“Chaque femme a son histoire:”
Exploring the Lives and Voices of Sub-Saharan Migrant Women Living in Morocco

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Introduction

The topic of migration can be easily viewed as a purely academic and abstract concept, discussed only in terms of theories and ideas, of policies and statistics. While it is imperative to understand the different theories behind this phenomenon in order to obtain an engendered perspective of the issue, it is all too easy to lose the human value behind migration while studying it. Decontextualized numbers lack any emotion; academic theories are devoid of a human face behind them. More than ever, it is becoming increasingly pertinent to study migration in a humanistic light and to comprehend the stories of those who are forced to permeate national borders.

As a country that both emits a growing number of migrants into Europe, as well as a receiving and transit nation for many sub-Saharan Africans, the issue of migration is becoming a progressively significant and topical issue for Morocco. In recent years, the European Union has been presenting this North African country with an increasing financial incentive to more tightly monitor its borders in order to inhibit the flow of sub-Saharan African into Europe, resulting in a devastating effect on clandestine migrants and refugees themselves. Those individuals who sought to escape the political atrocities and deteriorating economic conditions of their native homelands in search of stability and prosperity on the European continent are now forced to stay in transit. In effect, life for these migrants has become increasingly difficult, as they are forced to deal with previously unforeseen hardships in a country in which they did not plan to stay.

Studying migration under the Moroccan context involves a complete understanding of the issues that sub-Saharan migrants and refugees face in their daily lives and a comprehension of the unique difficulties they encounter en route to Morocco.
as well as throughout their stay in this North African society. In recent years, the face of a sub-Saharan migrant is becoming more and more that of a woman; driven by an array of factors, an unprecedented number of women and girls are slipping through Morocco’s borders. As sub-Saharan migration into Morocco is becoming progressively feminized, it is now becoming increasingly imperative to explore the personal narratives and lives of women in particular and to examine their experiences and histories not as an afterthought from those of men.

The intent of my independent study project was to attempt just that – to examine the lives of female migrants and refugees separately from those of men, focusing on any specific difficulties and hardships that this group faces. Seeing that they comprise one of the most marginalized sectors of Moroccan society, I was driven by a desire to comprehend the actual lives and stories of these women, and to establish a genuine connection with them in the process. Through long personal interviews with fourteen female migrants and refugees, as well as eleven males, I sought to better understand the situation of this specific group.

After the conclusion of my research, however, and as I began to write a dissertation on my final independent study project, I realized that I could not regard the women I interviewed only as subjects, I could not view their demographics as mere numbers, nor could I reduce their lives into a single thesis; in other words, I cannot reduce them into anything scientific just for the purpose of a study. I originally set off to do a rather quantitative analysis on my subject, to find women who had migrated from sub-Saharan African countries and conduct long and detailed interviews and questionnaires on the hardships and difficulties of their lives. By no means was this a
topic that one could study from an objective viewpoint without any emotional attachment. The women I’ve met and talked to have opened up extraordinary emotional histories, and have allowed me the opportunity to explore their traumatic pasts. Through my interviews, I never once observed these women through a purely academic lens, so writing about them in a solely academic manner becomes very problematic. A research dissertation feels as if it would diminish the emotional value of my experience and diminish the oral histories of these women. After each and every single woman opened up to me in ways I had never before envisioned, this is the least I can do. I would be doing no justice to these women by describing their experience in purely academic terms.

Thus, the purpose of this independent study paper is not just to make sense of my research findings in an organized and coherent way, but to give the women a voice through which to express themselves, a voice that they are so often denied. My research intentions are not to come to a solid conclusion, and my dissertation involves no concrete hypothesis, but is rather an attempt to make sense of this emotional research experience in general.

**General Approach**

Even though there is an indisputable link between the experiences of both male and female migrants and refugees from sub-Saharan African countries, it is imperative to examine sub-Saharan women separately from their male migrant counterparts instead of grouping both genders together in a single category and making generalizations for migrants of both genders. As a result of their sex, for example, female migrants may be driven by different factors than males which lead to migration from their home countries; likewise, they may encounter divergent hardships in transit to Morocco, as well as
maintain different responsibilities while in Morocco and undergo dissimilar experiences. In short, the outcome of migration may differ greatly by the gender of sub-Saharan migrants.

