

Immigration and *pensée d'Etat*: changes in Moroccan migration policy as transformation of 'geopolitical culture'

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Introduction

Morocco's 'radically new migration policy' announced by King Mohammed VI in September 2013 was widely welcomed as an important symbolic break with the recent past. Even before the previous legislation, in 2003, and particularly in the last few years, Moroccan immigration policy had become mired in accusations of racism and abuse (Bachelet 2013). The security focused approach was harshly criticised in human rights terms as excessively violent and in geopolitical terms as simply responding to the diktats of the European Union – Morocco had become the 'gendarme de l'Europe' in one widely repeated phrase (Belguendouz 2003).

The new, September 2013 policy approach was heralded as bringing refreshing change from this pattern, bringing a more humane focus, but also providing evidence of a more proactive stance, not simply responding to EU demands (Alioua 2013). This was particularly true of the regularisation of undocumented migrants that was announced in November 2013. More than any other element of the new policy, regularisation symbolised the desire to change. It also highlighted a willingness to develop policy not obviously aligned with EU priorities. The regularisation began in January 2014, yet, less than six months later the critique is surfacing again; the regularisation is limited, it will provide state authorities with the information to identify more undocumented migrants and it is simply the old security politics wrapped in a new discourse.

This paper argues for a more hopeful analysis, based on a wider framing of immigration policy, seeing immigration in terms of of Abdelmalek Sayad's celebrated analysis as 'how the state thinks of itself' (Sayad 1999, 6). This is not to deny the important human rights critique - it is true that Moroccan immigration policy, like that of many of its neighbours, often results in extremely harsh treatment of vulnerable migrants. Morocco has become the focus for much of this critique, not because it's policy is unusually bad but because the activities of civil society and foreign researchers are unusually unrestricted and the environment is relatively unproblematic – certainly compared to Algeria, Libya or Egypt, where the treatment of migrants is almost certainly worse but there is a very limited evidence base on these issues.

Rather than focusing exclusively on the impacts of the developing regularisation our aim is to set this against the broader geopolitical context of Morocco's much heralded 'grand retour' to the African continent (REF). Understood against this established geopolitical reorientation, the new immigration policy appears much more sincere, however imperfectly it is being implemented. Sayad's central argument is that immigration policy should not be seen as a purely internal matter, but must be related to international elements of any particular states self-image (Sayad 1999). Seen in this light, as Morocco's engagement with other African states develops it is logical that this would have an impact on approaches

to immigration. This paper investigates to what extent this is the case with Morocco's 'radically new' approach to immigration and how far this may be interpreted as a proactive, rather than a reactive policy development.

The following section examines the analytical basis to Sayad's approach and argues that immigration policy is never purely a question of domestic politics. The essay then turns to the experience of migrants, drawing on interviews with 50 migrants to Morocco, conducted in 2011 and 2012. These interviews reveal the gradual development of settlement in Morocco and the increasingly obvious position of sub-Saharan African migrants in certain sectors of the labour market. The third section reviews the Moroccan governments developing approach to these relatively new migratory movements. The final section concludes that these responses have moved from a reactive position both to new migrants and to the international relations that have sought to influence Moroccan policy. This suggests that the 'radically new approach' to immigration has been led, at least in part, by foreign policy imperatives.

State thinking and geopolitical cultures.

Sayad's argument about the centrality of immigration in understanding the State revolves around Bourdieu's distinction between 'penser l'Etat' and 'pensée d'Etat' (Bourdieu 1994, 101) that translates into English only with some difficulty. Bourdieu argues that it is impossible to think about the State (penser l'Etat) without employing the State's perspective (pensée d'Etat). This is because thinking about the State involves applying categories of thought to the State which are produced and guaranteed by the State, hence [it is] to misrecognise its most profound truth' (Bourdieu 1994, 101).

