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Migration and the Developmental Impact of Migrant Remittances on the Urban Space in Tunisia What Development Dynamics?*

الهجرة والفعل التنموي للتحويلات المالية في المجال الحضري في تونس أي دينامية للتنمية؟

Abstract: Historically, migration has served as a key factor determining countries' development strategies and monetary and financial policies. This article traces the developmental impact of remittances and the social capital migrants take back to their home communities in urban spaces. Based on the assumption that migration is marked by developmental and urban dynamics in which migrants serve as agents of development in their local communities, the study identifies the main sectors and areas that absorb migrants' financial returns, as well as specific social criteria and contexts which have impacted the developmental effectiveness of migrants' investment behaviour.

Keywords: Migration; Remittances; Development; Urban Spaces, Developmental Effectiveness.

ملخص: مثلت ظاهرة الهجرة تاريخياً إحدى الرافعات التي بنت عليها الدول استراتيجياتها التنموية وسياساتها النقدية والمالية. وفي هذا الإطار البحثي، تتقضى الدراسة الأثر التنموي للتحويلات المالية والرساميل الاجتماعية التي يأتي بها المهاجرون العائدون معهم إلى مجتمع المنشأ في المجالات الحضرية، مفترضين أن للهجرة دينامية تنموية وحضرية تجعل من المهاجرين فواعل تنموية في مجتمعاتهم المحلية. ومن أجل ذلك، تتبّع الدراسة القطاعات والمجالات الأشد امتصاصاً لعوائد المهاجرين المالية، بتفكيك الخلفية السوسولوجية لفعلهم التنموي، وهو فعل ارتبط بمعايير وسياقات اجتماعية مختلفة، كان لها أثرٌ بينٌ في الفاعلية التنموية لسلوكهم الاستثماري.

كلمات مفتاحية: الهجرة؛ التحويلات المالية؛ التنمية؛ المجالات الحضرية؛ الفاعلية التنموية.

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Preface

The new realities of the dynamics of individual and collective migration provide the foundation for a new approach to the complex relationship between the local dimension of development, and international — regular and irregular — migration. The new approach thus goes beyond the stereotype of the migrants from the 1960s or 1970s, who journeyed in order to improve their living conditions and overcome poverty. Rather than being simply a strategy to improve the family's socioeconomic situation within its original community (temporary migration), the emigration of a single individual has turned into an investment which will pave the way for a collective emigration, or a final move by the family to the host community (permanent migration).

This shift from individual to collective dynamics¹ has created new conditions and justifications for migration. It has also reduced the chances of returning home, which has become increasingly difficult given the growing economic frailty exhibited by communities of origin and the development approaches adopted therein. Viewed as a "geographical and sociological movement fuelled by a variety of motives and causes, and involving the polarity of attraction and expulsion dealt with in the literature on the sociology of migration and the classical theories explaining the phenomenon",² migration takes diverse forms which impact both formal and informal levels of economic life, the job market, and the urban space, including changes in the forms and aesthetics of architecture in local communities.

However, changes in the strategies and structures of individual and collective migration do not negate the impact of international migration. In fact, migration is having an increasing impact on the macroeconomic level of countries of origin (for example, via cash transfers and their role in supporting the state budget, improving economic and financial balances, etc.). The same applies to the microeconomic level, where we see change not only in the conditions of migrants' families, but also in the impacts of migrants' financial remittances, or their final return home, on urbanization, development, real estate, architecture, and the social structure of the local community. Manuel Castells³ views the city not as a static physical entity, but as a space of flows. Based on this understanding, migrants returning to their cities of origin are agents of change and development in the urban space given the financial, social, and cultural capital and the varied life experiences they bring back with them. As such, they offer successful models that can change negative perceptions of migration as a perilous venture which others should be discouraged from undertaking.

This study examines the ways in which Tunisians' external migration creates economic shifts in the urban and architectural fabric of Tunisia, and its impact on perceptions of and attitudes toward migration. In so doing, this research does not merely repeat macro-developmental theses that approach the relationship between migration and issues of development and change by focusing on the impact of official financial transfers on the country's hard currency balance, the value of the Tunisian dinar, national savings, the financing of major state development projects, and the importance of financial flows from Tunisians living abroad for improving the state's financial balances and reducing the public deficit.⁴ Rather, it views this relationship in terms of micro-sociological factors, that is, particular phenomena relating to migrants as actors, the investment decisions they make in relation to their financial returns, and the ways in which

¹ Reports on illegal migration describe cases in which a father, mother, and infant son all perish together, or in which a mother dies with her newborn child, leaving her husband and one of her children in the country of origin. Security reports also reveal a shift in the types of people who venture out on potentially deadly journeys for the sake of immigrating. Migrants are no longer limited to the unemployed, those running from the law, and those lacking strong employment skills; rather, they include well-to-do families, mid-level state executives, and individuals with advanced degrees in modern scientific and technological disciplines.

² Aisha al-Tayeb, "al-Fatāh al-'Arabiyya wa-l-Hijra ilā al-Jannāt al-Maw'ūda: Muḥāwala fī al-Fahm," *Omran*, vol. 6, no. 21 (Summer 2017), p. 8.

³ Manuel Castells, *Vers une théorie de la planification urbaine* (Paris: Maspero, 1997), p. 25.

⁴ Samir Bouzidi, "Mobilisation de la diaspora: Bonnes pratiques à l'international et éléments de transposabilité en Tunisie," LEMMA Projet de soutien au partenariat pour la mobilité UE Tunisie (Tunisie, 2018), pp. 8-11.

they employ the capital they accumulate during or after migration. This is connected not only to changing their social status and that of their families,⁵ but also to the creation of developmental dynamics. Hence, this study examines the effectiveness of migration in bringing about economic and social changes in the urban space based on how Tunisian migrants' cash transfers and financial returns are invested, the areas that most attract such investments, and their developmental impact.

Making use of relevant literature, qualitative studies, and official quantitative reports on the migration in Tunisia, the study is based on field work conducted by the author in the Ibn Khaldun neighbourhood of the Omrane Supérieur district in Tunis.⁶ It includes interviews with ten individuals, some of whom had emigrated, then settled permanently in their home cities, and others who had remained abroad but continued to visit their original residential areas and followed up on their commercial or real estate projects. Based on this inquiry into the developmental effectiveness of Tunisians' remittances, the study concludes that although the financial returns resulting from Tunisians' migrations constitute a developmental engine and a dynamic of change for Tunisian migrants' local communities of origin, this dynamic primarily affects local communities' urban and architectural fabric.

The study is divided into two sections. The first section deals with the patterns of migration and the shift in its dynamics from the individual to the collective. It reviews the history of migration in Tunisia since its independence in 1956 across three generations of migrants according to the classification of Abdelmalek Sayad.⁷ Based on the results of the fieldwork, the second section examines the validity of the research approach that views migration as a developmental dynamic which contributes to changing local communities primarily in their urban and architectural dimensions, concluding that the investment of these migrants' financial returns brings us into what might be termed "the economy of proximity".

The Patterns of Migration and the Shift in its Dynamics from the Individual to the Collective

1. On the History of Tunisian Migration

International migration in Tunisia began on a limited and modest scale during the French protectorate period, specifically after World War II.⁸ Migration flows did not expand noticeably until the early 1960s, in spite of the fledgling nation-state's attempts to restrict migration in order to preserve its human capital, which was still in its formative stages. This restrictive tendency was reinforced during the early years of independence by the state's adoption of a planned economy based on production co-operatives. While the Tunisian state and its economy were unable to absorb the increasing demand for jobs, France, Germany, and Belgium were the most attractive the European states to unskilled or trained workers in search of employment.⁹

⁵ Philippe Wanner, "L'apport des migrants au développement: Une perspective économique," *Annuaire suisse de politique de développement*, no. 27-2, 2008, mis en ligne le 22 mars 2010, p. 125, accessed on 27/9/2020, at: <http://bit.ly/3DDVP6L>

⁶ According to the latest housing census (2014), the capital city's Ibn Khaldun neighbourhood of the Omrane Supérieur district has a population of 55,513, of whom 44,808 are over the age of fifteen, and 65.3 percent of whom have a primary to secondary school education. Ibn Khaldun neighbourhood of the Omrane Supérieur district has an unemployment rate of up to 16.17 percent, with more than a third of those employed working in education, health, and administrative services, followed by commerce. We find that 61.64 percent of them own the houses they live in, 81.03 percent of which are attached dwellings or one floor of an attached dwelling, and that more than half of them bought their residences rather than building them. See: The Republic of Tunisia, National Institute of Statistics, "General Population and Housing Census 2014," *Statistiques Tunisie*, accessed on 19/6/2022 at: <https://bit.ly/3tKI1T5>

⁷ Abdelmalek Sayad, *La Double Absence: des illusions de l'émigré aux souffrances de l'immigré* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1999), p. 18.

