

Katja Žvan Elliott

“IT’S TOO MUCH!”: VICTIMS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE ENCOUNTER THE MOROCCAN STATE

Abstract

By using the narrative approach and linking it to feminist research ethics and critical race methodology, this article seeks to understand how non-literacy and poverty hinder low-income women’s access to justice and how these women experience the Moroccan state. The state here acts as an oppressive and marginalizing entity in women’s lives, but also offers the potential for empowerment. This ethnographic study tells the stories of three victims of gender-based violence to demonstrate that the state needs to (1) set up an efficient and responsive infrastructure for those lacking know-how and money; (2) institute proper training of state agents for implementation of laws and to prevent them from acting on personal opinions and attitudes with regard to women’s rights; and (3) strengthen procedures so that state agents can respond expeditiously to the needs and grievances of citizens.

Keywords: critical race methodology; family law; gender-based violence; low-income women; Morocco

In February 2018 the Moroccan legislative branch passed the much-awaited law 103.13 on the elimination of violence against women. This short law—eighteen articles in total—in its first clause recognizes and defines an impressive array of different types of gendered violence. However, overall, it falls well short of providing *any* protection for victims of violence.¹ The Rabat-based NGO, Mobilizing for Rights Associates (MRA), argues that the law:

Does not create duties or procedures for law enforcement and justice system personnel to address the critical, earlier steps in the law enforcement process, such as the reporting, investigation, and prosecution phases of violence against women cases. Policies and procedures are currently unclear for law enforcement, prosecutors and health services. . . . [The system] does not address the deficiencies in the current rape and sexual assault laws, for example by criminalizing marital rape or decriminalizing illicit sexual relations. It does not provide for any civil protection or temporary restraining

¹ Throughout the article I use the term *victim* of violence, rather than survivor. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I felt uncomfortable with the NGOs use of term. However, as time passed, I realized that women I met *were* victims. Although literacy classes, TV shows, and NGOs speak about women’s rights, urging women to demand them, these women’s knowledge of legal reforms and active pursuit of what the state deems as just only reminds them of the nonexistence of alternatives for low-income women.

Katja Žvan Elliott is an associate professor at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco; email: k.zvan-elliott@au.ma

© Cambridge University Press 2020 0020-7438/20

orders or other civil remedies, or establish any specific services or provide concrete support for women survivors of violence.²

This article is an ethnographic study of why without such protections and clear procedures the new law will not improve women's access to justice. It argues that without an overhaul of the socioeconomic and political systems, victims will continue to "run from violence to insecurity, as the law does not provide them with shelter, health, or legal advice and assistance."³ I look at poverty as a relationship involving the state, street-level bureaucrats, and low-income women, rather than seeing poverty as a result solely of "cultural practices" (out-of-wedlock pregnancies, underage marriages, domestic violence) or because women lack "human capital" (with low levels of education or skills).⁴ I use the critical race methodology (CRM) of Daniel Solórzano and Tara Yosso and the feminist research ethics (FRE) of Brooke Ackerly and Jacqui True as frameworks for articulating this notion of poverty as a relationship and focus on the experiences of low-income women and their quest for legal and gender justice. These two research practices, although normally not used in conjunction, share a belief that the aim of research is social justice.⁵ As such they share "a set of ethical commitments," that helps researchers be attentive to several issues. FRE instructs us—researchers—to be cognizant of the language we use to refer to those whom we observe and interview. Rather than labeling them as "research subjects," Ackerly and True suggest that scholars refer to them as "subject-participants" or "co-researchers," to acknowledge their active participation in the research, which without their contribution would not be possible.⁶ Thus, the subject of my study comprises the experiences of low-income women with street-level bureaucracy and state law as observed and narrated by them. The conclusion of Solórzano and Yosso is that this practice (and attentiveness to language) "pushes us to humanize quantitative data and to recognize silenced voices in qualitative data."⁷

CRM provides a framework to "'counter' deficit storytelling."⁸ Both FRE and CRM require researchers to be attentive to the pervasiveness of the "privileged

² Stephanie Willman Bordat and Saida Kouzzi, *USAID/Morocco Gender Analysis (Final) 2018* (Washington, DC: Banyan Global for USAID, 2018), 30, accessed May 2018, https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00SWQ6.pdf.

³ Hajare Elkhaldi, "103–13: Women's Associations Challenge Empty Legislation," *Morocco World News*, February 19, 2018, accessed January 2019, <https://www.morocoworldnews.com/2018/02/240953/103-13-women-law-against-women-empty-legislation>.

⁴ Matthew Desmond, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2016), 316, 317. See also Michael Lipsky, *Street Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2010). I am using Lipsky's term and definition of street-level bureaucrats working in "police and welfare departments, lower courts, legal services offices and other agencies whose workers interact with and have wide discretion over the dispensation of benefits or the allocation of public sanctions" (xi). Although Lipsky was writing about American street-level bureaucrats, many of their qualities—exercise of discretion and lack of resources, such as time and information—apply to what I observed in the Moroccan context, as will be discussed. I thank Nadia Sonneveld for drawing my attention to this work.

⁵ Brooke Ackerly and Jacqui True, *Doing Feminist Research in Political and Social Science* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 6; Daniel G. Solórzano and Tara J. Yosso, "Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research," *Qualitative Inquiry* 8, no. 1 (2002): 26.

⁶ Ackerly and True, *Doing Feminist Research*, 7, 37.

⁷ Solórzano and Yosso, "Critical Race Methodology," 38.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

epistemologies"⁹ of those who create "master stories" (also called majoritarian stories or monovocals) such as political elites, NGO workers, or researchers, and the need to juxtapose them with the "experiential knowledge"¹⁰ of those whose experiences and stories have been distorted, if not silenced, by the creators of master stories. Here, Hsain Ilahiane's definition of *al-hogra* is useful for explaining not only the limitations of master stories within the Moroccan context but also why non-literacy and poverty affect people's access to justice.¹¹ He defines *al-hogra* as "contempt," referring to "various daily micro-practices of injustice and indignation visited upon the vulnerable and the powerless of society by dominant groups."¹² Common to many urban Moroccan NGO workers and researchers, but also my Moroccan students and urban elites, with whom I have discussed Moroccan politics, is a belief that the country has been unable to progress and democratize because of people's illiteracy and poverty.¹³ Furthermore, elite urban NGOs have been able to create a language and hierarchy of women's experiences.¹⁴ Low-income women who use the services of such NGOs—literacy classes, listening centers for victims of violence, and shelters—are called beneficiaries rather than constituents, as Stephanie Willman Bordat and Saida Kouzzi have suggested.¹⁵ They rightly argue that the term "beneficiaries" denotes a clear class-based hierarchy and hence solidifies the distance between the unveiled Francophone NGO women and their poorer, less educated, and hijab-clad counterparts.¹⁶ Moreover, it is the experiences, political views, and

⁹ Ackerly and True, *Doing Feminist Research*, 25.

