



Senegalese Migrants in Morocco: From a Gender Perspective

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INTRODUCTION

Although the Senegalese presence in Morocco is old, the research which analysed this presence only came to light in the 1990s. In fact, this interest was a result of the creation of the Schengen area and the closure of the borders by Europe which put the spotlight on the sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco (Bensaad 2008). These migrants are stigmatised and often perceived as illegal migrants.

Migration of Senegalese to Morocco is not a new fact but it is part of an old trans-Saharan mobility. A historical perspective noted by several researchers (Ba Cheick and Choplin 2005) is often neglected by migration policies in Europe and in Africa.

Analysis of migration of Senegalese women to Morocco is an opportunity to show the particularity of Senegalese migration and make visible the role of women in this migration.

In addition, I intend in this chapter to make a point of the different views extracted from research which investigated the migration of Senegalese to Morocco. I will then briefly view some research that treated

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this migration from a gender point of view. Finally, I'll attempt, from the investigation results made between 2012 and 2013 into the migration of Senegalese to Morocco, to show the utility of a gender approach in the understanding of this migration.

THE SENEGALESE MIGRATION TO MOROCCO: A HISTORIC EXCEPTION OR A DESTINED COMMUNITY

Whether it is at the level of the heads of state or of the statements of the interviewed people, everyone agrees on the privileged and historic relations which bind Morocco to Senegal. This latter is often given as an example to express Morocco's attachment to its African continent. Nevertheless, this historic link which was strengthened several times and concretised by bilateral conventions and agreements did not prevent Senegalese migrants from being perceived as *Sub-Saharan* migrants—migrants in illegal situations having a single purpose, that is, to join Europe illegally. This homogenisation of the migrants arriving from the sub-Saharan countries hides a whole piece of the history of intra-African migration and denotes a big misunderstanding of the profiles of those who form this vague sub-Saharan group that appears to have no history. This oversight is particularly visible in the literature on the migration of the sub-Saharan group in Morocco and can be considered as one of the effects of the politics of the closure of the European borders since the 1990s.

The Uniqueness of the Senegalese Migration in Scientific Research

Although the literature on sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco has become more prevalent since the 1990s, knowledge on the subject remains very unorganised and not exhaustive. When we skim through the literature on this question, we realise that it was focused on illegal migration and written in the continuum of the works on irregular migration in Morocco. On the other hand, the literature has constituted a subject for research which allowed other researchers to update their initial subjects by widening their research territories to other nationalities, or by using it as an answer to the European political requests on the question of sub-Saharan migrations.

It is possible in this direction to regroup this research into three categories. The first category of works consists of studies of the Senegalese community which focus on migration or religion. As such, we can quote the work of A. Pian (2007), N. Lanza (2010), M. Alioua (2007), A. Kane

(2007), D.H. Fall (2003) and M. Timera (2009, 2011). The second category of works concerns more specifically the irregular migrations by trying to remove completely their mechanisms, causes and attachments. In this context, we quote the work of M. Lahlou (2005), S. Bredeloup and O. Pliez (2005), A. Pian (2007), l'AMERM (2008, 2009), C. Escoffier (2008) and M. Peraldi (2011). The third category of works concerns specifically those who relate to the historic and identity aspect, Bonte (2002), E.H. Chouki (2006), M. Ennaji (1996), M. Naimi (2004) and M. Villasante-de Beauvais (2000). This research was added to the corpus of literature which is understanding the phenomenon by historicising it and by showing the processes of continuity and discontinuity which characterise it.

In addition, it is important to note that this last category of research focused mainly on Senegalese migrants and their impact on Moroccan history, specifically linked to trans-Saharan trade.

These works do not allow us to have a global view and cumulative knowledge on sub-Saharan migrants. The facts on the migration of the sub-Saharan group in Morocco remain incomplete and cannot stand alone, in spite of the significant number of reports and studies on this topic. The analysis as well as the methodological approaches of immigration to the countries of the South and specifically the case of the countries of transit—as is the case for Morocco—are a reproduction often not contextualised. Migrants are treated in political and media statements in a dichotomous and normative way which does not take into account the diversity of their situation, the variety of their routes and especially the differences in their type of integration in Moroccan society. The realities of these migrants as well as their aspirations are often sacrificed by national and international actors who are concerned at various levels by this question for the benefit of the immediate political agendas.¹

THE EUROPEAN POLICY OF OUTSOURCING OF THE BORDERS: A TURNING POINT IN THE PERCEPTION OF SENEGALESE MIGRATION

Since the 1990s and the implementation of the Schengen territory,² the migration questions which until now have been discussed at the bilateral level will need to be settled in a multilateral way between Europe as a unified political body and the developing countries. One of the essential points

of this migration politics is the fight against illegal immigration. This included selection and control measures and an outsourcing of the migration problem. This outsourcing will involve the strengthening of the border controls at the external limits of Europe (Pian 2007).

