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Intra-household tensions and conflicts of interest in migration decision making: A case study of the Todgha valley, Morocco

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Abstract

This paper explores the role of intra-household tensions and conflicts of interest in explaining the diverse return and pendulum migration strategies among Moroccan migrants who first migrated to Europe in the 1960s and 1970s. Migration strategies and motivations of migrants and their households are explored through an analysis of survey and interview data collected in the Todgha valley, a migrant sending region located in southeast Morocco. While labour migration was part of broader household strategies to improve their living standards and material wellbeing, the study reveals that motivations to return are highly diverse and suggest that the issue of return can be a significant source of intra-household conflicts. This particularly applies to migrants who unilaterally decided not to reunify their families in Europe and to return after their active working life. Children who are left behind face situations of mass unemployment and an overall lack of perspective, and, hence, tend to be highly frustrated about their situation of ‘involuntary immobility’ and frequently resent their fathers for having blocked their access to Europe. Ageing migrants who did reunite their family, on the other hand, often do not fulfil their long-standing wish to return. While their spouses often oppose or refuse to return, also their children generally have an interest in staying because of better education and employment opportunities. Hence, an increasing proportion of (predominantly male) migrants seem to adopt a pendular migration strategy, which seems a second-best strategy to reconcile their wish to stay in Morocco with the reluctance of children and spouses to return for good, as well as their own interest in securing access to social welfare, health care and residency rights in Europe. This exemplifies that theories which portray international migration as the outcome of household decisions run the risk of reifying the household as a unit which takes unanimous decisions to the benefit of all, which may mask significant intra-household gender and age inequalities.

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1. Introduction¹

Since the mid-1960s, and following the conclusion of agreements with northwest European countries to recruit ‘guest workers’, Morocco has experienced large-scale emigration of mostly unskilled migrants. Moroccan migration was initially mainly oriented towards France, but also increasingly towards the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and, since the mid-1980s, Spain and Italy. Contrary to expectations, following the economic recession and the tightening of immigration policies after the 1973 Oil Crisis, relatively few Moroccan migrants returned, and many ended up settling. This process was accompanied by large-scale family reunification. The grim political and economic prospects in Morocco combined with the discontinuation of the ‘return option’ to Europe through the implementation of increasingly restrictive immigration policies, explain why many migrants decided, at least for the time being, to stay in Europe. So, paradoxically, the recruitment freeze stimulated settlement rather than the reverse (de Haas 2007; Entzinger 1985; Fargues 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. Until recently, a large proportion of first generation Moroccans and their descendants preferred to marry a partner — preferably kin — from the region of origin (De Valk, Liefbroer, Esveldt, and Henkens 2004; Hooghiemstra 2001; Lievens 1999; Reniers 2001). Only in recent years did such “migration marriages” decrease substantially in popularity in favour of marriages among people of Moroccan descent already residing in the destination country (Corijn 2009; De Valk 2008). Besides the increasing reliance on family migration, restrictive immigration policies also led to an increase in irregular labour migration to the classic destination countries in northwestern Europe and, since the mid-1980s, increasingly to the new destinations countries of Spain and Italy.

The combined effects of family reunification, family formation through new marriages, natural increase, undocumented migration, and new labour migration to

¹ The authors would like to thank Gunvor Jónsson for her valuable remarks on a previous draft of this paper.

Spain and Italy explain why the official number of people of Moroccan origin living in Europe has increased more than sevenfold from 300,000 in 1972, on the eve of the recruitment freeze, to an estimated number of 2.4 million people in 2004. Moroccans now form not only one of the largest, but also one of the most dispersed migrant communities in Western Europe (de Haas 2007).

The first generation of Moroccan migrants who moved to Europe in the 1960s and early 1970s is now approaching retirement age. The majority of this generation is not working anymore because of (early) retirement, unemployment or incapacity to work. Close to retirement age, the “shall I stay or return?”-question arises. Although many migrants persistently cherish the wish to return, only a minority actually do so. For example, while 24 percent of the Moroccan migrants in the Netherlands aged 55 and older would like to return (Schellingerhout and Klerk 2007), yearly less than 1 percent of this group actually returns to Morocco. The main factors that keep migrants from returning, at least for the present, are: unwillingness of the spouse, family ties, supposed higher quality of medical care in the Netherlands, fears of loneliness in Morocco and fear of loss of income and access to pensions, medical insurance and visas in order to visit family in the Netherlands (Cottaar and Bouras 2009; Schellingerhout and Klerk 2007).

Some migrants *do* return after the end of their active working life. However, what is more intriguing is that an increasing proportion of migrants adopt pendular migratory strategies, spending several months a year in Morocco while keeping official residence in Europe, which can neither be classified as permanent settlement in Europe or return to Morocco. This evokes a question of broader theoretical merit: how can we explain such complex patterns of residential mobility and the decision-making processes underpinning them? By exploring and explaining the migration behaviour and transnational residential strategies of first generation, ageing Moroccan migrants in a particular sending region, this paper aims to contribute to this broader debate. Besides seeking an explanation for emerging patterns of return and pendulum migration, the paper examines the consequences of such migratory strategies for intra-household (power) relations, and vice versa.

Our study will exemplify that patterns of return and pendulum migration can only be explained by taking into account intra-household and intra-family tensions and

conflicts of interest. This contributes to a more fundamental conceptual critique of mainstream migration theories that identified the household as the most relevant decision-making unit. Such theories typically conceptualise migration as the outcome of collective household decisions based on consensus and mutual benefit. By exploring the Moroccan case, this paper will show that by disregarding intra-household inequalities and conflicts of interests along the lines of gender and age, household migration models cannot explain many of the return and pendular migration patterns characterising migration. Before presenting the empirical results of this study, the following section will further explore the critique of household-level migration theories.

2. Theoretical background: critique of household migration models

There seems to be an increasing consensus in the migration literature that, instead of being part of income maximising behaviour by individuals, migration is often part of livelihood strategies pursued by households to spread income risks and, if possible, to generate income (remittances) which can be used to improve living standards or to invest in housing, education or commercial enterprises. This particularly applies to developing countries where (credit and insurance) markets often fail and many people are poor. Migration then becomes a strategy to overcome local market and other more general development constraints, potentially enabling families to invest, which seems particularly relevant in explaining migration occurring in developing countries (de Haan 1999; de Haas 2010; Stark 1991; Taylor 1999).

This perspective, which has been particularly explored within the ‘new economics of labour migration’ (NELM) (cf. Stark 1978; Stark 1985), represented a leap forward compared to theories which conceptualised migration in development countries as the result of an individual cost-benefit calculation of (lifetime) income-maximising individuals operating in perfect markets (Harris and Todaro 1970; Todaro 1969). The conceptualisation of migration as part of a family or household strategy creates analytical room to move beyond the income-maximising paradigm and to include motives such as risk-avoidance and risk-sharing. In addition, such perspectives allow seeing migration as an *investment* in which household members pool resources to

enable the migration of one member. By conceptualising individual migration as part of broader household strategies to improve wellbeing, income and to raise investment capital (which can often not be obtained through malfunctioning markets), we can also understand why migrants send remittances beyond the altruism motive.

Finally, this also compels us to reinterpret return migration. Return migration has been commonly associated with the comparative ‘failure’ of migration strategies or, at best, conceptualised as a stage following retirement. However, if the main motive for migrating is to improve the situation at home, migrants will return once they have succeeded to amass, save, or remit enough financial and human capital in order to realize their investment plans. Non-achievement of this goal due to low income, unemployment or high costs will lead to prolonged stay. This means that return migration can under certain circumstances also be associated with *successful* migration and integration trajectories (cf. Constant and Massey 2002).

