Migrations in Moroccan cinema (1958-2015): main thematic lines and evolution.

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Abstract

Morocco is a country with one of the highest migration rates in the world. With 29% of Moroccan films dealing with migration as the main topic, the objectives of this paper are to establish the most recurrent migratory thematic lines and to determine how migratory topics have evolved from 1958 - the year in which the first postcolonial film was produced- to 2015. A sample of 96 migratory films included in the Moroccan Cinematographic Center's catalogue has been explored by way of content and interpretative discourse analysis. The methodology has been complemented with in-depth interviews with ten Moroccan directors. The most active production period occurred from 2008 to 2011. The largest amount of films belongs to the category 'migrations abroad' (18 films, 18,7%). Secondly, the most talked about topic has been the 'return home', (16 films, 16.6%), and thirdly, that of 'life abroad'. Furthermore, Moroccan cinema has covered all the different phases of migration (rural exodus, migrations abroad, life abroad and returning home) in a very balanced way, showing coherent cinematographic reaction mechanisms towards social reality.

Keywords: Morocco; migrations; cinema; representation; Africa.

Introduction

International migratory flows are a defining characteristic of late 20th and early 21st century economic globalization (Tilly 2011, 675). Its study is essential to understand vital human processes where self-representations, identities, beliefs, aspirations and desires become explicit. Morocco has one

of largest migratory rates in the world. Over 3 million people of Moroccan descent are currently believed to live abroad (World Bank 2016). 85% of Moroccan emigrants live in Western European countries, where they form one of the most dispersed migrant communities (De Hass, Fokkema and Fassi 2015, 419).

The migratory experience has brought great benefits but also great difficulties to Moroccan society, which lives imbued with this contrast, conditioning its dynamics at all levels. The migratory issue has become, in turn, the great showcase of the economic, political-social, cultural and media agendas, both in Morocco and in the host countries. In relation to the latter, many authors agree in emphasizing how social perceptions are strongly conditioned by the dominant discourses of an institutional nature derived from the exercise of power (Van Dijk 2009). As King and Wood (2001, 3) state, 'Migration tends to be objectified as a time-space event or process which is largely to be explained in economic, demographic or sociological terms and linked to issues of employment, development, population redistribution, class formation and the creation of ethnic communities.'

Cinema, as any other form of human expression, is an agent in constructing the sense of reality of a culture (Howard 1986, 25) by shaping the system of representation and proposing models for identification or rejection. As Nouredine Mhakkak (2006) points out, 'cinema is the mirror at which a society looks to measure its degree of development and the stages it goes through to get there.' Films can present the living images of a certain society and its structure of thought, while it contributes to create proposals of artistic expression and aesthetics that can help to understand the migratory phenomenon beyond political arguments or macro-economic figures. Hence, its importance as an alternative to more institutionalized or mediated discourses. In addition, the study of the evolution of Moroccan cinema has historical, sociological, political and artistic interests in and of itself (Elena 2007, 208).

We based this study on the idea that cinema generates narratives and representations which are embedded in society or in its institutions. Artists are deeply influenced, as any other person, in the social

discourses in which they operate (Malpas, 2006); therefore, films act alongside historiography and other socio-political fields as mediators of national history making. As Malpas states, ‘any meaning that a text or a cultural artifact might have, is always related to the much wider cultural, political, economic and social institutions and practices of its context (2006, 57).

Processes of inclusion and exclusion, of incorporation and marginalisation, of acceptance and opposition, are characteristic of the dominant culture (Brannigan 1998, 42) and effectively, migration narratives and cultural representations constantly turn around the concepts of South as opposition to North, rich as opposition to poor, and power as opposition to weakness (Peralta 2015). For Greenblatt (1980, 3), one of the precursors of new historicism, ‘symbolic formations are as much a part of religious, political and socio-economic relations as they are part of literary and theatrical modes.’ Thus, films can contribute to disrupt modern discourses about migration and ask what we might learn from the socio-historical contextual evolution of this phenomenon from the beginning of the 20th century (Malpas and Wake 2006).

In this article we maintain that we can properly speak of the existence of Moroccan migratory cinema. To be considered migratory films, we understand that they focus on issues related to the migratory experience. This experience is not limited to the time in which the trip takes place, but also addresses aspects related to the migratory process that may occur before, during and after. On the other hand, we should not think that migrations are limited to emigration abroad. Moroccan cinema offers films about internal migrations and also other migrations of historical character, which have been taken into account in this study.

We base our affirmation of the existence of Moroccan migratory cinema primarily on the quantitative impact. Of the 327 films in the catalog of the *Centre de la Cinematographie Marocain* (CCM or Cinematographic Center, the official organism of national film production in Morocco) produced between 1958 and 2015, 96 films are directly related to the migratory issue, which represents 29% of the total.

As Manthia Diawara claims (1992), Moroccan cinema focuses mainly social-realistic issues on contemporary experiences, and migration is one of them. Thus, different migratory movements have crossed Moroccan contemporary history and cinema seems to testify and mirror that reality, following the cineastes' sensibility. This interest in the subject is also complemented by the fact that Moroccan cinema is the bearer of a series of characteristics that makes it unique in relation to other international proposals.

