

**International migration and  
regional development in Morocco:  
a review**

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## **Abstract**

Despite its status as one of the world's leading emigration countries, Morocco has been largely absent from the lively theoretical debate on migration and development. The impact of international migration on development in Moroccan migrant-sending regions is assessed through a review of empirical work. Notwithstanding empirical lacunas and methodological flaws, available evidence suggests that migration and remittances have improved living conditions, income, education and spurred economic activity through agricultural, real estate and business investment, from which non-migrants indirectly profit. This has transformed migrant-sending regions into relatively prosperous areas that now attract internal 'reverse' migrants. Although this challenges prevailing pessimism, the developmental potential of migration is not fully realized through several structural constraints. Migration impacts are heterogeneous across space, socio-ethnic and gender groups, and tend to change over time and household migration cycles. Migration and remittances may enable people to retreat from, as much as to invest in, local economic activities, depending on the specific development context. Paradoxically, development in migrant-sending regions seems to be a prerequisite for return and investment, rather than a consequence of migration.

## **Introduction**

Since the mid-1960s, Morocco has experienced large-scale migration of mostly unskilled migrants to western Europe. This migration was primarily oriented towards France, but also increasingly towards the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and, since the mid-1980s, Spain and Italy. The previous expectation that these 'guest workers' would return never materialized. Following the economic recession and the tightening of immigration policies after the 1973 Oil Crisis, relatively few Moroccan migrants returned. Migrant networks, combined with a sustained demand for migrant labor, explain why policies aiming to curb migration have had only limited effects. The number of Moroccans abroad has been on an almost constant and remarkably linear rise ever since the mid-1960s, with an average increase of 50,000 persons annually. Increasingly, restrictive immigration has led to a shift in migration strategies characterized by an increasing reliance on marriage migration and undocumented migration, in particular to Spain and Italy.

Over the past four decades, Morocco has evolved into one of the world's leading emigration countries. Moroccans form not only one of the largest, but also one of the most dispersed migrant communities in Western Europe. Out of a total population of 30 million, well over 2 million people of Moroccan descent lived abroad in 2001. This does not include the 400-700,000 Jews of Moroccan descent living in Israel. The actual number may be substantially higher, due to undocumented migration. In 2000, France housed the largest Moroccan population, comprising an estimated number of 840,000 individuals of Moroccan descent, followed by the Netherlands, with about 290,000 Moroccan 'descendants'. Belgium, Spain and Italy housed communities of 155,000, 200,000 and 195,000 Moroccan migrants in 2001, respectively (De Haas, 2003; OECD, 2004). Germany (98,000), the United Kingdom (25,000) and Scandinavian countries (10,000) contain smaller communities. Also across the Atlantic, communities of Moroccan, mostly higher skilled migrants in the US (85,000) and French-speaking Canadian province of Quebec (70,000) have rapidly expanded (Collyer, 2004).

In recent years, remittances have witnessed a remarkable increase. 3.3 billion US\$ in official remittances were received in 2001. The inflow of hard currency remittances is crucial to the balance of payments. While remittances represented 6.4 percent of Morocco's GNP over the

1990s on average, they represented 20.1 percent of all imports in goods and services (Buch *et al.*, 2002). In 2001, remittances were six times higher than official development aid, five times higher than FDI, and also exceeded revenues from tourism and the export of agricultural produce and phosphates.

Notwithstanding the macro-economic significance of remittances and incomes of migrants' families, the extent to which international migration and remittances can bring about more long-term, sustained development and economic growth in migrant-sending areas in poor countries is quite a different question. This very issue has been the subject of intensive debate over the past decades, in which the more pessimistic views have tended to dominate.

On the one hand, developmentalist 'migration optimists' argue that migration leads to a North-South transfer of capital (including investment capital) and accelerates the exposure of traditional communities to rational and democratic ideas, modern knowledge and education. Up to the 1960s especially, the expectation was that the flow of remittances, as well as the experience, skills and knowledge of returning migrants would help developing countries in their economic take-off (Penninx 1982, 782–3; cf. Beijer, 1970). In recent years, this developmentalist view of migration, remittances and development seems to be experiencing a renaissance (cf. Kapur, 2003).

On the other hand, 'migration pessimists'—inspired by the structuralist paradigm and dependency theory—have argued that migration and concomitant changes, such as growing inequality and individualism, lead to the breakdown of traditional, stable village communities and their economies, leading in turn to the development of passive, non-productive communities, which become increasingly dependent on remittances. The latter are said to be spent mainly on luxury goods and 'consumer' investments, and rarely invested in productive enterprises. In a process known as cumulative causation (Myrdal, 1957), migration is claimed to undermine the local economy by depriving communities of their valuable labor force. South-North migration is perceived as discouraging the autonomous economic growth of migrant-sending countries (Lipton, 1980; cf. Rahman, 2000; Rubenstein, 1992). Thus, instead of encouraging development, migration is seen rather as one of the very causes of further underdevelopment.

However, both approaches seemed to be too rigid and determinist to deal with the complex realities of migration and development interactions. In the 1980s and 1990s, the new economics of labor migration (NELM) emerged in American research as a response to both functionalist-developmental (the ‘migration optimists’) and structuralist migration and development theory (the ‘migration pessimists’). Stark (1978; several articles compiled in 1991), in particular, revitalized academic thinking on migration from the developing world, by placing the behavior of individual migrants within a wider societal context and considering the *household* — rather than the individual — as the most appropriate decision-making unit (cf. Taylor, 1999). This approach models migration as the risk-sharing behavior of households. Migration is perceived as a household response to income risks, since remittances serve as income insurance for households in the country of origin. In addition, migration is ascribed a vital role in providing a potential source of investment capital, which is especially important in the context of the imperfect credit (capital) and risk (insurance) markets prevailing in most developing countries (Stark, 1991; Taylor, 1999). Migration can, therefore, also be a strategy to overcome various market constraints, enabling households to invest in productive activities and to durably improve their livelihoods.

A growing body of more recent empirical work seems to corroborate the NELM hypotheses, as they indicate that the developmental impacts of migration are often far more positive than commonly assumed. Several studies have shown that migrant households tend to have a higher propensity to invest than do non-migrant households, but also that consumption and often trivialized ‘non-productive’ investments can have positive income-multiplier effects, through which the benefits or remittances might also indirectly accrue to non-migrant households (for excellent reviews, see Taylor *et al.*, 1996a and 1996b).

However, there is a striking absence in this debate of micro and meso-level empirical work from the major source countries of European-bound labor migration south and east of the Mediterranean (cf. Massey *et al.*, 1998). Recent theoretical insights on migration and development are almost uniquely based on micro-studies done in Latin America, particularly Mexico. Because of this bias, it is unclear to what extent actual migration impacts in migrant-sending areas outside the Western Hemisphere do correspond with these findings.

This certainly applies to Morocco, where the systematic study of migration and development has been relatively neglected after a temporary surge of largely pessimistic studies in the 1970s, while the Moroccan migration and development context and the theoretical debate have radically changed since then. Moreover, detailed empirical work that has been done tends to be exclusively descriptive, is not designed to test hypotheses and is theoretically disconnected. Most empirical work has remained theoretically underexplored, isolated and largely unknown, in particular, outside the French-speaking world. It is significant in this respect that recent attempts by Leichtman (2002) and Nyberg-Sørensen (2004) to address migration and development interactions in Morocco have almost completely ignored earlier empirical work. The striking result is that empirical work from a prime emigration country like Morocco has been absent from the general theoretical debate on migration and development.

The aim of this paper is to establish such a link for Morocco through reviewing a substantial part of the empirical literature on the effects of international migration on social and economic development in Moroccan-migrant-sending regions and the communities they contain. The analysis also aims to assess how this empirical evidence relates to the general theoretical debate on migration and development. However, we do not pretend to be comprehensive, since existing evidence is patchy. Therefore, the final aim of the analysis is to identify empirical lacunas.

