



International Journal of Interdisciplinary Gender Studies

Vol 3. Issue1. 2022 – Legal Deposit: 2021PE0016

Online ISSN: 2737-8373 – Print ISSN: 2737-8381

[www.contemporarymedusa.com](http://www.contemporarymedusa.com) <http://revues.imist.ma>

## **Editorial Foreword**

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Recently, women's migration has popped up as a significant component of the international debate. Indeed, migrant women constitute almost half of the global international migrants with a proportion of 48.1% of female migrants in 2020 compared to 49.4% in the year 2000 (UN DEZA, 2020). Similarly, male's migration increased with an estimated rate of 51.9% in 2020 compared to 50.6% in the year 2000 (UN DEZA). Yet, the outbreak of COVID19 marked a decrease of approximately 2 million international migrants as opposed to what have been supposed to be in the period between mid-2019 and mid-2020 (UN DEZA).

A combination of factors has driven the increase in the number of migrants all over the world. Their migration decision is mainly triggered by political instability, civil unrest, the increased population pressure on natural resources and economic downturns in many developing countries. Moreover, the technological developments, which improved the access to information and transmitted images of life styles in the media, have contributed to this growth. Therefore, they represented important motives that made the migrants more aware of opportunities outside their home countries and pushed them to decide to migrate either out of necessity or because of obligation.

Against this background, given its impact in shaping sociopolitical and economic policies at both local and international levels, scholars have started to track this influence from different perspectives. The first block approaches migration with respect to cultural, and social reasons and effects; the second one prefers to spotlight the time and distance significance of this process; the third group is more interested in the economic aspect of migration (UN DEZA, 2020). Unfortunately, the focus on women as a population of migrants has not yet given its due importance. Said differently, the driving forces of female migration, their migratory experience, the receiving countries' policy towards gender migration and how it may affect the predestined situation of migrant women, the role of migration in promoting or belittling women's potential



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and chances for a better life are issues that have not been fully considered to understand the causes and consequences of women migration

For these reasons and others, exploring questions related to gender and how it appropriates and shapes migratory projects and their outcomes, policies, patterns, and migrants' lived experiences is critical. In clear terms, the present issue mainly focuses on examining the (re)-configuration of gender relations in relation to internal and international migration from the perspective of multiple disciplines and angles. The latter include the socio-economic, literary, media, politics, to name but a few.

To this end, incorporating gender-specific migration experiences in the migration theory necessitates the development of a theoretical framework that considers and explains the unique experience(s) of women migrants at all stages of the migration process. In their article "*Women and Migration: Incorporating Gender into International Migration Theory*" 2003, Monica Boyd and Elizabeth Grieco specify "three distinct stages where gender relations, roles, and hierarchies influence the migration process and produce differential outcomes for women: the pre-migration stage, the transition across state boundaries, and the experiences of migrants in the receiving country" (p.3). In this issue, however, because the aforementioned causes and the consistent changes in the migration processes and patterns, a while-migrating stage is added to develop an inclusive theory that explains the unique migratory experience and patterns of women migrants.

### ***Before departure***

It is palpable that gender inequality in countries of origin is certainly a driving force for women in order to flee their home countries; social inequalities and gendered forms of domination such as the threat of forced marriages, threat of female genital mutilation and gender-based violence, (such as rape, domestic violence and sexual violence) (Freedman, 2012) are cases in point.

Women who leave their country legally or illegally also face difficult situations shared with men. For instance, fleeing dire economic and political conditions in the migrants' home countries to achieve their existence is an omnipresent trigger. Indeed, many migrants, regardless of their gender, view migration as an existential quest. By existential migration, (Greg Madison, 2006) in *Existential Analysis* refers to voluntary migrants who choose to leave their countries



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of origin for ‘existential’ motivations, unlike migration for economic reasons or forced migration. In other words, migrants considered it as a chosen attempt to express something fundamental about their existence by leaving their own and becoming a foreigner in a destination country.