In this paper, we aim to establish the main migratory thematic lines of Moroccan cinema and to determine how migratory topics have evolved along the sample period, from 1958 - the year in which the first postcolonial film was produced- to 2015. We will first offer background information on the previous research and the methodological approach. We will then present the results and a discussion of the analysis, and we will conclude by summarizing the theoretical inferences of this study and by suggesting future research avenues.

Key texts

In this study, two fields of analysis converge: migrations and cinema. An overview of the key texts which have been published reveals that migration studies literature has been growing extremely rapidly in recent years. In the particular field of Moroccan migration, the most prolific field of research is produced by sociological studies carried out mainly in European destination countries. These studies can be grouped into two main thematic clusters: processes of socialization (Pels and De Haan 2007; Saint-Blacant and Zaltron 2013; Stevens, Vollebergh, Pels and Crijnen 2007; Stercks, 2015) and perceptions and representations of migrants by destination-societies.

Some of them concentrate specifically on work force integration (Buitelaar 2006) as well as on development and empowerment practices (Pham 2016; Bolívar, Martí and Verd 2016). Studies about the impact of the economic crisis on international migration (Tilly 2011) and the return movements towards the origin country (De Haas and Fokkema, 2010; Reynery 2009; Gaillard 2015) should also be

considered among the approaches of the first group. National identities (Phalet and Swyngedouw 2002), media and public opinion (Maneri 2013), language and discourse aspects (Nortier and Dorleijn 2008; Awad 2013; Heller 2014), or even perceptions about criminal practices (Bovenkerk and Fokema 2016) have also been pegged as relevant in the second group. Some of those sociological studies deal with the specific topic of 'irregular' migrations (Elliot 2016; Kachani 2006; Arab 2014; Natter 2013; Lahlou 2011), showing the evolution and the socio-political frame on an international scale throughout the years.

Contrary to the prolific production in the field of sociological research, specific studies about the role of media (King and Wood 2001, 3) as well as cinema, are very limited up to now. The critical approaches of Miles (1993) and Rosello (1998) about how media have used the concept of 'European identity' to (mis)represent migrations from an exclusive perspective have been of interest for the present study. Some scholars have concentrated on the historical analysis of films (Armes 2004, 2005, 2006; Elena 2007; Bakrim 2006; Dwyer 2004). Bakrim is probably the most prolific Moroccan author, tackling aspects such as industry (2007), typology of films (2007) and cinema history (2006). Some of the authors have established links between history, national identity and cinema from the perspective of the 'post-colonial' era (Armes 2004, 2005, 2006; Carter 2008, 2009; Orlando 2011). As King and Wood (2001, 4) state, "notions like 'diaspora', 'hybrid' or 'transnational' identities are certainly the ones that both media and migration scholars have invoked to characterize the multiple identities that geographical displacement tends to produce, especially among younger generations of migrants."

The most frequent typology of research is based on film study cases. In this sense, the work of Smolin has approached the phenomenon of 'illegal immigration' from a deconstructive perspective through the analysis of two films: *Horses of Fortune* (Jilali Ferhati 1995) and *And After* (Mohamed Ismail 2002). Our literature review enables us to affirm that to date there is no study about the evolution of Moroccan migratory cinema, considering production and thematic aspects. This study aims to cover that gap.

Methodology: form-oriented and meaning-oriented content analysis¹

The national film catalogue issued by the *Centre de la Cinématographie Marocaine* consists of 327 films. By reading the synopsis of films, we first eliminated those that did not contain migratory topics. Our first approach delivered 96 films where the migratory theme could be present. The sample has been explored by the use of content and interpretative discourse analysis. The methodology has been complemented by the use of in-depth interviews with ten Moroccan directors.

In order to code our sample films into categories, we have followed the suggested analysis schema of Clatworthy and Jones (2001, 317). We understand that content analysis is both a quantitative and a qualitative method that enables us to draw inferences from data by systematically identifying characteristics within the data. The empirical and manifest elements of the text (such as the identification data) have been measured by using form-oriented content analysis. However, other latent features of the text, such as the context and the social reality (the influence of political migratory decisions, laws, economic turmoil, media representations, national policies and filmmakers' opinions), have been analyzed through the qualitative-meaning oriented method. While watching the films, we identified recurrent topics, and subsequently grouped the results into 5 thematic clusters, corresponding to the Moroccan migratory cycle: 'rural exodus', 'migrations abroad', 'life abroad', 'return home' and 'historical migrations'. This categorization has been placed between the quantitative form-oriented method and the qualitative meaning-oriented method, as we understand that researcher sensibility plays a role in interpreting which category can best help to thematically identify a film.

Findings

The production of migratory films: an overview.

¹ This study has been carried out with the support of the Erasmus Al-Idrissi al-Mundus Scholarship, granted by the European Commission. Fieldwork was conducted in Morocco between January and June 2016 and February-March 2017. We have used four different paths to access films: directly from cineastes or their production companies, through the acquisition of DVDs in the *medinas* of the main large cities, through the Internet and, finally, through the CCM itself, especially for the oldest films, difficult to locate otherwise.

