Spring 2023

Unveiling Anti-Blackness in Moroccan Society: A Historical and Contemporary Analysis

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Location of Primary Study: Africa, Morocco, Tangier, Essouira, Ait Benhaddou
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for MOR, SIT Abroad, Spring 2023

Abstract:
The purpose of this investigation is to delve into the complex dynamics of how blackness is perceived and negotiated within the intricate social fabric of Moroccan society. Drawing on the theoretical framework of black political thought, this study examines the interrelated systems of race, colonialism, and diaspora to trace the formation of black identity in Morocco, its navigation, and its manifestation in contemporary times. The Moroccan state has recently come under scrutiny for its treatment of Sub-Saharan migrants, who have been subjected to racism both from the police and the Moroccan people. This is even though black Moroccans with indigenous and formerly enslaved heritage are a visible presence in the country. Through extensive independent research, the author reveals that anti-blackness is deeply ingrained in Moroccan society, dating back to the initial Amazigh conquest when an established hierarchy was created to justify the invasion of black indigenous tribes. This pattern repeated itself with the arrival of pan-Arabism and pan-Judaism, with black indigenous people being relegated to an even lower status. The institutionalization of slavery in Morocco catalyzed anti-blackness, resulting in the homogenization of all black people in the country, regardless of their heritage. Slavery persisted in Morocco until the country gained independence in 1956 when campaigns of nationalism and Arabization further marginalized the existence of Black Moroccans. These efforts aimed to legitimize Morocco as a post-colonial state and contributed to Moroccan exceptionalism in the African context, allowing the country to distance itself from Black Africa and perpetuate racism towards Sub-Saharan migrants. Moroccan exceptionalism manifests in a multitude of ways for the black communities in Ait Banhaddou and the Gnawa of Essaouira as they navigate their black roots in the face of marginalization and Moroccan culture.

Keywords: African Studies, Racism, Colonialism, Diaspora, Migration

Acknowledgments: First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisor Taieb Belghazi and my research advisor Jamal Bahmad for their wisdom, inspiration, and encouragement. Thank you both for always letting me ask all my questions whenever I needed clarity, reassurance, or was at a lost in my ambitions. Your dedication and kindness encouraged me every step of the way with this project and comforted me when there seemed to be no end in sight. I would also like to thank my fellow students in the MOR program; you all were my biggest confidants when I was at my lowest when the discussions were hard, and when I couldn't form words. Similarly, I would like to thank all the friends I made along the way, especially those in the Sub-Saharn Migrant community who I feel privileged to know. You showed me your hearts through poetry, photography, and tight embraces; and although your stories will not be told here (as I couldn't possibly do them justice) I will forever hold them affectionately.

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I. Introduction

My research endeavors were centered around comprehensively exploring the multifaceted and nuanced dynamics of how blackness is perceived and negotiated within the intricate social fabric of Moroccan society. The initial inspiration for my research stemmed from my exposure to the experiences of Sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco, who had been subjected to racism and discrimination in a myriad of ways. While these experiences of blatant anti-blackness seemed straightforward at first glance, my curiosity and desire for a deeper understanding led me to interrogate and challenge my Western assumptions on race and explore the complex racial dynamics within Morocco, which is home to diverse diasporic communities.

Moreover, my personal heritage played a significant role in my approach to the topic. As someone with African American ancestry, my paternal history of enslavement gave me unique insights into the complexities of anti-blackness and the African Diaspora. Additionally, my maternal heritage of immigrating from Mexico to the United States provided me with a personal connection to the values and beliefs of migrants. While my heritage may have made my research susceptible to bias, understanding my positionality in the research allowed me to uncover the depth of issues that are often overlooked.

The experiences of Sub-Saharan migrants revealed a stark juxtaposition that excluded the narratives of the black Moroccan population. These migrants pointed to instances in which they were not allowed to enter certain public spaces, were physically attacked, or otherwise discriminated against based on the color of their skin alone. The Moroccan Association of Migrant Students and Research conducted a study that revealed 40% of those surveyed did not relate to Sub-Saharan peoples as their neighbors, 70% would refuse to share housing with someone from Sub-Saharan Africa, and 60% would not marry someone from this region.[1] These numbers point to anti-blackness from all directions.

However, my exposure to the Gnawa community in Tangier illuminated a far more intricate relationship between Moroccan society and blackness, with the presence of blackness among Moroccans themselves. While the topic of Black Moroccans was often shrouded in taboo and nuance, especially in the southern parts of the country, where discussions of origin could be met with caution, I discovered that the predominant narrative surrounding Black Moroccans reduced them to descendants of slaves. While this was certainly true for the Gnawa community, many other Black Moroccans claimed indigeneity in the south, challenging the long-held beliefs about their origins. The denial of their existence and history revealed many truths about the impact of diaspora and hierarchies of power in the country, from its colonial origins to the present day.

The phenomena of nationalism and Arab unity that have prevailed in Moroccan society have created a culture of neglect for the black natives of Morocco, and as a result, people of color who suffer from micro-aggressions based on colorism often lack the language to articulate their demands for equal rights and protection from the state. Moreover, Moroccans who do not

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[1] Crétois, June and Hassan Hamden, “Moroccan Survey: African, But Not Completely,” ALMONITOR, 3 Feb 2013, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/culture/2013/02/morocco-survey- african-heritage.html#

experience racism often distance themselves from the harsh realities that surround them, and their selective use of racialized language contributes to a post-independence society that is still rife with racist ideologies, not only based on ethnicity or nationality but also on the color of one's skin.

All of this serves to underscore the depth and severity of anti-blackness in Morocco and Northern Africa, particularly in the post-colonial context. It is crucial to recognize racism not merely as a social construct but as an empirical tool of power that has contributed to the global racial caste system we see today. By acknowledging the erasure of black people from history and society and working to restore their visibility, I hope to pay homage to the past and honor the present, all while confronting the roots of racism head-on. The following is my expansion of these initial observations.

Research questions: How is blackness navigated in Morocco and what are its implications on the discrimination faced by Sub-Saharan migrants? How are these prejudices navigated by Black Moroccans and how do their experiences inform the way migrants are treated? In what ways is this informed by Morocco's colonial period and Western imperialism? *To what extent does historical Afro-erasure in Morocco frame modern racism and anti-blackness against SubSaharan African migrants?*

Definitions and Concepts:

Black (identity): racial identity refers to people who are perceived and categorized as having dark skin, often with African ancestry.

Blackness: The condition or quality of being Black, often including aspects of cultural identity, racial identity, and shared experience.

Racialization: The process by which social groups are categorized and defined according to perceived physical or cultural differences, leading to the creation and perpetuation of racial hierarchies and systems of discrimination.

Indigeneity: The state of being native or indigenous to a particular place or region, often linked to the preservation of traditional cultural practices and knowledge.

Racism: A system of beliefs, attitudes, and practices that assigns value and worth to people based on their perceived racial or ethnic identity, leading to discrimination and inequality.

Enslaved People: People who are held in bondage, ownership, or control by another person or group, often forced to perform labor or work against their will.

Homogenization: The process of making things uniform or similar, often by eliminating or suppressing differences or diversity.

Black Diaspora: The dispersion of Black people and culture throughout the world, often resulting from slavery, colonization, or other forms of forced migration.

Pan-Arabism/Arabization: The movement to promote unity and solidarity among Arab nations and people, often through the promotion of a shared cultural and linguistic identity.

Pan Judaism: The idea that Jews are a single, unified people with a shared culture, history, and identity, often transcending national and regional differences.

Orientalism: A way of thinking about the East or the Orient as exotic, mysterious, and inferior to the West, often leading to stereotyping, cultural imperialism, and other forms of discrimination.

Exceptionalism: the idea that a person, country or political system can be allowed to be different from, and perhaps better than others.

Afro-Pessimism: The concept has many interpretations among scholars of Africana Studies and the Black Consciousness moment. Functions of the theory vary from context to context surround how anti-blackness is a global structure of oppression. For the sake of this study, Afro-Pessimism is defined in the context of development by colonial powers and the narrative that Africa persist as a scary, backward and poverty-ridden place; therefore, making it fixed in the continent's challenges related to poverty, health, development or governance.[2]

[2] Schorr, V. (2011) 'Economics of Afro-pessimism'. Nokoko 2: 23–62.

II. Literature Review

Framing Blackness: The Construction of Race in Moroccan Society

Morocco's unique approach to framing race is rooted in its diverse population and distinct history. While the Western concept of race has been heavily influenced by colonialism and the black-white binary, Morocco's racial landscape is shaped by a complex interplay of various ethnic groups and cultural influences. Recognizing and respecting these differences is crucial to understanding the broader implications of race in Morocco and preventing the erasure of the African context in the region.

Furthermore, failure to contextualize the racialization of Morocco can lead to harmful assumptions and marginalization of certain populations. Therefore, it is essential to examine the theoretical, empirical, and contemporary implications of race in Morocco and explore how race has been institutionalized in the country. By doing so, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of race and its impact on individuals and society in Morocco.

Reframing Race in the Maghreb by Corbin Treacy

To fully comprehend and address intra-African racism, it is crucial to break down preconceived notions of race that are often influenced by Eurocentric ideas. The multifaceted nature of intra-African racism is a result of the continent's complex relationship with colonialism. As Corbin Treacy argues in “Reframing Race in the Maghreb”, the imposition of Eurocentric ideas of race on a continent with established power systems among indigenous and diasporic communities is problematic.[3] This is particularly relevant when discussing the North

[3] Treacy, C. (2021). Reframing Race in the Maghreb. Unpublished manuscript, University of California, Los Angeles.

African region, also known as the "Maghreb", which has a rich and complex history of intersecting identities, such as indigeneity, tribal conquest, pan-Arabism, pan-Judaism, the spread of Islam, and black diaspora. Treacy emphasizes that using a Western lens to address contemporary issues of race and ignoring the historical phenomena in North Africa is inadequate and unproductive. He writes, “When we think about race and the postcolonial, the binaries of colonizer/colonized, north/south, and occident/orient are perhaps the first to come to mind… But the twenty-first century – with its movement of people, goods, and resources – has seen an expansion of racial fault lines beyond these polarities…Clandestine migration across the Mediterranean is often discussed for its agitating effects on Europe’s racial anxieties; less acknowledged is the growth of intra-African racism”.[4] Therefore, it is essential to understand the unique and complex ways in which race is framed and understood in Morocco and other African nations, to effectively combat racism and promote social justice.

It is important to recognize that race as a concept of power is not exclusive to Western or European theories but is rather a universal system of power utilized by all populations involved in conquest.[5] In the case of Morocco, this universal system of power is reflected in the country's unique racial hierarchy that has emerged as a result of its complex history and various cultural influences. This hierarchy serves as a means to navigate the intricate tribal, pan-Arabism, panJudaism, Islamic, and black diasporic formations that make up the country's society. Understanding this complex racial hierarchy is crucial to gaining a more nuanced understanding of race in Morocco and the various ways it intersects with other forms of identity and power dynamics.

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[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.

The Dark Matter: Race and Racism in the 21st Century by Howard Winant

In “The Dark Matter: Race and Racism in the 21st Century," Howard Winant argues that the concept of race was developed as a response to the social and political need to exert dominance over conquered and enslaved individuals.[6] This was done by establishing criteria for racial categorization, which in turn helped to organize and maintain oppressive regimes.

