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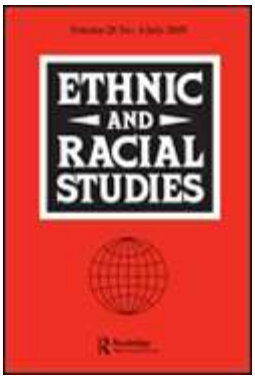

Gender and the dynamics of mobility: Reflections on African migrant mothers and "transit migration" in Morocco

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Abstract

By describing the everyday lives of African migrant mothers and their children in Morocco, this paper highlights how migration and "immobility" in so called "transit countries" are gendering and gendered experiences. Relying on migrants' narratives, the paper demonstrates how migrants' transition to motherhood creates both specific and gendered spaces for agency and particular and gendered constraints upon agency that shape women migrants' mobility dynamics in space and time.

Keywords: Migration, Gender, Morocco, Transit, African migrants, migrant mothers

Introduction

Since the end of the 1990s, the media has reported about increasing numbers of sub-Saharan African migrants are crossing the Sahara and northern Africa over land with the intention of eventually accessing southern European countries (Belguendouz, 2009, De Haas, 2007). As the migratory experience of such migrants involves stop-overs of varying length in different African and north African countries, they are often referred to as "transit migrants".

The term "transit migration" is increasingly used by scholars, and policy makers in Europe (Düvell, 2008, Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2008). It either refers to a kind of "ongoing mobility", a movement across space, involving a set of strategies for undocumented border crossing (Düvell, 2006) or instead to a

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period of "involuntary immobility" in which migrants are somehow "stuck" in a country against their will (Carling, 2002). Critical voices (Düvell, 2006, De Haas, 2007) have noted that "transit" is a politically laden concept of questionable validity to conceptualise what are probably new, contemporary migratory movements (King, 2002).

Yet the idea of "transit" as "temporary immobility" does represent a counterweight to the almost exclusive focus on mobility that characterises much of current migration theory (Hammar et al., 1997) as well as complicating current notions of "settlement" (Vertovec, 2006). As such, transit represents a challenge to dichotomist representations to mobility and immobility in migration literature and exemplifies the complexity of the relationship between both concepts.

There seems to be a need to find new ways to conceptualise human mobility as a dynamic process that can lead to fragmented journeys when people are able to move about only to get stuck in places where they did not intent to be in the first place (Collyer and De Haas, 2010). This gap is also partly due to the fact that neither rational choice models nor structural or network approaches to migration theory can fully account for the tensions between migrants aspirations to migrate and their actual abilities to do so (Carling, 2002).

This paper uses a gender perspective to unravel some new aspects in the dynamics of transit migration in Morocco by drawing on Doreen Massey's (1993) power geometry of space. A focus on gender highlights some of the connections between migrants' aspirations and abilities of mobility because this perspective allows analytical space for the interplay of migrants' agency and the structures surrounding them (Wright, 1995).

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Setting the scene: The representation of transit migrants in Morocco

The total sub-Saharan migrant population in Morocco is estimated to range between 4500 and 10000 people, of which women are supposed to represent between 20-30 per cent, that is to say between 1400-3000 people. (Médecins sans Frontieres, 2010, Keynaert et al., 2008, Khachani, 2008, Mghari, 2008). These estimates refer mostly to undocumented migrants because the number of recognised refugees among them is low[i] and students, diplomats and other regular residents from sub-Saharan Africa are not taken into consideration.

Despite this, the existing socio-economic profiles of transit migrants in Morocco have been predominantly based on information from male migrants (Collyer, 2007, Khachani, 2008, Lahlou, 2005, Wender, 2004, Mghari, 2008, Barros et al., 2002). On the one hand, this is due to the fact that some data on transit migrants in Morocco has been gathered before the events of 2005 in Ceuta and Melilla in the informal migrant camps around Oujda, Tanger and Ceuta where women with children were not often observed (Collyer, 2007, Wender, 2004). On the other hand, researchers have also admitted that access to women has generally been difficult to negotiate (Barros et al., 2002, Mghari, 2008, Women's Link Worldwide, 2009).

