



RACHID BENBIH, *al-Hijrāt al-Nisāʾiyya al-Jadīda fī Afrīqyā: al-Muḥaddidāt wa-l-Daynamiyyāt* [*New Women's Migrations in Africa: Determinants and Dynamics*] (Doha/Beirut: ACRPS, 2021), pp. 440.

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Rachid Benbih's *New Women's Migrations in Africa: Determinants and Dynamics*

explores the role of women in the process of migration in Africa and the routes taken by these women from the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa to Europe through Morocco. It investigates the structural social and political conditions and determinants of women's migration in African societies in the postcolonial era through a critical approach based on ethnographic fieldwork that utilized observation, unstructured interviews, photography, and questionnaires

to analyse the lived experiences of migrant women from Senegal and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in Morocco.

Benbih maps out the economic and social impact of neoliberal transformation projects in Africa, bringing together the micro and the macro in the study of migration, and arguing that the use of common expressions such as “women as actors in society” and “independent women's migration” in many previous literature on the topic conceals a socioeconomic reality imposed on Africa after the continent adopted structural adjustment programs. The author elucidates that he seeks to move beyond an epistemology of silence surrounding the role of women in society to an epistemology of silence on the “role of Western policy” in migration, in particular the impact of structural adjustment policies on the migration of women.<sup>1</sup>

The book notes that most studies on migration have been developed by Western researchers who overlook European policies accountable for the growth of African migration, often failing to pay attention to liberal adjustment policy, its negative consequences for the expansion of migration in Africa, and its role in the emergence of what the book dubs “new women's migrations”.

Benbih contends that migrants use forms of anthropological heritage to confront the pressures of staying in the country of residence, given the limited role played by the structures of Moroccan society in absorbing unregulated migration. Although women migrants take the same routes as men, one of the book's central arguments is that they utilize their sex as a means of securing passage to accommodate their social status to that permitted by law. In this, women use different strategies, such as “forging” documents or claiming refugee status or special social status (pregnancy or accompanying a minor, for example). Another central argument is that women's migration has generated new dynamics within Moroccan society, whether religious, civil, or economic.<sup>2</sup>

The book is divided into three sections. The first examines the dynamics of migration across three chapters that provide an ethnographic overview of the field, focusing on the status of migrants in different

<sup>1</sup> Rachid Benbih, *al-Hijrāt al-Nisāʾiyya al-Jadīda fī Afrīqyā: al-Muḥaddidāt wa-l-Daynamiyyāt* (Doha/Beirut: ACRPS, 2021), p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

neighborhoods of Rabat and Greater Agadir. It traces the relationship between the migrants and local society on the one hand, and the conflict or concord that they bring out on the other, drawing out shared social characteristics and mechanisms in their home countries. The author has produced a gendered ethnography of women's migration to understand the effects of structural adjustment on migrant women, considering migration as a continuous process that is inseparable from the historical context of Senegal and the DRC.

The second section concerns the dynamics of social activity, the socio-professional positions, and the social worlds of migrant women, categorizing the various forms of migrant women's presence and their formation of new socio-professional characteristics, like those working in beauty salons, hairdressing, or counselling centers.<sup>3</sup> It discusses the effects of migration and settlement on migrant women through field interviews, concluding that Morocco offers important opportunities for the social rehabilitation of migrant women and reshapes their identities through new social conditions. It also investigates the institutional relationship that links the migrant to certain institutions in Morocco, such as security centers and health and educational establishments. It explores how integrated women are in civil society institutions, how much they benefit from social services, and how successful they are in building a trusting relationship with Moroccan administrative structures. The author also looks at stigmatizing discourses surrounding color, belonging, and social behavior, and their resistance strategies<sup>4</sup> through celebrations, rituals, self-presentation, and the effect of family ties on the organization of women's social lives.<sup>5</sup>

The third section examines the dynamics of organized action, focusing on the dynamics of religiosity generated by migration to Morocco within the dichotomy of public renunciation and sectarian self-sufficiency, the dynamics of civil activity, and the dynamics of self-employment and the development of employment relations. In this vein, religious leaders have been particularly prominent among migrant women, and their efforts have focused on organizing and providing guidance to these women, rendering religion an important resource used by migrant women to meet their social needs.<sup>6</sup>

