

## Rethinking Mobility between Morocco and Italy Perspectives from a north-south migration

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### Introduction

Italy has often been described as an emigration country, at least it was until the early nineteen eighties. Today Moroccans are among the largest and longest-standing communities to immigrate to Italy. There are numerous studies about Moroccan migration to Italy; among the themes they touch on are the transnational dimension and mobility practices between the two countries (Capello, 2008). However, it is little known that well before Moroccans began moving to Italy, Italians were migrating to Morocco. The circulation of people and imaginaries between the two countries follow not only the pathways of Moroccans in Italy but also of Italians in Morocco.

Here my aim is to add nuance to our understanding of migratory processes around the Mediterranean by giving attention to the almost forgotten history of Italians in Morocco and the relatively un-studied movement of Italians towards Morocco today. This diachronic focus on the Italian migration will offer an insight into the many connections between Morocco and Italy as well as France and Tunisia.

After a general overview of mobility studies relating to Italian mobility and migration towards Italy, the contribution presents the multiplicity of experiences of people moving between Europe and North Africa through history, identifying two main periods in the Italian migration: during the protectorate and from the eighties onwards.

Particular attention is paid to the historical experiences and witnesses through which Italian immigration to Morocco emerges as a phenomenon rooted in history that continued through time until now. The history of Italians in Morocco offers a decentralized point of view of Morocco as a colonized, de-colonized and post-colonial context, and their contemporary experiences of the migration processes need to be understood from this diachronic perspective. The lack of documentation about the period after the protectorate makes it more difficult to depict a complete description of the phenomenon, nevertheless, some hypothesis are drawn on the importance of creating a better insight into the complexity of the flows of ideas and imaginaries between the two countries in a unitary analysis able to reconnect Moroccan emigration to Italy and Italian immigration to Morocco.

## 1- Italy as an emigration and immigration country

Italy is a strip of land extending across the heart of the Mediterranean, where, apart from the northern region, the plains narrow between mountains and sea. Italian people through history have used the sea as an important means of communication and have engaged in great economic and cultural exchange with the Arabic, Hellenic and Latin worlds. Through time, it is clear that that people continued to travel on the sea and through routes across the Alps.

Since the pre-industrial period, people have moved from the mountains towards the peninsula plains seeking trade and work. Nevertheless, when Italians think about their migration through history, they have a clear image in their mind: whole families with their meagre belongings packed in a cardboard suitcase at the ports of Livorno or Genova, waiting for a boat to America.

This is an image of what historians call the “great migration”, which started before Italian unification in 1861 and peaked during the first 15 years of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Not until 1975 did arrivals exceed departures and the period of Italy as an emigrant country seemed to have come to an end. The first census of Italians living abroad took place in 1871. From then until midway through the 1960’s, there were more than 24 million Italians living abroad, almost the same number as in 1861 at the unification of the country. (Audenino, Corti, 2000) This phenomenon has been studied and was clear in Italian memories until the 1980’s when Italy started to see itself again as a country of European immigration. It was in 1975 that for the first time net migration with extra-European countries became positive, with more migrants entering than exiting. It was also at this time that Moroccans started to arrive in Italy, later than in other European countries.

For many years now, the media, civic and political discourse, attitudes to project funding and local concerns have become so strongly focused on immigration, that there is now a tendency to consign Italian emigration to history. The new perceived reality is that of Italy as an exclusively hosting country. This focus on global mobility, developed thanks to the presence of “*the other*”, allowed Italy to look at itself from new perspectives and new questions about inclusive capacity but also about the role Italy plays in the geopolitical context of Mediterranean migrations from a postcolonial perspective (Lombardi-Diop, Romeo, 2015), or as a first landing point on routes from Africa and the Middle East. Italy then perceives itself as a country on the front line in any discussion about South-North migration to Europe.

