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**The Middle Ground: A Comparative Study on Mexico and
Morocco as Transit and Forthcoming Host Nations**

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SIT Study Abroad | Morocco: Migration and Transnational Identity
Providence College | Sociology and Global Studies

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Abstract

Migration has always existed but has increased with globalization as societies are becoming more interconnected through different mediums, surging the larger scale of movement between borders and the increasing inequalities in wealth between nations. As transit countries, Mexico and Morocco function as nations seen receiving migrants in transit to their countries of destinations. Central American migrants and migrants from the South-of-the-Sahara are two prominent migrant populations in Mexico and Morocco for many years, but due to the increased political discourse, legislation, and increased enforcement at these border regions, these migrants find themselves remaining for extended periods or even settling permanently in these transit points. In this paper, I will focus on Morocco and Mexico's political, social, and legislative approaches in receiving migrants as transit and host countries. It will look at the pressures the United States and Spain, as destination host countries, have upon Mexico and Morocco's border policies, respectively, to regulate and limit migration towards their shared borders. Moreover, many of these migrants will find themselves remaining in these transit nations for a longer period of time due to the many social, legal, and physical barriers that prevent them to make it to their desired destination.

Introduction

Middle ground: “A (metaphorical) place or position halfway between extremes; an area or position of moderation or possible compromise.”¹

Mexico and Morocco hold unique geographical, political, and economic positions, influencing them to be hubs of regular and irregular migration, especially in the past two decades. Moreover, these nations have become ones of passage and settlement. Due to their location, these nations act as transit points, receiving, hosting, and sending migrants. Between Morocco and Spain and Mexico and the United States, migrants risk their lives in search for a better life while crossing the Strait of Gibraltar and the heavily fortified Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, or the Rio Grande, deserts, mountains in the United States’ southern border respectively. Hein De Hass even describes the Strait of Gibraltar as “Europe’s Rio Grande” (Hass H. D., 2005). These transit points have existed for years due to migration paths recurring throughout history for numerous reasons, however the rise in transit and irregular migration since the 1990s has demonstrated a shift in political rhetoric and approaches towards dealing with this phenomenon. In 2013, it is estimated that there was between 30,000 and 60,000 long-term undocumented migrants in Morocco (In the Same Boat: Morocco's Experience with Migrant Regulaization, 2016). In 2014, there were approximately 392,000 Central American irregular migrants in transit through Mexico to the United States (Chávez, 2017). However, these numbers are only estimates due to the precariousness of their status making it impossible to know exactly how many migrants are present in the transit nations of Mexico and Morocco. Since the 1990s,

¹ "middle ground, n.3" *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2019, www.oed.com/view/Entry/252056. Accessed 25 October 2019.

both contexts in these points of transit have experienced a sharp rise in the flow of irregular migrants crossing through Mexico and Morocco in attempts to cross their northern borders. Many migrants have a desired destination nation set in mind, but due to lack of economic resources or migrant networks, they find themselves remaining in transit nations until they are able to continue their journey. The UNHCR describes these migrants in transit states as “stranded migrants” as they are unable to continue moving onwards towards the U.S. or E.U. due to tightened border controls, lack of resources, rejected asylum application, and many other circumstances, hence remaining in these transit states is their “second-best option” (Dowd, 2008). I chose to look at transit states as ‘middle grounds’, as they are locations, both metaphorically and physically, where migrants find themselves between options, realities, plans, and risks that determine the fate of their journeys.

The focus of this paper is to create a comparative analysis of Mexican and Moroccan approaches to shifting migration patterns through looking at important theoretical framework, relevant policies, dynamics between these transit nations and the migrant-receiving nations in the European Union and the United States, as well as looking at the impacts it has towards migrant populations. I will use the terms migrants to describe individuals in transit, but will not differentiate asylum seekers, refugees, undocumented migrants, or forced migrants due to the many overlaps and shared circumstances they find their selves in. There are significant amounts of differences between the two contexts of Mexico and Morocco, but this study will primarily look at the commonalities between the south to north migration, geographic location and economic disparities, the hardening and externalization of borders, and impacts of pressures from these nations northern neighbors. Morocco is described as the ‘Gateway to Africa’ and remains a strategic economic and political partner for Europe, as they sign agreements such as ones where

the European Union will provide Morocco with financial support in exchange for policing their shared borders and deterring migrants from crossing the Mediterranean (In the Same Boat: Morocco's Experience with Migrant Regulation, 2016). Mexico is described as an important “ally”, trade partner, and partner with the United States on migration management and border policies (Seelke & Garcia, 2019). The prevalence of geostrategic and economic interests heavily influences power dynamics between Mexico and Morocco with their northern neighbors. But it also demonstrates the asymmetrical power dynamic between these societies. In both regions, migrants will find themselves having no other choice but to remain in Mexico and Morocco due to strict asylum policies, lack of resources to proceed with their journey, heavily policed borders, and increased dangerous routes due to the increased surveillance by authorities in these regions. Based on available information, 33,761 migrants drowned in the Mediterranean Sea attempting to reach Europe from 2000 to 2017, making this border region with Europe the world’s deadliest (Fargues, 2017). The United States and Mexico border ranked third with the highest numbers of migrants dead and missing; between 1998 and 2015, there were 6,571 migrants found dead in the United States (Leyva-Flores, et al., 2019).

