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Stereotyping Sub-Saharan Female Migrants in Moroccan Print Media

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Abstract

Morocco currently occupies a curious position as both a country of transit and a country of installation for migrants originating from Sub-Saharan countries. While migration was previously dominated by males, the number of female migrants has increased significantly, culminating into the so called “the feminisation of migration». The situation of those migrants has grabbed media attention, especially of newspapers; hundreds of articles and reports have been written in newspapers, criticizing or denouncing the phenomenon. Even though the currently available body research has tended to neglect the linguistic ways in which such media convey meaning along the side of their use of images, little attention has been paid to language-based media. As such this paper scrutinises: (i) the depiction of Sub-Saharan female migrants in Moroccan print newspapers, and (ii) it considers how reports on ‘black’ African women migrants in Morocco may lead to propagating stereotypical acts and xenophobia towards this category of migrants. With these objectives in mind, this study is based on qualitative data of six news items and reports from three daily printed newspapers, chosen between 2012 and 2014. Relying on Critical Discourse Analysis has demonstrated the misrepresentation of female migrants by Moroccan print media.

Keywords: sub-Saharan female migrants, stereotype, xenophobia, newspapers, critical discourse analysis



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Introduction

The issue of migration has spawned abundant research and prompted a wide-ranging theoretical debate. Migration is simply a social phenomenon to a social scientist, with related social processes, actions, patterns, and outcomes, the examination of which illuminates our understanding of human life. Migration has received great scholarly attention by social scientists because “it has the potential to change individuals and societies in diverse and interesting ways, the potential to exploit, to enrich, to bring about competition, and to engender change.” (O’Reilly, 2016, p. 25). It raises questions not only about identity, belonging, and location but about representation and social cohesion or divisiveness as well. Migration, in general, is a particular challenge to theorists because it involves ‘nation’ at its heart. Unsurprisingly, international migration has become a “normal feature of contemporary societies: a global phenomenon of flows and counter-flows; geographical fluidity rather than population shifts; ongoing daily processes, not unique event.” (O’Reilly, 2016, p.25).

There is no doubt that the geographical situation of Morocco has made it an alley to Africa; this position has allowed the country throughout history to be a transit country for trades and people as well. Morocco has a long history with migration from Sub-Saharan countries; it has been a new Mecca for the followers of Sufi Orders that help Morocco to set up relations with several Muslim countries in Africa (Koundouno;Haim, 2013, p. 2;Tadlaouin, 2015, pp. 4-5; Haim, 2019).Indeed, this religious diplomacy has marked Morocco as a country of stability and in the process of development. This image has made it a destination country for some Sub-Saharan migrants who are seeking to finish their studies and immerse in the Sufi orders, particularly Tijaniya order¹; and a transit country for migrants, whose dream is to enter Europe through the borders of Ceuta and Melilla, fleeing conflicts and economic decline in several parts of the west and central Africa (De Haas, 2005; Norman, 2016, p. 8; Freedman, 2012, p. 41)

¹ For more information about Fes as an attractive destination to sub-Saharan migrants, read M. Berriane and M. Aderghal “Sub-Saharan Migrants in Fes: A presence on the margins of an evolvingcity” (Frontiers in Science and Engineering an International Journal Edited by Hassan II Academy of Science and Technology).



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However, during the last decade, the journey to Europe has become extremely difficult for Sub-Saharan Africans following Europe's intensified efforts to tighten its borders by erecting fences at Ceuta and Melilla, and installing an early-warning radar system at the strait of Gibraltar (Thorsen, 2017, p. 4; De Haas, 2005). Several EU countries have reacted to increasing Sub-Saharan immigration by attempting to 'externalize' border controls. They usually do so by putting pressure on North African countries to clamp down on illegal migration and to sign readmission agreements in exchange for development aid, and financial support for border controls (De bel-air, 2016, p. 2).

Consequently, the borders have become tighter, the smugglers more aggressive, and the passage more dangerous than ever. An increasing number of these migrants prefer to settle in Morocco rather than return to their unstable and unsafe countries (Marouan, 2011, p. 1; Collyer, 2006, p. 6). As a result, Morocco has received flows of immigrants, mainly illegal migrants, from Sub-Saharan countries. This new condition obliged Morocco to alter its views towards those immigrants after it has considered them for a long time 'economic migrants' (De Haas, 2005). It has equally obliged Morocco to reform its policies by adopting a new approach to migration, aiming to embrace the newcomers. Thereupon, Morocco officially declared itself a country of immigration in 2013, thus responding to the growing number of immigrants arriving from sub-Saharan Africa.

