

Article

Being a Sub-Saharan migrant: a glance at the Italian case in a gender-aware perspective

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Abstract. Resting on a gender-oriented approach, Zoran Lapov's text aims to retrace the migratory experiences of Sub-Saharan women taking them from their native lands to Europa, with a focus on the Italian case. Starting from the results of the international LeFamSol Project addressing Sub-Saharan migrant women in Italy, Greece and Turkey (2014-15), the present work is split into two parts: the first one, examining Africa-to-Europe migrations with particular attention to Sub-Saharan segments in Italy, is largely interested in push and pull factors underlying the phenomenon of Sub-Saharan female migrations, and in the most recent statistics on the topic; the second part, instead, sheds light on the mechanisms of inclusion, while delving into integration paths and strategies of Sub-Saharan African communities, esp. women, in Italy, and offering a panorama of their community organisation and social mobilisation (associations, networks, groups, etc.), including their specific needs and priorities. While treating the issue in terms of participatory processes in a gender-aware perspective, the paper has the ambition to contribute to the multilevel study and debate leading women, migrations and frontiers to meet.

Keywords. Gender, migration, Sub-Saharan Africa, frontiers, community organisation.

Resumen. Con el género en el centro de la discusión, el texto de Zoran Lapov se propone recorrer las experiencias migratorias de mujeres subsaharianas desde sus tierras natales hasta Europa, centrándose en el caso italiano. A partir de los resultados del Proyecto internacional LeFamSol dedicado a las mujeres migrantes subsaharianas en Italia, Grecia y Turquía (2014-15), el presente trabajo se divide en dos partes: la primera, examinando las migraciones África-Europa con especial atención a segmentos subsaharianos en Italia, pone énfasis en los factores de empuje y atracción que subyacen al fenómeno de las migraciones femeninas subsaharianas y en las últimas estadísticas sobre el tema; la segunda parte arroja luz sobre los mecanismos de inclusión, adentrándose en los caminos y las estrategias de inserción de las comunidades africanas subsaharianas, esp. mujeres, en Italia, con una panorámica sobre su experiencia de organización comunitaria y movilización social (asociaciones, redes, grupos, etc.), incluyendo las necesidades y prioridades específicas de la comunidad. Al tratar la cuestión en términos de procesos participativos en la perspectiva de género, la ambición del artículo es contribuir al estudio y al debate multinivel que llevan a mujeres, migraciones y fronteras a encontrarse.

Palabras clave. Género, migración, África subsahariana, fronteras, organización comunitaria

1. Introduction

The present contribution is an excerpt of the ongoing research on Sub-Saharan migrations to Italy in a gender-aware perspective. Thus defined, the topic calls for an analysis of: recent migration flows originating from Sub-Saharan Africa (push/pull factors, migration projects, routes, etc.), with particular attention to female segments; social and working conditions of Sub-Saharan migrants (especially women) in receiving societies, including mechanisms of inclusion-exclusion, legal status, healthcare (women's health), and employment opportunities.

Regarding the first subject, push and pull factors encouraging Africa-to-Europe migrations have changed over the last two decades: migration projects and routes are subject to continuous adjustments determined by various factors including conflicts, crises, socio-economic conditions, policies, frontier controls, etc.; meanwhile, the main push factors have become armed conflicts, wars, dictatorships, and socio-political insecurity. What is more, the share of women is on the rise while being increasingly exposed to a set of factors pushing them out of their native lands. Western and central Mediterranean routes (Italy, Malta, Spain) were predominantly used over more than two decades, while its eastern channels (Greece, Turkey, Cyprus) have become progressively important, particularly in the last 5 to 6 years. Main departure points are placed in North Africa with Libyan ports (e.g. Zuwarah, Zlitan, Benghazi) at the first place, followed by Morocco, Tunisia, less Algeria: therefrom, migrants attempt to reach South Italy (esp. the island of Lampedusa), Malta, less Spain and France. These have been added by another important area of entry and transit to Europe: despite all EU measures and frontier policies, Greece has become the main gateway to Europe since 2015, along with Cyprus and Bulgaria, that migrants try to enter coming from or through Turkey, Egypt or Near East (Campani, Lapov 2015: 11-12, 2016: 130-131).

The specificities of receiving countries in relation to migration processes offer important issues for analysis in a comparative perspective as differences can be observed between various European contexts. Social and above all working conditions have also considerably changed over the past seven to eight years throughout the EU countries, producing further negative impacts upon migrations: the outburst of the economic crisis, especially since 2008, has affected integration processes and prospects of regularisation in the EU space; thereby, the late 2000s represent a dividing line between the persons (i.e. their conditions) who reached Europe before the crisis, and those who arrived subsequently. Despite all the hardships, the context of community life and social mobilisation among Sub-Saharan migrants in Italy offers a rather lively experience, characterised by support networks and associations.

The paper's contents partly rest upon findings emerged from the European LeFamSol Project which involved Italy, Greece and Turkey as partners (*Learning for Female African Migrants' Solidarity: Help-Desks for Female African Migrants in the Eastern Mediterranean Region*, Lifelong Learning Programme, 2014-15). The Project's objective was to pave the way for a community self-help service to be run by network facilitators coming from the concerned immigrant communities: the idea channelled the Project's methodologies and actions pursued with women native to Sub-Saharan region (research, focus groups, life stories, workshops, training, etc.), resulting in conferences, research reports, and scientific articles.

2. Africa-to-Europe migration with particular attention to Sub-Saharan segments

The largest population of African immigrants living in Europe (regardless of their particular origins and quotas per country) is placed in France, United Kingdom, Italy, Germany, Spain, Belgium, and Portugal, i.e. countries linked with diverse African realities through their colonial past. Other two significant drivers of migration taking people from various African contexts to particular European regions are language affinity and employment opportunities.

