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“Double Pain”: Sub-Saharan Women Meeting the Challenges of Migration while Migrating

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Abstract

Mobility is a major socio-political and economic dynamism in the history of humanity. In the last few years, the migratory movement was characterized by the emergence of a new mobility dynamic led by sub-Saharan migrant women who are in transit situation in different countries before reaching their final destinations. These women who hoped that migration would better their life conditions find themselves disappointed because their gender and migration identities are intertwined. While it is true that this category of migrants take the risk to cross the borders ‘illegally’ to meet their objectives, they find themselves living in a *double pain*. They experience harsh situations while migrating that are characterized by the gendered inequalities and violent experiences. Based on a qualitative approach, the article uses irregular migrant women’s oral stories to explore difficulties migrants encounter during their journeys, especially on road before reaching the host country. The interviews used in this article are conducted in Oujda and Casablanca cities with irregular sub-Saharan migrant women who choose Morocco as a transit country and whose aim is to continue their journey to one of the European countries. The article is an eye opening to the experiences of sub-Saharan migrant women who escape different social, economic and political difficulties in their countries of origin to reach their final destination. However, this movement is not free from other obstacles that make their journey remarkable.

Keywords: migration, sub-Saharan, women, difficulties, on road



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Introduction

In their search for safety and stability, thousands of undocumented sub-Saharan migrant women increasingly join many people to cross the borders. Their main hope is to reach Europe to change their miserable life conditions. While international reports and media coverage have brought to public attention the situation of migrant women who cross Africa to reach Europe, with images of groups of migrants crowded in small unsecured boats, less attention has been paid to the sufferings women experience during their journey from home countries to final destinations.

This population becomes visible in the transit country ‘Morocco’¹, as migrants move with a hope to reach Europe and find themselves in the edge of their African itinerary. When migrants start their journey from the country of origin to the host country, they mostly take different routes to reach Europe passing by the Mediterranean. However, there is another side of the coin: migration is not a linear process (Schapendonk & Steel, 2014.) The migrants’ path and expectations can change during the migration’s process.

The present article explores the different difficulties sub-Saharan migrant women encounter during their journeys’ process. This will be achieved through the analysis of individual in-depth interviews and semi-structured questionnaire with open-ended questions conducted with women who migrated with a hope to reach Europe. The interviews took place in two Moroccan cities. One border vs. one central city based on a snowball sampling.

The article is organized into four main sections. In addition to an introduction and a conclusion, the first section is a review of the literature that focuses on the main scholarship on contextualizing clandestine migration and migration in its female face. The second section

¹ Morocco has changes its status of being a country of transit into a country of residence (Donaldson & Beaty, 2015.) In other words, over the last few years, as the EU has put more security on its border controls and increasingly externalized its migration policies, Morocco has changed to be a final destination for many sub-Saharan migrants. Additionally, Kreienbrik (2005) describes the impact of the huge mobility of migrants from sub-Saharan countries for Morocco: “*these migrants tends to use the kingdom as a transit route, but difficulties in entering Europe frequently result in longer stays in the ‘host country’.* Thus Morocco is suddenly confronted with a growing foreign, immigrant population whilst still considering itself an emigration country” (p: 193) This means that migrants prefer to settle down in Morocco and take it as a country of residence, whether by primary choice or by default. Thus, migrants are rather “stranded migrants” than “transit migrants” (Collyer 2010).



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focuses on a description of the research methodology. Its main objective is to understand the approach adopted in the study with a much focus on the research design, the target population, the research areas and the way data are collected, analyzed and discussed. The last two sections are reserved to the findings and discussion of the data.

Literature Review

Clandestine Migration

Migration has become one of the debatable global issues that world societies are called to deal with, and many scholars have in fact been examining the phenomenon from different perspectives: from economic to social sciences, from history to psychology (Barros et al., 2002, De Haas, 2007, Freedman, 2012.) Indeed, clandestine migration, as a visible movement from African countries to Europe, is not a new phenomenon. In fact, this mobility to reach the major metropolitan cities is mainly motivated by multiple and complex reasons. They include the lack of employment opportunities in the individual's country of origin, the scarcity of basic needs and necessary services (e.g., health and education), or family reunification, among others. However, one cannot deny the fact that migration across the Mediterranean has become at its peak due to the desperation and other situations of violence that push many individuals to make an unsafe journey as irregular migrants² that results most of the time in death or injury for so many (Alioua, 2013). Other researchers claim that the main purpose behind this migration is to find job opportunities (Ndiaye 2008, p. 142.) or to escape the poverty in the countries of origin (Serge, 2008, p. 17.) Whatever the personal motives, mixed population flows are the outcome, which represents a challenge for many governments and policy makers.

Additionally, the technological development helped in the expansion of clandestine migration recorded from Africa since 1990s. This is, of course, aggravated with the strong attractions, images of life styles and standard of living of the populations in Western Europe and North America. As a consequence, these factors made the sub-Saharan migrants, especially

² An irregular migrant is defined by Perruchoud Richard and Jillyanne Redpath-Cross (2011) as: *a person who, owing to unauthorized entry, breach of a condition of entry, or the expiration of his or her visa, lacks legal status in a transit or host country. The definition covers inter alia those persons who have entered a transit or host country lawfully but have stayed for a longer period than authorized or subsequently taken up unauthorized employment.* The term "irregular" is preferable to "illegal" because the latter carries a criminal connotation and is seen as denying migrant's humanity (p. 54).



