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Acquiring a 'voice' through 'exit'
How Moroccan emigrants became a driving force of political and socio-economic change

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Introduction

This paper argues that Moroccan communities abroad underwent an empowerment process through emigration. Predominantly unskilled, coming from rural areas and belonging to indigenous minorities, many of those who emigrated in the 1960s and 1970s had little agency to shape the socio-economic conditions of their existence. Over decades and through their active involvement in diaspora NGOs, emigrants' collective agency brought about social and economic change to historic regions of emigration.

The increasing demand for labour in Europe triggered a postcolonial migration of mostly young men into expanding fordist industries in the context of sustained economic growth. Large numbers of Moroccan men emigrated to France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany in the framework of bilateral agreements. This emigration and the permanence of these departures changed for good the idea of the Moroccan nation. The lowest estimation of the number of Moroccans living abroad is somewhere between 3,5 and 4 million individuals, based on the number of persons registered in Moroccan consulates; this represents around 10% of the Moroccan population. The real figure is probably higher if one were to include individuals who never registered, undocumented migrants and children under 16 (who will only be counted after the full introduction of the biometric passport). Moroccan emigrants are present in over a hundred countries, with the most numerous community settled in France (1 146 652), followed by Spain (671 669), Italy (486 558), Belgium (297 919) and the Netherlands (264 909), according to 2012 figures of the 'Ministry in Charge of Moroccans Living Abroad and Migration Affairs'¹. Even if the size of Moroccan communities in Southern Europe is nowadays

¹ Figures quoted by Alaoui (2013)

very significant, this emigration started later, in the mid-1980s. It was stimulated by labour demands in specific sectors such as agriculture and construction. Migration to the Gulf countries is also a growing phenomenon and represents 6% of Moroccans living abroad (Directorate of Consular and Social Services, 2012). The destination countries of Moroccan emigration went indeed through great diversification, and today significant Moroccan communities reside not only in Europe, but also in Canada, especially in Quebec, in the United States, as well as in the Gulf countries. This paper will focus on Moroccan emigration to France, where the largest share of Moroccans abroad reside, and on civil society organisations created by Moroccans living in France. It is worth mentioning that this dispersion led some authors to describe these communities, including first generation migrants and their descendants, as constitutive of a diaspora. The use of this term is arguable; this paper however relies on this concept as theorized by latest developments in the field of diaspora studies. In their diaspora typology Gabriel Sheffer and Moshe Ma'oz (2002) distinguish for instance between 'historical', 'newer' and 'incipient' diasporas. Under the category of incipient diasporas they include the Turkish and Filipino diasporas that stem from labour migration. It seems therefore appropriate to classify Moroccan communities abroad as an incipient diaspora under this typology. The weakness of bounds between the different communities in various countries and on different continents led Rachid Alaoui (2013) to favour the concept of 'transnational communities' over the concept of diaspora. While acknowledging this point, this paper refers to 'diaspora policies' in order to characterize a particular field of state policies, that reach out to expatriates, and which bear its specificities and need therefore to be named.

Since the 1960s, the Moroccan state has been actively engaging with its expatriates, with tremendous efforts regarding methods and means implemented in order to preserve diaspora links. The Moroccan state has been particularly active in engaging with its expatriates, from channelling departures from specific regions to current policies designed to facilitate participation or return migration of particular categories of emigrants, including French born youth of Moroccan descent with skills that match Moroccan employers' demands. In parallel, civil society organisations were created abroad taking various forms and endorsing different discourses. The progressive political liberalization of the Moroccan regime has created opportunities for synergies between the official and the non-governmental sectors that were not foreseeable in the past. The particular history of Moroccan emigration gave rise to an interesting re-definition of power relationships between the state and indigenous ethnic minorities. The question of how emigration empowered indigenous Moroccan minorities from the South (Souss-Massa-Drâa) and the Northeast (Oriental) and for what impacts needs therefore to be addressed in the context of changing forms of belongings to the nation. Equally, it is here

argued that diaspora activism needs to be taken into account in the analysis of democratisation processes in Morocco.

