

*Harnessing the potential of Moroccans living abroad through diaspora policies? Assessing the factors of success and failure of a new structure of opportunities for Transnational Entrepreneurs*

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**Abstract:**

In the framework of the emerging field of research on transnational migrant entrepreneurship at the crossroads of business and migration studies, the main purpose of this article is to assess the change of the Moroccan policy paradigm concerning their diaspora engagement policy, which has shifted from a guest-workers policy narrative (remittances based approach) to a transnational policy narrative (skills-mobilization based approach) during the last decade. Once we have framed this process, we proceed to analyse the factors of success and failure of this new structure of opportunities for Moroccan transnational entrepreneurs. We have interviewed Moroccan migrant entrepreneurs in Morocco and Spain and stakeholders from different Moroccan institutions, and our findings indicate that there is a gap between the aims of the Moroccan engagement policy and the experiences of these Moroccan entrepreneurs. We argue that the Moroccan government has a too narrow view of transnationalism (only focused on return), a false identity premise (assuming that attraction towards Morocco can only be achieved by fostering a sense of “Moroccanness” that appears to be far from reality), and a false socioeconomic premise that those that take this entrepreneurial route are motivated by opportunity rather than necessity.

## 1. Introduction: the Moroccan diaspora engagement policy paradigm

Though remittances play a decisive role in supplying currencies and reducing poverty, it is increasingly admitted that Moroccans Living Abroad (MLAs) can bring other forms of beneficial transfers to their land of origin, in the shape of technological, managerial and entrepreneurial know-how. Some nationals who return home may have acquired professional experience, social and cultural capital that stimulate the local economy. MLAs also begin to be viewed as drivers of innovation, employment and economic growth. The main purpose of this article is to assess this change of the Moroccan diaspora policy paradigm, which is shifting from a guest-workers policy narrative (remittances-based approach) to a transnational policy narrative (skills-mobilization-based approach) in line with the growing interest in migrants as actual or potential transnational entrepreneurs described by Zapata-Barrero and Rezai (2018) in the introduction to this volume.

The approach of this article is first descriptive: to place the diaspora engagement policy paradigm within the Moroccan migration dynamics context and overview its main features reviewing the main literature both from migration and business studies. Once we have framed this process, the rationale will turn to assessing the factors of success and failure of this structure of opportunities building process for Moroccan Transnational Entrepreneurs (MTEs). We have interviewed Moroccan migrant entrepreneurs in Morocco and Spain, and also stakeholders and public policy officers from different key Moroccan institutions.

We seek to contribute to the debate on transnational migrant entrepreneurship by exploring two sets of arguments: First, the *socio-economic argument* concerning the profile this policy is targeting, which does not take into account the differences between opportunity-driven and necessity-driven entrepreneurs that are often referred to in the literature (e.g. Newland and Tanaka 2010); and second, the *national identity arguments* which assume that in promoting a feeling of belonging (“Moroccanness”),<sup>1</sup> MLAs will be motivated to keep ties through professional and/or entrepreneurial ventures.

The main unit of the empirical analysis will follow the mainstream scholarship framework, which identifies incoherencies between policy expectations and outcomes (the so called “policy gap” in migration studies). In part, this is probably because the

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<sup>1</sup> This may involve national, cultural, linguistic and/or religious identity (Planet Contreras and Hernando de Larramendi Martinez, 2015).

policy does not manage to reach the appropriate profiles of people, and it may tend to assume the “Moroccanness” premise, which could be less important in practice in the process of individual decisions, as our exploratory empirical findings indicate.

These two main arguments will be complemented by some additional arguments based on the empirical findings: that the Moroccan application of transnational policies through this engagement policy is probably too narrow and only focused on return (*return transnationalism*), but does not contemplate other possibilities to practice transnationalism. We will also conclude that much of the shortcomings of this engagement policy are probably related to the fact that the philosophy behind it is too economy-driven, without contemplating the potential role that MLAs could play in political reform and the democratization of Morocco.

### **Contextualizing the Moroccan case study within the Migrant Transnational Entrepreneurs area of studies: shaping a framework for the analysis**

The fact that OECD in 2016-17 released two reports on Moroccan public policies; development and skilled migrants, is an indicator of the international interest in this policy paradigm change. These diaspora policies consist of an array of measures, including ministerial and consular reforms, and investment policies to manage a specific profile of MLAs: skilled nationals. In fact we can identify diaspora policies as a specific transnational pro-active policy developed by home countries, including economical, political (e.g. dual citizenship and the right to vote abroad, which still encounters some resistance from Moroccan authorities) and even symbolic, culture-related national actions. The Moroccan case study illustrates the difficulties in consolidating a policy paradigm change that has been progressively implemented since the 1990s, and that now seems to have the shape of a “governance of a structure of opportunities”, engaging Moroccan authorities, but also private and public partnerships, programs, institutions and government departments.

Taking recent theories of policy paradigm change (Hogan & Howlett, eds. 2015) it becomes clear that when emerging policies are contradicted by evidence or are shown to not meet their initial expectations, there are probably less chances that this new paradigm will be consolidated over time, and can only survive if some changes of the initial orientation are produced. The first literature examining the policy paradigm change from a remittances-based approach to a skills-mobilization-based approach shares the diagnosis that after some decades of implementation, it is much more of a policy rhetoric

than an efficient policy (Boukharouaa, 2014). This article will not only confirm this conclusion, but it will also propose additional arguments that seem meaningful to explain this policy gap.