¹⁰ Daniel G. Solórzano, "Critical Race Theory, Race and Gender Microaggressions, and the Experience of Chicana and Chicano Scholars," *Qualitative Studies in Education* 11, no. 1 (1998): 122–23.

¹¹ Hsain Ilahiane, "al-Hogra—A Time of Injustice: Portraits of Moroccan Muslim Men in Search of Dignity and Piety in the Informal Sector," in *Arab Masculinities: Anthropological Reconceptions*, ed. Marcia Inhorn and Konstantina Isidoros (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, forthcoming).

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ For NGO workers, see Katja Žvan Elliott, *Modernizing Patriarchy: The Politics of Women's Rights in Morocco* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2015). For researchers, see, for example, Souad Belhorma, "Two Months of Marriage Were Sufficient to Turn My Life Upside Down": Early Marriage as a Form of Gender-Based Violence," *Gender & Development* 24, no. 2 (2016): 219–30; Habiba Chafai, "Contextualising Street Sexual Harassment in Morocco: A Discriminatory Sociocultural Representation of Women," *Journal of North African Studies* 22, no. 5 (2017): 821–40; and Moha Ennaji, "Women's NGOs and Social Change in Morocco," in *Women in the Middle East and North Africa: Agents of Change*, ed. Fatima Sadiqi and Moha Ennaji (London: Routledge, 2011), 79–88. For comparison, see Stephanie Willman Bordat and Saida Kouzzi, "Legal Empowerment of Unwed Mothers: Experiences of Moroccan NGOs," (working paper, Legal Empowerment Working Papers, International Development Law Organization [IDLO], 2009), 4, accessed May 2018, http://www.wluml.org/sites/wluml.org/files/LEWP_BordatKouzzi.pdf.

¹⁴ Nadia Guessous, "Genealogies of Feminism: Leftist Feminist Subjectivity in the Wake of the Islamic Revival in Contemporary Morocco" (doctoral thesis, Columbia University, 2011), accessed May 2018, <https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/D8JH3T41>; Jessica Marie Newman, "Aspirational Maternalism and the 'Reconstitution' of Single Mothers in Morocco," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 14, no. 1 (2018): 45–67; Megan O'Donnell, "Safe Havens and Social Embeddedness," in *Women and Social Change in North Africa: What Counts as Revolutionary?* ed. Doris H. Gray and Nadia Sonneveld (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 45–68. Also of interest in this debate, from a comparative perspective, is Marnia Lazreg's article, "Feminism and Difference: The Perils of Writing as a Woman on Women in Algeria," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 81–107.

¹⁵ Stephanie Willman Bordat and Saida Kouzzi, "Capturing Change in Legal Empowerment Programs in Morocco and Tunisia: Shared Challenges and Future Directions," in Gray and Sonneveld, *Women and Social Change*, 33–36.

¹⁶ Willman Bordat and Kouzzi, "Capturing Change"; Guessous, "Genealogies of Feminism."

aspirations of these NGO workers that underpin the projects to resocialize and reeducate the “other” women, whose access to justice is denied because, as the master story asserts, they are ignorant of the laws.¹⁷ In a conversation with a daughter of a well-known Moroccan feminist, after I stated that “just because women are illiterate doesn’t mean they are stupid,” she said, “But they don’t know what’s good for them!” Similarly, Jessica Marie Newman’s study of single mother associations in urban Morocco demonstrates how neoliberal ideas about self-help, responsibility, and self-initiative seep into the mentality, training, and expectations of urban NGOs assisting low-income women. Her ethnographic study cogently argues that NGO workers stubbornly focus on “reeducation”¹⁸ of unwed mothers to teach them to be self-reliable and responsible parents while staying silent on structural obstacles such as poverty, lack of social and familial support, and the continuing stigmatization of unwed mothers, all of which determine women’s capacities, regardless of the training they receive while staying at the NGO-run shelters. Such master stories and attitudes provide a very narrow explanation of the complexities of the lived realities of silenced and marginalized populations, such as my subject-participants. As Ackerly and True argue, because feminist-informed research is “self-reflective, critical, political” it enables “the researcher to ‘see’ those people and processes lost in gaps, silences, margins, and peripheries.”¹⁹

Finally, these two practices require researchers to view not only subject-participants but also situations “in terms of intersecting and overlapping contexts and social forces,” such as gender, income, ability, and historical moment, to name those relevant for the analysis of the cases in this article.²⁰ In short, FRE and CRM provide the ethical and theoretical framework within which I can examine how gender, poverty (which includes women’s lower socioeconomic class as lack of social capital, their inability to pay for transportation and the legal and administrative fees necessary to access justice, as well as their inability to gain financial independence from their families), non-literacy, and geographical location intersect and impact women’s access to justice and search for alternatives. It is through this lens that we see more clearly how limited and limiting the master stories are in explaining the experiences of low-income women and providing solutions for their situations. To paraphrase Kimberle Crenshaw’s criticism of (white) feminist theory and politics, Moroccan urban women’s rights NGOs too often “claim to reflect *women’s* experience and *women’s* aspirations,” while rarely speaking with or listening to their constituents. “If this is so,” Crenshaw continues, “how can the claims that ‘women are,’ ‘women believe’ and ‘women need’ be made when such claims are inapplicable or unresponsive to the needs, interests and experiences of [low-income] women?”²¹ Women’s identity in Morocco, as elsewhere, is neither universal nor static; rather, it is contextual.²²

¹⁷ Newman, “Aspirational Maternalism”; O’Donnell, “Safe Havens.”

¹⁸ Newman, “Aspirational Maternalism,” 56.

¹⁹ Ackerly and True, *Feminist Research*, 22.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

²¹ Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique and Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1, (1989): 154.

²² Compare to Nivedita Menon, “Is Feminism about ‘Women’? A Critical View on Intersectionality from India,” *Economic & Political Weekly* 50, no. 17 (25 April 2015): 37–44.