The vast majority of Africans residing in the EU space are native to North Africa, namely to the Maghreb countries of Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria¹, represented respectively by some 2.500.000 to 3.000.000 Moroccan², 900.000-1.000.000 Tunisian³, and 900.000 Algerian⁴ nationals. The shares of Maghreb-born migrants are rather important in France, Spain, and Italy; along with these main destinations, Moroccan nationals emigrate to Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany, Tunisians to Germany and Belgium, while the Algerian community proves to be rather important in the United Kingdom too (see Fargues 2013: 3; De Bel-Air 2016: 3, 6; De Haas 2005; MPC 2013a, 2013b, 2013c; MTM i-Map 2012: 5).

In the context of African emigration, Sub-Saharan cohorts represent an important segment in recent flows approaching the EU. The figures of Sub-Saharan migrants oscillate both in relation to their sending and receiving contexts, the latter being reached by migrants native to different countries and in different quotas. The EU stock of Sub-Saharan migrant population includes 3,5 to 8 million individuals, mainly concentrated in France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, and Portugal (Council of Europe 2008): these figures are actually comprehensive of both resident Sub-Saharan population and the estimates on irregular migrants.

The phenomenon of Sub-Saharan emigration prevalently involves West Africa and the Horn of Africa. As for the Region of *West Africa*, the main sending nations are Nigeria, Senegal, Ghana, Cape Verde, Mali, Ivory Coast, and Cameroon⁵ with the following demographic quotas in Europe (total number of migrants per country of origin): Nigeria – 186.839; Senegal – 182.205; Ghana – 115.614; Cape Verde – 97.659; Mali – 78.530; Ivory Coast – 76.349; Cameroon – 65.840 (Konan et al. 2012: 90)⁶. Their top destination

¹ P. Fargues provides the following figures for Maghreb migrants residing in European Union in 2013 (per country of origin): Morocco – 3.056.109; Tunisia – 911.400; Algeria – 877.398 (Fargues 2013: 3).

² According to various sources, over 2 million people of Moroccan descent live in Western Europe: they were around 2.278.000 in 2005 (France, Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Spain, Italy) (De Haas 2005); in 2011, the Moroccan emigration counted 2.648.684 people, mainly settled in Spain, France, Italy, Belgium, and Netherlands (MPC 2013b); in 2012, Moroccan migrants in the European Union (plus Switzerland and Norway) were 2.436.957 (De Bel-Air 2016: 3, 6).

³ Out of 1.200.818 Tunisians residing abroad in 2011, 3/4 – cc 1.000.000 – were settled in Europe (MTM i-Map 2012: 5).

⁴ The Algerian emigration in European Union numbered cc 825.000 people in 2011 (MPC 2013a).

⁵ Commonly included among Central (or Equatorial) African countries, Cameroon is sometimes regarded as a part of West Africa.

⁶ Demographic and statistical data on migration population, in particular on migrants native to Sub-Saharan Africa, in the EU are difficult to collect and update owing to various reasons, i.e. ever-changing migration trends, rapid demographic dynamics, and the increase of irregular and transit flows in the Africa-to-Europe migration corridor. Data at national level prove to be more accurate; nonetheless, not all European States update nor release their immigration statistics on a regular basis. Accordingly, the overall EU data on Sub-Saharan immi-

countries in Europe are: Nigeria – UK, Italy, Germany, Spain, France, Belgium; Senegal – France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, UK; Ghana – UK, Italy, Germany, Netherlands, Spain, France, Belgium; Cape Verde – Portugal, France, Netherlands, Spain, Italy; Mali – France Spain, Italy; Ivory Coast – France, Germany, Italy; and Cameroon – France, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland. These national groups are followed by the communities native to the West African countries of Togo, Burkina Faso, and Gambia.

Another important sending region is the *Horn of Africa*, hence migration flows from Somalia, Eritrea, and Ethiopia constantly approaching Europe. Migrants from these nations are mainly heading for the following countries of destination: Somalia – UK, Sweden, the Netherlands, Norway, Finland, Italy, Denmark, Germany; Eritrea – Italy, UK, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland; and Ethiopia – Sweden, Germany, UK, the Netherlands, Italy. As regards the numbers, “*An estimated 280.000 Somali immigrants live in the European Union, Norway and Switzerland, largely due to a steady flow of asylum seekers*” (Connor, Krogstad 2016). Though being important sending countries of asylum seekers, the presence of Eritrean and Ethiopian migrants in Europe is much less prominent.

An overview of more recent inflows shows that the number of migrants who reached Europe from the said Sub-Saharan nations is constantly growing (in order of demographic weight): Nigeria – 320.000; Senegal – 240.000; Ghana – 210.000; Somalia – 200.000; Cape Verde – 120.000; Cameroon – 120.000; Ivory Coast – 110.000; Mali – 100.000; Ethiopia – 60.000; Togo – 50.000; Eritrea – 40.000; Burkina Faso – 30.000; Gambia – 30.000 (data, based on statistics and estimations⁷, are provided by Pew Research Center 2012).

Due to the colonial legacy, along with migrants native to other African regions, some less-represented communities count their members in Spain (migrants from Cape Verde and the former Spanish colony of Equatorial Guinea), Belgium (mostly from Rwanda and Democratic Republic of the Congo), and Portugal (from former Portuguese colonies, particularly Cape Verde, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and São Tomé).

