

**Morocco's migration transition:  
Trends, determinants and future scenarios**

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March 2005

**MDR Working Paper No. 3**  
"Migration and Development Revisited"  
A WOTRO/NWO research project

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# **Morocco's migration transition: Trends, determinants and future scenarios**

## **Abstract**

This paper aims to interpret the evolution of migration within and from Morocco over the twentieth century from a combination of theoretical perspectives defined as “transitional migration theory”. Colonization and incorporation of rural areas, along with a certain level of development, have spurred internal and international wage labor migration within and from Morocco to Europe. Migration seems to be the result of development rather than the reverse. Highly marginalized regions participated less in migration than the three, moderately enclosed “migration belts” with established traditions of pre-modern, largely circular migration. At the onset of large-scale migration, colonial bonds with Spain and France and selective labor recruitment had a major influence in determining the spatial patterns of labor migration. However, the influence of policies rapidly decreased because of self-perpetuating network effects. Rather than a reduction in migration, increasingly restrictive policies coincided with an increasing reliance on family migration, permanent settlement, undocumented migration and the exploration of new migration itineraries. Alongside a decentralization of internal migration, a spatial diffusion of international out-migration has occurred beyond the historical migration belts in response to new labor opportunities in southern Europe. Persistent demand for migrant labor, along with demographic factors and increasing aspirations, suggest that the propensity to migrate over formally closed borders is likely to remain high in the near future. However, in the longer term, out-migration might further decrease and Morocco could increasingly develop into a migration destination for migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa, a transition process which has already been set in motion.

## **Introduction**

Over the second half of the 20th century, Morocco evolved into one of the world's leading emigration countries. With over two million people of Moroccan descent living in Europe, Moroccans form one of the largest and most dispersed migrant communities in Western Europe. However, this conceals a high level of internal differentiation and dynamism in Moroccan migration, in which emigration, return migration, internal migration and, recently, immigration, occur simultaneously, and in which the spatial focus of these migration movements shows clear shifts over time.

Dichotomous and static push-pull models can typically not explain this increasingly complex migration reality, in which migrants often move in opposite directions. It seems to be more instrumental to analyze Moroccan migration dynamics within a dynamic theoretical perspective, which is able to link the occurrence of specific types of migration to broader demographic and development processes, of which migration is a constituent part. In order to better comprehend Moroccan migration, it seems useful to draw on the spatio-temporal theoretical perspectives developed by Zelinsky (1971) and Skeldon (1997).

Morocco has become a typical example of what Skeldon (1997) called a “labor frontier country”: that category of upper lower and lower middle income countries whose modest social, economic and infrastructural development has encouraged and enabled people to emigrate in large numbers. Skeldon (1997:52) argued that

there is a relationship between the level of economic development, state formation and the patterns of population mobility. Very generally, we can say that where these are high, an integrated migration system exists consisting of global and local movements, whereas where they are low the migration systems are not integrated and mainly local

In an attempt to make a global regionalization for migratory movements, Skeldon (1997: 52-53) distinguished the following five “development tiers”: the (1) old and (2) new core

countries (e.g., Western Europe, North America, Japan) characterized by immigration and internal decentralization; (3) the “expanding core” (e.g., eastern China, southern Africa, eastern Europe), where we find both immigration and out-migration and internal centralization (i.e., urbanization and rural-to-urban migration); (4) the “labor frontier” (e.g., Morocco, Egypt, Turkey, Mexico, the Philippines and, until recently, Spain and Portugal), which are dominated by out-migration and internal centralization; and the so-called (5) “resource niche” (e.g., many sub-Saharan countries, parts of central Asia and Latin America), with variable, often weaker forms of migration.

Skeldon’s regionalization is inspired by, and is an adaptation of, Zelinsky’s (1971) hypothesis of the mobility transition, in which he linked what he called the vital transition to population mobility within a spatio-temporal perspective. It was a fusion between the demographic transition theory, the notion of the spatial diffusion of innovations, the economic principle of least effort or economic optimization and the hypotheses developed by Lee (1966). By employing the term vital transition, Zelinsky broadened the concept of demographic transition – commonly seen as the main cause of migration pressures because of high population growth – by linking it to processes of modernization, economic growth and increasing mobility. In many respects, this vital transition is what others would call “development”. He distinguished five phases: (a) The pre-modern traditional society (high fertility and mortality, little natural increase if any); (b) The early transitional society (rapid decline in mortality, major population growth); (c) The late transitional society (major decline in fertility, significant but decelerating natural increase); (d) The advanced society (fertility and mortality stabilized at low levels, slight population increase if any); (e) A future “superadvanced” society (continuing low fertility and mortality). The core of his argument was that each of these phases was linked to distinct forms of mobility, in a process that he coined as the mobility transition.

Pre-modern societies (phase (a)) are characterized mainly by limited circular migration. In the early stages of the vital transition (phase (b), in particular), all forms of mobility (circular, rural colonization frontiers, internal rural-urban, international) increase. In

phase (c), international migration decreases rapidly, rural-to-urban internal migration slackens, but remains at high levels and circular movements further increase and grow in structural complexity. At the end of phase (c), the *rural exodus* significantly decreases, as the number of those employed in agricultural production approaches the minimum level associated with optimum economic return. In phase (d), residential mobility, urban-to-urban and circular migration become more important and, in this phase countries transform themselves from being net labor-exporting to net labor-importing countries because of mounting immigration of unskilled and semi-skilled workers from developing countries. In phase (e), most internal migration is urban-urban and residential, while immigration of unskilled labor continues.

Zelinsky's approach was innovative, because it conceived various functionally related forms of migration within a broader spatio-temporal development perspective, which does not naively assume a negative linear relation between development and migration. It is a diffusionist model, which assumes that the migration experience tends to spread progressively from relatively developed zones to less developed zones. Zelinsky's hypothesis is profoundly rooted in modernization theory, which has also been the main subject of later criticism. The model is a-historical in suggesting that there is a single, unilinear path towards development whereas, in reality, migration and development do not affect areas in the same way (Findlay *et al.* 1998). For instance, in the past, many formerly colonized countries experienced net immigration through settler migration. Mobility transition theory has also been rightly criticized for its false assumption of largely immobile traditional societies (Skeldon 1997:7-8).

Although this criticism seems to be valid, this does not necessarily upset the entire mobility transition model. Although the historical conditions under which migration within and from the developing world occurs are different from those of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, there is little that is *unique* about these processes (cf. Skeldon 1997:40). There is ample evidence to sustain the view that, in general, "development" in combination with demographic transition-related high population

growth tends initially to lead to an increasing diffusion of (initially internal, later international) migration across communities (Bauer and Zimmermann, 1998).

It is indeed striking that the countries with the lowest GNP and the highest population growth do generally *not* exhibit the highest rates of out-migration to the Western world (cf. Böhning, 1994; Olesen, 2002). The world's main labor exporters typically are upper-lower to lower-middle income countries (such as Mexico, North African countries, the Philippines and Indonesia), which are generally located in what Skeldon (1997) defined as the global "labor frontier". These countries, which generally experience falling birth rates, but a high growth of their working age populations, at least moderate economic growth, urbanization and de-agrarization, would currently be in phase (b) or early phase (c) of Zelinsky's model.

What has remained surprisingly unobserved so far is that migration economists have — apparently unintentionally — provided additional economic evidence for the Zelinsky-based models by uncovering the anatomy of what is called the "migration hump". Martin (1993) and Martin and Taylor (1996) argued that a temporary increase in migration — a migration hump — has been a usual part of the process of economic development. In the early stages of development, an increase in wealth tends to lead to a rise in migration, since a certain threshold of wealth is necessary to enable people to assume the costs and risks of migrating. Only at later stages of development, do regions and countries tend to transform from net labor exporters to net labor importers (cf. Martin and Taylor, 1996; Böhning, 1994:196; Olesen, 2002:141). This has happened in recent decades with countries as diverse as Spain, Italy, Greece, Ireland, Malaysia, Taiwan and South Korea. Economic development and decreasing income differentials with destination countries therefore tend to have a J-curve or inverted U-curve effect on emigration, steeply increasing in the initial phases of economic development and only later gradually decreasing (Martin and Taylor 1996). This migration hump seems to reflect rather adequately past (Massey, 1991) and contemporary (Olesen, 2002:141) migration patterns and shows a high degree of correspondence with Zelinsky's and Skeldon's models.

This appears to be a ground for rejecting relativist claims that no general inferences whatsoever can be made about the historical, spatio-temporal evolution of migration. In fact, Zelinsky's, Skeldon's and Martin and Taylor's approaches can be combined into what I propose to refer to as "transitional migration theory". Such a conceptualization allows for integrating migration and broader (economic, demographic) aspects of development into a single spatial-temporal model, which seems to offer a valuable insight into the complex, non-linear interlinkages between migration and broader development processes.

The remainder of this paper will describe and explain the geographically differentiated evolution of migration patterns within, from and towards Morocco over the past two centuries from broader, structural changes in the demographic, economic and political macro-context at the national and international levels. The aim is to evaluate the extent to which the specific case of Moroccan migration can be comprehended from transitional migration theory. This analysis will be used to derive tentative predictions of future migration patterns.

### **Pre-colonial population mobility**

Morocco's pre-colonial history shows that pre-modern societies can be highly dynamic and mobile. The population history of Morocco has been characterized by continually shifting patterns of human settlement. Moreover, nomadic or semi-nomadic (*transhumant*) groups traveled large distances with their herds between summer and winter pastures. While some nomadic tribes settled down and became peasants, other sedentary groups became nomadic or settled down elsewhere<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> We will neither examine the important migration of tribal groups to Morocco following the Arab-Islamic conquests beginning in the seventh century, nor the immigration of large numbers of Muslims and *Megorashim* Jews following the *reconquista* of the Iberian peninsula, as this is clearly beyond the scope of this study.

Frequent conflicts between tribal groups over natural resources — land, water, pastures — and the control over trade routes were associated with the regular uprooting, movement and resettlement of people. Ever since the eighth century AD, the urban-based sultanic dynasties and the upper classes associated with the sultan's power — the *makhzen* — have attempted to gain control over the autonomous Berber and Arab tribes of the mountains and the deserts of Morocco's hinterland. While the *makhzen* have never been permanently successful in this effort, the continuously shifting political and economic alliances within ethnic groups, religious lodges and tribal chiefs in which the *makhzen* engaged, strongly influenced commercial relations and patterns of mobility.

