Exploring Black African Women's Experiences of Vulnerability and Resistance on the Move: An Analysis of Women's Stories

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Abstract

In the last two decades of the twenty-first century, the world has experienced numerous crises caused by environmental disasters, migratory movements, and pandemics. These disasters impact the population unequally due to differences in vulnerability, exposure, and capacity. Migrants and women are among the groups most affected by disasters, with women being at higher risk when combined with migration and displacement. Despite the large amount of evidence that studies their vulnerability separately, there is a lack of research on the vulnerability of Sub-Saharan migrant women in Morocco. For years, the Moroccan print media has focused on the gender crossing of borders and the challenges these women confront. This article aims to draw attention to the experiences of black Sub-Saharan women migrants in various camps and cities in Morocco as their host country. It also shows how these women produce and maintain their gender roles and identities even in contemporary migratory movements. Through analysing media reports and conducting a fieldwork study, we attempt to highlight women's experiences that range from resistance to marginalization.

Keywords: Vulnerability; marginalization; experiences; Morocco; sub-saharan women; migrants; newspapers

Introduction

There has been growing interest in migration from Sub-Saharan countries to Morocco. International scholars and researchers have approached the issue from different interdisciplinary perspectives, including Gazzotti, Tysczler, Sebastian, Freedman, Nattar, Stock, and De Haas. Moroccan scholars, such as Alioua, Berriane and Aderghal, Belhorma, and Ennaji, have also contributed to the literature. The issue has been discussed and examined through sociologists, anthropologists, and feminist lenses. International migration today is complex, mainly due to the mixed migratory flows, where women make up slightly less than half of the worldwide migrants (International Migration Report, 2017).

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A lot of international reports and media coverage have brought into light images of boats full of women joining other migrants seeking a better life. Some have focused on their miserable journey and the sufferings women migrants experience during their journey to the Mediterranean (MSF, 2013). Others have focused on the factors beyond the feminization of international migration. In this context, In the past, political and social discussions about migration often treated it as a gender-neutral phenomenon (Ferrant, 2014). Studies on international migration have largely portrayed women as passive participants in the process (Morokvasic, 2014). Migration is a process that affects men and women differently. When we say that a process or outcome is gendered, it means that gender plays a crucial role in shaping social relations. Gender is reflected in societal expectations of how women and men should behave and what roles they should play. It is also evident in the practices and beliefs of various institutions, such as the economy, politics, society, and culture, that distinguish between men and women. This means that seemingly gender-neutral aspects of migration, such as leaving one's country, entering another, or experiences in the destination country, are, in fact, influenced by gender and produce different outcomes for men and women. Therefore, migration is gendered implies gender inequalities at exit, entry, and in experiences. (Boyd, 2004).

The invisibility of women in the migration process is linked to their status in traditional societies, which tends to confine them to the private sphere and portray them as economically passive and socially dependent (Cortes, 2016). However, due to the global feminization of labour and the economic crisis in which the division of labour is gendered, women have become central to the migration process. They actively seek to maintain their lives and support their families. According to Kawar (2004), migration "offers women new opportunities and financial independence in addition to improved status within their homes and communities" (p. 73). However, female migration is viewed negatively, mainly when a woman migrates alone. Due to the decision to migrate, they face several difficulties, such as unrealistic expectations, lack of proper information on the migration process and procedures, and employment opportunities (Kawar, 2004). Women are forced to balance the economic needs of their families while avoiding any disruption to the established social order out of fear of social stigma or negative reputation.

The traditional allocation of the primary household and educational responsibilities to women within the family unit is often an obstacle to the equal participation of both parents in family duties, which could otherwise partially mitigate the negative impact of female migration on the whole family. Moreover, this traditional vision contributes to discrimination against women's capacity for professional and human development.

Various and complicated are the obstacles which Sub-Saharan women migrants have faced either in their unbearable journey or while trying to cross the fences. Doctor without Borders' (MSF) reports illustrate the painful journey across the large Saharan desert. Being at the mercy of smugglers, many experience physical violence, especially women who are raped frequently and unable to fend for themselves. Women face further abuse and sexual violence on their journey northward by "a large number of armed gangs, composed not only of locals but also other migrants, exploit the vulnerability and isolation of the migrant population with the apparent intervention by local police." (MSF, 2013) Therefore, many female migrants fall pregnant during their journey.

These obstacles have obliged a large number of female migrants to consider Morocco as the second-best option. They are scattered in big cities and camps outside the fences of Ceuta and Melilla. Many have been blocked in Morocco as the passage to Europe has become more dangerous and expensive. In addition, the new migration policy has encouraged some migrants of illegal status to settle down and start living in Morocco instead of heading towards the 'Eldorado' as the future in some European countries looked dim due to the coronavirus. (Dumpis, 2022). As a result, the influx number of 'black' African female migrants has been revealed through print media. Many articles and reports discussed the causes of the increasing number of female transit migrants in Morocco. Because of their illegal residence, some highlighted the 'invasion' of 'black' females in the streets and public spaces in big cities. In contrast, others have shown hostile interactions between migrants and locals in selected areas.