Nowhere is this more obvious than in relation to migration, where fundamental categories of immigration and emigration, citizen and non-citizen, national and foreigner are inevitably produced by the State. The critique of these categories that is often of a political nature should, in Bourdieu's terms, be more accurately considered as an epistemological issue. Indeed, it is this distinction which is highlighted in recent critiques of approaches to migration which 'naturalise' the state, which take the state for granted in their assessment of various forms of migration (Bauder 2012; Gill 2010). Sayad builds on Bourdieu's arguments to highlight that, since immigration is inevitably wrapped up with categories that are both produced and maintained by the State 'thinking immigration is thinking the State'. He continues, 'The State is thinking itself in thinking about immigration' ('c'est l'Etat qui se pense lui-même en pensant l'immigration") (Sayad 1999, 6).

This is our point of engagement with Sayad. Sayad discusses these ideas early on in this article and he goes on to develop them into an analysis of perceptions of integration and naturalisation, of the ways in which individual immigrants

become part of the state, though they are rarely fully accepted by the state. We wish to take them in a slightly different direction, linking up with some of Sayad's earlier work on the nature of migration itself. Sayad's earlier insistence on the enduring connection between immigration and emigration (Sayad 1991) has implications for this later discussion of how the state thinks of itself. It is not only in relation to immigration that the *pensée d'Etat* is revealed but, since each immigrant is inevitably initially an emigrant, the state is also revealing something about how it views this act of emigration and therefore how it views the state from which the immigrant came. Immigration can never be considered as solely a question of domestic policy but must be linked, through immigrants' positions as emigrants, to the countries from which they originate.

Immigration policy therefore has clear implications far beyond the domestic arena. This is relatively well established in the case of asylum policy, where the offer of international protection through the recognition of an individual as a refugee has to imply that their state of origin has failed in its duty of protection in some way. The granting of asylum contains an explicit or implicit critique of the refugee's state of origin, indeed this context may affect the readiness of state to offer asylum in the first place – it is much easier to find refuge in a state that is hostile to your own than in an ally. This international dimension is less well accepted in the case of immigration policy. Even though immigration policy often involves direct negotiations with foreign governments, as in the case of labour agreements, it is still widely viewed as a matter of domestic politics. If immigration is about the State thinking itself this view suggests it is much more about self-understanding.

There is a danger here not just of naturalising the state, but of reifying it. To imagine the state as an entity which is capable of self-understanding, of 'thinking itself' as Sayad suggests, appears to go as far as to anthropomorphise the state – to engage in the discourse that 'France' or 'Morocco' behave in certain ways, when what we really mean is that particular individuals in the governments of those countries who have the authority to act in the name of the State behave in these ways. The apparent contradiction between Bourdieu's firmly constructivist view that the self referential nature of the state is its 'most profound truth' and Sayad's virtual personification of the state, as a thinking entity, can best be resolved by Timothy Mitchell's argument that the state is simply an 'effect' of policy arrangements (Mitchell 1991). The state is constructed through certain policy arrangements, including immigration policy, but it is not any the less real because of it.

'State thinking' is therefore most clearly understood as a form of discourse. This discourse may be influenced by the institutions of the state but it goes beyond any particular government in power and it is very rare that these institutions are able to manipulate or control the discourse to their own ends. Such discourses typically change very slowly and any particular government may find that it is as

much controlled by a particular set of principles as it is able to influence them, particularly where there are a powerful set of non-governmental lobbying interests reinforcing specific self-understandings. For example, the failure of successive US administrations to pass restrictions on firearms highlights how political debate is dominated by a powerful sense of the State as reinforcing rather than suppressing individual liberties and lobbying organisations such as the NRA have successfully linked their cause to ways in which the State 'thinks itself'. Free movement within the European Union provides a contrasting example in which new institutions have been able to shift the ways that states think themselves; until the recent economic crisis, relatively large scale population movements within the EU (such as the movement of a million Poles to the UK) went relatively unremarked as they were not labelled 'immigration' – highlighting how effective EU institutions have been at changing underlying discourses.

Any particular state may have a variety of what Gearoid O Tuathail calls 'geopolitical cultures' – in Sayad's terms this refers to how the state thinks itself, not domestically, but in relation to its position in the world. According to O Tuathail,

'All states, as recognized territorial institutions within an international system of states, have a geopolitical culture, namely a culture of conceptualizing their state and its unique identity, position and role in the world. Geopolitical culture emerges from a state's encounter with the world.' (2006, p7)

These encounters are mediated by as state's physical location and attributes, but the form of geopolitical analysis advocated by O Tuathail does not understand physical geography as determinant of political relationships, as more classical geopolitics does. Rather, the interpretation of features such as location is interpreted to produce different and often competing 'geopolitical cultures' which produce different policy orientations.

