Sub-Saharan students in Morocco: determinants, everyday life, and future plans of a high-skilled migrant group

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Sub-Saharan Students in Morocco: Determinants, Everyday Life, and Future Plans of a High-Skilled Migrant Group

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Abstract

Based on a study of sub-Saharan students in Morocco, this paper addresses the relationship between international student mobility and high-skilled migration and analyses how the increasing movement of sub-Saharan students to Morocco contributes to Morocco's transition to being a country of immigration and to its integration into the sub-Saharan migratory system. By studying the migration trajectories of sub-Saharan students, the article shows how three factors influence the students' movement to Morocco: their aspirations to expatriate, their growing up in cultures of migration and the existence of social networks linking the students to Morocco. The experience of otherness in a transit and immigration country such as Morocco contributes further to the shaping of an identity as transmigrants among students who consider their stay in Morocco as a first step on a longer-term migration that might lead to a second emigration or a permanent settlement in Morocco.

Keywords: African migration, high-skilled migrants, migration transitions, Morocco, student mobility

1. Introduction

Since Mohammed VI became king in 1999, the Moroccan state has made significant efforts to become more involved on the African continent. The kingdom has been carrying out a more active co-operation policy with its sub-Saharan neighbours, reviving and strengthening the bilateral cooperation programmes developed since Moroccan independence in 1956. Following complications in the Western Sahara decolonisation process and the OAU (now the African Union) having recognised the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, Morocco withdrew from the African organization in 1984 (Barre 2004). The new African policy aims to counteract Morocco's isolation from the African Union,to gain more support for its sovereignty claims over the Western Sahara province and to defend Moroccan commercial and economic interests in Africa (Wippel 2004). The country is more particularly involved in several sub-regional organisations such as the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) since 2001 or ECOWAS since 2005, to compensate for its isolation from the pan-African organisation.

Furthermore, the kingdom has participated in the construction of a road that links Senegal with Morocco (Wippel 2004), thus helping to increase the circulation of goods and people between West Africa and Morocco. Since the early 2000s, Moroccan companies have also been increasingly investing in African markets. The Moroccan banking sector in particular (Brack 2014: 93), as well as several Moroccan new communication and information technologies (NCIT) companies and consulting groups are nowadays present in West African countries. Morocco's regional integration within West Africa is represented in official national discourse as the result of historical and cultural relations that have linked Morocco with countries to the south for centuries; relations in which Moroccan kings are portrayed as having played a crucial role, especially as religious leaders (Sambe 2010).

While Morocco is attempting to reconnect with West Africa politically and economically, a reintegration from below seems to be taking place simultaneously through the increase in sub-Saharan migration flows, contributing to considerable changes in Morocco's migration patterns. In fact, since the late 1990s, trans-Saharan movements have been characterised by transit migration, and trade routes formerly taken by caravans have been used by lorries transporting migrants (Bredeloup and Pliez 2005: 6-7). Although these migrants aimed to reach Europe, they would stop in North African countries, including Morocco, sometimes for a considerable period of time. The kingdom's new awareness of its African identity can therefore also be seen as a result of its role as transit and destination area for sub-Saharan migrants.

Together with Morocco's economic development, the reinforcement of European border controls in 1999 (Natter 2013: 18) has transformed Morocco into an attractive destination for migrants (Bensaad 2005: 28). Although the number of sub-Saharan individuals living in Morocco is estimated to be comparatively small, the migration issue has recently entered the Moroccan public sphere. This led to a more visible political engagement with sub-Saharan migrants (Pian 2009) and to the regularisation of undocumented migrants in 2014. While sub-Saharan 'transit' migration in Morocco has been the subject of numerous studies (e.g. Alioua 2005; Escoffier 2009; Khachani 2006), older migration flows and circulations, which are also increasing, have remained understudied. This is the case, for instance, of sub-Saharan students whose number has recently increased in Morocco.

Morocco has, in fact, become a preferred country for sub-Saharan students to receive their training. Since the 1970s, the training of white-collar workers of sub-Saharan origin has formed an integral part of Moroccan–African bilateral cooperation (Barre 1996) and has been constantly developing over recent years. In addition to the official channels allowing and subsidising young sub-Saharans to come and study in Morocco, the country is also welcoming more and more students who are heading for private education establishments.

This paper analyses sub-Saharan student movement to Morocco and its relation with broader immigration trends and Morocco's recent foreign policy towards Africa. The aim of this study is to show to what extent students' move abroad and stay in Morocco may develop into, or form an integral part from the very beginning of, a long-term migratory plan and how this contributes to their identity formation as migrants.

The article is based on material collected at two different periods of time. The first set of data was collected in 2006, during a three-month research project conducted in Rabat, and is based on a quantitative survey and semi-structured interviews. 150 sub-Saharan students were interviewed during the quantitative survey. Among them, 79.4% were from West African countries and 76.6% from francophone countries; 23% of the students were women, 79.4% were between 20 and 25 years old and 94% had been living in Morocco for less than five years. Due to access problems, only three students from private schools could be included in the survey. On the basis of the results from this first survey, one- to two-hour interviews were conducted with 16 randomly selected students. The main themes of the interview looked at their travel and life experiences in Morocco, their relationship with their home country and their future projects. Three interviewees were from Senegal, four from Mali, one from Niger, two from Comoros, one from Burundi, one from Cameroon, one from Burkina Faso, one from

Cape Verde, and one from the Congo (DRC). Among this group, five students were women.

