Terrain of Contestation: Complicating the Role of Aid in Border Diplomacy between Europe and Morocco

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Theorists of border externalization have portrayed aid in border control cooperation as a bargaining chip that the European Union uses to “buy” the cooperation of countries of “origin” and “transit.” More recent scholarship, instead, has depicted aid as a rent that Southern actors try to extract from Northern donors by capitalizing on the presence of foreign, “undesirable” populations within their own borders. Both explanations overlook the manifold ways countries of “origin” and “transit” maneuver aid in diplomatic relations over border control, thus failing to conceptualize aid beyond the incentive/rent binary. This paper analyses the implementation of three aid-funded projects in the field of migration in Morocco. Building on postcolonial international relations and organizational sociology, I argue that countries of “origin” and “transit” do not always welcome aid in the field of migration with open hands. Rather, they decide to cooperate (or not) with Global North donors and their subcontracting partners depending on how specific aid-funded projects fit into their broader domestic and international foreign policy strategy. I identify a three-tiered typology of engagement (facilitation, negotiation, and obstruction) to argue that aid rather works as a terrain where countries of “origin” and “transit” display, contest, and renegotiate diplomatic relations with Northern partners in situations of power asymmetry.

Les théoriciens de l’externalisation des frontières ont décrit l’aide dans la coopération au contrôle des frontières comme une monnaie d’échange utilisée par l’UE pour « acheter » la coopération de pays « d’origine » et « de transit ». Des travaux de recherche plus récents ont plutôt décrit l’aide comme un loyer que les acteurs du Sud tentent d’extraire des donneurs du Nord en capitalisant sur la présence de populations « indésirables » au sein de leurs frontières. Ces deux explications ignorent les multiples façons dont les pays « d’origine » et « de transit » manipulent l’aide dans les relations diplomatiques relatives au contrôle des frontières, et donc ne conceptualisent pas l’aide au-delà d’une relation binaire incitation/loyer. Cet article analyse la mise en œuvre de trois projets financés par les aides dans le domaine de l’émigration au Maroc. En me fondant sur les relations internationales postcoloniales et la sociologie organisationnelle, j’affirme que les pays « d’origine » et « de transit » n’accueillent pas toujours l’aide dans le domaine de la migration à bras ouverts. Ils décident plutôt de coopérer, ou de ne pas coopérer, avec les donneurs du Nord et leurs partenaires sous-traitants, selon la façon dont ces projets fondés sur les aides s’intégrent au sein de leur stratégie de politique étrangère nationale et internationale au sens large. J’identifie une typologie de l’engagement à trois niveaux (facilitation, négociation, obstruction) pour avancer que...
l’aide fonctionne plutôt tel un terrain où les pays « d’origine » et « de transit » affichent, contestent et renégocient les relations diplomatiques avec les partenaires du Nord, dans des situations d’asymétrie du pouvoir.

Los teorizadores en materia de externalización de fronteras han descrito la ayuda a la cooperación en el control de fronteras como una moneda de cambio que la UE utiliza para « comprar » la cooperación de los países de « origen » y « tránsito ». En cambio, los investigadores recientes han descrito la ayuda como una renta que los actores del Sur intentan obtener de los donantes del Norte aprovechando la presencia de poblaciones « indeseables » dentro de sus fronteras. Ambas explicaciones pasan por alto las múltiples formas en que los países de « origen » y « tránsito » manejan la ayuda en materia de relaciones diplomáticas por encima del control de las fronteras, por lo que no logran conceptualizar la ayuda más allá del binario incentivo/renta. Este artículo analiza la implementación de tres proyectos financiados por la ayuda en el ámbito de la migración en Marruecos. Basándonos en las RRII poscoloniales y en la sociología organizacional, argumentamos que los países de « origen » y de « tránsito » no siempre reciben la ayuda en el ámbito de la migración con las manos abiertas. Más bien, deciden (no) cooperar con los donantes del norte global y sus socios subcontratados en función de cómo encajan los proyectos específicos financiados por la ayuda en su estrategia más amplia de política exterior nacional e internacional. Identificamos una tipología de implicación de tres niveles (facilitación, negociación, obstrucción) para argumentar que la ayuda funciona más bien como un terreno en el que los países de « origen » y de « tránsito » muestran, contienden y renegocian las relaciones diplomáticas con los socios del norte en situaciones de asimetría de poder.

**Introduction**

In April 2016, I sat in the office of Manuel, a European aid worker based in Rabat. Manuel worked for an international nongovernmental organization (NGO), which had recently won a grant from the European Union (EU) to manage a development project in the field of migration. As Manuel explained to me during the interview, the project aimed to provide capacity building to grassroots organizations working with migrants at the local and national scale. The interview followed a script that I would repeat again and again during my project interviews: what are the main activities carried out in the project, who are the main actors involved. . . Toward the end, I asked Manuel whether he had encountered any particular problem in the implementation of the project. Manuel looked at me, slightly puzzled, in the same way as you would look at someone who is displaying surprising ignorance on an obvious political event that is affecting everyone’s working life. “Well, obviously the fact that Morocco has broken all relations with the EU Delegation has delayed the project quite a bit,” he explained, raising his shoulders.

In January 2016, in fact, Morocco had decided to suspend relations with the local EU delegation in Rabat in response to the annulment of the EU–Morocco free trade agreement in the Western Sahara (El Yaakoubi 2016). This decision had been taken on December 10, 2015, by the EU’s General Court following a complaint lodged by the Polisario Front, a nationalist liberation movement fighting for the independence of the Western Sahara. The judgment thus excluded the agricultural and fishery products originating from the Western Sahara from the trade agreements signed between the EU and Morocco (Western Sahara Resource Watch 2016). By supporting the claim brought forth by the Polisario Front, the EU General Court had ruled over one of the thorniest issues in Morocco’s domestic and foreign affairs: the territorial dispute over the Western Sahara. The interruption of relation
between the Moroccan government and the local EU delegation had significant repercussions; talking to Reuters, EU officials warned that this move threatened the implementation of development projects amounting to over €1 billion of EU funding. “To keep projects working and funds flowing, meetings and information exchanges are needed. That is how the money is disbursed,” a source from the EU delegation stated (El Yaakoubi 2016). On the ground in Rabat, this affected Manuel’s ability to make sure that the implementation of the project would stick to the timetable.

