

# Making Do as a Migrant in Morocco: Between Formal Recognition and True Integration

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## ABSTRACT

The New Migration Policy developed from September 2013 onwards initiated a new approach to the presence of migrants in Morocco. It began a process that rendered it possible for migrants to attempt to access and maintain a regular migration status and transformed urban landscape in many cities across the country. However, a concrete policy on integration has not advanced. Drawing on long-term multi-sited ethnographic research, this article examines strategies migrants deploy to “make do” in Morocco: how they seek to integrate in the society despite the partiality, even absence of a formal framework that would regulate how to do so. It examines a context where immigration policy is a relatively recent development, integration strategies by the state are either in flux or absent altogether, yet which has for long been a region of concern for its neighbors in the North. This provides a setting where migrants strive to understand what is expected of them to become recognized as full participants in the society, and how they navigate at times conflicting demands.

## KEYWORDS

Migration policymaking; migrant organizations; integration; inclusion; postcolonial; Morocco

## Introduction

The New Migration Policy from September 2013 onwards and the preceding speech by the Moroccan King Mohammed VI initiated a new approach to migration in Morocco. By recognizing publicly migrants’ presence, King’s speech pushed forward a process that resulted in two regularization campaigns, thus rendering it possible for migrants to attempt to access and maintain a regular migration status. Moreover, the speech and the ensuing policy served as an incitement for the broader society to acknowledge migrants as part of the society. Regularization was based on defined criteria, of which proved residence for five years or more was the most accessible especially for people from Central and Western Africa, the most visible even if not necessarily the most numerous part of migrant population in the country.

Overall, the new approach to migration gradually transformed the urban landscape in many cities across Morocco as Black Africans were able to be present in public spaces without risking random arrests and violent attacks. Despite this major shift in public perception, however, a coherent policy on integration in the form of formally recognizing migrants’ inclusion and participation in society beyond issues directly related to migrants and migrant communities has not truly advanced. Furthermore, the possibility to maintain a regular migration status became harder since the summer 2020 onwards due to a stricter interpretation of residence criteria, which rendered it more difficult again to envisage both formal and informal ways of belonging in this precarious context.

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This article builds on long-term multi-sited ethnographic research with Central and West African migrants and civil society groups working toward enhancing migrants' rights in Morocco. Specifically, I examine the implementation of the new migration policy and sporadic measures undertaken to facilitate integration through lived experiences of those subject to this policy and its implementation. These experiences illustrate strategies that migrants deploy to survive and 'make do' in Morocco or, in other words, how migrants integrate into Moroccan society despite the partiality of a formal framework that would facilitate the process. These strategies are crafted across diverse intersectional dimensions, of which processes of racialization and gendering are central, and they are underpinned by distinctions based on assumed or actual social class and migration status. In this paper, the focus is on the processes of racialization and migration status, where not only social but also spatial location matters. Alongside and connected with these personal and community strategies, I also draw on migrant civil society organizations' advocacy work that has pushed for the formal recognition of migrants as an integral part of the Moroccan society.

Through this analysis, I examine migrant integration in a context where immigration policy is a relatively recent development and state's strategies for migrant integration are either in flux or absent altogether. Moreover, Morocco has for long been a region of concern for its neighbors in the North, namely Spain and the European Union at large, due to it having served and serving as a country of departure and transit for those aspiring to reach the European continent. This concern has materialized in substantial funding geared toward border control and migration management, and therefore contributed to the establishment and consolidation of "migration industry" (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Sørensen, 2013) in the country (Andersson, 2014; Magallanes-Gonzalez, 2021). I argue that due to its geopolitical location and the ensuing financial opportunities as regards the management of migration, Morocco will continue to approach migration and migrant integration with a short-term view that keeps most migrants in the country in a highly precarious position. Therefore, it is important to understand the ways in which migrants navigate this context so as to achieve some form of stability and predictability in their lives. In so doing, they integrate *de facto*, by being present through activities of everyday life, but their steps toward integration require determination, persistence, and support from the migrant community, and remain subject to policy changes that may occur suddenly. This reflects the highly politicized character of migration globally, and points to the difficulties that occur when migration management is transported in accelerated speed away from the centers of global capital to countries that need economic incentives for a diverse set of activities and are thereby likely to abide to, though not without strategizing, requests by their wealthier counterparts. Importantly, these dynamics additionally hamper the ways in which immigrant integration can be addressed and achieved in a formal and socially sustainable manner.