In order to capture the needs, interests, and experiences of low-income non-literate women I am using a narrative approach. Narratives, in Margarete Sandelowski's words, are "a framework for understanding the subject and interview data." She argues that the empirical research has been preoccupied "with obtaining information at the expense of understanding expression," and that because individuals themselves story their experiences, researchers too have to "rescue" empirical research "from efforts to standardize and scientize [it and reclaim it] as occasions for storytelling."²³ The stories in this article are not based on life-history interviews, which seem to be the preferred method for collecting data for this approach. Rather, data collected during my ethnographic fieldwork—participant observation, informal conversations, and formal semi-structured interviews with provincial NGO workers and their constituents—provide the material for the stories.²⁴ Attention is given to the experiences of women with bureaucracy, their reception, attitudes toward them as low-income citizens (their lack of social capital, class, and non-literacy) and as women (their gender), and their own understanding and responses to the events I witnessed with them. The three stories chosen for this article are representative of over forty cases that I followed during my fieldwork and about fifty cases kept on file at the Association that I perused. Some had a happy ending, whereas others were unresolved or ongoing. As with any other stories, these research narratives are "composed of a story or fabula, comprised of actions, happenings, settings, discourse or plot."²⁵ This approach helps elucidate the effect of Moroccan legal reforms and, more significantly, challenges the above-described master narratives. Instead, these stories expose a much less visible and less discussed reality of how poverty and non-literacy influence the dealings of street-level bureaucrats with their constituents, of poor infrastructure, and of withering bureaucracy, and also of how women themselves nonetheless manage their lack of human and social capital to access justice.

Before turning to the stories, I will discuss the research methods and setting. This will help contextualize the events and experiences of the women whose stories I narrate.

RESEARCH SETTING AND METHODS

This is an ethnographic study of gender-based violence (GBV). I conducted fieldwork in the provincial town of El Hajeb where I participated in a local NGO (the Association) and its Listening Center for victims of violence (the Center). The Association was established in 2002, "for the promotion of women's rights and reinforcement of their capacities in education, human rights, informal education, education on hygiene and physical support, legal orientation and functional education."²⁶ At the time of my fieldwork, all of their activities were performed by only three women—Jamila, Kenza, and Samira.²⁷ The Association was financed by different Moroccan and international partners, but, as Jamila explained, not many were willing to pay for the running costs such as the

²³ Margarete Sandelowski, "Telling Stories: Narrative Approaches in Qualitative Research," *IMAGE: Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 23, no. 3 (Fall 1991): 161–62.

²⁴ For comparison, see Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 4th ed. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012), 584.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ From the promotional material of the Association.

²⁷ All personal names are pseudonyms.

Internet, electricity, or salaries; partners normally only paid for one-time activities that the Association regularly organized. This meant that Jamila, for example, used her private funds to pay for expenses incurred by the legal accompanying service the Center offered (such as paying for transportation between the Association and various administrative buildings in El Hajeb), and its constituents covered costs for their transportation to and from the Association and for gathering and getting notarized required documents. Despite the fact that the state relies on NGOs to provide essential legal and other assistance to particularly low-income communities, the government does not provide any funding; the women laughed at my innocence when I asked them about it.

I started my fieldwork at the Center in late spring 2015 and finished it in the spring of 2017. In my first year of fieldwork, I visited the Center once a week and was assisted by a student researcher, Sarah Shera, who did her summer internship at the Center.²⁸ During this time I also attended various local NGO-led workshops in El Hajeb, Ifrane, and Azrou involving diverse partners, such as medical staff, police and gendarmerie, lawyers, and other NGO workers. The bulk of my participant observation work was completed in the summer of 2016, when for over two months I observed, accompanied, and interviewed constituents of the Center and discussed issues with the two women working there. On average the Center dealt with about twenty to thirty new cases each month, in addition to many repeat cases that required longer-term assistance.

As GBV is an extremely personal and sensitive issue, especially since I was working with victims of violence themselves and also various state officials, I was cognizant of the harm that my presence and questions could have on individual cases. I obtained permission from El Hajeb's police and my university, which also funded my trips and translations of interviews. In addition, on my first day at the Association I met with the women working there to explain my research project and ask if they would be supportive of my presence, questions, and requests to accompany them to various institutions. I did the same with their constituents. In fall 2016 and winter 2017, I conducted additional semi-structured interviews with some of the women whose stories I followed in the summer of 2016.²⁹

EL HAJEB

In order to contextualize the stories of the three women, it is important to take a closer look at the socioeconomic situation of the locality in which they resided.³⁰ El Hajeb is both a town and a province in the Fes-Meknes region. The province itself encompasses a number of rural communities and municipalities, of which the largest (and most developed) is the town of El Hajeb. The town itself is known for its military base and prostitution. Locals like to mention that the latter is not only tolerated by law enforcement but also encouraged as an activity for soldiers with little to do in an otherwise sleepy area. Many of the sex workers come from Middle Atlas poverty in search of work. According to the Association, whose work at its inception in 2002 focused on providing

²⁸ Sarah gave me permission to use her notes and the capstone that was the result of her internship and fieldwork. I am grateful to her for this and also for conversations about issues raised at the Association.

²⁹ I also offered a small amount of money to compensate them for giving me the time to do the interview and to cover their travel expenses.

³⁰ Unless otherwise stated, all statistics in this section are taken from Morocco's 2014 census, which is available on the governmental Haut Commissariat au Plan's website, www.hcp.ma.

health and training workshops for sex workers, local authorities have cracked down on prostitution in recent years: however, gainful employment for women (and men) generally remains scarce. There are numerous reasons for this, such as lack of governmental regulation of labor conditions in agriculture (as the main economic activity in the area), service, and the scant industry in and around El Hajeb.

The 2014 census report does not disaggregate employment data to demonstrate how many people work in the mostly unregulated agricultural sector and informal economy, which is where most women (and many men) work.³¹ Official statistics only provide general figures for women's employment in the region at 15.8 percent, with unemployment at 28.2 percent. Most of the women—66.5 percent—included in the employment statistics work as "salaried worker[s] in the private sector," 13.4 percent are self-employed, and 8.5 percent work in the regulated public sector.³² However, Aomar Ibourk reports in an ILO (International Labour Organization) working paper that "virtually all female employment in rural areas is informal, and over 98 percent of all employed women have no social security."³³ Furthermore, research on the size of the informal economy in Morocco suggests that "this hidden part of [the] economy constitute[d] 42.9% of the official GDP in 2015."³⁴ In addition, the 2016 HCP (Higher Planning Commission) report of the "national survey on the informal activities in Morocco" focuses merely on labor productivity within the informal economy and its contribution to Morocco's GDP. It concludes that the informal sector "serves a traditional society in transition and one marked by a limited supply of an un- or semi-skilled workforce in the job market."³⁵ Missing from this report and similar analyses is a focus on how employment in such a sector can reproduce poverty and that many people seek work there not because of corruption or because they are averse to paying taxes, as some reports suggest, but simply because they do not have any other viable alternatives.³⁶ During my fieldwork, all of the women I met through the Center who worked did so as day laborers in the agricultural sector, or as cleaning staff in cafés, private homes, and administrative buildings. Such employment allowed women and their families to survive, but not much more. Many of these women were family breadwinners as a result of their husbands' inability or

³¹ I use Aomar Ibourk's definition of informal economy as "employment in which the worker is not a member of any social insurance scheme," from "Contribution of Labour Market Policies and Institutions to Employment, Equal Opportunities and the Formalisation of the Informal Economy: Morocco" (Employment Working Paper No. 123, Employment Sector, International Labour Organization, 2012), 23, accessed 16 February 2018, http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/—ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_191244.pdf.