The decision made by Moroccan authorities is starkly at odds with the current discussions of aid in border diplomacy. Literature, in fact, have long tended to portray aid as a bargaining chip through which states in the Global North try to “buy” countries in the South into migration control cooperation (Korvensyrjä 2017; Arci 2018; FitzGerald 2019). Such an assumption has been criticized for conceiving aid-recipient countries as inherently passive subjects, which cannot but submit to Northern externalization agendas. More recent works have highlighted the agency that countries in the South manage to assert in border diplomacy. With regards to aid, however, this alternative view has focused on the capacity of countries such as Morocco, Turkey, or Jordan to engage in “refugee commodification” (Freier, Micinski, and Tsourapas 2021; Micinski 2021), the capacity to capitalize on the presence of foreigners on their own territory to extract rent (such as trade agreements or aid budgets) from donors in the North. While certainly describing a well-established pattern in migration diplomacy, this focus dramatically overlooks the variety of ways in which countries in the South maneuver aid to assert their power vis-à-vis the EU and its member states in border politics. In the anecdote just recalled, Morocco actually endangers the disbursement of aid budgets to reassert the terms of its partnership vis-à-vis the EU. More recently, migration studies literature has recognized noncooperation as a widespread tactic used by countries of “origin” and “transit” in order to reassert their power vis-à-vis Global North powers or to protect their domestic interests (Zardo and Loschi 2020; Cham and Adam 2021). However, noncooperation in the field of migration-related aid is simply not acknowledged by the literature. This reflects a broader gap in international relations (IR) scholarship on the foreign policy of countries in the Global South—that have historically been orientalized as at the “margins” of hegemonic circuits of power (Sabaratnam 2011; Fernández-Molina, Feliu, and de Larramendi 2019).

As El Qadim has already noted, systematically categorizing aid as a financial incentive that Northern countries leverage on and Southern countries aspire to in border control cooperation is problematic (El Qadim 2018). Indeed, the “trade metaphor” utilized to describe the role of development in interstate bargaining is marred by “false self-evidences” (El Qadim 2015, 183). First, EU negotiators might struggle to mobilize funding instruments because they simply cannot access them—development budgets might be under the control of a different actor, or function according to call for tenders rather than direct allocation. Second, aid recipients include a variety of actors beyond country authorities (including NGOs and United Nations [UN] agencies). This makes it unclear how aid could actually be used as an incentive to foster border control cooperation. Third, national and local authorities in aid-recipient countries might be underwhelmed by aid proposals: aid budgets might not be considered sufficient to contribute toward the cost of border control cooperation, and the projects’ focus might simply not be of interest (El Qadim 2018). In other words, that development aid is channeled toward the territory of a country of “origin” and “transit” for the purpose of implementing a migration-related project is not in itself a sufficient condition to consider such funding envelope as an “incentive” or a “rent” in border control cooperation (El Qadim 2015).

In this article, I build on postcolonial approaches to IR to interrogate (non)cooperation in aid for border control. How do countries of “origin” and
“transit” situate themselves vis-à-vis aid for migration-related projects? When do they cooperate, and when do they not? How can we conceptualize it beyond the “incentive/rent” binary? I argue that countries of “origin” and “transit” do not always welcome aid in the field of migration with open hands. Rather, they decide to cooperate (or not) with Global North donors and their subcontracting partners depending on how specific aid-funded projects fit into their broader domestic and international political strategy. Considering aid automatically as an “incentive” that donor countries can mobilize to attract the cooperation of “transit” and “origin” countries in border control cooperation, or a “rent” that aid-recipient countries try to extract in negotiations around migration containment, is reductive. While it is undeniable that development budgets also fulfill these functions, aid should be considered as a terrain of negotiation too—a space where countries of “origin” and “transit” display, contest, and renegotiate their terms of engagement with donor countries in the field of border control.

Taking Morocco as a case study, I analyze the implementation of three sets of development projects (the Assistance to Voluntary Return and Reintegration [AVRR], two border security projects aiming at upgrading the capacity of Moroccan authorities to patrol land and sea borders, and a humanitarian project assisting migrants stranded at the Northern Moroccan border) to highlight three ways in which Moroccan authorities utilize aid as an instrument of border diplomacy: facilitation, if they actively collaborate with European states and international organizations to streamline the implementation of a certain development program; negotiation, when they challenge the approach adopted by Global North actors in the allocation of aid; and obstruction, if they delay or prevent the implementation of a certain migration-related development project. I engage with Acharya’s concept of localization (Acharya 2004) to show how Morocco utilizes each of these tactics to advance their position in the international arena, renegotiate the terms of its cooperation with actors from the Global North, and regulate contentious issues in border control cooperation. Pluralizing our understanding of sending and transit countries’ engagement with development aid allows us to complicate our understanding of asymmetric power in border control cooperation. First, proactivity in the negotiation and reception of aid budgets in the field of migration is not necessarily synonymous with co-optation or submission to Northern hegemony (Maâ 2020): the state can rely on foreign aid to outsource and sugarcoat the most controversial parts of its migration policy. Second, proactivity and disengagement are not mutually exclusive strategies: the state can agree to facilitate the implementation of aid-funded projects that are in line with its own migration diplomacy while at the same time obstructing initiatives that run against the country’s interests.

Methodologically, the paper builds on extensive qualitative research conducted in Morocco between 2016 and 2019, specifically on the analysis of primary documents compiled by aid actors and interviews with Moroccan and European aid workers, representatives of Moroccan authorities and migrant people that benefitted from development projects. The rest of the article unfolds as follows. First, I engage with literature on postcolonial IR and noncompliance in border control cooperation to theorize the (dis)engagement of countries in the South with aid in the field of migration. The contextual section summarizes the hardening of the Euro-African border since the 1970s and analyzes the main tenets of the relation between the EU, its member states, and Morocco in border control cooperation. The following three sections analyze three different development projects to identify dynamics of facilitation, negotiation, and obstruction of aid implementation by Moroccan national and local authorities. The last section advances the discussions on aid as a terrain of contestation—rather than an object of cooption—in border politics.
Beyond Cooptation and Resistance: Building Power in Global Asymmetries