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 that the journey across the large Saharan desert is unbearable. Being in the total mercy of smugglers, many experience physical violence, especially women who are raped frequently 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 Report, 2013). Therefore, many female migrants fall pregnant during their journey.

These obstacles have obliged a large number of female migrants to consider Morocco as a second-best option. They are scattered in big cities and camps outside the fences of Ceuta and



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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 corona virus (Dumpis, 2021). 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 those transit female migrants in Morocco. Because of their illegal residence, some highlighted the ‘invasion’ of ‘black’ females in the streets and public spaces in big cities, while others have shown some hostile interactions between migrants and locals in selected areas.

When newspapers publish a story or a report indicating that ‘illegal’ female migrants are contagious and risky disease holders, based on police reports or society assumptions, this is classified as a stereotype. The objective is to look at how newspapers generally reproduce and disseminate negative and stereotypical discourse that may create an inferior and unpleasant image of ‘black’ female African migrants. Accordingly, the image of female migrants in Moroccan public opinion depends heavily on the way they are depicted and highlighted in the daily newspapers. Thus, this paper aims at exposing how stereotypes are communicated and framed through print media. The article questions how stereotyping perpetuates the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ dichotomy among local citizens and Sub-Saharan migrants. It equally probes how the six news items and reports understudy reproduce stereotypes based on differences about ‘black’ African migrants.

It is important to reveal that the word ‘migrant’ is used to describe, with other words such as immigrant, any person who enters Morocco whether legally or illegally. The purpose is that these terms are utilized by the press to refer generally to female migrants coming from Sub-Saharan countries though some might be refugees or asylum seekers. Yet each word has a particular meaning that conveys universal commitment and outcomes. It is true that in public policy the term ‘immigrant’ is common, but in this article, we use the terms ‘migrant’ and ‘immigrant’ interchangeably.



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Literature Review

Sub-Saharan immigration to Morocco has become a topic of interest for many researchers from different disciplines. Most researchers have focused so far on the mechanisms of the integration of sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco (Bitari, 2020; Bendra, 2017; Berriane et al., 2014). Iman Bendra (2019), for example, investigates how migrants' status (illegality/legality) and the socio-political conditions within the country affect their potential integration and/or exclusion. In addition to analysing the reasons behind the announcement of the National Strategy for Immigration and Asylum in Morocco, she highlights the living circumstances of migrants in Morocco through the job market, housing, access to health service, education, and their relation with the local population. She concludes that “The circumstances encountered by migrants in Morocco, and migrants' interactions with the public space, are similar to those of undocumented migrants in Europe and other countries” (Bendra, 2019, p. 21)

Similarly, Johara Berriane (2013), in her article “Integration mechanisms of sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco: social encounters, insertion in urban space, economic integration”, relies on two surveys she conducted in 2006 and 2011 in Rabat and Fes. Her objective was to illustrate how do Sub-Saharans live and experience the encounter with Moroccans. Besides, through migrants' experiences, she targets the influence of the politics of the host society on migrants' trajectories and projects living in Morocco.

In another study that draws attention to the humanitarian approach and violence near the borders; Elsa Tyszler (2020), for example, gives special attention to the embodied experiences of the border. Based on two and a half years of field research in Morocco (primarily in Rabat and the north) and the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, Tyszler's contribution demonstrates that humanitarianism practiced in a border town in Northern Morocco is also a space for updating race and gender relations, which, contrary to its claims, can lead to even greater restrictions on the mobility of those being 'helped', particularly women, and can reproduce a racialized and gendered order at the border. In a similar vein, Gazzotti's fieldwork, “Deaths, Borders, and the Exception: Humanitarianism at the Spanish–Moroccan Border” (2019), highlights humanitarian interventions in protecting a life that has become structurally degraded, pointing to the bestialisation of Black lives.



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Hitherto, the study conducted by Jane Freedman (2012) is among of the few studies that focus on a gendered reading of African migration in Morocco. It traces the experience of female Sub-Saharan aiming to reach Europe through Morocco. His study has demonstrated that Sub-Saharan females migrate to another country due to economic, physical, and social insecurities. 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. Another study that draws attention to female migrants in Morocco is that of Inka Stock's (2011), entitled "Gender and the Dynamics of Mobility: Reflections on African Migrant Mothers and "Transit Migration" in Morocco". The study shows that children and gender are often used by women deliberately to enhance their opportunities for mobility. This paper also indicates that women are "actively producing and reproducing their gender roles and identities in order to increase access to social and physical mobility, often by incorporating their children into the process" (Stock, 2011, p. 19).