Figure 1 illustrates the years in which migratory films were produced. Although the CCM's catalogue includes films from the year 1958, we have not considered the range of 1958-1967, as only two films were produced during that period, none of them based on migratory events.

Figure 1

Base: 96 films. Source: own source and elaboration

This graph shows several facts of interest. For instance, it can be seen that between the years 1968 and 1997, the production of migratory films was maintained at low or very low levels, in no case surpassing more than six films in any 5-year period. It is from the beginning of the decade of 2000s that migrations generate a remarkable impact on Moroccan cinema. The highest production levels are concentrated in the years 2008-2011 (26 films).

In the interpretation of these results, we also need to consider the evolution of the internal dynamics of the CCM itself, as the policies and strategies to support cinema have varied throughout the years. For some authors, the 1990s is the most prolific decade in the history of Moroccan cinema, with the production of 25 films in five years (Kelai 2006, 23; Bendris 2006, 62). This fact responds to a change of strategy of the CCM resulting in the complete reorganization of the institution in 1977, when all the cinematographic associations, clubs and organizations related to cinema started to be coordinated by the national institution. New dynamics followed in the 1980s. In 1982, for example, the CCM started to implement the 'Aid to Film Production' program, which became a fundamental turning point for the

development of Moroccan cinema (Kelai 2006, 23). That same year, the first National Film Festival was held in Rabat, showing a new impulse for Moroccan cinema.

This evidence leads us to think that in the evolution of Moroccan migratory cinema, both the social reality and the internal dynamics to support cinema have a direct effect on production as a whole. By 1998, the year when national production started to grow significantly in relation to the previous decades, the CCM had already created an infrastructure that made it easier for filmmakers to finance their films. This fact coincides with a period when the migratory topic started to become predominant in Moroccan society, due to consequences of the implementation of new European visa restrictions, as we will discuss in the next section.

Thematic evolution of migratory films

Figure 2 illustrates how the cinematographic thematic focus has varied throughout the years, according to the classification that has been established for this study: rural exodus, migrations abroad, life abroad, return home and historical migrations. The 47 years of film production included in the CCM's catalogue have been grouped into three blocks of 15 years each: from 1968 to 1987; from 1998 to 2002 and from 2003 to 2015.

Figure 2

Base: 96 films. Source: own source and elaboration (results in numbers)

This graph shows how, between 1968 and 1987, the issue of rural exodus was a priority, with the presence of almost a dozen films. The production drops to 4 films between 1998 and 2002 and maintains the same amount between 2013 and 2015. On the contrary, in the case of the films that deal with the issue of migrations abroad, the movement is inverse. In the first years of Moroccan postcolonial cinema there were only a few films whose protagonists considered emigrating outside the borders of the country. This theme begins to have more presence in the period from 1988 to 2002, and in 2003 generates a thematic boom, with the production of 18 films between 2003 and 2015 (18.7% of the 96 migratory films). These years coincide with the dramatic consequences for Moroccan society of the visa restrictions enacted by the European Union, alluded to previously.

In the case of films that deal with how migrants' lives develop once they have settled abroad, we have no record of any film for the years between 1968 and 1987, a reflection of the fact that the migratory movements were more internal in character at that time. Moroccan filmmakers began to address this issue in 1998 and it took on greater presence in the year 2003. Between this year and 2015 there are 12 films whose protagonists live abroad (12.5%). Similarly, the CCM catalog does not contain films that deal with the return home in the first period of post-colonial Moroccan cinema. This theme is very

present in the last decade, from 2003. There are 16 films that address it between 2003 and 2015, ranking second as the preferred subject, behind migrations abroad (with 16.6% of the total of migratory films). Finally, our study shows that there is an upward trend, beginning in 2003, in dealing with migratory issues of a historical nature, something that had been virtually non-existent before the indicated date.

Discussion

Rural exodus

The migratory topic has been present in Moroccan cinema since the very beginning of post-independence production. At the beginning of the 1980s there were only around 15 Moroccan films and many filmmakers debuted with the topic of rural exodus. The first Moroccan post-independence film was *The Dammed Son* (Mohamed Ousfour, 1958). This film deals with the life of a child who becomes a criminal due to educational negligence on the part of his parents. After this pioneering film, eight years later, in 1966, the second film, *The Kiff Route*, was produced. Two years later, in 1968, the third film of Moroccan cinema was released, *Struggle for Life*, by Mohamed Tazi B., which dealt with the phenomenon of rural exodus. We can therefore consider it the first migratory film of Moroccan post-colonial cinema. Only a year later, in 1969, another production that deals with displacement from the countryside to the city, *Spring Sun*, an enigmatic production of early Moroccan cinema directed by Latif Lahlou, reached the public.

These films deal with the consequences of internal emigration: homesickness, the massive arrival of people to cities which are not prepared for such an influx of people, the formation of marginal quarters, etc. As Bekouchi (2003, 9) reminds us from a sociological perspective, ‘during the 1960s to 1970s, 90% of migrants came from a rural area and were poorly educated and had no professional qualifications.’ In this sense, the evolution of the Moroccan diaspora has seen profound transformations over the last thirty years. The transition from an emigration of illiterate male workers to another type of family emigration of merchants and intellectuals has been one of its main characteristics.