Morocco's position at the intersection of sub-Saharan Africa and Europe can lead to a variety of geopolitical discourses: Morocco as orientated towards Europe (even part of Europe as Hassan II's 1984 application to join the European Union suggests), Morocco as a Muslim state, Morocco as a state of Amazigh origin, Morocco as part of Africa. The ways Morocco is seen change from person to person and from time to time but these are all clearly recognisable interpretations of Morocco's place in the world. It is interesting that geopolitical cultures of Morocco influence interpretations of how Morocco is connected to the countries around it, or interpretations of Moroccan history. In contrast, geopolitical culture in the UK has a strong strand of isolation and autonomy. Geopolitical culture, the way the state 'thinks itself' influences certain policy

orientations, such as migration, and as Sayad suggests we can turn to immigration policy to understand changing orientations of geopolitical culture.

The gradual development of settlement

For several decades, Morocco has been perceived as – and considered itself- an emigration country par excellence, claiming approximately 10 per cent of its total population live abroad. The Moroccan government's policy towards its emigrants has always been an important and intrinsic part of domestic and foreign policy focus.

It is only very recently that Morocco has started to refer to itself as a country of immigration too. This shift in the Moroccan government's discourse is mostly linked to a growing sub-Saharan population of irregular migrants who are not just transiting through Morocco but gradually making Morocco their home. While estimates of the number of sub-Saharan irregular migrants in Morocco have varied over the years from 10,000 to 15,000 (AMERM 2008), there is a general expectation that the regularisation process will help provide a more accurate picture of the size of the irregular population living in Morocco. Indeed, six months into the regularisation process, it is claimed that 16,000 applications from irregular migrants have already been received across the country (Le Nouvel Observateur 2014).

Life in Morocco

Our research findings from the Beyond Irregularity project show that the experiences of sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco are very mixed. They range from a legally settled professional class to a clandestine population of irregular migrants, many of whom live in a state of chronic poverty and exclusion. However, even though typically they face considerable difficulties in every area of their lives (eg access to health services, housing, education for their children and varying degrees of prejudice from Moroccan authorities and the general public), irregular migrants may still have positive views of their stay in Morocco, particularly when they have fled civil conflict and violence.

'I love Morocco. The climate suits me. There is a lot of food. I'm comfortable here despite a few problems ... I do not want to go anywhere else and I do not have the means to go anywhere else, especially not to Europe.'

Ivorian migrant, female, 44

Many migrants, having entered legally, subsequently lapse into irregularity and become *sans papiers*. Students, for example, may remain after their studies are

completed and then become unable to access formal employment, pushing them into illegal working.

Previous research (AMERM 2008) has highlighted the extreme economic insecurity of many migrants, rooted in a lack of sustainable or salaried work. Our research shows that many migrants are forced to work in the informal sector as a result, often undertaking the most dangerous or poorly paid work in agriculture or construction. The illicit nature of this work facilitates a highly inequitable and exploitative shadow market of clandestine labour, as testified by some respondents.

'My friends, they are never paid well. The Moroccan is paid 100 dirhams and the migrant 50, for the same work. And you are forced to do so. If you do not work, you do not eat.'

Cameroonian migrant, male, 34

The fact that sub-Saharan migrants often end up accepting lower wages, as they have no alternative, has meant, they are now in higher demand in certain sectors, particularly construction. They are also in growing demand from call centres and some tile and marble factories in large cities such as Rabat and Casablanca. And just like the indigenous populations in other established immigration countries, Moroccans have started to complain that sub-Saharan irregular migrants are taking their jobs.

An additional indicator of the transformation of this temporary migration into permanent settlement is the growing level of community organising. For example, in 2012 the first union for irregular migrants (l'Organisation Democratique des Travailleurs Immigres) was set up within the ODT (l'Organisation Democratique de Travail). This Union was set up with the objective of defending the rights of all migrant workers in Morocco, with a particular focus on the irregular migrant populations.