Another worth mentioning research is that of La Darrien Gillette (2014) *Human Trafficking in Morocco: A focus on Sub-Saharan Migrant Women*. Her influential work concentrates on the experiences of African female migrants with sexual violence and exploitation. Her data was collected from international and local organisations in addition to actual Sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco. She sums up that in the situation of some migrants in Morocco from south of the Sahara sexual exploitation is forced upon the women for pleasure in some cases and in others used as payment for crossing certain barriers during the migration journey (Gillete, 2014, p. 7).

All of the aforementioned studies have focused on the subject of migration in terms of the integration process that migrants face in some cities, or on a gendered interpretation of this sort of movement, and sexual violence they come across while crossing the borders. This paper, however, illuminates the way some Moroccan newspapers portray Sub-Saharan female migrants in particular. How were they portrayed before and after the new migration reform? What effect print media may cause to female migrants due to the negative representation. For this purpose, we have chosen some reports from three widely-read daily newspapers, namely *Almassae*, *Akhdash Al Maghribia*, and *Akhbar Alyaoum*. The increasing flows of Sub-Saharan migration have urged the issue of illegal immigration to be a topic of interest for Moroccan newspapers in particular with some differences in terms of news coverage and frequency.



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Media is one of the principal agents in shaping public perceptions and opinions about significant political and social issues. Through its coverage, media generally, can play a crucial role in promoting or combating existing beliefs, ideologies, and stereotypes. On this concern, Ivan makes use of Bernard Cohen who states that “the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about” (Ivan, 2011, p. 93). He refers to media as a bridge between our prejudices and the pictures we have, which construct the reality in our mind through the daily selection of news. He adds “the world will look different to different people depending on the map that is drawn for them by writers, editors, and publishers of the paper they read” (Ivan, 2011, p. 93).

Methodology

Our concern in this paper is to look at the way Sub-Saharan women migrants are portrayed by the Moroccan print media. Relying on Critical Discourse Analysis is helpful understanding how this category was perceived in the Moroccan press. This research method primarily “studies the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (Teun A. Van Dijk, 2015, p. 466)². Because CDA addresses social problems and political issues, the aim of this paper is to illustrate the reproduction of dominance by stereotyping ‘black’ female sub-Saharan migrants. In other words, the news items under analysis were certainly used to reflect the image of ‘black’ Sub-Saharan female in people’s mind and how they have been stereotyped within Moroccan society and to what extent this reflection may affect their integration.

It is worth noting that the work of the British linguist Norman Fairclough and the Dutch linguist Van Dijk, labelled as Critical Discourse Analysis claims to be more critical of language as it is used socially (Hesmondhalgh, 2006, p. 121). Thus, CDA enables us to understand the relationship between language and power. Moreover, Critical Discourse Analysis allows us to understand

²Teun A. Van Dijk “Critical Discourse Analysis” in *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, (Second Edition). Edited by Deborah Tannen, Heidi E. Hamilton, and Deborah Schiffrin, 2015.



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how texts make meaning and the different communicative forms in which those meanings are conveyed like language, image, sound, etc. Deconstructing how meaning is created allows us to understand how audiences engage with the texts under analysis [...]. Additionally, CDA allows us to establish a relationship between the multimodal characteristics of texts and the social, political and economic contexts that frame them. (Martinez, 2013, p. 4)

Consequently, decoding the images and the terms used to depict the existence of the African ‘other’, mainly of female migrants, may offer the reader a view from above how journalists and reporters may influence the reader’s opinion as well as the inhabitants’ interaction with the newcomers.

The focus of this paper was mainly related to the most famous daily newspapers *Elmassae*, *Al Akhdath Almaghribia*, and *Akhbar Alyoum*. The choice of these dailies has been based on the fact that they are widely spread in Morocco. According to the Le Desk: Reporters without Borders and to the last report of OJD Maroc of 2016, *Almassae*, for example, “was the second most widely distributed Arabic-speaking, general information Moroccan daily newspaper in the kingdom, with a daily average of 33 262 copies sold”. A total of 6 news items and reports between 2012 and 2014 were investigated. They were collected from newspapers archive in Rabat and websites. Choosing this period was deliberate simply because the state officially declared itself an immigrant country. Prior to 2013, the news coverage of illegal immigration was rare and mostly associated with illegality and death, and sometimes negative coverage pop up as Ashamal Magazine did in September 2005, entitling its coverage “Black locust invading Northern Morocco”. Equally important, the discourses adopted by these dailies had mainly been soared before the king’s speech on the 11th of November 2013; the latter is considered a turning point in Moroccan migration policy as it brought about some changes in the news coverage.