³² The private sector, as the public one, is on paper regulated by the Moroccan labor law. However, anecdotal evidence demonstrates that many private employers (in hospitality, agricultural business, and industry alike) are exploiting poverty, high levels of unemployment, and lack of literacy and circumventing (i.e., violating) regulations by not giving workers contracts, keeping them on one-year contracts before sacking them, forbidding them to unionize, etc. In areas such as El Hajeb, where the adult population is starved for any kind of employment, many employers do not have any problem finding a constant flow of people "willing" to work for low daily wages.

³³ Ibourk, "Labour Market Policies," 13.

³⁴ Othmane Bourhaba and Mama Hamimida, "An Estimation of the Informal Economy in Morocco," *International Journal of Economics and Finance* 8, no. 9 (2016): 140.

³⁵ Ahmed Lahlimi Alami, "Introduction de Monsieur Ahmed Lahlimi Alami," accessed June 2018, https://www.hcp.ma/INTRODUCTION-DE-MONSIEUR-AHMED-LAHLIMI-ALAMI-HAUT-COMMISSAIRE-AU-PLAN-A-LA-PRESENTATION-DES-RESULTATS-DE-L-ENQUETE_a1810.html.

³⁶ Bourhaba and Hamimida, "Estimation."

unwillingness to find work; sometimes this was also due to substance abuse, long-term absence, or divorce.³⁷ Absent husbands, in particular, caused distress for many women who came to the Center, and they reported not only economic violence but often also legal and psychological violence, as will be discussed.

I now turn to stories of the three women who sought guidance from the Center in navigating the bureaucratic system to access legal justice. These stories elucidate the effects of legal reforms and, more importantly, challenge master narratives in which legal reforms in Morocco are not implemented because of women's ignorance of the law. The following stories expose a much less discussed reality of weak laws that are disconnected from the lived realities, particularly of low-income populations, poor infrastructure, and decaying bureaucracy. They demonstrate how—rather than if—women use law to improve their situations.

DOUAA'S STORY

At the time of my fieldwork in El Hajeb in summer 2016, Douaa was 25 years old and separated from her husband, with two pre–primary school daughters. She was non-literate and one of nine children, only one of whom went to school for a few years. At the age of 20, her family arranged a marriage to a man from a village near Khemisset, about 90 kilometers (56 miles) away from her hometown. “He came at the recommendation of a male friend of the family and people said he was a good person,” Douaa said, as she described the arrangements to me. They did not, however, ask if he had a stable job. Her husband occasionally found work in agriculture, which is why Douaa had to look for seasonal work to survive. She reported that marital problems started when she asked him to get food or buy clothes for their daughters, to which he would reply, “What am I, a souk [weekly market]?!” She also urged him to register their daughters in the Family Booklet so that the children could get vaccinated and registered for school.³⁸ This booklet, as Willman Bordat and Kouzzi state,

[Proves] one's legal identity and civil status, and is of utmost importance in one's daily life. It is drafted upon marriage and contains all personal information about the Family Booklet's owner (the husband), his wife/wives, and any children born of the marriage(s). The name, place and date of marriage, divorce, birth, and death of each family member are recorded and, if necessary, modified later. Only one original Family Booklet is issued—in the husband's name, given to him, and deemed his property. A wife, divorced woman, widow or legal tutor may request a legalized copy.³⁹

“He didn't take it well that I insisted on getting them registered,” Douaa said, so they fought. He belittled her and called her a whore when she was ill, and [also] as well stole money from her. Eventually he and her mother-in-law sent Douaa back to her

³⁷ The family code is silent on women as breadwinners. Article 51 requires spouses to comanage the household; however, article 194 obliges the husband to assume financial maintenance of his wife once marriage is consummated.

³⁸ Fathers and families not registering their newborns in the Family Booklet was one of the most frequent issues encountered at the Center.

³⁹ Willman Bordat and Kouzzi, “Legal Empowerment,” 5.

mother's house for disobedience.⁴⁰ Douaa explained that "after my girls were born, we were without food or clothing, with nowhere to stay and nowhere to go. We had been staying with my mother-in-law and, the day she decided to kick us out, we left without anything but a blanket to cover ourselves." Her three married brothers "are not well-to-do either. And even if they were willing to help, who do you think could support three [additional] people? Maybe if I were alone. But how much help can they afford—pay my rent, buy food for us, and so on? They're barely able to support their own children," she concluded when I asked if anyone in her family could accommodate her and her daughters.

At the time of my fieldwork Douaa was separated from her husband for the second time. She worked as an agricultural worker earning about 50 MAD (\$5.20) a day and lived with her mother in El Hajeb. Without a family member to take care of her daughters⁴¹ while she was at work, Douaa hired a nanny whom she paid 20 MAD (\$2) a day.⁴²

Douaa came to the Association for help navigating the administrative system, which, to her, was intimidating, cold, and inaccessible. She knew that her husband was legally obliged to financially provide for her and their daughters, even when she stayed with her mother.⁴³ After all, she left her in-laws' house involuntarily. What she was not aware of was the number of documents she needed to request something to which she was entitled by law. To ask for financial maintenance (*nafaqa*), women need six documents: a written request containing the names of both the claimant and defendant, their address(es), and the number of children; a certified copy of the marital contract; birth certificates of the children; school certificates of the children (if in school); proof of the financial situation of the defendant; and any additional papers demonstrating costs related to raising the children (hospital or treatment bills, etc.).⁴⁴ The only document Douaa had was her marital contract; this was in such poor condition that Jamila had to tape it together to prevent it from disintegrating. She did not have her daughters' birth certificates, which is what complicated her case. Jamila suggested that Douaa first register

⁴⁰ Despite removal of the stipulation requiring a wife's obedience to her husband and his family from the Family Code in 2004, many families continue to demand obedience from brides. See Žvan Elliott, *Modernizing Patriarchy*, for further discussion of this issue.

⁴¹ Her mother also must work to make ends meet.

⁴² It is important to note that most agricultural workers work ten or more hours a day and are not paid by the hour. Morocco's minimum wage in the agricultural sector is 69 MAD (Moroccan dirham; \$7) per day (or 13.46 MAD/hour, that is, \$1.41/hour), although the government-mandated minimum wage in the public sector is 3,000 MAD (\$313) per day and 2,570.86 MAD (\$268) in the private sector. OJRA Blog, "Gestion de la Paie Maroc : Valeur du SMIG au 01 Janvier 2018," accessed June 2018, <http://blog.ojraweb.com/gestion-de-la-paie-maroc-valeur-du-smig-au-01-janvier-2018>.

