

***State of the art***  
**The root causes of irregular migration in the region of the Rabat Process**

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## Introduction

The purpose of this state of the art report is to give an overview of the existing works relating to the question of the “root causes” of “irregular migrations” in the region of the Rabat Process. This state of the art report cannot cover the whole array of perspectives which exist on these subjects. However, our objective is to identify the different key ideas, the contributions, the limits and shortcomings of the existing literature, with a view to positioning our study within this, justifying the foundations on which it is built and convincing the reader of its innovative approach.

### 1. Irregular migration in the region of the Rabat Process

#### A problem, root causes, a solution?

This first part summarises the different works coming from European institutions, in particular the texts related to the Global Approach to Migration implemented, for a certain number of West African and Maghreb countries, as part of the Rabat Process. The corpus also includes texts produced by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the main inter-governmental organisation in the field of migration, which works in close collaboration with governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental partners. Lastly, this part takes into account the reports of the Euro-Mediterranean Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration (CARIM), created in February 2004 and funded by the European Commission, for which irregular migration is one of its central scientific topics.

#### 1.1 Irregular migration, a problem

*“Irregular” migration, “illegal” migration or “clandestine” migration?*

While most of the texts written by international organisations and institutions immediately highlight the lack of a universal definition of “irregular migration”, they nevertheless attempt to define its boundaries. In this respect, the International Organization for Migration, in its lexicon of key terms on migration, gives the following definition: “Movement that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries”. It differentiates the perspective based on the destination country, according to which “irregular immigration” refers to the “irregular entry, stay or work in a country, meaning that the migrant does not have the necessary authorisation or documents required under immigration regulations to enter, reside or work in a given country”; and the perspective of the sending country, where the irregularity of emigration refers to a departure in which a “person crosses an international boundary without a valid passport or travel document, or does not fulfil the administrative requirements for leaving the country” (IOM, 2018: [online]). It makes the distinction with the term “illegal migration” and proposes to restrict the use of this term to “cases of smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons.”



### *The problem of irregular migrations*

In a Communication of the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, following up on the Hampton Court summit (27 October 2005) and presenting the challenges related to adopting a “global approach to migration”, migration was identified as a “problem”: “It [the global approach] therefore adopts “a coherent approach across a number of areas,” (EC, 2005: p.2). This co-occurrence of the terms “migrations” and/or “irregular migrations” and “problem” can be found in several texts by international organisations and institutions.

For example, we can cite several reports produced by the CARIM. Regardless of whether they refer to the “problem of the irregular migration of sub-Saharan people” in Morocco (Elmadmad, 2008: p.16), or having to “face the problem of clandestine immigration” in Mauritania (Ahmed Salem, 2010: p.6), or even to the “problem of irregular immigration” in Mali (Dembele, 2010: p.13), this type of migration - contrary to regular migration - has been identified as a problem in itself.

### *The problems causing irregular migrations*

However, in these same texts, the “problem” which is targeted has moved towards “root causes”: it is not so much irregular migration that poses a problem, but rather the “root causes” of this irregular migration. In other terms, it is necessary to shift the focus: moving away from the consequences of irregular migration to concentrate instead on the root causes of irregular migration. We can thus find extended vocabulary regularly associated with the terms “irregular migrations” and “problem”: “root”, “reason”, “source”, “genesis”, “factor”, “root causes”, etc. All of these terms invite us to consider the problem at the level of the “root causes” and to adopt a new approach to the problems that are the *source* of this phenomenon.

### *A problem to be solved*

A “problem” may refer to a “theoretical or practical question that involves difficulties to be resolved, or whose solution remains uncertain”, a “thing whose nature is difficult to determine, or which one cannot explain or understand”, or even, according to a more sociological definition of the term, a “situation which is considered to threaten certain values of civilisation of a given society” (CNRTL, 2012: [online]). Parts of these definitions can be found in the texts of international organisations and institutions. Whilst irregular migrations and the root causes of this are identified as a challenge involving a certain number of difficulties, it is also, and above all, considered to be a threat to which a solution must be found. Therefore, irregular migrations constitute a problem that must be - using the most neutral vocabulary - “resolved”, “solved” and “sorted”, or - if one prefers more offensive vocabulary – one which we might “fight against” or “attack”.