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the young ones more aware of opportunities outside their home countries. For them, in particular, Europe and North America represent “the best” or as it is labeled “the Eldorado” when it comes to the living conditions, freedom, guaranteed rights among others. In other words, these two destinations represent everything their countries of origin are not. Moreover, non-nationals usually need a valid visa to enter and stay in the country, unless bilateral treaties provide for other measures. If they fail to enter without it, they are considered “irregular migrant”. In this respect, the generalization of the visa requirement in all potential host countries, by significantly limiting legal migration and the simple mobility of individuals, has greatly contributed to the increase of clandestine migration.

Morocco for example, as a geographical space that relates Africa to Europe, is considered as an important gateway for migrants. It has traditionally been both a destination country for migrants and a country of origin for outward migration (Freedman, 2012). This means that, while the kingdom is a country migrant’s departure, it also becomes a host/transit³ country for migrants (Barros et al. 2002; de Haas, 2007). According to a report by Médecins sans frontières (Doctors without Borders) on the clandestine migration, irregular migrants represent 4.500 in 2010 (Médecins sans frontières, 2010.) In 2008, Association Marocaine d’Etudes et de Recherche en Migration reported that migrants mostly originated from Nigeria (15.7%), Mali (13.1%), Senegal (12.9%) and the Republic of the Congo (10.4%) (AMERM, 2008). 79.7% of these migrants were men (AMERM, 2008). They migrate via Mauritania or through Niger to the Algerian borders and then they cross Moroccan borders to reach European states as final host countries. Evidence suggests that although a minority group, women constitute an important proportion of African migrants. This sub-population is less visible, unlike men. In a study by the Association Marocaine d’Etudes et de Recherches sur les Migrations (AMERM), statistics show that women constitute 20.3% of the population of the sub-Saharan migrants (AMERM & CISP, 2007.) Having this in mind, many of the migrants remain undocumented.

Nevertheless, the desire of Sub-Saharan migrants to experience migration, though it is mostly not human, harsh and deadly migratory journey, is recently realized by the European

³ In many cases, the transit is transformed into a longer or shorter forced stay. The difficulties of crossing the Strait of Gibraltar or the ocean towards the Canary Islands make Morocco a lasting stopover for this population of migrants



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states. For instance, the event of Ceuta and Melilla in September 2005⁴ makes an important media showcase that demonstrate the singular migratory phenomena as well as the European and African scenes (Serge, 2008.) As a consequence, strongly ideologized scenarios from fragments of lived realities are produced and mediatized. However, a growing part of the African population, whose hope of a better life outside its place of birth did not abandon its dream of seeking the happiness of living in another country. Women are no exception in this scene. The next section attempts to shed light on women and migration.

The Female face of Migration

Gender-Migration is relatively a new issue on the research agenda. Indeed, research undertaken in the last few decades has a development of the female face of migration (Gouws, 2007). Traditionally, women in the migration scenes are mostly presented as accompanying family members. In other words, the traditional approach of the migratory phenomenon started from the idea that migration happens because of economic reasons. It is men who are culturally and socially believed to be the breadwinners. As a consequence, labor migration is predominantly male. This idea is emphasized in a study on the feminization of migration by Gouws. She claimed that:

The reasons why men and women migrate are different. Men mostly migrate to try and find formal employment, while women's migration is often linked to and impeded by their reproductive roles. Women therefore often only migrate for short periods of time to trade or to do seasonal work, while men migrate for longer periods. In the past women migrated as dependents of men while many single women or women with children now migrate (Gouws, 200, p. 1.)

⁴ The Spanish government built fences to secure its boundaries with Morocco, especially around the two cities. However, under the pressure of the European Union and in response to its political demands, the Moroccan government began gradually to adopt a new approach, which is closer to the objectives of Europe, especially concerning the surveillance and control of its borders. Thus, Morocco adopted strong measures to fight against trans-border crimes and illegal immigration mainly with Spain.



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Women, in this hypothesis, are not taken into consideration and migrant women workers are invisibly active. This is also enhanced by the governments' migration regulations. The latter are generally reflecting a bias towards male migrants, only giving women an opportunity to accompany men as their dependents.

However, it is recently that the female face of migration has begun to significantly appear at the scientific and social levels due to the development of research on gender in different disciplines. In reality, it was until the 1980s that the notion of "feminization" of migration emerged in the field of research in favor of the involvement of women in the labor market. The migration of women independently from men is often related to the feminization of poverty, especially due to the impoverishment of household headed by women. This situation is triggered by the severe economic instability in many Sub-Saharan countries. According to Adepoju (2007), single and married women seek migration opportunities in an independent way in order to look for job offers in countries of the North or inter regions. Their main objective is to find a source of income for families to survive, therefore, to change the traditional gender roles within families and societies (p. 11). In the Moroccan context, a study conducted by Inka Stock (2011) on transit migration in Morocco from a gendered perspective remains one of the important investigations that shed light on the challenges and agency experienced by African migrant women in a transnational migratory context such as the Moroccan. Stock's study focused on voicing out women's issues via their testimonies, which might be a way to expose their agency in public, as well as the gender-based obstacles they faced as irregular migrants in a transit country.