⁸ Khalifa Chater, "Les mouvements migratoires entre la France et la Tunisie aux XIXe et XXe siècles, la dichotomie du langage," *Cahiers de la Méditerranée, Mots et migrations*, no. 54 (1997), pp. 37-54.

⁹ Hassène Kassab, "Changements sociaux et émigration clandestine en Tunisie," XV Congrès de l'UIESP, Juillet 2005, Tours, France.

The 1970s marked an important shift in the phenomenon of migration in Tunisia. State control over migration decreased with the failure of its cooperative model and the Tunisian government's adoption of a policy of state liberalism.¹⁰ This shift in the development model brought about a profound change in the state's policy on Tunisians' migration abroad. After having acted as a barrier and a gatekeeper of scarce national human capital during its early years of independence and nation state-building, the Tunisian government began regulating and structuring the process of Tunisians' migration. This qualitative shift in the role and position of the state saw the number of Tunisian migrants to France to triple from what it had been in the 1960s (going from 52,179 to 149,274 in 1973).¹¹ For the Tunisian state, and the North African countries generally,¹² migration has gone from being an economic and social dilemma to a catalyst for strategies to solve poverty and unemployment, and an important dimension at every level of the development process. Convinced now of the developmental benefits to be considered when setting development policies, the Tunisian state began to institutionalize and formalize migration by creating governmental structures whose purpose was to regulate and structure the flow of migration towards Europe in particular. The year 1967 saw the establishment of the Office of Vocational Training and Employment (OFPE), which, in 1969, worked in coordination with the French National Office for Migration (ONI) to regulate the migration of Tunisian labourers, providing them with professional qualifications, following up on migrant workers abroad, and facilitating their return should they decide to.¹³

The flow of Tunisian migrants towards Europe witnessed an acute crisis in 1973-1974, as Europe's welcome began to cool with the end of the "Glorious Thirty" (1945-1975).¹⁴ However, this shift opened up new migration routes for Tunisian workers, who began heading primarily for oil-producing Arab countries (Libya and the Arab Gulf states), which were in great need of both skilled and unskilled Arab workers. The Tunisian state's policy of organizing trained migrants extended into the 1990s, during which migration underwent an expansion and an important shift in pattern as increasing percentages of competent migrant workers headed for both Europe and the United States.¹⁵ There was now a greater focus on training the labour force and, at the same time, marketing it through mediation between workers and host countries interested in bringing in Tunisian labour, especially the Arab oil-producing countries. The establishment of the Tunisian Agency for Technical Cooperation (ATCT) in 1972 opened diverse new outlets for migration to Tunisian workers with a range of specializations and skill levels based on work contracts, which numbered more than 2,000 in 2008, for example.¹⁶ ATCT sought to expand the developmental impact of Tunisian migration abroad and the overall benefit derived from cash transfers, especially in development programs and plans. Further, the Office of Tunisians Abroad (OTE) was established in 1988 under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs, its purpose being to develop programs and strategies that could overcome the obstacles and difficulties that prevent maximum benefit from the material returns of migration, and to offer Tunisian migrants various incentives and facilities to save or invest their financial returns in their country of origin.

¹⁰ Abd al-Latif al-Hurmasi, *al-Dawla wa-l-Tanmiya fi al-Maghrib al-'Arabī: Tūnis Anmūdhan* (Tunisia: Seras Publishing, 1993), pp. 35-50.

¹¹ Julan Tibu, *al-Dawla al-Tūnisiyya wa-l-Tūnisiyyūn fi al-Khārīj: Dirāsa Ḥawl Dīnāmikiyāt al-Jāliyyāt al-'Arabiyya al-Maghribiyya: Ta'zīz al-Musāhamāt al-Ijābiyyah fi al-Tanmiya al-Ijtimā'iyyah wa-l-Iqtisādiyyah wa-l-Taḥawwulāt al-Dīmuqrāṭiyyah fi Awtānihim al-Aṣliyyah* (Cairo: International Organisation of Migration: The Arab League, 2012), p. 110.

¹² Abdul Qadir Latrash, "Wāqi' al-Hijrāt al-Maghāribiyyah wa Taḥawwulātuhā," *Omran*, vol. 1, no. 3 (Winter 2013), pp. 127-128.

¹³ Tibu, p. 114.

¹⁴ In other words, paths of migration and the evolution in its volume and forms are associated with changes and developments in both communities of origin and host communities. The "Glorious Thirty" refers to the period after World War II during which "North America and Western Europe achieved remarkable rates of economic growth and relatively low levels of inequality for capitalist societies, while instituting a broad range of benefits for workers, students, and retirees. From roughly 1980 on, however, the neoliberal movement, rooted in the laissez-faire economic theories of Milton Friedman, launched what became a full-scale assault on workers' power and an attempt, often remarkably successful, to eviscerate the social welfare state." See: Juan Cole, "From Oakland to Tunisia: How a New Age of Activism was Born," *Mother Jones*, accessed on 5/2/2023, at: <http://bit.ly/3JJ2Err>

¹⁵ Economic Commission for Africa and Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and Africa, *A Study on Remittances from Tunisians Living Abroad* (North Africa: United Nations, 2015), p. 3.

¹⁶ Tibu, p. 115.

The flow of Tunisians abroad has historically been affected by changes in the development approaches adopted by the national state. Since the 1970s, it has become one of the key constants in development policy in Tunisia due to the role played by migrant remittances in bolstering hard currency reserves, increasing national savings, balancing budgets, and revitalizing economic sectors, particularly agriculture (within rural spaces), and services (within rural and urban spaces). However, the process of estimating the volume and value of migrants' remittances remains complex and imprecise as organized migration mediated and facilitated by state structures accounts for only a small percentage of the Tunisians going abroad and the financial flows into the country. Much of the money sent back to Tunisia is transferred informally due to the complexity and high costs of transferring funds through banks and the post. Irregular migration thus began to constitute an attractive path for Tunisians, especially since the 2011 revolution and the decline in the state's power on the security, development, and international levels.

2. The Shift in Migration Dynamics from the Individual to the Family

An in-depth reading of the quantitative data and research variables upon which the statistics published by UN-affiliated international organizations and bodies depended¹⁷ makes clear that migration is facing profound structural transformations. This situation calls for a comprehensive analysis of the new dynamics of migration and their wider implications locally and internationally. The act of migrating is no longer an individual venture which one undertakes in secrecy. It no longer involves avoiding the fears of family members about one's safety upon leaving an unsatisfactory but safe environment for an alluring, yet dangerous, distant land. At present, even irregular migration takes place with the consent of one's family, who may even fund the venture. Indeed, security and press reports on what is known in Tunisia as "*al-Ḥarga*" (putting to sea for Europe knowing full well that one is highly likely to die) often document multiple victims from a single family on the same doomed passage.

Be it regular or irregular, migration has come to be motivated by a despair so deep that an individual will feel justified undertaking the risks involved in *al-Ḥarga*. One young man asked, "Do I have a life in my country that I would fear losing? No, I'm already dead. So, the death you're talking about doesn't frighten me, since it will just put an end to the ongoing ordeal of living. If I risk death, I do it for the sake of a chance to live a real life."¹⁸ Families have begun preparing their most capable members to meet the conditions for being accepted and integrated into the host societies, especially children who are outstanding students or who have obtained training certificates under the supervision of institutions affiliated with or recognized by the country of destination. By preparing them for regular, or even irregular migration, such families hope their children can serve as bridges for other members into a new field of work, thereby enabling the family to find stability in Arab or European societies.

One respondent, a recent graduate, says:

I don't intend to stop at completing a master's degree. Rather, I see my success in getting this scholarship as a doorway to permanent residency in Germany. Frankly, I don't intend to go back and settle in Tunisia again. I'm going to live and build my future world abroad, which can't possibly be worse than what would await me in Tunisia. I also bear a burden for my family, so

¹⁷ United Nations, International Organization for Migration, *Taqrīr al-Hijra fī al-Ālam li-Ām 2018*, accessed on 20/6/2022, at: <https://bit.ly/3HEli0o>; United Nations, International Organization for Migration, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, *Taqrīr al-Hijra al-Dawliyyah li-Ām 2015: al-Hijra wa-l-Nuzūh wa-l-Tanmiya fī Maṅṭiqa ʿArabiyyah Mutaghayyirah*, accessed on 20/6/2022, at: <https://bit.ly/2GQHrLc>; United Nations, International Organization for Migration, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, *Taqrīr al-Hijra al-Dawliyyah li-Ām 2019: al-Ittijāq al-Ālamī min Ajl al-Hijra al-Āmina wa-l-Munazama wa-l-Nizāmiyyah fī Siyāq al-Maṅṭiqa al-ʿArabiyyah*, accessed on 25/7/2020, at: <https://bit.ly/3n2T4TE>

¹⁸ A personal interview in Ibn Khaldun neighbourhood of the Omrane Supérieur district, Tunis, on 7/1/2020 with M. H., a 30-year-old man without a steady job who works with a relative selling grain.