The present article explores the experiences of black Sub-Saharan women migrants in various camps and cities in Morocco, their host country. It also shows how these women produce and maintain their gender roles and identities even in contemporary migratory movements. By analyzing media reports and conducting an ethnographic study, we highlight women's experiences, ranging from resistance to marginalization.

Migratory Reforms in Morocco: making sense and space for Sub-Saharan women

Morocco had been primarily an emigration country throughout the twentieth century. However, introducing new migratory patterns in the 1990s - irregular and transit migration - strained Morocco's previously homogeneous migration profile, necessitating policy change and providing an opportunity to boost the diplomatic significance of migration issues (Jacobs, 2019). Due to being a transit and a destination, Moroccan authorities have taken the first radical step to deal with those coming flows of irregular migration from Sub-Saharan countries by enacting "Law n°02-03 relative to the entry and stay of foreigners in Morocco and to irregular emigration and immigration". Factors that motivated and pushed the country to form its migratory system include European pressure as one of the main factors within Morocco's policy-making process. (Lahlou, 2021; Khachani, 2010) Although Europe played an unquestionable impact in Morocco's policy-making process, this Eurocentric perspective ignores Morocco's political sovereignty. It distorts the multidimensional geopolitical backdrop in which Moroccan authorities developed their policies (Belguendouz, 2009).

In November 2003, in response to the initial reaction of the rising number of Sub-Saharan migrants, Morocco passed the security-focused Law No. 02-03, which governs the admission and presence of foreigners within Moroccan territory. Although the legislation established entrance and residence regulations for foreigners, reinforced anti-illegal migration measures, and criminalised human trafficking, it also gave migrants some rights. This newest chapter in Morocco's migration history reflects broader regional migration and policy issues while prompting the Moroccan government to reconsider what happens to migrants who stay. As Moroccan interest in Sub-Saharan Africa grows, the government has desired to implement integration policies and measures safeguarding migrants' rights.

In mid-March 2003, a national civil society network was formed to ensure the success of a radical reform of the draft law n°02-03, which included removing its pure security aspects and integrating a fundamental way of the human rights dimension. However, it must be recognized that mobilization and action were primarily focused on the law on terrorism. The

political agenda-setting was a strategic decision to improve the country's political weight in the region, resulting from the confluence of a particular regional environment, changing migratory flows, and new national priorities. The socio-political agenda-setting of irregular migration is significant, and external intervening factors and EU politics in this realm must be considered when tackling Morocco's internal dynamics and public policies.

The convergence of these two trends – rising Sub-Saharan migration to Morocco and the 'illegalisation' of the seasonal labour movement to Europe – dramatically transformed Morocco's migratory profile: Morocco progressed from being a traditional emigration nation during the twentieth century to a transit country (Abourabi, 2022). Indeed, Morocco's geopolitical role has been impacted by this dramatic shift in migration policy. Its choice to determine the agenda has been seen as a "bowing to European demands." In its endeavour to adopt "remote border controls," the EU pressured Morocco to cooperate on irregular migration. Despite this, the European variable alone does not provide a complete picture of Morocco's policy-making process. The decision to set the agenda was not merely a reaction to mounting pressure from the north but also a calculated move (Natter, 2014; Bendra, 2019). As a result, this dramatic change in the foreign policy in relation to immigration was obvious in the 2013 migration policy reform, which was due to socio-political changes in Africa and Europe as well. Was the new migration policy another step towards making sense and space for the 'African other' to integrate the growing of Sub-Saharan diaspora in Morocco or another political diplomacy phase for a more assertive role in Africa?

As more Sub-Saharan African migrants become trapped, those who are unwilling or unable to return to their home countries and those who have failed to cross European borders have become a common sight in many Moroccan cities, the majority of whom live in irregular status. Because of the growing number of Sub-Saharan African migrants in Morocco, media attention has focused on escalating tensions and violence between migrants and Moroccans. In 2013, King Mohamed VI announced a comprehensive development framework, dubbed the New Migration Policy (NPM for its French name, Nouvelle Politique Migratoire), in response to reports from civil society and organisations such as the National Human Rights Council about the dire conditions in which many migrants were living (El Ghazouani, 2019).

