high out-migration has thus not been despite of but, paradoxically, rather *because* of the extraordinarily rapid social transformations and development that Moroccan society has witnessed in its recent history.

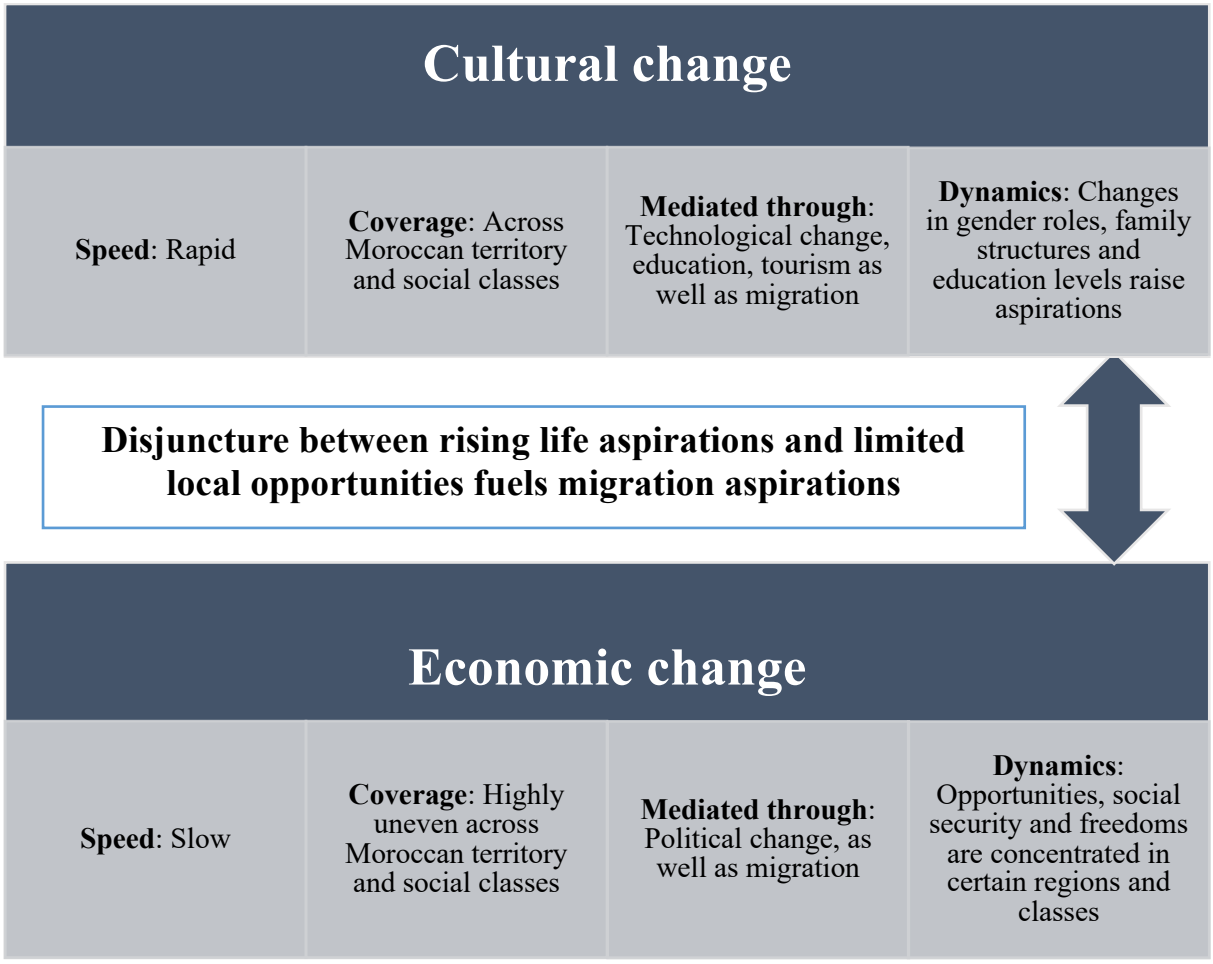
4. Conclusion

The analysis of Morocco's changing mobility complex in this paper has shown that the profound processes of social transformation which the country has witnessed over the past century have been associated with an increasing geographical reach and growing entanglement of different forms of migratory and non-migratory mobility. Rural out-migration has been the most important form of mobility in terms of its magnitude as well as its significance for the profound rural-urban transformations which Moroccan society has witnessed. In recent decades, rural-to-urban migration has slowed down, coinciding with a process of 'polarisation reversal' leading to the concentration of urban growth in smaller and medium-sized towns. This latter development has been facilitated by an enhanced transport infrastructure enabling people to commute between home and work over increasingly long distances. At the same time, emigration has continued at high levels and has further diversified in terms of the socioeconomic and educational background of emigrants as well as migrants' origin regions and destination countries. Parallel to this, in recent decades Morocco has increasingly become a destination for immigrants from Africa and Europe.