The article begins by presenting the migratory context in which the attempts toward integration take place. Here the emphasis is on the post-2013 contextual developments and includes regional variation in the country. In the end of this part, I will outline my research methodology thereby explicating the data upon which these insights rest. I will then discuss the concept of integration as it is deployed in this context, arguing for the need to address it in a two-fold manner. The possibility to access and maintain a regular migration status is considered as pivotal so that effective claims of belonging can be made, yet this status is connected with processes of racialization, gendering and class-based distinctions. The third part draws out examples of effective integration and obstacles to that and concludes by reflecting on what these examples may offer for a critical understanding of immigrant integration beyond the examined context. The article shows how modalities of integration change when the research focus moves away from global North locations (see also Gagnon & Khoudour-Castéras, 2012; Triandafyllidou, 2020) and calls for the need to be attentive to spatio-temporal variations in and between different locations in the global South.

## Migratory context in Morocco: Research setting and methodology

Traditionally a country of emigration and transit, from 2000 onwards Morocco came to be recognized as a country of immigration too (e.g., Berriane et al., 2015; Collyer, 2007; Collyer & de Haas, 2012; De Haas, 2007; Norman, 2016; Pickerill, 2011). Some of the migrant communities from the African continent emerged from the arrival of foreign students who had come to study in Morocco and decided to stay, others from migrants moving across the region looking for work and a place to begin building a life. Many had lived and worked previously in other North African countries, especially Libya before the war in 2011. Many had initially thought of a European country as the ultimate destination but were deterred from pursuing that goal after they had experienced violence at the Spanish borders first-hand, and witnessed others get injured or die. Some arrived fleeing conflicts in their home countries and sought an international protection status in Morocco. Many of these people stayed after failing in their attempt to access resettlement in a third country, which has been a limited option for refugees in Morocco over the years.

The New Migration Policy developed from September 2013 onwards initiated a new approach to the presence of migrants in Morocco. It was spearheaded by a report by the National Council for Human Rights (Conseil national des droits de l'Homme (CNDH), 2013) and continued with the National Strategy for Immigration and Asylum (SNIA) in 2014. This began a process that rendered it possible for migrants to attempt to access and maintain a regular migration status through two successive regularization campaigns (e.g., Benjelloun, 2017). Regularization was based on defined criteria, of which proved residence for a minimum of five years was the most accessible especially for people from Central and Western Africa. This requirement was loosened during the appeal phase: women migrants who had appealed a negative decision were given a regularized status, due to their gender-specific needs and vulnerabilities when living without a recognized migration status. The regularization process has been analyzed as the regime's attempt to construct a liberal outlook, and thereby silence other demands for political change sweeping the region since 2011 (Natter, 2021). Notwithstanding possible parallel goals, it transformed the migratory and ethno-racial landscape in the country.

The process was preceded and coupled with migrant community organizing throughout the country. Shootings resulting in eleven reported migrant deaths at the Spanish borders in Ceuta and Melilla in 2005 marked the push for the emergence of sub-Saharan migrant mobilizations to claim for a recognized position and basic and fundamental rights in the country (see, e.g., Üstübcü, 2016). In the years that followed, the presence of migrants from Central and Western African countries came to be tolerated, to an extent at least, in the major cities on the Atlantic coast (Casablanca, Rabat) but they needed to remain hidden in the public space in order to evade random violence and racist acts by police forces and the general public, or possible arrestation and forcible removal to the Algerian border. Tolerance, however, was not the case at the borders to the north (Tangiers, Nador) and north-east (Oujda): in the north, migrants were perceived as solely attempting to cross the border toward Spain, and in the north-east, they were considered as having just arrived from the Algerian side, either as first arrivals, or after having been forcibly removed by the Moroccan police forces (on these removals, see, e.g., Alexander, 2019). While this perception and ensuing deportability (De Genova, 2002) changed in many urban areas across the country after the pronouncement of the new migration policy in 2013, it altered the everyday life much less in the northern border areas. As for example Elsa Tyszler (2021) illustrates, harsh gendered and racialized violence at the Spanish borders has continued despite the new migration framework (see also Alexander, 2019; Gazzotti & Hagan, 2021; Tyszler, 2019; as well as Freedman, 2012, and Stock, 2012, on gendered insecurities in migration before the launch of the new policy). In these areas, arrestations and removals continued; what changed was the destination of removals from the Algerian border to dispersed locations across the Moroccan territory.