My research aims to analyze the current patterns and contexts of migration in both Mexico and Morocco as transitioning host nations. I will look at the influence geographical location has upon Morocco and Mexico as transit nations sharing a border with and receiving pressure from the United States and Spain as destination countries for migrants. I will also analyze recent statistics and data of irregular migrants and asylum seekers occurring within the last decade. Throughout this study, I will argue that rising border policing, politics, national discourse, and rising xenophobic views negatively impact migrants in transit northwards. Furthermore, I will look at Mexico and Morocco’s motives towards receiving and deterring

migrants from their northern borders. To build upon my argument, I will begin by broadly analyzing literature to lay important context such as why movements are occurring south to north, how transit states are formed, and the current trend of the externalization of the United States' and Spain's southern borders. Using a semi-structured interview approach, I will speak with scholars on the discussion of the comparison of these transit nations and an analysis of the changes occurring. My analysis will continue to discuss why Mexico and Morocco are shifting towards being host nations, how policies and border politics are shifting, and the impacts these nations, policies, and rhetoric have upon Central American and sub-Saharan African migrants in their reception in Mexico and Morocco respectively. Finally, I will conclude with a discussion of the limitations found in my study and explaining the importance for further research on this topic.

Literature Review

In this literature review, I intend to lay contemporary framework to understand migration patterns from south to north in both Mexican to the U.S. and Moroccan to the E.U. contexts. The scholarly sources and reports provide background on conditions for these patterns, geographic locations of these transit nations, policies and enforcement pressures placed upon the nations, and the demographics of the migrant populations traveling north.

South to North Movements

In *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, the authors argue that the patterned process of migration has been boosted with development, globalization, and global inequality, but also driven by social, economic, and political change.

South-to-North migration is most commonly assumed to be driven by poverty and violence, but in reality, this type of migration requires many resources both economically and socially and is influenced by the existing disparities between nations and availability of opportunities or lifestyles elsewhere (Castles, De Haas, & Miller, 2014). Since the 1970s, there was increasing demand for foreign labor in both the U.S. and nations in Europe. In the migration pattern of sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco in transit to Europe, the authors explain that since the 1990s, irregular migration particularly of people from lower income and independent women fleeing poverty and warfare in search for work opportunities in agriculture, construction, and service sectors in Europe (Castles, De Haas, & Miller, 2014). In the 1980s, Mexico's role as a transit nation increased significantly into a destination nation for migrants from Central American countries such as Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala after the civil wars and also due to natural disasters, gang violence, and economic insecurity (Castles, De Haas, & Miller, 2014). While the book provides more broad and systemic views of these migratory processes, it is applicable to understanding historical and developmental processes causing the movements and relationships occurring between these two frontiers to this day.

In the 2013 article, *Migration and Development on the South-North Frontier*, De Haas, Vezzoli, and Simona argue that in both the Mexico-United States and Morocco-European Union contexts, there are significant similarities in occurrences and dynamics happening at these shared frontiers such as trade liberalization agreements, demand for low skilled migrant labor, and presence of transit migration at these frontiers (De Haas & Vezzoli, 2013). Although there are geographical differences, Mexico and the U.S, sharing a physical frontier, and Morocco and Europe with the Mediterranean Ocean with the exception of the Spanish enclaves, the south to north movement is evident with transit migration of migrants from Central America and south-

of-the-Sahara occurring respectively. One of their arguments in this comparison demonstrates the asymmetrical relationships occurring between these frontiers, and also the existence of migrant flows due to labor towards the United States and European Union, demonstrates that these migratory patterns are linked to economic cycles, border economics, and labor market transformations occurring in the U.S. and E.U (De Haas & Vezzoli, 2013).

In *Immigration and Politics*, Cornelius and Rosenblum look at migratory patterns as an outcome influenced by assumptions or reasons for migration, immigration controls, and the effects of migration policies. The authors first begin by addressing theories and structural factors that lead towards migration flows north, explaining that these movements are costly both economic and human terms, so migration decisions can be viewed through the neoclassical economic theory, global economic integration and dual-labor markets, transborder social networks, and the migration system theory (Cornelius & Rosenblum, 2005). However, in the analysis of immigration policy, the authors argue that they are developed to respond to underlying causes of migration which could be explained through these theories, but in fact only address the perceived consequences of migratory inflows (Cornelius & Rosenblum, 2005). To address why these movements south to north are occurring internationally, Cornelius and Rosenblum state that it is due to the following three reasons; that migration has become a generalized process of global economic and political integration, it is a result of conflict, insecurity, and structural changes occurring in a region, and finally the sociopolitical and economic implications that are attached to the receiving nation (Cornelius & Rosenblum, 2005). Hence, as this analysis looks at patterned global movements, it is also important to look at how migration has been influenced by changing rhetoric and rising restrictions in mobility.

