**Telling Histories of the Present: Postcolonial Perspectives on Morocco’s ‘Radically New’ Migration Policy**

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In September 2013, King Mohammed VI announced sweeping reforms to Morocco’s migration policy that promised to break with decades of repressive border control, respect human rights, and open the path to integration for migrants across the country. In this introductory article, we outline the insights that postcolonial studies offers to understanding the ‘radically new’ migration policy in Morocco, and what such insights might add to the study of (North) African migration policy and politics more generally. Examining Morocco’s migration policy as it ‘actually exists’, the articles in this special issue decenter European actors and narratives, prioritise everyday and informal practices, and privilege subaltern accounts, to bring into view a complex migratory landscape that undermines the Eurocentric categories of ‘externalisation’ and ‘transit’ and that challenges presentist accounts of African migration as ‘new phenomenon’ or as ‘crisis’. We contend that these articles constitute an archive of what Ann Laura Stoler (2016) calls ‘colonial histories of the present’, narratives animated by imperialism’s afterlives. Telling these present-day histories provokes a reckoning with the ‘colonial presences’ that influence migration politics today, at the macro-level in relations between former metropolitan and colonized countries, the national level where implementation is subject to the central government’s strategic needs, and the micro-level where racialised, gendered migrants are subjected to quotidian violence. To conclude, we reflect on how such histories of the present offer alternatives spaces of belonging and more expansive definitions of North African subjects.

Keywords: migration governance; decolonial; North Africa; humanitarian border; Mediterranean migration; transit migration

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**Introduction**

On 10th September 2013, following a summer of migrant deaths and humanitarian protest, King Mohammed VI announced sweeping reforms to Morocco’s migration policy. Aimed at breaking decades of repressive border control, the sovereign called for a ‘radically new’, human rights-based approach, opening the path to integration and regularisation of migrants in the country. Rejecting the moniker of ‘Europe’s policeman’, the new policy sought to demonstrate the Moroccan state’s autonomy from European political agendas and become an exemplar among Maghrebi states struggling to contain migration toward Europe. Applauded by early observers, the implementation of the new migration policy has brought some remarkable progress in the status and treatment of foreigners in some parts of the country, though violence in Morocco’s northern frontier has continued unabated as European partners stress the need for increased border security. In addition, public discourse and policy guidelines emphasising Morocco’s renewed commitment to migrant human rights have been coupled with a new wave of authoritarian backlashes towards Moroccan protestors and journalists.

The new migration policy also impacted the trajectory of research. In much of the literature on border enforcement and migration management in the Mediterranean, Europe is the object of study. Such analyses gloss the participation of so-called ‘transit states’ like Morocco, casting Europe as chief geopolitical actor whose political, economic, and cultural rationales direct efforts to control mobility beyond European borders. Likewise, it elides the fact that, for the vast majority of African migrants, their desired destination is another African country, rather than a European one. Not only does a Euro-centric analysis provide limited explanation for the contradictions and tensions inherent in ‘actually existing’ border enforcement and migration management, but, as postcolonial scholars have long argued, it reproduces colonial narratives of Europe as the prime agent of history (Chakrabarty 2000; Quijano 2007).

The decisiveness of the new migration policy, along with postcolonial critique receiving belated attention in migration studies writ large, has prompted consideration of the Moroccan state’s priorities as (at least partly) autonomous from those of its European partners. A handful of recent studies have examined the geopolitical dimensions of the new migration policy from the vantage of Morocco, interrogating the strategic potential of the reform in light of its relationship with Europe and Morocco’s recent ‘pivot’ toward closer diplomatic and economic ties to other African states (Cherti and Collyer 2015; Messari 2018). Others have examined migration policy as a tool of Moroccan state-building, highlighting the policy’s role in legitimizing authoritarian states (Ferrie and Alioua 2017; Natter, this issue). Until now, these analyses have primarily drawn upon the formal archive of policy, law, or national and international organizational discourse, sources insufficient to represent the diverse sites, actors, techniques, and targets of border enforcement and migration management in the Mediterranean region and much of the African continent. Furthermore, the geographic shift from a focus on European states (and the EU) to a focus on the Moroccan state neglects postcolonial criticism’s more important insights, one of which asserts that geopolitics should be analysed at ‘lower’ scales through everyday encounters or embodied in the subaltern migrant to adequately capture policy-in-practice rather the policy-in-the ideal (Enloe 2014; El Qadim 2015). Another relevant critique finds that a national-level scalar analysis relies on Euro-centric and colonially constructed categories such as the ‘autonomous nation-state’, a fiction that occludes contradictions internal to the state and ignores the longue durée of cross-border intimacies that constitute the entire region (Braudel 1995; Cooper and Stoler 1997; Khatibi [1983] 2019).