### **Remittances, income and living conditions**

A recent survey revealed that 94 percent of 1,239 migrants who were interviewed during their holiday in Morocco said they had remitted money to Morocco during the 5 years covered by the survey and sixty percent reported that they had transferred at least one quarter of their income (Hamdouch, 2000). In 2000, migrants in France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Spain and Italy remitted an average of 10,740 Moroccan dirham (approximately US\$ 1,000) per year to Morocco (De Haas and Plug, 2004). This included children and the inactive population. At the household level, this implies that remittances per remitting migrant reach higher levels. A recent survey in south Morocco revealed that the average remittance-receiving household received 32,000 dirham (€ 3,000) annually (De Haas, 2003). Much

money is handed over personally and migrants take many goods (e.g., electronics, household appliances, furniture, cars, car spare parts and clothes) to Morocco as gifts or as merchandise (Refass 1999). Remittances in kind have been estimated at levels of 25-33 (Refass, 1999) and 30-50 percent (Khachani, 2002) of money transfers.

There is some macro-economic evidence that the inflow of remittances substantially contributes to income growth (cf. Testas, 2002). Teto (2001) projected that 1.17 million out of 30 million Moroccans would fall back to absolute poverty without international remittances, and the proportion living below the poverty line would increase from 19.0 to 23.2 percent.<sup>1</sup> The actual contribution of migration to income growth and poverty alleviation is likely to be higher, as only official remittances were considered and the income multiplier effects of remittance expenditure were ignored. However, the middle and higher income classes profit relatively more from remittances than the lowest income groups (Teto, 2001). This is because migration itself has proved to be a selective process, and most Moroccan migrants therefore do not belong to the poorest groups (Schiff, 1994, p. 15)

In regions with high international out-migration, the contribution to income growth can be far higher. In several communities in Morocco's three main migration belts — the Rif Mountains, the Sous valley and southern oases — between one fifth to over a half of all households have at least one member who has migrated abroad (De Haas, 2003; Schoorl *et al.*, 2000, p. xv). De Haas (2003) found that the average international migrant household's income was 2.5 times higher than the non-migrant household's income, and that this was largely the effect of remittances. International migration is a highly effective way of enormously improving the financial situation and living conditions of households (De Haas, 2003; Fadlollah *et al.*, 2000, p. xx).

It is often feared that this increase in income is artificial and temporary and therefore creates a dangerous dependency on external sources of income (cf. Aït Hamza, 1988; Mter, 1995; Kagermeier, 1997; Lazaar, 1989). However, empirical evidence suggests that remittances are a comparatively stable source of income and that the relation between migration duration and remittances is not linear. Remittances tend initially to increase with migration duration and

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<sup>1</sup> In urban environments this increase would be from 12.0 to 16.6 percent, and in rural environments from 27.2 to 31.0 percent.

the size of the household left behind, although they tend to decrease after family reunification (Fadloullah *et al.*, 2000, p. xix)<sup>2</sup>. One study conducted in France found that remittances reached their peak between 3 and 12 years after initial migration (Garson and Tapinos, 1981). A study on the trend of remittances per migrant head from northwest European countries revealed a peak around 1990, more than two decades after the onset of large-scale migration (De Haas and Plug, 2004). This is in line with other evidence that individual remittances tend to reach a peak approximately two decades after migration (Fokkema and Groenewold, 2003).

It is a common assumption that migrants will become less inclined to remit with integration, family reunification and diminishing family obligations. However, this decline is much more delayed and the slope of decline is flatter than once assumed. Transnational bonds are more durable than previously assumed (cf. Saa, 1998), and sending communities continuously renew the remittance potential through migration (De Haas, 2003). Moreover, migrants' social and, in particular, economic integration actually tends to lead to an *increased* capacity to remit (Chattou 1998). Remittances tend to increase with the income of the migrant (Fadloullah *et al.*, 2000, p. xix). On the basis of a survey conducted in Turkey, Morocco and Egypt, Fokkema and Groenewold (2003) concluded that employed migrants remit four times more than unemployed migrants. Therefore, the surge in remittances from the Netherlands in the late 1990s can probably be attributed to a significant decrease in unemployment among Moroccan migrants (De Haas and Plug, 2004).

The massive yearly return during the summer holiday<sup>3</sup> and the fact that second generation immigrants marry spouses living in Morocco reveals the relative durability of transnational ties. According to a 1988 study undertaken in France, 29 percent of the second generation 'Moroccans' abroad remit regularly (Collyer, 2004). Interpretation of this figure is ambiguous. Collyer (*ibid*, p. 19) observed that, although this can be a cause for dismay, "it does nonetheless suggest a significant degree of continued contact of the second generation".

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<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, the same study revealed that two-fifths of migrant households do *not* receive remittances (Fadloullah, 2000, p. 121).

<sup>3</sup> According to Fadloullah *et al.* (2000), three quarters of the international migrants had visited Morocco at least once in the two years prior to the survey.

Migrants' attachment to sending communities is also testified by the establishment of many 'home town' associations and development NGOs by migrants. Such 'development networks' (Lacroix, 2003) play an increasingly important role in sending regions through the establishment of public infrastructure (road construction, electricity, drinking water, irrigation systems, mills, dams, etc), social development projects (community centers, literacy projects, schools and dormitories, mosques, etc), and, more recently, projects aimed at improving local economies (workshops, women's cooperatives, handicrafts, vegetable oil and milk production, tourist development, etc.) (Lacroix, 2003; see also Gallina, 2004). The freedom of activities of migrants' associations used to be very restricted until recently, certainly compared with countries like Mexico and Turkey. However, increasing civil liberties in Morocco over the 1990s have led to a remarkable increase in association activities.

### **Demographic effects**

The effect of migration on decreasing population growth or unemployment at the national level should not be overestimated. Migration is too a limited phenomenon to counter general demographic trends, although demographic effects of migration are often magnified at a regional and local level. Large-scale out-migration of young people and subsequent family migration may cause a considerable slow down in demographic growth at those levels (Kerbout, 1990). Nevertheless, the commonly employed metaphor *exode rurale* to indicate this process is misleading, as it evokes an image of absolute rural depopulation, which occurs only in specific, isolated, mostly mountainous or desert areas (cf. De Haas, 1998). Most emigration regions have, instead, witnessed a net population increase (cf. Koubry, 1995). Moreover, where depopulation occurs, it seems to be the result of *internal* migration. International migration and remittances rather enable family members to stay in the village, and several authors have argued that it has prevented the depopulation of regions such as the Rif, Anti-Atlas and the southern oases (De Mas, 1990; Fadloulah *et al.*, 2000; Heinemeijer *et al.*, 1976; Mter, 1995). Moreover, as we shall see, the long-term direct and indirect effects of remittance expenditure can even lead to an increase in population through reverse migration.

## Migration, consumption and investments

Pessimism has pervaded the Moroccan literature on the development impacts of international migration. It is generally believed that remittances are primarily used for daily expenses, conspicuous consumption and ‘non-productive’ investments, such as the construction of palatial houses, which spur inflation and do not create employment. Productive investment in agriculture or industry, by contrast, is claimed to be very limited. In many instances, it is argued, migrant households even withdraw from productive activities in and outside agriculture. This is believed to lead to a dangerous, passive dependency on remittance income (cf. Fadloulah *et al.*, 2000; Hamdouch *et al.*, 1979; Lazaar, 1987; Kagermeier, 1997; Mezdour, 1993).

However, the empirical and analytical basis of such assertions tends to be rather weak. Firstly, the vast majority of studies only address migrants and do not include non-migrants and their households in research populations. In fact, the lack of systematic comparisons between migrant and non-migrant households makes it impossible to assess properly the impact of migration on the economic status and consumption and investment patterns of households. Secondly, virtually all studies ignore the analytical implications of the fungible nature of household income. Because the diverse sources of family income are typically pooled in the common household budget, it is not possible to earmark remittances (cf. Taylor, 1999). This makes common assertions such as “remittances are spent on x, y, or z...”, difficult to sustain.<sup>4</sup> Thirdly, impact studies tend to concentrate on remittances and migrants’ activities and do not consider other sources of household income. Nevertheless, remittances and income from other sources are likely to affect each other reciprocally, whether income is pooled or not. Therefore, all activities of households should be taken into consideration — the ‘whole household approach’ advocated by Taylor (1999) — in order to assess properly the impact of migration.