These changing migration patterns seem largely consistent with mobility transition theory, which predicts that all forms of migration initially increase when countries transition from low-income, high-fertility to high-income, low-fertility societies. These theories also suggest that, given its current levels of economic development and the advanced state of its demographic transition, Morocco could at the tipping point of a migration transition, beyond which we would expect emigration levels to decrease following patterns that have occurred in upper-middle-income countries such as Mexico and Turkey. However, the rebounding of Moroccan emigration after the post-2008 financial crisis does seem to contradict these expectations and to challenge deterministic, teleological applications of mobility transition theories.

To explain the paradox of continued emigration despite significant improvements in overall living standards and significant poverty reduction in Morocco, the social transformation perspective provides a more comprehensive understanding of migration beyond reductionist explanations focusing on a limited number of income or demographic factors. Shifts in Morocco's mobility complex have indeed occurred not only in the context of a demographic transition but also as constituent parts of broader processes of post-colonial state formation and monarchical consolidation and economic restructuring as well as an accelerated cultural modernisation alongside rapid educational expansion, infrastructure development, a veritable media revolution and the (largely unfulfilled) promise of political reform and liberalisation since the 1990s. A social transformation perspective enables us to understand the role of structural inequalities in shaping migration patterns. Indeed, since the 1990s, Moroccan society experienced a growing disjuncture between (1) a profound and rapid cultural change that has modified ideas of the 'good life' in terms of material aspirations and lifestyles among Moroccans across social classes and (2) economic development which has remained sluggish, partial and highly unequal, as the benefits of growth have mainly accrued certain privileged classes primarily living in Morocco's coastal areas (see Figure 16). This growing gap between aspirations and opportunities amongst Morocco's new generations of better-educated and well-informed youth explains the paradoxical coexistence of continuously high emigration, increasing immigration and a slowing-down of rural-to-urban migration.

Figure 16. The dislocation between cultural and economic change as a central driver of Moroccan migration



As we have shown, Moroccan society has undergone rapid and profound cultural change through a radical opening up towards the outside world, increasing material aspirations and a diffusion of urban lifestyles seen as 'modern' across the entire country. This change was initially triggered forcefully through colonisation but it has continued at even greater speed after independence due to expanding education, demographic change and increasing connectivity, further facilitated by Morocco's geographical proximity to Europe. Large-scale emigration to Europe from the 1960s played a major role in accelerating and intensifying this process of cultural change. In particular, since the 1990s, communication and infrastructure revolutions combined with continued emigration and increasing tourism have further enhanced access to new ideas and information and exposed Moroccans to higher living standards and alternative lifestyles, triggering what Zelinsky (1971) characterised as a 'mobility of the mind'. These processes have also fuelled mounting expectations among young generations with regards to decent work, social security, lifestyles and political freedom, as well as family structures, gender roles and understandings of what constitutes 'the good life'. This has increased overall life (and migratory) aspirations across Moroccan society.

This general, society-wide, aspirational change, however, contrasts with Morocco's erratic and geographically fragmented economic growth over past decades and the limited opportunities for stable employment, social security and durable improvements of living standards for the large majority of the Moroccan population. Despite astounding improvements in terms of infrastructure, poverty reduction and literacy, economic progress has been highly unequal, deepening the gulf between Morocco's economic heartland along the western coast and the rural hinterland, as well as between elites and the new and aspiring middle classes. Particularly the educated youth non-elite background is victim of this uneven economic development: since the 1990s, government budget cuts and a rapid increase in the number of university graduates have reduced their access to government and private-sector jobs that guaranteed upward social mobility and economic security in the past, leading to a fast growth in graduate and youth unemployment.

At the same time and particularly since the accession to the throne of Mohammed VI in 1999, the incipient political opening up and increase in terms of freedom of expression and women's and minority rights has triggered hope across Moroccan society that political and economic improvements would further materialise in real social mobility and democratisation. However, entrenched corruption, authoritarianism and the mediocre and sometimes even deteriorating quality of education and public health care – contrasting with the elite's access to private education and good health care – has increasingly fuelled widespread frustration with politics and a loss of hope for a better future. This has materialised in rising civil-society activism and political protests over the 2010s. Despite undeniable progress in literacy and school enrolment, Morocco's development approach is still suffering from various weaknesses, such as serious governance problems in a decentralised system, underperforming education and training systems, corruption and widening regional and social disparities.

This unsatisfactory situation prompted the King to launch the elaboration of a new development strategy in 2020. However, in the short and medium term, international migration will probably still remain an important strategy for aspiring young people wishing to access opportunities, social security, other lifestyles and more personal freedom. It is this disjuncture between fast-rising aspirations and limited local opportunities for socioeconomic mobility – between rapid, profound cultural (and related demographic and technological) changes across Moroccan society and the slow, uneven economic change structured by political priorities and benefitting only certain social classes and urban populations – that explains Morocco's mobility patterns, particularly the continuation of high levels of emigration alongside increasingly immigration. This highlights the complex, interlocking social mechanisms underpinning the mobility transition and explains the paradox of development-fuelled

emigration hikes. As long as development-driven increases in life aspirations continue to outpace improvement in local opportunities, this will result in increasing aspirations to migrate. At the same time, the developments causing Moroccans to leave also increasingly attract immigrants from other – poorer as well as wealthier – countries into particular economic sectors or regions, particularly for jobs for which local workers lack the skills or are unwilling to do.