Therefore, existing studies on transit migrants in Morocco implicitly invoke the image of the "typical transit migrant" as young, male, single and highly mobile. Lahlou (2005), for example says about "typical irregular migrants":

> "*He* is ....a Congolese, Nigerian, ...a Cameroonian,.....*He* is between 18 and 30/32 years old.....*this migrant* is a small business*man*, a farmer or also unemployed,... For the most motivated ones, their transfer to Europe starts one or two weeks after their arrival in Morocco..." (Lahlou, 2005, p.8, emphasis added)[ii]

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But it is not only that women migrants are often overlooked in studies on transit migration in Morocco in this way. When they are mentioned, women migrants are often described as being under male control during their migratory project. For example, Mghari (2008, p.9) states that women migrants seem to be often under "male tutorship", a view which is also implicit in the study by Women's Worldwide (Women's Link Worldwide, 2009) which found that most women interviewed had a "travel husband" who apparently controlled and/or protected them during their migratory project.

Strikingly also, where female migrants in Morocco have been the focus of research, their situation is often analysed in relation to sexual violence and/or trafficking issues (Medecins sans Frontieres, 2010, Keynaert et al., 2008, Sarehane, 2009, Women's Link Worldwide, 2009). Without wanting to negate the importance and gravity of these issues in migrant women's life in Morocco, the strong focus on sexual violence and male control in both research and policy making implicitly reinforces an image of female transit migrants in Morocco as victims, with little agency over their decision to migrate or their subsequent trajectory in Morocco. In contrast to male migrants, who's migration processes are often depicted as strategically planned and economically motivated moves, women's mobility appears to be "forced", and not of their own volition.

There has also been little attention paid to migrants' families and children in research and policy making in Morocco. With regards to children, the Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) census (2010) claims that children represent no more than nine per cent of the total migrant population in Morocco, which, in absolute numbers, would be equivalent to about 400. However, aid organisations estimate the total number of children to be significantly higher than that. This is also reflected in research by Keygnaert et. al. (2008) who found that 45 per cent of all women interviewed were living with one child or more in Morocco, whereas this

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was true for only 30 per cent of all male participants in their survey. This appears to indicate that a considerable proportion of both male and female migrants in Morocco are actually living there with their children.

These figures also suggest that women are more likely to live with their children and/or spouses in Morocco than men, even though it is not clear whether this is a consequence of migration or if they migrated as part of a male head of household and with children. The studies by Mghari (2008), Keygnaert, et. al. (2008), MSF (Medecins sans Frontieres, 2010) and Kastner (2010) all indicate that many women migrants become pregnant during the migratory project and while in Morocco. This seems to be in line with observations made in several NGO programmes aimed at migrant children, which are primarily targeting babies, toddlers and pre-school aged children. This family dimension throws up questions about the gendered differences in migrants' mobility strategies in Morocco.

By highlighting the stories of some women migrants and their children, I hope to contribute to a more diversified and complex image of female transit migration in Morocco that includes a perspective on families. This perspective also highlights the way in which gender, as a structural factor of power inequality, can both constrain and enable movement.

Immobility, transit and the idea of power geometry and gendered geographies of power

Feminists in Africa and Europe alike have shown how women's (im) mobilities are often shaped by their family and caring responsibilities and influence women's agency in the migration process (Archambault, 2010, Dodson, 1998, Koffman et al., 2000, Zontini, 2001).

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However, feminists have also stressed that, as a relational and social category, gender identities and roles are never fixed but changing according to shifting power inequalities in time and space. (Pessar and Mahler, 2003) In this sense, mothers' (and fathers') roles and choices during the migration process change with the places they move to and the time they are participating in new social networks. Accordingly, having family responsibilities in transit countries is likely to put particular constraints on migrants' choices and can alter their social roles and identities during the migration project.