On the other hand, through historical and social reflection, scholars have shown how the definitions of the country as a reservoir only of emigration or immigration rapidly enter into crisis in favour of a reading of Italy as a country of both emigration than immigration, at least in the last 50 years. The spatial and temporal models who read the phenomenon under the lens of the place of arrival / departure on the first, and of the times of permanence/stability in the welcoming country the second, were challenged by models that mostly emphasize the circularity and the connections (Corti, 2013). This re-reading occurs on all fronts: historical, sociological and anthropological.

Attention to immigration within Italian social sciences began in the mid 1980’s and increased in the 1990’s<sup>2</sup>. The Moroccan migration was one of the first flows of Italian immigration: it is one of the most long lasting and numerically significant. In one of the first works published on

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<sup>1</sup> There are many good publications on the subject. Here just a few of them Gabaccia, 2003; Audenino, 2008; Corti, Sanfilippo 2012.

<sup>2</sup> For an overview on the debate about migration Signorelli, 2006 and Capello, Cingolani, Vietti 2014.

Moroccan immigration into Italy, Schmidt di Friedberg on *Maroc Europe* in 1992, the researcher traces the history of the first 10 years of the phenomenon. In its early years this migration passed almost unnoticed, and only later it rose to public attention, leading to regulation, after which it began to stabilize. In those early years no specific visas were required to enter Italy, immigrants arrived in the southern regions closest to Morocco and then moved north. During this first period the Moroccan presence is characterized as seasonal, temporary, circular but however characterized by extreme internal mobility: "it is not unusual to meet a Moroccan regularly in Rome, registered as a resident in the province of Palermo but working in a Modena factory" (Schmidt, 1992: 125). In the first ten years of the millennium much research has been published about Moroccan people in Italy, analysing the flow both from the Moroccan point of view of emigration and the Italian one of immigration in a multi-sited approach.

In recent years migration and mobility has been seen as a global phenomenon that is of interest to not only southern countries but also in Europe. Much interesting research shows how transitions, return immigrations and new emigrations are occurring as much in Northern as in Southern countries. It is not possible now to describe Morocco only as a 'sending' country because it faces also different immigration flows (Berriane, Haas, Natter, 2016; de Haas. 2013).

Only in recent years, we have reconsidered migration and mobility as a global phenomenon that is of interest to not only southern countries but also to European countries. It is also true that until recently (around the crisis of 2008), statistically the phenomenon has related to the mobility of professionals and highly trained researchers (brain drain) It is only since the early 2000s that there has been a significant increase in young people and small business owners moving in search of a better life and working conditions<sup>3</sup>.

According to data provided by the Interior Ministry, on January 1st, 2016 there were 3,931,133 non-EU citizens residing in Italy<sup>4</sup>, essentially unchanged from the previous year. On the same date, the number of Italians subscribing to the Italian's Register Abroad (AIRE) was 4,811,163.<sup>5</sup>

It is clear that we need to reframe our understanding of human mobility and allow for a wider perspective that integrates the multiplicity of factors pushing mobility and highlights the 'moorings' that people on the move pass through (therefore, not only considering a 'sending' and 'receiving' country, but a complex system of connections and movements existing in a global economic and symbolic network).

By adopting this epistemological insight into mobility, this contribution aims to show how Morocco and Italy can be seen as part of an interwoven system of people moving back and forth along the Mediterranean sea (and the wider world) involving more than those two countries, and more than a flow of people moving from Morocco to Italy. It is a matter of re-narrating phenomena and considering them as part of the same story rather than separated issues, an attempt to recompose the temporal separation that sees Italy as the country of emigration or immigration in relation to the Maghreb countries.

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<sup>3</sup> Istat Annual Report 2015: In the section on mobility we can read: "Mobility towards foreign countries is increased of six points of percentage if compared with the previous." p 184

<sup>4</sup> Istat website

<sup>5</sup> I have chosen here to compare the data about the registered presence both of immigrants and emigrants. If we consider the number of regular and irregular migrants, there are more than 5 million non-UE citizens in Italy. It is also true that many Italians abroad are not registered in the AIRE register (more than the 60% of my informants are not).