## 1.2 Identifying the root causes of irregular migration

In order to fight against the “root causes of irregular migration”, it is first necessary to identify them. Since 2008, at the request of the European Union, the CARIM and the IOM have provided analyses and published reports on a certain number of countries, but have yet to fully cover all of the countries falling under the Rabat Process<sup>1</sup>.

Regarding the IOM’s reports, these have covered – since 2009 – Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Senegal (2009), Benin (2011), Nigeria (2014), Togo (2015) and Burkina Faso (2016). In each of its reports (entitled “Migration to...: National Profile”), the IOM dedicates one section to the “identification of factors generating migration”. Regardless of the country, the same factors are always put forward to explain the reason for the departure: economic factors (poverty, economic crisis, the burden of foreign debt), demographic factors (population growth, urban growth), environmental factors (drought, pressure on natural resources) and political factors (*Coup d’état*). Combined with these “push” factors are the “pull” factors, particularly those related to the labour demand in specific sectors - both in neighbouring countries as well as countries that are further away (Maghreb, European Union).

Regarding the CARIM reports, focus has progressively shifted from the Maghreb towards West Africa: Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, Tunisia (2008, 2009); followed by Mali, Niger, Senegal (2010, 2011). Compared to the IOM reports, CARIM reports explore the causes of irregular migration in more detail.. They distinguish between, on the one hand, “the causes of migration” - similar to those identified by the IOM - i.e. broad determinants; and on the other hand, the “causes of migrants”, identified through small surveys conducted by the CARIM or on the basis of existing data. Taking the example of Senegal alone: we find that the determining factor in the decision to leave is the economic condition, but the analysis attempts to highlight more detailed aspects of the reasons underlying this decision. Thus, emigration is not simply described as a search for better living conditions, but also as a “means to escape the humiliation linked to the inability to provide or maintain a fulfilling lifestyle” (M. Tall, A. Tandian, 2010: p.5). This report on Senegal demonstrates the objective of the CARIM, which, unlike the IOM, intends to examine multiple variables in order to understand the causes of migration. Nevertheless, the ultimate goal of both the IOM and the CARIM is to weigh up the importance of each of the determinants identified, in order to address them.

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<sup>1</sup> The data concerning the other countries of the Rabat Process - Cape Verde, Congo, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Liberia, Central African Republic, São Tomé and Príncipe, Sierra Leone, Chad - remains incomplete. In any case, no CARIM or IOM reports have been produced on these countries in particular.



### 1.3 Development aid: an instrument for fighting against the root causes of irregular migration

To solve the problem of irregular migration, the global approach on the question of migration confirms the adoption of a two-fold approach. The first concerns the fight against irregular immigration and the adoption of security measures. The second aims to initiate a comprehensive dialogue with third countries in order to “address the root causes of migration”. This second solution, envisaged as a more long-term solution than the first, is derived from development aid policy. It is based on the assumption that aiding sending countries will encourage potential migrants to remain in their home country rather than migrating elsewhere:

*“By helping create livelihood opportunities that offer alternatives to emigration, EU development policy, centred on the eradication of poverty and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, including through the promotion of economic growth and job creation and the promotion of good governance and human rights, helps address the root causes of migration”. (EC, 2005: p.4).*

However, the CARIM reports, relaying fragments of political and media rhetoric that translate the perspective of “southern countries”, point out the prominence of security approach rather than the development approach. These reports insist, at the same time, on the need to prioritise long-term solutions rather than increasing the number of repressive policies. In one of the CARIM reports published on Morocco, Abdelkrim Belguendouz particularly cites an intervention of the King of Morocco that summarises the positions of the “southern countries”: “the increase in the flow of illegal emigration - of which destitution is the primary cause and a world of opulence is the final destination - calls for a global response which goes much beyond a security approach. This will remain insufficient in itself if we do not seek to remedy the economic and social causes of the phenomenon in the sending countries” (Belguendouz, 2009: p.34).