Notwithstanding their more realistic character, the inherent danger of household-centred migration theories is that they conceptualise households as units which take unanimous decisions to the benefit of all. By conceptualising (internal and international) migration as the outcome of household (or family) decisions, household approaches tend to ‘reify’ the household, that is, to construct it as an entity which exists in reality, with a clear will, plans, strategies, and aims, and which takes unanimous decisions based on consensus that are to the advantage of the whole group. However, this is likely to mask significant intra-household inequalities along gender and generational lines. What is often presented as *the* strategy of *the* household can also be seen as the outcome of a struggle for domination between male and female, old and young, powerful and powerless (Rodenburg 1997).

Conceiving migration as a household strategy assumes an equality of power and interests among household members. This image of the household as a (unified) decision-making unit can be far from reality. While migration is commonly portrayed as the outcome of collective household decisions based on consensus and mutual benefit, particularly in patriarchal societies, it seems an illusion that women have an equal stake in migration decision making, while children are almost inevitably in a weaker position vis-à-vis their parents. Hence, it is likely that women and children

have generally less agency with regards to migratory behaviour. This does not only pertain to migration by fathers and male spouses, but also to their own (return) migration. Finally, there can also be instances in which decisions on migration—as any other issue—are taken entirely individually, without consulting and sometimes even without informing other household members.

Because of the dominance of adult men, female and younger household members can either be put under considerable pressure to migrate (alone or in the context of family migration) or might be *excluded* from access to mobility against their own will. When migration decisions reflect intra-household power inequalities, this also makes it likely that powerful (male, adult) household members benefit most from migration-generated resources such as remittances and educational opportunities for themselves and, particularly, their children. This explains that (male) migration might under certain circumstances reinforce and reproduce gender inequalities (Day and Içduygu 1997; de Haas and Van Rooij 2009; King and Vullnetari 2006).

However, it would also be erroneous to depict women and children just as passive victims of their ‘male dominators’. Although generally not as powerful as men, women and (especially adolescent) children do have agency and a certain influence on household decisions, which moreover tends to increase with age. General processes of women’s emancipation explain why an increasing share of ‘independent’ labour migrants are women, even from “patriarchal” societies such as Mexico or Morocco (Chant and Radcliffe 1992; Fadloulah, Berrada, and Khachani 2000; Jureidini and Moukarbel 2004; Salih 2001). A more fundamental point for this paper is that their own migration might increase their negotiation power because it may potentially improve their access to employment, education, residency and citizenship rights they might acquire abroad. This may shift the intra-household balance of power and generate substantial intra-household conflict pertaining to (return) migration decision-making.

The above discussion reveals the need *also* to take into account intra-household tensions and conflicts of interest if we are aiming to fully understand migration behaviour. This seems particularly important if the migration of one, several, or all household members results in the gradual or sudden shift in the intra-household

balance of power, which may, in turn, affect subsequent migration decision-making, leading to the emergence of new migration patterns. This paper will illustrate this point by exploring the case of the (return and pendulum) migration of the first generation, ageing Moroccan migrants.

3. Data and methods

This paper will explore the causes and motives for return and pendulum migration in more depth by focusing on the specific case of the Todgha valley, an emigration region located in the province of Ouarzazate in southern Morocco. This data was collected through quantitative, qualitative and participatory fieldwork conducted by the authors on several occasions between 1998 and 2008. Following an initial participatory appraisal, survey data was collected by the first author between September 1998 and June 2000 among 507 households containing 3,801 individuals, including 237 international (150 current and 87 returned) migrants, in six villages, in addition to continuous participant observation (see de Haas 2006).

The household survey was conducted in six villages located across the Todgha. They were selected on the basis of a spatially clustered sample, such that the survey covered the different migratory, ethnic, agricultural and geographical settings prevailing in the valley. Because of the importance of a certain level of trust, the survey was largely conducted by research assistants who originated from the same ethnic groups as the respondents. It was assessed that, in this particular context, the advantages of using “insiders” outweighed the potential disadvantages of such an approach. Strong ethnic rivalries prevail in the Todgha valley, so the research would probably have suffered from appointing “outsider” assistants from other villages or ethnic groups.

In 1999, open interviews were conducted with 20 (male) migrants between the age of 30 and 65 who were on return visits during the summer holidays. Additional qualitative data was collected through 27 open interviews (25 men, 2 women) among prospective and return migrants in 2003. Chance meetings during participant observation (1998-2000) and snowball sampling (for other interview rounds) were

used to identify respondents for the open interviews. The goal of the open interviews was to gain further insight into the respondents' migration histories, their motives for migrating, their experiences, and future plans concerning migration. It offered the opportunity to develop a more grounded understanding of *why* migrants make certain migration decisions. These interviews were conducted in French and Moroccan colloquial Arabic by the first author, regularly assisted by assistants if translation was needed.

Because almost all interviews were conducted with men, and to gain more insight into the gendered impacts of migration, in 1999 semi-structured interviews took place with 12 women (aged 26-50) married to international migrants, 11 women (aged 26-39) married to internal migrants, and 20 women (aged 22-60) married to non-migrants (Van Rooij 2000). The interviews focused on women's daily lives, tasks and responsibilities, their involvement in migration decision-making and how their lives had changed after the migration (and/or return) of the husbands. Because most women did not speak French, these interviews were conducted with the help of a local female interpreter.

In 2007 and 2008, semi-structured interviews were conducted by the second author with 25 male return migrants (aged 54-73) and 26 sons of return migrants (aged 20-31).² These interviews covered a range of different topics related to three stages of migrants'/fathers' migration history – situation before emigration, settlement in Europe and linkages with home country, and situation after return – with particular emphasis on experiences, attitudes, and perceived reasoning about intra-household tensions and conflicts of interest. The participants were recruited using the snowball method and through personal contacts of the interviewer. They were interviewed in their Berber language (Tamazight). All interviews were recorded and, after translating into English, transcribed verbatim. Next, the interviews were analyzed, first as separate documents, and then in relation to each other, and data were coded according to the responses provided under the headings of the guideline interview schedule.

² The recruitment of respondents and (translation of the) interviews were done by Jamal Ouahi, a local English graduate student. We are very grateful for his generous efforts.

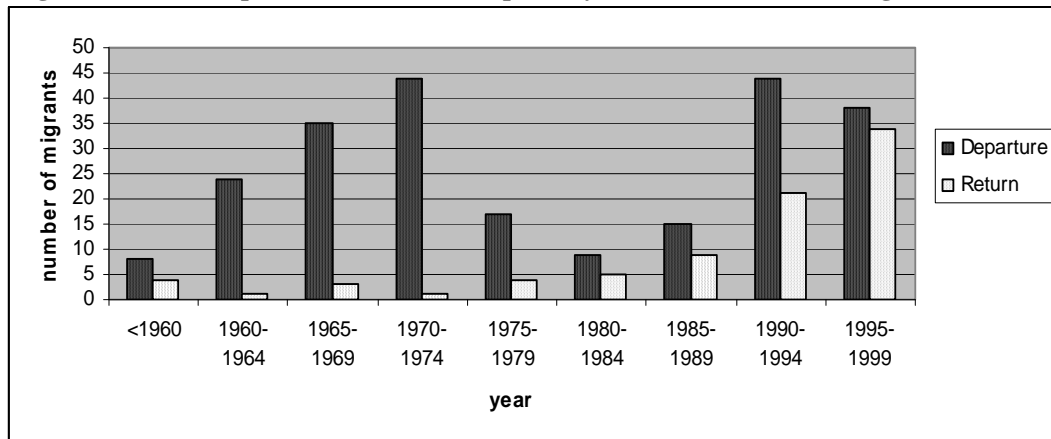
Although both quantitative and qualitative data informed the analysis for this article, most findings are based on the semi-structured interviews. As the primary goal of these interviews was to gain insight into the experiences and perceptions of migrants, questions of statistical representation were less relevant here. The interviews did not aim to achieve statistical representativity, but rather to explore the range of different experiences and motivations among different types of migrants. The use of qualitative methods is particularly appropriate to address and explore issues that are not easily quantifiable: in our case the motives and complex decision-making processes underlying return and pendulum migration strategies. Because quantitative data is generally not able to fully capture the complex motives underlying migration behaviour, the open interviews had a crucial added value. We are confident that the content of the interviews represent the range of possible outcomes with regards to the topics of this study. Interviews were conducted until a point of theoretical saturation was achieved; that is, until further interviews no longer provided new information or insights.