This special issue examines Morocco’s new migration policy as it ‘actually exists’ through everyday practices and encounters among migrants, state agents, NGO workers, and ordinary Moroccan citizens. It reveals the complex web of relations that organise the migration landscape beyond the trope of the monolithic state and reflects the longer histories of entanglement that shape migrants’ experiences moving across this landscape. We contend that these articles collectively constitute an archive of what Ann Laura Stoler (2016) calls ‘colonial histories of the present’, narratives animated in part by imperialism’s afterlives. Most of the authors in this collection draw upon ethnographic sources -- ranging from Moroccan Ministry of Interior officials to migrant leaders to European religious volunteers -- to challenge accounts situating either the EU or the Moroccan state as a single, unified actor in migration management. They also frame discussions about the capacities and constraints of the Moroccan state to control migrant mobility, and expose the limits and potential for migrants to integrate as promised under the new policy. Finally, these articles trouble migration studies’ reliance on received categories as the starting place for analysis. In particular, ‘externalisation’ and ‘transit’ appear as newly emergent, but, in fact, emanate from the same power-knowledge matrix as ‘metropole’ and ‘colony’. Likewise, the figure of ‘the migrant’ denotes a universal identity for persons on the move, collapsing the diversity of statuses, motivations, resources, and subjectivities that shape the migratory experience. Taken together, this collection underscores how migration policy – even humanitarian policy-- reifies difference, distributes power along familiar, uneven lines, and constrains migrant people’s political possibilities and life chances. Such findings complicate simplistic accounts of the Euro-African border as either imperialism in a new guise or as a definitive break from the colonial past, instead apprehending the spaces of the migrant subject as striated by multiple colonial formations that condition-- but do not determine-- contemporary struggles over identity and belonging in place (Stoler 2016; Trouillot 1991).

In this introduction to the special issue, we outline the ways in which postcolonial studies provides unique insights and tools for telling such ‘histories of the present’ in migration scholarship. Morocco constitutes a privileged vantage point to conduct such an analysis because of its interstitial position at ‘the locus of multiple converging imperialisms and state formations that have rendered it both a site of ongoing confrontation and conflict and of creative and theoretical production that has defined the twentieth century’ (El Guabli and Jarvis, 2018: 2). Analysing migration policy in Morocco therefore confronts scholars with a context shaped by present-day European political and economic influence, tense political relations between the country’s centre and its marginalised regions, territorial disputes with Spain, ongoing conflicts with Algeria and the Western Sahara, and, also, histories of conquest, occupation, and border tension that have characterised the Mediterranean region in general and Morocco in particular.

The introduction proceeds in four parts. Part one provides the context in which this special issue intervenes by tracing the development of border and migration policy as both a project of European intervention and an expression of Moroccan strategic manoeuvring. Part two unpacks how postcolonial studies has informed (or failed to inform) studies of migration between Europe and its ‘neighbours’, making the argument that decolonizing migration studies as a power-knowledge system entails scrutiny of mainstream analytical categories to denaturalise the histories (or ahistories) that their uncritical application supports. Part three highlights how migrants’ subaltern knowledges provide a privileged viewpoint from which to apprehend the geographic and historical breadth of transnational mobility control between Africa and Europe, and how Morocco’s new policy fits within this larger context. One insight that emerges contributes a more robust and historically situated engagement with race, an arena neglected or undertheorized in Morocco, the Maghreb, and other African states (El Hamel 2012; Pierre 2012). The final section discusses the contributions of each author as they scrutinise the new migration policy’s implications for reinforcing or reorganising relations of power at the level of the Moroccan state, in intimate interactions between migrants and other migration agents, and under the cover of informality or invisibility. The findings in these articles gesture to transhistorical and transnational processes that obtain in Moroccan migration politics today. To conclude we reflect on what this special issue has to offer our understandings of the workings of the Moroccan state, of African migration to and through Morocco, and how a postcolonial lens sheds light on the larger North African and Mediterranean migration landscape despite differences in state forms, migration policies in action, and other local particularities.