In summer 2012, a short quantitative investigation was conducted in order to complete and update the 2006 data, analysing the migratory trajectories of 95 out of the 150 students interviewed six years before.

After presenting some theoretical reflections on the link between student mobility and migration, the second part of this article will describe the characteristics of sub-Saharan student movement to Morocco. In the third section, the determinants of this student mobility are analysed. The fourth part concentrates on the Moroccan experience and its repercussions on the students' self-perceptions. Finally, the last part focuses on those aspects of student life, which could be seen as resembling migrant or even transmigrant life.

2. Student Mobility and High-Skilled Migration

A recent, but growing literature on the relationship between student mobility and economic migration has highlighted the similarities between students and high-skilled workers, since students represent 'a potential human capital asset for sending countries' (Freitas et al. 2012: 2). This is reinforced by the fact that international students are likely to stay in their training country for work after completing their studies. Studying abroad is often conceived as a strategy to enter a foreign labour market and hence to realise a migration aspiration (Coulon and Paivadi 2003: 45; Rosenzweig 2005). However, some people also choose to study for a specific degree abroad based on the needs of their home country, as a strategy to return home and find a job (Levatino 2014: 8).

The theoretical debates on the effects of student mobility (and high-skilled migration in general) on the country of origin have developed two different scenarios. On the one hand, the concept of 'brain drain' became prominent within 'dependency thinking' and the historical-structural Marxist paradigm of the 1970s (Freitas et al. 2012: 3). It emphasises the negative effects of scientific migrations on origin countries, because they tend to empty developing countries of their scientific resources. Often, brain drain is accompanied by the phenomenon of brain waste, in which qualified migrants, once they arrive in the destination country, end up taking jobs that are below their skill level (Hunger 2004).

On the other hand, new approaches to international migration that became more influential in the 1990s have been focusing on the migration processes themselves rather than limiting the analysis of migration to push and pull factors. Indeed, migration studies have incorporated the

fact that migration is seldom limited to a single, one-off move from one country to another. Instead, migrants often circulate between the home and host country or countries, a phenomenon which has accelerated over the past decades partly because of cheaper means of transport (Ma Mung et al. 1998; Tarrius 1996). The size of migratory social networks, i.e. the interpersonal links that connect migrants who are already settled with new migrants and non-migrants living in the home country, also contributes to this process (Boyd 1989; Massey et al. 1993). By keeping up these links and maintaining relations with geographically remote communities, migrants are increasingly assuming the character of transmigrants, i.e. migrants who 'develop and maintain multiple relations – familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political – that span borders' (Glick-Schiller et al. 1992). Recent migration studies therefore no longer analyse migrants' individual and collective identities within a localised geographical context, because they can have transnational cultural references from various origins and go back and forth between different areas.

The circular and transnational dimension of migration has also become visible among high-skilled migrations, as the establishment of transnational scientific communities reduces the classic dichotomy between the home and host countries (Dia 2005). In this context, the concepts of brain gain and brain exchange have emerged, to stress the positive effects of scientific migrations that contribute to the circulation of knowledge and the formation of scientific networks between scientific diasporas and their home countries, rather than emptying origin countries (Meyer 2012: 67). Thus, even students who decide to enter the labour market of their training countries might play a crucial role in the development of the academic field of their home countries.

These theoretical reflections mainly draw on studies that investigate student movement to high-income countries, i.e. traditional immigration countries. How do these theoretical insights play out in developing countries, such as Morocco, that have sent and are still sending students and highly-qualified migrants abroad (Bouoiyour et al. 2014) and that have high unemployment rates among their university graduates? Does Morocco represent a potential labour market for sub-Saharan students? And to what extent does Morocco's current situation as a transit and immigration country for sub-Saharan migrants affect the life experiences and future projects of foreign students?

3. Characteristics of sub-Saharan student migration in Morocco

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Sub-Saharan students living in Morocco belong to two different groups: students who have obtained a grant from the Moroccan state and who study in public universities, and students who do not receive such a grant and who usually attend private establishments. Although the former type of student migration has been going on longer than the latter, both flows have increased during the last decade, a trend that illustrates the interrelations between Morocco's regional integration in sub-Saharan Africa and the increase in overall sub-Saharan mobility.

3.1. Grant-holding students

In recent years, the number of sub-Saharan students registered with state-run establishments has been growing steadily. The training of white-collar workers by Morocco dates back to the early 1970s, but it was limited to a small number of students from Morocco's favoured partner countries such as Senegal, Guinea or Gabon. Over the last decade in particular, the numbers have grown considerably. While during the 1994-1995 academic year just 1,040 sub-Saharan students were registered with Moroccan state-run establishments, ten years later there were 4,477 (Direction de l'évaluation et de la prospective 2005), and in 2013-2014, their number reached 5,160 – out of a total number of 8,859 foreign students in Morocco (http://www.enssup.gov.ma).