This paper has also highlighted the theoretical need to see migration not only as a consequence of but also as a major driver of social transformation in its own right through various feedback mechanisms. The Moroccan case suggests that the following three feedback dynamics are particularly noteworthy. First, the socioeconomic effects of international migration have accelerated a general process of 'micro-urbanisation' through the growth of migrant boomtowns in high-emigration regions within Morocco: on the one hand, the infusion of remittances into home communities has accelerated the urbanisation of rural space through the construction of houses and investment in businesses and infrastructure in smaller and larger towns. On the other hand, remittances also facilitated the internal migration of family members within regions of origin from villages to rural 'migrant boomtowns' with better access to public services and labour-market opportunities. Remittance-fuelled economic growth and employment opportunities in such regions has also stimulated internal migration from poorer, more peripheral areas to these migrant boomtowns.

Second, the activism of Moroccan migrant workers abroad – and their exposure to and experience of political freedom and socio-economic rights in Europe – has encouraged and accelerated political mobilisation in Morocco, with emigrants playing a key role in initiating or supporting the establishment of civil-society associations back home which advocate in favour of the freedom of expression, women's rights or the rights of *Tamazight*-speaking populations. Through the transfer of ideas and ideals from abroad, which Levitt (1998) called 'social remittances', over half a century of large-scale emigration to Europe has also arguably contributed to increased expectations about the social security, education and health care which people expect the state to deliver as part of what is increasingly perceived as set of fundamental human rights. In other words, emigration has radically changed the mindsets of people and their expectations of what governments should provide.

Third, innovations in infrastructure and communications have led to a growing physical and virtual connectivity between Moroccans living in cities or abroad and their relatives in rural areas. This has fostered a 'mobility of the mind' (Zelinsky 1971), with emigration directly or indirectly challenging long-established cultural norms and traditional value systems. For instance, emigration has accelerated the demographic transition back in Moroccan origin regions through the transnational transfer and diffusion of 'modern' cultural norms around family size and gender roles (Fargues 2011). Such 'social remittances' have also contributed to the rapid demise of extended family models, to be replaced by nuclear families. Also, the spread of urban mentalities conveyed by the school, the market and the television have boosted the emergence of newly perceived needs and, especially, the aspiration for a new mode of life, seen as 'modern'. In this sense, emigration and repeated holiday visits by emigrants have contributed to the dissemination of perceived needs for leisure and internal tourism amongst the Moroccan working and middle classes.

Ultimately, this highlights that, in order to understand the causal mechanisms underlying the mobility transition and the unique ways in which these are manifested in different societies, we need to pay attention to:

- the various ways in which particular constellations of economic, cultural, political, technological and demographic changes, as well as their specific sequencing and

disjunctures, shape the entire mobility complex, consisting of interlocking, interrelated forms of internal and international migratory and non-migratory mobility; and

- the ways in which the resulting migration dynamics reciprocally feed back into broader societal transformations of which they are a constituent part.

While social transformations the most often result from incremental, piecemeal, almost unnoticeable small changes that occur progressively over a longer time-period, crises can create moments of historical juncture that seem to trigger radical societal shifts. However, a social transformation perspective also helps us to not necessarily misinterpret a crisis as a fundamental change. Often, a crisis attenuates, accentuates or accelerates underlying fundamental processes of political, economic and cultural change that were already happening rather than being their cause. For instance, the Covid-19 pandemic dramatically impacted on social life and global mobility in 2020 – with a sharp decline in labour migration, the collapse of international travel and a shift towards home replacing commuting.

However, experiences with past crises show that we must be careful not to overestimate their power to trigger fundamental societal changes. Neither the 1973 oil shock, nor the introduction of visas by Spain and Italy in 1991–1992, nor the 2008 global economic recession led to a structural, long-term decrease in emigration from Morocco because fundamental drivers of migration, such as European labour demand and the growing gap between rising aspirations and stagnant opportunities in Morocco, remained in place. In this vein, the resurgence of undocumented sea crossings to Spain in the final few months of 2020 suggests that the crisis has not altered the fundamental drivers of Moroccan emigration; rather, it may have highlighted the structural vulnerabilities and weaknesses of Morocco's economy as well as its health-care and social-security systems. It is therefore dangerous to misinterpret short-term declines in emigration as heralding a long-term decline as part of a fundamental migration transition. It may well be a momentary dip in a long-term plateau of consistently high out-migration. Only the future will tell us whether current developments and changes in government policies will herald a fundamental transformation of societies and thus migration dynamics in Morocco and elsewhere or whether they are just a temporary hiccup in a larger trend of continued globalisation and connectivity.

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