⁴³ The Moroccan Family Code, article 194, states, "The husband shall be obligated to pay maintenance to his wife the moment their marriage is consummated, as well as if she has bidden her husband to consummate their marriage once it has been duly concluded." Article 195 continues: "Maintenance for the wife shall be awarded by judicial decision starting from the date the husband has ceased to pay the maintenance expenses incumbent upon him, and the wife does not lose her right to maintenance unless she has been ordered to return to the conjugal home and has refused."

⁴⁴ There is a notice board at the entrance to the Association with a number of lists posted, containing information about what documents women need to ask for financial maintenance, to register children in the Family Booklet in the absence of a marital contract, to file for a discord divorce, to apply for the Support Fund for Widows and for Divorced Women, etc. The request is usually written by a public scribe, who is found in many low-income neighborhoods; depending on the scribe, women pay between 20 and 30 MAD (\$2–\$3) for the service.

her daughters in the Family Booklet. For this Douaa needed five documents: a written request to register children in the Family Booklet that included the name of the claimant, the claimant's address, the full name of the child, and the birth date and place; a certified copy of the marital contract; a birth certificate from a local authority or hospital; a certificate of live birth; and a certificate of non-registration in the Family Booklet from the Civil Status office. In addition, to file for registration, women have to pay 50 MAD (\$5.20) per child. However, in order to start compiling these documents, Douaa needed her identity card (ID), which her husband had taken from her. Thus Jamila told Douaa to first recover the ID.

The next time I saw Douaa, she brought Jamila a written complaint for the public prosecutor requesting authorization for the police to retrieve her ID. It was still morning and the public prosecutor was in session. After a couple of hours of sitting silently in the waiting room of the Association, Jamila collected Douaa and me, and we went to the provincial courthouse. The building looked official; offices we passed were open and unstaffed, despite being stacked with numerous personal files and containing file cabinets without visible locks. The main hallway was narrow and walls were empty, except for a few bulletin boards with notices in Arabic. One of the more prominent notices in bold read, "No to Bribe!" There were not many people waiting in the hall, but all except one were women. This demonstrated that women do use the court. A few officials were loudly chatting and laughing, which prompted Jamila to remark, "And when you look for them, you can't find them in their offices." We did not have to wait long before being called in. Jamila gave the prosecutor Douaa's file and explained the issue. He read the documents, asked additional questions, some of which were directed to Douaa. Mostly he explained issues and procedures to Jamila, who offered additional information about the case. He asked Douaa if there was violence in the marriage, to which she replied, in a barely audible voice, "No"; this surprised me because she had told me earlier that he verbally assaulted her. Jamila later explained that legally, the only violence that exists is physical violence and that sexual violence can only be prosecuted when accompanied by visible wounds, which have to be medically certified.⁴⁵ Much of the following conversation revolved around him trying to understand why she was unable to obtain such basic documents.⁴⁶ A birth certificate should not be a problem because there is a record at the hospital, he said. But she gave birth at home, she replied. So there should be a midwife, who assisted with births and could confirm these births. And, since she has a copy of her marital contract, the *muqaddam* has to issue the needed documents, he retorted. He then asked for her ID and she explained that her husband took it from her.⁴⁷ "Why would he do that?" he exclaimed, and she merely shrugged her shoulders. In any case,

⁴⁵ In order to bring assault charges of sexual or physical nature to court, the Penal Code, article 401, requires a medical report demonstrating that the victim of violence was incapacitated for more than twenty days as a result of the assault. The 103.13 law also recognizes sexual, moral, and economic violence, but this law did not exist at the time of my fieldwork. Women still need a medical certificate, however, to prove assault.

⁴⁶ The burden of proof is on the woman. For other cases where the burden of proof falls on the wife or woman, see Nadia Sonneveld, "Seeking Portia and the Duke: Male and Female Judges Dispensing Justice in Paternity Cases in Morocco," in *Women Judges in the Muslim World: A Comparative Study of Discourse and Practice*, ed. Nadia Sonneveld and Monika Lindbekk (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2017), 136.

⁴⁷ A *muqaddam* is a Ministry of Interior employee overseeing the life of an urban (or provincial) administrative section. The state relies on these employees to provide information such as who is married to whom, how many children were born in a marriage, who is related to whom, etc. This information is requested by public

he continued, this is not a big issue as Douaa can get a new ID by simply paying for it.⁴⁸ He finished the conversation with the suggestion that rather than seeing the *muqaddam* we go to the *qaid* who should be able to issue her birth certificates and register her daughters based on the marital contract she had.⁴⁹ He dog-eared the complaint she brought, wrote a message on it authorizing the police to go tell her husband to hand over her ID, signed and stamped the complaint, and gave it back to Douaa.

We returned to my car and drove back up the hill, where we took the road toward Azrou. We parked at the prefecture of El Hajeb to visit both the *muqaddam* and the *qaid*. But it was 2:30 p.m. during Ramadan and we found the building empty.⁵⁰ After trying to find an officer, we finally saw one who was still at work. He tried calling the *muqaddam* but could not reach him. He suggested we come back in three days when the *muqaddam* had office hours. Jamila turned to us and exclaimed, "Look, it's only 2:30 p.m. and everybody already left! Now imagine these poor ladies who are sent home to bring more documents every time they come and then sent from one end of town to another. It's expensive for them, they get tired of it and so they don't register their children!"

On Thursday at 10:30 a.m., Jamila, Douaa, and I were back at the prefecture. There were mostly men standing in the hallway and outside the building as there were no chairs or benches for people to sit on; offices were staffed and their doors wide open.⁵¹ The *muqaddam* had not yet arrived, we were told. Jamila, visibly annoyed, protested, "We came at 2:30 p.m. and he was gone, we come at 10:30 a.m. and he's not even here yet. . . . Of course people don't deal with papers when officials don't work or aren't in their offices when they're supposed to be."

About half an hour later, the *muqaddam* finally entered the building. He was young looking, wearing a grey hooded sweatshirt, with the hood covering his head and in a track suit as if he had just come from his morning jog. I had to ask Jamila twice who he was, as I expected a much more official presence. Jamila was first polite, but her mood changed once she received the same answer as Douaa had during her multiple visits to the *muqaddam*. He told us that he could not issue this certificate because she needed to bring her husband's ID. "What if I issue the certificate and then the husband comes and claims he's not the father of these two girls?" he asked, and suggested we see the *qaid*. We waited for a few minutes outside the *qaid*'s office, Jamila visibly furious with the system. Once in his office, the *qaid* read the documents and gave the same answer as the *muqaddam*. Jamila argued back, asserting that the law allowed men *and* women to register their children. He responded that the law also required either the father's verbal statement that he was the father or his ID. Jamila muttered that the family code was supposed to

prosecutors and courts to verify people's claims, like those of Douaa. *Muqaddams* thus act as professional witnesses.

