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# Sub-Saharan Refugees Finding Space and Place in Rabat, Morocco

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Sub-Saharan Refugees Finding Space and Place in Rabat, Morocco

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Africa, Morocco, Rabat

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### Abstract

In an attempt to affiliate itself with the Europe, Morocco has aligned its policy closer to the desires of the European Union, including stricter migration borders. As a result, Morocco is becoming more and more the interstice between a refugee's past and dreamed future until one can manage the journey to Europe or meet their needs in Morocco and return to their country of origin. Under prevailing notions of space as it accommodates systems of power and thought, and with consideration of Asef Bayat's theory of ordinary encroachment, I explore the experiences of Sub-Saharan refugees, economic and political, in Rabat, Morocco, as they occupy and claim space for their own goals. Exploring the opportunities present for Sub-Saharan refugees to access space and obtain private space reveals the spatial bounds put upon them, and consequently, the bounds of their power through financial, political, and social restrictions, which allows insight into the degree to which this population is welcome in Rabat. Gleaning information from reports and interviews with individuals and groups, I find that the understanding of this space as temporary is the largest factor affecting the refugee's use of the space and treatment from locals while inhabiting it.

*Keywords: Spatial Analysis, Refugee, Morocco, Sub-Sahara, Ordinary Encroachment*

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## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	5
Literature Review.....	6
Research Methodology.....	13
Research Questions.....	13
Setting.....	15
Population.....	16
Ethical Considerations.....	16
Limitations & Critiques.....	17
Findings & Discussion.....	23
Conclusions.....	34
References.....	35
Appendix.....	37
Interview Questions.....	37
Consent Form.....	38

## Introduction

This research paper is devoted to understanding the experiences of Sub-Saharan refugees, political and economic, as they acquire and use space in Rabat, Morocco. Involved in its analysis is the consideration of how people rely on other's place of origin to understand that individual's identity and place in their own society. This becomes especially important when considering the movement of displaced people around the world and how societies are willing to accept them into the current bordered nation structures. Oftentimes, problems occur due to the power dynamics acting upon the displaced, who require a degree of acceptance to survive and ideally, find a decent livelihood for themselves and their families. This report contains a review of prevailing literature about culture as it relates to physical space, power structures distributing identity groups across their domain, and the mechanisms employed by the marginalized to subvert the oppression of these structures. Next, I reveal my approach to this research, writing about the questions, demographics, and interview spaces involved in my research in the Methodology. Finally, I expose my findings and relate them to ideas proposed by scholars to answer the question central to my research: considering the opportunities available to Sub-Saharan refugees to acquire space and gain acceptance in Rabat, Morocco, how do they ultimately understand their experience as a refugee in this space and create opportunities for themselves to attain the life they seek?

### Literature Review

Despite a variety of notions proposed in academic work about the true content and meaning of culture, prevailing ideas in the minds of the general public rely on culture having spatial boundaries and recognized territorial origins. When culture is viewed as a “mappable object”, one can locate the belonging of individuals as their culture associates with their location (Ferguson, 1992). Doing so reveals those whose culture does not match their current location and consequently, does not originally belong to the space. While this is not always the case, especially due to increased globalization stirring a variety of identities together, the production of identity hierarchies within spaces continues.

These hierarchies are validated by the following notion that humans have a need for attachment to place (Ferguson, 1992). Those who have been displaced are “unnaturally out of place” and less crucial to the true nature of the area than those considered natives who have claim to the land and consequently, are understood to have more control and power over the land. The normalized ideas about natural attachment to place “lead to defining displacement as a ‘pathological condition of the displaced’ rather than the consequence of the sociopolitical context” (Malkki, 1992), maintaining that the displaced is the problematic population and one that needs corrective treatment to better accommodate themselves. This mentality simultaneously places power in the hands of the host country and diminishes the dignity of the displaced: continuing to regard this population as uprooted and in need of supportive transplanting, the power is in the hands of those in charge of planting these people and the plant is made reliant on the gardener (Malkki, 1992).

Following the line that the power of the displaced is reduced by those promoted as the original inhabitants and by those governing the state in which the displaced currently reside, this population experiences marginalization. Prevailing ideas about the marginalized imply that they are both passive and dangerous, which typically justifies their systematic deprivation from the collective benefits of established communities (Mitchell, 1995). Included in this deprivation is the establishment of and insistence upon the core of the nation's vision of the space allotted to the marginalized: oftentimes, locals know merely that these spaces are "somewhere else," a place that they do not ever need to go, and should not (Agier, 2011). This enduring image is typically enhanced by the power systems that gain from keeping the core and marginalized stable underneath their systems, namely those of the state and institutions working for the image of a nation-state.

The nation-state, as defined by Anderson, is a place where boundaries are drawn to mark the ruling area of a state and the people within those boundaries are a homogenous and united nation under that state (Anderson, 1983). Like the concept of culture, the nation-state inherently links people to places by promoting an image of who belongs as opposed to the "other," which does not (Said, 1977). Because they do not belong, nation-states view foreigners as a people that need accommodating. However, the spaces allotted are typically outside of the center, in the periphery, which enhances the spatial hierarchy: already understood as out of place, foreigners are then given boundary spaces, which removes them from the center's activities, concern, and attention.