Irregular migrants are typically barred from essential public services such as healthcare, schooling and legal assistance. Given their poverty, marginalisation and fear of removal, many migrants are unable to afford even emergency healthcare, let alone the longer term investment of education. In the past few years, civil society organisations have played a crucial role in filling the service gap for migrants. The situation will obviously change now that the regularisation process has started, but the transitional phase will take time and pose its own challenges.

For a few years now, Morocco has had an emerging second generation of sub-Saharan Moroccans with urgent human development needs. These are the children of migrants, born *en route* or in Morocco, who are now effectively 'between borders' in terms of their nationality. For them, Morocco is effectively

their 'country of origin' and most are likely to stay on, having no home to return to. Yet, as *sans papiers*, the majority are unable to access even a basic education.

'From the standpoint of pure territory, territorial belonging and nationality, they perhaps do not belong to any country. They were born, I would say, between borders, and then when these children are in Morocco we found that there are many problems because they cannot attend school because of the Moroccan system's registration requirement.'

Stakeholder 12

The situation of this group is arguably even more acute than that of their parents. However, lacking alternatives and even a home country to return to, this marginalised population will nevertheless be a part of Morocco's future. The condition of this second generation has constituted another pressure point for Moroccan policy makers. In this regard, the importance of Morocco acknowledging and resolving their predicament is not only humanitarian – a question of respecting their rights, in line with international obligations – but also pragmatic. In the long term, the value of investing in the social and economic potential of these children is evident. This is particularly the case with education, as many young migrants are now growing up with no access to even a basic level of instruction. With some now entering their teens, Morocco runs the risk of creating a new generation of permanently disenfranchised sub-Saharan Moroccans.

Some Moroccan NGOs, like Oum El Banine, estimate that in the past five years less than 101 sub-Saharan children have been to school in Rabat, spread across 36 different educational institutions, both public and private. They were able to access and remain in schools mostly through civil society organisations' (eg CARITAS, ABCDS) interventions and ongoing support. However, now that the regularisation process has started, the Moroccan state would need to educate thousands of children of sub-Saharan background, recognizing these children's specific needs in terms of language (French and English) and religious backgrounds (Qassem 2014). Only a month after the government's announcement, the Ministry of Education published a memo regarding the integration of children of sub-Saharan background into the Moroccan educational system (Mbengue 2013). While the registration of the children is said to still depend on the confirmed residency status of the parent, which will take time to achieve, this has nonetheless been a welcome announcement for many sub-Saharan migrants.

Another imperative for change is the ongoing challenges to the integration of sub-Saharan migrants due to limited social interaction between them and other Moroccans. For many of our respondents, their most direct contact was primarily negative, with (for instance) exploitative landlords or aggressive street

gangs. Nevertheless, a number had managed to establish meaningful friendships with Moroccans or at least reported positively on the treatment they had received from local people. Several respondents had received sustained assistance from Moroccans. One Senegalese respondent reported: 'Many of my Moroccan friends support me by providing me with clothes and food.' Another respondent, originally from Guinea, described her Moroccan friend as 'like a parent, like a mother'.

Nevertheless, the majority of our respondents rarely socialised with Moroccans. Some attributed this to the attitudes of the locals towards them. Migrants may, depending on their employment, come into contact with Moroccans in the workplace and interact with them on a regular basis in a public context such as the local market. Yet in their private lives, the level of contact was much more limited. Indeed almost all of our respondents were sharing accommodation with other sub-Saharanans rather than Moroccans, though the properties themselves were owned and managed by locals.

This segregation of sub-Saharan migrants is informed also by deep-rooted prejudice and stigma. In some contexts, this may have intensified as the growing number of settled migrants has brought the Moroccan and sub-Saharan populations into closer proximity. Particularly damaging is the association sometimes made between migrants and a plethora of social problems, including terrorism, AIDS, criminality, trafficking and prostitution. As one Moroccan stakeholder admitted: 'In some cases, the basic image that the average Moroccan has about sub-Saharanans is of dirt, AIDS, prostitution, and theft.'