### **Diaspora policy paradigm change in Morocco: main philosophy**

The Moroccan Diaspora engagement policies suppose the advancement of capacity building policies aimed at developing a set of state institutions to govern the diaspora, and probably belong to the most extended dimension of engagement diaspora policies. The other two contemplated by Gamlen (2006), namely extending rights to the diaspora and extracting obligations, are probably the least developed. This particular focus is situated in the broad process of change in Morocco already described by Haas (2007), which explored the shift from controlling the diaspora to including it. This shift occurred due to the high contributions of their remittances, and after recognizing that Moroccan authorities were working with a false premise in assuming that integration of their nationals in the host country would reduce national engagement and remittances. In this framework, this article seeks to enter into this second phase, centered on the mobilization of skilled MLAs in general. We seek to question the Moroccan philosophy, which assumes that the only way for young generations to keep their ties with Morocco and be engaged in productive investments, is by promoting national identity. Within transnational studies, this policy has some interest because it adds to the migration literature the value of considering transnationalism as something that does not necessarily exist naturally, but can be constructed politically from the country of origin. That is, the same transnational policy that was practiced earlier by Morocco with the purpose to prevent their nationals from integrating in the country of residence, now intends to mobilize one important population sector of their diaspora, the best educated and skilled, so that they may contribute to the development of Morocco. These transnational politics appear to be considered a pull factor for Morocco. The problem, as we will see later through interview analysis, is that the Moroccan government has a very narrow view of transnationalism (only focused upon return).

This policy shift from a guest-workers narrative (remittances-based approach) to a transnational policy narrative (skills-mobilization-based approach) must be understood as the broad mainstream focus of Moroccan diaspora governance today. This new policy dynamics certainly needs to be placed in a context where Morocco is itself changing from being considered an emigration to an immigration country. Morocco got its first

immigration law in 2013 (see first report 2013-2016, Royaume du Maroc, 2016), basically changing its social landscape with black Africans who stayed in the country instead of trying to cross the Mediterranean. These African migrants were controlled by Morocco as part of its commitments with the European (and Spanish) externalization of their policies. Numerous researches stress that this shift can also be interpreted as an indicator of the political and economic reforms made by Morocco these last decades, willing to become a much more attractive country to live and invest in. The constitutional reform of 2011, among others, cemented the role of the government on migration issues. It first made the protection of MLAs a priority, before granting them the right to participate in Moroccan political life (OECD, 2017; 52-54). Without this general process of change, the diaspora engagement policy would not gain legitimacy in placing economic development as one of its basic strategies for the coming years (OECD 2007) and its efforts to have a place in the global market and the African political landscape. The complex relation to Europe, and having taken the lead of the “African migration dossier” during its recent incorporation in the African Union are certainly additional factors shaping this context, and making Morocco an interesting dynamic model to analyze within the TME debate.

Three basic pillars sustain the Moroccan diaspora engagement policy philosophy (RdM 2016b): a) Preservation of the identity of the Moroccans of the World; b) Protection of rights and interests of MLAs; and c) Contribution of MLAs to the development of the country.

This diaspora policy focus seeks to profit from the know-how accumulated by MLAs for the benefits of Morocco. It is defined by one of the leading institutions, the CCME (*Conseil de la Communauté Marocaine à l'Étranger*), as targeting to manage nationals living abroad with professional, scientific, technical, artistic, cultural or associative expertise who could satisfy a well-identified need of the public or private sector; or meet the human resource needs of sectoral development plans and programs; or participate in any project at the territorial or national level in need of a strengthening of human resources in Morocco (El Asri, dir. 2012). It is within this broad policy scope that the promotion of Moroccan entrepreneurs living abroad is focused. This policy is directly linked to the economic strategy to develop Morocco (OECD, 2017) and belongs to its most important strategy regarding their diaspora in Horizon 2025 (Benguendouz, 2010; 29). In fact this policy seeking to mobilize MLAs is not new. It allows the home country to capitalize on pre-existing resources, without the need for significant

infrastructure investment (Charef, 2008). This policy can be interpreted as a Moroccan transnational field of action that seeks to foster a sense of belonging among those living abroad. Transnational spaces have been developed not only where migration flows, entries and exits are managed, but also where the identities, sense of belonging and unique forms of citizen development that are part of more intricate international relations are negotiated (Planet and Hernando de Larramendi Martinez, 2015). It also already existed as a strategy to involve Moroccan associations in the development of Morocco (Ostergaard-Nielsen, 2009). What is probably new is the institutional attention towards Moroccan individuals living abroad through a series of policy structures and programmes, and within the general scheme of attracting the “best” nationals.