Findings

Data from the newspapers under analyses echo to a great extent the real situation of Sub-Saharan female migrants in Morocco. Many of them have gone through stereotypical acts by some Moroccans; this might be due to the negative coverage of Sub-Saharan migration by Moroccan print newspapers. The selected news items indicate the crucial role of language and images in conveying messages about certain topics.



Figure 1 (Almassae newspaper, 2012, Jan 05, N1643)

The news report in figure 1 was published by Almassae daily newspaper on January 5th, 2012. The article comprises two pages with some pictures of ‘black’ female migrants. The image on the top of the cover includes two African women with two African men setting in a popular café; It almost occupies half of the page. Inside, a huge banner headline reads: **‘Battalions of illegal female migrants spread AIDS in the streets of Morocco’**. ‘The investigation’ includes seven pictures in total; three of the pictures show ‘black’ African girls standing next to the clients’ car; others picture these girls at home or with other African men.

The use of numbers and sub-titles are two main factors that can be noticed in this ‘investigation’. Titles like *‘More than 200 of unknown cases among African females’*, *‘Silent revenge’*, *‘High-end prostitution’* are amongst the sub-titles of this report. Another noticeable

item in this report is the repetition of some words and expressions, such as ‘The African HIV,’ ‘African prostitution,’ ‘threaten,’ ‘contagious,’ to name but a few.



Figure 2 (Al Massae Newspaper, 2013, Apr 18, N 2042)

Another chosen report was published on April 18th, 2013 by the same daily newspaper highlighted the same topic: “African prostitutes in Casablanca”. The readers can easily be attracted by the big picture of a ‘black’ girl behind a fence. The picture is positioned at the top and middle of the article; inside, a banner headline reads: “**Almassae**” reveals the map of **African prostitution in Casablanca**. Accordingly, the report includes nine pictures in total, three on each side of the newspaper picturing them half-naked and two at the bottom.

Besides, some small titles are used to mention the commonplaces of these ‘prostituting areas’ in the city of Casablanca. The reporter locates eight places that are considered the ‘**Hotbeds of Black Sex**’: Bab Marrakesh, Ain Diab, Moulay Youssef street, and many others. Additionally, the repetition of some words and phrases is also obvious while reading ‘the investigation’; Black sex, African females, illegals, and threaten.

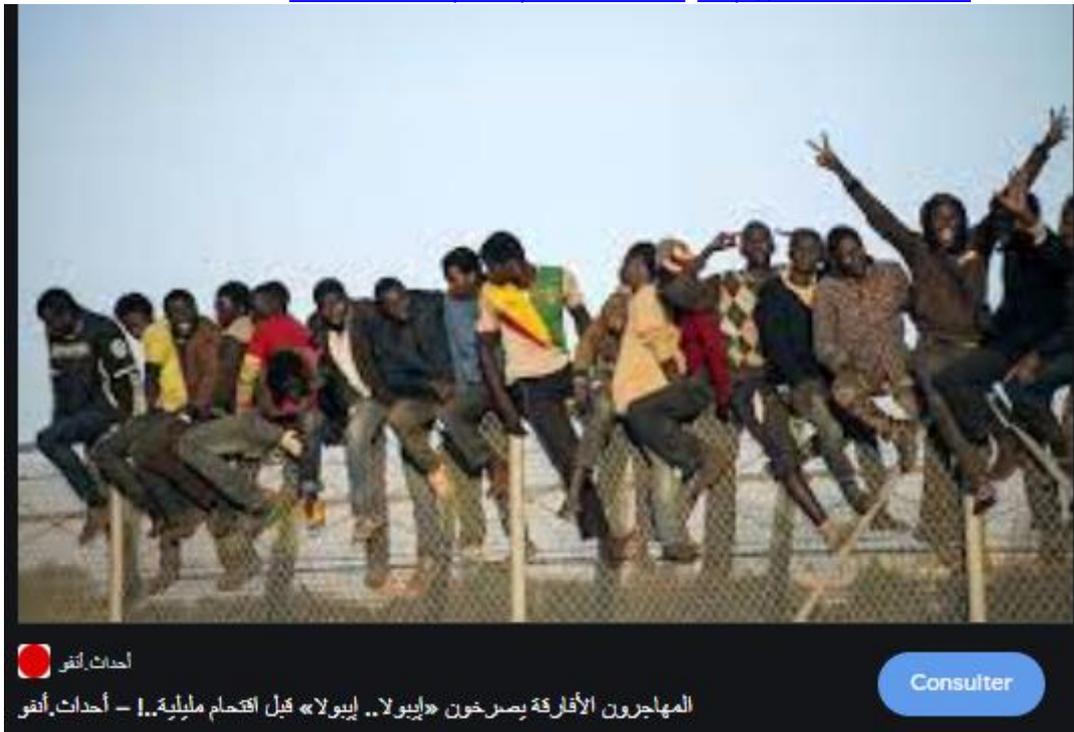


Figure 3 (Erreur ! Référence de lien hypertexte non valide. accessed on 03 / 10 / 2021)

