

Migration diplomacy in a de facto destination country: Morocco's new intermestic migration policy and international socialization by/with the EU

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Abstract

This article examines Morocco's migration diplomacy with a focus on the New Migration Policy (NMP) it launched in 2013 as a destination country. It argues that the NMP serves the objectives of Moroccan foreign policy towards *both* Africa and the EU, as international socialization by/with the latter remains a primary driving force for the country's migration policies. The main recent change in Morocco-EU socialization has been a return from norm-driven role playing to an overt exhibition of rational choice and a transactional attitude around migration/border control practices – while role playing has been reoriented towards Africa and the wider international community.

Keywords

Migration diplomacy; migration policy; foreign policy; international socialization; Morocco; European Union; African Union

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Introduction

The challenges arising from migration call for collective, balanced and above all humanistic responses. In recent years, Morocco has become a destination for many migrants from Africa. As a duty of solidarity and true to its tradition of hospitality and hosting, Morocco has just adopted a new migration policy, pioneering in the region, which allows migrants to enjoy the fullness of their legitimate rights (Mohammed VI, 2014).ⁱ

Such was the royal presentation of the rationale for the latest twist in Morocco's migration policy. The so-called New Migration Policy (NMP), launched by King Mohammed VI in the autumn of 2013 and featuring an unprecedented immigrant regularization programme, was officially depicted in normative terms such as 'global', 'rights-based', 'humanistic' and 'humanitarian' – a token of responsibility-taking from a newcomer to the club of migration destination countries. Besides respect for migrant rights, the NMP was supposed to be 'in line with the international commitments' of this state (Mohammed VI, 2013). Intriguingly, this happened in the midst of what appeared to be a major foreign policy shift for Rabat. The same king who had formerly set a high pro-European Union (EU) bar by demanding 'more than association, less than accession' (Mohammed VI, 2000) was now asserting that Morocco is 'free to make its decisions and choices', and not the 'preserve' of any one (Mohammed VI, 2016a). He claimed to be part of a new generation of self-assured African leaders who 'act with determination, firmness and conviction, without worrying about being "rated" or evaluated by the West' (Mohammed VI, 2017a).

Taking Morocco's newly announced orientations in migration policy and foreign policy together, a puzzle emerges: If the Moroccan authorities have come to care less and less about European expectations and recognition, which had conspicuously shaped their behaviour in migration governance since the late 1990s, is the NMP a purely domestically led and oriented policy?

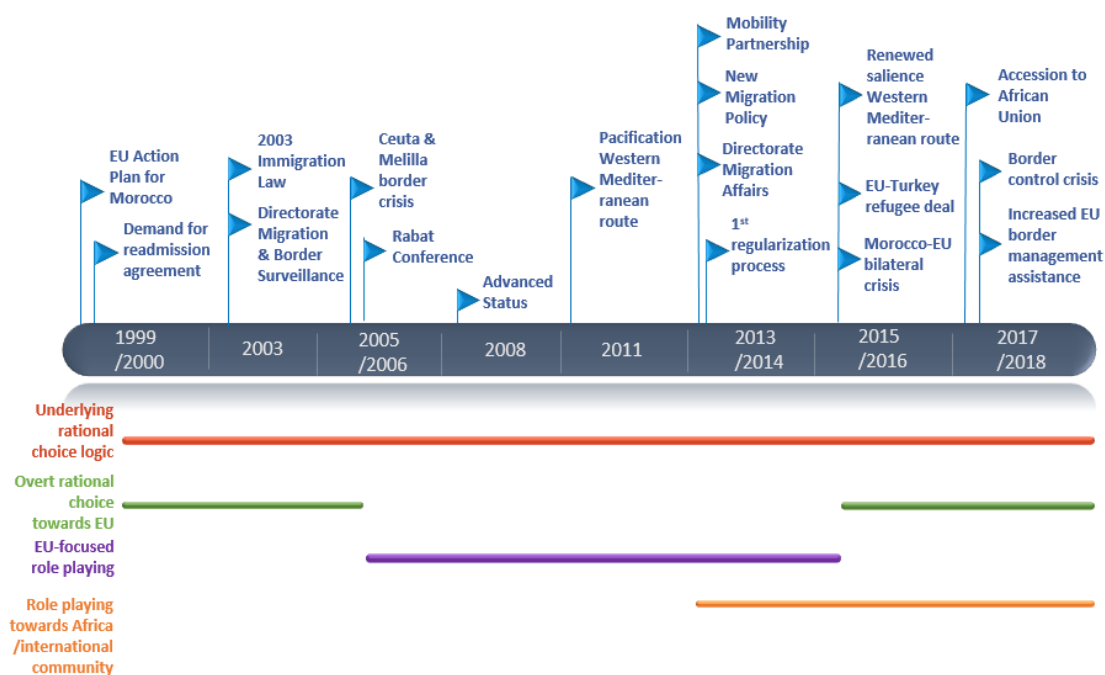
Otherwise, who are then the external recipients of the norm-driven behaviour – and discourse – it posits? Recent scholarly answers to these questions have been quite straightforward. They have rejected strictly domestic explanations by establishing a close relationship between the country's migration and foreign policies, where the former is largely functional and subordinated to the objectives of the latter – one of the two sides of the coin of the concept of 'migration diplomacy' (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019, pp. 115–116). More specifically and contestably, they have followed official discourse in concluding that the NMP has been motivated by the goals of Morocco's so-called New African Policy and, *for this reason*, it represents a break away from Western/European migration governance approaches – what this article conceptualizes as Morocco-EU socialization. In other words, the 'new Moroccan geopolitics of migration' (Abourabi & Ferrié, 2019, pp. 76, 69–70) would be associated to a 'broader reorientation of Moroccan geopolitical culture towards the rest of Africa' (Cherti & Collyer, 2015, p. 590) in terms of determinants and seek to be 'distinct' from European migration policies in terms of content (interview 9). The whole interpretation relies on a number of binaries, i.e. reactive vs. proactive policymaking, EU-driven vs. African-oriented agenda, securitized vs. rights-based approaches, and transit vs. destination country roles.