The migratory movements are currently a hot debating issue between the mainly poor sending countries and the richer hosting countries. For different periods of time, many young African women risk their lives and migrate to cross the borders and waves of the Mediterranean Sea to search for opportunities to better their life conditions. Sometimes, some of them do not achieve their dreams and die in the middle of the way; some are deported and turned back home and those who succeed to finish the journey are confronted with various types of gender based violence and other challenges. However, with the lack of job opportunities and bad conditions back home, many young sub-Saharan African migrants still prefer to leave their countries to an



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unknown world of experiences, often as an illegal migrant. The latter is also referred to as an irregular migrant. He/she is:

..a person who, owing to unauthorized entry, breach of a condition of entry, or the expiration of his or her visa, lack legal status in a transit or host country. The definition covers inter alia those persons who have entered a transit or host country lawfully but have stayed for a longer period than authorized or subsequently taken up unauthorized employment. The term “irregular” is preferable to “illegal” because the latter carries a criminal connotation and is seen as denying migrant’s humanity (Perruchoud, & Redpath-Cross 2011, p. 54)

This means that the irregular migrant leaves the country of origin to reside in a permanent or transit way in the receiving country. The status of the migrant is undocumented because of the absence or the regularizing papers that authorize a legal stay or because of the residency paper expiration.

To conclude, migration from a gender perspective is essential to understand this phenomenon. This is mainly related to the fact that most studies on migration from a gender perspective are done and elaborated by civil society actors. There is a gap in the gender-sensitive analysis of the issue, which very often makes use of gender to clearly understand and produce studies on the female face of migration. The present paper contributes to the development of this scholarship by exploring the ways gender plays a role in shaping the migratory process of women irregular migrants. It provides interesting insights, especially when women’s experiences based on the gender perspective are intertwined with experiences of migrants because of their illegal status and their skin color. Consequently, it is of great importance to understand the objective behind women’s mobility and the hindrances they face during the migration process.



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Methodology

The present article aims to answer the following question: what difficulties do sub-Saharan migrant women face during their migratory process that expands their sufferings? To meet the purpose of the study and to answer its research question, the article makes use of individual in-depth interviews and semi-structured questionnaire with open-ended questions. Interviews were conducted with 20 women migrants who are in a transit situation in the Moroccan Kingdom and who aim to continue their migration journeys. The objective of choosing in-depth interviews is mainly triggered by the fact that this technique helps in collecting detailed, richly textured, person-centered information from one or more individuals (Kaufman, 1994). The objective is also to describe their experiences and the meaning they attribute to these experiences using their own words (Kaufman, 1994).

Snowball sampling technique is used to recruit women participants from two different research sites. The use of this method is motivated by the nature of the target population, their irregular status and their inaccessibility during the fieldwork phase. To solve this, I had to contact an ex-migrant who is volunteering in a church in Oujda and who benefited from the regularization process in Morocco. Kindly, he accepted to help in the fieldwork in this city and facilitated the task by putting me in contact with other migrants. In Casablanca, I interviewed migrants who perform informal activities such as street vendors in Bab Marakech⁵. These women introduced me to other migrants in other places.

Data collection took place in two big Moroccan cities: one central city vs. one border city. The purpose behind choosing Casablanca and Oujda is firstly related to the fact that these two cities host big numbers of women sub-Saharan migrants during the data collection period from February 2018 to July 2018. Many migrants who choose either to transit or to settle in Morocco move to Casablanca – the economic heart of the country - because it offers them plenty of informal job opportunities in different sectors. Oujda is a city in northeast Morocco located close to the Algerian borders. In addition to providing job opportunities to migrants, its geographical position facilitates opportunities of crossing and reaching the Moroccan territories.

⁵ It is an open air space where communities of Sub-Saharan migrant men and women perform different economic activities such as street vending, hair styling among others.



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Inclusion criteria are based on women's profiles. They illegally migrated from African countries in order to reach Europe and they are living in a transit situation in Morocco. They originated from different African countries (e.g., Ivory Coast, Senegal, Congo, Cameroun, Mali and Brazzaville.) However, it is important to mention here that the determination of the migrant's countries of origin is often difficult because of the ambiguous nature of the declared nationality. Sometimes, some migrants say that they come from Mali or Cameroon while the interview reveals their Senegalese origin. The declaration of a false nationality is often linked to the hope of obtaining, if necessary, the refugee status.

Their age ranged between 15 and 47 years old. This age reflects a young age pyramid. Most respondents had low educational level that was inferior and inappropriate to find an employment in a formal sector. Furthermore, most respondents were single mothers living at least with one or two children, as an outcome either of rape during the migratory journey or born outside the wedlock. Other categories included divorced, married and single women.