Figure 3 (African migrants shout ‘Ebola, Ebola’ before the invasion of Melilla)

This news item was published during the spread of the Ebola epidemic³; I chose this news item because it is related to the topic of African migrants regardless of their gender as ‘contagious’. The headline is absorbing ‘**African migrants shout ‘Ebola, Ebola’ before the invasion of Melilla**’. It tells the reader that African migrants ‘break into’ Melilla shouting a deadly disease ‘Ebola’; The image used with the news item pictures several ‘black’ males on the top of the hedge raising their hands and waving; it indicates that they are shouting waiting for a chance to jump over.

Additionally, the writer of the news item made use of the Mayor of the Mallela’ Abd Malak El Barkani’ to illustrate the daily ‘invasion’ of the African immigrants. The repetition of words such as ‘invasion’, ‘shout’, ‘Ebola’ is also noticeable in the news item under analysis.

³This news item was taken from the online website of the newspaper as I lost the hard copy, but the content is the same. (Accessed on 03rd Oct 2021)

إيبولا .. وباء يزيد من انتشار فيروس العنصرية عند المغاربة



Figure 4 (إيبولا .. وباء يزيد من انتشار فيروس العنصرية عند المغاربة)

Figure 4 (Ebola .. an epidemic that increases the spread of the virus of racism among Moroccans.)

This last news item under analysis⁴ is taken to highlight the difficulties of black African immigrants they faced daily during the epidemic of Ebola. The latter raises stereotypical and negative connotations as the headline indicates; this was the situation of immigrants not only in Morocco but worldwide as the source of the virus was from Africa. The eye-catching headline resumes the way these ‘others’ are depicted in public opinion: **‘Ebola.. an epidemic that increases the spread of the virus of racism among Moroccans’**.

The report reveals the story of some African immigrants in popular neighbours like Al Qamra in Rabat, and the situation they have undergone due to the spread of this deadly disease. It also includes dropheads indicating their difficulties: *‘bitter reality’*, *‘Homeless on the sidelines’*, *‘A call without a response’*, *‘To come to seek knowledge is not to come to cross’*. These dropheads indicate the real suffer of migrants due to the spread of this epidemic not only in Morocco, but globally as well.

⁴This news item was taken from the online website of the newspaper as I lost the hard copy of the newspaper that goes back to 2014. Yet, the same report was found printed and published by the newspaper that year. (Accessed on the 3rd Oct 2021)



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Discussion

As a result of strengthening the fences and borders between the two countries, meeting female and male migrants in the streets of Morocco has become normalised. Wherever you go you come across some female alone or accompanied by their counterparts begging mainly near traffic lights of almost all main Moroccan cities (Oujda, Fez, Rabat, Casablanca to mention but a few). Unsurprisingly, the presence of females of different ages has doubled in such areas; they ask for a few dirhams so that they can feed their children or rent a house in their most common places. For instance, in his article, Boukhsas illustrated that Fes is considered one of the main cities for settlement for those migrants simply because it used to contain a large camp built near the train station before being destroyed by the authorities in 2018. Therefore, most of them live now in areas like Liraq, Monflouri, Atlas, Labita, Dokarat, and Najah. (Boukhsas, 2020; Berriane and Aderghal, 2014, p. 14)

Unfortunately, there are no official statistics concerning the number of female migrants in Morocco, yet their high presence is obvious in cities like Rabat, Casablanca, Oujda, and Fes in addition to the northern cities like Tanger, Tetouan, and Nador. Female migrants were supposed to represent 20 to 30 percent of the total ‘transit migrants’ in 2010 (Stock, 2011, p. 4). Mghari in his survey indicates that almost 20% of irregular migrants are women compared to 80 % men. This imbalance is explained, on the one hand, by the inequality of women and men to face irregular migration and, on the other hand, the difficulties of approaching sub-Saharan migrant women during the investigation (Mghari, 2008, p. 9; Collyer, 2006, pp. 12-13). The percentage of female migrants these days is higher; most of the studies about Sub-Saharan im/migrants in Morocco are based on male migrants and their life experiences (Lahlou, 2005; Bachelet, 2019). Women experiences are often overlooked or been portrayed concerning sexual violence and/ or trafficking issues (Stock, 2011, p. 5; MSF 2013, p. 21; Keynaert et al, 2014)