4. Results

General migration characteristics of the Todgha valley

The Todgha valley is an oasis with an official population of 68,500 inhabitants in 2004 (of which 36,400 are urban-based). Its population has intensively participated in labour migration since the mid 1960s, primarily to France, Morocco's former coloniser. Significant, secondary destinations are the Netherlands and Belgium. Following general Moroccan patterns, migration to Europe has been perpetuated since the recruitment freeze after the 1973 Oil Crisis through family reunification and new marriages between migrants' offspring and non-migrants. After family reunification was largely completed in the 1980s, family formation through new marriages with children of the first generation of migrants have become virtually the only other way to enter north-western European countries legally. Figure 1 summarises the survey data which clearly show that, while most labour migrants left in the 1960s and 1970s, there has been a significant increase in both new labour migration (to Spain and Italy) and return migration (from northwest Europe).

Figure 1. Year of departure and return of ‘primary’ international labour migrants³



Source: Household survey

The survey data further indicate the extent to which migration has become an all-pervasive phenomenon in the Todgha valley. Half of the surveyed active male population (16-65 years) has been, or is involved in internal (33 percent) or international migration (15 percent). Only 34.5 percent of all households are non-migrant. Taken together, 40.4 percent of all households are involved in international migration.

Whereas most international migrants still living in north-western Europe have eventually reunified their families at the destination, most migrants who have left their family in Morocco have eventually returned. These returnees make up 3.6 percent of the total active male population, while current international migrants represent 11.4 percent of the total active male population. The survey data indicate that over 70 percent of the surveyed international migrants who returned to the Todgha valley stayed more than 7 years abroad before their return, and the average stay abroad lasted 18 years (see table 1). Return migrants who stayed abroad for shorter periods often returned from Algeria, Libya and, to a lesser extent, Saudi-Arabia. This category also includes undocumented migrants to southern Europe who were either expelled or did not find satisfactory employment. Some migrants

³ ‘Primary’ labour migrants are migrants who obtained their residence permit on the legal basis of their work. The distinction between labour migrants and family migrants is to a certain extent artificial, because people who claim residence permits on the legal basis of family reunification or formation often end up working. Such labour migrants ‘in disguise’ can therefore be labelled as ‘secondary’ labour migrants.

consciously returned from Europe at a relatively young age with the intention to invest in their own enterprises.

Table 1. Total migration duration of internal and international migrants

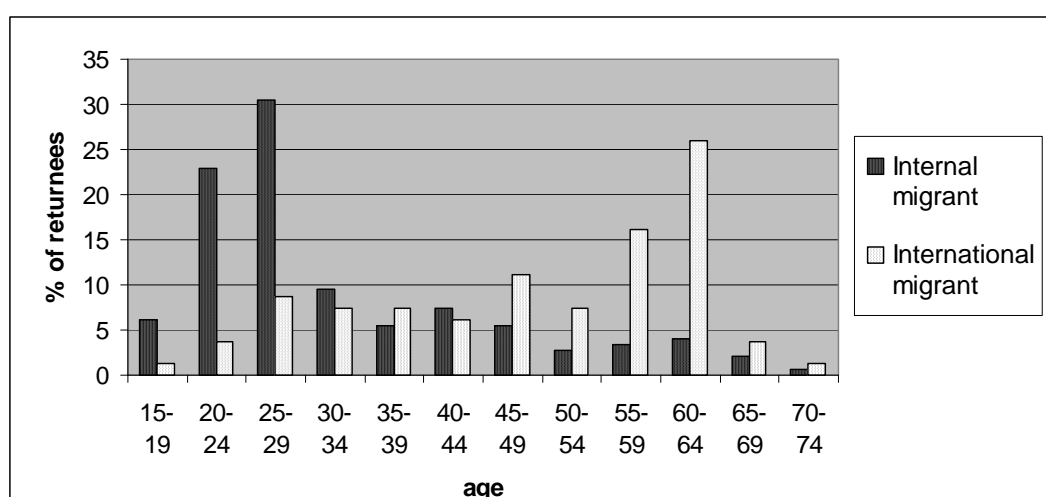
Migrant type	Total length of stay in years (%)						
	0-3	4-6	7-18	≥19	Total	Mean	<i>N</i>
Current internal migrant	37.5	17.9	36.5	8.1	100.0	7.5	285
Current international migrant	17.4	17.4	22.8	42.3	100.0	15.7	149
Returned internal migrant	24.7	32.0	30.7	12.7	100.0	8.2	150
Returned international migrant	13.4	14.6	19.5	52.4	100.0	17.7	82
Total	27.2	20.6	30.0	22.2	100.0	10.8	666

Source: Household survey

The average age of the surveyed international return migrants to the Todgha valley is 48 years at the time of their return. However, if we take the mode as the measure of central tendency, we come out at the 60-64 age category as the typical age of return (see figure 2). Two thirds of the returnees returned in the 1990s (see also figure 1). This corresponds with the ageing of the first generation migrants who left for Europe during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Remittances have come to play an important role in the region's economy. The average income of remittance-receiving households is more than double that of other households, and international remittances account for 32.8 percent of the income of all surveyed households. While remittances have increased income inequality, migrants' expenditure on housing and migrants' investments have stimulated the diversifying and urbanising regional economy and have triggered a counter-flow of "reverse" internal migration to the Todgha valley (see further de Haas 2006). The fact that the majority of investments are being done by migrants who are *currently* living abroad exemplifies the strong transnational nature of their orientations, in which they try to maintain a simultaneous foothold in two countries. Investments in housing and businesses are also part of a strategy to prepare for the intended "return" to the native region after retirement.

Figure 2. Age on return of internal and international return migrants



Source: Household survey

Table 2 shows the number of months the different categories of migrants stayed abroad during the 12 months prior to the survey (for current migrants) or during the last year of their migration (for return migrants). It reveals that among international migrants, the average number of months they stay abroad annually is somewhat inferior to 10. This figure is lower than expected, as summer holidays generally last between 4 and 6 weeks, and not all migrants visit Morocco each year. 24 percent of current international migrants stayed in Morocco for 3 months or longer, whereas also 28 percent of the international return migrants stayed 3 months or longer in Morocco in the last year of their stay abroad.

Table 2. Number of months of absence from the Todgha during last year (last year of migration for return migrants)

Migrant type	Absence in months during last year of migration (%)						N
	0-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	Total	Mean	
Internal migrant	10.6	19.2	38.4	31.8	100.0	7.8	292
International migrant	3.3	6.0	14.7	76.0	100.0	9.8	150
Returned internal migrant	9.1	15.2	33.9	41.8	100.0	8.0	165
Returned international migrant	3.4	8.0	17.2	71.3	100.0	9.6	87
Total	7.8	14.0	29.5	48.7	100.0	8.5	694

Source: Household survey

The high average stay in Morocco can largely be explained by the long period spent each year in Morocco by a category of relatively aged international migrants who

officially reside abroad, but who no longer work. Whereas among migrants between 15 and 29 years only 7 percent spent at least 3 months per year in Morocco, this proportion neatly increases with age, and amounts to 19.6 percent among the 30-44 years old and 33.3 percent among the 45-59 years old. Among migrants over 60 years old, 55.6 percent spends at least 3 months per year in Morocco. 22.2 percent of elderly, almost exclusively male, migrants spent at least 6 months per year in Morocco.

