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The contrasting cases of Morocco and Tunisia

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The tools of the trade

ABSTRACT

“Methodology is our chart to navigate the social world while methods are the tools of our trade” (Castles 2012: 16). Based on the theoretical underpinning and conceptual aims outlined in Chapter 2, this chapter discusses the methodological pillars of this research. First, it presents the comprehensive approach to policymaking that guides the investigation of immigration politics in Morocco and Tunisia, as well as the case selection rationale that underlies it. As I show, the two case studies allow an in-depth paired comparison across three levels: within Morocco and Tunisia over time, across both countries, and between the two case studies and the existing literature on immigration politics. Second, the chapter provides insights into my fieldwork and data analysis. As primary and secondary sources are the backbone of my analysis, I spend some time to outline how I selected and interviewed nearly 150 key informants in Morocco and Tunisia, what archives I explored and how I coded my data. The chapter ends with a reflection on the political contexts within which I conducted my fieldwork, as well as on the limits of reconstructing policy processes and on the potential biases related to my positionality as a young, European, White woman.

1 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.1 A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO IMMIGRATION POLITICS

My analysis of immigration politics in Morocco and Tunisia draws on three complementary research traditions in political sociology and public policy introduced in Chapter 2: the state-in-society approach, historical institutionalism, and the '3i' approach. This comprehensive approach has distinct methodological implications for how I conducted my fieldwork and data collection (see Section 2).

First, the 'state-in-society' approach (Migdal 1988; 2001; Migdal and Schlichte 2005) provided the backbone for conceptualizing the Moroccan and Tunisian state, as well as its imbrications with civil society and the international sphere. This approach had a two-fold added value for my research: First, it does not consider state (trans)formation as a historically or geographically circumscribed process, but as a phenomenon that is constantly ongoing all over the world (see also Tilly 1975). It thereby transcends dominant divisions between 'Western' or 'non-Western' state conceptions. Second, it argues that politics (the state) is inherently embedded in society in the same way as (Polanyi 2001 [1944]) maintained that economics (the market) is embedded in society, and not the other way around. This integrated conception of state and society overcomes prevalent distinctions between state-centred and society-centred visions of political processes, and allows conceiving of immigration policies as a reflection of deeper socio-political transformations. Methodologically, the state-in-society approach has invited me to pay attention to the symbolic aspects and internal workings of the Moroccan and Tunisian state, and to explicitly interrogate not only state-society interactions during my interviews, but also dynamics within the state and among societal actors.

Second, historical institutionalism (Hall and Taylor 1996; Pierson and Skocpol 2002; Skocpol 1985; Thelen 1999) has informed my understanding of political change in Morocco and Tunisia by highlighting their historicity and the centrality of institutional dynamics. It is based on three main assumptions: (1) the state is not a monolithic identity, but fragmented into different actors with potentially diverging interests; (2) institutions are not static, but prone to both radical and incremental change from within or outside; and (3) institutions and policy processes are socially embedded and historically conditioned, therefore displaying 'path dependency' dynamics (Collier and Collier 1991; Pierson 2000). As suggested by Pierson and Skocpol (2002), historical institutionalism is an inductive research strategy that attempts to develop middle-range, contextualized theories on dynamics of socio-political change based on the in-depth empirical analysis of historical processes and institutional interactions. Methodologically, this meant that although this thesis is not historical per se, it integrates, whenever possible, the historical depth, roots, and origins of contemporary developments (Bayart 1996; Migdal and Schlichte 2005). It was therefore important for me to gather as much archival and interview data on historical processes and long-

term developments as possible, and to not be caught up in today's interpretation of historical events, which are inevitably tainted – in Morocco by the 2013 immigration reform, in Tunisia by the 2011 revolution. Understanding continuities has therefore been as important as trying to explain change in immigration policies. Thus, as I will show, the historical trajectory of Moroccan and Tunisian state formation continue to shape responses to immigration up to today.

Third, to understand Moroccan and Tunisian immigration policymaking dynamics, I look at shifts in the constellations of interests, ideas, and institutions at play (for a detailed explanation of the '3i approach', see: Hall 1997; Palier and Surel 2005). Methodologically, this implied that instead of focusing on one specific civil society, state, or international actor within the policy process, I look at the entire cartography of actors involved in immigration policymaking and explore how dynamics among them shape policy processes and outcomes. This breadth of coverage in terms of actors inevitably entailed compromising on the depth with which each actor, its institutional structures, interest constellations, and structuring ideas, could be discussed. In return, the thesis' focus on inter-actor dynamics provided fruitful ground to develop hypotheses on the role of the polity in immigration policy processes, and to open up perspectives for more consolidated theory development in the future.

