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Mediterranean Migrations

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Morocco as a Middleman

Suffocating under pressure to protect the borders of “Fortress Europe,” countered by the dreams and optimism of Saharan and Sub-Saharan migrants trying to find a better life, Morocco has been backed into a corner. Because of the geographical location of Morocco as a borderland between Europe and Africa, they are in a position where they feel the need to please their neighbors both above and below them. With the ideas of these neighbors contradicting, there is no way to do so. Instead, Morocco has taken the position of the victim of the migration conflict, claiming to be caught as a middleman. If a victim of anything, Morocco is the victim of nothing more than being challenged by the complexities of a modernizing and globalizing world. The dynamics of their migration network spread much further than just across the Mediterranean, and behaviors of the nation have repercussions on both the European and African continents. While they may be treated as a gatekeeper, it is unreasonable to expect Morocco to be the sole peacekeeper of such complex relations.

The first challenge that Morocco faces is handling the pressure from the EU to keep secure borders. Europe seems to have an obsession with associating migration with insecurity, and thus with high rates of migration they hold security to be a pressing issue. In this regard, the EU aspires to seal its borders and in doing so keep hopeful migrants constrained to travel no further than North Africa (Baldwin-Edwards, 15). One way that the EU has tried to do this is by establishing “buffer zones” which keep migrants not only away from their interior, but even their

own borders. Morocco is expected to act as one of such buffers for the EU (Goldschmidt, 38). In the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, having such a buffer proposes a further challenge. In attempt to keep migrants away from this border, Spain sealed the cities away with fences constructed of a double barrier and barbed wires (Goldschmidt, 39). Much of this was based on pressure that Spain receives from the EU, for as a member, they are held under an even tighter leash than Morocco. The EU holds policies that are strict in their political jargon, but often neglect to admit some of their acceptance, if not need, for immigration. Goldschmidt explains that, “Europe is not opposed to the importation of labor; rather, the EU’s anti-migration policy is mainly motivated by questions of internal politics and identity, as well the linkage of migration with terrorism” (Goldschmidt, 48). While the EU knows that they do still hold a certain dependence and acceptance for the withstanding migration patterns, they choose to label it a “security issue” and demand aid in its solution.

In direct opposition to the EU’s attempts to stop northbound migration, are the Saharan nations that find the Europeans to not only overbearing, but also misunderstanding. While transmigration through northern Africa is a prevalent trend, it is only a piece of African migration patterns, and the piece that the media focuses on. The bigger context of the Sahara must be understood, otherwise, “this particular emphasis on transit migration to Europe, endorsed by much academic writing, feeds an unfounded fear of invasion in the countries north of the Mediterranean, while obscuring the diversity and flexibility of contemporary Saharan motilities and their local impacts” (Brachet, 238). Labor migration across the Sahara and through North Africa in attempt to enter Europe exists, as does migration with North Africa as a destination. However, these migratory patterns are intertwined in a full migration system through which a transportation network exists across the Sahara (Brachet, 246). When migration and

international travel thrives, so does regional movements and trade, as they are all interconnected in the same web (Brachet, 249). Much of the movement in the Sahara is that of mixed transport, and as Brachet states, “global and regional dynamics are intimately related” (253). In Europe’s assuming that all Sahara migration is an attack on them, they are wrong, for only a minority of these migrants are Europe-bound. But further, in their attempts to protect their “security,” they alter with the complex trans-Saharan migration routes and disrupt the well-established dynamics of these African nations. Economic and demographic consequences result in the Sahara.

It must not be neglected that the transmigrant population, those using North Africa as a means to reach Europe, does still prevail. From regions of the Sahara and below, migrants traverse the desert with Morocco, and in the greater distance, Europe, in their sights. Knowing the complex relationship of Europe’s quest for secure borders and Africa’s dependence on their migrant networks, Morocco must determine how to respond to this presence. Goldschmidt addresses the fate of these migrants as he describes them as, “penalized by national and social origin, impoverished by their long voyage, beaten and raped the moment they cross the borders, exploited and marginalized upon arrival in Fortress Europe, and used as political footballs by the regimes of transit countries” (48). Surrounded by such contradicting motives, Moroccan policy buckles under the pressure, resulting in these “political footballs.” These migrants are lost to system corrupted by a lack of global cohesion. Morocco’s transit nation identity is still “inchoate” and the migrants face the consequences of this lack of definition or understanding (Marcelino and Hermon, 883). The transmigrant suffers as society tries to recognize their increasingly prevalent role in society.