Since their migration is not individual, they also rely on migrants' networks in order to continue their transit or residential journey. For this reason, in both cities, women organize themselves in sub-Saharan informal economic communities, in which a network of businesses is characterized by the organization of a particular urban space within which diverse street vending activities take place. Yet, migrants existing in the research areas live in very precarious conditions with inadequate basic needs

Interviewees were given a notion on the purpose of the study and the researcher explained to them that their identities will be confidential by the use of fake names. Some of the respondents indicated that they do not want to reveal their real names because it would be possible to identify them by authorities. According to them, this may work against them later on and do not want to take this risk. All the interviews were recorded using a tape recorder. The language of the interviews was French since most of the participants do not master English and have little or absent knowledge of the Arabic language. The interviews were conducted at the church in Oujda because I had to schedule their meetings at their appropriate times. Interviews in Casablanca, on the contrary, were conducted in different places (location where they perform their business activity or in coffee shops).



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As far as the data analysis is concerned, data collected using the interviews as a qualitative technique are interpreted after being transcribed, translated into English and coded to end up having text/quotes to be used in the analysis through themes.

Results

A total of 20 interviews conducted with sub-Saharan migrant women who decided to take the migratory journey to reach European countries were used in the present study. The analysis is based on life stories of women who are in transit situation in Morocco. By the time of the interviews, they were waiting for suitable opportunities to continue their migration process. The subsequent section attempts to discuss the main hindrances confronted by this category of migrants during their migratory experiences. They mainly suffer from different forms of gender-based violence (e.g., psychological, physical and sexual abuses), traumas, and precarious life conditions because of their gender and migration identities.

Manifestations of Gender based Violence

In both research areas, data revealed that all the 20 participants faced several forms of gender-based violence before their departure. They reported unequal access to health, education and employment services. This in return impedes their full profit from a decent life and reduces their chances to live independently. Women reported multiple types of violence, ranging from female genital mutilation, forced marriage and rape, which is sometimes practiced by close family members. In the same line of argument, Freedman (2012) cited the main reasons for women's mobility:

Women may migrate to escape from the threat of forced marriage or female genital mutilation, for example. They may have been victims of domestic violence, sexual violence or rape, or persecution on the grounds of their sexual orientation. All of these factors, and others, may combine to make women decide to leave their country and undertake a migratory journey, which is also in itself a source of multiple insecurities (p: 43.)



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Once on their roads to the final destination of migration, migrants reported that they experienced or witnessed a wide range of human rights violation and multiple gender based discriminatory practices. Indeed, data revealed that the main aspect of these inequalities is related to their experiences of gender-based violence. The latter is defined as:

All acts perpetrated against women which cause or could cause them physical, sexual, psychological, and economic harm, including the threat to take such acts; or to undertake the imposition of arbitrary restrictions on or deprivation of fundamental freedoms in private or public life in peace time and during situations of armed conflicts or of war (Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. Article 1.)

Women who are waiting for opportunities of movement to final destinations reported having experienced or witnessed acts of sexual violence, physical violence, discrimination and racism, trauma, among others. Incidents of violence were reported to have taken place while migrating either in the roads, the try and/ or the country of transit. Based on the data collected in both research areas, being a migrant with illegal status may alter the communication of the women with other people. While some women develop relationships with other migrants during the process of migration, some migrants avoid relationships out of fear of being in troubles and be sent back home. This situation may sometimes create moments of tension between migrants and other people that can lead to scenes of violence. This idea is emphasized by Mathelde, 35 years old who claimed that:

“having plans for how you will safely reach Europe and how you will exit the country of transit without troubles oblige the migrant not to be close to others. Often, problems are created and violence against you or your children escalates because of miscommunications. You



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always need to make safety plans in case this violence takes place so as not to be sent back home by the authorities.”

The majority of perpetrators reported were men connected to the state security system, trafficking and smuggling gangs and/or other migrants. The triggers behind their decisions to migrate varied, as did the types of violence to which migrants were subject, but the abuse which they experiences is categorized into the following forms.

Gendered Sexual violence

Women from across the study reported cases of socially embedded violence they had experienced while migrating. Data revealed that the sub-Saharan migrants interviewed in both cities experienced gendered sexual violence. They stated that women and girls often were stigmatized and had no value in their culture. Participants have repeatedly highlighted that they experienced episodes of sexual violence or were obliged to witness how relatives or colleagues were sexually victimized. They were expected to unquestioningly obey to men. The sexual acts were said to be a commonplace experience among young women. These abuses include rape, harassment, sexual touching of the body, among others practiced by male migrants, police guards and traffickers. A Malian woman, Barbara, stated that it was common to be sexually violated during the migration process because of the gender and migration identities, and she said:

“I was physically forced to engage in a sexual intercourse against my willingness simply because I am a woman with a black skin coming from a poor country. I felt pain and couldn’t stop the men because they were very strong and I was very fragile. They also obliged me to engage in forced prostitution simply because I am in need of their help to cross the borders.”

Sexual violence is an act that involves a person who is in a hopeless situation. in the present study, the woman may be unable to refuse the sex act or to communicate the



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unwillingness to participate in the act because of her need to cross the borders and reach her final destination. In a worse situation, sexual violence remains a daily reality for the majority of Sub-Saharan migrant women that degrade their self-esteem.

