

## VILIFYING THE DANGEROUS “OTHER”: THE CASE SUB-SAHARAN IMMIGRANTS IN MOROCCAN NEWSPAPERS

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### ABSTRACT

Morocco is located in the extreme North-West of Africa, just 14 kilometers away from Spain. Its geographical location has made it a destination for thousands of Sub-Saharan migrants and refugees. Being an Africa state, Morocco is expected to be tolerant to other African immigrants. However, the reality is rather the opposite. Since their arrival in Morocco, Sub-Saharan migrants (SSM) are the subject of fear, mistrust and racism. Public discussions about those immigrants are often infested deprecating and racist tropes; hence, the immigrants are often referred as ‘dirty blacks, black locusts, invaders, and HIV carriers’. Yet, instead of covering events which involve Sub-Saharan migrants with a more objective and less racist discourse, Moroccan newspapers have always endorsed a populist, racist, and fear-mongering discourse. An example of such discourse is an article in a local newspaper and whose title could be translated as ‘Regiments of [African] prostitutes spread HIV in the streets of Morocco’. This paper seeks to analyze the discourse adopted by Moroccan newspapers in reference to SSM, it demonstrates how these newspapers make use of strategies of representation, syntax, transitivity, lexicon, argumentation, as well as rhetorical choices such as euphemism, metaphors, hyperbole used to create a negative image of African immigrants. The paper adopts and adapts tools from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to reflect on the characteristics of racist media discourse in Arabic newspapers. Contrary to the racist and discriminatory discourse adopted by right wing parties in Europe which receives a considerable attention. The deadly attacks against immigrants in South Africa, the massive police raids against migrants in Egypt, and the present day massive, violent, and inhumane deportation of Sub-Saharan migrants in Algeria have received little attention. Similarly, is the media coverage which legitimize and promote improper treatment of the migrants. The paper seeks to shed light on racism in a non-western context.

**KEYWORDS:** Racism, Discourse, Morocco, Sub-Saharan Migrants

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### INTRODUCTION

Morocco is located in the extreme North-West of Africa, just 14 kilometers away from Spain. The socio-economic situation of the country has made it one of the most important emigration countries in the world. Hundreds of thousands of Moroccans migrated to Europe via ‘guest worker’ programs starting from the end of WWII. It is estimated that 8 percent of Moroccans are emigrants. However, the large scale of immigration and the change of global migratory patterns have turned Morocco from a country of emigration into a country of transit, and eventually into a country of immigration.

Since 1990s, the number of Sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco has been increasing. This increase was related to a number of issues. First, the change of global migratory patterns from South-North to South-South, because of phenomena like globalization, and the increase of the number of immigrants who moved out of their countries to improve their life conditions, or escape economic, social and political setbacks. Second, the enforcement of strict border control measures by the European Union since the signing of Schengen Convention and the 'fortress Europe' policy. Third, the compliance of the Morocco state with the requests of the European Union to act as buffer zone between Sub-Saharan Africa and Europe. In brief, Morocco turned from being a country of transit into being a country of final destination, which in turn led to emergence of hostile and somewhat racist reaction on the part of some members of the Moroccan community.

The surge in the number of Sub-Saharan migrants was accompanied by an increase of racism and discrimination in the public sphere, and media discourse as well. Hence, local newspapers are encumbered with descriptions of immigrants as 'invaders', 'criminals', 'black locusts', and 'HIV carriers'. This paper examines the discourse which Moroccan newspapers adopt in relationship to Sub-Saharan Migrants. It views that this discourse is in many cases discriminatory and racist in nature. It is generally based on different strategies of Othering and binary Manichean perceptions, in which, the immigrants 'they' are perceived as bad, evil, lazy, while 'us' are perceived as ultimately good. It explores the language used to label Sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco, and how negative and dehumanizing traits are attached the migrants.

### **The Emergence of Immigration and Racism in Morocco**

Since the early 1990s, the European Union started to respond strictly to the waves of migrants coming from Africa, and sought to forge a new anti-migration strategy. The European strategy was twofold, first to implement stricter security measures in the shores of Europe in order to deter more migrants from entering Europe (Cherti, Grant 2013). The second part of the European strategy to fight migration was to externalize the European borders, by pushing North African countries to act as buffer zones or a front line between Sub-Saharan Africa and Europe, therefore preventing many Sub-Saharan migrants from reaching the European Shores (De Haas 2007).

