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# Moroccan Immigration to Europe: Old Legacies and New Ties

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# Decolonising the Mediterranean



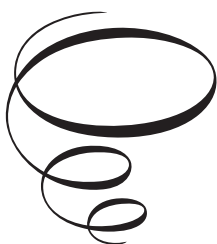
# Decolonising the Mediterranean:

*European Colonial Heritages  
in North Africa  
and the Middle East*

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## CHAPTER SIX

# MOROCCAN IMMIGRATION TO EUROPE: OLD LEGACIES AND NEW TIES

LAURA ODASSO

### Introduction

The day after the 2015 Belgian National Day (21 July), a political and media controversy exploded. On his public social media page, a Walloon party deputy called it a “shame” that a Belgian veiled woman of Moroccan origin was the only person to be interviewed on national TV during the celebration. Or, to quote his words: “Ah, the *only* person interviewed by the *Radio Télévision Belge Francophone*, a veiled woman who says nice things about Belgium! Yeah, we live in a marvellous country, but it’s not politically correct! As if during Congo’s National Day, Congolese TV interviewed a White man, and only him! But this will never happen in the Congo! [...]” Then, he declared “this way the RTBF wants to confine us within a sort of communitarian regime!” Public reactions for and against these statements quickly filled social media as well as newspapers.

National Day, a veil, a woman, and of Moroccan origin at that. The comparison with the Congo is reminiscent of colonial relations and minorities.

### **A diachronic approach to migration, does it offer clues to untangle the problem?**

The Belgian incident is one among several in Europe to illustrate what we may dub “banal nationalism,” those ideological habits that reproduce or represent the nation in the everyday lives of its citizens and residents, whereby nationalism is an “endemic condition.”<sup>1</sup> Banal does not mean

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1 Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995), 6.

inoffensive, as history has taught us. Yet, in Europe we are *so* used to debates such as the one mentioned above that we avoid grasping their hidden symbolic meanings and their effects on our future citizens. Instead, words, expressions and signs frame our perceptions, representations and gaze on the “Other,” and vice versa. Some incommensurable differences serve a tautology of fear and danger that generates social fractures distancing “us,” established citizens, from “them,” the newcomers. The latter are constructed through an ongoing process of distinction and amalgamation even when “they,” as in the case of Moroccans, are long-time immigrants and for the most part citizens. This process of othering is rooted in a regime of knowledge based on “practical orientalism enacted in concrete bodily meetings in everyday life.”<sup>2</sup>

Refraining from committing to methodological nationalism, I argue that *nation*, in the broadest sense of the term, still matters when we study the relations between Morocco and some European countries. Indeed, in the era of post-national States and globalisation, nationalism pops-up in particular interactions—a resurgence prompted by migration management and observable, for instance, in right wing parties’ positions and in a number of government statements on “national identity and security,” “public order” or “withdrawal of nationality.” Covered by the media on a daily basis, these pressing topics are often linked to words such as *migration*, *integration*, *Islam*, *invasion* or *terrorism* and have unfortunately become quite extensive. In fact, since 9/11 and, more recently, the Paris attacks in January and November 2015 and the Brussels ones in March 2016,<sup>3</sup> an overlap between culture, religion and origin has increasingly characterised public discourse, erasing subjectivity. Fear and confusion sometimes turn into islamophobia. This form of religious intolerance calls for a deeper “reanalysis of the political fundamentals of the nations and the racial matrix of the state.”<sup>4</sup> Moroccan established

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2 Ahmed Mehdoune, Sylvie Lausberg, Marco Martiniello and Andrea Rea, *L’immigration marocaine en Belgique. Mémoires et destinées* (Mons: Couleur livres, 2015), 174.

3 This chapter was written before the attacks at Brussels Zaventem airport and a city metro station in March 2016. Thus, the author has decided to avoid the debate on radicalisation and the descendants of North African migrants. Such analysis merits a separate chapter. Here, it is sufficient to note how the Moroccan community and some neighbourhoods in the Belgian capital have been highly stigmatised over the past few months, perpetuating the processes described in these pages.