In the speech addressed to participants in the 4th EU-Africa summit, HM King Mohammed VI highlights the challenges arising from migration and calls for collective, balanced and, above all, humanistic responses. In recent years, Morocco has become a

> destination for many migrants from Africa. As a duty of solidarity and faithful to its tradition of hospitality and hosting, Morocco has just adopted a new migration policy, pioneering in the region, which allows migrants to enjoy the fullness of their legitimate rights.[2]

Morocco's concentration on regularisation coincides with Algeria's expulsion of thousands of migrants or forcing them to trek into the Sahara, giving the Moroccan government an advantage over its Algerian competitor in the African Union. "Morocco's commitment to advocating for Africa's causes and interests is not new today; rather, it is an immutable orientation that we inherited from our forefathers, and which we continue to reinforce with

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[2] Mohammed VI (2014, April 3rd). Discours de SM le Roi adressé aux participants au 4ème sommet Afrique-Union Européenne à Bruxelles. Retrieved from https://www.maroc.ma/fr/discours-royaux/discours-de-sm-le-roi-adresse-aux-participants-au-4eme-sommet-afrique-union

confidence and pride," King Mohammed VI said in 2018, following Morocco's re-accession to the African Union. Morocco announced the National Strategy on Immigration and Asylum in 2015, hoping to realign and enhance its ties with Sub-Saharan African nations. The goal was to replace the 2003 legislation with new laws and processes to integrate into Moroccan society. This strategy aims to ensure that migrants have access to fundamental services, including education, health care, and job placement. This declaration was a watershed moment in Morocco's response to illegal immigration, mainly from Sub-Saharan Africa. Regularisation efforts and integration initiatives implemented after 2013 were important to Morocco's worldwide 'image polishing' campaign, highlighting the Moroccan state's progressive nature. As Natter indicates:

> The reform was instrumental for Morocco's 'geopolitical rebordering, i.e. the shifting of Morocco's position on the (imaginary and symbolic) world map that splits the world into developing and developed, democratic and autocratic countries. Indeed, the 2013 reform placed Morocco discursively close to developed, democratic receiving countries (Natter, 2021: 857)

Although this framing misses the fact that Morocco is still primarily an emigration nation, it allowed Morocco to present itself as a member of the 'receiving country family,' a group of countries marked by high levels of development, democracy, and modernity (at least in people's perceptions). Morocco will continue implementing more rules for absorbing Sub-Saharan migrants as long as their home nations continue to help it in the Sahara struggle. NGOs and international organisations, on the other hand, claim that the changes have done nothing to reduce migrants' vulnerability within the country. (El Ghazouani, ibid)

What impacts and changes have touched the Sub-Saharan migrants and refugees, mainly women and children? Despite significant flaws in lawmaking and implementation, it is evident that the 2013 reform has ushered in a new era in Moroccan immigration politics in terms of actors, interests, and power dynamics. The king, the National Council on Human Rights (CNDH), and its president, Driss El Yazami, have entered the scene as significant protagonists in Morocco's immigration reform. To make space and sense for those migrants, Natter illustrates the significant influence the 2013 shift has played. First, nearly 50,000 irregular migrants received legal status due to two amnesties implemented in 2014 and 2017. Moroccan pro-migrant Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), as well as migrant associations, were legalised. Morocco's institutional frameworks on immigration were also modified as part of the reform: the Ministry in Charge of Moroccans Residing Abroad was renamed the Ministry in Charge of Moroccans Residing Abroad and Migration Affairs (MCMREAM), and its mandate was expanded to include immigration.

The Directorate for Migration Affairs was charged in April 2014 with developing a National Immigration and Asylum Strategy (MCMREAM 2014). The Ministry of Education opened public schools to migrant children, the Ministry of Health announced the construction of health insurance for regularised migrants and refugees, and the Ministry of Labor exempted regularised migrants from the labour market test following this plan. The human-rights-based approach will also be legally established in new legislation on immigration, asylum, and human trafficking, according to the announcement (Natter, 2021). However, more fieldwork should be done to determine whether these reforms have been stuck at the political level or have at least improved the physical security of the migrants. Undoubtedly, this project encourages

some migrants of illegal status to stay in Morocco rather than sneak into Europe. We must recognise that regularisation is a critical and the first step towards integration. Meanwhile, we cannot assume that through identity cards, foreigners and Sub-Saharan migrants, in particular, are welcomed by many Moroccans.

Apart from the two shifts in migration policy and their global praise, we would like to mention the benefits of the new migration reform on Sub-Saharan migrants. Many researchers have tackled the benefit of the state from this new migration reform; since the reform has become broad to the extent that includes migrants and foreigners living in Morocco. Alioua (2017), for example, have focused on the returns from the diaspora, mainly remittances. Alongside remittances, the diaspora is also a key driver of tourism and investment. Accordingly, this economic side is another main factor behind the new migration policy. Indeed, thanks to this reform, Morocco has gained global recognition for migration leadership; Morocco has achieved widespread acclaim and a growing reputation as a leader in migration issues. The country hosted the Global Compact for Migration Summit in December 2018 and co-led the Global Forum on Migration and Development. Biada (2019) highlights the regional influence of migration leadership – King Mohammed VI was appointed as the AU 'Champion' of Migration in 2017 and proposed an 'African Agenda for Migration' in 2018. However, few have written about the positive impact of this reform on Sub-Saharan migrants, questioning their social settlement in Morocco as a new host country.