I have worked with migrants and civil society activists advocating for migrants' rights in and out of Morocco for the past decade, after having followed events in the country and visited it for the purpose of my other academic and civil society activities for many years prior to that. This multi-sited and multi-modal ethnographic research has included regular visits to the country, discussions with tens of people in different locations and keeping in touch with key participants in between visits. While some of these discussions qualify as interviews, I have named them ethnographic encounters where spoken interactions form just one part of the methodological setting. A large part of my onsite field research has consisted of accompanying people in their everyday activities, observing and participating in what they do rather than only documenting what they say. However, in this regard, it needs to be emphasized that discussions form an integral part of these encounters, with myself asking questions and my interlocutors explaining, asking me questions in return, and occasionally contesting my questions and observations as irrelevant. Such long-term perspective has enabled witnessing first-hand the transformation of the country and made it possible to follow trajectories of key participants, including the ways in which they reflect on the process of how to "make do" in Morocco over time. My first contacts were facilitated by my existing contacts with Moroccan migrants' rights activists, and some of my interlocutors I met at seminars and civil society events. Further contacts were made by snowballing, by participants naming other potentially interested interlocutors, which helped to render my presence acceptable by most people I talked to. I use ethnographic writing style, where the portrayal of the overall context and specific themes within it, and my analysis thereof, draw largely on informal discussions with many people over time, not on one-shot interviews and direct quotations from them.

Since the beginning of my work, I wanted to decenter my research and explore different cities and rural areas beyond the capital city Rabat, in order to grasp possible diversity of adaptation in different locations across the country (also Triandafyllidou, 2022). Most international organizations and migrants' rights associations have their headquarters in the capital city and are thus more prone to monitor closely the overall context in that location. Moreover, their services, including trainings, are accessible also to those migrants who are themselves less active in the migrants' rights mobilizations. Therefore, I considered it important to understand how migrants' rights mobilizations are perceived in other locations, how they may be generated and sustained locally, and which ways everyday integration and access to basic rights can be realized in these more remote locations thanks to, sometimes even despite, more organized advocacy work undertaken elsewhere. Besides my interest in decentering focus from the capital city, this quest was linked with the strategies of dispersal of migrants across the country especially from the summer 2013 onwards (Gazzotti & Hagan, 2021), which led to a formation of migrant settlements in cities such as Fez and Agadir, where informal campsites had not been part of the urban landscape. I also wanted to work with both longer-term residents, many of whom deeply involved in migrants' rights activism, and more recently arrived, in order to understand better a variety of experiences in the country, and ways of making decisions on whether to aspire to stay or continue the journey elsewhere. The names used are pseudonyms, and details that could identify the actual person have been removed.

### **Integration as formal recognition and practical inclusion as everyday integration**

The article takes the concept of integration from a two-fold approach. On one hand, integration can be perceived as actions of the state that has the capacity to act upon, or refrain from acting upon, migrants' possibilities to become a formally recognized part of the society they live in. These actions refer to, for example, formalized access to the labor market, children's access to education, language learning, and modalities of political participation recognized by the state. These were the ones migrants expected when integration was introduced in the new approach to migration. On the other hand, migrant integration is something that has always already happened before (or despite) formal policies are designed and implemented: migrants are