It is striking that claims that remittances are mostly used for conspicuous consumption (e.g., luxury houses, videos, television, satellite dishes, cars) are often not based on any attempt at

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<sup>4</sup> This problem already starts with questionnaire design. Migration impact surveys typically contain questions such as “Would you tell me in which ways the money you received from family, relatives and friends [...] was spent” (this was a question in a recent Eurostat/NIDI survey; cf. Schoorl *et al.*, 2000).

systematic data collection at all (cf. Aït Hamza, 1988; Kagermeier, 1997). They tend to be based on general impressions, which typically tend to record only the most visible type of — status-related — expenditures such as cars and palatial houses. They are likely to ignore or underestimate other, less visible, but necessarily not less important, consumption and investments. To a considerable extent, assertions that migrants spend their money “irrationally” (cf. Aït Hamza, 1988) on luxury goods and non-productive investments have become truths in themselves, which are hardly subjected to sound empirical verification.

In fact, if we look at the pertinent empirical data that *is* available, a considerably more positive picture arises. In as long ago as the 1970s, Heinemeijer *et al.* (1976) concluded on the basis a large-scale survey in the two main migrant-sending areas (the Rif and the Sous) that migrants actually had a relatively high propensity to invest, although the unfavorable and uncertain economic conditions limited investment opportunities (see also Bonnet and Bossard, 1973). More recent studies have also indicated that migrants do not indulge in conspicuous consumption and that they are more prone to invest in non-housing sectors of the local economy – the service sector in particular – than was previously assumed (De Haas, 2003; Khachani, 1998; Refass, 1999).

A recent survey claimed that over 70 percent of migrants had invested in Morocco (Hamdouch, 2000), although this figure is probably biased towards the more involved migrants, because only migrants on holiday in Morocco were interviewed. McMurray (1992, cited in Nyberg-Sørensen 2004) found that 41 percent of return migrants in Nador entered commerce, services or transportation. 12 percent were business owners or independent operators before migration, against 39 percent after return. From his survey, De Haas (2003) concluded that, between 1975 and 1999, 43 percent of return migrants as against 15 percent of non-migrants invested in agricultural water pumps; 29 percent as against 9 percent bought agricultural land; 88 as against 54 percent invested in real estate; and 39 as against 13 percent invested in non-agricultural enterprises. On average, current and returned international migrant households invested four and six times more, respectively, than non-migrant households.

Khachani (1998) argued that there has been a diversification in the economic activities of Moroccan migrants. In several migrant-sending communities, remittances not only enable

migrants' households to construct modern houses, but also permit the purchase of agricultural land and modern agricultural equipment, the introduction of state-of-the-art stock-raising, or the establishment of non-agricultural enterprises, such as those in the tourist sector, and the setting up of commercial establishments and small and medium-size industries in food-processing and the supply of building materials (cf. Nyberg-Sørensen, 2004; cf. Bencherifa and Popp, 1990; 2000). Migrants have also played a role in activating the stock exchange in Casablanca and are managing parts of the privatized transportation system, such as bus services (Nyberg-Sørensen, 2004).

However, since most studies do not systematically compare the consumption and investment behavior of migrants and non-migrants, it is unclear to what extent the relative propensity to invest in particular sectors is higher or lower among migrant households. Nevertheless, on the basis of prior research, some tentative hypotheses can be drawn up, which need further verification.

### **Migration and real estate investments**

Unsurprisingly, literally all studies agree that housing construction is the migrants' first investment priority (cf. Fellat, 1996). Hamdouch (2000) concluded that 83.7 percent of all migrants' investment projects were in real estate, as against 7.5 and 8.8 percent in agriculture and other sectors, respectively. De Haas (2003) concluded that 71.1 percent of the total monetary sum of investments by households in his sample was in real estate, 11.3 percent in agriculture and 17.5 percent in non-agricultural enterprises. The most visible spatial effect of international migration is the construction of new, often concrete houses and the related decline of the traditional, adobe or stone, habitat. In migrant-sending areas throughout Morocco, this building fever has transformed certain villages into towns, where migrants also prefer to locate other investments (Fadloullah *et al.*, 2000).

The majority of researchers lament the migrants' priority for real estate investments. The size and self-indulgent style of migrants' houses is generally frowned upon. Both scholars and policy makers have tended to strongly disapprove of what Kaioua (1999, p. 124) dismissed as a "mentalité de pierre" (stone mentality). They almost tend to accuse international migrants of

building large, richly-ornamented houses in an urban style which has been considered as “exaggerated” (Ben Ali, 1996, p. 354), reflecting an “irrational” (Aït Hamza, 1988) use of money for unnecessary status symbols. The lack of entrepreneurial mentality among migrants is often blamed for this orientation towards what Kaioua (1999, p. 124) called a “refuge sector par excellence”. This discourse is typically accompanied by a call on policies to “divert remittances to productive sectors of the economy” (Agoumy, 1988, p. 159) by “guiding” migrants towards more “rational” investment behavior (Kaioua, 1999, p. 124).

However, there seems to be ample reason to criticize this attitude as rather patronizing, for blaming migrants’ irrational mentality *a priori*<sup>5</sup> rather than trying to comprehend their motives. Houses do indeed function as a status symbol, expressing the upward social mobility achieved through migration (Mezdour, 1993, p. 182).<sup>6</sup> However, besides the fact that they tend to fulfill this function in virtually all societies, it appears to be erroneous to reduce the desire to construct houses as simply a quest to erect status symbols.

The importance attached to housing should primarily be explained by the universal quest for basic luxury, space, safety, privacy, fewer conflicts and better health. Hajjarabi (1988) has pointed to the legitimacy of the desire for decent housing and basic hygienic facilities. The first objective of migrants is to meet the households’ immediate needs. Proper nutrition, health care, clothing and housing serve to give the family a decent living. The relatively large, new houses and the sanitation and other equipment they tend to contain can offer more convenient living and privacy than was conceivable in traditional dwellings<sup>7</sup>. Dismissing such aspects of well-being as ‘non-developmental’ reflects a particularly narrow view of

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<sup>5</sup> In this context, Taylor *et al.* (1996a:411) spoke of “diatribes by academics and policy makers against migrants for their profligate and unproductive ways”.

<sup>6</sup> Berriane (1997) and De Haas (2003) argued that the luxury of migrants’ houses is often exaggerated. Only a minority of the houses are built in a truly pompous style, whereas many houses are relatively modest in size and style. Unfortunately, such palatial houses tend to be taken as a stereotypical, representative example for migrants’ houses, because they are located along paved roads and catch the eye. In fact, this is a distorted, deductive, and self-affirmative view typical of non-systematic, impressionistic “research” based on superficial impressions (for similar criticism, see Taylor, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> In the event of earthquakes or floods, the traditional (adobe) habitat can also be dangerous to live in because of the risk of collapse. Most of the damaged or collapsed houses during the 2004 earthquake in Al Hoceima, northern Morocco, were traditional dwellings. Most concrete structures survived the earthquake.

development. In fact, by suggesting that rural people should stay in their mud brick houses, wealthy and urban-based social scientists apply different standards to others than they would probably do for themselves.

Secondly, there are specific social and cultural reasons that explain the priority for housing construction. In extended families remittances are seldom sent directly to the migrant's wife, but generally to one of the men within the household (Hajjarabi, 1988, p. 180-1). Traditionally, the in-laws decide on the use of remittances. This situation is widely known to generate numerous conflicts between migrants' wives and their in-laws (De Mas, 1990; Hajjarabi, 1995, p. 107). Hajjarabi (1988, p. 182-3) argued that, because they expect to gain significantly in personal liberty and privacy, the wish to have one's own house — away from the authority of their parents-in-law — is a top priority among women (cf. Van Rooij, 2000). In fact, the decision to establish independent, nuclear households is often initiated by the spouse of the migrant. Hajjarabi (*ibid*) also argued that, in their very architectural design, traditional houses reflect patriarchal norms and the domination of the mother-in-law and, hence, hinder private nuclear family life.

This creates a push for migrants' nuclear families to establish their own households by constructing a new house either in the native village or in nearby towns. Besides increasing the personal liberty of migrant wives, this can also be an effective strategy for migrants to escape from the heavy financial burden of supporting large extended families. Such disaggregation, in which intra-household tensions about remittance use accelerate the break-up of extended families, the nucleation of family life and the physical 'lifting out' of nuclear families, has been observed for several migrant-sending areas (Aït Hamza, 1988; 1995; Berriane, 1996; De Haas, 2003; De Mas, 1990). This lifting out may be in the form of family reunification at the destination or the transfer of the family from the village to nearby towns, or building an own house in the village. By literally fencing off nuclear households from extended families, women gain in liberty and migrants escape from the obligation to support the extended family. This has the additional advantage of giving children better educational opportunities (De Mas, 1990).