1.2 THE COMPARATIVE METHOD: A NOTE ON CASE SELECTION

Because of the theoretical aims of my thesis, I have opted for a comparative research design. Much has been written about the comparative and case study methods, their analytical powers and pitfalls. While some scholars argue that small-N comparisons cannot produce generalizable insights (see for instance: King, Keohane and Verba 1994; Lijphart 1971), others have underlined the potential of 'critical' case studies for theory-building, in particular for generating hypotheses in areas lacking theorization (Flyvbjerg 2006; Hall 2006; Stake 1995). In migration research, large-N comparisons of policymaking in 'Western liberal democracies' (Geddes 2003; Hammar 1984; Joppke 1998a; Messina 2007; Penninx and Roosblad 2000; Timmer and Williams 1998) have developed alongside single or small-N case studies (Bonjour 2011; Cook-Martín 2008; Düvell 2012; Garcés-Masareñas 2012; Klotz 2012). Together, the comparative method "has resulted in some of the most innovative scholarship in the field" (Brettell and Hollifield 2014: 18-19).

This thesis adopts the methodology of a 'paired comparison' (Tarrow 2010) in which the independent variable is the transformation of the polity in terms of state formation trajectories and political regime dynamics, and the dependent variable is immigration policymaking.³⁵ I selected Morocco and Tunisia for two reasons: (1) the

³⁵ Also called 'controlled case comparison' (George and Bennet 2005) or 'matching cases' (Gerring 2007), it has the advantage of providing intimacy of analysis similar to a single case study, but with more analytical power to understand a particular outcome or mechanism. To the question 'why two', Tarrow (2010: 246)

variety of configurations between independent and dependent variable they showcase, namely liberal and restrictive immigration reforms, as well as laissez-faire, informal and conscious non-policies within a range of political systems (monarchy, presidential one-party system, young democracy); and (2) the similarities of Morocco and Tunisia with regards to demographic trends, human and economic development, geographical position, and (un)employment levels (see Annex 2) that allowed me to isolate as much as possible the effect of the (changing) polity on immigration policy.³⁶

Morocco and Tunisia thus allow the examination of political regime dynamics in immigration policymaking at three levels: (1) over time, through the longitudinal, within-country analyses of Moroccan and Tunisian policymaking; (2) across my two cases studies, i.e. within the world not usually captured by existing theories; and (3) across space by comparing my two case studies with 'shadow cases' from the literature on immigration policymaking in liberal democracies. Each level of analysis has a distinctive added value.

First, the within-country comparison improves the external validity of my conclusions on the politics of immigration in Morocco and Tunisia, as my period of observation covers different phases of immigration (de)politicization and policymaking against the backdrop of regime change and regime consolidation. Second, the fact that both countries are similar with regards to contextual variables (see Annex 2) improves both the internal and external validity of my conclusions on how political regimes shape immigration politics, as I compare immigration politics in the context of changing political regime dynamics within Morocco and Tunisia over time, as well as between Morocco and Tunisia after 2011. Thirdly, to draw broader conclusions on the role of the polity on immigration policymaking across the democratic/autocratic divide, I privilege knowledge of 'different' cases over a 'better' comparative set-up. Indeed, one could argue that a comparative design between either Morocco or Tunisia and a 'Western liberal democratic' country would have been more relevant for my research question. Yet, there is already a wealth of studies on the politics of immigration policy in 'Western liberal democracies' that I will use as shadow cases (see Chapter 2). The added value of my research is precisely to get insights into the variety of policymaking outside of this sphere.

answers: "the move from single-case to paired comparison offers a balanced combination of descriptive depth and analytical challenge that progressively declines as more cases are added. The moment we go from one case to two, I would argue, we are in the realm of hypothesis-generating comparative study, while also enabling ourselves to examine how common mechanisms are influenced by the particular features of each case; as we increase the number of cases, however, the leverage afforded by paired comparison becomes weaker, because the number of unmeasured variables increases."

³⁶ It would have been interesting to also include Algeria in this comparison, as immigration is subject to negative politicization (compared to depoliticization in Tunisia and positive politicization in Morocco) and state formation and political dynamics - structured by a socialist republic after independence in the 1960s, a bloody civil war opposing Algerian security services and Islamists in the 1990s, as well as a military regime since then that is challenged by the country's youth at the time of writing (April 2019) - differ from those in Morocco and Tunisia. However, to guarantee the quality of each in-depth case study, and acknowledging that fieldwork access to civil servants and civil society representatives would have been even more difficult in the Algerian context, I focused on the paired comparison between Morocco and Tunisia.

Of course, Morocco and Tunisia are not representative of the spectrum of polities that make up the world outside ‘Western liberal democracies’. In the heterogeneous world of non-democracies, Morocco and Tunisia – a monarchy and a presidential one-party regime that has gone through a democratic transition – are not situated at the most repressive end of the political regime spectrum compared to countries such as North Korea, Saudi Arabia or Eritrea. There is a practical reason for this: access to the field. In strongly authoritarian systems, gaining access to policymakers and documents would have been impossible, especially when dealing with a ‘hot’ topic like immigration that is linked to issues of national security and identity (see also Section 3.1). This selection bias does not, however, diminish the value of insights gained from the Moroccan and Tunisian cases. On the contrary, given that most countries in the world are neither absolute autocracies nor consolidated liberal democracies, it is vital to gain a better understanding of what shapes immigration policymaking across the democracy-autocracy spectrum.