This research approach was shaped by my frustrations with various academic studies on migration. Up until the 1980s, migration literature traditionally centered itself on male migrants, ignoring or devaluing their female counterparts by assuming that international female mobility occurred in response to the movement of males, or by assuming that females migrating as independent economic agents did not constitute a large enough population to affect overall migration patterns; “despite the fact that women comprise a large and growing fraction of immigrants worldwide, and are actually a numerical majority in many cross-border flows, research on international migration has focused disproportionately on males” (Massey et al. 2006). Sociologist Silvia Pedraza also noted the lack of academic literature on gender and migration: “the pervasive assumption that the international migrant is a young, economically-motivated male has overshadowed the reality of migration streams that were dominated by women” (Pedraza 1991). Various contemporary researchers emphasized the need to examine aspects of migration through a gendered lens, and to realize the effect of gender itself in shaping the experiences of female migrants.

**General Research Experience, Problems and Research Limitations**

My connections with migrants of both genders increased dramatically after speaking with Yene, an immigrant from Cameroon and an active member of the international migrant community. Not only did Yene put me in contact with other immigrants, but he also made me very aware of the problems and limitations of my
research. No migrant, regardless of gender or nationality, would meet with me in a public setting as I had previously anticipated, Yene warned me. Nor would they simply agree to meet a random stranger, and a student researcher at that, even if I were to tell them of my connection with the Cameroonian. He stressed the importance of making the participants feel as comfortable as possible by speaking with them in a familiar setting. Furthermore, Yene made me acutely aware of the potential complications that my presence could create in the migrant community if I were to exclusively choose migrants to interview, as I had previously envisioned would be the case. An immigrant who was not included in the study, for example, may be angered if they were to hear about the financial stipend we offered the other participants. They may demand Yene, as well as the other participants, why they weren’t considered, thereby potentially increasing tensions among migrants.

Keeping all of these obstacles in mind, Yene devised a plan where he would personally contact as many migrants as possible, to come to his house on a given day to be interviewed. Yene’s house would provide the perfect space in which to converse with migrants; the informal and comfortable location would make migrants feel most at ease. It was imperative that we remove as many power dynamics between us, the researchers, and the participants as possible; we applied various measures in order to do so. Yene would introduce us to the migrants as student researchers and explain to them about our study beforehand; we would supplement his introduction by explaining to each participant the rights they maintained during the interview. Due to the physical setting of the rooms in which we conducted our surveys, there was never a lot of room that separated us from the survey participants. As researchers, we found seating wherever we
could, typically on a bed, a chair or on the floor. However, we always made sure that our participants had a chair or other comfortable furniture, to sit on; we also made sure that we were never on a higher physical plane than our participants, but situated on a plane either level with them or below them.

Each individual would receive a stipend for his or her time once the interview concluded. In order to avoid any difficulties, my follow researchers and I gave Yene a total sum for the interviews conducted that day, and he would in turn redistribute the money among the migrants. We provided 60 Dirhams for each migrant, regardless of the length and duration of the interview, as well as 20 Dirhams for transportation. Depending on the individual, interviews typically lasted from twenty to thirty minutes; rarely was an interview longer or shorter than this time. We generally met and spoke with five to seven participants in a given day, and spent a total of four days conducting our interviews. In total, we interviewed fourteen female migrants and refugees, as well as eleven males.

Typically, the questions I used in my inquiry guide were designed to be general and open-ended, and were not intended to illicit a certain response but rather to evoke stories and encourage migrants to speak about their situation. The questions I asked were also never fixed, but varied depending on the individual in front of me. My interview guide was exactly that – a guide rather than a strict and unchanging manual. Furthermore, different issues were illuminated as I progressed with my research; my interview guide was modified accordingly. After my first set of interviews, I realized that various questions were in effect completely irrelevant. For example, I asked the first participant about her encounters with gender inequalities, both in the migrant community
and in Moroccan society. I explicitly remember the confused look she gave me as she asked me what gender inequalities were; it was clear that she had no conception of this notion. I asked this same question to another interviewee, only to find myself in a similar situation as before. I removed the question from my interview guide, after having decided that it was blatantly extraneous.