Religious difference may also compound this. Some Christian respondents emphasized the divisions between them and the largely Muslim Moroccan population, with several respondents even adopting a Muslim name in response to the pressure they felt from locals about their religious identity. ('They ask you directly if you are Muslim,' one respondent reported. 'So, if you say that you are not Muslim, well ... you must say that you are Muslim.') However, other respondents believed that religion was not the central issue, and that even Muslim migrants would not be accepted by the local population. 'In Morocco,' said another respondent, 'even if you say that you are Muslim, it does not make any difference, they will not accept you ... Us, the black people in Morocco, they don't believe you when you say that you are Muslim.' Language barriers, for non-native French speakers, can be another cause of exclusion.

More recently, the countries of origin have expanded beyond the francophone states that were the original sending regions to include countries such as Nigeria and Ghana. This means that, for English-speaking migrants, language may be an additional barrier. 'In Morocco in general, as an English-speaking person, it is difficult to find work,' one Ghanaian respondent reported. 'They give work to the

francophones, particularly the Senegalese who can work in the call centres and other things.'

Future plans

In contrast to the discourse of the 'transit migrant', many sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco have been based in the country for years (AMERM 2008). Nevertheless, although the transit label overlooks the social and political reality of long-term settlement, it does contain an element of truth: the common belief among migrants, even those who have lived for protracted periods in the country, is that their journey is still ongoing, with Europe typically the intended destination.

Hardship, homesickness or a general sense of hopelessness about their future may push some migrants to consider return as an option. 'Most have tried but have always failed. They understand that they cannot stay in Morocco because they do not have access to many things, such as healthcare,' according to one stakeholder. 'They think that if the conditions in Morocco and in the country of origin are the same, at least they will be regular at home and then there is the support of the family.' Yet in fact many migrants, despite deplorable personal circumstances, remain in the limbo of permanent transit for many years without returning.

Europe is still a preferred destination, with 57 per cent of respondents expressing a hope or intention to go there in the future. This shows that, even after extended periods in transit, border security measures do not stop many migrants from harbouring hopes of entering Europe in the future. In practice, many are likely to remain indefinitely in Morocco, or return to their country of origin. However, this included a significant proportion (18 per cent) of respondents – almost a third of those who wished to go to Europe – who either considered Morocco a viable alternative if their situation improved (9 per cent), or only wished to stay in Europe temporarily before returning to their country (9 per cent). This suggests that a significant proportion of Europe's migration pressure could be alleviated through regularisation of migrants in Morocco or the provision of short-term working and study visas in Europe. Such visas or residency permits would allow this latter group to enjoy a period of employment, education or training in Europe before returning to their home country.

Sixteen per cent of respondents wished to stay in Morocco permanently, with another 9 per cent expressing a desire to stay if regularisation was an option. This included a large proportion of migrants who had fled violent conflict or abuse in their country of origin. This suggests that Morocco is becoming a chosen destination for some migrants, including many who would be classified as refugees. Another 16 per cent of respondents wished to stay in Morocco in the

short term before returning to their country of origin, although most needed to save some money or gain some experience first. This again implies that a significant proportion of migrants, if offered the opportunity of a short-term working visa, could then return to their country of origin without becoming a permanent presence in Morocco.

Many respondents have no desire to remain in Morocco. This was in part because of their deep-rooted desire to continue to Europe, but also because of their disenchantment with the treatment they had received in Morocco and the limited options available to them there.

'There are no opportunities here. It is not for the future. Honestly. Work like that, and wages like that, they are miserable! This is miserable!'

Malian migrant, male, 26

However, others were more ambiguous in their attitude to Morocco. Some stated that they would remain in Morocco if regularisation was an option, but that without integration life would be intolerable.

'If I had documents, I would like to stay. But if I did not ... it does not encourage me ... You cannot work, get married, have a family like that, in this situation.'

Cameroonian migrant, male, 32

Some migrants, who had spent years in the country or who had fled violent conflict in their country of origin, had more positive attitudes. After spending a significant part of their lives in the country, notwithstanding their many difficulties, Morocco may come to be seen as a home of sorts.

'I thought about returning to my country. But how to return home, because I have spent much of my life here in Morocco?'

Guinean migrant, male, 28

'Since I am far away from the war, I live in peace and I feel good. It is true that the situation is not as we had hoped for, but it is comfortable.'