Unemployment, especially among young migrants, represents another serious issue in the country of origin. Consequently, it pushes the youth, males and females alike, to seek job opportunities outside their countries of origin. In essence, most migrants who seek augmenting their economic conditions target OECD<sup>1</sup> countries at first place because of these countries’ full engagement in promoting the national economic welfare with the aim to prosper in the international trade market. All these factors push male and female migrants alike to seek better conditions overseas in the hope of invigorating their living conditions by virtue of getting involved in diverse migrants’ economic strategies that may have a remarkable impact on them and their families at large.

In this regard, the first article in this issue uses oral history to explore reasons why Mexican women emigrate to the United States and the impact their migration has on their identity and family life. The article by Erika Rendon-Ramos, entitled “*Voces de mujeres: Migration, Family, and Identity through the Voices of Mexican Women*”, concludes that the family informs migration experiences at home and across the border. Women’s decisions to emigrate are based on what is best for the family and are put in front of one’s individual needs. This could include the initial decision to migrate and send remittances home, or it could include the decision to remain in Mexico.

The second article is entitled “Gender and the Decision of Migration: between Restrictions and Motivations: The Case of Sub-Saharan Migrants in Morocco.” In this paper, Nadia El Amri aims to highlight the significance of employing gender approach to explore the impact of culturally-defined gender values and practices on sub-Saharan individuals’ decision of migration. The findings of the article demonstrate that the prevailing socio-cultural ideologies have a determinant impact on women’s international mobility. Women’s decision to

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<sup>1</sup>The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is a unique forum where the governments of 37 countries with market-based economies work together to develop policy standards to promote sustainable economic growth.



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migrate is determined by men's control and greater access to information and resources and is strongly influenced by the common patriarchal social constraints at different levels.

Finally, unlike the hegemonic western lens that emphasizes the representation of migrant women as a uniform category that consists of poor, low skilled, poorly educated, victims of trafficking and vulnerable women, female high skilled migrants constitute a considerable share of the global international migrants. Seeking job promotions, better education opportunities, or/and higher living standards, female high skilled migrants see in the other side of the border a promising opportunity to achieve their aspirations and realize their dreams. To illustrate, Hamza Bailla in his article "Gendered competencies on the move: The case of high skilled Moroccan females migrating to Canada", explores the main motives and mindset behind the upsurge of Moroccan female high skilled workers' intention to immigrate to Canada. The article is an interesting contribution to the scholarship on migration and gender as it helps in understanding this new uptick of new young female immigrants to Canada and its links with the general context of Morocco. By the end, the study reveals an alarming resentment of young female professionals about the slow pace of reforms, mistreatments in the workplace and hopelessness about the prospect of positive change. For the female interviewees, migrating to Canada is a path for empowerment, career advancement, and better quality of life. This study offers an insightful understanding and a contribution to the debate about high skilled migration in general and Canada in specific. It manages to frame this new shift in the long history of migration in Morocco as part of the changing gendered roles within the Morocco society and how many female young educated immigrants are feeling hopeless about the general political, economic and social climate and willing to risk it all for a better quality of life in the receiving country.

### **While migrating**

The movement of migrants from their countries of origins to host countries puts migrants' lives, especially that of female ones, at risk as they most of the times use irregular means to cross borders. For instance, there are different means and roads used to reach the host country. They mostly choose between land, maritime and air migration routes and/or incorporate all of them during the migration process. This process may sometimes end up in



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their death. Moreover, there are some periods where migrants experience the hard moments in the middle of deserts like the case of Sub-Saharan irregular women migrants. Oftentimes, they lose their track on the crossing with little provisions. Instead of achieving the goal of reaching Europe, migrants end up blocked either in the desert without any orientations or impeded by certain obstacles in one of the transit countries without accompaniment. Therefore, their journey to the final destination is uncompleted for a reason or another.

