Depicting Migrants' Life in Moroccan Newspapers

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1. INTRODUCTION

Morocco's geographical location has made it an ally to Africa and Europe, resulting in a diverse society with many languages and cultures. The country's historical links with Sub-Saharan countries, the MENA region, and Europe have made migration familiar. However, it has become increasingly more difficult for Sub-Saharan Africans to journey to Europe in recent years due to tighter border controls (Thorsen, 2017). As a result, Morocco has become a destination for many migrants rather than just a transit point. This trend has been widely covered by national and international media, reflecting the global increase in migration. Morocco has received migrants from various regions, including Europe, for various reasons, such as economic opportunities, education, and transit to another destination (Castles et al., 2014; Kostas, 2017).

Morocco has become a popular destination for migrants from various regions, including Europe, due to the economic opportunities and access to education. Additionally, it is often used as a transit point for those heading to other destinations. Despite some flaws in their lawmaking and implementation, there was a significant improvement in Moroccan migration policies in 2013 thanks to the involvement of key players such as the King and the National Council on Human Rights (CNDH). As part of this reform, nearly 50,000 irregular migrants

were granted legal status through amnesty in 2014 and 2017. Moroccan pro-migrant Civil Society Organizations and migrant associations were also granted legal status. Moreover, Morocco's institutional frameworks on migration were modified, and the Ministry in Charge of Moroccans residing abroad was renamed and expanded to include migration affairs, demonstrating the country's commitment to managing migration (Natter, 2021).

I have chosen to research how mainstream media portrays migration from sub-Saharan countries. Media is known to be a primary influencer in shaping public opinions and perceptions of significant social and political issues. Media can reinforce or challenge existing beliefs, ideologies, and stereotypes through its coverage. Much debate surrounds the media's impact on public attitudes, with some arguing that it reinforces dominant ideologies. In contrast, others suggest it serves as a watchdog that questions and criticises the status quo, driving cultural, socio-political, and institutional change (Ivan Vaquero, 2011).

However, some places focus more on the media coverage than its effect on public opinion; Bernard Cohen, for example, states that "the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" (Ivan, ibid, 94). He refers to media as a bridge between our prejudices and the pictures we have, which construct reality in our minds through the daily selection of news. He adds, "The world will look different to different people depending on the map drawn for them by writers, editors, and publishers of the paper they read" (ibid, 94).

The topic of migration to Morocco has received much attention from policymakers and the media, even though the number of people involved is relatively small. During the 1990s, there was an increase in migration from Sub-Saharan Africa to Morocco, mainly due to Libya's 'Pan-African' migration policies and conflicts in West Africa (De Haas, 2006).This has made the issue of illegal migration an essential topic for Moroccan newspapers, but news outlets cover it differently.

Many writings have argued that the media frequently strays from the significant standard of sensible, exact, and target answering to the scattering of political propaganda and tabloid newspapers, such as news that has the potential to inspire mass challenge and brutality against migrants and minorities (Pineteh, 2017) This is obvious in newspapers as they synthesise various elements, including language, text, ideology, and culture.

Happer and Philo (2013) emphasised the crucial role played by the media in shaping public beliefs and bringing about social change. Newspapers are vital in creating and disseminating people's perceptions and discourses. Hence, newspapers are pivotal in shaping people's perspectives on migrants, minorities, women, and political leaders (Happer & Philo, 2013). Therefore, it is crucial to examine newspapers' representation of African migrants, which will be discussed in the upcoming chapter

As Van Dijk (1989) described, "the news media do not passively describe or report news events in the world, but actively (re)-construct them, mostly based on many types of source discourses" (Van Dijk, 1989, p. 5). It requires more analysis of how racism at the macro level is conveyed at the micro level of news production and reporting. However, newspaper headlines have significant textual and cognitive functions and deserve special attention. Indeed, as any newspaper readers know, headlines are the most "conspicuous part of a news report: they are brief, printed 'on top', in large bold type, and often across several columns " (Van Dijk, ibid, p. 50). They are usually read first, and therefore, the information expressed in headlines