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In the analyses provided by European institutions and international organisations, irregular migrations appear as a problem. Solving it involves identifying the causes of this problem, i.e. the factors that motivate departures from the different countries of origin (developing “southern” countries). The main causes that have been identified relate to the economic differences between the source and destination countries, political instability in countries of emigration, as well as demographic and environmental factors. The implementation of development policies is a logical conclusion of this reasoning. If the European Union aids these countries of origin in their development - on the economic, social, political and environmental levels - their populations will no longer be attracted by the idea of leaving: there will no longer be any reason motivating the desire to leave one’s country of origin to migrate to Europe. Irregular migration will be wiped out.



Described as such, the reasoning appears to be perfectly logical. Nevertheless, it does not appear to completely match reality. Irregular migrations, whilst they have not increasing in quantity, have not dropped significantly either. It is precisely the logic of international organisations and institutions on the one hand, and the observation of reality on the other, which has been used as the starting point for studies conducted by researchers in social sciences and humanities, and particularly in the scope of international migration. These works (studies) always start by expressing an element of astonishment, as to why such analyses have not been taken more into account in the political and institutional spheres. Their authors admit that the works of the institutions and organisations provide components for understanding the “root causes of irregular migration”.

However, through a critical reading of the existing corpus and/or more in-depth analysis based on the collection of new data, these scientific works have called into question the logical conclusion that has been tirelessly repeated in the texts of international organisations and institutions: these works (1) put into perspective the “problematic” nature of “irregular” migrations; (2) identify push factors other than economic and political instability and/or consider several variations of these factors; (3) call into question the use of development aid as a solution to the problem.

## 2. In light of scientific works (1)

### Towards a combinatorial analysis of the determinants of migration

The corpus of scientific works that we will explore in this second part is not homogeneous. Some of these works are based on existing statistical data (De Haas, 2008a, b) whereas others, deeming this to be incomplete, have produced new data (NIDI, Eurostat, 2000; MAFÉ, 2010, 2015). Using surveys - distributed to potential migrants, to those who have already left and/or already arrived, or to those who are part of migrants' *entourages*, or using historical, political and/or legal analyses - these works explore the different root causes of departure from countries of origin. Although they apply different methods and approaches, these works have in common the fact that they are working towards the same goal. With the help of statistical data, they put into perspective the so-called massive scale of African migration towards Europe, and prove the beneficial nature of migration for the economy, in order to demonstrate that migration does not constitute a “true problem”. Next, these works go further than international organisations and institutions and emphasise the need to identify a greater variety of push factors and to go beyond the profile of the African migrant based on the duality of poverty / insecurity. Lastly, by inviting us to reflect on the link between migration and development, these works call into question development aid as a “solution” to remedy irregular migration.



## 2.1 “Irregular” migrations: a problem to be put into perspective

Firstly, it appears that irregular migrations are actually less “undesirable” than described by international organisations and institutions. As sociologist Hein de Haas explains, European economies need this irregular and cheap labour. The same applies to the economies of the Maghreb countries. From the point of view of countries of origin, the trading and business activities (including informal ones) as well as the sending of funds (remittances) are also beneficial to the local economies and constitute a source of stability and a vital resource for development. The latest report of the World Bank estimates an 8.5% increase in remittances towards low and medium-income countries in 2017. According to these estimates, these remittances amount to 466 billion dollars, a new record (World Bank, 2017: p.3). Thus, “European and African States appear to have little genuine interest in halting migration” (De Haas, 2008b: p.10), as it seems essential for their economy to function.

In order to put into perspective the “problematic” nature of irregular migrations from the African continent towards Europe, another approach seeks to prove that: (1) “persons originating from the South of the Sahara represent a minority of the flows and numbers of migrants in Europe”; (2) that “sub-Saharan Africa is the region with the lowest emigration towards Northern countries in the world”; (3) that “departures to foreign countries are mostly focused on neighbouring countries” (Flahaux, Beauchemin, Schoumaker, 2010: p.3) within the African continent (Robin, 2014: pp. 20-31).