3. Sub-Saharan immigration to Italy

Italy has been one of the attraction poles for African immigration over decades now. The phenomenon dates back to the 1970s when the Country was reached by first African i.e. Moroccan migrants – if the decade represented the initial phase of their settlement, the following 1980s were the years of their stabilisation (IDOS 2013). As from the second half of the 1980s, migrants native to Sub-Saharan area, namely Senegalese, began to arrive. In terms of their demographic weight in Italy, these two have remained the most representative communities of their respective regions of origin: the Moroccans for Maghreb

gration are largely based on estimations (elaborated by international organisations such as IOM or UNHCR), and often dating back to some 10 to 15 years ago. In light of such a state of affairs, the reported data (Konan et al. 2012) are taken from a 2007 source, which – in its turn – refers to early 2000s. For individual Sub-Saharan regions and national groups present in Europe, see also: De Haas 2008 (for West Africa); Some 2009; Baizán, González-Ferrer 2016; ITPCM 2014 (Senegal); IOM 2009a, 2009b (Ivory Coast and Nigeria); Quartey 2009 (Ghana); Evina 2009 (Cameroon).

⁷ As stated in the online document, “The figures [...] refer to the total number (or cumulative “stocks”) of migrants living around the world as of 2010 rather than to the annual rate of migration (or current “flows”)” (Pew Research Center 2012).

and for the entire African continent, the Senegalese for the Sub-Saharan and West African regions. In both cases, commenced as male migration flows, Moroccan and Senegalese nationals have been coming to Italy for work since the 1970/80s; a part of recent Senegalese arrivals reach Italy in search of humanitarian protection (IDOS 2013: 5-6, 13-14; Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali 2015: 43-46).

The current number of African immigrants in Italy exceeds 1 million people (1.036.653 on 01-01-2016), i.e. 20,63% of all foreigners (Istat 2016). Counting a half a million people, the Moroccan community ranks first among African nationalities, and falls within first three of all immigrant communities⁸. Out of the Sub-Saharan Africans in Italy (around 339.500), the most prominent nationalities are: Senegal, Nigeria, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali, Eritrea, Gambia, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Togo.

As for the resident African/Sub-Saharan population, it is essential to take a look at the most represented African nationalities by going back to the 1970s. In the total stock of foreign residents in Italy, the following African nationalities are placed among the first twenty (20): in 1970 – Egypt, Somalia, Ethiopia, Tunisia, Morocco (with rather small numbers); 1985 – Ethiopia, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco (with a significant increase in number); 1990 – Tunisia, Senegal, Egypt, Ethiopia; 1995 – Morocco (ranking first: 81.247 people), Tunisia, Senegal, Egypt, Ghana; 2000 – Morocco (first: 162.254), Tunisia, Senegal, Egypt, Ghana; 2005 – Morocco (third: 239.728, being exceeded by Romanian and Albanian communities), Tunisia, Senegal, Egypt (Bettin, Cela 2014: 19-20). As it can be deduced, African nationalities were placed among the most represented migrant communities (first 20) in Italy from the 1970s to mid-2000s. The situation has changed in the last 5-6 years due to new arrivals from Asia and Eastern Europe exceeding the figures of Sub-Saharan nationals. All inflow types considered, some communities (Senegalese, Nigerian, Ghanaian, Malian, etc.) are on the constant rise; besides, Morocco, Egypt, and Tunisia have kept their position among the most represented foreign nationalities in Italy.

Sub-Saharan communities commonly do not fall within the largest foreign nationalities in Italy. Some are included, instead, among the national groups with a positive balance of entries. Thus, in 2013, Senegal came in tenth place with 7.187 entries chiefly for work and family reasons. In 2014, Nigeria entered the bulk of the top ten non-EU nationalities by number of entries: “*While Egypt falls behind and Senegal gets off the list, Nigeria moves to a seventh place with more than 11 thousand entries (mostly for asylum and international protection reasons), with an increase of flows by 65% from 2013 to 2014*” (Istat 2015: 4-5). In the same scope, the trend of migration flows – as from the biennium 2014-15 – has led to “*a significant growth of communities [native to] Nigeria (+13%), Senegal (+6%), and Mali (+107%)*” (Istat 2015: 2).

Moreover, Sub-Saharan Africans do occupy an important position among migrants seeking asylum and international protection. “*Permits [granted for] asylum and humanitar-*

⁸ On December 31st, 2015, 60.665.551 people resided in Italy, out of which more than 5 million (5.026.153) foreign nationals representing 8,3% of the national resident population. Out of some 200 nationalities present in Italy, more than 50% (cc 2,6 million) are nationals of an European country, while the share of non-EU legal residents amounts to some 78%. The most represented foreign nationality is Romania (22,9%); among non-EU residents (*soggiornanti regolari* i.e. legal residents or resident aliens), the most represented countries of origin are: Morocco (518.357), Albania (498.419), China (332.189), Ukraine (236.682), and Philippines (169.046), followed by India, Moldova, Egypt, Bangladesh, and Tunisia (more than 100.000 people each) (Istat 2015, Istat web page).

ian protection have doubled in absolute terms: in 2014, they passed from 19.146 to 47.873. In relative terms, they form 19,3% of new entries [compare: 7,5% in 2013].” (Istat 2015: 1). And, Sub-Saharan nationalities are at the top of the list: “Mali, Nigeria, and Gambia alone cover 42% of inflows seeking asylum and international protection [in 2014]. The increase observed between 2013 and 2014 interested more markedly the entries of some groups, whose inflows had quadrupled: Gambia, Senegal, Bangladesh, and Mali; only the flows from Eritrea have decreased. For many nationalities, the asylum-related entries have priority over labour migrations or family reunifications. In particular, in the case of Mali, Gambia, Somalia, and Afghanistan, the weight of asylum-related entries exceeds 90% of the total stock of inflows, [while] their weight exceeds 85% [in the case of] Eritrea.” (Istat 2015: 7).