An overview of the living conditions of Sub-Saharan migrants before the new migration reform may help in revealing the socio-economic settlement of migrants. Existing research has revealed long, fragmented and dangerous migrant journeys through Morocco, coercive border practices, poor living conditions, and lack of access to fundamental rights and deportation practices of the Moroccan state. (Collyer, 2010). Indeed, the challenging, long journeys of those migrants have been politicised by several actors inside and outside the countries, even by migrants themselves. Migrants' subjective experiences of suffering explain how migrant trips have become political journeys, in addition to the objective backdrop that criminalises irregular travel. In other words, the journeys to and through Morocco and settlement inside the country are frequently marked by rigorous regulations, difficult living conditions, and violent practices, all of which have sown the seeds of migrant mobilisation. (Ustubici, 2016) Migrants and CSOs working in the field emphasise that once they get to Oujda, they have restricted movement since the authorities tightly control the city centre and its environs. Police patrol the forest between Oujda and the Algerian border daily, raiding the informal communities, demolishing them, capturing some migrants, and driving others back across the border. Foreigners are not permitted to leave the city by train or bus without legal documentation, in addition to the forced practice of deportation to the border (Bachelet, 2014)

However, with its humanitarian intentions, the new reform has pushed many migrants to look for their long settlement in Morocco. In his article, K. Norman (2021) has illustrated the point of migration mobilisation in North Africa, comparing Egypt and Morocco. He assumes that migrants have been able to mobilise extensively in Morocco more than in Egypt, thanks to several factors. First, as migrants were compelled to remain in Morocco, a network of local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) stepped in to offer essential services. Simultaneously, migrants founded community-based organisations of their own (CBOs), such as the Conseil des Migrants Sub-Sahariens au Maroc (Council of Sub-Saharan

Migrants in Morocco) or the Collectif des Communautés Subsahariens au Maroc (Collective of Sub-Saharan Communities in Morocco). Some of these groups, after the death of several migrants in 2005 and a series of particular violent incidents, focused.

> "on providing services, but others took a more overtly political stance, advocating for migrant rights including the right to fair pay, access to health care, protection from detention and arrest, and the right to remain in the country." (Norman, 2021: 12)

In addition, the founding of GADEM (Groupe Antiraciste de Défense et d'Accompagnement des Étrangers et Migrants) in 2006, which had the explicit purpose of working for the rights of foreigners and migrants in Morocco, was attractive. GADEM, for example, created a 'Platform for Protection' in 2009, in collaboration with Caritas, La Fondation Orient-Occident, and other domestic and foreign NGOs, to assist in harmonising advocacy-focused organisations' requests. All those organisations contributed to the 2013 migration reform through civic mobilisation. Therefore, migrants have the sense of making space for their life settlement in Morocco through the help of those organisations and the rights provided by the new migration reform. A concrete example is the renovation of Its Souk of African Solidarity in Casablanca to provide opportunities for African migrants and women to open their business and get out of the economic marginalisation thanks to the help of Casablanca Council.

Overall, the specific socio-political changes in Africa and Europe have led to the 2013 migration policy reform in Morocco, the later aims at integrating and making sense of illegal migrants, mainly from Sub-Saharan countries with more attention on women and children. Despite the political purposes of the new reform, Morocco has been considered the only country from the South to develop a migratory system that deals with the African diaspora in the country. This overview has indicated the improvement in the living conditions of Sub-Saharan migrants through improving the physical security of the migrants hoping for more integration policies and measures to safeguard migrants' rights.

Literature Review

The situation of Sub-Saharan female migrants on the move to Morocco or while resettling in Morocco has attracted national and international scholars and researchers. Some have highlighted their difficulties and vulnerabilities during the migration process. Belhorma (2022), for example, provides a lens of women's marginalisation and stigmatisation in the migration process; they go through multiple forms of violence and suffering even in the transit country, Morocco in this case, due to the restrictive migration strategies. El Ghazouani (2021) indicates the gender-based violence of migrant female from Sub-Saharan countries in their country of origin; they have been subject to violent acts and vulnerability. While in Morocco, their socio-economic situation is not better than their country of origin, females undergo countless violations. They remain the victims of precarious conditions, such as living on the street and working in the informal sectors, where their rights are denied. Furthermore, sub-Saharan female immigration in Morocco remains largely absent from the new Moroccan migration policy.

In an attempt to examine the migration reform from a gender perspective, Alami Merrouni and Mechak (2019) read the policy reports published by the ministry in charge. They noticed that migrant women's access to public services is based on mainstreaming migratory policies

into existing governmental programs, policies and strategies. Nevertheless, specific action towards migrant women's related issues is remarkably present within social and humanitarian programs. They assume that the adoption of a gender-neutral integration policy leads to overshadowing migrant women's real needs and capacities and reinforces their double-vulnerable status, being a migrant and a woman (Alami Merrouni & Mechak, 2019).

Very few studies have drawn attention to the representation of sub-Saharan female migrants in Moroccan media; in our study (Dib & Sandy, 2022), we attempted to examine some newspaper's linguistic discourse concerning the representation of 'black' female migrants and xenophobia, making in some selected newspapers. In digital media, Oumlil (2023) looks at the self-representation of sub-Saharan female migrants in the digital public sphere, focusing on a YouTube page that uploads videos on migrant women's entrepreneurship or domestic violence.