The tendency towards prolonged stays in Morocco among unemployed, retired or (partially) incapacitated migrants becomes even clearer if we examine those households participating in international migration of which all household members were declared to be “living” in Europe. In 12.2 percent of those “empty” households one of the, usually older, ‘commuting’ household members was in fact present at the time of the survey. Although they were not considered to be part of the survey population, this turned out to be an arbitrary choice taking into account the *de facto* transnational character of such households. While many migrants who maintain official residence in Europe stay in Morocco for extensive periods, 55 percent of all self-declared return migrants have travelled to Europe at least once since their return.

Drawing on interview data, the following sections will further explore the motivations and decision-making processes underlying migration and return migration patterns from and to the Todgha valley.

A. Motivations and decision- making processes underlying migration to Europe

Consistent with the NELM hypothesis, migration from the Todgha valley to Europe has mainly been part of livelihood strategies pursued by households. Although most of the migrants *did* work prior to migration, mainly in agriculture, their emigration was essentially prompted by economic motivations; improving the living standard of the household or just surviving financially were the driving factors. For example, one of the interviewees said:

“Why I did leave? Do you think that life here was comfortable? If there was no sea between Morocco and Europe, the cows would not stay either. It was the misery that pushed us to Europe, like birds leaving their children in the bird’s nest in search for food. It was difficult to go to Europe and leave the family behind but we had no choice, we had no money, I had to support the family. Before leaving, I was working for 7 dirham⁴ per day. Do you think I could have built this house if I stayed here?”

Emigration of one or more household members to Europe functioned as income insurance for the households. There was a great certainty of finding a relatively well-paid job (compared to Moroccan standards) while Europe faced a real labour shortage. In this respect, one of the interviewees said:

“At that time, it was easy to go to Europe and find a job, not like now. Europe needed workers to build Europe, we were the tools. There were a lot of jobs on the one hand and few workers on the other. Bosses were competing for workmen. You could find four jobs in one day. You were working for one [employer] until another one was offering a higher salary.”

In general, the household’s migration strategy coincided with the personal interest of the migrants. On the contrary: those who did not emigrate by themselves were happy to be selected by labour recruiters although the way of recruitment was sometimes humiliating:

“They were coming here to look for those who could do the heavy jobs. I was lucky that I was selected by Mougha [a renowned French recruiter]. He came here to select those who could work in the French mines. All the men had to undress and he was looking at them. He put a stamp on the ones he thought could work hard. You had to be 1.70 tall at least. We were with 22 from my village, he selected only 4 and I was among them. We were like sheep. He refused the rest of our friends because some of them were too short, others were not strong enough to work in the mines.”

⁴ In 2008, one Moroccan dirham (MAD) is equal to about 0.10 eurocent.

Influenced by the positive experiences and dress code of those who had already migrated, regularly visiting their birthplace, they were eager to emigrate:

“I was eager to go to Europe, to earn a lot of money and to improve my living conditions, like my friends. They were coming with their black suits and told us about the good life in Europe. I thought: If I go there, I will be like them, dressed like those. I was happy when I arrived in France: buying clothes I never had, eating food we never heard about, having sufficient money.”

The living conditions migrants found on their arrival were less favourable than expected. With an abundant supply of jobs, it was easy to find work for those entering the destination country without a job contract, but the working conditions were hard and sometimes dangerous. Most of the interviewees worked in mines, car factories, hotels/restaurants or in the construction industry. They frequently worked double shifts to earn as much money as possible. In the first years, they often stayed in overcrowding boarding houses.

B. Decision making processes around family reunification

Almost all interviewees lived in extended family households before leaving Morocco. More interestingly, a sizeable proportion was already married and some even had children; none of the interviewees, however, emigrated together with their family. Their initial plan was to go abroad to work for some years and return with the savings. However, because of the persistent poor economic and political situation in Morocco and the increasing difficulties of re-entering European countries due to more restrictive immigration policies, many decided to prolong their stay. Eventually, their stay lasted two or more decades.

Consequently, their emigration was followed by family reunification, but not for all of them. In this respect, a sharp contrast emerges between those still living in Europe and the eventual returnees. The majority of the interviewed returnees decided *not* to reunify their families in Europe. Fears that their wives and offspring would become

“westernized” and lose their religious faith, was one of the main reasons why they decided to leave their families behind. As one of the interviewees succinctly put it:

“I did not want because it is not an easy place to raise your children. You are in their country so you have to respect their rules. The system there is teaching children to be Europeans. If they are young, not thinking about Morocco, their country, and not thinking about religion, that’s not good. There is a lot of freedom which is normal for Europeans but difficult for Moroccans. Moroccans always understand freedom in a wrong way, they turn everything upside down. I am not generalising the case because there are some young people who succeed. There are engineers, doctors, but the percentage is not that high. I was having a boss and he said to me: “All Moroccans are bringing their family here except you and you are a good person, you are educated”. I answered him: “The conditions here are not good for my children”. The boss said: “Why?” I said: “I saw so many cases of problems between parents and children and one of them was going to prison. I want to raise my children in my own way”. That’s why I did not bring them to France.”

Having themselves experienced the often problematic economic position of migrants and mounting racism in Europe over the 1980s⁵, many returnees also argued that it would be better not to expose their children to potentially humiliating positions. As one of the respondents stated:

“I thought that it is better for them to be in Morocco. In Europe, there are no rules, and we [Moroccans] will never really be accepted. I thought, “I will let them finish school in Morocco and send them to university”. Here in Morocco everything is cheaper and you are with your people. If you get a good job as a civil servant in Morocco, you have a lot of money and nothing to worry about. So I thought it is better if they stay in Morocco.”

Instead of bringing them to Europe, they assessed that it would be a better strategy to invest in the higher education of their children (and particularly of their sons) in Morocco, which would enable them to live a secure and comfortable life there as a civil servant.

The above-mentioned motives might give the false impression that migrants' decisions not to reunify their families was exclusively taken in the supposed interest of the household. It is likely, however, that behind these official, socially acceptable discourses, other motives may sometimes play a role. Failure to fulfil the financial (i.e., sufficient income) and legal (i.e., status as a permanent resident) conditions for family reunification also seem important reasons which migrants are, however, seldom willing to admit. Other, more personal motives opposing family reunification are marital conflict, estrangement, and fear of losing freedom of movement and control. Two interviewees were not hindered by social shame as they responded to the question "Why did you not bring your family to Europe?":

"If you try to control their lives it is not easy because you are not in Morocco. At school they teach them that they are free to do whatever they want, to come home with whom they want, so you can't control their life anymore. The European system is always trying to drive a wedge between you and your children if there is something wrong. I know, for example, that if my son would do something wrong and I would beat him, they would arrest me because it is not Morocco."

"No, it was not difficult to leave my wife behind, because I have experienced what women are doing there. They have too much freedom. If you want to control her, she will go to the police."

Although most interviewed women stated that they agree with their husbands' decision to migrate, several women also indicated that they actually had "no choice other than to agree", which reflects the domination of men in overall household decision making. On the one hand, thanks to remittances, women left behind by their migrant spouses tend to live in materially much better circumstances than other women. On the other hand, they tend to experience the separation as very difficult. Besides the perceived burden of carrying double ("male" and "female") responsibilities and the social and psychological stress this might involve, many wives missed the company of their husbands. So, this explains that the large majority of

⁵ Possibly, migrants who have not reunified their households also tend to have more negative

women wished to join their husbands in Europe, adding additional pressure towards family reunification.