The feminization of the phenomenon is obvious in the descriptions of African women migrants as prostitutes hanging around the streets of Moroccan cities. Hearing about the ‘wave’ of ‘illegal immigrants’ that are ‘invading’ the country severely impacts public opinion; therefore, they are going to be stereotyped and scapegoated by a large amount of the Moroccan population. The increasing number of xenophobic and racist practices by some Moroccans is



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supposed to represent popular thinking, which might be the result of slanted articles. We must assume that stereotyping and racist acts can be expressed in the newspapers by presenting those migrants, in this case, female as a threat. As Van Dijk puts it “the news media do not passively describe or report news events in the world, but actively (re)-construct them, mostly on the basis of many types of source discourses” (T. Van Dijk, 1989, p. 5). His analysis of how the reproduction of racism at the macro-level is actually reproduced at the level of Micro-level of news making and news reports illustrates the possibility of brainwashing the readers.

Surely then, the image of Sub-Saharan migrants in public opinion is influenced by the news coverage of those newspapers. Hence, their prejudices rely on the manner newspapers deal with the issue of migration. Prejudices, as Dijk highlights, “is not a personal opinion about other groups, but a shared group-based attitudes towards another (mostly dominated) group, and hence often associated with relations of group dominance and power” (T. Van Dijk, 1991, p. 38). Thus, the reports analysed indicate that some journalists portray some special issues with a kind of investigation though, they underestimate and help in shaping and reshaping readers’ opinion towards female illegal migrants. In other words, “the Press has the power to modify or to shape our attitudes because each linguistic component is not chosen at random but, on the contrary, is motivated and created as a result of a complex phenomenon that can specify meanings” (Martinez, 2013, p. 13).

Unremarkably, the majority of readers will be attracted by “**Battalions of illegal female migrants spread the AIDS in the streets of Morocco**”. This sort of headline can urge some Moroccans to ill-treat female migrants and stereotype them because of a slanted title. The headline is presented as “the investigation of the week”, which indicates not only that is “news” but also the newspaper probably has done some “investigation” about the topic of “sub-Saharan women migrants” and their work as “prostitutes” in Morocco. It is widely recognised that many readers skim the newspaper rather than read all the news stories. Readers who adopt this strategy focus on eye-catching titles and words. In figure (1), the investigation claims that sub-Saharan African women were largely responsible for the spread of HIV/AIDS in Morocco. On the top of the page there is a number indicating that ‘**160 African migrants are cured of the AIDS**’, and ‘**more than 200 cases are not indicated**’. The reporter considers the issue very



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crucial as it touches Moroccans' health; the phenomenon has been 'normalized' while police make 'seasonal campaigns' that do not eliminate the roots of this phenomenon. Meanwhile, the second page includes four pictures of young females standing by the side of some cars seducing some clients. Several subtitles are also found indicating some numbers and the assistance of Doctors without Borders; thus, the importance of the headlines cannot be underestimated.

Starting with the headlines, it is obviously clear that headlines express the major topic of the news item; in this case, the topic of these news reports is 'black' African females as prostitutes and disease contagious, in general. The most obvious property of these headlines is their rhetoric, especially the hyperbolic use of metaphors. Therefore, the presence of 'African prostitute' is conceptualised as 'Battalions', which indicates the military 'invasion' of 'illegal' African 'black' females in Morocco. Certainly, such metaphors are hardly innocent, and the use of such terms may amplify that African women are contagious and a threat not only to the inhabitants of Casablanca but the whole 'streets' of Morocco. Besides, battalions do not use violence in conquering their target, but soft weapons including diseases like AIDS and HIV as a massive threat. The target of this threat is Morocco and its streets and cities which are 'topicalised' in the headlines. In Figure (2), for example, the 'investigation' illustrates the spread of '**Hotbeds of Black Sex**' in some common places in Casablanca: Bab Marrakesh, Ain Diab, Moulay Youssef street, for example.

When it comes to female Moroccan migrants in Europe, often the news and reports have positive and economic connotations; while, on the contrary, when referring to Sub-Saharan female migrants, the Moroccan media systematically shift to legality and criminal issues, for example. Throughout my analysis of the news items and reports, we have deduced that Moroccan newspapers do not perpetuate totally hostile images of Sub-Saharan migrants, but it tends to focus on the negative side of this phenomenon. That is to say, there is a tendency of dramatization and sensationalism in the press when it comes to migration from African countries. This tendency, it seems to me, has contributed to depicting migrants as a threat; they are usually associated with dirty works.