This article addresses Morocco's migration diplomacy since 1999 with a particular focus on relations with the EU and the NMP. This last case illustrates how the migration-foreign policy nexus has been further stretched and complicated in the second decade of Mohammed VI's reign. The first element of the pair, i.e. the hitherto mostly outward-oriented migration policy of a sending and transit state, has turned more dual or 'intermestic'. Its internal dimension has grown in prominence as an additional role has been taken on as a destination country for sub-Saharan African migrants, however much this was largely a *de facto* side-effect of the European border closure, which has made it a 'transit-turned-host state' (Norman, 2019). Yet, the subsequent official discursive construction of the new role and even the most domestic *immigration* policy – whose international dimension may appear less obvious in principle – have

been also strategically employed by the Moroccan state as a 'means to obtain other aims' in its international relations, forming therefore part of its migration diplomacy (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019, pp. 116-117).

Now, contrary to the aforementioned literature, and combining historical institutionalism with international socialization theory, this article questions the dichotomous 'Europe vs. Africa' narrative of change in the Moroccan migration-foreign policy nexus. Instead, the argument is made that, first, international socialization by/with the EU remains a primary driving force for Morocco's migration policies – although the mainstream understanding of this concept in International Relations (IR) needs to be qualified by acknowledging Southern agency, reappraising the role of rational choice and distinguishing between behavioural/practical and normative dimensions (section 1). Second, the NMP serves the objectives of Moroccan foreign policy towards *both* the EU and Africa, rather than having opted for the latter in a putative binary choice. Third, while socialized migration/border control practices have remained in place, the most notable change in migration-related Morocco-EU socialization has been a certain regression at the discursive and normative level. This has consisted of a Moroccan move back from role playing to an overt exhibition of rational choice and a transactional attitude vis-à-vis the EU, especially after the coincidence in 2015-2016 of the EU-Turkey refugee deal, the renewed salience of the Western Mediterranean migration route and a Morocco-EU bilateral crisis related to the Western Sahara conflict. At the same time, norm-driven role playing has been reoriented towards other recipients in Africa and the wider international community (sections 3-4).

Timeline – Morocco’s migration policy and international socialization mechanisms



Our take on international socialization theory is particularly productive for illuminating these nuances and the subtle interplay between rational choice and norm dynamics in Moroccan migration policies. In particular, the mechanism of role playing, which stands halfway between pure rational choice and normative suasion, distinguishes Morocco-EU socialization in the 2005-2015 decade from the previous (1999-2005) and subsequent (2015-) stages, in which rational choice dominated the interaction in a more overt way, with significantly fewer normative claims and constraints (section 2). Also, proposed here as an original theoretical contribution, the distinction between behavioural/practical and normative socialization translates into a very precise institutional division of labour within the Moroccan state (section 5). On the other hand, Morocco merits special attention in the study of international socialization dynamics in the EU's neighbourhood because it has stood out for decades as an extreme case of European influence and Europeanisation among southern Mediterranean countries, in migration policy as in other areas. In the words of an EU official in 2014: 'Morocco is the southern partner with which we have the most consolidated relations' (interview 7). For that reason, changes in Morocco-EU

socialization may be indicative of a wider regional trend of declining EU normative power – and concerns – and even speak to current debates on the crisis of the Western-based liberal international order.

In terms of methodology, the article's findings rely on a qualitative analysis of high-level Moroccan official discourse in the form of 24 relevant royal speeches delivered by (or on behalf of) Mohammed VI between 2013 and 2019, which have been systematically coded with the help of the software NVivo. The king being the central decision-maker and enunciator of both migration and foreign policy (interview 10), where the government has remained sidelined, his speech acts provide sound and rich evidence of normative socialization at the state/macro level (Waltz, 1979, pp. 52, 74–77; Wendt, 1999, pp. 101–102), including role playing and rhetorical action – though not of behavioural/practical socialization and smaller (institutional) levels of analysis. Further insight into these two aspects as well as data triangulation has been gained from semi-structured interviews conducted in 2006, 2013-2014 and 2019 with Moroccan policymakers and diplomats, EU officials, Moroccan migration and foreign policy scholars, journalists reporting on migration, international organisation officials and NGO workers. Complementary primary sources include documents pertaining to Morocco-EU political dialogue, Moroccan official reports and press articles.

Southern Agency, Rational Choice and Norms vs. Practices in international Socialization

This article combines the historical institutionalist approach put forward in the introduction to the themed issue (Seeberg & Völkel, 2020) with a particular, fresh engagement with international socialization theory. While historical institutionalism is concerned with the dynamics of institutional development, the interweaving of stability and change, and the temporality of the latter, the concept of socialization was introduced into IR theory as a tool for making sense of a specific type of international political change – that induced by the presumed

influence of structures (such as the international system) over the units or actors that make them up (states and their institutions). The two perspectives share their attention to dynamic processes, agent-structure relationships, power asymmetries, the interplay between international and domestic actors/institutions, and the sources of change on either side (Rixen & Viola, 2016, pp. 10–11; Hall & Taylor, 1996, pp. 938–942). For the purposes of this paper, wedding them is particularly productive for two reasons. First, one of the weaknesses attributed to historical institutionalism is that its core concepts – path dependence, critical junctures, sequencing – ‘sometimes walk a blurry line between description and explanation’, for ‘explicit causal mechanisms are missing’ (Rixen & Viola, 2016, p. 19). International socialization fills this gap by providing explanation via one specific set of causal mechanisms (see Bennett, 2013). Second, at first sight another institutionalist approach, sociological institutionalism, may appear as the logical bedfellow for international socialization scholarship due to their common association with constructivist IR. However, the eclecticism of historical institutionalism corresponds better to the view of international socialisation proposed here below, which grants an equally central place to instrumental rationality and the social/cultural logic of appropriateness.