This mobilization strategy is explicitly a politics of attraction (*Marhaba*) of high-skilled Moroccan migrants that have acquired a social and cultural capital abroad, and that now are “seduced” to contribute to the national economical development.<sup>2</sup> The narrative policy logic behind this can be roughly defined as giving rights, services and facilities in order to consolidate duties towards Morocco, expressed through investments and creating jobs through entrepreneurship projects. This policy is mainly focused towards the productive economy rather than the in-productive one, which was one of the main destinations of the old remittances promotion policy model. As the majority of policy officers we interviewed recognized, they have difficulties reaching entrepreneurs living abroad. This approach to economic development is basically driven by traditional state instruments of promoting belonging and a sense of Moroccan identity (national and/or religious based). But as our exploratory empirical analysis reflects, most of the entrepreneurs who seek to develop their business projects in their country of origin are guided by pragmatic reasons rather than by strong feelings of national identity, contrary to the general mainstream narrative of Moroccan diaspora engagement policies. This constitutes one of our main findings, together with some other arguments strengthening what is already a general diagnosis shared by the literature: that Moroccan policy initiatives set out to attract their skilled nationals reflect a gap between expectations and outcomes. Most authors point out that the lack of an integrative view of the different policy initiatives, and the incoherence between different departments, institutions and programmes seeking to create a structure of opportunities for their nationals living abroad,

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<sup>2</sup> Operation Marhaba is under the effective presidency of HM King Mohammed VI, highlighting the logistical, human, material and technical resources mobilized, in particular by the Mohammed V Foundation for solidarity, in order to ensure the operation. <http://www.ccme.org.ma/en/what-s-new/53253>

may be some of the main causes (Boukharouaa coord. 2014; OCDE, 2017, p 55).

### **Distinctive features (and weaknesses) of the diaspora policy paradigm: setting up the governance of transnational Moroccan entrepreneurs**

Viewed from comparative migration studies, in some sense Morocco is doing the same as most European (such as Germany) and other Western countries (such as Canada): linking migration policies and development. But there are probably few that apply this policy focus to their own national population living abroad. This can certainly be interpreted as a change of policy paradigm from “brain drain” to “brain gain”: from seeing emigration as a national loss preventing Morocco from developing, to a resource if there is a possibility to politically revert the direction of their own national flows, and make their own nationals living abroad active agents of Moroccan development. Instead of seeking primarily to reduce the brain drain, the focus is on finding the benefits of this “bleeding”. By inverting the question, it is considered that the rich and diversified expertise accumulated by Moroccans residing abroad can advantageously be involved in the national development process (Belguendouz, 2010).

Morocco is apparently a great case study to know how origin countries take a proactive attitude towards their own nationals and try to have an impact in their attitudes, behaviours and life expectations (Weimar et. al., 2016). Migrants’ relationship with their home countries becomes central when they are expected to develop transnational businesses; these countries gain a new interest in attracting investments from those who formerly emigrated and who may have mixed feelings about the country they once left (Zapata-Barrero and Rezai, 2018). Through a series of programmes and policies, Morocco has been fighting during the last decades to change the view of their own national citizens living abroad who have been forced to leave their country, and who probably have some emotional resentment towards the country, to change their mind and see their own country as a land of opportunities. This is certainly directly related to the historical period of migration dynamics that allowed the linkage between this emerging transnational-based narrative policy to an inter-generational-based narrative. The Moroccan diaspora in Europe is entering the second and third generations, and most young Moroccans have limited knowledge of their origin, mainly filtered by their parents and in holiday periods. In spite of having very few demographic data, the majority of studies exploring the profile of these skilled nationals finds that they are young, well-

educated and in European universities, male, and they have kept a link to Morocco through family ties, holidays, etc., and have been in the country of residence for a long time (Gubert and Nordman, 2011; Hamdouch and Wahda, 2015). Some add that most were engaged in social activities and participated in various organizations in their countries of residence (Hamdouch & Wahba, 2015), and have the ambition to contribute through their acquired social and cultural capital (skills and expertise) to the development of their country of origin. Through this pro-active diaspora policy it is evident that Morocco wants to strengthen the ties with young people in its diaspora.

The distinctive features of this diaspora engagement policy have four main pillars, which may actually be its weakness according to our findings:

- a. It is economics-based, framed within the development strategy of the government, with the danger of neglecting political rights distribution and the MLAs as political actors. In some sense this policy paradigm change still does not present a change in terms of the view of MLAs as primarily economic actors.
- b. Following a) it belongs to a broad strategy of attracting the best and highest skilled migrants abroad (including entrepreneurs and investors of the productive economy), leaving aside those who are still worse off, who may suffer a double exclusion (from the country of origin and the host country). The MLAs who are not qualified still suffer discrimination and exclusion and seems now to be the forgotten population of its own government of origin. This is what has been recently claimed by several reports (FEF, 2015; OCDE, 2017, p. 52). Moreover, the diaspora policy does not foster entrepreneurship abroad; it has no pro-active approach seeking to influence MLAs and motivate them to take this new vital path. Its focus is rather on care and welfare (legal, information, economical and administrative dimensions) but without a campaign abroad motivating workers not to send their remittances, as the previous policy paradigm, but to engage in entrepreneurial activities with their country of origin.
- c. The transnational dimension of the diaspora policy is basically concentrated on return, assuming that Morocco sees the results of the transnational policy they have promoted for years, now basically affecting new generations supposedly committed to Moroccan identity (*return transnationalism*). The Moroccan diaspora policy ignores



other transnational strands indicated by the TDE literature, namely what we will call *circular transnationalism* and *residence transnationalism*.

