

**The social and cultural impacts of  
international migration on  
Moroccan sending communities: a review**

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Hein de Haas (1969) is a human geographer and a multimethod researcher. He is currently a research officer at the International Migration Institute of the University of Oxford. He previously held positions at the University of Amsterdam (1998-2001) and the Radboud University Nijmegen (2001-2005). Since his graduation (MA Hons, Amsterdam) in 1995, Hein de Haas has been almost continuously been doing research on migration issues. His research focuses on the reciprocal interlinkages between internal and international migration and broader development processes. His regional focus is the Middle East and North Africa and, particularly, Morocco. He conducted several years of fieldwork, besides Morocco also in Tunisia, Turkey, and Egypt. In 2003 he obtained his PhD (Nijmegen) on the basis of a thesis on the impacts of migration on regional development in Morocco. In 2004 Hein de Haas published *Aroemi Aroemi: Een Vreemdeling in Marokko* ('Aroemi, Aroemi: A Stranger in Morocco'; Bulaaq publishers), a personal account of his two-year stay in the south-Moroccan Todgha oasis.

## Abstract

The social and cultural impacts of international migration on Moroccan migrant-sending communities are assessed through a review of empirical work. Four decades of intensive international migration have fundamentally transformed sending communities, as well as Moroccan society in general. Exposure to migrants' relative success and wealth has also affected the perceptions and increased aspirations of Moroccans. Migration and remittances has enabled the emancipation of formerly subaltern socio-ethnic groups such as *haratin* in southern Morocco, who have subsequently been able to escape from the constraints of traditional peasant society. Remittance-induced construction of houses destined for nuclear families and purchases of household utensils generally improves the living conditions of migrants' spouses and families. Remittances enable migrants' children and particularly daughters to go to school. However, migration hardly has the often assumed effect on changing norms on gender roles, which rather reflect *general* processes of cultural change. The socio-cultural (religious, social stratification, gender) impacts of migration are notoriously difficult to disentangle from general processes of change. Migration *itself* is constituent part of a complex set of social, cultural and economic transformations that increasingly integrate Morocco and in global social, economic and migratory systems, as well as an independent factor in perpetuating and intensifying, magnifying and accelerating these processes at the local and regional levels. This also allows for a more positive evaluation of the commonly negatively evaluated 'culture of migration' as a fundamentally developmental consequence of increasing capabilities and aspirations of young Moroccans. Migration is the inevitable corollary of broader development and globalisation processes. This exemplifies that economic and social tends to paradoxically go along with *increasing* migration, because increasing aspirations can indeed often only be realised elsewhere. The perception that international migration is a relatively secure way towards more social and economic freedom is therefore more than a mirage.

# **The social and cultural impacts of international migration on Moroccan sending communities: a review**

## **Introduction**

Over the past four decades, Morocco has evolved into one of the world's leading emigration countries. 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. 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 labour, explain why policies aiming to curb migration have had only limited effects. Although most migrants originate from Morocco's three main migration belts (the Rif, the Sous and southern oases), there has been a process of spatial diffusion, in which more and more rural and, increasingly, urban areas have become firmly integrated in the Mediterranean-European migration system (cf. De Haas 2005a).

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, over 2.2 million people of Moroccan descent lived abroad in 2005. The actual number may be substantially higher, due to undocumented migration. Moreover, this does not include the approximately 700,000 Jews of Moroccan descent living in Israel. France is home to the largest legally residing population of Moroccan descent (more than 1,025,000), followed by Spain (397,000), the Netherlands (315,000), Italy (287,000), Belgium (215,000), and Germany

(99,000). Smaller communities live in Scandinavian countries (17,000), the United Kingdom (50,000), the United States (85,000), and the Canadian province of Quebec (70,000) (De Haas 2005a).

In contrast to earlier pessimistic predictions, migrant remittances from Europe to Morocco have shown an increasing trend over the past decades. Receiving \$3.6 billion in official remittances in 2003, Morocco was the fourth largest remittance receiver in the developing world. 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. 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 (De Haas and Plug 2006).

Despite its status as one of the world's leading emigration countries, empirical evidence from Morocco has been largely absent from the lively general theoretical debate on how migration affects development in sending areas, opposing 'migration optimists' to 'migration pessimists' (De Haas 2005b; cf. Massey *et al.*, 1998; Taylor *et al.* 1996a and 1996b; Taylor 1999). Recent theoretical insights on migration and development are largely based on micro-studies done in Latin America, particularly Mexico. Moreover, most empirical studies that have been done in Morocco have remained 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 ignored most earlier empirical work.

