

MOROCCAN RURAL MOTHERS: ROLES AND SOCIETY'S EXPECTATIONS

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Abstract

Generally speaking, mothers in Morocco find themselves in flux, constantly needing to manage and negotiate the conflicting expectations that are a result of the different conceptions of motherhood, let alone mothers in marginalized areas, rural areas, where they are silenced because of being mothers, and because of being that creature that must undertake hard work on a daily basis. Therefore, through using qualitative instruments, especially interviews, the focus will be in this study on diagnosing and analyzing the identity of mothers in Moroccan rural areas in terms of the roles they are assigned, their feeling towards their situation of being a “creature” working for free, and the tensions they feel in the ongoing process of fulfilling the society's expectations. Findings have shown that Moroccan rural mothers are suffering not only from patriarchy, but also from poverty and financial problems.

Key Concepts: Mothering, Mothering Identity, Rural Areas, Gender Roles, Society's Expectations

INTRODUCTION

According to the late census supervised by High Commission for Planning (2014), approximately seven million families exist in Morocco. This indicates that the number of mothers is large, but understanding the role of mother is not as easy as one might believe. In today's society, the meaning of the term —mother is complex, describing a wide range of women whose responsibilities vary dramatically. Understanding what —motherhood means is challenging because the responsibilities of mothers are constantly changing according to the community they belong to. Women find themselves in flux. Constantly need managing and adapting their own identities and roles by continuously reflecting on the conflicting expectations of what it means to be a mother. Although it may be difficult to construct a mothering identity in terms of roles, it is salient because the mothering identity is believed to be one of the most significant identity transformations of adulthood.

Purpose of the Study

Mothers in Morocco find themselves in flux, constantly needing to manage and negotiate the conflicting expectations that are a result of ever-lasting changes in the structure of Moroccan society. Indeed, this is what gives us the will to dive deep into the identity of Moroccan mothers.

This way, my research paper aims at investigating the conditions of rural mothers, via finding answers to fundamental questions like the roles of mothers in rural areas, the expectation

placed on them first as women and second as mothers. This research aims also to draw back the curtain on the tensions and challenges they encounter as a result of not fulfilling the expectations of their family and community.

Research Questions

Research questions were based on previous readings that have an impact on the emergence of these questions. Some personal matters and direct observation have also contributed to the development of those questions. Therefore, this paper aims to answer two major questions:

- 1) What are the expectations placed on Moroccan rural mothers?
- 2) What are the tensions Moroccan Rural Mothers face?

I-REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A-Rural Women in Morocco: Injustice, Poverty and Patriarchy

Article 19 of the new Moroccan Constitution states that men and women must enjoy equal rights and freedoms in all sectors and domains: civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental matters; yet, Morocco is ranked 131 out of 142 countries for equal gender rights (the Global Gender Gap Report, (2014)). This is for Moroccan women in general, so let alone rural women whose situation is even worse. Frankly speaking, many rural women are even totally excluded from social, economic and political reforms aiming at ameliorating and improving women's status throughout Morocco at least unlike their urban counterparts. Indeed, there many facets that demonstrate that urban women are experiencing a better life in comparison with rural ones.

Many have noted that there are many differences between urban women and their rural counterparts. For example, in cities women are either dependent upon their husbands for maintenance or must seek paid work so that to be able to provide for herself. In rural areas; by contrast, marriage is almost the only way to maintain social and financial protection for women. Women's place is at home to cook and prepare dishes to her family and never complain because it is her work as the historical and socialization factors have made that normal to extent that nobody even dare to question Harris (1981). They are almost always under the protection of men; the father, brothers before marriage and husband after marriage. Of course, the range of opportunities for women to earn living independent from men is usually much wider in cities than that in countryside.

Norms and traditions dictate rural women's roles. They must drop out of school when are adult, and learn to do household work in order to take care of her husband when getting married. Interaction and communication with foreign men is socially forbidden. This is why even if needing them in working outside home, single adult women are most of the time obliged to stay at home in order to avoid problems that might tarnish family's reputation. Thus, Moroccan rural women are suffering more than their urban counterparts.

