



Transcending Borders and Boundaries: the Dynamics of Moroccan Transnationalism and Sovereignty

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the changing stance of the Moroccan state towards its diaspora in Europe, initially viewed as temporary guest workers discouraged from naturalizing or engaging politically in their host countries, with an expectation of eventual return. Faced with a growing trend of naturalization and permanent settlement among these immigrants, Morocco has embraced dual citizenship. This policy aims to maintain enduring ties between the Euro-Moroccan transnational community and the monarchy, leveraging shared religious, nationalist, and monarchist bonds. In contrast, countries like the Netherlands perceive dual citizenship and cross-border allegiances as potential disruptors to their societal unity and national identity. This article explores the intricate dynamics and repercussions of these evolving perceptions, examining the complex interplay between Moroccan immigrants, their European host countries, and their country of origin within a transnational framework.

Keywords: Dual citizenship, Host countries, Moroccan immigrants, National identity, Transnational communities.

1. INTRODUCTION

The scholarly discourse on Morocco's engagement with its diaspora community has predominantly focused on the economic dimension, particularly the remittances sent back to the homeland. Sorensen (2004) underscores this emphasis, noting the critical role these financial contributions play in Morocco's economic landscape. Yet, the significance of the Moroccan diaspora extends beyond mere monetary transactions. This broader scope of impact encompasses several facets, including the diaspora's diplomatic functions in promoting Morocco's international interests, enhancing Morocco's global image, countering political opposition in foreign lands, and safeguarding Moroccan immigrants against religious radicalization, specifically conversion to Shiism.

The political socialization of these diasporic communities, therefore, emerges as a pivotal objective for Morocco, underpinning the rationale behind the formulation of diaspora policies. The conferral of citizenship status to these communities represents a strategic approach by Morocco. However, this strategy does not inherently secure homeland political allegiances among subsequent generations of migrant citizens. Here, the concept of political socialization becomes crucial, understood as the process through which “polities and other political societies and systems inculcate appropriate norms and practices in citizens, residents, or members” Sapiro (2004, p. 2).

This process manifests in various initiatives, such as Morocco's Summer Universities and homeland tours. The former offers migrant Moroccan students, aged 18–25, a two-week educational sojourn in Morocco. Additionally, the management of religion abroad is facilitated through two official institutions: The Council of 'Ulama for the Moroccan Community in Europe and Hassan II Foundation for Moroccans Residing Abroad. Here, religious elements interlace with nationalist sentiments, a phenomenon Brubaker (2011, p. 6) articulates as the transposition of “religious motifs, narratives, and symbols” into the political to forge nationalist claims. Laurence's observation further delves into this

interplay, noting the religious capitals', Rabat in this case, endeavor to retain its spiritual authority over diaspora believer-citizens (2018, p. 76). In this vein, Mahieu (2021, p. 676) posits that such programs should be viewed as origin state instruments of political socialization, designed to impart specific orientations and values to diaspora members, thereby facilitating their mobilization for the state's political, economic, or social projects.

The conceptualization of transnationalism and integration as binary opposites is challenged by Bouras (2013, p. 1120), who posits that these two phenomena need not be mutually exclusive. Levitt and Schiller (2004, p. 1003) further elaborate on this idea, introducing the notion of simultaneity. This concept refers to the everyday practices and connections that span both local (domestic) and global (transnational) contexts, suggesting a more nuanced understanding of immigrant experiences (ibid.).

This nuanced understanding of transnationalism becomes particularly salient when examining the case of Moroccan immigrants in the Netherlands, where transnational sovereignty often results in a complex interplay with the assimilation policies of the host country. The Dutch approach to Moroccan transnationalism has evolved significantly over the decades, traversing three distinct stages. In the 1960s and 70s, the Dutch government institutionally encouraged the transnational connections of Moroccans, under the assumption that these ties would facilitate eventual return migration (Bouras, 2013, p. 1124). However, by the 1980s, as the prospect of migrants returning to their country of origin became increasingly unlikely, the focus shifted. During this period, the preservation of Moroccan cultural links was still promoted, but now under the belief that such connections would aid in the integration process (ibid., p. 1125). During the 1990s to 2010, Dutch policies shifted towards an assimilationist approach, with a growing emphasis on socio-economic integration and questioning Moroccan immigrants' orientation towards their country of origin, linking strong cultural or religious identities to failed integration. This period saw public and political discourse increasingly framing Moroccan migrants' ties to their homeland and Islamic background as threats to Dutch values and national sovereignty, culminating in a demand for loyalty to Dutch society and a rejection of transnational connections (ibid., p. 1227).