In another paper, we have reviewed the research literature on the impacts of migration and remittances on economic development in Moroccan migrant sending regions. It concluded that migration and the remarkably reliable remittance transfers have considerably reduced poverty, improved living conditions and housing, incomes, education and spurred economic activity through agricultural, real estate and business investment. This has transformed migrant-sending regions into relatively prosperous areas that now attract internal ‘reverse’ migrants. However, the developmental potential of migration is not fully realised through several structural constraints such as corruption, excessive bureaucracy and a general lack of trust in governments at either side of the Mediterranean (de Haas 2005b).

However, it would be erroneous to depict and understand migration only as an economic phenomenon (cf. Reniers 1999). To a large extent, migration is also a social and cultural event both in its causes and consequences, and the social and cultural dimensions of migration can hardly be separated from its economic dimensions. The fact alone that migrants send remittances is an expression of the intensive social bonds they tend to maintain with kin back home (cf. De Haas 2003). Through its effects on socio-ethnic stratification, migration may also challenge traditionally established power relations and the functioning of village institutions, which might, in their turn, affect economic production, in particular in collectively managed agriculture. Changing value systems and social stratification may also affect the extent to which the social and economic benefits (and costs) of migration are distributed among ethnic groups, households, and sexes.

Finally, migration propelled social and cultural changes are likely to affect people’s future propensity to migrate. In this sense the literature has referred to a culture of migration, in which international migration is associated with personal, social, and material success, and in

which migrating has become the norm rather than the exception, and in which staying home would be associated with failure. This cultural connotation is said to generate its own dynamics by further strengthening migration propensities. It has even been argued that migration can be characterised as a modern ‘rite de passage’ (Massey et al. 1993: 453).

The aim of this paper is address the social and cultural impacts of international migration in Moroccan migrant sending communities. The paper will in particular address the question to what extent and in what way we can speak of a culture of migration in Moroccan migrant sending communities. This is done through reviewing a part of the empirical literature, which has been mainly published in the form of conference proceedings, theses, reports or books with limited distribution.

### **Migration, inequality and social stratification**

There is evidence that that the inflow of remittances substantially contributes to income growth and poverty alleviation in Morocco (Testas, 2002), although the middle and higher income classes profit relatively more from remittances than the lowest income groups (Teto, 2001), because migration itself has proved to be a selective process, and most Moroccan migrants therefore do generally 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.

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 and sending communities continuously renew the remittance potential through new migration (cf. Collyer 2004; De Haas, 2003; Saa 2003).

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, 2005) 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 centres, 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, 2005; see also Gallina, 2004). The freedom of activities of migrants' associations used to be very restricted until recently. However, increasing civil liberties in Morocco over the 1990s have led to a remarkable increase in association activities.

Migration and remittances have 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 – the typical investment priority of

migrants – is *also* an expression of the newly acquired social status. Likewise, migrants' contribution to the renovation or construction of mosques as well as the *hadj*, the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, not only fulfils an intrinsic, religious function, but also adds to their social prestige. 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.

Although it is certainly not the only factor explaining these changes, 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 (Fadlollah *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 southern oases, with their

caste-like socio-ethnic stratification, most people used to live in grinding poverty, while subaltern, generally 'Black' ethnic groups such as the *haratin* and '*abid* were restricted to serfdom or slavery (De Haas, 2003; Ensel, 1999; Ilahiane, 2001). 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 often gone in parallel with the relative 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 several formerly 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, many *haratin* 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 labourers 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 and organise collective labour (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; Otte, 2000). In particular, in fragile anthropogenic, labour-intensive agricultural systems, such as traditional oases and mountain terraces, the short term result might be a general decline of traditional agricultural systems and land degradation. Nevertheless, on the longer term migration and remittances might also enable the revitalisation of agriculture through investments in land, crops and machinery (cf. De Haas, 2001; 2003).

### **Migration, family life 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' honour.

However, nuclear family households have increasingly become the norm over the past decades.