Directly after the signing of Schengen Convention, European states worked actively to abolish their all internal borders, in order to facilitate the movement of Europeans within Schengen space (IOM 2008). Equal efforts were made in order to strengthen the external borders of EU and hamper the movement of non-Europeans and prevent them from reaching European shores. Military and semi-military forces were deployed across the European shores, and surveillance systems were installed. One of the recent systems which were set by the European Union is the 'European Border Surveillance System' (EUROSUR), which functions on the level of all European states, and reflects the determinacy of all the members of the European Union to fight 'illegal' immigration' (De Haas 2007). As it is stated in one of the press releases of the European Commission, the EUROSUR is 'Designed to support the Member States in their efforts to reduce the number of illegal immigrants entering the European Union by improving their situational awareness at their external borders ...'

Transit countries like Morocco and Libya were given substantial political and financial incentives to join Europe in its crusade against migration. In 2006, the European Union made payment of 70 million Euros to the Moroccan Department of Migration and Border Surveillance. According to some news outlets, the money was supposed to be used in the combat against 'illegal' migration through the 'improvement of the legal framework', the 'upgrading of permanent border posts', and strengthening the capacity of criminal investigation (GADEM 2010). The political support for the

Moroccan government was translated in many occasions, such as giving Morocco the status of advanced partner with the EU, praising Morocco in the international scene as an exemplary modal of democratic transition. (Collyer 2010).

The strategy Morocco adopted to react to the needs of its European partner also functioned on two levels. The first one is legal, while the second is related to security. Legislative institutions were instrumentalized to forge a body of laws that can restrict the movement of both Sub-Saharans, and Moroccans wishing to migrate to Europe. In 2003, the Moroccan government started implementing a law named 02-03, which aimed to 'regulate the stay of foreigners in Morocco'(GADEM 2010). Yet, as a number of activists commented, the term 'foreigners' refers only to the Sub-Saharan people and not to other 'foreigners' such as Europeans, who spend almost unrestricted periods of time in Morocco, but their status is not the topic of public debates.

The law 02-03 was criticized by Human Rights activists, as it violates the human rights of the migrants, and most importantly it undermines most of the international conventions which Morocco has signed and ratified. To be more specific, the law contradicts the Universal Declaration for Human Rights, which stipulate that any individual has the right 'to leave any country including his own'. In fact, GADEM (2010: 12) stated that 'Law 02-03 also contained a number of surprising measures such as those related to the detention zone for irregular migrants [...] without however, providing all the guarantees of defense for foreigners detained within these zones'. Indeed, article 34 states that it is possible to keep the migrants in place administrated by the local authorities if the migrants could not leave the Moroccan territory.

Concerning security measures, the Moroccan government has founded specific institutions to handle the 'problem' of migration. The Moroccan ministry of Interior affairs founded the Department of Migration and Boarder Surveillance, and mobilized more than 10.000 men whose sole job is to monitor the borders. Collaboration between Spain, Morocco, Libya, and Tunisia especially when it came to naval patrols was very common (IOM 2008). Similar to Europe, the Moroccan approach to the issue of migration was mainly in terms of security measures.

The collaboration between the European Union and Morocco had serious negative effects both on Morocco, and the migrants themselves. Hence De Hass (2007) contends that the repressive measure adopted by the Moroccan state have pushed many migrants to reconsider their plans to go to Europe. Smuggling methods and techniques became more sophisticated and professional, and smugglers started using fast Zodiacs instead of fishing boats. However, what is most important is that the anti-immigration discourse that has been adopted to defend the security measure helped a great deal in consolidating racist discourse and institutional racism against those migrants.