In this respect, the results of a study jointly conducted by Eurostat and the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI), entitled “*Push and pull factors of international migration*” (2000), as well as those of the scientific programme MAFE (*Migrations between Europe and Africa*) coordinated by the French Institute for Demographic Studies<sup>2</sup> (INED, 2008), are particularly significant.

These two researches have several points in common. They focus on both countries of departure as well as the destination countries, and are carried out using a comparative perspective between the States of the European Union and the States of sub-Saharan Africa. They focus on the causes of migration in general, and not exclusively on “irregular migrations”. In view of their shared observation that existing data is out-dated, sparse and incomplete, both consider the *raison d’être* for these major quantitative surveys to be the need to produce more recent data.

More specific studies in Senegal have also revealed that Senegalese citizens mostly migrate to neighbouring countries rather than to the Member States of the EU (Lessault, Flahaux, 2013; Lessault, Robin, 2015). These analyses “temper the discussions on the intensification of Senegalese emigration, whilst highlighting the determining influence of “regional” specificities [in Senegal] on the variations in the flows and the distribution of destinations” (Lessault, Flahaux, 2013).

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<sup>2</sup> The main difference between these two projects is geography. NIDI and Eurostat have conducted a survey on migrations from five West African countries, three of which are part of the Rabat Process (Morocco, Senegal, Ghana), towards Italy and Spain. The MAFE survey focuses on migrations from (and between) Senegal, Ghana and the Democratic Republic of the Congo towards France, Spain and Italy.





In order to focus more on this, we can also observe the migratory phenomenon on a smaller scale. In this respect, the figures provided in the latest report of the World Bank (2017) are particularly convincing. Indeed, in terms of figures, it is an undeniable fact that the number of migrants has increased: estimated at 172 million in 2000, it has risen to 258 million in 2017 (World Bank, 2017: p.11). However, when we compare this figure to that of the global population the change does not appear to be as significant: over the same period, the proportion has slightly increased from 2.8% to 3.4% (World Bank, 2017; p.11). This supports the argument of a relative constancy in international migration that has lasted for as long as the statistics allow us to determine.

Lastly, in order to put into perspective the “problematic” nature of the “irregularity” in itself, we should also consider the following question: from what point onwards does irregularity become a “problem”? From what point onwards can migrations be truly qualified as “irregular”? From what point onwards does the question of “irregularity” apply? From what point onwards does migration become irregular?

The surveys we refer to focus as much on intra-African migration as migration between African regions and the EU. The existing analyses have never identified determinants which apply to “South-South” migrations alone, or determinants which are exclusive to “South-North” migrations. In other words, whether these migrations occur within West or Central Africa, between this region and the Maghreb, or between all of these countries and the EU, the reasons for emigration remain the same. Moreover, these analyses show that these migrations are interlinked: very often, “South-North” migration is preceded by “South-South” migration. Yet, the question of irregularity does not arise in the first movement. In fact, this occurs firstly in an area of free movement, specific to the functioning of the ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) and the ECCAS (Economic Community of Central African States). Next, when the movement towards the Maghreb countries takes place, the logic of free movement often continues to apply owing to the existence of bilateral agreements between the Member States of the ECOWAS and the ECCAS on the one hand, and the States of the Maghreb on the other. In fact, the question of irregularity only arises when the intention to continue towards the European border emerges. In other words, the “irregularity” of the migration constitutes an external factor that arises from the implementation of migratory policies by the EU. As such, the question of irregularity does not only arise at the moment when migratory routes cross the political borders of the EU: it also arises from the moment migratory routes enter an area where the EU outsources the migration control of its own borders, i.e. upstream control, at the borders of the countries of the Maghreb and West Africa, on trans-Saharan, Atlantic and Mediterranean routes in particular (Audebert, Robin: 2009).