**The Long History of Moroccan Migration Politics**

In mainstream scholarly and policy representations, Morocco is often understood fundamentally as a country of emigration; only recently has it been transformed to a country of transit, and, finally, of immigration. This mainstream depiction, however, is largely reductive of the complex positions that Morocco has occupied within Mediterranean and African migratory landscapes, and occludes longer histories of invasion, empire and colonialism that have marked Moroccan and North African history more generally. Morocco’s own precolonial empire was intimately tied to regional mobility, including the trans-Saharan slave trade (El Hamel 2012). The onset of French and Spanish colonialism, culminating with the institution of the protectorates in 1912, durably restructured mobility within and beyond the country both by triggering a substantial north-south migration from European metropoles to Morocco’s urban centres, and by fostering the movement of Moroccan workers across the colonial empire (De Haas 2005; Lopez Garcias 2012). After achieving independence in 1956, an economic boom drew more Moroccan workers to Europe, reversing the direction of transnational migration from south to north. In the 1970s, economic recession in Europe shifted perceptions of Morocco from a source of cheap labor to a ‘country of origin’ and ‘transit’ for ‘undesired’ migrants, provoking new or tightened immigration controls in European states (De Haas 2005). Meanwhile, Morocco sought to expand its own territory, annexing Western Sahara in 1975, displacing the local population, and setting into motion a long-simmering geopolitical crisis that remains unresolved today (Zoubir and Benabdallah-Gambier 2004).

Especially after the signature of the Schengen agreement in 1985 and the generalisation of European visa policies in the early 1990s, the pressure of European authorities over migration control transformed Morocco into a testing ground for their border externalisation project. Externalization defines multi-national projects of border control as ‘a series of extraterritorial activities in sending and in transit countries at the request of the (more powerful) receiving states (e.g., the United States or the European Union) for the purpose of controlling the movement of potential migrants’ (Menjivar 2014: 357). Despite European pressures, Morocco has shown a firm intention to protect its own diasporic interests, and to leverage border relations to advance other foreign policy interests, like the territorial disputes with Spain over the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. This has resulted into a committed, albeit strategically intermittent, collaboration with the EU and its member states over border control (El Qadim 2015; Zaragoza-Christiani 2016).

Morocco’s participation in border control took a more proactive stance in the early 2000s, when the Moroccan Ministry of Interior formally adopted a border surveillance strategy in 2002 and the Moroccan parliament approved law 02-03 a year later (Gazzotti 2019). The new migration law criminalised irregular entry and exit from the country, as well as the facilitation of irregular emigration (Khrouz 2016b; Natter 2014). Although this policy reform clearly reflected the influence of European pressures for border externalisation, the approval of law 02-03 also allowed Morocco to establish itself as a key player in the management of migration in the Western Mediterranean, to accrue its value as a partner for European actors, and to forge new diplomatic alliances in the wake of almost twenty years of diplomatic isolation (Natter 2014). The approval of law 02-03 inaugurated a decade marked by increasing securitisation of migration governance. Although border enforcement was also channelled to contain Moroccan irregular border crossers, public discourse and policy increasingly framed illegality as a ‘Sub-Saharan’ matter (Natter 2014). Moroccan police forces widely adopted violent methods to deter ‘potential border crossers’ racialised as Sub-Saharans, including massive raids against migrant people in the forests surrounding the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, but also in other parts of the country, followed by forced displacement to the border with Algeria (Pian 2009). The systematic abuse of migrant rights mobilised the solidarity of Moroccan civil society organisations, who began to assist migrant people and denounce the consequences of border externalisation policies on a national and international level. The crackdown on migrant presence also triggered the formation of migrant-led organisations, engaged in defending their rights in Morocco against repressive border control practices (Alioua 2011; Magallanes-Gonzalez, this issue).