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In the first report, for instance, the journalist emphasises the idea that they are illegal migrants motivated by the circumstances in which they live to take this dirty job as their source of money. Mfimba (a sex worker from the Democratic Republic of Congo) states that:

A lot of female migrants from my country, who have arrived and those on their way despite the borders between Morocco and Algeria are closed, practice prostitution although some of them are infected by sexual diseases like AIDS but they are obliged to live and save money to continue the journey toward Europe. (Almassae newspaper, Jan 05, 2012, N1643- translation mine)

The reporter includes sympathetic language in his report. He also states that “this girl was raped in her home country, on her way to Morocco by smugglers, and also by Moroccans on her way to Casablanca”. Moreover, not far away from Al firdawse neighbourhood in Casablanca, high-class nightclubs in Ain Diab have begun to make use of African female migrants. The journalist claims that “clients have relationships with those migrants regardless to the danger that they carry”. Following the avowal of Mfimba, some African female migrants do not care about the infection of Moroccans, the journalist points out “Mfimba and her friends are not greatly interested in the health of Moroccans since their time in Morocco are temporary, so they do their work (prostitution) without the slightest of feeling guilt” (Almassae newspaper, Jan 05, 2012, N1643).

Indeed, the press does not usually induce the population to act negatively against the newcomers, but exaggerating headlines may have a fundamental function. Reading headlines like **‘the map of African prostitution in Casablanca’**, **‘Salient revenge’**, **‘High-end prostitution’** do urge some Moroccans to avoid dealing with immigrants thinking that all of them are AIDS contagious. The fact of writing from a xenophobic stance pushes many Moroccans to assume that most of those female migrants are spreading health diseases among Moroccans. Surely, such titles may not only play a crucial function in stereotyping migrants from Sub-Saharan countries but lead to the ill-treatment and conflicts between the inhabitants and the African immigrants.



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Although it goes back to 2009, the survey conducted by the Moroccan Association for Studies and Research on Migration's (AMERM), entitled "Les Marocains et Les Migrants subsahariens: Quelles Relations", illustrates the relationships between Moroccans and the new arrivals from Africa. The survey asked a plethora of questions, among those questions, they asked some Moroccans if they would share lodging with Sub-Saharan immigrants only 30.1% responded "yes" and around 70% responded "no". Then the 70% who responded "no" were asked to give a reason for this resistance. The general response is a difference of cultures, or "way of life." A fear of disease is another reason given by 13.6% of men and 16.8% of women. This view is high among young people aged between 18-24 and people of a high level of education (AMERAM, 2009, p. 76). These particular reasons are very telling in that they voice out the negative stereotypes of the sub-Saharan African, as poor and unclean, and a potential carrier of the disease (such as HIV/AIDS).

The use of photographs is another fundamental element that should be foregrounded, the saying "One picture is worth a thousand words" demonstrates the power of pictures in grabbing and holding the attention of readers; the power of the information they can convey. According to the common phrase, "I will believe it when I see it," individuals prefer to believe their sense of sight more than other sensory organs. Besides, the print use texts to glue readers to the pages of newspapers simply because media experts are aware of the fact that wide pages of texts in newspapers without pictures will result in the speedy diminishing of interest for readers, no matter how interesting a story is. Given all these, the importance of photographs in the newspapers' report can certainly affect the reader. In the two 'investigations' of Almassae newspaper, there are sixteen pictures of female 'black' African migrants, they are effectively used to accompany the news story and tell the news better. However, picturing some half-naked or in seducing position bargaining with their clients, can lead to misunderstanding and manipulate the reader about the 'danger' this African female carry out. Additionally, associating the spread of Ebola with an image of African immigrants (figure 3) on the fence trying to 'invade' Mallela may also lead to ill-treating the new arrivals.

In addition to the topic of prostitution, we found it equally essential to rely on some extra news items from other newspapers to bring back the coverage of Moroccan newspapers during



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the spread of the Ebola epidemic. The purpose is to highlight the idea of African migrants, both female and male, as contagious. It was widely known that the source of this disease was from the center of Africa mainly Liberia. Moreover, the spread of this disease in Sub-Saharan countries had led a large number of newsmakers to devote numeral articles to such risky diseases. Moroccan press like many other world presses had highlighted the issue and sometimes exaggerated it while associating the disease with Sub-Saharan migrants who entered Morocco through the borders with Algeria. Many articles were published in which those migrants were considered as a threat to Moroccans.