1. KING HASSAN II'S OPPOSITION TO THE ASSIMILATION AND INTEGRATION OF THE MOROCCAN DIASPORA COMMUNITY

King Hassan II opposed the naturalization of the Moroccan diaspora citizens and their assimilation into European countries. He deemed it a betrayal of the homeland and Moroccan nationalism. Thus, when foreign residents were granted the right to vote in the Dutch elections in 1986, King Hassan II did not hide his "displeasure." Three years later, in 1989, he considered the participation in French elections "a betrayal of one's origins." He says in an interview with the weekly French magazine, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 12-18 January, 1989:

Because the vote is attached to the land where one is born one is not attached to the country where one is only passing, where one is in a forced and temporary exile with the idea of return. It is a matter of roots. If you choose to take root somewhere and forever, it's something else. The right to vote is a sacred right to participate in the sovereignty of a community. We must not desecrate it. It would be a way of increasing the uprooting which constitutes the real misfortune of immigrants. In any case, I cannot admit it for Moroccans [...] If a Moroccan remains truly Moroccan in his traditions and in his behaviour, there are things that cut him off from fellow citizens in the same city and make him understand that he cannot be a stranger to a community and share the privilege of sovereignty. In a certain sense, it is a way of betraying one's origins.

According to Sarah Collinson and A. Kreienbrink, the king's strong opposition to the involvement of the Moroccan diaspora in the politics of their host countries stemmed from the Makhzen's concerns that the engagement of Moroccan migrants in their host countries' politics might lead to political unrest in Morocco if they were to bring

back new political ideas to their homeland (2005). Hassan II vehemently opposed not only assimilation and political participation but also the concept of dual citizenship for the Moroccan diaspora community. According to Collinson, the Moroccan monarch expected Moroccan nationals in European countries to act as ambassadors of their home country. She cites a speech from Hassan II during his visit to France in 1976, where he appealed to Moroccans to “remain Moroccan so that your country can in time count on its sons everywhere, wherever they find themselves [...] You must give a good example and continue to fulfil the role of ambassadors of your country” (Collinson, 1996).

In the same year 1989, Morocco started sending imams to Europe during Ramadan in what might be read as a royal reaction against some European countries to integrate immigrants. The following year, in 1990, a ministry for Moroccans residing abroad was created. In a throne speech of the same year, Hassan II announced:

Since We are linked by the act of allegiance to Our subjects living overseas in the same way as to their brothers living in Morocco We feel a religious, moral and paternal responsibility towards them. Our subjects living overseas deserve much greater attention than their co-citizens living in Morocco, whose needs are examined morning and night. We charge you with the needs of these sons, who are Ours [...] The objective of this task is to ensure the connections and the act of allegiance (Collyer, 2013).

This royal paternalistic attitude is more clearly expressed in a speech Hassan II gave in Paris on 7 May 1996, to the representatives of the Moroccan community abroad. The King addresses Moroccan residents abroad as “my dear sons,” and prays for them invoking, he says, “the prayers of the parents, addressing their children: ‘May God surround you with his blessing.’” He further tries to strengthen the filial ties with his diaspora subject by appointing his elder daughter, Princess Lalla Meryem, as president of the Foundation for Moroccan Residents Abroad. King Hassan states on this occasion, “our ties will not only be those of allegiance, but also ties of kinship, since you will be like my sons and daughters.” He goes on to say:

I am extremely happy, much more than I can express it, with our meeting today. As you know, visiting relatives is one of the duties of our religion [...] To show you, my children living in France, how great is our affection and how close our ties are, We have decided to entrust, upon our return, by the grace of God, the presidency of the Hassan II Foundation for Moroccans Residing Abroad, to Our devoted daughter, Lalla Meryem. Thus, our bonds will not only be bonds of allegiance, but also bonds of kinship since you will be like my sons and my daughters (Hassan II, 1998).

In the same speech, King Hassan II also announces that he has dedicated part of his property in Marnes-La-Coquette in the western suburbs of Paris for the construction of a mosque:

I would like this Mosque to be a model Mosque, representing Islam as the Moroccans understand it, a Sunni Islam, healthy, pure, an Islam of cohesion and brotherhood, an open Islam and not a rigid Islam, an Islam of the civilization and progress, so that a scientist versed in space sciences who teaches here in Paris, can go there to perform the five daily prayers and the Friday prayer. I advise you to remain attached to the Holy Book. I am not saying that your children must memorize all the verses of the Holy Quran, but they must at least memorize one or two “*hizb*” to be able to perform their prayers, invoke God during Ramadan and thus maintain spiritual ties with their Creator, because nothing equals the Holy Book to perpetuate these links (ibid.).

It is interesting how the speech concludes by urging Moroccan to dedicate themselves to the Holy Book because that would “maintain spiritual ties with their Creator” as well as strengthen their filial attachment to their sovereign. The religious vocabulary is abundant in the King’s speech: Mosque, the five daily prayers, the Friday prayer, Holy Book, Holy Quran, *hizb*, God, Ramadan etc. The speech sounds like a religious sermon that blends faith with nationalism.