Drawing on a classical sociological understanding of socialization as a ‘process of inducting actors into the norms and rules of a given community’ (Checkel, 2006, p. 5), international socialization has been defined as ‘the process that is directed toward a state’s internalization of the constitutive beliefs and practices institutionalized in its international environment’ (Schimmelfennig, 2000, pp. 111–112). The apparent features that recur in most definitions are its processual nature and the internalization of norms by the socialized actor as the expected outcome, which entails a switch ‘from a logic of consequences to a logic of appropriateness’ (Checkel, 2006, pp. 5–6). An example pertaining to migration governance is the so-called ‘postnationalist hypothesis’, which postulates that the influence of international norms explains why states, especially authoritarian ones, adopt more liberal domestic migration policies

(Norman, 2016, p. 423; see also Völkel, 2020 in this themed issue). At a higher aggregation level, and also relevantly for this article, international socialization has been combined with role theory as a way to better understand interactive processes of foreign policy role construction (Thies, 2012).

Another implication of the concept is that international socialization is most likely to occur within a structurally asymmetric power relationship between two parties. The socializer acts as a (core) member of the relevant community, while the socializee tends to be an alien or 'novice' within its sphere of influence (Thies, 2012, p. 28). This may happen in a context of hierarchy or hegemony (Ikenberry & Kupchan, 1990) as well as in highly institutionalized international environments such as international organizations (Johnston, 2001) and the EU (Schimmelfennig, 2000; Checkel, 2006). Both of these conditions arguably apply to the historically embedded relations between the EU and its southern Mediterranean neighbourhood in general and Morocco in particular, which makes international socialization a useful concept for tackling political change dynamics driven by EU influence on this country, including in migration governance (Fernández-Molina, 2016, pp. 101–104, 119). However, this requires reconsidering its common use in IR in order to acknowledge Southern (i.e. the socializee's) agency, reappraise the role of rational choice and distinguish between behavioural/practical and normative socialization.

Firstly, international socialization is generally viewed as a one-way process where agency lies with the socializer whereas the socializee is portrayed as a passive recipient, if not 'infantilized' (Epstein, 2012). Western-centric and colonial connotations are also inevitably part of the picture (Xiaoyu, 2012, p. 341). In this respect, the mainstream understanding of socialization in IR stands in contrast to that of the longer-haul scholarship in sociology and social psychology, which stresses the children's role as active agents in their own socialization and 'parenting as a bidirectional, reciprocal process' (Maccoby, 2015, p. 17). Reconceptualizing international socialization as a two-way process in order to do justice to the socializee's agency and reciprocal

influences between the two parties (Xiaoyu, 2012, pp. 344, 347) is also in line with the recent consensus in migration studies that, contrary to prior Eurocentric assumptions about their passiveness, the policies of countries such as Morocco are far from being a mere 'by-product of European migration policies' (Natter, 2014; Berriane, De Haas, & Natter, 2015, p. 517).

Secondly, much of the international socialization literature has been weighed down by a false dichotomy between rational choice and norm dynamics. The fact that the socialization has been most often observed through the lens of norm internalization or 'socialization-as-outcome' (Thies, 2012, p. 27) has obscured the pervasive presence of instrumental rationality and strategic interaction in the preceding processes. However, prominent constructivist scholars remind us of the 'intimate relationship between norms and rationality', as 'processes of social construction and strategic bargaining are deeply intertwined' (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, pp. 909, 911). Others have gone as far as to analyze socialization as a 'game' involving both 'social and strategic interaction' (Thies, 2012, p. 30). One empirical proof of this connection is the identification of different types of socialization based on the varying degrees of norm internalization that occur in empirical reality (Johnston, 2001, p. 495; see Wendt, 1999, pp. 268–278). For Checkel (2006, pp. 9–14), (non-)socialization mechanisms range from 'strategic calculation' or pure rational choice on the side of the socializee – the degree zero of socialization, where its behaviour is driven by the logic of consequences alone – to 'normative suasion' (type II internalization), which involves a deep transformation of values and interests. The in-between mechanism is 'role playing' (type I internalization), whereby the socializee effectively learns what is socially expected within the context of the asymmetric relationship, and takes on new roles accordingly, yet stopping short of genuine norm internalization (Checkel, 2006, p. 11). This has also been referred to as the 'adoption of the standard at a superficial level' (Schimmelfennig, 2000, p. 118), and grants a central role to rational choice in response to normative constraints. A variation of such partial socialization mechanism are situations of norm adoption with (indefinitely) deferred implementation.

Thirdly, and here lies an original theoretical contribution of this article, it is important to bring practices back into the scholarly analysis of international socialization. The standard psychological-sociological definition of socialization (Maccoby, 2015, p. 3) explicitly combines behavioural/practical content ('skills, behaviour patterns') and a moral/normative dimension ('values'). By contrast, the IR literature has often neglected the former in making socialization a virtual synonym of norm diffusion and internalization, and in '[separating] norm existence or strength from actual behavioural change' in its empirical operationalization (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, p. 892). The only prominent IR theorist who stands as an exception for highlighting behavioural/practical socialization is Waltz, who views socialization – alongside competition – as one of the two mechanisms through which the international system's structure produces its effects by 'limiting and moulding' the behaviour of the units, encouraging conformity and uniformity (Waltz 1979: 74-77). This blind spot is all the more striking in the light of the recent 'practice turn' in IR (Adler & Pouliot 2011: 6). Also, the distinction between behavioural/practical and normative socialization is critical for the subject of this article, as migration governance is known to be a field where norms and practices diverge dramatically, both globally and in EU-Morocco relations.

Morocco's Socialization by/with the EU as a Transit Country: A Dance between Overt Rational Choice and Role Playing

How did Morocco's migration-related socialization by/with the EU play out over the first decade of Mohammed VI's reign, when this state's transit country role became salient? In line with the theoretical discussion above, this section will show that: first, such socialization had both behavioural/practical and normative components; and second, Moroccan agency in response to EU influence was manifested initially in overt rational choice and later in the form of role playing. The earlier Morocco-EU socialization was essentially behavioural/practical in nature. It

subsequently took on a marked normative dimension which was essential for role playing and rhetorical action – as these require ‘norm manipulation’ and the ‘instrumental use of arguments’ (Schimmelfennig, 2000, pp. 129–131). The turning point between the two stages occurred in 2006, in the wake of the crisis provoked by collective assaults on the border fences of Ceuta and Melilla by sub-Saharan African migrants in the autumn of 2005 (Lahlou, 2015, p. 9; Natter, 2014; interview 10).

