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Ricard Zapata-Barrero

ABSTRACT. This article puts forward a number of theoretical considerations relevant for understanding the relationship between immigration policies and the flows and settlement of Moroccan immigrants in Spain. The basic argument is that there is a combination of perceptions and realities that have to be taken into account in any analysis exploring the interface between migrants' plans and their actions and state policies.

The structure of this article will include two main parts. In section 1 the main patterns of the Moroccan immigrant group coming to Spain are presented, justifying its selection as a case study. In section 2 the basic results of a set of interviews with main stakeholders and Moroccan immigrants about immigration flows and Spanish policies are introduced. Finally, I will end with some theoretical considerations for further research.

KEYWORDS. Spain, Moroccan immigration, policies, immigration flows

Ricard Zapata-Barrero, PhD, is Associate Professor of Political Theory, Political and Social Science Department, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, Spain.

Address correspondence to: Ricard Zapata-Barrero, Political and Social Science Department, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Ramon Trias Fargas, 25-27, 08 005 Barcelona, Spain (E-mail: ricard.zapata@upf.edu).

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INTRODUCTION: SPAIN AS A CONSOLIDATED IMMIGRATION COUNTRY

Some years ago, the Spanish immigration situation was usually presented as though Spain was undergoing an important demographic change, transforming from an emigration country to an immigration country. Today immigration is a demographic reality, which is institutionally, socially and politically recognised. Although the country's foreign population still represents relatively low numbers compared to other European states (8.8% of the population in 2007),¹ this group has more than doubled in the space of five years. The economic and historical connections with Northern Africa and South America have mainly triggered immigration flows. Immigration has become an important political issue since 2000, when political parties started to include it in their electoral campaigns and a process of institutionalisation of immigration issues began after several legislative changes (Zapata-Barrero, 2003b). Immigration is also a public opinion reality, since it became one of the main concerns of Spanish citizens and is now considered to be one of the country's top-ranking problems.² Rather than the focus being on integration issues though, the political debate has centred on the management of immigration flows and the control of irregular immigration, turning opinion ambivalent when we compare border and integration perceptions (Zapata-Barrero, 2008).

The structure of this article will include two main parts. In section 1 the main patterns of the Moroccan immigrant group coming to Spain are presented, justifying its selection as a case study. In section 2 the basic results of a set of interviews with main stakeholders and Moroccan immigrants about immigration flows and Spanish policies are introduced. Finally, I will end with some theoretical considerations for further research.

MOROCCANS COMING TO SPAIN AND POLICY ANSWERS: MAIN PATTERNS

Due to increased border control in the Strait of Gibraltar and expulsions of illegal immigrants by Morocco, a new maritime route has developed more recently between Mauritania and the Canary Islands. In reaction, Spain is pursuing a double strategy. On the one hand, it sends humanitarian help to both the Canary Islands and Mauritania, to secure the human rights of the immigrants concerned, and on the other, it enforces control of its borders, by sending the Mauritanian government patrols to guard their

coastline. More importantly though, Spain signed an Agreement of Return with Mauritania, giving the Spanish authorities the opportunity to send immigrants back (Bárbulo, 2006). In March 2006 Brussels estimated that the number of people waiting in Mauritania to be shipped to the Canary Islands to be around 500,000. At the same time, some 30,000 immigrants are estimated to be waiting in Morocco and Algeria to storm the fences of Ceuta and Melilla (de Rituerto, 2006; 18).

The strategic location of these enclaves in the north of Morocco, at the crossroads between Africa and Europe, has triggered immigration flows from both Maghreb countries and Sub-Saharan Africa. The situation escalated in September and October 2005, when the enclaves witnessed large scale and coordinated attempts by African immigrants to cross the border by forcing their way through the barbed wire fences.³

Moroccans living in Spain represent 20.4% of the total of Moroccan immigrants in the EU (contrast this to 44.3% in France).⁴ There are demographic and historical reasons why they are a relevant group for the purpose of this analysis. Moroccans have accounted for the largest and most sustained increase of a migrant group in Spain and Europe over the last 25 years. The most important incentives to leave Morocco (push factors) are mainly financial. The poor conditions of the labour market in Morocco (López & García, 2004; 213–215) and difficulties of executing a life plan at home push people to decide to emigrate. The decision to go to Spain rather than other EU countries (pull factors) is mainly related to the historical and economic bonds in the Mediterranean region and Spain's political and economic evolution, both of which feed into the migrant imagination.