*my success can open the door for my brother to follow me and build his future there too. I'll go on visiting home in order to see my family and help them improve their living conditions and their housing situation, which, as you can see yourself, promises nothing but more poverty. The situation in our country doesn't bode well for the future.*¹⁹

This is a decision which is not arbitrary, but rational and purposeful in the Weberian sense.²⁰ It is no longer a matter of individual paths associated with individual projects, but rather a collective dynamism, not in the sense of the family gathering in what Abdelmalek Sayad calls "the third age of migration",²¹ but, rather, in the sense of the family's influence on and participation in the decision to have its children emigrate, and the building of appropriate strategies to achieve success as a collective goal rather than an individual one.²² Abd al-Sattar al-Sahbani, for example, has clarified the shift in the dynamic of migration and the powerful presence of the group (family and friends who have migrated previously).²³

Accordingly, the decision to migrate has multiple effects, being a quest for collective, not individual success. The search for employment is the primary motive par excellence for making the decision to emigrate, as it both produces migration and changes the forms it takes. As for the familial factor, the fact that it ranks second in the list of motivations for migration, the choice of destination does nothing to undermine its importance and influence, which, according to Sarah Harbinson,²⁴ are determined by the family's structure and quality. The rationale behind the decision to migrate is not individual, but collective. The calculations and expectations of profit and loss go beyond the individual migrant to the entire family,²⁵ which mobilizes its material resources and devotes them to one of its members in the desire to make a success of a project that is, from beginning to end, a collective one in terms of both making the decision to migrate, and the consequences to which it may lead.

The transition entailed by migration may be permanent, or it may be a temporary strategy to change the family's socioeconomic status in its city of origin. However, the shared nature of the transition points to the transformation of migration from an individual act (a personal decision) to a collective one (a shared decision). This in turn points clearly to a growing consensus that there is an absence of economic, political, or social insecurity in the community of origin. This sense deepens as the society of origin grows increasingly unable to integrate its members into economic life and provide what is needed for social or political security due to the stalling of the development process, and as the development model proves incapable of preventing the exacerbation of unemployment, poverty, rising costs of living, and a dearth of decent work opportunities.²⁶ The 2021 National Survey on International Migration showed that 55.2 percent of

¹⁹ A personal interview in Ibn Khaldun neighbourhood of the Omrane Supérieur district, on 7/1/2020 with T. K., a 22-year-old student with a diploma in applied media who is preparing to leave for Germany after obtaining a scholarship from a German university.

²⁰ Abd al-Rahman al-Maliki, *al-Thaqāfa wa-l-Majāl: Dirāsa fī Susyulūjya al-Taḥaddur wa-l-Hijra fī al-Maghrib* (Fez: Faculty of Arts, Dahr al-Mahraz, Sociology of Social Development Lab, 2015), pp. 183-184.

²¹ Abdullāh Bel Abbas, "Zāhirat al-Hijra 'Ind 'Abd al-Mālik Ṣayyād: Min al-Siyāq al-Tārīkhī ilā al-Namūdhaj al-Susyulūjī," *Insāniyāt*, no. 62 (2013), pp. 25-38.

²² The collective dimension of the rationality of the act of migration comes not only from the family's participation in decision-making, but also from the fact that the family shares values, ideas, perceptions, attitudes, and expectations that motivate and encourage family agreement on the decision to migrate.

²³ Abdel Sattar al-Sahbani, *al-Shabāb wa-l-Hijra Ghayr al-Nizāmiyyah fī Tūnis: Dirāsa Maydāniyya li-l-Tamaththulāt al-Ijtīmā'iyya wa-l-Mumārasāt wa-l-Intizārāt* (Tunisia: Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, 2016), pp. 124-125.

²⁴ Étienne Piguet, "Les théories des migrations. Synthèse de la prise de décision individuelle," *Revue européenne des migrations internationales*, vol. 29, no. 3 (1/9/2016).

²⁵ Jordan Pinel, "Séraphin Gilles, Famille et migration," *Revue européenne des migrations internationales*, vol. 35, no. 1-2 (1/10/2019).

²⁶ These include, for example: al-Sahbani; Mehdi Mabrouk, *Ashri'a wa-Milḥ: Thaqāfat a-Hijra al-Sirriyyah: al-Shabakāt wa-l-Tanzīm* (Tunis: Dar Sahr lil-Nashr, 2010); al-Tayeb; United Nations, United Nations Population Fund, Danish Refugee Council (Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism "Mi4"), "*Mashrū' al-Hijra al-mukhtalaṭa li-l-Shabāb, Dawāfi' al-Hijra wa-l-Ḥājjiyāt li-l-Khadamāt al-Muta'alliqa bi-l-Ṣiḥḥa al-Jinsiyyah wa-l-Injābiyyah: Dirāsa Kammiyyah wa Naw'iyyah li-l-Muhājirīn al-Shabāb fī Tūnis al-Kubrā 2017*" (April 2018), accessed on 21/6/2022, at: <https://bit.ly/2HIE9uC>; Republic of Tunisia, United Nations, Office of the United Nations Population Fund in Tunisia, *al-Taqrīr al-Waṭanī li-Taḳyīm Mustawā Tanfidh al-Jumhūrīyyah al-Tūnisīyya li-Barnāmaj A'māl al-Mu'tamar al-Dawlī li-l-Sukkān wa-l-Tanmiya +20* (Tunisia: June 2013), pp. 165-175, accessed on 21/6/2022, at: <https://bit.ly/40r3sY5>

the reasons for migration were related to improving income, working conditions, and standard of living.²⁷ Despite being employed, poor workers succumbed to the desire to embark on the experience of migration, that is, to search for a different, more attractive life experience, since migration has been increasingly seen as a channel to advance one's living conditions,²⁸ and which the family supports and participates in. In fact, the family does this according to a strategy which it deems best suited to achieving its goals and its vision of itself, its status, and its relationship to its environment.

This perspective was voiced quite clearly by one migrant, who said,

Even if it's available, work in Tunisia doesn't amount to a real guarantee of security for the future. I left my job in Tunisia and travelled to France, and thank God, I managed to get a job and improve my family's situation and housing, as you can see. Work in Tunisia is to ensure the minimum standard of living, but it doesn't build the future and or achieve a decent life. Working abroad shortens the time needed to secure your future in Tunisia if you want to come back.²⁹

Table (1)
Distribution of Migrants According to Justifications for Migration and Gender

Justifications for migration	Gender		
	Males	Females	Total
Looking for a job	27.8	15.6	23.2
Improving income, nature, and conditions of work	29.6	26.7	28.5
Improving living conditions	26.5	27.0	26.7
Bringing family together	0.6	3.7	1.7
Education	11.6	18.3	14.1
Desire to travel	2.2	5.2	3.3
Other reasons	1.7	3.5	2.5
Total	100.00	100.0	100.0

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on: Republic of Tunisia, Ministry of Social Affairs, National Observatory for Migration, "International Migration in Numbers Based on the National Survey of International Migration in Tunisia," accessed on 20/6/2022, at: <https://bit.ly/3n4M0pL>.

This shift in migration from the individual to the collective (which has gone from merely a family supporting or approving an individual decision to migrate to being a major part of the decision to migrate) has been confirmed by the results of research and social surveys done on migration over the last decade.³⁰ According to a field study conducted by the National Observatory for Youth, clandestine or irregular migration, even *al-Harqa*, has itself begun receiving family backing in the form of both moral support and financing.³¹

²⁷ Republic of Tunisia, Ministry of Social Affairs, National Observatory of International Migration, *al-Hijra al-Dawliyya fi Arqām min Khilāl al-Mash al-Waṭani li-l-Hijra al-Dawliyya bi Tūnis*, accessed on 20/6/2022, at: <https://bit.ly/3n4M0pL>

²⁸ Sayad, p. 18.

²⁹ From a personal interview, Ibn Khaldun neighbourhood of the Omrane Supérieur district, Tunis, 8/1/2020 with S. F., a 50-year-old man who traveled to France illegally 20 years ago, but who was able to straighten out his situation in the host country and improve his family's situation. He has now added an upper floor to his house and completed a commercial project in his neighborhood.