4 Valérie Amiraux, “Visibilité, transparence and comméragé. De quelques conditions de possibilité de l’islamophobie... et de la citoyenneté,” *Sociologie* 1, no. 5 (2014): 81-95.

immigrants are among the main targets. The Moroccan Muslim is suspected of “lack of loyalty to the nation”<sup>5</sup> and, especially if male, of being a possible *sleeper* who may unexpectedly commit acts of terror.<sup>6</sup> Notwithstanding the recent events, the situation should be interpreted in the historical continuum of political alliances and concomitant social ruptures between some European States and Morocco (considering its local, national and transnational communities). In other words, colonialism, post-colonialism, economic preferential relations and the history of migration cannot be overlooked when seeking to understand the relevance of the counter effects of nationalism, practical orientalism and “internal colonialism.”<sup>7</sup> Strengthening the original notions, “practical orientalism” and “internal colonialism” help link the effects of international relations with internal social relations. Moreover, they focus the attention on the socio-economic development and inequalities left behind by colonialism, both in Morocco and in the European countries where Moroccans have settled. In the following case studies (France and Belgium), Moroccans are still perceived as an internal minority and rarely as full citizens; in Morocco, on the other hand, European regulations have reactivated internal power struggles between groups such as Arabs, Berbers, expats, and sub-Saharan migrants.

Building on these assumptions, this chapter explores Moroccan *ties* with said European countries and *migration management* over the past decades through the lens of the experience of migrants and bi-national families. My research in Morocco and on Moroccans has led me to move past the issue of migration *per se*. In fact, the debate around Arab—and at times Muslim—presence (with all its mistaken assumptions) was repeatedly mentioned during research interviews. Macro-events have affected sentiments of belonging and recognition among Moroccans and their relatives. When local and national history and international relations are integrated into the analysis, they allow contextualising Moroccan narratives, institutional and para-institutional discourses, media propaganda and the widely diffused prejudice against Moroccans.

Hence, combining two analytical approaches, namely “stigmatisation”<sup>8</sup>

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5 Gérard Noiriel, *Immigration, antisémitisme et racisme en France XIX-XX siècle. Discours politiques, humiliations privés* (Paris: Fayard, 2007), 159.

6 Marianne Gullestad, *Plausible Prejudice* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2006), 278.

7 Hind Robert, “The Internal Colonial Concept,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26, no. 3 (1984): 543-568.

8 Ervin Goffman, *Stigmaté. Les usages sociaux des handicaps* (Paris: Les éditions de Minuit, 1975).

and “recognition,”<sup>9</sup> the correlation between para-colonial domination and/or economic hegemony and migration management is questioned. Considering recognition as the “act of acknowledging or respecting another being, such as when we ‘recognise’ someone’s status, achievements or rights,”<sup>10</sup> I propose to link banal nationalism with belonging and recognition as presented directly by the interviewees. It seems, in fact, that behind the façade of enhancing international collaborations and protecting internal public security, migration policies maintain (or even produce) social inequalities and a *status quo* as regards the selection of *who* fits and *has to be included* among quasi-citizens and future citizens, directly affecting the Moroccan population, the immigrants who were at one time invited to settle in Europe and their descendants.

## **Do old legacies not matter?**

### ***Belgium***

Since the 1960s, Morocco has been one of the main workforce suppliers for Belgium. In 1955, France wanted to relocate abroad its unemployed North-African immigrants, sending them to work in Belgian mines. As the employers of the coal sector solicited manual workers, some Moroccans arrived without entry and residence permits. The years leading up to the 1964 ratification of the labour treaty between Morocco and Belgium were marked by “ongoing experimental, informal recruitment.” Circumstances were favourable: Belgium was already the second largest importer of Moroccan phosphates; the Moroccan government was willing to offer its workforce<sup>11</sup> without asking for anything in return;<sup>12</sup> and Moroccan workers were expected to be fluent French speakers and a perfect fit for the Belgian demographic needs generated by population

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9 Axel Honneth, *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007).

10 Paddy MacQueen, *Subjectivity, Gender and the Struggle for Recognition* (London: Palgrave, 2015), 19.

11 Morocco was facing stagnant economic growth.

12 For instance, in 1970, Belgium signed an agreement with Algeria as well. Unlike the Moroccan government, Algerian authorities asked for “decent life conditions” and “facilities and professional training that workforce should return to Algeria.” In Frennet De-Keyser, 2003: 11. The agreement was published in the Belgian Official Journal only in 1977, probably to prevent Moroccan authorities from increasing their demands.