A decade after the approval of law 02-03, Moroccan migration policy underwent a further, decisive shift. On 10th September 2013, King Mohammed VI announced his Royal High Orientations for a new migration policy. The announcement came one day after the presentation of five critical reports compiled by local and international civil society organisations on the state of migrants’ rights in Morocco to the UN Committee on the Rights of all Migrant Workers (see Jimenez Alvarez, Espineira Gonzales and Gazzotti, this issue), and one day after the publication of a similar report authored by the Moroccan CNDH. The CNDH report called for ‘a radically new immigration and asylum policy’ by which Moroccan authorities would respect the existing legislation on migrants’, refugees’ and asylum seekers’ rights, launch a campaign to regularise migrants without legal status, create a policy of integration in Moroccan society, and give broader consideration to civil society organisations (CNDH 2013). The announcement of King Mohammed VI was followed by a rapid sequence of events. In January 2014, a regularisation campaign was launched and implemented in collaboration with Moroccan and migrant civil society organisations. 23096 undocumented migrant people were granted residency permits over the course of the year (MCMREAM 2015 in Benjelloun 2017), followed by a second campaign in 2017. The government proposed legislation on migration, asylum, and the fight against human trafficking, and the Ministry of Moroccans Residing Abroad was endowed with the additional mandate of managing ‘Migrant Affairs’. Some timid steps were taken to facilitate the integration of foreigners in Moroccan public services – like the enrolment of children in public schools, which heavily relied on the support of both European and local civil society organisations. In addition, violence against migrant people in cities far away from the border and deportations to the desert at the border with Algeria were also provisionally discontinued (GADEM 2018). In December 2014, the government announced a National Strategy on Immigration and Asylum (SNIA, in the French acronym), which created an institutional framework whereby ‘civil society’ and European partners would aid in implementation of the new policy’s integrative measures (Gazzotti 2019).

Despite these actions, the contradictory nature of the ‘humane’ Moroccan migration policy became apparent the day after the end of the first regularisation campaign in 2015, when Moroccan militaries raided the forests surrounding the Spanish enclave of Melilla, arresting around 1200 people that were subsequently displaced to the centre and south of Morocco (FIDH and GADEM 2015). The continuing violence in the north of the country and its resurgence to other urban centres in 2018 underscores the tensions within Morocco’s migration policy between humanitarian aspirations and its lack of legal force (with the exception of the legal provisions on human trafficking) and lukewarm integration programs (GADEM 2018). Public rhetoric about the human rights commitment of Morocco in the field of migrant rights have gone hand in hand with the criminalisation of civil society figures known for their outspoken criticism about violence against migrants (Frontline Defenders 2020; Gazzotti 2019).

**Beyond externalisation: Decolonising migration studies**

The Moroccan initiative to formulate migration policy and the successes and contradictions that characterise its implementation controvert Euro-centric accounts of border ‘externalisation’. Postcolonial scholarship critiques the deployment of Euro-centric concepts (which are produced by European scholars and emanate from European contexts) to non-European countries which are subsequently found lacking (Chakrabarty 2000). Postcolonial methodologies challenge the application of such concepts as the practice of ‘history by analogy’, lacking in analytical rigor and reifying binaries such as centre/periphery, developed/developing, and origin/destination (Mamdani 1996; Stoler 2016).[[1]](#endnote-1)