working, learning the language and habits of the country, establishing families, reflecting on whether to stay or move away. This latter could be called “de facto” or “everyday integration” and it should form the basis for measures undertaken to “facilitate integration.” Contrary to countries with longer (recognized) histories of immigration, I argue, in more recent countries of settlement especially in various locations in the global South, such as Morocco, the acts by the state are crucially needed but the state is not always politically and economically capable of taking measures that would render meaningful formalized integration de facto possible (cf. Kraler, 2019, for a comparison on migrants’ access to social rights after regularization in different European countries). It would denote formalizing practices that most Moroccan citizens do not benefit from. In a later part of this article, I will address this as a necessary, yet seemingly impossible, task of constructing societal solidarity in a postcolonial context.

Above dynamics could be captured by the notion of “differential inclusion” (Andrijasevic, 2009; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013). This notion describes the diversity of migrant positionalities and their ensuing possibilities of claiming belonging in a more accurate way than the notion of integration. Whereas integration denotes becoming part of some entity that is existing already, often compared to jumping into a moving train, inclusion would emphasize the character of societies as always-in-the-making. However, as Korteweg (2017, p. 3) contends, similar pitfalls to those inherent in the conceptualizations of integration may be present with the notion of inclusion, namely the creation of categorization between “us” and “them.” This necessitates careful consideration of the deployment of any of these concepts. Moreover, in any context where the “problem of immigrant integration” is raised, it is pivotal to ask to which entity this integration should be achieved and how this could be done in practice. To answer these questions, it is important to study racialized and racist structures (e.g., Saharso, 2019) that may render it impossible for a racialized and thereby othered person to be considered as a full member of the society.

Processes of racialization act as an ordering technology also in the Moroccan context. The importance of race remains in the effects it produces, following Lentin (2015, p. 1404), not “for what it is but for what it does” (also Korteweg, 2017, p. 5). Whilst ethnic appearance as a visible marker is present potentially everywhere, through processes of racialization it becomes again more pertinent especially when combined with real or presumed social class of the persons or groups concerned (also Alexander, 2019). These practices are undergirded by the supposition that “being Black means being undocumented and poor,” as for example one of my interlocutors and a long-term resident in Morocco, George, formulated, drawing on his years’ long experience in the country. Prior to the pronouncement of the new migration framework in 2013, these processes resulted in harsh acts of politico-administrative and physical violence targeting potentially all Black persons in the country, regardless their actual migration status. As Tyszler (2019) reminds, any Black person could have been deported to the Algerian border: among those transported there by the police were, for example, students and professional athletes from Central and Western African countries. While some of this context changed, the situation in the northern borders remained the same. Moreover, racially profiled raids in other cities such as Rabat resumed from the summer 2018 onwards (e.g., Kynsilehto, 2019). What all this attests to are severe hindrances or practical impossibility to feel securely included in the society; the ways in which one’s ethnic appearance can be interpreted in a matter of a second, with extremely severe consequences (e.g., Gazzotti & Hagan, 2021; Tyszler, 2019, 2021), and with hardly any remedies.

The significance of migrant regularization is, hence, somewhat more ambivalent in this context than in global North locations where this has been analyzed (e.g., Kraler, 2019). While being an irregularly residing immigrant is a totalizing status in Europe and the US, for example, it seems to be less of a totalizing status in the context of Morocco. In Morocco, regularized status does carry a certain form of existential security with it, and since 2015, also the inclusion, on paper if not fully in practice, into the general health security provisions designed for the lowest income strata of the population (RAMED) (Oulidi & Diakité, 2020).<sup>1</sup> However, as the regularized status does not necessarily imply access to economic security, for example, it is less of a

totalizing status than in countries where social security more comprehensively speaking would be available and accessible. In this context, therefore, Arendtian notion of “right to have rights” beyond a formal recognition of possessing (or not) necessary residence documents, seems more connected to the color of one’s skin and perceived social class than the actual or perceived migration status (also Alexander, 2019).