Hassan II advocates for his diaspora subjects a nationalized Islam, “Islam as the Moroccans understand it, a Sunni Islam, healthy, pure, an Islam of cohesion and brotherhood, an open Islam and not a rigid Islam, an Islam of the civilization and progress.” Thus, as Rogers Brubaker argues, “nationalism may be formulated in religious vocabulary and the existence” (Brubaker, 2012, p. 12).

2. MOHAMMED VI: TRANSNATIONAL MOROCCAN SUBJECTS

Hassan II's successor, Mohamed VI, too, stresses the ties between the Moroccan residents abroad and the monarchy and homeland. In his first throne address to the nation on July 30, 1999, the sovereign expressed his royal attention to the Moroccan community abroad.

Among the matters we will pay special attention to are the issues of our community living abroad, and serious thought in overcoming the obstacles it faces on its path, and working to solve its problems and strengthening the bonds of belonging to the motherland (Sahib al Jalalat, 1999).

This royal speech clearly demonstrates a strong commitment to addressing the concerns and challenges of the Moroccan overseas community, with an emphasis on fostering a sense of connection and identity among the diaspora while strengthening their ties to their homeland. The king's speech underscores the significance of actively engaging with the issues faced by the expatriate community and reinforcing their sense of belonging. This is more emphasized in the throne speech of July 30, 2002. The King announces:

We cannot fail to express our joy and pride in the attachment of our loyal subjects residing abroad to their homeland and their attachment to the bonds of eternal pledge of allegiance (*bayaa*), authentic civilized identity, and their devotion to family and kinship, renewing our deep appreciation for their active contribution to the efforts of economic development, international radiance of Morocco, and our resolve that they should have what they deserve from a balanced presence and active participation in all areas of national life, as we would like to assure them that our utmost care is being attached to their conditions outside and inside the country (Khitab Sahib al Jalalat, 2002).

Unlike his father, Mohammed VI is not opposed to Moroccans naturalizing and integrating in their host countries, yet, by law they are still considered to be Moroccans. Moroccan nationality is transmitted by birth in Morocco or by filiations, born from a Moroccan father or mother, in the case of mixed marriages. Moroccan citizenship is not annulled by naturalization. Therefore, even when one acquires a foreign citizenship one is still considered a subject of the King of Morocco in accordance with the principle of perpetual allegiance. As Haans observes:

Moroccan citizenship is constitutionally inalienable. This means that Moroccans obtaining citizenship of their country of settlement cannot relinquish their Moroccan nationality, so that they automatically acquire double citizenship. ... In order to stress their "Marocanité", all migrants including their descendants—whether first, second or third generation—are officially called MRE: *Marocains Résident à l'Étranger* (Moroccan Residents Abroad) and, hence, subjects of the King (de Haas, 2004, p. 24).

The king dedicated a significant portion of his speech, delivered on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Green March on November 6, 2005, to address the Moroccan community abroad. His primary objective was to actively engage this community in the domestic political affairs of the country and:

to ensure an effective and credible participation of our immigrant citizens in all institutions and areas of public affairs, we have taken four important and integrated decisions: First: Enabling the Moroccans residing abroad to be represented ... in the House of Representatives, in an appropriate, realistic and rational manner. As for the second decision... it relates to the necessity of creating electoral legislative districts abroad, in order for our expatriate citizens to choose their representatives in the first chamber of Parliament, bearing in mind that they enjoy, on an equal footing, political and civil rights, which the law accords to all Moroccans, to be voters or elected in the homeland. Our third decision, enabling the new generations of our dear community, to vote and stand for election, like their parents, is an embodiment of the principle of equality in citizenship [...] Our goal will remain further than that, in response to the great aspiration of our citizens residing abroad, by opening up for them all spaces and modes of participation. Hence our fourth decision, to create a higher Council for the Moroccan Community Abroad, headed by our Majesty, to be formed in a democratic and transparent manner, which guarantees him all guarantees of credibility, efficacy and true representativeness. [...] Morocco is a source, destination and destination for migration. And given that our country is considered a source of

immigration, we have never ceased giving particular attention to our community abroad, and to its positive interaction with the countries of residence, and its active involvement in the reforms and the great workshops which we are leading (Al Khitab al Malakui, 2005).

The speech constructs Moroccan immigrants in a variety of linguistic expressions: “Moroccan Community Abroad” and “the Moroccans residing abroad” but more often “our” is used to invoke them as his loyal subjects and connect them to the sovereign and to their homeland: “our immigrant citizens,” “our expatriate citizens,” “our dear community,” “our citizens residing abroad,” and “our community abroad.” The relationship of the diaspora community with home and host countries is described in interesting terms: “its positive interaction with the countries of residence, and its active involvement in the reforms and the great workshops which we are leading.”