In 2014, more than 170.000 persons landed on Italy’s shores: 64.625 of them applied for asylum; 120.000 landed were counted in 2015 (until mid-September, IOM), 30.535 of whom asylum seekers (first six months, Eurostat) (quoted in: IDOS 2015: 6). Groups of migrants, who entered and stayed in Italy for the purpose of political asylum and humanitarian reasons in 2014, are prevalingly native to Sub-Saharan Africa, followed by Asian nationals; in fact, seven – of first ten nationalities – originate from Sub-Saharan countries: Mali (7.104 : 14,8 %), Nigeria (7.065 : 14,8%), Gambia (5.832 : 12,2%), Senegal (3.265 : 6,8%), Somalia (1.750 : 3,7%), Ghana (1.544 : 3,2%), and Eritrea (1.164 : 2,4%) (Pakistan is placed between Gambia and Senegal, Bangladesh and Afghanistan between Senegal and Somalia). While offering higher figures, the Rome-based *Centro Studi e Ricerche* (IDOS) informs that the first five nationalities of asylum seekers (2014) are: Nigeria (10.135), Mali (9.790), Gambia (8.575), Pakistan (7.150), and Senegal (4.675) (IDOS 2015: 6; see also Eurostat 2016; IOM 2015, 2016).

Depending on nationalities, gender ratio is rather variable⁹. In the said cohorts of Sub-Saharan asylum seekers, the female component was very much in the minority: almost all were 99% male groups; only three national groups had a slightly lower male share, namely Nigeria (81,0% male ratio), Somalia (80,7%), and Eritrea (78,8%).

Let us see now the data on resident population of Sub-Saharan origin in Italy at the beginning of 2016 (Table 1). The list begins with the Senegalese community: being constantly present since the 1980s up to the current number of 98.176 members (2,0% of the total immigrant population in Italy), it is the third African nation in Italy after Morocco and Egypt, and the most significant one in the stock of Sub-Saharan nationalities; the Nigerian community with 77.264 members (1,5% of the total immigrant population) ranks fifth (after Tunisia). These two communities are followed by other Sub-Saharan nationalities, namely: Ghana, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, and Mali (more than 10.000 people each); Eritrea, Gambia, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Togo (more than 5.000 people each).

Data split by gender make it possible to observe the proportions of male (M) and female (F) shares for each national group. The Sub-Saharan resident population present in Italy on January 1st, 2016, comprises around 212.500 men and 127.000 women (Istat 2016). These are absolute figures, and many of the recorded are not recently arrived persons, but long time immigrants rooted in the Italian context. The very male communi-

⁹ In 2014, the entries of women were down (-14%), while those of men were on the rise (+7,5%). Nonetheless, the gender ratio-in the total foreign population residing in Italy regardless of origins and nationalities – was rather balanced having around a 50:50 ratio throughout the year 2015 (Istat web page).

Table 1. Resident population of Sub-Saharan African origin in Italy, January 1st, 2016 (*in descending order*)

State	Nationality	Total	M	F
Senegal	Senegalese	98176	71539	26637
Nigeria	Nigerian	77264	40420	36844
Ghana	Ghanaian	48637	29640	18997
Ivory Coast	Ivorian	25056	14625	10431
Burkina Faso	Burkinabé	14657	9502	5155
Cameroon	Cameroonian	12738	6443	6295
Mali	Malian	10369	9741	628
Eritrea	Eritrean	9597	5237	4360
Gambia	Gambian	8016	7662	354
Ethiopia	Ethiopian	8000	3092	4908
Somalia	Somali	7903	5533	2370
Togo	Togolese	5090	3216	1874
Guinea	Guinean	4928	3465	1463
Cape Verde	Cape Verdean	4449	1437	3012
Benin	Beninese	2488	1489	999
Sudan	Sudanese	2326	1847	479
Kenya	Kenyan	2219	815	1404
Liberia	Liberian	1430	1153	277
Sierra Leone	Sierra Leonean	1297	794	503
Niger	Nigerien	1238	878	360
Guinea Bissau	Bissau-Guinean	945	758	187
Mauritania	Mauritanian	845	608	237
Chad	Chadian	464	367	97

Source: Istat. Istat data on foreign-born resident population, elaborated by Tuttitalia.it and Comuni-italiani.it, can be consulted on the following websites: <<http://www.tuttitalia.it/>>, <<http://www.tuttitalia.it/statistiche/cittadini-stranieri-2016/>>, and <<http://www.comuni-italiani.it/>>, <<http://www.comuni-italiani.it/statistiche/stranieri/>>.

ties, in terms of their presence and gender ratio in Italy, are: Malians, Gambians, Sudanese, Chadians, Senegalese, Bissau-Guineans and Liberians; an approximately equal gender ratio is being registered in the Cameroonian community, while the share of women exceeds that of men in Ethiopian, Cape Verdean and Kenyan communities (in grey: the cases of equal or prevalent female share) (Istat 2016). To note that Cape Verde, the starting point of pioneer migrant women since the 1980s (Jesus 1996; Grassi 2006), is no longer a country of emigration to Italy; though being decreased in absolute terms, their presence in Italy is still marked by a higher female share, fact that counterposes 3.012 Cape Verdean women to 1.437 men (Istat 2016).