Most sub-Saharan students come from the eight French-speaking countries of West Africa (53% of sub-Saharan students and 32% of foreign students in Morocco). Senegalese students made up the largest proportion (506). However, a growing number (13%) of students also come from Portuguese-, Spanish- and English-speaking countries such as Guinea Bissau, Ghana or Equatorial Guinea. Most students are men: in 2008-2009, only 26% of the sub-Saharan residents studying in public universities in Morocco were women (http://www.enssup.gov.ma).

The most sought-after courses are economics and law (39%), technology (23%), natural science (18%) and medicine (15%) (Direction de l'évaluation et de la prospective 2005). Given that the majority of these disciplines are taught in French, sub-Saharan students in Morocco only rarely speak Arabic. During the pre-colonial period, Morocco played an important role in the regional transfer of knowledge across neighbouring regions through religious education (Fall 2004: 280). Today, Islamic studies are taken by only 2% of all sub-Saharan students enrolled in Moroccan public universities. Yet, Morocco does still provide religious training, both for Muslims and for Christians. In 2012, an ecumenical institute was founded in Rabat by the Catholic and the Evangelical church (L'Opinion 2013) and a new institute for Islamic theology was founded in Rabat in March 2015 to train sub-Saharan students as imams and

preachers (http: //habous.gov.ma).

Given that education in Morocco is largely financed by the Moroccan state, the training of sub-Saharan grant-holders is organised and managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The number of registrations and grants is set on a country-by-country basis, and depends on the diplomatic ties that exist with the country of origin. Most of the students who are registered with state-run establishments are grant-holders. The grant includes free training in a public university or vocational training institution and a stipend of 750 dirhams per month. Although the country of origin is responsible for the selection of the students and selection criteria vary, a good score in the baccalaureate examination is most often a determining factor. Half of the students I interviewed had spent part of their school career in a private school and thus came from a fairly privileged background. However, students from lower social strata do also have access to these grants. Through this active education policy aimed at stimulating student migration from sub-Saharan African, the Moroccan state complements and reinforces its political and economic interests in the region.

3.2. Students in private schools

In addition to student migration to state-run establishments, sub-Saharan students increasingly enroll in privately-run establishments in Morocco. This mobility is much harder to study since there are no official data about it, but there is evidence that the number of foreign students registered with private establishments has increased considerably. In 1998-1999, 1,120 foreigners were registered in private schools, in 2010-2011 there were 4,000, representing 10% of all students registered at privately-run establishments in Morocco (Laouali and Meyer 2012: 116).

A few Moroccan private schools such as ISIAM, Hightech or Sup'management have particularly focused on students from sub-Saharan francophone countries, sometimes offering merit-based scholarships and having representation offices in West African capitals (Berriane 2012: 161). Other schools recruit sub-Saharan students in order to advertise and attract more students from the region (Touré 2014: 34). Given that fees in Moroccan private schools or universities range between 2,200 and 5,500 euros per year (Touré 2014: 33), students generally come from privileged family backgrounds.

However, there are many similarities and interrelations between both forms of student mobility. In fact, it is very common for sub-Saharan students to switch from one type of institution to another. In the Comoros Islands, for example, Morocco is a favourite country in which to study,

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and students who do not get the chance to sign up straight away for state-run universities head off to private schools. Once in Morocco, they do however try to get into state universities (Interview 8). Thus student mobility is not just related to the opportunity provided by a study grant and free education. While state-sponsored study channels are used as a means to come and study in Morocco, they also indirectly stimulate student migration to the private academic sector.

4. The determinants of sub-Saharan student mobility: cultures of migration and transnational social networks

4.1. The decision to leave

Sub-Saharan students' main motive for coming to Morocco is to improve their future life prospects. Also, studying in Morocco proves to be a good – and sometimes the only – opportunity to leave one's country, to study, and thus improve one's living standards (Interview 10). Indeed, students often stressed the lack of alternatives and the fact that the destination does not always play a key role in their migration decisions. As a student from Niger explained, 'For me there was no choice. I got my baccalaureate, and this was the first grant that came my way, so I took it' (Interview 6). Many students would have preferred to study in Europe, but given the lack of opportunities they have settled for coming to Morocco (Interview 7). Morocco is also easier to access for the nationals of several countries such as Congo, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Mali, Niger or Senegal since they do not need a visa to enter the country.

Furthermore, many sub-Saharan students who decide to come to Morocco are motivated by the idea of having a mission to accomplish for their country. Being selected to come to Morocco is seen by some as an obligation to go and receive education elsewhere to help build up their country (Interview 6; Interview 3). Moreover, parents often play a major role in the decision-making process. Often, they are the ones who encourage or even oblige their children to leave the country and prepare the migration for them, as a Comorian female student told me: 'Well, it's my parents, right, they told me to do it and I said yes' (Interview 9).