For a long time, the interviewed children had invariably cherished the wish to be reunited with their fathers in Europe. Due to their position within the family in combination with their age, however, they did not have any voice in the family reunification decision:

“My father was 100 percent against the idea to bring his family to France. He was always speaking about Europe in a negative way. He told us: “If I am taking you there, you will behave in a bad way, it is so easy to be spoiled. I don’t want to be guilty, because if you are doing something wrong, I’m responsible”. When we were young we could not be against our father. You know, our tradition, culture is that you have to respect someone who is older. When we became teenagers and wanted to discuss with him, he always escaped. He did not like when we started to talk about this subject.”

“The whole family wanted to go to Europe and if you could ask our cows they would also say “Yes”. < smiling > My father was the only one who did not like this idea. He said: “Everything you need, I can do for you, but to take you there, no”. He thought he could not afford to live with the whole family in Europe. I remember that he said: “Life there is expensive, with the money I earn I can make you happy here but not in Europe”. We had sometimes discussions about his decision but never quarrels because otherwise he might not send anything.”

Most of the interviewed migrants still living in Europe ended up reunifying their families. Some (return) migrants applied a migration strategy which has been referred to as “relay migration” (cf. Arizpe 1981). In this case of “partial family reunification”, the migrant did not reunify his entire household (i.e., his wife and children) at the destination, but let only one or two unmarried sons come over before their age of legal adulthood⁶. These sons then take over their father’s function as the migrant breadwinner after his active working life or remigration. In this way, the household maintains its stake in international migration. By passing the baton (i.e., the right to

experiences living and working in Europe.

residency and work in Europe) from father to son, a new generation of (labour) migrants can thus be created via legal ways. Through this “now or never migration”, families are sometimes torn apart. Jamal⁷, 20 years old, for instance, was left alone in Morocco.

“My father worked in Nice since 1969. He never wanted to take his family to France. He was afraid that we would become *Nsara* [Christians] until he suddenly changed his mind when he realised there was no future in Morocco for us. But I was already too old. My mother, brothers and sisters left me here alone. I do not know what to do. I see no solution.”

Jamal now lives alone in the large family house. He put all his hopes on obtaining a scholarship to a French university, which would allow him to join his family.

Although male migrants definitively played the central role in the decision-making process regarding family reunification, it does not mean that all women coming to Europe were passive followers. As mentioned above, the interviewed spouses of migrants do exert pressure on their husbands to reunify their families in Europe. This corroborates other empirical evidence. Interviewing 20 Moroccan women who joined their husbands in the Netherlands between 1967 and 1980, Bouras (2005) found some evidence of modification of women’s inferior role, depending on their marital status at the time of their husband’s departure. Women whose husbands emigrated after marriage often wanted to join them. Difficulties with raising the children alone and problems with their family-in-law were the main driving factors behind their wish to emigrate. Some of the married women even forced an ultimatum on their husbands – either coming back to Morocco or family reunification – by running away from his family home or faking an illness.

⁶ Adult children do generally not have the right to immigrate to European countries on the legal basis of family reunification.

⁷ Names have been changed to ensure the anonymity of the respondents.

C. The role of migration in improving transnational livelihoods and investment

From an economic point of view, the migration of one of the household members to Europe was generally a wise decision. Most of the interviewed migrants were very supportive of the family left behind. First of all, they sent money on a regular basis. The additional income was used for daily living necessities, to construct a house, to finance children's education, or, sometimes, to set up a small business. In addition, most of the migrants brought home goods (including clothes, electronics, food items, and toys) during their yearly social visit. Most households have been able to drastically improve their income and standards of living as a result of remittances and investments.

The interviewed children of returnees consider the supportive role their fathers fulfilled as rather obvious: after all, he did emigrate to alleviate poverty or improve the standards of living of the household. At a young age, however, they noticed their privileged position compared to non-migrant households:

“When he was coming in the summer, most of the neighbours visited our house. Besides presents for the neighbours, like tea and coffee, he brought clothes, things for the house, radio, television, and toys. We were one of the first families in our town that had bicycles. All my brothers, everyone got their own bicycle.”

The lasting and unyielding support was also viewed as given by the migrants themselves. “Of course I was sending money, that's why I left Morocco. You think there is someone who can leave family behind and forget them?” Nevertheless, some of them regret that their focus was so limited to their country of birth. In this respect, one of the interviewees said:

“Between us, at that time, there was competition between us. We were not wasting money. We were always buying things second-hand and eating in cheap places, just to be able to build a house in Morocco. We saved money and we lost it in Morocco. In those days, houses were not expensive in France. I could buy 5 houses for renting. But we were always thinking about Morocco, we built houses here, and they are now useless.”

After return, only a few realized the investment projects they initially intended to do. Besides lack of capital, experience/training and interest, administrative and institutional constraints were the main reasons of not doing so. They were especially discouraged by problems such as overwhelming bureaucratic rules and corruption. Two of the interviewees explained the difficulties they faced as follows:

“I was intending to set up a local bus company in Tinghir but I had quarrels with the authorities. It was like blowing in the wind. We discussed and at the end, no result. We discussed just for discussion. They are speaking here about improvements which do not exist. I talked with the governor of Ouarzazate [the province of which Tinghir is part] and he told me that he could not do anything because Rabat is controlling everything. But he could do many things, that’s why he is governor. But they don’t want to work for their country. Till the end, I didn’t understand what the problem was.”

“I have tried to start a project but I failed. I was buying land to make some business but at the end I found out that the ownership papers were fake, everything was gone, it was about 15.000 euros. If you want to have a project here, everything is going smoothly at the beginning, but at the end you will face a lot of problems. Why, when a tourist is coming here, they are serving him in a fast way? Because they can’t ask for bribes. But for a Moroccan, they are making it hard so that he is giving money.”

While the emigration of their husbands enables women and their families to significantly improve their living standards and material wellbeing, traditional social structures and gender roles seem to be more resistant to change. Although the absence of men has implied a considerable increase in the responsibilities and decision-making power among migrants’ wives, this has mainly been just a temporary change, as most men assume their traditional, patriarchal roles as soon as they return. Moreover, the women themselves tend to perceive their migration-related increase in tasks and responsibilities as a burden (cf. de Haas and Van Rooij 2009).

Compared to financial support, the migrants were far less able to give emotional support at a distance. Especially before the 1990s, when the telecommunication

systems were not well developed, it was very difficult to keep contact with the family left behind. As one respondent stated:

“If you wanted to speak with your family by phone, it took many hours. You had to make an appointment at the post office here so that your family was coming and waiting. You first called to Casablanca, from Casablanca to Marrakech, Ouarzazate and then Tinghir. There was only one line.”

Besides visiting Morocco in the summer, most of the migrants used to send letters, sometimes written by someone else if the migrant was illiterate (“There were some immigrants who could write. Most of the immigrants went to them for writing a letter”; “When I wanted to write a letter I paid for it because there was someone who was writing for me”). It goes without saying that the wives and children missed their husbands and fathers a lot:

“We were satisfied with his financial support, we were living comfortably compared to non-migrant families, but the father role was missing in our family for so many years so we suffered as well. I missed him because I need my father as I need my mother. He was coming once per year, in the summer, for 1.5 months. For us, as children, it was not enough. When you started to know and get used to him he left to France again. That was hard because most of us were born when he was abroad. Everyone was crying when he left because you knew that he would go for a long period.”

“The only disadvantage that my father was away was missing him so much. For example when he called I would run to pick up the phone and because of missing him so much I did not know what to say, like words were escaping my mind. Missing the role of a father is a problem, especially if there is not someone who is replacing the role like a cousin or an older brother because the mother can’t play both roles. And when he was sending a letter, everyone was trying to find out what was in the letter.”