While initially it was the European Union that pressured Spain to control its borders, it is now Spain that increasingly pressures the European Union to consider border control as a European issue and not merely a Spanish one (Zapata-Barrero & de Witte, 2007). In this respect, we have to consider immigrants crossing the sea to come to "Europe" rather than to Spain. As a consequence of restrictive policies, legal immigration from Morocco has become more and more difficult and illegal immigration of Moroccans increased, creating not only real problems at the border, but also influences public opinion. Most Spanish people in this context have the image of the "*patera*" (or "*cayuco*") when thinking about immigrants and link illegal immigration to crime. According to the representative of the labour union, the entrance of Moroccan immigrants has been restricted because of Islamophobia. The respondent explains that when the *Partido Popular* government was determining the quota, it chose to sign bilateral agreements with Eastern European countries and Latin America, for

reasons of perceived cultural proximity. Although traditionally an important immigration country, Morocco has been denied such an agreement, because of Islamophobia (related to the events of September 11, 2001), while culturally, Moroccans are actually much closer to the Spanish than Eastern Europeans. This policy has a direct impact in legitimising negative perceptions towards Moroccan immigrants already living in Spain, establishing them as “unwanted immigration”. Sentiments of xenophobia and maurophobia within Spanish society do not seem to discourage Moroccan immigration flows.

Despite these restrictive attitudes and policies, immigration flows from Morocco continue to be important. Moroccan immigrants still represents 16.31% of the total foreign population in Spain, followed by Romanians (15.18%), and Ecuadorians (9.95%). In 2007, 53.26% of the Moroccan population held a permanent residence permit, demonstrating the consolidation of the Moroccan community in Spain.⁵

Starting with the effects of Spanish immigration policy on immigration flows from Morocco, politics imposes colonial and national identity criteria. Next to the inadequate mechanisms providing for regular immigration opportunities, irregular immigration is also encouraged by illegal contracting. Policies for regularization have also had an impact. Moroccans have been one of the main groups profiting from these regularizations. In the most recent round (between February and May 2005), which was mainly focused on the regularization of illegal workers, some 691, 655 immigrants applied for the regularization of their status. In total 573, 270 were accepted, 64, 697 of which were Moroccans. B. López García (2004; 213–215) argues in this context that since the visa requirements from 1991, the increase of Moroccans is mainly due to the different legalization rounds that gave irregular residing Moroccans legal residence permits. This would explain the peaks of Moroccan net immigration just after the regularization programs.

In this context it is unlikely that extra border controls will stop immigration from Morocco. The labor quota policy has also resulted in a specific social profile of Moroccan immigrants residing and working legally in Spain.⁶ The characteristics of Moroccan immigrants are: very young (on average 27.5 years old), mainly male (63.02%),⁷ with jobs in agriculture (25.79%), services (38.82%), construction (30.94%) and industry (4.43%). This is to be compared with 15.62% of this group being female and only 5.95% of them having a permanent employment contract.⁸

While the legal framework is important for understanding the flows and characteristics of immigrants from Morocco, their settlement has influenced the development of integration policies. The social integration of immigrants became an issue of public and political debate for the first time in 2000 when riots against Moroccan immigrant workers took place in El Ejido, a market-gardening town (*ciudad-cortijo*) in Southeast Spain (Zapata-Barrero, 2003a). The growth of the Moroccan community in Spain has resulted in their religious and cultural demands, thereby pushing the Spanish government to develop an integration policy as well. It should be noted though that in the political discourse there is a strong relationship between the Spanish identity-building process based on maurophobia and the immigration policy (de Lucas, 2002, 23–48; Martin Muñoz, 1996, 9-16; 2003). This tends to follow the tradition of *Hispanidad*, favoring a religion (Catholic) and a language (Spanish) (Zapata-Barrero, 2006). The terrorist attacks in Madrid 2004 have increased this reactive discourse and resulted in the desire to control the Muslim community and to avoid the presence of extreme imams, as mosques are feared to be centers for terrorism (Zapata-Barrero & Qasem, 2008). In this context there is a big gap between what the legal framework allows and what is really being done as regards religious infrastructure. In spite of having one of the most liberal laws for managing religious pluralism (Law 26/1992), Spain has many political and social difficulties in recognizing cultural and religious Islamic demands.