Respondents said that women faced different forms of sexual violence. For example, in Oujda city, rape represents a common type of abuse within this community of migrants. This is because it is a border area and many of them are at risk of being raped while entering Morocco, especially by the smuggling gangs as perpetrators. They mostly do the acts as a group and not individuals. In other words, they may rape a victim at once or may do multiple rapes successively for a longer period. In all the cases of rape, respondents declared that they were not able to escape because of fear of being killed or deported back home. They have endured their sufferings and kept silent. As a vivid example, Denis narrated her experience with tears in her eyes:

After being expelled by the Algerian security forces, I had to walk for so many hours in the desert with other migrants to reach our next stop. During this process, we met different nationalities and I was welcomed by a family member who took me to his residing place. He told me he will introduce me to a man who is going to help me reach Morocco. This man did not take care of me as promised. On the contrary, he raped me. I didn't have any chance to leave his place as I do not have money. I stayed with him cooking and serving him. In return, he gives me food and some money that I saved for my next trip. At the same time, he obliged me to have several sexual intercourses with him if I want to stay alive and continue my journey. Sometimes, he invites his friends and they also have sex with me constantly. If I disobey, they beat me and force me to sleep with them. (Denis, 32 years old.)

Survivors of sexual violence reported that young women and girls commonly experienced sexual abuse in both research areas. For instance, migrants who transited through Algeria and



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tried to reach Morocco have experienced the worst situations of sexual abuse. This mostly results in a climate of fear and insecurity created by the perpetrators, such as in the forests of Gourougou near Nador city, where migrants live outdoors or in shelters made in plastics lacking any basic comfort. male migrants and smuggling gangs often took advantage of young women, while in these open spaces, were pressured to engage in sexual relations with these men to achieve their dreams of crossing the borders. For example, cases of this type of violence shows episodes covered primarily with unwanted sexual touching of the female's body with various tentative of undressing her to show parts of the body (private parts). This action is coupled sometimes with beating and/ or the confiscation of all their belongings. In this respect, women's experiences of sexual abuse results in a combination of physical and long-term psychological effects. In the city of Casablanca, almost all respondents declared that they were forced to make involuntary sexual relationships in return for promised food, housing, security and passing to the next step of the migration process. Every day sexual abuse was the norm rather than the exception:

“when I was in Maghnia, I was obliged to take off my clothes and have a sexual intercourse with a man I did not know who was he. Since I was young, fragile and tired from the journey, I could not escape. I cried and begged him, but without any positive reactions. The same scenario happened to me when I came to Casablanca city to look for a job opportunity as a hairdresser. In return, I've got some money and food and secured my life.” (Sandra, 36 years old from Senegal.)

Respondents said that women face significant psychological traumas if they were victims of sexual violence. In these cases, they emphasized the combination of emotional and psychological humiliation. Because of their situation of powerlessness, they reported hardships related to how to forget and trespass the emotional break downs. As a consequence, many of the victims expressed their affective consequences out of violence. Moreover, women also reported problems with their families and the community at large. Sometimes, they were



subject to violence and expelled from their family home even if the pregnancy results from sexual abuse. One of the interviewees confirmed this idea narrating her story as follows:

I am really ashamed. I was brutally raped by two unknown men while waiting for the traffickers. These men obliged me to do sexual acts against me and religion. I couldn't resist because I wanted to move on and reach the Algerian borders. I have to solve my family problems back home though I have to pay the consequences. Pamela, 25 years old from Senegal.

From the above-mentioned statements, one may assume that sexual violence can have different physical and psychological consequences on the lives of survivors of this type of violence. This means that they suffer from multiple forms of violence that are afflicted upon them in a combined way. In most cases, they are long lasting and women are in need of timely medical and psychological assistance. This kind of support is important in order to help the victims of rape and any other form of sexual violence to prevent any infection, to cope with their experiences and to avoid deterioration in their mental health.

Physical violence

Physical violence began in the country of origin and continued during the migration process. survivors talked about multiple episodes of physical abuse at the hands of men at different migration stages. For instance, while crossing the borders, migrants were put at risk of physical violence. It mostly consisted of severe beating and slapping among others. Almost all respondents revealed experiences of forced expulsions, especially when they were dropped at the Moroccan territories by Moroccan security forces and obliged to cross the Algerian side. At that time, they experienced harsh behaviors from the side of the Algerian security forces, which physically tortured them. As an effect, migrant women who were arrested and expelled return to Oujda city as soon as possible. Some of the respondents were expelled several times. However, they did not lose faith and came back again. Additionally, the arrests tentative in the borders area put them at risk of physical violence by the criminal gangs which were active along



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the border areas. For instance, this segment of migrants was an easy target to abuse and rob the money and belongings they had by the gangs' members.

“I arrived to Oujda city in the early morning. I had to walk to find my path to town. On my way, I was stopped by two tall men who talked to me in Moroccan dialect. One of them put a knife on my chest, frightened me and asked me to give him all what I have. I gave them my money and beg them not to hurt me as I was pregnant,” expressed Sophie, 24 years old.