2 FIELDWORK, DATA COLLECTION, AND ANALYSIS METHODS

To reconstruct immigration policymaking and understand the drivers and dynamics of Moroccan and Tunisian immigration politics, I relied on a rigorous combination of legal policy analysis, archival research in national and university libraries, and elite interviews with representatives of state, civil society and international actors. I carried out my fieldwork in Morocco and Tunisia in four trips between September 2016 and June 2017, alternating between both field sites to integrate elements of comparison and abductive reasoning into the research process. In addition, I revisited the interview material from the six-week fieldwork on Moroccan immigration policies I conducted in Rabat in November 2011 and January 2012 for my Master thesis (Natter 2014b). During all fieldwork stays, I was affiliated as a visiting researcher at the *Centre Jacques Berque* (CJB) in Rabat and the *Institut de recherche sur le Maghreb contemporain* (IRMC) in Tunis, which facilitated my interaction with local researchers and other visiting PhD students, and allowed me to consult the institutes’ libraries.

2.1 SELECTING RESPONDENTS

To identify and select respondents, I followed a two-step procedure that combined theoretical and snowball sampling methods, as is common in public policy analysis (Cohen 1999; Kingdon 2003; Tansey 2007). Theoretical sampling (also called purposive sampling) involves identifying respondents based on their expected involvement in the political process according to policymaking theories. In a first step, I therefore established my sampling frame, i.e. the universe of potential respondents. Based on academic and media articles, I drew up a list of institutions that were mentioned in

relation to immigration in Morocco and Tunisia, such as specific ministerial directorates, public actors, NGOs, migrant organizations, or international organizations. I then complemented this list with actors whose involvement I would expect based on immigration policymaking theories, such as employer organizations, labour unions, Ministries of Employment or Higher Education, as well as courts. Using journalistic techniques, for instance by screening lists of participants at relevant events or institutional organigrams accessible online, I identified the names and contact details of potential respondents and contacted them.

In a second step, I expanded my list of respondents through snowball sampling. At the end of each interview, I asked for further contact details, either from people who were on my initial list but from whom I had no personal contact details, or from people who were mentioned during the interview and whom I had not expected to play a role in immigration politics. After my first fieldwork stay and data analysis, and to avoid the potential selection bias introduced by snowball sampling, I restarted this two-step process, updating my initial list of institutions and potential respondents through theoretical sampling to ensure I covered a diversity of entry points into the field. This allowed a back and forth between empirical findings and theoretical expectations in the respondent selection consistent with the abductive analysis method (see Section 2.4).

Ultimately, I interviewed five categories of actors (for a comprehensive list, see Annex 1.1):

- High-level civil servants³⁷ centrally involved in immigration policymaking within Moroccan and Tunisian national state institutions (such as Ministries of Interior, Foreign Affairs, Migration, and Social Affairs, as well as the National Council on Human Rights (CNDH) and Interministerial Delegation for Human Rights (DIDH) in Morocco). For instance, I had the opportunity to interview all three Tunisian State Secretaries on Migration between 2011 and 2017, as well as the President of the CNDH in Morocco.
- Civil servants of state institutions who are less centrally involved in the formulation of immigration policy but key for its implementation (such as the Parliament, Ministries of Labour, Justice, Higher Education, or Health, as well as local administrations in Rabat and Tunis). It proved highly valuable to talk to civil servants working on issues related to immigration, as well as at the local level, as their discourse was less constrained.
- Civil society representatives of migrant-led collectives or organizations, local NGOs working with or on migrants, labour unions, as well as international NGOs operating in Morocco and Tunisia.

³⁷ To avoid any subsequent confusion, I will use the term (high-level) bureaucrat, decision-maker, policymaker, or civil servant interchangeably throughout the thesis. The term thus encompasses both people working in administration and government.

- International actors, such as representatives of the IOM, the International Labour Organization (ILO), UNHCR, and the local EU delegations.
- Academics and journalists specialized in migration and political change in Morocco and Tunisia. It is important to note that Moroccan and Tunisian migration researchers are often 'militant researchers'; many work at university while being simultaneously engaged in human rights or migrants rights organizations. Thus, the distinction between research and activism is often blurred in practice.

To investigate changes over time, and in particular to better understand immigration politics under Ben Ali's authoritarian regime in Tunisia, I interviewed not only people involved in immigration politics in Morocco and Tunisia at the time of the interview, but also former migrant activists, employees of international organizations, and retired bureaucrats. For this, as well as to reach higher level bureaucrats and migrant community leaders who for various reasons did not widely share their contact details, snowball sampling proved particularly useful.

The relatively low number of interviews I conducted with representatives of courts, businesses or political parties might seem surprising given the central role they play in mainstream immigration policy theories. As will become clear throughout the case studies, this in part reflects their limited empirical importance and the fact that regime dynamics matter in defining which non-state actors are of concern to immigration policymaking. This has an important methodological implication, namely that to understand the politics of immigration policy in more autocratic contexts, researchers need to shift focus from courts and businesses to other non-state actors, in particular civil society.