- d. Finally, in the same vein as Haas (2007), who argued that the remittances-approach policy paradigm was constructed under a false premise in assuming that integration in the host country would reduce national engagement and remittances, there is still a new identity-based assumption in this new policy approach: that most of the politics of attraction (*Marhaba*) are possible if they are politically driven by fostering a sense of Moroccanness (which may include national identity, language and/or religion).<sup>3</sup> Our findings show that the motivations of Moroccan entrepreneurs living abroad are much more pragmatism-driven than identity-driven.

These four features, but also shortcomings, may help us understand why these policies, in spite of being implemented through different stages since the 1990s, still have difficulties being successful, as some reports show us, including the last OECD reports (2016, 2017).

### **Mapping the institutional diaspora governance: building a new structure of opportunities to promote a new profile of Moroccans living abroad (Moroccan transnational entrepreneur)**

The structure of the Moroccan diaspora governance has three basic institutions. In 2007, the Ministry of Moroccans Residing Abroad (*Ministère des Marocains Résidant à l'Étranger, MMRE*) was (re)-founded to follow up on this engagement strategy towards MLAs giving administrative and legal support; the Council of the Moroccan Community Abroad (*Le Conseil de la Communauté Marocaine à l'Étranger, CCME*), a national consultative and prospective institution placed with King Mohammed VI, and

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<sup>3</sup> At this stage we cannot enter deeply into the “national identity” question in Morocco, but several dimensions could be a matter of dispute. There are Amazigh (officially described as a minority population, yet they are the majority), and the Arab populace (who generally do not intermarry with the Amazigh). In terms of language, there are huge battles over French or Arabic, or more recently English, as languages for teaching, official TV news, and other formal channels of communication. Whether people grew up in the North (with higher concentration of French influence) or in the South (that was never occupied by the French) is another central issue when speaking of “national identity”. As for religion, there are different versions of Islam (e.g. Salafi, Sufi and more conventional and moderate).

constitutionalized on the occasion of the reform approved by the referendum of July 1st, 2011. The CCME mainly assesses public policies towards MLAs, gives advice and develops studies, but also has the aim to become a “network of networks”, as its president Driss El Yazami declared in 2009 (interview in *Les Echos Quotidiens*, Casablanca, 1/12/2009). Finally, there is the *Hassan II Foundation*, founded in 1990 with the purpose of ensuring that MLAs maintain ties with their country of origin through religion, education, cultural and linguistic devices. There are also several departments seeking to provide juridical and administrative support such as the Directorate of Consular and Social Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation), the Ministry of Labour and Professional Education, the Regional Centre for Investment (Ministry of Interior), the Moroccan Council of Ulemas for Europe and the Mohammed V Foundation for Solidarity.

As the Moroccan government wants to direct transfers to productive investments, it has set up, starting in 2002, regional investment centers that provide assistance for investment and business creation. In order to stimulate investment, Morocco set up several programs under the already existing *MDM Invest* since 1949 to jointly finance, alongside banks, the creation or development of companies in Morocco promoted by Moroccans living abroad. For instance in 2009-2012 a strategic national plan providing services to small and medium enterprises, and in 2013-2016 a new strategic development plan focused on reinforcing guarantee and co-financing services with regional development. There are also some private firms such as *Bank Al Amal*, which was created in 1989 with the objective of financially contributing to projects of creation or development of companies in general, and now specifically addresses enterprises launched by MLAs. Another institution that plays a role in shaping this structure of opportunities is the Advisory Council on Human Rights. The Global Innovation Index, Boukharouaa’s chapter (coord. 2014) shows us the variety of programs targeting skilled MLAs. There are several public-private partnerships such as, for instance, the *Fincome (Moroccan Forum of International Competences Abroad)* aiming to involve Moroccan professionals residing abroad in supporting the economic, social, and cultural development of Morocco in terms of training, research, expertise, consultancy, or investment initiatives of their own. Recently there is also the so called *Marhaba Operation* (“Marhaba” means “attraction”), focused on attracting nationals to contribute to Morocco’s development offering services, information, assistance, and learning procedures. New bilateral and multilateral non-governmental networks, such as the

*German-Moroccan Skills Network* or the *Moroccan Association of Grandes Ecoles*, are the privileged interlocutors of Morocco in the context of skills transfer.

Some strategic partnerships with incubators play a role in channeling people and bridging Morocco with its diaspora, such as *Maroc Entrepreneurs*, a non-profit organization created in 1999 to promote economic development in Morocco through three main levers: to encourage MLAs to start their own business in Morocco; to discover the universe of the creation of companies and the socio-economic news of Morocco; and to establish a synergy between companies based in Morocco and Moroccan skills abroad. We can also mention the *Maghribcom platform* created in January 2013, providing a place for MLAs to learn about the initiatives and policies of the Ministry in Charge of MLAs. Both provide Moroccan professionals information regarding business opportunities, ad hoc collaboration, investment, and employment. There are also other examples of programmes, such as “Mobilization Program Skills”, which encourage investors in Moroccan enterprises.

