

5 | *Making Migrants Work*

During one of my fieldtrips in Morocco, I audited the sessions of a professional training course run by *Construire nos demains** [“Building our tomorrows”, in French], a small Moroccan NGO operating in a large Moroccan city. Managed by two young NGO officers, the professional training project was funded by a European donor. The course was attended by around fifteen people, all from West and Central Africa and in different administrative situations (some of them were irregular, others were asylum seekers, others again had refugee status). One of the participants was Mamadou, a young Malian man who had received refugee status a few years prior. One day, a few minutes after the beginning of the session, Mamadou entered the class, out of breath. “Sorry for being late” he apologised. “I had another training and we finished late”. The training workshop Mamadou had attended had taken place in another neighbourhood of city, approximately fifteen minutes away by taxi. “Another training course?” I asked him, while Clara, one of the two project managers, started introducing the content of the new session. “But how many trainings are you doing?” The young man started laughing, a bit sarcastic. “Lorena, you don’t even know how many training programmes I’ve been doing in the past few years”. As I would later find out, Mamadou had completed several training courses, in fields very different from each other, without any resulting in a job. When I asked Mamadou why he was doing so many training courses given that he was so frustrated about them, he answered “Lorena, you know, a training is always better than nothing, when you have nothing better to do”. I would remember this conversation a few months later when, in the premises of another Moroccan NGO, I met Roméric, a young Cameroonian man, who told me that he had recently completed a training course in hair-dressing. Prior to that, he had done a course in mechanics. Neither of

the two training courses that Roméric had attended, however, had been successful in helping him find stable employment.¹

The many training workshops that Mamadou and Roméric had attended attest of a specific juncture in Moroccan migration history. Sometime between 2014 and 2016, favouring migrant labour integration became a top priority for all the actors involved in migration governance in Morocco. Moroccan authorities included “vocational training” and “employment” into the sectoral programmes of the SNIA (MCMREAM 2016; MDMCMREAM 2017), recognising labour integration as a tenet of the ambitious project of migration policy reform launched in September 2013. Donors, IOs, and NGOs promptly deployed their energies and funds to put this policy in practice. As Richard, the IOM officer mentioned in Chapter 4, told me succinctly in 2016, “suddenly you have people with a residency permit . . . very well, but now you need to give *these people* something to do”.² The stories of Mamadou and Roméric, however, suggest that labour integration projects were not achieving the expected result of reducing migrant unemployment. If this is the case, why were Mamadou and Roméric still attending training course after training course? What other functions are aid-funded labour integration projects fulfilling? What do they *politically*, if not practically, do?

This chapter explores the social and political life of aid-funded efforts to facilitate migrants’ and refugees’ access to the Moroccan labour market. I argue that labour integration projects filter border containment power on the ground by functioning as sites of disciplinary power: they do not coerce migrant people into settling in Morocco. Rather, they subtly push them into internalising the need to engage into labour integration (Foucault 1979a). In the empirical sections, I will show that labour integration projects give aid workers a discursive instrument to entrench the narrative of Morocco as a “possible integration country” among migrant people, and to push the latter into internalising the responsibility of solving their own unemployment. Focusing on the case of asylum-seeking and refugee people, I show that the structures of power at work in the aid market push displaced individuals to either proactively engage into, or distance themselves

¹ Interview with Roméric, Cameroonian citizen, Tétouan, date withdrawn.

² Interview with Richard, IOM officer, Rabat, August 2016, emphasis added.

from, training workshops in order to fit certain presumed models of refugeehood.

The chapter first analyses patterns of migrant employment and unemployment in Morocco, situating them within the broader political economy of labour in the country. It then analyses the emergence of labour integration activities for migrants and refugees, identifying them as market-centred development tools. I highlight that the proliferation of neoliberal poverty reduction strategies in Morocco belong to a political trend to promote a quick fix solution approach to structural unemployment problems. I move on to show that labour integration activities struggle to reduce migrant unemployment. They, however, manage to achieve other objectives. I explain how implementing actors transpose a political understanding of “working migrants as immobile migrants”, thus producing an equation between employment (or job search) and settlement. In the last two sections, I describe two forms of disciplinary power produced by labour integration initiatives. First, I look at how the implementation procedures and assessment language of these projects depict labour integration in Morocco – a country with a high and structural unemployment rate – as a feasible endeavour. Second, I examine how labour integration activities spark fears of spatial and economic immobility among asylum seekers and refugees, pushing them to shape their participation into professional workshops as a way to perform a certain model of refugeehood vis-à-vis the UNHCR.

Migrant (Un)Employment in Morocco

The labour situation of many West and Central African migrant and refugee people in Morocco is quite precarious. According to the quantitative study conducted by the International University of Rabat mentioned in Chapter 4, only 57% of the migrant people surveyed were employed, with a large incidence (67%) of the sample working in the informal sector. Out of a total of 1,453 respondents, 28% earned less than 1,250 MAD (€123) per month and 30% between 1,250 MAD and 2,500 MAD (€114–€228), which is just around or less than the average income in Morocco (2,413 MAD – €220/month) (Mourji et al. 2016). Other research has shown that, while some migrants manage to set up their own small business, many others have to take up poorly paid, highly precarious, and physically demanding jobs in constructions sites, shops, and stalls

in the market. This category of workers has little to no capability to negotiate with their employers and are at a high risk of exploitation (Edogué Ntang and Peraldi 2011). When they are unable to find employment, migrants are forced to beg, an activity that they often consider shameful (Edogué Ntang and Peraldi 2011). Many women are obliged to use their bodies as an economic and protection resource (Pian 2010; Tyszler 2019). *Vis-à-vis* this weak economic situation, most migrants interviewed by the International University of Rabat expressed a feeling of dissatisfaction in relation to their daily life, characterised by job instability and discontinuity, economic insecurity, and difficulties saving. This translated into anxiety and mental health problems (Mourji et al. 2016).