For a long time, IR as a discipline has given disproportionate attention to the role played by Global North actors in the creation and maintenance of hegemony in the world order. The “imagined Western subject of world politics” has been analyzed as an entity that “can represent, know and treat parts of the world as its objects, through processes of objectification” (Sabaratnam 2011, 785). Southern actors have thus implicitly been considered worthy of analysis only in relation to the West—and overlooked as passive, powerless subjects that cannot exercise meaningful influence in the face of external intervention. Although such representational problem still persists (Tripathi 2021), recent scholarship has engaged with postcolonial literature to conceptualize foreign policy strategies and patterns adopted by “subaltern” subjects—where subalternity is conceived as “a position that is not completely other, resistant or alternative to dominant geopolitics, but an ambiguous position of marginality” (Sharp 2011, 272). Reframing countries in the South as autonomous geopolitical actors allows us to acknowledge that Global North countries are not the only interlocutors of Southern foreign policy interests—which embrace neighboring, regional, and broader South–South influences, alliances, or antagonisms (Mawdsley 2012; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Daley 2019). Reframing the locus of IR politics broadens our understanding of foreign policy (dis)engagement beyond the resistance/domination binary (Sharp 2011). Being in a position of structural dependency (from foreign debt, international supply chains, or international support more broadly) limits but does not prevent subaltern countries from developing an autonomous foreign policy strategy: subaltern actors can adopt a mix of resistance and compliance to formulate apparently ambivalent strategies that advance their geopolitical position (Kutz 2021).

Migration scholarship has largely mirrored the pattern followed by IR theory. The field, in fact, has recently switched from conceptualizing countries of “origin” and “transit” as passive recipients of EU border externalization policies to acknowledging their capacity to maneuver border control cooperation according to their own foreign and domestic politics strategy. Border control cooperation thus becomes a “give-and-take framework” where the assumed power asymmetries between the negotiating states turn into a relation of “interdependence”—whereby Northern countries try to pressure Southern partners into border control cooperation, and the latter leverage on their increased importance in the regional scenario to achieve political and economic concessions. Such concessions can translate into gains in fields very distant from border control (such as securing political alliances on territorial disputes, reparations of colonial damages, and international support of the domestic authoritarian regime) (Paoletti 2011, 192). Cassarino talks about “reverse conditionalities” to conceptualize the conditions that countries of “origin” and “transit” set vis-à-vis Global North negotiators, and the outputs that they manage to bargain in border control cooperation. “Reverse conditionalities” are thus the direct expression of non-Western actors’ empowered position, to the point that “the other actors have no option but to accommodate them [reverse conditionalities] with a view to ensuring a modicum of cooperation” (Cassarino 2022, 82).

Southern countries can gain leverage in an interdependent framework by adopting a series of responses—ranging from collaboration to outright resistance to border control cooperation. Countries of “origin” and “transit” can decide to proactively engage in border control cooperation if that increases their international legitimacy (Benjelloun 2017; Natter 2020), if that allows them rebrand their image as an “international” power after a domestic reputational scandal (Hellio 2014), or to accumulate other financial or diplomatic resources—a strategy that has gained countries such as Jordan or Turkey the label of “refugee rentier states” (Tsourapas 2019, 464). Cooperating with the EU on border control cooperation is therefore not necessarily a marker of submission to neo-colonial imperatives for countries
on the receiving end of externalization policies (Maâ 2020). Resistance is instead common where the adoption of restrictive border control measures would come at unsustainable financial and political price—like alienating a country’s diaspora or electorate (Mouthaan 2019), undermining the management of domestic security concerns (Zardo and Loschi 2020), hampering other foreign policy aspirations, or placing a disproportionate amount of responsibilities over border control on Southern actors (El Qadim 2015). Not complying with EU imperatives for border control is thus not the result of an irrational choice, but the outcome of a calculated prediction of the costs of cooperation (Cassarino 2018a). Indeed, political actors can also shift back and forth from collaboration to defection (and vice versa) to balance the need to maintain international support with catering to the pressures made by its electorates and domestic civil society (Cham and Adam 2021).

Less acknowledged by the literature, however, are the intermediate positions of partial or adaptive compliance that countries of “origin” and “transit” can adopt in border control cooperation. In his analysis of norm socialization within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Acharya utilizes the term “localization” to conceptualize this middle way between “acceptance” and “rejection” of external norms (in our case, an aid-funded project in the field of migration). Localization is understood as “a complex process and outcome by which norm-takers build congruence between transnational norms [. . .] and local beliefs and practices” (Acharya 2004, 241). In other words, localization provides an avenue to implement an exogenous norm through its adaptation to the functioning and strategy of the local context. Norm localization, however, is likely to be successful if a local actor is able and willing to turn an external norm into a legitimacy-building asset that can be adapted and streamlined into the existing normative architecture (Acharya 2004, 248). However, processes of apparent compliance can be pervaded by resistant behavior. This is particularly evident when Southern countries lean on the security concerns of their Northern partners to bend interdependence to their own advantage. Depending on the level of explicit threat, Tsourapas divides such behavior into back-scratching (“promising to maintain refugee populations within its borders, if compensated”) and blackmailing (“threatening to flood a target state[s] with refugee populations within its borders, unless compensated”) (Tsourapas 2019, 465).

The development field indeed constitutes an arena of power where the boundaries between resistance and compliance are especially slim, as conflict emerges but is expressed otherwise. Bono and Hibou brand development as a “battlefield,” where “conflicts, antagonisms, struggles, competitiveness and asymmetrical relations” emerge and that “lead to the emergence of different, sometimes even antagonistic worlds and world views” (Bono and Hibou 2017, 7). In her work on foreign debt in post-2011 Tunisia, for example, Fernández-Molina highlights how Tunisia alternatively displayed an “adaptive-compliant” and a “resistant” attitude vis-à-vis international financial institutions in an attempt to maintain a strategic balance between reconciling external expectations and domestic interests (Fernández-Molina 2019, 378). Drawing on a comparative analysis of Chad, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Rwanda, Fisher and Anderson argue that the regimes in power in each of these aid-recipient countries managed to turn the securitization of aid in the wake of 9/11 into a strategy to secure and further their authoritarian power (Fisher and Anderson 2015). Most interestingly, aid can be a terrain where the representation of Global North actors as all-powerful vacillates. Analyzing the role of EU Directorate Generals in the negotiation of the EU–Morocco readmission agreement, El Qadim deconstructs the supposed power asymmetry between the two actors by highlighting the disagreements and antagonisms tampering the relations between different EU directorates in the access and management of development budgets and foreign policy negotiations (El Qadim 2015). Casting the South as a subject, and aid as a field of contestation, gives way to a portrayal of IR where uncertainty and inconsistencies punctuate the behaviors of both parties (see also Tazzioli 2014).
Governing through Aid at the Euro-Moroccan Border

When Western European countries started closing their borders in the 1970s, Southern European countries started experiencing more pressure to monitor their frontiers and prevent the entry of undocumented migrants into the Schengen area (Boswell 2003). The introduction of visas for non-European nationals by Italy and Spain in 1990 and 1991 legally sealed off the Southern border of the EU, thus prompting a change in migration flows toward irregular border crossing and intensified family reunification (Arab 2009). Confronted with the continued and increasing numbers of undocumented migrants arriving to Europe, European policymakers quickly realized that the cooperation of “sending” and “transit” countries would be essential to effectively control Europe’s external borders. After the signature of the Tampere Agreement in 1999, the EU formally adopted the “external dimension” of its migration and asylum policy, giving way to the Commission to incorporate discussions over migration in the foreign policy of the EU (Lavenex and Uçarer 2004).