Various are reasons behind rural women's suffering and marginalization they are experiencing, among which their attachment with home and household, migration, education, poverty as well as minor marriage, which would be carefully explained in the following, paragraphs.

The household is one of the major reasons behind the dependency and subordination of rural women. Indeed, the household is perceived by Harris (1981) as –the primary site for the structuring and constructing of gender relations and women's specific experiences in the developing world¹“. Thus, the household is an arena of subordination and dependency normalization. Household is not a visible or concrete entity that is not identified as buildings or set of rooms, but it refers to the abstract functions of supervising family and home, which have been taken unquestioned and for granted.

The household is critical for the analysis of gender roles and relation and is usually the focal point of the sexual division of labor in the Moroccan context, where rural women work in the outside home in the fields and take care of domestic animals, besides doing the whole work of the household. Little girls start learning to abide by the patriarchal rules dictated by their families, and thus hauling water, washing clothes, running errands- at every young age, while their brothers play or go to school as they are obliged to obey men inside family. Noticing this gender inequality, Moroccan anthropologist Fatima Hajjarabi (2010) has documented the great efforts done by women in rural areas the enormous time and backbreaking labor involved in fetching firewood for cooking, a task that is performed entirely by women. Thus, in this way rural women take the burden of providing the daily needs to their families (cited in Brydon, 1988)

Additionally, rural women are deprived of basic infrastructure and needs such as drinkable water and other means of energy. In fact, the absence of potable water and energy resources in the domestic units, push and oblige women, who are traditionally responsible for these tasks, to manage offering of these basics. According to Mernissi, (1994) despite the introduction of technology and modern energy sources such as electricity into the Moroccan rural regions, these energy sources are limited to the large-scale farms and do not bring any relief from the energy of the women of the forgotten countryside for centuries. Rachid Elbadaoui (2004) argues in article entitled “Rural Women and their Struggling from Birth until Death” that on the basis of class and not gender poor women rural women are deprived the right to electricity and basic needs, unlike the upper class women, which makes their domestic tasks much more difficult, and thus double their suffering.

In term of education, Moroccan rural women face many more constraints than urban women. Perhaps the problem of education in urban areas is a problem of quality, but in rural areas are the problems of easy access to schools, and the traditional mentality of the rural community. This can be manifested in the low educational level of rural women; only 11% were literate in rural areas compared with 39% in urban areas. In this respect, many Moroccans have limited access to education, and women rates of participation lag behind those of men. In 2005 an estimated 49% of Moroccan population of 15 years of age are illiterate; 61, 7% of women, compared to 36.7% of men. Rural women's opportunities for education are among the most restricted, with nearly 8 out of 10 rural women unable to read. Illiteracy rate, in fact among women in

remote rural areas exceeds 90% (Zirari Hayat. Women's Rights in Morocco: Assessments). Hence, though the constant efforts of the state and NGOs, statistics has always proved a little improvement in women's educational status, especially these belonging to rural areas.

Various are the reasons that impede rural inhabitants from sending their children, especially female ones to school. As ELbadaoui believed that along with absence of some patriarchal mentalities that forbid girls the right to education, many children are unable to go to school because it is miles away or because their parents cannot afford the expenses. As they become adults, they probably will not earn more to send their own children to school. Therefore, the cycle of poverty will never stop if we continue to be careless.

Poverty is another issue characterizing rural areas that hinders women's independency. Most rural Moroccans are working hard just so that to find what to eat. Bread and butter are most of the times their official meal, and 35% of the average of their income is spent to cover basic foodstuffs. In such a context, only 10% of Moroccans have the means to buy imported foods at the supermarkets, let alone to eat at restaurants. And according to a study conducted by the Economic Council (2014) 79% of poor Moroccan population is rural and the majority of this rate is women². In fact, in rural areas there is what we can call the feminization of poverty³. In other words, many rural women are denied the right to inheritance and owning property in the name of culture and tradition. Consequently, they are unable to have access to lands ownership or inheritance which condemns them to remain totally dependent on their husbands or brothers and be wed at an early age.