Foreigners in the country face barriers to their inclusion in the labour market. Since 2004 the Moroccan labour legislation imposed a criterion of national preference. This allows employers to hire a foreigner for a certain position only if it is demonstrated that no other Moroccan national can cover the said post (Khrouz 2015; PNPM 2017b).³ Furthermore, the position of foreign workers is rendered even more precarious by the lack of clarity surrounding the procedure through which the National Agency for the Promotion of Employment and Skills (ANAPEC, in the French acronym) rules over labour authorisations, the rigidities of immigration law *vis-à-vis* the timing and practicalities for obtaining a work visa or residency permit, and the stricter application of the national preference option since 2012 (Khrouz 2016a). The new migration policy has not really contributed to improving migrants' access to the formal labour market. Although Moroccan authorities announced that they would lift the criteria of national preference in 2014, this statement was never confirmed by an official implementing procedure (PNPM 2017b). The data disseminated by the MDMCMREAM are telling. Between 2015 and 2016, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs validated the labour contracts of

³ It seems, however, that justifying the recruitment of 'some' foreigners is easier than for others. During fieldwork, a European aid worker told me that one of her first jobs in Morocco was as a communication officer for a private company. The contract she had signed, however, did not state her real professional position within the company, but stated that she was a 'language teacher'. As the company had explained her, it would have been easier to demonstrate to the ANAPEC that there were no Moroccans available to fill the position if the job involved teaching a language she was a native speaker of rather than communications (fieldnotes, autumn 2016).

only twenty-seven regularised migrants (MDMCMREAM 2017). Considering that the MCMREAM declared that over 23,000 migrants received a residency permit during the 2014 regularisation campaign (Benjelloun 2017b, 51), this number is minimal, and it reflects the difficulties that integrating migrants into the formal labour market entails.

Morocco's Labour Politics

The working conditions endured by migrants speak to a broader story of structural labour devaluation affecting the Moroccan labour market, characterised by high rates of unemployment and a stark incidence of informal activity (Kettani and Peraldi 2011; Khrouz 2015). According to the HCP, in the last term of 2017, 10.6% of the active population in Morocco was unemployed, with a much higher incidence in urban (15.1%) than in rural areas (4.3%). Most job seekers (71.1%) had been out of employment for over twelve months (Haut Commissariat au Plan 2017a). However, unemployment statistics might conceal the real unemployment share, because they underestimate underemployment (LO-FTF 2018). The Danish trade union council for international development cooperation (LO-FTF) estimates that, in 2013, half of the total labour force in Morocco were employed informally. As a consequence of the high incidence of the informal labour market, “75% of Moroccan workers do not have access to the existing pension systems and 85% are excluded from healthcare insurance” (LO-FTF 2018, 18).

The current state of the Moroccan labour market is the product of the economic development trajectory of the country, and in particular of its subordinated integration into the world economy (Berrada 1986; Berrada and Saadi 2013). With the establishment of the Protectorate in 1912, Morocco became an area of production of goods to export and trade in France. The productive structure of the country became mostly centred on agriculture and extraction (Capello 2008; Swearingen 2016), neglecting the development of the industrial sector (Piveteau et al. 2013). The expropriation of land from local farmers to make room for colonial agricultural production accelerated internal migration from the countryside to the cities. This supported the creation of an urban working class, which would become a primary source of cheap labour for the colonial economic apparatus. Measures regulating

labour conditions (such as the introduction of a minimum salary and the basis of a system of social security) did not substantially contribute to an improvement of life conditions for Moroccans, as they aimed at ensuring the expansion and reproduction of colonial capital (Berrada 1986; see also Catusse 2010). The economic and social strategy undertaken by Morocco after independence presented numerous signs of continuities with the colonial era (Capello 2008). The Moroccan development strategy in fact remained centred on the export-oriented agricultural, extractive, and service sectors. Attention to industrial policy remained scant (Bogaert 2011; Vermeren 2016) and only regained momentum after the rise in price of raw materials in the 1970s. Throughout this decade, Morocco associated the nationalisation of the economy with the attraction of foreign capital and the development of the export industrial sectors. Together with the natural resources, cheap labour remained a key pillar of the Moroccan economic development strategy (Fernández 2018). Some improvement in the protection of workers occurred in the years immediately following independence. However, the expansion of the social protection system was prevented, and salaries were kept low so as not to increase industrial production costs (Berrada 1986). The drastic reduction of phosphate prices in the late 1970s and the contraction of the European economy were detrimental to the health of Moroccan finances (Vermeren 2016). The imposition of the Structural Adjustment Plan (SAP) in 1983 entailed the reduction of public expenditure, the liberalisation of the economy, the privatisation of state-owned companies – and therefore the reduction of public employment – and the development of export-oriented sectors (Emperador Badimon 2010; Malki and Doumou 2013). SAP-related economic reforms laid the basis for the expansion of foreign capital in Morocco, especially in the form of delocalisation of industrial production (Cairolì 1998; Jiménez Álvarez 2003). The position of Morocco in the global economy as an export-oriented country further increased by virtue of the fiscal advantages given to foreign companies investing in certain areas of the country – such as the Free Zone in Tangier (Rothenberg 2015) and, first and foremost, the cheap cost of labour (Berrada 1986; Berrada and Saadi 2013). As Alami argues, these transformations increased structural unemployment, the expansion of informal labour activities, especially in sectors such as services and trade, and the casualisation of employment (Alami 2000).

Migrants' integration into the Moroccan labour market does not happen in a political or economic vacuum, but rather in a context where unemployment and informality are structural parts of a political economy of labour devaluation. Unemployment, underemployment, and informality are therefore not recent, easily amendable shortcomings of the Moroccan labour market. They have been a central and constitutive feature of the country's economic development for the past century.

Old Solutions to New Problems

After 2014, donors, NGOs, and IOs have joined their efforts to ensure that all actors, including migrants, civil society organisations, and state institutions, work together to achieve the objective of migrant labour integration. In 2017, the European Union launched a €4.4 million call for projects on "pathways towards the professional integration of migrants in Morocco" funded within the framework of the Mobility Partnership (see Chapter 1). The initiative aims at supporting 2,200 regularised migrants to enrol in professional training programmes and to access waged labour or to set up a small business. The programme also aims at reinforcing the capacity of Moroccan authorities to promote migrant labour integration (EU Delegation in Rabat 2017b). In the same period, Belgium (Enabel n.d.) and Switzerland (El Aissi 2018) signed contracts with the Mutual Aid⁴ to execute projects promoting the capacity of public institutions and civil society organisations to support the economic integration of migrants. Besides large, medium-term projects, a myriad of micro-initiatives have emerged to favour migrant economic subsistence. Labour integration activities supported in Morocco mainly fall into two categories: support to self-employment, labelled as facilitation of income-generating activities (IGAs)⁵; and employability and professional training courses for 'easily marketable' jobs. In academic development jargon, these are called

⁴ The *Entraide Nationale* (Mutual Aid) is a public institution under the tutelage of the Ministry of Family, Solidarity, Equality and Social Development. It is in charge of providing assistance to destitute populations.