However, Winant also notes that race has also been utilized as a means of unity and resistance against these oppressive practices. In other words, while the concept of race was initially created to subjugate and control people, it has also been used as a tool for marginalized groups to organize and fight for their rights and liberation. He writes, “Race developed as a highly practical political technology of oppression and resistance…Of course, this was in practice a complex process, not so bilaterally a matter of ‘us and them’; there were enslaved Europeans, African and indigenous slave-traders, ethnic differences among Africans, and so on,”.[7] Winant continues that this binary transcends historical contextualization of any region; nevertheless, the formation of a global binary came to be with the globalization of slavery and imperial empires. He cites numerous scholars who all contest that a “color line” gradually emerged, differentiating between the free and the enslaved, the native and the settler, and the oppressor and the oppressed, during the initial years of Atlantic slavery and empire.[7] On the institutionalization of slavery as an economic system, Winant writes “the accumulation of capital is always violent, always coercive, and that the racial dimension is at least involved. After all, ‘labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin when in the black skin it is branded’ (Marx, 1967: 329)…Structural racism – an odious stink pile of sh*t left over from the past and still

[6] Winant, H. (2018). The Dark Matter: Race and Racism in the 21st Century. Pluto Press.
[7] Ibid.

being augmented in the present – has been accumulated by ‘slavery unwilling to die’, by empire, and indeed by the entire racialized modern world system,”.[8] The legacy of slavery continues to exist beyond the abolition of slavery and has persisted into the modern era through various manifestations of its past iterations. Stuart Hall delves into this concept in "Race, The Floating Signifier", highlighting the ability of race and racism to adapt and manifest in diverse contexts.

Race, The Floating Signifier by Stuart Hall

The origin of racial classification systems can be traced back to a specific historical encounter where people of distinct cultures came together and attempted to understand one another. This encounter marked a turning point in the evolution of racial categorization and occurred at a specific point in history; the catalyst being the global slave trade and the institutionalization of anti-black racism. According to Stuart Hall in “Race, The Floating Signifier”, the global slave trade not only implemented a binary between the free world of nonblack people and the enslaved identity of black people but also emerged a universal antiblackness in social society on all levels.[9] This is an everchanging encounter ranging from language on the micro level to segregation on the macro level. He writes, “Race works like a language. And signifiers refer to the systems and concepts of the classification of a culture to its making meaning practices. And those things gain their meaning, not because of what they contain in their essence, but in the shifting relations of difference, which they establish with other concepts and ideas in a signifying field. Their meaning, because it is relational, and not essential, can never be finally fixed, but is subject to the constant process of redefinition and

[8] Ibid.
[9] Hall, Stuart. "Race, the floating signifier." In Stuart Hall: Critical dialogues in cultural studies, edited by David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, 153-72. Routledge, 1996.

appropriation." He continues, "It's reality. You can see its effects, you can see it in the faces of the people around you, you can see people pulling the skirts aside as people from another racial group come into the room. You can see the operation of racial discrimination in institutions and so on,".[10] The signifying function of race is particularly relevant in societies such as Morocco, where a complex and diverse system of hierarchy exists among multiple groups. In this context, as all of these groups interact within the nation and the world changes, the concept of race adapts and transforms to sustain the existing hierarchical structures. It is crucial to consider this dynamic when challenging Western/Eurocentric perspectives on race, as it underscores the fact that race operates differently in different contexts with distinct interrelated groups. Incorporating the post-colonial context of Morocco and the trends of nationalism and Arabization is particularly significant in comprehending the complex racial dynamics present in the country. The legacy of colonialism and the subsequent push for national unity have influenced the framing The signifying function of race is particularly relevant in societies such as Morocco, where a complex and diverse system of hierarchy exists among multiple groups. In this context, as all of these groups interact within the nation and the world undergoes a change, the concept of race adapts and transforms to sustain the existing hierarchical structures.

Race and Politics of National Identity in Morocco: Arabization and Beyond

The French and Spanish protectorates were established in Morocco in the early 20th century after a period of intense competition between European powers for control of North Africa. The French protectorate covered most of the country, while the Spanish protectorate covered the northern coastal areas. After years of protests, negotiations, and violence, Morocco finally gained its independence on March 2, 1956, with the signing of the Treaty of Fez between

France and Morocco.[10]

The Moroccan state utilized a double strategy of positive self-representation as the "New Morocco" while simultaneously employing subtle forms of negative other-presentation to establish a feeling of in-group solidarity among Moroccans. In "Notes on the (post)colonial Maghreb" Abdelmajid Hannoum asserts that to fully comprehend Morocco's post-independence political transformation from colonial to post-colonial power and knowledge, it is crucial to analyze and critique the implications of colonialism and nationalism.[11] Hannoum argues that the colonial ideology of racial othering, which portrayed Europeans as superior and Arab and Amazigh as inferior, continued to be used in contemporary Maghreb through discursive strategies.[12] These strategies mainly focused on constructing a narrative of inherent opposition and violence between the Arab and Amazigh groups, making it seem impossible for the Maghreb region to establish a nation. Post-independence elites then reworked this narrative to justify their anti-African, pro-Arab, and Francophone nationalist rhetoric, further perpetuating racialized discourse in contemporary Morocco.[13]

Hannoum continues that the erasure of Amazigh and African heritage in Morocco predates the post-independence elites, who repurposed racialized discourse to consolidate their power and legitimize the country's status as a modern nation-state.[15]Rather than rejecting French influence outright, the elites utilized the language to reaffirm their authority and present Morocco as a legitimate modern state. Simultaneously, asserted their Arab identity and align

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[10] Michael Brett, Morocco: From Empire to Independence, The English Historical Review, Volume CXXII, Issue 495, February 2007, Pages 220–222, https://doi.org/10.1093/ehr/cel412
[11] Hannoum, A. (2005). Notes on the (post)colonial Maghreb. Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies, 7(2), 151-167.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.

themselves with the wider pan-Arab nationalist movement, erasing any acknowledgment of the diverse cultural and historical roots that comprised the nation.

Discourse and the Denial of Racism by Teun Dijk

The Moroccan state's strategic denial of racial tensions was a means of preserving its legitimacy and preserving its power by engaging in "face-keeping" tactics. This practice of denying the existence of racism has been analyzed by Teun Dijk in his work "Discourse and the Denial of Racism," which highlights the negative impact of such practices on oppressed groups in both public and private spheres.[14] By fostering a herd mentality among populations, this denial reinforces the moral superiority of the dominant group, ultimately perpetuating the oppression of marginalized communities. He illustrates, “We see that the denial of racism is not only part of a strategy of personal, institutional or social impression management and ideological self-defense, it also is a form of sociopolitical management. It helps control resistance, and at the same time makes political problems of an ethnically or racially pluralist society more manageable,”.[17] Employing denial as a way to manage Moroccan society was essential at the time to unify the state to validify the population as a nation worthy of its post-colonial status.

This was pushed by the government and the Moroccan regime to not only allow for a more unified population but also control the narrative of race and identity in the country after independence. Dijk explains, “‘We are not racists’, ‘We are not a racist society’… it is the social discourse of denial that persuasively helps construct the dominant white consensus…people try to act, and hence to speak, in such a way that their interlocutors construct an 'impression' of them

[14] Dijk, Teun A. (1992). Discourse and the denial of racism. London, Newbury, and New Delhi: SAGE.
[17] Ibid.

that is as positive…when the dominant consensus is that there is no racism, minority groups, and their protests or other forms of resistance have a very hard time to be taken seriously. The more flexible the system of inequality, the more difficult it is to fight it,".[15] The imposition of dominant discourse in the public sphere reinforces power structures that discriminate against marginalized groups, erasing their voices and experiences. This creates a hegemonic cultural narrative that suppresses any alternative narratives that challenge it.

Despite this, the persistence of racism against marginalized groups such as indigenous black Moroccans, Amazigh tribes, and descendants of slaves in the country raises the question of how such discrimination can still occur even in the face of dominant discourses denying its existence. On this Dijk writes, "Whether in the streets of the inner city, in the press or parliament, dominant group members are often engaged in discourse about 'them': ethnic minority groups, immigrants or refugees, who have come to live in the country…A negative attitude may be found acceptable only when pertaining to a specific characteristic of a group, for instance when someone assumes that refugees often enter the country illegally, or when blacks are seen as insufficiently 'motivated' to get a good education or to get a job,".[19] The racism undertones of "otherness" transcend the denial employed by the state and by the populous rebranding the micro-aggressive racial discrimination as circumvention rather than denial. For example, discourses, narratives, and arguments can often construct a predominantly unfavorable portrayal of minority and immigrant groups, portraying them as culturally deviant or

[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid

competitive, and as a problem or a threat to our country, territory, space, housing, employment, education, norms, values, habits, or language.[16]

In the context of Morocco, these negative narratives are frequently targeted toward black individuals, specifically Sub-Saharan migrants residing in the country and their countries of origin. The racism encountered by these migrants will be further explored later in this research. Nevertheless, it is crucial to highlight the existence of two widely held narratives in Morocco - namely, Moroccan exceptionalism and Afro-Pessimism - that serve to expose racist and antiblack attitudes under the guise of post-colonial legitimacy. These narratives propagate the idea that Morocco is exceptional in the African continent due to its Arab identity and, therefore, superior to its African counterparts. This superiority complex is sustained by the idea that the African continent is inherently inferior and in need of external aid and control. These sentiments have the effect of further marginalizing already disadvantaged groups and perpetuating a sense of otherness, ultimately leading to more significant discrimination and social inequality.

The Flatness of Blackness: Afro-Pessimism and the Erasure of Anti-Colonial Thought by Kevin Ochieng Okoth

Moroccan exceptionalism is the notion that Morocco is an exceptional country in terms of its history, culture, and identity. This belief asserts that Morocco is different from other African countries and that it has a distinct and superior identity that is a result of its Arab and Islamic roots, as well as its history of being a powerful and independent kingdom. Moroccan

[20] Ibid.

exceptionalism is often used as a tool to assert Moroccan national identity and to differentiate Morocco from other African countries. It also reinforces the idea that Morocco is a modern, progressive nation that is open to the world, while simultaneously asserting its Arab and Islamic identity. This exceptionalism is a form of Afro-Pessimism that plagues Moroccan society and politics with elitist anti-black rhetoric regarding development, politics, and migration.

In "The Flatness of Blackness: Afro-Pessimism and the Erasure of Anti-Colonial Thought", author Kevin Ochieng Okoth defines Afro-pessimism in the developmental context and how it inherently correlates with anti-blackness. He explains, "Afro-pessimist discourses imposes a Eurocentric developmental model on the continent, and assess its progress in relation to a set of arbitrary criteria [i.e. democracy, access to education, capitalist venture]…Afropessimist representations never actually refer to the continent as a geographical territory; when the term 'African' is used, it denotes only those who are (visibly) Black and live in Africa. Unsurprisingly, all non-Black inhabitants of the continent are intuitively treated as nonAfrican,".[17] In light of Morocco's post-colonial identity, it became imperative for the nation to gain legitimacy by avoiding Afro-pessimism propagated by imperial powers. To achieve this, the Moroccan state and foreign forces deployed the exceptionalism narrative. However, in their quest to dissociate themselves from this narrative, a paradoxical Afro-pessimistic sentiment emerged within Morocco as a non-black ruling nation that does not identify as African. This experience will be further detailed later in my research; nonetheless, Morocco's disassociation and exceptionalism are inherently anti-black. Ochieng Okoth explains, "Anti-Blackness is thus

[17] Okoth, Kevin Ochieng. "The Flatness of Blackness: Afro-Pessimism and the Erasure of Anti-Colonial Thought." African Identities, vol. 17, no. 1, Feb. 2019, pp. 1-14.

qualitatively different from the regimes of violence that affect the non-Black person of colour…The central premise of the AP™ (Afro-Pessimism) is that anti-Black violence is the structuring regime of the modern world,". The Moroccan identity's strategic employment Afro-pessimism as a tool for political gain abroad represents a form of inherent racism. The nation relies on these racist narratives to reinforce its status and superiority complex.
Nevertheless, it is essential to examine how these theories of anti-blackness manifested in Morocco and the historical events that led to the country's intricate relationship with its continent. By exploring the roots of racism in Morocco, we can gain a better understanding of how it continues to play out in contemporary society. As we delve into the construction of race in Moroccan society, it is crucial to consider the often-overlooked history of black identity in the country. Therefore, exploring the hidden history of Black Morocco is vital in understanding the complex framing of blackness in Moroccan society.