Doreen Massey (1993) has provided a useful approach to conceptualise these dynamics through the power geometry of space. Massey argues that globalisation has increased the social differences between people and places, even though it is resulting in increasing mobility, flows and interconnections between places:

> "For different social groups and different individuals are placed in very distinct ways in relation to these flows and interconnections. This point concerns not merely the issue of who moves and who doesn't, although that is an important element of it. It is also about power in relation to the flows and the movement. Different social groups have distinct relationships to this anyway-differentiated mobility: some are more in charge of it than others, some initiate flows and movement, others don't, some are more on the receiving end of it than others, and some are effectively imprisoned by it". (Massey, 1993:61)

She alerts us to the fact that power relations inherent in structural differences between people, such as gender, class, race or age must be taken into consideration when analysing different forms of mobility because " the ways in which people are inserted into and placed within time-space compression are highly complicated and extremely varied" (1993:62) Pessar and Mahler (2003) elaborate on Massey in their framework for gendered geographies of power and introduce the concept of "social location" as

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> "Persons' positions within interconnected power hierarchies created through historical, political, economic, geographic, kinship-based and other socially stratifying factors. ....hierarchies of class, race, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality and, of course, gender, operate at various levels that affect an individual or groups' social location." (Pessar and Mahler, 2003:816)

By considering "social location" as a fluid concept that is both created, shaped and changed through individuals own resourcefulness, imagination and structural positioning in power hierarchies, Pessar and Mahler draw attention to ways in which individual agency and structural factors articulate through power and imagination to shape mobility strategies.

Understanding the dynamics of mobility in this way also alters our understanding of "place". In this context, Massey explains how processes of globalisation have stretched out social relations over time and space which give "place" a new, progressive meaning:

> "It is ....possible to envisage an alternative interpretation of place. In this interpretation, what gives a place its specificity is not some long internalized history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of relations, articulated together at a particular locus. ....the uniqueness of place or a locality, in other words is constructed out of particular interactions and mutual articulations of social relations, social processes, experiences and understandings, in a situation of co-presence, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are actually constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself".... (Massey, 1993:66)

By linking the concept of social location to Massey's concept of the "progressive sense of place", we can explain how social interactions in particular places can actually *shift* peoples' positions in relation to flows and interconnections. This idea is also a useful concept for conceiving "immobility in transit" and its relation to the mobility dynamics of migrant mothers with children. Massey clarifies that her progressive concept of place describes processes

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(1993:67). In this sense, it is possible to imagine transit in Morocco as a "process" too, rather than a static period of time in migrants' lives. Instead of focusing on the duration of transit, it is the changing nature of social relations on various levels that gives "transit" its particular meaning of "place" and conditions migrants' power with relation to their control over flows and movement.

The crucial value of Massey's progressive sense of place, power geometry of space and Pessar and Mahler's (2003) gendered geographies of power is to explain migrants' agency while recognising the structural constraints imposed by time, space and power inequalities. These insights are useful for understanding the way in which women with children travel differently and also why they might be more prone to "getting stuck" along the way in places like Morocco but not in others. I will draw on these conceptual frameworks in the remainder of the paper to explore how migration and immobility in transit are influenced by gender, time and place. I am going to do this by focusing on four different moments in which children can influence women's power over mobility and immobility. The first one is when children are taken on the migratory journey, the second moment is the impact of migration on motherhood and gender identity when children are born during the journey, the third moment is how motherhood during migration influences decisions to move on and the last one is how children in transit can change women's options to return to their home countries.

Methods

The remainder of this paper draws on my on-going research to address such questions. The data used here is based on ethnographic research with sub-Saharan migrants in Rabat. For the purpose of this paper, I have used data from in-depth interviews with 19 female and five male migrants with children in their charge (two men were the partners of two of the women interviewed). Even

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though seven of the migrants were recognised refugees, none of them had a legal residency and work permit in Morocco.

The methodological focus of the research lies in the use of narrative and observation to describe life in transit from a migrants' point of view. Respondents were interviewed repeatedly during the summer 2009 and again in the spring and summer 2010. The interviews were conducted in an unstructured way, mostly in their homes or while accompanying them in their daily activities and at work. This strategy also implied that the content of the conversations and exchanges often responded to migrants' own priorities and time schedules. In this way, migrants contributed to the shape of the themes that gradually emerged. The accounts reproduced here represent recurrent themes that have come up with different migrants but by no means claim to be representative of all women migrants with children in Rabat.