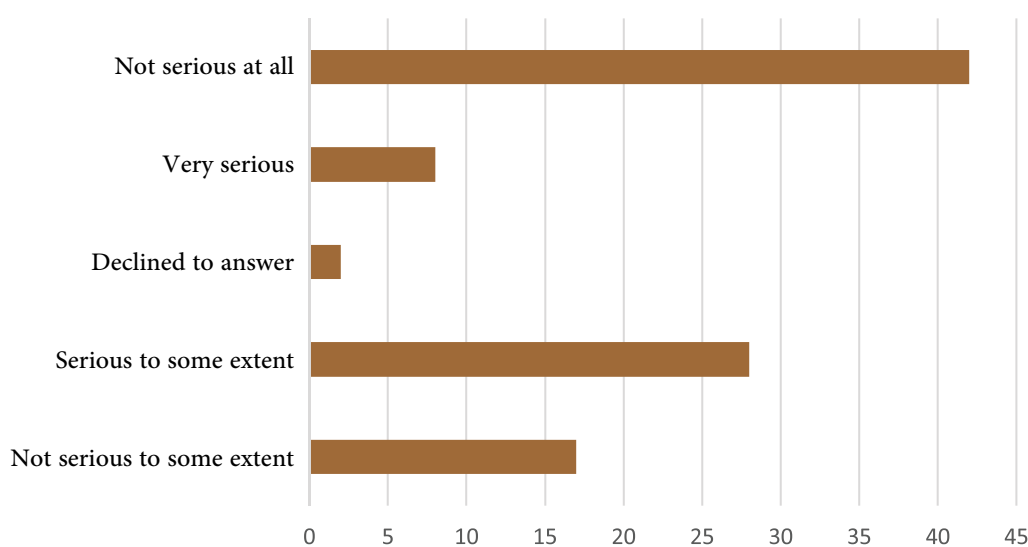
³⁰ Such as those done by Abd al-Sattar al-Sahbani, Mehdi Mabrouk, Muhammad Ali bin Zina, Aisha al-Tayeb, and others, as well as Arab Index surveys, the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies.

³¹ Mehdi Mabrouk, "El Harikoun, pour une approche sociologique du milieu social des immigrés clandestins et de leur imaginaire," *Revue tunisienne de sciences sociales*, no. 125 (2003), pp. 15-49.

A study by Mehdi Mabrouk on the culture of clandestine migration shows that family support (the collective dimension) is clear on a widening scale within the framework of regular migration.³² Nearly half of all families not only support their children's migration-related projects and the search for new educational and life paths, but even help them in planning and preparing both mentally and financially to make the project a reality. They do this based on the conviction that emigration is a path to success worthy even of great risks in a developmental context that does not bode well for an improvement in living conditions or solutions to widespread unemployment, especially for the educated (those with advanced degrees). What most preoccupies Arab citizens, and Tunisians in particular, is economic problems related to the high cost of living and worsening unemployment.³³ This concern coincides with an almost universal conviction that Arab governments lack the will or ability to solve the problems that are most important to their citizens. This conviction is clearly evident in the results of the 2017/2018 Arab Index survey,³⁴ in which approximately 60 percent of respondents stated that they did not trust their governments and did not believe they were serious about prioritizing citizens' day-to-day problems in their economic policies and in the model of development and governance adopted by successive governments since the revolution.

Figure (1)

Trends in Public Opinion on Governments' Seriousness About Solving the Most Important Problems Facing Their Countries (Tunisia)



Source: Prepared by the researcher based on Arab Index 2017/2018, The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, accessed on 16/6/2022, at: <https://bit.ly/2LadHMF>

In a departure from classical and neoclassical approaches, the individual is no longer the referential actor whose decision to migrate is governed simply by the laws of attraction (a known or imagined situation in the host society, such as getting a job, or a high financial return) and the principles theorized by geographer Ernst George Ravenstein, which revolve around actors' economic motives (an unsuitable or unacceptable position in the society of origin, such as unemployment and low wages).³⁵ Much of the research that has been done on migration acknowledges a change in the goal associated with migration. For although the goal of maximizing profit never loses its lustre and attractiveness no matter how minimal it is compared to the possible loss one

³² Mabrouk.

³³ "The Arab Index 2017/2018," *Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies*, accessed on 16/6/2022, at: <https://bit.ly/2LadHMF>

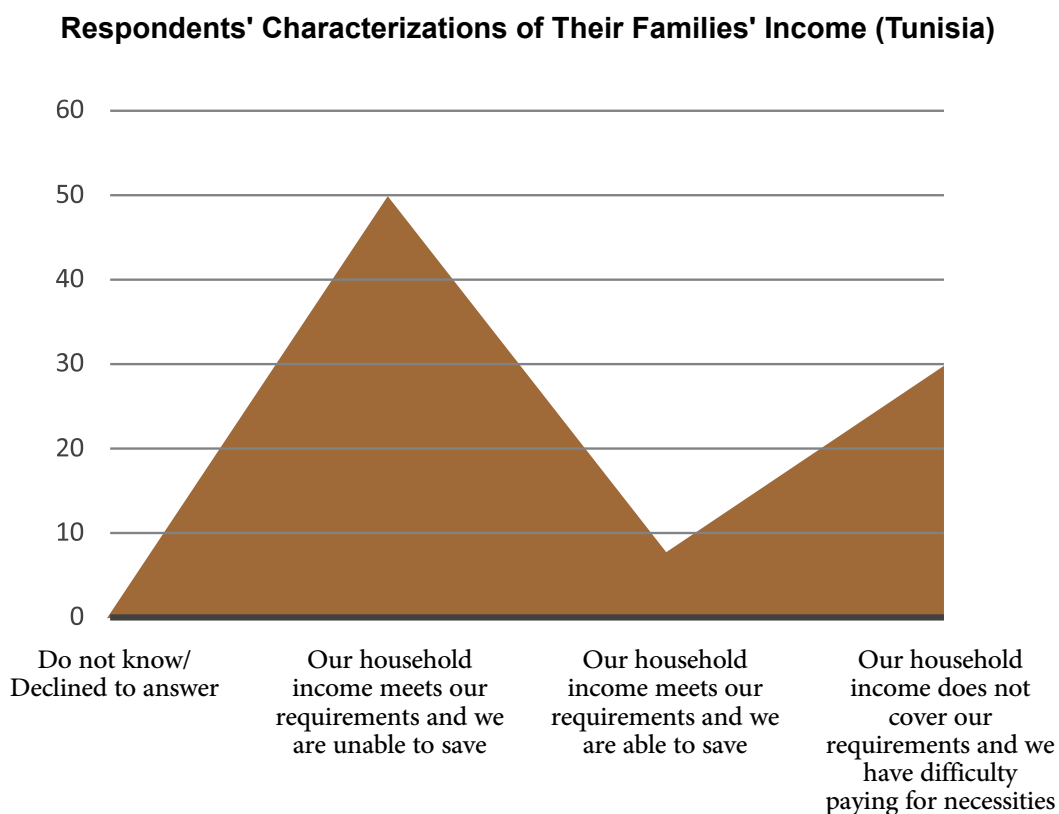
³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Victor Piché, *Les théories de la migration*, Collection: Manuels et Textes fondamentaux (Paris: INED, 2013), pp. 21-22.

might suffer as a result of not migrating. The possibility of remaining in a stagnant situation with poor chances of development and change is itself perceived as a risk by those who have made up their minds to emigrate.

This transition from a prevailing perception of migration as a break with the community of origin (an expulsive situation) to the perception of it as a process of creating transnational ties through the formation of social capital is based on the fact that the individual, in terms of understanding network theories and social capital, is linked to a social structure.³⁶ This social structure is related to the family in both its narrow and expanded dimensions, as well as to friends, neighbours, and neighbourhood residents, which provide social networks (or what Granovetter terms "the power of weak ties")³⁷ that constitute sources of information and act either to motivate or discourage the decision to migrate. For even though migration is undertaken by one member of the family, this impact extends beyond this one member to the entire family.³⁸ It also touches on the economic sphere, which reinforces individual perceptions of migration as a path that is essentially unavoidable if one is to escape a situation of marginality and vulnerability under a weak state that can no longer perform the roles expected of it on behalf of weak and disadvantaged groups whose socioeconomic status continues to deteriorate.

Figure (2)



Source: Prepared by the researcher, based on: The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, The Arab Index 2017/2018, seen on 6/16/2022, at: <https://bit.ly/2LadHMF>

The percentage of Tunisians who describe their family situation as bad, or very bad, rose from 57 percent in the 2017/2018 Arab Index to 88 percent in the 2019/2020 Arab Index.³⁹ A family's socioeconomic status is one of the factors underlying its collective determination not to remain in a society where the role of the state declines with every passing day. These factors may lead to a final departure from the country of origin; however, emigration may also be viewed as an alternative, albeit temporary, space that will be

³⁶ Alain Degenne & Michel Forsé, *Les Réseaux sociaux. Une Analyse structurale en sociologie* (Paris: Éditions Armand Colin, 1994).