## 2- North-South pathways connecting people's lives through the centuries

With the purpose of re-composing the epistemological separation into the analysis of mobilities, during my doctoral research I tried to use the findings of South-Nord research as a framework to understand also Nord-Sud migration. For example: how bureaucratic systems and institutions within the counties involved affect the migration process, how people define belonging, strategies for building and re-building families in a transnational context, how migratory chains work, imaginaries, relationships and neighborhoods in the new country, the flow of goods and remittances, how being on the move affects people's everyday choices and so on.

It is out-with the scope of this contribution to present an in depth analysis of all the considerations mentioned above, but I will provide some ethnographic case studies relating to different pathways that led to Italians migrating to Morocco; imaginaries and patterns of mobility in different periods that illustrate different types of migration as well as different relationships with Morocco as a hosting country.

Through interviews, fieldwork observation and analysis of the literature I started to notice some differences in the experiences of people arriving in Morocco during the period of the protectorate and until 1973, from the 1980's to the Italian Crisis of '92-'93 and after the European crisis of 2008.

With Sayad, anthropology views migrations as a phenomenon that claims to connect multiple sites and cultural systems: emigration and immigration are two parts of a unique total social fact, the many aspects of the countries involved (social, religious, political, ideas about the future) are to be considered as spaces where imaginaries and identities are continuously negotiated and rebuilt, therefore to understand the flows of people between Italy and Morocco we have to keep in mind both countries' socio-economic factors. When studying Italian migration to Morocco it is important to consider some aspects of Italy during these periods, included migration from Italy to other parts of northern Africa, European countries' colonial history, and also the impact of Moroccan migration to Italy.

The relations between Italy and Morocco began well before the nineteenth century, when the maritime republics of Genoa, Pisa and Venice traded with Moroccan ports such as Ceuta, Salé, Anfa, Asilah and Larache (Catalano, 2009). However, my starting point here is from the period just before the protectorate, at the time of unification of Italy.

Indeed the '900 migration of Italians to Morocco started from France and Tunisia.

The Mediterranean was characterized by the movement of peoples between the opposite poles of its banks. Migration routes were the reverse of those today: not from Africa to the "Fortress Europe", but from Europe to the "African colonies." (Rizzo, 2016)

«Maghreb was perceived as a natural extension of the peninsula and its islands, assuming the features of a promised land where to try their luck. Cape Bon was reached from Pantelleria and Trapani on small sailboats and migration has almost a spontaneous character»<sup>6</sup> It was just a night of sailing from Sicily to Tunisia: a port "non più a sud di Lampedusa"<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Translated from the Italian: <<L'Africa maghrebina fu a lungo percepita come il naturale prolungamento della penisola e delle isole, assumendo i contorni di una terra promessa ove cercare fortuna. Capo Bon era raggiunta da panteschi e trapanesi a bordo di piccole imbarcazioni a vela >> in Giuseppe Aiello, Antonio Cusumano (a cura di); *Islam in Sicilia. Un giardino tra due civiltà*; Fondazione Orestiadì, Gibellina 2012

<sup>7</sup> Not more southern than Lampedusa from the book by Laura Faranda (2016) on Italian migration to Tunisia.

In the 1820's many protagonists of the Risorgimento sought refuge in Tunis where the Italians, mainly Jews from Livorno already occupied leading positions in the society. Many of them were, in fact, fellow compatriots employed as secretaries, doctors or lawyers in high Tunisian office. After 1850, moreover, Tunis became an important centre of Mazzini's conspiracy. Between the 1860 and 1880 under renewed agreements with the court of the Bey, southern workers settled more easily, trying to escape the poverty and immobility of their communities of origin, hoping to find new opportunities and work. The Italian colony in Tunisia reflected in a small way Italian society: in a prominent position, there was a numerically small but solid middle class, made up of professionals, serious traders and entrepreneurs. The backbone of the community, however, was represented by old families of notables, who had moved to Tunisia for several generations: doctors, lawyers, merchants, businessmen, educated into the cult of the Risorgimento, faithful to the liberal tradition. Next to this a prospering petty bourgeoisie: entrepreneurs doing business in a period of economic expansion, caused by French investment in infrastructure, and those supplying the Italian colony with domestic products such as olive oil, pasta and wine. In the 1920s and 30s Italians in Tunisia numbered about one hundred thousand, of which more than half were Sicilian.<sup>8</sup>