Ghanaian migrant, male, 27

Nevertheless, the intended plans of migrants do not generally reflect their likely prospects, at least in the short term. Though a large portion of Morocco's migrant population may wish to leave, in practice this is where most are likely to remain for the foreseeable future. The result is that many migrants are effectively settled in Morocco, but without the ability to support themselves through productive employment in the formal economy.

Although only 5 per cent of respondents wished to return home immediately, a total of 30 per cent expressed a desire to return home after temporary employment in Morocco (16 per cent) or Europe (9 per cent). This highlights the importance of a range of return options for migrants. While sponsored voluntary repatriation packages should be available for migrants wishing to return to their home country, alternative arrangements such as short-term work opportunities before return could also play an important role.

Seven per cent of migrants did not have a clear preference for their next destination. As one migrant put it, discussing the variety of choices he faced: 'At night, I always think about what to do next, with the time already spent here: return home, go and cross the fences or wait for my situation to be regularised. I ask myself those three questions every day.'

Given the unpredictability of their 'project', many migrants are disoriented about what to do with their future. However, now that Morocco has offered a route for regularisation, their migratory project might become less uncertain, at least in the short term. Our central argument in this paper is that this recent regularisation deserves to be taken seriously because it fits with other recent developments in Moroccan geopolitical culture. The ways in which immigration reveals that the Moroccan state is 'thinking of itself' fit with other, related changes in political and economic priorities that became evident at about the same time as the 'radically new' migration policy was declared, in the last few months of 2013. In the final section, we turn to these broader diplomatic developments.

The development of Moroccan immigration policy as foreign policy

The criteria governing the 'exceptional regularisation' that began on January 1st 2014 were set out in a communiqué issued by the Ministère Charge des Marocains Résidents à l'Étranger et des Affaires de la Migration in November 2013. Six categories of foreign nationals are eligible to apply:

- Spouses of Moroccan nationals with at least 2 years residence
- Foreign couples resident legally for at least 4 years
- Children of the previous two categories
- Foreign nationals with work contracts of at least two years
- Foreign nationals demonstrating at least 5 years of continuous residence in Morocco
- Seriously ill foreign nationals who were in Morocco before December 31st 2013.

Successful applicants will be issued with a resident permit for one year, than may be renewed. The same communiqué also established the infrastructure for

examining these claims which involved the opening of a new 'bureaux des étrangers' in each prefecture and province.

The nature of these arrangements and the criteria for selection have been criticised, particularly by some migrants organisations as too restrictive. The requirement for five years of residence in Morocco for undocumented migrants is much more stringent than recent regularisations in Spain and Italy, for example, though it does follow the 1998 regularisation in France, which set the same limit. It is obviously very difficult to demonstrate presence on the territory for those who have been undocumented, though much depends on the ways in which these criteria are implemented and the ways that appeals are dealt with. Anecdotal evidence suggests that significant numbers of applicants are being rejected, but the final rejection rate cannot be too high or the Moroccan government will lose the substantial political capital it has gained in announcing the regularisation. The Conseil National des Droits de l'Homme announced the creation of a national appeals commission on June 26th that will begin to consider all applications that have been rejected so far.

It is already clear, however, that the regularisation cannot be interpreted or understood in isolation. Analysis of developments in foreign policy, in particular, suggest a more optimistic assessment of the sustainability of the recent commitment to migrants' rights. Recent changes in Morocco's geopolitical orientation are substantial. Although Morocco's international relations have always been and will no doubt continue to be dominated by the significance of relations to the north, new developments to the South suggest a significant change of emphasis. Since independence Moroccan emigration has always been dominantly towards the north, initiated during colonial times but further emphasised by the signature of a slew of labour migration agreements with European countries in the early 1960s. This culminated in the signature of a Mobility Partnership between Morocco and the European Union in June 2013, which will ultimately lead to a degree of free movement between Morocco and the EU.

Economically, the EU has always been Morocco's main trading partner. This was formalised in an initial commercial agreement in 1969 and developed with successive association agreements, culminating in negotiations for a 'Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area' launched in March 2013, which should result in the formal integration of Morocco into the European common market. In political terms, the decision taken under Hassan II, in 1984 to leave the African Union in protest at the membership of the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) was soon followed by a formal application to join the European Union, in July 1987 and though this was soon rejected ongoing negotiations are intended to extend the four central freedoms of movement of the EU to Morocco. Although this is likely to take many years, the advanced status conferred on Morocco in 2008 suggests that it will be one of the first countries in the Southern

Mediterranean region to develop such strong links with the EU, which fall just short of actual membership.