MOROCCAN IMMIGRATION FLOWS AND SPANISH POLICIES: PERCEPTIONS AND REALITIES⁹

When the only current policy is related to borders, and when this policy is evaluated in terms of control, there is a shared view that it has been a failure, since immigrants continue to arrive and use illegal routes in doing so. In any case, there is awareness that linking immigration policies with border control is not solely a Spanish decision, but rather a European Union exigency.

Morocco's immigrants combine personal and institutional information to build "their" perceptions, before deciding to migrate. Following different dimensions of the migratory process, we can highlight the following.

From Law and Order to Market Economy Foci

The change in government in March 2004 has had an impact on policy orientations. Before 2004, when the right wing *Partido Popular* (*Popular Party*) was in government, the focus was on security, with policies concentrated on restrictions, on “building barriers”. This focus is regarded as the main explanation of the existence of at least 800 irregular immigrants that required regularisation once the left wing party came into government in March 2004. It is broadly accepted that the restrictive immigration policy has encouraged the black economy and had negative results in terms of irregular immigration.

The stakeholders agree that the policy direction is now, with the *Partido Socialista* (*Socialist Party*) in government, quite different: from a Law and Order focus there has been a move towards one that links immigration to the labour market. That means that the policies are now concentrated on capacities for the absorption of immigration within the Spanish labour market. This new orientation has also changed the parameters of evaluation. To evaluate policies, then, involves an evaluation of immigrant integration into the labour market. This was the main focus of the last regularisation process, called the “normalisation process”, underlining that its purpose was to “normalise” the life of irregular immigrants already working in Spain in the informal economy (Cachón, 2006). However, the NGO interviewed does not see a clear or real change in policy, which continues to focus on border control.

Finally, it is commonly held amongst the different stakeholders that there is a link between policies, discourses and public opinion. Discourses are important, because they structure public opinion. Immigration in this context is highly politicised, in the sense that it belongs to the main dispute between government and opposition, having a negative effect in aligning public opinion. The stakeholders agree that immigration has been highly politicised, and thus there has not been a construction of real immigration policies. This has merely perpetuated the perception held by the public and politicians that immigration is a problem. The media also have an important role in this negative-perception building, linking immigration to problems, and legitimising public opinion.

Level of Awareness and Channels of Information

According to the representative of one immigrant association there is a link between knowledge of immigration policies and the Immigrants’

standard of living and their capacity to participate in the host society. The amount of information they have prior to arrival depends on their age, sex, level of education, level of participation in Morocco, etc. But in general, there is a general lack of knowledge, and when there is knowledge, the majority of it comes through informal channels.

The representative of the labour union explains that the Moroccans that come to Spain do not know about the immigration laws. The 'pull factor' in his opinion therefore is not Spanish immigration law, but the awareness of job opportunities. What people do know is that if they are caught without "papers" they can be expelled or repatriated automatically.

Information about immigration policy "once here" comes from immigrant associations, from students, the immigrant's participation in discussion groups, meeting and the internet. What is relevant in this context is that the immigrant only becomes aware of policies by their particular effect in the individual's own life.

Most actors agree that informal channels are the most important method by which awareness is raised. First of all, television and other media play a significant role. In this context the local policy maker argues that, compared to other nationalities that have come to Spain, it is possibly the Moroccans that are the best informed thanks to geographical proximity and television (most of them are from the North, from the Rif area). This means that many of them watch Spanish television and are thus made aware of information in general, but have no details.

Apart from television, large family chains also provide information, especially if families have already lived in Spain for some time. For example, information might come from family that send money home, visit home to demonstrate their wealth etc. (*la cuestión del triunfalismo familiar*, "the familiar triumphalism issue"). Finally, information might also come from human traffickers, telling their customers about regularisations and other relevant information about Spain.

The president of one of the Moroccan associations argues that immigrants also garner their knowledge from newspapers, which might cause some concern since the news is quite negative and dramatic. Despite this, many are not afraid and try their chances as though it were a lottery. Apart from the majority of informal channels, the president argues that there are also some formal channels. Official relations between the two countries are well presented thanks to visits by Spanish officials, nurturing a certain confidence. Other formal information channels have been the recent campaigns in Morocco aiming to inform would-be immigrants of the realities once in Spain, primarily that it is not easy to find a job.