In such a context it is possible to understand why, when France entered Tunisia in 1881 following its colonisation project, Italy perceived this as a significant insult, known as "lo schiaffo di tunisi" (the Tunis Slap)<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, the important Italian presence was seen as a threat by French colonial powers because of well-known Italian ambitions regarding the colonial regency of Tunisia.

Nevertheless, French investment during the protectorate to build roads and infrastructure provided employment opportunities for the nearby Italians. We should not forget that one of the reasons to migrate at the end of the 1800s was the shrinking demand for artisans and their desire to keep their skills alive (in the face of diminishing requests from the big industries). To be absorbed by the factories was considered an insult to their competence (Audenino, Corti, 1994). Therefore, more and more Italians, especially artisans from Sicily, arrived in Tunisia.

As mentioned before, the Italian community in Tunisia was notable (in 1881 there were 25,000 Italians and 700 French), this was seen as a threat by the French colonial government. Over time, the colonial powers used the law and regulations, such as higher taxation and the naturalisation of new births to rebalance the relative numbers in the population. Meanwhile in 1912, France obtained the protectorate of Morocco; many Italians who had their companies in Tunisia viewed that as new opportunity. In the following section some historical witnesses by people from the first migration and their descendants will be provided in order to show how personal lives, colonial history and descriptions of self-have been deeply connected throughout the XX century.

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<sup>8</sup> The history of italians in tunisia is taken from the web archive of AISEI, the web archive of the euro arab insitiute, and the above quoted book by Laura Faranda

<sup>9</sup> Intanto guardate: Tunisi è là! [...] E ci sono i francesi là, che ce l'hanno presa a tradimento! E domani possiamo averli qua, in casa nostra, capite? (*Now look: Tunis is down there! ... And there there are the French, they took it trickly, and tomorrow we could have them right here, in our own home, do you understand it?*) Pirandello in *I vecchi e i giovani* 1913

### 3- 1912-1956: Italians in Morocco during the protectorate

*«My father was born in San Giuseppe Iato near Palermo and when he was two his parents moved to Tunisia. My father grew up there... and he became a road contractor. Because of his job he met another Italian contractor who introduced him to one of his sisters, as in his family they were (just think of it) twelve sisters and a brother... This was how he met Maria, let's say, they liked each other, they got engaged and four years later they got married in Tunisia. There was a rumor there was a country called Morocco that was quickly expanding. At that time many people, let's say so, left for America, those from the south mostly went to Argentina or Australia. Others, just like my father, came to Morocco: it was in 1915, while there was the first world war of 14/18.*

*When they arrived in Casablanca by ship there wasn't a port; the ships had to stay far away and they reached the shore by old nasty boats. Except for the last meters, not to get people wet, they had to carry them to a dry place on their backs.*

*The Italians, they were very few, there was the protectorate there; they were mostly French, Portuguese, or Spanish people.... As for the Italians, who were they? Rather than Italians most of them were Sicilians»<sup>10</sup> (M.C. 2014, Interview, Amarcord Video Archives)<sup>11</sup>*

There are very few studies on the Italian presence in Morocco, even if there have always been relations between the two countries. Even the architecture of the modern Morocco has been influenced by Italian architects as shown in the research by Giacomelli, Godoli, Kassou (2009).