4. Receiving contexts versus Sub-Saharan migrants

In order to get a more complete picture of the phenomenon, it is important to understand what are the *push and pull factors* underlying Sub-Saharan female migrations. In the frames of the LeFamSol Project, the research team of the University of Florence combined a number of methodologies including bibliographic survey, interviews, focus groups, and life stories. During the LeFamSol fieldwork, emigration was mostly motivated as a path offering a double possibility: fleeing a widespread lack of security associated with armed conflicts, and looking for more satisfying socio-economic conditions. This means that migrating to Italy (and Europe) is perceived as an opportunity for improvement of one's own living conditions.

Besides the cluster of push factors (crisis, economic instability, armed conflicts, insecurity, etc.) that encourage Sub-Saharan people to emigrate, there are factors regarding the women in their social dimension: many of these fall within the scope of gender-based violence¹⁰, underpinned by an alleged subalternity of female gender, hence perpetrated against women. Amidst strictly "female" factors affecting women's choice to emigrate, the following are particularly relevant for Sub-Saharan female flows: family reunification (lack of social and economic independence), wish to escape sociocultural conditionings (e.g. forced marriages, authoritarian and violent family environment), mistreatments and abuses, trafficking, and genital mutilations. These factors are added by the necessity of women from several African realities to reach Europe (alone or accompanied) in order to seek asylum or humanitarian protection. Finally, there are women leaving for socio-economic and/or cultural reasons (e.g. opportunities of study), not infrequently coupled with a push towards social emancipation. In the overall European panorama, Italy was portrayed – during the LeFamSol research – as "*not bad*", even if "*worsened*" in the last years. Some of the contacted women compared Italy to other European realities, primarily France (e.g. Senegalese women), less England and Finland (e.g. Somali women). Such answers describe Italy as a final destination of the contacted Sub-Saharan women (which does not coincide with general trends of migration flows coming from or through Africa in the last 6-7 years) (LeFamSol Project findings; see Campani, Lapov 2015, 2016).

To start, *statistics* differ from one country to another offering thus diverse national outcomes. Italy is one of the EU countries that attracts African immigration (including flows from various Sub-Saharan regions): thereby, African and Sub-Saharan migrant groups display a certain demographic significance in Italy (esp. since the 1980s) for various reasons, including Italy's colonial past reconnecting the Italian State to Somalia and Eritrea. Broadly speaking, migrant women native to Sub-Saharan Africa represent a relatively small though growing component in the maps of flows moving towards Europe. What is more, qualitative researches addressing migrant settlements located beyond European borders, especially in Turkey and Morocco, confirm a growing number of women among Sub-Saharan migrants¹¹.

¹⁰ According to diverse categorisations, all of the said situations fall within the scope of gender-based violence; along with many other situations, these can be subdivided in various forms of violence (physical violence, psychological violence, sexual abuse and harassment, domestic violence, coercive practices, etc.). In this paper, the presentation of relevant situations have followed the narratives as being recounted by the African women involved into the LeFamSol Project.

¹¹ On the topic of migration (regular, irregular, transit), asylum, and relevant policies in Turkey, see: Frenzen 2015a, 2015b; İçduygu 2003; İçduygu, Aksel 2012; İçduygu, Kirişçi 2009; Yüksek, Brewer 2005; as regards the

Once in Southern Europe, Sub-Saharan women may receive different *legal status*: while a refugee status recognition can be expected in the case of women coming from the Horn of Africa, this solution proves to be more complicated for female nationals of certain other countries. Such an outcome implies further repercussions upon their social and economic integration. The situation has recently changed for some Sub-Saharan realities, namely a part of Nigerian female migrants (along with their male co-nationals) have entered the rows of asylum seekers in Italy. Regarding the legal status of migrants, it is relevant to recall a peculiarity of the Italian legal system (not applying to all EU realities): it distinguishes between residence and work permits as two – often correlated – legal levels and instruments enabling a foreign national to remain in the Country. Along with that, the individuals with no legal status defined (*soggiornanti irregolari* i.e. illegal residents), especially if women, find themselves in a particularly vulnerable condition which makes them easily susceptible to labour *exploitation*, and abuse.

The lack of legal status may compromise the chances of accessing *healthcare services*, with particular reference to women's health, namely: care of the female reproductive system, maternity-related healthcare, contraceptive methods and precautions, safe abortion, etc. Victims of human trafficking, many of whom being illegal residents, as well as subjects vulnerable to STDs, are often precluded from getting a proper or any health care (condition particularly observed in Greece and Turkey). On the contrary, Italy recognises and guarantees the right to health care, especially in case of essential medical care and emergency services, to all foreigners regardless of their legal status, the provision being extended to “irregular” (i.e. illegal) aliens too, especially if minors or pregnant women.

Employment opportunities that Sub-Saharan migrants, especially if newly arrived, can hope for in Southern European countries are not many. As a result, a good deal of them are employed in informal economy, which is – by the way – an extremely visible phenomenon, including peddling, selling tissues, lighters, watches, bags, umbrellas, water bottles, or other goods, including occupational “ethnic niches” (e.g. Senegalese men in peddling), in Italy for instance (Riccio 2007; Castagnone et al. 2005). Being mostly hired for low-skilled, under-skilled or unskilled jobs, large segments of African/Sub-Saharan migrant population are found in services, industry, building trade, agriculture, trade, and other sectors throughout South Europe. Due note should be taken of young recently arrived Sub-Saharan men native to West Africa who have started practising begging, combined at times with peddling, on the streets of Italian cities – important to stress that a part of them are asylum seekers awaiting a decision on their refugee status.