“Pull Factor” vs. “Push Factor”

According to some interviewees there is a clear link between policies and flows. For instance, there is a common perception that the politics of the former government, which focused on Law and Order, resulted in an increase of irregular immigration flows. A critique of the former right-wing government also includes issues relating to how quotas were dealt with using cultural criteria. It is a clear sign of policy intention, when it is politically decided to bring Polish women instead of Moroccan women. For some civil society stakeholders, the favouring of some nationalities over others promotes a *pull factor*. For instance, the arrival of Ecuadorians is directly related to the fact that the government privileged this nationality in the annual quota and made this decision public.

Although immigration policy does affect immigration flows, other relevant factors are also related such as poverty, inequality (north-south) and globalisation.

The basic position is that the immigration law does not produce a “pull factor,” but rather poverty. Instead of being worried about the “pull factor”, the political concern must be on the so called “push factor”. In this sense, instead of considering Spain as a “country of attraction”, it is politically much more appropriate to recognise that there are countries that promote the “exit option” for political and financial reasons. Factors explaining the link between Moroccan immigration flows and policies are then mainly related to the country of origin, rather than on the current policy of the “country of reception.”

Diplomatic relationships and bilateral agreements play a prominent role as well. For instance, Moroccans continue to come by *patera* (small fishing boats), but to a much lesser extent. This is basically due to agreements with Morocco, and other exchanges between both countries. The left-wing (*Socialist Party*) is the first Spanish government that has made a real effort to negotiate with Morocco. In many countries of origin there is not even diplomatic relationship and Spanish diplomatic representation. Most governmental stakeholders consider that now is the time to reflect on the successes and failures of policy on immigration flows and to work together with the countries of origins.

Strategies to Circumvent Existing Policies

Moroccans are probably the best-informed immigrant group in terms of policy awareness, with information filtering mainly through informal

networks. But it is Moroccans that are now more often taking the safe route. They take an airplane with false documentation, or they know somebody that can let them pass through without asking for papers. Moroccan immigrants know that they will be expelled when intercepted in *patera*. They therefore want to arrive without being intercepted. In this sense, one national policy-maker interviewed recognises that the return policies are a good instrument since they create some doubt for the immigrant before making a decision to migrate to Spain.

In general, most Moroccans come here for financial reasons, since they have few opportunities in their own country to improve their circumstances. Moroccan immigrants use both formal (as tourists) and informal (maritime) routes. The national policy-maker also mentions that there are the so called “survival mechanisms”, which means that people come, stay irregularly and wait for a new round of regularisation. Cases of document falsification, and of mafia, related to human trafficking and drugs are also mentioned by most stakeholders. Finally, national policy-makers are also aware that most immigration flows into Spain are transitory migration (mainly from Senegal). The final aim is to cross the Pyrenees and to go to other EU countries.

Background in the Country of Origin

Immigrants tend to come from families with a tradition of migration to Europe. Others come from families that have previous internal migration experiences, mainly of a rural to urban nature, aimed at job-seeking. Younger males tend to make the decision to migrate to Spain or other European countries due to the difficulty of securing work in Morocco and the inherent insecurities of any particular form of employment once taken on. In this case, emigration to Europe belongs to a second phase of the family project, where internal migration within the home-country is the first.

The decision to emigrate is sometimes linked to an important family event, for example, the death of a father and thus loss of the main source of income. This imposes the decision to migrate so as to achieve better financial conditions. Most of those who come nowadays use the channel of family reunification, and, once regularised, re-use the reunification channel for other relatives. There is, then, what we can call a “non-stop family regularisation chain”. Emigrating is, therefore, a family project rather than a personal and individual decision.

For some, Spain tends to come second to other European countries in desired destination countries, preferences often including Belgium or France. Thus we can confidently suggest that language is also a very important factor alongside migration policies. If it were not for migration policies, one could say Moroccans would choose those countries that allow them to speak French.

Therefore, initially, Spain was not the destination country, but a transit country. The fact that some immigrants change their country of destination and ultimately stay in Spain is related both to difficulties presented by the other countries and the opportunity offered by the regularisation process in Spain. This information is provided by friends, which really do the first reception work of the host society.