We can find a documented and passionate reflection on the Italian presence in Morocco in the only contribution on the subject: *Eclats de Memoire* by Roberta Jasmine Catalano. She traces the basis of a reflection on the phenomenon, but the comprehension of the relationship between people moving up and down Italy and Morocco, the connection between Italian socio-economic and migration flows especially after the 1970s is still to be analysed.

There were 5,140 Italians in Morocco in 1913, 12,000 in 1914 of whom 9,000 were in Casablanca. In 1931 the construction of the new Oujda-Fez railway required new workforces and as a consequence the Italian presence between 1930 and 1936 increased to 15,645. Before Independence in 1955, 17,500 Italians lived in Morocco, 14,500 in Casablanca (Catalano, 2009).



**Maârif, Casablanca.** Picture by Maria Giovanna Cassa, December 2016

<sup>10</sup> Translations from the interviews try to respect slang typical to the spoken Italian used by everyday people.

<sup>11</sup> The interviews in Amarcord Video Archives were collected by the production Studio in Casablanca for the documentary "l'America 'ca è", on Italian historical migration.

Many of these Italians didn't speak Italian, having a regional more than a national identity. They moved very soon after the unification of Italy. But they also seemed to have a kind of community based on the recognition of working skills. In Casablanca, many lived in the district of Maârif, which was called the “*Petite Italie*”.

*« My grandpa Rosario, a Sicilian, arrived in Morocco in March 1913 from Tunisia. There the story is a very special one: my grandma was a countess, from Lombardy, Milanese, she married a simple Sicilian worker, a mason in Tunisia. She was a daughter of one of her majesty's officers, they made him come from Italy to Tunisia to care for the Italian-Tunisian boarding school, a school for Italian and Tunisian dignitaries. At that time it was France that pressed to get the protectorate, and there was Italy that was trying to take charge with its schools.*

*My father was born in '14 in Morocco and by that time people didn't study too much and after the elementary degree he went to an apprenticeship. These immigrants in Morocco, what did they do? The sons learned a job, they went to learn in Italian firms and many of them went to Specioso Brothers who made wrought-iron, carpentry etc., and my father learned that...*

*We, the Italians, were... let's say so... the appendage of the professional introduction: People came out of school and went to work for a joiner... there were fantastic firms that don't exist anymore...leaf spring makers... metal workers » (L.B., 2014, Interview, Amarcord Video Archives)*

We can see that in order to understand the Italian presence in Morocco it is necessary to know that it was artisans and workers (mainly from Sicily and other southern regions) who moved to carry on their traditional employment. They saw in Morocco the opportunity to carry on their activities as they had in Tunisia, building of a new country under the French protectorate. This was an economic migration, carried on preserving their skills and artisan's abilities.

By analysing historical witness accounts, it is clear that the Italians of the first migration were not in a hegemonic position, even if, being Europeans, they were seen as being different by the native people. They were functional to the colonial system but not part of it. This condition is defined by the category of *petits blancs*: *those who went to the colony not to assume high institutional or administrative positions (...), but who moved only bringing themselves and their families, with the only help of their own arms* (Labanca 2001: 195), *whites a little less white than those who held power* (Giordano, 2016), *artisans and workers in the middle* on the balance of power (Fasce, 2001: 240). They were *Petits Blancs* that, in the case of Morocco, come as *allogenic auxiliaries* (Miege, Dubois 1994) to the colonial system.

From 1912 to 1940 French, Italian and Moroccan people lived together, working and raising their families; but as often happens the colonized territories become an arena for conflict and alliances between countries. From the early '20s, Fascism was rising and some of the opponents to the regime started to move away. Even if there is very little documentation, it seems that some of them moved also to Morocco (some by choice, other's not).