Finally, travel and escape are often mentioned by sub-Saharan students as important motives for their migration. A stay in Morocco is seen as a way of leaving, of discovering another world, of living out an adventure. This is particularly evident in the story told by a Congolese student who comes from a family that is scattered across a number of European and African countries. She wanted to study in a country that no one in her family had yet visited, and the possibility

of getting a grant for Morocco seemed to be a good opportunity (Interview 2). The existing literature on high-risk sub-Saharan migrations, such as irregular migration through the Sahara Desert or the Mediterranean Sea, acknowledges that seeking adventure is part and parcel of many migrants' motivation to migrate (Bredeloup and Pliez 2005: 14-15). The insights of my study suggest that this is also true for student migration.

Migration decisions are always influenced by a multiplicity of motives and the quantitative study for this paper has confirmed this in the context of student mobility. While 36% of the students interviewed stated that it was the grant that motivated their decision to come to Morocco, the country's political stability, the experience of being abroad and the brighter prospects for future studies were also put forward. For students originating from non-French-speaking West African countries, learning French also played a major role in the choice of the country.

4.2. Socio-cultural backgrounds: migrant societies?

At a time when migration opportunities are gradually becoming scarce and any means of getting out of one's country are good enough, student migration turns out to be a good opportunity to emigrate, even if it 'only' leads to Morocco. Omar, a Senegalese student in journalism, pointed at the prestigious character of migration within his origin country: 'Well in Senegal, if I've got two sons or three sons abroad, that's good, even if you're studying or working; the thing is to have family abroad, they like it, they like that [in Senegal]' (Interview 7).

Furthermore, the survey has shown that students usually come from families and social backgrounds where migration is highly valued and an established way of life. Indeed, 59.3% of my interviewees have family members living abroad and 51% of these members are brothers or sisters. Students usually belong to families that are scattered across different African and European countries, with a particularly large group in France (see Table 1).

[insert Table 1 here]

Students with family members abroad were particularly influenced by the picture of foreign countries painted by relatives visiting home:

> There's family who have already gone, so you see, you get ideas about the family, when you're little and your big brother is in France, he sends stuff, he sends mobile phones home, you see it and you say, oh, that's what France is about, I've got to do anything to get away, that's your dream and you work like stink to make it come

true (Interview 7).

Student migration seems to be a direct or indirect strategy to live a migrant life, whilst also having the privilege of advanced university education. In addition to the official channels which encourage this migration, there are social networks that influence the choice of Morocco as a destination and which demonstrate that Morocco's connection with the sub-Saharan migratory system started long before the so-called 'transit' migration of the 1990s and 2000s.

4.3. Links with Morocco

For many students (43%), links with Morocco already existed at the time of their departure, mainly through relatives or acquaintances who live or have lived in Morocco for professional reasons, or to study. Indeed, 30% of students interviewed have a family member who has already studied in Morocco (Survey 2006).

Sometimes, key figures in the country of origin can act as role models. In the Comoros Islands or Gabon for instance, 'big names' and 'well-known people', including ministers, have studied in Morocco, attracting young school leavers to follow their example (Interview 9). Thus, Moroccan university education has gained a good reputation in many sub-Saharan countries and former students from Morocco can easily enter the labour market of their home countries (Bredeloup 2009: 274-75). The news about those returning and their success at home or elsewhere stimulates further student migration to Morocco.

Thus, social networks – through personal ties or/and information channels – exist behind this student migration and play a role in sustaining student flows towards Morocco. Despite this partial familiarity of Morocco as a country, the actual migration is experienced as a break in the students' lives, given that their stay abroad is frequently accompanied by significant obstacles and difficulties that challenge the image that people in their home community have of Morocco.

5. The stay in Morocco: rupture and the experience of otherness

The students' accounts in 2006 reveal that the journey to Morocco represents a break in their lives, as they are facing a country that has only recently started to receive larger numbers of sub-Saharan migrants and that stigmatises them and pushes them away – in stark contrast to what they were expecting. Very often, the experience of otherness during their stay has a profound effect on their worldview and students withdraw into sub-Saharan spaces in Morocco

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to define new forms of identity and belonging.

5.1. The journey: a rite of passage?

Accounts of students' arrival and their first impressions of Morocco are highly representative of the importance they attribute to the journey itself. It was astonishing to see that all students, without exception, could remember the exact day they arrived in Morocco, even though for some a considerable amount of time had passed since then. The journey itself holds a crucial place in their memories and was seen as an adventure, for most of them the very first journey abroad in their lives, associated with separation from their families and parents, whom most of them have not seen since that time, and with the abrupt entry into adult life (Interview 3). More than anything else, leaving their families and living autonomously in Morocco is experienced as a test of their courage and maturity (Interview 10).

Grant holders undertook the journey in a group. Once at the airport, they met the other students with whom they were to share this experience. They were often accompanied by an embassy official – sometimes they even flew on the presidential aircraft which had been put at their disposal for the day (Interview 6). This did not only trigger a sense of pride and privilege to be chosen to study for the country, but also created a feeling of being part of an official delegation (Interview 15). Upon their arrival in Morocco, the reception process was overseen by the student offices of the respective countries, with support from the embassy.