This relatively long history of diaspora policies raises several questions as to the transformations that affected the state's understanding of who belongs to the nation and under which conditions. This paper attempts to answer two of these questions: How are forms of belonging to the Moroccan nation re-invented and redefined through diaspora links? How does the involvement of diasporic organisations in Morocco impact in turn the state? This paper is divided into three sections. The first section attempts to assess how emigration assigned new meanings to the concept of 'nation' and 'citizenship' at discursive levels; in a second section it is argued that the Moroccan diaspora constitute a soft power which explicate the state's interest in courting it; and a third section addresses the issue of multi-level empowerments that took place as a result of emigration and the emergence of a diasporic civil society.

Data collection and analysis for the purpose of this paper followed a qualitative methodology. Fifteen semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted between September 2012 and January 2013; including six community leaders engaged in transnational activities in France and six officials in Morocco (List of interviews, Annex 1). Participant observation served as a complementary method. The observation took place in seminars held by transnational NGOs (internal seminar of a French-Moroccan NGO, public seminar of a French NGO created by Moroccan emigrants), as well as in seminars organized by the Council of the Moroccan Community Abroad (three seminars) and the Ministry in Charge of the Moroccan Community Abroad (one conference and networking event that launched a new network of highly skilled professionals).

Emigration re-invents the nation and citizenship rights

From labour migration and the status of 'royal subject' to a diaspora consisting of citizens

The Moroccan state perceived very early the interest it had in engaging with its expatriates. 'Diaspora policies' is used here to characterize public policies addressed at Moroccan expatriates and their descendants. The engagement of the Moroccan state in diaspora policies started already with the channelling of emigration in the 1960s and 1970s. Regions inhabited by indigenous minorities, Amazigh, in the North (Rif) and in the South of the country (Souss-Massa-Drâa), were made into essential sources of emigration (Lacroix, 2005) as these regions were particularly suspected of political unrest. A certain pattern in the migration flows can be distinguished between emigrants from the Souss-Massa-Drâa region who migrated mostly to France and Belgium on the one hand, and emigrants from

the North-East of the country and the Rif mountains who migrated to the Netherlands and Germany on the other hand (Alaoui, 2013). Large-scale emigration offered a safety valve as men emigrated in significant numbers and started to send remittances back home. Mostly unskilled, men emigrated alone and their families started to migrate only years later, when the closure of the gates of labour migration in 1973 contributed to transform this migration into permanent settlement through the consequent need for family reunification. Communities were deeply changed by the arrival of women and children and births that from then on took place on French territory.

Moroccan state policies towards its expatriates went through several major reorientations since the 1960s until today. In the 1960s, the state sought above all to gain control over Moroccans living abroad through the work of associations named "Amicales des Marocains" created in France, Belgium and the Netherlands. It has been exposed that some of the leaders of these associations worked at that time for Moroccan intelligence services by providing names of activists who were detained upon their arrival in Morocco when they were coming back to visit their families (Driss El Yazami, interview by author, January 2013). The participation in industrial strikes was perceived as a form of treason and the repression could take different forms, from redundancies by French employers to seizure of passports upon return to Morocco (Iskander, 2010). The persecution of trade union activists and leaders took place in the context of strong internal repression after two attempted coup d'Etat against the monarchy in the early 1970s and a series of social unrests, a decade subsequently known as 'les années de plomb', the years of lead.

It is thus not only the receiving countries that were mistaken in assuming that these migration waves were to be only temporary. The Moroccan monarchy made similar assumptions. Hassan II considered Moroccan emigrants as his subjects, addressed them as such in his speeches, including on French television, and denied any form of belonging to the country of residency. A striking example of 1993 illustrates that this approach lasted relatively long. In an interview on French television Hassan II answered the journalists' question on integration as follows: "They will never be integrated. (...). I discourage you, in relation to my people, the Moroccans, to try an embezzlement of their nationality because they will never be a 100% French."² Hassan II refused to have his subjects 'integrated' into French society, as it would diminish their "marocanité".

² Interview on French television, mai 1993, "Ils ne seront jamais intégrés. (...) Je vous décourage en ce qui concerne les miens, les Marocains, d'essayer un détournement de nationalité, car ils ne seront jamais 100% français". (Translation, Author)

The emergence in the public sphere of the claims of French citizens of North African descent in the 1980s showed however that ethnic minority youth's priorities were related to the country of residence. In a context of recurrent racist assassinations and police blunders that were not fairly considered by the judiciary system, the 1983 peaceful march from Marseille to Paris, the so-called 'Marche des Beurs', is considered by some as the historic starting point of these new generation's visibility in the French public realm. The *de facto* loosened relations with the homeland of their parents required a change in Moroccan diaspora policies. In this context, and for a whole set of socio-economic and political reasons, the permanence of departures started to be progressively recognised by both the country of origin and the country of destination.