This situation makes Morocco one of the focal points of illegal migration for its citizens and for the other candidates of this type of migration who come from sub-Saharan countries. The latter have been diverted in their project by increasingly strict controls of the marine borders on the western side of the African continent (Choplin 2010). In addition, the 2011 political upheaval in Libya forced a large number of sub-Saharan workers to flee the violence; many chose to go to Tunisia and Morocco, most likely intending to cross the Mediterranean Sea to settle in Europe.

This political and economic context has put the spotlight on the sub-Saharan category. Since 2000 they have been the subject of an unprecedented focus.

UNAWARENESS OF THE ROLE PLAYED BY WOMEN IN SENEGALESE MIGRATION

The Minimisation of the Migration of Senegalese Women

Little research has been interested in the question of gender regarding the migration of the sub-Saharan group generally or the Senegalese in particular in Morocco. In this context, we can quote the work of Pian (2007), AMERM (2008) and Lanza (2010) on the Senegalese, which treats the sub-Saharan group as an irregular situation. The little interest taken in this segment of the population and the inferior treatment to which it is subjected is similar to the treatment of the migration of women generally and that of those coming from the Muslim world in particular (Morokvašić 2011; Moujoud 2008; Ait Ben Lmadani 2007, 2012). It echoes the subordinate place reserved for women in most patriarchal societies and confirms their inferior status. However, as shown in the aforementioned works, the role and the place of women in Senegalese migration are important. It is the minimisation of this role which remains the dominant position.

Furthermore, the migration of the Senegalese is not a new fact because it is in the continuum of a very old regional mobility between the various countries of western Africa, an intense mobility linked mainly to the commercial sector, a mobility and an important role which our survey with the Senegalese revealed (Fall 2007).

A DIVERSIFIED PROFILE AND AN IMPORTANT PLACE IN THE COMMUNITY NETWORKS

A survey led by Z. Chatou on the Senegalese in Morocco between 2011 and 2013 gave evidence of the evolution of the migration of the Senegalese in Morocco. She accentuated the arguably dominant role of women in this migration. In fact, even if we did not have reliable and measured data, the qualitative survey led with one hundred Senegalese in five big Moroccan cities (Fes, Rabat, Casablanca, Meknes and Marrakesh) showed that women's presence is as important as that of Senegalese men. In fact, an attentive reading of the results of this research shows the presence of women in Morocco as long as men and underlines their occupational integration in almost all the business sectors (with the exception of the building sector). These are represented also in the various investigated profiles: sportsmen, storekeepers, students and senior executives. Two categories escape this report, the *tijane* association and the domestic women.

It is in this way that we noticed the group of storekeepers (traders) is represented equally by men and women. These were since the 1970s the base of the trade between Morocco and Senegal. These pioneering women storekeepers were "authorised" by their husbands to trade between Senegal and Morocco because the latter is a Muslim country and is a sister country Tijania (Pian 2007). This is what Anaik Pian (2007) calls "the suitcase" trade. Some of them even developed this business activity on a transnational scale in several cases that we met who trade between Italy, France or Spain, Morocco and finally Senegal. Women migrants settled in Morocco as well as trader visitors or "women in constant move" who came for the Ziyarat (visit) to the Zaouiya-Tijania in Fes before buying in Casablanca (Bredeloup 2012).

However, in spite of the importance of this business activity, for the most part these women migrants occupy only a subordinate position of subcontracting, versus the Senegalese men who were well established in the transnational trade business and do not share a part of their merchandise. This report was confirmed by other research on these "women in constant move" who use both seduction and modesty to make a successful "negotiated entry into the men's world" (*Ibid.* 2012: 34).

The second profile is women athletes. During the survey, researchers noted the extent of the athletic economic sector and, in particular, the participation of young migrant Senegalese women as female athletes. Young girls, recruited early to girls' basketball clubs, live in precarious

situations. Paid between 2500 and 3500 dirhams a month, they have to take charge and prove their presence in Morocco. They become more and more vulnerable and exposed to the risk of not getting paid.

The third profile is domestic workers who are one of the more recent faces of migrants' profiles, further complicating the Senegalese migration landscape in Morocco. These women who arrived in the 1990s are encouraged by Moroccan families to settle in Senegal. As Mr. Diop,³ president of the Senegalese nationals association living in Morocco (Arserem), specified in a context of the closure of borders with Europe, certain Senegalese women were obliged to offer themselves as domestic workers to meet their needs. According to him, the domestic work of the Senegalese seems to be in connection with the resuscitated desire that some families of Fez have to have cleaners. If this assertion seems plausible, it is still necessary to qualify it by registering the domestic worker in its more globalised logic. The quasi-mechanical link which is often made between a situation of slavery and the serving work of certain black slaves to the big Moroccan families should not disguise the new world situation and the desire of certain social affluent classes to distinguish themselves from other families by recruiting foreigners. This last assertion can be strengthened by the recent but nevertheless important arrival of Filipina women on the Moroccan domestic labour market.