Almassae newspaper published an article in which the author tackles the menace of those migrants because they were considered the main contagious of this disease from their country of origin to Morocco before Spain; he states

Spaniards look to the epidemic that is coming from Liberia and other countries; the holders of this epidemic who transfer it to Spain are illegal Sub-Saharan immigrants, who come mostly from the downtown area of West Africa, and these do not pass through the bridge leads directly from their countries to Spain, but there is a bridge the other must pass through, which is Morocco. (Almassae Newspaper, Aug 26, 2014, N 2461-translation mine)

Besides, In a very telling headline, ahdath.info (the online website of Ahdath Almaghribia newspaper) indicates that “*African migrants shout ‘Ebola, Ebola’ before the invasion of Melilla*”. In fact, this title connotes that they are the only infected people, and, hence, should be prevented to enter the country and deported to their country of origin. The interview indicates that “those migrants use these terms to scare the Spanish guards and therefore sneak into the Spanish territory” (Almassae Newspaper, Aug 26, 2014, N 2461). The journalist also makes use of the mayor’s description of the ‘invasion’, and how they, sometimes, spilt over the guards so that they can be terrified and let them enter the territory. Hence, Both the journalist and the mayor are indirectly associating this deadly disease with African migrants crossing the fences.



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Such images about migrants from Sub-Saharan countries have led to more racist acts by some Moroccan children and sometimes young people. Indeed, discriminatory attitudes became worse after an outbreak of the Ebola epidemic in many African countries, making the lives of many immigrants in Morocco turn into a real hell. We have noticed that the discourses of newspapers towards Sub-Saharan migrants, in general, have changed after the state declaration as an immigrant's country. The shift has been noticeable in reporting their daily difficulties in Morocco and with some inhabitants. They have started to question their identity formation and the racist acts they confront. Therefore, the news coverage has become less xenophobic in reporting the issue of African immigration in Morocco. The following news item was chosen to illustrate this point. A concrete example mentioned by *alyoum24.com* (the online website of *Akhbar Al Yaoum*, figure 4) brings into light this point; “a bare-headed goes quickly toward his destination, in Al karma neighborhood, before he was stopped by children's laugh chanting ‘Ebola, Ebola’ though they do not know the features of the disease”. Moreover, during that period dealing with African migrants was hard due to the outbreak of Ebola and the spread of the disease among Sub-Saharan migrants. Hence, they were looked at as a threat to Moroccans; this fact was recognized by the speech of Dr. Alwardi, a former minister of Health when he stated that “we should not deal with African migrants in racist acts because of Ebola” (*alyoum24.com*)

The fear of ‘Ebola’ can raise xenophobia among citizens and therefore point a finger at those migrants as the contagion of this ‘modern epidemic’ as Mass Media of the world describes it. Moreover, Evan Williams told Al Jazeera America that “taxis stopped serving him after Ebola broke out in West Africa”. Though the illness didn't reach Morocco, Williams said “it increased the stigmatization of black Africans, who were wrongly associated with the disease”. He said migrants are treated “like animals” in Morocco. “Even in our country, where it is really poor, we don't live like this” he adds (Maggy, 2015).

All in all, though Moroccan press hasn't made any clear racist attack on Sub-Saharan migrants because of the outbreak of Ebola and the spread of contagious diseases like AIDS, the images that are used while describing the disease may shift the popular perceptions of migrants. Therefore, the Moroccan press, in general, should be more cautious when it comes to the image



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of the ‘other’ who is our neighbour and who has historically been part of Morocco’s identity. It is said that the press can play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions, thus Moroccan press is able to make that ‘other’ who is alien to some Moroccans easily integrate within the society. And instead of depicting those migrants negatively they should rely on positive images of their success, especially women.

Conclusion

The present article has shed light on the press coverage of the presence of female migrants in Morocco. Although many do believe that the press is reflecting what takes place in reality, one should be careful about the use of language since language is more powerful than one can imagine. No one can deny the effective role of the press in spreading truth and information to the reader, but the findings indicate that exaggerating the attitudes of some migrants from Sub-Saharan countries sometimes might lead to social problems. The study also strived to raise awareness of the power of language and images in press coverage; numerous fights have been erupted between some Moroccans against those migrants in some streets probably because a journalist or a report has portrayed an event in which an irregular immigrant committed a crime or raped a woman or caught spreading the virus among Moroccans. Generally, the newsmaker relies on the police information to report the incident, and tends to report what the officials are doing and saying; they rather need also to take the opinions and actions of those migrants into consideration. Therefore, The Moroccan press should refrain from broadcasting any message inciting intolerance, violence, hatred, and xenophobia towards Sub-Saharan female migrants and should instead actively contribute to awareness.

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