Monotheistic religion has been another factor in stimulating mobility. Besides the *hajj* (the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca), the numerous marabutic pilgrimages to tombs of local Muslim and Jewish saints (*mussems*) and mobility related to the schooling of pupils and students at religious schools and Islamic universities, as well as the peregrination of religious teachers, has put people into contact over large distances. The extended networks of Moroccan Jews enabled them to travel and to settle elsewhere and they played a vital role as intermediaries and commerçants in the trans-Saharan and Moroccan-European trade relationships (Kenbib 1999).

The establishment and growth of imperial cities in western and northern Morocco (Rabat, Marrakech, Fes and Meknes) attracted merchants and migrants from rural Morocco. The *makhzen*'s strategic economic interests in the Trans-Saharan caravan trade in gold, salt, copper, brass and slaves required them to establish military strongholds and trading posts in the interior—which sometimes developed into large towns, such as Sijilmasa, located in the southern Tafilalt oasis, which constituted a “global place in the pre-modern era” (Lightfoot and Miller 1996:78). Oases were commercial and migratory junctions. The diverse ethnic composition of oases — with their blend of Sub-Saharan, Berber, Arab and Jewish influences — testifies to a long history of intensive population mobility (De Haas 2003). Far into the twentieth century, the slave trade constituted an important form of forced migration within and to Morocco.

Centuries-old seasonal and circular rural-to-rural migration patterns existed between relatively densely populated rural areas — such as the Rif Mountains and the southern oases — and the relatively humid regions located in western Morocco (De Mas 1991). Such migrants often worked as agricultural laborers, leaving their villages during the agricultural peak seasons in western Morocco. Occupational specialists, such as well diggers and specialists in certain trades and crafts, maintained distinct rural-to-rural and rural-to-urban migration patterns (cf. Büchner 1986).

### **Migration under colonial influence (1830-1962)**

Until the second half of the nineteenth century, international migration from Morocco was mainly limited to a small number of merchants from Fes relocating to the West Africa coast and Egypt at the end of the eighteenth century and to the United Kingdom (Liverpool and Manchester) and France (Marseilles) in the nineteenth century (Abu-Haidar 1999:39; Ben Ali 1996:346). The French colonization of Algeria in 1830 heralded the beginning of a period of economic and political restructuring, which was to create entirely new migration patterns within the Maghreb region. The increasing demand for wage labor on the farms of French *colons* and in the northern cities such as Algiers and Oran, attracted a rising number of usually seasonal migrants from the eastern part of the Rif mountains and, to a lesser extent, the Sous area and southern oases over the second half of the nineteenth century (cf. Büchner 1986; Fadloullah *et al.* 2000:51). News on labor opportunities in Algeria spread rapidly, as Algeria was located on the route of the pilgrimage to Mecca (Bonnet and Bossard 1973:8).

In 1912, the French-Spanish protectorate over Morocco was formally established. While France gained control over the heartland of Morocco, the Atlas mountains and the oases south and east of the Atlas, the Spanish protectorate was limited to the deep south (the “Western Sahara”) and the northern zone, which consisted mainly of the Rif mountains. Road construction, other infrastructure works and rapid urbanization shaped new and

growing markets for unskilled *wage* labor. Integration of the largely autonomous tribes in Morocco's hinterland into the modern state and the capitalist economy, along with the concomitant expansion of infrastructure and means of transport, facilitated increasing rural-to-urban wage labor migration.

The colonial era also marked the beginning of labor migration to France. During the First World War, an urgent lack of manpower in France led to the active recruitment of Moroccan men for the army, industry and mines (Obdeijn 1993). They were predominantly recruited near Agadir and Tiznit in the southwestern Sous region (Bonnet and Bossard 1973). Between 1914 and 1918, more than 35,000 Moroccans left for France and between 34,000 and 40,000 joined the French army (Muus 1995:198). The workers were recruited especially in areas that had shown strong resistance to the French, as it was expected that this would curb internal political unrest. Although most migrants returned after the end of war, international migration resumed after 1920, because of the flourishing French economy. In 1929, more than 20,000 Moroccan migrants worked in France. Again, most workers were sent back to Morocco after the onset of the Great Depression of the 1930s (Obdeijn 1993).

About 40,000 Riffians found employment in Franco's army during the Spanish civil war and afterwards in auxiliary troops in Spanish Morocco (De Mas 1991:113). Apart from soldiers and a small group of merchants, labor migration from Morocco to Spain was negligible. Until the 1960s, Spain itself remained a source of labor migrants to northern Europe and even to Algeria (López García 1999). In the Second World War, labor shortages again led to the recruitment of Moroccan men in the French zone. About 126,000 Moroccan men served in the French army during the Second World War and in the subsequent wars in Korea and French Indochina, most of whom returned to Morocco after the end of war (Bidwell 1973).

After the Second World War, Moroccan labor migration to France slowly gained ground. As France stopped recruiting Algerian workers during the Algerian war of independence (1954-1962), migration from Morocco was boosted. Between 1949 and 1962, the

Moroccan population in France increased from about 20,000 to 53,000. Most worked in the mines or in the steel industry (Obdeijn 1993). Circular migration to Algeria came to a definitive halt in 1962 following the closure of the Moroccan-Algerian border (Heinemeijer *et al.* 1977; Muus 1995). Migration to Algeria often turned out to be the first step in subsequent migration to France. Some early Moroccan “guest workers” in France were directly recruited in Algeria. They often followed their former employers, who left Algeria after independence. Nevertheless, this post-colonial migration was only modest compared with the decade following 1962, which would dramatically change the face of Moroccan migration.

### **The great migration boom (1963-1972)**

Rapid post-war economic growth in northwest Europe created increasing unskilled labor shortages in sectors such as industry, mining, housing construction and agriculture from the 1950s. This triggered an increasing emigration of “guest workers” from poorer countries around the Mediterranean. Until the early 1960s, most were recruited in south European countries. When this migration stagnated, attention shifted towards south Mediterranean countries. Agreements on the recruitment of “guest workers” were signed between Morocco and the former West Germany (1963), France (1963), Belgium (1964) and the Netherlands (1969). This was the onset of a spatial diversification of Moroccan migration to Europe, which used to be mainly directed towards France. Migration boomed particularly from 1967, to peak in 1972.

The system of formal recruitment by specialized agencies was important only in the initial years of labor migration. Spontaneous settlement and informal recruitment by companies has been far more important numerically. In the 1960s, most emigrants traveled to France without a prearranged work permit to find work and were later regularized after their arrival (Collyer 2004). In 1976, only 13 percent of the Moroccans living in the Netherlands had migrated through formal recruitment, 43 percent through personal relations (“networks”) and 24 percent through direct recruitment by companies

(Shadid 1979:165). A more recent study indicated that only 3.5 percent of the Moroccans in Belgium had been recruited through official selection (Reniers 1999:684).

Administrative obstacles, long waiting lists and the accompanying bribery incited people to migrate as “tourists”. Migrants were often assisted by already-migrated relatives or friends, who often acted as intermediaries between employers and potential migrants (Reniers 1999:683). These spontaneous settlers did not initially experience too many problems in finding work and accommodation. Although the attitudes of the host societies towards migration became negative from the 1970s, many migrants succeeded in obtaining permanent residence papers through a series of legalization campaigns in the Netherlands (1975), Belgium (1975) and in France (1981-1982) (Muus 1995:199).

In 1965, about 30,000 Moroccans were living in Europe, mostly in France. In 1972, this number had increased tenfold to an estimated 300,000 (Bonnet and Bossard 1973), increasing further to over 400,000 only three years later. Besides France, Belgium, the Netherlands and to a lesser extent Germany, developed as secondary destinations.

A distinct pattern of out-migration was that of Moroccan Jews, who started to migrate to Gibraltar, London, Manchester and Marseilles in the second half of the nineteenth century (Kenbib 1999:233). This migration was however limited, compared with the mass migration that followed the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. On the eve of this migration, Morocco’s Jewish population numbered over 250,000 (Kenbib 1999). Between 1948 and 1956, 90,000 Jews emigrated. After the Six Day War of 1967, most remaining Jews decided to leave the country. Presently, only about 5,000 Jews remain in Morocco.

### **Family reunification (1973-1989)**

In many respects, colonial and post-colonial migration patterns were a modified continuation and spatial extension of older patterns of circular migration (cf. Ben Ali

1996: 346; De Mas 1991). Not only most host societies, Germany and the Netherlands in particular (Bonnet and Bossard 1973: 35), but also the majority of the migrants themselves expected that their migration would be temporary. Standing in an ancient tradition of circular migration, most migrants themselves intended to return after a certain amount of money had been saved to buy some land, construct a house, or start their own enterprise.

The 1973 Oil Crisis heralded a period of economic stagnation and restructuring, resulting in rising unemployment and a structurally lower demand for unskilled laborers. Consequently, northwest European countries closed their frontiers to new labor migrants. However, contrary to expectations, most migrants did not return, but ended up staying permanently. The Oil Crisis radically changed the political and economic context in which migration took place, both in Europe and in Morocco. Morocco suffered even more than the European countries from the high oil prices and the global economic downturn. The economic situation in Morocco deteriorated and, following two failed *coups d'état* against King Hassan II in 1971 and 1972, the country also entered into a period of increasing political instability and repression.

The discontinuation of this “return option” through the increasingly restrictive immigration policies, combined with the grim political and economic prospects in Morocco, explain why many migrants decided to stay on the safe side, that is, in Europe. Paradoxically, the recruitment freeze stimulated permanent settlement instead of the reverse (Obdeijn 1993; Fargues 2004b). In fact, the increasingly restrictive immigration policies interrupted the traditional, circular character of Moroccan migration. Family reunification heralded this shift from circular to more permanent migration. It was mainly through family reunification that the total population of Moroccans in France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany further increased from 400,000 in 1975 to almost one million in 1992 (Muus 1995:202).

Return migration has been low among Moroccans compared to other immigrant groups in Europe (Fadlollah *et al.* 2000:56). Nevertheless, the net emigration conceals the fact that

each year, tens of thousands of migrants actually do return to Morocco. There has been an increase in return migration of Moroccan migrants who decided not to reunite their families. This reached its peak in 1991, with almost 40,000 return migrants (cf. De Haas 2003). Since 1994, return migration has fallen to less than 20,000. An increasing proportion of retired or unemployed migrants belong to a new category of transnational “pendulum migrants” who commute between Europe and Morocco, living for a part of the year in both countries (De Haas 2003).