Human smuggling and trafficking networks represent sources of physical violence that sub-Saharan women confronted during their migration. The activities of the smugglers and the traffickers operating throughout the migration routes had become more visible and used by migrants who have the willingness to cross the borders. These networks took advantage from the illegal status of the migrants. In this respect, they treated their victims using threats, physical violence and sometimes tortured them in order to ensure the maximum of financial profit. This situation was provoked by the absence of protection by the state since migrants were viewed as illegal and criminals. Moreover, these networks acted in a form of an intercommunity organizing body including representatives from different migrant groups. These groups applied severe rules which must be obeyed by everyone or the migrant will be punished in a violent way. Thus, the violence carried out by these smugglers and traffickers often remained unknown as both the perpetrators and the victims live side by side and very few sub-Saharan migrant women choose to speak about their exploitation and prefer to remain silent.

Fatal outcomes may be the immediate result of a sub-Saharan woman being physically abused by the perpetrator. On the one hand, the short-term effects of physical abuse include broken bones, bruises and other physical injuries. On the other hand, the long-term effects of this form of violence may include hypertension, heart disease, chronic pain syndromes. In the same line of argument, one of the interviewees narrated her experience of physical violence on the Algerian-Moroccan borders by the police men. She said:



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“I was hardly beaten by a policeman, he called me using different racist terms and beaten me because I refused to obey to their recommendations. I consequently end up having a broken leg. I could not bear this entire trauma and I am now leaving with high blood pressure. I am always panicking and depressing when I meet or confront a policeman in the street.” (Deborah, 22 years old migrant coming from Mali.)

From this quotation, one may assume that the physical abuse has long lasting psychological effects such as depression and panic. These situations are sometimes coupled with the inhuman processes while getting access to health services. Many respondents complained about their experiences of trauma by the health agents. A Nigerian migrant recalled an experience while she was beaten and bleeding. The woman was not accepted in the hospital and denied medication. She remembers the inhuman treatment and emphasized that her black skin was the main reason that had pushed her to undergo such tormenting experiences.

Psychological violence

Sub-Saharan women migrants in both research areas revealed that they undergo moments where they experience psychological violence. Indeed, they feel frightened, sad, lost, confused and abandoned. These can manifest themselves in symptoms of depression, anxiety and psychosomatic tendencies. A case in point is Elisa, 36 years old and a mother of two kids, who narrated her story of physiological hardships during the migratory journey. She said that: *“we have to accept the long travelling hour, the continuous stops and waits at the transit points in order to reach our goals. But I can tell you that this is very difficult because all these stages are accompanied with hard emotional moments. They are also associated with great fatigue.”* From this quote, one may deduce that many women migrants feel disappointed and psychologically depressed because of the hardships experienced. This may explain the fact that this category of women who are travelling in an illegal manner without documents live with the unvarying feelings of being arrested and expelled and the ever-current danger of suffering from exploitation, abuses and violence at the hands of security forces, smugglers and human



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traffickers and, at times, the civilian population. Their abusers are able to act with impunity in the knowledge that their victims will be treated as criminals and offered little or no protection by the state.

Moreover, participants revealed that they also experience episodes of vulnerability based on their race in different stages of the migration process. This affects them psychologically and ends in developing traumatic effects. In the same line of argument, MSF's findings emphasize this:

from a psychological point of view, the different stages of the migration process place demands on migrants to continually adapt their behavior, customs or expectations, which can often cause stress, anxiety and disorientation. The loss or continual change of factors such as language, family, friends, cultural norms, ethical codes or social norms, which help define and ground a persons' identity and sense of self, can have a cumulative traumatic effect (MSF, 2010, p. 8).

From this quote, one may assume that most sub-Saharan migrants live in precarious conditions with changing aspects of life to adapt themselves to the living situation either in the forests and/ or abandoned houses. This living condition and the disparity between the expectations of a better life and the reality of their situation throughout the migration process can cause psychological trauma for many migrant women. Thus, it may result in having women with negative impact on their mental and physical well-being.

The majority of women in both research areas reported experiences of human trafficking, which caused them multiple psychological effects. This type of violence was typically practiced for financial purposes. A vivid example is a Nigerian woman who recalled her story of being kidnapped and only released when money was paid to the smugglers. She said: "I was kidnapped and sold several times just because they want to oblige my family to pay for me to be released." (Delamo, Nigeria, 28 years old.)

The majority of women respondents spoke of moments of stress while experiencing these forms of violence. This is mainly because the perpetrators are identified as persons having



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power. Interviewees struggled to find words to describe the inhuman treatment and horror they experienced. Sometimes, they felt valueless, especially when they are victimized on the basis of their illegal migration nature and abused by others in the same migratory conditions. “It used to happen a lot when we walked in the desert” she said, “when we reached the borders, I was raped by one of the migrants.” (Monica, Niger, a mother of a child.)

Trauma

Women feel depressed and anxious because of their fear from the unknown. In this respect, data revealed that illegal migrants do not have access to suitable basic needs. This situation push many, if not to say all the respondents to resort to collective action and find shelter as a group, where most of the time violence may take place. Anne, a 26-year-old from Ivory Coast, expressed her sufferings as she was a victim of aggression by some young people. She said:

“I was stopped by two men one of whom was holding a knife. They were drunk and put me in a corner, they said ‘mobile phone and money’ or we will kill you. I was afraid and gave them all the coins I collected from a day out begging in the street and my old Nokia mobile, which I use to call my children back home.”