Unlike in many global North locations (e.g., Grzymala-Kazłowska & Phillimore, 2018; Kynsilehto & Puumala, 2016), in Morocco the dispersal of migrants and refugees across the territory is not related to a deliberate policy toward sharing the task of migrants’ accommodation and integration between different localities. People on the move are dispersed across the territory during processes of dismantlement of informal camps and other settlements especially from the northern parts of the country, namely the borders to Spain and thus to the European Union (Gazzotti & Hagan, 2021). Despite the stated aims within the new migration policy (Benjelloun, 2017), this is done to discourage them from approaching the border, and perhaps to encourage them to decide to return to their countries of origin or move elsewhere, not with the view of their actual integration in other locations in Morocco as there are no formal reception frameworks in the cities they are removed to. Over the past years, these processes have led to formation of migrant communities in cities where they had not resided previously. Such examples are Fez and Meknes in the central parts of the country, and Agadir and Tiznit in the south. With newly established migrant communities I refer to people who have arrived fairly recently from Central and West African countries, as migrants from Europe and the United States, for example, have moved and established themselves in Morocco since a longer time, often working remotely to customers overseas, or as retirees living off their pensions gained abroad (see, e.g., Berriane et al., 2013). These latter are not, however, perceived as part of the migrant population in the same way as the former (see also Kunz, 2022), which further attests to the racialized and classed character of what is commonly noticed as migration, and whose integration may be at stake when integration becomes debated in the first place.

### **From regularization to integration: Examples of missing concrete steps**

In the spring 2015, right after the first regularization campaign had ended, there was lot of discussion about the next phase of the new migration framework starting: that of fully-fledged, recognized integration for the newly regularized migrants. Much hope by migrants and migrants’ rights groups was loaded to the term, and rumors circulated amongst migrant communities on how this challenge might indeed be tackled. In this section, I will discuss the pendulum of modalities of integration by focusing on the labor market, namely, formal and informal access to work, children’s access to education, and access to health care, and hopes and disillusionment coupling these modalities. Let us begin with a story from the field.

Two years after the end of the first regularization campaign, in March 2017, I met Prince, a friend I had not encountered since a long time:

Prince stormed to the association’s office, smiling. We greeted, both of us happy for the sudden encounter. He told me he was just off from a training session. “You know, I have accumulated a pile of certificates from different trainings. I’ve been trained on a continuous basis since 2014,” he told me. I was curious to know which kinds of trainings he had been following. “Well, everything from electrician to computer skills, to good governance and human rights,” he replied. “And thus far it has not resulted in paid employment?” I asked. He shrugged. “What can you do? They [the employers] keep telling me there are Moroccans for the job.”

Extract from the research diary, March 2017

Despite the acknowledged centrality of this part of the migratory process since the first regularization campaign, integration into the formal labor market has proved to be a difficult issue for the large majority of people within the migrant communities. While the skills level of many migrants is being developed constantly by successive trainings, mainly offered and organized by

international or civil society organizations and funded by international donors, actual possibilities to access a proper job according to the level of one's skills and matching newly acquired qualifications are very limited, if extant at all. This seems less of an issue relating to the quality of trainings offered but rather the lack of connections between the trainings and the perceived employability of the trained person by Moroccan employers beyond the training period. Hence the certificates are piling up, as Prince testified, yet the concrete results of having been professionally trained in different domains remain to be seen.

Above is one example of the functions and, indeed, dysfunctions of the migration industry (Andersson, 2014; Gammeltoft-Hansen & Sørensen, 2013; Magallanes-Gonzalez, 2021): funding flows from international donors to and through country offices or civil society organizations with specific programs that target "beneficiaries," that is, the racialized, classed and gendered migrant population but without a concrete path toward what these skills would attribute to once the training is completed. Training or other program accomplished, boxes can be ticked by the service provider, and results reported in terms of numbers of participants, hours spent in training, perhaps with a list of skills accumulated. Next set of trainees is to be recruited, and those graduating wished for the best, often left to look for a subsequent organized activity as Prince's example illustrates. Similar examples are unfortunately frequent.