### **Diversifying migration patterns (1990-2004)**

While family reunification was largely complete at the end of the 1980s, family formation gained significance as a major source of new migration from Morocco over the 1990s. For most Moroccans, marrying a partner in Europe has become the only option to enter the classic destination countries (France, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany) legally (Muus 1995:201)<sup>2</sup>. It is striking that large proportions of the second generation Moroccan descendants prefer to marry a partner — preferably kin — from the region of origin (Lievens 1999; Reniers 2001)<sup>3</sup>. In fact, family migration also implies the mobility of labor and therefore tends to function as labor migration “in disguise”. The permanent character of migration is also testified by a high tendency towards naturalization, especially among the second generations (Berrada 1990; Fadloulah *et al.* 2000:56). From 1991 to 2000 almost 400,000 Moroccans were granted the nationality of an EU member state, larger than any other immigrant group (SOPEMI 2003).

The increasing reliance on family migration has been one of the strategies through which Moroccans have continued migration to Europe. A second consequence of restrictive

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<sup>2</sup> The high demand for such marriages is reflected in an enormous increase in bride prices (Obdeijn 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Among the “second generation” Dutch of Moroccan descent (either born in the Netherlands or migrated before the age of 6), 56 percent of the men and 62 percent of the women have married a partner who lived in Morocco prior to marriage. For the first generation, these percentages are 78 and 68 percent, respectively (source: CBS Netherlands).

immigration policies was an increase of undocumented migration to northwest Europe. Especially during high economic growth in the 1990s, undocumented migrants were attracted by the increasing demand for cheap labor in sectors such as agriculture, housing building, cleaning and diverse service jobs (cf. Collyer 2004). Undocumented migrants often manage to obtain residence permits through legalization or marriage with a Moroccan or European partner they meet in the destination country, that is, through “becoming” family migrants.

The third major development has been the diversification of migration destinations. Themselves former labor exporters, Spain, Italy and even Portugal have emerged as new destination countries since the mid-1980s. In southern Europe, Moroccans typically find employment in agriculture and construction, while a smaller group earn a living as merchants (Huntoon 1998).

Until Italy and Spain introduced visa requirements in 1990 and 1991, respectively, Moroccans could enter easily as tourists, after which many of them overstayed and became *de facto* undocumented migrants. A recent survey indicated that, among Moroccan migrant workers in Europe who reported illegal entry or overstay, the proportion reporting that they were successful in their attempts to attain legal status is two-thirds or more (Schoorl *et al.* 2000:xix), although these results are not likely to be representative, due to a selection bias. As in northwest Europe, the establishment of visa requirements has led to an increasing reliance on undocumented migration. The long coastlines of Spain and Italy make it relatively easy to enter those countries illegally. There is a persistent demand for unskilled labor in Europe, especially in the relatively large informal sectors of southern European countries and of Italy, in particular (cf. Collyer 2004; Fargues 2004b; Huntoon 1998).

On several occasions in the late 1980s and 1990s, Italian and Spanish governments were compelled to grant legal status to almost two hundred thousand undocumented Moroccan migrants through successive legalization campaigns. In fact, this pattern of more or less spontaneous settlement and legalization afterwards is highly reminiscent of Moroccan

migration to northwest Europe up to 1973, which resulted in a spectacular increase in the legally resident Moroccan populations in those countries (Bodega *et al.* 1995; cf. López Garcia 1999). Between 1980 and 2000, the combined Moroccan population officially residing in Spain and Italy increased from about 20,000 to over 400,000. Spain and Italy have taken over the position of France as the primary destination for new Moroccan labor migrants (Fadlollah *et al.* 2000: 99). The fact that many recent migrants eventually succeeded in remaining in Europe has contributed to the perception among prospective migrants that it is worth the trouble to migrate (cf. De Haas 2003).

In many respects, the Strait of Gibraltar has become Europe's Rio Grande. Despite intensified border controls, tens of thousands of Moroccans and, increasingly, other Africans manage to enter Europe each year. Spain is located at only 14 kilometers from the Moroccan coast and the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Mellillia on the northern Moroccan coast literally represent "Europe in Africa". This makes Spain the main entrance to the Schengen area for African immigrants (Huntoon 1998). Undocumented migrants usually enter either in *pateras*, small fishing boats chartered by smugglers, hidden in vans and trucks, or carrying false papers. A true "migration industry" has developed in southern Spain and northern Morocco, where traffickers exact high prices from would-be migrant workers<sup>4</sup>. Over the 1990s, intensified border patrolling incited migrants to cross from more eastern places on the Mediterranean coast and to explore new crossing points to Europe, such as the Canary Islands and via Tunisia to Sicily and southern Italy (Fadlollah *et al.* 2000:113-5).

Particularly since the oil crisis, a relatively small number of Moroccans have migrated to Libya (120,000) and the oil-rich Gulf Countries (several tens of thousands), where they used to work on temporary contract basis. Because of political tensions following the

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<sup>4</sup> According to interviews the author conducted in 2003, the crossing by *patera* would cost between 1,000 and 1,500 US\$ and the (safer) crossing hidden in migrants' vans between US\$ 5,000 and 6,000. In 2003, the police claimed they intercepted close to 14,000 clandestine immigrants along the Spanish shores and 663 illegal vessels. By most estimates, many more immigrants escaped (International Herald Tribune, October 10, 2004). Each year, hundreds die along the way. A Moroccan newspaper has claimed that 3,450 would-be migrants drowned there during the 1990s (*Migration News Sheet*, June 2000).

second Gulf War (1990-1991), these numbers have decreased to an unknown level. More recently, the United States (85,000) and the French-speaking Canadian province of Quebec (70,000) have attracted small, but rapidly increasing numbers of generally well-educated migrants, in contrast to the predominantly lowskilled labor migrants to Europe.

**Table 1. Estimates of legally residing population of Moroccan descent living outside Morocco<sup>5</sup>**

Western countries	Population	Middle East/North Africa	Population
France (2001 estimate)	840,000	Libya <sup>6</sup>	120,000
Netherlands (2001)	273,000	Algeria	100,000
Belgium (2001)	203,000	Tunisia	24,000
Germany (1999)	98,000	Saudi Arabia	15,000
Spain (2001)	235,000		
Italy (2002)	258,000	<i>Total Arab Countries</i>	<i>259,000</i>
UK (2001)	50,000		
Scandinavia (2001)	10,000	Israel	400-700,000
US (2000)	85,000		
Canada (2000)	70,000		
<i>Total Western</i>	<i>2.12 million</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>2.8-3.1 million</i>

**Sources: INE Spain; ISTAT Italy; CBS Netherlands; Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland; Danmark Statistik; Statistics Norway; Collyer 2004; Abu-Haidar (1999); De Haas (2003)**

The combined effects of (1) family reunification, (2) family formation; (3) natural increase; (4) undocumented migration; and (5) new labor migration to Spain and Italy explain why the number of Moroccans abroad has increased sevenfold from 300,000 in 1972, on the eve of the recruitment freeze, to 2.1 million around the turn of the century. This is an average annual increase of 64,300. This means that, in 2000, about 7 percent of the total Moroccan population of 30 million were *legally* living abroad. France housed

<sup>5</sup> Actual figures in Spain and in Italy are probably far higher, because of the high incidence of undocumented migration.

<sup>6</sup> Data from Libya, Algeria, Tunisia and Saudi Arabia are from 1992. More recent data are not available, although the number of Moroccan migrants to those countries has probably dwindled following the second Gulf War (1990-1991).

the largest population of Moroccan descent, followed by the Netherlands, Spain, Italy, Belgium and Germany. Smaller communities live in Sweden, Denmark, the United Kingdom and North America (see Table 1).

Figure 1 illustrates the remarkably constant increase of the Moroccan emigrant population in defiance of the increasingly restrictive immigration policies<sup>7</sup>. It also shows a decreasing spatial focus on France and an increasing gap between the cumulative net out-migration from Morocco<sup>8</sup> and the registered Moroccan population in the main receiving countries over the 1960s and early 1970s, which reached a peak of 640,000 around 1980. To a considerable extent, this seems to reflect the initially undocumented status of most labor migrants. The narrowing of this gap can be primarily attributed to legalization campaigns and, secondly, to the natural growth of emigrant populations.

Interestingly, since the early 1990s, Morocco increasingly developed into a transit migration country for migrants from sub-Saharan Africa to Spain and further into Europe. Most transit migrants, who originate from countries as diverse as Senegal, the Gambia, Mali, Congo, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Cameroon and Côte d'Ivoire travel through the Sahara via Algeria and enter Morocco at the border east of Oujda. Although the destination of these migrants is usually Tangiers, where they wait to cross the Strait of Gibraltar, an increasing number of migrants who fail to enter Europe prefer to settle in Morocco as a second best option rather than return to their substantially poorer and

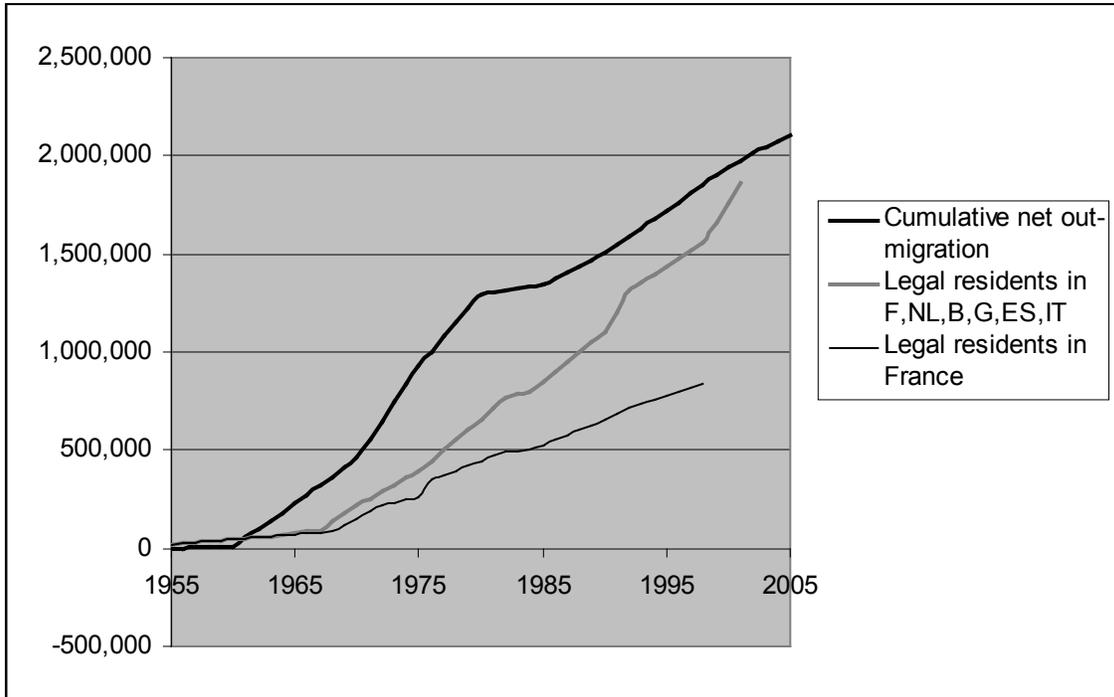
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<sup>7</sup> This figure is based on estimations of residents of Moroccan descent, whether nationals or non-nationals in France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Spain and Italy. Second and third generation “migrants” have been included, because they are relevant actors in perpetuating migration through family formation. As these data on immigrant stocks also include natural increase, they should not be interpreted as migration rates. Registration methods vary between countries, so statistics are not perfectly comparable and do not include undocumented migrants.