Transnational identification and integration in the host countries and loyalty to home and monarchy are not seen as contradictory but are rather complementary and mutually reinforcing. And after all, immigrants are the king’s faithful subjects. They are “our immigrant citizens,” “our expatriate citizens,” “our dear community,” “our citizens residing abroad.” They are perpetually tied to home through nationalism and religion. The throne and monarchy cannot abandon its subjects even when they reside in foreign countries and these exiled subjects are perpetually loyal to the trilogy of God, Country, and King. That is how Moroccan diaspora community is represented the official Moroccan discourse of immigration.

And In order to demonstrate and strengthen this bond, the king made the decision to integrate the Moroccan expatriate community into the political process by granting them the right to vote and stand for election in parliamentary elections. These three rights as well as the creation of the Council for Moroccan Residents Abroad, are enshrined in the articles of 2011 constitution:

Article 16 The Kingdom of Morocco works for the protection of the rights and legitimate interests of the Moroccan citizens [feminine] and citizens [masculine] resident abroad, within respect for international law and for the laws in force in the host countries. It is committed to the maintenance and to the development of their human ties, notably cultural, with the Kingdom, and the preservation of their national identity. It sees to the reinforcement of their contribution to the development of their homeland [patrie], Morocco, and to the strengthening [resserrement] of ties of amity and of cooperation between the governments and the societies of the countries where they reside, and of which they are citizens.

Article 17 The Moroccans residents abroad enjoy the full rights of citizenship, including the right to be electors and eligible. They can be candidates to the elections at the level of lists and of local, regional and national electoral circumscriptions. The law establishes the specific criteria of eligibility and of incompatibility. It determines, as well, the conditions and the modalities of the effective exercise of the right to vote and of candidature from the countries of residence.

Article 18 The public powers work to assure a participation as extensive as possible to Moroccans resident abroad, in the consultative institutions and [institutions] of good governance created by the Constitution or by the law (Ruchti, 2012).

The constitution places significant emphasis on Morocco's commitment to preserving and enhancing the national and cultural human connections between Moroccan expatriate citizens, monarchy, and motherland, stating that Morocco is “committed to the maintenance and to the development of their human ties, notably cultural, with the Kingdom, and the preservation of their national identity.”

In December 2007, the Council of the Moroccan Community Abroad was established through a Royal Decree and was subsequently enshrined in Article 163 of the constitution of 2011, solidifying its constitutional status:

The Council of the Moroccan Community Abroad [Conseil de la communauté marocaine à l'étranger] is charged [...] notably [...] to give its opinion on the orientations of public policies permitting assurance to the Moroccans resident abroad [of] the maintenance of close ties [liens étroits] with their Moroccan

identity, to guarantee their rights, to preserve their interests, [so as] to contribute to the human and lasting development of their Country, Morocco, and to its progress (ibid.).

The main purpose of the Council of the Moroccan Community Abroad, as outlined in this statement, is to offer its insights on public policies aimed at cultivating a profound sense of belonging and engagement among Moroccans residing overseas, thereby contributing to the nation's progress.

3. THE MOROCCAN-DUTCH CONFLICT OVER DUAL CITIZENSHIP

The phenomena of dual citizenship and transnational belonging are not indicators of the bad quality of integration experienced by immigrant populations. Varied integration trajectories are evident among immigrants, suggesting that transnational participation may actually serve as a catalyst within the integration process (Faist and Gerdes, 2008, p. 10). Moreover, dual citizenship could potentially enhance integration, as it symbolically acknowledges the diverse and transnational life experiences encountered by individuals, including those shaped by different cultural, ethnic, national, and religious backgrounds (ibid.).

However, it is noteworthy that in the discourse surrounding dual citizenship, right-wing politicians often raise two critical issues: integration and loyalty. They highlight concerns about the alleged patterns of failed integration, citing immigrants' higher unemployment rates and lower educational levels (ibid., p. 12), while often neglecting the reciprocal nature of the integration process. This discourse has been further complicated by the recent focus on Islamic fundamentalism and a perceived “clash of civilizations.” Concerns regarding immigrants from Muslim countries have escalated in the wake of major events such as the September 11 attacks and the bombings in Madrid and London, amongst others (ibid.).