Black Morocco: Uncovering the Hidden History of Black Identity in Morocco (*Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam by El Hamel)*

In the book "Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam", author Chouki El Hamel historicizes the genealogies and lineages of black Moroccans. From indigeneity to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, El Hamel provides a detailed and nuanced portrait of the history and culture of black Moroccans, shedding light on a little-studied aspect of the country's past and present. The book examines traditional notions of Moroccan identity, arguing that the country's black population has been overlooked and marginalized by mainstream narratives. He also explores the intersection of race, ethnicity, and class in Morocco, analyzing the complex social dynamics that have shaped the country's black communities.

Framing the Marginalization of Black Stories in the General Consensus

In his research, El Hamel delves into the complex narratives surrounding blackness in Morocco and examines the origins of the country's black population. He sheds light on Morocco's history of slavery and highlights the troubling trend of many Moroccans disregarding its existence, a phenomenon that has far-reaching implications for the status of black Moroccans within society. He writes, “This discourse defends the view that slavery was not harsh in North Africa and contributes to the culture of silence by attacking and dismissing Western scholarship by labeling it as ‘orientalist,’ and this discourages Moroccans from benefitting from the rich Western intellectual heritage in the field of race, gender, and slavery,”.[18] El Hamel supports his claim by asserting that, despite slavery being legal in the nation until independence in 1956, Moroccans do not have an Africanicity or black consciousness to examine slavery and its legacy of prejudice and inherited marginalization. He explains, “Moroccans do not claim that slavery never existed in their country, but the culture of silence about the history of race and slavery either located black Moroccans outside the community or completely absorbed them in it”.[24] This silence is multifaceted on a structural and systematic level, which will be explored later; however, it is imperative to consider when framing the exploration of Black Moroccan history. The erasure of Black history in Morocco and the silencing of discourse around race in Morocco has created a complex, nuanced, and concealed story. [25]It is from here that El Hamel delves into exploring the diverse experiences of black Moroccans, including their origins, migrations, and cultural practices.

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[18] El Hamel, Chouki. Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam. Cambridge University Press, 2014. [24] Ibid. [25] Ibid,

Chapter 1: The Notion of Slavery and the Justification of Concubinage as an Institution of Slavery in Islam

Historicizing slavery in Arabia is an endeavor that predates the birth of Islam by centuries and the origin can be traced to the time before the formation of Ancient Egypt. This is significant because the practice of slavery continued after the revelation of the Qur'an; thus, having a large presence in the Qur'an forbids slavery but gives license to the practice of concubinage, as long as the woman is a slave and not a free Muslim woman.[19]

However, like many nations founded in religion during the time of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the Moroccan state neglected this and used the fundamentals of Islam to justify practices of slavery. "During the expansion of Islam, slaves were collected from among the conquered. In addition to capturing slaves to the South, West, and East of the Arabian Peninsula following the movements of Muslim armies, slaves were taken in raids on the northern shores of the Mediterranean. In fact, until the nineteenth century, slaves of various origins were brought into North Africa and the Middle East", [27]El Hamel writes. "In legal discourse, the institution of slavery in Morocco seems to be not all that different from premodern and early modern notions of slavery held in the Mediterranean Basin in general...the expansion and racialization of black slavery in Morocco and in the adjacent Atlantic world were taking place at the same time,". Although the impact of Mawlay Isma'il's enslavement of Black Moroccans will be discussed

[19] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

later in the context of the historic racism against Black Moroccans, comparing the implementation of slavery in Morocco to other countries in the Mediterranean and the Western Hemispheres places the nation during this phenomenon in history. The systematic racialization of slavery in Morocco is a significant aspect that is often overlooked by many Moroccans, who dismiss it as a policy only used in the Americas and Europe.[28] This not only contributes to their perception of discussions around slavery and race as “Western" and "orientalist," but it also extends to the Moroccan nation's invasion, discrimination, and enslavement of black indigenous people in South Morocco. Thus, the issue of slavery and racism in Morocco is more complex and pervasive than what is commonly acknowledged.

Chapter 3: The Trans-Saharan Diaspora - Tracing the Origins and Roles of Black People in Morocco and West Africa: The Autochthonous Blacks of Morocco

According to a multitude of Moroccan Arabic sources, it is claimed that all black individuals in northwest Africa were initially slaves who were liberated at various times due to different circumstances. Nonetheless, there is a group of black people known as the Haratin who may not have originated from sub-Saharan Africa as slaves but rather were indigenous to southern Morocco.[29]The origins of name “Hartan” originates from the Amazigh word ahardan, which is linked to skin tone and denotes "dark color”, insinuating the dark-afro features of the indigenous tribe and illustrating the racialization of the group by the Amazigh people.[30] El Hamel dives deep into the untold history of the Haratin in Morocco and explores its racially motivated erasure via Amazigh tribal conquest. He explains, “According to scholar Gabriel Camps (1927–2002), the founder of the Berber Encyclopedia the first inhabitants of the Moroccan Sahara were of a dark complexion. The Haratin are the descendants of black people

who inhabited the Draa Valley since time immemorial…Berbers [Amazigh] most likely conquered the native populations of the Sahara and assumed for themselves a superior status, placing the natives in lesser, subordinate status,".[20] Nevertheless, as El Hamel notes, the history of the Haratin, the presence of the population, and the conquest by the Amazigh people are limited in Moroccan academia and research. According to El Hamel, the reason for this is multifaceted and rooted in racism and anti-blackness in Morocco due to black people in the country being automatically categorized as "other" or of slave descent. [21]"The lack of good sources documenting the history of the indigenous Haratin and all the black people in Morocco, blackness was homogenized, obscuring the origin of the Haratin and undermining the diverse origins and historical migration of black Africans. They also reflect the perception of blacks in the Arabized Moroccan society that stigmatized the slave status associated with all Moroccan blacks, hence the construction of a racial category." El Hamel discusses.[22] This homogenization of black people in Morocco erases the history of the Harartin people by it compartmentalizing them with the growing presence of enslaved black people in Morocco via the Atlantic and the Saharan Trade Networks.

The Atlantic and the Saharan Trade Networks pioneered the Transatlantic slave trade and were the precursor to the routes that displaces millions of Africans around the world and to the northern part of the continent. According to El Hamel, this marked the beginning of an eruption of commercial activities and slave raids in West Africa and validated the opening of the slave

[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.

market.[23] The trading networks were initially occupied by the Portuguese who traded with Moroccans for goods such as cloth, horses, and wheat and exchanged them for slaves and gold. These were the first slaves to arrive in Morocco, and as the market grew the trade was deemed profitable for the nation to implement the institution of slavery in its economy.[35] El Hamel writes, "The Portuguese, and later the Western Europeans, established their commercial itinerary along a preexisting African trade network. The total of enslaved blacks brought to Morocco…was high. According to Az-Zayani, when Mahmud Zarqun returned to Morocco in 1598, he brought back with him ten thousand male slaves and ten thousand female slaves.".[36] This was the official commencement of slavery in Morocco and had large implications on the eventual enslavement of the Haratin people by validating and institutionalizing the racial hierarchy placed upon them.

Chapter 4 "Racializing" Slavery – The Controversy of Mawlay Isma'il's Project

During the reign of Sultan Mawlay Isma'il between 1646 and 1727, Morocco subjected the indigenous black populace to a system of enslavement, coercively conscripting them to serve in the armed forces. The pinacol of anti-blackness in the country, the Haratin and enslaved black communities were subjected to a concerted effort by the government that was based solely on their physical appearance and complexion.[37] El Hamel documents, "Complying with the sultan's order, 'Alilish succeeded in collecting all black people in the area of Marrakesh whether they were slaves, free blacks, or Haratin, married with a family or single… The color of their skin and

[23] Ibid

their slave origin status were the grounds for enslavement, regardless of the blacks' long integration into Moroccan society. Such prejudice played a substantial role in Sultan Mawlay \Isma'il's decision to buy and enslave all blacks,".[24] The impetus behind this effort was rooted in the sultan's aspiration to establish a military force that would exhibit unwavering allegiance to his authority, thereby leading to the recruitment of an army entirely comprised of black slaves.[25] This historical homogenization of all black people in Morocco irrespective of their social standing, reinforced a paradigm shift from the traditional master-slave power dynamics to a racialized system that hierarchically situates Arab and Amazigh communities at the top and all black Moroccans at the bottom, consigned to a state of servitude. El Hamel states that this was validated by the school of Islam and writes that "The main legal schools of Islam sanctioned the enslavement of non-Muslims, regardless of skin color, race, or ethnicity, through legitimate means such as a 'just war', a purchase, or a gift".[40] Despite being challenged by indigenous black Moroccans, as evidenced by large-scale protests in the Sahara region during that era, the enslavement of the Haratin continued unabated, extending beyond the traditional justification of "just war". This homogenization of all individuals of black African heritage in Morocco facilitated state control and marginalization of this compartmentalized group, with the Moroccan state being a direct beneficiary of this dynamic. El Hamel delves into the intricate interplay between this phenomenon and the system of slavery in Morocco, which substantially influenced the positioning of black Moroccans within the social hierarchy.

[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[40] Ibid

Chapter 2: The Interplay between Slavery and Race and Color Prejudice

In this section, El Hamel elaborates on how the relationship between skin color, familial ties, and social function created the complex racial classification of black Moroccans originating. from slavery in the nation. Unlike the larger powers at the time who use the plantation model during the slave period, the institution of slavery in Morocco varied and took place on both the macro and micro scale. El Hamel writes, "In reality, slavery in Morocco was not a monolithic institution. Enslaved people participated in diverse economies and labor activities such as smallscale farming, domestic tasks, and artisanal and mercantile activities,".[41] Specifically, due to many Moroccan men practicing concubinage, enslaved women became an integral part of the Moroccan family home no matter the socioeconomic status of the family.[42] This combination of enslaved labor on the macro, economic and micro, social levels made for slavery to be more integrated into the private sphere of everyday Moroccan livelihood. These observations are often used to divert the narrative surrounding enslavement in Morocco due to the "lack of prohibitions against interracial relations" by Muslims in the country and to further the notion that all Muslims are inherently color-blind.[43]

Disregarding significant historical evidence, the interpretation of politics and slavery in Morocco as such overlooks the gross oversimplifications drawn from Islamic legal writings on the subject of slavery and its practice. Hamel resists this belief by analyzing pan-Arabism and the spread of Islam to North Africa, "Racialist ideas and positions were the product of deeply entrenched cultural prejudices that were not dislodged by the egalitarian color-blind tenets of Islam. The phenomenon of race in Morocco is old; it is as old as the Arab invasion of North Africa in the seventh century,".[44] As Arabs encountered indigenous tribes, such as the Amazigh \in what is now Morocco, ideals of others, exceptionalism, and prejudice were formed for them

[26]to justify their invasion and power over the tribes (this is to be expanded on later regarding race relations in the region).[27] Upon these first encounters, Muslim's capacity for prejudice was formed and was also transformed to justify the institutionalization of slavery in Morocco. El Hamel explains, "In Morocco, the two cultures, Arabic and Berber [Amazigh], found ideological convergence in the sense of using Islam to justify preexisting prejudice against black Africans…As ethnocultural distinctions became more popularly perceived as fixed, inherent, and static, the strength of these racial prejudices promoted supremacy of a certain race and established a sociopolitical order based on race,".[46] The sorrowful occurrences related to the enslavement of liberated Moroccans of African descent were not a result of chance but rather stemmed from biased attitudes centered around Arabo-Berber culture. The limitation of economic and political domination, as well as social exclusion based on race, was diminished due to the freedom of those with darker skin; therefore, the act of converting their free status into a permanent state of slavery only served to perpetuate and strengthen the racial prejudices of Arab-Berbers towards black people.[47]

This phenomenon is not unique to Morocco but is a byproduct of the diaspora of formerly enslaved populations linked by black consciousness and the assimilation, integration, alienation, and retention of elements of their previous culture in the host countries. It is from here that Black Moroccans derive their complex social placement intertwined with the superiority of Arabs and Amazigh tribes, socially imposed upon them to remain a distinctive group. Through this process, black consciousness in Morocco shares elements of Amazigh and Arab collective identity. El

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[27] Winant, H. (2018). The Dark Matter: Race and Racism in the 21st Century. Pluto Press. [46] El Hamel, Chouki. Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam. Cambridge University Press, 2014.