ageing in Wallonia.<sup>13</sup> The agreement was merely economic, Moroccans were regarded simply as workforce, and no mention was made of their language, religion, traditions and culture.<sup>14</sup> The proposal was clear: greater stability for Moroccan migration in exchange for supplying and reproducing both workforce and population, in other words a rejuvenation of society, as attested by the flyers inviting emigration, “Travailleurs! soyez les bienvenus en Belgique. [...] Il y a déjà des travailleurs de votre pays chez nous. Venez les rejoindre si vous croyiez que votre situation peut s’améliorer,”<sup>15</sup> and the speech delivered in 1964 by the Belgian Minister of Labour inviting workers to bring in their families: “émigrer dans un pays qui est nécessairement différent du votre pose quelques problèmes d’adaptation. Ces difficultés initiales seront beaucoup plus facilement surmontées si vous menez une vie normale, c’est-à-dire une vie familiale.”<sup>16</sup>

Moroccan immigration flourished, in the beginning, with the consent of both parties, Belgium and Morocco. Unlike in other countries such as France and Spain, there were no colonial ties whatsoever. However, at the time of the 1974 border closings, Belgium’s needs<sup>17</sup>—and consequently its immigration rules—changed and thereafter migration from Morocco was mainly motivated by family and study reasons. The Belgian policy of *laissez-faire* resulted in contradictory practices of stabilisation and inclusion. The number of undocumented Moroccans on Belgian territory increased. Yet, since the end of 1990, even family migration has been curtailed.

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13 Anne Frennet-De Keyser, “La convention belgo-marocaine du 17 février 1964 relative à l’occupation de travailleurs marocains en Belgique,” *Centre de recherche et d’information socio-politiques CRISP, Courrier hebdomadaire*, no. 1803 (2003), 9-11.

14 Ahmed Mehdoune et al., *L’immigration marocaine en Belgique. Mémoires et destinées* (Mons: Couleur livres, 2015), 63.

15 *Vivre et travailler en Belgique* (Bruxelles: Institut belge d’Information et de Documentation, 1965): 3. [Workers, you are welcome in Belgium! Some workers from your country are already settled here. Come join them if you think it can improve your personal situation!]

16 [When emigrating to a country that is different from yours, you may face adaptation challenges. These initial difficulties can be easily overcome if you live a normal life, that is to say a family life.] Ibid. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

17 Some workers were relocated to the transportation, construction and metallurgical fields.

Nowadays, Moroccans are among Belgium's oldest immigrant communities; almost half of them have acquired Belgian nationality<sup>18</sup>.

### *France*

As mentioned above, Moroccan immigration to France was, at its inception, dictated by colonialism and thus asymmetrical in many respects. While commercial exploration had begun in the late 1800s, Morocco was a formal protectorate<sup>19</sup> of France from 1912 to 1956. Simultaneously forging unity and fostering division, France employed a *politique de l'association* (policy of association) and a *politique des égards* (policy of respect and consideration), controlling the population thanks to alliances with the local religious elite and respecting Islamic traditions and authorities.<sup>20</sup> From a political management perspective, some researchers have asserted that Moroccan Islam was invented by French colonial officers and ethnographers and that Morocco itself was also reinvented as a modern polity,<sup>21</sup> with important consequences on future French expectations.

During the Algerian civil war, Moroccans replaced the Algerian workers and, after the proclamation of independence, they joined their colonial employers who were leaving en masse for France.<sup>22</sup> As in the case of Belgium, this migration<sup>23</sup> was regulated ex-post through the 1963<sup>24</sup>

18 Quentin Schoonvaere, *Belgique-Maroc: 50 années de migration. Etude démographique de la population d'origine marocaine en Belgique* (Bruxelles: Centre federal Migration, 2014), 11.

19 "Morocco remained a Protectorate, ruled in the name of a theoretically still sovereign Sultan. In fact, the handles of power were so adroitly created by the French that for long periods they were able to manipulate them with as little interference as in any ordinary colony." Robin Bidwell, *Morocco under Colonial Rule: French Administration of Tribal Areas 1912-1956* (London: Cass, 2005), 15.

20 Henri Laurens, "La politique musulmane de la France," *Maghreb-Mashrek* 1, no. 152, (1996): 3-12.

21 Edmund Burke III, *The Ethnographic State. France and the Invention of Moroccan Islam* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015).

22 Hein de Haas, "Morocco: From Emigration Country to Africa's Migration Passage to Europe," *Migration Policy Group*, October 1, 2005, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/morocco-emigration-country-africas-migration-passage-europe>.