For many Moroccan immigrants, their Moroccan nationality remains an integral part of their identity. Sometimes this perpetual allegiance causes tensions. In 2005, the Netherlands terminated the Moroccan program for teaching native language and culture, accusing it of reinforcing native identity and thereby hindering the full integration of Dutch individuals of Moroccan descent. With the rise of populism and nationalism in the Netherlands, cultural, political, and economic transnationalism has been discouraged. “Migrants and their descendants,” affirms Nadia Bouras, an expert in the field of the migration and integration of Moroccans in the Netherlands, “were expected to be loyal to Dutch society, and this meant they had to break all ties with their countries of origin.” She goes on to explain in the case of Moroccan Dutch:

Particularly, Moroccans scored very low in integration statistics. Their weak position in society was linked to their strong cultural attachments and orientation to their country of origin. As a result, migrants' ties with their countries of origin were no longer institutionalized by Dutch policies, but from this time forth were contested and discouraged. Moreover, the Dutch government pointed out the dangers of failed integration for the national sovereignty. Migrants' culture and religion, most notably Islam, was believed to be incompatible with western values and formed a threat to the western world (Bouras, 2013, p. 1228).

The Dutch government not only stopped the teaching of Arabic and Moroccan culture, it requested Morocco to stop the transfer of citizenship to the third generation of Moroccan immigrants in the Netherlands. Morocco refused this request (Belguendouz, 1999).

In March 2016, King Mohammed VI made a private touristic visit to the Netherlands. This visit followed private royal trips to Moscow, Budapest, and Prague and marked his first visit to the Netherlands since ascending to the throne. He stayed in Amsterdam and took up residence at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel on Herengracht for five days, from March 25th to March 30th. Once the Dutch Moroccan community learned of his visit, hundreds of them flocked to welcome the Moroccan sovereign.

The first wave of Moroccan emigrants to the Netherlands occurred in the 1960s and primarily consisted of individuals from the Rif regions in the Northeast of Morocco who came as “guest workers” to the Netherlands and other parts of Europe. In the 1970s, due to family reunion policies, these emigrants were joined by their wives and children. Waves of Moroccan emigrants continued to arrive in the Netherlands throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

Moroccans make up approximately 2.3% of the Dutch population, which is nearly 17 million people. As of 2022, their estimated number was 419,300 individuals, with more than half of them being born in the Netherlands.

The Moroccan community residing in the Netherlands is still regarded as subjects of the Moroccan monarch, even when they hold Dutch citizenship. Therefore, when Mohammed VI visited the Netherlands, the Moroccan-Dutch community displayed their allegiance to their king by gathering in large numbers at the entrance of Amsterdam, where the king was staying, eager to catch a glimpse of him. They cheered excitedly and eagerly, “Long Live the King!” and “Mohammed VI is our king.” A woman emotionally said to him repeatedly “Long live our beloved king.” Another woman burst into a chant while the crowd repeated after her “Long our live King! Long live our Morocco! Long live our Sahara! Long live our flag! Long live our country!” (Bakorti, 2016).

Some spectators wore traditional Moroccan clothes and others waved the Moroccan flag. Others blow the long nafar trumpets, and some women ululated.¹ The king’s waiters, wearing the Moroccan red hat, offered the spectators tea and Moroccan pastries. Some broke chanting the national anthem, loudly repeating the last phrase expressing commitment to allegiance to “God, Country, and King.” The king, adorned in a traditional black and yellow striped djellaba and a golden turban, shook hands with the spectators and posed for photographs with them. “For days on end, there were rows of people trying to get a glimpse of the king,” wrote a Dutch media outlet (Smit, 2016).



Figure 1. King Mohammed VI Outside Waldorf Astoria Hotel in Amsterdam, 25-30 March, 2016



Figure 2. *The King's Waiters Offering Tea and Pastries to Moroccan Dutch Spectators*

The tea, pastries, red fez, djellaba, and turban underline the shared identity and heritage that bind the Moroccan community to their homeland and monarch. All of these cultural and national signs and symbols transcend the boundaries of a mere ceremonial encounter; they evoke vivid and powerful scenes of allegiance between loyal Moroccan diaspora subjects and their sovereign.

In an article on the King's visit to the Netherlands, Abdellah Boussof, the Secretary General of the Council of the Moroccan Community Abroad, discusses the transnational political participation of the Moroccan diaspora community in their host countries as a means to advocate for the political interests of their homeland, with a particular focus on the issue of territorial integrity. He observes:

In April 2016, upon the arrival of His Majesty to the Dutch capital, Amsterdam, hundreds of Moroccans in the Netherlands, from all generations, made a pilgrimage to welcome him and take photos with him with an unprecedented enthusiasm in the "Tulip" country, declaring their eternal identity and everlasting allegiance (Boussof, 2016).



Figure 3. *A Moroccan Dutch Woman Embracing the King*

Dressed in a djellaba or colourful trendy clothes, the king toured the streets of Amsterdam and stopped to shake hands or pose for cellphone photos with young Moroccan Dutch. The king's visit and the enthusiastic interaction with the Moroccan Dutch seem to be a symbolic means of expressing his transnational ties with the Moroccan community in the Netherlands.