Aiding the state in organizing resources and people to make for a more efficient and powerful nation, urban planners have the power to design spaces that attract and accommodate certain desired users (Mitchell, 1995). As Lefebvre states, urban planners

are vested with the power to “distribute various social strata and classes across the available territory, keeping them separate and prohibiting all contacts- these being replaced by signs (or images) of contact” (Mitchell, 1995). Planners can position foreigners within the nation as they see fit, thereby maintaining that foreigners are under the power of their spatial organization and under their power when constructing an image of their relationship with the foreigners. Not just urban planners, but more broadly all agencies that construct infrastructure and advertisements obtain and utilize this power as they, or those funding them, find appropriate.

Again, people create spaces for certain populations. Once users of these spaces are defined, this population is deemed “representative” and all others can be removed because they are deemed dangerous to the order of the space, if only because it threatens the image of the space. As Mary Douglas writes, “representing disorder is very close to representing danger” in established communities (Larson, 2011). Ideas about a space become crystallized and when the “other” enters the space, they are easily identified and appear more invasive than they actually are. As is the case of Mitchell’s study of People’s Park, the homeless people that occupied the park after it was renovated were thought to be very problematic and non-representative of the park users, namely the refined middle class property owners. Perceptions of the homeless made them threatening to the order the designers and users desired and formed worries about the safety of the area. In fact, crime rates were not higher, but perceptions can be more important than reality, and they can even reveal alternative realities (Mitchell, 1995). In the case of a nation, displaced people represent disorder because, like the homeless, they are unknown and without establishment in the “representative” community. As more displaced people arrive, they

can be quickly noticed as outsiders, and a seemingly incalculable threat. However, the “unrepresentative users”, while they may not be the intended users and allowed the privileges of a space, such as being recognized for their contributions to the space, can and still do inhabit, use, and contribute to space. This lack of recognition, which can be intentional as Lefebvre suggests, relates to Foucault’s analysis of refugees being forever “confined outside” because they are displaced from their original space, kept around the periphery, and not recognized for their presence alongside the local population (Agier, 2011).

Recognizing the strategies used to maintain power dynamics over the marginalized within states, NGOs are established to step in as caretakers, but as they make up for structural issues within the state, they also reinforce the power of the state. Asef Byet contributes that as governments shifted from socialist to liberal economic policies, the responsibility of the state to its nations welfare drastically decreased, contributing to an increase in the number of marginalized individuals and a more intense state of marginalization by those already experiencing marginalization. This shift was made with the promise of wealth eventually trickling down to the marginalized populations, and with the recognition that those already poor would suffer greatly during this transition. NGOs and international aid systems are held responsible for aiding in the meantime, but evidence shows that these forms of aid are not entirely effective and can act to aid the state more than the poor it was advertised to benefit. The pitfalls of NGOs lie in their “structural constraints,” namely, their lack of organization, unaccountability, and professional middle class leadership, which inhibit meaningful development strategy. These problems make NGOs largely incapable of seriously impacting the marginalized for the better, but because

the general public's understanding is that states permit and are grateful for the existence of NGOs advertising aid to poor populations, states can gain credit for helping their citizens receive aid, which pacifies concerns about the state's lack of responsibility, maintaining its power (Bayat, 2010).

Knowing that they are not receiving the care that they are advertised to be receiving, analyses show that the marginalized seize control over their marginalization and use the system for what they can to benefit themselves and move up in society. Two proposed mechanisms are maintaining Morocco as an idea of interstice and "the quiet encroachment of the ordinary," proposed by Asef Bayat. An interstice is an inhabitable space between one boundary and the next. Due to the tendency for Morocco to be a transit country for refugees, it could be useful to consider the mental space of a refugee within Morocco. Thinking of one's space as an interstice allows for the freedom to overcome and diminish the power of borders and control that others attempt to assert (Ferguson, 1992). The second observed mechanism for the marginalized to empower themselves within the prevailing power systems is "the noncollective but prolonged direct action by individuals and families to acquire basic necessities of their lives in a quiet and unassuming illegal fashion" (Bayat, 2010). This approach is not defensive as the interstice proposition may be; instead it is active in seeking higher positions for themselves within the society. However, it is not solely self-transforming; there is evidence that large numbers of individual encroachments can slowly alter "many fundamental aspects of state prerogatives, including the meaning of order, control of public space, of public and private goods, and the relevance of modernity" (Bayat, 2010).

The following research uses Morocco as the representative nation-state, and explores political and economic refugees as examples of marginalized, displaced others. To assess the current modes and attitudes of contact between the Moroccan state and society, its Sub-Saharan refugees, it is imperative to relay Morocco's history of acting upon and interacting with refugees. When Morocco gained independence in 1956, the state began thinking more consciously of its borders. This measure was taken to build a national identity that could combat issues with the bordering countries of Spain, Mauritania, and Algeria. However, it was not until 2003 that Morocco declared an active stance on migration. In this year, the country released Law 02-03, which stated that it would aid the European Union in reducing irregular migration from Morocco to Spain and that it would help fight human trafficking between North Africa and Spain. It can be inferred that these statements were made to formally begin aligning itself with European political initiatives for potential economic benefits. In 2005, Moroccan authorities tried to expel more than 700 arrested migrants through the desert, showing how active it managed to become in that two-year span. However, Morocco continued to be exposed of management atrocities when Doctors Without Borders formally exited Oujda in 2013 to express anger with the authorities' treatment of migrants (this move also reveals how states are reliant upon NGOs to maintain its stability and image of the nation). That same year, a documentary aired on BBC accused Morocco of human rights breaches on migrants (Lahlou, 2015).