<sup>8</sup> Net out-migration has been estimated on the basis of differences between natural and real population growth, calculated by Fargues (2004a) on basis of the UN population database. Fargues (*ibid*) warned that this imperfect, method allows only for rough, “better than nothing” estimates in absence of reliable data on Moroccan out-migration. Furthermore, actual out-migration of Moroccans is likely to be higher, because of substantial return migration and immigration to Morocco from Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa.

politically more unstable home countries. They subsequently settle down in cities like Tangiers, Casablanca and Rabat on a semi-permanent basis, where they sometimes find jobs in the service sector, petty trade and construction. Others try to pursue studies in Morocco (Barros *et al.* 2002).

**Figure 1. Expansion of population of Moroccan descent in Europe, specified for France (1960-2001)**



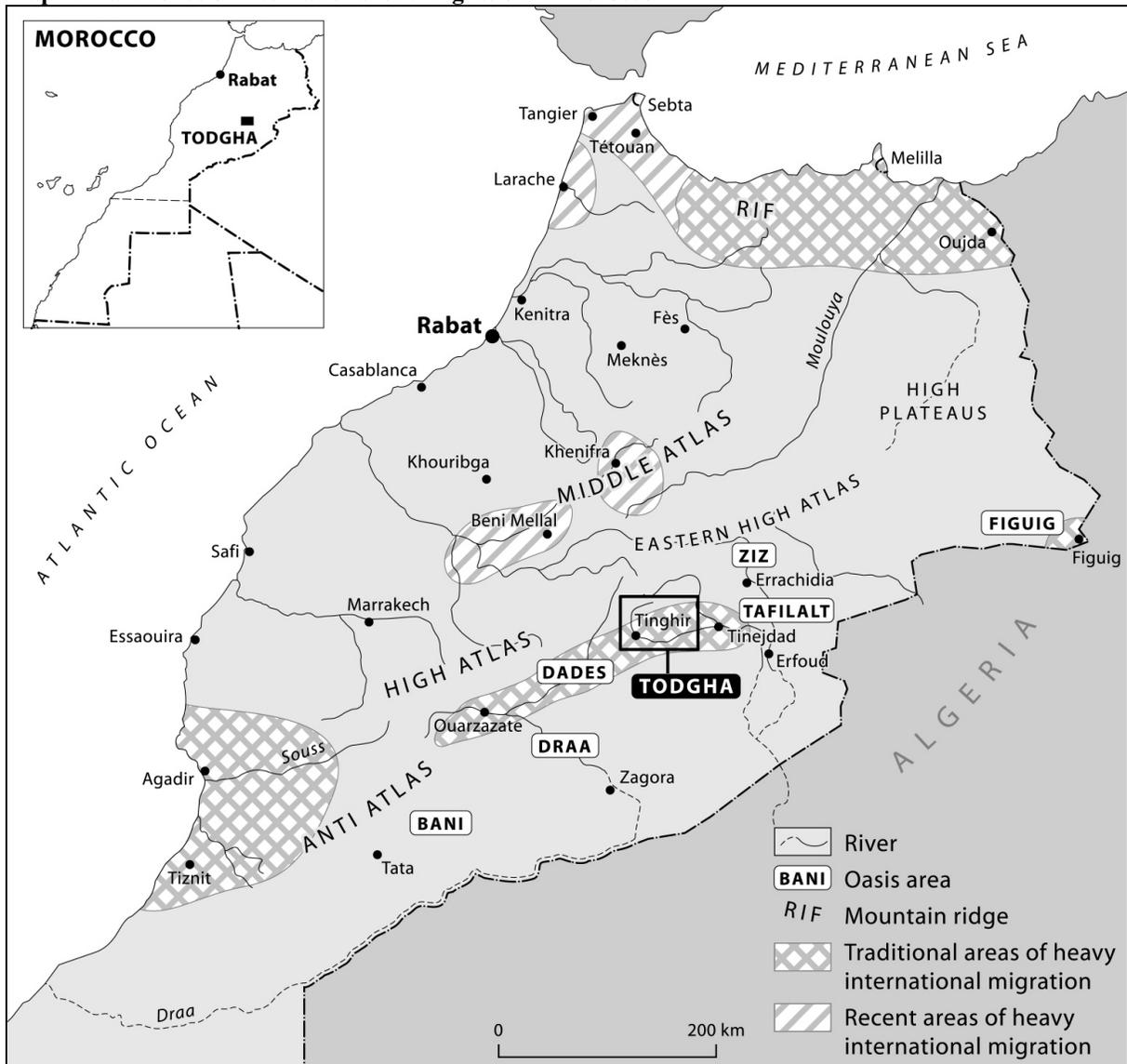
Source: National statistical services; De Haas 2003; Fargues 2004b

### **Regional differentiation in migration participation**

There are distinct patterns of spatial clustering and specialization in migration, resulting in a concentration of migration from particular sending regions within Morocco towards specific countries, regions and even cities within Europe (cf. Ben Ali 1996:348). Once established, such patterns tend to be reproduced and reinforced by the internal dynamics of migrant networks. The provinces with the highest international migration rates are Agadir (Sous), Ouarzazate and the northern provinces of Al Hoceima, Nador and, to a lesser degree, Oujda (Refass 1990:228). From this, it is possible to distinguish three

principal Moroccan migration belts. The eastern part of the Rif mountain area, the southwestern Sous region and the (usually river) oases located southeast of the High Atlas (mainly Dadès, Todgha, Ferkla) (see Map 1). Although migration rates have been highest in these rural areas, many migrants have also migrated from cities. Nevertheless, many of these were born in rural areas. The city – either in Algeria (Oran, Algiers) or Morocco (Nador, Agadir, Casablanca, Rabat) – was but the first stage in their migration careers, a junction from where they “leapfrogged” to Europe.

**Map 1. Main zones of international out-migration in Morocco**



Nowhere else in Morocco does migration seem to be so rooted in social life as in the eastern Rif mountains (Bonnet and Bossard 1973:15; Fadloulah *et al.* 2000:51). In the late 1930s, the number of Moroccan migrants to Algeria was estimated at about 85,000 each year, of whom 55,000 originated from the eastern Rif (Obdeijn 1993). In 1950 about one third of the male adults in the region of Nador participated in this migration (Fadloulah *et al.* 2000:51). Besides the proximity of Algeria, the preponderance of migration to that country can be explained by the fact that the Rif fell under the Spanish protectorate. This limited the opportunities for internal migration to the large cities in French Morocco, from which the Rif was isolated in terms of poor road and other infrastructural connections.

From the late 1950s, the Rif entered a period of deep economic crisis. This coincided with a rebellion of this Berber region against the Moroccan “Arabic” state in 1958-1959. After the closure of the Moroccan-Algerian border in 1962 following political and military tensions between the two countries, new migration destinations were explored in northwest Europe (De Mas 1991). Because most of the Rif area fell under the Spanish protectorate, migration to Europe from this region has exhibited a very distinct pattern from that of “French” Morocco. As most Riffians did not speak French and had little knowledge of France, migration from the Rif has been relatively concentrated on the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Sweden and, from the 1980s, Spain (cf. De Mas 1990; López García 1999). This exemplifies how colonization had a major influence in establishing initial migration itineraries.

The southwestern Sous region also has a strong tradition of out-migration going back to pre-colonial times. Besides Riffians, Soussi also migrated to Algeria from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Since early colonial times, Soussi have migrated as labor migrants and soldiers to France. Migration from the Sous has remained overwhelmingly oriented towards its former colonizer. Far more than the Riffians, Soussi have migrated internally and, more than any other ethnic group within Morocco, they have spread out over virtually the entire country. Known for their entrepreneurship, strong work ethic and trans-regional

and transnational solidarity, Berbers from the Sous have come to dominate retail trade in the majority of Moroccan towns (cf. Fadloulah *et al.* 2000:51).

The river oases located in the valleys between the High Atlas and Saghro south and east of the Atlas mountains form the third principal migration belt. From the late nineteenth century, traditional patterns of circular and seasonal migration were extended and modified because of French colonization. Several of these oases — which were located relatively close to Algeria — participated in migration to Algeria from the end of the nineteenth century (cf. De Haas 2003). Twentieth century migration from the oases has been directed both at the cities of Atlantic Morocco (Casablanca, Marrakech, Rabat, Agadir) and at foreign destinations. Most river oases located north of the Drâa valley, such as the Dadès, Todgha (Büchner 1986; De Haas 2003) and Figuig (Bencherifa and Popp 1990) became heavily involved in international migration to Europe from the 1960s. This migration has been predominantly oriented towards France, although there have also been distinct pockets of migration to the Netherlands and Belgium.