23 Before this date, about 126,000 Moroccan men had already served in the French army (Second World War, Korea and French Indochina) See Bidwell, *Morocco under Colonial Rule*.

24 In the same year, Morocco signed a labour recruitment agreement with the

French-Moroccan labour recruitment agreement. Despite the Moroccan government, the workers themselves and French society depicting the migration as temporary, after 1973 the majority of the workers did not return home. Indeed, the 1970s inaugurated the repressive era in Hassan II's North African monarchy known as the *Années de Plomb* (Years of Lead).<sup>25</sup> France closed its borders to new workers at the same time as Belgium, while those who were already settled in the country brought their families over, married out and, in some cases, started transnational activities. Morocco financed programs aimed at the retention of language and religion among immigrants. However, from the 1990s onward, migration policies started to target even family migration and especially binational marriages, regarding them as a source of informal regularisation for undocumented immigrants and a migratory chain that risked reinforcing identity closure.

Nowadays, France is home to the largest legally residing population of Moroccan descent.<sup>26</sup> Many Moroccan descendants are not registered as such with either consular or municipality administrations.

### **Border closings and then...**

During the 1980s and 1990s, the evolution of migration regimes partially erased the old legacies. The contribution of Moroccan immigrants to the economy of the countries examined above was seen as necessary and justified by mutual consent. Bilateral agreements notwithstanding, once the "internal needs" were met, changes in the French and Belgian migration policies transformed Moroccans from invited workers (with their spouses and children) to undesirable migrants. Thus, Moroccans emigrated to Southern European countries such as Spain and Italy, which had no visa requirement prior to the implementation of the Schengen system.

While a significant number of Moroccans in France and Belgium were already enjoying the benefits of a new life in Europe, friends and relatives were held back in Morocco. The visa policy gave rise to a one-way system

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former West Germany and, in 1969, with the Netherlands.

25 See: Ahmed Marzouki. *Tazmamart Cellule 10* (Paris: Paris-Méditerranée, 2001) and Tahar Ben Jelloun, *La Nuit sacrée* (Paris: éditions du Seuil, 1987); for a sociological perspective see: Mohammed Tozy, "Les enjeux de la mémoire dans le Maroc contemporain," and Salah El Ouadie, "L'Instance Equité et Réconciliation ou comment transformer un passé douloureux en levier d'avenir," in *Le Maroc aujourd'hui*, ed. Paola Gandolfi (Bologna: Il Ponte, 2008): 31-46 and 335-345.

26 de Haas, "Morocco: from Emigration Country."

of mobility: European citizens can easily enter Morocco, but a visa is still hard to obtain for Moroccans. In the 1990s, the *harragas* phenomenon—dreamers or desperate youths trying to cross the Mediterranean by all possible means to reach Spain as their final or temporary destination<sup>27</sup>—gave visibility to the unintended consequences of these restrictive policies. Legal restrictions were not a deterrent. Once in Europe, their undocumented status may have condemned these immigrants to an invisible existence, but it didn't hamper their labour and economic contribution (i.e., agricultural exploitation).

The years that followed showed the ineffectiveness of the migration system and its consequences on Morocco. First of all, in the context of a desired high-skilled, selected immigration,<sup>28</sup> Moroccans quickly morphed from a needed resource to an undesirable migrant group to be paradoxically limited on the basis of its historical presence. As a result, they have been regarded with suspicion by the institutional apparatus in charge of assessing migratory risk.<sup>29</sup> Secondly, over the decades, even family migration rights have been curtailed.

Since 2000, a proliferation of laws has imposed new conditions and limitations on eligibility for family reunification and several norms have inaugurated new patterns of control, selection and merit. Family migration has been moved to the top of the political agenda, supposedly to aid detection of sham and forced marriages and social security frauds; in fact, French and Belgian policy makers portray family migration as a breach of the immigration policy. In practice, these reforms reinforce borders and boundaries (both real and imaginary) that divide not only geographical territories but also citizens, migrants and those agents in charge of the “dirty work of boundary maintenance.”<sup>30</sup>

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27 Chadia Arab and Juan David Sempere, “Les jeunes ‘*harragas*’ maghrébins se dirigeant vers l'Espagne: des rêveurs aux ‘brûleurs de frontières’,” *Migrations Société* 21, no. 125, (2009): 191-206.