Considering Morocco's history, one can begin to assess the current Moroccan climate for accepting and accommodating refugees. According to the UNHCR's definition, a refugee is one who has "well-founded fear for [one's] personal safety" in country of origin, one who fears persecution for race, religion, nationality, and one whose country of origin

cannot or does not want to protect one from these threats (Guidebook, 2006). If an individual meets each of these requirements, one can be considered for an official refugee status. This is highly sought after status and the UNHCR does not grant them quickly to just anyone. It can take years for an individual to acquire this status, and until one does, one is often subject to impoverished conditions and violence from the public and authorities. However, even after attaining this status, one cannot be certain that one's circumstances will improve. The 2010 GADEM report stated that Moroccans possess ideas about "black" populations, Moroccan or not, which lead to their oppression, socially and financially. These ideas include considering any black person to be a descendent of slaves, which accrues associations to "savage" and "under-developed" discourse about this image of person. Consequences of these associations lead to even Moroccan authorities reinforcing racism. For example, if a refugee reports a complaint to the commissariat, the individual runs risk of being returned to the closed border between Morocco and Algeria even though this is against Moroccan policy. More commonly, racist remarks will not be condemned even though Moroccan penal code states that public insults will be repressed. The racism present also discourages Moroccans from accepting job requests from black people and refugees, especially, hindering the refugees' abilities to begin helping themselves within the country. (Note on Racial, 2010).

## Methodology

I set out to analyze various spatial interactions between Sub-Saharan refugees (political and economic), the Moroccan state, and society in Rabat, that reveal the extent to which Sub-Saharan refugees are accepted to participate in Rabat's economy and society as well as the mechanisms Sub-Saharan refugees apply to claim the spaces they are allotted and take as their own. The latter inquiry includes exploring the extent to which Sub-Saharan refugees desire to integrate themselves into Rabat's society. Research is conducted through analysis of previous research concerning the way that marginalized communities utilize space, participant observation of Sub-Saharan refugees, and interviews with individuals among those observed. Below is a list of the general questions and discussion of their importance, which determines the methods to explore the questions. Following is information about the location of my interviews, the demographics of my interviewees, ethical considerations, and the limitations and personal critiques of my work.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

*What opportunities are available for Sub-Saharan refugees to acquire space?*

Just as a vote in a democratic election sounds one's voice and carries power in the debate, one's physical presence, present willingly or reluctantly, is an individual's addition to a physical geographic community, which also carries power. Because physical space is largely limited or finite within borders of defined communities, taking up space reveals the power of the individual that is able to occupy this space. This power is enacted by mere access to the community and when an individual can participate in this community.

However, all individuals are not allotted the same access clearances in a community; zones are subtly or overtly constructed so that certain individuals with higher privileges can enter a greater range of spaces while those of lower privilege are restricted through the authority of financial, political, or social bounds. Consequently, the opportunities had by certain groups within communities to access space show the extent to which they are welcome and privileged in the community. Furthermore, the ability for an individual to declare a space as one's own through, for example, the acquisition of a private living space or claiming of public street space from which to vend, reveals greater power of the individual and heightens the amount of power enacted by the individual on the community. Exploring the opportunities present for Sub-Saharan refugees to access space and obtain private space reveals the spatial bounds put upon them, and consequently, the bounds of their power through financial, political, and social restrictions, which allows insight into the degree to which this population is welcome in Rabat.

*How do Sub-Saharan refugees claim these acquired spaces as their own?*

Refugees carry themselves with them when they travel. Upon entering Morocco, and upon entering Rabat, refugees import their identity, comprised of past experiences, traditions, morals, and ideals. Once Sub-Saharan refugees have acquired space, private or public, one considers how they occupy and alter the Moroccan space to accommodate themselves and their identities. The purpose of this inquiry is to understand the different approaches refugees take to engaging with their space and community, which can reveal

both their ability to integrate into the local community by becoming aware of local customs and codes, and the extent of their desire to do so.

*What do Sub-Saharan refugees want from these spaces?*

By their name, refugees are in search of a life without the oppression and fear they experienced in their country of origin. They want to create a better life for themselves and oftentimes for their families in their country of origin as well. Typically arriving in Morocco as a means to enter Europe, Sub-Saharan refugees' time in Rabat is usually aspired to be temporary, without desire to settle. This attitude could affect the approach this population takes to engaging with their space: while hoping that their current position will change as soon as possible, they try to use the space for all the short-term benefits that could be gained before leaving. Knowledge about the ways Sub-Saharan refugees want to use their space and time in Moroccan inform the state and other agencies concerned with refugees as to how they can better approach these wants, keeping in mind political controls, agency inadequacies, and financial issues that prevent these desires from being met.

## SETTING

To locate potential participants, I began observing my own daily spaces in Rabat and asking professors for insights into areas with concentrated Sub-Saharan refugee populations.

Leading up to my research, I taught English at Orient-Occident, an NGO, which works with refugees and migrants to provide a safe space in which to learn, acquire social services, and build community. One student, Bruce, became friends with me outside of class and agreed

to aid in my research, which resulted in significant experiences entering spaces that would not have otherwise been accessible to me alone. All but two interviews occurred in the spaces that the refugees typically occupy, specifically their workspaces or living spaces.