None of the interviews were taped, either because respondents declined permission or because I felt that this device altered the rapport negatively. Because of their undocumented status, migrants generally felt uneasy about the possibility of being identified when taped or photographed, fearing deportation. In certain cases, I felt that formal interview situations with tape recorders or notepad reminded migrants of institutional assessments by international organisations and they behaved as if they had to stick to a particular discourse in order to be taken seriously. The data that I am presenting are therefore extracts from field notes. The notes are not literal transcriptions as conversations were often conducted in broken English or French. All names have been changed to respect anonymity.

How children can influence decisions to migrate

Piper (2005) notes that in some contexts, particularly negative attitudes towards divorced, widowed, childless or single women often act as incentives for them to

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migrate, whereas mothers are expected to stay. When they migrate nevertheless, mothers tend to leave their children at home, mostly in the care of family members, in order to recover them later, once their situation is stable. (Zontini, 2001, Maziwa, 2010, Diaz and Kuhner, 2007) This suggests that it is generally more difficult to migrate together with children.

By contrast, seven women I interviewed had taken their children with them. Interestingly, those who had done so had migrated with a male companion, or followed him. While most of these women were not the initiators of the migration project, the decision to take the children *was* often taken by the women themselves, consciously and autonomously, even sometimes in contradiction to the explicit will of children's fathers. This suggests that some women might migrate with their partners in order to avoid a decrease in status as "single" mothers, or "left behind" wives, even if this might increase the difficulty of the migratory project.

> Emma's husband, a Congolese government official, had fled the country and had been granted asylum in Morocco whereas she stayed with her three children. Two years later she decided to follow her husband even though he tried to convince her not to do so because he was not working, had no place for them to live and feared that the children would have to abandon their education. Emma insisted because of the humiliation she felt daily: "It is difficult seeing your car passing by with a different driver in it, and you are standing at the bus stop, in the heat, being squashed when everybody wants to get into the bus. That is not easy.."
>
> Since Emma joined her husband together with the children, the family lives in extremely difficult circumstances, but Emma says: "At least we are together, and have each other to comfort when things go wrong. We may only eat rice on certain days, but at least we share it, all around the same table. If I'd stayed, my life would have lost its sense and I would have lost my husband."

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There are also other cases, in which women decide to take only some of their children, mostly the small ones, in order to be able to migrate together with their husbands. This is the case of Jules and Sara:

> Sara is from Central African Republic (CAR) where she married Jules, the son of a Congolese refugee. They have two daughters. Jules' decided to migrate to Europe in order to improve the family's economic situation, but Sara was against this because she feared the family would break up. She did not want to stay in CAR on her own, in her sister's house, without a job and being dependent on the favours of other family members for her maintenance. In face of Jule's determination to leave, her only option was to ask her husband to take her and the children with him. Finally, Jules accepted to take her and baby Victoria, who was six months old at the time and still breast feeding. Sara agreed sadly to leave her older daughter with her family, so that she could go to school until Jules and Sara could collect her. After almost two years in Morocco, she now constantly thinks about returning to Central African Republic, but she thinks- as the wife- she is not authorised to take this decision and she feels that she asked for it when she insisted on migrating.

The examples show that despite being generally seen as an obstacle to migration, children can also become the reason for doing so. In the examples I have given, this is both the case for "voluntary" and "forced" migrants, but highly dependent on the "social location" of the women concerned: In my research, mostly married women that had the option to migrate together with their husbands would take their children. It is possible that for these women, migration became a way to prevent loss of social status at home for themselves and the children if husbands were leaving (Chant, 1992, quoted in Archambault, 2010). In these instances, mothers, who normally are left behind, decide to migrate in order to *maintain* their status as wives and mothers within the family. Taking children is vital for achieving the aims of this strategy because they are used in order to clarify men's financial and moral responsibilities towards their wives and children.

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Coming back to the conceptual discussion on power geometries and gendered geographies of power, the example shows that some women, even though disadvantaged in their access to mobility by their "social location" as wives and mothers, succeed in migrating when this is done as a family together with (and because of) their children. In these cases, it is also evident that migration is their only option to prevent the negative effect of the mobility of others (their husbands) on their own status in their home country. However, while leaving with the family may be the way to prevent their loss of power and status as a woman at home, this does not mean that the migratory process *as a whole* implies unrestricted access to mobility or status gain for women. On the contrary, once begun, women's trajectories continue to be conditioned by unequal gender relations and their ability to *stay* mobile is continuously affected by them.