Other studies draw attention to the humanitarian approach and violence near the borders; Tyszler (2021), for example, gives special attention to the embodied experiences of the border. Tyszler's contribution demonstrates how EU border externalisation provokes racialised and gendered vulnerability of people seeking mobility and notably reinforces gender-based violence against migrant women.

Studies examining sub-Saharan migration in Morocco from the nexus of gender are limited (Ait Ben Lmadani, 2018). Her assumption shows the importance of intra-African migration and its role in redefining the socially constructed space and the Moroccan national identity project. Stock (2012) has examined African migrant mothers and 'transit migration' in Morocco. Her study shows that women are actively producing and reproducing their gender roles and identities in order to increase access to social and physical mobility. Freedman (2012) wrote about sub-Saharan women migrants in Morocco; he traces the experience of female Sub-Saharan aiming to reach Europe through Morocco. His study has demonstrated the economic, physical, and social insecurities push factors. He calls upon strategic plans to combat gender-based violence to protect these female migrants on their way to Europe or while staying in Morocco.

The aforementioned studies have focussed on migration in terms of the integration process that migrants face in some cities, on a gendered interpretation of this sort of movement, and the violence they encounter while crossing the borders. However, this article aims to draw attention to the experiences of black Sub-Saharan women migrants in various camps and cities in Morocco as their host country. It also shows how these women produce and maintain their gender roles and identities even in contemporary migratory movements. The main objectives of this study are to analyse:

What specific forms of violence and suffering do Sub-Saharan female migrants in Morocco go through in the new nomadic places? What are the specific policy recommendations that can help address the gender-based violence experienced by migrant women in Morocco?

Methodology

Given the sensitive nature of the population under study, this research employs a mixed-methods approach that integrates qualitative field interviews with critical media discourse analysis. This dual method enhances understanding of both lived experiences and media framing of Sub-Saharan migrant women.

Field work and Interviews

Twelve qualitative interviews were conducted with migrant women residing in Fes and Tangier between December 2, 2023, and February 14, 2024. Interviews lasted 10–20 minutes and were held in informal locations such as streets and cafés. Due to limited access and the irregular legal status of participants, snowball sampling was used. Participants were introduced through community contacts and peers after confirming the academic aim of the study.

The interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process: familiarization, initial coding, theme identification, theme review, definition, and final reporting. Major themes included forced migration, gender-based violence, economic survival, and informal labor. The characteristics of the people who were interviewed are shown in *Table 1*.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of interviewed migrant women

Nationalities	Nigeria	75%	9
	Guinea Conakry	25%	3
AGE	18 – 25	25%	3
	25 – 30	50%	6
	30 – 40	25%	3
	40+	0	
Education Level	Primary	50%	6
	Secondary	25%	3
	High school	25%	3
	University	0	
	No studies	0	
Religion	Muslim	25%	3
	Christian	75%	9
	Non-religious	0	
Total	12		

Media Analysis

It's noteworthy that media outlets across the world often showcase stories and images of migrants crossing the Mediterranean. Scholars from various fields have taken a keen interest in the relationship between media and migration, a rapidly growing area of study. The process of migration itself relies heavily on media representation, sparking debates on citizenship and

belonging in many countries. Some European countries have responded with extreme hatred and violence, targeting foreign individuals.

In Morocco, migrant situations have received significant media attention, with numerous articles criticizing or denouncing the phenomenon. While research has been conducted on violence and gender at the borders and on the integration of Sub-Saharan migrants, little has been written about how print newspapers in Morocco represent the increasing number of migrants from Sub-Saharan countries.

Therefore, this study builds on these stories to examine the print media's verbal and visual portrayal of Sub-Saharan migration. It focuses on how female migrants narrate and reflect on their experiences of vulnerability and violence throughout their mobility and displacement. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study identifies dominant narratives, lexical choices, and visual framing of Sub-Saharan female migrants. Emphasis is placed on themes of victimhood, resistance, humanitarian framing, and institutional discourse. This approach contextualizes how print media shapes public perceptions of female migration.

A considerable number of lexical and visual elements are analyzed from the most widely read Moroccan newspapers: *Assabah*, *Almassae*, *Akhbar Alyaoum*, and *Alahdath Almaghrebia*.