With a feeling of fear to be deported back home, she chooses to keep silent and preferred not to go to the police. Others who experience aggression and gender-based violence also refrain from going to hospitals, knowing that they will not be admitted because of the absence of papers or will have to pay high amounts of money to benefit from private health services. In other words, no respondent believed that reporting violence or the abuse would lead to action being taken. This in return, left most migrant women in both research areas feeling isolated and feeling like they were on their own, with no one to help them improve their situation. A case in point is what Halimato said:



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“It is hard to find someone to help you escape the multiple abuses perpetuated by men. I once was burned by the head of the house I was working with as a domestic. She punished me for trying to escape.”

Distress and low self-esteem

All migrants emphasized the extreme difficulty in the crossing of the desert, which take anywhere up to 20 days of psychological distress and sufferings. One of the respondents said:

I have tried many times to cross the sea to Europe but in vein. I would like to find a way to return back home because I am exhausted with violence I suffered from on my way to Morocco. I have been here many times and I was deported twice to Algeria. I was in the forest of Gourougou and I tried to enter Melilla, with no success. I have wasted my money and I am out of energy. I just want to come back to my family and children in my home country. Paola, 25 years old and a mother of two children, Cameron.

Moreover, respondents claimed the hard sufferings they faced in the middle of the desert. Sometimes, they lost their track on the crossing with little food and water for nutrition. This put the lives of many at risk. Instead of achieving the goal of reaching Europe, migrants end up blocked in the desert without any orientations. For example, Maria, a young female aged 23 years from Mali said:

“the journey from Mali to Morocco was very hard and full of painful conditions. I have experienced the feeling of hunger and thirst, especially when I was crossing the desert with other fellows; lack of hygiene and very low living conditions added to various gender-based violence.”



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Given the difficulty that the crossing of the desert presents, it is surprising to hear from all the respondents their payments for assistance on certain legs of the journey. None of the respondents has revealed her disagreement to seek help from others to cross the desert. This assistance is not part of the large-scale smuggling operations that are often known via media and stakeholders' reports. It is rather small in scale and local in nature. Migrants pay for this type of help to cross specific borders. It is often paid to other migrants who previously have made the journey and sometimes want to earn more money to pay for their onward journeys. However, none of the informants interviewed had yet reached her dream of reaching Europe.

Participants reported their sufferings from low self-esteem because of the precarious life conditions and the absence of the basic needs. The findings of the interviews match with the results of a study conducted by the Médecins Sans Frontières (*Doctors without borders*) on violence, vulnerability and migration. They examined the migrants' living conditions and found that they lack access to quality shelter, clean water and good sanitation, which might affect their lives and put them at risk of psychological traumas and effects on the migrants' mental health. According to MSF (2013), migrants who suffer from:

the lack of privacy and inability to wash or maintain basic standards of hygiene, combined with the fact that many migrants are unable to legally work and have to resort to practices such as begging, can undermine their sense of self-worth and dignity and result in feelings of extreme shame and anguish (p. 10).

The illegal status of migrant women in the field work is also viewed as a cause of their vulnerability and low self-esteem. It is a source provoking aggression and the risk of brutal treatment from police, racist behaviors, lack of access to basic needs, and in some cases other migrants' abuse and exploitation. Matilde, a nurse from Ghana, says she is optimistic and happy to take her degree with her wherever she goes. Despite all the obstacles, she still wants to continue her trip and persists in looking for a job opportunity in a European country, which is suitable for her degree. However, these precarious life conditions and racial as well as social stigmatization of migrants may not impede them from staying positive and focus their energies



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on achieving their dream of reaching “the Eldorado”. In this respect, they focus on dealing with the social exclusion, violence and blame for the sake of finding a way to cross the borders and have better life conditions.

Discussion

Gender based violence is a constant influence of the migration process, with many sub-Saharan women migrants experiencing conflicts, sexual abuses, physical and psychological traumas in their countries of origins and/ or during the journey to reach their final destinations. The findings of the field work demonstrate that the longer the respondents stay in the desert or in countries of transit, the more they are subjected to violence, exploitation and different forms of abuse. In this respect, one may assume that the violence and difficulties confronted by women on roads is perceived to be because of their gender. Women are observed to be used for sex whether or not they accepted.

In the case of the participants in both research areas, the particularity of the violence they face is frequently associated with psychological, physical and sexual mistreatment. Those who faced violence were either personally victimized or were forced to observe how their partners, family members, co-migrants and friends were subject to violence in their presence. Other female migrants knew about their friends and family members are being victims of violence which took place in Morocco or at its borders, especially at Oujda city. This is in fact revealed by migrants whose intention of being in Morocco might be different, as they take it as a stage in their migration process to reach the final destination, while for others it is a source to get integrated in the society and search for better life conditions.