After this initial phase spent with their fellow countrymen, they went their separate ways across the country. At that moment, many of these young people, who tend to come from relatively protected social environments, for the first time faced problems which they had never previously encountered, such as official procedures and financial problems (Interview 3). Some realised their grant would barely cover their needs (Interview 6). Others discovered it was difficult to rent private flats in a country where the norm was for young people only to leave the parental home once they were setting up their own family, and that it was not considered appropriate for groups of young single people to rent a place together (Interview 5).

5.2. Shattered points of reference: Morocco and the relationship with religion

Despite the existence of information channels and sometimes even considerable communication with acquaintances in Morocco, knowledge about Morocco before migration seems to be very minimal. However, one dominant idea about Morocco that students have before arriving is the kingdom's association with Islam. For all students, Morocco was seen as a very Islamic country, in which the whole of society was organised by religion: 'A Muslim

country [where] the girls would be wearing veils, with clothes right down to their feet' (Interview 12).

This idea was equally present among Muslims and Christians and offers a perfect example of the effects of Morocco's political strategy in Africa, in which religious diplomacy and especially the Moroccan king's religious authority are utilised in order to gain more allies on the African continent (Sambe 2010). The association between Morocco and Islam also shapes student migration, especially by women. In fact, women interviewed in 2006 arrived in Morocco with the expectation that they were going to wear a veil. Furthermore – although only 23% of sub-Saharan students are female – interviews show that Morocco is seen, particularly among those coming from Muslim communities, as a possible destination for girls. This is based on the idea that young female students would find themselves in a safe environment in Morocco, encouraging their families to choose this destination for them (Interview 8; Interview 13).

Once in Morocco, however, students encounter a society that is much less religious than expected, especially in large Moroccan cities such as Rabat. For some, this contrast between what was expected and what was actually found in Morocco had repercussions on their own attitudes toward religion. Omar sums up his astonishment at the attitude displayed by his university colleagues:

> I noticed it the first day, it really astonished me. Before I came, I thought Morocco was Islam, and all that; everyone goes off to pray when they should, and all that; and I noticed as soon as I came here, in class when the Muezzin gives the call to prayer, and all that, I'd go off to pray and others just stayed there, chatting away, chatting away, I was saying it's time to pray, and all that, they were messing around, pretending not to hear, I go to pray, I always go to the same place, and they don't pray. That astonished me, I wasn't expecting that, especially because you hear people say that Morocco, the Maghreb, they're Arabs, it's closer to Islam than we are (Interview 7).

The lack of religious practice among Moroccans surprises, given that they – belonging to a country that presents itself internationally as a model for Islam – should be acting as role models. Indeed, in its foreign policy towards West Africa, Morocco has been emphasising its role in the spread of Islam and the religious authority of the king as 'commander of the faithful' is also recognised by some West African religious groups (Sambe 2010). In response to the

lack of religious practice among Moroccans, Coming from a Sufi family, Omar, for instance, has withdrawn into his own community and joined a small association created by Senegalese students belonging to this same brotherhood on the university campus. Being Muslim does not therefore necessarily result in better integration into Moroccan society.

In other life accounts, living in Morocco has led to a complete re-evaluation of attitudes towards religion. For Othman, another Senegalese student who had been counting on his stay in Morocco to strengthen his faith, his worldview was shaken:

> When I came, people said, oh there you won't have any trouble, they'll even be telling you to continue praying because you're going to a Muslim country; it'll strengthen your faith. When I got here, I was a bit surprised on the first Friday, I went past a Mosque and I saw boys and girls arm-in-arm, walking past the Mosque; I'd thought it would be like Saudi Arabia (Interview 4).

Since coming to Morocco, Othman has completely stopped practising his religion. Whilst some are shocked by Moroccan society and withdraw into the heart of a religious community which they rebuild for themselves, others start to question their personal relationship with religion once in Morocco.

Whilst Moroccans' religious practice is covered at length in the accounts given by Muslim students, Christians usually engage with the country's Christian communities immediately after their arrival (Interview 12; Interview 3). In the city of Rabat, the Catholic and Protestant churches have been reactivated since 1980, notably due to the influx of Christian sub-Saharan students. Among the staff of both churches, a large number originates nowadays from sub-Saharan countries. These institutions represent spaces where Christian students spend a short time immersed in an atmosphere that, they say, reminds them of their home community (Interview 15; Interview 1).

The withdrawal into 'sub-Saharan' religious spaces is, however, also a reaction to the stigmatisation that students experience by Moroccans and that also contributes to the shaping of sub-Saharan identities.

5.3. Stigmatisation and 'black' identity: meeting places

From the students' accounts it is possible to identify three places in which students encounter Moroccan society: the street, the neighbourhood and the university. Each of these places is associated with different perceptions and experiences of their interactions with Moroccans.

All students had negative experiences in the street, which they see as a reaction to their phenotype. Students say they are insulted in the streets, are called 'azzi' - a name with negative connotations used to describe people of dark skin colour - and sometimes stones are thrown at them. In short, harassment can be a daily occurrence. In working-class districts in particular, children laugh and chant this name. It is not the children's laughter that shocks them most, but rather the failure of parents and other adults to do something about this behaviour (Interview 3).