Prior Knowledge of Relevant Spanish Policies

The main source of information is the friends' network. Often the ultimate destination is chosen according to where friends are already living. Most are from the same town in Morocco and are childhood friends. They usually have secondary and tertiary education and know almost everything about Spain's immigration situation, politics and society, because of television and the Spanish consulate.

Spain and Italy are the favoured destinations, because there is an awareness that people can obtain "permits" more easily there than in France, Germany and/or Holland. It is known that in these countries one can only enter through marriage and payment of large sums, but often the illusion of a good relationship is difficult to sustain.

Thus, in Spain migrants recognised the need for "survival mechanisms". A Moroccan immigrant interviewed explicitly says that "In Spain you can come without papers and work here in the black market. You have to suffer for 4 years or more to get papers, but after that everything is better".

The possibility of bringing family over (usually parents) when they reach the first "legal door" and renew their residence and work permits, accompanied by the attraction of the health system, adds extra incentives. A Moroccan immigrant interviewed in this context is bringing over his sick mother through the family reunification policy.

Entrance into Spain, First Accommodation and Work and Living Conditions

One of the Moroccan immigrants interviewed used a tourist visa to enter Ceuta and then crossed the Maritime border by ferry without his documents

being checked. Another immigrant who had managed to arrange university admission in Belgium says: "As I had a tourist visa for Belgium it was easy to cross the border with Spain by taking a ferry in Nador to Almeria". Thus visas given by one EU country can have an effect on other EU countries. This also confirms that Moroccan immigrants build their strategy for the migratory process by taking into account Member state disparities and differential policies.

The main information networks used in preparing the travel trajectory are friends, which also provide initial accommodation and help to find a first job. Thus, the embedding in networks is an important aspect of immigration. Some of those interviewed even recognise that the separation from friends is not easy and only occurs after the first job has been secured. One immigrant explained: "when I got my first job in Barcelona I started to rent a bed, no room or flat. It is impossible to rent a room or flat, very expensive and people are very racist here."¹⁰

Once accommodation in a friends' house is found, immigrants tend to enter the informal economy through restaurant work, bars, promotional work, fruit-picking and other jobs Spaniards do not want. An immigrant recounted what he earned at the beginning of his time in Spain: "18 Euros a day for working from 8.00 till 19.00. After some time working you can buy some clothes, rent a bed, buy a cell phone, call home, etc . . ."

Having worked in the informal economy (changing jobs within this sector), an immigrant then struggles towards better conditions and an extraordinary regularisation process, which itself can take three or more years. Once regularised, immigrants can enter the formal economy on short term contracts (three months), until they get a one year, and then a permanent, contract.

One Moroccan immigrant interviewed had an accident in Spain forcing him to be socially-dependent. It is worth to transcribe entirely his testimony: "In 2002 I had an accident, which made me paralysed on the right side. I like a lot the sea, and in weekends we often went to the Costa Brava with friends where we jumped in the water from the rocks. I jumped, but the others did not see it. Then a friend also jumped and landed on top of me. Soon I was unconscious and my friends brought me to the hospital with my sanitary card. As you know all people, including those without papers, have the right to have this card. It took me 2 years to recover. I went to different hospitals and lived in special care apartments in the hospital, but I wanted to leave. I have been helped a lot by my compatriots and friends to survive in this period financially, but also by organisations, like the Red Cross, etc. I did not tell my mom about the accident for a long time. But

I don't want to depend on them anymore, I want to be a full citizen and obtain like others a payment from the *Generalitat* for disabled people, because I cannot work. Now I have a residence permit for 1 year (since 3 months).”

Moroccan Mobility and Plans for the Future

Usually, Moroccan immigrants return to their country once they are certain they can come back legally. That is, once they have all the work and residence permits. This can be done after maybe some years within the informal economy and living as irregular, through “survival mechanisms”. Once in a regular situation, they tend to visit family and friends back home in the summer. At this stage, they realise they would face difficulties if they chose to remain in Morocco, since their way of life has changed and despite still ‘feeling’ Moroccan, they know that their future is in Europe. Having interviewed only two immigrants we cannot generalise, but neither of the interviewees had plans to return and know nobody to have them.