⁵ There is not a clear-cut definition of IGAs. UNICEF states that IGAs "cover initiatives as diverse as small business promotion, cooperative undertakings, job creation schemes, sewing circles, credit and savings groups, and youth training programmes" (UNICEF 1994). In her study of the INDH in Morocco, Bono recalls that INDH booklets define IGAs as "an activity which consists in

“market-centred development programmes”, because they are rooted in the belief that the market (not structural, state-led economic reforms) can provide solutions to economic marginalisation. Both pathways generally end up favouring migrants’ integration into fairly unskilled labour activities. IGAs allow migrants to set up small snack bars or shops. Professional workshops, instead, generally train migrants in cooking, mechanics, hairdressing, or dressmaking. The kind of training pathways proposed do not vary much. This generates some irony among civil society organisers. Fatoumata, the NGO officer that I quoted in Chapter 3, told me that her organisation had partnered with a Moroccan NGO to train migrant women to become assistant nurses. “You need to vary” she explained, “everybody does catering, braids, sewing . . . but it is not possible to have everybody trained to do braids!” she concluded, rolling her eyes in exasperation.

In light of the structural weaknesses of the Moroccan labour market, “favouring migrant labour integration” sounds like a challenging endeavour, which can potentially question the structure of the Moroccan economy and labour market, the welfare state available to the unemployed, and the very position of Morocco within international political economy. After examining the content of labour integration projects for migrants, one realises that to the ‘new’ problem of migrant unemployment, donors, development agencies, and NGOs have resorted to ‘old’ solutions. In fact, market-centred development tools became first fashionable and then globally mainstream in the early 1990s, when the deleterious effects of SAPs pushed state and non-state actors to look for alternative pathways to development. Informal labour, self-employment, and market-attuned, unskilled jobs became a new development poverty-reduction formula centred on the capacity of the poor to fight “against their own poverty” (Bogaert 2011, 142; see Elyachar 2005). The engine of this approach to poverty-reduction is not a political aspiration to eradicate poverty and inequalities. Rather, these instruments are driven by a security-

producing goods or services and/or in transforming products in order to sell them”, while the Moroccan Development Social Agency defines IGAs as “very small economic activities, led by poor and vulnerable populations, that produce a regular income” (Bono 2010, 27, translation by author). In interviews, development and humanitarian workers used the word “IGAs” in a much tighter sense, and exclusively to talk about self-employment, not to refer to professional training and employability courses. For consistency, I will adopt this distinction throughout the chapter.

generated need to identify avenues to manage and ‘patch’ social malaise to avoid its degeneration (Delcourt 2009; Hibou 2012). Market-centred development tools are what Denyer Willis and Chandler call “quick fix” solutions to social problems because they level off the consequences of inequality rather than addressing its underlying, structural causes (Denyer Willis and Chandler 2019).

Morocco has solidly engaged in neoliberal poverty-reduction strategies since the early 2000s. Rather than pushing for economic and social reforms decisively reshaping the country’s productive and redistributive strategy, the government and the Palace adopted poverty reduction tools based on supporting the poor in providing their own needs through small, mostly unskilled, entrepreneurial activities (Bono 2008). Informal labour started being praised by public authorities as a flexible resource which could play a decisive role in overcoming the crisis of the Moroccan labour market (Alami 2000, 93). At the same time, the Ministry of Labour and its partners began directing job-seeking graduates towards the private sector, rather than towards state employment (Emperador Badimon 2010). The INDH became the linchpin through which Morocco raised market-centred development interventions as the way out of poverty and unemployment (Bono 2008). IGAs and labour training courses have been included in programmes targeting a panoply of marginalised social groups, such as single mothers (Capelli 2016), women living in poor regions (Soletierre Onlus 2017), as well as groups considered more problematic for internal and international security – including disenfranchised youth, alternatively conceptualised as ‘potential migrants’ or ‘potential terrorists’ (Gazzotti 2018). A few years later, the same techniques for labour integration were applied to foreigners in the country. Daniele, the development consultant that I mentioned in Chapter 2, sarcastically put it in our interview, “before you did embroidery with Moroccan women, now you do it with sub-Saharan women”.⁶

Thus, labour integration activities for migrants and refugees in Morocco are part of an established trend of policymakers and development planners to “patch” the weaknesses of the Moroccan labour market through tools relying on the poor’s capacity to exit poverty by themselves, rather than through structural reforms promoting social security and wealth redistribution.

⁶ Interview with Daniele, development consultant, Rabat, March 2016.

Working Migrants, Immobile Migrants?

As I have explained in Chapter 2, the migration industry has historically contributed to the construction of a political performance of migrant ‘transit’ (pre-2013) and ‘settlement’ (post-2013) in Morocco. Labour integration projects are integrally part of this settlement spectacle. Although never explicitly depicted by donors as a border control strategy, labour integration activities for immigrants and refugees are rooted in a perceived connection between employment status and migrant spatial stability over a given territory.

Labour has always played a central role in border control strategies. Building on a sedentary and colonial approach to human development and well-being (Bakewell 2008; Landau 2019), donors perceive aid as an instrument to combat irregular migration by spurring the development of sending and ‘transit’ countries.⁷ In this way, donor countries would manage to settle ‘potential’ migrants by providing them with an economic alternative to migration, or so the rationale goes (Rodriguez 2015; Tazzioli 2014)⁸. Since the early 2000s, donors, NGOs, and IOs have on many occasions resorted to labour integration programmes to immobilise different categories of migrants, or ‘potential’ migrants, in Morocco. Cooperation projects favouring the promotion of IGAs, vocational training, and support to

⁷ Preventive strategies to migration containment include a wide array of approaches, including the attraction of diaspora investments and the incentives for the ‘productive’ investment of migrants’ remittances (Charef and Gonin 2005; Geiger and Pécout 2013; Kapur 2004), the concentration of economic development projects in regions with high emigration rates (Caillault 2012; El Qadim 2015), the creation of temporary recruitment programs (Arab 2009), and incentives to foreign companies to hire local workers (Vives 2017b).