D. Motivations and experiences of return migrants

Almost all returnees declared that they returned on their own initiative, that their return has been *relatively* unproblematic and that they do not regret their decision, at least not for themselves. As noted before, work (supporting the family) was the main driving factor behind their departure to Europe and most of them did not reunify their families. Hence, after their working life there were no reasons to stay in Europe. They continually cherished the wish to return and are happy to be back home to enjoy their retirement and be reunited with their family. Almost none of them wish to settle in Europe again. One of the interviewees described the return decision as follows:

“Why I returned? I am old, I can’t work anymore. Do you want me to die there? I went to France to work and I had always in mind to return. Morocco is my country, my land and my home. I’m now old and retired and all I want is to relax. Living in Europe means living in nostalgia, it’s hard to live far from the family. I am happy to be home, to live with my family.”

In order to explain the returnees’ statements about the relatively unproblematic character of their return, it is important to stress that the sample is biased towards those migrants who maintained strong links with Morocco and who returned voluntarily⁸. The fact that the large majority of them did not reunify their families in Europe obviously facilitated the return process, particularly compared to a small minority of migrants who returned as a couple or as a nuclear family. In addition, the statements by the interviewed male returnees might conceal the relative lack of agency of their spouses and/or children in the return migration process and, in case of returning as a family, the perhaps less voluntary nature of the return of the other family members.

Relatively few returnees are worried about their future financial situation. Their (state) pensions or social (e.g., disability) benefits, sometimes supplemented by earnings from one or more investments, are generally sufficient to live relatively

⁸ This contrasts with the situation of migrants who returned as a consequence of failing to find work or build up a social life, and the experiences of women or children who could express little agency in the return migration process (cf. de Bree *et al.* forthcoming).

comfortably in rural Morocco, where costs of living are much lower than in Europe.

As two of the interviewees stated:

“I worked many years and now I am retired, *hamdulillah*. It was a good experience although we had hard times. You have to sacrifice if you want to live in good conditions. When I was in Europe, I built some houses here and now I have sufficient money for the rest of my life and my family.”

“I’m retired and happy to be home. With the amount of money I now receive, it is difficult to live in Europe. Everything is expensive, you cannot buy anything for one euro, you have to pay a lot just for the house. In Morocco daily life is cheap, I can live here like a king.”

In general, the returnees experienced a *relatively* smooth re-integration and re-adaptation process. This does not mean, however, that their return was simply a matter of “going home”. As other studies on return migration have shown, feelings of belonging needed to be renegotiated upon return both at the community and family level (Albers 2005; de Bree, Davids, and de Haas forthcoming). Their decades-long stay in Europe has generally nurtured certain social norms and expectations about the role of public authorities which can lead to disappointment upon their return. As one of the migrants’ children stated: “He was coming back with another mentality, he wanted to use it here but it doesn’t work here”.

The interviewed returnees mainly complained about lack of trust, the sharp socio-economic inequalities, the poor work ethic, and what they perceived as the selfish, materialistic mentality of Moroccans in general and public authorities in particular, as the following statements exemplify:

“Moroccans are full of problems. It’s difficult to trust people here. For example, someone is asking you money and he is saying: “Tomorrow I will give it back”. And tomorrow, for sure, you will not see him. Moroccans are lying a lot. For Moroccans lies are like drinking water.”

“But if you want to succeed in life, you need to be patient with people. I learned how to be honest to people but it is not working here in Morocco. If you want to

practice what you learned there, you will be the enemy of the people here. So you have to swim with the current, not against the current.”

“Here, people don’t want to work in a good way, they always try to find the easy way. In Europe, I learnt how to work hard and do my job decently. Most of the old return migrants don’t like to be inactive. I still do some work in the fields.”

Their experiences of living in Europe have apparently reinforced certain negative perceptions of Moroccan public authorities:

“Moroccan authorities are only thinking for themselves and their pockets. When your pocket is empty, no one will help you. But in Europe, they are working for the benefit of the whole society, you know why? Because in Europe, as a president, you will be judged on what you did in the period you were president. Here, the mayor, I think he’s here for four years now, he did not do anything for Tinghir. Look at the roads how they still are.”

“When there is election, we don’t vote for someone who is good for us. Here, everything is based on faces. For example, if someone is from my family, I will say he’s good even if he’s bad. We don’t consider things that are of benefit for the whole society. If people here will start to use their mind, then everything will be okay. The citizens are like children. If they keep silent, it’s okay for the government. But if they would yell, the government would know what to do.”

It is likely that exposure to European media and public discourse has partly shaped migrants’ attitudes to Moroccan lifestyle and bureaucracy. What might also play a role is that migrants attempt to present themselves as more superior/modern by dissociating themselves from Moroccan authorities and society. Although they might have faced negative experiences in Europe as well, the Moroccan ‘system’ is judged as worse.

“The main problem I have is with the administration. What I was used to in Europe is totally different than what I see here. In Europe, you can fix your papers just in one day, they serve you in a nice way and people are treated equally. If you are in a queue, the first one is the first one, no matter if you are

an immigrant or native. The opposite holds in Morocco, there are no rights, rich people are dominating, that's what I don't like here. If you want to have just one document, it takes many days. They don't appreciate human beings. Here in Morocco, keep your dog hungry and he will follow you⁹, this is the policy of Morocco.”

“In Europe, you cannot say: “I know this person”, so that he will serve you in a fast way. Here, everything is working with faces. You have to give money if you want to be served. I have an example, I have a son. He had a problem with his eyes. I brought him to a hospital in Ouarzazate. At first glance, I doubted whether it was a hospital or something else. Nurses were sitting and trying to keep flies away. Then they were asking: “Do you know someone in this hospital?” They were making fun and you have to fill your pocket with a lot of money because everyone you pass you have to give 20 dirhams. And when the doctor was trying to inspect the eyes of my son, he was doing it in a rough way. I said: “Stop, stop, stop”. I said: “This is a human being, not an animal”. And they are using here one instrument for several people with the risk of transmitting diseases.”

The negative experiences of the interviewed returnees with the Moroccan public authorities in particular have to be put in perspective, as such feelings are obviously not exclusive for returnees. Furthermore, returnees were explicitly asked about the main problems they faced after their return and the main differences between Europe and Morocco; the focus was not explicitly on possible negative experiences with society and authorities in the country of destination.

At the family level, returnees sometimes face difficulties to (re)gain a position in the family. The mother-child relationship developed in the long lasting absence of the father. Moreover, for some sons the absence of the father figure entailed more rights and greater freedom of movement. Unpleasant moments and irritations occur when the father wants to regain the pivotal role in the family. As one of the interviewed children stated:

⁹ This refers to the idea that as long as you keep people poor, they will not bother you.

“We are not free anymore to act as we did with our mother. He is thinking in another way, he executes his orders and he is like a dictator in his arguments. He thinks he is the only one who knows more about the family. In reality, he doesn’t know us well but we have to respect him because he has the financial power. He also doesn’t like that he gets less attention than my mum. For example, sometimes we have fun with our mum in the kitchen and he is sitting alone in the living room. Then, when we sit together for the dinner, he becomes angry, leaves the room to sleep because there is no conversation with him like we have with our mum.”

Although the majority of the interviewed children were glad for their father that he was finally home – “He was working hard and now it is time for him to get some rest; “It was nice to see him relaxed after having a hard time” – his return is not always to their benefit. The main and often ever-recurring conflict they had with their father refers to the father’s previous decision not to bring his family to Europe. Instead of family reunification, they decided to offer their children a better, often higher education, with the expectation of better employment prospects in Morocco. However, this strategy has often failed since, in the meantime, it has become increasingly difficult for Moroccan university graduates (*licenciés*) to find a job due to budget cuts in the public domain, the general economic recession, misguided educational policies and the mediocre quality of higher education, and the general surge of the number of young people holding higher education degrees. Within the household survey sample, unemployment rates¹⁰ among higher educated people in international migrant households vary between 18 and 25 percent (see table 3).