Development funding has always been essential to the EU(rope) border externalization strategy. In the 1990s, the EU already counted on a long history of economic and technical cooperation with Morocco and North African countries in general, formalized with the establishment of the Global Mediterranean Policy (1972), the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (1995), and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) (2004) (Bialasiewicz et al. 2013; Collyer 2016). Soon after the 1999 Tampere Council, the officials from the EU’s Directorate-General Justice and Home Affairs, charged with negotiating border control cooperation measures with third countries, started claiming migration-specific funding. They saw aid both as a potential bargaining chip during negotiation rounds and as a way to de-center discussions over migration cooperation away from an exclusive focus on border security (Coleman 2009). In 2005, the European Council thus adopted the Global Approach to Migration (GAM)—renamed Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM) in 2011 (Hampshire 2016). The GAM established the need to couple actions on migration control with broader development objectives tackled by the EU in aid-recipient countries (Collett 2007). In practice, the external action of the EU in the field of migration has resulted into the creation of a panoply of financial instruments. In 2001, the EU created B7-667, the first dedicated funding line for migration control cooperation with third countries, which ran from 2001 to 2003 with a budget of €42.5 million. In 2004, the B7-667 was substituted by the programme for financial and technical assistance to third countries in the areas of migration and asylum (AENEAS) regulation (Coleman 2009), which ran until 2006 with an overall budget of €250 million. In 2007, the Commission created the Thematic Programme for Migration and Asylum (TPMA), which lasted until 2013 with an overall budget of €384 million (García Andrade and Martín 2015). Since 2016, projects on migration and border control in North, West, Central, and Eastern Africa have been mainly funded through the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), the financial instrument created by the EU to spur migration control cooperation with African countries in the wake of the so-called migration crisis (Gazzotti 2021). A 2019 report by Statewatch estimated that between 2001 and 2018, Morocco had received €215 million from the EU to implement projects in the field of border security and a further €61.6 million for the implementation of its migration policy (Statewatch 2019).

Morocco has always been a priority target in the EU border externalization strategy. Spain started soliciting Morocco’s cooperation in border control already in the early 1990s (Zaragoza-Christian 2016). In the following years, the collaboration between Morocco, the EU, and its member states has become more sustained and formalized, including through the signature of bilateral agreements to facilitate the return of irregular migrants from countries including Italy, France, Germany,
and Spain (Cassarino 2018b), and the joint surveillance of sea and land borders between Spain and Morocco (Vives 2021). Since 2003, the EU has tried to negotiate a readmission agreement with Morocco, so far unsuccessfully due to the resistance of Moroccan authorities (El Qadim 2015). Border externalization efforts have gone hand in hand with the development of a Moroccan art of migration diplomacy, whereby Morocco has ramped up its border management measures in alignment with its geopolitical priorities in the North and in the South (Benjelloun 2020; Natter 2020). The approval of a border surveillance strategy by the Moroccan Ministry of Interior in 2002 was followed the next year by the approval of law 02-03, a repressive migration act criminalizing irregular immigration and emigration from the country. Initially branded as a clear evidence of Morocco’s transformation into “Europe’s gendarme,” law 02-03 actually reconciled a more diversified set of interests: on the one hand, the appetite of the EU and its member states to externalize their borders through the cooperation of North African countries; on the other hand, the willingness of Morocco to gain geopolitical leverage after a long time of political isolation in the continent and marginality in EU relations (Natter 2014).

The explicit security vocation of the law reflected in the harsh policing methods that characterized the following decade of migration governance in Morocco: until 2013, the presence of black migrant people from West and Central Africa in the country was controlled through the deployment of vast and frequent arbitrary arrest campaigns, often complemented by deportation to the no man’s land at the border with Algeria. In September 2013, Morocco reformed its approach to migration governance by announcing the adoption of a new, “human right-based” migration policy. The new migration policy included two regularization campaigns in 2014 and 2017; the adoption of a National Strategy for Immigration and Asylum (NSIA) in 2014 and the launch of three law projects on migration, asylum, and human trafficking. The new migration policy garnered the support of the EU and its member states, which saw the policy’s focus on local integration as perfectly aligning to border externalization objectives. It also allowed Moroccan authorities to ease relations with their African neighbors by offering a more dignified treatment to their citizens living in the country after a decade of systematic abuses (Benjelloun 2020; Abourabi 2022).

Crucially, the new migration policy also allowed the Moroccan monarchy to consolidate its authoritarian power through the deployment of “controlled liberalisation” (Natter 2020, 851), a strategy that demonstrated Morocco’s commitment to maintain its international engagement in the field of migrants’ rights (and human rights more broadly) (Jiménez Álvarez, Espinheira, and Gazzotti 2020). Such move forms part of a longer-term strategy implemented by the King and its closer entourage, or Makhzen (Claisse 2013), to ensure the regime’s autocratic survival through the adoption of formally ambitious, albeit practically limited, human rights reforms [1] (Bono 2008). In practice, the new migration policy allowed the Moroccan monarchy to consolidate its power in three main ways. First, it promotes the regime’s international image as a state compliant with human rights treaties and conscious of popular demands for political freedom (Jiménez Álvarez, Espinheira, and Gazzotti 2020). Second, it allows the Makhzen to gain reputational primacy over other state actors (first and foremost, not only political parties, but also ministries in charge of implementing the policy at the mid- and street-level, and to negotiate its implication with domestic and foreign actors). Finally, packaging a migration policy that formally concedes to greater respect for migrants’ rights allows the state to neutralize and seed conflict among local civil society organizations who had contested the regime in the previous decade (Natter 2020). The new migration policy, however, was marked by the same contradictions registered in other reformist projects impulse in the past twenty years, insofar as migrant integration measures have been pursued alongside the implementation of
violent border control practices. Although around 50,000 people were regularized between 2014 and 2017, law 02-03 has not been reformed, and the law on asylum has not been approved (Gazzotti 2021). Even though violence against migrants came to a halt in the main urban centers, it always remained widespread in border areas, before resuming even in large cities since the summer of 2018. Such raids continued after the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic (Gross-Wytzen 2020).