When children are born along the way - Getting stuck in space and time

The majority of my female interviewees, (14 out of 19 women) have had (either first or additional) children during their stay in Morocco or in Algeria, while crossing the desert to reach Morocco from Niger. Three women had become pregnant there as a result of rape, as in Lucy's case:

> Ten years ago, Lucy had fled her house in Congo with her husband and her 5 year old son after her father was shot and her husband severely insured by insurgents. Her husband later died in the Algerian desert and she was forced to continue the journey alone with her son. When she was apprehended by Moroccan police in Oujda, the Moroccan border town with Algeria, she was raped by a Moroccan border guard and fell pregnant. She fell into a deep depression. Not knowing what to do with two children in her charge, she was unable to work or provide for them, and fellow travelling companions helped her to look after her son. "I was like in shock for a long time. I couldn't think. I only sat there, all day. And I always had these headaches. I still have them sometimes. I just did not know what to do. "Lucy has never attempted to cross the border since but found a new husband with whom she had another child since then. She lives with her family in Rabat.

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Albeit hearing frequently disturbing and violent stories on rape and pregnancy in Algeria and Morocco, most of the women I interviewed had children in Morocco as a result of consensual sexual relationships. These pregnancies, however, were mostly unwanted and some led to the break -up of the relationships. In many cases, the children born in Morocco already had sisters and brothers that had been born in the country of origin.

The relative control that my interviewees had over how they travel, and where to, seem dependent on their social location, the particular context in which they find themselves and the particular power relations that are played out in this particular place. This is well illustrated by elaborating on my previous examples.

Emma arrived in Morocco by plane almost directly from Brazzaville, using a large part of the families' savings to finance the journey. Lucy and Sara, by contrast, came via land through Cameroun, Benin, Mali, Niger, Algeria and entering Morocco through Oujda. Due to the lack of money to finance the next leg of the journey, both families spent long periods of time in different countries, trying to find work wherever they could. Other researchers have documented that Lucy's, Jules' and Sara's story and migratory strategy over land is similar to that of many other migrants who travel with little resources- with or without children (Bazonzi, 2008, Van Hear, 2004, Khachani, 2008). However, because of their relative independence from smugglers during their migratory journey through many parts of Africa (Bazonzi, 2007), they are partly in charge of "time-space compression" (Massey, 1993). They are able to move, albeit with interruptions, almost everywhere they want. In that sense, they can decide how and where to move within the realm of their financial, social and cultural possibilities. (Van Hear, 2004)

However, Lucy's and also Sara's relative control over the timing and type of migratory strategy diminishes when they travel through the Sahara from Niger,

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over Algeria to Morocco. My interview data suggest that women with children experience most difficulties in their migratory project there, as this part of the journey is heavily controlled by smuggling rings and is therefore expensive and very strictly organised according to very male dominated power hierarchies in which single women migrants are particularly vulnerable and subordinated to male control. Migrants pay middlemen who then guide them to migrant houses in different towns in the desert, where they have to wait (often crammed together in small rooms) until they can continue the journey or where they have to work until they can pay for the next part of the journey. Sandrine was only one of several women to tell me about her traumatic experience of being stuck in a desert town without money to continue the journey:

> "you just want to get away from all these men,...they are everywhere, they sleep in the same room, they eat from the same plate, ...So you do whatever to get away from there. So you pay with what you have got, with your body, anything. You clean their mess. You do things you would never imagine yourself to be doing elsewhere."

Research has documented how women and children are often sexually abused or forced to work in order to pay for the next part of the trip (Keynaert et al., 2008). Often, they engage in prostitution in order to make the necessary money to continue the trip through the desert (Noel, 2007, Keynaert et al., 2008, Kastner, 2010). This is particularly so if they are travelling alone, or are separated from their male travel companions.

Lucy's believes that she would not have been raped if her husband had been with her. Jules and Sara tell me how travelling with a child put them into a particularly vulnerable situation during their trip through the desert, because of their increased needs for medication, shade, food and water. Sara remembers that they had to pay for everything.