Phrases such as 'the war on migration' which were adopted by the Moroccan government have shaped the way state institution, as well as society sees immigrants, that is only through the lances of war and violence. Consequently, everyday discussions about Sub-Saharan migrants as well as media coverage began to demonstrate more open and direct discriminatory discourse. Stamens such as 'there are too many immigrants' 'they are invading the country' 'they are committing crimes' and vocabulary items such as 'cockroach' grasshoppers, 'Negros' became an integral part of the media discourse about immigrants.

### **Sub-Saharan Migrants and Moroccan Newspapers**

In November 2012, the Moroccan francophone newspaper Hebdo published an article entitled as 'Le Péril Noir.' or the 'the black danger'. The article starts by identifying Sub-Saharan migrants as a black danger, since thousands of them are claimed to be invading the country, bringing diseases, and engaging in prostitution. Hence, the article states that

‘Le Péril Noir: Des milliers de subsahariens clandestins au Maroc. Ils vivent de mendicité, s’adonnent au trafic de drogue et à la prostitution. Ils font l’objet de racisme et de xénophobie. Ils posent un problème humain et sécuritaire pour le pays.’.

‘The Black Danger: Thousands of illegal Sub-Saharans in Morocco. They live on begging, engage in drug trafficking and prostitution. They are the subject of racism and xenophobia. They pose a human and security problem for the country .’

The contradictory attributes assigned to the same individuals cannot escape observation. The immigrants are represented both as ‘black danger’ or ‘Péril Noir’ and also as victims, or as individuals who live on begging and at the same time as drug traffickers, or as lazy and jobless individuals who paradoxically take the jobs of citizens.

In fact, such discursive inconsistency is reminiscent of SlavojZezak’s concept of ‘theft of enjoyment’. This concept refers to situations and contexts in which the other which is in our case the immigrant is represented as a threat to the unique social and national properties of a given people. The other is represented as a dangerous individual trying to steal some we hold dear, which is our way of life. According to SlavojZezak(1993), the ‘other’ who is usually, an immigrant is feared because he wants to steal our ‘Thing’. The thing is what binds our community together; it is structured through fantasies, and imagination, in a way that is slightly similar to the description advanced by Anderson in his book *Imagined Communities* (1991). Consequently, ‘we’ as a nation, as a group of people are forced to like and defend our fellow citizens, because there is a Thing that binds us together. We fear the other, and hate him because he endangers our Thing, or ‘our way of life’. This Thing ‘is only accessible to us, but tirelessly sought after by the Other’(Clarke 2008). In our attempt to prevent the other from stealing our Thing, we do not only fall in the trap of racism, but we also make many paradoxical statements, as Zezak states;

We always impute to the ‘other’ an excessive enjoyment: he wants to steal our enjoyment (by running our way of life) and/ or he has access to some secret, preserve enjoyment. In short, what really bothers us about the ‘other’ is the peculiar way he organizes his enjoyment, precisely the surplus the ‘excess’ that pertains to this way: the smell of ‘their’ food, noisy songs and dances, ‘their’ strange manners, ‘their’ attitude to work...(quoted in Clarke 2008 : p. 525)

Indeed, identity is established through what van Dijk (1987) qualifies as the strategies of positive self-presentation, and negative other-presentation. As Zizek argues, our image of the other is often paradoxical, hence he is a lazy idler who lives on social security, at the same time he is the ‘workaholic who will take all our jobs’. In this context, the Other, the Sub-Saharan migrant is assigned a number of qualities which are mostly negative, but more importantly, they are inconsistent. In prejudiced discourse difference becomes paramount, it is highlighted; but not in terms of skin color, or race, because this is a feature of old racism. Modern racism and prejudiced discourse are however marked by highlighting cultural difference, differences in terms of life styles, working habits, and even religion (Cox 1959).

Before the article of Hebdo attracted international attention, many newspapers written in Arabic published articles with less sensitive language, yet received little reaction. Below, we can find some examples of such language;

- Regiments of prostitutes spread HIV in the streets of Morocco. (Al Massae, issue 1719)
- Black grasshoppers invade northern Morocco. (ashama, 6 september2005)

- The hidden world of Sub-Saharans who are trafficking in cocaine in the streets of Rabat. (Al Massae 2009/07/31)
- African migrants run Fraud and scams on Moroccan citizens. (almassae. Issue 1620)
- Sub-Saharan migrants, a sexual booms waiting to explode. (Tizpress 2012 January 23).