The impact of Moroccan 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). As far as they receive any attention at all, the consequences of migration on women’s wellbeing, and on conjugal and family life in general, are generally put in a negative light by (predominantly male) scholars. For instance, Aït Hamza (1995:159,164) stated that migration

has contributed to the desaggregation of traditional institutions, and to the devastation of society without yet resulting in any female wellbeing . . . . The behaviour of international migrants has engendered a disproportionate dream. Marrying a migrant has become the ideal of anyone. From their side, the migrants . . . indulge in the abuse of marriage, divorce and remarriage (translation from French by author)

The position of migrants’ wives seems indeed vulnerable, as they often live under the threat of being repudiated by their spouses. This seems in particular true for international migrants, whose relative wealth makes it easy and tempting to find a new and younger – or second – spouse in Morocco. Furthermore, the presumed lack of ‘paternal authority’ is said to increase delinquency among youngsters (cf. Fadloullah *et al.*, 2000, p. 130). However, as we will see, it should be emphasised that such 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; Fadloulah *et al.*, 2000, p. xix, 130). However, it is a different and complicated question whether the growing autonomy and responsibilities should be equated with women's emancipation or their increased wellbeing. 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 observations, 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 and gain in power and status vis-à-vis nonmigrant women, 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 labour 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 (Hajjarabi, 1995, pp. 106-7). So, the rapid transformation of gender roles can lead to feelings of shame and uneasiness with the new situation of often illiterate women who were themselves raised in a strongly patriarchal context. This explains why this ‘emancipation’ is not always positively experienced by the women themselves.

As these new roles are generally not assumed out of free choice, but by force of the situation, it should thus 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. 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>1</sup>.

However, there might be some less visible, more indirect and long-term effects of migration on the position of women. Firstly, international migration has a distinct positive influence on the educational participation of migrants’ daughters. Two different empirical studies indicated that — whereas international migration was not or hardly selective for education — international migrants’ children were better educated than children in 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 young women and that international migration therefore plays an accelerating role in closing the gender gap in education.

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<sup>1</sup> Until recently women migrated almost exclusively in the context of family migration. However, since the 1990s, an rapidly increasing proportion of independent labour migrants to Europe and North America are female (De Haas 2005a; Salih 2001). This feminisation of Moroccan labour migration also seems to be the result of *general* economic, social and cultural change in Morocco.

Secondly, Courbage (1995) hypothesized that – besides factors such as higher age of marriage, increased female labour 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 Morocco’s demographic transition (for a similar argument, see Fargues, 2004).

### **Migration, the nucleation and the spatial segregation of family life**

Migration-related tensions on remittance use are said to 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. Nevertheless, it is difficult to disentangle the specific role of migration from the *general* tendency in Moroccan society towards the establishment of nuclear families along with the decline of the traditional extended families.

Migration and remittances tend to motivate and enable migrants’ spouses to establish independent households in newly-constructed houses for their nuclear family; thereby escaping control by in-laws and gaining in personal freedom (see also De Haas 2005b).

Besides generally 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.

Women's quest for autonomy is a major, but oft neglected explanation why migrant households tend to give a high priority to investments in housing. Literally all Moroccan migration impact studies agree that housing construction is the migrants' first investment priority (cf. De Haas 2003; Fellat, 1996; Hamdouch 2000) In migrant-sending areas throughout Morocco, a building fever has transformed certain villages into nearby towns, where migrants also prefer to locate other investments (Fadloulah *et al.*, 2000).

Researchers and policy makers tend to lament the migrants' priority for real estate investments and tend 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. 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 behaviour (Kaioua, 1999, p. 124; cf. De Haas, 2005b).

However, there seems to be ample reason to criticize this attitude as rather patronizing, for blaming migrants' irrational mentality *a priori*<sup>2</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), although Berriane (1997) and De Haas (2003) argued that the luxury of migrants' houses is often exaggerated as a result of superficial observations. Furthermore, it appears to be erroneous to reduce the desire to construct houses as a quest to erect status symbols. There is evidence that migrants' real

estate investments can be a highly rewarding and relatively low-risk investment in an insecure investment environment, which potentially enables migrant households to secure and increase income. Moreover, house ownership tends to provide ‘life insurance’ for the migrants’ households (Ben Ali, 1996; De Haas, 2005b).

However, the importance attached to housing should primarily be explained by the universal quest for space, safety (in particular protection against earthquakes and flooding), privacy, fewer conflicts and better health. 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. Hajjarabi (1988) has pointed to the legitimacy of the desire for decent housing and basic hygienic facilities, with a direct and highly positive impact on the quality of family life. Such improvements in living conditions are particularly appreciated by women who are usually confined to household tasks.