Transit States

When looking at historical and contemporary movements towards Mexico and Morocco's northern borders, the media, political rhetoric, and even scholarly sources describe these migratory patterns to these nation's northern neighbors as frontiers of poverty, labor frontier countries, reservoirs of low-skilled migrants, and borders to the first world. Transit states are nations in which receive migrant flows, due to their geographic position or strategic passages and routes, where migrants have intentions to migrate to another country. Franck Düvell, in *Crossing the Fringes of Europe*, looks at how transit states emerge and the political discourse and responses towards the concept. Transit migration emerged in migration policy discussions in the 1990s, in which the International Organization for Migration, UN conferences, International Center for Migration Policy Development, and other councils demonstrated the need to recognize this pattern of movements internationally (Düvell, 2006). Hence, transit countries find themselves with the pressures of their northern neighbors to curb migration, or receive migrants by introducing opportunities, regularization campaigns, asylum procedures, etc., and if the migrant decides to, are able to help them return to their country of origin.

Throughout discussions and the continuous patterns of migrants arriving to transit states, especially irregular migrants following a south to north movement, joining political discourse and demonstrating the consequences of migrants being 'stranded' due to the increased fortification of desired host nations, presenting transit migrants as unwanted and a threat to national sovereignty (Düvell, 2006). Düvell identifies transit migration as an A, B, C pattern, where migrants are attempting to move from A to C but travel to B and find themselves remaining in this country due to economic restrictions, lack of human capital, immigration regulations, border controls, and so forth (Düvell, 2006). In this pattern, the country of origin,

transit, and destination are all places of insecurity for transit migrants due to their status, reasons for migrating, and precarious situations. However, there are limitations to this pattern describing transit migration as these movements are not consistent to following a path, they are dependent to different circumstances that may arise along a migrant's journey, deterring them from even arriving to a transit point or staying periods of time in multiple transit countries.

Most commonly, migrants remain in transit states due to hard borders, restrictive immigration policies, economic reasons, and the limited membership or admission into the desired host nation. In *The Transit State: A Comparative Analysis of Mexican and Moroccan Immigration Policies*, Ann Kimball compares these transit nations by defining transit states as states bordering a “fully developed country”, analyzing contemporary borders and restrictive immigration controls, and the externalization of borders creating xenophobic views towards these migrants in transit planning “clandestine entrance” to a heavily policed nation (Kimball, 2007). Kimball argues that the tightening of immigration controls created the contemporary transit state where the nature of bordering “the North”, as in the United States or the European Union, nations like Mexico and Morocco literally became gateways into the “the first world” leading to absorbing the migrants unable to continue their journey north (Kimball, 2007). Therefore, it is evident geographic positions heavily impact migration routes and patterns. Transit nations function as nations where migrants will be temporarily and want to spend little time in. Hence, they define transit states as a “crossroad” between the first and the third world (Kimball, 2007). However, in recent years, there has been a rise in migrants remaining in transit nations, even deciding to remain permanently, specifically in the countries of Mexico and Morocco due to the hardening of borders and expansion of policing from both sides of the frontier.

Restrictive Policies and Externalization of Borders

In *Theories of International Immigration Policy*, Eytan Meyers argues that immigration policy theory is not clearly defined, they do help aid in the understanding of immigration within international politics. He states that immigration policy consists of rules that create the selection and admission of foreigners ranging from temporary visits to permanent migrations, the restriction of undocumented migration, and how many migrants' nations accept (Meyers, 2000). This process of selection demonstrates the increasing importance given to citizenship and membership, hence influencing the limited membership and anti-immigrant rhetoric existing today across frontiers. As Lydia Morris states in *Managing Migration*, there is a material and symbolic significance of citizenship, which shapes the governing of entry, the "capacity" of a nation state to admit migrants, causing the increased policing of borders, leading to needing to curb migration (Morris, 2002). Morris in fact argues that with the continuing migrant flows across borders, it leads to the decline of the nation state and increases globalization (Morris, 2002). Hence, the function of fortifying borders is argued to restrict entry and membership and protect national resources and security.

In *Redrawing the Line: Borders and Security in the Twenty-First Century*, Peter Andreas analyzes the use of border control and enforcement to limit membership and entry within national borders, creating a phenomenon of 'keeping out undesirables' and increasing the expansion of border policing through externalization of borders in nations such as Mexico and Morocco. Specifically, the author states that this expansion of border policing is seen through increasing enforcement budgets, invasive laws, new technology in surveillance and information, stricter visa regimes, physical barriers such as walls and fences, and control mechanisms beyond entry points causing the "thickening of borders" (Andreas, 2003). With the closure and

fortification of borders, the increased anxiety over irregular migrants and policing of these frontiers is inherent as a result of the existence xenophobia and anti-immigration rhetoric in national-security approaches. The author analyzes both the U.S. and the EU's border policing approaches showing the presence of thickening borders in Mexico and Morocco respectively through technology, policies, funding from their northern neighbors to deter migration (Andreas, 2003). In *Policing Borders, Producing Boundaries. The Governmentality of Immigration in Dark Times*, Didier Fassin analyzes the increased politicization of immigration leading towards the policing of borders and subjectivation of migrants. Fassin discusses the impacts time has over borders, increasing restrictions in mobility in both Europe and North America, producing "illegality" and racial criminalization of migrants, all due to the construction and meaning given to borders (Fassin, 2014). Over recent decades, policing has produced the rhetoric of un-authorization to migrants viewed as "aliens" due to the marginalized perception given to certain populations, specifically through methods of apprehending and arresting migrants, new technologies at borders to target migrants, and increased xenophobia due to the inequality produced by laws (Fassin, 2014).