To sum up, taking the heavy burden of the household and the agricultural various duties, suffering from lack of education, poverty, and living behind doors, rural women are in total exclusion from outside sphere and they are far from developmental programs that can in a way enhance the bad conditions of these women.

II- METHODOLOGY

a- Overview of the Context:

Wa'ar is a small countryside that located in the region of Fes, Mekness. More precisely it belongs to the province of Fritissa, Boulmane. It is about 45Km from Outat Elhaj, and far from Tandit, another village by about 20Km, near the river of Malwiya. They speak both Berber (chal'ha) and Moroccan Arabic. According to the late census (2014), it consists of fifteen families, all of which are extended. That is each family comprises 10 to 15 members.

It has a real fascinating landscape. The weather is extremely cold in winter that is sometimes under 0 degree, and hot in summer with an annual average of 30 degrees. Furthermore, this countryside contains 3 major natural water sources (O'youn) that represent their only drinkable water. Their source of income is agriculture, for seed self-sufficient wheat and vegetable. In such a situation, the inhabitants are deprived from easy access to basic services such health care as this countryside contains neither public, nor private hospitals. In order to buy basic needs, they move to other villages, Tandit and Outat Elhaj, Wa'ar rural areas is served only by

one primary school. Students who pass the primary school have to move to Tandit so that to carry on their studies in the secondary and high school.

Thus, this specific context has been chosen because of various reasons. First, its people still depend on for-surviving agriculture. Second, its population is limited in terms of number that I can conduct my research on all mothers there. Last but not least, as I mentioned above, they can speak both Berber and Arabic, so communication perhaps be easier than any other place. Hence, and for these reasons, Wa'ar is a rural par excellence, and it would a good representative for the other Moroccan rural areas.

b- Population Sampling and Research Design

Having targeted a rural traditional community where most of the people are illiterate, there was no chance for distributing questionnaires. Interviewing people was the only solution to carry out the study. It was impossible even to record them using a device, because their men refused. Therefore, we opted for taking notes, and promised to keep the data for academic research only. Most of the interviews were conducted in the homes of the interviewees or the agricultural fields. The questions were posed in Arabic as no one speaks English. We were obliged to translate the questions as well as inquiries and summarize ideas when needed.

To carry out the research paper, the targeted population was only mothers, as well as some men who are asked about reasons behind their refusal of girls' education. The study was conducted on all 65 mothers that belong to Wa'ar rural area, aging between 20 to 65 years old. Almost all participants are illiterate; except four mothers with primary school education level.

4- FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A-Wa'ari Women and Education

Changing the world and societies undoubtedly start with education, and educating a woman is like educating the whole society, yet of 10 million Moroccans who do not know how to read or write, a majority (7 million or 62%) are women. Women constitute a priority target in the struggle against illiteracy. Despite positive developments in said struggle, the number of illiterate people is tending to rise in accordance with demographic growth and the non-generalization of rural schooling. There are not only gender inequalities, but also inequalities according to location, since there is a higher rate of illiteracy among rural women than among those living in urban environments.

Access to education and training constitutes a vector for integration into the labor market and society. It conditions perceptions of work, family and citizenship. A factor in compartmentalizing the public space and mainstreaming women's presence there, personal investment in training allows a reconsideration of the socially assigned roles and the construction of a future of equality. The schooling of girls, which began as soon as independence was gained, has provided the first generations of educated girls, who have therefore been able to access paid work and positions of public and political responsibility, but decades have been necessary to spread schooling such that it is no longer an essentially urban

phenomenon. After implementation of the national charter for education and training in 1996, the gender gap has tended to diminish at different levels of education. However, the urban-rural gap persists, illustrating the existence of a major geographical, social and gender disparities. The same is taking place in wa'ar countryside in particular and Moroccan rural areas in general, where illiteracy has a female face. The majority of Wa'ar rural women are victimized because they lack education. The following table illustrates the rate of illiteracy in Fritissa region.