The recent conclusion of these significant political and economic agreements is perhaps one of the motivating factors for the new openness of the Moroccan political establishment to the south. This has been driven by a series of high profile visits undertaken by Mohammed VI. In February 2014 he undertook his most recent trip to Mali, Ivory Coast, Guinea Conakry and Gabon. This was his fourth visit to sub-Saharan Africa since early 2013. Much was made of the possibility of a 'Grand Return' of Morocco to the African Union, at its meeting in January 2014 and, although this did not actually happen, Mbarka Bouida, the junior foreign minister was present in Addis Ababa for the meeting of the AU and held a number of bilateral meetings outside the main conference.

This interest in establishing relations with sub-Saharan Africa is of course not entirely new. Hassan II's much repeated description of Morocco as having its roots in Africa but its foliage breathing in Europe suggests an awareness of the essential geopolitical link that Morocco plays. But this was never backed up with visits to the south of the intensity of his son in recent months. These visits are obviously political, bolstered by the need to find additional support for Morocco's position on the Western Sahara.

This change in diplomatic priorities is also very significantly motivated by economic concerns – in Mali, Mohammed VI signed 17 separate economic agreements. Morocco's budgetary report for 2014 recorded a rise in exports to sub-Saharan Africa to 12.8 billion dirhams in 2012. Although this still does not rival exports of over 100 billion dirhams to the EU in the same year, trade with sub-Saharan Africa is growing rapidly; exports were less than 2 billion dirhams in 2002, a more than ten-fold increase in ten years, to the point where sub-Saharan Africa now accounts for 7 percent of Moroccan international trade.

The new immigration policy must be understood in this changing political and economic context. Greater respect for the human rights of migrants from countries of Sub-Saharan Africa makes sense at a time when the Moroccan state is forming closer relationships with those countries. This is a far more positive trend. More regular diplomatic engagement with countries to the south suggests that the policy is motivated by a more genuine concern for the rights of migrants from those places.

Previous Moroccan migration policy has been interpreted as a reactive response to European Union pressure to control migration to Europe. It is difficult to interpret the regularisation in the same way. Given the majority of respondents in our research who declared an interest in reaching Europe, a finding not uncommon in research of this nature, regular status may facilitate that. The regularisation is not therefore in the obvious interests of European states wishing to reduce immigration from Morocco. Yet reducing the numbers of

undocumented migrants in the country will allow Moroccan border control to direct attention elsewhere. The regularisation may also allow the Moroccan authorities to develop greater understanding of the pattern of migration to Morocco. Both justifications suggest that this is a much more proactive policy than has been the case in previous years.

Conclusion

In this case, it appears that Sayad's analysis is once again accurate; immigration does reveal how a state 'thinks itself'. The radical change in Moroccan immigration policy, introduced by Mohammed VI in September 2013 suggests a change in the way that Morocco thinks of itself – less orientated towards the North and more receptive to its Southern neighbours than it has been over the decade that new patterns of immigration have become established. Morocco has developed new economic and political priorities that have resulted in an increase in high profile diplomatic links with the South.

This form of geopolitical culture is obviously not new in Morocco, but coming at a time of radical change in the approach to immigration it does suggest a significant development. Without the broader shifts in geopolitical orientation doubts about the ways in which the regularisation is taking place may have more solid foundations. But since immigration policy fits so obviously with broader geopolitical changes, the initial optimism that this marks a substantial change in approach to immigration appears well founded.

Political arguments are already being aired in Morocco, yet an academic assessment of Morocco's 'radically new' immigration policy can only be made once the regularisation process has been completed at the end of the year. This will allow an assessment of the impact of the appeals commission and some assessment of the changes that will be necessary in terms of integration, particularly within the education system and the labour market. What is clear at this half way point is that the new policy represents a very significant evolution from a reactive, EU driven agenda to a much more proactive response that reflects on the country's broader international priorities.

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