To be more accurate, let us see some figures (2014) on foreign-born employment in Italy. Generally speaking, immigrant workers are basically involved in three economic sectors: services (65,7%), industry (26,2%), and agriculture (5,0%) (IDOS 2015: 16). As far as immigrant self-employment is concerned, “*The businesses run by foreign-born persons are 524.674, representing 8,7% of all registered companies. The main business sectors are commerce (39,9%), construction (26,9%), and manufacturing (8,0%).*” Observing the phenomenon in terms of nationalities of immigrant self-employers, Moroccan sole proprietors (or sole traders) – mostly represented in commerce (74,1%) as their first sector of activ-

topic in Morocco, see: Cherti, Grant 2013; De Haas 2005, 2014; Lahlou 2005; Amnesty International 2006; Women's Link Worldwide 2012; Human Rights Watch 2005.

ity – rank first (15,2% of total foreign-born); the Senegalese sole proprietors occupy the sixth place (4,3% of total foreign-born), also being prevalingly represented in commerce (88,8%) (IDOS 2015: 17; see also Ceschi, Stocchiero 2006).

Sub-Saharan migrant women share the conditions of their male co-nationals all over the Region of South Europe. Their employment opportunities prove to be rather scanty, while sectors attracting *low profiles* are reigning along with particular *occupational niches* (see Grassi 2006). Many Sub-Saharan migrant women end up in occupational sectors requiring low- or under-skilled profiles (e.g. services, industry, agriculture). A part of them are engaged in domestic and care services (care work, family care, home care, personal care, etc.): important detail, giving this occupation the name of live-in domestic work, is that the services supplied are often combined with living in the household of the concerned family (e.g. Eritrean women working as maids and caregivers in Italian families)¹². Some women are channelled into the entertainment and sex industry (e.g. a part of Nigerian women as victims of trafficking) (Adarabioyo 2003; Petrini 2009). A novelty, though numerically limited, is given by the emergence of Sub-Saharan (usually Senegalese) women engaged in peddling in Italy (see also: Ceschi et al. 2009).

Typologies of their socio-economic integration in receiving countries are interrelated with the *in/visibility* of Sub-Saharan women. The phenomenon can be introduced by the concept of *triple oppression* (or marginality) – social, economic, and cultural (see Campani 2007: 5-6), which depicts the social reality experienced by migrant women: such a circumstance is chiefly due to their general condition in emigration, their employment in socio-economic niches (with particular reference to domestic i.e. private sector), and their absence from the public sphere. As for the community of Sub-Saharan women, they simultaneously form the most visible and invisible segment of female migrant population. Concurrently, the perception of *racism* in combination with their somatic visibility – not to say “recognisability” – is quite pronounced throughout Mediterranean countries, even if the Greek and Turkish cases present additional challenges (Campani, Lapov 2015: 17, 2016: 135). Thereby, women of Sub-Saharan origins face diverse difficulties in the host societies ranging from regularisation procedures to employment, from housing to health service, from reception to incidents of discrimination.

All variables considered, it is not difficult to discern the *intersectional vulnerability* which marks the condition of Sub-Saharan African women in emigration (Campani, Lapov 2015: 17, 2016: 135, 137). The access to a legal status and to the right of residence provides key instruments for coming out of anonymity and combating mechanisms of exclusion. In this sense, Sub-Saharan women need additional empowering tools in order to break down the barriers of their social vulnerability. As for the newly arrived, their condition requires an adequate legal aid in regularisation process in the country of arrival; on the other hand, they need accessible services regardless of their legal status, esp. in the field of health care.

Extremely precarious conditions raging over the European South mark the contour lines of a reality that many Sub-Saharan migrants are blocked in, circumstance transform-

¹² As regards the phenomenon of feminisation of migration, “a marked female presence [observed in Italy] is boosted by a strong demand for labour in the eldercare sector and by the beingness of a strongly familistic welfare system. Female immigration, already present in the 1960s and 1970s, has greatly increased since the 1990s with arrivals from Eastern Europe”, mainly channelled into domestic sector (Bettin, Cela 2014: 21).

ing their daily struggle into an extremely tiring experience. In the final analysis, *degree of social integration* of migrants relies on political decisions taken at different levels of power; even more, it is strongly dependent on the cluster of actions and services provided by the Third sector (associations, NGOs, social cooperatives, etc.): a vast and varied domain, which has been progressively delegated – by competent national and international authorities – to deal with a large slice of services for migrants, including the segment of asylum seekers and refugees. In this very sense, the work of Third sector organisations is being integrated by initiatives launched by solidarity networks and organisations engaged in promoting anti-racism campaigns and assistance to vulnerable groups. As a matter of fact, many migrant, and Sub-Saharan, women are constrained to look for answers to their situations in this very field.

5. Community organisation and social mobilisation among Sub-Saharan Africans in Italy

The reality of African immigration is not a new phenomenon in Italy: it particularly applies to migrant groups coming from Morocco, Somalia, Ethiopia, Egypt, and Tunisia, who have been emigrating to Italy since the 1970s, and especially 1980s; while reckoning modest arrivals in the previous decade, Italy had been reached by West African immigrants, chiefly Senegalese and Nigerian nationals, in the second half of the 1980s (Bettin, Cela 2014; IDOS 2013; Ceschi 2012; Ceschi et al. 2009; Petrini 2009).

Despite specificities of single communities, several among Sub-Saharan national groups have been making attempts of self-organisation since the emergence of their migratory experience in Italy showing thus that the processes of their social mobilisation has been based on a constant commitment over time. Amidst various forms of community organisation, *associations* have constituted an useful resource providing solidarity and mutual support *networks* among Sub-Saharan migrants (Jesus 1996; Riccio 2007; Ceschi et al. 2006; Casella Paltrinieri 2006; Petrini 2009; Mezzetti, Guglielmo 2010). Though being present all over the national territory, the bulk of Sub-Saharan migrants is settled in larger urban centres, especially in the Centre-North of the Country: accordingly, it is in those contexts that they got socioculturally and politically organised in a more structured manner.