Through our interviews and interactions with migrants, my fellow researchers and I were made very aware of the problematic nature of our research. The first time I ever met with Yene, he asked me a pertinent question that struck a resonant chord: “qu’est-ce que vous allez faire avec ce recherche?” At first I was adamant in explaining to him that the results of our study would not be published and that our findings were only for our own benefit as well as that of the Center for Cross-Cultural Learning; in order to protect the identity of the participants, not a single organization, either governmental or non-governmental, would ever see our study or get a hold of our papers. However, Yene seemed unconvinced. Be prepared to answer this question time and time again, he told us. Yene warned us that migrants would inquire about our research and demand to know exactly what is going to be accomplished with it, an issue that I had not previously considered.

Even though I deliberated over Yene’s question for days to follow, I felt completely unprepared to deal with the questions that arose from the interviews. Migrants repeatedly questioned our motives. The standard question we heard after almost every interview involved what we would be doing with all of the information. “You have to do something for us,” one refugee from Côte d’Ivoire told us. The majority of the migrants we interviewed revealed to us very personal information about their lives;
for them, our interviews were not always easy to experience, even though we toiled in making them feel as comfortable as possible. Thus, many participants wanted to know what would become of our research, and how our studies would benefit them directly. As student researchers seeking to better understand their individual histories and collective plight, many individuals emphasized that it was now our responsibility to utilize the information they had provided us to positively change the condition of sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco. After having described to us her especially painful narrative, Amelie, a refugee from Côte d’Ivoire turned to us and said, “l’information qu’on donne là, si ça peut servir, si ça peut nous aider, si ça peut être utile pour nous à nous quitter de cette situation, ça peut être bien…[il faut] aller écrire ou faire quelque chose.”

None of us had the perfect response to the difficult question of what would be accomplished with our research; it was an impossible question to answer. When speaking with migrants, I would continually explain that as undergraduate American students, we do not maintain the power to achieve widespread change, but simultaneously emphasized our desire to help out in as many ways as we can. Over and over again, I repeated our interest and passion about the subject of migration, and how important it was for us to place a human face on the issue that we’ve so intensely studied; our understanding of migration had increased significantly because they had disclosed their lives to us. However, most participants remained somewhat skeptical. They wanted us to do everything in our power to help their situation, and to work towards improving the situation of migrants in general.

Even the representative of a well-known and well-respected migrant organization in Rabat refused to discuss the issue of migration with us. In previous years, he claimed,
the association had spoken with a myriad of researchers and journalists on the topic, hoping that these individuals would bring the issues and plight of migrants into the public eye, and make Moroccan society increasingly aware of the situation of immigrants.

Nothing’s changed, he told us, as the organization realized the futility in speaking with academic scholars and the media. In response, the association had adopted a policy in which they refused to disclose any information to the public. Even as students, we were presented only limited information and were denied interviews of any kind, with both migrants and other employees of the organization. The representative was apologetic, and understood our desire to attain more information on the situation of migrants, but remained adamant about the association’s policy. He never once inquired us about the results of our research, but was apparently aware of the limitations on the change our research could feasibly bring about.

The Women Themselves: General Research Findings

“Chaque femme a sonhistoire,” were the first words that Christine told me after I explained to her my research topic. Christine herself was a migrant who had endured indescribable pain since leaving Côte d’Ivoire, the country where she was born and raised. After having escaped the atrocities of the violent uprising that devastated her homeland in 2002, Christine underwent a long and laborious three-year journey before arriving in Morocco. She traveled from Côte d’Ivoire to Mali and then onto to Senegal, where difficult living conditions forced her to resort to begging as her only source of livelihood. Christine was finally able to find work as a domestic servant in Senegal shortly before deciding to flee again. From there she traveled without any money or papers through Mauritania and Algeria, and came to the border town of Oujda in 2005.
Christine did not hesitate to describe the brutalities that she witnessed and endured during her one-month stay in the border town; living in Oujda, the migrants lived under the continual threat of police raids, arrests, physical and sexual violence, as well as deportation. At the hands of the Moroccan police force, numerous men were beaten and countless women were raped. No longer able to endure the atrocities of life in Oujda, Christine fled the town. After two weeks of intense physical hardship as she made the 457 kilometer journey from Oujda to Rabat on foot, Christine arrived at the Moroccan capital only to experience a devastating police raid in which the police sent her once again to back to the Algerian border town. She made her way back to Rabat, and under the care of pastor David Brown and with the help of the migrant organization Caritas Maroc, was able to finally start a life after three years of constantly being in flight. She now works with the Fondation Orient-Occident and the Comité des Femmes et Enfants Victimes de la Migration, to help female migrants and refugees adjust to life in Morocco’s capital.