## POPULATION

The researcher sought to access a multitude of Sub-Saharan refugee communities in different spheres within Rabat. These communities always contained intersections of identities, but could be grouped as Sub-Saharan political or economic refugees. To relay nationality demographics, individuals spoken with were from Senegal, Cameroon, and Ivory Coast. Individuals have spent two months to seven years in Rabat. Those observed ranged in age from 16-68 years. Those who participated in any of the ten individual interviews or two focus group discussions ranged in age from 24-68 years. All individuals spoke French, but two conversations were held in a combination of French and English. Everyone had a place to live. Six of these individuals hold jobs; one is waiting to gain refugee status so that he can begin finding work; two look for any number of small jobs that they can do for money; it is unclear whether the approximately ten people that engaged in both focus groups discussion hold jobs.

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research project is approved by SIT's Institutional Review Board as well as the Local Review Board, managed at the program-level. I am held liable to the ethical responsibilities included in these board's standards. These standards include getting free and informed

consent from interviewees to participate, avoiding procedures that cause mental stress of the participants, and neither explicitly nor implicitly deceiving the participant about aspects of the research that are important to them. To obtain consent of the interviewee, I also ensured that one's name would be kept confidential and anonymous. The interviewee knew that one was free to stop the interview at any time and could choose to not answer any questions that made one uncomfortable. With these standards in mind and questions about the validity of my research, I will reveal some potential issues. Much of my research was conducted at the workspace of my interviewees. During three of these interviews, others passed by and made the interviewee uncomfortable to respond until the passersby were gone. Others would stop to observe the interview. In all three cases, the interviewee became hesitant to answer certain questions and I became aware of the questions I should avoid while these other people lingered. Knowing that these events occurred in their workspaces, I consider whether their business could be affected by the potential clientele that disapproved of the conversation between the interviewee and myself. While this occurrence does not break my ethical contract with the interviewee, it remains an indirect harm to the interviewee that is unintentional.

## LIMITATIONS AND CRITIQUES

### *Sample Size*

The sample size of ten individual interviews and approximately ten individuals within informal focus group conversations was limited for a number of reasons. As a white young girl, I was strongly advised by a number of people against entering the neighborhood,

Takaddoum, which has a significant concentration of Sub-Saharan refugees residing inside, alone and without a man. Heeding advice, my access was limited because I could only enter the neighborhood with another man who had both the time to do so and knowledge of the area. Secondly, I assume by the nature of the individuals' responses (many asked multiple times if I was a reporter) that the interviews requested and denied were due to my status as a foreigner and their uncertainty about whether I could be trusted with the information they possess. Finally, the three weeks time that I was allotted limited the number of interviews I could arrange and perform. I desired interviews with UNHCR, CNDH, and GADEM, but could not arrange times to meet with individuals from these organizations because they were not currently in Rabat and/or were unavailable. I believe that these interviews would have improved the quality of my sample size because it would have provided opinions of professionals and agencies alongside the lived experiences of the refugees. In short, more time to access certain communities, gain the trust of potential interviewees and get in contact with professionals would have enhanced the sample size of my research group.

### *Quality of Information*

The breadth and quality of information gathered is lacking due to the setting of some of the interviews and being a foreigner without complete trust of the interviewees. Six interviews took place publicly while the interviewee was working in his or her place of work. Three of these interviews were interrupted multiple times by clients needing the attention of the interviewee and because the information that he wanted to share could not be comfortably expressed with the presence of surrounding people. While this did not deter me from

continuing, I imagine that this could have interrupted the interviewee's mental presence in the interview. In addition, the pressure of extra people surrounding our conversation reminding the interviewee that he could not comfortably share this information could have inclined him to not share certain information altogether, especially if the interviewee felt at risk of losing business. A solution to this could have been requesting a formal interview in a more private location; however, I am still inclined to agree with my decision to perform these interviews at their places of work to observe the tensions that arise and navigate them as the interviewee feels comfortable. Another reason that I continued performing interviews in their work places is that certain work communities were clearly tight-knit and difficult to retrieve certain information from as an outsider. Many were afraid that I was a journalist, despite assuring them that I was only a student, and many did not want to appear associated with me at all. I did not want to ask them to meet with me privately to appear more inquisitive and secretive about the information I was after. As I interviewed three individuals within this community, I quickly realized that the short answers and similar answers given meant that they were cautious about the type and amount of information they would share. While this poses questions about the quality of information I gathered, it still reveals more information about the mechanisms this population utilizes to control their circumstances and maintain their position as the workers they have established themselves to be.

*Language Barrier*

A third potential critique of my research methods is the language barrier present in the interviews. I did not have a translator for any of the interviews, even though all were conducted in French, with two conducted in a mixture of French and English. I have taken nine years of French classes and have practiced speaking and listening during these years and during the time I spent in Morocco. I assure that I interrupted the interviewee to explain misunderstood words or concepts until I grasped the meaning, so I do not believe that my understanding of any responses is incorrect. However, I acknowledge that my level of French could have limited the depth of conversation that would have been possible with a translator. I chose to not use a translator because I am confident in my ability to understand and to be understood, and I did not want to make the interviewees more uncomfortable by bringing yet another foreigner into their space to listen to their sensitive information. In doing so, I could have prevented our conversations from reaching a more intelligent level because the interviewees thought that they would need to explain more concepts that I could not understand with quick explanations in French. Despite knowing that I could have gained more information with a translator, I am positive that I collected valuable information that I understand as it was meant to be understood.