³⁷ Mark S. Granovetter, "The Power of Weak Ties," Thayer Deeb (trans.), *Omran*, vol. 7, no. 26 (2018), pp. 137-138.

³⁸ Gilles Séraphin, *Famille et migration, Recherches familiales*, no. 13 (Paris: Éd. Union Nationale des Associations Familiales, 2016), p. 3.

³⁹ "The Arab Index 2019/2020," *Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies*, accessed on 10/3/2021, at: <https://bit.ly/3Qno8eq>

more conducive to meeting the family's goals and its economic and social status in the country of origin. As such, migration serves as a means of achieving aspirations that would otherwise be unattainable. Hence, the Tunisian sociologist Reda Boukraa views migration as a cultural act which reflects an awareness of the noninevitability of continuing to endure a miserable existence in the country of origin. Thus, he views the decision to migrate as an act of liberation from an unsatisfactory economic, social, cultural, and political situation through the pursuit of alternative possibilities.⁴⁰

In light of the foregoing, this research has investigated the developmental benefits of migration for families and the urban spaces from which they have moved. Reports on the volume of the financial returns of Tunisians abroad and the areas in which returning migrants spend their accumulated capital or financial transfers reveal the developmental implications of migration, the structure of this developmental dynamism, and the extent of its effectiveness. Therefore, it is prudent to examine the relationship between the financial return of migration and developmental action by asking whether migrants can be considered developmental actors in their urban space, and whether their financial capital becomes a developmental dynamic within the local community. Based on a reading of the data from the National Institute of Statistics and the Central Bank, as well as previous studies that will be referred to later in this analysis, the financial returns of migration have not, in fact, turned into capital in the sense of creating wealth through investment in specific economic sectors.

Migrants as Expatriate Developmental Actors: The Dominance of the Urban Dimension

This study traces the impact of urban dweller migration on social change and development within the urban space. It also tracks the implications and outcomes of migrants' developmental action through the investment of their financial transfers. There is a close link between the sociology of migration and the sociology of the urban space. It is not possible to think about the city and urban development without raising the issue of migration, be it internal (into the city) or external (out of the city). Accordingly, returning migrants' investment of financial, social, and cultural capital, whether in development projects or in improving living conditions within the urban space, reinforces the view of migration not as a risk and an adventure into the unknown, but as a typical life experience both individually and collectively.

As the state mobilizes additional resources in response to the major challenges it faces, especially with increasing demands by various segments of the workforce since the revolution, the financial remittances of Tunisians abroad are steadily increasing in volume,⁴¹ as is their economic and developmental importance. This explains the state's increasing preoccupation with overcoming legal and regulatory obstacles related to migrants' seasonal return and the transfer of their funds to their families in Tunisia. To better understand the dynamic of these funds and their developmental impact, the study traces the financial benefit achieved by Tunisians' foreign migration and its developmental impact on the macro-economic level. Similarly, the developmental and social impact of Tunisian migrants at home is examined by looking into the destination of their individual investments (micro-economic) and their cash transfers to their families in the community of origin (micro-spatial).

1. The Financial Return of Tunisian Migration

The financial returns of migration are significant in that they support the national economy and development projects more substantially than tourism, national savings, or the gross national product. According to

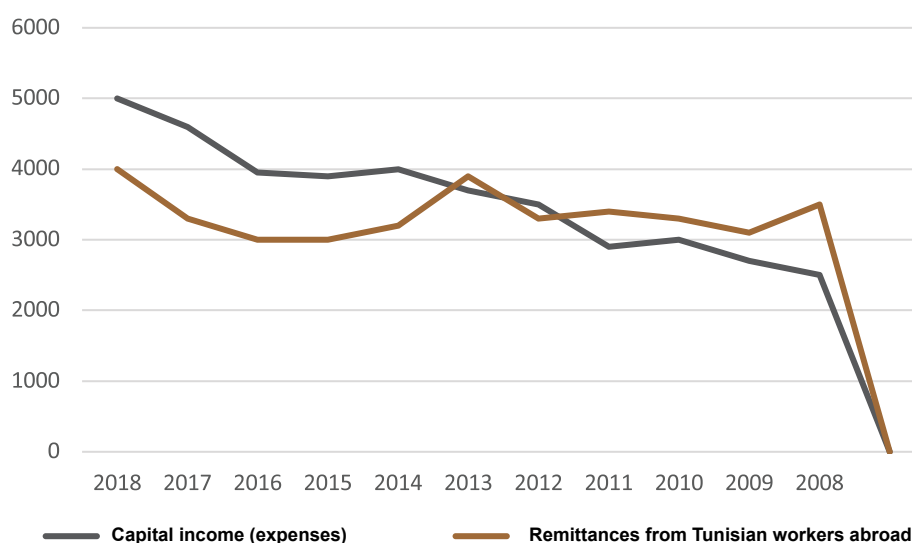
⁴⁰ Ridha Boukraa, "Migration, interculturalité et intégration: Approche globale," in: *Actes de la deuxième Ecole d'Été sur la Migration, Migration et Développement Durable en Tunisie: observations, analyses et perspectives* (Tunis: Organisation Internationale pour les Migrations, 2016), p. 40.

⁴¹ According to data from the Central Bank of Tunisia, remittances of Tunisians abroad grew at an average annual rate of nearly 20 percent, from \$508 million in 1992 to \$3984 million (\$3.98 billion) in 2014, reaching DT 4949.3 million (4.94 billion) in 2019.

estimates by the Central Bank of Tunisia, the financial and in-kind transfers of Tunisians through official channels in 2018 came to DT 5.03 billion (\$1.90 billion),⁴² or the equivalent of 4.8 percent of the gross domestic product.⁴³ Between 2006-2016, the volume of cash and in-kind transfers from Tunisians abroad nearly doubled, from DT 2.01 billion to DT 3.91 billion (\$1.82 billion) in 2016. Most of these transfers were cash, and played an influential role in adjusting the balance of payments by covering 37 percent of the trade balance deficit for the year 2016, representing 4.7 percent of the GDP in 2017.⁴⁴

According to official data released by the Central Bank of Tunisia on 9 June 2020,⁴⁵ the cash transfers of Tunisians abroad throughout 2019 amounted to about DT 5.2 billion (\$1.77 billion), reaching DT 8.6 billion (\$3.08 billion) in 2021 according to the National Observatory for Migration.⁴⁶ However, the importance of migrants' cash transfers lies less in their material volume than in their developmental outcomes, and the impetus they provide for sectors which are vital to the national economy and to the local communities of these migrants. Although the macro-developmental approach provides us with important figures which have financial implications for overall financial balances, especially national savings, they do not reflect the value of migrant money actually transferred into Tunisia, which virtually doubles if money transferred through informal channels is taken into account.⁴⁷

Figure (3)
Remittances from Tunisian Workers Abroad and the Expenses of Capital Income



Source: Banque Centrale De Tunisie, 2020: *Banque Centrale De Tunisie, Balance Des Paiements Et Position Extérieure Globale De La Tunisie* (Tunisie: Décembre 2021), accessed on 20/6/ 2022, at: <https://bit.ly/3tNWttj>.

Hence, the financial returns of migration in the form of migrants' remittances are not being used in a way that yields substantial development within the country of origin. Migrants' intentions to invest or involve themselves in investment projects with their accumulated capital have not been sufficiently robust to

⁴² The calculation of the US dollar amount is always based on the exchange rate of the dollar against the Tunisian dinar during the same year as given in the Central Bank of Tunisia's annual averages for interbank exchange rates. See: "Monetary, Economic and Financial Statistics," *Central Bank of Tunisia*, accessed on 20/6/2022, at: <https://bit.ly/3tNmvg0>

⁴³ Banque Centrale De Tunisie, *La Balance Des paiements Et La Position Extérieure Globale De La Tunisie* (Tunisie: Décembre 2019), p. 24.

