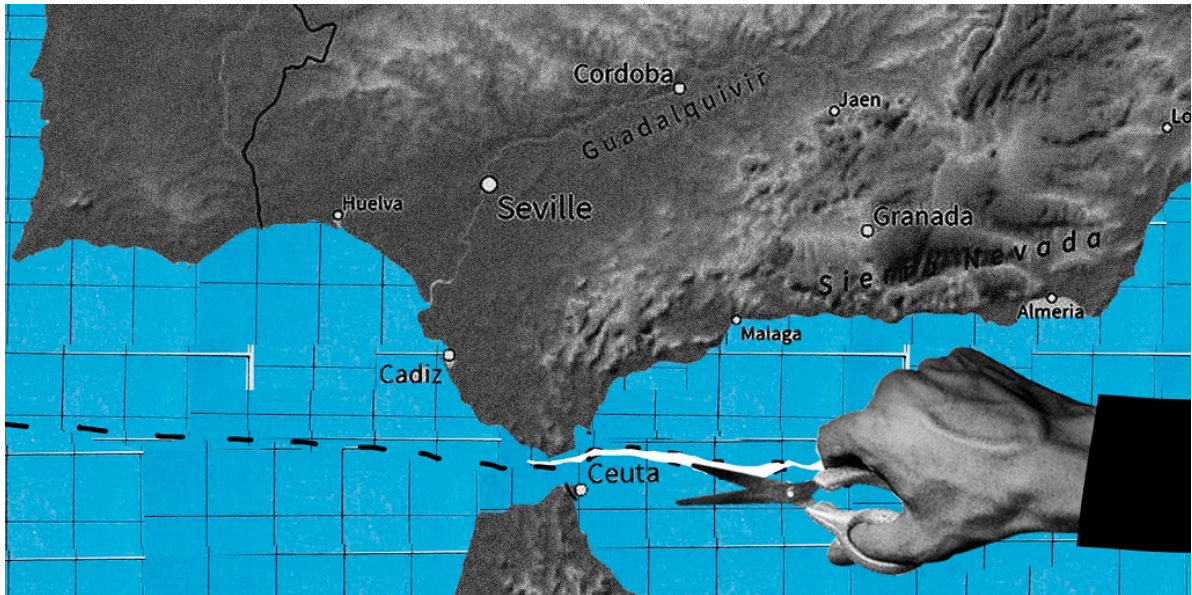


Adam, the migration process of a Moroccan child

Claire Trichot



Illustrator: [Hansel Obando](#)

Adam is the fifth child of seven siblings. Born in Tangier, his parents are originally from Taza, a city in the Fes region of north-eastern Morocco. At the age of 12, Adam lives between the street and a small room that his mother, Fatima, rents in the medina of Tangier with the money she makes from selling flowers every night on the shiny new promenade of this port city. Abandoned by a violent and irresponsible father, they have survived by making the street their primary provider of resources. Worn out from so many births and repeated violence, Fatima never misses a day. From 7 pm to midnight, accompanied by her young daughter, she goes to work to clear her stock of roses as quickly as she can, reselling them to passers-by in the Tangier night for five times more than their wholesale price.

«I am a flower seller. Not many people treat me well, I am often mistreated. Every day people driving luxury cars treat me with contempt. They are arrogant people who rob the country of its wealth. I don't want my children to grow up in a country where there is no justice, no equality and no protection. Wherever you go, people treat you with contempt. I want all my children to leave and,

if I get the chance, I will leave, too.»

Testimony of Fatima, Adam's mother, September 2021.

We met Adam six months ago in the Mohammed V hospital in Tangier. He was in a cast from head to toe. He had been hovering between life and death for a month after he was dragged along by the bus in which he was being deported from the border of Ceuta to Casablanca. Knowing that the coach would not stop in Tangier, he decided to jump off the bus without thinking that the driver would close the doors on him, trapping his leg and dragging him along under the still moving vehicle.