“Les femmes sont toujours les plus vulnérables,” Christine explains to me, highlighting the intense hardships that migrant and refugee women encounter. Migrants of both genders face a very difficult situation while in Morocco, Christine adds; because of differences in language, religion, culture and skin color, both men and women are subjected to widespread institutional and individual discrimination from the larger Moroccan society, making life in this North African country very difficult. Even though she admits that both men and women face similar problems, Christine emphasizes the suffering and difficulties that are unique to women that are encountered both while in transit to and once in Morocco. Men can do odd jobs, such as repairs, Christine explains,
in order to provide for themselves, but such work is neither expected nor desired of women. Those who cannot find employment must depend on the generosity of others for support, or are forced to resort to either begging or prostitution; “la situation est difficile au Maroc…les femmes ont besoin de se prostituer.” In addition, women are more susceptible to gender-specific trafficking in their homelands; Gildas of the organization Caritas Maroc mentioned Morocco as a popular transit nation into Europe for domestic servants or sex workers from sub-Saharan African countries. Christine claimed to know of various Nigerian women who had been forced to come to Morocco as prostitutes or domestic workers en route to Europe. Furthermore, women traveling to Morocco are the targets of severe physical and sexual violence from the Moroccan and Algerian authorities, as well as coyotes and human traffickers. Female migrants are especially vulnerable to such aggression and violence, exacerbated by the fact that the majority of the women migrating from sub-Saharan African countries make the journey into Morocco alone.

The narratives of the fourteen female migrants and refugees who I interviewed relayed a similar feeling. With the exception of three individuals, participants had not migrated alongside a male figure or any other family member or friend. Most of the women saw themselves as more vulnerable than men to violence and brutalities en route to Morocco and while in Oujda, citing sexual exploitation as the main difference between the transit experience of men and women. Amelie from Côte d’Ivoire explained that she could not even speak to us about the brutalities she endured in transit, because it was too painful a topic for her to discuss. Lila, a migrant from Nigeria who entered Morocco in 2002, described to us the gravity of the situation in Oujda: “the Moroccan police and the
Algerian police, they are not good. When they deport you to the frontier they will hold you; if they look at you and see that you are a single girl, they will want to rape you.”

However, even though many of the female migrants and refugees agreed on their heightened susceptibility to violence en route to Morocco, most of the women did not see a difference between female and male vulnerability while actually in this North African country; on the whole, they perceived themselves to be just as vulnerable as men to the hostilities and violence by the Moroccan society at large. In addition, the interviewees did not observe a difference between the experiences and responsibilities of male and female migrants and refugees; they did not believe their experiences to be dissimilar, but that migrants of both genders lived through comparable difficulties in Morocco. Over and over again, I heard anecdotes and explanations about how men and women alike face the same hardships relating to finances, employment and discrimination. Nina, an eighteen-year-old refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo told me, “il n’y a pas de différence [entre les expériences des femmes émigrées et hommes émigrés]…tous les émigrants souffrent beaucoup ici.” Amelie added, “les hommes émigrés nous comprennent, même s’ils ne te connaissent pas…on vit dans la même situation.”

The eleven male migrants and refugees who I also spoke with generally maintained a similar position on the comparison of male and female experiences. Mohammed, an immigrant from Nigeria, also mentioned “everybody, as far as sub-Saharan Africans are concerned here…all of us are passing through the same problems. Be human, children, the husband, the single ones, it’s the same phenomenon, every day.” Some men admitted that women are made to endure greater difficulties than their male counterparts, claiming that female migrants and refugees in general face greater
aggression and violence than men and are more vulnerable to being marginalized and oppressed. Cited by migrants of both genders, children represented the one factor that illustrated a difference between the experience and responsibilities of female and male migrants and refugees. Several men and women admitted that the presence of children increased difficulties and pressures on a female migrant, placing on them an added financial and social burden that is not generally typical of men. “Pour les femmes,” Amelié describes, “on a des enfants, il faut nourrir nos enfants, ce qui s’assoit à côté de toi.”