Casablanca, more so than other major cities in Morocco such as Rabat, Marrakesh, Fez or Agadir, has been established cinematographically as the prime example of the megalopolis within the context of migrations from the rural environment to the city. As Bakrim (2007) points out, 'Casablanca presents a stereotypical place in which to develop dramatic plots'. The arrival in the city is usually accompanied by great disappointment. In these films, the main protagonist profile corresponds to that of a young man who opposes the conditions of life in the countryside and desires a life in the city with greater possibilities of social promotion, not always with the expected results.

Migrations abroad

Our findings give evidence of the close relationship between social reality and cinematographic representations. Although films talking about internal movements from the countryside to the city can be found in today's cinema, *Majid* (Nassim Abassi 2010) and *Agadir-Bombay* (Myriam Bakir 2010), rural exodus started to become more evanescent as a cinematographic topic in the late eighties, as migrations abroad became prevalent in the evolution of Moroccan society. It was in the mid-1960s and throughout the 70s, following the signing of agreements with north-west European countries to recruit guestworkers, that Morocco experienced large-scale emigration (De Hass and Fokkema 2010, 541). The combination of high economic growth in Western Europe, the lack of immigration restrictions and active recruitment led to a boom of labour migration to France, and, to a lesser extent, the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany (De Hass et al 2015, 418).

Alyam Alyam (Ahmed Maanouni 1978) is perhaps the first film to show how young people in the countryside no longer considered going to the city but chose to go abroad, in a period when getting a work contract was relatively easy and there were no entry restrictions or visa issues. The protagonist of *Alyam Alyam*, Abdelwaheb, is a young peasant who has to face strong opposition from his mother to the idea of going to Holland. After the death of his father, Abdel becomes the head of the family, in charge of his seven brothers and his mother. As its director, Ahmed Maânouni, declares, 'What characterizes this character is his determination. He is even willing to sell the ox, which is the family's main source of

sustenance, putting everyone between a rock and a hard place' (personal communication, 2016). In the following dialogue of the film, where Abdelwahed talks with his mother and grandfather about his idea, the director shows how the young man obstinately opposes peasant life.

Alyam Alyam (Ahmed Maanouni, 1978)

Son: - *I want to go to work in Holand*

Mother: - *Why?*

S. - *I don't want to live in this poverty.*

M. - *Why don't you install a motor in the well?*

S. - *How should I? I earn so little money!*

M. - *You need to keep making the effort. God will compensate it.*

S. - *I am fed up. I am leaving. There is only misery here.*

The international economic recession following the oil crisis (1972-1974) caused a rapid increase in unemployment, a freeze of the recruitment of migrant labourers (De Hass et al 2015, 418) and a tightening of border control and migratory regulation in Europe. As a consequence, visa restrictions were enforced in France in 1986, provoking Moroccan migrants to decide to go to Spain and Italy (Arab 2014, 76) and, to a lesser extent, North America (De Haas 2007). Spain started to enforce visa restrictions on 15 May 1991 (Montalbán 2006), marking a milestone in the recent history and evolution of Moroccan migratory movements towards Europe, as migrants started to try alternative ways of reaching the other side of the Strait of Gibraltar. Risky and unauthorized migrations were to become one of the most striking dramas of the twenty-first century.

These are the central years of the intense '*patera's drama*'², with hundreds of families receiving tragic news about their migrant relatives. Filmmakers reacted to this reality by increasing considerably the amount of films devoted to the topic, a trend that has continued up to the current day. Films belonging to this group include titles such as *Looking for My Wife's Husband* and *Lalla Hobby* (Mohamed Abderrahmane Tazi 1993 and 1996), *Horses of Fortune* (Jilali Ferhati 1995), *And After* (Mohamed Ismail 2002), *The Sleeping Boy* (Yasmine Kassari 2004), *Tarfaya* (Daoud Oulad Syad 2004), *Two women on the Road* (Farida Bourquia 2007), *Casa Negra* (Nourredine Lakhmari 2008), *The Illegal*

² *Paterra* is the Spanish term for dinghy fragile boats

Immigrant (Said Naciri 2010), *Andalusia, my Love!* (Mohamed Nadif 2011) and *Isla Perejil* (Ahmed Boulane, 2015), among others.

From an evolutionary perspective, authors such as Smolin (2011) consider that the issue of illegal immigration appeared in Moroccan cinema for the first time in the final sequences of Mohamed Abderrahmane Tazi's popular comedy *Looking for My Wife's Husband* (1993). The protagonist, Hajj Ben Mousa, is a rich jeweler from the city of Fez in search of his third wife, young Houda, whom he has previously disowned. He paradoxically ends up by taking an illegal fishing vessel across the risky Strait of Gibraltar after the Belgian consulate refuses to grant him a visa. Along with this film, which became the first major blockbuster of Moroccan cinema, other filmmakers have resorted to humor decades later to address the issue of risky migrations. Among them, Mohamed Nadif in his film *Andalusia, my Love!* (2011). As the director states: 'in almost any Moroccan film one can find references to the issue of migration through one of its characters. It is a very common theme in our cinema, but very few films have dared to do it through humor and comedy' (personal communication, 2017). *Andalusia, my Love!* is the story of two students from Casablanca, Amin and Said, who dream of going to Europe. In a village in the north of Morocco a local teacher promises to help them cross the Strait of Gibraltar in a boat for the price of €1,200. The professor makes them believe that someone will pick them up several kilometers from the coast and will send them safely to Spain. While they wait to be picked up, the boat is shipwrecked.