[47]

Hamel writes, “Blacks in Morocco absorbed some of the Arabo-centric values expressed in the dominant interpretation of Islam in order to navigate within the Arabo-centric discourse. Black Moroccans perceive themselves first and foremost as Muslim Moroccans and only perceive themselves secondarily as participants in a different tradition and/or belonging to a specific ethnic, racial, or linguistic group, real or imagined”.[48] This emphasis on Muslim identity by Black Moroccans positions them closer to those of power and privilege in society and is a mechanism to navigate the power dynamics created and reinforced by Islam. Notwithstanding the efforts of black Moroccans to alter their status within society, the state responded by replacing the concept of otherness with racial notions and a racist ideology, a move aimed at establishing and safeguarding the social demarcations that delineate the identities and privileges of Arab and Amazigh communities.[49] This is further emphasized by the struggle for abolition in Morocco until the 20th century which stratifies this otherness and black people as a tool against colonial powers.

Chapter 7: The Abolition of Slavery in Morocco

The Moroccan movement towards abolition and emancipation was intertwined with the country's anti-colonial struggle, as the institution of slavery was utilized as a means to resist foreign intervention. The campaign to eradicate slavery became a tool that served colonial political interests, becoming a crucial component of propaganda in the foreign policy agendas of both the British and the French.[50] Over time, France assimilated the antislavery argument into other justifications for the conquest and colonization of Africa. El Hamel details, “The reason that the French were unsuccessful in ushering in abolition in Mauritania is that once the French established their colonial rule, they compromised their abolitionist policies to facilitate the

colonial. For the sultan of Morocco, the question of slavery was accepted in Islamic law and therefore the British demand was deemed offensive to Islamic traditions.”.[28] The inability of the French and the British to eliminate slavery within Morocco, coupled with the exploitation of this institution as a political tool to resist imperial powers, perpetuated the use of black bodies as objects of negotiation, a phenomenon that will be analyzed in greater detail later on in this paper.

This gained major attention from European powers, but ultimately resulted in the appropriation of slavery in the country by accounts of benevolence displayed by Moroccan slave owners.[29] El Hamel reports that scholars downplayed the abuse and cruelty of slavery in Morocco by declaring that slaves in Morocco are not numerous, and are kindly treated by their masters, who, at their decease, frequently emancipate their slaves.[30] However, he retorts these beliefs by contesting, “Whether or not they were treated well misses the salient point that they were reduced to servitude and forced to leave their native location. The idea that the practice of slavery was benign and even ‘compassionate’ withers in the face of such facts,”.[31] He further asserts this by emphasizing Moroccan men’s practice of concubinage that forced enslaved women into sexual relations with their Moroccan owners.[32] Although these women were given rights under Islamic law, this was only under the condition that the enslaved woman bore a child or married their owners in a polygamous relationship. El Hamel writes, “Black female slaves were tragic heroines struggling to overcome their enslavement, oppression, and sexual exploitation. Some were forced to use their sexuality and emotional resources to navigate the

[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid

harsh realities of slavery and its attendant loss of personal identity and pride to rebuild new identities and enhance their agency in a manner that at times transcended servile conditions, race, and color prejudice. The striving for survival and the tragic drama of the female slaves' lives entailed emotional and sexual bonds via concubinage within a society where gender was hierarchical – patrilineal and patriarchal."[56] The intersectional oppression of black women as sexual slaves was overlooked by foreign scholars who lacked a nuanced understanding of the intricate dynamics at the micro and household levels of slavery in Morocco, underscoring how misguided and erroneous narratives can arise when certain populations are excluded. This omission perpetuated the violence against black women in Morocco and bolstered the French government's ban on interference in households that kept slaves. El Hamel analyzes Frances's abolitionist position as interventionist policy in its former colonies and observes that despite the French colonial regime's significant emphasis on the abolition of slavery as a key justification for its colonial enterprise, it did not make a concerted effort to firmly prohibit slavery in Morocco.[57] According to Hamel, this is due to the growing resistance against the French protectorate in Morocco at the time by Muslim scholars. He argues, "Muslim scholars were instrumental in popularizing the abolition position. They started to push the position of the Protectorate." El Hamel continues, "They maintained that the conditions of legal slavery were no longer present at their time".[58] The denial of the existence of slavery in Morocco was a means to resist French influence in the country, even though the practice had evolved from a legal status to an inherited social condition. El Hamel writes that this was especially prevalent in southern Morocco where black slaves, specifically Haratin were forced into their caste as agricultural laborers working as sharecroppers.[59] It was from a labor rights strategy that the French inflicted their abolitionist agenda on Morocco by transforming the country into a wage labor system

under capitalism. El Hamel states, “The capitalist system altered the Moroccan social structures by transforming local human labor power into a class of wage earners…The creation of a wage-earning system influenced the migration of blacks from southern Morocco to the big cities, resulting in the eventual emergence of slums. Consequently, the number of slaves continually dwindled, and the institution eventually died a natural death,”.[60] Slavery in Morocco was not officially abolished through a royal decree or governmental policy but rather came to an end as a result of the French colonial occupation and the introduction of capitalist modes of production into the country.[61] Despite the forced end to slavery in Morocco, the legacy of slavery persists in the collective memory of many black communities as a period of hardship and resistance against oppressive rule. Among the descendants of slaves in Morocco, the Gnawa people and their community stand out as those who have retained their connection to their enslaved ancestors and their cultural heritage.

Chapter 8: The Gnawa and the Memory of Slavery

Despite their initial forced presence in Morocco, the Gnawa managed to integrate themselves into the social fabric of the country while preserving their ethnic and group identity over multiple generations. Originating the ethnic identity of the Gnawa presents a challenging task; however, it can be traced back to their West African origins. The term 'Gnawa' refers to both black individuals from West Africa and their unique religious, spiritual, and musical traditions.[62] Gnawa culture, music, and spirituality are very prominent in southern Moroccan communities with large black populations such as Marrakesh, Essaouira, Meknes, and Fez. Historically, these cities and communities were all connected to the Saharan Trade Network, and all had large slave markets connected to the Saharan slave trade. According to El Hamel, Gnawa

culture is reputable in Morocco and proudly linked to the times of slavery and commemorates the memory of slavery among Black Moroccans, which is maintained by the Gnawa people's intersection and incorporation of Islam and Amazigh heritage.[63] He writes, "Although the Gnawa are now fully integrated into Moroccan society and represent a symbol of confluence of cultures, they retain a cultural and a social distinctiveness…Although the Gnawa have adopted the AraboBerber-Islamic form of social identification, their music represents a fascinating syncretism and a mixture of resistance to enslavement, the rigors of forced migration, and the challenges of integration into their new social landscape,".[64] The formation of Gnawa culture is a mechanism of the black diaspora that has formed into a distinct ethnic group and turned their marginalized status into a collective identity.

However, like the Haratin, Gnawa culture has a lack of space in academia by Arab Muslim scholars and is often riddled with racist undertones concerning the spiritual practices of the Gnawa people. El Hamel documents, "It is only from fragmentary primary records that I was able to assemble this description of the Gnawa people; this situation was made more difficult because Arab Muslim scholars avoided writing about the rituals of animal sacrifice, spirit possession, and mystical trances."[65] El Hamel continues to rationalize that this neglect of research by Arab Muslim scholars is due to prejudiced beliefs of spiritual inferiority and accusations of paganism. Elaborating on the attitudes of Muslim intellectual spaces towards the Gnawa, El Hamel highlights that within such circles, the Gnawa are often viewed as an inferior form of Sufism and a cult that is influenced by pagan black traditions.[66] Additionally, this religious and cultural practice is primarily embraced by individuals from lower-class backgrounds who may have limited access to formal education and literacy. He highlights the racist undertones explaining, "The association of Gnawa with slavery and sub-Saharan traditions

was a prejudice that blinded local scholars to the merits of Gnawa contributions to and influence on the rich cultural traditions of Morocco."[67] He asserts that despite these efforts, the Gnawa community has only rebranded their status to a "spiritual order within Moroccan Islamic society" that continues to be marginalized against. The Gnawa communities' contribution to Moroccan culture and assimilation of Arab-Amazigh heritage does not shield them from the marginalization and discrimination as descendants of slaves.

El Hamel emphasizes that the composition of a distinctive Gnawan identity comprised of Arab-Amazigh heritage was means of survival having first arrived as forced migrants and then reembodying themselves with a socially and spiritually constructed identity through centuries of acculturation into Moroccan society. He writes, "The Gnawa provide a fascinating story of how a people reconstruct its identity against a broken cultural continuity. Drawing on their African musical heritage, the Gnawa have also created a musical genre in Morocco that enabled them to cope with the horrors of servitude and its legacies."[33] This phenomenon is also very popular among many diasporic communities, specifically former slave communities in the Americas and the Caribbean. Like those communities, the preservation of the Gnawa's historical memory of forced migration is predominantly manifested through their music. According to El Hamel, despite their past experiences, the Gnawa do not express a longing to return to their ancestral homeland, as their diasporic identity is built on a positive attachment to the Islamic culture.[69] Rather than a conscious effort to maintain a connection to their roots and displacement, it is their adherence to Islam that has facilitated their integration into their new homeland. He writes "The Gnawa originally used their music and dance to express the feeling of being subalterns and to

[33] Ibid
[69] Ibid

heal the pain of their abduction. Gnawa lyrics contain many references to the privations of exile and enslavement…In some Gnawa songs include words in a form of an open plaint generally to God and His saints that express the trauma of being displaced and the sorrow of losing their homes".[70] These songs document the story of slavery in Morocco, validating the experiences of Black Moroccans through music, art, and spiritual heritage. The Gnawa community's significance in Moroccan culture serves as a powerful act of resilience, standing as a protest against the country's deeply ingrained history of racism and serving as a source of confidence and pride for the wider black Moroccan community.