One might consider the article entitled as 'Regiments of prostitutes spread HIV in the streets of Morocco'.(Al Massae ,issue 1719, 2012) as exemplary case study of the relationship between Sub-Saharan migrants and the Moroccan media. The article was published in Al-Massae (The evening) , and claims that Sub-Saharan women practice prostitution in the country, therefore they are largely responsible for the spread of HIV/AIDS. The title, 'Regiments of prostitutes spread HIV in the streets of Morocco' is characterized by the use of hyperbole. Instead of writing (African prostitutes spread HIV in Morocco), the writer chooses using hyperbole to exaggerate the effect and evoke strong feelings and create strong reaction against the alleged prostitutes.

In terms of transitivity, the Sub-Saharan girls (prostitutes) are presented as active agents, they started to "represent" a serious competition, they "wore" very provocative cloths, "resort" to prostitution, they "transmit" sexual disease. The use of the verbs in the active forms indicates that these women are actively involved in prostitution, thus they willingly transmit diseases to Moroccans. On the other hand, Moroccan clients are viewed as passive victims. In terms of lexicon, we can say that the word choice is simple and do not indicate any particular register, however the word choice in the title is very significant 'regiments', which creates the impression that there are organized efforts made by those prostitutes to invade the country. In fact, such word choice sounds much stronger and is more emotionally in Arabic than it does in English (Richardson, 2007)

The naming of immigrants, or the 'referential strategies' (Reisgil and wodak 2001) are another way of Othering the migrants, giving them an outlandish character and emphasizing the theme of invasion. The article uses the term 'African' instead of Sub-Saharan African which is besides being politically incorrect; it tends to resurrect the white Vs black Africa polemic. Such naming strategy creates a mental image of the migrants, and plays on the Moroccan collective memory, by viewing African as the land of bad news, the land of war, starvation, and poverty. Apart from setting a dividing line between the migrants, and the host community, the referential strategy creates what van Dijk (1991) calls 'Ideological square', which consists of modes of positive representation of 'the self' and negative representation of the 'other'. Hence, all the bad things are attributed to the immigrants while the good things are ascribed to Moroccans.

Using a homogenizing overgeneralization about Sub-Saharan women, who are supposed to engage in prostitution in order to finance their journey to Europe, regardless of the ordeals they bring into Morocco. The article makes a case point on how media discourse can move from single isolated incidents to make over sweeping generalization about a whole race. Hence, the writes states in the article that he met two Sub-Saharan prostitutes, yet he decided that there is a mysterious, hidden underworld of sub-Saharan prostitutes to discover. Therefore, he states 'We approached the two girls trying to discover the hidden underworld of prostitution' (line14). Such overgeneralization does not only betray logic reasoning and insult the reader's intelligence, they also contribute to the rise of confusion instead of understanding, and racism instead of tolerance. Furthermore, the portrayal of Sub-Saharan migrants as armies invading the country and bringing sexually transmitted diseases is an extremely recurrent and popular trope in discussions about migration in Morocco.

## The African Invasion and the Syrian Journey of Hope: Comparing Discourse

The arrival of Sub-Saharan migrants has been continuously covered in the Moroccan newspapers, through the invasion metaphor. Sub-Saharan migrants are represented as invaders who bring crimes, poverty, filthiness, and diseases. Hence, one newspaper describes such movement as follows.

*Black grasshoppers invade northern Morocco. (Ashama, 6 september 2005)*

The invasion metaphor establishes a common feature in immigration discourse all over the globe. Hence, the British Prime Minister David Cameron once described the arrival of immigrants into the UK as, 'swarm of people coming across the Mediterranean'. This news article title represents an extension of such discourse. Yet, not all waves of migration are represented in this same way.

The arrival of Syrian immigrants and refugees has never been qualified by the media as invasion. Instead, it is often referred to as 'a journey of hope and suffering'. The use of metaphors indicates that the anxiety over the arrival of migrants is not motivated by concern over the security or welfare of country, but simply by fear and intolerance. This tolerance towards Syrian migrants, and refusal of Sub-Saharan migrants is deeply rooted in Moroccan collective memory and imagined community (Anderson 1991).