However, some migrants even expressed that they thought women were at a greater advantage than men. Alex, an immigrant from Cameroon, admitted that “la femme n’est pas comme l’homme, la femme a plus d'avantages que l’homme;” he perceived that men faced a greater social pressure than women to provide for their family. Patrick, a refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo, also felt that female migrants and refugees maintain some advantages that men do not have. He provided an interesting example of this mentality; if one saw an African beggar in the street, he claimed, one’s decision to provide them with money would be greatly affected depending on their gender. Citing that example, Patrick maintained that sub-Saharan female migrants are generally he recipients of greater public aid than their male counterparts, helping to ease their transition into Moroccan society.

Instead of delineating and categorizing themselves along gender lines, the interviewees emphasized race as the basis of their identity. These female migrants and refugees did not see themselves as different to their male counterparts, but accentuated instead their commonalities. Each woman I interviewed explained to me the intense
discrimination and hostilities she faced from Moroccan society; when asked if she encountered any sort of discrimination for being a woman, and not just for having dark skin, not a single woman responded affirmatively. None of the women admitted to having encountered gender discrimination or violence committed by male migrants or refugees. The women interviewed had not observed any gender inequalities between male and females in the migrant community, but were instead very aware of the disparities that exist between sub-Saharan migrants and Moroccans in general. Regardless of gender, migrants and refugees saw themselves as struggling against a common external threat, enduring similar discrimination, and maintaining a shared general experience in Morocco.

During the interviews, migrants and refugees did not hesitate to describe in great detail the endless hostility and discrimination they face on a daily basis in Morocco. On an individual level as well as an institutional level, sub-Saharan migrants and refugees face indescribable racism from the larger Moroccan society. Amelié told me, “le racisme existe partout…pour nous, la peau noire, c’est comme tu te trouve un animal…tu es considérée comme ça; c’est comme un chien qui passe, on peut marcher sur toi.” Almost every female and male migrant I spoke with cited incidents of being verbally insulted or physically threatened. Amelié described a situation in which she had been threatened and robbed by two Moroccan youth in a public area during the middle of the day. Several bystanders were present, she explains, but no one did anything; “il y avait de la circulation, les voitures passaient, les gens étaient là …mais comme [les voleurs] ont en fait avec un peau noir, voila, pas de considération…on peut faire tout ce qu’on veut.”
Lila from Nigeria also describes the hostility that many sub-Saharan migrants face in their daily lives:

If you are walking by, if some Moroccans see you like this, they will bring out their cutter, their knife, they will come and injure you. They can cut you like this just to collect that thing that is in you. They will collect it from you they will injure you, they will stab you with their knife, they will run away. They do it to men, they do it to woman…they don’t care.

Even if they hadn’t directly encountered unwarranted physical violence, every migrant or refugee expressed that they had come across a lot of verbal aggression. Several migrants mentioned being called “azziz,” a particularly offensive and demeaning term in darija used to describe foreigners. Mohammed, an immigrant from Nigeria, described the constant discrimination he faced on an individual level:

Say you’re on the road. [Moroccans] will start abuse, spitting sometimes, spitting saliva at you, calling you azzi. It means black. I don’t know what is wrong with black. We are all born the same way, how they were born. But if they see you, they start laughing at you. At times they will say to you, ‘go back to your country, we don’t want you here.’ You see, and they are forgetting that this country is part of Africa.

Gina, a Cameroonian immigrant, also speaks of consistently having to hear this racist and derogatory term: “on nous appelle les ‘azziah’ – nous sommes les blacks, les noirs; ils sont les blancs.” Mary, also an immigrant from Cameroon, expressed a similar statement: “Les Arabes sont trop hypocrites…ils nous appellent ‘africaines,’ mais ils ne savent pas qu’eux-mêmes sont africains.”

Lodging proved to be another example of anti-migrant sentiment. One migrant from Cameroon described to me how his landlord forces him to pay over twice the amount of rent that he would ask of a Moroccan, solely on the basis of his dark skin and foreign status. Joseph, a refugee from Côte d’Ivoire, expressed a similar statement:
Maybe when a Moroccan comes and takes a house they can give the house to a Moroccan for 600 [Dirhams]. [As a] black man, they can give it to you for 1000, 2000 [Dirhams]. Now we are staying seven [people] in a house, seven persons in one bedroom. We are paying 2500.