Maneuvering Aid in Border Diplomacy

In this section, I will outline a three-tiered typology of state responses to aid in border control cooperation (facilitation, negotiation, and obstruction). This typology will help nuancing the resistance/domination binary characterizing IR literature in general. By showing the blurred lines between compliance and autonomy, the section will also question the incentive/rent-seeking binary pervading migration politics scholarship.

Facilitating

Since 2004, Morocco has been a site of implementation of the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) program (MCMREAM 2016). Voluntary return, as the program is more commonly called, is an initiative that supports migrant people (including rejected asylum seekers) who want to return to their countries of origin through the purchase of flight tickets and, less frequently, the subsidy of reintegration activities—such as setting up income-generation activities in contexts of origin. First established in a handful of Western European countries in the 1970s, voluntary return programs became more widespread in the Global North in the 1990s, as national authorities saw them as an effective tool to combine with forced returns in order to boost the number of foreigners removed (or self-removed) from state territory (Koch 2013).

In Morocco, voluntary return was introduced at a time of intense border securitization. The Moroccan parliament had just adopted law 02-03, and border police was conducting mass arrest campaigns and deportations to the desert at the border with Algeria (Cimade and AFVIC 2005). In its 2016 annual report, the Ministry of Migration reports that Moroccan authorities first implemented the voluntary return program in 2004, to repatriate undocumented migrants from Nigeria. The same report records that 2,480 people were “voluntarily returned” in 2004 and, a further 4,485 people in 2005 (MCMREAM 2016). In October 2005, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) organized their first voluntary return mission in the country—not by its proper initiative, but at the request of Moroccan and Malian authorities. This happened weeks after the Ceuta and Melilla events, in a militarized context where Moroccan authorities had escalated arrests of migrant people in the north of the country, and their return to origin countries. The IOM thus was demanded to freight a charter flight for 220 Malian voluntary returnees (International Organisation for Migration 2005, 16), at a time when its presence in the country was extremely weak. The IOM did not have an office; its operations relied on the presence of an IOM official operating out of the office of Morocco’s Entraide Nationale (National Mutual Aid). The organization’s project portfolio was sparse, and mainly limited to the implementation of a few punctual programs targeting Moroccan youths (Caillault 2012). In 2007, the IOM signed a mission agreement with the Moroccan government, and its presence in the country thus became less ad hoc. The voluntary return program, however, remained fundamentally unstable, as the IOM struggled raising the funding.

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1 The expression is in inverted commas because the voluntary nature of such returns is dubious. At the time, Morocco was implementing a very aggressive deportation policy (Gazzotti 2021).
necessary to maintain the project. Moroccan authorities themselves complained about the limited scope of the program, branding it as insufficient to complement the financial commitment that Morocco was making to forced returns. As a civil servant from the Moroccan Ministry of Interior told to American diplomats in 2005, “[t]he IOM paid for one flight to return 120 Malians, while the GOM [Government of Morocco] paid for 20 other repatriation flights” (American Embassy of Rabat 2006). Since its inception in 2005, the AVRR had to be paused three times (in 2010, 2012, and 2016) because of funding shortages. In 2012 and 2016, the interruption caused public outcry among the migrant community, with people staging public sit-ins in front of the IOM to demand the organization to resume the program (interview with IOM officer, August 2016; interview with two IOM officers, July 2019).

The fate of AVRR suddenly changed in 2013, when Moroccan authorities integrated voluntary return in the country’s new migration policy. The NSIA, for example, recognizes voluntary return in the section on returning undocumented foreigners (GADEM 2018a, 2018b). Crucially, the Moroccan Ministry of Interior agreed to support the IOM in running the program by subsidizing the return of 1,000 people in 2014; 1,500 people in 2015; and 3,000 people in 2016 (MDMCMREAM 2017, 97), for a total contribution of 38.5 million MAD (€3.5 million) (MCMREAM 2016, 87).

The support of Moroccan authorities is also essential to the everyday functioning of the program: beside allowing the IOM to operate in the country, the Moroccan Ministry of Interior also issues the travel authorization for irregular migrants who wish to return to their country of origin. Contrary to what happens in Tunisia, Moroccan authorities do not apply fines to irregular migrants who decide to return to their country of origin through the program—a cost that, in Tunisia, is covered by the IOM through donors’ funding (Garelli and Tazzioli 2017). Both Moroccan civil servants and IOM officers express satisfaction regarding the program’s functioning. During an interview, a high-rank civil servant from the Moroccan Ministry of Migration argued that the voluntary return “has a lot of success among irregular migrants, because traffickers sell them the Eldorado and then when they realise that crossing is difficult . . . we give the possibility of regularization to those who want to stay here, and for those who want to go home there is voluntary return” (interview with Moroccan civil servant, June 2019). At the same time, IOM officers praised the good working relations with Moroccan authorities as key to program implementation (interview with a Moroccan civil servant, June 2019; interview with two IOM officers, July 2019).

The commitment of Moroccan authorities to the maintenance and expansion of the program has been publicly celebrated by both the EU and the IOM. The EU qualifies the specific arrangement for voluntary return in Morocco as “without precedent in the region [North Africa]” (European Commission 2016, 7, translation by author), and granted Morocco a budget of €1.2 million to support the institutionalization and ownership of the program by Moroccan authorities. In an interview granted to online Moroccan newspaper Yabiladi in 2014, the then IOM Chief of Mission for Morocco, Anke Strauss, declared that the IOM used to have a hard time raising the €1.5 million necessary to run the program, which costs €2,600 per returned migrant. Strauss thus welcomed Morocco’s contribution as a fortunate trend inversion (Chaudier 2014). The increase of incoming funds has expanded the operational capacity of the AVRR. Between 2005 and 2018, the IOM supported the voluntary return of 11,528 people from Morocco to their country of origin (International Organisation for Migration 2018). As the graph below highlights, the number of people returned substantially increased after Morocco became a donor of the program in 2014.