Between 17 and 18 May 2021, Adam, along with 1,500 other minors and 8,000 adults from Morocco and Sub-Saharan Africa, swam across the border separating Morocco from Ceuta. Border controls were relaxed by the Moroccan army for 48 hours in a manner that was as inexplicable as it was fleeting. During those 48 hours, word spread through Morocco that the border was open. Forty-eight hours of risk and opportunity for those with dreams of leaving: thousands of boys and girls, young people, adults, families, women and sub-Saharan migrants. Forty-eight hours in which the Spanish army began to retaliate by returning the migrants – adults and children – like hot potatoes.

Instrumentalisation of children

During that hellish week, the two nations of Morocco and Spain succeeded in instrumentalising children for exclusively political purposes, in grave violation of the higher interest of the child and contravening international conventions for the protection of children. The political implications of this migration crisis and the biased responses of international human rights bodies have thrown into sharp relief the power dynamics and imbalances present in international human rights law, and calling into question its universality.

In a report produced in June 2021, human rights associations active in Ceuta – Maakum, No Name Kitchen and Elin – warn of human rights violations in Ceuta, pointing out that “since the mass border crossing of thousands of people, either swimming or in small boats, at the Tarajal and Benzú checkpoints two weeks ago, we have witnessed how border defence, international relations and inter-country interests are evidently given priority over the lives and safety of people”.

Adam's story is a further demonstration of the failure of nations based on the rule of law, and of international law, to address the challenges posed by child immigration

Adam's story is a tale of collateral damage from the Ceuta episode and a further demonstration of the failure of nations based on the rule of law, and of international law, to address the challenges posed by child immigration, especially in border areas where people are most vulnerable and most invisible in terms of the exercise of their rights.

Rassif, a transnational path based on Human Rights

The Rassif project aims to respond to the multiple forms of violence and discrimination experienced by Moroccan children throughout their migratory journey from their country of origin, both along the way and in the destination country [1]. Promoted by the NGO Casal dels Infants, the Rassif project is being carried out in conjunction with third sector partners on both shores, in Morocco and Catalonia, to guarantee the rights of Moroccan migrant minors and respond to the challenges posed by their transnational mobility.

The fragile frontier between living in a family, taking to the streets to escape situations of violence, embarking on a migratory journey alone in order to survive and the events of that journey are key moments in the lives of the boys and girls the Rassif project aims to support. Human rights are the compass of the intervention at Rassif. We understand human rights as the conditions that ensure a dignified life and emancipation in different life areas.

In this sense, two concepts in Arabic guide our vision. The first of these is hogra, literally, "humiliation", which effectively describes the violence and indignities experienced by migrant children on a daily basis. The other is karama, literally, "dignity", which is part of their quest to live their young lives with dignity. It is important to observe that being young is a right which must be lived with a future perspective, in which life projects are chosen and decided upon by the young person themselves [2].

In the case of Moroccan migrant minors, the hogra they suffer clouds their dream of building a dignified life in their country of origin and catalyses their migratory project as a survival strategy. The risks involved along the way are likely to deplete their physical and cognitive capacities to a dangerous degree, but these risks are experienced as an inevitable stage in the process of attaining their karama.

The abyss between the children's expectations and the obstacles they encounter along the way leads to a process of marginalisation that weakens their identity and their capacity to empower themselves and move forward. Raising collective awareness and responsibility and promoting the recognition of migrant minors as full citizens by actors including nations, families and NGOs can help to reduce the risks encountered by children along the way and emancipate them as individuals, enabling them to broaden their opportunities and life choices.

Effective empowerment and participation in these mobilisation and advocacy processes will broaden the children's vision and activate the levers of change they need to navigate their way in a more conscious and considered way.