In migration studies, the concept of externalisation has come under fire from a number of scholars as one such colonial concept that narrates Europe not only as the locus of history but its chief protagonist (El Qadim 2014; Tyszler 2019). At the same time, externalisation implies a presentism that elides the histories inflecting the contemporary moment. For example, Aino Korvensyrja (2017) demonstrates how even critical studies dehistoricise externalisation as an expression of novel forms of European extraterritorial sovereignty, though European powers have been subverting African states’ autonomy for centuries. Martin Lemberg-Pedersen (2019) connects today’s European mobility regimes (which simultaneously encourage precarious labor migration and erect blockades to prevent it as constituting ‘modern-day slavery’) to European facilitation and suppression of the transatlantic slave trade in the same region. This is not coincidental, Lemberg-Pedersen argues, but a “continuation of the organising logics of the ‘colonial matrix of power’” that projects European innocence and reproduces Orientalist constructions of the Maghreb as feminized, submissive, and acted upon (Lemberg-Pedersen 2019, 248; Said 1978).

Rejecting externalization’s uni-directional trajectory of power, postcolonial scholar Nora El Qadim (2014) calls for analyses that take into account the ‘dynamics in which officials from so-called origin or transit countries outside of the EU have also played a role’ in setting migration policy priorities (245). As a result, a number of studies have begun to ask what analyses of EU partner states may reveal about ‘how the state thinks of itself’ (Cherti and Collyer 2015). In the case of Morocco, studies have demonstrated the strategic value of Morocco’s cooperation with Europe, which includes access to favourable trade relations and the muting of European condemnation of Morocco’s latter-day colonial occupation of Western Sahara (Gillespie 2010). In addition, the announcement of the new migration policy in 2013 has been interpreted by scholars as a way for Morocco to strengthen its diplomatic ties with the rest of Africa (Cherti and Collyer 2015; Natter 2018), and to respond to the ‘international shaming’ that Morocco suffered following the publication of a series of critical reports on border violence by NGOs (Norman 2016, 430). On the domestic front, the widely lauded ‘humanitarian’ policy was rolled out during the same period that the Moroccan government was cracking down on political dissidents in the *Hirak* movement (Norman 2020), violently quashing women-led demonstrations for water rights in agricultural oases (Salime 2019), and, most recently, enforcing ‘morality laws’ prohibiting abortion and extra-marital sex (Oppenheim 2019). As Katharina Natter argues in this issue, migration policy has become an important tool for state-making at domestic and international scales.

Moving away from Euro-centric concepts does more than ‘provincialise’ Europe or expose the rationales of Morocco as a migration policy actor: close attention to the Moroccan context de-essentialises the Moroccan state, revealing the tensions and contradictions inherent within it, as well as the disconnect between the aspirations of policy and its implementation and effects (El Qadim 2014). Focusing on informal practices instead of formal policy reveals the multi-scalar and multi-dimensional nature of the border and migration management landscape, implicating unexpected actors as agents of European and Moroccan strategic interests who, at times, act as ‘petty sovereigns’ to reinterpret these objectives in light of their own aims (Jones 2012; Tyszler, this issue, Magallanes-Gonzalez, this issue). Such approaches also expose the instability of the migration concepts ‘transit’ and ‘transit state’. Transit migration suggests continuous movement rather than friction, glossing the fragmented, extended, and immobilising nature of transnational migration (Collyer 2010), and enfolding vast space-times into an undifferentiated zone between origin and destination. Similarly, the category ‘transit state’ hides the fact that many migrant people are (often reluctantly) settling in conditions suggestive of containment rather than passage (Gazzotti and Hagan, this issue; Gross-Wyrtzen 2020b). Further, transit, like externalisation, is ahistorical. It casts transnational migration as a contemporary phenomenon, justifying border securitisation to deal with emergent ‘crises’ whose causes originate in institutional inadequacies, corruption, and political instability in migrants’ countries of origin without reference to external interventions through the colonial project and development programs. Focusing on the everyday and specific rather than the idealised and universal puts paid to such narratives, enabling scholars to map out trajectories of migration politics that knit Europe and Africa into a single analytical space (Stoler 2016). It is from that space that one can glimpse what Stoler (2016) calls ‘colonial presences’, the afterlives of colonial relations of power (and knowledge) that inflect migration politics and migrant socialities. Colonial presences are discernible in the migration context as thick vestiges – such as when former colonial powers try to enact a policy to subordinate Morocco to their own border interests -- and in intimate interactions, as in the case of Catholic workers assisting women endangered by migration policies (Tyszler, this issue).