Figure 4. The King in Traditional Attire Poses for Photos with Moroccan Dutch Youth



Figure 5 The King in Trendy Fashion Poses for Photos with Moroccan Dutch Youth

The monarch's visit, along with the associated symbols, holds profound symbolic significance as a manifestation of the enduring bond between the Moroccan diaspora and their ancestral homeland. This transnational imagined identity stretches beyond Morocco's geographical confines, encompassing the emotional and cultural essence that shapes the Moroccan diaspora's sense of belonging. These symbols act as a bridge connecting the diaspora to their Moroccan identity, fostering an unwavering sense of belonging and shared history that transcends geographic boundaries. This culminates in the formation of a transnational identity firmly rooted in the history, culture, and religion of their homeland.

The king donated 30,000 Euros as a contribution to the building of a new Al Ihsane mosque in Amsterdam. The architect Gerard Rijnsdorp, who designed the mosque, decided to use yellow bricks for the outer walls to invoke the architecture of the Moroccan Kasbah (Smit, 2016). The mosque board thanked the sovereign on the mosque website in these terms:

God bless you, Oh His Majesty, King Mohammed VI, and may he accept from you and reward you with a thousand good for this charity and all your good deeds. [...] May God grant us success so we can be the best ambassadors of our religion and our beloved Morocco, from its north to its Sahara, and from its west to its east, and thereby make you and Morocco proud of us in this country (Alihsane.nl, 2016).

Interestingly, the statement combines religion with nationalism. The members of the mosque's board promise to act as ambassadors with the duty of championing "our religion," with the connotation of "our Moroccan religion," and

“our beloved Morocco,” whose geographical borders are clearly demarcated. What is equally striking is that the board members crave from their religiously political mission not so much heavenly reward as the satisfaction of the monarch and of their native country. While the name of the country of origin is repeated twice, the country of residence is merely referred to as “this country.”

After its completion, two Moroccan Imams Ahmad Ezzekri and Imam Abu Khaoula were appointed to be in charge of leading prayer in Al Ihsan mosque.²



Figure 6. *Al Ihsane Mosque in Amsterdam*

Tensions between Morocco and the Netherlands continued over dual citizenship, especially during the Riff uprising. Moreover, on September 24, 2019, a group of Moroccan Dutch, signed a manifesto, renouncing their Moroccan nationality and calling for the Dutch government to help them break off all ties with Morocco. They insisted that they “want full Dutch citizenship, both in the Netherlands and abroad and to not be obliged by a foreign power to be a lifelong national” (Ennaji, 2019).

More recently during the coronavirus pandemic, a diplomatic conflict between the Netherlands and Morocco over the latter’s refusal to allow the repatriation of Dutch tourists stranded in Morocco because of the lockdown. In a declaration in the House of Parliament, Nasser Bourita, Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccans Abroad, accused the Netherlands of discriminatory attitudes against Moroccans who hold dual nationality. He said that the Netherlands operated 36 flights, 25 of which benefitted only Dutch nationals. “It was only after around thirty flights to repatriate Dutch people that the Netherlands began to take an interest in Moroccans with dual nationality based in the north of the Kingdom,” he said. Another point of contention is that the Netherlands wanted to repatriate Moroccan Dutch citizens from the airports of Al Hussein, Nador, and Tangier. Morocco considers this as another manifestation of the Netherlands’ support for the Riff protests since the suggested airports are in Riffian territories, the origin of many Moroccan Dutch. Hence Nasser Bourita accused the Netherlands of “political opportunism” (Diplomatie.ma, 2020).

4. Dual Nationality and the Football Tug-of-War Between Morocco and the Netherlands

The battle between Morocco and the Netherlands regarding dual nationality extends beyond politics to the realm of football. Morocco has successfully recruited several talented Moroccan Dutch-born players to join the Atlas Lions' national team, including Mbark Boussoufa, Karim El Ahmadi, Nordin Amrabat and Mounir el Hamdaoui, much to the displeasure of the Royal Dutch Football Association and the frustration of the fans (Gleeson, 2015).

² It would be interesting to mention that some worshippers protested against one of the imams for allegedly preaching negatively in a sermon about the Al Hussein uprisings. See, <https://www.maghress.com/alaoual/68012>

The Netherlands lost another young talent to Morocco when Hakim Ziyech decided to represent Morocco. Born to a Dutch father and a Moroccan mother, Hakim Ziyech holds dual citizenship for both Morocco and the Netherlands. In explaining his decision to play for Morocco, Ziyech stated, "Choosing a national team is not done with your head, but with your heart. I was born in the Netherlands, but I've always felt Moroccan. I know that many people will never understand this feeling" (Rudro, 2022).