Scholars and activists have often showcased the voluntary return program as the quintessential expression of border externalization (see, e.g., FTDES and Migreurop 2020). Donors such as the EU and its member states would be able to impose the implementation of the program on countries of “transit” such as Morocco due
to the latter’s supposed reliance on aid—or so the assumption goes. Such a description, however, could not be more detached from the genesis and evolution of the program in Morocco. The voluntary return was not an incentive that European donors used to force Moroccan authorities to bend to their priorities, nor a rent that Morocco sought in compensation for its cooperation into border control. Rather, Moroccan authorities politically and financially facilitated the program’s inception, survival, and expansion by transforming it into an instrument of its own migration policy. This happened because Morocco presented excellent conditions for the localization of voluntary return: the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Migration, in fact, turned the program into a resource that could be locally adapted in order to fulfill three sets of strategic priorities in Morocco’s domestic and foreign policy. First, it allows the country to reduce the cost of border control by garnering the financial support of international partners. Second, it allows Moroccan authorities, domestically and internationally, to be seen as offering a “humane” alternative to migrants stranded in the country—in line with the spirit of the new “human right-based” migration policy. Third, voluntary return allows Morocco to raise its diplomatic profile as a rare case of a “transit country” who financially commits to the implementation of the voluntary return program. In so doing, Morocco manages to position itself closer to the EU and its member states in terms of compliance to border control objectives, consolidating its role of regional mediator between Europe and North Africa. Originally conceived as an instrument to allow European countries to expand the number and categories of aliens that could be removed from the country, the voluntary return program turned into a tool that Moroccan authorities could use to make border enforcement more financially viable and increase their reputation vis-à-vis Global North partners (the IOM, the EU delegation, and other donors).

**Negotiating**

In 2018, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX) recorded 57,034 irregular border crossing attempts on the Western Mediterranean route. Although overall irregular arrivals to the EU were at their lowest level in 5 years, the number of voluntary returns in Morocco continued to rise.
(Statewatch 2019), Spanish authorities sounded the alarm, and European politicians started warning about a new migration “crisis” unfolding in the Western Mediterranean border. Spain and the EU thus started pressuring Morocco to ramp up its migration control measures (GADEM 2018a, 2018b). In July 2018, Moroccan authorities launched an aggressive policy of border control, arbitrarily arresting “potential irregular migrants” and displacing them away from the Northern border. In practice, thousands of black people (regardless of whether they had regular residency papers or the right to international protection) were forcibly displaced to areas in the center and interior of the country (Gazzotti and Hagan 2020).

Diplomatic tension on border control escalated at the end of July 2018, when around 600 migrants crossed the land border between Morocco and the Spanish enclave of Ceuta. Spain and the EU seemed to attribute the rise in irregular crossings to Morocco’s presumed laxism on border control. On July 30, 2018, the Spanish newspaper Elpais reported that “various internal EU reports warn that this country [Morocco] has relaxed the control of [undocumented] exits from its territory.” Quoting “field experts,” the newspaper specified that Moroccan border guards had been reportedly showcasing “a certain inactivity” in patrolling the border during the afternoons, “a moment that the mafias exploit to organize departures of migrants to Spain” (Abellán 2018).

Moroccan authorities vehemently rejected such accusations. In August 2018, Mustapha Khalifi, the spokesperson for the Moroccan government, reminded Spain and the EU that Morocco was doing huge efforts on the control of irregular migration, shouldering responsibilities beyond its capacities. Pointing to the lack of support from the EU, he specified that Morocco “makes huge sacrifices alone and with its own means and that the figures concerning [financial] support remain below the efforts and the sacrifices allowed by the Kingdom [of Morocco]” (GADEM 2018a, 2018b, 48). That same year, Khalid Zerouali, director of Migration and Border Surveillance in Morocco’s Interior Ministry, declared to the Spanish press agency EFE that Morocco was spending over €200 million per year in border patrol, including the deployment of 13,000 members of different security forces (TelQuel 2018). Such grievance is a leitmotiv in EU–Morocco cooperation over border control: in her work on the (unsuccessful) negotiation of the readmission agreement, El Qadim recounts that Moroccan authorities would qualify the aid budgets deployed by the EU for border containment as negligible vis-à-vis Morocco’s financial commitments to patrol its northern borders (El Qadim 2015).

In 2018, Spain responded to Morocco’s prompts by lobbying the EU to provide more substantial financial support to their Southern neighbor. In July 2018, Spain’s Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska forwarded to the EU a list of equipment (for a total of €60 million) that Moroccan authorities had flagged as necessary to patrolling their side of the border (LaSexta 2018). Shortly afterward, the then President of the EU Commission confirmed that additional financial support had been allocated to Morocco, and that the Commission was pleading EU member states for further contributions (GADEM 2018a, 2018b). In late 2018, Morocco received €74 million from the EU to purchase technical equipment for the patrol of land and sea borders (Statewatch 2019). A diplomat informed about the negotiations recalled

When the EU asked to strengthen the borders, they [Moroccan authorities] demanded a huge budget support. There was this [EUTF] program in partnership with Tunisia,\(^2\) but Morocco said it was not enough. The EU then increased [the budget support] to 140 million € […] Things started working, also through the pression of member states, and the numbers [about irregular border crossings] confirm it. […].

Moroccans started cooperating, they have deployed a lot of means in the North – and

\(^2\) This refers to the “Border Management Programme for the Maghreb region,” a €55 million project funded by the EUTF and implemented by ICMPD in Morocco and Tunisia.
In December 2019, Morocco received a further €101.7 million from the EUTF for a program supporting the fight against human smuggling and the management of irregular migration (European Commission 2019). The factsheet of the project built a direct connection between the project budget and the need to adequately and proportionately support Morocco toward the costs of border control cooperation. The EUTF-funded project thus aimed at “supporting these essential investments for the fight against cross-border criminality under all its forms, on the whole Moroccan territory” (European Commission 2020, 10). The factsheet then clarified the rationale for the budget and activities linked to the project, directly invoking the “important investment in terms of equipment and human resources (more than 30,000 elements of different security forces)” (European Commission 2020, 25) that Moroccan authorities were shouldering in relation to border control operations. Given that Moroccan authorities estimated spending €3.5 billion in border control over the 2020–2027 period, the factsheet concluded that “the engagement of the Moroccan government […] is sufficiently relevant and credible to be supported with an important programme of budget support” (European Commission 2020, 12).