### *Semi-structured Interviewing Technique*

In an effort to accommodate the interviewee's time and maintain a comfortable environment in which to share, I utilized semi-structured interviewing practices with those that were working during the interview. I did not appear with a list of questions, even though I generally followed the same routine of questioning. Rather than recording the

conversations with any devices (although I did voice record two interviews), I wrote detailed notes about the content of the interviewees' answers and paused the questions and answers so that I had time to maintain detail. A critique of this method is that my memory may not serve me as I review the notes that I wrote, which would decrease the quality of my information and the resulting analysis. Also, the nature of a semi-structured interview is relaxed and discussion did not always follow the line of questioning that I was interested in for the purposes of this specific research question. To be more certain of this critique and if I could perform my interviews differently, I would have preferred to begin interactions with the interviewees informally and then requested a formal interview at another date.

#### *Lack of Quantitative Analysis*

Although I do not believe that I have enough data to yield a representative and reliable quantitative analysis, one could have been useful in assuring that my qualitative analysis is accurate and defensible.

#### *Selection of Spaces*

I did not access information from the variety of spaces that I hoped to. Once interviewing, I focused on living and working spaces and communities. I tried to surface more complex opinions and feelings about more public spaces, such as the market or streets, but answers typically jumped to similar responses and then halted. Questions still arise about education and political spaces that I did not think to explore before beginning my research,

but could have enhanced the force of my research by building a more comprehensive spatial analysis about the Sub-Saharan refugee experience in the political capital of Morocco.

*What opportunities are available for Sub-Saharan refugees to acquire space?*

Focusing on living and work spaces available to Sub-Saharan refugees, I generally found that living spaces were not problematic to acquire so long as one has the money to afford one, while private work spaces are very difficult for refugees to access (it is illegal for refugees to work in the public sector). All ten of the individuals I interviewed and all individuals in both focus groups (roughly ten) had living spaces. The first focus group took place in the living space of one individual, Daniel, who rents a floor of a building in Takaddoum. Sitting amongst ten refugees and speaking with four of them about how refugees live in Morocco, the oldest, a 68 year old from Cameroon, motions to the badly patched up circle section of the room's ceiling, roughly three feet in diameter, and exclaims in English, "Is this an acceptable way to live? Six people live in this room and one night, the ceiling fell on top of someone!" (FocusGroup1, personal communication, 26 April 2016). Overcrowding was common among the political refugees interviewed- six people in one room, ten people in room- but one noted, "I have a place to sleep, so it's acceptable" (XY, personal communication, 4 May 2016). Typically, friends relayed housing opportunities to the interviewees; however the UNHCR also aids in housing placement. An interviewee, Bruce, relayed that there are different classifications of political refugees, and housing can be determined accordingly. He said "All refugees have a voice in their location, except for the young refugees, ages 13-17. They all live in G5 so that they are close to the UNHCR and Orient-Occident" (Bruce, personal communication, 6 May 2016). When asked about the origins of the money that refugees use to pay for housing, one individual in the focus group said, "Living spaces are expensive for us and not good quality" (FocusGroup1, personal

communication, 26 April 2016) It is unclear whether he included “for us” to mean that sometimes, prices are raised for refugees looking for housing, but this is a question I would have liked to explore. Bruce answered that if you take classes at Orient-Occident, which is funded by the UNHCR, then you receive both a refund for transportation to these classes and money at the end of the month to pay for housing and additional expenses. He stated that one receives “800 dirhams for housing and 200 dirhams for extra activities” (Bruce, personal communication, 6 May 2016).

Of all the people interviewed, Takaddoum was time and again named the worst place to live (nine of the individuals interviewed had lived in Takaddoum and all individuals observed and apart of the focus group in Takaddoum, lived in the neighborhood). The one man who had never lived in Takaddoum expressed gratitude for this fact and compared the neighborhood to his area in Rabat-Salé saying, “It’s not violent like Takaddoum. It’s not dangerous at night. Takaddoum is a very bad place. There are bandits living there, ex-prisoners” (John, personal communication, 24 April 2016). The majority of those who currently live elsewhere in Rabat, started in Takaddoum and it is clear that this neighborhood is not one that people want to stay in for long. I understand that the housing is cheaper in Takaddoum and this can be the main driving force for choosing it as one’s living space despite its threatening reputation. One man warned, “the police will not even enter the space for fear of their own safety” (Noël, personal communication, 6 May 2016). The neighborhood named acceptable or very good and without problems by all living there is Rabat-Salé. Landlords are notably indifferent towards the interviewee and security is praised. One inhabitant comparing his comfort in Salé as opposed to that in Takaddoum said, “Salé, it’s good. I can sleep well and relax.

Takaddoum is not this was with all the boys and girls stealing” (Samba, personal communication, 22 April 2016). However, rent is more expensive and living is more expensive as well. As Bruce walked me through the markets of Takaddoum, where he first lived, he expressed nostalgia for the food he could buy and added that food in Salé costs him much more.