Amin swims to the Moroccan coast, whereas Said appears on the shores of Andalusia, or at least that is what he believes. There he is taken in by other Maghrebi and sub-Saharan migrants in a type of work farm where migrants process and pack hashish. Little by little it is discovered that this farm is nothing but a mirage constructed by the mayor of the Moroccan village from where Amin and Said had disembarked. The mayor, a corrupt politician, makes the migrants believe that they have arrived in Andalusia, paying them with fake euros and recruiting them to the farm without the possibility of leaving. For Nadif, this comedy is a way of emphasizing deceit between equals, in a chained way: 'a

Moroccan who cheats another Moroccan and this one to another North African and this one to another sub-Saharan and so on. This path does not take us very far' (personal communication, 2017).

Director Ahmed Boulane, in *Isla Perejil* (2015), also resorts to humor in this political comedy. The film addresses a real issue as it is based on a diplomatic conflict that erupted between Spain and Morocco in July 2002, when a dozen Moroccan soldiers landed on Isla Perejil (Jazirat Laila in Arabic), a small, rocky, unpopulated island, under Spanish sovereignty, located in the Strait of Gibraltar. Boulane introduces several fictional plots within this real context. For example, only one soldier, Ibrahim (played by Abdellah Ferkous), is sent to the island not a small contingent as it was in reality. Another fictitious aspect is the inclusion of a migrant from sub-Saharan Africa, Moussa (played by the Senegalese Issa N'Diaye). One day Ibrahim rescues Moussa, who appears half-drowned on the shore of the island while trying to cross the Strait. Although Ibrahim initially treats Moussa with racism and as a prisoner, they eventually become friends and allies.

This film also confirms another important aspect of the migrations that take place from Morocco: the increasing presence of sub-Saharan Africans (Clochard 2007; Arab 2014) who use the Mediterranean route to reach the shores of Europe, supplanting the North Africans as the largest category of 'irregular boat migrants' (De Haas 2007). Morocco has gone, indeed, from being a transit country (Khachani 2006) to becoming a country of immigration and settlement (Arab 2014, 81).

Other films that have dealt with risky migrations are *Horses of Fortune* (Jilali Ferhati 1995) and *And After* (Mohamed Ismail 2002). We agree with Smolin's vision that these two films deconstruct the common narrative claiming that Moroccans risk their lives and 'burn their past' simply to pursue the fantasy of Europe or flee their daily misery (2011, 77). Thus, *Horses of Fortune*, as indicated by its director, is a film that speaks about the dream of a man, Mohamed, who lives all his life in Casablanca betting on horse racing in France. As an adult, this hobby becomes an obsession, or as Smolin (2011, 78) describes it, an addiction. Upon encountering obstacles in obtaining a visa, Mohamed looks for alternative ways to cross the Strait. In the process he meets Ali, a blind man who sells lottery tickets

outside the betting office where Mohamed goes. Ali also wants to go to Spain because his son, who lives there, has promised to take him to have his eyes operated on to recover his vision. This is how both come into contact with 'Mirina', a trafficker, who promises to cross them into Spain by raft. In addition to these two main characters, there are the stories of two women: Fatima, who wants to meet her mother in Gibraltar; and Elisabeth, a French woman from Tangier, who is in love with Mohamed and would follow him 'to the end of the world'. Reasons for migration, therefore, transcend the economical and enter the personal. The following sequence includes a dialogue between Mohamed and his wife Zeynab, which shows Mohamed's obsession with crossing the Strait:

Horses of Fortune (Jilali Ferhati, 1995)

Zeinab (wife): - *Why do you want to go?*

Mohamed (husband): - *I just want to see them. I need to see them.*

Z.- *You are crazy. You want to go there just to see the horses run. After all the inconvenience they have already caused us! You have already sold enough things at home. You even sold the television to support your betting. And now you quit your job to go and see the damned horses.*

M. - *Zeinab, I will go to Paris to see them run, and I will come back.*

Z.- *I am afraid that you will not come back. I am afraid of Europe. Many people who left forgot about their families afterwards.*

Reasons for migration may also be related to a rejection of the violent way of life in the big city, as is the case of Adil in the film *Casanegra* (Noureddine Lakhmari, 2008). Adil is a young man willing to invest all his savings in the purchase of a visa and a work contract to go abroad. For Bahmad (2013) these types of films have much to do with identity issues in a world of globalized neoliberal economics. Adil resorts to the following arguments when he justifies why he wants to emigrate:

Casanegra (Noureddine Lakhmari, 2008)

No more traffic noise, no more cops on my ass, no more posh people running red lights because they drive luxury cars, no more drunks in the neighborhood, no more women on the sidewalks who use children who are not even theirs to beg, no more fundamentalist beards that force us to enter paradise, no more perverted Saudis and Kuwaitis that pollute the soil of this country, no more stepfather, no more Casanegra.