On the imaginary level, the Moroccan territory is located somewhere between what Bernard Lewis qualifies as the Barbarians of the east and the south [who] were polytheists and idolaters offering no serious threat and no competition at all to Islam. In the north and the west, in contrast Muslims from an early date recognized a genuine rival a competing world, a distinct civilization'

Although such a statement is begging for a critical reading, especially that it comes from Bernard Lewis whose writings are to be taken with more than a pinch of salt, it also reflects part of the truth. What is certain is that on the real level, Morocco is located in Africa, but on the imaginary level it is located somewhere in between. What is certain however, is that despite being geographically located in Africa, ironically the continent is viewed in the collective mind as place of famine, poverty and war. Consequently, while Syrian immigrants are met with welcome and sympathy, Sub-Saharan immigrants are met with hostility. Unlike the Sub-Saharan migrants, the Syrians come from a place with which Moroccans associate and share history, culture, and religion. Africa is bellowing Morocco, therefore not an equal. It is only a place from which Morocco used to be its slave. In fact, word 'Azzi' which is used in Moroccan Arabic in order to refer to Sub-Saharan migrants, and even Moroccan with dark skin and which can be translated into 'Nigger' in English highlights the unpleasant history of Morocco and Sub-Saharan Africa.

In 1590, the Moroccan king Ahmad I al-Mansur also known as al-Mansur Dahbi 'The Golden' launched a military campaign against Songhai Empire in West Africa and whose goal was to expand Morocco's influence in Africa and strengthen the Moroccan economy by bring gold and slaves. The campaign was relatively successful, and met some of its objectives. Hence, local leaders in Sungai offered Morocco thousands of slaves in order to withdraw its army. The slaves brought from West Africa were mainly recruited in the army and worked to consolidate the power of the central government also known as the Mekhzen. Some of the slaves worked as domestic servants, and referred to their masters as 'azizi' which means my dear, and which developed later into 'azzi'. Most of the slaves were later emancipated because Islam encourages slave emancipation. However, this phase has left deep effects in the Moroccan collective mind. Moroccan with dark skin are continuously referred to using such words. In fact, there are parts of Morocco in which social

contact including marriage relations between the descendants of slave and the 'shorfa' the honorable free are strictly prohibited.

## CONCLUSIONS

Racism and racist discourse against Arabs and Muslims have received a great deal of attention throughout different episodes and stages of the relations between the Arab world and America and Western Europe. For instance, the surge of racism and discrimination in the United States after 9/11 events, or the raise of right wing racism that accompanied the arrival of Muslim immigrants into Europe after the Arab Spring. Much attention has been paid to the negative role of orient list and discriminatory modes of representation in reinforcing racism against Arabs, and Muslims; and consequently justifying the use of material violence against them. However, less attention has been paid to representation of immigrants in the Arab world. The way in which Asian migrants in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, and African migrants and asylum seekers arriving into Morocco, Algeria and Libya are being represented either in the Arab media or mainstream discourse have received limited if no attention.

In fact, statements such as 'Black locusts invade Morocco', 'The African Immigrants Invade the Streets of Oujda', 'I do not like them because they are slow minded, they are stupid', 'They are a huge problem that is threatening Morocco', 'I would never accept to live with anyone of them in the same room, house, or even building', 'today they get residency cards, tomorrow citizenship, then what's next, they will start asking us to pay them the rent.' , have become extremely recurrent in the discourse about migration in Morocco. Yet, this same discourse is criticized and labeled as racist when adopted in Western context.

The discourse of Moroccan newspapers has started to shift into a less overtly racist discourse. In fact, following the international criticism to the treatment of migrants and refugee seekers in Morocco, and the concern over the rise of racism in the country; the Moroccan media started adopting a more positive discourse in reference to Sub-Saharan migrants. However, this desire to adopt a politically correct and culturally sensitive language only creates a happy talk that conceals the existence of racism in the country and only blinds us from discussing the deeply rooted problem of racism in Arab world in general and Morocco in particular.

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