These evolutions are illustrated by the terminology used to characterize Moroccans living abroad: they were first referred to as 'Moroccan Workers Abroad' (Travailleurs Marocains de l'Etranger), then from the 1980s as 'Moroccan Nationals Abroad' (Ressortissants Marocains à l'Etranger) and 'Moroccan Residents Abroad' (Marocains Résidents à l'étranger), (Nuno and Souiah, 2013). Lately, the term 'citizens' started to be increasingly mentioned. As if to stress the transnational belongings of Moroccans abroad, 'Moroccans of the World' also became a phrase widely used, as in the web address of the Ministry "marocainsdumonde.gov.ma".

If signs of this discursive turn were already visible in the 1990s, this re-orientation was fully achieved at the level of political discourse in the 2000s. Stepping-stones in this evolution are royal speeches of November 6th 2005 and 2007, the commemorative date of the 1975 'Green March' on which the King delivers a speech each year. The 2005 royal speech pointed out to the central role played by Moroccans abroad in the development of the country, especially at the regional and local levels. In this speech, the King also announced the creation of an institution dedicated to Moroccan expatriates and in 2007 he outlined its composition and main responsibilities. It is interesting to note that the vocabulary of citizenry has entered the highest level of official discourse, in royal speeches:

"The democratic, development-oriented process I am spearheading requires the participation of all Moroccans, wherever they may be, in a spirit of strong commitment to our national identity and to responsible citizenship. My regular field visits and my tireless efforts to make sure my citizens at home enjoy a dignified life are equalled only by the special importance I attach to the conditions of our beloved fellow citizens who live abroad."³

³ King's speech on Green March Day, November 6th 2007

Source :

http://www.ccme.org.ma/images/stories/LTD/FES/LE_CONSEIL/discours_royal_2007_anglais.pdf

The acknowledgment of the fact that Moroccans started to put down roots in their countries of residence challenged the traditional concept of the Nation and required an appreciation of this dual belonging. Acquisition of citizenship of the country of residence for primo-migrants and the emergence of 'second' and 'third generations' of Moroccan descent transformed the sociological composition of communities. The reform of the Family Code, the Moudawana, in 2004, gave Moroccan mothers the right to pass on the Moroccan nationality. In the context of the presence of large communities abroad, this right bears important implications for the maintenance of diaspora links. The 2011 Constitution furthermore acknowledges the fact that many Moroccans living abroad have dual citizenship. Article 16 of the Constitution states:

"It [Kingdom of Morocco] sees to the reinforcement of their contribution to the development of their homeland [*patrie*], Morocco, and to strengthening [*reseserrement*] of ties of amity and of cooperation between the governments and the societies of the countries *where they reside and of which they are citizens.*"⁴ (Cursive, Author)

Moreover, the 2011 Constitution assigns to public authorities the duty to "assure a participation as extensive as possible to Moroccan residents abroad, in the consultative institutions and [institutions] of good governance created by the Constitution or by the law"⁵ (Article 18). The participation of Moroccans abroad is desired, but at the same time presented as a duty, as part of their role as citizens.

It is difficult to distinguish to what degree transnational activities impacted on these re-orientations. The debate around political rights of Moroccan emigrants illustrates however further how the concepts of 'citizenship' and 'nation' are being re-defined and how militant activities contributed to shape this debate.

At the heart of the definition of who belongs to the Nation: the old debate of voting rights for expatriates and why it remains open

The debate around the political rights of Moroccans abroad has been vivid since decades and it is central to the reflection about who belongs to the Nation and why. The right to vote for Moroccans residing abroad is enshrined in the Constitution adopted in 2011 (article 17), as it already was in the previous Constitution. The key discussion revolves around the modalities of this participation, which need to be

⁴ Jefri J. Ruchti, trans., Draft text of the Constitution adopted at the Referendum of 1 July 2011, HeinOnline World Constitutions Illustrated library 2011

The part in cursive could have arguably been translated in a slightly different way by adding "and/or of which". The French version stipulates: "les sociétés des pays où ils résident ou dont ils sont aussi citoyens".