Additionally, gender- based violence is a constant influence of the migration process, with many women migrants experiencing political conflicts, sexual abuses, physical and psychological traumas in their countries of origins and/ or during the journey to the receiving countries. Those women who may face violence are either personally victimized or are forced to observe how their partners, family members, co-migrants and friends are subject to violence in their presence. Furthermore, the difficult moments these women undergo during the journey, especially moments where they feel frightened, sad, lost, confused and abandoned can manifest themselves in symptoms of depression, anxiety and psycho-somatic tendencies. The article “*Double Pain*”: Sub-Saharan Women Meeting the Challenges of Migration while Migrating” by Souad Belhorma argues that sub-Saharan women live in a double pain because of their gender and migration identities. Based on testimonies of Sub-Saharan irregular women migrants in Morocco, the article traces the multiple forms of violence these categories of vulnerable migrants face during their journeys. Forms of violence include sexual, physical, psychological and socio-economic abuses by different people. The article maintains that this violence, based on gender and migration status, is a reality which is likely to persist and even get worse in the future, as the European Union continues to protect its borders, and Moroccan authorities continue to exercise restrictive migration strategies and policies that may impede their process of reaching the final destinations.

### ***While-in-Transit***

Over the past two decades, an increasing number of migrant women live in the transit countries, mostly in undocumented way or without regular migration status and with very limited access to the basic needs. With a hope to reach their countries of destination, most of these migrants are stuck in a situation of forced mobility for unknown periods of time. Evidence reveal that they suffer from several difficulties relating to their legal status and gender- based



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discrimination, both at an institutional and social level. They are always treated as criminals and offered little or no protection by transit countries. This is because in the first place they are illegal migrants and in the second place most of the transit countries' economic conditions are on the verge. Consequently, many migrant women feel disappointed and psychologically depressed as they, along with their male partners, find themselves exposed to stereotypical acts and xenophobic practices in transit countries; they are in most of times depicted as a source of danger and evil. In this context, the article "Stereotyping Sub-Saharan Female Migrants in Moroccan print media" by Salim Dib traces how print media in Morocco communicate stereotypes about Sub-Saharan female migrants by depicting them as contagious and risky disease holders, a fact which creates an inferior and unpleasant image of 'black' female African migrants and perpetuates the 'us' versus 'them' dichotomy. The article uses reports or news items of four most famous Moroccan daily newspapers between 2012 and 2014. One may conclude that the findings of the article are not specific to Morocco but may be generalized to other transit countries whose economies are on the verge.

#### The post migration status

The situation of women and their living conditions in a host country provides another aspect of marginalization and stigmatization. This makes the survival of this category of migrants in the host country difficult. In this respect, after their successful attainment and resettlement in the final destination, they start another phase of the journey; integration and assimilation of the host country's culture. In a completely new environment, migrant women strive to melt in the new society and build their cultural capital. However, in most cases the achievement of this cultural capital remains a far-reaching goal by virtue of dominance of the native culture. Some migrant women tend to resist the host culture either consciously or unconsciously, especially those who experience home sickness and diaspora in every sense of the word.

This fact is also emphasized by the previously discussed ideas, especially because the western narratives usually picture women coming from Arab Muslim world, Africa and Asia as poor, low skilled, poorly educated and victims of trafficking and vulnerable women. The receiving countries usually build barriers in the face of those women and considers them a threat to their social standards of gender equality as well as to their economic system. Female migrants



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are seen by the host population as a drain on the economy of its country that menaces the employment opportunities of its people. Thus, female migrants are approached by most receiving countries from the prism of domesticity and otherness that is dominated by the ideal of married, subordinate, passive, culturally blind submissive and socially isolated (Seijas,2014).