Jobs, even small and undesirable jobs, are significantly more difficult to come upon than housing. To start, refugees do not have access to public sector jobs (Chegraoui, personal communication, 10 April 2016). They are left with the option to find work in the private sector or to self-employ. This is a significant choice to make, even though it can tend to be a choice made for them due to job opportunities and wage tendencies. Three individuals that I interviewed remarked upon the difficulty of finding a job in the private sector, such as working for a bakery, construction, painting companies, or call centers, but I am not qualified to relay the difficulty anymore than this because I am uncertain how long these individuals have searched for these jobs and what their exact experiences were while doing so, although some attributed the difficulty to discrimination towards blacks and refugees. Two individuals commented that even if one manages to find a job, “they underpay you” or “they do not pay you at the end of the month” (Noël, personal communication, 6 May 2016 & XY, personal communication, 4 May 2016). Bruce only knew of two refugees that held positions in the private sector: one worked as a journalist and another worked in a restaurant (Note for discussion later: the journalist aspires to eventually start his own journalism business). Six of the ten refugees currently hold jobs, authorized or not, and they are all self-employed. Two of these workers expressed the necessity to be self-employed, because they did not want a boss telling them what to do and

when to do it. Both understood that this resulted in stress that they did not want in their lives. The other four individuals are content with their position as street vendors and do not plan to look for another job. They, too, feel in control of their work lives, which is an unquestionable goal for political and economic refugees alike.

The living spaces and the work spaces possessed by the interviewees became the two spaces of main concern during this research because all interviewees holding a job stated that their time is spent only at home and at work; those without a job, said that they spend most of their time in the home, for various reasons. Of course, living necessitates visits to the market and other microspheres, such as shared taxis or streets. However, I do not view these spaces as ones with the ability to be acquired by this population; rather, I consider them to be spaces possessing opportunities to be claimed, publicly or personally.

*How do Sub-Saharan refugees claim these acquired spaces as their own?*

Questions about interpretations of their spaces, as places where they, as foreigners, interacted with locals, were largely useful because their answers revealed differences between political and economic refugees in Rabat. Overall, economic refugees, especially those whose workspace has been legitimized by locals, are more confident in their claim over the spaces they occupy. Two examples of this, classified by their jobs, are individuals in Rabat that repair shoes on the street and sell products from their country in a market. In both cases, the refugees' clients are almost entirely Moroccan. On the other hand, refugees that cannot or will not find work in Morocco express that everywhere but their house is uncomfortable for them and they have no places that they are welcome. This population reports feeling alienated systematically and by society forever considering them foreigners.

When asked about their opinions towards the local communities in which they all operate, economic refugees were likely to respond that there are good and bad people everywhere, rather than identifying Moroccan society as especially bad. When asked about being accepted, an economic refugee replied, "I'm well accepted while at work," which could imply that in other spaces he could experience other treatment. Still, all of these interviewees expressed feeling that they merely created and occupied the border of the community rather than feeling a part of it; they feel like an outsider forever entering a space that is not theirs: "When I work here [vending on the street], it's not my space. They say, 'Go back to your country'" (Samba, personal communication, 22 April 2016).

Although economic refugees tend to express feeling connected to Moroccan society, while maintaining that they are not entirely accepted, the political refugees interviewed agree that they are not at all welcome. Alongside this, all admitted that they do not want to engage with Moroccans either, so long as they can avoid them. While this could appear as essentialism and hard-headedness, fear for their safety, which some feel is constantly threatened, is decidedly a large factor in this attitude. Evidence for this lies in statements about Takaddoum and the experience of Noël, after which, he says he is now uneasy "everywhere, even here in Orient-Occident." One month ago, a Moroccan attacked Noël with a machete at 21h00 in Takaddoum. "He tried to hit my head and I protected myself with my arms. It is by the grace of God that I could escape" (Noël, personal communication 6 May 2016). He knows that he can speak for others about feeling fearful on a daily basis, because a Moroccan also attacked a friend of his with a machete in plain daylight at 15h00. The extent of his unease interfered with our ability to meet for an interview as well. We had a day scheduled to meet in the afternoon, but with communication difficulties, it was

17h00 before we were both ready to meet. At this time, Noël said that it was already too late and we rescheduled for the following morning. The next morning, while discussing his routine unease, he admitted that this was the cause of his request to reschedule. It is clearly asserted that Noël's neighborhood is not going to be a place of comfort.

Another finding that reveals the degree of separation between Moroccans and Sub-Saharan refugees is the tendency to refer to themselves as Africans when they discuss both Moroccans and themselves in the same conversation, implying that Moroccans are something other than African while being apart of the African continent. When asked to explain why he calls himself African while speaking about Moroccans, a street vendor says in a hushed tone, "Moroccans think they are the edge of Europe" (Samba, personal communication, 22 April 2016). Many interviewed relayed the same assessment and expressed frustration with Moroccans for thinking that they were better than the term "African." One interviewee, XY, called it a superiority complex that shows itself in primarily two ways towards refugees. Using himself as an example, he said that Moroccans think little of the refugees' education: his diploma earned in the Ivory Coast was not accepted in Morocco and he had to go back to school after already establishing himself as a psychologist in his home country. Another example he gives is with work. He says that Moroccans do not want to hire Africans, but when they do get hired, they are still thought of as incompetent. Another interviewee commented on a Moroccan superiority complex by expressing irritation while saying, "When people come here, they are obligated to adapt themselves even though it is difficult" (Noël, personal communication, 6 May 2016). An analysis of this statement and those above can disclose that the African identity is not one

that Moroccans want to associate with and those entering who identify as African must adapt to Moroccan standards before one will be welcomed.