Before arrival, Moroccan immigrants think of Spain as another life, a life with future, an open door to life-improvement. Both individuals interviewed are aware of the situation in Spain and one of them explicitly says: “I am not like those who think of Europe as a paradise, but more as an opportunity to improve your life.”

Our interviewees’ current plans are not to return, but to continue to visit Morocco during holidays and to teach their children about Morocco and where they come from. The Moroccan immigrant who had the accident in Spain explicitly recognises that “I cannot go back, because health care is very expensive in Morocco and here it is free, they give me treatment and medicines for free, so I have no choice to stay here to revalidate. Also it is impossible to get a fixed job in Morocco. I have no plans for the future, I cannot go back now, because it is better to stay here to recover, but you never know what will happen. We are always looking for a better life, but not thinking too much about the future, because we don't know”. The point here is that the respondent did not come to Spain because of the better healthcare but remains because of it.

CONCLUSIONS: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

One of the first concluding arguments is that these trends and relations cannot be analyzed in isolation, but are interdependent. There are many

possible causal correlations to be made, but none of them can be considered to be definitive. Nevertheless, this article puts forward a number of theoretical considerations relevant for understanding the relationship between immigration policies and the flows and settlement of Moroccan immigrants in Spain.

The basic argument is that there is a combination of perceptions and realities that have to be taken into account in any analysis exploring the interface between migrants' plans and their actions and state policies. This interface is, then, far from obvious. Morocco's immigrants combine personal and institutional information to build "their" perception, before deciding to migrate. State policies do not reduce the will to emigrate if the personal reasons are weightier. What State policies maybe influence is the selection of the country of destination. When individual state policies force Moroccans to change their initial plan and migrate to another country, the result is an increasing number of what we can call "transnational families" in Europe. That is, families whose members live in different countries for State policy reasons (Belgium and Spain, for instance, following one of our interviews). This may be an interesting line of research due to the combination of the individual plans and State policies within the broader EU framework. The migratory process is always perceived by State policies to be individual, but the reality suggests that migration is more and more a family project and a complex network strategy which regards the overall European Union as a single community.

NOTES

1. Boletín Estadístico de Extranjería e Inmigración, n. January 15, 2008, Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales. http://extranjeros.mtas.es/es/general/Datos Estadisticos_index.html

2. See the CIS (www.cis.es), an independent entity established to study Spanish society, mainly through public opinion polls. It is organised within the Ministerio de la Presidencia (Ministry of the Presidency).

3. According to the Spanish and Moroccan authorities, five immigrants died on September 29, 2006 at the border of Ceuta when some 700 migrants stormed the fence and 6 died at the border of Melilla on October 6, 2006 when some 400 migrants did the same (Agencia EFE, 06-10-2005).

4. See Foundation Hassan II, www.alwatan.ma and the *Mediterranean yearbook Med. 2006* (IEmed/Cidob) <http://www.medyearbook.com/> (Table C1)

5. Boletín Estadístico de Extranjería e Inmigración, n. 1 January, 15, 2008, Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales. http://extranjeros.mtas.es/es/general/Datos Estadisticos_index.html

6. In addition to regularisation programs, and in parallel to Spain's work permit system, the country has experimented with a Labour Quota System in order to respond to short and long-term shortages in the labour market. This System establishes the number of workers to be recruited every year by sector and province. The quota system has been criticised by several immigrant support groups and political parties.

7. Boletín Estadístico de Extranjería e Inmigración, n. January 15, 2008, Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales. http://extranjeros.mtas.es/es/general/DatosEstadisticos_index.html

8. Boletín Estadístico de Extranjería e Inmigración, n. July 13, 2008, Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales. http://extranjeros.mtas.es/es/general/DatosEstadisticos_index.html

9. In order to have the most comprehensive information, we have conducted 9 semi-structured interviews with different stakeholders and Moroccan immigrants. The main purpose has been twofold: to have an evaluation of the immigrant policies implemented and their perception on the border policies and control of flows. By category of actors: 2 National policy-maker, 1 local-policy maker, 1 Trade Union, 2 Morocco association, 1 NGO, 2 Moroccan Immigrants (1 Man, 32 years old from Tanger, who just received a residence permit three months ago, and another man, 35 years old who obtained a residence permit in the extraordinary regularization process of 2000 and has now a permanent residence permit).

10. On the phenomenon of "camas calientes" (warm beds) see Colectivo IOE (2005).

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