⁴⁴ "Annual Report 2017," *Central Bank of Tunisia*, accessed on 16/4/2022, at: <http://bit.ly/3JJXuvw>

⁴⁵ "Annual Report 2019," *Central Bank of Tunisia*, accessed on 16/4/2022, at: <https://bit.ly/3Ry1wcb>

⁴⁶ "Tunisians of the World are a virtual platform for Tunisians abroad," *Republic of Tunisia, Ministry of Social Affairs, National Observatory for Migration*, accessed on 20/6/2022, at: <http://bit.ly/3Y8N1XX>

⁴⁷ Adel Washani, "al-Māl al-Muhājir fī Tūnis wa Imkānāt Taf 'ilihi fī Tahqīq al-Tanmiya: al-Furṣa al-Ḍā'i'a," *al-Mustaqbal al-Arabi*, no. 475 (September 2018).

be developmentally impactful in local communities. Add to this the fact that female Tunisians living abroad are less willing to invest in Tunisia than their male counterparts. This willingness is greatest among first generation migrants – that is, those born in the country of origin – who transfer funds home most regularly.⁴⁸

First generation migrants exhibit a powerful bond to their cities of origin, which is expressed through their determination to transfer all the money they have accumulated in the host country to their home communities. For these older migrants, who have a powerful desire to return home, migration does not reflect a negative emotional stance towards their country of origin. On the contrary, it is simply a strategy for improving their situation, a change of course in life which, as noted earlier, is marked by a profoundly communal dimension that involves the desire to support and motivate other family members.

One older, first generation migrant gave clear expression to this line of thought, saying:

I know my children are more inclined to stay abroad, especially with the deterioration of the security, economic, and political conditions back home. As for me, though, I didn't emigrate to stay indefinitely. Rather, I did it in order to achieve in my own country and my hometown what I couldn't do here. I haven't given up the idea of going home, and I've made a point of transferring the money I've made from my job here back to Tunisia on a regular basis. I'm not trying to become a capitalist or get rich. Therefore, I am not inclined to invest in any economic project that might fail, causing me to lose the savings I worked so hard to build up. I've renovated my house and added two floors that I've put up for rent so that, when my children decide to come back some day, they'll have a home ready for them to live in. And that's enough for me.⁴⁹

2. Reading the Developmental Impact of Remittances: The Predominance of the Social Dimension

There is no direct relationship between the volume of financial transfers to local communities and the creation of a dynamic local development capable of improving the economic status of local communities.⁵⁰ The capacity of remittances, or migrants' financial capital (which, according to a study carried out by the Central Bank of Tunisia in cooperation with the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), came to 9 percent of the gross national income in 2020)⁵¹ to bring about change within their local urban communities is not determined by the volume of cash transfers despite their importance; rather, it is determined primarily by how and where these funds are invested and the developmental roles they can play. In order to strengthen the socio-developmental dimension of migration and the link between migrant remittances and the development of communities of origin, it will be necessary to dismantle the structure of migration. The developmental impact of migration returns, or what might be termed the migration dynamic, is strongly affected by the pattern of migration, the strength or weakness of the qualified labour force, and/or the loss of highly trained and qualified competencies through brain drain.

When migrants return to their communities of origin equipped with money, experience, and training, this gives them a broader impact on migration's developmental yield, as it will be deeper and more effective than that of poorly qualified, unqualified, and/or illegal migrants. This is because the developmental outcomes of migration vary for communities of origin in the transition from mass migration to selective migration, that is, from the migration of a poorly qualified or unqualified labour force which has entered

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ A personal interview on 8/6/2020 with S. M., a 60-year-old man who spent 35 years in France. After returning permanently to Tunisia some time ago, he settled in the capital city's new Ibn Khaldun neighbourhood of the Omrane Supérieur district, and made great improvements to his residence.

⁵⁰ Cheikh Samba Wade & Aboubacry Wade, "La migration, facteur urbanisant et de développement socio territorial dans la vallée du fleuve Sénégal," *Études caribéennes* (Avril-Août 2018), pp. 39-40.

⁵¹ "Important figures on remittances of Tunisians abroad," *African Manager*, 5/27/2021, accessed on 4/12/2022, at: <https://bit.ly/3632r00>

the host community through informal routes, to migration which is subject to the supervision, guidance, and follow-up of national structures concerned with regulating the migration process and monitoring working conditions abroad.

On the macro-developmental level, the capacity of migration to act as a developmental catalyst⁵² is determined by the ways in which the state uses financial transfers and the social, financial, and cognitive capital accumulated by migrants residing abroad for at least 5 to 10 years⁵³ to launching development projects that absorb the labour force, promote local development, minimize regional disparities, reduce the general deficit, and so on. In order to do this, however, the state must have a strategic vision which includes the implementation of programs to mobilize the material and human potential of Tunisians abroad.

On the micro-developmental level, the developmental dynamic of migration is affected by migrants' destinations and the composition of migration (particularly in terms of competence and qualification). Moreover, the material capital with an economic and developmental impact in urban spaces is determined not only by direct financial transfers, but also by the social capital which migrants accumulate throughout their experience as migrants – that is, patterns of behaviour, the formation of relationships with the worlds of money and culture, and the creation of projects and social connections⁵⁴ with tangible applications to developmental action and change in cities of origin.⁵⁵ The effectiveness of migrants' remittances and their developmental dynamics in the urban spaces from which they came will vary according to the pattern and composition of migration in the sense that it is deeply affected by the quality of migrants, that is to say, their competencies, qualifications,⁵⁶ their ability to link strong relationships within the host country with financial and economic circles or scientific, research, economic or development institutions which can open up real opportunities to develop the urban spaces in the country of origin by, for example, spearheading projects that respond to the need to combat poverty, reduce unemployment and build infrastructure.

Thus, the developmental dynamic of the financial returns of migration is affected by migrants' ability to integrate in their country of residence, since it is this ability which will enable them to bridge their home culture with the host culture, thereby creating social and cultural capital that imbues physical capital with a depth that will facilitate change in their communities of origin. Migrants' ability to develop their urban space is determined to some extent by their levels of integration and involvement in the intellectual, scientific and economic life of the host community, and by their pursuit of professional training and the development of the skills they acquire during their time in the host society.⁵⁷ However, migrants'⁵⁸ capacity for integration is in turn greatly affected by the competencies and qualifications they bring from their country of origin, which guarantee them a better position within the host society, facilitate their integration into the labour market, and enable them to benefit more fully from the migration experience. There is a strong reciprocity between the status of migrants in their community of origin and their capacity for integration in the host society which plays a major role in determining the developmental impact of migration in the community of origin and the extent to which migrants emerge as local developmental actors. However, the impact of Tunisian migrants as local developmental actors may be diminished by their geographical distribution, as

⁵² Nations Unies, *Migrations internationales et développement*, Rapport du Secrétaire général (New York: 2006), pp. 50-54.

⁵³ Ibid., A/60/871, p. 69.

⁵⁴ Peggy Levitt, "Social Remittances: A Conceptual Tool for Understanding Migration and Development," *Working Paper Series*, no. 96. 04, Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies, Cambridge, 1996.

⁵⁵ Nesrine Amina Benhaddad & Nacer-eddine Hammouda, "Contribution des migrants de retour au développement de leurs pays d'origine. Étude comparative entre les pays du Maghreb: l'Algérie, la Tunisie et le Maroc," *Insaniyat*, no. 69-70 (Juillet-Décembre 2015), pp. 83-110.

⁵⁶ Denis Drechsler & Jason Gagnon, "Les migrations, une source de développement à exploiter," *Annuaire suisse de politique de développement*, no. 27-2 (2008), p. 84, mise en ligne le 19/3/2010, accessed on 27/9/2020, at: <https://bit.ly/3DKyh05>

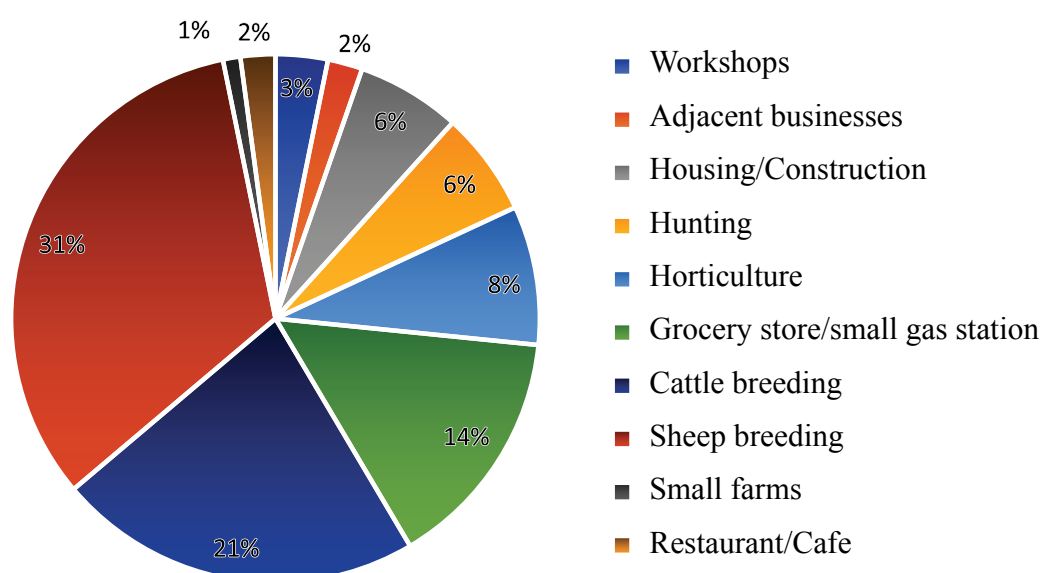
⁵⁷ Benhaddad & Hammouda, p. 95.