Figure 1: Rate of Illiteracy among Boys and Girls under 15 years old, in Fritissa Region

Boys	7,35%
Girls	19,56%

B-Wa'ar Region, Marriage and Motherhood

From the interviews conducted, it is evident that marriage is a source of social protection against shame and a sort of financial security, for they lack education. Women who remain single after the twenties of age become the target gossip in the rural community; their behavior is watched and scrutinized by neighbors and the male members of their family as one girl from Wa'ar rural area states "in here everybody watches everybody. The girl who does not get married at an early age will suffer a lot". This in a way means that early marriage is seen a prestigious event in the life of the woman, which implies and it ensures that she deserves and able to be a wife as one old woman says: "the girl who is asked for marriage by many men is a proof that she is well-prepared to become a wife and thus a mother no matter how old she is". It is implied that she is smart to undertake the tasks required from her. Hence, marriage in Wa'ar, and in Moroccan rural areas is valuable and it can be considered as that shield which protects women from the gossip of society and the complaint of their families.

If the institution of marriage, in Wa'ar rural area, is a social protection for single, adult girls, children are seen and considered as the touchstone that binds husbands to their wives forever. And most of time it is one of the ways that protects wife and push husbands not to leave their wives, as one mother explains and narrates her experience when she says: "two years after getting married, I did not give birth to any child; I was so afraid and my husband was not treating me well. He used to say to me since I am not a mother, I am useless". Thus, we can say that children are the cornerstone that keeps marriage lasts. In a word, as any other rural area, the institution of marriage is glorified and it is children who embellish and help in a way in the success of this institution.

As a matter of fact, having children, a woman can guarantee that her husband will not leave her or marry another wife. As a result, children function as the cornerstone of woman's social and marital life. Hadoum, one old mother narrates her own experience as follows: "when getting married my mother incited me to give birth as soon as possible so that I can feel some kind of security and control my husband". This testimony clearly indicates that children are pillars upon which rural women can enjoy a kind of marital stability, both socially and psychologically. This reproduction function allows women a source of equilibrium and dignity. Moreover, rural women use her reproductive function as a medium through which they invest

in their children as capital that will give them strength throughout her life. In plain words, children represent a kind of insurance against risk in woman's marital life especially when getting older. Women in Wa'ar rural area must give birth so that to face uncertainty inside the institution of marriage.

It seems also that women and rural population in general need children so that to guarantee their living. Having a lot of children is like accumulating a great capital that could be converted into an income when getting older. In simple words, having no education and savings for retirement, people there give birth to lot of children in order to be the providers of the house in a certain time. One mother clarifies this in understandable words: "we give birth to our children so that to provide for us when getting older". Thus, children are considered a kind of investment and a return on the capital; the affection and care a mother gives to her children are supposed to be offered back to those mothers when they get much older.

C-Roles of Rural Mothers

1. Caregivers

To suggest that these mothers are solely about being rural, rather than urban lies the complexity of their roles. Although noticing some kind of negligence towards their children, these mothers measure their success by the amount of care they show to every member of their family, and to their children. Indeed, Wa'ar rural mothers establish the view that despite the diversity of roles they have, it is the engaged presence of the mother in the child's life that is essential to their identity. This latter idea is revealed in one mother's testimony: "we are uneducated, yet we educate our children to be respectful, loving, humble and patient. We are their teachers in accordance with our knowledge". This statement has been consolidated by another testimony in which a mother states: "my main role is to take care of my children. I am not doing it in the right way since I am all the time busy with other tasks, but I do my best and all that I can do for them". Although not necessarily their intended goal, women of Wa'ar rural area's comments are outlining what they perceive to be the correct way for a mother to raise her children. These mothers even if too busy with other tasks, they try to give their children the possible attention in accordance with their capacity and availability at home, placing the mother at the center of the children's well-being and as one who is ultimately responsible for the future of the children's moral character, rural mothers contend and confess that they don't offer enough care to their kids, and they are aware also that their children should be raised correctly.