⁵ Jefri J. Ruchti, trans., Draft text of the Constitution adopted at the Referendum of 1 July 2011, HeinOnline World Constitutions Illustrated library 2011

defined by law. A distinction must be drawn between the possibility to cast a vote from abroad and direct political representation in national legislatures, what Collyer analyses in a recent article on 'special representation' of emigrants (Collyer, 2014). According to a 2007 study conducted by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 115 states and territories out of 210 have legal provisions that allow their electors to cast a vote from abroad but only 13 countries adopted measures to enable political representation in national legislatures for external voters, for instance Algeria, Portugal and Italy (IDEA, 2007; Collyer, 2014).

Direct representation through the election of deputies representing Moroccans abroad in the Parliament constitutes thus a possibility but is not imposed by the current Constitution. Such a reform was already introduced in 1984 but lasted only until 1992. Five deputies were elected through circumscriptions abroad, and this represented a relatively pioneering initiative among sending countries. The former Prime Minister A. Youssoufi characterized the Moroccan experiment as a failure (Belguendouz, 1999), mainly due to the difficulties of designing relevant circumscriptions, a lack of involvement of deputies with their constituencies, electoral frauds, and the political opportunism of deputies elected who migrated from one political party to another (Belguendouz, 2003). The current President of the Council of the Moroccan Community Abroad, M. Driss El Yazami, considers that no serious assessment of this initiative has been conducted to date (El Yazami, January 2013, Interview by author). In the absence of circumscriptions abroad in the last legislative elections, there was no other option than voting by procurement for Moroccans who were not in Morocco on the day of elections. The Association for the Observation of Elections has therefore denounced the absence of a possibility of voting abroad ("Collectif Associatif pour l'Observation des Elections") in 2002 (Belguendouz, 2003). A group of migrant associations went to court in Morocco in 2003 but the Supreme Court deemed their claim inadmissible. In 2011, a demonstration was organised on November 13th to protest against the exclusion of this part of the electorate in the legislative elections of November 25th. These critics were widely covered by the press⁶. The institutional opposition to the renewal of the experience of 1984-92 is still strong but some politicians, and in particular the Justice and Development Party, tend to appeal to voters abroad by promising their inclusion in the next legislative elections, as announced by Abdelilah Benkirane, the current Prime Minister, in August 2012. In the context of the upcoming 2016 legislative elections, political campaigning abroad has indeed already started and officials from several political parties organise meetings in the main cities where Moroccans abroad reside. The laws drafted by two parties, the UFSP and Istiqlal, illustrate this competition. The former suggested in February 2014 in its proposal 30 additional seats for deputies representing Moroccans living abroad while the latter

⁶ Entre autres : L'Observateur du 30 septembre au 6 octobre, L'Economiste du 25 octobre 2011, Aujourd'hui le Maroc du 18 novembre 2011, L'Opinion du 12 décembre 2011.

mentioned 60 additional seats in March 2014, which would represent 13% of the total number of seats. A proportional representation runs the risk of strongly overweighting the votes of Moroccans residing abroad. Other studies have indeed shown that in spite of the fact that in existing systems deputies elected in external circumscriptions tend to represent more voters than deputies elected internally, in terms of registered voters, external voters tend to have more weight because of the important discrepancies between population and registered voters (Collyer, 2014).

Part of this debate concerns the question of the social base of this demand and the representativeness of social actors who endorse this claim. This issue needs to be raised because the experience of certain countries of emigration that implemented the right to external voting has been to observe low turnouts. For example in the 2002 Portuguese legislative elections, the rate of abstention was as high as 75% (Dumont, 2013). Fieldwork with some of the main civil society organisations engaged in transnational activities between France and Morocco has shown that even though various opinions were expressed, this demand seemed to constitute a marginal concern. A historically significant NGO, the Association of North African Workers (Association des Travailleurs Maghrébins de France, ATMF) that started out as a gathering of Moroccan workers, does not campaign actively on this issue. A member of the national board nevertheless considered that this right should be implemented because a major share of the Moroccan population is now unfairly excluded from elections:

“It is said that only activists claim (that right) or those who have something else in mind. But citizens cannot take part in this debate, they are excluded from the debate (...) except people who are active either in political parties, or in trade unions or in NGOs. (...) Until this right is not granted, a share, and a big share after all, it represents in terms of percentages 10 to 12% of the population that is excluded. It is not insignificant 12% of the population that has no representation.” (National board member, Interview by author, November 2012, author’s translation)