Thirdly, housing *also* turns out to be a rational, relatively secure capital investment through which households are able to generate additional income through various lease arrangements.

Second and third houses are generally built in towns and cities. Taking into account high population increase, the nucleation of family life, fast urban growth and the concomitant large demand for housing (Dhonte *et al.*, 2000), real estate investments can be a highly rewarding investment strategy, which potentially enables migrant households to secure and increase income. Moreover, house ownership provides ‘life insurance’ for the migrants’ households (De Haas, 2003).

Thus, the high priority for housing seems to be rational, because it is a relatively low-risk investment in an insecure investment environment, which increases wellbeing and has potentially high benefits (cf. Ben Ali, 1996, p. 360). Because of sustained population growth, urbanization and the general process of household nucleation there is a persistent scarcity on the urban housing market (cf. Dhonte *et al.*, 2000). Construction has become one of the pillars of the Moroccan economy, not least because of migrants’ investments (Charef, 1986). Moreover, as we will see, real estate investments have had important, indirect positive economic effects in creating local and regional employment opportunities.

### **Migration and agricultural transformations**

It has been commonly argued in the Moroccan literature that international migration has contributed to the agricultural decline and a general disaffection with small-scale peasant agriculture. The ‘lost labor’ of able-bodied (migrated) men is ascribed a key role in the process of agricultural decline. The *exode rurale* is supposed to have led to agricultural decline or even abandonment of agriculture (De Mas, 1990; Ferry and Toutain, 1990; Kerbout, 1990, p. 55). Instead of investing, it has been argued that migrant households tended to withdraw partially or entirely from agriculture. Return migrants who *do* invest in agriculture often do so, not out of rational economic motives, but because of their strong emotional attachment towards agriculture. It would therefore concern a “ritual” (De Mas, 1990) or “sentimental” (Bencherifa, 1991) agriculture, in which the migrant practices a kind of “hobby farming” (Bencherifa and Popp, 2000, p. 142).

However, this pessimistic perspective is fundamentally challenged by an increasing number of empirical studies showing that international remittances have played a key role in facilitating agricultural investments. As long ago as the early 1970s, Bonnet and Bossard (1973, p. 19) observed that remittances had made possible intensification of agriculture in the Sous region. In other migrant-sending regions, too, migrants play an important and innovative role in the development of subsistence and commercial agriculture through the purchase of land, modern agricultural equipment, such as tractors and water pumps, the introduction of new crops and techniques and the establishment of new farms. Migrants show a particular preference for investments in the development of new irrigated agriculture (Bencherifa, 1991; Bencherifa and Popp, 1990; 2000; De Haas, 2001; Popp, 1999). Pascon (1985) observed that investments by international migrants in wells and water pumps have mitigated the effects of the severe drought occurring in the mid-1970s.

This apparent contradiction in the literature can be partly resolved by the fact that migration impacts are not uniform over time. There are indications that the initial effect of migration on agricultural productivity might indeed have been negative, because of an acute lack of family labor. This sometimes went along with a relative degradation of the agricultural infrastructure and irrigation systems. However, in the longer term, and after an adjustment process, this agricultural decline has often been reversed through agricultural investments made possible by the inflow of remittances (De Haas, 2001). While *current* migrant households sometimes de-intensify agriculture, return migrants play an innovative and production-increasing role in agriculture (Bencherifa, 1996, p. 416-422; Bencherifa and Popp, 1990, p. 97).

This exemplifies the importance of inter-temporal dimensions in the assessment of migration impacts. A focus on short-term effects of international migration might therefore partly explain the overly pessimistic conclusions of prior research. A more fundamental weakness of the ‘lost labor hypothesis’ is, however, its ignorance of the possibility that the migrants’ labor — if it creates absolute shortages at all — can be substituted by household members, sharecroppers, remunerated non-migrant or immigrant workers and, partially, mechanization. It seems that, after a period of decline and accommodation from subsistence, labor-intensive towards more capital-intensive forms of agriculture, such substitution is indeed occurring in several migrant-sending regions.

It should be emphasized, however, that migration does not automatically lead to agricultural development or other investments and, in fact, the impact of migration on agricultural development in Morocco is characterized by a high degree of spatial differentiation. Drawing on Bencherifa's (1991) seminal work, we can hypothesize the following patterns: Regions where arable land is relatively abundant and plot sizes large, where irrigation water is available in sufficient quantities and which are located near to roads and other public infrastructures, often attract investments of international migrants. Where water availability is uncertain or costly and other decisive factors obstruct agricultural production and family life — such as uncertain land property rights, complex collective regulations concerning maintenance and water distribution, extremely small plot sizes — migrants tend to be far less inclined to invest in agriculture or might even partially withdraw from that sector (see also Bencherifa and Popp, 2000, pp. 141-3; De Haas, 2001).

It is not uncommon for migrants originating from ecologically marginal areas (e.g., semi-arid mountains) to allocate agricultural investments in more favorable environments, such as more fertile coastal or alluvial plains. In oases, peasants prefer to localize new investments in desert areas outside the traditional oases, where land is abundantly available in contrast to the microscopic land tenure systems in the old oases, and where constraints arising from the complex and inflexible collective regulations concerning water distribution and maintenance of the agricultural infrastructure do not play a role (cf. Bencherifa, 1991, pp. 132-41; De Haas, 2003).

Besides geographical and ecological factors, the availability of public services and infrastructure (e.g., paved roads, electricity, drinking water, schools) appear to be highly important factors determining the attraction of rural regions for investments in general (Popp, 1999, p. 194). Isolation and the absence of basic public amenities – to which migrants in particular have become accustomed – are major obstacles to resettlement and investments in the region of origin. Where this is the case, migrants appear to prefer settling in nearby urban centers (Bencherifa and Popp, 2000, p. 143). It can therefore be hypothesized that the number of returnees decreases to the degree that the village is more isolated and bereft of public services.

Finally, it is important to differentiate between the impacts of internal and international migration. There is evidence that, especially in ecologically marginal areas where irrigation is relatively costly, internal migration is associated with agricultural stagnation or decline (Bencherifa, 1996, p. 417; De Haas, 1998). The relatively low incomes of internal migrants often do not allow for lost labor substitution. In arid and semi-arid areas where irrigation water is accessible only through pumping, internal and non-migrant households can even be forced to withdraw from agriculture if they cannot afford to invest in digging wells and buying water pumps. It is internal migration, therefore, rather than international migration, that seems to be associated with a retreat from agriculture through the decreased availability of family labor and poverty (De Haas, 1998; 2003).

### **Livelihood diversification, non-agricultural investments and intertemporal shifts**

Notwithstanding substantial agricultural investments by migrants, the relative economic importance of agriculture has decreased through a general diversification in rural livelihoods (Bencherifa and Popp, 2000; Berriane, 1997). Exclusively agricultural-based households are becoming an increasingly exceptional phenomenon. In large parts of semi-arid and arid Morocco, for example in the Anti-Atlas, the central and eastern Rif and southern oases, agricultural activities have become an activity of secondary economic importance (Bencherifa and Popp, 1990, p. 101; De Mas, 1990; Mter, 1995). Only 4.3 percent of the rural households surveyed by De Haas (2003) relied exclusively on agriculture. Such livelihood diversification is partly realized through migration, although the rural economies themselves are also becoming less agricultural and urbanizing, with increasing employment in non-agricultural sectors, such as retail trade, commerce, cafes and hotels, crafts etc.

This process of intra-regional urbanization and livelihood diversification seems to be associated with and reinforced by shifting investment priorities among migrants. Investments in all kinds of service enterprises, ranging from grocery stores, commerce, coffee houses, hotels, travel agencies, restaurants, money changers, to transportation (taxis, vans, buses) have become relatively more important to the detriment of real estate and, particularly, agricultural investments (cf. Berriane, 1996; 1997; Lazaar, 1987). Migrants have also played an important role in the growth of small-scale industry. Whereas, in the 1970s, the vast

majority of investment projects was in agriculture (cf. Heinemeijer *et al.*, 1976), Hamdouch (2000) found that the tertiary sector has become the privileged target sector among international migrants, accounting for 44.8 percent of intended investment projects — 27.4 percent in trade, 12.1 percent in tourism and 5.3 percent in other services. De Haas (2003) concluded on the basis of his village-based survey that 60.1 percent of the total of non-real estate investments since 1975 had been in non-agricultural business.