More dual-nationality Moroccan players, such as Noussair Mazraoui and Oussama Idrissi, have opted to play for their country of origin rather than that of their birth. The Dutch national coach, Ronald Koeman, has accused the Royal Moroccan Football Federation of enticing dual-nationality footballers to represent the Moroccan team by bribing with substantial sums of money. Koeman stated that "if the player was given a large sum by Moroccan officials, their Dutch counterparts could not do much; it makes it difficult to convince them to play for our teams" (Ennaji, 2019). Ziyech denies these allegations saying that "people invent the craziest things. I have not received any money to play with the Moroccan national team and the same applies to Noussair Mazraoui and Oussama Idrissi" (ibid.).

The decision of Moroccan-Dutch football players to represent Morocco has sparked consternation and outrage in the Netherlands, leading to a heated media campaign against them.

"It worked out the way it worked out, and I don't have a single second's regret," Ziyech said. "With Morocco I feel valued. There isn't a constant search for criticism as there is in the Netherlands" (Gleeson, 2018).

"I grew up in the Netherlands but I must honestly say that when I hear the national anthem of Morocco I feel a connection with the country," Karim El Ahmadi said (ibid.).

Opting to represent Morocco exposed Moroccan-Dutch football players to harsh media scrutiny. The media treated them as outsiders by accentuating their Moroccan heritage and diminishing their Dutch identity.

Media comments repeatedly condemned Moroccan-Dutch players for their perceived disloyalty and ingratitude, accusing them of exploiting Dutch resources to benefit another nation. For example, the public argued that Amrabat "used them and went home," asserting that he "received all culture and learning from the Netherlands" and was "ungrateful." One comment even went so far as to claim that his parents had insulted the country that "welcomes and educates their kids" by allowing him to choose Morocco over the Netherlands (Freeman, 2019).

Former international football player Ruud Gullit has suggested that the Netherlands Football Association should reconsider its investment plans in Moroccan-Dutch football players. Gullit argues that investing in Moroccan-Dutch football players is pointless if they ultimately choose to play for their homeland (Kasraoui, 2019). Other comments went as far as to call for a revision of immigrant policies.

Sofyan Amrabat faced the harshest criticism. Strong words such as "treason" and "traitor" were used to label and frame him, with the implication that he had forsaken his adoptive country. In fact, one article's headline even proclaimed that he had "Rejected the Netherlands" in favour of choosing Morocco, which created a breach of trust felt by the Dutch. A comment insisted that the players of Moroccan origin "are Dutch and have an obligation to represent the country," while another claimed that Amrabat "betrayed his homeland and chose his parents' nationality for convenience." Statements like these aim to deny a transnational identity to Moroccan-Dutch citizens and reduce their Moroccan heritage to being solely an aspect of their parents' identity, rather than their own.

Ziyech, too, fell victim to the politics of Othering. Numerous articles and comments emphasized his Moroccan heritage, labelling him as "the Moroccan" or attributing him "Moroccan blood." This process of alterity holds significant importance as it completely diminishes the players' Dutch identity, portraying them solely as outside foreigner (Freeman, 2019).

Ihattaren, on the other hand, received more favorable attention for his decision to play for the host country. His Dutch identity and loyalty were highlighted with statements like, "he was 'born and raised in the Netherlands,' he is a 'Dutchman.' Morocco was 'truly his place of birth but did not contribute to the development of his talent.'" Another comment stated, "If you grew up in the Netherlands and learned your football there, it doesn't matter. He might not

have Dutch blood, but he has Dutch football in his veins." Ihattaren's Moroccan ancestry was simply downplayed. In this case, rather than excluding him, as was the case with Ziyech and Amrabat, the public embraced him as one of their own because he was a successful footballer, he was Dutch, and he had fully embraced Dutch culture by choosing to represent Oranje (ibid.).

However, the Moroccan community in the Netherlands criticized Mohamed Ihattaren for choosing to play for the Netherlands. In an interview with Foxsports, Ihattaren recounts an incident at Eindhoven Airport where a group of Moroccan-Dutch individuals "verbally assaulted" him, accusing him of being a "traitor" for opting not to represent Morocco. Ihattaren attempted to explain that his decision was purely "a sporting decision." Nevertheless, the crowd insisted that if his father were alive, he would have been proud to have his son represent his country of origin. "Your father would have never allowed you to play for the Netherlands," one of the disgruntled fans told Ihattaren (Koundouno, 2019).

Maurice Crul, a university professor and immigration specialist, contends that, in addition to fame and financial gain, there is a significant factor that players consider before deciding to represent their country of origin or their birthplace: identity. Crul argues that "The Moroccan identity for the Europe-born players in the Atlas Lions team is strong and voiced proudly." According to Crul, the passion displayed by both the players and their diaspora fans stems from the pride they feel for their country and is fueled by the "anger a lot of young Moroccans feel because of the discrimination and hate they continue to encounter in Europe after the 9/11 attacks" (Ashraf, 2022).