## 2.2 A “mobile Africa”?

In order to put into perspective the massive, new and problematic nature of irregular migrations, some studies have focused on re-positioning current migrations within a historical perspective. As explained by F. Manchuelle (2004) or H. Van Dijk, D. Foeken and K. Van Til (2001), the whole history of Africa can be studied through the lens of mobility (secular routes of pre-colonial trans-Saharan trade; routes and



forced displacements linked to slavery). Nevertheless, “should we consider migration to be a cultural value that is supposedly an indelible part of Africa, a “*mobile Africa*” (van Dijk, Foeken & van Til 2001)?” (Canut, Sow, 2014: p.21). In other words, is the argument (myth?) of a traditionally and historically “mobile Africa” sufficient to explain the migratory phenomenon – despite, moreover, the fact that we know that a vast majority of the population does not migrate and that today’s Africa is no longer that of the pre-colonial era? Whilst it provides us with certain elements which help us to read the situation, this cultural perspective is not sufficient enough to understand the causes of migration.

Other scientific works have concentrated on the more recent history of African mobility, particularly focusing on political and legal developments in the different countries of Africa and Maghreb (Bredeloup, Pliez, 2005; Boubakri, 2005; De Haas, 2008a, b); Bredeloup, 2008; OCDE/CSAE, 2008, 2009; Robin, 2009; Brachet et al., 2011; Robin, 2013; Petit, Robin: 2013). The purpose of these works is to explain the redirection of movements of the population towards the Member States of the European Union, and thereby to explain the *causes of irregular migrations towards Europe*. The objective is to demonstrate that there was not necessarily an intention to migrate to Europe from the start: the aim was to show how the evolution of the political and legal context contributed to a gradual redefining and reshaping of migratory routes.

Lastly, in addition to these works, some have explored motives for the departure by studying the political situations of the countries of origin. Here we can cite, in particular, the works of Marc-Antoine Perouse de Montclos, Véronique Petit and Nelly Robin. Focussing on West Africa, *Crises and migrations in Southern countries* (2013) looks back at different “political crises”. While they are not structural determinants, these events are, *at a given time T*, factors of migration. For example, the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire undeniably modified the landscape of West-African as well as extra-continental migrations (Gonin, Robin 2009).

### 2.3 Migrations are not the outcome of a single determinant

“While migration is largely considered to be the product of the “destitution” of the African continents, do the migrants truly match the profiles of destitute persons?” (Flahaux, Beauchemin, Schoumaker, 2010: p.3). This question has guided the two aforementioned major quantitative surveys. This research invites us to consider migrations as “initiated” or “accentuated” by “economic factors”, “extreme poverty” or “social or economic insecurity”: they recognise that this creates a “significant potential for migration”. Nevertheless, in light of the assertion that the entire population does not migrate, authors have raised the following question: “what are the circumstances that transform this potential into effective migrations?” (NIDI, Eurostat, 2000: p.15).



The objective is to “understand the factors at an individual household level, and the context that influences the decision to leave or to stay” (NIDI, Eurostat, 2000: p.xiii). In order to achieve this objective, these research projects include a micro-level survey (individual data on migrants and non-migrants, data on households) as well as a macro-level survey (data on the contextual or structural aspects of the environment of persons that influence the choices and possibilities of migrating, at the national, regional and local levels).

What are the key points revealed by these two major surveys? The NIDI and Eurostat survey enabled a detailed analysis of the reasons behind migration to be conducted. They were grouped into three categories of reasons: economic reasons (improving jobs, better income, better standard of living); family reasons (family reunification or marriage); other reasons (school, studies, fear of war or persecution, retirement, end of employment contracts, homesickness, expulsion). Two variables were introduced: gender and the region of destination (NIDI, Eurostat, 2000: p.77). In addition to gender, the MAFE survey added age and level of education as variables. The added value of this survey is also the fact that “period effects” are isolated, the objective being to show that the potential to migrate towards Northern countries has not significantly increased (Beauchemin, 2015: p.12). These two surveys provide a more in-depth comprehension of the different push factors. By cross-referencing different variables at different scales, they enable multiple possible combinations to be considered, and go beyond the simplistic vision of migration motivated by a single determinant. However, they are also conscious of their own limits: “They [the analyses] remain quite rough as regards the identification of other migration determinants. Other studies should seek to further develop the question of factors of international migration, both at the individual and contextual levels.” (Flahaux, Beauchemin, Schoumaker, 2000: p.22).