It has been argued that recent, international migrants exhibit different attitudes towards investment than did the lower educated, more traditionally oriented ‘guest worker’ generation, and that recent migrants and the second generation are more inclined towards investments in productive, lucrative and often urban sectors (Gallina, 2004; Kaioua, 1999). Hnaka (1999, p. 165) refuted this hypothesis by arguing that recent migrants from the Sous were less interested in investing in general.<sup>8</sup>

However, it is unlikely that changing investment priorities can be wholly attributed to inter-generational differences in attitudes or structural economic transformations characterized by a decreasing relative importance of the agricultural sector compared with industry and, in particular, the service sectors. At least part of this intertemporal shift can be explained by the simple fact that migration is maturing, since investment priorities tend to shift over the life cycle. There is evidence of a relationship between migration duration and the sectoral allocation of migrants’ expenditure and investments. Heinemeijer *et al.* (1976, pp. 93-5) already concluded that housing is generally the first major investment – besides direct life necessities such as food and medical care – once a certain amount of money has been saved. As we have seen, economic activities in sending areas such as agriculture might temporarily stagnate or decline in the first years after migration. After this period, however, migrants tend to exhibit a diversifying tendency towards other types of investment, such as agriculture, small-scale industry and the service sector (Berriane, 1996; Refass, 1999).

De Haas (2003) identified a sequence in which real estate investments occur relatively early in the migration cycle and peak 5-14 years after initial migration, to stabilize at a high level.

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<sup>8</sup> Ben Ali (1996, p. 354) observed that the propensity to invest among migrants in the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium was higher than among migrants in France and Spain, although he did not analyze whether this reflects different circumstances in the country of origin or to differences in the characteristics of the migrants.

Major agricultural investments mostly occurred 15-24 years after migration and investments in non-agricultural private businesses peaked 25-29 years after migration. The relatively older international return migrants therefore had the highest inclination to invest in general and the highest monetary share (77.5 percent) in non-farm business investments — this seems to refute the hypothesis that there is a big inter-generational shift in investment priorities<sup>9</sup>. Previous research suggests that one of the very motivations to migrate is to enable the migrant to start his own enterprise upon return. Through its investment capital-generating function, migration makes possible the shift from a position of employee to the desired position of self-employment (cf. Heinemeijer *et al.*, 1976, p. 94; Kagermeier, 1997; Mezdour, 1993, p. 182). Berriane (1997) stressed the importance of transnational bonds between international migrants and family members who stayed in Morocco in explaining investments. This became apparent in the concern that migrants expressed in creating small-scale projects in trade or services in order to offer a job to their relatives, so that they could become financially independent.

### **Investment leakage, regional disparities and intra-rural urbanization**

The duration of migration tends to coincide with an increasing diversification in both the sectoral and spatial allocation of investments. For instance, whereas first houses are generally constructed in the native village, second and subsequent houses are generally constructed in urban centers. Migrants tend to allocate commercial investments to housing, commerce and to agriculture outside the native village, especially when the latter offers few prospects of economic development.

It is commonly argued that such leakage of migrants' investments from the periphery to the large cities in West Morocco would further exacerbate the already large spatial rural-urban economic disparities, which are said to subsequently accelerate the *exode rurale* (Aït Hamza, 1988, p. 169; cf. Bijaad, 1987; Fadloulah *et al.*, 2000, p. 53; Kaioua, 1999, p. 124; Naim, 1997). Nevertheless, the majority of urban-based investments tend to be allocated in rapidly

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<sup>9</sup> While extensive attention has been paid the role of return migrants in development, the role of migrants still abroad has been relatively neglected. This is rather strange, because these migrants send the bulk of remittances and their impact on local and regional development tends to be substantial.

growing towns *within* regions (i.e. provinces) of origin (De Haas, 2003; Refass, 1999). The relative arbitrariness of delimiting regions implies that judgment of migration impacts on spatial disparities is not unambiguous. This implies that differences in the scale of analysis affect the assessment of migration impacts on regional inequality. Restricting the analysis to the village level easily leads to the conclusion that many investments leak away to central urban areas. If we extend our scope to the regional level, the conclusion can be that most investments remain within the region and that migration has actually decreased inter-regional disparities with central regions located along the Rabat-Casablanca axis.

Thus, investment outside the native village or town does not necessarily mean investment outside the region. Even in the marginally located Todgha valley in south-Morocco, only 5.1 percent of all houses and only 16.0 percent of all enterprises had been established outside the oasis. Nevertheless, 19.7 percent of all houses and 42.4 percent of all enterprises had been established in Tinghir, a boomtown located within the valley (De Haas, 2003). This illustrates the general process of rural urbanization taking place in Morocco, which is closely intertwined with processes of internal migration and international migrants' investments in the urban sector.

The urban allocation of migrants' investments and the fact that many return migrants prefer to resettle in towns have spurred the development of new urban centers within or near to migrant-sending areas themselves. Numerous centrally located villages and small towns located within or nearby migrant-sending regions have therefore developed into medium-sized or large urban centers over the past few decades. International migration has played a crucial role in their growth (cf. Agoumy, 1988; Lazaar, 1989). Towns such as Tiznit, Agadir, Ouarzazate, Taza, Tetuan, Tangiers, Oujda have experienced a revolutionary and anarchic growth since the 1970s. Completely new towns, such as Nador and Al Hoceima in the Rif, Zagora in the Drâa valley, and the Kelâa Mgouna-Boumalne de Dadès cluster and Tinghir in the south, have sprung up from almost nothing in just a few decades (Aït Hamza, 1999; Bounar, 1993; McMurray, 1992, cited in Nyberg-Sørensen 2004). Numerous smaller centers have developed around crossroads, markets and administrative centers, in a process of what has been called a "generalized micro-urbanization" of the rural space (Berriane, 1996, p. 368, cf. El Maoula El Iraki, 1999). The proliferation of new urban centers has been accompanied by a slowdown in the growth of large cities (cf. Giubilaro, 1997, p. 35).

International migration is increasingly becoming an urban phenomenon. Not only does an increasing share of migrants originate from towns, but return migrants also increasingly prefer resettling and investing in regional urban centers. The presence of public amenities (health care, schools, electricity), employment opportunities and the greater potential for investments explain this phenomenon (Berriane, 1996, p. 379-80). In urban centers in the Rif and the south, international migrants have constructed 75 to 80 per cent of recent houses (Berriane, 1996, p. 368; De Haas, 2003, p. 322). Although some returnees settle in central cities such as Rabat and Casablanca, the vast majority resettle in towns within or close to their native regions, thus combining the advantages of urban facilities and ethnic-linguistic closeness.

Studies from north and south Morocco have indicated that some of the migrants still abroad also prefer to transfer their nuclear households (i.e., spouse and children) to towns (Berriane, 1996; De Haas, 2003). Besides the presence of public services and economic opportunities, this phenomenon is explained by previously mentioned frequent occurrence of conflicts between the migrant's spouse and her in-laws. Avoidance of material claims by the migrants' extended families is an important element in the decision to relocate the entire family to towns (Berriane, 1996; 1997; De Mas, 1990)

There also appears to be a certain selectivity in return migration, with particularly successful and wealthy return migrants favoring urban areas rather than their previous homes in often much smaller settlements in rural areas. Less successful migrants tend to return rather soon after migration and resettle in their native villages, since they lack the material and human capital to invest in urban areas (Collyer, 2004; cf. Berriane, 1997; Kagermeier, 1997).

### **Migration and education**

A study conducted in Tangiers revealed that educational facilities formed the primary motive for households to settle or resettle in the city and thus came before the quest for better living conditions and investment opportunities (Berriane, 1996, p. 376). This points to the important, but generally neglected, role of education in internal and international migration. Likewise, the impact of international migration on children's education has been largely neglected. Two

empirical studies that have addressed this issue came to the similar conclusion that — whereas international migration is not or hardly selective for education — international migrants' children were better educated and exhibited higher enrollment rates than children from non-migrant households (Bencherifa, 1996, pp. 418-9; De Haas, 2003, pp. 325-335). Furthermore, both studies indicated that this positive impact also applies to women and that international migration therefore plays an accelerating role in closing the gender gap in education. Remittance-enabled investments in the human capital of children may thus be another motive to relocate migrant households to towns with educational facilities.

