

Gender and Solidarity Networks among Transit Migrants to the European Union

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As migration restructures political relations between Europe and North Africa, and as countries shift from sites of “transit” to longer-term residence, this project examined the communities forged in these new spaces. Alongside a recent significant increase in women migrants, this project examined the formation of networks of support within a context shaped by regional political demands. Engaging with central theoretical concerns and utilizing frameworks of forced immobility, legal status precarity, gendered geographies of power, and critical race theory, the proposed project asks three questions:

Q1: How do characteristics of migrants headed to the European Union – include gender, migration history, country of origin, and religion – shape their experiences in Morocco?

Q2: How are networks of support gendered and gendering for women migrants in Spain and for those in transit in Morocco?

Q3: What on-the-ground forms of cooperation and coordination are emerging between NGOs and public officials as the European Union and transit countries (here: Morocco) negotiate contemporary migration issues?

To investigate these issues, this study used an ethnographic design including participant observation and 28 interviews with migrants, NGO workers, and policymakers. Fieldnotes and interviews are being analyzed using MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software. Initial findings have centered around 1) How the recent pandemic has affected desire to travel to Europe, combined with increased cost and danger; 2) The predominance of Senegalese migrants, especially women, who have remained in Morocco, due to special relationship between the two countries; and 3) The prominence of women migrants in market activities in Morocco, both challenging and reaffirming gender norms, roles, and expectations.

These findings were presented at the Ethnography and Qualitative Research Conference “International Mobility and African Cities” in Bergamo, Italy, organized by the journal *Etnografia e Ricerca Qualitativa* and the University of Bergamo. Using this as pilot data, my co-PI and I have submitted a proposal to the National Science Foundation for a larger project, “Forced Immobility, Gender, and Solidarity among Sub-Saharan African Migrants in Morocco.” Finally, findings will eventually be published in a major international peer-reviewed journal such as *International Migration*.