helps in the process of understanding to construct the overall meaning. As readers, we have observed that this is typically the case. Readers often do not read the entire news item; they only read the headlines. Therefore, the information obtained from headlines is essential in helping readers build their interpretation of the news item.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars from various disciplines have researched Sub-Saharan migration to Morocco. Two notable studies by Freedman (2012) and Stock (2012) examine the gendered aspects of African migration in Morocco, specifically the experiences of Sub-Saharan women trying to reach Europe. These studies reveal that female migrants face economic, physical, and social challenges that compel them to seek better opportunities in other countries. Additionally, women often use their children and gender to increase their mobility chances. Alioua's (2012) analysis provides a clear insight into the unpredictable nature of transnational migration. The study examines the experiences of Sub-Saharan migrants who halt in Morocco and the complex networks they form during their journey.

Several recent studies, including those conducted by Tyszler (2021) and Gazzotti (2021), have highlighted the issue of violence and the need for a humanitarian approach near borders. Tyszler's study, in particular, examines the experiences of a border town in Northern Morocco and demonstrates that the humanitarianism there can lead to more significant restrictions on mobility, especially for women. This may further reinforce a racialised and gendered order at the border despite the claims of the humanitarian approach to be otherwise.

Since implementing the new migration reform, many researchers have focused on integrating Sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco. Scholars such as Bitari (2020), Bendra (2019), Berriane et al. (2014), and Berriane (2013) have studied the integration mechanisms of Sub-Saharan migrants in Moroccan society. Bendra's work, for instance, examines how socio-political conditions and the migrants' legal status (legal/illegal) impact their integration or exclusion potential. Additionally, the research analyses the factors that led to the announcement of the National Strategy for Immigration and Asylum in Morocco (Jacobs, 2019). Bendra (2019) also explores the living conditions of migrants in Morocco, including their access to health services, education, housing, job market, and their relationship with the local population. Similarly, Bachelet's (2016) ethnographic study focuses on how 'irregular' Sub-Saharan migrants in a marginal neighbourhood in Rabat city cope with violent abuses and attempt to exert control over their lives. The study also examines migrants' imagination and hope, highlighting their limited agency, political participation, and emerging social relationships (Bachelet, 2016).

In our study (Dib & Sandy, 2023) on Sub-Saharan migration, we deconstructed the discourse of violence and illegality in newspaper coverage. Hitherto, in this article, I analyse how news narratives construct 'Black' African migrants' living conditions. By depicting narration and focalisation after the 2013 migration reform, I explore how Moroccans' perceptions of Sub-Saharan migrants might have been affected by newspapers' reports and narratives. Additionally, I examine how newspaper reports and portrayals form stereotypes and exaggerations about this group.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this study, we adopt the interpretive paradigm, which emphasizes the subjective experiences of individuals within social and historical contexts (Leavy, 2017). Our research analyses print media content in Morocco to understand how migrants' lives are portrayed. To objectively identify characteristics within the text, we utilized content analysis, a well-established technique, as our primary methodology. Saraisky elaborates that it is "a general set of techniques for analyzing collections of communications." (Saraisky, 2015, p. 27). In particular, we examined media content from four daily print newspapers that highlighted the lives of migrants in some Moroccan cities. We focused on articles and headlines published after the migration reform to understand how these newspapers depict migrants' lives. We selected ten headlines from these articles and analyzed thematically to identify emerging themes related to the portrayal of migrants' way of life in the host country. We conducted a thematic analysis to present and discuss our findings. This involved identifying emerging themes from the articles we analyzed. As defined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 6), "thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data". Therefore, we identified and discussed the emerging themes in the articles, such as the representation of 'African' migrants in print media in a new host country of migrants from Sub-Saharan countries.

This study used content analysis to examine data collected from three newspapers. The analysis focused on relevant text and images. Qualitative content analysis, which is generally thematic, was used. Thematic analysis is a method that identifies, breaks down, and summarises themes present in the data. This approach begins with text because it is used within a social context. Text analysis is a convenient metaphor in content analysis because, according to Krippendorff, "a text means something to someone; it is produced by someone to have meanings for someone else" (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18). Content analysis usually explores specific themes, such as how Black African migrants are "problematized" and turned into a discursive crisis in Morocco. It is important to note that this study only includes newspapers written in Arabic as they target many readers.