For the leader of another well-established NGO, Immigration Développement Démocratie (IDD), the issue of voting rights needed to be addressed in the broader framework of political rights. Abdallah Zniber pointed out to the need for a democratic tradition of civic rights for the act of voting to be meaningful (Abdallah Zniber, interview by author, December 2012). The President of the transnational NGO “Migration et Développement” expressed a different opinion and considered that it served better the interests of Morocco to have youth from Moroccan descent elected in France than the other way round. He also saw the risk of unnecessarily dividing the community if electoral campaigns were conducted on French territory. Fearing as well the importation of bad electoral practices, he did not consider the right to vote from abroad in Moroccan elections as constituting the most urgent

question to be solved. The founder of the same NGO, himself a migrant of Moroccan origin who came to work in the French car industry in the early 1970s and who became a trade union leader, considered that the most important struggle was to obtain voting rights in the country of residency and not in the homeland. He believed the implementation of this right would not bring about any positive outcomes for Moroccan communities in France:

"I ask the question to everybody: what will this bring us to be in the Parliament? Immigrants will fight each other, one will belong to the UFSP, one to Istiqlal, one to PAM⁷ etc...and in the middle of Paris we will argue and make a spectacle of ourselves which is not worth it; at the same time we give arguments to the extremists, 'you see they vote already there and you want to give them the right to vote here...For them to vote for elected representatives in France?' One should not be citizen twice." (Jamal Lahoussain, Interview by author, December 2012, author's translation)

If the right to take part in elections and the implementation of direct representation is among the demands of certain civil society organisations (Belguendouz, 2003), it is far from creating consensus. Actors engaged in development activities in Morocco have placed their priorities elsewhere, either because of political disillusion or on the grounds of the belief that one should fight for citizenship rights in the country of residency and engage differently with the country of origin. The debate around voting rights and its modalities is at the interesting intersection of state sovereignties and transnational activism. It also highlights how nationality and citizenship are inherently linked in nation-states and how international migration might introduce tensions in this equation. Catherine Wihtol de Wenden uses the term 'revisited citizenship' ("citoyenneté revisitée", Wihtol de Wenden, 2010) to characterize the conceptual and empirical changes triggered by international migration. Because the diaspora represents for the sending country a resource that is economic, diplomatic, cultural, political and demographic at the same time (Wihtol de Wenden, 2010), diaspora policies are arguably the symptom of a will to actively "re-territorialize" – as conceptualized by Louie (2000) in relation to Chinese transnational communities – what has been de-territorialized by international migrations. Beyond the territorial framework of analysis, it appears to be more fruitful to perceive in these policies a profound transformation of the nation-state's sources of legitimacy. Collyer, building upon Brand's analysis (Brand, 2006), makes a valuable contribution to this debate by observing and analysing the process through which 'special representation' for emigrants is the symptom of a partial displacement from territorial control to legitimacy stemming from the representation of the nation (Collyer, 2014, p.8). Central to the political analysis, voting rights are nevertheless not the only way the

⁷ UFSP : Socialist Union of Popular Forces, Istiqlal : Independance Party, PAM : Authenticity and Modernity Party.

state reaches out to citizens abroad. The following section looks into more details into the evolution of Moroccan diaspora policies and the meanings that could be assigned to these changes.

The diaspora, a soft power for the sending country?

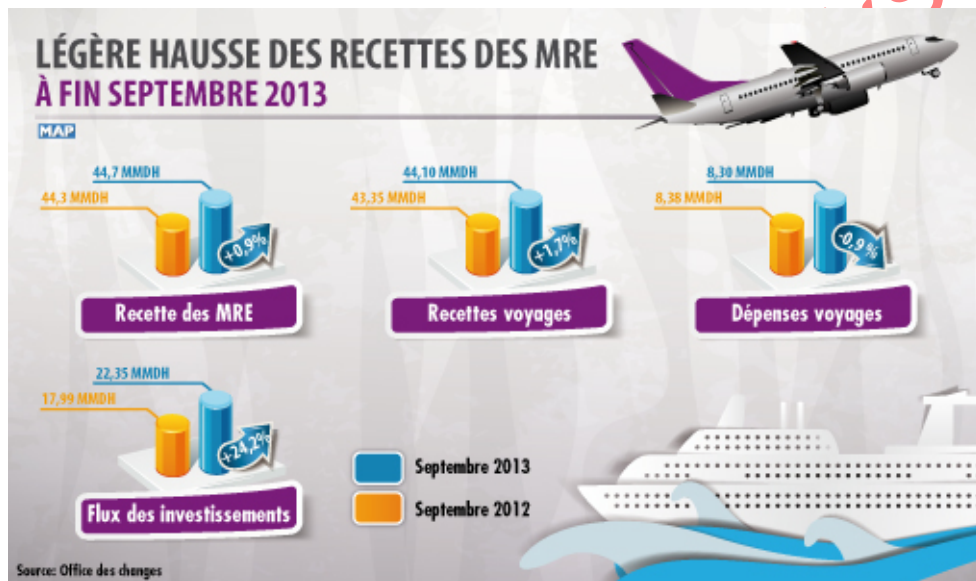
Pro-active policies of the state, from control and containment to incentives for engagement and participation