As we can see, there is a large array of government departments engaged in the multifaceted implementation of this skills-mobilization-based policy approach. Precisely one mainstream criticism by experts, which is recognized by members of the main institutions interviewed, is that there is a need for an integral and comprehensive approach that can interconnect all institutions. At present, the repetition of services provided, the lack of coordination between institutions dependent on the government and others linked directly to the Kingdom (such as CCME), and overlapping policies, create unnecessary internal competition between them affecting the outcomes. In 2012, a major study on the 25 years of Morocco's mobilization policy (El Asri, 2012) highlighted the lack of a coherent policy in this area. The first review of this structure of governance is that the way it is implemented affects the relation between Morocco and MLAs (Belguendouz, 2006). The policies carried out and the political tools put in place so far are failing because they lack efficiency. It is clear that, apart from the direct action of the Fincome program, the different programs noted above were not much more than announcements (Boukharouaa et al., 2014: 130). But we are not directly interested in assessing how this policy paradigm is implemented but rather to infer what mainstream narrative philosophy exists within this structure of governance.

Regarding policy narratives, there is first some ambivalence in how to understand transnationalism as an asset: either promoting return or to promote that MLAs stay in their residence abroad. This became clear when Abdallatif Maâzouz, Minister of Foreign

Trade, in the first meeting called *Autumn University* (20-21 November 2009 in Fès) invited MLAs abroad: “Stay in Germany, dear emigrants, to play a big role in the marketing of Moroccan products in Germany!” In the same meeting, however, the Minister of Industry and Trade, Ahmed Réda Chami, claimed “Do not stay on horseback in both countries. Come thus to Morocco to work full-time!” (Belguendouz, 2010: 19). There is no mention of the potential circularity of MLAs, having their home in both countries. But what is most important for us is that the only focus that seems to be contemplated in analyzing the structure of governance and the main missions of key-institutions is *return promotion* through a *Marhaba philosophy*. This return-based approach is *monodimensional*, seeing the transnational dimension of MLAs as a resource that can only be enjoyed upon return (*return transnationalism*), without incorporating mobility in the same policy agenda. These policy limitations could also be a factor of failure. A mobility program could certainly contemplate other potential profiles ignored by this diaspora policy, potentially also contributing to development: *circular transnationalism* or *residencial transnationalism*. One of the first to explicitly highlight this mobility framework in MTE studies is Saxenian’s work (1999). The frequency of travels from home to residence countries makes some MTEs become an example of a new migratory pattern, which she calls “brain circulation” as opposed to “brain drain” (Saxenian, 2005). This brain circulation has been the specific focus of a special issue coordinated by Rezai, Light and Telles (2016). The circularity of entrepreneurs who may work and reside in both origin and host countries (*circular transnationalism*) is only one typology of transnational entrepreneurs, which has to be analytically distinguished from those who remain in residence countries and may contribute to the Moroccan economy from abroad (*residence transnationalism*), and those who decide to return (*return transnationalism*). Most of the studies are precisely focused on the strong correlation between return intentions, and planned and executed investment in the country of origin (in general see McCormick and Wahba 2001, Gubert and Nordmann 2011, and more recently for Morocco, Hamdouch and Wahba 2012). On the other hand, the training of the vast majority of unskilled Moroccan migrants before, during or after migration has not received the same attention to date.

We may conclude that entrepreneurial activity amongst returnees has emerged as a desired profession for authorities, as the last OECD reports show us (OECD 2016, 2017) and the few surveys done on MLA entrepreneurs (Bensouda, Bouzoubaa, Kadiri and Khalil, 2006). These studies also share the concern that although returnees show a high

ability to create small or medium businesses and to generate jobs, there are still many hurdles that return migrants face when setting up their businesses. This will also be confirmed in our interview findings. We can infer from the policy narrative that there are two specific main priorities. First, the diaspora's loyalty to the country is aimed to be preserved by the formation of a strong national identity, where especially the second and third generations of Moroccan migrants play an important role. Transnational policy is directly viewed as inter-generational. The Moroccan diaspora policy gradually became aware that it is no longer so much the emigrant workers but their children and grandchildren who determine the current national issues. A policy of the "2.0" diaspora, openly directed towards the new generations is therefore essential. Current policies focus on preserving a Moroccan identity through linguistic, religious and cultural dimensions. Second, Morocco has the objective of restoring the trust of Moroccans residing abroad towards the Moroccan government, and defending their interests by promoting their legal, social and humanitarian situation in the countries of residence. It then follows, from a political science point of view, the traditional rights/duties logic: "I give you rights and you give me duties". But this also seems to fail, especially concerning political rights.

Despite that there has been a diversification of economic activities, relatively few migrants seem inclined to have the financial capacity to start large-scale enterprises in Morocco (De Haas 2007). Policies that try to enhance the development impacts of migration by specifically targeting migrants seem to have limited effects as long as they do not alter the general social, economic and political environment. Recent reforms have been primarily symbolical and, although they resulted in a better treatment of migrants-on-holiday and contributed to surging remittances, they still conceal a lack of structural change. Symbolic politics, as it has been labelled by De Haas, will not convince migrants to invest as long as the general investment climate in Morocco continues to be unattractive due to failing legal systems, deficient credit markets, legal insecurity, corruption and excessive bureaucracy. This is exemplified by low levels of Foreign Direct Investment, sluggish and erratic economic growth and a deficient education system. These structural problems are unlikely to be solved by specific policies targeting skilled MLAs (De Haas, 2007). Our interviews also confirm the findings of one of the few surveys on Moroccan entrepreneurs (Bensouda, Bouzoubaa, Kadiri and Khalil, 2006). When reading the testimonies, the factors that block the return to Morocco of the skills installed abroad seem to be articulated around three points: the lack of information about job opportunities and the economic environment, the lack of transparency and seriousness in the workplace,

and finally social problems. These last questions are of substantial importance since if we take the recent theories of policy paradigm change, if the new emerging policies are contradicted by evidence (this will be the role of interviews in this article), it is probably less likely that this new paradigm becomes consolidated through time, and can only survive if some changes are produced. This will be the underlying focus during the remaining part of the article.