⁵⁸ Ducheny Marie, Andrea Rea & Maryse Tripiet, "Sociologie de l'immigration (collection "Repères"), 2003," *Les Annales de la recherche urbaine*, no. 96 (2004), pp. 170-171.

well as the variable sectoral distribution of their investments, either directly upon their permanent return home, or through the influence of the family that receives their remittances and implements their investment strategies on their behalf.

The 2015 reports of the International Organization for Migration regarding the locations where returning Tunisians have invested their material capital in development projects reveal a disparate geographical and sectoral distribution for such investment. The city of Sfax in south-eastern Tunisia, for example, illustrates the pyramid of differential distribution, as is clear from the number of small projects that were carried out there as compared with other regions. Furthermore, of the 310 Tunisian migrants who returned home for good in 2015, 274 (88.38 percent) invested their financial returns in starting up small individual or group projects. One notes from this study that 52 percent of the returnees benefiting from this programme invested in the agricultural sector, especially sheep and cattle breeding,⁵⁹ which employed a number of local workers, whether family members or unemployed local residents. Meanwhile 18 percent of the projects formed part of the so-called proximity economy involving businesses attached to a personal or family residence (cafes, grocery stores, small gas stations, etc.).

Figure (4)
Percentage of Micro-Enterprises According to Activity



Source: L'Organisation internationale pour les migrations (OIM), "Projets de retour... Projets d'avenir," BROCHURE 31 mai 2016, p. 47, accessed on 21/6/2022, at: <https://tunisia.iom.int/fr/search>

However, the general feature revealed by the reports of the National Organization for Migration in Tunisia,⁶⁰ the National Immigration Observatory, and the latest census conducted by the National Institute of Statistics⁶¹ is that Tunisian migrants do not generally see themselves as development actors within their communities of origin. This is clear given the fact that few migrant families expressed the intention to invest in projects with a developmental yield or impact, the vast majority of them using their children's remittances to cover the family's day-to-day necessities. This is consistent with the findings of the 2020 National Immigration Observatory study, according to which 55.67 percent of the social reasons

⁵⁹ Organisation Internationale pour les Migrations, *Aide au Retour Volontaire et à la Réintégration de Suisse en Tunisie* (2015), accessed on 20/6/2022, at: <https://bit.ly/3y5XwHR>

⁶⁰ United Nations, International Organization for Migration, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, *The State of International Migration Report 2019*.

⁶¹ "General Population and Housing Census 2014."

for migration had to do with improving the status of the family,⁶² while many respondents stated that a significant percentage of their transfers to their families during their stay abroad were intended to cover health expenses (surgical operations or treatment in private clinics); pay tuition (financing siblings' or children's postgraduate studies abroad or at private universities inside the country); or enable the family to make improvements or expansions to their home. In many cases personally observed within the urban spaces where migrant families were interviewed, the money was used to restore or rebuild the façade of the house, replacing the traditional with the modern, the old with the new, and the simple with something more architecturally artistic or aesthetically pleasing.

The statements of respondents in the cases studied reveal that Tunisian migrants believe that helping family is a duty as long as they are employed and settled abroad. As for when they return home or plan such a return, buying or building a house is their main preoccupation, linked as it is to the idea of securing comfortable and suitable housing upon their final return or upon reaching retirement age. This is consistent with the 2011 TIDO study on expatriate Tunisians' contribution to Tunisia's economic and social development. Of the sample studied, 39.7 percent spent their financial transfers, which were predicted by official channels to come to 5 percent of the GNP in 2014,⁶³ then to decline to 4.7 percent of the GNP in 2017 (\$1.89 billion, or the equivalent of 233 percent of foreign direct investment),⁶⁴ on the purchase or construction of housing.

Cities of origin are generally the place where returning migrants tend to build or buy a home. Three-quarters of returning Tunisian migrants (77.4 percent) prefer, and are even determined, to buy or build a house in the neighbourhood in which they have previously rented a residence, or as part of the family home. In so doing, they seek to translate an experience of social success into a material act that repositions them within the structures of their social milieu.⁶⁵ The architectural improvements or expansions made possible by the capital migrants have sent or brought back with them upon their return have symbolic dimensions, since they demonstrate their improved standard of living to the surrounding community. Given the returning migrants' new perception of themselves and their place in society, this material reality thus becomes a semiotic text of sorts, the purpose of which is to affirm a social bond and a post-migration shift in social status that will be recognized by the community of origin.

The keenness to renovate or enlarge the façade of one's home in a way that communicates a change in one's material capacities and in the social bond to the urban space to which the migrant has returned confirms the link we have hypothesized between migration and urban change within cities of origin, since Tunisian migrants' development-related initiatives are dominated by the urban and architectural dimension. Tunisians' investment of income in the host society lacks a profit rationale, as the vast majority of Tunisian migrants' expenditures are absorbed by the real estate sector, which has profoundly impacted the urban dimension of local communities' development since the 1970s.⁶⁶ Furthermore, what we have observed in the cases we have studied can be generalized to the behaviour of other Tunisian migrants, who likewise demonstrate the desire to show off their material and social status by spending most of their accumulated capital in unproductive spheres by, for example, acquiring luxury cars, rebuilding, expanding, or modernizing the family home, or purchasing a new house in their home neighbourhood.

⁶² Hechmi Jelassi, Mohammed Ridha Ben Amor & Gabriella Sanchez, *Les sources d'information et les leviers de motivation pour la migration régulière et irrégulière depuis La Tunisie*, L'Observatoire national de la migration (ONM) et L'Organisation internationale pour les migrations (OIM) (Tunisie: 2020), accessed on 20/6/2022, at: <https://bit.ly/3HCKFo7>

⁶³ Chokri Arfa, "Aspects socio-économiques, mutations et enjeux des migrations en Tunisie," in: *Actes de la deuxième Ecole d'Eté sur la Migration*, p. 45.

⁶⁴ United Nations, International Organization for Migration, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, *State of International Migration Report 2019*.

⁶⁵ Bouchoucha, Fourati & Zekri, p. 19.

⁶⁶ Ma Mung Emmanuel, "L'impact des transferts migratoires dans la ville de M'saken (Tunisie)," *Revue européenne des migrations internationales*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Septembre 1986).

However, some in the study sample viewed their new (post-immigration) social status as incompatible with the urban space from which they came. This perception has created a dynamic of urban expansion in cities marked by the emergence of new, better-equipped neighbourhoods, most of whose real estate owners are from the upper middle class and returning migrants, such as in the Mahres district of the state of Sfax, for example, in the city of Manzil Kamel in the state of Monastir, and the neighbourhoods of Ibn Khaldun (the focus of our study), Tahrir, Tadamon, and Douar Hicher in Greater Tunis.

The absence of an entrepreneurial spirit on the part of Tunisian migrants is evident in the fact that they rarely invest their money in economic enterprises,⁶⁷ and that they do not search for material profits through the purchase of homes during their stay abroad. Rather, their main purpose in purchasing housing in the cities of origin is to achieve a sense of social safety,⁶⁸ which is associated in their minds with securing housing upon their final return, or upon reaching retirement age and the end of their work contracts in the host countries. Another aim is to highlight their new social status as proof of their success abroad, and as a model of social success in their family or community milieu. An older migrant, even one who did not spend a long time abroad, might say, for example,

Thank God, I was able after a long time abroad to build this house and secure housing for my two sons, which will at least lighten their burden when they want to start families in the future. Nowadays, Tunisian employees can't reconcile the costs of getting married, starting a family, and building a foundation for their lives. Frankly, I'm not prepared to risk what I earned by the sweat of my brow and a long exile on launching some enterprise that might or might not succeed. But building a house for my children comforts me psychologically, and makes me feel I've given them something that will provide them with shelter.⁶⁹

Although the economic factor fuels and justifies the individual or familial decision to migrate, it seems to do little to encourage the investment of the material returns of migration in the country of origin, be it on the part of central governments, or the local groups and communities from which the migrants came. According to the National Institute of Statistics, the poorest and least developed rural areas, which represent more than half of the locations from which Tunisian migrants originate, have failed to attract investment by these migrants in large or medium-sized agricultural enterprises, or in the establishment of economic institutions capable of absorbing some of the country's many unemployed, reorganizing the job market, and bringing down the high poverty rates within these regions (the urban margins, and the interior regions in the centre and south of the country in particular).