⁴⁸ This remark demonstrates a clear class difference if not the public prosecutor's complete lack of awareness of the daily economic struggles of women like Douaa. Although the 150 MAD (\$15.70) needed to obtain a new ID may not be much for the prosecutor, for Douaa it is more than a week's salary.

⁴⁹ A *qaid* is a state official who is responsible for issuing permits and licenses.

⁵⁰ Official working hours during Ramadan in recent years, when Ramadan falls within summer months, are 9:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m.

⁵¹ This reflects the culture in which handling of documents and contracts is done by men. It is men who are authorized to deal with such papers, representing not only themselves but also unmarried women (daughters, sisters) and their wives and children.

ameliorate women's rights and make it easier for women to access justice, whereas officials required the impossible: to bring their husband's papers when they cannot even hold on to their own. "How is this making it easier for women?" she asked rhetorically. Jamila then showed the *qaid* proof of Douaa's husband's paternity in the judge's reply to her 2015 request for financial maintenance.⁵² Not only did the judge's decision mention "his two daughters" but it also listed their two names as part of Douaa's husband's testimony. Persuaded, the *qaid* asked Douaa under what name she wanted to register the kids. His or hers? Jamila told him that, of course, his name because he was the father and they had been married at the time of conception and birth, as the supporting documents clearly demonstrated. The *qaid* checked the timing of their marriage and the birth of their first daughter and exclaimed, "But the daughter was born only seven months after the date of marriage! So she conceived illegally!"⁵³ The *muqaddam*, who was also in the office standing by the back wall, winked at the *qaid* victoriously, as if they had just won the case. Jamila looked at the documents, did her own math and corrected the *qaid*—the first daughter was born a year and a half after the marriage was contracted. The *qaid* again looked at the dates and conceded to Jamila, smiling. This example demonstrates the *qaid*'s lack of legal knowledge; the Family Code, article 154, clearly states that "the paternity of a child is proven by the conjugal bond . . . if the child is born six months after the marriage contract was concluded."⁵⁴ It furthermore shows how non-literate women are at the mercy of street-level bureaucrats' skills and legal knowledge. Had Douaa come alone, she would not only have been denied registration of her daughters but she could have been stigmatized, if not prosecuted, for having children outside wedlock.

The *qaid*'s mood changed, and he became much friendlier. He asked Douaa again what family name she wanted to give to her daughters and she showed him the health booklet of her oldest daughter which contained the daughter's full name, including the father's last name. The *qaid* then called the *muqaddam* in Khemisset, where her husband resided. He gave the *muqaddam* on the phone the name of her husband, but they needed more information about him, which Douaa could not provide.⁵⁵ After he hung up the phone, the *qaid* turned to Douaa and asked where she gave birth. "At my husband's place," she replied. "So, in Khemisset?" he asked. "Yes," she confirmed. "Well, then I can't issue this certificate because I'm not authorized to do that," he explained. Khemisset is under a different jurisdiction, and thus the paperwork had to be filed at the Khemisset Prefecture, the town where she gave birth. The mood of Jamila and the *qaid* changed immediately. Jamila, visibly surprised at this new revelation, exclaimed, "What, you

⁵² This document established important facts regarding the timing of her husband's (lack of) financial support after Douaa was first sent back to her mother.

⁵³ Article 490 of the Penal Code punishes sexual relations between unmarried people of the opposite sex with imprisonment ranging from one month to one year.

⁵⁴ Unofficial translation of the Family Code; accessed 5 May 2018, http://mrawomen.ma/wp-content/uploads/doc/Moudawana-English_Translation.pdf.

⁵⁵ During my fieldwork experience, I observed that, particularly when non-literate women in rural contexts do not have to deal with official paperwork, they may not have a reason to learn and remember details such as addresses and birth dates. Moreover, official addresses may differ from addresses or names of houses that people know them under. It is also expected and sometimes required that men (as fathers or husbands) deal with official documents, which further dis-incentivizes women from memorizing such details. Although on the surface it may seem that a person denies or omits knowledge of such information, the reality is much more complicated and often reflects the person's socioeconomic background and gender.

didn't give birth here [in El Hajeb]?" "No, there [in Khemisset]," she reiterated, shy and downcast.

Douaa's vignette is similar to many I encountered during my fieldwork in El Hajeb. After her lie was exposed, she was treated as a "bad victim."⁵⁶ Her case was dismissed and therefore even less deserving of the *qaid*'s help. Further exhibiting the power at play in this short encounter, the *qaid* sent Douaa out, whereas Jamila and I were allowed to stay in his office so that he could demonstrate that he (and by extension the state) was just and law abiding but women were not. As soon as she was out of the office, he exclaimed to Jamila, "See?!" The *qaid* told us a similar story of how another woman recently lied to him in order to get her daughters registered. He concluded with a sigh, "They just lie." I expected street-level bureaucrats working in a socioeconomically depressed area such as El Hajeb to understand why Douaa and other women would "just lie." The *qaid*, however, took it as an insult and shut the case. This perceived disrespect for institutions and the law is, on the other hand, quite possibly an outcome of *al-hogra*, or "feelings of injustice, indignation and resentment related to one's helplessness to remove injustice, a state of powerlessness, and a set of individualistic and collective behaviors or practices rooted in a repertoire of political, economic, legal, and administrative differentials."⁵⁷ Feeling that the system is stacked against them, people find alternative, if not always lawful, ways of accessing justice.

Back in my car we sat silently for the duration of our drive back to the Association. The air was filled with tension and annoyance. In the office, Jamila explained to Douaa how the system worked, that it was impossible for this *muqaddam* to know of her situation since she had not resided in El Hajeb during her marriage or pregnancy or when she gave birth to both daughters. He could not just issue papers, as there was a system in place with rules that had to be followed. Douaa finally broke down and began to cry because Khemisset was not close and she could not leave her daughters to deal with the paperwork. "Then I won't go," she said, "I can't just leave my girls. If I take them with me, I have to pay for three seats [in the grand taxi]. That's expensive." (The one-way ticket is cost 40 MAD, or \$4.20, per person.) Jamila told her that she had to register her daughters and said, "Who made the mistake in the first place? It was you and your husband. When you had your first child, you had thirty days to register her. You failed to do that. Then you had a second child and again you didn't register her. . . . What you did is falsification. Do you know what that means? It means that you lied to get some documents. You can go to prison for that." They ended the conversation on a lighter note with Jamila telling her that she had to find a way to go to Khemisset to obtain these documents, after which she could help her with registration. After Douaa left, Jamila rested her head on her hands. She then turned to me and said, "This is why authorities don't want to issue papers. Because people lie." I found out later that Douaa got a certificate from the midwife with Douaa's home address, as if she gave birth in El Hajeb. Jamila continued,

⁵⁶ Sally Engle Merry, *Human Rights and Gender Violence: Translating International Law into Local Justice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 188. Merry reports about how the system in Hawaii pigeonholes women victims of domestic violence as "good" or "bad" victims. The latter are not deserving of legal help because they "act in violent and provocative ways or refuse to press charges or testify." Douaa did not act physically violent, but by trying to deceive the state and acting "troublesome and difficult" (Ibid.) she lost the support of the official.