Crul also stresses discrimination and racism Moroccan Dutch are exposed to in the Netherlands. "Moroccan children experience a lot of racism in their daily lives—and during football matches when they play for their teams against others. More than any other group, they are the victims of racism," says Crul, adding that for these reasons, "This only goes to show that there is something else involved than just nationalism. It is about making a statement [to Europeans] that when you ask me to choose, I will choose Morocco rather than the country where I was born and raised. In this, a big role has been played by the pain and discrimination that the younger generation of Moroccans has felt" (ibid.).

For Tariq Panja the Moroccan diaspora footballers" decision to play for the country of their parents and ancestors, rather than the country of their birth and where they had learned the game is "a reminder of how, as a revivalist nationalism sweeps across Europe, some players have come to consider the nations of their parents and grandparents a better fit than the countries they have long called home" (Panja, 2018).

The homeland is expressed through family ties. Hence, Mahi, echoing Ziyech states that his decision was fulfilling his father's dream. "I think with the heart," Mahi said, "and the heart was for Morocco" (ibid.).

Hence Gullit concludes during his conversation with Amrabat, "The family pushes you to play for Morocco. So, therefore, there was no choice. I think they have no choice" (ibid.).

In the context of the Moroccan diaspora, the notion of "the nation" and "the homeland" extends beyond just being geographical entities. It is deeply ingrained in the cultural and familial fabric. Within this framework, the nation represents more than just a place on the map; it is an extension of the family, the father, and the mother, who are keen on preserving the ties between their Dutch-born children and the homeland they themselves left behind. For many Moroccan parents in the diaspora, the connection to their homeland remains a core part of their identity. They want their children to maintain a sense of their Moroccan heritage and cultural roots. Encouraging their offspring to play for the Moroccan national team is seen as a way to ensure this connection.

When these Dutch-born children don the Moroccan national jersey and play for the Moroccan flag, it holds profound significance. They become not just football players but national heroes, not just in Morocco but also within the diaspora community. Their participation in the Atlas Lions team fills their parents with immense pride, especially considering the challenges of marginalization and racism that their families had to face in the host country.

On the other hand, the host country develops a sense of frustration or even betrayal when second-generation immigrants, prefer their parents' homeland than their native land that invested much resources in their education and

taught them football skill. It regards dual citizenship as potentially detrimental to the unity and cohesion of the community, as well as a threat to their national identity.

In the case of the Netherlands, particularly with the ascent of nationalist parties, there have been efforts to curtail Morocco's transnational sovereignty and the promotion of cultural heritage among the Moroccan-Dutch community. This has been pursued through measures aimed at restricting the importation of Moroccan imams and *Murshidats* to the Netherlands and limiting the teaching of the Arabic language within the diaspora community.

4. CONCLUSION

This study delves into the transformative journey of Moroccan migrants in Western Europe, tracing their evolution from temporary guest workers to naturalized citizens of European nations, while simultaneously retaining their allegiance to the Moroccan monarchy. These migrants, often termed “Moroccans of the world,” epitomize a transnational imagined community, fostering profound connections with their homeland through shared facets of religion, nationalism, and allegiance to the monarchy. This community, functioning as informal ambassadors, actively promotes Morocco's economic and political interests abroad and symbolically upholds Moroccan identity in various domains such as media, public spaces, institutional settings, and sports arenas.

Despite the prevalent view that transnational ties impede the integration process, particularly among Muslim immigrants in Europe – Moroccans being a case in point – this article argues otherwise. The strong identification of Moroccan immigrants with their country of origin, often misconstrued as a lack of loyalty to host nations like the Netherlands, is exemplified in instances where Moroccan-origin football players opt to represent Morocco over the Netherlands. Contrary to the intuitive notion that dual citizenship might fuel such preferences, academic research indicates that dual citizenship potentially facilitates, rather than obstructs, integration processes.

The inclination of Moroccan immigrants towards a reinforced transnational identity has been significantly influenced by experiences of marginalization, racism, and discrimination in Europe, particularly post-9/11. Amidst prevalent xenophobia and socio-economic adversities, Muslim communities have increasingly gravitated towards Islam and traditional cultural practices as a refuge and a source of cohesion (Erdenir, 2010, p. 31). These tendencies have been further intensified by Europe's policies, often perceived as anti-Oriental, and recent stances on contentious geopolitical issues, such as the Gaza conflict. Individuals of Moroccan origin are often fully embraced as Europeans when they excel on the soccer pitch. At that point, these players often choose to represent their country of origin, where they find a profound sense of purpose as national heroes and a deep connection to the imagined land of their forebears.

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