Sometimes the migratory topic appears more transversa. We see this in films such as *The Sleeping Boy* (Yasmine Kassari 2004) where Zeinab, the starring character, is a young bride who has been left behind after her husband migrates one day after their wedding. Zeinab is pregnant and, while

waiting for her husband's return, she "lulls her foetus to sleep" following a local tradition. The absence of the husband is seen throughout the film from beginning to end, as happens in the film *Boiling Dreams* (2011) by Hakim Belabbès, based on a true story. Omar (the real name of a schoolmate of the filmmaker) never comes back home after trying to reach Spain, leaving a wife, a son and a daughter behind. Nine years after he leaves, his wife still waits for his telephone call. In the academic world, a number of recent studies have also highlighted how the pervasive phenomenon of emigration in Morocco has generated this corollary phenomenon of so-called 'left-behind women' or what we call the 'waiting wives': women in emigrant areas throughout the country who are married to Moroccan men living in Europe, but who are not themselves migrants (De Haas and Van Rooij 2010; Ennaji and Sadiqi 2008; Elliot 2016), which is probably one of the less considered consequences of migrations.

The absence of men goes further in the film *Dry Eyes* (2003). Film director Narjiss Nejjar depicts the life in a Berber mountain village only populated by women devoted to prostitution, as the men of the village have all migrated. The film evokes the so-called 'triangle of death', a region between the cities of Casablanca, Marrakech y Beni Mellal, with locations such as Tadla having more than 30% of their masculine population in 'irregular' migratory conditions (Bencherifa et al 2003, 111).

Living abroad

Of all the migratory cycles, however, it is 'life abroad' that has taken the most violent, negative and skeptical look towards emigration by Moroccan filmmakers. Life in Europe becomes a space of ambivalent social denunciation. It is on the one hand a desired place, one related to 'paradise', a place where you would make huge sacrifices to reach, a place of freedom, of economic progress. On the other hand, the films reflect life abroad as 'hell'. Mafia, prostitution, drug smuggling, labor exploitation, racism and xenophobia, violence, adaptation problems and cultural and generational conflicts are common elements in the corpus of films analyzed. The idea of Europe leads to great disillusionment once there, in the same way that happens with many of the films that are part of the block of rural exodus, where a great gap is established between what is expected and reality.

The fact of ending up in dirty business abroad, as a kind of inevitable fatalism, leading a double life or even becoming a suspect due to the fact of having Moroccan origin appears in numerous films, such as *Real Premonition* (Ahmed Ziad , 2007), *Do You remember Adil?* (Mohamed Zineddaine 2008), *Omar Has Killed Me* (Roschdy Zem 2011), and *A Moroccan in Paris* (Said Naciri 2011), among others. In the first case, *Real Premonition*, the protagonist, Samir, goes through his own personal odyssey to get to the US. Once there, he makes great efforts to adapt quickly, attending English courses every day. Even so, from one day to the next, through a series of coincidences and circumstances, he ends up caught between the interests of two mafia families, on the one hand, and the FBI on the other. That is where his nightmare begins.

From Paradise to Hell (Said Souda 2000) describes the story of five young Moroccan musicians who go to Europe to try to make a living through their profession. Despite their sincerest intentions and best efforts to adapt to a different life, they face racism and xenophobia on a daily basis. *A Moroccan in Paris* (Said Naciri 2011) is a comedy and focuses on the life of Najib. He manages to leave Morocco in a risky way and meet with his brother in France. The latter is an architect and has been married for 20 years to a Frenchwoman. On his way to Europe, Najib meets a gangster named Attila, a Turk of Catholic confession, and ends up getting involved in a sordid drug story. In *Do You remember Adil?* (Mohamed Zineddaine 2008), the protagonist, Adil, does everything possible and impossible to reach Bologna (Italy), where his brother, suffering a severe physical disability that makes him a completely dependent person, lives. From the time he arrives, Adil takes care of his brother: washes him, puts him to bed, takes him out in the wheelchair for a walk. He receives a salary, but for him it is not enough. He also ends up involved in murky business related to drug trafficking that makes him lead a parallel life full of anguish, shock and the unexpected, while the relationship with his brother and his own dignity deteriorate irrevocably.

In *Omar Has Killed Me* (Roschdy Zem 2011), the life of migrants in Europe is again related to the world of crime. Based on a true story, the film tells the story of Omar Raddad, a Moroccan who

works as a gardener for a wealthy Frenchman, Ghislaine Marchal. Marchal is found dead in the cellar of his mansion in the town of Mougins, in the French Alps. There, painted on the wall in blood, is reads: Omar has killed me. Omar pleads innocent to no avail and is sentenced to 18 years in prison. Four years after leaving prison, in 2016, 22 years after that fateful day, the case is reopened to present new DNA tests that can prove the gardener's innocence.