Another Gordian knot in child migration processes is the place occupied by gender in identity building among young people in different contexts, and the inequalities generated as a factor that further contributes to exclusion and vulnerability

At Rassif, we develop mechanisms to ensure the participation of young people and vulnerable minors as well as families with mothers and fathers of minors who lack social visibility due to their socio-economic situation. Participation in these processes is ensured by the collective empowerment experienced by the minors and their families as a result of the support provided. In these spaces for exchange, knowledge is shared and elements are contributed to increase understanding of the processes, thereby reducing and preventing the risks experienced by minors in their national and transnational mobility. Groups of community representatives are also formed by girls and boys who are motivated to lead preventive risk reduction processes in their communities and act as spokespersons for advocacy and mobilisation in collective spaces. A group empowerment process through the telling of their life stories ensures the effectiveness of the strategy.

Rassif and gender inequalities

Another Gordian knot in child migration processes is the place occupied by gender in identity building among young people in different contexts, and the inequalities generated as a factor that further contributes to exclusion and vulnerability. Currently only 10% of migrant minors living on the streets are women. However, due to the extent of their vulnerability and the violence they suffer, we believe that adequate and specific responses are required to reduce these inequalities.

An illegal migration project involves a strong gender bias related to the danger and vulnerability to which the migrants are exposed, placing girls at greater risk of being assaulted, exploited or raped. Paradoxically, we find both boys and girls suffering sexual exploitation in both origin and destination countries: the right to invulnerability of their own bodies is endangered for both sexes. Gender discrimination and marginalisation is experienced on both shores, though the nuances vary according to the different material and contextual conditions [3].

We also believe that gender inequalities related to the concept of family and power roles within the family system are a cause of the social violence experienced by minors that influences and determines their migration project.

A diagnostic report carried out within the framework of the Rassif project in 2019 [4] identified gender roles in Moroccan families as one of the main causes of family destructuring and the consequent “flight from home” of minors. These gender roles are influenced by a patriarchal vision of society in which the father monopolises productive and social tasks, i.e. providing household income and community relationships, while mothers

are relegated to reproductive tasks and the home.

The breaking of these social moulds leads to social stigmatisation as well as violence in the home: when a father is not able to fulfil the responsibilities that society imposes on him, for example. Children often risk their lives in the migration process to replace or flee from an absent or violent father figure, protect or rescue their mother, help her economically and provide a dream of a better life. This pressure to migrate to fulfil the role of provider and protector of the family, internalised culturally and educationally, forces them into high-risk situations along the way: life on the streets, consumption of toxic substances and all kinds of violence.

Having reached their destination, they sometimes experience different gender realities as conflicts and confrontations, and many boys encounter difficulties and live with violence in their emotional relationships. Gender influences all aspects of people's lives, including perceptions of risk and health-disease processes, particularly in boys, who may engage in risky behaviours to assert their masculinity.

Reckless actions expressed in violent conduct, for example, are perceived as indicative of virility. In order to be "men" in their interactions with other people, boys engage in behaviours that have profound repercussions for their lives and their health. In the case of the migratory process in particular, these behaviours include drug use and hypersexuality.

Mobility between neighbourhoods evolves into intercity mobility according to the needs of the moment. Eventually this mobility becomes transnational and a permanent way of life and survival

És per això que Rassif planteja un treball de fons amb joves i les seves famílies a través de grups de suport d'iguals sobre la violència de gènere i les masculinitats positives, per disminuir l'impacte de les relacions de poder, de la definició dels rols en la societat i de les violències generades. Treballar amb joves en activitats de prevenció de la violència de gènere significa actuar per l'apoderament amb "les noies" i en la desconstrucció de masculinitats violentes amb "els nois".