⁵⁷ Ilahiane, "al-Hogra".

“See, we spent so much time and effort to take her from one place to the other, and then when the *qaïd* starts to ask her questions she gives a different answer to him than she did to me. If she were honest with me from the beginning, we could have gone to [Khemisset] and dealt with the papers.”

SIHAM'S STORY

Siham was a single mother in her early forties.⁵⁸ She looked frail. Her eyes were sunken when I first met her in June 2016. A white cloth covered her hair, done up in the way I saw many housewives cover their heads while doing morning chores. She was wearing purple pajamas underneath her black and green djellaba. Her harried appearance made it seem as if she had left the house merely to ask a quick question. Jamila, who handled her case, was not in the office, so I introduced myself to Siham. She told me that the father of her child was absent. They had never married, and as she was recounting her story she lowered her voice so that the other women in the office could not hear her. She lived at home with her father who had divorced her mother a long time ago.

During our conversation, Jamila returned and greeted Siham warmly with multiple kisses on her cheek. Siham asked if her Family Booklet arrived. Jamila replied that she needed to go to court to get it, as they did not send documents to associations (or people's homes), but that first she would have to gather some additional documents. A 2002 amendment to the civil status law permits unwed mothers to register their children, although it is unclear whether they can obtain a Family Booklet. Until 2010, unwed mothers had to “choose a first name for the child's fictional biological father that begins with *Abd* [slave]” but this was recently revised by a circular that eliminated the *Abd* name requirement.⁵⁹ Despite the fact that the code was amended seventeen years ago, El Hajeb's Association reported regular maltreatment of unwed mothers by street-level bureaucrats. It is for this reason that the Association also organized registration days and set up stalls in towns and souks to assist unwed mothers with gathering necessary documents to register their children.

A few weeks later I came to the Association early and found Siham sitting at the steps of a café, across from the Association. She asked if Jamila was coming and I told her that she was dealing with files in Meknes. She had brought the additional documents but needed Jamila to accompany her to court so she could start the registration process. She said she knew the location of the court but not the Civil Status Office.

The following day, Siham was again back at the Association. This time, she was dressed for court. She brought her three-year-old daughter strapped to her back. She

⁵⁸ For an excellent analysis of the legal and societal status of unwed mothers, see Willman Bordat and Kouzzi, “Legal Empowerment.”

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 5. As stated in the Family Code, article 161, “only the father may acknowledge paternity.” Without his acknowledgement mothers are not allowed to use the name of the biological father when registering their children but have to come up with a fictional one. The circular interprets articles 54 (on the rights of children) and 146 (on establishing the filiation of a child of unknown paternity) of the 2004 Family Code as taking precedence over article 16 (on recognition of marriage and pregnancy from the conjugal relationship). It has to be kept in mind that a circular is not as binding as a law. I do not have data that would demonstrate whether or not Civil Status officers have followed the revised practice of this circular. I would like to thank Kouzzi and Willman Bordat for alerting me to this circular.

wanted Jamila to come with her to court to file her papers, as she "didn't go to school, I have no idea where to go." Jamila asked her to leave her daughter at home, but there was no one to leave her with. At the court we were sent to the second floor, room 3. I noticed a plan of the floor on the wall but wondered how many people could read it. The offices were mostly wide open, so Jamila asked at one of them which was room 3, as none of the doors had numbers on them. The one we were supposed to go to file Siham's papers also did not have a sign or a number. Jamila handed the papers to the official and gave him Siham's ID. We were then told to sit outside. Jamila explained to Siham that the official taking the documents was a good sign.

While we were waiting, Jamila asked Siham about work. She told her that she had been looking for work cleaning restaurants or cafés but could not find anything. "Everything is taken already," she explained. She received 50 MAD (\$5.20) a month from renting out a small store her late grandfather had owned, which was enough to buy diapers for her daughter. Jamila told her that this amount was too low for rent and that she had to discuss the price with the tenant, but Siham felt uncomfortable with that. She lived with her father, who had diabetes and received a small pension from France, which was what the three of them survived on. Siham told us that she used to work as a cleaning lady in a café where the owner was nice and "never tried to steal from me." Single mothers present a financial burden on their already stretched family budgets. It is women and their families who bear the brunt of taking care of children, whereas many men (the fathers) get away with impunity. This is why establishing paternity is so important for women, and why many men, at least in cases of out-of-wedlock pregnancies, disappear.⁶⁰ According to article 152 of the Family Code, paternity is established by conjugal bed, acknowledgement by the father, or sexual relationship by error.⁶¹ Refusing to acknowledge paternity does not carry any legal (or apparently moral) repercussion; however, once paternity is established, a father may end up in prison for not paying child support. During the conversation, Siham adjusted the strap of the wrap multiple times. Her daughter must have felt heavy on her back, with the strap cutting into her shoulder.

As we were contemplating Siham's situation, the official reemerged from the office with a number of files in pink folders, which he took to the public prosecutor. After five minutes he came out and handed Jamila Siham's ID and a piece of paper with the name of her daughter. Siham thanked Jamila for her effort and turned to me to say, "It's their [the Association's] work that matters." Her file was with the public prosecutor who had to consent to her application to register her daughter as an unwed mother. I found out the next day that Siham was able to start the process for registration. Siham's story is instructive as it demonstrates how women in her position—single, non-literate, low-income mothers—enlist the support of trusted NGOs to overcome what they lack in status and capital. I argue that it is the negative experience of these women related to how society treats them that inhibits their agency, rather than non-literacy and poverty per se.

⁶⁰ For an excellent analysis of a recent court case regarding a single mother proving paternity, see Zaynab El Bernoussi, "DNA Tests in Morocco: Marking a Historic Turn in Islamic Law," *Sharia Source at Harvard Law School*, 20 August 2018, accessed January 2019, <https://beta.shariasource.com/documents/3369>.

⁶¹ See the Family Code, articles 153–154 (conjugal bed), articles 160–162 (father's acknowledgment), and articles 155–158 (sexual relationship by error). For another excellent study of how Moroccan judges generally deal with paternity cases in courts, see Sonneveld, "Seeking Portia."

FATIMA'S STORY

"Problem with husband," is how Fatima began narrating her story. She sat down in the reception room of the Center and talked about depravity. How her husband had again assaulted both her and their daughter with Down syndrome. Through her tears she told us of the struggles she endured. Lifting up her djellaba, she rolled down her bloomers full of holes to show us a dark-color bruise on her left thigh. He also hit her on her head, she reported somewhat matter-of-factly. He refused to work and did not want to give her any money. They lived in his home, and he owned some land.