⁸ The idea that aid (and development more broadly) can be effectively used to curb immigration seems to persist among policymakers although academic research has proven that this approach has no real scientific foundation. However, the very absence of a basis of evidence for this policy approach highlights a third function played by aid: the symbolic and performative illusion of state control. As Oeppen argues in the case of public information campaigns in Afghanistan, these tools allow the state *to be seen doing* something about migration (Oeppen 2016, 64). The intended audience of much developmental efforts on migration control are not local communities in sending and ‘transit’ countries, but donors’ constituencies (Oeppen 2016). Political pressure in donors’ constituencies thus constitutes an influencing factor in shaping policy responses to migration, to the point that the production of knowledge on migration becomes entrenched in “signalling the legitimacy of policies or policymakers, rather than [being] a resource to help inform the substance of policies” (Boswell 2011, 21).

employability have been developed to favour the reintegration of Moroccan migrants forcefully or voluntarily returned from Europe (International Organisation for Migration 2016; Istituto Meme 2008; Vianello 2007). They have also been deployed to prevent the mobility of ‘potential irregular migrants’, a category which profiles young males living in areas deemed ‘at high migration propensity’ (Marín Sánchez 2006; Vacchiano and Jiménez 2012). All these programmes were based on the (simplistic) belief that employment, often in the form of precarious jobs, could alone constitute an alternative to emigration (Caillault 2012; INAS and UNICEF 2010).

In the specific case of the control of ‘sub-Saharan’ mobility, labour integration became an integral part of the SNIA because the Moroccan state started thinking of migrants as a settled, rather than a transit, population. Before 2013, only a handful of organisations were offering professional training courses and financial support for IGAs – mainly in Rabat and Casablanca (see Pickerill 2011). After the announcement of the new migration policy, programmes promoting training courses, workshops, internships, and financial assistance for migrant labour integration have boomed. The promotion of labour integration activities did not only coincide with the state’s acceptance of migrant presence on its territory, but also with the idea that migrants who seek – and obtain – a job are those who are no longer interested in crossing the border. Carmen is a Spanish woman working in a drop-in centre for migrants in Tangier. She explained that her team had decided to rearrange the centre’s programmes according to “migrants’ psychological time”, understood as the time that the migrants expected to spend in Morocco. The centre’s initiatives were therefore divided into “short, medium, and long-term permanence”. Labour integration activities characterised the ‘package’ offered to those migrants aiming to spend a long time in Morocco. Carmen told me that this group was very small, especially compared to the number of migrants considered as short- and medium-term permanence. At the time of the interview (September 2017), her organisation had supported the creation of only 5 IGAs for a total of over 1,200 beneficiaries.⁹ This distinction, of course, was not airtight, as employment is not an equivalent for immobility.

⁹ Interview with Carmen, officer of a faith-based organisation, Tangier, September 2017.

In his ethnography of a migrant-populated neighbourhood of Rabat, Bachelet argues migrant shopkeepers did not really fear the competition of other West and Central African stall-keepers, as they knew that sooner or later the latter would close their activity to travel to the borderlands and try to cross (Bachelet 2016).

Critical aid workers and human right activists sense the existence of a link between labour policies and migrants' perceived spatial mobility. This triggers their suspicion vis-à-vis the fervour of donors in generating local employment possibilities for migrants and refugees. In an interview, two aid workers started making sarcastic comments about all the attention being paid to integration projects:

Interviewee 1: Now integration is the new referential leitmotiv.

Because *ça passe vachement bien* [it passes quite easily] for Europe to approve projects to fix populations [in Morocco]

[...]

Interviewee 2: Most donors ... we have difficulties making donors accept a programme in its entirety. Most of them want to fund education, or labour integration, things that are really focused on integration ... it is really difficult for us ... to [help migrants] pay rent, to reimburse transportation ... there is no donor that wants [to reimburse] these invoices ...¹⁰

Suspicion towards labour integration also targeted donor-funded projects implemented by Moroccan authorities themselves. In 2015, the EU launched a twenty-four-month project, funded within the framework of the Sharaka programme¹¹ to support the ANAPEC in the labour integration of regularised migrants (MCMREAM 2016; MDMCMREAM 2017). "All this question of the European Union wanting to upgrade the ANAPEC honestly sounds quite strange to me" I was told by a Moroccan human rights activist in December 2016.¹² "I have the feeling that Europe wants to use Morocco as a big centre to upgrade migrants'

¹⁰ Interview with two NGO officers, August 2016.

¹¹ The Sharaka programme is an EU-funded initiative aimed at facilitating the implementation of the EU–Morocco mobility partnership signed in 2013 (see Chapter 2). For more information, see the website www.sharaka.ma/le-projet/presentation/

¹² Informal conversation with a Moroccan human rights activist, Rabat, December 2016.

skills and then select just the ones that European countries want. Otherwise, why so much effort trying to upgrade the ANAPEC?”¹³ According to the two aid workers mentioned above, labour integration, like education, is part of an ‘integration’ package that is seen by donors as instrumental to “fix populations”, to facilitate migrants’ settlement in Morocco. The human rights activist interviewed goes further, implying that the EU’s interest in upgrading the state capacity to provide labour integration courses not only fits into the broader European border externalisation strategy, but also into a plan to further filter the sourcing of manpower. For all respondents, the interest in labour integration is not genuine, but is part of a politicised border control plan.

“What Are All These Trainings Useful For?”