The main aim of analysing media information is to uncover its underlying meanings and the most probable interpretation that can be derived from it. Media texts are open to multiple interpretations depending on the context, so qualitative content analysis examines the link between the text and how its readers will likely understand it. This approach focuses not only on the text itself but also on the readers, the media, and other relevant factors. By analysing newspaper articles, we can pay attention to significant social issues such as migration, discrimination, and xenophobia. This analysis can reveal how the text legitimises and perpetuates these issues. We aim to analyse the newspaper articles under consideration to demonstrate how stories depict social power, abuse, inequality, and domination.

4. DISCUSSION

Sub-Saharan migrants escape their problems to find new life in a new place and space. Those migrants have crossed the Sahara and brutality in borders, searching for their own lives. Several studies about migrants' lives in Morocco have focused on African migrants talking about "comfortable life" and "Eldorado". Their journey involved suffering, brutality, and misery in

the quest for a better life (Bachelet, 2019). The new National Strategy for Immigration and Asylum (NSIA), whereby a more human approach to migration would be adopted, has played an essential role in migrants' lives and living conditions in the country. Its primary aim is "to ensure equal opportunities for the migrants, improve their access to economic, cultural and political rights, and change the perception of migration in society." (Bendra, 2019, p. 5). This article focuses on media coverage of Sub-Saharan migrants' lives and integration after the migration reform.

Regularization offered real potential for improving illegalized migrants' daily lives while stuck in Morocco. However, given their marginal position in the city, Sub-Saharan migrants' lifestyle was given space in the newspaper's coverage. Some highlight the integration frame of these migrants; others shed light on the life struggles and racism of the inhabitants. The following examples are taken after the migration reform to analyze the shift of newspaper depiction and topic interests after this reform.

One of the crucial topics that started to be published in the four selected newspapers is "Racism against Black African migrants". This issue was almost absent in the newspaper coverage before the migration reform, though it was highlighted in some events smoothly. Speaking about the impact of the new migration approach, readers have started to see some images and headlines that call for the end of racism and hostility between Moroccans and African migrants. A case in point is the following news item of Ahdath Almaghrebia, calling for an end to racism for a country of coexistence.

Figure 1: A campaign "My name is not Balck", *Alahdath Almaghrebia, March 21ˢᵗ, 2014 Issue 5236*

My name is not Black. "Ma Smetich Azzi" was chosen for this national campaign against racism, which was launched on Friday, March 21ˢᵗ, 2014. This campaign is an initiative of the "Papers for All" coalition, established the day after Morocco decided to regularise the legal status of African migrants in the Kingdom. It aims to raise awareness among Moroccan society

against racism. This campaign constitutes accountability for the various segments of Morocco to help African migrants whose legal status has been settled integrate effectively into society.

This visual depiction and interview with the spokesman of this coalition indicate the slight shift of the journal stakeholders to present issues like racism against 'Black migrants.' The call is for an effective integration of migrants into society. It seems that this campaign is aware of the ambivalent relationship between Sub-Saharan migrants and Moroccans, mainly in marginal neighborhoods, involving both exploitation and solidarity. The legacy of the slave trade and the historical marginalization of black people in a society where local historiography falsely characterizes Morocco as "a racially and ethnically homogenous nation" is, in El Hamel's opinion, the leading causes of this ambivalence (El Hamel, 2013, p. 2). Therefore, some marginal neighbors in Rabat, like Duoar Hajja, Douma or Al Irfan in Tanger, are ambivalent. Due to a simple argument on the price of a meal, *Tanger was turned into a battleground between Moroccans and Africans.*

It turned into a bloody conflict that produced the most significant uprising of African migrants in Tangier, a conflict in which blood was spilt and property was destroyed. It opened the doors of many interpretations, some of which classify what happened in the category of "racism", and some warn of an increasing "laxity" of migrants. (Almasae, Sep 1ˢᵗ, 2014 Issue 2466)

Newspaper coverage starts to discuss and investigate the issue of "Racism". They question:

- *Who drives racism against Africans in Morocco? Akhbar Alyaoum, Sep 5ᵗʰ, 2014 Issue 1465*
- *Are we racist?*
  Was the plant of tolerance killed in us with the events of Boukhalef in Tangier? Alahdath Almaghrebia, Sep 6-7ᵗʰ, 2014 Issue 5379

Several reports depict the causes of these attitudes, visualising and reporting some experts, civil society members and activists. In their reports, the journalists attempt to study the issue from the lex Moroccans use towards 'Black' Africans' that go back to childhood. Words like *Azzi, Draoui, Foula Kahla, Hartani, and Hankous* are examples children use to refer to black-skinned Africans. However, these lexical racist concepts quickly fade away as people grow up and become sticked to *'having fun and entertainment'*. These black-skinned people can become our neighbors and friends.