28 See the *Migration and mobility partnership* signed between the EU and Morocco in 2013: “an agreement for facilitating the issuing of visas for *certain groups* of people, particularly *students, researchers and business professionals*. Negotiations will also continue on an agreement for the return of irregular migrants.” Brussels EC DG Home Affairs, EU-Morocco Mobility Partnership (2013).

29 Morocco is considered a safe country. Hence, Moroccans are rarely granted asylum and the few reported cases are related to sexual discrimination.

30 Andrew Geddes and Adrian Favell, eds. *The Politics of Belonging: Migrants and Minorities in Contemporary Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate/ICCR, 1999).

### **“You will always be Moroccan”**

Within the context of stabilised immigration from Morocco, old social issues harking back to the labour struggles of the 1980s took on new forms. The visibility of Moroccans, among other migrants, fed a “neo or differentialist racism”<sup>31</sup> based on cultural differences. “The functioning of the category of immigration as a substitute for the notion of race and a solvent of ‘class consciousness’ provides us with a first clue”<sup>32</sup> to grasping the complexity of discourses and practices in the 1980s and 1990s. The culture of the country of origin started being depicted as a clear cause for impossible assimilation. Culture replaced nature. The same racism that had driven colonialism turned into a naturalised culturalism that concealed a hierarchy of valuable cultures and social groups, shaping disqualification and creating new boundaries even among Moroccans themselves.

Labour struggles seek wider social recognition: while striking for their rights, Moroccans asked to “be considered fully there.”<sup>33</sup> If migration is a rupture, then it produces ruptures in the hosting societies, too, revitalising nationalism from both sides: colonised/migrants and colonisers/autochthons.<sup>34</sup> In a city of eastern France, Ashraf told me unequivocally: “after a few years, a friend told me, you can do what you want. You can become a French citizen, but to them you will always be a Moroccan!” Ashraf has been in France since the 1980s, he has studied in Germany and France. He married a French woman in the 1990s. They have two children. Nowadays, he manages his own transnational business and his wife, Patricia, helps him. Patricia’s family was against their marriage. “You’re marrying a Moroccan?” Ashraf continued, “An Arab, a Muslim, a terrorist, why him? They never even met me. Patricia fought for us. When you are a Moroccan immigrant, you always have to prove—even to your wife’s family—that you deserve anything you may get [...] I always tried to follow the rules. Study, residence permit, then I was irregular for a while, but I always worked for French employers, I was paid under the table; I was even deported. My wife came to Morocco and we married there. I came back. I do as the French do, even better. It’s hard now, for newcomers, it is even worse.”

Long-time immigrants started to look at the newcomers with suspicion, fearing they would tarnish their reputation, even though the rising

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31 Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation and Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London-New York: Verso, 1991).

32 Ibid, 20.

33 Abdelmalek Sayad, *La double absence* (Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1999), 491-510.

34 Ibid., 165-173.

unemployment rate, weak social mobility and disqualification were already affecting them and their descendants, especially in working-class neighbourhoods both in France and in Belgium. Along with the “racialisation”—namely the dynamic ideological process of racial social production<sup>35</sup>—of social relations in which they were, and still are, involved came the ghettoization of the younger generations. Society at large still regards them, even the ones who are French nationals, as the children of Moroccan migrants. Thus, while French and Belgian models of citizenship imply affiliation and belonging to the national community, the descendants of Moroccan immigrants experienced a different nation compared to the previous generations. Being perceived as lesser citizens induces contrasting feelings of belonging and disaffiliation and leads to different strategies (i.e., individualisation, lack of differentiation, openness, identity closure and stigma reversal) in an “illusory process of decision concerning *what they are* with respect to their parents and their society.” Even newborns are asked to “assimilate” to the majority, while societies still assign them a “naturalised otherness” because of their origins. As a result, these young are stuck between contrasting demands: claiming to be Moroccan, or Muslim, and affirming their Belgian/French identity.<sup>36</sup>

This is just an outline of the contexts; an intersectional analysis can certainly provide more nuanced insights<sup>37</sup> without reducing the discourse on immigration to a continuity of colonisation or a relation of mere causality<sup>38</sup>. In fact, the situation is much more complex and fragmented. International relations and top-down history draw only a partial picture, as

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35 “The term *racialization* defines those behaviours and attitudes—conscious or otherwise—oriented and justified by racialization. Their effect is to update the idea of ‘race’ *producing* racialized individuals and groups.” Christian Poiret, “Processes of Ethnicization and Raci(al)ization in the Contemporary French Context: Africans, Caribbeans and ‘Blacks’,” *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales* 27, no. 1 (2011):113. See as well the works of Colette Guillaumin.