That labour integration activities have proliferated in Morocco does not mean that everybody is convinced about their usefulness. As I said in the introduction, Mamadou had been attending training course after training course, without improving his chances in finding a job

¹³ It must be highlighted that in the late 2000s the ANAPEC had fulfilled precisely this function: selecting just the migrants that European countries wanted in order to send them to Europe. In 2006, the ANAPEC had been involved in a circular migration programme managed by the municipality of Cartaya, in Southern Spain, and funded by the EU through the AENEAS programme. The project aimed at favouring the recruitment of Moroccan seasonal workers to pick strawberries in farms in the province of Huelva, taking advantage of the possibility, provided by Spanish migration law, to recruit seasonal workers directly in their countries of origin. In this framework, the ANAPEC was tasked with selecting the women who would otherwise have been recruited in Spain. The seasonal workers were mostly Moroccan women from rural areas with a low level of literacy and often with family and children at home. Their profile corresponded to the well-studied criteria of precariousness, dependency, and patriarchal subjugation, which, according to Spanish and Moroccan bureaucrats, made these women more likely to return home, rather than illegally remain in Spain. These characteristics were essential not only to ensure successful return rates, but also the low negotiation capacity of the workers (Arab 2018a; Hellio 2014; Vacchiano 2013). This “win-win-win” labour migration policy also resulted in objectionable excesses. The fact that the labour permit was tied to the labour contract – in turn, limited to a specific employer – and the lack of a firm trade union protection exposed the women to exploitative working conditions and to the abuses of their own employers (Arab 2018a, 2018b; Hellio 2014; see also Hellio and Moreno Nieto 2018).

afterwards. That he was not the only sceptical person became apparent a few weeks later. Towards the end of the training course, Rabia, a Moroccan aid worker employed by the IO partner of the project, showed up in the premises of *Construire nos demains** to discuss the next stages of the project with the two project managers, and the beneficiaries themselves. This visit was clearly unexpected. The atmosphere in the room was tense. The project managers were annoyed that the IO had not alerted them to the fact that Rabia would be coming. The people attending the training session viewed Rabia with suspicion. Rabia herself did not seem to feel at ease as she obviously sensed that her presence was not particularly welcomed. What followed was a two-act argument. “So well, I am here because you need to start making plans to liaise the beneficiaries with possible employers” Rabia said, addressing the project managers. The latter rebutted the proposition. “It is not our job to do this . . . we are trainers, we can advise [the project beneficiaries] but we don’t have the time to contact possible employers. This should rather be the job of your organisation”. Then, Rabia turned her attention to the asylum-seeking and refugee people present in the room, reminding them that, as ‘people of concern’ of the UNHCR, they could use the employability services offered by the agency. She therefore invited them to see a “career consultant”, to conduct a “skills assessment” and to survey the possible options for their employment. The discussion heated up immediately. “What are these training programmes useful for?” asked Mansour, a Cameroonian man attending the course, visibly upset. “We are overwhelmed by training courses which never lead to anything. I did a lot of workshops and nothing ever came out of this” he added. Several other participants nodded in approval.

The grievances and disillusionment described are not simply anecdotal. Data about the success rate of labour integration programmes for migrants and refugees in Morocco exist, and are not encouraging. In 2016, the Monaco Development Cooperation carried out an evaluation of the Programme for the Economic Integration of Urban Refugees in Morocco (PISERUMA). The project was launched by the UNHCR in 2007 to favour the local integration of refugees in the country and therefore reduce their dependency on the financial assistance of the UN agency.¹⁴ The programme offered both support for

¹⁴ Interview, UNHCR officer, Rabat, November 2016.

IGAs and enrolment in professional training courses. The evaluation of the project revealed that, since the inception of the project in 2011, 151 refugees had benefitted from professional training courses. However, just 21 (14 per cent of the total) had subsequently found employment (AMAPPE 2016). The IOM project “Professional training and subsistence opportunities for regularised migrants in Morocco”, which ran from July 2014 to February 2017, did also not offer encouraging results. The project had targeted 198 participants in total – 130 women had benefitted from professional training courses and a further 68 women from courses to support the development of small enterprises. The project evaluation states that the evaluators had not found enough evidence that the training courses “had necessarily improved the chances of regularised migrants to access the job market” or that there was a “link between professional training of regularised migrants and their access to employment opportunities” (IOM 2018, 5, translation by author). In particular, of the over 123¹⁵ women that had enrolled on the professional training courses sponsored by the programme, only 25 had finished the course and just 1 had found a job afterwards. Of the over sixty-eight women that had enrolled on the course supporting prospective small entrepreneurs, only fourteen had completed the course and five had an enterprise open and running at the time of the evaluation (IOM 2018, 15).

Under anonymity, development practitioners themselves recognised the low impact and cosmetic character of labour integration projects on migrants’ employment rate. Very telling is the account of Irene, the NGO worker that I quoted in Chapter 4, who recalled that her organisation would systematically refer beneficiaries to a labour integration programme when, even after careful examination, no form of economic support could be granted. As she explained:

There were people that, after we would try and suggest to pursue a professional training or to look for work, would reply angrily, as to say “I tried this, and this, and this, do you realize that you are trying to tell me to do things which I have already done and that have not worked so far?” At the end, the reaction changed a lot depending on how long the person had been in the country, if they had just arrived, they were angrier, as to say, “there is

¹⁵ There is a discrepancy in the report within the number of women that had joined these courses.

nothing going in the right way”, if they had been there longer they were more resigned.¹⁶

Irene kept on suggesting to migrant people to engage in labour integration activities. This, however, did not mean that she believed they worked – actually, she was constantly reminded of the contrary by the beneficiaries themselves. The reason why she kept on advising people to consider these pathways was one of protocol: in case the person was ineligible for financial assistance, labour integration was the option that the NGO pushed for. In Irene’s account, time, practice, and knowledge of the system did not allow beneficiaries of the labour integration programmes to find a job. Rather, it allowed them to recognise – and, somehow, accept – the limits of the system. Gabriel, a senior aid worker working for a European donor, similarly pointed out that the obsession of the migration industry for labour integration activities was living a social life of its own, disconnected from the very question of results:

We will train associations, we will train everybody, everybody will be trained and over-trained, but nobody will find legal employment because it’s impossible. So first everybody (the donors) supported professional training, then they turned to self-employment, the creation of economic activities . . . [. . .]. Training is easy . . . [. . .]. We will do feasibility studies, we will support business creators, we will support IGA, we will do it, whether it’s successful or not. This is easy, we can spend thousands and thousands [of €] on it, and even more . . . [. . .] it is more difficult to really find employment, and legal employment. Informal, black work, this is easy to do, they (the migrants) get away with it, and they got away even before. Switching from IGA to a real company that hires people, that is structured, that is recognised and that values skills . . . this is more difficult as well.¹⁷

Interestingly, Gabriel pointed out that the labour integration activities sponsored by donors were “easy”: they were activities that were easy to manage and that attracted an important amount of money. The momentum that these activities were experienced seemed, however, to be unjustified vis-à-vis the reality of the ground. While funding projects was “easy”, obtaining real results was “difficult”. Disillusionment about labour integration activities is widespread

¹⁶ Interview with Irene, former intern of a Moroccan NGO, phone, October 2018.