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Even in Morocco, single women migrants are vulnerable to abuse and social exclusion because they are facing triple discrimination as undocumented foreigners, poor and black women. Jeanne from Cameroun makes it plain to me:

> "It is difficult to find work here without papers, you see. Nobody employs black domestics. When they do, they treat you badly and they pay nothing. I have tried, I have found nothing. So what do you think is left to do?"

In these circumstances, women often try to increase their status and protection by finding a partner with whom to build a family. However, often this does not work out and they end up alone with a child to care for. Marie from Ivory Coast is a case in point. When she lost her job as a domestic in a development worker's house, she hoped to be able to found a family with her boyfriend.

> "But when I got pregnant, he said he didn't want the responsibility. He wanted me to have an abortion. I did not want that because you know how dangerous it is here. So he left. And I had the baby on my own."

In this sense, the particular migratory dynamics of African women in Morocco make unwanted pregnancies and rape more likely, and push them towards assuming caring responsibilities they did not necessarily look for and sometimes force them to interrupt their journeys. This is how children then shape migratory processes into fragmented journeys and to "transit".

The cases show that women can be active agents at the moment of choosing to migrate, but remain structurally disadvantaged by gender during their migratory trajectory (Pessar and Mahler, 2003). This disadvantage does not merely play out at the moment of departure or arrival, but is something that women have to grapple with throughout the migratory journey. Whereas they are able to compensate for power inequalities during large parts of the journey, particularly if they are counting on "male protection" or family relations, they are

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increasingly constrained in their mobility in places where the particular constellations of social relations and their social status as mothers put them in situations of great vulnerability, such as in the desert where mobility is controlled by mostly male smugglers and other gatekeepers.

Children and the options for women to continue migration from Morocco

Whilst children can represent an impediment to mobility, they are also often perceived as a means of enhancing opportunities to migrate to Europe. Whether or not this is true, some of the mothers I interviewed in Morocco believe that they are in an advantaged position relative to their fellow male migrant counterparts.

This is the case of Chrystal and Peter, a couple from Nigeria who came to Morocco in July 2009. When I met them in April 2010, Chrystal was 5 months pregnant. When they arrived in Morocco, neither of them knew that Nigerians could get deported once they arrived on the Spanish coast. However, as one of the flatmates from Nigeria had actually been deported twice, they realised that the prospects of travelling were actually not that easy. So they decided to change tactics. When I asked Peter why they decided to have a child right now, in such difficult living conditions, he said:

> "This child is my ticket to Europe. " He then explains that he is now trying to get the money together for Chrystal's ticket to Europe by boat , while still pregnant. Once she arrives there, he is confident that she will be taken to a shelter where she cannot be deported because she is pregnant. Once she has given birth, he can then try to join them there, and his risk of being deported will be very small as they can always allege family reunification.

However, when I met Peter again in the summer, the prospects for Chrystal's upcoming trip appeared rather dim as he had not managed to gather the necessary money. The price for a place on the boat varies between 700 and

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1500 Euros. This is an exorbitant sum to get together in a short time, if you have no connections to Europe sending financial support in the form of remittances or if you don't engage in some or other form of semi-legal activities in Morocco- neither of which are options for Peter. Kastner (2010: 22) documents similar strategies in her research on Nigerian migrants in Spain and Morocco and furthermore provides the evidence that children and pregnancies can actually seriously deter deportation and rape as well as symbolise an eminent, new beginning. Like Kastner, I found that babies are often given names like "Hope" or "Destiny", pointing to the uncertain period of waiting but also to the prospects of a better future.

This strategy is certainly not limited to Nigerian women, as the story of Nicole from Congo well evidences:

> In 2006, Nicole travelled to Morocco by plane when she was 7 months pregnant on her sister's French passport. She then wanted to take the boat to get to Spain where she thought she could manage to get Spanish citizenship if her son was born there, and would then be able to bring her husband over later on. However, she was apprehended and sent back to Morocco. "They didn't put me to prison. They just let me go because I was pregnant." She is still living in Morocco with her son and without husband.