Results and Discussion

In the context of the insecurity, political, and socio-economic crisis in some sub-Saharan countries, women are exposed to different types of risk and vulnerability. Despite the geographical distance and the risks entailed, sub-Saharan women do not hesitate to take to the road. They came from countries like Nigeria, Mali, Cameroon and Congo (AMERAM, 2009). The political context of sub-Saharan countries, the economic recession, and extreme poverty in which large sections of the population live are all factors that can account for the acceleration of migration in general. Before unveiling the results related to the Sub-Saharan female portrayal in media, it is worth mentioning that several studies show that women Sub-Saharans' active participation in migration is noticeably increasing even though they are still lagging behind their men counterparts. For example, The Moroccan Association of Studies and Research on Migrations' (AMERM) 2008 study shows that male migrants palpably outnumber female migrants regardless of the intended destination or the purpose; women migrants constitute (20.3%) compared to (79.7 %) of men migrants. Another informative and more recent study is conducted by Mourji et al. (2016); according to the study's findings, men migrants represent almost three quarters of the respondents. They represent (74.31%) compared to (25.69%) of women migrants. Regarding the invisibility of women migrants from Sub-Saharan countries, Ennaji et al. (2022) have illustrated this point: The Sub-Saharan migrants in Fez are primarily men. Women tend to be less visible in the city landscape. Out of forty-five interviewed participants, thirty-six were men, and nine were women. We met men primarily because women were less available. The hardships linked to migration routes may account for such a finding. Drawing on the results of these studies, one can recognise that the portrayal of "African" female migrants in Moroccan newspapers might be very limited to specific themes like violence and poverty.

Female migration in sub-Saharan countries is often not a matter of choice, but rather a necessity driven by factors such as poverty and insecurity, "I was obliged to leave my country of origin." This sentence, offered by many women respondents, reflects the importance

attached to the act of migration. Women who migrate are often seeking to escape difficult material conditions and conflict situations, and view migration as a strategy of flight. However, female migrants face specific challenges that are related to their gender, such as a lack of protection and increased vulnerability in their new environments. This is due to the fact that women and girls are particularly subject to discrimination and gender-based violence, both in their countries of origin and in their new surroundings. Additionally, female migrants often experience a loss of benchmarks and support systems, such as extended family, which can further complicate their migration experience. The feminization of African migration is an important trend that is transforming the traditional male-dominated sociological profile of immigration, and requires attention to the specific needs and challenges of female migrants (El Ghazouani, 2019).

The following stories are taken from the newspapers' reports depicting the daily life of female migrants and from the respondents in the two cities. They are concerned about the reasons for the migration decision, their experience on the move to Morocco, and their attempts to live and cross the borders. Sub-Saharan female migrants' experiences in Morocco range from legal settlement to a secret life marked by persistent poverty and marginalisation, as the following stories tell:

> *Poverty, hardship, and even wars and conflicts push them to ride the dangers of the desert to reach the European continent. However, the journey of many women throws them into the clutches of human trafficking networks that turn them into "slaves" who are exploited in prostitution in Morocco and European countries.*

In its report adapted from El Confidencial (Spanish Newspaper), Akhbar Al Yaoum reports about the life experiences of female migrants from Sub-Saharan countries. The above sub-headline concludes their life. They were forced to flee their original country, hoping for a better European life. To reach the latter, they all go through difficult living conditions; some "choose prostitution", while others " stopover in Morocco to begin its streets to get ready for another attempt to reach Spain". Many of them have told their stories:

> *In the neighbourhood of Boukhalef in Tanger, where everything human is absent, just a random neighbourhood here, just 10 kilometres from the city near the airport, most migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa live crowded in white buildings. Between two of these buildings, there is a mosque. For Africans, Friday is considered the best day of the week when hearts yearn to seek charity from Moroccans.*

Micho begs morning, evening and day and night, whether it is raining or under the scorching sun because she has no other choice here. After spending two years in the region, she knew all the forests, all the cities, and all the means that could be used to enter Spanish territory. She tried that by land and sea and ventured to storm the fence several times, but in vain, after which she gave in to despair.

The report also highlights some examples of women who experienced prostitution and other "jobs" so as to achieve their dreams. Fatima, from the Ivory Coast, *"practised prostitution with many of her friends in Rabat… because of her pregnancy and the death of her baby, she moved to Tangier hoping to cross the fence".* Another exciting story under the title of new slavery in Morocco. The report has depicted some examples from Ivory Coast; Nidenshi is an example of a girl who

was sent by their mother to work as a maid in a wealthy Moroccan family: *I started working as a housemaid and remained confined to that house for a year and a half until I decided to escape from that hell.*

Figure 1: "African migrant female … Slaves of the Sahara road" Akhbar Alyaoum, July 7th , 2014 Issue 1416

Generally, the above samples shed light on female migrants who have decided to migrate from their origin country due to several reasons, such as "civil war" and "forced marriage", to mention but a few. Besides, due to the securitising borders, some settled down in the country and started doing anything to look for an income. For example, working as a housemaid and hairdressing, and prostitution or even begging are some widely accessed by female migrants. The report tells the story of those who work to live and pursue their dream of "entering the Spanish territory".

