


# Chapter 6

## Gender and Border Employment: Exploring Women's Transnational Work Experiences in Morocco

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### ABSTRACT

*Migration represents an important transformative force offering both an emancipatory experience and new border identities. This is driven by the changing labor markets and globalization, which have expanded opportunities for women to cross borders and seek alternatives outside their countries of origin. Cross-border migration and feminization of labor migration are likely to continue. However, women's vulnerability to discrimination, abuse, and exploitation may also increase. Based on qualitative data collected via semi-structured interviews, the study seeks to investigate gendered labor migration and informal employment by focusing on the experiences of sub-Saharan women in the informal sector in Morocco. It explores their motivation, the challenges they face, and the opportunities available to them within the informal Moroccan economy. Finally, the study also investigates the dynamics of identity construction in a diverse environment characterized by cultural, linguistic, geographical, and ideological differences.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Migration has long been acknowledged as a global phenomenon. Its dynamism and complexity have attracted many scholars from numerous fields, including economics, sociology, history, and psychology, among others (Barros et al., 2002; De Haas, 2007; Freedman, 2012; Ustibici, 2016). This global phenomenon is not a standardized process, but rather a comprehensive one manipulated by international and national conditions. In recent years, global migration has grown in both scale and complexity due to technological advancements, improvements in transportation, and declining poverty levels. Therefore, it is essential to understand and interpret migration and globalization in the context of these significant developments. Migration is a process by which a person changes his/her location from one place to another. It is broadly defined by the International Organization for Migration as “the movement of persons away from their place of usual residence, either across an international border or within a state” (IOM, 2019, p. 137). When individuals migrate, they are not only relocated but also explore new backgrounds, establish new living conditions, and negotiate relations in the receiving country. This particularly implies that mobility is not only crossing geographic lines but also exploring socio-cultural specificities. Castles et al., (2014) defined migration as “a movement of people across a specified boundary for the purpose of establishing a new or semi-permanent residence, usually involving a change of social ties and networks” (p. 28). In support of this notion, Portes and Böröcz (1989) maintain that migration is “a process of labor and social incorporation that reshapes both sending and receiving societies” (p. 608). While this spatial understanding of migration is multidimensional and practical, it fails to capture the diverse personal, social, economic, and gendered experiences that stimulate migration.

Numerous theories have been developed to give explanations of the motivations behind migration. Arguably, the most influential one is the push-pull model. Lee (1966) identified four major variables influencing migratory decisions: conditions in the country of origin, temptations in the destination, intervening challenges, and personal reasons. These factors have since been interpreted to encompass societal aspirations, political instability, economic hardship, and environmental degradation, which significantly impact human migration. On the contrary, such frameworks have recently been criticized for ignoring gender inequality and relying on universalist conjectures. Traditional migration theories often represent migrants as rational, autonomous individuals- typically male. Yet, migration decisions and experiences are deeply rooted in gender norms, power relations, and caregiving responsibilities (Freedman, 2012).

Morocco serves as a particularly intriguing example in global migration dynamics. It was primarily a country of emigration and a transit zone for migrants heading to

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