For this same reason, another migrant from Cameroon mentioned housing as very difficult for her: “ici au Maroc, les problèmes que nous avons sont les problèmes de logement, le logement c’est très difficile et trop cher.”

Migrants also felt that they face intense discrimination from Moroccan institutions and thus had a hard time trusting social establishments such as Moroccan schools, hospitals, the police and governmental as well as non-governmental organizations. Migrants and refugees are not only faced with the constant threat of police raids and brutality in Oujda and other border towns, but in Rabat as well. “La police ne respecte rien du tout,” Christine described to me, a claim I found to be true throughout my interviews; migrants as well as refugees had encountered countless problems with the Moroccan police in the Moroccan capital. Lila from Nigeria described the cruel manner in which the police dealt with migrants in Rabat; “the don’t even know if you are existing like a human being…they don’t care, they are not good at all.” Christine herself had been the target of various police raids both in Oujda and in Rabat, one of which involved a policeman destroying the identity papers she had at the time. Joseph, a refugee from Côte d’Ivoire, mentioned an incident he encountered with the Moroccan police:

I was very hungry, so I stopped one old man, I asked him for money. He called the police people, said that I want to attack him, then the police came, so I ran away. That has happened to me three times in this country.

Mohammed also articulated an example of anti-migrant sentiment within the police force:

Sometimes when they raid, they arrested people, arrested children, arrested woman, taking them into the bus, the public bus, drive them into the desert with no water, no means of survival; it’s very, very terrible. It is pathetic. What I can say is that they have a
negative reaction against us, the authorities. I believe they don’t want us in their country. They don’t.

Much like the police, health institutions also proved to be another source of difficulty for migrants and refugees; several individuals mentioned to me their distrust of migrant health care in Rabat. Both male and female migrants revealed that they could not visit a Moroccan hospital on their own without the help and assistance of a migrant organization. If a migrant were to visit a hospital alone, for example, without an NGO worker, the hospital staff would treat them with immense disrespect, and often charge the migrants double for fees. Marie, an immigrant from Cameroon, provided a prime example of this mentality:

Here, as a black man a hospital in Morocco, it is not easy. [We must] call Caritas and the Catholic church. If we get sick, then [Caritas] will take us to the Moroccan hospital. [If] you alone go, [the hospital workers] don’t treat you well.

Lila from Nigeria also admits: “If you went to a Moroccan hospital, they will not care about you even if you are dying.” Furthermore, hospitals often serve as a space for the police to find and arrest clandestine migrants. Mohammed tells me:

The Moroccan police authority, they go into the hospitals to give an instruction to the doctors and the nurses there; if any Africans come for treatment, [the police] are coming. Which means they arrest people, even in the hospital.

Mohammed adds that he does everything in his power to avoid trips to any health care institution, for fear of being caught by the police: “myself, I don’t prey to fall sick. I haven’t fall sick. I just went through minor headache, fever and I went to the pharmacy to buy drugs. I don’t go to the hospital.”

Migrants and refugees also encounter numerous difficulties and problems with various governmental and non-governmental organizations from which they’ve sought
assistance. Soon after arriving in Rabat, most refugees are made aware of the inefficiency of UNHCR in Morocco, and realize how little the Moroccan branch of the refugee agency actually does for sub-Saharan Africans. Joseph tells me:

Here in Morocco, they don’t do nothing for us. Nothing. Nothing. They don’t appear, they don’t do nothing for us…myself, I think that when you are a refugee, [UNHCR] is supposed to take care of your problems. Since I got [the refugee status card], they do nothing for me. The last time, they give me 800 to pay my house. Since that time, they don’t give nothing to me.

Amélié as well does not describe her experience with this refugee organization in a positive light:

Je suis allée me confier à la HCR, pour avoir les papiers et me protéger…là, il faut parler, il faut avoir la preuve concrète. Mais est-ce que la preuve est fixée? Non…c’est pas tout le monde qui a le pouvoir de parler [de leur situation] et de faire telle ou telle chose, non…donc, je n’ai pas des papiers, je ne suis pas protégée. Voila, c’est ça la vie, je vais vivre comme ça.