Gnawa Music: A Spiritual Journey of Representation and Assimilation

Moroccan Gnawa and Transglobal Trance: The Medium is the Music by Deborah Kaphcan

The Gawa community embodies a remarkable confluence of race and religion, compelling it to deftly navigate the contours of the racial hierarchy within society while simultaneously adhering to the spiritual tenets of Islamic society. As documented by Deborah Kapchan in her work "Moroccan Gnawa and Transglobal Trance: The Medium is the Music", the spiritual practices of the Gnawa not only honor the memory of their enslaved forebears but also imbue their rituals with themes of restorative and therapeutic significance. She writes, "Spirit possession invokes somatic memories of slavery, while the ceremonies of the Gnawa provide a venue for healing and liberation,".[34]

However, notwithstanding the potential for marginalization and prejudice from the wider Arab-Amazigh Islamic society, both of these interrelated intersections have placed the Gnawa

[34] Kapchan, D. A. (2003). Moroccan Gnawa and Transglobal Trance: The Medium is the Music. University of Pennsylvania Press.

72 Ibid.

community in a precarious position. This predicament raises a poignant question: How has the Gnawa community persevered and asserted its presence within the multifarious tapestry of Moroccan culture? El Hamel claims the answer lies in the communities adopting Islamic beliefs and traditions to justify their worship and Western ideals of Orientalism. Kapchan documents this by observing "The Gnawa are practicing Muslims. The songs in their repertoire praise God, as well as the Prophet Muhammad; yet their ceremonies invoke the jnun (pl.), the genies that in Islamic belief are born of fire. Gnawa share elements of Sufi worship practices in their use of music and movement,".[72] The integration of Gnawa spiritual practices into the wider Islamic societal framework in Morocco serves to legitimize the Gnawa community within the broader religious and cultural hierarchy. Through its incorporation into Islamic practices, Gnawa spirituality has been able to assert its cultural significance and challenge the marginalization and exclusion of the Gnawa people within Moroccan society.[35] By recognizing and honoring the contributions of Gnawa culture to the broader Islamic framework, the wider Moroccan society has been able to celebrate its diversity and richness.

Conversely, the commercialization and appropriation of Gnawa music by Western societies have helped to maintain its distinctiveness and unique cultural identity. The commercialization of Gnawa music by Western societies has allowed the Gnawa community to assert its cultural identity and preserve its traditional practices.[74] By showcasing the unique rhythms and melodies of Gnawa music to a global audience, the Gnawa people have been able to maintain their distinctiveness and resist assimilation into broader Western cultural norms. This

[35] Ibid.
[74]

Western lens on Gnawa music and its significance on the Black Diaspora will be addressed later in the finding of this research.

The establishment of a black community in Morocco is a critical moment in the history of the country and an important starting point for understanding the current status of sub-Saharan migrants in the country. Despite the long and complex history of migration in Morocco, the presence of sub-Saharan Africans has been marked by a specific set of challenges and experiences, including racism and discrimination. Understanding the origins of the black community in Morocco is essential for contextualizing the current situation of sub-Saharan migrants. It is from here that my research pivots and seeks to shed light on the experiences of sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco and to analyze the racial factors in Morocco that contribute to their marginalization and exclusion.

The Plight of Black Sub-Saharan Migrants in Morocco: A Humanitarian Crisis

The Black Mediterranean: Bodies, Borders, and Citizenship by Camilla Hawthorne, et al.

The phenomenon of sub-Saharan African migration to Morocco is a complex and multifaceted issue that has evolved over several decades. While some migrants have been arriving in Morocco since the 1960s, the majority of them began to arrive in the late 1990s and early 2000s, driven by a desire to find better economic opportunities and gain entrance into Europe.[36] One of the critical factors driving sub-Saharan migration through Morocco is its geographical location, which positions it as a bridge between Africa and Europe. The proximity

[36] Benton-Short, Lisa, and Kerstin Gentsch. "Growing Destination for Sub-Saharan Africans: Morocco." Migration Policy Institute, 30 Apr. 2021, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/growing-destinationsub-saharan-africans-morocco.

of the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla to the Moroccan coast, as well as the existence of established migrant communities in Morocco, make it a preferred transit point for many migrants seeking to enter Europe.[76]

The fortification of the Mediterranean Sea against migrants is a phenomenon that has evolved over the last few decades, as European countries have sought to control the flow of migrants from Africa and the Middle East. In response to the increasing number of migrants attempting to cross the Mediterranean, many European countries have invested heavily in border control measures, including the construction of physical barriers, such as fences and walls, and the deployment of naval and air patrols.[37] One of the most visible examples of the fortification of the Mediterranean is the construction of border fences in Spain's North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla located in North Africa bordering Morocco. These barriers are designed to prevent migrants from climbing over the border walls and entering the Spanish territories. In addition, Spain has also deployed military and police forces to patrol the border and prevent migrants from entering the enclaves. According to Camilla Hawthorne in "The Black Mediterranean: Bodies, Borders and Citizenship", the fortification of the Mediterranean Sea is a multifaceted biopolitical issue with its empirical role as a hub for the slave trade from Africa to southern Europe and its now route for Sub-Saharan migrants fleeing their post-colonial countries.[38] "The Mediterranean stages a 'crisis' that is not a state of exception, as biopolitical interpretations of the sea have repeatedly claimed, but a state of repetition of the subjection of Black life through the same old means: borderless apparatus of surveillance, containment,

[37] Hawthorne, Camilla, et al. *The Black Mediterranean: Bodies, Borders and Citizenship*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020.
[38] Ibid.

captivity, forced displacement, forced labor, the slave markets, and dehumanization." Hawthorne continues, "It is the delinking of the Mediterranean from capitalist exploitation and its attendant infrastructures that used indentured racialized labor, restricted Black mobility, incarcerated racialized individuals in detention centers and camps, and denied them dwelling and citizenship rights as it happened in other systems of sea/ocean connectivity, and as it continues to do so in the contemporary Mediterranean,".[79] The continual weaponization of the Mediterranean against black people throughout history by Europe has funneled sub-saharan migrants to Morocco to evade the seas claim on death of black bodies.

According to Nicholas De Genova in "The 'Migrant Crisis' as Racial Crisis: do Black Lives Matter in Europe?", "The first intimations of a European "migrant" (or "refugee") "crisis" arose amidst the unsightly accumulation of dead black and brown bodies awash on the halcyon shores of the Mediterranean Sea… Anyone concerned with questions of race and racism today must readily recognize that they present themselves in a particularly acute way in the European migration context, haunted as Europe's borders are by an appalling proliferation of almost exclusively non-European/ non-white migrant and refugee deaths and other forms of structural violence and generalized suffering.".[39] The Rabat Process, which was initiated by the EU and the African Union in 2006, is a key element of Morocco's cooperation with European countries on migration issues.[40] The process seeks to promote dialogue and cooperation between European and African countries on migration, address the root causes of migration and improve the

[39] Nicholas De Genova (2018) The "migrant crisis" as racial crisis: do Black Lives Matter in Europe?, Ethnic and Racial Studies, 41:10, 1765-1782, DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2017.1361543

[40] Benton-Short, Lisa, and Kerstin Gentsch. "Growing Destination for Sub-Saharan Africans: Morocco." Migration Policy Institute, 30 Apr. 2021, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/growing-destinationsub-saharan-africans-morocco.

management of migration flows. Morocco's measures to control migration flows have been aimed at preventing irregular migration and ensuring the security of its northern borders to Europe. Morocco's approach to migration has been criticized for its human rights implications and extensions of European racism, particularly concerning the treatment of migrants in detention centers and the use of forced deportation without proper legal recourse.[82]

Later in this research, the experiences of brutality faced by sub-Saharan migrants will be documented and analyzed. This includes the violence and abuse they may experience during their journey through Morocco, as well as the mistreatment and discrimination they may face upon arrival in the country. Such experiences can have long-lasting physical and psychological effects on the migrants and can leave them vulnerable to further exploitation and abuse. Therefore, it is important to document and understand the extent of this issue to identify effective solutions and provide support for those affected.

III. An Exploration of Blackness in Moroccan Society: A Qualitative Study

Research and Methods

I conceptualized my research through a “history of the present” approach to fully encapsulate the significance of my empirical research’s impact on the contemporary sphere I navigated in my research. The "history of the present" is a concept in social and political theory that refers to the idea that the current social, political, and economic conditions are not just the result of contemporary factors but are also deeply rooted in the historical developments of the past. It is a way of understanding the present by examining how historical events and structures have contributed to shaping the current moment. In other words, the history of the present recognizes that current societal conditions are not static but are constantly being shaped by the

past. It also acknowledges that the present is not a moment in time that exists in isolation but is rather a result of the complex interplay of past and present forces. The concept is particularly relevant in understanding issues of social justice and inequality, as it allows us to see how historical injustices and inequalities have contributed to present-day conditions. By recognizing the history of the present, we can gain a deeper understanding of the factors that shape our societies and work towards creating a more just and equitable future.

After meticulously reviewing my historical literature and exhaustively researching empirical resources, I embarked on my investigation by engaging with the two subject communities at the heart of my study: Black Moroccans and Sub-Saharan migrants. Given the geographical distribution of black communities in Morocco, my research location and scope were extensive, with the majority of Black Moroccans residing in the southern region and many Sub-Saharan migrants in the northern part of the country.

To conduct a comprehensive analysis, my research methodology comprised a multifaceted approach that incorporated various qualitative research techniques, such as conducting in-depth interviews, making detailed observations, and conducting comprehensive case studies. This allowed me to gather rich and nuanced data from a variety of sources, including individuals and communities, which helped me to better understand the complex nature of the social and cultural dynamics related to blackness in Moroccan society.

While in the city of Rabat, I conducted a series of interviews with local NGO leaders and activists advocating for Sub-Saharan migrants' rights. These interviews, conducted in French with the aid of a Moroccan translator, delved into a range of topics, including police brutality, racism, immigration policy, and education. As Sub-Saharan migrants themselves, they spoke with great candor about the violence experienced by their community and shared personal stories

of their struggles with immigration in Morocco. Any further questioning was conducted only with the explicit consent of the interviewees, with a traditional interview format adopted as appropriate. In addition, I obtained the consent of a Sub-Saharan migrant to use his poetry as a form of testimony and personal narrative on his journey to Morocco.

Upon relocating to Tangier, one of Morocco's northernmost cities bordering the Mediterranean, I was keen to begin my research in the south, where I could explore the black indigenous communities and the Gnawa people. I visited Marrakech, Ait Benhaddou, Tinghir, and the Merzouga desert to meet with Black Moroccan communities. In Ait Benhaddou, I toured and engaged with the Hartin community, learning about their rich history and interactions with the tourism industry. Similarly, in the Merzouga desert, I undertook a ten-hour bus journey through the Atlas Mountains to reach one of Morocco's most arid regions. Although my original plan was to continue to Khamilya, the birthplace of Gnawa music, to conduct further research, limited accessibility to the community prompted me to redirect my focus to Essaouira. As a hub for Gnawa music along the southern coast, Essouira provided a rich backdrop to observe how Gnawa culture navigated the city's diverse cultural makeup. Through this, I was able to note the role of music and the arts in spreading awareness of the significance of slavery in the region.

Findings

Case Study 1: Discovering the Rich History of Ait Benhaddou's Black-Indigenous People

Figure 1:A tour group being led by local tour guide to the Ksar of Ait Benhaddou

Ait Benhaddou, a picturesque city nestled in the foothills of the majestic Atlas Mountains in Morocco, has gained international recognition for its renowned Ksar of Ait Benhaddou. Founded by the indigenous Amazigh people who have a rich and storied history dating back several millennia, the city is a testament to the ingenuity and creativity of its indigenous inhabitants. Ait Benhaddou's cultural significance as a historical site has been acknowledged by its UNESCO World Heritage status, which celebrates its architecture and design.[41] The Ksar, an extraordinary example of this unique architectural style, was built by the Berber people as a means of protection against marauders and invaders. Despite its ancient origins, Ait Benhaddou remains a vital and thriving cultural hub, attracting visitors from all corners of the globe. As such, it is a place of immense cultural significance and a testament to the enduring legacy of Morocco's black-indigenous peoples.