**Subaltern encounters with imperialism’s ruins**

Decentring European cartographies and categories, and privileging practices over policy can draw attention to non-dominant accounts excluded from the official archive because they are narrated by actors not recognised as central to power or because they are expressed in informal or dialectical registers. These subaltern accounts reveal the intersubjective relations of power that relay between the scale of the global and the intimate to underscore *connections*, rather than distinctions, that constitute these spaces (Stoler 1995; Pratt and Rosner 2006). Subaltern perspectives are attuned to these intimacies across time, space, and scale because subaltern people are situated at their articulation. In migration studies, the ‘critical connections between here and there, past and present, are often embodied in the figure of the migrant’ (Main et al, 2013, 136) whose mobilities frequently track along routes embedded in the landscape over centuries of encounter, exchange, and exploitation. This is not to suggest that the figure of the migrant is a singular one, or that all migrant people have the same experience of subalterity; rather, attentiveness to migrants’ varied encounters with colonial presences along such routes makes it possible to reckon with the ‘multiple temporalities in which people live, what is past but not over; how the articulation of past and present may recede and resurface; how colonial relations are disparately and partially absorbed into social relations’ (Stoler 2016, 25). On the move, migrant people encounter material evidence of ‘imperialism’s ruins’ (Stoler 2008) in the form of century-old mission outposts converted to humanitarian reception centres (Tyszler, this issue); they traverse or are dispersed to cities in the Western Sahara; they forge a multilingual *argot* that archives recent and long-standing antagonisms and rapports (Bajalia, this issue); and they draw from these historical relations to assemble social forms to make claims to Moroccan and international polities (Gross-Wyrtzen 2020a; Magallanes-Gonzales, this issue).

In addition, migrant people’s experiences and narratives forward the importance of race (and its intersection with gender) within the migration context. Migration studies has been late to consider the ways in which race intervenes in histories of the present. Recently, race has become a focus of analysis in Europe where political struggles to define European identity and culture have reassembled colonial repertoires of otherness (Balibar 2004; Stoler 2016). In the Maghrebi and African context, however, race is often dismissed as a Euro-American construct, while local or indigenous politics of difference play out through notions of ethnicity, religion, and gender (Pierre 2012; Wyrtzen 2015). Only quite recently have a handful of studies begun to take race seriously (e.g., El Hamel 2012). Ethnographers of West and Central African migrants in Morocco (and elsewhere in North Africa) have pushed for more open discussions of race as a central logic of border enforcement and migration management (Alexander 2019; Tyszler 2019; Gross-Wyrtzen 2020a). Migrants’ diagnosis of migration policy as resonant with older colonial mobility regimes, and their linking of today’s border violence to the racialised violence of the slave trade and colonial dispossession, require migration studies not only to take race seriously as a factor determining the mobilities and life-chances of migrants, but to use it as a lens through which we are able to discern imperialism’s ruins as they impinge upon the landscape and shape the politics of the present (Gross-Wyrtzen 2020a).

In sum, postcolonial methodology decenters European accounts of both history and the present, and subjects analytical categories to renewed scrutiny. It looks beyond formal archives to informal practices, agents, and spaces of power, to integrate subaltern accounts of state violence, transnational domination, and struggle. This allows us to shed light on connections between places and actors of domination that colonial knowledges have rendered not only separate but disparate, and complicates mainstream, presentist accounts by telling a history of domination as one pervaded by colonial presences, embodied forms of suffering, and sustained, creative resistances.

**Articles in the special issue as ‘colonial histories of the present’**

The scholars whose work appears in this collection explicitly and implicitly apply insights from postcolonial theory to investigation of Morocco’s new migration policy, revealing a migration landscape populated by Maghrebi, European, sub-Saharan actors engaged in a multiplicity of relations, new and old, and ranged along a continuum from coercion to care. Several themes emerge that highlight the social, spatial and temporal relations that gave rise to the policy and that continue to limit or enhance its liberatory possibilities.