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All of these studies refute the idea that migration is the outcome of one single determinant. They support a more complex approach of international migrations, and strongly encourage us to take into account several scales and different variables. These works also reverse the manner in which we should reflect upon the link between migration and development. The idea that it is not the poorest people who migrate dates back to the works of Gildas Simon (Simon, 2008). This idea has constantly been supported and proven in subsequent scientific works. Three related ideas can be derived from this. Firstly, the sole factor of “poverty” / “destitution” is not sufficient: people do not leave their country solely for economic reasons. Next, it has been proven that migration tends to increase the development of the countries of origin, especially via remittances, fund transfers and the creation of jobs by the migrants. Lastly, several works have shown that development increases rather than curbs mobility. Thus, these scientific works invite us - on the one hand - to consider development aid as a relative solution for solving the “problem” of irregular migrations. On the other hand, they invite us to stop considering irregular migration as a problem in itself or, in other words, to consider it as a false problem.



### 3. In light of scientific works (2)

#### Considering migrations “from the inside”: the importance of listening to migrants and a migrant-focused approach

During the 2000s, a certain number of scientific works of researchers specialising in the field of international migrations developed and supported the need to go beyond the approach to migration which focuses on external determinants, and proposed an alternative to these explanations, which they deemed to be too restrictive. By persuading us to consider migrations “from the inside” (Ma Mung, 2009: p.25) and to put ourselves in the place of the main actor – i.e. potential migrants, persons who have the experience of migration - the importance was to direct ourselves towards a fine and complex understanding of the causes of migration, in line with reality. Our study is situated precisely within this scientific framework.

#### 3.1 The “causes of irregular migration”: an “insoluble” question, as it is “inadequate”

Since the 2000s, studies on the question of the “causes of irregular migration” have multiplied, and the policies implemented to attempt to address these have also multiplied, both in terms of security and development aid. And yet international migrations, staying true to their historical constancy, have not disappeared: this is a common observation made by European institutions, international organisations, non-governmental organisations and researchers in social sciences and humanities. Therefore, an important question arises: is the desperate search for the “root causes of irregular migration” the correct path? Is this quest for an exhaustive knowledge of the causes actually relevant? Is it not an “insoluble” question, seeing as it is itself “inadequate” (Ma Mung, 2009: p.36)?

Firstly, this perspective criticises the use of the term “irregularity”, which implies that the causes of “irregular” migrations and those of “regular” migrations are different. Yet, people who choose to leave do not choose to migrate in an irregular manner. There are no migrants who decide to emigrate regularly and migrants who decide to emigrate irregularly: there are no root causes of regular migration on the one hand, and root causes of irregular migration on the other. At the start, there is a plan to migrate and a decision to leave, and it is only during the implementation of this migratory project that the migration may possibly become irregular. It is therefore external factors - external to the migrants themselves and to the reasons for their emigration - which create the irregularity during certain steps or during the entirety of their migration route towards the destination country. Provided that the relevant question is that of the “causes”, we support the need to free ourselves from the term “irregular” and to treat the “causes” without differentiating between regular and irregular migrations.



The second cornerstone of this critical perspective questions the understanding of international migrations according to “causes”. Whether it prioritises an approach focused on external determinants (i.e. migrations are caused by differences in the standard of living between countries of origin and destination) or it highlights internal determinants (i.e. people choose to leave after comparing the drawbacks and benefits of migration) all research on the “root causes of irregular migration” begins from the same postulate: inequality in the distribution of assets causes the displacement of individuals. Two related ideas can be derived from this: (1) since migrations are determined by determinants, understanding these determinants will allow us to explain migrations; (2) migrations are the result of mechanisms that work at the macro-economic or individual levels (Ma Mung, 2009: p.1).

While we cannot deny that the hope for a better life has an effect on the displacement of individuals or groups, these deterministic and “economistic” explanations (Ma Mung, 2009: p.2) for migration are deemed to be partial and insufficient to fully understanding the causes of migration. But, precisely why is this causality approach so limited? How and why should we go beyond an explanation for migration which is based on determinants and rational choices? By supporting the need to adopt another point of view and to formulate new questions, the paradigm of autonomy offers partial answers and has opened new perspectives.