The cultural identity of the Ait Benhaddou people is a fascinating and complex blend of Amazigh and black-Saharan heritage, the origins of which can be traced back to the 17th

[41] UNESCO World Heritage Centre. (n.d.). Ksar of Ait-Ben-Haddou. Retrieved from https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/444

Figure 2: Art by the local community in Ait Benhaddou. Pictured in a shop within the Ksar. Captured April 6th, 2023

century.[42] At that time, the city was established as a crucial trading post along the caravan route that connected the Sahara Desert and the bustling city of Marrakech.[85] This strategic location facilitated the intermingling of black-Saharan traders and the indigenous Amazigh people, leading to the creation of the distinctive black-indigenous identity that characterizes Ait Benhaddou today.

During my recent visit to Ait Benhaddou, I had the privilege of being guided through the narrow streets and alleyways of the Ksar by a member of one of the city's five founding families. As we wandered through the vibrant and bustling community, adorned with a fusion of Afro-Amazigh art and culture, I had the opportunity to engage in a casual conversation with my guide, who humorously introduced himself as the famous Oscar-winning actor

[42] Morocco World News. (2019, September 17). Berber People: The Indigenous People of North Africa. Retrieved from https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2019/09/282243/berber-people-indigenous-northafrica/

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Denzel Washington (a tribute to the upcoming “Gladiator” movie being filmed in Ait Benhaddou starring the actor). In our discussion, "Denzel" opened up to me about the complexities of Ait Benhaddou's cultural identity. He explained that while the people of the city primarily identify as Amazigh, they also maintain a strong connection to their black-diasporic roots through their vibrant art and music traditions. As illustrated in *Figure 2*, artists in Ait Benhaddou use traditional African art styles and symbols derived from their black Saharan ancestors. "Denzel" expressed that the arrival of Hollywood and tourism to the city has brought a newfound sense of pride and recognition to the Ait Benhaddou community, bolstering their sense of identity and presence within Moroccan culture.

Case Study 2: The Vibrant Gnawa Culture of Essaouira

Located on the Atlantic coast of Morocco, the charming city of Essaouira boasts a unique blend of cultural and historical influences. At the heart of its diverse cultural fabric is the thriving Gnawa community, which has been an integral part of Essaouira's identity for centuries. Visitors to the city can immerse themselves in the vibrant music and dance performances that take place throughout the year in various venues, such as cafes and courtyards. One of the most highly anticipated events on Essaouira's cultural calendar is the annual Gnawa Music Festival, which has been held in the city since

Figure 3: Photographic portrait of a Gnawa woman located in the old medina in Essouira

1998.[43] This festival showcases the best of Gnawa music and culture, with performances by traditional and contemporary musicians, dancers, and other artists. The festival has become a popular destination for visitors from around the world, and it offers a unique opportunity to experience the energy and excitement of this fascinating culture. Beyond the music performances, visitors can also attend workshops, lectures, and exhibitions that provide a deeper insight into the history and cultural significance of the Gnawa people.[87] These events offer a chance to learn about the intricate rhythms, instruments, and dance styles that have made Gnawa music so renowned around the world. The festival's diverse programming and inclusive atmosphere make it an important forum for intercultural dialogue, artistic exchange, and community building.[44]

Figure 4:Parrade of Gnawa musicians in the heart of Essouira's old medina.

While Essaouira's thriving Gnawa community is a testament to the city's rich cultural heritage, there is a noticeable absence of dialogue around the legacy of slavery and blackness in the city and Morocco as a whole. This is in part due to the double-fold process of Arabization and Islamization that the Gnawa people have undergone over the centuries. Despite their deep roots in sub-Saharan Africa and their historical association with slavery, many Moroccans do not view most Gnawa as black. The perception of Gnawa as exclusively Arab-Berber, rather than black or sub-Saharan, is a complex issue that reflects the legacy of colonialism, slavery, and racism in

[43] "Essaouira's Gnawa Festival: A Transcendent Music Experience." CNN, 23 June 2017, www.cnn.com/travel/article/essaouira-gnawa-festival-morocco/index.html.
87
[44] Ibid.

Morocco and the wider region. The Arabization and Islamization of the Gnawa people over the centuries have pitched into this perception, as has the historical tendency to view blackness as inferior or other. This has led to a lack of recognition and acknowledgment of the important contributions that Gnawa culture and music have made to Moroccan society and culture due to the remembrance of their roots.[45]

"This ambivalence [in talking about slavery in Morocco] is further compounded by a deep upwelling of frustration at the beliefs and attitudes shaped by the historical legacy of slavery and injustice to black people. Yet, there is still a fear of stirring up the ashes, lest they would start a fire that might hurt me and my nation, instead of helping it to overcome the scars of the past. Yes, slavery existed, especially in the south of Morocco, for a long time, and into the twentieth century. Of course, it has faded slowly, but in the beginning of the century people were still bought and sold. The majority of African people who were enslaved were Muslims, including my own grandfather and the "guard" slaves in my village. One of my uncles still remembers the names of twenty-five slaves still owned by rich white Berbers".[46]

The remembrance of the legacy of slavery and blackness is an integral part of Gnawa culture and is expressed through their music. The lyrics of traditional Gnawa songs often speak to the enslavement of their families and those who came before them and reflect the struggle of the Gnawa people to maintain their cultural identity and resist oppression. Below is traditional songs sung by Gnawa musicians that speak to their strife:[91]

> They brought from the Sudan
> The nobles of this country brought us

[45] Schroeter, D. J. (2008). Slave markets and slavery in Moroccan Urban society. Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies , 13(1), 185–213. https://doi.org/10.1080/01440399208575058
[46] El Hamel, Chouki. Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam. Cambridge University Press, 2014.
[91]

They brought us to serve them
They brought us to bow to them
They brought us
Oh there is no God but God
We believe in God's justice.
The Sudan, oh! Sudan
The Sudan, the land of my people
I was enslaved, I was sold,
I was taken away from my loved ones.

The Gnawa people have managed to maintain their cultural traditions and identity through their music, which serves as a powerful form of resistance and remembrance. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in Gnawa music and culture both within Morocco and internationally, with many young people rediscovering and embracing their Gnawa heritage.[92] This renewed interest in Gnawa culture is helping to shed light on the complex issues of race, identity, and heritage in Morocco and is paving the way for a more inclusive and equitable future for all Moroccans.[47] Initiatives such as the annual Gnawa Music Festival in Essaouira and the establishment of Gnawa cultural centers and museums throughout Morocco are helping to raise the profile of this vibrant culture and its unique contributions to Moroccan history and identity.

Resilience in Adversity: Understanding the Sub-Saharan Migrant Experience in Morocco

During my stay in Rabat, Morocco, a fellow student and I had the privilege of sitting down with artist, activist, comedian, and teacher Aurore Boréale to talk about her journey as a migrant from the Democratic Republic of Congo fighting against sexism and racism in Morocco as a black woman.

92 "Gnawa Music of Morocco: The Legacy of African Islam." The World & I, vol. 12, no. 11, 1997, pp. 218–223. ProQuest, https://search.proquest.com/docview/215563982.
[47] Ibid.

"[I] always gets the question about why she decided to migrated and it always feels targeted because she is black. [I] always think, why not? Why not to travel? [I have] the freedom to do it… [I] also hate the word immigrant. We are not just immigrants. We came to another African country; we are the same."[48] said Boréale when first prompted on why she choose to move to Morocco.

However, after this initial response, Aurore opened up about her complex relationship with her home country and her first impressions of Morocco upon her arrival. She revealed she made the decision to migrate from the Democratic Republic of Congo when she discovered she was pregnant with her eldest child.

"[I] did not want her baby to be born in Congo due to the conditions...I won't give birth in Congo because there is not freedom there… [I] left because of the miserable life conditions in Congo…[I] was attacked with violence," said Boréale.[49]

On her arrival to Morocco, Aurore recalled her perceptions of Morocco as a country before immigrating as a black woman and recollected memories of her first interactions with Moroccan people.

"Initially, [I] thought Morocco was beautiful with a flourishing community! [I] did not expect that [I] would be treated with so much discrimination for being a black woman. When [I] arrived, it was a bad first impression. People would tell [me] that [I] was *just* a black woman," detailed Boréale. "All black people, regardless of nationality, are treated poorly by Moroccans. Even if you are Arabic and black - you will get treated poorly."[50]

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[48] Interview 3/31/2023 by Olivia Talbert and Irasema Trujillo
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid

She continues to speak on her experience with the immigration system in Morocco and how it specifically entraps Sub-Saharan migrants by deliberately denying them documentation to detain them.

"[We] also have problems with their papers and getting Moroccan residency. [We] always apply for it and are always rejected. They pretend that it's easy but really it's them always rejecting us…. Only black people from Sub-Sahara are rejected for their papers. Meanwhile, Europeans always get accepted…When Sub-Saharan's come to Morocco, [We] have to fix [our] papers or return to [our] country. For example, if you are in a group with other Sub-Saharan migrants, they can put you in a bus and send you South to Casablanca. They just, like, throw them," said Boréale.[51]

In her work as an artist and comedian, Aurore experiences little job opportunities to perform and discrimination in the workplace. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she faced unemployment and was unable to perform her passions of slam poetry and contemporary dance; thus, she decided to relaunch herself as a comedian.

As a theatre teacher at a local school, she faces racism daily in the workplace directed towards her and her husband's abilities to teach.

"In school…they think that black woman cannot teach… A black person is not a donkey, not stupid, not silly, not bad," said Boréale.[52]

In accompaniment to the interview was an assistant from our study abroad program to assist in translation, who also spoke to the dynamics and perceptions of Sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco. Below is a detailed encounter between the two about the subject of racism in

[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.

Morocco:[53]

> Translator: “are Moroccan racists people?”, she asks with curiosity. Boréale: “yes, they are.” Aurore responds definitively.
> Translator: “Oh my god, I am Moroccan” she bewilders with surprise.

At this moment Boréale attempts to console the translator and they delve into discussing how Moroccans perceive migrants.[54]

> Translator: “Oh okay, Moroccan people are racists because they already heard some stereotypes about Sub-Saharan people, some African people…for example, people from another Africa… a person like her… I heard some bad stereotypes that are not good. ‘Maybe they will just like be against us (but) one day they will take our country’ or something like that”
> Boréale responds: “The most important thing for [me] is the idea that black people will come and destroy Morocco. [I] want Moroccans to work harder at removing the negative mindsets and mentalities and attitudes toward Sub-Saharan migrants. They should do this because when I emigrated here, I worked here. I spend my money here, I work hard here. [I] pay rent, [I] give money to the security. [Me] and a lot of other Sub-Saharan migrants are investing in the Moroccan economy,”

They continue to discuss, shedding light on the language used in Morocco against black Moroccans and black migrants.[55]

> Translator: ““Azia’ means black…for example, I have a friend, best friend which is black…Azia elle…you’re my black friend…but in a positive way” she remarks lightheartedly.
> However, Boréale disagrees with the use of the word by saying, “Azia is insulting to [me] It is not a good word,”.
> She believes that the word should no longer be used, as it is a racial slur, and should have consequences

[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibic.