¹⁷ Interview with Gabriel, officer of a European donor, Rabat, September 2016.

also in other contexts of border externalisation. In his work on the migration industry along the Western Mediterranean route, Andersson evokes the story of the CIGEM, an EU-funded labour integration centre in Bamako. The CIGEM aimed at favouring the labour integration of Malian ‘potential’ emigrants as well as returnees – to prevent the former from emigrating and the latter from re-emigrating. The job centre, however, was never able to provide many jobs to its target population, to the point that Andersson baptised it as “the Jobless Job Center” (Andersson 2014, 241).¹⁸

Although gaining large consensus by donors and implementing agencies, evaluation reports and testimonies by migrant people themselves suggest that labour integration activities did not fulfil their stated objective: increasing the chances of beneficiaries to find a stable and dignified job in Morocco.

Labour Integration as a Site of Disciplinary Power

A Country of “Possible Integration”

Even though the results were deceiving, labour integration projects were *doing* something. The first political function they played was that of entrenching the idea of Morocco as a ‘possible country of integration’ among displaced people. During the training sessions run by *Construire nos demains**, Mansour, Mamadou, and their colleagues complained about the apparent uselessness of training workshops, as they had not been able to get a job after attending them. Rabia, the IO officer, seemed to have a different opinion. “You are not obliged to follow training workshops”, she replied. “If you are doing so much training, maybe it would be appropriate to see a career advisor to

¹⁸ More broadly, the efficacy of market-centred development tools as poverty-reduction tools has been debunked by academic research. Since the late 2000s, scholars have argued that there is no sound scientific evidence that microcredit had brought about positive impact in terms of poverty reduction, although there were instead proof that in some cases the small-loan formula had damaged the social and economic tissue of the areas where it had been introduced (Bateman and Chang 2012; Lazar 2004; Rahman 1999). Bateman and Chang argue that the success and perpetuation of microcredit as a poverty-reduction strategy is due more to the political appeal that such a project has for neoliberal policymakers – i.e. outsourcing poverty reduction to the poor themselves – rather than to its poverty-reduction impact (Bateman and Chang 2012).

review your professional choices”. The reaction of Rabia was somewhat surprising. It was abundantly clear to everybody that the Moroccan labour market had an unemployment issue – the same people in the room were exasperated by their inability to find a job. However, Rabia seemed to imply that their lack of chance was *also* due to mistakes that Mansour, Mamadou, and the others were making in their job search. The antidote to this, she suggested, were a number of bureaucratic steps: “seeing a career advisor”, “reviewing your professional choices”, maybe “doing less training”. People in the room started shaking their heads, clearly not convinced. Rabia adjusted the shot, with a more empathic “finding a job in Morocco is difficult for everybody”. Before leaving the room, she added “We can sit down and talk and try to find a compromise. For example, a few refugees gathered together and founded a cooperative, now they work as members of the cooperative”. People kept on shaking their heads, clearly perplexed. This time, however, they did not voice their discontent as they had done just before. Rabia left the room, that had suddenly fallen into a frustrated silence.

The UNHCR labour integration programme to which Rabia had gestured towards was organised around bureaucratic steps aiming to channel the agency’s population of concern towards the labour integration activity with most chances of success. When a refugee decides to participate in the labour integration programme, the career advisors of an NGO partner of the UNHCR conduct an initial skills assessment to evaluate whether the beneficiary is best placed to take up professional training or to create an IGA. Young people between the age of seventeen and twenty-one with minimal previous professional experience and limited social capital are generally oriented towards professional training. Older refugees with a stronger network business capacities, and more clearly feasible plans are instead deemed eligible for support for small entrepreneurial activities.¹⁹ Both pathways to labour integration are constituted by multiple steps, follow-ups and assessments to increase refugees’ capacity to conform to market requirements. In the case of professional training courses, after their selection, beneficiaries are enrolled in training centres. To practically apply the skills learnt in class, the training course is then followed by an internship in various companies. Once the training phase is completed,

¹⁹ Interview with Brahim, officer of a Moroccan NGO, Rabat, October 2016.

beneficiaries are encouraged to join a course on employability. This provides refugees with the necessary skills to successfully *sell* their professional profile on the labour market. Eventually, the organisation provides support in the job search (AMAPPE 2016).

As Rabia put it, the pathway to (less un-)employment was paved with bureaucratic procedures through which project beneficiaries learn “market mechanisms” (Hibou 2012, 132) and try to comply with market requests, shaping their profile to appear more ‘marketable’. Centred around a logic of subjectivation, the rhetoric of Rabia transforms the outcome of the employment search into a responsibility of the jobseeker – and, to a lesser extent, of the organisations mandated to mediate the job search (Emperador Badimon 2010). This neoliberal narrative allows Rabia to move the burden of unemployment resolution from the context to the individual. She thus displaces attention from the structural complexity of migrant labour integration in Morocco to the petty technicalities of job seeking. In this way, Rabia manages to depict a situation that is not hopeless: at the end of the day, she implied, there were things that could be done to improve the success rate of the professional training courses. It was up to the trainers and the project beneficiaries to assume their share of responsibility, and make sure to do everything they could to spur the success rate of the programme. Rabia’s narrative makes Morocco a “possible country of integration” *if* migrants learn how to juggle the neoliberal labour integration system. In this way, training programmes filter border containment power (reiterating a narrative of Morocco as a ‘possible country of integration’) by trying to extract utility from the individuals they try to discipline (they push migrants to conform to neoliberal models of labour integration) (Foucault 1979a, 218).

Labour integration activities per se did not seem to be effective in facilitating participants’ integration into the job market. Despite their low success rate, they seemed to be successful in equipping aid workers with discursive arguments to entrench the idea of Morocco as a “possible country of integration”. The bureaucratic structure of labour integration programmes, in fact, seems to depict employment in Morocco as a complex, albeit feasible, endeavour, its success or failure relying *also* on the capacity of the unemployed to exploit their skills in the right, marketable way. In the everyday interaction between the institution and those qualified as ‘sub-Saharan’, this significantly displaces the attention away from the fundamental incapacity of the

Moroccan job market to absorb poor foreign workers in a stable and dignified way, placing responsibility for the success of integration onto migrants themselves.