Methodology and Ethics

To comparatively look at Morocco and Mexico's role as transit and forthcoming host nations, I used a variety of sources ranging from previously done comparative studies to UN reports on transit migration. I conducted this research project in Rabat, Morocco over the course of four weeks. My study consists of mostly content-based research and qualitative research from semi-structured interviews with migration scholars focusing upon commonalities and differences between the contexts. Initially, I had planned on having my findings be a collective of multiple

interviews supported by content research. Moreover, I had hoped to talk to scholars in Morocco on the subject of transit migration, activists from NGO's in Morocco's, as well as individuals from international migration organization's such as IOM or UNHCR, but unfortunately, I did not receive responses after contacting many individuals so it became clear I was not going to get as many contacts that I would have liked to. However, I decided to proceed with my study with a more content-based approach and was content with the two interviews I was able to obtain.

The overarching goal of these interviews was to hear the perspectives of scholars and activists surrounding the topic of transit migration and their opinions on current policies, dynamics, and changes occurring in these transit points. I chose to do semi-structured interviews through asking very broad open-ended questions allowing for natural discussion to arise and allow for follow-up questions to arise. Both interviews were conducted with verbal consent after reading through the purpose of my research, an informed consent form, their right to decline participation or withdraw from the research, maintaining confidentiality if desired, and consent to quote. Due to the format and discussion, my data was recorded on my password-secured laptop. One of my participants chose to preserve their anonymity so I have omitted their name; however, they provided broad details to describe their relation to the topic as a scholar. My second participant was recommended to me by my academic director, Dr. Et-Tibari: Dr. Mercedes Jimenez, a scholar of Social Anthropology and has conducted investigational studies relating to borders in the Mediterranean and a comparison about the north of Mexico and south of the United States. I received her contact information and conducted a structured interview in Spanish over the phone due to busy schedules. I grew up speaking Spanish at home, so I was able to communicate and understand throughout the interview; however, there may be differences or certain nuances lost in translation due to the differences in Latin American

Spanish from Spain Spanish, as well as my own translation from Spanish to English. My following interview was a scholar in the field of migration in Morocco and an activist who I was able to get in contact with after being introduced through the SIT Migration Program. I conducted this interview in person and was content with the discussion that arose through the interview. I generally followed the same questions for both interviews, but may have paraphrased them to better fit the conversation:

- To begin, could you tell me a little about yourself, where are you from and what work do you currently do? Could you describe your relationship or experience to this topic?
- What are the most evident commonalities you see occurring between Mexico and Morocco influencing their positions as transit and upcoming host nations for migrants?
 - What are differences between the two transit nations that you think are important to acknowledge?
- What are general characteristics of relations between Mexico and the United States versus Morocco and Spain (or the European Union)?
 - What kind of relationship do Mexico and Morocco have with their northern neighbors?
- What changes have you seen in the past decade in border security and migrant processing?
 - What may have influenced them?
- What factors do you believe most influence current immigration and transit policies?
- Are there any other comments you would like to make regarding this topic or questions for me about my research?

Throughout my research process, I maintained my positionality in mind being an American student and with the privilege to have studied in Rabat this semester and remained critical about the ethics of my study. My goal was to lay broad discussion questions in order to promote meaningful conversations on this subject. I found that the interviews I conducted were positive experiences for both me and the interviewees due to our common interest in migration and the comparative approach in discussing Mexico and Morocco's current migration situations. I am very grateful for these scholars to have taken the time out of their busy schedules to allow for these discussions and I am inspired about the work they do.

Findings and Analysis

Transit: "The action or fact of passing across or through a place; a passage or journey from one place or point to another."²

Transit Migration at the Global Level

The exclusion and deterrence of irregular migrants from entering migrant-receiving nations like the United States and Spain can be seen at the global level through international treaties and actions being made, or not made, to protect the human rights of migrants. An important treaty that was adopted in 1990 but enacted in 2003 after requiring at least 20 nations ratifying it, was the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. This Convention seeks to grant certain rights to migrant workers and their family members no matter what migratory status they hold (The International Convention on Migrant Workers and its Committee, 2005). Morocco ratified the Convention in 1993 and Mexico in 1999, and as transit countries, it states responsibilities these nations must uphold to protect migrants within their borders; however, no "Western" migrant-receiving nation ratify it including the United States and Spain (Information Kit: United Nations Convention on Migrants' Rights, 2005). It can be assumed that many of these migrant receiving nations choose not to ratify certain portions from the Convention as it can encourage more irregular migrants to come to these nations through granting more rights. The Conventions purpose however is an instrument to set standards for these nations to preserve human rights through judicial and administrative procedures, making it legally binding (The International Convention on Migrant Workers and its Committee: Fact Sheet No. 24 (Rev. 1), 2005). Hence

² "transit, n.2" *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2019, www.oed.com/view/Entry/204809. Accessed 27 November 2019.

this demonstrates that the Convention does not propose new rights, “it only ensures that human rights are properly applied to migrant workers” (Information Kit: United Nations Convention on Migrants' Rights, 2005). Through not ratifying this Convention and choosing not to uphold standards for the protection of human rights for migrant workers, it shows the prominence of the idea that membership is limited therefore influencing anti-immigrant rhetoric, resisting entry, especially irregular migration into these nations leading towards many migrants remaining “stuck” in transit nations.