Analysis of the ways refugees can claim space shows that they feel more welcome in spaces that are officially given to them and respected by Moroccans. Evidence for this includes authorized street vendors reporting feeling accepted by Moroccans while at work. However, private living spaces are reportedly not always respected. One interviewee renting space in Takaddoum who does not feel welcome in Morocco tells that the Moroccans living above him will enter his home and demand money for juice, for example. This individual then neither has space nor place that he can confidently claim within Morocco. An account of a Congolese refugee in Denmark, exposed that unexpected visits from concerned social workers or authorities had profound affects on the way this refugee understood his home space. He felt that it was not his to do with as he pleased, when the social worker forced him to keep his blinds open and directed him to feed his children local food dishes rather than African meals. While this is an example of locals intending to help the refugee, it affected him negatively, making him believe that he could not occupy a space of his own and as he wanted. In the case of Moroccans attempting to maintain dominance over a space that has been authorized as the refugee's, it is clear that this would do more damage to the mental space of an individual.

*What do Sub-Saharan refugees want from these spaces?*

While spaces have been designed for specific users to be used in certain ways, the public, and especially the poor, is not passive. People maintain their own desires that affect how they engage with a space and consequently, become known in an area. Common

interview responses expose some of the wants of refugees, including their desire to work for themselves, their understanding of Morocco as a temporary place of residence, and their community ideals. When asked if they were trying to find jobs in Morocco, interviewees typically responded that they were not interested in working for Moroccans, who would underpay them, treat them with disrespect, and cause them stress. Instead, they wanted to do small jobs that would get them the money they wanted or work for themselves so that they remained in control of their schedule. Associated with their ideal of controlling the work that they do for the money they receive is their insistence upon Morocco as a temporary location for them. For both political and economic refugees, Morocco is viewed as a means to an end. As one individual interjected as I asked another how he ended up in Morocco, “No one wants to be here. We would love to be anywhere else, but we have to be here for now until we can leave” (FocusGroup2, personal communication, 2 May 2016). This was a political refugee speaking about the waiting process he is in to leave for hopefully, Europe. However, economic refugees speak about their time in this country similarly, asserting that they will work here only until they have enough money to go back to their home country or until they can arrange to go to another country with better work opportunities and pay (usually cite European countries as qualified). When asked about what an ideal community looks like, many responses involved ideas about equality and three individuals specifically wanted universal education. One said that she believes “people should have access to the same opportunities if they are poor or rich, blacks or Moroccans, everybody” (Fatima, personal communication, 29 April 2016). What these individuals dream of is wealth redistribution to restructure the power dynamics in their lives. Overall, their desires reveal a need for greater control over

their own lives and the mechanisms by which they do so affect their understanding of the space they currently occupy: Morocco is not the space in which they will remain, and they will circumvent its control in the ways they can manage to personally gain as they please.

The desires of the Sub-Saharan refugees with which I spoke, show connections to Asef Bayat's theory about the "quiet encroachment of the ordinary." Bayat states that the goals of the ordinary, who are marginalized in society, are to infringe upon the property, power, and privilege of those in power. They also desire the redistribution of social goods and opportunities through acquisition of collective consumption, public space, and opportunities. Finally, they desire autonomy and evidence for this typically involves the marginalized trying to function as far as possible outside of state and bureaucratic boundaries (Bayat, 2010). To first address the infringement upon the wealth and power of those in charge, holding a job as an unauthorized street vendor uses space that is not granted to them. When asking an authorized refugee street vendor what the difference is between him and an authorized vendor, he responded, "If you're selling same products as Moroccans at cheaper price, there's going to be tension. You're creating jealousy. You are also obstructing their passageway and creating problems in the street" (John, personal communication, 24 April 2016). Whether the unauthorized vendor is making the active decision to interfere this way or not, he is certainly attempting to take the wealth of the Moroccan sellers by selling similar products at a discounted price and he is using space illegally and publically to do so, proving his attempt to seize small amounts of power for himself and his family. Many of those that I interviewed overtly spoke about dreams for the redistribution of wealth, which reveals some intent to partake in this process. As stated earlier, two individuals named universal education as the main concern. Finally, all

workers that I interviewed worked for themselves. They were self-employed photographers, cobblers, vendors, and individuals that did small jobs for others upon request. Stating that they had never sought out a private sector job in Morocco and that they would never consider having a boss telling them what to do and how to do it proves their inclination to remain outside of parts of the Moroccan economy, namely the ones where Moroccans have direct control over them as employers. Overall, my findings reveal that the Sub-Saharan refugees in Rabat are certainly utilizing methods of quiet encroachment that Bayat writes can gradually transform “many fundamental aspects of state prerogatives, including the meaning of order, control of public space, and private goods, and the relevance of modernity” (Bayat, 2010).