During fascism opponents were sent to the “confino”, literally to the “border”, isolated areas of Italy and the colonies where they were put in working and internment camps. Even if I didn't find Morocco on the lists of places of “confino” it is possible that some were sent to Morocco for this reason. There were 8 jails and internment or work camps in France<sup>12</sup> and it is possible that some people were sent to the colonies. I met a family in Casablanca that descended from

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<sup>12</sup> TpS: Topografia per la Storia [www.campifascisti.it](http://www.campifascisti.it)



Giovanni, a man from Bologna. He was a socialist, a dissident of the regime. His grandson told me that he arrived in Morocco in 1932 with all his family. They had run a coffee shop in Bologna, but all their goods had been seized and they were asked to leave. A cousin that was travelling to reach America sent them a photo from Casablanca; it was winter in Bologna and the photo showed him in light clothing. When they lost their goods and they were asked to leave Italy, Gianni decided that Morocco, with its good climate could be the right place to go. He, his wife Lisa, and the two sons arrived in Casablanca and tried to rebuild their life there. All the family is now in Ben M'Sik cemetery in Casablanca. Many other Italians are buried there, and walking the light and wide paths of this cemetery one can read on the gravestones moving excerpts of many European families, and also a little of about our history.



**Ben M'Sik cemetery in Casablanca. The grave of one of Giovanni's relative. Picture by Maria Giovanna Cassa, December 2016**

We shouldn't forget that Casablanca was one of the ports of exodus for the fugitives that sailed towards America. Many Europeans arrived in Morocco just as a stage in the trip to America and then decided to stay (Cassa, 2018a). Lino Bacco, head journalist for programming on Radio Mars and descendent of an Italian Family arrived from Tunisia in the first years of 1900. He says: “my grandfather used to say: *l'America 'ca è*<sup>13</sup>.”

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<sup>13</sup> *America is here*, in sicilian dialect. For an interesting collection of interviews on the subject, see the documentary by Amarcord and Augustus Color- Casablanca, the title comes from that expression: *L'America 'ca è*.





**Lino Bacco at Radio Mars studios, 2015, *Frame in the documentary “L’america ‘ca***

Up until the 1940, the Italian community was large, composed of many families and reasonably wealthy. They had companies of their own; they owned their houses and the buildings where they carried out activities for the community. During the fascism, for the first time, attention was paid to the communities abroad and the regime tried to build up a fascist Italian identity through schools, cultural activities and financing free summer holidays in Italy for the children of the families abroad. In September 1939, the Second World War began also in Morocco, as in the other French African countries where Italians resided. The balance changed, and Italians began to be viewed with suspicion by the French.

When, on June 10, 1940, Italy entered the war, Italians in Morocco suddenly changed from being auxiliaries of the protectorate to adversaries, finding themselves in a situation more similar to that of *allogènes dominés*<sup>14</sup>: unwanted enemies deported to the labour camps while their duties and goods were confiscated.

*«In 1940 I completed the first year of the professional school here, then there were the summer resorts... Mussolini organized them. I left for the summer resort on June the 6th 1940, we caught a train up to Tangier, at Tangier we caught the steamer to reach Naples, on the 6th we left...well...we had to get there... I remember they assembled all of us on the ship deck... its name was the Vulcania ... yes, I remember... in the Straits of Gibraltar the English stopped us, they made the engines stop, everything... The war hadn't started yet, we didn't know what had happened.*

*Then, during the night, we heard the engines starting again and the English in Gibraltar let us go away... they let us go away ... the English, or perhaps the captain escaped, I don't know.*

*Then in the morning, it was on June 10th, they called all of us on the deck to listen to the speech of Mussolini declaring war to France, to England... And instead of going as far as Naples they sent us to Sardinia to Cagliari. The planes arrived from Corsica and bombed Sardinia...*

*Because it was Italy to declare war to France... Eh... I remember that my mother and my aunt had the same dressmaker and afterwards when Italy declared war, they went to do a fitting for a dress that she had already cut and put together... and the dressmaker was a French... And when they went there the dressmaker gave them back the cloth and said... “Madame (...) your country has declared war against mine... I can't work for you any more” You understand? » (I.M., 2014, Interview, Amarcord Video Archives)*

<sup>14</sup> “Esclaves transportés, les coolies indiens, les travailleurs engagés. Ces allogènes entièrement dominés peuvent par leur destin ou leur habileté devenir à leur tour dominateurs.” (Miège, Dubois, 1994:13)

Italians and French, people that had worked together, after declaration of war by Musolini became enemies. Their goods were seized and families divided. The men were imprisoned and their wives and children had to face life in a hostile environment.