The Forgotten Ones of History (Hassan Benjelloun 2009) is a denunciation of the mafia system of sexual exploitation to which many women who arrive in Europe are tricked into joining and with very different expectations of work. *Insoumise* (Jawal 2015) denounces the system of labor exploitation in the agricultural sector in the heart of wealthy Belgium. Another recurrent theme has been the lack of cultural adaptation and the generational abyss, as depicted in the enigmatic *Here and There* (Mohamed Ismaïl 2005), where a retired father tries to instill in his adolescent children the Moroccan way of life causing a family breakdown.

Return Home

The category 'return home' contains the second largest amount of related films according to our findings, most of them produced in the period from 2003-2015, a moment when the first generation of Moroccan migrants were coming back after retirement (Schellingerhout and de Klerk 2007), and Moroccan society sometimes faced difficulties to administratively and personally integrate the returnees (Bekouchi 2003), with children who spoke Spanish or Italian and had great difficulties integrating themselves into the school system and university, as well as administrative problems managing the reunification of families, personal status and tax procedures in the field of investment and business creation (Bekouchi 2003).

In addition to returning home for retirement, there are two more key triggers for this: illness or death of a relative and the existential search for or reunion with the past, either to close wounds or to open new doors, including the desire to meet family members for the first time. *A Door to Heaven* (1988), directed by Farida Benlyazid, considered the first feature film made by a woman in Morocco,

is the story of Nadia, who returns to Morocco after many years living in Paris, before the imminent death of her father. Upon arriving, Nadia wears a leather jacket and drinks alcohol. However, at her father's funeral she hears the religious chants of Kirana and has a kind of revelation that leads her to experience a transition to spiritual Islam.

Burnt Hearts (Ahmed El Maânouni 2007) is another film of autobiographical character where the main character, Amin, rushes back his city of birth, Fez, to see his uncle before he dies and try to heal wounds from the past. The film's director, Ahmed Maânouni, suffered through the mistreatment of an uncle with whom he grew up. For him, 'The wounds of childhood accompany us throughout life and are written down somewhere. As they are painful, we usually hide them, but really we are only able to build ourselves when we have the courage to take them out and open our own book '(2016, personal communication). *Women Through Mirrors* (Saâd Chraïbi 2010) is another interesting film that tells of the return of a photographer who has lived in Paris for 10 years gaining international fame. He returns because his mother is dying and in doing so, he discovers a burdensome and complicated family past. He also finds many difficulties in adaptation.

One of the dimensions that Moroccan cinema has touched on in the films that deal with the return home is the profile of the qualified migrant who has training and work experience abroad and who, at a given moment, feels the need and the desire to return home to contribute to the improvement of one's own country. One emblematic film of this theme is *The Big House* (2009). It is a story inspired by the life of its director, Latif Lahlou, one of the 'deans' (Bakrim, 2015) of Moroccan cinema. The film is about an engineer who returns home with his Parisian wife, an ophthalmologist, and a son. The engineer wants to take all the knowledge he has acquired abroad to a Moroccan company in the solar energy sector, but there are many prejudices that he encounters. This is how Lahlou expresses the spirit with which he wrote the script for the film:

In 'The Big House' everything becomes a metaphor. I tell my own story and that of others of my generation who

went through the same problems as me. We were trained in Europe but our main interest was the development of our country. A person always goes back to their roots, because it is the land that fed you. You come back, even if not in a physical way, sometimes in an intellectual or moral way (2012, personal communication).

Also along these lines is the film *Casablanca, Casablanca*, by Farida Benlyazid, which, in 2002, became an open complaint about the corruption established in Moroccan institutions. The protagonist is again an engineer, played by Younès Megri, whose return to Casablanca becomes a great struggle to change the habits and mentality of the people. In one case or another, the need for adaptation, especially for those migrants who have been away for a long time, or for their children, becomes clear. Major conflicts and family frictions often arise. Those who have spent a long time away are criticized for trying to impose their rules again, for not respecting things as they always have been, as if they were placed in a position of superiority by living abroad. This is what happens in *Rock the Casbah* (Laila Marrakchi 2013), a film whose plot also starts with the death of the father figure, which in turn triggers the return home of the daughter of the family, who had emigrated to the US. With her return, all the family dynamics, stranded in the hypocrisy, are removed, as well as the double life, the unhappiness and the secrets of the late father's bedroom.

Moroccan filmmakers have also turned their attention to the particular circumstances of the children of Moroccan couples who have grown up or even been born in Europe or another continent, and to the children of mixed couples. A curious story is that told by Hakim Belabbès in *Soul Feelings* in 2003. The first scene takes place in a hospital in Chicago. A daughter, around 30 years old, visits her father Mehdi, who is a perfect stranger to her. The father has called her to communicate her that he is dying and he wishes to go with her to Boujjâad, his hometown. The daughter gives in reluctantly, without knowing that a transformative trip awaits her, as well. In the same vein, *French Girl* is a 2008 film by Souad El Bouhati and tells the story of a young Moroccan who, having been born in France, suddenly, at the father's decision

to return to Morocco, is thrust into a rural context, with a culture that is unknown and a language that she does not speak fluently.