In addition to being seen as foreigners, they often find themselves treated like illegal immigrants. For Fatou, this has become part of daily life, and she often hears herself being called 'harraga' in the street, a name given to migrants emigrating illegally to Europe. Fatou is studying in Oujda, a city in the north of Morocco, not far from the Spanish enclave of Melilla (Interview 13). In this city and its surrounding area, there is a sizeable community of sub-Saharan migrants attempting to enter Spain. Therefore, sub-Saharan students in Oujda have been particularly subject to stigmatisation. Being mistaken for irregular migrants, some of them have even been expelled to the Algerian border during police raids (Berriane 2012: 166). However, the lumping together of sub-Saharans and (irregular) 'transit' migrants is not limited to the north of the country. Idrissa, who lives in Rabat, tells how he was mistaken one day for an illegal migrant begging for alms: 'I asked a guy the way to, I don't know, a restaurant or something, I was with friends. I said please sir; he didn't even let me finish; I said please sir; he told me "I don't have money"' (Interview 10). Thus, in the anonymous setting of the street, students are confronted with frustrating situations and become conscious of their differences.

For students who live in flats, their neighbourhood (mostly working-class districts) represents another side of Morocco. Interviews revealed that these neighbourhoods often remind students of their country of origin. They tend to enjoy warm friendships with neighbouring families, who welcome them and adopt them into their own families (Interview1; Interview 13). A student in Salé explained how neighbours who spoke little French would try to speak to him regularly in the street in order to practise their French (Interview 11).

The third – and maybe most important – space of encounter between students and the host society is the university. In the accounts given, the scepticism and mistrust between sub-Saharan students and their Moroccan classmates and professors is noticeable. Once more, students see a link between their different phenotype and Moroccans' efforts to distance themselves. This is Christine's explanation for why her Moroccan classmates approached her, who was light-skinned, in particular:

They tried to approach me simply because I had a different skin colour from my compatriots. They couldn't understand it, they said how come you're like that and your compatriots are black, and I said yes, but there are also mixed-race people in my country (Interview 2).

Christine's account also illustrates the reciprocity of this distancing and how it is reflected in the spatial organization of classes:

I had compatriots in the same class who, hum, let's say, were black, who had already formed a clan; and when I got there I saw the blacks; well, I thought, I could go with the blacks, but that wasn't very good; I don't like this clan business; so with that I thought no, I'm going to try to integrate; so I just decided to sit anywhere in the class and that's how I came to speak to my neighbour in class who became my first friend; her name is Mounia (Interview 2)

The reciprocal segregation between Moroccan and sub-Saharan students is, however, in part a communication problem. In fact, sub-Saharan students are often more at ease speaking French, while Moroccan students prefer to speak Arabic among themselves. According to sub-Saharan students, the 'ignorance' of their Moroccan classmates also explains their behaviour towards sub-Saharan students. By the simple act of coming to Morocco, sub-Saharan students have had an experience of travel to a foreign country, which their Moroccan classmates were mainly lacking.

The spatial segregation is further linked to the stigmatisation of sub-Saharan students by their professors: 'There's a sentence that shocks every sub-Saharan student who arrives. It's when a Moroccan intellectual says to them: "you Africans"' (Interview 1). These representations are perceived as a humiliation by sub-Saharan students since their professor's image of Africa is mainly influenced by negative stereotypes linking 'Africa' to the desert, poverty or war (Interview 14). With time, they learn to deal with this situation by stressing their level of knowledge, distancing themselves from their Moroccan classmates and professors. Compared with Moroccans, they feel open and cosmopolitan, if not 'citizens of the world' (Interview 1).

Encounters with Moroccan students and people in the streets lead to the development of a collective consciousness, or even a common identity in response to similar experiences. Given that the hostile, at times racist, behaviour of many Moroccans is associated with their dark skin, this same aspect becomes an identifying factor among sub-Saharan students. Indeed, in their accounts, sub-Saharan students would describe themselves most of the time as 'black', also to

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differentiate themselves from their Moroccan environment. Thus, the phenotype, origin of their stigmatisation, becomes the reference point of their self-identification.

It is interesting to see that they describe themselves as 'blacks' and not as 'noirs' [the French word for black]. This might be linked to the fact that the word 'black' has also entered the French language and can be found in discussions on multicultural France as having a 'Black, Blanc, Beur' ('Black, White, Arab') culture. The term 'black' might therefore reflect the desire to belong to a black community that goes beyond the borders of the African continent. In contrast with the Moroccan society, which they experience as western and Europeanised, they construct an African identity. Moroccan society is experienced as being cold, closed in upon itself and sterile, characterised by individualism, a lack of solidarity. By contrast, 'black' society is characterised by solidarity and hospitality, with tradition and religion playing a key role.