As mentioned above, migrants conscientiously transfer money to their families on a regular basis throughout their stay abroad: first, in order to help them cover daily expenses related to food, clothing, medical care, and schooling, and second, to help them improve or expand their homes or build new ones. The capital accumulated throughout the migrants' stay abroad is spent less on the production of added value and the maximization of capital, and more on consumables (food, clothing, and medication), or fixed assets (real estate). Only 4.7 percent of the capital that came from Tunisian migrants in 2011 was invested in contracting and projects, and the investments that were made tended to be cautious, as evidenced by the launching of small and micro enterprises that relied primarily on family capital and family management.

⁶⁷ According to the TIDO 2011 study, of the funds transferred to families in their country of origin, only 4.4 percent are invested in economic enterprises. See: Bouchoucha, Fourati & Zekri.

⁶⁸ Mohamed Khachani, *Dialogue Sur La Coopération Migratoire En Méditerranée Occidentale*, document de synthèse, Association Marocaine d'Etudes et de Recherches sur les Migrations (Rabat, Maroc: 2002), pp. 7-8.

⁶⁹ A personal interview conducted in Ibn Khaldun neighbourhood of the Omrane Supérieur district on 10/1/2020 with B. A., a 45-year-old teacher who spent ten years in an Arab Gulf country.

According to a study done by the North Africa Office of the United Nations, this type of economic establishment (the economy of proximity) constituted 98.8 percent of the contracting concluded in 2011.⁷⁰

According to a study conducted by the National Agency for Employment and Self-employment (ANETI)⁷¹ on the economic yield of investments by Tunisians returning from France between 2011-2015 based on a sample of 160 returnees, economic enterprises had a very weak operational capacity, with a single project providing no more than a single job in addition to that of its founder. The findings of this study were consistent with those of other studies it relied on, as well as the field notes recorded in the Ibn Khaldun neighbourhood from interviews with families who had lived abroad for many years before deciding to return to their city of origin, and others who were still settled abroad and were diligently transferring their earnings to their families at home. Results reaffirmed the extreme caution that marks Tunisian migrants' investment behaviour and their unwillingness to launch medium-size or large projects. Similarly, the findings confirmed the family's powerful influence over both the decision to migrate and how to allocate migrants' remittances and the capital they accumulate and bring home.⁷²

As noted earlier, Tunisians returning from abroad who were included in this study expressed apprehension⁷³ about taking on an economic risk by investing all their financial returns in launching medium or large projects, fearing potential loss or the complexities of the investment procedures that would be required by Tunisian law. At the same time, their behaviour revealed a specific perception of their image as developmental actors, and their awareness of the state and local community's expectations of them as owners of capital from abroad capable of creating a development dynamic in the residential area, whether in its narrower sense (the neighbourhood or city) or its broader sense (the region and the country). At the same time, most migrants were deterred from engaging in investment by their concern to secure their own families, which led them to prioritize building, acquiring, or expanding their home and purchasing a car that would reflect their newly acquired affluence. The migrants we interviewed in various urban settings viewed their home and their car as visible measures of their social status, and they craved the reactions of those around them in their neighbourhood or city.

The powerful attraction held by the real estate sector for migrants thinking of investing their financial returns is not specific to the study population. Rather, this feature has likewise been observed in numerous Moroccan studies of the complex relationship between migration and development. In a study conducted by the National Institute of Statistics and Applied Economics in Rabat (l'INSEA),⁷⁴ the real estate sector was the number one destination for Moroccans' capital investments. Similarly, a Tunisian study on the investments of returning migrants showed that the construction sector accounted for a full 44.6 percent of such investments and real estate accounted for 29.8 per cent, as compared with only 6.7 percent for business enterprises.⁷⁵ Other studies have revealed a similar trend among Moroccan migrants with respect to the investment of their financial returns in their communities of origin, in that more than half of their financial returns went to meet the family's needs, and about a third on building or acquiring a home.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ Bouchoucha, Fourati & Zekri, p. 18.

⁷¹ "Migration De Retour Et Réinsertion En Tunisie Enjeux, Potentiels Et Role De L'Accompagnement," Actes Du Séminaire, Tunis, 30-31/3/ 2017, L'Office français de l'immigration et de l'intégration (OFII), p. 16.

⁷² In the area that was studied, nearly a third (31.9 percent) of the adults cited housing as a major reason for their decision to emigrate in 2014 (5,363 immigrants). See: "General Population and Housing Census 2014."

⁷³ This cautious behavior with respect to spending the financial returns of migration has been observed definitively among two particular groups: (1) retired immigrants, that is, those who have a pension sufficient to meet their basic needs, and who therefore direct most of their income into meeting their children's needs, securing adequate housing, and acquiring their own vehicle, and (2) young people who consider postponing their final return home as a justification for spending most of their income on improving the family's housing and living conditions and meeting its needs for health care, education, and housing.

⁷⁴ Bachir Hamdouch et al. *Les Marocains résidant à l'étranger: Une enquête socio-économique* (Rabat: Imprimerie El Maarif El Jadida, 2000).

⁷⁵ Republic of Tunisia, Ministry of Social Affairs, National Observatory for Migration, "International Migration in Numbers Based on the National Survey of International Migration in Tunisia," accessed on 20/6/2022, at: <https://bit.ly/3n4M0pL>

⁷⁶ Jean Pierre Cassarino, *Migrants de Retour au Magreb, Réintégration et Enjeux de Développement*, l'Union Européenne et l'Institut Universitaire Européen (Florence, Italie: 2007).

Conclusion

The state undoubtedly bears a major responsibility for the poor developmental yield of immigration revenues given the absence, or inadequacy, of special programs to guide migrants and encourage them to invest their financial transfers in development projects with high economic and developmental returns that will help solve the problems of poverty and unemployment while developing local economic sectors that reflect the nature of the region and its sociological composition. In addition to improving the balance of payments and increasing the value of national savings, the value of financial transfers from Tunisian migrants also involves their transformation into capital that produces added value, and a national, regional and local development tool that touches many aspects of economic life.

Migration is an indicator of the level of development in the country of origin. Its expansion points to the inability of the state and its development approach to maintain its skilled and unskilled human capital due to its lack of developmental solutions to the problems of unemployment and poverty and the absence of scientific, professional, and operational prospects capable of meeting the aspirations and expectations of an educated and qualified work force. At the same time, migration has become one of the most important underpinnings of the development strategies of countries of origin due to the high flows of remittances which they provide, and which have prospects for development dynamics if governments provide proper support for returning migrants and guide them in such a way as to turn them into important development actors.

This study of the developmental impact of spending the financial capital transferred to local communities of origin does not support the conclusion that Tunisian immigration is a dynamic of development. This is due to the predominance of non-productive consumerism related to covering the costs of medical treatment, education, food, and clothing, and to the relative unlikelihood of launching medium and large development enterprises, whether rural or urban, capable of absorbing some of the unemployed local labour force, creating economic dynamism, or creating new markets. The vast majority of the projects that absorb immigration revenues fall under the category of the economy of proximity, which represents an extension of the dominance of the family, whether in the form of managing these small projects or in the fact that the family home is the space in which these projects are carried out (grocery stores, shops selling clothes, perfumes, or home accessories, small gas stations, etc.).

Migration must therefore be transformed into a developmental dynamic, especially within migrants' local communities of origin. State institutions directly concerned with monitoring the conditions of Tunisian migrants, both those living abroad and those returning home on a permanent basis, need to intervene by supporting and guiding the investment of migrants' financial returns, and by providing technical, legal and financial assistance to direct these investments into the economic sectors most capable of absorbing this capital, thereby developing and integrating it into the economic cycle and into the development process both in the country as a whole, and within local communities. In this context, the 2021 economic balance released by the Tunisian Ministry of Economy, Finance and Investment Support included⁷⁷ a mechanism entitled "Our Tunisia for Integration" to be supervised by the Office of Tunisians Abroad. The balance also included the launch of the National Survey of International Migration in Tunisia (HIMS Tunisia), which was completed June/July 2020 and March 2021 in cooperation with the National Institute of Statistics and the National Immigration Observatory, which provides accurate and up-to-date statistical data related to various aspects of outgoing and incoming Tunisian migration, particularly the contribution of Tunisian migration to development, and where and how returning migrants are investing their transferred funds.

⁷⁷ Republic of Tunisia, Ministry of Economy, Finance and Investment Support, *Economic Balance for the Year 2021* (October 2020), pp. 152-153.

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