### **Indirect economic effects and 'reverse' internal migration**

Through urban-based real estate and business investments, international migrant households simultaneously capitalize on, and actively contribute to, the accelerated urban growth and concentration of economic activities in existing urban centers and migrant boomtowns (cf. Berriane, 1997). This also allows for a more positive evaluation of migrants' consumption, which has been too easily dismissed as non-productive or even a waste of scarce resources. Provided that most goods and services are produced regionally or nationally, consumption and, presumably, non-productive investments in housing and the service sector can have beneficial income multiplier effects through stimulating the agricultural and service sectors and creating employment and income among non-migrants as well. There is no hard micro-level empirical evidence from Morocco that can shed a more precise light on the economy-wide, indirect effects of remittance expenditure on regional income and employment growth. Although formal tests are therefore needed, there is circumstantial evidence which leads us to hypothesize that such positive effects are considerable (Bencherifa and Popp, 2000; Berriane, 1997; Charef, 1986; De Haas, 2003; Testas, 2002).

Urban-oriented consumption and investments by migrants and, in particular, the building fever have created an surge in the demand for laborers, particularly in housing construction, which cannot be met locally or even regionally. Remittance-enabled investments in commercial agriculture in parts of the Sous and the Rif have created substantial employment for farm workers. The simultaneous occurrence of out-migration and investments has caused an increase in urban and rural wages. De Haas (2003) found that while, traditionally,

sharecroppers used to retain 1/5 of the yield, they now retained on average 41 percent of the harvest.

Although this impact has typically been evaluated as a negative effect of migration, this wage increase is obviously beneficial for the non-migrant and internal migrant employees. This also explains why towns located in migrant-sending areas have increasingly become *destinations* for internal migrants. The latter originate from marginally located villages within such regions, but increasingly come from more distant, comparatively poor regions with low rates of international migration participation.

For instance, many construction and agricultural workers in towns and commercial agriculture in the Rif are immigrants from the Tafilalt and Drâa valley in the south (Berriane, 1996, pp. 381-3; El Mesquine, 1993). In oases with high emigration rates, workers are often immigrants from more mountainous villages or more marginal oases (De Haas, 2003; Saa, 1998). Similar patterns of ‘reverse’ internal migration towards regions of international out-migration have been described for the southwestern Sous (Bencherifa, 1996, p. 415). As early as the 1970s, Bonnet and Bossard (1973, pp. 19-20) described how remittances-enabled investments in commercial market gardening in the Sous area and subsequent increased labor demand had provoked immigration from other Moroccan regions.

A common contention is that remittances fuel price inflation, especially of land and real estate (cf. Aït Hamza, 1988; Hamdouch *et al.*, 1979), partially provoked by speculation (Agoumy, 1988). Nevertheless, these studies fail to disentangle the role of remittances from other inflationary pressures and it is not specified whether this ‘inflation’ reflects a rise in the aggregate level of prices and a subsequent decline in the general value of money, or that the rise in land prices is rather the result of higher local demand for this particular fixed supply asset. Inflation has been rather low in Morocco over the past few decades. Local surges in land and real estate prices might indeed have been spurred by migrants’ investments, and have affected the poor adversely, but they are a constituent part of a more general process of urbanization and the concomitant increasing scarcity of such assets.

## **Migration, inequality and social change**

Migration has not only deeply affected regional economies, but has also changed the social face of communities. Migration is not only an attempt to secure better livelihoods, but also a clear avenue of upward social mobility. For instance, besides its economic and wellbeing value, the construction of a house is *also* an expression of the newly acquired social status. Likewise, the renovation or construction of mosques and *hadj*, the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, not only fulfills an intrinsic, religious function, but also adds to the social prestige of the migrants. Both internal and international migration have played a central role in the “landslide of social, political and economic changes” (Crawford, 2001, p. 21) rural Morocco is experiencing. Migration has also accelerated the breakdown of ancient socio-ethnic hierarchies in migrant-sending communities. In fact, in most of rural Morocco, migration has contributed to the creation of a new social stratification (Fadloulah *et al.*, 2000, p. xxii; Mter, 1995), with international migrant households forming a new kind of “migration elite”. In many respects, the new socio-economic dividing line in Moroccan migrant-sending communities is now between households with and without international remittance income (De Haas, 2003).

One might easily conclude on the basis of such observations that migration and remittances cause increasing intra-community inequality. However, there is an apparent absence of formal, statistical tests pertaining to the effect of migration on income inequality in Moroccan communities. We know from the literature that this impact is heterogeneous and highly contingent on migration selectivity and migration stage (cf. Jones, 1998). We should therefore be extremely prudent before jumping to conclusions that migration has increased inequality based on rather superficial observations.

Furthermore, it is important to avoid romanticizing the past by acknowledging that traditional communities tended to be inherently unequal. For instance, in oases, with their caste-like socio-ethnic stratification, most people used to live in grinding poverty, while subaltern (mostly Black) ethnic groups were restricted to serfdom or slavery (De Haas, 2003). In essence, what has happened is that new forms of inequality, based mainly on access to monetary resources, which are to a considerable extent defined along lines of access to international migration, have been largely superimposed upon the traditional forms of

structural, hereditary inequality based on kinship, complexion and land possession. The rise of new elite groups has gone in parallel with the demise of traditional elites. This exemplifies the ambiguity and subjectivity in judging whether such migration-induced shifts should be regarded as positive or negative.

For many subaltern groups, migration literally constituted a liberation and has been their main avenue of upward socio-economic mobility. Migration and remittances have enabled the (at least partial) emancipation of individuals belonging to socially and ethnically subaltern groups. Throughout Morocco, migration has offered new opportunities to earn an external income independent of the constraints set by traditional peasant society. Formerly landless, and hence powerless, men now earn wages that allow them to buy land and gain increasing influence in local affairs (Crawford, 2001; Otte, 2000). In Moroccan oases, the *haratin*, a low-status ethnic group, have been able to acquire a higher social status through their new financial resources (Ilahiane, 2001; cf. Bellakhdar *et al.*, 1992; Ensel, 1999; Mter, 1995; Naim, 1997). These migration-induced shifting patterns or sometimes even reversal of social stratification explain why even individuals belonging to traditional high-status groups, who previously did not see the need to migrate, now aspire to emigrate abroad (McMurray, 2001).

Consequently, members of formerly subaltern groups increasingly reject traditional authoritarian structures. They often refuse to work as sharecroppers or agricultural laborers for traditional elite groups (cf. Kerbout, 1990; De Haas, 1998). Consequently, traditional village councils (*jemâas*), the most important local political institutions, have lost much of their effective power to settle intra-community conflicts (Aït Hamza, 1988; Otte, 2000). The negative consequence for traditional agriculture can be that collective agricultural works, such as the maintenance of irrigation systems, are not carried out properly and that common law regulating land and water use is decreasingly respected (De Haas, 1998; Kerbout, 1990; 2003; Otte, 2000). In particular, in fragile anthropogenic, labor-intensive agricultural systems, such as traditional oases and mountain terraces, the result might be a general decline of traditional agricultural systems and land degradation (cf. De Haas, 2001).

### **Migration and the position of women left behind**

Intra-household relations in Morocco tend to be based on strong patriarchal principles. This is manifested in the fact that only men have historically been allowed to migrate alone. Traditionally, migrants leave their wives and daughters behind with their extended family, who protected their chastity. In this context, De Mas (1990) interpreted remittances destined for the entire extended family household as the literal price that the migrant pays for this control. In this way men were able to migrate without risking their families' honor. However, nuclear family households have increasingly become the norm over the past decades.

As we have seen, migration-related tensions on remittance use have played an accelerating role in the breakdown of extended families and have stimulated the lifting out of nuclear families and nucleation of family life. Besides increased divorce rates, migration is seen as a major cause of the increasing number of female-headed households in Morocco. Fadloullah *et al.* (2000, p. 130) found that the proportion of female-headed households among migrant households is almost double (15 versus 8 per cent) that among non-migrant households. De Haas (2003) concluded that, mainly because of migration, female-headed households accounted for one-third of all the households interviewed in his survey.