*«When our fathers were imprisoned, mothers found themselves in trouble, alone... they didn't know what to do... for example... they didn't know how to go to the bank... before that they stayed at home cooking and looking after the children...»*

*My father was in a concentration camp. We were enemies and the French put in a concentration camp all men from 18 to 60 years old. Afterwards France asked for an armistice, didn't it? The Italians then were set free (and my father and my uncle were set free too. My father was a big man... when he came back he was so... he had lost 14 kilos. Afterwards the American arrived... and put them in prison again... a mess that I can't tell...!*

*...But with the Americans they were not in concentration camps, they were war prisoners...*

*I had come back from Italy just two days before the time when in November the Americans landed... The Italian prisoners could even go outside, during the day, they could work, sometimes they could have their meals at home and in the evening they had to go back into the camps... but they let them go out also on Saturdays and Sundays... especially the Italians... Many Americans were of Italian origin! They came here, you know, just to speak Italian...!» (I.M. 2014, Interview, Amarcord Video Archives)*

*«My uncle and my father told me about the bombing in 1942 when there was the Toch Operation... to prepare the American landing in Morocco... Well, at that time France was an enemy of the United States. The French ships went out of the port in order to defend themselves but then... eh... there was the American counter-offensive... one of the ships sunk directly inside the port... This was the cruiser Primauguet. In my opinion the Primauguet was this cruiser that sank at the end of the port of Casablanca, and with my father and me went there many times by boat, fishing, and we often were just on the wreck, and there were such fantastic fish there!» (L.B., Interview, Amarcord Video Archives 2015).*

During the war and after, up to independence in 1956, the Italians left Morocco and their number diminished until 1973 when the Moroccanisation law gave the final blow to their presence in Morocco.

#### **4- The end of the first Italian migration, Moroccan emigration to Italy and the new Italian arrivals**

After the fall of the protectorate, a great political movement was launched claiming the necessity of a cultural de-colonisation. Arab identity in Morocco was enforced through the obligation to leave behind the colonizers' language, previously used in all institutions. Arabization of bureaucracy and the refusal of French idiom were requested by a large number of Moroccans, along with the re-appropriation of the economy. In March 1973, a law established that at least 51% all the enterprises and the land had to be owned by Moroccans.

With this law Morocco intended to take back its economy from foreign influence. Many businessmen sold their activities and left Morocco or remained there ceding the 51% to Moroccan partners.

This is still a very strong memory in the old community and in the subjects I met. It a divider in their experience there: before and after 1973. Very few of them could remain in Morocco.

As I said before there is very little documentations and no specific research on the period that followed and what I can outline here are just my first hypothesis.

We have seen that after 1973 in Italy and across Europe concerns started to grow about people coming to Europe. The number of Italians abroad decreased and almost no documentation survives regarding what happened to the few Italians in Morocco until the mid-1980s.

At this time, Italy had had a great expansion in its economy, salaries had started to rise and it seemed that medium sized enterprises could export a model of trade. Entrepreneurs, especially from the northern regions of Italy, were starting to venture into foreign countries attracted by low costs generally, low labour costs and cheap raw materials.

Some of them arrived in Morocco, usually alone, leaving their families back in Italy.

*«Here there was not enough housing that was fit for our standard of life, particularly for families. There was not a good choice of schools. My wife came with the children just for the holidays, but my family stayed in Italy... but we were a good group, I could say a community. In COIM (Comitato Imprese in Marocco) we were 120 business owners, we met monthly; we used to go out in the forest for picnics... Fiat opened professional schools in many cities and we could find very good professionals who were able to work. Many of them decided to migrate to Italy and they found good jobs there. »* (G. Interview by the researcher, Casablanca, December 2016)

Therefore, we can see how the connections between the two countries were never really severed.