36 In Belgium, the older-generation Moroccan immigrants were urged to “Become Belgian and give up your cultural retrograde system,” while their descendants are asked to comply with the request to “Become Belgian but remain Moroccan.” These youths are stuck in a rejected otherness and excluded from the mechanisms of legitimation. Johanna De Villers, *Arrête de me dire que je suis marocain! Une émancipation difficile* (Bruxelles: Ed. de l’Université de Bruxelles, 2011), 202.

37 So as not to reproduce the culturalism that affects colonial relations. Cf. Christine Delphy, *Classer, dominer. Qui sont les “autres”?* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2008).

38 Ahmed Boubeker and Abdellali Hajjat, *Histoire politique des immigrations (post)coloniales. France, 1920-2008* (Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2013).

colonial subalternity reduced migrants' agency. Integrating subjectivities and migrants' stories into the analysis may instead help write another aspect of history, allowing a much better understanding of ruptures and preservation as they relate to recognition and stigmatisation. I will focus on mixed families' narratives, showing how stigmatisation and nationalism affect their daily lives nowadays.

### **Stigma: the case of family migration policies**

If the family is the foundational social dimension, as legal texts and institutional practices suggest, its control (more than its protection) is essential for shaping societies. Let me clarify this point. The couples I am studying are formed by either a French or Belgian national and a Moroccan partner—where “national” means native; or born of established immigrant, naturalised, Moroccan parents; or a Moroccan who has acquired French or Belgian nationality. As a third country national, the Moroccan partner needs to comply with a series of administrative requirements to remain in Europe (i.e., obtaining and renewing his/her residence permit). Depending upon their legal status, sex, age, social class, and “colour,” these couples disturb the normalised socio-institutional order. Simply put, recent family migration policies instil a social “preference for *the* national,<sup>39</sup>” or rather for *some* nationals.

A relevant example is the 2011 Belgian parliamentary debate on the reform of the family reunification law<sup>40</sup>. The discussion revolved around two issues: the modification of the 1960-1970 agreements with Morocco on workers' family reunification; and the application of the same requirements to both Belgian and migrant sponsors, as family reunifications are mostly solicited by Belgians of immigrant origin. A deputy argued: “Moroccans have different cultural and ethnic origins, but a majority of them have Belgian nationality. It is unreasonable to distinguish between Belgians and those foreigners who want to settle in Belgium for purposes of family reunification, as the law proposal targets exactly those foreigners [who come here to join Belgian descendants of immigrants].”<sup>41</sup> Thus, many proposals *openly* declared that these measures

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39 In Fatou Diome's novel *La Préférence Nationale* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 2001).

40 Parliamentary paper, Belgian Parliament House DOC 53-0443/018 (2010-2011): 166.

41 “Les Marocains ont des origines culturelles et ethniques différentes, mais disposent, dans leur grande majorité, de la nationalité belge. Il n'est pas raisonnable de faire une distinction entre les Belges et les étrangers souhaitant

were aimed at preventing intra-communitarian marriages conducive to migration among lower-class Moroccans. Several associations appealed against the reform on the grounds of discrimination, but the Belgian Constitutional Court ruled that “the circumstances justify the pertinence of the differential treatment provisions in order to control this specific typology of migration flow, as foreseen by the legislators.”<sup>42</sup>

Given the highly politicised topic, family migration debates founded on practical orientalism have influenced administrations and front-line officers’ attitudes. Marina, a policewoman assigned to the *Cellule Mariage Blanc* (White Marriage Hub)<sup>43</sup> in Brussels, explained: “We are not allowed to share any data regarding the countries of origin, but look at the blackboard there, the list of couples whose cases we are currently reviewing, names and surnames, they’re mainly Moroccans, some Turks and a few Blacks. So you have your answer! I don’t care about binational marriage, but I am *protecting my country* from fraud or abuse of social services and welfare benefits!” Marina is part of a system of actors tasked with the responsibility of assessing migratory risk. She<sup>44</sup> and other agents involved in processing marriage and family reunification cases describe their job functions in nationalistic terms, using the term “protection.” She explained to me how migratory risk can be ascertained from marriage intentions. By questioning couples intimately and observing their behaviours, she can speculate on their “possible admission to the citizenry.” Lacking any psychological training, her logic is: a “good couple” will show and reproduce love and affectivity as they are conceived of in a neo-liberal Western state.<sup>45</sup> All other family patterns and motivations should be banished.