The first step in the EU’s socialization efforts towards Morocco as a transit country, in the context of the nascent external dimension of the EU’s immigration and asylum policies, was the drafting of a country-specific Action Plan by the Council’s newly-established High-Level Working Group on Asylum and Migration in 1999. The most visible Moroccan concession to growing EU pressures about irregular migration control was the passing in 2003 of the country’s first-ever immigration law, which was criticized as unnecessarily restrictive and security-focused for domestic needs (Cherti & Collyer, 2015, pp. 590–591). The national authorities justified it in terms of instrumental value and Morocco’s ‘commitments towards its partners’ (Natter, 2014). Besides, behavioural/practical socialization centred around the transfer and enhancement of practices of border control, e.g. through Moroccan participation in the Integrated System of External Surveillance (SIVE, for its Spanish acronym), established in 2002, and joint patrolling with Spain in the Strait of Gibraltar. Its institutional translation included the 2003 establishment of a Directorate for Migration and Border Surveillance (DMBS) within the Ministry of the Interior (Wolff, 2008, pp. 261–264). The DMBS was indeed aimed at ‘rationalising the working methods [...] and optimising the deployment of operational surveillance units [...]’ (Lahlou, 2015, p. 8).

The rational choice logic guiding Moroccan behaviour was apparent in the issue-linkage strategy whereby this cooperation was attached to EU aid and market access concessions, as well as in the ‘opportunistic avoidance’ of the signing of a migrant readmission agreement (El Qadim, 2010, pp. 109–114). The most recurring EU demand on migration posed in the institutionalized bilateral political dialogue (EU-Morocco Association Council) since 2000 was the conclusion of

one such agreement including, besides Moroccans, third country nationals and stateless persons who irregularly entered the EU from Moroccan territory. Rabat communicated its readiness to 'engage in a constructive dialogue' on this matter in 2001. The 2005 EU-Morocco Action Plan under the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) listed it again among supposedly joint priorities (Wunderlich, 2010, p. 256), while the European Commission's Aeneas programme for financial and technical assistance to third countries in the area of migration and asylum (2004-2008) provided new material incentives. However, negotiations would be protracted to no avail over 15 rounds and eventually suspended in 2010, given the lack of 'a concrete incentive' for Morocco (interview 4) and this state's reluctance to bear the economic and political costs of readmission. These included potential negative impacts on its relations with some sub-Saharan African states (interview 5) and the latter's positions on the Western Sahara conflict (Fernández-Molina, 2016, pp. 120–122; Wolff, 2014, pp. 83–84). In the view of EU officials: 'They messed us about' (interview 6).

In parallel to this overt exhibition of rational choice, some early indications of normative socialization could be observed in the 2002 resurrection of the Delegate-Ministry for Moroccans Residing Abroad, now under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation (Belguendouz, 2006, p. 15). While keeping a sending country-related name and responsibilities by virtue of path dependence, much of the public activity of this government department was to be focused on communicating Morocco's growing predicament as a transit country facing 'strong migratory pressure', in an attempt to obtain not only greater material support but also political recognition from the EU. Recognition-seeking arguments stressed that Morocco was 'a credible partner that cannot be ignored' and 'one of the first countries to defend a shared responsibility in addressing the challenges posed by migration in all its dimensions' (Fernández-Molina, 2016, pp. 122-123; interview 1). The need for 'shared responsibility' and a 'global approach' to migration – an official slogan established by Mohammed VI himself in 2001 – were the norm-inspired motifs of an essentially EU-oriented discourse (Alami M'chichi, Hamdouch, & Lahlou, 2005, pp. 24–27).

This was a way of constructing the transit country role in a positive and constructive light. Civil society criticism that Morocco was actually becoming Europe's 'gendarme' – a negatively-charged 'word that EU officials detest' (interview 8) – was rejected outright by the authorities (Fernández-Molina, 2016, p. 143).

In subsequent years, role playing inspired by international and EU-promoted norms was to become vital for Morocco's pursuance of one of its two core foreign policy goals in the first decade of Mohammed VI's reign, i.e. obtaining a so-called Advanced Status as a recognition of its allegedly special bilateral relationship with the EU. Role playing was most prominently prioritized following the 2005 Ceuta and Melilla crisis, when the human rights violations committed by Moroccan security forces were met with international condemnation that tarnished the country's image abroad (Hernando de Larramendi & Bravo, 2006). After trying to 'shift the burden' by asking the EU for a new 'Marshall Plan' of economic assistance in order to combat irregular migration from sub-Saharan Africa, the Moroccan authorities turned the crisis into an opportunity: they took the lead in co-convening and hosting, in July 2006, the first Euro-African Ministerial Conference on Migration and Development, which would usher in a new institutionalized dialogue known as the Rabat Process. The Rabat Conference was a major success for Morocco's migration diplomacy. Besides Europeanizing the problem of controlling the border with Spain, national representatives boasted that the conference enshrined the normative 'global approach' that Mohammed VI had been advocating for years as a motto – although the concept was in fact already present in EU parlance since the 1990s. Furthermore, regarding the migration-foreign policy nexus, this diplomatic initiative was in tune with Morocco's self-assigned foreign policy role as mediator or 'bridge' between Europe and Africa, and with the New African Policy proclaimed officially, in its first incarnation, soon after Mohammed VI's accession to the throne (Fernández-Molina, 2016, pp. 122–125; Natter, 2014).