Given the vastness of situations, associations and networks of Sub-Saharan communities in Italy can be founded on different values, and oriented to different forms of collective action. One of the basic identity parameters is ethnic-national membership: accordingly, a good part of associations, organisations, networks, etc. can be defined as ethnic (or rather: monoethnic) or national (mononational) structures, meaning that their action, referred to the country of origin, promotes activities of socio-political and representative nature. A number of structures are distinguished, instead, by their mixed configuration contemplating the presence of various African origins, which is why the associations of this category can be assigned the title of pluriethnic or plurinational i.e. mixed-African; other organisations are even more international i.e. mixed with Italian citizens and/or non African migrants. Along with their ethnic-national affiliation, representative structures of Sub-Saharan migrants are defined, on one hand, by their composition and association formula (associations and networks made up of students, youths, workers, professionals of a particular sector, etc.), and by their commitment, on the other (sociocultural promotion,

volunteer work, struggle for peace, anti-discrimination, etc.). Finally, some structures are established on rather informal grounds: these are self-proclaimed “forums”, “assemblies” or “networks”, often marked by a rather static leadership, even membership, both being mirrored in the persona of leading community members (Ceschi, Lulli 2012; Ceschi, Stocchiero 2006; Riccio 2007; Casella Paltrinieri 2006; Mezzetti, Guglielmo 2010; Petrini 2009; Jesus 1996).

Moreover, religious affiliation seems to have a certain, though never exclusive, weight in aggregation processes of Sub-Saharan migrants in Italy: some communities or groups are linked – along with other patterns of community organisation – to churches or mosques, which broadens the range of possibilities for socialisation as religious structures commonly bring together followers from different social backgrounds and different origins (Casella Paltrinieri 2006; Petrini 2009). The involvement with various churches, having main centres in Rome, is particularly important in the case of Eritrean, Ethiopian, and Nigerian communities; amidst other forms of worship, Islam is another prominent faith acting as aggregation tool of Senegalese, Somali, and Malian nationals, for example.

While playing important role for some associations, gender segmentation has been left aside in other cases: as a result, both female and mixed-gender associations are being reckoned amongst Sub-Saharan migrants in Italy (strictly male associations are rare).

Associations and networks among Sub-Saharan women. Associations and networks founded by or with Sub-Saharan women have not been missing in this scenario. Broadly speaking, migrant women associations tend to reproduce the specific migration history of single national groups (associations of women native to Cape Verde and the Horn of Africa have existed in Italy since the 1980s), and to reflect the degree of group cohesion and inner gender relationships (exclusively female and/or mixed-gender associations). To boot, Sub-Saharan women are frequently gathered on a gender basis in plurinational African associations, as well as in international organisations and networks including Italian and non African migrant women. The purpose of these forms of social life is gaining the tools necessary for asserting women’s rights, and developing specific skills designed for providing welfare services to migrant population, with particular attention to its female segments. To do so, female or prevalingly female associations organise (among other activities) sociocultural events of intercultural nature, and promote awareness-raising campaigns (Campani, Lapov 2016: 140-141). Put differently, this further means that their activities are being networked.

Women of diverse Sub-Saharan origins play a key role in the sociocultural life of their communities and beyond. Examples of their commitment are nationality-based organisations, e.g. *Associazione Donne Somale in Italia* (*Somali Women Association in Italy*); or plurinational i.e. mixed-African organisations such as *Associazione Donne dell’Africa Sub-sahariana* (ADAS, *Sub-Saharan African Women Association*, Milan), and *Associazione Culturale Arancia Donna Subsahariana* (ACADS, *Orange Sub-Saharan Women Cultural Association*, Senigallia, Marche); or international ones, as for instance *Nosotras Onlus* (Florence, 1998), an intercultural association of foreign and Italian women which, along with women native to Africa with important Sub-Saharan segments (Somalia, Eritrea, Senegal, Nigeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Cape Verde, Congo), includes Italian and non African migrant women (Albania, China, Colombia, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Philippines, Jordan, Guatemala, Peru, Poland, Romania, Spain, etc.).

Going back to the overall discourse, it is possible to conclude that several among African associations can be defined, in many respects, as mixed: though being built up around a group of African/Sub-Saharan women native to one or more nationalities, and essentially based upon national links and common migration histories, it is often the case of plurinational associations gathering members – women and men – of diverse sociocultural backgrounds and orientations. The detail that makes difference, and may affect their scope of action, usually lies in association formula and commitments of a single organisation.

Scope of action. Regarding the extent of community action of Sub-Saharan associations and networks, the situation appears rather variegated. Accordingly, their scope of action can be addressed from various angles. First of all, it is correlated with variously defined profiles of Sub-Saharan organisations, as for example: a strictly “female” engagement, i.e. oriented to “female” issues, might be expected from female associations; similarly, organisations defined by their mono-national or mono-community configuration might be more likely to promote the interests of their own community, whereas mixed plurinational associations prove to be open to stimuli generated in multiple contexts. Another variable is reflected in territorial scope of associations and networks which makes the array of their activities further diversified: meaning that nationally or transnationally structured associations have different prospects of action in comparison to locally contextualised organisations (local, regional or interregional level). Finally, community cohesion will be defined by the same set of factors and priorities dictating the scope of action that the representative community structures may cover.