Finally, I consciously decided not to interview immigrants for two reasons: First, the added value of my thesis is to understand immigration politics in Morocco and Tunisia, and thus I focused on those actors who contributed to the politicization or policy process. Migrants were only interviewed as politicized actors, if they were actively mobilized in a CSO. Second, it would not have been feasible in terms of time and capacity to conduct in-depth, representative interviews with immigrants in addition to those mentioned above. To complement my study with the migrant perspective, I draw on the excellent work of other researchers who have devoted their efforts entirely to investigate the profiles, histories, living conditions, and aspirations of immigrants in Morocco and Tunisia (see for instance: AMERM 2008; Berriane 2015b; Boubakri and Mazzella 2005; Cherti and Grant 2013; Cimade and AFVIC-PFM 2004; Collyer 2006; Garelli and Tazzioli 2017; Mourji et al. 2016; Pellicani and Palmisano 2002; TAT 2016).

2.2 DOING INTERVIEWS

Out of the 252 people I contacted throughout all field trips (including my earlier field-work in 2011/2012), over 70% responded positively, but not all positive responses led to interviews. Ultimately, I conducted 144 interviews – 87 in Morocco and 57 in Tunisia. Across both countries the interviewees consisted of one third state respondents, one third civil society respondents, and one third international or academic respondents. Interviews lasted on average 71 minutes, ranging from half an hour to nearly three hours. All interviews were conducted in French, except if the respondent preferred to talk in English or German. For security reasons, only half of the interviews were recorded and transcribed (see Section 3.1). During non-recorded interviews, I took extensive notes and transcribed them immediately afterwards.

In addition to the formal interviews, I attended a number of workshops, seminars, and roundtables on immigration and immigration policy in Rabat and Tunis (see Annex 1.3). These allowed me to observe inter-actor dynamics, to record public discourses, and to conduct 48 additional informal conversations with a diverse range of respondents. Table 4 and Table 5 present the main characteristics of the interviews and respondents.

TABLE 4: Number of interviews by type of respondent and country

	Morocco 2011-2012	Morocco 2016-2017	Tunisia 2016-2017	Total
State institutions and political actors	12	20	18	50
Civil society (national, international and migrant-based)	6	17	22	45
International organizations and funding agencies	8	13	11	32
Academia and media	8	3	6	17
Total	34	53	57	144

TABLE 5: Interview and respondent statistics

	Morocco 2011/2012	Morocco 2016/2017	Tunisia 2016/2017	Total
Number of interviews*	34	53	57	144
Number of respondents*	33	59	57	149
Average length of interview	0h50	1h15	1h20	1h11
Minimum and maximum length of interview	0h30 - 1h30	0h30 - 2h45	0h30 - 2h30	0h30 - 2h45
Number of additional informal conversations	7	21	20	48
Average length of informal conversations	n.d.	0h50	1h25	1h07
Minimum and maximum length of informal conversation	n.d.	0h10 - 2h00	0h15 - 4h00	0h10 - 4h00

* The numbers differ, as I interviewed respondents several times or interviewed two respondents simultaneously.

Most of my interviews classify as ‘elite’ or ‘expert’ interviews (Bongrand and Laborier 2005; Cohen 1999; Dexter 1970; Harvey 2011; Peabody et al. 1990). These interviews require different preparation and present different challenges than those with vulnerable groups or in the context of a survey. In particular, the interviewer/interviewee hierarchy is inverted: The generally high educational level and specific expertise of the respondent makes him/her likely to dominate the interview, in contrast to interview situations in which the researcher is considered holder of the expertise.³⁸ Thus, prior knowledge of the respondents’ organizational surroundings and of his/her role in the policy process was imperative for the interview to succeed. Only informed, targeted questions on specific aspects of the policy process could pierce through official speech and reveal valuable information. At the same time, I was careful not to be too inquisitive and to respect the hierarchy and formal codes of politeness – which was sometimes challenging when respondents tried to move the conversation away from my topic of interest.

The semi-structured interviews focused on five issues: (1) the respondents’ personal trajectory and professional responsibilities, (2) the vision and role of their institution/association on immigration, (3) their position and interactions with other actors in the field of immigration, (4) their assessment of the major developments in immigration and immigration policy over the past two decades, as well as (5) their assessment of the past, current, and future challenges in Moroccan/Tunisian politics and society more generally. Annex 1.2 presents the set of core questions and

38 This does not only hold for interviews with civil servants, but also for interviews with migrant representatives. Although their educational levels were very diverse, the fact that most had been politically or socially engaged in Morocco and Tunisia for years made them authoritative on immigration issues.

an insight into the overall interview structure. In practice, however, the number and content of questions was adapted to each respondent's profile and the specific atmosphere during the interview.

In addition, constant observation provided additional valuable insights: Respondents' non-verbal reactions, moments of hesitation or forced assertiveness reflected their confidence to answer my questions and to share their knowledge or ignorance. For state respondents in particular, the formalities preceding the interview, the number of secretaries I passed, and the types of papers on respondents' desks gave insights into their status within the institution or organization, as well as their interests, and could provide the basis for an icebreaker. As Bongrand and Laborier (2005: 106) write: "Entering an administrative building to find an interlocutor can be as informative as the interview itself."