Figure 2: "The neighborhood has become a time bomb capable of exploding in the face of residents and migrants." *Alahdath Almaghrebia, Sep 6-7ᵗʰ, 2014 Issue 5379*

Akhbar Alyaoum, nevertheles, refers to these attitudes as 'organized attitudes' and 'crimes against African migrants'. According to the report:

The Moroccan Association for Human Rights called them "thugs", and a field report carried out by several activities, accompanied by the "Anti-Racism Group", talked about crimes that go beyond individual violations to organized actions committed against black Africans in Tangier and that the authorities, at the very least, stand by without intervening to protect these migrants. What is happening in Tangiers to raise the tension to unprecedented levels?" Akhbar Alyaoum tells the story from the beginning.

Figure 3: "*Who drives racism against Africans in Morocco?*" *Akhbar Alyaoum, Sep 5ᵗʰ, 2014 Issue 1465*

In the above reports, journalists give voice to social experts and activists to highlight the daily issue of racism in African migrant's lives. To give an idea about the historical root of racism in Moroccans' mindset, *Akhbar Alyaoum* interviews Al Inani, Vice president of CNDH, who indicates that:

Racist behavior towards blacks is rooted in the subconscious of Moroccans and is linked to slavery and enslavement. In Moroccan culture, the discriminatory and pejorative view towards Sub-Saharan Africans or even towards black-skinned Moroccans is still prevalent today.

The interviewee talks about the role of lexical choice and the spread of rumors of being 'criminals' and 'barbarians' by the media led to the confrontations we have started to see in some cities. She highlights the essential role of the government and media to stop these racist attitudes through spreading tolerance values in educational institutions and the role of media in opening Moroccans towards African culture. However, *Ahdath Almaghrebia*'s report shows the difficulties of migrant integration in some regions, especially illegal ones. In one sub-headline, the newspaper indicates *the boogeyman of racism: Impossible coexistence between citizens and illegal African migrants in Oujda.*

A sense of racism

"What we are suffering cannot be expressed in terms of contempt and a collapsed psyche in front of the flow of accusations distributed between the promotion of drugs of all kinds, smuggled alcohol, theft and interception," says Kalo, an African immigrant. He goes on to say, "The matter is related to a small group of migrants who boarded the drift boat for social reasons and reached the limits of eating garbage and sleeping in the open, which contradicts the rights of migrants."

An enormous African gathering and absent coexistence.

A substantial number of Africans gathered in the vicinity of Mohammed I University, and friction with the residents of neighboring neighborhoods, where there were frequent clashes and constant criticism. Coexistence exists only between illegal African migrants in the forest surrounding the university district and African students pursuing their studies at the university in various disciplines, says colleague Hafeez, a journalist at the "L'Oriental" newspaper. He added that the coexistence mentioned above with its inhabitants, grandfather, and districts is limited and does not exceed compassion on the part of citizens, especially in popular markets.

Alahdath Almaghrebia, Sep 6-7ᵗʰ, 2014 Issue 5379

Figure 4: The boogeyman of racism: Impossible coexistence between citizens and illegal African migrants in Oujda*. **Alahdath Almaghrebia, Sep 6-7ᵗʰ, 2014 Issue 5379***

Overall, the portrayal of Sub-Saharan migrants' lives in Morocco after the new migration policy remains positive. Most narratives are about begging, efforts of integration and questioning the possibility of co-existing with the inhabitants. This variety of representation indicates the role of media in playing a vital role in changing people's opinions about 'Black African migrants. Referring to their harsh living conditions can stimulate people to stop being aggressive towards them, at least. They are depicted as beggars because they remain the only source of living for some.

"Salamo Alaykom, I am a Tangaoui and help me."