Non-governmental organizations sometimes cause difficulties for migrants and refugees as well. Christine described to me how various feminine NGOs in Rabat also subscribe to the general discrimination against sub-Saharan by refusing to work with sub-Saharan migrant women; they only seek to serve the interests of Moroccan women. Christine also made a clear distinction between those organizations that admit to working with sub-Saharan migrants and those non-governmental associations that actually do assist and support immigrants and refugees. Various associations in Rabat, she admitted, claim to the latter but in effect do not genuinely reach out to migrants, and therefore do not understand the actual situation of migrants.

There are, however, various organizations in Rabat that provide migrants and refugees with necessary assistance and support. Concerned with the situation of clandestine sub-Saharan migrants, the Catholic organization of Caritas Maroc seeks to
help migrants and refugees in Rabat by offering everything from legal advice to health care and educational assistance. Fondation Orient-Occident also provides similar support for migrants; through this association, migrants and refugees can take part in *darija* courses, learn professional trades (such as baking or hair-styling) and participate in *écoutes psychologiques*, among other things. Such organizations are imperative for migrants and refugees in Rabat. Not only do NGO workers help clandestine migrants cope with an array of legal and social matters, but they also provide a crucial space for migrants and refugees to come together and address issues that are particular to them. The majority of the participants who I interviewed had utilized services from either Fondation Orient-Occident or Caritas Maroc, and expressed intense gratitude at these two organizations. Amelié, for example, discussed what a significant role these two associations play in the lives of migrants in Rabat: “si le Caritas n’était pas la, les églises, les organisations comme Médecins Sans Frontières et autres … on serait en péril ici.”

**Conclusion**

“J’ai peur,” Amelié also told me; “J’ai peur pour moi, j’ai peur pour ma vie, j’ai peur pour mon fils, j’ai peur de tout, de tout, tout me fait peur.” After my interviews with twenty-five migrants and refugees, I realize this constitutes a common theme among clandestine migrants and refugees in Rabat. Living under hostile social and economic conditions in Morocco caused this migrant population to endure a constant level of fear in their daily lives. Regardless of gender, these sub-Saharan migrants and refugees shared a common history and a communal experience, one of intense hardships and suffering. In hopes of improving their current condition, migrants of both genders find themselves filtering through Morocco’s borders in an attempt to start a better life. Caught in the
middle of a political situation between two regions which are intent on preventing the
flow of migrants, they quickly find that have few options to turn to. Not a single migrant
responded affirmatively when asked if Morocco was their final destination, regardless of
the amount of time they had already spent here. “Pour une personne, il n’y a pas une
destination finale,” Amélié explained to us, stating that her preferred location would be a
place of social and economic tranquility, a sentiment that was shared among all of the
migrants we interviewed. In the words of Sarah from Cameroon, “je ne peux pas
retourner…mais je vais toujours continuer.”

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Appendix

Interview Guide

1. In which country or countries where you born and raised?
   a. What kind of education and/or employment did you receive in your
country/countries of origin?
   b. What were gender relations like in your country of origin? What problems
      or hardships did you face as a woman?
2. When did you leave your country of origin? For what reason/under what circumstance?
   a. If applicable, what countries did you travel to before coming to Morocco?
   b. What was the transit experience like? What sort of problems or hardships, if any, did you encounter along the way?
   c. Did you experience any discrimination while in transit? If so, by whom, and what kind of discrimination?
3. When did you first come to Morocco?
   a. Have you found employment or education since coming to Morocco? If so, what?
   b. Where are you currently living? What are your living conditions like?
   c. What are some of the hardships you’ve experienced while in Morocco?
   d. Have you experienced any discrimination while in Morocco? If so, by whom, and what kind of discrimination?
   e. Is Morocco your final destination?
4. How do you feel your experience compares with that of other female sub-Saharan migrants living in Morocco?
5. How do you feel your experience compares with that of male sub-Saharan migrants?
   How do you feel the responsibilities of sub-Saharan female migrants differ from those of men?
6. How do the problems and hardships you’ve faced while in Morocco, compare to those you faced in your country of origin?
7. What do you feel are the perceptions that Moroccans have of female sub-Saharan migrants?
8. Do you feel vulnerable as a woman? If so, do you feel more vulnerable than men?