In any case, norm-driven role playing did never replace or detract from the importance of Morocco's behavioural/practical socialization for border control purposes. Indeed, 2005-2011

were the years when cooperation in that sphere became most effective in preventing sea and land crossings into Spanish territory, also vitally aided by the bilateral honeymoon that followed the preceding (2001-2003) crisis between the two neighbours (interviews 10, 2). Both dimensions of socialization were to be rewarded with the EU-Morocco Advanced Status. The merits highlighted by the related EU Declaration included not only Morocco's effective cooperation in the fight against 'illegal immigration' but also its 'leading role' in the Rabat Process and its expected 'active role' in the implementation of the wider 'EU-Africa joint strategy'. At the same time, one of the few reproaches made to Morocco, suggesting some sort of soft conditionality, was the non-completion of the negotiations on a readmission agreement: 'The EU reiterates the importance it attaches to the prompt conclusion of this agreement, which will open new opportunities for the development of cooperation with Morocco' (EU-Morocco Association Council, 2008, October 13). In hindsight, EU officials would view the Advanced Status negotiations as a missed opportunity in this regard: 'We should have pushed harder' (interview 6).

Morocco's New Migration Policy as a Destination Country and Foreign Policy towards Africa

In the early 2010s, though, the shape of migration from/through/in Morocco appeared to have substantially changed. A hard-to-determine but rising number of sub-Saharan migrants became stuck in Moroccan territory, in a situation of 'forced immobility' (Stock, 2019) due to the impossibility of travelling further north into Europe. Their settlement in the country was also favoured by national labour market transformations which had made low-status jobs in agriculture and construction no longer attractive for Moroccan youth in spite of high unemployment (Norman, 2019, pp. 50–51). The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs estimated the total number of foreign nationals residing in Morocco at 101,200 in 2017 (Conseil Économique, Social et Environnemental, 2018, p. 9). Sub-Saharan Africans remained mostly in

an irregular situation, with the exception of those coming from Senegal, Mali, Niger, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Gabon and Republic of the Congo, who enjoy visa-free entry to the country (Werenfels, 2018, p. 25). At the same time, the destabilisation of other countries in the region in the wake of the 2011 Arab Uprisings led to a short-term ‘pacification’ of Western Mediterranean migration route in 2012-2013 (interview 10).

These new conditions provided an opportunity for a new migration policy role, i.e. destination country role, to be socially and strategically constructed as part of Morocco’s migration diplomacy. By contrast with the awkwardness around the transit country role, this one was eagerly celebrated, leaving aside the extent to which it might be a ‘de facto’ (Baldwin-Edwards, 2006, p. 318) or ‘default’ (Lahlou, 2015, p. 2) situation. Altogether, with no less than a 2,200 percent increase, ‘migration’ was the key term whose appearances in royal speeches most grew between the 1999–2003 and 2014–2019 periods of Mohammed VI’s reign (Tizi, 2019, p. 12). Suggesting a sort of reversal of prior roles, royal speeches started stressing the ‘marked increase’ in the number of immigrants coming not only from Africa but also from Europe (e.g. Mohammed VI, 2013, 2017b), while paying significantly less attention to Morocco’s persisting national emigration as a sending country.

The destination country role was officialized both in discourse and in public policy with the launch of the NMP – originally termed ‘new global migration policy’ (Mohammed VI, 2013) in a variation of the ‘global approach’ slogan – in the autumn of 2013. In terms of decision-making, the trigger was the growing international criticism the Moroccan authorities were facing about serious human rights abuses against sub-Saharan migrants (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Shaming became particularly acute in early September 2013, when the Moroccan authorities failed to prevent the BBC from broadcasting a harsh documentary on the subject (interview 10)ⁱⁱ and several civil society organizations presented critical reports in a review of this state by the UN Committee on Migrant Workers in Geneva (Norman, 2019, p. 55). This led even the official National Human Rights Council (CNDH) to unprecedentedly admit deficiencies, calling for ‘a

radically new asylum and immigration policy' (Conseil National des Droits de l'Homme, 2013). Thereafter, the typical pattern of all strategic reforms under Mohammed VI's reign was followed once again: the decision to launch the NMP was taken and promoted by the king himself in a top-down fashion while institutionally relying on the CNDH, a consultative council not reporting to either the government or the parliament (Jacobs, 2019; see Fernández-Molina, 2016, pp. 39–40). The government was reduced to a mere implementation role as, following the royal speech, a Directorate of Migration Affairs was added to the existing Delegate-Ministry for Moroccans Residing Abroad.ⁱⁱⁱ

The content of the NMP was to be fourfold in line with the CNDH report's recommendations, including: the creation of the aforementioned ministerial department; the adoption by the government of a National Strategy on Immigration and Asylum; the passing of three new laws on immigration, asylum and human trafficking in parliament in order to replace the controversial 2003 law; and two consecutive immigrant regularization processes (Berriane, De Haas, & Natter, 2015, p. 515; Jacobs, 2019). The king prioritized regularization to '[symbolize] the desire to change' (Cherti & Collyer, 2015, p. 591), and therefore the first such campaign was swiftly undertaken starting from January 2014. This resulted in over 23,000 irregular immigrants being granted residence permits, labour market access and rights to schooling and health care. 24,000 additional applications were approved out of the 28,400 received in the second regularization phase in 2016-2017 (AFP, 2018). The National Strategy was formally enacted in 2015. On the other hand, the development of the NMP's legal framework stalled and, to date, none of the three new draft bills integral to it has been approved by the government and passed in parliament (interview 14; Norman, 2016, p. 432; Jacobs, 2019) – which appears to be a case of norm adoption with deferred implementation typical of role-playing socialization.

In parallel, in the sphere of foreign policy, the 2010s were the decade of the official relaunch of Morocco's New African Policy, now centred around the specific major goal of joining the African Union (AU) – a regional organization from which the country had been absent owing to its prior

withdrawal from the Organization of African Unity (OAU) when this admitted the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) as a member in 1984. By returning to pan-African multilateralism thirty years later, Morocco intended not only to pragmatically neutralize the SADR in one of the Western Sahara conflict's main diplomatic battlefields, but also to boost its newfound aspirations to become a regional/continental power (Hernando de Larramendi & Tomé-Alonso, 2017). This required an intense high-level diplomatic activity and led Mohammed VI to tour countries beyond his traditional comfort zone in Francophone West Africa (Mohammed VI, 2016d), including also for the first time states that continue to diplomatically recognize the SADR.