This phrase is repeated several times by a Malian migrant living in Tangier for over eight years. He keeps moving from café to café. He learned a lot of Moroccan dialects and has made several local friends who help him financially. His only problem is that he cannot find a stable home.

Another immigrant who looks elegant as he stands in front of the bakery door, asking for alms, confirms that he found nothing but begging to provide for his daily sustenance. However, this situation causes him great embarrassment, especially when some look at him with contempt or when he finds himself chased by the police. Nevertheless, he does not hesitate to take several tours around the city in order to earn some money, and his greatest ambition remains to move to the other side.

Attempts to integrate them into the labour market did not succeed, and there were some experiments in the construction sector, but they still need to achieve the expected results. Also, many of them prefer free trade, which makes them compete with the "street venders" at the level of the Kasparata market, and most of them specialise in selling phones.

Sub-Saharan migrants showcase daily scenarios that challenge societal norms and advocate for change. They encounter marginalization while attempting to integrate into the spatial and economic aspects of a physically open city that is socially based on segregation (Berriane & Aderghal, 2014). An instance of this social segregation and marginalization is the introduction of Al Ahdath Almagrebia's report on Boukhalaf events in Tanger. The news items indicate that Sub-Saharan migrants have lived for years in the region of Tetouan, mainly in the forest of *H*aiti; they built their community with rules and respect. The newspaper has already seen how everyone respects others and never attempts to assault the inhabitants regardless of their difficult situation. Their only way of getting money was begging on the road from passengers.

Rarely did these Africans, as they call them, appear in the streets of Tetouan; they only used to take refuge in those forests and in the best circumstances, you find them on the outskirts of the road, begging and fleeing in the middle of the forests whenever a car of security or gendarmerie appeared.

However, their going out into the street and sometimes starting to rent apartments made things change somewhat only as they increased and multiplied, as some say, something that has become provocative for some, but it becomes more violent and more damaging when these people become neighbors of the residents in a building or neighborhood. **Alahdath Almaghrebia, Sep 6-7ᵗʰ, 2014 Issue 5379**

Figure 5: "After years of living in peace and harmony between the two parties: Is it the end of the warm relationship between Moroccans and African migrants?" *Alahdath Almafgrebia, Sep 6-7th, 2014 Issue 5379*

In brief, depicting migrants' lives after the new reform has taken several directions. The four selected newspapers started to portray migrants' sufferings in integration and with the inhabitants. However, other news narratives examine the possibility of coexistence with the inhabitants but with a primary focus on irregular migrants. The four newspaper highlights topics that were almost absent before the migration reform, especially that of violence against migrants and racist attitudes towards 'the new Moroccans'.

In this last section, we attempt to examine the positive news narratives in Moroccan newspapers. On several occasions, Black migrants from Sub-Saharan countries were given the chance to comment on their life conditions and authorities' treatment in the border zone and also within camps in some cities. The general overview clarifies that media shapes its agenda depending on the government's decisions and also the way it wants to mediatize its image to the world due to the new policy towards Sub-Saharan countries. Some newspapers also highlighted violence towards migrants, and they even questioned the question of belonging and identity formation of the new Moroccans because of the social segregation of those migrants.

5. CONCLUSION

Moroccan Media, in general, has actively created a racist electorate before the migration reform either by portraying Sub-Saharan migrants as a threat to our community deliberately or through brainwashing by using some stereotypical items. Of course, hearing about the 'wave' of 'illegal immigrants' that are 'invading' the country severely impacts public opinion. Therefore, they are going to be stereotyped and scapegoated by a large amount of the Moroccan population, mainly from those who lack a critical view. The increasing number of xenophobic and racist practices by some Moroccans is supposed to represent popular thinking, which might result from slanted articles. The media has shown some improvement in news coverage following a reform. However, most news articles still highlight some difficulties in coexistence in the host country. The media has a responsibility to promote democratic ideas in the public sphere. Unfortunately, some news outlets have been criticised for compromising this principle by publishing news that could potentially incite public despair and violence towards migrants and minorities (Pineteh, 2017). It is essential to acknowledge that newspapers may perpetuate racism by portraying migrants as criminals or drug dealers. In doing so, the press contributes to the spread of racist beliefs within society.

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