The crucial question now for our analysis of spatially differentiated migration patterns is why international migration has predominantly occurred from these three migration belts. It has been frequently argued that the most intensive out-migration has typically occurred in rural regions characterized by low rainfall (Bencherifa 1996:404) and high population densities in relation to limited agricultural resources (Collyer 2004:29; Fadloulah *et al.* 2000:53). However, in sharp contrast to such common sense perceptions that migration is the outflow of “misery”, a closer look at the data reveals the striking fact that the areas with the heaviest out-migration do *not* generally belong to the most marginal and poorest in Morocco. Sedentary peasant populations of relatively opened-up areas with better links to the outside world participated earlier and more intensively in international migration than sedentary and nomadic or semi-nomadic people living in relatively isolated areas in the Atlas mountains, steppes and deserts.

In the relatively peripheral and agriculturally marginal Bani oases located south of the Anti-Atlas, the mountain oases in the Saghro and Anti-Atlas, as well as in the poor Drâa

and Tafilalt oases, international migration is relatively weak compared with comparatively accessible and prosperous oases located in river valleys (De Haas 2003). Close scrutiny of intra-regional differences in migration participation in the Rif and Sous areas described by Bonnet and Bossard (1973), reveals that coastal areas tend to participate remarkably more in international migration than more inland areas. People from areas located in the “margin of the margin” tend to migrate less and most migration from there tends to be internal. In the same vein, it typically is not the poorest people within the sending communities who migrate, as they cannot afford the costs and risks and often lack the aspirations and knowledge to migrate (De Haas 2003).

Secondly, it does not seem to be coincidental that the earliest expulsion zones of international migrants have also been the regions with established traditions of seasonal and circular migration within Morocco and towards Algeria. This has facilitated their participation in new forms of rural-to-urban and international migration.

Thirdly, political and ethnic factors have played a major role in shaping initial international migration patterns. The Moroccan state actively stimulated migration from these generally Berber-speaking regions, which had a rebellious reputation vis-à-vis the urban, Arab-speaking *makhzen*. These policies were mainly pursued through directing recruiters to these areas and through selective passport issuance policies<sup>9</sup>. Under French rule, the formerly autonomous, mostly Berber, tribes of the interior were only “pacified” after a military campaign of two decades (1912-1933). The post-colonial Moroccan state inherited the political-military infrastructure installed by the French. This enabled the *makhzen* to control the entire interior for the first time in history. Nevertheless, the Berber tribes of the interior — who played an important role in the struggle for independence — were sometimes reluctant to submit to the king’s power.

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<sup>9</sup> Before 1973, the highest legal constraint on migration was not immigration policies by European states, but the difficulty of obtaining a Moroccan passport. Nowadays, the situation is the reverse. An illustrative case of the influence of the Moroccan government in setting migration itineraries is the remarkable migration chain from the town of Settat south of Casablanca to Italy. Settat was the birthplace of the Driss Basri, the powerful interior minister under King Hassan II, who boosted the development of his home town in various ways, not least by favouring locals by issuing them with passports (Salih 2001:660-1).

The political discontent and perceived discrimination resulted in several insurrections. The Moroccan state quickly recognized the possibilities that a migration policy could have in terms of relieving tensions by promoting emigration from these regions and, in particular, from the notoriously turbulent Rif region (Obdeijn 1993, Reniers 1999:684). In fact, this was a continuation of earlier French policies to recruit workers in rural regions that had shown strong resistance to colonization.

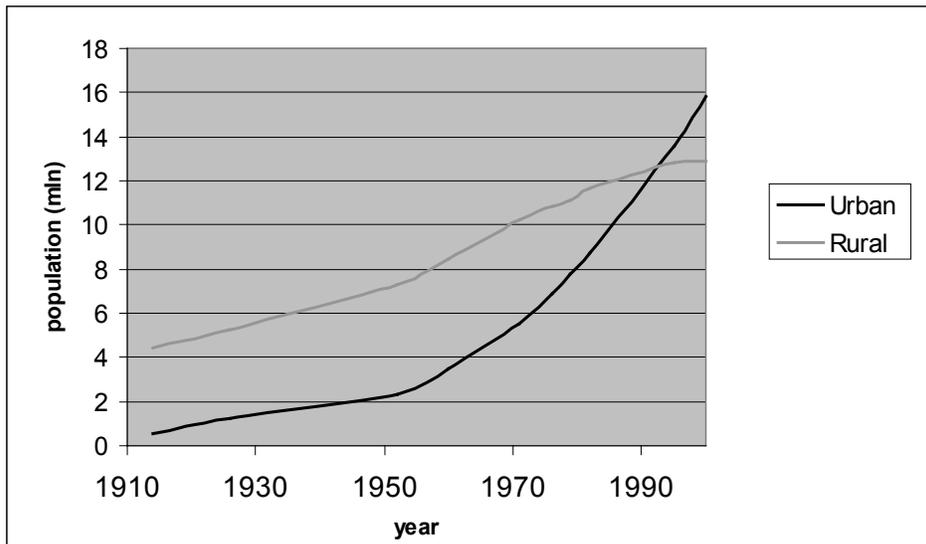
In the late 1970s and the 1980s, a diffusion process occurred, in which the international migration experience spread to regions that used to be predominantly oriented towards internal migration (Bencherifa 1996). Several new sending areas have emerged (Fadloulah *et al.* 2000:xiv), which also became spatially focused on specific destinations in Europe. The agro-pastoral region around Khenifra, located in the Middle Atlas, has increasingly participated in migration to France since the 1970s and, more recently, to Italy and Spain (Fadloulah *et al.* 2000:51). Until the end of the 1970s, migration from the region of Laârange (south of Tangiers) was mainly oriented towards the regional towns and Casablanca and Rabat. Since the 1980s, it has witnessed increasing migration to the United Kingdom — not a typical migration destination for Moroccans at all and a true “specialty” of the region. This community of about 25,000 people has settled mainly in East London (Abu-Haidar 1999:39). Nearby Spain has also become an increasingly popular destination. One-third of the current migrants from this region are living in the UK and 44 percent in Spain (Fadloulah *et al.* 2000:52,99-100). From the early days of the protectorate, the Tadla plain south of Khouribga was an important provider of internal migrants to the nearby metropolis of Casablanca and to regional towns. Since the 1980s, this region has specialized in migration to Italy (Costanzo 1999:43; Refass 1999:100).

### **The decentralization of internal migration and “reverse” migration**

Notwithstanding the high levels of international migration from Morocco, there is no doubt that internal migration has remained more important in numerical terms. Although

few reliable meso or micro-data on internal migration are available (Refass 1988:187), some earlier studies throw some light on the huge significance of rural-to-urban migration and point to the crucial function of internal migration as a precursor to international migration (cf. Noin 1970; Laghaout 1989). In the post-independence period, complying with what appears to be a universal mobility trend, Morocco's urban population has increased much faster than the rural population, which stagnated at around 12.8 million over the 1990s, even though birth rates have remained higher in rural regions (see Figure 2). In 2000, 55.2 percent of the Moroccan population were living in an urban environment (cf. Fadloullah *et al.* 2000:8,26)<sup>10</sup>.

**Figure 2 Rural and urban population growth Morocco (1900-2000)**



Source: Direction de la Statistique Maroc, Noin 1970

This only partly reflects migration from rural areas to the big cities. What is happening, in fact, is more complex than the often evoked image of a massive rural exodus. In fact, the term rural exodus – which is the standard term in Moroccan political and scholarly discourse to indicate rural-to-urban migration – is a misleading metaphor, because it

<sup>10</sup> Definitions of “urban” and “rural” are somewhat ambiguous, since these primarily reflect the administrative status of a district. Part of the high urban growth rate is the result of the administrative redefinition of previously rural districts which have evolved into truly urban or semi-urban areas over the past few decades. Such urban districts often include surrounding villages.

conceals increasingly important processes of intra-regional migration and the partial urbanization of the rural space. The term evokes an apocalyptic image of rural depopulation in absolute terms, while most so-called “rural” regions have in fact witnessed a net population *increase*, mainly because of the growth of urban centers within these regions (cf. Koubry 1995).

Urbanization and partial de-agrarization are *general* processes which also occur within rural Morocco, in which so-called rural populations increasingly earn additional income outside the traditional agricultural sector. Previously, such livelihood diversification was achieved primarily through long-distance internal migration. However, the development of numerous centrally located villages into small or medium-sized urban centers is increasingly offering non-agricultural employment within the “rural” provinces themselves (cf. Berriane 1996; De Haas 2003).

This process of micro- and meso-urbanization — which has presumably been encouraged by decentralization policies (Kagermeier 1989) and significant improvements in road and electricity infrastructure — over the interior of Morocco, has affected patterns of internal migration (cf. Berriane 1996). An increasing number of internal migrants do not settle in the big cities, but in rapidly growing smaller and medium-sized towns near to or within the rural provinces themselves. Examples of such growth poles are Nador and Al Hoceima in the north, Agadir and Tiznit in the southwest and Ouarzazate in the south. If we focus on the regional level, numerous smaller, but rapidly growing, towns have sprouted. Since the 1970s, the growth rates of small and medium-sized towns (5,000-50,000) have been higher than those of large cities (in particular, those with over 100,000 inhabitants), whose relative growth seems to be slowing down. The growth rate is highest in towns with 20 to 50,000 inhabitants (Kagermeier 1989:118-9). Consequently, rural-to-urban migrants increasingly remain in the provinces of the interior.

Interestingly, there is substantial evidence that urban-oriented consumption and investments of remittances in housing and private enterprises (shops, commerce, hotels, coffee houses, crafts, transportation) by international migrant households have

accelerated the growth of medium-size and large towns located in the migration belts. Consequently, the employment and entrepreneurial opportunities in such migrant boomtowns have subsequently created a reverse movement of internal migrants from within and outside these regions (Berriane 1996; Bonnet and Bossard 1973; De Haas 2003). Thus, international out-migration and the concomitant counter-flow of remittances have created an opposite movement of internal migration.

### **Migration and remittances as a national development strategy**

Throughout the post-independence period, the Moroccan state has actively stimulated international out-migration<sup>11</sup>. As we have seen, international migration was seen as a “safety valve” to prevent political tensions in Berber areas. Besides being a political instrument, migration was also seen as a tool for national economic development. In the 1965-68 Three-Year Plan, the utility of migration was primarily seen through the skills and knowledge that migrants were expected to acquire through work and education abroad. It was expected that this experience would be beneficial for national industrial development. In this “developmentalist” era, migrants, whose stay abroad was generally considered as temporary, were seen as innovative actors of development who would help Morocco in its economic take-off. The Five-Year Plan of 1968-72 largely played down the education argument and emphasized the quantitative aspects of migration in relieving pressures on the labor market and the positive monetary effects of remittances. This shift in attention can be explained by the increase in unemployment and increasing deficits in the balance of payments which Morocco witnessed in that period (Heinemeijer *et al.* 1977).