All of these ideas featured pervasively in official discourse. Quantitative text analysis shows that references to Africa/African in royal speeches nearly doubled in the years 2009-2013 (133) compared to 2004-2008 (72), and then tripled in 2014-2019 (403) (Tizi, 2019, p. 12). Qualitatively, post-2013 speeches significantly started to refer to Morocco as an 'emerging country': 'During these years, and without natural resources, Morocco has become an emerging country with recognized expertise; it is today one of the most prosperous nations in Africa' (Mohammed VI, 2017a). A similar boast was made of the country's supposedly 'unique, authentic and tangible model of South-South cooperation', and the growth of its foreign direct investment to the point of its being 'currently the largest African investor in West Africa': 'It is already the second largest investor in the continent, yet thus only for a short time, given its declared desire to become the first' (Mohammed VI, 2016b). Mohamed VI further claimed that, 'today, Morocco is an influential political power and enjoys esteem and credibility not only with the leaders of African countries, but also in the eyes of its people' (Mohammed VI, 2016d; see also Mohammed VI, 2014, 2016c).

What was the role of the NMP in this story? Arguments pointing to an instrumental, if not causal, relationship between the New African Policy and the NMP are based on two correlations, i.e. chronological and discursive. The former can be observed in the correspondence between the

timeline of key events in both policies. The launch of the NMP in 2013 coincided with Morocco's call at the UN for the creation of an 'African alliance for migration and development' as well as a royal tour in Senegal, Mali, Ivory Coast and Gabon. This preceded the January 2014 AU summit in Addis Ababa, on the margins of which the Moroccan deputy foreign minister held numerous bilateral meetings to remind African representatives of the conditions under which the kingdom would reintegrate the pan-African organisation – i.e. the SADR's exit or membership freeze (Cherti & Collyer, 2015, pp. 600–601). 2014 saw the first immigrant regularization decisions together with further royal visits to Gabon, Guinea Conakry, Ivory Coast and Mali (Abourabi & Ferrié, 2019, pp. 73–74). Finally, the opening of the second regularization campaign was announced by Mohammed VI in December 2016, five months after Morocco's formal request to 'return' to the AU at the Kigali summit (Mohammed VI, 2016b) and shortly before this was eventually accepted in January 2017 (Werenfels, 2018, p. 28).

Meanwhile, the discursive correlation between the New African Policy and the NMP was strong from the moment of the latter's launch. This was announced in a 2013 royal speech that focused on then ongoing challenges to the cause of 'national territorial integrity', in reference to Western Sahara, and relatedly, on the 'privileged relations that unite Morocco to the countries of sub-Saharan Africa'. Besides the transformation of the country's migration policy role 'into a settlement destination', what Mohammed VI presented as the context justifying the new domestic migration policy was 'Morocco's increasingly marked opening to its African environment' (Mohammed VI, 2013). Later, following his AU membership bid in 2016, he stressed that:

Africa, for us, is not a goal; it is rather a vocation in the service of the African citizen, wherever he is. [...] Morocco is among the first countries in the South to have adopted a genuine solidary policy to host sub-Saharan migrants (Mohammed VI, 2016c).

Finally, when Morocco accessed the AU in 2017, he said he prided himself on the two regularization processes, concluding that 'all these constructive actions in favour of immigrants

have thus precisely enhanced the image of Morocco, and reinforced the links which we had already established' (Mohammed VI, 2017a).

Since 2017, and going beyond the NMP, Morocco's migration diplomacy would maintain the same African orientation, taking on an actual pan-African leadership role on this matter. Mohammed VI was designated AU leader on migration issues at the January 2017 summit (Jaïdi, 2018, pp. 248–249) and, in such capacity, one year later he presented an African Agenda on Migration. He also proposed the creation of an African Migration Observatory, which would be subsequently established in Rabat, as well as the post of AU Special Envoy for Migration. He had similarly addressed the AU-EU Abidjan summit calling for immigration to be turned into 'a subject of peaceful debate and constructive exchange' (Mohammed VI, 2017b). Finally, the image of Morocco as an 'African champion of migration' would be reinforced by its hosting of the Intergovernmental Conference on the Global Compact for Migration,^{iv} held in Marrakech in December 2018. The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration concluded on this occasion under the auspices of the UN General Assembly would be unofficially referred to by the Moroccan authorities as the Marrakech Pact.

Whither Morocco-EU Socialization?

The official presentation of the NMP in connection with Morocco's broader reorientation towards Africa also involved, largely by omission, its discursive dissociation from relations with the EU. In emphasizing the normative foundations of the policy and the 'credibility of Morocco in the field of human rights', Mohammed VI granted rhetorical priority to the NMP's favourable reception by 'brother sub-Saharan countries' over the EU states. Also, the only contextual mention to European migration policies pointed to the Lampedusa migrant shipwreck in October that year, 'which we all painfully regretted' (Mohammed VI, 2013). In other words, norm-driven

role playing continued to be central to Morocco's migration diplomacy but, unlike in the previous decade, its primary external target seemed to lie outside the EU.

In fact, a chronological correlation as strong as the one with the New African Policy suggested a parallel instrumental relationship – not necessarily straightforward causality – between the NMP and Moroccan foreign policy towards the EU: the NMP was announced just three months after the conclusion of the 2013 EU-Morocco Mobility Partnership. The Mobility Partnership was a joint political declaration whereby Morocco, the European Commission and nine EU member states outlined a 'long-term cooperation framework' in all migration-related affairs. The four areas it covered concerned all the three migration policy roles played by Morocco at this stage: 'mobility, legal immigration and integration' as well as 'migration and development' as a sending country; 'preventing and combating illegal immigration, people-smuggling, border management' primarily as a transit country; and 'international protection' of refugees and asylum-seekers as a destination country. In practice, the crucial *quid pro quo* to be negotiated subsequently was a readmission agreement in exchange for EU visa facilitation for certain categories of Moroccan nationals, but this was still part of a bigger, global package (EU-Morocco, 2013; interviews 3, 6).