As regards the couples’ perspective, some report feelings of disqualification with regard to citizenry. Even though the control mechanism was formally introduced to protect “real marriage,” in reality it affects pervasively all couples without distinction, as all are suspected. Let us take the example of Mohammed. He is Belgian, he married Samia and

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s’établir en Belgique dans le cadre du regroupement familial, vu que la proposition de loi en question vise, précisément, ces étrangers-là.” Ibid.,

42 Arrêt de la Cour constitutionnelle n° 121 du 26/09/2013: 17.

43 It is one of the police special hubs created in 2012 to deal with policy prior to administrative investigations on marriages and on civil partnerships of foreign residents, as requested by the State Civil Service of the municipal administrations.

44 Interestingly, she is of immigrant origin as well, as her parents came from Spain.

45 Maïté Maskens, “Bordering Intimacy: The Fight against Marriages of Convenience in Brussels,” *Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 33, no. 2 (2015): 42-58.



after a few years they divorced. He told me: “My father arrived in the 1960s. Then my mother. They, too, participated in this country’s economic growth! It is also their country. They manage a restaurant downtown and live a quiet life. We are a respectable family. I married Samia because she was beautiful and yeah, you can’t control feelings, can you? Then we had some problems, like many couples do. But it seems that if you are of migrant descent you don’t have the right to make mistakes in life. Everywhere I went, whether it was city hall or the court house, I was a problem: the ‘savage Moroccan’ married to a Moroccan woman. Even divorce... that was hard, almost no one treated me as the Belgian I am, to them I was always a Moroccan Muslim man. First of all, I’m not particularly religious; second, I am an ordinary Belgian citizen, too, am I not?”

From the extract we perceive how men and women in these binational couples act in a changing discursive space where the politicisation of national and international events and migration presents “otherness” and “mixedness” as problems.<sup>46</sup> The need for workforce has been replaced by the assessment of migratory risk. The State seems to have no memory.

The narratives analysed above are reminiscent of the *tribal stigma*<sup>47</sup> of nationality, race and religion that can trigger reactions and be transmitted through lineages. Either openly or covertly, Moroccans’ life stories bring forth the question of “recognition in different spheres of daily interactions, namely love, right and solidarity”<sup>48</sup> for themselves and their children. It is worth mentioning that the new generations, even when born in France or Belgium, are affected by internal social boundaries. Their parents were concerned about the “border” resuming, as the entire process of settling into a country (i.e., legal-administrative and socio-economic) was essential in order to give their children a better future.<sup>49</sup> They were considered “juridical other”; their descendants, instead, are “racially other.”<sup>50</sup> The racial question is a social question, constructed by the dominant group, perpetuated through inequality in the fields of labour, education and public

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46 Cf. Laura Odasso, *Mixités conjugales. Discrédit, résistances et créativité dans les familles avec un partenaire arabe* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2016).

47 Ervin Goffman, *Stigmaté. Les usages sociaux des handicaps* (Paris: Les éditions de Minuit, 1975), 14.

48 Axel Honneth, *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 129-142.

49 Didier Fassin, *Les nouvelles frontières de la société française* (Paris: La Découverte, 2010), 5-9.

50 Ibid., 11.

policy, and further accentuated by the current fight against radicalisation—as well as by law enforcement's use of ethnic profiling, which risks getting out of control. French citizens of Moroccan origin are the main target. Andrea, the twenty-six-year-old son of a French-Moroccan couple, said to me: “Since I am not white, they [the police] often stop me. I am a favourite target for ID checks everywhere because I look like a Moroccan; then, when they see my name and surname, definitely French-German, their attitudes change slightly.” These kinds of narratives often recur among children of mixed couples.

In intermarriage, “us” and “them” are mixed and reversed in several ways, depending upon the social setting encountered by the couples and their children. Family migration policies underline how the nation still constitutes an important element for policy makers and administrations, contributing to the selection of what is regarded as a proper family in Europe and reproducing stigmatising categories. The logic of the State and some of its forms of banal nationalism reverberate in social gazes and everyday interactions.