Given my consideration of anonymity (see Section 3.1), I generally refrain from revealing the identity of my respondents (names, job description, institutional affiliation) throughout the thesis. Instead, I identify respondents through a number code – the code M16-I1, for example, refers to interview 1 in my 2016 Morocco fieldwork. I only reveal the respondents' position within the cartography of actors when statements were made during public events or when the respondents' identity is imperative to contextualize the quote and does not in any way compromise his/her security. In these cases, however, I retract the number code to avoid cross-referencing.

2.3 ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, I conducted online, library, and archival research.³⁹ First and foremost, I collected primary sources such as policy documents and institutional reports, minutes of parliamentary discussions and other institutional meetings, as well as action plans and reports of state institutions and local non-governmental organizations. I went through the entire online legal databases gathering laws and decrees in Morocco and Tunisia since 1956⁴⁰ to build a database on immigration policy change over the 20th and 21st century. Where primary sources were not available, I relied on press releases and other secondary sources. I also explicitly asked respondents for access to primary documents that I knew existed but were not publicly available – sometimes with success.

Second, I systematically recorded statistics on immigration to Morocco and Tunisia that were scattered across a diversity of sources (academic publications, NGO reports, media articles, public and non-public statistics from the ministries, estimations by international organizations etc.) and compared them.

39 I visited the Moroccan parliamentary archives and the national library in January 2012 and October 2016, as well as the Tunisian national archives and the research library of the IRMC in November 2016.

40 All official bulletins since 1956 are available online at the homepages of the Moroccan General Secretariat of the Government (<http://www.sgg.gov.ma/Legislation/BulletinsOfficiels.aspx>) and the Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education and Research (<http://www.cnudst.rnrt.tn/wwwisis/jort.06/form.htm>).

Third, I thoroughly screened national media for articles on immigration, such as *Le Matin*, *TelQuel*, and *Yabiladi in Morocco*⁴¹, as well as *BusinessNews*, *Inkifada*, and *Nawaat* in Tunisia,⁴² in addition to *HuffPostMaghreb* and *Jeune Afrique* for regional coverage. The screening covered the entire period of these outlets' online archives, generally starting between 2005 and 2008, and going up until the end of 2018. Because a systematic media analysis was beyond the scope of this thesis, I mainly used media sources to cross-check information from interviews and to gather information on events and developments that did not come up during my fieldwork.⁴³

Finally, I collected secondary literature during my fieldwork, such as books and doctoral theses from Moroccan and Tunisian scholars, reports from associations and local institutions on immigration and immigration policy. In addition, a one-week visit to the research library of SciencesPo Paris in July 2016 allowed me to access the major part of (French) academic writing on histories of state formation, national identity, political transformations, and migration regimes and patterns in Morocco and Tunisia. The historical and descriptive depth of these sources allowed me to better evaluate the motives of different actors in policymaking, and to contextualize the information I gathered through interviews and primary documents.

2.4 DATA ANALYSIS: TRIANGULATION AND ABDUCTIVE REASONING

The interviews and archival research provide the backbone of the thesis. Next to the systematic analysis of the interview material and primary sources, I used the collected data to create four outputs: (1) a database on immigration policy change and continuity in Morocco and Tunisia since the early 1900s and up until the end of 2018 (see Annex 3.1 and 3.2); (2) a compilation of statistics on the entry and stay of foreigners – their profiles, expulsions or integration referenced in official documents, interviews and secondary sources; (3) a database on socio-economic and political developments related to migration and state formation in Morocco and Tunisia more generally, to identify connections between different developments; (4) and 'cartographies of actors' that schematically map the immigration policy field and the interactions between different state, civil society and international actors (see Figure 7 and Figure 10 in later chapters). These four elements were central in systematizing insights into the institutions, interests and ideas that guided policy decisions, and in reconstructing Moroccan and Tunisian immigration policy processes.

41 *Le Matin* functions as the mouthpiece of the state, *TelQuel* is more independent and critical, and *Yabiladi* more neutral in its reporting.

42 Similarly, while *BusinessNews* keeps to neutral and factual reporting, *Nawaat* and *Inkifaya* are more investigative, online journalism platforms that have emerged after 2011.

43 I limited my analysis to French-language media outlets. Given that my focus was not to analyse media coverage as such, but to use it as a source for data triangulation, I believe the exclusion of Arabic-language media outlets does not bias my results.

Two main methodological tools guided this analysis: triangulation and abductive reasoning. First, given that respondents' accounts are subjective and seek to convey one version of a particular process, triangulation of information was key. I followed the criteria developed by Davies (2001: 77-78) for using elite interview material as the main source of information: Statements are more reliable if the information is first-hand, if the respondent has a high-level access to information, and if the remainder of the respondents' statements show high consistency when checked against other sources. In Morocco, I could further triangulate information by comparing respondents' discourses on immigration before and after the 2013 policy change, as I had already conducted interviews back in 2011/2012. This proved insightful in two regards, namely to evaluate the extent to which the 2013 reform emerged out of a particular socio-political climate in 2011/2012, and to assess how a top-down policy change and new discourse on immigration diffuses among state and civil society actors.