Figure 2: "Africans of Oujda...the dream of migration turned into "forced" camps" Assabah, Feb 8-9th, 2014 Issue 4297

However, there are many female migrants who enter the country legally but lapse into irregularity and become sans papier. Cherti and Collyer's study (2015) shows that many migrants are forced to labour in the informal sector, frequently in the most dangerous or low-

paying jobs in agriculture or construction for men. The illegal nature of this job allows a highly inequitable and exploitative shadow labour market. The socio-economic and administrative obstacles that female migrants face also hinder their access to public healthcare and education and puts them at a higher risk than the average population in Morocco.

Clearly, the images chosen for analysis not only depict the visual portrayal of Sub-Saharan migrants in the media but also raise questions about migrant integration and living conditions in Morocco. The corpus includes various images that showcase the different conditions in which these migrants live. Some face challenges finding employment and sleeping in open areas, while others have created makeshift settlements in the surrounding forests. Despite these difficulties, some still hold onto their dreams of entering "the Eldorado". Their lives in the areas surrounding Ouajda are very telling: "After arriving in this city, I lost all of my belongings, including my money and important documents." A respondent from Guinea Conakry States. Despite the opportunities that this city offers for female migrants on the move in Morocco, allowing for temporary stays to earn money or further their movement to the north. The collected data shows that respondents identified several risks for females and children in this city. When asked about the main risks for females and children, women respondents most frequently indicated physical violence by authorities raids, sexual violence, and robbery by homeless and gangs. When being asked about the hardest in Morocco, all respondents ageered on the period of Covid 19.

As the COVID-19 pandemic took hold worldwide in the first months of 2020, countries in North Africa implemented various measures to limit the spread of the virus, such as border closures between countries and partial or full confinements within countries. These mobility restrictions, together with the socioeconomic impact of the COVID-19 crisis, considerably affected migrants' needs, aspirations and capabilities to migrate within and out of the residential regions (Boukhsas, 2020). COVID-19 has multiplied risks for females on the move, with many finding themselves stranded in precarious situations, and others facing more challenging, costly and uncertain onward journeys, increasingly dependent on smugglers. Two respondents from Nigeria stated:

> "*I am used to migrating, but the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has made it extremely difficult. We left home to earn a living but unfortunately, things have not gone as planned. We have been robbed and now that we are here, we are unable to find work, making things even harder,*" said a 28-year-old man from Niger during an interview in Tanger. "*The situation in the country has forced people to do whatever it takes to earn some extra income, and unfortunately, some girls have had to resort to sex work during the pandemic,*" shared a 35-year-old woman from Nigeria during an interview in Fes.

Alongside their difficulties, female migrants from Sub-Saharan countries mostly accompany their children. Several headlines with images have been noticed while conducting this study. It has become common for Moroccans to see 'African' women in the streets holding their babies and children begging or doing their daily activities. After the new migration reform, the country has seen the second generation of Sub-Saharan Moroccans emerge. Many children of Sub-Saharan migrants, either born "en route or in Morocco are now effectively 'between borders' in terms of their nationality (Charti and Collyer, 2015). Therefore, their situation has also been depicted in some newspapers. Their fundamental rights, like education, have also

been portrayed. For example, Alahdath Almaghrebia tackled this issue on its cover page by referring to their new situation with the new migration policy:

> *African Morocco: Students from Sub-Saharan Africa continue their studies with Moroccan children implementing the policy of integrating migrants into all aspects of life in Morocco.* Alahdath Almaghrebia, May 29th, 2014 N 5295

Without any further information, the cover hand by hand with a picture of an 'African' child on the board, written in Arabic.

Figure 3: The African Marocco. Alahdath Almaghrebia, May 29th, 2014 N 5295

For these children and their mothers, Morocco has become their 'country of origin', and most are likely to stay in, having access to education: "I decided to live in Morocco and educate my little boy in Moroccan schools. Now, I send him to primary school in Dacarate neighbourhood" a respondent from Guinea Conakry.

However, if this is the case for regular and documented migrants, what about children of irregular parents? Those still take camps in Oujda, Nadour and other regions as their settlement areas. Children who live "primitive life in Ouajda forest". The report of Akhbar Alyaoum highlights the barriers to having access to education from the remoteness of the camps, which is another severe problem as a large number of them reached the legal age of schooling:

> *"We do not ask the Moroccan state for many things, it should only respect us as human beings and enable our children to go to school, even if it is in the form of a tent, so that we can educate our children," says Asax 32 father of a child in this camp, before adding, "If Morocco wants us to educate its children, we are ready, as most of us hold certificates and diplomas, and thus we can teach Moroccan children, and we do not ask for anything in return other than building a school. We also don't mind teaching our children Arabic and local culture, Nigerians are open minded"* Akhabr Alyaoum, July 18th, 2012. N 809

In addition to the remoteness of camps, Bendra Imane has also noted the uncertainty surrounding migrants in camps and the teaching of Arabic and Islamic culture, discouraging some from integrating their children in formal or informal schools. They prefer to wait to move to Europe for their children's education. However, the government's efforts in

implementing its Humanistic policy are also presented. Women and children migrants from Sub-Saharan countries are at the core of the new migration policy of integration.