#### **4. Methodology and sources**

In order to explore the relationship between policies and evidence by contrasting the Moroccan diaspora policy focus with actual practices, we performed a case study in Spain and Morocco. We conducted 31 interviews: 10 entrepreneurs, 4 Morocco experts, 4 policy-makers and 13 other stakeholders such as investment agencies, immigration officials, banks, chamber of commerce, entrepreneur associations, and business incubator directors. We visited businesses founded by Moroccan entrepreneurs in Spain and Morocco and participated in meetings with Moroccan politicians and policy-makers. Moreover we organized a roundtable inviting Moroccan actors (the Moroccan Ministry and Moroccan entrepreneurs, among others) in March 2017, titled *Moroccan Transnational Entrepreneurs: new social patterns, new narrative policies*. The interviewed Moroccan entrepreneurs were selected based on the criteria that they previously had migrated to Spain and either returned to Morocco to start a business, or chosen to develop their business project in the host country. They are all male (our repeated efforts to find female entrepreneurs matching our criteria failed, which may indicate that to the extent these exist, they are few in numbers, but also a certain inevitable selection bias as we depended on our contacts and no general information of our target group existed), and aged between 31-49.

Our stakeholder interviews confirmed that the entrepreneurs we interviewed appear representative for two main types of Moroccan migrant entrepreneurs, which we will describe in the following section. Nevertheless, it ought to be stated that the sampling was clearly the most challenging part of our empirical work. As we initiated our study we soon discovered that there were significant difficulties involved in finding any registers of entrepreneurs who matched this profile, as no such official records are kept, not even by Moroccan authorities. Despite the political interest in promoting business activities in Morocco of Moroccan migrants, there are no existing data on the transnational economic

activities of Moroccans abroad or the economic activities that returning Moroccans engage in (Mesbah, Aziz, Mahdi, Mesbahi, interviews 2016; Gabrielli and Franco 2018). It is therefore virtually impossible to estimate the frequency or character of these kinds of activities.

The municipal immigration department in Tangiers stated that they expect intensified return movements of Moroccans abroad due to the rapid economic growth that the region is undergoing, though the tendency is rather that many Spanish entrepreneurs invest in Morocco (Aziz, interview 2016). The large Catalan bank *La Caixa* has a department in Tangiers that offers assistance to Spanish companies who wish to establish themselves in Morocco; until October 2016 this had been the case of 850 companies. At *La Caixa* they find that many of these companies need to work with local Moroccans who have Spanish skills, which makes high skilled returning Moroccans ideal as consultants or employees, and consider this profile of return migrant more typical than that of the Moroccan entrepreneur (Mesbah, interview 2016).

Some Moroccan banks did have registers of entrepreneurs who are granted loans where the nationality of these entrepreneurs is stated, but would not share these with us due to their integrity policies. Instead, we had to rely on snowball sampling, limiting the recruitment of respondents to one person per initial contact in order to diversify the sample as much as possible. Some of our respondents were recruited through our contacts with Moroccan organizations and networks in Barcelona, some through the stakeholders we interviewed and some while visiting businesses and establishing contacts on the ground during the field work in Morocco. Needless to say we are unable to draw any general conclusions based on our limited sample; however it provides us with valuable information about the policies and the entrepreneurs' profiles, motivations and relationship both with the host country and the country of origin, as well as insights into some of the specific challenges that transnational migrant entrepreneurs face.

## **5. Case study of Transnational Migrant Entrepreneurship in Spain and Morocco: identifying favorable factors and restrictions**

In assessing whether Moroccan diaspora policies appear to succeed with their aim to attract Moroccans living abroad to develop their business projects in Morocco, we were mainly interested in the following questions: Who are these migrant entrepreneurs and

what drives them? Does a sense of “Moroccanness”, identification with and loyalty towards the home country matter or are business choices made on merely rational-economic grounds? And, what obstacles or opportunities do these entrepreneurs encounter?

### *Transnational migrant entrepreneur profiles in the Spanish-Moroccan migration corridor*

Moroccan migration to Spain is slightly different from that to other receiving countries as France or Belgium. It has been strongly dominated by the profile of a low-skilled male worker, who migrated for economic reasons and found work in sectors such as agriculture and construction during the years of economic growth, and then often lost his employment as a result of the financial crisis. Moroccans are the second largest immigrant nationality in Spain just marginally after the Romanians (15.4% and 15.7%, respectively) (ine.es 2018). Among our respondents, three of ten may be defined as belonging to this group, who migrated out of necessity and also returned and became entrepreneurs basically as a means to survive. The majority however, seven out of ten, has a different sociological profile: highly skilled and educated, with economic resources and a background from the higher social strata in Morocco. This profile would not be a typical Moroccan immigrant in Spain, but rather someone who may choose Spain just as he/she could choose France, Belgium or the US to study abroad or fulfill a professional project. This latter category of Moroccan residing abroad is probably the profile that Moroccan diaspora policies mainly aim to attract, though it is unclear whether they succeed in doing so, as most of the policy officers expressed.