Because all refugees interviewed agreed that Morocco was not their final destination and one interviewee stated simply for a group, “No one wants to be here,” it is clear that Morocco is a place of transition for assumingly most Sub-Saharan refugees. Places of transition, such as hotels and airports, are certainly enigmas when thinking about their presence in today’s world. Everybody within transition spaces is going somewhere else and will only remain here until their plans to leave arrive. While Morocco is not entirely made up of individuals wanting to leave- quite the contrary, I am confident that the majority of individuals in Morocco have limited intentions of moving elsewhere. However, the collective atmosphere of public spaces is comprised of the intentions that all users, representative and unrepresentative, have for the space, whether the space was designed for these intentions or not. Sub-Saharan refugees, all wanting to exit Moroccan territory, do not intend to integrate themselves into Moroccan society. Bruce stated that this was not a true goal of Morocco either. If this is true, then nobody regards the Sub-Saharan

refugees as a permanent population. As the theory of quiet encroachment suggests, these individuals will seek to benefit as much as they can from their current position until they can gain a higher position for themselves. In the refugees' case, their idea of an upgrade is becoming more autonomous and distanced from Moroccan authority, ideally leaving Morocco altogether. I imagine that this could affect the ways that the general Moroccan public interacts with the Sub-Saharan refugees as well. Recognizing the refugees' intentions, Moroccans could resent this population from utilizing Moroccan resources for their own gain without intent to engage and reinvest in Morocco. Ideas about each other become essentialized: Moroccans considered being "selfish," and "aggressive," and only concerned about money were common identifiers among those interviewed. When living in Morocco is thought to be merely a means to an end, it could be appropriate to label it an interstice, a space between one boundary and the next. Support for this perspective found within the thoughts of interviewees includes, "I'm here now, but I'm not really here," commenting on his lacking sense of establishment and commitment to this stage in his journey (Noël, personal communication, 6 May 2016). Another joked about the living conditions experienced by refugees exclaiming with laughter, "This isn't reality! This is the jungle!" (Bruce, personal communication, 6 May 2016). Like the mental association to space that Noël proposed, Bruce likens Morocco to a space that is nearly uninhabitable, a jungle where standard definitions and borders are unclear. Viewing Morocco as an interstice allows these refugees to diminish the power that authority and ordered space has over them. It is yet another way that this population assumes power for themselves to continue momentum in their pursuit of a better life.

### Conclusion

As the Sub-Saharan refugees that I interviewed understand their experience, Rabat, Morocco, and Morocco as a country is not a place that aspires to integrate them into Moroccan society. Admittedly, this is not a country in which they desire to integrate either. These concurrent struggles result in continuous assertions of power, largely explained as the mechanisms utilized by refugees to destabilize aspects of society and the physical acts of domination executed by Moroccans to relay their control over how comfortable or uncomfortable the refugees will remain in Rabat. Overall, I attribute the issues on both sides to each other's understanding of the other as a temporary circumstance. While refugees can utilize this thought to surge them towards their goals of reaching other countries or earning enough to return to their home country, it also impresses a degree of stress upon the space in which locals and these refugees. Sub-Saharan refugees feel marginalized and meriting of opportunities of success while present in Morocco and Moroccans feel threatened by these temporary inhabitants utilizing Moroccan territory and taking their profits. I believe that this conclusion exposes that migration numbers and aspects of a person's identity are not producing a problem in Rabat, Morocco; rather, it is the individual's judgments about a space, namely who belongs, who has power over this space, what a space should be used for, that determine the expressions of community relations in this space. While this could be an accurate depiction of the situation, it does not provide a proposition for ameliorating the relationship between locals and Sub-Saharan refugees. This proposition would require further research on effective methods for engaging all actors involved, including advertisement of goals and proposing incentives for all to take action.

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## Appendix

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

*To identify interviewee*

Name, Age, Nationality, Reason for Coming to Morocco, Length of time in Morocco and Rabat, Place(s) of Residence, Jobs held while in Rabat

*Place of Residence*

What do you enjoy about your neighborhood?  
Have you had any bad experiences while living there?  
What relationships do you have with your neighbors and landlord?  
Do you have friends in your area?  
How did you find your house?  
Who do you live with?  
Do you feel safe in this space?

*Work*

Where do you work?  
What jobs do you perform?  
How often do you work?  
What are your relationships with your coworkers?  
How do you engage with locals?  
How often are there new people working here?

*Community*

What qualities create your ideal community?  
Where do you spend most of your time?  
Where do you feel most comfortable in Rabat?  
Where do you feel uncomfortable in Rabat?  
Do you feel apart of any communities?  
Who forms your community?  
Which nationalities do your friends have?  
Are you friends with Moroccans?

*Future*

What are your goals for the future?

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## CONSENT FORM

### 1. Brief description of the purpose of this study

The purpose of this study is to analyze the current climate for Sub-Saharan refugees seeking suitable housing, livelihood, and community in Rabat, Morocco.

### 2. Rights Notice

In an endeavor to uphold the ethical standards of all SIT ISP proposals, this study has been reviewed and approved by a Local Review Board or SIT Institutional Review Board. If at any time, you feel that you are at risk or exposed to unreasonable harm, you may terminate and stop the interview. Please take some time to carefully read the statements provided below.

- a. **Privacy** - all information you present in this interview may be recorded and safeguarded. If you do not want the information recorded, you need to let the interviewer know.
- b. **Anonymity** - all names in this study will be kept anonymous unless the participant chooses otherwise.
- c. **Confidentiality** - all names will remain completely confidential and fully protected by the interviewer. By signing below, you give the interviewer full responsibility to uphold this contract and its contents. The interviewer will also sign a copy of this contract and give it to the participant.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's name printed

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's signature and date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewer's name printed

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewer's signature and date

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