> You see here, I have to say, Moroccans tend to be more European, because when you see the families, there's one family over here, another one over there, and they don't pull together like at home, see! […] here, the people are always shut away, if you turn up you have to ring the doorbell before you can go in. It's not like that at home. […] It's like everyone's keeping the others at arm's length, it's really not what you expect […] Because that's more like it is in European life, because like in Europe people don't know one another, you say hello [and] everyone gets on with their own stuff. (Interview 10)

It was also striking to see how Morocco's new role as an immigration country has changed students' attitude towards Moroccans. In 2006, my informants rarely described the behaviour of people in the streets as racist. Although students distanced themselves from Moroccans and tended to describe them as ignorant, they rarely openly criticised their behaviour. With the new public awareness of Morocco's role as a country hosting immigrants and the growing political mobilisation of African migrants and local civil society asking for more protection of migrants' rights (Alioua 2009: 279-303; Feliu i Martínez 2009: 343-362), a shift has been observed in students' discourses. Thus, in 2012, a Senegalese journalist who had studied in Morocco described the racist and discriminatory behaviour of his Moroccan fellow students and former professors in a special issue published in a Moroccan journal (Bâ 2012). Today, sub-Saharan student associations in Morocco have also become more vocal about the stigmatisation sub-Saharans are facing. However, while sub-Saharan students feel concerned about the situation of their 'irregular' countrymen, they also distance themselves radically from them, although

they often share similar aspirations to emigrate.

6. Between community life and the desire to escape: the creation of 'transmigrants'

6.1. Multiple African identities

Whilst identifying themselves as a group distinct from Moroccan society, sub-Saharan students also have other points of reference. Particularly those living in Rabat in the international student halls of residence spend most of their time in a cosmopolitan African setting, an 'Africa in miniature' (Interview 3).

This discourse, which promotes the idea of intercultural exchange, is fostered by the workings of the diplomatic process. Since 1981, the Confederation of Foreign African Pupils, Students and Trainees (CESAM) in Morocco has been representing the students within the country and working in collaboration with the Moroccan International Cooperation Agency (AMCI), the institution responsible for organising the education of African students. The chief role of this confederation is to support students, to organise activities throughout the year, and to represent African countries in Morocco.

Meeting other Africans plays a key role in the students' self-identification. Within the cosmopolitan African community, however, different sub-communities and identities are established, with language and nationality being the most important reference points. It is for instance customary to talk of French speakers, English speakers or Portuguese speakers, who see themselves as distinct groups, and to attribute particular character traits to the other groups. Most French speakers, for example, describe Portuguese speakers as being more 'Latinos' than 'African', because of their creole culture and strong links to Portugal (Interview 4).

But, given the existence of supporting structures set up by the national student offices, the most prominent aspect for identification is nationality. The integration of new arrivals into the community of their compatriots is so effective that national consciousness can arise or develop during the stay in Morocco. Thus, one Fulbe student from the Casamance region of Senegal (which has a longstanding separatist movement) actively developed a stronger 'Senegalese' identity by spending time with other Senegalese students and learning to speak Wolof once in Morocco (Interview 4).

6.2. Community life in Morocco: caught between solidarity and control

The national communities, when they are of a considerable size, therefore play a major role in

students' lives. The community is experienced as a source of support and solidarity. However, it is also seen as an organ of social control. Students feel compelled to observe the rules and customs of the home country, and female students in particular feel they are being monitored and restrained in their freedom to act. In fact, the lifestyle lived by female students in Morocco can have repercussions on their reputation upon returning to their home country. A Comorian student, for example, had serious problems with her family when she took the liberty of plaiting her hair in Morocco since, according to Comorian etiquette, such a hairstyle is only worn by girls of dubious reputation (Interview 8).

This is an illustration of the informative and supportive but also controlling role played by transnational networks between Morocco, the home country, and other migrant communities. These communities are too small and understudied to assess their influence within the larger transnational community. However, the way in which the Moroccan experience is lived out and the different possibilities for self-identification mirror to some extent the lives of transmigrants. Sub-Saharan students may for example feel black in one particular setting, Burkinabe in another, and elsewhere go on to identify themselves with the cosmopolitan Christian community. Whilst they remain in a fairly small community, their stay in Morocco is an exemplary transnational experience which, given the students' aspirations, could be continued in other countries.

6.3. Altered plans for the future

The students' migratory plans were only rarely restricted to their studies in Morocco. In fact, 82% of the students interviewed in 2006 said that they wanted to continue their studies in another country, or even work there. The most desirable destination among French speakers, Portuguese speakers and English speakers alike was France, mentioned by 55.9% of the students. This destination makes sense in educational terms, given that studies in Morocco take place within an educational system based on the French model and may therefore represent a first step towards studies abroad. France is followed by Canada (15.3%), the USA (9%), the United Kingdom (7.2%), Belgium (6.3%) and Portugal (1.8%). Italy, the Netherlands, Tunisia, Japan and Malaysia were each mentioned only once (Survey 2006).

Whilst they hoped that they would be able to continue along this path and reach new destinations, students were also aware of the limits of their ability to migrate. Thus, a number of them expected to stay in Morocco for a few years or more, whilst developing professional links with their country of origin. Othman explained:

I'd prefer to do it here even if it's just two years' experience before moving on, just think, if I spend two years working for the Moroccan press. I'm working like a diplomat behind the scenes, because I still think I'm well placed to build understanding between the two countries. (Interview 4)

The stay of former sub-Saharan graduates in Morocco can stimulate links and professional contacts between the country of origin and Morocco, or even enable the circulation of knowledge and know-how.