Moving away from Euro-centric analysis, the first theme addresses the workings of the Moroccan state and its agenda for expanding its role in the greater Mediterranean and African regions. Drawing from interviews with Moroccan state and humanitarian officials implicated in the policy’s articulation and implementation, several articles expose the curious relationships between liberalism and authoritarianism in Moroccan governance. Natter argues that Morocco’s authoritarian structure enabled it to impose the new, liberal migration policy, burnishing the state’s progressive image internationally and shoring up the monarchy’s legitimacy in the post-Arab Spring era. In her article, Sara Benjelloun argues that geopolitical considerations, which included smoothing relations with other African states (strained over the disputed territories in the Sahara), were key motivations for the new migration policy’s announcement and required ‘flexibility’ in its implementation. While actors from multiple ministries, non-state organisations, and civil society worked together to provide migrants with legal papers under the new policy, the palace (through the Ministry of Interior) sometimes intervened to stall or accelerate particular actions depending on real time events taking place on the national or regional stage, taking even high ranking officials in key ministries by surprise. In their intervention, Mercedes Jiménez Alvarez, Keina Espiñeira and Lorena Gazzotti argue that the legal ambiguities conditioning the uneven extension of human rights to migrants should be contextualised as part of a longer history of Morocco’s (partial) transition to liberalism, where human rights rhetoric also plays a performative role in the recrafting of the international image of the country. Framing the tensions and contradictions of the new migration policy in this light allows us to read the reform not as unfinished or incomplete, but as entangled in a larger project of state formation that aims to preserve existing power structures while increasing its relevance in international contexts through participation in transnational human rights frameworks.

The second theme coalesces around spaces and practices often invisible within the formal dictates of migration policy. In their analysis of forcible dispersal of migrants throughout the country, Lorena Gazzotti and Maria Hagan’s qualitative study reveals a cartography of the border that extends to even remote cities in the Moroccan interior. Beyond the spectacular violence of forced displacement, containment works in more subtle ways by compounding dispossession as a technique to border bodies racialised as illegal and undeserving. These dispossessions (of belongings and shelter, and displacements to cities dispossessed of assistance or livelihood opportunities) produce a condition of unbearability which comes to characterise black migrants’ daily lives. In her investigation of voluntary returns of migrants to their home countries, Anissa Maâ shows how European actors such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have become crucial to stabilizing the ensemble of local, national, and international partners, coordinating much of day-to-day operations. Prior to the 2013, the IOM, which is affiliated with the United Nations, carried out removals of sub-Saharan migrants through close, though informal, cooperation with and direction from the Ministry of Interior. After 2013, IOM strengthened coordination with humanitarian actors and migrant leaders while Moroccan state’s involvement receded into the shadows. Thus, Maâ argues, ‘the institutionalisation [of voluntary return programs] is linked to the perpetuation and normalisation of state violence against migrants’ even as this violence is enacted by non-state, and especially humanitarian actors (page). Elsa Tyszler’s contribution shows how intimate, private spaces— from the hospital examining room to the body— are sites saturated with power and violence. Through observations and interviews with migrant women receiving aid from a Catholic charity, it is clear that European religious workers participate in the ‘humanitarian border’ by policing women’s reproductive and mobility choices, even as migrant women resist or renegotiate these efforts. Religious workers use racial and paternalist criteria to determine deservingness among migrant women and to reframe migrant women’s behaviours in vulnerable situations as matters of personal responsibility.