In our analysis we draw on the well-known concepts of need-based vs. opportunity-based entrepreneurs (Newland and Tanaka, 2010). Our initial fieldwork led us to partly question the usefulness of a clear-cut theoretical distinction between these categories. Applying these concepts, we would categorize four of the Moroccan entrepreneurs in our sample as driven by necessity, and six as mainly opportunity-driven entrepreneurs. The necessity entrepreneurs are defined as such because their need to have a basic income for subsistence drove them to become entrepreneurs, lacking other more attractive alternatives. All four had previously migrated to Spain, and returned to Morocco because they suffered from the effects of the financial crisis and could no longer find employment. Three of them have a basic educational level (primary school), while one is highly educated (Master degree from Spain); this entrepreneur aspires at returning



to Spain once he has saved enough money to restart his life there, in his words out of both personal (“life quality is higher in Spain”) and political reasons (“there is no democracy in Morocco”). What the six opportunity entrepreneurs have in common is that they are overall highly educated (five out of six have postgraduate university degrees) and comparably resourceful in terms of economic assets and useful social networks. Five of six acquired their education in Spain, and only one in Morocco. Studying a Master’s degree (principally in law or business) was a central reason behind the decision to migrate for most of them. However in practice the categories of necessity or opportunity entrepreneur may intersect. For instance necessity entrepreneurship may indeed reflect more or less desperate life situations, but necessity could also drive the entrepreneur to focus on economic sustainability and identify opportunities to develop more pragmatic and realistic business projects:

“As I returned from Europe I looked for a job but there were none, and I had to make a living somehow. There [in Europe] I was able to save a little money, enough to pay the rent for the stand at the market place, buy some goods as fruit, vegetables, rice and couscous and get started.” *Moroccan business owner, Ifrane (Fez region)*

We find no indications that opportunity entrepreneurship is inclined to be more successful than necessity driven initiatives, though the more precarious position among necessity entrepreneurs who lack economic resources or constructive social networks make them more vulnerable to failure. Moreover, all our respondents for whom the definition of opportunities is more central than plain necessity are also in need of their income from the business activities to make a living, to some degree making them necessity entrepreneurs as well. The distinction is thus not clear.

Beyond looking at the migrant entrepreneur profiles, we were interested in what motivated the choice of returning or not to Morocco, and to what degree the activities developed were really transnational.

### ***Moroccan identity or pragmatism? The choice of where to develop TE projects***

When enquiring into the potential that migrant TEs have for growth and development in both sending and receiving countries, the question of where the

entrepreneur chooses to be based and whether the business activities actually involve transnational links between the countries becomes central. The Moroccan *Marhaba* policies assume that Moroccans abroad will be attracted by sentiments of belonging and solidarity with their country of origin as drivers behind entrepreneurship. However most of the respondents did not mention such sentiments as relevant for their business and migration decisions. Two of the respondents (both defined as opportunity-driven) claimed to feel strongly for Morocco and wanted to contribute to its development. The other opportunity entrepreneurs in our sample had instead chosen to be based in Spain. When asked why, personal preferences and motives (as having a Spanish spouse) dominate for three of them, while the fourth respondent had political motives and partly left Morocco for opposing the regime.

In looking at how the entrepreneurs we interviewed made the choice of where to be based, we thus found variation, but motives were overall largely personal (family ties and lifestyle preferences dominate among the more resourceful respondents, while legal obstacles and unemployment are decisive for those in more precarious situations) and rational/pragmatic (one establishes a business where this is most economically favorable). Interesting is that the vast majority (eight out of ten) stated that they prefer to live in Spain (as *resident transnationals*), though four of them were unable to at present. Actually, the *possibility to choose* where to be based in itself appears to draw a dividing-line between different categories of TMEs. Three of the four necessity entrepreneurs in our sample had all returned from Spain against their personal desire, as remaining there was economically unsustainable. They were also entrepreneurs out of lack of other viable alternatives.

Looking closer at the level of transnationalism involved in the respondents' entrepreneurship initiatives, we see that just as the choice of where to be based, whether our respondents develop or not transnational businesses appears based on both personal motives and the identification of potential, as a respondent offering legal services to Spanish companies on the Moroccan market. Here, there is indeed a difference between the respondents we described as necessity entrepreneurs compared with those defined as opportunity entrepreneurs. None of the necessity entrepreneurs engage in transnational business activities; their small businesses are entirely focused on selling local products on the local market. Among the opportunity entrepreneurs instead, all six perform transnational business activities and maintain close links between Spain and Morocco. Reconnecting with Newland and Tanaka (2010), our findings appear consistent with their

account that opportunity entrepreneurs more often have access to transnational networks and financial resources that facilitate their entrepreneurship. However, Newland and Tanaka (ibid) also suggest that transnationalism makes these businesses more likely to succeed, but there is a lack of empirical evidence to prove that this is so, and the fact that necessity entrepreneurs' businesses tend to be small, often one-person companies that focus on local markets does not necessarily make them less successful or economically sustainable. There is no given causal relationship between transnationalism and success, and there is a need to further explore what migrant businesses tend to be most beneficial and sustainable both in terms of personal success and economic development. Moreover, beyond mere economic success of individual business projects there may also be a need to analyze the potential multiple effects of returning and circulating migrants' transnationalism for national cultural and political life, for instance.