The survey conducted six years later (in 2012) shows that the plans to reach new destinations were rarely fulfilled. Among 95 of the students I had interviewed in 2006, 67 had graduated and 28 were still studying. Among the 67 graduates, 26 had gone back home, 25 were still in Morocco and five were working in a developed country (Survey 2012). Although the numbers provided by this survey are not representative, they show some interesting trends. While the majority of former sub-Saharan students aspired to a second migration, only a few were able to realise this wish. In contrast, Morocco seems to become a country of settlement and work for sub-Saharans who graduate there.

Due to capitalist restructuring, social changes and the demographic transition that Morocco is facing today, the country is entering a migratory transition phase characterised by the increase in both emigration flows and movement back and forth, and the number of immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa who will settle permanently in Morocco (de Haas 2014). While sub-Saharans settling in Morocco are usually portrayed as unskilled labour migrants, the student mobility studied in this article seems to indicate that the circulation of high-skilled individuals between sub-Saharan Africa and Morocco is also increasing.

Some sectors, such as the French-language press sector or telecommunication engineer companies, already employ a large number of former sub-Saharan students who have stayed in Morocco. For Moroccan companies that are investing in Africa, sub-Saharan graduates from Morocco may also represent an important resource as middlemen between their Moroccan employer and their country of origin. However, sub-Saharan graduates are mainly hired as trainees and rarely receive permanent work contracts (Berriane 2012: 171), since foreigners only receive a work permit for jobs for which Moroccans do not have the needed professional qualifications (Khrouz 2013).

The survey also identified many students who, having finished higher education courses, now work in international call centres which have been outsourced to Morocco. But, apart from

Senegalese nationals, who are allowed to work legally without a work permit, sub-Saharans working in call centres are often there on an illegal basis and thus can easily be exploited by their employers. In order to avoid illegality and to keep their residency status, many former sub-Saharan students who are working in call centres register at private schools, without however attending the courses.

Thus, despite the high unemployment rate, especially among university graduates, some work sectors in Morocco provide students with an alternative to returning to their home country and allow them to build up their own professional existence in Morocco. However, the difficulty for foreigners in Morocco to obtain work permits contributes to rather temporary settlements and precarious life situations.

7. Conclusion

Based on the study of sub-Saharan student mobility in Morocco, this paper addresses the relationship between international student mobility and high-skilled migration. It has been shown that the sub-Saharan student's decision to move to Morocco is based on aspirations similar to those of other migrants. The prestigious character of education abroad, the fact that students grow up in cultures of migration and aspire to emigrate are all factors influencing the student's move abroad. Further, the choice of Morocco as training country is not only due to the bilateral agreements between Morocco and sub-Saharan states but is also influenced by the existence of social networks linking the students to the host country. In addition, the experience of otherness in Morocco contributes to shaping a sense of belonging among students and their identification with a larger transnational and cosmopolitan community of sub-Saharan Africans.

Like other sub-Saharan migrants temporarily settling in Morocco, students see the country as ideally one stage of a longer migration – one that is supposed to be followed by further migration for study or work. However, like other migrants transiting through Morocco, students rarely achieve a second move to a developed country, and staying in Morocco becomes an alternative to returning to their home country. Former sub-Saharan students tend therefore to stay in Morocco, even though the difficulty in getting work permits and the high unemployment rate among university graduates in Morocco leads to temporary and precarious work conditions.

However, Morocco's increasing economic integration in the sub-Saharan region and the

establishment of Moroccan companies in Africa might contribute in the near future to an increase in demand for high-skilled labour that has been socialised in both sub-Saharan countries and Morocco. This might contribute to a better professional integration of sub-Saharan high-skilled migrants in the Moroccan labour market and might further influence Morocco's transition from an emigration to an immigration country, reinforcing even more the transnational movements back and forth between Morocco and sub-Saharan Africa.

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Appendix

[insert Table 2 here]

Tables with captions

Table 1: Countries of residence of family members living abroad (Survey 2006)

Country	Number	Percentage
France	42	28.0
United States	13	8.7
Portugal	9	6.0
United Kingdom	4	2.7
Nigeria	3	2.0
Other European countries	7	4.6
Other African countries	7	4.6
Other countries	4	2.7
No family abroad	61	40.7
Total	**150**	**100.0**

Table 2: List of sub-Saharan students interviewed in 2006

Interview Nr.	Nationality	Sex/Age
1	Cape Verde	F/21
2	DRC	F/25
3	Togo	M/22
4	Senegal	M/25
5	Mali	M/21
6	Niger	M/22
7	Senegal	M/19
8	Comoros Islands	F/24
9	Comoros Islands	F/26
10	Mali	M/21
11	Mali	M/22
12	Burkina Faso	M/20
13	Senegal	F/22
14	Cameroon	M/17
15	Burundi	M/23
16	Mali	F/23