More recently in 2016, the Global Compact for Migration was assembled at the global level within the UN General Assembly along with the Heads of State and Government, making it the first inter-governmentally negotiated agreement (Global Compact for Migration, n.d.). It is not a treaty and not legally binding, hence states remain in charge of their immigration policies, so it is instead a framework for encouraging international cooperation for approaching migration policy in conformity with international law (World Leaders Adopt First-Ever Global Compact on Migration, Outlining Framework to Protect Millions of Migrants, Support Countries Accommodating Them, 2018). It arose in response to the continuous patterns of “mixed migrants”, such as undocumented migrants, economic migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, unaccompanied children, etc., it seeks to address issues such as push factors causing decisions to leave their countries origin, the dangers migrants may experience in their journeys, and how migrants are treated when reaching nation frontiers (Margesson, 2019). As more migrants find their selves remaining in transit nations, exploitation, vulnerability, abuse of human rights, and lack of protection is common due to lack of identification documents, increased policing, and xenophobic rhetoric, hence the Global Compact for Migration would suggest focus on the protection of migrants regardless of their status and acknowledging the shared responsibility to

establish efforts towards this phenomenon. The United States chose to not participate in the Compact for Migration as it had concerns “around sovereignty and lack of consistency with U.S. immigration policies and principles” (Margesson, 2019). Irregular migrants therefore in the United States continue to be seen as unauthorized entries instead of migrants seeking security. This aligns with the previously stated theories of maintaining national sovereignty through restricting membership and who is able to exercise rights in that specific nation.

Both the Convention on Migrant Workers and the Global Compact for Migration demonstrate discourse at the global level and attempts to shift towards protecting the rights of migrants in transit and holding nations accountable toward the treatment of these vulnerable populations. For transit states specifically, they hold an important position as many migrants find their selves remaining in these middle grounds, hence reforms and steps must be taken to protect the prominent population of migrants that exist within their borders. By ratifying and being a part of these global efforts, it demonstrates the nation’s willingness to be accountable for working towards protecting and upholding migrants’ dignity. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that these discussions are for providing rights that every human should already be deserving of, and that nations like the United States did not ratify these treaties; therefore, there is much more that can be done to assure migrants have access to resources beyond basic human rights.

Setting the Geographic Stage

Globally, mobility has become an exclusive and restrictive action due to the increase in visa regulations, financial costs, policies, and border enforcement. Even with heightened policing of borders and increasing anti-immigrant rhetoric, this does not stop or deter migrants from their journey’s north. As Mexico and Morocco’s northern borders harden, more migrants find their

selves remaining in these nations for longer periods of time. In Morocco, its presence as a transit migration country began in the 1990s as migrants from Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Nigeria, and other sub-Saharan countries arrived through Algeria and most likely enter Morocco east of Oujda, in hopes of arriving to Tangier where they hope to cross the Strait of Gibraltar (Hass H. D., 2005). In Mexico, transit migration arose throughout the 1980s and 1990s from what is commonly known as the Northern Triangle, the three Central American countries of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, of migrants seeking asylum due to poverty, political instability, histories of civil war, gang violence, environmental changes, amongst other reasons (Cheatham, 2019). However, the United States and the European Union respond by making asylum policies stricter and border controls harder.

Morocco's geographic location is unique where it is the only nation in the continent of Africa which shares physical land borders with Europe due to the Spanish enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta. However, it also shares the Strait of Gibraltar with the south of Spain, and is heavily influenced by Europe politically, economically, and geo-strategically to act as a gatekeeper and curb migration from their shared borders. As migrant flows continue through the established routes towards European borders, Morocco is forced to confront these patterned movements. Faced with all of these physical barriers, migrants will turn to living in clandestine or other dangerous networks to continue their journeys in hopes to avoid migration control strategies. It is very likely that the majority of transit migrants have irregular statuses in these nations and are vulnerable to being apprehended or legal violence by the state, hence transit states, specifically Morocco, has to look towards upholding basic human rights for these individuals. Looking at Mexico, it appears there are many similarities between Morocco as transit states, but its contexts has many differences, especially in more recent years. Geographically, Mexico is the only nation

sharing the United States' southern border, making it the only bridge between the rest of Latin America and the United States. In her interview, Dr. Jimenez emphasized this by stating that Mexico is the only country in the vertical border bridging Central America and the United States' southern border (Jimenez, Interview). Due to this position, Mexico is commonly referred as a "buffer state" between the United States and Central America (Cornelius W. , 2018). Moreover, as border enforcement heavily increased, fewer asylum applications being accepted, and large numbers of migrants remaining on Mexico's side of the border has demonstrated the shift towards adapting to receive these migrants in transit.