Establishing an enterprise is one option to gain a livelihood. Street vendors and stores specializing in clothing and foodstuffs from African countries South of Sahara, ethnic restaurants and food stalls, as well as hairdressing services have multiplied in the urban landscape especially in major cities (also Anthias & Cederberg, 2009; Pickerill, 2011). Some service providers, often migrant women involved in ethnic catering businesses, also move from one city or town to another, for example in the areas surrounding the Spanish borders, in order to reach out to potential new clientele. They bring along foodstuffs that are not easily available otherwise and sell cooked food for those who have difficulties with preparing food where they are, after the recurrent destruction of informal campsites in the areas nearby the Spanish borders, for example. For those who can travel between Morocco and the country of origin, it is possible to engage in transnational import and export activities, by purchasing goods available in a more reasonable price in Morocco, transport them to the country of origin and sell there, and bring local products when returning to Morocco (also Pickerill, 2011). Transport is, however, costly and logistics function unevenly between different countries within the African continent. Commercial aspects aside, these difficulties are likely to bear an impact on the disconnections, not only material but more symbolic ones, between the parts of the continent at the northern edges of the Saharan desert and those south of it. Through these symbolic disconnections, integration of racialized migrants in North Africa become all the more complicated.

In formal terms, entrepreneurship is not easy, however, and besides courage, it demands some initial funding that is not easily accessible. Getting a bank loan is not possible with a residence permit of only one year's duration. Despite promises, in late 2016 when the second extraordinary regularization campaign was announced, of three-year permits for those who have renewed their residence for several times, no-one I talked to over the year 2017 had received or even knew someone else regularized under the extraordinary regularization operation of 2015, who would have later received a multiple-year permit. According to my interlocutors who were closely following the regularization process, even the format for printing out three-year cards did not exist yet at that time within the immigration administration.

After the halt in the immigration administration due to the first months of Covid-19 lockdowns in the spring 2020, the process re-opened in an altered form. During the two regularization campaigns and the ensuing renewal of permits, there had been some flexibility in interpreting the criteria for regular residence, as regards to written rental and work contracts. What changed in July 2020 onwards was a stricter reading of the criteria: the person intending to renew their residence permit was asked to provide a written contract for accommodation and work. This change in interpretation was soon responded to by an outcry especially on behalf of associative actors helping other migrants in their administrative processes. They pointed

out how such requirements are rarely met even by Moroccan citizens, as for example most service jobs function by oral commitments and rental arrangements are organized by informal channels.

The humanitarian industry revolving around migration (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Sørensen, 2013) is an ever-increasing sector in Morocco (e.g., Andersson, 2014; Magallanes-Gonzalez, 2021). The associative sector is one of the few sectors, alongside domestic work and businesses serving mainly clientele from South of Sahara, such as hairdressing or catering services mentioned above, where migrants from Central and West African countries can find paid employment. In the associative sector, they work as coordinators, community workers or peer educators. This is important not only for getting a modest salary but also for the recognition of their skills. However, many organizations prefer Moroccan nationals for proper jobs, under the pretext of the necessity to converse fluently in Darija. Moreover, many migrants I talked to were critical of the small amount of salary they received as compared to the funds available for international organizations and civil society organizations operating in the migration industry, and the ensuing salaries especially for the foreign staff of these organizations (see also Magallanes-Gonzalez, 2021; Üstübeci, 2016). Moreover, massively funded organizations regularly ask migrant civil society organizations to work for their projects for free, in order to perform tasks such as gathering data among migrant communities (also Magallanes-Gonzalez, 2021). With access to a registered status as civil society organizations, migrant associations also began seeking funds from international donors to implement their own activities. The competition for funds has resulted in becoming protective of one's project, in order to avoid project ideas to be stolen, which hampers possibilities for intra-associational cooperation in such endeavors.