Cross-border mobility stories

The mobility of Moroccan children begins at local level as they seek freedom and refuge in the neighbourhoods of their city and spend more and more time on the streets, eventually abandoning school and family and adapting to the ecosystem of marginalisation. Their capacity for socialisation becomes increasingly fragile and limited as they find sufficient resources within their own peer groups to support themselves in this marginal life. Mobility between neighbourhoods evolves into intercity mobility according to the needs of the moment. Eventually this mobility becomes transnational and a permanent way of life and

survival. Polydrug use, or consumption of psychoactive substances in combination (e.g. benzodiazepines, cannabis, solvents and ecstasy) allows them to withstand the risks, frustrations and violence they experience along the way, rapidly deteriorating their health as well as their psychosocial skills.

Rassif also addresses this issue, considering children's mobility and their experiences as fundamental elements in the building of a comprehensive and coordinated intervention among actors in the territories that responds to all the children's needs. The aim is to collect and work with the life stories of young people to address the elements that generate conflict along their way.

When we talk about Moroccan migrant minors, we need to discuss the social positions, interests and needs of these young people, as well as their society of origin and the society that receives them, which views the phenomenon, not as an opportunity, but as a risk to the stability of the system of hegemonic identities. The conflict varies from one moment to the next and is determined by the circumstances and by the host system. In any case, the issue remains unresolved and the decisions made by the various administrations at origin, transit and destination illustrate their failure to adequately address this particular migration phenomenon. There is a generalised negative perception of the conflict, which most of the time is perceived to be a difficult problem to solve. In our view, conflict is an opportunity for transformation and change [5].

«These troubling biographies are difficult to reconstruct since the stories, like the lives of these adolescents, are confusing and fragmented. What the stories say about them is not always true, but neither is it false. The boys say little about the extent to which they risked their lives on the journey between Morocco and Spain - or perhaps they are not aware of these risks. The girls talk a lot about other girls who have fallen prey to sexual violence, but say nothing about themselves. [...]

[...] That night, Ayoub is talkative. He has come out of hospital, he does not know how he came to be admitted. It must have been late one night. He remembers being stoned and drunk. He must have passed out. Now he's shaking like a leaf. He has lost his jacket or it's been stolen, he doesn't know. Ayoub arrived from Tangier three years ago. He was 11 years old. He says Paris is very hard. Where would he like to go? He laments: "Really? To Paradise, I swear. Look at me: I haven't eaten since the hospital, I sleep on the street or in hotels." Leaning against a wall, he keeps talking: "So yes, I steal, I can say it because if I don't steal, I don't eat. The rich don't

understand, they have the good life.” He starts to cry: “I steal, I’m a thief. But I was robbed, too, of 2,000 euros. I’m trying to save so I can send money to my family.”»

Extract from Le Monde, 5 March 2021: “Les gamines à la dérive de Barbes”.

Despite the trauma of his interrupted migration experience, what happened to Adam has not shattered his dream or deterred him from trying again in the future. His ambition is fuelled by the economic and psychosocial vulnerability of his family and his daily contact with his brother Ahmed, who successfully crossed the border on the first day of the Ceuta migrant crisis.

Adam and the thousands of minors who risk their lives every day in search of a better, more dignified reality, fleeing the daily grind of a hopeless existence, are the catalyst for the challenges and changes that nations, their jurisdictions and the international human rights framework must address without further delay.

REFERENCES

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Claire Trichot is the director of Casal dels Infants' delegation in Morocco, an NGO with its headquarters in Barcelona dedicated to improving the lives of girls, boys, young people and families in disadvantaged neighbourhoods of Catalonia. She has been directing this association for 13 years. In Morocco, the organization works with 15 local associations to strengthen their capacities to carry out social and community development projects for vulnerable populations including NEET young people, street children and women victims of violence. Following a nine-month stint as a lawyer at the CETI in Ceuta (Temporary Stay Migrant Centre) as part of a mediation project with several NGOs, she arrived in Tangier in 2001. As a French national with Spanish grandparents, she became deeply involved in the community organisations and social problems of this growing city. In 2006, she helped found the NGO 100% Mamans to offer support to young single mothers who are excluded and marginalised in their project for motherhood and building a better life.