Impacts towards Central American and Sub-Saharan Migrants

Media outlets and political rhetoric display the presence of transit migrants as massive groups or caravans, creating an image where "unauthorized aliens" are invading the frontiers. In reality, migration through these nations is not a new occurrence nor has the number of migrants drastically increased, instead more focus is placed on fortifying borders instead of the needs and security of migrants in transit. Policing borders and deterring migrants towards more dangerous paths, however, may increase the length of time migrants stay in these transit nations as well as change the measures they take to reach the borders, such as organizing in large numbers. This state of being in transit, is one where migrants find themselves stuck in a transit nation by default with no status, little protections, vulnerable to crime and violence, seen as criminals, and risks their lives in search for security. In response to the humanitarian crises occurring in both Mexico and Morocco, Medecins Sans Frontiers has been providing medical and mental health care to these vulnerable populations as well as creating reports documenting events occurring in these border regions. In the case of Central American migrants, most commonly from the Northern

Triangle, MSF states that there is an estimate of 500,000 migrants entering Mexico every year fleeing from violence and poverty, driving their decision towards taking these dangerous migration paths through Mexico (Forced to Flee Central America's Northern Triangle: A Neglected Humanitarian Crisis, 2017). Furthermore, once arriving to Mexico, migrants find themselves in life threatening circumstance such as riding high speed cargo trains, walking in high temperatures without food or water, at constant risk of apprehension or detention, and experiencing violence while in transit, most commonly sexual violence and physical attacks (Forced to Flee Central America's Northern Triangle: A Neglected Humanitarian Crisis, 2017).

In Morocco, the sub-Saharan migrant population is predominately West African, entering the transit country through Oujda, fleeing from their countries due to environmental reasons, lack of economic and livelihood opportunities, and people fleeing from human trafficking networks and due to the tightening of border controls by the European Union, many migrants find their selves remaining trapped in Morocco for up to 5 years; many living in crowded unsanitary lodgings in cities like Rabat or Casablanca, or in makeshift shelters in the forests in Nador (Violence, Vulnerability and Migration: Trapped at the Gates of Europe, 2013). Due to the criminalization and marginalization of sub-Saharan migrants, migrants are exposed to dangers such as poverty, poor living conditions, sexual violence, persecution, discrimination, expulsion to the Algerian border, and direct physical violence inflicted by Moroccan and Spanish authorities throughout their journeys (Violence, Vulnerability and Migration: Trapped at the Gates of Europe, 2013).

In both reports, it is evident that migrants in Mexico and Morocco are remaining longer periods of time in these nations due to increased dangers and pressures inflicted by the externalization of borders and rhetoric surrounding immigration, however, these dangers have trickled down into these transit nations, negatively impacting their reception and violating their

human rights. These reports emphasize that these transit migrants already fleeing dangerous circumstances, will most commonly encounter more violence on their migration path through Mexico and Morocco, demonstrating the humanitarian crisis occurring. In both contexts, migrant populations are extremely vulnerable and seeking protection, but will most likely encounter forms of violence on their journeys aspiring to reach northern borders. However, reaching the shared frontiers of U.S. and Mexico or E.U. and Morocco is not the end of their journeys for many, and require overcoming many barriers, risks, and life-threatening dangers.

Border Politics and Pressures from Northern Neighbors

The patterned process of migration has always occurred, internationally, but due to the rise of global inequality, social, economic, and political change, the approach to dealing with this phenomenon has become heavily politicized. As a result of this, borders have transitioned into violent and increasingly policed frontiers, transforming anxiety over its regulation and functions to keep “unwanted” foreigners out. It is evident that these policy changes were meant to have deterrent effects, but policies do not change the circumstances of which these migrants are fleeing from. But as border enforcement measures have increased from the United States’ side and only small percentages of asylum applications being accepted, Mexico has transformed into an important transit country for these migrants seeking safety and security. It is estimated 392,000 irregular migrants were in transit through Mexico in 2014 in hopes of reaching the United States; of that number, it is predicted that 56% was apprehended by U.S. Border Patrol, 33% was apprehended by the Instituto Nacional de Migración throughout Mexico, and only 11% reached the United States without being apprehended (Chavez, 2016). As a result of increased surveillance, migrants are taking more dangerous routes and are traveling in larger groups. At the

same time, Mexico receives pressures from the United States to curb migration, apprehending undocumented migrants when encountering Mexican authorities. In fact, the U.S. State Department has allocated over \$100 million to Mexico in order to “control migration” (Meyer & Taft-Morales, 2019). Moreover, the Trump administration has implemented policies in 2018 such as the “zero tolerance” policy where apprehended migrants would be transferred for criminal prosecution, a policy to separate and detain migrant children from their parents if they were apprehended, and that victims of “private” violence which includes domestic and gang violence, could not claim asylum (Cornelius W. , 2018). However, the UNHCR states that victims of gang violence and well-founded fear of persecution as bases of recognition for the consideration of refugee and asylum status (UNHCR, 2010). Not only does this show that the circumstances for seeking asylum are no longer seen as actual violence, it shows the increased presence of xenophobia in the implementation of migration policies in the United States.