### ***Children's schooling and informal education***

In 2013 the Moroccan Ministry of Education published a memorandum that opened migrant children's access to public schools (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale (MEN), 2013). The schooling of children from sub-Saharan African countries has continued to be a problematic issue. Many children are out of school either due to language hurdles, or because the parents of Christian faith were worried over their children getting Islamic religious education in the Moroccan educational system. Despite the Circular on schooling in the French language, primary education continues to be delivered in Arabic language, which is not something many parents are willing to support for their children. This applies in particular to parents who do not consider long-term stay as a viable prospect, due to the precariousness in the everyday life, but also to the difficulties the parents would encounter when not being able to help the children with their school assignments. The quality of education in public schools is yet another concern (see, e.g., Amghar, 2019). Most Moroccan families, even those with meager financial means, strive to get their children educated in private schools. For most migrant families this is hardly possible, as they already struggle hard to make the ends meet in terms of housing, food, clothing, and other basic necessities of the everyday life.

In the field of informal education offered by associations, the major question related to integration into the broader society concerns the possibility to ensure enough interaction with Moroccan children to facilitate integration from both sides. An example I have been given several times is the nursery at the Fondation Orient Occident, a fabulous intercultural center in the Manal neighborhood toward the southern end of Rabat. It is a place for Central and West African children to play and learn in beautifully decorated and clean facilities, in a small group. This enables the parents to go out and work. Meanwhile, the fact that there are non-Moroccan children only works against the aims of integration. To achieve this aim, mixed spaces would serve better the purposes of integration, but at least at the time I last visited the premises in 2017, there were no Moroccan families who would take their children to the multicultural nursery.



## **Access to health care**

As mentioned earlier, registered migrants have, at least in paper, access to universal healthcare RAMED reserved for all those with low income (see, e.g., Akhnif et al., 2019; Oulidi & Diakité, 2020). This system has, however, been unevenly accessible for migrants: for example, health care centers may have asked for a valid residence permit in the original version and refused entry for prospective patients whose residence permits were undergoing renewal, which is a notoriously lengthy process. Moreover, access to public health care services depends on the city or town in which one seeks for these services, with public services in the border areas to Spain being largely closed to migrants and accounted for by non-governmental service providers that operate with funding from international donors. Access to health is a basic right and has been justified as such in many projects within the “migration industry” over the years. In this domain, many signs of violence and violations can be witnessed, but especially public reporting on such acts needs to be done with caution, as the service providers may have their status withdrawn as was the case with Doctors without Borders (MSF) after they published a critical report in 2013 (Médecins sans frontières (MSF), 2013; see also Tyszler, 2021).

The context of the Covid-19 pandemic added to the lived precariousness of migrants in Morocco beyond health-related matters. According to Moroccan sociologist and migrants’ rights activist Mehdi Alioua, the specific support measure of some 800 to 1200 dirhams for low-income families during the first months of Covid-19 lockdown and resulting practical unemployment concerned only those migrants who had been able to access a valid RAMED card at the end of 2019 (El Ouardighi, 2020; Kynsilehto, 2020).

These examples illustrate concretely the multitude of difficulties which the lack of a coherent integration policy and ensuing implementation bring about. In countries with longer histories of immigration regulation it is possible and, indeed, necessary to pose the question of who needs integration (Saharso, 2019; Schinkel, 2018), that is, from whose perspective tightening steps for measuring integration are undertaken. In countries with more recent developments of any forms of migration governance, both in its restrictive and especially in its enabling sense, that would constitute the first step toward becoming a recognized part of the society, the debate cannot begin with the question of whether or not integration policy and measures toward realizing that in practice is necessary. The answer would be very simple: It is necessary. However, developing such policy and praxis needs to start from the question of whose perspective it should be conceived in the first place; question that countries with longer histories of immigration began to ask only relatively recently. In Morocco, this process began in a promising way by involving and including organized migrant civil society in the policy debate since the beginning. This enabled diverse migrant perspectives to come forth, both on behalf of those who have resided in the country for several years, and those more recently arrived, though the latter usually filtered by the former. However, this inclusive approach changed in 2018, for reasons that are not exactly clear. Timewise, the change coincided with the end of the second regularization campaign, and the preparations for the global migration summit held in Marrakesh in December 2018.

## **Possibilities of broadening societal solidarity?**

Immigrant integration has been analyzed as a governance technique (Hadj Abdou, 2019). In a context such as Morocco, also the lack of integration policy can be understood as a governance technique. Via this lack of a coherent policy, even those migrants who have been able to access a regular residence status, are kept in a highly precarious position as the previous part illustrated. Their multiple contributions are essential yet clarifying their diverse roles at the level of policymaking in a long-term perspective would necessitate addressing structural issues in the society, which the state has been thus far reluctant to do.