The two reconcile the disagreement and the translator acknowledges Boréale's perspective, returning to the original conversation about Aurore's experience with racism as a black woman, specifically by Moroccan men.

"The worst thing is that [I] was fighting every day for respect. Because you know, especially, in Casablanca there are lots of bad boys. More than Rabat, they don't respect [me] and tell [me] in [my] face directly, using the word, 'Azia'. They will question [me] and try to attack [me]…Moroccan guys barely respect women as is. Since [I am] a black woman, it is worse," she recounted. "[I] was so shocked with the aggression of the men who would always touching [my] a*s on the streets and always trying to give [me] money on the streets for *things* in return."[56]

Aurore's accounts of the racism and the sexual assault of black women illustrate the dehumanizing behavior of Moroccans towards Sub-Saharan women and how the objectification of women in the patriarchal society intersects with anti-blackness in the culture.

She then opens up about her experience as a mother to a black daughter in Morocco and her perspective on educating the youth about racism as a teacher herself.

"[My] daughter gets picked on at school for her hair and skin color. (We need to) help debunk the early stereotypes children are instilled…(and) educate (Moroccan) children on being compassionate and respectful to everyone" said Boréale. [103]

Additionally, I sat down with Alpha Camara, a Guinean migrant who has taken on the role of an activist and community leader. Alpha's work focuses on providing assistance to migrants

[56] Ibid.
[103]Ibid.

who face numerous challenges in Morocco, including lack of documentation, housing, and healthcare.

In addition to his work in Rabat, Alpha also works to distribute resources to the Forest, a migrant camp located on the Spanish border in Nador, known for its treacherous living conditions in the wilderness. Alpha's work goes beyond providing practical support for migrants; he is also deeply involved in identifying the bodies of Guinean migrants who die at the border, a tragic and all too common occurrence.[57]

"It is more of psychological violence, have(ing) to deal with pressures and other difficult situations," said Camaro regarding the violence and challenges he faces working with his NGO to provide aid to migrants. "[I] gets the most resistance from authorities. It is mainly the laws and when the NGO gets involved with activities that authorities do not like. Authorities will contact the NGO to call them out on these actions," he said, commenting on the Moroccan border controls disallowance of aid and resources to migrants in the Forest.[58]

Through his work with various NGOs, Alpha is actively working to address the systemic issues that contribute to the hardships faced by sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco, including discrimination, xenophobia, and lack of legal protection. During our conversation, Alpha spoke passionately about the experiences of sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco, highlighting the many obstacles they face on a daily basis, from difficulty finding work to police harassment and violence.

"Regardless of if they are regular or irregular, Sub-Saharan migrants are always stopped and questioned…Undocumented migrants are expelled and arrested…[I] had a phone convo with

[57] Interview 3/28/2023 by Olivia Talbert and Irasema Trujillo
[58] Ibid.

a friend in the south of Morocco who gets stopped regularly and his savor is his residence card," Camara said.

Despite these challenges, Alpha remains hopeful and committed to his work, believing that change is possible within education and activism in migrants' home countries.

"[I] think most people that go from this part of the world where there is no rule of law, a lack of job opportunities. [I] think the change needs to occur in the countries where migrants leave…[I] believe we can help solve issues so that migrants can stay put in their countries… [We] need to sensitize the youth to fight for their rights in their own home countries. To make a change and bring about change in their countries….It is a structural change that is needed. Education is key in this change"[59]

Lastly, I had the privilege of meeting David Essomé, a multifaceted individual who has made significant contributions to the literary and artistic landscape of Morocco. As an author, poet, and founder of the esteemed Africa Dreamland organization, David is deeply committed to enhancing and promoting the talent of young black artists across the country.

During our conversation, David shared his poignant and deeply personal story as a SubSaharan migrant, using the power of poetry to convey the nuances and complexities of his experience. His latest book, "The Clandestine Child" ("L'enfant Clandestin"), is a testament to his exceptional skill as a wordsmith, as well as his unwavering dedication to raising awareness about the struggles and triumphs of those who have migrated to new lands in search of a better life. Below are three excerpts from his book that share his story and personal narrative:[60]

[59] Ibid.

[60] "L'enfant Clandestin" by David Essomé 2023

AT THE FOOT OF THE GRID
Africa is suffering and me with it.
My color melts like butter in the sun.
She suffers the injustices of all the others, and even spring in the eyes of God...
My heart aches and I can't sleep anymore.
Black aspires more and more to white,
and white only wants to appropriate the values of black.
All these exchange games are overwhelming.
No one wants to be themselves anymore.
But what is deplorable in my eyes,
it's that black people always end.

COURAGE (II)
Everyone steers his boat as he wants and as he can,
With more or less success, because life is arbitrated...
There are bitter crossings
- dare anyone tell me otherwise.
I deliver just a few words for all these children,
caught in the waves, prisoners of the waves...
I've seen storms hit ten-year-olds.
They may have had to lower the mainsail,
too much wind and too much water dig our graves
- dare anyone tell me otherwise –
and I would say that we don't swim in the same water.
I saw these warrior-minded children, full of honor,
to cross the years in the middle of a sea of fear,
facing the tornadoes, in the heart of the storms,
at the helm, captains of a ship called courage, they resist pressure better than anyone. I saw their strength, their dignity, when fate seemed to befall them, between winds and tides.
They have earned the right to grow old, that of hoping for a calmer sea, for
them too see the future

TALK TO ME
Talk to me about politics and I'll talk to you about the States Islamic!
Tell me about the African Union and I will tell you about its betrayals!
Tell me about ideal and I'll tell you about Thomas Sankara!
Talk to me about injustice and I'll talk to you about Africa!
Talk to me about peace and I'll talk to you about Mali!
Speak to me of forgiveness and I will speak to you of abandonment!

Talk to me about slavery and I'll talk to you about colonialism! Tell
me about love and I'll tell you about all these migrants murdered in
the name of borders!
Talk to me about economics and I'll talk to you about ecology ...and
freedom!
Tell me about all your religions and I'll tell you about faith!
Talk to me about justice and I'll talk to you about rights!
Talk to me about freedom of expression and I'll serve you a quenelle!
And if you talk to me about puppets,
I will tell you about the leaders of our continent!
For them, Africa is just money!
His fate is no more than loot, an orgy, a feast!

V. Conclusion

The objective of my research was to explore the intricate social dynamics involved in the perception and negotiation of blackness within the complex tapestry of Moroccan society. By utilizing theoretical framework, this investigation examines the interlocking systems of race, colonialism, and diaspora to trace the formation, navigation, and manifestation of black identity in contemporary Morocco.

Recent criticism of the Moroccan state's treatment of Sub-Saharan migrants has brought to light the persistence of racism towards black people, despite the existence of black Moroccans with indigenous and formerly enslaved ancestry. Independent research conducted for this study displays the deep-seated roots of anti-blackness in Moroccan society by retelling the narratives of black Moroccans in Ait Benhaddou and Essouira through their presence in Moroccan culture. This lack of recognition and acknowledgment of the country's history of slavery has contributed to a general erasure of the experiences and contributions of black Moroccans, and has made it difficult for many to fully embrace their cultural heritage and address the discrimination they face.

However, this erasure of black Moroccan heritage and history was a deliberate strategy by the Moroccan state during the independence era in an attempt to display a unified Arab identity in the nation, which marginalized all others. The motivations behind the Arabization of Morocco and the nations exceptionalism rhetoric is inherently a function of Afro-pessimism as the country aims to distance itself from the "rest of African". This has resulted in many Moroccans distancing themselves from identifying as African; thus, perpetuating racism towards Sub-Saharan migrants as shown by the testimonies of migrants through interviews and poetry in this research.

Analysis and Interpretations

When examining the Case Studies of Ait Benhaddou and Essaouira, a deeper understanding emerges regarding how these communities skillfully navigate their identities and address the challenges of marginalization. Rather than solely identifying themselves as descendants of black-indigenous tribes or enslaved peoples, they strategically embrace their Amazigh heritage and Muslim faith as crucial components of their self-perception. This deliberate choice to foreground their Amazigh cultural identity and religious affiliation can be seen as a response to the transformative forces of Islam's expansion and the pan-Arabization movement in Morocco.

By aligning themselves with the Amazigh culture, which traces its roots back to pre-Arab Berber civilizations, these communities establish a link to an ancient heritage that predates the arrival of Arab influences. This affiliation allows them to carve out a space for themselves within a society that has undergone significant cultural and demographic shifts over time. By emphasizing their Amazigh identity, they reclaim their unique traditions, language, and customs,

asserting their distinctiveness and refusing to be assimilated into a homogenous Arab identity that dominates the national narrative.

Simultaneously, the communities also draw strength from their adherence to the Islamic faith. Islam serves as a unifying force, providing a shared spiritual foundation that transcends ethnic and cultural differences. By embracing their Muslim identity, they position themselves within the larger framework of the Moroccan society, which has been predominantly shaped by the Islamic tradition. This strategic choice not only ensures their inclusion in the broader religious community but also provides them with a sense of belonging and legitimacy within the national fabric.

In adopting these multifaceted identities, the communities effectively navigate the ever-changing power dynamics and hierarchies that exist within Moroccan society. They consciously select the aspects of their heritage that will enable them to maintain their distinctiveness, preserve their cultural practices, and secure their survival in the face of marginalization. By emphasizing their Amazigh and Muslim identities, they position themselves as integral contributors to the Moroccan national fabric while preserving their unique cultural heritage.

Furthermore, the erasure of their respective heritages serves as a stark reminder of how Morocco's history with slavery, particularly the enslavement of all black individuals under Sultan Mawlay Isma‘il, is neglected and underrepresented in Moroccan society. This historical neglect perpetuates a collective amnesia surrounding the experiences of enslaved populations and their descendants, contributing to their marginalization and the invisibility of their narratives.

The omission of this significant aspect of Moroccan history serves to uphold a particular narrative that downplays the country's diverse cultural tapestry and reinforces existing power structures. By neglecting the legacy of slavery, Moroccan society evades confronting the

uncomfortable truths associated with this dark chapter and the ongoing implications for affected communities. Acknowledging and addressing this historical omission is essential for fostering a more inclusive and equitable society that embraces the complexities of its past and actively works towards rectifying historical injustices.

However, in the absence of acknowledging and sharing the stories of Ait Benhaddou and the Gnawa community in Essaouira, Moroccan society perpetuates the denial of racism and the history of blackness, thereby allowing for the persistence of anti-black sentiments against Sub-Saharan migrants. Through my extensive research, I have uncovered compelling evidence that demonstrates a direct connection between the experiences of Sub-Saharan migrants and Morocco's deep-seated history of anti-blackness.

In my poignant interview with Aurore Boréale, a prominent figure in the fight against racial discrimination, several recurring themes emerged that shed light on the prevailing dynamics in Moroccan society. First and foremost, the denial of racism by many Moroccans stands as a significant barrier to addressing and eradicating anti-black attitudes. This denial serves to shield the dominant group from acknowledging the existence and impact of racism, hindering progress toward equality and social justice. Furthermore, there is a prevalent undercurrent of anti-immigrant sentiment among certain segments of Moroccan society. This sentiment, intertwined with notions of national identity and belonging, creates a hostile environment for Sub-Saharan migrants who face discrimination and marginalization based on their status as foreigners. Afro-pessimistic beliefs, such as the perception that black migrants are inherently less educated or less capable, further compound the challenges faced by this community. These beliefs are deeply rooted in the erasure of Morocco's history of discrimination against black individuals, whereby the state and larger society have reframed and downplayed

the significance of anti-blackness. This reframing allows for the perpetuation of discriminatory practices and serves as a justification for Moroccan exceptionalism, which, inherently, holds racist undertones against black Africans. Additionally, the experiences shared by Boréale as a black woman in Morocco draw disconcerting parallels to the historical era of concubinage, during which black women were treated as commodities, objectified, and sexualized. The lingering echoes of this dark past continue to reverberate in the present, contributing to the dehumanization and marginalization of black women.