In the context of Morocco, Dr. Jimenez explicitly stated it is important to acknowledge the difference in this transit point; Morocco is one of the many “interlocutors”, where Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt are also coastal transit points that influence the European Union’s geostrategic approach to migration (Jimenez, Mercedes. Interview by Christina Roca. Semi-Structured. November 26, 2019). Hence, Morocco is one of multiple transit points between Europe and other African nations acting as buffer zones to reduce migrants to reach European borders. This interdependence between the European Union and Morocco in geostrategy, political, and economic relationships heavily impacts how Morocco establishes their migration policies. The government must maintain good relations with Europe and “co-operate” in their regulation of migration due to their commercial partnership with Europe such as Morocco’s ‘Advanced Status’ within the European Neighborhood Policy and its first place of destination for

its emigrants (Sadiqi, 2004). This language of “co-operating” may appear to be a two-way approach, but it is important to recognize the asymmetrical partnership between the nations and what role Europe wants Morocco to play when managing migration flows. It has even been described that Morocco has been “bowing to European demands” as Morocco is pressured to manage migration flows and deter migrants from crossing to Europe (Natter, 2013). When asked about the characteristics of these power dynamics, the scholar interviewed described this relationship as Europe only seeing interests in giving money to keep people out; instead of placing importance on integration programs and the needs of migrants (Anonymous, Interview by Christina Roca. Semi-Structured. December 3, 2019). For instance, the European Union allocated 92.8 million euros towards migration and border management in 2014 (EU Cooperation on Migration with Morocco, 2018). Morocco’s role of curbing migration towards European borders shows that its role as a transit state has developed into a gatekeeper state but also one that is responsible for receiving migrants unable to reach Europe. In both Melilla and Ceuta, the European Union funded the construction of its heavily three parallel fortified 10-foot fences, barbed wires with razors, cameras, noise and movement sensors and other policing measures (Andreas, 2003). With the installation of Spain’s Sistema Integrado de Vigilancia Exterior in 2002 and Europe’s Frontex in 2005, these border control methods are responsible for the technological developments across these border regions including the enclaves and Mediterranean (Collyer, 2007). These border management controls arise in response to the perceived threat of migration populations moving northwards most likely driven by nationalism and xenophobic views; however, these efforts to secure borders only make their journeys more dangerous and even deadly.

Transformations from Transit to Host Nations

There have been changes in rhetoric when creating new policy approaches concerning migration populations in Morocco; in 2003 laws were more focus upon “dealing” with the migration phenomenon from a security perspective, “in addition to the human developmental aspects” (Sadiqi, 2004). Prior to the 2013 changes towards handling migration policies, Morocco was not always receptive towards migrants. In 2003, the Law 02-03, relating to the “Entry and Stay of Foreigners in Morocco, Emigration and Irregular Immigration” influenced attitudes towards migration as it enacted restrictive policies, deeming any foreigner without proper documentation in Morocco a criminal (Violence, Vulnerability and Migration: Trapped at the Gates of Europe, 2013). Moreover, migrants were unable to rent and work due to the “illegality” attached to their presence in the nation, therefore increasing their vulnerability. There is a national security rhetoric attached to this law as it was enacted to combat illegal immigration. Since 2013, Morocco has changed its political approaches towards the continuing phenomenon of shifting towards being a migrant-receiving nation. More specifically, with increased control and strict policies from Europe on its borders, Morocco has become a nation of hosting asylum seekers, irregular migrants, foreign students, refugees, and increasing numbers of migrants choosing to settle for longer terms whether it be voluntary or involuntary.

Mexico also enacted the South Border Program, (Programa Frontera Sur) in 2014, in response to the “crisis” at the border, and which was intended to be a comprehensive program meant to reinforce border security and regulate migrant flows; its developments were the installation of new checkpoints, roadblocks, Centers for Comprehensive Management of Border Traffic, increasing the speed of the freight train, “The Beast” to deter migrants from riding it, and increased apprehensions in within Mexico (Vega, 2017). However, these changes make

migrants' journeys much more dangerous, diverting them to other routes, increasing smuggler fees, and the abuse of human rights. These responses appear to be approaches to quickly control and deter migrants. Furthermore, Mexico has implemented many legal instruments to work towards protecting the human rights of migrants within their borders, stating that entry into Mexico is not deemed a criminal offense, guaranteeing certain protection especially to women, children, and the elderly, and entitling undocumented migrants to receive health care for three months through the Seguro Popular Plan; but there is no clear regulation or enforcement of these implementations (Forced to Flee Central America's Northern Triangle: A Neglected Humanitarian Crisis, 2017).