The impact of migration on gender roles has received relatively scant attention, since most research focuses on the position of the — mostly male — migrants and interviews tend to be held with — supposedly male — 'household heads' (cf. Hajjarabi, 1995). The consequences of migration on women's wellbeing are generally put in a negative light by predominantly male scholars, while the presumed lack of "paternal authority" is said to increase delinquency among youngsters (cf. Aït Hamza, 1995, p. 159,164; Fadloullah *et al.*, 2000, p. 130). However, these assertions tend to be based on general impressions rather than on systematic empirical inquiries.

It is a common assertion that migration has encouraged the emancipation of women. In the absence of their husbands, women's responsibilities, autonomy and power are said to increase (Aït Hamza, 1988; 1995; Bouzid, 1992; Fadloullah *et al.*, 2000, p. xix,130). Nevertheless, a comparative study by Van Rooij (2000) among non-migrants' and migrants' wives refuted the hypothesis that migration contributes to changing gender roles. The lives of migrants' wives remain largely confined to housekeeping, child-rearing and agricultural work (for similar results, see also Bouzid, 1992; Steinmann, 1993). Although they tend to have more control

over the use of their husbands' earnings and in child-rearing, this gain in authority was mainly temporary, since migrants resume their position as patriarchs as soon as they return (Van Rooij, 2000).

Since the material situation of wives of international migrants is better and more secure, they are generally able to hire non-migrant women and men for certain domestic and agricultural tasks (Aït Hamza, 1995, p. 165), easing their physical labor burden compared with other women (Steinmann, 1993; Van Rooij, 2000). Spouses of international migrants gain in power and status vis-à-vis non-migrant women. However, Steinmann (1993, p. 122) argued that the increasing emphasis on a capital-based economy and one-sided dependency on their husband's remittances adversely affected women. Moreover, changes in gender roles are not necessarily positive. For instance, if women take over traditional 'male' tasks, such as harvesting as a result of migration, some of the younger men may refuse to work in what has now come to be dubbed 'women's work' (Nyberg-Sørensen, 2004, p. 10).

Furthermore, the emotional burden of the increased responsibilities can be high. Both Hajjarabi (1995) and Van Rooij (2000) revealed that migrants' wives do not necessarily appreciate the sudden increase in responsibilities and tasks, which were not theirs within the normative context of traditional society and to which they do not always aspire. As this new role is generally not assumed out of free choice, it should not automatically be equated with emancipation in the meaning of making independent and conscious choices against prevailing norms on gender roles. Migration itself apparently has no direct influence or only a limited one on such norms, and gradual changes in these and the improving position of women therefore reflect general processes of cultural change within Moroccan society rather than the particular effect of migration<sup>10</sup>.

However, there might be some more indirect positive effects as well. We have seen that international migration does have a distinct positive influence on the educational participation of migrants' daughters and that remittances have both pushed and enabled migrants' wives to establish independent households in newly-constructed houses for their nuclear family,

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<sup>10</sup> Until recently women migrated almost exclusively in the context of family migration. However, it should be noted that, since the 1990s, a small, but increasing proportion of independent labor migrants to Europe and North America are female, which also seems to be the result of general cultural change.

thereby escaping control by in-laws and gaining in personal freedom. Furthermore, Courbage (1995) hypothesized that – besides factors such as higher age of marriage, increased female labor force participation and improved education – the migration of Moroccan families to European countries has contributed to the diffusion and adoption of European marriage patterns and small family norms, and so has played an accelerating role in the demographic transition (cf. Fargues, 2004).

### **A culture of migration?**

International migration also has profoundly affected the social and cultural face of migrant-sending regions. International migrants have become role models (Kerbout, 1990, p. 54). Their yearly massive return during summer holidays and exposure to the relative wealth of migrants and their direct relatives have increased the sense of relative deprivation and the aspirations of ‘stay-behinds’ (Aït Hamza, 1995). Migration has had an important influence on life rhythm and seasonality. Instead of the sowing and harvest seasons in autumn and spring, the July-August holiday season is now the yearly economic and cultural peak season, when markets are at their busiest and most marriage feasts take place (De Haas, 1998; 2003).

After comparing Ghana, Senegal, Turkey and Egypt, Schoorl *et al.* (2000, p. xv) concluded that Morocco had the strongest migration tradition and that migration had become an “all-pervasive phenomenon” in that country. The exposure to migrants’ wealth and status symbols is frequently said to have given rise to the emergence of a culture of migration, in which international migration is perceived as the main avenue of upwards socio-economic mobility (Fadloullah *et al.*, 2000, pp. 132-46) and ambitions and life projects are generally situated *elsewhere* (Hajjarabi, 1988). For many youngsters, the question is not so much whether to migrate, as *when* and *how* to migrate. The hopes of many young non-migrants are focused on marriage with an international migrant as the most secure way of migrating abroad.

Nevertheless, there is reason to criticize the uncritical way in which the culture of migration is often assumed to be ‘just’ there as a reified entity and the way in which this assumption is subsequently projected onto perceived realities. For instance, in a quantitative analysis of the role of migration culture and networks in perpetuating Moroccan migration, Heering *et al.*

(2004) measured migration culture, which was included in their model as a dummy variable, simply by assuming that regions with established tradition of high international out-migration “had” a migration culture and regions without such a tradition did not have such a migration culture.

Besides obvious measurement problems, the term ‘culture of migration’ itself can be misleading, since it suggests that rising aspirations and the outward-looking mentality are mainly the consequence of the exposure to the perceived success of migrants. It is important to recognize that migration *itself* is constituent part of a complex set of radical social, cultural and economic transformations that have affected Morocco, as well as an independent factor in perpetuating and probably intensifying, magnifying and accelerating these processes at the local and regional levels. Migration is not only a factor explaining change, but also an integral part of change itself to the same degree as it may reciprocally enable further change. Other processes, such as improved education, increasing exposure to electronic media, improved infrastructure and tourism also play a key role in opening people’s eyes to the wider world and helping to raise aspirations. Since these are part of more general and universal processes, ‘culture of migration’ is perhaps not the most appropriate term to use.

The socio-cultural impacts of migration tend to receive a bad press. Migration is said to have caused people to disdain local wages and manual, particularly agricultural, labor, and thus led to agricultural decline (Bencherifa, 1991; De Haas, 1998; Heinemeijer *et al.*, 1976, p. 88). It has often been hypothesized that, as a consequence of the migration culture, youngsters cannot imagine any local improvements through their own initiative and do not believe that they can build their future in Morocco (Schoorl *et al.*, 2000, p. xvi). The ensuing passivity and unwillingness to work and invest is evaluated as being harmful to regional development. However, the empirical evidence presented above *generally* points to the contrary, since migration and remittances have led rather to increased local economic activities, although presumably not at levels sufficient to respond to the even faster increased aspirations.

It has been commonly argued that migrants create an unrealistic perception of Europe as an El Dorado of almost unlimited opportunities (cf. Chattou, 1998, p. 236). Non-migrants are said to have exaggerated images of living in Europe through the media and the tendency among migrants to show off during holidays and to conceal failures. Although this is probably true to

a certain extent, the simple fact that salaries in Europe easily exceed Moroccan salaries by five to ten times<sup>11</sup>, as well as the prospect of increased personal freedom and the access to public health care, schooling and social security do, however, seem to justify the strong desire to migrate. Even the prospect of becoming an undocumented migrant does not scare all people off. Prospective migrants are rightly optimistic about their chances of obtaining legal status, considering the fact that, over the past decades, a large proportion of previously undocumented Moroccan migrants have succeed in obtaining residence permits through legalization or marriage.<sup>12</sup>

Fadloulah *et al.* (2000, p. xxiii) stated that the migration culture can become “a collective psychosis [in which] the group becomes almost totally obsessed by the idea of leaving, at any price” [translation from French by author]. However, this seems to be a caricature. According to their own survey, 29 percent of men had the intention to emigrate, but only 3 percent had undertaken concrete steps in that direction. Moreover, the survey was conducted only in regions of high out-migration. International migration is a highly selective process, mainly occurring among specific sections of the population of 20-29-year olds (Schoorl *et al.*, 2000). People do not want to leave at “any price”, and therefore only a minority turn intentions into action. Migration demands considerable and increasing costs and risks and is therefore generally a well-considered and well-prepared decision, in which family and community members are often heavily involved (cf. De Haas, 2003).