It is equally important not to ignore the more specific social and cultural reasons that explain the priority for housing construction. In extended families remittances are mostly not sent directly to the migrant’s wife, but generally to one of the men within the household (Hajjarabi, 1988, p. 180-1). 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 is a top priority among women (cf. Van Rooij, 2000). 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, impede private nuclear family life.

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<sup>2</sup> In this context, Taylor et al. (1996a:411) spoke of “diatribes by academics and policy makers against migrants

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. Intra-household tensions about remittance use seem to accelerate the break-up of extended families and the nucleation of family life and the physical 'lifting out' of nuclear families (Ait Hamza, 1988; 1995; Berriane, 1996; De Haas, 2003; De Mas, 1990). This lifting out may be in the form of building an own house in the village, the transfer of the family from the village to nearby towns or family reunification at the destination abroad.

Studies from north and south Morocco indicated that not only return migrants but also several still-abroad migrants 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, the aforementioned frequent occurrence of conflicts between the migrant's spouse and her in-laws and avoidance of material claims by the migrants' extended families are important elements in the decision to relocate the entire family to towns (Berriane, 1996; 1997; De Mas 1990). Remittance-enabled investments in children's education may be another motive to relocate nuclear migrant households to towns with educational facilities (Berriane, 1996, p. 376).

Finally, the above described processes of family nucleation and intra-family tensions tend to ultimately push migrants' nuclear households to family reunification. The ultimate wish of migrants' wife generally is family reunification abroad. The relative power of women tends to

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for their profligate and unproductive ways”.

increase significantly in case of family reunification (Aït Hamza, 1995, p. 165-8), not only because of the fact that women generally enjoy more rights in Europe, but also because this allows them to gain independent residency and social security rights after three to five years. Along with progressing nucleation of Moroccan family life, there seems to be an increasing tendency towards reunification of households as soon as this is legally possible, in contrast to the former 'guest worker' pattern of many years or even decades of separation (cf. De Haas 2003).

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

Migration and the close confrontation with other cultural models this involves, seems also to have a profound influence on local culture and perceptions of people living in migrant sending communities. International migrants have often become role models in migrant sending communities (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).

Crawford (2001, p. 23) found that migration has affected (i.e., increased) the use and knowledge of Arabic in a Berber-speaking area. On the other hand, this has paradoxically led to higher consciousness, pride and affection with the mother tongue. Moreover, migration is

said to influence local tastes and styles, which is said to become particularly visible in the construction of urban-style houses and villas by migrants (cf. Aït Hamza, 1988 ).

There seems to be hardly any research on the impact of migration on local religious life in Morocco, although these are potentially important<sup>3</sup>. In the south Moroccan Todgha valley internal and international migrants have presumably played an accelerating role in the rise of orthodox, relatively puritan Islam, which is not fundamentalist but clearly deviates from the declining popular Islam. On their return from cities and abroad, labour but also student migrants tend to criticize allegedly pre-Islamic practices of popular Islam in rural (often Berber) areas such as the veneration of *marabuts* (local saints) and mountains, sorcery, the tradition of *ahidus* (mixed dancing and music making during village feasts), and the traditional practice of tattooing women's faces and bodies. Indeed, most such practices are rapidly declining under the combined influence of migration, formal education, the state-controlled mosques, and the media, which are all channels through which 'correct' Islam is propagated. It is nonetheless difficult to disentangle the influence of migration from other influences, which are likely to be more important (De Haas 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' relative success, 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 or only avenue of

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, research in Sudan has demonstrated that migration to Saudi Arabia has led to an influx of new religious norms, which have stimulated the rise of fundamentalist Islam and the parallel decline of popular

upwards socio-economic mobility (Fadlollah *et al.*, 2000, pp. 132-46), and in which ambitions, life projects and dreams are generally situated *elsewhere* in the thoughts of people (Hajjarabi, 1988). It is commonly argued that migrants tend to blow up their success.

Economic and social problems or outright failure are typically being hidden, which would create exaggerated images of social and economic opportunities in Europe. 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.

This fixation on migration is said to be so overwhelming that in Moroccan migrant sending areas a large number of young men were not only jobless but not looking for work either (Schoorl *et al.*, 2000, p. xvi). A large proportion of nonmigrants think that it would be a good choice if their daughters would marry a migrant (Fadlollah, 2000, p. xx). Hajjarabi (1988) stressed that the migration culture is also vivid among women, who are, nevertheless often still dependent on men in realising this ambition (cf. Salih 2001).