Beyond this link, the statements and the focus group made with ten Senegalese women show that a minority of them arrived with an employment contract as domestic workers while the others offered their service as domestic workers once they were on Moroccan soil. In this focus group, it is the women who were trading and, because of the frequent police controls, they preferred for some time to work as domestic workers. The Senegalese women working for Moroccan families lived in an exploitative situation that was particularly violent. The majority of them lived in extreme vulnerability, subjected to working hours in contradiction with labour law, cut off from any social relationships. They often found themselves with a seized passport and without an employment contract. There is also an intercultural conflict between what is represented as domestic work in Senegal and what is perceived by the imagination of the Moroccan families. The definition of hygiene, cleanliness and the arrangements change, and with it the definition of the domestic space. The domestics find themselves legally unprotected and several of them leave their employers. It is probably in the domestic work where conflicts are the most virulent.

These women also work as hairdressers or cooks for fellow countrymen to make ends meet. Another category waits to fit into a basketball club and must have a casual job to survive. This uncertain situation can explain the occupational pluralism which most of the working migrants women practice; they are often forced to do several jobs to earn incomes in trade, paid work or service work. Contrary to two other profiles which content themselves with a single activity that corresponds to their initial qualification, the situation of economic vulnerability from which these women suffer obliges them to work in multiple small jobs to compensate for the loss of income in their main activity.

Thus, the women seem more exposed to instability and resort to “resourcefulness” compared to the men. The same migrant woman could be simultaneously a hairdresser, a storekeeper, a cleaning lady, sometimes salaried or self-employed and even an intermediary to employers in search of domestic workers.

Finally, there is a difference in the way men and women react to the negative stereotypes and the attitudes of indifference or rejection of the Moroccans towards them. It is in this way that women, regardless of their social status and the mode of insertion, are more easily inclined than men to express their dissatisfaction at the expressions of rejection. This differentiation is partially explained by the social vulnerability of the women compared to men and by the place of women in the Moroccan society. One trading woman denounces the attitude of certain Moroccans by stating, “as soon as they see a black woman, they think she is a prostitute”. Migrant men do not necessarily have to encounter this particular situation on a regular or daily basis.

It seems that gender does not play a determining role in access to these various spheres. Whether it is in the practice of a commercial activity, access to certain jobs in tertiary education or the choice of the sectors of higher education, the women and the men divide up in almost equal measure. This observation goes against the preconceived ideas that convey the image of Muslim women assigned to exercise subordinate jobs and to access less prestigious sectors.

However, if the professional integration of Senegalese women migrants in most of the business sectors is as important as that of men of the same social background, certain sectors remain closed and continue to submit to this “natural” distinction of gender in its social roles. This is how certain sectors (such as those of the domestic services) remain almost exclusively female. On the other hand, the building sector remains completely dominated by men.

Following the example of what takes place in most countries in the world, these two jobs continue to be exclusively female or exclusively male. In addition, within these various activities, the place and the role of women can be determined by the differences linked to gender. As an example, in the trade sector, women are generally relegated to retail and distribution only. Moreover, the discrimination in salaries according to gender forces most of these women to engage in multiple activities.

Furthermore, as shown by Blanchard (2011), for the Senegalese in Marseille, the women play a dominant role in the community networks. In fact, during our survey, we noticed the role of these migrants in the preservation of family links. Often, they find themselves compelled to aid their family by sending money regularly. They are also at the heart of the community solidarity, as in the case of a woman who transformed her apartment into a restaurant where she welcomes first comers or passing migrants in Rabat. However, this solidarity does not exclude the reproduction of social inequalities linked to gender. In fact, the same women who denounce exploitation can resort to it with regard to other women who have arrived in Morocco more recently.

CONCLUSION

Migration between Senegal and Morocco existed long before the modern borders of these countries were defined. However, the experiences of men and women migrants differ. As the survey showed, the Senegalese migrants often move alone by mobilising the family network to emigrate, find accommodation or find work. The presence of women in Morocco is as old as that of men, and the evolution of their profile was appreciably the same as that of men, but the research that studied this presence, or that studied the role of these women from the gender point of view, is rare.

For my point of view, this absence has two causes. The first cause is the one which is at the origin of the oversight of women until recently when women began to migrate worldwide. In fact, as indicated by Morokvašić (2011: 26), “the problem of ‘women and gender in migrations’ remained for a long time hidden, in part and at the same time because of the researches on the migrations and on the women, the social relationships of sex and gender which had evolved independently, without crossing each other and without acknowledgment”.

The second cause is linked to the specific acknowledgement of migration in certain countries of the South. This acknowledgement stresses the

situation of “transit” through the countries that are on the border of Europe, and which perceives the migrant as a supposed young male adventurer, and alone. This dominant vision conceals the presence of migrant women who are supposed “to join a spouse” or at least to emigrate “legally”. This reason proves to be more plausible than some reports that treated sub-Saharan women migrates in Morocco as linked to the networks of human traffic. This is how in these works “we abandon the hidden and confined victim and we pass to the victim whom we are going to be able to show” (*Ibid.* 2011: 36). The migrant is only so exposed to be better concealed.

NOTES

1. Even if we have enough elements to judge the new migration politics in Morocco, the actions put in place in the policy of the regularising of sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco tend more to answer the European agendas than the needs of migrants in the region.
2. The convention of Schengen was signed on June 19, 1990, and came into effect in 1995.
3. Quoted by N. Lanza (2010).

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