Being the “Good” Refugee

The second function played by labour integration activities consists in creating and entrenching certain models of refugeehood among training beneficiaries. In fact, binary representations of ‘transit’ and ‘permanent’ migration are not only upheld by institutional actors. The perception that the international community has of ‘transit’ and ‘settled’ migrants is well known to beneficiaries themselves, who internalise these categories and try to model their behaviour around them.

How this process of internalisation worked emerged clearly the first time that I audited the training sessions given by *Construire nos demeains**. On that occasion, I was struck by a debate between the potential participants and the two trainers. The latter were giving an introductory session to people interested in joining the training course. After explaining the different components of the workshops and the degree of engagement requested of the participants, they opened up to the audience for questions. Aissatou, one of the participants, had been recognised as a refugee, and she asked if enrolling in the project would reduce her chances of obtaining resettlement in a third country. Other participants nodded, expressing a similar concern. Quite surprised, the two programme managers asked for clarification. It turned out that quite a few of the participants were either being considered by the UNHCR for resettlement in a third country, or strongly hoped to be soon offered that opportunity. As the number of refugees that the UNHCR managed to resettle in a third country every year was very low, participants feared that engaging in a professional training programme would negatively influence their chances of obtaining it. In particular, they feared that the UNHCR might interpret their participation as proof that they actually wanted to stay in Morocco and not seriously consider them for resettlement. This concern apparently pervaded the whole refugee community, which had developed a certain suspicion towards training programmes in particular and UNHCR as an institution. “People [the refugees] are happy when they [UNHCR and associated NGOs] tell you that you haven’t been selected for

a training program, even proud!” said Khadija, another lady also present at the session. The two programme managers looked at each other, slightly perplexed. “Well, if it is like this, we need to be informed . . .”, Clara hesitantly said. They were confused. Were these concerns just the product of overthinking on the part of the refugee people in the room? Or had their desire to build a useful project pushed *Construire nos demains** into an ambiguous larger game?

Under the UNHCR mandate, “resettlement is not a right”, the UNHCR Resettlement Handbook states. “There is no obligation on States to accept refugees through resettlement” it continues. “Even if their case is submitted to a resettlement State by UNHCR, whether individual refugees will ultimately be resettled depends on the admission criteria of the resettlement State” (UNHCR 2011b, 36). In Morocco, in particular, the agency considers resettlement in a third country as a residual option. During an interview in 2016, a UNHCR officer explained that resettlement applies only to critical cases, such as LGBTI refugees, unaccompanied minors, or single mothers, “people who face a lot of difficulties here but that could rebuild a life in a resettlement country”.²⁰ At the end of 2015, UNHCR Morocco counted 5,478 individuals under its mandate. During that year, only forty-six refugees had been resettled to a third country (UNHCR 2015). Between 1 January and 30 September 2016, fifty-eight refugees were relocated to other countries (US, Canada, and France) (UNHCR 2016). Resettlement is also a delicate diplomatic issue: when the UNHCR expanded its operations in the country in the late 2000s, Moroccan authorities were conflicted between not wanting to allow refugees recognised by UNHCR to stay in the country (American Embassy of Rabat 2006a) and fearing that the option of resettlement would attract large numbers of migrants from Western and Central Africa (American Embassy of Rabat 2006b). Resettlement opportunities, however, remain scarce, to the point that asylum seekers and refugees have organised a number of protests to claim broader access to it (Scheel and Ratfisch 2014).

Refugee and asylum seekers described the labour integration projects as if they were screens from which the UNHCR could observe their behaviour, or from where they could make their behaviour legible to the UNHCR. In this portrait, labour integration projects look like

²⁰ Interview, officer of the UNHCR, Rabat, August 2016.

a structure akin to the Foucauldian panopticon: an architecture of surveillance that allows the inmate to be seen by the supervisor, who stands in a central tower from which he can observe everything without being seen by the prisoners. The panopticon allows discipline to be exercised to maximum effect and with minimum effort: the pervasiveness of power is ensured not by the figure of the surveillant himself, but rather by a material infrastructure that induces “in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (Foucault 1979a, 201). As legal migration opportunities for poor West and Central African people in Morocco were extremely limited, resettlement constituted one of the few legal mobility avenues for refugees living in the North African country. Low resettlement figures, and the political drive sponsoring local migrant integration, pushed refugees and asylum seekers to fear that they could lose access to one of the only legal escape routes out of Morocco if they had shown interest in any of the labour promotion activities.

During interviews, however, aid workers involved in UNHCR-sponsored integration activities consistently stated that all refugees were eligible for labour promotion projects, whatever their future mobility plan was. Brahim, an officer of a Moroccan NGO working on the PISERUMA programme, specified that the UNHCR had stopped sharing with them the list of the refugees who were being considered for resettlement. He explained that a misleading rumour had spread in the refugee community stating that enrolment in labour integration activities would lower their chances of obtaining a relocation. “UNHCR just calls us if they know for sure that someone will be relocated very shortly” he told me. “In that case, it’s not worth enrolling them in a professional training course or supporting them in the creation of an income-generating activity”.²¹

Based on the different versions given by the people that I interviewed, it is of course impossible for me to establish whether labour integration actually matters for resettlement decisions or not. What these data show with certainty, however, is that it does not really matter: the fear of being “stuck” in Morocco, and the powerful role that UNHCR was playing in the life of refugee and asylum-seeking people, were enough to trigger the latter’s suspicion vis-à-vis labour integration programmes. Like in Foucault’s panopticon, the surveillant does not

²¹ Interview with Brahim, officer of a Moroccan NGO, Rabat, October 2016.

even need to be surveilling for power to work: the prisoner, who “is seen, but [. . .] does not see” (Foucault 1979a, 200), lives in the constant awareness that someone might be looking at them, and is induced to behave accordingly. They are therefore being pushed to monitor their conduct, to refrain from manifesting their wills and their dissent, to avoid any action that might irritate the source of power – that might be observing them, or that might not.

The fear to be seen as ‘willing to integrate in Morocco’ was not the only concern that asylum seekers and refugees felt vis-à-vis labour integration activities. During the quarrel with Rabia evoked earlier, the latter had made clear that nobody was obliged to follow any training courses. Khadija, visibly irritated by the answer, replied that even if there was not any obligation to follow training courses, she was concerned that the UNHCR would curtail her financial assistance if she refused to take a course she had been advised to take. Others in the room had nodded, expressing agreement. Labour integration activities, therefore, were sites where West and Central African asylum seekers and refugees would project not only their fear of immobility in Morocco, but also their fear of losing the support of the UNHCR altogether.