Next to triangulation, my thesis relies on abductive analysis as advocated by recent, constructivist developments of grounded theory (Charmaz 2014; Timmermans and Tavory 2012).⁴⁴ These focus on the iterative process between data collection, data analysis and theory-building. My research questions, fieldwork set-up and coding strategy facilitated such abductive analysis in three ways: First, my research was geared towards explaining theoretically surprising empirical findings, namely a liberal immigration reform by an autocratic regime and the continuity of restrictive immigration regulations throughout a democratic transition.

Second, while existing theories on immigration policymaking informed my initial data collection through theoretical respondent sampling in Morocco and Tunisia, I started analysing my empirical material during and between fieldwork trips. This has allowed me to generate new working hypotheses on the role of political regime dynamics in immigration policymaking, that I then confirmed or refined with subsequent fieldwork. Thus, in my second research stay between March and May 2017 I interviewed a range of respondents that I had initially not expected to play a role, and conducted follow-up interviews with key informants from my first trip to confirm, disconfirm or specify conceptual ideas that emerged from my empirical material.

Lastly, while I did not strictly implement the coding strategy of constructivist grounded theory, I deliberately started data analysis early on in the research and analysed my interview material and the primary documents I collected in two steps

44 "Abductive analysis constitutes a qualitative data analysis approach aimed at theory construction. This approach rests on the cultivation of anomalous and surprising empirical findings against a background of multiple existing sociological theories and through systematic methodological analysis" (Timmermans and Tavory 2012: 169). As Charmaz (2014: 1) highlights, "grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves. [...] Grounded theory begins with inductive data, invokes iterative strategies of going back and forth between data and analysis, uses comparative methods, and keeps you interacting and involved with your data and emerging analysis."

(Charmaz 2014). In a first analysis round, I stayed very close to the empirical data to have themes and categories emerge that would capture similarities, differences or patterns of immigration policymaking across interviews and policy documents. In a second, theory-guided analysis round I privileged codes with the most analytic significance to analyse the empirical material in light of different theoretical frameworks. This allowed me to cluster insights according to immigration policy drivers and inter-actor dynamics. This back-and-forth between empirics and theory is consistent with my ambition to refine scope conditions of existing theories and develop new, middle-range theories on immigration policymaking as outlined in Chapter 2.

3 FIELDWORK REFLECTIONS

This last section seeks to go ‘behind the scenes’ and to reflect upon the political context within which I conducted my fieldwork and which my respondents have to navigate on a daily basis, as well as on the limits of reconstructing policy processes and the potential biases related to my positionality as a young, European, White woman. It thereby defies “homo academicus [who] relishes the finished [...] [and] likes to make the strokes of the brush, the touching and retouching disappear from his work” (Bourdieu 1992: 219).

3.1 RESEARCHING IN (SEMI-)AUTOCRATIC SETTINGS: ACCESS AND ANONYMITY

First of all, researching (semi-)autocratic policymaking can be challenging. Over the past years, scholars started to write about fieldwork techniques and risks in authoritarian settings (Art 2016; Glasius et al. 2018; Goode and Ahram 2016; Koch 2013; Loyle 2016; Shih 2015), highlighting issues that I also faced during my research in Morocco and Tunisia to a certain extent: Documents are not always openly accessible, archives badly kept, statistics often inexistent, the media is biased, and people do not dare to speak up – especially not on sensitive topics like immigration, territorial integrity or power structures. Although Morocco’s political context is clearly more authoritarian than Tunisia’s nowadays, Ben Ali’s security state has left its marks on inter-personal trust, and questions of access to and anonymity of respondents were therefore crucial in both of my fieldwork sites.

First, on access: While archives, written documents, and statistics were indeed only available to a minimal extent, access to most interviewees – especially at high level – was surprisingly easy. The main difficulty I faced was to identify the person of interest in the first place and to get his/her contact details – at best a mobile phone number or a private email address. Institutional email addresses are not common in Morocco and Tunisia and, if they exist, are often not used. But once contacted, most people were rather open to and available for an interview. I can only hypothesize

why respondents were willing to take the time and share their knowledge with me – among which: being eager to diffuse a message through me, flattered by the interest towards their person and work, curious to learn about my intentions and project, or keen to present themselves and their institutions as open and transparent (Cohen 1999). Indeed, conserving the image of a ‘modern’ state towards the outside world is crucial for Morocco and Tunisia.

While access to most respondents was relatively easy, this was not the case for all: For instance, the Ministry of Interior (Mol) proved difficult to access, especially in Tunisia. Most respondents discouraged me to even try, and others made clear that I would have minimal chances of success given that the Mol remains inaccessible even for international organizations, diplomatic representation, or other Tunisian institutions. Despite the revolution, the autocratic heritage is still palpable and the Mol is said to “function with the same mental configuration as before” (T17-I1). Although I did secure the private phone number of a key person in the Mol, I did not manage to arrange an interview.⁴⁵ I experienced similarly closed doors at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) in Morocco during my 2016/2017 fieldwork. While access had been easy back in 2011/2012, respondents emphasized a change in the overall climate, making the MoFA difficult to access for researchers. Part of the reason might also be that the migration dossier is now part of the royal agenda and thus treated like high politics, which brings with it more secrecy. Both cases leave an obvious gap in my list of respondents. However, as Glasius et al. (2018: 29) write, “authoritarian fieldwork requires caution, patience, and the willingness to accept that it is not always possible to interview those one wants to speak to”.