### **How to probe into the new dynamics of EU-Morocco relations with regard to migration?**

A number of applications for family reunification submitted by Belgian-Moroccan immigrants are routinely rejected by the federal Belgian Foreign Affairs Offices. Applicants generally remain on Belgian territory without a residence permit; compared to other nationalities, they are rarely held in detention centres and deported. After a special charter flight to Morocco triggered a diplomatic row, and while Europe is negotiating readmission agreements with Morocco, Belgian authorities prefer to avoid problems for the time being. Moreover, Morocco occupies a peculiar position among Arab Mediterranean countries. Regarded somehow as an extension of Europe, it is a sensitive border-territory between Europe and Africa. While the monarchy seems to detach from its African roots and reach out to Europe and the United States, the situation is in practice more complicated. Great inequalities still persist in the country and the presence of important foreign communities—both expats and sub-Saharan migrants—has given rise to new tensions.

Within the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, established since 1995, Morocco enjoys a privileged position in its relations with the European Union. While trade bloomed after the country acquired advanced status in 2004, it was not matched by equal fluidity in the mobility of people on both sides of the Mediterranean, not even after

the implementation of the Global Approach to Migration in 2005 and the Mobility Partnership in 2013. The European Union prefers to focus on economic and security actions. The principle of conditionality—linking benefits and concessions to the fulfilment of conditions relating to the protection of human rights and fundamental liberties—is often disrespected. Although it is wrong to believe that socio-political reforms may be merely imposed from abroad, European influence nevertheless matters (e.g., the Neighbourhood European Policy) and a new era of relations has begun.<sup>51</sup> Depicted as Europe’s gatekeeper, Morocco has become a country of transit for migrants, a container for the new European migration, while remaining a country of emigration. The EU countries have been actively seeking to influence its migration policy and security controls to suit their interests. This is best illustrated by the ongoing discussions on Readmission Agreements.<sup>52</sup> It seems that these agreements are the price to be paid by Morocco to obtain a quota of legal migrants to Europe, to the detriment of “real” mobility and free circulation of persons. In a way, the policy, if implemented, would simply follow the logic “if you give more, you get more.” However, the Moroccan political and administrative system still follows a top-down approach, and until now the government has made few concessions to the agreements, which risk reproducing old dominant ties and dividing the Moroccan society into a hierarchy of classes.<sup>53</sup>

## Conclusions

Morocco can be seen as a metaphor for the European migratory regimes; there are concrete examples of how its population was subjected to different policies and power relations across generations, mainly in France and Belgium. This topic is still relevant nowadays, as family migration policies demonstrate.

The demeanour towards Moroccans in Europe still suffers from “orientalist” attitudes, framed as tribal stigma, which create new societal internal boundaries and play a part in representing fixed Moroccan identities that fail to correspond to reality. Forms of hidden banal

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51 A wide debate exists about Europeanisation out of Europe and the impact of the implementation of ENP. See Whitman and Wolff, 2010, and especially Federica Bicchì’s paper.

52 Nora El Qadim, “La politique migratoire européenne vue du Maroc: contraintes et opportunités,” *Politique européenne* 2, no. 31 (2010): 91-118.

53 At the time of writing, a bilateral agreement is being signed between Belgium and Morocco.

nationalism have been shown to disqualify even nationals, due to their Moroccan origins. Inevitably, this process modifies memories, belongingness and affiliation among immigrants and their families. Belongingness remains a subjective experience, however, as it may change during status passages. Politics and institutional practices, media propaganda and the new ties that connect Morocco and Europe affect this sentiment. New forms of nationalism have racialised Moroccan immigrants and their descendants, whose belongingness and citizenship do not overlap.

Furthermore, new ties perpetrate old legacies and inequalities. One-way, selected mobility in the Mediterranean area is one of the best examples.

Migratory policy regimes, social actions and inequalities need to be rethought in light of history and of the experiences of the populations that are directly affected. A careful consideration of the porous boundaries of belonging and “mixedness” may help overcome stigmatisation and nationalism on the road to real recognition from below, and be a political tool to prevent the “locked destinies<sup>54</sup>” currently shared by several social groups.

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54 In French *destins verrouillés*. Cf. Abdelmalek Sayad’s works.

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