The Return of the Son (Ahmed Boulane 2011) tells the story of Mehdi, fruit of a relationship between a Moroccan and a French woman who lived in Morocco. Mehdi was a minor when the mother fled to France with him once the relationship stopped functioning. 15 years later, Mehdi has the need to go to Morocco to meet his father Aziz. Once there, the young man lives an authentic existential crisis because he does not fit in with the Moroccan way of life. The following sequence expresses it:

The Return of the Son (Ahmed Boulane, 2011)

Mehdi (son): - *I don't think I could live here. I will always be a foreigner who does not speak the language. And I do not understand so many things.*

Azziz (father): *You don't know what you are talking about. You can choose where to live. I hope that you change your mind. But don't forget that you are my son.*

Mehdi (son): *I know that I am your son. And you will always be my father.*

Tenja (Hassan Legzouli 2004), *The Look* (Nouredine Lakhmari 2004), *Islamour* (Saâd Chraïbi 2007), *Moroccan Dream* (Jamal Belmajdoub 2007), *Fragments* (Hakim Belabbes 2010), *Aïda* (Driss Mrini, 2014) are also examples, among others, of this thematic category.

Historical Migrations

Finally, there is a small corpus of films dealing with historical migrations. It is only in recent years, especially in the period from 2003- 2015 when these kinds of films have more of a presence, with a total number of nine. The main topic in this group is the exile of Moroccan Jews from 1948, the date of the creation of the State of Israel. Between 1948 and 2003, a total of 270,188 Moroccan Jews migrated to Israel (De Vega 2009). Films such as *Good Bye, Mothers* (Mohamed Ismaël 2007); *Where Are You Going Moshé* (Hassan Benjelloun 2007); *My Land* (Nabyl Ayouch 2010); *Thingir-Jerusalem*, *The Echoes of the Mellah* (Kamal Hachar 2011) and *For a New Seville* (Kathy Wazana 2012) are included in this group.

But other historical events, such as the participation of Moroccans in World War II to fight against Hitler, with more than 50,000 workers and more than 16,000 military personnel. Bekouchi (2003), have also been depicted, like in Mourad Boucif's recent film *The Men of Clay* (2016). As Bekouchi (2003) reminds us, the first Moroccan migrations began in the early twentieth century and were colonial. This historical revisionism might have been possible after the relatively political openness following Mohammed VI's succession of his father King Hassan II in 1999. In the last decade, the increasing and significant amount of films denouncing the repression practises of Hassan II's regime during the so-called 'Leads Years' would also support this idea.

Conclusions

In light of the findings, we can affirm that the place of migratory topics in Moroccan national film production is incontestable. Quantitative and qualitative evidence has been offered to show that Moroccan cinema has reacted to the social impact caused by migratory movements. The largest amount of films in this study belong to the category 'migrations abroad between 2003 and 2015' (18 films, 18,7%). In fact, the specific topic of risky and undocumented migrations, as we have shown, concentrates the highest amount of films among this group, showing that it has been a very sensitive topic for Moroccan filmmakers. Secondly, the most talked about topic has been the return home, (16 films, 16.6%), and thirdly, that of life abroad.

Furthermore, Moroccan cinema has covered all the migratory cycles and different phases (rural exodus, migrations abroad, life abroad and returning home) in a quite balanced way, showing coherent cinematographic reaction mechanisms towards social reality. When Morocco was extensively aware of the rural exodus in the decades of the seventies and eighties, Moroccan cinema produced a large number of films related to the subject, addressing different prisms and perspectives. When Europe started to prevent access to African migrants in the year 1991 by reinforcing visa and administrative restrictions and Moroccan migrants searched for alternative and risky migratory paths, cineastes expressed their

indignation and denounced one of the most dramatic episodes of international migrations.

In the decade of the 2000s, a period when a large part of the migrant population was already settled in their countries of destination, Moroccan filmmakers turned their attention mainly towards the vicissitudes of life in Europe, marking a critical ascertainment of the huge gap existing between an imagined life in an imagined paradise and real life conditions. Finally, coinciding with the retirement of the first generation of emigrants and their decision to return to their country of origin in this same decade, Moroccan filmmakers have been closely watching the processes of return and adaptation, offering cinematographic evidence of its intrinsic difficulties. On the other hand, there has recently been an increasing interest to bring to light some specific types of historical migratory movements, even if they were forced or institutionally orchestrated, such as the participation of Moroccans in the World Wars or the exile of Moroccan Jews in 1948.

Our findings allow us to confirm that there is a close relationship between the production of migratory films in Morocco and the socio-political evolution of the phenomenon. Thus, cinema might become a valuable historical and sociological document when depicting realities. More specifically, Moroccan cinema has brought into the spotlight awareness about the social changes and specificities of migrations throughout the years. In line with Orlando's previous approach (2011), 'contemporary Moroccan cinema accurately portrays the reality of the country, and filmmakers have succeeded in generating awareness and discussion within Moroccan society that impact and advance changes as the country moves forward in the millennium'. This kind of research supports the idea that contemporary films are essential in the accurate documentation of past history and present realities.

The exploratory findings presented in this study cover a gap and offer a basis for future research on a very new field of study. They also lead to new research questions, as all the studied categories need to be analyzed in close detail in further work from a thematic and narrative point of view. Moreover, new ways of distribution should be found for easier access to Moroccan cinema, and therefore

Moroccan history, society, culture and art.

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