The second way in which the political contexts affected my fieldwork concerns my respondents’ anonymity. With immigration closely linked to issues of national security, territorial integrity, foreign policy, and national identity, the risk of crossing a regime’s ‘red lines’ is high. Also, the “grey area” (Loyle 2016: 924) around certain topics created a sense of uncertainty for both me and the respondents about what can be openly talked about or not. Because my respondents – activists, journalists, politicians, and bureaucrats – represented antagonistic interests on immigration, and because only a limited number of people in Morocco and Tunisia are working in this field, I was careful not to disclose any information on my interviewees to each other.⁴⁶ Also, while respondents were willing to talk to me, half of them did not want to be recorded to ensure the interview could not have future repercussions. Likewise, I did not ask respondents to sign informed consent forms; consent was given orally.

45 The person in question politely referred me to the official procedure, which consists of asking my embassy to contact the MoFA who could then schedule an appointment for me – a pointless endeavour that I did not engage in.

46 One related challenge were so-called “reverse interviews” (Glasius et al. 2018: 61), whereby respondents would turn around the interview situation and start to question me about my research, the people I talked to, what insights I had gained and what my personal opinion on immigration politics was.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, I generally do not attribute quotes to individuals but refer to a number code. I only reveal the respondent's institutional positioning when the contextualization of a quote is imperative and the respondents' security is not compromised.

My approach to recording, oral consent, and handling of quotations is standard practice in (semi-)authoritarian contexts, as well as in elite interviewing more generally (Benjelloun 2018b; Cohen 1999; Glasius et al. 2018; Pinson and Sala Pala 2007; Roman et al. 2017; Shih 2015). Ultimately, the protection of my respondents outweighs transparency concerns towards the research community. I believe that by transparently reporting my research strategy, interview guide, and the list of actors with whom I spoke, the reliability and quality of my research insights can be granted to a sufficient extent without compromising my respondents' anonymity.

3.2 RECONSTRUCTING POLICY PROCESSES

Alongside challenges associated with the autocratic fieldwork context, researching policymaking in retrospection raises issues of accuracy, especially when based on the narratives of people involved. Significant challenges of retrospective accounts include: the distortion of processes and developments according to their outcome, a subjective assessment of processes depending on the positive or negative political leverage the respondent gained from the issue, memory inconsistencies, as well as keenness to present policy processes as smoother and less conflictual than they were (Bongrand and Laborier 2005; Davies 2001; George and Bennett 2005; Tansey 2007). Nonetheless, "testimonies are often the only data allowing access into the history of the genesis of a public intervention or decision" (for an extensive discussion of the merits of interviews for public policy analysis, see: Pinson and Sala Pala 2007: 577).

In Morocco, the fact that I conducted interviews before and after the main policy change in 2013 allowed me to assess the change more objectively. In particular, I interviewed respondents from 2011/2012 again in 2016/2017, asking them to reflect on the contextual developments and changes in their everyday work. The relative continuity of people involved in immigration in Morocco since the mid-2000s facilitated these repeated interviews.

In contrast, the political volatility in Tunisia since 2011 has affected my field research in two ways: First, it was difficult to identify people who had worked on immigration before 2011, given that immigration was a political taboo dealt with almost exclusively by the Mol and the President. My respondents either did not know or did not want to share any information on the civil servants working on immigration before 2011. The blacklisting of civil servants from the Ben Ali regime made it almost impossible to reach these respondents. While this is a limitation of my fieldwork, there was not much I could do about it, except relying more heavily on second-hand information from researchers and other experts on Tunisia's past immigration regime.

Second, between my first and second fieldwork stay, several key respondents had changed their positions, among them the director of the General Directorate for International Cooperation on Migration (DGCIM), the director of the National Migration Observatory (ONM), and the person responsible for migration at the General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT). On the other hand, some of my high-level respondents only started their work very recently, and therefore were not aware of long-term developments. I tried to alleviate this by talking to people involved in the politics of immigration policy at various moments in time.

3.3 STUDYING PRESTIGE PROJECTS AND ‘NON-POLICIES’

Next to retrospection, I realized that the political salience of immigration was key in shaping respondents’ responses and reactions. In Morocco, many respondents seemed to have a set narrative on the 2013 policy change. The fact that immigration had been turned into a prestige project by the King meant that many respondents, especially within the state but also within civil society, took up the official policy framing. While I could not force respondents to leave their scripted speech behind them, I tried my best to trigger more interpretative, spontaneous responses by confronting respondents with paradoxes or contradictions that I observed, or by asking broader questions with only loose links to the policy change.