The subsequently launched NMP was directly relevant to a number of objectives of the Mobility Partnership, chiefly 'to conclude a balanced readmission agreement [...] reconciling the need for operational efficiency with the requirement to observe the fundamental rights of migrants', and 'to support the strengthening of the Moroccan legislative and institutional framework for asylum' (EU-Morocco, 2013, articles 13 and 28–29). Indeed, at the time of the signing of the declaration, EU officials in Rabat highlighted the importance of developing Morocco's national asylum system (interview 3). The connection Mobility Partnership-NMP was confirmed in several EU statements between 2013 and 2015 in these terms:

Morocco is the first Mediterranean country with which the EU has entered into such a partnership. The EU warmly welcomes the decisions made, which aim to establish a new migration and asylum policy, to include in particular official recognition of the status of many refugees and regularisation

of irregular migrants [...], and highlights the relevance of the Mobility Partnership in supporting Morocco's implementation of this policy (Council of the EU, 2013, p. 7).

Other congratulatory EU declarations reflected typical themes of Moroccan official discourse such as this state's pioneering status and destination country role:

The EU will strongly support such a policy, as Morocco is the first country in North Africa to introduce a genuine immigration policy [...]; it also notes that Morocco is facing up to its responsibilities as a host country and no longer as just a country of origin or of transit (Council of the EU, 2014, p. 9; see also Council of the EU, 2015, p. 13).

All this evidence points towards some role of EU-led normative socialization in encouraging or influencing at least parts of the NMP's content, i.e. the National Strategy on Immigration and Asylum and the promised new legal framework, especially on asylum. This goes against the perception within Moroccan civil society, at the time, that the Mobility Partnership would merely reinforce the country's behavioural/practical socialization in terms of border control commitments (Norman, 2016, p. 433). Such scepticism disregarded the complementarity between the two forms of socialization as per the comprehensive spirit of the Mobility Partnership: 'A reinforcement of border control [...] entails not only the security approach but also elements linked to the respect for and exercise of fundamental and social rights' (interview 11). The paradox about Morocco-EU socialization is that it seems to be behind *both* of the two contrasting approaches towards sub-Saharan African migrants followed in recent years by Morocco: 'integration' and 'crackdown' (interviews 12, 8).

Notwithstanding this, the Moroccan diplomat in charge of migration affairs in Brussels in 2014 denied any causal link between the Mobility Partnership and the NMP, stressing the domestic origins of the latter:

It is a national process that was launched by the highest state authority, His Majesty the King, on the basis of a thematic report of the CNDH on the issue of migration. Morocco was a country of origin and transit, but has become a country of destination par excellence (interview 5).

In general, the EU connection was conspicuously absent from Moroccan official discourse. What does this mean for Morocco-EU socialisation? The 2008 Advanced Status appeared to have been the apex of Morocco's pro-EU foreign policy activism in general and EU-focused migration-related role playing in particular. The fact that EU-Morocco negotiations on the readmission

agreement and visa facilitation twice stalled – suspended in 2010 and again in 2015 under the Mobility Partnership roadmap – confirmed Morocco’s return to an overtly transactional attitude and exhibition of rational choice vis-à-vis the EU as its primary (non-)socialization mechanism. Interest in role playing, along with its normative dimension, was to even further decrease from 2015-2016, which was an important turning point as a result of three developments. First, the EU-Turkey refugee deal of March 2016 set a new model of successful strategic bargaining by a transit state confronted with rising practical migration control demands and decreasing normative concerns on the side of the EU member states.

Second, the renewed importance of the Western Mediterranean migration route into Europe from 2015 onwards, following the virtual closure of the Eastern and Central routes from Turkey and Libya respectively, dramatically increased the leverage of Morocco vis-à-vis the EU and member states such as Spain. Sea arrivals from Morocco to the Spanish coasts multiplied from around 8,000 in 2016 to 22,000 in 2017 to 58,500 in 2018.^v A formal deal along the lines of the EU-Turkey one was categorically ruled out by Morocco, e.g. when in 2018, EU member state leaders suggested establishing ‘regional disembarkation platforms’ for migrants rescued in the Mediterranean in this and other North African countries (Abderrahim, 2019, p. 2). However, the sudden, extraordinary effort made by the Moroccan security forces to stop the surge in irregular entries into Spain in the summer of 2018 – an escalated crackdown including extensive human rights abuses, raids and forced transfers aiming to keep migrants away from the northern coast/border – suggested an opportunistic attempt to cash in on the increased border management assistance (140 million euros) offered by the EU (interview 12; Alami, 2018). Even in relation to the NMP, according to national experts, the 2018 crisis would have caused a ‘return to the previous situation’:

Since late 2018/early 2019, doubts have begun to arise as to the appropriateness of the NMP: how to act when all the crossings into Europe are blocked, the migrants remain in Morocco, there is no support to give them and Morocco does not have the socio-economic capacity to integrate them. [...] Morocco’s current policy is to strengthen cooperation with the IOM in programmes of assisted voluntary return to countries of origin (interview 10).

Third, all of this coincided with a wide-ranging bilateral crisis between Morocco and the EU in the wake of a series of rulings of the Court of Justice of the EU, in 2015-2016 and 2018, which excluded the annexed territory of Western Sahara from the territorial scope of EU-Morocco economic and sectoral cooperation agreements. The Moroccan response to the perceived attack to its territorial integrity and 'national cause' included recourse to tactical issue linkage and even undisguised threats to reconsider taken-for-granted cooperation on migration and border control. In the words of the agriculture minister and king's strongman: 'How do you [Europeans] want us to do the job of blocking African emigration if Europe does not want to work with us today? [...] Why are we going to continue to act as gendarmes?' (Otazu, 2017).