The first migrant women's associations and civil Organizations were formed at the intersection of international civil society and migrant women's society, in a way that clearly shows the role of international organizations in strengthening their leadership skills. The author emphasizes the role of anthropological determinants such as the less patriarchal culture of the home country, compared to Moroccan society, which has helped produce civil action among migrant women that is different from Moroccan feminist activity.<sup>7</sup> Conditions of employment have likewise contributed to the creation of new dynamics of work, such as self-employment through migrant women's domestic labor enterprises and hair and beauty salons, as well as migrant women's involvement in union activity, which has helped influence the legal framework for domestic labour. Their positioning within Moroccan social space has meant that they are seen as civil and union actors, leading to a change in their identities.<sup>8</sup>

"Out of a conviction that using clear concepts does not necessarily lead to comprehension, but does at least keep the author safe from misconceptions",<sup>9</sup> the author elaborates on certain concepts that can have multiple meanings, such as "emigration" and "immigration",<sup>10</sup> and explains the difference between overlapping concepts, such as "social activity" and "social action", by reference to their origins and content.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, he employs an important set of concepts that form the conceptual basis of his research, explaining them

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 274-275.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 290-296.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 305-331.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 341-362.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 385-396.

<sup>9</sup> Abdullah Laroui, *Maḥmūd al-Āydiyulūjīyya*, 5th ed. (Beirut/Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqafī al-Arabi, 1993), p. 129.

<sup>10</sup> Benbih, p. 44.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 70-71.

by focusing on aspects of change and settlement, noting the difference between mobility and transmigration, and emphasizing the individual context of each concept and the epistemological problems they raise.<sup>12</sup>

The author pays particular attention to the concept of social dynamics, adopting the comprehensive definition of “social reality, in the process of constant formation revealed by different social mechanisms: events, realities, conflicts, changes”. He is critical of the definition provided by Georges Balandier in his *Sens et puissance*, arguing that it amounts to no more than stereotypical thinking and accusing Balandier of making social dynamics dependent on a structural and systemic approach to society – quite unlike the ethnographic approach adopted by the author.<sup>13</sup>

The author also uses the concept of “anthropological heritage”, borrowed from the French writer Emmanuel Todd. Unlike Todd, who relies on the family structure and its role in transmitting this heritage from the home country to the migrants’ country of settlement, Benbih focuses on the religious dimension of this heritage in the study of migration, the system of kinship, and structures of collective solidarity. In the two sample groups he chooses – migrants from Senegal and from the DRC – the religious dimension is represented by Islam and Christianity respectively, with patriarchal kinship for the Senegalese and matriarchal for the Congolese. Solidarity structures for the Senegalese migrants are principally a matter of religion, and largely comprise the activities of the Tijaniyyah Sufi order, while among Congolese migrants, associational solidarity is more prevalent.<sup>14</sup> The author also employs the concept of social activity, emphasizing the differences between social activity and social action, and explaining that an anthropological approach focuses on what is habitual and regular in religious, social, and cultural behavior, hence his choice of “social activity” over “social action”.

The book adopts Erhard Friedberg’s concept of “organized action”, which he characterizes as “found in every place, inasmuch as mutual reliance forces people to organize themselves and coordinate among themselves in order to ensure successful cooperation”.<sup>15</sup> According to Benbih, this is manifested in groups of migrant women’s self-organization in order to position themselves within social space. Finally, the author uses the concept of “net migration”, i.e. the net development of migration in each country (the number of emigrants compared to the number of immigrants) within a specific time period, to show that African countries have recorded a negative migration rate since the application of the structural adjustment programs that African countries continue to pursue (albeit under different names). In this, he draws on evaluation reports concerning these programs produced by African institutions such as the African Development Bank.<sup>16</sup>

The author concludes with a critical, decolonial perspective on migration, which evokes a post-colonial positionality to understand a migration characterized by the imposition of the programs of international institutions on African countries. This perspective is important because it does not elide the effects of colonialism that have extended into the postcolonial era. While other researchers have adopted this perspective,<sup>17</sup> Benbih does not separate migration from the historical experience of African countries in the postcolonial period. Thereby, the book’s sociological project hopes to shake off the colonial dust under which the sociology of migration has been slumbering, moving beyond the stereotypical thinking that characterizes the colonial perspective.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 151-152.

<sup>17</sup> Nicolas Bancel et al., *Ruptures Postcoloniales: Les nouveaux visages de la société française* (Paris: La Découverte, 2010).

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