In contrast, in Tunisia I realized early on that I was, in fact, researching a ‘non-policy’.⁴⁷ I often faced empty faces once interviewees realized I wanted to talk about Tunisia’s approach towards foreigners on its territory, not about Tunisia’s emigration and diaspora politics. Almost always, Tunisian respondents understood the word ‘immigrant’ as referring to Tunisian migrants abroad, not to foreigners in Tunisia. Many of my respondents asked: “To make sure we are talking about the same thing: when you say immigration you really mean foreigners in Tunisia? Not Tunisian returnees or Tunisians in Europe?” (T17-I4). Although part of this confusion might be due to language specificities – there is no differentiation between immigrant and emigrant in Arabic, the word *muhajirun* captures both – these reactions are revelatory of Tunisia’s self-understanding as a country of emigration. An international respondent confirmed: “We are obliged to say *foreign migrants* so that Tunisian partners understand what we want to talk about – for them migrant is emigrant and emigrant is Tunisian” (T17-I20). While the non-politicization of immigration was at times challenging, as no one expected I would be interested in it and people felt they had nothing to say, it also provided an opportunity, as respondents were taken by surprise and did not have ready-made opinions or scripted responses to my questions.

47 Debates on the ‘policy of no policy’ have emerged particularly in the context of US-Mexican migration until the 1990s, where it characterized the absence of an explicit Mexican emigration policy, the tabooization of irregular migration in bilateral cooperation and the dominance of *laissez-faire* as the perceived most beneficial policy for both parties (Domínguez and de Castro 2001; Rosenblum 2004).

3.4 POSITIONALITY: BEING A YOUNG, EUROPEAN, WHITE WOMAN – ASSET OR OBSTACLE?

Finally, my personal ascriptions and positionality – being a young, female, foreign, White researcher – inevitably shaped my fieldwork, both in terms of access to respondents as well as interview substance: First, I had the impression that being a young woman played out to my advantage, facilitating my access to policymakers and civil society actors given the (unfortunate) gendered assumptions that I would not be too inquisitive, too threatening, or too politicized in my work. As Glasius et al. (2018: 64-66) write: “Naivety is a commonly used interview strategy [...], typically more available to young women and foreigners. [...] Women are considered less threatening, and may sometimes have greater access to officials precisely in authoritarian circumstances”. Interestingly, none of my interviewees – not even at the highest ministerial levels – ever asked me about a research permit or a letter of recommendation from my university and supervisors. Although I always carried the latter with me, I never needed it. Second, I felt that being European, White and French-speaking facilitated my access to more high-level actors, as well as to workshops, receptions, and seminars organized by Moroccan and Tunisian institutions. In 2011, when I was visiting the university in Rabat for the first time, a Master student I met there told me: “Everything is easy access if you are a foreigner in Morocco. All doors are open”.⁴⁸

The downside of being a foreigner was that some respondents might have perceived me as one of the numerous European academics and journalists who arrived in Morocco and (to a lesser extent) in Tunisia over the past years to investigate immigration politics, or as a vehicle to pass on certain messages to European publics, funders, or politicians. The fact that I was neither French, Spanish nor Italian slightly alleviated this effect, as there was no post-colonial dynamic at work. Similarly, respondents were more inclined to talk to me as I speak some Arabic, have lived in several North African countries since 2009, and could demonstrate that my academic interest in Moroccan migration policies predates the heightened attention and buzz around Moroccan policies since 2014.⁴⁹ I nonetheless remained careful in my analysis and tried to identify instances where respondents might have adapted their discourse to a ‘European’ audience.

Ultimately, the speculative question of ‘what would respondents have told me were I Black, Moroccan or a man’ remains unanswered. While every researcher has to “work with what you have” (Glasius et al. 2018: 64), careful data triangulation

48 In particular, I felt that my Whiteness facilitated my half-day observation of the Moroccan regularization campaign in 2017. Had I been Black, I would probably not have been allowed to roam around the regularization office for several hours without being inquired by the local policemen.

49 One Moroccan respondent told me that she only accepted the interview because of my publication record on Moroccan migration policies. As she had negative experiences with talking to “journalists or academics who did not do their homework” (reference redacted) and had only very superficial knowledge on the Moroccan or migratory context, she now generally declines all interview requests.

allowed me to cross-check information gathered in interviews and to assess their reliability (see Section 2.4).

4 CONCLUSION

Despite the methodological challenges of relying primarily on interview material for public policy analysis, qualitative research methods provided the best tools to investigate my central question of *how the polity shapes the politics of immigration policy*. The paired comparative research set up allowed me to advance hypotheses for a more general theorization of immigration policymaking, in particular by (1) distilling similarities in immigration policy drivers and dynamics across the ‘Western/non-Western’ and ‘democratic/autocratic’ divides, and (2) specifying the so-called ‘regime effect’ in immigration politics. Morocco and Tunisia were critical cases in this regard because of the theoretical relevance and diversity of constellations of the two main variables of interest: immigration politics and polity structures.

My fieldwork, in particular the 144 interviews I conducted with a wide range of actors provided the backbone for my empirical analysis of Moroccan and Tunisian immigration policies. The theoretical conclusions I draw from my two case studies are based on a dialogue with the literature on immigration politics in ‘Western liberal democracies’, as well as comparative politics research on state formation and public policymaking across the globe outlined in Chapter 2. With these theoretical and methodological pillars in mind, I now turn towards the empirical heart of the thesis: the Moroccan and Tunisian case studies.