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<sup>11</sup> Although international migration was stimulated, the opposite was true for internal rural-to-urban migration, which was perceived as a threat to political and economic stability. The rural exodus was perceived to lead to the decline of agricultural production and to urban overpopulation. The Moroccan state has therefore aimed, largely in vain, at curbing internal migration.

The belief that migrants would be particular actors of change, importing new ideas, attitudes and skills, gradually faded. Efforts to stimulate the participation of returned migrants in the development process through investment-stimulating programs generally failed, partly through bad implementation, partly because of a lack of commitment among migrants and the general distrust of government agencies (Fadloulah *et al.* 2000:32; Fellat 1996; Obdeijn 1993). Moreover, migrants seemed not to be willing to invest in productive enterprises and spent most of their money on consumption and “non-productive” housing construction. This contributed to the rising skepticism about the usefulness of migrants in the development of their regions of origin<sup>12</sup>.

In contrast to policies aiming to stimulate investments by migrants, policies to increase remittance transfers seem to have been very successful. Since the late 1960s, Morocco has encouraged the creation of a network of consulates, bank branches and post offices to facilitate the transfer of remittances<sup>13</sup>. Since the early 1980s, remittance transfer via banks has progressively replaced postal orders as the primary means of money transfer (Refass 1999:98). Since the end of the 1980s, new monetary policies have been applied in Morocco, involving the lifting of restrictions on exchange and on the repatriation of money, which have probably contributed to a renewed increase in remittances after a period of relative stagnation (Giubilaro 1997:30). In 1989 the Banque Al Amal was created with the aim of helping to co-finance emigrants’ investment projects in Morocco by offering significant loans at attractive interest rates (Collyer 2004). Since 1995, migrants have been allowed to open foreign exchange banking accounts with Moroccan

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<sup>12</sup> Recent empirical work has challenged these pessimistic conclusions. Expenditure and investments by migrants seem to have had substantial positive direct and indirect effects on wealth, education, living conditions, economic activities and employment in several migrant sending areas, sometimes creating reversal internal migration (cf. Bencherifa and Popp 1990; Berriane 1996; De Haas 2003).

<sup>13</sup> In 1968 the Credit Populaire du Maroc (CPM) Bank was given the task of gathering remittances from migrants to provide an alternative to the post office, as well as in kind and cash transfers. The success of the CPM in dominating the bank trade in remittance transfers is responsible for transforming it into one of the largest banks in Morocco. From the early 1970s other Moroccan banks began to open branches in Europe and gradually competition for the prized trade of remittance transfers grew (Collyer 2004).

banks (Fellat 1996:316), which have established an increasing number of foreign offices in European cities with sizeable Moroccan communities. Remittances are further encouraged through fiscal policies favoring migrants (Refass 1999:98) Moreover, currency devaluations have increased the value of remittances and encouraged migrants to remit money (Giubilaro 1997:30).

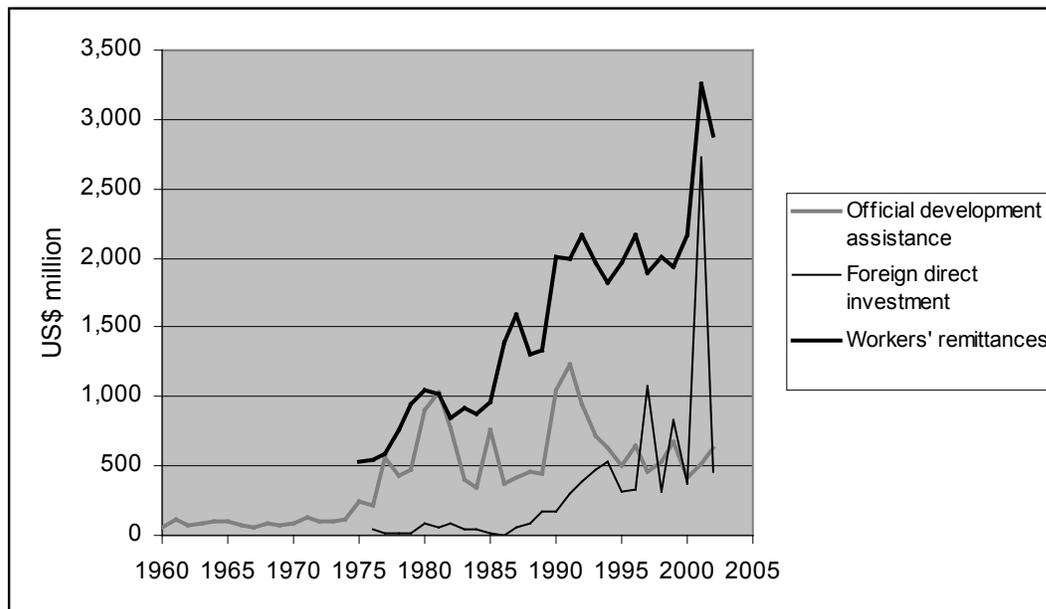
Through the probable effect of fiscal policies, the development of an efficient banking system, low inflation and the absence of large black markets for foreign exchange, Morocco has been relatively successful in directing remittances through official channels. Nevertheless, remittances in kind in the form of goods (e.g., electronics, household appliances, furniture, cars, car spare parts, clothes) taken to Morocco as gifts or as merchandise by migrants have been estimated to represent one quarter to one third of official remittances (Refass 1999:102).

Notwithstanding some relapses, remittances surged from 200 million dirham (23 million US\$) in 1968 to over 18.5 billion dirham (2.1 billion US\$) in 1992. However, a stagnation occurred over the 1990s at levels of around 2.3 billion US\$ (see Figure 3). It has been thought and feared that this would herald a future decline in remittances. The unfavorable development perspectives in Morocco and the integration of the “second generation” in the host countries has generally been believed to have led to a decreasing inclination to remit money (Fadloullah *et al.* 2000:58). It appeared that the great age of Moroccan migration had ended and that the ageing migrant population in northwest Europe represented a declining potential in terms of remittances.

However, these predictions have not come true. On the contrary, a sudden surge in remittance transfers occurred in 2001 to a level of 3.3 billion US\$. As inflation was low and exchange rates were stable, these factors cannot explain this increase. To some extent, the spectacular surge might be the effect of the introduction of the euro, which led migrants to deposit their ready money in Moroccan banks or to convert it into dirhams while on holiday in Morocco. However, there seem to be other, more structural

factors explaining the remarkably persistent character of Moroccan remittances (De Haas and Plug 2004).

**Figure 3. Total volume of official remittance, ODA and FDI flows to Morocco (1968-2000)**



Source: World Development Indicators (World Bank)

Firstly, migration has persisted at higher than expected levels because of family formation and undocumented migration to the classic destination countries. Secondly, there has been a general underestimation of the durability of transnational links between migrants and stay-behinds. Modern means of communication and increasingly easy and cheap transport links have helped diminish perceived distances (Cammaert 1986). The increasingly massive return of migrants during European summer holidays<sup>14</sup> and the high incidence of transnational “network marriages” indicates that the presumed disintegration of networks with the growing up of second and third generations is proceeding much more slowly than was once expected.

<sup>14</sup> According to a recent survey, three quarters of the international migrants have visited Morocco at least once in the past two years (Fadlollah *et al.* 2000). Moroccan authorities claimed that, during the summer of 2003, 1.512 million migrants visited Morocco, which is 50 percent higher than in 1999.

Thirdly, the unforeseen establishment of new, large and rapidly growing migrant communities in Spain and Italy are likely to “refresh” and maintain the future potential for remittance transfers. Whereas remittances from most classic destination countries except the Netherlands stabilized over the 1990s, remittances from Spain, Italy and the USA showed a steep increase (De Haas and Plug 2004). It is therefore likely that remittances will remain a vital source of income (for Moroccan households) and foreign exchange (for the Moroccan state) in the near future.

Between 1995 and 1999, Morocco was the sixth largest remittance-receiving country in the world. In 2001, it occupied the fourth place. The macro-economic significance of remittances is considerable. While remittances represented 6.4 percent of Morocco’s GNP over the 1990s on average (thereby occupying 14<sup>th</sup> place in the world ranking), remittances represented 20.1 percent of all imports in goods and services (Buch *et al.* 2002). Remittances substantially contribute to income growth (Testas 2002) and poverty alleviation. Teto (2001) concluded that about 1,170,000 Moroccans would fall back to absolute poverty without international remittances<sup>15</sup>.

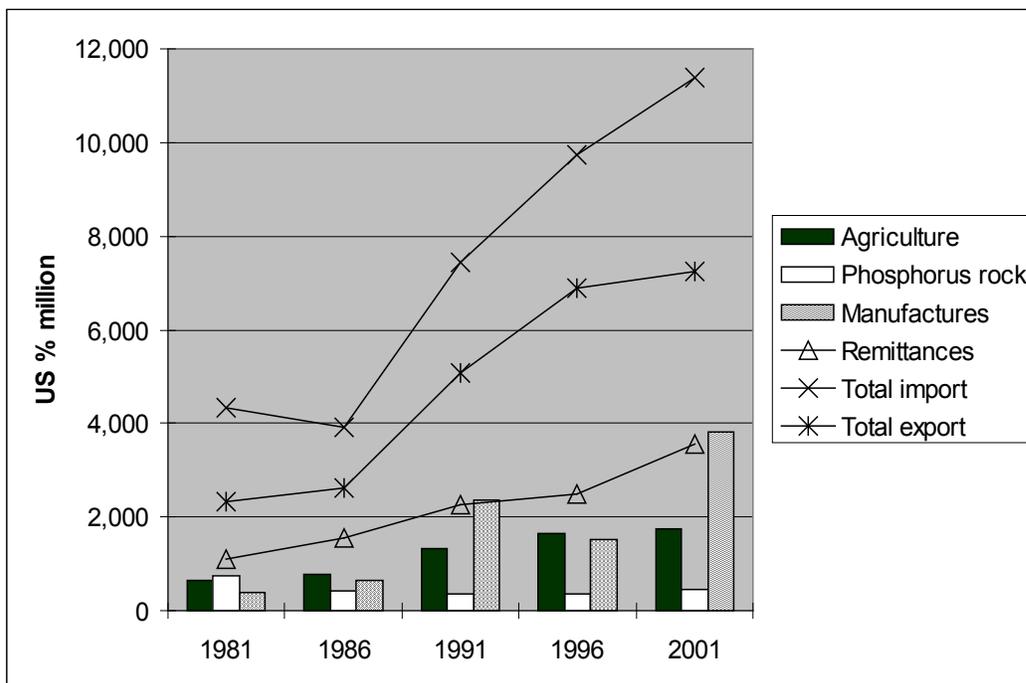
For the Moroccan state, remittances are a crucial and relatively stable source of foreign exchange and have become a vital element in sustaining Morocco’s balance of payments. Over the past two decades, remittances have proved to be a substantially higher and less volatile source of foreign exchange than official development assistance (ODA) and foreign direct investment (FDI) (De Haas and Plug 2004; Giubilaro 1997:31). FDI is not only lower but also highly volatile. Whereas ODA was almost equally as high as remittances over the 1970s, it only represented one-fifth of remittances in 2000 (see Figure 3).