Focusing again on the economic dimension of these entrepreneurship projects, all our respondents agree that there are serious obstacles to doing business in Morocco. For several of them this is part of why they have chosen to be based in Spain. Our interviewed stakeholders confirm that few returning Moroccans set up their own businesses. They claim that the main reason for this is the lack of financial support for new companies in Morocco, whose only option are regular bank loans, which are difficult to access and have high interest rates. Therefore it is generally necessary to have substantial private savings to invest (Mesbah, Aziz, Mahdi, Mesbahi, Boukaich, interviews 2016; Franco and Gabrielli 2018). The lack of funding opportunities for start-ups or other forms of institutional support is the most important obstacle for setting up a business in Morocco according to the interviewed Moroccan entrepreneurs. Several of them also claim that Moroccan bureaucracy is difficult to manage, and that the informality of society makes useful social networks indispensable.

“There are no credits here for start-ups or anything like that, you must have capital of your own to set up a business. There are lots of people with a high education and ideas but with no money to invest.” *Moroccan transnational entrepreneur, Tangiers*

“The main obstacle is without any doubts the bureaucracy, and the legal insecurity. The administration here works in a way that... if you don't know the law very well they will destroy you. And you need friends who can help. And

capital to invest. In Spain there are pretty favorable credit systems for companies, but in Morocco there are only regular bank loans with high interests.” *Moroccan transnational entrepreneur, currently Madrid-based and circulates between Madrid and Tangiers*

The question of why some MTEs engage in a relation with their home countries, while others prefer to follow an international entrepreneurship venture, still remains under-researched (Solano, 2016). Also, it was relevant to enquire if MTEs were aware or not of being considered as “agents of change” of their home countries. We find that those who enter in contact with home policies are more aware of their potential influence beyond their own individual business benefits, but there is still not a general pattern on how MTEs build their projects beyond the individual business scope and take into consideration home policies, seeking to attract them. We also found that the MTEs indeed had ties with their home countries (mainly through family and friends networks), but these ties could not necessarily be interpreted under the national-identity premises, as seems to be the policy assumption of the Moroccan government. Our interviews cannot confirm that a given “Moroccanness” influences on business decisions or entrepreneurial projects. On the contrary, our interviews show that ties to origin countries can be maintained for more pragmatic reasons. For the young transnational entrepreneur it is easier to do business in a context that you know and can “control”, than with unknown countries. To conclude, what our migrant entrepreneur respondents have in common is that they are mainly driven by pragmatism in their entrepreneurship activities. Even the very decision to become an entrepreneur, rather than an employee, is mainly pragmatic for most of them.

## **7. Discussion: The Moroccan diaspora as a tool for national economic development: limitations and further research**

Encouraging the return of Moroccan expatriate skills abroad has marked government action since the 1990s. Institutions have been created specifically for this purpose. Moroccans residing abroad remain Moroccans regardless of the number of other nationalities acquired. This dual legal affiliation has several advantages for themselves and for the country of origin (cultural openness, currency transfers, etc.), even if it sometimes poses a problem: multiple obligations towards both the country of origin and

the country of residence, the problem of integration in host countries, etc. Today the focus seems to be not only transnationalism but trans-generationalism, since Morocco wants to strengthen ties with young people in its diaspora. With the economic and political transitions led by Morocco, the potential of skilled Moroccans residing abroad constitutes an important force for revitalizing and deepening the reform process.

Creating a favorable environment for professionals who are now abroad to further the development of innovation in Morocco has been successful in some ways, but more needs to be done to direct the innovative potential of its highly educated workers towards entrepreneurial projects, which are still very few within this broad Marhaba policy. As for other developing countries, ensuring that the home country becomes more attractive to these migrants is an important early step. But to do that, more and better data are needed. There is a great need for further research in this area.

Other questions may arise for the migrant as transnational actor. Can the entrepreneur be transnational without being a political actor? The fact that Moroccan diaspora engagement policy is only economically justified is probably a limit in the current migration dynamic. The need of political action parallel to the economical one is probably one of the main recommendations we can infer both from interviews, but also from some critical, but constructive voices. Belguendouz (2010, 29) insists, for instance, that the full involvement of MLAs in the process of internal democratization in Morocco remains on the agenda and will not succeed unless it is also supported by the Moroccan government.

This diaspora policy engagement also has some false premises that we have tried to uncover contrasting governance narratives with Moroccan entrepreneurs' motivations. Its insistence on linking their promotion of transnationalism as a means to make Moroccans keep a foot in Morocco seems to be unquestioned, and it is probably, as we have shown contrasting narrative policy with TMEs' motivations, another factor that distorts the Moroccan diaspora philosophy.

There may be a need to revise diaspora policies based on ideals (as a strong national identity and sense of solidarity with the "motherland", or an overstatement of the potential for development in merely economic terms that returning migrant entrepreneurs bring with them) if they are not matched by reality, and aim at formulating more concrete actions that facilitate transnational migrant entrepreneurship in practice, and also recognizes its potential for social, cultural and political transformation.

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