These mothers feel that they have a much more positive impact on their children's lives than mothers whose children are in care of someone else as a mother states: "I have I little kid whom I used to leave with my mother-in-law or my neighbor, but now I take him on my back whenever and wherever I go to work outside home in the agriculture, as I realize that I must be the only responsible for him", and another mother states: "I am obliged to take my little kid with me on my back to the farm, whenever I go, because I don't know I feel scared to let with somebody else". Thus, rural mothers associate mothering mainly with being engaged, the best mother is that one who assumes responsibility of looking after and the well-

being of the children wherever, and whenever she goes. By associating good mothering with being an engaged mother, those mothers are embracing the idea of acting as a caregiver and making it as an important part from their roles.

2. Household Managers

The other theme that emerged in rural mothers' testimonies is their role as a household manager. For rural women, managing the household, yard work and organizing the family schedule constitute a fundamental part of their daily tasks. Rural mothers come up also with simple ideas and tips so that to save money and help their families financially.

Family is sacred to these mothers, so management of the whole family is required, as one mother states: "we get married first to manage the whole household and take care of the all members of my husband's family". This, implicitly elucidates that a wife in rural areas is required to serve and take care not only of her husband and kids, but all member of the family. Within the same vein, a mother states that "I must serve every member in this family, including my father-in-law, mother-in-law and all the siblings of my husband. It is very hard but I have no choice".

In fact, one of the facets of managing the whole family is cleaning, washing clothes, cooking and supervising the husband. Latifa², one mother clearly explains that when she says "I must get up early every morning, at 5 o'clock so that to clean the house, and then prepare the breakfast". These are approximately the house tasks that must be performed on a daily basis, but family's need stake precedence in the schedules of the women. Rural women schedule is reorganized and organized according to needs if not orders of the family, waiting for men of the family to ask for they want them (rural women) to do. One interviewee declares: "sometimes I was planning to take rest after finishing my tasks, but my husband came to tell me that I must undertake another work". In short, re-arranging one's day on husbands' needs is perhaps unique to rural women.

The other commitment of these women with respect to household management is helping the husband in earning and saving money through running simple projects. Khadija, a mother clarifies "I must be the right hand of my husband so that to resist poverty and bad conditions...when I first came her as a bride, I brought three hens with me so that to give income of the eggs to my husband". Another mother who did the same thing says "for me when came, I brought with me 2 rabbits, after four years I have thirteen rabbits and from time to time I give one rabbit or two rabbits to sell it and take the money". Thus, helping the husband financially and earn the living is another concern and task of rural women.

There is another chief role that rural women play in earning a living, which is the burden of working outside home as these women help their husbands in the various agricultural activities.

Women of the countryside play a fundamental role in the agricultural tasks. Aicha Mhamdi², a mother of nine children best summarizes the role of rural women in agriculture³.

women here must participate in all stages of harvest; we begin with olive harvest, via helping in collecting it and taking it to centers in charge of milling olives...when the

season of olives ends, we are required to take off the poisonous herbs from the land. With the arrival of the summer and the beginning of harvesting agricultural products; wheat, barley and pulses, we harvest the crop with traditional tools for long hours...it can be sometimes 12 hours a day.

From this statement, it is very clear that women actively participate in what should be men's work. Rural women are still a significant power in agriculture. In fact; they represent the working power that substitutes for men working in non-agricultural activities. Wa'ar rural area women have no alternatives except agricultural responsibilities, for they receive insufficient general and expert education. Actually, the activities of rural women in agriculture emerge as a consequence of social and economic necessity, rather than their own choice. Moreover, besides these aforementioned seasonal activities, Wa'ar rural women perform other daily tasks such as taking the burden of bringing water from long distances so that to utilize it and meet the several needs of the family, collecting firewood for heating and cooking, as well as taking care of the cattle. These daily tasks are best summarized by Aicha Mhamdi¹: "In here we have to bring water, collect wood and bring food to the cattle. Women have to this every day".