In my conversation with Alpha Camara, a firsthand witness to the realities faced by black individuals in Morocco, a disturbing pattern emerges: the state's inclination towards homogenizing black people through discriminatory policing and profiling practices, reminiscent of the oppressive era under Sultan Mawlay Isma‘il. During that period, the Sultan's orders resulted in the capture and enslavement of all black individuals in Morocco, regardless of their diverse origins. This historical parallel becomes evident when we examine the profiling techniques employed by law enforcement officers under the guidance of the Sultan. These profiling methods allowed for the indiscriminate targeting and capture of black individuals, irrespective of their place of origin. Similarly, in contemporary Morocco, police officers question and target black individuals, particularly Sub-Saharan migrants, primarily based on their skin color. The focus on skin color as a determining factor for profiling aims to expose vulnerable migrants who may lack proper documentation, making them susceptible to capture and mistreatment by the police. These experiences shed light on the context surrounding the occupation of the Forest in Nador by Sub-Saharan migrants, who navigate the area in an attempt to evade the police, as the authorities are driven by the misguided belief that their skin color alone makes them suspects. The forest serves as a temporary refuge for these migrants,

providing them with a precarious sense of safety and security as they strive to avoid capture and mistreatment due to racial profiling. The parallels between historical and contemporary practices highlight the persisting challenges faced by black individuals in Morocco. The state's tendency to homogenize black people based on skin color not only perpetuates discrimination but also fails to recognize the rich diversity within the black community, erasing the nuanced experiences and unique backgrounds of individuals. This approach reinforces harmful stereotypes and prejudices, further marginalizing and exposing vulnerable populations to mistreatment and abuse.

The poetry of David Essoumé serves as a profound addition to the discourse surrounding the migrant experience, particularly as a black man encountering discrimination while striving for a brighter future. Through his evocative verses, Essoumé captures the essence of the migrant journey, shedding light on the immense challenges and unwavering determination faced by Sub-Saharan migrants. His poetry vividly portrays the dangers and obstacles encountered along the way, both social and physical in nature. Essoumé's poetic expressions delve into the resilience and tenacity exhibited by migrants in their pursuit of a better life. He eloquently encapsulates the indomitable spirit that drives them forward, despite the adversities they encounter. Through his words, he highlights the human willpower and determination that enable migrants to overcome barriers and forge ahead, seeking refuge and opportunities beyond their place of origin. Moreover, Essoumé's poetry delves into a profound exploration of historical themes, offering a critical perspective on the abuse, exploitation, and marginalization endured by the African continent. His poignant verses uncover the harsh realities and painful truths of Africa's past, refusing to shy away from recounting the true story of its struggles and resilience. Through his artistry, Essoumé confronts the narratives of abuse, exploitation, and denigration that have

plagued Africa's history, thus reclaiming the narrative and shedding light on the multifaceted aspects of its heritage. By weaving together the experiences of migrants and the historical context of Africa's mistreatment, Essoumé's poetry confronts the injustices that have shaped the continent's trajectory. His words offer a powerful medium for storytelling and reflection, challenging prevailing narratives and inviting a deeper understanding of the complexities and realities faced by black individuals.

Implications

Looking towards the future, the cases of Ait Benhaddou and the Gnawa culture in Essaouira present Morocco with valuable opportunities to further recognize and celebrate their stories. It is noteworthy that these cases have gained particular attention and recognition due to the lens through which they are perceived by the Western world. This amplification of their presence within Moroccan society, facilitated by Western perspectives, has allowed these communities to achieve greater visibility and prominence. In examining these instances, it becomes evident that Western and Eurocentric perspectives have played a significant role in shaping how race is perceived and understood within Moroccan society. The phenomenon of Orientalism, for example, has influenced the portrayal and representation of these communities, often reducing them to exoticized stereotypes catering to Western fantasies and tourism. This lens has both positive and negative consequences, as it brings attention to the unique aspects of these cultures but can also perpetuate harmful misconceptions and oversimplifications. However, the incorporation of these communities into Western narratives and global tourism has also offered them a platform to maintain their distinctiveness and preserve their cultural identities. The exceptional rhythms and melodies

of Gnawa music and the architectural heritage of Ait Benhaddou have captivated international audiences, enabling these communities to resist assimilation into broader Western cultural norms. This recognition has allowed them to assert their cultural agency and assert themselves as valuable contributors to Morocco's diverse cultural tapestry. It is important to approach this recognition with a critical lens, acknowledging the complexities and power dynamics inherent in the process. While the Western gaze has brought attention and appreciation to these communities, it is vital to ensure that their stories are not merely reduced to commodities for consumption or tokenized representations. Genuine recognition and respect for their cultural heritage should involve collaborative efforts that prioritize the agency and self-determination of these communities, allowing them to shape their own narratives and futures. As Morocco moves forward, it is essential to leverage the global attention garnered by these cases to promote a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of race and cultural identity within Moroccan society. By acknowledging the influence of Western perspectives and actively engaging in a dialogue that challenges stereotypes and embraces diversity, Morocco can continue to progress towards a society that values and celebrates the rich tapestry of its cultural heritage, while empowering marginalized communities to tell their stories on their own terms.

However, the reality faced by Sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco starkly contrasts with the recognition and celebration of cultural heritage seen in cases like Ait Benhaddou and the Gnawa community. These migrants are confronted with overt racism, both from Moroccan society and the broader global community, leading to a human rights crisis that has tragically resulted in the loss of thousands of lives. As migrants strive to establish a presence within the community, deeply ingrained racial sentiments from the era of slavery, which were previously

denied by Moroccan society in the pursuit of unity, have resurfaced, exacerbating their marginalization and discrimination. Despite the harrowing testimonies provided by migrants, detailing the brutality they endure, the Moroccan state deliberately chooses to turn a blind eye, thus perpetuating their exceptionalism and refusing to address the systemic racism faced by these vulnerable individuals. Paradoxically, anti-immigrant rhetoric and the practice of "othering" migrants, often stemming from European countries, are utilized by the Moroccan state as a smokescreen to justify racism within their own borders. This manipulation of narratives and rhetoric aims to deflect attention from the urgent need to address the plight of Sub-Saharan migrants, and instead positions Morocco as a gatekeeper and partner for European nations in managing migration flows. Moreover, Morocco's compliance with European nations, both in Europe and the Mediterranean, can be interpreted as a form of neo-slave trade. By using immigration policy as a political bargaining chip and a means for negotiation with the European Union, Morocco engages in the commodification of the lives of Sub-Saharan migrants. In this sense, black bodies are objectified and traded as political currency by countries with their own vested interests and agendas. This disturbing parallel draws upon historical evidence that illustrates how Morocco, during the era of the transatlantic slave trade, utilized the institution of slavery as a means of resisting colonial powers, rejecting abolitionist ideals and policies to assert its independence. In the contemporary context, the commodification of Sub-Saharan migrant lives by the Moroccan state echoes the exploitation and dehumanization seen during the transatlantic slave trade. The Mediterranean and the Atlantic have become graveyards for the accumulation of thousands of black bodies, a chilling reminder of the brutal history of the slave trade and the enduring legacy of imperial powers, both old and new. It is imperative to recognize the profound injustice and systemic racism that underlies the treatment of Sub-Saharan migrants

in Morocco and the broader global context. Efforts must be made to challenge and dismantle these oppressive structures, centering the dignity, rights, and humanity of all individuals, regardless of their race or place of origin. Only through genuine recognition, accountability, and transformative action can Morocco and the international community begin to rectify the deep-rooted historical and contemporary injustices faced by Sub-Saharan migrants.

Upon initial hypothesizing, the notion that the issue of black visibility was solely at play in the Moroccan context was held without accounting for the commodification of black bodies by the Moroccan state. While this notion was partially correct, a more comprehensive understanding of the racial hierarchy in Morocco necessitates a consideration of the ways in which black Moroccans are erased and how the Moroccan state is complicit in claiming the lives of black migrants. Recognizing and uplifting the stories of black Moroccans is critical to addressing the broader issue of blackness in Moroccan society and its role in perpetuating racism against Sub-Saharan migrants. By doing so, we can better contextualize the racialized experiences of black Moroccans and migrants and address the systemic and institutional factors that enable and perpetuate their marginalization.

VI. Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Further Study

Barriers and Pitfalls

Overcoming the language barrier is a crucial aspect of conducting qualitative research in a different language. It requires a high level of language proficiency, cultural sensitivity, and a willingness to invest significant time and resources in accurately interpreting and analyzing data. In my research, I encountered several difficulties in this regard, including the nuances of the

language used by sources and participants, which made the research sensitive to misinterpretation and inaccurate conclusions.

One way I addressed this issue was by using translators during interviews and seeking reliable translations of sources. However, there is always the possibility that a translator may struggle to accurately convey the intended meaning of the participant's words, leading to the loss of critical information.

Cultural differences were also a significant challenge. Conducting research in an unfamiliar culture can lead to a lack of understanding of the social norms and values of the participants, leading to misunderstandings and cultural faux pas. It may also result in missing important contextual information that is critical to understanding the data. To overcome this challenge, I relied on the guidance and advice of my advisors, teachers, and mentors, who are experts in Moroccan culture. My immersion in Moroccan culture through living with a Moroccan family and traveling around the country also provided me with valuable insights.

Conducting research in arid regions, such as South Morocco and the Sahara, presents several challenges that require careful consideration. Firstly, these regions are often home to indigenous communities with distinct cultural practices and beliefs. As an outsider, it was crucial to approach the community with sensitivity and respect, ensuring that the research was conducted ethically and without causing harm. Given my lack of indigenous heritage, I was particularly cautious not to impose myself on the community or disrupt their way of life.

Moreover, the limited infrastructure in Southern Morocco's arid cities made it challenging to reach my target population’s. Transportation and communication posed significant obstacles, and I had to rely on unconventional modes of transportation such as camels or mules. In some areas, there was no cellphone service, adding another layer of difficulty to the research

process. Despite these obstacles, I approached my research with a positive mindset, putting the limitations of accessibility into perspective and making every effort to reach the communities I was targeting.

Recommendations for Further Study

Given the opportunity and the resources, I would recommend further investigation into the history and culture of the Haritins and Afro-Indigeneity in Morocco and Tourism and the commodification of Gnawa culture.

This would involve analyzing the power dynamics between the tourism industry, the Moroccan state, and the black communities, specifically the Gnawa community, which is often marketed as an exotic and mystical attraction to tourists. Further research would require a deeper exploration of the commercialization and appropriation of Gnawa music, its history, and its relationship with the tourism industry. The role of the state in promoting and commodifying this culture for tourism purposes and the impact of this on the community's identity and autonomy would also be worth investigating.

Moreover, the study of the relationship between tourism and the commodification of culture can provide insight into the larger discussion of cultural appropriation and exploitation of marginalized communities in the global tourism industry. This investigation can shed light on the ethical and moral implications of commodifying culture and can help develop strategies to ensure that cultural heritage is preserved and protected. Therefore, further research in this area is necessary for a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of the tourism industry on black communities in Morocco and the ethical considerations surrounding cultural commodification.