The allocation of aid in the field of border policy was not a straightforward process: the EU did not actually compensate Morocco for complying with its request to ramp up border control, nor Morocco tried to leverage on European security apprehensions to extract a rent. Aid, in this particular instance, was seen and mobilized by both parties as a partial reimbursement for costs stemming directly from Morocco’s cooperation with the EU—a cooperation that the EU was asking Morocco to increase, even if the request was not initially accompanied by a financial envelope. The allocation of aid itself thus resulted from Morocco’s capacity to frame migration control cooperation not as a partnership where both partners were equally engaging and benefitting from but rather as an unequal game where Morocco was investing and the EU was taking profit. Rather than constituting an external norm that could or could not be localized, aid therefore constituted a terrain for Morocco to negotiate a different support package that allowed the country to re-center the terms of its engagement with the EU along the lines of a fairer financial and political relation.

Obstructing

The Northern Moroccan borderland is the area where migration control, and its violent effects, appear in the neatest light. Since the early 2000s, migrants living in the forests surrounding the Spanish enclave of Ceuta and Melilla, and in the neighboring urban centers (Tangier, Tétouan, and Nador), have suffered ongoing human rights abuses committed by both Spanish and Moroccan police forces, as well as civilians (Tyszler 2020). From 2003 to 2013, Doctors without Borders (MSF) maintained a presence in these areas to provide assistance and facilitate access to healthcare to migrants suffering from illnesses, deteriorating life conditions, and sexual violence. In 2012, however, MSF announced their intention to withdraw from their Moroccan mission. The NGO, in fact, had judged its own activity to be “unsuitable for the situation in the field.” In an interview to Jeune Afrique, the then head of MSF Morocco, David Cantero, explained that the human rights violations that his team was witnessing on the ground were so structural that they could not be solved through a medical organization (Jeune Afrique 2013).

The departure of MSF was accompanied by the launch of a damning report where the organization denounced the violence perpetrated by Moroccan and Spanish
authorities as one of the main factors leading to the deterioration of migrants’ healthcare conditions (MSF 2013). The report put Morocco on the spotlight for its negative record on the respect of migrants’ rights, thus fostering a climate of international shaming that pushed the King to announce a migration policy reform (Jiménez Álvarez, Espiñeira, and Gazzotti 2020). MSF’s decision to close its Moroccan mission was accompanied by a search for entities that could take over the work of medical support for distressed migrants in the North-Eastern Moroccan borderlands. MSF actively looked for organizations, facilitated field visits, and liaised interested parties with potential funders. In 2013, the border project MSF had been undertaking for years was taken over by Doctors of the World, an international medical NGO, and by a Catholic organization depending on the Tanger Diocese (Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes España n.d.). The project was coordinated by the IOM and funded by Switzerland (OIM Maroc 2014a), for a total amount of 851,000 CHF (the equivalent of €824,000) (Coopération Suisse 2021). The Catholic organization also received a small budget of €40,000 from the EU delegation in Morocco over 2014/2015 to carry out a similar set of activities (EU Delegation in Rabat 2016). From 2015 onward, Doctors of the World and the Catholic organization carried on the project without the involvement of the IOM. To the best of my knowledge, the project run by MSF in Morocco was not funded by European aid (Gazzotti 2021).

The implementation of the IOM-run project, however, suffered from a series of complications due to a deteriorating relationship between partner organizations and Moroccan authorities. In an interview to the Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes, Father Esteban Velazquez—the coordinator of the project in Nador—had complained that the NGO was having trouble consistently delivering assistance to migrants stranded in the forests surrounding the Spanish enclave of Melilla due to lack of a written authorization from Moroccan authorities to visit the area. The NGO was thus unable to justify their presence on site when stopped by local security forces. Civil servants from the local EU delegation and the Swiss Embassy had got “personally involved at the highest levels” to facilitate the delivery of a permit, to no avail (Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes España n.d., 31). The very presence of the two NGOs implementing the project was majorly threatened in late 2014 and early 2016, respectively. In the fall of 2014, Moroccan authorities closed the office of Doctors of the World “for reasons linked to the administrative regularization of its [Doctors of the World] situation.” Doctors of the World then applied for permission to hold a constitutive general assembly in Oujda, where the NGO was based at the time. After failing to receive an answer from local authorities, the NGO applied for a new permission to the Ministry of Interior and held a constitutive general assembly in Rabat. Even though the NGO continued working during this period of turmoil (OIM Maroc 2014b, 7), former humanitarian workers recall that it encountered real difficulties in implementing the direct assistance elements of the project. Staff members had to work from home for an extended period of time before resuming office presence from a coworking space in Rabat. Doctors of the World finally decided to support the creation of a local Moroccan NGO that could implement the migration aspect of the project with more ease than an international NGO (WhatsApp conversation, former humanitarian worker, June 2022). A second major disruption occurred a year later, in January 2016, when Father Esteban was barred from reentering Morocco at the border post of Beni Ensar after a brief visit to the Spanish enclave of Melilla (Público 2016). The staff members in Nador suddenly found themselves without anyone to coordinate the only project delivering humanitarian assistance at the border.

In the field, various sources explained the behavior of Moroccan authorities as part of a broader strategy to limit the risk of reputational damage deriving from the spread of news about border violence. A former humanitarian worker read the intolerance vis-à-vis Doctors of the World as a way for Moroccan authorities to avoid that another medical organization undertook the same outspoken advocacy strategy.
adopted by MSF. Quoting a former MSF employee, my interviewee explained that “given that one [NGO] had left and that the other [NGO] entered,” Moroccan authorities were probably concerned that the two medical organizations had the same operational and advocacy strategy (interview with a former humanitarian officer, May 2018). Wary of the reputational disaster that another report on violence at the border would have produced, Moroccan authorities would have therefore opted for intimidating Doctors of the World into being a discrete presence at the border. Similarly, Moroccan authorities never publicly announced the reasons behind the entry ban issued against Father Esteban. However, there is common agreement among aid workers and human rights activists that this was due to his outspoken advocacy about border violence. “Maybe he said something that bothered someone,” an anonymous source suggested in an interview to the Spanish newspaper *El Diario* after Esteban was prevented from entering Morocco again (*El Diario.es* 2016). During interviews, NGO workers implied that Padre Esteban had been banned from the country because of his relation with the media. In particular, they pointed to the “very abrupt, very direct” tone he adopted to communicate about border violence (interview with two aid workers, Rabat, September 2016). In the weeks following the entry ban, the staff members remaining on the ground operated in a climate of fear, and decided to distance themselves from the media in order to avoid further disruption to humanitarian operations (WhatsApp conversation, former humanitarian worker, June 2022). All this happened just a few months after Morocco had expelled two staffers of the NGO Amnesty International, who were conducting research on the situation of migrants and refugees in the country (*Amnesty International 2020*).