Figure 4: Immigrant Children and Moroccan School. Alahdath Almaghrebia, 6-7th December 2014

The above image is taken from the cover page of a report highlights the role of civil society like the Umm al-Banin Association, which conducted a study related to the relationship between migrant children and the Moroccan school:

> *This study can be considered as a roadmap for achieving the "School for All" strategy that the Ministry of National Education has set as a goal to achieve. This report coincided with the new immigration and integration policy adopted by Morocco. This study recommended some valuable points: Activating a plan to support civil society to provide educational services to these children while working to facilitate children's access to public primary education and exempting them from school fees imposed by institutions, and encouraging and involving migrants with pedagogical expertise in the school integration process, as well as in follow-up.*

> *Due to the situation's sensitivity, the parents of immigrant children who profess other religions need to exclude teaching Islamic subjects in the total school course, including exams, and replace them with classes on Moroccan culture.*

Besides, the situation of children in relation to primary education has also been tackled at the parliament level. In a written question directed to the minister of education N 6539, the memorandum says:

> The Ministry is intensely involved in the implementation of the national policy and asylum, which was launched in 2013 with a wise vision of His Majesty aimed at the victory of the humanitarian side in order to provide the rights of migrants at the national level and issued a memorandum in this regard on October 9, 2018, in order to facilitate the registration of children descended from immigration in Public, private, and non-formal educational institutions regardless of their administrative status. Migrants widely accepted this study. One of the most beautiful ways to promote the values of tolerance, difference, looking at the other, and coexistence.

The Ministry organizes an educational competition in this regard for all educational levels.

Concerning the second generation of Sub-Saharan Moroccans, few reports have brought to light their real difficulties in the camps of undocumented migrants. Their uncertainty has made them out of the educational process in the country, although the government has assured them all rights to have access to education. However, the issue needs more attention from civil society and the government to avoid keeping children as victims of the migratory process. Their integration into society has become a must due to their legal residence. The ministry circular has marked a radical shift from the old discourse that did not recognise the vital role of education in migrants' integration. Nevertheless, other problems have remained unaddressed, such as language and cultural barriers. Overall, women and children migrants from Sub-Saharan countries are represented superficially full of prejudices, asking for pity and solidarity.

Even though irregular migrants often endure significant challenges in every aspect of their lives, they may still have positive opinions of their time in Morocco, mainly if they have fled civil war and violence in their country of origin. An Ivorian female has told Bendra (2019) concludes the view of a large number of female migrants in Morocco:

> *I love Morocco. The climate suits me. There is much food. I am comfortable here despite a few problems … I do not* want to *go anywhere else, and I do not have the means to go anywhere else, especially not to Europe.*

Overall, the decision to stay in Morocco or move to Europe is a tough one for many sub-Saharan women who are trying to migrate. Crossing into Europe is becoming increasingly difficult and returning to their home country with nothing is not an ideal option. The experiences of these women during the migration process expose the marginalization and stigmatization they face. The migration of women is complicated because it challenges traditional gender roles and customs. While it is usually men who migrate clandestinely, more women are now migrating, which is causing difficulties and risks for them. However, female migration also allows women to resist traditional gender roles and become successful individuals. Despite facing problems such as exploitation and gender-based violence, they have the courage and motivation to continue their journey to Europe to improve their living conditions if they get the opportunity. Additionally, by crossing borders, sub-Saharan migrant women have broken down social and cultural barriers and challenged traditional beliefs.

Conclusion

Thousands of Sub-Saharan migrant women are crossing borders in search of safety and a better life, often making their way to Europe or Morocco as their second-best option. Moroccan press coverage has brought to public attention the miserable living conditions of female migrants and their children both during their journey to Morocco and in remote camps. Numerous reports have portrayed their experiences in Moroccan cities, where they strive to make a living after being exploited during the journey process. Women suffer more than men, as they are subjected to countless violations of various types, including discrimination. The study showed that many rely on drug trafficking and sex work to make a living, which only increases their vulnerability and puts them in danger. As a result, most women live in crowded

rooms in poor neighborhoods, while many others are homeless, sleeping on the streets, in cemeteries, and in forests.

The study provides an in-depth analysis of the violent experiences that migrants face during their journeys, with a particular focus on women migrants. The research findings reveal that women are more vulnerable to physical, sexual, and psychological traumas. They are often subjected to practices that expose them to violent and abusive people who exploit them for their own benefit. Consequently, sub-Saharan migrant women find themselves in a precarious situation, where they seek to improve their living conditions, but their gender and migration status make them more susceptible to suffering.

The situation of female migrants moving to Morocco particularly without the proper documents is causing problems for the country although with the great efforts after the new migration reform in 2013. These people don't have access to important things like healthcare, education, and legal rights. It's important for Morocco to help these people become a part of the country, instead of separating them. However, it's also important to make sure that Morocco can handle the number of people coming in. Taking care of these immigrants costs a lot of money, and there might not be enough jobs for everyone. It's a complicated situation that needs careful attention.

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