In order to gain a major visibility, several African communities have been organised so as to cover up to a national level of community networking, as for instance *Comunità Eritrea in Italia* (*Eritrean Community in Italy*), with the possibility of local branches e.g. *Comunità Eritrea in Toscana* (*Eritrean Community in Tuscany*), *Comunità Somala in Toscana* (*Somali Community in Tuscany*), *Nigerian Citizens Community* (Tuscany), or more generally – *Federazione Africana in Toscana* (*FAT, African Federation in Tuscany*) which brings together nationals of diverse African countries from Maghreb to Sub-Saharan and Central Africa up to the Horn of Africa.

In many cases, organisations develop contacts and relationships with each other, often in the frames of particular projects, programmes, actions, though even temporarily. On the same grounds, a part of Sub-Saharan associations rely on other structures operating in the field (e.g. local authorities, NGOs, churches, other associations), which enables them to access additional resources, and enlarge their experiences and opportunities of action.

The tools of social promotion, employed by Sub-Saharan migrant associations in Italy, are the same that can be observed in other forms of migrant community organisation: press, web pages, conferences and other public presentations, information activities, training activities, collaborative projects, etc. The assortment intertwines with the threads of social support networks which offer themselves as a key tool leading to a further expansion of the scope of action.

Community needs and engagement. The engagement of Sub-Saharan associations and networks in the context of their emigration settlements, Italy in this case, is strictly linked to specific needs of single communities. With this regard, the following emerged as the most topical questions during the LeFamSol Project:

- *Social cohesion and promotion.* The activities pursued by Sub-Saharan associations in Italy are aimed at promoting: inner cohesion and solidarity; cooperation with the surrounding social context; relations between the countries of origin and Sub-Saharan communities abroad (in Italy); communication, information and exchange activities; sociocultural activities; intercultural exchange; linguistic and cultural mediation; struggle for rights and equality; struggle for peace; struggle against exploitation and human trafficking; struggle against racism.
- *Specific needs of Sub-Saharan women in emigration.* The said activities are being added by further requirements based on the needs claimed by female segments of Sub-Saharan communities in relation to their host societies, Italy in this case. These include: promotion of women's rights; reception and protection of newly arrived; attention to specific sectors where they can be exploited as women; healthcare with particular attention to women's health; legal aid (e.g. regularisation or international protection procedures); labour market integration support.
- *Pending difficulties and issues.* Regarding the dynamics affecting the interaction with the Italian society, many Sub-Saharan migrants keep facing several pending issues, ranging from race-based discriminatory attitudes to labour exploitation in various economic sectors conjugated (in some cases) with trafficking in human beings; some encounter difficulties in approaching services providing housing, health care, refugees/asylum status, and else. Consequently, such a condition deepens the exposition of Sub-Saharan migrants to manipulation making them susceptible to a strong *social vulnerability*.
- *Social visibility for a more active participation.* Though being on the constant rise, African and generally migrant associations have a rather limited weight in policy- and decision-making processes in Italy. Coupled with their social vulnerability, these factors altogether preclude Sub-Saharan African citizens from the possibility of reaching an adequate social visibility that would lead them to a more active participation. Accordingly, several associations (often mixed i.e. pluri- and inter-national) invest their energies into the process of making social and political establishment of African/Sub-Saharan communities in Italy more solid.

6. Conclusions

Uncertain at the departure, migration projects of many Sub-Saharan Africans are bound to face a number of circumstances producing continuous violations of basic human rights. The cluster of perils, migration policies and border controls contributes to raising a wall against the Africa-to-Europe exodus. Risks of death and violence during the journey and especially at border crossings are followed by uncertainties and instability at both "external" (e.g. Turkey, Morocco) and "internal" borders (e.g. Italy, Greece, Spain) of Europe.

And, this is exactly the limbo that Sub-Saharan African women find themselves trapped in after risking their lives by crossing the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea.

Only a radical improvement in living standards of many Sub-Saharan countries would stem the flow of desperate people heading from Africa to Europe. Yet, this is not likely to happen in the near future: Africa is strewn with conflicts, wars, dictatorships, socio-economic and political crises; on the other side, a crisis-struck Europe facing the rise of populist anti-immigration parties and xenophobia.

Such a situation leaves a little space to act. What is possible to do with and for a specific group – Sub-Saharan women in a migration context – is to develop a particular strategy, namely networking competence in a gender-aware perspective with a network facilitator as a key actor (as envisaged by the LeFamSol Project): that is a contact person linking the newly arrived, the related community (where this entails no risks), and the host society. The process, aimed at offering reception and basic information, calls for contacts and relationships which are supposed to be created and managed by networking with relevant social actors and stakeholders.

Founded on the principles of interaction and exchange, networking patterns in migration contexts should never be satisfied with the contents implied by an initial action plan. In order to survive, a network should expand its relationships and links: analogously, a Sub-Saharan women's network should certainly involve Sub-Saharan women, without excluding though other social actors – women and men – coming from diverse backgrounds. If the purpose is to communicate better, interaction with the diversity must be a priority.

Networking acts as a powerful tool of promotion in participatory processes aimed at reaching social, cultural and political goals: as a such, a social support network constitutes an *omnidirectional informative, supportive and empowering platform* for its members. In consideration of their needs and priorities, one of the main goals of networking is to increase the visibility of a group of people, Sub-Saharan migrant women in this case, by establishing helpful links for their stability in the context of their settlements. This means that signs of visibility must be constantly launched so as to get fresh stimuli aimed at breaking down barriers and conquering new horizons. Satisfied these requirements, the purpose of informing, organising, supporting and mobilising both Sub-Saharan women and relevant social actors will have a better chance of being achieved.

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