The UNHCR does not ensure financial assistance to all those falling under its mandate. According to a factsheet compiled by UNHCR Morocco in March 2016, cash assistance was ensured to 1,200 “vulnerable refugees”, out of a population of 4,277 refugees/persons in need of international protection. Based on an assessment conducted by UNHCR partners, the UN agency would grant between €80 and €110 on average to people in need of financial assistance.²² In a country where finding and maintaining a job was such a difficult endeavour, the financial assistance provided by the UNHCR was certainly an essential relief for those who were eligible to receive it. Granting financial assistance to refugees is, however, a contested topic within the history of the UNHCR, due to the shared (and politically situated) belief within the agency that financial assistance could lead to refugee dependency on aid²³ (Crisp 2003). The UNHCR has developed a varied sets of activities and strategies to promote refugees’ “self-reliance” (see

²² Interview with Irene, former intern of a Moroccan NGO, phone, October 2018.

²³ This concern has not always ranked highly in the UNHCR agenda. Rather, the narrative of self-reliance emerged in the 1980s, as the UNHCR started navigating a political landscape characterised by increasing funding constraints,

UNHCR 2005b, 2011a), understood as the “the ability for refugees to live independently from humanitarian assistance” (Slaughter et al. 2017, 1). The PISERUMA project itself was created in the late 2000s as part of the UNHCR’s self-reliance package,²⁴ precisely to reduce refugees’ dependence on financial assistance.²⁵

The multiple political meanings that beneficiaries attribute to labour integration activities speak to the broader contested relationship between refugees and the UNHCR. During a later conversation, Mamadou explained to me that it was difficult for asylum seekers and refugees to understand exactly how decisions about resettlement or financial assistance were taken. Labour integration activities, therefore, were a platform for them to show the UNHCR that they were “serious”:

You know Lorena, we are just beneficiaries, we do not really know how they work in the inside. The UNHCR, when they suggest you to do a training course, it is not to block you, it is for . . . sometimes there are people that enrol to a training course, but then they come once yes, once no . . . if you do not take it seriously, how can the UNHCR take you seriously? [. . .] We cannot know how it is because it is an issue between states, it is closed to the outside, you know.²⁶

The relationship between asylum seekers and refugees to the UNHCR is a complex one. The former feel like the agency grants them support (“when they suggest you to do a training course, it is not to block you, it is for . . .”), but then feel clearly at the receiving end of an enormous power imbalance (“we are just beneficiaries, we do not really know how they work in the inside”) and diplomatic game (“We cannot know how it is because it is an issue between states, it is closed to the outside, you know”). Engaging *seriously* in labour integration activities then becomes a way to prove your own industriousness to the UNHCR (“if

the emergence of populist, anti-immigrant, security-related rhetoric, and a shift in the nature of UNHCR operations (Crisp 2003).

²⁴ As Turner argues, humanitarian organisations tend to promote normative forms of self-reliance, posing clear boundaries of permissibility to how refugees can try to help themselves. The tendency of Syrian refugees to appropriate available resources in the Jordanian camp of Za’atari and make use of them in ways not allowed by the UNHCR and related organisations was a reason for concern, rather than a symbol of pride, for humanitarian workers (Turner 2018).

²⁵ Interview, UNHCR officer, Rabat, November 2016.

²⁶ Interview with Mamadou, Malian citizen, place withdrawn, June 2019.

you do not take it seriously, how can the UNHCR take you seriously?”). In a context where the provision of social assistance is not ensured as a right, but is discretionarily provided by charities, the poor start feeling the need to prove their good character “beyond the ‘objective’ parameters introduced to select individuals eligible for assistance” (Bono 2014, 148). Labour integration programmes, like other instruments of discipline, exercise the maximum power at minimum costs because they are “visible” – the behaviour of migrant people is potentially always visible to the aid agencies they interact with – but “unverifiable” – beneficiaries do not know whether someone is actually checking their attendance or their performance during training workshops, but they have no way to verify it otherwise (Foucault 1979a, 201).

Refugees attributed different political meanings to labour integration activities. On the one hand, they saw it as a way for the UNHCR to understand their willingness to integrate. On the other hand, they saw it as a way for the agency to measure the ‘industriousness’ of their population of concern. Refugees reacted differently to these two meanings, feeling the need to distance themselves from labour integration activities, while at the same time feeling obliged to engage in them. This politicisation reflected refugees’ perception of the power imbalance vis-à-vis the UNHCR, as the agency played a huge – yet unlegible – role in ordering the present and the future of their lives. Labour integration activities became the battlefield where the disciplinary power of the border and of the neoliberal social regime became visible and tangible. This pushed refugees to assume behaviours that, they believed, would allow them to navigate a world of evident constraints and limited agency.

Conclusion

Aid-funded projects do not settle displaced people away from the European border by offering them economic alternatives to migration. Much to the contrary, labour integration activities did not seem to be very effective in facilitating migrant labour integration at all. This, however, did not mean that these projects did not *do* anything. Labour integration projects filter border containment power by working as disciplinary mechanisms. They operate in a context marked by structural constraints (in terms of unemployment, of border closure, of

influence of IOs). These significantly limit the choice that displaced people can adopt, and that therefore ‘push’ beneficiaries to adopt certain attitudes vis-à-vis labour integration projects.

I have identified two ways in which these programmes deploy this disciplinary power. The first is by fostering discourses portraying labour integration in Morocco as a feasible endeavour. The adoption of market-centred development tools to decrease unemployment displaces the attention away from the structural problems affecting the Moroccan labour market. Rather, the focus is placed on individuals and the organisations assisting them as agents determining the success or failure of labour integration. In this way, unemployment becomes an individualised failure, thus transforming the questionable idea of integrating migrants into a struggling labour market into a feasible endeavour.

Second, labour integration activities become stages where displaced people perform certain kinds of model behaviours to abide to models of refugeehood. Feelings of powerlessness spark anxieties of spatial and economic immobility. These fears induce beneficiaries to either distance themselves from or to overengage in training workshops, in the hope to prove the UNHCR that they are either “not integrated enough in Morocco” – and therefore eligible for resettlement into a third country – or “industrious and diligent in their professional integration” – enough to deserve the financial assistance allocated by the agency.