The institutional division of labour

As a final point, the combination of historical institutionalism and international socialization theory helps shed light on the institutional makeup that has crystallized over time in Morocco's migration policy. When asked about the key national institutions in this domain, observers all agree on identifying a 'tripartite management' structure (interview 10) where the king and his Royal Cabinet 'have the upper hand' (interview 12) to 'give the impulses, the directions' (interview 10), while the foreign and interior ministries implement these. The ministerial duality reflects not only the increasingly intermestic nature of migration policy – here as elsewhere – but also a distinct division of labour related to Morocco's international socialization. While the Ministry of Foreign Affairs tends to be in charge of role playing and therefore more involved in normative socialization dynamics, the Ministry of the Interior is the leading target and agent of behavioural/practical socialization, subject to fewer normative constraints. Such contrast clearly emerges in the recent discourse of the two departments. Months after the foreign minister claimed that 'Morocco does not play and will never play the role of policeman for the EU' (Alami,

2018), the director of the interior ministry's DMBS contradicted him putting the rational choice guiding Moroccan cooperation in quite crude terms:

From January 2019 until today, we have aborted 40,300 migration attempts to Spain. It is 25% more compared to the same period last year [...]. Our border control is able to stop the pressure, but we have to continue working to reinforce that system [...]. The 140 million [euros pledged by the EU] are a good start (Martín, 2019).

Furthermore, the role-playing orientation of the foreign ministry explains the anomaly that this department was made responsible for both the external and the *internal* steering of Morocco's NMP (interview 9). Coupled with the path dependence created by its housing since 2002 of the Delegate-Ministry for Moroccans Residing Abroad, to which broader Migration Affairs were attached in 2013, this has produced the odd situation that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and not that of the Interior, now lead the Inter-ministerial Regularization Commission (interview 14). Moreover, the foreign ministry acts as the main Moroccan institutional partner for UN agencies (UNHCR, IOM), the EU and other donors even for domestic public policy purposes, such as migrant access to healthcare and education (interviews 11, 14). Such unusual task is also indicative of the predominance of 'indifference-as-policy' – minimal state intervention and outsourcing of basic welfare services to a combination of international and civil society organizations – in the Moroccan engagement with immigrants as a host state (Norman, 2019). Incidentally, with the cabinet reshuffle of October 2019, the Directorate of Migration Affairs moved on the organizational chart of the foreign ministry to a new Delegate-Ministry for African Cooperation (interview 9), which emphasized the African reorientation of Morocco's migration-related role playing.

By contrast, and more discreetly, the Ministry of the Interior's behavioural/practical socialization has continued to be dominated by the EU and EU member states' border control pressures. A recent examples of this is the adoption, in November 2018, of what critics decry as a 'covert visa' policy for the citizens of Mali, Guinea and Republic of the Congo, whose long-held visa-free access to Morocco is now qualified by the requirement to apply for an electronic travel authorisation (interview 13). Another new restrictive administrative practice stemming from this

ministry that contradicts the aims of the NMP is that of requesting regularized migrants to provide a tenancy agreement – which many of those living in impoverished neighbourhoods and/or informal housing lack – in order to issue their residence permits (interview 14).

Conclusion

In sum, this article has shown how the various migration policy roles played by Morocco within the Euro-African migration system have all been put to strategic use for broader foreign policy purposes, as part of this state's migration diplomacy. This has been a persistent manifestation of Southern agency, countering the structural power asymmetry within the context of Morocco's socialization by/with the EU. The migration-foreign policy nexus has also been vital in motivating the NMP that Morocco has more recently launched as a migration destination country, which appears therefore as an essentially intermestic policy in spite of its formally domestic content. In this case, and compared to the first decade of Mohammed VI's reign when the transit country role was constructed with an inevitable EU orientation, official discourse has profusely stressed the African foreign policy connection while the EU's role has gone largely unsaid. However, Morocco-EU socialization has acted as a primary driving force for both past and present Moroccan migration policies. This does not detract from the continuous presence of Morocco's rational choice vis-à-vis the EU, being either overtly exhibited, in periods such as 1999-2005 and 2015-present, or combined with partial norm adoption and rhetorical action in the form of role playing, as in 2005-2015. Recent change in Morocco-EU socialization has indeed consisted in giving up norm-driven role playing led by the foreign ministry – which has been reoriented towards other recipients in Africa and the world – in favour of an overtly transactional attitude around migration/border control practices under the responsibility of the interior ministry.

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4. Mounir Belayachi, deputy ambassador of Morocco to the EU. Brussels, 23 May 2014.
5. Nabil Abderrazaq, minister plenipotentiary in charge of Migration Affairs and EU-Africa Relations, Mission of Morocco to the EU. Brussels, 23 May 2014.
6. Eneko Landaburu, former ambassador and head of the EU Delegation in Morocco (2009-2013). Brussels, 23 May 2014.
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8. Javier Otazu, journalist, EFE correspondent in Morocco. Email, 22 November 2019.
9. Abdelwahab Maalmi, professor of International Relations, University Hassan II Casablanca. Email, 27 November 2019.
10. Mehdi Lahlou, professor of Economics, National Institute of Statistics and Applied Economics (INSEA), Rabat, Morocco. Phone, 27 November 2019.
11. Manuel Lorenzo, former head of MPDL delegation in Morocco (1999-2017). Email, 27 November 2019.
12. Aida Alami, Morocco-based freelance journalist. Phone, 29 November 2019.
13. Abdelkrim Belguendouz, professor of Economics, University Mohammed V Rabat. Phone, 2 December 2019.
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ⁱ All quotes from non-English sources are translations by the authors. Omissions within quotes are also theirs.

ⁱⁱ See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-23959892>.

ⁱⁱⁱ See the ministry's organization chart in <https://marocainsdumonde.gov.ma/organigramme-marocains-du-monde-mcmre/>.

^{iv} See <http://www.un.org/en/conf/migration/>.

^v See <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5226>.