The lack of policy, and something that might be called even a reluctance to truly develop such policy, is based on the underlying assumption of most migrants being in transit in Morocco. While this may ring true for the most recently arrived young persons, many of whom dream of continuing their studies or pursuing a career as a professional athlete in Europe, it fuels these aspirations also amongst those who would be willing to stay in Morocco but who find it difficult or impossible altogether to establish a decent life in the country. Moreover, lack of policy seems to rest on the assumption that should Morocco decide to establish real measures of migrant integration, it would serve as a welcoming factor for an increasing number of migrants. In that sense, Morocco has adopted the mindset commonly found elsewhere.

De-migranticization of migration research, proposed by Dahinden (2016) as a way of tweaking the ways in which academic scholarship perceives mobilities and societies beyond migrant-specificity, could provide a useful approach for the context of Morocco. As elsewhere, migrant presence and specific concerns raised in terms of their societal integration may render visible issues that are present amongst the majority population but that may have been thus far invisible or neglected altogether. In Morocco, such issues are the lack of written work contracts and the possible effects this may have to labor rights, and deepening inequalities already at the level of basic education, where Moroccan families increasingly seek to school their children in private entities, leaving the poorly resourced public education to those with lowest income, including migrant families. This latter resonates with experiences in other countries, where integration through education has suffered from residential segregation (e.g., Clark & Blue, 2004) even in countries with strong equalitarian social ethos (see, e.g., Malmberg et al., 2018). Moreover, lack of prospects for building a meaningful life; something that could be called existential immobility coupled with physical boundedness despite a constant mobility within urban areas (cf. Jansen, 2014; Lems et al., 2016), characterizes the condition of both most Central and West African migrants in Morocco as well as low-income Moroccan nationals. Both, especially the younger ones, are also among those trying their luck for a way out of the country northwards. This similarity of conditions of the least privileged in the society, whether migrants or nationals, is not addressed in an adequate manner in the largely externally funded migration industry which, in turn, renders it again more difficult to propose societally acceptable formal integration of migrant population in the country.

## Conclusions

In this article, I have discussed the evolving migratory context in Morocco, with a specific focus on migrant integration. The article has shown how the laudable opening toward a recognition of immigrants as an integral part of the society in 2013 and the steps taken in order for them to access a regular residence status have not been conceived in a long-term perspective to guarantee their access to basic and fundamental rights. As the experiences especially from August 2018 onwards unfortunately illustrate, the steps forward have been coupled with a disparity between different locations in the country, especially in the northern regions bordering Spain. Moreover, the turn toward a more literal, restrictive reading of the criteria for accessing and maintaining regular migration status in the country since the reopening of the process in the summer 2020, rendered it more difficult to access a residence permit. Indeed, this lack of possibility to protect oneself from deportation and other forms of abuse, also in the labor market and hence having an immediate impact on the access to economic rights, render it extremely difficult to claim belonging. It has left an increasing number of people in a highly vulnerable position and, one may contend, in existential uncertainty of whether and why a country that was willing to formalize their presence has actually changed its policy again. In the meantime, people, who have now been left in a yet again more precarious position, have built their lives in Morocco, having stayed and worked for many years, established families, and began to grow roots in the country; in other words, they have integrated into the society *de facto*.

Measures taken short-term or longer-term to address migrant integration rarely go beyond specific forms of migration industry largely financed from abroad. This links with the point on the potential lack of societal solidarity that could be broadened to have racialized non-citizens as part of the “community” within which such solidarity is constructed and maintained. Due to the legacies of colonialism that have amplified social stratification and, in particular, disparities concerning race, gender and social class, this form of community-building remains an apparently far-fetched idea.

## Note

1. Moroccan government announced this inclusion in 2015 but implementation of this decision and the subsequent delivery of RAMEL cards to regularized migrants took many years.

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