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<sup>15</sup> The actual contribution of migration to poverty alleviation is probably higher, as only remittances transferred via official channels were included in this estimate. Schiff (1994:15) rightly stressed that remittances benefit relatively non-poor households rather than the poorest, who are less inclined to migrate. Nevertheless, the indirect contribution of remittances to poverty alleviation might be higher through income multiplier effects (De Haas 2003)

From a macro-economic perspective, migrants are to be considered as a major “export product”. In 2000, remittances represented one-quarter of total exports of goods and services. The revenues of remittances dwarfed those of phosphates, Morocco’s main primary export commodity, throughout the 1980s and 1990s. During the same period, remittances were also higher than receipts from agricultural exports (see Figure 4). Remittances have also remained higher than receipts from the expanding Moroccan tourist industry (2.8 billion US\$ in 2001)

**Figure 4. Value of remittances, total exports, total imports and major export products (1981-2001)**



Source: IMF Balance of Payments Statistics Yearbook (annual); World Bank (Morocco at a Glance)

From the onset of migration, the Moroccan state has attempted to maintain a tight control on migrant communities in Europe by explicitly addressing migrants as its subjects<sup>16</sup> and, until the early 1990s, actively discouraging their integration into the receiving countries

<sup>16</sup> Moroccan nationality is inalienable. This means that even Moroccans who obtain citizenship of their country of settlement cannot relinquish their Moroccan nationality, so that they acquire double nationality. In order to stress the “Marocanité” of migrants and their offspring, official government discourse persistently designated them as MRE: *Marocains Résidant à l’Étranger* (Moroccan Residents Abroad).

(Obdeijn 1993). Through a network of Moroccan embassies, consulates, mosques and state-created offices for migrants such as the “Amicales”, Moroccan migrants were discouraged from establishing independent organizations, joining trade unions or political parties in the countries that the Moroccan state considered only as their temporary place of residence. This policy served a double goal. Firstly, the state wanted to prevent Moroccan migrants from organizing themselves politically and thereby becoming a potential factor of political opposition “from outside”. Secondly, integration was perceived as endangering the vital remittance transfers.

However, the integration-discouraging policies were increasingly criticized not only by European governments, but also further alienated the migrant population from state institutions. In the early 1990s, the Moroccan government seemed to recognize that its patronizing and repressive policies had increased already present feelings of distrust of Moroccan state institutions and had probably chased away potential migrant investors instead of binding them closer to their home country.

In the same period, remittances stagnated. Urged by the fear that this would herald a decline in the vital remittance transfers, the Moroccan state changed course by adopting a more positive attitude towards the integration of migrants and through targeted campaigns addressing migrants in a non-patronizing way that can be best described as “courting the Diaspora” (cf. Hamilton 2003). There is increasing recognition that more positive, trust-increasing strategies are needed in order to stimulate remittance transfers and investments by migrants. This shift in policies was probably influenced by a general change in macro-economic policies stimulated by the IMF towards more open markets, that placed a high priority on attracting foreign capital as a tool for national economic development. Consequently, migrants were no longer approached as indolent remittance senders who were expected to remain obedient, but increasingly as potential businessmen who should be convinced to invest in Morocco.

A ministry for Moroccans residing abroad was created in 1990, to be incorporated in 1997 into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Fargues 2004b). Also in 1990, the Moroccan

government established the *Fondation Hassan II pour les Marocains Résidant à l'Étranger*. Its aim is to foster and reinforce the links between Moroccan migrants and Morocco through assisting them in various ways, both while in Europe and during their summer holidays in Morocco, and to inform and guide migrants on investment opportunities. This went along with a general process of liberalization of Moroccan society over the 1990s. Freedom of speech and organization has significantly increased. Increasing civic liberties meant more freedom among migrants to establish (transnational) organizations such as Berber, cultural and “home town” and aid associations (cf. De Haas 2003; Lacroix 2003).

There also is increasing awareness of the need to reduce obstacles to investment, such as the complexity of regulations, corruption and excessive red tape (Kaïoua 1999:124-5). The priority placed on restoring the confidence of migrants in the Moroccan state and in convincing migrants to invest in Morocco has probably played an important role in a number of recent policy measures to combat corruption among rent seeking border and police officials and among officials in general—who tended to harass migrants on holiday and “cream off” their relative wealth. In 2002, the new Moroccan king Mohammed VI announced plans to ease administrative procedures for obtaining business permits.

Obviously, whether these attempts to promote Morocco as a fertile ground for return, remittances and investments by migrants will be successful depends not so much on image building, but on the capacity of the state to further improve the *general* social, economic and political conditions of Moroccan society.

### **Morocco as a labor frontier country**

The case of Morocco seems generally to conform to transitional migration theory, which predicts that social and economic development initially tends to be associated with increasing internal and international out-migration. Fundamental changes in the political

and economic macro-context explain how Morocco has become firmly integrated within the Mediterranean-European migration system. Colonization, the incorporation of Morocco's formerly semi-autonomous tribal hinterland into the modern (colonial and Moroccan) state and the capitalist economy, urbanization and the concomitant development of infrastructure have allowed the evolution of new, intensive and increasingly complex patterns of internal and international migration, which were a partial extension and transformation of pre-modern labor mobility.

Internal and international migration increases in the early phases of (1) social and (2) economic development, since more people (1) *aspire* and (2) can *afford* to migrate. This also seems to apply at the regional and intra-regional levels. A key observation is that the poorest and most isolated areas have not tended to expel most migrants. In particular, international migration seems to be the result of development rather than of marginalization or absolute poverty. The analysis also provided evidence for the conceptualization of migration as a spatial diffusion process. Alongside a growing complexity of internal migration, a spatial diffusion of international out-migration has occurred beyond the historical migration belts, partly in response to new labor opportunities in southern Europe.

Morocco has several demographic characteristics in common with other "labor frontier" countries. Morocco is in full demographic transition, witnessing a still rather high, but decreasing, population growth, sharply falling birth rates and, most relevant for migration, a steep increase in the number of young adults entering the labor market. Population growth reached a peak in 1965 and has started to decline since then, mainly because of a steep decrease in fertility rates from 6.89 in 1972 to 2.75 in 2002 (Source: World Bank Development Indicators). This means that, drawing on Zelinsky's (1971) vital transition, Morocco passed from phase (b) of the early transitional society to phase (c) of the late transitional society in around 1970.

This demographic transition neatly coincided with the explosive start of the Moroccan international migration boom, which peaked in 1972. This makes it tempting to attribute

the migration boom to Morocco's demographic transition. Although high population growth (in particular, of the working age population) and high international migration do indeed *tend* to occur simultaneously, this does not mean that rapid population growth is automatically associated with more migration. After all, population growth is only one component of a complex chain of processes (cf. Coleman 1999: 486-7). A high demand for unskilled labor in northwest Europe, direct labor recruitment in Morocco, economic downturn and pro-emigration policies pursued by the Moroccan government coincided with this transition. This unique combination of demographic, economic and political circumstances where labor demand and supply matched, seems to explain why international out-migration boomed in the 1968-1972 period.

It is important to stress in this context that the actual propensity to migrate is not determined by demographic factors, but mediated by the level and pace of development in sending countries. This eventually determines to what extent expanding populations can build their desired futures within their own country. In Morocco, the discrepancy between population and growth in labor demand has been particularly high and increasing ever since the Oil Crisis. While the number of young adults entering the labor market has increased dramatically since the 1980s, public spending cuts and austerity measures following a IMF-instigated structural adjustment program have hit employment growth. In 1998, official unemployment was 19.1 percent among the total labor force and 35 percent among the age 15-24 labor force. University graduates, who used to enjoy practically guaranteed employment in the public service, also face huge difficulties in finding jobs (Giubilaro 1997; White 1999). Over the period 1990-1995, the Moroccan rate of domestic absorption — total entries into national employment / total labor supply — was only 46 percent — substantially lower than in other Mediterranean emigration countries like Tunisia (78 percent) and Turkey (71 percent) (Giubilaro 1997:58).

Secondly, migration does not take place in a social, ethnic and political void. The very process of colonization has created the infrastructural, economic and social preconditions under which large-scale migration could occur. Especially at the onset of large-scale migration, colonial bonds with Spain and France, active labor recruitment in specific,

often dissident, Berber regions and selective passport issuance policies had a decisive influence in establishing the spatially clustered, specialized migration itineraries between specific regions and specific European countries and cities. Yet the influence of policies on regulating migration rapidly decreased because of migration-facilitating network effects which counteracted restrictive immigration policies after 1973. The continuing labor, family and undocumented emigration of Moroccans over formally closed borders exemplifies the significance of migrant networks in perpetuating already started migration movements (cf. Massey *et al.* 1993).

During the protectorate and the first post-independence decades, the authoritarian state could maintain a higher degree of migration control than at present, essentially by depriving Moroccans of basic civil rights (e.g., refusing passports, forced return from France). However, ironically, the post-war extension of the European constitutional welfare states (which also implied granting more rights to migrants), as well as the increasing civic liberties in Morocco, along with the improved education and access of increasingly ambitious and capable individuals to information and migrant networks, have significantly reduced the capacity of both the Moroccan and the receiving states to control migration.