In this way, migration has increased feelings of relative deprivation among others, which subsequently increased the desire to migrate among nonmigrants. Nevertheless, it seems not only the material factors that incite people to leave. Migrating tend also to be associated to the idea of personal liberty (Ossman 1997). Confronted with economic stagnation and political as well as social unfreedom and insecurity and a general lack of perspective, many youngsters aspire living in open, democratic societies, in which they have more possibilities for personal development.

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Islam. As return migrants had a higher status, fundamentalist Islam is therefore identified with progress and

The perception that migration is *the* ultimate road towards social and material wellbeing is said to be further encouraged by special programmes on national television, in which only successful Moroccans abroad are interviewed (Fadloullah *et al.* 2000, p. 89). Over the 1990s, satellite dishes have penetrated even in Morocco's smallest and most remote villages and have further intensified the confrontation with alternative cultural models and the economic affluence usually depicted on foreign channels (cf. Davis 1989; Davis and Davis 1995).

This positive image of 'elsewhere' and 'the other', combined with circumstances of economic stagnation and high unemployment in Morocco, explains that migration is being seen as the main avenue of upward social mobility (Fadloullah, 2000, p. 132-46). 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 would 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 might be true to a certain extent, the simple fact that salaries in Europe easily exceed Moroccan salaries by five to ten times<sup>4</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 many 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

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prosperity (Bernal, 1999, pp. 26-28).

<sup>4</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.

legalization or marriage.<sup>5</sup> The massive legalisation campaign in Spain 2005 further justified prospective migrants' optimism.

Furthermore, 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. However, 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

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<sup>5</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.

people's eyes to the wider world and helping to raise aspirations. Since these are part of more general and universal processes, a '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, labour, 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 on this point is mixed. Evidence from at least some migrant sending communities points to the contrary, where migration and remittances have led rather to increased local economic activities (cf De Haas 2005b), although presumably not at levels sufficient to respond to the even faster increased aspirations.

Fadlollah *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 if we consider the empirical facts. 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, their survey is likely to be biased because it 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 (De Haas 2003; Schoorl *et al.*, 2000). Moroccans do not want to leave at 'any price', and this is likely to be the very reason why

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 can be the inevitable corollary of broader development processes, in which people's horizons widen and their capabilities and aspirations increase. Such rising aspirations push people to exploit their talents and capacities, to become more productive and to increase their wellbeing. It would be naïve to assume that these aspirations could all be realized in the proverbial native village. In fact, migration allows for better wellbeing and productivity, and this seems to be the more 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 largely rational choice to migrate.

## **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 increased aspirations of Moroccans. There is substantial evidence that migration and remittances has enabled the emancipation of formerly subaltern socio-ethnic groups escape from the constraints of traditional peasant society, often to the detriment of ancient elite groups. 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.

The 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 behaviour and various processes of social change, such as the demise of traditional peasant communities 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 wellbeing and productivity of young people.

The impacts of migration are notoriously difficult to disentangle from general processes of social and cultural change, with which it is closely and reciprocally intertwined as both a cause and a consequence. Changing norms and increasing knowledge of the outside world in

particular through improved education, media exposure, infrastructure development, and the confrontation with migrants' but also tourists' relative wealth have boosted life aspirations of nonmigrants. Alongside with increasing income and the facilitating role of migrant networks, this continues to give Moroccans not only the factual (material) possibility but also the necessary aspirations to migrate abroad.

This also allows for a more positive evaluation of the commonly negatively evaluated 'culture of migration', which is often erroneously assumed to be 'just' there as a reified entity. 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. However, 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 and accelerates its integration in global social, economic and migratory systems, as well as an independent factor in perpetuating and probably intensifying, magnifying and accelerating these processes at the local and regional levels.

Migration is the inevitable corollary of broader development and globalisation processes, in which people's horizons widen and their capabilities and aspirations increase. This exemplifies that economic and social tend to paradoxically go along with *increasing* migration. Notwithstanding empirical evidence that migration and remittances have led rather to increased economic activities and income growth, this has not (yet) been at levels sufficient to respond to the even faster increased aspirations. Hence, migration continues. Even if impressions of Europe are too rosy and despite the manifold problems migrants may face

abroad, the perception that international migration is a relatively secure way towards more social and economic opportunities and freedom is therefore more than a mirage.

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