We also see that the migratory paths of Moroccan people started to include Italy in the 1970s and '80s. The first Moroccans arriving in Italy were viewed with interest and curiosity. Many Italians probably could not point to Morocco on the map at that time. There were no general or specific visa requirements to enter the country. Many arrived in the southern regions of Italy, nearest to Morocco and then some moved to the north.

Interestingly, my informants described the initial relationships between Italians and Moroccan immigrants as being different from today. There was a greater openness to gaining knowledge from the “others” that were arriving. It was only at the end of 1980's and during all of the 90's, that more Moroccans arrived, sometimes just for a part of the year to sell mats and other objects from the excellent traditional of Maghrebian handicrafts. At this time the idea of Morocco and Italian's imaginary of the country started to change.

The presence of Moroccans in Italy introduced Morocco into our imaginaries. Love and friendships between Moroccans and Italians often developed in people a curiosity about how their lives would be if they lived in another country. Many of them decided to go and see the country of their Moroccan friends and sometimes they decided to stay, to get married, or to work in Morocco. The interviews I collected about Italian arrivals in the end of 1980s and 1990s are like that.

They generally moved with a great sense of adventure, a desire for knowledge and being fascinated by this close “otherness”. This seems to have helped them adapt to a reality that was very different from the one they were used to. They chose Morocco because it was a place that could offer them a better lifestyle (even if they had just a rough idea of what a better lifestyle

would mean). It is only after the 2008 crisis that the number of Italians moving to Morocco increased again, but this seems to have been a more economic migration, based on trade: the high quality of Italian products or skills and the opportunity to invest their savings in a lower wage economy.

It is not easy to say how many Italians are present in Morocco now: most of the people I've been working with aren't registered in AIRE<sup>15</sup> so I suppose that the nearly 5,000 registered can be realistically increased to 10,000. The Italian population is composed of new young businessmen, who have arrived in the country since the 2008 crises, allured by Morocco's economic growth, low taxation and geographic proximity. Now the Italian community is the third largest, after the French and Spanish. We can say that the new presence in Morocco is just in a small way a descendent from the historical one. As before, Italians arrive in order to work, looking for of a better life, but now they have a better economic situation and are more mobile. They are not looking for a salaried job but following a precise business plan.

The new arrivals are focused on work, allowing defining this as an economic migration. One difference from the past is that today, in the "age of migration" (Castles, Miller, 2009), not only men migrate in search of better opportunities but also women. In fact, during my research, I met many women either single or with their families, running enterprises in many sectors: catering, tourism and luxury crafts.

## Conclusions

This contribution shows how the two shores of the Mediterranean Sea have been connected in many different ways throughout history, multiplying the interrelations and the possible directions of mobility.

It would be valuable to have a deeper understanding of the ties between both migratory pathways: not only that of Moroccans to Italy but also that of Italians to Morocco. Because of the lack of documentation regarding the Italian presence in the Maghreb, it is difficult to analyse the role of personal histories and relationships connecting the flows of people between Morocco and Italy through the years, especially after the end of the protectorate.

What is clear from the research data is that for many Italians, ideas and imaginaries of Morocco are shaped by their relationships with Moroccan immigrants in Italy. Moreover, Italian's narratives and self-perceptions even today often recall the history of Italian presence during protectorate and Second World War memories still offer an important framework to understand their contemporary experience (Cassa, 2018). On the other hand, we can maybe assume that imaginaries of Italy on the part of Moroccans have been shaped not only by Moroccan people coming back from previous migrations, or by the "brand" of Italy, but also, at least for the middle-aged and older Moroccans I met, by the stories about Italians in Morocco in the twentieth century.

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<sup>15</sup> Anagrafe Italiani Residenti all'Estero (*Italians Abroad Register*)

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