There is political and economic interdependence between these nations and their northern neighbors. In many cases, these transit nations are seen as intermediaries in mobility linking “the north to the south”. During the second interview, the scholar discussed the importance of Mexico and Morocco bordering two of the most powerful regimes in the world but are also northern neighbors that do not want migration towards their borders and have made admission as restrictive as possible; furthermore, there are large economic ties between the nations such as remittances from Moroccan and Mexican diaspora and trade policies (Anonymous, Interview). Dr. Jimenez also highlighted that Morocco and Mexico have determined dynamics that are heavily influenced with remittances and the geostrategy for being sending countries in labor, foreign populations, and remittances which plays a big role in these economies, generating a social path transnationally in both countries (Jimenez, Interview). This shows evidence towards Mexico and Morocco's northern neighbors hold dominion in how they want migration to be managed and intervened prior to reaching their shared borders.

In both contexts, the United States and Europe are the dream end goal for many of these migrants but are finding themselves remaining in Mexico and Morocco. Transit migration is caused as a result of destination countries becoming restrictive in its admissions due to nations' protectionism and therefore provoking migrants to take riskier routes or turning to remaining in transit points because of their inability to move for economic, social, or legal reasons (Düvell, 2006). One can argue that this is also done in response to xenophobic attitudes towards migrant populations movement northwards, and the perceived threat to national security and identity. As Dr. Mercedes Jimenez explained, these transit policies are in contradiction in terms of nation's receiving the pressure to control migrant flows but also stating the need to protect the human rights of these populations; "People talk about human rights, but they don't defend them" (Jimenez, Interview). Hence, it is evident that in the context of transit migration towards the United States and the European Union, there is more efforts being placed on apprehending and deterring migrants, instead of regarding the protections they need and are deserving of.

These transit points are becoming more permanent settlements for these populations due to the continuous flows of migrants and pressures from their northern neighbors to curb migration. Moreover, an important note raised in an interview, is that both Mexico and Morocco hold complex relationships with their more developed northern neighbors, as previous emigration nations and now having multi-generational diaspora in these regions, hence finding their selves needing to "adhere" to these stronger forces to manage migration due to economic and social ties (Anonymous, Interview). Many migrants in transit are undocumented migrants and must avoid coming in contact with border patrol or other authorities. This demonstrates the uncertainty present in these journeys and the role these transit states hold in security of these migrants. As Collyer describes it, this type of migration is "chaotic" and "disordered" with danger during

every phase of the journey (Collyer, 2007). In recent years, the externalization or ‘thickening’ of borders, policing on both sides of frontiers, and increased risks in migrating has augmented, but has proven to not stop migrants from deciding to proceed with their migration journeys. The fortification of borders does not eliminate the reasons and circumstances migrants have influencing their decisions to risk their lives in transit towards the United States and Europe. Therefore, by policing borders and creating more barriers, migrants will look for different paths or methods to reach their destination, whether it be what they originally planned for or remaining in a transit nation which presents itself with some opportunities. Migrants are finding refuge in what were previously transit states, but it is evident that Mexico and Morocco have adapted to receiving long-term settling migrants but must continue to construct reforms and work towards upholding dignity and security for these individuals.

Conclusion

Security: “Freedom from care, anxiety or apprehension; absence of worry or anxiety; confidence in one's safety or well-being.”³

It is evident that as displaced and vulnerable populations continue to migrate, there is a rise in barriers and walls put up. Due to the exclusion policies and hardening of borders, migrant populations are finding themselves finding refuge in countries such as Mexico and Morocco, from the poverty, violence, or lack of livelihood they were escaping from. At the global level, conventions were held such as the Convention on Migrant Workers and the Global Compact for Migration discussing methods towards upholding human rights for migrant populations in their

³ "security, n.1" *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2019, www.oed.com/view/Entry/174661. Accessed 7 December 2019.

territories; however there appears to be a lack of effort from host receiving territories to enforce these discussions due to their unwillingness to receive and address the needs of migrant populations. The physical, mental, and emotional impacts towards migrant populations as a result of the restriction in mobility is demonstrated in reports published by Medecins Sans Frontiers for both Mexico and Moroccan contexts receiving migrants. Finally, the evident pressures from the United States and European Union upon Mexico and Morocco respectively impacts border management, policies, reception of migrants, and relationship dynamics between the territories sharing borders. Due to the restriction of entry and hardening of borders of the United States' and the European Union's southern borders, Mexico and Morocco have developed from transit states to receiving migrants choosing to settle permanently in these nations. All in all, we see that in both contexts, nations are working towards managing migration and instead of addressing the phenomenon head on.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Study

My research aims to critically look at the contexts of both migration patterns impacting Morocco and Mexico's transition towards receiving migrants settling permanently in these nations due to the increased pressures from their northern neighbors. One major limitation of my research was the short duration of the research period; I was only able to interview two scholars in Morocco, hence my analysis for Mexican context was limited to literature and data. Due to this, my research as a whole was limited to mostly content-based research on broad macro-level analyses of shifting policies and relationships impacting this phenomenon. There are many other neocolonial factors, systems, economic pressures, and policies that I was not able to touch upon in my study, that influence the dynamics occurring today. Moreover, many of the sources that

have conducted comparative studies on both these nations were published in the early 2000's, and further research should be conducted to look at how politics, media, and nationalism influence the rising xenophobic and even racist attitudes towards migrant populations.

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