### **3.2 The autonomy paradigm : a reversal of perspective, looking at migrations through a new lens**

Firstly, why can (or why must) deterministic explanations be considered as insufficient in identifying and explaining the causes of migration? This criticism has been made several times in various scientific works. Emmanuel Ma Mung (2009) summarises this in the following contradiction: if the argument which supports differences in living standards of living as the push factor is true, in that case we would observe the migration of an entire population; yet, only a part of it actually goes through with the act. According to this same logic but focusing on the individual level, he also states that not all of those who stand to gain from migration and who would benefit from it actually do migrate.

Next, in what way are these deterministic explanations the source of two restrictive, and therefore simplistic, visions of migrants? These explanations lead us to consider migrants either as “ballistic objects propelled by differences in the standards of living between the sending countries and the receiving countries”, i.e. as “a set of agents that have no control over their actions”; or as “unfeeling calculators aiming to maximise their gains while minimising their efforts”, i.e. as “individuals having all the information and means that enable them to choose between remaining where they are or moving elsewhere, and having advanced knowledge of the effects of their actions.” (Ma Mung, 2009: p.1).



In this critical perspective to understanding international migrations through analysing determinants, factors or causes, a series of studies (Arab: 2007; Bruslé: 2006; De Gourcy: 2005; Diminescu: 2008; Escoffier: 2006; Hily, Rinaudo: 2002; Nedelcu: 2004; Schmoll: 2004; Tarrus: 2007) has contributed to the development of notion of the autonomy paradigm (Ma Mung, 1999). For example, we can cite the works of Florence Boyer on the concept of a “migration project” (Boyer, 2005a, b). According to her, to analyse migrations and reveal their complexity, this notion has several advantages. Firstly, it intrinsically calls into question the determinant-based approach and the cause-effect logic. Indeed, considering that migration projects are constantly being re-evaluated and reconfigured whilst the migration is carried out (neither linear nor direct) and that they are re-adjusted based on the situations encountered on the ground, analysing root causes does not really make sense: although the original causes for leaving have not been completely supplanted, they must be reviewed in light of the changes in the migration project and the reasons for these re-adjustments. Thus, Florence Boyer proposes to set aside the question of “why” to introduce rather the question of “how”. Secondly, it enables the different spatial and temporal scales of in which migration takes place, to be included. Finally, the members of the groups to which the migrant-actor belongs (family, friends, etc.) are given back their place in the different decision-making processes, both at departure and during the migratory journey.

How can we summarise the paradigm of autonomy?

The first lever is terminological: in order to guarantee a change in the way we look at migrations we must “liberate” ourselves from the vocabulary currently in use. In this respect, when describing the situation, i.e. the environment in which migrations take place, the autonomy paradigm sets aside the term “determination” and instead uses the term “conditions”. The same applies for characterising the process by which the individual evaluates all of these conditions in order to take the decision to emigrate. The autonomy paradigm suggests no longer using the terms “calculation” and “examination” that are freely used in the texts of international organisations and European institutions. It suggests, rather, giving priority to the term internal “dispositions”.

The key idea on which the autonomy paradigm is built is as follows: neither conditions (i.e. the context, the environment) nor internal dispositions (specific to the individual) have a determining nature. In other words, context and environment do not have any more influence on the decision to migrate than the specific, individual dispositions and vice-versa. On the contrary, these “conditions” and these “dispositions” work together: in order to carry out their project, individuals or groups adapt and organise their context in order to succeed in their project to migrate. By stating this, the autonomy paradigm underlines the importance of the “know-how” and the “ability” of the migrants, and therefore emphasises their “ability to take the initiative” and firmly supports the adoption of a new point of view to understand and to explain international migrations: that of the migrant-actor (Ma Mung: 2009; Migrinter: 2012, 2018).