However, the high importance of political factors and migrant networks is no reason to refute transitional theory as such. In fact, it is possible to incorporate political factors as “free market distortions”, and networks as an intermediary variable reducing costs and risks of migration. Moreover, notwithstanding the major influence of networks and politics, the principal root cause of the ongoing migration has remained unchanged, that is, the huge gap in social and economic opportunities between Morocco and European countries. The significance of migration policies and networks is huge, but should not be overstated. Large-scale migration is unlikely to occur or persist at high levels in the absence of its material *sine qua non*. Migrant networks are only likely to facilitate subsequent migration in great numbers if stay-behinds perceive migration to be to their benefit.

The case of Morocco refutes Zelinsky's prediction of rapidly decreasing international migration in phase (c). The demographic transition and associated mortality and fertility declines have shown considerable diversity in different historical and geographical settings (Hirschman 1994). Likewise, the sequence of mobility change proposed by Zelinsky on the basis of the European experience does necessarily exactly apply to contemporary developing countries (Skeldon 1992). Contemporary developing countries experience steeper — but presumably also shorter — peaks in population growth because their demographic transition evolves much faster than was the case in northern Europe (Kirk 1996: 368). This seems to go along with a temporarily decreased capacity of economic and employment growth to keep up with galloping population growth. This might explain why international out-migration persists in relatively advanced stages of the demographic transition. Furthermore, growth of working age population seems to be a more essential factor than fertility or gross population growth. This implies that the association between declining fertility and declining emigration propensities is likely to lag behind rather than being the more direct link suggested by Zelinsky.

An additional explanation for persistently high out-migration might be that the income and opportunity gaps between contemporary sending and destination countries (and the perceived levels of relative deprivation) are possibly higher than they were at times of large-scale European emigration to the New World. On this issue, the migration hump theory offers valuable additional insight, because it sees migration as a result of *relative* wage gaps rather than of absolute wages in sending countries. However, the Moroccan case has shown that there is ample reason to broaden this view from “wage” to “opportunity” gaps, so as to include economic and socio-cultural dimensions of development, which include political freedoms, ethnic rights, educational opportunities, social security and health care. Migration can consequently be seen as a means of seizing better opportunities at another place *as compared with* opportunities at the sending end. This also exemplifies the limited explanatory power of conceiving migration in terms of artificially separated “push” and “pull” factors.

Thus, although Zelinsky's original mobility transition hypothesis ignores considerable variation in demographic transition and migration patterns in specific historical and geographical settings and needs adaptation to take into account the generally faster transition of currently developing countries, this does not upset the general validity of the mobility transition model. No two countries have followed identical paths to demographic transition, development and migration at each stage. However, this diversity is not irreconcilable with the universality of the transition (Kirk 1996). In the past sixty years, the demographic transition has proved to be a universal phenomenon, while the importance of the interrelationship between the demographic transition, more general development processes and mobility patterns remains (cf. Kirk 1996; Skeldon 1992). By incorporating insights derived from Skeldon's regionalization and the migration hump, while allowing room for the historical and political uniqueness of each specific migration experience, the "transitional" migration theory seems remarkably adequate in explaining observed *general* past and present patterns of mobility.

### **Future scenarios**

Taking into account demographic and economic determinants and drawing on insights from transitional migration theory, it is likely that migration from Morocco will remain important at least for the coming one or two decades. Firstly, in Spain and Italy, recent labor migrants have laid the foundations for a new and permanent Moroccan diaspora, which is likely to increase through legalization and family reunification. Secondly, family formation is likely to further increase the ranks of the established migrant communities in northwest Europe. Thirdly, unemployment and the general lack of opportunities in Morocco will continue to motivate young people to migrate abroad, either legally or illegally. Extensive migrant networks and the long, south European coastline make this migration notoriously difficult to control. Moreover, since the demand for migrant labor in particular sectors of the European economy is likely to persist, many Moroccans will continue to have a strong economic rationale to take the risks and social, economic and psychological costs of migrating.

Likewise, remittances are likely to remain one of the pillars of the Moroccan economy in the coming one or two decades. The increasingly self-conscious migrant communities are likely to remain a crucial factor on which Morocco's future social, political and economic development partly depends. Although the explicit labor-exporting policies of the 1960s and 1970s have been abandoned and lip service is being paid to the migration restrictionist aims of the European Union, the Moroccan state has little interest in a decline in migration while European employers are in need of their labor. In the meantime, migration continues and it is unlikely that governments on either side of the Mediterranean are genuinely willing or able to stop this movement.

It is more difficult to make more long-term predictions, as the future potential for Moroccan-European labor migration crucially depends on the evolution of the broader political-economic context at the sending and the receiving ends of the migration equation. However, the demand side seems to be the least uncertain factor. There seems to be a broad consensus that the demand for both unskilled and, increasingly, skilled migrant labor in Europe will persist and even increase. This is partly related to the ageing problem. Although there is a general consensus that migration cannot be a structural solution to ageing, the fact that the post-World War II baby-boom generations will massively start reaching retirement after 2006, is likely to result in a sudden rise in the demand for labor in specific sectors (Fargues 2004b). Various economic sectors, horticulture and the low-skilled service sector in particular, already rely so heavily on cheap (often undocumented) migrant labor, that they cannot survive without it. The fact that Spain has signed (officially temporary) labor migration agreements with Morocco in 1999 and 2001 and that a new recruitment agreement was being prepared in 2004 (Collyer 2004), illustrates the real need for this labor. But, obviously, much will also depend on future economic growth in the EU.

On the supply side, pressure on the Moroccan labor market is not expected to decrease significantly in the short run (cf. Giubilaro 1997: 64-5; Fadloulah *et al.* 2000: xxiii). However, the good news is that Morocco has almost reached the point where the

dramatic reductions in fertility since 1972 will result in the reduction of the number of people attaining working age beginning in 2010 to reach full momentum in the period 2015-2020 (Courbage 1999). The next generation entering the labor market will theoretically face less labor market competition and also bear an exceptionally light demographic burden compared to past and future generations (Fargues 2004b).

This positive, delayed effect of fertility decline on the rate of domestic absorption may eventually lead to declining international migration, as transitional models predict. However, whether, and the extent to which and when this will really happen, crucially depends on future political stability and freedom, economic growth and job creation. This is partly contingent in its turn on various exogenous factors, in particular, on how Morocco's association agreement with the EU will be implemented, how this will affect competitiveness and to what extent market integration will also allow increased access of Moroccan producers to the EU market (White 1999; Fargues 2004b; cf. Martin and Taylor 1996). Thus, the (declining) right tail of the migration hump is by no means inevitable. As Martin and Taylor (1996: 57) warned, under unfavorable economic and political conditions, or if economic growth is accompanied by increasing income inequality, a migration hump may be extended or transformed into a semi-permanent "migration plateau" of sustained out-migration. This makes it notoriously difficult to make long-term predictions.

Migration hump theory predicts that emigration tends to decrease steeply if income differentials between sending and receiving countries reach values between 4 or 5 to 1, provided that the emigration country is growing fast and offering hope and opportunity (Martin and Taylor, 1996:58)<sup>17</sup>. With GDP per capita gaps ranging from 12 to 20 (5.6 to 7.6 in PPP terms), substantial time will be required for per capita GDPs in Morocco and European countries to converge (see Table 2). Increasing media exposure and improving education is likely to boost aspirations and perceived relative deprivation and, hence, the

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<sup>17</sup> Others have placed this "migration turning-point" at income differentials of 3 to 4.5 (Böhning, 1994:196; Olesen, 2002:141)

propensity to migrate (cf. White 1999). The dense and efficient migration networks might further lengthen the Moroccan migration hump.

**Table 2. GDP per capita (2001) and life expectancy (2002) for selected countries**

	GDP/capita US\$	Morocco =100	GDP/capita PPP US\$	Morocco =100	Life expectancy	Total fertility rate 2000-2005
Mali	239	20	810	23	48.5	7.0
Congo, DR	99	8	680	19	41.4	6.7
Senegal	476	41	1,500	42	52.7	5.0
Côte d'Ivoire	366	54	1,490	41	41.2	4.7
Mauritania	366	31	1,990	55	52.3	5.8
Ghana	269	23	2,250	63	57.8	4.1
Morocco	1,173	100	3,600	100	68.5	2.7
Italy	18,788	1,602	24,670	685	78.7	1.2
Spain	14,150	1,206	20,150	560	79.2	1.2
Germany	22,422	1,912	25,350	704	78.2	1.4
France	22,129	1,887	23,990	666	78.9	1.9
Belgium	22,323	1,903	25,520	709	78.7	1.7
Netherlands	23,701	2,021	27,190	755	78.3	1.7

**Source: Human Development Report 2004**

Thus, assuming a moderately positive scenario of modest economic growth, political stability and a further increase of political and civic liberties, we might on the one hand predict that Morocco still has a fairly long way to go before entering Zelinsky's phase (d) and transforming itself from a "labor frontier", labor-exporting country into an "expanding core" (cf. Skeldon 1997) and, subsequently, a net labor importing country. On the other hand, based on the experience of countries which have previously gone through this mobility transition, transitional migration theory predicts that the in-out migration break-even point is preceded by a period in which large-scale, though declining, out-migration simultaneously occurs with increasing immigration from relatively poorer countries.

It seems that, in Morocco, this process has already been set in motion with mounting trans-Saharan (overland) immigration from Sub-Saharan countries. Although most Sub-Saharans traveling to Morocco are transit-migrants on their way to Europe, an increasing

number are settling in Morocco on a semi-permanent basis. Although Moroccan policy makers tend to stress the temporary, transitory character of sub-Saharan immigration, one of the few laws of migration seems to be that some proportion of “temporary” migrants will prove to be permanent settlers.

The establishment of what seems to be a new trans-Saharan migration system seems entirely consistent with transitional migration theory and it exemplifies the importance of relative deprivation in explaining migration. Since they see Morocco as an easily accessible, comparatively more developed, politically stable and safe country (see basic indicators in Table 2), an increasing number of migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa prefer settling there to returning home if they do not manage to enter Europe. This might herald an era of increasing African migration to, and settlement in, Morocco and the coexistence of immigration and emigration typical of “transitional” countries. Interestingly, this immigration might well restore Morocco’s historical function as a bridge between sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa and Europe.

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