In many regards, Morocco falls to the influence of the EU and takes on their motives. The clearest example of this is how increased migration has caused Morocco to, just like the EU,

tie immigration policy with the idea of security (Baldwin-Edwards, 11). Particularly, at the borders of the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, the brutality that Moroccan policy has been a large issue. During raids on the borders of the enclaves in the early 2000s, where exhausted and hopeful transmigrants stormed the border fences, Morocco responded harshly. This treatment was described, “to be at best inadequate, at worst profoundly inhuman” (Baldwin-Edwards, 2). In the immediate response, Morocco met the hopeful and desperate migrants with extreme violence. From there, surviving migrants were either imprisoned or sent away and dumped into the desert in Algeria (Baldwin-Edwards, 12). The lucky ones were deported to their home nations. One Nigerian woman told the New York Times, “I would take the hell back home rather than stay here.” Another Cameroonian man shared similar sentiments in saying, “When I arrived in Morocco, my life changed -- it became a nightmare.” In these respects, a lack of sympathy for their southern neighbors is seen in the Moroccan handling of migration. Because of the power of Europe, it seems they fell to such an influence. They assist in the despair of these migrants; “the disappointment of those who, after having traveled for months or years, can see the lights of Europe on a clear night, but discover that the Fortress is very difficult to penetrate” (Goldschmidt, 39). Morocco lacks sympathy for these people, even knowing the hardship in their own people who too dream of crossing the Mediterranean. In this situation, the way Morocco self-labels as a victim, perhaps suggests that they resent feeling obliged to behave in such a ruthless way.

Morocco must not only think about their security, but also their development as a Nation. In this regard, they seem to have chosen not to fall to the influence of their surroundings, but rather attempt to act in their own best interest. They further complicate relations with both their northern and southern neighbors in their pursuing of their own emigration patterns. As Africans

find them to be acting in hypocrisy and Europeans find them to be invading, Morocco continues to send their own people across the Mediterranean. Migration appears to positively impact development of Morocco as a nation and the sending communities from which these migrants come. At the household level, “migration has enabled households to invest in housing, agriculture, private enterprises and the education of male and female children” (de Haas, 1586). At a more national level, the aid of remittances is huge and North Africa has proven to have the greatest ratio of remittances to GDP of any region of the world (Baldwin-Edwards, 6). Theory continues to find that emigration is linked with development, and a building up of a nation’s status, and Morocco continues to prove such theory to be true. In comparison with much of the African nation, the Moroccans, and North Africans in general, are thriving (Baldwin-Edwards, 9). As they export more of their own people in hopes of development, they further complicate the transcontinental tensions: “Morocco views immigration policy as mainly a security policy, with the country now not only a transit country but also a *de facto* destination country” (Baldwin-Edwards, 11). The nation is questioned for how it can it secures borders to transmigrants, but turns a blind eye at the movements of its own people, knowing the payoff. When questioned on such, Morocco acts victim to the situation.

In some regards, Morocco has been trapped in unfortunate fate in their position as a gatekeeper. Trying to please both the Europeans above them and the Africans below them is not an easy task, if even a plausible one at all. Yet, for Morocco to act victimized to the situation, they neglect to realize that both the EU and the Saharan and Sub-Saharan Africans could argue the same sort of fate. The situation is very hazy, and no clear solution, nor one that pleases all parties, has yet to be offered. In titling his article “Between a Rock & a Hard Place,” Baldwin-Edwards appropriately explains Morocco’s position. In trying to keep a sense of peace in the

Mediterranean and with all of their neighbors, Morocco's policies have fluctuated in how they lean and have led to Morocco being criticized for an inadequate response to the migration question. Yet, when stuck between a rock and a hard place, it is unfair to expect Morocco to hold a perfect solution. With such unrealistic expectations, illegal behaviors, contradiction, and mistreatment will unfortunately prevail. The Mediterranean region must reconfigure their response to the idea of a borderland (Marcelino and Hermon, 901). As relations between the two continents, and across the sea progress, a further sense of cooperation must exist before policy improves.

Works Cited

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