A week before coming to the Center she went to the gendarmerie and to the public prosecutor. The gendarmerie did not make a report, instead telling her that she needed to bring them a medical certificate from a public hospital attesting battery, which she did; they then told her to go to the public prosecutor to get an order for the gendarmerie to act, which she did. Yet, despite the fact that she followed all these steps, nothing was done. The bruise she showed us looked fresh, not a week old. I asked Jamila what the gendarmes could do, and she explained that they could go and talk to her husband, and/or start a legal process with a judge who could send him to prison or order him to pay a penalty.

Fatima and her husband were both born in 1956. Jamila mentioned later, "See, violence against women doesn't know age." They had five children. Their youngest daughter, who has Down syndrome, was born in 1994. Fatima brought the Family Booklet with her, as well as an old handwritten marital contract. She told us that she had lost her appetite and that she could not live like that anymore. She was holding a tissue in her hand, folding it in and out as she told us her story. She could "endure the hard work, the hunger," because she thought that things would get better once their children were older, but the situation did not improve. "It's too much," she sighed. She was the one who built the toilet in the house, worked on improving the house, not him. The neighbors saw how violent he was toward both her and her daughter and asked her if he was crazy. If she said anything to him, he told her, "Just go to the makhzen [the government, or law enforcement] and see if they'll do anything." I asked her if she wanted to divorce him and she exclaimed, "Where will I go if I divorce? I can't leave the house!" "Who from my family can take me?" she responded when I asked if she did not have a family to help her out. Her sister had died, and her mother was frail and ill.

She told Jamila that she had witnesses of his violence, namely neighbors whom she could ask to testify. They heard him when he called their daughter "bitch" and loudly denied being her father. Fatima told us that she had sent off all the necessary papers to apply for financial assistance for people with Down syndrome, which was initiated by the post-2011 government led by the Justice and Development Party (PJD). She never received any response or help. "The makhzen doesn't implement these things they tell us about," she concluded.

Jamila and I took her to the public prosecutor because the gendarmerie she went to was in Taoujdate, about 30 kilometers (18–19 miles) from El Hajeb. When we arrived at the court, the female officer at the Complaints Office opened a big blue ledger entitled "Violence Against Women" (VAW). The ledger had up to ten full pages, although I could not see the dates of entries. She checked the file number of the complaint Fatima had brought to the public prosecutor the week prior to coming to the Center.

Her case was listed as one of the last cases of VAW they had received. The officer left to check on where they had sent the prosecutor's note so that Fatima could follow up on her complaint. She came back and informed us that the note was still at the court because the courier had not come to collect the files yet. She explained that they could not send these notes by post, as they might not arrive, and told Fatima to wait a few more days before following up. Jamila and I were shocked at the lack of urgency. The husband could severely injure or kill his wife or otherwise continue abuse while she waited for her documents to be processed by different authorities, even though she had followed all the necessary steps and had all the documents and signatures. Moreover, in order to follow up with the process Fatima had to travel between Taoujdate and El Hajej, which cost her money she did not have.

We waited for a few more minutes and then left when we found out that the prosecutor was in Meknes. I do not know the epilogue of this case, but similar cases ended with the system failing to assist or protect victims. Gendarmes argued that they were too busy and could not carry out all of the prosecutor's orders. Many women, meanwhile, were again reminded of the absence of any tolerable alternatives and returned to their violent homes. As another client of the Center explained to me after I asked if she wanted to divorce her abusive husband, "A covered head is better than a naked one." For many Moroccan women, the status of being married, regardless of the constant humiliation, violence, and profound vulnerability, continues to be the only alternative to being stripped of their home and, more importantly, their dignity.⁶²

CONCLUSION

This article demonstrates that when research actively seeks to include the voices and experiential knowledge of marginalized populations, we are able to see (if not understand) what it means to be non-literate and poor in a society "riddled by extreme patterns of social, economic and regional inequalities."⁶³ Furthermore, the attitudes demonstrated by the street-level bureaucrats in all three stories are "layers of assumptions that persons in positions of [power and privilege] bring with them" when they deal with those who are subordinate as a result of gender, class, or education.⁶⁴

This article calls for more ethnographic research, informed by FRE, CRM, and similar approaches, to expose how contempt (*al-hogra*) manifests itself in relationships between those in positions of power and their disenfranchised counterparts. Rather than dismissing the vulnerable position of low-income populations by blaming it on their poverty and non-literacy, what is needed is "formulation of a more robust and materialist understanding of social class than is usually allowed: not *class* as a subject position or identity, but *class analysis* as a mode of structural comprehension," as posited by Barbara Foley.⁶⁵ This has the potential to bring greater social justice to the disenfranchised than merely reform of (self-serving) laws.

⁶² For more on the importance of marriage in Morocco, see Žvan Elliott, *Modernizing Patriarchy*.

⁶³ Ilahiane, "al-Hogra".

⁶⁴ Solórzano and Yosso, "Critical Race Methodology," 28.

⁶⁵ Barbara Foley, "Intersectionality: A Marxist Critique," *Science & Society* 82, no. 2 (2018): 272.

In early 2018, Douaa was living with her husband in El Hajeb. She invited her husband back to get her papers in order before pursuing divorce. They were living in a small rented room, too small for the four of them. Douaa was working regularly, whereas her husband only worked occasionally. Jamila was upset with Douaa for fabricating her story, but she was also aware of the financial and legal constraints of the Association's constituents and understood why they tried to trick the system. Being aware of the importance of documents and after exhausting every legal possibility, she often suggested to women that they return temporarily to their husbands to gather the needed papers and signatures and then renew their quest for legal justice. Some women are able to reach justice in the end, while all along being reminded of their status as low-income citizens.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to thank the three anonymous *IJMES* reviewers for their generous, insightful, and kind feedback. I am grateful for the financial support from Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane (AUI) for my fieldwork. Earlier versions of this article were discussed at AUI's Brown Bag Series (thank you to Paul Love for organizing the event) and Yale University's Comparative Research Project—I am thankful to all those in attendance for their comments. In addition, the conversations, comments, and support of my colleagues and friends—Zaynab El Bernoussi, Doris Gray, Leslie Gross-Wyrtzen, Saida Kouzzi, Smita Kumar, Nadia Sonneveld, Stephanie Willman Bordat, and Jonathan Wyrtzen—helped me see my data through different disciplinary lenses. And last but not least, my husband Derek Elliott listened to the harrowing stories I encountered during my fieldwork and edited all the missing definite and indefinite articles: thank you for your love and encouragement. This article is dedicated to the amazing women of El Hajeb's Association who shared their office, time, knowledge, and frustrations with me. Your work matters!