Nicole's story demonstrates how the new beginning she had hoped for, stagnated over time into the inability to continue her family life together with her husband. She experiences this as a waste of her life and particularly as a loss of her social status.

Often, the difficult experiences during migration as well as the stagnation in Morocco push people to desperate attempts to cross the border to Europe, particularly after several frustrated attempts. In these situations, several mothers I met had entrusted one or several of their children to other people who then

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smuggled them over the border to Spain and from there to France and other European countries:

> After a divorce from her husband in Cameroun, Marie Lou decided to travel with her son to Europe. While in Morocco, she entrusted her six year old son to a Congolese middleman to bring over to Spain and from there to France. She was told that African children were able to get French citizenship and once this had happened, she would then be able to travel legally as well, claiming citizenship as the child's mother. Upon arrival in France, her son was immediately put into institutional care. He has been living there ever since, and although Marie Lou is in contact with him, she is not allowed to join him, because- according to her information- she has lost her right of legal guardianship to the French state on the grounds of abandonment. She still hopes that once her son is 18 years old he will be able to bring her over to France to live with him.

Some of the refugees with children are determined to stay in Morocco because they believe that having children increases their possibilities to be resettled legally in a European country.

> Asma came from Ivory Coast in 2004 together with two children and was recognised by UNHCR in Morocco as a refugee whereas her Congolese husband was not. As a consequence, her husband has left her, not seeing any future for him in Morocco. She decided to stay because she believes that women with children are among the refugees that are most likely to be resettled to a European country by the UNHCR. She believes that she should not give up this chance, particularly because of her children's future. Meanwhile, however, her children do not go to school and she is not allowed to work in Morocco.

These four cases clearly illustrate that children are sometimes used to sustain migration strategies that then, however, turn out to be extremely risky and with few chances of success. In other cases, the fear for their children's life may also deter migrants from illegal border crossing to Europe. In any sense, children shape the imaginary and actual migration strategies open to migrants over time and therefore also have implications for the way in which these migrants live their

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life in Morocco. In some of these instances, women find that motherhood supposedly places them in a better position with respect to migration to Europe and children then often prolong the time spent in Morocco, until the "right moment" comes to continue the migratory project.

Children and their impact on social location in immobility

In certain ways, children do not only condition mobility towards Europe; they can also become a reason for not returning to one's home country when it becomes clear that migration to Europe is increasingly difficult. Amina from Nigeria is an example:

> Since 2002, Amina has been living with her husband in Rabat where she has given birth to three children. Even though the family lives mostly on begging, Amina cannot think of going back to Nigeria now. She tells me it is because of the shame: "The only thing I have achieved is this!", she says, pointing to her three children." I cannot bring this back to my mother, three more mouths to fill and nothing to help her with buying the rice. No, I cannot go back like this. "

Women who have children of mixed race, for example, like Lucy, are particularly resistant to returning to their home country, fearing the reaction of their communities. Often, having a child of mixed race is associated with prostitution, promiscuity or rape. If this goes along with economic failure, migrant mothers fear rejection and social marginalisation on their return to their home country. This is so, because, in their eyes, having a child of mixed race –and out of marriage- decreases their possibilities of social upward mobility once back home and can only be compensated by economic success. Esther's story is illustrative of this point.

> Before migration, Esther was renting her own little apartment, running her own hairdressing salon and enjoying a rather independent lifestyle in Abidjan.

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> When she came to Morocco in 2008 to expand her ventures into the import of food stuffs, she rented a room in a lower – middle class neighbourhood, sharing a flat with Ivory Coast refugees. At that time, she had a valid visa and hardly ever mingled with undocumented African migrants in Rabat.
>
> She then started a relationship with the owner of the flat, a married Moroccan civil servant, and fell pregnant. She was ashamed of the prospect of returning to Ivory Coast unmarried with a mixed raced child. Staying in Morocco, however, also meant that her source of revenue dried up and her visa would run out. When I met her the first time, her baby was two months old and she was living in a basement room in the same flat. She survived on occasional hairdressing and occasional monetary gifts from the child's father, which he pushes underneath her door in an envelope.