The autonomy paradigm therefore suggests a migrant-centred approach. Studies that are grounded in this scientific approach adopt a comprehensive and phenomenological approach: they focus on understanding the senses and meanings that individuals give to their actions, and develop a focus which is based on their thoughts, desires, intents, emotions and portrayals of reality (Ma Mung, 2009; Robin, 2014).

### **3.3 Understanding the conditions of expression of the migratory experience from the point of view of migrants**

“Put yourself in the shoes of the migrants”, “think about migrations from the inside”, “prioritise a migrant-centred approach” are all expressions that define the intentions of a large number of scientific studies that seek to go beyond the idea of migration as “a homogeneous phenomenon for which a single explanation suffices” (Canut, Mazauric, 2014: p.8). Whilst all of these studies fall under the autonomy paradigm, more recent works have paved the way for particularly innovative reflections by claiming the need for a socio-linguistic approach, focused on the “voices”, “anecdotal accounts” and the “words of migration”, in order to describe a migratory experience which is as close as possible to what is fundamentally at play (Mazauric: 2012, Canut, Mazauric: 2014).

These studies do not discount economic reasons. Nor do they refute the idea according to which inhabitants of West Africa and the Maghreb leave home because they are faced with economic difficulties, because their country is in conflict, because they are forced by their family or simply due to reasons of honour and loyalty. In addition, these studies acknowledge that such reasons are repeatedly invoked by potential migrants. In the same respect, they do not completely reject the concept of an adventurer, a “figurehead of African migration”, a concept introduced by migrants themselves to give meaning to their action and to give themselves the strength to continue their paths. This figurehead is often portrayed simplistically in the political and media spheres as the typical young migrant leaving his country of birth to quench his “thirst to discover new horizons” (Bredeloup, 2008: p.296) – which in itself is an alternative to the purely economic vision, which emphasises the desires of youth, adventure and experience.

Just as these recent works propose setting aside texts that support economic causality, they also invite us to go beyond the works that support the “adventurous paradigm”: “the promotion of the figure of an adventurer (Bredeloup, 2008), linked to that of Eldorado (de Latour, 2003) and success, Whilst being a convincing analytical framework, this does not allow us to take into account the multiple forms and conditions of migration. In fact, there is a risk of portraying the traveller as a disembodied archetypal figure, ignorant or oblivious of the dangers of the road, desiring only to surpass themselves according to a paradigm of virility or ostentation” (Canut, Mazauric, 2014: p.8).



As an alternative to the restrictive, mechanical and economic explanations on the one hand, or the essentialist and psychological ones on the other, these innovative works intend to “take the words literally spoken or written to describe these migratory experiences” in order to show that they cannot be considered in any way other than “a complex set of subjective positions, organisations and *contextualisations* leading to choices, compromises, desires and reflections that resonate differently for each person” (Canut, Sow, 2014: p.12).

## Conclusion

Beyond these fundamental epistemological debates, seeing as they are not without effect on the manner in which migration is viewed, two main challenges have been brought to light.

Migration constitutes the basis of the economic development and political stability of the African regions of the Rabat Process.

*De facto*, outsourcing the control of the borders of the European Union to the borders of the Southern countries of the Rabat Process can, in the long run, weaken the free movement that has been established there (ECOWAS, ECCAS and bilateral agreements between these two sub-groups and the countries of the Maghreb). However, hindering the mobility of citizens of these different regions strongly risks negatively impacting upon the economic development and, *a fortiori*, the political equilibrium.

As such, when we oppose development aid and migration policies (i.e. by developing sending countries we will help stop migration), we enter fundamentally into an exclusive “South-North” relationship, which is not in line with reality.

By admitting that migration constitutes a source of economic development and a guarantee of political stability, we must accept the idea that the free movement of the citizens of these countries must be guaranteed.

Therefore the solution lies neither in development aid nor in the development of migration policies which restrict people’s movements, but rather in maintaining free movement. Only free movement will enable there to be economic development and political stability in these regions.

Given that it appears to have had as its sole consequence to encourage the Member States of the European Union to enhance migration control, the term “irregularity” weakens the principle of free movement, which is the guarantee of economic and political development and stability.





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