The disparity between the expectations of a better life and the reality of Sub-Saharan migrant women’s situation during the journey is a cause of diverse traumas and psychological shock. For instance, among the 20 interviewees who talked about their experiences of violence, 16 women from both cities have reported that they faced psychological violence primarily in relation to their illegal status, racist verbal abuses and humiliation. To begin with, the weight of expectations traced by migrant women is high, particularly among those who have received money from family members to cover the costs of the trips. They find themselves disappointed and trapped in the middle of nowhere. Yet without any sources to sustain themselves, which



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result in mix feelings of regret, helplessness, guilt, pain, failure and frustration. This is aggravated by the various obstacles impeding their continuation of the journey, which is coupled with gender-based discrimination, racial and social stigmatization due to the illegal status. Surely, all these hindrances may destabilize their mental health and cause them psychological problems. Since women use different routes to reach the host country, their migration process may end up sometimes in their death. This is emphasized by (Simon, 2006): *“many unfortunate migrants have lost their lives by drowning in the straits of Gibraltar, the Atlantic between the Canary Islands and Africa, the Aegean and off the shores of Sicily while fleeing from hardship, extreme poverty or discrimination, or merely seeking a better future”* (p. 26)

To this effect, one may deduce that sub-Saharan migrant women face difficulties both at the institutional and societal levels, which emphasize their precariousness and vulnerability. These dramas are manifested throughout the entire journey, whether it's through crossing the desert or off the coasts between North Africa and Europe. In the same vein, Gatti (2008) emphasized that many women are lagged in the desert. Constantly stopped by the police and the military, these women are beaten, tortured and dispossessed of everything. Then, some cannot move forward or come back. They end up wandering in the city of Agadez, starving, and ready to accept any work in exchange for a bowl of food. Thus, this results in hindering their full access to basic necessities and suffering from obstacles that mark their migration process. The present study made it also possible to better understand the violent experiences faced by migrants during their migration journeys. These demonstrate that women migrants experience physical, sexual and psychological traumas, where they are continually subjected to practices that put them at risk of confronting violent people and perpetrator who abuse and exploit them. Consequently, all this affirms the very unsatisfactory situation of sub-Saharan migrant women whose aim is to better their life conditions, but find themselves faced with double pain because of their gender and migration statuses.

Migrant women who survived the gender-based violence are at high risk of developing mental health problems. In this respect, psychological support is important in order to help the victims and the survivors of sexual mistreatment and violence cope with their experiences and avoid deterioration in their mental health. Even though, the extent of the psychological damage



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depends on certain factors such as the circumstances of the violence, the victim's relationship with the perpetrator, fear from further experiences of violence among others. Thus, the social stigmatization out of sexual violence that women suffer from, both during the journey and in borders or transit countries, can result in their vulnerability and marginalization.

All in all, the situation of sub-Saharan women and their experiences during the migration process provide a lens on women's marginalization and stigmatization. This makes the survival of these migrants in the host country difficult. In other words, the migration of women is fraught with contradictions. On the one hand, it leads to a double transgression: it upsets traditions and challenges the traditional division of roles in the framework of increasingly exogamous unions that transform the notion of the family. Traditionally speaking, it is men who migrate in a clandestine manner. In the last few years, migration has become feminized. Difficulties and risks incurred throughout the migratory process are sociologically regarded as obstacles to female migration. On the other hand, female migration reproduces representations and behaviors related to traditional female-male roles. This means that women have successfully shown some resistance to the traditional gender roles. In the discourse of all my respondents, they perceive themselves as successful individuals who succeeded in migrating and reaching at least Morocco like their male counterparts. Though they have faced problems in the migratory journey such as exploitation and gender-based violence, they still show capability and have the enthusiasm to continue their journey to Europe in order to help their families and change their living conditions. Furthermore, by crossing the borders, sub-Saharan migrant women effectively transcended the social and cultural boundaries and shaken up traditional beliefs that existed before their migration.

Conclusion

To conclude, the findings of the study support the idea that sub-Saharan women leave in a double pain because of their gender and migration identities. Indeed, "the Double pain" represents a new life condition of sub-Saharan migrant women during their migration process. The later puts them at risk of gender-based violence and multiple sufferings. This means that because of being a migrant woman, they suffer from numerous forms of violence during their journeys. For instance, they suffer from sexual, physical, and psychological by



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different people. Respondents from Casablanca and Oujda experience violence during their migration process from the country of origin, during the migratory process and whilst in the transit countries. 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 as Moroccan authorities continue to exercise restrictive migration strategies and policies that may impede their process of reaching the final destinations.

Given the remarkable violent and gender-based mistreatment experienced by sub-Saharan migrants, comprehensive cross-border and multi-level prevention strategies are of great importance to impede this phenomenon. Firstly, given the fact that the European Union contracting with different countries to regulate the status of the Sub-Saharan, it is crucial that the European Union adopts certain prevention factors. They might include political care for the conditions of the migrants and their families, especially in terms of health conditions and survival in order to have decent lives. Moreover, to change the migration regulation into one that advocates for human rights beyond survival and encourages all the partner authorities and institutions to abide by the humanitarian nature of the changes in order to allow the sub-Saharan migrants better lives.

Secondly, almost all interviewees who find themselves blocked in the Moroccan territories and could not continue the journey agreed upon the importance of regulating their status in the Moroccan Kingdom. This will enable them at least to have decent work and secure a living for them and for their families. In other words, being documented and employed is of great importance to the sub-Saharan migrants who decided to have a living in Morocco. Thirdly, they stressed on the essentiality of creating awareness among people on risk and prevention in order to prevent gender-based violence to happen to the sub-Saharan migrants and women in general. For this reason, they requested the application of laws to punish perpetrators of GBV as they believed this could make them halt the perpetrators from acting violently toward women.



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