In this special issue, two different articles discuss three different forms of encounters between migrant women and their host societies. They are all based on women's diaspora writings. The first article is entitled "Othering female other in Does My Head Look Big in This? By Randa Abdel-Fattah" by Fettah El Ouardi. In this article, El Ouardi analyses Randa Abdel-fattah's 2005 novel *Does My Head Look Big in This?* The novel is a story of a sixteen-year-old Australian-Palestinian girl, Amal Mohamed Nasrullah Abdel-Hakim, who has decided to wear the *hijab* (head scarf) as a full-time wearer to the MacCleans Grammar School, an elite private school in Melbourne. Despite the fact that Amal, the protagonist, was born and raised in Australia, she is still regarded as an outsider and is, therefore, excluded from her nation, especially when she decides to wear the veil in public. To fight back, Randa Abdel-fattah's uses the struggles of her protagonist not only to destabilize images attributed to Muslim Australians but also to reconcile the Muslim identity with the Western national identities. The protagonist is introduced as an open-minded and good-natured person, who finds great pleasure in spending time with her best friends regardless of their different backgrounds and religions. Amal sees no harm to establish strong ties with friends belonging to different religions and races such as Japanese, Jewish, and Christian friends, while the host space is denying to reconnect with her because of her new religious dress code.

The second article is entitled "Transcultural Reflections on Identity, Memory and Gender in Naima El Bezaz's *Vinexvrouwen (Suburban women)*". In her article, Nouzha Baba takes the Moroccan-Dutch writer Naima El Bezza novel as the point of departure. The novel tells the story of Naima as a Moroccan-Dutch woman caught between her strictly Moroccan patriarchal family and her struggle for freedom and emancipation. The narrative gives expression to the autobiographical self's transforming cultural subjectivity in a challenging manner, expressing her liberal thinking and resisting her family's patriarchal culture. The narrator's critique of the issue of gender and sexuality brings into view the patriarchal Muslim world and the liberal Western world, represented as conflicting, irreconcilable worlds, the



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cultural borders of which are too rigid. The author of the article argues that Naima's act of writing about gender and sexuality issues attempts to liberate her thinking, as well as to raise questions about the stigmatization of Muslim women in her Moroccan-Dutch community. Still, through its aesthetic representation of (post)migration and transculturality, the author explains how the novel intervenes in negotiating cultures and identities, drawing upon the polarization between Moroccan patriarchal culture and Dutch liberal culture.

The last article in this issue is authored by Wissam Bitari who used two diasporic novels - Najat El Hachmi's *The Last Patriarch* and Fadia Faqir's *The Cry of the Dove*- to investigate how gender is used to criticize the spaces of home and diaspora. The author concludes that gender roles change whenever the subjects' spaces change. She also concludes that despite the benefits mobility brings, it does not always contribute to the liberation of characters but it sometimes proves to be a restrictive process, especially when patriarchal practices move.

In brief, one may deduce that migrant women face difficulties at different levels of their migration journey. Indeed, they confront obstacles before, during and after their migration process, which emphasize their precariousness and vulnerability. In this respect, their harsh experiences may hinder their full access to basic necessities such as health care, education for their children, access to law regulations and most importantly access to stable employment at the host country. Consequently, all this may affirm the very unsatisfactory integration situation of migrants and women migrants in particular. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the mode of travel is a key element in measuring migrant women's safety to get to their destination countries. It is palpable that women refugees and migrants who cross the borders by plane experience little or no violence or exploitation. The on-road journey, however, is more risky and doubtful as those women refugees and migrants lack access to assistance and protection, especially those who are not accompanied by their male relatives.

Also, women migrants are constantly represented by the west as weak and subordinate, devoid of agency, and culturally driven. This representation adversely affects the public perception of those women which in turn makes them consistently vulnerable and deficient. Overemphasizing the victimization of migrant women by stakeholders and public institutions of the host countries aggravates the situation and make the process of accepting those women





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by the receiving country's communities difficult on one hand, and the course of integrating for migrant women in the new setting unattainable on the other hand. On account of this, lack of assistance and support may trap women in the darkness of loneliness and rejection. In line with this argument, concerns should be raised and forces should be joined to ensure women are internationally protected while on road and after arriving to their destination. National and international organizations and authorities, NGOs, and civil society organizations should work together to stop any kind of violation against migrant women. The support for those women should continue even after they reach their target as they face countless problems and impediments that block their integration in the new environment which they are not familiar with.

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