Esther's social status deteriorated because of her pregnancy and particularly because of her mixed race child. She was now facing exclusion from her family back home, the Ivory Coast community in Rabat and Moroccans. With time, she felt more and more stuck in an environment of exclusion and immobility. However, she was far from giving up on this situation and considered her options: either making a lot of money in Morocco so that she could go back to the Ivory Coast with her child without having to depend on anyone there or staying in Morocco and building up her life there, which inevitably meant finding some stable income and a legal residency permit. Both options clearly show that she intends to find a way to compensate her lack of social status through enhanced economic status. In order to achieve either of the two options, she felt that she had to make an effort to distinguish herself from the other transit migrants in Rabat.

> She made it clear to me several times that she did not feel to belong to the groups of "destitute irregular migrants" (even though she was also irregular at that time, sharing a flat with other irregular migrants and using the same support structures. In fact, I met her at Terre des Hommes, where migrant mothers with young children could get help.) Her dream is to set up a restaurant or a hair dressing salon, designed to cater for the African " upper class " in Rabat, like the members of embassies, students and

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> businessmen. According to her, this would a) help her to establish the connections she needed for improving her status within the African community and b) improve her profits as these people had purchase power.

The example shows that migration can impact on the way in which motherhood is experienced and lived because it can lead to changes in "social location". Esther's mixed race child and having a child out of marriage have not only influenced her mobility, but her social status, her networks, her options to work in Morocco, and also her ability to return home. Over time, however, these roles and identities as a "single mother" can be used by women to increase their economic status and can be adapted favourably to the context.

> When I met Esther nine months later, she had actually managed to borrow the necessary money to set up a hair salon in the living room of the apartment. She was insisting proudly that she managed this essentially through funds from a church based organisation for particularly vulnerable migrants- among those single mothers. Apart from that, she had managed to convince her daughter's father to allow her to use the apartment as salon, despite the strong disagreement voiced by the other flatmates over her occupation of the communal space.

Esther has successfully used her position as a single mother to negotiate with her ex-partner for help, securing preferential treatment before all the other migrants in the house. She has deliberately used support networks designed for particularly vulnerable migrant collectives in order to improve her situation, while at the same time trying hard to distinguish herself from this group. This shows how the social relations that migrants build in a place and that are positioning them in relation to mobility are sometimes also negotiated through the gender roles that women want to play. In some instances, the role of the victim and forced migrant appears beneficial to increasing their chances for onward migration or successful return.

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Conclusion

This paper has shown that the interplay between structural and individual factors that shape women's mobility and immobility in transit is complex. While structural constraints on mobility are real in women's lives, the examples in this paper also show that children and gender are often used by women deliberately to enhance their possibilities for mobility. The extent to which this is possible is not only determined by power relations but also by time and space. Women's gender roles and identities shift in space and time, repositioning them in relation to possibilities for movement. This paper illustrates women migrants' constant struggle to keep on moving or to improve their status over time, despite their disadvantageous position in relation to both physical and social mobility.

The stories of women migrants with children in Morocco show that the gendered and gendering aspects of migration are not mutually exclusive but instead interact with each other. There is a need to conceptualise gender inequalities as real and constraining women's choices, migratory trajectories and life in transit. However, this does not mean that women migrants are therefore reduced to victims incapable of controlling and directing their migratory projects or their life in Morocco. Women are actively producing and reproducing their gender roles and identities in order to increase access to social and physical mobility, often by incorporating their children into the process.

By using a gender perspective, the paper approaches transit migration epistemologically from a different angle than many other studies. Future research on transit migrants might be enriched by adding such complementary viewpoints, which acknowledge not only gender, but also ethnicity, class, "race" or age as important structural, but non-static factors in shaping *female and male* migrants' mobility strategies.

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[i] According to the UNHCR in Morocco (LI ROSI, A. & RYAN, A., 2010, 'Refugee protection and international migration: a review of UNHCR's role and activities in Morocco', *Policy Development and Evaluation Service, UNHCR*, Geneva,) the total number of female refugees in February 2010 was 143, which represent 18% of all refugees. Of this, the great majority came from sub-Saharan Africa (mostly Ivory Coast and Democratic Republic of Congo).These numbers exclude asylum seekers.

[ii] My translation from french

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