The final theme highlights the space-times of belonging and exclusion. Several authors challenge the notion that either inclusion or exclusion is static, but rather is an unstable and constantly negotiated process. In his long-term ethnography of migrants *in wait*, George Bajalia focused on two events occurring in Tangier during winter of 2018: a police raid on a migrant woman’s house, and an international football match between Libya and Nigeria. These events -- one highlighting state violence against racialised migrants and the other underscoring the transnational socialities that emerge in the wake of such violence-- demonstrate the shifting grounds of belonging that condition migrants’ multiple subjectivities. Cynthia Magallenes-Gonzalez’s ethnographic study underscores how migrant leaders in particular embody the tensions between integration and exclusion. She demonstrates how the impetus for and success of the new migration policy relied significantly on the activism and knowledge of these leaders, though they found themselves barred from moving up the ‘humanitarian aid industry’ ladder and remained financially precarious. These exploitative practices against migrant leaders engendered other forms of exploitation as leaders leveraged their positions to extract value from their communities by facilitating connections to smuggling networks, thus complicating distinctions between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ migrants and relativising the notion of migrant subalterity. Finally, the conversation between civil society activist Jackson Abena Banyomo and anthropologist Catherine Therrien about the former’s migrant journey constitutes a first-person account of the way illegalisation constrains the life opportunities of West and Central African migrants, and how receiving legal residency has given Abena Banyomo a more secure life in Morocco. By describing his pathway to regularisation, Abena Banyomo forwards important reflections about choice, agency and perseverance in migration. He highlights how his legal status opened new opportunities to pursue his own dream while ‘carry[ing] on helping others’ who remain shut out of accessing similar opportunities.

**Conclusion**

The articles in this collection and the themes they explore index the multiplicity of relations implicated in the control of West and Central African’s movements across borders. Shifting analysis from the EU to Morocco complicates studies of migration that persist in using border externalisation as a metric to understand migration in Morocco, uncovering how the authoritarian state is able to operate through liberal discourses and European partners to achieve its own ends, sometimes benefiting migrants and other times extracting value from them. At the same time, if Europe’s liberalism developed in the crucible of colonial and racial violence (Fanon 1952; Mills 1997), European discourses about human rights and democratic freedoms for migrants today are juxtaposed with Europe’s ever-increasing spending on border militarisation. Morocco is able to use its migration policy to expand its influence across Africa and diffuse diplomatic tensions. Careful analysis of how migration policy unfolds on the ground shines light on less visible aspects of border enforcement that entrap migrants in unbearable conditions and make them vulnerable to multiple forms of violence that range from *la chasse aux noirs* (the hunt for blacks) in the forests and cities of the north (Law 2014) to migrants’ abandonment in poor, disenfranchised cities in the south. Migrant activists have demonstrated against the violence of border enforcement in Morocco for nearly two decades, calling out Morocco’s anti-black racism and Europe’s refusal to open its doors to its former colonies, whose resources enriched Europe and made it a desirable destination in the first place. As humanitarian migration management became institutionalised after 2013, migrant leaders found themselves again at the bottom of a social and economic hierarchy dominated by Europeans and elite Moroccans.

The discussions forwarded by the articles in this special issue offer new avenues to advance academic discussions in both migration studies and North African studies. Bringing a postcolonial sensibility to migration studies—questioning mainstream categories, taking account of history, narrating from elsewhere--excavates imperialism’s ruins as they endure in the academic field and as they persist in actual migratory landscapes. To North African studies, this collection offers a way to rethink the Maghreb, not as a peripheral or isolated ‘island in the west’ (Kitlas 2019), but as a dynamic and unbounded region enmeshed in multiple cultures, histories, and struggles. Though the articles here focused on Morocco, they demonstrate that Maghrebi states are best understood relationally. This relational ontology of the Maghreb pushes studies beyond discrete comparisons of individual North African states and their polities to consider an expanded political field long shaped by human mobility. Today migration politics are not peripheral to North African politics, neither are migrants peripheral actors within North African polities. Many migrant people in these studies passed through or lived in Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya on their way to Morocco, and possess an embodied knowledge of Maghrebi space that surpasses that of many North African ‘natives’, prefiguring a distinctly (North) African, postcolonial cosmopolitanism of the future.

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1. Postcolonial scholarship, as a poststructural form of critique, examines the ways in which discourse shapes relations of power. These relations, in turn, are naturalized through universalizing histories which locate ‘the West’ as the space and agent of history. Furthermore, in a Hegelian framework, the West serves as midwife to facilitate the non-Western world’s passage to modernity and thus, into history, Stone, A. (2017). Hegel and Colonialism. *Hegel Bulletin,* 1-24. doi:10.1017/hgl.2017.17 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)