Controlling humanitarian organizations through repressive measures runs contrary to the smooth disbursement and delivery of aid-funded humanitarian projects. Both organizations in charge of delivering the direct assistance component of the Swiss-funded project, in fact, had to resort to alternative mechanisms to implement the project while navigating the obstacles imposed by local authorities. The *obstruction* of aid-funded humanitarian projects is therefore symptomatic of a clash between Morocco’s domestic and foreign policy priorities and the potential implication of humanitarian presence on the ground. To resort to Acharya’s terminology, the aid-funded project under consideration did not meet the condition for localization. Even though the project objectives themselves did not run contrary to Morocco’s migration policy as it existed on paper, the implications of the project implementation (i.e., facilitating the proximity of actors with an advocacy potential to situations of visible human rights violations) threatened the delicate balance that Moroccan authorities had built to maintain a public image as a modern, human-rights-compliant country while implementing a migration-containment strategy relying on border violence. Such delicate balance relied on the public denial of systematic human rights abuses happening at the border, which Moroccan authorities had undertaken since the very beginning of the migration policy reform (*Gazzotti 2021*). Allowing humanitarians to witness human rights abuses paved the way to the possibility of outspoken advocacy, which had in the past submitted the Moroccan government to intense media and international pressure. Aid, in this situation, did not constitute an incentive, and much less a rent that the Moroccan government was trying to extract from border control cooperation. It was a medium that enhanced a *threat* to the reputational strategy of the regime, and therefore needed to be contained.

**Conclusion**

This article has complicated the role of aid in border diplomacy. Theorists of the externalized border have long tended to systematically conceptualize aid as an “incentive” that Northern countries use to “buy” the cooperation of aid-recipient countries. The latter are therefore represented as passive actors, willing to partake in
border control because they are dependent on aid. Postcolonial views on border diplomacy instead maintain that countries in the South are autonomous actors that perform rent-seeking behavior by transforming the presence of foreigners into a weapon to obtain financial advantages from countries in the North. In this latter interpretation, however, aid is still seen as an added rent that is being extracted in the framework of border control cooperation. Based on literature on postcolonial IR and organizational sociology, I have questioned the incentive-rent binary by analyzing aid as a brokering space where countries of “origin” and “countries” reassert their geopolitical priorities vis-à-vis Northern donors and implementing partners. Building on the analysis of three different aid-funded projects implemented in Morocco, I pluralized the strategies that countries of “origin” and “transit” can adopt toward aid into three categories: facilitation, negotiation, and obstruction. In the case of voluntary return, facilitating the implementation of an aid-funded project fulfills three objectives of Morocco’s migration policy: controlling the number of irregular migrants in the country; being seen as offering a “humane” alternative to deportation; and garnering the financial and political support of European partners. In the case of the border policy projects, negotiating the allocation of further financial support is key to mitigating the financial impact that border control cooperation generates on the country’s budget, and allows Morocco to reassert the terms of responsibility sharing with Spain and the EU in the monitoring of the Euro-African border. As for humanitarian projects, the obstruction of aid-funded initiatives through intimidation and distancing from the field is strategic to the objective of the Makhzen to protect its image at home and abroad. Building on Acharya’s concept of localization, I have argued that aid-funded projects on migration are more likely to be well received by an aid-recipient country such as Morocco when the local bureaucracy identifies a way to repurpose the project contents into an opportunity to advance its own domestic interests. This is particularly evident in the case of voluntary return, which the Moroccan Ministry of Interior turned into an opportunity to partially externalize the costs of its deportation policy onto European donors first, and into an instrument to raise its international profile after 2013. Such opportunities for localization did not exist in the case of aid-funded humanitarian projects in the borderlands. As the project implied a high potential for reputational damage, Moroccan authorities repeatedly disrupted the project implementation, to the point that project staff on the ground had to resort to alternative solutions to be able to deliver the projects.

This paper ultimately contributes to two main bodies of literature. First, it informs migration studies scholarship by nuancing and pluralizing our understanding of aid in border diplomacy. Considering aid as a terrain of contestation allows us to understand border control cooperation as a much more dynamic and situated process than the literature often implies. Seeking aid and obstructing its implementation at once are not contradicting behaviors per se. Rather, the attitude of a country of “origin” and “transit” toward aid-funded projects depends on the political domain and situated circumstances that aid is affecting. Second, this article adds to a growing body of IR work on the formation of power in situations of asymmetry. Observing the alliances and conflicts emerging from the negotiation and implementation of aid pushes us to complicate our understanding of the “powerful” and “the powerless,” of the “center” and the “margin.” Aid, the instrument of soft control by excellence, becomes itself a terrain of contestation, where power can emerge and be reasserted in conditions of marginality. This is a fertile field for further scholarly investigation, especially for work exploring what the obstruction of aid-funded projects says about border control cooperation specifically, and North–South politics more broadly. Much more attention should thus be paid to the analysis of projects that failed, projects that did not happen, or projects that had to be suddenly reformulated into something else.
Notes

[1] Initiated under the late reign of King Hassan II, this tendency consolidated through the approval of two constitutional reforms in 1992 and 1996, the promotion of a regime of “alternation” in 1998 led by the Socialist Union of Popular Forces’ Abderrahman Youssoufi, and the ratification of a number of human rights treaties (Jiménez Álvarez, Espiñeira, and Gazzotti 2020). Keen to mark a break with the country’s repressive past, Mohamed VI made political liberalization a trademark of his reign after he became king in 1999 (Bono 2008). The formal alignment of Morocco to the international human rights regime, however, did not correspond to a disappearance of authoritarian techniques of ruling, such as the suppression of dissident voices, the persistence of legislations constraining civil liberties, and the deployment of violence against marginalized groups (Amnesty International 2017; Telquel 2018). To borrow Can’s reflections on Turkey, coercive and violent mechanisms of state power have not disappeared, but they “have become less sustainable for the image of the state at the national and international levels” (Can 2016, 352).

References


Complicating the Role of Aid in Border Diplomacy between Europe and Morocco

SERVICIO JESUITA A MIGRANTES ESPAÑA. n.d. “Por Un Estado de Derecho…También En La Frontera Sur.”