In fact, the valuation of the strong desire to emigrate is an inherently normative affair. From one perspective, migration is as a vote of no-confidence which drains migrant-sending regions of valuable human resources. From another perspective, out-migration is the inevitable corollary of broader development processes, in which people’s horizons widen and their

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<sup>11</sup> The typical salary of a day laborer doing unskilled work in Morocco is around 5-6 US\$ per day. Even *undocumented* agricultural workers in the Spanish province of Andalusia earn about 26 US\$ for an eight-hour day (Migration News, Vol. 7, No. 6, June 2000). Regular salaries in western and northern European countries tend to be significantly higher. The average agricultural and construction worker in the Netherlands earned a net salary of 106 and 133 € per day in 2001, respectively.

<sup>12</sup> A recent survey demonstrated that, among Moroccan migrant workers who reported illegal entry or overstay, the proportion reporting that they have been successful in their attempts to attain legal status is two-thirds or more (Heering and Van der Erf 2001:6; Schoorl *et al.* 2000:xix). Nevertheless, this figure is possibly biased, because of an overrepresentation of already legalized migrants.

capabilities and aspirations increase. Such rising aspirations push people to exploit their talents, to become more productive and to increase their wellbeing. It would be naïve to assume that these aspirations could all be realized in the native village. In fact, migration allows for better factor productivity, and this seems to be the fundamental reason why economic and social development (e.g., improved education, information, income, infrastructure) is generally associated with increasing migration (cf. Skeldon, 1997).

It would be unrealistic to think that young people would do better to stay to help the development of the sending area if we bear in mind the high unemployment and the lack of resources available to them. This very lack of certain capabilities largely disables them from ‘developing themselves’, and it is particularly through international migration that these capabilities can be acquired. It is therefore a rational choice to migrate. Even if impressions of Europe are too rosy and despite the manifold problems migrants may face abroad, the perception that international migration is the most secure way towards more social and economic freedom is therefore more than a mirage.

## **Conclusion**

Four decades of intensive international migration have fundamentally transformed sending communities, as well as Moroccan society in general. Migration has become an all-pervasive phenomenon that has also affected the perceptions and increasing aspirations of most people. An increasing number of studies since the 1990s have revealed the generally positive impacts of migration on development in Moroccan migrant-sending regions and the communities they contain. Migration has enabled households to invest in housing, agriculture, private enterprises and the education of male and female children. The relatively high and stable remittance income improves the wellbeing and living standards of households. This generally seems to confirm the hypotheses of the new economics of labor migration. Nevertheless, because much empirical work is methodologically flawed or biased, more systematic empirical comparisons and analytical rigor are needed to formally test hypotheses on the effects of migration on marginal propensities to invest, intra-community inequality and the economy-wide income multiplier effects of remittance expenditure.

However, there is substantial circumstantial evidence which leads us to hypothesize that migrants' consumption and investments have stimulated the economies of migrant-sending regions as a whole, from which non-migrants and 'reverse' immigrants to emigration areas have indirectly profited through increased employment and income. Through household relocation and increasingly urban-based real estate and business investments, international migrant households simultaneously capitalize on, and actively contribute to, the accelerated urban growth and concentration of economic activities in urban centers mostly located inside or nearby migrant-sending areas.

Although the remittance-induced construction of houses destined for nuclear families generally improves the wellbeing of migrants' wives and remittances enable their daughters to go to school, migration hardly has the often assumed effect on changing norms on gender roles, which rather reflect *general* processes of cultural change. There is substantial evidence that migration has enabled the emancipation of formerly subaltern socio-ethnic groups to the detriment of ancient elite groups. This socially differentiated nature of migration impacts exemplifies the inherently ambiguous and value-laden nature of migration impact assessments. Ultimately, differentiating valuations of migration impact are strongly related to differentiating *a priori* assumptions about what actually constitutes 'development'.

This is visible in the widely diverging opinions about how to evaluate migrants' consumption and investment behavior and various processes of social change, such as the demise of traditional societies and extended families. The same applies to the culture of migration. Although this is generally negatively evaluated, because it tends to perpetuate emigration, it can also be positively interpreted as a highly developmental consequence of increasing the capabilities, aspirations and, hence, potential productivity of young people.

This raises the fundamental question of whether the more optimistic tone of recent migration impact studies reflects a veritable change in migration impacts over recent years, the use of better or other methodological and analytical tools, or the deductive echo of a general paradigm shift away from dependency to neo-classical and neo-developmental views on development and migration. It appears that all these factors have at least some explanatory value. Firstly, there is indeed evidence that impacts change over time and are partly contingent on the migration stage, and that positive effects become more apparent as

migration matures. Secondly, the overall quality of migration studies has improved, leading to better and more subtle insights into the heterogeneous nature of migration impacts. Thirdly, general paradigm shifts have certainly played a role. Structuralist theory has become discredited, and this might have led to less negative interpretations of dependency and a more positive value being attributed to the global incorporation and capitalization of pre-modern peasant societies.

The above analysis leads to the following three key observations. Firstly, whereas international migration and remittances have stimulated social and economic development in many migrant-sending regions, it is important to observe that this impact is fundamentally heterogeneous across space and time, as well as across socio-ethnic and gender groups. Notwithstanding the generally positive impact, some regions and some social groups can be adversely affected by migration.

A second key observation is that, instead of a more a less predetermined impact, migration and remittances give migrants and their households the freedom to retreat from, just as much as to invest in, local economic activities. While remittances enable change in both directions, they do not determine the direction of this change as such. That is why neither the 'migration optimists' nor the 'migration pessimists' are right. Whether migration will trigger development or perhaps the reverse, is fundamentally contingent on the specific social, cultural and ecological context prevailing in migrant-sending areas, as well as on national and international factors, such as migration policies and political and economic conditions, prevailing in sending and receiving societies. This context will eventually determine the extent to which migrants tend to return, circulate, remit and invest, as well as the sectoral and spatial allocation of such activities. Prudence is therefore called for in making generalized statements on the alleged positive or negative impacts of migration.

The third key observation is that there is ample evidence that the development potential of international migration for Moroccan sending communities is far from fully realized. Kagermeier (1997; 1999) was right in stating that many return migrants are not successful and that many investment projects fail. He questioned the dominant image of the successful return migrant, and argued that the high visibility of their often urban-based material investments create a bias obscuring the difficult life of many return migrants and their general failure to

realize their initial dream of establishing their own enterprise. The fact that Moroccans have one of the lowest tendencies to return of all immigrant groups in Europe (Fadloulah *et al.*, 2000, p. 56) seems to indicate that Morocco is indeed not the most attractive environment in which to live and invest.

On the one hand, this might be partly related to the fact that many first generation migrants lack the financial means, education and cultural background to start innovative enterprises (Kagermeier, 1999, p. 205). On the other hand, the developmental potential of migration is not fully realized due to an unfavorable general development context characterized by inadequate infrastructure and the absence of public services, particularly in rural areas; failing credit and insurance markets; excessive red tape and corruption confronting potential investors; difficulties in obtaining title deeds on property; inefficient judiciary and a lack of legal security; as well as a general lack of trust in government institutions and doubts about future political and economic stability (Bencherifa and Popp, 2000; De Haas, 2003; Gallina, 2004; Kaioua, 1999). This might explain the generally prudent investment behavior and the tendency to invest in relatively low-risk sectors, such as housing and retail trade.

It is not realistic to expect a large-scale return on investments for as long as the state fails to create an attractive social, political, economic and institutional environment. In fact, the increasing involvement of migrants' associations in community development can also be negatively interpreted as a response to the state's failure to develop a proper institutional framework. Three decades ago, on the basis of the first comprehensive study on migration and development conducted in Morocco, Heinemeijer *et al.* (1976) argued that, although migrants exhibited a relatively high propensity to invest, the investment opportunities for migrants in their regions of origin were very limited. They therefore concluded that development in migrant-sending regions was a *prerequisite* for return and/or investment rather than a consequence of migration. In fact, this thoughtful observation has not lost any of its validity.

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