What is surprising in all that is their desire to stay at home, through the question of what is the task and role that you are more comfortable in, almost everybody answer with staying at home to take care of the children and husband as Latifa² says "I find really comfort in staying at home and taking care of the household and my children, and there is not something better than being besides your kids whenever they need you". Another interviewee declares: "I hope really one day my husband would let me stay at home because just to look after him and his family". This desire to stay mirrors in a way the intensive mothers defined by Hays (1996) in which mothering is characterized by the amount of time mothers in their homes, taking care and managing the household. Staying at home is seen as the only viable option to fulfill their commitment as mothers. However, this is perhaps unreachable dream as poverty necessitates the working of these women inside and outside home.

These themes are very significant because they function as a means of articulating a particular identity of mothers in Wa'ar rural area. The roles of these mothers are multifaceted as they revolve around supervising the family inside home and helping the husband in agriculture outside home. Man in Wa'ar rural area is the boss and women must be obedient not only to their husbands or children, but to every male inside the family. They are like machines that work from morning till night with no relief. Thus, Moroccan rural women have proved that they are strong, powerful and capable of taking care of themselves and their families, and are always ready to meet the challenges of survival.

The absence of men in the homes of a large number of rural households, has forced women to seek additional ways and means of earning income to maintain themselves and their families. It is out of this necessity that farming the land is and has become an increasingly important means for survival in rural communities, especially for women.

It is therefore not coincidental that large numbers of women work along the entire agricultural value chain, and make significant contributions to family income and economic well-being. This is, in addition to their traditional reproductive and domestic responsibilities

3. Wa'ar Rural Women and Socialization

Through the focus group I undertake with Wa'ar mothers, it is very clear that the construction of their identities, I talked about in the theoretical framework, as mothers working outside and inside home for free came a result of socialization, which is the process through which the individual learns to become an accepted member of the society, which means that these rural mothers are products of the social context they belong to. This view is demonstrated when I asked these Wa'ar mothers about what makes them believe that the roles assigned to you really reflect the good motherhood? Most of them replied with saying that they have learnt that from their parents and observations of people of their countryside.

These rural mothers seem to agree on the fact that they were brought up to become housewives and mothers. Aisha, one of these mothers¹ declares: "My mother used always to remind that I have to stop going to school when finishing the primary level and wait for a husband to come", another Waari woman states almost the same idea: I stopped going to school when I was 12 years old, and my father told me that I have to prepare myself to become a wife now; and she added: my mother used to teach me how to cook and clean, believing that would be of paramount importance when getting married". These testimonies show again clearly that family is the first agent of socialization, and plays a major role in shaping and redirecting the personality of these mothers.

The individual also learns many values and traditions through imitation and incidental learning since parents do not always teach like a teacher as one mother² states: „I perform the same activities my mother used to perform. Indeed, I learnt everything from her. „" another mother declares as well: everybody says to me that I am just a copy of my mother in everything she does. Actually my mother is my role model". Those mothers see in their mothers as role models and good examples to follow, which is a facet of the socialization process. Thus, they construct their identity in accordance with what they saw their mothers do.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It's obvious that the concept of mother is a social and cultural construction, which makes the identity of mothers in terms of roles and expectations differ from one context to another. For cultural and social factors, the roles performed by mothers in Morocco are not same as their counterparts in the west.

From gender perspective, education plays a major role in the oppression which rural mothers experience. Indeed, rural mothers are like machines that are obliged to work all the day long. They have to work as free force labor in fields, besides their traditional roles inside home. The research findings convey that how these women are deprived of many basic rights just in the name of culture and tradition.

Public discourse has made even rural women's call for their rights a — shame “. Moreover, this study enhances scholars 'understanding of the static roles of mothers in Society. As we become increasingly aware of the affects that societal expectations have on one 's identity, scholars must continue to study the changing ways in which mothers are responding to the public rural discourse and how those responses are ultimately transforming the role of mother.

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