¹⁰ It is useful to note that, in this context, unemployment is a concept with a limited meaning. In fact, many people are underemployed in the sense that they only work from time to time, depending on the availability of—mostly temporary—employment.

Table 3. Unemployment rates by educational level, by household migration status

Household migration status	Unemployment rate by educational level (>15 yrs) (%)					
	No	Primary	Lower sec.	Higher sec.	Higher	Total
Nonmigrant	2.2	3.7	1.4	3.2	0.0	2.6
Internal	1.0	1.7	6.9	0.0	15.0	3.1
Indirect international	1.2	1.9	0.0	6.7	27.8	4.4
Current international	2.8	3.3	7.3	3.9	25.0	4.8
Returned international	3.9	2.8	10.4	5.3	18.2	5.4
Total	2.1	2.8	6.0	3.4	18.3	3.8

Source: Household survey

Many jobless graduates are forced to return from the cities where they studied to the Todgha to stay with their families. This is generally perceived as an extremely frustrating if not humiliating experience. The graduates find it dishonourable to remain dependent on their parents and to be unable to marry. Boredom and bitterness often characterize their existence. The unemployed sons (and sometimes daughters) of return migrants tend to be full of resentment vis-à-vis their fathers who did not allow them to join them in Europe. Three of the interviewed children said:

“What is hurting me, and I still remember, is that once my father came with his boss to Morocco and the boss said: “I will arrange everything so that you can bring your family to France” but my father refused. He was always giving the same reasons: “There is nothing to do in Europe, it is hard to live there, difficult to find a good job, I don’t want to see you suffer as I did. It is better to stay here, to focus on education, I am sure you will get a good job here in Morocco”. It was easy to convince us when we were still young. But those reasons are making me now upset because I’m looking to my generation that is living in Europe. They have a well-paid job, especially those with a diploma, not like here. Oh, I regret all the years I spent here without any result, always quarrels at home. I also want to have a good life and safe future. Life here is dead, nothing to do. Spain or France, it doesn’t matter, I just want to be out of Morocco.”

“My father told us about the hard time they were having in Europe, how they sacrificed in order to give their family a better life. He was living with his friends in a small room just to save money for our family, so that we could go to school. Many times he said to me: “Life there is not as simple as you imagine, it

is hard to live in a host country, one has to stand nostalgia. I want that you will get a different life than mine. We were pushed to emigrate, but for you there are chances here in Morocco”. At that time, we thought that he knew what’s the best for us. But as you can see, there is nothing to do here, no jobs, low salary. As a child I was proud of my father. Now I realize that he was making a big mistake not to bring us to Europe. We are like cat and mouse, every time arguing and trying to avoid him. The quarrels and discussions about this subject will always be there.”

“I am very disappointed about my father’s former decision not to bring us to Europe. He was afraid of losing his children in the other world, that we would behave like Europeans. He was always speaking about Moroccan families in Europe who had problems, not about those who were successful. Too much freedom, alcohol and girls, that’s why he did not bring us to France. But he forgot that we can behave badly here as well. I am saying this because my brothers were not listening to my mum in a good way, they were smoking and drinking alcohol at an early age. If my father did not emigrate, they would not do it or only in a hidden way. Still we have heavy discussions with him about Europe. It feels like a war, every time the same problems at home. He is pushing us to work in the fields and to feed the cows and sheep which we don’t like. He is always saying: “Here you have everything but you are not active”. But it is because of no good jobs why we are not active. And even if you have money in Morocco, there is nothing to do with it. In Europe you can work and see the result, not like here. All my friends in Europe, they are more happy with their life than before they left. Before my father was coming back he should have brought us to Europe.”

Confronted with the broken ambitions of their children, some returnees regret their previous choice not to reunify their families in Europe:

“To be honest, I regret I did not take my family to Europe, we did not know that life would change in such a fast way. If I did so, my sons could have a good job and be out of the misery. Now they have a diploma and they are doing nothing. Those who brought their children enjoy four or five salaries. If you have a job and respect their law, life in Europe is much better than here.”

The majority, however, stick to the opinion that their decision to leave behind the family was the right one. To justify their former decision, they mainly refer to problems faced by reunited migrant households in Europe (“Those who were raised in Europe are behaving in a bad way, they are drinking and smoking, not working”), the increased discrimination on the labour market and racism particularly towards Muslims, the current less favourable employment opportunities in Europe and the sharp contrast between youth’s expectations of Europe and their own experiences:

“The problem of young people is that they think Europe is paradise. They are only dreaming and looking to nice cars and they think that immigrants have a lot of money, but they don’t realise that it takes long time and hard working. When you see that someone is having something, a car or a house, you should ask yourself how he managed to get those things. I was patient and working hard. Those two characteristics make one’s future, also here, no matter whether or not you went to school. If you want to go from the first floor to the second floor, you have to use stairs. But the problem is that they are not listening to us.”

The interviewees frequently contrasted their current experiences in Europe to the situation in the ‘guestworker’ days, which they tend to see more positively:

When Dutch girls saw our brown skin, they wanted to speak with us. But now, when you are saying: “I am from Morocco”, everyone is trying to avoid you.”

In the past it was easy to find a job, they begged us to work. Now, even well-educated young Moroccans can’t find the job we got in the past.”

Some of the interviewed returnees held a rather pessimistic (but realistic?) view of the chance of being successful in Europe among Moroccan jobless youth. Mohamed, having regularly quarrels with one of his sons, said:

“How can they be successful in Europe if they are not working here? Over there, it’s hard, you have to wake up early in the morning, you have to be on time, but they are sleeping here till 10, having breakfast and going to the centre. During lunch time they are coming back home to eat, take a nap, and then they

are going out again till they want to eat couscous < smiling > If you work here, you will work there as well. But if you are a loser here, you will be a loser there, I saw so many cases.”

Despite these justifications, the overwhelming majority of their adult children want to emigrate. They believe that it is now their turn to experience life in Europe. When they cannot go to Europe through a job contract or marriage, they frequently try to emigrate illegally, under their own steam or with the (financial) help of the family. In fact, many young men (and, increasingly, women) who now emigrate to Spain and Italy, often irregularly, are children of relatively well-off, ageing return migrants that decided not to reunify their families.

The case of Idir, a return migrant from the Netherlands, is illustrative for this pattern. Idir arrived in the Dutch town of Alkmaar June 1970 after having worked in the coalmines of Pas-de-Calais in northern France for 8 months, work for which he was recruited in the Todgha. The work in the mine was extremely heavy, and through friends he eventually arranged a work contract for a local cheese factory in Alkmaar where other members of his ethnic group (Aït ‘Atta) were already working. He invested the money he earned in building a large, two-storey house suited for his imagined future extended family – his sons, their spouses and their children – and the purchase of agricultural land in the oasis. He decided not to reunify his family in the Netherlands. He now regrets this choice, because his children could not find work in Morocco: “I have made a mistake, but when I realised this it was already too late”.

In 1995 he decided to return permanently. However, his three sons (who are between 18 and 28 years old) did not find work in Morocco, and now all had illegally migrated to southern Europe, two in Spain, and one in Italy, where they work in the construction industry. Thanks to recent legalisation campaigns, they have obtained residency permits. Two of his three daughters are married, one with a villager who is illegally working in Spain since 18 months. Two of his three sons will marry when they visit during the summer holiday. According to Idir,

“Their spouses and children will follow them quickly, as soon as possible. That is better. That is the big mistake I made. It is better for them. If you return home

after a day working and talking Dutch to your mates, it is so nice to have a girl at home. She can also cook and clean the house. After passing the threshold you are “back” in Morocco, which is a real pleasure. It is also better for the children.”

Although Idir regrets his own choice not to reunify his family, he obviously enjoyed the fact that his own children “do well”. During the interview, Idir was called two times on his mobile phone by one of his sons in Spain and his daughter’s migrated husband.