Expectations regarding the benefits of emigration were formulated from the early days, as the potential financial and technical benefits were included in governmental plans already in the 1960s (De Haas, 2003; Belguendouz, 2006). Morocco identified indeed remittances as a strategic source of foreign currency. In this context, the state reached out to its emigrants and engaged in a 'conversation' with them (Iskander 2010) in order to attract financial transfers by bringing the national bank, Banque Centrale Populaire, to Moroccan workers, who previously relied on informal means to transfer remittances back home. Iskander (2010) showed how the state has proven to be innovative and thus very efficient in channelling from early on these remittances. The expected short and medium term benefits in terms of skills and know-how were however not fulfilled along the lines of the governmental plans. Emigration became permanent and returns before retirement were rather rare, thus the expected transfers of knowledge could not happen, and for those who returned, the structures of the Moroccan economy did not offer the opportunity to make use of the skills acquired.

The Moroccan monarchy changed its approach significantly in the 1980s as it sought political normalization and favoured co-optation strategies rather than control and repression. This significant turn took place when remittances started to decrease, for instance a 20% decrease in remittances was observed in 1988 (Aboussi, 2013). In parallel, more and more Moroccans were acquiring the citizenship of the country of residency (Chattou and Belbah, 2002). The following decade witnessed therefore necessary reforms of state policies in engaging the diaspora, in order to maintain strong links with Moroccan communities abroad. If this shift, from 'controlling' to 'courting' (De Haas, 2007a), has been to some extent successful, it is because it took place in the context of "general processes of political and economic change", without which the courting efforts would most probably have had no impact (De Haas, 2007a, p.47).

Moroccans living abroad represent today around 10% of the population and their remittances amounted to 9% of the GDP in 2007, i.e. 7 times the Official Development Assistance, according to data provided by the Moroccan Ministry in charge of Moroccans abroad. These transfers represent for Morocco the second

source of foreign currency, a key asset in maintaining the external trade balance. The need to ensure the continuity of these financial flows in the context of a threat of loosened linkages encouraged the state to develop new institutions. Caring for Moroccans abroad became thus the second national priority after the defence of territorial integrity (Consular Services, Department of Protection and Assistance, Interview by author, January 2013). Figures related to the level of remittances are for instance regularly published and widely covered by the media, as illustrated by the graph below entitled “Slight increase in revenues of Moroccan Residents Abroad (MRE) by the end of September 2013”.



Source: Published by the Moroccan Press Agency

URL: <http://www.mapexpress.ma/actualite/legere-hausse-des-recettes-des-mre-a-fin-septembre-2013-office-des-changes/>

To take up these challenges, new institutions were created in the beginning of the 1990s, as mentioned above, to gather knowledge around the changes that affected Moroccan communities abroad (Belguendouz, 1999) in order to implement policies directed at attracting the financial wealth of emigrants and at maintaining cultural and religious linkages. In this context, Bank Al Amal was created in 1989, in order to attract investments by Moroccans living abroad, along with a dedicated Ministry department. Additionally, the Foundation Hassan II created in 1990, was in charge of cultural and religious affairs and it is until today responsible for sending teachers of Arabic language in the framework of a bilateral agreement with France. A major operation was also launched in 1991, the ‘Opération Transit’, in order to smooth the journey of Moroccans coming back for holidays by welcoming them already in Spanish harbours. In the same period, Morocco took part in the UNPD sponsored programme TOKTEN aiming at mobilizing highly skilled emigrants and organised in this framework the first conference on the participation of Moroccan scholars from abroad in the development of the country.