E. Patterns and rationale of emerging pendulum migration

In contrast to migrants who did not reunify their families, migrants who *did* so typically do *not* return to Morocco towards the end of their working age. One of the main reasons is the reluctance of migrants’ spouses and, in particular, children to return. This is an important observations as it indicates that the migration to Europe (women) and the transition from youth to maturity (children) have strengthened women and children’s position within the family and hence, their negotiation power with regard to subsequent moves – including the decision not to move (back). Women often do not want to return due to fear of being restricted in their freedom of movement and the wish to live close to their children and grandchildren in Europe. Migrants’ children generally oppose the idea of returning because of their expected limited prospects and integration problems in Morocco. Most male migrants themselves also realise that return of their children is not viable in view of the superior educational and job opportunities in Europe.

Instead of definitively going back to Morocco, a substantial and apparently growing group of the elderly “non-permanent returnees” seem to develop multi-local residential strategies, in which they spend several months per year in Morocco and Europe, while keeping legal residence in Europe. The restrictive immigration policies that have come to characterise European countries mean that migrants have very little incentive to give up their residency rights. Maintaining residency rights in Europe is often also a legal requirement to access social benefits. In practice, obtaining

citizenship is perceived as the surest way to secure residency and other rights. The significance of the multi-local residential strategies of these pendulum migrants is further reinforced by the experiences of permanent return migrants who tend to regret their choice and the partial non-exportability of various social security and pension benefits.

The majority of the pendulum migrants are men, who typically leave their spouses and children behind in Europe for shorter or longer trips. This is not surprising, as it is the migrants' spouse who bears the primary responsibility for housekeeping tasks in general and child rearing in particular. Patriarchal values valuing such typical women's roles explain the relative immobility of female 'family migrants' compared to male 'labour migrants'. However, ageing migrant women whose children have grown up seem to increasingly join their spouses for extended 'holiday' stays which might last several months.

While social, nostalgic and perceived health benefits (such as the warmer climate in the case of rheumatism, which is often cited by migrants) play an important role for their long stays in Morocco, some of these truly 'transnational commuters' are active in trade activities in which they bring consumer goods or cars from Europe, and take back from the Todgha local products such as olive oil. Other migrants give people paid rides back to Europe or, sometimes, smuggle irregular migrants across the Gibraltar Strait in their small vans, locally known as *transits* (derived from the archetypical Ford Transit).

Mohammed, for instance, migrated in 1968 to Montpellier in France. His wife and children followed him in 1976. He is jobless since 1990, and will officially retire within a few years. All his daughters are married now; two of his three sons are still studying at university. He originally planned to start a large agricultural enterprise upon return. He even bought the land and installed a water pump. But the fact that his children were married, working and studying in France made him realise that it was impossible to return permanently. He now spends half of the year in Morocco to run his agricultural enterprise. During the months of absence, his brother ensures the management of his small farm, where he produces almonds and wheat. When he returns to France, Mohammed brings along local produce (mainly almonds and olive

oil). On his way back, he takes electronics and car parts to sell at the local market. He only lives in one part of his two-storey house in his native village. The vacant rooms are inhabited by his brother and his family. During the summer holidays his wife and children visit his native village, but his single sons generally remain only for a couple of weeks, after which they travel around in Morocco as 'tourists' before returning to France.

It is worthwhile noting that pendulum migration is not the prerogative of migrants who reunified their families in Europe. Some ageing migrants who did not reunify their families and have not returned, keep on commuting between the destination country and their families left behind in Morocco. Moreover, a substantial proportion of the ageing returnees come to Europe on a regular basis. Their stays in Europe can serve to visit family and friends in Europe or to do business, but are often also a legal requirement to secure residency rights in Europe. Because of these mobility patterns of semi-return or transnational commuting, classic distinctions between permanent and return migration are becoming increasingly blurred, and we are now witnessing the emergence of transnational *Todgha* communities that maintain intensive contacts with either side of the Mediterranean.

5. Conclusion

The evidence presented in this paper supported the idea of NELM that labour migration from developing countries is part of broader livelihood strategies pursued by households who, on the whole, tend to benefit collectively from migration through significant improvements in standards of living. From a non-material point of view, however, the emigration step seems to be less beneficial to the household members: While the family members left behind are missing their husband and father, the migrants have to stand alone and feel lonely. Moreover, although all household members do reap some material benefits from migration, such collective economic benefits do not imply these benefits are equally distributed within households or that labour migration and possible subsequent moves (by other household members) are the outcome of unanimous decisions based on consensus among all household

members. To the contrary, migration decisions often reflect intra-household power inequalities along lines of gender and generation.

Some migrants who left in the 1960s and 1970s considered that they would do better to invest in Morocco and their children's education. Hence, along with fear that their wives and offspring would become "westernized" and lose their religious faith in Europe, they did not reunify their family. The majority of these migrants also decided unilaterally to return home towards the end of their working life. However, their unilateral decision to return also blocked legal entry into Europe for younger family members, who now find themselves in situations of what the literature had characterised as 'involuntary immobility' (Carling 2002). This has generated considerable intra-family tensions. Because of large-scale unemployment and the lack of perspectives in Morocco, the unemployed sons (and sometimes daughters) tend to be full of resentment vis-à-vis their fathers who did not allow them to join them in Europe.

Confronted with the broken ambitions of their children, some migrants regret their choice not to reunify their families in Europe. Therefore, some migrants who initially did not reunify their families decide to do so at the last moment when this is legally possible, that is, just before one or more of their children attain adulthood. Through this 'now or never migration', some families are torn apart when minor children migrate with their parents but adult children are left behind because they have no legal right of entry into Europe.

The majority of the labour migrants, however, *did* bring their families to Europe. Although always cherishing the wish to return after retirement, most of them do *not* return permanently, not in the least because their children (who were mostly raised and educated in Europe) and spouses (who generally enjoy more legal rights and social freedoms abroad) generally oppose the idea of returning. The limited social and economic opportunities in Morocco and the integration of migrants' children in European societies explain why the expectation of returning as a family has turned into a myth for most migrants who reunified their households in Europe.

Instead of a definite return, a growing group of ageing Moroccan migrants develop specific forms of pendular migratory behaviour which official statistics cannot capture. While officially residing abroad, and often living on receiving-state social security benefits and pensions, they tend to stay in Morocco for several months per year. Pendulum migration by ageing Moroccan migrants can be interpreted as a strategy to reconcile the reluctance of children and spouses living in Europe to return and the interest migrants have in maintaining social and economic ties with Morocco, while holding a firm legal, social (security) and economic foothold in Europe in the interest of avoiding losing transnational social ties and avoiding falling back to poverty. As most of them do maintain formal residency in Europe, they are not counted as return migrants. This emerging form of transnational mobility defies conventional migration categories as these migrants can neither be classified as ‘permanent’ settlers nor as returnees, and are usually ignored by official migration statistics.

In fact, we are witnessing a striking reversal of residential strategies over time. Whereas in the 1960s and 1970s a sizeable proportion of the male “guestworkers” left their families behind and visited Morocco during their summer holidays, we now witness the re-emergence of transnational, multi-local households after a phase of reunification in Europe, in which the ageing migrant workers leave their spouses and children behind in Europe for part of the year. In both cases, it is the migrants’ spouse who maintains the domestic and kin-keeping role. However, there is one major difference: while women and children have an inferior position vis-à-vis their spouses and fathers as well as in the decision on their own migration to Europe through family reunification, they do have more power and, hence, deploy this increased agency by exerting substantial influence on the decision to stay in Europe, accompanied by visiting Morocco for shorter or longer trips, instead of returning permanently. Without rejecting the household or family as a useful unit of research altogether, this exemplifies the need and usefulness to *also* take into account intra-household power inequalities and conflicts of interest if we aim to fully understand migration behaviour.

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